



The MAY DAY MYSTERY

By Octavus Roy Cohen

SYNOPSIS

Antoinette Peyton, senior at the university of Marland, resents Pat's Thayer's attention to her. Thayer, seventeen-year-old red head, is a winner because the tension between them is increased by Max Vernon, another student, who is in love with Thayer. Thayer and Vernon threaten each other. Larry Welch, Thayer's brother, professor at the university, is appealed to by Thayer and Vernon to settle the matter. Thayer and Vernon are friends with Thayer. Welch and Tony Peyton are in love. Welch does not know what he can do. Tony then tells him she is married to Thayer, but is his wife only in name.

CHAPTER II—Continued

"Pat Thayer proposed to me during the last five minutes of that football game, Larry. He kept insisting that Marland was going to win the game and I kept saying that we weren't trying to bring us good luck by talking like a jinx. But he said to me, 'Pat, we won't lose. I'll make it happen.' I knew we weren't a chance. You're not going to bet," I laughed. Of course I said I was not. He leaned so close that his lips were close to mine. He whispered to me: 'Let's see how game you are, Tony. If Marland gets as good as a tie out of this, you're to marry me right after the game.' 'Don't be silly,' I said, and he insisted that he was serious. 'And I'd better see you quick, Tony—I'll fix the whole team.' 'She looked away, and there was a tremor in her voice. 'You can't understand it now, Larry. There's no use trying to make you understand. 'I do, though.' 'You can't. It isn't possible—sitting here in your classroom, looking over a period of three months and trying to make a person understand how a kid could get drunk with football excitement and plunge into a serious thing like marriage. It isn't sane. And it isn't reasonable to expect you to understand something which myself can't fathom now.' 'Just the same,' he said gently, 'do understand.' 'I hope so.' 'Anyway, I made the bet. You know what happened after that. We tied that game. Everybody went crazy. The game ended and Pat and I drifted out with the crowd. And once we got outside and into a taxi Pat announced that we were going straight to the court house and get a license. At first I thought he was joking. Then I saw he was serious. I laughed at him, and he accused me of being a bad sport. 'I can pretty well summarize what happened then. I tried every way I could to argue him out of it. He was gentle and considerate and firm. He kept talking about paying my debt. . . . Besides, I liked him. The excitement of the game had thrown off my balance. I retained the ability to strike a bargain. I said I'd go through with it if he'd be willing to keep the marriage a secret—and merely a honeymoon—until vacation time. I promised him we'd take a honeymoon in the summer if he'd do what I wanted. He protested, but finally agreed. . . . 'She stopped talking, Larry gazed intently at her averted face. 'And then, Tony?' 'And then,' she responded, without turning, 'we were married.'"

CHAPTER III

EVERYTHING seemed to be summed up in her simple statement. She spread her arms helplessly, and the young man stared at her. 'I had hoped not to tell you,' she was speaking in a soft, tired voice—'until after we should have been divorced or had the marriage annulled. I detected the idea of a campus scandal—or gossip—or whatever it would have been. I was in a very bad form. Then I was going West or to France or somewhere and quietly have the whole miserable affair ended. But seeing you—with him—that rather changed things, Larry.' 'I understand. I wish you had told me before, though. And, going back to the beginning. . . . what caused you, to—become misanthropic?' 'She gave a little smile of dislike. 'Several things. I'll talk frankly because it is your right to know. Before we were married, I agreed that the marriage was to be a mere formality. I was going to have a pretty straight talk with Mr. Paterson Thayer. A pretty d—n straight talk. 'No!' She was on her feet and her hand was on his arm. This new Larry frightened her. 'Can't you see that you mustn't talk with Larry? He'd be liable to get nasty and spread the story. You mustn't go near him now.' 'I've got to. Leave yourself out of it if you wish. I've got to consider my life. His affair with her can't be permitted to run on.' 'That's true,' she said thoughtfully. Then she came to her and she looked up brightly. 'Let's

compromise, Larry. You go chat with my. See if you can do anything with her. Of course she mustn't know that I'm Pat's wife. But if you can't get her to do what you want to stay away from Pat. And meanwhile I'll go to Pat right now. I'll tell him that if he continues coming around with my I'll tell the whole campus. That will spite his guns. Don't you see that's the sensible thing?' 'He looked at her keenly. 'Do you think you can bluff him, Tony?' 'This time, Larry,' she said, 'I'll make him understand that I'm not bluffing.'"

The main building of Marland university looks down from the top of a modest hill upon the quiet, far-flung residential town of Marland. The roadway which descends some block precipitously from the main building to Main road is lined on both sides with fraternity houses. Halfway down the hill stands the home of Pat Thayer, by all odds the largest of them all. Shortly after noon of May first—at the very hour when Tony Peyton and Larry Welch were having their conversation in Larry's classroom—two young men descended the hill, turned in at the Psi Tau Theta house, and sought accommodation. Actually Rubie Farnum, and the other in a somewhat dejected work chair. The lad who stepped in the hammock was 'Rubie' Farnum, a tall, angular, gangly young man whose neck made his appearance rather more snugly than his background. Actually Rubie was an urban product. Phil Gleason, his companion, was also a junior; but even in the first hour of approaching summer, he was immaculate—lanky, even. He was short and slender and inclined to be dynamic. He spoke always in exclamations, whereas nothing ever excited Rubie to more than a slow, amiable drawl. The veranda of the various fraternity houses were not empty now. They were particularly filled. On several of the porches, young men slept calmly in hammocks. A few were reading. Phil Gleason glanced at his watch; frowned; shook the timepiece violently, and then turned to his friend. 'D—n thing's busted again!' he exploded. 'What time, Rubie?' Mr. Farnum reached into his pocket and extracted a large but reliable watch. 'Twelve-thirty.' 'Humph! I got a class at one—' Gleason's sharp eyes swung toward the street as a tall, graceful figure turned in on the concrete walk leading to the house. 'Hello!' he observed softly—'here comes What the Well-Dressed Man Should Wear.' Thayer, happily ignorant of their caustic comment, mounted the porch steps and nodded to the occupants of chair and hammock. 'Hello, Phil. Howdy, Rubie.' Thayer passed through the door into the big downstairs reception hall. Rubie chuckled. 'He's got it soft, that bimbo, Star boarder here. Ever been in his room of his?' 'Yeah. Second floor, front. Day window and everything. Fixed up like a boudoir of one of Louis Fourteen's lady friends.' 'Ain't it so?' And if—Rubie chuckled his head on one side and listened attentively. The soft summer air was rarely shattered by the roaring of a high-powered motor. 'I think,' said Rubie, 'that our most striking violet is about to appear in its gas-line chariot.' They looked down the hill in time to see a long, low gray touring car of heavy and expensive type swing smoothly into Fraternity row from the street and turned uphill to wait the Old Main. Rubie sank back into his hammock with a sigh of infinite relief. 'And that,' he remarked—'is most decidedly that.' 'Yeah. But what is it?' 'Busted. I know. Say, Phil—did you get a good flash at her?' 'I didn't get anything else.' 'She seemed kind of worked up. Right mad, I might say.' 'She did. Sure as a goat. What you reckon?' (TO BE CONTINUED)

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