

"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 LVIII

Flossie cocked her ear, listening intently.

"Yes, that's the Wheezer, all right," she said, drawing a long sobbing breath. "I suppose Sam thinks he's coming to take me home with him! But I just won't even see him, and you can tell him so! You can tell him I'm through with him forever and ever, amen!"

But the surprise of her life was in store for her. Sam did not ask to see her, when he came. He did not want to see her. He distinctly said so.

"If your mother's here, I'd like to speak to her," he told Mary Rose, who let him in. His nice young face was very grim and he spoke with a certain dignity that had always been lacking in him before.

Before Mary Rose could call her mother, she heard her step on the stairs and she came into the room with her hair still in curl papers and her gray flannel kimono pinned around her.

"What have you to say for yourself, young man?" she asked, not even glancing at the chair that Sam had found.

Sam gave a queer, sarcastic smile. "Well, I don't know whether I want to say it for myself, or not—but there are a couple of things I wanted to talk over with you."

He turned to Mary Rose. "May I speak to your mother, alone?" he asked, and with a nod, she turned and went out of the room.

But at the head of the stairs she stopped and stood still to listen. For to eavesdrop is a human failing and, nœ as she was, Mary Rose Middleton was very human. Most of us have listened to things not intended for our ears at some time or another in our faulty lives.

"You see this ring—and this—and this?" she heard him ask, and she knew that he was showing Mrs. Middleton the things that Hilary Dexter had given to Flossie. The sapphire and the vanity case of gold and jade, the cigarette holder that matched it and a string of tiny seed pearls that had been his last gift to her.

"Did you ever see these things before?" he asked, and Mrs. Middleton answered quietly that she never had.

"They belong to my wife. They were given to her by the man I work for." Sam went on, and Mary Rose heard a gasp of surprise close to her. Flossie had come on tiptoe out of the bedroom and was standing out of the way.

"How did he know where I got them? I didn't tell him," she whispered.

Sam's next words answered her question. "You know I'm Dexter's secretary and I pay all his bills for him," he was saying. "And months ago I made out the checks to pay for these things. I remember them distinctly—I thought they were for his wife or his daughter. And all the time they were for my girl."

His voice broke on the last word. But after a pause, he went on. "For months before I married Flossie I knew she was going around with some one besides me. But I thought if she'd found some fellow that she liked better than she did me, I'd step out when the time came. But I never dreamed that she was having a rotten affair with a married man! You can see how things were between them when he gave her things like this! Why, that one ring cost over \$1,000!"

At that Flossie gave a little moaning cry and ran down the stairs.

"Sam Jessup, what you're saying is a lie!" she was raging at him, when Mary Rose followed her into the sitting room. "I don't care how much that ring cost—I never had a love affair with Dexter! I never cared two shakes of a dead lamb's tail about him!"

Sam dropped down to his knees beside her. "Yes, but you took all that jewelry from him," he reminded her. "Why did he give it to you? And why did you take it, if there was nothing between you?"

He started to get up, but Flossie threw her arms around him, half-strangling him. "I don't know why Dex gave it to me!" she sobbed, and Mary Rose saw Sam wince at the sound of Dexter's name on her lips.

"But I took it because I liked it! Oh, Sam, I love nice things—I'd sell my soul for 'em! You don't know how I hate to poor."

Sam held her close, his face hidden in her tousled hair that always drugged his sense with its sweet swarm scent. "You're going to be a lot poorer, for a while, than you've ever been before," he told her. "Because I'll never work for Dexter another minute as long as I live!

And it's going to take time to land another job half as good as the one I had with him!"

Then Mary Rose had an inspiration. "I know where there's one every bit as good!" she said. "In fact, I think it's better. It's with a man whose wife hates to have girls working for him!"

She went to the telephone and called Jim Morrell, just as he was sitting down to the Sunday morning breakfast that his adoring, jealous wife always cooked for him with her own be-diamond hands.

"I've found you a secretary—a man," she said to him and they both laughed.

"No, but I mean it," she went on. "Remember you promised to fire me if I found a man to take my job? Well, this man is my brother-in-law. He has been Hilary Dexter's secretary for more than five years. So you know he must be good—and he is!"

"I thought we were just joking the other day when we were talking about secretaries," Jim Morrell answered her after a pause. "I certainly was, at any rate. I like the way you do your work for one thing. I don't want to make a change."

His voice sounded irritated.

"Well, never mind, said your brother-in-law along in the morning," he added. "I'll look him over, at any rate."

Mary Rose felt sure that he wouldn't hire Sam, but he did. And she found herself reading the "Help Wanted" columns again and going the rounds of the offices where secretaries were needed.

The following Sunday night a little after nine she and her mother sat alone before a wood fire in the back parlor. It had been raining all day and the wind rattled the shutters outside the windows now.

"I just can't get warm. I think I'll go upstairs to bed," Mary Rose said, yawning and closing her eyes. She had been reading. As she stood up the front door bell pealed through the house.

On her way to answer it she drew back the curtains of the parlor and looked out. Through the slanting rain she could make out the outline of a car that stood before the house.

"It's Tom Fitzroy," she called to Mrs. Middleton, who had hurried upstairs, declaring she was too tired to talk to anybody.

He came in, bringing the chill and dampness of the storm with him and dropped her soaking slicker down on the tile floor of the vestibule.

Mary Rose picked it up, and took it out into the kitchen. "My goodness, Tom Fitzroy," she scolded him.

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MR. FIXIT

Grape Vine Jungle Ob-
structs Thirty-Fourth St.

Let Mr. Fixit present your case to city officials. He is The Times' representative at the city hall. Write him at The Times.

The W. Thirty-Fourth St. jungle is made by growths of wild grape vines, it would appear from a letter Mr. Fixit pursued today.

DEAR MR. FIXIT: Will you please see what you can do to get this vine removed from the hall?

MR. AND MRS. WALTER PECK.

Board of health authorities are a bit doubtful of their legal powers in this instance, but have promised Mr. Fixit to make a thorough investigation.

CURED BY KING

LONDON—King George IV cured General Sir George Higginson of smoking. General Higginson recalled on his 100th birthday recently, that when he was a child the king noticed him in his perambulator one day and, for a joke, since the child was staring at the king's cigar, put it to the baby's lips. The nauscent impression stayed with him all his life, Sir George stated.

14 CHILDREN BEFORE 26

HOLLISTER, Cal.—Mrs. Joseph Churchill, 107 years old, does her own housework and cooks the meals for her husband, 88, whom she married forty-nine years ago. She sees without glasses. Only one of fourteen children born to a previous marriage is alive. All of them were born before she was twenty-six years old.

Mr. Fixit has a ray of hope. The street superintendent's department hopes to obtain enough money from the gasoline tax fund soon to repair a number of bridges over the city. City council probably will authorize the money at its next session Monday.

Dear Mr. Fixit: My garbage has not been emptied for three weeks. Will you please tell me why they miss our alley? I have a good can with a lid, as required.

MRS. ALA CANDEL,

1505 Chester Ave.

Orders have been issued by the sanitary board to the collector on your route to get busy.

HAY COMES FIRST

SPRINGFIELD, Mass.—When there's haying to be done, what's a little matter of \$1,500,000? At least the hay had the call recently, when a meeting was called to decide a \$1,500,000 dairy pool merger. It was a fine day to rake and mow, and so many of the farmer-stockholders were absent that no vote could be taken.

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