

Rich and Reckless

By Mary Raymond

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BEGIN HERE TODAY
MOLLY MILFORD, rich and popular, has received proposals of marriage from three suitors, but KENNY STUART, whom she loves, has not asked her to marry him.

DONNA, Molly's stepmother, is only a few years older than Molly. Donna is anxious for her stepdaughter to marry.

Wick, a successful attorney, has been with a succession of parties, all alike. Molly asks him to take her to "The Red Poppy," a fashionable night club. He refuses. Molly is determined to go anyway, and sets out for "The Red Poppy" with WICK ROSS, another admirer.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER II

GLITTERING signs winked familiarly at Molly as she rolled along in Wick's smart car. They made the mental visions she had conjured up seem unreal. In the darkness, she smiled a little. Brent was probably right when he called her a child. It had been silly to inveigle Wick into this adventure.

He had been nice to humor her, but "The Red Poppy" doubtless wouldn't measure up. Tomorrow she would have a headache and wish she had stayed at home.

Tomorrow she would be a good girl and try to feel grateful for her easy, protected life. She would golf dutifully with Dad, lunch with Brent if he asked her, shop with Donna for the Florida trip she was planning. Donna was restless, too, lately.

"None of us is really living," Molly was thinking. "We are only being whirled about by events, tossed around in a rosy cloud that hasn't any reality."

Wick's car had long since left familiar surroundings. Out here in the countryside, the wind had an eerie sound. It seemed spooky even with Wick beside her.

"A perfect place for a holdup," Wick spoke shortly.

"I've a funny feeling along my spine," Molly whispered. "As though dozens of people must have passed along this same road tonight."

"And some of them," Wick retorted, "aren't the kind of folks I'd like to meet along here."

"Don't worry. I left my jewelry at home."

"You don't read the newspapers. Holdups can be most unpleasant. Particularly if you've left your money and rings at home. Sometimes you get a nasty bump on the head or maybe a playful dig with a knife. But luck's with us so far. That bright glow over there is the famous 'Red Poppy'."

As they came nearer, yellow squares of light from a long, low, clubby type building began to prick the darkness with color. Wick drove around the side where they found a motley assemblage of automobiles. Some were rather swank, Molly noticed. Others looked as though they were on their last legs.

There was nothing unusual about the place except the dense woodland around it and a sense of isolation. A queer place, if you wanted crowds. But maybe more thrilling things awaited inside. Frances had said this place was terrific. It must have points, to be revealed later.

"Here's our cheerful choice," Wick muttered. He helped Molly from the car. "Not too late to turn back," he added.

"When I wake up behind bars, I'll say, 'Wick and Brent wanted me to be a good girl and I wouldn't.' Anyway, what could happen?"

"Plenty . . . police."

"Police!" Molly spoke with the disdain of one who has known only the friendly protection of the guardians of the peace.

They were inside now, and a tall, suave-looking man came toward them, smiling. Molly felt his gaze rest on her for a moment with sudden, sharp interest.

"He knows I'm not a regular customer," she hazarded mentally, "and suspects I'm all set for something exciting."

The proprietor signaled to a waiter, who piloted them to a table.

Molly curved her mouth downward to signify to Wick her disappointment. Wick had been stuffy, deliberately building up an atmosphere which was about to collapse. There was absolutely nothing here to thrill or excite one.

The big room had the usual polished dance floor. A large revolving mirrored disc in the center of the ceiling bathed the dancing area in a flood of shifting rainbow squares. Mirror panels were set in the walls between other panels decorated with vivid red poppies.

The crowd had not yet come to life. People were sitting at tables indifferently, looking at a quite ordinary show with bored eyes. Perhaps after a while that girl with hair like green straw would be crying in her cup and that ugly man with her would flourish a knife as Brent's edition would have it.

THE music had begun. Loudly and brassy and insistently, but the tune was familiar. Nothing daring or sinister in that!

"It's a dumb sort of place,"

Molly told Wick. "The Red Poppy! Don't they get opium from poppies? The name suits it. It could put anybody to sleep."

"It could put people to sleep in more ways than one," Wick said, persisting in being stupid.

Molly's gaze roamed about, and then she stiffened with resentment. The man who had welcomed them at the door was staring at her intently. He spoke to another man at the table, who whirled about in his chair and stared at her, too.

She wouldn't tell Wick about these obnoxious men. Wick might magnify the incident and start something. She smiled at the idea. No, Wick wouldn't, but Brent, if he were here, would be certain to start something.

As though her thoughts had turned into substance, there—entering the room—was Brent.

"Look who's here! How did this happen?"

Wick's eyes traveled the direction of Molly's. He laughed. "It might be a coincidence."

"I won't have Brent trailing me like a bodyguard," Molly spoke indignantly. "I—you shouldn't have told him where we were going."

Her eyes concentrated on the tall, blond young man who was studying a menu with such absorbed attention, so obviously unconscious of her. She was trying not to feel a sudden rush of pleasure, mingled with relief.

There was surely no need for feeling hot and bothered. The bold men who had shown such objectionable interest were now engrossed in conversation, evidently having forgotten all about her.

The man she had mentally dubbed "the proprietor" was speaking now with a newcomer, who had sauntered by their table. The new man was young and very handsome, Molly marked.

His dark hair grew nicely on a poetic kind of head. He was evidently a person of importance, judging by the interest of the group. All three looked pleased and excited.

The proprietor was standing deferentially, talking in a low tone, while the young man regarded him coolly, almost with distaste, Molly decided. Once he smiled, and she saw a flash of white teeth. And once he turned, and his eyes met hers steadily for a moment.

She flushed a little. There were lots of staring people in this place. And she was quite as mannerless, looking at others around her as though they were a new species.

A significant conversation was taking place between the dark-haired young man and the others at his table.

"What's the reason for getting me into these clothes this minute?" he asked in a low, level tone.

"The same reason that brought you to town, that paid your train fare from Chicago, Nelse," Thornton Black, who was known as "Steve" to a small group of "special friends," spoke quietly.

"Cut the preliminaries. What wedding reception am I to crash tonight?"

"You're wrong this time . . . you start your job right here. What do you think, Nelse, the girl walked in tonight! Looks like everything is playing into our hands. You could have knocked me over with a feather when she came through that door. You see, Nelse, you're graduating from petty jewel robbery."

The young man took out a cigarette and lit it coolly. "You're not talking to me, Steve. The word kidnapping isn't in my vocabulary, but G-Man is."

"Got a white liver, Nelse? Well, we've a cure for that. It's pretty strong medicine and you might have to spend a stretch inside some big house after you take it."

Nelson Ferguson's eyes narrowed. "Somebody else might be keeping the company."

"Here, here!" put in one of the trio, a fat little man with an oily voice. "Is that any way for friends to talk? Nelse wants to be urged. He doesn't know what a big piece of pie he'll draw for his share. Only right, too, when he'll be taking the biggest risk. You could never make me believe Nelse would scare."

"Not scared," Nelse said slowly. "But this is a right pleasant planet I'm living on. A lot of the boys have left it recently."

"Those boys didn't have your brains," Bill Patrick put in. "Tell me which one of your absent friends could have engineered that Dawson deal except you and pulled three straight bank jobs without leaving a clue. Or made the police of four cities sit up and take notice for nothing. You've got to hand it to yourself. Those boys weren't as smart as you. That's why we're sent for you. That's why we're willing to take a small slice if you pull the job."

"What job?" Nelse sat down.

"Know who that girl is I pointed out to you?" Black asked.

"No."

"They call her the Golden Girl."

(To Be Continued)

A candidate in Quebec is promising 100 acres of land to every family of 12. Hardly more than the youngsters of each of the families would yield every Saturday night.

A Pittsburgher has blue eyes that turn to brown when the moon is full, but a local housewife has brown eyes that turn to black and blue when hubby is.

Flapper Fannie Says

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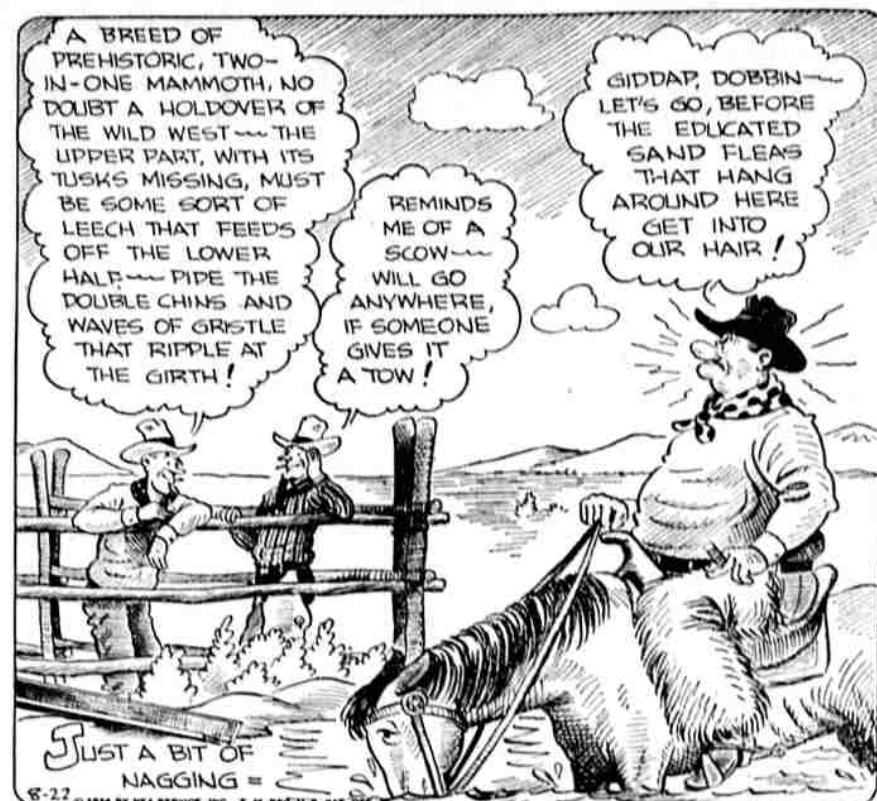
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OUT OUR WAY



HEROES ARE MADE—NOT BORN.

BY J. R. WILLIAMS OUR BOARDING HOUSE



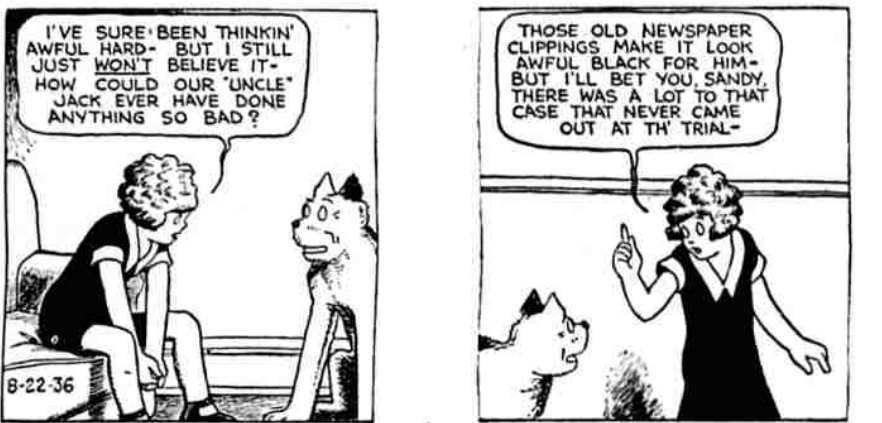
JUST A BIT OF NAGGING =

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MYRA NORTH, SPECIAL NURSE



LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



WASH TUBBS



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



BY BLOSSER



BY CRANE



BY MARTIN

