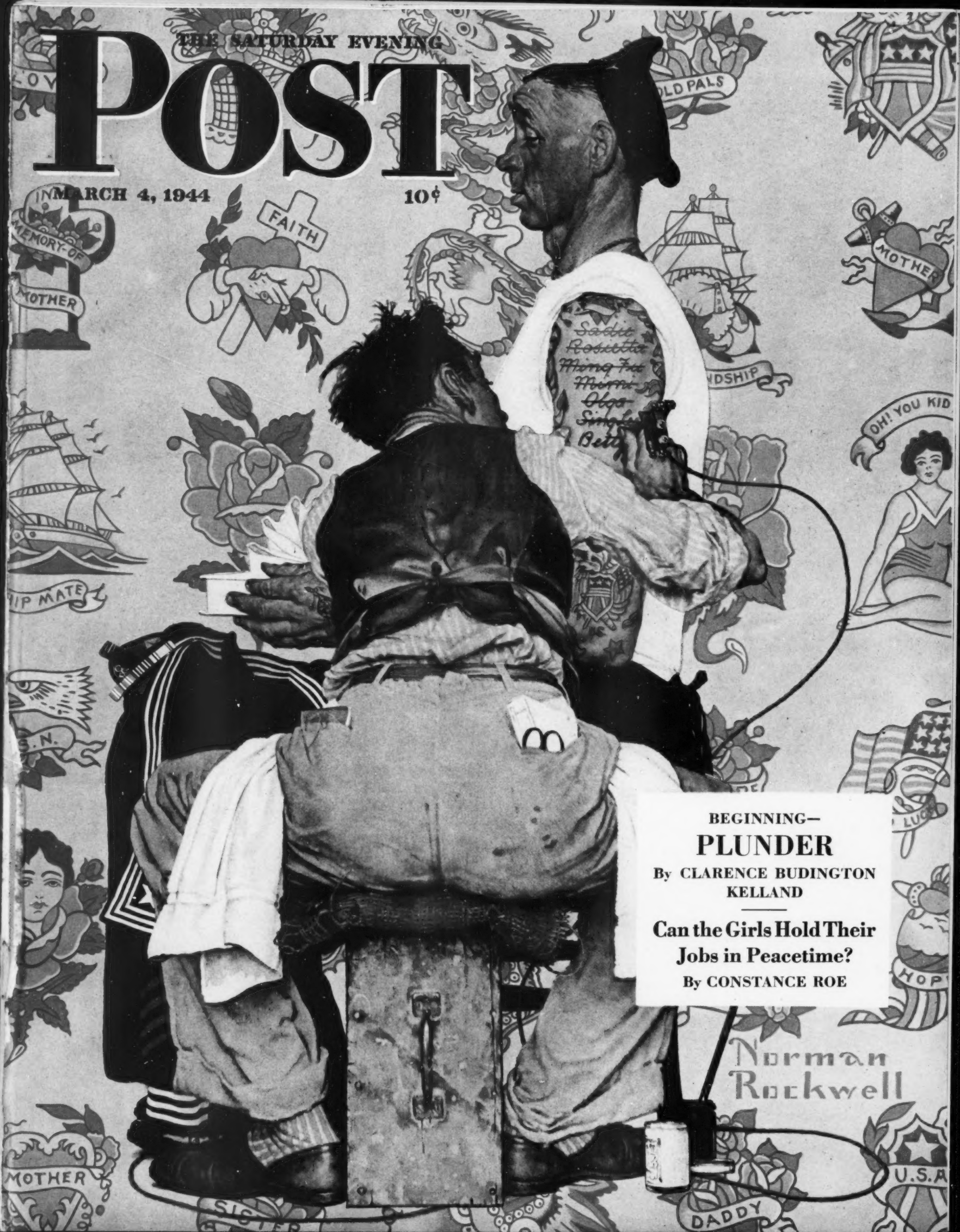


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BEGINNING— PLUNDER

By CLARENCE BUDINGTON
KELLAND

Can the Girls Hold Their
Jobs in Peacetime?

By CONSTANCE ROE

Norman
Rockwell



When G. I. Joe comes home from the wars, and naturally wants his old job back, will she have to come down from her perch?



She is welcome now, and also useful, but later on even her union card may fail to save her from involuntary retirement.

Can the Girls Hold Their Jobs in Peacetime?

By CONSTANCE ROE

MAIZIE JOHNSON has just had another merit raise and her foreman admits she does all right on that turret lathe. Maizie is getting pay checks the like of which she never saw before; and, subconsciously, at least, she's planning on those pay checks continuing indefinitely.

I get a politely derisive smile when I try to tell her, "Stay with it till the war's over, and then get into some kind of woman's work." I'm as old as Methuselah and too feeble to understand modern life if I try to warn her, "You can't win." I'm forty-one and she's nineteen, and men are different today from those I worked with. Women are getting along all right working in war plants, aren't they? And the men like having women around.

It seems there's always a new crop of us women who find ourselves, by force of one reason or another, in men's trades. I was born into mine in peacetime. Maizie arrived in hers via the intensified short-course-training schedules necessitated by war. She's justifiably proud of herself in matching men's ability on machines, and she doesn't believe there's a price tag involved for a woman who looks covetously at a man's job. Nobody could tell me, either, back in the 1920's.

I was doing all right. I was one of the few women printers who could work anywhere in the New York World composing room. I set the type for the front-page banner headline the day Lindbergh landed at Le Bourget Field. I operated a linotype and exchanged wisecracks with other operators on murder-trial testi-

With a sigh for her bruised femininity, a labor-union veteran advises the ladies to abandon their lovely beach-head in man's industrial world when the war is over.

mony that curdled the blood of all but newspaper workers. I lounged at the windows with the rest of the gang to see celebrities like Queen Marie and Jack Dempsey and Gertrude Ederle shake hands with the mayor on the City Hall promenade across the street from the World Building. We wisecracked about those spectacles, too, and went back to our linotypes to set up copy telling all about it for current extras.

1928, and I'd been on the World three years. Big-time newspaper work in the composing room. I loved it. High-tension atmosphere you don't get anywhere else, even in the editorial rooms, where the news comes in freshest. Big stories breaking at the last minute and the Page 1 truck being trundled back for a make-over. The tight fifteen minutes on the day side while the stock-market reports are shoved through just before press deadline.

I was sitting pretty. I was basking in that secure satisfaction that comes to a few seekers at the end of the rainbow. The "gold" was contained in a type-

metal pot at 550 degrees Fahrenheit. The World was a gigantic organization, apparently as solid as Plymouth Rock, an American institution that would never die—and besides, the fellows liked to see a skirt or two around the composing room.

I'd come a long route, by way of Minneapolis and Chicago and points north and south—Brown & Phelps', James T. Igoe's, Western Newspaper Union and the Chicago Daily News. I went on to New York and walked straight into the millennium on the Evening World. It was the wide-open 20's. There was work for everyone—as there is today—and men didn't object to women working with them on equal status. There were more jobs than printers, and the men could afford to be generous. Never again was I to find working conditions for women so ideal as those that existed on the World at that time.

I got seventy-two dollars for a thirty-seven-and-a-half-hour week on the lobster shift, which is the equivalent of the graveyard shift in industry. That, I was to learn later, was not hay. I walked through the World Building lobby with the same confidence with which a girl riveter goes through the plant gates today. I was doing a man's work at a man's pay. Nobody could have made me doubt the perennial tolerance of my working comrades, nobody could have told me that their cheerful loan of brawn, in the few instances when my job required handling something heavier than I could lift, would someday be withdrawn. Men were overjoyed to see an extra hand come walking through the door, and if it wore skirts and was pretty by any stretch of the imagination, they fell over their feet in welcome.

But a year or so after the Wall Street debacle of 1929, I began to notice that the men's attitude toward women workers was changing. The New York World folded. It just couldn't happen, but it did; and I discovered, after I walked through that lobby downstairs for the last time, that other things had been going, too—specifically, the doormat that had said "Welcome" to women workers in a man's trade. It had been snatched up and tucked away in mothballs, to be hauled out again when needed, about ten years later.

New York was dead as a mackerel. I went upstate, to Albany, to Schenectady, to Troy. But there was no



"The men like to have us around," female labor boasts. But when employment dries up, says the author, chivalry quickly follows suit.



Used to money of their own, millions of the sex are going to sniff at postwar bromides about woman's place being in the home.

extra work for anybody, skirt or no. The atmosphere had changed, too, since the last time I'd walked into strange composing rooms. Now there were no smiles, no friendly gathering of printers around you, asking where you were from, how work was in Peoria, and why didn't you hang up your traveler's card here. The composing room just gave you a quick glance and returned immediately to work, every man in the place totally absorbed in the type before him. You wore a skirt. There were too many extra men printers showing up for every shift and walking, which, in English, means they didn't catch a day's work. During the next few years I was to catch just enough work to get by in a style to which I tried not to become accustomed.

I landed in Detroit in 1931, where the Free Press and News composing rooms said they didn't want women printers. One of them said frankly that they refused to hire women.

"The hell you do!" I told them, in the elegant parlance of the printing trade. "Here's my union card; it says you can't skip my name and hire below me, if I choose to deposit it here."

"That's right," the chapel chairman agreed. "Put your slip on the board if you insist, but you'll find they'll never hire as far as your name."

I found he knew what he was talking about. There was no work for women there. There was a depression getting swiftly under way, and the printing trade was beginning to try to protect men with families. Not that the publishers could say, "We refuse to hire women." They don't have much voice in the matter of labor in their composing rooms after they sign a union contract. The composing room is run strictly according to union law, and this puts a woman in the uncomfortable position of battling against her own brotherhood in her own union.

I took a run up to Saginaw and showed in at the Daily News. The day chairman told me to see the night chairman, and the night chairman said vice versa. A linotype operator with one too many beers under his belt cut in with the information that they were giving me the run-around and actually wouldn't let a woman printer in the place.

"Some blonde got one of our married men in trouble," the bleary but honest operator said. "They won't hire any more women here." Which was the

first time I'd run into that situation, at least in such concrete form.

Somewhere along there my attitude began changing too. I needed a job. I had a union card and I knew my trade and could turn out a day's work that asked no odds of anyone. I began to fan a righteous spark of indignation that made me want to fight, if necessary, for the dignity of my service in the trade for ten years.

No, printers aren't any odd-lot fanatics. They're red-blooded he guys, the salt of the earth; basically about the same as the riveters, the welders and the machinists. Their reactions as men and family providers are about the same.

But there are several reasons why they resent women members in the trade. For one thing, they have an instinctive feeling that a woman doesn't belong on



It's great to be a sturdy oak. Still, a clinging vine has a nice life too.

a man's job. Then, too, by nature a woman is built on a lighter chassis, and once or twice during nearly every day's work she's got to ask a man to do some little chore on her job that takes more heft than she possesses.

In good times men love to help a poor little woman get by. In bad times their instinct tells them she has no business there if she can't do the work. One of their most telling arguments is the fact that most men learn their trade in a six-year apprenticeship, and six years is a long time out of anybody's life. Any journeyman naturally resents a fellow member with a card achieved by less effort. I never heard of a woman printer who had served the six years. Mostly we women learn our trade in a small-town shop or by a six-weeks' linotype-keyboard school course—some men do, too, but that's different. When they stop to think of this, men resent it.

The International Typographical Union gives its women members the most complete and impartial protection a woman can hope to get in any industry. ITU is the oldest and one of the most progressive unions in the United States. Its constitution recognizes no differentiation between the sexes, and there have been women ITU members since 1870. But even ITU law can't change human nature, and when a man's baby needs shoes, he's going to connect with a pay check if he possibly can. Other men are going to help him get it too. During the depression, a man was a man who had to have a job if there was a job, and a skirt was a skirt, and came last on the hiring list.

I remember a redheaded girl who was doing make-up in a suburban Detroit open shop in 1933, and she was doing all right at it too. But a former make-up hand came back with a tale of wandering and woe, involving his wife and three children and their dismal future, if any, unless he got work pretty soon.

The foreman told Red she'd have to go, because there was a depression on, and everybody had to figure a little for the other guy, and anyhow you couldn't just stand by and watch children starve. I remember her furious defeat, and her explosion across the day's type forms of pages she'd just completed: "Was it my fault the fool got married when he couldn't support a family? I didn't have anything to do with his bringing three kids into the world!" (Continued on Page 37)