

The SHINING TALENT

By ELEANOR EARLY © 1929 NEA Service Inc.

THIS HAS HAPPENED MOLLY BURNHAM, sensationally successful young playwright, has returned from Europe, to assume the care of little RITA NEWTON, daughter of Molly's dead roommate, RED FLYNN, Rita's father, and meet Molly in New York, and travel to Boston with her. JACK WELLS, Molly's sweetheart, was also at the pier, when the boat touched. But Jack saw Red Flynn with his arm about Molly, and left the dock angrily. Molly telephoned him later at his office, reproaching him for his foolish jealousy, and asking him to take her to luncheon. Jack says he is sorry, but he has an engagement with an important client, Mrs. Bulwer-Eaton. Molly is hurt and angry, and decides it doesn't pay to love a man too much.

Red Flynn reads the script of a new play Molly has written, and declares that it is better than "The Death of Delphinus Darrow," which has already made her famous.

When they reach Boston, Molly and Bob take a taxi to Bob's flat, and Bob tries to tell Molly of the girl she will meet, a girl who is supposedly caring for little Rita. NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY CHAPTER XXIX

BOB was genuinely distressed that Molly felt uncomfortable for him.

"A friend of Rita's," she prompted, willing to help him out.

"Oh, no—Lord no!" He took off his derby, and mopped his forehead. He straightened his tie, and tugged at his collar.

"The fact is," he blurted, "she's a . . . well, sort of a cheap little thing, Molly. But she's a decent sort, really. And she's awfully good to little Rita."

"Oh, a nurse-maid," she said (if he would only let it go at that!).

But Bob was honest. Or perhaps he was merely cautious.

"Well, she's a sort of friend of mine," he admitted. "Rita, of course, knows her. She's not Rita's sort, you see. She worked at the office for a while. Her name's Elsie—Elsie Smith. You'll be nice to her, won't you?"

Molly laughed.

"You don't think I'd be nasty to any friend of yours, I hope! But you won't need me, will you? I mean to look for an apartment tomorrow. I'll need a bigger one now. I'll find something near, so that you can see Rita every day."

"You're awfully good, Molly. I expect I'll be a good deal of a nuisance."

Molly hadn't thought of that before. Now she considered the probability of a nuisance. Well, anyhow, he needn't think he could bring his Elsie Smith around!

When they reached the flat, Elsie Smith, in pale blue georgette, greeted them effusively.

"It was simply grand of you to come, Miss Burnham," she declared, extending a very small, limp hand.

"Bob certainly thinks an awful lot of you. He's talkin' about you all the time. Rita's out in the park. It's so lovely and sunny I thought it would be good for her."

She was almost pitifully anxious to impress Molly favorably.

"Don't you think Bob looks real good?" she appealed, and added quickly, "Aren't what's he's been through. I've tried to keep him cheered up, Miss Burnham. Because there's no use, as you say, cryin' over spilled milk. And all the tears in the world won't bring the dead back again. Bob's beginning to get like himself again."

She took his arm in proprietary fashion, and Molly saw that he was winking under her familiarity.

"I'll go get Rita," she offered.

Elsie said she had better go about dinner, and retired to the kitchenette, to chatter pans, and make a great many busy sounds.

Molly suspected that the girl's culinary achievements were largely confined to opening cans. And the meal proved shortly that she was right.

Molly sat in the divan where she had sat the night Rita took of the disease that was killing her. She could see Rita now, in the big red chair, with her head against the high back.

Molly dashed the tears from her eyes. Elsie was heating tomato soup. And the coffee was beginning to boil. She could hear it percolating. Something had burned, and the smell like toast. She must think of other things, or Bob would come in, and find her crying.

Elsie, nursing an injured finger, appeared in the door. Her cheeks were flushed, and she looked angry.

"I never touch it myself," she said. "But would you like a little drink, Miss Burnham?"

Molly shook her head.

"No, thank you. I don't care for it either."

Elsie went back to her clattering pans. And then, after a while, little Rita from her arms, Molly smiled again on the woman's breath.

Rita was a lovely child. She showed Molly her dolls, and her new shoes, and her little bunny. She confessed that she wore her pink broadcloth coat only for company.

"You're company," she said. "I'd of worn my old blue one, only you was coming."

"Has Daddy told you, dear, asked Molly, "that you're going to be my little girl, too?"

"Elsie told me," announced the child.

Molly smiled.

"I'll be looking for a pretty house tomorrow—shall we?" she asked.

"That would be fun, I guess," declared the little girl politely. "Will we take my doll and my bunny? And my dollies, and the big bunny?"

"Oh, we'll have a lovely party," promised Molly. "And we'll invite everybody—daddy and Elsie, and all the dollies, and the Easter bunny. But I guess maybe we'd better wait until we get all moved in, don't you?"

"What's 'all moved in?' demanded Rita.

"Such a child!" moaned Miss Smith. "She's a regular caution, Miss Burnham. Always askin' questions. Little pitchers, as my mother used to say, have big ears. The things that child picks up! My word, it isn't decent."

Molly was of the same opinion. The sooner she could get little Rita away from the unwholesome atmosphere of her father's flat, the better it could be.

After dinner Molly put the child to bed. And, shortly afterward, protesting that she was very tired, asked Bob to phone for a taxi, to take her to the cab. She would stay there until she found an apartment.

When the cab came, Bob took her to the door. He was very quiet, and Molly was glad that he made no

further excuses for the presence of Elsie. Before she had driven to the end of the street, she missed her bag, and remembered that she had left it on the divan. She had the driver turn about, and, when they reached the apartment, asked him to ring Suite 8, and ask if he might go in for Miss Burnham's bag. A moment afterward, she thought it might be more gracious if she ran in for a moment herself. People like Miss Smith were so apt to take offense at the most trivial things. She ran up the stairs, and reached the door as it closed on her driver. She could hear Elsie's shrill voice.

"Have a drink, Big Boy? Your frosty fare froze this little girl to her marrow."

"Sh, Elsie," remonstrated Bob. . . .

But Molly had turned and fled. In the taxi she dropped her burning face in her hands, and tears dripped through her fingers. But whether they were for Rita, or for her outraged pride, she did not know.

Her eyes were waiting in the lobby of the Copley when she reached there. "I reckoned you'd come here," he said. "And I had such darn good news I wanted to spill it in person. Durbin's been trying to get you on the phone all evening. He was so insistent about it that I called him back an hour ago. Told him I was seeing you, and asked if I could take a message."

"Well?" She lifted her tired face questioningly.

"He said," said dear. He's absolutely sold on it. Says it has Delphinus beaten 10 ways. You can write your own contract, from all I gathered. And he wants to put it on paper."

Molly was very tired. She felt not at all the way a successful playwright, receiving good news, is supposed to feel.

"That's fine," she sighed. "You're awfully good, Rita."

She laid her hand affectionately on his arm. "I've never asked, because you seemed so reticent about it. I've wondered sometimes if you thought me un sympathetic. But I've often wanted to ask you . . ."

"You mean about my mother?" he interrupted. "She's just the same, dear—always just the same. She'll never be any different, till she dies."

"She didn't hear anything about that. Not thing, dear. Don't worry your little head about that."

Red took her hands in his.

"See this, you're all done up. What's the matter? Did Rita's death hit you so fearfully hard, dear?"

"Oh, I'm not just that," she told him, wearily. "It's everything."

"Can't you snap out of it? Any girl who can sell plays like the rest of us eat a meal! Good gosh, Molly, what's eating you? It ought to be the happiest kid in the whole damn country."

"I know, Red. Isn't it funny?"

"Yeah—it's a scream. A perfect scream. I'm apt to bust my sides, laughing."

"Well, run along," she advised. "You don't want me weeping on your shoulder, do you? It is funny, you know. I never felt so much like crying in my life."

The next day Molly went apartment-hunting. It would be better, she decided, to avoid Bob, until she had a home of her own. When everything was ready for little Rita, she would let him know.

She found a place in the Fenway, in a new building. It was very grand, and very expensive. On the merits of the baby's nursery, she signed her lease.

It was a delft blue and buttercup nursery, with Mother Goose paper on the walls, and built-in, modernized furniture, cut on queer, straight lines, like geometrical figures. It faced the east, and its broad front was all of glass—a special kind.

"To admit the ultra-violet rays of the sun," explained the girl agent. "There's nothing like ultra-violet rays for infants. Marvelous things those rays. They're curing tuberculosis with them these days."

That settled it. Maybe it was a lie. Maybe she was stupid and glib. Anyhow, nothing was too good for Rita's child.

Molly's own bedroom was lovely. Luxurious, and feminine. The carpet was soft and green, like moss. The taffeta cushions of her chaise-loungue were orchid. And there were orchid organza curtains that were the dearest things in the world, with the morning sun streaming through them.

The drawing room was modern, and Molly hated it.

"But I shall be entertaining," she reflected. "And the nursery is perfect! I adore my bedroom. And the bath is simply too good to be true!"

She felt, as she signed the lease, very much like a movie actress, because movie actresses, she thought, all had swanky bedrooms. That was an idea she had from reading the soap advertisements.

She wondered if her mother would consider a green porcelain tub immoral. Probably. But her father would think it was great. She said ask him to come and visit her. He could sleep on that funny cubist sofa in the drawing room.

She decided to telephone Bob at his office, to ask him to bring little Rita to her. She could not force herself to spend another evening with that Elsie woman.

But Bob was not in when she called. And, before she could get in touch with him, she had encountered Miss Smith in the lobby of the hotel. "Hello," said strange voice. "I was looking for you."

For a moment Molly did not recognize her. Elsie. You're not tryin' to high hat me, are you? Because I've something pretty important to say to you, Miss Burnham."

(To Be Continued)

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LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



The Orientla Influence



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SALESMAN SAM



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Tell Me, Little Gypsy



WHY IT LOOKS TO ME LIKE TH' NORTHERN LIGHTS ARE BURNED OUT!



By SMAL



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



THAT'S NOT I WANNA KNOW—WHAT BEACH? WHERE DID THEY GO?



LISTEN—THIS IS GOOD! THE BOYS ARE TRYING TO FIND OUT FROM OPAL, WHERE BOOTS WENT—THERE'S JIMMY, AND BUB—HORACE, FERDY, MERVIN—



THEY'RE TRYING TO BRIBE HER NOW—TSK—TSK—THEY WON'T GET MUCH OUT OF OPAL.



YEH—TWO LIL' WREN'S SHOOTED OUT ON US



MOM'N POP



HEAVENS! LISTEN TO THAT RAIN—IT'S SIMPLY TEEEMING !!



I'D BETTER LIGHT THE LANTERN AND SEE IF EVERYTHING'S O.K.



IT'S WATER !!



YOU'RE A FINE BOY SCOUT, PITCHING CAMP RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF A LAKE!



WELL, THE STARS WERE OUT WHEN I WENT TO BED AND BESIDES HOW DID I KNOW WE WERE IN A GULLY?



OUR BOARDING HOUSE



PUT THEM ALL TOGETHER AN' THEY'LL SPELL BURNED CANNED BEANS!



THAT SUPPER YOU COOKED LAST NIGHT WAS A LODGE INITIATION!



ANOTHER MEAL ON THAT ORDER, AN' I'D FOLD UP LIKE A CARPENTER'S RULER



THE canvas parachute worked great.

