

LEAP YEAR BRIDE



LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

Timothy J. Jackal

By HAROLD GRAY

CHAPTER XXXVI
AN PHILLIPS looked up from the typewriter. "We've been at this thing for two hours," Brenda complained, "and I haven't even written half a page!"

The typewriter table stood a few feet from the davenport in the living room of Brenda Vail's apartment. A lamp made of a Chinese vase with a shade illuminated the young woman's face.

Brenda Vail turned. She had been reading before the open window and now she rested one hand against the mantel. It was a pose that was becoming as Brenda Vail very well knew. Her figure was silhouetted against the black sky. She wore her favorite costume—pajamas. They were made with trousers of black velvet and a tunic of gold brocade.

Miss Vail shrugged impatiently. "What is the use?" she said. "I have told you that when I am out of the mood I simply can not work. I am tired. My head aches. This trying to build up action, to plan sentences and exclaim, it is madness!"

"I'm sorry," Phillips' tone was apologetic. "I didn't know you weren't feeling well. It's only that we know we promised ourselves we'd have the first act done this evening. A little rest and perhaps it'll be able to get at it again."

He arose but the woman put out her hand to stop him. "No," she said. "Don't go. Stay here and talk to me and maybe the story will feel better. I am as anxious to have the work finished as you are. A little rest and perhaps it'll be able to get at it again."

She sank to the davenport. Her head was pillowed against a cushion of jade satin. "Sit here beside me," she went on. "You're comforting, Dan. I feel as though I'd know you a long while, yet what is it? Only about two weeks. Most of that time we've been talking about gamblers and gamblers and other terrible creatures. Talk to me about something else, something you don't know."

For an instant the gray-green eyes met Dan's. "If you so will," she said. "I'd know you a long while, yet what is it? Only about two weeks. Most of that time we've been talking about gamblers and gamblers and other terrible creatures. Talk to me about something else, something you don't know."

Phillips smiled. "That's an odd thing for you to say. You have so many friends, Brenda. Why, you're the last person in the world I'd expect to be lonely."

"You think so? Ah, then you are not as clever as I thought. Loneliness comes from the heart. What do you know of a woman's heart?"

"Why—why I don't know. I don't spend much time reading those love-story columns if that's what you mean. I've always had the idea that men and women are really pretty much alike."

Miss Vail leaned her head back. "Men and women are alike," Brenda Vail said slowly. "And yet they are different. Each of us, I suppose, is doomed to much loneliness. It is only when a man or woman meets another who really understands that the loneliness is lifted. But there—I have myself for company all day. I want you to talk to me."

Phillips smiled. He looked very much at home and very attractive when he smiled. "I'm sorry, but honestly the only thing I've been thinking of for a week is this play. Do you really understand what this means to me, Brenda? Do you? Why, I'd begun to think I was sunk in this place forever! I thought I was never to have a chance. It was the greatest piece of luck in the world for me when you came here."

She was pleased. "And I think it was luck for me, too," she said. "Tell me—what are you planning to do if our play is a great success?"

"Oh, I hadn't thought that far ahead yet. Remember, I don't act in this play. But I'd like to go to New York and know some of the people you've talked about. I'd like to go to the places you've told me about. That must be the life—New York with the theaters and the people who write and act and paint!"

"It is a great life," the woman said. "And it is what you should have, Dan. For to write you must really know life. You must have experienced adventures if you want to call them that. You must see something of the world. Oh, you have talent—I am sure of that. But you need to develop it."

"You must let nothing stand in the way of your work," she told him. "Nothing—do you understand? You must go to New York. You must travel. You must have freedom and

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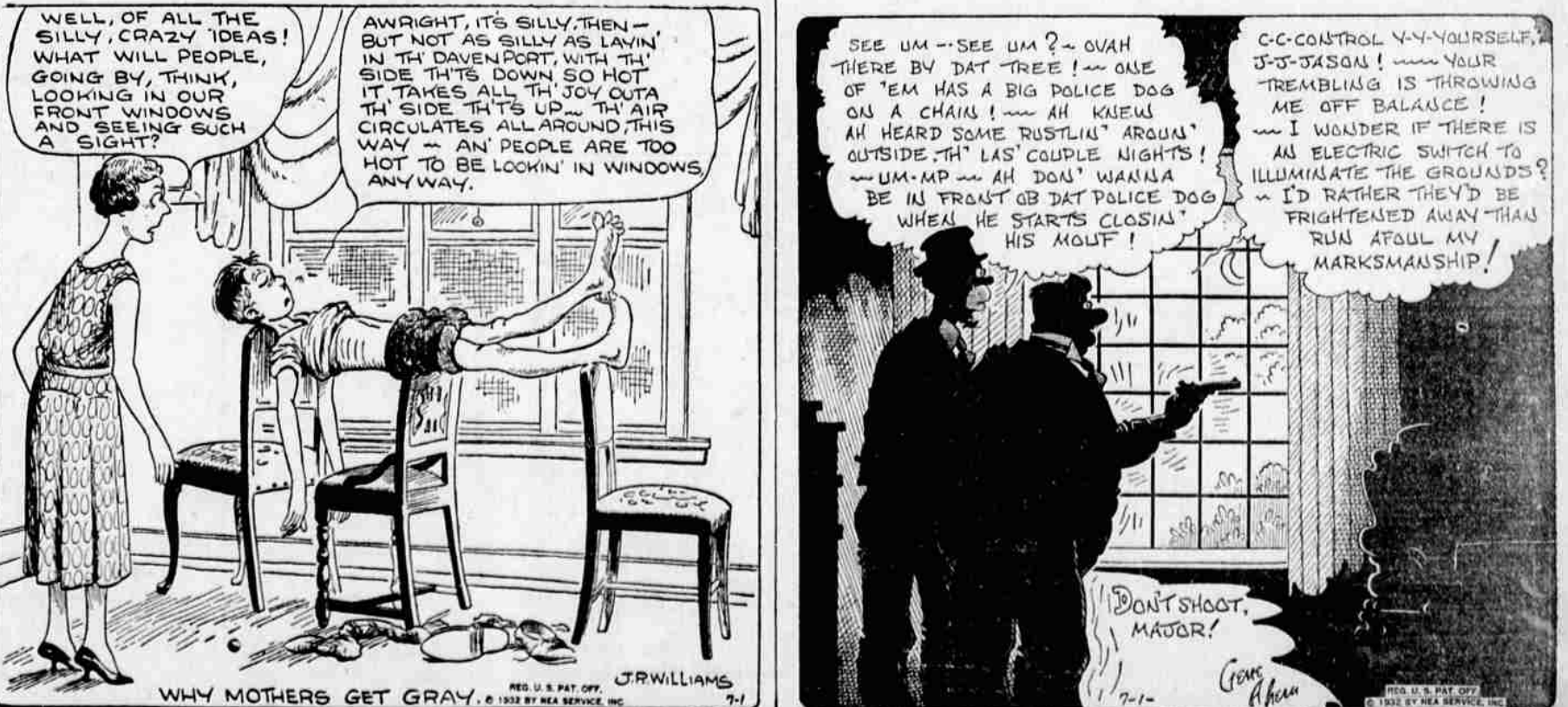
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