

Both Parties Concerned

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Before announcing that he knows a girl like a book, a man had better make sure he has read to the bottom of the last page.

There really isn't much to tell - I mean it wasn't serious or anything, but it was kind of funny, at that. I mean because it looked there for a while as though everybody at the plant and Ruthie's mother and all was going to have the laugh on us. They had kept saying I and Ruthie were too young to get married. Ruthie, she was seventeen, and I was nearly twenty, nearly. That's pretty young, all right, but not if you know what you're doing. I mean not if everything's Jake between she and you. I mean both parties concerned.

Well, like I was saying, Ruthie and I, we never really split up. Not really split up. Not that Ruthie's mother wasn't wishing we did. Mrs. Cropper, she wanted Ruthie to go to college instead of get married. Ruthie got out of high school when she was fifteen only, and they wouldn't take her at where she wanted to go till she was eighteen. She wanted to be a doctor. I used to kid her. "Calling Doctor Kildare!" I'd say to her. I got a good sense of humor. Ruthie, she don't. She's more inclined to be serious like.

Well, I really don't know how it all started, but it really got hot one night last month at Jake's Place. Ruthie, she and I were out there. That joint is really class this year. Not so much neon. More bulbs. More parking space. Class. Know what I mean? Ruthie don't like Jake's much.

Well, this night I was telling you about, Jake's was jam-packed when we got there, and we had to wait around for about an hour till we got a table. Ruthie was all for not waiting. No patience. Then finally when we did get a table, she says she don't want a beer. So she just sits there, lighting matches, blowing them out. Driving me nuts.

"What's the matter?" I asked her finally- It got on my nerves after a while.

"Nothing's the matter," Ruthie says. She stops lighting matches, starts looking around the joint, as though she was keeping an eye peeled for somebody special.

"Something's the matter," I said. I know her like a book. I mean I know her like a book.

"Nothing's the matter," she says. "Stop worrying about me, Everything's swell. I'm the happiest girl in the world."

"Cut it out," I said. She was being cynical like. "I just asked you a question, that's all."

"Oh, pardon me," Ruthie said. "And you want an answer. Certainly. Pardon me." She was being very cynical like. I don't like that. It don't bother me, but I don't like it.

I knew what was eating her. I know her inside out, her every mood like. "Okay," I said. "You're sore because we went out tonight. Ruthie, for cryin' out loud, a guy has a right to go out once in a while, doesn't he?"

"Once in a while!" Ruthie says- "I love that. Once in a while. Like seven nights a week, huh, Billy?"

"It hasn't been seven nights a week," I said. And it hadn't! We hadn't gone out the night before. I mean we had a beer at Gordon's, but we came right home and all.

"No?" Ruthie said. "Okay. Let's drop it. Let's not discuss it."

I asked her very quiet like, what I was supposed to do. Sit around home like a dope every night? Stare at the walls? Listen to the baby bawl its head off? I asked her, very quiet like, what she wanted me to do. "Please don't shout," she says, "I don't want you to do anything."

"Listen," I said. "I'm paying that crazy Widger dame eighteen bucks a week just to take care of the kid for a couple of hours a night. I did it just so you could take it easy. I thought you'd be tickled to death. You used to like to go out once in a while," I said to her.

Then Ruthie says she didn't want me to hire Mrs. Widger in the first place. She said she didn't like her. She said she hated her, in fact. She said she didn't like to see Widger even hold the baby. I told Ruthie that Mrs. Widger has had plenty of babies of her own, and I guessed she knew pretty good how to hold a kid. Ruthie said when we go out at night Widger just sits in the living room, reading magazines; that she never goes near the baby. I said what did she want her to do - get in the crib with the kid? Ruthie said she didn't want to talk about it any more.

"Ruthie," I said, "what are you trying to do? Make me look like a rat?"

Ruthie, she says, "I'm not trying to make you look like a rat. You're not a rat."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot," I said. I can be cynic like too.

She says, "You're my husband, Billy." She was leaning over the table, crying like -but, holy mackerel, it wasn't my fault!

"You married me," she says, "because you said you. loved me. You're supposed to love our baby, too, and take care of it. We're supposed to think about things sometimes, not just going around."

I asked her, very calm like, who said I didn't love the baby.

"Please don't shout," she says. 'I'll scream if you shout," she says. "Nobody said you didn't love it, Billy. But you love it when it's convenient for you or something. When it's having its bath or when it plays with your necktie."

I told her I love it all the time. And I do! It's a nice kid, a real nice kid.

She says, "Then why aren't we home?"

I told her then. I mean I wasn't afraid to tell her. I told her. "Because," I said, "I wanna have a couple of beers. I want some life. You don't work on a fuselage all day. You don't know what it's like." I mean I told her.

Then she tried to be funny like. "You mean," she says, "I don't slave over a hot fuselage all day"

I told her that was pretty hot. then she started lighting matches again, like a kid. I asked her if she didn't get what I meant at all. She said she got what I meant all right, and she said she got what her mother meant, too, when her mother said we were too young to get married. She said she got what a lot of things meant now.

That really got me. I admit it. I'm willing to admit it. Nothing really gets me except when Ruthie brings up about her mother. I can't stand it when she brings up about her mother. I asked Ruthie, very quiet like, what she was talking about. I said, "Just because a guy wants to go out once in a while." Ruthie said if I said "once in a while" again, I'd never see her again. She's always taking things the way I don't mean them. I told her that. She said, "C'mon. We're here. Let's dance."

I followed her out to the floor, but just as we got there the orchestra got sneaky on us. They started playing Moonlight Becomes You. It's old now but it's a swell song. I mean it isn't a bad song. We used to hear it once in a while on the radio in the car or the one at home. Once in a while Ruthie used to sing the words. But it wasn't so hot, hearing it a Jake's that night. it was embarrassing. And they must of played eighty-five choruses of it. I mean they kept playing it. Ruthie danced about ten miles away from me, and we didn't look at each other much. Finally, they stopped. Then Ruthie broke away from me like, she walks back to the table, but she don't sit down. She just picks up her coat and beats it. She was crying.