

DARLING FOOL

By MABEL McLELLON

CHAPTER XLII

"Neither. Merely from New York. Why don't you like him?"

Charles shrugged. "He's all right. One of those picturesque buccannery of finance. Rich enough for—"

"For what?" Monica prompted him. "For anything." Charles' tone dropped the subject. Courteously, as one stranger to another, he asked, "Is the doctor in?"

"No, he's not." How odd, she thought, that he didn't know Dr. Waterman had gone to Chicago for that conference. Surely she had heard him tell Charles only yesterday about the trip.

"I won't stop then," Charles said. "He was gone with a cool and distant bow in his direction."

"I hate him!" Monica said, aloud in the quiet room. She was furiously angry. No one had ever made her so angry before. She wanted to quarrel with him violently, satisfyingly.

"What did you say?" Charles was on the threshold again, lean and elegant. He had heard her.

"Nothing!" She stared back at him, all defiance.

"Oh, yes, you did." Suddenly his face was not two inches away from her own. He, too, was angry. His lips were set grimly. Monica deliberately pointed her own, in the shape of a kiss. Almost before she knew what was happening, he had pinned her arms to her sides, was kissing her fiercely, angrily.

"You asked for that," "Oh, oh!" She panted, struggling for release. "How dare you?"

"You wanted me to." He taunted her with that, letting her go.

She would have struck at him blindly but again those strong arms pinned her as in a vise. "Saving them for Mackenzie, eh?"

Monica flushed a deep scarlet. Not only the words but the tone were insulting.

"You—you're insufferable! I don't know why I ever thought you were my friend."

"Friend!" Charles laughed softly. "You must know that's not friendship between a man and a girl. Either they're in love and know it or—"

"Or what?" She was still furious with him but curiosity had her in its grip. She must know what he meant to do.

"Or they're in love and don't know it," Charles finished shortly. He walked over to a mirror, coolly straightening his tie.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to behave like a cave man," he said. "I just stopped in, really, to say goodbye. I'm leaving day after tomorrow. Before I go may I wish you health, happiness and prosperity—all that sort of thing?"

"Thank you," Monica was trembling all over. She could scarcely stand but she was determined he should not know it.

"I suppose I won't be invited to the wedding."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

His voice was harsh. "Don't you? Miss Andie says he wanted you to marry him in London and that you'd almost made up your mind."

"Really? Who's listening to gossip now?" She wanted to put her hands on her hips and shout at him. She had never felt such a passion of violence in her life.

"One hears things," Charles lit a cigarette, watching her coolly.

"And you assume I couldn't resist the charms of great wealth?"

"What girl could?"

Monica whirled on him, a veritable small fury. "You mean what poor girl? Oh, how dare you talk to me like that? You never would—to someone—someone like—"

She could not go on. She was afraid, desperately afraid, she was going to cry.

(To Be Continued)

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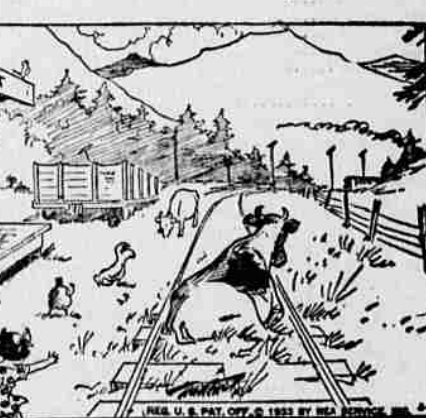
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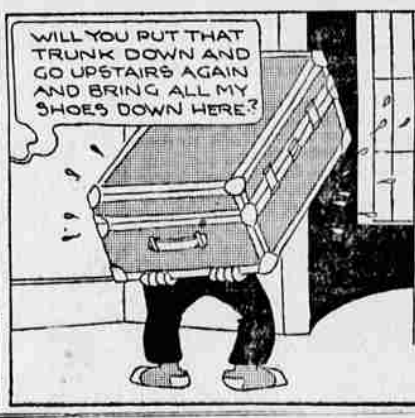
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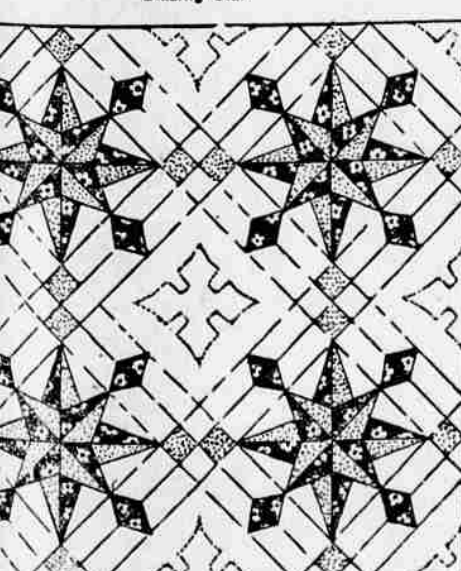
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