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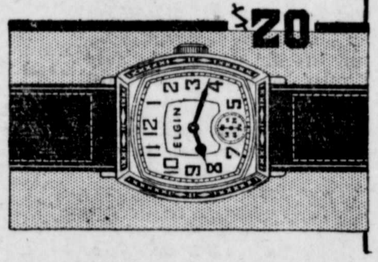
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The Cross-Word Romance

By JANE OSBORN

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ROSAMOND GALE had always tried to start from her house at least ten minutes before train time, though she needed only half that time to reach the suburban station. She was not naturally that sort of person—precise and over prompt—but she took a sort of pleasure in avoiding Tom Gage, her next-door neighbor, who also went to town on the eight o'clock train.

Rosamond Gale didn't know exactly why she took such pains to avoid her neighbor. She wanted most of all to have him know that she avoided him. She wanted him to know she was entirely indifferent to him. Other girls might and did put themselves out to meet him, but Rosamond was not of their number.

Rosamond always took pains to remain at the end of the platform opposite to the end that Tom Gage frequented.

"If he cared the least bit or really wanted to see me," she sometimes told herself, "he could manage to sit with me or at least in the same coach. I'll show him that I am quite as indifferent as he is." And Rosamond persuaded herself sometimes that she actually was.

The change came about when Tom Gage gave up riding in the smoking car. Previously he had always been ready to make up a set at bridge, but now he sought the seclusion of a seat in one of the regular coaches, where he buried his nose in his morning paper by the time the train pulled out of the station and remained so buried until it was time to get out again at the city terminal.

Quite frequently Tom Gage now rode in the same coach with Rosamond, though Rosamond assured herself that she couldn't help that since she entered before he did. Then other one-time smoking car habituees and bridge enthusiasts joined Tom in the regular coaches, and Rosamond soon realized that cross-word puzzles were responsible for the change.

"Look here," Rosamond heard Tom say one morning with mock seriousness, "I left the smoker just so I could have it nice and quiet to do cross-word puzzles." One day Tom took a seat opposite to that of Rosamond. They exchanged most formal bows as she sat down. Then he opened his morning paper and, glancing hastily over the first page, he turned to the cross-word puzzle.

"What's the name of a bird that can't fly?" she heard him ask a friend ahead of him.

"Blamed if I know," said the friend. "There isn't room for ostrich."

"Emu, emu," Rosamond whispered over and over to herself. Sometime later she knew that Tom still lacked the necessary word. If he could get that, she heard him say, he could get the whole thing easily.

Then without quite knowing what she did she said it aloud, and as the train had come to a stop sooner than she thought the word was spoken loud enough for Tom to hear.

"Thanks," said Tom, looking over at her. "That just fits." Rosamond blushed. She knew she did, but she didn't know how much that blush became her. She saw that Tom's eyes were resting upon her, but all the time she thought that he was saying to himself: "There's a foolish girl that has nothing to do but to listen to what other people are saying. And what a child she must be to blush in such a manner."

The next morning after Rosamond had taken her seat Tom suddenly appeared in the aisle beside her.

"May I sit with you?" he asked. "Maybe you'll help me with my puzzle. You seem to be a fan, too." And Rosamond, blushing again, said he might. She had to admit, as he sat there, that there was really something extraordinarily attractive about him. She hoped no one thought that she had asked him to sit there.

"What's a word in four letters, meaning love?" asked Tom, who was working on one puzzle, while Rosamond worked on another.

Rosamond did not know. "I'll try like," said Tom.

"Oh, I don't think the two words have the same meaning at all," said Rosamond. "There are ever so many people I like whom I don't love. And I cannot imagine loving a person I didn't like. That is—"

"You seem to know a lot about it," said Tom.

"I guess I know as much about it as you do," she flung back. "But perhaps like is the word."

After that Rosamond blushed a little every time she saw Tom.

Then after doing puzzles together for a few weeks on the train, Tom asked Rosamond whether he might "run over" to see her that coming evening.

When Tom called that evening Rosamond had arranged a reading table with a low light upon it, several new cross-word puzzle books, some sharpened pencils and two or more dictionaries.

"Banish the puzzles," said Tom, as he led Rosamond to the low Chesterfield before the open fire. "I want to talk about that word in four letters. You said you sometimes liked people you didn't love and couldn't love a person you didn't like. Rosamond, do you like me?"

"Not so very much," said Rosamond, "that is—"

But Rosamond didn't finish.

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