

## The Middle Ground

By MARION RUBINCAM

## CLAIRE'S LITTLE TRIUMPH

Chapter 100

The song seemed to be a contest between the three drums of the orchestra and the large brunette. There was a struggle lasting through three verses, each louder than the other, and they ended about even in a storm of applause. But the brunette outdistanced the drums and finished triumphant in the encore. After which she retired smiling, the three drummers mopped their brows and comparative silence settled down over the restaurant.

In this comparative silence Maisie shrieked over to Claire for more particulars. Maisie's voice was never exactly low and pleasing, and she had to compete with several hundred voices that also were not exactly low and pleasing.

"But Claire, darlin'—you've kept it from us. We thought you and Luther were parted for keeps. Why didn't you let us know everything was balmy again?"

The man sitting between them and one of the girls got up to dance. Maisie moved next to Claire, where she did not have to talk so loud. Grange and Luther found they were in the same profession and were talking and laughing together.

"Oh," Claire said easily, "we thought we'd have a little honeymoon together—second honeymoon, you know—and not let on."

"Is he—are you—have you been—?" Maisie wanted to be delicate, she also wanted information. Not knowing how to achieve both ends, she floundered about helplessly.

"Yes, we've been living at my flat," Claire helped her out sweetly. She was much cleverer than Maisie, who adored her, so she used Maisie to send out information to her friends.

How long had it been since Jim dropped from the crowd? At least a month—she had to give the impression that the reconciliation was longer than that.

Luther would be sure to blunder into telling the truth, he never could lie decently, she remembered. Here he was talking suspension bridges and steel cables with Grange.

She slid her hand under his at the table, to attract his attention, Maisie was all eyes and ears—what fun she would have telling the girls this. She was the first to know.

"It's Luther's flat really," she went on. "We used to be there—I just kept it on while—well, while Loo went off to look after his mother and Amy. Oh, but we made it up long ago, didn't we, Loo? Her hand pressed his warningly. "Only Loo had to go away on a trip, and I couldn't leave the show—so we said nothing—we didn't want a lot of gossip."

Maisie leaned closer, lowering her voice to a whisper—a whisper which carried more clearly than ordinarily spoken words.

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"That accounts for it," she said. "I always said it was you who threw over Jim. I think it's grand of you to do that, for your husband. I always told the girls you and Luther were really in love—I'm so excited. Poor Jim, though—Claire, you might have let him down gently. Do you think he wants to make you jealous with that girl? She can't hold a candle to you for looks or style."

Claire hoped Luther had gone back to his discussion of cantilevers, air pressure, hydraulics and such things. She glanced at Jim's table. It was empty—she turned to look at the dancers.

They were crowded together on the small floor, hot, uncomfortable, stepped upon, each couple holding tightly together, not so much from affection as from necessity because there was no room for freedom, the whole compact mass swinging slowly, rhythmically to the music.

They were not separate individuals, not separate couples, they were a mass, they were hot humanity, they were cross without knowing it and tired without admitting it. They only thought they were having a good time because this sort of thing was taught them as the thing to do for pure enjoyment.

Only the slim, dark little girl in Jim's arms seemed cool and at ease. Claire danced around the edge of the floor where the crowd was not so thick, skillfully steering his way among the couples, his arm not so much clasping the girl as holding the crowd away from her.

"He's dancing near the edge so's you can see him," Maisie's large whisper came again. "Trying to make you jealous, Claire. I wondered why he didn't bring his girl to our table. Now I know. He was just afraid you and your husband might come in and make him look like a dunce. I'm glad I phoned you."

Claire wanted to stop this. Luther

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might hear. She turned to him, her eyes asking to dance. But the music stopped suddenly. Jim passed with a short nod to the table, the stranger's eyes gave them a brief, unconcerned glance.

A tough little girl dressed in Colonial costume, but with silk tights beneath the panniers instead of skirts, began to sing.

## Tomorrow—The Dance

## Heart Problems

Dear Mrs. Thompson: I have been going with a boy friend for three months and would like to give him a birthday present. His birthday is in March. My birthday was the second of February and he did not give me anything, but he forgot that it was my birthday. What would be an appropriate gift?

SARA. Do not give the young man anything. The limited time you have been friends would not make a gift appropriate.

"J. H.": I am not posted on legal matters. The lawyer who draws up your will will give you the desired information. If it is inconvenient to see the lawyer, write to him.

## SUGAR CAMPS OPEN

CRAWFORDSVILLE, March 3.—The few scattering sugar tree camps in this locality are opening up for the annual spring run. That was once an important occasion now has dwindled with the vanishing forests until it now is a novelty. With the coming of low priced sugars, the actual need of maple syrup is confined only to those who use it on their breakfast cakes.

## New Arrival of

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## TO GIVE RECEPTION FOR G. A. R. OFFICERS

Plans for a reception on the afternoon of Monday, March 13 to be given the department commander, R. H. Tyner, Adjutant General Ball, Division Commander McGuire, and other departmental officers of the G. A. R., were completed at a meeting of the Women's Relief Corps Thursday night.

The reception will be held at 2 o'clock in the post rooms. The officers are to be present at a barbecue and entertainment of the local Sons

## Mrs. Snyder Found the Magic Word

Housecleaning is no longer a bug-a-boo with Mrs. Snyder. She found that the one word—Rub-No-More—means "Magic" during housecleaning.

And she found this all out at her grocers. Upon his shelves she saw some R. N. M. White Naptha Soap alongside of a number of packages of Rub-No-More Washing Powder, Yellow Naptha Soap, Soap Flakes and Spotless Cleanser.

These reminded her of last Fall when she cleaned house with these products. As if by magic—her work was easier, more economical and all cleaning finished in less than half the usual time. Moral: "Let the Rub-No-More Elephants do your housecleaning."—Advertisement.

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## Gasper Township Farmers Discuss Fertilizer Orders

HAWTHORN HILLS, O., March 3.—Consideration of fertilizer orders and of membership in the cooperative dairy products marketing company, which is being formed in Preble county, was the principal business at the Potter schoolhouse Tuesday evening. Explanation of the fertilizer proposition was given by Harry Stover, who

acted as chairman. E. D. Turner, county agent, described the plan of the organization of the dairy company, and several farmers announced their intention of joining.

A get-together meeting was decided upon, and the invitation of Mrs. Caskey to hold it at her home was accepted. The date will be announced later. An arrangement committee was named, consisting of Mrs. Caskey, Mrs. Mack Cohee and Mr. Oler.

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