NEVER MIND THE LADY
by David Garth

SYNOPSIS: Allaire West just has refused George Fox's proposal of marriage, because as she frankly tells him, she cannot forget Terry Willett, hard-fighting engineer now on his way back to South America and one of the most difficult jobs on the continent. And then Roy West, Allaire's father, tells her that Terry has been with Puff Harrington under rather compromising circumstances. Allaire has deserted the formal dinner arranged by her father, and is trying to decide what to do.

Chapter 36

MORNING FLIGHT

AND Allaire could have sworn Terry Willett really loved her. He'd fought for her and she'd been so proud of it. Proud! She nearly laughed. He'd fought for Puff too, and gone to "ight Court.

A mouthful of fog. Yes, her father had warned her. Steering an impossible course amid parties, and horse shows, and bachelor cotillions, toward the glow of rivers to cross and battles to win. And now Ray was laughing.

She yanked off her silver satin slipper and hurled it savagely out the window.

"That's for you, Willett!" she said furiously.

The gesture seemed to snap something in her. She sank back as if exhausted. The gesture had been silly, inane, and she hated to make silly inane gestures.

She'd made one before when she sent Terry away when she knew she loved him. Sent him away in his hour of need, the Carteret minister had said.

Hour of need! It seemed a spar, that phrase, in the floating wreckage. A spar that any woman would seize. A strong man had needed her, one of the greatest honors vouchsafed to woman. And she'd sent him away, relinquished all claim to him, sent him to Puff on the rebound. She'd driven him to Puff Harrington.

"It was my fault," she repeated stubbornly. "Mine."

But he had come back to fight a battle for her, to sweat and be hurt and run the gauntlet of an armed and desperate snake. Allaire clung to that fiercely. She had sent him away, but he had come back.

She went to the phone and called Shorty Hasbrouck at the Washington landing field.

"Shorty," she said clearly, "this is Allaire West. My bus is still in the shop. Can you fly me down to Miami tomorrow morning?"

"Sure," said Shorty. "How early?"

"With the sun," said Allaire.

She hung up and stood lost in thought. There'd be a big argument around here; might as well get it over. She picked up the house phone and called the butler's pantry.

"Blythe, see if you can find my father. I want to see him right away."

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Contact! A group of three people stood on a landing field and watched a little red and black Stinson rising into the early morning sun. Rayburne West, Nell West, and George Fox.

"What got into her?" Ray sounded dazed. "After what she knows about him."

Fox turned and faced them.

"It's very simple," he told them steadily. "You starved her for affection when she was young and she's grown up with all that affection stored and accumulating and waiting to get out. And she's made it over lock, stock, and barrel to Terry Willett."

He took a deep breath. "And if you ever prayed in your lives before, you'll pray that her courage and love and fight won't go to waste, but will see her through. Because," and his voice shook, "she's putting all her chips on one turn of the wheel and the odds are against her—"

He turned away from them. What did they know of battle?

PROPIONOIRE! And the coffee chutes were humming again. Coffee! Thousands of bags of it. The Great God Coffee! Hail to Coffee!—it had broken the grip of the revolution. The last mines were being taken up out of the harbor so that the freighters of twenty nations could get in to resume their profitable trade.

Dark-skinned men in white ducks came into Propionoire and filled the hotels and bars. They had been marooned outside by the revolution. They met their friends, embracing with alternate hugs which reminded one of a French general conventionally saluting a decorated pollu.

The coffee brokers in their little shabby-noles on the narrow streets were once more at work, and so were the steamship agencies, and freight solicitors. Life Begins in Propionoire.

But of course the revolution had never stopped those days of sodden rain and days of blinding heat. They'd always been there in a place where anything could happen.

Terry Willett and Bucky Corrigan had moved in on the river job. They'd shoved into town the day the armistice was signed. They had things going in two weeks and in two weeks they also knew what they were up against.

Corrigan came down the river to get some more men and ran into difficulties. It was going to be a long job and a lot of the women didn't want either to accompany their men or let them go up to that unhealthy spot in the river.

The padre had influence, but Corrigan wasn't much good in talking to padres, so he sent for Willett. Willett came down impatiently, while Corrigan ended up in Drake's office, looking as though he'd been through a war.

"By golly," he said, lounging in a chair with one putteed leg thrown over the arm, "it's a stinker if I ever saw one. You can't get a hold on the thing—it's like grabbing a handful of ooze."

"It's a tough one," agreed Drake, the Coffee Company agent, "but Willett almost licked it before and if that river can be opened to commerce it will be a great thing."

"Yeah, sure. Willett doesn't give a damn about opening the river to commerce, but the job beat his old man and he's death on beating it. You know what he's figuring on doing?—putting in a system of locks. Why, he hasn't got a chance. Rainy season will be on him before the work's half done, and everything will go blooey."

HE shoved his sun helmet back on his head and rolled a cigaret with deft powerful fingers.

"Willett's come back from the States funny. He doesn't say much. Doesn't laugh much either. All he wants to do is pull this job through and he's putting his whole life into it."

No, nobody with any sense would have tackled that job. Drake had always felt that. But it was everything to Terry Willett. It was a Debt of Honor.

Corrigan went back to his hotel room in the Santini. He poured out a long shot, fizzed a dab of soda into it, and then glass in hand sat back with his feet resting on a chair and prepared to be comfortable.

Willett came in shortly afterward. He was a picture of bronze—his hair, the complexion of his lean square-jawed face, his brown breeches and puttees and his khaki shirt with the sleeves rolled up over tanned forearms.

"What luck with the padre, fella?"

Willett nodded briefly.

"He's going to use his influence. Great institution, padres."

"Yeah, they marry people too. That's another great institution."

Willett picked up the bottle and pulled out the cork. He mixed a quick one and then sank down in a chair with his long legs stuck out before him.

"Ever thought of it, Bucky?"

"Oh, sure," said Corrigan, "lots of times. When I was in the States last I nearly stepped off in a weak moment. Cute kid—Anne Harlow was her name. Came half-way to my shoulder and her eyelashes were so long they got in the way when you kissed her."

"What happened?"

Corrigan wasn't quite sure. It had been three years ago.

"I don't remember exactly. I went to Mexico with the McLean outfit and when that job was over swung south instead of north. She'd have had a sweet life in some hole like this, wouldn't she? And I'd rather be able to shove off somewhere at a moment's notice than be tied up with some babe. Am I right?"

"Yes, I guess you are, Bucky. They don't mix."

"Sure," said Bucky. "Let's get drunk tonight—one last binge."

Willett looked speculative.

"But I'm not going to take care of you," Corrigan said severely. "If you get into any fights you'll have to finish them yourself. Let's understand that."

"Count me out, Bucky. The idea doesn't register. And if you knock over any of these toy policemen I'll boot you in the seat of your intelligence. We can't get into any extra trouble."

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Allaire lands, tomorrow, in Propionoire.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

For further proof address the author, inclosing a stamped envelope for reply. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

Strange as it seems, Micholas Mavrogheni, ruler of Wallachia, surrounded himself with a court of horses, bestowing upon them honorary titles that had been taken away from nobles who refused to obey orders.

Wallachia, an ancient province between Serbia and Hungary, was called upon by its Turkish overlords to furnish an army for the sultan. Mavrogheni called his nobles together and ordered them to take up arms for Turkey. The nobles turned thumbs down on the idea of fighting for a foreign ruler, and refused to obey. Mavrogheni then ordered horses brought from the stables and told the nobles to mount. They refused even this command and their enraged ruler dismissed them all from office, took their titles from them and replaced them with the horses that they had refused to mount.

John Hiner, who completed 17 years of school by the time he was 17 years old, entered kindergarten at 5. By outside study, summer school sessions and skipping a grade now and then, he finished junior high school at 12 and took three years of senior high in two years—17 years of school work in 12 years of schooling.

In Albania, Christian parents used to tattoo Christian crosses on the foreheads of their beautiful daughters, knowing full well that, although Turks loved beautiful women, the cross was disgusting to them. A Christian girl with a cross on her forehead, however beautiful, was safe from unwanted attentions.

Tomorrow: Convicted by a Shark.

NORTH BEND, Ore., Jan. 24.—(AP)—Henry Kirchmann, of the Gardenia Packing and California Hardwood companies, said the results of a present survey would determine whether he would establish two fish-reduction plants in North Bend within the near future.

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

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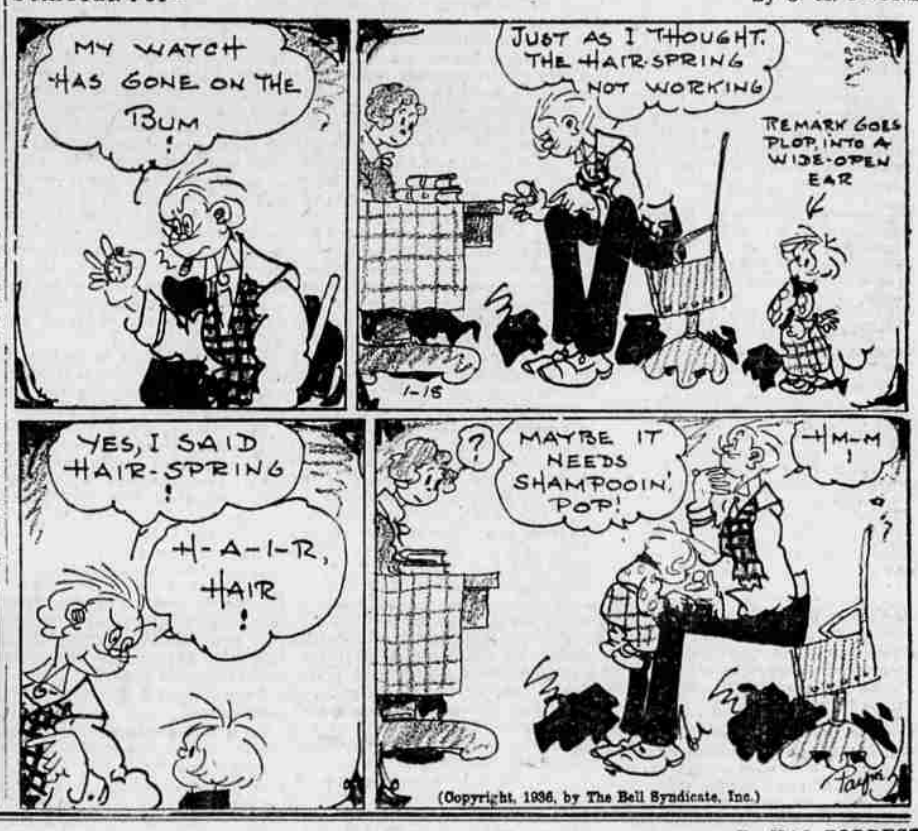
S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



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TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Boys Are "Stumped!"

By HAL FORREST

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Crip's Activity!

By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—Getting Even

By SOL HESS

La Grande Normal To Dedicate Unit

LA GRANDE, Ore., Jan. 24.—(AP)—With Dr. E. S. Evenden, Columbia university (New York) professor and one of the outstanding authorities on teacher training in the United States, as the chief speaker, the new $155,000 elementary school on the Eastern Oregon Normal school campus will be dedicated here Monday afternoon, Chancellor Frederick M. Hunter, of the state system of higher education, also will deliver an address.

OREGON CITY, Ore., Jan. 24.—(AP)—The last unsolved burglary here was cleared today when John Hart, John O. Beckman and Webster Weldon confessed to thefts at the Rose store here the night of December 29. The three, arrested in Portland last week, confessed to eight burglaries in Clackamas county. They were up for sentence today.

Mattresses Save Mules In Tumble

GRANTS PASS, Jan. 24.—(AP)—Sterling Sloan tells it:—

Sloan was driving four mules along the mountainous Rogue river road. One slipped off a six-foot bank and died.

Two others became frightened, ran away and plunged over an 85-foot embankment. They landed on their burdens—mattresses—regained their feet unhurt—and he-hawed. It took Sloan most of one day to get them back on the road.

Its Coos Bay Bridge

NORTH BEND, Ore., Jan. 24.—(AP)—Plates received here for the new Coos highway bridge apparently settled what appeared to be developing into an extensive local controversy regarding a name for the span. The bronze plates bore the words "Coos Bay Bridge."