

ROMANCE COMES HOME

By AGFEE HAYES
Illustrated by Henrietta McCaig Starrett

TEN minutes before midnight and she felt herself the luckiest girl in the strangest situation in the whole world. More like a quaint story of knighthood she thought, looking at the arched walls of the lovely old medieval chateau and at her bag with the soft evening wrap thrown over it beside the window.

She had never dreamed when she won a trip to Europe as first prize in a contest that anything like this could come of it. And it wouldn't have except that the first day at the Louvre she'd met Comtesse de Leusse—who was really Marion Courtney, of America, and who was homesick and glad to see another American girl.

So June had become the house guest of Comtesse de Leusse—that was allowable on her trip as long as the company which sent her didn't have to pay for stop-overs.

And meeting Henri had been—the merest coincidence, he always declared. It was true he certainly hadn't been at that first elaborate party when Marion had persuaded June to wear a de Leusse necklace which had made her feel guiltily more than ever like Cinderella.

Henri had come the day after the party. Just happened by, he said. Had always been interested in the de Leusse chateau, knowing it was one of the oldest in France. And he'd stopped in, to learn—if the de Leusse family didn't mind—more about it. And June had been there!

The Comtesse had recognized Henri's family name—Ecomard—and had introduced him enthusiastically. The Ecomards were, she told June later, of the oldest aristocracy, but so exclusive one rarely saw them. She invited Henri to the next party. And he had come.

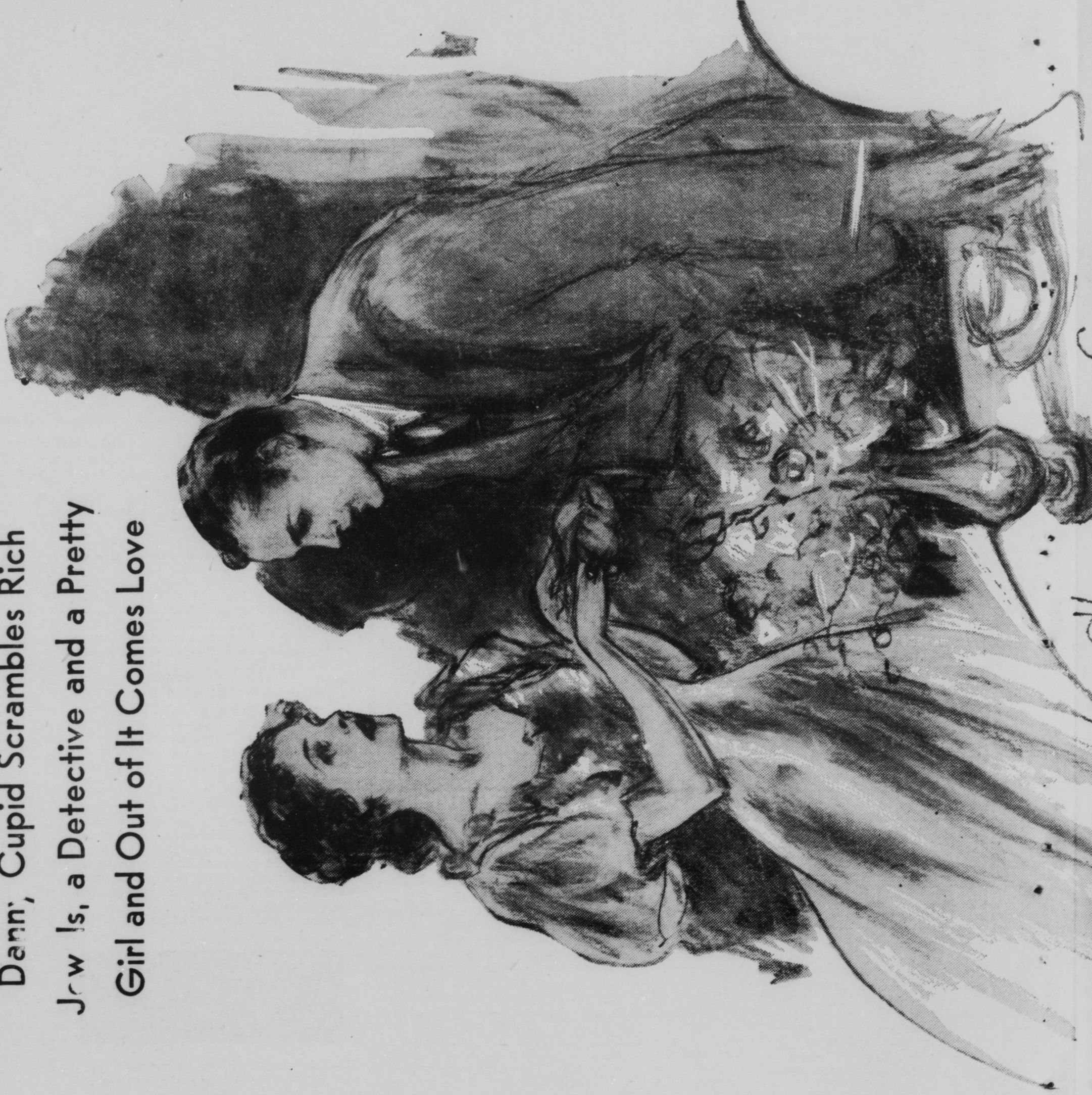
That had been only a week ago. Seven nights. And every night but one she had seen Henri. Remembering, joy danced in June's heart, lit candles in her blue, blue eyes, twinkled on her lovely mouth and gave radiance to the flushed beauty of her face.

SEVEN minutes more, now, and she'd be in Henri's arms. The thought of it lifted her almost out of herself. She remembered his caresses, his quick, hot kisses, the swift approval with which his handsome dark eyes appraised her. To think he could ever care for her—June Harrington, whose mother ran a boarding house in Marysdale!

She hadn't ever mentioned the boarding house to him. She'd intended to, all along, but—

Only five minutes more by the little jewel-encrusted watch Uncle Steve had given her before she left Marysdale. The moon had risen, was casting an unreal glamour about the chateau. In the dim light of her boudoir June looked herself over—simple white silk

Dann, Cupid Scrambles Rich Jewels, a Detective and a Pretty Girl and Out of It Comes Love



And it wasn't lovely Venice. It was Venice without Henri—moonlight that hurt, the painfully small swish of water against a gondola, the poignant singing of a gondolier, the great heart-breaking ache of beauty unshared by one whose lover has died.

Even on the lovely Conde liner bound for home and gliding like a great white palace over an ocean blue as sapphire and smooth as ice, June walked the deck alone, a tragic depth in her lovely eyes, a Madonna sadness on her delicate features. She was wholly unaware that men were arranging elaborate coincidences in which to meet her, that older women looking at her youth and bearing sighed, and that at least two youths from New England's best families would go home with a slim golden ideal fixed in their minds, which would haunt them until they were old men.

IT WASN'T until she was on the last lap of her journey—on the little local which ran up to Marysdale—that June forced herself out of her reverie. The small fields rolling away from the train were familiar now. She was coming home. Soon she would adjust herself to the dear familiar things—mother's boarding house, inefficient Myra, who helped in the kitchen and waited tables; old Jed, who shaved twice a week and did odd jobs about the yard and house, even the horror of changing boarders, and the kindergarten classes starting next week. They were all old and friendly. No one would know she had been a fool. Surely she could bear secretly the torment of moonlit nights alone!

Old Jed met her at the train. He was so glad to see her, he wiped a gnarled hand on his baggy trousers and pumped her arm warmly.

It was sundown and Marysdale was at supper. All the prim New England cottages she had known since babyhood were hushed for the evening meal, yards abandoned. Life here was routine, comfortable, unromantic. She bit her lips in effort to say the usual things cheerfully to Jed.

For she realized, with a slow heavy fear, that Henri had changed Marysdale from a dear friendly village to a lonely, empty foreign place.

"The chrysanthemums sure looks swell, even yet, Miss June," Jed was saying proudly. There was more gray in the stubble on his face than she had remembered. "Them chrysanthemums is bigger—"

"How's mother?" she interrupted.

"Fine! Fine! Same as always. Got two new boarders—"

In another minute she was in her mother's arms and little Mrs. Harrington's face was shining with welcome. "Just in time for supper, June!" she smiled.