Heart of Liane

by MABEL McELLIOTT

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CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER Hugo, Crown Prince of Slavaria, had left her Liane stood quite still for a moment. The music from the ballroom came to her in little muted gasps. She thought, "I ought to run back to the box and see Clive for a moment. He'll wonder where I've vanished." She wondered how the Prince would find her wrap. She had not told him what it was like.

With one foot on the bottom stair she stood irresolute. As she turned a quiet, commanding voice said, "Don't move, girl. We've got you covered."

Lightning-like she wheeled in time to get a dim flash of two grim men in evening clothes. One was armed. This she saw before the black silk scarf was slipped over her eyes.

"Grab her, Len," one of the men said gruffly. A hand clamped itself over her mouth. Strong, unkindly arms lifted her. She felt the night air on her face. She kicked violently. One silver pump fell off, unnoted. Struggling still, she was lifted up. Ah, a car seat. The smell of Russian leather, of cigarettes. The thrum of an expensive motor.

The man on the seat beside her released her hands. He said with ironic politeness, "Do you no good to scream now, miss. Better be quiet and make no trouble."

Liane bit her lips to keep from weeping. "If it's my pearls you want," she said tremulously, "you may as well have them now and let me go. I've nothing else of value."

"Shut your trap now and don't bother me," the man said with engaging frankness. "You can have your say after a while."

They rode thereafter in silence broken only by the grunt of the man in the front seat. "Right here?" Liane heard the man beside her ask as the car slowed. A grunt from the front seat was the reply. The car seemed to turn.

For a few minutes they traveled under branches bending so low Liane could feel them scrape the tonneau. Then the car bumped over a deeply rutted lane and came to a standstill.

"Out here," commanded the surly voice. Liane felt herself lifted, carried. No use, she thought, to cry out now. She was in the hands of the enemy.

The man carrying her went up three steps that creaked under him. A door swung on protesting hinges and the fetid air of an overheated, underventilated room assailed Liane's nostrils.

She stared at the man who had carried her. The other one could be heard in the hall outside, shouting order at some unseen henchmen.

The man returning Liane's stare was iron gray, loosely built. His mouth was a thin, cruel line. Hands in pockets, he lounged against the lintel, regarding the girl with a bitter, sardonic gaze.

"You're the smart kid who bopped Ginny Weisman over the head down at the gold coast movies," he accused Liane. The girl's heart gave a wild leap. Did this explain the strange adventure in which she now found herself? Were these men friends of that captured bandit who had tried to hold up the box office at the Willows Stream theatre?

But the man's next words belied this.

"Don't get me wrong," he leered. "Ginny's no pal of mine. I just remembered seein' your picture in the paper at that time."

"You talk too much," growled a voice from the doorway. Liane glanced up to see the first man's partner glaring at them. "Get out," growled the newcomer. "Always falling for a new skirt. Shut your gab and beat it."

The man with the iron gray hair sidled out, muttering.

"Now, look here, girl," began the newcomer in an oily tone more distasteful to Liane than his growl had been. "You keep quiet and you won't get hurt but if I hear you starting any funny business — well, don't, that's all!"

"If you'd only tell me what it's all about," Liane began desperately.

The man grinned horribly, without mirth. "You'll find out what's it all about," he grunted. Taking up his station in the other broken-down leather chair he drew a pipe from the pocket of his coat and began leisurely to stuff it. Liane noted that his evening clothes were of good quality, his linen spotless. Doubtless he had managed to slide by as one of the guests of the club.

Liane beat her hands together softly. She looked across at the calmly smoking jailor and said again. "Please let me go. This can't do you any good, you know. Mr. Cleespaugh will have searching parties out."

The man smiled evilly.

"Maybe we hadn't thought of that, hey?"

"Pretty little piece, you are," he purred at her. His big hand reached out to touch her bare shoulder.

Liane sprang back. Like lightning was her movement as she darted out of the big chair and away from the man's grasping fingers. But one foot was unshod and the other, in its high-heeled silver slipper, stumbled. She would have fallen if the man's hateful arm had not reached out to steady her.

"Better be good," he warned.

He thrust her back into the collapsing chair. His talon-like fingers reached for her supple young loveliness again.

"Keep away from me," Liane moaned faintly. And all at once everything went black before her. She felt herself falling—

When Liane opened her eyes the man was bending over her. She felt cold water, icy water, trickling down her neck. She put up her hand to her head. Her fingers came away red. "Blood," she moaned faintly.

"You fool," the iron gray man was saying. From her place on the floor Liane could see him dimly. He was in the doorway looking fiercely at the man with the cat's eyes.

"You fool, you!" he repeated. "Makin' passes at her and scarin' her to death so that she passes out and bumps her head on the corner of the table." He went into the hall and called in a raucous voice, "Molly!"

A fat woman in a dirty apron came. She had a red face with creases in it and her hair was done in a pancake on top of her head.

"Molly, get me some clean rags and a pan of water," said the man with the iron gray hair. The woman ambled away. Liane lay there, still half dazed, hating the fetid floor, the smell of blood and the icy water on her face and shoulders.

"I thought she was a goner," the man nearest her admitted. "I thought she had passed in her checks."

"You're a fool," said the iron gray man. The woman called Molly came waddling back with some torn strips of white cloth, and an earthenware bowl. She said not a word but watched the man as he lifted Liane to one of the sagging chairs.

"Leave me alone," the girl said bitterly. "You've done enough." She shrank from his fingers. The man said roughly, "Hold still, you. I'll fix this cut."

The woman stood by regarding the tableau curiously out of her beady eyes.

Once she put out a soiled hand and touched Liane's petal soft dress.

"Pretty," she said wonderingly. Liane looked at her with something like hope. The woman seemed stupid but not unkind. But presently she waddled away again, leaving Liane alone with the two men and the girl's heart sank. She began to feel desperately sick. Her head was giddy and a hot pain burned in one temple. Her teeth began to chatter as if with ague.

"Get her a shawl," commanded the iron gray man. The man with the cat's eyes went out, grumbling. Liane closed her eyes. The room whirled around her.

Now the second man was following the first from the room.

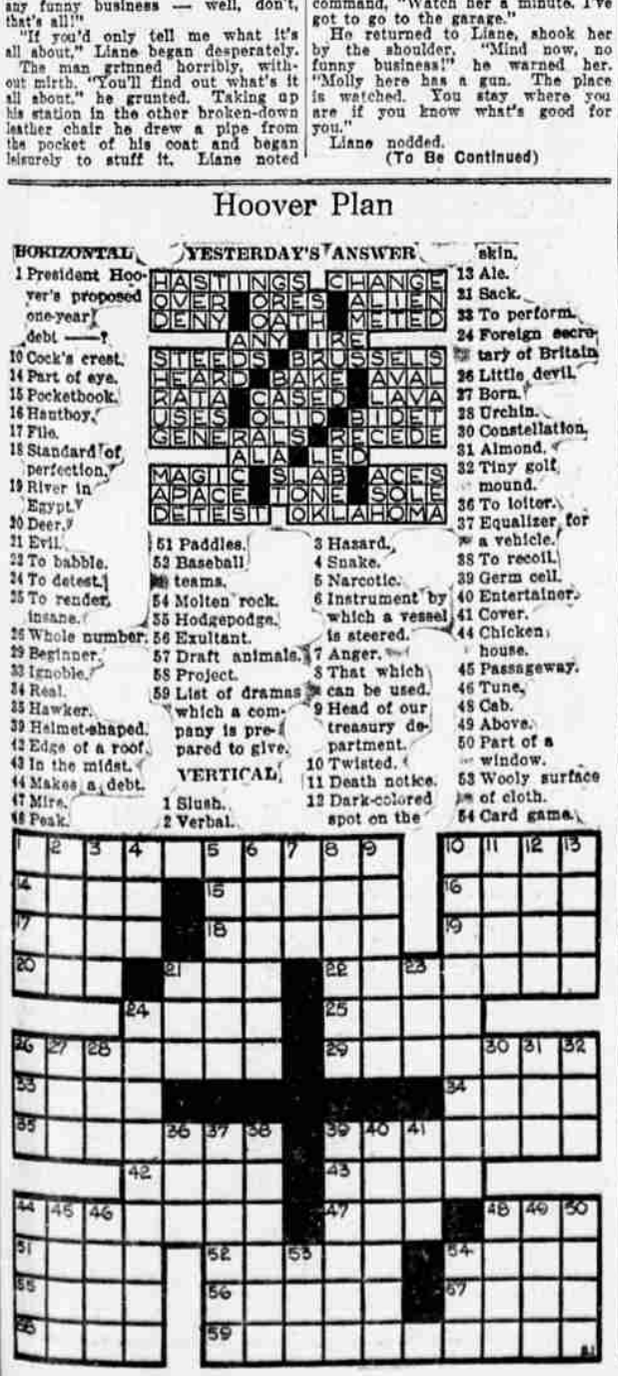
"We're not supposed to hurt her—yet," she heard him say. She tried desperately, but failed. She was grateful even for the comfort of the hateful prickling robe someone presently threw over her shoulders. She heard the woman's cackling voice and the iron gray man's rumbled command, "Watch her a minute. I've got to go to the garage."

He returned to Liane, shook her by the shoulder. "Mind now, no funny business!" he warned her. "Molly here has a gun. The place is watched. You stay where you are if you know what's good for you."

Liane nodded.

(To Be Continued)

Hoover Plan



HORIZONTAL

1 President Hoover's proposed one-year debt ——?
10 Cock's crest.
14 Part of eye.
15 Pocketbook.
16 Hautboy.
17 File.
18 Standard of perfection.
19 River in Egypt.
20 Deer.
21 Evil.
22 To babble.
24 To detest.
25 To render insane.
26 Whole number.
29 Beginner.
33 Ignoble.
34 Real.
35 Hawker.
39 Helmet-shaped.
42 Edge of a roof.
43 In the midst.
44 Makes a debt.
47 Mire.
48 Peak.
51 Paddles.
52 Baseball teams.
54 Molten rock.
55 Hodgepodge.
56 Exultant.
57 Draft animals.
58 Project.
59 List of dramas which a company is prepared to give.

VERTICAL

1 Slush.
2 Verbal.
3 Hazard.
4 Snake.
5 Narcotic.
6 Instrument by which a vessel is steered.
7 Anger.
8 That which can be used.
9 Head of our treasury department.
10 Twisted.
11 Death notice.
12 Dark-colored spot on the skin.
13 Ale.
21 Sack.
23 To perform.
24 Foreign secretary of Britain.
26 Little devil.
27 Born.
28 Urchin.
30 Constellation.
31 Almond.
32 Tiny golf mound.
36 To loiter.
37 Equalizer for a vehicle.
38 To recoil.
39 Germ cell.
40 Entertainer.
41 Cover.
44 Chicken house.
45 Passageway.
46 Tune.
48 Cab.
49 Above.
50 Part of a window.
53 Wooly surface of cloth.
54 Card game.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

HASTINGS CHANGE
OVER ORE IS ALIEN
DENY OATH METED
ANY IRE
STEEDS BRUSSELS
HEARD BAKE AVAL
RATA CASED LAVA
USES OLID BIDET
GENERALS RECEDE
ALA LED
MAGIC SLAB ACES
APACE TONE SOLE
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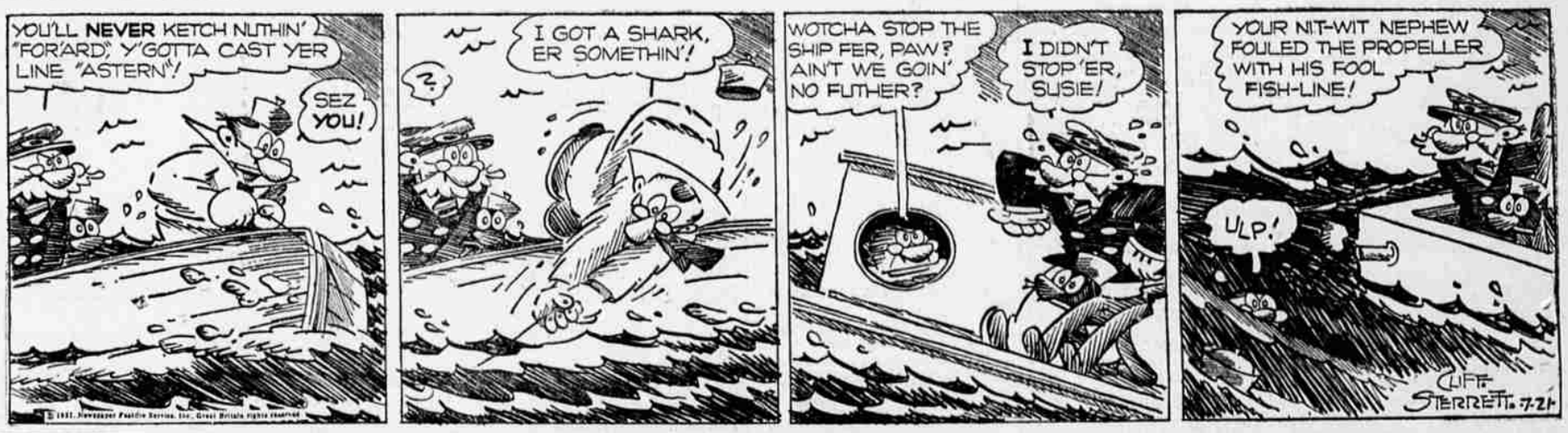

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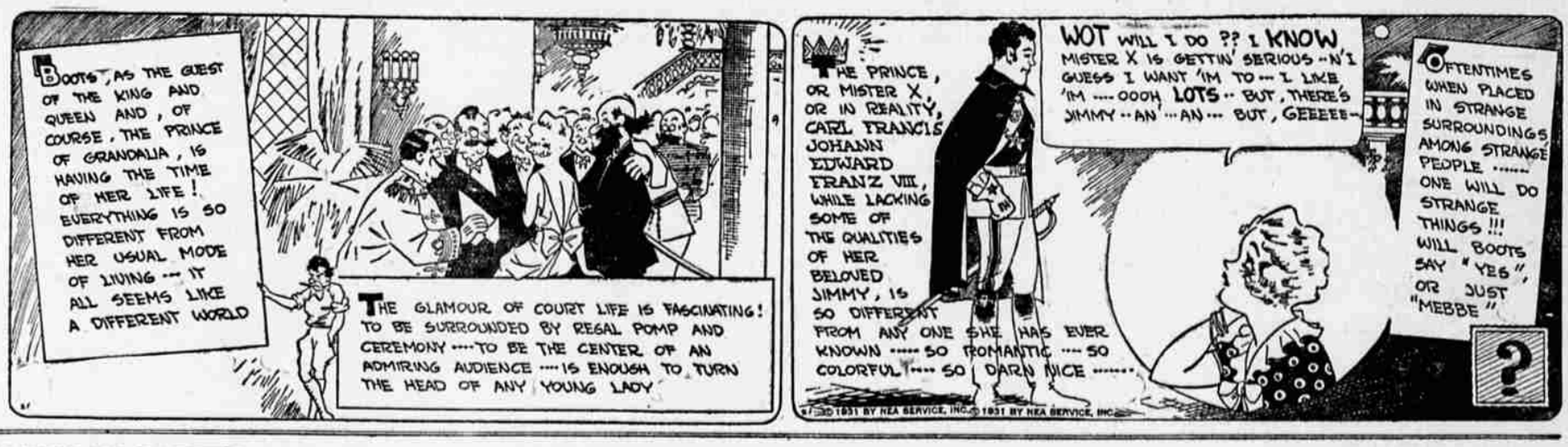

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