

Weird Tales



JANUARY, 1952

Cover by Jon Arfstrom

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*... if it got food enough in the swamp it could
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D. McILWRAITH, Editor



The Seamstress

BY
E. EVERETT
EVANS

*... slave to a Fate
that would not leave
her alone.*

Heading by Carl Kidwell

COLLECTORS of Internal Revenue are continually running into some very peculiar situations, but I seriously doubt if anyone of them ever struck one as strange, as unbelievable, as the one I had some time ago. I use the word "unbelievable" with intent, for I am not sure even yet that somebody hasn't done a mighty fine job of leg-pulling on me. And yet . . . there was so much sincerity and truth in little Miss Angie's eyes. It is hard to believe

anyone like her could die. Besides, I saw that bobbin.

Anyway, for the second year we had received a very strange tax return, and decided it should be investigated. Not that the figures weren't correct—they just didn't make sense to us.

Since I am one of the department's trouble-shooters, I was sent to Springfield to look into the matter. Now "Springfield" is not the name of the place I went. I use

that because the United States Postal Guide lists twenty-five Springfields, and I do not want to see that poor, rich wonderful, unfortunate little lady molested by idle curiosity seekers—or fortune hunters. You see, in spite of the generally-held belief, we Collectors of Internal Revenue do have hearts.

Miss Angie—everyone in Springfield called her that, and I soon got the habit—lived in a charming little cottage. The small entrance porch was covered with morning glories and climbing roses. Just off the front hall was a large, sunny workroom with a big bay window in front of which, on low stands, were dozens of potted geraniums.

Seated in a little, low, armless rocking chair, with work tables on either side, was a small, apparently middle-aged woman, who was neither pretty nor handsome. But she had a personality shining from her that instantly made you forget such trivialities as mere prettiness.

After explaining my mission, I asked her about it. "You list returns from investments that must run into millions. Yet that money is merely deposited in your account at the bank, and your actual expenditures listed are just smaller than this item of nine hundred and sixty-seven dollars you list as earned by your sewing."

She nodded placidly without looking up. "Goodness, yes. I've always made enough from my sewing to live on."

"But all that other . . ."

"Was my husband's. When he was . . . killed . . . I didn't have any use for it. I asked the bank to take care of it for me, and I 'sposed everything was all right about it. They make out my tax returns."

"Yes, Mr. Jacobs explained all that to me. My superiors sent me here because this seemed so unusual they wanted to make sure it was correct."

"The government can have it all if they want it," she said almost acidly. "Goodness, I don't need it, and I don't know how to give it away so it'll do more good than harm."

I shook my head in perplexity. "Why do you work so hard at sewing when you have so much more than you need?"

Her face paled and she shook so, as with a palsy, that I hastened to beg her pardon.

"It was mere curiosity, not official business. You don't need to answer."

After a moment she quieted down and peered at me through the steel-bowed spectacles she wore.

"You're from out of town, and I think you'd not go blabbing it around here, any more'n Banker Jacobs does. I don't want the people here ever to know the story. But I think it would do me good to tell it to someone. But I warn you," her smile was very strained as she looked up at me, "you won't believe me. You'll probably think I'm feeble-minded or something. But that's all right. Goodness knows I often think so myself."

"It all started back quite a few years ago," she began. "I guess the best place to begin is with Marcy Howland."

I was struck with the fact that she kept right on sewing all the time she was talking, her needle flashing in and out, making the finest, tiniest stitches I've ever seen. Yet she apparently paid no attention to her work, for I seldom saw her even look at it. But here is her story. Judge for yourself.

"OH, MISS ANGIE, I've such good news! I'm to be married; and you're to make my wedding dress—white satin, old lace and all!"

The pert little figure in the low rocker looked up at the flushed face of the girl dancing and whirling about the room, too excited to stand still.

"Well, I declare to goodness, Marcy, that's just fine. How'd it happen, and who's the lucky fellow?"

"I'm the lucky one, Miss Angie. It was after the dance last night, and it must have been that pink party dress you made for me that did it. My fiance," she savored the word on her tongue, "is Ronald McClain. It's funny, for he's never hardly looked at me before, in spite of how I've loved him all these years. But he danced with me several times, then begged to take me home, and asked me to marry him."

The happy girl stopped her pirouetting before the big bay window, where the afternoon sun was shining warmly. She stooped to smell the potted flowers there. "Your geraniums are doing so well this year, aren't

they, Miss Angie?" But then, the whole world must have been beautiful to Marcy Petersen that day.

The little seamstress looked more closely at the excited girl. Inwardly she had marvelled that such a plain, drab, timid young woman had managed to catch a husband at all, to say nothing of such a catch as Ronny McClain, probably the town's most eligible bachelor.

But as she now examined the girl, Miss Angie was struck by the change that had come over her. Why, Marcy's face and eyes were sparkling and alive, her drab hair seemed softened and gleamed with highlights, her very skin seemed to have come alive and was flushed with health and vitality.

As the girl babbled away about her plans and her happiness, and the things she wanted the little seamstress to make for her, one thought intruded into Miss Angie's consciousness with such force as to make her gasp aloud.

Instantly the girl turned to her in concern. "What is it, Miss Angie? Are you sick?"

"No . . . nothing . . . it's nothing, Child." How could she tell her fears about those strange coincidences that had been happening here in Springfield the past year or so?

For now she remembered it was while she was working on that pink party dress of Marcy's that Ronny McClain had come to her workroom and she had laid aside the dress to sew monograms on his new shirts.

And had used thread from the strange bobbin for both jobs!

She made herself snap out of it. "I'm sure you and Ronny will be very happy, Marcy. I'll put my finest stitches into your dress, you can be sure."

AFTER the girl was gone, Miss Angie got up and made a pot of tea. While sipping the fragrant brew, her thoughts spun webs of memory.

Dear Billy Conner. He had always been a pet of hers, even as a little boy living next door. After his parents were killed in that train wreck, he lived with her while finishing his last two years of high school. Then he fulfilled a boyhood ambition by "going to sea."

"But he always comes back to me between

trips," she joyfully told visitors who asked after him. "He tells me the grandest stories and brings me odd things he picks up in all those foreign places he goes to," and she'd point to the whatnot in the corner.

His latest present had been that peculiar bobbin of thread, found in a bazaar in some little Greek port town. It was made of lemonwood, he told her, and was carved with strange designs that, when studied, she seemed almost able to understand, but never quite could.

But it was the thread that puzzled her . . . and the fact that the bobbin never seemed to empty.

When he gave it to her the thread was a fine, black silk. She first used it when repairing a tear in Gertrude Clarke's black poplin. It seemed such good thread, and worked so neatly into the fabric that when she finished the repair she was surprised, even though she considered herself an expert seamstress. Once she let the exact spot out of sight for a moment, it was impossible to tell where she had worked on it.

The next day she was searching her thread rack for a certain shade of blue cotton and, to her great amazement, discovered that this peculiar bobbin now held exactly the shade and texture of thread she needed.

At first she was puzzled by the uncanny way that weird bobbin always held exactly the thread she needed, no matter how often she went to it. Pink silk, blue cotton, black linen — anything and everything came from it.

She grew a bit frightened, then worried lest she be committing some sort of sin by taking advantage of such unholy magic. For in Miss Angie's simple, child-like heart only the deepest-dyed, most sinful sort of black magic could accomplish such things.

But gradually, through continued use, her fears and doubts began to dissipate.

"It is a comfort to have such a handy thing around," she defended her use of it to herself. "Now I never have to hunt for the exact match to whatever I'm working on."

Once in her needle the thread seemed almost alive. Her stitches were truer, her work far more excellent than it had ever been, so perfectly did the thread blend into the fabric.

All of which was a mercy to her tired eyes and, her fears once allayed, a thing to be accepted gratefully and used regularly. Thus does one of simple faith accept the gifts that the gods—now why did she use that expression, rather than "God"?—give to certain fortunate people.

IT was only gradually that she came to notice these many peculiar coincidences—if they were that. Sitting hour after hour with busy hands every day as she did, her active little mind raced as fast as her flashing fingers.

Although she seldom left her little cottage, she knew the news and gossip of her small town almost as soon as it happened. There were a dozen business callers each day, besides many friends who dropped in for a simple chat of gossip. Each brought a load of news and the talk of the town. Nor was it only the women who came. There was no tailor in Springfield, so she did sewing for men, as well as dressmaking and hat trimming for the women.

Let's see now, her thoughts flashed back.

The first time was when Constable Bivins came to see me after that terrible fight between Chuck Wiggins and Bob Considine. Someone mentioned seeing both boys come here that morning, so he came to ask if either had said anything that might shed light on their quarrel, that had flared into that sudden, awful fight.

"Why . . . why, no," she was aghast at his news. "Goodness me, neither of them even mentioned the other. Chuck just wanted a suspender button sewed back on his pants, and Bob had torn a pocket on his coat."

It was only after the constable left that the thought came to Miss Angie that she had used thread from the bobbin for both jobs. She grew almost frightened. Had she been to blame for that fight?

But later in the day she had sewn some lace on a camisole for Jenny Edwards and lengthened a pair of her husband's trousers. The two had been on the verge of a separation for some time, but after that night they had grown closer than they had ever been. So Miss Angie figured if the bobbin brought bad luck, it also brought good.

These had been only momentary wonders to Miss Angie, but as such cases multiplied week after week—some good, some bad—she began to worry again, and decided that terrible bobbin was to blame. She carried it out and threw it in the garbage can.

But the next morning, when she sat down in her low rocker, there was that bobbin back on her sewing table.

Startled, and really afraid of it now, she regarded it wordlessly for some minutes. Then she rose determinedly, picked it up between thumb and forefinger, and started towards her kitchen stove where there was still a hot fire.

But a sudden *compulsion* stopped her in her tracks, and she felt a thought in her mind as strong as a spoken word. "Sew," it said.

A sudden surge of anger and determination made her small figure straighten. She spoke aloud, the better to emphasize her feelings.

"I *won't* use it any more!" and again she struggled to go to the stove and burn that bobbin and its horrible, magic thread.

"Sew!" the command seemed to make her senses reel with its force.

Slowly, against her will, she found herself going back to her low chair and taking up the dress on which she was working. Time after time, through the days that followed, she tried to destroy that cursed bobbin of thread, but found the coercion ever present, ever stronger than her will and determination.

In time, to preserve her peace of mind, she developed the conviction that it was only her foolish fancy that had, first, made her imagine it was evil and, second, that something was forcing her to continue using it. Now she accepted the fact meekly, without further questioning, and without thinking about it except when some new coincidence forced itself upon her consciousness.

MISS Angie was making a new dress for Margie White, whom she considered about the prettiest and sweetest girl in Springfield. She sat dreaming of this and that, her needle plying in and out without too much attention.

The front door opened and heavy foot-

steps approached her workroom. As she looked up, she saw Hank Brower in the doorway. He grinned at her shamefaced.

"Ma'am, I tore my overalls—in a sort of an exposed place. Could you do a rush job on 'em?"

"Why certainly, Henry. Oh," as he came closer, "you mean the ones you have on?" he nodded. "Go back of the screen there and take 'em off."

He did so, and threw them to her.

"How do you like railroading?" she asked, as she worked.

"I like it fine, mostly. Braking isn't too bad, and if I can make good I'll get a chance at conducting some of these days."

"You'll make good," she said sagely. "You've got good stuff in you. I remember your Pa. He was a fine man, and you're a lot like him."

"Thanks, Miss Angie. If I can be half the man he was . . ." he let it go at that.

Hardly had the door closed behind him when it banged open and shut again, and a rush of feet brought a big, breezy young man running into the room.

"Hi, Miss Angie, I'm home again!" and two strong young arms scooped her out of her chair and into a big bear hug.

"Billy! Oh, it's good to see you again!"

She was filled with the joy that the safe return of "her boy" always brought. She kissed him and looked him over carefully to make sure he was well and happy.

For an hour they chatted swiftly of their experiences of the past year, glad and content to be together again.

FINALLY he rose. "Think I'll go down town for a little while."

"You're staying here, of course."

"Where else?" he grinned. "Think I want you to paddle me for even suggesting going to a hotel."

Suddenly she remembered the girl. "By the way," she said with an attempt at casualness, "Margie White was in here awhile ago to have me make this dress for her. She's grown into a beautiful girl."

"Little pigtailed Margie? But that's not surprising, she did have regular features."

"Maybe you'll see her."

He looked at her with pretending sever-

ity. "You wouldn't by any chance be indulging in a little match-making, would you, Miss Angie?"

She colored a bit at being caught. "Well, you'll be wanting a wife some day, and I want you to have the best."

He threw back his head and laughed uproariously, then came over and kissed her. "You sure beat the band, Darling."

He started out again, then turned back. "You need any money? I saved about four hundred this trip."

"Goodness, no, Billy. But thank you anyway. It's just like you to think of that. You put it away for saving."

He smiled. "You know you'll never have to worry if anything happens to me. I've signed my insurance to you, and the bank knows you get my money."

"Hush you now, Child, with that sort of talk. Goodness, nothing's going to happen to you."

But there was a fond smile of thanks on her face as she looked up at him. Then her sharp eyes noticed something amiss. "The braid's coming loose on your cap. Let me fix it."

He took it off and examined it. "So it is. Leave it to you to spot a thing like that," his smile was loving as he handed it to her. Then he saw her unwinding a length of golden silk from the old bobbin. "Hey, you still got that gadget I brought you? I 'sposed it's all be used up by now. Or did you wind some other thread on it? Seems I recall it was black silk, wasn't it?"

She hesitated, wondering swiftly if she should tell him about it, but he saved her the necessity. "Hey, did I tell you about when we were in Genoa?" and was off into another of his yarns.

She finished before he did, then he started out again. "See you all of a sudden," and with a cheery salute was gone.

The little seamstress smiled secretly as she picked up the dress and began working on it again. She found herself humming a wordless little tune as her swift fingers flashed in and out. He didn't know about that magic thread, and that she had used it consecutively for him and Margie. She was sure it would mean great happiness for them both.

It must have been about an hour later, when she was pulling basting threads from Margie's dress, using the point of her shears as dressmakers do, when suddenly, seemingly almost of themselves, the shears snapped together, cutting the thread in a place she had not intended.

Miss Angie laid the dress and shears down wearily. She sank back into her chair, removed her steel bows and rubbed her tired eyes. "Got to rest more," she murmured. "My nerves are getting very jumpy."

But the pressure and need for sewing made her uncomfortable at such loafing. She got up and brewed a pot of tea, then carried it back to her worktable, and sipped as she sewed.

IT was just about sundown, and Miss Angie had about decided it was time to fix some supper for Billy and herself, when there was a knock on the front door. Rising, she went to open it, wondering who it was that did not simply come in to her workroom.

Standing on the little, vine-covered porch was a tall, darkly handsome man, whom she recognized from descriptions given her, as a newcomer to Springfield.

"I was told you are a seamstress," he said, courteously removing his hat, and bowing in the continental manner.

"Yes. Come in, please." She opened the door wider to let him pass her, then showed him into the bay-windowed room. "What did you wish?"

He took a package from beneath his arm and opened it. "I just purchased some underwear, and find it too loose for comfort. I wondered if you could fix it for me?"

She fingered the fine silk. "What do you want done?"

He spread one out on the table. "You see how straight the lines. It bunches under my shirt. I usually have them tailor-made, but had to get some more here. I thought perhaps you could take out a little on each side, make it more form-fitting."

"Goodness, yes, I can do that easily," she smiled. "This is beautiful material. Expensive, too, isn't it?"

He frowned a bit, as though she was go-

ing too far, then his face cleared into a smile. "I like nice things especially next to my skin."

Miss Angie looked up at him again, and this time studied him more closely. She liked what she saw, and as she continued staring, almost rudely, her heart began fluttering and a strange, new emotion came into being within her. She felt herself flushing and quickly turned away.

For in that moment Miss Angie had, for the first time in her busy, selfless but lonely life, fallen in love.

She made a pretense of hunting for her tape-measure, and when she felt she had herself at least partially under control, turned back to him.

"If you'll please remove your coat," she forced her voice to a calmness she did not yet feel, "I'll take your measurements."

Smiling, he did so, and she felt a wonderful ecstatic thrill as she put her arms about him to adjust the measure. Then she noted the size of his chest, stomach and hips, and jotted them down on a pad of paper.

Rapidly she counted the garments. "I see you bought half a dozen. I can have them ready for you day after tomorrow noon."

Again that almost-frown, then he smiled. "I'm quite busy day times. I'm an inventor of sorts, you may have heard. If it's convenient I'll come for them in the evening."

"Goodness, yes. Come whenever you have time."

When he had gone she sank into the low chair, her work and the meal she was supposed to prepare gone from her mind. She lay there, day-dreaming things she had never expected to feel, her love-starved mind conjuring up delights that made her squirm with pleasure even as she was scolding herself for even letting such thoughts into her consciousness.

But only for a short time, then the compulsion to sew made her pick up her work. Yet her mind continued deliciously engrossed with the sort of dreams most girls have in their late 'teens or early twenties, but which she'd had to wait until her early forties to know.

A sudden noise on the front porch dragged her away from those wonderful

thoughts. "Oh, goodness, it's Billy, and supper not ready!" She started to rise.

But it was not Billy Conner. "Why, Constable Bivins," she gasped as the big man appeared in the doorway, his face strained.

"I . . . I got bad news for you, Miss Angie," and her breath caught in her throat. "Get hold of yourself . . . Bill Conner's just been killed—and Margie White!"

"Oh, *no!*" she moaned, and hid her face in her hands, while hot tears gushed from her eyes. The constable came over and laid a comforting hand on her shoulder. Gradually her sobs quieted and she was able to look up at him.

"How . . . how'd it happen?"

"They were walking together out by the edge of town, and were just crossing the mill side-tracks when some freight cars that had got away and were running loose jumped the track and turned over on 'em. Hank Brower, the brakeman, saw it and reported it. Seems he hadn't set the brakes tight enough to hold 'em on that grade."

"But what about Billy? What's you do with his . . . ?"

"It's at Morrison's undertaking parlors. I guess you'll have to make the plans—you're about the only kin he had left."

She cried noisily for some minutes, and again he reached out and patted her shoulder awkwardly in sympathy. Some time later she nodded.

"Yes," her voice was low, "I'm all he had left. I'll go down to Morrison's and make . . . arrangements. We'll have to get in touch with his ship and tell 'em he's not . . . coming back. And he said something about insurance to pay for his . . ." again the tears welled up, but she fought them under control.

AFTER the funeral little Miss Angie went back to her cottage and threw herself onto the bed, sobbing away her grief. She was too heart-broken to care about the promised work piled high on her tables, yet could not rid her mind of it. She had always been so conscientious and now, despite her grief and her wornout condition—she had barely slept since that shocking news—she felt somehow that she had no business lying here like this.

Hard as she tried to keep it away, the thought grew stronger. Again that strange, weird *compulsion* was in her mind, "Sew!" it commanded, and when she made no move to comply, it grew stronger and more persistent, like an ache inside her head. Finally, "SEW!" it thundered, and her weary body dragged itself back to the little, low chair.

She picked up a needle from her pin-cushion, and seeing only a four inch tag of thread left in it, automatically reached for the spool. She came up with that enigmatic bobbin. When she saw it, she realized again that it was—it *must be*—the cause of all the troubles—as well as the few seeming blessings—that had come to her and the people of Springfield since that dark day Billy had brought it to her.

Now, clearly, she remembered something that had not entered her consciousness before. Billy had said he found it in Greece. *Greece!* Her mind flashed back to her school days, and her reading of Greek mythology. To the Three Fates, Clotho who spun, Lachesis who sewed, and Atropos who snipped the threads of life.

"Oh, no! It can't be possible! Goodness, those were only old folk tales. There can't possibly be any truth in them."

Nevertheless, in a fit of revulsion she threw the bobbin into a far corner of the room. But instantly that inner coercion forced her to rise, cross the room, pick up the bobbin and bring it back to her chair.

Resignedly, although now more afraid of it than ever, she unreeled a length of thread from it. Without even looking at it, she knew it would be exactly the shade and texture of the cloth she was working on.

Almost without volition she worked on, paying no attention to what she was doing but knowing, subconsciously, that it was perfect work. Hour after hour she sewed, nor realized it had grown dark. She did not switch on the lights—when one is not looking at one's work, what need of light?

A GAIN there came a knock on the door. "Come in," she called wearily, and heard the door open and close.

She glanced up as a figure appeared in the doorway, and suddenly she came alive as she saw it was the handsome stranger.

"Oh," she fluttered, and switched on the lamp. "I'm terribly sorry, Sir, but I haven't finished your work. My . . . my boy was killed, you may have heard . . . Billy Conner . . . and we buried him today. I haven't felt like . . ."

"Yes," the voice was very sympathetic. "I heard, but I did not know he was your son."

"Oh, he wasn't, not really," she made haste to explain. "I never married. When I said he was my boy I meant I was about the best friend he had here after his parents were killed. He boarded with me while he was finishing school."

"I see," he smiled. "You're a very kind little lady."

She dimpled and smiled shyly at him. "I'll work real hard and have them for you tomorrow evening for sure. I . . . I'm so happy to do anything I can for you."

She knew she was acting like a silly schoolgirl, but she could not help it. Her heart was pounding and all the pent-up needs of those long, love-starved years welled out and became a palpable thing that even the stranger could not help but notice. How could she know that her wonderful, selfless personality shone about her like a halo?

"Why, that is most kind of you, Beautiful Lady. You are very charming. I kiss your hand," and he took her cold little fingers and bent over them in a polished manner never before seen in Springfield.

Nor did he release them immediately. Instead, he held her hand and fondled it as he looked penetratingly into her face. After a long moment he slowly loosed her hand. "I shall return, then, tomorrow evening. Or the day after—I am not in that much of a hurry for them."

"No . . . no," she stammered. "Tomorrow will be all right. And thank you."

"You are welcome," the resonant, courteous voice again thrilled her. "In a way, I am glad you do not have them done. It gives me the pleasure of seeing you once more."

After he had gone she sat day-dreaming again. But not for long. The inexorable pressure that now ruled her life was strong within her, nor could she disobey it until the dress was finished, long past midnight.

Then she found herself able, at long,

weary last, to go to bed. Her spent body was quickly asleep . . . but her dreams continued on and on . . .

THE next day seemed to drag as she worked swiftly, watching the clock, waiting for evening when she would see him again.

She scolded herself many times that long day for her silliness, but made no special effort to stop her so-pleasant dreaming.

That such a man could ever care for such a plain, middleaged spinster never once entered her thoughts. Her great love *must* communicate itself to him, and make him love her in return.

Late in the afternoon a new idea came to her. If the thread from that magic bobbin brought love to others when she sewed for two of them, one after another, why not for her?

Her breath gasped out, and she felt a vast worry that such a thing might bring him harm, rather than good. But something deep inside whispered that it would mean great mutual love.

She must chance it!

She dropped her work on his underwear, and took her nicest frock from the closet. She knew the fichu was torn in one place, and this she mended, the silk from that magic bobbin doing its work so the sewing was not perceptible. It needed pressing, too, she decided, so heated her iron and smoothed out the wrinkles. Then she put it on, and went back to finishing his work.

When he finally came it was done. She had prepared a nice little meal, and after showing him the work, she shyly asked him to share her meal with her.

"I am terribly sorry, Miss Angie, but I have just dined. But," seeing the hurt look on her face, "it was so nice of you to invite me, that I'm going to be presumptuous and ask if I may come tomorrow evening instead?"

"Of course," she fluttered. "I'd love to have you. I . . ." but her shyness was too great, and she could not go on.

He seemed to understand her feeling, and again lifted her hand to kiss, pressing it gently in his fingers as he did so.

"I have a feeling, Little Lady, that we are fated to become very, very close . . . friends."

"Oh, I hope so." It was a low whisper.

Her heart sang all the next day as she worked, and her flying needle was no swifter than her flashing thoughts. She was pink with excitement all day, and her dreams were as rosy as her face.

Yet the hours seemed interminably long before it was time to prepare dinner. This time she took even more pains with her cooking.

But even crawling hours do pass, and finally he arrived. She met him at the door and gave him her hand to kiss. But under the influence of her love and desire she must have swayed toward him, for suddenly he gathered her into a close embrace.

She thrilled far more than even her dreams had imagined, as those strong arms went about her.

"Oh!" she thought rapturously, "it is working for me, just as it did for Marcy and Ron, Jenny and Dick, and all the others!"

Slowly, shyly, she raised her face to his. "Oh my dear!" she whispered.

"You feel it, too?"

She nodded, face aflame and eyes not fully meeting his.

They were married four days later, and since he was merely staying at the hotel, they came back to her little cottage until, as he put it, they could build a house worthy of her.

Hardly had they removed their wraps than she felt herself forced into the sewing room, to sit in the low rocker and resume her work.

"Angie, Darling, you don't have to keep on sewing," he protested, half-humorously, half-angrily trying to take the unfinished dress out of her hands.

"But I do," she insisted, retaining her hold on the cloth. "I promised Mildred Blake she could have this tomorrow, and I've got to keep my promise."

He understood that, for promises were sacred to him, too. Reluctantly he let her keep on, but sat near her, and they talked of many things as the long hours wore on. He told her of his preference for small towns—the reason he was here or in some

other whenever his work permitted. She told him many of her own dreams and aspirations.

THE next morning she was up long before him, back at her sewing. When the dress was finally completed, he heaved a long sigh of relief, and even volunteered to deliver it.

When he returned, however, she was busily sewing on another. This time he lost his temper.

"Angie!" he almost shouted. "I won't have my wife sewing for other people like this! I have more money than we'll ever be able to spend. You don't have to work, and I don't want you to. I want you to relax and enjoy yourself. We'll make plans and take trips—all over the world if you wish."

She tried, valiantly. But it was to no avail. The fate to which she was now slave would not let her alone. Time after time she went back to her sewing; time after time he dragged her away from it.

At last she had to tell him. "I . . . I can't stop sewing!" she wailed miserably, and the eyes she raised to his were panic-stricken. "I don't want to keep on, but something I can't resist makes me!"

"Nonsense," he said brusquely, with a man's sureness against a woman's supposed weakness. "I know how you like the people here, and how they all rely on you. But let them find someone else to do their drudgery—or learn how to sew, themselves!"

She shook her head miserably, wiped her eyes, and picked up her needle again. "You just don't understand, Dear. Goodness, it's not that simple at all."

Finally he wormed it out of her, and held the bobbin in his hands, examining it curiously. "It's certainly from ancient Greece," he said. "I recognize the letters, although I can't read it."

He straightened with determination, turned and strode across the room toward the heart fire, raising his hand to hurl that accursed bobbin to the flames. But somehow it . . . dropped . . . from his hands to the floor. His advancing foot struck against it, making him stumble and fall. His head struck against the mantle and he landed face downward in the roaring fire.

The bobbin lay safely on the floor.

Miss Angie screamed, and hurried across the room. But her first act was to pick up the bobbin and replace it safely on her work table, her second to try to drag her husband's corpse from the flames. Why in that order, she could not tell. She certainly didn't want or intend it that way.

When the constable and coroner arrived, little Miss Angie was back in the little, low rocker, sewing in patient resignation.

WELL, that's the story as I pieced it together from what Miss Angie told me that afternoon. It seemed incredibly credible at the time, with her honest, earnest, troubled eyes looking into mine. Now that I'm away from there, I just simply . . . do . . . not . . . know!

But one thing I'll bet. No other village can boast a professional seamstress worth ten million dollars. If the fates planned it as a reward to her, it was a useless gesture.

No, I did *not* let her do any sewing for me.
