

LITTLE IMP

Sally Started on What Was to Be
a Lark but Jumped Right Into the
Arms of Romance

THE small sedan gasped and balked. Nan sat back and swore. "Darn, and a flock of darns. Stuck—a howling blizzard, a country road and night catching up with me. If it hadn't been for this darn detour—" Who would have thought that March sky was planning a blizzard, a last fling at Winter? Sleet had begun to fall when Nan had left New York, but what did a little sleet matter, when she was all set to drive to New Haven to spend the week-end with Dad and Mother?

The icy wind took a deep breath and raised its voice in a shriek.

"How nice you sing! Rehearsing my requiem while I freeze?"

She leaned forward, stared through the tall gaunt trees, rubbed her eyes, stared again and laughed as yellow glowworm lights sprang suddenly from out the darkening woods.

A house, and a big one! A country estate, no doubt. "Shine little glowworm—twinkle—for a little storm-tossed gal," she said gayly.

"Perhaps I can stay there overnight. I'll tell them who I am. A teacher of piano in Miss Parke's School for Girls, New York, is a character reference above question. The family silver will be safe."

She turned up her coat collar, pulled her hat low over her bright hair, stepped out of the car and shook her fist at it.

"Freeze to death for all I care," she cried gayly, dark-blue eyes sparkling, red lips laughing, for warmth, shelter lay ahead.

IT WAS a longer walk than Nan realized. When she neared the big porch, she was reeling, fighting for breath in that icy blast.

Evidently she had been seen, for the hall door opened and a young man sprang down the stairs, caught her as she reeled and slipped, lifted her like a child.

"Keep still. You're all in." He glanced down at the lovely elfin face that rested on his shoulder. Long thick lashes lay like a dark smudge on cheeks whipped rosy-red by the wind. His arms tightened around the little figure as he bent before the wind and hurried up the steps.

Then Nan found herself on her feet in a big mellow hall. Felt her hands grasped by a lovely woman with iron-gray hair. She heard a chatter of young voices, every one talking at once. "I was driving—my car broke down—her lips stiff with cold, enunciated the words painfully."

Illustrated by
KEMP STARRETT



By
FLORIA HOWE BRUESS

"Miss Evans came just five minutes too soon," Nan said brightly. "I intended to tell you when breakfast was over."

She was conscious that Reed had made a startled movement, but she did not look at him. Her eyes were fixed on Mrs. Mason.

"You know you all look me for Sally, and I let it pass. I thought it would be such a lark. And it was."

Swift little ejaculations ran around the table.

"But—who are you?" Mrs. Mason asked quietly.

Silently Nan applauded. "Breeding. She doesn't flicker an eyelash."

"I am Nan Norton. I teach piano in Miss Parke's School for girls in New York. I was on my way to New Haven to spend the week-end with my parents. I got mixed up on a detour, found myself on a country road, then my engine died. It was growing dark, there wasn't a house anywhere near until I saw the lights from your house and—well, I couldn't sit in my car all night."

"Indeed you could not," Mrs. Mason said, and there was a twinkle in her eyes.

"Sal—I mean, Nan, you sure are an actress," Dick laughed.

Nan's eyes were guileless. "I didn't act. I was just myself."

"You sure put it over, some one chuckled and laughter like quicksilver ran around the table.

Nan listened for Reed's voice. But Reed was silent. She would not look at him—

Mrs. Mason rose. "Lay another plate," she told the impassive-faced butler and hurried to the hall.

"I think that's the cutest joke," Bess said laughingly.

THEY looked up expectantly as Mrs. Mason entered with a stunning-looking girl wrapped in sables, and a hat that said "Rue de la Paix."

After introductions were made, Nan rose. "I am leaving now. I packed my bag last night. And thank you for your lovely hospitality, Mrs. Mason."

"Can't you stay over, Nan? I would be glad to have you," the woman said warmly.

"Thanks so much. You're sweet. But my folks are expecting me."

She looked around the breakfast table. "Good-by, everybody. You're a grand bunch of girls and boys." She gave a smart little salute, and still did not look at Reed. Her eyes might betray her—

They called, "Good-by, Nan." But Reed was silent.

As Nan ran upstairs, her eyes were blazing, her cheeks hot. "Reed is furious. He thinks he made a fool of himself. He didn't even say good-by. High-