

—THE EVENING STORY—

BANK NIGHT

Aunt Sarah Mae Gives the Lie to that Gag About
Teaching an Old Dog New Tricks

BY STEW KASER.

NOBODY here in Haywell could figure out why Aunt Sarah Mae wanted \$25. She has that little cottage over by the tracks and her son, Port, who has a job carpentering over on the new defense job at Burlington, sends her money every two weeks. And after all, when you're 72 years old, you can get along on darn little.

But Aunt Sarah Mae wanted \$25. And she was willing to do anything within the limits of her imagination and the morals of the Methodist Church to get it. She was even willing to go to a movie.

That doesn't sound like much, but that's because you don't know Aunt Sarah Mae. She was 70 years old when she saw her first movie, and she had to be tricked into it at that. She declared up and down that she wasn't going to pay good money to see a lot of shadows on a screen. Of course, even people that do like movies don't get much chance to see them in Haywell. It's too small for a regular movie house, but in the summer there's an outdoor movie every Friday night in the lot between the bank and my general store.

Well, Port was home for the weekend, and he was bound and determined to get Aunt Sarah Mae to that movie. She didn't suspect anything—just thought they were going downtown for ice cream, I guess. Whenever Port came home she got just as excited as a school-girl with her first beau. So down the street they came, she on his arm. They were just about to walk past the movie place, when all of a sudden he just steered her in there and sat her down.

I GUESS she thought too much of Port to make a fuss right there in front of everybody, because she just sat perfectly still and looked straight ahead for the whole time. It wasn't until after the show, and they started the bank night business that she showed any signs of life at all. But my, how she perked up then! She got real flustered and grabbed Port by the arm.

"You mean they give away \$25 here every Friday night?" she asked.

"Sure, Ma," he answered, "That's why they call it 'bank night.'"

You can imagine everybody's surprise when she walked in next week all by herself. Aunt Sarah Mae, the person who swore you'd

never get her to see a movie. There was dead silence for a second, and then the whispering swept over the crowd like wind over a wheat field. Of course they didn't draw her name, but she kept right on coming, week after week. Folks just couldn't figure out why she was willing to go through such torture just for a small amount of money like that.

"Why don't you try moving pianos, or digging ditches to earn \$25, if you want it so bad?" I asked once. "It seems to me that would be less trouble to you than sitting through those movies once every week." Well, sir, she didn't say anything at all. Just smiled a funny little secret smile. I don't think it would have bothered me a bit if it hadn't been for that smile. There was something so young, and . . . sort of . . . adventurous about it that I never could get used to seeing it on the face of a 72-year-old woman.

LAST night the excitement really broke loose because Aunt Sarah Mae's number won the \$25 prize-money.

Of course everybody got real excited—almost as excited as I was, I guess. The only one in the whole crowd that seemed to have any wits left was Aunt Sarah Mae. She just marched up there, as proud as punch with a great big smile and her head held high. Fred handed her the money without a word.

"Thank you," she said. Then she turned around and swept out of there like a ship in full sail; out the entrance, and down the street.

This morning when she came into my store I said, "Well, I guess now that you got the money you won't be coming to the movies any more, seeing you hate them so."

"Hate them?" she answered, "Lord love you, Jeff, whatever gave you that idea?"

"I thought you just wanted the money."

"Of course I wanted the money, you old fool. But I'm going to take that money, and we're going to go to Burlington, Port and me, and spend every bit of it going to every consarned big indoor movie palace they've got. I'm crazy about movies!"

Well . . . that's women for you. At least, that's Aunt Sarah Mae.

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Tomorrow: A soldier fights one battle and wins two in "Fear Is a Ladder," by J. Joseph O'Donnell.