

Today's Short Story

A NEW MOTHER

By Maribelle Morrison



"I saw 'Orchids for Three,'" he said bewildered. "But you—you're not the star."

JIM JUNIOR didn't even notice that Mona was looking at him. He was worried because he couldn't figure things out, and no one had told him anything. Even at 10, Jim Junior had a scientific turn of mind and liked to have everything cut and dried.

To begin with, what was the reason for this unexpected vacation from school? At Graystone Academy, where Jim was a boarder, they were awfully mean about letting a guy out for week-ends. You were only allowed three a term. . . . He and Dad were sorta green about vacations—they liked being together. Maybe they liked it more than ordinary fathers and sons, because Jim Junior had no mother; she had died when he was three.

For one horrible minute, he'd thought that something awful had happened to Dad. Maybe he was ill. Maybe he was dead!

But he had soon grinned in relief. Nothing could have happened to Dad. Aunt Jane would have broken any bad news last night. People didn't keep bad news very long.

A CROSS the room he caught Mona's eye. Not a bad kid, Mona, for a girl. Pity she was delicate and had that giggly Miss O'Malley for governess. Mona's lips were closed firmly, as if she were having a struggle to keep quiet. Now she caught his eye, and leaned forward. Suddenly, her words came out with a rush. "I know something! Uncle's . . . married . . . again!"

Jim Junior stared at her, blinking. Married. His Dad married? It sounded queer . . . awfully queer. Jim Junior felt a shaky feeling in his knees.

"But that isn't all," Mona drew a breath. She looked at him half pityingly, half triumphantly. She liked Jim, but she liked a sensation better.

"Go on!" He set his jaw.

"He's married a film star . . . Mona's eyes were round as saucers. "A film star? Like . . . like . . . Janet Gaynor!"

JIM JUNIOR sat down on the nearest chair. His face felt red. A film star. People like Dad didn't marry film stars, did they? He gulped. Yes, they did. Johnny Farmer, at his school, had a mother who was a big star. He'd always felt sorry for Johnny Farmer. Oh, his mother was pretty . . . she was too pretty for a mother. And she gave him lots of things . . . and he had more pocket money than any guy in the school. But Mrs. Farmer had an awfully sissy name on the films . . . Bettina Madison, they called her. The other guys called Johnny "Bettina Madison's little boy."

It was awful for Johnny. Then, too, his mother was hardly ever home when Johnny had his vacation. She was always in Europe, or somewhere. Johnny got letters with foreign stamps . . . but that didn't make up.

"She's probably awfully cute . . . Mona said helpfully. "Film stars are awfully pretty sometimes . . ."

TIM JUNIOR grinned. Johnny Farmer's mother was pretty . . . but not the sort of way you wanted your mother to be. She had white hair, like an Eskimo, and terribly long red nails . . . and the other guys said she painted her toe-nails.

Mona edged up to him. This was a dangerous business, but it was awfully thrilling. "I can tell you something else. She's playing in a film that's on today in the village. It's called 'Orchids for Three.' Mona's eyes sparkled; she touched Jim Junior on the arm. "We could go down and see it . . ."

No one . . . them go. Miss O'Malley thought they'd gone into the yard to ride Mona's new bike. But Mona took 50 cents out of her savings bank with a knife . . . and they cut down the village street.

There were only a few feet from the Brentwood Palace Cinema when Mona said suddenly: "I bet they'll put your picture in the paper . . . with her . . ."

she couldn't. No one could have guessed at his thoughts. He had never thought Dad would marry. Not without telling him.

IT WASN'T as if he would have minded terribly. In fact, he had often thought that he would like a mother. But he wanted the usual kind. A mother like Tubby O'Neill's mother, for instance. Mrs. O'Neill was a bit fat, like Tubby, but she had the nicest smile and she could think of more exciting things for him and Tubby to do in the vacation. . . . Besides, she knew just how to treat a boy. She never kissed Tubby in front of the other guys . . . though Tubby admitted he hugged her plenty when he got her alone!

He wouldn't have minded that sort of mother. But a film star. . . . They met Miss O'Malley coming down the road; she looked very excited. She pounced on Mona and shook her . . . just a little, because Mona was delicate.

"Mona! Where have you been?" Mona told her. She told everything. Better to break it to Miss O'Malley than mother! More and more she felt sure mother would be really mad. Besides, she was a bit scared about Jim Junior; he looked rather sick.

MISS O'MALLEY looked curiously at Jim.

"So you've seen her . . . your new mother?"

"Yes." Jim's face went red again. He wouldn't say a word. Miss O'Malley looked rather uncomfortable for a minute. Then she hurried the children forward.

"Better brush up first, Jim . . . then come downstairs quickly. Your father is here . . ."

"Dad!" Something caught in Jim's throat. He wanted to see Dad . . . he wanted it badly. But Dad with a film star . . . with a film star called Babs. . . . Jim rushed upstairs again. It was quite a long time before he walked downstairs again.

"Jim, old man!" This was his father, pumping his hand, slapping him on the back. He had to try to smile back . . . his father looked so terribly pleased to see him . . . but he felt as if the smile was crooked on one side of his face.

"I've got a surprise for you, Jim. A big surprise . . ."

HE was conscious of Aunt Jane, and another figure with her. But he simply couldn't look past his father. Somewhere in that room Babs Honeyford was waiting, with her long red nails and her white hair. If she kissed him, he felt he would be sick.

Jim Junior gulped. "I know," he said. "I saw her . . . this afternoon. Mona and I went to see 'Orchids for Three' . . . so I . . . saw her in it." There was a short, astounded laugh from his father, and a sound of annoyance from Aunt Jane.

"You saw me! You must have awfully good sight, Jim!" He went forward slowly, as if he were hypnotized. The lady was holding out her hand . . . just one . . . to shake his.

He drew a long breath. She wasn't a young lady. She must be almost as old as Dad . . . as old as Mrs. O'Neill. Tubby's mother. She had a blue dress with white on it . . . very like the dress Tubby's mother wore to the Prize-Giving. She had a nice hat, and beads round her neck. She didn't look a bit like the movies. She looked as if she might be some boy's mother . . .

HE went a little farther forward. Then he stopped, staring up into her face. The relief on his own was enormous. "This wasn't that Babs. This lady wasn't even a bit like her. "I saw 'Orchids for Three,'" he said, bewildered. "But you're not the star . . ."

He frowned, trying to remember. He didn't remember her at all. "I only had a very small part," she said, apologetically. "I used to be on the stage once . . . but I was never much good. And I'm not going in the films any more. Your father and I thought it would be nice if we all had a house in the country . . . a real house . . ."

She smiled at him; without realizing it, he was standing quite close to her. She had an awfully nice smile. "We thought you wouldn't mind a few days away from school . . . to help us find the right sort of house . . ."

She said. Her eyes twinkled. You knew she had things like rabbits . . . and maybe a pony . . . on her mind.

JIM's father had come forward. "I think he's disappointed you're not a star, Mary!"

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

With Major Hoople



MEET YOURSELF, MAJOR!

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FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS

WHAT TIME DID YOU NOTICE NUTTY COOK WAS MISSING?

AS I RECALL, I WENT INTO THE BEDROOM AT EXACTLY 9:35 P.M. . . . THE WINDOW WAS OPEN AND HE WAS GONE!

YES!

WAS THAT SOON AFTER YOU'D RECEIVED PHONE CALLS FROM PEOPLE, BAWLING YOU OUT FOR TAKING THE KID INTO YOUR CUSTODY?

THEN YOU FIGURED THE BOY LEFT BECAUSE HE DIDN'T WANT YOU MIXED UP IN A LOT OF GOSSIP AND CRITICISM?

WELL, YOU WERE RIGHT! THEY FOUND THE BOY OUTSIDE JUVENILE HALL, POUNDING ON THE DOOR.

I'VE KNOWN LOTS OF PEOPLE WHO WERE LAW-ABIDING CITIZENS, BUT I NEVER HEARD OF A GUY GOING TO THAT EXTREME TO PROVE IT!!

WHAT?

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WASHINGTON TUBBS II

GET IN, BOYS! THEY GOT MAGLEW!

HEY! LEND A HAND

BANG BANG! BANG BANG!

MOST OF THE MAGLEW GANG REACH THEIR CAR.

ALLEY OOP

THIS IS TREASON! YOU'VE GOT NO BUSINESS ON MY THRONE, WEARIN' TH' MOOVIAN ROYAL CROWN! I'M TH' KING OF MOO-

YOU MEAN YOU WERE KING!

BUT, HOYKAWOW, OOP! IT TAKES BRAINS T'BE A KING! EVERYBODY KNOWS YOU AIN'T GOT BRAINS!

OH, YEAH?? MAYBE THAT'S TH' REASON YOU WERE SUCH A BUST!

OOP, THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE! GIMME BACK MY CROWN, AN' GIT OFFN THAT THRONE, OR I'LL CALL IN TH' ROYAL GUARD!

THAT WON'T GET YOU A THING! TH' GUARD TAKES ORDERS FROM TH' CROWN-AN' RIGHT NOW, TH' CROWN IS ON MY HEAD - BUT -

BUT WHAT?

I'LL MAKE A BARGAIN WITH YOU!

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BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES

WHERE DID THE FOLKS GO?

GORA HAS SOMETHING UP HER SLEEVE, AND NO MISTAKE

I DUNNO! CORA SEEMED ALL EXCITED ABOUT SOMETHING! SHE WAS POURIN' TALK AT TH' PROFESSOR, A PILE A MINUTE

WELL, I DUNNO! IT'D TAKE PLENTY TO EXCITE ME, RIGHT NOW! HONESTLY, THIS IS TH' MOST PEACEFUL SAND PILE I'VE EVER SEEN

ISN'T IT, THO? IT'S A SWEET PLACE TO LET DOWN, ALL RIGHT

YEAH! N'WHEN YA LET DOWN ENOUGH TO GET REAL CHUMMY, I'M STILL WAITIN' TO HEAR HOW YA EVER HAPPENED T'BE HERE, IN TH' FIRST PLACE! WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

OH! - IT'S ABOUT A PERSON WHO FOUND OUT THAT THERE IS A CROWD

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THE TARZAN TWINS

Despite their fear and horror, Dick and Doc felt a certain exhilaration in flying through the air in the arms of the ape. Many times the boys had thrilled to the spectacular leaps and swings of acrobats in the circus, but no acrobat could perform these flying miracles.

One breath-taking leap followed another, time and again. After Dick and Doc were certain their ape captors would miss their hair-breadth calculations and plunge swiftly earthward, but their fears were groundless. On and on they sped toward their mysterious destination.

Half the time Dick's heart seemed to be in his mouth. He thought of steep roller-coasters, plunging express elevators, terrifying chute-the-chutes, diving airplanes; but none of them had given him the remarkably thrilling sensation he experienced now.

Then suddenly their captors dropped quickly downward through the trees. Before the boys realized what was happening, the apes landed lightly on the back of an elephant! And there beside them, as if conjured up by some extraordinary magic, stood a strange man.

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OUT OUR WAY

GOSH! THIS IS A WONDERFUL COUNTRY!

YES - IT WAS!

NEAREST GATE IS SIX MILES NAWTH!

THE GREAT OPEN SPACES

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By Blosser

By Crane

By Hamlin

By Martin

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

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