

the money she'd earned on good shoes for her little mother. So quiet, Abby. Did anything happen at the office?"

With painstaking care Abby buttered a bit of bread. "No, mother. As a matter of fact, Mr. Bret Curtis asked me for a date for a week from Friday. I believe it is. I don't know if I've mentioned him or not. He's the younger one."

"You mean one of the partners in the firm?" Jane Marsden paused, in a flash seeing Abby settled on her own estate on Long Island, swinging into the drive in a smart new station wagon. But in the next second she was stricken. "Abby! What are you going to wear?"

"Oh, my goodness, that'll be easy enough. They have such bargains these days if you know where to look. . . . Now don't you get yourself all worked up, mother."

She could not have mentioned the thirty dollars, of course. But that sum grew larger every minute—grew positively monumental. Abby kept backing up and looking at it from new angles. Borrowing was out of the question. That was a psychological impossibility, even if there had been anyone from whom she could have borrowed. Abby's father, it so happened, had been a chronic borrower, who had left his wife and children nothing but his final remorse and an accumulation of unpaid bills. Debt, the bogeyman of Abby's childhood, was still a monster, never for one moment to be embraced. But she must have that thirty dollars. The need to have it was practically as vital as the need to breathe.

We are very apt to measure ourselves by our aspiration instead of our performance. —GEORGE ELIOT.

It would have been agreeable to spend the whole evening going over her financial situation. Unfortunately, she had a date with George Fletcher.

George had a rather formal way of arriving—take her to the movies—as if they were going to the opera. He invariably knew what pictures were being featured in the local theaters, and the precise moment at which the newsreels would go off and the pictures would come on. There was no risk in an evening with George. On the other hand, there was no particular promise of adventure.

After the movie—which had to do with Lana Turner, suffering with charm—they repaired to a little neighborhood soda fountain. George seized the opportunity to talk about marriage.

EVEN his first proposal, which had taken place several months ago, had lacked a romantic note. The idea of their marriage was something George seemed to regard as a good, sound, sensible proposition which Abby would eventually come to see in a favorable light.

"You haven't got anything against me, have you, Abby?"

"Not a single thing," she said, stirring her strawberry soda. "But the trouble is—and I'm awfully sorry, George!—I just don't love you."

"You're looking for love the way it is in the movies," he told her. "Marriage isn't like that."

"Isn't it?"

"No."

"What is it, then?"

"Well, it's two people taking a long-range view of their lives—having a lot in common—wanting a home— He warmed to his theme. "Now if you kept your job the first two years or so, we could swing the payments on a little house in Jackson Heights or maybe someplace in Jersey. When the house was paid for we could think about a family—and by that time I ought to be making a pretty good income. Then the way I figure, we could get going on a really good plan for our savings—and I could retire around fifty."

subject. She didn't know what to say. The future was already waiting for her in clouds of glory. The future, the very specific future, was Friday, October the tenth.

The next morning her mother found her in the kitchen, making sandwiches. "What on earth for, Abby?"

Abby reached for the cream cheese. "Just a way of saving lunch money, mother. Smart, don't you think?"

"No!" Jane Marsden flushed suddenly. "I won't have it, Abby!"

"But —"

"Oh, I know how much you enjoy having lunch at Sanborn's with the other girls. It's one of the few real pleasures you have in your life. And I'm not going to have you making any more sacrifices just to do things for your brother and me!"

Abby hesitated. If she explained about the little black dress, her mother would cancel the appointment she had with the dentist that afternoon. That was precisely what she'd do. She'd go around with an aching tooth and not say a word. Abby put down the knife and the cream cheese. It would be simpler, she decided, to go without lunch for ten days. Lots of people went without lunch when they were dieting—and none of them ever seemed to drop dead.

During the noon hour the thought of a tuna-fish sandwich, a cup of coffee and a hot-fudge sundae occurred to her. But it was just a habit peevishly asserting itself, and not a real torment and temptation.

Instead of lunching she walked over to Sixth Avenue.

Timidly she entered a small, rather grubby-looking jewelry store, and confronted an old man who had obviously lost all interest in life and all faith in the human race.

"I saw your advertisement in the paper," Abby began. "I think it said you bought old gold?"

He looked at her and waited, refusing to commit himself about the advertisement in the paper.

"Well," faltered Abby, "I brought some things —"

She put the little hoard of treasures on the counter, where they looked pathetic and foolish, and as if they were reproaching her for betraying them to the cold eye of a stranger. With no great enthusiasm the old man scrutinized Abby's baby locket, a water-logged gold watch, and her high-school class ring. He finally announced they were worth no more than four dollars and twenty-five cents.

That was a shock. But Abby accepted the money, steeling herself against giving any backward glance to the sad little souvenirs of her childhood. Hurrying out of the place, she was mentally adding the four dollars and twenty-five cents to the eight dollars she would save on lunch money. She was not a bit discouraged, because she had already remembered hearing about a mail-order establishment which gave people envelopes to address in their spare time.

That night she managed to smuggle the first big box of envelopes into the apartment. Her mother would be exceedingly upset if she were to know about any extra job like this, but it was possible for Abby to work late, in her bedroom, with a towel spread before the door so that the light could not shine through to the hall. It was all going to be quite simple, she told herself happily. If she worked until two o'clock every morning she would earn exactly eighteen dollars, and that would be twenty-five cents more than was needed. She would go a bit short on sleep for a while, but that was not of the slightest im-

(Continued on Page 213)

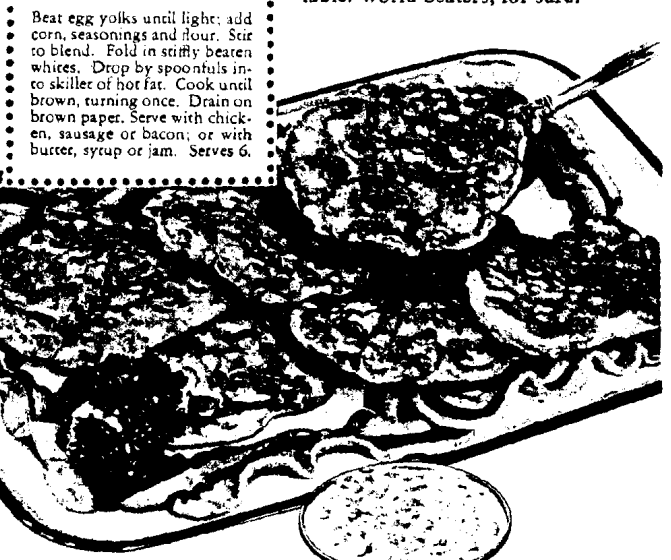


World Beating! Corn Fritters Del Maiz

RECIP FOR
CORN FRITTERS DEL MAIZ

- 3 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups Del Maiz Brand Cream Style Corn
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 cup sifted Del Maiz all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup fat or oil

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