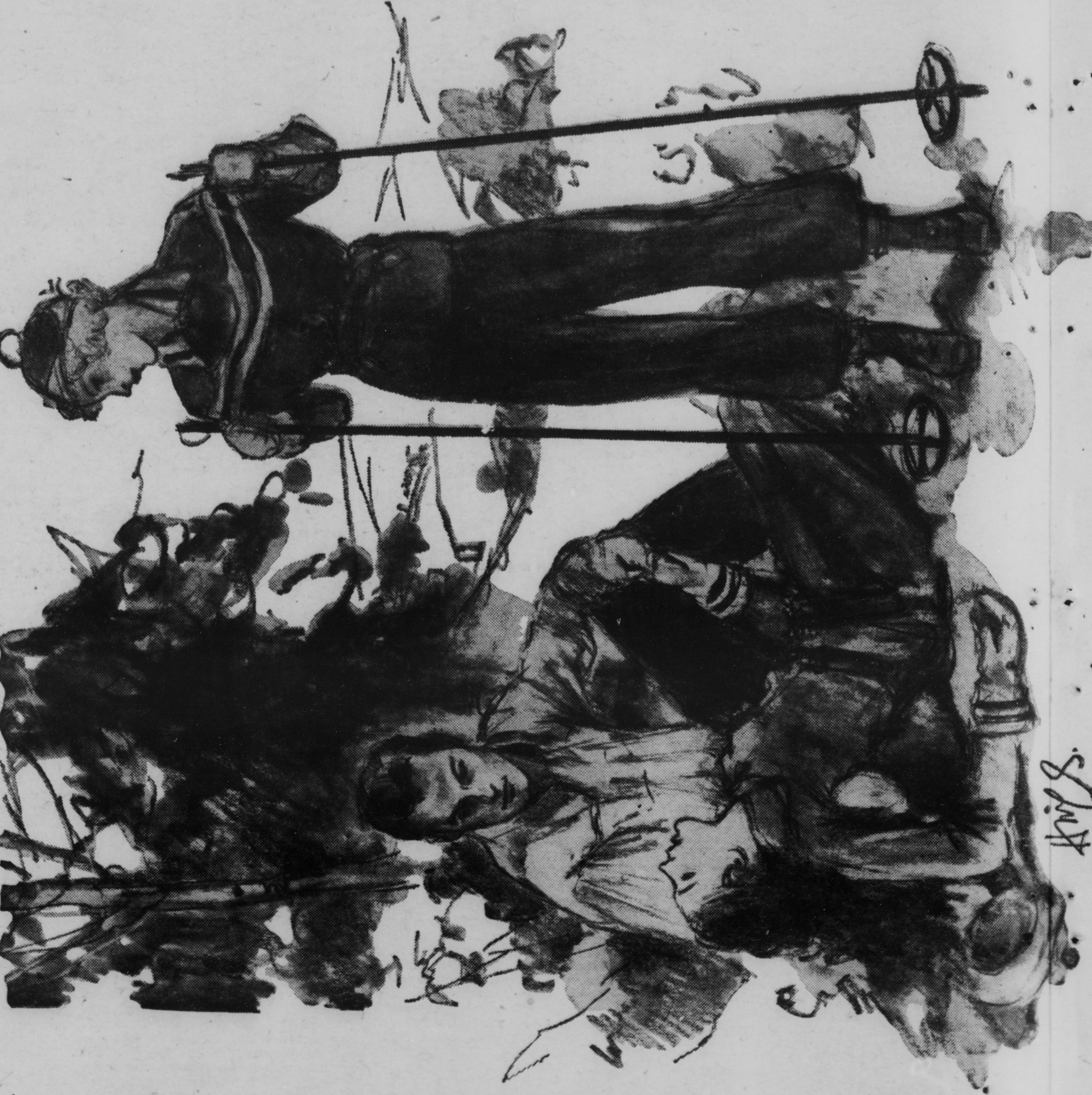


LOVE IN BUD

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Polly Was a
"Business Gal"
Until She Found
the Man Who
Could Write
"Love" Across
Her Heart

POLLY stood on the station platform gazing at the line of motors drawn up to meet the train. Which one, she wondered, would be Marcia's? The train gave a snort and, with a prodigious puffing, slid away from the station. The other passengers were moving in gay, chattering groups to the motors that awaited them. Had Marcia forgotten her?

"Here you are!" hailed a voice that had a laugh tucked in its depths. "I've been running my legs off looking for you. When Marcia said you were a half-pint she meant it. You were swallowed up in that crowd."

Ted Brooks paused from sheer lack of breath. His fiery-blue eyes twinkled at Polly, who was staring in complete and swift fascination at the bright blond head, shining hatless in the bright and friendly sun.

"How do you know I'm Polly Ayers?" she wanted to know.

"Bronze hair—" he looked at the wing of hair over her right ear, "gorgeous brown eyes—I'd add something to that if I were a poet—sassy little nose, lips to remember. And don't forget, five feet of well—Marcia almost did you justice. No cat in Marcia."

Polly's laugh fell like notes from a cello. Ted grasped her suitcase, touched his cap like a chauffeur, said: "This way, Miss."

He tossed her case in the rumble, tucked her beside him and whirled away from the station.

"Marcia sent me—her good deed for the day. The bunch are skating. Last thing of Old Man Winter, who is paying us a belated visit. I'm one of her guests. Answer to the name of Edward Brooks—Ted, to you." He shot a swift smile at

"We'll make a good-looking couple. I'm dark and Ted is fair, you know, and I'm tall, I need a tall man. Then, too, Ted does everything just a little better than any one else. He has everything except money and I can surely supply that. I have money—and plenty. In my own right, you know."

Polly made an effort, found her voice. "Why didn't you tell me last night when we talked in your room?" She listened intently to her voice. It was natural.

"I wasn't engaged then," Marcia's amused eyes met Polly's. "It certainly was an unique proposal. This morning after breakfast Ted slipped a sheet of paper in my hand. It was a pencil drawing of a bride and groom standing at an altar before a minister in robes. And underneath Ted had written:

"You and I. How about it?"

Marcia laughed. "Like Ted, isn't it? I told him I'd take a chance."

Polly said something—she did not know what, for she was watching love and happiness close like a steel door in her face. What she said must have been right, however, for Marcia laughed and said: "You're to be one of my bridesmaids, Polly."

And then Marcia was gone and Polly was alone to look this thing in the face. Ted had never said he loved her, and what did a kiss, stolen in the dark, mean? "Not a thing."

SHE wore her other dinner dress that night, a lovely clinging thing of black velvet. As she slipped it over her head she said aloud, voice bright and brittle.

"In mourning for lost love."

When she entered the living room Ted brought her cocktail to her. At sight of that beloved face the pain she thought she had buried deep was upon her, tearing at her heart like claws.

Ted touched her glass with his. "To you, Polly," he said in a singularly still voice. He drained his glass and turned away just as her long lashes flicked with bronze lifted. A moment later he stood beside Marcia and Polly heard their laughter.

Dinner was announced. The evening passed with bridge. It wasn't so hard, Polly thought. But as she undressed that night a white, drained face looked back at her from the mirror.

The party broke into different amusements the following morning. Ted, Marcia, Ken and Polly decided to ski.

Polly would take last turn at the hill, for she wanted to watch the others—she had not played at the sport for several winters. She must get the hang of it, for there would be no more chances this year.

The others stood at the foot of the hill watching the little figure skim down the hill like a bird of brilliant plumage. She was cutting along fine when something

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