

THE dance ended with a crashing of cymbals and Marcia stood looking at Peter's lean face, his solemn eyes, the little muscle twitching on his firm jaw. She remembered suddenly how lonely she had felt for weeks and that with Peter, oddly, she didn't feel lonely at all. She touched his arm, her blue eyes bright. She said: "Peter, let's skip out. There must be a back stairs, an unob- servable escape!"

There was, and presently Marcia was in Peter's little roadster at the roadside diner and they were eating their way through two thick, pungently fragrant beefsteaks. They were having a swell time. Peter talked a lot of nonsense. "You are an idiot!" Marcia laughed. "Your column must be a scream." He chuckled, paid the waiter, tossed a 10-cent tip on the tray. His blue eyes twinkled. "It's the Rockefeller in me," he said soberly and started the car. "Where are we going?"

"To the Lincoln Memorial," said Peter, gayly. "And don't say I don't know how to show a girl a lavish time." The memorial was lovely in the moon- light. Peter parked the car and caught Marcia by the hand and led her up the broad white marble steps. As they passed by the double columns and came up before the giant figure in its colos- sal chair, Peter stopped and turned and looked at Marcia. He said, evenly: "It's serene, isn't it? And it's a symbol- ism. It is my Washington—the quiet life that flows beneath the brittle, fever- ish, bubbling city that you know and which so few real Washingtonians do."

Marcia faced him, illumined. "Peter, I'd like to see your Washington. Will you take me?" For one second Peter looked at Mar- cia as a young man looks at a girl he wants to kiss for the first time. His eyes moved dark and secret over her face. It was with an effort that almost hurt that he didn't touch her. He thought: "She has the loveliest mouth in the world. I could kiss it forever." Then he said, aloud: "Great! We'll begin tomorrow."

THEY did. And Marcia began divid- ing the days between Ed and Peter. If Peter took her to have boeuf at L'Escargot one day, Ed took her to a fashionable hotel for cocktails the next. If Marcia and Peter sat on high stools at the Newspaperman's Club on a Mon- day, Marcia and Ed sat at a smart luncheon on a Tuesday. Marcia and Peter saw the moon at midnight from the steps of the Memorial; Marcia and Ed saw it through the windows of a country club, an Embassy, a Legation.

Thus January, February and March passed. Ed had complained about the days when he was not permitted to see Marcia. He had taken her in his arms and said: "Don't use feminine wiles on me, Marcia. I won't get tired of you. Let me see you every day."

She had said: "But I can't take

Marcia said lightly, "Try hard, Sandy, darling." And Sandy burped. He nearly took the roof off. Marcia laughed

on being in love with you. Not that I did you do it?" Sandy was getting wide awake now. He was conscious that his stomach was empty, his pants extremely wet. His lower lip began to pucker and Marcia said, softly: "Sandy, don't cry. I wouldn't know what to do!" But Sandy cried, promptly, loudly. And Peter came through the door.

Peter went straight to the crib. He lifted Sandy up and Sandy grinned as Peter carried him to the bathnet, made an expert change of diapers, a good pow- dering job. Peter said, "Don't you think I handle him dashing when his head is only basted?" Then: "Marcia, hold him. I've got to put his bottle in the warmer." Marcia's blue eyes widened. "Peter, I couldn't. He might break!"

"Nonsense! Support his back. Here. Like this!" And Marcia had Sandy in her arms and his soft round apple cheek nuzzled against her throat. Tiny dim- pled hands pawed at her shoulders and she thought: "A little man in the mak- ing. His life before him—love before him. I wish he were mine." While Peter fixed the bottle Marcia walked Sandy. Through the living room, the hall, the dinette. She thought: "This is a lovely little apartment. It does ooze happiness. And Peter had said 'on 1500 happiness a month.'"

A T LAST Peter was back with the bottle and had Sandy in his arms, tucking a pink bib of toweling beneath one of his chins. The bib was too much for Sandy. He couldn't wait now. He came down and watch Sandy for an hour or two, will you?" Marcia said, "But Peter . . .!" "You won't have to do anything," said Peter. "Sandy's only 3 months old. He's a schedule baby. He won't wake up until 6. I'll be back by then. Please, Marcia." Marcia said all right and when she reached the Randolph apartment look- ing almost like a child herself in a little blue knitted suit, Peter waved her into the bedroom. He said, "You were a peach to come." Then he was gone and Mar- cia was standing there by the crib try- ing not to think how tall and handsome Peter was.

Sandy was asleep on his stomach and Marcia could see nothing of him above the sheet but little yellow duck tails on the back of his neck. But Sandy smelled good. He smelled like powder and faint indescribably sweet flowers. Marcia sat down beside the crib and waited. At exactly 6 o'clock Sandy began wak- ing up with much stretching of his chubby arms and his legs and a wide toothless grin. Skin like a slow-turning peach, eyes like big blue grapes. Sandy looked at Marcia gravely. Marcia said: "Sandy, I never saw so many chins. How

intently. And Sandy was squiggling

"Heavens, that would wake up Sandy!" They both ran pell-mell through the tiny apartment. They at the door stood Ed, meticulous in afternoon formal. He was irritated. Vastly annoyed. He said harshly: "Marcia, didn't you know the Fikes were having a tea in our honor this afternoon? That damned dressmaker of yours couldn't remember this address. I've been to every apart- ment house on the street!"

Marcia said, "Ed, I'm sorry." And she introduced the two men. Ed shook hands grimly. Marcia didn't know whether it was because Peter was so handsome or because Peter was a waste of time in his estima- tion. He turned back to Marcia and said: "There's just time to make the general's dinner. I'll have to change. So will you."

Marcia got her hat, she clutched her pocketbook nervously. Peter said, "Thank you, Marcia." And then Marcia was hurrying beside Ed. Ed was saying: "I don't know what excuse we can give the Fikes. It's un- pardonable, you know." They were walking out to Ed's limousine, Ed's cane clicking a sharp, angry staccato. He went on: "By the way, Marcia, there will be a man present tonight to whom I want you to be gracious. An English- man—very influential."

But Marcia didn't hear. She stopped short, her blue eyes on a little patch of a park facing the apartment house. On a bench there a young couple sat, looking up at the third floor, waiting patiently, almost fearfully. Marcia knew who they were. The girl was Peter's sister. The blonde girl who had been with Peter at the movies. The man was Sandy's father.

So they hadn't gone to Richmond! They hadn't gone anywhere! No story had broken on the Hill. They had loaned Peter their apartment and their precious baby. Now Marcia knew why. She knew with her heart singing and her blood racing. And she knew, too, what a fool she had been to think she could marry Ed. What a fool she had been to think that she was like Grace and Gwenn—that she could obey her mother in this important matter of her heart.

She turned on Ed, her eyes starry, and said quickly: "Oh, Ed, now I am sorry!" And then she fled and Ed stood there in the twilight, puzzled, hardly con- scious of the diamond in his palm.

The door wasn't locked when Marcia tried it. She tipped in quietly. Peter was sitting by the crib in the sprawling twilight shadows. He was saying softly to the soundly sleeping Sandy: "You did your best, old man. Your very best. But it didn't work. I was crazy to think she loved me. I was crazy to think she could see happiness here, feel it—want this sort of happiness. With me, Sandy. Me. But she doesn't want me, Sandy." Sandy slept on, but Marcia, in the door, said in a whisper: "Peter, oh, Peter, but I do want you!"