Wrapped For Mailing

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Chem. T. Jr.

SHE stood and looked at it for a long moment, its dusty velvet back black against the bright yellow blotter on the desk. The room was very still. She thought what a nice frame it had—sterling silver—but the velvet back certainly did pick up dust.

Of course she did have a clothes brush—and she could brush the dust off if she tried hard enough—and it would look a whole lot better if she did. But then, what with one thing and another, school kept her so busy she never quite got around to it somehow. So there it lay covered with dust and little white specks of lint.

She supposed she really ought to brush it. She supposed that was the thing to do when you sent a picture back to somebody—you brushed it off so it would get back in just as good shape as you got it. Well, almost as good shape. Of course there was that dent already in the upper right hand corner, so it probably didn't make a whole lot of difference anyway.

IT WAS funny about that dent. She had come into the room one night last fall, furious after a quarrel, and had stood in front of the picture looking at that smiling face and thinking of all the wonderfully cutting things she could have said to it a few minutes before but hadn't thought of. And then all of a sudden—quite by accident and almost without her knowing what it was doing—her arm had flown out toward it. And then there was that funny tinny sound of metal hitting hard wood as the corner of the frame hit the floor.

She chuckled suddenly to herself—my, but he'd been mad that night. Well, so had she. And all over a nobody—some dumb girl he used to know at home. Maybe she had been a little—well, short with her, but after all it had been kind of dumb for the girl to come up and start talking to Dave about a ride home for Thanksgiving when anyone could see they were on their way to the football game, and wanted to be sure and get picked up by

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the gang at the corner. So when she'd seen what looked like a good chance to escape she'd taken it—"and cut her off with your smarty wisecrack with a sentence half out of her mouth." That's what Dave had said afterwards. Dave usually didn't get excited about those things—but that time he had somehow. Sometimes people were awfully funny.

It had taken her a long time to make him forget the silly business, too. She'd had to drag herself out to go to church with him for months, and even five or six weeks afterward, still had to be careful about insisting on the dollar Union dance instead of the thirty-five cent show down town. Of course, in the end it had been all right, but the dent in the picture frame had still been there, and always would be, she supposed.

And now, she was sending it back to him, dent and all. It just went to show you that you never could tell what would happen. Last spring she'd just about been able to wrap him around her little finger—and now—well—he hadn't even called her up since he got back this fall.

THAT was a kind of a rude thing for a person to do—not even call your friends to let them know you were alive—not even call them once. Maybe she'd been worried about how he was and everything. But what did he care how she worried? She picked the picture up and turned it over. Smiling through his dumb teeth like that. Who'd he think he was? He'd had the colossal nerve to call her a "rude, spoiled brat," for snubbing his dumb home-town friend and then he turned around and acted the way he did. Pretty good, that was!

Well, he needn't worry about her—she tossed her head—there were plenty more just as good as he around—just as good dancers, and just as smooth-looking—that really knew how to give a girl a good time. He really didn't have a thing thousands of other fellows didn't have too.

Well! He'd just better be pretty careful what he said to other people about being rude, if he didn't even act polite himself. And anyway she hadn't really been rude at all to his old dumb girl friend. She'd just said, "Cut the old home-week stuff, Dave—here comes fun!" And then she'd pulled him up to the car where the gang was waiting and they'd whisked in! Well! What was there in that to get mad about? She'd thought he'd thank her for

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getting rid of that dumb thing so neatly, but there he sat all straight and funny around the mouth, and stiff like a ramrod even in the car jammed full of sensible people, laughing and shouting and acting like a good time, instead of being all mad and dumb, like the way he was.

CRASH! Somehow, the picture had—well, sort of slipped out of her hands. Gosh! And there it was face down on the floor. Gosh! Well! It served him right, she guessed—but she couldn't have him telling around the school how she'd sent his picture back to him broken! Gosh! How terrible! She didn't want to pick it up. She better not even look at it probably. Maybe she could pick it up face down and not even see the other side and wrap it up and—well, then she could say if anyone ever said anything to her about it that the last time she'd seen it it had been all right. Which was perfectly, perfectly true.

"It must have been broken in the mail," she could say. "They're getting awfully careless, lately. Just the other day mother sent me some perfume that was all . . ." And then they would be off the subject and everything would be all right.

PROBABLY she could make the story even better by not putting it in the cardboard mailing box. It might get really broken a little more and then she'd really be telling the truth. Of course she was telling the truth now, but then it would be even truer.

She picked up the picture still face down. The tips of her fingers could feel a crack starting near the dented corner. She drew her fingers away from it hastily. She mustn't cut herself. She carried it to the table and folded stiff brown paper around it. A twist of string—address inked on—and a stamp. There it was, all wrapped ready for mailing. She would take it down and put it on the mail table first thing in the morning.

"Essie!" someone called down the hall. "Phone!" It was probably that new fellow she'd met last night at the exchange.

"Thanks," she called back, and practiced saying "Hello," in her most musical tones a couple of times before opening the door. First impressions were so important—the most important of any, some people thought. She went out, humming a little dance tune as she went.

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