

Judith Lane

By JEANNE BOWMAN

SYNOPSIS: Judith Dale has gone to the Rio Diablo dam to supervise the work begun by her former employer, Big Tom Bevins, in accordance with the terms of his will. She has left Justin Cunard and Judge Harmon in Houston to fight Mortos Lompero, who is trying to recover for the Bevins heirs the money left Judith by Big Tom for the completion of the dam. But she also has left behind her husband, Norman Dale, Lompero's law partner. Norman does not approve Judith's course. The dam workers await Judith's speech.

Chapter 27

STRAIGHT TALK

AS Judith Dale raised her hand, silence fell on the crowd of dam workers who had come to greet her. They had asked for a speech.

"Tell me what you would like to know?" she asked.

"Our jobs... how about our jobs?" "Who gets Mason's place?" "How long you goin' to keep operatin'?"

Again her uplifted hand—"Big Tom would have had the man next in line fill Mason's place. We'll follow the same plan. Max Larson is next in line."

A roar of approval greeted this. "Your jobs are safe. The new company has money to carry on the work and keep your salaries going during the will contest—"

She stopped. Somewhere on the outer fringe an argument was going on. "What's the trouble?" she demanded.

"Aw," came a voice, "there's a bird back here says we ought to beat it while beatin's goin' and get ourselves a real job. He says the Bevins women are goin' to let this dam go as soon as the will's broke and they get the money."

"What'll we do with him, Miss Judy?" asked a young voice, "shall we ride him out on a rail?"

This emergency was one Big Tom could not have foreseen. Judith knew her dam workers. She had known them all of her life. They could be quickened to mutiny as quickly as they could be quickened to loyalty and upon the turn of a word this decision might rest.

"Ride him out on a rail!" echoed Judith in derision, "why give him transportation, let him walk."

The quick answer won. Roars of laughter, scuffling on the fringe, then silence.

Judith spoke again—"naturally you are interested in your jobs. Whether you keep these jobs or not is up to you. It will depend upon one thing, your loyalty to Big Tom Bevins."

"As you work, remember you are working for him, just as I am working for him. He earned the five million dollars it will take for the erection and maintenance of this dam and he had a right to say how it should be spent. He left it to me with the orders to spend it as he would have spent it had he lived, not for my personal use. I am working as his secretary; his stenographer, at a salary less than many of you are receiving."

"Big Tom knew there would be an attempt to break his will and he prepared for it. There will be no danger from that source... but the same influence which will try to break the will, will try to send spies into camp here to cause dissension, distrust, anything to hinder the work on the dam."

"If you listen to these spies, you will be hurting yourself worse than anyone else."

"Big Tom had foresight enough to protect your interests against our common enemy. Have you loyalty enough to protect his memory and carry out the desire of his life, the building of this dam?"

TO Judith, it seemed the shout of assent was unanimous and shortly afterwards the crowd began dispersing and she found herself surrounded by a group of foremen, engineers and construction men, many of whom she had worked with before.

"You said the right thing, Mrs. Dale," said Larson, "they were worried about working for a millionaire stenographer. You put them straight on that."

"And what you said about loyalty," added another.

"Say, Judy," interposed Clark Goodwin, with whom she had attended college, "did you mean that about working for a salary?"

"I certainly did," she answered, then with a boyish grin, "where do I pitch my tent? And say, could you rustle a second one for my girl friend? This is Delphy, boys, she decided she wasn't going to let me come down here and eat mantillas and hojy beans, so I found her on the train, spending her last nickel to take care of me."

"Good for Delphy, you bet we can find a tent for her."

They had been walking uphill and Judy saw they were fast coming to

the queer ship-rook where the surveying crew had taken shelter during the storm. There in its lee was a small house, lights gleaming through bare windows, hammers beating a rapid tattoo.

They stopped before the opened door and a man in coveralls, pounding a final nail in the door step, stood up.

"Welcome home, Small-Jude," he said.

"Slim Sanford," gasped Judith, "if I didn't know you had wings I'd believe you were your own ghost. However did you get here?"

"With my wings. Cunard sent me down as soon as you razzed up your mind to come. He wired Laredo for lumber to be sent in the door step, worked in their off hours to put this up."

"I repeat, you're a great gang," Judith, who knew the dearthness of lumber so far from shipping centers, appreciated the little wooden shack for its true value. It was just one long barren room with a board of lean-to for a kitchen and a curtained alcove for Delphy, but it spelled luxury.

Delphy took in the situation and called Slim Sanford aside. Slim had been around Hillendale enough for Delphy to have assumed a proprietary air over him and his services.

"Ma's Slim, reckon I'd best make coffee and sangwiches?"

He decided it would be a fine idea and he presided over the oil stove which Delphy eyed with considerable apprehension while she made sandwiches, devoured by the men who sat in the big room talking to Judith.

JUDITH was silent for the most part, listening to them talk and gleaning the real news of Big Tom Town. When Slim came in with the coffee pot she looked up and surprised his eyes in an unguarded moment. Sympathy and tenderness were there, and a fierce protectiveness.

"Delphy says just chocolate for you, Judith," he explained when she held up her cup for coffee.

After the men had left, Judith went to her comfortable bed, brought in on the work train for her, and tried to sleep, but her mind sped back to Houston. What would Norman think when he realized he had left? What would he do? Would he write? Where was he now, still in Galveston, perhaps? His case promised to last for a week at least. She wondered if Mathie was with him?

Restlessly she turned and tossed. Mathie would be with him if it were within her power. Perhaps she would talk him into taking her to their farmhouse for dinner... perhaps there would be clove pinks and hollyhocks along the path.

She was being silly, neither one were in blossom this time of the year and Norman would not be out with Mathie.

She should be thinking of the work which lay before her. She thought of Slim Sanford instead, thought of him wonderingly. Of course Slim had been acting as a winged courier for Cunard, and yet there seemed to be something deeper in his concern for her welfare.

Judith did not want Slim's regard to go deeper than friendship—and yet she felt a twinge of pleasure when she thought of the aviator.

She started to turn and heard Delphy's springs creak. She held her breath. If Delphy learned she was awake she'd have to drink some more chocolate and she couldn't. She lay there wondering what the old woman would do when she saw the native children; try to fatten them? What a time she'd have.

That was it, she'd write Norman in a light vein—"Normy dear, behold your wife, Delphy accompanied by six cans of chocolate and the old red brick—"

She curled into a comfortable position, punched her pillow into a puff ball and burrowed her head into it resolutely. She'd count sheep. She began, one, two, three... and then one hundred, two hundred... six hundred and fifty... was it six or seven... there were voices outside. She opened her eyes, the sun was streaming in through the uncurtained windows and Delphy was tiptoeing to the door, a warning—"Shhh!" preceding her.

"Ize right sorry sir, but she didn't get no sleep till come, two-thirty this mornin' an' I won't waken her—"

Judith sat up and peeped out the window. Heads, men's and women's, Scougins was in the lead... a delegation of the native families were waiting at the door.

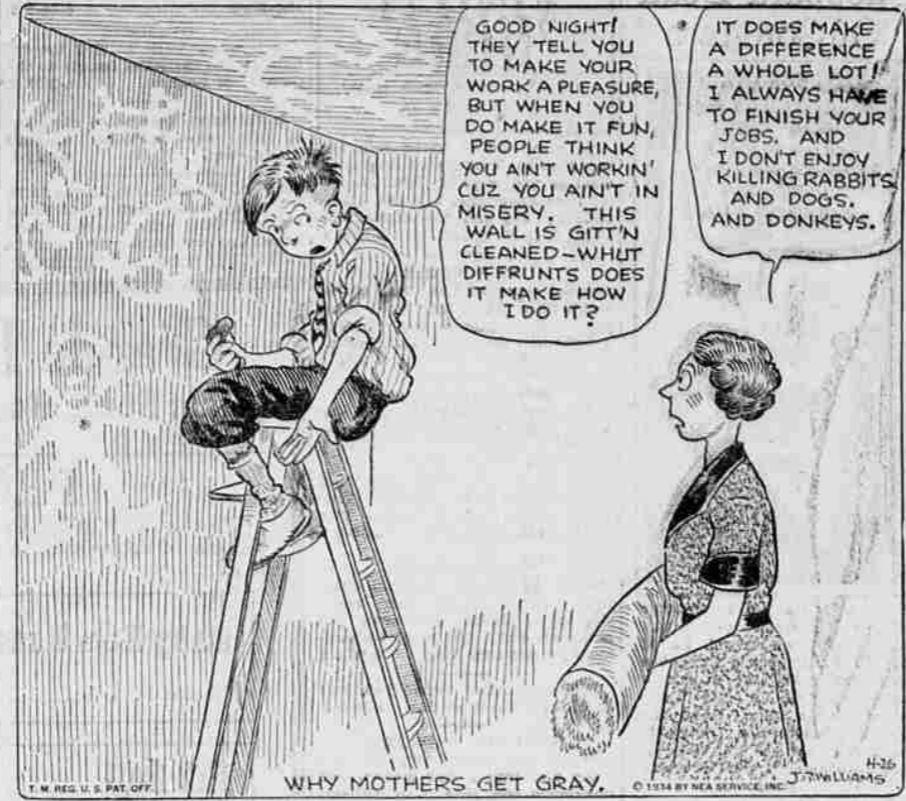
"Delphy," she called, "tell them I'll be out as soon as I dream."

Tomorrow, J. dy meets a delegation.

OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams THE NEWFANGLES

Chick Has Company!



JOE PALOOKA



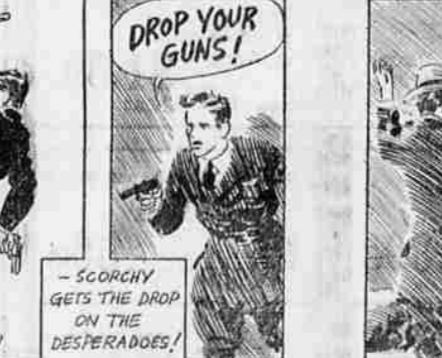
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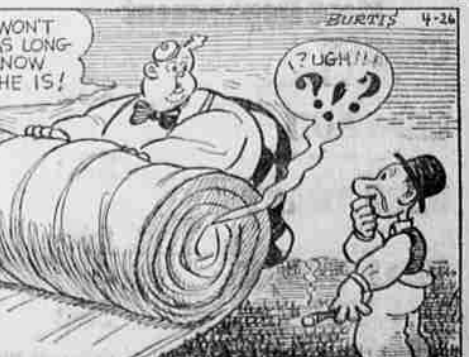
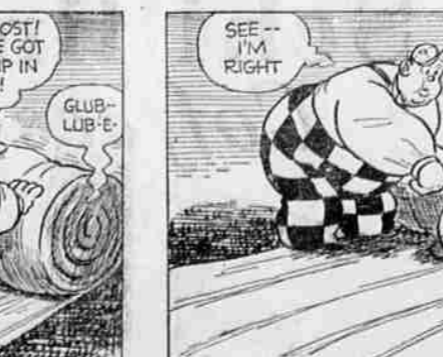
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FLORIDA TO STOCK STREAMS WITH MILLION BLACK BASS

WELAKA, Fla., (AP)—Here's good news for Florida fishermen. More than a million black bass, each weighing half a pound or more, will be taken from the state hatchery here in the spring and turned loose in Florida's fresh water streams. Hitherto hatchery fish were distributed at the finger-length stage and about 85 per cent died or were eaten by larger fish native to the streams.

BAMA STARS IN LEAGUE

AUBURN, Ala. (AP)—Clifford Smith and Charles Kaley, regarded as two of the greatest pitchers ever to wear the uniform of Alabama Polytechnic Institute, have enrolled with the Nashville, Tenn., club of the Southern association.

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