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# Vermont Maid Syrup

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He would have shouted, but in that moment there was apparent, a little farther away, her bright head brilliant under the street lights, Cynthia with Hugh Bascom. Hugh was unlocking his car.

He couldn't speak. The girl looked up in his face and was dumb too. When the doorman came up with his cheery "Taxi, sir?" she started to get some assent, but Chet cut sharply across it. "I've got my own car." His hand was a vise on her arm, steering her toward it.

The girl gave a startled glance back to the other cars just starting off. She said quickly, "Don't bother about me. I live north of the park. I'll find a taxi—I'd rather. You go on with your friends."

"That's out," said Chet briefly. He unlocked his car, thrust her in.

"But you were taking —"

"She's got herself another fellow. She didn't like waiting." His voice was hard, expressionless. He went round to the other side and got in.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Please let me out." She turned to him in an energy of appeal. "Go back and join them. You can square it—you know you can square it."

HE HAD started the car but she went on urging, so he said shortly, "Don't know where they're going."

"You can try all the places," she told him. "They haven't much start. You can find them —"

He did think of it. He thought of going back, of barging about to all the places they had suggested. He saw himself parking and hurrying into hotels and scanning dance floors. No, he wouldn't be that kind of ape. He had his own pride too. Cynthia had walked out on him. Perhaps he'd been wrong, but she might have understood. Now he was washed up. This girl had done him in pretty completely.

She said, in a steady, considering voice, "I was your bad luck, wasn't I? And I don't know what was the matter with me. I don't know many people, of course—I've been away so much—but I've always got by before. I've never had a rush, of course, but I've never been stuck before."

No, she'd have to wait till tonight to pull that superlative performance.

She went on, "I'm all right, really, in a crowd I know. But strangers—I just don't catch on."

He said gruffly, "You haven't got your stuff in a show window."

THAT WAS the answer—everything on display. Diamonds or paste, just so it glittered. What price hearts of gold when there was platinum hair? And then he thought of hair that was red gold like a flame, and a skin that was satin white and softer than down, of eyes like green jade—maybe it was just that show-window stuff that had got him down. Maybe he didn't know the real Cynthia at all—the Cynthia that had walked out with Bascom. Well, he wasn't likely to know her now. He was washed out.

She was saying, "Anyhow, I'm going back to college day after tomorrow, and it will be all right then."

He was going back tomorrow, and nothing would be all right any more. But he couldn't tell her that. Off the top of his mind he asked, "What college do you go to?"

"Smith."

"Maybe I'll be seeing you," he gave back mechanically. "I drop down there sometimes. I'm Princeton."

She said bluntly, "I shouldn't think you'd ever want to see me again."

That was right too. But he maintained steadily, "Oh, tonight was just one of those times."

They drove on in silence. They were past Lincoln's statue, where the light was flung on the rugged, patient face that seemed waiting, through decades of disappointment, for a general that would cease its plaudits and fold in his ways. They wound through wooded slopes with the façade of the silhouetted behind them, against the pallor of the lighted sky. Then they drove up to the sheer, overtopping cliff which was her home.

Lights were burning in windows on the top. She pointed up. "The ours."

He ducked his head down to look. "Nice drop."

"THAT'S what I thought, tonight," he told him. "I thought, when I was dressing for this dance, that it would be most as easy to go out that window. I don't know what it's like, going into an arena. Getting ready, with your hair all ice and your heart knocking, hoping against hope that this time you'll have a really glorious break. That's what I thought tonight. I thought it might be the break. And look what happened. And I'll be pretending that it was divine. Why don't they play it another way? In the old days they talked about wallflowers, but a girl could sit out dance or two without feeling crucified the way she feels when she's nailed to a man. And look at the man's part of it. Look at you. I spoiled something for you tonight. You couldn't help yourself. It's a fool's game."

"It is," he said soberly.

The doorman walked forward from the iron grille of the entrance and to the pair; then the sight of the girl's head above her evening wrap sent him back reassured, waiting.

She said scornfully, "But I would mind it, I know, if I had the right way to show off."

CHET put a sudden arm about her shoulders. "Don't you worry about your waders. And don't you talk about jumping out of windows. That's tosh. The thing is hang on."

That went for him too. Just take Hang on in a world where there was red-gold beacon, no soaring uprush of hope. For he felt, with queer definiteness, that Cynthia was gone from him. And something in his feeling about Cynthia, that had made her so infinitely precious to him, was gone from him too.

Well, he could take it. Just as this had taken it tonight. They were both pretty sunk now, though. He was glad she was going back to college; she said she went all right there. It crossed his mind that she might go all right where if a man took the trouble to hang over. If he had her at his disposal, instance, he could set the stage in any shape, give the lads a song and dance beforehand, have them on their feet. Gaiety would bring her out, he thought. She certainly had something coming her. And then, because he was young, wretched and turbulent and sorry for himself, and for himself, he gave her a good-bye kiss.

Her lips clung to his in a touchingly unguarded response. "You've been sweet," she said in a small, breathless voice.

For a moment he forgot his own going ache. He thought that she was sweet herself, and pretty darned plucky, thought what a crazy shame it all. Shutting off his inside lights—that doorman was too interested—he bent toward her again. His lips were quirked with a funny little smile because he had remembered that pretty soon he would have to ask her name.