

Summer Sweethearts

By Mabel McElliot

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CHAPTER XX



had to rush right off again and I told him and he said tomorrow would do just as well."

"Then he's not leaving right away?" Michael asked, relief obvious in his voice.

"Listen to the man! Of course, he isn't. That's what I've been trying to tell you. And I tried to get you on the telephone all evening but no one answered."

"Funny, I've been there—or someone has—all the time," Michael said, with his ingenuous, masculine air of sticking to the facts.

"Well, anyhow, you're here now, and what do we do about it?" Sally demanded brightly. "I'm terribly sorry but it wasn't my fault, and Father is probably right—he says I'd never make a business woman. What do you think?" she demanded ingenuously.

She was all scent and color and femininity in her delicate frock of pale pink lace. It was demurely cut—a dinner frock—and Sally's charms were naively displayed in it.

"I think he's probably right," Michael said soberly.

Then they both broke into a great shout of laughter. The sober-faced maid, picking up scattered newspapers in the study just beyond the porch windows, straightened with a grim smile.

"So she has a new one," this woman murmured to herself.

"Look, here's the thing," Sally went on after a moment, as if to herself. "Would you be an angel and take me down to the Blue Sky club tonight? Lenny Talles—that's the boy who WAS coming over from Scarsdale—well, he has an impacted tooth or something and can't come. And I have Father's card and I was just dying to go..."

Michael looked down at his tweeds and back at her. His smile was a little wry. He lifted his shoulders in the ghost of a shrug.

"Oh, don't be a donkey! It's the kind of place where you don't have to dress if you don't want to. Look, they're having a beauty contest or something later on tonight. That Cissy Malone—you know who she is—is to be there, I'm dying to see her."

"Not the kind of a place for a kid like you."

"Oh, Michael, don't be so stuffy!" She made him feel like a maiden aunt. "If Father belongs to the darned thing I guess I rate it. Besides, you'll take good care of me, won't you?" Her smile was provocative. Michael wanted, for an instant, to shake her. But she was friendly, he told himself. Like a cuddlesome little kitten, almost. Not all the people around here were really friendly.

"Besides, I can sign checks," Sally rattled on, as if with pure artlessness. "Don't think I'm dragging you into a gyp joint. Specially when you told me about your mortgage and all. Why, Michael, I think you're perfectly wonderful."

She had her hand on his arm. She was all gentleness and winning sweetness. Yet Michael hesitated.

"Look," Sally coaxed brightly, "if you come along with me to the club for a bit probably Father will be home by the time we get back. Then you can see him and talk to him..."

"I don't like to see you in a place of that sort," Michael hesitated.

"Michael, that's terribly sweet of you," Sally's dimples faded. In their place a grave wisdom brooded. "I do—I mean it! I think that's terribly sweet. But don't you see I'll be perfectly all right with you, there? You are so very strong, Michael..."

Her voice was soft. Her brown, liquid eyes were luminous. For the moment Sally was all woman. She was Circe in a pink lace dress.

"All right," Michael said grudgingly. "But I'm against it, don't forget that."

"You're a lamb!" She laid a fluttering, warm hand on his wrist. "I'll do something for you some time. Besides Father will be pleased. He said you were such a sterling young man. Honestly, that was what he said."

"Thanks," said Michael, getting red and feeling a fool. But it was all right if Sally said such things to him when there was no one else to hear. She was, really, a sweet little thing. She said the first thing that came into her head.

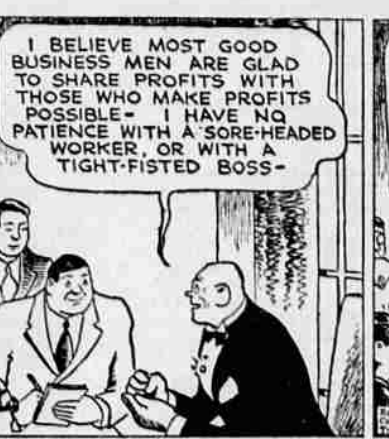
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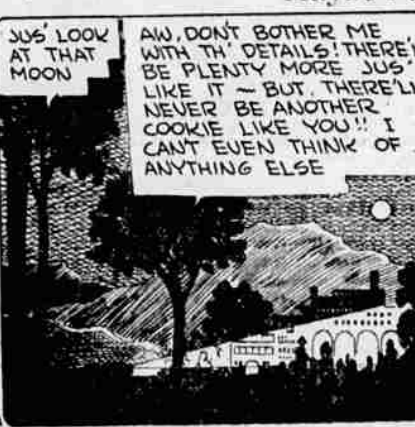
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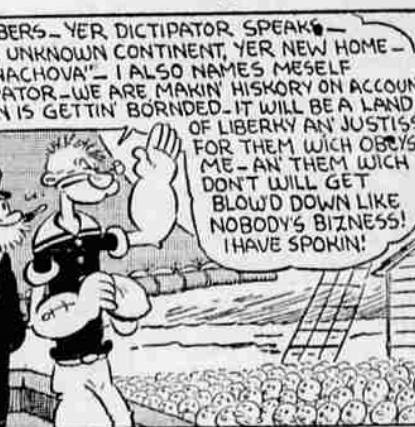
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