

Her New Pink Latin



by
Robert
J. Horton

MRS. PINNEY, as the proprietress of one of those four-story rooming-houses with the stone-railed steps in the early West Forties, was a never-failing barometer of the rise and fall of her roomers' fortunes.

She knew, for instance, two weeks before Mr. Loring committed suicide, that he was going to do it. Some subtle telepathy that courses through those narrow, darkened halls told her, she said. Hadn't she quit asking him for his rent a week before?

And Miss Titterlee! Why, she knew the very next day after Miss Titterlee first met her *him*. Even though Miss Titterlee had never before had a *him*, to her knowledge and even if the extraordinary assortment of cold creams and powders, and rouges had not made its the appearance on her dresser that next day, she would have known, she declared.

"This business teaches one things," she sighed to Mr. Tumpkins.

She liked Mr. Tumpkins. He was the only man in the house who used bay rum!

Nor did the latitude of her roomers' activities conclude the scope of Mrs. Pinney's observations. Visitors, also,

had a place in her deductions.

In this way she came to dislike Monte Robinson.

Monte Robinson came to see Gertie Rector, who worked in a photograph gallery, and who had the second-floor front. Gertie was pretty and practical. She made most of her own clothes; trimmed most of her own hats. Indeed, she had won Mrs. Pinney's heart from the moment she fixed over that lady's turban with the green parrot feather (which was out of style) into a sort of turn-back affair with a white-ribbon rosette (which was the very latest thing).

And Gertie could cook. Mrs. Pinney knew this, because she had winked her official rooming-house eye at certain culinary feats which Gertie had performed on the little gas burner (twenty-five cents a week extra) in her room.

Then, in the last analysis—which possibly should have been the first—Gertie was young.

Mrs. Pinney had dwelt on all these admirable traits at length to Mr. Tumpkins, who was so old that he kept all of his shoes in trees! Time wasted—except conversationally.

Many youthful masculine eyes

looked with favor in Gertie's direction. Some were bolder than others. Monte Robinson was the most audacious of all her admirers, and, perhaps, for this very reason had made the most progress.

He came regularly—which fact alone was sufficient to secure unto him the lasting enmity of Mrs. Pinney.

"Who is this Robinson?" she demanded of Gertie.

"Oh, he's a swell—a regular swell!" Gertie had responded, peering in the mirror and preening a wisp of hair.

"Yes, by ready-made-clothing store standards, maybe," retorted Mrs. Pinney grimly. "But where does he work? What does he do?"

"He works down-town somewheres; he's got an elegant job among the brokers."

"Among the brokers!" sniffed the landlady. "You can find *anything* among the brokers!"

Gertie elevated her eyebrows.

This always got Mrs. Pinney's goat. When Gertie elevated her eyebrows the worthy landlady became incoherent and thrashed about the house in a rage, leaving Gertie alone—which was why that shrewd young lady did that very thing at discomfiting moments.

In direct contrast were the love-making methods of Fireman Mark Mathews. As a matter of fact he didn't have any methods at all. He worshiped at a distance. He walked by the house frequently, and whenever he saw Gertie, he touched his cap gallantly and mentioned something or other, but—Gertie knew a little about eye-messages, and the one Mark's big brown orbs flashed at her thrilled her secretly.

Now and then when Mark passed he didn't see Gertie at all, but found Mrs. Pinney on the steps. At such times he stopped and talked with her. He found it

easy easy to talk with Mrs. Pinney. Gertie was never mentioned, but here was another case of unspoken messages. Both were thinking of the same thing at such times.

"Look at him!" Mrs. Pinney remarked one evening in the presence of Gertie and Monte as Mathews passed, "Look at him! If ever I saw a man, there's one; look at those shoulders; look at that well shaped head and clean-cut face; look at that chin; and only twenty-one years old; there's a lad with a future in the department—"

She laid it on thick until Monte hastily proposed the movies, and they left—Gertie looking back over her shoulder once.

Then came the advent of the new pink satin.

Spring had smiled upon the city. There was fresh energy in the traffic cop's arm, added warmth in his smile. Bock beer came on; garden-seeds sold to the last package of early tomatoes, and Mrs. Pinney had all the lace curtains washed.

I don't know whether it was satin or not. It *looked* like satin—and it made Gertie look like an earthly angel.

It probably was the only ready-made dress that she would buy during the year. And for her the whole of spring's orbit revolved about it. It was the echo of the songs of the birds, the reflection of the gladdening tints of green and the high-flung, summering skies. She loved it.

She wore it first on the initial trip she and Monte took to Coney Island. She looked sweet and winsome beside her consort, who was attired in the newest one-button pinch model, with a flashy, cheap shirt and tie. He carried a cane. Not a broker's attire, nor yet that of a respectable clerk of a broker.

"We oughta have a great time this summer, kid," Monte drawled. "You look

swell in that new rag. I'm glad you got that. Now I can take you to some of the sweller places, where we ain't gone before, because—"

Gertie was regarding him with widening eyes.

"Oh, that's all right, kid; don't get peeved. All your clothes is all right, only this rag has got the others beat so far, and makes you look so pretty I just wanted you to know it."

He squeezed her hand, and she felt assured.

And, of course, they had their fortunes told. Monte sneered at the idea at first, but gave in when he noted Gertie's look of injury.

Show me a girl, working for small wages, living in a hall-room with all the irksome inconveniences that go with it, who isn't superstitious, and I'll lead you straight to Captain Kidd's cache in return!

They went into the interior of the palmist's tent separately, as is the custom and rule.

Monte's was the regular reading—strange woman, journey soon, and all that.

But the woman in the dirty turban and cheap bracelets saw something unusual in Gertie's palm, or in her eyes—or in both. Or it may be that on occasion those people really are gifted with prophecy and revelation.

"In the lines of your hand I see a wedding with you as the bride," said the seeress mysteriously. "Yes, and I see you wearing at the wedding the very dress you have on!"

"Will I be happy?" The question trembled on Gertie's lips.

"That depends," answered the seeress wearily. "Your man lines seem crossed."

Gertie came out of the tent blushing.

"Same old stuff," said Monte to

himself.

That night Fireman Mark Mathews walked past the brown-stone front rooming-house many times. On the fifteenth trip he found Mrs. Pinney on the steps.

"They're out to Coney," she volunteered, as if she had decided the time for unspoken messages had passed.

"She's got on her new pink dress. My Gawd, boy, how that girl loves that dress. I don't believe she'd trade outfits with any lady over on the avenue. She'd rather lose her life than lose it. You oughta see the way she takes care of it!"

Mrs. Pinney made a gesture of despair. "How's everything over to the station, Mr. Mark?"

Mr. Mark reported conditions to be normal and departed—thoughtful.

Two weeks passed with Gertie living in ecstasy between the few times she appeared in her new dress. She pondered—thrilled over the prophecy of the Coney Island fortune teller.

Monte came regularly, but seemed wary of some new quality he had discovered in Gertie's speech and manner. She seemed shy, too, and Monte's ilk detested shyness.

Mark Mathews passed from time to time. He looked more boldly at Gertie. A fact which for some reason which she could not explain satisfactorily to herself, disconcerted her.

Mrs. Pinney held aloof, but went about her duties humming a silly old tune about love and the cooing doves in spring, and all that, until Mr. Tumpkins came out flat and asked her what was the matter.

Then Mrs. Pinney went into Mr. Tumpkins's room and held a half-hour conversation with him behind a closed door.

"I tell you I won't do it!" he snapped as she emerged.

"You mean to tell me you won't help to save a young girl from the likes of that Robinson thing?" Mrs. Pinney returned.

"But what have *I* got to do with it?" he evaded.

"It's your duty," said Mrs. Pinney firmly. "Besides, you get a third chair in your room—an easy one!"

"I don't need a—" Mr. Tumpkins hesitated. That *was* an inducement, after all. A third chair in a rooming-house in that locality was—well, it was a third chair, that's all, especially if it were an easy one.

"The directions is right on the box; all you've got to do is light 'em," continued Mrs. Pinney in a sweet, persuasive voice.

"But I'm no fireworks expert!" he flared.

"You don't have to be. You can read, can't you?"

That was not so easily answered, either.

And Mrs. Pinney evidently had another card up her sleeve. "And if you don't wish to do it as your duty, you might, at least, consider me," she declared.

"But what have *you* got to do with it?" He plainly was weakening.

"I'm running this house. I'll have no mismating here!"

In the end Mr. Tumpkins promised to do whatever it was that Mrs. Pinney wished him to do, even to ten readings of the directions on the boxes. He appeared thoughtful for the next day or two, and snorted a great deal but he got the third chair in his room, and so finally desisted.

Gertie, Monte, Mrs. Pinney, and two others were grouped about on the front steps of an early evening a few days later.

Suddenly there was a flash in the

darkened hall behind them. Mrs. Pinney screamed as a dense volume of smoke came rolling out the doorway.

"The gas! The gas! Oh, who left the gas turned on?"

The house, indeed, was afire. Little flames licked about the front doorway and ate rapidly into the old, seasoned wood, which was as dry as tinder.

Almost before the echo of Mrs. Pinney's screams had died away came the fire-fighters. Foremost to reach the scene was Mark Mathews. He held a fire extinguisher, and his eyes quickly swept the little group about the lower part of the steps.

He saw Gertie convulsed with sobs, and Monte, his face white and his chin quivering, holding her back and crying: "Stay back, everybody; stay back."

Smoke was pouring from the windows above.

Mathews did not hesitate. He vaulted to the porch rail, grasped the upper window-ledge of the first floor, and pulled himself up by sheer strength to the second.

Gertie screamed as she saw him dive into her window, filled with smoke.

A ladder was hastily run up.

Mathews reappeared, bearing what looked to be a woman or a child in his arms.

He descended, quickly made his way to Gertie, and held out the bundle.

"My new pink foulard—it's saved!" she cried joyously.

There! It wasn't satin, after all.

Next evening—Mark Mathews paused as he reached the rooming-house steps.

"Good evening Gertie!"

"Hello. Mr. Mathews!" Her voice was like the sound of chimes heard from afar.

"The West Side Firemen's Ball is

coming off Friday night, Gertie, if—”

She arose. “I’ll be ready at eight,” she promised. And the look she flung back at him over her shoulder as she ran up the steps won Fireman Mark Mathews two promotions within the year.

Mrs. Smith came out on the stoop next door.

“What was the damage, Mrs. Pinney?”

“Oh, trivial, trivial; hardly worth mentioning.”

“Funniest thing” —Mrs. Smith seated herself on the rail— “funniest thing, Mrs. Pinney, that smoke; it looked just like the smoke I saw ’em have in them movies I saw ’em making over in Jersey last year. I—”

“Come over; come over, Mrs. Smith,” interrupted Mrs. Pinney. “I got some new records for the funnygraf.”

A man came out of the door behind Mrs. Pinney.

There was a bandage about his head, under his chin, and on both hands. His eyebrows had disappeared. He actually swore when he saw the landlady.

“This is what I get for following the directions on the boxes,” he snarled.

“But I didn’t say to light ’em all at once,” replied Mrs. Pinney sweetly, wiping a spot off his chin.

He broke away and stamped down the steps.

In his eyes was a baleful glare.

It was Mr. Tumpkins!