Co-Ed Wife

By EUGENIA MACKIERNAN

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CHAPTER IX

You needn't bother, David," said Coral. "I have something to say to him now." She turned to Hoyt. "The time isn't quite up, but my decision is made. I'll never marry you! Never, do you understand? And you can play any cheap cad's trick you like for revenge, but it won't matter. I hate you, Hoyt Marquis. I'd rather die than be your wife." He stepped toward her threateningly, and something stung her into adding, "You wasted all your effort anyway. You know I'm married already."

Without thinking of what she had done or the consequences of her words she took David's arm and left the room, her heart singing. Nothing matter now. David had forgiven her! Together they could conquer anything!

Then Coral awoke on the morning following the prom, she reviewed the events of the night before with a sense of wonder that so much could have occurred in such a short period of time. She had leisure, also, to consider what might be the effects of her words to Hoyt. Strangely, now that her decision was made, she felt no regret, no fear. The truth was that she supposed Hoyt would tell his parents, perhaps go through with his scheme to ruin her father financially. Yet, lying on her bed with the bright morning sunshine streaming into the room, it was hard to believe that Hoyt, selfish and revengeful as he was, would really make good his threats. And was it likely that his father, the level-headed banker, John Marquis, would ruin an old friend at the whim of his son?

Coral stretched lazily and gave a little sigh of happiness. No matter what happened she and David would work it out. If Holt's plans went through, she and David would help her father somehow. Surely her mother and father would not be angry with her when they met David and saw what kind of person he was. Hoyt would try to prejudice them, of course, but they would see for themselves.

She sat up in bed, startled. Hoyt! What had happened to him last night? From the moment that she had taken David's arm and left the dance she had thought no more about him. She and David had discussed his threats, of course, planned what they would do if he carried them out, but in their happiness it had not occurred to them to wonder what he would do after being left stranded high and dry on the dance floor. Coral felt worried in spite of herself. No action would have been more carefully calculated to infuriate him. He would be far more angry at her public defection than at what she had told him. For the first time she noticed that Donna was not lying, still asleep, in her bed had been slept in, and the covers were thrown back for airing. Coral wrinkled her brows. It was unlike Donna to be up so early, particularly after a dance. As she got out of bed she decided that there was nothing to worry about. Donna had probably decided to get up for breakfast after all, and had slipped out of the room quietly in order not to waken her.

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As a matter of fact, she had not talked to Donna since the night before, when David had left her to come to Coral's aid. Could she be up? As she dressed, Coral pondered the problem. It was quite possible. Donna, like Hoyt, resented a public affront, no matter how small, and, more than a private hurricane, Coral surely she would not allow such a little thing to make her really angry. It was not serious enough for that. Running her comb through her dark curls, Coral giggled a little at the recollection. The whole thing was rather funny in retrospect. She and David leaving Donna and Hoyt, quite oblivious of the demands of common politeness or the opinions of spectators. There were probably plenty of tongues wagging on the campus this morning about their sudden departure.

Just then she heard swift footsteps coming down the corridor, and in a moment the door of the room was opened revealing Donna, in all the glory of her newest and most expensive sports clothes. There was, Coral noted immediately, no anger in her face. As a matter of fact, she looked almost suspiciously gay and good-natured.

"Good morning, lazy bones," Donna said. "Look at you, just getting up, when I've been over the hills and far away and back again in the last two hours."

"Such ambition," Coral laughed. "It would have taken a derrick plus all the king's horses and all the king's men to have gotten me out of my nice, warm bed that early. Where have you been?"

Donna tossed her blue felt hat into a chair and sat down on the bed before she replied, "I've been out since breakfast with your boy friend," she said.

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Coral's heart stumbled a little on its regular course, and she sat down suddenly on the nearest chair. "David?" she said huskily.

Her roommate laughed merrily. "Goodness, no. After last night I realized that I haven't a chance there. I mean Hoyt. He took me down to the lake for breakfast and then we went for a ride in the country. He's just crazy for Wheatland."

Coral was absurdly relieved. She could not forbear asking laughingly, "How does Hoyt feel this morning?"

"He feels like a cobra just ready to strike, if you must know. He gathered from me last night after you and David left us in the lurch, and he was very, very mad then. But this morning! Gee! Last night was nothing but the calm before the storm."

"Do he really angry, Donna?"

"Oh, but! What do you expect? You can't expect handle him with gloves. Anyway, I also understand you told him that the wedding bells are going ring for you and our prominent young chemist." She eyed Coral curiously. "I think that little declaration is going to make you some trouble. Hoyt Marquis isn't as easily bribed to keep as I am."

Coral rose to her feet. "What do you mean, Donna? Why should he make trouble? What good can it do Hoyt to tell anyone here at the university about David and me?"

"Don't get so excited," Donna said warily. "I didn't say he was going to tell anyone here, though I wouldn't be surprised if he did. But he kept making noises about some money your father owed his and a lot of things like that."

"Well," Coral said slowly, "you may as well know the truth, I guess. My father does owe Hoyt's dad a considerable sum of money, and Hoyt has always said that if I didn't marry him he'd make his father call in that loan. I'll admit he had me badly frightened, but to tell you the truth, the more I think about it, the harder it is for me to believe that Mr. Marquis would be influenced in such a matter by his son's selfish desire for revenge."

Donna yawned. "Maybe you're right. Time will tell. But didn't Hoyt say anything to you last night about another little plan he has up his sleeve, all set to pull if you don't play the game by his rules?"

Coral looked at her, startled. "Another plan? What other? What are you talking about?"

"Nothing, nothing at all," Donna said hastily.

Coral lost her temper. "Donna, I sometimes think that you tell me things like this just to make trouble. You'd like nothing better than to break up my marriage and cause Hoyt to do some rash thing to hurt us all. I can't make up my mind whether you're telling the truth about all this business or just talking to get me excited. What is it?"

Donna sat up very straight. "I'm telling the truth all right. I wouldn't bother to make up things to see you squirm when I have so much fact at my fingertips."

Coral walked across the room to the bed and put her hands on Donna's shoulders. "I'm sorry I lost my temper, Donna. But can't you see the strain I'm under? If you know anything which Hoyt is planning to do which he hasn't told me, please tell me now. Can't you see what it means to me? My whole lifetime of happiness is at stake. I'm begging you, Donna! Tell me what you know."

Donna pulled away from her, eyes narrowed, jaw clenched. "I'll tell you nothing."

"Donna, please!" Coral was near to tears.

Her roommate shifted uneasily. "Forget it, Coral. I was just teasing you."

"Are you sure, Donna? Don't lie to me."

"Of course I'm sure. Stop fussing about it. I just wanted to have a little fun. I like Hoyt, and I think you've been pretty mean to him. I was silly to feed you such a line. Pretend I never said it."

Coral relaxed. "I hope you're not fooling me, Donna. I couldn't stand it if this situation got more complex than it is right now." She was too relieved to notice Donna's calculating look or the sly smile which flickered on her lips for an instant.

They were silent for a moment till Donna said, "Did you see the papers this morning?"

"No, why?"

"They raided the Crossroads Tavern last night. Somebody got into a fight and reported it to the police. Hoyt told me you left just when the fight started."

Coral took a deep breath. "Am I glad we got out of there. We..." A voice called from the corridor, "Coral, you're wanted on the phone."

She left the room and ran down the stairs. It was David, she knew. He had promised to call her this morning. She picked up the receiver. "Hello."

"Hello, Coral? David speaking. Listen, darling..."

She interrupted him. "David, I knew it was you. Can you come over? I've no classes till two, and a lot of things to tell you."

"I'll be over all right, Coral, you must listen to me. Something awful has happened."

"David," she cried, "What is it? What's the matter?"

"Hang on tight, sweetheart. The process, Maxwell's, Benderff's and mine has been stolen! They think I took it to sell. Don't say a word to anyone until you're talked to me. We're both in this."

(To Be Continued)

FROM FRANKLIN

FRANKLIN, June 18.—(Special)—Sunday guests at the John Phillips home were Jess Tucker and Cecil Phillips of Reedsport and J. W. Conley, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Conley and children of Veneta.

Mrs. Greta Donk has left for a 10-day visit with her husband at Klamath Falls.

Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. John Phillips visited Junction City Grange Friday night.

Miss Margarete Mack of Monroe is staying with her brother-in-law and sister, Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Porter.

Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Brazier of Cottage Grove spent the week-en at their place near Dandy mill.

FROM OAKRIDGE

OAKRIDGE, June 18.—(Special)—Mrs. Ellen Follette of Crawfordsville stopped here Tuesday en route to Nebraska, to visit her daughter, Mrs. John Orr, and her grandchildren, Everett and Margret Fields.

The Oak chapter of I.O.O.F. is sponsoring a dance in their hall Saturday night. Everyone is invited to attend.

Virgil Winkleman and children have returned from a trip to San Francisco.

GUESTS FOR DINNER

HARRISBURG, June 18.—(Special)—Tuesday evening dinner guests at the Gov Hughes home were Mr. and Mrs. E. G. Mason and sons, Robert and Rodger of Corvallis, and Mr. and Mrs. Herman Littlefield and daughters, Helen and Marjorie of Pine Valley, Oregon.

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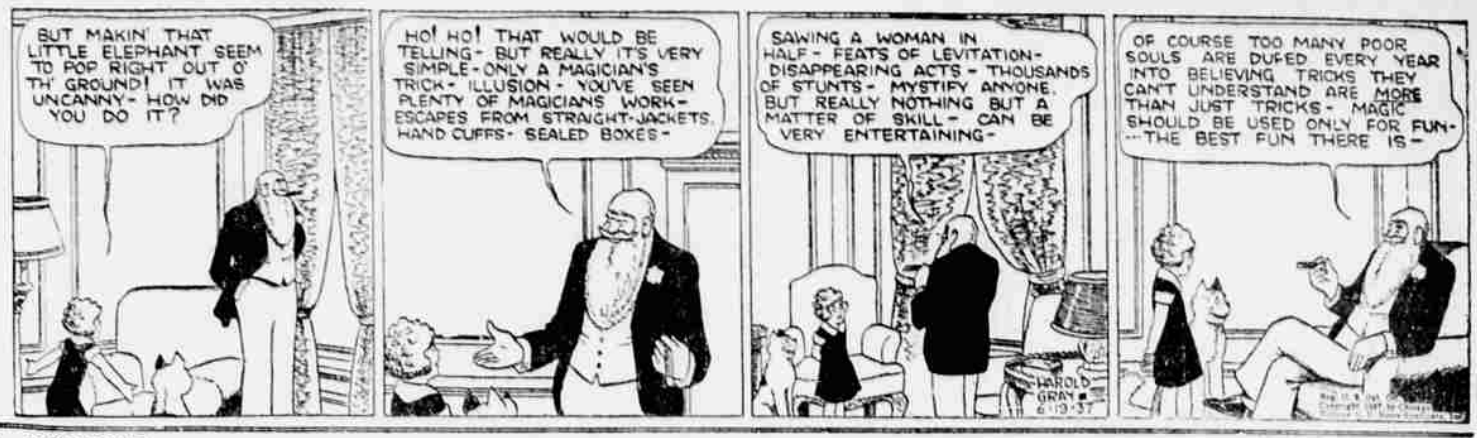

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