

Today's Short Story

WHOLE LOAF

By Alma and Paul Ellerbe



MARGOT TEALE sat at her desk in the old-fashioned two-room kitchen and bath walk-up apartment on W. 10th-st. that had been home to her during the whole of the brief period of her business life.

She felt uneasy about the most important thing in all her world—her relationship to Philip Wayne. She hadn't seen him for 10 days, but she knew perfectly well that something ought to be done about it.

It was, however, airplane time in Margot Teale's career as a publicity woman, and her desire to do something about that was an itch, a frenzy, an obsession, of the kind that had already, in a mild sort of way, made her famous.

Her feeling about even Philip Wayne was, just now, as a 16-candle power bulb to the sun for her feeling about the publicity possibilities of the Ariel airplane, the just-out, \$600 beauty whose hopscotch into the public consciousness it was her newest job to superintend.

SHE knew it shouldn't have been, but it was. In fact, at that very moment, when Phil heaved himself up so extraneously out of her subconscious mind or somewhere, she was up to the eyebrows in line drawings, cuts, paintings, newspaper spreads, and pamphlets, all about the Ariel.

"I'll telephone him," she resolved, "the moment I come up for air," and forgot Phil Wayne, time, space and her own identity in her work. Among the things she forgot was Mrs. Henschel, come from some where in the very West Forties to clean house, as she did once a week and had done once a week until she almost faded now for Margot into the wallpaper.

Margot pondered, scribbled, telephoned, figured, read copy and corrected it, and Mrs. Henschel was telling about a vacation trip her husband was making, solo, to California.

"AND—er—didn't you want to go too?" Margot inquired, a little dazed from the jerk back from imaginary coastings down the long savannahs of the blue in the Ariel. "Oh, I don't know. It would have been very nice, no doubt. But I never craved what others get and I don't."

It's probably true, Margot thought. An elderly woman, as remote and still and impersonal as the attraction of gravitation. An odd instrument for Fate to choose for the stabbing awake of Margot Teale. "I never craved but one thing in my life, and that was the man I didn't marry."

"Yes?" Margot said. She forgot the Ariel. "I began to crave him the night I married my husband. I don't know why I didn't listen to him when he kept asking me to marry him. I guess it was because I was so young, and—and pretty—and green here in America. I thought I could have the world. I thought everybody got rich here."

"HE was smart and a good worker. His shoes were full of money right then. But something—I don't know what—made me laugh and put my fingers in my ears and run whenever he tried to talk to me. One day he cried, and called him a big dumbhead. After that he didn't come any more. I thought he would, of course. I thought so for a long time. But he went away off somewhere. I never heard where. I don't know how it was I began to crave him the night I married my husband. That was seven years afterward. My husband is a good man. I had respect for him. He said he would give me a home. The brother I had lived with was married my that time and I needed a place to go to."

Mrs. Henschel's words lingered in the air—"...a place to go to." "There's only one place for me to go to," Margot said, "and that's you, Phil Wayne," and reached for the telephone.

BUT he had gone, the switchboard operator at his apartment house told her, to dine at the Kentucky Cardinal on Eighth-st. Dining alone, Margot thought, putting on her coat and hat to join him there, at the place where they used to dine together at least three times a week. Poor old boy! She'd given him a raw deal! "Phil, darling," she said to him in her thoughts, "how did we get like this?"

As she went into the tenderness

and color and mystery that are New York at the twilight of a clear day: "You know damn well how!" she could hear his voice saying in reply: "Too much business in your cosmos! I like your nerve, asking me how we got like this!"

"We'll be married immediately," she'd say to him now when she saw him. "Tomorrow, if you like. Tonight. Any time. An old cleaning woman woke me up, and I won't be half asleep about it ever any more, darling. I promise you."

SHE hadn't the least premonition of what was coming, either. She approached the Kentucky Cardinal as for a royal Bengal tigress—not that the two were alike in anything save unexpectedness. Unprepared, indeed, for any woman, but least of all the women in the world for Laura.

Stopping in sudden breathlessness at sight of her, she stared at the two of them through the window of the little restaurant, bent toward each other over a small table, talking earnestly—Phil and his oldest and best friend.

Why had he gone back to her? She had dropped out of his life since he had been in love with Margot. "Why don't you see her any more?" Margot had said, and he didn't tell her, but murmured vaguenesses about being busy.

He had gone on murmuring vaguenesses and he had not seen Laura. Had he once been in love with her? Margot had thought so. And now—

He looked up suddenly and caught her eye through the window, and she gave him a little wave of the hand and walked on something tight about her heart. For there had been nothing casual or cowardly or natural about his nod, and she had seen the red flow into his face.

"DO you remember," he said when he came two hours later—she had known he would come and had put on his favorite violet and black gown and got the fire burning brightly under the funny old marble mantel and laid out the cigarettes he liked best—"do you remember what I said to you at Tony's the last time we dined there?"

"Yes," she said, and looking at him standing there before her fire, taut and worried and serious, the words came back to her: "There's no blood in your veins now—just ink. I expect to see you come out with your hair tied up in typewriter ribbons, and brass paper fasteners on your clothes instead of buttons."

"If you had a husband you'd probably expect to keep him in a filing cabinet somewhere. Snap out of it, girl, before—well, before I do, see? I'm Old Dog Tray and all that. I'll stand without hitching. But I won't stand forever."

"YES," Margot said, "I remember, Phil. You warned me repeatedly. I did think I had you—that was because I knew you had me. I—I did behave as if I had filed you for reference. Have you snapped out of it?"

He stared at her for a long, taut moment. "Something's come back into Laura's face that had gone out of it—life, hope, courage, the will to live, something. It's come back because when I met her on the street feeling sort of lost-doggy and hopeless, I told her I felt like that and she told me to have dinner with me. Margot," he said with a sort of painful humbleness, "Laura's in love with me."

"Yes," she said, "she's always been."

"I wasn't sure before, but I'm sure now. It's a man's world. All the cards are stacked against women. Especially women like Laura. Faithful, pure-hearted, patient, old-fashioned, good-sort of magnificent."

HE looked at her intently. "Margot, I could change the world for Laura. It hurt me terribly to see how much she hopes I'm going to. To see that—that life come back into her face. About all the religion I've got is to give that the road—whatever it is. Never to hurt it."

The cold sweat sprang out all over Margot Teale.

"Do you want to marry her?"

"No," he said steadily. "I want to marry you—if you want me enough. But not as your half-a-loaf."

"I want you enough for anything."

HE bent over her where she sat beneath the light and looked deep into her eyes.

"Thank God!" he said, and kissed her.

THE END.

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OUR BOARDING HOUSE

With Major Hoople



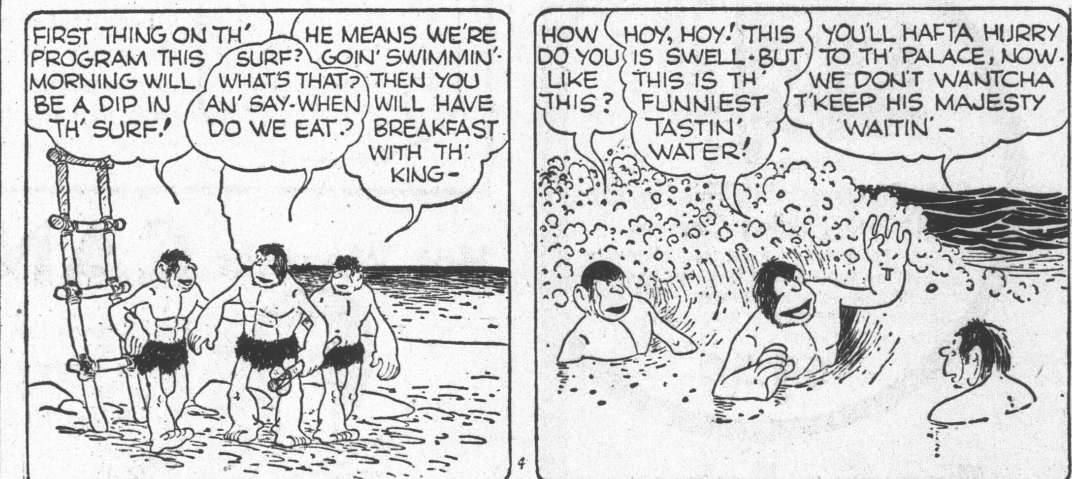
FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—



WASHINGTON TUBBS II



ALLEY OOP



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



TARZAN AND THE LEOPARD MEN



When the girl was led before Lulimi, the wily high priest, concealed his surprise and took quick advantage of the situation. "Behold!" he cried; "the Leopard god looks with favor upon me, and has brought this white maiden to be high priestess of our temple."

Lulimi was shrewd. It was he who organized this gang of jungle racketeers known as the Leopard Men. He had invented the rituals and all the horrible rituals which welded his ruthless followers into a vast secret brotherhood of blood and iron.

He seemed destined to establish an invisible empire of greed and crime. In more civilized realms he would have been known as the "big shot." There was only one man in all Africa who would challenge his power; but that man had already run afoul of his cohorts.

OUT OUR WAY

—By Williams



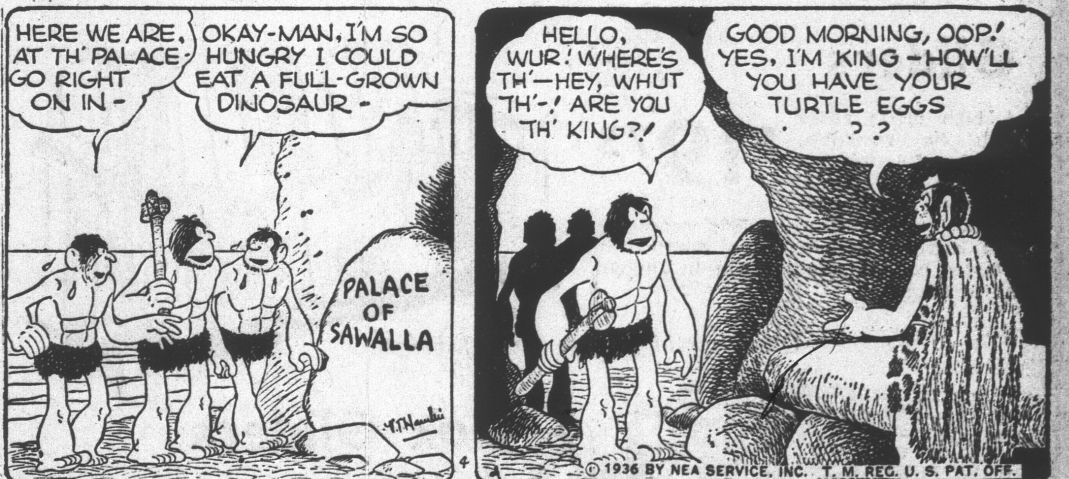
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—By Crane



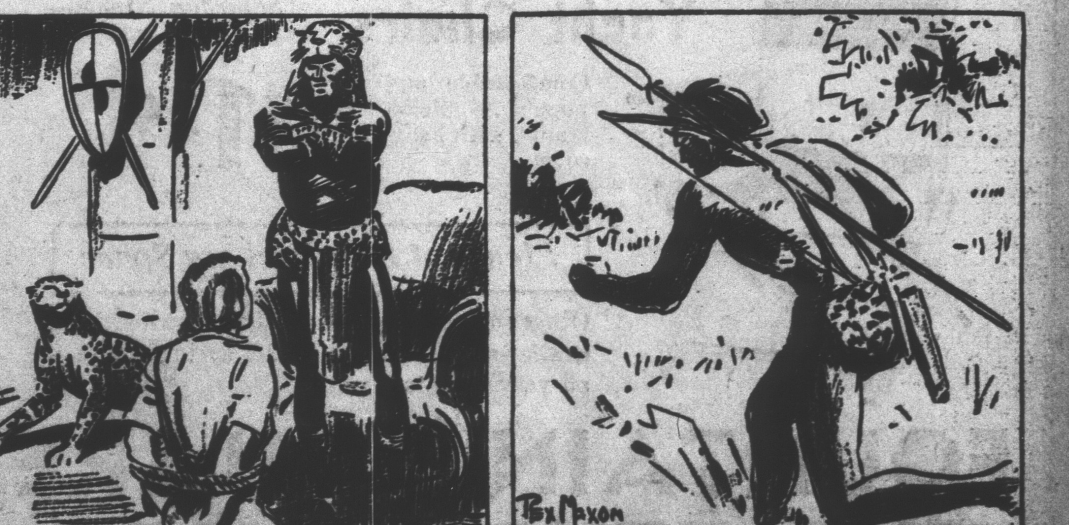
—By Hamlin



—By Martin



—By Edgar Rice Burroughs



Tarzan rushed fiercely upon the four Leopard Men who had leaped from ambush to attack Orlando. Since Orlando was suffering from a wound, the Jungle Lord expected little aid from him. Tarzan was virtually alone against the four steel-toothed fiends!

He seemed destined to establish an invisible empire of greed and crime. In more civilized realms he would have been known as the "big shot." There was only one man in all Africa who would challenge his power; but that man had already run afoul of his cohorts.

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