

"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 LIII

A shadow of very real fear crossed Mary Rose's face, darkening it.

"Oh, but you won't let her come back to work, will you?" she asked. Her voice and her eyes, still wet with tears, begged Dexter not to give Flossie her old job, again.

"She doesn't need to work, now that she's married. Fifty dollars a week is more than enough for a young couple to get along on, isn't it?"

Dexter nodded. "Yes, and Sam's making more than that, anyway. I gave him a gavel for a wedding present," he added with the proud air of an elderly Boy Scout who has done his daily good deed. "I can't make out why she wants to come back. She never did like to work. Here, read her letter."

He thrust it into Mary Rose's hands.

"My dear Mr. Dexter," Flossie had written in her childish, flyaway hand, "I have decided to come back to work for you. So you can expect me to be on the job next Monday morning as usual. Yours sincerely, Flossie M. Jessup."

"Cool as a cucumber about it, isn't she?" Dexter asked, when Mary Rose raised her eyes from the letter. "Steps out of a job when she feels like it, and thinks she can step right back into it. But she can't. You tell her so for me, will you? I don't want her to come down here, coaxing me for it, either."

Mary Rose knew that he was afraid that Flossie would do that very thing—and that if she did come coaxing for her job, she would get it back. For Dexter probably still had a soft spot in his heart for her—not very soft, perhaps, but reasonably tender. His next words proved it.

"Ask her what she's like for the new little home, will you?" he asked, as Mary Rose turned toward the stairs. "I thought of a silver coffee service. Or do you think she'd rather have a silver dresser set—brushes and things? Something for herself?"

"I think you'd better give her the coffee service," she told him, with gentle reproach.

Didn't he have any sense, she asked herself as she went down the iron stairs of the building for the last time and out into the autumn sunshine?

Didn't he know that it wasn't proper for any man but a woman's husband to give her toilet things for her bedroom?

"Of course, he must know it," she answered herself angrily. "Anybody knows that! But he just wants to give Flossie something for herself alone. He's still mushy about her!"

And she made up her mind, furiously that Flossie never would go back to work for Dexter, except over her own dead body! She was so very furious that she forgot to think about John Manners for at least twenty minutes.

But when she stopped in at the florist's shop for chrysanthemums for the house decorations "the thought of him came again, aching, into her mind. For among the ferns in the greenhouse tinkled a tiny fountain, almost hidden among the soft green leaves.

The sound of it brought to Mary Rose the memory of the night last summer when she had driven out into the country and had sat in a leafy lane and listened to a brook babble peacefully to itself somewhere in the shadows.

"I suppose there'll always be something to remind me of him," she said to herself, "as long as I live."

Out of doors the sun was shining in a sky that was like Chinese blue enamel and the falling leaves seemed to dance brightly on the air as they floated toward the gutters.

"How can everything look so happy, when I'm so filled with this ache feeling?" she wondered.

As she started up New York St. carrying her flowers, Tom's car drove up beside her, and his voice startled her: "Yoo-hoo! Mary Rose! Jump in!"

She shook her head. "No, I've a headache, and I want a minute or two more in the air. Besides that,

"I brought something else, too," Tom said in an undertone.

And when Mrs. Middleton had disappeared into the kitchen to give the cook some last nervous orders, he showed Mary Rose what that "something else" was.

He brought it slowly cut from his pocket—a tiny circle of platinum, crusted with little diamonds—a wedding ring.

Mary Rose took it from him. Within its narrow band was engraved the legend "T. F. to M. R. M. Nov. 14."

She looked up at him with wide, startled eyes. "Why, that's today—Nov. 14!" she said.

"I know it." He nodded and his ruddy face became even more ruddy than usual as a flush of embarrassment spread over it. He began to stammer as he always did when he was nervous or shy.

"I thought you might want to marry me today—just by some wild ch-chance!" he exploded. "See?"

Almost before the words were out of his mouth, she was shaking her head. Then she threw it up with a quick, impatient movement.

"Tom, must you spoil this perfectly good friendship of ours all the time like this?" she asked.

He smiled at her. "There's no such thing as friendship between a man and a woman when they're as young as we are," he said. "Any doctor can tell you that! A man always loves a woman and wants her—or she doesn't exist for him. Mary Rose, I'm beginning to think you are as cold as ice. I don't believe you know the meaning of love."

Yet whatever she was—cold or not—he loved her. And even though he knew that beyond friendliness, she cared nothing for him, he would

have taken her if he could on any terms!

She slipped away from him and ran upstairs to dress. Before she was ready she heard the unmistakable asthmatic cough of Sam Jessup's automobile out in the street.

She ran to the window! Yes, there they were—Sam and Flossie—taking their bags out of the old Wheezer and coming up the walk with them. Mary Rose noticed that Flossie was wearing a new hat—a little gray thing of the shape known to all women as the "Gigolo." The last scream in that hat fashions!

"Think of paying \$20 for that thing!" she said to herself.

When she got downstairs, Flossie was in Mrs. Middleton's arms and Tom was shaking Sam Jessup's hand as if it were a pump handle and slapping him on the back.

"Hah! Hah! I fooled you all!"

"Hah! Hah! I never thought Sam and I'd be married so soon, did you?" Flossie cried, looking from one face to another, with her blue eyes dancing.

"I fooled Sam, too," she added, with a peal of silver laughter. "I never will forget the old kid's face the day I ran away. I met him down at the corner and served notice on him that we were on our way to be married. He was surprised 'most to death!"

She ran on, giving little, short, delighted shrieks over the house, gay with its flowers, and she clasped her hands with joy at the sight of the table and of all the presents heaped on the sideboard.

Lancaster, Ohio—"For ten years after my marriage, I had poor health,

and I was a woman who could not work."

To be a successful homemaker, a woman must guard her health. When mother is not well, the home is upset. Women everywhere are learning through their own personal experiences, as these women did, the merit of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

Lancaster, Ohio—"For ten years after my marriage, I had poor health,

and I was a woman who could not work."

Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.