The MELODY GIRL

by RUTH DEWEY GROVES

AUTHOR OF "THE HUSBAND HUNTER," ETC.

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CHAPTER XXXV

AMONG the cards Beryl held in her game with Tommy there was one ace. It was a black ace and she hoped it would trump anything that Tommy could produce. It should, she thought, as she drove slowly toward the Larkin house. It had cost her enough to impress anyone with the slightest sense of honor. And she could not believe that Tommy's character had become completely undermined.

But impatience was such a slight burden compared with the black despair she had known. She hoped never again to feel as she had when Dr. Augusten told her, "Your voice is gone, Miss Borden."

They had left her alone. She had asked them to. And what she had thought and what she had suffered had blocked out her youth—left her a woman.

She was a woman tonight as she went to find Tommy. She felt charitable toward him. She might have lost her voice anyway without tramping in the dew and being out when she should have been in bed. Tommy hadn't asked her to do that. She couldn't blame him. Besides Tommy had helped her. His need was the price of her misfortune. Her future should not be sacrificed for nothing.

Ever since the thought had come to her that now she could make an appeal which Tommy must listen to Beryl had been resigned to the hopelessness of her situation. She even found it a relief not to have to worry about the inadequacy of her sweater. It wouldn't matter now if she caught cold. Her voice was gone. Something in her throat had hardened. The voice wasn't coming back.

It had happened the night Pol had got into trouble. Pol had got out of it, but Tommy wouldn't have. He'd have been made the goat.

Beryl had parked her car in front of Pol's house when he and Tommy came out to get into a truck which stood in the driveway. Beryl went over to them and insisted she would follow the truck if Tommy went with Pol.

Pol looked at Tommy. "All right," he said sharply, "we'll settle this later, Tom."

"I guess you know what that means," Tommy exclaimed to Beryl as Pol drove away. "I'm in bad. Pol's had about enough of you!"

"Then quit him," Beryl returned coolly, "and save yourself from being kicked out of his gang."

Tommy had sworn angrily and walked away.

Pol was arrested that night. It didn't come to anything, but he blamed Tommy and thereafter Tommy had evaded Beryl with complete success except for one accidental meeting.

That was three weeks ago. Irene hadn't written and Beryl had no excuse to tempt Tommy into a talk. After tonight she would have no difficulty in seeing him or she would not want to see him. "For I'm not going to crawl to him if he isn't worth it," she told herself.

She wouldn't have planned a test for him but this one that had been thrust upon her would measure Tommy's character for all time for Beryl.

To put a soul upon the dissecting table is not an agreeable thing. Beryl, in her night of struggling with her new misfortune, had grown more tolerant, yet she knew that if Tommy failed her now she could never believe in him again.

After arriving at the Larkin house she sat awhile in her decrepit old car and weighed the potentialities of her venture. She could find nothing to induce her to turn back.

And no matter what she thought there was Tommy. She saw him as he stood in the middle of the Larkins' living room to turn on a light. The shades were up and the glaring light flooded the shabby room with a hard white brilliance, turning it into a stage for Beryl. She saw Tommy light a cigaret and pick up a newspaper. Then she put the palm of her hand down hard on the button that sounded the horn of her car and sent forth a raucous call. She repeated it in rapid succession several times, making it too peremptory for anyone to ignore—least of all Tommy who might reasonably expect that it was one of the crowd calling him.

Beryl held her breath as he came to answer the call. She had purposely parked her car in the shadow of a large maple tree. Tommy did not recognize it until he was within speaking distance. Then he swore under his breath and prepared to retreat, but Beryl was out of the car in a flash and clinging to his arm.

"Don't be a coward!" she challenged. "Besides there's no one home, is there?"

"Why can't you mind your own business?" Tommy retorted.

"That's just what I am doing," Beryl said. "Please come with me Tommy somewhere where we can talk. I want to tell you something—about myself. I'm in trouble too now."

Tommy drew back and tried to peer at her in the semi-darkness. People rarely thought of giving Beryl sympathy. She never seemed to need it. Beryl continued urging while he hesitated. Her voice was fraught with despair and it was genuine. She clutched at Tommy, suddenly afraid with a blind unreasoning fear, that he would not listen to her.

Tommy turned back toward the car. "Get in," he said gruffly. "I don't want you hanging around here. Pol won't stand for it."

"You drive," Beryl said, and slipped into the seat at the right. She was trembling so she could not have held the wheel steadily. Tommy became aware of her increasing agitation.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked bluntly.

Words to answer him were jumbled in Beryl's mind. She did not know which to use. How could she tell him?

Suddenly she put her face down in her hands and Tommy was astonished to hear the sobs that were torn from her lips. He drove the car to the side of the road and stopped.

Beryl, crying, was a complete stranger to him. "Gee," he said awkwardly like a little boy, "gee, Beryl, don't cry."

Beryl lifted her head. "I know," she said, "it's a nice way to act after dragging you out here to listen to me." She dabbed vivaciously at her eyes. "I've had a tough break Tommy. It's tough for you, too, because I've got to tell you the truth. My voice is gone. I may never sing again and . . . and they say it wouldn't have happened if I'd obeyed the doctor."

"Why didn't you?" Tommy asked logically enough.

"Because I couldn't," Beryl told him. "It was you, Tommy. You needed a friend. And you can't deny that there were times when you'd have got in a lot deeper with Pol if you hadn't had me on your trail."

"Yes," Tommy admitted. "I guess that's so. Do you mean that—" He paused and Beryl finished for him.

"I should have been in bed when I was chasing all over the country looking after you," she declared. "And now, Tommy, it's a showdown. I've paid a big price to help you. I'm not going to cry any more but I can't endure it unless you make it count for something. If you do I won't care. I'll even be glad."

Tommy stirred restlessly. "What can I do?" he asked vaguely.

"You can be yourself now and quit the Larkin gang. You know you can't stick with them forever, Tommy. I'll bet you're sick of it already. They know how to take care of themselves better than you ever will, but they'll slip some day. You're not a fool, Tommy. You know that. Come on back with me now—come to our house. We owe you a lot—our family—but you owe me more. And I'm licked. If I've got to admit that all I had to hold to on this old earth has gone down before the vivaciousness of Pol Larkin.

"Think of it, Tommy," she hurried on, "my whole future—everything that has given me a chance to lift myself out of the routine of working in a grocery store. I'll have to go back to that now, and I loved singing. I love the luxuries I never had before. It's horrible to think that I lost all that just because certain men are crooks! But I won't mind if it proves you're what I think you are. You've never been a welcher or a double-crosser, Tommy. You've always been regular. And now, it's up to you to make good. I've bought your release from the Larkins with everything I had. Will you take it, or will you let me down?"

(To Be Continued)

'Five Year Plan"

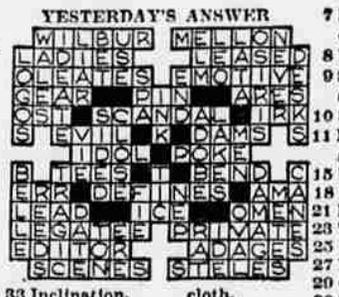
HORIZONTAL

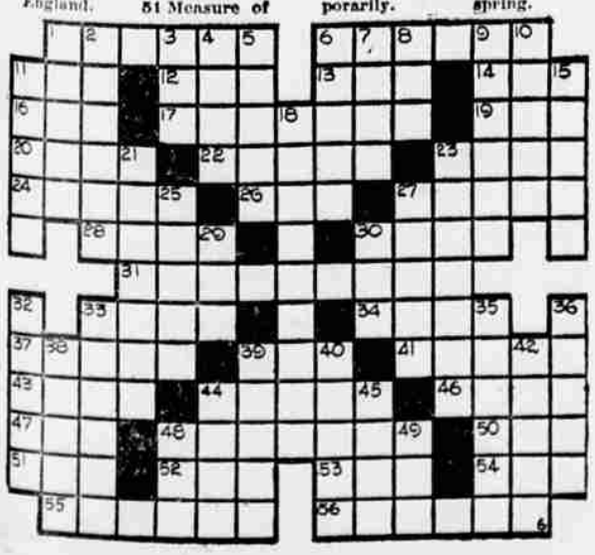
1 In what country is the "Five Year Plan"?
6 Part of ancient Palestine.
11 Kinsfolk.
12 Snake.
13 Era.
14 To decay.
16 Kiln.
17 Work of the highest class of literature.
19 The heart.
20 Whitelaw ——, American diplomat?
22 Muse of poetry.
23 Bottom.
24 Mountain chain in South America.
26 To imitate.
27 To burden.
28 A jolly-boat.
30 Saucy.
31 Richard I, of England.
33 Inclination.
34 Red vegetable.
37 To love.
39 Eon.
41 To breathe loudly in sleep.
43 Insect's eggs.
44 Manifest.
46 Suave.
47 Feline animal.
48 Rubber, pencil ends.
50 Eucharist vessel.
51 Measure of cloth.
52 Boy.
53 Frost bite.
54 Two fives.
55 Pertaining to old age.
56 King of the Waters.

VERTICAL

1 Ascended.
2 Slovenly.
3 Membranous bag.
4 Small body of land.
5 Armadillo.
6 To sew temporarily.
7 Money changing
8 Dry.
9 Street within a building.
10 Snare.
11 Mohammedan scriptures.
15 Tendency.
18 Blue gems.
21 Merchants.
23 Thrives.
25 Hogs.
27 Entices.
29 Quantity.
30 Taxi.
32 Waltz.
33 Phial.
35 Paradise apple.
36 Started.
38 Faces of clocks.
39 To avoid.
40 Center of amphitheater.
42 Paunch of a cow.
44 Verbal.
45 Tidy.
48 Prophet.
49 Mineral spring.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER





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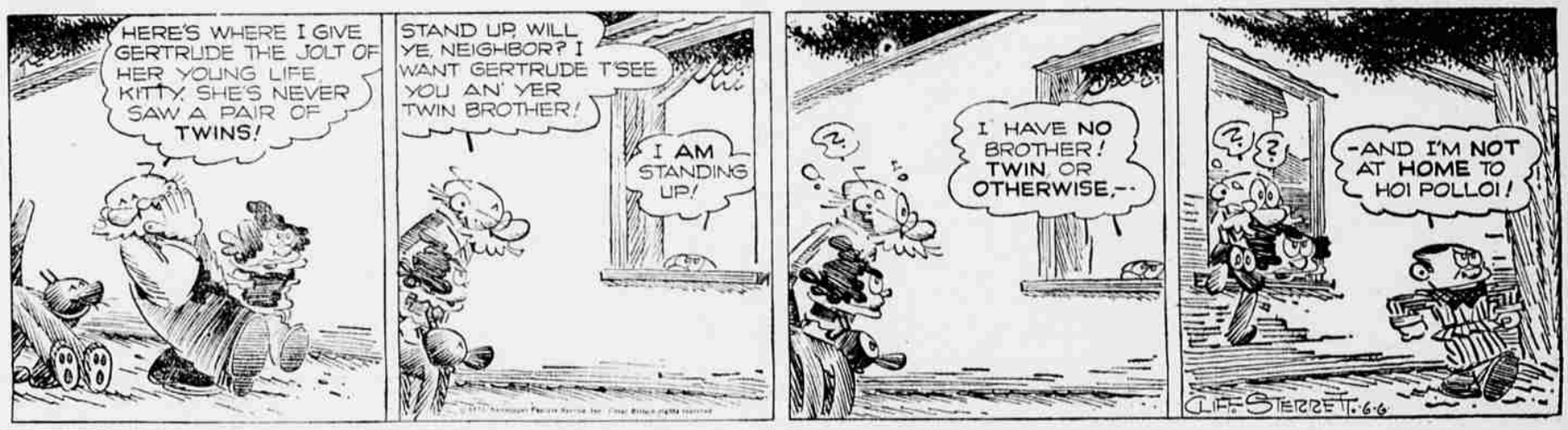

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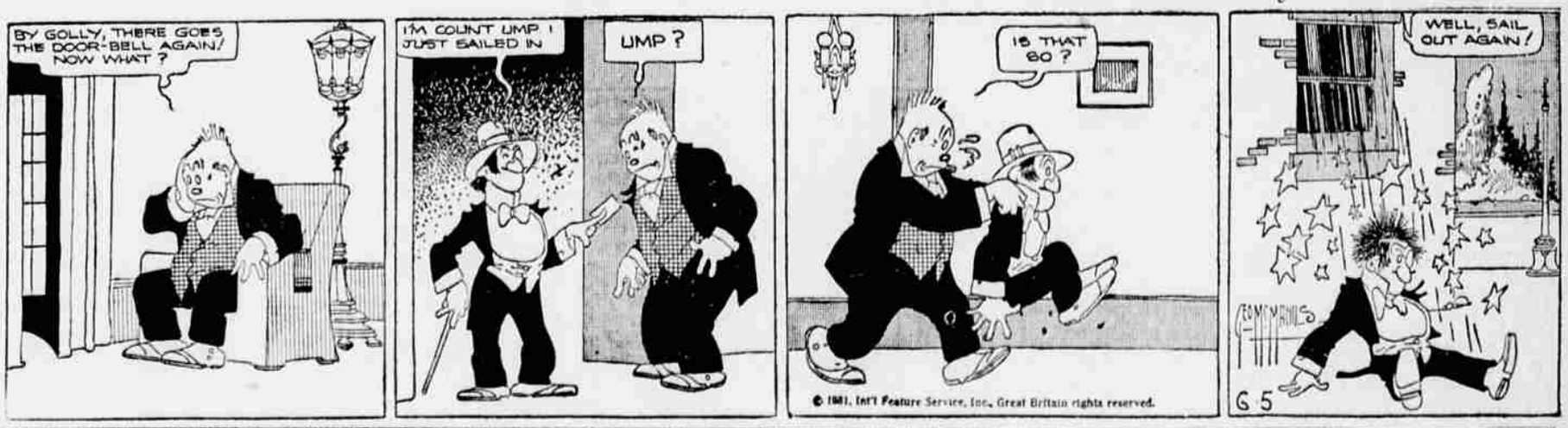

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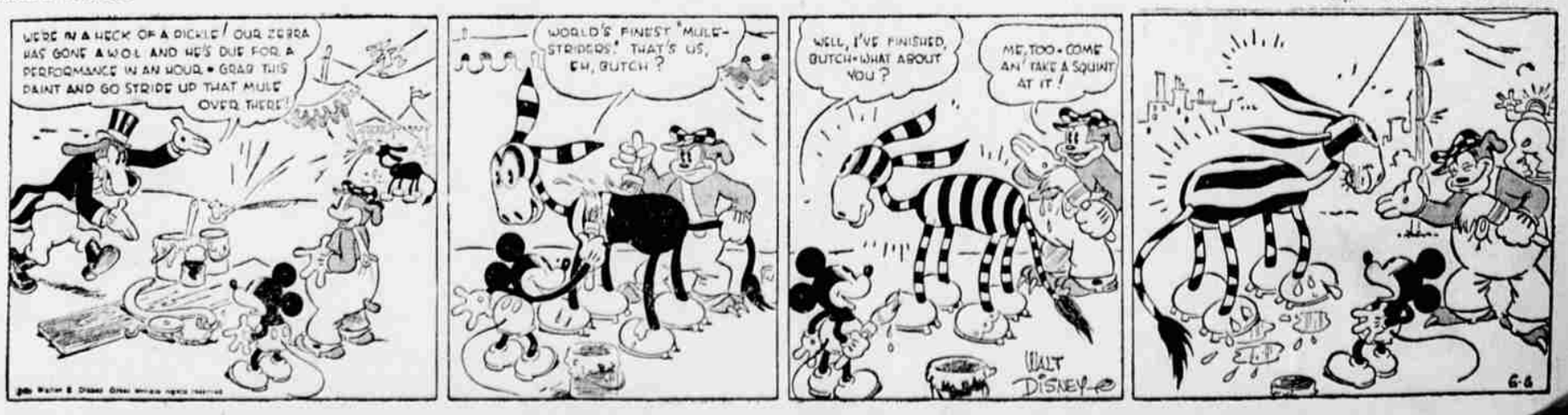
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