

BOY CRAZY

by GRACE PERKINS

SYNOPSIS: Locked in her room, Hope Ross faces her father's disapproval. Her stepmother, Mrs. Dickey, is a spoiled, selfish woman who has been threatening her marriage. Dickey has been sent away by Mr. Ross.

Chapter 17

WHOLESALE INSULT

WHO wants their damned old food?" demanded Hope. "I wouldn't touch it, if I was dying of thirst! The birds can have it—and the worms!"

Whereupon with one energetic and somewhat muscular gesture, Hope picked up the tray of tempting, steaming food on dainty Wedgwood dishes, and dived the whole thing, into a clattering, smashing pile, out of her window!

Which greatly relieved her nerves—until she suddenly realized that it left her without a drop of cream or a crumb of food for the dolefully mewling Sassy.

And until—some two hours later—she realized how piteously hungry she really was!

Late into the moonlit night, Hope paced up and down her room, her imagination working overtime. Packing her bags, and dressing so that she would be ready for travel. For surely Dickey would come! What could he be delaying him? Had he really hurt Papa Ross—and what was going to happen? She must ask questions that couldn't be answered. The same questions beating over and over in her mind. . . .

She must have faith. Dickey would come, and there must be some good reason why he hadn't arrived before this. Whatever the hour, she would go with him—if she had to leap out her window and into his arms to make it! Why on earth were her bedroom windows directly over the blubbering brook and the sunken garden? One couldn't very well tie a sheet and jump the rest of the way down there—only to land soaked and wet to the skin! No indeed! She'd run away if she had to, but that would be silly now, because ten to one she'd pass Dickey on the way, and besides, Papa would be watching the garage, and how could she get any distance without a car being caught?

Better, anyhow, to wait until Dickey and his father arrived, and then leave, with perfect dignity, haughty and proud. . . . They had said they'd stick together no matter what, hadn't they? Oh, but surely Dickey would come. . . . And Hickey would help them like he said. . . . And some day Dad would be sorry. . . . And see things in the right light. . . .

Why were the walls of the house built so soundly? Why such silence—such ghostly, gruesome silence everywhere, with only the faint tinkling of the phone in Papa's study ringing every few minutes? . . . What was the matter with everybody? Had they gone crazy?

Was that the sound of a car on the driveway? Oh, why couldn't she see the front of the house? Who was coming—or who was leaving, and for where?

Dawn crept into the rose and apple-green bedroom, and found Hope Fairfield Ross sitting by her open window, dressed in a blue duvetine suit, her hat fallen to the floor, her yellow head bent against the window ledge in the sleep of exhaustion. Asleep—but still dressed and ready for the slightest sign, the harest sound of love to call for her and carry her away to happiness. . . .

Long before Hope had succumbed to exhaustion, three men faced each other in the enormous billiard-room below the house.

If only the bride could have seen or heard Hickey, with Dobson at his feet, and Dickey by his side, pale and disheveled. John Howard Ross, before his huge cobblestone fireplace, one arm stiff in his sleeve, and the other raised with a vehement gesture that punctuated the snarl of his words.

"And the behavior of the boy," he repeated with a nasal sting that robbed his voice of any human quality, "has only proven my statements. Drunk at the Country Club a hour before he ran off with my child! Drunk, and in a fist fight with a surgeon today with a broken ear-drum! He should be sued! I ought to have him arrested! I wouldn't sell my family name by sending into a court brawl with him! My family will suffer enough as it is with the publicity of this whole disgraceful affair!"

"I shan't leave until I see Hope, just the same!" growled Dickey with white and glowering obstinacy. "She doesn't want to see you! She doesn't want ever to see you!"

Papa Ross fired the words back into the boy's face.

"I'll have to hear that from her own lips!" insisted Dickey for the fortieth time in the last hour. "Drunk you were!" shouted Papa Ross, not to be outdone in a little matter of repetition. "Drunk, I say, when you dared to run off with a girl who isn't old enough to know her own mind! Ignore her family, and never so much as notify us of her safety or her whereabouts. Her mother is seriously ill as a result—

from a heart attack early this morning that has put her in a very grave condition. And as for your behavior when at last you got around to bringing my daughter home—

With a speechless, almost flabby twitching of his dry lips, Papa Ross pointed to his own injured left arm. "I'm sorry—dreadfully sorry and ashamed—but you didn't give me a chance!" cried Dickey hotly. "I've got some rights. You wouldn't even—"

"You've got no rights!" raged his father-in-law with a snap of his jaw. "You're nineteen and she's seventeen. You're minors! Infants! You have no rights, either one of you, and I'll never give you a chance!"

"And I'll never believe Hope doesn't want to see me, until—"

But old man Hickey turned and put his hand on his son's shoulder. "That will do, boy," he said tersely. Then, with a weary straightening of his huge square shoulders under his loose-fitting tweed coat, the producer turned somber eyes on the banker.

"I have, sir," Hickey spoke with slow deliberation and a careful dignity to mask the unmanageable tightness of his throat, "come here with nothing but good-will—nothing but apology, and with a desire to meet you half-way—all the way—in order to keep these two children from ruining their lives. I have—"

"Half-way!" snorted Papa Ross fiercely. "Half-way! With nothing but good-will and apologies, eh? With no thought to the inheritance perhaps that is Hope's—"

With sudden clenched fists, Hickey squared off in a flash of uncontrollable anger. "God-damn you, sir!" he roared, his throat easing for the first time in that hour with the relief of a good, round, wholesome fury.

At his feet Dobson growled a warning, showing his pointed white teeth, as he planted himself immovably before Hickey's patent-leather shoes.

"No! No thought of money!" repeated Papa Ross, bringing his good right fist down on the edge of the billiard table until several scattered little white and red balls clicked dolefully. "You, with your four fops last season! You, with your son a parasite on his college! Free tuition, because his brains are in his foot and he is able to kick a goal for his team! Don't think I don't know you. I've looked you up. I know everything you've done."

Like a streak Dickey was across the eight feet between them, while his father cried out a protest and bent to hold Dobson by the collar. But Dickey wasn't sane enough at the moment to listen to any protest. Dickey was blind with anger—with wholesale insult.

But not a second time was Papa Ross to be caught by the boy's unthinking rage. Before he fairly realized what he was doing, Papa Ross had grasped a billiard cue, lifted it high in the air, his right arm free in the swing of vengeful anger, descending with a blow that crashed mightily downward, across Dickey's face and shoulder, felling the boy with the stroke.

For one dry-eyed moment, Papa Ross gazed down at his foot, realizing the extent of his own fury—understanding vaguely in the back of his mind, why the boy himself had twice been driven to physical attack.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—A Party—and a Menace!



'SMATTER POP—In view of the Hard Times

By C. M. PAYNE



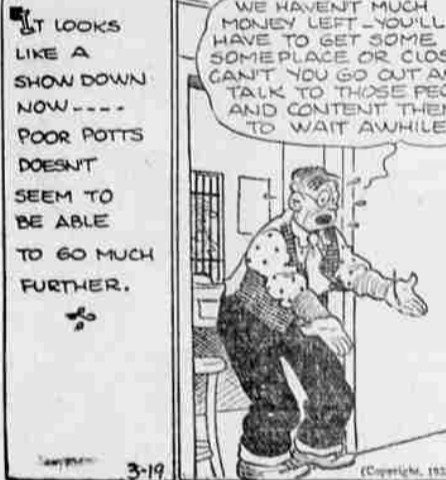
BOUND TO WIN—Ben's Noble Sacrifice!

By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—The Show-Down

By SOL HESS



MUTT AND JEFF—A Broadway Columnist Puts Two and Two Together

By BUD FISHER



INQUEST FAILS TO DIVULGE MURDER

MARSHFIELD, Ore., March 19.—(AP)—An inquest today into the death of John Hilt, 70, of Lakeside, whose charred body was found in his burned home Wednesday night, did not disclose, the coroner said, any new information on the manner of his death.

Hilt's body was found by police when they went to the house on a liquor search. His body was on the floor, only a few feet from the door.

Banker Passes
PORTLAND, Ore., March 19.—(AP)—Henry H. Newhall, president of the Bank of East Portland, died here Friday. He had been ill two weeks.

JAPANESE BOY HONORS IRELAND'S SPECIAL DAY

THE ALLEN, Ore., March 19.—(AP)—Tommy Loniki, Japanese truck gardener, believes in entering into the spirit of a thing.

On Thursday, St. Patrick's day, Loniki visited the county clerk, showed \$2 across the counter and went away with a license for his Irish setter which he has named "St. Patrick."

BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



THE BAND BOX & SHOE BOX.
A NEW DRESS FOR EASTER? The Band Box features Silk Dresses and sport knit suits: \$6.95 values for \$4.95; \$12.50 values for \$9.50. Our \$14.95 dresses are equal to \$20-\$25 dresses. Low operating expense enables us to sell at these prices.