

LOVE WILL NEVER DIE

By JOHN HUNTER

WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY
ANDREW BRENT—a young man of unusual intelligence and charm, who is the hero of the story.
AUDREY—a young woman of unusual intelligence and charm, who is the heroine of the story.
CONSTANCE—Andrew's mother, a woman of unusual intelligence and charm.
MISS SCRATCH—a young woman of unusual intelligence and charm, who is the heroine of the story.
THE BOSS—a young man of unusual intelligence and charm, who is the hero of the story.
MISS O'FLAGE—a young woman of unusual intelligence and charm, who is the heroine of the story.

and helped her. She seemed quite com- possible. There was a gravity about her which had crushed Constance, and when Aunt Ella brought her home from the Continent. She seemed to have forgotten all about the Eros and Harkness. Constance endeavored not to feel anxious as she watched her.

Under the shade of the great oak tree, where Harkness had taken his seat after he had crushed Constance, Aunt Ella sat and knitted, with her eyes on both of them, like some benign guardian angel.

Afternoon brought a visitor to Red Roof, and he came in a long, low yellow motorcar, driving alone. He was Preslow.

"I hope I'm not intruding, Mrs. Brent," he said, as Constance met him. "I've just been down to Tonbridge, and I remembered you lived here. He saw Audrey, and lifted his hat. "Good afternoon, Miss Brent."

Audrey came across to him. He thought she looked pleased to see him. Constance watched them as their hands met, and wondered why Preslow had come.

"I am going to commit a burglary," he was saying, and wanted you to act as my accomplice. Do you think you could steal a bunch of your mother's flowers for me, while I keep her in town?"

"I could try," assented Audrey, and turned away to the flower-beds.

Preslow looked at Constance.

"I called to have a chat with you," he said quietly. "Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"If it is very important," answered Constance coldly. She had no great affection for the son of Lady Barbara Preslow.

They strolled down the pathway, and sat on a low seat under the bridge bordering the vegetable garden. Preslow came to the point abruptly.

"Mrs. Brent, I have fallen in love with your daughter."

Constance did not look at Preslow for some moments. She was endeavoring to think clearly. At last she said: "Are you sure you are in love with Audrey?"

"Confident," asserted Preslow briskly, much as he would have confirmed a statement relative to his work.

"Why have you troubled to tell me?" Preslow unflinchingly.

The sarcasm in Constance's voice left Preslow untouched. He knew she was referring to the fact that neither he nor his mother recognized her in the ordinary course of things.

"I think it is best that we should understand one another perfectly in an affair of this description," he answered smoothly.

"You have a wonderful perception," observed Constance. "Does Audrey also understand—perfectly?"

Preslow shook his head. "I have not spoken to Audrey, yet," he admitted. "It was on that subject, really, that I called on you."

"I see," said Constance. "You do not know if Audrey cares for you yet?"

"I don't think she is unfavorably disposed toward me."

"Well?"

Preslow produced a silver cigarette case. "May I? Perhaps you would like one too?"

Constance shook her head. "The air is very sweet," she said. Preslow looked quickly at her. He was wondering whether she was serious. He did not associate Constance Brent with an appreciation of nature. Yet, as he looked round the garden, he was conscious of a vaguely understood, but different, viewpoint. However, he had come on business.

"A lot may be done," he said slowly, watching the big smoke spiraling from his cigarette, "by a little judiciously exercised influence, especially if that influence is brought to bear by a mother."

"I have come to you to obtain your approval of my suit, and also to enlist your assistance in pressing it."

"Sir Richard's 'Love'"

Constance faced him. "Do you realize that it is a dangerous thing to attempt to order the bestowal of a girl's affections?"

Preslow nodded. "I do. One is likely to spend everything. But I ask for no ordering. I merely ask for a diplomacy such as you know how to use: a gentle, unobstructive pressure, an imperceptible molding of thought and inclination. It can be done."

Constance looked across the garden. She knew that Preslow was speaking the truth. "Suppose I object to the whole affair?" she asked.

"Oh, but you will not," answered Preslow easily.

"Why?" She turned to him swiftly once more.

Preslow shrugged his shoulders. "It is the most sensible thing that could happen." His eyes were fixed steadily on Constance. "I have given the whole affair a great deal of thought, and I can see no other sequence of events which would give such generally satisfactory results as a marriage between myself and Audrey. I hasten to assure you that in my consideration I dwell fully on the fact that you have done everything for her."

"You are more than kind," murmured Constance bitterly. "This is a business arrangement?"

"Hardly," Preslow was suavely logical. "At first, I admit, I approached it from a business standpoint, but I find now that I really have a great affection for Audrey herself, apart from all other things."

Constance bit her lip. This was the love Preslow had to offer. A business arrangement at first, but now a great affection. Nothing more. Preslow followed up this point.

"It is a better arrangement than—the Harkness affair."

"What do you know of Harkness?" Constance's tone was hostile.

Preslow smiled. "I spent the evening with Audrey yesterday. I learnt one or two things."

Constance eyed him steadily. She knew that he could have summoned Audrey so skillfully regarding Harkness that the girl would not be aware of the process. She was wondering how much he knew, and began to be afraid that he knew everything, which was exactly what Preslow intended.

"Harkness does not enter into the discussion," she said.

"I see," murmured Preslow. "It is finished."

"There was some trouble last night," answered Constance.

"At the Eros?" Preslow's eyebrows were lifted the slightest bit.

"He disgraced himself," said Constance shortly. "Audrey will not see him again."

Preslow was highly satisfied. He began to feel on firmer ground.

"I am glad—for her sake," he said. "And have I permission to go ahead?"

Constance considered. If Audrey married Preslow it would certainly simplify matters considerably. But, on the other hand, though she knew Preslow was considered quite a sound man, he was cold, self-centered, and had no love to spare for other people. His mother was the same.

"I shall stand on one side," said Constance slowly. "I will not attempt to influence Audrey one way or the other. If she leans to care for you it is enough. But I will not take part in any scheme of coercion."

CONTINUED TOMORROW

THE GUMPS—Old Shady Rest Calls Andy



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Miss Scratch



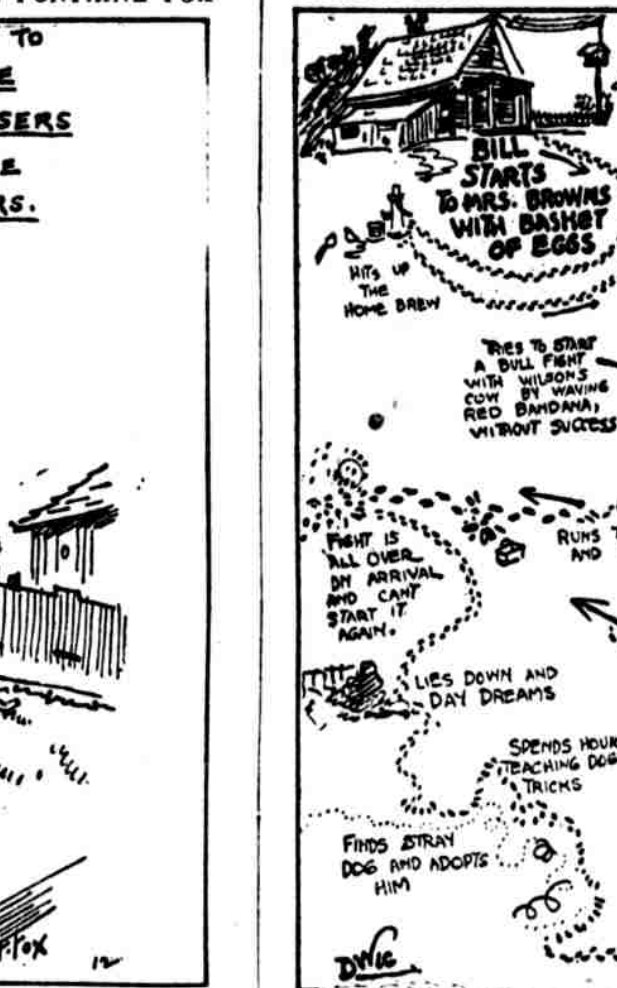
The Young Lady Across the Way



PATHETIC FIGURES



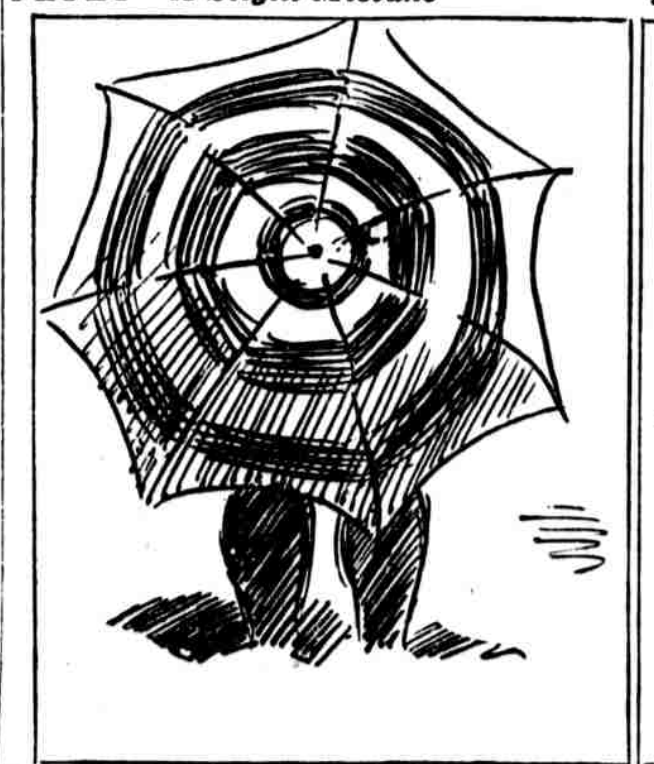
SCHOOL DAYS



PETEY—A Slight Mistake



GASOLINE ALLEY—Getting Solid With Walt



Understanding
 THEIR eyes met and held for a moment in the half light, and then Harkness bent forward and kissed her on the lips.

"Good-night."

He felt her fingers clutch tight at his hands, and then relax. "Good-night—Jimmy."

She stepped from the cab, and Harkness gave the man the address of his flat. As the cab started off he saw that she was still standing on the pavement, watching it.

Love! As he leaned back he wondered why people called love the greatest thing in the world. It was the destroyer, a destroyer more powerful than death. He had taken little Lois, whose life had hitherto been like a cup of champagne, all verve and sparkle, and made her a woman saddened and heart-broken.

He felt a great pity for Lois as he reflected on it. And pity is akin to love.

Constance took Audrey home in the brightness of the morning following on Harkness' last night at the Eros, and during the whole of the journey down to Sevensons hardly a dozen words were exchanged between them. At the gate of the cottage Aunt Ella met them, and her kind eyes had a question in them as they looked from Constance to Audrey and back again.

"Audrey stayed last night with me," said Constance, briefly. "You had her wire?"

"Yes," Aunt Ella was obviously uneasy. She could read the tragedy written in her sister's eyes, could see the marks which agony had left on Audrey's face, and she feared more than she dared admit even to herself.

They went inside and Aunt Ella diffidently suggested that a cup of coffee might be refreshing after the mild journey. It was brought, and after the maid had left the room Constance said very quietly to Aunt Ella:

"Audrey has discovered all about the Eros, Ella."

Aunt Ella put down her cup. She thought that Constance might have spared her in the presence of Audrey. She did not immediately understand that Constance was afraid of Audrey, was afraid of lighting this matter out alone with her daughter, but wanted her sister's quiet but efficient support. Aunt Ella ventured on a timid observation.

"It would have been better to have told her at first."

Constance nodded. Audrey got to her feet, as though to leave the room, but Constance put out her hand.

"Don't go, Audrey," she said. "Your aunt knows everything. Constance said: 'Ella, will you tell Audrey what you know of the Eros? It might be better than if I told her.'"

Aunt Ella wiped her spectacles. These somewhat tense situations were not her natural atmosphere. She had been made for the quiet backwaters of life, where a burned cake or a spoiled joint of meat was the greatest trouble, yet, somehow, as Constance, with all her weariness patent in her expression, surrendered the affair to her, she felt a strange stirring of her mother's, a still, quiet throbbing of gentle confidence in her heart.

She spoke very softly and carefully, and in every word was the ring of truth. She told Audrey of the starting of the Eros, of how it had gradually lifted itself in the social scale and moved to the house in South Audley street; told of her mother's struggles and her bitter fight to keep the faint of reckless gambling from the club.

Although Aunt Ella did not realize it, the story was cleverly related. While she did not hide anything, it yet showed the Eros as a monument to the credit of Constance instead of a reproach. As the story was unfolded Audrey began to wonder if she had judged her mother harshly. Yet she felt she must ask one question when Aunt Ella had finished.

"But why was everything—hidden from me?"

"They knew what she meant by everything," Harkness was covered by that, as well as the Eros.

Constance answered a timid question.

"Because I was a coward, Audrey. I had wanted you to be untouched by all this; I knew you thought me better than I am; and I was afraid, as for Harkness, I speak of him without any intent to hurt your feelings. When he came in I knew at once that the affair with him could not and must not continue. At the moment I was unable to see my way clearly. I accepted him as a stranger while I thought the thing over. In the meantime—you know what happened and what he did."

The lie sounded as truthful as Aunt Ella's story had sounded. Audrey bent her head.

"There is nothing more to tell me?" she asked quietly.

"There can be nothing else, dear, can there?"

All three of them were silent, and during that silence Audrey thought swiftly. Her mother had erred, perhaps, but only erred in not telling her what was she to blame for? Beyond that, after all, Constance had done it all for her, had stooped, if she had stooped, Harkness might be lifted higher. And tremendous decision had been thrust on her mother at the moment of that meeting with Harkness. If, in the stress of it, she had chosen the wrong course, she was entirely to blame.

Audrey came across and kissed Constance gently.

"Mamma, I am sorry I made you unhappy. Please don't blame me, you have nothing at all of the world, and expected to find it filled with children. You see really was only a child when I left the convent, I knew of men and women. I only had my own, child-standard to judge people by. I could not allow for things, and a tolerance for other people which comes with experience. But now I am beginning to see the world in a clearer light. I realize that life is not a game, but something very real. Audrey's voice faltered. "I'm not a child any longer, mamma."

Constance looked down at Constance for a moment, saw the tears which swam in her mother's eyes, and abruptly turned and went out of the room.

The morning shattered on to lunch. Constance busied herself in the kitchen, and later Audrey came down.

By King



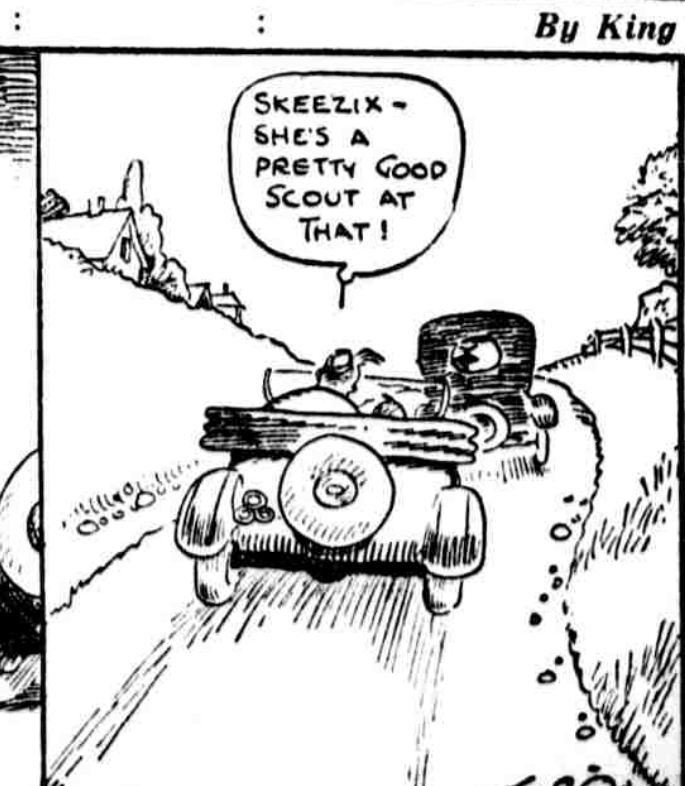
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