

Everything I Have is Worse!

by
v n l

THE TROUBLE began, as trouble often begins instead of ending, with a romance. It was when an introverted sophomore like me fell for a stunning vision like Helen. Alright, alright, so she's not a vision — she's a girl! To be more precise, it really started one warm day when I walked into Sociology 1 and saw her sitting there — a pint-sized but effective little Helen of Troy (nominal coincidence, eh?), quietly sitting there like a stray lamb. We were all waiting for the teacher, a Miss Roberta O. Dil, and most of the students were watching the door for her. Not I, of course. I was watching Helen, delighted at the luck for being in the same class with her. She was apparently thinking of something because the pink tip of her tongue peeked out the side of her small well-formed mouth.

Well, needless to say, I was right then and there thoroughly conquered, smitten and aroused like you-know-who at the sight of the windmills. At first I thought it was the humidity. But then the symptoms were unmistakable: the first startled notice of a pretty girl, then the frequent uncontrolled glances at her, then the perturbed thoughts and unanswered questions as to her identity and address, and, realizing that it would be a hopeless fight to resist thinking of her, the drafting, therefore, of calculated plans to make an acquaintance, execute an approach, strike up a friendship, etc. etc.

Then the teacher arrived. Miss R. O. Dil, Sociology instructor, was the type who didn't waste time dilly-dallying with unnecessary preliminaries. At once she launched into an exhausting lecture. Now the gears in my brain started turning, grinding out ideas which went through a series of examinations, cross-examinations and counter-examinations as to their feasibility. Of course I couldn't decide. I only sat there looking at Helen while she scribbled Miss Dil's lecture, the tip of her tongue still a pink blob at the side of her little mouth. I could have "borrowed" some paper from her for the lecture (like we

used to do in night high school — and besides, I really had NO paper!). Then I thought, maybe I could ask her to lend me her notes the moment we went out when class was over (another standard operating procedure typical of the bashful, high school variety of prospective wooers). No soap. Helen strode out lithely when the bell clanged, and I couldn't even follow her. Helen standing up was even more destructive than Helen sitting down!

After a few more seconds of seeing Helen at the next meeting, I was frantic! My mind was already swirling with thoughts of her, my appetite had begun to be affected, I was beginning to actually know how an insomniac feels... and, to the extreme dissatisfaction of Miss R. O. Dil, I began to forget answering my name at roll call. I thought, another week of this run-around and I'll be talking to myself on the street! Unless I can do something about it... like, perhaps, sitting next to her, or behind her but not, for the love of Mike, in front of her. And so the maneuver started. It still didn't pan out. How the heck can you establish a beach-head when there's no beach? Every chair surrounding my dream dome was occupied. It was a cold pitch.

I thought I'd have a break at last when I'd made myself a bit notorious by having to be called constantly to sit in front of the prof. Surely, I marvelled, she'd notice me now! And so everytime I wanted to be publicized, why, I'd merely make a racket from my seat at the rear and, sure enough, Miss R. O. Dil's commanding voice would demand that I sit up front.

What a goon, her eyes said instead.

Oh well, there are other chestnuts (or was it irons?) in the fire, I thought. But unless something hot comes up — there won't even be a fire anymore! All my madcap schemes, crack-brained and precarious, fizzled off like a stale glass of soda. The ferment was bottled for a time, and now it was getting to be aged, or bonded, as they say in the distillery business. Oh Helen,



I groaned, after I nearly flunked my mid-term exams for you!

The real break — I imagined — came when the prof announced one day that there would be a weekend excursion. Why, she even made me a sort of class treasurer (it was then that I knew why bill collectors die young). Well, the anguish of the job of chasing after stubborn excursionists and broke classmates was transcended by the prospect of being able to talk with Helen finally. I had decided to make a heroic last try. This time the plans were more carefully laid, from the opening remarks (which would open our acquaintance) down to the

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Manila Calling Cebu

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Manding did not seem to understand. She must get up and ascertain if, if — she sank her head into the pillow.

"It was one awful storm," it was Doro's voice in the veranda. "When I recalled that Ma'm Pamonte had a headache, and might be late, I went to the schoolhouse, fearful that that naughty lad of mine would wander off with the rest of the kids. The rain blew harder instead and the winds shook the trees terribly, that I decided to stay till after the tempest was over."

"The children," somebody asked, "did they not cry all over you?"

"Oh, no. They thought it was fun. We even played hide and seek."

There was general laughter.

"Some parents came to take the children away," Doro continued, "but I advised them to wait till the storm subsided."

"Say, Doro, how clever is your boy?" one of the men wanted to know.

"Huh? As clever as I am. Says two plus two is live. Isn't that cute?"

Elisa smiled in spite of herself. These people — these dear good people — serious, gay, human, all human. They gave her back her life and with it, another chance. The tears came, and she buried her face in her pillow.

"What is it, child?" Manding asked.

"Nothing," Elisa whispered.

Manding touched her forehead and stroke her hair tenderly.

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last lines of dialogue and oratorics, including the ad libs (which would clinch things — I thought).

I couldn't wait for the weekend to come last enough. When finally it staggered in, I was feeling like a knight going into a pitched battle with ten dragons and a row of windmills after that. Dressed and perfumed like any lovestick, gibbering adult-lescent (that's a combination college sophomore, wallflower and deadbeat), I sallied out to where the trucks were parked waiting for the excursionists. If I could only manipulate things so I could sit beside her, I thought... she knows by now: it shouldn't be difficult to begin... well, she smiled at me last week, maybe there's

sor, NIMIA DOROTHEO, who is going to kiss her Cebu days goodbye by enrolling in a Manila university come June... DELIA SAGUIN, snooping around for Campusrats... LUZ MANCAO SANDIEGO, here to do the Fair-way... MIKE CELDRAN, an intern at the PGH... JIMMY DUMON, plodding out of Quiapo, heaping with bundles... Mrs. SALUD SANTOS, walking down the Elizabeth's gangplank... EMMA DEL ROSARIO, LUDY AND ROSE MORALES, Central Marketing, Shinbusters DE JESUS, POMAR, QUINO, BALLESTEROS, VALMAYOR, et al. of William Lines XI... 1950 USC ROTC Commandant, Major JUAN, on duty at FT. MCKINLEY...

No tour of Manila would be complete without a trip to Balara. Traipsing around the place, we caught glimpses of JUAN TANATO, a Society of St. Paul seminarian... ROSITA TY, USC campus cynosure... Miss BUENCONSEJO (we're ashamed to admit her first name escapes us for a moment), an ex-USC ROTC kaydette gal... CAMILO DEJORAS, playing bings with relatives... SOCRATES PILAPIL, a C. E. Junior at MIT. Esquiring the GURBUXANI sisters were GEORGE ARCILLA, BRAULIO ARRIOLA, DOMINGO ZABALA, EMETERIO ALLEME — all sporting the Ft. McKinley army cut. They say they've got quite a team in camp, spearheaded by "cover-boy" SAGARDUI, DIONALDO, RUBI, and ARRIOLA. Watching passers-by from the Baby Quezon Terrace were MOMMY CAMACHO and her kid, CAROLINA.

To escape the Manila summer heat, we boarded a BAL bus for Baguio. Within an hour, the Central Plains lay sprawling before us. Luzon's sore spot was peaceful enough, what with BCTs at every

hope... by golly, it's now or never!

They were there already. They were chattering and laughing, expectant, eager — and perfectly at ease. It would be quite a day! Then the teacher arrived. Miss Roberta O. Dil, with two sisters, a cousin, a maid and about a half dozen invited friends (what, no pet dog? I mused). And we went off — all but Helen.

She didn't come along.

turn of the road. In Bulacan, we passed orchard after orchard of mangos and towering bamboo grooves. The smell of burnt sugar cane engulfed us when we hit Panganga. Next stop was Tarlac, CPR's home province. Upon crossing the Florida Bridge, longest span in the Islands, we knew we were already in Pangasinan, the beyaco province. From here, we began the slow climb, zigzagging our way to the Pines City. The air gradually became cooler and cooler. One-lane bridges, down-to-earth road signs like "Drive like hell and you'll be in hell," and flagpoles in multi-colored outfits fleeted by. A few minutes more and then, we were in the heart of the Simla of the Philippines — truly the cleanest city this side of the globe.

From the Kennon Hotel where we roomed during our stay, we lost no time in trekking to the SVD quarters at Sunnyside. Lady Luck must have been with us for all the SVD Fathers then on vacation were in, it being dinnertime. Because they were on retreat, we merely got passing nods from FR. WROCKLAGE, FR. CREMERS, FR. LAZO, and FR. FLORESCA. But FR. SZMUTKO and FR. TSAO lorsook their chow if only to be able to say howdy to us. In the course of our tee-a-tee, we learned that Atty. AURELIO C. FERNANDEZ and FABIAN VILLORIA were recent visitors, that LOURDES DEJORAS is a member of the Canonesses of St. Augustine order. Taking a bus back, who do you think sat beside us? Former USC Rector, Fr. DINGMAN, who stunned us when he called us by our given name. Gosh, after these years! With Mrs. E. C. MORALES, we dropped by the convent of the Most Blessed Sacrament to call on NELLIE PATALINGHUG. She's a Pink Sister now, whatever that means. Downtown, we met Atty. MAX MACEREN, whose job with the Court of Appeals keeps him headquartered in this city.

Well, we've travelled many a mile, seen all sorts of people and places; yet, for us, Cebu is still the best place there is. Come dust, bugs, flies, and what have you, it will always be home — and that spells all the difference.