

The Free Press' Short Story

QUALITIES OF A QUEEN

O. A. MILORADOVITCH

MAY BAILEY opened her pay envelope and saw, besides the usual check, a slip of paper. Her heart sank for that meant that her services were no longer required. The check was double the usual amount, which was some consolation. It meant, however, that her dismissal was immediate.

"Anything wrong?" asked Netta Wood. May tried to laugh. "I'm glad, that's all. Well, if some one has to go, I guess I'm the one. But I've done my best." She forced back the bitter words that rose to her lips but she could not control her thoughts. It seemed too bad that she who needed the job so desperately should be the one to lose it, while some of the other girls, Netta, for instance, had good homes and would not suffer if they were out of work. May had nothing in the world except fifty dollars in the savings bank, and there was that debt to the hospital still only half paid. Whatever would become of her? Joss were so hard to find nowadays, and she had no relatives. Her hands trembled as she put on her hat and coat.

"Come and have lunch with me," said Netta. "No, thank you," answered May stiffly. "I don't want anything to eat just now." Netta laughed and put her arm through May's. "Oh, come along. Please, May. I want to talk to you. I have a great idea."

"All right, then," said May half-heartedly. When the girls were seated at a corner table at Henry's Cafe, Netta picked up the menu card and ordered the best special lunch for two.

"Not for me," said May. "I'll just have a cup of coffee and a sandwich." "Don't be silly," laughed Netta, and repeated the order. When the waitress had gone, she said to May: "When you get a new job, you can treat me to a dinner. We're friends, aren't we?"

May tried hard to keep back the tears but they filled her eyes. Since her mother's death, four months ago, she had felt indifferent to everything and everyone; but now Netta's warm friendliness touched her. She forced her voice to sound casual. "We have been good neighbors in the office, haven't we?" "Yes, indeed," said Netta. "And now I hope we can be even closer neighbors. Over the excellent lunch she told May her great idea. The apartment where she lived had been rented for a year by her brother, who had unexpectedly been sent to Mexico by his firm. The lease could not be broken so Netta was now living there alone. The last time she had gone home for the week-end, her parents had made her promise to find some one to share the apartment with her.

"Now please, May, won't you be that somebody? I couldn't bear to live with some girls in such close quarters. We all have our own special little ways and often they are irritating to others. Why, Burton himself used to send me half-crazy sometimes, and I'm fond of him; but he left books and magazines lying round everywhere, when he shaved he splashed lather around the bathroom, and—"

"I don't shave," interrupted May solemnly, "and I don't leave things lying around. But I can't live with you, Netta. I just can't afford it."

"Oh, but that doesn't matter," said Netta hurriedly. "You see you won't have to pay rent and if only you will get breakfast and dinner for us both, you needn't pay anything at all. You'd be doing me such a favor. I simply loathe cooking."

May said in a very clear voice, "Are you offering me a job—as your maid?" "Of course not," protested Netta. "I can't afford to have a maid; her wages would be two-thirds of mine." "Just hoped you would help me out, in a friendly way, for your board and lodging. You can take a job, of course, and we can be like sisters. Please answer yes."

May looked straight into Netta's eyes and said quietly, "I won't accept charity. But if we can figure out in a business-like way that my help is worth my board and lodging, I will come to live with you."

Netta took a gilt pencil out of her bag, did a sum on the back of the menu card, and showed it to May. "Look," she said, "it's perfectly clear and straight. Accommodators as they call themselves, won't come for less than two dollars an evening; and if I made a definite weekly arrangement it would cost me at least ten. And you won't have a room to yourself, for there is only one bedroom. You can sleep on theavenport in the living room. There's a good big closet there, too. May, if you will only consent to my plan, you will be helping me out."

After lunch May went home with Netta. She behaved like a solemn little girl presented with a doll's house. She was interested in every detail of the apartment, and counted every knife, fork, and spoon in the green-lined top drawer of the white enameled cupboard in the kitchenette. "These are real Queen Quality teaspoons," Netta, she said, "but there are only eleven of them here. Where is the twelfth?" "Please forgive me, household queen," laughed Netta. "It's just that Burton used to bring home his pals at any old time and I got excited and spilled things

around. Perhaps I dropped that spoon into the garbage pail. Anyhow, it's gone."

"What a pity!" said May. "They're solid silver, too!" "I'm not good at housekeeping," confessed Netta.

"Now I just love to cook and keep a house in order," said May; "but I'm not nearly so good at office work as you are."

The arrangement between the two girls worked splendidly. Every morning May arose early and prepared a good breakfast neatly and quickly. She would have been perfectly contented with her new life if only she had been earning money; but she could not obtain work, although she spent hours looking for a position.

Three months went by without a break in the harmonious rhythm of their lives; then Netta had to go home for her elder sister's wedding. She took a week's leave from the office and left May in full possession of the apartment.

Netta had written to her mother about May, but her letters home were always laconic and, so Mrs. Wood declared, unsatisfactory. When the wedding was over and the young people had started on their honeymoon, Netta's mother wanted to know everything about her daughter's new friend.

"You're hard to please, Mother," declared Netta, somewhat irritably. "You insisted that I have some one to live with me, and now that I've found a perfect peach of a girl, you put me through a questionnaire."

"I should like to know who she is and where you met her," insisted Mrs. Wood. Netta spoke as though answering questions in an oral examination. "Her name is May Bailey; her age is twenty; her eyes and hair are brown. I met her at the office."

"Why isn't she there now? Was she discharged?" asked Mrs. Wood. "Now, Mother," protested Netta, "why do you speak as if May had done something wrong? They were cutting down expenses and the less expert clerks had to go. That's all."

"But who are her people?" "Netta had to admit that she did not know much about May's family except that her father had died long ago and her mother quite recently.

"Well," said Mrs. Wood finally, "I hope it's all right. But you're taking a risk, my dear. I hope you will find everything in order when you get back." Netta left the room without saying a word. She had planned to return by train, but William Hartley, the son of her father's partner, was going to the city that day and offered her a seat in his car. They started early in the morning so that Netta was home before noon, and found that May was out.

Netta was hungry after the long drive and went into the kitchenette to make herself some coffee and a sandwich. While the coffee was percolating, she set a cup and saucer on a tray and opened the drawer to get a spoon. The drawer was empty. The Queen Quality spoons were gone!

Her first thought was that May must have been cleaning them. As they were nowhere to be seen in the kitchenette, Netta looked in the living room. A brand new suit case lay open just inside the closet door. In it she saw a pile of pretty underclothes and a neatly folded dress.

Netta tried not to be suspicious even then. She thought, "May is my friend. She has found a job, that's all. The spoons must be somewhere around."

The eleven Queen Quality spoons were not anywhere about, however, and at length the thought that Netta had been fighting down got the best of her and beat through her mind like a persistent refrain: "May is a thief—a thief—a thief!"

She heard the key turn in the lock and footsteps passed through the entry into the kitchenette. "Good gracious!" said May's voice, and then, "Netta! Netta! Where are you?"

Netta went slowly into the kitchenette where May was busy at the stove, rescuing all that was left of the coffee. "You didn't expect me so soon, did you?"

May looked up. Her usually pale face was the color of a June rose and her eyes were gray-bright. "She looks queer," thought Netta.

"Not until this evening," admitted May. "But I'm glad—glad. I've so much to tell you. I just couldn't write about it—and it happened only the other day. Why, Netta, whatever is the matter with you?"

Netta looked straight into May's shining eyes, then turned, opened the drawer, and pointed to the empty groove.

All the light and color faded instantly from May's face. "So you've noticed that—already," said the girl dully. She turned then, and ran into the living room.

When Netta followed, she saw May bending over the suit case, trying to fasten it. "I never thought you would do such a thing," said Netta. "I can't believe it, even now!"

"Can't you?" said May. "Well, the spoons have gone, and I took them. But you'll have them back to-day. Of course, you won't believe the word of a thief. Hadn't you better send for the police?"

Suddenly Netta felt very angry, and

was glad of it. Anything was better than that dull pain, like a weight on her heart. "That's just what I ought to do. It's what you deserve."

May said nothing but quickly laid the key of the apartment on the table, and walked out.

Netta sat alone in the room that had been May's. She was no longer angry, only very unhappy. Presently the door bell rang so persistently that she had to take up the house telephone to ask who was there. It was the postman with a registered package. She went downstairs to sign for it, brought it back into the living room, and opened it listlessly.

There lay the Queen Quality spoons, but the set of twelve was complete. Each spoon was marked "N. W.", while beneath them was a card on which, in May's handwriting, was written this poetic gem:

"Don't lose one again. For they're marked with your name—And it would be a shame If you lost one again."

Weeks passed without bringing news of May, and Netta began to lose hope. She did not know the name of the hospital where May's mother had been treated, but she knew that May had been paying the bill by installments. She went the rounds of all the hospitals in the city, and at last came to the right one only to be told that the bill had been paid in full, and that the last address given was the one she was so weary of hearing, her own.

Her face betrayed the bitterness of her disappointment and the registrar said kindly, "Perhaps Doctor Jarvis can tell you Miss Bailey's address."

"Doctor Jarvis?" echoed Netta. "Is he a friend of hers?"

"Oh, I don't know anything about that—definitely," said the registrar. "Still, it will do no harm to ask."

In the doctor's office Netta sat down last in the line of waiting patients. When her turn came, she was shown into the consulting room and saw a tall, youngish man who looked at her gravely and kindly. "I am not ill, doctor," she said; "but I do want your help. My name is Netta Wood. Can you tell me the address of my friend, May Bailey?"

"I can," said the doctor, "but I don't think I shall."

"Why not?" asked Netta quickly.

"Because you have hurt her most deeply."

Netta felt and looked ashamed. She said in a low voice, "So May has told you about that. Well, if she told you the whole truth, if she knew it, she would say, too, that I hurt myself even more. Oh, Doctor Jarvis, deep down in my heart I never really believed May guilty."

Doctor Jarvis smiled, and his grave face grew suddenly boyish. "Come, I will take you straight to May. It is quite a drive, but my car is here."

Driver and passenger did not talk as they drove through the dusty city streets into green country lanes. When the doctor stopped the car outside a small white house in a large garden, however, he said cordially, "Welcome to my home, Miss Wood."

"So May lives in your house?" "Yes, happily for me and my little daughter. The first day I met May I knew that I had found a treasure but thought that she was not for me—a widower, and almost ten years her senior. But we met again, not long ago, and—well, I saw that we might help each other to be happy."

From the little house a light flashed out a welcome, the door opened a little way, and May's voice called across the garden, "Is it you, David?"

Doctor Jarvis turned towards the voice, but Netta pushed past him and ran up the path. "May is coming?" she asked.

"Oh, Netta!" cried May Jarvis, and swung wide the door of her home.

It will prevent ulcerated throat.—At the first symptoms of sore throat, which presages ulceration and inflammation, take a spoonful of Dr. Thomas' Eucalyptic Oil. Add a little sugar to it to make it palatable. It will allay the irritation and prevent the ulceration and swelling that are so painful. Those who were periodically subject to quinsy have thus made themselves immune to attack.

HOW THE LIBRARY HELPS YOUR TOWN

1. Completes its educational equipment, carrying on and giving permanent value to the work of the schools.

2. Gives the children of all classes a chance to know and love the best in literature. Without a public library such a chance is limited to the very few.

3. Minimizes the sale and reading of vicious literature in the community, thus promoting mental and moral health.

4. Effects a saving in money to every reader in the community. Through the library every reader in the town can secure at a given cost from 100 to 1,000 times the material for reading or study that he could secure by acting individually.

5. Adds to the material value of property. Real estate agents in the suburbs of large cities never fail to advertise the presence of a library. If there be one, as giving added value to the lots or houses they have for sale.

6. Appealing to all classes, sects and degrees of intelligence, it is a strong unifying factor in the life of a town.

UNDERSTANDABLE

Mrs. Peck—"Now, Henry, what are you thinking about? I can always tell when you have some thought that you are trying to conceal from me. Out with it!"

Henry—"I was just wondering what the Mormons could see in polygamy."

ECONOMY, MAYBE



"Father insists that I come out now instead of next winter."

"Why?"

"He's afraid to take chances on the fashions in gowns six months hence."

COLD WAVE COMING



"Looks like a case of an irresistible force and an immovable body."

"What's up?"

"Our star salesman seems to be worn up against a man who won't buy anything."

IN HIS CLASS



Her Father—Nonsense! Why your income wouldn't buy feathers for her hat.

Her Sultor—That's all right. They're not wearing feathers now.

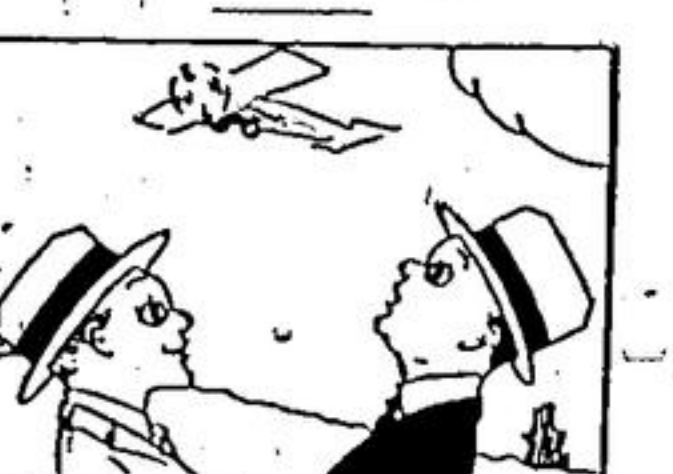
LYNCH HIM!



"How did you know that Colonel Bruff was from Alabama?"

"Because he has such a mobile face."

IF AND WHEN



Mrs. Brown is crazy to have her husband get an airplane. "What for?" "So that she can look down on the neighbors, I suppose."

OH, OH



"I take half an hour's beauty sleep every afternoon."

"You should make it longer, dear."

SALT AND PEPPER



She—I'm sorry I ever married you.

He—So are all the other girls.

What Goes on in Every Home

Watch in your own home how THE FREE PRESS --- or any other good newspaper --- is read. Possibly the personal items are a first matter of interest; and perhaps the main headlines on the front page are scanned; but it is a pretty safe thing to say that women readers will turn very early to the advertisements of local firms which advertise fashion items, food items, and other offerings related intimately to current needs and desires.

Every woman knows what she wants ---not perhaps in the precise form or color, or variety or manner, but certainly in the main matters of her desire or need. This applies to clothes, hats, shoes, food items, beauty preparations and many items pertaining to home furnishing. And so women are eternally on the watch for information --- and for temptation! They are swiftly perceptive of the advertisements which present and propose the things of their desire or need. And obviously it is those retailers who advertise to them who stand the best chance of their custom.

It is the same in the case of men. Few men buy impulsively. When they leave home each day for their place of employment, it is not just to get rid of their money. What they buy is, mainly, something whose purchase has been planned --- clothes or other forms of apparel, hardware items, motoring sundries, shaving and other bathroom needs, plants, books, and so on. Men, like women, have been reading advertisements in line with their ripening desires and intentions, and of course they go in largest numbers, to those retailers who have been informing them and soliciting their custom.

All of us, instinctively, go where the light is, not where the darkness is. Advertisements are light, and so they attract the buyers to those stores which they illumine.

The way to get business is to ask for it. Can the truth of this statement be successfully disputed? And here is another equally true statement: The public buys from those who invite its custom.