

HIS MOTHER'S SON

A Business Adventure of Emma McChesney
By EDNA FERBER

Author of "Dawn O'Hara," "Battered Side Down," etc.

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"Full!" repeated Emma McChesney (and if it weren't for the compositor there'd be an exclamation point after that question mark).

"Sorry, Mrs. McChesney," said the clerk, and he actually looked it, "but there's absolutely nothing stirring. We're full up. The Benevolent Brotherhood of Bisons is holding its regular annual state convention here. We're putting up cots in the hall."

Emma McChesney's keen blue eyes glanced up from their inspection of the little bunch of mail which had just been handed her. "Well, pick out a hall with a southern exposure and set up a cot or so for me," she said, agreeably, "because I've come to stay. After selling Featherloom petticoats on the road for ten years I don't see myself trailing up and down this town looking for a place to lay my head. I've learned this one large, immovable truth, and that is, that a hotel clerk is a hotel clerk. It makes no difference whether he is stuck back of a marble pillar and hidden by a gold vase full of thirty-six-inch American beauty roses at the Knickerbocker, or setting the late fall fashions for men in Gatesburg, Ill."

By one small degree was the perfect pose of the peerless personage behind the register jarred. But by only one. He was a hotel night clerk.

"It won't do any good to get sore, Mrs. McChesney," he began, suavely. "Now a man would—"

"But I'm not a man," interrupted Emma McChesney. "I'm only doing a man's work and earning a man's salary and demanding to be treated with as much consideration as you'd show a man."

The personage busied himself mightily with a pen, and a blotter, and sundry papers, as is the manner of personages when annoyed. "I'd like to accommodate you; I'd like to do it."

"Cheer up," said Emma McChesney, "you're going to. I don't mind a little discomfort. Though I would mention in passing that if there are any lady Bisons present you needn't bank on doubling me up with them. I've had one experience of that kind. It was in Albia, Iowa. I'd sleep in the kitchen range before I'd go through another."

Up went the erstwhile falling pose. "You're badly mistaken, madam. I'm a member of this order myself, and a finer lot of fellows it has never been my pleasure to know."

"Yes, I know," drawled Emma McChesney. "Do you know, the thing that gets me is the inconsistency of it. Along come a lot of boobs who never use a hotel the year around except to loaf in the lobby, and wear out the leather chairs, and use up the matches and toothpicks and get the baseball returns, and immediately you turn away a traveling man who uses a three-dollar-a-day room, with a sample room downstairs for his stuff, who tips every porter and bell-boy in the place, asks for no favors, and who, if you give him a half-way decent cup of coffee for breakfast, will fall in love with the place and boom it all over the country. Half of your Benevolent Bisons are here on the European plan, with a view to patronizing the free-lunch counters or being asked to take dinner at the home of some local Bison whose wife has been cooking up on pies, and chicken salad and veal roast for the last week."

Emma McChesney leaned over a desk a little, and lowered her voice to the tone of confidence. "Now, I'm not in the habit of making a nuisance of myself like this. I don't get so chatty as a rule, and I know that I could jump over to Monmouth and get first-class accommodations there. But just this once I've a good reason for wanting to make you and myself a little miserable. You see, my son is traveling with me this trip."

"Son!" echoed the clerk staring. "Thanks. That's what they all do. After a while I'll begin to believe that there must be something hauntingly beautiful and girlish about me or every one wouldn't petrify when I announce that I've a six-foot son attached to my apron strings. He looks twenty-one, but he's seventeen. He thinks the world's rotten because he can't grow one of those fuzzy little mustaches that the men are cultivating to match their hats. He's down at the depot now, straightening out our baggage. Now I want to say this before he gets here. He's been out with me just four days. Those four days have been a revelation, an eye-opener, and a series of rude jolts. He used to think that his mother's job consisted of traveling in Pullmans, eating delicate viands turned out by the hotel chefs, and strewing Featherloom petticoats along the path. I gave him plenty of money, and he got into the habit of looking lightly upon anything more trifling than a five-dollar bill. I'm prepared to spend the night in the coal cellar if you'll just fix him up—not too comfortably. It'll be a great lesson for him. There he is now. Just coming in. Fuzzy coat and hat and English stick. Hiss! As they say on the stage."

The boy crossed the crowded lobby. There was a little worried, annoyed frown between his eyes. He laid a protecting hand on his mother's arm. Emma McChesney was conscious of a little thrill of pride as she realized that he did not have to look up to meet her gaze.

"Look here, mother, they tell me there's some sort of a convention here, and the town's packed. That's what all those banners and things were for. I hope they've got something decent for us here. I came up with a man who said he didn't think there was a hole left to sleep in."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Emma McChesney, and turned to the clerk. "This is my son, Jock McChesney—Mr. Sims. Is this true?"

"Glad to know you, sir," said Mr. Sims. "Why, yes, I'm afraid we are pretty well filled up, but seeing it's you, maybe we can do something for you."

He ruminated, tapping his teeth with a penholder, and eying the pair before him with a maddening blankness of gaze. Finally:

"I'll do my best, but you can't expect much. I can see you can't expect another cot into eighty-seven for the young man. There's—let's see now—whose in eighty-seven? Well, there's two Bisons in the double bed, and one in the single, and Fat Ed Meyers in the cot and—"

Emma McChesney stiffened into acute attention. "Meyers?" she interrupted. "Do you mean Ed Meyers of the Strauss Sans-silk Skirt company?"

"That's so. You two are in the same line, aren't you? He's a great little piano player, Ed is. Ever hear him play?"

"When did he get in?"

"Oh, he just came in fifteen minutes ago on the Ashland division. He's in at supper."

"Oh," said Emma McChesney. The two letters breathed relief. But relief had no place in the voice, or on the countenance of Jock McChesney. He bristled with bitterness. "This cattle-car style of sleeping don't make a hit. I haven't had a decent night's rest for three nights. I never could sleep on a sleeper. Can't you fix us up better than that?"

"Best I can do."

"But where's mother going? I see you advertise three large and commodious steam-heated sample rooms in connection. I suppose mother's due to sleep on one of the tables there."

"Jock," Emma McChesney reproved him, "Mr. Sims is doing us a great favor. There isn't another hotel in town that would—"

"You're right, there isn't," agreed Mr. Sims. "I guess the young man is new to this traveling game. As I said, I'd like to accommodate you, but—"

Let's see now. Tell you what I'll do. If I can get the housekeeper to give over and sleep in the maid's quarters just for tonight, you can use her room. There you are! Of course, it's over the kitchen, and there may be some little noise early in the morning—"

Emma McChesney raised a protesting hand. "Don't mention it. Just lead me thither. I'm so tired I could sleep in an excursion special that was switching at Pittsburgh. Jock, my child, we're in luck. That's twice in the same place. The first time was when we were inspired to eat our supper on the diner instead of waiting until we reached here to take the leftovers from the Bisons' grazing. I hope that housekeeper hasn't a picture of her departed husband dangling, life-size, on the wall at the foot of the bed. But they always have. Good-night, son. Don't let the Bisons bite you. I'll be up at seven."

But it was just 8:30 a. m. when Emma McChesney turned the little bend in the stairway that led to the office. The scrub-woman was still in possession. The cigar-counter girl had not yet made her appearance. There was about the place a general air of the night before. All but the night clerk. He was as spruce and trim, and alert and smooth-shaven as only a night clerk can be after a night's vigil.

"Morning!" Emma McChesney called to him. She wore blue serge, and a smart fall hat. The late autumn morning was not crisp and sunnier than she.

"Good-morning, Mrs. McChesney," returned Mr. Sims, sonorously. "Have a good night's sleep? I hope the kitchen noise didn't wake you."

Emma McChesney paused with her hand on the door. "Kitchen? Oh, no. I could sleep through a vaudeville china-juggling act. But—what an extraordinarily unpleasant-looking man that housekeeper's husband must have been."

"That November morning boasted all those qualities which November-morning writers are so prone to bestow upon the month. But the words wine, and sparkle, and sting, and glow, and snap do not seem to cover it. Emma McChesney stood on the bottom step, looking up and down Main street and breathing in great draughts of that unadjectivable air. Her complexion

stood the test of the merciless astringent morning and came up triumphant and healthily firm and pink and smooth. The town was still asleep. She started to walk briskly down the bare and ugly Main street of the little town. In her big, generous heart, and her keen, alert mind, there were many sensations and myriad thoughts, but varied and diverse as they were they all led back to the boy up there in the stuffy, over-crowded hotel room—the boy who was learning his lesson.

Half an hour later she reentered the hotel, her cheeks glowing. Jock was not yet down. So she ordered and ate her wise and cautious breakfast of fruit and cereal and toast and coffee, skimming over her morning paper as she ate. At 7:30 she was back in the lobby, newspaper in hand. The Bisons were already astir. She seated herself in a deep chair in a quiet corner, her eyes glancing up over the top of her paper toward the stairway. At eight o'clock Jock McChesney came down.

There was nothing of jauntiness about him. His eyelids were red. His face had the doughy look of one whose sleep has been brief and feverish. As he came toward his mother who noticed a stain on his coat, and a sunburst of wrinkles across one leg of his modish brown trousers.

"Good-morning, son!" said Emma McChesney. "Was it as bad as that?"

Jock McChesney's long fingers curled into a fist.

"Say," he began, his tone venomous. "do you know what those—those—those—"

"Say it!" commanded Emma McChesney. "I'm only your mother. If you keep that in your system your breakfast will gurdle in your stomach."

Jock McChesney said it. I know no phrase better fitted to describe his tone than that old favorite of the erotic novelties. It was vibrant with passion. It breathed bitterness. It sizzled with savagery. It—Oh, alliteration is useless.

"Well," said Emma McChesney, encouragingly, "go on."

"Well," gulped Jock McChesney, and glared; "those two double-bedded, bloomin', blasted Bisons came in at twelve, and the single one about fifteen minutes later. They didn't surprise me. There was a herd of about ninety-three of 'em in the hall, all saying good-night to each other, and planning where they'd meet in the morning, and the time, and place and probable weather conditions. For that matter, there were droves of 'em pounding up and down the halls all night. I never saw such restless cattle. If you'll tell me what makes more noise in the middle of the night than the metal disk of a hotel key banging and clanging up against a door, I'd like to know what it is. My three Bisons were all dolled up with fool ribbons and badges and striped paper cases. When they switched on the light I gave a crack imitation of a tired working man trying to get a little sleep. I breathed regularly and heavily, with an occasional moaning snore. But if those two hippopotamus Bisons had been alone on their native plains they couldn't have cared less. They belted, and paved the earth, and threw their shoes around, and

bleek of chips, and wake up when the bell-boy came in with another round. When I did every six minutes. When I got up this morning I found that Fat Ed Meyers had been sitting on the chair over which I trustingly had draped my trousers. This sunburst of wrinkles is where he mostly sat. This spot on my coat is where a Bison drank his beer."

Emma McChesney folded her paper and rose, smiling. "It is sort of trying, I suppose, if you're not used to it."

"Used to it!" shouted the outraged Jock. "Used to it! Do you mean to tell me there's nothing unusual about—"

"Not a thing. Oh, of course you don't strike a bunch of Bisons every day. But it happens a good many times. The world is full of ancient orders and they're everlastingly getting together and drawing up resolutions and electing officers. Don't you think you'd better go in to breakfast before the Bisons begin to forage? I've had mine."

The gloom which had overspread Jock McChesney's face lifted a little. The hungry boy in him was uppermost. "That's so. I'm going to have some wheat cakes, and steak, and eggs, and coffee, and fruit, and toast, and rolls."

"Why sigh, the fish?" inquired his mother. Then, as he turned toward the dining room, "I've two letters to get out. Then I'm going down the street to see a customer. I'll be up at the Sulzberg-Stein department store at nine sharp. There's no use trying to see old Sulzberg before ten, but I'll be there, anyway, and so will Ed Meyers, or I'm no skirt salesman. I want you to meet me there. It will do you good to watch how the overripe orders just drop, ker-plunk, into my lap."

Maybe you know Sulzberg & Stein's big store? No? That's because you've always lived in the city. Old Sulzberg sends his buyers to the New York market twice a year, and they need two floor managers on the main floor now. The money those people spend for red and green decorations at Christmas time, and apple-blossoms and pink crepe paper shades in the spring must be something awful. Young Stein goes to Chicago to have his clothes made, and old Sulzberg likes to keep the traveling men waiting in the little ante-room outside his private office.

Jock McChesney finished his huge breakfast, strolled over to Sulzberg & Stein's, and inquired his way to the office, only to find that his mother was not yet there. There were three men in the little waiting-room. One of them was Fat Ed Meyers. His huge bulk overflowed the spindle-legged chair on which he sat. His brown derby was in his hands. His eyes were on the closed door at the other side of the room. So were the eyes of the other two travelers. Jock took a vacant seat next to Fat Ed Meyers so that he might, in his mind's eye, pick out a particularly choice spot upon which his hard young fist might land—if only he had the chance. Breaking up a man's sleep like that, the great big overgrown muck!

"What's your line?" said Ed Meyers, suddenly turning toward Jock.

Prompted by some imp—"Skirts,"

slightly, and assume a blankness of expression. And Emma McChesney, with that shrewdness which had made her one of the best salesmen on the road, saw, and miraculously understood.

"How do, Mrs. McChesney," grinned Fat Ed Meyers. "You see I beat you to it."

"So I see," smiled Emma, cheerfully. "I was delayed. Just sold a nice little bill to Watkins down the street." She seated herself across the way, and kept her eyes on that closed door.

"Say, kid," Meyers began, in the husky whisper of the fat man, "I'm going to put you wise to something, seeing you're new to this game. See that lady over there?" He nodded discreetly in Emma McChesney's direction.

"Pretty, isn't she?" said Jock, appreciatively.

"Know who she is?"

"Well—I—she does look familiar but—"

"Oh, come now, quit your bluffing. If you'd ever met that dame you'd re-

member it. Her name's Emma McChesney—"

excitedly. "The nerve of him! He's coming over here."

Ed Meyers was waddling toward them with the quick light step of the fat man. His pink, full-jawed face was glowing. His eyes were bright as a boy's. He stopped at their stable and paused for one dramatic moment.

"So, me beauty, you two were in cahoots, huh? That's the second low-down deal you've handed me. I haven't forgotten that trick you turned with Nussbaum at DeKalb. Never mind, little girl. I'll get back at you yet."

He nodded a contemptuous head in Jock's direction. "Carrying a packer?"

Emma McChesney wiped her fingers daintily on her napkin, crushed it in the table, and leaned back in her chair. "Men," she observed, wondrously, "are the cussedest creatures."

This chap occupied the same room with you last night and you don't even know his name. Funny! If two strange women had found themselves occupying the same room for a night they wouldn't have got to the kimono and back hair stage before they would not only have known each other's name, but they'd have tried on each other's hats, swapped corset cover patterns, found mutual friends living in Dayton, O., taught each other a new Irish crochet stitch, showed their family photographs, told how their married sister's little girl nearly died with swollen glands, and divided off the mirror into two sections to paste their newly washed handkerchiefs on. Don't tell me men have a genius for friendship."

"Well, who is he?" insisted Ed Meyers. "He told me everything but even name this morning. I wish I had throttled him with a bunch of Bisons' badges last night."

"His name," smiled Emma McChesney, "is Jock McChesney. He's my one and only son, and he's put through his first little business deal this morning just to show his mother that he can be a help to his folks if he wants to. Now, Ed Meyers, if you're going to have apoplexy don't you go and have it around this table. My boy is only on his second piece of pie, and I won't have his appetite spoiled."

"Do you want work?" "Yep," replied Plodding Pete. "If you'll gimme somethin' light an' easy, I'll engage. I believe I kin get more rest as a regular hand than to go on bein' waylaid an' pestered by people that's tryin' to hire me."

"Her Advantage." "A ship has one paradoxical advantage in a storm."

"What's that?" "No matter how she may lose her grip she generally manages to keep her hold."

"Almost Synonymous." Mrs. Malaprop—I give Jim some of that compulsion of cod liver oil today. Mrs. Highbrough—Emulsion, you mean, do you not? Mrs. Malaprop—it seemed just the same.

"Unwarranted Liberty." You are taking a liberty when you pat a strange horse on the nose. Suppose horses went around patting men on the nose.—Louisville Courier-Journal.

"Vast American Industries." Private capital invested in timber lands, mills, logging railroads, and other forms of equipment in this country reach an enormous aggregate, and the lumber industry, which employs 739,000 persons and has an annual output valued at one and one-sixth billion dollars, is the third largest.

"Safes." Also cannot without our custom state the infinite address of entries on the right-hand page of the bank book—Ohio State Journal.

HOME TOWN HELPS

AVOID ALL WASTE OF GROUND
Italian Gardeners Utilize Space Which Americans Would Consider Little Account.

Just outside the railway station at Springfield, Mass., is a row of tenement houses occupied by Italian families. Between them and the tracks is a garden, divided into long, narrow strips, each strip being tilled by one of the families. In the early morning and evening laborers from the factories may be seen busily at work in these small patches, some of which are not more than ten feet wide. In the daytime the women and children are busy in them. These Italians raise enough vegetables for their own tables and have a supply left for sale. It is intensive gardening. Not an inch of ground is wasted.

Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts have thousands of such patches and thousands of abandoned farms have been taken up and made highly profitable by these expert gardeners from Italy. They do it by wasting nothing. The refuse from their homes is returned to the earth, as nature intended that it should be. Chickens and pigs are made to fertilize unbroken ground, and the pigs root up underbrush and loosen stones. The simplest of implements are used, but the Italian gardeners know that constant attention is the secret of success. Never a weed is allowed to spring up; the soil is not allowed to go without hoeing and raking. The fence is a support for tomato, bean, pea and other climbing plants.

On an area smaller than that of the ordinary city backyard an Italian will grow vegetables enough to supply his table the year around.

TREE PLANTING AS A DUTY

Effective Way in Which Each Citizen May Take Part in Bettering the Community.

The man with a vision plants a fruit tree, and there is pictured upon the canvas of his mind the full grown, developed tree, laden with the fruit of its kind, painted and flavored with the richest colors and most delicious extracts, but he knows that before that picture can become a reality his hand must give that tree a fertile soil, the best cultivation, a scientific trimming and spraying for years. But nature thus assisted, does her part, and the tree, as the years go by, develops and in time produces its perfect fruit and rewards the labor of the tender.

But the tender took the greatest delight in his work, knowing that the time would come when his labor would bear its reward. His work was a work worth while, and the community in which he lived was made better for his work, for he who does nothing more than plant a tree by the wayside and tends it to maturity has done more for mankind than he who sits and dreams and talks great things of accomplishment, but does not a thing to bring them about; or even he who ever works at his task with stolid indifference to its great importance or unmindful of its pleasures.—From "The Business of Farming," by W. C. Smith.

Lamp-post Gardens.

Dame Russell says Minneapolis is out-clasping all other cities in utilizing flowers to ornament the business streets. Last year window boxes and hanging gardens were introduced in the shopping thoroughfares, and there were more than 15,000 feet beautified in that way. This year, by private subscriptions, a fund has been raised to put 500 miniature gardens on as many lamp-posts and to keep them bright with blooms. "Flowers on lamp-posts would astound New Yorkers," says the New York Evening Mail, "and would certainly set the kids to climbing. How long would the lamp-post gardens last on the east side?"

Why City Planning Pays.

It promotes trade by supplying direct and easy ways for the extension and development of commerce; fosters city growth by making it easier and cheaper to conduct all classes of business, increases and insures all property values by preventing the many evils of haphazard building; makes every citizen a more efficient worker by saving time and money in transit of goods and people; and, above all, it assures to that city which adopts it, a future citizenship sound in body, mind and morals.

Prizes for Biblephiles.

A first edition of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll (C. L. Dodgson), fetched \$1,000 at London. It was bought by Mr. G. D. Smith of New York, who also paid \$600 for Keats' "Poems," and \$350 for the same author's "Lamia," with Harrison Ainsworth's signature on the fly leaf, \$840 for Byron's "Poems on Various Occasions" (privately printed, and a great part of the edition destroyed by the author), and \$580 for Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe."

Vast American Industries.

Private capital invested in timber lands, mills, logging railroads, and other forms of equipment in this country reach an enormous aggregate, and the lumber industry, which employs 739,000 persons and has an annual output valued at one and one-sixth billion dollars, is the third largest.

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RAINY DAYS ON THE ISTHMUS

Inhabitants of Panama Strip Certainly Cannot Reproach Nature With Niggardiness.

For nine months of the year it "rains sons" on the isthmus of Panama. The precipitation of one month not long ago was 59 inches. This broke even the Panama rainy season record and nothing like it has occurred since, but with something like an av-

erage of twelve feet of rainfall in nine months the lathmus can keep up a showing of dampness without being worried about an ability to live up to soaking records.

Gatun lake, the artificial body of water created by Lieut. Col. William L. Sibert by the hard process of damming the unruly Chagres river, is now, at the close of the rainy season, at the high level which the army officer predicted it would reach. The Chagres pouring into the valley made the lake, but the rains made the Chagres.

For the next three months the river will be little more than a trickling rill, but water enough has been stored to keep the lake level as it is until the rains descend and the floods come once more as they have descended and come uninterruptedly ever since the day of Balboa, and since how long before nobody knows. The United States government has built a lock canal across the isthmus of Panama. A sea-level waterway would have been imperative if the skies above the isthmus were not in the habit of weeping

day in and day out for nine-tenths of the year. Some of the Panamans through the years probably looked upon the drenchings as a curse, but commerce must look upon them as a blessing. Every mile of the way through the canal, except for the comparatively short distances of the ocean approaches, the trading ships of the world will sail through fresh rain water. All water is in water, but down at Panama, somehow or other, it seems as if a "liquid differentiation" properly might be made.

Labor Company Must Pay. In Klein vs. Phelps Lumber Company in the supreme court of Washington (September, 1913, 135 Pac. 226), it was held that where a lumber company which had secured permission to remove a dam on the premises of a duck club notified the caretaker who lived near by at about six o'clock

in the evening, that the blast was about to be set off, but later informed his elbow into his stomach and dropped his hat. A second later the door of old Sulzberg's private office closed upon Emma McChesney's smart, erect, confident figure. Now, Ed Meyers' hands were peculiar hands for a fat man. They

the same evening without any further notice to him, while he was unloading his wagon, filling the air with gravel and debris, which fell upon him and his horses, causing the team to run away, whereby he was knocked against a barn and severely injured.

Unwarranted Liberty. You are taking a liberty when you pat a strange horse on the nose. Suppose horses went around patting men on the nose.—Louisville Courier-Journal.



"Come on out of here and I'll lick the shine off your shoes."



"His name," smiled Emma McChesney, "is Jock McChesney."