

Today's Short Story

DOUBLE HOUSE

By Alma and Paul Ellerbe



WHEN old Daniel Ruffin built the red brick double house for his two granddaughters, the east side for Elizabeth and the west side for Harriet, he hoped to put Elizabeth's husband, Michael Sherlin, on his mettle, to make him measure up to Harriet's husband, Felix Wayne, who would always present to the world the same conventional authentic front that his side of the house presented.

Daniel Ruffin couldn't be sure about Harriet—fellow like that who, before his marriage, had wandered about over the world writing books for boys, a pipe between his teeth and an Irish setter at his heels.

"He couldn't be sure about Mike, and maybe he wasn't so very sure about Elizabeth, either," Harriet Wayne said to her husband. "She used to give him a good deal of anxiety, you know."

Their parents were dead and their grandfather had brought them up. Harriet had never given anybody any anxiety. Even as a child she had been a round, sober-eyed, slightly dull, conscientious person with a quiet go-aheadness that would take her somewhere. And Elizabeth seemed to be where she wanted to go right then.

Her enjoyment of life had begun after awhile to seem to her grandfather purposeless. He wanted her to settle down to the serious business of living. Then less than a year before his death she married Michael—not exactly the kind of husband to help her do it.

"BUT now that we're going to live here beside each other, it's going to be all right," Harriet said. Harriet was seven years older than Elizabeth and behaved almost as if she were her mother. "The set-up will sort of force them to pattern their lives after ours, don't you think?"

"And goodness knows they need something sensible and forward to pattern after. When we get awine in the spring, they'll have to get some, too, to match up with them. And it will be the same way about porch furniture—and other things."

But it wasn't. The Felix Waynes bought expensive awnings, and the Michael Sherlins did without. They said they liked the sunshine.

"So inexcusably home-made looking," Harriet said to Felix. "Elizabeth has a good color sense, but precious little sense of the fitness of things. You'd think they'd have pride enough to get new things for their new house."

The Michael Sherlins didn't seem to have any pride at all. They didn't seem to think people needed it. They got along without an incredible number of things that the Waynes considered essential.

THEIR heads didn't go down, even after Felix had found out about the silver and he and Harriet had gone over—they felt that it was absolutely their duty to do so—and, at last, expostulated.

The Sherlins knew something was going to happen as the two of them came through the door. Felix went to the hearth and took his place somewhat like Elizabeth thought—a corner in an inquest, his legs a little spraddled, his hands behind him.

Michael Sherlin disliked nearly everything about his brother-in-law, but away down at the bottom of himself he rather liked Felix. He gave him a conversational push now because Felix always needed it.

"Anything wrong?" Mike said. "Well, yes—yes, there is, Mike. 'Spill it,' Mike said disconcertingly, trying to help.

"Well, the fact is—er—I was in at Glidden's today, and—"

Mike and Elizabeth both laughed. "And the Sherlin skeleton came out and did a step or two for you, eh?"

HARRIET's cheek grew pink. "Mike," she said earnestly, "I do think you might have given Felix a chance to help you before you began selling your wedding presents. I really do."

"I'm afraid Felix wouldn't have been very keen to do it, Harriet, if he had known what we were going to do with the money."

"What are you going to do with it?" "Buy a car," Elizabeth said. "In fact, we've bought it."

Her sister stared at her. "But you can't afford it, can you?"

"We couldn't if we paid for it any other way."

"But really, Elizabeth, haven't you any sentiment?"

"For a chest of silver given to us by a stranger?"

"By an old and esteemed friend of your grandfather's."

"Whom we never saw in our lives," Mike said, "and almost certainly never shall see."

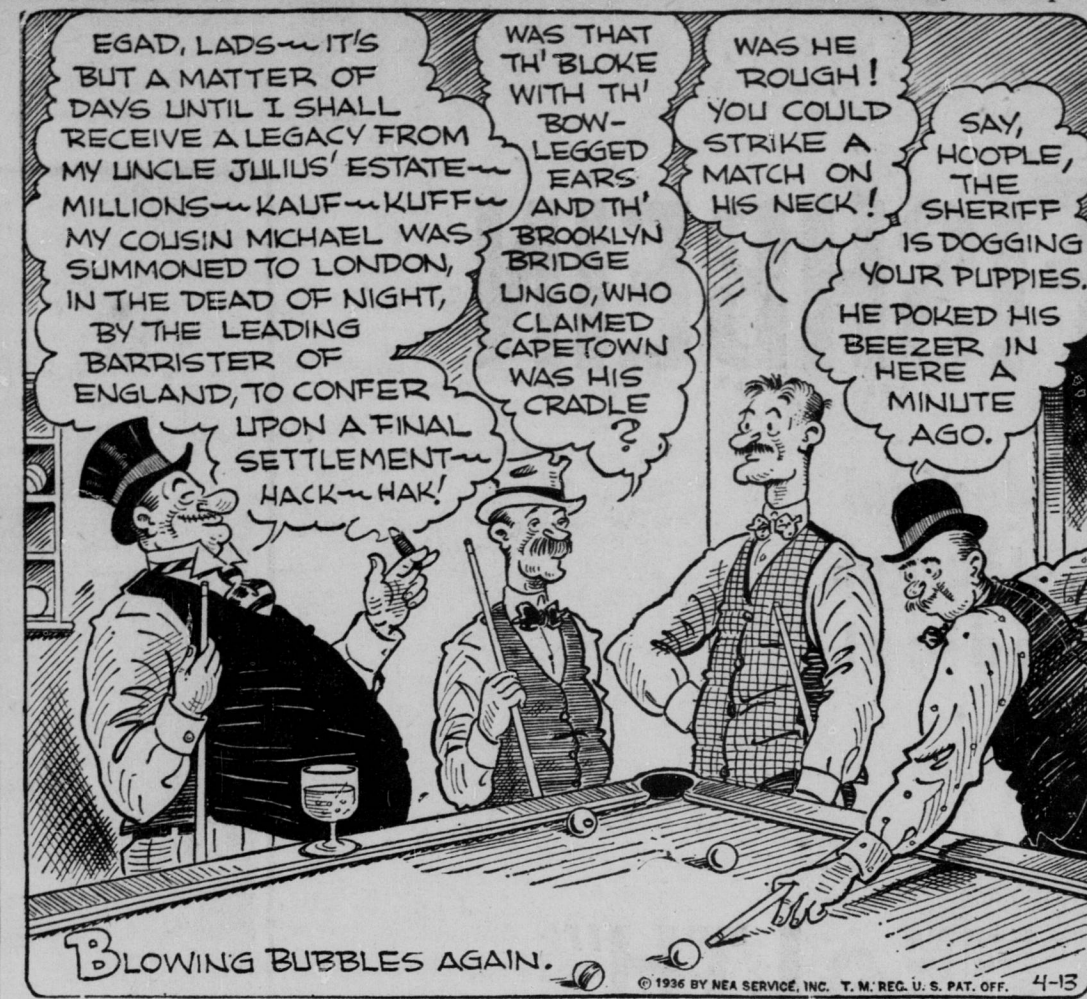
"It isn't likely," Harriet said; "but it's quite possible. And if you do see her, then what will you do?"

"Make her see, I hope, that she's given us all outdoors instead of just something to be locked up in a closet."

"YOU," Felix said with an accent of finality, "don't know Miss Conover."

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

With Major Hoople



BLOWING BUBBLES AGAIN.

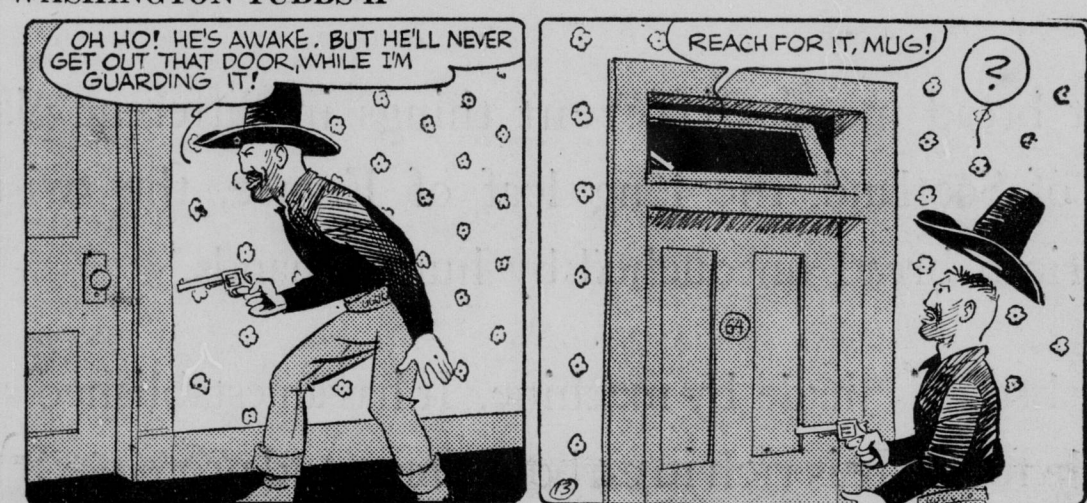
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FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



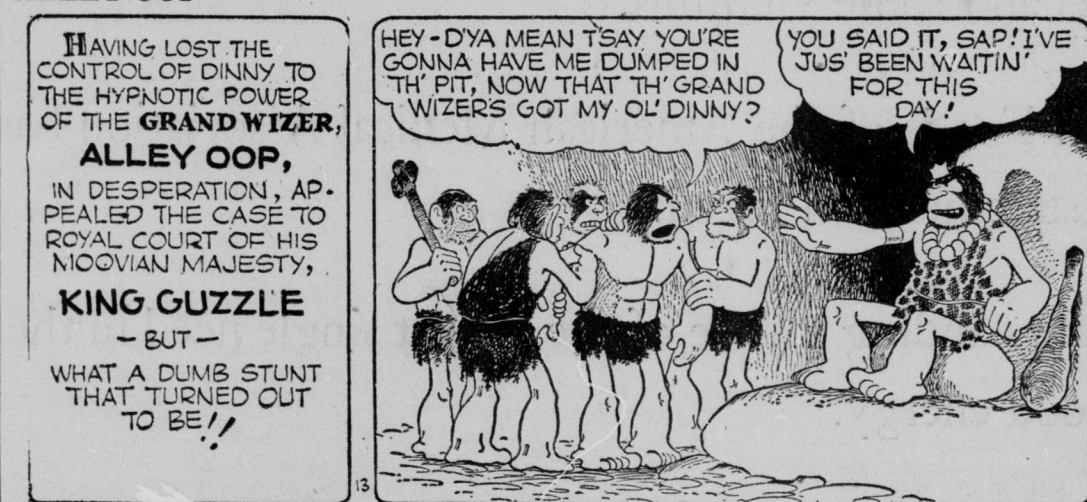
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THE TARZAN TWINS



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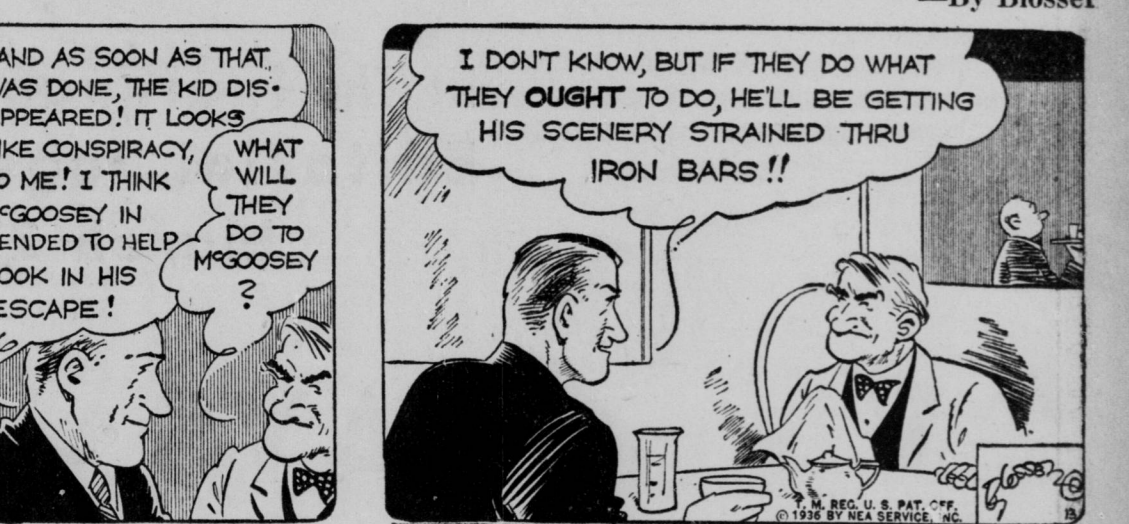
OUT OUR WAY

—By Williams



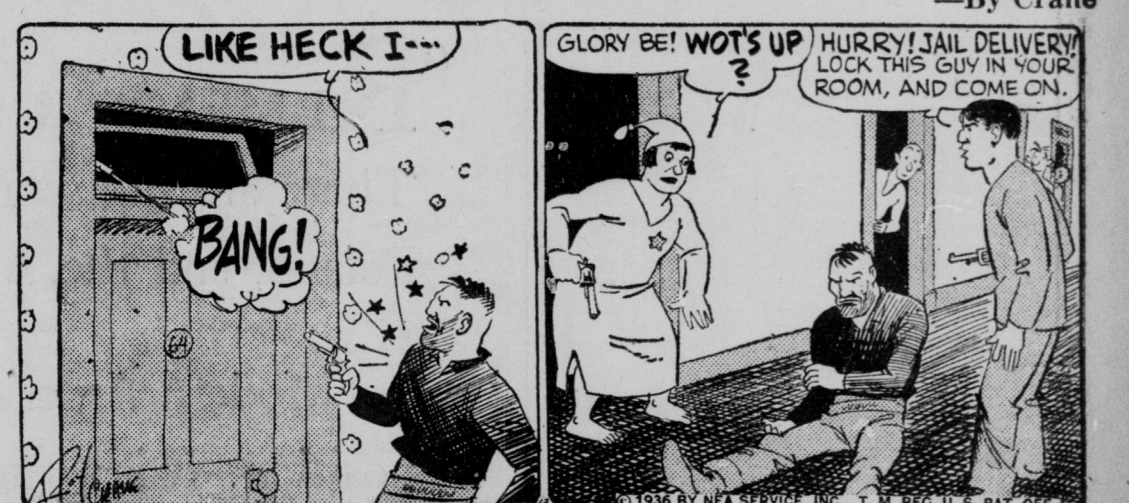
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