

Today's Short Story

# AFTER THE CONCERT

By Alma and Paul Ellerbe

IT was during a concert in the Metropolitan Opera House. One of those Sunday night performances when they give you a sort of musical combination salad composed of assorted choppings from operas.

Stephanie, a beginning music teacher, and Francis, a beginning doctor, often came to them, because neither she nor he had much money. They were both extremely fond of music, and these Sunday night affairs were inexpensive. Stephanie sat between two vacant seats. One of them was Francis' and the other her aunt's, who had developed a headache and been unable to come. Francis was a lamb, about including her in things like this, and the little old lady was as fond of music as they were.

She was supposed to be chaperoning Stephanie here in New York, though they lived a couple of miles apart. Francis himself had no doubt attended by this time to the patient who had telephoned just as they started, and should be joining her now at any moment. It was rather an event for Francis to have a patient. It was still only a matter of weeks since he had acquired an office.

SOMEbody was singing "Caro Nome," from "Rigoletto," and the worn cadences slipped through Stephanie's mind almost without registering; she had heard it too often. She thought, instead, about Francis. She thought they were as predestined for marriage as a couple of homing pigeons for the barn. It was depressing. Each, from the other's point of view, was so entirely eligible; so nice; so suitable; so presentable. Did she love him? She wished she knew. She was fond of him and he loved her— which, of course, wasn't enough—not by a blamed sight. But there was no other reason on earth why not, so she supposed that unquestionably, eventually, they would. Yes, it was depressing. She certainly hadn't meant to get married like this. She had meant to get married romantically, adventurously, at the end of a whirlwind courtship. In spite of her knowledge of music, she was still pretty young—as, indeed, was Francis.

THE tripping cadences of "Caro Nome" having come to an end, she looked around her. It was the intermission. Audiences interested in her. She hesitated, picked out of this one nice, suitable, presentable young man and comparing them with Francis—considerably, as a rule, to his advantage. Wondering, first about this one and then about that, if she had been in love with him, whether she could have been happy with him.

That was a kind of daring and had a good bit of a kick in it. It also cheered her up greatly about Francis, making her realize anew how attractive he was. She had not, however, noticed the young man at the other end of the tenth row until an usher brought her a program with words pencilled in its blank spaces. He explained that they were a young man's words and he had requested that she read them.

Then she noticed him attentively and met his eyes looking attentively at her. At that distance she rather liked him. Intelligent looking, forceful, an individual. Not run-of-the-mill. Not just like everybody else. There were so many nice young men in the world who were just like everybody else. At first she thought, naturally, that he must be some one she knew. And then she saw he wasn't, and froze him ever so slightly and read what he had written.

"I HAVE met that girl in the row left, just once. You can look at her and see how nice she is." Stephanie looked; the girl was nice, "and that she'd never say anything in a thousand years you wanted to hear." Stephanie looked again and judged it to be true. "I was about to get up and go talk to her when suddenly I thought: Why don't I go talk to that other girl, who would have something to say I'd want to hear? Just because I didn't happen to meet her that time at Bill Weatherbee's cocktail party? You were there, but nobody introduced us. Do you remember?" Stephanie remembered the cocktail party, but not the young man.

"I decided that wasn't a good enough reason. If you agree with me (my name's Gilmer Parkinson, Jr., a senior in a reputable coffee importer here in New York and I work for him) raise your hand to your hair, and I'll come on over. If you don't, just don't raise your hand to your hair, and I won't. I'll even apologize if you want me to—though I won't quite know what it's for."

"YOU know perfectly well what it's for," Stephanie said, when he had come on over and she had duly extracted the apology and he was sitting beside her in her aunt's place. "What you did was green and silly and bad manners. Besides, it was dangerous, because I might have bored you to death; or what's far more serious, you might have bored me."

She could say it safely, because now that he was there, she could tell at a glance that he wasn't boring. He laughed ungrudgingly. "True enough," he said, sitting there as if they had always known each other, emanating somehow his essential niceness and sensibleness and trustworthiness (he was as easy to let about as a dog)—"true enough, but true. It is impossible to live without running risks. It is impossible to have any fun without deliberately increasing them. Think of marriage, for instance." "It's just what I was thinking of," Stephanie said soberly, and looked up, and there was Francis. "Dr. Francis Bannister," she said, "my oldest New York friend" (she hadn't been in the city very long) "and Gilmer Parkinson, my newest."

AND when Francis had got himself settled, "I acquired him," she said, because she greatly wanted to see how Francis would take it, "through this," and showed Francis the other man's note. Francis took it very badly. He was grumpy. "I—er—I see," he said, handing back the scribbled-up program. "Quite like the Arabian Nights, isn't it? Quite romantic." He sat, plainly, in the seat of the censor, and he disapproved. For the first time since she had known him, Francis forgot his manners. Francis—something unbecomingly like a red danger flag inside

of Stephanie; something beat up a loud alarm—Francis was stuffy! This was the moment she had been waiting for. She had thought it would probably come suddenly, unexpectedly, as the result of something like this, and help her decide. Her heart began to pound. "I can't marry a stuffy man!" "I can't," and asked Mr. Gilmer Parkinson Jr. to go along back to the apartment with her and Francis after the concert was over, so that she would see how far Francis' stuffiness would

It went all the way. It stalked along beside them like a specter, up Broadway and along W. 47th-st. to the door of the funny old commercial building on the top floor of which Stephanie had the odd, commodious, delightful quarters in which she taught a few intelligent pupils and lived the life she had always dreamed about, under the somewhat distant chaperonage of her aunt. Something inside of her was gripped and hurt and relieved and angry and several other things all at once.

"I have suspected this about him from the beginning," she thought, "and now I know. He'd be doing my deciding for me from the start onward! He'd be living my life for me! A drunkard can be cured; a murderer can repent and you can give your life, magnificently, to helping him live it down; but stuffy men will be stuffy millions of years after they are dead, on their little pink cloudbanks, right alongside of your own, in Heaven, Golly!" Stephanie thought (somewhat brokenheartedly) of extending her key toward the lock of the downstairs door, "but I'm glad I found out in time!" and thrust the key into the lock and began to turn it as one opening the door upon a new era in her life.

SHE never entered it—that new era. She opened the door and entered the vestibule of the dark, empty old building in which hers were the only living quarters, and Francis and young Parkinson entered with her. None of them had the other two men who had entered also as silently as shadows until just as the door was clicking shut behind the five of them. There was a little dim light in the vestibule, enough to show them the men had automatics and wore masks. "Stick 'em up and keep quiet," one of them advised, "and you'll be all right."

But Francis wouldn't. Her sense of disappointment in him; her heartick feeling that at last she knew that she couldn't marry him; and that she almost wished she hadn't found out, increased as he swung, furiously but ineptly, at the man nearest him.

"YOU fool!" she thought angrily, holding her own hands high above her head. "You dub!" And then the man dropped him almost out of hand with a short, upward curving blow. She went sick all over at sight of the blood, and wavered a little with her arms in the air like that. There was a moment when she wasn't quite following things. She didn't know what had dropped the man who had struck him across Francis' inert form until she saw young Parkinson dropping the other one, too—charging him, head down, like a ram, between the roaring, fire-spitting automatic, which roared and spit a split second too late. Parkinson's head caught the man squarely in the diaphragm and laid him on top of the other two writhing in dry, spasmodic, agonized attempts to get back his wind.

"COUPLE of amateurs, I guess," young Parkinson said, collecting their guns. "You might step out and call a cop." But the cop didn't need calling. He was there before any one could step out, gun in hand and shoulder against the door. The old lock gave before the heave and bulk of him, he stepped inside and normally resumed its sway.

When Dr. Francis Bannister came back to consciousness his head was in Stephanie's lap, where she sat plump on the dirty floor, second-best dress and all; the blood had all been carefully wiped away by her handkerchief and one in his outside coat pocket, and she was saying to him: "Oh, darling, I've found out such a lot of things! You're stuffy—just a little bit stuffy, and I'm sorry about that; and you're no sort of a hero, and I'm rather glad; and you're mine, honey, you're mine, and I love you!"

(THE END)

## TECH HOME ECONOMICS COMMITTEES SELECTED

Groups Are to Plan and Conduct Remaining Meetings.

The Home Economics Club of Technical High School has selected committees to plan and conduct the meetings of the group for the remaining meetings of the semester, Miss Hilda Kref, sponsor, announced today.

The membership committee, Joan Pettit, chairman, Emily Jackson, and Jane Goodwin; program committee, Jo Ann Pierpont, chairman, Margate McCrossan, Dorothy Spocke, and Arlyne Bonewitz; social committee, Delores Newmeyer, chairman, Eleanor Wilkinson, Margaret Ten Eyck, Mary Catherine Jones and Ruth Seak; music committee, Alice Heldibrant, chairman, Fran Churchill; welfare committee, Helen Dean Robins, chairman, Nora Boyce, Mable McCord, Marie Pierson; publicity committee, Maxine Chaille, chairman, Mary Cathrine Day, and Edna Joseph.

## UNION NAMES LEADERS

Workers Co-operative at Real Silk Chooses Officers.

Officers of the Workers Co-operative Union of Real Silk Hosiery Mills, formerly the Employees Mutual Benefit Association, were announced today.

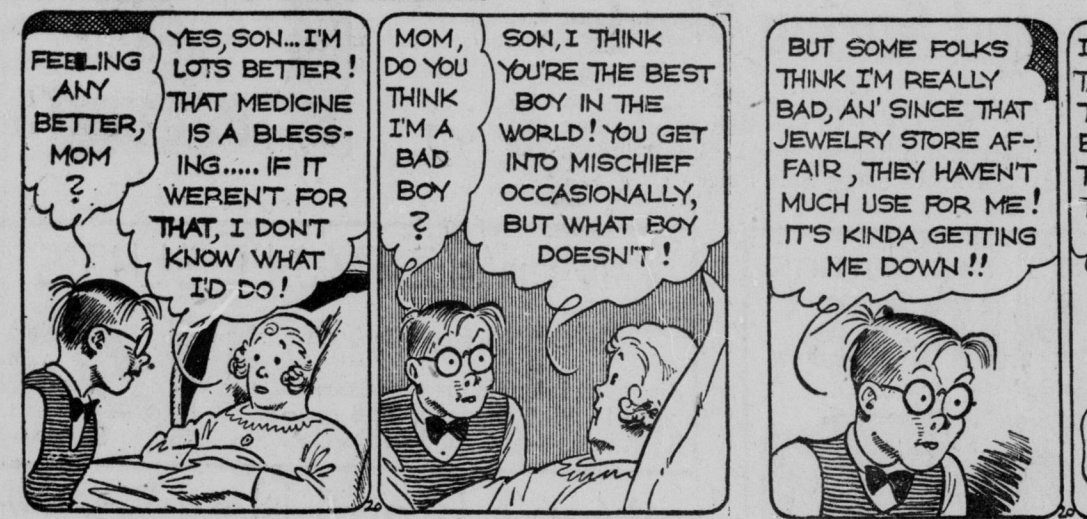
They are Isadore Krieger, president; Walter Roth, vice president; Clayton L. Rogers, secretary; Frank M. Smith, assistant secretary, and Forest Badders, treasurer.

## OUR BOARDING HOUSE

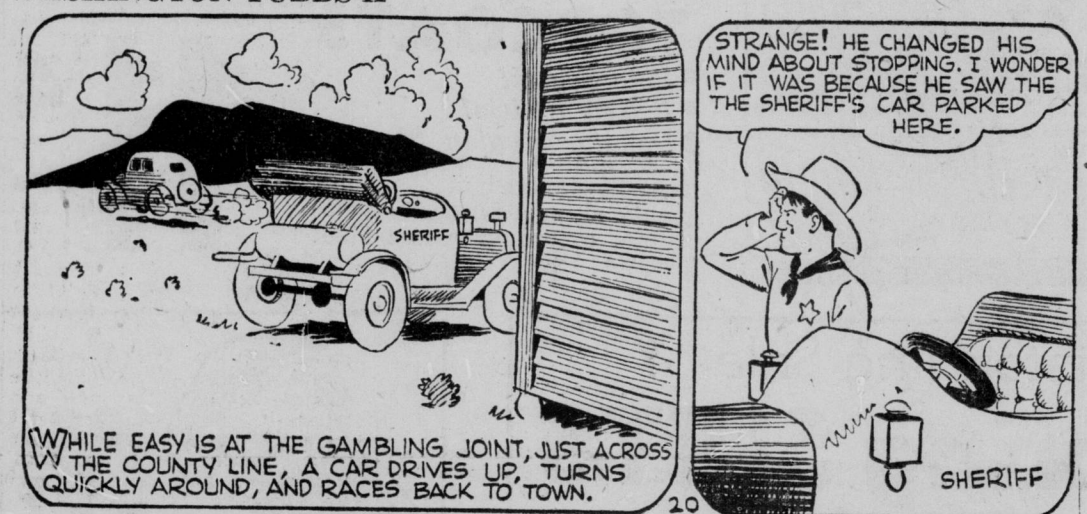
—By Ahern



## FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



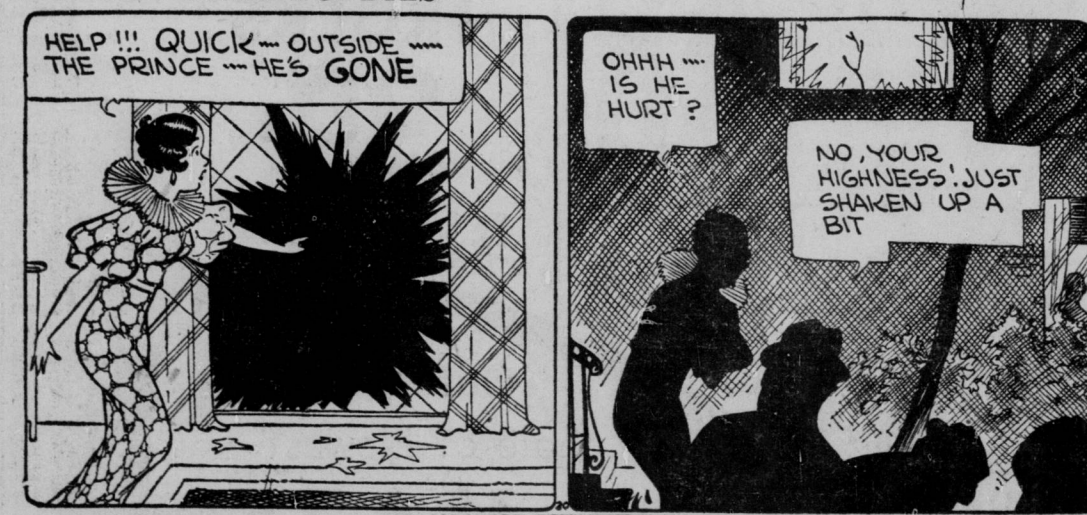
## WASHINGTON TUBBS II



## ALLEY OOP



## BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



## THE TARZAN TWINS



## OUT OUR WAY

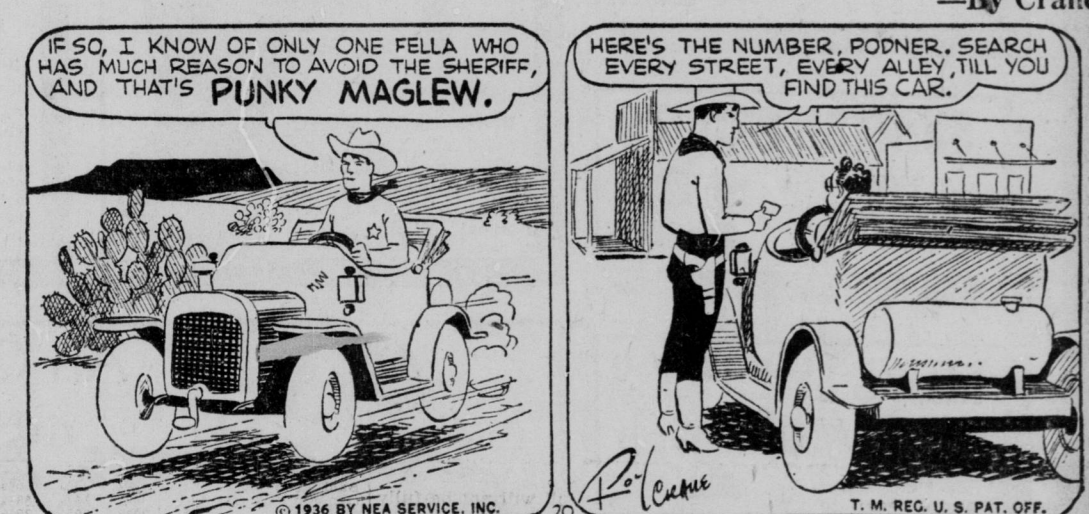
—By Williams



## THE HOUSEBREAKER



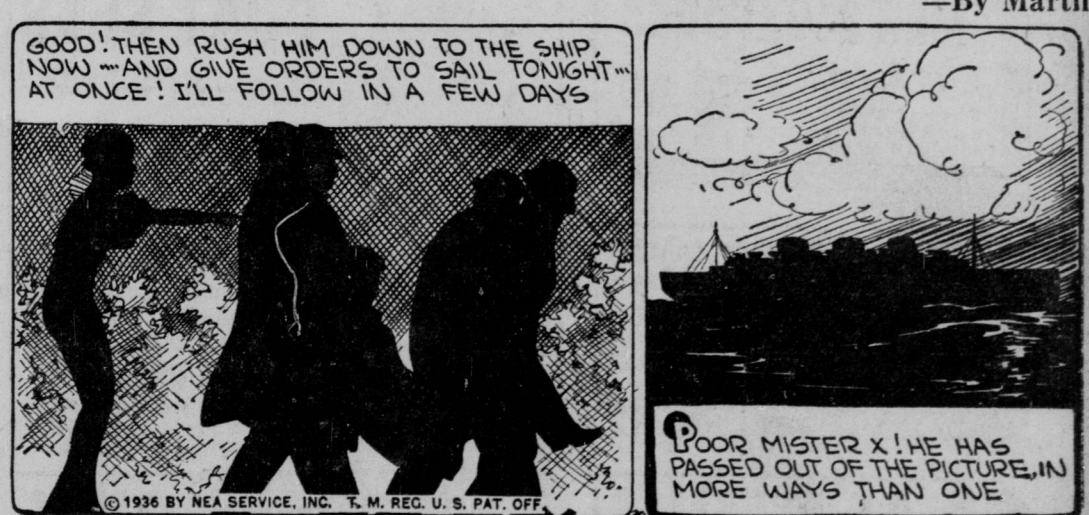
## THE HOUSEBREAKER



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