

# "The VANITY CASE"

A Tale of Mystery and Love

By CAROLYN WELLS

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he smiled all was forgiven and he won the heart of one who saw him.

Bunny liked him a lot, and though they were eternally sparring, they were the best of friends.

"Afraid not," she returned, "the ceremony has to take place in my bathroom, and Myra is such an old fuss where the proprieties are concerned."

A maid entered, pushed a perambulator, which was really a small cellar. She brought it to rest in front of Heath, who at once set himself to the business of mixing cocktails.

Myra, from her lounge-chair, studied the maid critically. But she could find nothing to censure. Cap, apron and personal attitude were all perfection; for Katie was quick to learn and Myra was a thorough and competent teacher.

Though there was supposed to be about the house the careless and informal air always associated with a studio or a bungalow, Myra Heath's housekeeping instincts rebelled, and she was most punctilious in the matters of domestic etiquette.

So Katie took the glasses from Heath, on her perfectly appointed tray, with its caviare canapes and tiny napkins, and served them properly.

But after that she was allowed to leave the room, and "dividends" were apportioned out by Heath himself.

"Rotten to have a snoopy maid around," he growled; "cocktails should be absorbed only in the bosom of one's own family."

"Katie isn't snoopy," his wife rejoined, not curtly, but with the air of one stating an important fact.

"Not snoopy exactly," offered Inman, but Perry Heath said, gayly:

"So no you'd notice it. That's a bid for me to follow her."

"Run along, then," said Myra, tolerantly, "I'll entertain Larry till you get back."

It was not entirely unprecedented, for their bridge games occasionally broke up in just this fashion.

Heath strolled along the terrace to the far end, where he found Bunny in a rambler arbor, exactly where he had expected to find her.

Very fair she looked, as she stood leaning against its trellised window, her fair hair a soft gold in the moonlight, her flower-like face a little wistful as she gazed up at him.

Perry Heath was not a handsome man, but he was gentle and kindly, and little Bunny, unversed in the ways of men of the world, had fallen for his gay, good-natured charm.

His appearance was a bit inconspicuous in its lack of distinction or striking features. His rather pale face was surrounded by a shock of dark brown hair, which he had a habit of impatiently pushing back from his forehead, over which it invariably dropped again. His eyes were a gray blue, and he wore large tortoise-shell rimmed glasses, which, he said, having put on for his painting, he was later compelled to wear constantly.

They were not specially becoming, but Bunny contended they had distinction to his face and gave him a Bohemian look.

For the rest, Heath was average-sized, average weight, and always dressed in the perfection of good taste, well as in the latest mode of tailoring.

His manner was always pleasant, receptive, responsive and generally charming. This, though habitual with him, was looked upon by Bunny as specially for her, and she was rapidly becoming his abject slave and adorer.

Heath saw this, of course, and tried to stave it off by coolness and even negligence toward the girl.

But Bunny disregarded this and blithely went on falling in love with neatness and dispatch.

"Come along, Bunny girl, they're waiting for us," Heath said, trying not to look too directly at her.

"Stay just a minute," she whispered, stepping a bit nearer to him. "Just one little minute—to look at the moon."

"Why, there isn't any moon, child," he exclaimed.

"There will be in a minute. It's just going to rise—up out of the sea. Oh, do wait for it. Do—dear—"

Of course, Perry had to meet the occasion. He waited. Waited, with Bunny in his arms, her slim little form held so close he could feel her quick, startled breathing, could hear her ecstatic little gasps as she nestled her chin in his cupped hand that sought to raise her face to his.

But as the golden disk began to show above the sea horizon, Myra's voice sounded from the doorway:

"Come on in, you two—the evening's over."

They obeyed her summons, and, returning to the studio, found Inman mixing himself a nightcap and Myra looking with deep interest at an old brown bottle she was holding.

She referred to a big book on glass and verified its exact status.

"Yes," she said, rapidly, "it's all right! Doytville Glass Works—Philadelphia—oh, it's a gem! A wonderful find!"

"Hang your wonderful find!" cried her husband, irritably. "It amazes me, Myra, when you are so unenthusiastic over most things, how you can go into ecstasies over a bit of ugly old glass, just because it is old. I have a feeling for beauty, in any form, but for a rotten old whisky bottle—no!"

Myra looked at him a few seconds, without speaking, and then turned her attention to the brown bottle.

"I love that particular stare my wife gives me occasionally," Heath said, addressing no one in particular.

"You shall have it again, if you care for it so much," Myra returned, and gave him another look, this time showing a more definite trace of content.

"Come, come," said Larry, "birds in their little nests agree. Let up on the blathering, if only to spare your guests' embarrassment. And, too, old scout, your pictures are no more uniformly good than Myra's glass junk. This isn't saying that some of them are not masterpieces, but on the other hand—no!"

Bunny, sitting on the arm of Heath's chair, clasped his knee while she swung a well-dressed and imperious leg.

Her own face was a trifle over-decorated, but the garish tints couldn't help the soft loveliness of her natural complexion, and though her nose was white as a clown's, it was adorably impudent and bewitching.

She had tossed around her neck a filmy scarf of American Beauty red and its deep tone brought out the fairy-like charm of her soft pink throat and golden hair.

"Larry knows more about color than you do," said Myra, judicially, speaking almost as if she was judging an exhibition of art.

"Pooh, color is my middle name," Heath retorted. He was not miffed at all, these altercations were of frequent occurrence. "I wish to goodness, Myra, you had a little sense of color. It might lead you to improve your pure, angel face. Your lips are perfectly shaped, but too pale. Your delicate, but high cheek bones would welcome a touch of rouge,

etc.

Cocktails finished and dinner announced, they went across the lounge to the dining room.

Here again, the absolute perfection of the appointments and the excellence of the food justified Myra in her pride in her housekeeping.

Dinner was rather a merry feast, for the cocktails had been potent, and, though Myra smiled but sel-

dom, the other three were in fine fife and feather, and a pleasant time was had by all.

Coffee was served on the front terrace, that looked out to sea, and later, as the darkness settled down, they went inside for bridge.

"Let's play in the studio," Bunny said. "It's so much more cosy."

"Yes, I know your idea of coziness," Heath retorted, "it's to babbie all the time you're dummy and most of the time you're playing."

Bunny made a face at him and went on to the studio, where Katie was deftly placing table, chairs and smoking stands.

They played a few rubbers, for moderate stakes, and then, Bunny, being dummy, and chattering as was her wont, Heath said, sharply:

"Do shut up, child! I can't think straight with your tongue clattering like that!"

"Oh, all right," and the girl flounced out of her chair, went through the French window and out on the terrace.

"Now, she's mad," observed Inman, but Perry Heath said, gayly:

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