

THE LUXURY HUSBAND

Chapter 31
DISASTER

"Look out, the floor's giving away!"

All eyes in the direction of the voice. There, to their instant horror, they saw boards breaking away from the sides of the wall.

During those first moments they seemed incapable of grasping the impending calamity—the hastily erected floor, unable to stand the strain of it all, was in imminent danger of collapsing under their very feet!

When this fact finally forced itself upon them, they made, one and all, for the stairway. But here they found their exit blocked. The elephant, equally frightened, had placed its huge, unwieldy frame against the stairway. The wild animals, too, had broken loose.

Women screamed—the floor creaked and rocked perilously. How much longer would it hold?

Barbara, since the first outcry, had stood as though stupefied in a far corner of the room. Henderson had left her. Now, suddenly becoming aware of a strange noise at her feet she looked down to see the jaguar crouching before her as terrified, poor brute, had placed its known as Barbara herself. She screamed wildly and loudly. She swayed dizzily and closed her eyes. Then she heard footsteps running towards her. Looking up she thought that she must be insane. For it was Ray, close beside her.

"Ray!" she screamed.

Quickly he had ripped the black cloak from his costume and had thrown it over the frightened beast's head. The next moment his arms were about Barbara, crushing her to him with the hunger of months of yearning, his lips bruising her face with the intensity of his kisses.

"Barbara, my dear! Oh, my dear!"

She clung to him, half swooning with the intoxication of her joy. . . . To be held in Ray's arms once more . . . to know that he loved her. Nothing mattered except that Ray, keenly aware of the danger, was hurrying her towards the stair-case. The elephant still guarded the exit, the mob seething about him. The noise of the ripping of boards had increased; the floor wobbled dangerously; it seemed about to cave in.

It was Ray who prevented a calamity—Ray who, on a moment's inspiration, rushed up to the band platform and seized the singer's microphone. Through this he shouted directions to the terrified dancers. With the help of the boys from the band he cleared the mob from around the stairway, himself finally succeeding in getting the elephant to move.

At any moment he might have been trampled under its great feet. Barbara, watching him, thought that she must faint from the fear of it, the fear of what might happen to Ray.

Barbara and Ray remained in the hall until the last, gaining the garden just in time to hear a sudden, deafening sound behind them as the huge floor caved in and, with a mighty roar, collapsed.

In the scuffle that followed Barbara lost sight of Ray. One moment he was by her side, the next he was gone. She called him once, twice, without reply. She searched everywhere vainly, desperately. Where could Ray have gone? She ran to the front of the house where automobiles were jamming mad pools of fear. She couldn't believe Ray had left her again—left her after those moments she had lain in his arms—after his kisses had scorched her face.

Minutes passed; the majority of

her guests were already gone. Frantic she became, rushing along the driveway, searching the faces of those who passed her in limousines or taxis . . . not hearing their murmurs of sympathy, of regret, watching only for Ray.

She found him at last in a taxi, on the point of leaving. Without a thought for appearances she rushed down and rapped frantically on the window.

"Ray! . . . Ray! . . ."

He looked up. Seeing her he rose immediately and got out of the car. "You'd best go on without me," he murmured to Bill. "I'll follow—presently."

For a few moments they stood on the steps, without speaking. He was so stiff and straight—she felt almost afraid of him.

Her hand touched his sleeve. "Come inside, Ray. I want to talk to you. . . ."

She turned to climb the stairs but, when he didn't speak, nor attempt to follow her, she said, her voice cracking suddenly:

"Ray—how can you be so cruel?"

"I'm sorry, Barbara. But can't you tell me what you have to here?"

She tried to make her smile plausible, the smile to hide the pain in her eyes.

"I want you to come inside," and when still he hesitated, "Don't be absurd, Ray. You ask as though we weren't married and I was trying to vamp you!"

He came at that. Invariably, the best way to get around Ray was to ridicule an attitude of his. He followed her up the steps and into the great stone mansion that had housed London for three successive generations.

She led him upstairs. He followed her mutely, not knowing where she was leading him. But when he saw she had brought him into her boudoir, a dainty slip of a room in white and gold, he stood motionless in the doorway.

She led him upstairs. He followed her mutely, not knowing where she was leading him. But when he saw she had brought him into her boudoir, a dainty slip of a room in white and gold, he stood motionless in the doorway.

She saw the look and it hardened her, stiffened her resolutions to have done with this nonsense of separation.

She essayed a desperate laugh. "Don't be so dramatic, Ray—sit down!"

He seated himself on the chaise longue, a slender thing of gold with absurd pink taffeta cushions. He seated himself gingerly as though in the past months he had become unaccustomed to the boudoir of a lady of fashion.

"What is it you want, Barbara?"

Then, casting her pride to the wind and throwing her cards on the table with the reckless impulsiveness that was Barbara, she spoke, her voice grown husky.

"It's you I want, Ray. . . . Oh, my dear, I've wanted you every minute you've been away!"

He started, overwhelmed by what seemed to him the unfairness of her attack. . . . He tried to rise but now she was beside him on the lounge, her arms holding him down.

"You wouldn't leave me now, Ray? Not after what happened to-night? Oh, my dear, I couldn't bear it. Swear to me you'll never leave me again."

(To be Continued.)

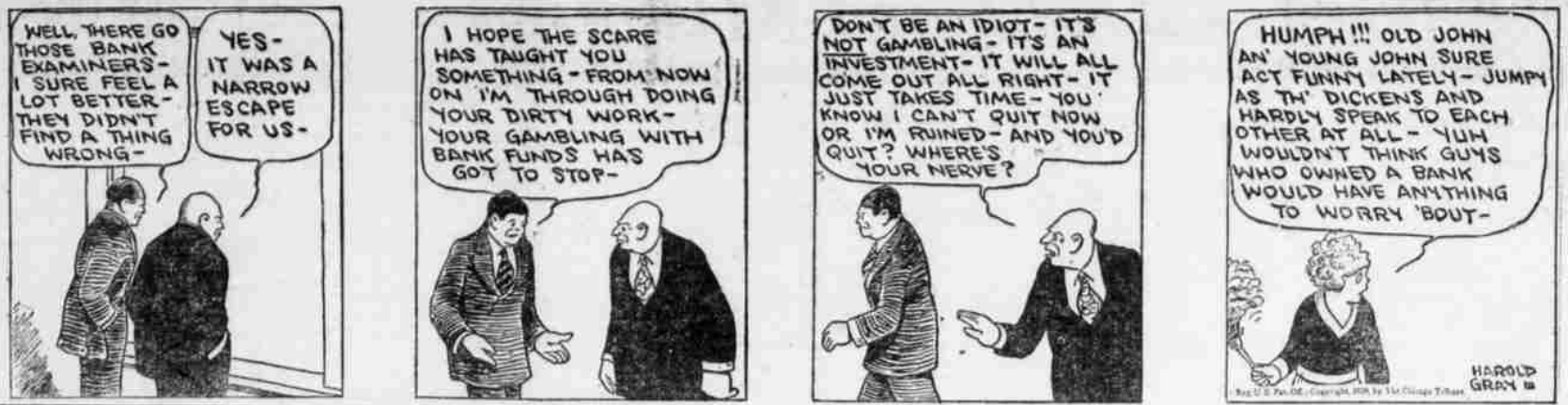
HOUSE OWNERS MOVE

Silverton—Among the changes made in people moving the past few days are the W. E. Satchwell family moved from the Ravin house on Adams street to the P. L. Brown house on Welch street; The Mahlen Hoblitts from the Lane house on Adams to the Ravin house on the same street, and the E. A. Lanes from Gottenbug Apartments on North First to their own house on Adams.

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

Recrimination

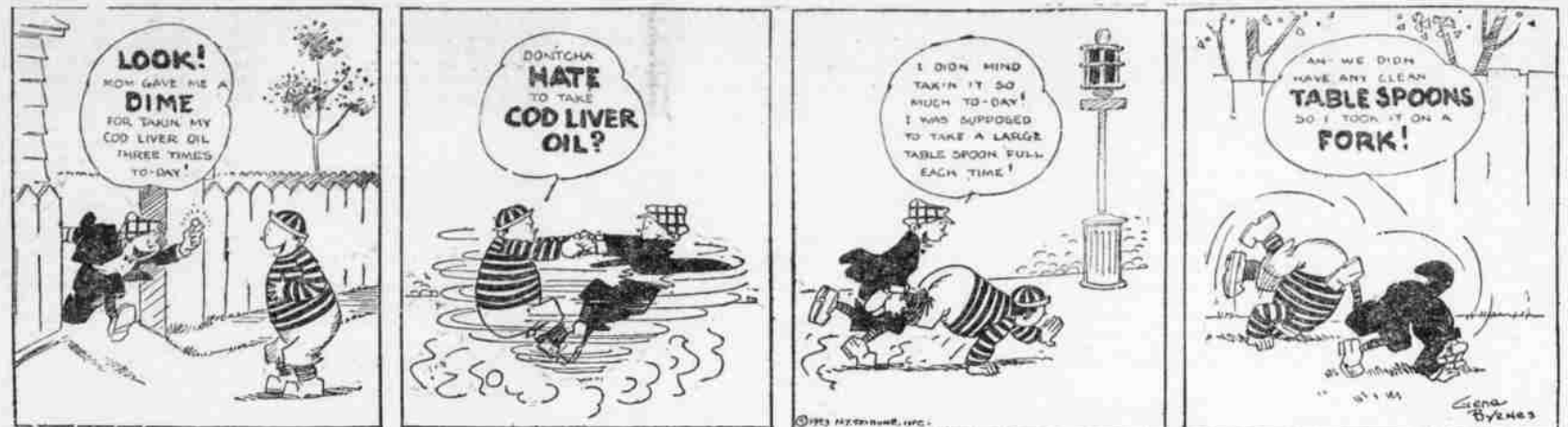
By Harold Gray



REG'LAR FELLERS

Should Use Hoop

By Gene Byrnes



TAILSPIN TOMMY

Betty Tries Some Strategy

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST



DUMB DORA

The Mob Scene

By Chick Young



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



MUTT AND JEFF

An Hour of Classical Static

By Bud Fisher



ACROSS Solution of Yesterday's Puzzle

- French seaport
- Spill
- Accidents
- Catchers of evil
- Epoch
- Ray drives hours to
- Process of training by study
- Fiber plant
- Small child
- Sweet potato
- Performed
- Angry
- Large knife
- Article of apparel
- Suicid
- Exist
- Kind of beetle
- Obese
- To sound, in language
- Conduct tending to increase
- Months
- Post driver
- Mammalian, eous, form
- Stamping
- Disturbed the vibrations
- French article
- Descriptor
- Double prefix
- Gone by
- Dullied
- Shabby
- Make lace
- Prose
- Article
- Bouquet
- Head covering
- Dense fogs
- Discharged
- Small exhibition
- Make a mistake
- Experiments of airplanes
- Slender metal
- Conducted atmospheric moisture
- Metal-bearing rock
- Grow drowsy
- Attiring
- Free of all deceptions
- Help
- Examined thoroughly
- Implement for peeling
- Winged
- Preposition
- Blot
- Over
- Heavier
- Conceals
- Saw without an opening
- Weapons
- Not seat
- Wagon
- New comb
- Form
- American author

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