Darling Fool

By MABEL McELLIOTT

BEGIN HERE TODAY

MONICA O'DARE helps to support her mother, younger brother and sister by working in a drug store in the small town of Belvedere. Her older brother, BILL, plans to marry ANGIE GILLEN as soon as Angie divorces her husband. Monnie is in love with DAN CARDIGAN whose wealthy parents do not approve of her. SANDRA LAWRENCE, pretending to be Monnie's friend, tries to win Dan from her.

Sandra becomes angry at a maid and her father's chauffeur and dismisses them. A few days later when she receives a telephone message saying her father is badly hurt Sandra hurries to him only to find herself the victim of kidnapers.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XXV

SANDRA'S voice, in spite of her desperate efforts to keep it cool, had a note of hysteria. "Where are you taking me now?"

"You keep your mouth shut!" The woman in the heavy veil, the one who had joined her captor a moment before, spoke hoarsely. Sandra had a fleeting impression she had heard that voice before and that its owner was attempting to disguise it. She shrank from the glare of eyes behind the heavy drapery of gauze. There was something wildly intimidating about that stare.

They conferred for a few minutes outside the closed door while the girl on the couch, her feet still bound, allowed her eyes to rove frantically about the room, seeking some means of escape. There seemed to be none. The window was locked and barred—she could see that. Even if her shackles were loosed it would take some superb tactics to get out of this fetid room. Fool—fool she had been to come alone! They had got her into this trap with maddening ease.

Sandra's thoughts roved to home and her father. He would be reading that soiled note presently. If she knew him, he had already telephoned the police. Then what? Would his life also be in danger? Pretending to shrug off this notion as pure melodrama, Sandra raised her head proudly. The man re-entered and, stooping, loosened the ropes which bound her slender ankles together.

"Come along, you!" he said, not unkindly. "We're steppin' out of here."

Sandra brushed against the woman in the passage as she followed. Again she had a sense of imminent menace, of an almost tangible hatred.

The man indicated she was to sit beside him in the rickety sedan. Before stepping into it Sandra glanced about quickly to fix the scene in her mind. In the darkness she could see only a rotting fence and dooryard. The whole place was like half a hundred discouraged farms tended by renters in the countryside. There was nothing to distinguish it.

"Never mind your lookin'," the man cackled. "We're not comin' this way again."

The veiled woman clambered into the back seat and Sandra felt those boring eyes upon her.

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THEY rode, bumping and swaying, for what seemed to the girl hours although when she glanced at the dial of her watch she saw it was only 11 o'clock. Curious they didn't trouble to blindfold her! She knew this road—it was the Embury Turnpike. Wouldn't it be the simplest thing, she thought, to scream—to attract the attention of some passing motorist? For all she knew alarms might have been broadcast already regarding her disappearance.

As if reading her thoughts, a rasping voice from the rear said harshly, "No funny business now. I've got a gun!"

They turned left into a lane lined with poplars. The moon was rising and the landscape lay cool and sharply etched before them, like a back drop in a theater. Black against the sky rose a clumsy house, sprouting half a dozen chimneys. Dark. Sinister.

"Wait here," the man commanded his henchwoman. He jumped out and went about to the back of the house, returning presently in disgruntled mood.

"Key's not here," he cried to the woman in the back seat. Sandra had an almost insane impulse to laugh. It was so absurd, this criminal protesting innocently that he couldn't get into a house because he hadn't a ker.

The woman wrenched the car door open, evidencing her intention of searching for the missing key. But instead she paused, stifling a scream. Lights were blurring the roadbed of the lane. A car was coming toward them at top speed.

"It's the cops!" yelled the man. "Let's go." He flung himself into the driver's seat. The starter whirred—died. Again and again he tried it, desperation in every move. But the car bore down on them.

"Run for it!" said a hoarse voice. Sandra saw the veiled woman trip over a log. Then the lights of the car shone full into her eyes.

"You big—!"

Sandra looked up, half laughing, half crying. But instead of the friendly blue-coated figure she had expected to see, she found herself staring into the eyes of James, the chauffeur.

"You all right?" His voice sounded relieved. The woman, having picked herself up, now began to run. In a trice, the long-legged James had overtaken her, was shaking her soundly.

"Little rap!" Sandra heard him saying. "Didn't I tell you?"

She could hear angry sobs, a protesting murmur. Hetty! It was Hetty who had been her captor, whose burning glance of hate had eaten into her very flesh.

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RECOVERING her composure completely, Sandra swung herself over the side of the car.

"Would anybody," she inquired coolly, "tell me what this is all about?"

James turned. The habit of respect was strong but even Sandra could catch the note of dislike.

Grudgingly he muttered, "You threw us out without jobs. You wouldn't give us even a recommend. It wasn't our fault."

Sandra flushed. "She was impudent. She didn't deserve it."

James put a restraining hand on Hetty, whose lunge forward boded no good to Sandra. The man, her original captor, had by this time disappeared, drifted into the darkness somewhere.

"You better not talk that way," James said defensively to Sandra. "You better be glad I come along in time to save you. When she" (he indicated the struggling Hetty) "gets a mad on she's a sure enough wildcat. She was bound to get even."

"I'm not goin' to let her off like this, so easy," panted Hetty. "She was sweet on you. She tried to get her hooks into you and when she couldn't, she gave us both the air."

James intervened. "You know as well as I do, Miss Lawrence, we can't get jobs without we have a recommend."

"They didn't want that—they wanted money," Sandra informed him icily. "They've sent a note to my father demanding $50,000."

James groaned. "Honest, Hetty, did you do that?"

The girl nodded, defiant.

"You little nit-wit!" He whirled on her. "Do you know what a mess you can get us into? You and that no-count cousin of yours."

"I don't care," Hetty said sullenly. "I said I'd get her and I did. She's not as smart as she thinks she is. Anyhow we got to go through with it now. She knows who we are and she'll get the police after us if we let her go. Don't be such a chicken heart, Jim. She doesn't care what happens to us. Why should we care about her? She'd let us starve to death."

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THERE was danger in the atmosphere. Brooding hatred. The smoke of revenge. Two pairs of eyes stared at the girl in the Paris frock.

"What good is she anyway?" Hetty raved. "Never does a hand's turn. Makes mischief wherever she goes. What right's she got to live?"

Sandra saw something flash in the darkness. She heard a muffled report. She watched, fascinated, the struggling figures.

James turned his head sharply. "Get out of here," he barked. "Run for your life. And if you tell about this night—if you get Hetty into trouble—you'll be sorry for it, that's all."

Sandra ran, stumbling in the ruts, almost sobbing. Briers tore her thin stockings and once she fell into a pool of ooze, sinking to her ankles.

At last she reached the main road, a bedraggled figure. Which way to turn? She did not know, so took the right, hoping it led toward home. Her thin shoes were hopelessly inadequate. Her body felt as if it had been beaten.

Several cars passed, their lights almost blinding her. Her breath was torn from her now in gusty sobs, every one burning her parched throat. On and on she stumbled along this road that seemingly had no turning.

At last she heard the pur of a motor going in the same direction. She was frightened rather than relieved, hearing men's shouts. What new horrors did this nightmare hold for her?

"Sandra!"

She heard her father's joyous shout just before she lost consciousness.

(To Be Continued)

The world speed record for seaplanes is held by Warrant Officer Francisco Agello of the Italian navy, who set a new mark of 423.772 miles an hour recently.

Oklahoma's legislature recently defeated a movement to derive a fund for maintaining existing state airports from money obtained by taxing airplane gasoline.

Flapper Fanny Says

Girls with heavy dates don't mind short waits

OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

By Ahern

SALESMAN SAM

By Small

BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES

By Martin

WASH TUBBS

By Crane

FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS

By Blosser

THE NEWFANGLES—MOM'N POP

By Cowan