

Just what She Wanted

By Dana Burnet

Usually, when a man is knocked out he is beaten but not when the charming Fern Peabody sits in his corner

AT THE age of six Fern Peabody had expressed a desire for the unattainable. She had stood at the window of her nursery and said: "I want that!"

"That" was the evening star. And a fine, large, brilliant star it was. But Nanny, her nurse, had said: "Come away now, darling, and get your toofums brushed. Little girls can't have their playthings out of the sky."

Fern did not want her toofums brushed. She wanted the beautiful red-gold jewel shining above the trees beyond her window. She gave Nanny one rebellious look, sat down on the floor, and shrieked. Ordinarily a sweet-tempered child, with the disposition and general appearance of a small blond angel, her shrieking produced immediate results.

Poor Nanny was stampeded. She rushed to call a maid, who called Huffman, the butler, who called Miss Simms, the governess, who ran to the nursery calling loudly for the child's father, who stopped dressing for dinner and came.

Mr. Peabody was a widower, and therefore sensitive about his parental responsibilities. He came, he snatched up his angel-child and held her close to his starched shirt-bosom.

"There, there!" said Mr. Peabody. "There now, darling!"

But Fern only beat a tattoo on his stiff evening shirt and repeated her sobbing demands for the heavenly bauble.

"Papa loves you," said Mr. Peabody. "He'll give you anything you want. He'll buy his little kitten something just as good as a star."

His little kitten wailed: "No-o-o! I wanna-a-a-oooh—ah-ha!" and once more smote Mr. Peabody's shirt-front with her baby fists.

Her right hand struck Mr. Peabody's

single pearl shirt-stud. It was an enormous pearl. Mr. Peabody had bought it to commemorate the acquisition of his first million. But to Fern it was merely an arresting, round, bright object which might be converted into a temporary substitute for the unattainable.

"I want Daddy's marble," said the angel-child, and clutched with moist fingers at the pearl.

Mr. Peabody was greatly relieved. He laughed. Miss Simms, Nanny, Huffman and the maid also laughed, somewhat hysterically. Mr. Peabody removed his fabulous shirt-stud and gave it to his daughter, who at once smiled happily upon them all. Even at that age Fern had a devastating smile. "The little darling!" wept Nanny, and came forward to take her charge from Mr. Peabody's arms.

THERE was a pleasant silence. Everybody felt suddenly at peace, and a trifle exalted. Miss Simms thought of her girlhood, and Huffman, the imperturbable, was seen surreptitiously to wipe his eyes. The maid sniffled, and went downstairs to propose marriage for the twentieth time to the footman, who could not see the advantage of it.

Little Fern went to bed, and slept like all the cherubim, with one baby hand crumpled against her rosy cheek. The next day she lost the pearl down

the bathroom drain. For all I know it is now one with its original oyster. But the child was completely satisfied. As she grew older, her memory of this incident was that she had got just what she wanted.

When she was nineteen, Fern Peabody discovered something else she wanted. And because, up to that time, she had never failed to have a wish fulfilled or an inclination indulged, she anticipated no difficulty in obtaining the object of her present desire. Especially as the object in question was human, and of the masculine gender. Since her debut, the previous winter, Fern had learned, with satisfaction, that she possessed certain hypnotic powers over the masculine gender.

So she went to her father, who was still a widower and her adoring slave, and sat on the arm of his chair, and stroked his hair with her hand.

"Papa," said Fern, "there's something I want most awfully."

The great banker did not even glance up from the financial page of the evening paper he was reading.

"How much will it cost?" he asked mechanically.

"It'll cost a good deal, I'm afraid."

"Well, my dear?"

Mr. Peabody's tone was tranquil. There was nothing extraordinary in this conversation; there was nothing extraordinary in the world at large. Lifting his eyes from the paper, Mr. Peabody saw the sun sinking as usual into the waters of Long Island Sound. A refreshing breeze swept the terrace upon which he sat at peace. Across the velvety expanse of lawn one of the undergardeners was pushing a lawnmower, which gave off a familiar drowsy hum. In a few minutes Huffman would announce dinner. Mr. Peabody, wondering if he might venture a cocktail, repeated serenely: "Well, my dear, what is it?"

"It's a man," said Fern.

"A what?"

"A man."

"A man?"

"A young man," said Fern.

Mr. Peabody felt a slight strangeness intruding upon the familiarity of his surroundings.

"What do you mean, Kitten? What sort of young man is it you want, and why do you want him?"

"I want to marry him," said Fern.

"What!" said Mr. Peabody.

"Please, Papa."

"Nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense."

"But—good Lord! Who is this young man? What is he?"

"He's a poet," Fern said.

"A poet?"

"Yes. He's had a book published. And he's quite blond and tall, and his nose crinkles when he laughs. And I do want him most frightfully."

"My sainted grandmother!" exclaimed Mr. Peabody.

"You know I've always intended to marry a poet," said Fern.

"I didn't know any such thing!"

"Well, I have. And—he's beautiful, Papa."

MR. PEABODY looked up almost pathetically at his lovely daughter.

"You're joking, aren't you, Kitten? You're not serious, are you?"

"I'm terribly serious," said Fern.

"I'll die if I can't have him." Her hand lightly traversed the bald spot on her father's head. "You *will* let me have him, won't you, darling?"

"Let you—?"

"Yes, because, you see, he hasn't any money, and I imagine poets are rather expensive. I mean, I suppose they ought to travel a good deal, and be made comfortable, and have nice things around them, and—"

"Just a minute, my dear! Just a—"

"And anyway, darling, you promised me a trip to Paris this fall. And as long as I'm going I thought George might as well go with me—"

"George?" queried Mr. Peabody.

"Oh, yes. His name is George. George Everet Haley."

"But I—I don't know anyone named Haley," cried her father. "I don't like Haley! I—"

"Why not?" said Fern. "It's a good old New England name. George's family came originally from Vermont. George went to Harvard. He had an older brother who's a prize-fighter, and this brother—"

"Wait, Fern! Wait! You say George's older brother is a prize-fighter?"

"Well, no," said Fern. "He isn't any more, but he used to be. That's how he earned the money to put George through

"Because I like it here, that's why, you big stiff," said Cliff's voice dreamily. "Just a little dazed, that's all," explained Fern



college. Then Clifford—that's the older brother—went into Wall Street, and he's doing very well. But of course we—George and I—couldn't let Clifford support us. And since you've got such oceans of money, darling, why, I just thought—"

"Hold on!" commanded Mr. Peabody. "Hold on! I must get this straight. Where did you meet this young man?"

"At a luncheon of the Literary Society. You know I go into town every Thursday for the Literary Society lectures. And as yesterday was Thursday—"

"You don't mean, Fern, that you met this—this Mr. Haley—only yesterday?"

"Certainly I did."

"My sacred aunt!" said the great banker.

"We went dancing afterward," Fern said. "And then we had dinner together, and after that we danced some more. So you see we had plenty of time to get acquainted with each other."

Mr. Peabody said vaguely and helplessly: "Plenty of time. . . ? Plenty of—!" Then, with a conscious effort, he pulled himself together and spoke in a voice approximately measured and calm. "My dear," he said, "I may be old-fashioned, but it seems to me a little too preposterous to expect me to believe that you can be serious about a young man you've known for a single afternoon."

"And evening," said Fern.

"May I ask," continued Mr. Peabody, ignoring the interruption, "whether this—your friend Mr. Haley actually proposed marriage to you?"

"No. I proposed to him. But he was awfully pleased with the idea. He said he'd been hoping to marry a rich girl, but that he'd never really expected to marry one who was both rich and—well, he said 'beautiful.' And then he kissed me—"

"He kissed you?"

"Well, to be exact, Papa, we kissed each other—"

MR. PEABODY lifted both arms above his head and let them fall again; an obviously futile gesture.

"I must meet this young man!" he exclaimed with fervor. "I must see him and have a talk with him!"

Fern rose smiling from her chair. She gave her father a soothing pat on the shoulder.

"You will see him, darling. He's coming to have dinner with us tonight. I've invited him down for the week-end."

"For the week-end? You mean you've invited him to visit you here?"

"To visit us, Papa. And please—for your own sake, darling—do try to have an open mind about him."

Mr. Peabody stared speechless at his charming daughter. What he saw was a grown child, a slender, graceful figure with white-gold hair, a small red childish mouth and blue eyes that looked appealingly but with complete assurance into his. He had a sense of bewilderment, of curious panic. He knew that he could deny her nothing, and the knowledge appalled him. He started to say that his mind was always open; but at that moment Huffman, the butler, emerged from the doorway leading onto the terrace.

"Mr. Haley, Miss Fern."

"Oh, he's come!" said Fern, and went quickly through the door into the house.

Then shortly she reappeared, leading by the hand a tall, tousled-headed young man who smiled, showing a set of perfect white teeth. Mr. Peabody observed, with a sinking heart, that the young man was, as his daughter had described him, beautiful.

"Papa," said Fern. "This is George."

"How do you do, Mr. Peabody?" said

the young man. "Gee, I'm awfully glad to meet you!"

"Oh, you are, eh?"

"Yes, I—I've always been interested in Wall Street, and finance, and—I mean, our big American financiers have always seemed to me to be the most romantic figures in the world, and as you're just about the biggest of the lot—well, this certainly is a thrill for me!"

Mr. Peabody turned a bewildered face to his daughter.

"What did he say, Fern?"

"He said," explained Fern gently, "that he thinks you're a romantic figure. But don't let it worry you, darling. It's just his poetic conception of you."

"No, it isn't!" protested young Mr. Haley, with warmth. "It's an absolute-

ly realistic conception. I'd rather be a banker than a poet any day."

"Would you?" said Mr. Peabody feebly. "Well, well! How are you, George?"

"I'm just fine," said George.

"He's sweet, isn't he, Papa?" said Fern.

Huffman appeared with cocktails.

During dinner, Fern watched, with satisfaction, her father's swift capitulation to George's charm. It was wonderful the way George pretended to be interested in banking, and finance, and in Papa's personal career. Of course, thought Fern, no poet could possibly be interested, really, in the prosaic life of a business man; but anyway, it was smart of George to have taken that tack with her father.

Later, she said to her young man, as they sat alone in a summerhouse at the edge of the lawn, overlooking the moonlit Sound: "You're awfully clever, George, the way you got around Papa."

"Got around him?" said George.

"I mean the way you started him talking about banking and Wall Street and the Stock Exchange—"

"Say!" interrupted George, with his charming impulsiveness, "do you think your father meant what he said about taking me to see the Stock Exchange? I'd certainly like to see it. It must be exciting. I've often asked my brother Cliff to take me, but he says it's a bore."

Fern said rather coldly: "I should think it would be a bore."

"Oh, no, Fern! Why, I bet a stockbroker's life is just about the most exciting thing there is. Gosh, think of being on the floor of the Exchange when the market's jumping up and down, and you've got a couple of millions, maybe, of your customers' money in the pot, and everyone yelling at you and waving their fingers in your face and prices breaking all around you, and—I tell you, Fern, you've got to have a darned cool head—"

"GEORGE!"

"What?"

"Nothing," said Fern. "Except that—well, we've been sitting here for half an hour, at least. And it's a lovely night, and you haven't—"

"I haven't what?"

"Kissed me," said Fern.

"I did too," said George.

"When we first came out here."

"Oh, that!" she said, with a shrug.

"Sweetheart!" George said, and put a long arm around her shoulders, and kissed her with purpose and enthusiasm. Fern sighed, and looked up at him, and touched his cheek with her hand. "That's better," she said; and then: "You do love me, don't you, George?"

He kissed her again.

"Crazy about you! Say,

Fern, you wouldn't mind, would you, reminding your father that he promised to take me to see the Stock Exchange? I could go to town with him Monday morning—"

"George!" said Fern.

"Yes, darling?"

"Don't you like being a poet?"

The young man ran his fingers through his permanently tousled hair.

"Oh, sure, it's all right. My book sold pretty well. But, gosh, there's no money in poetry. No big money, I mean. And anyway, you're always sitting down. You sit, and think, and make up rhymes, and—what I mean, you're all alone," said George. "It isn't like an office where you've got partners and secretaries and stenographers and messenger boys and—what I mean, you just sit and think."

"Then you really were serious when you said you'd rather be a banker than a poet?" inquired Fern wonderingly.

"Certainly I was serious," said George.

"But George! I don't see why! I mean poetry is so much nobler than business! You know it is! I mean a poet can travel, he can go anywhere he likes, and—"

"Stockbrokers can travel, too."

"BUT it isn't the same thing," said Fern. "Why, suppose you had a job in a broker's office! We wouldn't see half as much of each other as we would if you were a poet, and worked at home, in your own study. I'll fix up your study for you, George. It'll be sweet! And then if we want to go to Paris, or anywhere, we can just pack up and go."

"Provided we have the money," said George.

"Oh, but of course Papa will see to that. He's got loads, you know. And he always gives me everything I want. So we'll never have to worry about money, George," said Fern.

"How much will he give us?" asked George, who seemed to have quite a practical streak in him.

"Well—if it was only twenty-five thousand a year, we could live on that, couldn't we?"

"Gosh," said George. "I should think we could!" After a moment he added quite cheerfully: "I guess you're right, Fern. Poetry has got its advantages. And anyway, I won't be dependent on Cliff any more. I'll be glad to be independent of Cliff! He's bossed me since I was a kid, and I'm getting darned good and sick of it."

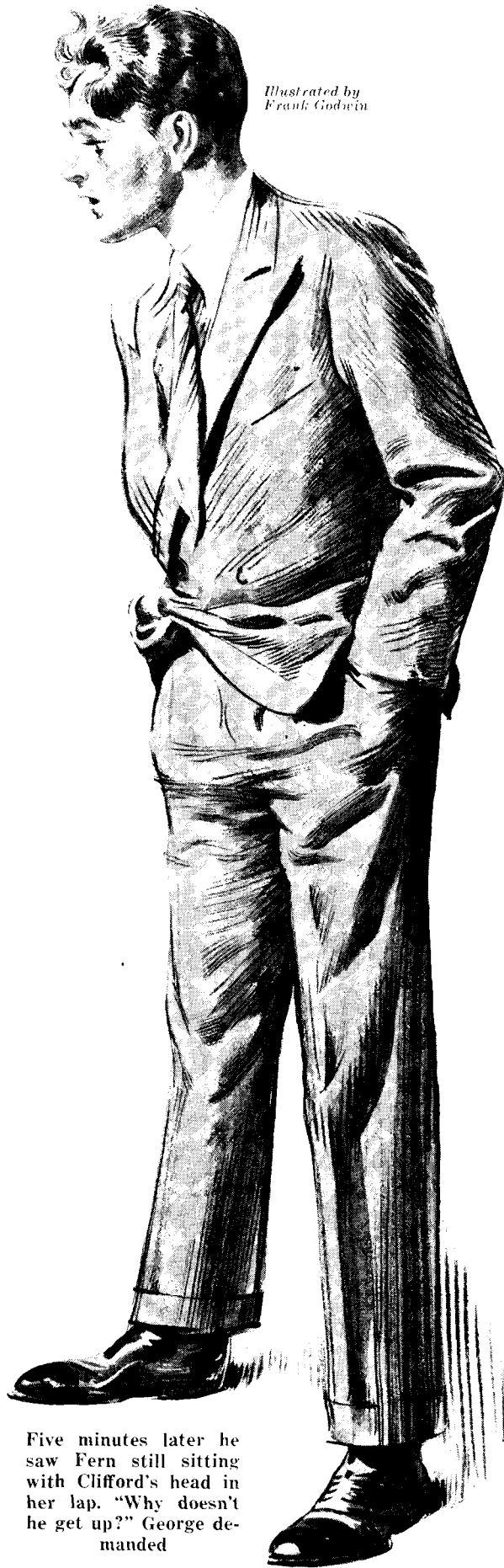
Fern thought this ungrateful, and said so. But George replied: "Oh, yes, I know he's supported me, and all that. It was pretty tough, too, at times. Especially when he was fighting around at a lot of cheap boxing clubs, and getting socked on the jaw for twenty-five dollars a night, so that I could go through Harvard. But just the same, I'm tired of having him boss me."

"Is he the bossy kind?" asked Fern. She had a mental picture of Clifford Haley as a great hulking brute of a man with a prominent and much-socked jaw, a flattened nose and a heart of gold.

"I'll say he is!" returned George emphatically. "It was Cliff who chose my career for me. He decided I had to be a poet, and he wouldn't hear of my being anything else. You see, I wrote some silly verses while I was in college, and they were published, and Cliff read them and made up his mind I was a genius. I told him that every college sophomore wrote verses. But he wouldn't listen to me."

"And he was right!" exclaimed Fern. "You are a genius, George. Your book proves that."

"Well, I'll tell you, Fern," said George. "It was terrible writing that book. I bet it was more work than



Five minutes later he saw Fern still sitting with Clifford's head in her lap. "Why doesn't he get up?" George demanded

building the pyramids. I sweat blood. If I have to go on doing that sort of thing the rest of my life"—here the gloomy note in his voice was painfully audible—"I might as well be dead."

Fern felt suddenly sympathetic and maternal. She said: "Poor baby!" and moved over close to him and put her arms around him and caressed him. "But, George, it won't be so bad when we're married. Because then you won't have to work except when you feel like it, and you'll probably do *beautiful* things, and I'll be so proud of you. I mean, I was thinking this morning it would be sort of nice to be on a ship going to Europe, and have people come up and say: 'Your husband's George Haley, the poet, isn't he? We saw his name on the passenger list.'"

"Yes," said George. "I guess that would be sort of nice."

"And you do love me, don't you, George?"

"Sure! I sure do, Fern."

"You'll always love me, won't you, George?"

"Of course I will! But say, Fern," murmured George, "I'd certainly like to go into town with your father on Monday to see the Stock Exchange. You won't forget to remind him about it, will you?"

"No," said Fern, "I won't forget." She sat up, smoothing her pale hair. "I think we'd better go in now, George. It's funny, but I'm beginning to feel a little cold."

About five o'clock on the following Monday afternoon Fern was sitting on the terrace reading a book. The book was "Poems," by George Everett Haley. But in spite of her earnest attention to the verses of her beloved her mind could not help wandering a little. Her beloved had gone into town that morning with Papa, to see the New York Stock Exchange. He was returning this afternoon, in Papa's car, to Great Cove. For Papa, during the course of George's week-end visit, had succumbed completely to the young man's attractive personality. It was miraculous the way Mr. Peabody had succumbed.

Yesterday, after an excellent Sunday dinner, Papa had said: "Well, it still seems preposterous to me that you two children should want to get married on such short acquaintance. But I'm willing to consent, at least, to your engagement. Let's have some Benedictine with our coffee, my dear."

SO ALL was well, and Fern was now a girl engaged to the young man of her choice. The only flaw in her happiness was that her young man was not, at the moment, sitting beside her. But he would be returning soon, full of excitement and enthusiasm over the day's adventures. After all, she reflected, closing the book on her lap, why shouldn't George be interested in seeing the Stock Exchange? But there was something annoying in the thought, at that. Something anachronistic and subtly disturbing.

Huffman came out on the terrace.

"Mr. Haley, Miss Fern," he said.

"Oh. . . . Tell him I'm out here, Huffman."

"Very good, Miss Fern."

She opened the book of poems and began once more to read. She thought it would be nice to have George discover her absorbed in his works.

"Miss Peabody?" said a voice she did not recognize as George's. It was a baritone voice, with a certain metallic note in it, and it startled her. She glanced up in surprise, and saw a strange man standing before her. He was not much taller than George, but he was broader. He had huge shoulders that sloped down to a small, taut waist. He was trim and taut and husky, and his hair conformed neatly to the contour of his head. It was a shapely head,

and there was an auburn sheen to it.

"You're not George," said Fern. It was all that she could think of to say.

"I'm George's brother," said the trim, taut man.

"Oh, you're Clifford?"

"I'm Clifford."

"Oh!" said Fern.

"Is George here?"

"No. He went into town this morning with my father. Papa was taking him to see the Stock Exchange."

"What!" said Clifford, staring down at her. "Then it *was* George I saw in the visitors' gallery this morning. I thought it looked like him. But when I looked again, he was gone. He must have seen me and ducked."

FERN said rather haughtily: "Why should he have ducked? Certainly George isn't afraid of you. . . . Is he?"

Clifford Haley did not answer her at once. He seemed to be studying her. Finally he said: "You don't understand, Miss Peabody. I've been taking care of George since he was a kid. I'm only four years older than he is, but I've been a regular father to him. No, he isn't afraid of me, but he does what I say."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a telegram. "I received this at noon today. It's from George. It says he's engaged to marry you, Miss Peabody."

"Do sit down," said Fern.

Clifford sat down. But even in this relaxed position his figure lost none of its sculptured tautness. Fern saw how his biceps filled the sleeves of his blue serge coat. She had a queer impulse to ask him to let her feel his muscle. . . .

Clifford leaned forward, his arms folded across his massive chest.

"Miss Peabody, there's no use beating about the bush. You can't marry George, and that's all there is to it."

"Why can't I?"

"Because it would be the ruin of him."

"Oh! What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," said Clifford gently but quite firmly, "that if George marries money it will be the end of his career as a writer."

Fern said: "But he isn't marrying money. He's marrying me."

"You have money," retorted Clifford; then abruptly he asked: "How long have you known George?"

"Since last Thursday at one o'clock," replied Fern.

"Since last Thursday!" exclaimed Clifford. "Yes, I thought it was something like that! My dear Miss Peabody, you look like a sensible young woman—"

"Do I?" said Fern. "How dreadful! I must have forgotten to powder my nose."

The elder Haley sat back in his chair, shoved his hands in his pockets and regarded her with grim admiration.

"If George marries you," he said, "he won't work. I know that boy inside out. He's a genius, but he's as lazy as they make 'em. He's always complaining about the literary grind, and how he sweats blood over his writing, but it's just plain laziness. And he's got a strange, perverse hankering after money. Haven't you discovered that money-worshiping streak in him?"

Fern confessed that she had. "I must say it did strike me as a little strange," she acknowledged. "I mean, in a poet like George."

Clifford drew his hands from his pockets and clamped them over his knees. They were big, hard, muscular hands. . . . Fern thought of the blows they had struck in the ring . . . and shuddered deliciously.

"Miss Peabody," said Clifford, looking straight into her eyes. "You don't know what George's career means to me. When I was a boy, working on my father's farm in Vermont, I dreamed of being a writer myself. I wanted to be a poet. Yes, I did. I don't know where the idea came from, but as far back as I can remember the word 'poet' meant something to me that was great and fine and—well, sort of shining—if that isn't too fancy for you?"

"No," said Fern, steadily returning his look, "it isn't too fancy for me. I know what you mean. It's what first attracted me to George."

Clifford nodded and said: "Yes, George has got it, whatever it is. And I haven't."

"Haven't you?" said Fern.

"Gosh, no!" he said. "There's nothing bright and shining about me. I had to go out and grub for a living when I was ten years old. My father and mother were dead, and I had George to look out for. I made up my mind that he was going to have the chance I'd missed. I wanted him to go to college—"

"So you took up prize-fighting to send him through Harvard," said Fern.

"Oh, he's talked to you about that? I wish he wouldn't. You see, I was big and husky, and I thought I might as well be making use of my earnings."

"I see," said Fern.

"You do understand, now, don't you, why I'm so interested in having George go on with his career?"

"I understand perfectly," said Fern.

"And you will give him up, won't you?"

Fern said simply: "No, I won't."

"You won't?"

"I won't!"

CLIFFORD sprang to his feet with the ease and suddenness of an uncoiling steel spring.

"All right. Then I'll pick George up bodily and take him home with me," he said, slowly and decisively.

Huffman appeared in the doorway.

"Beg pardon, Miss Fern. Your father has just telephoned to say that he won't be home for dinner tonight. He's dining in town. Mr. Haley is dining with him. They'll motor down later in the evening."

"Very well," said Fern. "Thank you, Huffman."

Huffman bowed and went back into the house.

"Well!" Clifford exclaimed. "See George is dining in town with your father! But I've got to see him!"

"Then you'll have to wait," said Fern.

Clifford looked at her.

"All right," he said icily. "I'll wait."

There was a silence.

"If you're frightfully bored," said Fern, "we might have dinner at the Yacht Club."

Some four hours later Fern and Clifford Haley were returning from the Yacht Club in one of the Peabody motorboats. A (Continued on page 48)



In spite of Fern's earnest attention to the verses of her beloved, her mind could not help wandering a little



Smoothing it out he handed it to his secretary. "You can destroy this," he said

Illustrated by
W. L. Barnes

Genius Wins

By Ned Tomlinson

A SHORT SHORT
STORY

WHEN old man Stallings reached his office that morning he noticed, alongside his mail, a neatly tied and sealed little jeweler's box.

Opening it, he took out a handsome, lustrous black pearl.

He pressed a button, and his secretary appeared. Seeing what he had in his hand, she said, without waiting for him to ask, "A man from Waldon, the jeweler, left that for you a few moments ago. I told him he need not wait; that it would be safe here until you arrived, whatever it was."

"All right," answered Stallings, shortly, and dismissed her with a motion of his hand.

He reached for the telephone. "Get me Mr. Samuel Waldon, the jeweler," he told the operator, and proceeded to open his mail.

A few seconds later the telephone bell tinkled.

"That you, Waldon?" he asked.

"YES, Mr. Stallings; I suppose you are calling with reference to the black pearl?"

"Yes."

"Well, I got it from abroad yesterday afternoon, and knowing you like them and have a number of very beautiful ones, I thought—er, maybe, er—"

"I understand," replied Stallings. "How much do you want for it?"

"Fifteen thousand dollars, Mr. Stallings; it's not very large, but it has an unusual sheen, and—"

"Too much," interrupted the banker. "Ten thousand is an outside figure. I'll give you that for it, however, as it happens to match a black pearl which I already have."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Stallings," came back over the wire, "but really I can get fifteen thousand for that pearl any time, and—"

"Never mind," Stallings cut in, a tinge of irritation in his voice, "I am not in the habit of haggling; if that is your price, that ends it." And he hung up the receiver without giving the person at the other end of the line a chance to say anything further.

Ten minutes later he rang for his secretary.

"I want some one," he said, "to go up to Waldon's for me. Any one of our messengers will do."

The door closed, opened again almost immediately, and a clean-cut, well-dressed young gentleman crossed the room and stood silently at attention beside his chief's desk.

Stallings handed him an envelope, unsealed, addressed to Mr. Samuel Waldon, and the little box in which the pearl had been delivered. The box was in its original wrapping, the broken sealing wax at the sides still adhering to the paper, which was held in place with a small rubber band.

"TAKE this box and this envelope up to Mr. Samuel Waldon," said Stallings. "Be sure and deliver them to him personally; no one else will do. In the envelope is a check made payable to his order for ten thousand dollars. Tell him I instructed you to bring back to me whichever he decided not to keep. If he accepts the check, bring the box back to me; if he keeps the box, bring the

check back to me. Have I made myself clear?"

The messenger inclined his head. "Yes, sir," he replied. One learned to be economical of words in Stallings' office.

An hour later he returned, and laid the little box on Mr. Stallings' desk.

"He decided to keep the check, sir," said the messenger.

"So I see," answered Stallings, and the clean-cut, well-dressed young gentleman went out, feeling somehow or other that he had been unnecessarily verbose.

Stallings had been dictating to his secretary, who was sitting beside him, neat, silent and efficient. She had been with him a number of years and knew him better probably than anyone else in the world. He looked at that moment, she decided, entirely too much like the cat who had eaten the canary, not to have been up to something.

Reaching across the polished surface of his desk, he picked up the little box, unwrapped it, and took out a tightly folded piece of paper. It was a check to the order of Samuel Waldon for fifteen thousand dollars.

Smoothing it out, he handed it to his secretary. "You can destroy this," he said, "he seems to have accepted the smaller one, after all."

Opening a drawer at his side, he took out the pearl, fitted it in its little plush-lined box, slipped it in his pocket, and went on with his mail.