

Pleasures and Palaces

Not Every Department Store Clerk Is Courted by a Millionaire—There Are Motor Cars and Motor Cars—But—

By Royal Brown

Even in khaki overalls, Jimmie Cromartie was not without masculine charm. In evening clothes, as grand marshal of the annual ball of the Plumbers' union, local No. 673, he—well, Denise Luydon had reason to look like the kitten who has swallowed the canary.

For the sake of Denny he even dared the depths of Marston's bargain basement where she was "At Home" from 8:30 to 5:30 every weekday.

"Oh, I'll say you've got him hooked!" acknowledged pert-lipped, dark-haired Number 833. "My Marty wouldn't come down here for a couple of farms. I hope," she added gratuitously, "that you aren't throwing yourself away on him though. If I had your looks I'd marry a million. You could!"

But Denny was beginning to suspect that she would rather have him without a million than any other man with. The only trouble with Jimmy as a lover was that he was red-headed and you never knew when he was going up in the air.

"And I," as Denny admitted to Number 833, "have some red in my hair myself."

Jimmy had just bought a second-hand flivver with what is known as a speedster body. He explained that he had picked it up dirt cheap.

"It's not good enough for you, kid," he said huskily. "And neither am I. You ought to be traveling around in a Lenhard Double-Six."

The smile she flashed at him was worth traveling more miles to see than that old pseudo-speedster of Jimmy's had left in it.

"I'd look fine in a Lenhard Double-Six, wouldn't I?" she mocked. "Let's go!"

"Let's," agreed Jimmy, with renewed buoyancy.

This made it unanimous save for the car. Its misbehavior, coupled with the impertinence of the younger set ever in evidence in the neighborhood, had removed some of the sheen from the morning, a Sunday in May. But the irreparable might not have happened if, after they had swung into the Fens, a limousine had not rolled by.

"Is that a Lenhard Double-Six?" demanded Denny, with interest.

Jimmy gave it an austere side glance. "Yep," he assented in a tone that should have warned her.

"I'd like," she murmured, "to ride in a car like that—if only just once!"

"I don't doubt it," commented Jimmy unpleasantly. Then as Denny looked at him wide-eyed with surprise, he added, "Don't let me stop you!"

Denny's lovely eyes narrowed. "Do you mean you think I couldn't get the chance?" she demanded forthwith.

"Not at all!" he retorted, but she knew he meant her to believe just that.

The pseudo-speeder speeded on, but romance had blown a tire. And so it was that Denny delivered her ultimatum. "I wouldn't marry a man with a temper like yours for a million," flared Denny. "If you'll please stop this—this car, I'll walk home."

"I'd like to see a girl," observed Jimmy, "who wouldn't marry anything with a million tagged to it. That's what all girls want nowadays—money!"

"Are you going to let me out?" demanded Denny frigidly.

He drove her home instead. "Sorry to have butted in where I wasn't welcome," he announced. "I'll see it don't happen again."

"That," sweetly, "is dear of you, Mr. Cromartie. Katie Kennedy would love to go for a ride with you. Why don't you take her?"

Jimmy stepped on the gas. "He'll be around again," Denny assured herself serenely. "And maybe I'll be at home and maybe I won't."

But then Denny's pretty mouth set grimly.

"So he took her!" she murmured. "Well, he can have her. I should worry!"

"I'd like," Denny informed Number 833 the next day, "to have one of those guys that write movies about millionaires wandering around bargain basements, stand around here a while. I'll bet their feet would get more tired than mine do before they saw one."

Number 833 gave her a quick glance.

"No," she retorted coolly, "have you?"

Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm was eyeing the flushed loveliness that Denny presented her so unflinchingly.

"She'll do," she murmured. And then addressing Denny directly, "Please get your hat—I want to talk to you."

"Oh!" Denny protested. "I couldn't get off—"

"That will be all right," Marston intervened. "Do as Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm says."

"She'll do," she decided yet again.

Then aloud: "I'm not crazy," she announced grimly. "Merely in my dotage. An old woman to be humored until she has the grace to pass on and leave her money to those better fitted to spend it. But—well, I'm not dead yet!"

"I'll say you're not," thought Denny.

"No," Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm went on. "I guess I've got enough of what my granddaughter call pep to beat her at her own game. And that's what I propose to do with your assistance."

"Now," thought Denny, "for the string."

"What," she demanded, "do I do?"

"Act natural—be yourself."

Denny gave her a direct glance. "Say, what do you expect; that I'll eat with my knife? Am I to be a horrible example generally? Is that the big idea?"

"It might be a good one," re-

"I didn't ask you where she had gone," snapped Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm. "Send Moulton to me."

"Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm," he informed Moulton, "nearly took my head off when I told her Mildred had gone to Gloucester."

"I heard her tell Mildred she would take a girl from the bargain basement and adopt her if she didn't give up that artist chap," Moulton said. "You don't mean to tell me though that she has done so?"

"If Mildred persists we'll have in her place here, Moulton, a young woman who is utterly impossible," he assured her.

The room in which Denny was established, with its soft tones of silver-gray contrasting with the vivid rose of the rugs and the hangings, was exquisite enough to awe her.

"Is there anything more I can do for you, miss?" the austere-eyed Moulton was demanding.

"You can stop looking as if you thought I had something contagious," Denny suggested coolly.

Moulton started. "Beg pardon, miss?" she gasped incredulously.

"Oh run along!" commanded Denny impatiently.

Moulton obeyed and Denny inspected her room as a kitten might inspect a new and strange garret. Then she turned to her bath, with its white tiled floor. It was the tub itself that staggered Denny. This was a marble set not on a tub into the floor, with steps leading down to it. From the tub she glanced up at the array of faucets.

"Well," she decided, "Jimmy would certainly feel at home. It looks like a plumber's paradise."

In surrendering her to Moulton Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm had announced that she herself was going to nap.

"My sole concession to age," she had explained. "Dinner will be at 7 and your frocks will be here by 6. Until then amuse yourself as you choose."

From her window Denny was seeing the grounds.

"Quite an improvement on McCarthy's backyard," she admitted. Abruptly she turned from the window, and, emerging into the long hall outside, found the marble staircase that led down to the reception hall. At the foot of the stairs she encountered Hawkins.

"How does a person go about amusing themselves here?" she demanded.

Hawkins gathered his dignity about him. "There's tennis courts down by the boathouse. And if you 'appen to care for golf—"

"I don't 'appen to, somehow," Denny assured him. "Next?"

Hawkins bowed, like an automaton. "Perhaps you care for riding? There's some very good saddle horses in the stable. If you wish—"

"If they were on a merry-go-round I might be interested," she cut in. "Go on. What else have you to offer?"

"I'm sorry, Miss, but that's all I can think of at this moment. Is there anything else, Miss?"

"No," Denny assured him. But as he bowed again, mischief lighted her eyes. "Unless you happen to have a piece of gum about you. I don't often indulge—but I'm desperate."

If Hawkins had, he swallowed it anyway he swallowed something.

"I'm sorry, Miss—"

"Oh, don't mind," reassured Denny. "I didn't expect you would have."

The nod she dismissed him with was worthy of a princess.

The boathouse was closed. She surveyed the greenhouses and garage, stables and kennels.

"I wonder," she mused, "if they really have a good time with all this or just kid themselves into thinking they do."

"Hello!" came a blithe voice. "I've been looking for you."

Denny turned. A girl in a yellow sweater and sport hat, with linen skirt and low buckskin shoes, was coming toward her. She was very blond and very pretty.

"I'm Mildred Chisholm," she announced. "Granny just broke the news to me and I told her I'd look you up and take you over to the Country club for tea." She smiled.



"Sorry to have butted in where I wasn't welcome," Jimmie announced.

"Have you quarreled with Jimmy?" she asked with interest.

"I'm through with him," amended Denny with dignity.

Number 833 giggled. "And now you're after a millionaire?"

Denny smiled in spite of herself. "I'll admit I don't see any standing around in line. But believe me, if I got a chance—"

Abruptly she broke off and as abruptly her expression changed so that she looked more like a rosy cherub listening to some celestial choir than a shop girl who—the truth must out—had been almost caught in the act of chewing gum.

Number 833 cast startled eyes around.

"Egypt's Queen," she gasped. "The boss himself. And look who's with him. Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm—"

Denny did not know who Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm might be, but there was no question but that she was somebody.

No one, save herself, knew why she had descended to the bargain basement. She had peremptorily ordered Marston to take her there and he had obeyed.

"Who," she demanded, "is that girl—the one with the wonderful hair?"

"I don't happen to know," he confessed. "But I'll be glad to find out."

"I'll find out myself," she cut in. Now what followed, as Number 833 told her Marty afterwards, certainly beat the movies!

"What," demanded Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm, "is your name?"

"Why Denny—I mean Denise Luydon," Denny managed to answer.

"Have you any family?" persisted her inquisitor.

"Don't be an ass, Marston," suggested Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm. Then, to Denny, "I'm not going to eat you, child. Don't be afraid!"

"Afraid! That was enough for Denny."

"You're on," said she. "I'll be ready in a jiff!"

"Oh, gee," breathed Number 833, while Denny powdered her nose and adjusted her hat, "supposing she should adopt you—"

"If she does you can have my gum," retorted Denny coolly. "I parked it under the counter."

"She," Number 833 went on, "has a wonderful place at Exeter Pool, greenhouses and tennis courts and cows with class written all over them—"

"I hope it hasn't bars on the windows," commented Denny. "She sounds as if she had escaped from some such place."

Nevertheless she went along with Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm.

"I wonder," that lady suggested abruptly, "what you are thinking about all this."

"I am thinking," retorted Denny diplomatically, "that in about five minutes the old alarm clock will go off and I'll wake up."

Appreciation of that glistened briefly in Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm's eyes.

"Remember Cinderella, child," she retorted. "Perhaps I'm your fairy godmother. Anyhow the modern version of the coach and four awaits outside."

It was after all an American car, the best, perhaps, but at least three years old. The upholstery was luxurious if sedate, and the chauffeur and footman were smartly if somberly liveried. As Denny's quick glance took all this in, the older woman watched her.

marked Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm thoughtfully. "Yes—why not?"

"Excuse me—I'd rather go back to the bargain basement." This Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm ignored.

"I don't know," she said, "but what I would do well to adopt you at that. You might amuse me and that—ever so grimly—is more than most people do."

And so they swept on to that far-famed millionaires' colony that lies along the North Shore, and finally to Exeter Pool. They stopped there in the village before the specialty shops.

"We'll get you outfitted now," Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm said.

Soon they were on their way once more. The car turned in from the state road up a poplar-lined drive to the house. Denny caught her breath.

"Egypt's Queen," she thought. "It looks like the Art Museum."

"Now remember," Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm reminded her, "what I expect of you. You're Irish and you have Irish wit. I'm counting on the combination to carry you through."

In her eyes there was a certain humorous suggestion of a good joke shared that kindled Denny.

"Leave it to me," Denny promised blithely. "I'll be the limit. Say—shall I shake hands with the butler?"

The corners of Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm's mouth twitched. "Try it!" she said.

To the butler's horror Denny did. He withdrew his hand as if an adder had bitten it.

"Is Miss Mildred at home?" demanded Mrs. Winthrop-Chisholm directly.

"No, ma'am thank you, ma'am. She's gone to Gloucester—"