

Sketch

Volume 13, Number 2

1946

Article 9

Politics

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Abstract

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Politics

Mrs. Billie Allen

CHARLES THOMAS KING, Police Magistrate, tipped back his chair and surveyed the court-room over his two-for-a-nickel cigar. For an hour now he'd been listening to these black boys and girls lie. He could always tell when a nigger was lying—their eyes were so big and white and innocent. This was one time they couldn't get out of it!

He looked at the two white people sitting on the front bench. Jake still looked pretty shaky. He had just come from the hospital this morning. Mrs. Jacobs was almost as white as he was. She'd had a bad time of it while her husband was in bed. Well, the trouble had been brewing down at their place for quite a while. With the Jacobs cafe bordering on colored town that way, the darkies couldn't help but see the good time the white kids were having. They just couldn't stand to be left out of the fun, so they tried to fix it so nobody else would have fun either. They really ganged up on Jake when he tried to calm them down!

Damn these niggers! Gonna get them out of here as soon as possible. They haven't a leg to stand on anyway. He looked over at his secretary and gave her a broad wink. Mighty lucky to have Betty. But she was pretty down on him—didn't like the way he decided that last case. He'd make it up to her this time. If only the boys "upstairs" didn't put the pressure on. Better not delay the verdict. Then nothing could change his mind.

The "Honorable" judge squirmed in his chair under his secretary's piercing gaze. God, but it's warm! Summer's really creeping up. He glanced at his calendar—less than a month until election-time—these niggers can really swing the votes!

He forced his attention to the proceedings. Look at the smirk on that Atley's face! Only 18, but she makes two of Jake. Wouldn't want her slipping up on me in the dark!

Well, they were sunk. Can you imagine that old man threatening Jake for getting his daughter in trouble—huh—wonder who was to blame for those four years she's already spent in reform school.

The five-feet, ten-inch colored girl was speaking. "Yes, sir,

Jedge, that Jake, he really did mess me up." She lifted a much-banded leg and arm. "Now, I'm even scared ta go ta school fer fear dem white gals will gang up on me."

More lies! White girls gang up on her! His own daughter had told him how six negro girls had cornered one white girl in one of the high school halls, and threatened to beat her up if they caught her working at Jake's after school. Had to keep three of Jake's helpers home to protect them until they could calm the negroes down. Mr. King frowned, his bushy eyebrows making a bridge across his nose. If those filthy niggers ever lay a hand on June.—

Guess I'll shoo them out—maybe I'd better tell 'em to come back tomorrow for the decision.

"Return at 10 A.M. tomorrow for my verdict, Folks," he said, staring with unseeing eyes at the "Re-elect Carpen" sign in the back of the room.

The colored people filed out of the building casting confident glances at the judge. Hadn't he got Johnny Dixon out of it when he had that knifing fracas with Frank Bailey? They'd vote for Mayor Carpen as long as he played ball with them—Nope, this time it was gonna be different!

Mr. King chewed on his cigar and watched the Jacobs as they stopped to chat with Betty. Those niggers ought to thank Mrs. Jacobs, instead of trying to kill her husband. If it hadn't been for her, there wouldn't be a house standing in nigger-town. Fifteen minutes after Jake had been stabbed by the girl, a mob of men appeared armed with clubs, guns and gasoline—gonna burn them out. But she got up on a car and pleaded with them until finally they promised to do nothing until they found out if Jake would live.

The Jacobs had gone now. Betty was looking at the police magistrate. Her pretty blue eyes were questioning. "Smells, doesn't it?" She said nothing more as if waiting for her words to sink in.

Her boss leaned back and folded his hands over his well-fed stomach. "Well, Betty, this is a cut and dried case. We're gonna tromp on these colored folks before they take the town over completely." His voice was determined, but his eyes refused to meet those of his secretary. He'd said those same words before, but each time the "boys" had changed his mind.

"The election is in less than a month, isn't it, Mr. King?" Betty's voice was sweet, too sweet. How'd she know he was thinking of that very thing? He'd show her he was on the level this time,

even if it cost him his job. The judge gritted his teeth . . . there really wasn't much money in barbering, though.

"Will you go back to barbering?" Damn, had he been thinking out loud? How else would she know what had been on his mind!

"Heh, heh," King's laugh was forced. "You don't think we're gonna lose out in the June election, do you, Betty?" But Betty was looking out of the window.

Damn politics. How'd he ever get mixed up in them anyway. God knows he didn't have brains enough for this position. The other towns this size had lawyers as their police magistrates. He was just easily bought, that's all. He fingered his wilted tie. The diamond stick pin had suddenly lost its luster.

Betty was watching him. Why did he feel so uncomfortable under her gaze? She hated crooked politics worse than anything. Funny, she knew that he'd suspended the fine on that Teddywall case and then accepted a hundred bucks for doing it. She also knew that he received a "take" off the slot machines each month, but she could stand that.

"You just call the Sheriff's office afterwhile, Betty. Tell them to drop around about ten tomorrow morning and we'll make them a gift of that big gal! They'll know what to do with her over there." Betty smiled, really smiled, the first since this business had begun. But the smile soon faded. The Judge, watching her, saw the unbelief on her face. He knew that she had decided to wait and see if he was really going straight this time. And those niggers *do* bring in a lot of votes. Condemning one would sway the whole flock to the other side. Well, Mamma and the kids would just have to get along on what he made barbering. Suddenly, he jumped from his chair and grabbed his hat. The activity startled Betty, but she understood. He wanted to get out of there before the Mayor or any of his men got in touch with him about the trial. If they couldn't find him, they couldn't give any orders.

"What shall I say if anyone calls?" Betty asked.

"Tell them you don't know where—" But the telephone was ringing. This was his chance. Betty looked down at her notebook so as not to see the indecision on his face.

Slowly, his pudgy hand dropped from the door knob, his hat fell to the chair, and the Judge walked across the floor, his eyes staring fixedly at the peeling phone.

"Hello . . . yes, it's over . . . no . . ." He looked at Betty to see if she were listening. "Well . . . I . . . I see . . . a . . . er . . . on the plaintiff? . . . but . . . oh, he is? . . . all right . . . yes, sir . . . tomorrow . . . goodbye." The phone went back on its cradle.

Mr. King mopped his handkerchief over his perspiring forehead. The room was warm. He had tried to disguise the conversation, but Betty, he knew, had filled in the blanks. She was waiting for his explanation. Well, let her wait. He needed a glass of beer.



Verses In April

Elizabeth Ann Curran

Winner, Freshman SKETCH Contest

Love is the April trees
 Who dormant lie for months
 Waiting the touch of soft spring sun,
 And then unbud to form the sweet green
 Canopy of young affection, newly come.

What can I give you when you go away,
 The remembered charm of an hazy day?
 The feel of a shimmering ice-cold stream,
 Where once we dangled our legs in a dream?
 Or the thought of a fleeting April kiss?
 This can I give you, but only this.

White lilacs in the rain
 Spread their ethereal skirts
 To beaded drops sewn to their hems;
 White lilacs in the rain
 Shed their liquid jewels
 On the ground beneath;
 The ballet ends.
 White lilacs in the April rain
 Bow their heads
 To the pale curtain lowered on them.