

"Always Ancil's parties are like this," Sandra told him. "Forty guests and never—never more than one attractive man"

## Chips in the Stars

By Richard English

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT O. REID

The odd case of George Evans, whose career must forever remind certain Hollywood parties that it doesn't pay to make a man something he is not

WHEN George came into the commissary he saw that Jeffrey Moore, the prominent ham of the same name, was bending over Peggy's table, giving out with his dimples. George frowned. After three years as Mammoth's ace reception clerk his chief complaint with the picture industry was that one was always coming in contact with actors. Mummies like Jeffrey Moore, who was forever trying to move in on Miss Peggy Reardon, the scenario department's loveliest secretary.

It was Jeffrey who first saw him bearing down on them. George was a tall, sober young man with dark hair and a short, blunt nose and he had the quiet dignity of one who never went in for that old red-apple business. Jeffrey slapped him on the shoulder in his most offensive democratic manner.

"Hello, pal. I was just telling Peggy what a great guy you are."

"So I feared," said George, not even mentioning how good Jeffrey was in his last picture. Jeffrey looked hurt and Peggy sighed. She was a very pretty party with copper-colored hair, a pert nose and deep blue eyes. Right now she was wishing that George could only remember that, after all, he was in Hollywood and not some Horatio Alger book.

George knew that if you wanted to get ahead you couldn't have too many friends in a studio and still he persisted in letting the chips fall where they might. Much as she respected this rugged individualism, there were times when it could be very upsetting.

George sat down and Jeffrey turned his back on him, giving her one final, flashing smile. "I'll have to be running along," he said, patting her on the shoulder. "Until tonight then—"

George, who had just picked up his menu, lowered it, staring at Peggy. Her eyes were following Mr. Moore's handsomely tailored back as it swung through the door. Her bemused gaze was something to disturb any young man who for the past six months had been pricing bungalows and engagement rings.

"What is this?" he asked. "What is this until-tonight-then business?"

Peggy was suddenly busy with her salad. He couldn't see her eyes but somehow he knew the dialogue wasn't going to be reassuring. Not at all.

"Jeffrey wants to take me out tonight," she said.

"Tonight?" George said starkly. It was Saturday and they had a standing date for the Palladium Ballroom on Saturday nights. The



color was creeping into his face. "He's got his nerve," he said bitterly. "Who does that ham think he is, anyway? Why, even his stand-in is a phony!"

Peggy didn't have that beautiful red hair for nothing. She looked at George a moment and then she laid down her fork. "Listen, George," she said reasonably, "just because you don't like him doesn't make him a phony. All he did was ask me if he could take me to Ciro's."

The very thought of Peggy being exposed to that carriage trade made George nervous. If those producers ever saw Peggy floating around with someone like Jeffrey Moore they would be wanting her to trade in her notebook for a make-up case. It was to protect her from just such a fate that George had spent three months slaving over an original aviation story.

That story was meant to elevate him from the reception desk to a scenario berth; a contract and the means with which to install Peggy in a minor Moorish bungalow. For weeks now his story had languished in Mr. Ancil Steinberg's office and, at the present rate of production, it would still be unread a year from now. That knowledge upset him all the more.

"What about us?" he demanded. "You know we always go out Saturday nights. After practically going steady—"

Peggy's blue eyes were troubled. Until they were actually engaged she felt there shouldn't be any strings on either of them. Even George should realize that any girl would like a chance to go to Ciro's with a famous movie star. If he wasn't so unreasonable he would understand those things. She said that, and George could feel himself growing old and cold all over.

"Unreasonable?" he said stiffly. "Who's unreasonable? It's just that I don't want my girl going out with one of these etchings experts. Do I make myself clear?"

Peggy stared at him, her lovely lips slightly parted. When she did speak her eyes were smoldering. "You make it very clear, George," she said icily. "I hadn't accepted yet but I will now! After all, I'm old enough to pick my own company. And that doesn't mean it has to be you!"

**B**EFORE he could even think up an answer to that one she had laid aside her napkin, picked up her purse and was halfway to the cashier's. George was white with trying to control his seething emotions. He hadn't said anything to make her that mad. A dark and growing bitterness was swirling within him. Who did she think she was? Just because he wasn't in the chips. . . .

The trouble was with Mammoth itself. Their guiding genius, Mr. Ancil Steinberg, was a man of sudden moods and furies and the studio floundered on the same uneven keel. Their Little Napoleon either had eight epics rolling at once or everyone sitting around going crazy with nothing to do. With the studio running in fits and spasms a young man who was in the throes of life's noblest emotion had no chance to better himself. And until he did, he was going to be up to his ears in actors who were also taken with Miss Reardon.

George was moodily finishing his deviled-egg sandwich when Miss Meyer came bustling into the restaurant. She was the gray, sleek lady who had been Mr. Steinberg's personal secretary clear back in the days when he didn't have a studio to his name. She scanned the café and, seeing George, came hurrying

toward him, bearing a large manila envelope.

"I was afraid you had already left," she gasped. "Mr. Steinberg's gone to Palm Springs and some very important papers he's been expecting have just arrived. These are very confidential, George, and so I want you to take them to Mr. Steinberg yourself. He's having some friends down for the week end and you'll find him at his house."

George glanced at the envelope. "I—I don't suppose Mr. Steinberg's got around to reading that story I brought you?"

Miss Meyer shook her head. "You must remember he's a very busy man," she said reprovingly. "When the right time comes I'll call it to his attention. Now, how soon can you get started, George?"

"As soon as I get some gas," he said wearily, picking up the envelope and starting for the door. Any other time he would have resented the studio intruding into his precious week end. But now that he was free-lancing he might as well be in Palm Springs as anywhere else. At least it was a long, long way from Ciro's.

**A**CCORDING to his speedometer it was exactly a hundred and twenty-six miles from the studio to El Rancho Steinberg. It was a sprawling pink adobe mansion on the outskirts of Palm Springs and it was entirely surrounded by a pink wall that guarded the mighty from the gaze of the curious. Gloomy clouds were hovering over the desert as George turned in the gate and started up the long semicircular drive.

The drive was filled with station wagons and limousines and there was even one buckboard present, driven in by someone who was doing Palm Springs the hard way. George pulled up before the house and before he could even open his door two footmen descended upon him.

"Mr. Steinberg's expecting me," he said. "If you'll just tell him—"

The footmen had already gone into action. Veterans of a hundred unexpected guests, in thirty seconds flat they had him out of his car, into the house, up the stairs, down a corridor and into the largest bedroom George had ever seen, not omitting those in Miss Joan Crawford's pictures. For a moment George was lost in the general vicinity of a four-poster bed. When he recovered his bearings it was to discover that one of the servants was laying out the contents of his overnight bag and the other was drawing his bath.

"Not so fast," said George. "I brought some papers down for Mr. Steinberg and—"

One of the footmen already had the precious envelope and was going out the door. "I'll deliver it to his suite, sir. You'll find the other guests in the Cactus Room. Dinner will be at eight, breakfast at eleven, and if you desire chaps and a sombrero kindly inform the housekeeper."

For a moment George was too dazed even to reply. He had already picked out a little auto court where he could afford to pass the night and suddenly to find himself impersonating one of Mr. Steinberg's house guests was very upsetting. People had been banished from Hollywood for far less. Finally getting a grip on himself, he ventured out into the hall and after some little difficulty discovered the stairway. Once he made the ground floor he found Mr. Steinberg in the Cactus Room.

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"Have you gone crazy?" she gasped. "If they ever find you in here—" He looked up. "This happens to be my office," he said with quiet dignity



ILLUSTRATED BY HARRY MORSE MEYERS

They were shearing through, their great horses racing. They picked openings and came through with swinging swords

# Knights with Wings

By Harold Lamb

THAT morning began when the sun came through the mist. It was the warm sun of early spring, and when it struck through the pines, and into the gray ferns of the forest, it warmed the bodies of the Pole named Szary, and the girl lying beside him—close beside him for warmth.

They were lying there shivering and listening, and they heard the melting snow trickling into the hollows of this Baltic forest. They were looking out between the ferns, across the ribbon of the river toward the black castle, secure on that far bank.

"It looks," she whispered, "like a buffalo lying down, very comfortably."

"No, it doesn't," Szary objected. "A buffalo gets up after a while, and goes to some other place, to fill his belly with grass or with water or with whatever a buffalo likes. This stronghold of Vorberg will not move itself away. No, it has bedded itself down to stay there by the river."

She smiled, while her teeth chattered

from cold and excitement. "Vorberg hath no need to go away, Szary," she objected, "to fill its belly. Nay, it sits there atop the river, and it eats our countryside."

"Hush you, chatter bird," he growled. He thought he heard a hunting horn. And he moved his hand stiffly toward the damp, broken branches, putting them on the steaming embers of last night's fire. She did not try to help him, knowing that she might hurt him by that. For this chattering girl, this Yadvi

of Cracow, knew Szary's mind, and she wondered often how she might ease that black temper of his until it would not hurt him.

White smoke swirled up from the wet pine branches, making, Yadvi thought, a new white giant's plume in the forest. She knew that Szary wanted this. Careful had he been to make an eye of light by night where the watchers on Vorberg's keep could see it—and now a heavy smoke for the huntsmen to observe.

"They ride this way," said Szary, his head close to the ground. Here, in the ravine, sounds carried far, and he thought that stones rattled down below them.

And Yadvi's head, with its disordered, strawlike hair, pressed close beside his. The devilkin of a girl was lying on her back, her gray eyes half closed. She was hiding the chill and the fear that tore at her; but she could not hide the pulse throbbing in her throat. And she begged something of him, quickly, while the telltale smoke rose over the two of them like a tent. "Szary, do not be angry again. When you feel hot rage, say to yourself it doesn't matter. I want you to think of me, and say that to yourself. Do it."

Her gray eyes, close to his, held him as if her bare arms were around his neck. He looked over her, through the ferns, without seeing anything.

"Do it!"

"Certainly," he grunted.

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**Editor's Note:** The riders in the illustration above are Poland's famed Winged Hussars, the fearless, expert riders that flourished as a military unit for a century after the Poles and Lithuanians had broken the yoke of the Teutonic Knights in the first battle of Tannenberg (Grunewald) in 1410. The feathered wings, reminiscent of the Polish eagle emblem, were symbolic of salvation after death in battle but had the more practical effect of overawing the enemy in spectacular charges