

DARLING FOOL

CHAPTER XLIV

"I know," he said firmly. "I know that." There was eagerness in his eyes. "You can see Paris any time. Next month—next year—with me. Monica, I am asking you to marry me."

The color flared up in her cheeks. "But that's impossible," she said. "I can't tell you now," she persisted. "Later."

"Then you won't go back with me?" His face darkened. "We could be married by special license tomorrow. Never mind how—I could arrange it. You could sail with me and in January when all this business of the loan is finished we could come back to Paris together. I've wanted to show you Paris. Remember I said that from the start?"

"I remember!" Amber eyes flashed at him.

"Monica, you darling! Don't disappoint me now."

She trembled, feeling this man's power, his attraction. "Give me until morning," she pleaded at last, in answer to his importunities. "Telephone me at nine."

"The boat train," he reminded her. "Leaves at 11. That makes it short." But his eyes were glowing with triumph. He felt himself master of the situation. "You can throw a few things into a dressing case, can't you? And Miss Corey can send your trunk later."

The girl began to be taken back to her hotel early; for by this time she was actually almost ill with nervousness and excitement. MacKenzie readily acceded to her request. He was jubilant. Already he treated her like one of his choicest possessions. She was cold? Ah, that would never do! "Haggins, wrap Miss O'Dare in the fur rug, so!" That was better. He would order hot milk sent up to her directly she got back to her room. Did she mind being alone until Miss Anstice returned? Well, all the better perhaps, so that she might make her decision.

At parting he was very gentle with her, under the bright, respectful eye of the uniformed boy at the lift. "Sleep well," he charged her, smiling. "Oh, I will," she promised, laughing nervously. "Thank you for everything—you are so kind."

But her eyes were troubled after she had left him. What should she do? It was too much to expect her to make such a tremendous decision overnight. Out of his presence, she now relaxed, feeling, if the truth were told, a bit resentful at the tumultuousness of his wooing. Miss Corey had described him not long ago as a bit of a pirate. The term suited him exactly. He had a touch of the buccannery about him. A polite, well-dressed buccannery, of course, but there was in his nature a trace of the ruthlessness which belongs to the unscrupulous. Monica recognized this, liking him none the less for it. Attracted in spite of herself. That he was twice her age did not seem to matter. She was young enough to consider this fact in itself a romantic circumstance. She did not love him—no! But since she could not have the man she most people inclined to overestimate the value of love?

She sat thus, wrapped in her old blue dressing gown, and sipped the warm milk the servant brought her, reminded by it of the man's solitude for her.

"What shall I do?" she cried aloud to the empty walls. "What shall I tell him tomorrow?"

As if in answer to her cry a soft knock sounded at the door of the suite. Monica, thinking the maid had returned to carry away the empty cup, softly called, "Come." But, instead of the fresh-faced English woman in her neat uniform, a page boy entered with an envelope on a silver.

"The letter came on the boat train madam. The director thought it might be urgent, it had been so delayed."

She tore the envelope open with trembling fingers. Dan's writing. It had been addressed to her hotel in New York and forwarded.

What could he have to say to her?

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MONNIE turned the letter slowly in her hands. Dan's familiar writing, black and bold, stared back at her. Her heart turned over. How odd—how very odd it was to receive a letter from him at this moment, when she was trying to make the most momentous decision of her life! It was as if Dan himself had reached across the many miles that separated them, saying, "Wait, Monnie! Don't forget me. I'm still here!"

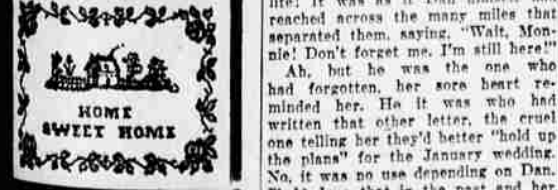
Ah, but he was the one who had forgotten her. Her sore heart reminded her. He it was who had written that other letter, "hold up one telling her they'd better 'hold up the plans' for the January wedding. No, it was no use depending on Dan. He'd done that in the past and her pride, her love, her faith in him had been wounded past bearing."

Should she open it? Should she make her decision first—and by this time she had pretty well decided what she would say to Arthur MacKenzie on the morrow—and read Dan's letter afterward? Had he still the power to sway her past reason, past belief? Did she dare to see what Dan had written her on the very day before she had sailed from New York to adventure and from another man's devotion? She wondered. While she was pondering the matter, flushed and disturbed, little Miss Anstice blew in.

(To Be Continued)

More women than men live to be centenarians.

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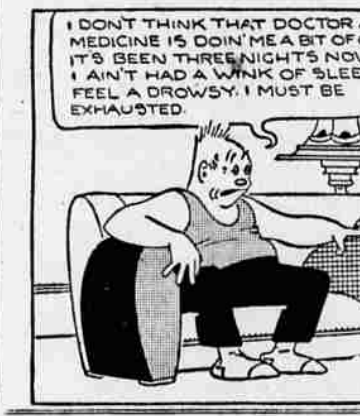
TIM TYLER'S FLYING LUCK



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



BRINGING UP FATHER



OUT OUR WAY



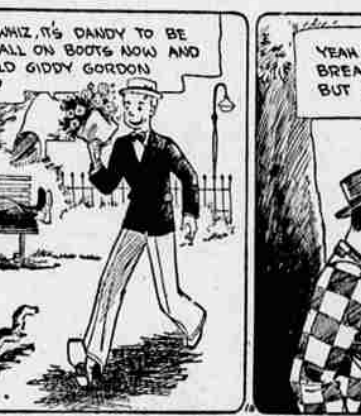
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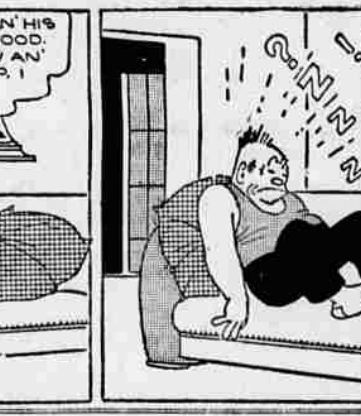
THIMBLE THEATRE



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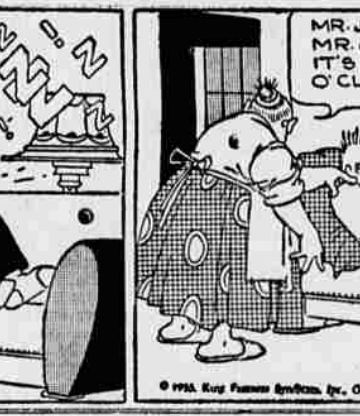
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