



(Continued From Last Week)

He could revert to infancy and take his audience with him, make old men and women laugh at the simple things that had tickled their childish hearts. And withal there was an amazing sophistication. He was a baby that calculated and measured, triumphed and yet wept and wanted always the next top. He was thinking of Mem as his next toy and she was thinking of him as her next child.

His warm head and his brown eyes, like maple sugar just as it is liquid to syrup, and with the same gold flakes glistening—they were quaintly babyish to her in spite of his old talk.

"I want to love and be loved, but not to love too much. I'm afraid of love. It has hurt me too bitterly. Some of them haven't been true to me, and that hurt me horribly. And I haven't been true to some of them—and that hurt me still worse. I don't know which is ghastlier—to see a woman laugh at you or cry at you. Marriage is no solution. I don't see how it can help being the end of love. Love ought to be free—like art and speech. Oof course art isn't free. There's the censorship. Everything you do and say yea feel must be submitted to the censor. They call this a free country and have censorship and marriage!"

She smiled. He was more like a prattling baby the more cynical he grew. His heavy head made her breast ache and yearn for baby. But he wanted only the froth of life without the body and the dregs.

"Could you love me just enough and not too much?" he pleaded.

If he had said: "Marry me tomorrow!" he might have had her then. But she had not his opinion of marriage. She had played the game without the name—endured the ecstasy and the penalty without the ceremony. She had escaped public shame by miracle of lucky lies and accidents. The hunger remained for the rewards of marriage, the honesty of a home, the granite foundations of respectable loyalty.

So when he pleaded with her for love that cheated and played for fun and not for all, for a kiss, for caresses, she shook her head—mystically as he thought, but very sanely and calmly, in truth.

Finally she yawned in the face of his passion and said, "I'll be going home now, please."

He was so thwarted and rejected that he seen her home alone. She was grateful for that.

She toiled all the while at her own technic. When she finished the short comedy with Ned Ling she was drawn back to the Bermond studio for the principal role in a big picture. She was not yet to be starred, but she was to be "featured" with a young man, Clive Cleland, who was spoken of as Tom Holby's successor.

Young Cleland fell prey to her growing fascinations, but he was so much her business rival and their professional love scenes were such duels for points, that she could not think of him as an amateur in love. Besides, an unsuspected loyalty to Tom Holby was awakened in her heart by the pretense that this raw youth was Tom's "successor."

Holby was out in the Mojave Desert on location, and his absence pleaded for him like a still, small voice that interfered with the murmurs of nearer lovers.

She was full of impatience of every sort.

She had fallen out of love with herself.

Mannerisms that directors or critics pointed out, or that she discovered for herself, vexed her to distraction. It was a strange thing to recognize in herself a fault that she detested in others and was yet unable to eradicate. Striving to avoid these recurrent tricks, she grew self-conscious, and people said that she was getting a swelled head when she was most in a panic. What they took for conceit was the bluff of a rabbit at bay.

And all the while the longing for a home, a single love, a normal average life, alternated with onsets of cynical defiance for the conventions.

She was in a marriage mood and her heart and her friends gave her conflicting counsel: "Don't marry an actor! Don't marry an actor! Don't marry a business man! Don't marry anybody!"

Ned Ling was one of Mem's most abject worshippers. He had taught her the mechanics of comedy, and helped her tragedy thereby. Without being able to laugh at himself, he taught her to laugh at herself and at him.

He grew morbid for her. He cast away his fears of love and his horror of marriage and his sense of humor at the same time. He flew into tempests of anger at her unresponsiveness and became a tragic clown at whom she could not help smiling.

He made comic exists from her presence, swearing he would never see her again, and comic returns. But Mem would only flirt with him, and with anyone else who amused her.

Tom Holby came back from the desert browner than ever, less subtle, more undeniable than ever. He fought

hard for her in the spirit of the hero he was playing at the time, a man who acted on the theory that the cave man is woman's ideal and that she prefers above all thing to be caressed with a club.

But these highly advertised tactics were not to Mem's liking, at least at the moment. When he grew too fierce she struck him in the mouth with a fist that had stout muscles for a driving bar, and she brought the blood to his nose with a slash of her elbow.

She railed at his awkward confusion, but thereafter she was out when he called.

Eventually she met him again at the golden wedding anniversary of an old actor, and accepted his apology and his company home.

"How wonderful," she said on the palm-gloomed way, "to be loved by one man for fifty years!"

"I could love you for a hundred," Tom groaned. "Let's get married and quit wasting so much time."

"I wouldn't give up my career for all the happiness in the world."

"I don't suppose any woman ever gave up her career when she got married."

"How do you mean?"

"Most women have been brought up for a career of housekeeping. A father or mother told them what to do, and scolded them when they did something else. They learned how to make dresses and sew and cook, and that was their business. When they married they just moved their shop over to their husband's home and expected him to provide the raw stock and tell them what to do and scold 'em if they didn't do it, or spank 'em."

"But you'd be hugging other girls before the camera—and other men would be hugging me."

"As long as it didn't mean anything."

"But it might come to—"

"Well, for the matter of that, a lot of hugging goes on in a lot of homes—and outside of them. No guaranty ever went for anything, and there's none now. We've got as good a chance as anybody."

"But what if we should fall out? Divorces are so loathsome."

"They're pretty popular, though. They're more decent than the old way—and divorces are as ancient as the world. Moses brought down from heaven the easiest system—"

"Yes, but Christ said—"

"Christ said nothing about a woman ever getting a divorce at all. He only allowed a man to get it on one ground."

He took her in his arms, but Mem was not in a gambling mood, and withdrew herself. She wanted to ponder a while longer.

When she was under Tom Holby's spell, she was easily convinced that the idyl partnership was an actor and an actress. She had been of a mind that actor and actress and director made the perfect combination. Claymore had left his autograph on her soul.

Then a rich man fell into her orbit and wanted to put "big money" back of her, organize The Remember Steddos Productions, Inc., and make pictures exclusively for her. But he talked so large that he frightened off her love.

This love business was driving Mem frantic. In all the pictures she had played, as in the traditions of her girlhood, love was a thing that came once and never came again. Good women knew their true fate-mates at once and never swerved in their devotion.

Yet here she was, passionately interested in several gentlemen, finding each of them fascinating just so far, and faithful thereafter. Instead of giving herself meekly to the bliss of matrimony she was debating its advisability, practicability, and profit. She must be at heart a bad woman; one of those adventuresses.

Then came The Pause. Hard times struck the movies so hard that in the studios they became no times at all. Most of the motion-picture factories disarmed entirely, and the rest of them nearly. The Bermond Studios kept one company at work, and it was not Mem's company.

She was stricken with terror as she confronted her problems.

What could she do now—not to perfect her shame, but to make a living? The would be poorer than her father. She would have to discontinue the installments of that "conscience fund" which she had learned to expect from Dr. Bretherick. She could not even pay the installments on numerous vanities she had bought for herself from the shops.

Her lovers were as defutured as herself. Authors, actors, directors—all—instead of marriage they talked poverty.

No one had talked hard times longer or louder than Bermond. Having heard him croak of disaster so long, Mem assumed her contract would be cancelled. Bermond sent for her and she went prepared for the guillotine. He said:

"I like you, Miss Steddon. You've worked hard. I find that the exhibitors are wiring in: 'Give us more Steddon stuff. Why don't you star her?' What the exhibitors say goes—as far as it can."

"Ce can't star you now. But I believe in you. I want people to know you. And when the good times come again you must be ready for them. So I'll go on paying you your salary and sent you out on a tour of personal appearances."

"Your last picture looks like a knockout. I'm going to take down Clive Cleland's name and feature yours alone. I want you to go East—to New York, and Boston, Philly, C all the big cities, and let the people see you when they see the picture."

"We'll pay your traveling expenses and so your mother can go along as our guest."

"Of course!" Mem cried. "And it's ever so kind of you."

The abandoned suitors of Mem made a sorry squad at the Sante Fe station—they stared at her with humiliated devotion.

Bermond sent a bushel of flowers and fruit to her drawing-room. He saw to it that there were reporters to give her a good send-off.

Soon after her arrival the papers of New York were publishing her engaging eyes, the billboards all about town were announcing her, and in paragraph and advertisement she was celebrated. But so many others were also claiming the public eye! other new-comers and favorites in impregnable esteem.

People who had come from Calverly were claiming Mem as a fellow-citizen and feeling that they gained some mystic authority from mere vicinage. Some of them called upon her in person or by telephone and set her heart agog.

The night her own picture was shown she stepped out before what seemed to be the world in convention assembled. She felt as tiny as she looked to the farthest girl in the ultimate seat up under the back rafters.

She parroted the little speech that Bermond's publicity man had written for her and afterward wondered what she had said. There was a cloudburst of handclapping and a salvo from the orchestra that swept her from the stage into the wings.

And that was that! She did not know that one of the town's wealthiest men was lolling in a fauteuil down front and that her beauty and her terror smote him.

His motto had been, "Go after what you want, and bring it home!" He prided himself on being a go-getter who had not often come back foiled. He wanted Mem and he went after her. He was willing even to bring her home.

There was no difficulty about meeting Mem for a man whose name spelled honestly amassed and gracefully dispersed.

Tustin Boas came humbly to Mem to pay his respects, and his enormous name made her tremble as her bisque daintiness set him quiver. He was shy, ashamed of his own lack of heroic beauty; and Mem was dazed to find herself feeling sorry for him. Pity was a dangerous mood for her.

He might have won Mem via pity, if he had not tried to win her from her career. He was a monopolist by inheritance, and he wanted all there was of Mem. Boas had one terrific rival, the many-headed monster.

It is not hard to seduce an actress from the stage, but it is hard to keep her off. There is a courtship that the public alone can offer, and no one man can give her as much applause as a nightly throng's. That form of polyandry is irresistible to most of the women who have been lucky enough to get on the stage or the screen and to win success there.

One day Bermond summoned her again to his New York office and said:

"How about getting to work again? I've got a great story for you and they need you at the studio. On your way back you can make personal appearances at four or five cities, but it's back on the job for you, eh? That's right! That's a good girl!"

Bermond offered Mem neither ease nor devotion—except devotion to her publication. He offered her toil and wags, hardships and discontent, sleepless malaise and bad press notices.

And she could have flung her arms about him and kissed him.

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