

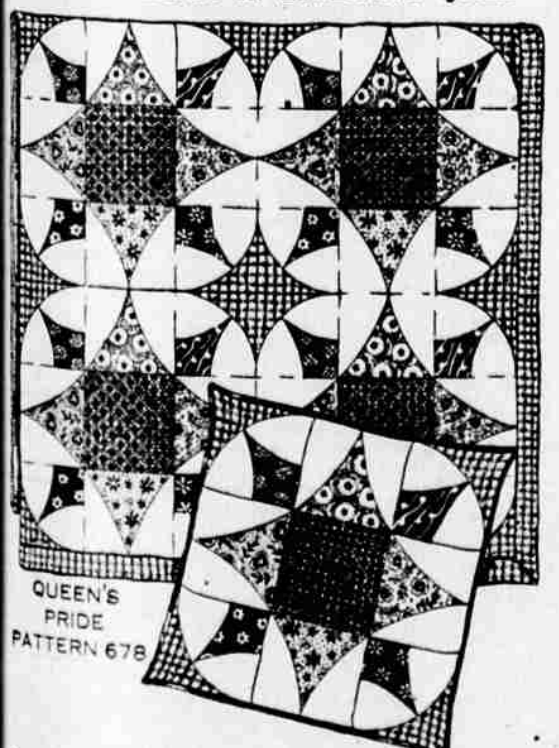
The ROMANTIC RUNAWAY

by KATHARINE HAVILAND-TAYLOR

CHAPTER XXVIII
balcony, guarded by a twisted wrought iron grill.
"Oh, very well, Miss Treadway." "Why don't you call me Marcia, lamb? I'd rather you did. Otherwise you'll make me feel terribly ancient. When anyone calls me 'Miss Marcia' I simply want to kill them!"
Estelle laughed. Miss Treadway talked as she always had—so quickly that the listener had a definite impression of scintillating brightness. If the words had been analyzed little real brightness would have been found, but then few of Marcia's world had time for analyzing anything or the habit of doing it.
"Would you like tea, Marcia?" Estelle asked, hesitating a fraction of a second.
"No, sweet. I'd love one of those cocktails with 47 mean elements in them, though. Do you know what I mean?"
"I don't but Kerry will. He's a rather important person who does all sorts of things for father. I'll ask him to have it sent up." Estelle rose, speaking, and Marcia moved to lay her hands on the girl's slender shoulders. "You really are sweet," she drawled coolly with a smile after a frank, slowly taken surrey.
"I'm not," Estelle answered with conviction, "but it's lovely of you to say so, Marcia."
"We're going to have some good times together, child."
"I know I shall!"
A few days with Marcia were enough to convince Estelle that the visit was no answer to her loneliness. Marcia was brutally frank in her conversation and her gossip was a sort far from agreeable to the girl.
"My dear," she would say, "He lived with her for years right under his wife's nose! Of course, knowing his wife, you can't help but rather sympathize with him. Besides, 'live and let live' is my motto. That's a sweet dress you have on, child!"
Frequently Marcia would watch Estelle narrowly as she talked thus bitterly or frankly. The child would have no peace, Marcia thought impatiently, until she had ceased dreaming and come to a blunt understanding of the world about her. Estelle seemed none times to be an incorrigible dreamer.
"Don't believe in anything and learn to take everything you can get," Marcia said sharply one noon. "The sooner you do, the better for you! The only people who know anything like happiness are those who are absolutely heartless."
"But I don't want to believe that!" Estelle protested.
"You'll have to, sooner or later. I know! I was like you once but I got over it. The only thing to do is to laugh at everything and cheat when you can get away with it. That's as close as anyone gets to happiness."
Estelle started to go downstairs. As she threaded the narrow hallway looking down on the great living room she saw her father below. He was not alone.
Suddenly the girl turned into her room, to stand there with hands against her hot cheeks.
(TO BE CONTINUED)

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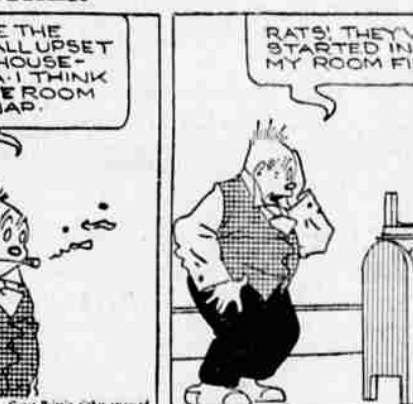
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