Lovable

By MARY RAYMOND © 1934 NEA SERVICE INC

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Ann had been willing to accept ction as a substitute for love she ld be lying now in a beautiful m. Presently Susan would enter h her breakfast, served on a large, er tray. A perfect breakfast, with fee in a low silver pot, iced fruit, st eggs, crisp bacon and a bit of rmalade. A slim vase holding two fect rosebuds.

"More coffee, madam?" The waiter, hovering near, spoke to the sad-d young woman who had scarcely ched her meager breakfast. He ed in a low tone, "There's no extra t. It is just a little compliment to customers."

"Thank you, no," Ann said. Half the luke-warm mixture was still in cup. She lifted it to her lips finished it.

"Could you tell me how far it is Engleside?"

"Fifteen or twenty miles out."

"Thank you."

An hour later Ann was lying on a in an inexpensive room of an in-pensive hotel. By conserving her ds she could manage to stay here ee days, eating sparingly at cheap taurants.

At noon she went out for another gal meal and returned to the hotel. the writing room she wrote an wer to the advertisement that had racted her eye.

* * *

The morning of the third day she eived an answer. Mrs. Lois Tracy been pleased with Miss Ann Jones' ter and would be glad to consider for the position. Since there was car line or bus service in the gleside section, Mrs. Tracy would e in for her early that afternoon.

Mrs. Lois Tracy proved to be a tty, dark-haired young woman, a le on the plump side, with a long, ly bob and intelligent dark eyes. In her brief appraisal of Ann, Mrs. acy decided, "She's too pretty. If had a husband I wouldn't consider a minute. She'll be good to the ldren. She's never been a gover-ss before. But she's smart. I nk I could depend on this girl. She's ning away—from some man or her-f. If it was a love affair, it wasn't tawdry kind."

Aloud she said, "If you want the re it's yours. The children—Pris-a (we call her Sissy) and Theodore onny)—are perfect little demons. they have average brains.

"I've never been able to get along h them very long at a time. I'm great shakes as a mother. I'm an ist, but children are no respecters genius. They're twins—and just out the time I'm getting an inspira-n Sonny wants an oatmeal cooky Sissy wants to show off her new nce steps."

Mrs. Tracy lighted a cigaret and ntinued, "By now you've probably ided I'm a terrible mother. I am. u think I haven't any business with ldren. That's true, but here they and, in spite of myself, I'm rather d of them. That's why I'm turning m over to someone like you.

"I've already decided that you ven't had kindergarten training and t you have never held a job of s kind before. That makes no ference to me. All you need to do keep one jump ahead of the kids."

Ann found that, except for her first ief greeting and an occasional yes d no, the conversation had been en-ely one-sided.

Yet here she was with a job.

* * *

HE wide gates ahead parted and swung open and two small chil-n appeared so suddenly they seem-to have sprung up like mushrooms. "Hello, duckies," Mrs. Tracy called. e who I've brought you—a nice y to teach you manners and spank u when you're naughty."

The dark-haired, dark-eyed little l stepped forward confidently and pped a chubby, tanned hand into n's. The blond, serious-eyed little y stood aside. Something caught Ann's throat. Peter's son, who uld be born some day, would be like nny. Sturdy, serious-eyed. Like ter, he must be won.

She was sorry for this little boy. nny had a mother who filled her life th pictures, and books and music at crowded those small ones out.

"I'm going to stay here a long time, Sonny," Ann said. "Let's get acquainted now."

She smiled at him and suddenly he was by her side. "Where are your books?"

"We'll use the old ones until you and Sissy and I can go to town and get new ones," Ann said.

"May I?" his voice was breathless.

"With lots of pictures," piped Sissy.

"All pictures," promised Ann.

The artist mother's swinging stride had carried her up the slope to the bungalow spreading out among the trees. Ann, holding Sissy's hand, followed. But her eyes were on the fair-haired boy trudging along on the other side.

"The other member of the household will be in around six," Mrs. Tracy told Ann later. They were sitting in the attractive bedroom that had been assigned to Ann.

"My brother, Allan Vincent," Mrs. Tracy explained. She got up and walked over to the window, walked restlessly back and sat down again. "I'm quite proud of him and just as worried about him."

Ann waited.

"What I mean is that he's gone far in his profession. He's at the top. But it isn't what he'd like to be doing and it has made him bitter. Am I boring you?"

"No. I'm interested."

Mrs. Tracy continued, "He intended to be an artist. We had a small inheritance from our father and Allan went abroad at 16. For nearly four years he gave himself to his studies. At the end of that time an honest and very blunt instructor told him he could never do anything really worth while. Allan's sense of color is extraordinary, but he lacks something."

Ann said softly, "What a shame. Perhaps the professor was wrong."

"No." Mrs. Tracy shook her head. "He was quite right. For six months the boy—he's only 24 now—went wild. Drank and ran about with a terrible crowd, lost himself entirely. One day he met a former classmate who is rich and insisted on lending Allan some money. He was furnishing a new home and asked Allan to help him.

"It ended by Allan doing the whole thing. The house was a sensation and contracts for others poured in. It gave my brother a new interest. He began to study again. He's been in France and England and only a few months ago opened an interior decoration studio here. He's made money, but it hasn't brought him happiness. He has a suite of rooms in town, but spends most of his time here. He tries out his color schemes in really charming paintings. Quaint ides. But it works."

* * *

It was dark when Allan Vincent arrived. He was slender, dark-haired, boyish-looking. Ann met his dark, discontented eyes. "I'm glad you're here," was the way he acknowledged the introduction. "For two reasons. The kids need discipline."

"I'm off to get into a hot bath and then into pajamas," Mrs. Tracy said. "I'm dead!"

"You look tired," Allan Vincent said to Ann. "Wouldn't you like to have dinner in bed, too? Don't hesitate, if you feel you'd like to. This is the original Liberty Hall. Very frequently, the children are the only ones at the table."

Ann was tempted. She felt tired, lonely, sick at heart. But, thinking of two children sitting alone at the table, she said, "No. I'd prefer having dinner with the children. It will be a good time to get acquainted."

"I'd prefer having dinner with the children, too," the young man said.

It was a queer meal. Ann thought. The strange young man with the intelligent, restless eyes at one end of the table, a child on each side. The children were quiet, their fascinated eyes fixed on Ann. Occasionally, under her coaxing, they broke into excited conversation.

"My mother doesn't know any stories but Miss Lane told us some. About Rumple—"

"Stilts," prompted Sonny.

"Skin," finished Sissy.

Ann knew about Rumplestiltskin too. And after dinner, she told the story with many embellishments.

(To Be Continued)

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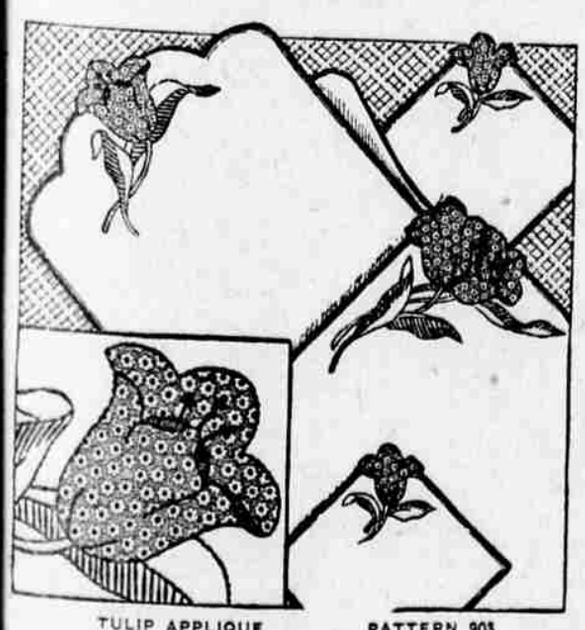

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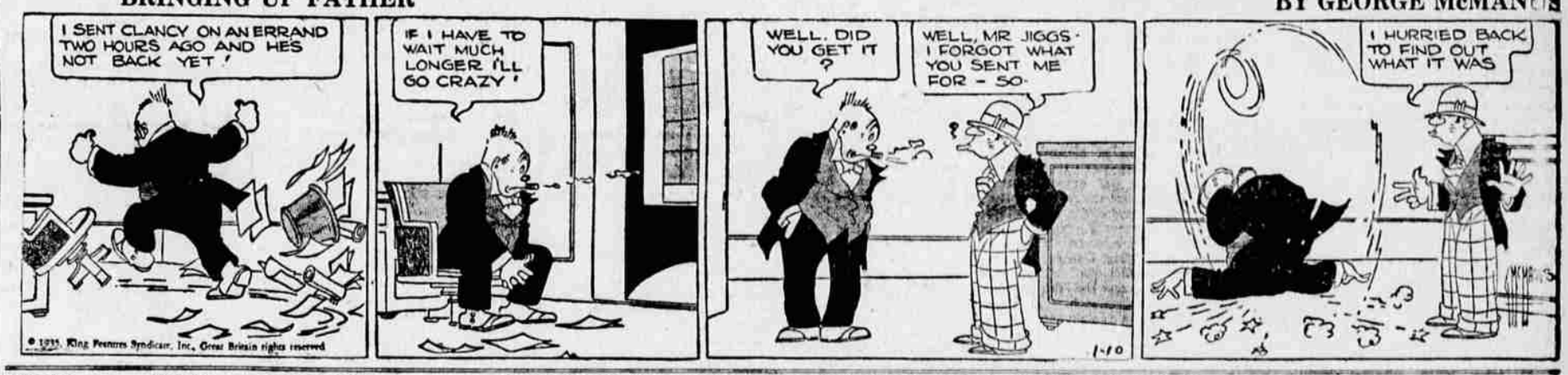

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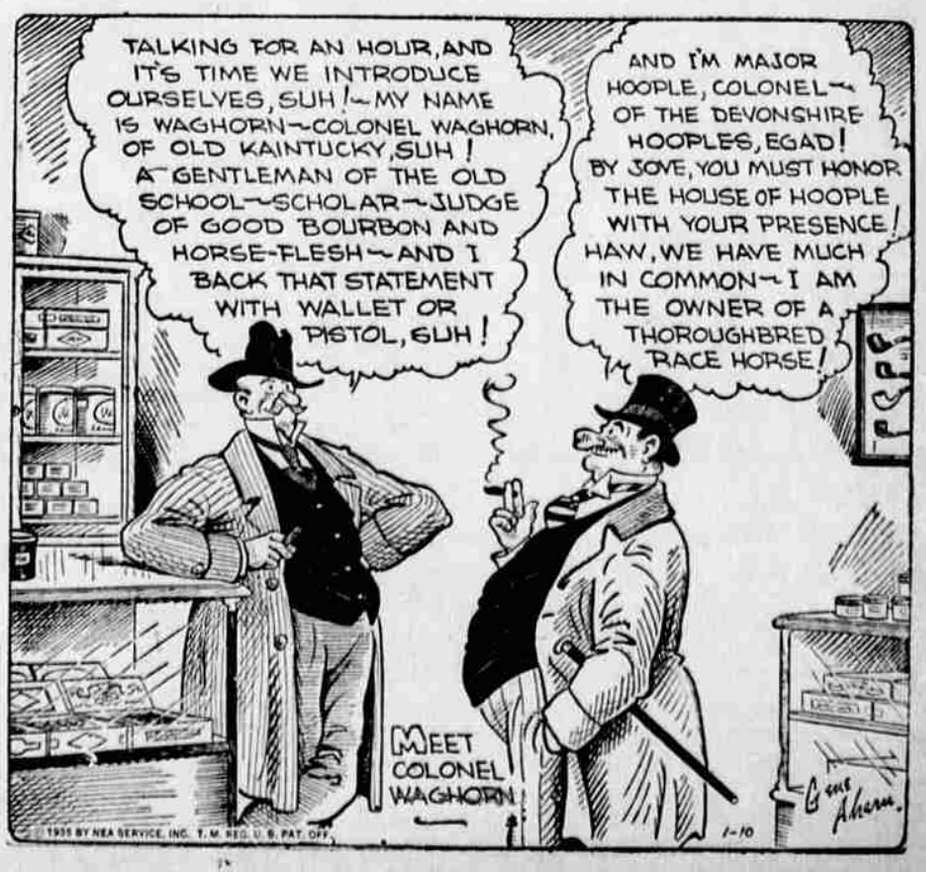
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