

# THE MELODY GIRL

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Beryl decided that Tommy was right. They'd best stop and talk. "Well," Tommy invited as she still hesitated after the car was comfortably parked in the shade. She faced him. Her voice showed how wretched she felt. "Shall I let you have both barrels at once, Tommy?" she asked. "Sure, go ahead." "It's pretty tough. Sure you can take it?"

Of course, Shoot! Beryl drew in her breath. "I can't get Irene back for you," she said. "She's married." Tommy just wilted. He didn't say a word or make a move—he just wilted. Neither spoke for a long time. Tommy's voice was hollow when he did look at Beryl and say dully: "Tell me about it."

She told him all she knew and was tempted to add what she thought, but appreciated the futility of it. She might as well tell him that he was lucky to be alive as to tell him that she was married. It was a comfort to have a daughter like Irene—one who could be obliging. It would be a little thing for Beryl to acknowledge her fault as readily as Irene had done and write to her sister.

As usual, her argument with her mother was of short duration. Mrs. Everett, thinking it over, felt that she had not made the situation any better for Irene. She came in softly the last thing before she went to bed and brought a tray of light refreshments for Beryl. "Are you sure you're well," she asked. Beryl nodded.

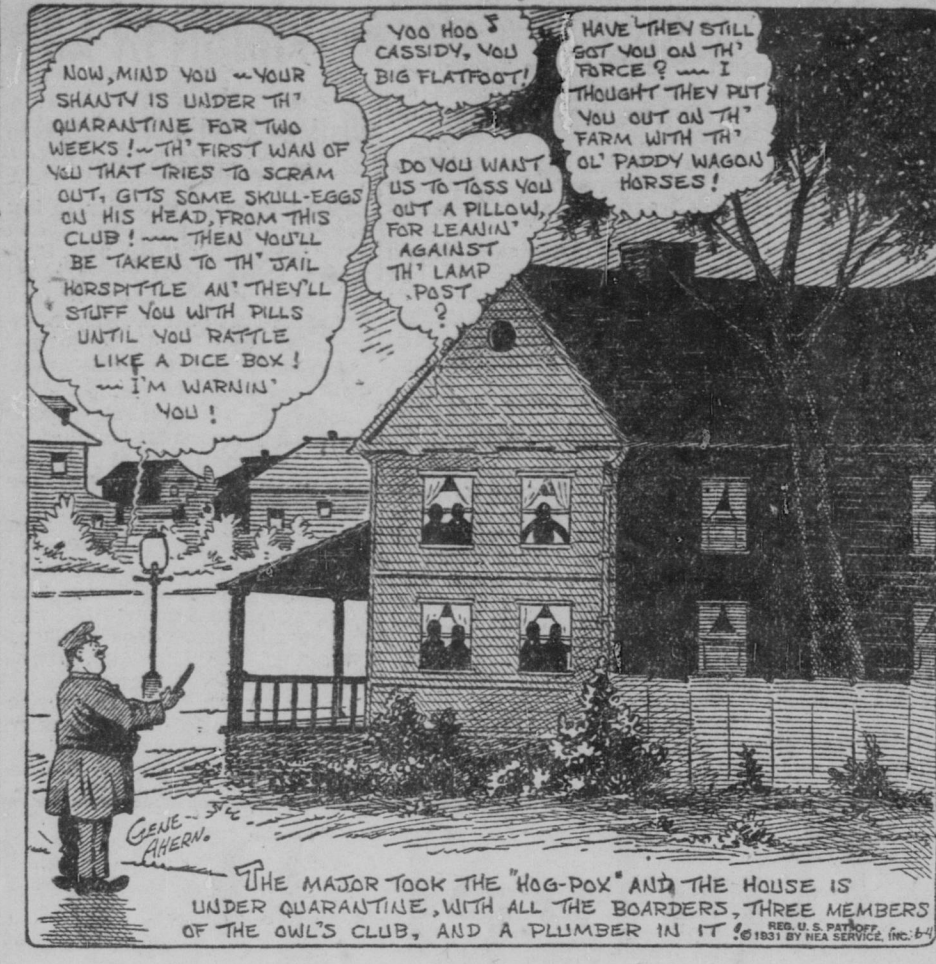
"I wish you wouldn't quarrel with me," her mother said forlornly. "It's hard to have a child get married and go away. Irene didn't mean the cross words she said. It was just temper and she was sorry right away." "Poor little Irene..." But Beryl hadn't been thinking of her sister—she was thinking of something that frightened her.

When she had spoken her mind to Mr. Hoffman, he knew that he'd better look after Tommy or answer to a virago. "I don't believe you do or not," Irene informed her. "We're married. Maybe you won't believe that, either, so I'll bring the marriage certificate home to show you." And you can't mother to pack my best things right away. We're leaving early in the morning for Oakdale.

She put down the telephone without waiting for a reply from Beryl. She had seen Prentiss coming. "I was talking with Beryl," she said to him sweetly. "I want her to break the news gently to mother." "You're a thoughtful girl," Prentiss said soberly. "I know I'm going to be a happy man, Irene."

She smiled at him. "You wouldn't mind taking some flowers to mother, would you?" she asked. "As a peace offering?" And so she got her orchids, with a bunch of roses for her mother. Beryl was not at home when the bridal couple arrived there. She had a battle royal with her mother, who stoutly denied any previous knowledge of Irene's plans. After that she went to find Tommy.

Beryl didn't believe that Irene had told Prentiss about her engagement to Tommy Wilson, but it would do no good to interfere now. Perhaps it wouldn't have helped anyway. If Prentiss believed Irene loved him he'd say she had the right to break her engagement to Tommy. Beryl realized that her own interest in Tommy might have confused her sense of values. She even wondered if she hadn't hurried this blow by trying to help him.



## FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS

