

ALYCE MAE *By* Chester Crowell

The Story of a Pretty Little Modiste Who Worked Harder to Get a Free Meal Than to Acquire a Partnership in the Flourishing Firm of Madame Jean.

IT was immediately after Mrs. Donald Bright left Mme. Jean's shop that Alyce Mae—to use Mme. Jean's expressive words—blew up. But perhaps it would be better to tell precisely what Alyce Mae did. Well, first she cried and then she sobbed, and after much sobbing she laughed hysterically, then she resumed crying. Meanwhile, Mme. Jean walked round and round the chair in which Alyce Mae had collapsed in the beautifully decorated little shop (exclusive gowns and millinery) wringing her hands and chanting mechanically, "O, my poor little girl! What can I do for you? O, my poor little girl! What can I do for you?"

Mme. Jean would have taken Alyce into her lap and mothered her if that had been possible, but it wasn't—or at least not quite—on account of Alyce Mae being seven inches taller than Mme. Jean. So she walked round and round the chair in which Alyce Mae had collapsed in the beautifully decorated little shop (exclusive gowns and millinery) wringing her hands and chanting mechanically, "O, my poor little girl! What can I do for you? O, my poor little girl! What can I do for you?"

Yes, now that the damage was done she recalled the fact that Alyce Mae often had dark blue rings under her eyes during the forenoons. This very morning Alyce Mae had come in looking tired and sleepy. Probably she had been up half the night working on those sketches of gowns for Mrs. Donald Bright. Poor girl, perhaps she was working herself to death. What if this should prove to be a nervous breakdown? The business might fail. Mme. Jean now began to weep aloud.

"Don't worry, Sarah," said Alyce Mae. "I'll be all right in a minute." When customers were not present Alyce Mae always called Mme. Jean "Sarah" because her name before she became Mme. Jean of Fifty-seventh street, had been Sarah Ratkowsky . . . of Twenty-third street.

"O, my poor girl!" Mme. Jean wailed for the hundredth time. "What can I do for you? Tell me, are you ill? Are you in love? Is it that I have been mean to you?"

"No, Sarah," Alyce Mae replied. She was quite calm now. "I need sleep, that's all. I'm dead tired." Now, Mme. Jean had executive ability. Once let her know what to do and that thing would be done with sparkling promptness and efficiency.

"Ella!" She almost barked the girl's name, and as Ella responded Madame clapped her hands in the manner that meant "more speed."

"Yes, Madame," said Ella. "Get a taxi," ordered Mme. Jean, "and take Alyce Mae home. When she is in bed and asleep, return. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Madame." So Ella removed the pretty little useless apron that she wore, pulled her hat on, retouched her rouge, powdered her face and neck, examined herself critically in a full length mirror, hunted for her purse, and after Mme. Jean had said, "For God's sake, Ella," Ella Mme. Jean made a gesture of assisting Alyce Mae into the automobile, patted her hands, and added one more "My poor little girl" as the taxi started.

HAVING done all that she could for the moment, Mme. Jean paused before reentering her shop to admire its show window. This contained a beautiful vase for which she had paid three hundred dollars. In the vase reposed twenty-five dollars' worth of roses. Dark velvet hangings provided a background for this one splash of warm color. The shop bore no sign except a small brass plate beside the door, on which was written "Mme. Jean." Occasionally a man would come in to buy flowers . . . but women made no such mistake. They knew who Mme. Jean was, whether they had ever worn one of her creations or not.

The sight of this window cheered Mme. Jean, for it meant about the same thing to her that a crown means to a queen. With no difficulty at all she recalled a time when Sarah Ratkowsky had owned and operated a store on a Twenty-third street . . . Latest Style, \$9.50. And in those days no one had ever heard of Alyce Mae Frobisher, the designer, because there was no such person. Alice Butcher had been clerk and scout; she went forth with pencil and pad to sketch the gowns in more fortunate establishments. These were imitated. As a designer, however, she found the name Butcher not entirely satisfactory.

On reentering her shop Mme. Jean found a tall, handsome Irishman standing with his back to one of the full length mirrors. He seemed remarkably at ease; most men who stumbled in by mistake were in a great hurry to get out. "Mme. Jean?" he asked. She bowed. "My name is Callaghan." And he



He had just stopped his car in front of the home of Alyce Mae Frobisher, dress designer, twenty-six, when the murder car drove alongside.

showed a policeman's badge. Mme. Jean mopped perspiration from her brow and said, "Yes, sir." Callaghan smiled reassuringly. "Is there a girl here named 'Alyce Mae'?" he asked. Again Mme. Jean mopped her brow. "Has she no last name?" she parried.

"I don't know her last name," Callaghan confessed. "What is it?" "Frobisher."

"Well, Madame, is Alyce Mae Frobisher here?" "Not at this moment," she replied. "Alyce Mae has just gone home. She is ill."

"Where does she live?" "May I inquire why you wish to know?"

"Certainly, Madame, and don't be uneasy. It's just that we want to ask her about some people she knows." "Maybe I could help you, Mr. Callaghan. I am the head of the firm."

"She met these people last night, Madame, and I don't think you were with her."

"No, Mr. Callaghan."

"WELL, now, I'm not going to arrest the girl, so will you tell me where she lives?" Mme. Jean hesitated a moment, then told him.

"I hope it's nothing serious," she ventured. "There's no need to worry about the girl. Thank you, and good day to you."

"It seems strange to me," Madame commented as she followed Callaghan to the door, "that any one would introduce such people to a nice girl like Alyce Mae."

"It does that," Callaghan agreed with a smile, and went on his way rejoicing at the brevity of the interview.

Less than an hour later Alyce Mae was awakened from a sound slumber, and after slipping on a dressing gown, unlocked the door to her dimly furnished apartment. Ella had executed her commission and gone back to the shop. Callaghan selected from among the chairs one that seemed equal to his weight.

"Now, then, miss," he began, "just tell what happened last night." Alyce Mae smiled pleasantly.

"Where did you meet them?" Callaghan asked. "I was waiting my turn at the telephone pay station in a hotel," Alyce Mae explained, "and they were waiting, too, so we began to talk and after while one of them asked me to go to dinner with him and he seemed to be the very nice, so I said 'yes.' Then the other man said he'd see if he could pick up a girl and he walked around the mezzanine floor and pretty soon he came back with a girl and she seemed to be very nice, so the four of us went out to dinner together. Any one could see the men were gentlemen."

"Yes," Callaghan agreed, "they seem to have been pretty good sports. Then, this girl actually did fall out of the taxi?"

"She certainly did, Mr. Callaghan and she only had one or two drinks, so it was really an accident and that's all there is to it."

"You never saw any of these people before?"

"No, sir."

"Did the men tell you what their business was?"

"No, sir. I didn't ask. But they were very nice."

"Are you going to see them again?"

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Callaghan. They haven't asked me. We were rather upset last night and not thinking of future engagements. If they ask me again I don't know of any reason why I shouldn't."

"Well, miss, I think that's all and I'm much obliged to you," Callaghan rose and began to fumble with his hat.

"Have you talked to the men?" Alyce Mae asked.

"Yes, miss. And you confirm their story, so I guess the investigation is over."

"I'm glad of that," Alyce Mae commented.

"So am I," said Callaghan, smiling. But he departed very uncertain about Alyce Mae. As to the accident of the preceding evening he felt sure she had told the truth; but, on the other hand, how well did she actually know the men in the case? And if she didn't know them very well at present, how well would she know them in the near future?

FOR his part, Callaghan was patiently waiting for them to disclose the hiding place of stolen bonds and meanwhile checking up to the best of his ability on all persons with whom they came in contact. Now, here was Alyce Mae, a beautiful girl, evidently bright witted and making a good salary. Wouldn't she be a very convenient person to dispose of stolen bonds? On the whole, he decided to keep an eye on her.

While Alyce Mae Frobisher was ill. With the aid and advice of two husbands, both now in their graves, Sarah Ratkowsky had gone through much poverty and three bankruptcies. Left a helpless widow, she had discovered Alyce Mae and now struggled along on a yearly profit of twenty-five thousand dollars. However, the fact that Alyce Mae still drew a salary often troubled her conscience, for she felt that they ought to have begun as partners on moving uptown. But Alyce Mae had demanded a salary, so that was that. In the first two years the designer had drawn out of the business five thousand dollars more than the owner, but now that this inequality had become more than wiped out, Mme. Jean again felt that they ought to be partners.

SHE decided to discuss the matter with Alyce Mae this very evening. At precisely six o'clock the apartment door was opened and Alyce Mae, attired in an evening gown, said: "O, Mme. Jean, it was so good of you to come. Allow me to present Mr. Wilson. We were just going out to dinner."

At first Mme. Jean was astonished, then she was angry, but curiosity triumphed and she looked at Mr. Wilson. In a situation of this sort he was ideally placed to win her ill will, but clothes were a passion with Mme. Jean, and Mr. Wilson's were faultless. His hair was prematurely white, which made his face appear almost boyish.

Mme. Jean estimated his age at forty-five, and that was another point in his favor, for she considered forty-five a very sensible age. So Mme. Jean remained neutral. If a girl contemplated matrimony, she considered, it would be just as well to fall in love with a man who was already prosperous, and this one certainly appeared to be.

"Mme. Jean must come with us," said Mr. Wilson.

"I thank you," she replied, "but Alyce Mae ought not to go out this evening. She is not well."

"I'm feeling much better, now," Alyce Mae protested. "Please let's go out."

"No, my dear girl. I am going to be stern with you. This evening you stay right here, and if you are feeling better, we will talk business. Please pardon me, Mr. Wilson, but this young lady has no mother and I have no daughter, so you see—"

"I see," he interrupted, "and I bow to the inevitable."

Mme. Jean thanked him and offered additional apologies, while Alyce Mae brought his hat. After accompanying him to the elevator, she faced her employer belligerently.

"What's the row, Sarah?"

"There is no row, my dear girl. Now, take off that gown and make yourself comfortable."

"Have you had your dinner, Sarah?"

"No."

"Well, neither have I." Alyce Mae took off the gown and she will fix something for dinner. That is what I intended to do in the first place. Mme. Jean hastened into the tiny kitchenette and opened the ice box. A moment later she returned saying, "I cannot understand you, Alyce. This is the third time in a year that I have opened your ice box and every time I find the same thing; one-half can of stale beans and one-half a box of crackers. And no ice. Anyway, the crackers ought not to be in the ice box. But do you live on beans and crackers? For heaven's sake, girl, you make six thousand dollars a year. Why should you live on beans and crackers? Are you in financial trouble? If so, why

don't you tell me? You know I would help you. What is the meaning of this, anyway? Now tell me, are you in debt?"

"No, Sarah, I am not in debt."

"Well, I am glad to hear that. Now put on a dressing gown while I run out and get something for us to eat."

On the way to the butcher shop

to sometimes because the men are away from home and leaving a good time and forget that you have to go to work in the morning?"

"I'm pretty good at getting rid of them, Sarah."

"Sometimes, maybe, you make the 'good night' pretty snappy and shut your door real quick?" Again Alyce

flushed angrily.

"Not as ridiculous as what you have been doing, my dear girl. I don't know why it is that girls like you who do not want to marry . . . girls who really have only contempt for men . . . yes, that is the way you feel . . . I don't see why you can't let them alone. You must always be taking something away from them. The reason you like best for it to be a dinner is only that that doesn't seem to compromise you. Yet, you go after the men like pirates. You don't love expensive dinners that much."

"I do so! And I can't afford them."

"Nonsense, Alyce! You love to make a man pay a big check. The fact that you are a great designer . . . means nothing to your vanity. No, you are not satisfied with that. You must be a successful parasite. Do you think I don't know? Don't I see dozens of your kind? Pools that vanity enslaves! And you talk about being free, free, free! You spend money like drunken sailors for shoes, hats, gowns, more rent than you can afford, jewelry, perfume, God knows what all, just to make men feed you expensively. All of you are alike . . . you hate like poison to buy food."

"Sarah, you're crazy."

"All right, I'm crazy. But do you accept the condition?"

"Of course, I have no choice. Gee, this steak is good!"

Mme. Jean beamed appreciation. On the way home she kept dabbling her handkerchief into the corners of her eyes because tears came . . . for no reason at all except that Alyce Mae had kissed her on both cheeks.

Meanwhile, Alyce Mae examined the list of her bonds. She would go to the bank tomorrow and arrange a loan. Fortunately, she and Mme. Jean had their accounts in the same bank so there would be very little to explain.

BUT Alyce Mae did not carry out her plan. On the contrary, she went to Atlantic City and remained several days. This totally unexpected trip was caused by a headline she read in her newspaper while riding to the shop. It contained the information that a "prominent Connecticut business man," whose name proved to be Wilson, had suffered severe injuries in an encounter with a young man who, when arrested, gave the name of Vittorio Cortesi, and said he was in the trucking business.

The police had learned that "jealousy over a girl" was the cause of the fight. They declined to give the name of the girl. But Alyce Mae didn't know how long they might continue to decline, and on the whole it seemed better to be out of the city. Evidently, the fight had occurred immediately after Mr. Wilson left her apartment, so it was a great stroke of good fortune that she had not gone with him. But what a fool that Cortesi was! Hadn't she told him, time after time, that she wouldn't marry any man? What on earth was the matter with the fellow? Just because she went out to dinner with him a few times, did that give him the right to beat up another of her dinner companions? Well, he was in jail now, and it served him right. Let them keep him there. Such a hot head!

So Alyce Mae plucked dinners from

FOR several minutes they gave undivided attention to their food, then Mme. Jean said: "Alyce, I come down here tonight to offer you a full partnership in the business."

"Sarah!"

"I didn't mean give it to you, silly." "Aw, Sarah."

"Listen to me. What you need is something to steady you, my dear girl, so I will sell you a half interest for ten thousand dollars. That is dirt cheap and it will pay itself out in a year. It is really a gift, but I think

A LYCE MAE choked her laughter and came into the kitchenette where she kissed Mme. Jean on both cheeks and made her very happy, for it was difficult to win any show of affection from Alyce Mae. Mme. Jean had often noticed the calculating glitter in her icy blue eyes and judged that it denoted business ability. At other times, however, it seemed to indicate even more.

"What did that detective want?" she asked.

"Why, I happened to see an accident and he wanted to ask me about it."

"Was that all?"

"That was all."

"Alyce, I think that Mr. Wilson is in love with you."

"That's ridiculous!" Alyce Mae flushed angrily.

"Not as ridiculous as what you have been doing, my dear girl. I don't know why it is that girls like you who do not want to marry . . . girls who really have only contempt for men . . . yes, that is the way you feel . . . I don't see why you can't let them alone. You must always be taking something away from them. The reason you like best for it to be a dinner is only that that doesn't seem to compromise you. Yet, you go after the men like pirates. You don't love expensive dinners that much."

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ness, but to give up all those vice bonds was a strain. So she departed without expressing a final opinion and went to the shop, where Mme. Jean kissed her and uttered funny little chirps of happiness. Together they examined several half completed gowns, and finally, just before closing for the day, Mme. Jean presented two paper dollars for her along with a slip to be signed. They laughed over this ceremony and parted at the front door.

"You must go to the bank tomorrow and arrange that loan," Mme. Jean said, as she stepped into her automobile.

Alyce Mae nodded assent and resolved this matter in her mind all the way home. Perhaps if she could get some one to sign the note with her, that would make a difference. But who could she get? Mr. Wilson was now impossible. So was Vittorio Cortesi. She tried to think of other names. A dozen or more came to mind, but with most of these men her acquaintance was, after all, rather slight. Moreover, she didn't know how to reach more than two or three of them. They knew how to reach her, but she didn't know how to reach them.

THAT night Alyce Mae ate cold beans and crackers, drank a glass of milk, and bemoaned her bad luck. On the whole, she found it a tough and unfeeling world. You could dance with it and dine with it and make it merry, but when you wanted something in return there was . . . no one. Even Sarah wanted ten thousand dollars for a partnership in a business, that was really half hers from the beginning. The more Alyce Mae thought about it, the less she wanted to pay any such sum for something that by right was really hers. And so she went to bed.

"Let's have luncheon together," Mme. Jean suggested at noon of the following day. Alyce Mae was delighted, for Mme. Jean believed in bountiful luncheons at expensive restaurants.

"When are you going to see about the loan?" Mme. Jean asked as soon as they were seated.

"I have thought it over, Sarah, and I don't believe I'll take you up."

"No?" Why not?"

"Well, it would take everything I've got."

They ate in silence. When, finally, the waiter laid the check down beside Mme. Jean's plate she turned it over and said: "Six dollars and thirty cents. That is thirty fifteen apiece, Alyce."

"O, are we having a Dutch treat today?"

"Yes!" Mme. Jean chuckled, but angry color mounted to Alyce Mae's forehead. Three dollars and fifteen cents for lunch! She never spent more than sixty-five cents.

"It comes a little hard at first," Mme. Jean remarked.

"Yes, it comes a little hard," Alyce Mae snapped. "What do you mean by dragging me off to a place like this and then asking the bill? You stick your nose into my affairs a little more than I like, Sarah. You can take your partnership and your two dollar dinner slips and go to the devil with them! Do you hear her? I mean what I say, so you can quit your silly grinning. And what's more I'm going to get a job somewhere else. I resign now. So help me, as long as my name is Alyce Mae Frobisher I'll do what I like with my evenings and I'll be damned if I pay for my own dinners. I was born free and I'm going to stay that way!"

"I'm sorry," Mme. Jean said softly. "Now, I won't be able to help you. O, I do wish, my dear girl, that you were married."

"You're crazy!"

"Yes, maybe we are both crazy. We must be . . . because we need each other so terribly . . . and we can't help each other. I tried and I don't know how. To me you are crazy . . . and to you I am crazy. Don't quit me, Alyce."

"I was born free and I'm going to stay that way!"

"I guess that's all," Mme. Jean said sadly.

And it was all, until one year and eighteen days later . . . as she calculated with characteristic precision . . . when she read in her morning newspaper: "A burst of machine gunfire snuffed out the life of Tony (Spats) Peruggia, Beau Brummel of gangland, at one o'clock this morning. He had just stopped his car in front of the home of Alyce Mae Frobisher, dress designer, twenty-six, when the murder car drove alongside. Miss Frobisher fell beside her escort with three bullets through her head and died instantly. Friends said she had met Peruggia yesterday afternoon for the first time." (Copyright, 1932, by Chester T. Crowell.)

Gold Nose Veil Matches Sleeves of Deb's Gown

WASHINGTON, D. C.—(AP)—A tiny gold colored nose veil, worn by Miss Patsy Douglas, debutante, matches puff sleeves of cloth of gold attached to an afternoon frock of green satin. She wears a single orchid on the left shoulder. The small hat is of green felt.

Washington Deb Turns Graceful Back to World

WASHINGTON, D. C.—(AP)—Backs are to the fore this season in capital debutante circles. Dresses appearing at the opening balls in the capital are almost backless. Narrow pieces of silk, ribbon or rhinestones hold the garments in place. Corsage bouquets are worn at the waist in the back instead of in the front.

Athletic pursuits during the autumn have produced the supple, graceful back necessary to this style of gown. The debutantes still ride horseback and play tennis between coming out teas and dances to retain their slenderness.

