

"What a man!" breathed Sally when she saw Billie for the first time.

She had always known that she was big. But Billie! He towered over everyone in the lunch room when he clomped in. She stared at him, all one hundred and seventy pounds of her alert and tremendously interested.

And it was muscle, too, she noted with approval. His Texas A. & M. cadet uniform fitted his immense frame superbly. The brass buttons winked and glittered as he came across the room; the Sam Browne belt was like a brownbacked flexible mirror crossing the clean, heavy khaki tunic.

He sat down at one of the tables, adjusted the razor-like creases of his trousers carefully.

The chair groaned—made a valient effort to support his great weight, then gave way completely. He sprawled on the floor, shawing it, rattling the glasses at the surrounding tables.

One of the oil-spattered spectators laughed.

Billie climbed to his feet. Wrath moved over his face like slow clouds piling up for a storm. He took a deep breath and the buttons of his tunic jumped forward. Clenching his fists, he said softly, "Did I hear som'budy laugh?"

He was Thor with his hammer poised, and the sudden quiet which filled the room was an intense thing. Not even the oil field workers, noted for their readiness to do battle, would oppose this khaki-clad man mountain.

Sally leaned toward him, long-lashed blue eyes sparkling, as he picked up his cap, stepped over and sat down at the counter. "What will you have, big man?"

His round eyes took in the exposed portion of her generous frame. Then he grinned. The confidential grin that exists between two Big People.

"Gimme four hamburgers and—to start with, one cup o' Cawfee."

Sally laughed in genuine delight. This was a man! She was noted for her hamburgers and sandwiches, but she never before took as much care in preparing four hamburgers as she did these for Billie.

She was amply rewarded by the manner in which he ate them. He was slow about it; slow, and easy, and very thoughtful, down to the last little crumbs. And the evident admiration for her hamburgers increased the rapid thumping of her heart.

"May I say," he smiled, "that those hamburgers were, without the slightest doubt, the best I have eaten in many a day."

"Thank you, Stranger. Come in again sometime."

"You can rest assured that I will, ma'm."

His enormous bulk filled the doorway—and then he was gone. And a great temporary regret filled her soul. Regret because men like him did not come in often. Temporary because she knew that he would be back. She knew the kind of food that big folks liked. And she knew that instinctively he had known it.

He did come back. Began to come back often.

He introduced himself the third time that he came in. His name was Billie Thomas Jefferson Rugglesby. He was named "Billie" after his mother—after his mother and father had almost divorced over it. The "Thomas Jefferson" was a concession to his father's political ideals. He had grown up on an old plantation "just outside" Greensburg, Georgia.

All this he explained in slow and serious voice. He had spent the Thanksgiving holidays with his room-mate, who lived in Corsicana, and there he had met the one and only girl. And from what Sally gathered, this girl was all that Sally was suddenly afraid that she would be: Small and Blonde, and very, very beautiful.

BIG PEOPLE

Billie was a senior at A. & M., and he hitch-hiked to Corsicana every week-end to visit this girl. And, since it was not far from Corsicana, and directly on the highway to College Station, Billie began to make it a point to stop at Sally's Superb Sandwich Stand.

It was not long before Thelma, Billie's girl in Corsicana, began to detect a change in him, a certain undercurrent of unrest that was definitely disturbing.

It worried her. It was like she told Gertie—Gertie was the beauty parlor operator who marcelled her hair every Friday. She knew all about Thelma and Billie.

"It's just like I say, Gertie," Thelma exclaimed, as she started on a fresh stick of Juick Fruit. "Here I am. Here I am. I mean the way I used to be . . ."

Gertie nodded understandingly. "Of course."

"Popular! My goodness, I bet I had four steady fellas before I met Billie. But what happened? What happened? Gertie made sympathetic noises in her throat.

"Of course, my other boy friends wanted dates at Thanksgiving. But there I was. Entertaining a King Kong. After all—I couldn't act rude. You know—after all—he is shot-putt champion of the Southwest." She giggled. "I don't know where they put the shot, but it seems to be aw'f'ly important!"

Gertie laughed politely.

"But there I was. All that my other boy friends could see Christmas was this nice big mammoth following me around. He just scared 'em all away. Now where am I? I ask you?"

"Getting the swellest wave in town!" They both laughed at Gertie's wit.

"Don't be sil', Gert! But things are coming to a head next week-end. He's been acting strange lately. And he's just got to propose next week, Gertie! He's just got to! Mamie got married last week y' know—and Ruby Kennedy is announcing her engagement Thursday. And, or, the way she acts now! So Snooty!"

I just feel left out of our old crowd now, not being even engaged. Sides, I'd like being engaged to a champion athlete—it sounds so nice to tell everybody. And he is sweet, and kind and cute—even if he is so big. Y' know, really and truly, I think that I may be in love with him."

"Sure enough?"

"Yes, I do!"

"My father's cousin married a big man like that, Thelma, and—do you know what?"

Thelma popped the chewing gum with her thumb and teeth, shook her head.

"He weighed two hundred and seventy-nine pounds when they got married and he gained three hundred pounds in the next three years!"

The wad of gum in Thelma's mouth dropped back to her tonsils; she jerked upright, coughing.

Gertie giggled. "But it was all right after all. He got a job as a fat man in a side show, and he's been making good money ever since. After all, there isn't any depression in the freak business as I know of."

Thelma sat motionless, her carefully drawn mouth open wide. Horrible thoughts concerning the future with a side show filled her mind. She put them out resolutely.

"I'm going to marry him," she said somewhat hoarsely, "For better and not for worse, too! . . . Oh, if I could only get a proposal out of him. . ."