DINNER FOR TWO

She walked past twice before turning in. When she entered, her eyes traveled around the room as if looking for someone she only half expected to find. He wasn't there.

The head-waiter came forward.

Betty asked, "Remember me, Tony?" He did not at first, yet - "It was last year - last Thanksgiving," she reminded him.

"Oh, yes." He remembered now. "You were with young Mr. John Biggers." As he led her to a choice table he tried to remember more about her.

As he held her chair she said, "I don't believe I'll order just yet, Tony."

Maybe it was a silly thing she was doing. He probably wouldn't come. And if he should, after a year there was no reason to believe he had changed toward her.

They had met at a house party given by the Gilbertson's. Sue Gilbertson, a matchmaker of note, had told Betty: "He's frightfully alone, wealthy, and sensitive about it. He's been sued so many times he thinks all the ladies are out for his pocketbook. So be careful, gal, be careful!"

Betty had laughed, "Don't worry, Sue! I'm not in the market at present. Your wonder boy will be perfectly safe."

They were engaged a week later, two weeks before Thanksgiving. And because they were both alone in the world they had spent the feast day together. Here in this same restaurant they had eaten their Thanksgiving dinner - and parted - a year ago today.

It was a minor thing, really. She had noticed in the two weeks of their romance that he was squeezing his pennies so closely. From what Sue had told her she knew of his many charities, the time and money he gave to worth-while causes. But in the line of entertainment, tips, the ordinary expenses of his daily social routine, he was almost miserly. The climax had come on Thanksgiving day. He was wondering how much to tip with mathematical precision. Betty had winced.

"Heavens, John!" she had said, "you'll be pinching cigarettes next."

And he had said quickly, "And why not?"

"With all your money!"

"All my money? I didn't know my wealth was so well known."

At the coolness in his voice Betty had said, "Oh, don't look surprised. I knew of course. Sue told me."

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It had resulted in their first and last quarrel. She had come to believe during the year's passage that all of his penny pinching might have been a trial. His fear that women were interested only in his money had so possessed him that he had taken this sly way to test her.

It seemed as if she would have to dine alone. She called for a waiter. Then as she was about to order her attention was drawn towards the door. A group of tattered, worn men were filing through the restaurant to a long table under the balcony.

"What in the world?" Betty turned to the waiter.

He smiled, "Just one of Tony's doings. Free meals to twenty of the city's hungry on Thanksgiving Day."

"How nice!" She watched the line of men, then stiffened at the sight of a familiar figure. "John!"

He turned, his face white with strain. Slowly he walked over to her table. "Hello, Betty."

"John—dear! Sit down. Tell me—"

He took the chair opposite, at ease despite his clothes. "There's nothing to tell. These things happen to everyone. I—I've missed you, Betty."

"And I've missed you," she whispered. "But, darling, if you're—I mean I've a splendid job now. And, oh, I want to help! We were wrong before. Now there won't be that dreadful money between us. We can start from scratch."

She laid her hand on his arm. "Let's have dinner together. Won't you please? Our second Thanksgiving dinner."

He asked, quite surprised, "You mean you wouldn't be ashamed to eat with me here, dressed as I am?"

She shook her head slowly. "I'll never be ashamed of you, dear. No matter where we are or how you're dressed."

Then he said, "I'll never forgive myself for doubting you, Betty. Perhaps it's too much to hope that you can. But, well—I'm not really what I appear. I mean I'm not broke. I've wanted to do something for these men, and charity is a serious responsibility to me. I wanted to make sure my money would go where it was most needed. So I've mingled as one of them, seeking the worthy."

"Thank God I did! I'll never doubt you again, Betty."

Betty was in doubt—She must remember to tell Sue. All, she reasoned, was fair in love.

"Dinner for two," she said to the waiter.

- Franklin Hopkins - '38