

THE RULES OF THE GAME

THE moment Mr. McCabe's bulky figure appeared at the top of the three steps leading down into the sunken living room, Walter Bradford was aware of how unfortunate it was that he had asked Mr. McCabe to drop in for a drink on this particular Sunday afternoon. There was a sudden, embarrassing silence around the coffee table, and everybody seemed to stiffen. Old Dr. Redlich, who had been discoursing on his favorite theory—that *Bundeskanzler* Dollfuss, not Hitler, was really the one to blame for Austria's downfall—stopped abruptly in the middle of an involved German sentence. Melanie Altmann brushed a few cake crumbs off her taffeta frock, which had been fashionable sixteen years before in Vienna and had been altered twice since the advent of the New Look. Her husband fumbled with his necktie.

It was definitely unfortunate, Walter said to himself. Of course, he couldn't have foreseen that the Altmanns and Dr. Redlich would drop in uninvited just today. Walter hadn't seen them since he'd moved out of the city eight months before. Well, there was nothing he could do about it now. He got up to welcome his guest. "Hello, Mr. McCabe," he said, extending his hand. "Glad you could make it."

Mr. McCabe was about to grasp the outstretched hand when his heel caught on the top step and he twisted around and clutched the stair rail. "Wow!" he said. "That was close. Would be too bad to have to sue a man the first time you stepped into his house." He broke into laughter and patted Walter's back, staring at him with an air of expectancy. Walter forced a polite smile, though he didn't see anything funny in Mr. McCabe's remark. Well, maybe it *was* funny. It was so hard to say.

Mr. McCabe was a ponderous man with a healthy, outdoor complexion—a little too healthy, perhaps. He was a widower and half retired, Walter had been told, spending only two or three days a week at the office of the small but rather well-known investment-banking firm in Wall Street in which he was a partner. Almost every afternoon, Mr. McCabe was at the nearby golf club.

Dr. Redlich and Altmann had got up from their chairs and were standing

erect and still, almost at attention, like soldiers about to be inspected by an officer. Melanie Altmann was sitting up stiffly.

"Mr. McCabe," Walter said to the others. "Mr. McCabe lives in that big Colonial house down the road. His daughter goes to school with our Peggy." He pointed at his guests. "Mrs. Altmann. Mr. Altmann. Dr. Redlich."

"How do you do, sir?" said Dr. Redlich, bowing ceremoniously from the waist and thrusting out his hand in a clipped, military gesture. He was a pompous, podgy man with clumps of gray hair around his bald pate, and he was wearing a pince-nez that was fastened by a ribbon to the top button of his vest. Dr. Redlich always wore a vest with his suit, even on warm summer afternoons, and he preferred dark suits, blue or black. Back in Vienna, he had been a prominent bank manager, economist, and art collector. He was a bachelor and had had the reputation of being a fastidious dresser.

Mr. McCabe seemed startled for a fraction of a second. Then he took Dr. Redlich's hand and shook it heartily. Mrs. Altmann relaxed and said, "Won't you sit down, please, *ja*?" Her husband nodded and murmured something that sounded like "d'a meet you."

Mitzi Bradford came in from the kitchen, carrying a coffeepot. "Darling, this is Mr. McCabe," Walter said. "My wife."

"Hello," Mitzi said. She put down the coffeepot and gave Mr. McCabe her hand. "I would have recognized you at once. You have your daughter's eyes."

"I should think it's the other way around," Mr. McCabe said, laughing, holding Mitzi's hand. Walter smiled. The Altmanns looked on unsmiling, and Dr. Redlich frowned.

"Ellen McCabe and our Peggy are great friends," Mitzi explained. "Please sit down, Mr. McCabe. I've just made fresh coffee. You must have some, with whipped cream."

"Coffee?" Mr. McCabe said.

"*Ja, ja*," Melanie Altmann said.

"Time for our *Jause*."

"Beg your pardon?" said Mr. McCabe.

"*Kaffeeklatsch*, as the Germans said," Dr. Redlich explained. "In Austria, we

called it *Jause*. Characterized by the consumption of vast amounts of strong coffee, topped off with whipped cream, which was called *Schlagobers* in Vienna and *Schlagsahne* in Germany, but if you would so much as mention the word '*Schlagsahne*' in our Vienna, you would—"

"Please, Dr. Redlich," Walter said. He noticed, for the second time, the puzzled expression in Mr. McCabe's eyes. Mr. McCabe seemed wondering and confused, as though he had momentarily lost his way in the middle of a noisy, sprawling, foreign city.

"Bitte, have some of the *Apfelkuchen*," Melanie Altmann said, offering the plate to Mr. McCabe. "*Wunderbar*. Mitzi made it herself." After eight years in America, Melanie Altmann still talked a mixture of German and English.

Walter took Mr. McCabe's arm. "Let's go to the bar. You'll want a drink."

Mr. McCabe nodded, and he and Walter left the coffee table and went to the built-in bar, at the other end of the large living room.

"I knew this place when old Judge Adams lived here," Mr. McCabe said. He seemed to be looking for something. Across from them, at the coffee table, Dr. Redlich resumed his lecture about *Bundeskanzler* Dollfuss, in subdued German. "Didn't you change the layout?" Mr. McCabe said, still glancing around.

"That glass door over there," Walter said. "We had it broken through to the garden. And my wife had this room redecorated. Mitzi—Mrs. Bradford—is crazy about Early American furniture. What will you have?"

"Well, I'm afraid I had a bit more rye than was good for me last evening. Guess I'd better have a hair of the dog."

"Pardon me?"

Mr. McCabe was still glancing around. "Rye-and-soda, please," he said over his shoulder.

Walter reached for the bottle of rye, thankful that McCabe apparently had not noticed his bewilderment. But why should rye-and-soda be "hair of the dog"? He had thought that at least he'd mastered the American drinking vocabulary. After a few years of trial and error, he had learned to mix cocktails. In fact, he'd become quite good at it, and occasionally one of his American friends would compliment him on his Daiquiris. At such moments, he would have a feeling of new assurance, almost of achievement—like the feel-





"Just listen to this, Henry! A very artistic woman in West Virginia is going to weave you a suit."

ing he had after using a slang word in the right place, or watching himself in the mirror after he'd bought his first American suit. He mixed a drink for McCabe and handed it to him, then he mixed one for himself.

McCabe lifted his glass and said, "Cheers." Then he began a long account of the Adams place as he had known it in the old days.

WALTER nodded and made an occasional comment, but he only half listened. Hair of the dog, he thought. An offhand remark, an idiomatic expression, and a blank wall rose in front of you, a wall of uncertainty, painful conjecture, and final embarrassment. You could ask questions and admit your ignorance, or could keep quiet and remain confused. It was one hell of a dilemma, and there was no way of getting around it. Walter wished he had come to this country as young as Peggy had, and not at the age of thirty-four.

Peggy spoke English the way Ellen

McCabe and the other American kids did, with no accent. She was eleven. She had been eight months old when her parents brought her to America, late in 1938. They were from Vienna, where their name had been Blum. When they had gone to file their citizenship papers, in New York, Walter had asked permission to change his name to Bradford, Walter Bradford.

His European friends hadn't approved of the change. Dr. Redlich, a lifelong friend of Walter's dead parents, had said that Blum was an old Jewish name, nothing to be ashamed of. "It was good enough for your grandfather, in Poland, and for your father, when he moved to Vienna. It should be good enough for you here. It isn't even hard to spell."

"It's not American," Walter had said. "It makes you conspicuous. People like you and I must try to submerge, Dr. Redlich. We must get Americanized fast. We haven't much time left."

"There's no sense pretending," Dr. Redlich had said sullenly. "Walter

Bradford! Ridiculous! As soon as you open your mouth, they'll hear your accent—"

"My accent is all right," Walter had said quickly. "After all, my two years at Cambridge . . ." He had given an angry shrug. Dr. Redlich had a way of meddling in other people's affairs. "If you want to play the game, you've got to observe the rules." Dr. Redlich had stared at him hard, and Walter had turned and walked away, and that had been the end of their conversation.

"That old fool is getting on my nerves," Walter had said later to Mitzi. She had nodded. Mitzi was blond, pretty, and plump (*mollert* was the Viennese expression). She liked to wear dirndls and was delighted to discover that they had become acceptable, even fashionable, in America. She was devoted to Walter and had long before come to the conclusion that he could do no wrong. Well, he hadn't let her down. They had come over with little money and no connections at all. The



“Does Meg Froman regain the use of her limbs? Is Dr. Krakauer right in saying there is no organic damage but only a state of shock? Does Ted Fry mean to hint that Julian is flying back from Buenos Aires for good? Get a package of vitamin-rich Sparkel-Oats at your nearest grocer’s and read the outcome to this true-life drama on the back of the box.”

first few years hadn’t been too pleasant—a succession of drab jobs and drab two-room apartments. But Walter had worked doggedly, and now he was over the hump. He had been lucky to have a stomach ulcer just before his draft number came up, so that he was classified 4-F, and it wasn’t his fault that his illness had cleared up a year or so later. And, after all, the home front needed people, too. He had gone to the blood bank once, and he had worked hard for the import-export firm where he was employed.

Now he was a partner in the firm; he had already been to Europe on business twice since the end of the war, and he was planning to take Mitzi along the next time. Everything was hunky-dory. They had been able to buy a house in the country, and they had finally decided on this one. The house cost more than they had originally planned to spend, and it was too big for their

needs, but it had a lot of authentic old charm and twelve-inch-thick walls that, according to the real-estate agent, had been built in 1818.

After they moved in, Mitzi had been asked to join the garden club, and she had helped the other women with the flower show. She also went regularly to the Thursday-afternoon discussions of the book club. Maybe one day they would be asked to join the country club. Walter hoped so. Another year and “Blum” and all that went with it would belong to the distant past.

The Bradfords had certainly got ahead of their European friends. For Dr. Redlich, the Altmanns, and most of the others, the past was still very real—more real, in fact, than the present, which at times seemed but a sort of weird daydream.

“I guess I’m just too old,” Dr. Redlich had said once, taking off his pince-nez and rubbing his eyes with a tired,

resigned gesture. “America is an inspiring country, but at my age it’s impossible to get readjusted.”

Walter hadn’t seen it that way. “The truth is that they were all too rich over there,” he had said to his wife after Dr. Redlich left. “We didn’t leave behind some Cézannes and Renoirs, like Dr. Redlich, or two factories and a villa in the Salzkammergut, like the Altmanns. They just can’t forget it.”

“It’s more than that, darling,” Mitzi had said. “We had Peggy.”

Mitzi was right. Peggy made all the difference in the world. Peggy frowned when her parents talked German. She asked them repeatedly not to speak it when she brought her schoolmates home. Peggy ate popcorn and read the funnies and listened to “The Lone Ranger,” and when she grew up, she would go to a good college and marry a nice young man from New England.

Walter had not wanted a child back in Vienna, where he and Mitzi had been married eight months before Hitler marched in. “What future could our child have?” he would ask his wife, in bitterness. But when Peggy was born, he had been overjoyed, and had made a decision.

Two months later, the Blums had left Vienna for London, and from there they had come to New York. And now, thank God, Peggy would never have to go through any of the terrible things he and Mitzi had been forced to go through! Peggy was safe.

FROM the garden came laughter and Peggy’s happy voice. Walter had a feeling of warmth and happiness. He took McCabe’s glass and filled it again.

McCabe said, “I see you’ve done some landscaping in the garden.”

“Come out and take a look,” Walter said. He was anxious to get his American guest away from the coffee table and Dr. Redlich’s political lecture.

They stepped out onto the lawn, Mr. McCabe with his glass in his hand. Under a tree on the other side of the lawn, Peggy and Ellen McCabe were lying on their stomachs, reading the

funnies. They wore dungarees, which were rolled up to below the knees, and faded sweaters. Ever since the Bradfords moved out here, Peggy and Ellen had been inseparable. But then children made friends so much easier, especially a well-balanced girl like Peggy.

"Those two get along like a million dollars," Walter said, pointing at the girls.

"They certainly do," McCabe said. He stopped in the middle of the lawn. "Say, did you speak English before you came to this country?"

"I went to Cambridge," Walter said. Mr. McCabe looked at Walter with an air of new interest, almost with warmth. It gave Walter a feeling of deep satisfaction. "I was a student there before the war," Walter went on.

"That's it!" McCabe exclaimed. He nodded twice and seemed very pleased. "Your accent!" He cocked his head toward the living room behind them, from which the muted, monotonous voice of Dr. Redlich came out. "It's different. We were in England in the summer of '36. Had a wonderful trip."

"I've always liked England," Walter said.

The two men continued on across the lawn. "Your garden's in good shape," McCabe said, glancing around.

"You should have been here two weeks ago," Walter said. "We had a man until then, but he gave notice."

"A gardener?"

"Yes. Fellow named Sikorski."

"Those Polacks just aren't reliable," McCabe declared, shaking his head vigorously. "Now, I have Frank Hopkins, a local man. Frank's father used to work for my father. Frank would never let me down."

"I wish he could take care of our place," Walter said.

"Let me talk to him," McCabe said. "Maybe Frank can squeeze you in."

"Thanks a lot," Walter said.

They had reached the tree under which the girls were lying. Peggy sat up. "Hello, Mr. McCabe," she said, waving her hand.

Ellen remained lying on her stomach. "Hi, Pop," she said.

The comics section of the Sunday paper was lying in front of

them. Walter never read the comics. He didn't understand them.

"Having fun, girls?" he asked. Ellen gave him a short glance and nodded. Walter always felt a trace of self-consciousness in Ellen McCabe's presence. Sometimes he would talk to her and she would stare at him blankly, as though she didn't quite understand what he was saying. Grownups at least pretended to understand you, but children never did.

Peggy said, "How do you like my mansion, Mr. McCabe?" She moved her arm in a sweeping gesture toward the bushes, the lawn, and the house behind it.

"You've got yourself quite a place here, Peggy," said McCabe, and laughed. He winked at Walter.

"Yeah, but Peggy's lonely in her big mansion," Ellen said.

"Lonely?" Walter said, startled.

"Peggy's an orphan. Like Little Orphan Annie."

Ellen turned over and sat up. "I think we ought to have a dinner party this evening," she said to Peggy very gravely.

Peggy nodded, frowning. "It might break up the monotony of my sordid existence," she said.

McCabe laughed, pointing at the comic supplement, and spilled a little of his whiskey. "Sure," he said. "A dinner party. Formal. And Daddy Warbucks is going to fix it."

Walter stood there watching Peggy. He was proud of his daughter, talking like a grownup with Mr. McCabe, but he didn't know what they were talking about. He wanted to ask who Daddy Warbucks was, but he didn't. Some-

how, he was afraid to. There were times, like this, when Peggy was almost a stranger to him, talking her own language. It was as if she and Ellen and Mr. McCabe were members of a secret society that Walter hadn't been asked to join. Well, girls at that age were funny, Mitzi used to say, and Mitzi ought to know. He gently stroked Peggy's hair.

"What you got in that glass, Pop?" Ellen McCabe asked.

"Nothing for you," McCabe said, and laughed.

"Want something to drink, Ellen?" Walter said. "Come on in. I'll open a couple of Cokes."

"We'll be there in a minute," Peggy said, and they turned back to the funnies.

Walter and McCabe walked away from the girls. "I want you to know how pleased I am that Ellen has found such a nice friend," McCabe said. The whiskey had deepened the reddish color of his cheeks. He gave Walter a jovial slap on the back. "Ever since my good wife died, I've been worrying about bringing up that child." He finished his drink and put the glass down on the arm of a lawn chair, and they walked toward the front of the house. "Well, I'd better run along now."

"Don't you want to come in and have another drink?"

"I think I'll go over to the club for an hour or so—get in a little putting practice. Say, how about coming over there with me sometime?"

"I—I'd be delighted," Walter said quickly. "But I don't play."

"Everybody's got to start *someday*,"



McCabe said. He got into his car, which was parked in front of the house. "Give my regards to Mrs. Bradford, will you? And say goodbye to your guests for me."

"I will," Walter said. "Next week, you must come over with Ellen and have dinner with us."

"Swell," McCabe said, and shifted into gear. "We'll do that. Be seeing you, Walter." He drove off.

WALTER stood there until the car had vanished around the curve in the road; then he went back into the house. He was whistling, and he took one jump down the three steps to the living room.

Dr. Redlich put on his pince-nez and looked at him. "Where's your American friend, Walter?"

The emphasis on the word "American" irritated Walter. "Mr. McCabe had to leave," he said curtly. "He sends regards to everybody."

"He's very nice," Mitzi said. "And the girls are such great friends."

"*Das ist aber nett,*" said Melanie Altmann. "But it must be a strain to speak English all the time, *nicht wahr?* Especially on a Sunday afternoon, when one feels like relaxing."

The door to the garden was torn open, and Peggy and Ellen came in, breathless and laughing.

"Children, children!" Mitzi said.

"Hi, everybody!" Peggy shouted.

Ellen said, "Hi!"

"*Halloh, Kinder!*" exclaimed Melanie Altmann. She turned toward Dr. Redlich. "*Ist das die Tochter vom Amerikaner?*"

"*Ja, natürlich,*" Dr. Redlich answered. He put on his pince-nez and studied Ellen. "*Fesches Mädel,*" he said.

"Have some *Apfelkuchen,* children," Melanie Altmann said. "It's *wunderbar.*"

Ellen had suddenly become quiet. There was a puzzled look in her eyes—the same look that Walter had noticed twice in Mr. McCabe's eyes. But, being younger, Ellen was less concerned about concealing it. She stood there, a little lost, her lips open, staring at the people around the coffee table.

Then Walter noticed that Peggy, too, had become quiet. She was looking at Ellen, and the whites of her eyes had become unnaturally big, reflecting something Walter had never seen there before. She seemed unable to move, and her body was tense.

Walter felt his face grow hot. He got up quickly and walked to the bar.

BOSTON IS LIKE NO OTHER PLACE IN THE WORLD ONLY MORE SO

When I am out of funds and sorts
And life is all in snarls,
I quit New York and travel east
To Boston on the Charles.

In Boston, life is smoother far,
It's easier and freer,
Where every boy's a Harvard man
And every man's a skier.

And there I know a small hotel
Whose rates are not too high,
Alive with ancient Boston dames
Who have refused to die.

A lobby full of stately palms,
A chef that's quite insane,
Martinis yellow as the rose
And warm as summer rain.

There's something in the Boston scene
So innocent, so tranquil,
It takes and holds my interest
The same as any bank will.

For Boston's not a capital,
And Boston's not a place;
Rather I think that Boston is
A sort of state of grace.

The people's lives in Boston
Are flowers blown in glass;
On Commonwealth, on Beacon,
They bow and speak and pass.

No man grows old in Boston,
No lady ever dies;
No youth is ever wicked,
No infant ever cries.

No orthodox Bostonian
Is lonely or dejected,
For everyone in Boston
With everyone's connected.

Where hackmen have peculiar names
And relatives afar,
And one can watch the Chrysler spire
Bisect the morning star.

So intricate the pattern
The barroom of the Ritz
Becomes a jigsaw puzzle,
Each life a piece that fits.

At symphonies and weddings
The young debs spend their days;
They glide through cocktail lounges
Carrying huge bouquets.

Each Boston girl is swept along
Down the predestined channel
To where she meets a Boston boy
Alert in Brooksian flannel,

Magnificent in fallen socks,
His hair like stubble weeds,
His elbow patch an earnest of
The fellowship of tweeds.

When Muzak plays in Boston,
It wakes celestial strings,
And I can sit in Boston
And think of many things,

For Boston's not a capital,
And Boston's not a place;
Rather I feel that Boston is
The perfect state of grace.

After a week of Boston
I rise and take the train,
And I am always very glad
To see New York again.

New York seems doubly beautiful,
Its air as clear as Heaven's;
New York—where life is always
At sixes and at sevens,

Where no one ever marries right,
And girls go off their trolley,
And young men go to N.Y.U.,
To Fordham, and to Poly,

Where hackmen have peculiar names
And relatives afar,
And one can watch the Chrysler spire
Bisect the morning star.

—E. B. WHITE

"Come on, girls," he said. "Let's have some Cokes."

Peggy gave Ellen a slight push, and the girls came after him. At the bar, Ellen McCabe turned around and glanced back at the Altmanns and Dr.

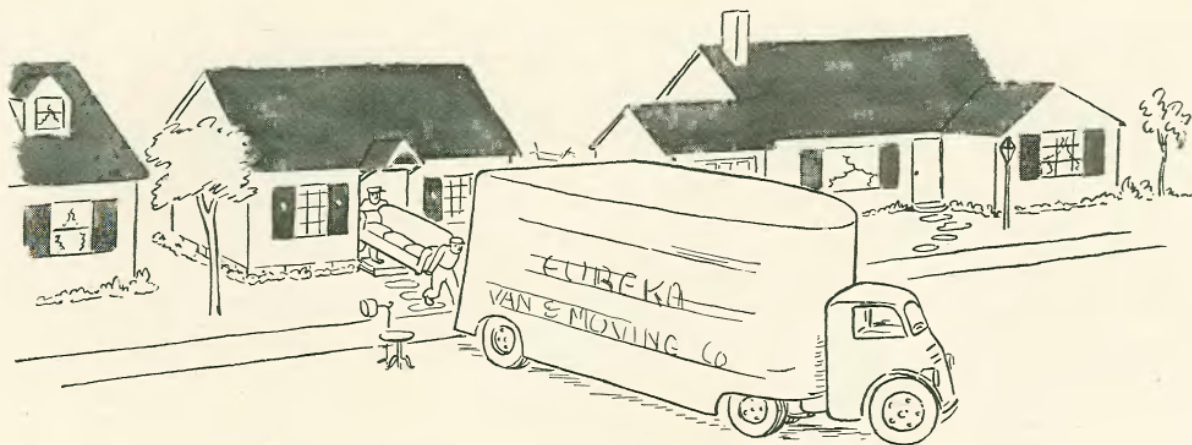


Redlich, who had resumed his German monologue, reviewing in great detail *Bundeskanzler* Dollfuss's last speech before his assassination.

Peggy took the two Coke bottles out of Walter's hands with a jerk and reached out for the bottle opener. She avoided looking at Ellen. She seemed anxious to get out of the living room and back into the garden.

"Wait a moment, Peggy darling," Walter said, "let me help you." He

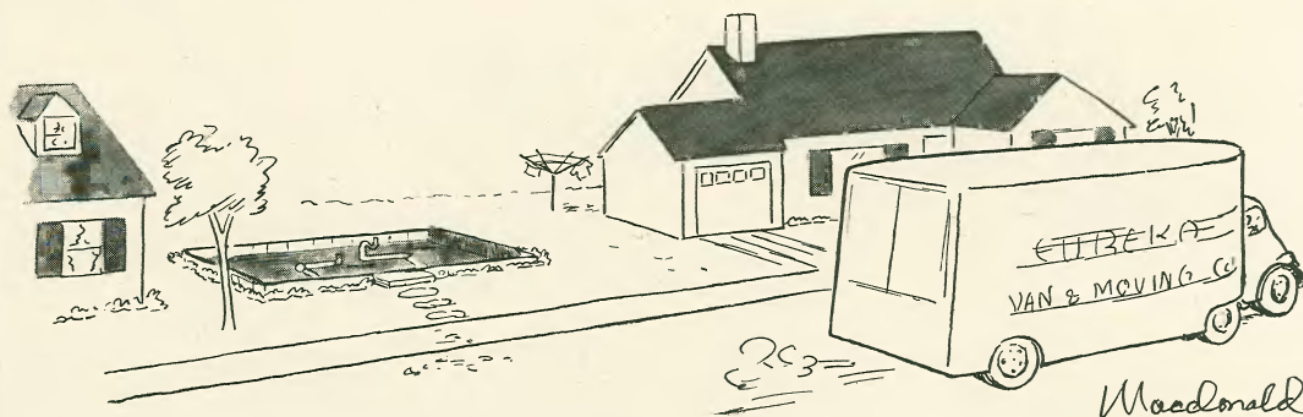
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really wanted to say something quite different to his child, but he knew that he couldn't find the right words and never would.

Peggy shook her head impatiently and opened one of the bottles. She let the cap fall to the floor and handed the bottle to Ellen. While she was opening the other bottle, the opener slid down the neck of the bottle, scratching the skin of her hand, but she didn't seem to notice it.

"Let me see your hand, dear," Walter said. Peggy didn't look at him. She

threw the opener back at the bar, but she misjudged the distance, and the opener fell to the floor, too. "Let's go!" she said to Ellen in an urgent, low voice, and ran quickly through the door, without looking back. Ellen went after her.

Walter picked up the bottle opener, in an unconscious movement, and absently put it back on the bar. Through the glass door he could see Peggy. She was walking across the lawn slowly and somewhat stiffly, almost like a grown-up person, her shoulders hunched, her head bent. For a second, Walter want-

ed to go after her, but then he turned and crossed the living room of their new, large—much too large—house, and sat with the group at the coffee table, without listening to the monotonous voice of Dr. Redlich. —JOSEPH WECHSBERG

The four young men carried old-fashioned nosegays of deep rose carnations outlined by frills and wore coronets of the same flowers in their hair.—*San Francisco Chronicle*.

How sweet!