

LOVE and LEARN

By Peter Clark Macfarlane

If Your Soul Spectrum Happens to Be Overshot With Blue Today, Try This Lively, Humorous Yarn of College Life as a Remedy.

It was in his sophomore year and eked out meager resources by waiting four hours a day in the co-op dining hall. She was lank of figure, but of an open countenance and a hopeful disposition. She was timid, pale and cheaply garbed, with little to commend her to the masculine eye except golden braids, which in her diffidence she tried to conceal, and two soft, blue eyes with a wistful light in them that could not be concealed at all. When she could get it she took the most inconspicuous table. This happened to be one of his, and a waiter learns to read human nature. She studied the bill of fare critically, frowning, as if consulting a very fastidious taste, but he knew as a matter of fact that she was doing "math"—figuring three ways from the soup or two from the dessert to get a combination that would give her the greatest sense of fullness for the slightest depletion of her purse.

The second time she honored one of his tables Joseph Hancock snuggled an extra pat of butter to her under cover of some excess bread. The girl noticed it, of course, and gave him a shy, grateful look. That was the first time that she knew that her eyes, besides being blue and wistful, had mines of polished diamonds in the depths of them. The kindling of those sparkling lights gave Joe some kind of thrill, the exact duplicate of which he had never before known.

"Gosh!" he gasped out in the entryway, and consulted the mirror in the washroom to make sure his hair was slicked back as smooth as glass and as shiny as any.

When for dinner the girl again chose one of his tables Joe felt flattered and encouraged to speak, but kept the remark carefully within the line of his professional relation to her by suggesting, "Coffee's poor tonight, but I can recommend the milk." He said this in an undertone, necessary, and understood almost inevitably have a note of the confidential in them.

To this the girl responded, "I prefer milk," she admitted, lifting the soft, blue eyes, "only—only it doesn't taste like the milk we used to get down on the farm."

"This will," assured Joe, proudly. "Leave it to yourself."

At the ice box he dexterously manipulated the pitchers and the glasses under the very eye of the Jap custodian, and the girl got a glass that was half cream.

"O!" she sighed, after taking a sip, and glowed upon him.

"On the q. t.," he warned, not with his lips, but by lowering the screen of his eyelids for a second, the accidental presence of the head waiter in the vicinage having compelled such discretion. The girl caught the import of the signal and bowed her face to her food, dishing slightly. This was the first time Joe knew there could be color in those transparent cheeks.

"The girl's anemic, run down, starved!" he diagnosed, and satisfied some impulse of his heart by smuggling two pats of butter to the side of her plate. She acknowledged them with a grateful look.

"My name's Joe Hancock," he confided, rearranging the salt, pepper and sauce bottles, and pretending to brush imaginary crumbs from the other side of the table as excusing his lingering presence.

"That's a good name," the girl said, smiling at the sound as if it gave her pleasure.

"Like it?" remarked Joe, beaming.

"Hancock's in American history, you know," she responded, as trying to be very pleasant, "and Joe is such an honest name, don't you think?"

Joe blushed beautifully. "What's yours?" he demanded, interestedly.

"Lela—Lela Mason," she responded with frank simplicity.

"Gee!" said Joe, his brows rising. "That's a peach of a name."

"You are awfully kind," she commented, and then, lest he should misunderstand her meaning, tapped the glass of half and half significantly.

"Kind is my middle name—to some people," he boasted.

In the next few minutes, as young Mr. Hancock busied himself with sundry goings to and fro, occasional irresistible glances were stolen at the meek golden head waiter, and a design and a program began to take form within his mind. Joe heard with sympathetic admiration, but nobly charitable in another.

"Chef," he began, impressively, when approach and petition might be made to that dark, majestic presence who presided in the kitchen, "when I say 'Small steak' you give me a small steak, don't you?"

"Ah, what does college boy?" affirmed that sweating lump of ebony with an air of conscious rectitude.

"Well, now," proposed Joe in wheedling tones, "from this on, once in a while, you are going to hear me pipe 'Steak small' instead. That's a high sign—take me? When you hear it grab a T-bone, cut the bone out of it and fix it up so it will go by the checker as a piece of round."

The black chef looked thoughtful under his white cap, and increased the measure of his frowning dignity as he weighed the cog suggestion to organize a system of petty larceny.

"Ah, gits you, Mistah Hancock," he admitted at length, "but what does Ah gits?" The emphasis was significant.

Joe thrust a half dollar into the yellow palm of a black hand that happened to be mysteriously open and conveniently near.

"I can't keep this up, you understand, Sam," he explained, "but you understand, Sam, I'll keep it up till it weighs like a golden twenty. 'I'm workin' my way; but it's for a poor little girl, a freshie. She's half starved, and, just as a matter of humanity, I've got to fatten her up till she can do herself justice, in her studies at least."

Joe got a good deal of plea into his tones, and the black man had a sympathetic heart, as well as a palm that itched.

"All right, Mistah Joe," he conceded, grandly. "I'll collide wid you on de proposition; and, once in a while when you-all's finances will stand it, you collide wid me," and he tapped his pocket and rolled his eyes, both significantly.

"You're on," declared Joe, with a croak of emotion in his utterances, and hurried outside to make a suggestion to a certain young lady as he tore off her meal check.

Now, in simple truth, the cheapest steak was beyond Lela's means; yet she could not appear ungrateful, and came the next night determined recklessly to major on that viand.

It was a miracle steak that she got—rich, tender, juicy, unbelievably palatable. And as the days went on other miracles were wrought in the old dining hall. Instead of being drowned in a thin blue fluid called by the trade name of milk, her cereal of mornings and her rice puddings for dessert were smothered in a froth of rich cream.

Joe Hancock, too, began to appear more in the role of a prestidigitator than a waiter. He could be loitering along the aisle, ostensibly looking out for the wants of his patrons, and maybe backing up against her table as he made way for some one to pass, or even while he exchanged a few casual words with the head waiter; but, lo, when he moved off there would be a small extra pitcher of maple syrup for

her hot cakes upon the table which had not been there before. Joe must have been carrying that pitcher around in his hip pocket till the operator had learned the trick, and yet how he had done it without disaster was more than she could ever understand.

As for the benignant slight of hand performer, by the end of the very first session he began to get an unselfish man's reward in seeing that Lela's hollow cheeks were filling, the first faint blush of a rose color that was to be permanent growing upon them.

"She's fattening up! She's fattening up!" he chuckled, exuberantly. Then his mood became rapt and sober. "Bless her little heart!" he breathed softly.

This utterance was followed by a peculiar dissolving sensation in his head, and he did not understand this. It was a feeling that embarrassed him. He obtained relief from it by approaching Lela with a bold suggestion, for practice made his hand skilful and success had made him daring.

"Don't do any more 'math' over the menu card," he told her, seizing a moment when such confidence was possible, "know what we've got, and I'll tell you what we've got. I'll see you get the best there is each time, and I'll fix the check."

"But—is it right?" gasped the girl, with round, worried eyes, for conscience has been troubling her.

"Right!" ejaculated Joe, pursing his lips and frowning. "Of course it's right. This is a co-op hall, isn't it?"

Lela did not see just why this should make a difference, but Joe said it, and he was a sophomore; she was only a freshman. Besides, the world had dealt rather skimpily with her hitherto, and here was now a nature to fly in the face of Providence.

With Joe the casualties resolved themselves quite as easily. He was getting so interested in this girl, so fascinated by the growing round of cheek and increasing shapeliness of arm and shoulder, that his appetite diminished. He was eating very little himself. Whatever the co-op lost on Lela Mason, Joe was sure it made up on him, and yet he felt no pang of starvation. It was food and drink to him just to stand off and gaze at her when she did not know that he was gazing; and it was positively thrilling to observe her delighted flush at discovering his glance upon her. She was still sparing of conversation, but such eloquent messages of thanks and grateful appreciation as she sent to him across that old dining hall!

And pretty? Why, the girl was going to be beautiful—was beautiful already. In his own absorption with that bright spectacle it did not occur to him that others might be discovering that nascent beauty also. That "Fat" Franklin, for instance, a proud young, possessor of an automobile and such wealth that he could afford to eat T-bone steak three times a day if he so minded, and buy cream and butter and all the other things that the simple expedient of paying extra for them—that he, who was accounted one of the boldest and most successful "queeners" in the college, should this day for the first time have contemplated with the interest of discovery the redning roses of Lela Mason, was a consideration quite below the threshold of Joe Hancock's consciousness.

"Some queen, I'll say!" murmured "Fat" into his coffee cup, and assayed her boldly with an expert eye.

"For Joe to have known about this would have delighted him greatly, and today nothing disquieted him, because a second week of their casual acquaintanceship having passed, he had ventured to ask Lela to step out with him, and she had consented modestly. It was a blissfully exchanged and girl time they had together. They exchanged life stories and found several pleasant surprises in common. The sudden stoppage of his heart passed, however, with Lela's cheery greeting, and that organ thumped proudly as the girl started toward her accustomed table. But there followed to her place the obese and self-assertive young Franklin person.

"Allow me!" "Fat" said grandly, and pushed in Lela's chair for her; then took the opposite one.

"I'd like to push his face in—the slot!" growled Joe away down in his larynx.

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