

April Escapade

By Kathleen Norris

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Illustrated by
Charles Lassell

Mary Kate doubled both arms on the red oilcloth and burst into silent, tearless sobbing that was all the more violent because of her effort to restrain it

The Story Thus Far:

CHRISTOPHER STEYNES, a wealthy young man of great social prominence, has fallen into a matrimonial trap, set by a Russian countess. Knowing a "wife" will save him, he offers Mary Kate O'Hara, a beautiful San Francisco girl, a large sum if she will pose as his bride for twenty-four hours.

The girl's family is poor. Martin, her older brother (who acts as chauffeur for old Doctor van Antwerp, of Burlingame), longs to study medicine in Germany. To help him, Mary Kate accepts the offer.

Telling her family and Cass Keating, her fiancé, that Gordon Rountree, her employer, is sending her to Sacramento on business, she joins Steynes in Burlingame, smart San Francisco suburb, goes to a dinner party, meets the Russian Countess, and demolishes the matrimonial trap; after which, she retires—in Steynes' rented mansion.

Early in the morning, a burglar enters her room. Terrified, Mary Kate steals to Steynes' bedroom and awakens him. Together they telephone the servants and the police, and Steynes shoots the intruder—one Tony Moody, who, wounded seriously, is carried away to a hospital.

The following day Mary Kate—after being forced to give the authorities her true name and address, and after telling Steynes she must never see him again—returns to her home. Martin, she learns, is away—driving his employer to Portland; and she notes with relief that her name has not appeared in the newspapers.

Steynes 'phones her and insists on seeing her. They meet, and, at luncheon, Mary Kate admits to Steynes that she loves him, and Steynes, who loves Mary Kate, calmly tells her that, because of their differing social backgrounds, they can never marry. After which, Steynes announces that Moody, the burglar, insists on seeing Mary Kate!

They go to the hospital and are led to the wounded housebreaker's room. There, on the bed, lies Mary Kate's brother—Martin!

IX

ON THE following night Mrs. O'Hara went over to see Uncle Robert, as always on Wednesday evenings, escorted by Tom. Martin was left in Mary Kate's care, his bandaged arm carefully propped on pillows, himself comfortable in the big kitchen chair.

Cass came in, and he and Martin played cribbage; both furtively watched Mary Kate, who busied herself quietly

and constantly about the kitchen, wiping the last spoon, putting it away, brushing the stove with the old turkey wing that hung beside it, wiping sinkboards and chairs carefully.

She was subdued and nervous tonight; close to tears. Mrs. O'Hara had imagined this condition a natural reaction to Mart's accident; she had had a turn herself that she would not soon forget. She had suggested that Mary Kate go with her to Aunt Julia's, but the girl had wearily declined. She didn't feel like going out, somehow.

THE little children straggled up to bed at eight o'clock. Cass, made uneasy by Mary Kate's paleness and her manner, wondered if there was anyone to whom they could telephone, for a fourth at bridge. But Mary Kate also negated this idea: she said suppressedly that she meant to go early to bed.

Martin had not spoken to his sister since his return home the day before; they had avoided even each other's eyes. Of the shadow on his handsome face she had been fearfully conscious all day; she knew the terrible hour of reckoning must come, and meanwhile, it was unbearable to be at outs with Mart. They had been inseparable friends since actual babyhood; they had never quarreled. It had been a mutual admiration society, Mary Kate thinking that no brother had ever been like Mart, and Mart as proud of his pretty, clever sister as a father, brother and lover in one.

It made her heartsick tonight to think how good, how pure and safe, Mart had always felt his sister to be!

When the last claim of the children above stairs had been satisfied for the night, and when the gate had clicked be-

hind Mrs. O'Hara and Tom, Martin suddenly put the cribbage cards aside, and jerked his head authoritatively in the direction of his sister.

"Sit down a minute, Mary Kate, I want to talk to you," he said.

Cass gave her an apprehensive glance, and turned red. But Mary Kate obediently sat down, and turned a tired and miserable young face toward her brother.

"Does Ma know any of this?" Martin asked, without preamble.

"About what really happened? No."

"How much do you know, Cass?" Martin asked.

"I know it all," Cass assured him, promptly.

"You know it all?"

"I told him," Mary Kate explained, very white. "I didn't want to marry him without telling him."

"You didn't have to tell me," Cass said, embarrassed.

"You know how I knew you were down there, Mary Kate?" Mart asked.

"Yes. You told me, in the hospital. You said that you had driven Doctor van Antwerp home, and that you saw me at Mr. Rountree's."

"Where'd you get the dress?"

"Mr. Steynes bought it."

"I might have known!" Mart said.

He looked ten years older than his twenty-two years tonight, and as he spoke he put his hand over his eyes, with a gesture of despair.

"You can't take that tone with me, if you are my brother!" Mary Kate said, trembling, but in a restrained tone.

"LOOK here, I understand the whole thing," Cass put in suddenly, "and it isn't half as bad as you think, Mart."

Mart moved his haggard eyes to him.

"I don't get you," he said heavily.

"Why, look here, Mart. All Mary Kate did was to go down there—this Chris Steynes had a house party, and she pretended to be a girl he was engaged to. Gordon Rountree knew all about it—there was no harm done!"

"Did he?" Mart asked, with sudden incredulous hope in his eyes, of Mary Kate.

"Certainly he did!" she said coldly.

"And how many people were at the house?" Cass supplemented, encouraged.

Mary Kate could ignore this question, for Mart spoke simultaneously.

"I thought you pretended to be his wife, Mary Kate?"

"No," she answered unhesitatingly. "Just—just his girl."

"OH—?" Martin said. "But look here," he went on, puzzled. "I went up to Rountree's door, after I saw you—I had been home to change my clothes—and I asked if Mrs. Steynes was there, and the girl said that Mr. and Mrs. Steynes had just gone home. That was after one. Then I went to the Steynes house, and everything was dark."

The girl shuddered. She was sitting sideways at the table, her elbow resting on the red oilcloth. She leaned her cheek against her hand, looking down at the floor, her face, her whole aspect, desolate.

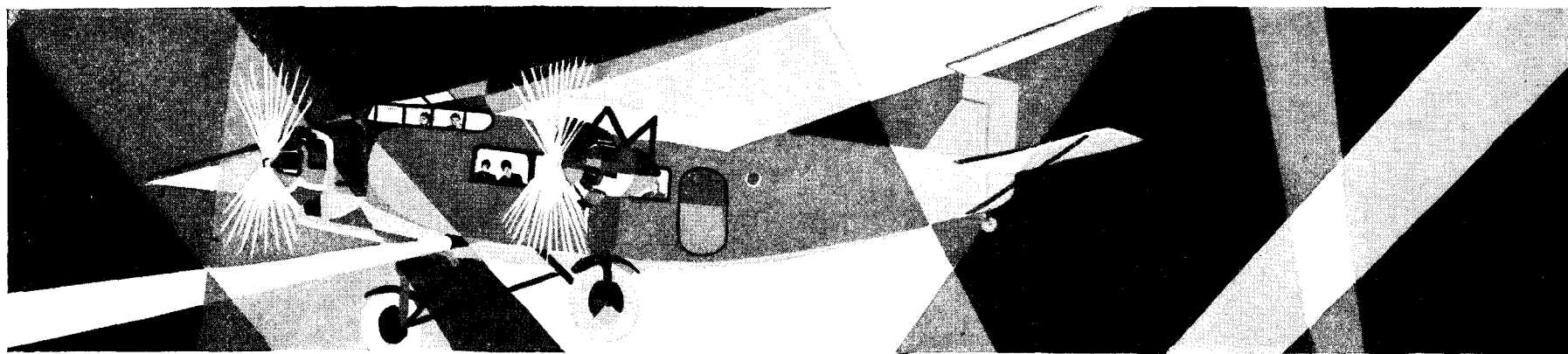
"I wish you'd taken Tess or me along with you!" Martin said, suddenly.

"I didn't think Mother or you would approve."

"It wasn't such an awful thing to do," Cass said generously. "He had his nerve, to ask her. But I don't think it was so bad!"

"I lay in the hospital there, trying to think how I could get hold of you. I knew there must be some explanation," Martin said, with a somewhat mollified glance at his sister. There was distinct placation, appeal in his tone. "I wanted to die," he said, simply.

Mary Kate did not change her position. Her sorrowful gaze was lowered to the floor, with its old linoleum of red and yellow, black and white. Now the tears began swiftly to fall, running down her cheeks, splashing on the little frilled collar she wore on a plain blue dress, and on the thin young hand that looked forlorn (Continued on page 58)



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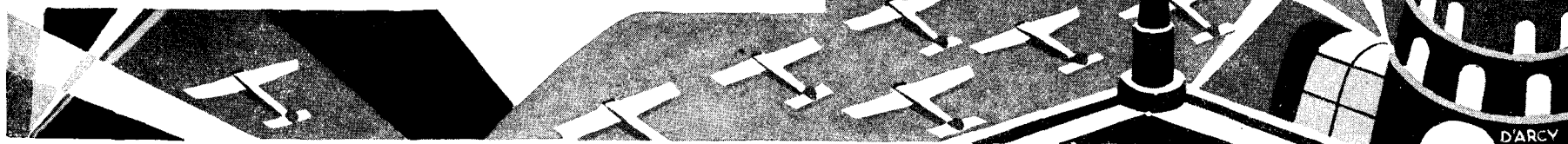
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Nothing but a Ghost

By Albert Richard Wetjen

*A memorable story of mystery
and adventure beyond the
edge of the world*



Illustrated by
Courtney Allen

He did not look at all insignificant now. He looked quite ready to use the guns sagging in their holsters. "I was delayed a little," he said

TO THE north a steamer's smoke made a dark smudge along the heat-blurred horizon. To the west a cumbersome junk yawed along, as if her helmsman was dozing or was not particular as to which direction he steered. The last of the harbor shipping had faded from sight and Singapore smoldered far away in a violet shimmering haze. The sky was a bowl of aching blue, flecked with vague misty cloud patches, and the lazy wind lifted an occasional ruffle of white across the sheen of the purple, oily sea.

The trading schooner Arrabelle rolled slowly and creakingly, as if reluctant to depart from the land, while a rusty-colored bird hung as if suspended above her main truck, keeping pace with her without motion of its wings. It was appallingly hot.

There were five men on the poop of the little craft. The helmsman, a squat Malay, was naked to the waist and wore a dirty red sarong, his head covered by a battered old straw hat that cast a dark shadow across his eyes as he squinted alternately ahead or up at the mainsail, and occasionally spat blood-red betel juice over the rail near him. Near the fore'ard taffrail stood three other men, white, though so heavily sunburned by years in tropical waters as to be scarcely distinguishable from the Malay seaman, except for their

clothing. They were dressed in duck and wore canvas shoes, and one of them boasted a blue silk sash about his waist instead of the customary belt.

THESE three men conversed in low tones, as if afraid of being overheard, and sometimes turned their heads to glance at the fourth white man, who stood leaning against the taffrail some distance away, his arms resting on the sun-scorched teak.

He was insignificant enough, this last man, a little above medium height, gaunt, bony, aged. His hair showed white beneath the edge of his sun-helmet, and there were age wrinkles about his mouth and across the sun-reddened nape of his neck. His shoulders, which had apparently once been wide and massive, were caved over the ruin of a once fine chest and his eyes, squinting from between puckered lids, were a lifeless and tired gray. He was the Arrabelle's passenger, a Mr. Smith, who had bought a cabin on the little craft the previous day and had boarded her an hour or so before sailing time. He took no notice of the three other white men but seemed lost in a bleak reverie, as if he dreamed.

"Like as not a missionary," commented the man with the blue sash. His name was Anselm and he had a thin, hawk-like face, with prominent cheek bones. His eyes were a cold blue, im-

passive and without emotion, and his lips were a mere slit beneath a slightly beaked nose.

"Don't matter much," commented one of his companions, a short, fat man with a heavy bristle of dark beard. "But it's lucky we ran across him. We needed his passage money to get away on."

Anselm glanced at the speaker and nodded. The third man was chewing tobacco, the dark juice dribbling slowly from a corner of his mouth, and he gave a grunt that might have meant anything. He was taller than either of his companions, and very broad. One eye puckered queerly, due to an old scar that zigzagged below it, and his lantern-jawed features were gashed by a ragged red mustache stained brown at the edges. He was the captain of the Arrabelle and together with the short fat man, who was the mate, her owner.

"We'll get rid of him at Billiton anyway," observed Anselm in a tone of voice that dismissed the matter for the time being. He pulled a stubby, twisted black cheroot from the pocket of his duck jacket, lighted it and puffed contentedly. A Malay stuck his head out of the scuttle to the main cabin and called in a high-pitched voice. Anselm sighed.

"Time to eat, but it's too hot."

The master of the Arrabelle grunted

again, spat overside and then with a dexterous motion of his hand, disposed of his quid. He hitched up his belt and turned. Anselm and the mate followed slowly, halting for a moment as the captain called to his passenger:

"Grub's ready!"

The man leaning on the taffrail roused with a slight start and nodded. The captain ducked down the scuttle and entered the main cabin, taking off his jacket as he did so and tossing it on a small flat-topped desk lashed to dead-eyes against one bulkhead. Anselm and the mate followed suit and then sat down and watched the captain slop drinks from a gin bottle into some tin pannikins.

"WELL," said Anselm, significantly, "we're off! And here's luck."

"Luck!" grunted the captain. The mate merely wiped his lips and sighed. All three drank. Mr. Smith came down the companion from the poop, and without speaking, sat in the only vacant chair. He did not remove his jacket as the others had done and he seemed unaffected by the stuffy heat 'tween decks, which was bringing the sweat in glistening nodules to the foreheads and throats of his companions. It was as if he had been dried out some time in his youth, for he seemed quite comfortable. The Malay brought (Continued on page 32)