o Much for Love

by NARD JONES © 1936 NEA Service, Inc.

CHAPTER VII

s indeed a closely-knit town, large nor small, into which Courtney brought Helena—and alarm she discovered that the Department Store was the most impressive structure She was to learn that it was re not simply in size. True, not as large as Helvig's, Helena had worked, but it ly the biggest organization kind in its half of the state. the town, as well as to the ding farm families, it was a of life. Women met their at Henderson's, had tea or here. The store was more than place where they could buy al- ything they wanted.

can see from what I've said," wrote her mother, "that I've hands full—and that I don't just what to do. I'd thought you here with me, but the I don't know whether I'll not living in the Henderson It's too big, and it frightens I never could feel I had any there. So I've taken a ttle est and I've hardly been out last week. But today John telephoned and said he was over. I have to meet Peter's and a man from the bank. . . ."

tried to keep from this letter mother the feeling of bewil- the frightening knowledge yond her little apartment the waiting to see her, appraise her. Helena did not con- she had more than once ed escaping to the station and the first train—any train, so it was bound away from the the towering Henderson De- Store.

* * *

had just sealed and stamped when the bell of her apart- nded. "It must be Courtney," thought with a sigh. Aloud, "Come in, please."

ing from the little writing desk nfronted, not John Courtney, Frazier. The girl wore a tweed suit and a jaunty hat Helena instinctively realized from Helvig's.

morning, Miss Frazier." Hel- tered. "I'm awfully glad you

," answered Leah Frazier, precisely a call, Miss Derrik." lled coldly. "It is Helena Der- t it? I mean, you wouldn't all yourself Mrs. Peter Hen- would you?"

ignored the thrust. "Won't down?"

nk you, no. I can state my very briefly. I understand going to meet Roger Barnes

, I am."

er Barnes managed the store er, you know. I suppose you turn everything over to him?"

fingered the letter she had ritten. "I'm not prepared just discuss my plans."

Frazier's eyes glittered with anger. She kept her voice level obvious effort. "Perhaps, r, you'll consider my advice, hape."

advice is that you relinquish to Peter's estate. No doubt rnes will be willing to make compensation—say, a sum that e reasonable under the circum- ."

parently you've discussed the with him?"

why not? My people were the founders of this town. I friend of Peter's and of his Obviously, you have neither kground nor education to even in the management of the

smiled. "Perhaps not the und, if that's necessary. But rked in stores for quite a I think that might be a very ducation for this job. With the of Mr. Courtney, and perhaps one from the bank—even Mr. if he wishes to help—I might ng."

couldn't!" Leah returned control. "Everyone knows ked Peter into marriage—just might fall into this. I suppose ought you played into great en he had the accident. I sup-

t's enough, Miss Frazier!" ried, facing her. "If everyone a story like that it's only you've spread it. Now will you leasa?"

Frazier girl colored, held fast composure. "Yes, gladly. But ess, I'll warn you. If you at- to stay in this town you'll Peter's store in six months. you to do it."

ll help? . . ." said Helena, derstanding.

Frazier smiled. "Yes. And so my friends. We'll boycott son's Department Store, and e accounts there now running ery of money. You don't know how fast a thing like that can spread in a town such as this."

* * *

Helena gazed at her in sudden contempt. "You'd—you'd do a thing like that just to spite me? You'd try to smash Peter's store and hurt the town, just to—"

"Oh, it would come back," interrupted the Frazier girl. "After we got rid of you." She turned and left the apartment, slamming the door insolently.

When Courtney arrived he found Helena wrapped in a cold rage that had not subsided from the moment Leah Frazier had gone.

"The Frazier girl was just here," Helena told him. "She wants me to turn the store over to Barnes. And she says if I don't she'll boycott it."

The lawyer pursed his lips. "I was afraid of something like that. And there's another hurdle, too. I've discovered Barnes has been talking to the employes. He's warned them that if you take over you'll mismanage the place, put it out of business, and lose their jobs for them. If he fails in that stunt, he's going to contest the will on the grounds that Peter was temporarily incompetent when he made you his sole heir."

"I don't care about that," Helena whirled upon him. "They can all have the store if they want it. But I don't like the idea of being run out of town. Won't anybody be with us?"

"It's hard to say. I think we can count on one person, and he's important to us. That's John Lassiter."

"Who's John Lassister?"

"He's old Aaron Lassister's son. Aaron's president of the biggest bank here—the one we do business with—but he's turned things over to John mostly."

"Why . . . why should he be with us?"

Courtney shook his head. "I don't know, but he is. He told me he thought you ought to have every consideration. And I don't think he approves of the wide credit Barnes allows in the store. He thinks it's bad business now."

Helena looked at the attorney. "I wonder," she said slowly, "who the people are who are getting long-time credit at the store? Maybe it's our friends who would boycott. If that's true, we can stand that kind of a boycott." She went into the next room, reappeared with a hat and light summer coat. "Are you ready to see Roger Barnes?"

* * *

Courtney broke into a wide grin. "You know, I believe you like a good fight. I'd never have dreamed that when I first met you. For the first time, you're showing interest in the Henderson Department Store."

"I've had experience in a store bigger than this one," Helena told him. "And I've a good notion to run it—and make them like it." She smiled. "With your help, of course."

Courtney nodded. "You'll have it. And I think you're right, Helena. I knew the president of one of the biggest chain dry goods stores in the country, and when he wanted to put his sons in charge of the business he put 'em behind the counter first." He lowered his voice confidentially. "Frankly, I've never liked the idea of Barnes running the place. I think he lost money for Peter. That is, the store's been paying, but not what it should. Of course, Peter never worried much about that."

Within 20 minutes they were in Roger Barnes' office on the mezzanine floor of the store. Barnes was a cadaverous-looking man in his early 50's, startingly unlike his late nephew. He made no secret of his resentment toward Helena. Plainly he intended to frighten her out of the business if he could.

They had talked only a few moments when John Lassister arrived. The banker's son was a pleasant, well set-up young man, whose ready smile did not conceal the fact that he knew his way about. After expressing sympathy for Helena, he was all business, but she could sense the friendliness Courtney promised.

"I've been showing—ah—Mrs. Henderson the financial statement," Roger Barnes said. "But of course I doubt that it means very much to her."

"Oh, yes," said Helena sweetly. "We used to draw up financial statements as part of our high school course." She turned to Lassiter. "I may be wrong, but it seems to me that, in comparison with the total annual volume, we carry a tremendous amount on the books. There's a notation here that says some are 90-day accounts. Several of the larger charge accounts run six months or a year. Isn't that rather unusual?"

Roger Barnes spluttered. "Those are people whose good will we need."

"Just so that I can get some idea . . ." Helena turned back to Barnes. "Is Miss Frazier one of those? And if she is, would you call her representative of this class of trade?"

(To be Continued)

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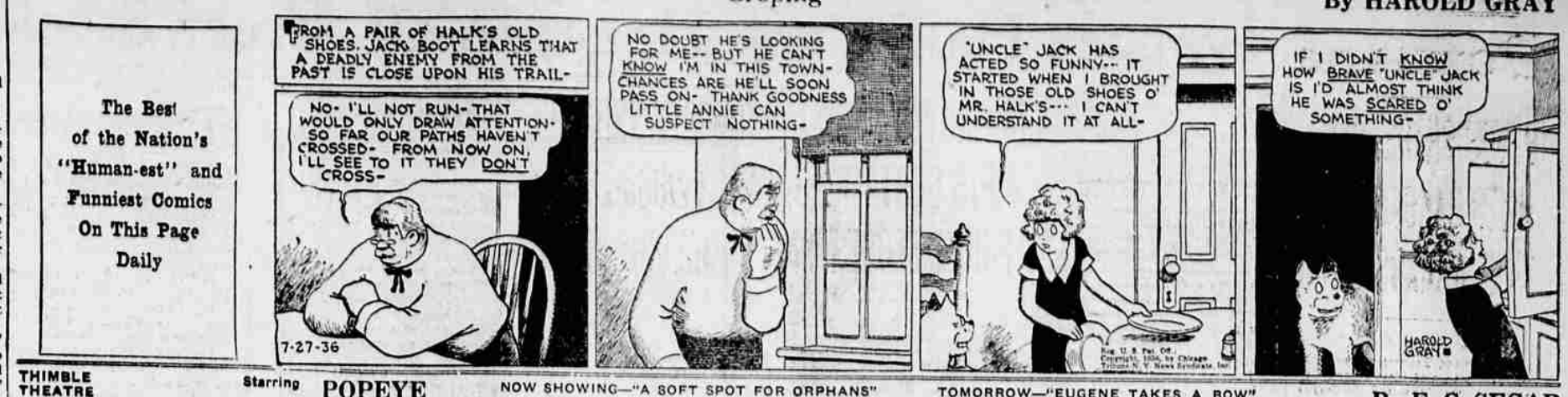

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