

THE ROSE IN THE DARK

BY ROY VICKERS

Chapter 18
CORNERED

Dr. Lytton visited Gramnock the next afternoon and found him learning to feel his way about the rose garden, under Hallie's guidance.

"Miss Conaldine has been teaching me all day," explained Gramnock. Lytton, tongue-tied, could only draw fiercely at his cigarette.

"He listened to the talk of these two lovers," between instructions and directions, always casually given, Hallie was leading Gramnock to speak of Africa. Time slipped away among the roses. . . .

"I'll go back to the house," she said, suddenly rising. "You'd like to have a professional look at your patient, doctor, no doubt; and I have my unpacking to finish."

"Unpacking?"

"Oh, didn't you know? I've asked myself to stay. I angled hard for the invitation yesterday but Society is so dainty or so very, very proper. I can't quite make out which it is. Perhaps you'll smooth him down for me, will you?"

Both she and Gramnock laughed, the carefree and intimate laughter of acknowledged lovers. Lytton laughed, too, and hoped he would never again see such misery as lay in this girl's eyes while her lips curved and pouted so gaily.

"She wants to stay here for three weeks—that is, until we're married," said Gramnock, when the sound of her footsteps had died away. "Heaven knows what Southcliff will say!"

"Forget 'em," growled the doctor. He rubbed his hands nervously together. "You're to be married in three weeks then—that's settled!"

"It's settled in this sense—that I still don't feel I ought to marry at all and that she—Rose—absolutely refuses to budge from my side until I can live a tolerable life without her. Well, what am I to say to her? What is a tolerable life to a blind man? And if I could see—would life even then be tolerable without her? . . . I'd like to believe that she's getting her own way because the puzzle is beyond me but, to be honest, I haven't really tackled it. I'm afraid of it. And while I'm busy dodging it, she's simply settling everything."

"I see," said Lytton.

"I heard from Lester this morning," said Gramnock.

The doctor started.

"I had a wire yesterday," went on Gramnock with careful quiet. "His letter confirms it. He has arranged to marry Nurse Ellesmore within the next few days and to take her abroad. After that, he wants to sell this place and settle down in New York."

"He never liked Southcliff," said Lytton, for the sake of saying something—anything.

"No. It was mother who loved it. Of course, Lester will be free to do as he likes with all his property once he is married. It's too bad, isn't it, and yet sort of funny that all the elaborate machinery mother set up to insure that Lester should marry suitably is to end in this!"

"Your brother felt that the Ellesmore girl had a claim on him?"

Dr. Lytton had found a temporary solution of the situation by thinking of Nurse Ellesmore and Rose Conaldine as two separate people.

"He did; and I was bound to agree with him. In other words, I gave my consent to his marriage and by the terms of the will that is enough to put Lester in complete authority over his possessions. . . . Lytton."

"What's the girl like? I don't mean physically—I've been told she's dark and handsome with one crooked eyebrow or something—but what kind of a wife will she make Lester?"

"Is she—well, you know what I

mean? Is she going to be his social death-warrant or not? Because Lester will never find any kind of life outside the society of others of his type. He is gregarious or nothing."

Lytton shifted miserably in his seat. He was not used, he told himself, to this stepping gingerly about between lies, half-lies and evasions. He said, desperately, "Old man, I wish I could tell you what you want to know but I can't. And that's the truth."

Gramnock evidently accepted this as normal.

"No, I suppose you wouldn't know," he said. "You only knew her as a nurse. . . . It's odd, doc, how Lester's description of her has stuck in my mind. It's the uneven eyebrows, I suppose. I find myself thinking about her quite a lot—not in relation to myself but as the woman who is to be my brother's wife."

"The doctor grabbed again at the pretense that Hallie and Rose were not one but two.

"I should have thought," he said, "that you had someone else to think about."

Gramnock smiled.

"I don't somehow, actively think about Rose," said Gramnock. "She's a part of my mind and of my spirit. She is my life. . . . Sorry! Didn't know I was given to that kind of thing, did you? But perhaps it's because I've never actually seen her."

"No, of course you haven't."

"I'm told she is very lovely. Nurse Casey very sweetly told me so. But Lytton, here's a queer thing! Casey got mixed up with Rose and said that Ellesmore weren't level, that one was higher than the other. When I exclaimed, she said she'd confused the two."

"She's a fool."

"They aren't alike, are they? I don't know why it should have come as such a shock to believe that they are even of the same type."

"There isn't a shadow of resemblance between them," lied the doctor hastily. "As for eyebrows or whatever it is, you can take it from me that damn few people have got perfectly level eyebrows. You haven't. I haven't. Your brother has one of the very few asymmetrical faces I've seen and that's one of the reasons I don't like it."

"You were always a little down on Lester," grinned Lester's brother.

"Very likely. And talking of faces, old man, just let me see if that swelling of yours is gone yet."

He plunged into a discussion of Gramnock's general health and kept at it until Hallie was again visible between the trees.

"I'm here again, Saxely," she called, and Lytton recognized this as an agreed signal which would relieve Gramnock of speculating on her nearness. "I find I've left some things at Mrs. Bartholomew's. Will you give me a lift there, Doctor Lytton?"

"With pleasure."

"Nurse Casey will be back from her walk soon, and, in any case, Saxely likes a little time to himself occasionally." Her hand was on Gramnock's shoulder and Lytton saw him carry it to his lips. Then, instead of releasing it, Gramnock felt it with his other hand.

"I must learn this business, nest," he said, cheerfully. "This hand of yours, Rose, is a little different from the hand of any one else in the world. I must learn to feel that little difference. And then I must feel your face. Breathe down just a second. Lytton says faces are rarely symmetrical. Perhaps I can tell in my fingers where one half is out of line with the other, now that my eyes aren't able to deceive me."

Hallie had whitened but, after one started, inquiring look at Lytton, she had bent to the groping

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

C. Plouse Hush



By Harold Gray

REG'LAR FELLERS

Solid Comfort



By Gene Byrnes

TAILSPIN TOMMY

Shades of "Captain Kid"



By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST

DUMB DORA

A Thin Excuse



By Paul Fung

BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus

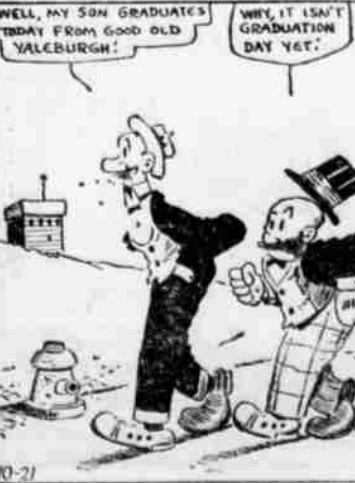


By George McManus

MUTT AND JEFF

Cicero Is A Polished Pebble

By Bud Fisher



By Bud Fisher

ACROSS

1. Memorandum book
4. Piece
8. Spanish gentleman
12. Vegetable
13. Having ripeness
14. Money
15. Fast bright light
17. Fruitlike ending
18. Meat dish
19. In what place
21. Curved
22. Ape of the state
23. Through
24. Missing edge
27. Thin
28. Eyes
29. Tasty
30. Middle-aged gem
32. Metal
33. Little knot
34. Paradise
35. Egg-shaped
36. Number of the Command
37. Brown gem
38. Round roof
39. At home
40. Fleety person
41. abstr.

DOWN

1. Half size
2. Membership
3. Point of time
10. Expires post.
11. Beard
16. For what reason
17. Ape
18. Longish
19. Leaf
20. Arranged
21. Glaze
22. Nitrogen ether
23. Aurlion
24. Fragrant
25. Heric head
26. Minute particle
27. Pine
28. Bone
29. Part of a miniature
30. Woman's religious circle
31. Along
32. Flange
33. In this place
34. Clear as
35. Nitric
36. Before
37. Ape
38. Diver
39. All-mpt
40. What?
41. Plural ending

SOLUTION OF YESTERDAY'S PUZZLE

TAMM SERIF ACES
OLEO ALAMO BABY
LEANS ATAR ANON
LENGTH AGE TONE
EAR ESSEN
OPERATOR TOD TO
PANEL POSED DIP
ERIE LEVER SLIDE
RED FIRED SATAN
AS FIB RADICALS
PAGED NAG
AWLS RIP PHRASE
BOAT AVOV STREN
LONE TEPEE PEND
EDEN ESSIS EATS

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