

Summer Sweethearts

Mabel McElliot

1935, NEA Service, Inc.

CHAPTER XXVI

erises were ended. Michael, helpless in this particular matter, had to listen to a good deal of comment—criticism.

She wanted to make him over. When they were married, she would say, luxuriating in the thought, they would rebuild the house. They would put a glassed-in porch over there; they would add a big, white-tiled kitchen.

"But you won't run the school any more, Michael?"

He set his jaw stubbornly. "Why not? It's the work I know best."

She set herself the task of winning him over. "Ah, but that won't do, Michael. You can raise horses for racing for the track, whatever you call it. We'll travel. Wouldn't you like that?"

"We're going to live on my income."

"I simply adore it, if it could be done," said Sally, with the greatest possible air of reasonableness.

"But darling, it cannot be done," she punctuated the last three words with little butterfly kisses. "Is my great big man cross at his poor little girl?" she demanded brightly.

Michael surveyed her with a quizzical air. "Sally, do you realize we've been over this ground at least three times before? And that you've said precisely the same thing?"

"Have we, sweets? Well, I'm sorry. But you're such a mule, I have to say things a dozen times to make any impression."

It was a false position Michael was in. He knew it, and from gallantry, masculine weakness—what you will—was unable to free himself from it.

Sally's adoration was often very sweet to him; this he would not deny. But in the main he had the sensation of being a very large, very clumsy fly caught in a particularly sticky web.

Many men, he reminded himself, had married without being desperately in love with the women they married. He had been told this; he had read it in books. Often fine marriages were built on just such foundations. Sally was pretty, strong, healthy, generous. What more did he want? In his wildest dreams he could not expect anything more of a wife.

Or could he? Wasn't there, somewhere, a spark waiting to be kindled? Hadn't dark blue eyes flashed a message to him more than once during this dreary summer? Had he ever felt, for a single instant with Sally, one-tenth of the pure emotion he had known those few instants he had held Katharine's slender body in his arms?

Well, that had been a sort of madness. It was over now. The best way—the clearest way—was to take the path Sally had pointed out to him. She would be a true and faithful wife; they would, some day, have four children. Sturdy little boys with Sally's opaque dark eyes and her flashing smile. Wise did he wince, inwardly, at the thought?

One day in early September he was returning from a solitary ride on the new dapple gray. The late evening was full of a soft and mellow light. The first star appeared, lamp-like, in skies the tender color of opals.

Michael rode into his own dooryard. Sally's car was parked there. She was slumped over the wheel, with an aureole circular spread out before her. She looked up and waved as he came past.

"Look, marvelous, what I've got!" Michael alighted and came over to stand by her. She was rosy and seductively dressed, fragrant and bright-eyed. Yet his heart was like a lump of lead; he saw the picture, paid tribute—yet there was no real response in him.

"Look what I've brought," cried the girl, flourishing the travel canteen. "Daddy has a job for you—South American trip—it's to do with horses, so you can't possibly object. I've been looking up sailings. We can be married right away."

Katharine brought her car to a stop before the drug store, the windows of which were emblazoned and placarded with picturesque endorsements. A life-sized cardboard figure of a blond girl ornamented the left-hand corner. Issuing from her mouth was a balloon explaining that daily use of some sort of patented product gave her that rose and gold complexion.

Michael recognized this respected figure, even while she tried to tear it down.

"Match for you," fat Joseph said, with his wide smile. "I've what the town people say, the real tabbies any you're roughneck or what; he's a

round her head. "They're all that's what they are."

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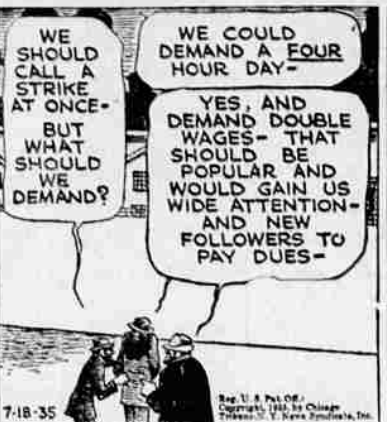
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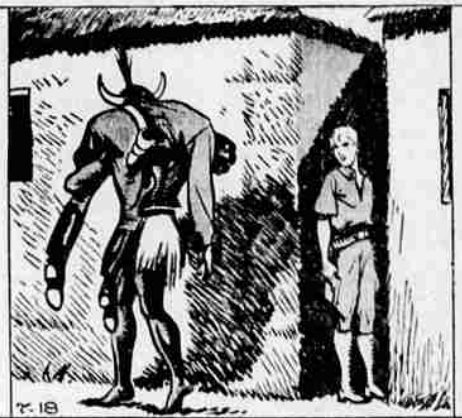
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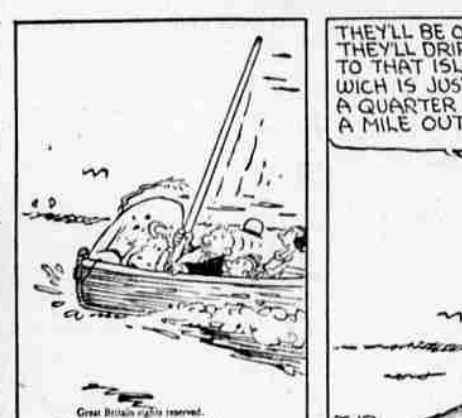
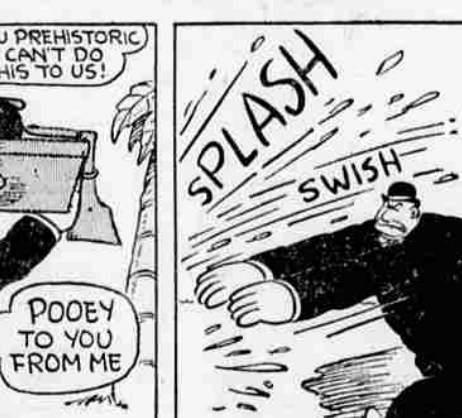
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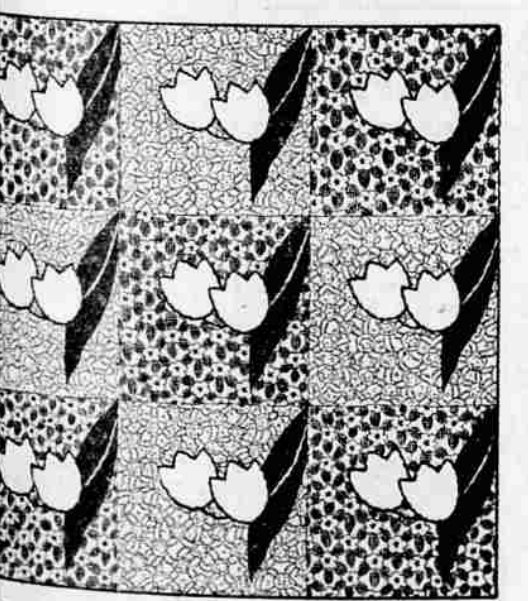
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