JO ELLEN

By ALEXANDER BLACK. Copyright, 1924.

(Continued From Yesterday.)

It was on Tuesday that she confessed to herself that she was not happy. Mr. Trupp had been in for an hour, most of which had been consumed by a prolonged account of a fishing trip he once made with a man who was now mixed up with some tremendously important thing about the war.

She had forgotten to bring a book. For a time she watched the street from Mr. Trapp's window. There was a dental office directly across the way and she could see plainly the feet of the people in the dentist's chair and the white jacket of the dentist. She practiced for a while, then sat there at her own desk counting the windows of the apartment house visible through the vertical slit. When she saw an occasional head it looked imprisoned. Everybody seemed to be living in a cage. She was living in a cage. She was not locked in; she might run away for an hour or two and no one would know. Probably Mr. Trupp wouldn't care. She was held simply by a bargain, the bargain to stay there doing nothing most of the time, for fifteen dollars a week. Probably in a certain length of days she would get more dollars a week for doing nothing most of the time.

No, this was not the business of her dream. Mr. Trupp himself did not fill the dream lines. She had fancied meeting a lean, taciturn, livewire sort of a man who had the manner of looking through her, who would ask her three or four jerky questions, and tell her at last that he would give her a trial. Then here was Mr. Trupp, asking nothing at all, interrupting the little he gave her to do with stupid stories of his stupid life, and telling her to be comfortable. . . .

For a moment she thought Mr. Trupp had come back. But it was Wilton, who after softly closing the door sat down in the corner chair.

Jo Ellen said, not quite in her natural voice, "Good morning."

Wilton made no response. He gave a furtive look in which there was an effect of fright or puzzlement, and leaned sideways to spit. Occasionally he glanced toward Mr. Trupp's empty room, and for a time he went in and sat in his cousin's chair. When he returned to the chair in the corner, Jo Ellen, her face over the shorthand book, heard again the revolting liquid sound.

It was possible that she could endure the shut-in dullness of the office, that she might in time come to find compensations in the infrequency of Mr. Trupp, and learn to make the best of his casual garrulity. But she was sure she would never get used to Wilton. He was silent. He represented no actual threat. But there was a horror in the silhouette of him hovering there in the corner of her eye. She tried to pity him, but her pity was stifled by a nausea.

Wilton seemed to know when it was 12 o'clock, perhaps by some bell or whistle, and when he had gone, Jo Ellen was seized with a desire to get far from the place. She went to a more distant restaurant for lunch, and afterward walked briskly over to Central park. There was a mellow color in the old trees and an autumn tang in the air. People came out of their cages to be here in the sunlight. Shiny black shuttles that were motor cars raced through the mesh of green and amber.

III

Nevertheless, the midday walk began an effort to throw off the thrall. Her own zest was met by various contributory helps. Even the confidential remark by the young man who ran the Number One elevator and who now assumed the privilege of an established acquaintance, was an alleviation. Mr. Trupp acquired a sensational variation by almost dashing into the office with a document that was to be copied in a hurry. And late in the afternoon, when quiet had returned, came Marty Simms' voice over the 'phone.

Marty was greatly entertained by Jo Ellen's effort to guess how he knew where she was. She noticed a heightened animation in his manner, and took the liberty of suspecting that a changed situation had invested her with a new interest. She asked him whether he was talking from his office, which might mean that he was subject to the attention of the girl with the suspicious ring, for example.

"Yes," he said, "but I'm in a booth. We have a booth for long distance—or for any nice little private talk like this."

"Then nobody knows how you're wasting your time."

"O they all know I never call up anybody but very particular friends."

"But suppose one of these friends happened to have work to do?"

"Say—are they driving you?"

"Terribly!"

"Somebody'll have to rescue you. I know a nice soft job."

"I don't want a soft job. A soft job is what's the matter with me."

"Quit joshing, Jo Ellen. What do you mean?"

"My man doesn't give me enough to do. I'm bored to death."

"Then you're alone in the office—talking that way."

"He lets me say anything I like."

"Honest—what sort of a fellow is he?"

"A fat man."

"Then he isn't there. Listen, Jo Ellen, I have to go up to Seventieth street—"

"You can't come in. I'm going to be strict about that."

"I thought you might let me steer you home in the crush."

"I don't need to be steered, thank you."

"You see, after I get through at Seventieth street I'm going up to the Hill anyway—have an invitation to dinner up there."

"How nice."

"It certainly is. I'm quite fussed about it. Wonderful place to go to. People you'd like."

"You don't need to be escorted."

"That's just it—I do, to the place I'm going. I think they'll expect it. In fact, I know they will. It's all made up for that."

"Well, of all things!"

"Yes. Your mother said, why not come to dinner? Wasn't that luck? I was only going to ask whether you'd be in tonight. Of course, you can say, no. Your mother didn't think you had anything doing."

"I'll meet you at the corner of Broadway," said Jo Ellen.

"I'm so glad you're delighted."

"At a quarter past five," Jo Ellen added.

Standing in the swaying crowd on the subway train, Marty unfolded the news that he was planning to go to Plattsburg. His father thought if there was to be war for the United States it would be worth while to get some training. A better chance for a commission and all that. And he agreed with his father.

"I wanted to find out what you thought," he said.

"I can see you're going," returned Jo Ellen evasively.

She had thought about soldiers a good deal. Everybody had. But she had never thought definitely about Marty that way. She tried to fancy, facing him there in the crowd, how he might look . . . how he might be, as a fighter. There was nothing about him to suggest anything soldierish—nothing about his ways. He was strong enough, and maybe of a soldier size. But the sentimental streak, or whatever it was that seemed to separate him from anything rough, somehow made it hard to imagine him in a fearful game like the war.

Evidently he was full of this new notion. She could understand now a certain look he had when he met her at the corner, as of being at the door of an adventure, one that took you tremendously out. A training camp would not be at all like an office. There would be big movement in it, a slashing kind of action with a huge group of others. If it led into the great adventure . . . well, evidently, that could be frightful, even if you didn't die. But you were kept going . . . enormously. . . .

The talk at dinner was about war. Mrs. Rewer liked Marty, and she grudged the sacrifice of him. She had a fighting indignation about enemies, but a flaming resentment against the ghastly processes of punishment. Grandmother Bogert had a more dogged attitude toward any nasty thing that had to be done. Her theory was that sniveling didn't get you anywhere.

"You would talk different if you had a young son," declared Mrs. Rewer.

"Young son?" growled Uncle Ben. "I guess I'm young enough to be in this when the time comes."

His mother sent him a subduing glance.

"You have your obligations here," she said. . . .

There were other evenings when Marty reverted to the training camp. On this subject Uncle Ben was usually inarticulate. He had furtive habits as to Marty, as though he envied him or doubted him. He studied Jo Ellen's face when Marty was near her, and was inclined to commit jostling remarks. When he spoke directly to Marty he was always gentle enough. He thought he was a nice clean boy. In a general way Marty measured up, but there was a sort of presumption in his enthusiasms; perhaps a little of his taking Jo Ellen's interest for granted. Something like that.

(To Be Continued Tomorrow.)

New York
--Day by Day--

By O. O. M'INTYRE.

New York, July 17.—I saw them first in a cafe in Paris. She was an ancient dowager in a red plush dress leaning heavily on a shepherd's crook. The other hand held an ear trumpet. She was palsied, wrinkled and almost sightless.

He was one of those sleek and gay young blades whose sartorial accomplishments fitted him to pose for clothing ads. She was querulous and exacting, not only with myrmidons who fluttered about, but with him.

To the stranger they appeared a grandmother and devoted grandson. But a waiter whispered they had just been married. She was 80 and he was 27. Her wealth is colossal and he was an impecunious social butterfly who flitted about European spas and haunts.

This was several years ago. Recently they came to New York and again I saw them. She is still with dimming sight seeking the dazzling lights and he trots along in her path like a faithful young dog.

Now at 30 his hair is sprinkled with gray. Crow's feet are forming around his eyes. His efforts to be spruce and debonnaire have wilted. He sits glumly at her side answering her rasping questions in monosyllables.

It is the old story of the mating of May and December. He has all the trappings of a nabob—motors, country homes, valets and unlimited checking account. He can go wherever he desires, but always he must go with her—a sort of glorified serf.

Cynics may sneer at love in the cottage. Sometimes love does fly out the window, but whatever happens it cannot be worse than the cold, metallic boredom of a loveless marriage in the castle.

Great fortunes are lost over night in New York. A turn in the market daily reduces to penury men who have risen to the top of the heap. I have in mind a man of 40 whose financial bubble recently burst. He who had a magnificent apartment on Central Park South was forced to move to a one-room and kitchenette on Columbus avenue. Motors, horses and rare art collections went under the hammer. It was a lightning-like calamity that stripped him of the luxuries he loved. Worry has furrowed his brow and this is what he told me. "When I had money I seemed to have an endless procession of friends. One man to whom I gave $500 upon three different occasions snubbed me in my club. Only two people have called me up to sympathize with me—one was a preacher and the other was my laundress."

It has always seemed to me financial worry is the most poignant of all the worries that harass mankind. I have a memory of standing on a Broadway corner 12 years ago without a cent in the world—not even carfare. It is such times that New York appears the cruelest of all cities. There doesn't seem to be a friendly smile among its millions. The staccato street noises chant "You're broke; you're broke."

Bryant park, near the public library, is a haven for the broke and jobless. The friendly benches are filled with young men and old who seek a little solitude away from the bruises of the world. Those who read are perusing "help wanted" columns and those who do not—sit and stare.

The other night after a banquet I tackled one of those big, long, strong, hour-long cigars. For three days afterward I gave up many things—including smoking. I have heard another guest, used to the cigaret, had to be carried out. From now on an after dinner mint is my speed.

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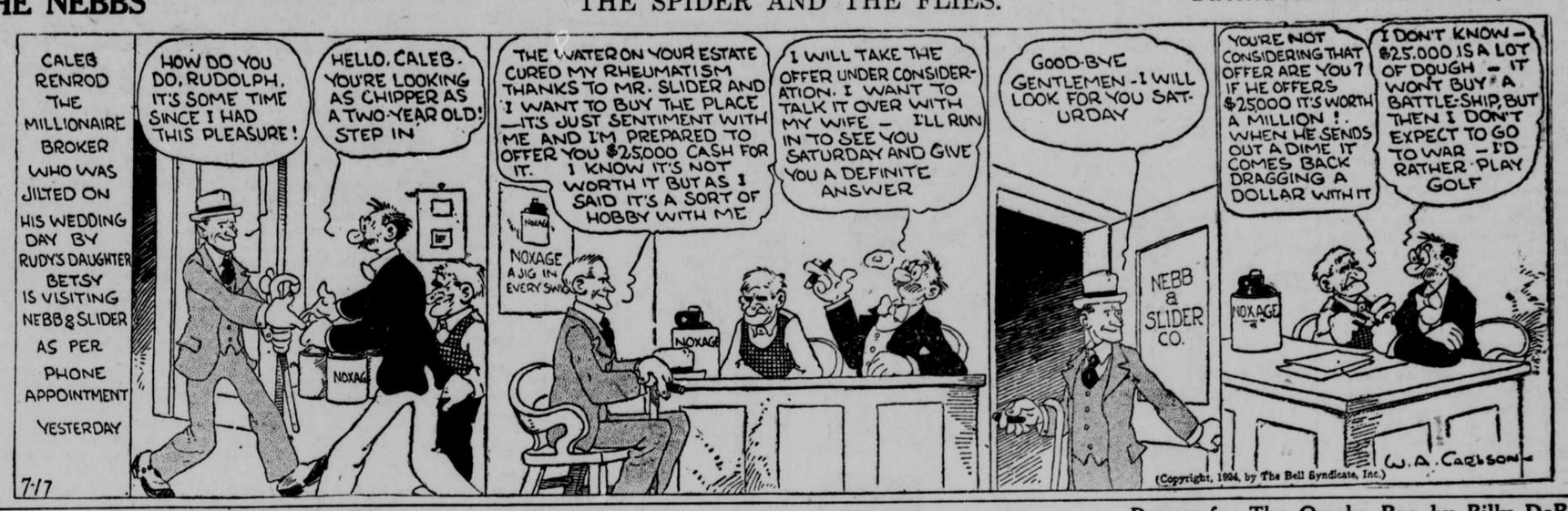
THE NEBBS — THE SPIDER AND THE FLIES.

Directed for The Omaha Bee by Sol Hess



Barney Google and Spark Plug — Barney "Banks" on Being on Hand Promptly.

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BRINGING UP FATHER

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SEE JIGGS AND MAGGIE IN FULL PAGE OF COLORS IN THE SUNDAY BEE

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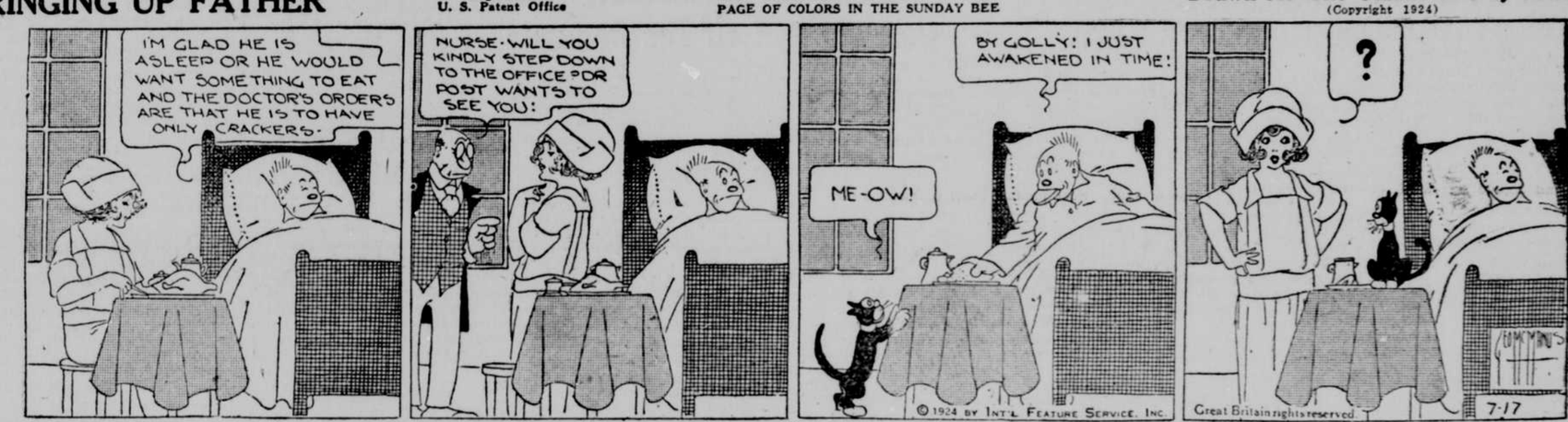

JERRY ON THE JOB — EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT

Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Hoban (Copyright 1924)

Me and Mine

By Briggs

ABIE THE AGENT

Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Hershfield

Hard to Pin Him Down.