

Nothing Venture

by Patricia Wentworth

SYNOPSIS: The tragedy of Nan's first kiss from Jervis is that she feels it was given lightly. Everything is wrong; Jervis demands proof that her father is Nigel Forsyth, famous explorer, and believes she has mercenary motives in accusing Robert Leonard of murderous designs upon Jervis. Nan sends proof to her own husband, the letters set with her tears.

Chapter 24 FIRST OVERTURES

Jervis sorted out the letters Nan had sent him, and read them through. They were the rather stiff letters which a man writes to children with whom he has no other than a formal relation.

I hope you and Cynthia are doing well at school. There's nothing like a good grounding. Your aunt says Cynthia is very backward. I don't know if that's true, but I am very sorry to hear this. You will both have to earn your living some day, as I have nothing to leave you. Life out here is precarious.

Jervis had a tenderness for children. He frowned at the letter as he read it. It was dated July, 1919. Nan would have been eleven. Good Lord! What an exhilarating letter for a kid of eleven to get from a father on the other side of the world! It must have been about the last letter he wrote her too.

He turned to another: My dear Nan,

I have had your letter, and the snapshots of you and Cynthia. In answer to your questions—you are set at all like your mother. I am afraid you take after my side of the family. Your mother was very lovely, and everyone loved her. She took love and admiration as a right. Cynthia has a look of her.

And the letters were signed in the same way: Your affectionate father, NIGEL FORSYTH.

Somehow Jervis found them pathetic. Outside of the signature there was not much affection in them. He got a picture of the man, worried and without an idea of what to do with two little girls in America.

And he had a picture of the child who had hoarded these letters—a child who wanted to be like her beautiful mother, and wasn't; who had to shoulder the responsibility which Nigel Forsyth was laying down. It was Nan, obviously, who had to placate "your aunt," to manage Cynthia, and to bear in mind that she had got to earn her own living. He was prepared to bet that she had to earn Cynthia's living too.

He put the letters back in their envelope and went upstairs. He stood listening at the door between his room and Nan's, and then knocked upon it. There was no answer. And yet he was quite sure she was not asleep; he had a feeling that the whole room was waiting to hear him knock again.

Instead, he tried the handle, and found, as he expected, that the bolt was fastened on the other side. As the handle moved with a faint creaking sound, he heard the soft padding of feet and the merest ghost of a growl. Next instant Bran was snuffing at the crack.

He knocked again, a good deal louder, and became aware of a movement that was not made by Bran. It was a very soft, inaudible movement. It suggested to him that Nan was sitting up in bed—putting back the bed-clothes—slowly, slowly. Bran pushed against the panel and snuffed the key-hole.

With lips against the crack, Jervis said, "Nan—are you awake?" She said, "Yes," in a whisper. It was an uneven whisper, and it told him for certain that she had been crying.

"I didn't mean to wake you." There was no answer to this. "I've brought your letters." Again no answer.

He knew that she was leaning against the door. He heard her hand slip on the panel, but she did not speak. He wondered why her hand had moved. It was not to open the door.

An impatience of her silence gave him a touch of bravado. "I've come to ratify the apology. Aren't you going to open the door?" She said, "No"—or he thought that she said, "No." Afterwards he wondered whether her silence had said it for him.

"Won't you open the door and take the letters?" Nan had wept until she could weep no more. Those scalding tears seemed to have washed everything away, like a flood that obliterated all landmarks and leaves behind it an even desolation. There had been a moment when she could have killed Jervis for that light kiss. The hot rage was gone. There had been a moment when she could have flung herself into his arms; and that too was gone. There remained a grey, desolate loneliness, and she was very tired.

She was not sure whether she had spoken when Jervis asked her to open the door. Bran pressed close to her in the dark, and when his warmth touched her she knew that she was cold.

Her silence and the darkness touched Jervis with a vague apprehension. He had come into his room without switching on the light. The windows stood wide, and uncurtained, and there came from them a faint, dusky half light in which the accustomed furnishings of the room took on a strange aspect. The sky beyond the windows was pale with the rising moon.

All at once the strangeness was in his own thought. He had for an instant the sense that all this had happened before—in a dream—in some strange place. He and Nan, with darkness between them; and Nan weeping in the darkness. It touched a deep unknown spring and released a rush of some emotion which rose in him and then ebbed again.

The whole thing passed between one breath and the next. It left him with the feeling that he had just waked up and did not quite know where he was. He said, in a changed voice, "Are you all right?"

"And this time he heard her say, "Yes"; and he heard Bran push against the door. Nan straightened herself a little. They could not stand here like this. It would be better to open the door and take her letters—only she couldn't do it. If she opened the door, he would know that she had been crying. No—he had no light in his room; there was not the faintest thread of light at the foot of the door.

Why were they standing like this in the dark with the door between them? She had no strength to go away. She leaned against the cold panel, and very faintly her lonely desolation felt the stir of a desire that he should speak, that he should go on speaking; because when she heard his voice she did not feel quite so dreadfully alone.

His voice came to her through the panel. "What is the matter?" She drew a breath that returned in a sigh. "Nothing." "You've been crying." "No."

"Then won't you open the door?" A little warmth crept up in her. She had cried for such a long time. It would be nice to make friends. She was very tired. She put up her hand and slipped back the bolt, and at once she was afraid.

The door opened into Jervis's room. As he turned the handle, Bran threw all his weight against it and plunged joyfully through the opening, mouthing Jervis and butting him with his head. Nan could see him, huge and black against the three pale windows on the far side of the room. She could see Jervis too, tall and black. Bran ran back to her, whining.

She stood quite still where she was, and Jervis took a step forward as far as the threshold and stretched out his hand with the letters in it. He did not cross the threshold, and when she had taken the letters he stepped back. Then he said in a constrained tone, "I've read them. I'm sorry for what I said. I'd no business to say it."

Nan put the hand with the letters to her breast. Her hand was cold, and the letters were cold. She did not speak. All at once Jervis said, "Good-night." He stepped back and shut the door.

Nan nods, Monday, a good friend and a potent ally.

HOG FUEL BURNER FOR JUNIOR HIGH

Installation of a hog fuel burner at the Junior High school to replace the old oil burner, now in use, has been arranged by the Medford school board and will be completed by October 1. Installation will be made by the Com-

bustion Engineering company of Portland. The school board is purchasing the burner only and is doing the excavating and installation of the tank and all other preparatory work. J. O. McNeill has the contract for the excavation work. The new heating system will enable the board to save between \$800 and \$1000 a year over the present cost, making it possible to pay practically all installation expense the first year the new plant is in use. On the basis of bids submitted the

contract for hog fuel was let to the Owen-Oregon Lumber company. In this way the installation will not only lessen the district's heating costs by between \$800 and \$1000 but will enable payment of fuel costs to a local industry. Willamette Registration, SALEM, Sept. 19. — (P) — Enrollment of entering freshmen at Willamette university began Friday with 124 signing up on the first day. Last year there were 170 enrolled the first day.

COUPLE SLAIN IN ARMY TRIANGLE

SAN ANTONIO, Texas, Sept. 19. — (AP)—Sergeant Frank J. Costello of Company F, ninth infantry, at Fort Sam Houston, was held by military police Saturday in the fatal shooting

of his wife and a non-commissioned officer of his company. The victims were Mrs. Anna Costello, 19, who had been separated from her husband about seven months, and Corporal Louis L. Leaman of the ninth infantry. Mrs. Costello was killed in her San Antonio apartment. Shot five times, her body was found huddled in a corner of the living room, the metal top of a radio set clutched against her breast as if for protection. Corporal Leaman, whose home is in Forest City, Me., was shot down

in his tent at Camp Bulls less than an hour later. Military police arrested Sergeant Costello at the camp. PORTLAND, Ore., Sept. 19. — (P) — Police detectives last night arrested Henry Engle, 44, who, they said, is an ex-convict from the Oregon State penitentiary. Detectives said they recovered stolen loot valued at \$1000. Detectives said Engle was sentenced to one year imprisonment for burglary, but that he served only five months. They said he admitted six recent Portland robberies.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—An Old Stunt Modernized!



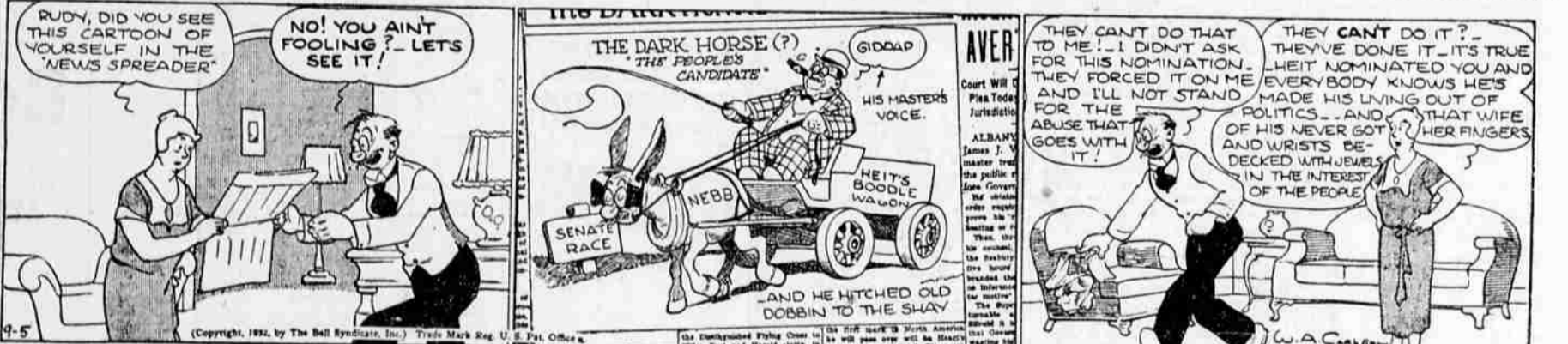
BOUND TO WIN—Still Suspicious



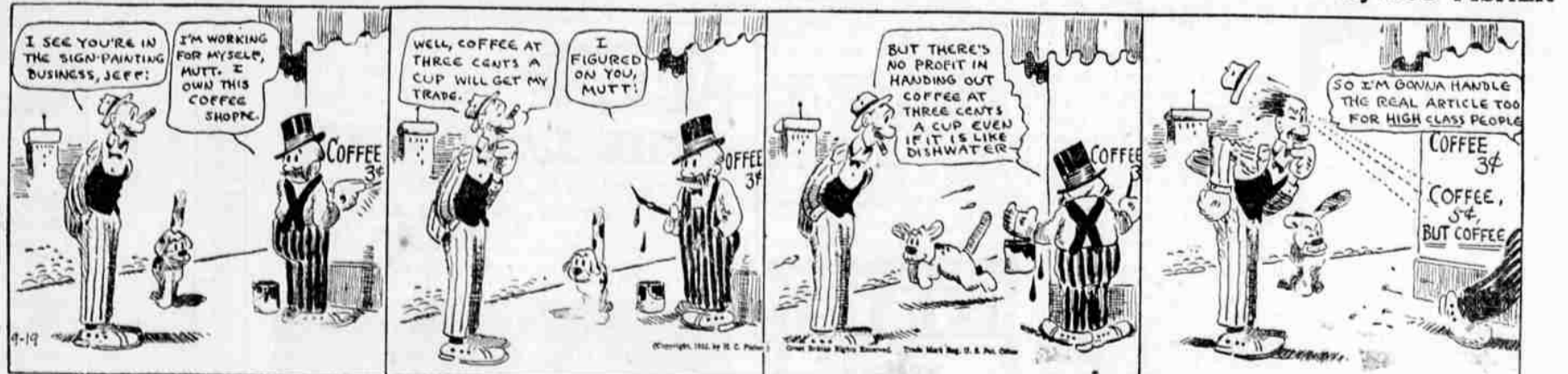
S'MATTER POP—A Last Minute Reprieve



THE NEBBS—I Accept



MUTT AND JEFF—The Imitation—And The Genuine



BRINGING UP FATHER



ENTERPRISE GRANGERS HEAR TALK AT MEET BY MRS. VIVIAN BARTO

Enterprise Grange met September 10 with Worthy Master Eugene Moore in charge. He turned the meeting over to Mrs. Betty Hillis, worthy lecturer. Mrs. Vivian Barto resigned to devote her time to advertising work for the Oregon Grange Bulletin. Mrs. Barto talked about Grange advertising as an opening feature. She spoke on advertising, co-operation, loyalty due to merchants who advertise in the Bulletin. Mrs. Barto went to Josephine county for the Bulletin September 12. Mrs. Hillis continued the program with a reading by herself, a letter from the state lecturer, Mrs. Marie Flint M'All. She urged Grangers to boost the general meeting September 30. Tom Cullen gave a humorous poem by Worthy Chaplain Mrs. Mary Moore, "Nagging Wives." Negro melody, folk song, "Jubilo," "Happy Furder, Excitation," "Hunt-

ing a Pole Cat." Earl Jackson, reading by Sister J. R. Bowen of Henry Ansley's "I like the depression," taken from the Texas Globe News. A story was given by Worthy Master Eugene Moore. Short talk by Frank Jackson, worthy overseer. After a song or two and passing of peace as a treat by Mrs. Hillis, the meeting was turned back to the worthy master who reported the purchase of an electric stove and the completion of business arrangements which permitted the blaze of beautiful light enjoyed at this meeting—the first time Enterprise Grange has had the benefit of their electric lights.

Worthy Secretary Mrs. Harry Purrier gave an interesting report. Earl Jackson was re-installed as a member after several months absence. Marketing committee was scheduled to meet Monday evening at the new court house. Meeting closed in regular order