

"THE CLEAN-UP"

A NEW YORK EVANGELIST TURNS GANGSTER

When You Heard Linda Allen Moan 'em Low, You Clapped, Whistled and Stomped for an Encore. And when Fred Harris, Evangelist, Sang About the "Gospel Train," Even Linda Admitted He Knew His Crooning Onions.

By NICK LEWIS
CHAPTER I

Linda Allen was hardly more than a kid—a kid of maybe seventeen or eighteen or nineteen summers; certainly not more than twenty.

Her face was terribly young and expressive and terribly beautiful in a piquant, babyish sort of way; her hair was blue-black and just a little fuzzy-wuzzy, and her eyes were of that deep, deep brown which inevitably reminds one of twin dark pools of quiet water.

And yet it was not in her face, nor in her hair, nor in her twinkling eyes that Linda Allen's real beauty lay. For once you had heard her croon in that melodic, husky voice of hers one of these heart-tearing lyrics of the old Southland which she, for all her youth, had known so well, once you had thrilled to the sob in her voice as she moaned:

"Stop the sun, stop the moon,
For I'm going crazy soon . . ."
you forgot all about how beautiful and how childish and immature she seemed. You forgot all about everything except that there was music and that music made you feel happy and sad, jubilant and penitent, rested and weary all at once. And when she was through you were genuinely sorry, and you clapped and whistled and stomped on the floor until she returned to the stage and reseated herself atop Al Cooper's miniature piano and sang again in the same plaintive mood:

"It's just an old shanty in
old Shantytown . . ."
Harlem, it seemed, couldn't get enough of Linda Allen. This tiny, olive-skinned child of the South, this delicate, fragile product of the cotton fields found her path to glory already hewn for her. Less than six months after her advent into the metropolis she found her name flashing in letters two feet

high out in front of the Tom-Tom Club:

LINDA ALLEN: THE GIRL WITH THE VOICE OF THE SOUTH!

At least half a dozen men sent her flowers after each performance; two were regular visitors in her dressing room. There was, first of all, Ace Hinds. Linda felt it her duty to be decent to the Ace; in addition to owning the Tom-Tom, he controlled bookings over several of the more important theatrical circuits. Of medium height, dark-skinned and heavily built, he was not a bad looking himself. Once upon a time he had trod the boards himself, but that part of his career lay many years behind. Lately he had divorced his wife; now he was, Linda had been warned, definitely "on the make."

She found him, seated uncomfortably on the single chair which her tiny dressing room afforded, when she came in after the first show, just after ten o'clock. He arose, hand extended in affable greeting, face beaming. She laughed happily up at him. "How'm I doin', Ace?"

"Baby, you're doin' jes' perfect," he complimented her. Then he tried to catch her in his arms, but she eluded him.

"Don't, Ace!" She shook a warning finger at him.

"Aw, honey," he protested. "Get out a minute while I change," she commanded him. "Go 'head, now." She pushed him, gently protesting, toward the door.

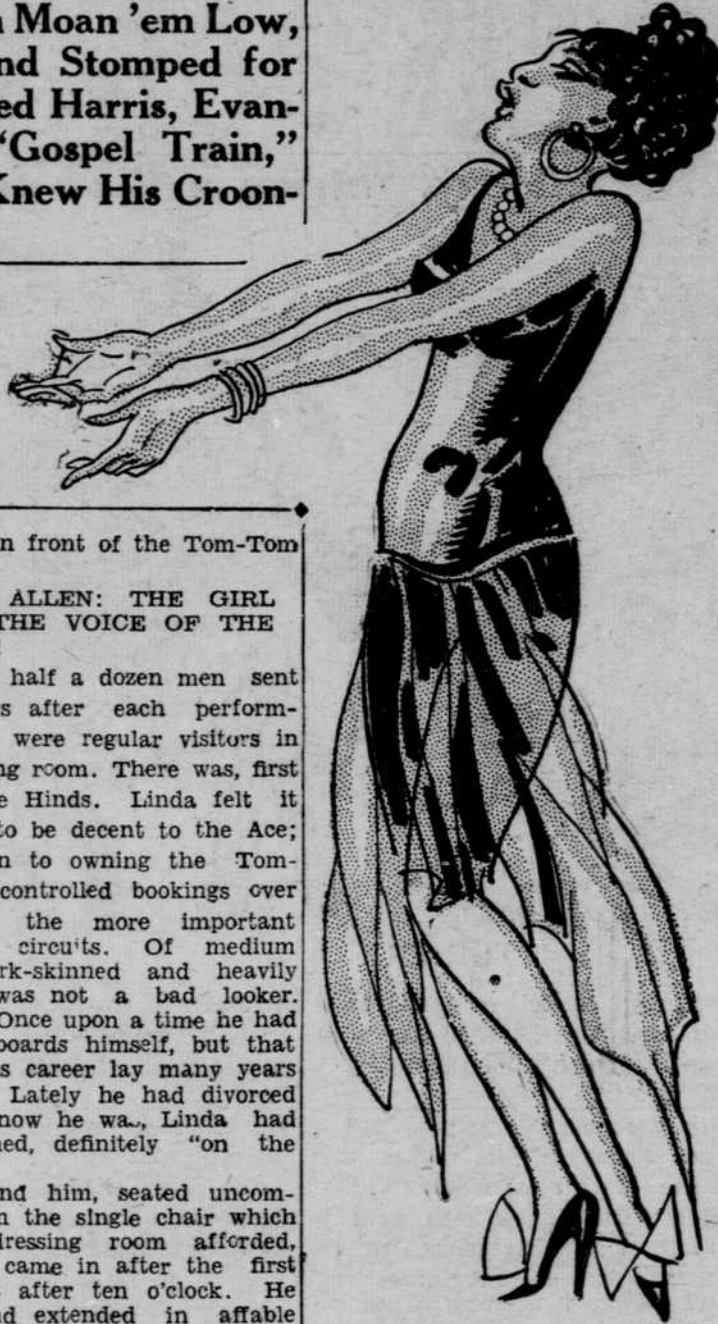
The Ace waited five minutes in the narrow hallway without results. Music in fast dance tempo and the rhythmic scrape of feet drifted up to him, but he paid no attention. Thinly clad chorus girls brushed by him in beavies, greeting him casually. It was hot in the hallway. He mopped his brow.

Al Cooper, half-pint musician with Linda's act, jogged up the narrow iron steps with a grin on his face and a merry tune on his lips. He nodded curtly as he passed the Ace. Then, without a word, he pushed through the door into Linda's dressing room. "Hey, wait—" the Ace called after him,

but Al had disappeared, closing the door in the Ace's face. Linda opened it a moment later.

"Gee, I'm sorry," she apologized, "I'd forgotten all about you."

The Ace made an effort to smooth things over. "Oh, that's all right," he muttered, coming in. He gazed rather sourly at Al. "Ain't you due



LINDA ALLEN—The girl with the voice of the South.

to go on in a couple of minutes?" he asked significantly.

Al refused to take the hint. "Not till twelve o'clock," he said. "We just came off a couple of minutes ago."

Linda, glad that she didn't have to be left alone with either of the men, and yet afraid that one or the other might take a notion to start something, bustled about the tiny room, straightening out things, and hanging up clothes. "It's hot!" she exclaimed. Then: "How's the crowd holding out, Ace?"

"You'd wov 'em any night, honey, hot or cold."

"I'll say," Al put in, "that's a nifty little act we got there, just you and me."

"You," the Ace bristled. "Say, whaddya do but play the piano? Anybody can play the piano."

"And anybody can sing, too, but not like my little partner here."

"All right, all right," Linda soothed. "Now All, you be a good boy and dig up a couple of chairs. And Ace, see if you can get this window to stay up a little while. It's terribly stuffy in here without a breeze."

The window came up easily, admitting a loud overtone of street sounds, but refused to stay put. The Ace propped it up with a stick, while Al hunted for chairs.

"That's a whole lot better," Linda commented as a slight breeze stirred through the room. All returned with the chairs and a waiter bearing refreshments followed. After a few drinks they all felt better.

"What's that?" Linda rose and went to the window suddenly. The Ace and Al followed her and peered out into the darkness.

Across the blackness of the near-

deserted street there came the sound of a voice, a man's voice, melodious and clear.

"Oh, let me go in with Noah. . . ."
And then the full-throated answer of a thousand shouting souls:

"In with Noah, Lord!"

The song went on and on, endlessly, the rhythmic clashing of cymbals and shuffling of feet providing accompaniment. Linda listened entranced. As her eyes grew more accustomed to the dim light she perceived that the singing and the shouting emanated from a tent, a huge and well-equipped structure directly across the street from her window. Across the front, in flashing mazdas, was the sign, "THE GOSPEL TRAIN."

"What's going on, anyway?" Al Cooper grunted.

The Ace laughed. "There's a bunch of crazy people over there—getting religion. Listen to 'em shout!" Then his expression changed. "That guy—that evangelist who leads 'em, though—he's due for a nice, long ride, believe me."

"Robbing you of business?" Al wanted to know.

"Two ways!" the Ace exploded. "First he draws half the people who would come here over to that confounded tent of his, and then he preaches to 'em and tells 'em to stay out of place like this. He's got a drive on agal st all the dance halls and cabarets in town—calls 'em dens of sin and iniquity and anything else he happens to think of. He gonna drive 'em out—gonna clean up this town. Well, we'll see who gets cleaned up first."

Al laughed. "That's a hot one!" he said.

Linda didn't laugh. She stood at the window, motionless, until the singing lulled. "Come on, let's go over there for a minute or two," she suggested.

"I got some business with Bill Norris," the Ace parried, pulling out his watch. "I'm late now."

"I'll go 'long," said Al.

The Ace's face clouded. "Business can wait," he said. "Come on, Linda, I'll take you over there."

"We'll all go along together," Linda suggested. "We'll have to leave before twelve. I have to dress for the act."

She took one man on each arm and led them across the street, guiding them through one of the doors of the big tent, down an aisle and to one of the few vacant seats.

The music started once more; the choir boomed out, followed by the full-throated voice of the throng:

"Oh, happy land, Jerusalem,
When shall I come to thee?
When shall my sorrows have an end?
Thy joys, when shall I see?"

And then the clear, rich voice of the great evangelist rang out above all the rest:

"Oh, happy harbor of God's saints,
Oh, sweet and pleasant oil;
In thee no sorrow can be found,
Nor grief, nor care, nor toil."

Linda Allen sat transfixed as the crowd began to sway, chanting in delirious abandon, shouting and clapping hands and swaying to the beat of the primitive music.

"And we shall meet, we shall meet on that beautiful shore. . . ."

There was something vaguely familiar about all this. It brought back memories of the early years she had spent on a plantation in the South. Here was the gospel train, going up to glory, going to the Lord. And these men, these women, these children rocking to the rocking of the train were going up to glory with it, going up to the Lord.

And there was something familiar, too, in the kindly-faced, youngish man who was the leader of them all, the evangelist. She studied his face and thought that she remembered him from somewhere. But where? It eluded her.

And then suddenly she knew. He was Fred—Fred Harris. Fred, who had left her old home town when she was twelve to study religion. How he had changed! He was grown up now, tall and well-built and handsome. When she had been just a kid Linda had imagined herself in love more than once with Fred Harris. But he had al-

ways seemed so much older, so much smarter than herself that there didn't seem to be much hope for her. And then she had seen him leave his old home and his father and mother for one of the big Northern schools, and with passing years she had almost forgotten that he existed. Yet now she was more than sure that this was he! Her heart beat faster. She found herself swaying and clapping her hands to the music as he swayed and clapped his hands.

The Ace and Al looked on with wry faces. They were business men, men of the theatre. They didn't go in for this type of stuff.

"Come on, honey, let's get out of here," the Ace suggested. "It's hot."

"Oh, no, I want to stay," Linda objected.

"It's almost time for the act," Al pulled out his watch and showed it to her.

"This is almost over," she whispered.

And in a few minutes the singing stopped and the people arose to file slowly toward the exits. The Ace and Al tried to ease Linda out ahead of the crowd, but she wriggled away from them. Dodging through the rows of seats, now helter-skelter, she made her way to the front of the tent. And her two friends, watching impatiently, saw her grasp the hand of Evangelist Fred Harris, saw him turn and suddenly recognize her, then saw the two of them almost fall into each other's arms.

"Fred!"

"Linda!"

"That guy," said the Ace, "doesn't know what he's playing with. He's due for a nice long ride, and I don't mean a comfortable one." "Nerts," said Al.

Fred Harris is in for plenty of trouble if the Ace and Al have anything to do with it. Don't miss next week's thrilling installment.

THINGS I NEVER KNEW TILL NOW

1. That there are twelve men on the jury because there are twelve months in a year, it being agreed by the originators of the idea that people born in different months cannot be one opinion.

2. That "Hallelujah" is pronounced the same in every language.

3. That there is a very wealthy Indian squaw, whose main object is comfort. She bought an ambulance so she could ride lying down.

4. That some flowers do not like music. A carnation will actually turn its head away from a radio. Try it.



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