

Tom Tyson. You know him, don't you?"

"Sure. He's a fraternity brother." Pete grinned and waved. "Hi, Tyson!"

Tom burrowed his way through the crowd. "Pete, you old goat! What the devil are you doing here?"

"Devil wasn't in on this. It's Leone's idea." He turned to her. "You two know each other?"

"I don't believe I—" Tom began dubiously.

But Leone smiled. "Certainly. How are you—Tom?"

For an instant he just stared. Then, "Oh, yes, of course, it's—you. You look different, somehow."

"Why don't we take a table together?" Pete suggested just as if he'd memorized cues. "How many in your party?"

"Just two. Miss Carewe and myself." La Narendra was probably in checking her newest mink wrap. And pinning on the orchids Leone had ordered that morning.

"I'll go buy up the head waiter." Pete offered and started toward the dining room. "Don't misplace Leone."

"Not a chance." Tom's smile had no "please-take-a-letter" flavor now. "Let's dance before the floor gets jammed."

This was too smooth. You could dream things would work out this way, but they didn't really happen.

Tom guided her through the maze of couples. "Surprised to find you here," he said. "Didn't know you went in for all this."

That, she decided, must be the prim white collar and cuff influence. "Did you think I spent my evenings making patch-work quilts?"

His laugh began deep in his middle somewhere. "No, I'd have pictured you studying 'Principles of Business Efficiency' through. How long have you been with McCracken & Spears?"

"Two years."

"And before that?"

Leone slanted a smile at him. "In Santa Rosa. Going to school."

"I thought so," he said and scowled. "Why don't you go back there and marry that old beau and learn to make biscuits? An office is no place for a girl like you."

The music wailed to a halt and they started back to the lounge.

"Because I know how to make biscuits already," she told him. "And I've got a new beau—right here in San Francisco."

Pete came barging toward them.

"You two go along," Tom said. "We'll be right with you."

But it was nearly thirty minutes before they came. Tom, who was curt if Leone didn't answer his buzzer within five seconds, was all smiles. And Miss Carewe—Leone's turtle soup suddenly tasted like lukewarm gelatin.

"How do you do, Miss Landon," she said when Tom introduced them. Her voice was like Slavic music. It matched the mystery of her dark eyes.

Leone bowed and snapped a cracker between cold fingers. She was gorgeous, really. A coronet of black hair wound around her head, her skin like spilled cream above the daring black velvet.

"When better throats are cut—" Leone muttered sweetly and got out. "I'll phone you tomorrow."

But about 11 the next morning Narendra swept herself and her double silver foxes into the office and claimed an appointment with Tom.

Not that she really had one, Leone thought and poked Tom's buzzer. Tom always left all appointments up to her. Besides, he was up to his eyes in the Farland damage case this morning.

But—

"Miss Carewe to see you, Mr. Tyson," she clipped into the mouthpiece.

"Show her right in, please." He sounded as if his fairy godmother had just granted him three wishes.

Pete was probably right. Trying to compete in the Carewe class was simply leading by her chin.

For the next hour Leone filed all the "unpaid" bills very carefully in the "paid" file and got a different answer every time she added the column in her cash book.

It was nearly noon before they finally came out.

"We're going to lunch now, Miss Landon," Tom said. "Get us two tickets for a matinee this afternoon. Something good—use your own judgment."

"And, darling, hadn't you better reserve a table at the Richeleu for tonight?" Narendra was positively purring. "It's always so crowded."

"Yes. Ask for Henri, Miss Landon. I'll be back about 1 for the tickets."

"Yes, Mr. Tyson."

After they had gone Leone drew capital Ns all around the edge of a blotter and thought. Finally she turned up an idea. It had to do with a memo in the personnel file. Tom Tyson had won his letter in basketball and been elected to Phi Tau Something for all-around sportsman.

Leone plugged in her head phone and whipped the dial, R-O-7-6-6-5.

"Pete, this is Leone. Could you get four tickets to the track meet this afternoon?"

"Sure."

"On the sunny side?"

"My hopes, mostly. Meet me here at the office at 1? Bye."

It was quarter after 12 now. A taxi home. Into a crisp white linen and a hat with a brim. And back by 1.

It worked out that way, too. Pete, in fact, rode up in the same elevator. And Narendra and Tom were waiting.

Greetings all around. Then: "Did you get the tickets?" Tom asked.

Leone nodded. "Yes, and Pete and I decided to go, too." She smiled all charm and innocence and sweetness and light. "I knew you wouldn't mind."

"No, of course not." Tom didn't really.

Narendra drew and quartered her with a glance and said, very sweetly, "How nice."

"Let's all go in my crate," Pete suggested while they waited for the "down" elevator.

Leone spared him one of her special smiles.

"Good idea." Tom opened doors and made way for Narendra with the flourish of a doorman in brass buttons. "Where are we going?"

"To the—" Pete began, but Leone got ahead of him.

"It's a surprise," she said. "Wait and see!"

So they waited and they saw. Tom was delighted when they parked beside the new college field. That is, until he saw Narendra's frozen horror.

"Not—not a track meet!" she said in the same tone she'd have spoken of a lynching.

"Best one of the season, too," Leone assured her blithely, and climbed out. Pete began on his statistics and the Phi Tau Something in Tom succumbed.

THE broad jump pit was just below them and Stanford's Bill Grant had already made a beautiful jump. And the Cal entry was teetering on tiptoe twenty yards from the sawdust pit, getting set, starting with little running steps, faster, faster as he neared the pit. Tom hunched forward, forgot to light his cigarette, looked for a minute as if he'd forgotten to breathe.

Just before the jumper hurled himself feet first across the chalk line Narendra decided to take off her coat. It was gorgeous, of course—either mink or dyed ermine, Leone wasn't sure. And big. Tom helped her, and so he missed the jump, after all.

"Oh, too bad, Tom," Leone consoled him. "That was a beauty."

"Boy, that was jumping," Pete assured them and they all watched the scoreboard as if lives instead of points depended on it. "We took 'em!" Pete screeched when a big white 5 dropped into the slot. "Nice going."

Tom started to fold the coat on the seat, but Narendra vetoed that, so he had to hold it on his knees.

During the quarter-mile, Spike Martin showed a spurt just when it looked too bad for Cal.

"Get going, Spike!" Tom bellowed at him and flapped the ermine—or mink—coat at him.

Leone and Pete crescendoed Tom's pleadings. "Get moving, Spike!"

Spike heard them all right and moved into second place just as the first carried the tape across the finish line. Four more points on the big scoreboard.

"Boy, what a race! Three more strides and he'd have made first!" Tom exulted and pounded Narendra on the shoulder.

"Did you see that, Narendra? Came right up from—"

"Yes, I saw it," Narendra snapped, dabbing at the perspiration on her forehead. "Tom, could you get me a drink of water?"

"S matter? Too warm for you?" Tom asked evasively and watched the entries for the pole vault.

"Who's the tall guy with the white hair?"

Leone consulted the program. "Andersonsen. Stanford entry. Both he and going to catch on."

Bill Bevans broke the world record last year. Cal can't afford to lose any more now. We're just about even."

"Tom, are you going to get me a drink?" Narendra's voice was getting prickly at the edges.

"Sure," he said and began the long climb over laps and legs and empty seats to the aisle.

He was gone through most of the vaulting and when he came crawling back he had a bottle of jaundiced-looking orange soda pop in each hand.

"Walked all around this damned place," he panted. "S all I could get." Narendra wouldn't touch the stuff. So they drank it. Leone and Pete and Tom. During the 100-yard dash, Leone yelled like a Comanche Indian. Tom and Pete went berserk.

Then Tom missed the finish of that, too, because Narendra simply couldn't stand the sun another minute, so he folded a program and made a sunshade for her.

"And a blinder for myself," he muttered under his breath as he stared at an upside-down photograph of an athlete throwing a discus.

Down on the track the winner swept across the finish line and the whole stadium burst into a roar.

"Who was it? Who was it?" Tom begged frantically.

"Stanford man," Pete wailed. "Who was he?"

And then the three of them bent heads over Leone's program and muttered names and compared records.

"There hasn't been a race like that in years," Tom said, almost awed. "Say, am I glad we came. This was your idea, too, wasn't it, Leone?"

Modestly, Leone admitted that it was. When the relay started, Cal's entry got a five-yard lead. Tom was savaging the end of his cigarette. Then the second man dropped the baton, Tom leaped up, shouting: "Get that stick, you damned idiot. Get that stick."

At his elbow Leone supplemented: "And hang onto it."

He did and fought his way back.

"They've still got a chance," Pete muttered over Leone's shoulder.

The third man got back three of the original five yards' lead.

"Colossal! Simply colossal!" Tom pumped Leone's hand as if she deserved the credit, personally.

Narendra stood up. "I can't stand this any longer. I'm simply suffocating."

The fashionable high collar of her costume suit did look a bit dejected and her nose was decidedly beetish where her brimless toque let the sun get to it.

Leone felt crisp as fresh lettuce in her linen suit.

"But gosh, Narendra," Tom protested. "Why, the whole meet depends on this relay. It won't take long—if Cal makes the five points then—"

"I don't care if Cal makes fifty-five points," Narendra said coldly. "I'm leaving now."

"Pete, what time was your appointment?" Leone asked so innocently that for a moment she was afraid Pete wasn't going to catch on.

Tell you what," he went on, just as if it were his own idea, "I'll run Miss Carewe in with me and you two can stay in the final gun."

Pete was so dependable.

"Do you mind, Narendra?" Tom was trying to be polite and not take his eye off the track at the same time.

"Certainly not!"

Leone didn't dare look at anybody. She smiled and, out of the corner of her eye, saw Tom tip his hat perfunctorily as Narendra slid past.

DOWN at the exit Pete looked back, grinned as he caught Leone's eye, ran a finger across his throat and started down the stairs where Narendra had disappeared.

They stayed another three-quarters of an hour to get final scores and applaud the winners as they were introduced over the loud-speakers. So it was after 5 when they snailed with the crowd out into the street.

"What a meet! What a meet!" Tom chanted, grinning. "I haven't seen one like that since Naren—since—for a long time."

For nearly a year now, Leone told him, silently. Ever since he'd started buying orchids in carload lots.

"I'm starved, aren't you?" he said abruptly. "I don't suppose you, by any chance, like Italian food?"

"I adore it!"

"Really! With onions?"

"With onions!"

Tom began doing a semaphore at a cruising taxi. "Take us to Luchini's," he told the driver. Then while they edged through the traffic, Tom made a noise like a prosecuting attorney.

"Like picnics?"

"Love them."

"Like to swim? Really get wet?"

"Uh-huh."

"What don't you like?"

"Well, orchids for one thing," she said demurely.

"Good." Suddenly he seemed absorbed in the back of the driver's head. "Who is he?"

"Jerry Hodges," Leone read blandly if the placard over the door. "And if he doesn't give smiling service the company would appreciate—"

"I mean," Tom glowered at her. "Who is the man you said you were going to make biscuits for?"

"Oh, him?" Leone even managed a shrug. "Let's forget about him."

"Do you love him?"

Leone felt a treacherous flush. "Yes, I'm afraid I do!"

"Does he love you?"

"Well—I—I—"

"Hasn't he said so?"

"No—o—"

"What kind of a damned fool is he?" he demanded savagely.

—s i i d-head an' very near-sighted. I work for him."

Tom gasped, fumbled, recovered, and shot an arm around her waist.

"You mean he was near-sighted and you used to work for him," he corrected firmly and then kissed her—hard.