

THE REAL THING

BY WINONA GODFREY

THE rain had slackened somewhat as the taxicab stopped in front of a good but not too fashionable restaurant. The taxicab was on account of the rain, though Tyler felt flush and free-handed anyway because of his recent elevation. He had just been made suit-buyer for Hathaway & Eaton.

He helped the lady to descend with an anxiety that was really superfluous, for she appeared to be quite equal to the task of caring for herself. It was Miss Mackan, who managed the waist-section for the same firm. No sooner had she set her well-shod foot upon the wet pavement than a most piteous "me-ew-ow" assailed her ears.

A black kitten, tiny, wet, bedraggled, lost, wholly forlorn, appeared in the window-glare, running a few steps this way and that in a bewildered fashion to avoid the careless feet of passers-by.

"Kitty, kitty!" called Miss Mackan in a flute-y contralto.

The kitten fled to the wall, Miss Mackan pursued, captured the runaway, and returned, holding its cold little body and its dirty little feet against the soft warmth of her new pony coat.

"You'll get all dirty," Tyler warned her. He was very fastidious.

"What of it?" replied Miss Mackan. "I might trample ruthlessly on my grandmother, but a miserable kitten can get me going any day!"

She nodded to the head-waiter, and he, with the affability of long acquaintance and generous tips, led them to the usual table. Besides, men always bestirred themselves when Miss Mackan bent her merry eyes upon them and smiled that slow, devastating, gently sophisticated little smile. The wholly sophisticated smile is never entirely bewitching, but Miss Mackan's seemed to say, "Oh, yes, I know—just lots of things. Yet I still have faith and I can still be merry!"

The waiter at their table pulled out her chair for her, shaking his head with smiling disapproval at sight of the kitten, clinging desperately now in its fright at the light and noise.

Miss Mackan's eyes were suddenly grave though she said lightly: "Now, don't start anything, Frank."

"This thing," Mr. Tyler affirmed, "was started a long time ago—I'm only going to tell you about it now. You're going to listen, aren't you?"

Miss Mackan made a little gesture of resignation. "I suppose so."

"I got my raise today," he went on. "That's one reason I haven't said much—I knew my salary wasn't as big as yours, but now, that's fixed—"

"Dear, dear," sighed Miss Mackan, "is it going to be as bad as all that?"

For a not too serious fellow, poor Frank was most tremendously serious at this moment. His round, good-looking face was several shades paler than usual. He dug the tines of his fork into the tablecloth and did not look at her.

"I know how you are with all the fellows," his voice was low. "Everybody knows it, I guess, for that matter. You're jolly with 'em, and ready for all the fun, but the minute a man gives you one look that—that, well, that isn't exactly brotherly—you shy. And the next time you go out with another fellow."

"Ho-hum," said Miss Mackan, looking down to see if the kitten was still purring contentedly on the edge of her skirt.

"Most women aren't like that," argued the suit-buyer, from the depths of his knowledge of womankind. "Most of 'em are just trying to get a fellow going. But you—maybe that's why they're all so crazy about you," he reflected gloomily.

"Maybe it is," murmured Miss Mackan with a sudden dazzling smile, as if such a possibility had never occurred to her before.

"And I know," he admitted, still gloomily, "that that's why you've gone around with me more—because I've tried never to let on that I—that I—"

She shook her head reproachfully. "You've deceived me, Frank."

"Come now, Glory," he pleaded. "Do take me seriously this once. Can't you see how serious it is to me?"

She looked at him. "I'm sorry," she said simply.

"I had to let you know. I couldn't keep from it any longer. I don't suppose it's any use, but I wish you'd tell me why nobody seems to stand any show with you. Don't you—don't you care—about—that sort of thing, you know?" He flushed a little, boyishly.

She leaned her chin in her hand and in her turn drew a tiny pattern on the tablecloth with a teaspoon.

"I can't stick at home all the time—I don't seem to be able to stand much of my own society these days, somehow. So I go out with this man or that, to dinner, to the theatre, to a dance. With the drummers it's just business—"

"I guess it don't pain 'em any," Tyler surmised.

"Jove!" he burst out suddenly. "I can't understand a man that wouldn't be good to you! I don't know just how to say it, but it seems like you're so full of—of pity for everything that suffers!"

"You? You've seen your father, and you can look at your brother. And then think of me," she said. "I can't bear to think of you." I thought hard. And then—why it just had to be—I married him."



"YOU BETTER TRY IT, JIM, AND SEE."

"Don't," she whispered. "It isn't true. More true now, maybe, but not—once."

After a little silence: "I'm going to tell you about it—if you want to hear it."

"You know I do," said he.

"I won't go into many details," she began slowly, "but I've got to tell you something of the beginning of things so you'll understand how I felt. My father was handsome and—good for nothing. My brother Neal was just like him. They couldn't let the liquor alone. I had a sister, too. When we were little my mother made the living. She didn't have much education, so she made it with the hard work of her hands. When we got big enough, my sister and I went to work, too—in a department store. We were check-girls. And we didn't get much education either."

"Nobody'd ever know you hadn't been raised a lady," Frank declared; his ideas on the subject were rather elementary.

Glory had a sense of humor.

"I'm one now anyway," she smiled. "Clothes make the lady nowadays, don't they?" She touched her silk dress. "And white hands." Hers were like milk. "I know an awful lot of things, Frank, that you don't learn out of books, but I guess I don't know much that you do."

"You don't need to," protested her loyal cavalier.

For a moment her white lids closed over the deep purple smoulder of her eyes, the red of her lip was caught in her teeth. For only a moment; she went on steadily.

"Of course, he'd promised, and we were happy—oh, good Lord, boy, we were happy! Pretty near a year went by, and one night he came home to me—drunk. I know I've got heaven coming to me somewhere, because I had my hell right there as I stood looking at him. I didn't say anything. More happy time went by, only it wasn't quite so happy because of that shadow on it—then again. That time mother happened to be there."

"Glory," she said, "go right now. Go while there's time. It's your duty," she said. "Do you want sons like him to make hells for other women? You see sticking by him don't do it—maybe leaving will wake him up. You've tried him—you've given him his chance—now you leave him."

"I had an awful feeling in my heart, Frank. I could have killed him and me and sent the whole world to chaos right there. But we don't do those things, you know. I put on my hat and mother put on hers, and we walked out. I seemed to go into a kind of trance—I was just like a dead woman walking around. I didn't come to for six weeks. I found I was working in a store in a city a long ways off."

Her voice died away, and she sat a moment in silence staring down at the table.

"Well, about that time, we heard from my sister; she'd married a nice, steady fellow and they lived in another town. She wrote me that he had been there—had come in quietly and asked if she knew where I had gone. And she lied and said she didn't, and he needn't ask her anyway 'cause she wouldn't tell him. And he went away."

"Well?" said Tyler presently in a voice not quite steady.

"That's all," she said. "I never heard from him again. It's eight years ago. I worked hard. I got to be a buyer—I make plenty of money. At first I thought nothing mattered because I'd soon die anyway. But I didn't," she smiled a little.

she was carrying in her arms. They thought she was doing it for effect.

"Of course I'll take it home," she was saying to Frank. "We keep a kitty orphan-asylum, Mother and I."

"Some class!" said Johnny the waiter as the door closed behind her. Then he wondered what had gone wrong with her appetite.

It was only a few days later that closing-time at Hathaway & Eaton's found Miss Mackan still at her desk with some little matters postponed from busier days. A recess by a window, curtained from her own section, served her as an office.

Presently silence and solitude settled about her. The hubbub of day-time died away into peace. Like the heavy quiet of an empty theatre, there was something almost uncanny in the dim aisles between the cleared counters, the covered tables, and swathed dummies.

The shaded light hanging low over Miss Mackan's desk brightened her hair into gold, and threw her figure in its black dress of newest cut into relief. The twilight without the lamp's circle was hardly relieved by a single light far down the aisle.

The noise of the street below came to her muffled. For some time she worked with a concentration characteristic of her, then her eyes grew dreamy, and her pencil tapped idly on the pad before her. Perhaps she was thinking of Tyler, who had been looking rather dejected since the dashing of his hopes the other night.

A board creaked softly outside the green curtains—a little sound like a light step—perhaps a mouse venturing forth on a journey of exploration.

Miss Mackan had not troubled to draw those curtains together—they hung now half apart; she had heard the sound without paying attention to it, now she lifted her eyes to see a man standing there in the aperture.

The shade of her desk-lamp cast the upper half of him into shadow. She did not move nor scream; her gaze sought his face—his famished eyes that were yet reverent as the starved might pause for grace before the feast.

"Glory," he half-whispered questioningly.

We can't all meet our great moments with blank verse on our lips.

"Why, hello," said Miss Mackan, slowly. He advanced a few steps to the desk, hat in hand, a gray fellow in a brand-new suit of clothes; gray eyes set steadily in a face of ruddy tan.

"How are you, Glory?" he asked awkwardly.

"Well," said she, not rising. They did not touch hands.

"You're looking fine," he affirmed. "Sit down." She indicated the other chair.

right up, and every day I'd bathe and shave and dress up and sort of wait around for you to come in. You didn't come.

"Then I went and asked your sister—I'd been too proud to do it at first. She opened my eyes—she showed me what they all thought and felt about me—especially your mother."

"Then I went out and got drunk in earnest—I'm telling you all of it, Glory. I lost my job; then one day I sat down to look the thing square in the face. I said to myself, 'You're a nice one, you are! No wonder your wife left you! Do you blame her? Suppose it'd been the other way, you'd have been plumb disgusted, wouldn't you? What makes you think you could do anything and she ought to stand for it? that she would stand for it?"

"What makes you think that?" I said to myself. "Now, I said, 'what are you going to do? Are you going to quit decency altogether and just be a hog? Are you going to show everybody that she was right? Or are you going to be a man? You let on to her in the beginning that you were a real man and she believed you. You better prove it, hadn't you? Do you think you could prove it, you damned fool? I said."

"Honey, by some God-sent chance you'd hit on the right way to wake me up. You showed me what it was to lose the thing you do care for the thing you don't care for. For a year I looked for you and couldn't find you, because you see I hadn't any idea where to look; and I began to find out what an almighty big country this is. Then I stopped to take stock of things."

"I wasn't making much, of course, and I saw I wouldn't have anything to give you if I did find you. Well, I fell in with a fellow named Bryson who was going out to California to grow oranges. He had some money and I didn't, but he wanted me to go in with him, and I did. We got some groves and, Lord, how we did work! He wanted to marry a rich girl, and he was proud and wanted to show 'em, and—you know what I wanted. Say, we just had to make good! All the time I was trying every way I could think of to find a trace of you. I even put advertisements in the papers. I suppose you didn't happen to see any of 'em?" wistfully.

"No," said Glory in a very low voice, "I didn't see any of them."

"Time went on," he resumed, "and things began to come our way—we began to have money in our pockets. But all the same I was feeling pretty blue. I didn't know what you'd done. You might have got a divorce and married some other fellow in all that time—say, honey, you didn't, did you?"

"No," she whispered.

He wiped his forehead.

"I didn't know, you see. So one day I started out again. I was going to find out if it took every bean I had. I couldn't tell you all of it, but one day I got to talking to a traveling man in San Francisco. While we were standing there, a woman passed, and I kind of looked around to see her good."

"I'd sort of got into the habit of looking at all the light-haired women to see if it was you. 'Interested in blondes?' he asked. And I said, 'Well, kind of,' and he said, 'Well, up in Seattle at Hathaway & Eaton's, they've got a peach! Not one of your fly ones—believe me, she's a real lady. For looks and style and intelligence, she's got all the society dames beat a city block.'"

"I asked what her name was, and he says, 'Miss Mackan.' I guess I looked kind of funny, for he grabbed me by the shoulder and yelled, 'What's the matter, man? are you sick?' I said, 'Say, you're going to have all the oranges you can eat the rest of your life, but I can't tell you about it now—I got to catch a train!'"

He laughed a little.

"Think of chancing on it that way after all that searching!"

She had sat almost motionless during his recital, not looking at him; her fingers still turning the pencil she had held at his entrance.



"THE MEN I MET BEGAN TO TAKE NOTICE"

on a napkin. They were fine hands, not small, but white and strong and capable—and ringless.

"Say, Glory," he began, a little hoarsely. "Who said you might?" inquired Miss Mackan sweetly. "Yes, Johnny, I'll have some fish—the kitten will like it."

She met his gaze with her honest eyes that always seemed purple at night.

"No, Frank—I don't want it."

"I am going to say it tonight," he declared firmly. "You can't switch me this time. I know you never take me seriously, but this time—say, girlie, I mean it."

She did not speak, but she rose as he did and stood before him. He did not try to touch her.

"I don't know whether you could ever feel the same, but I'd sure try to make you. And, Glory—why, Glory, I've often thought if I could just take you in my arms like I used to—it would just have to come back to you—"

Miss Mackan looked straight and deep into her husband's eyes.

"You better try it, Jim, and see," she breathed with a tremulous smile.