



She looked at him as if he were a hole in a sock.
"Here's my police card," she said. "Ask him for his"

WORKING PRESS

The new Managing Editor had a creed. It was that cretonne curtains and girl reporters just didn't belong in any newspaper office. But Holly Brown, girl reporter, had other ideas . . . and applied them fast

by **Richard Powell**

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A Short Story Complete in This Issue

HOLLY BROWN came into the city room of the Philadelphia Evening Express with a Spring-cleaning bounce to her step. During her two weeks' vacation the room had taken on a dreadful masculine untidiness. It needed a woman's touch. She tingled with pleased horror, like a wife returning from a trip and finding dishes piled in the sink.

Typewriter ribbons had been pounded into black lace. Rewrite men were dropping paper on the floor instead of into wastebaskets. There were new cigarette scars on the desk she shared with one of the other general assignment reporters. As for Andy Struthers, the City Editor —

She marched to his desk and said accusingly: "Andy, your face is yellow. You've been grabbing a coke and a sandwich at your desk instead of taking a proper lunch hour."

"Hiyuh, Holly. Good vacation? Yeah, I've been skipping lunch hour. But we have a new Managing Editor and —"

"So I heard, McCready Hale. The man who wrote 'Spot News.' That's no reason for not taking care of yourself. And now that I'm back —" She paused. Andy was looking at her very queerly. "You are glad I'm back, aren't you?"

His fingers hammered an invisible typewriter. After a moment he asked, "Ever thought of getting married?"

"No. Why?"

"Just asking. Girl like you ought to have a lot of guys forming a line to the right. Some

dames, now, they don't look good unless you print their picture with 120 screen on smooth paper. But a kid like you, bright hair and nice clean features, comes out swell in half-tone with our lousy 60 screen. I often thought, if the ship-news boys would only get more girls like you posing on the rail, they'd —"

She laughed. "You sound as if you're getting ready either to marry me or fire me."

"Neither, Holly. Have you read Hale's book?"

"No."

He brought out a copy of "Spot News," found a marked passage and read: "Women reporters and cretonne curtains have no place in a city room. The working press must be hard-boiled and sometimes unscrupulous — two qualities that women are more likely to exhibit in married life than in business."

"Andy, he's wrong! I don't mean me, I'm no good, but Kate Johns is one of the best police reporters in the city."

He said crisply, "Fired."

"And — and Mary Anne Bowman —"

"Fired."

"Without a chance to show him what they can do?"

"He calls it a chance. He brought his pet cobra over from New York with him. A guy named Bill Reardon. He sent Kate and Mary Anne out on test assignments against Reardon. This guy is on to every dirty trick invented since Gutenberg started cutting type, and —"

"And I'm next?"

He nodded miserably. "He left word to send you in."

She walked into the Managing Editor's office, feeling as weak as the singed kitten she had brought back once from covering a fire. Mr. Hale was thin and his face was tarnished like old silver. She diagnosed him immediately as a case of too little home cooking. She could hardly resist asking him home for dinner.

Across the room was a leather chair holding a tangle of arms and legs. She tried to sort out the tangle, in her imagination, and got a young man so big that there must be some mistake. He had black hair and a scowl.

"I'm Holly Brown," she said, running a finger over the desk. It needed dusting.

HALE looked up. "Oh, yes. The young man across the room is Mr. William Reardon. Why don't you get up, Mr. Reardon?"

"Why should I?" Bill growled. "I'm not ready to leave."

"I raised him from a cub." Hale shrugged. "But now that he's fully grown I may have to give him to the Zoo."

"Why should I kid the girl by acting polite? She knows I'm your hatchet man. Why don't you fire her now?"

"He has no sporting sense," Hale explained. "No — what are you doing, Miss Brown?"

She crumpled her handkerchief. "Your desk was so dusty that —"

"Your job is to collect news, not dust. You may have heard that I don't believe there is a place for women among the working press. I'm going to let you try to prove me wrong. Here's an assignment for you and Mr.

Reardon. Gloria Townsend, twenty, of Jasonville, crashed Hollywood a year ago and has been featured in a couple of B pictures. She visits the home town today and will get a civic welcome."

Bill snapped his pencil point and grumbled, "Just a second."

Holly opened her purse. "Here's an extra one." He glared at her and pulled another pencil from his pocket. She sighed. He was the first reporter she had ever met who carried a spare.

Hale chuckled, "They told me you were a terribly helpful girl, Miss Brown. But I'm afraid Mr. Reardon isn't in need of your talents. He can cook and —"

"Lay off," Bill growled.

"— sew and darn stockings and wash clothes. He's independent of women."

She looked pityingly at the black-haired giant. He must be very unhappy having to do all those things for himself. She wished he would growl again. His voice tingled through her like the rumble of trolley wheels in a tunnel.

Hale continued: "You and Mr. Reardon will cover this story independently. Each will phone to a different rewrite man: I will compare the stories."

"Then he'll fire you," Bill snapped.

Hale ignored him. "This is a trivial assignment, Miss Brown. Probably there won't even be any other city reporters present. But if you cover it properly, your job is safe. The Townsend girl arrives in Jasonville by train at 10:30 this morning. That's all."

SHE turned toward the door. There was a noise behind her like a football team going downfield at the kickoff, and Bill charged out ahead of her. She collected her hat and coat, paused to lend the slot man on the copy desk her bottle of aspirin, and then went out to her car.

Jasonville was thirty miles from Philadelphia. By 10:15 she had covered twenty-five miles, and calculated that she would arrive just in time. She twisted her coupé around a curve and saw a boy thumbing toward Jasonville. She stamped on the brake pedal.

"Gee, thanks," he said, climbing in. "Didn't think I'd ever get a lift. Only car going by in the last ten minutes wouldn't stop. Fellow in a yellow roadster. He nearly run me down."

"Was he young? Black hair?"

"Uh-huh. You know him?"

"We're reporters. We're covering Gloria Townsend's visit."

"I'm going in town to see her too. She taught school a year. They give us a holiday. There won't be anything open in Jasonville but the First National Bank and the post-office. Jimmy's father was going to take a bunch of us in but his car broke down. Do you think maybe we could stop by for him?"

"I'm afraid I haven't time."

"Jimmy'll feel awful bad not making it."

She glanced at his sad eyes, and was lost. "We-ell, but just this one stop."

It was astonishing how many small boys a coupé would hold, she thought. There seemed to be four inside with her and as many more on the running board. They were Jimmy and Elmo and Bob and Shorty and some others she couldn't remember. It was 10:40, she was still four miles from Jasonville and she had to drive slowly.

"She's a reporter," her first passenger announced. Two heads poked in the window.

"Like in the movies?"

"There's another reporter ahead of her. They're trying to beat each other."

"Not exactly," Holly said. "You see we're both from —" A half-dozen voices protested. They assured her that in the movies all reporters spent their time beating each other. They spent the rest of the trip telling her how it was done.

As she had expected, the Jasonville railroad station was nearly deserted. The baggage master said that the Townsend girl had been taken on a parade that would last, maybe, a half-hour. Then everybody was going to a reception at Borough Hall.

Her passengers scattered to hunt the parade while she tried to pick up more details. She was worried. Getting to an assignment late wouldn't have mattered if other city papers had been covering the story. Rival reporters were always helping her, and friends popping up unexpectedly with news. But she didn't have any friends here.

She drove along the main street, looking for a pay telephone sign. All the stores were closed, and the guard at the bank told her that the only pay phones open were in