

The Girl In Green

By

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FROM her front window Bernardine could look out into Central Park. It was a languorous afternoon in early fall. Summer seemed to be staging a return engagement. It was very warm. She had the windows wide-open. Because of the extra warm day, coming so late in the year, a great many people had taken advantage of the park's facilities. Mostly they were in pairs; almost nobody she could see was alone. While Bernardine was all alone, up in her little apartment. She sighed and walked restlessly around the front room.

She had just bathed, and, having thrown on a light kimono she was waiting for her body thoroughly to dry. Since the day was so warm it was slow in drying. She did not want to put on her sheer undies until it was thoroughly dry.

Impatient she threw off the kimono and stood, just in mules, coolly nude, the breeze from the window toying with her. There was a full-length glass in the parlor. Happening to glance into it she wondered why she should be alone. And then she had to admit it was her own fault. She was timid.

JUST TURNED TWENTY-ONE, and just come to New York from the South, to finish her musical education, she had no sophistication which might have equipped her with social ease. Always, down South, she had been sheltered, told that it was the business of a young lady to make an auspicious marriage.

And she was beautiful in that magnolia petal way in which Southern girls are beautiful. The sheen of her skin was unbelievably lovely in its unblemished magnolia whiteness. Deep brown eyes that burned with a heavenly fire. Jet black hair, soft and shiny, which was now done up in little braids, since she had not wet it but had confined it under a bathing cap during her shower.

CRUSHED ROSEBUD MOUTH, red and damply fresh; which had been kissed, only so chastely, by a few Southern youths who had been so aware of her

family and social position they did not dream of treating her to the amorous delights with which they enchanted less auspicious southern ladies.

Bernardine shrugged her prettily rounded shoulders and sighed impatiently. Looked once more at her sweet body in the mirror, like a white flame; built for love, warm for kisses, fragrant for caresses. So straight, and yet so perfectly curved at just the right places. She twisted and glanced back over her shoulder. Ripe large round dimples, where they would do the most good. And then the lush mounds of her bosom haughtily firm in their conical perfection.

BERNARDINE SIGHED AGAIN. It was hell to be a lady. She was trained to it so long and because of her family and social position and comfortable income, men never under any circumstances dreamed of treating her other than as a lady.

If only she knew just one man who might forget her impressive southern name; who might be overpowered by love, and not think of marriage right off . . .! Just one! If only on this heavenly afternoon, when she was really and completely free, since the aunt whom she was staying with in New York had gone to New Rochelle and wouldn't be back until ten or eleven o'clock. But she didn't know such a man.

Lovesick for love that she had never had, Bernardine went back to gaze out of the window.

She noticed a familiar figure down upon a park bench. The only one that was alone. He'd been there for some time. Looked lonely. She went and got her opera glasses. Looked down at him closely. Was thrilled. Even though he was seated it was possible to tell that he had a splendid slim strong masculine figure. He must be, she judged, about thirty. Beneath his neat brown fedora she could see that he had light hair. And his facial features were extremely handsome. She felt little ripples of delight go through her.

"One like that!" she told herself, and her southern blood tumbled and sang through her veins.

And then the wildest and maddest of ideas took her. There, at last, was a handsome, desirable male who couldn't know that she was "Miss Pendleton," of *The Pendletons* . . . who'd only know her for a beautiful and desirable girl.

SHE FLEW TO her bedroom and swiftly got dressed. Black lace panties and a loose brassiere . . . no use tightly confining one of her outstanding attractions if she were giving up being Miss Pendleton and would be just a beautiful, desirable, warm-blooded girl. Who would ever know . . . after years of repression . . . surely she was entitled to that.

Light fluffy dark green dress, that would accentuate the lines of her figure. Her heart pounded madly, and she hurried lest she lose her courage and change her mind and again become like Miss Pendleton, instead of just Bernardine the courageous; a new characterization for her; one that she had never dared dream of assuming before.

Jaunty little green hat. Green pumps to match. Now she was not Miss Pendleton, not Bernardine . . . but the girl in green.

She touched her lip rouge with her little finger; made it heavier and bolder than usual. Put on more mascara than she ever had before. Shaded her eyes darkly; more darkly than might have been strictly considered good taste.

Walked up and down before her mirror, practicing a daring swing of hips and body. She blushed with shame at herself, then flushed throughout with a heavenly surge of a new sort of excitement. . . . Oh, just once, she told herself fervently, to have a man who wouldn't "Miss Pendleton" her.

She flew to the window. Yes, he was still there; still looking lonely and thoroughly attractive.

GOING DOWN IN the elevator she was a little disconcerted by the elevator man's look of surprise to see her made up so heavenly.

Out into Central Park. She slowed down as she approached the bench. The young man was still there, and he was even better looking, close up, than he had been through opera glasses. Deliberately Bernardine gave him a flirtatious look. He nearly fell off the bench. As she passed on she heard his feet crunching on the gravel behind her. So clean and strong he looked . . . her blood raced through her veins. Presently he was directly behind her. She heard his voice challenging gaily.

"Say, where you going so fast?"

Bernardine, telling herself that she wasn't Bernardine, but rather The Girl in Green, swung around and looked him over insolently.

"Who's asking?" she said, hoping that she sounded very slangy.

"Jerry Thurston Peck," he said. "One of the Park Avenue Pecks—with a lost history in Wall Street."

Goodness, she thought; he was not only attractive physically but subjectively as well. He was at her side now.

"Mind if I walk along with you?"

"Meaning what?" she asked.

"My intentions, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Oh . . . what would a young man's intentions be when he picks up the most beautiful girl who has ever graced the walks of Central Park on a warm and glorious day in early fall . . . but, lady, I ought to warn you, I haven't got a nickel."

FOR A MINUTE Miss Pendleton nearly annihilated him with a look; but in time Bernardine remembered that she was The Girl in Green.

"What were you looking so solemn about?" she wanted to know.

"I was looking solemn," he promptly told her, "because you hadn't come along yet. If I'd known you were coming I would have looked, and felt, just swell."

"And now that I'm here," The Girl in Green asked, "what are you going to do about it?"

"I do wish I could at least buy you a drink," he said; "but I'm stony. Last year I lived on Park Avenue; this year I live on Sixty-seventh Street in a furnished room; I'm supposed to be looking for a job; but I'm almost no good for just a job. I'm a Ph.D. in romance languages . . . if you can fancy that. Wouldn't care to hear some romance language would you?"

"Well," The Girl in Green said toughly, "even if you are a dead one you sling a pretty good line; if you want to come on up to the apartment I'll set you up to a drink anyway . . . if you can stand southern corn liquor . . . that's all I've got."

"All you've got! Say, I wouldn't want anything else if I had a direct choice . . . you're from the south, aren't you?"

"Don't ask me any questions and I won't tell you any lies."

"All right, I won't, since the party's on you."

BACK UP IN the apartment he calmly took off his coat and vest and threw them on a chair. Bernardine was thrilled speechless; it was the first time in her life that a man had dared to take off his coat in her presence. But she could have wished he were a bit more brutal.

"You seem to be getting along jake," he commented, looking around the apartment. "Since you are sitting so pretty you wouldn't be a good fellow and take a vacation and let me fall in love with you because you like me, would you—or do you like me?"

"If I hadn't liked you," said The Girl in Green, "I wouldn't have brought you up here."

"That's sure right," he agreed softly.

"You've got a bit of a southern accent yourself," she observed.

"It's the corn liquor," he told her, downing the second glass. "Why don't you take off something and be comfortable?" he suggested. Miss Pendleton nearly fainted; The Girl in Green wordlessly peeled off her green frock and was revealed in her black panties and brassiere, stockings and pumps . . . the sight nearly caused him to swoon. He stared and stared; finally said:

"Come over here and let me touch to see if it's real."

She came near him and he was about to slap her playfully upon one of the loveliest parts of her. Miss Pendleton was reminded of the gun in her bureau drawer, and, for a minute, the jocular young man was very near to sudden death; but The Girl in Green, who still retained her nature even if she didn't retain her gown, came to the rescue. So that he couldn't attempt to slap her again, she put herself into his lap.

THIS DID NOT seem very noticeably to quiet him down. His arms went around her. His hands were warm. When they smoothed her velvety magnolia skin, Miss Pendleton took a deep breath, and The Girl in Green shivered with ecstasy beyond anything she had ever known before.

His arm was around her now in a tight embrace, squeezing her and holding her very, very close to him and a heaven of delight was surging through Bernardine. The Girl in Green suddenly had a very brilliant idea.

"You remind me," she said, "of my first

sweetheart. I didn't want to kiss him or let him make love to me, but he made me . . . I was awfully angry with him at the time. Maybe you ought to humor me a bit."

"Anything, lady."

"You do look an awful lot like him . . . that first man; I wonder . . . it would be sort of thrilling . . . if you could sort of be like him. Suppose I pretend that I don't want to kiss you; and you make me. No matter how reluctant I pretend to be, don't you let me get away with it."

"Geel!" he complimented, "you do think of the swellest games."

BUT SUDDENLY SHE became frightened at what she had suggested. She rose and started to go away.

"Oh, no you don't," he said playfully, and pulled her back down into his lap.

"But—but—but—" faltered Miss Pendleton, despite the delight of The Girl in Green, "I'm afraid." She tried to get away again.

"What you afraid of?" he asked, playing up.

"Afraid I might—weaken—"

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that," he told her, jocularly. "A wise girl like you."

But again Miss Pendleton took fright and tried to pull away. This time she escaped, all but one wrist, which he held onto tightly.

Frantically frightened now, Miss Pendleton perked and pulled to escape. He suddenly gave her leverage by rising swiftly from his chair. She pulled herself over backward. Instantly he was beside her. His strong arms went around her. He bent her back over one arm; leaned down and glued his lips over hers, in the longest, most exciting kiss she had ever heard of. Without releasing her he lifted his mouth from hers and let it trail down along her white throat . . . and then his kisses seemed to become electric. She had the feeling that, from her highly sensitive lips, as though they were wireless units, the kisses were spreading all over her, sending messages of thrills everywhere.

"OH, PLEASE," BEGGED Miss Pendleton, now breathlessly frightened, "go 'way. It was all a mad notion on my part. I can't go through with it. Please, please. . . ." But frightened as Miss Pendleton was, The Girl in Green was highly elated when, instead of obeying, he only grasped her tightly with one strong arm that encircled both of hers, held her as in a vise; and allowed his lips to

tarry upon hers, sending out thrills to the very end of her fingertips, and making her curl up her toes.

“You’re making me lose my breath,” Miss Pendleton objected a moment later.

“But prettily?” he said softly.

“Yes,” sighed The Girl in Green.

The afternoon hush which comes to New York about sunset came over the town. Birds all over Central Park started clustering and twittering in the trees where they would roost for the night. The horns on the automobiles down below sounded farther and farther away.

And then at last when she had descended back to reality, Bernardine saw a very earnest, and tragic eyed young man facing her.

“Say!” he exclaimed hoarsely. “What was the idea of pretending . . . !”

And then realization crashed down upon her as to just how innocent she had really been; there was no use trying to lie to him now, she saw. Averting her eyes she blurted out the whole story.

“GEE!” HE SAID, over and over again, “Gee! I’ll never forgive myself; I should have known. And besides, damn you, I’m so much in love with you now I’d go mad if—listen, you little devil—I really am Jerry Thurston Peck. The reason why I’m broke is that I am one of the Manhattan Pecks. . . . I could get on my feet easily enough by going to some of my relatives or friends . . . they’d give me a fancy job; but, after the Wall Street crash I was too proud to do it . . . I thought I could get myself a job on my own. But listen, you naughty angel, what I feel now is bigger than any silly pride. . . . If I get back on my feet will you wait, say six months, then let me see you again, and—”

“Wait,” she breathed ecstatically, “Pendleton or no Pendleton, I’d marry you tomorrow. Now I know what really matters in life. . . .”

And when he took her again into his arms the slanting rays of the setting sun struck obliquely across the town and brought a carmine hush over everything.