

Business Before Blueberries*Continued from previous page*

"Well, I might have, eventually. I'll never sell now unless they meet my price. I don't like to be pushed."

"You are a stubborn idiot!"

He stared at her. "You... you DID say it before! You weren't humming."

"I said it. I also said this place would make a beautiful golf course, and it would. If you had any sense at all, you'd sell out now before they lowered their bid."

"Not me. Not while the blueberries hold out."

"Blueberries! Can't you see you're standing in the way of the lake's ever really being anything?"

"Frankfurter stands and gasoline stations aren't my idea of what an earthly paradise should look like. I like it here just the way it is. If I weren't so broke, I wouldn't sell out at all." Jason Pell sighed suddenly. "You know, I'm awfully tired of blueberries. I'd give a ton of them just now for a good solid steak!"

"Sell out and you can have a cow."

He shook his head sadly. "That wouldn't do. Sign of weakness, and I'd worry about that part of it so much I wouldn't be able to finish the horns."

JILL STROLLED out on the lawn. The moon was full, ladling dripping silver over the trees and shrubs, and drowning its moonbeams in the shining lake. But Jill couldn't appreciate the moon just then. There was an uneasy feeling between her shoulder blades which, wriggle them as she would, wouldn't go away. She'd just come from an excellent dinner, but the juicy parsley-sprinkled steak had gone almost untasted. It was a little unfortunate, perhaps, that it had to be steak that night, for with the first appetizing hint of it the specter of Jason Pell sitting down in his bare room to a bowl of blueberries and milk had arisen. And said specter just wouldn't depart. Jill remembered only too well how empty a bowl of blueberries could leave you, and, though she certainly wasn't worried about him, still slow starvation had never appealed to her as a method of disposing of an enemy. That uneasy feeling grew stronger and stronger, and Jill finally decided something had to be done.

She went back to the house and sought out the darkened pantry. Rummaging in the refrigerator, she found a slab of cold roast beef and some cheese. She added rye bread, wrapped the lot in a napkin, and went out the side door, headed for the lake. She took a paddle from the boat-

house, launched the canoe as silently as she could, and started out.

She found Pell's dock easily in the bright moonlight and started up the path. There was a light in the cabin. She knocked.

"Hullo?" a startled voice said. "Who's there?"

"Me," Jill said.

She heard footsteps and the door was suddenly flung open. Pell stared at her. Then he said, "Ah! Nice of you to drop in. A fine neighborly spirit." He looked a little anxious. "It isn't just to borrow a cup of sugar, is it? Because we haven't any."

"I brought you some stuff," Jill said.

He unfolded the napkin on the table and gaped at the food. Then he said, "Sorry I can't accept this. Pride won't allow me to take anything from the enemy camp," and took a knife from a drawer, cut the bread, carved some roast beef, made a sandwich, and bit into it. "Mmmm. Want some?"

Jill shook her head. "I hope you understand that I only brought this over because there are certain business tactics I don't approve of. I'm still on the other side. I still think you're thoughtless, stubborn, and altogether..."

"...hungry. Sure you won't join me?"

"Well," Jill said, "not this stuff, but if you have any more blueberries."

"Millions." He disappeared into the kitchen.

Jill examined the open book on the table. She looked up as he came out. "Making a study of them?"

He set the bowl down before her. "Found that book on the dock this evening. Must have been left by some picnickers. Very interesting. Did you know that the care and feeding of blueberries is a thriving business?"

"No."

He nodded solemnly. "It is. Did you know that they grow on sour land, and if you burn them over the year before and clear the bushes off and spray them when the berries are getting red and spray them again and use hand rakes and winnow them and some other things which I haven't got to yet, you get quite a crop?"

Jill said, "These are good. Could I have some more milk, please?"

He poured. "To resume, if you have any sort of luck you can get a ton and a half of blueberries to every acre. I have about one hundred acres. They sell from four cents a pound in the canning factories to over thirty cents a pound for good ones uncanned. And in chapter three, the book assures me there is always a demand for the stuff. Averaging, say, ten cents a pound, that would be a yearly income. Have you got a pencil and paper?"

"No," Jill said, finishing the blueberries, "and I've got to be getting back."

"I wonder," he mused on the path down to the dock, "where a fellow could get some capital. I'd need capital."

"Sell out," Jill suggested. "You'd have capital then."

"Yes, but I wouldn't have this place."

"That's the point," Jill said. "And it would make a nice golf course. Well, goodbye." She pushed off from the dock.

"Hey!" Pell called after her.

"What?"

"Coming over tomorrow night?"

"No."

"But I expect to be even hungrier tomorrow night. I

can tell."

"Oh, well," Jill sighed, "I'll see what I can do."

Jill found she could do very well. A bit of judicious bribing of the cook, who liked her anyway, and there was always a ready supply of food to be taken to indigent blueberry-eaters. Of course, she could have had the cook take it to Pell himself, but the exercise the moonlight paddle provided was an excellent excuse. Besides all this, she had developed a curious worry she could not shake off. She was terribly afraid that Jason Pell would get thin if he didn't eat regularly. Why his getting thin or fat should bother her she couldn't understand, but it did; so much so that when she was prevented from taking food to him for two days by a driving rainstorm, she was nearly frantic with anxiety. Despite the food, however, she gave him clearly to understand that her interest in him was a result solely of her resentment at her uncle's business methods, and it was a definite concession when, one morning, observing him fishing in one corner of the lake, she headed the speedboat over.

"Hullo!" she called. "Any luck?"

"Sure!" He grinned at her. "Swell!"

"Where are the fish?"

He held up a small tin can. "It's in here."

"It?"



"It."

"But I thought you said the fishing was swell?"

"Not the fishing," he corrected. "My luck. Got a letter this morning. Offer of a job with a patent attorney's firm down in Montreal."

"You...you're leaving then?" Jill was a little shocked at the flatness of her own voice. It seemed to her that she should have been exulting at the cleared way for the golf course. But, somehow, she'd liked those evenings on Pell's battered dock – the long talks about things like stars and the sky and books and philosophies of living things she'd somehow never got around to discussing with Don. "When

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