



ReaderWorks™

Publisher



Our campus is not a giant, factory-size job with a particle accelerator and a two-hundred-man football squad, but it's chummy. The chummiest - thing -about it is the bulletin board in Old Main. You may find a stray glove fastened up with a thumbtack, or you can pick up a baby-sitting job if a married veteran doesn't beat you to it. Or you can buy a car cheap if you tow it from where it gave up. There are items like: "Will the person who removed a windbreaker from the Library please return same and receive a punch in the nose?"

But the main interest is the next four sections, "A-to-G," "H-to-L," "M-to-T," and "U-to-Z," for they are what we use in place- of the U.S. Postal "Service" at enormous saving in postage. Everybody inspects his section before class in the morning. If there's nothing for you, at least you can see who does get mail and sometimes from whom. You'll look again at lunch time and before going home. A person with a busy social life will check the board six or seven times.

Mine isn't that busy but I frequently find a note from Cliff. He knows I like to, so he indulges me. It's fun to get mail on the board.

There was a girl I used to run across because we were both in "H-to-L"--Gabrielle Lamont. I would say hello and she would say hello and there it stopped. Gabrielle was a sad one--not a total termite, but dampish. Her face had the usual features but she let them live their own lives, not even lipstick. She skinned her hair back and her clothes looked as if they had been bought in France. Not Paris--just France. There's a difference.

Which they probably were. Her father is in Modern Languages and he sent her three years to school in France. It did something. I don't think she ever had a date.

We both had eight o'clocks and she would check "H-to-L" every morning when I did and then go quietly away. There was never a note for her.

Until this one morning... Georgia Lammers, who is~ purely carnivorous, took a note off the board as Gabrielle came up. I heard this soft little voice say, "Excuse me.

That's mine." ~-

Georgia said, "Huh? Don't be silly!"

Gabrielle looked scared but she put out her hand. "Read the name, please. You've made a mistake."

Georgia snatched the note away. She is a junior and wouldn't bother to speak to me if Daddy weren't on the staff--but I'm .not afraid of her. "Do it," I insisted. "Let's see the name."

Georgia stuck the envelope in my face and snapped, "Read it yourself, snoopy!"

"Gabrielle Lamont," I read Out loud. "Hand it over, Georgia."

"What?" she yelped, and looked at it. Her cheeks got very red.

"Hand it over," I repeated.

"Well!" said Georgia. "Anybody can make a mistake!" She flung the note at Gabrielle and flounced off.

Gabrielle picked it up. "Thanks," she whispered.

"Usual Yellow Cab Service," I said. "A pleasure"-- which it was. Georgia Lammers is popular in a cheap, plunging-neckline way, but not with me. She acts as if she had invented sex.

Gabrielle started getting mail every day--some in envelopes, some just with a thumbtack shoved through folds. I wondered who it was; but every time I saw Gabrielle she was alone. I decided it must be someone her father did not like so they had to use notes to arrange secret dates. I told Cliff so, but he said I had an uncontrolled romantic imagination. -

Gabrielle got eleven notes that week and -I got only four, all from Cliff. I pointed this out and he said I did not appreciate my blessings and he was going to ration me to three a week. Men are exasperating.

I came up one morning as Gabrielle was taking down a note; this time Georgia Lammers was there. As Gabrielle left I said sweetly, "Nothing for you, Georgia? Too bad. Or was it Gabrielle's turn to swipe your note?" -

Georgia sniffed and went into the Registrar's office, where she is a part-time clerk. I thought no more about it until after five, when I was waiting in Old Main for Daddy, intending to ride home with him.

There was nothing on "H-to-L" for me, or for Gabrielle, or Georgia. Nobody was around so I sat down on the Senior Bench and rested my feet.

I jumped when I heard someone behind me, but it was only Gabrielle. She's a freshman, too, and anyhow she wouldn't tell. But I didn't sit down again--our senior committee thinks up fantastic punishments for ignoring their sacred privileges.

A good thing I didn't--Georgia came out Of the office then. But she did not notice me; -she went straight- to "H-to-L" and unpinned a note. I thought: Maureen, your memory is slipping; there was nothing for her a minute ago.

Georgia turned and saw me. She flushed and said, "What are you staring at?"

"Sorry," I said. "I didn't think there was a note for you--I just looked at the board."

She started to flare up, then she put on a catty smile. "Want to read it?"

"Heavens, no!"

"Go ahead!" She shoved it at me. "It's very interesting."

Puzzled, I took it. It was -a blank sheet, nothing but creases and thumbtack holes. "Somebody is playing jokes on you," I said.

"Not on me."

I turned it over. The address read: "Miss Gabrielle Lamont."

It finally soaked in that the address should have been "Georgia Lammers." Or should have been for Georgia to touch it. I said, "This note isn't yours. You have no right to it--"

"What note?" "This note."

"I don't see any note. I see a blank sheet of paper."

"But-- Look, you thought it was a note to Gabrielle. And you took it down anyway."

Her smile got nastier. "No, I knew it wasn't a note. That's the point."

"Huh?" -

She explained and I wanted to scratch her. Poor little Gabrielle had been sending notes to herself, just to get mail when everybody else did--and Georgia had caught on. Both girls had campus jobs which kept them late; Georgia had seen Gabrielle come in late a week earlier, look around, and pin up a note. Being a sneak, she had ducked out to find out to whom Gabrielle was writing-- only to find that it was addressed to Gabrielle herself.

Poor Gabby! No wonder I had never seen her with anyone. There wasn't anyone.

Georgia licked her lips. "Isn't it a scream? That snip trying to make us think she's popular? I should write a real note on this--let her know that -her public isn't fooled."

"Don't you dare!"

"Oh, don't be dull!" She pinned it up, putting the tack back in-the same holes. "I'll let the joke ride until I think of something good."

I grabbed her arm~ "Don't you touch her notes again or I'll~"

She shook me off. "You'll what? Tell her that yOu know her notes are phony? I can just see you!"

"I'll tell the Dean, that's what! I'll tell the Dean you've been opening Gabrielle's notes."

"Oh, yes? You looked at it, too."

"But you handed it to me!"

"Did I? My word against yours, sweetie pie."

"B~it~"

"And if you talk, the whole campus will know about Gabrielle's fake notes. Think it over." She marched off.

I was so quiet on the way-home that Daddy said, "Smatter, Puddin'? Flunk a quiz?"

I assured him -that my academic status was satisfactory. "Then why the mourning?"

Before Daddy let me register he had warned me that the First Law of the Jungle for a professor's child was not to be a pipeline to the faculty. "But, Daddy, you're a professor."

"Student stuff, eh? Better sweat it out alone. Good. luck."

I did not tell Mother either, because with Mother free speech is not just a theory. I did nothing but worry. Poor Gabrielle! She took her "note" down next morning, looking pleased--and I wanted to cry. Then I saw the smirk on Georgia Lammers' face and I felt like murder and mayhem. There was another "note" Friday and I wanted to shout to her not to touch it. I didn't dare. It

was like a time bomb, watching Gabrielle's pitiful makebelieve and knowing that Georgia meant to wreck it as soon as she thought up something nasty enough.

I was in the Registrar's office Monday, not to see Georgia, though I couldn't avoid her, but because I am a freshman reporter for the Campus Crier. One of my chores is - getting up the "Happy Birthday" column. I thumbed through the files, noting dates from the coming Friday through the following Thursday. Gabrielle's name turned up for Friday and I decided to send her a birthday card, via the bulletin board, so for once she would have real mail. Next I listed Bun Peterson's name; her birthday was the same as Gabrielle's. Bun is president of the Student Council and head cheerleader and honorary football captain; it seemed a shame she had to have Gabrielle's birthday as well. I decided ~to get Gabrielle a really nice card, with a hanky.

As I finished Georgia picked up my list and said, "Who's getting senile?~"

I said, "You are," and took it back.

She said, "Don't get too big for your beanie, freshman." She went on, "Going to the party for Bun Peterson?"--then added, "Oh, I forgot--it's upper classmen only."

- I looked her in the eye. "A double choc malt against a used candy bar you aren't either!"

She didn't answer and I swaggered out.

It was a busy week. Junior sprained his arm, Mother was away two days and I kept house, the cat had to be wormed, and I typed a term paper for Cliff. I didn't think about Gabrielle until late Friday when I stopped by the board on the chance that there might be a note from Cliff. There wasn't, but there was another of Gabnelle's notes, in an envelope with her name typed. I realized with a shock that I had forgotten her birthday card.

I was wondering whether to get one and let her find it

Monday, when I heard a pssst! It was Georgia Lammers,

motioning me to come to the office. Curiosity got me; I

went. She pulled me inside; there was no one else in the

outer office. "Keep back,"- she whispered. "If she sees anyone, she may not stop. She's due now--it's after five."

I shook her off. "Who?"

"Gabrielle, of course. Shut up!"

"Huh?" I said. "She's already been there. Her 'note' for Monday is up." - -

"A lot you know! Hush!" She crowded me into the corner, then peeked out. -

"Quit shoving!" I said and looked out.

Gabrielle was pinning something up, her back to us. She saw the envelope with her name, took it down, and hurried away. -

I turned to Georgia. "If you've monkeyed with one of her notes, I will go to the Dean."

"Go ahead--see how far it gets you."

"Did you touch that note?"

"Sure I did--I wrote it. What's wrong with that?" She had me; anybody can send anyone a note. "Well, what did you say?" -

"What business is it of yours? Still," she went on, "I'll tell you. It's too good to keep." She dug a paper out of her purse. It was a typewritten rough draft, full of x-outs and inserts; it read:

Dear Gabrielle,

Today is Bun Peterson's birthday--and we are giving her the finest surprise party this school has ever seen. We would like to invite everybody, but we can't--and you have been picked as one of the girls to represent the freshman class. We are gathering in groups and will descend on her in a body. Your group will meet at seven o'clock in the

Snack Shoppe. Put on your best bib and

tucker--and don't breathe a word to anyone!

The Committee

"It's a shabby trick," I said, "to invite her to another girl's party on her own birthday. You knew it was her birthday." -

"What of it?" -

"It's mean--but just like you. How did you get them to invite her? You aren't on the committee--are you?"

She stared, then laughed. "She's not invited to anything."

"Huh? You mean there's no party? But there is...," "Oh, sure, there's a party for Bun Peterson. But that little snip won't be there. That's the joke."

It finally sank in. Gabrielle would go to the Snack Shoppe and wait--and wait--and wait--while the party she thought she had been invited to went on without her. "That strikes you as funny?" I said.

"That's just the beginning," this Lammers person answered. "About eight-thirty, when she is beginning to wonder 'Wha Hoppen?' a messenger will bring another note. It will be blank paper, just like those she sends to herself--then she'll know." She giggled and wet her lips. "The little fake will have her comeuppance."

I started after her and she ducked back of the counter. "You're not allowed back here!" she yelled.

I stopped. "You'll have to come out some time. Then we'll find Gabrielle and you will tell her the truth--all of it!"

"Tell her yourself!" she snapped. Two boys drifted in and the Registrar came out of the inner office and Georgia became briskly official. I left.

Cliff was waiting at "H-To-L"; I was never so glad to see him.

"Well," Cliff said a bit later, "phone her. Tell her she's~ been had and not to go to the Snack Shoppe."

"But, Cliff, I can't! That would be almost as cruel as the way Georgia planned it. Look--can't you get- sOmebody to take her to Bun's party?" Cliff wrinkled his forehead. "I don't see how." "Cliff, you've got to!" -

"Puddin', today is Gabnelte's birthday, too. Right?"

"Yes, yes--that's what makes it so mean." "You don't want to send her to Bun's party. What we do is give her a surprise party of her own. Simple."

I stared with open-mouthed adoration. "Cliff--you're a genius." -

"No," he - said modestly, "just highly intelligent and with a heart of gold. Let's get busy, chica."

First I phoned Mother. She said, "Tonight, Maureen? I like to entertain your friends but--" I cut in with a quick up-to-date. Presently she - said, "I'll- check the - deep freeze. Sommers Market may still be open. How about turkeylegs and creamed mushrooms on toast?"

"And ice cream," I added. "Birthday parties need ice cream."

"But the cake? I'm short on time."

"Uh, we'll get the cake."

As I hung up Cliff came out of the other booth. "I got the Downbeat Campus Combo," he announced.

"Oh, Cliff--an orchestra!"

"If you can call those refugees from a juke box that."

"But how will we pay for it?" -

"Don't ask--it was a promotion. They bid on Bun's party and got left, So they listened to reason. But I'm not doing well on guests, baby."

"You called your house?"

"Yes. A lot of the boys have other plans."

"You call again and tell those free loaders that they

will never eat another Dagwood in my house if they are -

not there, on time, and each with a present. No excuses.

This is total war." -

"Aye aye, sir~" - - - -

We went to Helen Hunt's Tasty Pastry Shoppe. Mr.

Helen Hunt was just closing but he let us in. No birthday cake... not a baker in the place until four the next morning--sorry. I spotted a three-tier wedding cake. "Is that a prop?"

"Frankly, that's a disappointment. My wife and I each entered the same order."

"You're stuck with it?"

"Oh, we may get a wedding cake order unexpectedly."

"Eight dollars," I said.

He looked at the cake. "Ten dollars"--then added, "Cash."

I looked at Cliff. He looked at me. I opened my purse and he got out his wallet. We had six fifty-seven. Mr. Helen Hunt stared at the ceiling. Cliff sighed and unpinned his fraternity pin from my blouse, handed it over, and Mr~ Helen Hunt dropped it into the cash register.

- He took the little bride-and-groom off the cake, set candles around each tier, then fetched an icing gun. "What name?"

"Gabrielle," I replied. "No, make it 'Gabby'--G, A double-B, Y."

I called Madame O'Toole from there. Madame bends hair for half the girls on the campus. She lives back of her beauty salon and agreed to be panting and ready at seven-fifteen. Fast driving let Cliff drop me at six-ten. Junior was stringing Christmas tree lights across the front porch and Daddy was moving furniture. Mother was swooshing like a restless tornado, a smudge of dirt on her cheek. I kissed Daddy but Mother wouldn't hold still.

I made three calls while the tub was filling, then dunked, put my face on, and inserted myself into my almost-strapless formal. Cliff honked at five minutes to seven; he looked swell in a tuxedo a little too small and the darling had two gardenia corsages, one for me and one for Gabrielle. We roared away toward the Snack Shoppe, hitting on all three.

We got there at seven-fifteen. I looked in and saw

Gabrielle at a rear table, looking forlorn and nursing a half-empty coke. She was in a long dress which was not too bad but she, had tried to hse makeup and did not know how. Her lipstick was smeared, crooked, and the wrong color, and she had done awful things with rouge and powder. Underneath she was scared green.

I walked in. "Hello, Gabby." - - -

She tried to smile.- "Oh--hello, Maureen." -

"Ready to go? We're from the committee."

"Uh--I don't know. I don't feel well. I'd better go home."

"Nonsense! Come on--we'll be late." We got on each side and hustled her out to Cliff's open-air special. -

"Where is the party?" Gabrielle asked nosily.

"Don't be nosy. It's a surprise." Which it was.

Cliff pulled up at Madame O'Toole's before she could ask more questions. Gabrielle looked puzzled but her will to resist was gone. Inside I said to Madame O'Toole, "You have seventeen minutes."

Madame looked her over like a pile of wet clay. "Two hours is what I need." -

"Twenty minutes," I conceded. "Can you do it?" Over the phone I had told her that she had to create Cleopatra

herself, starting from zip. - -

She pursed her lips and looked the kid over again. "We'll see. Come along, child."

Gabrielle looked dazed. "But Maureen--"

"Hush," I said firmly. "Do exactly what- Madame tells you."

Madame led her away. While we waited Cliff called the Deke house and the senior dorm and stirred out five more men and two couples. It was thirty minutes before they reappeared--and I nearly fainted. -

Madame was wasted here--She belonged at the court of Louis Quinze.

And so did Gabrielle. - -

At first I thought she was wearing no makeup. Then I - saw that it had been put on so skillfully that you thought

it had grown there. Her eyes were eight times as big as they had been and looked like pools of secret sorrow--if you know, a woman who has lived Her hair was still brushed -straight back but Madame had done it over. What had been a bun was now a chignon--"bun" wasn't the word. Her cheekbones were higher, too. And Madame had done. something to the dress--it clung more and seemed more low-cut. Riding high on her shoulder was the corsage and her skin blended into the petals.

Instead of the beads she had been wearing there was a single strand of pearls -resting where pearls -love to rest. They must have been Madame's very own. They looked real. - - -

Cliff gasped so I poked him to remind him not to touch. Gabrielle smiled timidly. "Do I look all right?"

I said, "Sister, Conover would shoot Powers for your contract. Madame, you're wonderful! Let's go; kids. We're late." -

You can't talk when Cliff is driving, which was good. We got there at twenty past eight; our block was jammed and our house stood -out in colored lights. Junior was on guard; he ducked inside. -- Cliff took our coats I gave Gabrielle a shove and said, "Go on in."

As she appeared in the living room the Downbeat boys bit it and they all sang:

"Happy birthday, dear Gabby!

"Happy birthday to you!"

And then I was almost sorry, for the poor baby covered her face and sobbed. -

And so did I. Everybody began laughing and talking and shouting and the Downbeat Combo went into dance music, not good but solid, and I knew the party would do. Mother and I smuggled Gabby upstairs and I fixed my face and Mother shook Gabby and told her to stop crying. Gabby stopped and Mother did a perfect job

fixing what damage had been done. I didn't know Mother owned mascara but I am always finding Out new things about Mother.

So we went back down. Cliff showed up with a strange man and said, "Mademoiselle Lamont, permettez-moi de vous presenter M'sieur Jean Allard," which was more French than I knew he had. -

Jean Allard was an exchange student that one of the boys had brought along. He was slender and dark and he fastened himself to Gabby--his English was spotty and here was a woman that spoke his language... that and Madame O'Toole's handiwork. He had competition; most of the stags seemed to want to get close to the new-model Gabby. -

I sighed with relief and slipped out to the kitchen, being suddenly aware that I had missed dinner, a disaster for one of my metabolism. Daddy was there in an apron; he gave me a turkey leg. I ate that and a few Other things that wouldn't fit on the plates.

Then I went back and danced with Cliff and some of the stags that had gotten crowded out around Gabby. When the orchestra took ten it turned Out that Johnny Allard could play piano, and he and Gabby sang French songs--the kind that sound naughty, -what with the eye-rolling, but probably aren't. Then we all sang Alouette which is more my speed.

Gabby was gaining a reputation as a woman of the world. I heard one ex-Boy Scout say, "You've really seen the Folies Bergere?"

Gabby looked puzzled and said, "Why not?"

He said, "Gee!" while his eyebrows crowded his scalp.

Finally we brought out the cake and everybody sang "Happy Birthday" again and Mother had -to -repair Gabby's face a second time. But by now Gabby could have washed her face and it wouldn't have mattered.

Professor Lamont arrived while we were killing the ice cream and cake--Daddy's doing. He and Jean Allard talked French, then I heard Jean ask him, in schoolbook English, for permission to call on his daughter. Doctor Lamont agreed in the same stilted fashion.

I blinked--Cliff never asked Daddy; he just started eating at our house, off and on.

Around midnight Doctor Lamont took his daughter home, loaded with swag. At the last minute I remembered to run upstairs and wrap up a new pair of nylons that would never fit Gabby but she could exchange them. So Gabby cried again and clung to me and got incoherent in two languages and I cried some, too. Finally everybody left and Cliff and Daddy and I tidied up the place, sort of. When I hit the bed, I died.

Cliff showed up next morning. We gloated over the party, at least I did. Presently he said, "What about Georgia?"

. I said, "Huh?" -

He said, "You can't leave it at this. It ought to be poisoned needles, or boiling lava, but the police are narrow-minded."

"Any ideas?"

He pulled out the bill for the cake. "I'd like to see her pay this." -

"So would I! But how in the world?"

Cliff explained, then we composed the letter together, like this: -

Dear Georgia,

Yesterday was Gabrielle Lamont's -

birthday--and we gave her the finest party this school has ever seen. Too bad you were hanging around the Snack Shoppe while the fun was going

on. But we know you would like to give her a present anyway--you can still pay for the cake.

Put on your best bib and tucker and trot around -

- to Helen Hunt's. It was a surprise party, so don't breathe a word to anyone! (Nor shall we.)

- The Committee

P.S. On second thought it will be more fun if you

don't pay for the cake!

It wasn't anon~mous; the bill had our names on it and we pinned it to the letter. I bet Cliff two hamburgers that she wouldn't knuckle under. I was wrong. Half an hour after it was delivered Helen Hunt phoned to say that Cliff could have his pin back, the mortgage was lifted.

Monday morning I was at the board earlier than either Cliff or Gabby. Gabby's poor little "note" was still pinned up, where she had put it Friday. I wondered what she would do; start pretending all over again? -

I spotted her coming up the steps, walking alone and lonely, same as always--and again I wondered if it had done any good. Then somebody shouted, "Hey, Gabby! Wait a minute." She stopped and two boys joined her.

I watched her and then Cliff growled at my back, "Why the sniffles? Got a cold?"

I said, "Oh, Cliff! Give me your hanky and don't ask silly questions." - -