

# Judith Lane

by JEANNE BOWMAN

**SYNOPSIS:** Judith Dale's effort to complete the Rio Diablo dam according to the plan of Big Tom Bevins, her former employer, is complicated by Morton Lampere's effort to recover for the dam. Judith's five million dollar debt to Big Tom for the dam, against Lampere's agent has led Scoggins, one of Big Tom's loyal supporters, into the belief that the Scoggins farm contains oil, to hamper Judith's work. She is waiting for the report of her geologist before acting.

## Chapter 36

### SCOUTING TRIP

JUDITH awaited the return of geologist Kane, and the town of Big Tom seemed to wait with her; sensitive to the feeling of this mass thought, she knew they were waiting for her to make a move.

"This fellow who's dealing with Scoggins must have told them something," said Slim Sanford, as he sat on the step of Judith's shack.

"If we only knew what it was," said Larson, "we might know how to deal with it. Work has actually slackened off, oh, not the hours of labor, but the efficiency."

"He's probably spread the rumor that we're going to abandon the dam," Scoggins said drily. "Scoggins made it plain to me that if we wouldn't stop work, they would ask for an injunction."

"But Judith," Slim interrupted, "isn't the dam more important than an oil well?"

"We think so, but the rights of the individual are always important, and it would be up to the courts to decide that. They'd probably have to set a precedent with their decision because I'm sure such a problem never before has come up."

"And meanwhile," said Slim thoughtfully, "the dam work would be lying idle and that wouldn't look so good for you in court, would it, at the time of the will contest?"

"She could prove it wasn't her fault couldn't she?" asked Larson.

"Yes," agreed Slim, "but Lampere could use the point against her case. He could say that had Big Tom been in his usual mental health, he wouldn't have overlooked protecting such a salient piece of land, from such possible danger."

"And," added Judith, "he could say that of course one could not expect a mere stenographer to foresee and handle such an oversight, therefore proving her to be unworthy of her trust."

"What do you say we hop into my ship and fly up to Scathborne's field? It won't be as trying as sitting here waiting for Kane."

They followed the course of the Rio Diablo up to the point where it forked, one fork working its way into the low lying hills, the other curving aimlessly through a section of brown plain.

Slim, ever accustomed to reading the far mystery of the earth's topography, sighted Scathborne's field below and started banking through the sunset to a height where the others could see it.

The wooden derrick had been erected, and although the little shed housing the machinery which supplied the dynamo was but half completed, the dynamo was evidently in working order, for as they watched lights flashed on and off on the derrick.

Kane was waiting for them when they landed. Judith spied him first and set the rapid pace for the others. Eagerly the trio faced the geologist and waited for his verdict.

"Now of course," he parried, "I'm not psychic enough to tell whether there is oil any place, but I can tell you this much. There is every evidence of Scathborne's having struck a lucky pool."

"And our land here, Scoggins' land?" interposed Judith.

"There isn't any reason, geological or otherwise, to allow anyone to believe there is oil there."

"Then why—" began Max Larson.

"I'll answer that," said Judith with sudden conviction. "It's clear now, the whole thing. Lampere has had an unbelievably lucky break. If Scathborne brings in a well and Scoggins is drilling, Big Tom's dream of building a dam in this valley, will be outlawed."

"If there is oil here and the people don't need the dam; don't want it because it will flood land from which they can win more money than they could in a thousand years by farming it, there will be no more need of my going on with the dam and the logical procedure of any jury will be to return that Bevins' money back to Mathie and Mrs. Bevins."

"What are you going to do, Judith?" asked Slim and Larson in unison.

"I'm going up on the rock and I'm going to think," said Judith decisively. "If my eyes tell me true, Scoggins is coming up the hill. Keep him entertained, don't give him your report, Mr. Kane, and I'll be back soon."

She slipped out of the rear door and in the gathering shadows of twilight raced up to the rock. Delphy had asked if this was where she communed with Big Tom. Perhaps it was, perhaps, however that great basin of shadows and the cupped bowl of the sky impressed her with the vastness of the world and kept petty problems from intruding into her analysis of the important ones.

What would another man, an engineer, do under such circumstances? Which was the more important, oil, or growth? But that wasn't up to her. She had sworn to carry on as Big Tom had wanted without thought of self.

Eyes on the glimmer of the evening star, silver against the apricot afterglow, she thought, "What would he do? Suddenly she knew... but without money how could it be done? Big Tom would find a way and so would she."

Judith turned and walked back down the hill ready to face Scoggins.

THERE was something martial in the step of Judith Dale as she strode down the hill to her house where Scoggins, Kane and her two faithful friends awaited her.

"Hello, Mr. Scoggins," her greeting was friendly. "I was going to call you up to hear Mr. Kane's report. You've met him of course, the boys would see to that. Mr. Kane, you know, is Jackson B. Kane, the geologist who free lances among the big oil companies of the south... you've heard of him I know."

"Well... well yes," admitted Scoggins reluctantly. Judith knew that he had because she had taken pains to see that an oil weekly, printed in Houston and carrying a picture and story about Mr. Kane, fell into Scoggins' hands before the two met.

"I'm going to let Mr. Kane give you his report in detail. Suppose we go into the house where there is a light and he will show you some maps he has made."

For the ensuing hour they sat about the table, listening to Kane's slow voice speaking in its assured tones. He used words a layman might understand, and Scoggins nodded from time to time as if he were being convinced against his will. When the geologist had concluded the farmer leaned back against his chair, a queer, baffled look on his face.

"But you won't swear before God there ain't oil there," he challenged.

"No," agreed Kane, "for only God knows."

It was a serious moment. Scoggins nodded. "I'm glad you said that... said it the way you did. It makes me sorta believe in you more'n if you said you did know there weren't any."

Again a few moments of silence, then he spoke again. "Course, my man, the feller who's goin' to run the test well for me, he said you'd say there weren't none, he said Miss Judy'd see to that—"

"And you believed I'd do such a thing, Mr. Scoggins?"

"No, I didn't, and I up and told him so."

"And how do you feel about this now?" Judith's voice trembled in spite of her effort at controlling it.

"... Miss Judy... if it wasn't just for Tommy and Mame, I'd say, forget it, but your man here says maybe... that is he wouldn't swear there weren't no oil. Miss Judy, I just got to go on and see for myself."

"I don't blame you a bit," declared Judith, to the utter astonishment of everyone present. Scoggins included. "It's the only thing to do under the circumstances. If we went ahead and flooded the basin you'd spend the rest of your life wondering if you'd done wrong. You'd never use a yard of water for your orange trees without wondering if that water had washed over land that covered oil."

"That's just it, exactly," murmured Scoggins in wonder, "exactly. 'You ain't mindin' me goin' on then and you stappin' work on the dam?'"

"Mr. Scoggins, do you realize if I stop work on the dam, and your well doesn't come in, you'll put your planting back one whole year? And you'll put the planting of every other farmer along the river back that same length of time!"

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Monday, Judith discloses her daring plan.

to Baker where Mr. Baum will have steady employment.

Mr. and Mrs. Mac Stark, of Walling, were weekend guests at the J. B. Welmer home.

Mr. and Mrs. Monroe Hemphill, of near La Grande, spent the weekend at the Fred Taal home.

Mrs. Mabel Scott and daughters motored to Meacham Sunday to visit with their son and brother, John Scott.

Two carloads of sheep belonging to Tom Boylen were unloaded late Saturday night. They were trailed out to summer range Monday.

Frank Bennett went to Kameka Monday where he will have employment for sometime on the railroad.

How Times Change—On the Track Lawrence, Kan. (5)—Fifty-seven years ago a field meet was held at the University of Kansas and the late W. G. Raymond won the mile run in 6 minutes, 41 seconds. Fourth place winner in that meet was timed at 10:08 not bad for the two-mile nowadays.

### HILGARD PERSONALS

Ed Salling, who suffered a slight stroke a week ago and is unable to be up, had many visitors Sunday. Among them were Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Booher and Mr. and Mrs. Ole Matheson, of Perry, Mrs. Carl Salling and daughter, Betty Joe, of Kamela. Mr. and Mrs. Bill Salling, Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Driscoll, Mrs. Gladys Lilly, Mrs. O. White and Mr. and Mrs. Glen Salling and son, all of La Grande. Mr. and Mrs. John Grey, Steve Beauschamp and Pete Kutrux, of Hilgard.

John Grey has been called to Meacham as foreman of an extra gang on the railroad.

Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Booher, of Perry, spent the weekend visiting old friends in Hilgard.

Mr. Crow went to Pendleton Saturday to work for a couple of days.

Mr. and Mrs. Mac Rees and children, of Cove, spent Sunday at the Fred Rees home.

Mr. and Mrs. Orville Baum, of La Grande, were also guests at the J. B. Welmer home. They are moving

### OUT OUR WAY

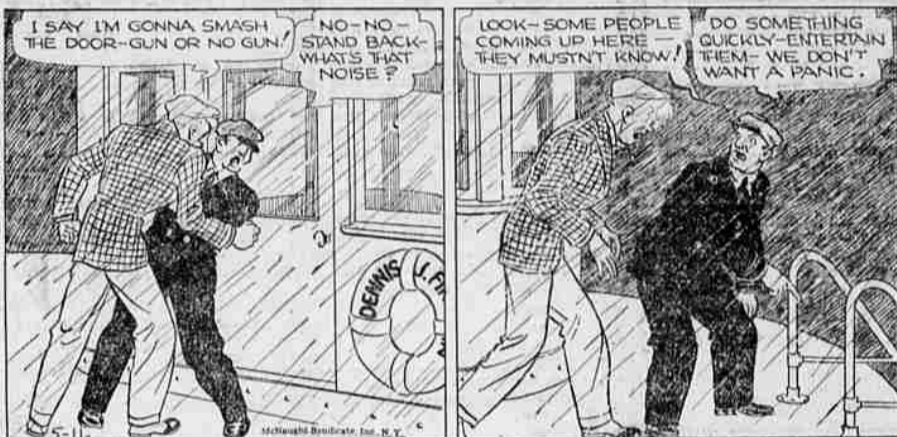
By J. R. Williams

### THE NEWFANGLES

### A Little Oversight!



### JOE PALOOKA



### OLLY OF THE MOVIES by Ollendorff



### DIANA DANE

(Trademark Registered) U. S. Patent Office

### While They Last



### SCORCHY SMITH

(Trademark Registered) U. S. Patent Office

### Three of a Kind



### THE DILLYS

