Thrilling Romance of Rise and Fall of an American Family—and Its Comeback

THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

By GEORGE GIBBS

Author of "Youth Triumphant" and Other Successes
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Are Flappers as Bad as They're Painted? Are Jazz-Boys All Limbs of Satan?

SYNOPSIS

CHERRY MOHUN, daughter of a money-making father and socially aspiring mother, is a typical girl of the period—a flower in a hothouse but also an athletic girl, not altogether spoiled by wealth and adulation. Dr. David Langres, a young American ethnologist, who is vastly surprised at the changes he finds in the country on his return from a long scientific expedition, meets her through George Lovett, an elderly philosopher. Cherry is bored by the savant, and he is startled at her and her set.

The Mohun Family

THE Mohun family had emerged from partial obscurity in the years immediately preceding the Great War, when Jim Mohun's first million dollars (by long odds the hardest to get) had produced, through fortunate ventures, other millions almost overnight. The small town, a short distance west of Pittsburgh, from which the Mohuns had migrated to New York, was very proud of the achievements of its native son. The house in which the Mohuns had lived, a square, frame affair, with a cupola at the top of its geometric center, was pointed to with pride as the former residence of Jim Mohun, the financial wizard. And the cast-iron deer, which faced the beholder on each side of the graveled path that led to the front porch of the old house, still stood expectant as though awaiting the great man's return.

But Jim Mohun had long ago outgrown those provincial shades. And Alicia Mohun looked back from the splendid perfection of her show-place near Oyster Bay with gentle shudderings at the memory of those expectant deer.

It was true that, when they were first married, the house at Lieperville had seemed a very splendid place, for Jim Mohun's fortune was then rated only in the thousands and in very few of those. But Mrs. Mohun was very proud of the fact that her mother was a Van Wyck and later, when social ambition became the actuating motive of her life, managed to use that family connection with an adroitness which paved the way that her husband's growing fortune had already blasted through the social wilderness.

The move to Long Island had been a shrewd one, for this was the backdoor into New York society, and before the children had grown through adolescence the progress of this family was duly noted and the name of Mohun recorded as being "among those present" at the dinner tables of the elect. Alicia Mohun made few mistakes. She had the social instinct and she had beauty—assets of importance, when re-enforced by a steadily growing income and a desire to please. The value of beauty in a woman's face, when added to other personal charms, can never be lightly considered. A beautiful woman at once creates an audience. She takes the center of the stage. Hostesses want her as a part of the decoration of their dinner tables, and any man has a dead soul, indeed, who isn't gratified at being in her presence. If she sparkles for him, he feels that he has a part in enhancing her beauty. If he provokes her smile, or her blush, he sees in these manifestations new beauties which he himself has painted. Beauty in a woman is in itself almost equal to power, but a clever beautiful woman is omnipotent.

Realizing the full value of these assets with which nature had endowed her, Alicia Mohun played the social game with a skill which at times somewhat bewildered her husband, who found himself, almost before he was aware of it, a habitue of the houses of the near-great and a member of at least one exclusive club. His own knowledge of the world did something for him here, for, though he had none of the finer perceptions which distinguished his wife, he was manly, good-looking in rather a heavy way and had sense enough, when at a disadvantage, to remain silent.

But it was his wife who bridged these difficulties, ignoring with a graceful confidence the snubs of the snobbish, mounting the social ladder by climbing nimbly over the shoulders of various circles of acquaintances, conquering all prejudices and winning new favors with a tireless attention to the amenities and a succession of subtle campaigns of advertising which kept her name and face in evidence at bazaars, show ring and hunt-meets. She cultivated the society writers, did them judicious favors, always consented to be interviewed and provided the poor things with copy with an air of conferring a favor. There were pictures, too, of herself, of the children, now grown very handsome too, of the place at Oyster Bay, exterior and interior; of the stables and the hunters which her son Jack and her daughter Margot rode to the hounds. Very prettily, in the familiar chat of a society magazine which devoted a part of its pages each month to well-known people, was told the story of how Margot, the daughter, had been called Cherie by her French governess and how that affectionate appellation had been Americanized to "Cherry" by members of the family and the circle of immediate friends, a title to which she seemed so suited that it clung to her through all the adolescent years.

Jim Mohun watched with good-natured tolerance this surprising progress of the family upward through the fringe of society and at last into its very woof and warp, but he interposed no objections, footing the bills growing greater each year. He realized that the social affiliations which his wife was bringing him had added value to his business connections, which increased yearly in prestige. But, as the years went on and the demands of his many interests grew more exacting, he was content to leave the control of his social destinies entirely in the hands of the author of them and to devote more and more of his time to the accumulation of the large sums of money which were required to pay the new obligations he had thus assumed.

Sometimes, perhaps, memories of the cast-iron deer on the shady lawn at Lieperville assailed him. It had been very quiet there. He had always worked hard in his Pittsburgh office, but not so hard that he couldn't reach home in time for a romp with the children before dinner. And there had been evenings then which he could spend with the whole family around the evening lamp, go to bed early and awake refreshed the next morning to the business of the day.

Now, it seemed, he was hardly ever refreshed. His nights as well as his days were filled with business conferences and, when these were lacking, there was his wife waiting to conduct him to some formal dinner or to some box at the opera, when all he wanted was to snooze in an easy chair as in the old days, over a trade paper or a book—and so to bed.

As it was, he scarcely saw his wife on terms of familiarity. She was always in the act of preparation for some social affair at home or abroad or else full-panoplied in fine raiment—too gorgeous a vision to be considered so commonplace a fact as a mere wife, or else too weary from her social triumphs to act as one. The time had come when he stood a little in awe of her, a little in awe, too, of his children, who, emulating the example of their superior mother, carried on the social standard of the Mohun family to the very seats of the mighty.

As the children, Jim Mohun now saw little, for Jack had been at Yale and

The time had come when he stood a little in awe of her

Cherry at a fashionable boarding school up the river. But each new occasion when he met them seemed to strengthen the belief that, if a trifle spoiled, they were very remarkable children, quite superior, in fact, to any others of their acquaintance, for, in addition to personal beauty, which they took from their mother, they had inherited a little of his own definiteness and much of his magnetism. Jim Mohun was quite willing to believe what other people told him—that his wife was the most capable as well as the most beautiful woman in New York.

The town house, though not large, was in a fashionable neighborhood and decorated with those colors which comported best with the burnished gold of Alicia Mohun's hair. Her hair had always been rather gorgeous, and the threads of gray which had appeared upon her temples were banished by means of a secret process known only to herself and her maid. But she was wise enough not to make the mistake of "doing it all over," as so many women of her set had done, and trusted to its natural vitality to preserve the wave and color. The youthfulness of her figure and face, which deceived so many as to her exact age, was the result of habits of abstemiousness, regular massage and the use of various unguents, the ingredients of which not even her own daughter knew. Her face was her religion, and many were the secret hours spent upon the ritual of regeneration.

But the real secret of her perpetual youth lay in the nice adjustment of her mental processes, for beginning with the theory that if is worries which age one and not the years, she permitted no thought to enter her head which would cause her the least anxiety or dismay. She did not permit herself even the luxury of pity, all of her charities and her husband's being executed, vicariously, by individuals employed for that purpose. Life was always at the flood, and she rode gayly on the first wavelet, preening herself in the bow of her splendid craft.

It is difficult to daunt the aspirations of such a person, and she had now attained almost every ambition of her life. That this attainment had cost her something in the qualities which count as spiritual is not to be doubted, but what did those deficiencies matter to Alicia Mohun, since she was unaware of them?

And if there were people who said that her beauty was a little cold, her lips a little hard, she knew that she had only to smile at them to hitch her critics to her chariot wheel.

In the casual and impersonal way of the youth of the period her children adored her. She flattered them constantly and let them do exactly as they chose. She had perfect confidence in them—because she was sure that, basking in the constant sunshine of her own perfections, they could not possibly do anything discreditable. In the back of her head, of course, there was a hope that Cherry would make a brilliant match. Mrs. Mohun had succeeded in everything else, why not in this? And indeed her daughter, even before her debut, was already surrounded by a gay set of wealthy young men, most of whom were distinctly eligible, from the worldly point of view, which of course was the only point of view that mattered.

If Cherry had formulated any ideas upon the subject, she said nothing of them, but it was clear to those who knew her well that in the end she would probably do exactly as she pleased. Her mother knew that she swore, that she smoked, that her self-sufficiency as a driver of ambulances in Paris had made the thought of a chaperon a joke, and that she was accustomed to go whither she pleased by day or night with any companions she chose, either male or female. But Mrs. Mohun comforted herself with the assurance that these were but passing phases of social custom and that Cherry under any conditions was now quite able to look out for herself. And so Mrs. Mohun made no attempt to stem the tide of carelessness, of recklessness in the habits and customs of the younger set. She followed the example of other mothers above and below her in the social scale, who, rather than risk the popularity of their daughters, figuratively closed their eyes, turned their backs and put their trust in God.

But Cherry went on her way blissfully unaware of these mental reservations on the part of her mother. "Mussy," as she called her, was a good sort, and neither of them took very seriously the half-bantering suggestions as to the proper conduct of Cherry's social campaign.

There was not the slightest doubt as to its success. Everybody told her that she was lovely and quite all right in every other way. And Cherry believed what everybody said. She was a child of Nature.

If any one had told her that the conduct of the crowd of young people with whom she consorted tended to demoralize the tone of society, she would have replied with perfect candor and some resentment that they were all straight as strings and as fine a lot as anybody would find anywhere. And, moreover, that, in so far as she personally was concerned, the "tone of society" could go to the devil. If Dad thought she was all right, nothing and nobody else mattered. Perhaps if Dad had taken pains to inquire as to some of the escapades of her set, he might have undeceived her. But he didn't. He was too busy.

On the Sunday afternoon following the meeting at the Golf Club, Cherry was rather bored. The succession of social activities with which the past few weeks had been crowded had for some reason come to a pause—leaving her rather breathless and exhausted. Dick Wilberforce was away for the afternoon. Phoebe Macklin had gone motor-boating with Jack Spencer, and the rest of the crowd had made engagements. To make the matter worse, this was the day her mother chose for her afternoon at home, and, unless Cherry speedily found something to do, she was in for a trying afternoon in helping her mother entertain a lot of older people from the city, some artistic and literary celebrities, to the cultivation of whom she had lately been turning her talents. Having "arrived" with the people that really mattered, this harmless hobby diverted her. A little judicious patronage of the arts added tone to her "afternoons." [illegible] not share her enthusiasm. There would be an Italian baritone who would roar, a writer of pseudo-highbrow fiction who always talked about himself, and a new painter of portraits who emulated Boldini. There would also be older people, neighbors in town and country, who offered a manner which they secretly despised.

To make matter worse, this was the very day upon which Dicky had promised to take her "up" in his new and very fast plane, with which he was going out for the latest race.

To Be Continued Tomorrow

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Chicago, Nov. 23—
Atropine Sulphate, usp. 0.65 mgm. H/T; Epinephrine Hydrochloride 1 mgm. tabs.; Strychnine Sulphate, 1 mgm. H/T; Dressing Pads, sizes 1 and 2; Sutures, catgut, chromicised and plain; Autoclave, sterilizers, doctor's size; Ambrine, 1-lb. bars; Boric Acid, 324 mgm. tabs.; Fluid Extract of Ginger; Formaldehyde Solution; Iodine Swabs; Lead Acetate; Bandages, all kinds; Gauze Rolls; Gauze Sponges; Hospital and Infirmary Furniture; Surgical Instruments and Appliances; Medical Books and Dictionaries.

Also:-
In the Chicago Sale will be found large assortments of Clothing, Textiles, Underwear, Haversacks, Safety Razors, Hardware, Office Furnishings, Subsistence and Commissary Supplies.

At Camp Knox, Ky., Nov. 21, mammoth stores of Clothing, Textiles, Hardware, Kitchen Utensils, Table Cutlery and Miscellaneous Supplies will be auctioned. Catalog of this sale may be obtained from Quartermaster Supply Officer, 1819 W. Pershing Road, Chicago, Ill.

Full details of all offerings in both sales are contained in catalogs which will be sent on your request. For Philadelphia catalog write: Surplus Property Section, Office Surgeon General, Munitions Building, Washington, D. C. For Chicago catalog write: Quartermaster Supply Officer, 1819 W. Pershing Road, Chicago, Ill. The Government reserves the right to reject any or all bids.

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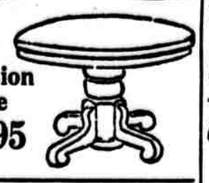

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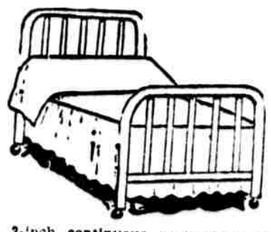

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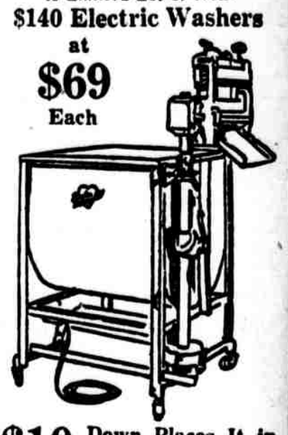

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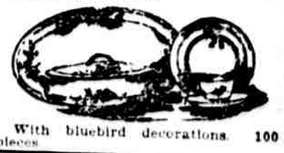

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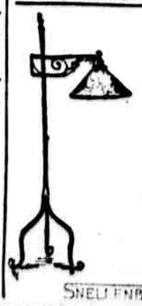

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