

Today's Short Story

## THE PRETENDERS

By Helen Fuseli

THE phone rang three times before Alice could rub the sleep away from her eyes and gather strength enough to rouse herself from her cozy bed. Fred, her husband, shouted above the noise of the spray from the bathroom: "Answer that, will you, dear?"

"Why, Bill Trevers!" Alice exclaimed, fully awake with the recognition of Bill's voice over the phone. "Where are you and when did you arrive? Wonder you wouldn't let us know beforehand, you old rascal you!" She called to Fred, who poked his wet head out the crack of the bathroom door: "It's Bill Trevers."

"Tell him to meet me for lunch at the Blake—Gee! Old Bill in town actually, after all these years—the Blake at o're sharp. Tell him I'm all wet or I'd come to the phone."

Alice hung up the receiver and danced a merry pattern across the bedroom floor.

"He's coming up tonight, too, for dinner and says he's all set for a blowout—wants to see the town and do things. Says to draw out our best bib and tucker and prepare for fun!" Alice called with glee.

"CAN'T we find a girl for him? More fun with a foursome. Besides, we ought to see it to that Bill gets tied up—he's too dangerous unleashed like this," she added.

Fred, strolling into the room scrambling into his vest, grinned broadly. "The little matchmaker at it again?" he questioned good-naturedly, "but you never could make any dent on Bill. He's just another of those stubborn bachelors. Just think, we haven't seen Bill since we were married. I always thought he was kind of sweet on you once, but too loyal a chap to break in on his best friend."

"Nonsense," commented Alice, "why we were all just pals together—but I've got to find a girl for him tonight and I believe I know just the one, too."

THE Harlows had been married for five years, but the honeymoon had never ended. Their friends joked with them, saying that their devotion was a pose—that no two people could live so peacefully and blissfully together without one single scrap—that it couldn't be done. But it was done, for Fred and Alice were not posing. They were really married in the true sense of the word. They did not tread on each other's privacy; they practiced courtesy and consideration toward each other; they respected each other's wishes and curbed their selfishness. In fact they were in love and five years had not rubbed the bright luster from their romance.

"Well—who's the chosen one to be?" Fred asked finally.

"Nan Pierson," answered Alice, "she's just the one I've decided. She never gets much of a chance to have any fun. She's stuck up there—"

"Who's she? I don't remember any one by that name," interrupted Fred.

THE lives up at the top of this building, in one of those tiny roof apartments they have turned over to business women. She has done some sewing for me since she lost her fine job as a designer down town, and she has been frightfully up against it. She makes beautiful things—that is, for other people—poor dear, she never takes any time to make pretty things for herself. I'll see her after breakfast and get her to join us."

"Anything you say is all right with me," Fred agreed. "Gee! It will be great to have a reunion with Bill again. I hear he has made a stack of coin since we last saw him. Lucky devil!"

Six o'clock seemed determined never to roll around to Alice. After breathless confidences with Nan Pierson and the sorrowing about to sort out her most becoming costume, the excitement of arraying Nan in some of Alice's finery, she glanced at the clock, certain that the hands had stopped. But at last she heard a familiar key fumbling at the door and a cheery voice call, "Where is she—that girl of yours, Fred?"

Alice fairly ran to meet them in the hallway. Bill lifted her in his strong arms until her lips met his. "Oh, you two kids! Am I glad to be with you again?" Bill Trevers exclaimed, swinging her around like a small child. His great body seemed to fill the entire hallway and his breezy, wholesomeness Western spirit bubbled with good nature and prosperity.

Questions and answers were baited back and forth between the three for a space of an hour when the bell buzzed timidly.

"Oh, that's Nan—the girl for you tonight, Fred," Alice called over her shoulder as she hurried to the door.

A tall, slim, dark-eyed girl trailed Alice into the living room. Fred's first glimpse of her registered pleasure—she's a knockout, he thought swiftly.

Bill Trevers closed his large hand over a slender one and smiled cordially into dark, questioning eyes as he said, "Any friend of Alice's is bound to be perfect in my sight."

OH, I'm just tired of pretending. I'm not rich, but poor. Yes, as poor as any girl could be who has lost a good designer's job and is trying to make ends meet by sewing for other women." And Nan wiped the tears out of her eyes. "I might just as well tell you the truth, for I have lost you anyhow. These clothes aren't mine but Alice's. I can't go on. I haven't a cent and I just received notice to pay my rent or leave. I'm licked. It was like being in fairyland and now it is all ended. I know you hate me."

"Who has any right to say that I'd hate you, young lady? If there's going to be any fairyland around I insist on being the prince. About all I've been so far is a pretty big numbskull."

And Bill's strong arms sheltered Nan's weary shoulders as he leaned forward and kissed away the remaining tears.

## STREET CAR FRANCHISE IS TO BE DISCUSSED

Trackless Trolley Temporary Permit Expired Yesterday.

Terms of a permanent franchise contract for the Indianapolis Railways trackless trolley are to be discussed at a meeting of utility and city officials next week. Hubert S. Riley, Works Board president, has said.

A temporary permit providing for 10 per cent of reconstruction and 5 per cent of resurfacing costs on streets where trackless trolleys operate expired yesterday.

The board approved the reconstruction and resurfacing of 20th-st from Parker-av to Olney-st at an approximate cost of \$30,281 yesterday. The Indiana Railroad is to relocate its track, and Indianapolis Railways is to pay costs as provided under the temporary permit. Property owners are to pay 25 per cent and the remainder.

Catholics Re-elect President

SOUTH BEND, Ind., March 21.—Dr. Henry G. Schumacher, Cleveland, was retained as president of the National Catholic Conference in elections concluding a two-day meeting yesterday.

## OUR BOARDING HOUSE

By Ahern



## FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



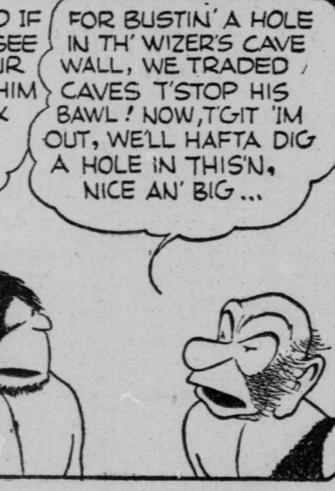
—By Blosser

## WASHINGTON TUBBS II



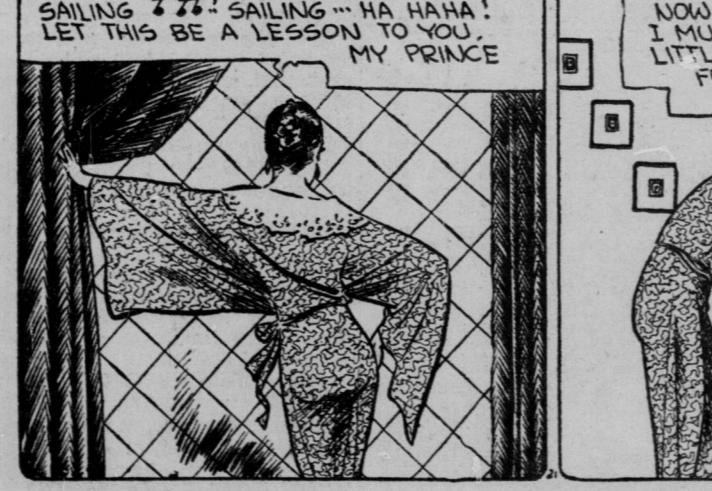
—By Crane

## ALLEY OOP



—By Hamlin

## BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



—By Martin

## THE TARZAN TWINS



—By Edgar Rice Burroughs

THE END

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