



Thirteenth Instalment

Sandy brought me," she said. "I'll have this one with him."

It wasn't a jolly evening. But I managed to be adequately conversational and very polite. No reference was made to the last evening that the four spent together.

And then, after the dinner had been drawn out as long as possible, it was time to go home! There wasn't anything else to do.

It was Sandy, not Tony, who decided the situation.

"I think, Jane," he said (they'd never gotten past the first name stage), "that it's up to me to take you home, even though I started the party with another gal! After all, you know, we're on the outside, looking in."

Jane bit her lip sharply.

"I've got my car downstairs," she said. "I can take you all home, you know."

And at last, after detailed directions had been given to the chauffeur, the car came to a stop in front of Ellen's house. The moment had arrived—and Tony rose to it nobly.

"Thanks, Jane," he said, as he helped Ellen out of the car. "You were nice to come to dinner with me—and nice to bring as home."

It would have been all right if Jane had left it that way—if she had just said a gracious goodnight. For a moment one imagines that she meant to, and then she leaned out of the car and her slim, beautiful hand rested lightly upon the sleeve of Tony's coat.

"You'll not forget," she said, "that it's my birthday Saturday, and that the crowd is coming down to our country place for the week-end. You said you'd be there, you know."

Tony mumbled something. It sounded to Ellen like "I'll remember." And then he was starting to slam shut the door of the car. But his movement was arrested by Sandy's gay, tactless voice.

"Throwing a party," Sandy asked, "and not inviting me! How come—Ellen should have somebody along who talks her language. She'd be lost with all of you folks—who are Philistines."

Sandy, you see, was assuming—the other three, Jane and Ellen and Tony, realized it at the same horrible second—that Ellen was to be a member of the party! The birthday house party to which Jane had invited Tony—Tony evidently, to her mind, was still playing the role of a bachelor!

"Of course, you can come, Sandy," she said, sweetly, "if

you want to. It might be much more charming for Ellen to have one of her own—sort. Maybe you have the right idea, at that."

And then the car had gone flashing down the street.

For a long moment there was silence before Ellen found words. Before she spoke in a voice that was shot through with bewilderment.

"And now," she said, "what are we going to do?"

Tony laughed boyishly.

"I guess," he said, "that it's all set! It begins to look as if you're coming with me to a house party. Sandy certainly put Jane in an odd position, didn't he? But, as usual, she came through one hundred per cent."

"Yes," said Ellen, "yes, she did. Jane did come through. As usual." She spoke so softly that for all Tony knew she was sighing. He didn't know that all at once there was a seething anger in her heart.

"You're rather a peach, you know," she told Tony, and her tone was not at all casual. "You've made everything very easy for me, tonight. But even though you're so regular, even though you've been truly wonderful, I couldn't possibly accept Jane's invitation—I can't possibly go to her party. She was forced into asking me, you realize that. She doesn't want me—why should she want me? It's you she wants!"

Tony answered.

"I'd like, Ellen," said, answering the first part of her remark, "to make all of life very easy for you, if I could. That happens—" his voice also had lost its casual note, "that happens to be the way I care about you." He paused. And then he was answering the last part of what she had said to him.

"But," he added, "I do wish awfully you'd come to Jane's party. She may have been forced into asking you—I'm honest enough to admit that she was—but the important thing is that she did ask you. Under the circumstances, if you don't go, I couldn't go either, now. And if I don't appear on Jane's birthday, my crowd will think it's strange. And so—" even through the dark Ellen was aware of his smile, "and so it would seem that we're in a box. Fortunately we're in the same box. Not—" the smile had grown into his carefree young laughter, "not that it isn't very nice to be in a box with you!"

Ellen was turning again; they were getting nowhere. She started to move wearily toward the steps of the house in which she lived. Tony followed her. They climbed the steps together, slowly.

"I don't know what to do, Tony," she said, and her voice was vague. "Don't you think we'd better let it ride—all of this business about Jane's party? Let's just wait and see what happens."

Tony was speaking "Whether you go to Jane's or not," he said, and his tone was wistful. "I wish we might have a few evenings together. This has been sort of grand, hasn't it? To me it's been kind of crazy not seeing you since—" his voice lowered, "our wedding day."

For just one second—one second out of all life—Ellen dared to be eager. She did not draw her hand away, even though it was held so loosely.

"Sometimes," she said, "during the last two weeks I, too, felt that we were silly. I'd be glad to see you just as often as you want to see me, you know." She said the last with a rush. She tried not to emphasize the word, "just as often as you want to see me."

Tony answered very seriously. "That would be quite a lot," he said. "I guess we won't go into that. I guess you understand." He hesitated slightly. "Well, I guess it's goodnight."

Ellen was faltering there in the doorway. She took a step forward—Tony was very close. It was a short step. But despite his closeness, he couldn't know that she was near to yielding—to making crazy, sweet admissions.

"Won't you come up," she asked, "for just a minute?"

But Tony was moving away from her, down the steps. It seemed as if the distance was automatically widening between them.

"I'd like to," he said, "but I don't trust myself to come up with you. Unless—your invitation means more than I think it

means. You must realize why I can't."

Ellen was fumbling with her latch key. She knew in her soul that she must open the door quickly, before she told Tony how much she wanted him to come in, how much she wanted him not to trust himself. She couldn't make that move—she wouldn't. He wouldn't be given a chance to hurt her pride, or to break her heart. She must open the door, now—and go inside, alone.

In the morning Jane's letter came, as Ellen had known that it would.

"My party," read the pseudo-original letter, "is going to be very informal. Just a few of my oldest and most intimate friends have been asked down. Of course, I do hope you can come and that you won't find it too dull—being among strangers."

As Ellen read the edged words, she was suddenly more bitterly annoyed than she had ever been in her life.

"I won't go," she was storming. "I won't! I won't! I won't!"

That resolution carried her through the first half of the day. Carried her along until Sandy's note arrived.

"I'm wondering," Sandy wrote, "if I can go up to Jane's party with you and Tony, on Saturday. Drive up with you, I mean. I've decided to accept the gal's invitation—it ought to be fun."

Ellen, reading Sandy's note, gritted her teeth and realized that she was indeed in a box.

And so it came about that, with the advent of the week-end, Ellen found herself en route to the house party—and in a car with two men.

On the way out Ellen had been picturing that home. She had seen it, in her mind's eye, as a magnificent place of stone and stained glass. But in a way she had been wrong. For Jane's home, though it was large and stately and magnificent, was magnificent in the early colonial manner. It was a simplicity so reminiscent somehow of a certain old house with its shabby garden, that brought the quick tears to Ellen's eyes.

And then the door was opening and the butler was unbending from his dignity to give Tony a personal greeting. And Tony, with an air of one who belonged in the white house, was instructing the butler to tell Miss Jane that they had arrived.

Miss Jane, Miss Jane! As she appeared in the doorway of the drawing room, she seemed more attractive than she had at any of their previous meetings. Ellen thought.

At that moment of meeting, Ellen was glad of Sandy's support rather than for Tony's. For Sandy was barging in with his usual carefree manner.

Now the three of them were following Jane into the drawing room to meet Mother, and to have tea. Mother—a faint reflection of Jane herself—offered a greeting from behind the heavy silver service, while from around the room rose shouts.

"Hello, Tony, it's about time you were getting here!"

"How's the boy—how's the married man?"

There were quick introductions—introductions to people whom Ellen had met only on certain magazine pages.

Sandy had already disappeared with the girl Margie, who was among those present. Ellen had seen him drag her, unprotesting, to a window seat behind a flowing damask drapery. Ellen was telling Tony that she took her tea without either cream or sugar or lemon, and Tony, his arm lightly around her waist, was drawing her from one side of the room to the other, saying, "This is my wife, y' know!" And, "Jack, here, was in my class in college."

Ellen heard her own voice making polite responses; catching the double entente of a sentence here and tossing it back. She had dragged off her small hat and was running her slim, nervous fingers through the tangle of her curls.—Jane was still standing by the doorway of the drawing room with one hand resting on a bell cord, with the other outspread over her heart. Ellen, through the veil of her own lashes, could see the hurt in Jane's eyes as they followed Tony's broad tweed-covered back down the length of the room.

All at once, for the first time since Jane had dawned upon her horizon, Ellen was being sorry for the other girl!

Jane's mother was saying something, and Ellen bent near to listen.

"We're all so fond of Tony," Jane's mother was saying gently. "We've all been anxious to meet his wife. Jane's description of you hasn't been very clear. You're so pretty, my dear—" Jane's mother sighed, "and so young. Tony's a very fortunate boy."

All at once, impulsively, Ellen's hand was reaching out to touch the hand of the slim woman tinted in silver and amethyst. Here at least, in this mad room, was one

oasis—one cool, friendly oasis: and so decorative.

"Hello, Ellen," said Margie, and there was more warmth in her voice than there had been in Jane's.

"Say, I'm glad you brought your boy friend. He's amusing—the one with the whiskers, I mean."

Ellen laughed. She didn't dislike Margie.

"He thinks you're amusing, too," she said. "He's mad to paint you."

"Nude?" asked Margie. Her voice had a slightly rising note. "Isn't that the way artists usually paint their women?"

Ellen felt her color rising, but she answered levelly.

"Some do," she answered, "but not Sandy. He's a fashion man primarily, although he does stunning illustrations."

"Oh," said Margie. That was all.

The other girls were bending forward, frosted glasses in hand, cigarettes held before carefully rouged lips. One of them, a dark young person, spoke languidly.

"You're the first model I ever met," she said. "Do you pose for the figure?"

Again Ellen answered as casually as she could.

"Only for my mother, years ago," she told the dark girl. "She was an artist, you see. She was rather—an important artist. You probably wouldn't know... I'm afraid that even if I wanted to pose in the altogether I couldn't compete with some of the models who go in for figure work. My own figure—" she laughed, apologetically and smoothed the dark silk that shrouded her knees.

Jane stopped shaking the cocktails. She poured one for herself, with a steady hand.

"I won't offer you a glass, Ellen," she said at last. "I know you don't drink. You've none of the obvious vices. Is it—" she passed, and the dark girl, whose name Ellen didn't know, went on.

"It is a pose," drawled the dark girl. "Your Elsie Dinsmore attitude. If so, it's a good one."

Ellen stretched her feet out in front of her, and regarded the toes of her plain little black slippers.

"Call it a pose, if you want to," she said, at last. "I'm not the type to smoke and be catty and get tight. One has to be dark and dramatic to get away with that, I fear."

"Atta, kid," said Margie almost inaudibly. Margie was blonde.

Dinner was again a magnificent jumble—all the way from the caviar in its little ice molds to the magnificent birthday cake that was carried in, blazing, by the butler.

she was next to Sandy, at the extreme end of the table. "Below the salt," Sandy whispered to her. Tony sat at Jane's right.

Somebody was toasting Jane. It wasn't Tony—that was all Ellen could tell. But it was somebody with a voice well bred and assured like Tony's.

"There's nothing we can wish her," said the voice. "she has everything!"

"Yeah," said Sandy under his breath to Ellen, "not quite everything. We know."

Ellen wanted to slap him—to do more, to murder him!

They danced after dinner, in the same drawing room. When the dancing began, Jane held out her hand to Tony with an air so proprietary that it gave Ellen a little kicked feeling in the pit of her stomach. But she scarcely had time for any definite feelings, for she was being whirled off in the arms of the stout boy who, like many stout youths, was an exceptionally good dancer.

And then somebody was cutting in—one of the Jacks or Jims or Charleys who had been in Tony's class in college.

It was the fourth dance before Ellen found herself in her husband's arms—found herself being steered, with a complete directness of purpose, toward a conservatory that opened out of the room in which they danced.

"I've got to see you alone," Tony murmured in her ear. "This is the queerest situation I've ever been mixed up in."

"That," said Ellen, "goes double."

"Gosh almighty!" said Tony. Just that.

And—"I wonder why I came—" Ellen asked of him, very seriously. Tony's hands were holding hers so tightly that her wedding ring bit into the two fingers next to it.

"Have they been giving you a buggy ride?" he asked Ellen. "I heard that they looked you over before dinner. Margie told me."

"They tried to," Ellen told him, "but I can take care of myself."

"Sometimes," said Tony, "I wish you couldn't."

"What was the idea, anyway?" Ellen wanted to know. "This party, I mean. If it hadn't been for Sandy, and for the way he precipitated me into it, it would have all the earmarks of being an announcement for you and Jane of something or other. I feel like a guilty secret."

"You may be guilty," said Tony, "but you're no secret—not any more! To tell you the truth, El-

len," he admitted, "I don't want get the hang of this thing, now. Believe it or not, when the party came up that night, it was just sheer devilishness on Jane's part. I realized it at the time. I took me off my feet for a month. She'd nothing about any party to me, before. She just said it to get your goat. I'm not even sure it's her birthday, tonight—I never can remember dates. I wouldn't have told you this if Sandy hadn't made her come through in a big way. When he did I was tickled to death. It gave me a chance to be with you again. I told a dozen lies—white ones—about how my friends would feel—and yours."

So that was that! Ellen all along had suspected, from Tony's bewilderment on the night of the impromptu meeting, that there had been something odd back of the birthday party arrangements.

(Continued Next Week)

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ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTICE
Having qualified as administrator, c. t. a. of the estate of J. M. Wellborn, deceased, late of Wilkes County, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons having claims against the estate of said deceased to exhibit them to the undersigned at North Wilkesboro, North Carolina, on or before the 14th day of November, 1935, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate will please make immediate payment.
This 14th day of Nov., 1934.
R. W. COWEN,
Adm'r. c. t. a. J. M. Wellborn, deceased.
1-4-35

NOTICE
North Carolina, Wilkes County
Under and by virtue of the power of sale contained in a Mortgage Deed, executed on the 27 day of January 1931, by C. W. Elledge and wife, to R. M. Maberry, Mortgagee, said Mortgage Deed being to secure the payment of a certain note, and default having been made in the payment thereof, the undersigned mortgagee, will offer for sale at public auction to the highest bidder for cash on the 26 day of January 1935, 10 o'clock a. m. at the courthouse door in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, the following described land, to wit:
Lying and being in North Wilkesboro township, Wilkes county, and more particularly defined and described as follows:
Beginning at a stake on the west side of highway No. 18 in C. M. Elledge line westwardly 140 feet to a stake in George Byrds line and C. M. Elledges corner running south with Byrds line 50 feet to a stake M. F. Ashers corner, thence east 140 feet to highway No. 18, M. F. Ashers corner, thence north 50 feet to the beginning known as the part of the C. D. Coffey & Sons property.
This 27 day of Dec., 1934.
R. M. MABERRY,
Mortgagee.

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