

Cupid and Conductorettes

BY JACK BECHDOLT

Illustrated by J. Scott Williams

MRS. SARAH STALTON SMOOF was a lady reformer of uncertain age and boundless energy. She was the originator of the movement to clothe the nude statuary in the Metropolitan Museum in Mother Hubbard wrappers, organizer of the campaign to stop cigarette-smoking in the American army, and founder of the League to Prevent Love-Making in the Movies.

One day the morning sun discovered her

writer, she wrote a letter to a newspaper, complaining of the shockingly loose morals of conductorettes. The paper printed the letter, and another interesting reform movement basked in the light of publicity for several weeks.

II

POP LUFKINS sat on the topmost step of the flight that



"MY H-HEART IS B-BROKEN!"

with nothing to do, so she looked out of the window of her house, which stood near the end of a suburban car-line. When she had nothing else to do she found congenial occupation in looking out of the window to see what others were doing and find reasons to disapprove.

This was in the days when women car-conductors were a novelty introduced by the great war.

A street-car had reached the end of the line. The motorman and the conductorette sat side by side on the step, and anybody could see with half an eye that they were enjoying their conversation. A prejudiced person might have said that they were flirting.

Mrs. Sarah Stalton Smoof looked, and her indignation waxed. Turning to her type-

led down to the dim, musty hall, and rubbed the light fuzz of his bald spot in savage perplexity.

It was not enough for that iron-jawed wife of his that he, an active man, barely fifty, must be snatched from the job he had followed for years and be kept idle at home. No! He must also sit by and see his daughter break her heart for love of a man of whom Mrs. Lufkins did not happen to approve.

Through the thin pine door of Clytie Lufkins's bedroom came the subdued noise of a woman's grief. The sobs were stifled, as if their author had buried her head in the pillows, but every echo stabbed Pop Lufkins through the heart like a white-hot dagger.

A long-drawn moan brought him to his

feet wincing with sympathetic pangs. He stole to the door and knocked gently.

"Clytie! Come, kitten, come!" he soothed.

"Go away! Please let me alone, Pop. My h-heart is b-broken!" pleaded Clytie.

The rasp of Mrs. Lufkins's anger broke into their murmurs.

"Pop, you leave that fool girl be. If it wasn't for you and your chicken-heartedness we wouldn't have all this row on our hands. You hear me, Pop? Put out that cat and come to bed. Has this whole family got to act like a pack of fools?"

Straining through a wall of lath and plas-



"LET ANOTHER BELLOW
OUT OF YOU, AND
I'LL BE IN!"

ter from the bedroom adjoining Clytie's, the voice of Mrs. Lufkins lost none of its commanding timbre, its suggestion of despotism. Pop started like a man stung by a wasp.

"Yes, Mattie," he mumbled patiently.

"And you, Clytie!" raged the fond mother. "You let another bellow out of you, and I'll be in and hand you a good, old-fashioned wallop like you deserve. Believe me, I'll give you something that will make you forget this foolishness about marrying a low-down, greasy plumber!"

"He's not a plumber," Pop whispered to himself fiercely. "It ain't fair to—"

Half-way down the stairs a change came over him. He stole softly to the front door,

pushed aside the dusty lace curtain, and peered out.

"It ain't right," he argued, in vindication of what he was planning. "It just ain't right by neither of 'em. They're young and they got just as good a warrant to get married as I and Mattie had. Poor old Phil!"

Across the street, beneath an arc-light, he saw the figure of wo thus apostrophized. Phil Leonard, as a matter of fact, was not an old man, but a young fellow of twenty-five or thereabouts, slight of build and not bad-looking. Out there on the wet sidewalk he stood disconsolately, with his eye fixed upon the modest residence of the Lufkins family, and he gazed as one who looks his last on the face of a dead friend. The utter hopelessness of youthful despair was printed plain in every line of him; and Pop regarded him with a mournful eye of sympathy.

Teddy, the cat, stole velvet-footed through the dark and rubbed against Mr. Lufkins's leg, only to be spurned by his sock-clad foot.

"It ain't right," Pop repeated bitterly; "and what's more, I won't stand for it!"

Softly he turned the handle of the door, swung it open, and, went out on the steps that descended to the street.

"S-s-s-st!" he hissed. "Oh, Phil!"

Step by step Pop stole toward the sidewalk, reiterating his whispering signal. A March drizzle trickled over the stones and collected in pools that soaked his scantily covered feet, but he did not notice it.

Phil Leonard suddenly became aware of the messenger from the house of his regard, and splashed across to meet him.

"Pop!" he exclaimed. "Good night, man—look at your feet!"

"Never mind my feet. Phil, I got an idea. Listen—you want to get married, you and Clytie?"

For answer Phil gripped Pop sharply by the arm with a grasp that made the older man wince.

"Do we?" he exclaimed bitterly.

"Well, then, go ahead!"

"Go ahead! What d'you mean, go ahead? You know what *she* said."

"Yes, but"—Pop gulped excitedly—"never mind what she said."

"You mean—"

"I mean this, Phil. I like you pretty well for a son-in-law, see? Clytie likes you pretty well, too, I guess. That leaves only Mattie against you, and it's time Mattie learned something. So if Clytie says yes—say, wait a second while I get her!"

It was more than a second that Phil waited on the door-step. It was more like ten minutes; but finally Pop succeeded, by devious strategy, in running himself and Clytie past the maternal blockade.

The girl he brought with him was a black-haired, slender wisp of a thing. Her wistful face bore traces of recent tears, which a hasty toilet had not entirely effaced; but despite this Clytie Lufkins looked a girl worth hazarding a lot to win.

"Now, Phil and Clytie, listen to me," Pop announced briskly. "Mattie's dead set against your marrying, and Mattie's a powerful self-willed woman. I been thinking this thing over, and the best thing you can do is elope—and do it to-night!"

"Elope? Oh, Pop!"

"Say, it sounds like you said a mouthful," Phil began enthusiastically, when Pop waved him to silence.

"Understand me, Phil, my girl's not been raised to go eloping with the first young fellow that comes along. Nothing like that! She ain't the kind of girl would go running off from her father and mother, if—"

"Say," protested Phil hotly, "don't I know that? Don't I know—"

"And furthermore," Pop swept on, "I'm going to see that this fly-by-night business is done right and proper, because I'm going to elope with you. Now, what say?"

They said nothing. They only stared their bewilderment.

"Well now, Phil, I understood you to say you had the money and you wanted to marry my little girl. And you, Clytie, didn't you tell me you wanted Phil?"

Clytie's arms were close about Pop's neck and her cheek against his as she nodded voiceless assent.

"Sure I got the money, and my new job in Brooklyn's a steady thing, just like I told Mrs. Lufkins," Phil answered. "But about this—now—your eloping with us—"

"I'm dead set on that, Phil. By rights a girl ought to have the company of her own mother to make everything right and proper when she marries a young man, but Mattie's made up her mind she won't have you because you're a plumber—"

"I'm not a plumber," protested Phil. "I'm a pipe-fitter, and—"

Pop waved the interruption aside.

"So that ain't to be," he went on. "Next best thing, as I see it, is for the girl to have her father; so I go along, or the elopement's all off. After you're married you don't need to keep me any longer 'n you want, but to-night I go with you over to Brooklyn, and to-morrow morning we'll go to the city hall. After I see you two safe, settled, and happy, I'm coming home to Mattie, and probably things will work out all right. She'll rave, but she'll get over that—she'll have to. Now, what say?"

"I say you're a trump!" declared Phil warmly. "As for your staying at our house, why, you can just put your feet on my radiator as long as you live. Ain't that right, Clytie? Now I'll chase off and get a taxi. Clytie, can you be ready in an hour?"

"I—I'll be ready, Phil!"

"Then I'll run along with you, Phil," Pop announced, "if you don't mind."

"But your feet, Pop!"

"My feet be hanged!" said Pop vigorously. "You think I'm going to risk going back after my shoes *now*? Not if I have to walk on my hands!"

Pop splashed bravely beside Phil while they sought the nearest taxi-stand. Panting somewhat, because Phil's eager steps set him at a dog-trot, he proffered Phil heartfelt advice.

"My boy, after you been married and settled down, there's one thing you got to avoid like it was poison-ivy, and that's letting your wife boss your job. In my case it was conductorettes brought on all the trouble. If it hadn't been for them, I wouldn't be hoofing it through the slush to-night in my socks."

"Conductorettes! Why, Pop!" Phil stared with sudden astonishment at his almost father-in-law.

"Yep, female car-conductors," puffed Pop, shaking his head.

"Why, you gay and sporty old rascal! Conductorettes—"

"Oh, nothing like you think," Pop disclaimed vigorously. "But when Mattie read in the paper how women was going to run the street-cars, she got jealous and made me quit my job. Wouldn't have me flirting around outrageously with a lot of bold women in khaki bloomers, not her! And me—like a sucker, I listened and quit. I quit work, Phil—the job I'd held for

twenty-five years; and right then was when I let my wife begin bossing me. From conductorettes it got to be other things. She wouldn't let me get another job—said I didn't need one, anyway. Just because we had a little money and owned the house, she was going to keep me home and make a gentleman of me. Every time I talked about going to work she could see some kind of women connected with the job, and she wouldn't let me. Phil, are there any lady plumbers—pipe-fitters, I mean?"

"My Lord, no, Pop!"

"Well, likely there will be some day; but when there are, you stick to the job just the same. Never mind what Clytie says. It's being idle makes a fool of a man. Look where it's brought me! If the girls want to be plumbers, let 'em; and while I don't advise you ever to cross my little girl in what she wants, that's one time a man's got to stand up for his own happiness. If Clytie don't like lady-plumbers, you just let her lump 'em—or you'll be good and sorry!"

III

Pop gazed abstractedly from the window of a third-story Brooklyn flat into a third-rate Brooklyn street in the last stages of a late spring thaw. It needs a philosopher to find cheer in such a prospect, and it was plain from his attitude that Pop was no philosopher.

Mr. and Mrs. Phil Leonard had been married and at home in the flat almost two months. Apparently their hurried flight to Brooklyn had not created a ripple on the surface of metropolitan life. Their wedding had been one of a batch of half a dozen perfunctorily mumbled over by a tired city magistrate, and two months of Brooklyn commonplaces had worn

off most of the guilty thrill of their midnight escape from Mrs. Lufkins's dungeon.

"Pop, what is it?" Clytie paused, dust-rag in hand, a pleasant domestic figure framed in the doorway of the tiny kitchen.

"The postman's gone by—again," Pop muttered dully.

His daughter moved to his side, a matter of very few steps in that flat, and slipped two soft, warm arms of velvet texture about his neck.

"Never mind," she soothed. "Probably it 'll come in the next mail. Mails are something fierce these days."

"Clytie, I got a feeling she won't ever write."

"Now, Pop!"

"I should have gone home directly you and Phil were married. Oh, Clytie, I



"LISTEN—YOU WANT TO GET MARRIED, YOU AND CLYTIE?"

wisht I had! But I was afraid—you know how Mattie is when she's riled—and I thought my letter would kind of smooth the way. Instead of that, not a word. She won't forgive us, girl, and I—I kind of m-miss her!"

"Pop! There now, don't feel that way!"

"But I've made up my mind," Pop declared, winking hard. "I'm going home. It's got to be done."

"Maybe you're right, Pop."

"And I'm going to do something else, too—I'm going around to the office and get back my old job on the car."

"Why, Pop!"

"Yes, I been thinking things out, kitten. If I hadn't listened to Mattie and quit my job, we'd all have stayed happy. It ain't healthy, not working, when you're an active man. I was just in Mattie's way puttering round the house. Conductorettes or not, I'm going to get back my old job, and then I'm going straight home to her!"

Clytie planted a warm kiss on her father's bald spot.

"Oh, I do hope it's all right!" she breathed fervently. "I hope it's all right between you, Pop, because I—I want my ma back again—I want my ma!"

Pop rose to face his daughter. Very gently he placed his hands on her slender young shoulders. His eyes were moist.

"There, kitten, there!" he soothed. "I'll get her back to you if I have to hog-tie her and carry her all the way to Brooklyn!"

He returned so late in the evening that the portion of dinner which Clytie had saved for him was crisped brown in the oven. He carried a basket, from which emanated the wails of an agonized cat. He seemed to have shrunk in stature. His face was white and queerly drawn, and his eyes were ringed with dark circles.

He waved aside the dinner as he sank into a chair and announced dully:

"She's gone!"

"Gone!" Phil and Clytie chorused.

"Gone, lock, stock, and barrel—sold out the furniture a month ago and moved away—didn't leave any address." Pop's voice was flat and toneless with rigidly suppressed emotion. "She left a note, though, with Mrs. Wilson, next door."

Phil read the missive that Pop handed him:

Pop:

You and Clytie skipped out like thieves in the dark. All right! I can skip out, too, and you needn't bother to try and find me, any more than

I tried to find you. I drew half the money at the bank. The other half's yours, I guess.

MATTIE.

P. S.—I gave Teddy to Mrs. Wilson. If you don't like the home he is in, take him.

Clytie threw herself into her husband's arms, abandoned to tears. Pop slowly bent over and released the cover of the basket. He placed Teddy on his daughter's lap with awkward tenderness.

"Look, kitten dear, here's old Ted come back home!"

"I don't want him!" Clytie protested.

"I want my ma!"

Pop's arms, fists clenched, rose above his head in an abandonment of agony. His voice reached a shrill, vibrating note as he wailed brokenly:

"So do I, Clytie—so do I!"

IV

POP LUFKINS took No. 978 out of the barn with a grin creasing his cheeks, for he had long ago recovered his old, cheery spirit. The morning was a bitter-cold one in February, but he was scarcely aware of that. He did not notice whether his car was crowded or empty. Automatically his hand moved the controller-handle and shifted the hissing air-brake. Automatically his mind responded to the alternate *ting* and *ting-ting* of the signal-bell.

His lips pursed into a voiceless whistle and his blue eyes twinkled. His motor-man's cap was jauntily tilted back, and his red muffler streamed from under his coat like a brave flag of joy.

Back and forth the car sped, its steel wheels squealing against frozen rails. The passengers packed in it groaned and gasped, grumbled and trampled and cursed. The fare-indicator clicked incessantly. The conductor who had taken the car at the barn left it and a new one took his place, but Pop never thought about his relief.

At length the crowd began to thin. The rush was past. The car was reaching the finish of its run. Automatically Pop eased it over the switch-points at the end of the line. Automatically he lifted off controller and brake handles and started toward the opposite end of No. 978. Automatically he noted that the conductor had lifted the fare-box and was carrying it forward—

Then the lightning struck.

Pop raised his eyes to smile into the face of Mattie Lufkins—Mattie in the khaki bloomers and short skirt of a conductorette;



"THE POSTMAN'S GONE BY—AGAIN"

Mattie lugging along the heavy fare-box; Mattie wearing the service-cap and grimly determined to squelch this old rake of a motorman who wore his cap on the back of his head and whistled.

Mattie Lufkins's mouth and eyes opened wide. The fare-box dropped from her hands and crashed to the floor between them. Pop Lufkins, goggling, incredulous, and dumfounded, added the controller-handles to the crash.

It was a moment before either spoke.

"Pop!" Mattie gasped. "Oh, *Pop!* I been looking and looking and *looking!* Oh, Pop!"

"Mattie! So it's really Mattie! I thought you had gone for good and all."

"And I thought I'd lost you! Oh, Pop, but I'm glad!"

"On a street-car, Mattie?" Pop passed his hand before his dizzy eyes. "I don't make it out, somehow."

"I b-been t-trying to find *you*," sobbed Mattie. "I t-tried every way I knew!"

"You—you *wanted* to find me?"

Mattie nodded humbly.

"I—I got so lonely," she murmured. "I—I just couldn't stand it. It seemed like—"

"But you had my address all the time, Mattie—you had Clytie's address—"

"She—well, that is we—you—I—Mattie, we're a grandma—yep, early this morning! And, Mattie, it's a little mite of a grandson!"

V

MRS. SARAH STALTON SMOOF had just completed her organization of the League to Reform Lingerie Advertising, and, hav-



IT WAS A MOMENT BEFORE EITHER COULD SPEAK

"No, I—I was mad, and I tore up your letter the day I got it. Then, after I left the house, I saw how wicked I was, Pop—how I had wronged you and Clytie; and I put advertisements in the papers and—and everything. Then I thought of the cars. I knew you'd go back to the old job; but they wouldn't tell me at the barns, so I went to work. I've worked through the five boroughs, hoping to find you. But, Pop, my little girl—Clytie—how is—"

A vast smile radiated over Pop Lufkins's face.

"Clytie? She's fine, she—there, there, deary, don't you worry now, she—"

"What, Pop? What is it?"

ing nothing to do, she looked out of the window. What she saw caused her to run for her opera-glasses.

In the street-car that stood at the end of the line a middle-aged motorman was embracing a middle-aged conductorette. The shameless, brazen creatures!

Mrs. Smoof decided in a flash that it was high time to revive her campaign for the moral uplift of conductorettes. She sat down at her desk and rapidly outlined another stinging complaint to the newspapers.

Mrs. Smoof was shocked in every fiber of her ladylike being; but she was not unhappy, for she, too, above all things, disliked to be idle.

On Grand Cayman

BY GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

Illustrated by Modest Stein

ONCE upon a time in the long ago, certain English pirates, questing safe storage for their loot, laired themselves on a tiny dot of coral rock and sand lost in the middle of the Spanish Main. Women, I suppose, formed part of their plunder. At any rate, pirate families arose there. Then shipwreck from time to time cast a few mariners of different races against the jagged rock, open to boundless sweeps of storm; and thereunto in later years were added cargoes of black ivory—slaves from the Kongo and the Niger. And presently, after obscure decades of battle, murder, and sudden death, over another island in far and shining seas the British flag was waving, and a new colony was born on Grand Cayman.

Piracy died, giving place to piety and “wracking,” so that men prayed ships might be sent them from the sea, to break on the gray coral and strew merchandise for their eager hands. Dwellings were built of rare woods, furnished with costly stuffs from merchantmen. Then even wrecking passed away, so that no longer the Cayman folk lighted false beacons to aid their prayers. Races blended, and law took root.

England held aloof, meddling not; but a little of old England put down tap-roots there, and grew—a bit of England which to-day must be in some respects what England was in centuries far gone. The old English speech of that other age, softened and made languid by long tropic isolation, still remained English such as with close attention you shall understand.

Dreaming and aloof, having no contacts with the modern world save a casual schooner from Jamaica, or an infrequent Honduranian bark, Grand Cayman drowns under her ardent sun. Lapped in traditions of the past, defiantly proud of being Brit-

ish still—of being the only West Indian island never conquered by the don—she lies amid infinite reaches of crystal blue, unmindful of to-day.

Her life ebbs and flows, patriarchal in its unmoved simplicity. Her thought is still the thought of children to whom the locomotive, the air-ship, the motor-car, even the telephone, are but tales of such of her adventurers as have ventured far north to Cuba, or even to the half-mythical wonders of Mobile and New Orleans. A brownish folk for the most part, virile, muscled like bronzes; a folk content to fish, to catch gigantic sea-turtles, to bask.

Primitive? That you shall see. And so, now, to our story.

II

THE moon had never burned more bright on Grand Cayman than that still, stifling night of January. Right up in the middle of the unclouded blue, pin-stabbed with star-points of flame, it hung—not silver, but more like a targe of burnished, luminous steel.

Under its splendor the league-long rollers of the Caribbean crumbled to white on shining sands and over sharp-fanged coral. Its light revealed the long straggle of Georgetown, skirting the coast between West Bay and Old Isaac's; it gleamed on corrugated-iron roofs, made inky shadows under the huge-fingered breadfruit-trees and gnarled sea-grapes, and showed, in the broad, open bight fronting the town, a single craft at anchor.

This craft was a bark, white with red rails, bluff-bowed, and clumsy-rigged, her bare poles swaying easily against the stars. Her flag, still aloft, drooped the blue and white of Honduras. From aboard murmured a hum of Spanish; and one could see the waxing, waning glow of cigarette-