

Neither did she look up as he crossed the floor of the kitchen and stood directly beside her.

He called her by name—then she looked up at him. Her eyes were dull and expressionless and didn't seem to take in his sodden appearance. Again he called her by name and smiled. "It won't happen again," he told her, "I promise you. I've had time to do plenty of thinking and it shouldn't be too hard to keep my balance from now on. Help me, won't you?"

The look of joy that sprang into his wife's eyes, and her answering smile as she threw her arms around his wet shoulders, were evidence enough that she understood and was willing to try!

The Flat Tire

Jack Nieff

IN the morning they drove to the train in silence, and when Joe got out of the car he made no attempt to kiss her. "See you tonight," he said and walked away. Jane slid over behind the wheel and backed the convertible out of the station parking space viciously, her mind still busy with the previous evening. She remembered every bit of it, word for word, scene for scene.

It had really started when the Blakes arrived for dinner and brought with them a stranger named Marion Todd, an old friend of Helen's who had dropped by late in the afternoon. Helen said, "I called about six but you weren't in, Jane, but I knew you wouldn't mind." She laughed. "Marion eats hardly anything at all."

Jane looked at the girl and thought: "Just men." Marion was a sultry brunette with languorous eyes, a gorgeous figure and a full mouth. She wore a dress that was expediently cut two inches too low. "I hope you're not angry," she said in a husky voice, "but Helen insisted." Then she sank into a deep chair and crossed her long, lovely legs. Joe's eyes bulged.

Marion Todd, it was soon evident, approved highly of Joe. Her eyes left him only occasionally, and she laughed throatily at every limp witticism he uttered.

Jane could understand the girl's preoccupation with Joe without being enthusiastic about it, for Ed Blake was short and pear-shaped and a complete bore. Joe, damn him, still looked like the good half-back he had once been.

There were drinks after dinner, of course, and Marion found the stack of new records for the player. Politely enough Joe asked her to dance, and after thirty seconds Jane bitterly admitted that they

were something to see. The girl was built to order for the music and danced like a professional, as did Jane's own beloved husband.

Joe came to her next, a fixed smile on his face, and she accepted the challenge and suffered defeat. She simply wasn't as good a dancer, and the day had taken too much out of her. "Tired?" Joe asked, and there was impatience in his voice.

"Of quite a few things," she told him.

They didn't dance together again. Jane stayed with Ed Blake, who didn't care much for dancing, and endured his time-worn witticisms for the rest of the evening. Joe was evidently enjoying himself, mainly with Marion Todd. The big ox was behaving as if he hadn't seen a woman in six months.

When the evening finally ended, it developed that the Blakes' car was in the garage and they had come in a cab. Joe, still playing the perfect host, said he wouldn't think of letting them take a taxi home at this hour of the night and offered to take the Blakes home. Marion Todd, it seemed, lived three miles beyond them. They all left in high spirits, and Jane went in and savagely attacked the dishes, one eye on the clock. After half an hour the clock received her complete attention.

Joe finally came home, just as she was trying to decide between Reno and Las Vegas. He'd taken an hour and a half to make a twenty-minute trip, and there was a smear of lipstick on the side of his mouth. Jane was sitting up in bed, a book in her lap. She said, "Well, have a pleasant trip?"

"Wonderful." He was putting his clothes in the closet.

"What," she asked, her throat tight, "is Marion's place like?"

"Huh?" he said, turning to her, and the lipstick was like a neon light. "I don't know. I just dropped her off in front of her house."

"You're getting a little old for that, aren't you? I mean, parking for an hour in front of a girl's house? Look at your face."

He glanced in the mirror, wiped the stain away with a tissue. "Helen was feeling silly," he said. "She insisted on paying me with a kiss for the taxi ride."

"And Miss Todd's ride was quite a bit longer, so the fare should have been—"

"Now look, Miss District Attorney of the Year," Joe said. "I took them all home and had a flat on the way back. The lousy jack broke, and I had to walk a mile to Druding's and then have them come back with me to change the tire. Let's not make this one of your silly production numbers. And you should talk. You spent most of the evening, as usual, glued to the side of the gorgeous Mr. Blake."

"Joe Roberts, if you think for one moment that—"

His eyes were filled with anger as he said, "Look, stupid. You going to keep this up forever? I've had a rugged day, and I'm sure not going to listen to you yackety-yack for the rest of the night. You

want to talk, you talk to yourself." And he picked up a blanket and went to the sofa in the living room.

Oh, it had been a wonderful evening, all right. She snapped the car into the driveway and was delighted at the sound of the bumper ripping the side of the garage door.

Joe got off the six-fifty-seven feeling fine. The car was in its customary place. He walked toward it with a light stride, then he remembered. Well, if she was still in that same mood, he'd have to spend the evening talking her out of it. He opened the door. "Hello, baby," he said, and got in behind the wheel.

"Darling," she said timidly, "I stopped at Druding's for gas today, and Ted told me all about the trouble you had last night. You poor lamb, you."

Joe knew enough not to smile. "Women," he thought, "you just can't figure them."

Jules Kessler

Ian D. Mitchell

"LET me speak to Charley Swan."

"One moment, please, I'll see if he is here."

"He's there all right. Tell him that Jules Kessler is on the phone."

"Yes sir, Mr. Kessler . . ."

"Hello, Charley, wipe your chin and pull up a chair."

"What do you want, Jules? I'm entertaining a few guests right now. Why don't you call back later?"

"Can't, Charley, I'm going right down to the theater. Why guests at the Variety Club, Annunziata not paying off?"

"We're getting good reviews."

"Georgia Fain's the only one they're talking about."

"Gassner seems to think it's pretty good theater."

"Yeah, and Gassner would purr for Rumplestilskin if it satisfied the 'aht and theatah' crowd. Don't kid me, Charley, Annunziata won't last more than a week and all you'll have to show for it will be a couple of squibs in your scrapbook."

"You're wrong about the show, Jules; it's booked ahead for three months. You're also wrong about Georgia Fain. They're not talking about her, they're raving about her. But you didn't call me to discuss the success of the show. What is it you want?"

"Georgia Fain's contract."

"What!"