

WHITE GOODS

By FANNIE HURST

SYNOPSIS

Sadie Barnet, a salesgirl in the white goods department, lives with her aunt, Dee Dee. Dee Dee scolds her for her selfishness in accepting favors and entertainment from Jerry Beck, whom Dee Dee considers unscrupulous. Sadie goes for a ride in Jerry's car, and is startled at his brutal commands to his chauffeur, but pleased at his asking her to be his second wife. When she returns she finds that Dee Dee has gone blind—she promises never to leave her.

CHAPTER V

ALONG the road of Newton Heights Spring and her firstling crept out tenderly. Even close up to the rim of the tiled highway itself, an occasional colony of wood violets dared to show their heads for the brief moment before they were effaced. The threat of rain still lay on the air, but the Sunday rank and file of motorists these back logs, lowered windows and turned shining noses toward the green fields.



(C) By Gerard Bistritz FANNIE HURST

"Aw, now, cut the sob stuff, Peony! You can't help it. Nobody can, that's the trouble. Say, what kind of a little queen will they think you are if I bring you home all soggy with crying?"

"I ought not to have come, Jerry. I'm no kind of company today, only all of a sudden she's got so—so soft with me and she made me come sitting—she tried to take a nap. Poor old Dee Dee!"

"Yeh, and poor old devil. Maybe she's just getting what's due to her." "Jerry?" "Sure, I believe every one of us gets what's coming to us."

"Here we are, Tootsie. See, Peony, that's the house I bought her and her mother, and they was kicking at it before the plaster was dry."

"That's a concrete front. Neat, ain't it? That's a concrete floor, too, I built on a year after her and her mother vanished."

"It's a beautiful house, Jerry." "You're the kind of kid that knows how to appreciate a home when she gets it. But her with her six devils of a mother, they no sooner got in than they began to sulk with each other against me—her and her old mother trying to learn me how to run my own show."

"Glad they're living in a dirty Harlem flat now and tryin' to put it over on me that they're better off in it. Bah! If I had to double up on an alleyway, I wouldn't give her a smell at the house, not a smell."

"Say, but ain't it pretty, Jerry, right up over the river, and country all around, and right over there in back the street cars for the city when you want them?"

"This is going to be your street car, Peony? Six cylinder one?" "She colored like a wild rose."

"Oh, Jerry, I—I keep forgetting." "They drew to a stop before the box-shaped single house, its rough concrete front pretentiously faded over the doors and windows with a design of pebbles stuck like dates on a cake, and perched primly on the topmost step of the square veranda the inert figure of a small girl."

"Aw, ain't she cute?" "Miss Barnet sprang lightly to the sidewalk, and beside her Mr. Jerome Beck flicked the dust of travel from the bay of his waistcoat, shaking his trousers knees into place."

"This has got your Twenty-third street dump head a mile, and then some, ain't it, Peony?" "Jerry, call her here, the little girl. You tell her who—who I am. Tell her gently, Jerry, and—how good I'm going to be to her and—Aw, ain't I the silly, though, to feel so troublin'?"

"The child on the steps regarded their approach with unsmiling eyes, nor did she move except to draw aside her dark stuff skirts and close her knees until they touched."

"Hello there! Moping 'gain, eh? Get up! Dibs! I tell you not to let me catch you not out playin' or lovin' Cloonan around? Say howdy to this lady. She's coming out here to live. Come here and say howdy to her."

"The child shrunk to the newest-post, her little face overtaken with an agony of shyness."

"Cat got your tongue? Say howdy. Quit breathin' through your mouth like a bell. Say howdy, that's a good girl."

"Don't fess her, Jerry. She's bashful. Ain't you, dearie? Ain't you, Maizie?" "Moping, you mean. If it was her mouth in the dirty Harlem flat she'd be sorry enough. She knows what I mean when I say that, and she knows she better cut out this mouthing. Quit breathin' through your mouth or I'll stick a cork in it."

"Aw, Jerry, she can't help that." "Cat got your tongue? Where's Cloonan?" "The child's little face quivered and seared, each feature drawing itself into position for tears. Her eyes disappeared, her nostrils distended, her mouth opened to a quivering rectangle, and she fell into silent weeping."

"Aw, Jerry—you scared her! Come here, darling, come here to me, Maizie, come, don't you see your books afterwards. Come, Peony, here, up these stairs. This is the second floor. Pretty neat, ain't it? Her and her mother shopped there more weeks on this oak leaf set. Some little move out here from Twenty-third street for a little rooming-house queen like you, eh? Neat little bedroom, eh, Peony? Eh?"

"The face was close to her and claret red with an expression she did not dare to face."

"Look, this is the front hall. Guess this ain't got that sty in Twenty-third street beat some. Look! How do you like it? This way to the parlor and dining-room."

Sadie Barnet smiled through the shadows in her eyes. "Jerry! Say, ain't this beautiful! A upright piano and gold chairs and—Why, Jerry! why, Jerry?"

"And look in here, the dining room. Her and her mother shopped three weeks to get this oak set, and see this fancy cabinet full of china. Slick, ain't it?"

"Her fingers curled in a soft clutch around her throat as if her breath came too fast."

"Jerry, it—it's just grand." "He marshaled her in all the pride of ownership."

"Look, butler's pantry, exposed plumbing." "Oh! Oh!" "Kitchen."

"Oh! Oh!" "Here, Cloonan. I told you I was going to bring somebody out to take hold and sit on you and your bills, didn't I? This lady's coming out here tomorrow, bag and baggage. Hand over your account book to her and I bet she does better with it. See that you fix us up in honeymoon style, too. Bag and baggage we're coming. Savvy?"

"The figure beside the ill-kept stove, bowed in lap and taring potatoes with the long fleshless hands of a bird, raised a still more fleshless face."

"Howdy?" "Cloonan's been running this shebang for two years now, Peony, and there ain't nothing much she can't learn you about my ways. They ain't hard. Look! Porcelain-lined sink. It's got Twenty-third street beat some, ain't it?"

"Yes, Jerry." "Fix us a beefsteak supper, Cloonan, and lemme weigh up their groceries I sent out and lemme see your books afterwards. Come, Peony, here, up these stairs. This is the second floor. Pretty neat, ain't it? Her and her mother shopped there more weeks on this oak leaf set. Some little move out here from Twenty-third street for a little rooming-house queen like you, eh? Neat little bedroom, eh, Peony? Eh?"

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