MAD MARRIAGE

by LAURA LOU BROOKMAN Author of "HEART HUNGRY," etc.

CHAPTER XL

It happened in the casual way of so many heartbreaks. Gypsy was in Martin's, the town's largest department store, on Thursday afternoon. The air outside was sultry but there was no sunshine. Men and women, mopping their brows and seeking to echo each other's complaints about the heat, wondered if the clouds would bring rain and concluded it was unlikely. There seemed to be no end to this scourge of hot weather.

Gypsy had hated to come down town. She made the trip because of a special sale of electric fans. They were cheap and a fan in each of the bedrooms would make the nights less intolerable.

She made the purchase and was giving the clerk the address when she saw Abbie Manley at the next counter.

"What are you doing out on such a day as this?" she asked.

"Gypsy! I haven't seen you for days—not since you and Jim were out at the house that evening. My dear, I'm wilted. Look at me! Did you ever see such a sight?"

"I'm exactly the same. I wished after I got on the car that I hadn't decided to come in today, but I wanted one of those electric fans. Did you get them?"

"Let's go down to the fountain room," she suggested. "It's actually cool there and I feel the need of a pineapple soda."

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Abbie led the way to a table in the corner. Women and girls, a few of them with young men, sat at the neighboring tables. Some artificial, unseen device supplied a cool, gentle breeze. The waitress returned and took their orders before them.

Gypsy took a sip from the tall frosted glass and sighed. "Our garden and lawn have been almost ruined by the heat. Do you think it can last much longer?"

"It's hard to tell!" Abbie said philosophically. She took a spoonful of ice cream and pineapple. "By the way, I said I hadn't seen you since you and Jim were out at the house that I did. I saw you at the Pine Grove Inn last Monday. I was with Mrs. Reynolds and she was in a hurry so I couldn't come over and say hello."

"But I wasn't at the Pine Grove Inn—" Gypsy began.

"Of course you were. Didn't I see you? You had on a blue dress and your back was toward me, so of course you didn't see me, but I recognized Jim. It was about two o'clock."

Gypsy's lashes were lowered. "I remember now," she said quietly. "I'd forgotten about Monday."

"When is Jim going on his vacation?" Abbie asked.

"It's not quite decided. Next month, I guess. He wants me to go rather earlier—to the lakes. I think perhaps I will."

"I wish I could go with you," Abbie said enviously. "Charles is such a bear. He says if he can endure the heat down town I ought to be able to stand it at home. Won't let me go without him. We're going east in September. Isn't it disgusting to have to wait so late? Why—Gypsy, what's the matter with you?"

"I'm all right. Just a little faint."

"But you're white as a sheet! Is there anything I can get for you?"

The girl shook her head.

"I'm perfectly all right," she insisted. "If you don't mind, though, I believe I'll leave."

"Of course. I'll go with you."

"Please—" Gypsy stopped her. "Please don't bother, Abbie. I'd much rather you didn't. Really. I want it. I'll be all right as soon as I get outside."

"But, my dear child, I can't let you go alone like this."

"You will if I ask you to, won't you, Abbie? Please!"

"It doesn't seem right—" Abbie began, but she did not rise to follow as Gypsy turned away.

The hot air struck the girl's face like a blow as she stepped out on the street. It was the same stifling heat from which she had sought refuge, and yet Gypsy did not give it a thought. She did not notice the direction she took but started walking.

At the Pine Grove Inn last Monday. The dress. "If it were anyone but Abbie," Gypsy thought, "I wouldn't believe it. I'd think they wanted to make trouble. Abbie couldn't do that. She wouldn't! Oh, but even Abbie should know I never wear blue!"

Marcia Phillips' face danced before her. Marcia wore blue divinely. Gypsy had seen her go past the house in blue frocks a dozen times. So Jim had lunched at the Pine Grove Inn with Marcia Phillips.

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Tears were blinding her. She paused to brush them aside. What if people did notice that she had been weeping? Jim already had made a spectacle of her. Lunching with Marcia Phillips at the Pine Grove Inn!

She would go away, of course. People could believe it was a vacation trip if they wished. She would go away and make it as easy for Jim to divorce her as possible. Or she would divorce him. The whole thing was settled. She would tell him tonight.

It was a relief to come to a decision. Gradually Gypsy became aware that she had been walking in the wrong direction. She was on the east side of town in a neighborhood she did not know.

She turned to retrace her steps. The buildings were old here. The shops looked run-down and cheap. Barefoot children in soiled clothes played in the street. She passed an eating place and was almost nauseated by the odors. Once more she realized how terribly hot the air was.

Two blocks farther and the street became more respectable. Now a breeze was stirring. It was like an oven blast. Gypsy saw that the sky had darkened.

"It's going to rain," she thought, as the wind blew her skirts. "It may be a bad storm. I'd better hurry to get to the car."

Suddenly she heard her name. It was a man who was speaking. Gypsy turned.

"How do you do, Mrs. Wallace? I'm afraid you've forgotten me."

"How do you do?" Gypsy said. She raked her brain but for the life of her she could not recall a name for this friendly, attractive person who evidently knew her.

"My name is Gibson—Frank Gibson. Don't you remember your husband introduced us the first night you arrived in Forest City? It was on the train just before we reached here—"

"Oh, of course I do. You must excuse my memory, Mr. Gibson. It's really dreadful."

"Not at all. Besides I can understand. You would have seen more of me. I assure you, only I've just come back from a trip to the west coast. Isn't it my luck, though, to leave Oregon and get back just when the heat wave is doing its worst!"

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"Oh, I'd love to see the west coast," Gypsy told him. "Were you in California too?"

Gibson nodded. "I like Washington and Oregon better myself. Make the trip out there usually twice a year. Selling hardware is my business." He paused and grinned. "Not with a pack on my back, you understand. My firm sells to retailers."

Gypsy smiled. "I didn't think you carried a pack," she said.

"Speaking of the heat wave look at this!" Gibson held out one hand. Raindrops as big as five-cent pieces had begun to fall. "Well, I guess the siege is broken at last. You'd better come up on these steps! You'll get wet."

"It doesn't matter," Gypsy said. "I'm going to have to run to catch my car—"

Gibson took her by the arm and led her under the shelter of the entrance to the drug store.

"You'd be drowned if you tried to catch a car now. Even a taxi. Besides, there's no need. My car is just around the corner and if you'll let me get it I'll drive you home."

"Would you really?"

"Glad to. Will you wait here? I swear it won't take me more than a minute!"

Gypsy's heart pounded as she waited. If it were anyone except Frank Gibson it would have been a perfectly natural procedure. Jim had practically declared she should never speak to Gibson. Well—Jim Wallace was not a person to give her orders. When the trim brown coupe drew up to the curb before the drug store the girl ran out to it. Gibson swung the door open and she stepped inside.

"Going to be hard to drive, isn't it?" she asked.

"Not bad. With such big drops the shower can't last long. Too bad because the ground needs the moisture—to say nothing of we suffering humans."

The glass at each side of the car was drawn down. Gypsy took a deep breath.

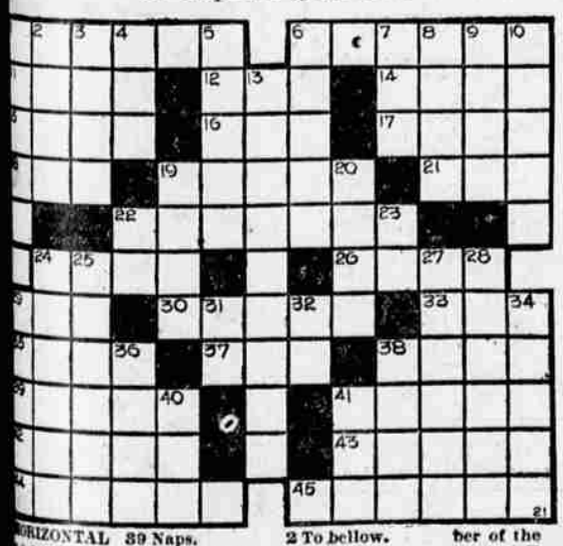
"Oh, the air is so much fresher!" she exclaimed. "I love rain storms."

"Do you? Like them myself. Always have liked to drive in the rain."

There was a pause and then Gibson spoke again. "It's still early," he said with sudden enthusiasm. "Suppose instead of taking you directly home we swing out on the Somerset road? We can get a real breath of fresh air out there. What do you say? Shall we do it?"

(To Be Continued)

A Capital Question



HORIZONTAL
1 Salem is capital of ——?
6 To impel forward.
9 Warning cry in golf.
12 Verb.
13 Withered.
14 Speedily.
16 To fondle.
17 Taste.
19 Before.
20 To refurnish with men.
21 Limb.
22 Recoiled.
23 Peace door.
24 Leave.
26 Jelly.
30 Bundles.
32 Native metal.
34 Wing-like.
36 The deep.
37 In a line.
38 Naps.
41 Stopping device on auto.
42 Notched.
43 Greaser.
44 Made depressions.
45 Cranes.

VERTICAL
1 Bid.
2 To bellow.
3 Gaelic.
4 To secure.
5 Backs of necks.
6 Flower leaf.
7 Kiln.
8 To chime.
9 Eagle.
10 Former member of the Federal Farm Board.
13 Mementoes.
19 Long grasses.
20 Tennis fences.
22 Right.
23 To accomplish.
24 In abundance.
25 Female warrior.
27 Mental state of an army.
28 Dealer in stocks and bonds.
29 Fatigued.
31 You and me.
32 Each.
34 Pitchers.
36 To slumber.
38 Dry.
40 To observe.
41 Feather scarf.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

W	A	S	P		T	H	O	M	P	S	O	N
I	D	E		A	R	A		A	R	I	S	E
N	O		A	L	A		H	I	E	D		W
S		B	L	I	M	P		D	E	L	F	
T	O		P	A	P	E	R		N	E	A	T
O	R	A		S	E	T	O	N		S	I	R
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	L	U	L	L		L	A	V	E	R		P
A		S	O	A	P		T	E	N		M	E
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R	E	D	E	E	M	E	D		F	A	T	E

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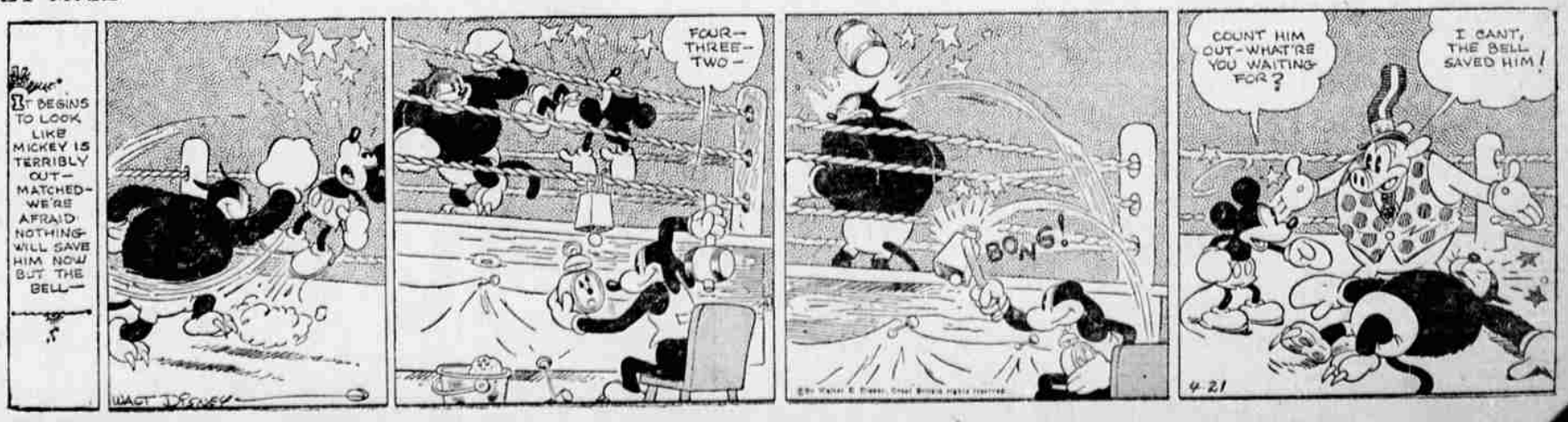
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