

SERIAL STORY

BLACKOUT

BY RUTH AYERS

YESTERDAY, Mary accepted Gilbert's proposal. They are to be married Saturday, before he leaves for the front. Lenox gives her money to buy a wedding outfit and Mary is surprised to find she has not lost her interest in fashion. Then at the registry she hears herself answering "I do!"

CHAPTER XV

AFTER the brief words of the registry marriage service, Mary and Gilbert started back to the Soho rooms.

Gilbert's arm was tucked in hers in a comradely fashion as they walked, giving her a feeling of protection. Even more, she felt an unexpected sense of elation, now that the wedding service was over.

She was still in love with Vincent Gregg. She always would be. But the fact that she had seen him with Carla that day no longer seemed so frightening or so cruel.

This marriage at the registry gave her a new status. She was Mrs. Gilbert Lenox. No longer did she have to masquerade as Anna Winters. A great surge of tenderness for the serious, red-headed American doctor came over her.

"You've saved me from absolute defeat," she tried to say. "You've got a heart as big as you are. Great heart—that should be your name—or maybe Sir Galahad."

Gilbert looked down at her, small and trim by his side. He even managed a smile, although Mary could tell he wasn't thinking of her now. He was impatient to be on the way to the base hospital at the front.

Almost mechanically he replied, "You're already looking up yourself, my dear. That outfit does something for you."

It did, too. The simply styled dress was a blue that reflected her eyes and the veil on the small hat shadowed the twisted right cheek.

Her hair was still colorless and dull and the glowing opal tones of her skin had been blotted out, likely for all time, by the drab pallor. But a new uplifting of her courage radiated from her.

IN the apartment, Gilbert began to pack a few intimate possessions.

"This is my mother," he said, showing her a photograph of a sweet-faced woman. "We're mid-westerners. There have been doctors in my family ever since covered wagons moved across the prairies."

Mary was glad he talked. Snatches of anecdotes and revealing incidents about his boyhood and his home in Missouri.

"Have you a girl at home?" she asked abruptly. Red flamed in her face when the words were said. "Oh, I'm sorry. You haven't asked anything about me or the man I love. I've no right to ask you."

"That's quite all right," Gilbert answered. "Girls maybe, yes. But as I told you that day on the sunporch at the hospital, I've never been in love—real love. That's something different. It has to be."

Mary was at his side at once. "Some day you'll find someone who's crazy about you. I know it. You have everything to offer a girl."

She went on in a rush of words, "What you're doing for me now, giving me your name while you're in France—letting me use your money until I can repay it—all that is chivalrous and generous beyond words. But when you come back to England, I'll be all right again. You've pulled me through and I feel the worst is already over. The marriage can be annulled quietly and I'll never stand in your way. Even now, I envy the girl who'll be your real wife—your sweetheart."

Mary's eyes lowered and her hands twisted miserably in her lap.

Gilbert bent down to her. Before either of them were aware of it, he had drawn her to her feet and encircled her shoulders.

"You want to watch out, Mrs. Gilbert Lenox, or you might be the girl I fall in love with." His voice grew husky.

In a breathless move, he had lifted her in his arms, held her as lightly as if she'd been a doll. The new tenderness Mary felt for him began to flame into something stronger. She waited, half hopeful, half fearful that his lips would press down hard on her mouth.

THE spell broke. Gilbert kissed her—but lightly, almost in a brotherly way, and put her down. Mary remembered her unsightly face. No, Gilbert Lenox would never fall in love with her. It was pity, not a glimmer of love, that had made him give her his name.

When he had packed his few things and put a worn Bible in his pocket, Gilbert wrote out a few addresses and directions to her.

"It's not that I'm afraid," he said. "There's really no danger at all. I'm to be well behind the firing lines—not that I wouldn't like to be right in the thick of the fight. But medics get the breaks in these wars and if that's where I can help most, that's where I've got to stay. Still, even in the med-

ical corps, I'm going to be pretty far away and it's best to leave some instructions."

When Mrs. Simmons brought tea, Gilbert gravely announced their marriage to her.

The lodging house landlady blinked. "Oh, I say!" she began. "A bride? Congratulations. I might have guessed after your taking such good care of her."

"You're to look after Mrs. Lenox while I'm gone, understand?" "I will indeed," the worthy Britisher said. But all the time, Mary could read in the candid face the thoughts that went on behind it. Mrs. Simmons was obviously thinking, "Handsome Dr. Lenox, him to be saddled with such a poor little nobody of a girl!"

As they had their tea, Dr. Lenox did not refer again to the brief, business-like ceremony at the registry. It was as if they'd been two people who'd signed a contract to make them partners for a stated time at the end of which they would go their separate ways.

Nor did Gilbert talk any more about his departure. Instead, he was very much the physician in these last few minutes with Mary Carroll. He called her Anna, of course, and every time he said the word, Mary felt a trace of guilt. But it was too late now to tell him her real identity.

"Dr. O'Connell is doing special surgery in the same base hospital where I'll be stationed," Gilbert said. "I'll give him the history of your injury and all the facts about it so when he comes back to London he'll be posted on the case. But now, my dear, all the help he can give you isn't going to be worth anything if you don't cooperate. You're terribly run down—no color, no appetite, and your nerves playing havoc with you."

Mary nodded. With every passing minute, she was feeling a stronger pang at this parting. She might never see him again. Her husband! "I understand," she began. "I'll do as you order."

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(To Be Continued)

Although it is a metropolitan district, London county council, England, contains more than 1000 cows.

New British War Minister



Oliver Stanley, above, replaced Leslie Hore-Belisha as Great Britain's war secretary in a major cabinet shakeup. He now is responsible for the entire army operation. Formerly he was trade secretary.

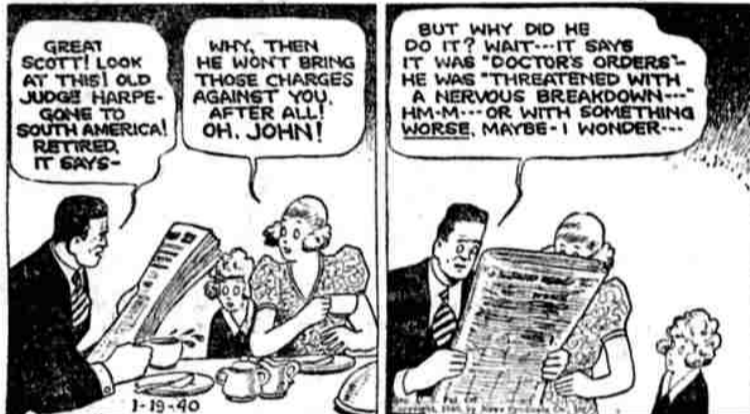
OUT OUR WAY BY J. R. WILLIAMS



RED RYDER



LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



WASH TUBBS



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



SNOOP! WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY CUPBOARD?



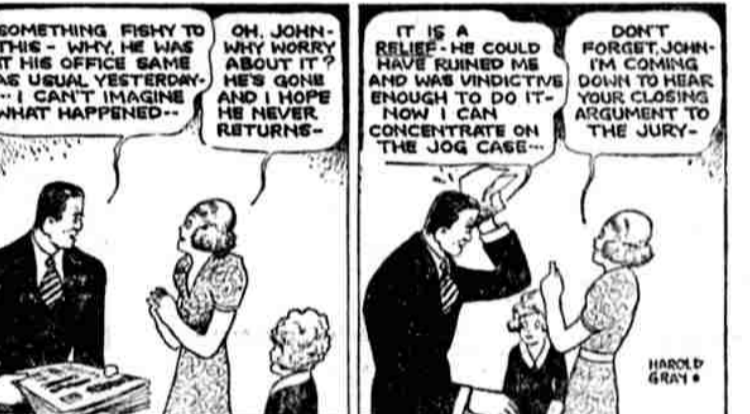
OUR BOARDING HOUSE With MAJOR HOOPLE



BY FRED HARMAN



BY HAROLD GRAY



BY BLOSSER



BY CRANI



BY MARTIN



By Button



FLAPPER FANNY By Sylvia



PHILANTHROPIST

Crossword puzzle with clues and answers.

Crossword puzzle with a portrait of a man.