

JO ELLEN

By ALEXANDER BLACK.

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(Continued From Yesterday.)

Perhaps it was true that the strong did not have sins, but only follies. It was pitiful that sin should so often get their label from the outward consequence. The crushed had no benefit of the doubt. If there was consequence there was sin. Then came the added collective consequences. If your direct punishment hurt others also, the others had their reasonable complaint. The sin took on the dimensions of all the effects. Uncle Ben had said it. Nothing more should be piled on. The argument was excellent.

In their room she stood behind his chair and spoke quietly. She tried to fancy herself as a mature woman addressing an injured child, or if not that, at least as a woman in the presence of a lesser strength.

"Uncle Ben has told me every thing," she began.

Marty would not have it this way. He wrenched the chair around and seized her.

"Look here! I told him—yes. But I got to tell you. How do I know! Listen!"

"You haven't got to tell me. That was your affair." This caught in her throat, but she went on. "What you did before you married me—how can I go into that? How can any woman do that? But after you married me—you were hurt after any manner of way. I don't take back any thing. The way things are—that's what we have to go on. The way they are. We have to make the best of it. The best—don't you see? We can't do anything with what happened before. No use going into what happened before. We don't need to make it any harder. If you—"

He began to sob and to make patting motions with the hands that held her.

"O Jo Ellen!"

"Our living together is our affair now, and—"

"You mean it isn't Mother's?"

"Or my mother's," Jo Ellen returned firmly.

"You're right, Jo Ellen. You're right. You're wonderful. I'm a pretty cheap imitation of anything wonderful. I'm only—"

The crisp call pierced the closed door.

"I'll see what she wants," said Jo Ellen. She hurried to Mrs. Simms' room, and met the eyes that seemed to be reaching far forward like dragons.

"A glass of water, please."

"Why did it make Jo Ellen's heart beat violently to go after the glass of water? Were hearts good at guessing?"

A gesture directed the placing of

the glass on the table beside the bed. "If you're slapping him," said Mrs. Simms, "you'd better understand—"

"I'm not slapping him."

"I don't know what you'd call it. Your uncle pumping him, and now you here full of it. You people may think you can jump on him. I won't have it. You might as well understand that."

Jo Ellen set her teeth. "You're jumping on me."

"I'm standing up for him. His father won't see anything. He won't see that the poor wretch is being hounded."

"I was only saying . . ." Jo Ellen gulped down the hot words she didn't want. "I was only saying that we must work it out—together."

"I knew you were lecturing him. A mother gets things like that. I know it. Telling him where he gets off. Exactly. Just what would make it nice and comfortable for you, exactly?"

Jo Ellen quivered. If you said a certain sort of word everything would come to an end. You had to think of that. A braud of Mrs. Simms' thin hair, terminating in a sharp whip, lay straight out on the pillow.

You could take hold of that and pull her out of bed, then stand over her and tell her where she got off. But people who were in bed weren't treated that way. It couldn't be done. Nothing could be done. You had to keep on letting thoughts like that tear around inside of you, until your insides were sore, and do nothing.

"A drink of water," asked Marty. "He was not satisfied. 'Did she say anything?'"

"She said I was not to lecture you." He gaped at her tears . . . and watched her throw herself face downward on the bed.

VII.

Mrs. Simms was better in the morning. Marty looked from one to the other of the two who had wrestled the night before. This looking from one to the other might become a habit. Jo Ellen wondered whether Mrs. Simms had noticed it. Mrs. Simms never appeared to notice anything, but what was to be deduced from her faculty for knowing things? If she knew that Marty watched them both, what did she think it meant? Did she know how much Marty drank?

What sort of talk went on between them when Jo Ellen was not there?

In the evening Marty tuned up his violin, twisting the little pegs with a flushed face. This meant that Jo Ellen was to attempt accompaniments on the old, frightfully-out-of-tune piano. A man in a wheel chair might have been a good musician. There were a hundred fine things a man might do in a wheel chair. . . . He might really have kept his father's books as he had promised. . . . Jo Ellen remembered a man in a wheel chair behind the counter of a little jewelry shop, a man with an extraordinarily radiant smile and eyes that made you understand that all poets do not write poetry. This man's poems were hammered out, filed and twisted into exquisite whineries of gemmed metal, into necklaces that had a music, into rings over which he hovered as if all were somehow to be worn by the One Girl. He was indeed, a surprisingly sunny man. The sun in him seemed to have broken through a tempest. It shone on him almost dreaded to buy them. It was as if you might be inflicting a kind of bereavement. Yet he had a way of arguing to decide that you could be trusted with the treasures—you, in particular. . . .

Marty plucked the things thickly. And when he began to play the note was his thin, uncertain note. The intermezzo, and The Evening Star. Jo Ellen, with her back to him, felt the thin wall writhing its way to her nerves. A taut silk thread drawn back and forth over the skin, could soon show blood. These sounds rasped with a persistence that was delicately horrible. The sheets before her squirmed and blurred. Her fingers fumbled.

"You'll have to practice up," suggested Marty, struggling again with the pegs.

"You need a little practice yourself," added Daniel Simms from behind his evening paper.

"Of course," said Marty. "I'll have to get it out tomorrow."

"I couldn't stand much of it," remarked Mrs. Simms.

"Oh!—Marty blinked at his mother. He went on defiantly, with a sullen expression.

The next piece broke down in the middle.

"Why don't you try something with a little life in it?" demanded Daniel Simms. "Makes me think of a funeral."

"You're not very encouraging," said Mrs. Simms. Simms chuckled, and bit at his cigar. "You're not so

damned, encouraging yourself, mother."

Jo Ellen braced herself. "Why not try this—?"

But Marty was putting away the violin, with no further words. His acid silence might have implied that everybody was turning on him. In the interval before bedtime he contrived to console himself with whiskey. The exhaled fumes were easily to be detected in their room. This odor had not been sickening at Amy Lenning's party. Here it was like the smell of a soul rotting.

Marty breathed guiltily.

"I wish you wouldn't drink that stuff," said Jo Ellen quietly, though she regarded him with a kind of terror.

"What's a drink?" He swung his head.

"What's a drink?" He was remembering that she had been game about the music. "What's a drink once in

a while? A drink. What life do I have? You don't think of that. Nobody does."

"You're once in a while is getting to be pretty often."

Her imagination took a sheer leap. "Suppose I said I was thinking about the high place?"

"The high place?" It was a gasp.

plexed him. "What do you think about when you look that way?" It was plain that this question had been hanging in his mind.

Her imagination took a sheer leap. "Suppose I said I was thinking about the high place?"

She had jolted him for the moment. She could see him groping out of the whisky fumes, back through the crazy tangle to the clear open height. She saw him wince and waver, and she was traversing spaces herself.

(To Be Continued Monday.)

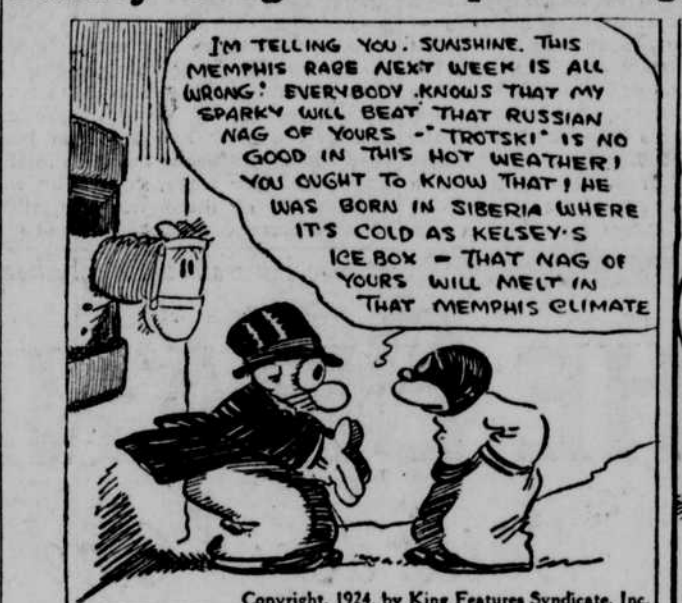
THE NEBBS

RUDY WAS JUST FOOLING FANNY ABOUT NOT CHECKING THE TRUNKS HE NOT ONLY CHECKED THE TRUNKS BUT HAD THE KEYS IN HIS POCKET THAT SHE HAD LEFT HOME ON THE DRESSER



Directed for The Omaha Bee by Sol Hess

Barney Google and Spark Plug



WANTED—COLD ACCOMMODATIONS



Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Billy DeBeck

New York --Day by Day--

By O. O. MCINTYRE.

New York, Aug. 30.—Manhattan is filled with swindling little jewelry shops. They are bandbox affairs just big enough for a small stock and two salesmen. Customers are lured in by the gaudy window displays that herald amazing prices.

If your eye is taken by an article in the window you learn that it has been sold and there are no more in stock. So they attempt to sell you something else. Business, they say, is always bad and they are forced to raise money by selling under the cost price.

There are whispered implications that many of the articles are thieves' loot. Then there is the old dodge that payments have been made on articles and not taken and the customer is to receive the benefit of these payments.

Peculiarly enough these highbacking shops thrive on the credulity of New Yorkers. The usually called veldt never patronizes them. The proprietors have an amazing tenacity. There is an ill luck superstition among them about permitting a customer to leave without purchase.

Languid clerks and cash girls go to these places for baubles to brighten drab lives. Hundreds of them are lured by the false dazzle to make first payments and later regret, but they are never able to get their money back.

I stepped into one the other day to replace a broken watch crystal. Before I departed the salesman had tried to sell a paste diamond bar pin, a new watch, a strand of pearls, a shirt stud set, a gold knife and a traveling clock.

Two hours after I left the place the watch had stopped. It was taken to a first class establishment. The watchmaker said someone had removed a bit of the works. I have suspicions.

Lean days have come to Tin Pan Alley. The radio has cut royalties on songs to almost nothing. A composer and lyricist who used to make from \$20,000 to \$50,000 on royalties is lucky now to make \$200 a week. Many song writers are going into other work.

The publishing houses are cutting down their staffs to half the usual size. There is a composer who has two song hits this summer. In better days he would have made \$100,000 easily. Now he estimates his profits at about \$15,000.

Tin Pan Alley does not expect to come back to its former splendor. The biggest publishers are adjusting themselves to newer conditions. Even the jangle of the many pianos in the beehive of compartments has grown dim.

New Yorkers specialize in "reaction." One is continually being asked his reaction to this or that. The word is as much overworked as the word "moron" among the intellectuals. I am always a shade self-conscious when asked about my reactions. Briefly I am one of those dolls who never react.

Harry Houdini, the handcut king, lives up on West 113th street. He is the idol of the boys in the neighborhood. For he mingles with them and does some of his tricks now and then. Seven babies in the neighborhood are named for him.

A tough lad from the East Side went into one of the cafes with his "skott." He asked for two glasses of water and when brought to him took two sandwiches from his pocket and began to eat.

The manager came up and said: "What is the big idea?"

"Who are you?" said the lad.

"I'm the manager."

"You're just the fellow I want to see. Why isn't your orchestra playing?"

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BRINGING UP FATHER



JERRY ON THE JOB



THE RETORT SWAUKING



Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Hoban

ABIE THE AGENT



ABIE THE AGENT



ABIE THE AGENT



Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Hershfield

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Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Hershfield

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Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Hershfield