

DENNY BROOKS

A STORY OF COURAGE
By ELENORE MEHERIN

CHAPTER ONE.

Queenie Brooks had the face of a madonna, the heart of a gypsy and a voice that was pure song. She was 28. For ten years she had followed her creed with unflinching devotion. This creed was Love. She took it wherever she found it—she walked wherever it led.

At 15 it brought her into marriage with Jim Brooks. He left her a few years later with two children and no money. Queenie worked a little. But neither heart nor mind, white hands were fashioned for toil. So Queenie looked for kindness from the world. And she found it. She couldn't keep her husband, but there were others willing to take his place even though it meant supporting two children.

Once Queenie went off for a trip and left her children—the boy, nine; the girl, six. When she returned the next week the court had taken them. Queenie was heart-broken. The judge declared an unfit person, and her son and her little girl awarded to their Aunt Josie, the sister of Jim Brooks. Queenie, moist-eyed and sweet-lipped, accepted the judgment meekly. Her man Brooks didn't.

Denny was Queenie's son and to him she was without fault. She was some beautiful gray fairy with her dark eyes and fragrant hair, and she always put sugar on his bread, let him run around with a dog and a cat, holes in his stockings, laughed when he tore his coat. Even once when Prince Jerry came bounding in out of the rain to shake water on her new carpet, Queenie thought it was funny. She took a clean towel and dried Prince and told him to sit by the fire and get all warm. That's the way Queenie was.

So Denny ran away from his aunt, and back to his mother. It was 7 o'clock and dark when he pushed the door of the kitchen, coming face to face with Queenie and Sid. Sid was the big fellow who lived at the house where channels gloves and always had money in his pockets.

"I came back. I thought I'd come," Denny smiled valiantly.

His cap, looking from one to the other, wide-eyed, frightened. He more openly: "Hee-oo didn't I think to come back?"

Queenie laughed and jumped from her chair, sweeping her arms about him.

That night he went with Queenie and Sid to the old Grove Street Theatre, and Sid bought him a bag of barbies.

Sid often had things in his pockets for Denny. Every night he used to come home with a lot of bundles. Then he'd come and say to Queenie: "Call Queenie."

The three of them would sit down together and they always laughed. At his aunt's no one ever said a word at the table. They were all afraid of Uncle Matt. Denny was mighty glad he ran away.

Dinner was the happiest time. Afterward Queenie used to get up, toss back her head and say gaily: "Leave the dishes, Sid! She always said that as she ran off to her room to send a long while combing her hair. He'd come out with the reddest lips and a bright cherry hat that showed a little of her black, curly hair. Then she'd stoop down and kiss Denny. She always smiled so good—like flowers in the sun. And she was rough and smacked of cabbage. He hated to kiss her.

But Queenie was like the lemon verbena that Denny picked and put in bottles to make cologne. If she'd only stay home and tell him stories the way she did on Sunday nights! Sometimes he shut his arms tight about her neck and told her he'd let her go. But she'd just press her soft cheek against his and laugh: "Fraidcat, Denny, darling? You're not afraid! Go right to bed now and don't you be frightened."

Just the same Denny was afraid. He'd pull the blankets up to his chin and lie staring into the darkness until it became people and terrible images. Then his heart began to pound high up—almost to his throat. He wasn't afraid of Mother Burke and he could lick the kid next door, but he crouched under the covers and gulped when those formless shadows pressed along the wall.

There was one big black shape with horns curving from its shoulders. Every night it was the last plunge out of the darkness. Denny hid from it.

One night after he'd been back home a long time he woke up suddenly, saw a light glowing against the window and in that pale illumination made out Queenie's slender figure. Or he couldn't be sure. Perhaps it was his guardian angel peering in the night. He lay very still. The figure came over to the bed and leaned down. He knew it was Queenie for the fragrance and the black curls and the lace like a white cloud at her neck. Even this, as though it were something mystic, frightened him. He could scarcely say: "Mamma, mamma."

Queenie laughed: "Scarecrow! How you kick the covers." She tucked him in. As she stooped down to kiss him he wound his arms about her neck, clinging to her. He felt tears at her cheek.

"You crying, Queenie?"

"Laughing, to sleep, Denny."

She seemed to float on that beam of golden light until the hall door swallowed her up, leaving a faint perfume drifting over Denny's pillow. He went to sleep.

Queenie wasn't up for breakfast. She never was. But she always set out a glass of milk and three or four crumbs of toast or jam. Sid then scrambled eggs for him. This morning he ate alone.

It was a great day in Denny's life. The report cards were given out and as incredible as it seemed, he was number one. This had never happened to Denny before.

He couldn't believe it. He was afraid to ask Miss Linden for fear he'd say there was a mistake and make the mark away from him. There he was coming down the aisle right off to snatch it from him. She stopped at his desk. Denny trembled.

Miss Linden put her hand on the boy's curly head and, there, if she didn't say: "Now, Denny Brooks, see what you can do when you go to school every day. I want to be number one next month."

At that Denny doubled up his fists and sat very tight for he didn't want Miss Linden to hear his heart thumping. He was almost bursting with triumph. Gee! Number one! Wait till he told Queenie and Sid! Gee!

He tore home holding the white card in his hand and never stopping running till he reached the kitchen door. It was locked. Denny yelled: "Mamma, open it. Hurry! There was no answer. The door opened. He put his foot on the step and his tongue and his tail both wagged in enthusiasm, came bounding up and licked Denny's hand. Denny paid no attention.

"Darn it!" he gulped, tears running into the corners of his mouth. "Darn it! Coulda left the door open. Leastwise coulda left the door open!"

He sat there kicking, so he sat down and let his hands hang limp between his knees and could hardly keep from crying when Prince Jerry licked them.

"Quit it, Jerry!" he said in a big voice. "Quit it, I tell you!"

There was no one home and Queenie forgot to unlatch the kitchen door. But she must have left her lunch somewhere!

Denny went around to the front door, pressed his thumb on the bell and kept it there.

Sylvia Morton, who lived next door, came flying through the alleyway with a big hunk of bread and jam. Denny could have pounded her and grabbed the bread. Then he remembered his report, yanked it out, pretending to be reading it.

"Lo, Denny," Sylvia called, sticking her fingers in her mouth and licking the jam off. "What's that? Got your report?" She came up the steps and poked an inquisitive nose over Denny's shoulder. "Ooo! Number one, are you, Denny?"

For the moment he forgot his hunger, inquiring mildly: "Well, what does it say, Sylvia? It says number one, doesn't it? Guess I can be number one if I feel like it. Guess she came right up to my desk and said so."

"Miss Linden?" Sylvia asked, vacuously, and as some other children came rushing along she cried out: "Denny Brooks is number one! 'Eve Denny!"

When he was alone Denny'd like to have buried his head against Prince Jerry and cried. Letta good it was to be number one. Queenie couldn't stay home. She mighta known he was going to surprise her.

He went hungry—like a ravenous little wolf to school. In the middle of the afternoon he could feel a terrible clawing like a big hand twisting him into a knot. Then he began to think of the good things Queenie made a little feast after school. His heart softened toward her and he ran all the way home. The door would surely be unlatched now. There'd be snails and doughnuts and maybe pancakes—great mountains of them, with butter and molasses dripping from the edges.

The door wasn't opened. Denny caught the knob in both hands and shook it. Then he sat down with his head in his arms and he didn't care if he did cry. He was just that dying of hunger Nobody but Prince Jerry, rubbing a wet nose against his little hand, cared a bit. He forgot now the triumph of the morning. The report card was doubled up and dirty in his pocket.

All Denny wanted was something to eat—even a piece of bread. There must be some way to get it.

He climbed to the window where he could see the table with the empty milk glass and the snails he had left at breakfast. He tried to raise the window. It wouldn't yield. And right inside was that big sugary snail!

In his stomach leaped up in fury Denny banged on the window—called and called. After a long while he let himself slide miserably to the walk, clenched his fists, resolvedly. He guessed he'd die alright. Then he'd be sorry. You bet she'd be sorry when somebody came and told her he died because she didn't leave no lunch out for him!

He sat a long while until Prince Jerry, growing impatient, ran up with a stick and kept dropping it at Denny's feet, whining for him to play. Denny started down the alley-way, the dog at his heels.

They passed the vacant lot. Matchless Burke called to Denny to "git in the game." Denny went over and sat on an empty barrel and swung his feet. He couldn't stop thinking of that sugary snail, and the more he thought the greater was the gnawing in his stomach. He leaned over and folded his arms.

Suddenly he remembered that Sid had given him a nickel and he turned to search his pockets. He turned them inside out and not finding it, searched again. Then he remembered he'd put it in his sweater pocket in his own room. He jumped from the barrel and ran home. Maybe Queenie had come in.

But no. He climbed again to the kitchen window. It was dark. He couldn't see the table or the butter or the half-eaten cake.

An inspiration came to him. He went next door to Sylvia Morton's. Sylvia's older sister Alice was in the kitchen. Her hands were all covered with flour and there was the warm, enlivening odor of baking biscuits anyone ever smelled.

"Hump—guess you're cooking biscuits?" Denny remarked wisely, his glance on the oven.

"No—Jellyroll." Alice answered. "Smells awful good."

"I'll save you a piece, Denny."

"Ain't it most don't Alice?"

"Lard, no—just this minute put it in."

Denny waited, then he added sadly: "Sylvia's better be up with a wait for Alice to protest. She didn't. Denny was forced to leave. He didn't want to mention that Queenie forgot his lunch. They might send him back to Aunt Josie.

He went to his place on the front steps, and when Prince yanked at his side, put his arms around the dog's neck and began to cry.

When it grew dark, Denny was frightened and took to his room again. A hand was laid on his shoulder.

"What's the matter, Denny?" It was Sylvia's father.

"I can't get in. Gee, I don't know where my mother is. She ain't anywhere. Haven't you a key?"

"No."

"Well, now let's see, Sylvia's father took a ring of keys from his pocket, tried half a dozen. Miracle—the door swung open and Denny cried out:

"Queenie, Mamma!" as Mr. Morton touched the switch and flooded the small hallway with light. The shrill cry echoed through the silent hall.

"Gee, she ain't here! Gee!" Denny pressed close to the neighbor pushing him close toward a closed door. "There's her room!"

Mr. Morton twisted the knob. It gave readily, the hall light flooding the room, falling directly across the bed and the figure lying there. A shudder chilled him.

"Go back, Denny—go back." He tried to shove the child from the room.

But Denny, too, had seen.

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(To Be Continued.)

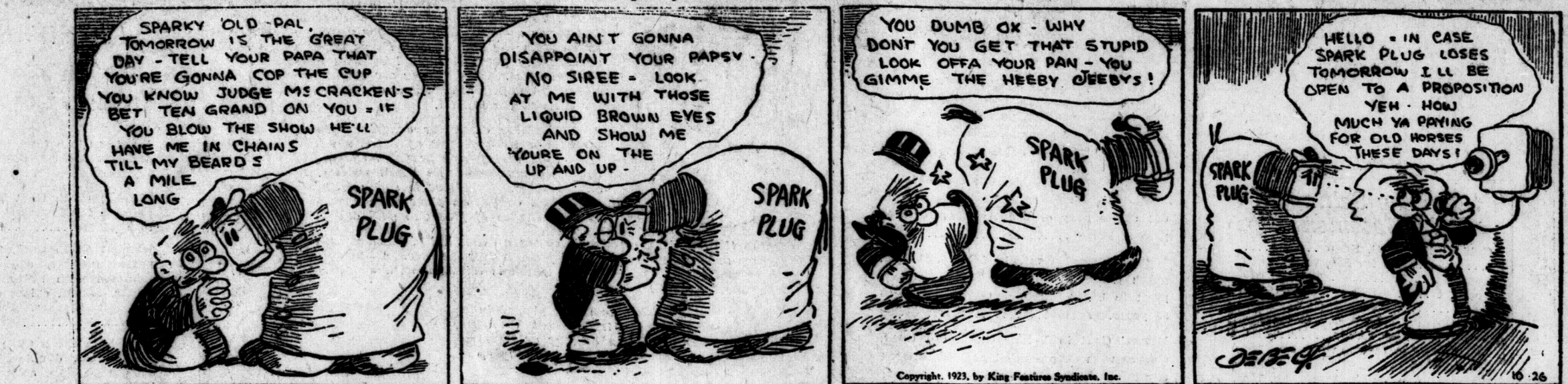
THE GUMPS—LOST IN THE STORM



BARNEY GOOGLE AND SPARKY PLUG

If Sparky Loses Tomorrow He'll Go To "Greece"

BY BILLY DE BECK



MUTT AND JEFF

It Looks As If "Aspirin" Never Would Get in a Race.

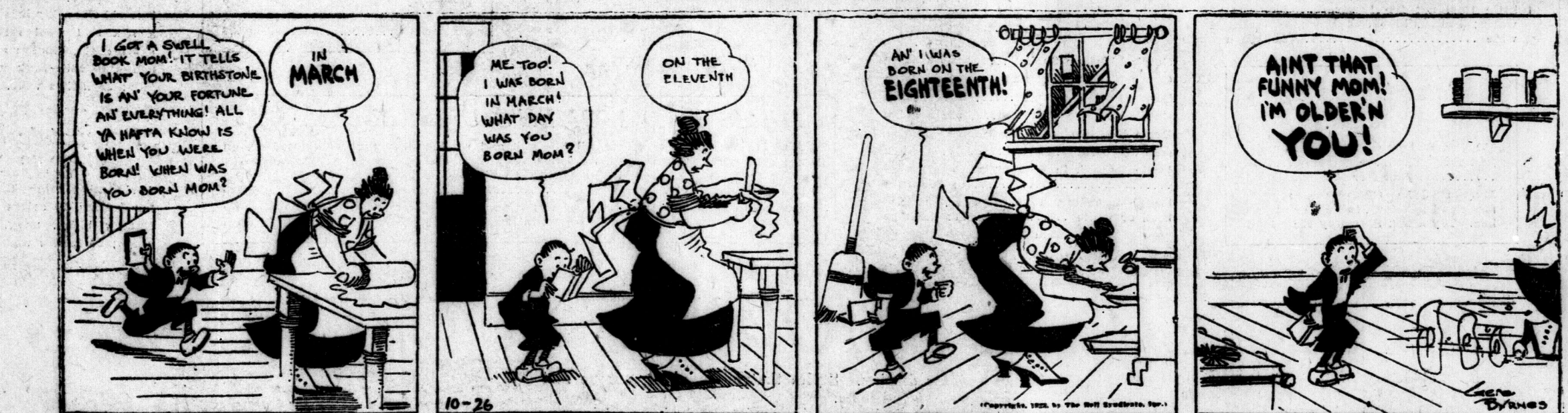
BY BUD FISHER



REG'AR FELLERS

It's a Reasonable Deduction.

BY GENE BYRNES



OUR BOARDING HOUSE

BY AHERN.



"You Said It, Marceline!"

By MARCELINE DALROY
On "Coquetry."

COQUETRY
Is like PERFUME,
It suggests pleasant things;
For BEHIND perfume
Is a FLOWER,
And BEHIND coquetry
Is a pretty WOMAN.
Coquetry is like a
Black LACE scarf
Over a BARE shoulder—
It provokes thought at least:
For one does not know
If it is an invitation,
Or an ACCIDENT;
An inspiration

Or a CHALLENGE;
A man does not know
If it means the wearer
Is WARM—or COLD;
He sees THROUGH it
And yet wonders
At WHAT he glimpses.
PERFUME in a flower
Guides the MR. BEE—
Coquetry in a WOMAN—
Ah!
Maybe that is why
Women who are too proud
To use it THEMSELVES,
Fear the women who DO.

Hambone's Meditations

By J. P. Alley.

OLE OMAN LAUGHIN' AT ME 'FUH LETTIN' A NIGGAW SASS ME LAS' NIGHT, BUT LAW ME— DAT NIGGAW WUZ BIG NOUGH T' GO BAR-HUNTIN' WID A SWITCH!

