

# *Sketch*

---

*Volume 15, Number 3*

1949

*Article 6*

---

## Feel Free To Tell

Luella Leacock\*

\*Iowa State College

Copyright ©1949 by the authors. *Sketch* is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).  
<http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch>

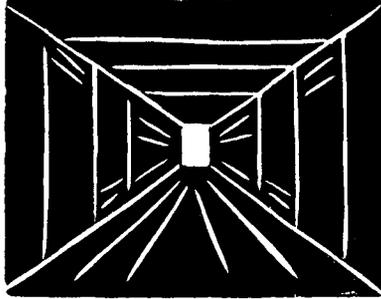
# Feel Free To Tell

Luella Leacock

## **Abstract**

”Tell me, Mrs. Morrison,” the man’s voice asked, kindly, “When do you feel Jubie began to, as you put it, go ‘bad’?”

## Feel Free To Tell



“TELL ME, Mrs. Morrison,” the man’s voice asked, kindly, “When do you feel Jubie began to, as you put it, go ‘bad’?”

There it was again, the same old question! Impatiently she repeated her answer.

“Like I told you already, after me and Al got married he just seemed to turn against me, even stole money from my pocketbook. But I told you all this before!” Her voice whined a little as she said the last, but Lord, she was tired of his dumb questions.

“I don’t see it matters,” she whined on. “There ain’t nothing can help him now!”

“Yes, it is a little late.” The psychiatrist was silent a moment, seeming to direct his attention to the odd little figures he was drawing on the paper before him.

Leona Morrison fidgeted in her chair. She wished they’d let her go home. There wasn’t anything she could do for Jubie now, and she was about to point this out when Mr. Whatever-his-name-was started talking again.

“You see, Mrs. Morrison, at the trial, all these things will have to be brought out in Jubie’s defense, and I want to help you recall the testimony you will give. Not only that, there may be others who will benefit from what we can learn from you.”

He edged his chair closer to his desk and folded his hands in front of him. He looked at the woman seated across from him. It was important that he arouse her desire to confide in him, but—

“He was just rotten bad to do what he did. I don’t know what your fancy words would be for it,” Mrs. Morrison’s harsh voice filled the silence, “but he’s just plain no good!” This guy was getting on her nerves so bad she was about to scream.

“All right, Madam, we’ll use your term if you wish.”

How he made her squirm when he acted so cold, and imagine calling her Madam.’ She suspected he was trying to insult her, calling her that. After all, she wasn’t ladylike enough to be called lady-like names. For just a moment she wondered if he meant—

“See here, you,” she bristled, but he cut her off.

“Mrs. Morrison, I’m only acting as a friend to Jubie. And to you,” he added. “In return I want something from you. You can help other parents perhaps, and other children, and you can very much help Jubie, if you help me to know him. The person he is, and why. That is, you tell me all about him, and perhaps I can learn why he—ah—committed this crime.” He toyed with his pencil a moment. “What about Jubie when he was smaller?”

Her and Jubie had been awful happy when he was little. It had been hard mostly, trying to get enough cleaning to do to keep him in milk and having to take him out to her work with her, but she’d been proud that she’d kept her baby after Fred left them. Her mother had crabbed at her to put the kid in a home somewhere, but somehow she couldn’t do it.

“Mom,” he’d say when he was big enough to see how things were with her, “Mom, when I get big—” and he’d stop to just think about getting big, “I’m going to buy you a pretty pink dress that’s so long it’ll sweep the sidewalk!” and his eyes would sparkle so with excitement.

“Ya gotta nice boy there, Mrs. Morrison,” the neighbors said, and she’d been proud to have a son that wanted to look after her. She thought then, Fred maybe had given her something good after all, in spite of his meanness. She wondered now if Fred were still alive. One thing was sure, if he were he’d never let her know, not when Jubie was in this terrible

trouble. In a way though, she couldn't blame him. Who would want to own up to a son that killed some other kid! The thought of it made her stomach turn over.

"You said Jubie changed after you married this Al? Where is he now, Mrs. Morrison?" he interrupted her reverie with a soft question.

"Where is Al! Why the nasty kike just walked out one night and never came home! I don't know where he is," she added sullenly. "But I'm glad he's gone. I never should let myself get mixed up with a dirty Jew in the first place!"

The man looked at her across his desk, and for a moment she met his gaze, then dropped her eyes to her fingers twisting nervously in her lap. Sure, she knew he was a Jew, and she decided right now was a good time to put him in his place, he'd been acting so snooty about her! After all, she wasn't the criminal!

"I don't like Jews," she said flatly.

"I see."

Now she had put him in his place she decided she could talk to him.

"Jubie was awful good when he was little," she rummaged through her handbag for that picture of him.

"See," she handed it to him, "there he is, when he was four years old, and look at that sweet smile!"

The man took the picture from her and looked at it thoughtfully for a moment. He remained silent as he returned it to her. "Go on," he murmured as he leaned back in his chair.

"Well," she groped for words. "By the way," she snickered "it was a funny thing about this picture. I didn't have the money to have one taken downtown, so I—" she closed her lips on what she had been about to say. He probably wouldn't think it was funny the way she'd gypped the photographer out of his money. Well, he hadn't lived on Humboldt Avenue, where you learned to take what you wanted, if no one was looking!

"I will say," and she did, "I allus managed to get some of the extras for Jubie and me, even if I had to cheat to do it." There, she'd let him know it meant more to her that she take care of her kid than be pussy-footed about how she did it.

"I was a *good* mother. Of course, when he started into school I couldn't keep track of him much. He got into lots of trouble, just like the other boys. The older kids taught him to steal candy, and cigarettes. Sometimes he'd bring home money."

Her listener thought Mrs. Morrison said this with a hint of pride, but he kept his thoughts to himself. "Didn't you question him about these things?"

"Question him! Cripes, I used to yell at him morning and night, trying to tell him he'd spend his life in jail if he didn't mend his ways. I was right too," she said smugly. "So for a couple of days, I guess, he'd quit snitching things, and then start in again. Mosta the kids around where we live got sticky fingers." She said this with an air of pointing out a necessary fact.

"Did you ever think of taking Jubie out of that neighborhood?"

"Now where would I get the money to move outa there! Humboldt Avenue was a good as I could afford. Besides, lotsa other boys live there, and they didn't—" she stopped, then finished lamely, "do what Jubie did."

"When did you begin going to the Welfare for help with Jubie, Mrs. Morrison?"

"Oh, that," she moved uncomfortably in her chair. So he had been talking to those people! "Well, like I told you, after Al and me got married, well, Jubie just got out of hand all the way."

"What do you mean by 'all the way'?" prompted the man, noting Mrs. Morrison's air of reluctance. "I suppose you mean police trouble," he assumed smoothly.

"Yeah."

"Are you aware of why Jubie had greater difficulties at that time?"

"Him?" Mrs. Morrison snorted with anger. "It was me had the troubles, Mister! Why, I had to go down to the precinct house just about every other night—he was always mixed up in something. I even begged them cops to keep him there, so I wouldn't have to run back and forth. But nyah!" Her expression of contempt for the local police made her face ugly to see, and her audience looked away.

"Couldn't Mr. Zimmerman help you with the boy?" he inquired finally.

"Ya," she considered for a moment, "I guess you'd say he tried. He'd whale the daylights out of him right at first. But then it got so Jubie just didn't come home nights, so he never got a chance at him."

"See, it just shows you how he was starting to be," she said flatly, as she shook her head. "I married this guy to get a better home for the both of us, and what does he do to show his thanks? I'll tell ya, he just acts mean and sassy around the flat, till Al is fighting with him to leave; then Al starts yelling at me about getting rid of him." She seemed to be contemplating some lost security before she said emphatically, "He shoulda been in reform school long ago."

"Mrs. Morrison, how old was Jubie at this time?"

"Well, that was only—five years ago, I guess, and he's twelve now, you know."

Only twelve years old, she thought bitterly, and he'd killed someone already. Well, she'd known for a long time he would end up bad, but not like this! Stealing, well, he'd been doing that for a long time, and he hated cops, so he might someday done something to a cop, but to just up and hit Jamie with a rock he musta known would kill the kid—well, he must be wrong in the head was all she could figure!

"Mrs. Morrison, did you take Jubie's side in these fights between your husband, your second husband that is, and your son?"

"I should say not!" she was indignant at that question. "What was there to take his side about? He was just bad—in trouble with the school nearly all the time. At first, they come to see me and asked me to send him more regular. That was fine, and I told 'em a thing or two! What could I do? I kicked him out in the morning and if he didn't go to school I couldn't help that, could I? I used to yell myself hoarse trying to make him go to school. Then I even took to going to the school people to see if they couldn't do something with him. After all, that's what they're there for, isn't it? I even talked to a man from the welfare, trying to get him to send Jubie—somewhere! Anywhere that he would be kept in line! I told them over and over, I sez, 'if you don't do something with that boy, find some place where he can't get into trouble—'" She slapped her fist against her knee as she interrupted herself excitedly, "and there

you have it! I told them how it would be—and look!” She settled back against her chair, seemingly satisfied with her predictions and the outcome of them.

“When Jubie was little,” she went on, comfortably, “I took good care of him, but when he started school I kinda felt he was old enough to take care of himself. That was when the war started anyhow, and I was working in a factory. Made more in one day than I used to make in a week! Jubie had a real nice home, then. We ate good, and I bought some things for the flat. Why cripes, Jubie had it as nice as anyone in the block!”

“But you weren’t home much, were you?” he interrupted.

“Well, now, whadya think? I told ya I worked!” Jubie’s mother said loudly.

“Of course, Mrs. Morrison. Please don’t get so excited; just remember, I’m acting as a friend in this matter.” He smiled dryly at her muttered expression of disbelief.

“Was it during this time you met Mr. Zimmerman?”

“I already tolja when I met Al!”

“At a dance, wasn’t it?” He assumed a sympathetic air, as he asked if she got much chance to go out in the evenings.

“Of course not,” she answered. “While I was doing this war work in the factory, I used to go out—er—several times a week. Jubie was old enough to be left alone. After all, I was working real hard to fix up a home for Jubie and me, so I sure deserved to get some fun of an evening.”

“I see. Then during this period you feel Jubie had a nice home.”

“He had as nice a home as any kid in the block!” Mrs. Morrison said emphatically.

“But you weren’t there.”

“Look, Mister, I told you—”

“Yes, I know, you worked.”

“Well?”

He could see Jubie’s mother was tired of the interview. He sighed, looking at his report, and wondered if he could get a more complete picture.

“Say,” Mrs. Morrison demanded, “can’t I go home, yet? I been here all day, and I’m tired.”

He looked at her flabby face. Yes, she looked tired. She returned his gaze with a hard look, and stood up to leave.

"Would you like to see Jubie now?" a police matron opened the door to ask.

Jubie's mother stood for a moment, undecided. A kind of hunger showed in her eyes, then left as quickly as it had leapt up.

A policeman brought Jubie into the room where his mother stood. The boy looked small between the burly policeman and the tall police matron, and his thin face was set in lines of despair. He glanced uncertainly at his mother, then down at the cap he twisted in his hands. The boy's voice broke the stillness—"Ma, I—" He moved toward her. "Ma, I'm sorry—I didn't mean—Ma, I'm sorry, I'm sorry—" His voice broke with emotion.

Jubie's mother looked at him, her eyes cold and staring. Finally she spoke, "So you're sorry, huh! Well, being sorry ain't going to do no good now, I guess."

Jubie's outburst of emotion stilled at his mother's words. His eyes blazed defiantly through the tears as he said, "Don't worry about me, I can take care of myself!" He turned back to the matron and they started for the door.

"Well, Mister Smarty," Mrs. Morrison called after them, "at least you'll be where you won't cause me no more trouble!"

The slam of the door almost drowned the sound of her voice.

She moved about the room, gathering together her coat and hunting her purse. At last, ready to leave, she turned to the psychiatrist.

"I do hope I bin some help to you," she said with an attempt at dignified concern. "There really wasn't much to tell though, was there.?"

The psychiatrist kept his eyes lowered as he pretended a great busyness among his papers.

"Oh, you'd be surprised," he sighed heavily, "at the information you've given us. You'd really be surprised!"

—Luella Leacock, H. Ec., Fr.

