

Julie And The Seven Wise Men

BY RODMAN HILLIARD.

I.

JULIE realized that it was Spring. The forsythia bush beneath the window had blossomed overnight. Its yellow flowers, unfolded, trembled in a lazy wind that had blown up from beyond the magnolia tree across the street. Julie sat in the window and gazed down at the forsythia bush. Somewhere a phonograph was grinding out a familiar tune. Almost unconsciously, Julie listened:



"I've got that old fashioned love—
in my heart
And there it shall always remain—
Just like the ivy vine
Clinging little closer all the time
Thro' the years, joys and tears
Just the same—"

She smiled. Old fashioned love! There wasn't any such thing! College romances didn't mean anything but necking and booze and jazz; or perhaps a few serenades now and then, or a steak-roast

or a dance or a ride in some fellow's rattling, old Ford. Old fashioned love! A look of disgust passed over Julie's face. Why men didn't take girls seriously any more—that is unless the girls knew where the liquor could be found; or unless they petted, or could tell dirty jokes. Well, she'd had her fling and now she was through! No doubt all the men she had ever known thought she was just a hot date but otherwise brainless. She didn't blame them, though. How could they know any better? They were such a bunch of damn fools, all of them! Just a bunch of boys trying to be men; trying to act sophisticated or something when they didn't know how—running around in knickers, chasing all the women in school, slouching down in their chairs in classes, crowding about the steps of buildings, smoking too much and trying to

look wise! Men! Hell, they were just silly kids! And she was through with them—through with them for good!

Julie leaned out of the window, plucked a blossom from the forsythia bush, inspected it critically then, crushing it between her fingers, flung it to the breeze. Someone had put another record on the phonograph and it was rasping out a different song:

"She wouldn't do-oo-oo
What I asked her to
So I socked her in the eye—"

Julie's thoughts whirled around angrily. There you were! The girls were just as bad as the men—maybe worse. What did they care for? A good time! And what was a good time? Dancing and petting and drinking and dressing and painting and acting like fools! That was a good time! Well, no wonder men didn't take girls seriously; how could they! But she was through; she had sworn off! She had been like the rest, she guessed. Just a bobbed-haired dummy. But that was no sign she was going to keep on being that way!

"What's the matter? Sick?"

A voice from within the room interrupted Julie's thoughts. She stood up quickly to confront the owner of the voice.

"Gee, Fera, you scared me!" Julie gasped.

The intruder laughed. "Scared you? Well I guess I did! Say, I believe you are sick, Julie!"

"I'm sick all right," Julie replied, "sick of everything!"

"Oh come on now!" the other girl coaxed. "Things aren't so worse after all."

Julie was silent. It was better to say nothing at all, she thought. Fera couldn't understand.

Fera was visibly exasperated. "You're not gonna get dumb and spoil our date tonight!" she exclaimed.

"Date? Who said anything about a date tonight?"

"Don't be a fool! You know we're double-dating tonight!"

Julie resumed her seat in the window. "Well, I'm not going!" she announced.

"You are too!" was the other's indignant reply. "You can't treat me that way when everything's fixed for a good time tonight!"

"I'll do whatever I wanta do!"

"Julie! Have some sense! You know Mac and Sugar are coming over in Sugar's new car, and we're going to a dance out at Beech Bluff—and Mac's promised to bring some liquor along!"

"Damn!" Julie landed an emphatic kick against the wall.

"Didn't I tell you I wasn't going?"

"Oh, all right then!" the other girl replied, crisply. "If you're gonna be a drag, stay at home!"

Julie felt a desire to explain. "Listen, Fera!" she pleaded.

But Fera had burst out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Julie was determined. She was through with parties; through with Mac Raynor and Sugar White and all the other booze-hounds in school. But the evening brought a moon and a still warmer breeze than that which had blown through the forsythia blossoms a few hours before. After all, she thought, why stay at home? It was such a wonderful night!

She heard a motor throb. It was Sugar's car! Hastily, she powdered her nose, ran a comb through her hair, grabbed a hat from off the bed and hurried out of the room. Her adventure with The Seven Wise Men was begun.

II

Freshmen—those who knew anything about it at all—would have told you that The Seven Wise Men were just plain thugs. Among Sophomores, however, a different opinion existed. The Seven Wise Men was a society of vigilantes that somehow managed to ferret out, and obliterate, certain iniquities with which the campus occasionally was infested. Juniors held firm to the belief that The Seven Wise Men was little more than an organization of gossiping loafers. Most Seniors had never heard of the order and those who had heard of it were too listless to concern themselves over its mysteries.

The truth of the matter was strange. The Seven Wise Men were not thugs—neither were they vigilantes. Juniors had almost placed them in the proper category. They were gossiping loafers; and yet, by chance, their organization was not without a purpose. Each of its seven members had taken a solemn vow to uphold the causes of flapperism and jazz. Every Tuesday night, at twelve, they met at the Gander Inn and crowded into one of the booths in the rear of the place where they would spit on the floor, shout at the waiters, consume enormous quantities of tobacco, and converse in a most secret manner. At three in the morning they would stand up, stretch themselves, and sneak out of the Inn, glancing furtively here and there as though in fear someone might detect their departure.

Such was the routine of their meetings. The third Tuesday following Spring Vacation found them in their favorite booth in the Gander Inn. Mac Raynor, as usual, began the conversation.

"Julie's taken the veil!" he announced.

"What?"

"No!"

"The hell you say!"

"Aw!"

A chorus of exclamations arose—a very voluble chorus that drifted into the far corners of the Inn. A girl in an adjoining booth giggled. Sugar White turned around and stared at her, disapprovingly. The girl made a wry face and choked her giggles.

"Yes," Sugar affirmed, "taken the veil—absolutely!"

"Says she's through," Mac interjected; "and she wouldn't touch a drop of Sugar's imported gin. Ask Sugar! That right, Sugar?"

Sugar drew a deep breath of cigarette-smoke into his lungs. "Sure as can be!" he replied.

Jack looked at George and George looked at Langley, each inquiringly.

"What's the matter with her?" asked Ted Grange, who, of the seven, was the least perturbed.

"Can't figure it out, Ted!" Mac answered. "She's just as cold as stone—and acts like she soured on everything and everybody."

Big Joe Rousky brought a massive fist down upon the table. It was Big Joe's manner of dismissing a conversational topic that was about to wear itself out. The other six gave him their attention.

"Julie can't go on this way!" he exclaimed. "We'll have to change her mind for her."

"Damned right!" voted the others.

"Now," Big Joe continued, "the whole thing's up to us—get me? So I think Langley oughtta be the first to enlist."

Langley Merrom gazed blankly at the others.

"Well, whatdya say, Lang?" Sugar White demanded.

"All right, if that's the hope!"

Big Joe brought his fist down upon the table-top a second time.

"Agreed!" he announced, "And now let's figure on the rest. How's this for a line-up: After Langley, George; and then Ted, Jack, Sugar, Mac and me."

"Good enough!" was the verdict.

"Then drag out something else," Big Joe said hoarsely.

III

Langley Merrom was the poor little rich boy. His father owned banks, a newspaper, a potato farm in Idaho, and five shares

of stock in The Amalgamated Kraut Packers' Corporation. Langley's possessions, however, were not quite so extensive. A straight-eight Zenzelli roadster, which he had bought in Turin; sixteen tailored suits from Brownleigh's, Bond Street, London; eleven hats from Dunlap, three trunks of accessory apparel purchased along Fifth Avenue; a three-thousand dollar Russian wolfhound, and his ownings were listed completely. Of course one might add the three carat diamond set in platinum that he wore, very discreetly, on his little finger, but it was such a trivial item. And Langley resented any mention of such trifles. He was democratic—so extremely democratic that he allowed his fraternity brothers unconditional use of the Zenzelli and permitted the town photographers to take snapshots of his Russian wolfhound.

And Langley Merrom was true to the cause of The Seven Wise Men. The evening after the meeting at the Gander Inn he dressed himself in the most English of all his English suits, leashed his Russian wolfhound, stepped into the Zenzelli and glided away on his crusade. Anyone who might have noticed him as he drove away would have known by the firmness of his expression that he as resolved to conquer—whatever he had decided to conquer. He was resolved to save Julie Farrel from prudishness! That she should renounce necking, or an occasional drink of gin was unbelievable. She was such a good old egg, such a mean mamma, such a hot number.

Langley Merrom set his jaw and jammed his foot down upon the accelerator. The Zenzelli leaped forward with increased speed. Langley's thoughts repeated themselves. Julie Farrel should not become a Puritan! He would get her in the car, he would drive out into the country, he would hand her his best line.

IV

The next day Langley appeared in Economics class with a black eye. The other Wise Men were indignant. Big Joe, the Grand Goof of the order, called a special meeting and that night they met at the Gander Inn.

"Well I'll be damned," Big Joe exploded when they had crowded into their booth, "you're a hellufa sheik, Lang!"

Langley was downcast. "Let up!" he pleaded.

"This time, I'll go myself!" announced Big Joe; and the meeting was adjourned.

And so Big Joe set forth, bravely enough—too bravely, in fact. Big Joe feared neither man nor beast nor woman. He was the greatest fullback in the history of Monroe. His father and mother were Czecho-Slovakians and had to come to Cleveland as immigrants where Big Joe, then Little Joe, was born. At the age

of twelve he began playing football, and when he was sixteen his hands had grown to such gigantic dimensions that he could grasp a football between his thumb and forefinger and throw it sixty yards. This peculiar ability was responsible for his graduation from high school—and though the authorities of Monroe persistently denied the rumor, it was generally agreed that Big Joe Rousky was the only student in the university who was paid a salary to attend classes.

Big Joe knew all that was to be known about football. He could bring down the most elusive open-field runner in the country with a swift, crashing tackle. From the forty-yard line he could kick the ball square between the posts. And he could forward-pass seventy yards straight into the hands of a receiver. He knew all that could possibly be known about football—but he did not know Julie Farrel.

Big Joe's fate was worse than Langley's. At the next meeting of The Seven Wise Men Big Joe appeared with a greater collection of scratches about his face than he had received in the Buckeye game the preceding fall.

"It's hopeless!" he told the others.

"No," Mac Raynor interjected, "we've got to keep on trying!"

Ted Grange was detailed for duty, but Julie refused to see him. Then George Hollwell, Jack Lane, Sugar White, and Mac Raynor were turned down in rapid succession. The situation became desperate. Big Joe called another special meeting and, one by one, the members straggled into the Gander Inn and assumed their places in the rear booth.

"Where's George?" Ted Grange inquired.

Jack Lane refilled his pipe.

"That's just what I was going to tell you about," he replied.

"You won't believe me, but Julie gave George a date for tonight!"

"What!" the others exclaimed.

"Yea, George made it at last. Maybe we'll pull through after all!"

The door of the Gander Inn banged shut and George Hollwell walked down to the booth. His gaze was fixed on the floor as he spoke.

"Couldn't convince her that she was wrong in trying to act like a Nun," he said.

"We'll have to give it up!" Sugar White suggested, and another meeting was adjourned.

V.

Weeks sped by. The Seven Wise Men saw Julie infrequently. Once, Ted Grange passed her on the campus but she did not speak;

another time George Hollwell met her coming out of Library, and though George saluted her with as much courtesy as was the custom among undergraduate men she apparently did not notice him. At the ensuing meetings at the Gander Inn there was little mention of Julie Farrel. The Seven Wise Men were convinced that her case was a hopeless one.

"Like Loyola, she has renounced the world," said Ted Grange, who wrote passionate verses for the campus literary magazine, read books constantly, and found particular delight in parading his knowledge before any group at any time.

"Pipe down!" returned Big Joe gruffly. "This is no Phi Beta Kappa meeting!"

It was their first failure, and consequently impressed them. Even the approach of examinations, which necessitated the postponement of further meetings, failed to decrease their anxiety over Julie Farrel's downfall—for, as The Seven Wise Men judged her conduct, she *had* fallen—miserably. She had become a prude, and they were agreed that no one could be guilty of a greater sin.

Examinations were completed at last. The Seven Wise Men filed into the Gander Inn for their first meeting in two weeks.

"We've got to celebrate!" Big Joe announced.

"You mean recuperate," Ted Grange corrected him.

The others booed Ted. Exams were no worries for him. He always made A grades.

And so plans were laid for a celebration. The vote was for a week-end at French Lick, so, therefore, on Friday morning they met at the Inn. Langley's Zenzelli was parked at the curb and behind it Sugar White's speedster. Jack and George and Ted and Langley piled into the Zenzelli, one on top of the other. Mac and Big Joe and Sugar squeezed ehmselfs into the narrow seat of Sugar's speedster. The Zenzelli purred softly, Sugar's speedster roared, and amid the shouts of a group of students standing on the steps of the Gander Inn they were off.

It was a race all the way. Big Joe, bulging over the sides of Sugar's speedster, was such effective ballast that Sugar's car almost overtook the flying Zenzelli ahead. But at noon the chase was ended when both cars rounded a turn and speed down the straight, paved drive towards the gardens of the resort.

Afternoon found them on the golf course. George Hollwell and Langley Merrom were on the fourth green. Langley was dressed in that very correct golf attire which an Edinburgh tailor had fashioned from the finest Harris tweed. The shaggy, heather stockings which covered his rather emaciated legs were from a

quaint little shop in St. Andrews, and his stout, brogue shoes had cost him the modest sum of five pounds half pence at a London bootmaker's. Langley assumed the correct position for a putt.

"Snap it up!" said George Hollwell, impatiently. "There's a foursome waiting behind."

After three strokes Langley succeeded in dropping the ball into the cup.

"Now," he exclaimed with a sigh of relief, "bring on the foursome!"

The foursome moved onto the green. There were two men and two women in the party. One of the men was tall and dark and smiled sickly at the two women who were joking with the other man, an obese animal with a bald head that glistened in the sunshine.

"Well, if it isn't Langley Merrom!" the tall man exclaimed, as Langley handed the putter to a caddy.

"So it is!" the others cried.

Langley appeared somewhat embarrassed.

Good afternoon," he replied, stiffly, and walked away followed by George.

"Say!" George demanded, when they had reached the tee. "What's the matter with you?"

"Those people are scum," Langley returned, "just ordinary scum. Met them at Deauville last year. That tall fellow was Jules Ballot, the most notorious gambler in the country; and the heavy guy's name is Jacobson. He bootlegs to all the rich resorters. I've forgotten the names of the two women, but I got it straight that they're no good—ex-chorus girls or something. The fat dub, Jacobson, pays all their bills."

George bit his lip. "Hell," he exclaimed, "that's no reason for passing 'em up cold! You're a damn fool, Lang. Maybe they would have treated us to a drink if you hadn't been such an ass!"

"That's all right," Langley defended himself; "it don't pay to get mixed up with a gang like that!"

"Aw shut up!" George rejoined. "Why should you get so nasty nice? Hell! You're as bad as Julie Farrel!"

That evening George related the incident to the others, who denounced Langley bitterly.

"You're right, George," Big Joe growled, "if Lang keeps on he'll be too good to live!"

"Yea!" Jack Lane agreed. "Just like Julie Farrel!"

"He and Julie would make a good pair!" Mac Raynor suggested as they walked into the dining room and seated themselves

at a table which had been reserved for them.

"But you don't understand!" Langley pleaded, when they had taken their places. "Those people are rotters. They're the fastest gang of drinkers and no-accounts I ever knew!"

"There they are now!" George Hollwell exclaimed, glancing down the aisle.

The others followed his gaze. Three women and two men were seated at a table a few yards distant. One of the men was emptying the contents of a silver flask into a glass which one of the women held in her hand. The girl holding the glass was reeling in her chair and laughing indecorously.

George's face went white.

"My God, Lang! Who's that girl.

Langley turned and looked.

"It's *Julie*, it's *Julie Farrel*!" he exclaimed, excitedly.

"I'm whipped!" Big Joe announced.

"Lord! She's duped us!" Jack Lane sobbed.

Ted Grange rubbed his forehead judiciously and assumed a scholarly pose.

"Do you know," he said, after a moment's deliberation, "I believe *Julie's* intoxicated!"

"Well," Sugar White replied, "you've got to hand it to her. That's the best jag I ever saw!"

"I guess she couldn't make the grade!" Mac Raynor said.
