



and be my Love

By PEGGY DERN

W.N.U. RELEASE



THE STORY THUS FAR: Megan MacTavish and her father, with Annie, the servant, live on a small farm at the edge of Pleasant Grove. Their living is made from chickens and a few cows, for MacTavish has been a ne'er-do-well for years. Into Pleasant Grove came a woman who called herself Alicia Stevenson, and having inherited the old Brigham place she is now a neighbor of Megan's. Alicia is a woman of about forty years old, well dressed, and something of a mystery. A stranger comes to the MacTavish place to buy milk and butter and eggs, and announces himself as Tom Fallon, the new high school principal, now living in the Westbrook place. He states that his wife is an invalid.

CHAPTER II

Megan and Tom sat quietly on the big flat rocks, saying little, their eyes following the antics of the dogs and cats galloping around in circles on the Ridge. She thought she had never seen the pines look so beautiful.

He asked for permission to fill his pipe and light it, and tentatively offered her a cigarette.

"Thanks, no," Megan answered lightly. "It's a habit I've avoided—I don't think I'd care much for it, and it is expensive."

Obviously Tom understood the logic of that, and for a moment they were both silent, until he got his pipe going well.

Megan said after a moment when the silence threatened to become awkward, "How is Mrs. Fallon? Does the climate seem to agree with her, as you'd hoped?"

Tom's brown hand tightened about the bowl of his pipe until the knuckles stood up in little white mounds. He tore his eyes from the landscape and gave her a look that was hard and cold and bitter, so much so that she was startled by the sudden, inexplicable hostility.

"Mrs. Fallon is—doing as well as could be expected, under the circumstances," he told her. His voice was harsh, and the very sound of the words told her that he had repeated these words until they had ceased to have any meaning; yet he had never ceased to resent the necessity for them.

"I'm sorry if I seemed—inquisitive or rude," Megan told him frankly, her face hot with color, her head up. "I had no such intention. You have made no secret of the fact that your wife is an invalid. Naturally, in a small town like this, people are interested and anxious to be of service, if they may—"

"The only service anyone can do my wife—or myself—is to leave my wife alone," stated Tom, and Megan's eyes blazed at his tone.

She was on her feet now, and she said swiftly, her voice shaking with anger. "You may be quite sure that in the future, I, at least, shall be happy to do so!"

She turned blindly to walk back through the pines, but before she had gone half a dozen steps, Tom was on his feet, laying a hand on her arm, in swift, abject apology.

"Please wait—please, forgive me," he apologized humbly. "That was unforgivable of me! It's just that—well, the subject is—an extremely painful one—"

"I'm sincerely sorry that I mentioned it," she told him stiffly, her face still hot.

He looked down at her gravely, his hand still on her arm, restraining her as she would have walked away.

"You see, Miss MacTavish," he said at last, his voice raw with pain, "my wife's illness is—chiefly mental."

He set his teeth hard when he had spoken the last two words, and Megan looked up at him, puzzled.

"Mental? You mean she merely imagines she is ill? That she is a hypochondriac?" she asked, in all innocence.

Tom's face was white and rigid now, but his eyes were alive with pain.

"No," he said huskily. "I mean that my wife is—mentally ill—that she has the mind of a young child—that she is not—not normal!"

It was obvious that he had tried to say "insane" and had not been able to get the word past his stiff lips.

Megan was conscious of a moment of stunned, shocked horror. This man—chained to an insane wife! This man, whom everybody liked, with his fine mind and his keen sense of responsibility, and a woman who had the mind of a young child!

"Oh!" was all she could say, her tone shocked and rich with sympathy and touched with keen embarrassment that she must witness his moment of naked, burning revelation. "I'm—terribly sorry—"

Tom brushed aside the choked, inadequate words and said with a sort of forced quiet, "So you see why it has been necessary for us to—deny the well intentioned callers—"

"Of course," Megan told him unsteadily, sick with pity for him.

"She is—entirely harmless," he told her, and his face was wrenched with the pain and the shame of having to put that thought into words. "She is never left for a moment alone and she never leaves her bed. But if people here knew about her—mental condition—well, undoubtedly

they would—well, feel that she should be locked away! Put in an institution—" The pain of the thought silenced his words for a moment, and after he had got himself somewhat under control he managed a smile at her that was little more than a grimace and said, "So now you know. What are you going to do?"

Megan flinched from the look and from the words. She looked at him with wide, distressed eyes.

"What's it got to do with me? I mean, why should I do anything?" she protested swiftly. "I'm terribly sorry—I didn't mean to pry into your affairs—"

"I know," Tom brushed the words away with a gesture of the hand that held his pipe. "But I think, somehow, I wanted you to know. After all, you are my nearest neighbor. We see each other often—it's inevitable you should wonder. I—hope you won't feel it necessary to—"

Megan's face flamed with hurt.



He looked down at her gravely, his hand still on her arm, restraining her as she would have walked away.

"You may be quite sure that I shall reveal your secret to no one—why should I? What right—or necessity—would I have?" she told him sharply.

Tom smiled at her, a white, faint smile that was somehow very tragic.

"I know you wouldn't. Forgive me. I'm clumsy and stupid, but not intentionally or willfully so. Forgive me—for everything?"

Megan melted beneath the look in his eyes, and put her hand in his and let him draw her back to the flat stone, where she sat down once more. And as though the revelation of his tragic secret had cleared the air between them, as though they were friends now, they spoke of other things.

His mind was keen and alert; Megan read a great deal and used her mind to think with, and it was for both of them a pleasant experience to be able to talk of things that had nothing to do with Pleasant Grove. Megan liked her friends and her neighbors, but there were many times when she hungered for impersonal talk of matters far afield from Pleasant Grove, and she enjoyed this contact with a stimulating mind.

He walked with her to the barbed wire fence, when she saw that the rust go because the evening was ending; he laughed a little, and obligingly held up the lower strand of barbed wire so she could crawl under it without snagging her skirt.

"There really should be a gate here," she told him, getting to her feet on the other side of the fence, laughing across the four strands of barbed wire at him. "But I'm like the man who was going to fix the leak in his roof, only he couldn't work while it was raining; and when it wasn't raining the roof didn't need mending. I somehow never get around to it!"

She whistled. The two dogs came bounding to her, and the four cats stepped daintily out of a great thicket of honeysuckle vines that sprawled at the corner of the fence. And as she walked back down the meadow path to the brook, she looked over her shoulder, and lifted her hand to him in a gay little gesture, as she saw him standing there. He lifted his hat to her and bowed in a gay burlesque of a sweeping old-world gesture, and she went on, her heart a little lighter for him. She was terribly sorry for him, but she admired the gallantry with which he carried his burdens. And, looking across the fields toward the drab little five-room frame house that was the Westbrook place and that now held this pathetic woman, his wife, she felt the tears in her

eyes. Poor man! and—poor woman! She shivered a little and hurried as she went, as though to run away from thoughts that bit too deeply.

One of Pleasant Grove's favorite autumn diversions, when the harvest was in and the winter greens had been planted, and it was still too warm for "hawg-killin'," was quilting parties.

Through the scant leisure time of winter, most of Pleasant Grove's women pieced quilts, out of "scrap bags" and carefully hoarded bits of material; and then when the quilt top had been pieced and finished, the owner notified her friends that she was "putting up" a quilt and they were invited to come and help her quilt it.

A few days after her talk with Tom on the Ridge, Megan went over to Mrs. Stuart's, where there was a quilting. There were greetings, a breezy exchange of pleasantries, while Megan settled herself, brought her thimble out of her pocket, threaded her needle, and set to work.

There were perhaps a dozen women about the big frame, which was opened to its fullest width, the width and length of a double bed. Megan talked lightly and carelessly to her neighbor, the pretty little Whitaker girl whose sweetheart had just been reported injured in action in Italy and who was grateful for the chance to talk about him.

Suddenly Megan heard the name, "'fessor Fallon" and looked up. Alicia Stevenson was watching her shrewdly, a little knowing look in her small, dark eyes that made Megan oddly and absurdly uneasy.

Mrs. Burns, who was president of the Parent-Teachers' association of the local school, was saying, "I think we're lucky to get a man like Professor Fallon here. The school board says his qualifications are excellent and his references are extremely good!"

Mrs. Stuart bit off a thread and patted her last stitches into place before threading the needle afresh.

"Sort of makes me wonder how come we could get a man like 'fessor Tom, in a little bitty place like this," she said, as she moistened the tip of the thread and squinted at the eye of the needle, trying to insert one through the other. "I don't reckon it's anything ag'n the man, though, if he wants to live in a little country town—"

"Maybe Megan could tell us more about that," said Alicia silkily.

"About what?" asked Megan, cravenly pretending not to understand.

"Why a man like Tom Fallon would be satisfied in a little hick town like Pleasant Grove," said Alicia, smiling. "After all, you know him so much better than any of the rest of us—"

"I sell him milk and butter and eggs, yes," Megan told her curtly. "I'd hardly say that made us old friends, though."

"But I thought during some of those long hours you've spent together on the Ridge, he might have told you something of himself," suggested Alicia, limpid-eyed, her voice soft as satin.

There was a startled gasp about the quilting frame, perhaps not so much a gasp, as a sense of movement that made Megan know they were all staring at her, startled, wondering—waiting.

Megan drew a long breath. "Just what do you mean by that?" she asked Alicia sharply.

Alicia's eyes were wide with surprise, but there was a trace of malice in her depths also.

"But, darling," she protested, her voice artificially gay and sweet, "what could I possibly mean except that I've seen you and the gallant professor on the Ridge—"

"Once, quite by accident, when I was out for a walk—" Megan began, but Alicia interrupted her with pretty concern and an apology that was worse than the most open accusation.

"Of course, I'm terribly sorry," Alicia interrupted. "Please don't say any more. I never dreamed—I mean I wouldn't have mentioned it for the world—" She was prettily confused, and Megan could feel the hint of tension, of curiosity, that crept about the room.

The women who had been her friends and neighbors all her life looked at her and then quickly away, very carefully not meeting her eyes, trying not to meet each other's eyes, elaborately pretending to be very casual.

"This is ridiculous!" said Megan hotly. "You're trying to make people believe that I've been—sneaking off to meet Mr. Fallon—"

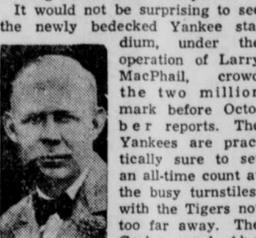
"Why, darling!" protested Alicia, wide-eyed, hurt, though secretly enjoying, as she always did, this by no means unusual result of her malicious dropping of bits of information here and there. "I didn't say anything of the kind. All I said was that it was obvious that you knew the man better than any of the rest of us, and that you should therefore know better than to bury he was willing to hide—I mean to why himself in a little hick town like Pleasant Grove."

Mrs. Stuart eyed Alicia belligerently.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



A HUMAN tidal wave, headed for almost any sort of sporting competition, has struck baseball in a record sweep. All past records are being submerged in the way of attendance figures, even on the part of those teams who are conceded nothing better than sixth place.



Grantland Rice

It would not be surprising to see the newly bedecked Yankee stadium, under the operation of Larry MacPhail, crowd the two million mark before October reports. The Yankees are practically sure to set an all-time count at the busy turnstiles, with the Tigers not too far away. The Cubs and the Dodgers also should surpass their best year, with many thousands added to the list.

A sporting crowd is willing to take a heavier beating than any other section of the human race. All these frenzied multitudes ask is a chance to buy a ticket, then let nature take its course. These crowds make the sardine look like a rover in the wide-open spaces, with room to spare.

The Kentucky Derby set a new high in several directions. So probably will the Louis-Conn intermingling at the Yankee stadium in June.

The Rush to Sport

We have been asked to explain this overwhelming rush to sport. After all, we have few who can match in ability and color the headliners of the Golden Age. I am referring again to Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Bobby Jones, Man o' War, Bill Tilden, Tommy Hitchcock, Devereux Milburn, Walter Hagen, Rogers Hornsby, Earl Sande and Red Grange. We have no such galaxy of famous names with which to conjure, although DiMaggio, Williams, Nelson, Hogan, Arcaro, Blanchard, Davis and a few others may be just as good.

It may be that the glamour of past years takes on too keen a hue and glint. But that Golden Age of Sport produced a pretty fair collection of talent and color. No such talent has been proved in this present postwar era up to date, but it may happen later.

It may be that the coming season in various sports will give us champions that can match the Old Guard of the lost and golden era. We don't believe so. But we know that sport will give us greater crowds than ever were known in the past.

We know that there will be more money than ever before wagered on the races through the mutuels and the bookmakers—a total surpassing 2 billion dollars. New York alone will pass 500 million through the mutuels.

In this era of peace following the blackness of the world's greatest war, there are two details that make this possible: (1) the reach for release—the excuse for taut nerves and (2) more widespread cash than this country has ever known previously. It is the same in England, even more so. This is no knock against the human race. It is only a natural reaction, even if it isn't the wisest and the sanest reaction. When was the human race ever sane or wise?

Some Big Questions

The season will soon begin to unroll a number of answers to various important questions.

No. 1. How will the Yankee pitching staff make out? Will it be consistently good enough to be even fairly close to the pitching strength of Tigers, Red Sox or Indians? Or the Senators?

No. 2. Can the Tiger infield hold up well enough to give Steve O'Neill's crack pitching staff the chance to win again?

No. 3. Can Leo Durocher find enough pitching to keep his Dodgers up with the Cardinals and Cubs? Especially the Cubs.

No. 4. How far will the Cardinals be in front by the first of August?

No. 5. Will the Giants' somewhat jittery defensive play crowd Mel Ott's team out of the first division?

No. 6. What about the season's impending pitching duel between Bob Feller and Al Newhouser?

No. 7. Also the A. L.'s all around batting championship among Ted Williams, Joe DiMaggio and Dick Wakefield?

No. 8. How many home runs can Hank Greenberg deliver to offset the natural and expected deficit in foot speed?

No. 9. To what ball clubs are a few of the Cardinals' pitching surplus headed?

No. 10. How will Pesky and Doerr of the Red Sox compare with Rizzuto and Gordon of the Yankees?

No. 11. What are the odds on either Phillies or Athletics leaving the ancient and moldy cellar?

No. 12. How will the old New York-Boston argument concerning the all-around ability of Joe Gordon and Bobby Doerr work out?

No. 13. How far up will Billy Southworth be able to lift the Braves in his first Boston season?

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