

THE FLAPPER.

BY DOROTHEA DEAKIN.

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN E. SUTCLIFFE.

NO one was taking much notice of what Toby said. At home no one ever takes much notice of what any one says, yet every one goes on saying what he wants to say, just the same, and generally all at once, and very loud.

But I happened to be silent myself at that particular moment, and I heard Toby distinctly say that poor old Bill *was* up against it this time, and that he wasn't going to see him again just yet, you bet. Gave a chap the blues to see him—that was why. No one had asked him why, of course, because, first of all, no one had heard what he said, and even if they had they wouldn't have been in the least interested.

Marjory was telling mother that she *must* have the motor this afternoon particularly, and Joan was explaining to father how terribly antediluvian he was to talk about woman's sphere being the home, and that there was every reason why she should take part in the Demonstration; and Jerry was standing in the middle of the breakfast-room shouting at the top of his voice, Had any one seen his trouser-clips, as he was late already?

I went up to Toby and asked him straight out what was the matter with Bill Pendered.

Toby looked surprised.

"You there, kid? Nothing for little girls to know."

Toby is the kind of young man who thinks a girl doesn't exist, except as a thing to be pinched and have its hair pulled, and be sent upstairs for his cigarette-case, until its hair is up and it has come out. He doesn't understand that even a flapper may have her feelings. And I wasn't going to tell him about that dance two Christmases ago, when I was having such a rotten time, and when I heard people talking of me as "the plain, leggy one," and my shoes were tight, and there was something prickly round the collar of my new dress, and I'd broken the thread of my corals,

and half of them had rolled under the wardrobe in Marjory's room.

I have never been in such black depths as I was that evening, and Billy Pendered came late, and looked so handsome and inaccessible. Marjory said he was inaccessible, and Joan said he was unimpressible, and Jerry said he was suffering from swelled head because he'd been chosen to play centre-three-quarter for the North. And he never danced with any one but mother and me the whole evening; and he persuaded me to go and find some comfortable old shoes to put on, and we got Williams to bring a little supper-table into the conservatory for Toby and us. And Bill said he didn't want any other girl than me, and we talked footer all the time, and I had a ripping evening. He told mother I was the first girl he'd ever met who took an intelligent interest in the game. That's why I didn't like to hear what Toby was saying about Bill being up against it.

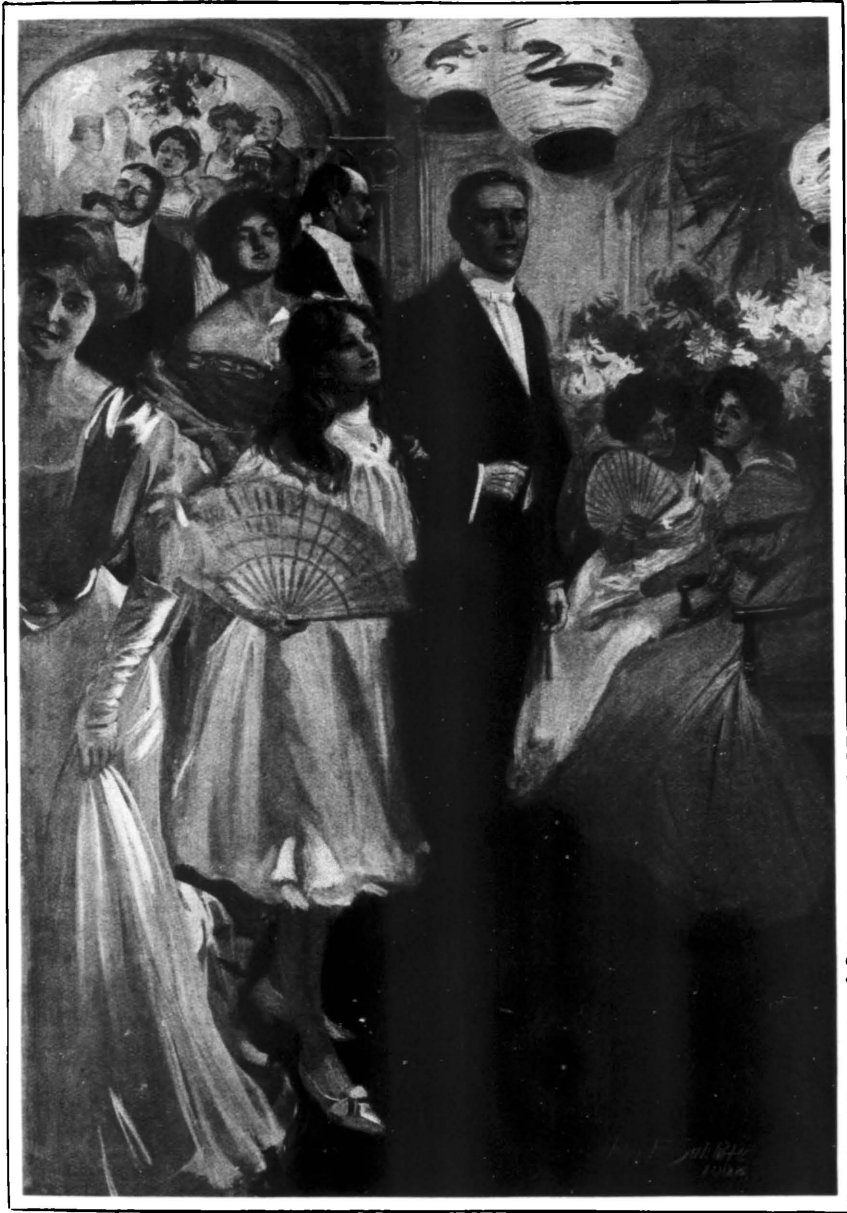
"Is he hard up?" I asked.

Toby stared at me. I suppose he thought he'd better be civil, in case he wanted anything fetched from the top of the house in the near future.

"He's gone in for a rotten thing he calls impressionist photography," said he. "And it doesn't come off. None of his friends will consent to look like a nightmare, even to please him, and you can't wonder. I think myself he just takes an ordinary photograph and smears his hand over the wet plate. It looks like it,—and he charges five guineas a dozen. Silly idiot!—why doesn't he do nice clear portraits of pretty girls, and touch 'em up at the eyes and mouth, and take out the collar-bones? He seems to like a woman to look a hag. I've no patience with him."

"You surprise me," said I; and then I had to stoop to dodge a Suffrage pamphlet Joan had left about ready to his hand.

"There's a girl in it, too," said Toby,



"I heard people talking of me as 'the plain, leggy one.'"

when we'd calmed down and father had told mother exactly what he thought of the way she'd brought us all up. "Some girl he wants to marry, only he can't afford it. Fancy wanting to marry a girl!"

I caught Joan's eye then, and thinking she might have some leaflets for me to distribute, I cleared out and went up to my own room to think.

Toby seemed to feel that the only thing to do when your friends were up against it was to keep out of their way till they felt better. You might do more harm than good, he thought, by trying to help them, and better leave people to worry through by themselves. But I couldn't agree with him. I very often can't agree with people; and it's a queer thing, but it's always the other person's fault somehow.

I thought and thought, and then I unplaited my hair and brushed it. It's nothing much to look at—just lightish and longish and straightish. I've got darkish brown eyes and a pale squarish face. Marjory says that my best friend couldn't call me handsome. I'm not allowed to have my dresses to my ankles yet, and the brown velvet is the shortest, but it's my best. And I put it on, and my big brown beaver hat and warm coat, and I took all the money out of my box that I'd been saving for a new bike, and I found some more lying on mother's dressing-table that I took on account of my next week's allowance in advance; and I went downstairs the back way, and dodged Williams in the hall, and got safely off by the side-door unnoticed. I don't suppose any one would have minded if they *had* seen me, only they might have thought of some urgent errand they just happened to want doing, and I didn't care to run the risks. It's no joke being the youngest in a family like ours, while you're still a flapper.

When I got to the corner I hailed a cab, and comforted myself by remembering how Joan had told father that he was quite prehistoric in his ideas for objecting to a girl careering about town alone in a hansom.

I knew Billy had his studio in Orlebar Street, and I found it quite easily by the colour of the curtains. Toby had told me what a dingy, terra-cotta-ish mauve they were, and I went straight up to the third floor and knocked. The door was

ajar, and I pushed in; and he couldn't have heard me knock, for he was sitting at a table with a photograph in his hand, and his eyes were all screwed-up and worried-looking.

He jumped up, but he didn't look pleased.

"How do you do?" I said. "I've come on business, Mr. Pendered. I do wish you'd do a nice picture of me for a Christmas present for father. Toby told me about the—er—the—the new kind of photographs you did, and I don't know any one else who does them; and I should be awfully pleased if you'd do mine like—like——" I looked desperately round. Really, they *were* queer, ghostly, shadowy things, with no faces but a white blur, or wide grins without heads. "——like that," I said, pointing to one that seemed to be a girl sitting on a couch; but I was sorry afterwards I'd chosen that, because it turned out to be Lady Mervyn's prize Siberian wolf-hound. And really no one would have known. It was amazingly like Joan when she is arguing with father and telling him how archaic his ideas generally are.

But it broke the ice anyhow, and he cheered up no end and showed me all round, and explained his gold medal picture which he called "The Fan," and which was a girl lying on a divan with a white accordion skirt spread out to look like one. A fan, I mean.

Then he made me take off my coat and hat, and sit in a big carved chair with a straight back, and he spread my hair out and made his white bull-terrier come and put his nose on my knee, and he said he should call the picture "Young Britannia." And then he talked footer like mad. He said he'd had to give it up because he couldn't afford it. He said the men were a splendid lot of chaps, but too expensive for him; and then he sighed, and I longed to ask him why he didn't chuck art, and go on the Stock Exchange, or be a fashionable doctor—not the common general kind where you have to know a lot about everything, but a specialist for nerves, or heart, or something obscure, where you need only suggest a few possible horrors, and say the family doctor will watch the case, and take five guineas, and offer to come again in three months. Uncle Ferdie is simply rolling, and that's what *he* is.

I did say so presently, for I find it

almost impossible not to say what I think; but poor Billy Pendered just shook his head and said that even to be a swindler you wanted brains. I think he was unjust to Uncle Ferdie there.

We had tea in the studio after that, and I lit the fire, which had gone out; and while he ran out for cakes I had a good look at that photograph he had been making himself so miserable about when I went in. It wasn't one of *his* taking, I saw with half an eye, for it was a beautiful person in a lace dress with her hands behind her, looking down at a big Persian cat. She had dark lashes and the sweetest mouth, and there was something in the way she smiled that made you want to kiss her. I began to understand why it worried him to feel that his impressionableness wasn't going to pay.

When I got home I told them all, at once, where I'd been and why. I don't believe in secrets when it's too late for any one to stop you doing it. Mother said she didn't think it was quite nice, and father said why not have taken Marie? As if Marjorie wouldn't have kept her dancing about for two hours while she dressed for the Wetherbees' "At Home"! Joan said a girl could go anywhere nowadays, but that I was too young to have any sense. Toby said: "Shut up. Let the kid alone. She's only a flapper."

I pointed out then, that if I was to be called by this unflattering and disrespectful name, I should jolly well flap—so there! And there the matter ended.

When the proofs came home, a good deal more was said. Jerry said it was a very nice terrier, but which was me? Father said if that was all modern improvement had done for photography, give him the old-fashioned daguerreotype. But I had a scheme in my head. There was something about Billy Pendered's worried, haunted look that I couldn't forget. I hadn't had time for many novels, because I'd always gone in too much for games to bother about reading, and that sort of rot; but I'd read enough to understand that Billy was eating his heart out for some girl, and that he was too poor to marry. And I thought hard for about twenty-four hours for a plan to help him; and the next day I took Marjorie's new Enfield (I'd buckled my front wheel, and smashed the forks, coasting down Benderby Hill in the dark, and

accidentally smashing into a lorry that had drawn up there), and I rode over to school. I'm at St. Gwendolen's, but I've been at home for a fortnight with a bad cold, and mother said I'd better run wild another week on account of the games mistress being so down on slackers, and she didn't want me to get overheated. So I scorched over to school (six miles in half an hour, and through town half of it), and I didn't want to see Miss Craggs (the head), so I slipped round to the hockey-ground, and shouted to Henriette le Breton, who happened to have just been sent off the field for fouling Nancy Owen. She's our school beauty, Henriette, all pink and white and golden, with sapphire eyes. Toby says she's a peach, and pretty enough to eat. She was bottom of the batting average, though, last term. Looks aren't everything. It was one of her weaknesses that I meant to trade on now. She seemed awfully pleased to see me.

"I've not come back," said I. "Mother says I'm too run down to come back for another week. But I want you to do something for me, Hennie."

"You do, do you?" said she, opening her eyes. "Like your cheek."

"I've always heard," said I desperately, trying to be diplomatic, "that girls who are good-looking, and all that kind of rot, can influence people."

"If you've been having a bust-up with Craggs," said Hennie elegantly, "you don't catch *me* trying to soften her with my smiles. Even if I *am* as beautiful as the day, you don't suppose *she'd* appreciate my efforts, do you? She'd only think it swank, and be down on me like a ton of bricks."

"Oh, chuck it," said I. "I haven't much time. I don't want Dumbell" (Dumbell is the games mistress) "to see me. I want you to do something for a friend of mine—a ripping sort he is—"

"It's a he, is it?" said Henriette.

"He's awfully up against it," said I. "His father came to smash, and he's had to take to photography for a living, and he does those new arty things—awfully swagger and uncommon and expensive. Some of the ones I saw were—were wonderful. I wish you'd go and have yours done for Christmas presents, Hennie. I want a nice photograph of you tremendously."

The idea that they were expensive appealed to Henriette, whose people are simply rolling.

"Don't mind if I do," said she.

"But I want you to do more than that." I had never been so much in earnest in my life. "I want you to persuade all your friends to go, and all your relations, and I want you to do your level best to make him fashionable."

Henriette gasped.

"A society beauty," said I, "can make anything fashionable."

This triumph of diplomacy was too much for Hennie. She beamed at the idea.

"Suppose we don't like 'em?" she murmured.

"That doesn't matter a bit," cried I. "You can make people think it's the latest thing. If they think it's *art nouveau* they'll stand it just as they do the uncomfortable furniture and things. You can make the girls do anything, anyhow. Begin with them. He's awfully nice. Played for the North twice. He'd have been sure to get his international cap if he hadn't had to chuck footer."

Henriette, at once filled with deep sympathy, assured me of her help; and then I saw they'd nearly finished the first half, and I did a move before Dumbell caught sight of me. It was all right while they were playing, because at St. Gwendolen's we play a fast game.

My appeal to Henriette turned out a complete success. Billy Pendered happened to do a portrait of her in a green dancing frock embroidered in daisies which she had gone as Spring in to a fancy-dress dance, and she came out looking like an Academy picture, yet awfully sweet too, and her relations were fearfully gone on it, and she ordered five dozen, and all the girls at school went crazy about the new photography and went in tribes to be taken. A lot of them are Jewesses and rolling in money, and they sent all Bayswater in carriages and motors to the studio. Billy had to get two assistants, a girl to attend to sitters and make appointments and answer the telephone, and a young man to develop and print, and so on.

Marjory went, directly she saw the Spring picture of Henriette, and so did Joan, though she had refused at first; but father called Marjory's portrait an irresponsible smear, and I heard Joan tell him

that he was left far behind in the trend of modern thought, and that his objection to the vagueness of Billy's likenesses was simply neolithic. She had to go after that.

I believe father is beginning to wish Joan would get married.

Billy was awfully grateful and jolly to me and Toby, and we had ripping little tea-parties in the studio when the sittings were all finished, and the assistants had gone home. Once or twice Henriette brought a party of friends, and we had no end of a time. We cleared the studio and danced, because it turned out that the telephone girl played the autoharp and she'd happened to have her instrument with her. I was awfully glad, and persuaded Billy to let her stay to tea. She was quite a nice girl, only her hair was too beautifully and toweringly dressed, and she would talk about her "boy."

But in spite of this glorious success, and all the fun we had, Billy's look of worry grew deeper and deeper; and at last, the day Joan had sent me for her proofs, I could stand it no longer, and I said straight out: "Why don't you marry the girl?"

"What?" he said, and dropped Joan down beside the bull-terrier, and didn't attempt to stop him when he licked her.

"Risk it," said I. "You're making sacks of money. Don't be so prudent. Jump in and swim."

"My goodness!" He stared at me in the same foolish way, and I grew red and wished I'd minded my own silly business—I often do that. "Sorry," I said, and cleared out quick. It struck me all at once that perhaps it was the girl who wouldn't risk it—though it isn't generally. Perhaps she thought he was still poor and struggling, and most likely he was too proud to tell her of the change in his circumstances. You never know. I hated the thought of that girl, somehow, although she certainly looked a dear in her portrait; but I don't believe in half doing things, and I felt now that I'd got Billy's life's happiness to attend to, and that I hadn't finished yet. I knew her address, because I'd seen it on a letter, and I went straight off in a hansom to ask her what she meant by playing fast-and-loose with a fine three-quarter like Billy Pendered. She happened to be in, and I saw at a glance the kind of suburban girl she was—with a small waist and a baby mouth, and little,



"Then I saw myself in the long mirror."

helpless-looking hands. Plays tennis and wears high heels in the country, I expect. Her eyes were ripping, though.

I told her what I'd come for at once. "Billy Pendered's fretting about something," I said. "I expect it's about you. Why don't you marry him?"

She looked surprised, and told me rather snappily that she failed to see how her private affairs concerned me.

"They don't," said I. "But Billy's do. I don't want to be cheeky, really I don't. But I thought perhaps you didn't know how much money he was making, and how fashionable his kind of portrait was getting to be."

She changed then, and said I was a nice frank child, and that she did know. Billy always told her everything. She said she was very glad.

"I hope he isn't fretting about me," she said, quite nicely. "I shouldn't like to think I made him unhappy. But I'm not going to marry him."

I stared. She went on in a slow, drawling voice, that made me want to slap her, that she had mistaken her feelings about poor Billy—that she didn't care about him any more. She said he depressed her, and that he expected too much of her in the way of sympathetic interest in his athletics.

"Then why on earth don't you break off?" I asked indignantly.

She sighed and said she hadn't the courage. She hated hurting people's feelings, and she knew she could rely upon me to keep her secret.

I was simply boiling. I nearly burst with the effort to keep from telling her what I thought of her, and I cleared out quick. I was so sorry for Billy that I could have cried, and yet I daren't tell him what that fool girl had said.

The next time I saw him he came to dinner, and I could hardly speak to him—I was so full of the secrets of his abominable Muriel. He thought I was offended with him, and the more I wouldn't speak the nicer he was to me; and he asked me to bring Toby to tea with him to-morrow to see a new fancy picture he'd been doing of Henriette le Breton and her little sister.

Almost rudely I said I wouldn't go, and all that night I could hardly sleep a wink for thinking of Billy's broken heart. I was awfully fond of him, you see—much fonder than I'd quite realised, but

I didn't find that out till a good while afterwards.

By twelve o'clock I was so worried with thinking about him that I asked Toby to go and help me cheer him up. Toby said he couldn't, as he'd got to go and see the man about the new Delaunay Belleville.

By four I had made up my mind to go alone and not to mention it to mother till I came back. Marjory caught me in the hall, and said her new evening frock had not come from Rosine's, and she'd pay for a cab for me if I'd rush down to town and get it, as it was no earthly use telephoning to Rosine, who'd promise anything; and if it *really* wasn't finished she'd know that she must make Marie do up the sleeves of the lilac ninon-de-soie.

It was ready, and I took it with me to Billy's, and I met the two assistants, and told the telephone girl that I'd seen a young man waiting at the corner, and I was sure it was her "boy"; and then I crept quietly into the studio, and there was poor Billy with his arms stretched out over the table, and his face hidden.

My heart seemed to turn all cold at once. I ran across the room and knelt down beside him, and laid my cheek against his arm.

"What's the matter, old Bill?" I said.

He looked up, and his face was all white and worried. "Nothing," he said. "I was just thinking—that's all."

"I don't like the way you think," said I, trying to laugh; but I didn't care if he did see how wet my eyes were.

"What a dear you are!" he said. "It's always such a comfort, somehow, to have you near me."

"I wish you'd tell me why you're so miserable," said I.

He put his arm round my shoulder and drew me close to him, and then he looked away at Muriel's picture and sighed.

"I'm in the dickens of a mess," said he.

I was rather surprised at the way he put it, but I didn't speak.

"You're a wise little girl, aren't you?" he said sadly. "I wonder if your wisdom can help me now?"

"Try," I said, hardly daring to breathe for fear he should change his mind.

"Suppose a chap had been and made a silly ass of himself by thinking he was

in love with a girl and then finding out that he wasn't?"

I drew a deep breath of pure astonishment.

"Suppose he'd been much too poor to think of getting married, and had settled down to the idea of a permanent engagement, and then had suddenly begun to make money, and to realise that there was no reason why he shouldn't get married at once?"

I got up and went to the window for air.

"It isn't fair to her," he said sadly, "to put it off any longer. Yet——" he sighed and stopped suddenly.

"Why not tell the truth?" said I. "It's generally best."

"And break her heart?" he asked mournfully.

I turned round sharply. "Oh, Bill," I cried, "what a blithering idiot you are!" I was nearly crying with joy. And then I told him every blessed thing that girl had said to me, and I was surprised to find that he was quite hurt at first, and said, so this was woman's constancy, was it? He said that above all things he liked a woman to be true. And then he threw Muriel's picture in the grate, and then he picked it out again and kissed it for the last time; and then he put it away in a drawer and said girls were all alike, and that *I* was the best sort of friend for a man to have.

"*I'm* a girl, too," said I, for really he didn't seem to have grasped the fact.

He laughed. "Not you!" said he. "You're a dear little flapper. I don't know how you come to be so full of sense and sympathy at your age."

"I'm sixteen," said I quietly. "Seventeen in six weeks."

"What!" He needn't have looked as if he thought I was lying. "You *told* me you were fourteen," he cried reproachfully.

"Yes," said I. "So I was once. But that was ages ago. The years roll on, you see."

"No!"

I felt I could have shaken him. I suppose he had expected me to go on being a flapper for ever. "Oh, I know I've got short dresses and my hair down, but I've grown two inches since this dress was new. You needn't look so disbelieving!" I cried indignantly. "You just wait!"

I looked madly round, seized the brown box with Marjory's new frock, and rushed into the dressing-room. I flung off my brown coat and dress, and did my hair up ever so high, with a great thick plait all round the front, and I tore open Marjory's box and took the dress out. It was a lovely soft blue, with a beautiful little short embroidered bodice, and tiny sleeves with jewelled chains lacing them together; and I looked so strange and grown-up and different that I hardly dared to go out of the room. There was a white chiffon thing lying on the table, that Billy used to make cloudy effects round people's shoulders with, and I made a scarf of it and covered my bare neck with it, and pinched my cheeks to make them pink, and sailed in with my head in the air.

He sat down suddenly and said, "No!"

I said, "Yes."

Then I saw myself in the long mirror, and couldn't believe it any more than he could.

He came to presently, and said, I mustn't have tea with him now, because I was a grown-up young woman; and I said, "Rats to that!" and went and changed, and we had a ripping time.

But it was the last. I saw that he meant to treat me quite differently for the future. It seemed a pity, and yet——

Well—I was not sorry. It had occurred to him at last, you see, that I shouldn't always be a flapper

