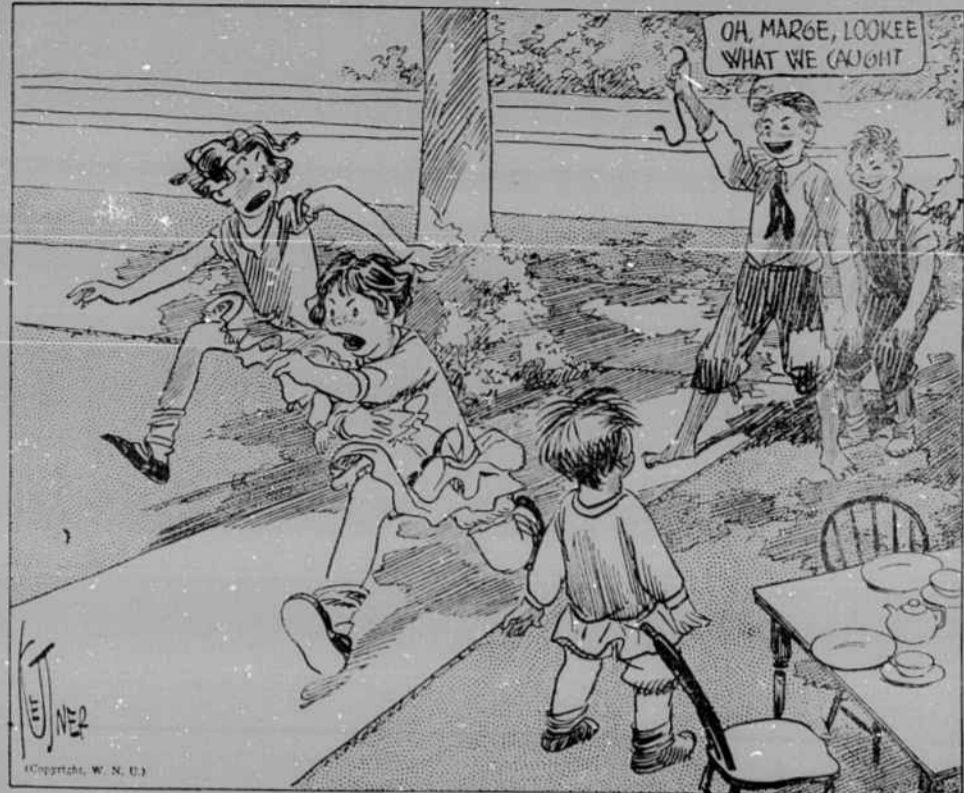


OUR COMIC SECTION

Events in the Lives of Little Men



IN THE WORLD THAT WAS 'FLOWERLAND'

By FANNIE HURST

FROM the time Ruth Adlon was fifteen, and had "quit school," as the saying goes among the Ruth Adlons, she had been an "instructor" in a dance hall known as "Flowerland." It was one of those resorts where, for an entrance fee, you may purchase a strip of tickets; six for twenty-five cents. Each one of these entitles you to a partner for one dance number. There were about fifteen girls and six or seven men employed in the same capacity as Ruth. They were professional partners.

Ruth Adlon's fervor for the dance was something that seemed to surpass her own vitality. She was tireless. Fragile, to what seemed a breaking point, nervous, slender, and of a wax-like pallor, her feet, even on these rare occasions when she sat on the sidelines, when a partner had not claimed her with his ticket teetered. The rhythm of the jazz music seemed to run through her veins, and to keep her constantly excited. She was one of the best (if not the best) dancers at Flowerland.

The system there was on a commission basis. Your income consisted of a percentage on the number of tickets you collected during an evening. Ruth earned more than any girl on the staff.

One of the youths employed in a similar capacity at Flowerland was in love with Ruth. His name was Christian Cowen. Ruth used to tease him about this name of his, it seemed so incongruous, considering the environment. And so it was. As a matter of fact, Christian was the son of a Methodist minister in a small Southern town. He had drifted eastward, chiefly to escape his father's insistence that he follow in the ministerial footsteps. He too was a frail fellow, distinctly of a social class above that of his colleagues, yet strangely at home in the gay, relaxed, whirling world that was Flowerland.

It was extraordinary that such an environment could have turned out a girl as unworldly as Ruth Adlon. Her partners were just so many customers to her. At the close of her work-a-day, or rather her work-a-night, she forgot them as promptly as a salesman forgets the string of people to whom he had sold coffee over the counter during an afternoon. In fact it might be said of Ruth Adlon, that she was a girl's girl. She enjoyed the gossip among them. She liked to walk home with one for a companion. It was seldom that she consented to an outside engagement with one of the partners she met in Flowerland. Not that she had any scruples about the life of the dance hall, but Ruth was not interested.

That is why her affair with Christian Cowen, when it came, was one that from the very first started in to be of more serious moment than is usually the case in such an environment.

They fell in love and immediately their solemn young eyes fastened upon the goal of marriage. Ruth entertained no illusions about the ambitions or the potentialities of Christian. To her he was merely a darling boy who needed her. And Ruth needed him. On the initial equipment of loving one another deeply, and about one hundred and seventy-five dollars between them, they were married, and continued their joint work at Flowerland until four months before Ruth was going to have her child.

In the sixteen months of their marriage, these two little dancing people so curiously dependent upon one another in the vast amusement world in which they whirled, had feathered their tiny nest of an up-town flat and settled down to a happiness that was drenching and all-sufficient, except for one fly in a smooth ointment.

Christian, who loved his dancing wife with all the tenacious capacity of the frail, was branded in his make-up with a broad streak of jealousy. Because she was so delectable to him, it was inconceivable that she could be anything else to the hundreds who were fortunate to hold her in the dance.

When their baby girl was four months old, a stroke of invisible lightning, as it were, smote the happy little household.

Whether during the dance, or in some twisted motion of which he had not been conscious, Christian after suffering some weeks of pain in silence, went to a physician who X-rayed his hurting spine and found a fracture.

Overnight, as it were, if not only because necessary, but imperative, for Ruth to take upon her slender shoulders the entire responsibilities of the household.

For eight months, Christian Cowen lay flat on his back in a rigid plaster cast on a hospital cot. For eight months, Ruth Cowen twinkled on her toes, to meet the expenses of that driven little household, and strangely enough, thrived doing it. And so did her baby. It was impossible to employ the services of a nurse in the household, and so, to her despair at first, she was obliged to entrust the child to a nursing home for infants. But the little girl, even as her mother, seemed to bloom and blossom under what might normally be considered an adverse condition, and as Ruth beheld this take place, her heart on that score at least was light within her.

It was a strenuous, nerve-racking life, darting like a frenzied messenger of sweetness, between the dance hall, the nursing home and the hospital where Christian lay strapped to his cot.

His recovery was tedious, slow and torturous. And yet, Ruth who hovered so lovingly over him did not know the most tortuous aspect of it.

Lying there day after day, week after week, month after month, the pressure of the secret jealousy came to be almost unbearable to Christian. Evenings, when the ward lights were low and the patients about him had dropped off to their troubled sleep, he was forced to lie there, visioning Ruth in the arms of others. It was impossible to imagine that the men who held her did not thrill to her nearness as he did. It was impossible to fight down the frenzy, knowing that even as he lay there, she was desirable to others. It made of him, as the months wore on, a fretful, nervous, irascible patient, sharp with his nurses, critical, even cruel, in his remarks to Ruth.

There came a time, however, when Christian, on crutches, was able to leave the hospital; was even able, on an evening, to hobble down, when assisted by Ruth, and sit on the sidelines in the dance hall and watch the scene.

It was his idea that this might ease the secret torture.

On the contrary, it only seemed to inflame it. The sight of her, tireless, enthusiastic, playful, even with the burden of her responsibilities full upon her, actually seeming to delight in the act of the dance, was even more than he could bear.

Poor Christian, in his sense of defeat and in his love for this girl; and in his fear and torment for her, he was all warped inside, and of that Ruth knew nothing. She only saw her maimed, nervous husband through the eyes of her desire to serve him and to ameliorate, if possible, the dreariness of the semi-invalidism that seemed to stretch wearily ahead.

By now, the hurting jealousy of Christian's began to take on a certain menace. He plainly detected that in Ruth's dancing there was a joy-of-life.

There was one Spanish fellow in particular, who used to spend his entire strip of tickets in dances with Ruth, toward whom she seemed to lift a face as dewy as a flower. Sitting on the sidelines with his crutches beside him, slow smoldering hates began to burn in the maimed husband of Ruth.

The two things that Christian loved best in life, that small, dancing mother and the small child she had begot, were in peril. And somehow, to the feverish brain of the troubled young husband, the Spanish fellow who came to the dance hall once or twice a week began to be the symbol of that peril.

One evening, there occurred in that dance hall what seemed a miracle, although medically, and in the colder annals of science, it is known as "trauma."

In the midst of what was the routine performance of Ruth dancing around the floor in the arms of the young Spaniard, Christian, unable to bear any longer what seemed to him the amorous clasp of these two, jerked himself to his feet, and forgetful of his spine, rushed without his crutches out to the center of the floor, hurling them apart.

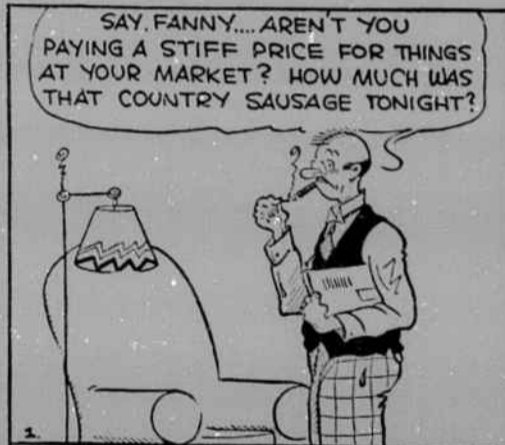
In the confusion and the unpleasant notoriety of the moment, one outstanding fact was revealed to Ruth. Christian was standing erect and strong on his two feet. Christian was able to walk off that dance floor without the aid of crutches.

That was the beginning; the beginning of a great many things in their little household. Also it revealed to Ruth the pitiful, tortured mental life that had been her husband's throughout the months. More than that, it revealed to her the power of his mind over the matter of his body.

Christian, who walks as normally as anyone now, has a paying position with a commercial house; Ruth is now able to carry on a life she loves even over and above the life of dancing.

She is mistress of a little home and of the day-by-day destiny of two growing children.

THE FEATHERHEADS



A Good Idea



Eye to Business
Excitedly the manufacturer of the world's greatest insect exterminating powder burst into his export office. "Hey," he bellowed, "have we got an agency in Egypt?" "Why—er—no, sir." "Well, why haven't we? I saw a film of them pyramids last night, and it said they were covered with millions of hieroglyphics."—Legion Weekly.

For Evening Use
James' father had recently bought an open car in which James was very interested. In telling some of his companions about it he said: "My daddy has a fine new low-necked car and takes me for a ride in it every evening."

The Qualifications
Father—Who is the brightest boy in your class, Tommy?
Son—Fred Wells. He can eat apples behind his geography book and never get caught.—London Answers.

Au Lucifer
Social Worker—Do you believe in the transmogrification of souls?
Fisherman—No. I likes 'em fried in the reg'lar way.—Pathfinder.

Smack—Smack!
Fonda Love—You certainly have a pretty mouth.
Miss Huggins—Go on with your fooling.
Fonda Love—I said it's a pretty mouth, and I'm going to stick to it.—Pathfinder Magazine.

HE WAS LOYAL



His Intentions
Father—Mr. Sweeting is very wealthy, Joan, and a nice fellow to boot.
Joan—Oh, dad, please don't do it.

Modest Declaration
"You have served your country a great many years."
"I have," admitted Senator Sorghum. "Your people have absolute confidence in you."
"I won't say that they always have absolute confidence. But it has always happened that they'd rather take a chance on me than they would on the other fellow."

Resourceful Dad
Son (hinting)—Dad, the second installment on my saxophone is due. Can you think of any way I could keep the music company from coming out and taking it away from me?
Dad—Yes, wrap it up and send it back to them!

What Did She Mean?
Mrs. Jones—I hear your car was wrecked, Mr. Johnson.
Johnson—Yes, the car was smashed, but I was unharmed.
Mrs. Jones—What a pity!

Now, Listen Here—
"Do you ever read in bed?"
"Not now. I often lie awake and listen to a lecture, though."—Pathfinder Magazine.