

Soft is the Strain

By Stanley Paul

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL OLIVER HURST

The reaction of Miss Virginia Bailey when she realized her lover was faithless. A guide for every girl fortunate enough to love unwisely

ONE moment there'd been just Henry, who was reading his beautiful lines to her; the next moment Henry was kissing her and Mother walked into the room.

"Oh, my adored one!" he was murmuring, and the words weren't part of his sonnet: they were words for Jinny; meant for her—she could tell by his sensitive eyes.

Jinny had never been called "Oh, my adored one" by anybody. Most of the lads she knew called her "Schmaltz" or "Butch" when aroused. The effect, now, was disturbing; suddenly the little heap of kindling that had been accumulating through brief years under her heart sent up a puff and blazed.

So here she was enveloped in Henry's long arms, with her heart, now thoroughly frightened, banging like anything.

It must, she knew, look rather awful to Mother—like a kiss in a corny movie—because, at the moment of discovery, Jinny's fingers were where they'd longed to be for weeks: straying through the wavy black hair that adorned the back of Henry's distinguished neck.

Mother, who had never gasped anything in all the years Jinny had known her, least of all a "Virginia," gasped now. Over Henry's shoulder Jinny saw it. It was Henry's intensity and Henry's age that caused it.

Henry saw to things, though. He was that way—capable. At least in such delicate matters. He crossed swiftly to Mother's side, bent from the hips very smoothly and his drooping, wide shoulders were sort of hemming. Mother couldn't duck out before he lifted and kissed her uncertain hand.

"Forgiveness, Madam," he begged. "Jinny is so utterly lovely, and I—alas!—so alone."

He picked up his battered hat and bowed again toward Jinny with, oh, such deference. In a moment she could see him on the walk.

Mother spoke three times while Jinny's eyes followed him southward along Irving Place toward 14th Street until the twilight veils of August came between.

"Well!" Mother said when at last she captured some attention, "who is this 'Alas, I am alone'?"

Jinny knew very well that she'd do best to be casual and light and say off-handedly, "Oh . . . a man."

But there was too much risk in that. Her racking heart might betray her and the statement sound altogether too much like: "Oh! A man!"

"Who is he?" asked Mother once more.

"He's Henry Sylvester Tremaine."

"Still," with persistence, "who is he?"

"Henry is a poet!" Pride marched to music in her tone.

"Heavens!" said Mother, sitting down

on the piano bench with a positive thump. Mother, who was always so very graceful.

"Shall I get some salts?" offered Jinny with irony. "After all, darling, poets are people. And at my age you pitched a little woo."

"Not with the Arcient Mariner."

"Henry isn't ancient," Jinny snapped.

"Where did you meet such a person?"

HERE was a moment's triumph. "At your Beekman Union, Mother." Which was where Mother spent Daddy's absent months. She had rushed them back from the Cape, in fact, to get ready for Beekman's fall work. "I stopped by to see Miss Pender and told her that New York to me in August was a left-handed throw from death, and asked her if she had any writers who were looking for cheap typing—remember that secretarial hour you insisted that I take last year? Well, she gave me Henry. He was a client of mine."

"Was?" asked Mother hopefully.

"Well . . . he's hardly that . . . now."

"Jinny!"—in tones of horror; then abruptly: "What is his age?"

"Oh, twenty something," vaguely.

"He's the type who would try to conceal his years."

"Henry," Jinny stormed, "is not a type. Perhaps he does appear older. He has had a hard and bitter life—"

"Not with that satisfied mouth."

"Mother, you're being horrid!" Jinny sighed wearily. "Let's not—please! This can go on and on . . ."

"Oh, no, it can't," snapped Mrs. Bailey. "Not till your father comes home. And I doubt then if he'll permit it."

"Now just because Daddy's the rugged type who bellows around an oil field, and—"

"Your father never bellowed in his life. At any rate, you'll promise not to see him until after your father returns."

The small spirit of rebellion that was making a sort of Union Square out of Jinny's storm-swept young breast broke out a banner and a band.

"I cannot promise," she said, and knew it sounded silly and dramatic; nevertheless she meant it.

"Well! This is a serious thing. There's always Vermont, you know, Jinny."

"Sissy!" Jinny wanted to say. "You're scared, aren't you, without Daddy? Sending me up to Aunt Sue's!"

Aloud she said: "How Taftian! How quaint, to be immured. It's like an old-fashioned novel, isn't it? Please hand me my turret and moat."

"I shall, dear," said Mother sweetly, "when I put you on the ten o'clock tonight."

Jinny managed one hour out of the three that remained to her, an hour in which Mother thought her replenishing toiletries for the trip. A call to Henry's lodging house brought him to their own park bench, safely away from the apartment, under the guttering lights of Washington Square.

"It's all," Jinny told him, "for a principle," and wondered if he sensed her meaning.

He seemed to. He took her hand. "Sweet one, people have died for those—as we die a little in parting. I shall think of you upon that mountain farm. I here in this squalor."

"Oh, Henry," her sympathy was quick.

"But not for long, with good fortune. Do you remember Plutocrat's Daughter?"

"Of course. It was written about me. And I loved it," Jinny breathlessly said.

"It is entered for the Agincourt Prize. Five hundred dollars. In September."

"Henry! It will win! I feel it!"

"Will it? Ah, then we shall see if the world can put apart two"—Henry was nicely hesitant—"two people such as you and I. Meanwhile," he shrugged wearily, "there is only that nuisance—my rent."

Jinny was rifling her purse. Henry drew away painfully.

"Please," begged Jinny, "just this little, this trifling—"

Henry laughed. It was a short laugh, and bitter, and was followed by another of his shrugs. This one, however, was different: it dismissed all material thought. "Yes," he said again, "I shall think of you often and the light I have seen in your eyes. Tell me, lovely one, is it tenderness? And does it perhaps glow for me?"

"Oh, Henry. . . ." Jinny murmured somewhat brokenly.

She left behind a twenty-dollar bill.

IT WASN'T a mountain farm. It was a small place on a hill just out of Norford and it had been made surprisingly comfortable by the sister who had always stayed at home.

Aunt Sue was none of your maiden aunts who go to make up a bevy—she was sweet and solid, with comfortable ideas like: "Why don't you go and lie down?"

So Jinny lay down and suffered on the glider out under the elm trees, on her bed in the comfortable chamber looking out to the west and Champlain.

She'd begged Mother not to tell the reason for her visit over the telephone. "Just say I'm over-New-Yorked, not a case of thwarted young love. If she thinks I'm yearning, or anything, she'll be sure to have Elizabeth Arthur around. She thinks that Lizzie knows



"A little of me with each gallon," he said. "How much will you have?"

things on account of that academy of hers."

Elizabeth Arthur was Miss Arthur of Miss Arthur's Academy for Young Ladies, which was a Norford prideful landmark, and its mistress a cultural local light.

Somewhere along in the twenties, thought Jinny, Lizzie might have got there, there being wherever she was going, only she'd missed the boat. She had the zeal of the stranded for any mast on the horizon. She was a nice old girl whose emotions were as colorful and as thin as a falling autumn leaf.

No. Jinny wanted solitude, and got it for ten days running, and accepted reproach from the cool green hills for Henry in the canyons of New York.

He wrote, "Do not languish. Find someone to laugh with—and play. Stay gay, my sweet, as I adore you. . . ."

Jinny read it and cried.

BUT crying, she decided, was languishing. And languishing was insidiously dangerous. That sour, wan expression that had come for a visit might remain.

She said, therefore, on the eleventh day, that she'd milk the cow, or wash dishes, or even help with the canning that looked frightful in all that steam. Aunt Sue said: "You can fill the car up. I'm driving down to Burlington today. You can come with me, if you'd like to. There's a Venoco Station in the square."

So in view of her mood, which was questing, and of Henry's letter, which had adjured her, and the day itself, which was lovely with a wind out of

Canada blowing south and polishing the sky to blue brilliance with buffers of cottony clouds, she might have been quite receptive to the play the Venoco man made.

He was, however, too sure of it—too certain it was going to click. He came marching out of his station with a look even more alert than he'd learned in the book of instructions, and a grin that was cocked at ready and drawing a bead Jinny's way.

She made her face a blank target, but he fired the grin just the same.

He said: "You're Virginia Bailey. And your Aunt Sue hasn't been boasting. And I'm going to have lots of time for you now that the summer crowd's gone."

"What are you," asked Jinny coolly, "a sort of premium with your gas?"

"Sure! To my favorite customers." He wagged the hose at the tank. "A little of me with each gallon. Well? How much will you have?"

"Fill it up," said Jinny indifferently, but she watched him in the mirror overhead. He did have, well—something. A certain attractive style. Take him out of that denim and put him in slacks and a jacket and she'd met him all over the summer scene from Ogunquit in Maine to Cape Cod. With a slight difference, however. Take that short crop of hair. It didn't, as it did on most other men, make him all skull and ears. His jaw had a nice line of outgoing thrust, and it was neat, but not pugnacious. But none of these things, she reflected, could offset such insolent nerve.

He walked up forward still grinning

and cradled the hose on the pump. "A dollar and ninety. That was ten. You've really bought quite a lot of me. How'll you have me? By the light of the sun or the moon?"

"There isn't," said Jinny, "an opening. However, you might leave your name." "Jake," he said. "How's Friday? What're you doing then?"

"Nothing that you are," said Jinny and kicked at the starter hard.

He framed his face in the window. "I'll call for you just about noon."

"I wouldn't really if I were you." Jinny raised one slim, tanned arm for an idle pat at her hair. It brought her elbow a possible inch from the end of his rather nice nose. He went cross-eyed just like anyone.

IT WAS a lovely way to leave him and robbed him of any illusion that he might be smooth and masterful. She gave him a parting wave.

"Who's Jake?" she asked later, driving Aunt Sue home from Burlington.

"You mean Jackson Corliss. Jake's an awful nice boy. His whole family's nice for that matter; though goodness knows what would've happened if Jake hadn't quit Technology and come home when his father died. I could've helped him about getting the Venoco agency, I mean through your father, of course, but he got it with no help at all. . . ."

She rattled on endlessly. There were other things about Jake Corliss drawn from her store of minutiae. Jinny was remembering that grin.

She wrote that evening to Henry:

"There's a boy here who *might* ease ennui. He's impossibly young and artless. . . ."

Artless was not the right word. She admitted that after noontime on Friday a thousand feet up. Artless men didn't fly airplanes—at least not as deftly as Jake.

Jinny had done transport flying, and some with a Princeton Junior who had tried to do things to her stomach and had wound up by ruining his own; but this was a little different, it was a comfortable, family kind of craft.

"I thought," Jake was telling her, "when I took the agency for these babies that there'd be a market of some kind. But Vermonters aren't having any airplanes just now, nor my flying service, it seems. All I've had so far is a trip down to Bellow's Falls. One of Lizzie Arthur's urchins gave infinite promise of pip and I flew her home so the academy wouldn't catch a quarantine card. Look, we're over Montpelier. Below is the center range."

The world was a tessellated lake bottom seen through limpid waters upon whose endless surface they plowed like a steady old seagoing scow.

"Could I sell you one?" Jake asked her. "Not this one. But they make a sweet sport job. I'm going to sell one to myself as soon as things start to pick up. No? Well, I always ask. It's all right. You never can tell who might buy. Tell me, do you like horse racing?"

"Adore it," said Jinny, who'd never seen one.

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Reassurance for Londoners. These are spectators at a demonstration in which bombs burst against a gas- and fireproofed house



UNDERWOOD

The Lord will Provide for England

By Martha Gellhorn

They don't go in for imagination in England; it's improper if not downright alarmist. Gasproof homes and bombproof shelters are merely the new preoccupations of placid existence, and Air Raid Precautions on a national scale only a bit of insurance against the unthinkable emergency. "Everything's going to be all right," say our British friends as they prepare for the worst

WHEN you go to London you forget about war. Everything's the same. The high top-heavy busses rumble around with signs that extol laxatives and breakfast foods and inform you that a musical comedy called "No Sky So Blue" is terrific. The people press against an iron railing before a house in a fashionable square, watching the young ladies and gentlemen inside dance to the tune of an expensive jazz band. In Regent Street, the jewelers' shops seriously display diamond tiaras, which will be seriously bought and actually worn. At the Admiralty Arch, their faces green and violet in the electric light and the coming dawn, stand men and women waiting to get a doughnut and a cup of coffee from the Silver Lady, a charity food van that serves

the homeless every day. Red-coated guards pose like wooden Indians before Buckingham Palace and the gentry, in glittering evening dress, stream down Piccadilly while it's still day, on their way to the theater. It's just as it always was. If you buttonholed every passer-by in Piccadilly Circus and asked: "Do you think there's going to be a war in Europe?" ninety out of every hundred would say, "No," first, and if they stopped to think about it, they'd probably say, "Well, not this year anyhow . . ."

England is prosperous, that's the thing to remember. Unemployment has dropped from 3,000,000 to 1,700,000. The great rearmament program gives direct employment to 600,000, which means that families are out shopping

again. People have money for a glass of beer or two on Saturday night, and a movie; there are cricket matches to watch on Sunday. People have pretty good homes and the rents are not high; if you work you can eat three times a day. And if the great London press, which sets the tone for the nation—the Times and the Telegraph, the Mail and the Express—avoids scaring the readers and agrees heartily with the government policy, that helps to keep people calm too. The radio is also discreetly advised not to underline troublesome issues, so you never tune in to hear of danger: you tune in on news programs that are as neat and unexciting as the papers. And even the newsreels are trimmed, so that bombed China and bombed Spain are avoided, because the English public

is not supposed to relish such horror.

It's all kept quiet, and you forget that across that choppy and uncomfortable Channel lies Europe, and you just think: I am in England, a fine green island, and everybody outside is a foreigner and very likely nasty, and here we'll tend to our own affairs, which means: Business as Usual.

Besides, England hasn't been invaded for a thousand years, and there is no terror to climb back into the memory of her people. In the last war, in all four years, there were only 1,414 people killed by aerial bombardment, and only 270 tons of bombs dropped on the whole country. For your information, it is estimated now that 200 tons of bombs could be dropped per day. And the English don't go in for imagination: imagina-