

Darling Fool

By MABEL McELLIOTT

BEGIN HERE TODAY
MONNIE O'DARE who lives with her mother, brothers and sister in a small town in love with DAN CARDIGAN, heir to a local fortune. CHARLES EUSTACE, newcomer in town, seems to admire her but she likes him only as a friend. KAY, her sister, is discontented at home and Monnie is worried about this.

SANDRA LAWRENCE who pretends to be a friend of Monnie's tries to win Dan away from her. HETTY, a maid in the Lawrence home, thinks Sandra is "vamping" JAMES, the chauffeur, and she is jealous.

Sandra plans an elaborate party to which Monnie is not invited. NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XVII
HER voice over the telephone sounded small and clear. "It's Monnie, Dan." She could almost hear the intake of breath at the other end of the line.

"Monnie! That's great! But you said you wouldn't—"

"I know I did." She bit her lip to keep it from trembling. Now absurd it was to behave like this! "I changed my mind. I want to see you, Dan."

There was no hesitation now on his part. He said heartily, "Sure. Glad you decided to. When and where?"

"Tonight," the girl told him. "It's important."

There was the barest pause and then Dan said, "Of course. I've got a date—but I'll break it. Shall I call for you around 7?"

It was arranged then. How simple it had been! Monnie hung up the receiver with fingers that shook a little. Sandra did not know how right she had been when she had advised Monnie to play a waiting game with Dan Cardigan. The very fact that she had held him at arm's length for a month had awakened his interest anew. Now she determined with all her heart to fight for him.

Sandra had once said with her air of knowing all about it, "A woman can have any man she wants if she really sets her mind on it." Of course when Sandra had said that she had been thinking only of herself. She had not meant the words to apply to anyone else.

Monnie felt more than usually self-conscious when she explained to her mother that she had an engagement with Dan Cardigan that night.

"But I thought—" Mrs. O'Dare had the evening paper in her hand, folded back to Miss America's social column. The words leaped at Monnie:

"Among this evening's guests will be Mr. Charles Eustace, Mr. Daniel Cardigan, Jr.—"

"He was invited to that party," Monnie said lightly. "He's just not going."

Not—? Mrs. O'Dare's pretty, anxious face looked up, looked away. "Oh, I see."

A MOMENT later she said gently, "I'm glad you're having a little fun, honey. You've been so quiet lately. It isn't quite fair—your not having a good time when the rest of those girls do." Her gaze embraced Sandra and all Sandra's crowd.

"Don't you worry about me," Monnie's voice was gay. Indeed she felt singularly light-hearted. "I'm all right."

"But you're young," fretted the mother. "You need your chance, Monnie. Don't think I don't know what working in that store all day means—helping to run this house—everything. It's not exactly a girl's job. It's too much for you." She bent over the paper to hide the sudden rush of moisture that had sprung to her eyes.

Monnie laid her smooth young head over the worn one. "You're not to worry, I said. Everything's fine. Everything's splendid!"

She sang as she dressed, little catches of dance tunes. It was enough tonight to be young, to be alive, to have a brief glimpse of that elusive thing, happiness. When at 7 a motor horn sounded and she heard Dan's deep voice an instant later, conferring with her on the venue, she could have wept for sheer joy.

"Sandra's going to cut me all for this," Dan told her, helping her into the car.

"She's—for what?" Monnie pretended utter innocence. Her candid eye implored him to share the secret.

"Oh, that big racket she's throwing tonight," Dan said carelessly. "They'll be one man short, that's all."

"Oh, really?" Monnie frowned thoughtfully.

"Doesn't matter a bit," Dan grinned down at her. "To me, that is. I had Frank, at Dad's office, call her up and say I was asked out of town—on important business. Good joke." With his free hand he shook a cigarette from the paper packet and somehow managed to light it.

"She'll be awfully mad at me," Monnie informed him. "If she finds out." Her eyes were limpid, guileless.

"Nuts!" said Dan inelegantly. "She can't run me. Let her be mad. Tell you what, Monnie, she's too bossy for me. No matter what Mother says—"

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about, Dan," said Monnie in the gentlest voice imaginable. "I think it's about time we came to some decision about our—our affairs. There's a good deal of talk around town—"

THE young man interrupted her, frowning deeply. "About what?"

Monnie tucked in a vagrant curl. Her expression was still sweetly untrodden.

"About you and Sandra," she said. "They all say you're going to marry her." She put up her hand to ward off Dan's earnest explanation. "I don't know how true it is and honestly, Dan, I don't care." She paused to let that sink in. "But what I wanted to say was—I completely release you from the agreement we had last autumn. I want you to feel perfectly free to go ahead, to do as you like. After all," said Monnie in dulcet tones, "we were pretty much kids last year. Perhaps we've grown up, both of us. Perhaps we've seen things in their true light."

"I don't know what you mean by that," Dan muttered silently. "It wasn't really an engagement anyway," Monnie pursued earnestly. "We just—well, sort of pledged ourselves to each other in a boy and girl way. You gave me this," and her curling fingers opened to disclose a seal ring. "Mind you," she went on softly, "I'm not saying it wasn't really—awfully sweet and precious. I was thrilled over it. But I've come to realize just as you have, Dan dear, that we're not exactly suited to each other—"

He broke in. "Who says we're not?"

She gave her slender shoulders a tiny shrug. "Your people—and mine."

"I thought your mother liked me," Dan began, injured.

"She doesn't really," Monnie told him quickly. "She thinks you're a splendid boy—that you have wonderful possibilities. But what Mother says is this, she wants me to have the best. She doesn't like to think I'd be snubbed and looked down upon just because we happen to have lost our money. Mother feels we can hold up our heads with the best of them. She's not willing to let me in for unpleasant situations. After all, Dan, I'm not being critical but you know your family hasn't been particularly nice to me."

HE had brought the car to a standstill now in a little grove of oaks. Dinner was forgotten in the heat of the discussion. Monnie had never looked prettier than at this moment, her face colored delicately with excitement, her amber eyes dark with feeling.

"I know they haven't. Darn them!" Dan muttered venomously. "Pack of snobs." He squared about, facing her, breathing in her nearness and fragrance. His finely chiseled face with its Celtic eyes under the heavy brows was brought very close to hers.

"What you're trying to tell me," Dan said soberly, steadily, "is that you've changed your mind. I don't deny that I had rather—well, cooled off—when I got back in June. Mother worked on me a lot, said I owed a big marriage to the family. All that kind of thing. Then you were pretty snappy and—admittedly every time I saw you, I thought, 'what the deuce? But now—'" He stared down at her and the girl had to grip herself to keep from trembling at the intensity of that gaze. "Now I'm not so sure I want to call it a day, see? I'm not so sure some other chap hasn't been mulling in. What's happened, Monnie? Is there somebody else?"

She decked her lashes downward deliberately before choosing words to answer him.

"What makes you think that?" Those strong brown hands gripped her slender ones. She smelt the fragrance of cigars and shaving soap and fresh linen. Blue eyes stared into dark ones for one long moment.

"Dan Cardigan, let me go," Monnie commanded. "You're no right—"

"Haven't, eh?" growled her one masterfully. "You're my girl. You're going to tell me here and now what's changed you or I'll know the reason why!"

Under her struggle for composure Monnie was conscious of a deep and secret flash of triumph. Things seemed to be working out her way, after all.

(To Be Continued)

Three-day Protest Brought To Halt

MINNIEVILLE, Ore., June 6 (AP)—A group of protesting unemployed men who for three days had staged demonstrations on the courthouse lawn here, had disbanded today after a committee they appointed had accepted a compromise offered by citizens banding relief work in family count.

Flapper Fanny Says

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OUT OUR WAY

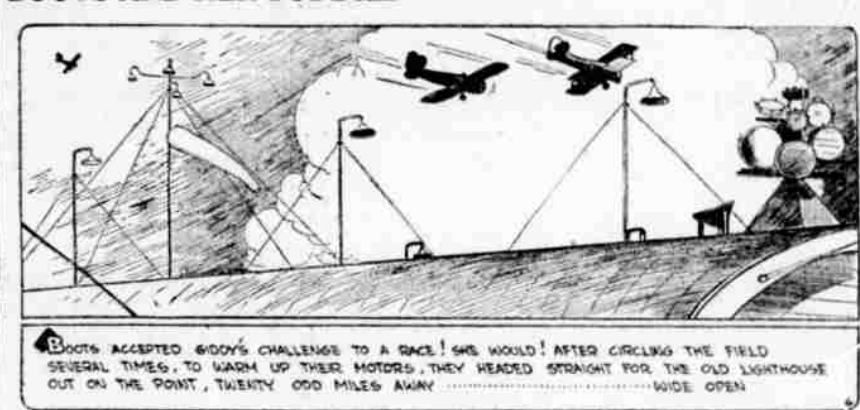
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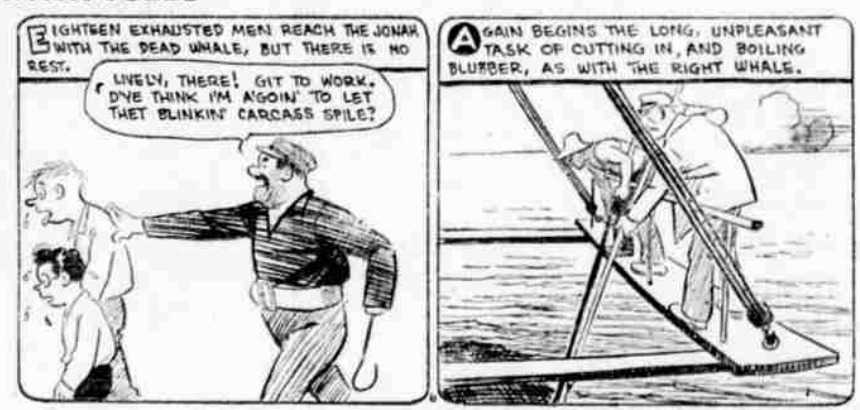
SALESMAN SAM



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



WASH TUBBS



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



THE NEWFANGLES—MOM'N POP



OUR BOARDING HOUSE

By Ahern



By Small



By Martin



By Crane



By Blosser



By Cowan

