Gems of Peril

by HAZEL ROSS HAILEY

©1931 BY NEA SERVICE INC.

CHAPTER XXXIX

SOMETIME during the remainder of that first dance, which had become a horrible nightmare to Mary, she was aware of a severe bump—looked around to see Bates, perspiring and apologetic, piloting a square woman awkwardly nearby.

De Loma's start and quick leap startled her more than the collision between the two couples. Though Bates bemoaned his clumsiness and begged a thousand pardons, De Loma's look would have slain him if it could.

It was not until she and Bates were left alone together at the table while De Loma, to whom there was no dance but the tango, went to speak to the orchestra leader, that she learned the little incident had been intentional.

"He's got a gun," Bates whispered to Mary, as soon as the other two were out of hearing distance. "He carries it on the right side. Sorry I have to take that method of finding out, but I wanted to be sure. Did he step on you?"

"Some," Mary confessed, wriggling her bruised toe, "but anything for the cause. So that was it! I thought you simply had two left feet."

The press of so many extra guests had made service slow; Mary noticed that their dinner was still in its early courses. Unless he chose to walk out and leave his food uneaten, Dirk was committed to remain where he was for some time, at least. Well, she could make that time memorable for him, she resolved fiercely.

Mr. Jupiter, who had been roaming restlessly along the low wall that edged the roof, ostensibly looking at the Ambassador's famous "view," now came back and leaned down to speak to her.

"Mary, I'm going down to the corner. I can't sit here and see that fellow strutting around out there like a—like a damned top! He ought to be dancing on the end of a rope. By God, I'll put him there, too! It makes me sick to watch him."

He did indeed look as if he were under a severe strain. Mary said she would follow soon, and added in an undertone to Bates, "Hadn't you better go with him?" Bates appeared worried. The old man looked far from well, but there was the necklace to think of. Jupiter moved to the parapet again to see if he could pick out the "Gypsy's" lights, and Bates and Mary exchanged thoughtful looks.

"I'll put him in a cab anyhow," he finally decided, "and be right back." He hesitated. "I don't like to leave you here alone, though—and I want to stop and see how the boys are coming with the searching of De Loma's room."

"I'm not afraid," Mary assured him. "Don't be long, though. Hurry back."

"Listen! You better give me that!" Bates leaned forward, an anxious frown cutting its way down the middle of his plump, pink forehead. "With that gun The Fly's liable to think he can stand 'em all off and try something desperate."

"But I can't give it to you, here!" Mary whispered impatiently.

"Nobody's looking. Pull your wrap around while you unfasten it. Drop it on your napkin and lay the napkin down on the table, and I'll pick it up. I'll watch."

Mary did as he said, looking around guiltily at her unobserving neighbors as she pressed the clasp and let the heavy loop of gems drop into her lap. Hastily she covered them with the napkin and laid the napkin on the table with as nonchalant an air as she could muster.

• • •

Mr. Jupiter was tramping around the room to the exit. Mary suddenly saw De Loma and the orchestra leader end their confab, and De Loma turn and walk swiftly toward their table.

"He's coming!" Bates rose hurriedly as she spoke, grabbing the napkin and stuffing it in his inside pocket quickly. He cut straight across the room and caught up with Mr. Jupiter at the door.

De Loma dropped into the chair beside her. He had recovered his calm somewhat.

"Ah, these American orchestras!" he scoffed. "They know nothing but the jazz. Would you believe he has not a single tango on the program for tonight? I told him, 'Play me the tango, and you will see something!' He will play it, but he thinks not many in this crowd can dance it—they are older folk, mostly. For them he plays the waltz!" He shook his head in amazement. "What good is riches if you can only dance the waltz!"

Now she became aware of something under the napkin on which her right hand rested—something round, hard, like a handful of pebbles—the necklace! Bates hadn't taken it after all! In his hurry he had seized an empty one and stuffed it in his pocket without looking — and the Jupiter necklace was still here, underneath her hand.

She might have picked it up and put it on again—afterward it occurred to her that that had been the sensible thing to do. But at the moment she was too panicky.

• • •

Almost as if he read her thoughts, De Loma suddenly noticed the absence of the rubies.

"You have—lost your necklace?" he asked in a choking voice, pointing to her throat.

"Oh, no," she managed to laugh. "I was so warm, and the stones are so heavy, I just took it off."

He drew in a deep sucking breath and leaned back, his sinister face relaxed. She saw his eyes creeping over her, the table, her handbag, searching it out.

"But you had me frightened for a minute!" he chided her. "Such a valuable string could easily become—lost in a crowd like this."

"I asked Mr. Bates to lock it up for me," she said, deliberately, answering his unspoken question. His face hardened, seemed to lock together as if he were shutting in his feelings with a titanic effort. He was silent so long that Mary began to wonder if he were going to speak to her again at all. At that moment the orchestra began to play "To Tears."

Unsmiling, he tapped out his cigaret and said "It is the tango. Will you dance it with me?"

"Will you pick up my glove, please?" Mary asked, on sudden inspiration. "I think I dropped it over there." Surprised, he bent over and made an effort to locate the glove, which lay where she had thrown it—under the table. There was nothing for him to do but get down on his knees and pick it up.

In that moment, Mary unclasped her purse on the table, slipped the necklace into it and clasped it again. She was shaping out a fresh handkerchief to account for that loud snap of the handbag's fastner—if he had heard it—when he arose, flushed and patently illpleased, from his chivalrous errand.

Reluctantly she arose and let De Loma's arm encircle her. She dreaded to dance—with Dirk there, watching. She couldn't bear it if he looked at her again—like that.

The floor began to clear, the entire room to grow still, watching them with breathless attention. "Bravo!" someone cried, and someone else, unable to resist the rhythm, began to snap his fingers. Instantly a crackling accompaniment grew up to swell the efforts of the traps player, outdoing himself on the castanets.

Dirk was watching, now. Mary saw his eyes, like slits, through the fog of cigaret-smoke. His jaw was set, his face expressionless. Cornelia watched, too, but unwillingly, scornfully. Mary felt a wicked thrill of joy.

De Loma, apparently wishing to impress the open-mouthed Ethel, now wheeled about and aimed their steps deliberately at Dirk's table. The hovering spotlight that followed them included the three watching faces in white, revealing glow.

She felt herself whirled about, her body bent back until the thick red bob of her hair swung free. Above her De Loma's grinning, gloating face appeared for a second, like something in a dream . . . then she felt his lips on her mouth.

In the next instant Dirk, white-faced, his eyes blazing with murderous fury, had sent De Loma hurtling backward with one hard blow. From the floor, where she sank when De Loma's arm released its grip about her, she saw Dirk hurl himself at the reeling man a second time . . . saw De Loma throw back his coat and reach for his gun.

"Look out!" she screamed and threw her arm before her eyes. She crouched where she was, terror-stricken, waiting for the shot she was sure would come.

(To Be Continued)

Diversified Questions

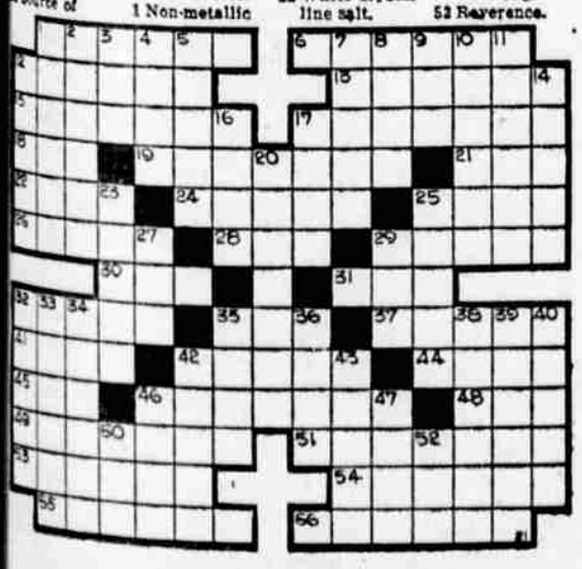
HORIZONTAL

1 To conduct one's self well.
6 Innermost chain of oscicles of the ear.
12 To reach a place.
13 Disclosed.
14 Caustic.
15 Molasses.
16 Eucharist vessel.
17 Swayed suddenly.
18 Poem.
19 To galvanize.
20 Male ancestors.
21 Stepped upon.
23 To come in.
24 Skillet.
25 Those who color fabric.
27 Loose.
28 Peak.
29 Grown-up.
30 Prefix denoting through.
31 Magic wheel.
32 Glass.
33 Great heat in fever.
34 Source of indigo.
45 Label.
46 One of a race of mythical one-eyed men.
48 Devoured.
49 Graduate of an institution of learning.
51 Optical illusions.
53 To narrate.
54 Marriage portions.
55 Unkneeled.
56 Dressmakers.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

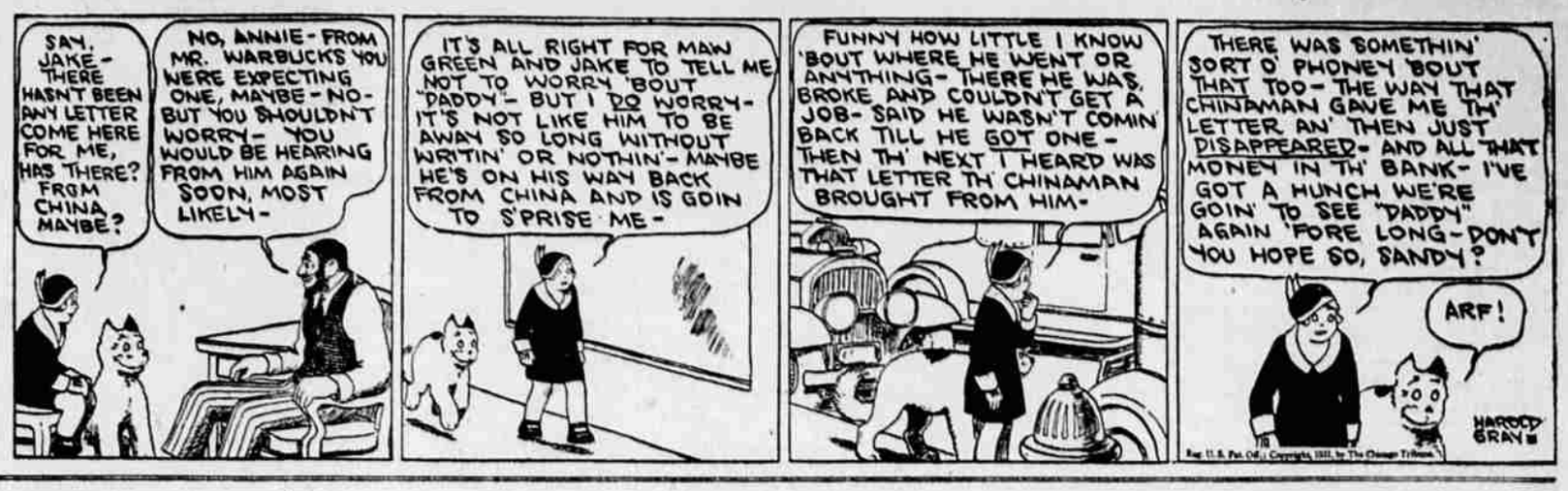
VERTICAL

1 Non-metallic element.
2 Roving.
3 Secreted.
4 Grandparental.
5 Armless marble statue now in the Louvre, —— of de Milo?
7 Anchor rings.
8 Imitated.
9 Vegetable.
10 An additional performance because of applause.
11 White crystalline salt.
12 To astonish.
14 Actions.
16 Journey.
17 Therefore.
20 Skull of a vertebrate animal.
23 Gray matter of the brain is composed largely of a nerve ——?
25 Cat-tail.
27 Rodent.
29 Drone bee.
32 Pulpit block.
33 Merchant.
34 Hoof, claws, or nail.
35 Platform.
36 Biblical name.
38 Ass.
39 Matches at corners.
40 To consecrate by religious rite.
42 Vial.
43 Apart.
46 Person against a measure.
47 The bow of a boat.
50 Door rug.
52 Reverence.



LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE — Annie's Hunch — By HAROLD GRAY

The Best of the Nation's "Human-est" and Funniest Comics On This Page Daily



TIM TYLER'S FLYING LUCK — By LYMAN YOUNG

POLLY AND HER PALS — By CLIFF STERRETT

BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES — Worse and More of It! — By MARTIN

BRINGING UP FATHER — By GEORGE McMANUS

MICKEY MICE — By WALTER DIZNEY