

"Business Kisses"

By BEATRICE BURTON
Author of "Gloria, The Flapper Wife"

The names in this story are purely fictitious and are not to be taken as referring to any particular person, place or firm.

CHAPTER LI.

No word came from the honey-mooners for more than a week.

Mary Rose's heart ached for her mother, who waited with pathetic eagerness for a letter from Flossie.

A letter that never came.

Every morning she would stand out on the front steps, watching the slow progress of the postman making his way up the street. And her feet would drag listlessly as she came back into the house.

"Well, I guess the baby's just forgotten us, Mary Rose," she would say. "She has Sam now, and she doesn't need us any more. But that's the way of the world—the young things grow up and run away, and forget. I suppose you'll be leaving me, too, one of these days."

Mary Rose would shake her head. "No, I'll never marry anybody," she would say with firm decision. "You know what Aunt Henry Blaik says—that I look like an old maid already."

And her mother would sigh and go upstairs to her own room, where she was making a new dress for Flossie—soft, gold-colored thing in which Flossie would look like a blonde dryad.

She had dragged an old trunk out of the attic and in it she was packing all of Flossie's clothes—running fresh pink blouses, looking ribbons through the "Teddy bears" and nightgowns, mending the thin chiffon stockings and putting new bands on the tiny felt hats that were the only kind Flossie wore.

"I may as well fix up the few clothes she has," she would say grimly to Mary Rose, "because she's not likely to have many new ones if she waits for Sam Jessep to buy them for her!"

Then one morning when Mary Rose got to the office she found a letter lying on her desk. Across it her name was scratched in pencil. The handwriting was Flossie's—round and unformed as a 6-year-old child's writing.

"Darling Mary Rose," it read. "You still have \$20 of mine. Remember that I asked you to get it for me last week? Please send it to me right away, as I am in terrible need of money and cannot get Sam to give me any. He sure is the world's worst tightwad, and the way he freezes on to money makes me sick. If I had known he was like this, he would have had to chloroform me to get me to marry him, believe me, baby! With love, Flossie."

"P.S. Send the money special delivery. It is for a hat that I need terribly, and I have paid down my last dollar to hold it. F. M. J."

The letter had been mailed from Ridgmont and Mary Rose groaned aloud as she laid it down.

She knew that Flossie couldn't possibly be in "terrible need" of a hat.

For her cute little felt were made to weather sun and rain, and, moreover, she had taken at least three of them along on her nuptial flight with Sam.

But hats were a passion with Flossie, and she would cheerfully have begged, borrowed, lied or stolen to get one that she fancied. And this time, from the tone of her letter, she had evidently had a rousing row with Sam to get one—but to no avail.

"I suppose he just didn't have the money, after he'd paid his hotel bill," Mary Rose thought, as she folded Flossie's \$20 bill into an envelope. "If he'd had it, he would have given it to her!"

For she knew something about Sam's blind worship of Flossie, and the extravagances it had led him into in the past. He had even bought his ramshackle second-hand car because Flossie hated street cars and deliberately advertised the fact.

"I simply will not go out with a man unless he has a car," she had told him long ago. "There are too many men with machines who are dying to go around with me!" And so Sam had bought the disgraceful Wheezer.

Mary Rose slipped a sheet of paper into her typewriter and began to tap off a letter to her self-willed young sister:

"Dearest Flossie," she wrote. "I'm sending the money for the hat, but don't you think you're making a mistake by quarreling about it with Sam? I do. The way to make a man give you things is not by razing him, surely."

She got that far and stopped, her hands poised in the air above the machine for a minute or two. Then suddenly they dropped, pulled the letter from the typewriter and deliberately tore it into little bits.

"Who am I to advise Flossie what to do?" she asked herself bitterly. "She knows more about men in a minute than I'll ever know, if I live to be a hundred years old. Why, I don't even know how to forget a man who's forgotten me as completely as I am."

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