

# Just Before the Battle

THE SEA OF MARRIAGE HAS ROCKS OF STRIFE, SAYS THE  
OLD RIME, AND SOMETIMES THE PLEASANT STREAM  
OF COURTSHIP MAY HAVE THEM, TOO

By Elizabeth Jordan

"WHAT I can't understand," Clarice Van Doren was saying, "is why you're takin' the guy so seriously. No girl does that nowadays, after she's twelve years old; and you with a college education, too! Don't pay no attention to him, or, if you must notice him, laugh at him or step on him. Believe me, kid, it's the only way," she added with stern conviction.

She was in Edith Capen's private office as she spoke, seated close to Edith's desk, and observing with wide-eyed wonder the threatened collapse of David Shipman's usually perfectly poised secretary.

Along the Rialto, Miss Capen had the reputation of being a twenty-minute egg—a reputation which Miss Van Doren, proud of having the run of the Shipman theatrical offices, had helped to circulate. The visitor admired Miss Capen, and was under obligations to her. Heretofore Clarice's admiration had been combined with high respect, but to-day it was touched with scorn. This college girl to whom she had looked up, and whom she had inwardly revered—this highly paid private secretary to the great David Shipman—was just like all the rest of them when it came down to cases. She could have her feelings hurt and look red-eyed and pink-nosed and desperate, exactly like eighteen-dollar-a-week Mary Burke at the telephone.

"Of course Dave Shipman is the toughest egg in the business," Clarice went on, as Miss Capen did not speak, "and that's goin' some. His manners are ter'ble, and he breaks contracts like he'd break doughnuts. The way he treats comp'nies at rehearsals is a scandal. As to expectin' him to remember that he owed somethin' to old friends—well, I could give you a lot o'

dope on that, if I wanted to. When that kid was twelve and thirteen, my mother used to give him the hand-outs that kep' him alive; but does he remember it? Not so you'd notice it. He's been stallin' me off a job for two months, when he knows darned well I'm on my uppers. He could 'a' dropped me into that road company he sent out last week, but did he do it? Not him! Grattitood's a word Dave never looked up in the dictionary."

These references to her own wrongs had aroused Miss Van Doren much more than her companion's hardships. She began to feel that something ought to be done about them, quite forgetting her earlier advice to ignore the ingrate.

"You ain't goin' to stay on here after this, are you?" she urgently inquired. "There's other men in town that's got to have secretaries, and that knows how to treat 'em; and a whole lot of 'em would be glad to take you. Any one that's stayed with Dave Shipman a year has won a medal. Ike Einstein would give you a job to-morrow. Why don't you leave Dave flat? It 'd be the big surprise of his life if you did, and believe me, he'd have some job fillin' your place. With the repitition he's got for temper and tantrums, there ain't another girl in the business would take the work. Every one knows he threw a telephone book at Mamie Murray's head only last week and cut her cheek open on the cover of it; and last month—"

"He's ashamed of that," Miss Capen now contributed. It was her first remark in five minutes, and she had filled the interval with vain regrets over having betrayed her state of mind to the sharp eyes of the older girl.

"Did he say he was?"

"No, but I could tell it by his actions. He couldn't bear to look at Mamie."

"So he 'pologized by firing her! I know. It's jest what he'd do."

"No, he didn't fire her. He got her a better job in another office, and it's really a relief to have her gone. Mamie was rather trying, you know—either crying or giggling all the time."

"Be that as it may, he's the limit, Edith Capen, and if you don't want your own head split open some day, when he's in one of his rages, you'll get out of here an' you'll stay out."

"I suppose I ought to." Edith Capen hesitated, her resolution flickering like a candle flame. "He really is getting worse, and his outbreak just before he left the office this afternoon was unpardonable. Think of his shouting to me, before you and Mary Burke, that I was a fool!"

"What's keepin' you here after that?"

"You'll think I *am* a fool."

In her overwrought state it was a relief to Edith to talk to some one, and she remembered that Clarice, despite her free tongue, could be trusted where her friends were concerned. Shipman's secretary had been a friend at court to Miss Van Doren—had slipped her into the private office ahead of other callers, and had seen that her name was at the top of the list of applicants for musical comedy seconds. Yes, Clarice could be trusted, and it *was* nerve relaxing to talk after a year of repression; so Edith went on.

"You'll say I'm a fool," she repeated, "but it's Mr. Shipman himself I'm thinking of. He'd be in an awful hole if I left him—"

"Wouldn't it serve him right, since he can't treat you decent while you're here? The idea of Dave Shipman thinkin' he can insult a girl like you, jest because he's payin' you a salary!"

"I know it would serve him right; but, after all, it wasn't I he was bawling out. He was simply venting on me his rage against some one else. He's like that. Success has spoiled him. He thinks he's a superman, and can do anything he pleases."

"I know," Clarice added. "And the bunch that's helpin' him to think so by kotowing to him every minute makes me sick!"

"Yes, that's what's helped to spoil him. It's 'governor' this and 'governor' that,

and 'what you say goes,' and 'this is one of your inspirations,' and 'no one can help *you* to think,' till he sees himself as a little god."

"You never heard me flatter him none, did you?" Miss Van Doren darkly inquired.

"No, I never have."

The secretary laughed, and the laugh helped to clear the atmosphere.

Privately Edith had often reflected that Clarice might be the cross that won Shipman his crown. Her manner to him was as rude as his own, and she never lost an opportunity of letting him see that she remembered the days when, as infant citizens of the same block, she and the successful young producer had played together in the gutters of the East Side. Edith knew that Clarice privately admired the way in which her old playmate had risen from those gutters, had attended night school, had worked through two years of college, and without money or influence had fought up to the top in the theatrical world.

His fighting spirit, Edith believed, was now Shipman's big handicap. He could not stop fighting, for he had always fought—with his tongue, his fists, and his brain. He could no longer fight with his fists—at least, not publicly; but he gave full rein to his temper and his tongue. Clarice was the only person who could silence him.

"Don't give me none of your Cherry Street lip," she frequently remarked in the heated interviews between them; and at this Shipman would turn on her a scorching look that usually ended the interview.

"You bet I don't flatter him," she now complacently asserted.

"It's not his temper I mind as much as his air of omniscience and omnipotence," Edith went on. "It's got so that when he's conducting a rehearsal, no one around—company or director—dares to offer him any sort of suggestion. He considers advice as no better than an insult, and he's ready to discharge the person who presumes to offer it."

"Don't I know? Ain't I watched him? It 'd do him a whole lot of good to have some one talk to him once in awhile that could make him wise to himself."

Edith sighed.

"It would," she agreed; "and—well, I'm rather tempted to stay and be the one that does it. Since I don't care how soon I leave, I might be able to give him a little

training. It 'd be a thorn in his side, but it might help him. Something has to be done for him soon, by some one."

Clarice caught her lower lip between her teeth and studied her friend, her eyes brightening as the possibilities of the situation opened to her.

"It 'll be a great stunt, if you don't weaken," she slowly agreed, turning over in her mind the idea that had just come to her.

"I won't weaken, if I decide to try it. He's thirty-four years old, but he's just a horribly spoiled little boy, with no more sense of responsibility for his actions than a spoiled little boy would have. He knows a lot about the show business, but he could learn a lot more if he didn't think he knew it all now. I don't agree with you about laughing at that sort of thing. I don't believe in occasionally stepping on it, either. His case calls for steady work; otherwise he'll be setting up a throne here, ordering a crown for himself, and ending in some sanitarium, with delusions that he's the Deity."

"I c'n give you a glass of water, if you want to moisten your throat," Clarice suggested rather absently.

She was immensely intrigued by the discovery she had made, and she was very sorry for the girl before her. Edith Capen was in for a devil of a time!

Edith laughed again. Her poise was returning with her self-respect. One attack of weakness in a year wasn't a bad record after all.

"I'm not going to orate any more. I'm not going to worry any more, either. I've done my last worrying over Mr. David Shipman; but if there's any way of making him feel ashamed of himself once in awhile, and of cutting into his abysmal self-satisfaction, I'm going to do my best to find it."

"Go to it!" Clarice spoke almost reverently. "Here he comes, so you needn't lose no time. H'lo, Dave!" she remarked airily, as the producer approached; but she rose to leave as she spoke. There were limits even to Miss Van Doren's audacity.

"Hello, Maggie Murphy!" Shipman had discovered that it irritated Clarice to be addressed by her former name in these new surroundings, so he never failed to address her thus. He got his effect, and went on contentedly: "Don't you ever do anything but loaf around these offices?"

In the circumstances it was a cruel speech, and Miss Van Doren whitened with anger.

"Any time you want to keep me out of these offices you know how to do it, Dave Shipman!" she flared. "You c'n do it by keepin' your word to my dyin' mother that I'd never be out of a job; but if she'd known I'd have to crawl on my stomach twice a year to make you keep it, she'd 'a' died before she ast you!"

"Good day, Maggie," said Shipman firmly, and went on into his own office, with a jerk of a thumb toward his secretary, to intimate that he wished to be followed.

Edith nodded a farewell to Clarice, who was swishing angrily toward the door, and, gathering up her notebook and pencil, accompanied her employer.

## II

SHIPMAN's private office was the inside one of his suite of three rooms. Miss Capen's desk was in the second room, connecting with it. The third, a chamber guarded by a robust and hard-faced office boy, was one of the bleakest hunting grounds of the theatrical district. In it, during Mr. Shipman's office hours, and long before these began, from a dozen to thirty anxious-eyed candidates for work daily awaited that gentleman's pleasure. They were a varied crowd, including the beginners who were making good, the novices who were anxious to begin, the established favorites who were rarely kept waiting, and — most tragic figures these — the old-timers who, through advancing age, illness, or dissipation, had ceased to make good.

Two qualities all these classes had in common—pluck and pride; and there was no spot where pluck and pride were more needed than in Shipman's waiting room. The successful young producer was as ruthless as a force of nature. He could not risk failure by miscasting rôles, and he thought he could not waste time by softening his rejections. More than once Miss Capen had witnessed a real tragedy in those offices.

"My God, I wish there was some way to keep that infernal girl out of here!" Shipman grumbled, as he dropped into his desk chair.

"Isn't the way she suggested the best one?" Edith said lightly, as she sat down

beside him and opened her notebook. "A job would keep her away."

Shipman raised his head from the letter he was reading and shot a quick look at her. It was the first comment of the sort she had ever made to him. It implied criticism, and to Shipman criticism was insult.

"I've given her a lot of jobs," he said icily. "I've kept her in jobs for years."

"Yes, and she has always made good in them. She's above the average for chorus work—has a nice voice, dances well—"

"You seem to be interested in Maggie Murphy," Shipman jeered.

"I like her—every one does, for she has one of the biggest hearts in the business; but I'm more interested in the situation. When Napoleon was a poor young man, a certain laundress in Paris washed his clothes free of charge. When he was an emperor, he made her a duchess."

"I've heard that incident," Shipman returned dryly; but he plainly regarded the reference to Napoleon as a tribute to himself, for he went on in a milder tone. "You're thinking of those hand-outs Mrs. Murphy used to give me," he said. "She gave 'em, all right. She did a lot for me. I was starved and frozen most of the time; but perhaps you don't know that I gave her full value for every hand-out. She had no boy, and I was a handy kid. I ran all her errands, did her repairing, and made myself generally useful. When she asked me, before she died, to look after Maggie, she admitted the score was even between us; but I've done it just the same, and the reason Maggie hasn't got a job now is that I'm holding her back for 'The Prince of Jazz' company next month. That 'll be on Broadway for at least a year, and to be on Broadway a year is Maggie's notion of heaven."

"That's splendid, but why don't you tell her about it?"

"Because she's too damned fresh. Now give me those letters I dictated this morning."

Edith laid the mass of correspondence before him. She was interested by his recent revelation, but she was not moved. She was going to leave, probably almost at once. She hoped she could register at least one or two more protests against him as an individual before she went.

She found an immediate opportunity. Shipman looked up from the first letter he

was about to sign, his handsome, smooth-shaven face flushing angrily.

"Look here!" he snapped. "This isn't the way I wrote that letter!"

Edith dropped an eye on the letter.

"No, it isn't," she said cheerfully. "I improved it."

"You *what*?"

"I made it a humane communication from a successful young man to a down-and-out old woman. I told her just what you said, but I worded it in a way that wouldn't hurt her feelings."

He lowered his black head and stared at her in silence. It was his characteristic gesture before the bull-like rush of his temper. She met it calmly, and his own look slightly changed. He spoke, however, as irritably as before.

"Hereafter don't change my dictation. I'm capable of deciding how to write to my correspondents."

"Oh, but you're not, Mr. Shipman—that's just the trouble." Miss Capen spoke with undiminished cheerfulness. Probably she was leaving to-day, so there wasn't much time left to her. She would make as effective use as she could of what there was. "Your letters are often horribly cruel. I'm sure there isn't another producer in the field who sends out so many unnecessary heartaches in his correspondence, and makes so many poor souls cringe with humiliation. You not only refuse work to people, but you make them feel that no one wants them. I can't write such letters any more. They haunt me. They've been keeping me awake at night."

He stared at her with equal amazement and anger.

"Is this a resignation?"

"I suppose so. Certainly I can't stay on if I haven't the privilege of softening the cruel blows you're directing right and left. I don't so much mind what you say to the young—they can look out for themselves; but this bullying of the old and the helpless—"

"Bullying! What the devil do you mean by that?"

He was furious now, and was working himself up into still greater fury. He hurled the letter on his desk and squared himself for action.

"May I really tell you? I'm so glad, for I meant just what I said. It is bullying you're doing to these people. You sit back in your comfortable office and strike



out at them with indifference and rudeness from behind the shelter of your strength and success; and they have to take the blows. What else can they do, poor wretches? They have no way to get back at you, and you know it; so why isn't it bullying?"

"If any one else talked to me this way," he began ominously, "but you—you—" He stopped, and continued in a different tone. "I see! You're simply talking through your bob because I lost my temper this afternoon. Well, I don't see how I can help that. As for those letters, I never meant to be cruel, and I don't believe I have been."

Incredibly, he meant it—she saw that, but she was still more conscious of the amazing revelation he had given her. Apparently, for once in his life, he was open to another's point of view.

"Do you think so? Just let me read your letter to Mrs. Fallows—the one that you dictated and I ventured to change," she said, turning to her notes.

Before he could answer, she read the dictation, coolly and impersonally, from its curt beginning to its end.

"How about it?" she asked, as she laid down the notebook.

"One letter doesn't make a case," he muttered.

He looked so like a sullen and bewildered small boy that her lips twitched, but she ruthlessly continued the lesson.

"One doesn't, but here are more. Listen to the one you wrote to poor old John Adams yesterday."

She read it.

"Did you send that?" Shipman asked.

"No, I didn't. I softened it. I've been modifying half your letters for months, but usually you've read them so hastily that you haven't noticed it. Here's another."

She read several more—they were all very short—and he listened in silence.

"Do you care to go on with to-day's mail?" she asked at last.

"No, I don't, but I've got to. The answers must go out to-night."

He dictated the answers, but she realized that his mind was not wholly on what he was saying. Once or twice he checked himself and omitted or modified a sentence. It was true, then—he had not realized what he had been doing.

At the end of the dictation he whirled his swivel chair to face her more directly.

"Look here!" he said crisply. "You'll put me in the devil of a hole if you leave. If I have to break in another girl while I'm busy with this next production, I'll go crazy, and you know it!"

"I know you make things very hard for yourself," she corroborated.

He flushed again.

"What d'you mean by that?"

"I mean—since you ask me—that things would be much easier for you, and for every one who works for you, if you could learn to exercise a little self-control," she calmly told him, though her nerves were jumping. "Of course, when you rave and rant, you rattle yourself and everybody around you."

He rose.

"Well, I guess that 'll be about all," he said quietly. "You can finish out your week, Miss Capen, and after that I'll try to struggle along without your valuable assistance."

"That will be fine," she heartily agreed.

"If you like, I'll get a new girl in to-morrow and give her a little preliminary training; but do try, for your own sake, not to interrupt it by throwing a chair at her," she lightly added, as she rose.

"I believe you're crazy!" he almost shouted.

"Oh, no—I'm just one human being speaking frankly to another. You must remember that I have merely answered your questions and thrown in a bit of excellent advice as a farewell gift."

She strolled out of the office, leaving him speechless.

### III

THE next morning Shipman glanced around Miss Capen's office as soon as he came in, as if looking for a newcomer. Edith answered his unasked question.

"They've promised some one by this afternoon," she encouraged him; "a girl with fine references and five years of experience."

"I bet she chews gum!" he bitterly predicted, and added in a lower tone, coming close to her desk: "Suppose we forget her? Telephone 'em we don't want her. I've been thinking it over. I can't break in a new secretary now. You—you can change my letters."

"But I'll have to change your manner a little, too," she warned him.

"Oh, well, I'm sorry about yesterday."

Evidently he attributed all these developments to his loss of temper, which seemingly had had her for its object. He was blithely unconscious of other ground for criticism. "I can't understand you—you've been so sensible till now," he unwisely added.

The remark gave her the opening she needed.

"I can't show that kind of 'sense' any longer. If I stay on, may I say anything I please to you? I really can't keep quiet hereafter."

He grinned. She was beginning to amuse him. Besides, for a whole year she had been an ideal secretary.

"Shoot off your opinions if you want to. They won't interest me, but they may relieve you."

But already Edith had discovered that they did interest him. Those hesitations and changes in his dictation had proved it clearly enough.

Clarice dropped in during the day, at an hour when she had reason to believe that Shipman would be out, and announced that she had come to say good-by. Hereafter, she explained, she would pin her faith to Ike Einstein. It appeared that he had invited her to come to him and get a job any time she was tired of being kicked downstairs by Dave Shipman.

"But you mustn't do that," Edith hurriedly assured her. "You'll be awfully sorry if you do!"

"What's the idea?"

"Of course I can't tell you anything; but you lie low till to-morrow, and I'll ask Mr. Shipman to write you this afternoon."

Clarice nodded, but without much hope. She had evidently lost faith in her old playfellow, and had dropped in more to satisfy her curiosity about the working out of the new experiment than to go through any formalities of farewell.

"How's things going?" she wanted to know.

"I've been fired once and taken back again. I expect to be fired once or twice more before night," Edith admitted.

The prophecy seemed about to be borne out that afternoon, when Shipman flew into one of his characteristic rages and threw an inkwell at the office boy, who had allowed an unwelcome caller to pass the sacred portal of the private room. The youth capably dodged the inkstand, but some of

its flying contents spattered over him and Miss Capen, wrecking the boy's coat sleeve and some handsome embroidery on Edith's one-piece gown.

"I'm sorry about that," Shipman muttered abashedly, looking at the stains on the dress.

"That's the least of it," she coolly told him, sopping up the ink with a blotter.

"I'll buy you a new dress," he went on. "Get anything you like, and put through a voucher."

"I never allow gentlemen to pay for my clothes. It's one of my rules," his secretary told him. "I can go without a new spring coat and buy another dress."

"I'll raise your salary a hundred a month. The dress didn't cost more than that, did it?"

"Only half as much; but it isn't worth while to raise my salary—I'm leaving so soon, you know."

"Good Lord!" he cried wearily. "Have we got to go through all that again?"

"You must see that I can't afford to stay here; but it's unfortunate that you didn't choose me as the only target. Jimmy will spread the story all over town, and there's a lot of talk about you already."

"Let 'em talk their fool heads off—damn 'em!"

"They're doing it, and—I don't know whether I ought to tell you this, but we agreed that I could say anything I wished—it's the kind of talk that's bad for business."

He faced her with the look of one whose nerves are at the snapping point.

"What d'you mean, bad for business?"

"I myself understand that these outbursts of yours are mere childishness—the result of a lack of elemental dignity and self-control."

"Oh!" he said in a choked voice. "You understand that, do you?"

"Yes—they're the result of having no poise, and of thinking you're so big and important that you can do anything you like, no matter how silly and how unworthy of a grown man it is. I understand all that, but people outside are not so charitable."

"Charitable! You think you're charitable! My God!" He laughed harshly. "You're so damned charitable," he said, "that I'm going to can you right now, and this time it's final!"

"All right, but let me finish, anyway."

It will be the last thing I can do for you. You ought to know that your enemies are starting a story that all these performances of yours are the result of some brain trouble. Of course you know that some very serious brain troubles begin with symptoms like these—uncontrollable excitement, rages over nothing—but you needn't worry about that," she added hastily, as she saw the look in his eyes. "You haven't any brain trouble."

"God! I should think *not!*"

But his big figure had slumped down in his chair and his dark face had whitened.

"You haven't," she repeated firmly; "but people will think you have, and they'll lose confidence in you. A story like that soon spreads, and it's hard for normal, sensible human beings to believe a grown man would act this way unless there was something wrong with him."

"There's a whole lot of 'em worse than I am," he muttered, staring at her like a half frightened, half furious child.

She was ruthless again.

"There isn't one who acts half as badly as you do. When I first came, you were like the rest of them—you were merely temperamental and unreasonable and easily excited. No one stopped you or reasoned with you, so you deteriorated at a frightful rate. Now everybody's gossiping, but no one has dared to speak to you about the gossip."

"They'd better not!"

"But you're getting extremely unpopular, Mr. Shipman. Have you noticed how few people come to see you now, compared to the number that came even a few weeks ago?"

"They know I've already cast the new production."

"But they also know that you'll soon cast another one. The truth is that many of them are afraid to come. Almost all of them, I think, would rather work for some one else."

She let that sink in, and then told him of Clarice's call and Ike Einstein's interest. The latter failed to alarm him, but he revealed an unexpected insight.

"He wants to get the inside dope of my office," he said scornfully; "but he's on the wrong track. He couldn't get it from Maggie. She's not the blabbing kind."

He dictated a letter to Maggie, promising her a place with "The Prince of Jazz." Then he leaned back with an air of deci-

sion and faced his secretary. His manner was calm, almost judicial.

"Now you've got all that off your chest, perhaps you'll quiet down for a few days," he suggested. "Meantime, you might analyze yourself once in awhile. You think you're perfect, don't you? Well, you're not, my girl! You've got a million miles to go. I could tell you a few things about yourself that would surprise you, and some day I'll do it!"

#### IV

AFTER that Dave himself quieted down, not for a few days, but for several weeks. He had sounded his few intimates and had discovered that Miss Capen's information as to current gossip was correct. He was shrewd enough to realize that the growth of such a reputation as he was acquiring would indeed be "bad for business." Only his office staff got the benefit of the change, however, for he had suddenly decided that he was not quite ready to put on the third production of the season.

During this restful interval he thought a good deal about his secretary, assuring himself that he loathed her. Incidentally, every afternoon, he read his correspondence with great care and took pleasure in baiting her.

"You're making me a regular *Pollyanna*," he sardonically assured her. "My letters are just full of sweetness and light. By the way"—a sudden thought came to him, and he obviously welcomed it—"where do you get that stuff? I'll tell the world it doesn't come out of you. You're just about as hard-boiled a virgin as they make 'em!"

"It's simply amazing how well you and I understand each other," Miss Capen softly commented.

"You bet we do! You're the kind of woman that would lead a man a dog's life if you married him," he went on, interested in the new theme and charmed by the opportunity to get back at her. "I'll bet the guy you marry won't know his soul's his own!"

That got under her skin. She flushed, and he continued his dictation with a grin of triumph. Perhaps it was due to this that her next criticisms on his character were even franker than their predecessors.

"I'm beginning to realize," she said, as she closed her notebook, two months later, when he had finished his correspondence,

"that your apparent cruelty was simply a matter of thickness of skin. I believe now that you really didn't know you were being cruel. There's a complete lack of sensitiveness and understanding about you—in your relation to other human beings. You crash through life as an elephant goes through a jungle."

He leaned back in his desk chair and studied her as she sat before him.

"Aside from that I'm all right, I hope," he grinned.

For some reason her criticisms had almost ceased to annoy him. Indeed, he sometimes appeared to enjoy them, and he certainly enjoyed the retaliation in which he constantly indulged.

She shook her head.

"You have brains," she admitted, as she rose to return to her own office, "and you're a prodigious worker. There isn't a lazy bone in you. Aside from those qualities I can't see that you have any good ones, except a sort of reckless generosity due to the fact that you're making more money than you know how to spend. You don't show any common sense or discrimination about your giving, and it doesn't include any self-sacrifice; so you don't deserve credit for it."

"Sit down and let's have this out," he invited. "You interest me strangely, as the playwrights say. Besides, I want to tell you some things about yourself, for a change," he added, as she hesitated.

When she had accepted his invitation, Dave leaned back in his chair, clasped his big hands behind his head, and went on easily:

"I don't deserve any credit for anything, according to you; but luckily you're here to bring up the average. Now, tell me something—how does it feel to think yourself so perfect that you can be a star of Bethlehem to all mankind?"

"I don't think anything of the sort."

"Don't you, though? Then you've got some pointers coming to you. Let me tell you right now that you're about the smuggest and the most self-centered human being I've ever known. You're a mass of egotism. Your kindness and gentleness are merely surface qualities—things you've grafted on your nature as matters of policy. You mean to get on, and you're getting on. You want to be popular, and you're popular with superficial observers; but I know you through and through."

"That is interesting," she admitted without rancor.

It was, and it made her thoughtful. Was it—could it be—possible that in any degree he was right? Was she really so obsessed by the mote in her neighbor's eye that she could not see the beam in her own?

She put the problem to Clarice the next time that minor luminary of "The Prince of Jazz" dropped into the offices—an attention rather rare since the new musical comedy had settled down for the long run that its producer had predicted. Clarice was very happy, very well dressed, very optimistic, and too busy for many calls. She was developing ambition, and was studying singing with an idea of working up to more important parts.

Also, her opinion of Dave had changed. She referred to him without rancor, and gave obvious consideration to a charge that Edith had expected her to repudiate with pained surprise.

"I wouldn't say you was exactly conceited, deary," she finally announced, in solution of the problem. "I'd just say that if any one introduced you to yourself, you'd get up and bow. You'd be meetin' some one you thought was worth while—see?"

This is an ungrateful world, but Clarice laughed when Edith mentioned the fact.

Edith's next jolt came after another interval of several months, which had been marked by various brisk interchanges of criticism between her and her chief. Late one afternoon, when the rest of the staff had departed, Shipman settled back in his desk chair and addressed his secretary with the manner of one who has the evening before him.

"Considering how you disapprove of me—I know you really do," he remarked, in answer to some light comment of hers, "I can't see why the devil you let yourself go on loving me!"

She was too much amazed to be angry.

"Loving you!" she gasped.

"You know you love me, don't you?" he asked in surprise; "or is it possible that you don't realize it yet? I've suspected it for months, but I wasn't quite certain till Maggie Murphy talked to me a few days ago. Maggie pointed out that a girl like you wouldn't be wasting time on me if you hadn't fallen for me. 'And when that happened,' Maggie said, 'of course she had to make you into somethin' fit to marry.'"



"This would be infuriating if it weren't so idiotic," Edith said with cold anger.

"Don't get excited," he urged. "I love you, too, so it ought to be all right, though God alone knows how we can possibly work it out. Perhaps you and He have some plans," he added simply. "If you have, let me in on them as soon as you can. The whole thing looks like a complete loss to me now."

As she was obviously unable to answer this, he picked up a manuscript and began to read it with a contented smile. *That* would give her something to think about! The breeze she created as she rose and hurried through the door fanned his brow.

## V

"I'm leaving, Mr. Shipman," Edith announced the next morning.

"I expected that. It's the nineteenth resignation. I've kept track of 'em."

"And you've discharged me eight times."

"Good! That shows a fine development in self-control. When are you leaving?"

"At the end of the week."

He nodded.

"That will be fine. I was beginning to feel that it was about time—though, to tell the truth, it's a little sooner than I had expected to be married. However, it will give us a week at Palm Beach before the production of 'The Dancing Dervish' comes up, so that's all to the good."

"I'm beginning to think," she said slowly, "that you really are insane!"

He shook his head at her.

"Tut, tut! Look at the poise and patience I've shown for the last six months in listening to your criticisms! Look at the judgment I've shown in picking out my future wife!" He leaned forward and took her hand. "My dear girl, why kick against the inevitable? You're acting like an unbroken colt, but you've met your master, and you know it. Stop working yourself into a rage, and kiss me. I can tell you by past experience that rages aren't worth while."

"I hate you!" she said. "I loathe and abominate and despise you!"

He nodded.

"I suppose you do. In girls of your temperament love is often mixed up with feelings like that. I was reading a play last night that went into the matter in some detail. It's a good play, too. I've

about decided to put it on." He returned to the earlier interest. "There's absolutely no question that you and I will lead a cat and dog life," he sighed; "but I'm ready to begin it any time you say. Whenever you make me see red, I'll remind myself, as I've been doing for the past five months, that it's because you adore me. You're the type that chastises when it loves. Every time you think you're fed up with me, remember what a superb job you made of me when you took me in hand—and don't forget," he cheerfully added, "that the reason you took me in hand was that you had decided to annex me, and that I was worth the trouble of making over. You were right about that, too!"

"Do you really think so?" she rather acidly inquired.

"Yep. Look at the facts! The only way you can tell me now from the modest violet is that I'm so much more modest than the violet is. I'm so gentle that callers cry on my shoulder. I'm so generous that I'm heading straight for the poorhouse. That club of East Side boys you made me interest myself in has written an anthem to me."

"It has all made you worse than ever," she declared. "The only change there is in you is that you don't usually show your self-content so plainly. I ought to have realized that it would be this way!"

He ignored the interruption.

"Did you know that I was made treasurer of the new Actors' Charity Fund last night?" he went on. "They say it's because I'm so kind and sympathetic. I think they must have been reading a lot of your letters. Old Mrs. Fallows informed Einstein, the other day, that I was like a son to her. I'm told there's a general feeling now among the theatrical rank and file that if they can get into one of my companies they're sure of a father's fostering care."

"Don't be so absurd!"

"Isn't it true? You know it's true; and the great pity is that I'm going to waste all these fine qualities on you. However, I suppose you're going to be the hammer of life that pounds me into shape—the harrow that churns me up. Although, as a matter of fact," he continued in a musing tone, "if you asked my opinion, I'd say I thought I was all right now, and that after we're married you and I ought to concentrate on improving *you*. How about being

married next Saturday, with that understanding?"

"I wouldn't marry you," she told him, "if—"

"If I was the last man on earth—I know. Why are you so ashamed of loving me? Dear girl, there's nothing to be ashamed of in loving a man—especially one whom you've made over in your own image and likeness, as it were."

"There is—there *is*! I *am* ashamed of loving you. I think all this apparent change in you is merely a bluff. I think you've made up your mind to get back at me, and that this is your notion of the way to do it. I think that underneath your new manner you're the same Nero you always were. I think—"

"Darling girl!"

He leaned forward and kissed her lips to stop the rush of words. It worked so well that he prolonged the interruption.

"You've got your whole life before you to tell me what you think of me," he assured her, after a long and silent interval; "so what's the use of trying to do it all at once? Besides, you're going to have nicer thoughts about me later on—yes, you are! Here, kiss me again!"

"Men don't make love that way," she muttered against his lips. "They don't take so much for granted."

"Don't they? Well, perhaps you can cure me of that, too. You know you'd

hate to feel as I do—that I'm such a perfect model that you simply can't put in any improvements next season."

She sighed.

"I wish I knew what to do with you!"

She was leaning back and smoothing the bobbed hair that he had made stand out around her head like a halo.

"You know darned well what you're going to do with me. You're going to marry me, and when you do, my girl, we'll both have our hands full. Compared to us, the Kilkenny cats will be a mere memory and the World War a friendly bout; but oh, *boy*, what fun we're going to have! To go home after a quiet day at the office and start a good knock-down-and-drag-out battle with you will make a new man of me. Here, kiss me again, and name the day!"

"You don't need me any more," she weakly protested.

He shook his head at her.

"I'm a man that needs an iron hand throughout life," he declared; "and you're a woman that has to be jumped on with both feet every night and morning. It's going to be mighty interesting. Of course, if you haven't the nerve for the experiment, or if you're afraid of the reforms I'm going to bring about in you—"

"I haven't got the bullying spirit out of you yet!" she breathlessly murmured, as he caught her in his arms. "All—right! Make—it—Saturday!"

## ROSES

YELLOW and creamy and pink-petaled roses,  
 Budding and blooming on tree and on vine;  
 Calyx of gold where the honey bee dozes,  
 White as a snowdrift or crimson as wine;  
 Roses as royal as queens in their glory,  
 Roses as timid as novices young,  
 Rhapsodists telling a wonderful story,  
 Poets, whose lyrics the breezes have sung.

Velvety soft or with satinlike splendor,  
 Salmon or copper or amethyst bright;  
 Dancing like sprites or as wood genies tender—  
 Beautiful roses, the garden's delight!  
 Passing, each breeze with your perfume is freighted,  
 Bearing your largess wherever it goes;  
 Nothing so rare by the gods consummated,  
 Nothing so sweet as the heart of a rose!

L. Mitchell Thornton