

“Chic” Jackson’s Bean Family

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One of the best known families in Hoosier history was the “Bean Family,” a creation of Charles Bacon (“Chic”) Jackson. For more than a score of years the daily doings of this family took precedence in public interest over problems of state, fluctuations of the stock exchange, business depressions and similar relatively unimportant matters. Thousands laughed at the droll humor of Roger, admired Mrs. Bean, played with Woody and Cynthia and their dog Yank, marveled at the indomitable Golduh, viewed with mixed emotions the prying impertinences of Mrs. Probe, and eagerly waited the coming of Uncle Castor and Aunt Mary Bean of Boston, Mrs. Bean’s Uncle Wash, the Constable of Flipsbury, Jose, the colored “lormry” woman, Delbert, the spring poet, and Buck, Golduh’s beau.

Roger Bean was a business man. The exact nature of the business we do not know but it was important. By his own careful estimate the downtown business world had been set back ten minutes by Mrs. Bean’s insistence that he help move the piano. No, he wouldn’t help move the piano, he said on another occasion, not even if it were on Golduh’s foot. He suspected her of being the fairy godmother of all the chores hung on his neck anyway. Didn’t they know he had an office downtown?

Roger wasn’t always attentive to questions addressed to him on weighty matters. The pancakes? Why yes, they were the best he had ever tasted. He thought so well of those pancakes that he was thinking seriously of recommending Golduh for citation before the league of Nations. No, he wouldn’t take flowers to the office. Sure he liked flowers. He liked gravy too but he wouldn’t carry a bowl of it down the street, Oh, well, if they could be wrapped to look like spark plugs or monkey wrenches he would take about a third of them. Just a word of warning: “If I come home tonight and find that jigsaw puzzle disturbed about a third of you women ’ll go to the booby hatch.” As usual, Golduh had the last word: “Yeah? Wal, they’d better fetch a taxi ’cause I won’t walk down.”

Roger couldn’t fool anyone, least of all Mrs. Probe. She knew the habits of the Bean family. Roger wasn’t smoking

and that meant he was going to the office without his breakfast. It was a shame too—a house full of women and they couldn't get a man's breakfast. Roger admitted it. It was a great injustice but he would try to bear up under it. If Mrs. Probe would speak to his women folks about the matter, there was a bare possibility they would try to mend their ways.

Occasionally, we are permitted to look in on the doings at the office. Blinkey Burleson, who has an office down the corridor from Roger's, is resolved to ignore the picture Roger sent him. It might not be phoney, of course, but it was quite possible to have your picture taken with a string of fish belonging to someone else. But how Blinkey chuckled when Roger was arrested for speeding. Perhaps it was mean not to have identified him but he had it coming to him. To get even Roger threatens to tell Mrs. Burleson that Blinkey went to Philadelphia to see the world series and not on business for Roger, as Blinkey had told her.

It was the entrance of Golduh, the redheaded cook from Bucyrus, Ohio, into the Bean household that made it essentially different from that of the average middle class home. Golduh excelled in two accomplishments. She baked biscuits of unvalued excellence and she threw bricks with unerring accuracy. Admitted to the household as a temporary arrangement only after various proposals of Roger, among them the hiring of an unemployed chorus girl, had been rejected by Mrs. Bean, Golduh soon became indispensable. Golduh herself sensed the situation, and, when Mrs. Bean urged her to take a vacation, replied: "Roger would beef like heck. You know how tough he is about the cooking."

Golduh took the same pride in all the housework that she took in the kitchen. It was, of course, unorthodox to send the preacher to the back door but there was method in it. She wasn't going to have the front porch tracked up, she told Mrs. Bean. "But you must learn to exercise discrimination," Mrs. Bean explained. But Golduh was reluctant to do that. Dais Fitzworthy had bought one of them bust developers and after a few days couldn't get her corset on. Golduh wasn't trying to be flippant. She was never disrespectful to Mrs. Bean. Golduh simply didn't understand.

For that matter, the potato peelings in the Beans' garbage can may have been a trifle thick but Mrs. Probe's mis-

take was in telling Golduh so. "For pity sakes, Golduh, what is the matter?" Mrs Bean exclaimed from the back porch to which she had made a hurried exit from the house. "O'm gitting' danged tard o' her meddlin' in my business," Golduh offered by way of explanation. "How you keep out of jail is a mystery to me. You're just a police character and I don't see why Mrs. Bean keeps you," Mrs. Probe shouted by way of rebuttal. "Come, Joey, don't pay any attention to the hussey," she said to her rooster, who somehow always managed to get a ringside seat on the fence. "I'm not afraid of her," she confided to Henry, who, wholly oblivious to what had hapened, was immersed in his mystery story.

Golduh's reputation for thoroughness was soon established in the neighborhood. "Buddy, when Gol gits through with ya yer embammed. I dunno wotchir up to but whotever 'tis don't do it," the ash-man warned the meter man, who, unmindful of the danger to his health and happiness, was proceeding to turn off the gas at the Bean home while the Beans were on a vacation.

The same scientific methods were advocated by Golduh in domestic affairs that she practiced in foreign relations. In a case involving no less a personage than Roger, she rendered an *obiter dictum* on the handling of husbands in general: "Oh dear! I wish I could depend on Roger when I entertain," Mrs. Bean confided to Golduh in tones of utter despair. "O'll tell ya why ya caint," Golduh responded. "How far'd I git if I told them tradesmen: 'Oh dear! O'll jist be put out if yer not here with my order?' Wal, husbands aint so durned different. Yotta say jist two words: 'Be here' then tell the flat world he better had. Aint it so? Huh? Now aint it?"

It was a severe blow to the majesty of the law when Buck, the brakeman, superseded Clarence, the policeman in Golduh's affections. It was Clarence's fault thought, for Golduh had confided to him one evening on their way home from the guild that her greatest ambition was to have a home of her own and not have to work for other people. Mrs. Probe couldn't understand it. Was it alimony that he had to pay to a former wife on the high price of furniture that prevented him leading Golduh to the altar? she asked Clarence one evening as he passed her house on his beat. Clarence was inclined to blame Golduh. "I positively won't

marry you this year," he claimed she had written to him the previous Christmas while visiting her folks in Bucyrus.

Buck, on the other hand, had a way with the women. "End o' th' line! Everybody out! Hi, Gol! Why, I'd rather see your red head than th' headlight on th' pay car," he greeted Golduh one evening while on a brief leave from his train. No, he didn't mind in the least the dough on Golduh's hands. He rather liked to look like a leopard.

Golduh for once was subdued. "Why, Golduh, most girls would be stirred pink by all the nice things he says about you," Mrs. Bean told her by way of reproof for her apparent indifference. "Yes and look forward to bein' married on a railroad bridge and takin' our honeymoon on a handcar," Golduh retorted. Golduh liked Buck though. He could be train caller on her railroad, she told Floss Avringhan at the Guild.

In accordance with the practice of the time, Golduh accepted lecture engagements. Unlike Mrs. Bean who talked to the Breakfast Club gratis, Golduh was going to charge for her lectures. It might be unethical but there were precedents. There was Bryan for instance: "He does it, donty? Huh? You tell'em he does," Golduh reminded Mrs. Bean.

Serious repercussions in the labor world resulted from Golduh assuming new responsibilities, the most important of which was the hiring of Jose, a colored woman, to take over the laundry work. "Says which?" was Jose's initial response to all questions. If pressed for a more definite commitment she usually responded: "Yo all bettah ast Mis Gol." When Golduh desired to know what she had done with her "pickup" she replied: "Ah's jis plannin' my work, thinkin' it out like." She would have Golduh know if it didn't discommode her too much that there was marked similarity between her coming and going and that of the preacher: "Yo all doan tale him he's late—he tries to keep yo souls clean an' Ah tries to keep yo cloves clean."

Uncle Wash, as were Uncle Castor and Aunt Mary, was a welcome guest in the Bean home. The constable dropped in at frequent and irregular intervals while the Boston folk made a more extended visit once a year. "Howdy, Goldy, folks all well?" Uncle Wash inquired on an occasion by way of placing his name in the pot. "Ye guides, look who's here," Golduh greeted him from the head of the receiving line.

"Wal, park your chew an' c'min. We'll eat as soon as Mrs. Bean comes."

In the kitchen, the exchange continued with Golduh busy with the meal and Uncle Wash occupying a corner by the range, his chair leaning against the wall and his feet in a somewhat exalted position: "By cracky, I've had a siege since I wuz here last—sumpin like th' quinzy." "Un-hu yaint livin' right. Swotcha git." "The doc says it wuz brung on by havin' my whiskers cut." "Zat why yer wearin' that tie counta th' quinzy, heh?" "Yep I haint had th' quinzy since I put it on." "Ye guides, I'd ruther have th' quinzy."

At one time, we begin to fear that Uncle Wash has designs on the conjugal happiness of Henry. Things take a turn for the better, however, when Washburn tells Lavina that if Joey were his rooster he would teach him to chew tobacco and to spit. We are further reassured when Uncle Wash, in answer to Golduh's earnest solicitations, assures that lady that his frequent trips to the city were notivated by business considerations: "Pretty much a matter of business, by gum, pretty much a matter of business. Five cents per mile and fifty cents for dinner." The business must have been fairly lucrative for to our own certain knowledge he came to town twice on a hog truck. His efficiency as an officer, however, was in nowise impaired. In answer to Roger's question as to whether Flipsbury was as wide open as ever, he entered an emphatic denial: "No, siree, I got her well in hand. By cracky, she's as tight as a drum." "Yep, I 'spect he's even closed the barbershops," Golduh observes as she transfers another pancake to Uncle Wash's plate.

As befitted the personages, the reception accorded the Boston folk was a little bit different: "Now—there's two gittin outa th' taxi—looky who," Golduh exclaimed excitedly to Mrs. Bean after both had hastened to the window. "Oh—bless his heart! Now Golduh, if I catch you not being nice to him, I'll send you away. Uncle Castor, you darling! Why didn't you write? Where's Aunt Mary? Golduh come take Uncle Castor's coat and hat." "Hi siay, Sylvia, 'ows th' geryl? It's bully to see you. 'Owdy Goldy, the bally old nuisance is back again." "Aw swell. We wuz jis wishin' fer ya, hopin' ya'd stay all summer. Ritzy ol' club ya got here." (This

last remark referred to Uncle Castor's cane). The words of welcome for Mobile, the colored chauffeur, were uttered by Jose: "Doan y'all look at me liak yo's company. Git yo'self a handful o' dese valises."

Neighborhood excitement over the arrival of Uncle Castor is followed by speculation. Did he lose his job or just run out on it, Mrs. Probe wondered. Henry couldn't leave his job and go gallivanting around the country. Like as not Uncle Castor couldn't afford it either. Golduh, too, was mystified. Why didn't he drive his own car or at least hire a white man? There were so many of them out of work. There was one thing certain: If she were Mrs. Bean, she wouldn't let him use one of her good napkins to polish them durned old shinny clubs. Roger liked to play golf with Uncle Castor, but wearing a sweater was quite a different matter. He would stand for his initials on his shirt and baby ribbon on his pajamas, but he wasn't going to look like "a Pomeranian pup."

Despite the difference in environmental influences, there was mutual understanding between Uncle Wash and Uncle Castor. "Howdy, Wash, you old jail bird, hout on bail, hi suppose," the Bostonian greeted the Flipsburyite during the progress of a cordial and extended handshake at a pre-arranged meeting at the Bean home. Uncle Wash returned the volley: "By cracky, never thought Aunt Mary'd tolerate ya this long. Howdy, you old Boston dude. Tryin' to evade the law, I reckon." Nor were their interests and habits essentially different—at the Follies Uncle Castor would have liked a cigarette while Uncle Wash was just dying for a chew.

Interspersed with the doings of the grownups were the play and chatter of the children. Woody was left on the Beans' doorstep while Cynthia was adopted into the family after a harrying experience with Harry the Rat. This last was accomplished not without protest from Mrs. Probe, who, while confessing that it was none of her business, thought it wasn't right to bring up the child in an atmosphere of brick throwing, vulgar language and downright mismanagement.

It was the grownups and not the youngsters whose welfare was endangered, however. "Daddy Woger" is going to hear from Cynthia "when he dits home, by tracky," and Woody informs Golduh that he isn't going to have his mail

(this particular letter was from Peggy)) put in any old pantry. But even Woody must have seen the logic in Golduh's retort: "Ye guides! It's hid there less than in any place else. If I was going to tell someone to meet ya, I'd send 'em to th' pantry, big boy." It is true, of course, that Roger was offered the czardom of the "Northside Clippers," but the proposition carried with it the obligation to provide the uniforms for the ball team to which Woody belonged and we do not wonder that Roger desired to sleep on the offer.

The children grew and in due time Woody graduated from high school. "For pity sakes! I can't hardly believe it," Mrs. Bean said, half to herself and half to Golduh, as she looked down the street from the front porch of the Bean home. "Tain't nobody but Woody," Golduh replied. "But just think, he will soon be in college," Mrs. Bean explained. "Tain't nothin' to be ashamed of. Yotta be glad tain't th' penitenshury," Golduh offered by way of consolation.

Did Woody graduate from college? Were Buck and Golduh finally married? If so, was the wedding formal and was Mrs. Probe invited? Does Joey still defy the mortality tables for Rhode Island Red roosters? If not what was the manner of his going and what were the funeral arrangements? How does Yank amuse himself, now that the children are grown, or has he had his day and gone where all good dogs go? Are Clarence and Uncle Wash still guardians of the law and does the latter's bag of "ladyslipper" have a zipper on it? Did Roger weather the depression and what is his attitude toward the New Deal? Is Mrs. Bean as charming as ever? Has she had her hair bobbed? Does she use rouge and fingernail-polish? These and many other things relating to the recent doings of the Bean family we would like to know. The answers lie buried with "Chic" Jackson.

Charles Bacon ("Chic") Jackson, the creator of the comic strip, *The Bean Family*, was born in Muncie, Indiana, on New Year's Eve of 1876. He attended the Muncie schools but withdrew before completing his high school course. He worked successively in a shoe factory, grocery store, printing office, bolt factory, maleable iron works, glass factory and, at last attained what to him seemed the zenith of his ambitions, a position as illustrator and front page cartoonist

on the *Muncie News* later on the *Muncie Star* into which the *News* was absorbed.

While employed by the *Muncie* newspapers, he became acquainted with Margaret Wagner of Springport, Indiana, who also was employed by the *Muncie News*. To Miss Wagner, he sold the "blue-sky proposition" of becoming Mrs. Jackson, as he said in speaking humorously of his life, and they were married in 1902. "While I have been busy raising the Bean family, Mrs. Jackson has very successfully reared our two fine boys," he once remarked years later.

A few years after their marriage, the Jacksons went to Chicago where "Chic" spent a year at the Chicago Art Institute. In 1907, he accepted a position with the *Indianapolis Star*, at first doing Sunday feature illustrating and later developing *The Bean Family*. This last feature first appeared in the *Star* of April 22, 1913, the first drawing, appropriately enough, showing Roger and Mrs. Bean alighting from the train at the Union Station preparatory to settling in Indianapolis. During Jackson's later years, the strip was syndicated and appeared in other journals besides the *Star*.

The vast popular interest in the doings of the Beans was made manifest by the amount of "fan mail" Jackson received. Said the *Indianapolis Star* at the time of his death: "Let Chic make the smallest kind of a mistake and he heard about it. He precipitated a small flury when he inadvertently left the stripes from Golduh's stockings one day. One person, a woman, called him to time for having Mrs. Bean serve gingerbread too late in the season. Thousands of letters came to him from all over the country to point out any small discrepancy and other thousands wrote just because they wanted him to know the enjoyment they got from his strip." A favorite method of expressing appreciation was by sending bricks for Golduh to throw. These were often accompanied by humorous suggestion for their use.

Among Jackson's cherished recollections was one of a call that James Whitcomb Riley made in 1915. The poet was infirm and unable to leave his car, but sent his chauffeur to the second floor of the *Star* building with a request that "Chic" come down to the parked automobile. There Riley told him of the enjoyment he had derived from the characters displayed in the strip and of the pleasure the good wholesome humor had afforded him. When the poet

died the following year "Chic" was deeply grieved and expressed his loss in a cartoon representing Roger Bean under a tree reading "The Raggedy Man" to Woody, the Caption being: "But His Songs Go On Forever."

Jackson had often expressed a desire that he might live to see Woody through college. This desire was not realized for, on June 3, 1934, a short time before the close of Woody's Freshman year, Mr. Jackson died at the result of a heart attack. The deep sense of loss of the many who followed his strip was appropriately expressed in a drawing by William Heitman in the *Star* of June 5, of that year, representing the characters in *The Bean Family* with downcast countenances gathered around the vacant chair and drawing-board of their departed friend.

The Bean Family was not an ordinary comic strip. To its development Jackson brought a deep insight into human nature, based on a broad knowledge of the workaday world. His aim, as he himself expressed it, was to picture human beings naturally on the theory that there was enough humor and fascination in everyday life without straining to create either. That his characters seemed as real as flesh and blood people is proof that he succeeded.