

Summer Sweethearts

By Mabel McElliott
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CHAPTER XXV



KATHARINE thought it would drive her frantic at first. But she steeled herself to it. After a week—two weeks—she found she could bear the thought without flinching.

She had not been back to ride since the formal announcement in the papers. Therefore she had not met the puzzled, unhappy look in the eyes of Michael Heathcote. She had been compelled to see Sally's radiant smile or air of possessive triumph just now. Later, perhaps, when she had got over the shock of knowing he was going to marry someone else. When she'd managed to forget those scraps of words she had treasured so foolishly.

"My darling!" he had called her, holding her in his arms, that day Fury had flung her.

Or had she dreamed it?

Voices intruded into her day dream. "Katharine, we're going to have tea under the big maple. Want to take time out?"

She put down her pencil. "Oh, tea would be grand!"

Lavinia brought the big silver tray with the quimper cups on it and the thinly-sliced bread and the silver pot. "Anybody want iced? Stan, you? Or Evelyn?"

Evelyn Vincent was an Englishwoman, a friend of Violet's. She came now, balancing her cup, to glance at Katharine's sketch.

"Oh, that's very nice, dear. Look, Stan, don't you think so?"

"Mind if we look, Katharine?" The girl shook her head, smiling. Funny, she didn't mind in the least if these people looked at her work. With Bertine she would have fairly squirmed.

Stanley Mercer, tall and loose-jointed in his white cotton slacks and blue shirt, came over to squint down at the enamel.

"Why, this is awfully good. Evelyn, you ought to be able to do something with it."

Katharine, her heart beating very fast, looked from one to the other. They weren't making fun of her; they were in earnest! She had tried so hard to get it all in—the rocks and the drooping gray-green plants clustered about them and the flame and burnt orange of the nasturtiums.

"You've got something there, really," said Evelyn Vincent, who ran an art shop in Fifth Avenue.

For the first time in weeks hope stirred in Katharine's heart. Her "dabbling," as Bertine had always called it, contemptuously, might prove to be a way out for her, after all.

"You're so stuffy," Sally pouted. "Other men I know would jump at the chance. Why, if you took this job from Father we could be married right away."

"I know," Michael said. "But you see, I'm an outdoor man. Always have been."

"Here's what I think, Michael," Sally put her head on one side, looking like a plump, bright-eyed and extremely knowing bird. "You're a simpleton. That's what you are, really, not to grab the chance. First thing you know, people would forget all about the riding business. . . . they'd be accepting you."

She had gone too far, and she knew it. Red crept up in his lean cheeks; the slate-colored eyes sparkled dangerously.

"Not that it matters, of course, what all these dolefuls think. . . . They were in the overstuffed comfort of the Moon living room, all fat red couches and taffeta pillows and stiff carved chairs. An ornate lamp shed an effulgent glow on Sally, who sat curled up, little girl fashion, in one corner of the deepest couch and played with Michael's fingers.

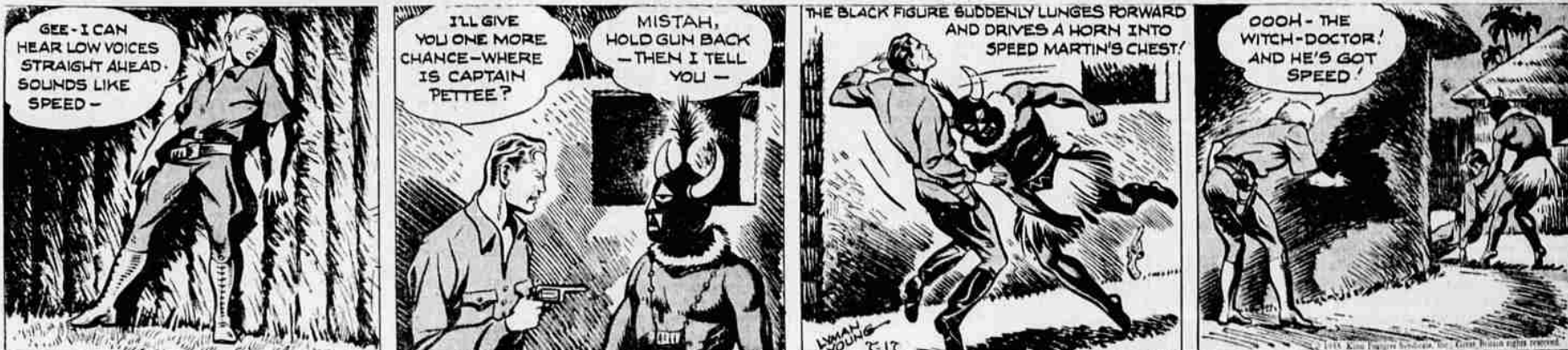
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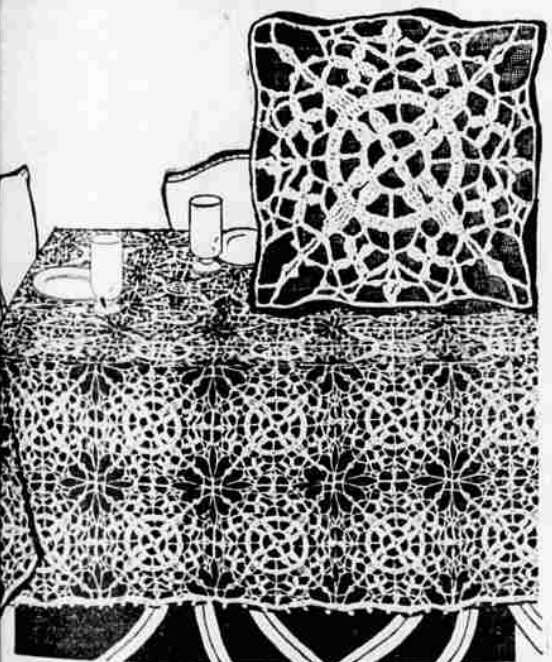
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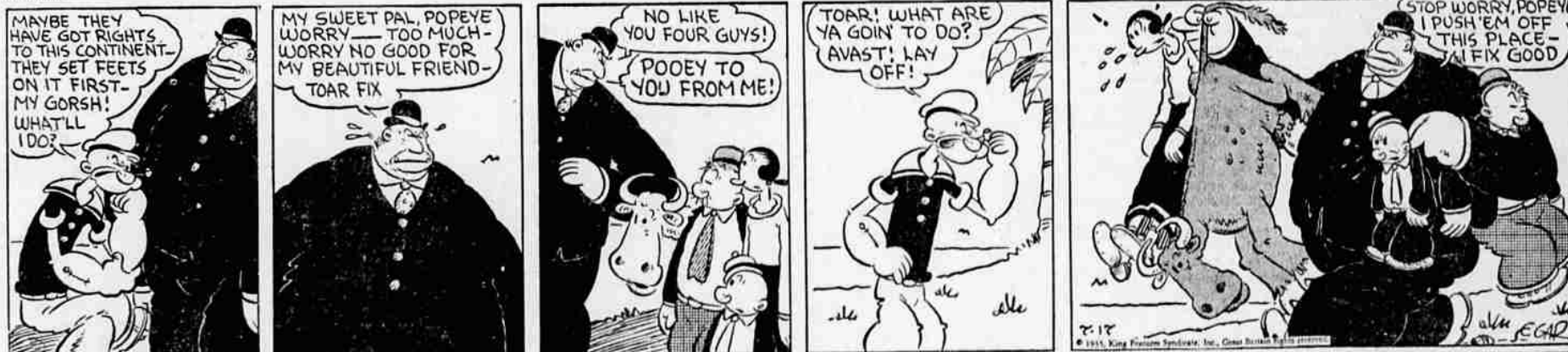
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