

The MELODY GIRL

by RUTH DEWEY GROVES
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BEGIN HERE TODAY
IRENE BORDEN, secretly in love with TOMMY PRENTISS, dares his compliment with her half-truths, but fails to convince him that it is his turn to be the one to come.

Irene wants to be a radio singer. She secures an audition and takes Beryl to the studio. Beryl's voice accidentally bears and is charmed by it.

She gives her a test and offers a contract. Irene accepts. Her voice is bitter-sweet. For Irene fails and the radio voices never. Irene makes promises to elope with Tommy. She has a secret and the marriage is postponed.

Beryl is shocked. Irene tries to forget her hopeless love for Tommy by going to parties with PRENTISS. Irene is a good sport. She tries to win Prentiss from Irene.

Irene attempts to win Prentiss from him.

Next morning Beryl becomes ill and faints.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE
IREL had not locked the bathroom door, an oversight that saved a deal of trouble. Irene was able to get in without waiting for some one to break down the door.

She took one look at Beryl lying on the floor—a stain of red on her forehead where it had struck against the bathtub as she fell—and ran screaming to her mother's room.

Mrs. Everett was scarcely less panic-stricken than Irene when she saw Beryl, but between them they got the terrified girl to her bed and then let Mr. Everett take charge.

Beryl soon regained consciousness and saw in a moment into what confusion she had thrown the family. Therefore she said nothing about the pain in her head and waited quietly for the doctor.

When he came she confided to him that it was the pain in her throat that worried her. No, she hadn't fainted. She had slipped. A little dizzy, perhaps. Yes, she might have been feverish before she went to bed.

When the doctor left she realized that he hadn't given her any information at all. She was to remain in bed all day and he would come back on the morrow.

She obeyed these instructions until afternoon and then went to sit on the porch. The pain in her head was gone. She felt as well as usual except for a slight weakness and that queer feeling in her throat, a touch of which remained.

"I guess you just got played out at the party and were too weak to go for a walk around taking a bath at night," her mother diagnosed as she led Beryl downstairs.

"I'm all right," Beryl said. "Don't bother."

But her mother would take no chances, so she said, and insisted upon helping her all the way to the porch. There Beryl remained quietly in a chair, because she didn't want to disobey the doctor's orders altogether.

This was better than staying in bed, she argued with herself. Not half so tiring. If she were really too do as she liked, she'd go down to the beach and sit on the sands in the sun and toast herself. Then the doctor would have something to scold her for, maybe.

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She stirred uneasily in her chair.

Could there be anything wrong with her—with her throat? The doctor had been so definite about coming back. Her throat! She hardly dared think what it would mean to her to have anything injure her throat—anything serious.

Well, their doctor was an old fogey. She'd have a consultation if he said there was anything wrong.

Beryl kept her concern to herself and got a bit of amusement out of Irene's enjoyment of the situation. Irene had assigned to herself the duty of answering the telephone calls.

News of Beryl's fall had traveled quickly from neighbor to neighbor. Irene enjoyed the limelight. Her conversations were invariably sweet but short, and Beryl sensed that she was waiting for one call in particular.

It came at last. Prentiss apologized for keeping them up so late the night before. He and Irene talked for several minutes before he remembered that it was Beryl he should be calling.

Then Irene explained to him that Beryl was "indisposed," and could not come to the telephone. He asked if he might come out from town and, without consulting Beryl, Irene told him that would be all right.

All day Mrs. Everett had been shooting visitors away from Beryl

she had nothing to do but sit and wait.

She closed her eyes suddenly against the sunlight and swallowed hard at the lump in her throat. But she would not start thinking again—she would not! There was so much to fear, so much to guess at.

So much to fear! Her emotion had tightened her throat. It pained

her and all at once she felt very tired.

No matter what came of it, she would have to go to bed and leave the field to Irene when Prentiss arrived.

In Beryl's eyes was that mocking light that so nettled Irene and there was a hint of ridicule in her voice. Irene turned away with a touch of her head and enough discretion to keep silent.

A little later Tommy dropped in and wanted Irene to go for a swim with him. She said she had to shampoo her hair.

All three sat on the porch for a while. Beryl was silent and quivered inwardly over the adoration in Tommy's eyes whenever he rested on Irene.

Irene chattered lightly of nothing, in high spirits but noticeably out of tune with Tommy. In Tommy's mind there dawned a growing question.

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PRESENTLY Irene left them—to make herself beautiful for Prentiss. Beryl well knew. She wondered if Irene had made the trap and that love to be held must be fed on something more substantial.

Irene was fooling herself, too, for she was the type who would make herself charming only when she had a companion.

Some day she would let herself go and very likely become frowzy. She was that type. She had appeared ungroomed at the breakfast table too often for Beryl to doubt it.

"Love to be held!" The phrase caught in Beryl's mind. Was she mistaken? Here was she, loving Tommy in spite of herself. What effort did he put forth to hold that love? None at all.

Would there be some one to go on loving Irene, knowing her shortcomings? She knew Tommy and she went on loving him, but Tommy was not like Irene. He was quite the reverse, for that matter.

The more you studied Tommy, the better you liked him. But if you scratched the surface of Irene's character—

Charitably Beryl turned her thoughts from that track. But what about Tommy if he married Irene and discovered that he had made a mistake?

Tommy seemed to think himself alone. He sat with his head in his hands and said nothing.

"I'm just an old shoe to him," Beryl thought bitterly (forgetting how dear old shoes to weary feet). "But, oh, Tommy, Tommy, I could love you if you'd let me!"

The rush of desire, the thought, was so intense that for a few seconds Beryl was startled. She almost expected Tommy to look up as though she had spoken her thoughts aloud and he had heard.

How could she prevent Tommy from marrying Irene? Would she need to? There was Prentiss. But if nothing came of Prentiss' interest had one a right to interfere in another's life?

"Right or no right, I'll stop this match if I could!" Beryl thought.

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