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FOUR LADIES

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By CHARLES J. McGUIRE

PART ONE

By CHARLES J. McGUIRE

THE DRAMATIC HAPPENINGS WHICH A FATHER, IN A FAMILY OTHERWISE FEMININE, IS UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND.

THREE of the ladies were in the living room. Ford Booth, slipping his second cup of coffee at the dinner table, could hear them whispering. So he knew it was something feminine and probably dramatic. Maybe a new dress. They always acted that way at the advent of a new dress among them. When the stage was set, he would be called in to admire. He always was. He went on slipping his coffee and appreciating the warm mellowness of the early summer night. It was June 3d. He heard steps on the stairs, slowly descending. Then:

"Daddy! Come in here! Quick!"
That would be Anita and Joan, his

her. And he saw that her gown was blue, long, straight in line and cut in the shape of a heart at the top to show her gleaming young shoulders. She was transported as well as transformed and he thought:

"A new dress affects any woman as an audience affects an actor. Now I know why nobody recognized Cinderella at the ball."

His eyes dropped below the hem of her dress. Yes. There were the slender little feet in their golden, high-heeled slippers.

"Is that—?" he began. "That can't be my little daughter!"

Yes, it is, Dad," Priscilla told him in her low drawl.

"Grown up!" he said wistfully. "What's that you're wearing?"

"It's an aquamarine, taffeta, sweetheart evening gown," Anita told him eagerly. "Isn't she lovely?"

"Yes," Ford agreed, "she is. But why should a baby dress in an evening gown?"

and George Aimes of M. and Mr. Pedar of I for us?"

"Delighted," he said. "And envious." He sat down and telephoned summonses for the three and, after what seemed an hour's wait in the huge oak-paneled Tudor-Gothic room, Priscilla saw two spruce white-uniformed giants and a smaller cadet bearing down on them. The giants did not seem aware of the smaller man and she knew why. He was a ducrot, a Plebe who would not be recognized by the upper classmen until after graduation parade tomorrow. Under her guise, she trembled. Here was life, real grown-up life, walking toward her.

PRISCILLA

Cadet Pedar was a southerner. He was dark, seemingly slow-moving and drawing.

"Lady," he drawled diffidently as the other four left them, the cadets without a glance at him, "you're Dresden china. Do you know the Point?"

"No," she said. "This is my first time."

"Then I suggest we step in here to Booder's and fortify ourselves with a soda or a sundae and then we might take a walk. Does that sound all right?"

"It sounds nice," she said, and thought, "He's awfully nice. He treats me as if I were much older. And I am, really, though mother and dad don't realize it and the boys I know are all too dumb to see it."

Booder's, which is where cadets may spend their first government monthly checks, was crowded, and she could feel the eyes of many, who couldn't seem to see Pedar, studying her appraisingly. She knew it was the "once over" and she was glad for her new sports suit and her low-heeled shoes and her "nice" hat. Other Plebes found themselves close enough to force Pedar to introduce them, and she liked her chocolate soda and was more and more convinced that Pedar was awfully nice.

"Miss Booth," he drawled diffidently, as they left Grant, "my name's Tim. I'm telling you because I hope to know you better."

"You—Tim. It's an awfully nice name."

"Now what would you like to see?"

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"Now what would you like to see?"

Thayer Road is our Main street. Or we could walk up to Fort Put or Redoubt Number Four."

She waited but he didn't say a word about Flirtation Walk and she was glad because Anita and Joan had told her about Flirtation Walk. That's where you got kissed.

She told him she would like to see the river, so they walked into the hills and sat down and gazed at the Point and the broad, clear Hudson below them. Priscilla told him it was awfully nice and meant much more than that. She was thrilled with the beauty of it and the serious company of a grown-up man.

He told her about himself, about getting his appointment after two years of college. He mentioned how glad he was that he would not be a Plebe after tomorrow's Graduation Parade. Did he know she knew that, then, when the whole corps passed through the sally-port into the area after Parade that the Plebes could kick any Upper Classman they chose just as hard as they chose and the Upper Classmen would have to take it for deviling the Plebes all year? And after that, the Upper Classmen "recognized" the Plebes by shaking hands and, lo and behold, the Plebes were Plebes no longer. That meant that he could attend the hop tomorrow night at the Gym. Did she have a drag for that. If she hadn't, could he drag her? She hadn't, she thought it would be awfully nice if he would drag her tomorrow night.

"Gosh!" He said suddenly after a glance at his wrist watch. "I've got to run. I'll miss Parade!"

He took to his heels without a backward glance at her and she gazed thoughtfully after him until he disappeared. Her gaze picked up the scene, the great beautiful buildings. It was lovely. The whole afternoon had been lovely, though it had gone awfully fast. There was something about the river. It was like some one in green and silver breathing. And she felt so nice!

She just sat and sat. She heard bugles. And a band playing. She saw the flag descend slowly on its staff down there on the plain. The boom of a gun. And it was dusk. She rose and walked down the hill.

She was sitting in their room in Mrs. Ainslee's house in Highland Falls when Anita and Joan came in and she repeatedly told them with indestructible calm there was nothing the matter with her. That Mr. Pedar had had to run to make Parade and she had just sat on the hill looking at the Point. No, she hadn't seen Parade. She would see it tomorrow. And Mr. Pedar was dragging her to the hop tomorrow night because, then, he would no longer be a Plebe. His name was Tim. Anita and Joan exchanged glances over her head and Joan winked.

"God," she quoted cryptically, "help the army!"

Priscilla was disappointed in the hop that night. There was something missing and things went wrong. Her partner, Cadet James Davidson, was an A Company man, and A and M are the first-and-over companies. Cadet Davidson was six three, exactly a foot taller than she.

Any other time she would have been thrilled by the beauty of the scene in Cullum hall. The huge room lit by its 400-odd lights and filled with men in dress uniform and girls in evening dress. But the soft music did not soothe her, partly because Davidson held her

at arms length, perhaps because she looked so fragile. It was then she issued the order of which her sisters were to hear in an hour and the post with-in the week.

"Hold me closer," she precisely insisted, "so I may know what you're planning to do."

She never really let Tim Pedar down Flirtation Walk. As she explained it, she slept late that night and he was the first person she met after breakfast next day. It was past one and a lovely day, so they just walked. They took a beaten path running along the river. She never even suspected it was Flirtation Walk until she suddenly saw a balanced rock overhanging the path. She knew immediately it was "Kissing Rock" and Tim was smiling shyly at her because the legend is that the rock will fall unless a girl lets a boy kiss her. She smiled back at him and put up her lips. He kissed her and then put his arms around her and kissed her again.

"Gee, you're a sweet kid!" He whispered. "Gee, you're sweet!"

"I've been kissed," she calmly told her startled sisters later. "Under Kissing Rock. And it wasn't as bad as I'd expected. It was nice."

At Parade that evening she was hypnotized by the perfect cadenced rhythm of those 1,600 marching men and by the fact that somewhere among them was Tim. When they marched off Parade grounds toward the sally-port, she knew that when she saw him again he would no longer be a down-trodden Plebe but a Yearling.

The hop in the gymnasium that night was a hop! Tim looked different, bigger. She supposed it was because he had grown from a Plebe into a Yearling. They danced their first six dances together and as many of the rest as the other men would allow—which weren't many. So many cut in on her that she couldn't dance more than six steps with any one person. But they had the first "moonlight" together and danced in the semi-darkness and it was then she realized she was terribly in love with Tim. It was awfully nice.

She tried wishing that he would cut back and she was successful a surprising number of times. They were dancing together when the Officer of the Day raised his gloved hand and the drummer rolled his drum and the hop was over. She told Tim she would call him out next day but she never did because when she got back to Mrs. Ainslee's, Anita and Joan were already there and Anita looked tired and drawn.

"Pack up, Cilly," Joan said. "We're driving home tonight."

Priscilla, after one long look at Anita, did as she was told.

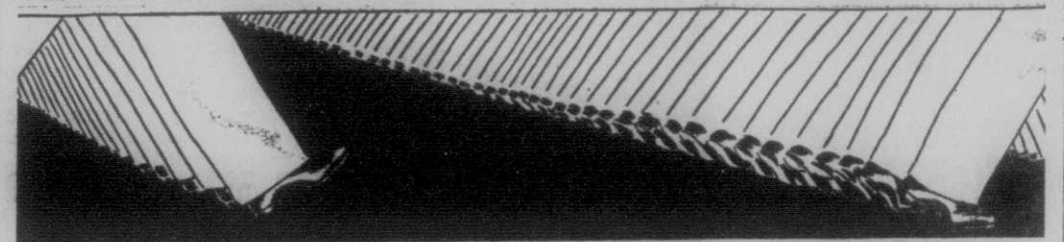
(To Be Continued)

LIQUOR LICENSE FEES
A report to the state treasurer's office from the state liquor board reveals that during the two weeks from April 1 to April 15, sale of liquor licenses cost the sum of \$177,900. This money was divided between the public school general fund and the public welfare fund.

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She was hypnotized by the perfect cadenced rhythm of those sixteen hundred marching men.

two older daughters. And so that would be Priscilla, 16, and his youngest, coming so slowly and dramatically down the stairs. He carefully set his cup in the saucer, rose, laid his napkin on the table, and moved into the living room.

The three were grouped, their faces uplifted, staring at the stairs. Frances, his slender wife, was smiling. Anita, his oldest, blonde and eager, had her lips parted. Joan, brunette, sultry and inclined to accept what today offered and let tomorrow take care of itself, was trying to act her 18 years and keep from jumping up and down with excitement. Ford Booth grinned. His eyes followed theirs. And his mouth opened.

For a vision floated into his startled gaze. A small, slim woman with sad, luminous eyes, a short nose and a wistful mouth. She came down the last steps slowly, staring straight before

"It's for West Point," Frances volunteered. "The girls are going up for a few days of June Week."

"Oh," He grinned. "God help the army."

"The army," Anita told Priscilla, "is all right. If you'll remember that Plebes are polite and kind of nice. But Second Classmen are pretty conceited. And First Classmen are insufferable."

"All except one," Joan said dreamily. "And he's seven feet high and wonderful to behold because Anita loves him."

"Six two," Anita corrected. "And I don't love him. But maybe I could. And maybe you could fall in love, too, if you keep your mind on anybody or anything for five minutes."

"But I haven't much mind," Joan laughed. "And I love the uniform, no matter who's in it. Just when I begin to love one kydett, another one comes along and tempts me away with a compact or a bracelet or something. After all, a kydett is a kydett. He's a gentleman who will be an officer some day. He may be a ducrot or a dumjohnny, a B. J., a hivey, or even an engineer, but he's still a kydett and I love him, collectively. Maybe I'm fickle, but why can't I love 'em all?"

Ford didn't know what she was talking about because he didn't know army slang. He went back to the dining room and his coffee. But the coffee was cold. He sat there, half listening to a technical discussion of the changes that must be made in Priscilla's gown. But he was thinking. He was thinking of the cruel alchemy of time. Yesterday, you held a baby girl in your arms, and today she was a young woman descending a staircase in an evening gown. It made him a little sad.

He was reading about Joe Louis, an hour later, when the girls went out. Frances came downstairs and sank into a chair. After a while, her silence pushed the paper into his lap and he saw tears in her eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing," she said. "Only our girls are grown up. They'll soon be married and gone."

"Rats!" He objected. "Why, they're only kids!"

"Anita's 20 and almost in love. I was 21 when we were married."

"She only thinks she's in love," he contradicted. "She's a born business woman and she has a good job. She's too smart to fall in love. You wait and see."

"Didn't seeing Priscilla in her evening gown tonight make you feel old?" She asked curiously.

"No," he said flatly. "Why should it? She's only 31 years younger than I!"

Frances looked long at him.

"I doubt that," she said at last. "I wouldn't be surprised if she were a year or two older than you."

Priscilla seemed as poised as a sophisticated woman of 30. She knew all about West Point and the quaint customs of its inhabitants because Anita and Joan had been among