Heart of Liane

by MABEL McELLIOTT

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CHAPTER IX

CHUCK DESMOND could be an entertaining dinner companion. Having summoned a taxi he handed Liane in with a flourish and demanded to be driven to Wishwaters, the seafood palace down on the shore. He promised Cass he would have her daughter home in good time for her evening appearance at the theater.

It was all very surprising and Liane enjoyed it. The young man talked easily and wittily. His was the vernacular of the newspaper city room, crossed with the world of sports and of Broadway. He was as cynical as a stage manager, in some ways as artless as a child of six.

"Muriel will—well, she'll crown me for this," Liane said, laughing, as they sat over their coffee.

Desmond lifted an interrogative eyebrow. "Says which?"

"Oh, all this!" Liane indicated the dancing floor, mirrored and smooth, on which a few early couples were even now executing slow, snail-like steps. The tented top sparkled with lights. Cars were beginning to buzz into the drive, their wheels crunching on the gravel outside.

Desmond regarded his cup indifferently. "Nice girl, Muriel, but thoughtless," he observed drily. "You were pretty sweet to come with me on last minute bid."

"I was delighted," Liane told him. She meant it.

"I'll be seeing you," Chuck Desmond said, patting her hand as the taxi drew up at the theater.

Desmond told the driver to hotfoot it for the station. He would just have time to make the first act of "The Frolic." Well, this evening hadn't been wasted entirely.

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Elsie wanted to know, "Who's the new boy friend?"

Liane said demurely, "My mother used to know his mother."

"Oh, that bologney!" Elsie lost interest. She went on, "D'ye know, I'm kind of sorry we're cheaking out of here next month. I've got used to the smell of new-mown hay mixed with my carbon monoxide and I'll miss it. Still, there's nothing like September 1 in Times Square. There's a feeling in the air—oh, I don't know—as if something were just about to happen. Something big."

"I know," said Liane dreamily. "I know just what you mean but it seldom does happen."

"Never can tell." Elsie winked elaborately. "Believe it or not, there are plots batching around here that don't meet the eye."

Liane, thinking of her adventure that afternoon, shivered a little. Elsie, not noticing, continued. "That Muriel girl, for instance. Is she a fast worker? Believe it or not, she has little Boy Blue eating out of her hand. Wait till the scandal columns get hold of that. Which Junior Leaguer is that way about what drama star?"

"She only met him this afternoon," Liane protested.

"Yes, I know. But what that dame does with 24 hours is nobody's business," said the cynical Elsie. "Mrs. Blue's little boy may be hooked before he knows it. He's not used to these high-powered debutantes. I don't mind," she explained, "if she'll lay off my Clive. But Muriel's a natural born poacher, and if she thought she could burn me up by going for him, she would."

Liane had heard a great deal of this in the past so she lent a mildly inattentive ear. "I wouldn't worry," she said, absently. "Yes, Mrs. Gridley, of course I've got your tickets ready."

Elsie took the hint and drifted along in the direction of her dressing room.

The little coop grew stifling as the evening wore on. Liane sat stiff and watchful, smiling her professional smile at the late comers, the women all smartly cropped and heavily scented in their frail chiffons. When the doors flew open at the intermission she caught a glimpse of a dark, lowering face above a dazzling shirtfront. Van Robard! He did not even glance toward Liane. The girl with him was small, lusciously blond. Her black frock was daringly cut away at the back to show a rounded pair of golden shoulders. She talked animatedly, a cigaret dangling from the corner of her geranium-stained mouth. She looked bored and exotic.

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Liane's heart was beating so rapidly it almost stifled her. Of course he must know she was there but he wouldn't even look at her. What a fool she was to mind! Oh, she hated him, she hated him! Liane had a sudden wild longing for green fields and cool dark places where she could bury her face in long grass and weep long and satisfyingly, unheard.

How she envied all these young girls at Willow Stream. They had everything — money, family, that vaunted and elusive thing called background. They could reach out and take what they wanted in their greedy little jeweled hands with the nicotine-stained fingers. No matter what they desired, a star sapphire, a trip to Europe, a handsome husband, there was almost always some adoring male to get it for them. What did they know of striving, of heartbreak? What did they know of saving up for a winter coat, wearing some friend's castoff shoes? No, they had their little ermine wraps, their half a hundred Paris frocks, their perfumes, their horses and their planes. No wonder when a fascinating man looked about for a girl to admire he chose one of them. They were so petted, so admired. They had a nimbus of glamour about them. The Cinderellas of the world hadn't a chance beside such rivals.

She put her head down to hide the rush of tears that threatened to come.

A shadow fell across the book in front of her. "Don't move. Don't say a word," warned a menacing voice. "Slide up that window and give me the cash!"

The startled girl looked up into somber eyes under a pulled-down cap. Trembling she obeyed. Her fascinated gaze watching the blue barrel of the gun he leveled at her. There was an electric tensity in the little foyer. Two other men, both armed, stood in the doorway. "You people, give us all you've got," commanded one. The women, whimpering, had begun to strip themselves of their rings. One screamed and was ordered summarily by her white-faced escort to shut up.

Liane fumbled at the catch that swung open the barred door of the cage. Underneath the shelf was a short, ugly weapon to be used in case of emergency. She thought quickly.

"I can't budge this," Liane said, with a child's querulousness. "You'll have to come around."

"No funny business, now," warned the man in the cap, backing off. As Liane opened the door of the coop, she brought her good right hand down suddenly. The invader fell with a thump.

All at once there was confusion in the lobby. A woman shrilled "She got him." A gun barked once. There was a rush and a scurrying. Four men were grappling with the robber who had fired his gun while the other made a precipitate rush for a parked car.

A giddiness swept over Liane. She stood staring at the slumped figure at her feet. "Take him away, somebody," she moaned weakly. Everything swirled blackly around her. She felt herself falling.

When she opened her eyes Van Robard was bending over her.

"Good girl," he was saying huskily. "You were the best man among us."

She felt those words were her accolade. The girl in the black dress was whimpering. Somebody cheered. Well, she'd showed them, anyhow, hadn't she? She might be a beggar maid but she wasn't a coward.

Van was carrying her into the little office now. He was all solicitude, the blond girl forgotten. There was a terrific hubbub all about. A woman was having hysterics. Men were rushing to and fro. Under cover of the noise Van murmured, "Tried to get you to look at me before tonight, but you were absorbed in business."

The look of faint reproach Liane gave him was tinged with mockery. "I saw you," she murmured. "Hadn't you better go back to her?"

He flushed angrily. The little doctor bustling in with his black bag interrupted their tableau. "Here, here, Mr. Wells thinks I'd better look you over. Any bruises?"

Van, defeated, shrugged himself away. Liane submitted to the physician's ministrations.

"Right as rain," was his verdict. "They tell me you were a brave young lady."

She smiled at him faintly, scarcely listening. Liane thought, "right as rain except for a great bruise on my heart."

(To Be Continued)

"Fours and Fives"

HORIZONTAL

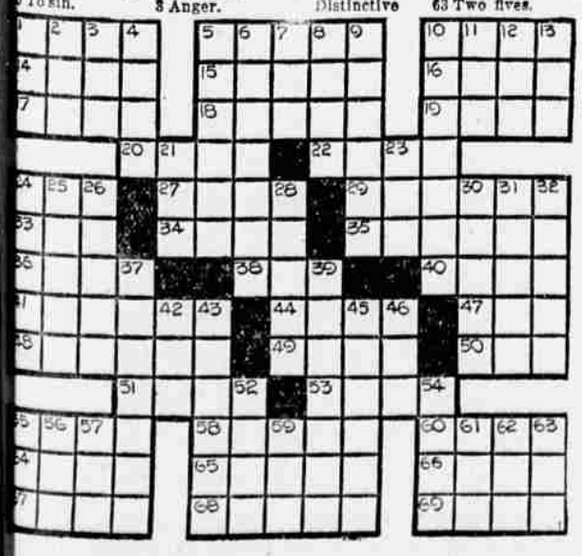
1 Face.
5 Paroxysm.
10 To scorch.
14 Pertaining to air.
15 Eyelashes.
16 Too.
17 Bird.
18 Sharp and harsh.
19 Passport indorsement.
20 Prehistoric stone circle.
22 Ice cream drink.
24 Nominal value.
27 To scutinize.
29 To bandage.
30 Poem.
34 Bare.
35 Music dramas.
36 Brought legal proceedings.
38 Flatfish.
40 Family group in a clan.
41 Perverse.
44 Uncommon.
47 Golf device.
48 Treeless tract.
49 Cabbage salad.
50 To sin.
51 Sailors.
53 Legal claim.
55 Abode.
58 Assumed name.
60 To leave out.
64 Urn.
65 Slack.
66 Slope of a hill.
67 Boundary.
68 Nicks.
69 Adam's first home.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

GOURD		STATESMAN										
ELSE		FEAR		NOOSE								
TIE		HALT		STOPS								
TO		HALF		SPITE		D						
Y		PULL		CHARY		SI						
SHALL		PRIDE		ROC								
BOLL		DRAPE		PART								
ULE		BEATS		ALIBI								
RD		CEASE		GLAD		O						
G		SOCLE		BOAT		ON						
		ALLOT		SOAR		AMA						
		GROOM		SOUL		EWER						
		REPRESENT				CANNY						

VERTICAL

1 Cat's foot.
2 Feminine pronoun.
3 Anger.
4 Oklahoma's second most important mineral product.
5 Infrequent.
6 Man who holds the balloon altitude record.
7 Beer.
8 Noblemen.
9 Date plum.
10 Barbarians.
11 Prophet.
12 Manager.
13 Eggs of fishes.
21 Distinctive theory.
23 To immerse.
24 Acts as a model.
25 Matured.
26 To thread.
28 Approaches.
30 Rugged mountain crest.
31 Candle.
32 Compound ether.
37 To what order of insects does the house fly belong?
39 Heavy objects used to steady a balloon.
42 Mineral spring.
43 Forerunner.
45 Elevates.
46 Female sheep.
52 Black haw.
54 Organ of smell.
55 Dress edge.
56 To be in debt.
57 Encountered.
59 Electrified particle.
61 Amidst.
62 Fish.
63 Two fives.



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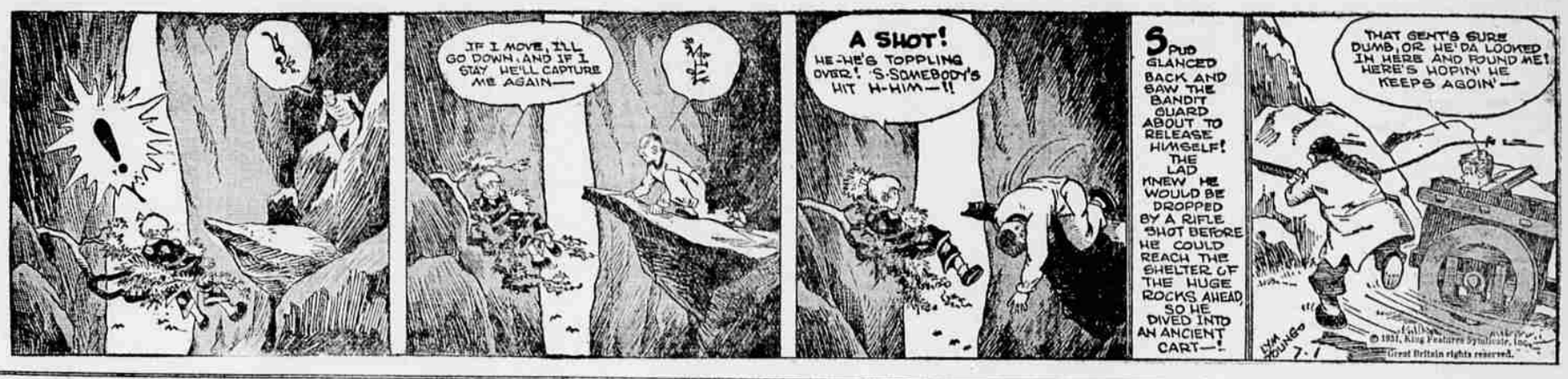

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