

SERIAL STORY

BLACKOUT

BY RUTH AYERS

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YESTERDAY, surprised by Dr. Lenox's strange offer of marriage, Mary resolves to see Vincent, before she goes to Vincent's lodgings, to see him with Carla Marchetta.

CHAPTER XIV

MARY leaned against the sand-bag barricade for support. Vincent Gregg and Carla Marchetta passed down the steps of the lodging house and on beyond the tobacconist's shop, joined the throngs of Trafalgar Square.

Their attitude of intimacy had been heightened by one of merriment, some pleasantry they alone enjoyed. This jest or witticism, or whatever it was, seemed to shut a door between them and Mary Carroll.

Now, even if she could have renounced her pride, if she could have faced her fiancé with her beauty disfigured from the blow on the Moravia, she could never have matched Vincent's pace. Things had gone too far ahead while she lay in the hospital. And if ever the adage, "three's a crowd," was applicable, it was now.

Her loneliness seemed almost more than she could bear. The desolation of her heart had stunned her. She had not known she could feel so cut off from anyone as she felt removed from Vincent at that minute.

BACK to Charing Cross she went as the bright winter day became overcast. The silver balloon barrage melted into gray clouds as visibility lessened. A light rain whipped her drawn face. The coat that Lady Ponce-Townsend had provided was all too thin for this cold, wet wind.

Her feet dragged along the streets and up the stairs to the rooms in Soho Square. And there was no cheery fire blazing in the grate as there had been yesterday. Without stopping to remove her wet coat she sat down at the writing table. Without even thinking what she wrote, the words formed:

Dear Dr. Lenox: The offer of marriage you made last night overwhelmed me with its generosity. While I feel reluctant to allow you to sacrifice yourself for me, nevertheless, if you are still of the same mind, I shall be proud to share your name. And if you have reconsidered and wish to withdraw the offer, please believe I understand.

Anna Winters. She sealed the letter hurriedly, found a stamp and rushed out to post it before she might change her mind.

THE next night brought Gilbert Lenox to Soho Square. The sight of him renewed her courage. "I don't think you will regret this decision," he said seriously. "It isn't that I will ever bother you. Your personal life will be as free as it always has been."

Mary nodded. That was one of the reasons she had held back. He could give her so much and she could give him nothing in return.

"You have to say 'I will' in the registry and it will be all over. It's quite simple to get married in wartime; everything is easily arranged. I made inquiries today," he went on. "I will have time off on Saturday afternoon. I think it would be best to have the ceremony then, if you agree. Then, if I have to go to France next week, everything will have been taken care of."

"It isn't as if he weren't one of the most eligible men in London," Mary told herself. "Handsome, educated, likeable, and as dependable as the Bank of England. Why is it that men like Gilbert Lenox are always second choices to the Vincent Greggs?"

But to love Vincent had been her destiny and to escape his love she could not. Nor would she ever stop loving Vincent. And was she being fair to Vincent? After all, he thought her dead. Was it not unjust to expect that he would cut himself off from all the things of life because of her memory?

Gilbert's voice brought her back to the immediate problem. "You will want to get yourself some gay clothes to be married in," he was saying. He tendered a 10-pound note. "Some new clothes will make you feel better. You don't get married every day, you know."

"How exactly like him!" she reflected as she murmured her thanks. "Thoughtful, above all." She had not included that in the swift catalog of his qualities. When she spoke it was hard to express the fullness of her gratitude. "You are much, much too good. You deserve the finest wife in the world."

frack with jaunty pleats and close-fitting bodice. And it even had a jacket that would do away with the shroud-like black coat Lady Ponce-Townsend had given her. The outfit, even in winter, seemed to promise spring.

A close-fitting toque of the same color had a smartness that was almost American. And its finger-tip veil would cast merciful uncertainty over the marred side of her face.

A gold clip, new gloves, hose and oxlips of London tan gave Mary an exhilaration she had not felt in months.

But all the time she busied herself with these outward details, she battled with her conscience, too. On the marriage records she must give the name of Anna Winters. Hitherto her masquerade had hurt no one. Would it be wrong to take this legal step without revealing her own identity?

In the end, she had her answer. This ceremony was to be an impersonal contract—not a marriage at all. If she betrayed her real identity now she would be sent back to America. Some day she would make everything clear to Gilbert Lenox.

SATURDAY found Dr. Lenox and his bride-to-be en route to the registry. "Cheer up, little sober sides," Gilbert said, looking at her kindly as the taxi bounced over the cobbles. "There isn't a thing to worry about. From now on, everything will be all right!"

In the bright winter sunlight, Mary found herself relaxing under the doctor's thoroughly competent guidance. He'd saved her life when she had been at death's door and now he was determined on further salvage of the pitiful thing he'd saved.

Somehow, the shock of seeing Vincent Gregg with Carla Marchetta no longer seemed so appalling. The blight of loneliness, terrifying and chilling, seemed to lessen when she was with Gilbert. When the clerk in the registry asked if she, Anna Winters, took this man, Gilbert Lenox, for her lawfully wedded husband, she hesitated only a second. Then her voice, which had been so muffled, spoke up clearly—"I do!"

(To Be Continued)



NEW ENVOY—Economist and sportsman, wealthy James H. R. Cromwell (above) was nominated by the President as U. S. minister to Canada. Cromwell, with his helress-wife, Doris Duke, has long been supporter of F.D.R. administration.

OUT OUR WAY BY J. R. WILLIAMS



THE DEBATE

OUR BOARDING HOUSE With MAJOR HOOPLE



BY FRED HARMAN



RED RYDER

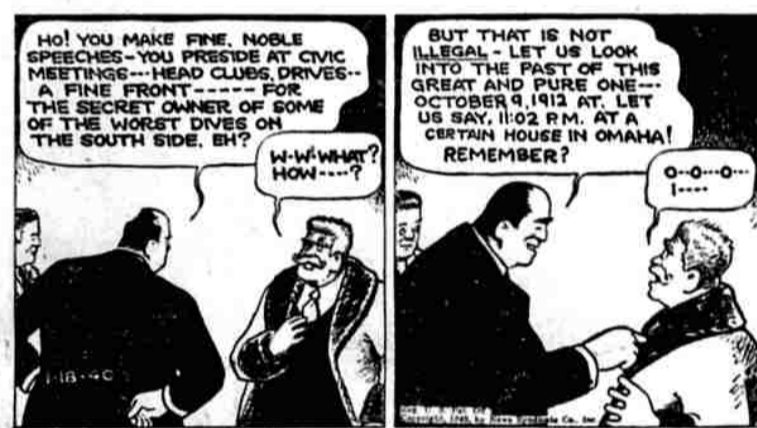


BY HAROLD GRAY

FLAPPER FANNY By Sylvia



FLAPPER FANNY



LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



BY BLOSSER



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



BY CRANE

A FAVORITE STAR

Crossword puzzle grid with clues and a small portrait of a woman.



WASH TUBBS



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



ALLEY OOP



BY V. T. HAMLIN

