

## **The Duplicity of H. Lewis Colman**

**Donald J Plefka**

The "girls" met at the flat of Belle Fenton for their regular Prado card club gathering. The table had been setup and ready with the deck of playing cards, score pad and pencil. But there were more important matters to discuss and both Irene and Leslie were bubbling over with their exciting news. Belle and Jeanie were just as excited to hear of the reason for all the excitement. The card game could wait.

Both had new beaus! As each related their story of how they met and that they were sure that this one could be "the one" for them, the others drank in every detail. As it unfolded, the two men in question seemed to be very similar ... fair complexion, neatly trimmed sandy brown hair, clean shaven, piercing blue eyes, a dimpled chin and an engaging smile. Each had good prospects in life and were quite ambitious. All agreed, the men in question seemed perfect. It was Leslie who said, "His birthday is this coming Friday and I must find a way to help him celebrate". Irene, quite surprised, said, "Lew's birthday is also Friday!" to which the former exclaimed, "His name is 'Lew'? ???"

Both ladies were by now quite upset and even more so when it came out that with each of them, their new beau went by "Lew" but the full names were H. Lewis Coleman. The men of their dreams were the same man! All four ladies were devastated with this revelation. He had seemed so sincere to both the girls. Further discussion reviled that Irene always saw him on Sundays while Leslie only on Saturdays. At first, they agreed the neither would ever see him again but then decided he should be given a lesson ... he needed to be confronted with his duplicity ... but how?

After much discussion it was decided that both Leslie and Irene would send Lew notes inviting to meet at Pop's Ice Cream Parlor at 2nd and Elm at 6 PM on Friday. All four of the girls would be there in the event that he actually came although they thought it more likely that he would realize that the jig was up and they would never hear from him again. At least they would have the satisfaction of knowing he had been exposed without the pain of confronting him. But if he did come, they would indeed confront him to see what possible explanation he could have for his deception. Then they would never see him again. Needless to say, all thought of Prado playing was gone from their minds that evening.

On the appointed day and time the four were in a large booth at Pop's well before the appointed time. Irene and Leslie were both holding up well and Jennie was comforting them both by telling them there would be plenty more prospects for them in the future. The bell mounted on the door jingled announcing the arrival of one H. Lewis Colman, who with a joyful smile on his dimpled face went right toward the group, saying, as he approached, "Leslie, you brought friends! How nice, you must introduce me to them." The ladies were rather startled, certainly not expecting anything like that from him. Irene indignantly said, "And what about me?" to which Lew responded, "Well of course, I wish to be introduced to you as well as the other ladies."

Irene burst into tears as she rose from her seat, saying, "So that's the way it is to be! I am denied ... as if I never existed! Never fear, you will never see me again!" and with that she hurried toward the door. Before she could reach it to make her escape from this horrid embarrassment, it was opened by a new arrival and Irene stopped dead in her tracks. The newcomer was none other than H. Lewis Colman, dimple and all! He said, "Irene, you are crying! Whatever has upset you this way!"

Before she could respond, the second Lew Colman and the first Lew Colman saw each other and both exclaimed in perfect unison, "My God! Who is he?" The ladies looked at them both, then at each other hoping for some enlightenment and then back to the two men. They were even wearing similar clothes, tweed jackets with contrasting vests although of slightly different shades of grey, down to blue trousers and black oxfords. Everyone was jabbering at the same time and the din was so loud that Pop came out from the back to quiet them down and inquire about what was causing the ruckus.

When things settled down, Both men, again almost in unison said, " I am H. Lewis Colman! Who the devil are you?" That of course answered the common question of both men but solved nothing. Belle immediately considered that one of these men had come from an alternative reality but instantly discarded what she knew to be a fictional concept. She did suggest that they all sit down, for they all had risen to their feet if they had not already been there. She suggested that she be allowed to ask some questions and maybe they could make some sense of all this. When they agreed she proceeded and after a time, they revealed a series of facts which only seemed to deepen the quandary milling about in their minds.

Both men were born on exactly the same date in Cleveland. In both cases their mother, who's name was Sarah, had died just three days after their birth. Both men received as a middle name the name of their mother's family, Lewis, and chose to use it rather than their given name. Both men were raised as an only child by his grandparents. Both said that when he was an infant his father, whose name was Gregory Colman, had gone off to Alaska and was never seen or heard from again. Belle's mind went back to the alternative reality theory and the thought was again quickly discarded. They all just looked at each other in silence ... completely baffled and none more than the gentlemen in question. All at once, a thought came to Belle. There was just one unasked question and she was sure it held the key to the identities of these duplicate men.

"Gentlemen", she inquired of the two, "What is the family name of the grandparents who raised you?" Again, they answered almost in unison but the replies were not the same. "Colman" was the one, and "Lewis" was the other. Belle smiled and although all the others still had quizzical expressions, she said, "I suspect, gentlemen that you are twins, probably identical twins and split up after the death of your mother." She interrupted their "buts" and asked what the initial "H" represented in their names and again the reply was in unison but different, one being "Harvey" and the other, "Herman".

Belle suggested that they would probably need to go back to their respective grandparents to get more answers. Ice cream sodas were ordered. but hardly touched, except for Jennie's who was simply fascinated by all this. There of course was a continued discussion and speculation but now Irene and Leslie were relieved and smiling. The only thing they definitely decided was that Belle must be right and because he was more comfortable with it, Harvey Lewis would henceforth be called "Harvey" and Herman Lewis would remain "Lew". At the close of the evening, Irene left arm in arm with Lew and Leslie with Harvey.

The two Mr. Colman's moved in together and in about a week's time went together to Cleveland. They first went to the Lewis home and upon seeing the two together the Lewis' said they thought the second child was dead. The same reaction was repeated at the Colman house. Between the two, the story unraveled. The twins had been pre-mature but born at home. They were both very frail and after the death of their mother, one child was placed in the care

of each family on the belief that it would be easier to care for one struggling infant rather than two. When neither seemed to be responding well, their father became distraught and after losing his wife could not face the prospect of losing both his children. He simply disappeared and when inquiry was made of his former employer, it was a fellow worker who told them that Gregory Colman had gone to Alaska. To make matters worse, the two sets of grandparents argued. The Lewis' blamed the other's son for not taking their daughter to the hospital for the delivery. They got to the point where they weren't speaking and not too long after, the Lewis family moved to the other side of the city due to a change in employment. They simply "lost touch" and not wanting to re-establish contact "conveniently" assumed the other child had died. Neither family told their grandson of his brother.

It seemed that all the mystery had been resolved and almost a year later there was a double wedding. While the two men were waiting for the ceremony to begin, the pastor came to them accompanied by a bearded man. He simply said that the man wished to introduce himself and stepped aside. His first words were, "I am Gregory Colman, your father!" Both young men, by this time, were accustomed to this kind of surprise and welcomed him to their wedding. And so more of the story unfolded both at that time and during the reception that followed.

Gregory had indeed gone to Alaska but when he had traveled up the Yukon, searching for gold, he was severely injured in an avalanche. A family of local Indians found him and nursed him back to health. They were deep in the wilderness and he was too weak to be on his own for several months and by that time winter had set in. He was with the family for over a year and had married the daughter. He assumed his parents and in-laws would not accept his new family so he did not contact them. He and his new bride relocated to Skagway where he established a lumber mill. He did however keep in contact with his old friend back in Cleveland with an exchange of letters and was kept apprised of his family back home. And so when informed of the pending wedding he came back to ask forgiveness.

**Postscript:**

Forgiveness was sought by everyone and forthcoming from everyone. The families were reconciled, all of them. It all unfolded at the reception, a

**glorious event. As far as we know the newlyweds lived happily ever after.  
Gregory Colman returned to Alaska to be with his wife and seven children.  
Belle and Jennie were left to find new members for their Prado card club.**

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