

Her Fling at Life

FOR A FEW GLAMOROUS DAYS EVANGELINE MOWBRAY WAS
A MAID OF THE SUN AND LIVED IN A WORLD OF
RAPTURE AND ROMANCE

By Clough McQuinn

EVANGELINE MOWBRAY pined for romance. In one of the love stories that were her daily diet, she had read that as we live we build prison walls about ourselves, and that some day we awake to find ourselves completely shut in by bars of our own setting.

Last night had been the night of Evangeline's betrothal party, and this morning she was disconcertedly viewing the added height of her prison walls. Her life was the quiet, sheltered kind that knew of adventure only vicariously; but until now she had held a vague hope that some time an experience like those in the popular best-sellers would come to her. In those best-sellers the fatal "yes" ended the story. Evangeline had already uttered the fatal "yes," and now she was sighing for just one fling at life, just one tiny romance to take with her into the prison she was building for herself.

Perhaps she made a demand upon her subconsciousness. Certainly she registered a mental vow to seek some small adventure in the land where hearts rule heads.

Being engaged to Dave Bartlett, one might suppose that she had already tasted romance; but Evangeline didn't think so. Not that she did not love Dave, for she had loved him nearly all of the twenty years of her life. It was Dave who rescued her from the river when a boat upset under her amateurish rowing. It was Dave who carried her home, cradled in his strong arms, from a picnic, when she fell out of a swing and broke her arm. Yes, and it was Dave who blistered his hands smothering out the blaze when her dress caught fire at a Halloween party. It was always Dave, but Dave wasn't romance. Dave was a sure thing.

Father had said last night that he was content to let Evangeline go, because she would be safe with Dave. Evangeline didn't want to be safe. She had read thrilling tales of heartache and desire, of great risks taken, of disaster averted, and happiness won just at the chasm's brink. She was sure no such soul stirring adventures could ever be hers, and the years ahead looked like a long wet day.

As she lay in a hammock swung in the wide porch of the flower-bordered bungalow that was her home, Evangeline was aroused from these meditations of discontent by the arrival of the postman. He handed her a couple of magazines, gay with pictures of girls reveling in romances that she would never know, a circular from a mail order house, and a letter for her mother from Delia, Evangeline's married sister. The girl took the letter to her mother in the sun parlor, and returned to her hammock and the magazines.

Some moments later she was interrupted in the midst of a throbbing love story.

"Come and read your sister's letter," her mother called.

"What's the excitement? Beans gone up another cent?"

Delia's husband raised beans.

"Come and read it," was the mother's reply.

It was the usual family letter. Tacked on to the end, as the important thing in a letter is apt to be, was the news that Herbert, Delia's husband, must go to the city on business, and that Delia would like to have Evangeline stay with her while he was away.

"You'll go, won't you?" her mother asked, when Evangeline laid the letter down.

"Oh, I don't know. Life isn't wildly exciting at Dee's."

"Of course, if you think just of yourself—but I don't like to have Delia left alone with Herbie."

"Sure I'll go!" Evangeline had a sudden vision of little four-year-old Herbie, of whom not only she, but the whole family, were abject slaves and devoted admirers. "I haven't seen Herbie for more than three months, and he's growing so fast that one can hardly recognize him from one month to another."

"Delia has a new roadster, too," her mother reminded her. "You'll have a good time."

"Maybe," Evangeline agreed.

This would interfere with her recent resolution to seek a romantic adventure. The California bean belt was hardly a promising hunting ground for romance; but that could wait until she returned.

II

DELIA'S home was a brown, wistaria-covered bungalow, backed up against the first of the foothills that rose step by step to the Coast Range. Before the bungalow the San Joaquin valley spread, flat and wide, to the eastern horizon. Acre after acre of it was planted to beans, their first bright green leaves just now beginning to show through the dark earth in exact geometrical lines.

On the second day of Evangeline's visit, Herbie exhibited his rabbits and a baby quail hatched under a bantam hen. Then he tumbled off his coaster, in his zeal to show his speed, and finally went to sleep, exhausted with his efforts to entertain his aunt.

"Guess I'll hike up Altar Hill," Evangeline announced to Delia, when she had shut the door on the sleeping child.

Altar Hill was so named because of a large rock on the summit, its flat top discolored by ancient fires and its sides streaked with dark stains, ghastly in their suggestiveness. This rock, Herbert had told her, was a sacrificial stone of the sun worshipers, who once inhabited the country. The hill sloped gradually from the valley, but on the other side it dropped abruptly, almost precipitously, into a shallow arroyo. The Altar Rock was at the very edge of the steep drop, having been placed there to catch the first rays of the sun as it rose across the flat valley. As Evange-

line made her way up the slope, she was visioning for herself an ancient pilgrimage to this barbaric altar, where, perhaps, a beautiful maiden was to be sacrificed to the Sun God.

Arrived at the big rock, she found blue lupins growing all about it. Evangeline never could resist flowers. The choicest ones, of course, grew in the most inaccessible place behind the rock, where the ground dropped steeply. She reached out, lost her footing, slipped, tumbled, and rolled down into the arroyo, where she almost landed upon an artist seated at his canvas.

"Great Heavens!" he ejaculated, rescuing his toppling easel. "Where'd you come from?" he demanded, staring at Evangeline as she scrambled out of the mesquite bushes.

"From the Altar Rock," she told him. "I'm afraid I startled you," she added, breathless and apologetic.

"When the Sun God casts a fair maid from his altar to my feet, then I must, indeed, be in high favor," the artist replied grandiloquently, and bowed low before her.

Evangeline noted the supple swing of his movements, and noted, too, with one quick appraisal, that he was of the type used on her favorite magazine covers.

"I would that the gods had dealt more gently with the maiden," she returned, in speech like his own. "This manner of presenting is embarrassing and painful."

"You are hurt?"

He came close, and laid a questioning touch on her arm. Evangeline held forth her hand, which had landed among his tubes of sky-blue and sage-green.

"Not hurt, but see what your paints have done to me!"

"Oh, poor little hand!" he exclaimed, and took it in his own. With his handkerchief he wiped her fingers, one by one, carefully, almost caressingly. Sharp thrills of fire flicked through her veins. "A bit of paint is nothing," he assured her. "It is amazing that you are not hurt—not even scratched."

He examined her fingers as if he expected to find a mortal wound. Evangeline, observing how her sun-browned hand contrasted with the artist's so white and well kept, blushed for shame, and would have withdrawn it. He must have sensed her embarrassment, for he spread her small brown fingers on his palm and said:

"You have dwelt much in the smile of the sun."

"That's a kindly way to think of my awful tan!" she replied, laughing, and slipped her hand from his. "What are you painting? May I look?"

"It is but begun. I am doing the Altar Rock. The view from here is magnificent."

It was, indeed, a wonderful view. The old altar looked higher and grander, etched against the clear sky. The artist had a fair sketch of it on his canvas.

From the Altar Rock to the picture, and then on to the artist, Evangeline's gaze traveled. How blue and bright his eyes were! What an artistic pallor his skin had, and what a serious expression—melancholy, almost—was on his classic features!

He turned and caught her appraising gaze. For a moment she thought a flash of anger darkened his eye.

"Do you think you know me?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon," she apologized. "It wasn't nice of me to stare so rudely. I was thinking that you must have been ill, you are so white. I'm terribly brown, you see."

"Ill? Yes, I was ill once, but that was long ago. I am quite well now. See, I am strong!" He flexed the muscles in a white arm from which the khaki sleeve was rolled back. "I carried all that"—indicating by a nod a rather bulky roll and numerous packages and canvases—"over here at one trip."

"Oh, indeed! You must be quite well, then." Evangeline inventoried with her eye various artist's paraphernalia. "Do you use all that just to paint one picture?"

"Most of it; but I am painting a series of these altar stones. There are many of them along the coast, all the way from South America to Alaska."

"Are you doing them all? Which way are you traveling?"

"Up from the south. When I have finished, we shall select the best specimens, restore them to their ancient beauty, and re-establish the worship of the sun."

"Oh, you are a sun worshiper?"

It seemed preposterous.

"We all are," he answered gravely. "Whether we acknowledge it or not, we all look to the sun for our every need, for life itself."

"Yes, we do, don't we?" Evangeline interestedly acquiesced. "I'm glad to have met you." She was taking a courteous de-

parture. "I hope our stone will be one of the best specimens, so that it will get itself restored. We are all fond of it."

She turned to go.

"Are you going? I thought the Sun God had given you to me," he said quite seriously.

"But now the sun is going down, and woe be to any little maid of the sun who is not in her appointed place when the sun goes down!"

"I bow to the will of the great sun," the artist acquiesced, with a profound salaam which might have been intended for either Evangeline or the sun, which had begun to touch the tops of the mountains of the Coast Range.

This was rare fun, Evangeline thought. What a quaint fancy he had! She had gone a step or two when he called:

"Will the Maid of the Sun return to me here to-morrow?"

She hesitated.

"You will, will you not?"

His blue eyes entreated her, and his voice held an appeal that gave her heart a delicious little quiver.

"Why, I—I do sometimes walk this way." Then, decisively: "You will be working on your picture. I would like to see how it progresses."

"Thank you!"

He was beside her now, and held out his hand. She gave her own, and felt again the little thrills flash from her finger tips to her heart. He held her fingers close, as if embracing them, and then, with a second "Thank you," he let her go.

III

EVANGELINE was halfway home before she was altogether herself. There was something wonderful, fascinating, romantic—yes, romantic, that was it—about this meeting. The man was different from any she knew. Such a quaint, fanciful way he had of talking about sun gods and sun maids! He had probably been reading up on them in order the better to understand the altar rocks he was painting.

She was pleased with herself, too, at the way she had fallen in with his play. That was the way the characters in novels acted—always pretending, and playfully saying all sorts of daring things that they could not say seriously.

When she reached her sister's bungalow, and found everything so real and matter-

of-fact, she suddenly decided not to mention her adventure. Of course, older sister fashion, Delia would not approve, and then there would be Dave to explain to. No—the less said, the less to explain.

"You must have gone farther than Altar Hill," Delia remarked when Evangeline came in.

"I just wandered around. Hello, Herbie! Have a nice nap? You've grown an inch while you slept. Give your auntie a kiss. There!" She embraced the child and tousled his curls. She lifted him above her head and shook him playfully. "Believe me, those lovely curls and those brown eyes are going to put an awful heartache in the female world when you step out," she prophesied.

"Don't talk nonsense to the child, Evangeline," Delia chided, though pink with pleasure. "You shouldn't lift him like that, either. He's too heavy."

"I like lifts," Herbie asserted.

"Of course you do, little human! We all like things we shouldn't have. Auntie has the same likings."

"Do you want me to lift you, auntie?" the child asked.

"Not to-night, little man, thank you."

Evangeline swung him down from her shoulder.

"I should think you'd be tired enough to rest, after your long walk," Delia protested. "There's a letter from Dave for you."

Evangeline wasn't tired. The hot blood raced through her veins. She wanted to run or shout. Instead, neglecting Dave's letter, she went to the piano and sang loudly:

"He may be meek,
But he's son of a sheik,
And he's sun, moon, and stars to me."

Next day Evangeline alternately decided to go and not to go; but all the while she knew that she would go, that she couldn't keep away. Had she not desired romance, and might not this be the fulfillment of her desire?

This time she walked around the hill and into the arroyo. The artist stood near the same place as yesterday, gazing up at the Altar Rock. She thought he was studying it for his picture, but when he heard her step he turned quickly and greeted her with—

"I thought you would come as you did yesterday!"

As he spoke, he took her hand, and awakened again the thrills of joy. He led her to a rock that he had placed for her near the little canvas stool before his easel.

"Is it comfortable?" he asked anxiously, when she had seated herself.

"It is, indeed. How thoughtful you are! Thank you."

"It is my great joy to serve you, Maid of the Sun," he replied. "See!" He nodded toward the picture. "I have not worked—I was so impatient for your coming." He touched her shoulder, almost reverently. "I was afraid you were not real. What do they call you in the sun temple whence you come?"

"My name, you mean? Evangeline Mowbray."

"Evangeline!" he echoed doubtfully. "Not Evangeline?"

"Yes, Evangeline. Why not?"

"Evangeline Bellefontaine! Can it be possible?" he said, turning to look at her with dawning recognition in his shining eyes.

"No—Evangeline Mowbray," she corrected; but he seemed not to hear.

"You are! Of course you are! Evangeline Bellefontaine! Now I can see you are!" He looked intently at her and quoted:

"Black were her eyes as the berry that grows on the thorn by the wayside—

Black, yet how softly they gleamed beneath the brown shade of her tresses!"

Evangeline blushed rosily at this quoted description of herself, for it fitted her quite as aptly as it did the original. The artist seemed overcome by his discovery of her identity.

"You do not recognize me?" he queried. She looked bewildered.

"Gabriel," he prompted.

"Oh!" Evangeline grasped it now, and laughed merrily. That was the game to-day—she was to be Evangeline, instead of a sun maid. What a clever man he was!

"You do remember your Gabriel?" he pleaded.

"Noblest of all the youths was Gabriel, son of the blacksmith," Evangeline replied happily, proud that she could remember even that much of the poem story, and could hold her own in this new game. "Your name is Gabriel, then?"

"Yes, I was Gabriel Lajeunesse, but in this incarnation I am called Gabriel Gener. Through three other lives I have

been seeking you, my Evangeline, my lost Evangeline! It is written so—do you not remember?”

She looked into his face. His expression was serious, but his eyes glinted with a mocking light.

“I remember,” she agreed.

“I am surprised that I did not know you yesterday. I felt drawn to you the moment I saw you, and I’m sure my soul recognized yours, but our minds are not so intuitive. Did you not feel a thrill of recognition?”

Did she? She had felt a whole series of thrills. Perhaps there was something in the incarnation theory. Just now she was thinking how she had come to be christened Evangeline. A schoolmate of her mother’s, who bore that name, had died, and when Evangeline was born the name sung itself so persistently to the mother that she gave it to her child. Perhaps—but Gabriel was speaking again.

“And the way you came to me—falling like a star from the altar of my dreams! Don’t you see how fitting it all is, Evangeline? Fairest of all maids, my Evangeline, lost and found again!”

His voice, mellow with cultured cadences, held for her the mystery of a chant. She had always felt that romance should be like this—soft-voiced and dreamful. Hitherto no one had understood, but this man, whom she had never seen until yesterday, spoke to her in the language of her hidden thoughts.

“Did you not know me, Evangeline? Did not your heart try to tell you that you belonged to me?” he pleaded.

“I—I did feel that somehow you were unusually interesting to me. I wonder if we really have known and—and have cared for each other in some other world, some other life!”

“We cannot doubt it. When your heart speaks to mine, when the sun himself smiles upon us and sends you to me, we have only to accept and be grateful for the happiness given to us.”

He looked down upon her with eyes glowing with admiration. Suddenly he got to his feet.

“I shall paint you, my Evangeline, with the dawn on your cheek and the dusk in your hair—the beginning and the end of the sun’s splendor. Your beauty shall not perish. It shall live forever on the canvas I shall paint!”

A flush stained the girl’s cheeks, and happiness, like a scented breeze from the orange orchards, flowed over her. Gabriel’s admiration was sweet. Dave never showed such appreciation of her charms.

“Stand just here, with the dark of the mesquite bushes behind you.”

He placed his hands on her shoulders to pose her, and she quivered with pleasure under his touch.

Slipping a fresh canvas on the easel, he rapidly sketched her slender form against the gray-green hillside. Evangeline, though delighted to pose, was unused to standing still. She grew tense, almost rigid, in her effort to keep her position. Presently she wavered a little and caught her breath. Gabriel saw tears in her eyes.

“Ah, you are weary! Why didn’t you tell me? I am so sorry! When I work I forget everything.” While he apologized, he urged her to her seat upon the rock, and sat beside her. “Rest on me—there!” He placed an arm about her and drew her head to his shoulder. “That’s what a lover is for,” he said, and gently kissed her brown hair.

Evangeline was breathless with ecstasy. Presently she stood before the easel.

“Is that really me? Am I beautiful like that?”

“More beautiful, my Evangeline! There is no tint in paint, no magic in a brush, that can put your loveliness on canvas.” She raised her eyes to his, and felt the warmth of his admiration like a cordial. “There is only a suggestion there as yet. To-morrow we will go on with the picture.”

To-morrow! Evangeline was suddenly aware that the sun was going down behind the Coast Range. How the hours had flown!

“See how late it is—Gabriel!” She hesitated over the name. “I must go.”

“For to-day, yes.” He took her hand, and once more set her pulses throbbing. “To-morrow you will come again, and we will work on the picture. When it is finished, we will present it to the temple, to be a reminder of you when you have gone away with me.”

He still held her hand. He seemed to have forgotten it, but Evangeline was palpitantly aware of his caressing touch. She made a move to go. Gabriel drew her close, and, in a voice low and love-laden, he asked:

“May I—a good night kiss?”

Evangeline, enraptured, fascinated, yielded, and felt her heart melt with the touch of his lips to hers.

"Till to-morrow!" he said, and reluctantly let her go.

Evangeline looked back to wave to him before she turned out of the arroyo. He was still standing with bared head where she had left him:

IV

HERBIE was watching for Evangeline, and ran to meet her. This evening she was not boisterously happy. She was quiet and subdued. She felt herself staggering under a load of love.

"Don't you want any kisses to-night, auntie?" Herbie queried.

"Indeed I do!" She kissed the child fondly, and held his warm, throbbing body in a close embrace. "I always do—don't you?"

"Yes, I do, if a love person kisses."

"Oh, you wise little boy! How do you know so much?" she exclaimed, hiding her crimson face in the soft curve of his neck.

Another day, and Gabriel painting her portrait, while Evangeline alternately posed and watched him paint.

"You are wonderful!" she admired. "You must have studied a long time."

"A long time, yes—through three incarnations, you know," he said, giving her a glance from his keen blue eyes—a glance which told the whole story of the secret of reincarnation that they shared.

"Here and in Italy," he went on, talking as he painted. "Have you been in Italy?"

"No," she answered, a little awed to find that he had traveled so far. "Tell me about it."

"Some think only of Paris, but Italy is the very birthplace of art. It is in the air we breathe there. You would love Italy. Shall we go there for our honeymoon?"

"Could we?" she asked incredulously.

"Why not? You like to travel, don't you?"

"I never had a chance to travel, but I'm sure I'd love to."

"Then we will go. I wanted to stay when I was there, but I had to come back to find you." He turned from his work to look at her, but she could not meet his eyes, they were so full of ardent love. "I have a folio of sketches made in Italy. If you

would care to see them, I will bring them to-morrow."

"I'd love to see them!" Her heart felt bursting with happiness. Truly they must have known and loved each other at some other time, in some other existence! Through Evangeline's mind ran the thought that if the Gabriel of old loved his Evangeline as this Gabriel loved her, it was not to be wondered at that she had sought him all the days of her life. Evangeline lived in a dream of love. True, there were times when she would have liked to be just herself, and not the reincarnated Evangeline Bellefontaine; but Gabriel never wavered from his quaint fancy, and she was so far under the spell of love that she followed his lead. His devotion was seldom touched with passion. He was tender, wise, and whimsical. He had traveled much, and knew odd bits of romance and history, which he told with embellishments that gave them a glamour all their own. When she was with Gabriel, she felt herself to be in another world. When she was at home with Delia and little Herbie, she was still in a daze.

Delia laughed at her.

"I declare, Evangeline, being in love with Dave has made an altogether different girl of you!"

Evangeline blushed with shame. The thought of Dave frightened her. She had not told Gabriel about Dave. She had not told Gabriel anything about her family. He evinced no curiosity about them, but she must tell him, and must get their love into the realm of reality.

She must tell Dave, too. It wasn't going to be easy to tell Dave. Life was complicated, but oh, life was sweet!

Too soon there came an evening when Herbie ran to meet her with great excitement in his big brown eyes.

"Auntie, I got a secret—an awful nice secret!"

"Are you going to tell your lovingest auntie?"

"You have to guess three guesses."

"Mamma made a cake."

"No, sir! It isn't a secret to eat."

"There are some new baby rabbits."

Herbie shook his head.

"The little quail can fly."

A still more vigorous shake.

"You'll have to tell me. I can see by the shine in your eyes that it's something wonderful."

"It's the wonderfulest best. My daddy's coming home! He's been gone 'most a year."

"Almost a week," Evangeline corrected.

"That's just the same. My daddy's coming home, my daddy's coming home!"

He ran ahead of her into the house, shouting his glad news, which Delia verified.

"He phoned out from the city, the extravagant boy," Delia related happily. "He's bringing a friend, he said, and they'll be here in time for dinner. I suppose you're tickled to hear it. A week is a long time for an engaged girl to be away from her lover, and it hasn't been very lively here with nothing to do but to roam around the hills."

"It hasn't been bad at all. I've had a real good time," replied Evangeline, turning to the window, that Delia might not see the great happiness in her face.

V

THE next day Evangeline was late at the rendezvous. She found Gabriel walking nervously back and forth, looking up at the Altar Rock. The anxiety in his face startled her, and his eyes, from studying the rock so long, were strained and tense.

It had been his custom to work on the picture of the rock in the mornings and on the portrait in the afternoons, when Evangeline was with him. Both pictures were practically finished. The portrait was an exquisite idealization of the girl, with glowing color and every feature perfected beyond reality. It was like her, and yet she knew that she was not—never could be—as beautiful as the face on the canvas. It was a likeness seen through the glamour of love.

To-day Gabriel was so intent upon the Altar Rock that she was beside him before he knew she was there. When she touched him, he turned and gathered her into his arms with more passion than he had yet shown.

"I thought you would never come! What happened to make you so late?"

"Yes," she answered gently. "I am late. I couldn't come sooner. My brother-in-law is returning to-day, and there were extra things to do. Are you not well, Gabriel? You look tired."

He seemed not to hear her question.

"I can't let you go again, Evangeline," he murmured, with his face against her

brown hair. "Suppose you never came back!" He held her closer. "I can't risk it. We must start, right away, back to Acadia."

"Yes, that would be lovely, wouldn't it?" Evangeline agreed softly. "We will do just that as soon as you see my people. You'll come to the house to-morrow, and then we can make our plans. Perhaps I could go touring with you while you finish your series of altar stones."

"Yes, yes!" he assented. "You'll go with me always, everywhere. I will finish these pictures to-day, and to-morrow we will make our offering to the Sun God." Gabriel looked about, puzzled. "I wonder what we can have for an offering!"

"Oh, flowers are always acceptable. It has been so long since an offering was made to the sun that he'll be surprised into accepting anything."

"Perhaps you think I overestimate the importance of this," Gabriel said gravely; "but I want it to be done right. I want the offering to be worthy of the favor we ask. I will see to that," he went on, squaring his shoulders. "Only you will be here? You will be on time to greet the sun when he comes up?"

"Yes, Gabriel, I'll be here; but now I must go back, there's so much to do."

His arms, which he had kept about her, tightened.

"Evangeline, my Evangeline, I can't let you go! You are so dear—I love you so—it takes the very heart out of me when you leave me!"

"I know, Gabriel dear, I know," she comforted; "but it is only for a little while—only until sunrise."

"Only until sunrise, yes, and never shall another sun set on us apart! Never, my Evangeline, my beloved one! I live only when you are near me. When you are away I am lost. I can't paint—I can't even think. I can only wait for you to come back to me." He kissed her hair, her cheeks, which he found wet with tears. "Tears? Tears for me? I am so happy that it grieves you, too, to part, if only for a few hours! To think that your tears could give me joy! But they do."

They clung to each other in an ecstasy of anguish. Evangeline reluctantly drew away.

"One kiss more! You have made me so happy, so happy, that I could die now, satisfied to have had so much of perfect

bliss!" Another long kiss, and he loosed his arms from about her. "See, I let you go, because I know that I shall be with you always. I shall live in your heart forever. Is it not so, my little Evangeline, sunshine of St. Eulalie?"

"Always, Gabriel, always!" she answered brokenly, and left him there, not daring to look back.

Evangeline assisted Delia with the preparation of the dinner, but her heart was with Gabriel—Gabriel who loved her with such romantic fervor.

As the dusk came on, Delia and Evangeline established themselves on the wistaria-covered porch, from which vantage point they could see, between the tall Lombardy poplars, the automobiles as they sped by on the highway.

"Herbert ought to be here any minute now," Delia remarked, as she looked at her watch for the tenth time in five minutes.

"Mother, may I go out on the road to meet daddy?" Herbie got off the porch rail that he had been riding. "May I, mother?"

"Yes." Delia straightened his blue rompers and smoothed the unruly curls. "Don't go on the highway. Stay by our own road."

They watched him trudge down the driveway—a sturdy, important little man. An odor of scorching meat came through the open door.

"Oh, that roast!" Delia exclaimed, and rushed inside.

A second and stronger whiff of scent followed the clang of an opened oven door. Evangeline, with a reassuring glance at Herbie, walking down the driveway, turned leisurely inside to investigate the damage to the dinner.

Presently, with great honking, the expected car came up the driveway. Delia and Evangeline rushed out, and Evangeline was straightway caught in a very proprietary embrace. She was shocked to find herself being kissed by Dave, while the impress of Gabriel's fervent lips was still warm on her own. She realized anew, in the moment of greeting, that it wasn't going to be easy to tell Dave that in the few days she had been away their whole lives had changed.

That course of thought was interrupted by Delia's cry:

"Where's Herbie?"

"Herbie?" echoed the father.

"Yes, he went out to meet you."

Evangeline stood with Dave's arms still about her, while anxiety grew upon them all.

"You didn't see him, did you, Dave?" Herbert asked.

"No, and I was watching, too, thinking we'd see the girls out looking for us."

"I'll run down to the road."

Delia started as she said it, but Dave was ahead of her.

"I'll go," he said, and sprinted over the hundred yards or so to the highway.

Through the dusk they silently watched Dave approach the road and look about. He stepped out and hailed a passing car. The occupant and Dave looked in both directions. Then the car drove on, and Dave turned back. He came slowly at first, but hurried as he neared them.

"Better skirmish about a bit and see if he hasn't fallen asleep somewhere. Make it snappy!" he urged.

"The man you stopped—he hadn't seen him?" Delia questioned.

"No, but he said he wasn't looking."

Evangeline started off to the rabbit pen. The rabbits were Herbie's special concern. She was dazed by this sudden calamity. Herbie couldn't be lost—he couldn't be, in that short time! Why, it wasn't fifteen minutes ago that she had seen him walking down toward the highway. He must be there!

She ran down the driveway. There was no hiding place. The well trimmed trees, the flat bean field, the paved roadway, offered no cover. Even the little ground squirrels, racing back and forth, were still visible in the gathering darkness.

Dave was calling, and she turned slowly back. The sound of Dave's voice brought a rush of thankfulness. Her old dependence upon him was reestablished—or had it ever left her? Dave was there, and everything would come right if Dave was standing by.

"Didn't find him, eh?" Dave asked. "I was afraid you wouldn't."

"That crazy man!" Herbert blurted out.

"Yes, I'm thinking of that, too," Dave replied. "We met officers in town," he explained, "searching for a patient who had escaped from the insane asylum."

"Oh, but that's so far away," Delia protested.

"They told us that the fellow killed a tourist and took his car. They found the

car near here. He had run out of gas and abandoned it."

"Herbert! Dave!" Delia grasped an arm of each. "Go find my baby! Go! Go!" she entreated.

"Wait a minute," Dave counseled. "Let's get some system. You girls phone everybody. Call up the city and ask them to broadcast a report that Herbie is lost. I really believe he's asleep somewhere around," he consoled Delia; "but we can't take any chances on that. Got a gun, Herbert?"

"Oh!" Delia gasped in alarm, and clung to Herbert.

"We don't expect to shoot any one," Dave assured her. "It's just to give the good word when we find the boy. What have you girls got in the way of a gun?"

"There are the hunting guns," Herbert suggested. "You know how to load them, Delia."

"That's the stuff!" said Dave. "Now, Dee, if I can have your car, I'll go north and Herb can go south. You call the city hospitals, too. If he got on the road, and some one ran into him, they might have taken him right to a hospital."

"Call out the bean hands, Delia," Herbert added. "Tell them to comb this ranch. All set! Let's go!"

"Buck up, girls," Dave encouraged. "The kid 'll surely turn up. Stick by the phone and listen for news, and shoot hearty when it comes."

The two cars drove away.

"You do the phoning, Evangeline," Delia directed. "I'll fix the guns."

Each went to her task, glad to feel that she was actively assisting in the search. When the guns were loaded, Delia placed them near the door. It was quite dark now, and she stood in the open door and peered this way and that.

"I can't stay here while my poor baby may be in the clutches of that awful madman! I must go out and help to find him! You stay by the phone, Evangeline."

"Don't go far, Dee. When you come back, you can take a turn at the phone and I'll search."

Evangeline telephoned to the city broadcasting station, and then listened in on their own set to hear the report repeated. How near the whole world was! Heretofore the radio had been a thing of amusement, sometimes a bore, but to-night it was a useful friend. She telephoned the

nearest ranchers, who, without hesitation, promised to join the search.

Delia came in.

"Which way did you go?" Evangeline asked.

"Just around the garages and down by the sheds. There's no place to hunt. I can't think of anywhere he could go."

Evangeline went out and walked aimlessly about. Like Delia, she could think of no place that the child would go.

The night crawled on. Evangeline hoped that Delia would not notice how cold it was. She remembered Herbie's inconsequential little rompers, and shivered.

Dave came in, dusty and haggard. He suggested that they should have hot coffee ready for any of the men who might come in. Again they were glad to do some tangible service.

"You mustn't get discouraged," Dave told Delia. "You see, it's likely Herbie's fallen asleep, and we'd only find him by accident. Later he will wake up and make a row, and we'll pick him up in no time."

Herbert drove up, but would not get out of his car. He drank the cup of steaming coffee that Delia brought out to him, and was off again.

Was ever a night so long?

Delia returned from another fruitless round.

"The night's nearly gone, and they haven't found him yet. It's getting gray in the east. The sun will soon be up, and they haven't found him. They haven't found my baby!"

Sunup! Evangeline had forgotten. Sunup, and the sunrise prayer on Altar Hill! How long ago that seemed!

"Rest here, Dee dear," she said. "I'll take a run out. I just remember some one else who will help us."

She was out before Delia could question her.

Gabriel would be on Altar Hill, and he would lend his aid. As she started up the hill, the reddening east warned her that she had but little time if she would be as prompt as she had promised. Once, as she walked, she glanced up, and yes, there was Gabriel, waiting by the Altar Rock. She waved her hand to him, but did not look again. She wanted all her attention for the speed she was making.

"Oh, Gabriel!" she cried as she came near. "Herbie, my little nephew, is lost. We've hunted all night."

Gabriel did not seem to understand about the child. He remarked gravely:

"I was afraid you would be late. See, the sun is nearly up!"

Evangeline came on, eager for the embrace she had but lately learned to claim; but he raised a hand, and she paused.

"Stand just there, please. See, the sun approaches the horizon. We will now offer our sacrifice!"

"Sacrifice! Sacrifice!"

She glanced at the Altar Rock. A slow horror crept over her. Was it possible that a familiar little form lay under that mass of wild flowers? She stared. Suddenly she saw Herbie's terror-stricken eyes gazing at her from above a gag tied across his mouth.

"Herbie! Oh, Herbie!"

She threw herself toward him, but Gabriel drew her back with gentle authority.

"Do not touch the sacrificial offering," he cautioned.

Offering! She looked at him. Something unreal in his manner awed her. She saw the shining brightness of his blue eyes—too blue. They blazed as if a door had been opened into a furnace. She felt a mortal coldness, like death itself, curdle the blood in her veins. The horrible truth swept over her—he was mad. Her Gabriel was the escaped madman!

The red disk of the sun appeared above the flat bean field. Gabriel stepped forward, and raised a long knife.

With a scream of fright and fury Evangeline rushed upon him. He was on the edge of the steep slope behind the altar, and, taken unawares by her attack, he fell backward into the arroyo, almost at the very spot where she had fallen only a week before.

Evangeline swept away the flowers, and frantically fumbled with the knotted rope that bound the child. In answer to her scream a shout sounded near by.

"Help! Oh, help!" she called. "Oh, Herbie, darling baby, you are not hurt, are you? Auntie will have you loose in just a moment. You poor frightened darling!"

But her shaking fingers were useless against the knots.

A man came running up.

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

He picked up the knife that Gabriel had dropped, cut the ropes, and tore the gag from the child's mouth.

"Herbie, dear Herbie!" Evangeline moaned.

She gathered the child in her arms. He clung to her tensely, without a sound, his face hidden against her neck.

"That the kid we're hunting, is it?" the man asked.

Evangeline nodded.

"You know we are to shoot a signal when we find him. Tell the kid, so it won't scare him."

"Herbie, dear, the man is going to shoot his gun." Evangeline's voice was shaky and choked with tears. "Daddy will hear the shots and come for us. All right!" She nodded to the man.

He shot off the entire round in his revolver, and was answered by shots from every direction.

"Looks like they liked the sound of that gun, eh?" he remarked. "Say, did you see the crazy guy?"

"Yes, I pushed him off the hill," she gasped.

"You *what*?" This time it was the man who gasped.

"I pushed him. He fell back—down the arroyo."

The man went to the rock and examined the ground.

"Hey, you!" he called to an approaching searcher. "Look down the arroyo for our man. He's somewhere near by. Watch your step—he's foxy, you know!"

He made a megaphone of his hands and called to another man, who was crossing the bean field.

"Go tell the mother we found the boy, all safe."

The man in the bean field waved a hand, and faced about toward the bungalow.

Other searchers began to appear, shouting, and now and then shooting. Herbie, with his face hidden against Evangeline's shoulder, shuddered and clutched with tense little hands to her neck.

"Don't be afraid, Herbie! Auntie's holding you. All these men are daddy's friends. They've been hunting you all night. Herbie, little man, you're as safe as safe. Daddy's coming up the hill this minute."

But for all her soothing assurances the child's small body only twitched and clung closer until he felt his father's arms about him and heard his broken cry:

"My son! My little son! Where'd you find him, Evangeline?" Herbert inquired, while, unashamed, the tears ran down his face.

Before she could reply, Dave arrived with Delia in the little car, and Herbie was transferred to the lovingest arms of all.

"Hoo-hoo!" came from the arroyo.

"Hello!" answered the man who had first arrived, and who was the officer in charge.

"Guess he's here, all right! Knocked cold—cracked his head on a rock."

"Handcuff him," the officer ordered. "We're taking no chances."

"I did just that, you betcha!"

"All you fellows come on to the house," Herbert invited. "We'll have something to eat, and hear about this."

A guard was detailed to convey the unconscious insane man to the city hospital, for emergency treatment. The others unanimously accepted Herbert's invitation and proceeded to the bungalow.

"I'll say that kid of yours had a narrow escape," the officer remarked, when they were all comfortably seated on the wide porch. "That fellow just don't stop to argue. When he don't like what any one says, he croaks 'em, and he's the big husky that can do it, too!"

Evangeline, beside Dave in a sheltered corner of the porch, felt a wave of unspeakable terror as she remembered the hours she had spent with the maniac. What if she had not fallen in with his game and agreed to his fancies? What if she had teased him, as she often teased Dave? What if he had—

Interrupting her realization of the desperate position she had occupied, the last of the searchers drifted in, carrying an artist's canvases. Evangeline's heart sank with dismay. She had forgotten the pictures.

"Guess the poor guy thought he was an artist," the new arrival said, as he tossed the canvases to the officer.

"He was," the officer replied. "Pretty good one, too, so they say. The tourist he killed was an artist, too, and he must have stolen the poor fellow's outfit as well as his car."

Evangeline shrank into her corner, trembling with fear. Now her secret would be out! What could she say when her portrait was displayed before them? She had expected to tell Dave about her lover, but it was impossible to tell him about a madman.

"Let's see!" The officer turned them

over. "That's a pretty fair stagger of that rock, eh? What's the other one?"

Evangeline closed her eyes. Now they would know!

There was a silence. She imagined them looking at her picture—like her, only more beautiful than she could ever be. Why didn't they speak? She couldn't bear the silence, and she couldn't look.

"Queer thing, that!"

It was Dave's voice, from beside her, that spoke.

"Crazy stuff," was the officer's verdict.

Evangeline forced herself to a glance. She looked; she stared. The picture, so beautiful and so like her when last she saw it, had been changed. The head was a blazing sun, with radiating lines of light; the body was clothed in a shapeless robe of white.

For one hideous moment Evangeline thought that she, too, was mad. Then some one was saying:

"Stand away! Let her have air!"

She had fainted.

"Poor girl!" Dave crooned over her like a mother. "Some wild night you had!" He wiped away the water that Herbert had generously administered. "Coming out of it now, eh?" he encouraged, as she opened her eyes.

She nestled closer against him. How good and safe his work-hardened hands felt! How kind, how beautiful, his suntanned face! A vision of Gabriel's pale patrician features flashed out of the near past.

"Oh, Dave, Dave, hold me tight!" she whispered. "Don't ever let me go! Dave, oh, Dave!"

She clung as frantically to Dave as little Herbie had clung to her; and Dave comforted her, even as she had comforted Herbie.

The insane man died without regaining consciousness. His head had struck the very stone he had placed for Evangeline's seat.

Never afterward could she endure any reference to that terrible night. Nevertheless, she knew that all her life long she would carry, in the sound-proof chamber of her memory, the tones of a soft, cultured voice in its last words of love:

"I could die now, satisfied to have had so much of perfect bliss. See, I let you go, because I know that I shall live in your heart forever!"

The Fake's Progress

THIS IS A STORY OF THE BUXOM DAYS JUST AFTER THE MUSTACHE CUP AND THE DEERSKIN VEST BECAME EXTINCT

By Hugh Varney Dexter

"SEEN ye in church last night," was the pleased remark of old Philo Meeks as he paused in a Monday morning inspection of his huge machine shop. "That's the right idea, Silas."

"Yes, sir," young Si Hall, precision expert, acknowledged without enthusiasm.

His attendance at divine service had been due to the suggestion of a buxom girl who worked in the whip factory. The night had been too rainy for a stroll, and her old man usually sat smoking on the porch until nearly ten o'clock. A fellow had to be smooth in handling women, and the first rule was to humor them when they were new.

"Six days o' work, good sleep, clean livin', an' worship on a Sunday," the shop owner continued oracularly, "that's what builds up success, Silas."

"Yes, sir." The machinist verified the correctness of the work on his lathe by the application of a micrometer screw. The movements of his hands were swift and sure.

Old Meeks was aware that he had indulged in garrulity during working hours, but Hall's caste was high in the shop; and to discover him a solid citizen, too, pardoned further conversation.

"Good habits like that won't do ye any harm here," Philo went on, significantly. "I was a foreman myself at twenty-four. The idea for a smart lad is to 'tend strictly to business, an' do no gallivantin' around at night, an' no whisky swillin' an' no cigarettes. 'Course, when a feller gets his full growth, if he's a mind to smoke a good pipeful now an' then—well, that's his lookout."

"Yes, sir."

The old man gave his favorite a tolerant beam for that absorption in the task before him, and moved on. He could not see that

the youth's manner was that of bored assurance, and that his workman's pride lay in gloating because difficult jobs were often passed over older heads to him. Philo Meeks's working years had been devoted to a fanatical study of machinery rather than the analysis of human nature, and the mental processes of Silas Hall had little to do with the shop.

The youth was in revolt. He hated nearly everything that this small city of New Buford stood for. His inner gaze was directed toward adventure in the great outside world, a realm of sporting affairs, and easy money.

His temporary escape was Ben Ballou. Here was a philosopher who never spoke of dull things like church and clean living. Ben was the best pool player in New Buford, and once had successfully defended his championship against a city shark in Diehs's saloon, at twenty dollars a side.

Ballou had the sporting page of a New York City newspaper spread out grandly before him when Hall entered the pool room this evening.

"Lo, Si," he said, looking up from his reading and casually proffering a crumpled packet of cigarettes. "I see these sportin' fellahs is gradu'ly comin' round to my opinion. Remember how the bunch in Diehs's snickered when I predicted this young Jim Corbett 'd give old John L. the fight of his life? Well, here's one o' the biggest Noo York authorities gives him a fair chance to win.

"It 'll be a tough battle, though," he conceded, and he added, not without a little bluster, "an' yer little frien' Ben, here, mightn't be very far from the ringside when they start the doin's in Noo Or-leans."

His talk conjured a pleasing picture before the mental eyes of young Silas Hall.