

Darling Fool

By MABEL McELLIOTT

CHAPTER XLVIII
RISBY BRIGGS' mother stopped by at Vernon's drug store to buy some bicarbonate of soda. She had eaten too much chicken salad at the wedding reception and besides she wanted to talk over the excitement with somebody and she had just seen Miss Anstice Corey go in. Mrs. Briggs was wearing her new violet crepe de chine with a little knot of artificial roses pinned to her bosom. She felt very elegant, much dressed up.

"Lovely wedding!" Miss Anstice was beaming. "Lovely pair."

"The bridegroom is a very handsome man," Mrs. Briggs contributed. "I thought Monnie looked a bit away and wasn't that a real plain dress for her to choose? I can't imagine why she didn't wear a veil."

Mrs. Anstice raised the large net she had learned to use in London and regarded her neighbor coolly.

"Monnie looked perfectly beautiful," she told Mrs. Briggs, "and that biscuit-colored frock was in the best possible taste. Her hat was a French one."

The tone alone should have quelled the irrepressible mother of Risby but it failed to.

"Well, I thought it looked mighty funny, sitting on the side of her head so that you could see all her curls. An' she didn't look like a grownup woman, as it seems to me a bride should look. That hat an' the dress, too, made her look like a little girl. Even though she's years older than my Risby!" This last was delivered somewhat spitefully.

MISS ANSTICE bowed, sweeping out of the store majestically and thus putting an end to the conversation. Baffled, Mrs. Briggs gazed after her. Poor woman, she had genuinely longed to talk over the details of the wedding but as usual she had said the wrong things. She sighed, feeling angry and frustrated. It was upsetting, any way you looked at it, to see the O'Dares getting up in the world this way. Hadn't they always been "as common as you or me," to quote Mrs. Briggs' favorite expression? And look at them now—Monnie marrying a boy everybody said was a millionaire, Kay going (as the story ran) east to college next fall, Bill and his mother taking an apartment in Cincinnati while he took an engineering course, with Mark trailing along to enjoy the advantages of a city school.

It was all perfectly disgusting, Mrs. Briggs told herself self-righteously. For her part, she'd never encourage her daughter to marry for money. Who would have thought this Charles Eustace would turn out to be so grand? Nobody had known until Monnie's engagement was announced back in the early spring, how "well connected" he was. And an orphan, too. That made it even more—well, certain.

Mrs. Briggs took up her package and her handbag and started home. It was just like Risby to flounce off with those girls—her "crowd" she called them—leaving her mother to go on alone. But wasn't that Gertrude Hampstead just up ahead? She might get a few more details from Gertrude who was "intimate" with the family. Hadn't there been something between Gertrude and Bill O'Dare several years back?

"Well, I see you were there, too!" Mrs. Briggs' voice had a ringy ring. "Quite a blow-out."

Gertrude looked really pretty in that blue outfit. Funny she had never thought of Gertrude before except as a plain girl.

"It was beautiful, wasn't it? They just left. I waited and I caught the bouquet!" Gertrude admitted. Mrs. Briggs observed for the first time the small nose-peg of bluish roses and pale sweet peas that Gertrude held.

"My, my, quite exciting! You'll be the next. Why couldn't they have caught it? That would have been something to talk about."

Gertrude smiled, looking tranquilly sure of herself.

"Well, we weren't going to announce it till Bill comes back next spring but he said today we might as well—"

She held out her left hand, showing the most precious pearl ring.

"Well, well, thought Mrs. Briggs, marching off with a sour expression, so that was the way of it! That yellow-haired hussy hadn't got Bill, after all, and she had quarreled with her old friend, Edith O'Dare, about the story. It was all very disappointing. Risby a beau of the moment was a clerk at one of the red-front stores on Main street and here Edith O'Dare's children were turning out so smartly. A person couldn't help being envious. It just turned you sour, it did, to see the luck some people had.

KAY flew into the bedroom, strewn with the trimmings of the going-away bride. A smart, prettily-groomed Kay with a postage stamp but perched distantly at her golden curls.

"Got everything, Monnie?"

"I think so," Monnie's jacket of printed silk in soft browns and tans suited her extremely.

actly. Her new bags, marked with the initials that were to be hers henceforward, were closed and locked. Kay poised herself for flight.

"Well, come along then. The car's waiting. Are you dead? You must have shaken hands with a million people."

"I never had such a good time in my life." And indeed Monnie looked the picture of a happy bride. She glanced about her, one swift, inclusive look, the last being on the small room where she had spent much of her girlhood.

"Sorry to go!"

Monnie shook her head, with an April face. "No—and yes—it's home. Nothing else will ever take its place." She could not say what she really felt, that she was leaving the old Monnie O'Dare behind with all her unhappiness.

"Well, I'm not," said Monnie, "and Kay practically. If mother and Bill come back next year they're going to take one of those new little houses out in Webster Addition. Bill says he won't have any trouble renting this. Hank Harnett wants it."

THE two girls went out, shutting the door behind them. Mark, waiting to be of service, bounded up the steps, two at a time, to carry the bags. At the foot of the flight stood Charles Eustace, waiting for his wife. Monnie felt her heart contract in that new way at sight of him. What a wonderful life they were going to have together! And how generous Charles was being with all of them. None of her protests had stopped him. He had changed all their lives. Bill was no longer the sulky, stained garage mechanic but a purposeful young man with squared shoulders and an authoritative air. Through Charles, Bill was to have his chance.

"Was I long?" He took her hand, smiling down at her in that gently quizzical way.

"Too long to suit me!" Her mother stood in the background, beaming.

"You'll have to step on it to make the city in time." That was Bill, consulting his watch, joining grave and brotherly. They were driving to the city where they would board the train for the east. Later they would sail for Bermuda.

She kissed them all, feeling choky for a moment. Charles' hand staided her and she was in the car, the motor running.

"Good-by, everybody! Good-by!" Their faces were a blur now and Main street was slipping past. The country road, lush with May, lay before them. Their way past the village cemetery where, on a high hill, Dan's grave was marked. Respectively Monnie's eyes sought the shaft. Charles understood.

"Foot chap!" He slipped his brown hand over hers. "He didn't deserve what he got."

She looked up at her young husband, all her heart in her eyes. "You're very generous, my dear." Dan was dead and there would be always a shadow in her mind at memory of him, but she knew her luck. She had got the right man. She was eternally grateful to the fates for arranging her destiny.

The marker indicating the town line was passed and Monnie, twining a little in her seat, could see the lights of the village blooming below them in the late May dusk.

"The last of Belvedere," she said softly, with a catch in her voice.

"Ah, you'll see it again," Charles reminded her. "Be back next year to visit the Mill House together."

Yes, she knew that, but she would not be returning as Monnie O'Dare. She would be Mrs. Charles Eustace, rich and feted. Doors would be opened to her that had been locked before. She was leaving something of herself behind. She was turning the pages of a new chapter.

"Happy?"

She gave him the smile he loved to see. "How can you ask that?"

THE END

In 1934 and 1936, Henry Blair was granted patents on a corn harvester; he was the first Negro to receive a patent on an invention.

Civil officials in India wear blue uniforms of various shades for occasions of state.

Flapper Fanny Says



It's dangerous for girls to take jobs over their heads when they lack the proper footing.

OUT OUR WAY



By J. R. Williams

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

By Ahern



SALESMAN SAM



By Small

BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



By Martin

WASH TUBS



By Crane

FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



By Blosser

THE NEWFANGLES—MOM'N POP



By Cowan