

HOSTILE ALLEY



Ben Ames Williams

SYNOPSIS

Jim Saladine listens to the history of neighboring Hostile Valley, with gossip of the mysterious, enticing "Huldy," wife of Will Ferrin. Interested, he drives to the Valley for a day's fishing, though admitting to himself his chief desire is to see the reputedly glamorous Huldy. "Old Marm" Pierce and her nineteen-year-old granddaughter Jenny live in the Valley. Since little more than a child Jenny has at first admired and then deeply loved young Will Ferrin, neighboring farmer, older than she, and who regards her still as merely a child. Will takes employment in nearby Augusta. Jenny is disconsolate. Bart Carey, something of a ne'er-do-well, is attracted by Jenny, but the girl repulses him. Learning that Will is coming home, Jenny, exulting, sets his long-empty house "to rights," and has dinner ready for him. He comes—bringing his wife, Huldy. The girl's world collapses. Huldy becomes the subject of unfavorable gossip in the Valley. Entering his home, unlooked for, Will finds seemingly damning evidence of his wife's unfaithfulness.

seated herself to eat with them; and the three were laughing together at some word Zeke had said, when a car drove into the yard. A car with a man at the wheel and Huldy by his side. They saw her through the open door; saw her, and sat still and frozen while she descended and came toward them. The man stayed in the car. Jenny thought that Huldy was as beautiful as ever. She gazed herself on her feet, facing the door. Will half turned in his chair as though to rise; but that board nailed across the end of his peg cramped under a rung of the chair, and prevented. Zeke looked questioningly at Will, and then at Huldy; and Huldy stood smiling, in the doorway. Then she laughed. "I see you ain't lonely, Will?" she said. He tried again to get up. "Where's your catch?" she inquired derisively. "Want me to fetch it for you?" Jenny asked. "What have you come for?" Her tone was steady, her heart still. "Don't worry," Huldy told her. "I don't aim to stay. I left some clothes here; come to fetch them. Unless you've been wearing them!" "They're in a box in the attic," Jenny said, ignoring the taunt. "I put them away."

"Moved in, have you?" Huldy commented. "Seems like you was in quite a hurry. I waited till he married me, anyway!" Jenny's cheek was white; yet she curbed her tongue, and Huldy turned to Zeke. "I don't know you," she said amiably. "But you look like you had sense enough to realize there's a crowd!" Zeke grinned, deriding her. "From what I hear, three wouldn't crowd you none," he retorted. Her brows lifted. "So you been hearing about me, have you?" Then she smiled, flatteringly. "But you'd find that one's enough for me, if he's a whole man," she said. Will wrenched the board off the end of his leg, with a squeak of drawn nails, freeing his foot. He stood up to face her. "Huldy," he said huskily, "you mind your tongue. Come in if you want. You're always welcome here. But mind your tongue." Huldy was for the moment silenced; but Zeke spoke to Jenny. "Where's this box?" he asked scornfully. "I'll fetch it down for her."

"In the attic, the far end," Jenny said. "By the window." Zeke turned toward the attic stairs, behind the stove; but Huldy spoke to him. "You're in an awful hurry to get rid of me," she protested. Zeke hesitated, looked at Will. "I'll pack her back in the car out there if you say, Will," he offered, his cheek hot. Huldy whispered mockingly: "I guess you don't like me at all!" "Not a bit, lady," Zeke assured her. "Nor any of your kind." "How do you know my kind?" she challenged. "I've seen enough of 'em, in gutters and around," he said mercilessly. But Will turned upon him. "Zeke, you hush up," he said. Then to his wife: "Huldy, he'll fetch your things!" Huldy stood, leaning indolently against the jamb of the door, smiling at them all. "He don't have to hurry. I might decide to stay," she said softly. No one spoke; but Jenny felt the blood drain out of her lips.

"I like handsome men," said Huldy, drawing. "And even if he don't like me, he's handsome as they come!" Zeke's eyes were black with anger. She laughed at his rage, and she said in soft tones: "You can see he don't like me, Will. I'll have to make him like me before I go." Zeke cried, in choking exasperation: "You've got one man outside! How many..." Huldy looked over her shoulder, then back to Zeke again. "You go out and tell him he can go," she said. "Tell him I'm through with him!" And when he hesitated: "He's just a little man," she urged, derisively cajoling. "You're no call to be afraid!" Zeke appealed to Will with a glance; and Will spoke wearily. "Go ahead, Zeke," he said, submitting. "This here's Huldy's home, if she's a mind to stay." Huldy took off her hat and laid it aside; she touched her hair with her hands. Jenny stood up and moved toward the door; but Huldy said softly: "Don't you go! There's room enough for both of us. I don't want your Will!" Will protested heavily: "Huldy, if you stay here, you'll have to mend your ways!"

Huldy was suddenly vicious, dangerous. "Don't talk to me!" she retorted. "After fetching her in here the minute I was gone. I aim to stay; and if you try to boss me around, I'll howl her name up and down the Valley till people hold their noses when they see her! You better mend your own ways, Will Ferrin!" Zeke touched Will's arm. "Let me throw her out, Will," he protested. "Don't you go and take her in."

"I have to, Zeke," Will confessed. Zeke stared at the other man, hot, scornful, furious. "All right," he said then contemptuously. "If you're that kind, I'm quitting! You'll have to get on without me!" But Huldy moved slowly to Zeke's side. "Don't you quit," she said, and touched his hand. "You'll be glad you stayed." Zeke seemed choking; he said at last, grudgingly: "I'll finish out the week, I reckon."

And Huldy smiled contentedly. But Jenny could bear no more. Moving slowly, she went out through the shed and the brook and down the orchard path to the brook; she came through the deep woods home. As she opened the kitchen door, Marm Pierce looked up inquiringly. And then, in quick alarm at what she saw, she rose to her feet; but there was no need of a question. Jenny spoke. "Huldy's back," she said through trembling lips. "She's come home!" Marm Pierce exclaimed, in quick reassurance: "Don't you grieve, Jenny! She'll never stay!" Jenny shook her head, almost smiling, pitifully. "She didn't aim to. She just come to fetch her clothes," she said. "But she saw Zeke Dace. And—now she's going to stay!"

From Huldy's return until Jim Saladine came at last to Hostile Valley, two years intervened; and during this period, though her heart was his forever, Jenny saw Will not at all. In the country as in the city, it is possible to go for years without glimpsing your next-door neighbor. Accident might have brought them face to face; but neither the girl nor Will would design an encounter. Jenny loved him deeply and completely; and the very fact that they did not see one another served in some fashion to intensify the girl's devotion. This love of hers for Will, springing out of years of her childhood, growing in stature and in depth as she became a woman, seemed to feed on denial. Lacking the man himself, she kept his remembered image in her heart and was wistfully contented so.

It sometimes seemed to Marm Pierce that Jenny's love for Will must communicate itself to him in silent ways; and at first she blamed him for that he did not throw Huldy headlong out of his home and his life, so that he might turn to Jenny; and she spoke this thought to Jenny. But the girl shook her head. "Not Will," she said. "He's not the kind to. Long as she lives, he'll stand by her." Marm Pierce indignantly insisted: "There's nothing so dumb as a good man that's got mixed up with a bad woman; and I've a mind to go tell Will so." Jenny smiled wisely. "You'll not," she said. "You never will." And Marm Pierce, perceiving in the girl a wisdom greater than her own, never did. In the weeks after Huldy's return, Amy Carey fell more and more into the habit of coming through the woods to see the old woman and the girl who dwelt here in this house divided. Win Haven's side of the house fell nowadays more and more into disrepair. It would not be long, unless measures of repair were taken, till that half of the house sagged weakly downward into a collapsed ruin. Once Jenny proposed taking tarp paper and like material to roof the other side of the walls against moisture; but the old woman would not consent. "I wouldn't give Win the satisfaction," she declared. When Amy came to stop a while with these two, in the warm kitchen, she could not fail to remark the increasing disrepair; and she urged Marm Pierce to take measures of prevention. "You'll have to," she said. "Because Win won't never do anything. He was to our house the other night, and talked about it; and he 'jows to be 'round when his side of the house falls, and to watch and see the trouble it makes for you. Brags that if you try to mend anything he'll take a shotgun to you."

"He around again, is he?" Marm Pierce demanded tartly. "I didn't know but he'd died in a gutter somewhere before now." "He comes to our place right along," Amy assured them. "There's a new steam mill putting in down brook below here, opposite where Seth's mill used to be. They come in from Liberty village. Win, he's working there. He comes up and him and Bart set and drink and brag." She added huskily: "Win, he's shining up to Huldy, too." "That old fool!" Marm Pierce exclaimed. "You can't go to blame him," Amy said ruefully. "Seems like she takes a kind of satisfaction in fretting a man, and getting him haired up, and laughing at him after." And she said slowly: "But I don't know as she's bothering with anyone, only Zeke, now."

Jenny caught some accent in the girl's tone. Her perceptions were perhaps quickened by her own love for Will; but Marm Pierce, in this matter not so wise, said sharply: "Zeke's as big a fool as any of them. I 'lowed he had more sense than that."

"Zeke's all right," Amy said, in humble defense. "Only he... Her eyes filled with slow tears. "He used to come down to set with me," she confessed. "Always joking and laughing, he was. Zeke's a hand to make a joke out of things. But I ain't seen him lately."

So Marm Pierce understood, and her lips set in anger. "I'd like to give that hussy a piece of my mind!" she cried impotently. "Amy whispered: 'Sometimes I'm scared.' She shivered unceasingly. "Dunno what I'm scared of, either. But the men that have seen her, sometimes they come down to our place; and they're half crazy, kind of. Bart, he hates the sight of her. He can't see anything hard enough of her. He's always been a good friend to Will, and to have her treat Will so frets Bart awful. And Win Haven, he'll come down and cuss and rave and rant about her, like he wanted to twist her neck. But Zeke, he don't ever come down!"

"Nor Will?" Jenny guessed. "Will, he stays up there," Amy asserted. "Him and Zeke." The girl shuddered. "I dunno what's going to come of it," she admitted, fearfully. And she said: "Bart talks about licking Zeke. He says somebody'd ought to, long as Will can't do it himself." Marm Pierce asked sharply: "Can't Will take a gun to him, or a cart stove? If he had any gumption in him..." "Will's got gumption enough," Amy assured them. She looked at Jenny. "Bart told me, here about a week ago, he was up there, and Huldy said something about you, Jenny. Will, most times, he's gentle to her; but Bart says Will he got up at that and he says to her: 'Huldy,' he says. 'You keep your tongue off Jenny or I'll rip it out of your mouth!'" Jenny felt a fierce surge of pride and happiness; but she hid her eyes, so that these others might not see. Marm Pierce exclaimed in a deep exasperation: "I sh'd think as much! What'd she say to that?" "She shut her mouth!" Amy reported. "Bart said she kind of

laughed, but she did hush up! He said Will was enough to terrify a body, the way he looked at her." And she reflected: "Will, if he does get mad, it don't pay to fool with him." There were other days when Amy came thus to be with them. They were remote from the Ferrin farm; but Amy was not. From Will's place down to Carey bridge was a scant quarter mile; so Amy had almost daily word of what passed on the hill, and her deep trouble increased. "It's like a sore place, up there," she said one day. "Like a sore that's bound to spread if you don't scrub it out, and burn it out." And she cried: "There's times I'd like to! Even Bart, he ain't the same, with that woman on his mind all the time." She shook her head. "Seems like they all hate Huldy," she confessed. "But they can't seem to stay away from her. I'm scared, Marm Pierce. It wouldn't surprise me a mite if a crowd of them went up there some day and rode her right out of the valley!" "Good enough for her!" the old woman declared. "I wish't they would!"

But this did not happen, and after a time Bart was forced to cease his visits to Will's farm. One day Amy came running to fetch Marm Pierce. "Bart's hurt awful!" she cried. "Zeke beat him pretty near to death. You've got to come and take care of him."

"Hurt how?" the old woman questioned, already preparing to obey this summons. "They had a fight," Amy panted. "I was in the house, and I heard them, and ran out, and they was at it, down by the bridge, fighting and rolling around in the ditch, and getting up and scrambling at each other and going down again. They kep' at it, till Zeke he had the best of it. Backed off finally and left Bart laying there in the road..."

"(TO BE CONTINUED)"

"I might decide to stay," She Said Softly.

Little Lights on LIVING By MARIA LEONARD Dean of Women, University of Illinois

HOW TO TRAIN CHILDREN FOR LEISURE TO BE successful in anything these days one needs training because competition is so keen. If one had five centuries to live, one might be content to progress by the trial and error method. We should build on the experiences of the past, though history proves that man moves slowly along this line. Our present-day status regarding war would be enough to prove this statement.

Learning comes through two avenues to the child, namely, precept and practice through the professions. Today a certain part of child life is neglected from precept and practice, which needs as much direction and guidance as their schooling. This is their play time. Play is an important and necessary part of every one's life. It is not idleness nor is it unoccupied time, for it recreates physically and mentally. If it fails to do this it "wreck-creates" and breaks, rather than re-creates and builds. For this reason it is necessary to train children in part of their play time, making it as educational as the other hours of their day.

A friend of mine who has three sons, seventeen, fourteen and ten, wondered what to do with them when school closed. I suggested to her to let them use the basement to build book shelves for their den. It may cost a little, but it saves more in character, by keeping them busily happy and happily busy. Children should be taught in part of their playtime to be industrious and inventive—for loving and knowing how to work is a blessed heritage. They should be given tools and materials to play and work with instead of finished, painted toys, soon laid aside when the thrill is gone. This learning how to do things and how to make things trains head, hand and heart, at the same time it gives the child a sense of achievement.

Much in modern life today tends to make our children lazy and blasé as they sit idly and listlessly, listening to the radio, auto riding, or watching a movie. Training for leisure enables them to grow stronger intellectually as well as physically in their playtime.

WHERE THE FAMILY FAILS

ENGRAVED in stone on the doorway of the law building of an Eastern university is the silent but powerful message, "He who enters selfishly here endangers." This is certainly true of the profession of law and of medicine, in fact of all professions, including that most responsible profession of them all—parenthood.

Our American home has suffered greatly from without and within this quarter of a century. Causes and results have become hopelessly interwoven in helping to destroy the home's momentous influence, through easy divorces, childless homes, bandbox apartments, promulgated heresies of marriage through literature and screen.

However, the basic ailment of the whole world from nation to individual is selfishness—self-aggrandizement, selfish interests. The golden rule has become leaden—do for yourself and let others do likewise. This doctrine has permeated some of our American homes. At a fairly recent Parent-Teachers' state meeting in one of our most intellectual Eastern states, the president made an eloquent appeal for parents, fathers and mothers to spend one evening each week with their children, reading or playing in the home circle or at a movie. Asking for a rising vote of promise from this audience of 500 parents she could hardly suppress her disappointment when only 75 men and women stood to pledge this much of their time from their own pleasure plans to really become acquainted with their children.

Two years ago Roger Babson told us that more money was spent for automobiles in the last three and one-half years than had been spent for homes in the last 150 years.

When parents' interests turn in on their own pleasures, their children's interests turn out of the home, so that children themselves lose enjoyment and become bored with an evening at home. If one figures approximately the waking hours from childhood to college age, seventeen, about 1,000 hours are spent on Sabbath school, around 11,000 hours in the public schools, leaving 50,000, nearly 87 per cent of childhood and adolescence under the influence and responsibility of the home.

How can parents give the child momentum enough in his first six years to carry him through life from home lessons of character and religion, if some of our parents are so absorbed in their own selfish interests that they are unwilling to spend even one evening a week with their children?

Rubber Used in Place of Down in Upholstery

Rubber is being used increasingly as a household commodity. The latest purpose is as a substitute for down in cushions and upholstery. The rubber is converted into sponges, of varying dimensions, and is thus given the springy quality needed for stuffing of upholstery, cushions, tops of large footstools, etc. It is this rubber-sponge upholstery that is competing with down. In softness, it is manufactured to be comparable. When the rubber is totally deoiled, the competitive value reaches a high water mark. It is true that down will acquire a faint unaltered odor unless cushions are shaken frequently, and aired occasionally also. So both rubber and down require care in order to preserve their freshness, in this use for cushioned furniture or soft cushions.

Rubber is a recognized agent for rug linings, the word lining being used as in the case of carpet lining, to mean a separate article to be laid between the floor and the rug or carpet. In each instance the lining softens the tread and prevents the floor coverings above them from wearing out as quickly as if put directly on the hard boards. In the case of rubber rug linings, slight adhesive quality of the rubber mats helps to keep rugs from slipping on the floor. This is a great recommendation as rugs that slip and slide under foot cause accidents; and whatever reduces them is desirable. Rubber corner pieces for rugs keep the corners from turning up, and also lessen the liability of the rugs slipping.

Indented rubber door mats long ago found a place for themselves, both outside doorways, and inside the house before entrance doors. Rain cannot hurt them, and the mats are easily cleaned of dust and dirt by washing with the hose, or douching with water. These floor mats when deeply indented act as old-time foot-scrapers. Wiping shoes on the ridged surface of the mat before coming into a house takes off mud and dust, and makes housework easier for the homemaker, who does not have to clean up the muddy tracks.

With the various electric appliances in the home of today, rubber becomes an important non-conductor

in many ways. Iceless refrigerators have rubber insulations. Rubber and glass are competitive agents of insulation, each having certain advantages for their specific uses.

Rubber knobs come to stick into backs of furniture to keep them from hitting walls hard. They are excellent for sofas and davenport positioned with backs along walls. These buttons, in varying sizes are put to many uses to suit the home maker's needs.

To enumerate all the many household purposes of rubber would be an impossible task in one short article, which is primarily to acquaint homemaker's with the novel upholstery use to which it is being adapted.

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Women Are Less Liked by Men Than in Former Years

We are in the middle years of a woman's generation which was vigorous with hopes and intentions of accomplishments, electric with desire to be worth something to the world, ambitious to have women of equal stature with the men who were their husbands and companions.

The original plan, we must remember, was never to incur the resentment of men. Women felt very sure that such resentment and antagonism as they encountered in their first efforts was the result of shock and would be transient; they expected that a few years of accomplishment would do away with it. There has been much accomplishment, the best of it unfortunately concentrated in the hands of a comparatively few women, and more than a few years have passed. But the resentment of men has not disappeared. Quietly it has grown and deepened. They are no longer angry, as they were in the beginning when women did unaccustomed or conspicuous things. Men love individual women as passionately as they ever have, but in the aggregate they seem to like women less. Young girls, married women, working women and widows all come in for a share of this general criticism.—Margaret Culkin Banning in Harper's Magazine.

Advertisement for Grape-Nuts Flakes. Includes illustrations of a man conducting a band, a man playing a harmonica, and a box of Grape-Nuts Flakes. Text: STRIKE UP THE BAND AND GIVE IT A HAND. THE FLAVOR'S GLOR-I-OUS. JOIN IN THE CHOR-I-OUS. IT'S GOT EVERYTHING IT'S THE CEREAL KING. GRAPE-NUTS FLAKES! ONCE you taste Grape-Nuts Flakes, you'll cheer too! And it not only has a delicious flavor, but it's nourishing. One dishful, with milk or cream, contains more varied nourishment than many a hearty meal. Try it—your grocer has it! Product of General Foods.