

Today's Short Story

SPARKPLUG

By Shane O'Neill



If you are young, male and six feet two, with very definite ideas about what plans a certain young woman should make concerning her life, it comes as a rude shock to find that your ideas have been disregarded, not to say ignored.

And rude shocks of that nature are more than liable to throw you completely off balance. That's why Matt Clark made the great mistake of saying, with what he considered patient tolerance, "Now, Dot, I respect your intelligence, and all that, but on this question you just don't know what you're talking about, honey."

Dot regarded him narrowly. She saw the aforementioned six feet two, attractively sprawled on the sofa beside her. She saw a mounting red in the well-modulated Clark cheeks, and willful purpose in the usually smiling blue eyes that stared back at her.

And, what was most important, she saw that if she followed her impulse and gave in now, she would be lost forever. It would always be, "Yes, Matt," if she didn't put her foot down. And put it down she did, with a vengeance.

Her voice was sweeter than honey—possibly too sweet. "And just what did the great big strong man think: he was going to do about it?"

THE mounting flush covered all Matt's face.

"Here's what I'm going to do about it. I'm not going to let you do it at all. I forbid you. If you're going to be my wife you aren't going to work, and that's that. We might as well understand it thoroughly before we get married." He raised his hand, as she started to answer.

"Just a minute, Dot. I know the whole story. You went to night school for two years because I had to work late, and you wanted something to do. Now you want something to do with what you've learned. Why waste it? And so forth. Right?"

"Well, you'll have to waste it, either or no offer. I'm not going to have my flane working in a hard-boiled advertising office. It isn't the right atmosphere."

As he concluded, Matt looked satisfied with himself. It was settled now. Then the bombshell broke.

"Of course, it is a little sudden, darling, but I've just discovered something. I'm not going to marry you at all. But you won't miss me. Far from it. I'm going to work at Gill and Buzzel, right in the same office with you. And, unless I'm greatly mistaken, the same colossal conceit that has brought us to a break will be anything but helpful to you in your job. At least I'll have a chance to watch and see."

Her voice took on a hard edge. "And now, I think, you'd better go."

Matt had nothing to say. The red had faded and now he was white. He got his hat, and without turning to look at her again, walked slowly out the door.

THE next three months were sad for both of them. Dot was quick and attractive, and she did get some lucky breaks. From the general stenography office, she graduated by the end of the second month to be Mr. Gill's secretary.

She had a real flair for the business, was conscientious, accurate and fast. And during that time she saw Matt every day, and he saw her, but never a word passed between them. Then she began to worry.

It started one morning when Mr. Gill was having a talk with the copy chief, Jack Bell.

"How's young Clark getting along, Jack?" Dot's heart stopped for a second, and she pretended to be very busy with Mr. Gill's personal file.

"That's a funny thing, skipper. I was just going to talk about him. I don't know what's the matter with him. He can't seem to turn out the kind of stuff the clients will accept. And it isn't as if he didn't have the ability to do it. He just sits and mopes, and then when he does turn to the copy has no zip. When I talk to him about it he turns sulky and argumentative. I'm afraid we'll have to let him go."

The head of the agency considered for a while.

"I don't like to do that. He's good material. Tell you what, Jack, send him in to me. I'll have a talk with him. Send him right away."

As Bell left to get Matt, Dot gathered her papers to leave the office too. She couldn't just couldn't sit there and listen to it. But Mr. Gill stopped her.

"Miss Hennessy, wait a while will you? I want you to be in on this. And then, tall and miserable looking, Matt entered. "Close the door behind you, Clark," the boss said.

"Sit down, son," he continued, "and you, Miss Hennessy, take notes. Now, what seems to be the matter? Bell tells me that your work is going to pieces, and that you won't take advice. What's wrong?"

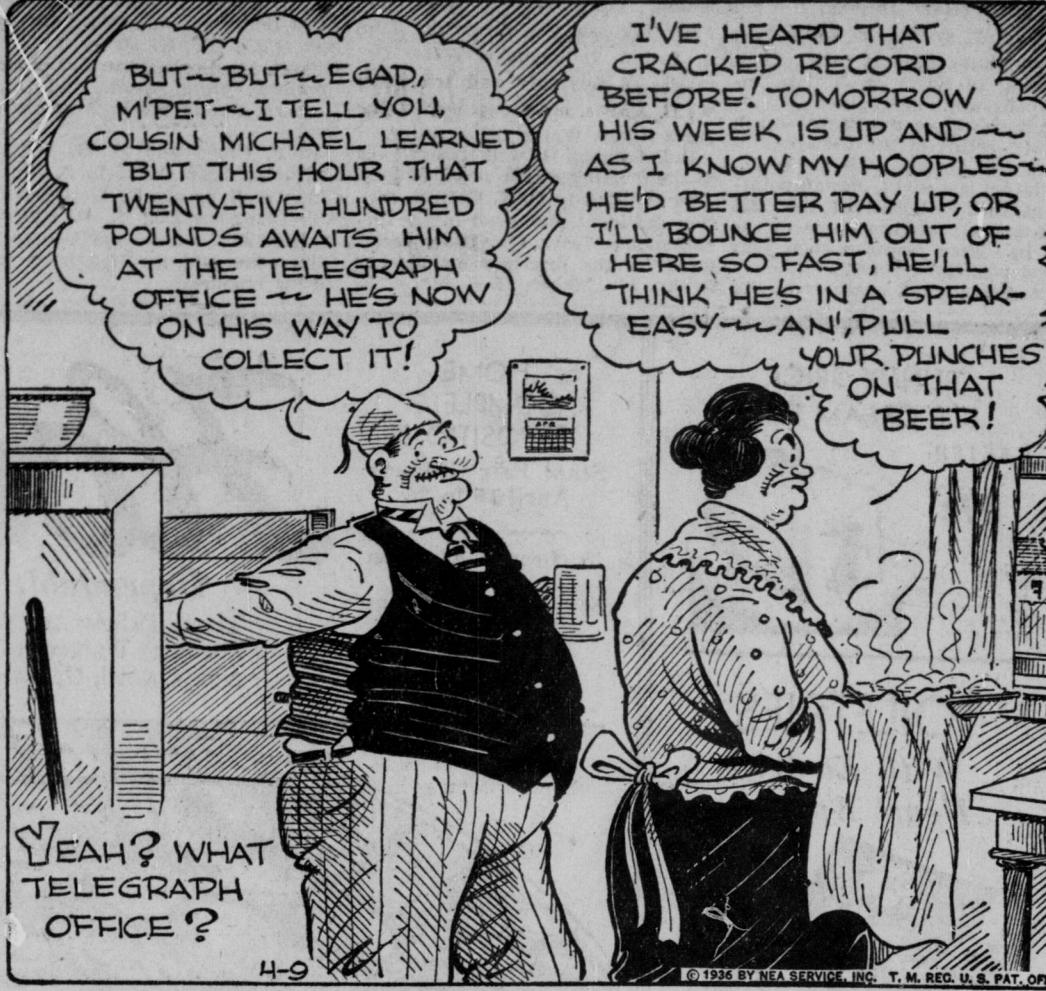
Matt's jaw was set. Called him in to humiliate him in front of her. It never occurred to him that the editor knew nothing of his romance and its break-up. Well, Gill knew what he could do.

"There's nothing the matter with me. Mr. Gill. Nothing the matter with my copy, either. If I got an even break around here there wouldn't be any trouble at all."

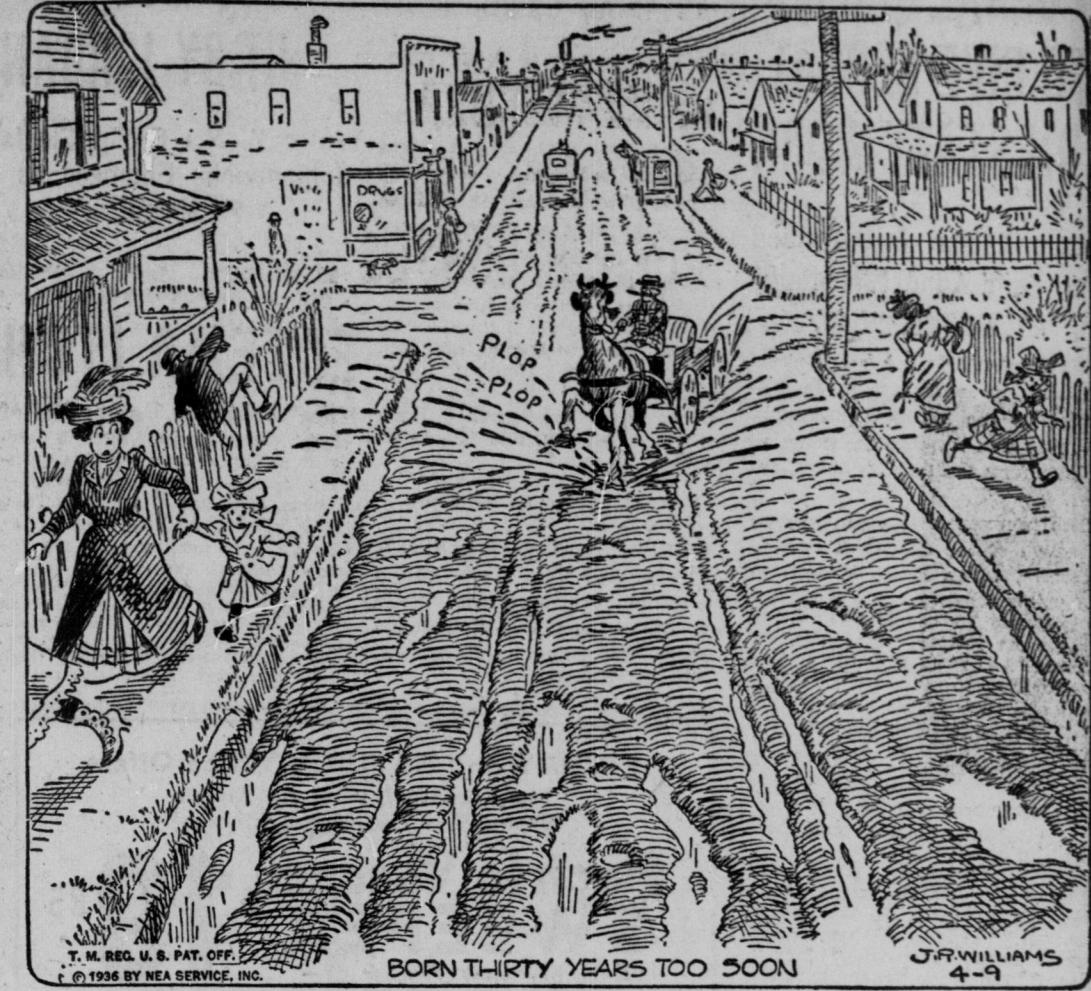
Gill stared sharply at him. "I see, young man," he said softly, "so you don't think we're getting a square break. Well, if I did what I ought to do, I'd tell you to get your

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

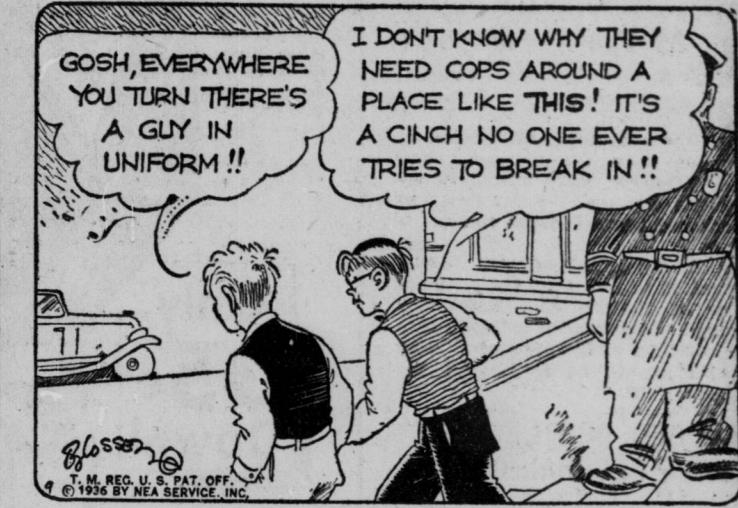
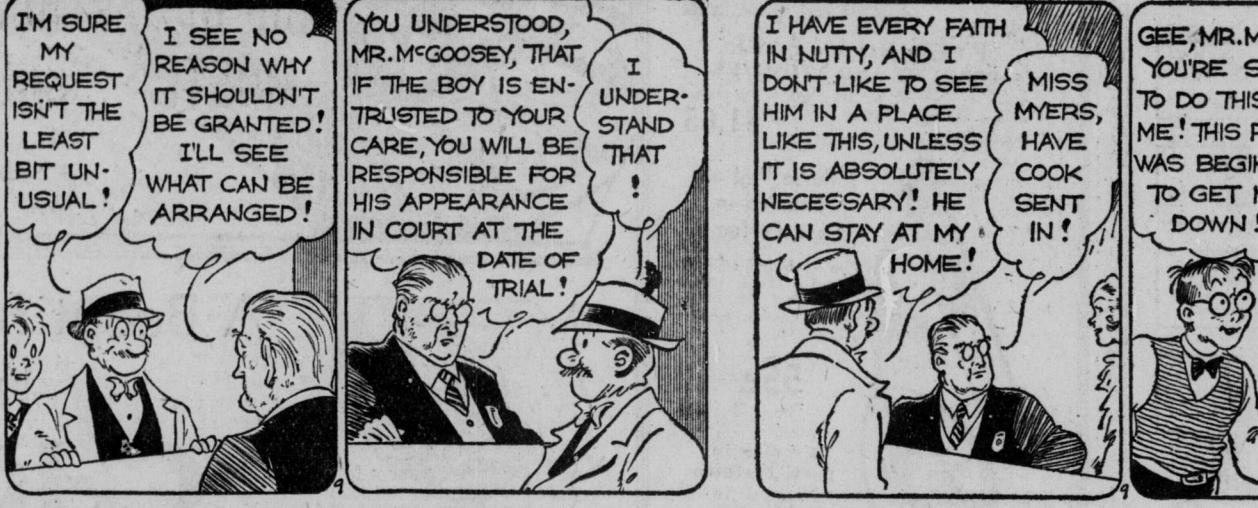
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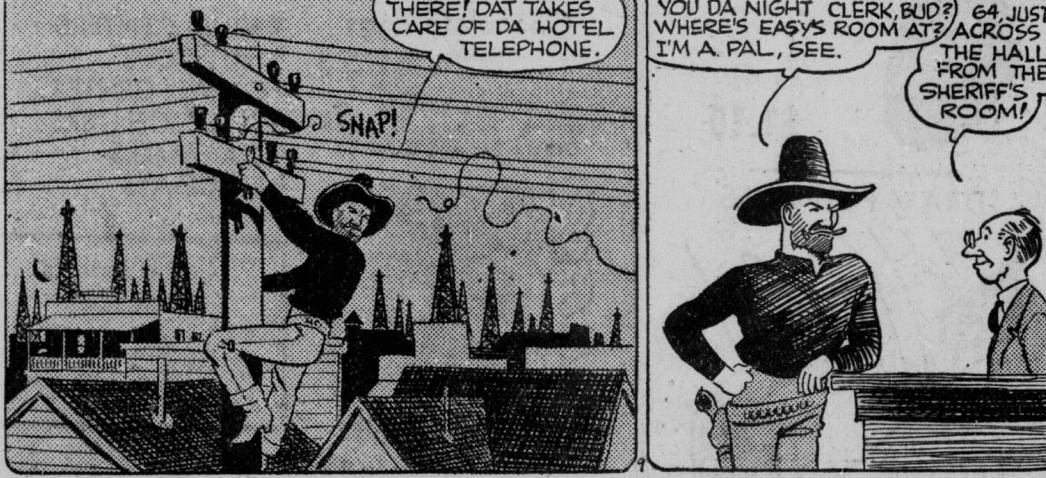
OUT OUR WAY



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