

THE WHANGO TREE HAD A BUBBLY THORN



By Loretta Parker

THERE is not enough laughter in the world. Laughter is all about us but it cannot be heard above the voice of anxiety.

This sounds like the beginning of a lecture. It is.

No one has less right than I to discourse on laughter. No one could be more doleful than I. Each morning I wake hating the universe. By noon I hate myself. By night I am semi-conscious, dazed with self-pity.

Today I laughed for the second time in my life. I am not a laugher.

The first time I laughed was long ago in the days when I toddled instead of tottered. My little sister fell off a ladder. She almost broke her leg. I laughed and laughed. I laughed so hard my mother was afraid I would choke to death and my sister hoped I would.

Such humor is supposed to be typical of children and fat men. If one

is neither juvenile nor stout, then any sadistic humor traits are expected eventually to flow into wider channels of subtler merriment where witticisms and the reading of limericks take precedence over the joy of seeing someone fall off a ladder.

From the time of that first mad mirth, my sense of humor never slipped into wider channels. It remained a muddy ditch. And finally dried up. It died. I miss it.

As a plain girl longs to be beautiful and accordingly reads articles on beauty, so do I long to laugh, and I read and watch and listen to everything that might help me laugh.

I know the writings of the one and only Lewis Carroll to the pitch where hours of potential sleeping time are spent in jabbering "Jabberwocky." I love Mr. Carroll. But he cannot make me laugh.

Hilaire Belloc has been with me

(in the bookcase) for many a year. I love him, too. Yet he extracts from me a half-smile, no more.

I believe absolutely in the hackneyed dictum that the cure for everything is laughter. It is the only medicine left for a world of war and nerves.

Today I lunched with a friend who is my friend because we like to flounder in the same dark pit of gloom. But today she was smiling. This was so strange that I resentfully asked her why.

"My husband," she said, "was at a meeting last night. A man at the meeting instead of saying his speech recited a poem. He doesn't know who wrote the poem and all he knows about it is that it was written in 1840. My husband brought the poem home to me and told me that if I didn't read it he would divorce me. He said I was getting almost as morose as you and that the poem might cure me."

She read aloud the following poem.
And I laughed . . .

The woggly bird sat on the whango tree,
Nooping the rinkum corn,
And graper and graper, alas! grew he,
And cursed the day he was born.
His crute was clum and his voice was rum,
As curiously thus sang he,
"Oh, would I'd been rammed and eternally clammed
Ere I perched on this whango tree."

Now the whango tree had a bubbly thorn,
As sharp as a nootie's bill,
And it stuck in the woggly bird's umptum lorn
And weepadge, the smart did thrill.
He fumbled and cursed, but that wasn't the worst,
For he couldn't at all get free,
And he cried, "I am gammed, and injustibly nammed
On the luggardly whango tree."

And there he sits still, with no worm in his bill,
Nor no guggledom in his nest;
He is hungry and bare, and gobliddered with care,
And his grabbles give him no rest;
He is weary and sore and his tugmut is soar,
And nothing to nob has he,
As he chirps, "I am blammed and corruptibly jammed,
In this cuggerdom whango tree."



SPIDERS ARE HER PREY

By Belle C. Ewing

How would you feel if someone sent you a dozen black widow spiders for Christmas? Nan Songer was delighted. You see, spiders are her livelihood and she is especially fond of black widows!

Nan Songer is a well-known naturalist whose home is in the San Bernardino Mountains, near Yucaipa, California. She has devoted nearly thirty years to the care, study and cultivation of spiders, whose web is most important in the world's precision optical instrument industry. The spiders' strong, slender web is used in bombsights, telescopic gun sights and other precise optical mechanisms.

Mrs. Songer, a peppy woman of fifty, became interested in the study of insects while still in her teens. She observed and collected many forms of insect life, including moths, butterflies and crickets. This hobby gradually led to spiders, and in 1939 she established a regular "spidery." Her experiments gained national recognition when she discovered that the web of the bandit garden spider carried illumination better than any other.

Before Mrs. Songer's entry into the field, it was the usual practice for laboratories to attempt to accu-

mulate their own web by the hit-or-miss method of dropping a spider from the ceiling and then gathering the web which it spun in an effort to break its fall.

This method was crude and unsatisfactory and the amount of web gathered in this way was very small. Then, too, spiders spin more than one type of web; the only one that can be used for instrument purposes is the single strand that the spider spins when traveling up and down in the air. The spider spins an entirely different strand for catching its prey. This web is sticky and has no elasticity, and is of no commercial value. It remained for Mrs. Songer to perfect a method of extracting the proper type of web by a process compared roughly to that of milking a cow.

"Spiders," Mrs. Songer stated, "are very temperamental." They must be in the proper mood before it is possible to extract the web, and the spider must know the person working with it. The spider insists upon absolute quiet during the "milking" process.

She firmly fastens the spider to be milked on a wooden block by means of a wire staple. Then, armed with long, slender needles, she gently