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## THE HOUSE OF TOO MUCH TROUBLE

In the House of Too Much Trouble
Lived a lonely little boy;
He was eager for a playmate,
He was hungry for a toy.
But 'twas always too much bother,
Too much dirt, and too much noise,
For the House of Too Much Trouble
Wasn't meant for little boys.

And sometimes the little fellow
Left a book upon the floor,
Or forgot and laughed too loudly,
Or he failed to close the door.
In the House of Too Much Trouble
Things must be precise and trim—
In a House of Too Much Trouble
There was little room for him.

## FOR THE LOVE OF MIKE

On that memorable November night when Mike realized the fact that he was one of those gentlemen who prefer blonds, Joan Sawyer [illegible]

[illegible]

pick and choose, but Joan knew better.

Aside from that, the job appealed to her. Or perhaps it was Mike. To begin with, Mike wasn't much older than Joan, and so far as manner went there was more than a touch of D'Artagnan to him, mentally as well as physically.

Earlier, he had been a newspaperman. He had become a fistic impresario mainly because he saw money in that, and because he had a healthy human appetite for money. Mike could and sometimes did wear a tux with eclat. He could also talk like a Harvard man, which was not surprising—he was.

Not that anybody would believe that at times. Mike was temperamental. Now and then, he would explode for Joan.

"Take a letter!" he would command.

[illegible]

romance than a whirling dervish. He's all business."

And she believed it—at six o'clock this November evening. Mike in love with anybody? Not Mike! He was too busy. At least that was Joan's idea of it—until she met Mike's blonde.

Escaping at last from her mother, she had turned her admirable nose back toward the city. The night was soft, balmy for November. The stars were veiled and the sky, luminous with the reflected light of the city, forecast rain. But the show was indoors, of course. The advance sale had been reasonably good but the last-minute sales would tell the story.

"The ring-side seats help pay the expenses but it's the galleries that turned red ink into black," was the way Mike phrased it.

Tonight, the galleries would be full. Joan realized that as she joined the jostling crowd outside and felt relieved—and glad. In one way. In one way, it made no difference to her. One flop or even several would not extinguish Mike. She'd still have her job. But she was close enough to Mike to know his business and—she thought—his emotions at that moment.

"He'll be ready to kiss me," was the way she summed her thought up, happily.

This was purely metaphorical, of course. He would certainly be riding on the crest of what promises to be a big success, but at the same time he would be engulfed by a thousand last-minute details, wondering where she was and probably fuming a bit. She had not seen fit to mention the fact that this was her birthday. Mike was spectacular enough at Christmas—his way of repaying her for many things, such as his occasional bursts of irritation.

This morning, for instance, his birthday greeting to her had been, "You might occasionally put something where I can find it when you're late."

For that Joan had forgiven him. He had been edgy for days. Strain, she supposed.

Tonight, the first thing he'd say probably would be, "Well, I told you all the people in the world didn't lose their money in the stock market, didn't I?"

He had told her no such thing. He had worried. But she wouldn't so remind him—not being married to him.

But she was wrong. What Mike said was:

"Oh—er—were you looking for me?"

Naturally she had been. But she hadn't intended to intrude. She had glimpsed Mike's head and sped toward him. She had seen that he was speaking to somebody but she never dreamed it was somebody special.

It was his expression that made her realize what she had interrupted. Mike was plainly bemused, bewitched, beglamoured. Obviously, by the tall, cool—very cool—blonde he was engaged with. Or engaged to, for all Joan knew. He wanted to be, anyway, she could see.

"Er—this is my private secretary, Gloria," Mike explained.

"Oh, of course!" drawled Gloria. She had a lovely voice. Joan granted her that, even as she was willing to grant that Gloria was stunning as she stood there with her lovely head bared, a velvet evening wrap pulled around her shoulders.

Well, Joan could see how Mike might fall for her. "A man would!" Joan assured herself, almost viciously.

But not at the moment. Somebody had to be on the job and Mike was not tonight. Gloria filled his thoughts.

It was not until midnight, in fact, that Joan, abed but not asleep, had a chance to consider Gloria as she felt Gloria should be considered.

"Gloria? I'll bet she wasn't born with that name," Joan assured herself.

Her contact with Mike's blonde had been brief, but the episode rankled. The way Gloria had looked her over. A deliberate, subtly insulting appraisal.

"As if she were some young Roman aristocrat and I something imported from Carthage," fumed Joan. "And how does she get that way?"

All Joan knew about Gloria was what her eyes had told her. They assured her that Gloria was trying to put something over. Atmosphere—society stuff probably.

"And of course, that being so you're simply not her social equal," Joan reminded Joan. And added, "But just the same I was more suitably dressed than you were, Gloria, everything considered."

Behind that was the memory of the way Gloria had appraised her attire. Joan had done some surveying herself, enough to discover that nature's hand had grown careless when it fashioned Gloria's extremities. "We certainly were like a pair of cats," realized Joan.

It was foolish of her to lie awake and fume so, she informed herself. Or was it? Joan had her job to consider. And if Mike should marry Gloria—well, figure it out. Joan did.

"She's just the sort that would see to it that her husband's secretary was cross-eyed or something like that," she decided. "Two to one she puts the skids under me."

Nor was Joan just being feminine or borrowing trouble. As a matter of fact, Mike had already made his first mistake that same evening as he was taking Gloria home after the bouts.

"Your secretary is quite attractive," Gloria had drawled, even so casually.

Joan would have pricked up her pretty ears at that, perhaps even laid them back a bit. But Mike, with masculine denseness, had suspected no pitfall. What he construed as a compliment to Joan simply suggested a tribute he was willing to pay her any time.

"She's a darned sight more than that," he had assured Gloria.

Then he made the mistake of trying to explain to Gloria how good Joan was.

"Good Lord!" Joan would have mourned, could she have heard him. "Doesn't he realize that he's practically writing my epitaph?"

But Gloria was too wise to suggest anything like that at this stage. She had made up her mind about Mike. He was really attractive, and although he was in a queer business, he obviously made money. She had recognized an enemy in Joan—but to Joan she could attend later.

"I don't know what I'd do without her," Mike finished feelingly.

Gloria smiled. "You sound as if you were in love with her," she suggested demurely—too demurely. She knew better. In fact, she even suspected what might come next.

"In love with her?" echoed Mike, wide-eyed. "Me? Why—"

He took a deep breath and then, forgetting the taxi driver, told with whom he was in love. He was almost breathless at his own temerity. She was so miraculous. She had her career. Of course, he didn't really believe that she—

But Gloria did.

The taxi driver told his wife all about it when she set his six-o'clock-in-the-morning supper before him.

"He sure had a bad case of it," he assured her between mouthfuls.

"And she accepted him?"

"The guy never had a chance. And he makes the thirteenth fish that's been hooked in the old bus this year."

"How much did he tip you?" interposed his wife.

The driver saw red lights ahead and stalled. "'Just a quarter."

"Listen here, Christmas is coming. You can't kid me. Come across!"

They arbitrated on the basis of five dollars, which left the driver four dollars and some cents to the good, anyway, because Mike had slipped him a tenner. A tribute to the miracle that had been vouchsafed him—and to Gloria.

Not that Gloria appreciated it. She said nothing then, but it occurred to her that Mike needed somebody to manage his money. Gloria was good that way—especially about tips. "People like that despise you when you overtip," was a bit of her philosophy Mike had not heard—yet.

On the other hand, Mike had saved taxi fare to his own quarters. He had walked there on air, and though there was now a fine rain, he was not conscious of it.

The girl with whom Gloria roomed was, however. But that was because it was her wrap Gloria had worn. They often exchanged articles of attire but each was carefully examined on its return.

"Put it on a hanger—perhaps it won't wrinkle," she commanded. And when this was done, added, "Well?"

Gloria knew what she meant. "Oh, he all but got down on his knees. I had to promise to marry him to put him out of his misery," she yawned.

"'Kind of you, but isn't it nice that he can support you in a style to which you are quite willing to become accustomed?" gibed the other.

Gloria, however, considered that too crass. "It's no use trying to hint that I'm to be an old man's darling, because, Billie darling, he's young, you know. He just happens to make a lot of money."

"Just happens? He'd be out in the garden eating worms right now if you didn't know that he makes thirty thousand a year."

"Well, I wouldn't be fool enough to marry anybody who couldn't support me."

"Don't tell me!" suggested Billie darling. "But how about that nice philanthropic and altruistic old boy you've already got three thousand from? What's he going to say when you tell him that grand opera is off and you're—"

"It was just a loan," announced Gloria virtuously. "I'll pay him back."

"You? Or Mike?" Billie grinned wickedly. "'The bridegroom's gift to the bride was a check for several thousand to repay—"

Gloria let that pass. Her thoughts had taken another twist. "I met his private secretary tonight," she told Billie abruptly.

Billie gave her a swift glance. "Pretty?"

"Oh, rather. But terribly assertive. You can see that she thinks she practically owns him.

Billie said nothing for a second. Then: "And may the Lord have mercy on her soul," she murmured.

But Mike, being a mere man, never dreamed of that angle. He was just dumb enough to believe that Joan would give three cheers when he broke the great news to her.

Joan guessed what had happened before he told her. "It's his idea that he's the happiest man alive—and for two cents he'd tell you all about it," she assured herself, the minute she saw him. But she wasn't interested. Not even two cents' worth.

"Good morning," she said crisply. "Wasn't it wonderful how they turned out for the bouts last night? Almost a sell-out, wasn't it?"

"The bouts? Oh, yes," replied Mike. "I haven't seen the figures yet."

"I'll get them for you," promised Joan—and fled.

But that was like postponing a trip to the dentist. Once she had the figures she had to return. To discover Mike standing by the window mooning at the traffic below.

"Here they are," announced Joan, hoping to snap him back to business.

He turned, his eyes beglamoured. He hesitated. Then: "I can't think of a darned thing this morning," he confessed. "Except—"

And then the dam burst.

"'You're the first person I've told," he assured Joan.

"You mean the first person you've had a chance to tell it to," amended Joan—but to herself.

To him she said, "Of course I wish you all happiness."

"And try and get it!" she added privately.

She hated being that way. But how could she help it? She did not, could not deny that Gloria was beautiful. But just the same—

"It seems incredible to me," Mike was raving on. "She has a wonderful voice and has been studying for grand opera. She comes from a fine old Virginia family too, you know."

Joan didn't and she wasn't going to take his word for it, either, even though she continued to smile brightly while her mouth ached.

"They've had to skimp and save to send her here," Mike went on. "You know what the Civil War did to those old southern aristocrats."

"Sure; I've been to the movies myself," said Joan—to Joan.

The strain was telling on her. She dropped her eyes to the notebook in her lap and began making little marks.

"The poor kid hasn't been having such an easy time," confided Mike. "Of course she's not the one to complain much."

"Oh, no—she wouldn't," retorted Joan—in shorthand.

"Just little things she's let drop give me an idea of what she's up against. She lives with a roommate who is sort of hard-boiled and unsympathetic, I think."

"But of course she couldn't be expected to appreciate Gloria the way you do," commented Joan's pencil.

"Ive only known her for a week," added Mike.

Joan made more pothooks. "You'll know her better as time goes on."

'But she's knocked me for a complete loop," finished Mike. "Don't you think she is wonderful?"

"She simply took my breath away," Joan assured him—and escaped.

The page of comments, torn to small bits, went into her wastebasket. She was ashamed of it, of herself.

She hoped Mike had no such idea. And actually he hadn't. He proved it that night, to Gloria herself.

"You—you haven't changed your mind!" he began breathlessly, as he greeted her in the hotel lobby where they had arranged to meet.

"Silly!" she said. "Of course I haven't"

They dined together. Lights and color, silver, napery and music. But, so far as Mike was concerned only Gloria.

"When are you going to marry me?" he asked.

"June?" she suggested demurely.

"June!" he exploded. "Oh, Gloria, be nice!"

She was quite willing to be. "When, then?" she asked.

"Tonight; right off."

"Don't look at me that way," she commanded. "Everybody will guess our secret."

"Secret?" he echoed. "Why should it be a secret? I'm willing to stand up here and now and announce that—"

"I want it to be a secret," she told him.

She was thinking of the philanthropic and altruistic underwriter of her expenses. She had never given him any real reason to think it was anything but a business loan, but just the same, men being men—

"Just our secret," she went on. And added quickly, "You haven't mentioned it to anybody, surely?"

'Only to my private secretary," Mike confessed. "I had to tell somebody."

A man less in love might have been startled by the way her eyes hardened.

"Only your private secretary!" she commented scathingly. "Do you have to tell her everything?"

"Why, of course not. But I thought she'd be interested."

"I don't doubt it. "She—" Gloria bit her lip. She had started to say, "She's probably in love with you herself," but she knew the danger of putting such a thought in any man's head. So instead she said, "I don't trust her?."

"What? You don't trust Joan?"

"I distrusted her the moment I saw her," Gloria persisted. "You can say what you want but I feel people that way. I'm psychic."

Mike was literally dumfounded. He couldn't understand it—though Joan could have given him a clue.

The best he could do was try to Make Gloria see she was wrong.

"I prefer not to discuss her," Gloria informed him distantly. She was not willing to risk a quarrel at this stage.

Of course she was 'way off about Joan, Mike knew. But if she didn't want him to mention her name to Joan, of course he wouldn't

Joan had been prepared for the worst, but not that. "I suppose I'm paid to listen to whatever he has on his mind," she had assured herself. "But if it's to be a steady diet of Gloria I balk."

Instead, Mike was just—well, funny. As she took his dictation her pencil flew swiftly but her thoughts outraced it.

"She's been at him—about me," she realized. "It will be the help-wanted columns for me before she gets through." She felt sick when she went back to her desk. In fact, "I suppose I was fool enough to think I could get Mike myself if I wanted to," she admitted.

Well, that was out now. Mike would marry Gloria. He might live to regret it but he would stick to his contract to the end. Mike was a square shooter. He'd always be loyal to his wife.

It was not until later—days later—that she realized that Mike might also be doing his best to be loyal to her, even while being subtly poisoned against her.

"Even she couldn't make him give me notice," ran her thoughts. "He'd feel—" She had no need to put his feelings into words. No wonder Mike acted funny these days. She had a full vision of his predicament. What she suspected brought her swiftly to her feet. She went directly to Mike's office.

Mike was at his desk. On his desk now was a picture of Gloria in the most expesive frame Mike could buy. Even though Joan wouldn't look at it she felt as if the picture were smirking at her triumphantly. Briefly she wavered. Let her have Mike without a struggle? Let her strip him of that sweet impetuosity and eager generosity? Then she remembered that Mike was not hers to surrender. So:

"I—I just wanted to tell you, Mr. Wayne, that I'm leaving the first of the month," she said as casually as possible.

It was out. She couldn't renig now. That was her first thought. And then she realized that Mike was staring at her, starkly incredulous.

"Leaving?" he repeated, finding his voice.

It was as if Gloria had momentarily ceased to exist, as if that silver-framed portrait on the desk was not. He was looking at Joan just as he would have looked had she announced such an intention before he had met Gloria.

Joan nodded. She could not speak.

"But I don't understand," he protested.

She had tried to make it easy for him—and now he was making it hard for her. She hadn't even considered a reason. So far as she was concerned it was all Gloria. But she could hardly tell him that.

"It's just—" she began—and bogged.

Just what? That she had another job? He'd want to know about that, and she could hardly invent a job on the spur of the moment. That she was not satisfied? She wasn't, but she couldn't tell him why. And he was waiting—expectantly, still puzzled.

It's just—just that I intend to marry," she informed him desperately.

It sounded to her too crazy to be swallowed by anybody. But Mike was on his feet instantly, all boy.

"Good Lord, I might have guessed it," he was saying. "I don't know how I'm ever going to get along without you but some man's picked a prize for himself. I only hope he deserves you. When do you plan to be married?"

At that, Joan realized that she might as well prepare to do some tall lying. "December sixth," she said, at random.

He glanced at his desk calendar. "Why, that's a Friday," he protested. "Aren't you reckless?"

Joan was by now. She had not expected so many pitfalls. "The better the deed, the better the day," she managed inanely.

"Ar you going to houskeeping?"

"W—we haven't decided," said Joan. And as Mike looked perplexed, added, 'My fiance's business is uncertain."

Mike grinned. "You sound as if he promoted boxing exhibitions," he remarked. "What does he do?"

What did he do? A nice question to fling at her that way! And it had to be something uncertain.

"Well, he's a—a bootlegger," announced Joan, who was fast reaching the point where she didn't care what she said.

"A b-bootlegger!" stuttered Mike.

"He's promised to reform. And he's really awfully nice."

"Of course," Mike said doubtfully—and worriedly, too.

Joan didn't miss that. In fact she began to feel that this wasn't going too badly. She was almost enjoying it.

"You see, he gets out of prison on the morning of the sixth," she went on, inventing ad lib and admiring her own facility. "And we are going to be married quietly at noon and—and go off somewhere to start life anew."

Mike was plainly beyond words now.

"So that's the reason we can't say much about plans," Joan added.

Her eyes were as clear and candid as a child's as they met his. The truth was not in them but no man would ever have guessed it, for when a woman starts lying she does a good job. Anyway, Mike swallowed it all. Joan was leaving not because he preferred blondes but because she preferred bootleggers.

"And it might be worse," Joan assured herself, surveying the situation afterwards. Of course, she was somewhat appalled then. It seemed to her as if she must really produce a bootlegger for Mike's inspection. "I might advertise for one," she mused, seeing the humor of it but a bit scared as well.

Then she realized that her selection of a bootlegger had been a positive inspiration. He might, for instance, be murdered by his gang at the prison gates—these gates being remote, of course—or she might change her mind at the last minute. "Mike would approve of that," she assured herself.

That was true. A life of deceit, as Joan was discovering, is not without certain compensations sometimes. The way Mike looked at her these last few days! It was as if, after all their years together, he was really seeing her for the first time. And he was plainly bothered. He couldn't say anything but it was clear he did not approve.

"All my friends think I'm taking a terrible chance—the few I've told, that is," Joan said one day. "He's been married once and is divorced but it wasn't his fault at all—his wife was simply horrid to him."

Mike swallowed. "How—how did you happen to meet him?" he asked.

"He was East on—on business last summer," explained Joan.

"But you said he was in prison."

"Oh, he had been arrested and was just out on bail then," she temporized. "He needn't have gone to prison but I felt he should—to start clean, you see. We talked it out and he was willing to, for me."

She should have been ashamed of herself. But she wasn't, if only because Mike looked as if he could see how the bootlegger-bridegroom would be willing to do anything for her. "And that does him good;

(Continued on page 2, Col. 3.)