

GREENLAWN

BY RUTH BRANDAO FERRARI

Illustrated by Dick Priest

THE trouble in Greenlawn started, of course, when Linda Ryan had Sylvia Bender's carpenters tossed into jail. Yes, that was when it started, Nan Kelly was often to reflect, but it surely didn't end there. It was as though a small demon had found his way into the tiny Utopia of a street and kept demoning until he wrecked the works.

There were only six houses in Greenlawn. The little street had been cut the year Nan and Jack were married, and they'd bought the very first lot. Mrs. Bender, Sr., bought the lot next door and was the first to build. Then the Kellys built, then the young Ryans on the opposite side of Mrs. Bender. The three houses across the street went up in rapid succession—Paula and Monty Sanders's first home, Marian and Ben Johnson's, and Myrna and Drew Ferguson's.

In the beginning the little street was a sort of Honeymoon Lane, but Nan, who'd been born with a maternal heart, was already dreaming of the day there'd be children in Greenlawn and praying that a little Kelly would come first. But he didn't. Young Phil Bender married the beautiful, fiery, red-headed Sylvia, and Mrs. Bender turned the upstairs part of her house into an apartment for them. Sylvia fought with her mother-in-law and eventually with her husband, but she got along well enough with the other girls. She had the first baby, a boy, just before Linda Ryan's son was born. In six years' time there were two children at the Benders', three at the Ryans', four at the Fergusons', and Paula Sanders, who had yearned for an ethereal little girl, had the toughest boy on the street. But as for Marian Johnson and Nan—well, Nan always turned thoughts sharply at this point to something else.

It was shortly before Linda's third child was born that Sylvia Bender decided she had to have an outside stairway leading to her apartment. Before that time there'd been only the stairway that led through Mrs. Bender's house, and Sylvia wanted more privacy. She planned it in the only feasible way it could be built, at the west side of the house, but it did definitely intrude on the Ryans' privacy. It was close to their home, and anyone on the stairway could look into the Ryan kitchen and bathroom, which burned Linda up, particularly since she knew Sylvia was the kind to look.

Fred Ryan, egged on by his wife, had a talk with good-natured Phil Bender when Linda heard what was afoot. The lumber was already in the yard, but the

work hadn't started. Phil was reasonable about it, and since there was no other way to build the stairway he tried to get Sylvia to call the whole thing off. But Sylvia was spending a little nest egg of her own on the project, and she wouldn't be called off.

Linda and she had a knockdown, drag-out fight about it, but one morning the carpenter and his helpers arrived and started work. An hour later they were carted off to jail. Linda had somehow discovered that neither Sylvia nor the workmen had thought to secure a building permit.

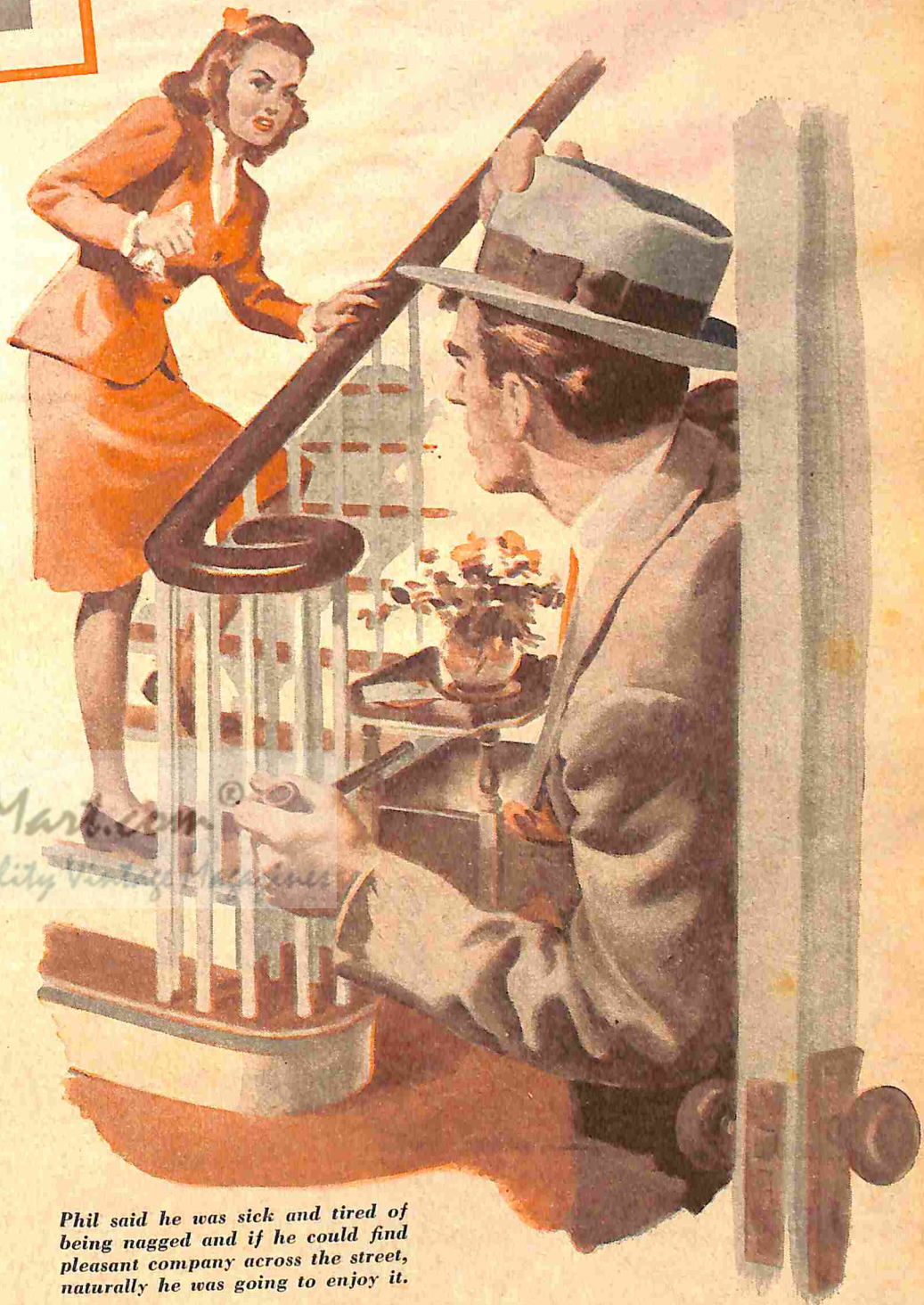
It was funny, of course—red-headed Sylvia running through Greenlawn shaking her fist at the patrol wagon. And her row with Linda was funny, too, or would have been to anyone but the Greenlawners who prided themselves that theirs wasn't that sort of neighborhood. Of course, Sylvia secured the building permit that very day and the men weren't in jail overnight, and she just had the extra expense of paying them for their lost time. Then the work was resumed, with Linda getting madder with every blow of the hammer.

The girls chose up sides, all but Nan, who remained neutral. Meanwhile Sylvia forbade her children to play with the little Ryans, thereby extending the feud to the younger generation, who demonstrated their acceptance of the challenge by enthusiastically hurling mud back and forth across the fence at the enemy family's laundry. Tuesday bridge was discontinued, because if Sylvia were invited Linda wouldn't go, and vice versa.

Finally, after the third little Ryan was born, Linda, who'd had little experience at holding grudges, decided she wanted to make up, and sent some homemade candy over by one of the children. Sylvia accepted the candy, making cracks about wondering if it were poisoned, but the two girls made up. Only, things were never quite the same in Greenlawn again. The weekly cut-in bridge game had been given up and nobody resumed it. Because about that time most of the female Greenlawners had started developing complexes of their own which had nothing to do with the Ryan-Bender feud.

The war was on, and Paula Sanders was in a state bordering on melancholia because her husband hadn't tried for a commission in time and had been drafted. Nobody had much sympathy

The topic of the little street's talk was a mysterious Mrs. Henderson, who might be a blessing—or a curse



Phil said he was sick and tired of being nagged and if he could find pleasant company across the street, naturally he was going to enjoy it.

with her. Paula had come to Greenlawn as a dark-haired, shining-eyed bride with a facile imagination and a glib tongue, and until now nobody had even noticed that she had always complained in a sort of monologue instead of conversing, and the other girls were too absorbed in their own troubles to try to snap her out of it.

Linda had lost her servant, among the war casualties, and had plunged into housekeeping so deeply that she was fast becoming a household drudge and penny pincher. She had never been pretty but had once been Greenlawn's most stylish young matron. Now her somewhat mousy brown hair was unwaved; the house

dresses she wore constantly were seldom ironed. Her husband was coining money at the shipyard, and Syl-

via, whose husband was having financial difficulties, was always making cracks because Linda let the gardener go rather than pay the increase he demanded, because Linda did her own washing, because Linda was Linda.

Drew Ferguson had been transferred, and some war workers rented the Ferguson house and were never around.

And Marian Johnson had become the tragedy of Greenlawn. A frail, pretty helpless little blonde, she had a dreadful time giving birth to a little girl who died after a few hours. There was no reason, the doctor said, why Marian couldn't have another child, but Marian was scared. She became a pale little wraith who stayed in the house alone all day, and after a while the Greenlawners realized that Marian was becoming a solitary drinker. Her husband was a re-

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