

The story of a

PLAIN WOMAN who is considered

The woman is Mary Dee—a name we use for the purpose of non-identification. She is considered by many one of the most attractive women in this hemisphere, though, viewed analytically, she is a plain woman. We all probably pass the woman who *might* have been Mary Dee a dozen times a day without actually seeing her. She could have been that slightly over-plump, somewhat fussy woman walking into Schrafft's a minute ago; or the colourless matron, expensively but dully dressed, just glimpsed buying her niece's wedding present at Cartier's. In fact, the tightly corseted, harried mother shopping with the débutante daughter is about Mary Dee's age and general build; so is the shrill plain woman ahead in line at the ticket window. And, given another psyche, Mary Dee might have been one of those indiscriminately clad hurriers one sees seething along the streets—middle-sized, middle-aged, noticeable only for their nervous hustle-and-bustle.

The fact that Mary Dee is none of these is due to her own idea of herself—which happens to be none of these. We decided to look into her story (which we've learned from family, friends, acquaintances, and from Mary Dee herself), and here are some of our findings. Read them with this very much in mind: in the end, there still remains the mysterious element of "personality"—impossible to dissect or analyze.

We've come to believe that the vital element in the Mary Dee whom we know is this: she decided at a surprisingly early age that she'd rather be happy than unhappy. If this sounds too obvious to set down, reflect on the women—pretty as well as plain—whose pleasure apparently is in playing the tragic rôles of life, even creating them if none is available. (We learned from Mary Dee herself that, even when she was in her teens, and at the stage of reading a novel a night, she was moved to sympathy by the stories of Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina and the other romantics—but not to the point of wishing to imitate them.) Mary Dee has seldom met misfortune stoically or vindictively, let alone with fatal pleasure. It might be said of her that she simply stepped over the slings and arrows as they fell around her, and went off to cultivate her garden until her spirits improved.

Her plain appearance certainly should have

had the power to make her unhappy. Mary Dee would not have been human if it didn't. She tells us that she felt the pang of it early—the grandmothers gushing over prettier little girls at her first parties, a fairly painful episode or two at dancing school. But she had much less of this than other plain children, for this reason: apparently she was extremely cosy to have around, because of the talent she'd developed for happiness.

As her fate had almost always seemed to improve whenever she didn't prolong the bad moments, she developed very early a great asset for a plain girl—a happy, confident look which became as much a part of her facial expression as her mouth or her nose. This attracted friends. People are superstitious about happiness: many of us like to be around it in the hope that some of it will rub off on us. Mary Dee became a gregarious person, with the ease of manner that develops when one moves—happily—among people a great deal. She is good at bridge, fair at tennis and golf, and her interests range from a respect for good writing to a fair knowledge of music and paintings, and a lifelong participation in some good-works groups. She has an amusing turn of speech, but there's no stab to it.

Exactly how plain was Mary Dee to begin with? Her hair is a medium brown (nothing so interesting as mousy!), her skin reasonably fair, but not flawless, her features not particularly memorable for beauty or for a striking strangeness—because this latter can be an asset, too. Her eyes are not large, her nose could never be called "distinguished," and her ears are... the better to hear with: not small enough to be a beauty point. Her figure has femininity, but it is basically difficult. She is rather short, and short-waisted, and an extra three pounds is enough to make problems (so she makes sure she doesn't gain them).

We had to look deep, though, to get at her plainness—to the everyday eye, she's quite a beauty. Here's how she appeared at luncheon last week, for instance: a slender, rather alluring figure in an easy little blue tweed suit, a blue silk Paisley turban, and some very good sapphire earrings. Her complexion seemed rose and ivory, her eyes looked prettily slanted and much bluer than we'd remembered. And they had the look in them that a beautiful woman has when she's being taken to lunch by the

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most attractive man she knows. The man happened to be her Uncle Harry, seventy-one this year.

How *does* she do it? She is—though her gentle look seems to belie it—self-reliant. So perhaps her dependence on her own efforts for her good looks is part of her success. An only child, frequently in the company of several uncles and aunts, Mary Dee was subjected from childhood to a series of contradictory opinions on every subject from politics to her own plain appearance. Usually the uncles, to give her confidence, told her she was a beauty as everyone would realize one day. And the aunts, trying to spare her future hurt, urged her to learn to be a good listener or a marvellous dancer or to take up a scholarly career at which she would meet men who were looking for a wife who wasn't just a "silly little flapper."

It occurred to Mary Dee that since everyone seemed to feel differently on these subjects, it might save a lot of time and trouble if she formed her own opinions—and trusted to these for the most part. Standing in front of a mirror and repeating hypnotically, "I am beautiful, I am beautiful," did not appeal to her. She was an active girl, as she is an active woman, so she decided there were things she could *do* about her looks. For a time (charge it up to youth), she was influenced by some of the standard ideals: movie stars, the most popular girls at school, fashion models, even the women in paintings. But she soon arrived at the conclusion that her best prototype was a beautiful version of her own self, and she went at this project with tremendous zest.

Was she unpleasantly ambitious... is that why? What is probably true is that everything wonderful that has happened to her has come about because of a natural blind spot: she has never been able to see why she doesn't deserve some of the best of life. Since she has little reason to feel undeserving, or more in need of punishment than blessings, she enjoys what does come to her, and generally expects good things. She feels as free of guilt about the happy life she has as a woman can, in this day and age. She's read enough psychiatry to know that guilt-feelings are bred of fear, and for her, fear has always been a coward—face it and it flies. She rarely gets so far as to hate or to feel guilty.

This also came easily to her: to feel that

everyone else deserves good things, too. And knowing that Mary Dee wishes them well, the people around her almost always tend to wish her well in return. Is there a kind of "white magic" at work in the world? Perhaps it was their wishes that brought Mary Dee her happiness.

But, inevitably, there were a few envious hearts at the stunning marriage she made. She has always found men a pleasure to have around, and they have been attracted to her for that if for nothing else. Then, she is not a woman who demands perfection—so she usually gets more of it than the woman who does. She was late to marry: twenty-nine. Sentimentalists might say that there's one man in the world for every woman and Mary Dee waited because she was fated to find him. Whatever, her husband turned out to be a man that hundreds of women would have considered an excellent husband indeed.

Jonathan Dee is good-looking, a man of some money and great presence; almost formidable, if it were not for tremendous personal charm. He has known many of the world's beauties and encountered many of its great feminine brains. Why he chose the woman he did is his secret. That great talent she has for happiness, perhaps? We know only that she seems to interest and amuse him endlessly—and he seldom takes a serious opinion of hers lightly. (Mary Dee talks well and easily today, contrary to that long-ago advice of her Aunt Evelyn's. At her very first dinner party, she discovered that "good listeners" were a drug on the market, and what really was wanted were people with something to say.)

Here's what Mary Dee has done with her looks and her clothes to give herself the appearance of beauty. First, she is *deliciously* neat (more about this in a minute), not simply orderly and nicely groomed. Then, like many plain women, the power of clothes to change the wearer, their excitement and colour, appealed to her more than to a beauty. Fortunately. And, fortunately, she has always known that her figure demanded improvements. If she had been a woman of less happy determination, she would be quite plump by now. She does curve at bosom and hip, but pleasantly so. And as she's not very tall (about five feet five inches in high heels), her whole posture effort is to stretch the distance between top rib and hip-bone. She's memorized the feeling (*Continued on page 176*)