

Darling Fool

By MABEL McELLIOTT

BEGIN HERE TODAY
MONNIE O'DARE, beautiful and young, sailed for Europe with her old friend, MISS ANSTICE COBEY, to try to forget DA CARDIGAN who Monnie believed had killed her for SANDRA LANE RENCE. In New York before sailing Monnie encounters AL THUR, MACKENZIE, a middle-aged man of wealth. She meets him again on the boat and he is obviously attracted to her.

While Sandra, at home, is taking advantage of Monnie's absence to try to win him from her, Monnie is in London where Mackenzie shows her with attraction. They go to dinner one night and he starts her by proposing that she return to America when he does.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY
CHAPTER XXXVII

HAD she really heard Arthur Mackenzie say those words or was she dreaming? Monnie, lacing her fingers in her lap, gave him a direct, almost childlike look.

"I-I don't understand," she faltered. "You're going back to New York. But Miss Anstice and I plan, as you know, to start for Paris next week."

"I know," he said firmly. "I know all that." There was eagerness in his tone. "You can see Paris any time. Next month—next year—with me. Yes, Monnie, I'm asking you to marry me."

The color flared up in her cheeks. She was tense. "But that's impossible. I told you—"

He interrupted her with a sweeping gesture. "I know. You told me about the young man back home whom you swore to love forever. Well, what's happened in this, as I see it. Either he's forgotten about you—which I doubt, as I scarcely think you would have cared for a fool—or he's got entangled with someone else. Either way he's lost his chance. Monnie, I'm in love with you. Does that sound absurd from me—with all you know about me?"

There must have been something tell-tale about her expression for Mackenzie's smile was grim.

"I know you've heard plenty. Gossip aboard ship. I won't attempt to deny any of it. I've not been an angel. You must know that. Women—well, we won't go into that. It's all past. I have never asked a woman to marry me before, believe that. There's something about you, Monnie," he told her, his voice softening, "that makes me want to do things for you—show you the bright places of the earth."

"That's kind," she murmured, frowning at a smile.

"It's not," he assured her. "Pure selfishness, that's what it is. I want to see your eyes shine like a child seeing its first Christmas tree."

"Am I so naive?" asked Monnie, struck by this picture of herself.

HE threw out his hands. "It's not that exactly. You're—oh, so fresh and unspoiled. I never knew there was anyone like you in the world. You give me back some touch of my youth—some faith I'd lost. Do you know," he went on in a slightly altered tone, "do you know what Cornish Panaway said to me when first she saw you? On the deck that first day. Do you remember?"

"I remember," said Monnie, thinking of Cornish's cynical eyes. "She said, 'Who's the little tap-dancer?'"

Monnie's color was high, her voice angry. "How could she?" He shrugged. "She knew money. She knew me. She assumed there was something between us, but I soon put her straight on that. I knew then that what I felt for you was different because when she said that I wanted to knock her down."

He fell into an instant's musing. "What do you say, Monnie?" he asked with a boy's eagerness.

She gave him a level glance. "I can't answer you now," she told him. "I must have time to think."

"I'm not very patient, you know," he reminded her, smiling, assured. "I'm used to putting things through quickly."

She had a glimpse for an instant at what her life would be if he took her hand to him. Enough to sell, always. He would be ruthless. She would have what she wanted materially but her very thoughts would be owned by him. Did she want that? She shivered.

"Cold?"

She shook her head.

"You're not eating a bite."

"Too excited, I guess," she said.

"You've—taken me off my feet."

HE laughed, delightedly. "Such a baby!"

"And you leave tomorrow," she mused, staring beyond him, not really seeing the soft pale colors of the room, the mirrors reflecting the images of well-dressed, soft-voiced people. This was his life, she thought. A succession of smooth-paced events, money paying the way for all manner of luxury, luxury without ostentation. Arthur Mackenzie's wife would be a sort of queen in her own right. Doors would open for her. The temptation came to her to surrender. It would all be so easy. No more money worries, no more snubs. She could do so much for all of them at home. Her mother, Kay, the others. Why did she hesitate?

"I must," she murmured, "have a little time. To think things over."

"Ah, time!" He threw out one strong brown hand in an impatient gesture. "We've known each other—how long is it? Two weeks? Three? Enough, anyway. Don't

let's waste the precious minutes, Monnie. Life is so short."

But she was stubborn, for once. She was not so pliable in this man's hands as she might once have been.

"I can't tell you now," she persisted. "Later."

"Then you won't go back with me?" His face darkened.

"We could be married by special license tomorrow. Never mind how—I could arrange it. You could sail with me and in January when all this business of the loan is finished we could come back to Paris together. I've wanted to show you Paris. Remember I said that from the start?"

"I remember!" Amber eyes flashed at him.

"Monnie, you darling! Don't disappoint me now."

She trembled, feeling this man's power, his attraction. "Give me until morning," she pleaded at last, in answer to his importunities.

"Telephone me at nine."

"The best train," he reminded her, "leaves at 11. That makes it short." But his eyes were glowing as with triumph. He felt himself master of the situation. "You can throw a few things into a dressing case, can't you? And Miss Corey can send your trunk later."

The girl begged to be taken back to her hotel early, for by this time she was actually almost ill with nervousness and excitement. Mackenzie readily acceded to her request. He was jubilant. Already he treated her like one of his choicest possessions. She was cold? Ah, that would never do! "Haggins, wrap Miss O'Dare in the fur rug, so!" That was better. He would order hot milk sent up to her directly she got back to her room. Did she mind being alone until Miss Anstice returned? Well, all the better perhaps, so that she might make her decision.

At parting he was very gentle with her, under the bright, respectful eye of the uniformed boy at the lift.

"Sleep well," he charged her, smiling.

"Oh, I will," she promised, laughing nervously. "Thank you for everything—you are so kind."

But her eyes were troubled after she had left him. What should she do? It was too much to expect her to make such a tremendous decision overnight. Out of his presence, she now relaxed, feeling, if the truth were told, a bit resentful at the tumultuousness of his wooing. Miss Corey had described him not long ago as a bit of a pirate. The term suited him exactly. He had a touch of the buccaner about him. A polite, well-clothed buccaner, of course, but there was in his nature a trace of the ruthless man who belongs to the unscrupulous. Monnie recognized this, liking him none the less for it, attracted in spite of herself. That he was twice her age did not seem to matter. She was young enough to consider this fact in itself a romantic circumstance. She did not love him—no! But since she could not have the man she did love, did this matter? Weren't most people inclined to overestimate the value of love?

She sat thus, wrapped in her old blue dressing gown, and sipped the warm milk the servant brought her, reminded by it of the man's solicitude for her.

"What shall I do?" she cried aloud to the empty walls. "What shall I tell him tomorrow?"

As if in answer to her cry a soft knock sounded at the door of the suite. Monnie, thinking the maid had returned to carry away the empty cup, softly called, "Come."

But, instead of the fresh-faced English woman in her neat uniform, a page boy entered with an envelope on a salver.

The letter came on the boat train, madam. The director thought it might be urgent, it had been so delayed.

She tore the envelope open with trembling fingers. Dan's writing! It had been addressed to her hotel in New York and forwarded.

What could he have to say to her?

(To Be Continued)

Flapper Fanny Says

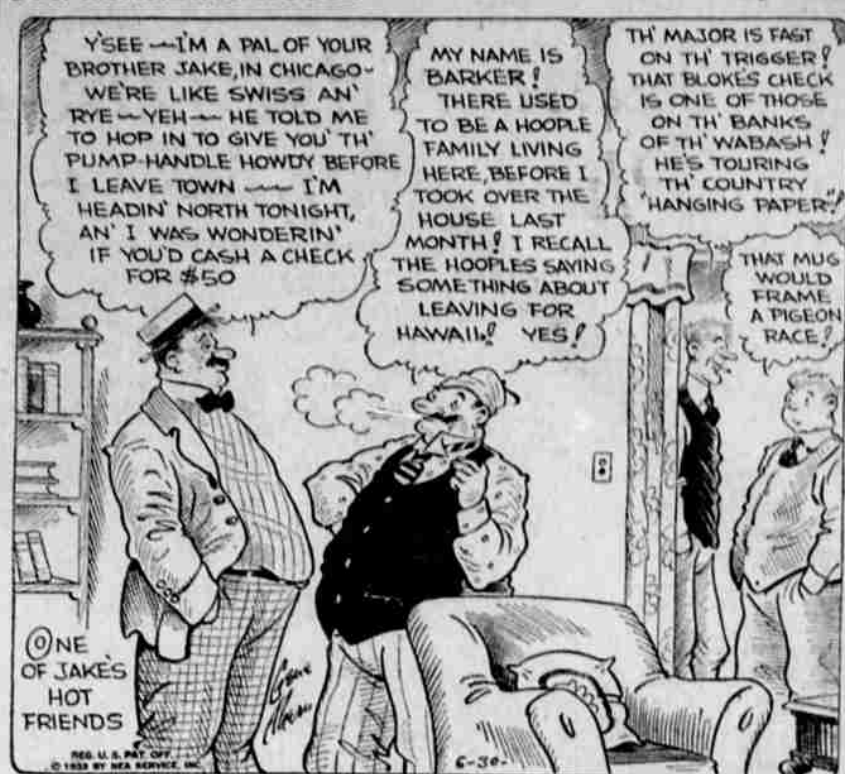


Give a dude rancher enough rope and she'll tie into trouble.

OUT OUR WAY



By J. R. Williams OUR BOARDING HOUSE



SALESMAN SAM



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



WASH TUBBS



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



THE NEWFANGLES—MOM'N POP



By Small

By Martin

By Crane

By Blosser

By Cowan