

SERIAL STORY

WHEN A GIRL MARRIES

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TRUE CONFESSION

CHAPTER XIV

TOM gave a dismayed whistle. "Good heavens, girl, what have you been doing to yourself? You look as if you'd lost 10 pounds."

Enid's face was white and drawn, and in Letty's house dress, two sizes too big for her, she actually looked as if she had shrunk. She smiled wanly. "Oh, I'll be all right—now."

It had been a hard week. Mom had been strong enough to go home the day after her thrilling rescue, but she refused to leave the hospital until she had been assured that someone would be with Pop every minute.

And upon Enid had fallen the burden of keeping that promise. For Letty had her babies to take care of, and Aunt Faye was too mindful of her own comfort to spend many tedious hours by a sick man's bedside.

Not that Enid complained. She was thankful that her father was alive to receive care and attention.

So she had stayed with him faithfully, sleeping propped up in a rocking chair in his room, and only twice during the week had left the hospital to come out to the cottage to bathe and change clothes.

It had not been until Friday night, when Pop had been at last pronounced out of danger, that she had had anything like a full night's sleep.

Mom was in the cottage kitchen with the girls, where Tom had found them that Sunday morning. His words focused her worried attention upon her youngest daughter's face. It was the first time she had really seen the strain in it, the hollows under the dark sober eyes.

"She does look right peaked," Mom agreed with Tom. With vigorous decision she took the dish towel out of Enid's hand. "I'll help Letty with the dinner. You borrow her bathing suit and go for a swim with Tom before we eat. It'll do you good."

Vainly Enid protested. Tom dragged her out of the kitchen threatening: "Now mind your mother. Get into that bathing suit, pronto—or—his eyes twinkled—"I'll put it on you myself!"

"And lay down there in the sun until you get some color in your face," Mom added. Reluctantly Enid ducked into the bedroom and put on Letty's bathing suit. Saying that she was too tired to swim had been only an excuse. The truth of it was, she dreaded being alone with Tom.

It was half a city block to the lake front from the cottage occupied temporarily by the Sharons. Then one had choice of scrambling recklessly down a steep bank, or walking another two squares to the resort hotel and going down the steps there to the boat pier.

Tom elected the path down the bank. He helped Enid and then, still holding her hand, raced her through the shallow breakers that were dashing lazily on the sandy beach. The water was cold, despite the hot August sun beating down on it.

When she caught her breath, Enid turned over on her back and floated. Tom struck out with his vigorous crawl stroke and swam out into the lake until his head was a mere bobbing speck on the green water. Then he turned and came back to her, the water foaming from the drive of his strong arms.

He looked at Enid and grinned. There were white circles under her eyes now where a few minutes before there had been shadows, and the rest of her face was turning a beautiful scarlet. He laughed. "We'd better get out and dry or you'll be parboiled."

She followed him up the sandy beach to the foot of the bank where some scrubby trees threw a thin shade. She sat down on the yellow sand and shook her hair free from the cap. Tom flopped on his stomach beside her, watching her. Enid met his eye and then looked away.

"Nice here, isn't it?" Tom asked lazily. Enid agreed. He sat up suddenly, remembering something that had been on his mind. "Say—I suppose the hospital bill for your folks was pretty steep, wasn't it? I meant to ask before I went away that morning if you saved any money. I've got a little in the bank . . . some that I've saved this last month by buying a ring."

She straightened up jerkily. Tom stared at her. "What's the matter?" "Oh, Tom, Tom—don't—" "Don't what?" "Don't buy me a ring now."

"Why? You want one, don't you—an engagement ring?" "No!" It was as if the word escaped of its own volition. Certainly Enid had had no premeditated intention of uttering it. But as she said it, her decision was made. She was too tired to go on pretending; to go on trying to fool Tom—and herself.

the money now, instead of a ring—" "Tom, please—" He patted her shoulder. "All right. We won't talk about it. I'll wait."

SHE pushed herself away from him. Her voice was desperate but determined. The false situation into which she had weakly allowed herself to be drawn had to be ended once and for all.

"Tom, you don't understand. I'm not going to marry you. I don't love you. I never have." There it was out! She hadn't meant to tell him this way. In fact she hadn't meant to tell him at all. She had fooled herself all week into thinking that she could take up her life where she had left it before she met Dr. Henry Holliday. But now she knew that she couldn't.

Tom stared at her, at first unbelievably, then his face went white under his tan. "I'm sorry, Tom. Really I am," Enid whispered wretchedly. She wished she could wipe that look from his face.

"I don't suppose it will hurt you to ride once more with me," he cut in harshly. "Tom—I didn't mean that! I'll be glad to ride with you, if you want me to."

"I came up here to get you, didn't I?" It wasn't a cheerful ride. Tom was silent and surly, and Enid was harried by a sense of guilt. She wasn't accustomed to feeling that she had behaved badly—and she knew she had to Tom.

She was also uneasily aware of the secret hope beating deep in her heart. A shameful hope that she wouldn't admit even to herself, but that was there as she said her constrained goodby to Tom, when at last they reached the un-

pretentious little frame house on Elm street. She didn't need any makeup for the sunburn she had acquired that afternoon had reddened her lips and given her face a soft and lovely flush. Above her pink cheeks her eyes were wide and shining . . . and expectant. (To Be Continued)

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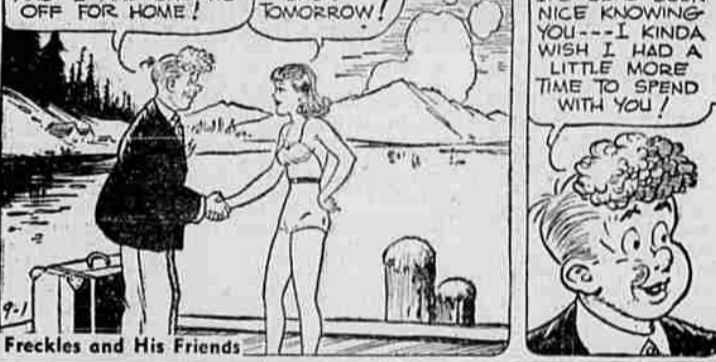
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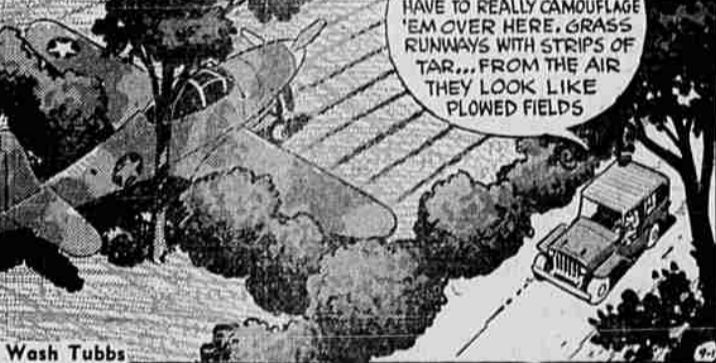
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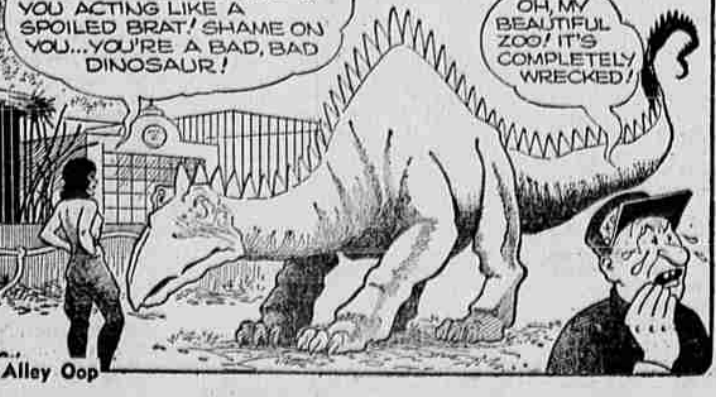
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