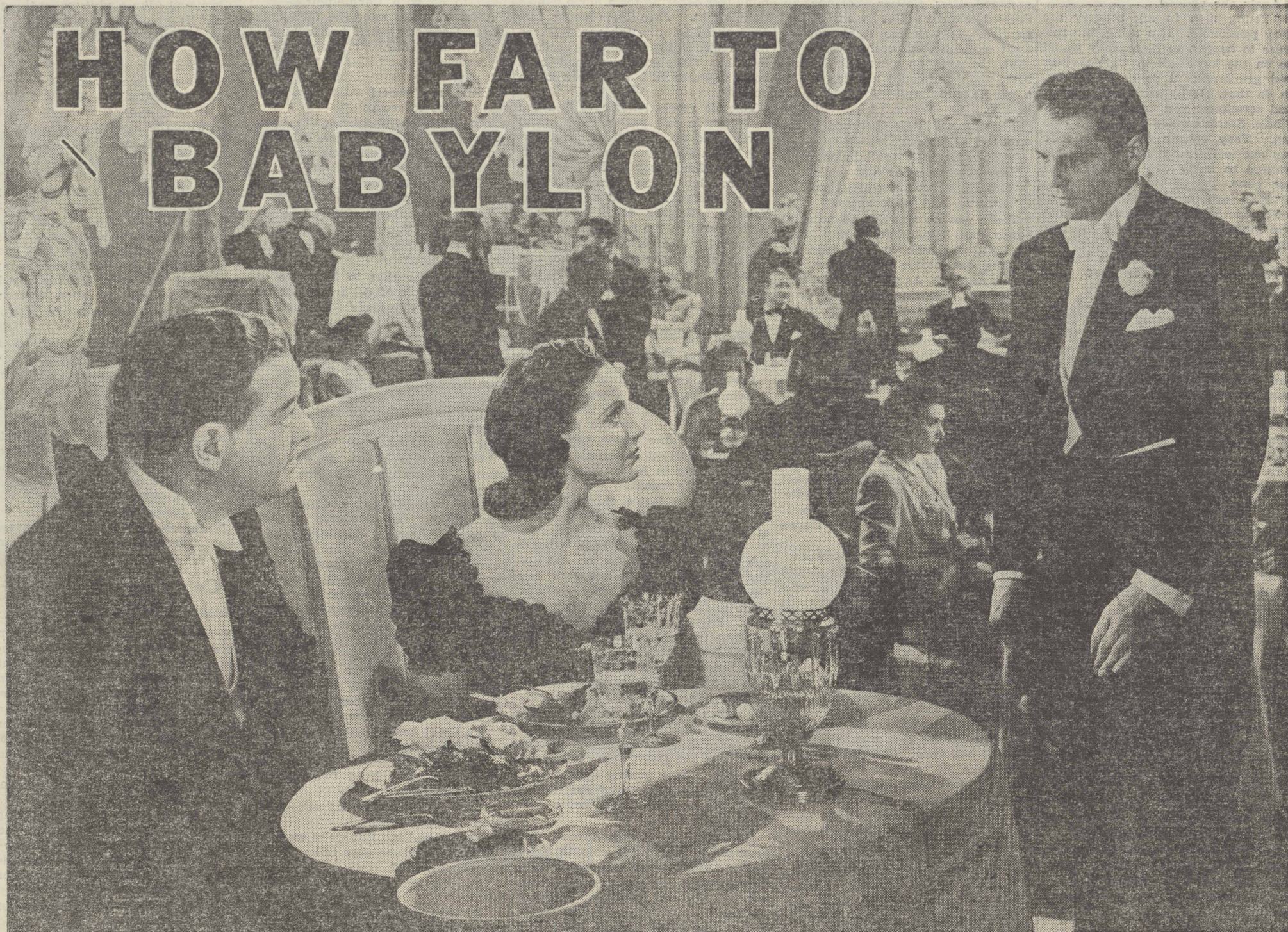


HOW FAR TO BABYLON



TOMORROW would be the wedding. A fashionable Manhattan wedding. There would be an escort of motor-policemen, clearing traffic and blowing sirens. There would be crowds. There would be cameras clicking.

It was not unlikely that a wedding of such importance might be included in the news reels. If it were, miners in Gold City, Ariz., expectant divorcées in Reno, maharajahs in India would dream for a sentimental moment while they witnessed Miss Betty in her hour of triumph.

Yet Yolande, who had been described variously on hotel registers as Miss Betty's personal maid, companion, secretary, found difficulty in appearing as glad as was required.

She was 21—the same age as Betty. During the past five years she had become increasingly her friend.

Her father, an army captain in Morocco, had died. His pension had proved insufficient to support his widow and daughter. To eke out a livelihood they had taken to growing flowers which they sold in the public market. Like an angel sent to answer prayer, Miss Betty had paused at her stall and carried her off to the Riviera, to Paris, to Biarritz and so to New York.

Happy, exciting years had followed, crammed with fêtes and journeyings. Boys and men always worshipping. To Yolande her young mistress had seemed the reincarnation of one of those princesses whose praises troubadours had sung.

Yolande, without realizing her own mischief, had helped to compose letters of refusal in such gentle terms that fires of affection were never quite extinguished. Miss Betty's virgin bedroom was a Bluebeard's chamber decorated with photographs of suitors. One of Yolande's duties was to retire them as they became negligible and to polish the silver frames of those who were still eligible.

Then Miss Betty had fallen head over heels in love. Her choice was Stanley Morton, Yolande recalled in vivid detail the evening of the disaster.

There had been a lull between flirtations. For a week no boy had called. Mrs. Steele, Betty's mother, had become alarmed. She'd asserted

that this playing fast and loose must stop. Betty was earning a reputation. The day was dawning, if it had not dawned, when no bachelor of serious intentions would be seen with her.

Betty's retort had been to phone Henry. Dear Henry, her oldest standby, who refused to take no for an answer! Henry, with his sensitive face, whose cause Yolande had championed so ardently that Miss Betty had twitted her on being sweet on him.

"Want to marry me, Henry? Am I proposing? Sounds that way, doesn't it? A trifle abrupt. But listen, Henry. Mother's been lecturing me. Says I'll soon be on the shelf. Says no nice man will look at me. Well, you're a nice man. I'm inviting you to look at me tonight to prove mother's wrong. You will? Then dine with us at eight. What's that—don't be silly. There's always a chance."

Starved Look Lingers in Henry's Eyes

Promptly at eight Henry had arrived. There was a starved look in his eyes, which became positively famished when he saw Betty.

In his mind his future and hers were already settled. All that remained was to get her alone. Unfortunately there was the formal dinner. Mrs. Steele treated him with the warmth that his mission merited.

While coffee was being served, the butler informed Betty that she was wanted at the telephone. When she inquired by whom, the butler lowered his voice.

By Coningsby Dawson

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"By Mr. Stanley Morton. Says he must speak with you personally."

On Betty's return she was thoughtful. When her mother rose tactfully, she stayed her.

"But, mother dear, we adore to have you. Don't we, Henry?"

Henry, cursing Mrs. Steele in his heart, contributed his fervent assurances. Since he couldn't get rid of her, he attempted to make the best of her. Without positively admitting his desire to become her son-in-law, he stated his worldly prospects. His father had offered him a position in his shipping business. For himself he would much rather devote his talents to music. Were he to capitulate and enter the shipping business, he would find himself immediately possessed of a tidy income.

"But, mother, it's so fascinating to hear you and Henry."

To cause a diversion Henry suggested that he should play for them, and wandered into the sun parlor where the piano was situated. Neither followed him. After improvising, he commenced a syncopated version of the wedding march.

He became so interested that he failed to hear the doorbell ring or to see Stanley Morton shown into the library. The first thing he knew was when the sun parlor door was closed discreetly. He thought that odd, but expecting Betty to join him,

played on. He played tunes to which they had danced. He was tempting her with memories.

Stanley Morton entered with Betty on his arm.

"I've just proposed to Betty. Be the first to congratulate us."

"I congratulate you."

Henry rose stiffly and bowed like an orchestra leader who had learned his manners in France.

"We're going out to celebrate," Betty added. "You don't mind? You'll excuse us?"

Henry bowed from the waist a second time.

"We men exist only for your pleasure. Never consider me at all."

The pain in his eyes was not lost on her. Dragging her newly acquired man, she fled.

"Oh, never consider me at all," Henry apostrophized her departed presence. "I only loved you. Love's the trick of a conjurer. I'm Dan Cupid in disguise. I'm not wise. I'm a fool, pulling rabbits from a hat, Dream rabbits. On this final evening of her girlhood some one had thrown a party. Out she had romped into the night."

Before accepting her invitation he studied her. She was dark as Betty was fair. Her hair was cut in a straight fringe across her forehead. Her figure was sturdy. There was something innocent and valiant about her. She was of the same race as Joan of Arc. He noticed with a pang that she was dressed in a gray tailor-made costume that had once belonged to Betty.

Vaguely he remembered the story of the flower market and the instant click between the two young girls. With a musician's sensitiveness he conjured the sound of chimes and the fragrance of mimosa. The far flung bridge across the Rhone. The dazzling country, silver with olive groves.

He stooped toward her. Before his lips could touch hers, she turned her face aside.

"I did not say my lips."

"Why not your lips?"

"Because, Monsieur, I am merely sorry for you. In France when we are merely sorry, we do not kiss on the lips."

He wanted to know why she should be sorry for him.

"Because I have shared your letters to Miss Betty."

"You have!" He was dismayed.

"They were very beautiful," she nodded, "and some parts were very funny. In my country if a young man wrote such letters, he would either be kicked out or accepted. In

roof with him, were he to marry Miss Betty. Under the same roof she would be able to serve and watch him. He was like a little boy, so crazy and harmless.

"Don't, Mr. Henry."

He looked up.

"Why not?"

"You break my heart."

Seating herself on the piano stool beside him, she slipped a comforting arm about him.

"Don't go to pieces."

"She's the only girl."

"Heaps of girls must have wanted you, Mr. Henry."

"The devil prompting him, he asked, 'Have you?' Then, correcting himself, 'That was childish. Do you mind if I kiss you? I have to kiss some girl to restore my self-respect.'

"If kissing me will restore it."

Found Banging Out New Tune in Frenzy

His hands crashed on the keys.

"There's a song in that. We'll entitle it 'Never Consider Me at All.'"

And that was how Yolande found him, banging away in a frenzy, interspersing his invention with jeering phrases from the wedding march. Tho she had scarcely acknowledged the fact to herself, she had always had a soft spot for him. She had dreamed of living under the same

ROMANCE —AND— MYSTERY

A romance involving smart people and unusual situations and replete with charmingly sophisticated conversation is the story by Coningsby Dawson, "How Far to Babylon." Mr. Dawson, one of the best known of the modern writers, knows how to weave a tale expertly, for he has been in literary work more than thirty years. Born in England in 1883, he came to the United States in 1905 as a representative of British newspapers. He served with the Canadian army in France during the World war, after which he returned to America, where most of his writing—poems, novels, and short stories—has been done. His home is in Newark, N. J. The second story of today's Fiction Section, "Justice Is Blind," by Ishbel Ross, is built around a mystery murder that is solved by a clever girl reporter.

[Continued on Page 2.]