



Everybody's



NUMBER ONE

JULY, 1923

VOLUME XLIX

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

JAMES H. GANNON, President **SEWELL HAGGARD, Editor** **C. H. HOLMES, Secy. & Treas.**
SPRING AND MACDOUGAL STREETS, NEW YORK, N. Y.

6, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, August 16, 1899, at the Post-Office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Entered as Second-Class Matter at the Post-Office Department, Ottawa, Canada. Yearly subscription, \$2.50, in advance. Single copy, twenty-five cents. Foreign postage, \$1.00 additional. No extra postage for Canada.
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Long Distance

*If You Don't Believe That Sometimes Dreams
Come True, and That Romance is to the
Romantic, Don't Read This Story*

By Douglas Newton

Illustration by H. P. Brown

LEON PETRIE sat, indecisive, at his big drawing-desk. The telephone was there before him; he had only to stretch out his hand— He did stretch out his hand. He laughed at it. He saw it was trembling—excitement, of course, but nevertheless absurd in a grown man of precise habits.

He took his eyes from the telephone. He looked out of his windows down to where the river showed a flat and lovely blue in the evening sun. He looked at the bridge, a fairy-like and romantic structure in its scaffolding. The bridge gave him courage. It was good work, fine work, strong work—and it was his.

He lifted the telephone toward him.

"Give me long distance, please," he said to the ghost of a feminine voice his action had stirred to life. Presently he said, "I want Greendowns, two three one one."

"Greendowns, two three one one!" cried an absurdly tinkling echo of his deep voice. "I'll ring you."

He sat waiting, staring at the bridge to give him courage to do this absurd, this fantastic thing. The telephone-bell's ring struck through him a sudden, sweltering panic. His left hand clenched tight and white as he lifted the ear-piece.

"Is this Greendowns, two three one one," he mumbled, with a thick, dry tongue.

"Wha' say?" came another feminine voice—a servant's voice. "Want us—Greendowns, two three one one?"

"Oh, I do!" he cried. "May I speak to

Miss—Miss—you know, the young lady of the house?"

Would that blundering piece of diplomacy succeed?

"Mean Miss Juliette, do you?"

"Of course it's Juliette—Miss Juliette! Couldn't be any other name!" he cried, for this was the first time he had heard *her* name.

"'Spose not," said the voice tartly. "Hold on; I'll fetch her."

Leon held on. His pulse was beating, but this time there was elation in it as well as other emotions. He waited sixty hours, or, anyhow, that number of seconds, when:

"Hello! Are you there? You want to speak to me?"

"Immensely!" he gasped. "It is Miss Juliette?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"That doesn't matter really. Speaking to you does." Curious how he was utterly bereft of ideas and words, now that he was really speaking to her—now that he had pulled off the incredible *coup*, and was actually, really, decisively in touch with *her*! He could only say:

"I know it's you. There aren't two voices in the world with just that er—that jolly sound. It's you!"

"I've admitted it," said the voice, with a little laugh. "And I guess you're Dick?"

He hesitated.

"Aren't you sure?"

"Well, that's just the idiot thing you'd say, Dick. And the voice is something like

—only more like a human man's than a schoolboy's. But you're disguising it, you old ass, Dick!"

"Old ass—yes," said Leon, with a sigh. "But Dick—I fear not. Doesn't my voice sound like some one you aren't likely to meet anywhere—some one who is securely located in Venezuela?"

"Are you ringing me up from Venezuela?"

"The distance is rather less, but for all practical purposes I am just as remote."

"I believe," said the distant, silvery and delicious voice—certainly Leon could not mistake that voice—"I believe you're telling me you don't know me."

"No," said Leon. "I'm telling you that you don't know *me*."

"I don't quite understand. Have I—have I ever met you?"

"In a sense, I don't suppose you have."

"In a sense!" she cried. "Does that mean that in a sense I have?"

"Well, your eyes *did* linger on me—with a woeful lack of attention, I thought. But I understood. Oh, please recognize I understood! The problem of Fifine's spring costumes was infinitely more important."

"Do you know," said the silvery voice, "I think you're no more than a nightmare. I don't know what on earth you're all about."

"Plant your feet firmly on Fifine's frocks and reconstruct from that," said Leon, getting his second wind, as it were. "You were talking of them at tea one afternoon a few weeks back at the Ritz."

"The—what?" cried the voice.

"Just the Ritz."

"You—you mean to say you saw me in the Ritz?"

"Very much, and at tea-time. You were sitting at a table for two, making cream buns look exactly like human food. You were talking of this unparalleled and mesmerizing Fifine. At the table on your left sat a youngish man of large, linear specifications—a rather rugged specimen, uncouth perhaps, shy certainly, features nothing to write home about, but with, maybe, a certain homely candor—a young man not entirely unlike four hundred thousand other young men—"

"That would be you?"

"That was me. It is me still, but I'm no longer at the Ritz, unfortunately."

"Why unfortunately?"

"Because"—Leon hesitated—"if I were, I could be doing what I did then."

The hesitation was on the other side.

"What was that?"

"Oh—neglecting my tea and staring at something—some one immensely worth while—immensely beautiful."

"Oh!" trilled the voice. "Do you really think that she is good-looking?"

"I know *you're* lovely," said Leon, with emphasis.

"Oh!" cried the voice again, a little breathlessly. "Oh—but—but you don't know if she was me at all."

"There's no mistaking the voice."

"But—but—don't you realize you might be making a deuce of a bloomer—mistake."

"I know it's you," said Leon doggedly. "I know it in my soul. There's your voice, and, then, how else am I speaking to you?"

"You mean you—you heard my name?"

"No. I mean I heard your telephone number," said Leon. "You can make a bloomer—was it?—about names, but never about a telephone number."

"But how—how—tell me—"

TIME up!" interrupted a cold, godlike voice. "Wanta 'stension?"

"Hours more!" cried Leon, and his pulse jumped as he heard another voice cry:

"No—no—don't cut us off! We want to go on."

"By Jove, we do!" thought Leon.

"Where were we?" said the silver voice. "Of course this is frightfully wrong, but—"

"Interesting—I hope. Well, I'll tell you all, as the wronged young man in the play says, before we're cut off. I was sitting, all eyes and no heart for cream buns, staring at you, wishing and wishing that I might have had the wonderful luck to know you. Trying to invent all manner of daring and absurd things that would introduce me to you—"

"Like rescuing her—this girl—me from a suddenly insane waiter running amuck with a pastry-fork?"

"Oh, you understand! Yes; mad and queer ideas like that. All the time you sat talking Fifineries with a red-haired, eager, plump little woman—"

"Who was she, I wonder?"

"You'll answer that question better than I. You called her 'Madge'—"

"Oh, Madge Kingsley! I know her."

"You seemed to have little doubt on that score. She called you——"

"What?" cried the silver voice, with a gasp. "What did she call me?"

"Just 'darling.'" He sighed. "I admit it was appropriate, but not very satisfying to the hungry eavesdropper. Yes; I admit I eavesdropped vilely. I was absolutely unprincipled in my desire to get some clue."

"And you got the telephone number?"

"YES; but that was all. As you gathered your forty thousand parcels to depart, you discussed further meetings. Apparently you were such busy young women you could not fix up anything definite. In the end, you said: 'Well, you know where I'll be. Just ring me up. The number is Greendowns, two three one one.'"

"And then?"

"And then you vanished."

"But the name—my name—'Juliette.' You had that. How did you get it?"

"Wicked diplomacy. By pretending to have a faulty memory, I jockeyed your maid into telling me."

"And my—my surname?"

"I don't know it."

"What about the telephone-book?"

"I'm in Venezuela—well, at least one hundred and twenty miles away from you. Your telephone-book is not current here."

"So that—apart from the telephone number, I'm absolutely unknown to you?"

"Apart from that, and the perfectly fitting name of Juliette, and your voice with its particularly enticing quality, and the memory of you at the Ritz, and the very well-defined knowledge that you must be immensely worth knowing and worth talking to, and that I want to go on talking to you, and want you to give me permission to have future talks with you—apart from that—yes; you're unknown to me."

"So that's the reason for your ringing up?"

"That's the reason."

"And it wasn't to suggest another tea?"

"I'm in Venezuela, you know—unfortunately."

"Fortunately. I should have refused that."

"Then you don't refuse future conversations. I say; that's awfully good of you, Miss Juliette. If you ——"

"Wait a minute until I decide whether it

is good or bad of me. It's an extraordinary proposition. I'm afraid——"

"Before you start making me worse than afraid, do let me tell you what an absolute gonsend these chats would be to me. Look here; I'm marooned bang in the middle of a most inhospitable nowhere. I'm miles from any town. There is nobody to talk to here save a gang of workmen and one or two office-men, who are as bored with my society as I am with theirs. I'm a lonely soul perched up on a cliff overlooking a river, asking you to take pity on me——"

"I like that—no; not the pity, but being perched up on a cliff. It sounds celestial. I'd like to hear about that."

"I'd like to tell you," said Leon enthusiastically. "It's a red cliff——"

"But why *should* you be dumped down in loneliness?" said the voice quickly.

"Oh—oh, I'm by way of being an engineer. There's a bridge down there under my eye, which I'm helping to build." He had a sudden fear she might take him for a draftsman or assistant. "As a matter of fact, I'm building it. It's my bridge, but the men who ram the stones and dirt into the revetments talk so assuredly of it being 'their' bridge that I've got into the habit of sharing it with others."

"That also sounds tremendously interesting."

"It is!" he cried. "I knew you'd feel it so. That's one of the reasons I want to talk and talk and talk again to you."

"Yes—but, you know, would it stop at—bridges?"

"It will stop at bridges," he said slowly, after a pause, "until you give me permission to—to talk of other things."

"That sounds like a renunciation," she said, with a sort of hesitation which he could swear was the vocal expression of a blush.

"I'll be frank with you," he said. "It is. But I am commanded by you."

"Do you know—" she said. Then she paused, then went on rapidly: "It's all so absurd! You've got hold of such a wrong idea. I don't know what I ought to say——"

"Oh!" he said mournfully. "I had hoped I had persuaded you——"

"Time up——" began a voice.

"Seven o'clock each evening is the best time to ring up," said the silvery voice quickly.

"Can't have'n extension," said the goddess of the exchange.

"I'll remember. Good-by!" shouted Leon.

"*Au revoir*," said Juliette.

"It's really splendid of you, Miss Juliette," began Leon at seven the next day.

"There are other ways of looking at it," her clear voice said. "'Shocking' is the word quite a number of people would use. But it's done now. By the way, I think some sort of name to your voice would make you less disembodied."

"Of course!" he cried. "My name is Leon——"

"Leave it at 'Leon.' As my own surname is anonymous, it is only fair. I've been thinking quite a lot about your eery on the cliff——"

"I've been thinking of nothing but you."

"That," she said, but not too severely, "isn't at all bridgy, and we agreed to confine ourselves to bridges. Tell me about yours?"

"Well, it's a bridge. I have a secret suspicion that it is a lovely and marvelous bridge. There are some people who only think it a railway bridge that cuts off twenty miles of an old loop round this rather broad, shallow and blue river, thereby saving much money in coal and haulage and other mundane things. But to me it is something more than that. I think it is a beautiful, strong thing, with grace in every girder, stanchness in every pier. I like to see it grow tie by tie, section upon section, span by span. It's like the growth of something human."

"It's your child," she said, and he felt her soft smile.

"You *do* understand!" he cried. "Of course it's a very useful bridge, besides the things I see in it, and will serve a noble purpose. It's a unique bridge in its way. We've had some difficulties to face—a queer lift on the right bank of this blue, broad river I look down on. That lift made several eminent engineers swear we couldn't build the bridge. But we have. Then there have been bad bottoms in the sand-banks that nearly caused a disaster with one of our piers, and then storm-water coming down and charging headlong at our puny work, as though nature intended to brush such an impertinence right away,

has meant a lot of trouble. It's been a fight."

"You sound like a fighter," she said. "Tell me more about your work."

He told her. It was easy to tell her. He could see her quick, fragrant, glowing beauty thrilling with animation—even though she was over one hundred miles away by 'phone. But he knew she was thrilled, and that she saw the romance of doing tremendous things in a big way. He knew by the instinct within him, by the tone of her softly, silvery voice, by the acute and interested questions she asked. He seemed to have only started talking when the slightly nasal goddess of the exchange intervened.

"**L**OOK here, Juliette"—they had arrived at "Leon" and "Juliette"—he said one day; "you've let me talk and talk about myself with never a word about you."

"We weren't to stray from bridges," she said, and then, with just a sigh, "In any case, I don't matter very much."

"You matter tremendously," he insisted. "Please, will you drop bridges, Juliette?"

"Yes. But bridges are more interesting. That splendid life you lead, Leon, is more interesting. It is a great breath from the outer world."

"What? The talk of a man set down in a wilderness?"

"Your wilderness is less lonely than mine, Leon. I'm only a little house mouse, you know. I am shut up in this house as though in a cage, and all I see of life is the larder, so to speak, and the four walls."

"But you see the Ritz occasionally."

"The Ritz?" she echoed.

"You were at the Ritz when I saw you the first and only time."

There was quite a long pause.

"Oh, I'd—I'd forgotten that," the soft voice stammered. "I ought to have—I ought to have—" The tone steadied. "I can't— That is, the few visits to town I have made don't count." The voice went on rapidly, as though pleading. "You'll understand why I welcomed these talks with you—wanted them—when I tell you that you are less lonely than I, Leon. You have your men and your work and your marvelous bridge. I have nothing. I live here with my father, who is a scholar. He is so preoccupied with his books of philosophy that I do not count to him. This is a



He looked toward the door and gasped. A young girl stood there, a girl definitely and delightfully younger than the girl of the Ritz.

lonely house, and there are practically no callers. I live virtually alone, day in and day out alone."

"But, Juliette, it's hard to believe that. That day at the Ritz——"

"Oh, forget that day at the Ritz!" she cried. "It's given you an entirely wrong idea of me. That girl you saw at the Ritz wasn't me—wasn't the me who lives here. Please do get me straight, Leon. I'm a little, shy mouse of a creature; I always have been. That's why I am the one who stayed at home. There were three of us girls, you know, and I was always Cinderella. Things were put on me—oh, just naturally, because I was—am—quiet and homy and rather dreamy and bookish. None of the boys noticed me—that was because I was younger and less vivid than the others, and because I was shy and because I instinctively kept in the background. I always have been there. My sisters married and left me behind as if it were the most natural thing in the world for me to be left behind."

"Poor kid!" said Leon softly.

"Oh, you understand, too," she said. "You see that I didn't really like being left in the background, being a queen of domestic virtues—and nothing else. At first I don't think I minded. The sort of boys that called did not seem to me to be the kind to be enthusiastic about. But later I got scared. Life was becoming dangerously lonely. I was out of it all in this backwater. I began to fear that it was going to pass me by." Suddenly she broke off. "Oh, but all this sounds like the confession of a homely old spinster of plain features and demeanor——"

"I know you're not that," he said quickly. "I know how beautiful you are."

"You know?" she cried.

"Didn't I stare at you at the Ritz?"

"Oh, that! Well, yes; that would tell you something of me. And my glass tells me——"

"And I tell *you*," he said, with a touch of passion, "that life is *not* going to pass you by—that you were made for big things, for joy, for happiness——"

"Oh!" she protested faintly. "Don't forget the subject's bridges."

"Bridges! Don't you see that you are part of my bridge-building, Juliette, that you help and inspire. That you and I——"

"No—no!" she gasped. "I can't listen. I'm ringing off. Good-by!"

THEN two eternal days went by. On the third,

"It is you—it is you, Leon?" came her voice, husky with anxiety. "Oh, Leon, I thought—I thought— Oh, why didn't you ring up yesterday and the day before?"

"Sorry, Juliette, my dear," he said, and his voice was hoarse. "I couldn't. I wanted to, but I couldn't. There's been a little trouble at the bridge. I couldn't get away."

"The bridge!" she cried. "Oh, it's only that! No; that's cruel to you. I did not mean to say anything nasty about the dear bridge. It was—I thought——"

"I understand, Juliette. No; I wasn't huffed at your ringing-off."

"You always do understand, Leon. And the bridge—I'm really afraid about the bridge now. Is it all right?"

"Quite all right. There was nothing really grave—properly handled. Some girders slipped while they were being put into the middle span. Until we could get them in place there was a strain on the whole fabric. It was all trying and worrying—but it's all over now. We can——"

"Leon"—her cry was urgent—"your voice is strange! You're tired, weak. Oh, Leon, is there anything wrong?"

"No—no! Don't worry. I'm all right. Just a little tired—that's all. We were hard at it while it lasted, you know. But now, just hearing your voice makes me as vigorous as a lion again."

"You *are* tired. I can hear it in your voice. You were hard at it while it lasted. Leon, that means you haven't had any rest in the last two days. Have you even been to bed—or lain down at all?"

"Well, you see——"

"Tell me! Tell me!"

"I'm afraid—not."

"Then you're going straight to bed—*now!*"

"But, Juliette, not just as I'm beginning to talk to you. You don't know how I've ached for this moment."

"Don't I? Can't I have any—feelings?"

"Juliette—you mean——"

"Leon, I mean you to go to bed."

"But I can't possibly—not now."

"But won't it be nice of you to go—for

me? Aren't we one in—in understanding, Leon? Go straight to bed."

"But Juliette dearest——"

"It's just as long for me until to-morrow. Good-by, dear. Go to bed."

I RESTED like a giant, and I feel like two men— Three, now that you're on the 'phone."

"Yes; you sound better, Leon. How is your arm?"

"What?"

"That slipped out. But, then, the secret of you is out. Yes; I know it—the world knows it. Don't you get the papers down there—in Venezuela, Leon Petrie?"

"Damn!"

"No; that isn't the word, really. I was rather thrilled, and—and *why* did you say your features were nothing to write home about?"

"Eh? What's that? What do you know about my features, Juliette?"

"Almost everything, I think. I've been studying five separate versions of them in three separate papers, and—and I don't think you are quite as repulsive as you made out. Also, there are the other things you forgot to tell me. Why didn't you mention that when the girders fell into the river——"

"There's one thing I didn't and couldn't mention, Juliette," said Leon swiftly. "That is that this mess-up has meant leave for me. Leave for me—do you understand? I've got a month's holiday to spend where I like. Did you hear that?"

"Oh!" she cried, as though taken aback. "You've got a holiday! You can go where you like——"

"And," he said firmly, "you know exactly where I'd like to go."

"Yes," she breathed; "yes. But I've got to think. And—and, Leon, aren't you trying to draw the reddest of red herrings across the conversation? Why didn't you tell me that when the girders fell a man was pinned by them in the water, and that he might have been drowned if you had not gone to him along a shaky structure liable to collapse and crush you at any moment, and that you held his head above the water in spite of a dangerous current until——"

"Oh! Oh! They've got all that, have they? How the newspapers do poke about into things!"

"They do—bless them! Perhaps they knew how proud their readers—one reader, at least—would be. There's also the story of how you worked like a giant, and how at terrible personal risk—risk so personal that your arm was broken—you worked amid your men, inspiring them, so that your bridge was saved——"

"Well," he said slowly, "it was my bridge—*our* bridge, Juliette, and it had to be saved—and aren't you manipulating that proverbial red herring, too, my dear? Aren't you trying to obscure the fact that I have a holiday, and I am asking you to invite me to Greendowns?"

"Leon, I'm a coward. I'm afraid. I—I feel I dare not—not risk it."

"You—you darling! What risk is there?" Pause. "And it's got to be. I must see you again. It's got to be!"

"Yes," she sighed; "it's got to be. Leon, what dress did—did that girl—did I wear at the Ritz? Was it a golden-brown silk with fur trimmings, with a little brown hat with an orange feather?"

"Yes; that was the dress. But what on earth——"

"I thought it must be. Oh, I'm grateful! I—I'll meet you in that. When you leave the station at Greendowns, walk to the right to the crossroads. Take the Small Dole road and climb the hill, and I shall meet you on it. Now tell me the day and I'll give you your train."

He told her the day and she gave him his train. And then she said:

"And, Leon, don't be disappointed in me. If you are, go away without showing it and never—never 'phone to me again. I'll understand."

"I won't be disappointed in you."

"Don't be certain." She sighed. "You never know. A—a girl at the Ritz isn't always the same as a girl at home."

The girl, slim, fragile, exquisite, turned about when they entered the lounge of the house at Greendowns. She faced Leon, and he saw that her lip was trembling, that her deep eyes were dark with anxiety.

"Well?" she whispered.

"Juliette!" he cried softly. "But it's— it's amazing!"

"How—amazing?" she faltered.

"Well, you're so—so different."

"Disappointing?" she said, and her hand went quickly to her young breast.

"Disappointing!" he cried, "Good heavens. It's—it's the other thing. The girl at the Ritz was only a shadow of you. I can't grip it. You seem younger, gentler, sweeter——"

"And as pretty?"

"Pretty!" he cried. "You were pretty then—yes; but now you're *lovely!*"

"Leon," she cried, and a delicious color flooded her exquisite face; "Leon, you really mean that?"

"Mean it? Why, my dear, can't you see I'm—I'm almost afraid of your loveliness? Somehow, I don't dare dwell on my good fortune."

She came to him swiftly, rested her hand on his arm.

"It was I who ought to be afraid. I'm not now. And you needn't be, Leon." He moved. "Wait"—she smiled at him—"wait just ten minutes."

SHE went out swiftly and he waited. He was filled with a bewilderment of wonder. He had prepared himself to find her a little less a goddess than his dreams had pictured. Dreams are dangerous and cruel things that have a knack of idealizing one's dream-love beyond the hope of human competition. He had been stern with himself—had told himself that it wouldn't be fair to her to expect her, or any woman, to be as beautiful as the creature his fancy had painted.

And here she was, infinitely more beautiful!

He couldn't quite understand it. She seemed different, and beyond the girl of the Ritz. She had a daintiness, a delicacy, a sense of being unspoiled by the world that the girl of the Ritz had not had. The girl of the Ritz had been pretty in an alluring but, at the same time, worldly and self-assured way. But pretty as she had been, she was but a faint echo of this girl, the girl she was now. Queer how he should think of her as a different being!

A voice said softly, timidly,
"Leon!"

He looked toward the door and gasped.

A young girl stood there, a girl definitely and delightfully younger than the girl of the Ritz, than the girl she had just been. She wore a simple frock, the frock that a girl just out of her teens would wear in the

country. Her hair was more simply arranged, and it suited her better. She had an air of gentle, modest innocence, a freshness and loveliness that simply put the Ritz girl out of court. He sprang up.

"Juliette!" he said, almost in awe. "That is—is it Juliette?"

"Yes," she said. "This is Juliette—the real Juliette at last. Is she——"

"Yes!" he almost shouted. "She's adorable! She's streets ahead of the girl just now. Is she the same girl?"

"The same girl." She smiled. "But in her own dress."

"But that other dress, that Ritz dress——"

"That was Margot's—my sister's. Leon, I've never been to the Ritz."

"Never been to——" He stared at her. "But I see that, my dear. It wasn't you I saw there. It was that dress, and—and was it your sister Margot?"

"Yes; it was Margot. I'll tell you how it was, Leon. Margot gave that telephone number to Madge Kingsley because she was coming down here to stay. She spends a fortnight here every year. She had gone, leaving behind this dress, as she had got something smarter from Fifine's, when you rang up. That was why the servant thought naturally of me only when you—you diplomatically fished for a name to put to the Ritz girl. And then, when I talked to you—at first I couldn't make out what you were driving at, and then it struck me as intriguing—interesting. And then, as you talked, it was like getting a breath of clean wind from the big world into this stagnant little backwater. I was thrilled. And I was so lonely, cut off— And then I couldn't give it up——"

"Thank God!" said Leon quietly.

"But, Leon, I let you think——"

"My dear," he said softly, "you let me go on thinking that the reality was less wonderful than you. That's the only thing I have got against you. You let me go on holding that vague memory of the Ritz girl, while all the time I might have been thinking of you."

"And you're not—you're not——"

And Leon showed her what he was not, and what he was. He took her in his arms—or, rather, he did it as well as one sound arm would let him. And that was very well, indeed.