

Coming Stories by
Edward Worthy
Edward Lawson
Dorothy West

THE OMAHA GUIDE

JUSTICE/EQUALITY ALL THE NEWS WHILE IT IS NEWS NEW TO THE LINE

The Finest Writers
Send Their Stories
First to the Illus-
trated Feature
Section

W. B. Ziff Co., 608 Dearborn St., Chicago
Advertising Representatives

ILLUSTRATED FEATURE SECTION—December 17, 1932.

BLUE RIBBON FICTION IS FOUND EVERY WEEK IN
THE FEATURE SECTION

BRIGHT LIGHTS

WHAT HAS HAPPENED: This is the story of Ellen Young, pretty 18-year-old girl with a great deal of ambition. Born in the poverty-stricken environment of Cream Ridge, she decides upon a career for herself rather than marriage or the ordinary life of drudgery. She finds a job in a small tea-room to pay the cost of a course in stenography. In the tea-room she meets and comes to like Jerry Wilson, the only waiter, who plans some day to open a similar shop of his own. Jerry asks Ellen to join him in the projected venture, first as his cook and later as his wife. But Ellen, grown tired of working in the kitchen all her life, accepts instead a job with Harold Stern, a young publicity man and politician who has come into her home town for a short time on a publicity mission.

Now go on with the story:

CHAPTER II.

Harold Stern proved genial enough as an employer, and although Ellen at first resented the little familiarities in which he chose at times to indulge, she finally came to take them quite as a matter of course. And in spite of the aversion which he had at first inspired in her, she found herself now, as she continued to work for and with him, strangely fascinated, swept off her feet.

He was intelligent, quiet, suave, successful. For many years he had been a theatrical press agent; that was still his principal occupation. But now that the theatrical business was at such a low ebb, he had accepted this political job until things picked up. It would last, probably, only until after the election in November, but it paid him well in the meantime. That was what Ellen liked about him: he could get the soft-snap jobs, jobs which paid big profits on small investments of time and energy. She compared him to other men she had known—hard-working, poorly dressed chaps like Jerry Wilson—and the comparison was inevitably in his favor. Oh, he had it all over them!

Their work progressed beautifully. There was not much to it after all—only a few dozen letters to be sent out each day, a couple of speeches to be given during the weeks that immediately preceded the election. Ellen was particularly impressed by the speeches which she typed; she admired Harold Stern for his intelligence, his use of words, his splendid command of the English language. She was sorry when election day drew near, for she felt that it would mean the end of her association with the man who had given her her first real break. And although she was happy when their candidate did win the election, she could not suppress her anxiety over what the future held in store.

The morning after the election returns had all come in, she went to the office as usual, though with some misgivings. Stern came in late; he looked tired and had evidently been drinking the night before.

"Well," she asked him, cheerily enough, "what are we supposed to do now?"

He grinned at her. "Baby," he said, "we're moving. We're going back to little old New York. Earl Tracey's decided to put on a new show up there, and I'm gonna press-agent it."

"We?" Hope sprang to Ellen's heart.

"Sure, we. You're my secretary, aren't you?"

"Oh, of course." Ellen experienced the joy of elation. "Gee, won't that be great?"

He looked at her in wonderment. "Never been to New York?" he asked.

"No," she told him. "Never. But I'd like to go. I've heard so much about it and all . . ."

"Then run along home and get packed up. We're leaving this afternoon—the 2:26, so we'll be there by night. I've got to drop in and see Earl around nine."

"Go right now?"

"Yep, and make it snappy. I'll get your ticket. Here's your check for last week. Now heat it, it's my



"I'll bet she could do the part better than you are doing it now."

There'll be a lot of men in here soon to cart this stuff away."

"Yes, Mr. Stern."

She drew on her coat and hurried through the door, then half-ran to her little home.

Having joyously informed her mother and father of the good news, she proceeded briskly to throw the few good clothes which she possessed into a thin pasteboard suitcase. Her face was lit with bright anticipation. "Gee, mom," she said to the sick woman who lay on a couch in the front bedroom, "won't it be simply grand!"

Her mother smiled faintly. "Just be careful, Ellen. Watch your step. There's lots of pitfalls in a big city like New York for a young girl like you. Especially when she's as pretty as you are."

"Oh, mother," she cried. "Don't worry about me. I'll be all right. I'll write you long letters and tell you everything that's happened. And I'll be making lots of money—enough to pay all your doctor's bills, and more besides."

"You're going right away, Ellen?"

"Yep. Gotta hurry. I want to run over and tell Jerry about my good luck, tell him goodbye."

She kissed her mother and flung herself downstairs and out the front door. Suitcase in hand, she made her way quickly to the little tea-shop in which she had worked so long, side by side, with Jerry Wilson.

She found him there, seated behind the counter reading a magazine. Breathlessly, she told him: "I'm going to New York, Jerry!"

He started. He said, "Who're you going with?"

"With Harold Stern. I'm his stenographer."

"Oh, Ellen—" His voice seemed to hold vast disappointment in her.

"You aren't sorry?"

"I AM sorry," he reversed her. "Gee whiz, to think of your running off with a no-good guy like that—"

"But there's nothing wrong with Harold, Jerry," she insisted. Then realization came to her. "I know," she went on, "you're just jealous, that's all. Jealous of Harold."

"Maybe I am," he admitted. "But after all, haven't I a right to be? Stern isn't anything but a cheap publicity man; he doesn't deserve to have a decent girl like you around him."

"But you've got to remember, Jerry, I'm just his stenographer. I'm only working for him. There's nothing wrong in that, is there?"

"And can't you see, Jerry, it's my

waited for all my life. I couldn't let it slip through my fingers."

Jerry forced a slight smile. "I see," he gulped. "I guess maybe you're right. Well, anyway, I sure hope you're a great success when you get to New York. And I know you will be. You'd be a success anywhere; you've got the stuff in you."

"Oh, Jerry—" She threw her arms suddenly about him, kissing him briefly on the forehead. "Goodbye, Jerry," she said softly.

"Goodbye, Ellen—" She turned, gathered up her things quickly, and hurried away, leaving him sitting there, vastly confused, amazed.

New York was a revelation to Ellen Young. Never before had she seen anything like it. In glowing terms she described it in the long letters which she wrote each night to her mother, telling of the awe-inspiring splendor of its skyline, the beauty of its waterfront, the magnificence of its towering buildings. Her tiny apartment in the heart of Harlem was a palace to her in comparison with the dingy little Cream Ridge shack in which she had lived all her life. The parks, the buildings, the streets, the subways, the theatres, all were a constant source of interest to her. How beautiful, how wonderful life was here!

Harold Stern located himself in a somewhat more elaborate apartment hardly a block from hers. The night after they had gotten settled, he called for her in his car. "We've got to get to work," he told her. "Tracey's got that show rounding up already, and he wants some snappy advance notices in the papers about it. We'll go over to his apartment first and see what we can pick up. Bring a pencil and some paper with you."

"All right," she agreed. "You go ahead. I'll be down in a minute."

She changed her clothes quickly, grabbed a stenographer's notebook and pencil, and hurried down to join him. The car astounded her; she had never before seen one so beautiful, so handsomely appointed before, except at a distance. "They wouldn't let me bring it down to the Ridge with me," he explained. "Said it looked too prosperous and would make all the people down there turn against me. I guess they were right, at that."

"It's simply swell," Ellen sighed, leaning back on its luxurious upholstery. They sped through the streets of Harlem, past row after endless row of almost identical brown-fronted houses. Then Lenox

Avenue, a turn to right, and they were there.

Earl Tracey's apartment was one of the most elaborate establishments which Ellen had ever visited. The lights were soft and shaded, the carpets deep, the walls hung with beautiful tapestries. A fireplace with its blazing log made the first room cozy; further back a radio furnished music.

There was a brief wait before Tracey himself put in his appearance. Ellen sat on a deep-cushioned sofa with Stern and talked in a low undertone about nothing at all. When Tracey at last came in she saw a small, thin, very nervous man in a long dressing gown; a very dark complexioned man, but a rather handsome one.

"Oh, hello there, Stern," he said as he entered the room. "Glad to see you back." Then he turned to Ellen. "Your stenographer?"

Stern gripped his hand. "Yeah, brought her back with me."

"I get you." There was a brief hint of a sideways smile on Tracey's face which Ellen could not understand. However, as it was obviously intended for Stern, she did not let it bother her. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Young, Ellen Young."

He nodded briefly. "All right," he said, "come on back here and let's get to work."

They went into the rear room. Tracey switched off the radio, then began talking rapidly to Stern about the projected show. From time to time, Stern would turn and snap a few phrases at Ellen, which she would dutifully record in her notebook. It was long past midnight when they were through. Stern took Ellen home in his car.

The following morning their work began in earnest. There were newspaper stories to be gotten out and mailed—dozens of them. There were feature stories about each of the stars who were to take part in the elaborate production, shorter items concerning the chorus girls and lesser principals. There were advertising contracts to be let, programs to be ordered, circulars to be distributed. It was all very new and interesting and fascinating to Ellen, and though it was hard work, she reveled in it.

Tracey was whipping the show into shape very quickly for an early opening, so all of the preliminary work had to be rushed. Often Ellen worked with Harold Stern in his apartment until early in the morning, taking down items as fast as he could dictate them, suggesting new slants out of which

he could fashion stories. With untiring energy she attacked the great mass of work, and long before the time of the final rehearsal Tracey's show, which he had named "Dark Harlem," had received an extraordinary amount of publicity.

Only the final dress rehearsal now remained before the whole show would be loaded up and sent to Washington for a try-out week. If it proved a success there, they all knew it was due for a long, long run in Harlem, or even on Broadway.

Ellen attended the dress rehearsal as part of her job. Any little incident which happened now would be news, and Stern's business was to get the news into the papers. They sat together in the front of a chilly, deserted theatre while Tracey ran the performance from a point of vantage in the orchestra pit. Often things displeased Tracey, and when that happened his nervous temperament would flare up; he would call for a repetition of the scene which had displeased him. The night dragged on as number after number was gone over, pepped up, slowed down, or cut out altogether. The orchestra grew weary with the constant repetition; most of those who had merely dropped into the theatre to watch the rehearsal left their seats and went home. Still Harold Stern remained, picking up bits of interesting information here and there, dictating them to Ellen for future reference.

At two o'clock in the morning the whole performance definitely struck a snag. Tracey was working on a garden scene, one which featured a very beautiful young girl in a charming duet with one of the male principals. The trouble was with the girl. She was tired and sulky, and Tracey's constant fault-finding only served to sharpen her temper.

"Good Lord!" the producer shot at her after the fifth try, "What's so hard about that number, anyway? Why, I could pick a girl up out of the streets who'd do it better than you without half trying. Why don't you stop acting and just be natural? That's all there is to it."

The girl tried again, with even worse results. Tracey tore at his hair. He looked around him. "Look," he cried, "I could get that girl back there, with never a day of stage experience, and put her in there—and I'll bet she'd do the part better than you're doing it now."

Ellen smiled at the reference to herself. She was growing tired of this scene now—she had seen it so many times she knew it almost by heart.

But Tracey was serious. He turned suddenly and beckoned to her. "Come up here a minute," he called.

She hesitated.

Stern nudged her. "Go ahead. He means you," he prodded.

Ellen arose and with pad and pencil in hand walked down the aisle toward the stage. Tracey motioned her to go up onto it. She did. The lights, pouring down upon her, blinded her for a moment, then she found herself in the midst of the garden scene which had caused so much trouble.

"Miss Young," Tracey explained, "You've seen what I've been trying to do all this time. I want you to step in there and take the girl's place just long enough to show. Enid here how it should be done. Don't try to act. Just be natural. And hum your part of the song if you don't know the words."

Ellen was nervous, she trembled all over. She dropped the pad and pencil to the floor, then collected herself and started to do as she had been told. Enid LaFrance, the original girl, stood off to the side, her temper slowly arising at the proceedings.

The orchestra started, and the words of the duet came dimly back to Ellen. The action she did not