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MAIN STREET

The Story of Carol Kennicott

By SINCLAIR LEWIS

Carol sprang up, whimpering. "Oh, they didn't do that!" They didn't poke fun at my feast, that I ordered so carefully for them! And my little Chinese costume that I was so happy making—I made it secretly, to surprise them. And they've been ridiculing it, all this while!"

She was huddled on the couch. Vida was stroking her hair, muttering, "I shouldn't—"

Shrouded in shame, Carol did not know when Vida slipped away. The clock's bell, at half past five, aroused her. "I must get hold of myself before Will comes. I hope he never knows what a fool his wife is."

Like a very small, very lonely girl she trudged up-stairs, slow step by step, her feet dragging, her hand on the rail. It was not her husband to whom she wanted to run for protection—it was her father, her smiling understanding father, dead these twelve years.

III.

Kennicott was yawning, stretched in the largest chair, between the radiator and a small kerosene stove. Cautiously, "Will, dear, I wonder if the people here don't criticize me sometimes? They must. I mean: if they ever do, you mustn't let it bother you."

"Criticize you? Lord, I should say not. They all keep telling me you're the sweetest girl they ever saw."

"Well, I've just fancied— The merchants probably think I'm too fussy about shopping. I'm afraid I bore Mr. Dashaway and Mr. Howland and Mr. Ludelmeyer."

"I can tell you how that is. I didn't want to speak of it, but since you've brought it up, I'll tell you. You got this new furniture down in the city instead of here. I didn't want to raise any objections at the time but— After all, I make my money here and they naturally expect me to spend it here."

"If Mr. Dashaway will kindly tell me how any civilized person can furnish a room out of the mortuary pieces that he calls— She remembered. She said meekly, "But I understand."

"And Howland and Ludelmeyer— Oh, you've probably handed 'em a few roasts for the bum stocks they carry, when you just meant to jolly 'em. But rats, what do we care! This is an independent town, not like these Eastern holes where you have to watch your step all the time, and live up to fool demands and social customs, and a lot of old tabbies always busy criticizing. Everybody's free here to do what he wants to." He said it with a flourish, and Carol perceived that he believed it. She turned her breath of fury into a yawn.

"By the way, Carry, while we're talking of this: Of course I like to keep independent, and I don't believe in this business of binding yourself to trade with the man that trades with you unless you really want to, but some time I'd be just as glad if you dealt with Jenson or Ludelmeyer as much as you can, instead of Howland & Gould, who go to Dr. Gould every last time, and the whole tribe of 'em the same way. I don't see why I should be paying out my good money for groceries and having them pass it on to Terry Gould!"

"I've gone to Howland & Gould because they're better, and cleaner."

"I know. I don't mean cut them out entirely. Course Jenson & Ludelmeyer is a shifless old Dutch hog. But same time, I mean let's keep the trade in the family whenever it is convenient, see how I over?"

"I see."

"Well, guess it's about time to turn in."

He yawned, went out to look at the thermometer, slammed the door,

patted her head, unbuttoned his waistcoat, yawned, wound the clock, went down to look at the furnace, yawned, and clumped up-stairs to bed, casually scratching his thick woolen undershirt.

"Till he bawled, 'Aren't you ever coming up to bed?' she sat unmoving."

CHAPTER IX

She had tripped into the meadow to teach the lambs a pretty educational dance and found that the lambs were wolves. There was no way out between their pressing gray shoulders. She was surrounded by fangs and sneering eyes.

She could not go on enduring the hidden derision. She wanted to flee. She wanted to hide in the generous indifference of cities. She practised saying to Kennicott, "Think perhaps I'll run down to St. Paul for a few days." But she could not trust herself to say it carelessly; could not abide his certain questioning.

Reform the town? All she wanted was to be tolerated!

She could not look directly at people. She flushed and winced before citizens who a week ago had been amusing objects of study, and in their good-mornings she heard a cruel sniggering.

She encountered Juanita Haydock at Ole Jenson's grocery. She besought, "Oh, how do you do! Heavens, what beautiful celery that is!"

"Yes, doesn't it look fresh. Harry simply has to have his celery on Sunday, drat the man!"

Carol hastened out of the shop exulting, "She didn't make fun of me. Did she?"

In a week she had recovered from consciousness of insecurity, of shame and whispered notoriety, but she kept her habit of avoiding people. She walked the streets with her head down. When she spied Mrs. McGannum or Mrs. Dyer ahead she crossed over with an elaborate pretense of looking at a billboard. Always she was acting, for the benefit of every one she saw—and for the benefit of the ambushed leering eyes which she did not see.

She perceived that Vida Sherwin had told the truth. Whether she entered a store, or swept the back porch, or stood at the bay-window in the living-room, the village peeped at her. Once she had swung along the street triumphant in making a home. Now she glanced at each house, and felt, when she was safely home, that she had won past a thousand enemies armed with ridicule. She told herself that her sensitiveness was preposterous, but daily she was thrown into panic. She saw curtains slide back into innocent smoothness. Old women who had been entering their houses slipped out again to stare at her—in the wintry quiet she could hear them tiptoeing on their porches. When she had for a blessed hour forgotten the searchlight, when she went scampering through a chill dusk, happy in yellow windows against gray night, her heart checked as she realized that a head covered with a shawl was thrust up over a snow-tipped bush to watch her.

She admitted that she was taking herself too seriously; that villagers gaped at every one. She became placid, and thought well of her philosophy. But next morning she had a shock of shame as she entered Ludelmeyer's. The grocer, his clerk, and neurotic Mrs. Dyer had been giggling about something. They halted, looked embarrassed, babbled about onions. Carol felt guilty. That evening when Kennicott took her to call on the crochety Lyman Casse, their hosts seemed flustered at their arrival. Kennicott jovially hooted, "What makes you so hang-dog, Lym?" The Cassees littered feebly.

Except Dave Dyer, Sam Clark, and Raymie Wutherspoon, there were no merchants of whose welcome Carol was certain. She knew that she read mockery into greetings but she

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Borden's ST. CHARLES MILK

"With The Cream Left In"

could not control her suspicion, could not rise from her psychic collapse. She alternately raged and flinched at the superiority of the merchants. They did not know that they were being rude, but they meant to have it understood that they were prosperous and "not scared of no doctor's wife." They often said, "One man's as good as another—and a darn sight better." This motto, however, they did not commend to farmer customers who had had crop failures. The Yankee merchants were crabbed; and Ole Jenson, Ludelmeyer, and Gus Dahl, from the "Old Country," wished to be taken for Yankees. James Madison Howland, born in New Hampshire, and Ole Jenson, born in Sweden, both proved that they were free American citizens by grunting, "I don't know whether I got any or not," or "Well, you can't expect me to get it delivered by noon."

It was good form for the customers to fight back. Juanita Haydock cheerfully jabbered, "You have it there by twelve or I'll snatch that fresh delivery-boy bald-headed." But Carol had never been able to play the game of friendly rudeness; and now she was certain that she would never learn it. She formed the cowardly habit of going to Axel Egge's.

(To be Continued.)

VERONA NEWS BUDGET.

Several Burials — An "At Home" Held in Grant Hall.

Verona, Jan. 16.—The body of the late William Grant, Watertown, N. Y., was brought here for burial on Jan. 15th. The funeral was held from the home of his niece, Mrs. A. Trousdale on Thursday, Jan. 12th. The body was accompanied from Watertown by a daughter of the deceased.

Mrs. E. M. Yorke fell one day last week and was removed to Kingston for treatment.

Mr. and Mrs. F. Latchky, Cleveland, Ohio, spent a few days at Mrs. Arthur Ryder's recently. Charles Gunsolus, Peterboro, was a recent visitor at his sister's, Mrs. Thomas Ryder. H. C. Percy drove the Rev. Dr. Lawson to his appointment at Picoodilly on Sunday.

An "At Home" was held at Grant hall last Friday evening in honor of the young people who were home for the holidays. The hosts were Mrs. W. D. Percy, Mrs. L. H. Craig and Mrs. S. Asseltine and an enjoyable evening was spent in games and dancing, after which a dainty repast was served.

Wilfred Craig and Fenwick Curran have returned to the Dental College at Toronto.

The funeral of the late John Graham was held at the Methodist church on Jan. 7th at 11 a.m. The body will be left in the vault until spring. Mr. Graham had many friends and had been an Orangeman for the past forty years. He leaves three sons, Roy, John and William, all of Verona, and one daughter at home. Blackburn, Gananoque, were brought here for burial on Jan. 10th. Mrs. Blackburn was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Anson Grant.

C. A. Percy, of the Parish branch of the Merchants bank has been transferred to Pembroke branch to a senior position.

Mr. and Mrs. Zara Bell spent Sunday at John Graham's. Mr. and Mrs. Danford Lakins, Petworth, spent Sunday at G. A. Lakins'. Geo. Reynolds, Parish branch of the Merchants Bank, spent the week end at home. Messrs. Dillon and Mills have begun shipping a quantity of fedspar from their property at Fourteen Island lake. The Eureka Pint and Spar So. is loading fedspar on the siding. Mrs. James Hoser, Napanee, is visiting her sister, Mrs. Thomas Ryder.

John Welsh, Dover township clerk has resigned, after forty-five years' service.

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Good humor comes from the kitchen.