

The MELODY GIRL

by RUTH DEWEY GROVES

(Continued from Page 1)

en are supposed to have, but she's a throwback when it comes to tackling a modern girl's problems."

"That's a nice way to talk about your sister."

"She's only my half-sister, but I don't enjoy knocking her. I'm just trying to stop you, Tommy, from making a mess of our life. Irene wouldn't help you."

"A lot you know about it. She's got to get a job until I'm through college; then she won't have to work."

BERYL felt like swearing, but she didn't because, as she said, only mule drivers were original enough to make it interesting. She'd never heard any mule drivers curse, but she'd heard about it.

"I suppose you believe that," she sighed instead; "but you're wrong. You're terribly wrong. Irene's had a lot of jobs, but some things are strong with every one of them."

"She's only been out of high a couple of years," Tommy protested.

"I know," Beryl said; "but that was long enough for Irene to find out that she and work didn't spring from the same genealogical tree. They're not even remotely related."

"She never had a chance," Tommy maintained. "She's too attractive. Men get fresh with her."

"Is that so?" Beryl said, as though she were deeply impressed with a new angle of the situation. "My goodness."

"Cut out the scoffing and take me back home," Tommy demanded.

"Not just yet, little boy. If you can't be appealed to for your aunt's sake, you're going to be talked to for your own. And here it is. You marry Irene and you'll be back in the theater before the summer is over. Your uncle will pay you enough to induce Irene to coax you into giving up college. You won't go back next fall."

"Well," said Tommy drawled. "You're so sure of everything—hasn't it occurred to you that Aunt Em will be all right when the damage is done?" She's no hard-hearted tyke."

"I should say not," Beryl broke in, "the way she treats you, she's a lady bountiful. You don't deserve it—an all-around and a chance for a real education."

"She'll forgive us," Tommy said complacently. "I know she will."

Beryl shook her head. "I don't think you know her," she said soberly. "She's got her heart set on a future for you, Tommy, and she knows as well as I do that Irene never will see it through on your allowance—not while your uncle dangles a good salary under your nose. Irene's never had any money, you know."

"She'll have plenty some day," Tommy declared. "With that voice of hers..."

"Yeah, I've heard about that voice," Beryl cut in. Then she mimicked: "Irene will become famous if she ever gets a chance! If only we could do something to put Irene before the public! It's such a pity that opportunity doesn't come to Irene; with a voice like hers."

"It makes me sick."

"You're jealous because you can't sing."

"Who wants to sing?" There was disdain in the question, but deep in her heart...

"I guess your mother's right," Tommy remarked: "you must be like your father."

"Don't you say anything about my father!"

"Well, you're not like your mother, and she was a queer chap, wasn't he?"

"If you mean he was not like Daddy Everett, you're right. Poor Daddy Everett. But you can't blame him for Irene, she's like mother."

"You oughtn't to talk about your mother."

"I wouldn't, if you didn't make me. But I can't help it if I have brains enough to see what people are like, can I? It makes me wild that mother can't see what kind of wife Irene would make for you."

"And I can't see that it's any of your business," Tommy retorted.

"You look out," Beryl warned him, "or I'll let her have you."

"Please, kind lady," Tommy be-

gan in a beggar's whine, but Beryl stopped him.

"You're like a brother to me, Tommy," she declared and thought she said it firmly somehow her voice did not ring quite true, not at least, to her own ears. She hoped that Tommy did not notice. Anything but having him think she was acting through jealousy.

"We've grown up together," she went on hurriedly, "we played robin and Indian and we let them keep the tooth we pulled out with the barn door. Remember? Irene wouldn't touch it, and she cried when your mouth got full of blood."

"She was always more refined than you," Tommy said brutally.

"You see; you talk to me just like a brother," Beryl said good-naturedly, but inwardly she winced. "That gives me the right to talk to you like a sister. But all I want to say is just this: Won't you wait until you're through college before you get married?"

"Oh, sister, sister, you're breaking my heart," Tommy exclaimed with mock sorrow. Then he became serious. "But I'll break your neck if you don't let me out of this."

"No you won't, mister," came in unison from all of Beryl's gang—not while we're here."

"You little devils," Tommy muttered.

"No swearing in a lady's presence," he was warned.

"BERYL turned and looked at him. "Well," she said, "do you promise?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Tommy replied.

"Then I can't take you back," Beryl told him. "And I hate to keep these kids up. Every one of them slipped out of bed to help me on this job. Really, Tommy, haven't you any sense?" Her voice was impatient.

"This means everything to you. Can't you see? Irene has her own way with every one. She's made mother think it's all right for you to deceive your aunt—it was easier than stealing out as you were doing.

"She could get the right things packed, you know. And I think she took some of mine, too," Beryl added with what to Tommy was uncalled-for warmth.

"If she's so good at handling people maybe she can get the old run-away blessing from Aunt Em," he suggested.

"Do you really want to go back to managing the theater?" Beryl countered. "You know Mr. Hoffman doesn't care what becomes of you eventually. All he wants is to have your best years, then, when his old building falls down, he'll retire and you can go job hunting—with no profession, and no training."

"I could always manage a theater, if I'm so good at it."

"Yes, but you'd always be working for some one else. Irene never would help you save enough to buy a theater of your own."

"I guess my aunt will leave me some money some day."

"That's what you think, and Irene would think it, and she'd tell you it wasn't necessary to save any money. And then maybe your aunt wouldn't leave you any money. A maybe's a maybe, you know."

"Besides, Tommy, haven't you any pride? Don't you want to go on at college, now that you've had two years? If you had to quit it would be different, but you planned it for years. You used to talk about it a lot when you were in high. You

seemed to have your heart set on it. And now, just because you've become infatuated with a pretty face, you're ready to give it up."

"It sounds dastardly, doesn't it?" Tommy mocked. "But don't take it so hard, fair lady. It's my funeral. However, you can walk a while to hold the wake. The pretty face may have more behind it than you think, and the old aunt may turn out to have a heart of gold."

"And you'll turn out to be a better man than I thought you were," Beryl snapped back at him.

"Thanks," Tommy said tartly.

Tommy had enlightened them somewhat.

It was plain that she had wanted to stop him from running away with her sister, and now she was going to let him do it.

Pigmy especially was downcast. He liked Tommy, but Irene was anathema to him. Ever since she had intercepted and read, with much public glee, one of his love notes to Agnes, of their neighborhood, he had "hated the ground she walked on."

Beryl's voice cheered them a bit, however, when they neared her home and she said briskly: "Well, here we are, men. Bring forth the captive and escort him to you fair damsel, who waits with trembling heart and suitcase packed (some of my things), too."

The car came to a noisy stop. "I see she wouldn't talk like that if all was lost," one of the band whispered to another, as they hauled Tommy out and gave him a push that sent him stumbling across the sidewalk.

"Gently, gently," cautioned Beryl. "Wouldn't damage the bridegroom and send him frowns to his doom?"

The boys desisted from further violence upon the person of the belated bridegroom and turned to Beryl. "Is that all?" they chorused. "That's all, my lads. Your reward will be forthcoming on the morrow. Picnic rations for all hands round and the end of the island if old Wind in the Face can make it. Bathing suits and iodine. And sound the tocsin at daybreak. Away with you now. Early to bed, or we won't get back tomorrow night."

They scampered off, calling back good-night. Beryl watched them go with a look of pride. Noble little rascals—her gang. It was not their fault if she had failed. But had she?

She did not drive on at once to the ramshackle garage the boys had built for her in the back yard—a garage just big enough for the old car to hop into. She sat, in-

stead, behind the wheel and watched her stepfather's house.

A half smile of satisfaction curved her lips—beautifully modeled lips, but much larger than Irene's rosebud mouth. The smile did not extend to her eyes; in them was a look of doubt.

THE shades of the house were down. They usually were down at night. Beryl liked it so, and Mrs. Everett insisted upon it. The family life, she said, was not to be put on exhibition.

Beryl had remarked that it couldn't afford to be—one of her nail-on-the-head statements that always so irritated her mother and Irene. They preferred to call things by euphemisms.

What was occurring behind the shades now Beryl thought she could guess. Irene's voice must have been shaken to its foundation, for she never could abide to be kept waiting—and on her wedding night of all times!

Beryl could hear her saying it, even if the walls of the house did shut out the sound. But what would Tommy say? That was the question that troubled her. Well, she'd better go in and find out, she decided.

Leaving the old car at the curb she hurried up to the house and softly opened the front door. Instantly voices came to her from the living room in the rear of the hall.

That living room had once been a bleak dining room. Beryl had transformed it—the house being so

planned that the old living room—into a place with privacy and character.

Mr. Everett had aided and abetted her in making the change, but Irene and Mrs. Everett had jeered—until all of the world that came to view it pronounced it great.

Beryl hastened toward it now

with quickening pulsebeats. If Tommy had told Irene of her part in the night's event she knew what

to expect. But Irene's fury held no terror for her—poor Tommy who was about to make a big mistake on the very threshold of his life. Why, she'd have had to make an attempt to save him even if . . . even if . . .

Beryl didn't like to say, even to herself, that she loved Tommy Wilson. He wasn't at all the man for her, she told herself at times when the thought would intrude in spite of the barrier of worldly-mindedness that she had built up to protect herself against her family.

He was weak, Tommy was, she argued scornfully when she couldn't get him out of her thoughts. He was weak, or he couldn't have fallen for Irene—baby-faced Irene. An

inner voice would agree with her.

Yes. Tommy was weak—but he

was Tommy just the same, you

know, the voice invariably added.

Tommy, whom she'd liked to a

finish more than once (only half

suspecting that he wasn't exerting his strength to the fullest).

Tommy, who had smashed his lunch pail on a boy's head for hitting her with a rock, and bought Irene a penny stick of candy because the fight made her cry.

Tommy who had—but it was endless—she could think of a thousand events and adventures that had drawn them together in their childhood.

(To Be Continued)

"I suppose you believe that," she sighed instead; "but you're wrong. You're terribly wrong. Irene's had a lot of jobs, but some things are strong with every one of them."

"She's only been out of high a couple of years," Tommy protested.

"I know," Beryl said; "but that was long enough for Irene to find out that she and work didn't spring from the same genealogical tree. They're not even remotely related."

"She never had a chance," Tommy maintained. "She's too attractive. Men get fresh with her."

"Is that so?" Beryl said, as though she were deeply impressed with a new angle of the situation. "My goodness."

"Cut out the scoffing and take me back home," Tommy demanded.

"Not just yet, little boy. If you can't be appealed to for your aunt's sake, you're going to be talked to for your own. And here it is. You marry Irene and you'll be back in the theater before the summer is over. Your uncle will pay you enough to induce Irene to coax you into giving up college. You won't go back next fall."

"Well," said Tommy drawled. "You're so sure of everything—hasn't it occurred to you that Aunt Em will be all right when the damage is done?" She's no hard-hearted tyke."

"I should say not," Beryl broke in, "the way she treats you, she's a lady bountiful. You don't deserve it—an all-around and a chance for a real education."

"She'll forgive us," Tommy said complacently. "I know she will."

Beryl shook her head. "I don't think you know her," she said soberly. "She's got her heart set on a future for you, Tommy, and she knows as well as I do that Irene never will see it through on your allowance—not while your uncle dangles a good salary under your nose. Irene's never had any money, you know."

"She'll have plenty some day," Tommy declared. "With that voice of hers..."

"Yeah, I've heard about that voice," Beryl cut in. Then she mimicked: "Irene will become famous if she ever gets a chance! If only we could do something to put Irene before the public! It's such a pity that opportunity doesn't come to Irene; with a voice like hers."

"It makes me sick."

"You're jealous because you can't sing."

"Who wants to sing?" There was disdain in the question, but deep in her heart...

"I guess your mother's right," Tommy remarked: "you must be like your father."

"Don't you say anything about my father!"

"Well, you're not like your mother, and she was a queer chap, wasn't he?"

"If you mean he was not like Daddy Everett, you're right. Poor Daddy Everett. But you can't blame him for Irene, she's like mother."

"You oughtn't to talk about your mother."

"I wouldn't, if you didn't make me. But I can't help it if I have brains enough to see what people are like, can I? It makes me wild that mother can't see what kind of wife Irene would make for you."

"And I can't see that it's any of your business," Tommy retorted.

"You look out," Beryl warned him, "or I'll let her have you."

"Please, kind lady," Tommy be-

gan in a beggar's whine, but Beryl stopped him.

"You're like a brother to me, Tommy," she declared and thought she said it firmly somehow her voice did not ring quite true, not at least, to her own ears. She hoped that Tommy did not notice. Anything but having him think she was acting through jealousy.

"It sounds dastardly, doesn't it?" Tommy mocked.

"Tommy, she's declared and thought she said it firmly somehow her voice did not ring quite true, not at least, to her own ears. She hoped that Tommy did not notice. Anything but having him think she was acting through jealousy.

"It sounds dastardly, doesn't it?" Tommy mocked.

"Tommy, she's declared and thought she said it firmly somehow her voice did not ring quite true, not at least, to her own ears. She hoped that Tommy did not notice. Anything but