

# First Aid To Saint Valentine

By **RENE MANSFIELD.**

**T**HEY were sitting at the foot of the wide, rug strewn stairs, beneath the clustered lights that an impertinent bronze Venus held everlastingly over their heads; the girl with fingers locked about her knees, the man, his big frame distributed over the three stairs, leaning painfully on his elbow to insure a constant view of a flickering eyelash and an elusive dimple.

"Aren't they lovely, Rob—every one of them?"

"My dear, I'm speechless! Never has my discerning eye been gladdened by such a phalanx of beauty—style—charm! Where did you get them? Why did you get them? Nancy, if this is a new and improved method of throwing me down it has its advantages, I will admit. But be sure that if I can resist the wiles of these sirens will doubtless employ to ensnare a good looking, eligible person like myself, you need never fear that my devotion will waver, my dear, even if Circe or the Lorelei girls or my handsome stenographer camp out in bungalow till further orders. I never—"

Unfortunately, to lighten the effect of this effort, Robert attempted to place his hand delicately over his heart. His elbow slipping on the treacherous waxed stair, he had a sad time gathering himself up. Manifestly this was a dangerous place for a young man. No hostess would willingly imperil the life and limbs of her guests. So Robert slipped again—but this time simply a strong right arm about a blue silk girdle for support.

"Robert, you goose! Stop it! But, really, now, Rob, isn't Angela, in her black gown, with that mop of auburn hair, a dream?—and Evelyn—and Doris—"

"Ten thousand dollar beauties, 'pon honor, Nancy. Angela makes me think of nothing in the world so much as a nice black lamp post, lighted. Doris might have stepped—no, she couldn't step, she must have oozed—right out of the director's period. Nancy, I know she can't eat anything but spaghetti, and what would happen if she didn't get it started straight?"

"Rob, I think you're horrid!"

Robert followed an escaping dimple to its lair with his eyes and then with his lips.

"Nancy, they're winners, every one of them. Your valentine house party can't help being a thundering success. The men are corking good fellows, and if the ungrateful wretches don't lay their hearts at every foot of these sirens—I mean at the feet of every siren—after you've gone and searched the globe for the best on the market, I'll scratch their hearts out and do it myself, s'elp me, Cupid!"

"Spoken like my gallant hero," laughed Nancy. "They are a nice lot, aren't they? Even dear little Amaryllis—"

"Nancy Haverill, right here, in all seriousness, let me ask you and what why is Amaryllis? What under the shining sun possessed you to ask that little mouse, that little moth, that shrinking violet, down here with these gorgeous butterflies and worldlings?"

"Her heart, my dear, for she has a heart as big as all outdoors. I know she's plain—"

"Plain? My dear, that girl is so homely that if she ever got into the papers for any reason on earth even the yellow journals wouldn't call her pretty. More I cannot say. I'm afraid, Nancy, she's going to be the rift in the lute of love that's bound to be played in this locality before the finish of this house party. Nobody will fall in love with her in two weeks—nobody will ever fall in love with her in twenty years." Robert heaved a prodigious sigh and began to feel personally responsible for the shortcomings of Amaryllis.

"Rob Haskell, you talk more and say less every day of your life. Why, you blessed bambino—"

Nancy, I wish you wouldn't call me that," began Rob plaintively. "You know I'm 8 feet 2—"

"You blessed bambino, I'm planning to have Amaryllis engaged to the most eligible man in the set before this party's over!"

"Nancy, you can't do it. I tell you I don't care for her style. I—"

"Did I tell you Carl Newell wired me he could be here, after all? He's coming in, in the morning on the 8:32. I'm so glad he'll be here for the valentine party. He's it. He ought to be marrying somebody and it may as well be Amaryllis. They are beautifully suited to each other—and I'm going to see that they fall in love."

Robert raised his eyes to the bronze Venus and murmured feelingly: "She's going crazy. O, there's not a doubt of it—not a doubt in the world."

"Well, I don't care what you say, Rob Haskell, Amaryllis Dean and Carl Newell will be engaged before the end of this house party or I'll know the reason why."

"O, you'll know the reason why, all right, dear. I know it now. But go ahead and find it out in your own sweet way if you want to. And now let me do some talking."

Nancy got up precipitately and raised her arms in mock despair. "If he's about to begin to commence to talk, I'm going—"

"Now, look here, Nancy, it's just this. When are you going to tell the H. P.—no, I don't mean the house of parliament, I mean the house party—about our little partnership project? And when are you going to decorate your fourth finger with the paltry jewel that represents my year's income?"

Nancy surveyed him wickedly from the top stair, to which she had been withdrawing, with tantalizing determination.

"When—when Amaryllis and Carl announce their engagement?"

"O, say, now, Nancy, that isn't fair! That isn't—good lord, I suppose I'll have to take a hand in this thing after all and help lead my old friend Carl to the slaughter—I mean the altar. O, I'll help you—"

"Indeed, you won't do anything of the kind! Don't you dare to poke your Grecian nose into this at all, Robert. Men always make such a botch of these things. I think in about eight days, maybe six—good night, blessed—"

"Nancy?"

"Good night, Rob—dear—"

The last was flung down to him so softly that Robert couldn't be sure it wasn't just a perverse little giggle. Of course, Nancy knew it wasn't. She hurried along the hall, where, from behind closed doors, she caught the murmur of whispered midnight confidences, and rapped gently on the last door but one.

"Amaryllis—may I come in?"

The door was opened at once by a girlish little figure in a plain, dark negligee.

"Why, my dear child," cried Nancy, taking her by the shoulders and shaking her affectionately, "my dear child, how beautiful you look with your hair down like this!" Nancy brushed back the wavy masses of fine black hair that fell about her shoulders and undulated to below her waist, peering down into the plain little face. Yes, Amaryllis was certainly homely. Her eyes were small, her nose was bumpy, and her mouth was huge. But when a smile twinkled her eyes and wrinkled her nose and puckered her mouth, one surely might forget that she had a face.

"Where do you put it all when you put it up? I never dreamed you had so much!"

"O, I twist it and tuck it and poke it," laughed Amaryllis. "Nancy, you were such a dear to ask me! It's going to be splendid—this house party. I never saw so many pretty girls all together at one time. Angela Marsh is a beauty. I was so glad MacFarwell talked to her all through dinner tonight, because I love so to watch her raise her eyebrows and pout her lips!"

Dear little Amaryllis! The potter that fashioned you so that you turn from your own mirror with distaste poured into you a generous essence of beauty and love of beauty not tinged with envy or covetousness.

"Well, I'm awfully glad you like it, you funny little thing. The girls were my seminary chums—and the men are nice, too, don't you think? O, do you happen to know Carl Newell? No? He's coming in in the morning. I could almost wish his business had kept him away, as he thought it might, at first. Carl is a good enough sort, but difficult, you know. He's quite homely and downright shy. Poor fellow, I feel sorry for him sometimes, he does seem so ill at ease."

"Then I'm afraid the girls may snub him a little because he was mixed up in some disgraceful affair a while ago, though quite innocently, I'm positive. Well, Carl will have to look out for himself, that's all. Heigh-ho! I'm monstrous sleepy, dear, and you've most politely, if most patiently, swallowed three yawns. Good night, Amaryllis. Sleep late in the morning, my dear. Tomorrow night is the valentine party, you know. Pleasant dreams."

Nancy left Amaryllis feeling slightly concerned for



the shy, homely young man who wasn't going to have a happy time of it, it seemed.

And Nancy tripped along the hall to the big east room, where four of the girls, in gaudy kimonos, were huddled about the dying embers of the grate fire.

"O, you owls," said Nancy. "Go to bed. How do you expect to captivate the eligible of eligibles with heavy eyes and fagged-out dispositions? Carl Newell is coming in the morning! You don't any of you know him? Well, let me tell you right now, he's the catch of the season. Good looking—one of those strong faces, you know—awfully clever and lots of money. Why, every girl I know has made three kinds of an idiot of herself over him. Of course, he's a little spoiled and conceited, perhaps. But you won't any of you be able to resist him? Good night, girls—good night."

And Nancy left Doris and Angela and Evelyn and Anne hugging a secret determination that she at least would not swell the throng of misguided females who flung themselves at the head of this vain person, each reflecting also that this indifference was quite likely to prove attractive, anyhow. And Nancy smiled into her pillow and then slept the sleep of the righteous quite as if a conscience were of no consequence at all.

The next morning, without the least feeling of compunction, Nancy, sitting straight and tall in her electric runabout, watched Carl Newell swing from the platform of the 8:32 and stride down the platform toward her. She noted with frank admiration the easy sway of the muscular shoulders, the strong lines of the face, a face that a girl of 18 would call homely, a woman of 25 would call interesting, and a woman of 40 handsome.

"Nancy! You here at this hour! I'm immensely flattered," he said as he stepped up to the trim little rumbout. "The only you, you rash debutante, who could defy the drab ghostliness of a February morning."

"Blarney! I'm flattered to get you here, Carl Newell. Have you a good supply with you?"

"Of what, please?"

"Of those pretty things that slip out so easily. We haven't anybody who makes a specialty of them and we really feel the need of some one."

"Nancy, you mean well, but that's not a nice thing to say. Do you think any able bodied man cares for the reputation of a Chesterfield? Besides," he added, "to do scant justice to the occasion I should have to sit up nights to replenish my supply. You wouldn't have me do that?"

"There, you see—you can't help it, Carl," laughed Nancy as she started the machine at a good clip. "I think you're going to have a nice time. You know all the men, I believe—MacFarwell, Robert Haskell, John Trenton, and brother Dave. And I'm going to introduce you to four of the prettiest girls that ever dangled a score of scalps at their belts. Best tack yours on secure, Carl."

As they skimmed along the frozen country roads, between gaunt elms and barren oaks, black skeletons against a dull gray sky, Nancy dilated at such length upon the surpassing attractions of the four girls that it would have taken a Hebe, a Mme. de Staël, and a Troy Helen rolled into one to equal the charms of any one of them.

"But I thought there were to be five unrivaled damazels besides yourself?" said Carl, amused, poor innocent, at her generous enthusiasm.

"O, there are five. There's Amaryllis Dean. But you won't care for her at all. She's plain. You'll agree she's quite the homeliest girl you've ever seen. She never throws off an extreme reserve and diffidence unless she's strongly attracted to one, which isn't often. She doesn't care for men at all, and I'm really afraid

she isn't going to have a splendid time. Mother and I are fond of her, but we never expect anybody else to appreciate her. Do you see that fence over there with a good sized section of it gone? Nancy Haverill—she neatly done, don't you think? What car are you running these days, Carl?"

When they arrived at the house they found the whole party starting off in the two touring cars for the little town several miles away, where they were to have dinner at a queer little inn. So after hurried introductions over the gay laughter and the cranking of the machines, Carl Newell found himself in the tonneau between the classic Angela and the modish Doris, watching Nancy on the porch, waving a merry good-by and calling out that she and Amaryllis would have transformed the place into a valentine paradise and a Cupid's retreat before their return.

Before the day was over he had decided that Angela's face was really too haughty to be strictly beautiful, and Doris's was much too shallow. He wondered several times what Miss Dean could look like, if she were so homely that even loyal Nancy didn't deny it.

After Mrs. Haverill, Nancy, and Amaryllis had festooned the house with glided strings, weighted with scarlet hearts, and piled the fireplaces with ferns and blossoms, and poised the pink wax Cupid at the top of the evergreen tree in the library, from whose boughs dangled folded paper hearts, each bearing the name of the girl a man might take in to dinner when she succeeded in sending through it an arrow from a miniature bow, and threaded the rooms with a maze of gilt cords which should lead their followers into nook and cranny till at the end of each a red satin heart or a little scarlet mitten indicated, unquestionably one's success or defeat in the lists of love; and after they had transformed the dining room into a bower of palpitating pinkness, pierced with golden arrows, the girls found they had just time to dress hurriedly for dinner.

As Amaryllis was pinning her masses of hair up in her usual light screw, Nancy burst into the room and insisted tactfully and delicately upon arranging it for her. When Amaryllis surprised eyes beheld her flushed little face in the mirror, softened by the loose waves and curls of glossy hair, she turned to Nancy delightedly.

"Ay, Nancy, I've never tried to do it so. I didn't think it would make any difference, I'm so perfectly hopeless, anyway. It—it feels loose, dear." But Nancy was gone, leaving an awakened Narcissus gazing at her plain reflection.

Carl Newell experienced a decided shock when he was introduced to Amaryllis Dean. She wasn't beautiful, she wasn't in the least pretty, but in comparison with the proteque images of Amaryllis as the "homeliest girl you've ever seen," that had crossed his mind during the day, she was a distinct relief, at any rate. He was considerably annoyed to hear himself stammering a formal acknowledgment in ill chosen words, awkwardly self-conscious before the kind eyes of little Miss Dean, which, it seemed to him, reflected somehow the surprise in his own. He was immensely relieved when Evelyn Mason called to him to gird on his armor of archery, step forward boldly, and wield the young bow and arrow that should bring down the heart of his dinner partner.

"You are the last one, Mr. Newell," chirped Evelyn, handing him the tiny bow and arrow, the manipulation of which toy did not tend to restore his equanimity. "Why, that's odd—there isn't another heart on the tree. Nancy, O, Nancy"—Nancy left Amaryllis, to whom she had been talking and came over to the denuded tree—"Mr. Newell hasn't a heart!"

"Libel!" murmured Carl.

"Mr. Newell has a perfectly good heart, Evelyn. I put them all on myself and it must have fallen down. Here it is," and Nancy plucked up the scarlet heart from the floor just back of the tree. No, it wasn't odd that nobody else had noticed it because a corner of the rug had carefully hidden it from view.

"They don't usually escape you like that, do they, Carl? There, I thought you'd bring it down with your first shot. Who is it?" with elaborate carelessness.

"O, Amaryllis. She's over there in the corner. I'm really sorry, Carl," she managed to breathe in his ear. "Where's John Trenton? I'm starving!"

As Carl Newell offered his faultlessly garbed arm to Amaryllis he felt that he was going to be at a disadvantage with this reserved young woman who "didn't care for men, anyhow." His uneasiness trapped him into the remark that it was again proven that the "last's the best of all the game." Carl Newell—erstwhile wit and acknowledged sulphite!

"O, I can't tell you, Mr. Newell," returned Amaryllis, her warm heart intent only on putting the shy young man at his ease, "because it's a truthful ugly duckling, anyhow. But I did the best I could for you. I didn't hide my light under a bushel, but I dropped my heart under a tree." Amaryllis felt furred and tight, but the man was obviously so grateful for the conversational lead that she plunged into a naive little story that brought the twinkles to her eyes, the wrinkles to her nose, and the pucker to her mouth.

At the end of the first course she flattered herself that all constraint on his part had vanished and Carl Newell was immensely flattered by the frank camaraderie of the difficult Miss Dean.

Robert Haskell caught Nancy's eye across the table and during an outburst of laughter managed to say, "Fire start. Good work, general!" Anne Morgan was purring sweetly to MacFarwell, "Miss Dean doesn't seem to have any trouble at all talking to Mr. Newell. The rest of us haven't been so honored."

At the end of the last course Carl Newell was trotting out his choicest brot motts, quite satisfied if they produced a twinkle, a wrinkle, and a pucker.

When, a little later in the drawing room, Nancy thrust an arrow into his hand, attached to a gilt cord, leading, heaven knew where, he was glad to find that Miss Dean's pursuit of her thread of destiny, as it were, led her on a route near to his. Presently they found themselves in the dining room again, with several others, where the gilt cords were twisted about table legs and andirons and silver services.

"Where is mine going?" cried Amaryllis, following her cord into the butler's pantry. "Good-by!"

Carl Newell determined to drag his after him if it didn't lead him to the same place. But, unfortunately for the plate rail, it did. Amaryllis was descending the stairs to the wine cellar, winding about her arrow the cord that lay along the banister. Carl, a few feet behind, followed the gleam of his cord along the opposite hand rail. There was a solitary light burning in the dim room. Amaryllis, a little conscious, hurried along till the glint of her cord disappeared behind a wine cask. There seemed ample room for her slim little person to slip behind it, but she found herself held tightly between the wall and the cask when she attempted to squeeze herself through.

She managed to wriggle through somehow, but as she stepped out into the pale light again the loosened cord, which Nancy had piled high and treacherous, caught on something or other, slipping down and down until it quite enveloped her. When Carl Newell saw her standing there in the wavering light, like an elfish spirit of some fragrant vintage, he swallowed hard and dignificantly.

Who said Amaryllis Dean was plain? Who said

Amaryllis Dean was homely?

"How stupid of me," gasped Amaryllis, trying to twist up her hair. "A taller person could have reached over instead of going around. But I got the heart, Mr. Newell," she added, displaying an elaborate red satin one.

"You got two, Miss Dean," said Carl, quite irrational by now. "Miss Dean, you're the—" Well, they discussed at some length the remarkable felicity with which they seemed to get on and the pleasure with which they looked forward to a continuance of the coincidence.

When they appeared upstairs with satin hearts pinned over quickened ones, Nancy gasped aghast.

"Amaryllis Dean, look at your gown! Ruined—absolutely ruined, and the only decent one you have," she scolded loudly. "I thought anybody would reach for that cord instead of prowling around as you must have done. It's all my fault and I've spoiled your gown and your evening."

To be sure, though she hadn't noticed it before, Amaryllis' white satin gown was a sight—all dust and cobwebs and the bottom stained with the wine which had stood in a little pool behind the cask. Though, as Nancy said, it was the only presentable gown she had, Amaryllis evinced not a shade of annoyance, concerned only that Nancy should not blame herself for the mishap.

"Most girls would make a duce of a row," reflected Carl. Before the evening was over Nancy whispered into the attentive ear of Robert Haskell, "Who may trot out one's disposition if one's good fairy provides the occasion?"

Late that night, when the pink wax Cupid in the library was alighting his bow at the bust of Socrates above the fireplace, having tried his hand at everybody else, Nancy opened the door softly to find Carl and Robert smoking a final cigar before retiring.

There are just a few of you going to be permitted a guaranteed peek into the future, which will disclose without fail the identity of your own true valentine. I shall now write on these slips of paper," said Nancy, with mock solemnity, as she took from the desk paper, pencil, and envelopes, "the names of four young women, for each of you, whom rumor has it you are more interested in than in others."

Nancy wrote a name on each slip with much gravity and a thoughtful forefinger placed conscientiously at her temple. "I now place them in these envelopes, seal them, so—and you, Carl, and you, Robert, will shake them up properly, place them under your pillows tonight for the spirit of St. Valentine to arrange, and in the morning select the second envelope from the right. Destroy the others without opening or the charm is broken, then open the fatal envelope and go ahead serenely. All's plain sailing on the sea of love."

"Have a care, Nancy Haverill!" laughed Carl Newell, watching dreamily the circling smoke of his cigar. "You know I have a pagan faith in the little god of chance. Be careful what you do."

"I know it, Carl Newell. But don't be alarmed. I'm consulting you to the wise care of St. Valentine. Promise, now, both of you to do as I say!"

The men, imbued, also, with the spirit of the sentimental, raised their right hands in solemn compliance.

Nancy raced up the stairs, smothering a little chuckle, and went straight to the room of Amaryllis, whom she found sitting at her window gazing out on to nothing at all and holding in her hand a red satin heart. She protested all the time against Nancy's foolishness, but when the door closed behind her Amaryllis placed the four envelopes under her pillow carefully and stood looking down at them for a long, long time.

The next morning Rob Haskell caught Nancy by the arm as she was hurrying by him with several faces.

"Young woman, you've gone and done it now. Since you insisted upon invoking the aid of providence and the saints and the fairies to point out my matrimonial path, I'm going to see that you abide by it. The name I drew out of the second envelope to the right this morning was—Nancy Haverill!"

"Of course, it was, silly!"

"Of course—?"

"Why, yes, I wrote my name on all of your slips, Amaryllis' name on all of Carl's, and Carl's on all of Amaryllis'!" Nancy put her hand up beside her golden pompadour in military salute. "At your service—Nancy Haverill, first aid to St. Valentine, assistant manager to Cupid, and official starter in the race for love!"

In less than two weeks two young women had become temporarily ambidextrous owing to the blazing of two stones on two happy fourth fingers.