

LOUIE

One sultry afternoon in mid August of last summer, in a small village in the Mississippi Valley, an old lady sat in her front yard, loudly shrieking an unintelligible jargon. She tore at the lawn about her and flung the yellowish green blades of grass over her greyed head and stooped shoulders, as she swayed back and forth and from side to side. Right and wrong, good and bad, dark and light, rich and poor, back and forth and back and forth again, was her jumbled theme. Nearing her, one could easily determine her advanced age, with the dry, wrinkled skin over her face, interrupted by an unsightly mole on her cheek, sprouting a few coarse hairs. Her faded blue eyes were lusterless and the reddened lids and brows were covered by a sparse growth of grey hairs. Her neck was mottled with dirt, and the old calico dress as filthy as the owner, half hid the underwear, even more unsightly than the scaly, sagging skin of her body beneath it.

Such was Louie, colloquial small town abbreviation for Louella May. She now rests in a ward in one of the State institutions for the insane, waiting for the peace of infinity to rescue her.

Let us turn back the chronicle, a century and some years more.

Her forbears were of English stock, who emigrated from Britain about 1800 to settle in Pennsylvania. One son of this family, Joseph P. ^{Elliott} Elliott (Louie's grandfather), after an education in an Eastern college, moved westward to settle in the valley of the Mississippi, where he developed an excellent reputation as a bridge builder. One of his masterpieces, a stone bridge, still arches over a rocky gorge of one of the tributaries to the Mississippi. Most of the others were covered bridges of wood, often painted red,

and adorned many roads in the counties bordering the river in that vicinity. This bridge builder married a Keal, the daughter of a German immigrant, who was a prosperous farmer of the region; and to this union there were born four children, Joseph junior (Louie's father), Thomas (her uncle), Jane and Mary (her aunts). The bridge builder lived to the age of 90. In his latter years, he was a cantankerous senile, who quarreled and fought with his neighbors and was labeled by them as crazy. His wife lived only to 50, dying of an acute illness. The daughter, Jane, Louie's aunt, was a well known character, a recluse who lived quite alone in a rambling old house near the village square. The small boys often teased her by throwing rocks at her porch, to which she usually responded by coming forth with a butcher knife, and the tormentors commonly fled in terror. Once she became too aggressive with her knife and they sent her away. Her Uncle Thomas and her Aunt Mary lived long and uneventfully.

Louie's father, Joe, grew up, married, and through the agency of his father-in-law became a merchant. He ran a successful general store for over fifty years. There were two children, the elder William K., and the younger, Louella May, our heroine born the year 1875. William grew up to enter business with his father, who protected him for all his life. Besides Williams's junior partnership in the general store, he made many ventures in side lines, all of which came to grief. At one time he bought a printing press and attempted to print the wedding announcements, sale bills and programs of the community. His efforts were badly done and soon he had no

customers. Later, he became a photographer, with equally poor results. Another venture was a roller skating rink. When his father died, the general store ran down and business failure again overtook him. He developed Parkinson's disease and died in mental incompetency.

Louella May grew from infancy to girlhood, through grade school to high school, rather uneventfully. She was a pretty child, ^{with} light brown hair, a fair skin, ^{and} ~~with~~ clear blue eyes. In that she was a daughter of the leading merchant of the town, she was as much of a snob as one can be in a small town. She had her ^{temper} ~~childish~~ tantrums at times, and once she tore up one of her school books in a childish rage. This did not imply any aversion to formal education, as she was an excellent student and somewhat precocious.

The years flew by, and soon she was a student in the local high school. She emerged from adolescence as pretty as in childhood, slender, fair ~~skinned~~, with wavy brown hair, and ^{as} blue eyed as ever. Her interest in boys seemed quite in keeping with the other members of her group, and it was not unusual that her first real emotional contact was with her cousin, ^{Barlow Spicer} ~~Harlow Spencer~~. ^B Harlow was a bluff, generous proportioned country boy, not very intelligent, but one of the better boys of the community. Louella was first attracted to ^B Harlow solely to have a beau, as [?] did the older girls of her group. From ^{the} ^A casual companionship of walking home from school, occasional moments of conversation at Sunday school or social gatherings, they soon began to court. He took her to Christian Endeavor meetings,

to church each Sunday, to the socials, box suppers, and was truly a swain to be proud of. His father allowed him a horse and buggy, as all the farm boys had, and the two were always invited together for all the social activities of the community.

In the spring of their senior year in high school, after a year of courtship, Louella's interest was far more than casual. Her thoughts were all of Harlow, and to be away from him from the hour school closed till the next morning, was dreariness indeed. To see him, hear him talk, watch him compete at play with the other boys was contentment of the highest order. In their moments alone, with his arms about her in the darkness, a clumsy kiss was an inexplicable ecstasy. Their relationship grew more intimate and her senses awakened to new stimulations, the taste of his lips, the salty male smell of sweat on his neck as she lay on his shoulder, riding along in the summer night, intoxicated her.

When alone, she phantasied of their moments together and yearned for a show of ^{greater} affection on his part. It was entirely in keeping with the season that these two youthful egos should merge their emotions more intimately. One Saturday night, after a band concert they drove out of the village along one of the unfrequented country roads, as they frequently had done on many occasions. It was not uncommon for the horse to stop if the lines were loosened, when Harlow's hands were busy elsewhere. On this occasion, they dismounted from the buggy and sought a grassy plot under a tree at the edge of a neighbor's cornfield. Harlow had no need to ask. This moment had lived in Louella's mind a hundred times, and while the details

were an enigma to her, Harlow's clumsy fumbling efforts were in part successful. He was overcome, half ashamed and half proud of his conquest. Louella's emotions were still at a fever pitch and she little understood Harlow's further lack of interest at the moment.

Little was said on the way home, and they parted as usual on the family front porch. Louella fairly flew to her room, as rapidly as a kerosene lamp in her hand would permit. She wanted to relive and re-enact all that had just happened to her. She divested herself of dress, petticoats, undergarments, and viewed herself in the old walnut framed mirror of her bedroom. Outwardly, she was unchanged. Inwardly, she was aflame. Avoiding her usual routine of brushing her hair, she blew out her light and lay herself upon the bed. Her very posture recalled the ecstatic mood of the earlier evening. In phantasy, Harlow appeared and gracefully stooped to enfold her in his arms. Gone were his gaucheries of reality, absent were his stumbling sentences, and his voice had a new tenderness as he murmured compliments to her. Again, she lived through an emotional peak, and fatigue invaded her youthful body. The phantasy disappeared as sleep overcame her.

Next morning, the cold water from the well was just as chilled as usual and breakfast and household chores were unchanged. It was Sunday, and the anticipation of seeing Harlow at church and Sunday school swept her again to a momentary pitch of excitement.

From that time on, Louella lived, gloriously, luxuriously, although phantastically. The crude realities of her life were dreamed into an ethereal experience to the very limits of her girlish imagination.

With the passage of summer, Louella was confronted with leaving her home for college. Contemplation of separation from ^BHarlow threw her into a despair that could not pass unnoticed by the family. Her unhappiness was objectified in her conduct, pettish replies to simple questions of her mother, minor tantrums if her wishes were not always granted. One day she dumped all of her school books in the rain barrel when her distaste for college and leaving was at a fever pitch. Her parents thought it all rather queer, but temporary, and kept on with the plans.

On arriving at Galesburg and Knox College, all was well again. Separation from ^BHarlow was not as unpleasant as she had thought. Her dreams were just as pleasant as when they centered on the actualities of their romance. School with new clothes, different environment, other friends, and many boys, more gallant than the one at home, readily distracted her. Easily she became a belle and embarked upon a new chapter of living, supplemented with phantasy to meet all of her emotional requisites.

On her return home on vacations she was more than ever a belle, and easily outshone all her girlhood friends, none of whom enjoyed collegiate training. ^BHarlow was again her attentive swain, squiring her to church picnics, the county fair and all the social events of the country. In her absence, his attentions were turned to the local girls, one Ollie Bennett. Ollie and Louella were close friends and both knew of each other's interest in ^BHarlow. Louella had no fears of Ollie ever being in any way successful in pushing her aside. It seemed only a matter of course that ^BHarlow should look upon Ollie

as second choice with herself in the foreground. It mattered little that Harlow seemed to court her rival assiduously when she was away, but it caused no comment among the town^sfolk when it was said that Harlow and Ollie would be married in the summer. When Louella returned from school that year for summer vacation and Harlow did not appear as usual, several days passed till she learned of his engagement with Ollie. At first she refused to believe it and dreamed little excuses to explain her loss. The cruel specter of the truth gradually confronted her as the wedding day drew near, and finally took place. She was forced by circumstances to be a bride's maid and participate in all the pre-nuptial affairs. By day she tried on the new finery, the dressmakers made for her and when night came, with darkness hiding reality, she would again enact her phantasies. Dawn would bring the clarity of objectivity that could not be avoided and she was racked with distress and anguish. The wedding was a climax - witnessed through a daze of tears - and all her senses were dulled to imperception. With the night, she stiffened into complete insensibility and entirely shut out the horrors that surrounded her. The village doctor could not arouse her. Medication was futile as it could not be administered with her mouth so firmly closed. A terrible shuddering enveloped her body while her mother tended upon her. Her disgust was exemplified by the pollution of the sick bed. The family and the doctor conferred over the gravity of the "fit" which she had had and despaired of her life. Removal to the hospital at the County seat was accomplished

and gradually she returned to reality. Her convalescence was prolonged all summer. Although her mother and father made every effort to pamper her, her course was marked with outbursts of temper, crying spells, faints, and symptoms which baffled the physician no end.

Village gossip was less tolerant. They knew why ^FHarlow had thrown her over for Ollie. Soon the more outspoken relatives openly said that ^BHarlow had gone with her for no good. Time, however, mends many a break and with the advent of fall, Louella returned to Galesburg and Knox College. Readjustment in the new environment was rapid and a new admirer was a great aid. Frank Coburn was an art student, tall and large of frame, with coal black hair, and a fair skin. His delicate face and hands were those of the artist. He had no difficulty in capturing Louella's fancy and soon their courtship was one of the obvious campus romances. Frank's ability in water colors and oil was already noted - and his standing with the school faculty and students added to his glamour, in Louella's eyes. He had the grace of movement, the caress in his voice, and the sureness of purpose of which she had dreamed. Romance brought intimacy and many of her phantasies became realities. There were field trips for sketching, with hours alone with Frank, in the woods and field. Walks at night in the moonlight lent lustre to their love. The hammock on the side lawn under the generous maple foliage shaded their courting and lovemaking from the mild chaperonage of the family with whom she lived. As the term drew to a close, Louella planned

that Frank should visit her at home that summer. Correspondence with the family brought permission and maturity of plans.

The visit occurred late in the following summer, and Louella was again the belle with a handsomer swain than ever. She felt fully recompensed for the old ^{injury} ~~wound~~ that ^{to} Harlow had dealt her. Frank was more than impressed with her family and the comfortable life they led. The security of the village merchant economy in no way dimmed his admiration for Louella, and before his visit was over it was practically established that marriage was his full intention.

Following another romantic year at college, and graduation, the marriage was consummated at the family home with a splendor beyond the usual village ceremonies. No shadow marred Louella's happiness unless it was a rare reopening of the old wound. Momentarily a melancholy would invade her inmost being that would almost nauseate her - driving her to seclusion.

With the marriage and a new home of her own, a wedding gift of her parents, she set the social stride of the village. Many of her activities set the townspeople somewhat aghast - and caused no end of tongue wagging. First there was the bicycle and a new costume for cycling. It was a lady's bicycle and there was nothing immodest about the dress and the petticoats but even so, none of the other ladies rode bicycles in those days. At the County fair, she not only entered a horse in the show but rode the young gelding, with a side saddle and another dashing outfit of clothes. Truly, she played her role as belle with sweep and verve worthy of a larger and more inspiring environment.

Frank found life in the village much to his liking. The new wife and the comforts of the new home ministered to his well being, serving his fancy admirably. He rose late in the morning, strolled uptown to the post office at mail time, back home for dinner at noon, sketched or painted a bit in the afternoon about town or out in the countryside with Louella, returning for supper. The evenings were usually spent with her family who lived next door or with some of their young friends about the town.

Louella's father found it hard to accept such a dilettante. Leisurely activities were ^{quite} ~~so~~ contrary to his hard working, frugal nature. After some months, he felt it incumbent to remonstrate with Louella, admonishing her that a young husband should provide for a wife by work which brought money. When it became obvious that Frank's paintings had no market value in the village, a few family conferences led to Frank beginning work in the store. This meant arising at six o'clock in the morning to be at the store by seven, and finishing at nine or ten in the evening with a short half hour for dinner and supper. Art was temporarily set aside for commerce and soon life took on a brackish taste, which became worse, day by day. As winter wore on the discomforts of the home added to his distress. The fire had to be kindled in the morning; the wood brought in from the shed, the ashes carried out, along with many other minor chores, which did not add to his comfort. As spring came, romance did not flower again in his breast as nature did about the country. He was bored with work and with Louella. His interest was art and painting pictures. Louella was petulant about posing for him and her huddity no longer

intrigued him anyway. They quarreled, made up, and their emotions ranged from the highest peaks to the depths. Finally, Frank decided he could bear the village no longer, and persuaded Louella to secure enough money from her father to finance him to California. He promised her that as soon as a studio could be set up and some pictures finished he would send for her, and they would start life anew. With no family and no narrow minded village to hamper them, their life in far off California would be a panorama of color, too glorious to put in words.

He left. Louella was overcome with lonesomeness and grief. She secluded herself in her cottage for a week and her family feared a recurrence of her former illness. Gradually she recovered contact with reality but did not seem herself. In her lonesomeness she turned to her reveries to shut out the pain. Letters arrived regularly from Frank, describing his plans, always enthusiastic, and full of promise of reunion and renewal of their romance. Night after night she would dream, half asleep and half awake, of their former happy hours. In the morning, she would again face the drab dreariness of another day alone. As the days passed into weeks, then months, a year - then two - she began to fade. No longer had she any interest in her wardrobe. In her solitude she was inactive physically and her weight increased and her graceful curves became rounded molds of fat. Her hair without the nightly brushing and regular washing became scraggly and oily. Her voice took on a whiny drawl and her eyes were lustreless. Louella became plain Louie to the town^sfolk.

At times she did her best to keep up appearances that she was

not deserted. She carried Frank's letters with her when she went shopping and read them aloud to anyone who would listen. They told how soon he would be sending for her, and what life held for her in the future. The ache in her heart, however, told her how untrue this was.

A number of years after Frank's departure, Louie's father was persuaded by a zealous merchandiser from Chicago to hold a fire sale to get rid of the surplus stock of many years accumulation. After several days of inventory, arrangement of material, price tagging, and advertisement to the local public, the sale began, one Saturday. The public demand was overwhelming for the old shoes, gingham, percales, ancient headgear, mustach cups, and odds and ends beyond description. The entire ^{Easton} ~~Elliott~~ family including Louie were drafted into services as salespeople. By the end of a week the stock was exhausted and the sale was over. Louie enjoyed every minute of her venture as a saleswoman before the public. Her services while not entirely satisfactory to her father and brother were not too bad, and she started clerking irregularly in the store on Saturdays and rush times to relieve the stress on the regular personnel. The store had only one regular clerk besides the family members - a grizzled old bachelor named Wes Hendricks. Wes was of a saturnine disposition, inclined to be surly. Most of the women of the town avoided Wes in the store whenever they could, as he was short in his conversation - and unwilling to go out of his way to humor any of the customer's minor whims. He lived a lonesome life with an old spinster half sister, Ada Offen, in a little cottage at the edge of

the village. Ada was a fragile sickly sort of woman, friendly and active in the Methodist Church, which was her only social outlet. Wes had no social life and sneered at her interests in the church.

When Louie first came to the store Wes did not even deign to notice her presence. As she became a more permanent fixture as a clerk he at first feared she might replace him in his own job. It was soon obvious, however, that her frequent inaccuracies, and irregularity of hours made this an impossibility. Occasionally they were in the store alone and Louie's attempts at conversations, which were at first rebuffed, began to intrigue him slightly. From commonplace matters of store incidents, weather and the like, conversation drifted to Louie's romantic interests, which was an unknown subject to Wes. As Louie found him a more willing audience, she related more and more of the details of her life with Frank, and eventually little episodes of their love life. A vicarious thrill perfused Wes when such subjects were discussed, and he thirsted for more. A chance brush against Louie as they passed each other behind the counter one day brought to the surface, ideas that had never before occurred to him. Later, as he passed her, he slyly pinched her on the buttock. No remonstrance was offered and he made further advances at the very next opportunity. Louie was lonesome and hungry for masculine attention and Wes's little gestures were manna from heaven. Her daydreams personalized about old Wes, and in her phantasies, he assumed a Lotharian status far beyond his potentialities. The little game of touch and go continued until one day during the lunch

hour, when they were alone in the store, Louie called to him from the stock room upstairs to help her lift down a package. The expected occurred, and the flower of their love soon bloomed to full maturity. While Wes was far from being romantic, the appetite was there, even though it had not been pampered for years on end. Louie was enraptured, and while she still dreamed of Frank, and sometimes hoped for reunion with him, she gave herself generously to the affair of the moment. Their trysting place was an odd room on the second floor in the back end of the store, furnished only with an old horse chair sofa.

It was obvious that such an arrangement was doomed to discovery. Near the end of a noon hour, when Louie and Wes were at their rendezvous upstairs, one of the town milliners, a deaf old spinster, came to the store for some material. Finding no one on the first floor, she ascended the stairs to the stock room where she knew the materials ^{she desired} were kept, and to her dismay surprised the guilty pair in utter adultery. With a terrified shriek, that she herself could not hear, she fled downstairs in virginal horror, across the village square to her home. She lived next door to a sour old widow, whose tongue was as sharp as her temper. The milliner's shame was so great that she had to tell someone and the proximity of the neighbor gave her the story. By nightfall, the anecdote was half through the town, and that evening it was a much told tale in the village barber shop, with embellishments and variations for each new listener. The gossip had only one effect upon Louie and Wes. They changed their rendezvous from the store to Louie's home, and the time from noon-hour to evening.

There were some in the village who thought that the discovery of the affaire might automatically terminate it and others who felt quite the opposite. No one believed that it would only make it more an open secret and even more scandalous. Louie was quite unemotional about the discovery and Wes just plain didn't give a hoot about what the villagers thought. The only discretion which he exercised, was to enter Louie's house through the back door rather than the front way.

The block in which Louie lived was rather small and diagonally across the area from her home was that of the village doctor. Next to the doctor's house was his barn, and then a vacant lot. Wes adopted the habit of making his way across this vacant lot next to the Doctor's barn, stepping over a low wire fence to Louie's property, and thence to her back door. Soon a pathway was worn through the vacant lot, and the fence sagged slightly where Wes stepped over it. It became an accepted fact in the village that Wes made a nightly pilgrimage over this route, and caused no end of gossip in all the local centers, especially the barber shop, the focal point for the town loafers. These loafers found much vicarious enjoyment in discussion of the subject and the next step was for one of their numbers to post himself as a look-out for Wes's nightly trek, then to follow him, to see what he could see. The peeping Tom's increased in number, and in fair weather as many as half a dozen would stealthily stalk old Wes to his rendezvous and lie along the fence as a watch-party. On many occasions, small boys would accompany the older men even though the business was far above their emotional concepts.

Actually, Wes would lightly knock at the kitchen door, which Louie would promptly open, with a lamp in her hand, illuminating Wes's figure and his admission to the Kitchen. Visibility into the kitchen was impossible by the watchers, but the light would soon be carried to the bedroom, blown out, and the house would be in darkness.

During the darkness, the boys and men discussed the affair in progress. Speculation was varied as they vied with each other in salacious imaginative ideas as to just what was taking place. A record of these nightly comments would have put Boccacio or Casanova to shame. Sometime later, the lamp would be relighted, and this was the signal for the watchers to scatter, as Wes would soon depart.

Gradually the village settled down to view the affair with something akin to aplomb, although there were those who felt that something should be done to curb the scandal in their midst, no action was ever taken. Louie really enjoyed the notoriety and soon began to talk about it.

She was a member of the Congregational church and attended all services quite regularly. Sunday school was at ten o'clock and church at eleven. She was in the adult Ladies' Sunday school class, and in the sanctity of the church, no one quite dared to scorn her when she took her place among them, sometimes sitting next to the minister's wife, or any of the socially elect. After Sunday school, she would proudly march up the aisle to her pew which was second from the front in the middle section, just in front of the pulpit, directly beneath the eye of the preacher. She prayed just as devoutly and sang off key as sweetly as her less sinful sisters. After church,

the minister quickly made his way to the door to shake the hand of each churchgoer, and Louie was accorded her greeting, the same as anyone else. As little groups congregated in the vestibule, or on the church steps, Louie would join any that suited her fancy and enter the talk. A turn of the discourse would allow her to make some gracious remark about Wes which brought studied silence on the part of her listeners. The pause would allow her to continue the theme, and she would casually relate that Wes had dropped into see her on the night before, and would offer some bits of conversation they had had about this or that topic. By this time the group would begin to edge away and disperse, but Louie would cling to one of the ladies when possible and walk along home with her, elaborating on the topic of Wes, his friendliness, a little gift he had brought her, and, if possible, his affection for her. Most of the ladies were aghast at the very mention of his name and found no tongue to continue such a conversation. There were some, however, whose curiosity, was such that they listened in spite of themselves, then later, would retell the terrible things Louie had told her to her closest friend, under the promise of secrecy. These little quips made their way about town, causing no end of merriment. According to Louie, Wes often commented on the loveliness of her ankles and the curve of her leg. She also said he admired her choice of garters. All this and many other choice tidbits of a more intimate nature were whispered about and each week brought forth a newer one or the old ones were retold.

Wes was well along in years when his affair with Louie began. Whether the travail of the amour had any effect on his well being, no one really knew, but his health began to fail and his visits to

Louie became less regular. He had to give up his position in the store. There were those in the village who felt that his illness was nothing more than the just retribution of an omnipotent God for his immoral conduct, as well as those who directly attributed his sickness to his unseemly activity and some who felt sorry for the old bachelor. The village had really stood the scandal surprisingly well, and then new phases developed which were even worse. While Wes was still able occasionally to make his way to Louie's home of an evening, the news leaked out that he had a rival. Davey Seward, the new contender was a much younger man than old Wes. He was a clumsy, loutish sort, some ten years Louie's junior. Among the men around town he was rather unpopular for no particular reason, and had few friends. Occasionally, however, he had been among those from the barber shop, who had stalked old Wes to one of his nightly visits and had undoubtedly indulged in some fancies of his own, regarding the unseen joys. When Wes began to fail in his appointments, Davey had managed to slip into the store for a passing word with Louie over a minor purchase, then a little chat, and finally professed a desire to call upon her. Louie was charmed with the new admirer and a new affaire d'amour was launched. Apparently, no interference ever resulted and it is doubtful if old Wes ever knew of his rival. Death solved all of Wes's problems. His half-sister had him buried from their little cottage with due Methodist ceremony, despite his former disregard for religion. Louie attended the service in dutiful black and sobbed as genteely as the other mourners. Wes was laid away in his grave and Davey gracefully acceded to full duties.

He was a more thoughtful lover than Wes had ever been. It was impossible for Davey to lavish expensive gifts on Louie, as his supply of money was limited, since he practically never worked. In the winter and fall, however, he trapped and hunted small game, and Louie was generously awarded the choicest quail, rabbit or doves. Davey was never able to come to a regular meal to enjoy any of these delicacies. He was always expected home at these times and could not have explained such an absence to his mother. He did, however, often indulge in a cold snack of an evening when hunger overtakes many a man. Louie delighted in relating these little incidents after church to her fellow worshippers; - how fat the brace of quail were that Davey had given her - or how much he had enjoyed a cold leg of rabbit last evening. The townsfolk had been duly agitated at her conduct with Wes - but they were even more shocked about Davey. Some of the women stated that they didn't understand how a woman of her age could carry on as she did, with so young a fellow as Davey. Louie could and would have explained this had they asked her, but none of them dared. The ladies expressed sympathy to ^{one} another that poor Mrs. Seward had such a worthless son, and wondered how she bore such a cross.

The years moved along with no significant episodes to spice the village gossip until Davey began to falter a bit in his attentions. At first he had been a nightly visitor, and often his stay was prolonged throughout the evening. Later, he lapsed an occasional visit and found an excuse to stay away. The absences became more frequent, and while Louie complained, he simply failed to keep his

appointments. These little details were not unknown about the town, and it is quite possible that there were some who considered the possibilities of substituting for Davey.

Charley Crook was an old bachelor farmer who lived out north of town, with his brother Clip, also a bachelor. They lived a rather secluded sort of existence socially, and seldom, if ever, participated in any of the civic or social activities of the community. On Saturday nights, they usually drove into the village for their weekly supply of groceries and loafed about town a bit. Charley was always a silent member of any group in the store or the barber shop, and just stood about smoking a nickel cigar with a taciturn air. As the male gossips of the barber shop told a new little anecdote about Davey or embellished an old one, Charley kept his thoughts to himself. There was considerable surprise in barber shop circles, when the news leaked out that Charley had been making his way across the vacant lot, by the now well-worn pathway to the back door of Louie's cottage. Charley seldom came to town except on Saturday night and no one knows exactly how the tradition was established that Saturday night belonged to him, but such is the fact. The double affair did add new zest and angles of speculation to the gossip, but nothing unusual happened as the months and years rolled along.

It is not clear when a new lover was added to Louie's retinue - one Jess Constable. He was one of the town's ne'er-do-wells, who eked out a precarious existence by stealing an occasional pig or two from a poorly watched field of some farmer. Sometimes it was a few

bushels of corn from an isolated crib, or any saleable material that he could filch. When really hard pressed he would work. Jess had a voluble slatternly wife and four dirty children who were much like himself.

With three admirers, Louie really lost caste in the village. People went out of their way to avoid her and she gave up working in the store. She still went to church, but was almost totally ignored. The women could find no excuse for her mode of living and barely nodded to her when they passed her on the street or encountered her at church. No one really knew the degree of her dereliction. If a man left the barber shop, another member or two would silently withdraw to see whether he made his way to the well-worn path cross lots to Louie's door or to his home. Many were suspected, but apparently few if any were guilty.

The first World War began about this period and Davey Seward was drafted. The village activities centered around the Red Cross, the Liberty Loan drives and war activities. Louie's affairs were of less moment than the international crisis. When the war was over, Davey came home, and soon brought to the village a new bride whom he had met near the training camp where he had spent the war period. The new wife was an ex-widow with five children and Davey went to work to support them. He led a virtuous life, with the American Legion as his only outside interest.

Charley Crook and Jess Constable still carried the torch, however. Old Charley was kicked by a colt he was breaking to harness

and took pneumonia and died, leaving Jess as master of the field. A number of years elapsed before Charley Peer came on the scene as Louie's last lover, and the one who brought her final undoing.

In earlier years, Charley Peer had lived in a nearby town, working as a farm laborer. There is no doubt that he had heard much about Louie before he arrived in the village, and of course he heard more after coming there. He was soon on as firm a footing as any of her former admirers and certainly equally or better established than Jess. The situation on this basis remained unchanged for some years - with participants growing older and perhaps less ardent in their romantic pursuits. With the great depression, the little path across lots was still worn bare, and Jess and Charley went on relief without undue disturbance of their emotional interests.

Louie, however, showed the wear of the years. She was now old and stooped. Her clothes were poor and unkempt. Her father and mother had died and she was alone in the world except for her brother Will and his wife, who shunned her almost completely. The attitude of the village seemed one of persecution in Louie's eyes. Minor episodes became magnified. She accused the postmaster of intercepting her mail. Frank's letters had been rare indeed, but she felt sure they had been kept from her. The clerks in the village stores, she thought short-changed her. She scandalized the village once more by stopping the local undertaker to pull up her dress to show him a black and blue mark above her knee where one of the male actors of an itinerant medicine show had kicked her. She informed her brother

and his wife that robbers had entered her house and stolen pictures, furniture, and other valuable articles. Some of these stories were believed by the townspeople and by her relatives, particularly by the latter, that articles of value had been stolen. Her sister-in-law asked her neighbors to keep an eye on the cottage and to report to them if any one were seen there who might be robbing her. Not long after this admonition, one of the neighbors did see a man stealthily enter Louie's yard about dusk and disappear toward the back of the house. This was not unusual, but the regular visitors were well known and this one seemed to be an intruder. Her sister-in-law was at once warned by telephone, and she in turn called the sheriff. He hurriedly summoned a couple of deputies and a few volunteers, who armed themselves with stones and clubs and surrounded the house. Louie's sister-in-law came down and was supported by a few of the womenfolk. The sheriff rapped soundly on the front door and demanded that the thief surrender himself. One of the deputies did the same at the back door. Silence followed their demands, and the same was repeated several times. The noise had attracted the attention of several neighbors and they joined the attack. The sheriff deployed his forces about the cottage, with one at each window and shouted that he was going to break down the door. With this a light appeared in the sitting room and Louie called from within. As the light illuminated the frontroom, one of those stationed at the window noticed that the curtain was being slowly pushed aside, and he found himself staring directly into the face of old Charley Peer. With the shout "Here he is" everyone ran to that side of the house and old Charley ran out the back door, across the neighbors back yard

and left town for two weeks.

The sheriff escorted Louie's tearful sister-in-law to her home. He strongly advised her to act, which she did, and the next day the sheriff appeared to put Louie away.

There is only one more paragraph to this story, a few words about Frank, Louie's husband. After his trip to California, he occasionally wrote Louie to secure funds from her father and for a time succeeded. Visitors to Los Angeles reported occasional stories of his life there. A short time after his arrival there, he bought an old street car from the transit company and set it up as a studio where he lived and painted. He was able to sell a picture now and then and lived a rather Bohemian sort of existence, and always kept busy at his painting. In later years, he achieved some success, and eventually bought a car and a trailer in which he traveled all over California, painting as always.

The last record except that of his obituary, was a clipping from a Los Angeles paper telling of a showing of his pictures in a local art gallery. The report further stated that the great publisher, Frank Knox, of the Chicago Daily News, had purchased several large water colors, which were esteemed the choice of the Knox collection.