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SOUTHERN BELLE

*A love story that makes a romantic
tradition at last come true*

By SARA HAARDT

Illustrated by George Rapp

OLIVIA LEE stared at her reflection in the dressing table mirror, and told herself that she might live through the night but would never look the same. Well, you wouldn't be a belle always, even though you started out, at thirteen, being the most popular girl in town, with nobody to hold a candle to you. She had known it was coming, only . . . only . . . she hadn't expected it so soon. It simply didn't seem reasonable to be the most rushed girl on the floor one minute, and to be looking desperately over your partner's shoulder for some one to break in on you the next. She couldn't believe that anything so dreadful had happened to her!

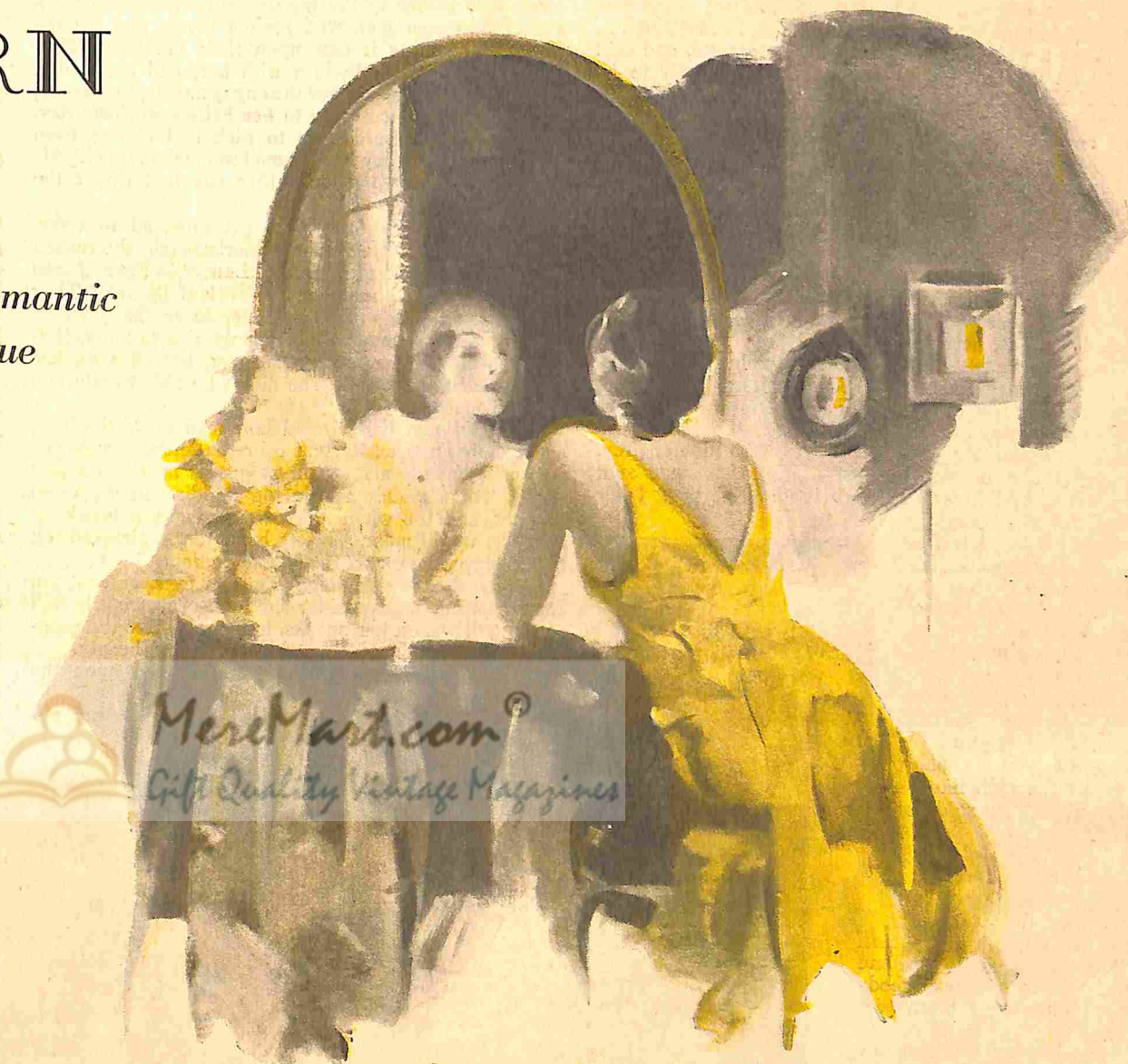
Olivia stared at her face. The overhead light was flattering but she knew, anyway, that she hadn't changed. Her dark eyes that sparkled so brilliantly were the same; her cheeks, under her rather lavish make-up, were as satiny smooth; her hair as golden brown and fluffy. After all, she was only twenty-five, and it wasn't conceivable that she had begun to break. Then what was the matter?

She tilted her head back ever so slightly, and regarded her image through half-closed lids—a gesture of coquetry that had never failed her until tonight and that even now relieved the pain in her heart. She saw a pretty girl of the fluffy vivacious type who suddenly looked tired and defeated.

No, she herself hadn't changed, but all the while those strangely exotic young things outside were perfecting a new type. Their pale, heart-shaped faces with their cold opaque eyes rimmed so strikingly in black lashes arose to mock her. Why, they hardly wore any make-up at all, just those long curved eyelashes and the merest suggestion of lipstick, and yet she had never seen young girls so seductive. They were hard in a new inexplicable way that belonged wholly to their younger bodies clothed so paradoxically in long, swirling skirts and all the new Victorian frills. Oh, there never had been a style so provocative as their hardness decked out in the romantic softness of flowing, feminine draperies! No wonder she had had only two breaks during the last dance. No wonder she had fled to the dressing-room, the last refuge of wallflowers, in her shame!

She jerked up, and rubbed the rouge off one cheek, experimentally. No, it was as she feared—it wasn't becoming to her: she merely looked washed out instead of palely seductive. She'd have to do something about her hair first, it was entirely too fluffy. She'd let it grow and wear it coiled, simply, in a knot at the nape of her neck like—like—

"No, no, no!" She tossed her hair free. There was such a thing as pride, even in defeat. She didn't look like herself, she wasn't herself, with it slicked down in a horrid little knot.



It was true, still true: she was lovely

"I must go out and dance," she said defiantly. "I can't stay in here all night." Then, softly, while she was thinking this, she began to make up her face again. She rouged her cheeks, more deeply than usual, and beaded her eyelashes with a match stick. She rubbed her geranium lipstick over the deeper carmine that was supposed to be the proper shade for brunettes.

How delicate her skin was beneath the rouge! How brilliant her smile was beneath the lipstick! It was true, still true: she was lovely. No girl of the younger generation could match her sparkle, her rippling vivacity.

Swiftly she put the lipstick and rouge back into her evening bag, and walked over to the door. She stood poised, outside, a shimmering butterfly waiting to be wafted off on the waves of music. "How can I help being beautiful? How can I help being rushed?" her dark flashing eyes seemed to say.

It worked. Lawrence Pratt abruptly quit the stag-line, and came toward her.

"WHO'S the sweetest thing in the world?" he murmured, pressing his cheek close to hers.

She tilted her head back, and smiled at him, and something deeper and darker than her eyes, something fugitive and faintly frightened looked out at him as she saw that they were well past the stag-line now, and that nobody else had started to break in on them.

"It is a sweet dance," she answered in a radiant

voice. She saw the brilliant colors of the dancers woven and interwoven into a changeful pattern, and she thought, "I must think of some excuse to sit out this dance. If only I could get away for a while people wouldn't notice." Aloud she said, "Have you seen the lanterns around the pavilion? I want a tiny piece of one for my memory book, but I can't reach them."

"You come with me," he guided her expertly through the door on to the porch, "I'll get you all the cock-eyed lanterns there are if you say the word."

They descended the porch steps into the June night. Lawrence guided her to one of the winding paths. There was an old wooden bench, shaped like a sofa with a curved back and arms, waiting for them under a heaven tree. Olivia waited while Lawrence dusted off the seat with his white silk handkerchief.

"Oh, isn't the pavilion lovely from here?" she cried rapturously. "I think the first June dance is the nicest of the year."

"Still talkin' about the dance?" he laughed. "I don't care about the dance—I care about you."

He made a sharp movement as if to take her in his arms, but something stopped him. For a moment on the dance floor he had thought he saw a tumultuous question burning beneath her radiance. But no, she was less a girl to him, a warm reality of flesh and blood, than a legend of beauty.

"I shall care about the first June dance if I live to be a hundred," she was saying, and though she stared at

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