

DANGER ROMANCE AHEAD

BY TOM HORNER

YESTERDAY: Barnes elapses with Bentley over the gate, but agrees to put it in when Monnie is ready. Bentley makes a remark about Larry, but Collins takes it rather than make a scene. The next day he goes to work, steps at the newspaper office.

CHAPTER VI

THE weeks hurried by. Larry swung into the work on the ranch, nursed his aches in silence, and was rewarded by Barnes' approval and increasing friendship. Monnie and the Colonel were more friendly toward him, too. Both of them rode with the men during spring roundup and branding and Larry was glad when the way the girl worked. She rode as well as any man, could cut a calf from a herd as skillfully as Barnes. During branding, she cooked for the crew, then joined the others roped and dragged bawling calves up to the fires. It was hot, tiring work and Larry was glad when the last calf had a hayhook branded on its hip and the cattle were headed out to summer pasturage. He found Monnie riding beside him. All of the old animosity had disappeared.

"Dad likes the way you handle cows and horses, too," she said. And before he could say anything, "He won't keep a hand who rides a horse too hard, or gets his cows excited. Says a fool cowboy can run more dollars off a cow than all the grass in the Panhandle can put on it. I had you picked as a tenderfoot when you came here. Guess I was wrong." She laughed at the memory.

Larry liked to hear her laugh like that. "You were half right, Miss Monnie. I grew up on a horse, but I've been away from Texas for a while."

"What brought you back?"

"I was in my boots, I guess. Can't be happy any place else. I quit my job and came home. I was lucky when you almost ran into me—"

"When you crashed a stop sign—"

"My fault, I know. I asked about you, decided I'd hit your Dad for a job."

"But you're no ordinary cowpoke, Larry. Her glance swept over him from heel to hat, approvingly. "You're different. You're educated."

"Half the cowmen in the county have college degrees," he countered.

"But they're sons of ranchers, not \$30 per hands. You—You—Oh, there's Mike!" She swung her hat at a horseman riding toward the herd. "So long, Larry, see you later."

LARRY felt like a new man after he had washed off the trail dust, changed clothes. He waited until twilight, then walked to the ranchhouse. Monnie was alone on the porch, crisp and summery in white. She looked as if she were dressed for a party. Larry stopped at the railing.

"There's a dance in town to-night. Some radio band. Would you like to go?"

"I'm sorry you didn't ask me sooner, Larry," she answered smiling. "That's why Mike rode over to meet us today. He asked me to go with him."

"Okay, thanks. Maybe some other time," Larry started to leave but she stopped him.

"Come up and talk until Mike comes, won't you? Dad's working on the books. I want to know more about your secret past." She moved over on the swing, making room for him beside her. Larry couldn't refuse.

"Now, let's hear more about the man who quit his job to be a cowboy," she commanded.

Larry shook his head. "You heard all that this afternoon. We'll talk about you."

"That won't take much time. Daughter of the toughest and best rancher in these parts. Drive a car too fast. Don't know much book-learnin' but I make tolerable biscuits. Free, untanned and 21."

"There's a bit more to it than that," Larry said. "First place, you're not quite 21—you won't be until August—August 28, I believe."

"How did you find that out?"

"A top cowboy knows everything," Larry answered, in mock seriousness. "Let's see. . . . Went to school in New Orleans until they kicked you out. Then tried some school in St. Louis. Then the university. You studied some there, made the dean's honor roll, once. Elected beauty queen during your senior year."

Monnie turned to him, frankly puzzled. "Pete's been talking."

"You wrecked one car while at state," Larry went on. "One boy was hurt—got yourself engaged to an eastern fellow and a writup in a gossip column. But you went to Dallas and forgot him. Been arrested for speeding some eight times."

"Even Pete doesn't know that—"

"Don't interrupt! You roped in a rodeo, led two parades. You've had four automobile accidents and you testified at the coroner's inquest when this fellow was found dead in a burning car on the canyon road. . . ."

The Colonel's voice interrupted. "Monnie! Telephone, for you!"

SHE was gone only a minute or two. "It was Mike. He won't be here until later. Something happened to delay him—one of the men got hurt—" she explained, then dismissed Bentley from her mind.

"Larry Collins, where did you find out all that about me? Some of it was in the papers, but not in any you could have seen. How did you know?"

"Power of the press," The words slipped out before Larry realized what he was saying.

"Then you're a newspaperman."

What are you doing here, getting atmosphere for a story?" If Monnie was angry because he had learned so much about it, she did not show it. Rather, she seemed pleased.

"Something like that. But you'll have to keep my secret for a while. It wouldn't do for the Colonel, or Barnes—or Bentley to find out who I am just yet," Larry cautioned, then asked:

"Pete said something about you hitting a cow, getting hurt, Bentley saving your life. Power of the press didn't cover that. What did you do, hush that one up?"

"Pete's an old woman—talks too much. Besides, Mike—"

"It couldn't have been the time the car went off the road up the canyon, could it?" Monnie shook her head, looked away. She seemed unusually disturbed by his question.

"I don't know anything about any accident on the canyon road," she answered, almost coldly.

"But you do, Monnie, you do. You were there, you helped pull the dead man out of the burning car. You testified at the inquest. Bentley testified at the same time—"

Monnie jumped to her feet, faced Larry. Anger darkened her face. "I told everything I knew about that—I don't know what you're talking about. Why should I know anything about—What's it to you anyway? What are you doing here, spying on me?" She turned her back on him.

Larry was standing beside her. His fingers bit into her shoulders as he turned her around to face him. He waited a second, searching her eyes, then spoke slowly, deliberately:

"I hope I can trust you, Monnie. You have to tell me all about that accident. I have to know. I have a right to know."

"Why?"

"The man you helped pull from that burning car was my brother, Hugh Collins!"

(To Be Continued)

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(To Be Continued)

OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. WILLIAMS



RED RYDER



LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



WASH TUBBS



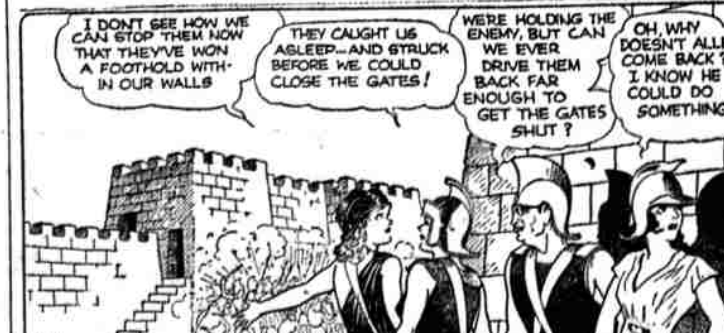
FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



ALLEY OOP



OUR BOARDING HOUSE With MAJOR HOOPLE



BY FRED HARMAN



BY HAROLD GRAY



BY CRANE



BY BLOSSER



BY MARTIN



BY V. T. HAMLIN



FLAPPER FANNY

By Sylvia



"They didn't print a line about your accident. Oh, well--better luck next time."

GOD OF WAR

