

"The VANITY CASE"

A Tale of Mystery and Love

By CAROLYN WELLS

BEGIN HERE TODAY

In Harbor Gardens, Long Island, in an elaborate bungalow lived PERRY HEATH and his wife, MYRA. At the time the story opens the Heaths were entertaining as house guests.

LAWRENCE INMAN, a distant relative of Myra's and, aside from Perry, the only heir to her considerable fortune and

MISS MOORE, young, vivacious, golden-haired, an old friend of Myra's, Myra Heath was a peculiar woman. She was cold, serious, but she did not love her husband, but seemed enamored of Inman. She never used cosmetics or dressed in colors. In fact, her hatred of color amounted to a phobia. She collected rare old bottles and her latest was a whisky bottle which she was quite proud of and which aroused her artistic sense.

There is a growing intimacy between Perry Heath and Bunny, Myra becoming provoked, declares that she made her will in favor of Inman, cutting Perry off.

That night, after Bunny and Inman retire, Myra Heath alludes mysteriously to Perry's "secret." When Perry goes to bed, Inman comes down stairs, and he and Myra are discovered in each other's arms later by Perry.

The next morning, Mrs. Prentiss, who lives next door, was telling her nephew, Todhunter, that she had seen mysterious lights had seen the night before in the Heath bungalow. While they are talking a loud scream from the Heath home interrupts their conversation.

Katie, the maid, had found Myra lying face down in a pool of blood. The butler had found Perry in a room unoccupied and awakens Inman.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY CHAPTER V (Continued)

Herick's excitement made him incoherent, and without waiting to dress, Inman flung on a dressing gown, over his pajamas, and pushing the man aside, hurried down the stairs.

He went straight to the studio, and gave a gasp as he looked down at the prostrate figure on the floor. The two candles were still burning, but they were sputtering and almost burnt out.

Myra lay in a comatose position, but with strange accessories. Her gown, the one she had worn the evening before, was of white georgette, simply made. But across the bodice, now was flung the deep crimson scarf that was Bunny's. Round her neck was a heavy string of large, almost barbaric beads, of red and gold.

Instinctively, Inman glanced up at a light sconce, where these beads usually hung, as a sort of decorative touch.

Their place was empty. Had Myra decked herself in these things?

He gazed at her face. Always beautiful, in her calm pale way, she was far more so now, with the color on cheeks and lips, with the dark touches that made her eyes look large and striking, and with the scarf of American beauty red, enlivening her white dress.

And the candles—two of those from the long studio table, standing in their brass candlesticks at her head and feet, still faintly alight, but just ready to flicker out, these gave the effect of a shrine or a strange ceremonial of some sort.

"Oh, my God!" Larry groaned, as a man will, who does not know what else to say.

"She's been killed, Mr. Inman," said Herick, as he pointed to a great confusion on Myra's left temple.

This was not noticeable at first glance, for the head was turned to that side, and the hair was a bit fluffed out as if to hide it.

Inman looked, then turned away in horror, and ran from the room. Herick followed him, and they faced one another as they stood in the lounge.

"What must we do, sir?" asked the man, and Inman stared at him speechlessly.

"But we must do something," Herick urged, allowing himself the familiar pronoun by reason of the great stress of the occasion.

"Yes, yes," Larry roused himself to answer, "I suppose we must."

"Where is Mr. Heath, sir?" Herick went on, anxiously.

"Lord, I don't know. Where can he be? He must be around somewhere."

"No, sir, he ain't. Why, he'd be right here, if he was. Now, what about Miss Moore?"

"Miss Moore? Oh, yes—well, what about her?"

"Why, sir, she ought to be—warned a bit, don't you think?"

"Yes, yes, certainly. Warn her, Herick, warn her, by all means," Herick stammered.

"It's not for me, sir. I'll send Mrs. Pierce or one of the maids."

"Yes, do. That's right," Mrs. Pierce or one of the maids.

Herick shook his head. Mr. Inman was a broken reed. And with Mrs. Heath dead and Mr. Heath absent, what was to be done?

"Do you think, sir," he said, forcing himself to suggest, "that we ought to call a doctor, or—"

"A doctor? Oh, yes—a doctor. Why—why, Herick, sir's dead."

"I know, sir, but it's most generally done in such cases. Oh, I wish Mr. Heath would come."

"I wish so, too. I'm—I'm no good in a matter like this. I'm no good, Herick."

"No, sir," said Herick, sincere for once. "Well, then, suppose I telephone for Doctor Conklin, he's the family physician."

"Yes, do—do that, Herick, at once."

"Yes, sir. And I'll send Carter, the ladies' maid, to Miss Moore, and she can tell her, you see."

"I see. And you, yourself, you'd better dress, for there'll be people coming, you know."

"Why, yes—" Inman looked down at himself as if surprised at his garb. "Yes, certainly. I will."

He went off to his room, and, closing the studio door, Herick went to the telephone.

He summoned Dr. Conklin, who promised to come over at once.

Then, with a swift glance about, Herick pulled open a drawer in the big table, and from a loose pile of small bills, and a box containing silver coin, he helped himself rather liberally, stuffing the money in his pocket.

never before, to his knowledge, had she worn a string of gaudy beads. It was beyond his powers of divination to fathom these mysteries.

And then, at her feet, propped against the candlestick that stood there, he saw the card which he had seen many times before—the ornate pen and ink work that bore the legend, "The Work of Perry Heath."

CHAPTER VI

To Herick this carried no sinister suggestion, he merely thought the card had been dropped there and was about to pick it up when there seeped through his bewildered brain a vague memory that one should not touch things on the scene of a mysterious death.

So he restrained his impulse to blow out the last feeble flickerings of the two candles, and, instead, raised the shades of the back windows to let in the daylight.

Then, patting his pocket with a soft sigh of satisfaction, he went out of the room and sought the other servants.

He found them in the pantry, agog with excitement at the tales of Katie and Mrs. Pierce, but not daring to report for duty until summoned.

Herick was unstrung himself, but kept his head, and assumed an extra dignity as he issued orders.

"No gossiping now," he said; "Mrs. Pierce, you go on with getting the breakfast ready. We've no call to neglect our work. Carter, you go up to Miss Moore's room, and—well, you do the best you can. Tell the young lady that Mrs. Heath has—has—say, she's had an accident—yes, that will do, an accident. And get Miss Moore to dress at once, for the doctor is coming and after goodness knows what goings on there will have to be."

"Oh—I can't tell Miss Bunny," Carter burst into sobs. "Poor Mrs. Heath—she's sure, Herick, she's—dead? Let me see her."

"No, nobody, must go into that room till the doctor comes,—or Mr. Heath."

"Where is Mr. Heath?" exclaimed Carter.

"I don't know," Herick said, slowly. "There's a lot to be learned yet. You go along, Carter, get Miss Bunny dressed and take up her breakfast. I'm at my wit's end! Nobody to boss—no, anything; Mr. Inman, he's all flabbergasted like—I wish Mr. Heath would come back—wherever he's gone!"

Carter obeyed the orders of her superior, and taking a tray with coffee and rolls, started for Bunny's room.

But even as she tapped at the door, she heard the sound of wild sobbing within.

No summons bade her enter, and after another knock, Carter opened the door and went in.

Bunny was huddled in a forlorn heap in the middle of her bed, and was crying bitterly.

"There now, then now, Miss Bunny," Carter said, moved to pity at the sight of the girl's intense grief, "take a sup of coffee, do—"

With an air of bewilderment, Bunny looked up in the maid's face, and docilely took the cup she proffered.

As she swallowed, she looked over the rim of the cup at Carter.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"What's all the excitement about?" "Well, — Miss, — you see, Mrs. Heath, she—she isn't so well."

"Not well! Myra! What do you mean?"

"She's—she's had an accident, ma'am."

"Accident! What sort of accident?" "She—" but Carter's powers of vague prevarication were limited, and she blurted out, "why, she's dead, ma'am!"

"Dead!" said Bunny, not hysterically, but with an awed, dazed air, her intent gaze fixed on Carter's face.

"Yes, ma'am," the maid returned, ready, the Rubicon crossed, to dilate on the subject.

"Dress me," Bunny said, almost sharply. "Never mind the bath, give me my clothes."

And in utter silence the girl rapidly donned her garments.

A plainly tailored white volley gown was forthcoming and Bunny put it on, adding a necklace of small jet beads.

"Do you know where Mr. Heath is, ma'am?" said Carter, timidly, but determined to raise the question.

"No, how should I? Isn't he about?"

"No, ma'am, Herick can't find him anywhere."

"Oh, he's around somewhere, of course. No, I don't want any more coffee. Where is—Mr. Heath?"

"Oh, ma'am, she's in the studio—she's—"

"Never mind, Carter, I'll go down now."

Bunny went slowly downstairs, pausing on every step.

Just as she reached the lounge, Dr. Conklin entered. He was a brisk, alert, person, with sharp penetrating eyes and a quick, jerkiness of movement.

Though he had turned toward the studio, he paused at sight of Bunny, and looked at her inquiringly.

"Belong here, do you?" he said, shortly.

"I am a guest of the Heaths," Bunny returned, a little brusque, because she was not accustomed to such abrupt manners.

"Oh, you are. Where is Mr. Heath? What am I wanted for, anyway?"

Herick, who had admitted the doctor, said, respectfully: "If you will come this way, sir."

He led the way to the studio, and Dr. Conklin walked in silence after him.

Bunny followed timidly, and with hesitating steps.

She was the doctor pause suddenly as he reached the studio door, and clench his hands, while his face took on a look of horror.

But he said no word, and strode over to the body that lay on the floor.



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES—By MARTIN



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—By BLOSSER



"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 thing.

CHAPTER LXVI

"You!" she gasped. "You! John Manners!"

He nodded without a word. They stood there for a full minute, looking at each other, before Mary Rose recovered herself.

"What do you want to marry me for?" she asked, and she led him into the little parlor that was shining with cleanliness and sweet with the smell of late roses from her own garden.

What in the world had he come for, she wondered.

Perhaps he had heard that she had left Cornelius Tuedeman's office and wanted her to go back to work for him.

"Well, I won't," she said to herself fiercely. "If I starve, I'll never set foot in his office again!"

Suddenly she realized how dreadful she must look in her shabby, soiled dress, her torn apron and patched shoes. She gave a nervous little laugh.

"I must look like Cinderella," she exclaimed, and crossed the room to the dim old mirror above the mantel. She began to pull the hairpins from her hair and to fluff it over her ears.

"I've brought you the little glass slipper," he said, and if he tried to make his voice light and flippant he did not succeed.

Mary Rose turned and faced him. "What do you mean?" she asked in that straightforward way of hers.

John shifted on his feet. "Maybe the fairy tales have changed since I was a kid," he answered. "But when my mother told me the story, the Prince brought Cinderella the glass slipper when he asked her to marry him—that's all." He gulped.

"You understand, I know I'm no Prince," he went on, after a pause. "I know I'm an awful dub, but—"

will you marry me?"

The familiar room seemed to whirl around Mary Rose like a spinning top. "Will I what?" she asked, and didn't hear the sound of her own voice.

"I want you to marry me," she heard what he said plainly enough. And she walked away from him and sat down in an old rocker on the other side of the room. She knew just what he was doing now.

"No, I won't," she said clearly. "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth! You believed that tale that Flossie told you about me and—Tom Fitzroy! You never gave me a chance to explain things to you!"

"But what she told me must have been the truth," she said to herself. "She came close to him and bent over him. 'But I do love you—I always have loved you better than anything on earth. And I'm afraid I always will,' she said softly, but he didn't move."

"You must have known I married poor Tom because he was dying," she went on in that same soft voice. "The night he—went away and was hurt, I had told him I never could marry him. He knew I loved you. He guessed it."

She stood there, when she had finished, longing to put her arms around him, so that she ached with that longing. But she hardened her heart against him.

"You'd better stick to your Doris thing," she said bitterly. "I saw by the morning paper that she was home from Europe! You'd better marry her because I never will!"

"She won't marry me," His voice was low and muffled. She had to bend her head to hear what he was saying. "She knows what you can't seem to get through your head—that I want you and nobody but you."

He stood up suddenly, with his arms straight at his side.

"You remember that letter you tore up—the one I sent to you, right after your husband died?" he asked, and she nodded.

"That letter was no letter of condolence," he told her, shaking his head. "It was a love letter to you—"

"She kept perfectly still and he went on:

"It was Doris who showed me that piece in the paper, about your marriage to Fitzroy in the hospital—and that morning she told me she never would marry me. You see, I

went all to pieces over that newspaper clipping."

Mary Rose raised her eyebrows. She couldn't imagine the dignified John going to pieces over anything.

And yet he was shaking now like a leaf. He had no dignity now!

There was the softness of pity in her eyes as she looked at him and the Eternal Mother that is in every woman longed to comfort him, and the love that she had always had for him made her want to stretch out her arms and give herself to him.

But she didn't move.

"Mary Rose," he said to her, "what is the use of all this? The mean little suspicions and the misunderstandings and all the rest of it? Tell me the truth. Does anything matter so very much to you except the feeling you say you have for me?"

She wouldn't answer.

"Suppose Flossie did tell me a lie and I believed it?" he pleaded for himself. "Can't you see that it was my jealousy of Fitzroy that made me believe it? When he came down to the office, I used to want to throw him out on his head—"

"Hush—his dead, remember!" But it was not of Tom that Mary was thinking. All at once she saw clearly the mischief that Flossie had done the last few months. She had been the cause of Sam's leaving

the Dexter Company, and of Mary Rose's leaving, and even of poor Miss MacFarlane's broken-hearted going.

And now the lies she had told John Manners rose between them like a flaming sword—keeping him away from Mary Rose.

"I don't know why I do this foolish thing," she sobbed, furious with herself for breaking down. "I'm tired, I guess. We've been cleaning house all week long—"

"I know why you're crying," she heard him say, and then she was in his arms—in his arms where she had longed to be for endless months and months and months.

He pressed her head back against his shoulder, and looked down at the grimy, tear stained face—the face he had said was the loveliest in the world.

"Next time you clean a house, it'll be my house," he whispered. "Tell me the next time you clean a house—it will be my house—and yours!"

"It will be your house—and mine!" she whispered, and then her lips closed. She raised them like a flower to his face.

And at last she knew what it is like to be close held by the man you love—and the wonder and the glory that there is in his kiss.

(The End)

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