

Accident

Bill Wins His Betty

And A Collegian's Revenge Is Spoiled

By JAMES McNITT



HE orchestra was tuning up, and to its strident discords the decorating committee was giving their work the final survey. The red and gold streamers of the sophomore class stretched the length of the gym.

Clapping her hands to her ears, Betty Van Dyne cast a withering glance at the Merrivale Merry-makers.

"If that's any indication of what they're going to do tonight, Mrs. Van Dyne's daughter isn't going to syncopate to her best advantage," she said, irritably.

Camille Robinson waved a stray bit of red crepe and replied cheerfully, "Don't be a pessimist, Bet. That orchestra is supposed to be the best in this section of the state. It ought to be, at one hundred bucks a throw. You know, we want this Soph Prom to be bigger and better than ever."

"That last remark is so original, Camille. What time is it?"

"Nine o'clock."

"Well! And we've been here since five o'clock, with only time off for dinner. That's the sacrifice we have to make for the sophomore class. Listen while I spout my speech of introduction for the new officers."

She assumed a ludicrous pose and was about to begin when someone behind her asked, "What do you represent, Betty? The spirit of the ages or the progress of civilization?"

She turned. "Oh, hello, Bill. Who are you dragging tonight?"

"I'm doing a solo. It's a crime to pay for a double ticket, though. By the way, whose idea was it to have the doggy tickets?"

He drew a pasteboard from his pocket. "Printed in embossed Old English type,

like wedding invitations. Listen to this: 'You are cordially invited to be present at the Sophomore Promenade to be held May 17 at the Grey University gymnasium. Price—Five dollars a couple.'"

"Five dollars a couple! Is it any wonder our fathers are forever receiving letters from their offspring at college? Five dollars for a dance that will be as dead as the Latin language, with plainclothes men and representatives from every reform society in town here to keep us in the paths of righteousness. It's a shame the younger generation can't go to the bow-wows without being troubled on the way by a lot of old fogies. Come on, Betty, the orchestra is beginning to syncopate."

He led her onto the floor. The Merry-makers were moaning the first bars of "Lazy Louisiana Moon."

"Some orchestra, isn't it?" he murmured.

"Oh, fair," she replied condescendingly. "They are one of the big reasons for your paying five dollars."

He groaned. "You *would* have to bring that up and spoil my evening. How can I be optimistic at that price?"

"I'm afraid you're a true-blooded Scotchman, Bill," remarked Betty.

Bill shrugged. "Perhaps. When I go out with a girl all I ever spend is the evening."

"Oh, you don't mean that," Betty remonstrated. "You keep the band off your bank-roll when you're with me."

"Oh, I meant with the average girl," he returned quickly.

Betty smiled. "With that line Izaak Walton must number you among the elect."

"I've been fishing for you for some time, but I don't seem very successful."

"Well, remember, the persevering chap always wins."

"Or gets kicked out for being a pest," he said gloomily.

"Better a pest than a pessimist," she retorted. "Come, be gay! Let joy be unconfined. You're young yet. They're playing another dance piece, 'I Don't Want Your Kisses If I Can't Have Your Love.'"

"May I have this dance, Betty?" This came from Steve Merriam, a dapper brunet of faultless manner and appearance.

"Sorry, Steve. I promised Bill the first two dances. You may have the third and fourth, however."

"O. K., Betty. I'll be seeing you."

When Steve had left Bill uttered a low growl. "That Valentino gets on my nerves."

Betty spoke sharply. "Don't be inane, Bill. You've had a grudge against him ever since he beat you out for quarter last year."

He sneered. "As if I had had a chance. The coach is a Gamma Nu, and he naturally favored a Gamma for the position."

"Bill!" she blazed. "If there is one person I hate, it is the one who alibis. You know as well as I do that Steve is a better player than you are."

Bill did know it. Although they were apparently equal on offensive play, Steve was clearly a better defensive player. There had been rumors that Coach Halliden's choice had been influenced by fraternity loyalty and Bill had accepted them to soothe his feelings. He had dwelt on them so morbidly that Steve seemed a person to loathe and tread on as if he were a snake.

Crestfallen, he apologized, but he knew that the wrath of a woman is not so easily appeased. They finished the dance in silence and soon he turned her over to his rival.

The orchestra was crooning, "Put a Little Salt on the Bluebird's Tail." Bill muttered something about playing cheerful music when his own soul throbbed with the blues. Shaking his head to clear his troubled mind, he attempted to find consolation in a pretty

blonde; but she was of the frivolous type and bored him to tears with her chatter. Others were equally unsuccessful in pleasing him and he walked over near the orchestra, brooding.

In the frame of mind he was in now, murder seemed a trivial thing, and Steve seemed a likely candidate for the victim. And Betty, too, the fickle little fool. Bill, however even in that murderous mood, did not forget the shadow of the noose hanging over potential murderers.

In the little while they had been in the gym, a spring storm had blown up. At frequent intervals jagged bolts of thunder tore open the sky. Then suddenly there came a flash, a roll of thunder, and—darkness!

The Merrymakers broke off in the middle of "Cryin' for the Carolines." Confusion was rife. Finally one of the sophomore leaders cried, "Quiet, everybody. We just called the plant and they said they couldn't fix the trouble in less than three hours. The dance is postponed to a later date."

By the aid of numerous matches the people present felt their way to the exits. In the flickering light Bill noticed Steve. He tried to ignore him, but Merriam stopped him. "Be a good fellow and take Betty and me home. It's raining felines and canines outside."

Bill consented ungraciously and the three piled into the roadster. Its motor purring peacefully, the car started down the road.

The road was very treacherous; he was obliged to proceed with the utmost caution. A moment of laxness would mean an accident. And why not? The thought flashed through Bill's brain. He himself had nothing to live for and as for the other two—he snorted in homicidal glee. How easy to relax his vigilance for an instant. There would be a crash, and three more deaths would be marked up to skidding.

In a second it was done. When the car hit the flimsy white railing, it hesitated an instant, and plunged down to oblivion.

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RUNNING A BLUFF

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of the faculty. Anyway you can bank on it, the teacher won't ask him.

At another time, you need a library permit and you know your class teacher will not sanction your having one. So you forge the signature. This is not a common practice. Only five out of every seven students do so two or three times a week. You quail for a moment when the session room teacher stamps it, but she is thinking about her new hat. You read College Humor, but are buried in "Facts of Contemporary History," when the soft-voiced librarian appears. She has come over to beg you to lower your voice a dozen octaves or so. You rejoin that you were discussing a debate. The bluff of your debating cards, half-filled with especially good wise-cracks from College Humor convinces her. Victory again!

That is the method. The only difficulties are getting wrong hunches; meeting fellow bluffers whose technique is better; and total ignorance. You must study once a week in order to succeed. And you can't run the bluff in mathematics.

Bluffing is a gentle art, a sophisticated pastime, a daring, free-booting parlor trick; only my advice is, don't pull it. Every mountain has its bluffs, and all too soon your bluffs are mountains with sudden precipices at your feet, and there is only a house of cards at the bottom, a reputation that turns into a cascade of bricks when it collapses.

A C C I D E N T

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He returned to consciousness with a vague sense of being in a very white, warm bed and having a terrific headache. Looking up, he saw a nurse, dressed in the immaculate uniform of the Harper hospital, Grey University. He smiled, relaxed, and fell asleep again breathing normally. How long he was

asleep he did not know, but when he awoke, Betty was at his side.

"Betty!" he murmured incredulously. "Then you're all right?"

"Oh, surely, Bill. Steve and I escaped with only a few severe cuts. The car skidded and landed on its side—the side you were on."

His eyes glared dully at the ring on her hand. "Where did you get that?"

"That's my engagement ring from Steve." She held it up admiringly. The light gleamed on its facets and reflected brilliantly.

He gazed at her, still not comprehending.

"Steve proposed Tuesday night," she explained.

COLOR BLIND

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The gentleman stepped back in surprise, but he was not quite able to regain his poise. "I believe you are mistaken. Besides I certainly do not see why my private affairs should be any of your business."

"The blood stains on your gloves are enough to prove where you were before you came here. Mitzi Damita—" The gentleman ran towards the door. "Wink" had been ready, however. His trigger finger was waiting.

"Your crimes have been too perfect, 'Quickfingers.' Your not being able to tell red from yellow was a pretty fatal distinction, though." Then to the girl, who had been watching the scene in great amazement, he directed, "Call police headquarters, will you please, while I keep him covered."

Quickly the girl recovered from her astonishment and phoned the police. In a moment she said, "The chief wants to know if you'll talk to him a second."

"Sure thing. Keep him covered a minute, will you?"

"Mm-mm," she exclaimed, delicately taking the weapon from him.

"Hello, chief. Thanks! How'd I do it? Oh, I just worked on a suspicion."