

Masquerade

By Anne Gardner

A New Serial Story—Start It Here

“THIS is the way!”

Janet Craig, slim; pretty and modishly dressed, stopped beside a snappy tan and chocolate roadster.

“You look up and down the street to make sure no one you know is coming. Then you open the door of the car and step inside.”

Janet did so. “And then—”

“Janet, you don’t mean that the girls get into the cars of perfect strangers to do their smoking?” Alicia, horrified, interrupted the lesson.

“You have the idea exactly,” laughed Janet.

Alicia had learned many things since she had been placed by her father—THE Henry Baker—in Miss Lacey’s Select School for Young Ladies.

“But,” said Alicia, “what if the owner should come along?”

“That’s what gives us such a kick,” Janet said, settling herself in the driver’s seat and lighting a cigarette. “Suppose it should be John Gilbert, or Buddy Rogers? Why, it might be anybody.”

“But what would you do?”

“Well, if he turned out to be old and bald, I’d say I got in the car by mistake, but if he turned out to be a Rudy Vallee I’d sit tight and smile and then I’d kid him along.”

“But when he found out that you were Janet Craig he might blackmail you or something.”

“Oh, he wouldn’t know that. I’d tell him I worked for a living—lived in a hall bedroom—it would be the thrill of a lifetime.”

“It might be fun,” Alicia admitted, “but my stepmother would skin me alive if she knew I’d done such a thing.”

Alicia stepped into the car and accepted a cigarette, but she did not light it, for just then a man and a girl emerged from a near-by doorway and came toward them.

“It is Lochinvar,” whispered Janet excitedly. “And that’s a showgirl with him. I know, because they’re rehearsing a show in that building.”

Alicia had an impulse to run, but Janet settled herself more comfortably and smiled at the man when he came up.

“Gee, I bet you think we’re fresh, don’t you?” she said provocatively.

“Why, no. I think you’re both delightful.”

“Gee, kid,” Janet turned to Alicia, “he sure slings swell language, don’t he?” Alicia was surprised, but game.

“Yes, he—he does,” she managed to stammer, and she raised her eyes to his. He was perfect, perfect! She wished they were not playing this silly game.

Janet carried the adventure off well. They were glove clerks, she informed the man, and she managed to say a good many other things before his showgirl companion angrily reminded him that they had an appointment.

“I wonder who he is,” said Alicia as she and Janet walked away.

“Jerome Huntley Payson, Bachelors’ club,” Janet exhibited a little square of

cardboard. “He slipped me this when we shook hands. And he’s certainly going to hear from me.”

“Why, Janet, you can’t!”

“Then you call him. That’s a command,” said Janet. “I’m pledge mistress of the V. V.’s and if I like the way you handle this I’ll see that you get your pledge pin tomorrow.”

This was the only argument that could possibly have affected Alicia. Elaine Baker, her socially ambitious stepmother, had drilled into her the idea that the best way to secure success as a debutante was to become a member of this exclusive secret society.

So the masquerade was on.

“—and we made a date for dinner tonight,” Alicia finished her story of the telephone conversation.

“Fine,” commended Janet. “I wish you all kinds of good luck.”

“But I’m not going to keep the date. That wasn’t in the bargain.”

“You certainly are. That is, if you want that V. V. pledge pin. I’ll come over tonight and help you dress.”

Alicia’s relations with her stepmother were strained, and she hated to think of what might happen if she failed to make V. V. Weakly she consented.

Looking as much like a showgirl as possible—Janet had contrived that—Alicia hurried to her rendezvous, remembering her chum’s parting instructions.

Payson saw her in the hotel lobby and hurried toward her.

“Hello,” he said. “How lovely you look.”

“Oh, you are a kidder, aren’t you?” Alicia gave him an arch smile to conceal her nervousness.



This Is
ALICIA

society bud, who “masqueraded” and found herself on a trail of heartache and disillusion.

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