

Judith Lane

by JEANNE BOWMAN



SYNOPSIS: Rodant because of her engagement to Norman Dale, Judith Lane returns from a trip to Rio Diablo to find two disturbing things. One is that her employer's daughter, Mathie Bevin, is trying to take her place from her, and the other is that Morton Lamper, Norman's law partner, is conspiring to interfere with Judith's trip to Rio Diablo.

Chapter Eight THE PICNIC

JUDITH waited while Tom Bevin regained his composure. She had tried to lead up to Cila's message, gently, but the name of Lamper seemed to startle him.

"I never did trust that man, Judy," he remarked at length, "you know we retained that firm because of Norman's father, then when he died before Norman was admitted to the bar, Lamper took over our work. Tell me what you know."

Judith related what Cila had overheard and when she concluded, the big man nodded his head—"he's seen a chance to make quick money exploiting the land... he needs it, Judith," as a steward appeared, "keep this quiet won't you, don't say anything to Norman. How about your friend? Can you trust her?"

"Absolutely."

They went below to dinner, Judith aware of the frigid condemnation in Mrs. Bevin's eyes for delaying the host. She found herself seated between two of Norman's friends who sought to make up for the lack of kindness shown by her hostess.

But at length the boat docked and Norman, his mother and Cila whisked Judith home to her apartment.

"Have a big rest," Norman admonished. "I'll be around here about noon tomorrow... or today, rather. Want to take you on a picnic; then we'll go home and have dinner with mother. Is that agreeable to you?"

"Of course," agreed Judith, parting reluctantly from his embrace; an program which included him was more than agreeable.

She walked out on the "underslung jaw" of her attic after he had left. The janitor had kept her potted shrubs and flower boxes watered and weeded. She stretched out in a wicker chair and looked up into the velvety blackness of the sky where stars... the color of Mathie's hair... seemed neatly applied.

Mathie loved Norman. Norman's partner Lamper was trying to hurt big Tom... Norman was going to marry her, a mere stenographer. She should stay and protect big Tom. Women... stenographers and newspaper women... were quicker to sense dishonesty, than big bluff honest men.

But she loved Norman and she couldn't go on being a stenographer and have him too... now that she had promised.

She yawned at the velvety sky, made a face at the stars which looked like Mathie Bevin's hair, wondered how a girl like that could belong to a man like Tom Bevin, wandered indoors, dropped the ruffled dress and sheath of foam Cila had insisted was a petticoat, pawed sleepily through a drawer for a nightgown, donned it and tumbled into bed.

"HOW does this appeal to you as a picnic spot?"

Norman had brought his roadster to a stop at the foot of an oak-covered knoll. Judith, looking up from under the wide brim of starched linen hat, felt a queer tug at her heart as she saw the knoll, the two stalwart old oaks topping it, the lazy stream meandering around its base to a far meadow.

"Perfect," answered Judith. She ran ahead of Norman, who carried hampers and rugs, and at the top of the knoll stopped entranced—"Norm... look you can see the city skyline... oh it's a love of a place. I wonder who owns it."

"I do," answered Norman, spreading a rug at the foot of an oak, then seeing the rapt expression of Judith's face, "Judy, would you... consider it as a home site? I know you business girls prefer apartments... want to be around where things are doing. I won't be able to afford a car for you for awhile and it might be lonely until we had neighbors but—"

"Norman I'd love it. Even stenographers like a wee bit of nature 'y'know," she chided.

"Perfect stenographers," he corrected, then "Judy, see that swale down there, that's where I used to go frog hunting and that creek... you'd be surprised at the size of the fish I caught in there. And see that ancient old oak, the one leaning

over as though its load of moss was too heavy? Once my hound Pepper mint tread a possum there."

"Norman, when did you buy this place?"

"Two years ago... the day I first saw you at a board meeting. I knew then you were the girl with whom I wanted to live here for the rest of my life."

Judith pondered a moment "Canny Scotchman," she said, "waited two years to be sure."

"No... I was watching you all of the time. I waited the two years for the money to build after I'd bought the place."

Judith laughed—"that proves I was right, you are a canny Scotchman."

"But Judith," he protested, "I couldn't come to you empty handed. On my small salary we'd have had to rent one of those little houses we saw from the viaduct that night. Tell me, what kind of a house would you like to have here?"

"A white one, with green roof and shutters, slim white pillars and..." she added, dreamily, "pink geraniums in window boxes."

"A modified Mount Vernon. Small one I mean."

"It would be ideal here... stone terraces with velvety lawns leading to the highway... and Norm, could I have an iris bed down there... along the edge of the swale?"

Suddenly she was like an excited child, and Norman, unpacking the delectable lunch his mother's cook Delphinium had prepared, laughed with her. Perhaps, he mused, it wouldn't be so difficult weaning her away from the quick tempo of the business office, or the thrill of adventuring into the field with Big Tom.

THEY watched the sunset from the stacked terrace of their future home, then drove to Norman's house. Mrs. Dale was busy with a bridge foursome—"Judy," she apologized, "I'm so sorry... They just happened to drop in and I did want to get acquainted with you."

"Try to amuse yourself for an hour or so, won't you? Norman, take her around and let her see if she wants any of this furniture... I'm selling next week, just reserving a few favorite bits for my apartment... I'll move as soon as you two are married..."

They had drifted into the living room where the three women waited. Judith received introductions, heard Mrs. Dale say in the midst of them, after one quick glance at a waiting hand—"Four spades."

"Five diamonds," retorted her opponent.

"Five spades," came from her partner.

"Oh come on," exclaimed Norman in a hurt small boy voice, "I want you to meet Delphy and Lige, they had more hand in my upbringing than mother and dad put together."

They went into a spotlessly white kitchen to find Delphy, a large colored woman, bending over the stove and her son, Elijah, in a white jacket, arranging a salad.

"Miss Lane, this is Delphinium Grant, the best mammy a boy ever had."

"Go long," chuckled Delphy.

"I like the results of your mammying," Judith said smiling at the old woman. "Like them so well I'm going to marry him."

"So you is the girl." She subjected Judith to a close scrutiny, then nodded her head.

"Is you, Miss Judith?" questioned Lige. "Well, Ma's Tom Bevin, he all long 'bout four o'clock and he say for you to call him on the telephone soon's you come in."

"His say it's vitamin potent," contributed Delphy.

"Vitamin important," interpreted Norman.

"He say call th' office," said Lige as they started towards the hall phone.

"Something must be wrong for him to be in the office on Sunday," declared Judith, apprehension chilling her.

When Judith returned from the telephone she was the efficient secretary.

"Norman," she had checked herself from addressing him as Mr. Dale, "can you rush me to the office?"

"What's wrong, Judy?" he asked as they were working through Sunday night traffic.

"I can't imagine, Norman. Mr. Bevin talked rather queer. He said he must see me at once and for you to go on home as he wanted me to work late and would drop me off at my apartment on the way home."

Tomorrow, Judith is swept off her feet by Big Tom's plan.

BURIAL INSURANCE WILL BE DIVIDED; ORGANIZER PLAYED

HELENA, Mont., March 21.—(AP) Montana assets of the Merrill Mortuaries, Inc., will be distributed among its nearly 2,000 stockholders in the state.

The concern sold burial insurance. It is the power and duty of the court, Judge Bourquin held, to wind up the business of the concern and distribute its property. He pointed out it could not be dissolved because it is already in receivership.

He described the securities which the firm disposed of in Montana as "less than a lien on a flock of wild geese."

"The defendant is the mere alter ego of (Charles) Merrill in a nefarious scheme to overreach its Montana stockholders," the decision read. "That is one more of predatory flash corporations which in local history in Montana have found green pastures, happy hunting grounds, the land of milk and honey, is clear."

"The marvel," it continued, "is the ease with which their fly-by-night pressure salesmen separate people and money for pseudo securities less than a lien on a flock of wild geese."

Such sales of securities, the judge remarked, "excites wonder" in the "astounded and cynical observer" that anyone should "choose to travel the rugged road of honesty."

WAR COST GERMANY 13,000,000 CITIZENS

BERLIN.—(UP)—Germany lost 13,000,000 citizens due to the war and the Treaty of Versailles. These figures show that Germany's losses were:

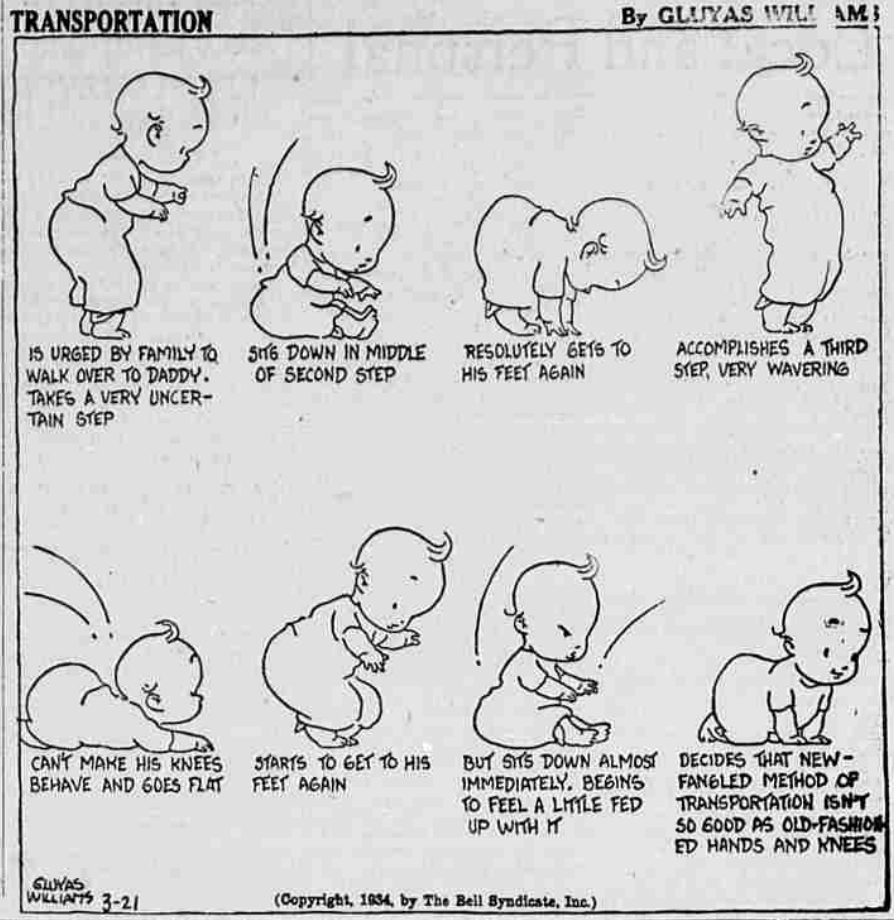
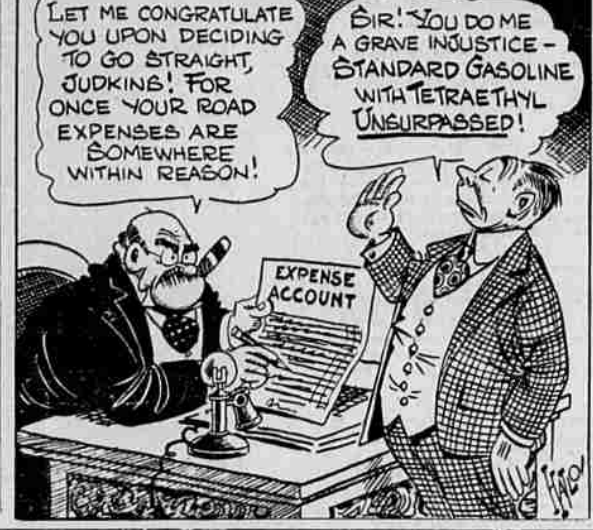
Two million killed at the front in the war.

Three million to 4,000,000 died of hunger, due to the food blockade.

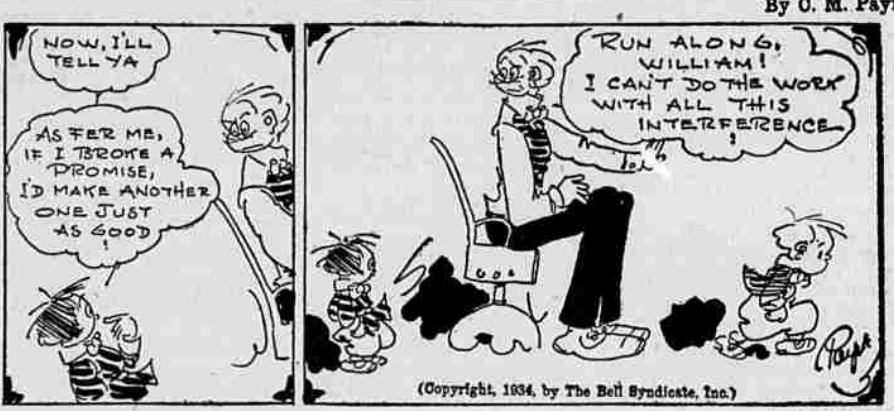
TRANSPORTATION

Montana Youths Work Racket BILLINGS, Mont.—(UP)—Billings has its own version of gangland racketeering. Chief of Police Val Lechner has been called to aid anxious housewives, who said a gang of youngsters have written threatening notes, warning that household garbage cans would be upset "unless you lay 25 cents on your garbage."

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Turkish Palace Renovated—ISTANBUL.—(UP)—Yildiz, the palace of Abdul Hamid the Damned, and the last residence of Turkey's sultans, is being transformed. Its chief kiosk and Abdul Hamid's throne room will be made into a seat for international conferences.

Co-Eds Won Rifle Shoot—MISSOULA, Mont.—(UP) Montana university girls apparently are better marksmen than men. A co-ed squad competed against eight male teams here recently and won top honors in the Garden City Rifle association match.