

ALL IS BRIGHT

By ELEANOR BROWNE

Author of "This Time Forever," "Diane Looks at Life," "Highway to Romance," "A Christmas Cruise With Romance in The Wind ... Ghosts of Pirates! ... Everybody Adventure Bent — And One Girl Finds The Golden Treasure — LOVE.

Star tried to hurry through the narrow passageway but she thought ruefully that she certainly hadn't acquired her sea legs yet. Both hands were engaged in holding her billowing chiffon skirt away from the sides of the boat. It took all her sense of balance to avoid stumbling unaccountably from one wall to the other. Gloria in a revealing evening frock of black followed more sedately, but the roll of the boat caught her off guard every now and then.

"Oh dear, we're so late!" exclaimed Star.

"The better to make an impressive entrance, my dear."

But Star would have preferred to watch everyone else enter. It was going to be awkward enough to meet Kent Barrett again without having the whole dining room looking on. Gloria had insisted that they sit at his table, but he had not been there since the fact that they had been in almost solitary glory and then watched the movies for an hour with eyes that drooped in spite of themselves. Finally they had gone off, yawning to their stateroom. Kent Barrett had not appeared.

Nor had she seen him today. Some of the passengers had been ill, one of the stewards had deserted the decks; others preferred to stay in their cabins the first day out. Gloria had seen Kent, she acknowledged, but she had not wanted to talk about their meeting, and Star had not questioned her further.

Star had looked forward to this "get-together" dinner with excitement. She had started to get ready long before the dinner gong sounded. But Gloria fussed and fretted about the wrinkles in her dress and the fact that she had forgotten her blue mascara until Star was in a fever of impatience. Yet she could sympathize with Gloria, too. It must have been hard for her if she had surprised him. At last Gloria had declared she was ready and it was eight-thirty before they were in sight of the brilliantly lighted dining salon.

The dining room steward came to meet them as they appeared in the big double doorway. Star looked at the laughing chattering group with wondering eyes. In her imagination she had pictured the sparkle of glass and silver, the soft music. But she had not thought of the smart officers' uniforms, of the lovely frocks and gleaming jewels of the women. She had not known that there would be paper hats for everyone, and noisemakers like New Year's Eve. Most of all she had not been able to imagine herself a part of it; she could scarcely believe that it was her blue satin sandals stepping onto the polished floor.

The steward bowed deeply. "This way, please." Star was so excited she did not see the instant tribute paid to her graceful figure, her bright joy in everything about her. But Gloria, one step behind, was acutely aware of the admiring glances and whispered comments at the tables as they passed. Barton Underwood glanced up with a smile and Gloria was warmly responsive. She had found him a little dull yesterday afternoon, but after all he might be useful if Kent continued to prove difficult. Kent had been astonished to see her on board, but he had left little doubt in her mind that it was not a pleasant surprise.

Star found herself at Kent's left; Gloria was at his right. A strange man whom Star had not seen before sat next to Gloria. There were two vacant places. She discovered later that they belonged to a Mr. and Mrs. Livingston. Gloria was looking at the thin dark-eyed man next to her with open astonishment.

"Surprise!" he said, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "You know Miss Churchill?" Kent inquired sharply.

"Jack and I met at the Whitmans," Gloria explained.

"Then you have only to meet Miss Sandringham," Kent said smoothly. "This is Mr. Coates, who will be with us as far as Kingston. He is to establish a museum in the West Indies. This is the first field trip, right?" Coates nodded. "And this is Miss Sandringham, who is making the complete cruise." Star smiled in acknowledgement.

"I hope you're a good sailor," Coates said without much interest. "The Caribbean is rather choppy this time of year. Even last night had me down."

"I'm having such a good time I hardly noticed," Star said gayly. Coates groaned.

"Kent, what shall I eat?" Gloria asked. "I haven't Star's desire for food tonight. I suppose I should try something."

Kent answered almost rudely. "Eat whatever you like. You don't need a doctor to tell you that." He turned abruptly to Star. "Are you enjoying the trip, Miss Sandringham?"

Star caught her breath; she had scarcely hoped that she would give her a chance to make herself known so soon.

"It's more fun than I ever imagined it could be. I've lived in a little inland town. It was Milford," she said looking at Doctor Barrett squarely. "Have you ever been there?"

"It seems to me I have," Kent's frowning consideration was perfect, she thought scornfully.

"Wasn't it about ten years ago?" she demanded.

Kent seemed surprised. "By George, I believe it was! How did you know?"

Star smiled with satisfaction. At least she had made him admit that much. Gloria watched her shy little roommate with growing interest. So Kent had forgotten Star! Well, there was no point in worrying about a romance as completely dead as that. She decided, turning with more interest to Coates.

"Uncle Ezra and I often thought of taking this trip together," Star went on, finding her story harder to tell than she had imagined it would be. "But she sighed, "he wasn't well the last few years."

"Ezra? What a funny old-fashioned name," Gloria commented.

"I don't think so," Kent Barrett objected. "In fact, it's been a familiar name in our family for many years."

"That's odd," Star's heart beat faster as she approached the climax of her story because Uncle Ezra's name was the same as yours—Barrett."

Kent's control was perfect. "Do you suppose we're related?"

"We couldn't be related in any case," she pointed out. "I wasn't really a niece."

"I'm glad," Kent said simply and hurried on. "Is your uncle with you?"

"He died just a month ago—calling for his son," Star's blue eyes burned into his and he did look confused.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," he stammered. "You must find it lonely without your uncle."

"He was a dear, sweet person," Star said warmly. If Kent intended to act as if he did not know what she meant, she would make him listen. "But he did have an odd habit of being thought poor and dependent. It wasn't until after his death that even I knew he was really tremendously wealthy."

She flushed a little as she told the falsehood, but her sense of guilt was immediately overcome by a feeling of triumph as she saw Kent Barrett's face. He looked as if he could scarcely believe his ears, as if she had shocked him by mentioning money. Star hoped he was feeling sorry now that he had strayed away from her so long. Her remark might not have been in the best taste, but she had at least told John Kenneth Barrett what she wanted him to believe—Ezra Barrett's son had lost a fortune by ignoring his father.

"Are you going to travel a bit now?" Jack Coates was leaning forward with sudden interest. "You must be tired of living quietly."

"I am," Star agreed. "I want to live gayly and adventurously."

"That's right," Coates, as he spoke, had a vision of the private capital his museum needed falling into his lap in a most agreeable way. A lovely girl who had just inherited a fortune . . . he at his most attentive best . . . tropic nights when even the most conservative must feel the thrill of romance . . . It was a perfect setup. Surely he need look no further for financial assistance.

"If you'll get your wrap," he suggested, "we can go out on deck for a while."

Gloria was amused at Coates' sudden interest in Star. Moreover, she felt rather pleased that her roommate had made such an impression; she needed to concentrate on Kent. She rose when Star and Coates had left and slipped her arm lightly but definitely through Kent's. She could have laughed aloud at his outraged expression as they walked toward the door.

"Pardon me, Doctor Barrett?" Barton Underwood was standing at the head of the stairs as they came up. He nodded briefly to Gloria.

"This is Mr. Underwood, Kent," she introduced them. "He has a darling little boy, Stuart. You've probably seen him around."

Kent had not only seen him but had heard of him from the room steward. He raised an eyebrow at Gloria who had never before to his knowledge shown an interest in children.

"It's about Stuart," Barton explained. "He seemed upset when the steward put him to bed and he's feverish now. I imagine it's nothing more than the strange food—perhaps a touch of seasickness. But I'd like you to look him over, if you will."

He led the way and the little group proceeded to what was known as the "bridal chamber." It cost twice as much as the other staterooms, but Kent thought Underwood didn't care about that, even if he knew it. The name of Barton Underwood was synonymous with wealth and power. Kent went in first and Underwood stood aside to let Stuart pass.

Stuart greeted them with a blood-curdling shriek and reached for the nearest object—a clothes brush his father had left on the bedside table. Kent pushed Gloria aside and took the weapon away.

"Catty-face! Catty-face!" Stuart screamed in a rage.

"The child's delicious," Gloria said.

"Stop that, son," Barton commanded. For answer Stuart kicked

off all the bed clothes and squirmed like an eel in the young doctor's grasp.

"Here, old man," Kent admonished. "Keep still a minute and let's see where the trouble is."

Stuart turned a deep red and opened his mouth for another scream. Kent turned to Gloria and nodded toward the door. When she had gone Stuart relaxed that the man who held him so gently and firmly was not so easily influenced as his father—now mopping his brow in one corner of the room.

"I hope it isn't serious," Underwood said apprehensively.

Kent laughed. "Nothing a good sleep won't cure," he said. "But I think Stuart has something on his mind. Now, young fellow, what's the trouble?"

Stuart settled himself comfortably

ably. "Wanna story?" he explained. Barton, rummaging through the bureau drawer for pajamas, said apologetically, "I think I know what he wants. Sandringham—"

A timid knock interrupted him. Star herself opened the door.

"Gloria said Stuart was ill," she said anxiously. "Is there anything I can do?" She had thrown a purple velvet cape over her shoulders and her eyes seemed almost the same color.

"Story?" the boy asked eagerly.

Star nodded. "But while I'm telling it," she said firmly, "you must let Doctor Barrett put a little glass tube in your mouth. And if he wants you to do anything else like putting out your tongue or staying quiet you must do exactly as he says. Is it a bargain?"

Stuart nodded indifferently, his

eyes on Star's face as she settled herself in one of the chairs. Kent envied his opportunity to gaze at her with open admiration—and he envied her tender thoughtfulness, so different in its effect from the distrust he seemed to inspire. Barton, looking vastly relieved, found the small pajamas at last and slipped them on.

(To be Continued)

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OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams



OUR BOARDING HOUSE

With Major Hoople



CHAPTER VII

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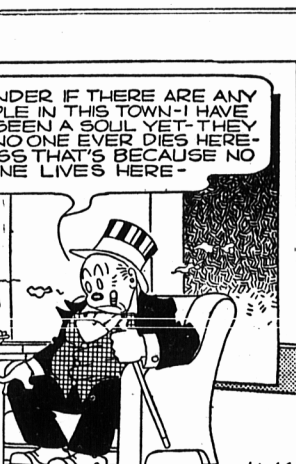
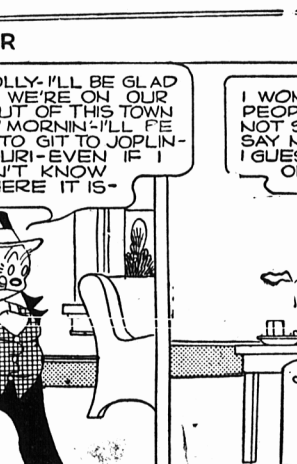
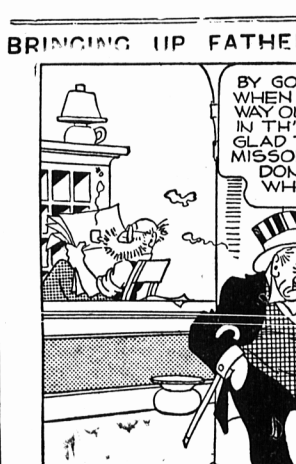
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By George McManus



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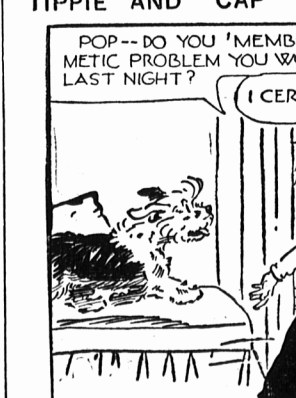


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TIPPIE AND "CAP" STUBBS

By F. W. WINA



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