

The FICTION Corner

THE BUILD-UP  
By RUBE GOLDBERG



I was ambling along in my car counting posts and watching my nervous windshield-wiper as it slapped out a clear segment of a circle when I spied a smallish man walking ahead. The back of his neck seemed a bit scrawny and a little round hat sat on top of his head as though a vagrant breeze had dropped it there.

He was carrying a small bunch of flowers. When I pulled alongside I asked him if he wanted a lift. His clothes were limp with the steady drizzle and he seemed to have walked a long way. "I've only got a short way to go now," he said. "It ain't hardly worth bothering about."

"Jump in, anyway," I said, "you're all soaked."

"All right. But I'm only going around the bend there to Cypress Hills." As he got into the car he held the flowers high so as not to break the stems.

"Cypress Hills," I repeated by way of showing a little interest. "That's a cemetery, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's a cemetery."

"Oh," I said. Flowers, cemetery, rain. I kept a respectful silence.

When we had driven a short distance there was a great rumble of thunder through the low hills and the sky opened with a sudden torrent that made the surrounding landscape a wet blur.

"Guess I'll pull up alongside the road until it blows over," I told my passenger. Neither of us spoke for a while.

The great clatter of the storm outside rendered the silence behind the closed windows a little oppressive. Presently the little man said, "My wife is buried over there." He pointed in the direction of Cypress Hills.

"I'm sorry," I answered. "When—"

"Just a few weeks ago."

"Was it sudden or—"

He ignored my unfinished question and said absently, "It's strange what a delicate thing life is. It can be cut off by an accidental move or even a thoughtless word. Something you say can snap it off just like a thin piece of thread."

There was a clap of thunder and the downpour wrapped us in a fresh film of rain. The little man told me his story. I give it to you in his words as closely as I can remember them.

Martha spent her whole life trying to build me up into something. She started right at the wedding. She was about an inch taller than me and she wore her flattest heels at the wedding and stooped over a little when the minister stood us up for the ceremony. She looked so proud you'd think she was marrying a millionaire. And me only a bookkeeper at the mill.

There wasn't much about me she could brag about, but she made up a lot of things. She said she won me away from a fancy blonde named Tillie and told how I saved the company's payroll when six armed bandits broke into the mill. Of course, there wasn't any blonde named Tillie and the six armed bandits were just two fellows who looked in when they saw a light and asked the road to Cloverdale.

Martha wasn't very strong and got spells now and then. They said it was her heart. I didn't pay much attention to what the doctor said. I'd always make her rest after one of her spells and she'd come

during that time Martha got some of the red back in her cheeks and she moved around more lively than she had in years. She made me get a dinner coat with all the fixings that went with it. She had the studs screwed in the shirt four days before the banquet.

After we wrote the speech we went over it here and there until it sounded right. Each evening after dinner we'd go to the kitchen where people couldn't look in and I'd stand on a chair and make the speech. I must have delivered that speech at least fifty times.

Well, the big night finally came. When I got dressed up I looked pret-



"How did it go?" she cried. I shouldn't have told her.

around fine. Jed Miley down at the post office told me his wife was like that and as long as they didn't get any excitement or shock they could live to be a hundred. Martha always rested when I told her but she never really rested even when she was lying down. Her mind was working. She was thinking how she could make the town know what a great husband she had. I tried to explain that it didn't matter as long as we were happy. But she kept on being riled. I just kind of hoped something big would happen to me for Martha's sake.

Well, sir, it was like the hand of fate. Something big did happen at last. At least, it was big to Martha and me. Mr. Clawson, the president of the mill, was getting up a dinner in honor of the town council and asked me to make a speech!

When I came home and told Martha that evening she nearly jumped out of her skin. I had never made a speech before in my life. I was scared stiff at the thought of it. But Martha was going to prove everything she had said about me, through that speech. I just had to show Mister Clawson and the councilmen she was right.

The dinner was two weeks off and

ty good. Martha stood at the gate waving good-by and looked ten years younger. I was sort of choked up and happy. I was only sorry she couldn't come along. It was just for men, you know.

I left my car in front of the house and walked down to the Clifton Hotel so I could go over my speech just one last time. When I got there I said hello to everybody—even Longyear, president of the bank. I'd never spoken to him before. I felt pretty important.

THEY put me on the platform next to Charlie Simmons, who is quite a wit around these parts. He has one of those ventriloquist dummies and also does card tricks. He told me a few jokes and I laughed although I didn't listen. I took a taste of the soup but after that I couldn't eat a thing. The speech kept pounding in my head.

After the ice cream Mister Clawson rapped for order and made a flowery speech about the town council. Then the head of the council said a lot of nice things about the mill and how much good it had done the town. More speeches followed. Each time the toastmaster got ready to call on the next speaker I shook all over thinking it might be me. It seemed that everybody in town was making a speech. My mouth got dry.

Then Simmons got up and did his dummy act and some card tricks. He went over to the piano and sang some songs. People called for more. They all laughed and sang with him. I looked at my watch. It was eleven o'clock.

I managed to get my head clear and quickly thought over the first few paragraphs of my speech. They were saving me for the last. A sort of surprise, I thought. Then Mister Clawson got up and his voice sounded far off. He said some of the boys wanted to play poker and others wanted to sit around and chat. It was too late for more speeches. After hearing Simmons any more talk would be tame. It was a wonderful evening and everybody had enjoyed it thoroughly. They all stood up and sang Auld Lang Syne. The dinner was over.

You can't blame me for not being able to think clearly after that. I was so disappointed I got kind of numb. I sneaked out through the back door and went home. Martha ran down to the front gate and grabbed me around the neck. She cried, "How did it go?"

I said, "They didn't call on me." I shouldn't have told her the truth. It was a dreadful blunder.

Painting Cellar Floor

Rubber base paints frequently are used for painting cement floors and basements, because they are resistant to alkali which would adversely affect some other types of paint. Before applying rubber base paints to a cement floor, any old paint should be removed with paint remover, all residue from the paint remover washed off with turpentine or mineral spirits, and the floor thoroughly dried out. A further precaution before painting cement cellar floors, either new or old, is to etch them with muriatic acid solution in the proportion of about one pint of acid to one gallon of water. If the acid solution is used the floor should be well rinsed to remove traces of the acid and then thoroughly dried before painting. Two coats of the rubber base paint then can be applied, being careful that the first coat is dry before the second coat is applied.

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ASK ME ANOTHER? A General Quiz

The Questions

1. Do sharks have to turn over to bite?
2. Is white a color?
3. How much blood is there in the human body?
4. Who was the first president of Texas after its declaration of independence?
5. What city in the U. S. is one mile above sea level?
6. The Boston Tea Party took place in what year?
7. In what battle were American troops ordered to withhold their fire till they could see the whites of their opponents' eyes?
8. A parcel post package is limited in weight to how many pounds?

The Answers

1. No, a shark can bite any side up.
2. Yes, it is a combination of all of the colors of the spectrum. Black is the absence of color.
3. From one to one and a half gallons, the quantity varying with the size of the individual.
4. Sam Houston.
5. Denver, Colo.
6. In 1773 (December 16).
7. The Battle of Bunker Hill.
8. Seventy pounds.

Australia to Standardize Rails Over 18,000 Miles

Australia's independent state railroads now plan to adopt the standard gauge, which means relaying the 18,000 of the 24,000 miles of tracks that are using other gauges. This chaotic situation, which requires passengers and freight to be transferred from one system to another as many as four times between certain cities, has existed for 94 years, incurred an economic loss of \$2,400,000,000 and will cost to correct nearly \$300,000,000.

This Week's Best Fiction

passenger. Neither of us spoke for a while. The great clatter of the storm outside rendered the silence behind the closed windows a little oppressive. Presently the little man said, "My wife is buried over there." He pointed in the direction of Cypress Hills. "I'm sorry," I answered. "When—" "Just a few weeks ago." "Was it sudden or—" He ignored my unfinished question and said absently, "It's strange what a delicate thing life is. It can be cut off by an accidental move or even a thoughtless word. Something you say can snap it off just like a thin piece of thread." There was a clap of thunder and the downpour wrapped us in a fresh film of rain. The little man told me his story. I give it to you in his words as closely as I can remember them. Martha spent her whole life trying to build me up into something. She started right at the wedding. She was about an inch taller than me and she wore her flattest heels at the wedding and stooped over a little when the minister stood us up for the ceremony. She looked so proud you'd think she was marrying a millionaire. And me only a bookkeeper at the mill.

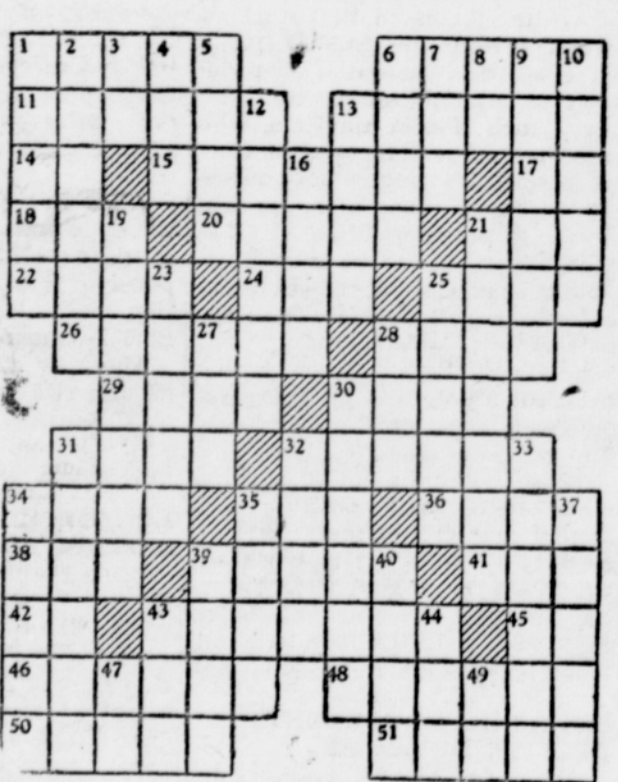
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Horizontal

- 1 To stop the motion of
- 6 Faith
- 11 One ruling for a sovereign
- 13 Public speaker
- 14 Italian article
- 15 Epicure
- 17 Chinese measure
- 18 Encore!
- 20 To inflict
- 21 Girl's name
- 22 Serf
- 24 Sailor
- 25 Son of Adam
- 26 Messenger
- 28 To box
- 29 Gaelic
- 30 Large snakes
- 31 Support
- 32 Fencer's cry
- 34 To change direction
- 35 Star
- 36 Lampreys
- 38 To say further
- 39 Scottish poet
- 41 Lair
- 42 Note of scale
- 43 Trumpetlike wind instruments
- 45 Six
- 46 To tolerate
- 48 Was inclined
- 50 Austere
- 51 Augusta is its capital

Vertical

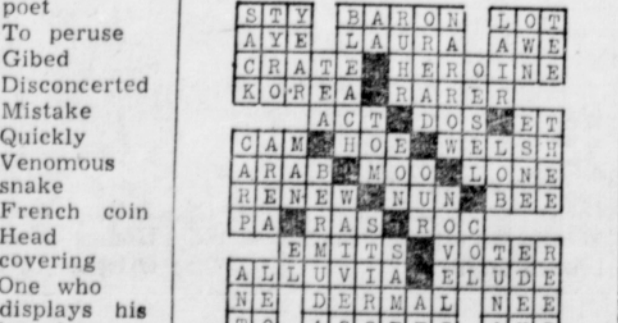
- 1 Secretly offered
- 2 Flavor
- 3 Symbol for silver
- 4 Cask
- 5 Poetic: enough



No. 32

- |                                  |                           |                  |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| 6 Journey                        | 33 Football team          | 40 Upright stalk |
| 7 Rodent                         | 34 Poetic: dales          | 43 Mongrel       |
| 8 Low note                       | 35 Certain                | 44 Nabor         |
| 9 To unite, as metal surfaces    | 37 Slang: inferior        | 47 Prefix: down  |
| 10 Test                          | 39 Brought into existence | 49 Roman gods    |
| 12 Slow-moving reptile           |                           |                  |
| 13 Persian poet                  |                           |                  |
| 16 To peruse                     |                           |                  |
| 19 Gibed                         |                           |                  |
| 21 Disconcerted                  |                           |                  |
| 23 Mistake                       |                           |                  |
| 25 Quickly                       |                           |                  |
| 27 Venomous snake                |                           |                  |
| 28 French coin                   |                           |                  |
| 30 Head covering                 |                           |                  |
| 31 One who displays his learning |                           |                  |
| 32 To rotate                     |                           |                  |

Answer to Puzzle Number 31



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