GUILTY LIPS

by LAURA LOU BROOKMAN — Author of "MAD MARRIAGE"

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CHAPTER VI

NORMA dropped into the nearest chair and read the note again slowly. Chris had written in great haste. The words were scrawled. There was no salutation. The note read:

"Minnie Baker's baby's been hurt in an accident. I've gone to see what I can do. Minnie's nearly crazy. I'll telephone later. Chris."

Poor Minnie Baker! She was the bookkeeper at the Hart Advertising Agency and of course in time of trouble she would turn to Chris. Why, oh, why did grief and sorrow so often descend on those who had already had their fill? Norma had never seen Minnie Baker but had heard Chris speak often of her. She knew Minnie's husband was in a sanitarium fighting against tuberculosis. Chris Saunders had helped them borrow the money to send him there. Chris had saved Minnie's job for her, too, though the bookkeeper did not know this. Minnie—poor, struggling Minnie—was the sort who never in the world should have been in a business office. She would probably spend the rest of her life there, a painstaking bookkeeper but a slow one.

Norma sighed, arose and put away her hat and coat. She prepared a frugal meal for herself. The bad news had depressed her and she was not hungry.

While she was drying the dishes a little later the bell rang, summoning her to the first floor. Norma threw down the dish towel and ran down the stairs. She supposed it would be word from Chris.

But it was not Chris nor was it a telephone message which awaited her. Instead a small boy in not particularly clean sweater and knickers stood framed in the doorway.

Norma looked at him inquiringly.

"Where's the dog?" the young visitor demanded.

"You mean—" Norma began, hesitating.

The boy flourished a folded newspaper. "Here it is," he said. "in The Press. It says you've got a puppy here just like my 'Spot.' I've come for him. 'Spot' got away last week when Dad and me were down town in the car. We parked and when we came back Spot was gone. I'm a carrier for The Press. I read your ad last night but I couldn't get over here on account of getting somebody to carry my route. But I'm sure it's 'Spot' you've got. He's just like the ad says, 'gray and brown with a black spot over the right eye and a black tail.' That's why I named 'im 'Spot.' Where is he?"

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The long speech had come tumbling forth in excited jerks. The boy had his cap in his hand. His sandy hair slanted across his forehead in disordered wisps. He had blue, very serious eyes and a determined manner.

She led the way along the hall and the boy followed. As she was about to open the door leading to the basement stairs he stopped her.

"Wait a minute," the youngster said, eyeing Norma shrewdly. "I suppose you'll want to know if it's really my 'Spot' you've got here. I suppose you think maybe I made up some of what I told you. We don't have to go downstairs to find out. Listen to this—"

He got down on his two knees before the open door, leaned down into the darkness below and uttered a shrill whistle. An instant's pause and then the whistle was repeated with three sharp blasts.

For a moment the pair eyed each other. Compassion swelled in the girl's heart as she saw the boy was sure to face disappointment. He was such a sturdy little urchin, so confident.

The boy did not whistle again. He was leaning forward, hand cupped to his ear, straining to hear.

Then a smile like sunlight crossed his face. "He's coming!" he cried triumphantly. "I hear him!"

Sure enough! Norma heard the faintly perceptible tap-tap of puppy feet on the basement floor. A shout from the boy. Another instant and the barking, wiggling little animal and his youthful master were a rolling, squealing mass of ecstasy. They tumbled backward against the wall. They tumbled forward. With quick, bounding leaps the puppy was now in the youngster's arms, now climbing over his back.

Still holding the puppy, breathless, from the scuffle, the youngster said proudly, "Well, Miss, I guess I proved he's my dog all right, didn't I? That's how I always call him—by whistling."

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Norma thought she had never seen a happier child. "Of course I can see he's your dog," she said. "And I'm glad you read the ad and came for him. Spot's a lovely puppy. You'll have some grand times together."

"Oh, sure!" the boy said, for some reason at this late moment succumbing to bashfulness. "Sure, we'll have good times together all right. We always do." For the first time he caught sight of the collar about the pup's neck and inspected it with interest.

"I got the collar," Norma explained, "so I could get him home safely the night I found him. There's a leash, too, upstairs. I'll get it—"

"Never mind," the boy interrupted. "I've got a leash for him and a collar, too, at home only he didn't have 'em on the day in the car. Believe me, Spot's goin' to wear that leash from now on whether he wants to or not!" He gave the dog a squeeze. Then backing away and looking up at the girl with a glance that was a perfect imitation of a dignified adult, he said, "Well, Ma'am, what do I owe you?"

"Why—for what?"

"As a reward for findin' Spot."

Norma laughed. "You don't owe me a thing in the world," she said. "Not a thing. Take your puppy home and see to it that he doesn't get out again without that leash. By the way—you haven't told me your name."

"William Schwartz."

Norma went up to her room with a pleasant sense of satisfaction. It was fine to see anyone as happy as that youngster. He had made her forget that the world is filled with disappointment, sorrows and heartache.

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Half an hour later when Chris telephoned the soberer view of life came back. Little Junior Baker's fate was still in doubt. The child had been bandaged and treated by a physician. He was quiet now. Chris was doing what she could do to comfort Minnie, who was hysterical, utterly useless in caring for the infant.

Chris' voice betrayed the emotional strain under which she had been working. It required questioning from Norma to bring out what had actually happened to the child and even then the tale was incoherent. The baby had, as usual, spent the day with the woman who lived a flight below Minnie and who was paid to look after Junior each day while the mother was at work. The woman's name was Mrs. Sorenson. Shortly after 5 o'clock—only 20 minutes before Minnie reached home—Mrs. Sorenson had gone to the door tot answer a knock and the baby toddled into the kitchen. There was a steaming pan of water on the stove. In some way the child had overturned the pan, been drenched in the boiling liquid.

"I'll call you at the office in the morning," Norma promised. "Oh, I do hope the baby's going to be all right!"

How ineffectual the words seemed compared with the fine, valiant spirit with which Chris always turned to help a friend!

For the third time that evening Norma turned to climb the two flights of stairs when the door of the first floor rear apartment opened, letting out a slanting wedge of light. Bessie Hawthorne's face appeared in the opening.

"Oh, Miss Kent!" the girl called. "Yes, Bessie?"

The custodian's daughter came forward. "Did he take him, Miss Kent? I mean the puppy. Did the boy take him?"

Norma nodded. "Yes," she said. "There wasn't any doubt about that boy and dog belonging together. You should have seen them."

Bessie smiled. "That's good," she said. "I was going to tell you Ma's coming home tomorrow so you couldn't keep the pup downstairs much longer. Oh"—she paused dramatically—"did you get your message at the office?"

"What message?"

"Didn't you get it? Goodness me—the man said it was important!"

(To Be Continued)

Diagonal Blacks

HORIZONTAL

1 Bird.
6 King —— of Norway?
11 Spasmodic as a (motion)
12 Relinquishes.
14 Seat of the court in Holland.
15 Arid.
16 3.1416.
17 Inlets.
18 Pantry.
19 Vertical line across a musical staff
20 Wayside hotel.
21 Damaged.
22 Dale.
23 Street.
24 To degrade.
25 Type of meter.
26 To act as model.
27 Dry.
28 —— Free State.
30 Slow-witted.
32 Company.
33 Measure.
34 Aspects.
35 The heart.
36 Tennis fence.
37 Swimming birds.
38 State of insensibility.
39 Exists.
40 Warbles.
41 Jewel weight.
42 Wise answer.
43 To give.
44 Gifts bestowed in return for corrupt decisions.
45 To play a flute.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

VERTICAL

1 Lament.
2 Rocking stone.
3 Burden.
4 To emulate.
5 Prefix meaning out of.
6 To set.
7 Ventilated.
8 To affirm.
9 Cognizance.
10 Bone.
11 Former name of Oslo, Norway.
12 Justifiable.
13 Body of directors.
15 Mere.
16 Dialect.
18 Crippled.
19 Company.
21 Lace.
22 Empty.
24 Portion of medicine.
25 Lily.
26 Half quarts.
27 Monkeys.
29 Regrets.
30 Covers of nuts.
31 Customs.
32 Hairy.
34 Cost.
35 Sea skeleton.
37 To seize.
38 Jargon.
40 Prefix meaning three.
41 Call of a dove.
42 Either.
43 To accomplish.

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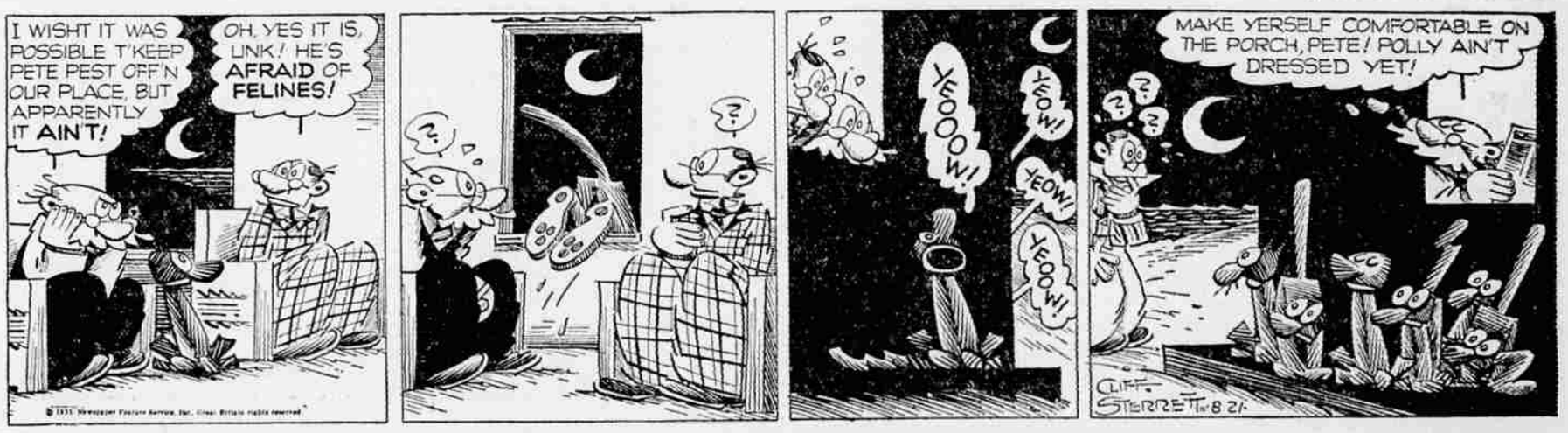

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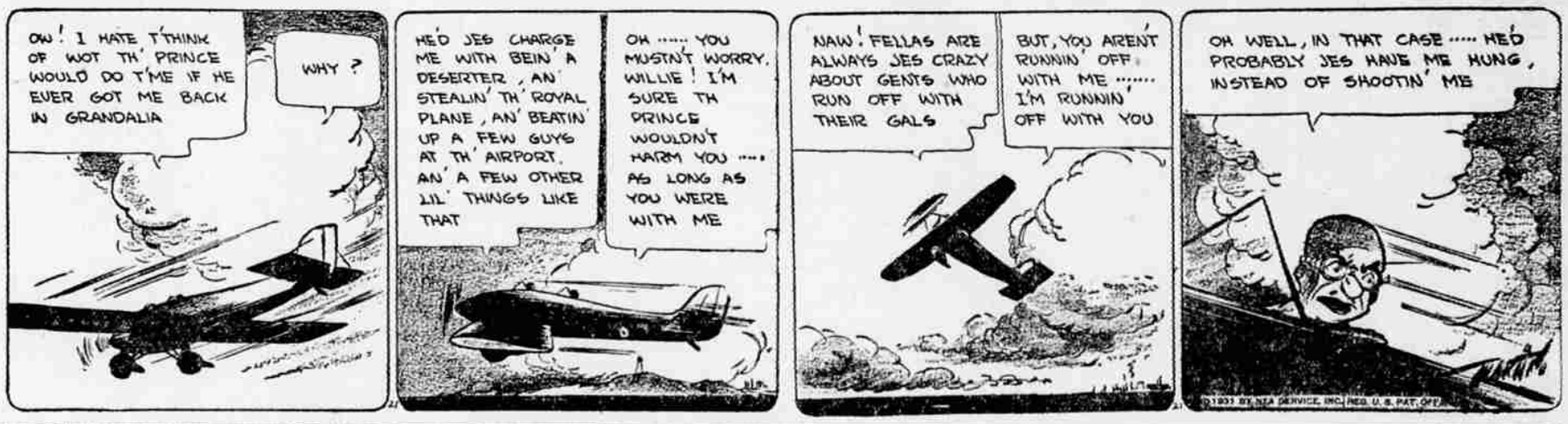

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