

HOUSE OF SHADOWS

by Ida R. Gleason

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CHAPTER XII

CLAIRE went to Eb and laid her hand on his arm to attract his attention. He was evidently in a half-frenzied condition. "Eb," she said, "Tell us where you've been. What happened?"

Again the menacing finger pointed accusingly at Susie. "Ask her," Eb said grimly. "She can tell you how she brought me food down in that room of Lyman Fossick's. But all the time I was tied, hands and feet. All I could do was kick against the wall in hope someone would hear me. For a while I thought someone did hear me, but I guess I was wrong. If the tree hadn't been struck I'd been there yet. Saved the ropes off on a bit of sharp stone."

"Lyman Fossick's room!" began Claire. "Eb, was it under the pine tree? Sit down there and tell us."

"Yes. Where Lyman Fossick used to keep his blasted jewels," the old man explained. "I allers said they'd bring him no good, nor Susie either."

All eyes turned to Susie, but she only tossed her head. "He's out of his mind. I've said so before and now you can see for yourselves. He—"

Eb's cracked voice rose almost to a scream as he sprang to his feet. "Then ask him!" He pointed at Nick Baum. "Ask him what's between him and this wicked sister of mine!"

Susie shrank back. "No. It ain't so! Nicky never had nothing to do with it. I was the one wanted to find the jewel. I—"

"But he's the man who pushed me down the mine shaft," broke in Pat. "When he offered to light my cigar—just now, I noticed the little finger of his hand is cut off at the second joint. And the guy who fought with me in the tunnel was shy a joint of one of his little fingers."

FOR a moment Nick Baum's handsome face held a suspicion of fear. Then he turned to Claire. "Is this the way you usually treat your guests? Of course it is perfectly absurd—"

Dan Dallas unexpectedly took command of the situation. "Not so absurd as it seems, Baum, when they know that you're Susie's son." One hand was concealed in his pocket, and now that pocket showed a menacing bulge. "The time Susie spent in the city when she was young was long enough for her to have a son by some unknown father. It was not hard to discover that that son was still living, and now, of course, grown. That made a workable basis for the theory that Baum and the son were the same person. Then when I discovered Susie was hunting for another treasure of Lyman Fossick's, what more natural than that she should enlist her son's help?"

Claire shuddered as she looked at Nick's dark face which had lost all its handsome charm. "Now see how you've messed things up!" he snarled at Susie. "You and your talk about the damned jewel." "Nicky!" Susie's cry was desperate, heart-broken. "I only wanted it for you, Nicky."

But he turned his back upon her and addressed Dan Dallas. "All right, let's get going, since the game's up. I suppose you've got handcuffs and all the trimmings."

He held out his hands, but as Dallas moved toward him there was a sudden brief skirmish, a sharp report, and the confessed criminal dropped to the floor in a twisted heap. The gun he had tried to fire at Dallas fell between them.

"Dead," Dan's tone had the finality of a curtain line. Later, with the remembrance of Susie's agonized weeping still ringing in her ears, Claire stood in the library of the House of Long Shadows where Pat and Bob and Dan Dallas were grouped about the fireplace that bore the sign of the broken arrow.

DAN DALLAS walked to the bookcase and looked at it closely. "That it always stood out from the wall like this?" he asked. "Why, no!" Claire answered. "It must have moved. Maybe when I was fussing with it—"

She did not finish, for at the pressure of Dan's fingers, the bookcase swung slowly forward, showing a doorway with a flight of narrow stairs leading downward.

"To the secret room, I'll bet! Come on!" Pat said excitedly, and started down.

Another very low door at the bottom opened directly into the half-ruined place Eb had described, with the gaping hole which the tree roots had torn open at one side.

"Look at that, will you!" Dallas threw the ray from his electric torch on the opposite wall.

The shock of the tree's fall had wrenched the big, wooden cupboard in the cellar room from its place, disclosing the solid back of the shelves, hinged to swing open to make another entrance into the secret room.

"Eb said he heard me in the tunnel," Pat took the torch and went over to inspect the outside. "Why, of course he did—see here!"

Only a thin wall of earth separated the secret room from the other cut where Pat had dug his way out of the old mine.

"And we're still directly under the house, the library and the cupola side," Pat went on.

"Do you suppose this is where he hid his wonderful jewel?" Claire looked about her rather blankly. "Yes," Bob Steele answered positively. He had been examining one of the walls. "See here, and there! There's no telling how sure this stuff will run. Your uncle's jewel was a gold mine, Claire, and what a mine!"

HANNAH sniffed. "Your Uncle Lyman would be sure to go at it just that way. Gettin' us all 'most killed!"

"There's still one thing that hasn't been explained," Claire remarked. "The tapping noise I heard that night I was up in Uncle Lyman's room."

"It was probably either Susie or Nick doing a little investigating on their own, Miss Fossick," said Dan Dallas. "Your party arriving unexpectedly must have added an extra spur to their efforts. Baum was undoubtedly the one who put the log across the road to block your way."

"One thing I still can't understand, Claire," insisted Pat. "If he was going to marry you, why did he bother to pull all this stuff, with the danger of getting caught?"

For a minute she did not reply. Then she looked straight back at him. "Nick knew he would never marry me, I think, Pat."

"Well, this is no place for a sick man. Mr. Steele, you better be getting back where it's warm," Hannah's practical voice broke in. Without more ado she herded Bob and Dan Dallas out of the room and up the steps.

Pat caught Claire's hand and drew her back for a minute. "You mean you didn't love him, Claire?" he asked eagerly.

"How could I after I met you, Pat? Oh, do I have to throw myself at you?"

Pat's arms closed about her, and his lips crushed hers. But in a minute he reminded her, "I'm poor and you're rich now that you've got the mine."

"But the mine won't buy me happiness, and if I haven't that, I'd rather the old tree was still making it the House of Long Shadows, with Uncle Lyman's jewel hidden under its roots. Please, Pat, don't stand there and say you won't have me, just because I've got something that was almost the end of us all."

Pat grinned. They walked out through the cellar and, as they came slowly up the steps, a shaft of moonlight touched the cupola of the old house with a silvery glow. Claire looked up at it with a smile.

"See, Pat, dear, the shadows have gone. From now on it's going to be the house of long life and happiness."

THE END

Exquisite Exile



Refusing to be downcast over the turn of political fortunes that keeps her family from returning to their native land, Senorita Maruca Sacasa, daughter of the exiled former President of Nicaragua, Dr. Juan B. Sacasa, enjoys herself in the whirl of Washington summer activities. Here she's bound for a swim, white beach ensemble contrasting prettily with her dark beauty.

Flapper Fannie Says



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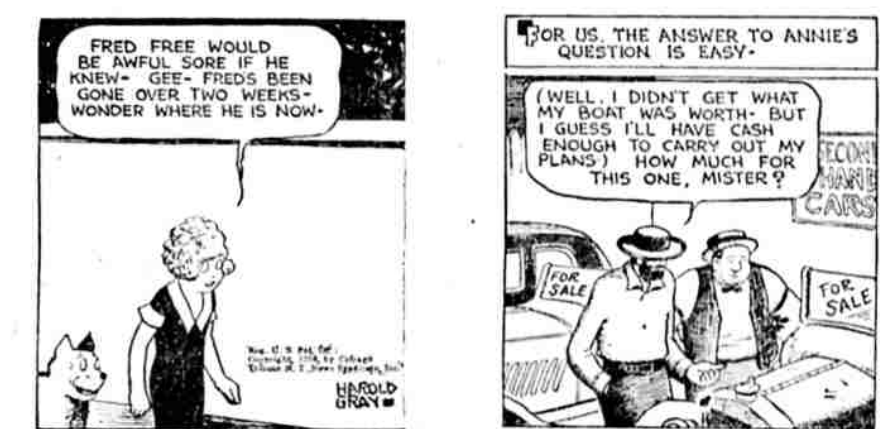
BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



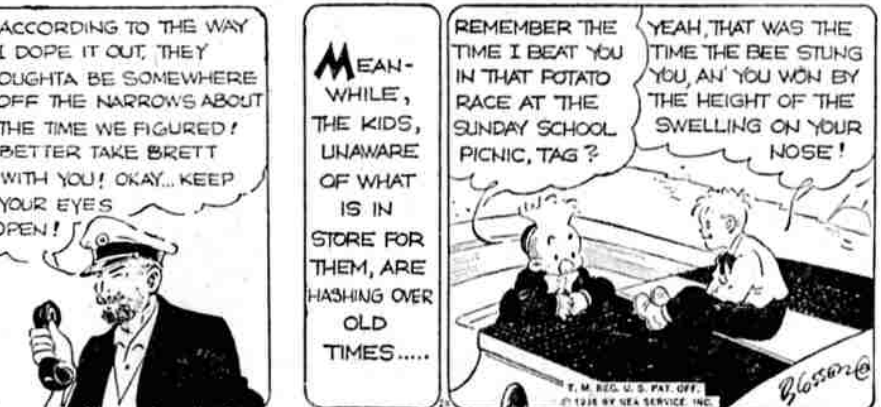
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