

THE LIBERAL SHORT STORY

HEAT WAVE
By Harriet Cahn

Even before Paula opened her eyes after a restless, torrid night, she knew it was going to be another of those days. This would be the eighth successive day of blistering, leaden heat.

There were two studio couches in the room. Grace Larkin, with whom Paula shared the one and a half room apartment lay asleep on the other couch. The alarm clock on the night table by Grace's couch clanged. Through half-closed lids, Paula watched Grace reach over and turn it off, then settle back, her bony arms stretched over her frowzled head.

"Well, well, Grace chirped cheerfully. "Another day."

Paula hated the way Grace said that. Every morning the same thing. It was enough to drive you nuts.

"Want to use the shower first?" Grace asked.

"Yes," said Paula shortly.

"Got out of bed on the wrong side this morning?" Grace called after her.

Paula slammed the bathroom door pretending not to hear.

After her shower and the donning of a fresh linen dress, she felt a little better, but when she went to the kitchenette to make the coffee she found that Grace had lit the oven to make toast. On a morning hot enough to fry eggs on the window sill Grace had to light the oven. The moron. Singing in the shower, knowing the oven would heat the room to unbearable temperatures. Suddenly Paula felt that she hated everything about Grace.

The two girls caught the same subway express as usual. If the air in the street had been intolerably hot, it was dead to the point of suffocation underground. The train was packed as usual. Paula's crisp dress became a limp mass. A fat man, weighing a couple of tons stepped on her instep...kerplunk!

"The elephant," she moaned. "The clumsy elephant!"

"He heard you," Grace whispered grimacing warningly. "What's eating you this morning anyway, Paula?"

Paula looked at Grace's angular but placid face with loathing. Odd that she should have liked anybody who often said she could stand it if it was 100 degrees in the shade.

Paula did not trust herself to answer. Grace complacently began calling Paula's attention to her new outfit, worn for the first time that she had bought for a song.

"How do you like it?"

Paula drew a long breath. For once Grace was going to hear the truth...and plenty of it. She was through making a fool of herself, lying to people to make them feel good.

"That yellow shade makes you look terribly sallow," she said. And you should never wear a high crown hat like that. It makes your face look long as a horse's."

The rush of tears to Grace's amiable blue eyes stopped Paula for a moment, but she got her second wind

when the train lurched to a stop and stood there a veritable steam room in a Turkish bath.

"The dress would be fine," Paula panted, "if it only fit you. Anything else you'd like to know?"

Grace's face turned chalky white. She said nothing.

Grace got out at the next station to wait for the local. Paula, stony-faced, continued onward.

The stalling of the train made Paula five minutes late. Mr. Edwards would pick out just this morning to be ten minutes early. He had come out of his private office, watch in hand. He said nothing, but his stare was eloquent. His dictation was faster than usual. He was a hard man to work for but he was fair. He never worked the help harder than he worked himself, and he paid good wages.

But this July morning Mr. Edwards seemed impossible to suit. Paula never stopped to think that maybe Mr. Edwards was suffering from a heat hang over just as she was. All she knew was that he was hateful, mean and spiteful.

He showed Paula a mistake in punctuation she had made a week before. He called her attention to the fact that she had omitted to file a personal letter in the desk file. He made caustic remarks about people who stole time which was, he intoned as bad as stealing from the petty cash drawer. Worse.

Paula gritted her teeth. Her heart that had been swelling with rage against all humanity seemed to explode like a balloon with hatred for Mr. Edwards.

"Mr. Edwards," she said slowly and carefully, "you have spent 20 minutes telling me my faults. Did it ever occur to you to inventory some of your own? You hitch in your chair, you dictate with a cigar in your mouth, you read a shave most of the time, and if there is anything I despise in a man it's a man who bites his finger nails."

Mr. Edwards turned the color of a fainting salmon.

"Miss Pounds," he said, "I cannot allow any employee, even one usually so amiable and efficient as you, to talk to me like this. Either you will apologize or get two weeks pay from the cashier on Saturday...your last pay cheque here."

A faint chill struck at Paula's scalp. Apologize? She had never been able to bring herself to apologize to anybody. She wouldn't...not even to save her job, once so precious, now less than nothing. She hated her office, she hated her notebook, the typewriter that clacked like a mocking hen.

"You fool. You stupid fool."

"Let him try to get another slave to work for him as I've worked," she haranged herself. Her face blazed from anger and from heat.

At noon she hurried out, too upset to take her time. Her steps, from habit led her to the Grill where she and Jim always met for lunch. But one look into the Grill and her stomach turned over. It was crowded, smoldering, sweating. Jim, his good-looking face damp from perspiration, came up. She jerked away irritably.

"Let's go to the Royal today," she said harshly. "It's air-cooled."

He grinned sheepishly and dug into his pockets.

"This is Thursday honey, and I'm cleaned. I couldn't even get by the hat check girl in my financial condition."

"Very well," said Paula. "I'm going alone. Luckily, I can afford to eat at a civilized place for once. Besides I need some one whose company is a bit less depressing than yours."

"Okay," she heard him say, but faintly. But when she got to the Royal she had lost her appetite. She eyed the cool interior wistfully but you couldn't go into the Royal and just sit without ordering. The sight of food made her ill. Besides, she hadn't enough money for a meal there, if she was to be out of a job on Saturday.

All afternoon she worked savagely, like one possessed with devils. On her way home, at six, the thought of the stifling apartment made her turn away from her block where people were sitting out on stoops, where babies were squalling and where life was horrible.

She stopped, hesitating in front of a movie theatre. She went in and sat in the last row, closing her eyes. Blessed, blessed chill enveloped her. She breathed in the cool air as if it were the only oxygen she had had for weeks. Her eyes closed. She dozed lightly. She awoke two hours later a new being. Remembrance broke over her like a wave. She had wantonly, for no reason that she could figure out thrown away Grace's

friendship, her job and... Jim.

When she came out dazedly, she saw it was raining. Squalls of rain were sweeping the heat out of the city. Gasping she ran the few blocks to the apartment. Thunder crashed, lightning played around her as she closed the windows against the storm.

Then, like a whiplash of rain, her sobs started. She threw herself on the daybed, her tears falling almost as fast as the rain outside.

"You poor kid! Don't take on like that. Is it because you're sorry—about this morning?"

Grace had come in. Her lids were swollen so that she could scarcely see. Paula nodded.

"I was mean...horrible," she said.

"I don't know what possessed me."

"I was kind of mad at you," Grace admitted. "But if you're sorry as all this..."

The next morning Paula had to wear a jacket...it was so heavenly cool. Mr. Edwards came in, untidy but cheerful in the new-made world of dropping temperatures. Suppose he would not listen to her? She loved working here. It was a wonderful office, so cool and airy and she needed her salary.

"I know you are a generous, fair man," she began. "Otherwise I would never dare to think you would accept my apology about yesterday. I was ill...nervous."

Mr. Edwards waved his hand. "We all say things we regret afterwards," he said. "You're too good a worker to lose because of a little argument. But never let it happen again."

So she still had her job. But Jim. The job was nothing if she lost him. Maybe he would be at the Grill as usual.

Ten minutes after she seated herself at the counter, he strode in—with a blonde. Her heart leaped...died miserably.

"You asked for it, Paula Pounds," she told herself. "No whining, please."

"Miss Pounds...Miss Lake." Jim was introducing them. While they laughed and chattered together, Paula tried to choke down her sandwich and malted milk. Miss Lake excused herself, saying she had some shopping to do.

Paula glanced sideways at Jim.

"Do you...like her Jim?"

"Crazy about her. She works in the policy department. She's married to one of my best friends. They don't allow married women to work at the office so she calls herself Miss."

"I want to apologize Jim, for..."

"Skip it, Paula, I figured the heat got you. Want to take in a movie tonight?"

"I love movies," Paula said letting him reach for her cheque because it gave him a lot of pleasure. "I think movies give you a broad outlook on life."

ORANGEVILLE-PETERBORO HIGHWAY

The appointment of Gordon Conant as attorney-general, usually the premier's right-hand minister, should prove a boost to the Peterboro-Oranville highway. Mr. Conant is the member for neighboring Ontario county. There were other factors besides the Oshawa strike in the now much discussed Ontario riding contest. On Oct. 4 the provincial cabinet passed an order-in-council assuming as a provincial highway the part of the proposed highway lying between the No. 28 highway south of Peterboro and the No. 12 highway in Mr. Conant's riding. On Oct. 4 or before Mr. Conant had the unusual privilege for a candidate who had never been a member of the legislature of receiving a telegram from R. M. Smith, deputy-minister of highways, assuring him that the necessary order-in-council was being passed. Mr. Conant immediately had this telegram printed and widely distributed as a circular, showing a map of the proposed highway. No doubt Mr. Conant's success in this matter of getting a highway two days before he had ever been elected to the legislature impressed some of his northern constituents. Mr. Conant and Mr. Baker, whose impressive victory should increase his legislative prestige, ought not to have much difficulty in getting the province to accept the last 25-mile link of this logical highway.

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Plan Splendid Hunting Season



Prospects for big-game hunting are unusually bright in Canada this fall. Reports covering the thousands of square miles of wilderness accessible by Canadian Pacific Railway show a plentitude of game and excellent conditions for hunting. Outfitters and guides across the country also report more reservations for hunting parties, both from Canada and the United States, than they have had for years.

Wild sections of Canada lying practically in the back yard of civilization have a wide variety of big game in addition to many types of game birds and smaller animals. Nova Scotia has moose, deer and black bear; New Brunswick, moose, deer and black bear; Ontario, moose, deer and black bear; Manitoba and Saskatchewan, moose, deer and caribou; Alberta and British Columbia, mountain sheep and goats,

caribou, moose, elk (wapiti), deer, and grizzly, brown and black bear; and the Yukon Territory and Alaska, practically the same as British Columbia.

An indication of the increased interest in hunting this year has been given by the number of applications coming to the general tourist offices in Windsor Station, Montreal, for copies of the two hunting booklets, "Open Seasons for Hunting" and "Fishing Waters and Game Haunts."

Look At It This Way

A retail store regards itself as being a public servant. Therefore, it is wholly fitting that it should try to be the best and most eager servant possible. A retail store which hides itself from those whom it wants to employ it becomes under-employed, and so its sales decline.

The public inclines in largest numbers toward those stores which seek its attention and custom. It takes the advertising store at its own valuation. It likes to do business with those who manifest eagerness to serve it. It likes to buy at those stores which have to renew their stocks frequently.

Advertising is just communicating news and information about one's store and service. It is just a form of talking. It is those who talk who are listened to. Silent stores lose out to stores which carry on conversations — in the form of newspaper advertisements — with those whose custom they want.

Any retailer who wants to get more customers — for the replacement of customers who become lost to him and for the expansion of his business — can surely get them by making his store important in their eyes, and by putting in his advertisements the kind of information which will help buyers come to decisions.

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