

(continued from previous page)

as what came later. I had been happy, and I had a sprig of daphne on my coat . . . and later. . ."

The newspaper boys were calling in the street. The trams swept along, the people hurried across from side to side, the lights were showing in the shop windows, and behind her there was a girl waiting for her to say more, but the words had gone.

"I'm sorry, Miss Spencer. I had no idea. I . . . well . . . Well, I'm going now. Good-night."

Here I am, making a martyr of myself. A tragedy queen or something. Here I am, a woman of 54 with tears running down her face, being pathetic to a poor girl who admires me. I must be ill. I need a tonic . . . or a rest . . . or vitamin pills.

She blew her nose vigorously, went to the mirror, and jammed her hat on her head, put on her coat, and looking round to see that all was in order, saw the daphne and deliberately, with defiance, pinned it on her coat. Then she locked the door.

It was cold outside. A bitter wind blew from the north denying all hint of Spring and in a moment the emotion of the day was swept aside. She was old. She felt upon her the depression of those years when she had hoped and waited and finally become reconciled, when she had laid aside those half-formed wishes and looked ahead to the long years which she would live alone.

It was all pitiful. It could be amusing if she could once get rid of that regretful feeling of frustration. Almost angrily she took the flowers from her coat and threw them in the gutter.

Well, there I was, just a silly girl. I believed everything he told me. I thought I was beautiful when I knew I hadn't a decent feature. I imagined and built upon and added to and finally I had myself decked out in orange blossom and satin. Then he went away. That's all. Gave me a few sprigs of that beastly flower to pin on my coat, held my hand for a moment, said good-bye, and went.

And after all these years I haven't come to my senses. After all these years I'm still silly and sentimental and almost hopeful.

Go on, cry. Here she comes, the foolish old maid who still regrets romance. Here she comes, the efficient accountant gone sentimental.

Suddenly she stopped. Once let go and you're finished. Once feel again and you can't go on. Once care again. . .

She turned and walked briskly back the way she had come. Here, just about here. . . No, here. She stopped and retrieved the daphne from the gutter, pinned it on her coat, then stood wondering. What could she get for tea?

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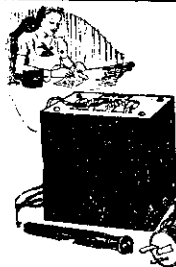
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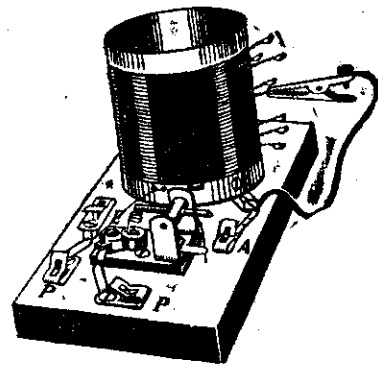
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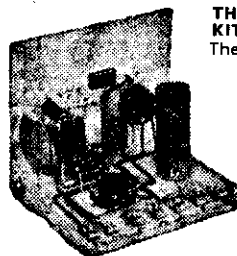
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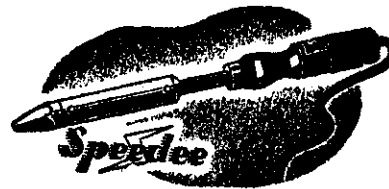
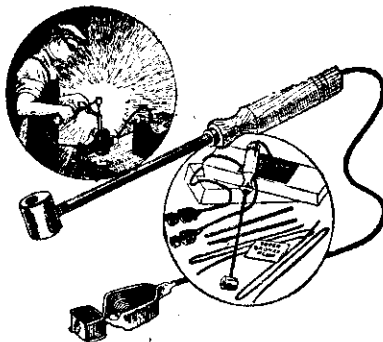


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