

DARLING FOOL

CHAPTER XXXVII
Miss Anstice, 50 and birdlike, her gray curls escaping from a new velvet turban, smiled benevolently at the girl.

"We'll go first to the Splendobil," she said. "We'll be there by 8. Dinner in our room—or if you'd rather, down in the restaurant. I think that would be better. You'll like that."

"Oh, so much!"

"Well, then, that's settled. I thought you weren't too tired to go to a play. There's Katherine Cornell in that new Miss Anstice, taking off her gloves and blowing gently into her fingers to keep the shape, as she had seen her mother do."

"I'm never tired," declared the girl in the green coat, meaning it and looking as if the statement might be true.

"The boat sails at 12 tomorrow," murmured Miss Anstice, rehearsing their plans for the doze time. "I won't sleep a wink I'm afraid. It must seem silly to you, at my age, but the fact is I'm terribly excited, my dear."

"Oh, so am I!" cried Monnie. "It's the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me. I still can't believe it."

"That's a very nice young man," Miss Anstice mused a moment later, touching her curls reflectively.

"Who? Oh, Charles?" Monica O'Dare smiled without a trace of self-consciousness. "Yes, isn't he splendid?"

"Now in my day," said Miss Anstice, "he would have been considered quite a catch."

"Oh, but he is! All of that," protested Monnie innocently. "All the mothers on the Hill are angling for him. At least that's what I hear."

"I understand none of them have been very successful," murmured the older woman with an oblique glance. "With Charles?" Monnie considered this. "Well, I don't know. Charles is sort of—well, distant. I don't," averred Monnie, "think he cares much about girls."

"Monica O'Dare! I could shake you!"

"What for?" The girl turned a surprised look upon her companion. Miss Anstice primed her lips, shrugging.

"Never mind. Only—I never heard such nonsense in my life!"

It was only, Monnie reminded herself, 12 hours since they had left Belvedere. With her eyes fixed on the stage where the deep-voiced, tragic-eyed girl moved so gracefully, Monnie's heart beat more swiftly. All day she had been perfectly happy, looking forward to the trip, the hotel and the excitement of the big boat. But now she was reminded of what a wrenching thing love could be. She wanted desperately to forget that, wanted to laugh a little and play a lot.

"Isn't it beautiful, my dear?" That was Miss Anstice, wiping her eyes. "People don't love like that any more. They don't know real romance."

"I suppose they don't," Monnie knew she didn't mean that. Of course, they did! Manners had changed and speech along with costumes. But the flaming feeling—that was the same.

Coming up the aisle of the theater later behind Miss Anstice the girl was conscious of eyes watching her. She lifted her own to encounter the bold stare of a tall man in full evening attire. He held his top hat at a most elegant angle and stood negligently on the fringe of a smart party. The women, Monnie observed, were beautifully dressed and talked in shrill, assured voices.

"How extremely rude!" Miss Anstice, taking her arm, was piloting her toward a taxi.

"I think it extraordinary, the way people stare in the city," observed Miss Anstice. "That man! I didn't

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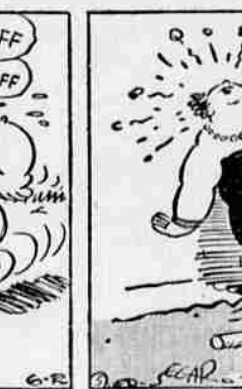
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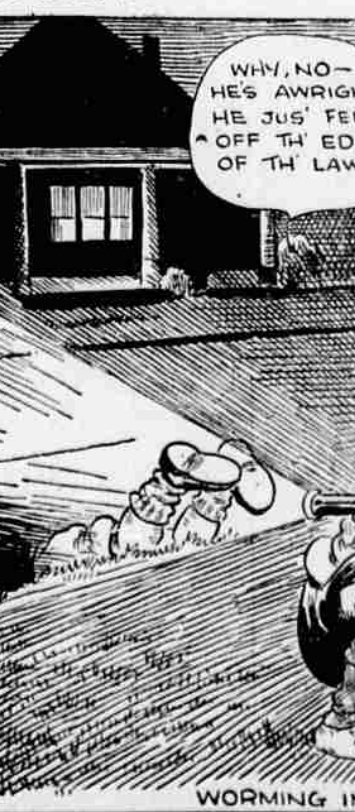
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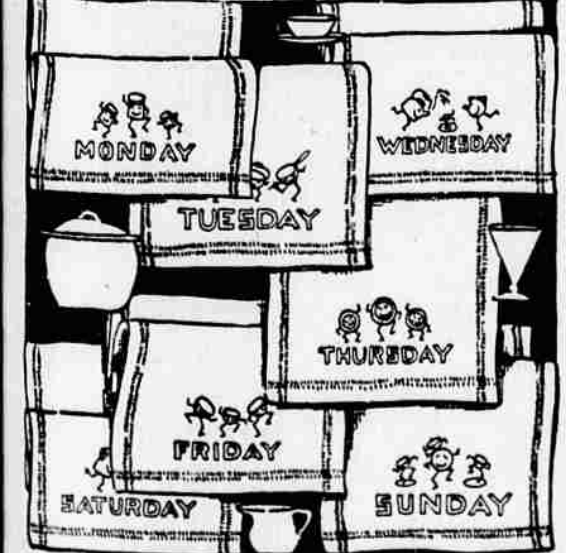


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