DARLING FOOL

by MABEL McELLIOTT

CHAPTER XXVIII

Why had she liked Arthur Mackenzie quickly, on sight she wondered? Was it because he reminded her of Charles? He wasn't the least bit like him, really. Why, he must be 40! But he was nice. There was something definitely attractive about this assured man of the world.

"He's the sort who gets what he wants, always," thought the girl dreamily. It must be wonderful to go about with a man like that, to be cared, taken care of as if you were a valuable piece of porcelain. Kay would love New York, love the kind of life Monnie had had a glimpse of tonight. Motor doors opening and shutting, rich fabrics, the scent of costly, elusive perfumes on the air.

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For the first time since her decision to go with Miss Corey had taken form, Monnie was honestly glad.

"Maybe I can free myself from this obsession about Dan," she thought, slipping off. There had been days when she was certain she had conquered the wild, ungovernable anguish, and then a chance look, a word, a chanted line of verse, would set the old pain to throbbing again. Well, she could put half a world between them and perhaps that would help.

They had an early breakfast and were ready a full hour before the time appointed, their bags strapped and waiting.

"The clerk says he's sending up some mail," Miss Anstice announced, turning away from the telephone. Monnie's heart gave a wild leap. A letter—the long-awaited letter might be among them! But there was only a bon voyage note from Kay and another from Charles Eustace. She had to throttle her disappointment. She had been hoping against hope that Dan might send her one little line to take with her to all those strange places.

"Any news?" Miss Anstice looked up from her checkbook.

"No news!" Monnie smiled valiantly to hide the hurt.

She stood on the deck a little later, watching late comers board the ship. Miss Anstice was in her cabin but she had sent Monica out "to see the entertainment." A slim wand of a girl in a coat of hunter's green, her amber eyes starry above the collar of deep brown fur, she drew many eyes. Porters struggled with trunks on the deck, leisurely men with brief cases strolled aboard. There was one bridal party, youthful and distinguished, dressed with careless elegance, making farewells. The girl had a long, pale, aristocratic face. She was wrapped austerely in black caracul topped by a stole of silver fox. Monnie could hear her slow drawl.

"My dear, we'll see you in Biarritz next month. Don't look at Ronnie—those drinks last night were poisonous—"

Somehow, Monnie thought, this girl didn't fit the picture of the happy bride. She looked cool, disdainful, far from radiant.

"Good morning, Miss O'Dare."

Monnie wheeled, surprised to hear her name spoken in this melee. There, watching her with an expression of faint amusement on his weatherbeaten face, was her good Samaritan of the night before, Arthur Mackenzie.

"Oh, how do you do! You're seeing some one off?"

He shook his head, enjoying her amusement. "No, I'm sailing. Discovered I had some urgent business in Spain and thought I might as well make this boat. It's my favorite."

The girl in the silver fox glanced their way and Mackenzie bowed to her ironically. Her glance included Monica and she said something in a low tone to her companions. There was a soft murmur of laughter from the group. Mackenzie took Monica's arm and she could not resent the gesture, so impersonal it was. He smiled down at her.

"Let's get out of this crowd, shall we? Where is Miss Corey?"

Monnie explained, conscious of heightened color and of a quickened pulse. The man made small talk easily and well. His manner was perfect. Ah, she must see this—and that! Were they to be in London for long? His sister, Lady de Cassan, was down in Sussex and that was a pity. She would have liked meeting them.

"You'll be at the Berkeley, Miss Corey said?" His nod was comprehensive.

At the companionway entrance they again encountered the girl in the black furs, alone. Negligently she said, giving Mackenzie a half-moon of a smile, "Nice to see you, Arthur."

He hesitated. "Miss O'Dare, Mrs. Faneway."

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Monica acknowledged the introduction shyly and the tall girl bowed, giving her an appraising glance with something inimical behind it. At that instant little Miss Corey appeared from nowhere at a high pitch of excitement.

"Oh, Monica, my dear, there you are!" Miss Anstice's composure, meeting Mr. Mackenzie, was perfect. "Such a nice surprise, Mr. Mackenzie. I had no idea, last night—"

"Nor did I." His smooth tone sounded regretful. "It was a sudden thing. I was just piloting Miss O'Dare around."

Monnie thought she saw a flash of amusement in the tall girl's smile as she drifted away.

"See you sometime, Arthur," the girl's voice floated back. The lean, bronzed young man who had been at her side rejoined her.

"Is that Corinth Candell who just married Harris Faneway?" breathed Miss Corey who always read all the society sections of the newspapers.

"Yes. Lovely, isn't she? Her father's my partner."

"Very pretty. Very pretty." Miss Anstice raised the lorgnette she had been training on Belvedere society for 20 years. Privately she thought that Monica with her delicate, wild rose coloring and starry gaze was much more delightful to look at but this Faneway girl had style. Now Monica, with the right clothes and the proper background, would be ravishing. Miss Corey gave Mackenzie a quick glance. She must find out as soon as possible if he was married—

"All ashore," called the uniformed man coming toward them. "All ashore," echoed the men below.

There were the usual prolonged farewells. Handkerchiefs waved from the dock. All at once, with a clamor of bells and a throb of engines, the great ship began to move.

As the trio watched a messenger boy come trotting down the ramp, waving a yellow slip.

"Some beggar's missed his message," commented a fat man beside Monnie. She listened dreamily to the harbor sounds, watching the piers slip past. She was on her way at last to adventure. The messenger boy and his tardy telegram meant nothing to her. How was she to know that Dan had sent her a wire at the hotel and that it had been forwarded to the boat?

Dan had said, "Forgive foolish letter. Waiting to hear from you. Love."

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DAN said grumpily, "Tell her I'm out."

The new maid stood in the doorway, irresolute, as Mrs. Cardigan murmured protestingly, "Dan, you simply must go! It's disgraceful."

(To Be Continued)

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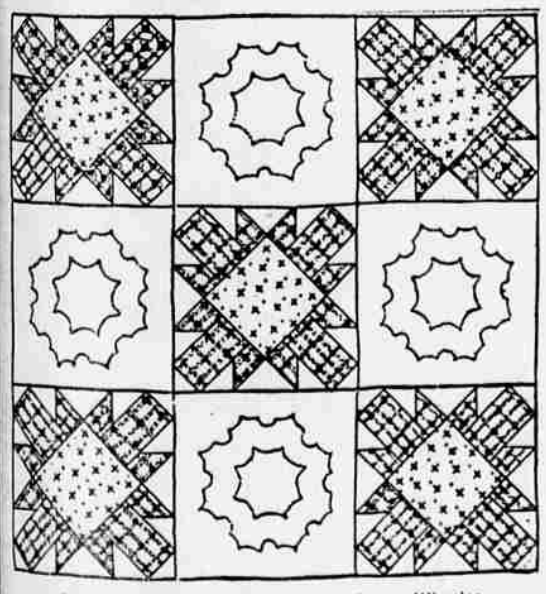

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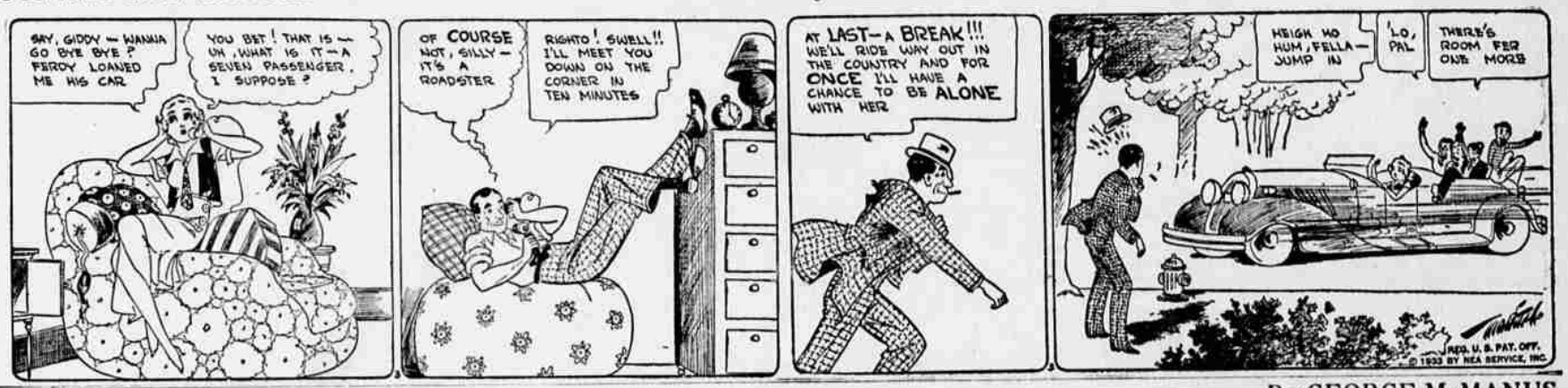

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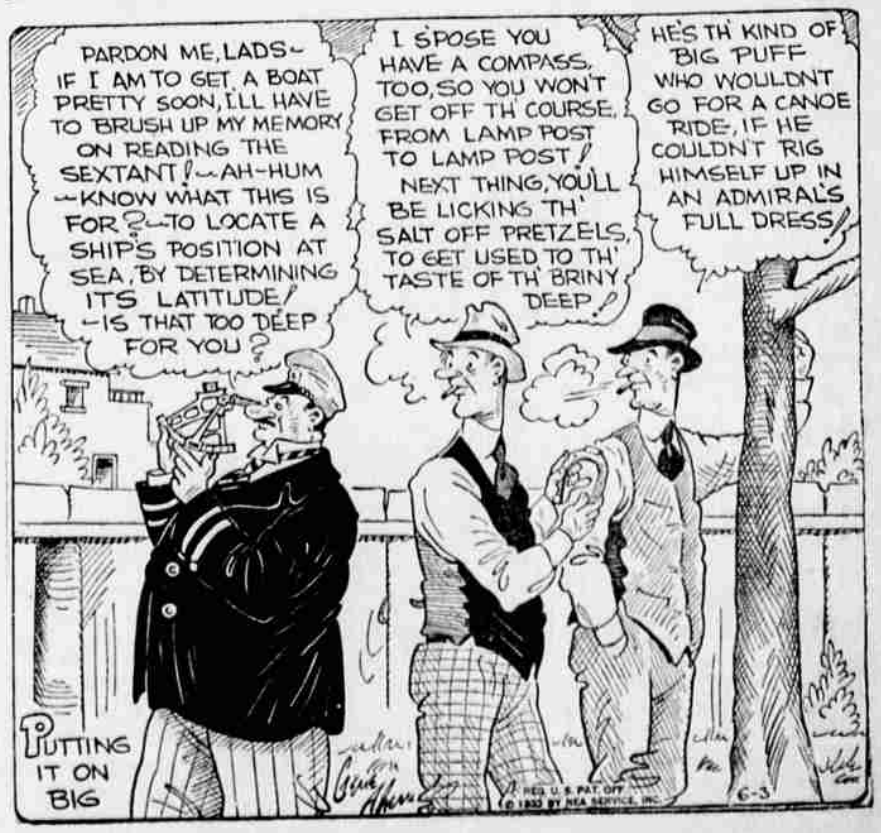
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