

The ORIOLE

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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The Blackmailed Partners Made No Reply, on Account of an Inability That Was Perfect for the Moment.

"Oh, nothin'." Henry still kept his eyes upon his gloomily scuffing toe. "I just wondered, because I didn't happen to see him in school this afternoon when I happened to look in the door of the Eight-A when it was open. I didn't want to know on account of anything particular. I just happened to say that because I didn't have anything else to think about just then, so I just happened to think about him, the way you do when you haven't got anything much on your mind, and might get to thinkin' about you can't tell what. That's all the way it was; I just happened to kind of wonder if he was around anywhere, maybe."

Henry's tone was obviously, even elaborately, sincere; and Herbert was reassured. "Well, I didn't see him," he responded. "Maybe he's sick."

"No, he isn't," his friend said. "Florence said she saw him chasin' his dog down the street about noon."

At this Herbert's uneasiness was uncomfortably renewed. "Florence did? Where'd you see Florence?"

Mr. Rooter swallowed. "A little while ago," he said, and again swallowed. "On the way home from school."

"Look—look here!" Herbert was flurried to the point of panic. "Henry—did Florence—did she go and tell you—did she tell you—?"

"I didn't hardly notice what she was talkin' about," Henry said, doggedly. "She didn't have anything to say that I'd ever care two cents about. She came up behind me and walked along with me a ways, but I got too many things on my mind to hardly pay the least attention to anything she ever talks about. She's a girl what I think about her the less people pay any 'tention to what she says the better off they are."

"That's the way with me, Henry," his partner assured him earnestly. "I never pay any notice to what she says. The way I figure it out about her, Henry, everybody'd be a good deal better off if nobody ever paid the least notice to anything she says. I never even notice what she says, myself."

"I don't either," said Henry. "All I think about is what my father and mother say, because I'm not goin' to have their advice all the rest of my life, after they're dead. If they want me to be polite, why, I'll do it and that's all there is about it."

"It's the same way with me, Henry. If she comes flappin' around here blattin' and blubb'n' how she's goin' to have some'm to do with our newspaper, why, the only reason I'd ever let her would be because my family say I ought to show more politeness to her than up to now. I wouldn't do it in any other account, Henry."

"Neither would I. That's just the same way I look at it. If I ever begin to treat her any better, she's got my father and mother to thank, not me. That's the only reason I'd be willing to say we better leave the plank down and let her in, if she comes around here like she's liable to."

"Well," said Herbert, "I'm willing. I don't want to get in trouble with the family."

And they mounted the stairs to their editorial, reportorial, and printing rooms; and began to work in a manner not only preoccupied but apprehensive. Now and then they would give each other a furtive glance, and then seem to reflect upon their fathers' and mothers' wishes and the troublous state of the times. Florence did not keep them waiting long, however.

She might have been easier to bear had her manner of arrival been less assured. She romped up the stairs; came skipping across the old floor, swinging her hat by a ribbon, flung open the gate in the sacred railing, and flounced into the principal chair, immodestly placing her feet on the table in front of that chair. Additionally, such was her riotous liveliness, she affected to light and smoke the stub of a lead pencil. "Well, men," she said heartily in a voice assumed to be that of a tall, powerful man—"I don't want to see any load'n' around here, men. I expect to have a pretty good newspaper this week—yes, sir, a pretty good newspaper—and I guess you men got to jump around pretty brisk to do everything I think of, or else maybe I guess I'll have to turn you off and get some new ones that'll be more obedient. I don't want to haf to do that, men."

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Florence made it clear to them that henceforth she was sole editor of the North End Daily Oriole. (She said she had decided not to change the name, after all.) She informed them that they were to be her printers, nothing more; she did not care to get all inky and nasty, she said. She would, however, do all the writing for her newspaper, and had with her a

new poem. Also, she would furnish all the news and it would be printed just as she wrote it, and printed nicely, too, or else—"look out!"

Thus did this cool hand take possession of an established industry, and in much the same fashion did she continue to manage it. There were un-suppressible protests; there was covert anguish; there was even a strike—but it was a short one. When the printers remained away from their late newspaper building, on Wednesday afternoon, Florence had an interview with Herbert after dinner at his own door. He explained coldly that Henry and he had grown tired of the printing press and had decided to put in all their spare time building a theater in Henry's attic; but Florence gave him to understand that the theater could not be.

Henry and Herbert had both stopped "speaking" to Patty Fairchild, for each believed her treacherous to himself; but Florence now informed Herbert that far from depending on mere hearsay, she had in her possession the confession of his knowledge that he had ocular beauty—the ruinous bit of writing in his own hand and signed with his complete name—that she had discovered the paper where Patty had lost it; and that it was now in a secure place, and in an envelope upon the outside of which was already written, "Wally Torbin, Kindness of Florence A."

Herbert collapsed. So did Henry Rooter, a little later that evening, after a telephoned conversation with the slave-driver.

The two miserable printers were back in their places the next afternoon.

And on Saturday the new Oriole, now in every jot and item the inspired organ of feminism, made its undeniably sensational appearance.

A copy, neatly folded, was placed in the hand of Noble Dill, as he set forth for his place of business, after lunching at home with his mother. Florence was the person who placed it there—without charge. She came hurriedly from somewhere in the neighborhood, out of what yard or alley he did not notice, and slipped the little oblong sheet into his lax fingers. "There!" she said, breathlessly. "There's a good deal about you in it, this week, Mr. Dill, and I guess—I guess—"

"What, Florence?"

"I guess maybe you'll—" She looked up at him shyly; then, with no more to say, turned, and ran back in the direction whence she had come—and was gone. Noble walked on, not at once examining her little gift, but carrying it absently in fingers still lax at the end of a dangling arm. There was no life in him for anything; Julia was away.

Away—and yet the dazzling creature looked at him from sky, from earth, from air; looked at him with the most poignant kindness, yet always shook her head! She had answered his first letter by a kind little note, his second by a kinder and littler one, and his third, fourth, fifth, and sixth by no note at all; but by the kindest message (through one of her aunts) that she was thinking about him a great deal. And even this was three weeks ago. Since then, from Julia—nothing at all!

But yesterday something a little stimulating had happened. On the street, downtown, he had come face to face, momentarily with Mr. H. I. Atwater, Senior, Julia's peculiar old father; and for the first time in Noble's life this Mr. Atwater nodded to him pleasantly. Noble went on his way, elated: Was there not something almost fatherly in this strange greeting? There had been an easement of the pain of absence; and he glowed with thoughts of Mr. Atwater.

The glow faded somewhat from Noble when he reached a telephone; he called up his mother, and she said there was no recent news of Julia current in the Atwater family connection that she could hear of; none of them had word that she was coming home. However, Noble did not descend all the way into the cellar of his soul; some of his glow remained and kept him a little more cheerful than he had been for several weeks. The kind greeting of Julia's father had stirred his imagination. An event so singular might be interpreted in the happiest way: What had Julia written her father, to change him so

toward Noble? And Noble was still dreamily interpreting as he walked down the street with the North End Daily Oriole idly in an idle hand.

He found a use for that hand presently, and, having sighed, lifted it to press it upon his brow, but did not complete the gesture. As his hand came within the scope of his gaze, leveled on the unfathomable distance, he observed that the fingers held a sheet of printed paper; and he remembered Florence. Instead of pressing his brow he unfolded the journal she had thrust upon him. As he began to read, his eye was lusterless, his gait slack and dreary, but soon his whole demeanor changed; it cannot be said for the better.

THE NORTH END daily ORIOLE

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POEMS

My Soul by Florence Atwater

When my heart is dreary
Then my soul is weary
As a bird with a broken wing
Who never again will sing
Like the sound of a vast amen
That comes from a church of men,

When my soul is dreary
It could never be cheery
But I think of my ideal
And everything seems real
Like the sound of the bright church bells
peal.

Poems by Florence Atwater will be in the paper each and every Sat.

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NEWS OF THE CITY

"Miss Florence Atwater of this City received a mark of 94 in History Examination at the conclusion of the school term last June.

"Blue hair ribbons are in style again.

"Miss Patty Fairchild of this City has not been doing as well in Declamation lately as formerly.

"MR. Noble Dill of this City is seldom seen on the streets of the City without smoking a cigarette.

"Miss Julia Atwater of this City is out of the City.

"The MR. Rayfort family of this City have been presented with the present of a new Cat by Geo. the man employed by Balf & Co. This cat is perfectly beautiful.

"Miss Julia Atwater of this City is visiting friends in the South. The family have had many letters from her that are read by each and all in the family.

"Mr. Noble Dill of this City is in business with his father.

"From letters to the family Miss Julia Atwater of this City is enjoying her visit in the south a greaddeal.

"Miss Patty Fairchild of the 7 A of this City, will probably not pass in Arithmetic unless some improvement takes place before Examination.

"Miss Julia Atwater of this City wrote a letter to the family stating while visiting in the South she has made an engagement to be married to MR. Crum of that City. The family do not know who this MR. CRUM is but it is said he is a widwer though he has been divorced with a great many children.

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It may be assumed that the last of the news items was wasted on Noble Dill, and that he never knew of the neighborhood improvement believed to be imminent as a result of the final touches to the ditch at the Mr. Henry D. Vance backyard.

PART THREE

Throughout the afternoon adult members of the Atwater family connection made futile efforts to secure all the copies of that week's edition of the North End Daily Oriole. It could not be done.

It was a trying time for "the family." Great-aunt Carrie said that she had the "worst afternoon of any of 'em," because young Newland Saunders came to her house at two and did not leave until five; all the time counting over, one by one, the hours he'd spent with Julia since she was seventeen and turned out, unfortunately, to be a Beauty. Newland had not restrained himself, Aunt Carrie said, and long before he left she wished Julia had never been born—and as for Herbert Illingsworth Atwater, Junior, the only thing to do with him was to send him to some strict military school.

(To Be Continued)

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