Another Saturday Night

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MARY ELLEN sat quietly behind the folks, watching dusky cornfields fly past the car window. Usually when they went to town it seemed as if they poked past the monotonous rows for hours. She'd waited all week for Saturday night, but now that it had come she was scared. Maybe Jack wouldn't notice her yet, even with the new permanent that made her look as grown-up as the town girls. What if he did and she forgot what she was going to say? She had dreamed about having a date with Jack Hunter ever since he had been her partner in a game at the Methodist party. But that's all it had ever been—just a dream—before she got her first permanent. Her new permanent, she called it, as if she'd been visiting the beauty parlors regularly for years.

She opened her purse and fished until she found a mirror. One side of her hair was muffled by shadow. She turned her face toward the dim light and looked again. It did look nice. Surely Jack would see how nice she looked and talk to her. He'd stop and say, "I never noticed what beautiful hair you have, Mary Ellen." She wasn't sure about this part, when she thought more about it, but anyway they'd start talking and she'd ask him who won the
baseball game yesterday. (Of course she already knew Hayward had won. She had asked about it the first thing this morning, because Jack played on the team.) Then he'd tell her all about it. She didn't know much about fielders and home runs, but she would nod her head and laugh and act as if she did. Dorothy Fisher was always looking at him with her eyes kind of funny, and smiling as if they knew a secret. Mary Ellen had practiced the look till she could do it fine, and she might even use that. If he still didn't say, "Will you go to the show with me tonight?", she'd ask him if he had been swimming lately and then get around to Johnny Weismuller. The show tonight was "Tarzan and the Pygmy Princess," and she knew Jack would go. He nearly always went to the show after the band concert.

"Are the hens all right, Mary Ellen?" asked Mother, over her shoulder.

"Uh—huh," Mary Ellen answered, feeling a delicious little curl over her ear.

"Well, look and see if their heads are out. I don't want them to smother."

Mary Ellen sighed. She wished they would smother. She hated hens. Why did Mother have to sell them tonight, anyway? She leaned a few careful inches toward the box on the other side of the seat and pecked in. They were all right. Their eyes glared up at her from the sides of their heads, "Just wait till we get to town!" They'd fly right up and squawk right on Main Street—she just knew they would. And when she got out of the car she'd smell of chickens.

THEY stopped at the produce station as soon as they got to town. Mary Ellen pushed herself back into the corner and looked coldly at Jake Cline as he shoved his dirty old hat in the door and shouted, "Got a few hens to sell, young lady?"

"They're mother's," she said.

He gave a windy haw-haw and pulled out the hens, fluttering and protesting. He made them flop on purpose, Mary Ellen thought crossly. She looked out cautiously to see if Jack were watching.

A man came up to Dad and said something about his corn allotment. "Well," answered Dad, "you know, I think——" Mary Ellen watched Dad lean back against the car and point the stem

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of his pipe at the man. "I think I'll get out and try to find some of the girls," she said.

"Oh, why don't you wait—well, all right," answered Mother. "We'll try to park somewhere across from Wohlner's. It usually isn't so crowded there."

"All right, Mother, I'll find it."

Mary Ellen looked in the mirror and pushed awkwardly at the new waves. She wondered if Jack would have the car tonight.

"And we'll probably be ready to go home soon after the concert, so remember to come to the car. Dad's been working awfully hard today and he's tired."

"O. K. Does my hair look all right?"

"Yes, it looks nice."

Mary Ellen climbed out of the car.

"Stand up straight, dear," Mother reminded her.

She frowned and started up the street. She hoped she didn't see any of the girls. They'd hook onto her arm and walk around and around the street, and she wouldn't get to talk to Jack alone. She looked sideways into a garage window. It was dark and she could see her hair. It was lots prettier than Lillian's, and Jack walked home from parties sometimes with Lillian. Of course Lillian wasn't bashful at all.

SHE saw old Mrs. Thompson waddling straight toward her, like a big, affectionate puppy. Mary Ellen stared with sudden fascination at cans of furniture polish stacked in a window. She tried to slip behind some tired-looking women standing with arms folded on protruding stomachs, but a fat hand caught her arm.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, deary?" beamed Mrs. Thompson.

"Oh, I was just—oh—I—" Mary Ellen looked down at her arm. It looked silly held out like that, and besides Mrs. Thompson pinched.

"How's your Mother? Didn't she come in tonight?"

"All right. She's in the car, I guess."

"Well, I'll see her later on. I'm glad to get a visit with her little girl. Can't hardly tell which is which now, you're growing up so fast. How old are you now?"

"Fourteen."
“Fourteen! Well, you sure take after your mother. She looked just like you do when she was your age, only she was maybe a little lighter, I don’t know.”

Mary Ellen spread her mouth into a pleasant expression and looked through the crowd. The band kids were beginning to walk up and down the streets. In their stiff, white trousers they were moving proudly toward the roped-off street. They trotted and clumped and skipped, but none of them sauntered beside a black cornet case with a green and yellow Music Clinic sticker on it. He’d probably be late. People didn’t care much if Jack were late. He’d grin and give a crazy excuse that made everyone laugh, and not even the teachers got mad. Mary Ellen had heard kids say, “Oh, well! His father’s on the school board.” She’d felt mad and stuffed inside and wanted to hit them, but she hadn’t said anything.

Mrs. Thompson was squeezing her arm harder. Mary Ellen widened her smile and looked at her.

“And little Patty was so sweet when I was there. Her mother took her to church and she said—”

Mary Ellen tried to see the clock in the store. As she turned back she saw him coming—down at the other end of the next block. He was alone. If she could get away now she could beat him to the place where the band played. She could talk to him right away—it wasn’t time for the concert yet. She looked at Mrs. Thompson. What could she say? If only Mother would come along. She’d have to hurry. She pulled her arm loose.

“Oh, Mrs. Thompson—I’m awfully sorry, but I just remembered—I’ve got to go right away, in a hurry! I— I— Mother’ll probably be here in a minute. ’Bye!’”

She wanted to run, but it wasn’t ladylike and she was almost a sophomore. She walked fast until she was near the roped-off street. She strolled up to the rope, listening to her heart thumping in her ears. She slid her hand along the rope, jumping casually over the knots. She stopped and pretended to look around for the girls. Jack came. She watched him reach over the rope and lay his cornet on the first chair. He saw her standing there, looking at him.

“Hi, Mary Ellen,” he said as he went past her.

Her smile left a puzzled forlorn mouth that wanted to cry.

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She looked at the bricks in the street. If she kept looking at them, people wouldn’t see her face. She’d—“Hey, what’s down there, anyway?” said a voice. She jumped. Jack was there again, holding a sack of popcorn toward her and frowning at the ground.

She laughed. “Why—well, nothing.” There was still a chance! She could talk to him now. He had come back after all. She looked around to see if anybody were looking. She wanted the girls to see her—she was talking to Jack Hunter!

“Want some popcorn?” he asked.

“Mm—hm. Thank you.” She took a big handful and held it carefully telling herself whose popcorn it was. She’d save a piece for her memory book.

Jack threw a handful into his mouth and chewed it looking across the street. Mary Ellen wished her ears didn’t feel so hot.

“Are you going—are you—are you playing in the band tonight?” she stammered.

Jack looked at her in surprise.

“Sure!”

“Oh.” She put a grain of popcorn in her mouth and chewed it mechanically.

“How do you think it sounds with the new oboe the school bought?” Jack asked.

“Just fine,” replied Mary Ellen in a flat voice, as she tried to straighten her skirt.

“Well, Shaw isn’t so hot at playing it yet, but he’s really a swell pitcher.”

“Oh, is he?”

“Yeh. We played a good game yesterday. We played Banburg, you know.”

“Uh—huh.” Mary Ellen nodded her head and smiled weakly.

“Beat the socks off them, too.” he offered her more popcorn, but she shook her head.

“I still have some.”

“Well, guess I’ll go see if I can find Smith. Seen him around?”

“No,” said Mary Ellen.

She watched him go up the street dipping his hand into the popcorn sack. She bit her lip and looked down at the bricks. This time they were laughing at her and pointing their fingers. She kicked at them. Two little boys ran past giggling and threw something. A girl dragged by with a red-faced baby yelling from
a cart. Mary Ellen walked toward Wohlner's, looking at the sidewalk straight ahead of her. She stopped and looked across the street. The car was there, over beside the green delivery truck. She waited for cars with sneering lights to go by. She crossed the street and got into the back seat. She sat very still, looking at the steering wheel. After a long time the band crashed into a noisy march. Another Saturday night.

Pressure

Clyde Zimmerman

Ag. Jl. '39

IT WAS two o'clock in the afternoon by the clock on the wall in the dingy editorial office of the Post-Gazette. Sam Barker ran a hand through rumpled, grayish hair. Then he attacked the editorial proofs on the desk before him. The door to the street opened and shut.

Sam looked up. “Afternoon, Jed,” he said.

“Afternoon, Sam. Paper out yet?”

“Not quite,” said Sam.

“Late, isn’t it?”

Sam grinned. “What’s your hurry? I never saw you so anxious to get a copy before.”

“Never mind—I guess I got a right to want my paper on time. Besides—there’s something special I want to see in this one.”

Sam scrutinized a sentence, then drew his pencil through it. “Guess you can’t wait to begin that new serial we’re starting today, “Beginners in Love.”


“Right interesting reading, some folks think,” said Sam.

“Well, there’s something else I’m more interested in.”

“About how the legislature’s going to reduce taxes, maybe—”


“You put it in, of course.”

“Oh—oh, that,” Sam scratched his head. “I’d almost forgotten

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