

Today's Short Story

BORN BARNSTORMER

By Sloan Taylor



It was late in July, and Phillip wondered why none of the bootleggers had come out to talk to him over with him. Barney had told him the city was a gold mine for any pilot willing to fly the stuff.

Phillip was willing enough to fly their booze. He had no pious compunctions about the prohibition law. He liked a drink himself.

Phillip had been barnstorming around the country for four or five years—ever since he got out of the Army. His worldly wealth to show for it when he talked to Barney that spring was a jittery old Standard and about \$200 in cash.

Time was getting to be, he told Barney, when he ought to set down. He needed a new ship. But there was no possibility of his barnstorming himself for a new ship with the old Standard, powered by a Hiss with less than 100 hours left in it.

"Then flying the booze," Barney had advised him, "is your best bet. Out there west of town, where I been hopping the stuff, you can get some farmer to let you use his field to fly passengers. You won't even make coffee-and-cake money at it, but you hang on, and before you know it, some of the liquor mob will be out to line you up."

"Here—," he wrote an address on a slip of paper and handed it to Phillip. "That's a speak where I hang out. Come around in a couple of weeks and look me up."

PHILLIP flew the old Standard to the city, where Barney had found fortune. He found that Barney was right about a field. He located a suitable spot on a good highway, with an open shed in one corner near the road where he could hang his ship.

After he opened shop, Phillip began to make regular trips to the speakeasy to look for Barney. The bartenders knew Barney, and they knew he was out of town, but none could say when he would be back.

As the weeks of waiting passed, Phillip's little cash reserve melted away alarmingly. It looked like he'd have to hit the barnstormer's trail again with the old Standard.

He was leaning on the gate at the field one afternoon, moodily contemplating the gloomy prospect, when a sleek limousine pulled up on the other side of the road.

In the car were four men. Phillip looked them over carefully and decided that here was a quartet of the toughest hordes he'd ever seen. He opened the gate and crossed the road.

"INTEREST you gentlemen in a hop?"

The man beside the driver studied the plane a few seconds before answering. "That airplane carry four people?"

"No, that's a three-place job," said Phillip. "Two passengers and the pilot."

"How about four people and a pilot?"

"Well, if you want to charter—"

"Buy."

Phillips told him the name of a manufacturer in the East who was making immediate delivery on a five-place cabin ship for \$25,000.

"Yeah? And what's your cut?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you, mister," said Phillip. "The salesman is an old Army buddy of mine, and he'd slice me in for around \$3500 salesman's commission. Yeah, and if you want me to go to the factory and ferry it back for you, they'd pay me another couple of hundred."

The man in the front seat knocked the ash off his cigar and said to the driver, "Go ahead, Tony." Tony got the car in gear and the limousine stepped away.

THE limousine again stopped beside the fence the next afternoon. The same driver, Tony, and a solid-muscled man with a pock-marked face got out.

"You clicked with the boss yesterday, Tony told Phillip. "He says you look like you're on the level, and he wants you to buy that airplane if you'll do a little job driving it for him."

"Sure, I'll fly it for him."

"Okay. We're ready to go when you are."

Three days later, the people at Valencia Aircraft, dazzled by the \$25,000 bill Tony counted out to them, had one of their CHW-5 models on the factory apron and gassed for the hop to Chicago. With a check for \$3750 and a neat roll of bills totalling \$250 in the breast pocket of his windbreaker, Phillip got behind the controls and told Tony they were ready to go.

Darkness was settling over the country when Phillip reached his field outside of the city, where he saw a car standing beside the shed. A man got out when the Valencia taxied across the field, and took Tony and Solly aside for a whispered conference. Then he got back in the machine and drove off.

"That was Nick," said Tony. "He'll be back later. Now, come in the shed and I'll tell you what it's all about. You got a light in here?"

PHILLIP picked up a lantern and took it outside to light it. There was too much gas and oil inside to risk striking a match. When he returned with the light, Tony spread a road map on the top of a gas drum. His finger traced a line down across Indiana to a town on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River.

"That's where we're going. Me 'nd Solly 'nd Nick 'nd you. There'll be another guy meet us there."

"Okay. I know that country well. I barnstormed all through there. That place you want to go is a mining town, isn't it?"

"Yeah, yeah," said Tony impatiently. "Now get this: You're to wait in the airplane while we pull off the job. Take about an hour. Then you take us back across the river and land at a place just

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

With Major Hoople



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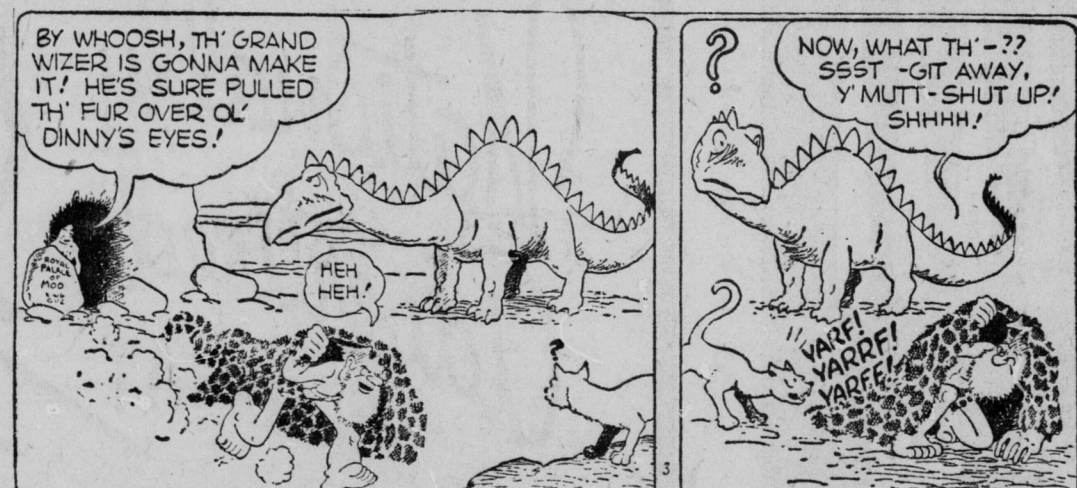
FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—



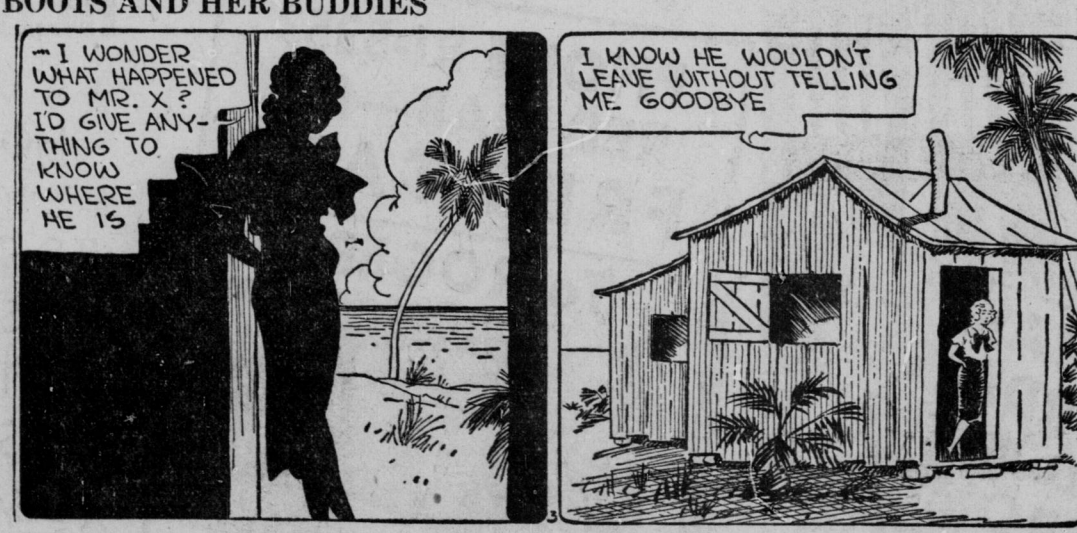
WASHINGTON TUBBS II



ALLEY OOP



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



THE TARZAN TWINS



OUT OUR WAY

—By Williams



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