

Reckless Cinderella

By May Edginton

The Story Thus Far:

MEETING Frank Wittheimer, a wealthy roué, Ray Bowfor, a lovely young girl, who works in a New York department store, foolishly permits him to shower her with gifts. One evening, when they are dining together, alone, in Wittheimer's palatial residence, Ray receives a rude shock. The 58-year-old man tells her he loves her. He does not, however, make any mention of marriage.

The girl is horrified. She shows it—and Wittheimer, very angry, orders her out.

Rose, Ray's sister, elopes with a professional dancer—the ratlike Pedro—and goes to Europe. Before she departs, Ray gives her her only fur coat.

But she must have another coat! Tuesday evening she is dining with a titled Englishman—Lord Times. She'd met him, quite by accident, while motoring up the Hudson. Insulted by her companion, a rough youth, she had gotten out of the car, and been picked up by Times and young Westward, a New York lawyer, and driven back to the city.

She was well dressed, young, and beautiful. When she had told the two men that she was rich; that she lived in a lovely home in Virginia; that she was related to the Poinsetters, whose Fifth Avenue home she was occupying during their absence in Florida; that her name was *Beaufort* (not *Bowfor*)—they had believed her. And why not? Had she not actually asked them into the Poinsetter residence, where, under the watchful eye of an old servant, she had entertained them? . . . She must have a coat, in order to impress Lord Times—and she gets it. Her boss lends her one. . . . One perfect evening with Times, and the young lord leaves for England.

Then Ray is lonely. She knows she should not see Wittheimer again. But . . . the following evening she goes to his home—the home of the "Old Tiger"—where the strangest adventure of her life awaits her.

III

OLD FRANK also was in one of what she called his ugly moods; but it was an ugly mood with which she was not familiar. He was not in dinner clothes as usual. His big face, pale and gray, was inscrutable. His eyes, pale and gray, were lit with a sardonic humor. He did not rise to meet her, but sat hunched on a divan; sultan, satyr; incalculable. She danced up to him; and by the time she danced up to him her face was gay.

For he liked gay faces.

His voice was unusual. "Sit down beside me," he said, patting the divan. She landed on it with a little spring, and sat close to him, feet curled under her, clasping an ankle. He gave her a sidelong look, sardonic, unkind.

"Well, how are you, baby?"

"Fine. And how's the big boy?"

"Oh . . . fine," said Old Frank inscrutably.

"What've you been doing today?" she coaxed.

He gave her a long look from lack-luster eyes.

"Mostly," he said, "sitting around, handing you my congratulations."

"Now, honey, what's that?"

He turned his bulky body slowly on the divan and faced her.

"The other day—Sunday night—you turned me down, eh, kid?"

"Oh, now please, Mr. Wittheimer—"

"Old Tiger just for a bit longer."

"My Old Tiger! Smile!"

"No. Your Old Tiger doesn't feel like smiling—except when he thinks of congratulating you, baby. He doesn't feel at all good about things. He's had a bad, bad day."

She pursed her mouth into a sympathetic pout.

"What kind of a bad day, Tiger-man?"

"A terribly bad day, kiddo. The worst kind. And so I want to congratulate you on your womanly intuition, dear. On that—that—" he looked for the right expression, snapping fat white fingers in the air—"that flair that some of you little girls have certainly got for spotting the winner; and for—for turning down the loser even before he loses. I think you will go far, dear, if you keep right on going along the road you've started." His voice grew very soft.

Now all at once she felt fear of Old Frank; not the same fear she had felt last Sunday, but a fear of the deep, deep cynicism that was dug into the very fiber of his being, that lay in the queer gray brain behind those grayish eyeballs. The very thick softness of his slow, contemplative voice made her uneasy; all her nerves responded to his look and voice; her nerves acutely anticipated the unknown. He went on:

"You will think yourself a remark-

ably clever woman when you know how lucky you were to turn the old man down last Sunday."

And a smile curled his wide thick-lipped mouth, a smile of the deepest derision and irony. He put out a hand and began playing with the fingers of one of hers. His head bent, and sagged so low between his hunched shoulders that, sitting erect, she was staring at its bald expanse. He said in that soft voice:

"This old man that you see before you is down and out. Yes. He's down and he's out. Last Sunday he was a rich old guy and worth a woman's while, but tonight it is all over, and no woman's going to look at him ever any more." The bald expanse of head shook slowly, negatively, from side to side.

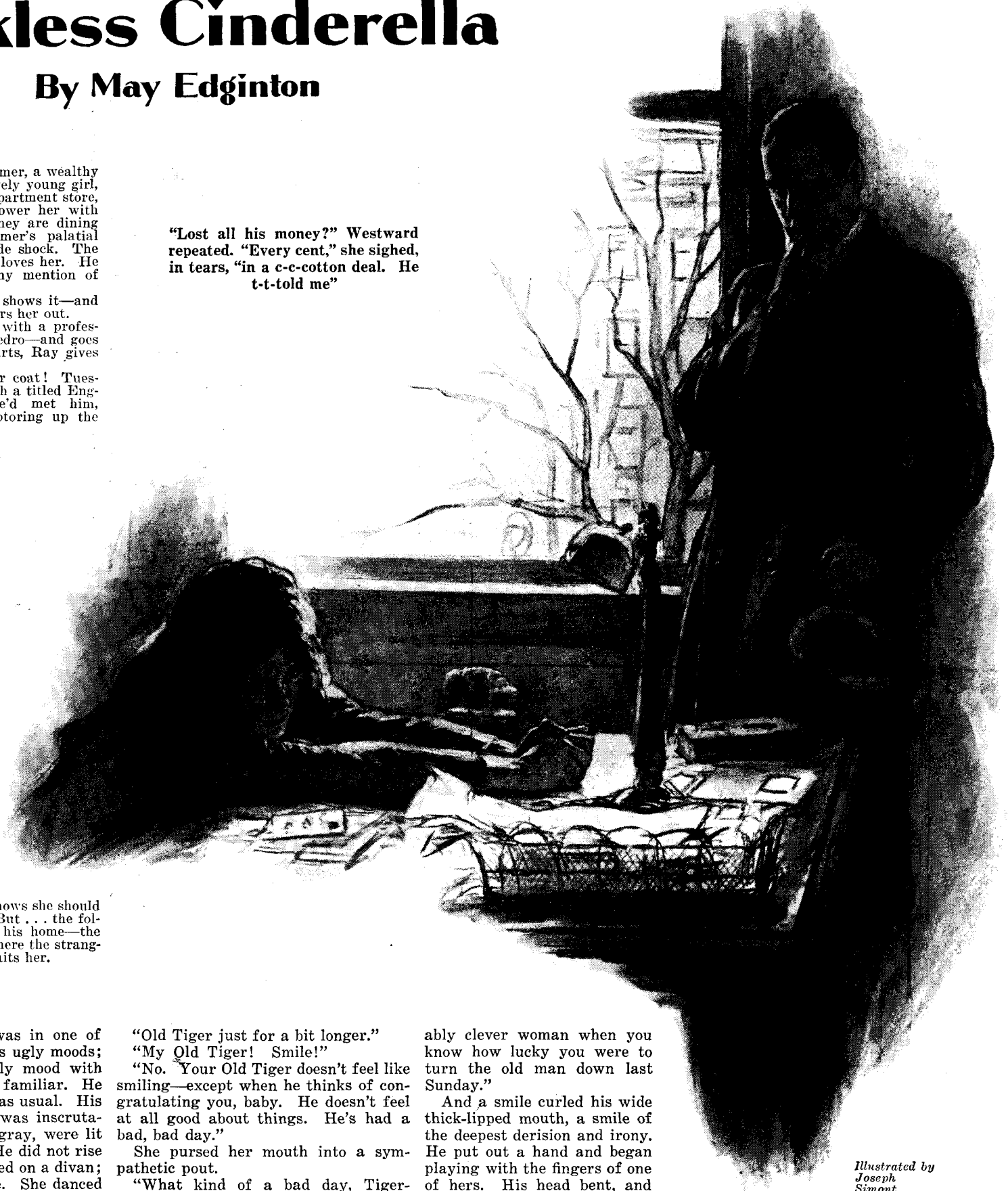
SHE sat, poised erect, dismayed and shocked.

His head lifted for a moment; the gray eyes bored into hers like screws turning; there were derision, weariness and a certain malicious humor in them. His head sagged again.

"Yes, you're a smart kid. Great gifts. Great gifts."

Shocked and wounded: "Oh, Mr. Wittheimer—"

"Lost all his money?" Westward repeated. "Every cent," she sighed, in tears, "in a c-c-cotton deal. He t-t-told me"



Illustrated by
Joseph
Simont

"'Old Tiger' for one more minute surely. . . . He's got a bottle of champagne left!"

"'Old Tiger' then. Don't talk to me like that!"

"Why not?" he mused patiently. "Can't you hard-boiled babies take the truth now and then? Besides, I'm complimenting you. Make no mistake. I've no grouch against you. I give you my congratulations."

"Please don't talk to me like that!"

Pity was a strange thing; so akin to a sort of love. Her heart—so easy to move if they only knew it, and, thank God, they didn't—was nearly sobbing up into her throat. The poor old man! Older now in his mysterious, cataclysmic poverty, for only rich men were cosseted and corseted and barbered to stay looking young.

"You make it seem as if I—as if I—just took everything—"

"Well." His voice came still softer and more reflective. "Didn't you? Just like all the rest of 'em?"

"No! No! . . . Only while you had it to give and wouldn't miss it, and I did want it so—Old Tiger!"

"Aha!"

"Are you—absolutely—ruined?"

"Dear, I'm down and out. I always was a great speculator, you know. Well, the bottom's fallen right out of the market—some will say I ought never to have gone into cotton, and they'll be darned glad I did. Five million dollars dropped, baby, and it isn't likely the Old Tiger will pick himself up again. So now, right here is where we say good-by, isn't it?"

UP CAME his head, with his eyes boring into her, from his face like a mask. His mouth was set like a trap. She had never before seen him so; and all at once she knew that her refusal last Sunday had come as a very hard thing to him.

"How can you say things like that!"

"Because they're true, dear."

"They're not true. I don't want to leave you—"

"You left me very quick last Sunday."

"That was different. I ran away because—"

"To make the rich old fool bid higher."

"Oh! oh! if you could only believe—"

"Believe?"

"Some woman sometimes."

"Ah, well, women have made it hard for me to do that."

"It's you and your kind who make us grabbers."

"Maybe. Maybe." His voice rolled on, his eyes remaining on her face. "We know just about where we get off, we men. It's our money you want every time. When that's gone, you must look for the next one. I don't blame you. I've no grouch. Say good-by, and aren't you thankful for turning me down the other day? You can hardly wait for that champagne that Oscar'll bring us, can you?"

"I don't want your champagne!" she cried.

"What do you want now, then?"

"To help you."

A long sterile silence descended on them. It is possible that during it Wittheimer began to believe a little; but his belief had to grow slowly. He knew, as he said, just where he and other such fat, elderly, rich fellows got off. They liked their women young, pretty, gay, alluring. Such were to be bought but never to be won any more by fat, elderly, rich fellows weary of life and yet raked by their old lusts.

He had known other men like himself who wished devoutly that they could be satisfied with the sort of kind, gentle, good, domestically inclined woman in the forties who might make herself

satisfied with them. But they couldn't. They must buy the hard young beauties, the avaricious and the necessitous, the demi-virgins, or the frank courtesans. And yet, buying and buying, in the hearts of all of them as in his heart—he supposed—was the boyish wish, the hopeless hope, that somehow in all this bleared half-world of love the generous flowers of youth might be found again. So that, when he heard Ray Bowfor's shaken voice saying, "I want to help you," there was a stir almost of awe in him; it was as if some beautiful ghost of a long-dead credulity rose again.

"WHY?" he said.

"Because you have been my friend, Old Tiger; so good to me."

"But if there's no more to be got out of me?"

"You've been so good to me!" she repeated plaintively.

"Ah, well. I hoped that you'd be good to me."

She was silent. Then: "I want to do something for you," she said at last.

"Are you—are you—fond of me, then, baby?" he asked haltingly.

"Very, very fond of you; only not—not—"

"Aha! . . . that's the way they all talk. They don't want to be fond enough of me if they can help it, though. I see through 'em every time."

"Then why do you—why do you—?"

"Half a loaf's better than no bread."

He looked at her, still like a great sphinx.

"Well, I'm pretty low," he said. "I'm like that nigger in the musical play."

And he began to sing in a voice that was still a rich deep bass:

*"Ah gits weary an' sick of tryin',
I'm tired of livin', and feared of dyin',
But Ol' Man River he just keeps rollin'
a-long!"*

When his voice ceased, the tears were dripping from her eyes.

"You mustn't feel like that! Mustn't!"

"Why not? I've nothing to live for."

"Oh, but—oh, but—"

"If there was a little love, say," said Old Frank softly; "if a little girl had a little love for me not 'cause I'm a rich man—which I'm not—but 'cause I was Old Tiger—'cause . . ." He broke off. "Tonight," he informed her, "do you know what I'm going to do? I'm packing up, taking the late train to Florida. I'm having those couple of days at Miami Beach in the sunshine; and then—all over!"

"All over?"

He sang: "I'm tired of livin'. . ."

"But, child," he said, "I'm not so scared of dying, after all."

"Oh, please! Old Tiger!"

She jumped off the divan, walked from him across the room and back. He watched her all the way, writhing inside

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He turned his bulky body slowly on the divan and faced her. "The other day—Sunday night—you turned me down, eh, kid?" "Oh, now, please, Mr. Wittheimer—" "Old Tiger just for a bit longer"



Finally, Austin made out a misshapen shoe propped into an angle of the tonneau. Henry was asleep

The Belle of Calomega

IN THE night the train crawled out of the Blue Ridge and entered the deep South.

When the porter jerked the green curtains three times, drowsily predicting, "Calomega," Austin Munn came awake abruptly. He always did. He was not a man to waste time catching cat-naps after the night's sleep was over. In fact, he sat up so energetically that his head banged against the bottom of the upper berth, accounting, perhaps, for a momentary sense of unreality, for the belief that everything was inordinately hot and bright and that there was around him the oppressive aroma of many magnolia blooms.

His wrist watch said seven forty-five. In twenty minutes, if the train were on time, he would be in Calomega. Twenty minutes was exactly what he allowed himself for matutinal preparations in New York. A neatly typed day's schedule hung on his wall. It began, "Arise by alarm, 7:30. Bath, shaving, teeth, etc., 16 minutes. Dressing, 4 minutes. Walk to restaurant, 3 minutes; breakfast, 20 minutes. . . ."

Observe Austin Munn as he steps off the train, keen and eager-eyed for the most responsible assignment of his three-year-old career. He is twenty-four. Just under six feet, he wears a dark, well-cut suit, a stiff collar and maroon tie. He looks alert and competent, as though he is destined to do big, American things. But he has

When the go-getting Austin met the easy-going Darma something was just bound to happen—for Darma was a go-getter, also, in her lovely Southern way

By James Aswell

amiable and very pale blue eyes, and the merest indecisive dimple in his chin—which you might never notice, though you knew him for years. For the rest, he is Yale—the best business manager the *Record* ever had—and he has never had a drink in his life. By profession he is an efficiency engineer.

"KERRIDGE, sir? Or if it ain't too much of a piece, maybe you kin walk."

"What?" He fastened a puzzled gaze on a monstrosity black and dirty Negro leaning from a Ford. Then, "Oh—I'm looking for—I'm going to the house of Miss Darma Lysle."

"Whoo-oo," murmured the taxi driver vaguely, eyeing Austin's two sizable bags. But he ambled out finally and lugged them to the tonneau of the Ford, heaving a great sigh.

"You know where the Lysle home is?" "Cose I knows where Miss Darma lives. I doubt if she's up yit, though."

"Surely she'll be up. She's expecting me." He glanced at his watch. "It's eight-twelve now."

"Can't never tell, mister." Over the roar of the engine, "Might not be up at ten-twelve. She's a sleepy lady, Miss Darma. Sleepiest lady I ever know. Always sleepy, since she was a little gal. I knowed her daddy. He don't ketch no worms neither."

Austin strained forward. "I beg your pardon?"

"I say, Ol' Man Lysle, he don't beat de birds out mawnin's. Fine ole gen'l'man, 'fo' he die."

Now Austin looked at the town. It was sunk in genteel slumber. Across the show-windows of the stores near the station were big wooden shutters which would open at nine-thirty. The merchants would then sprinkle floors to lay the dust; sit down to chat or doze. He had read about towns in the South like this. The American Mercury had given him a fair idea of what to expect, although he knew the Mercury exaggerated things. A new industrial age was bound to come for the South; they'd wake up and find themselves. Already there was the Lysle Woolen Mill; and the very fact that Mr. Lysle, before he

died, had sent for an efficiency engineer showed that Eastern ideas were percolating. It might be tough going at first, but here was a big new field waiting to be conquered.

He was riding down the principal thoroughfare of Calomega. At one end were stores—the "business district"—and at the other a single row of rather pretentious residences, which all needed paint or to have their lawns mowed. Beyond their wide porches moved no sign of life. At the front gate of one mansion a stout Negress, her head done up in a white bandanna, paused and watched the progress of the Ford. She kept her hands folded under her apron and smiled.

Austin wondered which was the home of Darma Lysle. He did not wonder long, for just before the street became the Dixie Highway, leading away south, they jerked to a stop in front of the most dilapidated fine home he had ever seen.

AN IMMENSE house with colonial columns whose paint had scaled in streaks was half hidden far back in a cluster of sycamore trees. Toward it ran a cobbled walk, weeds pushing up between the stones. You could not tell which of the shrubbery had been planted by design and which just grew. Yet it was not the sort of unkempt appearance acquired by a house which has been deserted a long time. There hov-