

IT TAKES ALL KINDS

By
Louis Bromfield



Harper & Brothers Publishers

NEW YORK and LONDON

1939

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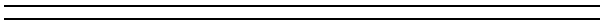
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FIRST EDITION

H-O

The story BETTER THAN LIFE was originally published serially under the title of AND IT ALL CAME TRUE and is published in England under the title of IT HAD TO HAPPEN. The story MCLEOD'S FOLLY was originally published serially under the title of YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE.

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The individual stories contained in this volume are presented
as separate eBooks.

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IV

The Girl Who Knew Everybody

SHE was neither a pretty girl nor a plain one. She had an attractive face, bright and full of intelligence, and blue eyes which looked at you with immense interest and curiosity the first time she saw you, so that you in turn were interested and because your vanity was touched, you liked her and wanted to go on with the adventure.

Her name was Mary Carlin and I saw her for the first time seated on a stool before the bar of the Palace Hotel in St. Moritz. It was in one of the big seasons when everyone had money or thought he had money and everyone was spending it. As Toto Rossi said, “*Everybody* was there,” and by the way he said it, you knew he meant “*everybody* who was *anybody*” in Toto’s scheme of things. And to understand Toto’s scheme of life you had to know Toto.

He was the son of one of the myriad Italian counts and his mother had been Miss Winegartner of Newark with an enormous fortune made partly out of copper and partly out of brewing. She gave birth to Toto and then in despair at the life in which she found herself—a millionairess with her freedom and all her rights vested by Italian law in the silly little man who was her husband—she gave up the struggle and simply fell into leading the depraved life for which her husband had set her so detailed an example. But Toto remained and as he grew up, he was dragged about with her from hotel to hotel

and watering place to watering place, practically a witness to the countless liaisons which the Countess Rossi, nee Miss Elline Winegartner, conducted with a lavish hand. His father faded out of the picture and saw him once or twice a year.

Toto was nothing much to begin with but what there was of good in him never had a chance. At twenty-four he was simply a continental bar fly, much more Italian than American, dressed much too carefully with elaborate double-breasted waistcoats and jackets which were cut too tight at the waist. But he knew everybody and was “frightfully amusing” and went everywhere, and by that he meant that he frequented all the expensive hotels in season and that he knew everyone of the troupe which went in turn from hotel to hotel always in season, from Deauville to the Lido, to Biarritz, to Morocco or Algeria, to St. Moritz, to London, to Paris and back again to Deauville to begin all over again. He had a generous allowance but it was by no means enough for him, and he augmented it by charging a price for introducing climbers who sought an entrance into the squirrel cage. He got them invitations to parties and saw that they spent enough money on their own parties to make it worth the while of “everybody who was anybody” to accept their invitations. Either the climbers failed after the first attempt or became initiated into the world of “everybody who was anybody.”

2

It was Toto, dark, sallow, dissipated, with sleek hair and shaped waist, who introduced me to Mary. She was then, I think, in the middle of her career. She must have been about twenty-seven or eight, slender, with blond hair and a lovely complexion, and dressed superbly in the smartest, most

expensive clothes it was possible to find. That night on the bar stool she wore a gown of peach-colored crêpe de Chine.

The look of interest in her eyes when I came toward her with Toto was so intense that I, like all the others, wanted to know her at once, talk to her and spend the whole evening in her company. As I crossed the floor, I thought, “Thank God, here is someone who is young and fresh, someone with enthusiasm in whom I shall perhaps find some fun.” Among the others who were anybody, there were plenty who were young, younger even than Mary herself, but like Toto who was only twenty-four, they were as old and as tired as time itself, and save when they were not malicious or witty at the expense of a friend, were almost as deadly.

“Oh,” she said, when she heard my name, “I’ve been longing to meet you for years. I love your books ... all of them.”

I thanked her, the only answer one can make to that statement which always leaves the conversation in mid-air.

“Have a cocktail with us?”

Toto excused himself. “I’ll see you later,” he said. He went to join a fat woman in *pince-nez* and a beaded gown, and a short little man with a plump stomach who might have been the keeper of an American speakeasy.

“Who are they?” I asked, looking after Toto.

“That’s Mr. and Mrs. Hagedorn,” she said. “He’s the new American minister to one of those funny Balkan countries. He made his money partly out of glass and partly out of backing the cinemas. He gave a lot of money to the Republican party, so he’s an ambassador now.”

“Oh.”

“They’ve got lots of money. They’re entertaining in a big way.” She laughed, “I don’t mean they’re amusing. I mean they’re spending money for other people’s entertainment. Why don’t you come along? They’re giving a party tonight.”

“I don’t know them. They’ve never heard of me.”

Again she laughed. “That’s all right. They’ve never heard of most of the people here. They’ll be delighted. They want to know everybody. Go with me. I want some new company. I’m sick of always sitting between two of the same ten men.”

“All right, if you’ll have another cocktail on me.”

We had another cocktail and while I talked to her, I kept watching her, in the way of writers, thinking that she must be very rich indeed, for not only were her clothes expensive but she wore a half-dozen diamond bracelets and a diamond pendant set with a big emerald.

Over her cocktail glass she looked at me and laughed, “You’re all tanned. You must have been skiing.”

I smiled, “That’s what I came here for.”

By now it was nearly eight o’clock and the bar was filling up with everybody who was anybody. There were a half-dozen members of dethroned royal families, innumerable poverty-stricken counts and dukes and princes, two great Paris dressmakers, one or two racing men, a fashionable photographer and his excellency Mr. Hagedorn and the Ambassadress who sat with her full bosom resting on the marble top of one of the tables, a dozen gigolos of different nationalities, and a dozen middle-aged and aging women, all hard, all dressed with extreme smartness, all faultlessly made up, waved and talking with animation, three or four women who, in less liberal days, would have been known simply as cocottes.

As the room filled up Mary Carlin gave me less and less of her attention. The restless blue eyes wandered this way and that. She kept bowing and people kept coming up to speak to her. Some of them I knew. Some of them I did not. Once when I asked her a question she could not answer at all for she had not been listening.

I grinned and said, "You seem to know everybody."

"Yes, pretty nearly." She slipped down from the bar stool and said, "I must go and fix it up with the Ambassadors."

She crossed the room to the table where the Hagedorns sat, buying cocktails for everyone who came to their table. They were near enough for me to hear some of the conversation. At sight of Mary, Mrs. Hagedorn's large fleshy face beamed with pleasure.

Mary put her arm about the plump shoulders of the Ambassador and said, "How are you, darling? I haven't seen you all day."

Then their voices lowered and I saw Mrs. Hagedorn look toward me and then turn away quickly. I knew it was all right. I had a name which sometimes appeared in the newspapers. I was of the second class because the name appeared respectably. If it had appeared scandalously I should have been of the first class, and I was by no means rich enough to make up for my sad penchant for respectability.

Then Mary led me over to Mrs. Hagedorn. To my astonishment the Ambassador got to her feet, and held out her hand beaming at me through the shining *pince-nez*.

"I'm afraid you don't remember me."

I fell into lies at once. “Yes, of course. I’ve known you all along.” Desperately I waited for a clue. She gave it to me.

“I haven’t seen you since you lectured in Zenith. Let’s see, that must have been five years ago. I was the one who brought you there. I was chairman of the program committee.”

Mary interrupted us. “I’ll just run into the dining room,” she said, “and change the places. You can trust me, darling. I know everybody and who gets on with who.”

The Ambassadors bridled. “She’s just like a daughter to me. She’s the sweetest girl. I don’t know what we’d have done without her here. She’s just arranged everything. Have another cocktail?”

“No thanks. And please do sit down.”

She sat down and pursing her lips a little she said, “I only worry about whom she may marry. She’s running about with Toto now. He’s a nice boy but not for a husband.”

“No, certainly not.”

“I don’t approve of these foreign marriages, even if I am an ambassador.”

“They don’t seem to turn out well,” I answered, making conversation.

“Don’t repeat what I’ve said because Toto would never forgive me.”

She liked saying Toto’s name. She liked the bowing and smiling at passersby. She liked saying Mary Carlin was like a daughter to her. I think she knew her glory was short and that after the next election she would return to live in Zenith. It wasn’t a pretty spectacle. She wanted to know everybody who was anybody, and they were only using her for what she

was worth. That night she had brought a jazz band and two singers with good Zenith money all the way from Paris, just to entertain them.

At dinner I sat next to Mary Carlin and on the other side sat a countess whose name I never heard distinctly. She was a tall, gaunt, sour woman who had once been a beauty. She did not seem inclined to talk but only regarded me as she regarded the rest of the room, with a bitter expression of disillusionment.

So I talked to Mary Carlin.

She told me she came from Indiana and that she was rich. Her money came from an uncle who had made it out of a factory which confected felt hats. During dinner she forgot herself for a little while and the restless look went out of her blue eyes. She listened to me and she herself talked. Perhaps she was interested because we talked about Mary Carlin.

I asked her where she lived and what she did all the year round.

She said that she lived Nowhere in Particular, or rather that she had a small flat in Paris and the rest of the time traveled about living in hotels.

“Doesn’t the life bore you after a while?”

“No. It’s fun. There’s always people about and parties.”

“You seem to know everybody.”

“No, not quite.”

And then she made a cynical remark, odd for anyone so young. “We all belong to two classes,” she said, “those who give parties and those who go to them. The ones who give them have to have the money and the ones who go have to work. They have to be amusing.”

I grinned, "And which lot do you belong to?"

"I belong to the lot who give parties. I'm not clever or amusing."

"What would happen if you lost your money?"

"I'd be down and out."

I tried a few words with the countess but nothing came of it and I turned back to Mary. She saw I was interested in her and she gave me all her attention. I could, I think, have asked her anything. I think she fancied she was being intellectual and the idea excited and amused her for the moment.

"Don't you ever think about getting married?"

For a moment she didn't answer. Then she said, "Yes, sometimes. But there's no hurry. There's plenty of time."

"How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-seven."

"If a nice man came along wouldn't you marry him?"

"No—not yet. I'm having too much fun."

I looked about the table at the tired faces, the sallow faces, the bitter faces, the bored faces. "I don't think there's much chance of a nice man coming along out of this party."

"Besides," she said, "the marriages I've seen haven't turned out so hot."

And just then a nice fellow came through the doorway. You knew he was nice as soon as you saw him because in his tanned face and blue eyes, there was nothing bored, bitter or dissipated. He was tall and blond and looked as if he were good on skis or at steering a bob or at doing almost anything. He had a look of race and of honesty. The sight of him among all the others was a shock.

In the middle of a sentence Mary saw him and stopped talking. I saw the old restless look come into her eyes and I divined that here was someone who attracted her.

“Who is that?” she asked.

“I’ve not the faintest idea.”

From then on our conversation was ruined, for she could not rest until she had found out who the stranger was. All the intimacy was gone. She turned to her dinner companion and asked the people who sat opposite but no one knew him, and slowly I divined another fact, that she was not interested in him for himself or because he was attractive, but because he was the only person in the room she did not know. It might have been amusing to have attempted a flirtation on my own side, but now I knew it was no longer possible. It seemed to me suddenly that she was not a woman at all but a kind of machine.

The stranger was an acquaintance of Mrs. Hagedorn. I could see him making apologies for being late. She made a place for him beside her. He did not dine. He merely sat there talking to her now and then. The Ambassadors bridled and shook her carefully waved head.

Suddenly I felt tired and bored and unbearably sleepy from a day spent in the open. We rose from the table to go into the ballroom for the music and the performers. I saw Mary Carlin go straight to the Ambassadors and I saw her being introduced to the stranger. She had forgotten me utterly. She knew me well enough now to bow to me wherever we met in the world and to ask me to parties. For the moment at least that was all the interest she had. It was not very flattering.

I went to bed.

In the days that followed I met the stranger. He turned out to be an Englishman, Wemyss by name. He was an engineer and had been in South America, building railroads. We met at the top of the Cresta Run and from then on saw a good deal of each other, for he had lived alone or among Indians and negroes for so long that he felt shy and restless in the fashionable crowd that haunted the bars and the rinks.

The odd thing was that when he was not seeing me he was always with Mary Carlin. I do not know what drew him to her unless it was the attraction of opposites for he was rather a taciturn, solitary fellow and Mary chattered a great deal and was always surrounded by crowds. Perhaps he found some attraction in the struggle to separate her from the people who always surrounded her. He spoke of her now and then and frequently I saw them together always surrounded by the Totos and the Mimis and the Pipis.

The Ambassadors and her husband returned to their Balkan post since it was necessary for him to put in an appearance now and then, and for a time there was no one in the place but Mary Carlin rich enough to give parties as big as those given by the Hagedorns.

Then one morning Wemyss said to me, "Do you know Mary Carlin well?"

"So-so," I said. "We call each other by our first names."

"She's an odd girl," he said. "She's never alone."

I laughed, "No, that's true. She knows everybody."

He looked at me with his frank blue eyes, a little puzzled and suddenly I understood that he was in love with her and

would have nothing said against her. He thought that I was laughing at her.

“She oughtn’t to be running around with all these people.”

“She likes it, apparently.”

Then naïvely he said, “I’d like to get her away from them. She’s too nice a girl to make a mess of her life.”

“I don’t think she’s really involved in any way. There isn’t any sort of a mess. Sex doesn’t concern any of them very much ... at least not straightforward sex.”

His eyes narrowed and he said, “I didn’t mean that, there can be worse things than that. There’s such a thing as frittering away one’s existence. That’s the worst sin one can be guilty of.”

It was, I suppose, a priggish speech, and yet under the circumstances and in the surroundings, it seemed profoundly true.

“She’s much too nice a girl. There’s something fine in her.”

Abruptly I said, “Are you interested in her as much as that?”

“Yes, I am. Only I’d like to see her alone just for a moment now and then. I’d like really to talk to her, but it’s never possible. As soon as I begin two or three people interrupt us and she forgets all about me and what we were saying.” He lighted a cigarette and looked off over the mountains, “Do you think you could help me?”

I laughed, “Of course. How?”

“Help me with a plot to get her alone for a little time. I’m not bad at making love. If I could get her alone I think I could make her listen to me.”

“If you can think of a plan I’ll help you.”

That night he came to me with a plan. I was to say that I was giving a party at the inn and invite her. I was to bring her myself and once we arrived we would find him there and I was to make an excuse and escape, leaving them alone together.

I agreed, partly out of friendship for Wemyss and partly because I had come to see what he had divined—that there *was* something good in Mary Carlin. There were fine qualities. They could be saved if some nice young man would carry her off and marry her, saved out of the fathomless depths of utter triviality and banality. Since I had come to know her better, she seemed to me a nice girl who had lost her head.

I asked her to a small party at the inn and she accepted. Wemyss was happy. It was odd to see a man so much in love. I think he was a genuine romantic, the kind of man who falls in love blindly, once and never again. And he had a faint Messiah complex: he was determined to save Mary. He had lived to the age of thirty-four without ever having had his heart touched and now he had fallen in love with a girl whom he scarcely knew and had never spoken to except in crowds. With a man like that a girl can do as she pleases. Any woman is lucky to find a husband of that sort. They happen once in a lifetime and they are devoted forever. In all the world, he was the one man to save her. The nice man had come along.

Wemyss and I skied and bobbed and once or twice we took Mary Carlin on the bob, and always she arrived bringing two or three people with her. But he was content in the knowledge that on Thursday he would meet her alone at the inn.

And then the blow fell. At four on the afternoon of the rendezvous we came in from skiing and I found a note from

Mary Carlin.

It read, “Sorry, darling, but I can’t dine tonight. I looked for you everywhere and had to leave without explaining. I’m going to Paris tonight on the Engadine express. Alice and Reggie are throwing a big party at the Ritz.”

I had no idea who Alice and Reggie were. Mary Carlin always called everyone by his first name and most of the time I never knew whom she was speaking of.

I had to break the news to Wemyss. I did it as gently as possible. His blue eyes darkened, and he said, “Well, that means I go to Paris in the morning.”

4

Two days later my own holiday came to an end and I went to Paris to sail for New York. I did not have Wemyss’ address and it never occurred to me to look up Mary Carlin at the Ritz. I understood perfectly my own relationship to her. I might not see her again for five or ten years but wherever I saw her, she would come across the room and greet me as an old friend and say, “Hello, Jimmy. Where *have* you been all this time?” and then introduce me to Alices, Reggies and Totos. So I did not discover whether Wemyss had been able to find her alone or whether he had proposed to her.

But six months later I met Mary Carlin’s aunt. It was in Cordova, Indiana that it happened, in the little town where Mary had been born and lived all her life until as an orphan of twenty-two she came into the money left by her uncle. I was lecturing in the Town Hall and after it was over a score of women came out into the reception room to shake hands with the noted author. Among them was a plump little

woman with a jolly face. She waited until all the others had passed along the line.

Then she came forward and said, "I'm Mrs. Carlin. I heard from my niece that she met you last winter."

"Oh, yes. Of course, Mary Carlin. I saw her in St. Moritz."

"And how is she?"

"She was fine, enjoying herself."

"Yes, I gather from her letters that she's having a wonderful time, meeting all the most celebrated people, ambassadors and dukes and everything. I don't hear from her very often nowadays. When she first went over, she used to write regularly, but now I only hear now and then. You see, in a way, I'm a kind of a mother to her. She lived with me from the time she was seventeen after her poor mother died."

"Yes. She told me something about that."

"It's funny. She seems to like Europe. The first time she went over she only stayed six months, but this last time, she went over for six months and she's never come home. That was more than three years ago."

As I watched Mrs. Carlin I began to discover the clue to what Wemyss meant when he said, "She's too nice a girl to get mixed up with all this set." I began to see that beneath the restlessness and the fine clothes of Mary Carlin there lay hidden somewhere the elements of this jolly, cozy, little woman who stood talking to me. Mrs. Carlin was provincial and all that was unsmart, but she had honest blue eyes and a friendliness that never could be found in the world of everybody who was anybody. In every line of her face, in the very tone of her voice, in her smile was written the story of all the happiness of a woman who had found her place in life

and filled it with success. She was a little dazzled by Mary Carlin's accounts of her brilliant life, just as Mary herself was a little dazzled.

"I hope she's not going it too hard," said Mrs. Carlin, "she always liked a good time. I've never been to Europe, but I'm thinking about going over to see Mary. My husband and I are thinking about a vacation."

My first swift impulse was to discourage the idea. It was impossible to imagine Mrs. Carlin visiting Mary in a hotel surrounded by Totos and Alices and Reggies. Out of all that world, only Wemyss seemed appropriate. I thought he would understand Mrs. Carlin and appreciate her and that they would like each other. But it was none of my business.

"Well," said Mrs. Carlin, "I'm certainly glad to have seen you. I'll write to Mary about seeing you. When you see her again, tell her not to go it too hard." She bridled a little. "You know what I'd really like to see? I'd like to see Mary married and with a family. She's that kind of a girl."

Suddenly I realized that if her aunt did make that trip to Europe and saw Mary Carlin, she would not know her at all.

5

I saw Mary Carlin the next time in the bar at the Hotel Royale in Biarritz. The bar is perched on a rock above the beach and one can sit there in the sun or shade as one prefers, drinking and watching the naked bathers on the beach below. It is a place frequented by everybody who is anybody.

At first I did not recognize her. I saw Toto, looking exactly the same as when I had last seen him, sallow, dissipated and ageless. Only this time he was wearing a purple and white

striped dressing gown and a pair of bathing trunks. He saw me and crossed over and then I heard a woman's voice cry out, "Hello! Jimmy, where *have* you been all this time?" I turned and saw Mary Carlin coming toward me.

I knew her at once, more by the sound of her voice than by her appearance, for she had changed a good deal. She was still smartly dressed in the newest of hats and gowns, but something had gone out of her, something which I think must have been the flush of first youth. She was no longer a girl. She was about thirty then, and if one had wanted to argue about it, she really did not look more than thirty. Her skin was smooth. Her throat was thinner than it had been, her eyes more brilliant and there were hard little lines at the corners of her pretty mouth. I thought, "Across that face is the shadow of the old maid." But it was none of these things which made her seem a well-preserved woman of middle age. The thing lay in the too careful and too brilliant make-up she had put on as a protection, as if she herself already felt that she was beginning to grow gaunt and rattly, and in a nervousness which made itself felt all about her. And in her voice there was a faint hint of nervous shrillness.

She took us back to her table and we pushed chairs in among a circle of Argentines, dukes and dressmakers, clad in peignoirs and bathing trunks. I felt suddenly and thoroughly out of the picture. People kept coming and going from the table, greeting Mary Carlin and passing on. All the talk was of Mimi or Reggie or Alice. There was nothing for me to say for I had no idea who Alice or Mimi or Reggie were. And Mary Carlin had less time for me now than she had had when we met in St. Moritz. She wanted to have me there at the table with her but after that her interest ceased. I had the

impression that she would have liked one large table at which everyone in the bar was seated drinking the drinks she paid for. She wanted me there but she had no time for me. There were so many other people.

At last when I rose to go, she called across the table, “Come along to dinner tonight, Jimmie. I’m throwing a party at the Reserve in Ciboure. Dinner’s at half past ten. I must see more of you. There’s so much I want to talk about.”

Her voice was shrill. She seemed to me a person who was going faster and faster.

And as I turned I saw Wemyss coming through the door. He was as glad to see me as I was to see him. He looked a little older but still healthy and vigorous and honest. We made a rendezvous for the late afternoon and then he went into the bar to Mary Carlin’s table.

Toto walked back with me to my hotel.

“What’s Wemyss doing here?” I asked.

“Mary Carlin. He follows her every place.”

“So the devotion has lasted.”

“It’s got to be a famous story. He never went back to South America. He’s stayed in England. His father died. He’s Sir Arthur Wemyss now.”

I grinned cynically, “Maybe she’ll marry him now.”

“No,” said Toto seriously, “I don’t think that interests her. I don’t think it would interest her if he was King George, except as somebody to invite to dinner so that she could say, ‘Yes, King George dined with me last night.’ She’s a funny girl. I don’t think you’d find her in any country but the United States.”

“Why?”

“She’s not interested in men as such. I don’t think she’s even been the tiniest bit in love with anyone. She likes parties and knowing everybody, and she’s willing to pay for it.”

“She looks much older than she ought.”

“It’s no wonder,” said Toto. “She always stays up till the last cat is hung and then she gets up early in the morning for fear of missing somebody or something. When she’s in Biarritz she’s worrying all the time for fear there’s something she’s missing at the Lido. She keeps going faster and faster. She can’t even find time to go back to America on a visit. And you can’t go on doing all that all the time without some help from the outside. She’s taken to drinking a good deal. I think too she takes stuff to make her sleep. The story is that she’s lost a lot of her money too.”

“If she’d only marry Wemyss he could save her.”

“Maybe.”

“Why do you say maybe?”

“Maybe it’s too late.”

“He’s a romantic sap, hanging around like that all this time.”

Toto grinned cynically, “I think the affair has taken on the proportions of a missionary adventure. He’s as British as she is American.”

“Why does she keep him hanging about?”

Again Toto grinned, “Because, I suppose, she has the horrors sometimes and then she thinks she might want to marry him some day, and have him look after her.”

I saw her again that night, but no more intimately than I had seen her in the morning. We greeted each other and exchanged a few remarks and then the crowd swallowed her

up. At dinner she had a grand duke on her right and a dressmaker on her left. Across the table I watched her and I saw what Toto meant. She kept going faster and faster. She was talking so much that she bored both the duke and the dressmaker. Watching her I wondered where it would end and it seemed to me that it could only end in complete bedlam. I thought of Mrs. Carlin back in Cordova, Indiana, and used her as a measuring rod. I saw that there was very little left which was nice in Mary Carlin. She had grown hard and thin and brittle. It was impossible to think of her any longer as the niece of the plump little woman. I wondered whether Mary Carlin had stopped writing altogether to her aunt.

6

I went away the next day and I never saw Mary Carlin again. In the months that followed I read about her in the continental papers, the *Daily Mail*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Paris Herald*. She was always giving parties and attending parties, always in the smartest resort at the smartest season. I went to America and when I returned I discovered that a strange thing had happened. Mary Carlin's name had disappeared from the newspapers. It was as if she had suddenly disappeared. I thought, "Perhaps, after all, she has married Wemyss or she has gone back to America." But in the back of my mind there lurked always a less healthy suspicion. She had been going faster and faster.... When I thought of her, it was, oddly enough, as I had seen her that first time in the bar at St. Moritz, young and gay and enjoying herself.

In August I found myself in Paris. It was hot and dusty, the one month of the year when Paris is at its worst. One

afternoon I was reading, clad in dressing gown, when the telephone rang and Toto's voice came over the wire.

"I read in the papers you were in town."

It seemed odd that the fashionable Toto should be in Paris in the one month when it was deserted like a plague-stricken city by everybody who was anybody. The next minute he made his apologies for being there.

"I had to come to Paris on account of business. Can I see you for a moment? Something awful has happened."

"Of course. What is it?"

"I don't know whether I can tell you over the telephone."

"I'd better know."

"Mary Carlin has committed suicide. That's all I can tell you now. I'll be right over."

He arrived in a high state of Latin excitement.

"I want you to go with me to the hotel and help fix things up. I'm no good at such things."

We went downstairs and hailed a taxi. "To the Ritz," I said to the driver.

"No," said Toto, "to the Hotel de Portugal, rue Bonaparte." Then as we climbed in he said, "She hasn't been at the Ritz for more than a year now. She couldn't afford it. She's been living in a scrubby hotel on the left Bank."

"Couldn't afford it?"

"No."

Then he told me what had happened. As her life whirled faster and faster, Mary Carlin spent more and more money. It cost a great deal of money when you weren't especially clever and amusing because then you had to give all the

parties. And she was not, apparently, as rich as people thought her. And presently she began drawing on her capital and to save that she began to speculate desperately, for she had to have money to go on as she had been living, entertaining people and knowing everybody and being everywhere in season. And slowly the money she had began to ooze away, now in a steady stream, now in large lumps. She ran into debt and sold the diamonds I had seen her wearing. And then came the great crash in the American stock market and nothing remained. Then it was she went to the people she knew, the countless people she had entertained and looked upon as friends. She tried to borrow money but the clever ones had none and the dull rich ones turned a cold shoulder to her. She couldn't give parties any longer and people found it unpleasant to invite someone to dinner who would ask for a loan. She wanted enough to go into the stock market again, but the most she ever got was a gift of a few hundred francs or lira here or there, enough to carry her along from day to day.

“The last time I saw her,” said Toto, “was at Easter. I met her walking alone in the Bois. I heard nothing of her since then till this morning when her maid came to my flat.

“The maid wasn't any longer with her because Mary Carlin could no longer afford a maid, but the maid liked her and kept in touch with her and sometimes came in to press her clothes for a few francs.

“So,” concluded Toto, “when this happened, the proprietor sent someone to tell the maid and she came to me.”

He had been drinking. His nerves were on edge and he began to cry.

The taxicab stopped before a simple little hotel and we went in. The proprietor met us, wringing his hands. Nothing like this had ever happened before in his hotel and would we get the body out as soon as possible.

“I’ve sent for an undertaker. I’ve arranged all that,” said Toto. And I thought suddenly that after all there was something commendable about Toto.

The undertaker was already there, waiting for a hearse to take the body away. He greeted us in the hall and asked whether we would like to see the body. I refused and we entered the little cupboard which Mary Carlin had taken as a sitting room to receive the friends who never came. The maid was there, a big dark Provençal woman, who kept crying and drying her eyes. She had collected all the clothes and on a table a little pile of telegrams and letters. She thought we had better take possession of them. I took them saying I would send them to her aunt in Indiana. Toto did not even know that the aunt existed.

There were three or four telegrams, all from the people she had once entertained saying that they were away, here or there in some fashionable place, and would see her when they returned. There was a letter from her aunt in Indiana telling the gossip of the little town of Cordova. It sounded strange and remote from everything which had been Mary Carlin’s life and I wondered if Mary Carlin had had any interest any longer in any of the people her aunt wrote about. Probably she had skimmed through the letter scarcely reading it. At the end Mrs. Carlin reproached her for not having written in six months.

At the bottom of the little pile lay a gray envelope. As I turned it over I read engraved on the back, Marshcote,

Hampshire, and something told me that it was from Wemyss.

I opened and read it.

Dear Madame:

Your telegram addressed to Sir Arthur Wemyss arrived this morning and I have forwarded it to him by post. I regret to say that he is now on his way to East Africa, following his marriage of a week ago, and it is impossible to count upon its reaching him short of three weeks.

Hoping that the delay will not cause you too great inconvenience, I am

Yours respectfully,
Martha Davis,
Secretary to Sir Arthur Wemyss

I gave it to Toto to read.

“So in the end,” I said, “she sent for him.”

I looked at the postmark. It must have arrived the night before, just before she went to sleep after the glass of veronal.

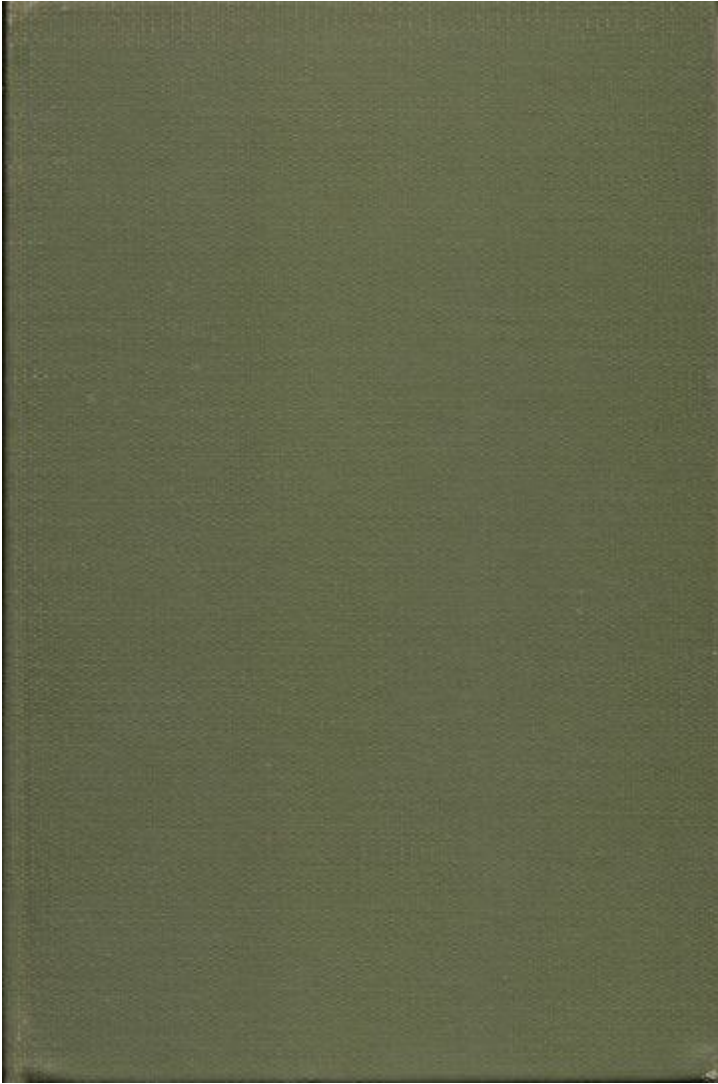
Toto put down the letter and looked toward the door behind which Mary Carlin lay dead. His lip curled a little.

“She was never even in love. She never even had an affair,” said Toto, “she died an old maid ... a virgin.” And into that word the gigolo put the full force of Latin contempt. “She never had time to live.”

Then after a little pause he added, “The girl who knew everybody and nobody at all.”

The undertaker’s men came into the room and we went quickly out.

That night I had a telegram from Toto. He had been called away suddenly to the Riviera. In the end I paid the undertaker's bill. I, who had only met Mary Carlin a few times in hotel bars.



[The end of *The Girl Who Knew Everybody* by Louis Bromfield]