

KITTY FREW

By JANE ABBOTT

Chapter 25
DOES A PRINCESS EAT?

KITTY put the incident of the orchids out of her mind. Marge wore them often; any one of a number of admirers might have sent them to her. "And, anyway, what if Gar did?" she asked of herself, feeling very tolerant and understanding.

Christmas occupied her time and thought.

In a bureau drawer she had hidden her gift for Gar. It was a crayon sketch of a New York skyline. "Granite Mountains," Kitty had thought when she first saw it, and the rising peaks had made her think of the Panther range at dusk. Gar would think that, too.

She planned how Gar and she would celebrate this, their first Christmas together. They'd have a tree, of course. They'd trim it and light it Christmas Eve.

But Gar laughed when she said they'd have a tree.

"We won't be home long enough to look at it, Kit. Marge is throwing a party Christmas Eve, at the theater—a sort of christening. And mother'll want us over at the house on Christmas Day."

Kitty would not be dismayed. She only smiled when Gar called her a funny little kid.

Gar's time was given over more than ever to the Players. It was necessary for him to go to these last rehearsals, he explained to Kitty. Every day he went over to the little theater; there was always something or other there to demand his attention. He talked endlessly of one thing or another, the new drop curtain, the lighting effect, the little coffee room next to the foyer, who was good and who wasn't in the cast. "Wait until you see Marge! She's perfect!" He confided to Kitty that Somerset was a bum. But Marge was handling him properly! And Kitty listened, believing she was really interested because Gar was so interested.

Gar had been insisting that she buy a new evening dress for herself. "Call it my Christmas present, if you want to, Kit." She'd consented, finally, on that understanding, but Gar was too busy to go with her to select it. She bought a slimy white and silver thing.

Three days before Christmas she ran into Dorcas in one of the stores. Dorcas' arms were full of bundles. She nodded down at her burden. "These are for my family. I always have a party Christmas Eve. Wish you could come."

They'd talked only for a moment for Dorcas was in a rush.

Kitty felt a moment's envy for the merriment they'd have in Dorcas' room. David would be there, of course—

Well, she was glad David wouldn't be alone!

And she'd have her tree. She'd bought it; the janitor was going to help her stand it in a corner of the living room. She'd trim it before Gar came home. She'd have an especially nice supper and they'd eat in state. She'd put on the new dress—Gar's Christmas gift. And then they'd light their tree—

Snow fell steadily the day before Christmas. At dusk the city was covered with a soft blanket.

She trimmed the little tree, lovingly, sniffing at its fragrance.

Her supper was ready except for the switching on of the oven heat.

She put on the new dress with considerable excitement. Gar would like it.

The telephone rang. "Kit, I'm down at the theater tied up in knots. I just can't get away. Will you be awfully lonesome if I don't get home until later?"

"But, Gar—"

"The racket here won't start until midnight. I'll dash up in time to get dressed. Have my things ready, will you? Looks like it was going to be some Christmas, Kit!"

Kitty put down the telephone. Her lips quivered, tears brimmed in her eyes. Christmas Eve! She turned her back on the little tree and went slowly into the bedroom. If Gar had sounded more sorry that he was detained! He hadn't explained what kept him. Unpleasant suspicions leaped to her mind.

But she met them defiantly. Of course something had come up; she understood how they all turned to Gar in any emergency, depended on him. She was proud that they did! Oh, she understood. She said aloud: "It's all right." It would be only a matter of two hours or so and then he'd come, he'd dress, they'd go out to meet their Christmas gaily—

Those "two hours or so" loomed threateningly until a saving thought came to her. She'd go to Dorcas' apartment, surprise them all in their merriment. They'd be glad to have her come. She ordered a taxicab. "92 Ketchum Street." She sat very erect in it, smiling in anticipation of bursting in upon them. She'd see David.

She heard laughter as she entered the old house. Dorcas' door stood open flooding the narrow upper hall with rosy light. Kitty stood in the door for a moment before anyone noticed her. With one swift sweeping glance her eyes took in the familiar room, the familiar faces, the little white-haired man sitting in the chair of honor, the Christmas tree twinkling at the further end of the room, Dorcas and Mrs. Gentle and Mark in the alcove fusing over the table laden with food, David, his back to her, standing before the fire.

He turned as if some wordless greeting had reached him across the room. Her coat had slipped a little off from her shoulders revealing her to him more a vision of mist and silver than the flesh and blood reality that waited, smiling, for a word to bid her enter.

The others saw her before David could speak. She was drawn into the room gaily. "I didn't think there was a dog's chance of your getting here, Kitty," Dorcas cried. Emil and Max were pressing her hand. Everyone seemed to talk at once, everyone except David. He still stood by the fire but his eyes hung on her, his smile met hers.

"I can't quite believe you're real," he said to her in a low tone when she stood beside him.

They made a place for her in their merriment.

Mark passed the plates which Mrs. Gentle had heaped with food. Max filled the coffee cups. David put his pillow next to Kitty's chair.

"Does a princess eat?"

She accepted his compliment with a vivid blush. "This one does. I'm ravenous! Oh, it's nice, being here with you tonight."

She was relaxing happily, the old security sweeping over her. It was nice, this feeling of belonging to this cheer that prevailed. She forgot what she had fled from!

David seemed particularly nice tonight, a different David than she had known, ready to laugh, ready with nonsense that made the others laugh. She liked this David! She liked the look he gave her now and then which was so wholly hers. It had something of Tubby's devotion in it. It was the new dress, of course, she thought.

Presently she took alarm at the lateness of the hour. While she was bidding each one good-by and exchanging wishes for the Christmas Day David went down to the street to hail a taxi. He put her into it and leaned for a moment in the open window of the door.

"I have a little thing for you, Kitty. It's a promise. I'm going to finish that book."

"Oh, David, that'll be the nicest thing of all! You know how much I want it."

As the taxi rushed her back to the Tudor Arms she thought of David's promise, feeling a little glow of satisfaction that it had been made to her. David had let her in, the sister who was ready with affection and pride and concern for his success. Of course she really could help him more than Dorcas could because their feeling for one another always stood in their way; it made Dorcas more critical, David less confident.

Gar had not yet come in. It was almost midnight, almost Christmas Day. The lamp which Kitty had left burning touched with soft light the waiting Christmas tree. Kitty stood for a moment, looking at it. Before they rushed off to the party at the theater she and Gar would take time for the ceremony of switching on the lights.

She went to the bedroom and laid out Gar's evening clothes. She heard a key in the door—Gar! She ran out to the entry to meet him.

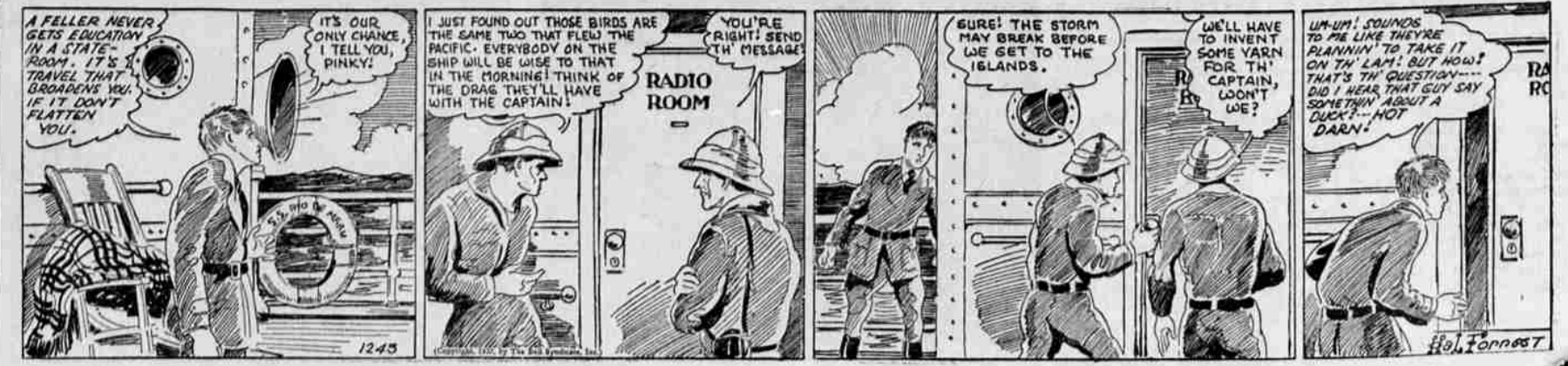
Tubby and Red Harding stood in the open door, supporting Gar between them. Gar's head was hanging limply, sideways, his face blotched, identically blank.

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Where has Gar been, and what has happened? Kitty learns only too well on Monday.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Crooks Plan To "Jump Ship!"

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST



S'MATTER POP—The Inattentive Parent Gets A Shock

By C. M. PAYNE



BOUND TO WIN—Jonathan's New Profession

By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—Fifty-Fifty

By SOL HESS



MUTT AND JEFF—Jeff Is Little—BUT!!!

By BUD FISHER



JOBLESS STAGE WELLINGTON RIOT

WELLINGTON, New Zealand, May 11.—(AP)—Rioters outside the house of parliament bombarded the building with bricks and stones, breaking 150 windows before the police took control. The trouble began when a parade of 4000 unemployed, which up to then had been orderly, reached the parliament square and a fight started. Police said there was only about 50 men involved in the rioting. A number of these were arrested. Some storekeepers said that before the police came their windows had been smashed and their shelves looted.

HIBERNIA BANK READY TO OPEN

PORTLAND, May 11.—(AP)—Opening of the Hibernia bank here awaits the signature of A. A. Schramm, state bank superintendent, on the petition to the circuit court permitting him to turn over to the new bank the assets of the Hibernia Commercial & Savings bank which closed several months ago. This announcement was made today by John F. Daly, president. At a meeting last night, depositors urged Schramm to prompt action. It was believed likely the Hibernia bank will open next Monday, or earlier. SHERIDAN—W. E. Bates will open jewelry shop in State Bank building.

BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus

