

Summer Sweethearts

By Mabel McElliot

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CHAPTER XVII

But no. To the left a dinghy painted red sped out toward the little boat bobbing at anchor. Gibbs Larkin's boat.

Zoe Parker eloping with Gibbs! That was preposterous. Katharine had hoped, uneasily, that she had named it. After all, even if it were true, was it any of her business?

She shook herself, sprang erect, ran to the end of the pier and, with a flash of green and white against the dazzling summer scene, the man smoking a cigarette on the deck opening from the gun room.

When he came down the pebbled path of beach several minutes later Katharine was swimming. She noted to him. "Come along in."

"Going to in half a minute." "John, you're mad at me!"

He looked at her with his familiar smile and for a minute Katharine was struck by the quality of it.

"I wanted to have a talk with you," Katharine said, his voice oddly smiling.

"Did you, John? Look—first of all, I want to tell you something. It's the most cooked thing that ever happened to me, but I've got to tell someone. Not half an hour ago I heard Zoe Parker planning to elope with Gibbs Larkin."

"Well, what's all the shouting for?" Ignored the man, watching her interest in the play of emotion in her mobile face.

"He's terrible, Johnny. We can't have her do it. The other night—when you came down on the beach and found me? You saw me dash off, didn't you? Could I be the way you looked?"

He nodded. Something flashed across his quiet face.

"Well, that was Gibbs. He'd been eloping. I didn't think it would be so serious. The Parkers could never forgive me if they knew I'd helped."

"What?" asked Dr. Kaye equably. "You want me to do?"

Katharine said miserably. "I don't know what to do."

The enormity of her offense in helping Zoe make a rendezvous now struck her with full force. But she couldn't help, even if she had unwittingly helped Zoe's plot to elope with Gibbs Larkin.

"There's just nothing we can do," she said to Dr. John Kaye. "I feel—oh, terrible about it all!"

"Bad business," he commented bluntly.

"You think so, too, Johnny?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I've seen Larkin quite a while."

"He's such a rotter," Katharine burst out angrily. "And Zoe's honest—the sweetest thing."

"But she's grown up," the man reminded her. "I really don't see how

you can interfere. You didn't eavesdrop intentionally..." Katharine flamed in some indignation.

"What we might do," pursued John Kaye quietly, "is to find them and stick to them like limpets all evening—not let them out of our sight. And perhaps balk it this time anyhow."

"John, you're marvelous." "But would it do any good?" demanded the man. "Wouldn't she dash off at the very first chance and marry him?"

Katharine shook her head despairingly. "I suppose so."

"Well, to ease your conscience, I'll see what I can do to help you tonight, at least," said Dr. Kaye gently. "John, you're an angel! I'll dash in and dress now and see if I can catch Zoe. Maybe I can talk some sense into her..."

"Don't do that," the man warned. "That would be fatal."

Katharine blew him a kiss as she ran toward the house. How understanding he was! There was something, she told herself, awfully sweet about John. She was glad he knew about the other night. She had hated letting him go away, thinking she was conducting a flirtation of which she was ashamed.

The sun was slipping slowly down toward the brassy horizon when she came out again. She was in white, a favorite last year flock of white silk, cleverly and simply cut. Her hair shone like a gilded casque. She was smiling with satisfaction. Zoe, whose voice on the telephone had sounded exceedingly gay, had consented to come over for an aperitif before dinner.

Katharine had rather admired her own nonchalance, asking Zoe. In the face of her own guilty knowledge of Zoe's plans, she had to steady her voice a trifle and strive for casualness.

"John Kaye's here. Won't you drop in for a minute for some sherry? Even John thinks a debutante may have sherry and live."

"Oh, darling, I'd love to," Zoe's voice, utterly care-free, had trailed back.

"And how about staying on for dinner?" Katharine had pursued. "We could pick up someone at the club and go somewhere to dance."

Zoe sounded regretful. "Darling, I can't. Have a date."

"Well, then, come over early anyhow."

"I'll be there before 7," Zoe promised.

It was 6:30. Katharine felt the tingling of nervousness in her finger ends. As soon as darkness fell Zoe would rush off to keep that "date" of hers, perhaps the most portentous one she had ever made in all her life.

Of course Zoe didn't know what Gibbs really was. She wouldn't believe it if anyone told her. For all her appearance and pretense of sophistication, Zoe was pretty much of a child.

There was a night club girl he'd been mixed up with in New York last year, for instance. There had been the most unsavory stories. Some people actually said the girl had supported him. The girl lived on the fringe of the half-world; people who made their livings by their wits and who were, sometimes, struck at in the dark—rubbed out," as the gangsters said.

(To Be Continued)

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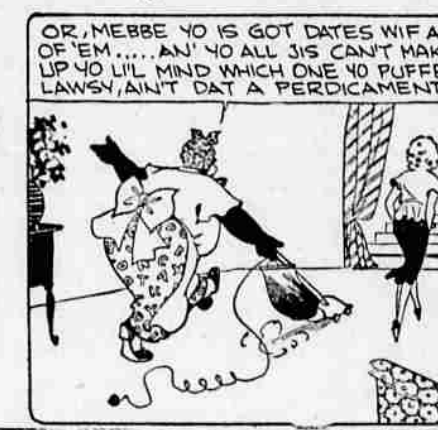
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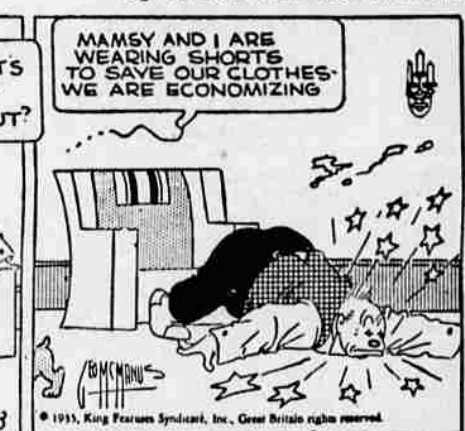
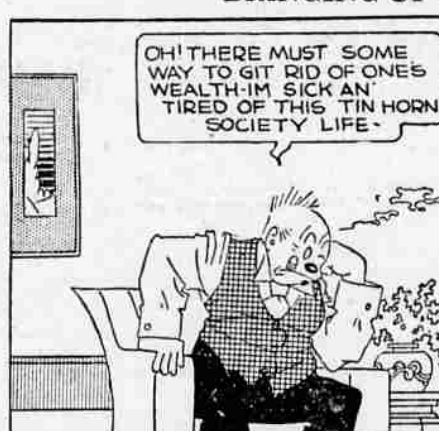
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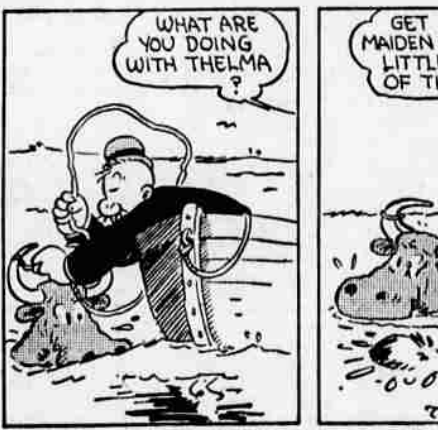
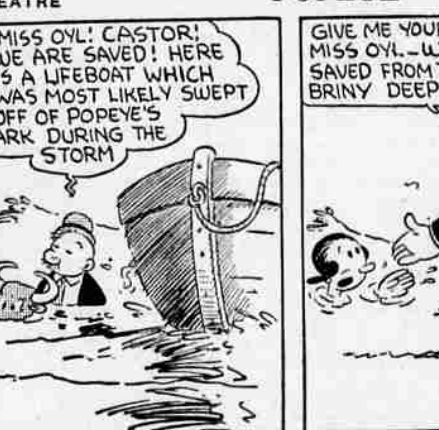
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