THE OUTLAW

The Story of a Girl Who Didn't Want to Marry

By ETHEL LLOYD PATT.

CHAPTER LII

Several weeks passed during which I did not see Hugh Trotter. I wondered whether he was angry with me. The last time I had seen him was in a roadhouse when I had been dining with Mr. Dayton. Just as I had gone to lift my glass of campagne to my lips Hugh had come into the restaurant with two other men. Something in the hurt and surprised expression of his face had caused me to put my glass down without touching the wine.

Since then I had not heard from him. I began to think he was really angry. This, I told myself, was unreasonable on his part. After all, he had no real claim on me. He had been a good friend; that was all.

His silence and his absence hurt me more than I could have cared to admit. Also, in the meantime, many things had been happening to me.

A new interest and scarcely an admirable one, had come into my life. There could be no doubt now that Mr. Dayton, president of the Champion Film Company, was strongly attached to me. So strongly that his common sense was imperilled. He had made it plain to me that he would be willing to divorce his wife and marry me if I felt I could care for him. And at the time I was tempted by the thought—though not tempted because I personally liked Mr. Dayton.

But it was scarcely to be wondered at that a vision of jewels and motors and unending spending money should dazzle the vision of a girl who had been brought up in the humblest kind of a home. And so, as the weeks passed, I permitted myself to spend more and more time with Mr. Dayton.

I accepted several of his dinner invitations. I motored with him. Most of the time he discoursed upon my charms.

Then, one evening, when I was resting at home after a hard day's work in the studio, Hugh came to see me. After our greetings we came at once to the point about which we were both a little self-conscious. It was I who broached the subject.

"Mother has been wondering why you haven't been out to see us," I said, my own pride too hurt to permit Hugh to know that I had missed him.

"I have been pretty busy," he told me. "A lot of night work. It happens that way sometimes on my newspaper. And, anyhow, I didn't know whether you would be glad to see me."

"Why not?" I asked with an effort to be casual.

"Well," said Hugh, "about all I have to give you is my time, you know I haven't automobiles and I can't buy you wine. My income doesn't warrant it."

"I don't care anything about automobiles and wine," I declared, my face flushing.

"Why go in for them then, Nell?" queried Hugh. "To tell you the honest truth, when I saw you out at that place I was a little surprised. You know, you didn't seem to be having a very bad time. You didn't look bored. And, by the way, do you often allow old men to hold your hand in public places? As I said, I might not be able to buy you much else, my dear, but I have most freely given you my respect."

The quick anger which comes of a guilty conscience, flamed in me.

"And there is no reason why you shouldn't give me your respect," I said. "I wasn't doing anything bad. If you want to know the truth Mr. Dayton wants to marry me. I suppose that's all right, isn't it?

Hugh's face grew a little whiter, but he looked at me steadily.

"Of course it's all right," he said, "if you want to marry him. I thought he had one wife—but I suppose I'm wrong."

I figgeted for a moment uneasily. "Well, he has one wife," I admitted, "but if I want to marry him he'll divorce her."

"Oh I see," said Hugh. "Very nice. Just the sort of thing a clean, sweet girl should get herself mixed up in. However, I repeat, if that is what you want, I would take it, if I were you. I happen to believe that you wanted something better, Nell. But I'm wrong, as far as I'm concerned, got to it. That's all I've got to say. 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, my dear."

Suddenly, for some reason I could not explain, tears filled my eyes.

"Oh, I don't know what you're talking about," I said. "I didn't say I was going to marry him, did I? I just said he wanted me to."

"Well," said Hugh easily, "we seldom dally long with thoughts that dont interest us. I fancy I have the situation clearly in my head."

"By the way, did you read this morning's paper? Did you see that article about the strike?" And for the rest of the evening I could not get Hugh back to any personal discussion of any kind. Yet, somehow, he managed to convey to me that he was not as interested in me as once he had been. That somehow, I had failed him. The knowledge of what I thought he felt stung me. I tried to chatter on with him as though I did not care. The effort even to me sounded hollow. When he had gone, and I was in my room alone, my cheeks were very scarlet and the tears were very near the surface.

"Oh, what's the matter with me!" I said to myself as I jerked at my long black hair with my comb, impatiently. "Oh, what's the matter with me? I don't know what I want!"

Chapter LIII

I was enjoying an income of fifty dollars a week as a moving picture actress with the Champion Film Company. Because Mr. Dayton, the president of the company, was, for the moment at least, my slave, many favors were being thrown my way. The company paid for riding and swimming lessons for me and had bought me a good riding habit and a bathing suit.

Incidentally the wholesome exercise was developing me physically and making me rosier and younger looking every day. To all outward appearances, at least, I was a most fortunate young woman.

I often had Mr. Dayton's auto practically at my disposal. My riding habit was kept at the studio and my employer insisted that since I could not go through the streets dressed for my riding that I should use his car. Also, on several occasions, when he said I was overworked, he insisted that I take the car and drive my mother for a few hours in the afternoon's sunshine.

Apparently, Mr. Dayton had made up his mind that I was worth winning and that I was not to be won lightly. He made no attempts to caress me. At rare intervals, he would perhaps touch my hand—that was all. After the one time in which he had lost his self-control and had kissed me violently, when we were out automobiling one evening, he never attempted a similiar demonstration. If he had, I am sure I would have awakened more quickly to the knowledge that affection for him was out of the question. My instincts, as a young girl, were too strongly against any alliance with a man of his age. But as he was keeping himself in the background and making me feel only his thoughts for my comfort and pleasure, unconsciously I was slipping, day by day, further into his toils. And all this while I silenced my mother's protests with what I believed to be cold reasoning.

"Mother!" I would exclaim, "these things are nothing to me to take from Mr. Dayton. They are all in the course of my work. Why, he doesn't even send me flowers—to me personally I mean. You have no idea the awful bills some girls run up for stockings and hats and things like that and charge them to the film company. Now, please don't worry, mother. I'm seldom alone with Mr. Dayton. You can trust me."

But mother would shake her head. "You may not think it, dearie,' she would answer, "but it is an awful thing to show a girl all the pretty things she always coveted and expect her not to reach out her hand for them if there is any way of getting them. Nellie, child, the best way to beat temptation is not to stand and stare at it. Turn your back, my girlie, and walk away."

But I didn't heed mother's advice. Instead, more and more I accepted Mr. Dayton's invitations, until finally on several occasions, I even stayed in town in the evening that I might dine with him or go to the theatre. Naturally, all this led to still further folly.

I began to spend sums of money upon my clothes that were not warranted, inasmuch as a very large percentage of my earnings necessarily went to the upkeep of our home. When I paid ten or twelve dollars for a pair of shoes or fifty dollars for a dress, somebody at home had to suffer. For my father's meagre wages were dwindling fast. He was drinking very heavily now. It was a good week when he was able to work half-time.

The money I earned was educating my little brothers and sisters. I was giving them warm clothes and putting shoes and stockings on their feet. I had no right to spend it in the way I did.

But after my first party with Mr. Dayton, when he had taken me to a small restaurant to dine, I told myself it ws necessary to be suitably gowned for the occasion. What I overlooked was that it was far from necessary that I ever should have gone at all. So—dressed one night in a suit for which I had saved for weeks and the finest of white kid boots, and in a well made hat, I fared forth for the evening, to meet my employer.

In other words I, a girl who could little afford such luxuries or clothes, dressed out of all proportion to my income, went to meet a man who was my employer—already married. How I imagined anything but ill could come of such a thing I don't understand.

Chapter LIV

On the very night that I went out to dine, then to the theatre with Mr. Dayton, I came home to face a situation which awakened me at once to some realization of where my actions were taking me.

I had saved for weeks. At least I had bought myself a pretty and expensive suit, a good hat and a pair of shoes, the money for all of which but a very short time ago would have fed our family for weeks.

I was earning fifty dollars a week. During the first period of our affluence I had not kept more than ten dollars a week for myself. Now, because through Mr. Dayton I was being shown a more luxurious world, I had come more to covet luxury.

Without realizing, I had been keeping more and more of my money for myself; spending it upon things where were not consistent with our general mode of living.. I might at least have saved some of it. Had I not been selfish or had I had any foresight, I would have tried to get together a bank account. I would have saved in case of father's illness, or in the case of some need for it for the children.

Instead, I had spent all I could lay my hands upon for fine feathers for myself. Andt then came the night when, after having dined with Mr. Dayton and having attended a comic opera with him, I returned to my home to find mother waiting up for me.

I had let myself in quiet with my latch key, imagining that everybody in the house was asleep. Instead, from the darkened sitting room, mother came toward me.

"Well, dearie," she said, "did you have a good time? You certainly looked pretty when you went out. It hardly seems possible that you are my own little Nell."

"Oh, I did have a good time, mother," I told her. 'For dinner I had things to eat I never tasted before. I'll tell you all about them to morrow. I had some cheese, fixed in the most wonderful way. I think I can do it for you. But why did you wait up, mother? Have you been sitting there long?"

"Just since your father went to bed," mother told me. "I don't know. I can't get over the feeling dearie that a girl's mother should be waiting for her at night, no matter how late she stays out. I don't want you to get the idea, Nellie, that you're not responsible to any one."

We had moved into the hall by this time, and the light shone upon mother's face more distinctly.

"It is sweet of you, dearie," I said as I slipped an arm around her, "but you're not strong enough, mother." And then, as I saw her face even more clearly. "Why, you look awfully tired, dear," I said "There are circles under your eyes, black, away down deep."

"It's nothing," said mother, and turned toward the stairs.,

But I noticed that her hand trembled on the rail. Suddenly, after going up a step or two she sat down.

I knelt beside her. In the waning light, her face looked very drawn.

"Why, mother," I whispered "are you in pain. What's the matter with you?"

"Well, Nellie dear," said mother "I don't feel so awful well. I have a bit of a pain—but it will pass."

After sitting quietly for a few moments, she managed to get her breath again and went upstairs.

I helped her to undress and get into bed. But I told myself I would call the doctor the first thing in the morning. I knew that something must be radically wrong.

Next morning, on my way to the studio, I called up Hugh and asked for the telephone number of the young doctor he had brought up to see mother once before. Hugh gave me the number.

"Mother seems so much worse, Dr. Parker," I said. "Don't you think you'd better come out and see her?"

"Well, I told you, Miss Birney," came the doctor voice "that your mother would never be well until she underwent an operation. She has been needing it for years. I don't see how she has stood the pain as well as she has. I told you she evidently was not cared for properly after the birth of your baby sister. You said yourself there was no one with her at that time. I gave her a tonic, when I saw her But I told her, and I told you, that she was in immediate need of an operation."

"Oh, my goodness." I exclaimed "Why didn't mother say something? Why has it not been arranged?"

"She did say something," the doctor replied. "She said at the time that 'operations cost money, and that she couldn't afford it. She said you were not earning a salary that would warrant—" he paused for a word, and then—"exactly what she said, Miss Birney," he continued "was that you could not afford such extravagances."

"Oh how foolish! How foolish!" I cried. "I didn't know! Of course she must be operated on at once. I'll get the money. How much do I need?"

"Why, I told your mother," said Dr. Parker, "that ordinarily such an operation as she requires would cost perhaps $500. But that I knew a first-class surgeon, who also knew Mr. Trotter. Since the case was as it is, I'm sure he would be willing to undertake your mother's case for what you feel you could afford to pay—say $100.

"One hundred dollars," I said huskily. I was just the sum I had spent on clothes for myself. I hadn't needed them. And all the time my mother had been bearing her own pain. Bearing it without a word to me. The thought stung me to some realization of my folly.

Chapter LV

It was brought home to me with one thrust how ill mother really was. Naturally it worried me. The doctor had told me over the telephone that she must have been in pain for some time and that only one thing would relieve her—an operation. He said he could get a first-class surgeon who, through Hugh Trotter's influence would be willing to undertake her case for one hundred dollars. Of course, there would be the hospital expenses.

Meanwhile, my burden of anxiety was added to by a guilty conscience. I did not have the hundred dollars. What was worse, I would have had it if only I had not spent it upon finery for myself. The thought of my pretty dress and hat made me miserable. I now realized to the full how selfish I had been. I told myself that if only I had used my eyes I would have seen mother's condition.

I suppose my anxiety showed in my face. Probably I went about my work in the studio more or less half-heartedly. Mr. Dayton, the president of the Champion Film Company soon noticed my preoccupation.

"Miss Birney," he sad in the tender tone which he had adopted toward me, "you're not quite yourself today. I don't want to scold, but there's no good in going on with this scene if you're not really up to it."

"Thanks" I said dully. "I'd rather work. I think I can go on. I'm just worried about mother. She's sick."

My Dayton was too much a man of the world not to realize what this might mean.

"Well, if your mother is sick," he suggested, "don't you need money?"

"That's it," I admitted, stung to the truth by his having hit upon my real difficulty. "Mother has to go to the hospital and have an operation at once and I haven't the money. If only I——"

Mr. Dayton started to interrupt me.

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"If only I hadn't spent the money on clothes," I concluded. "I would have had it. That's what is making me heart sick."

My eyes filled with tears.

"My mother is in pain," I said, "and I hadn't sense enough to see it. The money that would have made her well has gone in nonsense for me."

My Dayton laid his hand on my arm.

"Dear child," he said, "you musn't feel that way. It's natural for you to want the pretty things and you're entitled to them. After all, its your money; you earn it. But I can't see you worried like this for the sake of a few hundred dollars. It's ridiculous. How much do you need?"

"I can't take it from you," I said. "can't take money." And then a thought struck me. "But," I suggested wistfully, "if the Champion Film Company could lend it to me; couldn't it be taken from my salary in the next few months?"

"Of course," agreed Mr. Dayton, quickly. "Now, don't worry any more about it, child." He paused and frowned. "I don't want to say too much," he said, "but I do want to impress upon you that it's not fair to yourself to worry in this way. Your father should look after your mother. I don't think that any girl is called upon to give her earnings to her family. If you're doing that, it's because you're a noble little girl. But there should be a limit to the demands made upon you.'

Of course talk of this kind was a salve to my conscience. At any rate, the promise of help eased my mind from immediate worry. I was glad to know that I could go home to mother with the means at my command to care for her properly.

To my surprise I found Hugh Trotter at the house when I let myself in with my latchkey.

"Hello!" I said, "have you come out for dinner?"

"Yes," he said. "Dr. Parker told me that our mother was not quite well. I came out to see if there was anything I could do."

"Nothing at the moment,' I answered and went over and kissed mother. "But we're going to have her all right pretty soon. Dr. Parker says that she must be operated on at once. And, mother, dear, the Champon Film Company is going to lend me the money, so that you can be attended to properly at once. I'm so glad!"

"Now, Nellie, child," began mother, "I'm not going to have you spending your money on me like that."

"Please, mother,' I begged, my face flushing. "The money isn't anything."

"Miss Nell is quite right,' put in Hugh. "You shouldn't let the money part worry you, Mrs. Birney, and for the rest, you"' see how comfortable you're going to be. I promise to come out every night and help Miss Birney look after the children while you're in the hospital. You're not to worry one bit. You'll see—I'm a splendid bachelor uncle.'

"You're a good, kind young man, that's what you are,' said my mother.

And across my mind there flashed the contrast between what Hugh offered and Mr. Dayton fain would give me.

Chapter LVI

With Hugh Trotter's help and under Dr. Parker's direction, it was arranged that my mother should go to a hospital in the city. Dr. Parker told me that once the operation was decided upon it was always better for the patient to go through with it without delay. Naturally, the thought of it from day to day, even to the bravest person, was apt to bring on a case of nerves. Although, I must say, it would have taken a very acute observer to find any fear or worry about herself in my mother's attitude. Her gratitude to me for undertaking to pay for the operation was almost pitiful.

It was a fairly trying time for me. As I had grown older and more understanding, I had come to care more and more for my mother. Perhaps because I realized more fully her bravery. If the money was to be earned to give her the care she should have, I naturally would have to continue working at the studio all day.

This left my younger brothers and sisters to their own devices. That was not so bad since they were in school and fairly well able to care for themselves with the exception of Jane. Jane would have to be looked after by the maid of all work while I was away during the day.

Certainly this was enough responsibility for a fairly young girl to shoulder. But on top of that came my father's unreasoning objections. His mind was becoming uglier and more befuddled day by day through drink. When I told him mother was ill and would have to have an operation, he protested violently.

"Once let these women think they're sick," he said. "and you hear nothing but their pains and aches for the rest of your life! All these doctors want is your money. If a woman once goes to the doctor he'll tell her there's something the matter with her, whether there is or not. Why shouldn't he? Ain't it how they earn their living? Don't talk to me! I won't have none of it in my household! Your mother has got along all right so far, and I won't have this nonsense put in her head now!"

"Father," I said, "we won't argue the matter. Mother is ill. I've had the diagnosis of a good surgeon. She's going to be operated on to relieve her of this pain. That's all there is to it."

"Well, she's not," declared my father. "Am I master in my own house or am I not?"

I refused to discuss the matter any further with him.

A few days later, after father had gone to work. I took mother to the hospital. She was not to be operated on until forty-eight hours later. Father came home very much under the influence of liquor that night and didn't even ask for her. So for the moment a scene with him was avoided.

However, I must say I worried. I didn't see just how I was to get through the next two weeks. This, in spite of the fact that Hugh came out the first night I was left alone with the children, helped to give them their dinner and kept them good natured afterwards with his humor and his stories.

He paid very little attention to me personally. And my mind was too distracted with worry over mother to think very much of my own affairs. But I couldn't help noticing and being grateful to Hugh for his patience and his thoughtfulness. After all, there was on reason why he should do so much for me. I put the thought into words.

"Nell," said Hugh, "don't you make any mistake about it. I like you first rate, and I'd do a lot for you, but, believe me, I'd do a heap more for your mother. She's a brick. If I come out here every night, don't you put any feathers in your cap. I'd do as much and more, any day, to set your mother's mind at rest about the children. She's a good scout. That's what she is!"

And to contrast with this way Mr. Dayton's advice and manner towards me.

"My poor child," he sighed, "I wish I could take you out of all this. You know I would if I could. You were made for sunshine. You'll break down under the worry of this. I wish you didn't have to go through with it."

I repeated something of this conversation to Hugh, half laughingly and half to see what he would say.

"Made for sunshine!" he snorted. "Well, then, you're made of darn poor wear, my dear. Because there's not a life in the world that hasn't some storm in it. Give me the girl who's got an umbrella every time. I suppose your boss meant that to be a compliment. But I take it that he means he wouldn't turn to you if he was in any trouble. If you were "made for sunshine,' you'd probably wilt on a good hot day."

"Well, Hugh,' I protested a little stiffly, "he certainly meant it to be a little more complimentary than you are anyhow. But I think what Mr. Dayton meant to say was that I naturally had a very happy disposition. Im sure that's not very insulting."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" said Hugh. "Take that stuff at its face value. If you like it, lap it up—that's all I've got to say, but in my humble opinion when a girl's in a pickle, the thing to do is to lend a hand and pull her out if you can; not tell her how sweet she looks in her distress."

"But kind words are nice, too," said.

"Sure!" agreed Hugh heartily, "the only trouble with them is you can't eat them." And then in a matter of fact tone: "You better go upstairs and see what's the matter with Jane; she's yelling her head off. When I came in tonight she was licking a brush one of the painters left. I took it away from her, because I had a hunch it might not agree with her."

Chapter LVII

The first week after mother left home to be operated upon passed without any dire calamity. The best of it all was that mother went through with her trial and came out the other side in far better condition than even I had dared to hope. The doctor told me that her splendid reaction was because of her courage.

"She doesn't know what the word fear means, Miss Birney," he told me. "We knew so well how much we had to hurt her and the pain she would have to suffer that I think we were all a little nervous; but your mother, bless her, never winked an eye. When she came out of the ether, the first thing we knew she was cheering us all up as though we were the patients and she were the doctor. That's a wonderful little mother you have."

Of course I went to see her every day. Mr. Dayton insisted that I use his automobile, and this offer I accepted. It enabled me to run down from the studio to the hospital quickly during the noon hour and thus have more time with mother. For, in the afternoon as soon as my work was through, I had to go directly home on account of the children. Every night almost as soon as I reached the house, Hugh Trotter was there too. And he was perfectly dear with the children. Already they adored him. Little Jane would crawl on his knees and chatter to him almost in a more friendly way than she did with me.

As for my older brother, Tom, he was never tired of Hugh's tales of the office of the Sphere and his life as a reporter. Meanwhile, mother grew better constantly.

"Nellie," she said on the third day I went to see her. "don't you go to pitying me. I'm having the grandest sort of a time. I never had so much waiting on in all my life. The bed is so comfortable and so clean and I haven't half the pain I used to have.

"Dearie," she said, with her little whimsical smile, "it's just a grand party I'm having, that's all."

Of course all the nurses on mothers floor adored her. She had very special attention. Partly this was due to Hugh Trotter's influence through his newspaper and with the surgeon who had operated on mother, but partly it was due to mother's own sweet way.

Every time I went to see mother in the hospital I found nurses from other cases, who had stolen away from their charges, just to run in and pat mother's hand, or straighten her pillow, or tell her some bright little story. She was the pet of the place.

"We'd like to keep her here all the time," the head nurse told me. "You've no idea what she does for us all. She's just on of those women who radiates kindness and good sense. You're a lucky girl, Miss Birney, to have that woman for your mother."

The head nurse was a fairly tall, strongly built, fine looking woman. She was a Scotch-Canadian, with a flare of dark red in her cheeks, and soft waving hair that was beginning to turn a little gray at her temples. She had the straight gray eyes of the Scotch and their capable way with her.

From the first I had been attracted to her, though a little afraid to say how much I liked her and warted to be friends. I felt that I had less to give her than she had to give me. But instead—

"I'm awfully interested in your work, Miss Birney,' she said to me one day when I went down to see mother. "If you don't think I'm too old a woman and would bore you. I wish you'd come out to luncheon with me, if you can—or better yet we might go to my apartment for tea on my day off. Would you care to?"

"I'd love it," I said. "Thank you for asking me—and"—I added tentatively—"I'd really like to wait until your day off, so that I could go to your home; I think it would be pleasant."

As a matter of fact the head nurse's invitation opened a vista to me of the kind of friendship for which I always had longed. The girls in the studio where I worked had not been attracted to me any more than I was attracted to them. Moreover, Mr. Dayton's marked interest in me had antagonized them, even if I would have cared to be on more intimate terms with the rest of the company. I feel sure they misjudged me and believed something about the president of the Champion Film Company and myself which was not true. But, anyway, the result was that I had made no friends at all since I had worked in the studio.

The head nurse of the hospital was a woman of poise and breeding. Instinctively I felt this. Also she had a sweet and sunny nature. It would be a pleasure to know her better, and, to clap the climax, she was an unmarried woman. A woman, I told myself with my own ideas in life. One who had decided that marriage was a folly which inevitably brought pain and trouble in its wake.

I was to find out now really different was her point of view.

Chapter LVIII

I accepted Miss McIntosh's invitation to tea. She was the head nurse in the hospital where my mother was recovering from an operation. As a matter of fact, I really believe the nurse's first advances to me were prompted more by admiration for mother than because she took any special interest in my life. However, she had asked me a number of questions about the moving picture business.

When I queried curiously, "You would not like to become a moving picture actress, would you Miss McIntosh?" she replied, "Well, in the first place, of course I am not fitted for it. I have none of the qualities of an actress. We Scotch seldom have. We are not sufficiently mobile.

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CORNS

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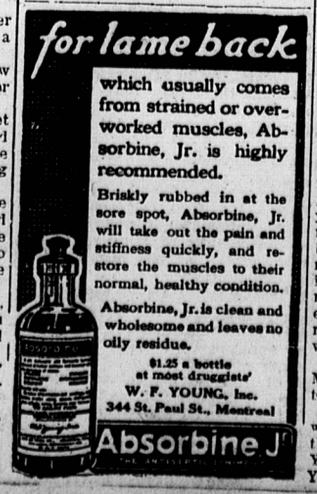

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Accept only an "unbroken package" of "Bayer Tablets of Aspirin," which contains directions and dose worked out by physicians during 21 years and proved safe by millions for Headache, Earache, Toothache, Neuralgia, Colds, Rheumatism, Neuritis, Lumbago, and pain generally. Made in Canada.

Handy tin boxes of 12 tablets cost but a few cents—Larger packages.

Aspirin is the trade mark (registered in Canada) of Bayer Manufacture of Monoaceticacidester of Salicylicacid. While it is well known that Aspirin means Bayer manufacture, to assist the public against imitations, the Tablets of Bayer Company will be stamped with their general trade mark, the "Bayer Cross."

Aunt Emma Is So Romantic. —By Herbert Johnson