

# Bride in Spirit only

Continued from Front Page

Not bad, this cigar, eh, Tankey?"

"Very good, indeed," Dr. Rissmore affirmed. "William's selection of brands is A one. I am in perfect comfort to continue listening."

"So am I," the minister chimed. Turning to his host, he pleaded: "William, please go on from where you left off. We promise not to interrupt."

"Very good, I resume at once," the host assured them.

"Let me see. Yes, I was on my way from the court to Mildred's house. As I drew near, a feeling of alarm and fear came over me and positively cowed me. Crowds were gathered so densely in the block my progress was impeded. Fire engines were on both sides of the street; an ambulance in front of the open door was guarded by two policemen.

"In a veritable panic, my heart sinking with dread forebodings, a sudden, retching pain stabbing at my vitals, I rushed up the steps to the officers, made known my identity and passed rapidly into the house.

"I called out in my agony to know what had happened; whether anyone was injured.

"A friendly hand stopped me, then led me to the kitchen, where on the floor with the ambulance

doctor and nurse bending over and administering to her, I beheld my heart's best love, unconscious and burned, being bathed in oil and swathed in bandages of cotton.

"In hushed whispers, I learned the details.

"Mildred, my love, had been cleaning a dress with gasoline, when there was a sudden flare, a blinding explosion, and the sound of a heavy body falling.

"The family upstairs had rushed down to the kitchen which was ablaze, but a neighbor had been before them. Hearing the noise of the explosion and seeing the flames bursting from the window, he had climbed in through another window, snatched up rugs from the floor and smothered the flaming clothes on the prone, unconscious figure.

"In a little while, tender, loving hands lifted the tortured body, placed her on a stretcher and bore it to the ambulance.

"I climbed in and sat beside the sufferer, hoping, praying, watching eagerly for some symptom of returning consciousness as the ambulance, with screeching siren and clanging gong, hurried upon its way.

"I was rewarded finally by hearing a slight moan, followed later by a smothered scream, as we reached the hospital and carried her into the emergency ward.

"It was hours before I was permitted to see her again. Joined by her mother and other members of the family, we sat waiting in the reception parlor of the hospital—waiting, sad, weary and distraught, in an agony of suspense; waiting for the message which would bid us hope or condemn us to despair.

"The summons came at last. We were conducted up the stairs into a private ward, where on one of the two beds in the room, Mildred lay, unconscious, still, but breathing faintly.

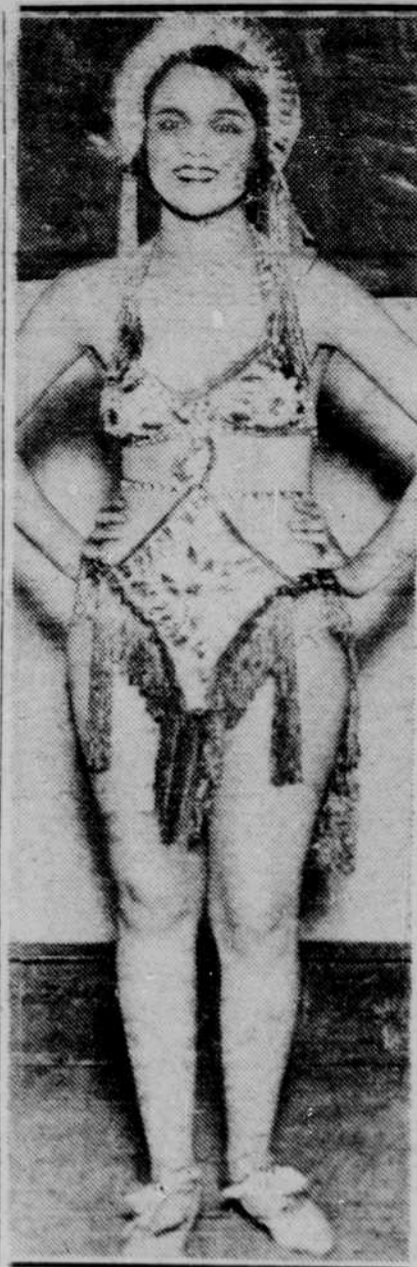
"The doctor was there. He met us with a sad smile trying to bolster our failing courage, as he said in rather a serious tone: 'We are hopeful she may pull through and live. But, we fear her sight is injured, if not lost. It is also a question as to whether she inhaled any of the flames. This we shall know definitely within the next day or two. Her chest, face and arms are burned severely. We shall do our best, however, so you must be brave and hope for the best. On account of the intense pain, she will be kept under opiates for some time. I think you had better go now.'

"Quietly, each one of us looked at the bandaged figure and tipped away.

"I squeezed firmly the doctor's hand as I grasped it in thanks, pleading in husky tones for immediate notification should she regain consciousness or should any change in her condition occur.

"This he promised me. Then I, too, tipped out of the room—a pitiful, dreary, forlorn figure.

"Three days passed ere Mildred gained consciousness. When she did, scream after scream of pain



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arms into her home, she awoke out of a restless sleep and called me. She desired to sit up. Gently I raised her up and fixed her pillows. Her eyes held me in a prolonged stare, then she said: 'Come closer!'

"I placed my arms around her and bent my ear close to catch her words.

"'Will, darling,' she whispered huskily, 'please remember your 'Spirit Bride' will always be near you, loving you and protecting you at all times. Talk over your cases with me. I shall understand, answer you in your dreams when your spirit will blend with mine. I shall guide you on to greater and larger success. This I shall do until you marry and have need of me no longer. I am going now, Will, darling. Thanks so much for everything. Kiss your 'Spirit Bride' goodbye.'

"I kissed her again and again, crying out all the while, 'No, no! You cannot, you must not leave me!'

"The family heard and all came running into the room, as a flow of blood gushed from her mouth—a hemorrhage—almost at the moment of my last kiss. Her body went limp. As I laid her back down gently upon the pillows, her head rolled helplessly to one side.

"Mildred had passed a 'Spirit Bride' into spirit land."

A long silence followed, during which Lawton fought for mastery over his emotions.

Neither of the two friends uttered a word, for the narrator had raised his hand signifying he would continue. Before going so, he lifted his glass and drank, refilled it and drank again.

His voice was somewhat shaky as he resumed, but it gradually grew stronger and surer.

"Boys, we dressed her as a bride, with veil, orange blossoms, and everything. Her burial was my wedding day.

"I trust you understand this explanation and why I insist I am as much married as either of you.

"Mildred has kept her dying promise. She lives here with me, that is, her spirit does. She is my spirit wife. Day and night we hold sweet converse and association. Awake and asleep, I can sense her presence.

"Only for a few hours in each twenty-four is she compelled to absent herself. This happens between the hours of three and six in the morning, when she must return to the place where her ashes rest. At all other hours she is either with me or about the premises just as any living, breathing wife in the flesh would be. She helps me with my cases. Really she is the secret of my continued success. Not one case have I lost by following her advice and directions.

"Yes, I owe everything to her, to my beloved Mildred, who is present with us now."

Again there was silence, dead silence, amid the group after Lawton's tragic recital and startling, concluding statement.

This silence was broken at last by Robbs, the minister, who remarked with a sob in his voice: "Will, old chum, I never knew it was like that. Forgive my banter and chiding. I, too, have had remarkable psychic experiences, some of which I may relate ere we part. Meanwhile, old man, you have my heartfelt sympathy."

"Same here, with like pleadings for forgiveness," Doctor Rissmore hastened to add. "I, too, have a flood of tales I can tell. Before we separate for good, I shall relate a few. I am positive there is a mighty thin veil shrouding this world of ours from spirit land."

"You are right, Tankey," the

clergyman declared. "It is my belief, through this veil between us, those on the other side see us, hear us, note what we do and try to aid us. It is just as a person in a boat on open, clear water may look down into the depths and see what is taking place there, while a person underneath the waves may not see nor note what is taking place above the surface.

"We living beings in this world are like the persons under the water while—Good Lord! I smell perfume. No! It's more like the scent of lilies or apple blossoms."

"I smell it, too," the doctor agreed. "It's getting stronger and I heard distinctly the swish of a dress skirt. Did you hear it, too, Barton?"

"Don't be alarmed, boys!" Lawton reassured them. He moved over to the piano and played softly—Then, "It is orange blossoms you smell. Don't you recall my concluding words? I told you Mildred is here present with us. This scent is how she makes her presence known. The perfume is that of her bridal wreath. You remember I told you we laid her away in her bridal dress and crowned her with her bridal wreath."

Lawton's face lighted with pleasure as he continued calmly, speaking as though he addressed some one who had just entered the room.

"Welcome, Mildred! The boys are our old friends and so pleased to have you join us. Stay with us,

Continued on Page 3,

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and agony, seemingly, rent the walls of the room. Hurriedly, the doctor applied the needle, while the sympathetic nurses did their best to quiet and reassure the suffering patient, until the opiate took effect.

"Ten days had passed since the accident, when I received a summons to the hospital. Hastening there, I found Mildred conscious, in less pain, bearing stoically her anguish. She had been asking for her mother.

"But her mother and I arrived at the same time and we were soon seated beside the bed listening eagerly to the halting account of 'How it happened,' whispered through seared and bandaged lips.

"Four months afterward, Mildred had recovered sufficiently to be removed to her home. She was, however, a frail, wraithlike spectacle of her former self.

"I had pleaded and urged, again and again, during my many and constant visits to the hospital, that her return home should be celebrated by our immediate marriage. I had tried even to have her consent to a quiet wedding in the hospital.

"To all of my pleading and urging she was adamant.

"'No, no, Will!' She would answer. 'I can never fulfill the marital relationship in the flesh. While I realize your love is constant and true, I am yours and you are mine, I cannot burden you with this blind, helpless body. I can and will be your 'Spirit Bride' for the length of my earthly days and throughout eternity.'

"Yes, Mildred was blind. The explosion had burned out the light of her eyes. She had opened her sightless lids to a blank wall of darkness. Worse, she had inhaled some of the flames which had seared her lungs. The dreaded pneumonia had been staved off, but tuberculosis had developed. To all appearances the end was only a matter of time.

"She lingered on, wasting away daily. Every moment I could spare I spent with her at her bedside.

"Three months to the very day on which I had carried her in my

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