LEAP YEAR BRIDE

by Laura Lou BROOKMAN

CHAPTER XLVI

ENDA'S expression altered instantly. There was just time for ick glance into the mirror to sure herself. Angry color flamed r cheeks but that was all right. er becoming.

'll get out as soon as I can," ips promised beneath his breath. ey heard the hall door open close, the murmur of voices then footsteps. Brenda, radiant smiling now, hurried to greet newcomer.

Mr. Harris!" she said with sac- ine infection. "This is such a ure—"

nd for me, too, Miss Vail." e man on the threshold was g looking. Tall, well set up rather handsome. His hair and were dark. He wore a dark carried a brief case. As he e he stepped forward, surveythe room with a swift glance his eyes turned to Dan.

renda intervened. "Mr. Harris," said quickly, "this is Mr. Phil- he's—why, why, DAN—!"

or suddenly Dan Phillips had wn his head back and burst a shout of laughter. "Mr. Har-" he exclaimed. "So this is your Harris, is it! Oh, this is too h—!"

he laughing continued, became ier.

renda Vail said hotly, "I don't " what you're laughing at. I t understand—!"

ll at once she saw that someg had happened to Mr. Harris. brisk business-like manner was Harris was—yes, he looked nish. He was actually grinning, ing at Dan as though the two each other. It was incredible.

What's—what's this all about?" woman asked helplessly. "I'd to know the joke, too." She ed at Harris. "You—you are Harris, aren't you? That's your , isn't it? Do you know Mr. llips?"

he stranger's face sobered. "Yes, know him," he answered. "I 't expect to see him here, rh. It's — rather a surprise. nges things somewhat. I—well, Dan here I suppose I may as he frank. I'm the Mr. Harris were expecting, Miss Vail, and again, I'm not. My name is ris—that is, it's my middle name. had a note from me saying call this afternoon to talk to about picture rights on your es. The fact is—well, I'm not presentative of United Actors as id you—"

You're not with United Actors? n you're not the man who wrote —"

Oh, yes I am. I wrote the let- and sent them to a friend of to remail from New York."

But, Mr. Harris—!" Brenda Vail's had lost its animation. She staring at the man uncompre- ingly, almost stupidly. "If you're the Mr. Harris, who are you?" demanded.

My name is Pearson, Miss Vail. Harris Pearson. I'm on the s."

You—on The News! You mean in Wellington? You mean you n't anything to do with motion ures? Then United Actors—they 't want my stories?" Suddenly turned on Pearson with blazing er. "What did you do it for?" cried. "How dare you? Oh, but e must be a law against this of thing. I'll see that you pay it! Tried to trap me, didn't you? ught you'd get money—"

Brenda's afternoon had been too h for her. She snatched up the rest thing at hand, a pottery , and hurled it across the room. vase hit the wall, shattered pieces. Brenda's anger was not ssed. She caught up a cushion n the davenport, ripping the silk that the cotton lining fell to the r.

What did you do it for?" she amed.

he two men exchanged glances. ysterical woman is not a pleas- sight. Phillips said, "There's use losing control of yourself, da. People wil hear you—"

What if they do! Do you under- d what he's telling me? It ns I can't go to Hollywood! money—I'd counted on $10,000 least!—it means there won't be money! What am I to do now? never been so humiliated. So mistreated! I'll see that you for this. I'll see that you er—!"

earson was actually sorry for Rage had made Brenda Vail a haggard, shrew-like old wo- She looked years beyond her Her lined, twisted face was etic.

I'm sorry," he said sincerely. shouldn't have done it. There e reasons but—well, there's no going into that. Miss Vail ,I iberately decieved you and I deserve whatever you think of me. But after I've said I'm sorry I'm afraid there's nothing more to be—"

"Oh, you think that, do you?" Brenda snapped. "Well, you'll find there's plenty I can do about it. I'll have you arrested. I'm going to make you pay—"

"I'm afraid you won't be able to do that," the young man said quietly. "You see, Miss Vail, I've been a newspaperman too long to take chances where law is concerned. There was no mention of money in my letters. I didn't sign anyone else's name. When you examine those letters closely you'll find there's nothing whatever in them on which you can base charges."

"You think I'd believe that? You think I'm going to listen to you? Well, I'm going to see my lawyer!"

"Then you'll only be obliged to pay fees for nothing. It will be rather foolish."

• • •

Perhaps Brenda believed him. Perhaps she saw that suddenly every one of her glamorous dreams had faded. The vision of Brenda Vail, the great scenario writer—her name flashing on the silver screen—her photograph in newspapers—wealth, fame, influential acquaintances—all that had vanished. The woman turned away, covering her face with her hands.

"We'd better go," Phillips said. "Brenda doesn't want us here, Max."

my sight, I tell you—!"

"Yes, go! I never want to see either of you again! Get out of

Her angry, high-pitched voice followed them out into the hall. Silently the two men entered the elevator and rode to the ground floor. They stepped out on the street and Phillips was surprised to see how light it was. A little after five o'clock. It seemed hours since he had entered Brenda's apartment but in reality it was less than 45 minutes.

"I'm glad of it," Pearson told him. "I was beginning to think you'd lost your head entirely. That's how I got into this mix-up. Senseless apparently. I suppose that's what usually comes from stepping into other people's affairs. But I couldn't stand by and see a dame like this Vail woman put the skids on you! I figured that if I could get her interested in going to Hollywood—make her think she had a chance at the big dough—she'd, well, show up in her true colors. She's vain, of course. Terribly vain. You see I took the trouble to look up Brenda Vail rather thoroughly."

"How'd you do that?"

"Oh, sent a couple wires. You didn't happen to know about Brenda's marriage, did you?"

"Married? But she's not—?"

"No, she isn't married now. Husband died two years ago—killed in a taxi smash-up. Seems he was crazy about Brenda and she led his around by the nose. The dope is that this husband could really write and people who knew both of them insist he wrote the magazine stories printed under Brenda's by-line. At any rate she hasn't had a thing published since his death."

Phillip's lips tightened but he did not speak.

"Listen, Dan," Pearson went on. "I hope you're not sore about what I tried to do. Suppose I should have known the thing was silly but it seemed to work. At least she fell for those letters. I wouldn't have tried such a thing if I hadn't known about the phoney game Brenda pulled."

"I'm not sore," Phillips assured him. "At least not at you. When I think what a complete idiot I've been—!"

"Forget it. She's not worth worrying about!"

"Oh, isn't she? Listen, let me out of this car. I've got to find a telephone!"

"You can't do that, Dan. I won't let you. You can't go back to that vampire, I tell you!"

"She's not a vampire! She's—an angel. She's the sweetest, dearest, most wonderful girl in the world! Stop this car, Max. I tell you I've got to telephone. Good Lord—you don't think I'm talking about Brenda Vail, do you? It's Cherry! I tell you I've got to find Cherry!"

(To Be Continued)

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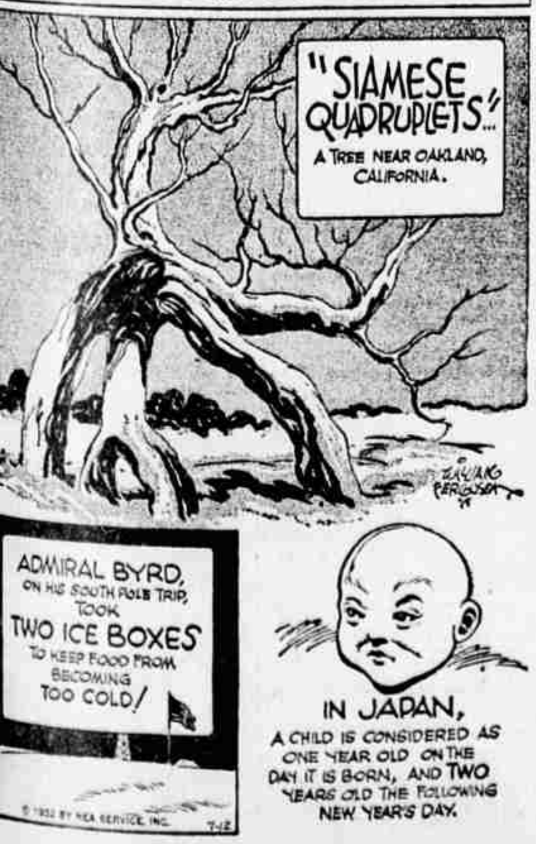

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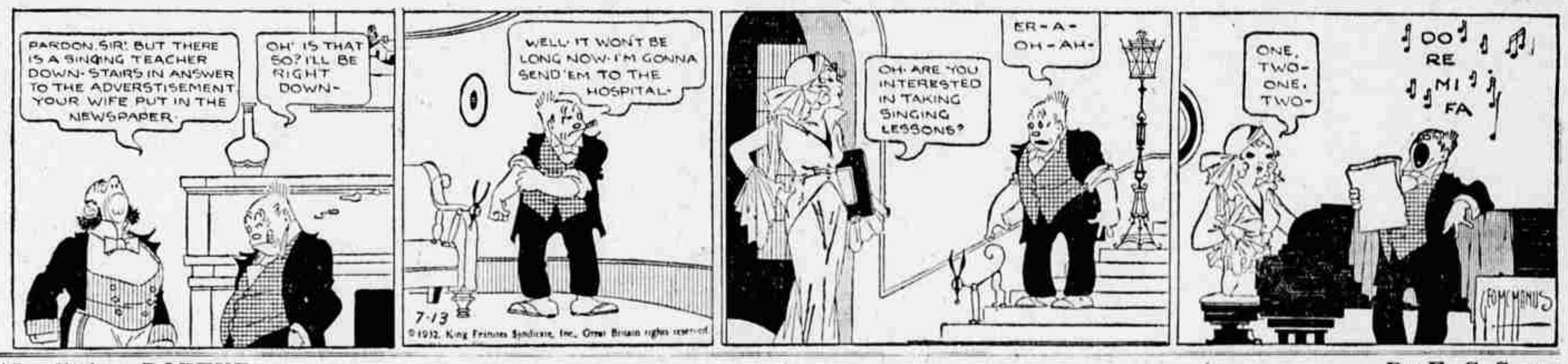

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