

TIMES SERIAL—

## Devil's Laughter.... By Alice M. Laverick

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

OH, I HAD been kissed before. It was part of growing up and losing one's freckles, acquiring a complexion and replacing bones with curves.

There had been a few undramatic skirmishes after high school hops with half-grown or over-grown youths who pressed clumsy kisses on my reluctant lips, provoking no singing in my heart, no feeling of ecstasy. Only boring anti-climax.

But this was different. This was Colin Fitzgerald.

"I'M NOT the first man to fall in love with his nurse," he had said. And I could bear witness to that, also. There had been that middle-aged widower whom I had nursed when I was still but a probationer, who had asked me to share his home and his three children with him.

I had been kissed before. But this was Colin Fitzgerald and I held it to my heart for a long moment and defied anything else to enter.

AND THEN the ghosts came. The ghost of Beatrice Harrington, the ghost of Charlotte Brent, for surely, though Charlotte lived, she yet was dead.

And slowly and wearily I rose to my feet and began to pack for my return to the hospital. I left early the next day.

And I did not see Colin again before I went.

The epidemic was worse even than I had feared and I was kept busy indeed. Which was what I both needed and wanted. So that it was three weeks before I returned again to Innisfall.

IT WAS then that I heard from Ellen that Colin Fitzgerald had gone away again.

"He had this elegant chance," Ellen said vaguely. "I don't know—something to do with horses, it was. And Mark gave him some money, Mark seemed to think it was a fine chance for him. He's gone to Louisiana, I think it is."

I stood by the kitchen window looking out at the scattered scraggy maples in the back yard over the river.

BY CONTRAST with the splendid trees at the front of the house, they were poor specimens indeed. So must I be, I thought bitterly, when taken in consideration with those two lovely ladies whom Colin had once admired.

I was young and green—as green as the first little blade of grass in the spring. He had been amusing himself. Else why had I not heard from him after I returned to the hospital?

"Come and have your tea, Celia," said Ellen, recalling me to the present, the drab and dull present.

I TURNED from the window and came over to the table and sat down. But when I lifted the cup, my hand was trembling.

Sometimes, looking back on the next few years of my life, I smile

a little sadly, remembering how, at the age when most girls are thinking only of clothes and dates and dancing, I was throwing my whole self into my work at the hospital.

To be sure, I was making quite a reputation for myself there at Saint Gregory's.

SO MUCH so that when the new wing was opened up, I was appointed head of the whole surgical floor, something of a triumph for one so young.

Yet I remember, too, my surprise and chagrin that Father Gene was not more impressed by this signal honor given me. Though I should not have been surprised, for he had often urged me not to take myself so seriously.

"You're too young," he would say. "Get out and play more. Go out dancing."

"I KNOW there are plenty of lads so much time at Innisfall. Give them any encouragement at all. Go along and laugh aloud for a change."

He frowned, too, at my spending so much time at Innisfall.

"Every time I go out there," he said once, stopping by my desk at the hospital, "there you sit like an old crone, drinking your tea and kuggamugging with Ellen in the kitchen. In heaven's name, Celia, what's the matter with you?"

"I DON'T know," I said, laughing. "Perhaps I'm a little fey," the laugh dying away instantly, as I remembered that this was the very speech Charlotte had made to me so often that first summer at Innisfall.

"Then you're not fey," Father Gene was saying emphatically. "You're as sane as anyone I know. Indeed, you're a little too sane."

"At your age you should be giggling instead of sitting there like

a graven image. If you had a vocation, now, I might understand how you'd like to live like one cloistered. But I don't believe you have."

I SHOOK my head, laughing again at the idea of my giving a vocation. He eyed me shrewdly for a moment, then he said, "I've a notion you have some special lad in mind, Celia, that dims all the others."

"Touche," I said with what was meant for airy nonchalance.

It must have been most unconvincing, for he added hastily, "Now, Celia, I didn't mean to pry into your business. But if anything's bothering you and you'd like my advice, you know I'd be glad at any time."

HE LEFT abruptly at this, leaving me staring after him, somewhat puzzled. Until it suddenly dawned on me that Father Gene was disturbed, thinking that I might be in love with another woman's husband.

Naturally, he could not suspect that Colin Fitzgerald was the man who dimmed all others in my poor foolish heart.

(To Be Continued)

## 50TH WEDDING DATE TO BE CELEBRATED

The 50th wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Chester Randall will be observed with a buffet dinner and open house at their home, 1312 N. Olney st., from 6 to 10 p. m. Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Randall have lived in Indianapolis for the last 25 years. They were married near West Milton, O., on Oct. 6, 1896.

The couple has one daughter, Mrs. Orville Korn of Indianapolis, four grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

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Four Indianapolis men have been awarded gold buttons in recognition of 50 years of service in the meat industry.

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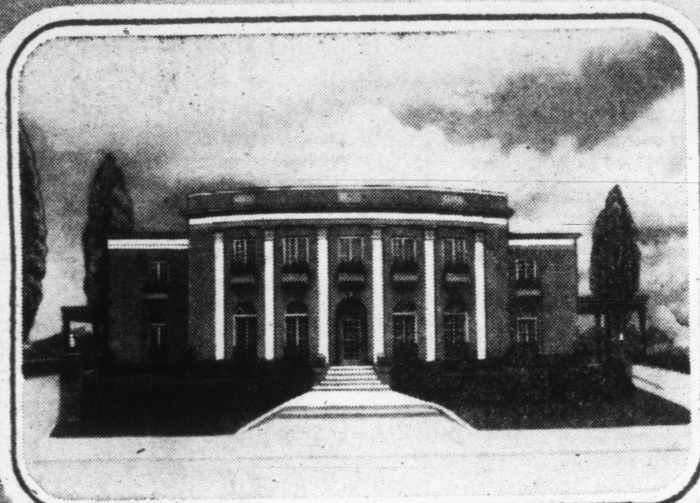
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