

Rich and Reckless

By Mary Raymond

CHAPTER IX

Back in the library, Brent turned over the newspaper with aching fingers. The report of Molly's death had almost crowded the rest of the page. It was there, less conspicuously placed, and there was a reading, "Picture on Page 2."

Brent studied the photograph of a young man the police had slain. He wasn't a doubt of it. He was the same man who had danced with her that night at "The Red Poppy."

Dark hair, bold eyes, lips parted in a smile revealing very white teeth. He read it all—the story of Hand Harry Whitman, known to his friends as Nelson Ferguson, gambler, armed gunman, jewel robbery suspect, who had conspired, through front alibi, and skillful lawyers, to land in a swank apartment instead of penitentiary cell.

The account hinted that the gangster had been betrayed into the hands of police by former friends. Acting as a tip-off, officers had gone to "The Red Poppy," an eating place across the river. A girl had been with Whitman, but when the lights were switched off she had disappeared. Police were of the opinion that she was a chance acquaintance of the gangster and not involved in the bank robbery.

Brent was breathing hard. The girl had gone off . . . just as they had that night . . . the same man . . . the girl who had looked like Molly.

"It makes sense. It's a complete story," Brent found himself saying. "It's got to make sense!"

He picked up the telephone and dialed a number. "Mrs. Milford, please. Tell her Brent Stuart is here."

After a short interval he heard a woman's voice, "Brent, you poor unpoor man!"

"Donna, may I come out for a moment? It's something urgent or I wouldn't ask you to see me now."

"Of course, Brent. Come immediately."

Fifteen minutes later he was saying, "Donna, please humor me. I know I sound insane, but I want you to try to remember. Was there anything unusual about Molly? After that night, I mean."

"I don't understand, Brent. Anything at all you may have noticed," Brent said gently.

"It's so hard to talk about. It doesn't seem as though it could be true. Donna's voice was choked with tears."

"Yes," Brent said in a low tone, "try to remember."

"I noticed one thing particularly. She was so tight. Her eyes were so tight. It was a little difficult."

"Much too tight?"

"Yes. I—why do you ask?"

"Donna, please! Was there anything else?"

"Yes. Molly always liked the very best of everything. Naturally, you know. The silk slip she had on was brand new. Trimmed with lace and the material was expensive. But, of course, she may have had an expensive slip."

"That was all?"

"Yes," Donna replied slowly. "No, there was something else. She didn't have her finger nail polish. I do. Molly always preferred a natural nail. Her nails were deep red. She had decided to change. I told her about the mood she was in. Fed up with doing the same old things. I said, 'It must have been that. Molly suddenly lost her mind.'"

"No," Brent said. "Molly's personality was all right."

Donna did not notice that he used the present tense. She said, "You loved her, Brent."

"Deeply, Donna. Ever since she was in high school. But I never told her. It didn't seem fair until after her death. I wanted her to have her own life, and not be swept into marriage because of an early romance. 'Now,' a voice was tense with repressed emotion. 'I wish I had. Maybe she would be married, and she would be happy now.'"

Donna watched him drive away. He was taking this awfully hard. At a strange state of mind he was asking all those morbid questions. He had humored her because he loved her so desperately.

Driving rapidly, Brent found himself talking aloud. "The girl who killed herself wasn't Molly. Molly sent a message after that girl was dead. She was alive!"

He could have shouted the fact. But if he did, who would believe him? People would say grief had settled his mind.

That girl who was so much like Molly that her father, her stepmother, and the man who had loved her for years had been deceived, was not Molly. She had worn Molly's clothes, she was not Molly.

Molly was somewhere in desperate need of him, expecting him to come. There was something that Molly had to do. She shuddered a little as she took out the compact and looked at that belonged to the dead girl. With acute danger, over-for the time, at least—Molly had lost the compact. Careful makeup could assume her masquerade.

She brightened lips up to vulgar richness, spread a crimson lush on her cheeks, and applied powder to her forehead and chin.

The door had opened quietly. Lightened, Molly dropped the compact in her purse and turned.

But the masked woman's words—she and the ugly as they were—reached Molly. At least the woman had suspected the real reason behind the careful makeup.

"Pretending, isn't you? And for what, my beauty? For Louis? It's bad, but Louis doesn't like girls. He stands up before a machine gun and before he'd talk to one. If you see how Louis feels toward you, you wouldn't be wasting no paint and powder on him. He figures you might be a cause of him moving to the Big House as a permanent boarder. May-be, though, 'twas Steve you had your eye on."

Molly spoke carefully. "I was just doing things to my face—I guess it's just a habit with me."

"You don't have to tell me about the habits of girls like you. You had me fooled for a while, thinkin' you had been let down like a ton of bricks. Say, I sure was soft, fallin' for that line."

"Honest, I—it was just habit. I wasn't thinkin' of nobody."

"Well, I don't like you with war paint on. It gives me the jitters. Take it off and don't put it on again. Wait, I'll get you a towel."

"Now, Winnie, I wouldn't go to so much trouble. The tall man Molly knew as 'Steve' lounged in the doorway. The woman whirled at the sound of his voice.

"What's the sense of her makin' herself beautiful? You'd think she was going to a dance instead of spendin' the night in the wood room."

"It's a pity she got messed up with Nelson. She look right nice on a dance floor," Steve drawled. The blond woman exclaimed angrily.

"Hold your tongue, Winnie. What's the excitement about anyway? Just because the little girl makes her face all red and white . . . kinda cute-looking, I think . . . you throw a fit. You're playing the wrong card, Winnie. You should know better than to throw one of those jealous tantrums."

"Jealous! Who, me?" the woman shrieked. "Jealous of her!"

"Of her and every other skirt."

"Have it your way, Steve. Have it your way."

All the violence had dropped from the woman's mood. She seemed suddenly utterly weary and dejected.

Molly thought, with swift intuition, "She really loves him."

"I don't want this little girl bulldozed any more," Steve went on. "You understand me, Winnie?"

"Sure, I understand you. I always understand you."

"See you don't forget."

The man walked away. When his footsteps had died in the distance, the woman whirled on Molly fiercely.

"You win—just as the others have. I ought to be used to it by this time, but the woman isn't made who gets used to it."

Molly wanted to cry out, "You stupid woman, I couldn't be interested in a man like that." She remembered her role in time.

"You've got me wrong," Molly said with feeling. "He's your husband, isn't he?"

"Much good it does me. It never made any difference to Steve that he bought a marriage license and stood up with me before a preacher."

"He shouldn't treat you like that, not when you love him as—like you do!"

There was real sympathy in Molly's voice.

"Honest to God," Winnie breathed, "I believe you're sorry for me!"

"I am," Molly answered simply.

Winnie searched Molly's face for a moment. "It's funny how I feel about you. I'd like to wring your neck sometimes, and then, sometimes I'm fightin' for you. Guess I'm just plain dumb to be fightin' for you, seein' the way Steve is."

"What do you mean . . . fighting for me?"

"It's Louis. He's lost his nerve. He's afraid for you to be turned loose. And nobody's got time to play nursemaid to you all the rest of their lives. I've been standin' up for you when Louis starts talkin'."

"What does he say?" Molly whispered.

"He says dead men don't tell tales. And dead girls don't either."

(To Be Continued)

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

The Best of the Nation's "Human-est" and Funniest Comics On This Page Daily

8-29-36

THIMBLE THEATRE

Starring POPEYE

NOW SHOWING—"CONTROL YOURSELF, OSCAR"

MONDAY—"HE ADMITS IT HIMSELF"

SECRET AGENT X-9

CLEAN GET-AWAY, BOSS. GOOD! KEEP TO NOT EVEN A FINGERPRINT FOR THE G-GUNS TO FOLLOW UP

HAVING ESCAPED WITH THEIR LOOT, MARTIN'S GANG TAKES TO A SIDE-ROAD

BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES

GOSH! I HOPE I'M GOIN' IN TH' RIGHT DIRECTION

I NEVER DID SEE SO DERN MANY DETOURS

WASH TUBBS

SOCIETY NOTE:

FOLLOWING A TEN DAY HONEYMOON TRIP TO PRAIRIE DOG AND POINTS EAST, MR. AND MRS. C. HOLLIS WALLIS HAVE RETURNED TO EL HOVO WHERE THE BLUSHING BRIDE WILL RESUME HER DUTIES AS SHERIFF.

OUT OUR WAY

COME ON—COME AWWN! PUT SOME LIFE INTO IT—WE'RE LATE NOW!

AWRIGHT! AWRIGHT! BUT YOU'LL BE SORRY WHEN I BREAK MY ARM CRANKIN' AN' HAVE TO KEEP IT IN A SLING—WHUT'LL YOU DO FOR A CRANKER THEN, HUH? I GUESS YOU'LL JUST HAFTA STAY AT HOME, TILL THE LABORIN' PART OF THE FAMILY RECOVERS!

HEROES ARE MADE—NOT BORN

Men of Action

THAT GUY BOOT-HE SEEN ME WATCHIN' HIS HOUSE—IT WASN'T MY FAULT—

THEN WE GOTTA ACT FAST—WE'LL GRAB HIM—NO DIRTY KILLER CAN GET AWAY FROM ME—

WHILE FAR AWAY A GRIM, RAGGED AND BEARDED APPARITION STRIKES AWE TO THE LOAFERS ON THE STATE CAPITOL STEPS—

I HAVE NO TIME TO ARGUE—TAKE ME TO THE GOVERNOR AT ONCE—

YOU MUST BE NUTTY—GWAN—GIT GOIN'—BUM—AFORE I RUN YUH IN—

NEVER MIND, FLUNKY—I'LL FIND HIM MYSELF—

Starring POPEYE

I'LL GET YOU, YOU BIG DUNCE!

OH, HELP!

THAT'S RICH! LOOK AT OSCAR CHASIN' TOAR—HAH! TOAR AIN'T AFRAID OF NOTHIN' ON EARTH—HE'S JUST KIDDIN' HIM—

DARN YOU! JUST WAIT!

IDIDNT KNOW TOAR WAS SO PLAYFUL—HAH! PERTY SOON HE'LL LET OSCAR CATCH HIM AND THEN WON'T OSCAR BE SURPRISED

The G-Man Turns "Rubberneck"

HERE'S NEW INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE HOME OFFICE—BANK HOLD-UP IN WESTON. NO IDENTIFICATIONS OR FINGER-PRINTS. STORM REPORTED NEAR TOWN. STEP INSIDE A MINUTE.

AND IN JASPER'S O.S. STORE.

Full Speed Ahead

TELL HOW IT FEELS, BUDDIE, TO BE MARRIED TO A TWO-GUN LADY PRIZE FIGHTER?

AND IN BEHALF OF THE SKUNK STREET MERCHANTS, I PRESENT THESE HEAVY WEDDIN' PRESENTS.

OH, HONEY—HEAVENLY BUNCH! AIN'T MY PET, IT SWELL? HEAVENLY!

Feathers for the Nest

WHOOPEE!

WOY'S THE GROOM'S NAME?

I DUNNO. THEY CALL HIM MISTER LULU BELLE.

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

I PENNED A CARD TO TH' MISSUS AND TOLD HER WE'D HAVE YOU CRATED AND READY FOR SHIPMENT ON TH' 6:31, SO TH' WELCOMING COMMITTEE PROBABLY IS GETTING IN A FEW PRACTICE SWINGS WITH TH' MOP!

YOU HAD BETTER TUCK YOUR HEAD IN A PADDED DERBY WHEN YOU RETURN TO THE CAGE—TWO WEEKS IN TH' OPEN MIGHT HAVE SLOWED YOU UP ON DOING TH' DODGE, MAJOR!

FAW! A THOUSAND DRATS TO YOUR PETTY JIBES—A HOOPLE CAN PARRY ANY BLOW!

TH' ONLY BLOW THAT EVER GOT UNDER HIS GUARD, WAS TH' TIME HIS "BILLIONAIRE" UNCLE PASSED OUT OF TH' PICTURE AND INSTEAD OF REAPING A HARVEST, IT COST TH' MAJOR \$50 TO PLANT 'IM!

WHOME, TO THE ROOST!

By HAROLD GRAY

THIMBLE THEATRE

Starring POPEYE

Starring POPEYE

By E. C. SEGAR

Starring POPEYE

By ALEX RAYMOND

Starring POPEYE

By MARTIN

Starring POPEYE

By WILLIAMS

Starring POPEYE