Golden Rain

by Margaret Widdemer

SYNOPSIS: Iris Lanning finds herself in the fairyland of her Aunt Phina's Park avenue apartment, meeting the conventionally beautiful Sigrid with whom her brother Owen is in love. Aunt Phina is America's most famous coeuturière; Owen designs for her. And the strange thing is that Iris did not even know whether either Phina or Owen was living three days ago. Morgan Black, Iris' best friend, found both of them for her, and they at once snatched Iris from the old-fashioned home of her Uncle Will and Aunt Ella.

Chapter 18

GAY PARADISE

IRIS never had seen a platinum blonde before, except in a movie. Sigrid's naturally yellow hair had been made almost silver; her brows and lashes had been done with the conventional mascara. Aunt Ella would have called her "actressy," except for her quick forthrightness of gesture and manner.

Phina introduced them formally.

"Where is Mrs. Russell?" Iris asked to break the moment's tension.

"Oh, she isn't staying," Phina said.

"I do not think she will ever be worth the trouble Miss Phina put upon her," Sigrid said.

She had no foreign accent, but a slight inaccuracy about the proper valuation of words and the right elisions. Her intonations were a little flat and vaguely wrong, also—but it was so intangible that Iris could only feel that it was a pity one flaw marred the girl's perfection. She was so beautiful, and so obviously intelligent and charming. She looked no more than sixteen.

"I suppose it is a part of the work, but when fat women cry on me I want to give them a kick in the pants."

Her doll-like childish beauty and high cool childish voice made her rough words irresistibly funny. Owen laughed out with a look of proprietorship and pride.

"Mrs. Russell is my very good friend," Phina said, at which Sigrid lifted a black line of eyebrow mockingly. Fortunately dinner was announced.

To plainly reared Iris it looked like a party. The four tall candlesticks, with yellow candles matching yellow roses in a low translucent bowl, the lace runners, the low glass nut dishes matching the bowl for the roses. But it was, she knew, Phina's normal state. What might seem casual charm was careful correctness. Iris loved beauty and order, and it soothed and delighted her.

The little dining room had deep silver-cloth draperies, hiding the windows and making all one wall; it had odd geometric silver lights, triangular silver chairs. You felt as if you were living in a pattern, not a real, tossed-about place. You wanted to step and speak like a girl in a pageant.

The courses followed ceremoniously: clear tomato soup, a mousse of fish, peas and broccoli passed in a silver dish with two compartments. Then endive with something curly which proved to be chicory and a tingling Roquefort dressing.

Finally for dessert a dish of fruit Iris had thought wax, it was so beautiful, which had been standing on the odd-planed side-table; and a choice of cheese and biscuits, passed on a big silver dish of a sort Iris recalled put away at home, and a mystery till now. Coffee in small golden cups.

"Tired, Iris?" Phina asked when dinner was two-thirds over. "Or do you want to go to a show?"

Theaters, as casually as that?

"I'd love it!"

"Get the paper, Honora—" and Phina read down the list, discarding this one and that. She settled on a revue, finally, that Iris "must see." Honora telephoned an agency; it was all arranged in five minutes.

"IRIS will have to use my black velvet cape and the bag with it. I haven't her evening wraps yet," Phina said, with more seriousness than she had used on all the rest together. Her voice implied the deep importance of evening wraps and the bags which matched them.

Sigrid, too, looked serious. Iris thought it was because of their business, but she discovered later that most women felt that way.

Honora came with Phina's gold and fur coat and bag and long gloves. She herself was given the black velvet cape, a short thing with long ties. Sigrid slipped into something that had been lying across a chair: Owen was given his overcoat, folding silk hat, gloves and cane.

They entered the mysterious door to the elevator, and were off. It was all pure enchantment to Iris—her first New York theater. When she told Phina, her aunt was shocked.

"Owen, you must see to that. Make out a list of revivals she must see, and buy her seats to plays she should know about."

"All right." They were settling themselves in the taxi, by a known routine: the girls one each side of Phina. Owen on the folding seat in front.

"I can't get over the casual way you use taxis," Iris couldn't help saying.

"The limousine's no good for the theater district," said Owen, above his cupped hands, manipulating his lighter. "In fact, no private car is."

"Well, I like the feeling that if you have your car down there the taxi people have to wait," said Sigrid pertly.

"You could have the runabout," said Owen hastily, as if to check something Phina was going to say. Iris felt dimly that Owen was nervous when the two women were talking. And yet they worked together.

And the vague feeling of antagonism was dimmed by the fairytale inference; two cars, evidently, Owen's runabout and Phina's limousine. Was she a greedy pig to like it that taxis were a commonplace, and limousines and runabouts a casual possession? . . .

And then they entered the warm white and gold brilliance of the theater lobby; there were little usher girls in gay costumes like French cadets; the party swept forward down the aisle to orchestra seats; the orchestra began playing heavenly merry dancing music; the curtain presently rose on a stage full of slim beautiful girls in long rose-colored gowns, leaping and laughing with exquisite precision.

The long lovely curves of the dance, the light and color and music, so moved Iris that her eyes filled with tears. She hoped they didn't see her, and presently she was laughing with the rest. She did not know that the others watch her with amused pleasure at her frank rapture.

"I'm dying for a cigaret," Sigrid said, at the end of the first act. "Come on out in the lobby."

"YES, you go, Iris, I'll stay here," said Phina, who looked a little tired after her trip. After all, she was human. So the young ones, Iris, in her black and rose, alight and excited, small Sigrid with her silvery head, Owen, slow and casual, climbed over three stout sulky immovable women and down the aisle to the gorgeous lobby. The smoke was thick. Somebody finally opened the front doors, letting in a gust of spring air.

"Oh, that's good," Iris said thankfully, supposing she was next Owen.

"You bet, baby!" said the man beside her, and she found she was looking at the red-headed Dicky who had tried to make friends with her on the chair car that afternoon. His party had evidently also decided to end the evening at this, the most popular of the revues.

"We meet again!" said he, with a hand on his shirt front. "Who's the platinum blonde? You kept her from me."

"Sigrid Swenson. The name is Swedish, so you needn't wisecrack, beautiful," said Sigrid for herself behind Iris. "And you, young stranger?"

"Dicky Hamilton. The name is Czechoslovakian. Cigaret?"

"Sure, I'm nonchalant. Seen you somewhere lately. No, I'm not trying to make you. I did."

"Yep, that's right, I remember the silver wheels. But I don't know where. Where I saw the other one was on the train coming over from Philly this p. m. from the game. I was just getting her sold on the gang when Allan pulled me off her—crab he is. Hey, I know. Phina Weatherley's. Georgia Blair dragged me in there last week."

"That's right, I'm the junior partner," said Sigrid; which impressed Dicky, or at least he stopped talking long enough for her to continue. "Iris is her niece, Owen's her nephew—Phina's."

Owen was beside the two girls, listening to Sigrid's quick patter of talk with something of Uncle Will's detached serenity. The handsome nutcracker face, black-eyed, bright-painted, black-banged, of the girl called Georgia pushed in beside Dicky's. Her red dress, her spatter of glittering earrings and necklace and clips and buckles all focused on Owen.

"We saw you both," she said with emphatic friendliness. "You never waked all the way across. Do you always sleep like that?" She had a sharp possessive charm when she smiled.

"Curtain's going up," said the cool voice of the tall man Allan from behind the rest. He and Iris smiled at each other like friends. Georgia pulled from the other groups as they widened apart, putting a thin glittering hand on Owen's arm.

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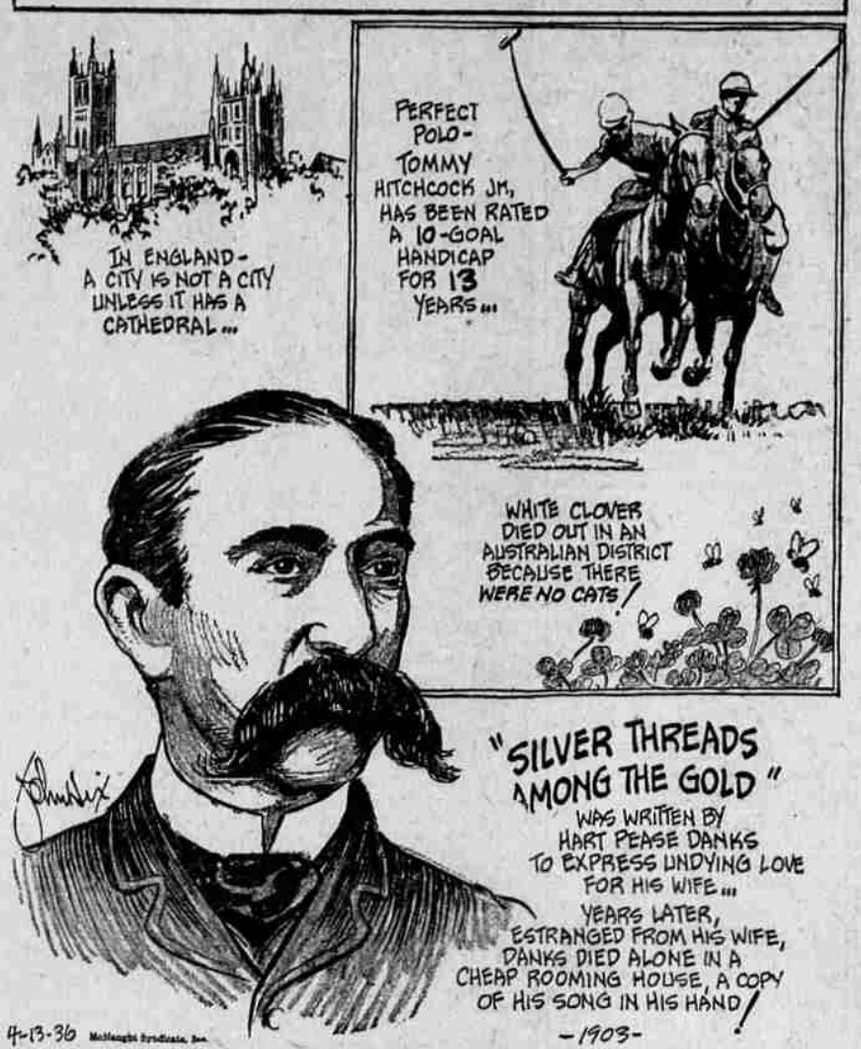
Iris, a little dazed, is still whirling tomorrow.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



4-13-36 McNaught Syndicate, Inc.

Strange as it seems the successful growth of white clover is often dependent upon the presence of cats in the vicinity. The strange chain of interdependency of various forms of plant and animal life was related by Darwin. Clover, he pointed out, is dependent upon the presence of bumblebees because they carry the pollen from one flower to another and thus fertilize the crop.

If the bees are to flourish, there must not be too many mice, for mice destroy bees' nests. Thus, the more mice, the fewer the bees and the poorer the clover. If, however, there are plenty of cats, there will be fewer mice, more bees, and better clover. One area in Australia had a clover failure because there were not enough cats to destroy the mice. Clover is not native to Australia, and before it could successfully be grown there, bumblebees had to be imported.

The words to "Silver Threads Among the Gold" were bought for $3.00 by the composer, Hart Pease Danks, and set to music by him. Although the song became one of the biggest sellers of all time, it was composed by Danks as a tribute to the love he felt for his wife.

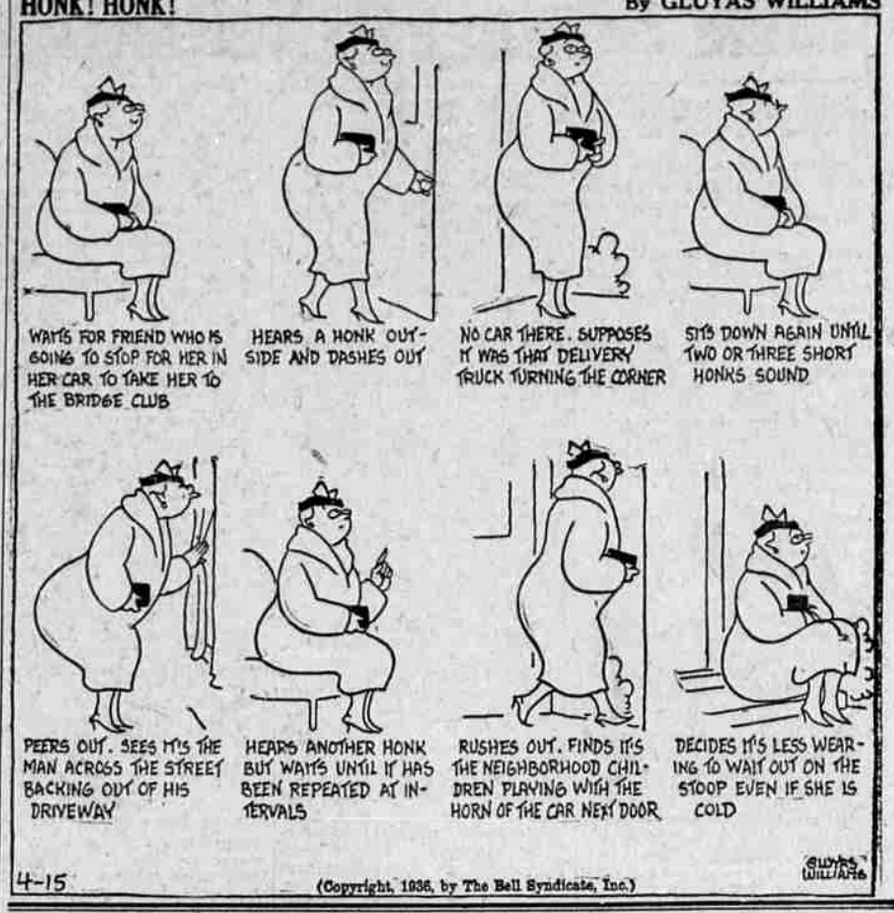
Yet, strange as it seems, this moving song of undying love could not preserve the composer's own happiness. Within a year after it became a success he and his wife became estranged. Thirty years later Danks was found dead, alone in a cheap rooming house—his immortal song clutched in one hand. Across it was written an unfinished last message: "It is hard to die alone and . . ."

A polo player who rates a 10-goal handicap is considered theoretically perfect. Hitchcock was given this rating 13 times.

Tomorrow: Town of 8 Governments.

Use Mail Tribune want ads.

HONK! HONK! By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



S'MATTER POP— By C. M. PAYNE

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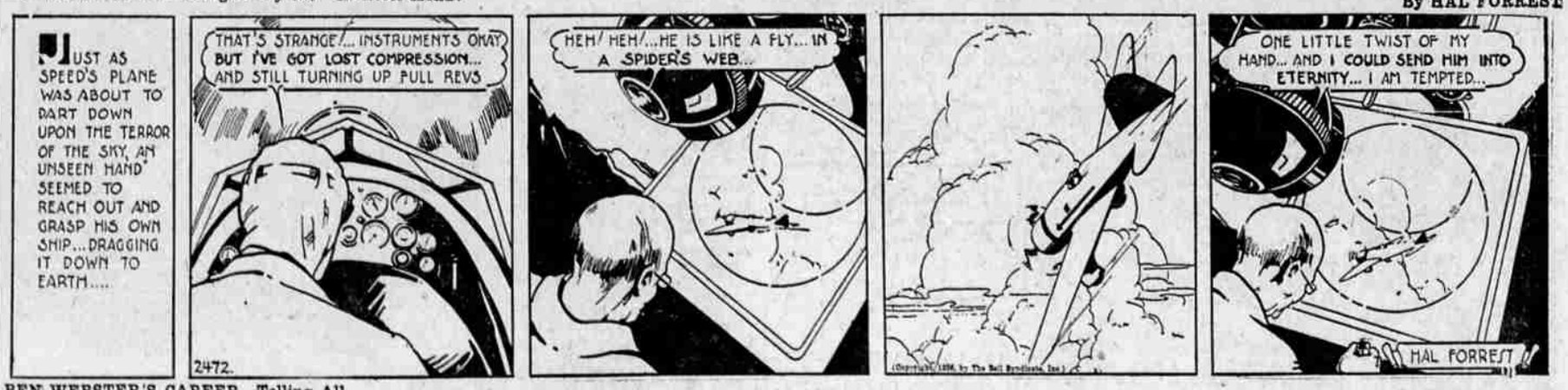

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Telling All By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—Just a Tip By SOL HESS

CANADIAN WHEAT STOCKS FAR DOWN

OTTAWA, April 15—(AP)—Stocks of wheat in Canada on March 31 were about 37,000,000 bushels below the corresponding date last year, said a crop report issued today by the dominion bureau of statistics. Stocks at the end of March in Canada were given as 246,022,889 and a year ago at 283,032,184.

The 1936 figure was the lowest for that date of any year since 1930 when the total was 238,646,367 bushels. In addition to the stocks of Canadian wheat in Canada on March 31 last, there were 16,435,165 bushels of Canadian wheat in the United States making the total in both countries 262,458,054 bushels as compared with 229,249,930 in the same positions a year ago.

BOOM PREDICTED IF F. R. RETAINED

JERSEY CITY, N. J., April 15.—(AP)—Alexander Calder, president of Bag & Paper Corp., said at the annual stockholders meeting today, "if Roosevelt is re-elected, we will have the greatest business boom in the history of the country, but I won't say how big a crash we will have after."

"If a Republican is elected we won't have so big a boom, but we also will have less of a crash."

The stockholders approved an increase in authorized capital stock to 300,000 shares, without par value and all of one class, from 200,000 shares now outstanding.