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IDLE RAINBOW

By Phoebe Sheldon

XXX

Rufus stood there for a long time before he answered. Then he said: "Maybe we'd better go in here where we can be quiet by ourselves." He carefully closed the door and sat down on the couch. What a relief! Julia noticed, a blue monk's cloth cover. The pillows she had covered herself in an orange and blue cretonne. A sally put-er-ri-er-ri-er with orange and blue plumeage. She watched the end of Rufus' cigarette turn gray and the ash grew longer and longer. Then she got up and brought over a brass ash tray and laid it beside him.

Finally Rufus said: "Would you mind telling me, Julia, what has changed your mind so suddenly? For six years I have begged, pleaded, eased, coaxed you. For six years you have put me off in one way or another. Then you do a dreadful thing. I think you want to crush all the spirit out of me. I don't know why you do it, but you want me to marry you. It is absurd on the face of it, but you give me your reasons and I accept them. I'm wondering at your lack of feeling. You know all the time how much it means to me and still you insist upon your terms. I've been trying to find an answer to it for days and weeks and months. Maybe you'll tell me now." He rubbed his hand across his forehead. "It's been a nightmare these months. I've been months. I must have been in a daze to let a woman make such a fool of me. But I seem to have waked up."

Julia rose. She stood tall and erect. "Perhaps I have misunderstood you all these years. Of course, if you don't want to marry me, I don't want to marry you."

Rufus pulled her down again. "That's being melodramatic. And I isn't answering my question. Why do you so suddenly changed your mind?"

"I don't know, Rufus."

He was very patient. "There must be some reason. First, do you love me?"

Julia was sobbing a little and feeling around for her handkerchief. "Why, yes, Rufus."

"Did you love me enough to marry me all these years?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you?"

"All right, if you must have it," Julia hung her head up. "I simply couldn't bear to think of living up here without any money. Going without things all the time. No money for clothes. No money for anything. And you perpetually having nothing to fix the farm up with and all your fussing around out there in the greenhouses. We wouldn't have been in love five minutes under these circumstances."

"But you had an ample income for your personal expenses."

"I know. But if I had remarried it would have gone to charitable institutions."

"I see."

"I thought if you would get some money from the farm, enough for a small income with your salary from the bond house."

"I see."

"Eat I do love you, Rufus. I've always loved you. You will marry me, won't you?"

Rufus got up, stood by the window and then came over and sat opposite her on the couch.

"My dear Julia, it seems so very simple to me now. I wonder a myself. I wonder! And I get a curious sense of satisfaction in hearing you beg me to marry you. It makes things perfectly even. It seems to be worth a certain amount of grief. But I don't know what has happened to me, Julia. I seem to be quite cold and indifferent. I have been that way for a long time. I mean capable even of sitting here and analyzing my own emotions while you weep. It all comes down to this, Julia. You have been greedy. You wanted your freedom and my love too. You wanted luxury. You weren't willing to pay—you weren't even willing to make a down payment."

Julia bit her lip. She fingered the gold chain that hung around her neck. "If that's the way you feel, I think I may as well go into town. I'd hardly care to stay around here any longer. Anyway, I hate the place!" She left the room without looking back, and went upstairs.

Julia closed the door to her bedroom carefully and then threw herself on the bed, sobbing. Then she reflected, would ruin her looks. She wondered vaguely how much of a salary John Alexander received. Who was his broker anyway?

Wasn't it just her luck that the only man she had really cared about would turn out to be more or less impecunious? She had tried hard enough to make something of him. But maybe he was all for the best. If he was going to revert to type it was just as well to know it before marriage as afterwards. Imagine being married to a farmer! Even a gentleman farmer like John Alexander.

It was the end of March. There was a thin mist in the air. Lindsay Abbott and Rufus Haydon walked up the steps of Grand Central Palace and presented their tickets to the man who was taking tickets.

Rufus said: "You'll be disappointed. Haydon Tree Food is on the third floor. Don't you want to see the other exhibits?"

Lindsay shook her head. "I can hardly wait to see the exhibits set-up. I've seen Poppy working on them for days and the says they are simply a knockout. Toby says our product will sweep the market."

They walked down the aisles hearing the perfume heavy with the moist damp sweet fragrance from the heavy-headed luxuriant blossoms set up in stiff garden plots.

Lindsay lingered over a brick garden with a sundial in the center. "You knew," she said, "terribly conscious of Rufus beside her, that Poppy and Toby were getting married, didn't you?"

Rufus leaned on his elbows. "I didn't know in so many words, but seeing these two together it wouldn't take many guesses."

"It's funny, isn't it, how things can get mixed up sometimes? You

know Toby and I were engaged for a while. It was a curious brain-storm on my part. I had a funny feeling that there wasn't any place for me in the world—that nobody wanted me—that all my life I had been shifted around from one person to the other. Well, Toby seemed so much to want to marry me, and in a sort of high-minded moment I said yes."

Rufus said: "You aren't by any chance trying to tell me you didn't love Toby, are you?"

Lindsay said: "Now that I think of it, maybe I am. I've told you plenty of times how crazy I am about you. Why—?—you going to do about it, Rufus?"

He said: "I've been thinking about it most of the time. Lindsay about it. I wish I knew what to do about it. You know of course that I've worshipped you ever since I first saw you. I'm a lot older than you are. Then, I'm more or less starting out in this business. There's hardly any income right now."

"And what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to see if you will marry me just the same."

"I will, Rufus Haydon. I will indeed. Do you suppose my people get engaged at the Flower Show every year?"

"And that I wouldn't know."

in the end they held each other's hands tightly and looked into each other's eyes. The kind of a look that stops the heart and promises all kinds of things. And finally they climbed to the third floor, but missed Gwen Alexander who had gone out somewhere, so Rufus scribbled a note for her and thumb-tacked it on the bulletin board of the Garden Club. It read:

"Save your breakfast table effect. We'll use it for a wedding breakfast if it isn't willed on Saturday, Rufus."

Then as they went down the steps in the midst of the rushing river of people which flowed on each side of them, Rufus leaned over and kissed Lindsay. "To make it legal, darling," he said, "and because I love you."

THE END.

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On Thursday evening, Oct 5th,
the member of the North River W.

I met at the home of Mrs. Spurgon Warren for their regular monthly meeting. The president presided over the meeting which opened with "The Institute Ode." After the minutes of the previous meeting had been read and approved, the reports of the different committees were heard, and all bills presented were paid. A Grab Box was an interesting and profitable item on the evenings programme. At the close of the meeting a delicious lunch was served by the hostess and refreshments committee.

The president, Miss Leah MacKinley, invited the members to meet at her home on Wednesday evening, Nov 2nd for their annual meeting. Lunch committee: Mrs. Gordon Thompson, Mrs. John MacKinnon, Mrs. Roy Bruce, and Miss Mary Doyle.



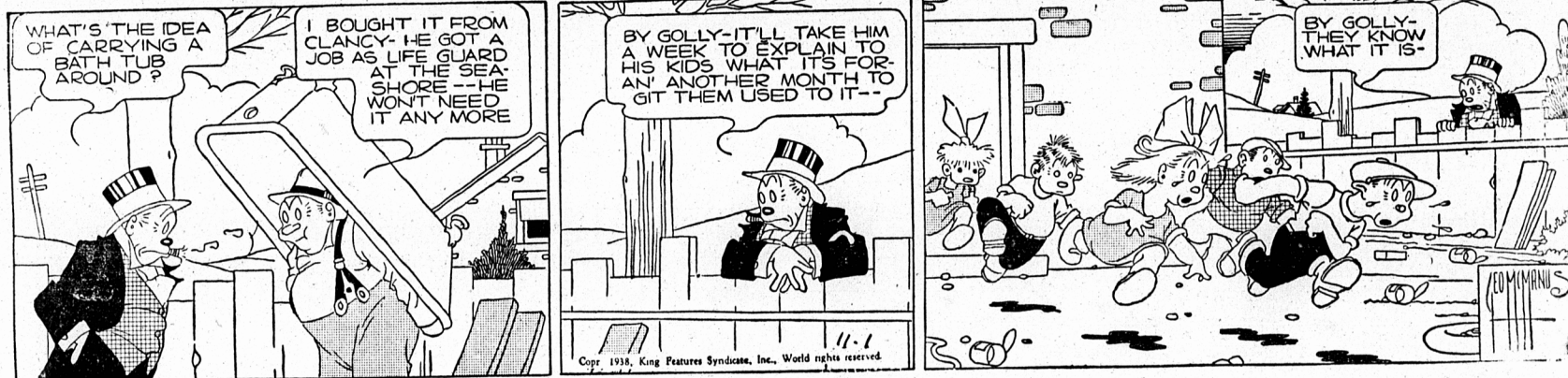
OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams



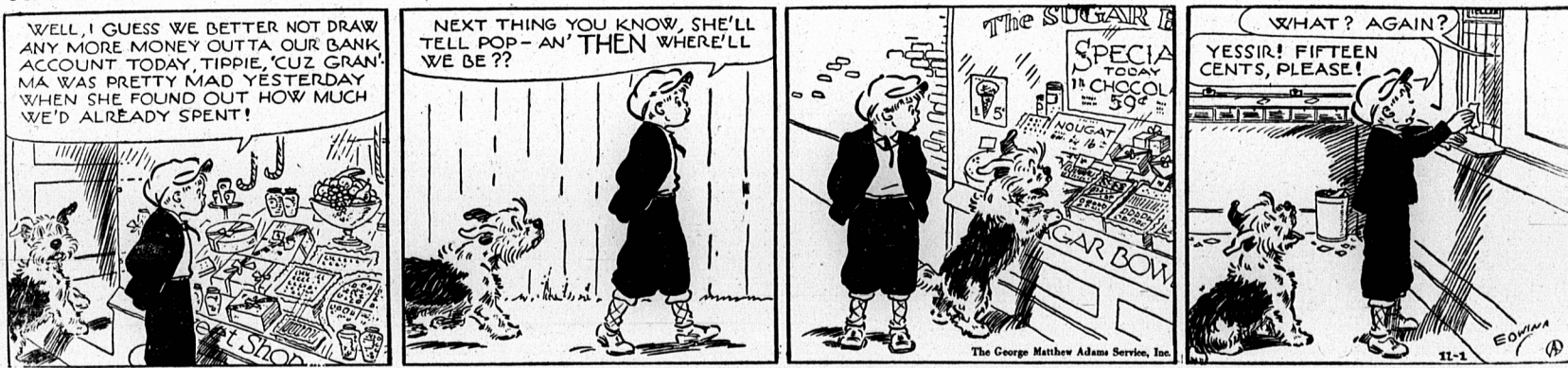
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By George McManus



TIPPIE and "CAP" STUBS

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