

THE LUXURY HUSBAND

Chapter II
THE HOUSE PARTY

An English house party is invariably composed of types as though each host or hostess wished to impress upon their friends how cosmopolitan their acquaintances are: an army officer on leave from India, a naval man, a retired business man, a more or less well-known author, an heir apparent to some title. As for the women, be sure there will be Lady So and So, widow of the Bishop, Miss Clackstone Maddock of the flat-heeled, sporting variety, the poorer relative who is being given a chance to marry money, the wife of the business man, the fiancée of the author who is in musical comedy and motors down in London on Sundays.

The crowd of guests Ralph Henderson had assembled was no exception to this rule and, when Barbara and Ray arrived and were ushered into the drawing-room, she felt, in her own words, weak at the knees.

She did not know what she had expected, unless she had thought that, as in America, a house party consisted of a number of people of similar ages and tastes who met to have a roaring good time.

It looked a depressing enough assembly and none realized it more keenly than the host, but he had arranged the party more with the idea of impressing Barbara as to the importance of his friends than with giving her what is familiarly known as a good time.

Henderson seated her beside the largest and most important of the dowagers.

"Lady Fielding, may I present Mrs. Lowther?"

Lady Fielding surveyed Barbara through her lorgnette while to herself she said, "This must be the millionaire."

Then aloud, remembering that several of her pet charities were sadly in need of funds, "This is indeed a pleasure. Come and sit beside me, dear Mrs. Lowther, and tell me all about America."

Barbara gasped and, as she seated herself, murmured, "What do you want to hear about, Lady Fielding?"

Lady Fielding smiled a wintry smile.

"About your dear strange people. Tell me, do you find it hard to understand us over here?"

Barbara smiled wickedly.

"Not at all. I bought one of those phrase books, 'English in Three Days,' and with its help I seem to be able to make myself understood!"

"No-o-o!" ejaculated Lady Fielding.

She was trying to decide whether or not Barbara was making fun of her, but in view of the girl's money, she decided to give her the benefit of the doubt.

Meanwhile, Ray was faring no better than Barbara. His host had put him beside Major Perkins whose interest was confined exclusively to sport and chorus girls. Henderson had done it purposely, hoping to make the American uncomfortable.

"What's your sport?" demanded the major.

"I used to row when I was in college."

"College?" The major blinked. Ray saw that there was something wrong.

"Not since I was at Yale University," he told him.

"Ah! not since you were at the Varsity," the major corrected him. "What did you say the name of it was?"

"Yale."

"Never heard of it," said the major decidedly.

At this they lapsed into silence, while Major Perkins racked his brains trying vainly to think of something that might interest the American. But he was finding it hard, especially as the fellow did not seem to understand the King's English, as he phrased it to himself.

He made another attempt at it later.

"Professional man?"

"No," said Ray. "Music."

"Ah! Music. Play the piano, I suppose?"

Ray spoke a little defiantly, purposefully raising his voice as though he wished Barbara to hear.

"I play the saxophone."

"The saxophone?" queried the major, startled then. "Ha, ha, I see, jolly good joke, what?"

Ray went red. "It isn't a joke. I play for my living."

There was a strained silence and then Henderson said, "Mr. Lowther is an artist on the saxophone. Did you bring your instrument down with you, Lowther? I'd hoped you'd blow us a few tunes after dinner tonight."

Ray was conscious of the sting behind his words.

"Sorry, Henderson," he said stiffly, "I didn't."

"But what is a saxophone, Mr. Lowther?" Lady Fielding inquired. "I suppose I must seem most frightfully ignorant."

"A saxophone, Lady Fielding," Ray smiled, "is commonly looked upon as the step-child of jazz."

"Ah, jazz! Something of which I strongly disapprove."

"This sure is some peppy bunch," Ray remarked tartly to Barbara that night as they were dressing for dinner. "Seems to me I'd rather spend a few days in a morgue and have it done with."

"Can't say it was what you'd call a riot this afternoon," Barbara replied smiling. "But Hendy told me that the majority of them were only in for tea. Anyhow, Ray, we've got to seem to enjoy ourselves since Hendy's gone out of his way to be nice to us."

"Nice to us—nice to you, you mean," Ray said scornfully as he flung a collection of tips into an upper drawer. "I suppose you didn't happen to hear his remark about my saxophone playing?"

Barbara had her back to him, she was rolling her nude chignon stockings into a little hard knot behind her knees.

"It was you who brought up the subject, Ray," she reminded him. "And really I don't see that there was any necessity for your doing so."

He took her up sharply.

"You talk as though there was some disgrace attached to my job, as though it were a dark skeleton to be kept locked in the family closet!"

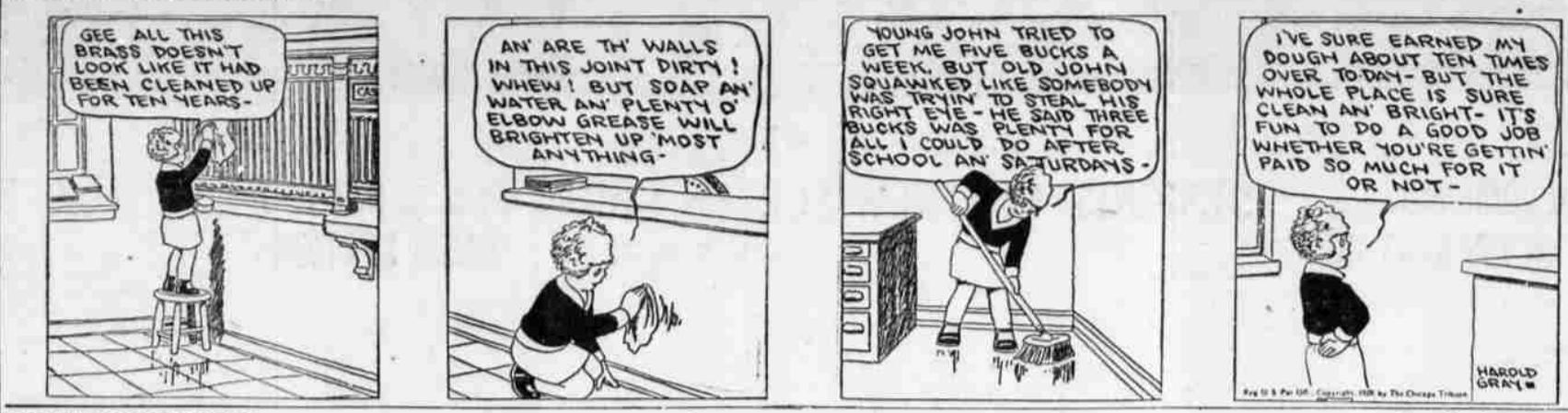
Her answer was muffled, she was slipping the palest of pink gossamer dresses over her head. It sounded like, "Don't be childish, Ray." At any rate it angered him sufficiently to continue.

"What on earth are you going to do, shut up for a whole week in this place? I can't see why you don't invent some excuse and we'll leave tomorrow."

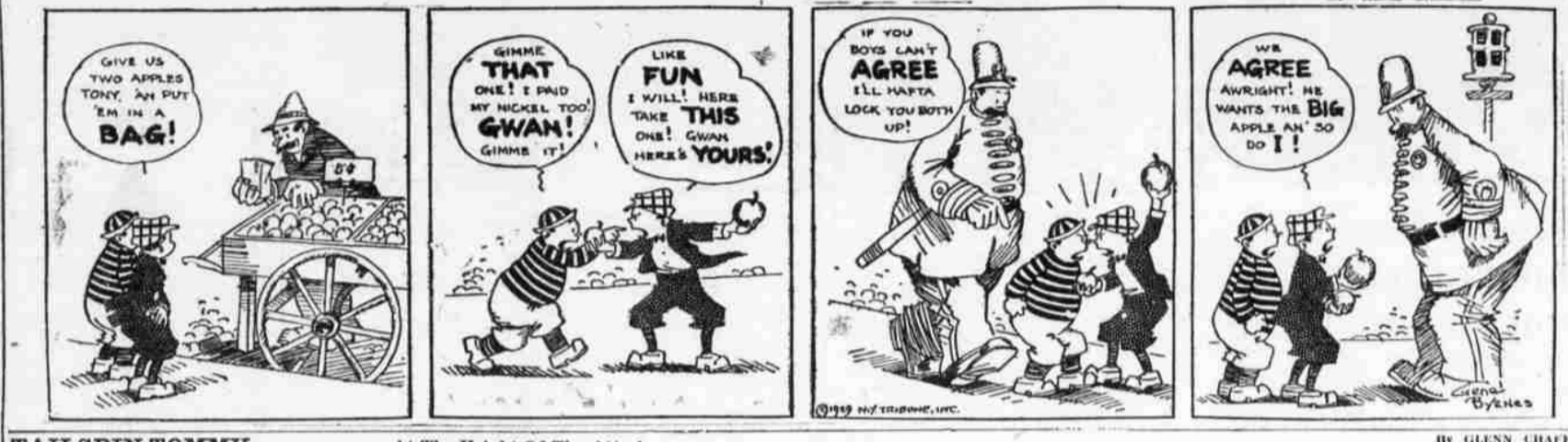
She did not reply at once. She was standing surveying herself before the mirror humming a tune. Her short gossamer frock was at the same time both simple and daintily sophisticated; her hair, that had a natural wave in it, was fitted closely to her head.

She had the air of piquancy about her that is half American and half French and which, for lack of better expression is sometimes known as "cute."

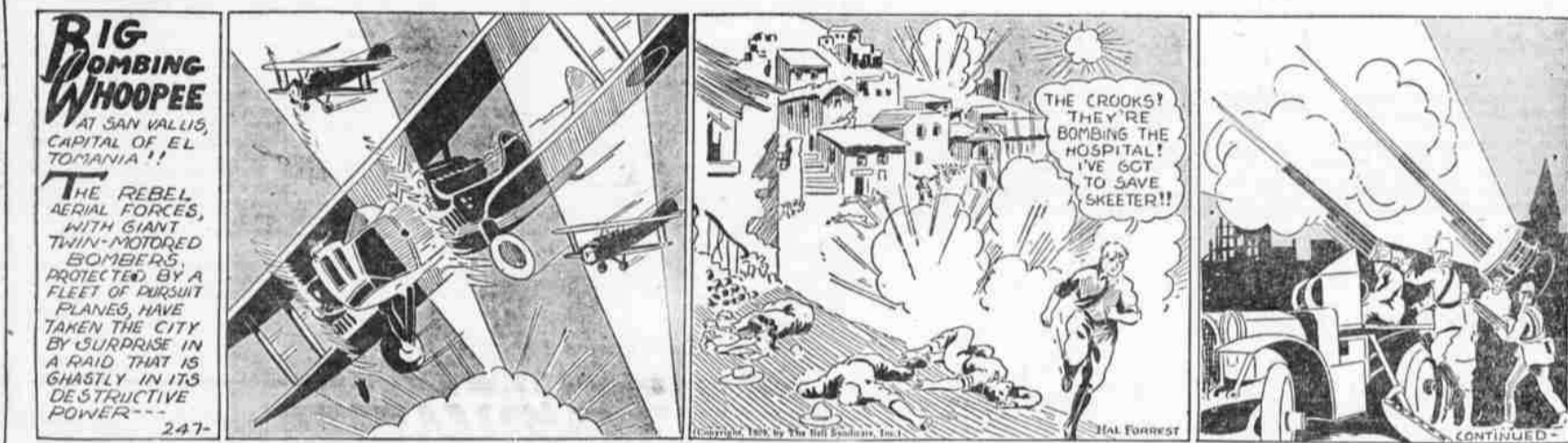
LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



REG'LAR FELLERS



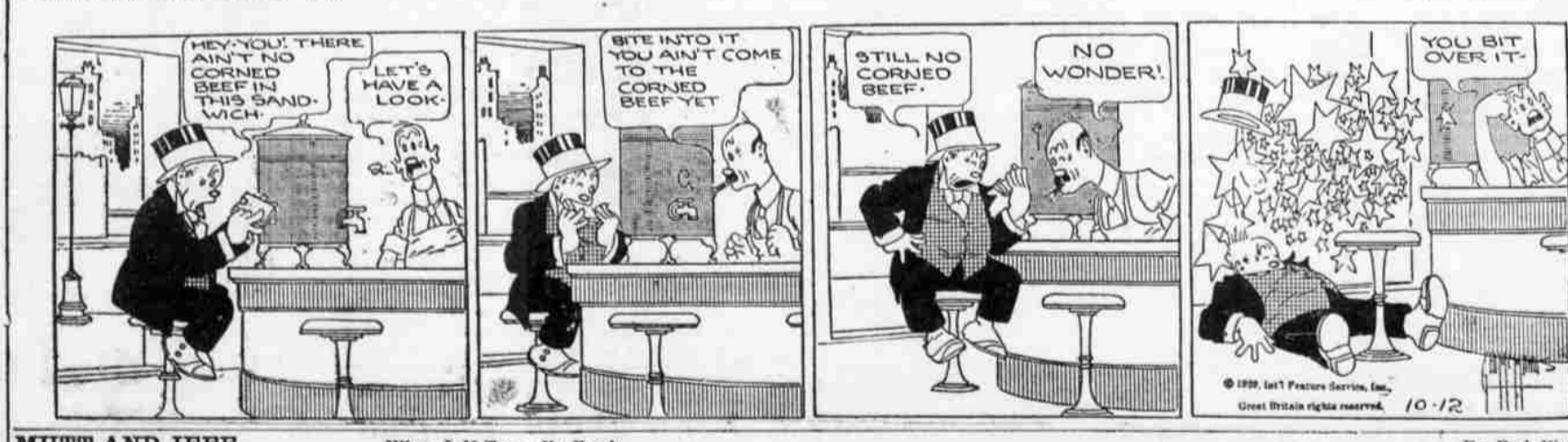
TAILSPIN TOMMY



DUMB DORA



BRINGING UP FATHER



MUTT AND JEFF



Solution of Yesterday's Puzzle

1. Falls behind	PALEST
2. Exercise as one's own	SCILLA
3. Male descendant	ARECAS
4. Liver	ATE AMUSEMENT
5. Cut off	LIN PETS NA
6. Applied	MOSS RA INGOT
7. Musical sound	SN TE HEROINE
8. Consisting of traps	BARE TORN
9. Non-wood	TSARINA NI SS
10. Current	AORTA LANET
11. Worthless leaving	NR DENS INE
12. Variety	TRANSIENT TIE
13. Sausage	LEVITE IATROL
14. Fold over	ELATED ERRORS
15. Pocket collog.	
16. Frigate New Zealand bird	
17. By means of thread	
18. Presently	
19. Narrowed	
20. Afraid	
21. Generic form of John	
22. Alarm	
23. Boat with a loaded stick	
24. Stumble hearing	
25. French possessive pronoun	
26. Archlike form of beagan	
27. Alcoholic liquor	
28. Permit	
29. A weight of India	
30. Misreal	
31. Hold back	
32. Heavy wagons	
33. Naval distress call	
34. Humanian silver coin	
35. Upright	
36. Slices of toast	
37. Anoint	
38. Veterinarian's large bill	
39. Extravagant gaudy	
40. Angle	
41. Uncanny	
42. Expert	
43. Nickname for Edward	
44. Flound	
45. Outside prefix	
46. Urged	
47. Organ of hearing	
48. Not bright	
49. Hair	
50. Neof	
51. Find fault	
52. Without good reason	
53. Robbed	
54. Classify	
55. Faithful	
56. American operatic soprano	
57. Saucy	
58. Airmen	
59. Legumes	
60. Sea eagle	
61. Undermine	
62. A marshal of France	

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