

THE CLAUSONS:

By Zona Gale

CLAUSON stepped from his roadster and held out his hand to Miss Rickson. But with a hand on either side of the opening she swung herself down, landed softly, gave him a warm, hard little fist and a thank you almost gruff, and was up the steps of her boarding house. The house itself looked as if it had measles and Clauson drove on thinking what a frightful life Miss Rickson lived; his stenographer by day and a tenant of a scarred-looking boarding house by night.

And what a brick she was—brown, rosy, businesslike little brick. A woman, too. Eyes that were deep with what could be tenderness.

"None of that," said Clauson and turned into his own street.

He put up his car, walked the half block to his apartment and



Zona Gale is one of the most "understanding" women in America. She writes nearly always of the small town and small-town people, their ways little and big; their faults and their virtues, but in her writing she pour's kindly, with the splendor, a wealth of things which make America what it is today.

When one speaks her name it recalls poignantly among her many books her "Friendship Village," "The Loves of Pellets and Etcetera," and last and even more vital than those that have gone before, "Miss Ruth Bettie," book play and motion picture.

Though "The Clausons" comes from the pen of one of the few authors in this series who are not married, all who read it will agree that it gives one of the points in married life that may be numbered among those that are termed universal.

While he waited for the elevator he thought which he had kept in the background abruptly enveloped him, seemed to rush at him from outside: Suppose Miss Rickson were waiting for him up in fourth floor front. Romance of a sweetess almost forgotten might be possible with Miss Rickson.

He hurried down the tiled hall to his own door, burst in, shouted: "Hello, Jep!" He was genuinely shocked at himself. He wanted to make amends by a tremendous homecoming such as he had, before

He looked thoughtfully at Jep. Jep



"I wish you wouldn't call me 'darling' when you don't mean it!"

was responsive, she had humor, she could be amusing. But he was so used to her. Her hands, that gesture to her hair, her absent look, her little crooked yawns. Not a surprise, not even a variation. She was Jep forever.

At nine Clauson rose and wound the clock and observed as usual that he must have regulated.

"I've heard you say that oceans of time," Jep remarked—also as usual.

"But I don't want to move at all," said Clauson bitterly. "I like this place. I'm used to it. What right has he got to turn us out?"

"I saw one of them last week," Jep went on absently. "Darling little cupboards and such oceans of closets."

"I don't want to move at all," Clauson repeated doggily. "I'm used to this place—!" His eye rested on the deep fireplace that never smoked, on the familiar brown tile, on the shelves he had built, on the homey atmosphere of everybody else.

He faced about and said abruptly, "I'm going out for a little while, Jep."

"Well, where on earth are you going?" she inevitably asked.

"To take a turn around a block or two. I'm sleepy. I'm sleepy," said he, and went.

Ten minutes later he was back and at the look in his face Jep said: "My darling! Is anything the matter?"

"I wish you wouldn't call me 'darling' again. It's nothing the matter?"

NEXT day they drove out to look at the bungalows in the new addition. It had been a terrible day at the office, appointments broken, a big contract lost and Miss Rickson at home ill.

Then he looked at Jep waiting on a corner Clauson was in no mood to like a house on a street of pearl.

Yes, the bungalows were undeniably nice, Jep was in ecstasies. "See, darling! Oceans of pantries!" She put, the thrill which talk with her could conceivably hold.

"Yes, pulled down," he repeated sharply. "We'll all have to get out by

fall. Dibble heard it pretty straight. Says he's got his eye on a flat and he's going to get out of here now and submit till his lease runs out.

"Arthur," said Jep absently, "do you think we could get one of those bungalows in the new addition? If we only could—let's look tomorrow, dearest, and if we can get one, let's move at the wheel. He was thinking how

rightfully used he was to Jep's enthusiasm.

"Miss Rickson," he thought, "now she'd be so different. So still and considerate. Thinking of a man's comfort instead of the closets." And now for the first time he let himself think of her without reproach.

While he was hanging up his coat, Jep called to him from her room:

"Darling," she said, "when we came in the house just now, did I kiss you?"

"Why, yes, I think so," said Clauson.

"Oh, nothing. I didn't think I'd forgotten," she answered. "I never mean to forget."

Clauson thought: "Good heavens, have we come to this?"

When he joined her she was bending over the living-room table, all heaped up again with whatever it was and she was saying absolutely that she looked just as motley as the others did. He wondered disconsolately if any other woman on earth found motifs in everything the way Jep did.

"Pulled down," she repeated, and he wished terribly that she would not let herself look so surprised—Jep always did that. He had seen her do it innumerable times over nothing.

"Yes, pulled down," he repeated sharply. "We'll all have to get out by

the leaded windows, the compact kitchen.

"No corners, though," he growled. "No corners, I can't smoke unless there's corners—I tell you, Jep, I don't want to move."

They went home in the rain and all the way there Jep was absorbedly—and aloud—imagining furniture into that bungalow. Clauson sat silent, hunched at the wheel. He was thinking how

rightfully used he was to Jep's enthusiasm.

"I don't want to leave this place," he insisted. "I'm used to it—I tell you, Jep, I'm so used to it that I'm rooted. I'd be miserable anywhere else."

"I'm used to it, too," she admitted. "Truly, for all my talk, I'm homesick already."

"Then let's cut talking about it, for now," said Clauson.

THIS evening passed as all evenings passed. They considered the theatre and gave up going. They considered telephoning for somebody to come in and make up a table and gave that up, too. Clauson lighted the fire and smoked, and Jep read aloud. Then they slipped into silence. * * * And Clauson fell to thinking of Miss Rickson. He had heard her say incredibly little, and yet he could feel the rest, the laughter, the thrill which talk with her could conceivably hold. But he and Jep had nothing to say to each other, really, which they had not already said.

He rose abruptly. "I'm going out for a little while, Jep," he said.

"Where on earth are you going?" she rejoined, as always.

This time as he went he did not reply.

At a chemist's he called up the racing boarder's house and asked for Miss Ruth Rickson.

"I've something I want to talk over with you," he told her earnestly. "Are you well enough to have a bite of supper with me?"

Screwed his silencer and slipped his automatic into the wet pocket of his mackintosh.

Feeling in an inside pocket for a cigarette, he found one and lit it from the smoldering end of a tinder lighter.

Then, carefully concealing the lighted cigarette in the palm of his hand, he walked softly and noiselessly down the drive, keeping to the shadow of the bushes and watching to left and right for signs of approaching pedestrians.

At two points he could see the health road, and nobody was in sight. There was plenty of time, and men had been ruined by haste. He reached the gate of a flight of steps under a square and ugly portico.

He looked up at the building, it was in darkness. Apparently, it was empty, but he knew enough of the colonel's methods to be sure that Boundary would not advertise the presence of the girl to the outside world.

He stood hesitating wondering. The whole thing might be a trap, but Solomon White was not easily scared. He

went up the building, took a revolver from his pocket, drew back the hammer and walked forward cautiously. There was no sign of life.

The rustling of shrubs and trees was the only mournful sound which varied the roar of the storm.

He was opposite the door, and one foot was raised to surmount the first step, when there came a sound like the sharp tap of a drum.

"Rap, rap."

Solomon White stood for fully a second before he crumpled and fell, and he was dead before he reached the ground.

Still there was no sign or sound of life. A church clock boomed out the quarter to ten. A motor car went past, and then the laurel bushes by the side of the steps moved, and a man in a black mackintosh stepped out. He beat over the dead man, picked up the fallen torch and flashed the light on the dead man's face; then, with a grunt of satisfaction, Raoul Pontarlier un-

"I am not, thank you," came back at him crisply. "Won't this wait until morning? I'll be down at work then."

"It will not wait," said Clauson, just as crisply. And then she said that the landlady sometimes let her use her own sitting-room and she would see. Ten minutes and Clauson was in the landlady's sitting-room and Ruth Rickson sat before him. She was in her office dress and she waited primly and as if she were about to take dictation; but with a faint, puzzled frown.

It was a terrible room, this in which

they were seated. The colors fairly locked horns. Above Miss Rickson's head depended a bright oil of a dog much too large for his kennel. The light swooped down from the naked gas jets. There was an odor of cold storage.

"I can't get you out of my mind," Clauson began abruptly. "Look here. I want to help you."

"Help me!" She looked still more puzzled. Her somewhat wary presence was not as Clauson had imagined it. She made it a bit difficult for him to go on. He was not very sure what he intended to say—anyhow had not been sure any of the time. He had depended on inspiration and her manner was not inspiring him.

"Yes. Help—help you somehow to get a better deal," he brought out.

"Thank you. That's very nice of you. How?" inquired Miss Rickson rapidly. It was the exact manner in which she sometimes said, "Will you spell that name for me, please?"

Clauson floundered. "I don't know," he said. "You tell me. What do you—what do you want to do?"

Miss Rickson was watching him. It came to Clauson that she was enormously able to take care of herself, to make her own deals. There in the office, taking his orders in silence, deferential, gentle, she had never seemed anything like so self-sufficient as she seemed now.

"I want to be a stenographer," she said. "That's fair plain, isn't it, by my taking the trouble to learn the stuff?"

"Yes, of course. But haven't you any other ambition? Haven't you ever wanted—" Clauson was feeling rather foolish, as if the only reason which he could think of offhand for coming to see her had failed.

"Why," said Miss Rickson, "I suppose I want to be married."

Clauson was startled. "You are going to be married?" he inquired.

"Nobody that I'd have is ever asked me. But," said Miss Rickson gravely, "he may, he may." She smiled a little then and dipped her head.

All the same he entered his own apartment quietly and rather as if he thought—or hoped—that Jep might be asleep.

She was not asleep. She came flying to meet him, her face radiant, and he saw that something had happened; something that she liked; that they would like.

"Oh, dearest," she cried, "what do you think? It's all a mistake. Jep called up to say they aren't going to tear down the building this year at all. And we don't have a man."

"Say," said Clauson. "Say."

He sat before the fire and filled his pipe. The fireplace that drew so well, the book shelves near enough to be reached from his chair and the old brown familiar tiles were theirs for a long time to come. He looked round on the room. He liked them, he was used to them. He looked across at Jep and smiled. He was used to her as he was used to her.

That held him. He stared at her, his pipe suspended. He was not likely to think things out, but gently, a certain satisfied sense of her very accustomedness assailed him. Of her familiarity as of well-loved home. He cared for her, she cared and they always would always be. An eternity of being accustomed to each other. So accustomed to each hardly knew the other to be there at all.

"Me? Not much. I'm no teacher born. Three and a bath—that's my measure. And my mother will live with me—when I get it."

Clauson arched. He looked around him a little while. "But wouldn't you live somewhere now?" he wanted to know. "Wherever where such a cursed dog wouldn't sit in front of a kennel he doesn't fit?"

He sat before the fire and filled his pipe. The fireplace that drew so well, the book shelves near enough to be reached from his chair and the old brown familiar tiles were theirs for a long time to come. He looked round on the room. He liked them, he was used to them. He looked across at Jep and smiled. He was used to her as he was used to her.

"It's got to be regulated, that thing," he heard himself mutter.

Jep smiled up at him laugherly.

"If you didn't say that every night, I'd miss it."

He stood looking down at her. And then he said in a vast content:

"We certainly are used to each other, dearest—aren't we?"

Copyright, 1922, by United Feature Syndicate. All rights reserved. Reproduction prohibited.

JACK O' JUDGMENT

An Unusual Story of a Blackmailing Gang and a Mysterious Avenger, by the Author of "Green Rust," "The Daffodil Murder," "Clue of the Twisted Candle"

By Edgar Wallace



"You'll speak—or you don't pass," said Jack O' Judgment.

said hoarsely: "nothing to do with that, do you hear?"

"Where are you going? Won't you tell Jack something; give him a bit of news?" Poor old Jack bears nothing these days." The figure sighed, laugher building between the words.

"I'm going on private business. Get out of my way," said the other, remembering the urgency of his mission.

"But you'll tell Jack O' Judgment?" wheeled the figure. "You'll tell poor old Jack where you are going to find your beautiful daughter?"

"You know!" said the man.

He took a step forward, but the revolver waved him back.

"You'll speak or you don't pass," said Jack O' Judgment. "You don't pass until you speak. Do you hear, Solomon White?"

"One should be very careful, Harold," his mother used to tell him, "and always do what's right."

"Why?" Harold would ask, but his mother never could think of any good reasons, other than one should do right because it was the right thing to do.

Harold didn't think that was much of a reason. Neither do I.

BUT as time went on Harold grew to

the young fish-hood, becoming more and more baffled about life.

The people who came to the bathing beach puzzled him most of all. What curious fins they had! And practically no scales at all except violently colored ones that flapped around them as they swam. And how concealed they were.

There wasn't one of them who could swim as good as a minnow and yet

took a revolver from his pocket, drew back the hammer and walked forward cautiously. There was no sign of life. The rustling of shrubs and trees was the only mournful sound which varied the roar of the storm.

He was opposite the door, and one foot was raised to surmount the first step, when there came a sound like the sharp tap of a drum.

Solomon White stood for fully a second before he crumpled and fell, and