

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

—By Ahern OUT OUR WAY

—By Williams

The MELODY GIRL

by RUTH DEWEY GROVES
AUTHOR OF "THE HUSBAND HUNTER, ETC."

NEA FICTION
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BEGIN HERE TODAY
BERYL BORDEN, secretly in love with TOMMY WILSON, discovers that he is engaged to Irene Everett, and kidnaps her with the assistance of her "gang" to force him to give up his girl. Not to break the heart of the aunt who is failing to convince him, Beryl lets Tommy return to Irene who, enraged at the thought of the elopement, listens and postpones the wedding. Later, Tommy goes to the beach and finds Beryl. She has run out on the beach, and the boy is carried out by the tide and found helpless in the surf. She finds him and carries him home. She finds his mother and the sneers of the town. The adventure has in store for her.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER TEN

THE afternoons in which Beryl waited was more in the nature of a central hall at the top floor of a spiral-like building than a mere part of the suite.

Through the many doors people came and went in varying degrees of preoccupation. But all seemed to have one thing in common—an utter obliviousness to her.

She sat quietly withdrawn in a handsome but uncomfortable chair and watched them with keen interest, particularly the gorgeous woman who came in with her chauffeur, the latter carrying a pet dog, and a maid as Gallic as Paris.

In a few minutes the maid reappeared and went at once to a door opposite where Beryl was sitting.

She was careless in closing the door behind her and Beryl could see, through the crack she left, the remarkable quickness with which she extracted a cigarette case from a pocket in her smart black uniform, drew out a cigarette and applied a match to it.

She puffed it greedily and Beryl guessed that the indulgence was a stolen pleasure.

Then, after the maid had crushed out the burning end in an ash tray, Beryl saw her hold the cigarette case to her mouth in the manner of one using a throat spray.

Hurriedly thrusting it back into her pocket she came out of the room leaving the door wide open behind her, and went to rejoin her mistress.

THE room exposed to Beryl's view, was a dainty sitting room. She was charmed by it and decided to have a closer look at its perfection.

But she'd never seen anything like it before and admitted she'd need a postgraduate course in interior decorating ever to think of doing one similar.

From the white and gold mantel she turned to a small Florentine piano and found herself unable to resist the desire to run her fingers over the keys.

The tone of the instrument delighted her. She sat down on the rose and blue striped cushion of the bench and began to play very softly. But the music she wanted, the romantic music of long ago, was not at her command.

She was not an accomplished pianist—having had neither time nor money to develop her talent—so she turned to playing the things she knew—the chords and runs of her song accompaniment.

This set her to singing, but she had not forgotten entirely where she was and that she might disturb some one if she made any "noise" as her musical efforts were called at home.

So she smothered her voice and sang in a velvety monotone.

Always, when she sang consciously, she sang to an audience. Mostly it was an audience of one—her father as her fancy pictured him.

He'd have liked her music, she thought, and just for him she'd learned a tender ditty or two. Now she sang them with her head on one side and dreamy light in her soft gray eyes.

PRESENTLY the dreamy light faded in tears, but she sang on, her voice a bit choked, yet vibrant with the wish in her heart—the wish to have known her father. There was loneliness in it, too—the loneliness of one who walks alone.

When she stopped, her hands remained poised over the keys and she stared away into space beyond the silk-lined walls of the room into the smiling face of her father. "You liked it?" she asked, and was startled to hear a voice behind her say, "Very much."

She turned in a flash and the

newcomer wondered at her surprise, since, he believed, she had just addressed him.

"Oh," Beryl stammered, "I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what, pray? For some of the loveliest sounds ever heard hereabouts?"

Beryl's confusion left her and she stared at the man with a coldness that dared him to bait her further.

"I mean it," he said quietly. "But I was hasty, for you may be looking for a job."

He smiled and Beryl smiled with him. "No," she said, "I'm not a singer."

"No," he agreed with her, "you are not a singer, thank the Lord, but I'd like to hear whether that is the case."

"Sometimes. Are you sorry you're not a singer?"

"Yes," Beryl answered simply, "but no one knows it except you and my father."

"Well, I'm not sorry—not if you turn out to be what I think you are."

Again Beryl stared at him in demand of an explanation. "I think you are an entertainer," he told her. "Would you care to try it out?"

"Try it out?" Beryl repeated dubiously.

"Yes, since you're here at the studio it won't be any trouble for any of us. I've a free moment to give to it."

Come along, and try not to forget what you were singing just now and how you were singing it."

"Oh, but I can't," Beryl protested. "I'm waiting for my sister. She's having an air test—you sent for her, you know, Irene Everett. She's a soprano."

The man shook his head. "Then I didn't send for her," he declared emphatically. "The only soprano I care for is Jenny Lind."

"Her teacher has great hopes for her," Beryl boasted.

THE man nodded. "I see—the teacher arranged the test. Quite often they turn up good material for us—and quite often—but come along. I want to hear what you can do. I'll see that your sister is informed of your whereabouts."

Beryl began to feel excited as she was conducted to an office-like room down a corridor. There an alert-looking young man was introduced to her.

She left that room for still another. The man whose name she did not yet know remained behind. This time he was led to a room that looked like a drapery display to her, or a stage set to exhibit a microphone. A piano stood beside it and Beryl was seated there.

"Now will you please play and sing for yourself?" the alert young man asked her with a casual friendliness that helped greatly to put her at ease. "The same thing you were singing when Mr. Barnhoff heard you."

A hint of stage fright appeared in Beryl's expression. It brought a soothing, "You've never done this before, have you?" from the young man.

Beryl shook her head.

"Well, just take it easy while you warm up a little. Mr. Barnhoff won't be listening in for while yet. He had something else to do."

The latter statement was untrue, designed to make the ordeal easier for Beryl. For the young man knew that an invisible audience was often more terrifying than a visible one.

As his personal contribution to her success he moved about in quiet activity, softly whistling cheerful tunes.

Beryl's hands hovered uncertainly over the piano keys. "You're scared," she said to herself scornfully. "Beryl Borden, you're scared!"

In self reproof she began to play with a stern determination. The resultant sounds displeased her more than her stage fright had done.

"That's no good," she said aloud and stopped. The helpful young man came over and stood beside her.

"They say that Kreiser always plays to his wife—no matter how

she scolded him."

She scolded her voice and sang on in a velvety monotone.

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