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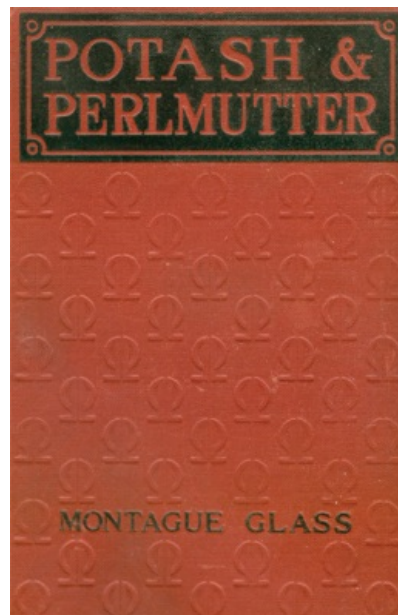
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK POTASH & PERLMUTTER: THEIR
COPARTNERSHIP VENTURES AND ADVENTURES ***



P O T A S H & P E R L M U T T E R

THEIR COPARTNERSHIP VENTURES AND ADVENTURES

BY

MONTAGUE GLASS

ILLUSTRATED

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Potash & Perlmutter

CHAPTER I

"No, siree, sir," Abe Potash exclaimed as he drew a check to the order of his attorney for a hundred and fifty dollars, "I would positively go it alone from now on till I die, Noblestone. I got my stomach full with Pincus Vesell already, and if Andrew Carnegie would come to me and tell me he wants to go with me as partners together in the cloak and suit business, I would say 'No,' so sick and tired of partners I am."

For the twentieth time he examined the dissolution agreement which had ended the firm of Vesell & Potash, and then he sighed heavily and placed the document in his breast pocket.

"Cost me enough, Noblestone, I could assure you," he said.

"A hundred and fifty ain't much, Potash, for a big lawyer like Feldman," Noblestone commented.

Abe flipped his fingers in a gesture of deprecation.

"That is the least, Noblestone," he rejoined. "First and last I bet you I am out five thousand dollars on Vesell. That feller got an idee that there ain't nothing to the cloak and suit business but auction pinochle and taking out-of-town customers to the theayter. Hard work is something which he don't know nothing about at all. He should of been in the brokering business."

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"The brokering business ain't such a cinch neither," Noblestone retorted with some show of indignation. "A feller what's in the brokering business has got his troubles, too, Potash. Here I've been trying to find an opening for a bright young feller with five thousand dollars cash, y'understand, and also there ain't a better designer in the business, y'understand, and I couldn't do a thing with the proposition. Always everybody turns me down. Either they got a partner already or they're like yourself, Potash, they just got through with a partner which done 'em up good."

"If you think Pincus Vesell done me up good, Noblestone," Potash said, "you are mistaken. I got better judgment as to let a lowlife like him get into me, Noblestone. I lost money by him, y'understand, but at the same time he didn't make nothing neither. Vesell is one of them fellers what you hear about which is nobody's enemy but his own."

"The way he talks to me, Potash," Noblestone replied, "he ain't such friends to you neither."

"He hates me worser as poison," Abe declared fervently, "but that ain't neither here nor there, Noblestone. I'm content he should be my enemy. He's the kind of feller what if we would part friends, he would come back every week and touch me for five dollars yet. The feller ain't got no money and he ain't got no judgment neither."

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"But here is a young feller which he got lots of common sense and five thousand dollars cash," Noblestone went on. "Only one thing which he ain't got."

Abe nodded.

"I seen lots of them fellers in my time, Noblestone," he said. "Everything about 'em is all right excepting one thing and that's always a killer."

"Well, this one thing ain't a killer at all," Noblestone rejoined, "he knows the cloak and suit business from A to Z, and he's a first-class A number one feller for the inside, Potash, but he ain't no salesman."

"So long as he's good on the inside, Noblestone," Abe said, "it don't do no harm if he ain't a salesman, because there's lots of fellers in the cloak and suit business which calls themselves drummers, y'understand Every week regular they turn in an expense account as big as a doctor's bill already, and not only they ain't salesmen, Noblestone, but they don't know enough about the inside work to get a job as assistant shipping clerk."

"Well, Harry Federmann ain't that kind, Potash," Noblestone went on. "He's been a cutter and a designer and everything you could think of in the cloak and suit business. Also the feller's got good backing. He's married to old man Zudrowsky's daughter and certainly them people would give him a whole lot of help."

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"What people do you mean?" Abe asked.

"Zudrowsky & Cohen," Noblestone answered. "Do you know 'em, Potash?"

Abe laughed raucously.

"Do I know 'em?" he said. "A question! Them people got a reputation among the trade which you wouldn't believe at all. Yes, Noblestone, if I would take it another partner, y'understand, I would as lief get a feller what's got the backing of a couple of them cut-throats up in Sing Sing, so much do I think of Zudrowsky & Cohen."

"All I got to say to that, Potash, is that you don't know them people, otherwise you wouldn't talk that way."

"Maybe I don't know 'em as good as some concerns know 'em, Noblestone, but that's because I was pretty lucky. Leon Sammet tells me he wouldn't trust 'em with the wrapping paper on a C. O. D. shipment of two dollars."

Noblestone rose to his feet and assumed an attitude of what he believed to be injured dignity.

"I hear enough from you, Potash," he said, "and some day you will be sorry you talk that way about a concern like Zudrowsky & Cohen. If you couldn't say nothing good about 'em, you should shut up your mouth."

"I could say one thing good about 'em, Noblestone," Abe retorted, as the business broker opened the store door. "They ain't ashamed of a couple of good old-time names like Zudrowsky & Cohen." [Pg 11]

This was an allusion to the circumstance that Philip Noblestone had once been Pesach Edelstein, and the resounding bang with which the broker closed the door behind him, was gratifying evidence to Abe that his parting shot had found its target.

"Well, Noblestone," Zudrowsky cried, as the broker entered the show-room of Zudrowsky & Cohen, "what did he say?"

"He says he wouldn't consider it at all," Noblestone answered. "He ain't in no condition to talk about it anyway, because he feels too sore about his old partner, Pincus Vesell. That feller done him up to the tune of ten thousand dollars."

In Noblestone's scheme of ethics, to multiply a fact by two was to speak the truth unadorned.

"S'enough, Noblestone," Zudrowsky cried. "If Potash lost so much money as all that, I wouldn't consider him at all. One thing you got to remember, Noblestone. Me, I am putting up five thousand dollars for Harry Federmann, and what that feller don't know about business, Noblestone, you could take it from me, would make even *you* a millionaire, if you would only got it in your head."

Noblestone felt keenly the doubtfulness of Zudrowsky's compliment, but for a lack of a suitable rejoinder he contented himself by nodding gravely. [Pg 12]

"So I wouldn't want him to tie up with a feller like Potash, what gets done up so easy for ten thousand dollars," Zudrowsky went on. "What I would like, Noblestone, is that Harry should go as partners together with some decent, respectable feller which got it good experience in the cloak business and wouldn't be careless with my five thousand dollars. I needn't to tell you, Noblestone, if I would let Harry get his hands on it, I might as well kiss myself good-by with that five thousand dollars."

Noblestone wagged his head from side to side and made inarticulate expressions of sympathy through his nose.

"How could you marry off your daughter to a *schafskopf* like Federmann?" he asked.

"It was a love match, Noblestone," Zudrowsky explained. "She falls in love with him, and he falls in love with her. So naturally he ain't no business man, y'understand, because you know as well as I do, Noblestone, a business man ain't got no time to fool away on such nonsense."

"Sure, I know," Noblestone agreed. "But what makes Federmann so dumb? He's been in the cloak and suit business all his life, ain't he?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Zudrowsky exclaimed. "Cohen and me got these here fixtures for fifteen years already, and you could more expect them tables and racks they should know the cloak and suit business as Harry Federmann. They ain't neither of 'em got no brains, Noblestone, and that's what I want you to get for Harry,—some young feller with brains, even though he ain't worth much money." [Pg 13]

"Believe me, Mr. Zudrowsky," Noblestone replied. "It ain't such an easy matter these times to find a young feller with brains what ain't got no money, Mr. Zudrowsky, and such young fellers don't need no partners neither. And, anyhow, Mr. Zudrowsky, what is five thousand dollars for an inducement to a business man? When I would go around and tell my clients I got a young feller with five thousand dollars what wants to go in the cloak and suit business, they laugh at me. In the cloak and suit business five thousand dollars goes no ways."

"Five thousand ain't much if you are going to open up as a new beginner, Noblestone," Zudrowsky replied, "but if you got a going concern, y'understand, five thousand dollars is always five thousand dollars. There's lots of business men what is short of money all the time, Noblestone. Couldn't you find it maybe a young feller which is already established in business, y'understand, and what needs *doch* a little money?"

Noblestone slapped his thigh.

"I got it!" he said. "I'll go around and see Sam Feder of the Kosciusko Bank."

Half an hour later Noblestone sat in the first vice-president's office at the Kosciusko Bank, and requested that executive officer to favor him with the names of a few good business men, who would appreciate a partner with five thousand dollars. [Pg 14]

"I'll tell you the truth, Noblestone," Mr. Feder said, "we turn down so many people here every day, that it's a pretty hard thing for me to remember any particular name. Most of 'em is good for nothing, either for your purpose or for ours, Noblestone. The idee they got about business is that they should sell goods at any price. In figuring the cost of the output, they reckon labor, so much; material, so much; and they don't take no account of rent, light, power, insurance and so forth. The consequence is, they lose money all the time; and they put their competitors in bad too, because they make 'em meet their fool prices. The whole trade is cut up by them fellers and

sooner as recommend one for a partner for your client, I'd advise him to take his money and play the ponies with it."

At this juncture a boy entered and handed Mr. Feder a card.

"Tell him to come right in," Feder said, and then he turned to Noblestone. "You got to excuse me for a few minutes, Noblestone, and I'll see you just as soon as I get through."

As Noblestone left the first vice-president's office, he encountered Feder's visitor, who wore an air of furtive apprehension characteristic of a man making his initial visit to a pawn shop. Noblestone waited on the bench outside for perhaps ten minutes, when Mr. Feder's visitor emerged, a trifle red in the face. [Pg 15]

"That's my terms, Mr. Perlmutter," Feder said.

"Well, if I would got to accept such a proposition like that, Mr. Feder," the visitor declared, "I would sooner bust up first. That's all I got to say."

He jammed his hat down on his head and made for the door.

"Now, Mr. Noblestone, I am ready for you," Feder cried, but his summons fell on deaf ears, for Noblestone was in quick pursuit of the vanishing Perlmutter. Noblestone overtook him at the corner and touched his elbow.

"How do you do, Mr. Perlmutter!" he exclaimed.

Perlmutter stopped short and wheeled around.

"Huh?" he said.

"This is Mr. Sol Perlmutter, ain't it?" Noblestone asked.

"No, it ain't," Perlmutter replied. "My name is Morris Perlmutter, and the pair of real gold eye-glasses which you just picked up and would let me have as a bargain for fifty cents, ain't no use to me neither."

"I ain't picked up no eye-glasses," Noblestone said.

"No?" Morris Perlmutter rejoined. "Well, I don't want to buy no blue white diamond ring neither, y'understand, so if it's all the same to you I got business to attend to."

"So do I," Noblestone went on, "and this is what it is. Also my name is there too." [Pg 16]

He showed Morris a card, which read as follows:

TELEPHONE CONNECTION	REAL ESTATE & INSURANCE
	IN ALL ITS BRANCHES
PHILIP NOBLESTONE	
BUSINESS BROKER	
<u>G E T A</u>	
<u>P A R T N E R</u>	
594 EAST HOUSTON STREET	NEW YORK

"Don't discount them good accounts, Mr. Perlmutter," he added, "it ain't necessary."

"Who told you I want to discount some accounts?" Morris asked.

"If I see a feller in a dentist's chair," Noblestone answered, "I don't need to be told he's got the toothache already."

After this Morris was easily persuaded to accept Noblestone's invitation to drink a cup of coffee, and they retired immediately to a neighboring bakery and lunch room.

"Yes, Mr. Noblestone," Morris said, consulting the card. "I give you right about Feder. That feller is worser as a dentist. He's a bloodsucker. Fifteen hundred dollars gilt-edged accounts I offer him as security for twelve hundred, and when I get through with paying DeWitt C. Feinholtz, his son-in-law, what is the bank's lawyer, there wouldn't be enough left from that twelve hundred dollars [Pg 17]

to pay off my operators."

"That's the way it is when a feller's short of money," Noblestone said. "Now, if you would got it a partner with backing, y'understand, you wouldn't never got to be short again."

With this introductory sentence, Noblestone launched out upon a series of persuasive arguments, which only ended when Morris Perlmutter had promised to lunch with Zudrowsky, Harry Federmann and Noblestone at Wasserbauer's Café and Restaurant the following afternoon at one o'clock.

For the remainder of the day, Philip Noblestone interviewed as much of the cloak and suit trade as he could cover, with respect to Morris Perlmutter's antecedents, and the result was entirely satisfactory. He ascertained that Morris had worked his way up from shipping clerk, through the various grades, until he had reached the comparative eminence of head cutter, and his only failing was that he had embarked in business with less capital than experience. At first he had met with moderate success, but a dull season in the cloak trade had temporarily embarrassed him, and the consensus of opinion among his competitors was that he had a growing business but was over-extended.

Thus when Noblestone repaired to the office of Zudrowsky & Cohen at closing time that afternoon, he fairly outdid himself extolling Morris Perlmutter's merits, and he presented so high colored a picture that Zudrowsky deprecated the business broker's enthusiasm. [Pg 18]

"Say, looky here, Noblestone," he said, "enough's enough. All I want is a partner for my son-in-law which would got common sense and a little judgment. That's all. I don't expect no miracles, y'understand, and the way I understand it from you, this feller Morris Perlmutter is got a business head like Andrew Carnegie already and a shape like John Drew."

"I never mentioned his name because I don't know that feller at all," Noblestone protested. "But Perlmutter is a fine business man, Mr. Zudrowsky, and he's a swell dresser, too."

"A feller what goes to a bank looking for accommodations," Zudrowsky replied, "naturally don't put on his oldest clothes, y'understand, but anyhow, Noblestone, if you would be around here at half past twelve to-morrow, I will see that Harry gets here too, and we will go down to Wasserbauer's and meet the feller."

It was precisely one o'clock the following day when Morris Perlmutter seated himself at a table in the rear of Wasserbauer's Café and Restaurant.

"Yes, sir, right away!" Louis, the waiter, cried, as he deposited a plate of dill pickles on the adjoining table, at which sat a stout middle-aged person with a napkin tucked in his neck. [Pg 19]

"*Koenigsberger Klops* is good to-day, Mr. Potash," Louis announced.

"Pushing the stickers, Louis, ain't it?" the man at the next table said. "You couldn't get me to eat no chopped meat which customers left on their plates last week already. I never believe in buying seconds, Louis. Give me a piece of roast beef, well done, and a baked potato."

"Right away, Mr. Potash," Louis said, as he passed on to Perlmutter's table. "Now, sir, what could I do for you?"

"Me, I am waiting here for somebody," Morris replied. "Bring me a glass of water and we will give our order later."

"Right away!" said Louis, and hustled off to fill Abe Potash's order, whereat Abe selected a dill pickle to beguile the tedium of waiting. He grasped it firmly between his thumb and finger, and neatly bisected it with his teeth. Simultaneously the pickle squirted, and about a quarter of a pint of the acid juice struck Morris Perlmutter in the right eye.

"Excuse *me*," Abe cried. "Excuse me."

"S'all right," Morris replied. "I seen what you was doing and I should of ordered an umbrella instead of a glass of water already."

Abe laughed uproariously.

"Dill pickles is uncertain like Paris fashions," he commented. "You could never tell what they would do next." [Pg 20]

"I bet yer," Morris replied. "Last year people was buying silks like they was crazy, y'understand, and this year you would think silks was poison. A buyer wouldn't touch 'em at all, and that's the way it goes."

Abe rose with the napkin tucked in his neck, and carrying the dish of dill pickles with him, he sat down at Morris' table, to which Louis brought the roast beef a moment later.

"I seen you was in the cloak and suit business as soon as I looked at you," Abe said. "I guess I'll eat here till your friends come."

"Go ahead," Morris replied. "It's already quarter past one, and if them fellers don't come soon, I'm going to eat, too."

"What's the use waiting?" Abe said. "Eat anyhow. This roast beef is fine. Try some of it on me."

"Why should I stick you for my lunch?" Morris rejoined. "I see them suckers ain't going to show up at all, so I guess I'll take a sandwich and a cup of coffee."

He motioned to Louis.

"Right away!" Louis cried. "Yes, sir, we got some nice *Koenigsberger Klops* to-day *mit Kartoffel Kloes*."

"What d'ye take this gentleman for, anyway, Louis?" Abe asked. "A garbage can? Give him a nice slice of roast beef well done and a baked potato. Also bring two cups of coffee and give it the checks to me." [Pg 21]

By a quarter to two Abe and Morris had passed from business matters to family affairs, and after they had exchanged cigars and the conversation had reached a stage where Morris had just accepted an invitation to dine at Abe's house, Noblestone and Zudrowsky entered, with Harry Federmann bringing up in the rear. Harry was evidently in disfavor, and his weak, blond face wore the crestfallen look of a whipped child, for he had been so occupied with his billing and cooing up town, that he had forgotten his business engagement.

"Hallo, Mr. Perlmutter," Noblestone cried, and then he caught sight of Morris' companion and the remains of their generous meal. "I thought you was going to take lunch with us."

"Do I got to starve, Mr. Who's-this—I lost your card—just because I was fool enough to take up your proposition yesterday? I should of known better in the first place."

"But this here young feller, Mr. Federmann, got detained uptown," Zudrowsky explained. "His wife got took suddenly sick."

"Why, she may have to have an operation," Noblestone said in a sudden burst of imaginative enthusiasm.

"You should tell your troubles to a doctor," Abe said, rising from the table. "And besides, Noblestone, Mr. Perlmutter don't want no partner just now." [Pg 22]

"But," Perlmutter began, "but, Mr. Potash——"

"That is to say," Abe interrupted, "he don't want a partner with no business experience. Me, I got business experience, as you know, Mr. Noblestone, and so we fixed it up we would go as partners together, provided after we look each other up everything is all right."

He looked inquiringly at Perlmutter, who nodded in reply.

"And if everything *is* all right," Perlmutter said, "we will start up next week."

"Under the firm name," Abe added, "of Potash & Perlmutter."

CHAPTER II

In less than ten days the new firm of Potash & Perlmutter were doing business in Abe Potash's old quarters on White Street with the addition of the loft on the second floor. Abe had occupied the grade floor of an old-fashioned building, and agreeable to Morris' suggestion the manufacturing and cutting departments were transferred to the second floor, leaving Abe's old quarters for show-room, office and shipping purposes. It was further arranged that Abe's share of the copartnership work should be the selling end and that Morris should take charge of the manufacturing. Both partners supervised the accounting and credit department with the competent assistance of Miss R. Cohen, who had served the firm of Vesell & Potash in the same capacity. [Pg 23]

For more than a year Morris acted as designer, and with one or two unfortunate exceptions, the styles he originated had been entirely satisfactory to Potash & Perlmutter's growing trade.

The one or two unfortunate exceptions, however, had been a source of some loss to the firm. First, there were the tourists' coats which cost Potash & Perlmutter one thousand dollars; then came the purple directoires; total, two thousand dollars charged off to profit and loss on the firm's books.

"No, Mawruss," Abe said, when his partner spoke of a new model, which he termed the Long Branch Coatee, "I don't like that name. Anyhow, Mawruss, I got it in my mind we should hire a

designer. While I figure it that you don't cost us nothing extra, Mawruss, a couple of stickers like them tourists and that directoire model puts us in the hole two thousand dollars. On the other hand, Mawruss, if we get a good designer, Mawruss, all we pay him is two thousand a year and we're through."

"I know, Abe," Morris replied, "but designers can turn out stickers, too."

"Sure, they can, Mawruss," Abe went on, "but they got a job to look out for, Mawruss, while you are one of the bosses here, whether you turn out stickers or not. No, Mawruss, I got enough of stickers already. I'm going to look out for a good, live designer, a smart young feller like Louis Grossman, what works for Sammet Brothers. I bet you they done an increased business of twenty per cent. with that young feller's designs. I met Ike Gotthelf, buyer for Horowitz & Finkelbein, and he tells me he gave Sammet Brothers a two-thousand-dollar order a couple of weeks ago, including a hundred and twenty-two garments of that new-style they got out, which they call the Arverne Sacque, one of Louis Grossman's new models."

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"Is that so?" said Morris. "Well, you know what I would do if I was you, Abe? I'd see Louis Grossman and offer him ten dollars a week more than Sammet Brothers pays him, and the first thing you know he'd be working for us and not for Sammet Brothers."

"You got a great head, Mawruss," Abe rejoined ironically. "You got the same idee all of a sudden what I think about a week ago already. I seen Louis Grossman yesterday, and offered him fifteen, not ten."

"And what did he say?"

"He says he's working by Sammet Brothers under a contract, Mawruss, what don't expire for a year yet, and they're holding up a quarter of his wages under the contract, which he is to forfeit if he don't work it out."

"Don't you believe it, Abe," Morris broke in. "He's standing out for more money."

"Is he?" said Abe with some heat. "Well, I seen the contract, Mawruss, so either I'm a liar or not, Mawruss, ain't it?"

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Here they were interrupted by the entrance of a customer, Ike Herzog, of the Bon Ton Credit Outfitting Company.

"Ah, Mr. Herzog!" Abe cried, rising to his feet and extending both hands in greeting. "Glad to see you. Ain't it a fine weather?"

Mr. Herzog grunted in reply.

"Potash," he said, "when I give you that order last week, I don't know whether I didn't buy a big lot of your style fifty-nine-ten, ain't it?"

"Yes, you did," said Abe.

"Well," said Herzog, "I want to cancel that part of the order."

"Cancel it!" Abe cried. "Why, what's the matter with them garments? Ain't the samples made up right?"

"Sure, they're made up right," said Herzog, "only I seen something what I like better. It's about the same style, only more attractive. I mean Sammet Brothers' style forty-one-fifty—their new Arverne Sacque."

"Mr. Herzog!" Abe cried.

Herzog raised a protesting palm.

"Now, Potash," he said, "you know whatever I buy in staples you get the preference; but when anybody's got a specialty like that Arverne Sacque, what's the use of talking?"

He shook hands cordially.

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"I'll be around to see you in about a week," he said, and the next moment the door closed behind him.

"Well, Mawruss, that settles it," said Abe, putting on his hat. "When we lose a good customer like Ike Herzog, I gets busy right away."

"Where are you going, Abe?" Morris asked.

Abe struggled into his overcoat and seized his umbrella.

"Round to Sammet Brothers," he replied. "I'm going to get that young feller away from them if I got to pay 'em a thousand dollars to boot."

Leon Sammet, head of the copartnership of Sammet Brothers, sat in the firm's sample room and puffed gloomily at a Wheeling stogy. His brother, Barney Sammet, stood beside him reading aloud from a letter which he held in his hand.

"Gents," he said, "your shipment of the fourteenth instant to hand, and in reply will say we ain't satisfied with nothing but style forty-one-fifty. Our Miss Kenny is a perfect thirty-six, and she

can't breathe in them Empires style 3022, in sizes 36, 38 or 40. What is the matter with you, anyway? We are returning them via Eagle Dispatch. We are yours truly, The Boston Store, Horowitz & Finkelbein, Proprietors."

"Yes, Barney," Leon commented, "that's a designer for you, that Louis Grossman. His Arverne Sacques is all right, Barney, but the rest is nix. He's a one garment man. Tell Miss Aaronstamm to bring in her book. I want to send them Boston Store people a letter."

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A moment later Miss Aaronstamm entered, and sat down at a sample table.

"Write to the Boston Store," Leon Sammet said. "Horowitz & Finkelbein, Proprietors, Gents'—got that? 'We received your favor of the eighteenth instant, and in reply would say we don't accept no styles what you return.' Got that? 'If your Miss Kenny can't breathe in them garments that ain't our fault. They wasn't made to breathe in; they was made to sell. You say she is a perfect thirty-six. How do we know that? We ain't never measured her, and we don't believe you have, neither. Anyway, we ain't taking back no goods what we sold once. Yours truly.' That's all, Miss Aaronstamm. I guess that'll fix 'em. What, Barney?"

Barney nodded gloomily.

"I tell you, Barney," Leon went on, "I wish I never seen that Louis Grossman. He certainly got into us good and proper."

"I don't know, Leon," said Barney. "That Arverne Sacque was a record seller."

"Arverne Sacque!" Leon cried. "That's all everybody says. We can't make a million dollars out of one garment alone, Barney. We can't even make expenses. I'm afraid we'll go in the hole over ten thousand dollars if we don't get rid of him."

"But we can't get rid of him," said Barney. "We got a contract with him."

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"Don't I know it?" said Leon, sadly. "Ain't I paid Henry D. Feldman a hundred dollars for drawing it up? He's got us, Barney. Louis Grossman's got us and no mistake. Well, I got to go up to the cutting-room and see what he's doing now, Barney. He can spoil more piece-goods in an hour than I can buy in a week."

He rose wearily to his feet and was half-way to the stairs in the rear of the store when Abe Potash entered.

"Hallo, Leon!" Abe called. "Don't be in a rush. I want to talk to you."

Leon returned to the show-room and shook hands limply with Abe. It was a competitor's, not a customer's, shake.

"Well, Abe," he said, "how's business?"

"If we got a good designer like you got, Leon," Abe replied, "we would——"

"A good designer!" Barney broke in. "Why——"

His involuntary disclaimer ended almost where it began with a furtive, though painful, kick from his elder brother.

"A good designer, Abe," Leon went on hastily, "is a big asset, and Louis Grossman is a first-class A Number One designer. We done a tremendous spring business through Louis. I suppose you heard about our style forty-one-fifty?"

Abe nodded.

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"Them Arverne Sacques," he said. "Yes, I heard about it from everybody I meet. He must be a gold-mine, that Louis Grossman."

"He is," Leon continued. "Our other styles, too, he turns out wonderful. Our Empire models what he designs for us, Abe, I assure you is also making a tremendous sensation. You ought to see the letter we got this morning from Horowitz & Finkelbein."

Barney blew his nose with a loud snort.

"I guess I'll go upstairs, and see what the boys is doing in the cutting-room, Leon," he said, and made a hasty exit.

"Not that Louis Grossman ain't a good cutting-room foreman, too, Abe," said Leon, "but we're just getting in some new piece-goods and Barney wants to check 'em off. But I ain't asked you yet what we can do for you? A recommendation, maybe? Our credit files is open to you, Abe."

Abe pushed his hat back from his forehead and mopped his brow. Then he sat down and lit a cigar.

"Leon," he commenced, "what's the use of making a lot of talk about it. I'm going to talk to you man to man, Leon, and no monkey-business about it nor nothing. I'm going to be plain and straightforward, Leon, and tell it to you right from the start what I want. I don't believe in no beating bushes around, Leon, and when I say a thing I mean it. I got to talk right out, Leon. That's the kind of man I am."

"All right, Abe," Leon said. "Don't spring it on me too sudden, though."

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"Well," Abe continued, "it's this way."

He gave one last puff at his cigar.

"Leon," he said, "how much will you take for Louis Grossman?"

"Take!" Leon shouted. "Take! Why, Abe——"

He stopped suddenly, and, recovering his composure just in the nick of time, remained silent.

"I know, Leon, he's a valuable man," Abe said earnestly, "but I'm willing to be fair, Leon. Of course I ain't a hog, and I don't think you are."

"No, I ain't," Leon replied quite calmly; "I ain't a hog, and so I say I wouldn't take nothing for him, Abe, because, Abe, if I told you what I *would* take for him, Abe, then, maybe, you might have reason for calling me a hog."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't, Leon," Abe protested. "I told you I know he's a valuable man, so I want you should name a price."

"I should name a price!" Leon cried. "Why, Abe, I'm surprised at you. If I go to a man to sell something what I like to get rid of it, and he don't want, then I name the price. But if a man comes to me to buy something what I want to keep, and what he's got to have, Abe, then *he* names the price. Ain't it?"

Abe looked critically at the end of his smoldering cigar.

"Well, Leon," he said at length, "if I must name a price, I suppose I must. Now I know you will think me crazy, Leon, but I want to get a good designer bad, Leon, and so I say"—here he paused to note the effect—"five hundred dollars."

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Leon held out his hand.

"I guess you got to excuse me, Abe," he said. "I'd like it first rate to stay here and visit with you all morning but I got work to do, and so I hope you'll excuse me."

"Seven hundred and fifty," Abe said.

"Fifteen hundred dollars," Leon replied quite firmly.

For twenty minutes Abe's figure rose and Leon's fell until they finally met at ten hundred thirty-three, thirty-three.

"He's worth it, Abe, believe me," said Leon, as they shook hands on the bargain. "And now let's fix it up right away."

Half an hour later, Abe, Louis Grossman and Leon Sammet entered the spacious law offices of Henry D. Feldman, who bears the same advisory relation to the cloak and suit trade as Judge Gary did to the steel and iron business.

The drawing of the necessary papers occupied the better part of the day and it was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that the transaction was complete. By its terms Sammet Brothers in consideration of \$1,033.33 paid by Potash & Perlmutter, released Louis Grossman from his contract, and Louis entered into a new agreement with Potash & Perlmutter at an advance of a thousand a year over the compensation paid him by Sammet Brothers. In addition he was to receive from Potash & Perlmutter five per cent. of the profits of their business, payable weekly, the arrangement to be in force for one year, during which time neither employer nor employee could be rid one of the other save by mutual consent.

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"It comes high, Mawruss," Abe said to his partner, after he had returned to the store, "but I guess Louis's worth it."

"I hope so," Morris replied. "Now we can make up some of them Arverne Sacques."

"No, Mawruss," Abe replied, "I'm sorry to say we can't, because, by the agreement what Henry D. Feldman drew up, Sammet Brothers has the sole right to make up and sell the Arverne Sacques; but I seen to it, Mawruss, that we got the right to make up and sell every other garment what Louis Grossman originated for them this season."

He smiled triumphantly at his partner.

"And," he concluded, "he's coming to work Monday morning."

At the end of three disillusionizing weeks Abe Potash and Morris Perlmutter sat in the show-room of their place of business. Abe's hat was tilted over his eyes and he whistled a tuneless air. Morris was biting his nails.

"Well, Mawruss," Abe said at length, "when we're stuck we're stuck; ain't it? What's the use of sitting here like a couple of mummies; ain't it?"

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Morris ceased biting his nails.

"Yes, Abe," he said, "ten hundred and thirty-three, thirty-three for a designer what couldn't

design paper-bags for a delicatessen store. I believe he must have took lessons in designing from a correspondence school."

"Believe me, Mawruss, he learned it by telephone," Abe replied. "But cussing him out won't do no good, Mawruss. The thing to do now is to get busy and turn out some garments what we can sell. Them masquerade costumes what he gets up you couldn't sell to a five-and-ten-cent store."

"All right," Morris said. "Let's have another designer and leave Louis to do the cutting."

"*Another* designer!" Abe exclaimed. "No, Mawruss, you're a good enough designer for me. I always said it, Mawruss, you're a first-class A Number One designer."

Thus encouraged, Morris once more took up the work of the firm's designing, and he labored with the energy of despair, for the season was far spent. At length he evolved four models that made Abe's eyes fairly bulge.

"That's snappy stuff, Mawruss," he said, as he examined the completed samples one morning. "I bet yer they sell like hot cakes."

Abe's prophecy more than justified itself, and in ten days they were completely swamped with orders. Abe and Morris went around wearing smiles that only relaxed when they remembered Louis Grossman and his hide-bound agreement, under which he drew five per cent. of the firm's profits and sixty dollars a week.

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"Anyhow, Mawruss, we'll get some return from Louis Grossman," Abe said. "I advertised in the Daily Cloak and Suit Record yesterday them four styles of yours as the four best sellers of the season, originated by the creator of the Arverne Sacque. Ike Herzog was in the first thing this morning and bought two big lots of each one of the models. Ike's a great admirer of Louis Grossman, Mawruss. I bet yer when Sammet Brothers saw that ad they went crazy; ain't it?"

"But," Morris protested, "why should Louis Grossman get the credit for my work?"

"Because, Mawruss, you know them Arverne Sacques is the best sellers put out in the cloak and suit business this year," Abe replied. "And besides, Mawruss, we may be suckers, but that ain't no reason why Sammet Brothers should know it."

"Don't worry, Abe," said Morris; "they know they stuck us good and plenty when they released Louis Grossman."

"Do they?" Abe rejoined. "Well, they don't know it unless you told 'em. Louis Grossman won't tell 'em and I didn't tell 'em when I met Leon and Barney at lunch to-day."

"What did you tell 'em!" Morris asked, somewhat alarmed.

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"I told 'em, Mawruss, that the season is comparatively young yet, but we already made from ten to twenty per cent. more sales by our new designer. I told Leon them new styles what Louis Grossman got up for us is selling so big we can't put 'em out fast enough."

"And what did Leon say?" Morris asked.

"He didn't say nothing," Abe replied, "but he looked like his best customer had busted up on him. Then I showed him the order what we got from Ike Herzog, and he started in right away to call Barney down for going home early the day before. I tell you, Mawruss, he was all broke up."

"I know, Abe," Morris commented, "that's all right, too, but, all the same, we ain't got much of a laugh on them two boys, so long as Louis Grossman loafes away upstairs drawing sixty dollars a week and five per cent. of the profits."

"Well," Abe replied, "what are you going to do about it? Henry D. Feldman drew up the contract, and you know, Mawruss, contracts what Henry D. Feldman makes nobody can break."

"Can't they?" Morris cried. "Well, if Henry D. Feldman made it can't Henry D. Feldman break it? What good is the lawyer, anyhow, what can't get us out of the contract what he fixed up himself?"

Abe pondered over the situation for five minutes.

"You're right, Mawruss," he said at length; "I'll go and see Henry D. Feldman the first thing to-morrow morning."

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The next morning Leon Sammet sat at his roll-top desk in his private office, while Barney went over the morning mail.

"Hallo," Barney cried, "here's a check from Horowitz & Finkelbein for the full amount of their bill, Leon. I guess they thought better of that return shipment they made of them bum garments that Louis Grossman designed. They ain't made no deduction on account of it."

"Bum garments, nothing," Leon commented. "Them garments was all right, Barney. I guess we didn't know how to treat Louis Grossman when he worked by us. Look at the big success he's making by Potash & Perlmutter. I bet yer they're five thousand ahead on the season's sales already. We thought they was suckers when they paid us ten thirty-three, thirty-three for him, but I guess the shoe pinches on the other foot, Barney. I wish we had him back, that's all. Them four new designs what he made for Potash & Perlmutter is tremendous successes. What did he done for us, Barney? One garment, the Arverne Sacque, and I bet yer them four styles will put the

Arverne Sacque clean out of business."

"Well, Leon," said Barney, "you traded him off so smart, why don't you get him back? Why don't you see him, Leon?"

"I *did* see him," said Leon. "I called at his house last night."

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"And what did he say?" Barney asked.

"He said he's under contract, as you know, with Potash & Perlmutter, and that if we can get him out of it he's only too glad to come back to us. But Henry D. Feldman drew up that contract, Barney, and you know as well as I do, Barney, that what Henry D. Feldman draws up is drawn up for keeps, ain't it?"

"There's loopholes in every contract, Leon," said Barney, "and a smart lawyer like Henry D. Feldman can find 'em out quick enough. Why don't you go right round and see Henry D. Feldman? Maybe he can fix it so as to get Louis back here."

Leon shut down his roll-top desk and seized his hat.

"That's a good idea, Barney," he said. "I guess I'll take your advice."

It is not so much to know the law, ran Henry D. Feldman's motto, paraphrasing a famous dictum of Judge Sharswood, as to look, act and talk as though you knew it. To this end Mr. Feldman seldom employed a word of one syllable, if it had a synonym of three or four syllables, and such phrases as *res gestæ*, *scienter*, and *lex fori delicti* were the very life of his conversation with clients.

"The information which you now disclose, Mr. Sammet," he said, after Leon had made known his predicament, "is all *obiter dicta*."

Leon blushed. He imagined this to be somewhat harsh criticism of the innocent statement that he thought Potash & Perlmutter could be bluffed into releasing Louis Grossman.

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"*Imprimis*," Mr. Feldman went on, "I have not been consulted by Mr. Grossman about what he desires done in the matter, but, speaking *ex cathedra*, I am of the opinion that some method might be devised for rescinding the contract."

"You mean we can get Potash & Perlmutter to release him?"

"Precisely," said Mr. Feldman, "and in a very elementary and efficacious fashion."

"Well, I ain't prepared to pay so much money at once," said Leon.

Now, when it came to money matters, Henry D. Feldman's language could be colloquial to the point of slang.

"What's biting you now?" he said. "I ain't going to charge you too much. Leave it to me, and if I deliver the goods it will cost you two hundred and fifty dollars."

Leon sighed heavily, but he intended getting Louis back at all costs, not, however, to exceed ten thirty-three, thirty-three.

"Well, I ain't kicking none if you can manage it," he replied. "Tell us how to go about it."

Straightway Mr. Feldman unfolded a scheme which, stripped of its technical phraseology, was simplicity itself. He rightly conjectured that the most burdensome feature of the contract, so far as Potash & Perlmutter were concerned, was the five per cent. share of the profits that fell to Louis Grossman each week. He therefore suggested that Louis approach Abe Potash and request that, instead of five per cent. of the profits, he be paid a definite sum each week, for the cloak and suit business has its dull spells between seasons, when profits occasionally turn to losses. Thus Louis could advance as a reason that he would feel safer if he be paid, say, twenty dollars a week the year round in lieu of his uncertain share of the profits.

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"Abe Potash will jump at that," Leon commented.

"I anticipate that he will," Mr. Feldman went on, "and then, after he has paid Mr. Grossman the first week's installment it will constitute a rescission of the old contract and a substitution of a new one, which will be a contract of hiring from week to week. At the conclusion of the first week their contractual relations can be severed at the option of either party."

"But I don't want them to do nothing like that," Leon said. "I just want Louis to quit his job with Potash & Perlmutter and come and work by us."

"Look a-here, Sammet," Feldman broke in impatiently. "I can't waste a whole morning talking to a boob that don't understand the English language. You're wise to the part about Louis Grossman asking for twenty dollars a week steady, instead of his share of the proceeds, ain't you?"

Leon nodded.

"Then if Potash falls for it," Feldman concluded, "as soon as Grossman gets the first twenty out of him he can throw up his job on the spot. See?"

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Leon nodded again.

"Then clear out of this," said Feldman and pushed a button on his desk to inform the office-boy that he was ready for the next client.

As Leon passed through the outer office he encountered Ike Herzog of the Bon Ton Credit Outfitting Company, who was solacing himself with the Daily Cloak and Suit Record in the interval of his waiting.

"Good morning, Mr. Herzog," Leon exclaimed. "So you got your troubles, too."

"I ain't got no troubles, Leon," Ike Herzog said, "but I got to use a lawyer in my business once in awhile. Just now I'm enlarging my place, and I got contracts to make and new people to hire. I hope *you* ain't got no law suits nor nothing."

"Law suits ain't in my line, Mr. Herzog," Leon said. "Once in awhile I change my working people, too. That's why I come here."

"Sometimes you change 'em for the worse, Leon," Herzog commented, indicating Abe Potash's effective ad with a stubby forefinger. "You certainly made a mistake when you got rid of Louis Grossman. He's turning out some elegant stuff for Potash & Perlmutter."

Leon nodded gloomily.

"Well, we all make mistakes, Mr. Herzog," he said, "and that's why we got to come here."

"That's so," Herzog agreed, as Leon opened the door. "I hope I ain't making no mistake in what *I'm* going to do." [Pg 41]

"I hope not," Leon said as he passed out. "Good morning."

Ike Herzog's interview with Henry D. Feldman was short and very much to his satisfaction, for when he emerged from Feldman's sanctum, to find Abe Potash waiting without, he could not forbear a broad smile. Abe nodded perfunctorily and a moment later was closeted with the oracle.

"Mr. Feldman," he said, "I come to ask you an advice, and as I'm pretty busy this morning, do me the favor and leave out all them *caveat emptors*."

"Sure thing," Feldman replied. "Tell me all about it."

"Well, then, Mr. Feldman," said Abe, "I want to get rid of Louis Grossman."

Mr. Feldman almost jumped out of his chair.

"I want to fire Louis Grossman," Abe repeated. "You remember that you drew me up a burglar-proof contract between him and us a few weeks ago, and now I want you to be the burglar and bust it up for me."

Feldman touched the button on his desk.

"Bring me the draft of the contract between Potash & Perlmutter and Louis Grossman that I dictated last month," he said to the boy who answered.

In a few minutes the boy returned with a large envelope. He was instructed never to come back empty-handed when asked to bring anything, and, in this instance the envelope held six sheets of folded legal cap, some of which contained the score of a pinochle game, played after office hours on Saturday afternoon between the managing clerk and the process-server. [Pg 42]

Feldman put the envelope in his pocket and retired to a remote corner of the room. There he examined the contents of the envelope and, knitting his brows into an impressive frown, he took from the well-stocked shelves that lined the walls book after book of digests and reports. Occasionally he made notes on the back of the envelope, and after the space of half an hour he returned to his chair and prepared to deliver himself of a weighty opinion.

"In the first place," he said, "this man Grossman ain't incompetent in his work, is he?"

"Incompetent!" Abe exclaimed. "Oh, no, he ain't incompetent. He's competent enough to sue us for five thousand dollars after we fire him, if that's what you mean."

"Then I take it that you don't want to discharge him for incompetence and risk a law suit," Mr. Feldman went on. "Now, before we go on, how much does his share of your profits amount to each week?"

"About thirty dollars in the busy season," Abe replied.

"Then here's your scheme," said Feldman. "You go to Grossman and say: 'Look a-here, Grossman, this business of figuring out profits each week is a troublesome piece of bookkeeping. Suppose we call your share of the profits forty dollars a week and let it go at that.' D'ye suppose Grossman would take it?" [Pg 43]

"Would a cat eat liver?" said Abe.

"Well, then," Feldman now concluded, "after Grossman accepts the offer, and you pay him the first installment of forty dollars you're substituting a new weekly contract in place of the old yearly one, and you can fire Grossman just as soon as you have a mind to."

"But suppose he sues me, anyhow?" said Abe.

"If he does," Feldman replied. "I won't charge you a cent; otherwise it'll be two hundred and fifty dollars."

He touched the bell in token of dismissal.

"This fellow, Grossman, is certainly a big money-maker," he said to himself, after Abe had gone, "*for me.*"

The following Saturday Abe sat in the show-room making up the weekly payroll, and with his own hand he drew a check to the order of Louis Grossman for forty dollars.

"Mawruss," he said, "do me the favor and go upstairs to Louis Grossman. You know what to say to him."

"Why should *I* go, Abe?" Morris said. "You know the whole plan. You saw Feldman."

"But it don't look well for me," Abe rejoined. "Do me the favor and go yourself."

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Morris shrugged his shoulders and departed, while Abe turned to the pages of the Daily Cloak and Suit Record to bridge over the anxious period of Morris' absence. The first item that struck his eye appeared under the heading, "Alterations and Improvements."

"The Bon Ton Credit Outfitting Company, Isaac Herzog, Proprietor," it read, "is about to open a manufacturing department, and will, on and after June 1, do all its own manufacturing and alterations in the enlarged store premises, Nos. 5940, 5942 and 5946 Second Avenue."

Abe laid down the paper with a sigh.

"There's where we lose another good customer," he said as Morris returned. A wide grin was spread over Morris' face.

"Well, Mawruss?" Abe asked.

"Yes, Abe," Morris replied. "Ten hundred and thirty-three, thirty-three you paid for him. And now you must pay him forty dollars a week. *I* ain't so generous, Abe, believe me. I settled with him for twenty-seven-fifty."

"Well, Mawruss, it's only for one week," Abe protested.

"I know," said Morris, "but why should *he* get the benefit of it?"

"Did you have much of a time getting him to take it?" Abe asked.

"It was like this," Morris explained. "I told him what you said about a lump sum in place of profits and asked him to name his price, and the first thing he says was twenty-seven-fifty."

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"And you let him have it for that?" Abe cried. "You're a business man, Mawruss, I must say. I bet yer he would have took twenty-five."

He tore up the check for forty dollars and drew a new one for twenty-seven-fifty.

"Here, Mawruss," he said, "take it up to him like a good feller."

It was precisely noon when Morris delivered the check to Louis Grossman, and it was one o'clock when Louis went out to lunch.

Three o'clock struck before Abe first noted his absence.

"Ain't that feller come back from his dinner yet, Mawruss?" he asked.

"No," Morris replied. "I wonder what can be keeping him. He generally takes half an hour for his dinner."

At this juncture the telephone bell rang in the rear of the store and Abe answered it.

"Hello," he said; "yes, this is Potash & Perlmutter. Oh, hello, Leon, what can we do for you?"

"I want to speak to Louis Grossman. Can you call him to the 'phone?" Leon said.

"Louis ain't in," Abe said. "Do you want to leave a message for him?"

"Well," Leon hesitated, "the fact is—we had an appointment with him for two o'clock over here, and he ain't showed up yet."

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"Appointment with Louis!" Abe said. "Why, what should you have an appointment with Louis for, Leon?"

"Well," Leon stammered, "I—now—got to see him—now—about them Arverne Sacques."

"Oh!" Abe said. "I understand. Well, he went to lunch about twelve o'clock, and he ain't come back yet. Is there anything what we can do for you, Leon?"

But Sammet had hung up the receiver without waiting for further conversation.

At four o'clock the telephone rang again, and once more Abe answered it.

"Hello," he said. "Yes, this is Potash & Perlmutter. Oh! hello, Leon! What can we do for you *now*?"

"Abe," Leon said, "Louis ain't showed up yet. Has he showed up at your place yet?"

"No, he ain't, Leon," Abe replied. "You seem mighty anxious to see him. Why, what for should I try to prevent him speaking to you? He ain't here, I tell you. All right, Leon; then I'm a liar."

He hung up the receiver with a bang, and an hour later when Morris and he locked up the place, Louis' absence remained a complete mystery to his employers.

On Monday morning Abe and Morris opened the store at seven-thirty, and while Morris examined the mail, Abe took up the Daily Cloak and Suit Record and scanned the business-trouble column. There were no failures of personal or firm interest to Abe, so he passed on to the new-business column. The first item caused him to gasp, and he almost swallowed the butt of his cigar. It read:

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A partnership has this day been formed between Isaac Herzog and Louis Grossman, to carry on the business of the Bon Ton Credit Outfitting Company, under the same firm name. It is understood that Mr. Grossman will have charge of the designing and manufacturing end of the concern.

He handed the paper over to Morris and lit a fresh cigar.

"Another sucker for Louis Grossman," he said, "and I bet yer Henry D. Feldman drew up the copartnership papers."

CHAPTER III

When Mr. Siegmund Lowenstein, proprietor of the O'Gorman-Henderson Dry-Goods Company of Galveston, Texas, entered Potash & Perlmutter's show-room, he expected to give only a small order. Mr. Lowenstein usually transacted his business with Abe Potash, who was rather conservative in matters of credit extension, more especially since Mr. Lowenstein was reputed to play auction pinochle with poor judgment and for high stakes.

Therefore, Mr. Lowenstein intended to buy a few staples, specialties of Potash & Perlmutter, and to reserve the balance of his spring orders for other dealers who entertained more liberal credit notions than did Abe Potash. Much to his gratification, however, he was greeted by Morris Perlmutter.

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"Ah, Mr. Perlmutter," he said; "glad to see you. Is Mr. Potash in?"

"He's home, sick, to-day," Morris replied.

Mr. Lowenstein clucked sympathetically.

"You don't say so," he murmured. "That's too bad. What seems to be the trouble?"

"He's been feeling mean all the winter," Morris replied. "The doctor says he needs a rest."

"That's always the way with them hard-working fellers," Mr. Lowenstein went on. "I'm feeling pretty sick myself, I assure you, Mr. Perlmutter. I've been working early and late in my store. We never put in such a season before, and we done a phenomenal holiday business. We took stock last week and we're quite cleaned out. I bet you we ain't got stuck a single garment in any line—cloaks, suits, clothing or furs."

"I'm glad to hear it," Morris said.

"And we expect this season will be a crackerjack, too," he continued. "I had to give a few emergency orders to jobbers down South before I left Galveston, we had such an early rush of spring trade."

"Is that so?" Morris commented. "I wish we could say the same in New York."

"You don't tell me!" Mr. Lowenstein rejoined. "Why, I was over by Garfunkel and Levy just now, and Mr. Levy says he is almost too busy. I looked over their line and I may place an order with them, although they ain't got too good an assortment, Mr. Perlmutter."

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"Far be it from me to knock a competitor's line, Mr. Lowenstein," Morris commented, "but I honestly think they get their designers off of Ellis Island."

"Well," Mr. Lowenstein conceded, "of course I don't say they got so good an assortment what you have, Mr. Perlmutter, but they got a liberal credit policy."

"Why, what's the matter with *our* credit policy?" Morris asked.

"Nothing," Mr. Lowenstein replied. "Only a merchant like me, what wants to enlarge his business, needs a little better terms than thirty days. Ain't it? I'm improving my departments all the time, and I got to buy more fixtures, lay in a better stock and even build a new wing to my store building. All this costs money, Mr. Perlmutter, as you know, and contractors must be paid strictly for cash. Under the circumstances, I need ready money, and, naturally, the house what gives me the most generous credit gets my biggest order."

"Excuse me for a moment," Morris broke in, "I think I hear the telephone."

He walked to the rear of the store, where the telephone bell had been trilling impatiently.

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"Hello," he said, taking the receiver off the hook.

"Hello," said a voice from the other end of the line. "Is this Potash & Perlmutter?"

"It is," said Morris.

"Well, this is Garfunkel & Levy," the voice went on. "We understand Mr. Lowenstein, of Galveston, is in your store. Will you please and call him to the 'phone for a minute?"

"This ain't no public pay station," Morris cried. "And besides, Mr. Lowenstein just left here."

He banged the receiver onto the hook and returned at once to the front of the store.

"Now, Mr. Lowenstein," he said, "what can I do for you?"

And two hours later Mr. Lowenstein left the store with the duplicate of a twenty-four-hundred-dollar order in his pocket, deliveries to commence within five days; terms, ninety days net.

"Well, Abe," Morris said the next day as his partner, Abe Potash, entered the show-room, "how are you feeling to-day?"

"Mean, Mawruss," Abe replied. "I feel mean. The doctor says I need a rest. He says I got to go away to the country or I will maybe break down."

"Is *that* so?" said Morris, deeply concerned. "Well, then, you'd better go right away, before you get real serious sick. Why not fix it so you can go away to-morrow yet?"

"To-morrow!" Abe exclaimed. "It don't go so quick as all that, Mawruss. You can't believe everything the doctors tell you. I ain't exactly dead yet, Mawruss. I'm like the feller what everybody says is going to fail, Mawruss. They give him till after Christmas to bust up, and then he does a fine holiday trade, and the first thing you know, Mawruss, he's buying real estate. No, Mawruss, I feel pretty mean, I admit, but I think a good two-thousand-dollar order would put me all right again, and so long as we wouldn't have no more trouble with designers, Mawruss, I guess I would *stay* right too."

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"Well, if that's the case," said Morris, beaming all over, "I guess I can fix you up. Siegmund Lowenstein, of Galveston, was in here yesterday, and I sold him a twenty-four-hundred-dollar order, including them forty-twenty-two's, and you know as well as I do, Abe, them forty-twenty-two's is stickers. We got 'em in stock now over two months, ever since Abe Magnus, of Nashville, turned 'em back on us."

Abe's reception of the news was somewhat disappointing to Morris. He showed no elation, but selected a slightly-damaged cigar from the K. to O. first and second credit customers' box, and lit it deliberately before replying.

"How much was that last order he give us, Mawruss?" he asked.

"Four hundred dollars," Morris replied.

"And what terms?" Abe continued.

"Five off, thirty days."

"And what terms did *you* quote him yesterday?" asked Abe inexorably.

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"Ninety days, net," Morris murmured.

Abe puffed vigorously at his cigar, and there was a long and significant silence.

"I should think, Abe," Morris said at length, "the doctor wouldn't let you smoke cigars if you was nearly breaking down."

"So long as you sell twenty-four hundred dollars at ninety days to a crook and a gambler like Siegmund Lowenstein, Mawruss," Abe replied, "one cigar more or less won't hurt me. If I can stand a piece of news like that, Mawruss, I guess I can stand anything. Why didn't you give him thirty days' dating, too, Mawruss?"

At once Morris plunged into a long account of the circumstances attending the giving of Mr. Lowenstein's order, including the telephone message from Garfunkel & Levy, and at its

conclusion Abe grew somewhat mollified.

"Well, Mawruss," he said, "we took the order and I suppose we got to ship it. When you deal with a gambler like Lowenstein you got to take a gambler's chance. Anyhow, I ain't going to worry about it, Mawruss. Next week I'm going away for a fortnight."

"Where are you going, Abe?" Morris asked.

"To Dotyville, Pennsylvania," Abe replied. "We leave next Saturday. In the meantime I ain't going to worry, Mawruss."

"That's right, Abe," said Morris.

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"Sure it's right," Abe rejoined. "I'm going to leave *you* to do the worrying, and in the meantime I guess I'll look after getting out them forty-twenty-two's. Them forty-twenty-two's—them plum-color Empires was *your* idee, Mawruss. You said they'd make a hit with the Southern trade, Mawruss, and I hope they do, Mawruss, for, if they don't, there ain't much chance of our getting paid for them."

A week later Abe Potash and his wife left for Dotyville, Pennsylvania, and two days afterward Morris received the following letter:

DOTY'S UNION HOUSE,

Dotyville, Pennsylvania.

Dear Morris:

How is things in the store? We got here the day before yesterday and I have got enough already. It is a dead town. The food what they give us reminds me when Pincus Vesell & me was partners together as new beginners and I was making southern trips by dollar and a half a day houses American plan. The man Doty what keeps the hotel also runs the general store also. He says a fellow by the name of Levy used to run it but he couldnt make it go; he made a failure of it. I tried to sell him a few garments but he claims to be overstocked at present and I believe him. I seen some styles what he tries to get rid of it what me & Pincus Vesell made up in small lots way before the Spanish war already. It is a dead town. Me and Rosie leave tonight for Pittsburg and we are going to stay with Rosies brother in law Hyman Margolius. Write us how things is going in the store to the Outlet Auction House Hyman Margolius prop 2132 4 & 6 North Potter Ave Pittsburg Pa. You should see that Miss Cohen billed them 4022s on date we packed them as Goldman the shipping clerk forgot to give them to Arrow Dispatch when they called. That ain't our fault Morris. Write and tell me how things is going in the store and dont forget to tell Miss Cohen about the bill to S. Lowenstein as above

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Yours Truly

A. POTASH.

P. S. How is things in the store?

During the first three days of Abe Potash's vacation he had traveled by local train one hundred and twenty miles to Dotyville, and unpacked and packed two trunks under the shrill and captious supervision of Mrs. Potash. Then followed a tiresome journey to Pittsburgh with two changes of cars, and finally, on the morning of the fourth day, at seven-thirty sharp, he accompanied Hyman Margolius to the latter's place of business.

There he took off his coat and helped Hyman and his staff of assistants to pile up and mark for auction a large consignment of clothing. After this, he called off the lot numbers while Hyman checked them in a first draft of a printed catalogue, and at one o'clock, with hands and face all grimy from contact with the ill-dyed satinets of which the clothing was manufactured, he partook of a substantial luncheon at Bleistift's Restaurant and Lunch-Room.

"Well, Abe," Hyman said, "how do you like the auction business so far as you gone yet?"

"It's a good, live business, Hymie," Abe replied; "but, the way it works out, it ain't always on the square. A fellow what wants to do his creditors buys goods in New York, we'll say, for his business in—Galveston, we'll say, and then when he gets the goods he don't even bother to unpack 'em, Hymie, but ships 'em right away to you. And you examine 'em, and if they're all O. K., why, you send him a check for about half what it costs to manufacture 'em. Then he pockets the check, Hymie, and ten days later busts up on the poor sucker what sold him the goods in New York at ninety days. Ain't that right, Hymie?"

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"Why, that's the funniest thing you ever seen!" Hyman exclaimed.

"What's the funniest thing I ever seen, Hymie?"

"You talking about Galveston, for instance."

Abe turned pale and choked on a piece of *rosbraten*.

"What d'ye mean?" he gasped.

"Why," said Hyman, "I just received a consignment of garments from a feller called Lowenstein in Galveston. He wrote me he was overstocked."

"Overstocked?" Abe cried. "Overstocked? What color was them garments?"

"Why, they was a kind of plum color," said Hyman.

Abe put his hand to his throat and eased his collar.

"And did you send him a check for 'em yet?" he croaked.

"Not yet," said Hyman.

Abe grabbed him by the collar.

"Come!" he said. "Come quick by a lawyer!"

"What for?" Hyman asked. "You're pulling that coat all out of shape yet."

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"I'll buy you another one," Abe cried. "Them plum-color garments is mine, and I want to get 'em back."

Hyman paid the bill, and on their way down the street they passed a telegraph office.

"Wait," Abe cried, "I must send Mawruss a wire."

He entered and seized a telegraph form, which he addressed to Potash & Perlmutter.

"Don't ship no more goods to Lowenstein, Morris. Will explain by letter to-night," he wrote.

"Now, Hymie," he said after he had paid for the dispatch, "we go by your lawyer."

Five minutes later they were closeted with Max Marcus, senior member of the firm of Marcus, Weinschenck & Grab, and a lodge brother of Hymie Margolius. Max made a specialty of amputation cases. He was accustomed to cashing missing arms and legs at a thousand dollars apiece for the victims of rolling-mill and railway accidents, and when the sympathetic jury brought in their generous verdict Max paid the expert witnesses and pocketed the net proceeds. These rarely fell below five thousand dollars.

"Sit down, Hymie. Glad to see you, Mr. Potash," Max said, stroking a small gray mustache with a five-carat diamond ring. "What can I do for *you*?"

"I got some goods belonging to Mr. Potash what a fellow called Lowenstein in Galveston, Texas, shipped me," said Hymie, "and Mr. Potash wants to get 'em back."

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"Replevin, hey?" Max said. "That's a little out of my line, but I guess I can fix you up." He rang for a stenographer. "Take this down," he said to her, and turned to Abe Potash. "Now, tell us the facts."

Abe recounted the tale Mr. Lowenstein had related to Morris Perlmutter, by which Lowenstein made it appear that he was completely out of stock. Next, Hyman Margolius produced Siegmund Lowenstein's letter which declared that Lowenstein was disposing of the Empire cloaks because he was overstocked.

"S'enough," Max declared. "Tell, Mr. Weinschenck to work it up into an affidavit," he continued to the stenographer, "and bring us in a jurat."

A moment later she returned with a sheet of legal cap, on the top of which was typewritten: "Sworn to before me this first day of April, 1904."

"Sign opposite the brace," said Max, pushing the paper at Abe, and Abe scrawled his name where indicated.

"Now, hold up your right hand," said Max, and Abe obeyed.

"Do you solemnly swear that the affidavit subscribed by you is true?" Max went on.

"What affidavit?" Abe asked.

"Why, the one Weinschenck is going to draw when he comes back from lunch, of course," Max replied.

"Sure it's true," said Abe.

"All right," Max concluded briskly.

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"Now give me a check for fifty dollars for my fees, five dollars for a surety company bond, and five dollars sheriff's fees, and I'll get out a replevin order on the strength of that affidavit in half an hour, and have a deputy around to the store at three o'clock to transfer the goods from Hymie to you."

"Sixty dollars is pretty high for a little thing like that, ain't it, Max?" said Hymie.

"High?" Max cried indignantly. "High? Why, if you wasn't a lodge brother of mine, Hymie, I wouldn't have stirred a hand for less than a hundred."

Thus rebuked, Abe paid over the sixty dollars, and Hymie and he went back to the store. Precisely at three a deputy sheriff entered the front door and flashed a gold badge as big as a dinner-plate. His stay was brief, and in five minutes he had relieved Abe of all his spare cigars and departed, leaving only a certified copy of the replevin order and a strong smell of whisky to signalize the transfer of the Empire gowns from Hymie to Abe.

Hardly had he banged the door behind him when a messenger boy entered and handed a telegram to Abe.

"Ain't shipped no goods but the 4022's," it read. "Have wired Lowenstein to return the 4022s. MORRIS."

"Fine! Fine!" Abe exclaimed. He tipped the boy a dime and was about to acquaint Hyman with the good news, when another messenger boy entered and delivered a second telegram to Abe. It read as follows:

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"Lowenstein wires he insists on delivery entire order complete, otherwise he will sue. What shall I wire him? MORRIS."

Abe seized his hat and dashed down the street to the telegraph office.

"Gimme a blank," he said to the operator, who handed him a whole padful. For the next twenty minutes Abe scribbled and tore up by turns until he finally evolved a satisfactory missive. This he handed to the operator, who read it with a broad grin and passed it back at once.

"Wot d'ye take me for?" he said. "A bum? Dere's ladies in de main office."

Abe glared at the operator and began again.

"Here," he said to the operator after another quarter of an hour of scribbling and tearing up, "send this."

It was in the following form:

*Don't send no more goods to Lowenstein
" " " " wires " nobody*

"Fourteen words," the operator said. "Fifty-four cents."

"What's that?" Abe cried. "What yer trying to do? Make money on me? That ain't no fourteen words. That's *nine* words."

"It is, hey?" the operator rejoined. "Quit yer kiddin'. Dat's fourteen words. Ditto marks don't go, see?"

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"You're a fresh young feller," said Abe, paying over fifty-four cents, "and I got a good mind to report you to the head office."

The operator laughed raucously.

"G'wan!" he said. "Beat it, or I'll sick de cops onter yer. It's agin the law to cuss in Pittsburgh, even by telegraft."

When Abe returned to the Outlet Auction House's store Hyman was busy stacking up the plum-colored gowns in piles convenient for shipping.

"Well, Abe," he said, "I thought you was here for a vacation. You're doing some pretty tall hustling for a sick man, I must say."

"I'll tell you the truth, Hymie," Abe replied, "I ain't got no time to be sick. It ain't half-past three yet, and I guess I'll take a couple of them garments and see what I can do with the jobbing and retail trade in this here town."

"Don't you think you'd better take it easy for a while, Abe?" Hyman suggested.

"I am taking it easy," said Abe. "So long as I ain't working I'm resting, ain't it, Hymie? And you know as well as I do, Hymie, selling goods never was work to me. It's a pleasure, Hymie, I assure you."

He placed two of the plum-colored Empire gowns under his arm, and thrusting his hat firmly on the back of his head made straight for the dry-goods district. Two hours later he returned, wearing a broad smile that threatened to engulf his stubby black mustache between his nose and his chin.

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"Hymie," he said, "I'm sorry I got to disturb that nice pile you made of them garments. I'll get right to work myself and assort the sizes."

"Why, what's the trouble now, Abe?" Hyman asked.

"I disposed of 'em, Hymie," Abe replied. "Two hundred to Hamburg and Weiss. Three hundred to the Capitol Credit Outfitting Company, and five hundred to Feinroth and Pearl."

"Hold on there, Abe!" Hymie exclaimed. "You only got six hundred, and you sold a thousand garments."

"I know, Hymie," said Abe, "but I'm going home to-morrow, and I got a month in which to ship the balance."

"Going home?" Hyman cried.

"Sure," said Abe. "I had a good long vacation, and now I got to get down to business."

One morning, two weeks later, Abe sat with his feet cocked up on his desk in the show-room of Potash & Perlmutter's spacious cloak and suit establishment. Between his teeth he held a fine Pittsburgh cheroot at an angle of about ninety-five degrees to his protruding under-lip, and he perused with relish the business-trouble column of the Daily Cloak and Suit Record.

"Now, what do you think of that?" he exclaimed.

"What do I think of what, Abe?" Morris inquired.

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For answer Abe thrust the paper toward his partner with one hand, and indicated a scare headline with the other.

"Fraudulent Bankruptcy in Galveston," it read. "A petition in bankruptcy was filed yesterday against Siegmund Lowenstein, doing business as the O'Gorman-Henderson Dry-Goods Company, in Galveston, Texas. When the Federal receiver took charge of the bankrupt's premises they were apparently swept clean of stock and fixtures. It is understood that Lowenstein has fled to Matamoros, Mexico, where his wife preceded him some two weeks ago. The liabilities are estimated at fifty thousand dollars, and the only asset is the store building, which is valued at ten thousand dollars and is subject to mortgages aggregating about the same amount. The majority of the creditors are in New York City and Boston."

Morris returned the paper to his partner without comment.

"You see, Mawruss," said Abe, as he lit a fresh cheroot. "Sometimes it pays to be sick. Ain't it?"

CHAPTER IV

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"Never no more, Mawruss," said Abe Potash to his partner as they sat in the show-room of their spacious cloak and suit establishment one week after Abe's return from Pittsburgh. "Never no more, Mawruss, because it ain't good policy. This is strictly a wholesale business, and if once we sell a friend *one* garment that friend brings a friend, and that friend brings also a friend, and the first thing you know, Mawruss, we are doing a big retail business at a net loss of fifty cents a garment."

"But this ain't a friend, Abe," Morris protested. "It's my wife's servant-girl. She seen one of them samples, style forty-twenty-two, them plum-color Empires what I took it home to show M. Garfunkel on my way down yesterday, and now she's crazy to have one. If she don't get one my Minnie is afraid she'll leave."

"All right," Abe said, "let her leave. If my Rosie can cook herself and wash herself, Mawruss, I guess it won't hurt your Minnie. Let her try doing her own work for a while, Mawruss. I guess it'll do her good."

"But, anyhow, Abe, I told the girl to come down this morning and I'd give her one for two dollars, and I guess she'll be here most any time now."

"Well, Mawruss," said Abe, "this once is all right, but never no more. We ain't doing a cloak and suit business for the servant-girl trade."

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Further discussion was prevented by the entrance of the retail customer herself. Morris jumped quickly to his feet and conducted her to the rear of the store, while Abe silently sought refuge in the cutting-room upstairs.

"What size do you think you wear, Lina?" Morris asked.

"Big," Lina replied. "Fat."

"Yes, I know," Morris said, "but what size?"

"Very fat," Lina replied. She was a Lithuanian and her generous figure had never known the refining influence of a corset until she had landed at Ellis Island two years before.

"That's the biggest I got, Lina," Morris said, producing the largest-size garment in stock. "Maybe if you try it on over your dress you'll get some idea of whether it's big enough."

Lina struggled feet first into the gown, which buttoned down the back, and for five minutes Morris labored with clenched teeth to fasten it for her.

"That's a fine fit," he said, as he concluded his task. He led her toward the mirror in the front of the show-room just as M. Garfunkel entered the store door.

"Hallo, Mawruss," he cried. "What's this? A new cloak model you got?"



WHAT'S THIS? A NEW CLOAK MODEL YOU GOT?

Morris blushed, while Lina and M. Garfunkel both made a critical examination of the garment's eccentric fit. [Pg 65]

"Why, that's one of them forty-twenty-two's what I ordered a lot of this morning, Mawruss. Ain't it?"

Morris gazed ruefully at the plum-color gown and nodded.

"Then don't ship that order till you hear from me," M. Garfunkel said. "I guess I got to hustle right along."

"Don't be in a hurry, Mr. Garfunkel," Morris cried. "You ain't come in the store just to tell me that, have you?"

"Yes, I have," said Garfunkel, his eye still glued to Lina's bulging figure. "That's all what I come for. I'll write you this afternoon."

He slammed the door behind him and Morris turned to the unbuttoning of the half-smothered Lina.

"That'll be two dollars for *you*, Lina," he said, "and I guess it'll be about four hundred for us."

At seven the next morning, when Abe came down the street from the subway, a bareheaded girl sat on the short flight of steps leading to Potash & Perlmutter's store door. As Abe approached, the girl rose and nodded, whereat Abe scowled.

"If a job you want it," he said, "you should go round to the back door and wait till the foreman comes."

"Me no want job," she said. "Me *coosin*."

"Cousin!" Abe cried. "Whose cousin?"

"Lina's coosin," said the girl. She held out her hand and, opening it, disclosed a two-dollar bill all damp and wrinkled. "Me want dress like Lina." [Pg 66]

"What!" Abe cried. "So soon already!"

"Lina got nice red dress. She show it me last night," the girl said. "Me got one, too."

She smiled affably, and for the first time Abe noticed the smooth, fair hair, the oval face and the slender, girlish figure that seemed made for an Empire gown. Then, of course, there was the two-dollar bill and its promise of a cash sale, which always makes a strong appeal to a credit-harried mind like Abe's. "Oh, well," he said with a sigh, leading the way to the rack of Empire gowns in the rear of the store, "if I must I suppose I must."

He selected the smallest gown in stock and handed it to her.

"If you can get into that by your own self you can have it for two dollars," he said, pocketing the crumpled bill. "I don't button up nothing for nobody."

He gathered up the mail from the letter-box and carried it to the show-room. There was a generous pile of correspondence, and the very first letter that came to his hand bore the legend, "The Paris. Cloaks, Suits and Millinery. M. Garfunkel, Prop." Abe mumbled to himself as he tore it open.

"I bet yer he claims a shortage in delivery, when we ain't even shipped him the goods yet," he said, and commenced to read the letter; "I bet yer he—"

He froze into horrified silence as his protruding eyes took in the import of M. Garfunkel's note. Then he jumped from his chair and ran into the store, where the new retail customer was primping in front of the mirror. [Pg 67]

"Out," he yelled, "out of my store."

She turned from the fascinating picture in the looking-glass to behold the enraged Abe brandishing the letter like a missile, and with one terrified shriek she made for the door and dashed wildly toward the corner.

Morris was smoking an after-breakfast cigar as he strolled leisurely from the subway, and when he turned into White Street Abe was still standing on the doorstep.

"What's the matter?" Morris asked.

"Matter!" Abe cried. "Matter! *Nothing's* the matter. Everything's fine and dandy. Just look at that letter, Mawruss. That's all."

Morris took the proffered note and opened it at once.

"Gents," it read. "Your Mr. Perlmutter sold us them plum-color Empires this morning, and he said they was all the thing on Fifth Avenue. Now, gents, we sell to the First Avenue trade, like what was in your store this afternoon when our Mr. Garfunkel called, and our Mr. Garfunkel seen enough already. Please cancel the order. Your Mr. Perlmutter will understand. Truly yours, The Paris. M. Garfunkel, Prop."

M. Garfunkel lived in a stylish apartment on One Hundred and Eighteenth Street. His family consisted of himself, Mrs. Garfunkel, three children and a Lithuanian maid named Anna, and it was a source of wonder to the neighbors that a girl so slight in frame could perform the menial duties of so large a household. She cooked, washed and sewed for the entire family with such cheerfulness and application that Mrs. Garfunkel deemed her a treasure and left to her discretion almost every domestic detail. Thus Anna always rose at six and immediately awakened Mr. Garfunkel, for M. Garfunkel's breakfast was an immovable feast, scheduled for half-past six. [Pg 68]

But on the morning after he had purchased the plum-color gowns from Potash & Perlmutter it was nearly eight before he awoke, and when he entered the dining-room, instead of the two fried eggs, the sausage and the coffee which usually greeted him, there were spread on the table only the evening papers, a brimming ash-tray and a torn envelope bearing the score of last night's pinochle game.

He was about to return to the bedroom and report Anna's disappearance when a key rattled in the hall door and Anna herself entered. Her cheeks were flushed and her hair was blown about her face in unbecoming disorder. Nevertheless, she smiled the triumphant smile of the well-dressed.

"Me late," she said, but Garfunkel forgot all about his lost breakfast hour when he beheld the plum-color Empire.

"Why," he gasped, "that's one of them forty-twenty-two's I ordered yesterday." [Pg 69]

Anna lifted both her arms the better to display the gown's perfection, and Garfunkel examined it with the eye of an expert.

"Let's see the back," he said. "That looks great on you, Anna."

He spun her round and round in his anxiety to view the gown from all angles.

"I must have been crazy to cancel that order," he went on. "Where did you get it, Anna?"

"Me buy from Potash & Perlmutter," she said. "My coosin Lina works by Mr. Perlmutter. She gets one yesterday for two dollar. Me see it last night and like it. So me get up five o'clock this morning and go downtown and buy one for two dollar, too."

M. Garfunkel made a rapid mental calculation, while Anna left to prepare the belated breakfast.

He estimated that Anna had paid a little less for her retail purchase than the price Potash & Perlmutter had quoted to him for hundred lots.

"They're worth it, too," he said to himself. "Potash & Perlmutter is a couple of pretty soft suckers, to be selling goods below cost to servant-girls. I always thought Abe Potash was a pretty hard

nut, but I guess I'll be able to do business with 'em, after all."

At half-past ten M. Garfunkel entered the store of Potash & Perlmutter and greeted Abe with a smile that blended apology, friendliness and ingratiating in what M. Garfunkel deemed to be just the right proportions. Abe glared in response. [Pg 70]

"Well, Abe," M. Garfunkel cried, "ain't it a fine weather?"

"Is it?" Abe replied. "I don't worry about the kind of weather it is when I gets cancelations, Mr. Garfunkel. What for you cancel that order, Mr. Garfunkel?"

M. Garfunkel raised a protesting palm.

"Now, Abe," he said, "if you was to go into a house what you bought goods off of and seen a garment you just hear is all the rage on Fifth Avenue being tried on by a cow——"

"A cow!" Abe said. "I want to tell you something, Mr. Garfunkel. That lady what you see trying on them Empires was Mawruss' girl what works by his wife, and while she ain't no Lillian Russell nor nothing like that, y'understand, if you think you should get out of taking them goods by calling her a cow you are mistaken."

The qualities of ingratiating and friendliness departed from M. Garfunkel's smile, leaving it wholly apologetic.

"Well, Abe, as a matter of fact," he said, "I ain't canceled that order altogether *absolutely*, y'understand. Maybe if you make inducements I might reconsider it."

"Inducements!" Abe cried. "Inducements is nix. Them gowns costs us three dollars apiece, and we give 'em to you for three-ten. If we make any inducements we land in the poorhouse. Ain't it?" [Pg 71]

"Oh, the price is all right," M. Garfunkel protested, "but the terms is too strict. I can't buy *all* my goods at ten days. Sammet Brothers gives me a line at sixty and ninety days, and so I do most of my business with them. Now if I could get the same terms by *you*, Abe, I should consider your line ahead of Sammet Brothers'."

"Excuse *me*," Abe interrupted. "I think I hear the telephone ringing."

He walked to the rear of the store, where the telephone bell was jingling.

"Miss Cohen," he said to the bookkeeper as he passed the office, "answer the 'phone. I'm going upstairs to speak to Mr. Perlmutter."

He proceeded to the cutting-room, where Morris was superintending the unpacking of piece-goods.

"Mawruss," he said, "M. Garfunkel is downstairs, and he says he will reconsider the cancelation and give it us a big order if we let him have better terms. What d'ye say, Mawruss?"

Morris remained silent for a minute.

"Take a chance, Abe," he said at length. "He can't bust up on us by the first bill. Can he?"

"No," Abe agreed hesitatingly, "but he *might*, Mawruss?"

"Sure he might," said Morris, "but if we don't take no chances, Abe, we might as well go out of the cloak and suit business. Sell him all he wants, Abe."

"I'll sell him all he can pay for, Mawruss," said Abe, "and I guess that ain't over a thousand dollars." [Pg 72]

He returned to the first floor, where M. Garfunkel eagerly awaited him, and produced a box of the firm's K. to M. first and second credit customers' cigars.

"Have a smoke, Mr. Garfunkel," he said.

M. Garfunkel selected a cigar with care and sat down.

"Well, Abe," he said, "that was a long talk you had over the telephone."

"Sure it was," Abe replied. "The cashier of the Kosciusko Bank on Grand Street rang me up. He discounts some of our accounts what we sell responsible people, and he asks me that in future I get regular statements from all my customers—those that I want to discount their accounts in particular."

M. Garfunkel nodded slowly.

"Statements—you shall have it, Abe," he said, "but I may as well tell you that it's foolish to discount bills what you sell *me*. I sometimes discount them myself. I'll send you a statement, anyhow. Now let's look at your line, Abe. I wasted enough time already."

For the next hour M. Garfunkel pawed over Potash & Perlmutter's stock, and when he finally took leave of Abe he had negotiated an order of a thousand dollars; terms, sixty days net.

The statement of M. Garfunkel's financial condition, which arrived the following day, more than satisfied Morris Perlmutter and, had it not been quite so glowing in character, it might even have [Pg 73]

satisfied Abe Potash.

"I don't know, Mawruss," he said; "some things looks too good to be true, Mawruss, and I guess this is one of them."

"Always you must worry, Abe," Morris rejoined. "If Vanderbilt and Astor was partners together in the cloak and suit business, and you sold 'em a couple of hundred dollars' goods, Abe, you'd worry yourself sick till you got a check. I bet yer Garfunkel discounts his bill already."

Morris' prophecy proved to be true, for at the end of four weeks M. Garfunkel called at Potash & Perlmutter's store and paid his sixty-day account with the usual discount of ten per cent. Moreover, he gave them another order for two thousand dollars' worth of goods at the same terms.

In this instance, however, full fifty-nine days elapsed without word from M. Garfunkel, and on the morning of the sixtieth day Abe entered the store bearing every appearance of anxiety.

"Well, Abe," Morris cried, "what's the matter now? You look like you was worried."

"I bet yer I'm worried, Mawruss," Abe replied.

"Well, what's the use of worrying?" he rejoined. "M. Garfunkel's account ain't due till to-day."

"Always M. Garfunkel!" Abe cried. "M. Garfunkel don't worry me much, Mawruss. I'd like to see a check from him, too, Mawruss, but I ain't wasting no time on him. My Rosie is sick." [Pg 74]

"Sick!" Morris exclaimed. "That's too bad, Abe. What seems to be the trouble?"

"She got the rheumatism in her shoulder," Abe replied, "and she tries to get a girl by intelligent offices to help her out, but it ain't no use. It breaks her all up to get a girl, Mawruss. Fifteen years already she cooks herself and washes herself, and now she's got to get a girl, Mawruss, but she can't get one."

Morris clucked sympathetically.

"Maybe that girl of yours, Mawruss," Abe went on as though making an innocent suggestion, "what we sell the forty-twenty-two to, maybe she got a sister or a cousin maybe, what wants a job, Mawruss."

"I'll telephone my Minnie right away," Morris said, and as he turned to do so M. Garfunkel entered. Abe and Morris rushed forward to greet him. Each seized a hand and, patting him on the back, escorted him to the show-room.

"First thing," M. Garfunkel said, "here is a check for the current bill."

"No hurry," Abe and Morris exclaimed, with what the musical critics call splendid attack.

"Now that that's out of the way," M. Garfunkel went on, "I want to give you another order. Only thing is, Mawruss, you know as well as I do that in the installment cloak and suit business a feller needs a lot of capital. Ain't it?"

Morris nodded.

"And if he buys goods only for cash or thirty or sixty days, Abe," M. Garfunkel continued, "he sometimes gets pretty cramped for money, because his own customers takes a long time to pay up. Ain't it?" [Pg 75]

Abe nodded, too.

"Well, then," M. Garfunkel concluded, "I'll give you boys a fine order, but this time it's got to be ninety days."

Abe puffed hard on his cigar, and Morris loosened his collar, which had become suddenly tight.

"I always paid prompt my bills. Ain't it?" M. Garfunkel asked.

"Sure, Mr. Garfunkel," Abe replied. "*That* you did do it. But ninety days is three months, and ourselves we got to pay our bills in thirty days."

"However," Morris broke in, "that is neither there nor here. A good customer is a good customer, Abe, and so *I'm* agreeable."

This put the proposition squarely up to Abe, and he found it a difficult matter to refuse credit to a customer whose check for two thousand dollars was even then reposing in Abe's waistcoat pocket.

"All right," Abe said. "Go ahead and pick out your goods."

For two solid hours M. Garfunkel went over Potash & Perlmutter's line and, selecting hundred lots of their choicest styles, bought a three-thousand-dollar order.

"We ain't got but half of them styles in stock," said Morris, "but we can make 'em up right away." [Pg 76]

"Then, them goods what you got in stock, Mawruss," said Garfunkel, "I must have prompt by to-morrow, and the others in ten days."

"That's all right," Morris replied, and when M. Garfunkel left the store Abe and Morris immediately set about the assorting of the ordered stock.

"Look a-here, Mawruss," Abe said, "I thought you was going to see about that girl for my Rosie."

"Why, so I was, Abe," Morris replied; "I'll attend to it right away."

He went to the telephone and rang up his wife, and five minutes later returned to the front of the store.

"Ain't that the funniest thing, Abe," he said. "My Minnie speaks to the girl, and the girl says she got a cousin what's just going to quit her job, Abe. She'll be the very girl for your Rosie."

"I don't know, Mawruss," Abe replied. "My Rosie is a particular woman. She don't want no girl what's got fired for being dirty or something like that, Mawruss. We first want to get a report on her and find out what she gets fired for."

"You're right, Abe," Morris said. "I'll find out from Lina to-night."

Once more they fell to their task of assorting and packing the major part of Garfunkel's order, and by six o'clock over fifteen hundred dollars' worth of goods was ready for delivery.

"We'll ship them to-morrow," Abe said, as they commenced to lock up for the night, "and don't forget about that girl, Mawruss." [Pg 77]

On his way downtown the next morning Abe met Leon Sammet, senior member of the firm of Sammet Brothers. Between Abe and Leon existed the nominal truce of competition, which in the cloak and suit trade implies that while they cheerfully exchanged credit information from their office files they maintained a constant guerilla warfare for the capture of each other's customers.

Now, M. Garfunkel had been a particularly strong customer of Sammet Brothers, and since Abe assumed that M. Garfunkel had dropped Sammet Brothers in favor of Potash & Perlmutter his manner toward Leon was bland and apologetic.

"Well, Leon," he said, "how's business?"

Leon's face wrinkled into a smile.

"It could be better, of course, Abe," he said, "but we done a tremendous spring trade, anyhow, even though we ain't got no more that sucker Louis Grossman working for us. We shipped a couple of three-thousand-dollar orders last week. One of 'em to Strauss, Kahn & Baum, of Fresno."

These were old customers of Potash & Perlmutter, and Abe winced.

"They was old customers of ours, Leon," he said, "but they done such a cheap class of trade we couldn't cut our line enough to please 'em."

"Is that so?" Leon rejoined. "Maybe M. Garfunkel was an old customer of yours, too, Abe."

"M. Garfunkel?" Abe cried. "Was M. Garfunkel the other?" [Pg 78]

"He certainly was," Leon boasted. "We shipped him three thousand dollars. One of our best customers, Abe. Always pays to the day."

For the remainder of the subway journey Abe was quite unresponsive to Leon's jibes, a condition which Leon attributed to chagrin, and as they parted at Canal Street Leon could not forbear a final gloat.

"I suppose, Abe, M. Garfunkel does too cheap a class of trade to suit you, also. Ain't it?" he said.

Abe made no reply, and as he walked south toward White Street Max Lapidus, of Lapidus & Elenbogen, another and a smaller competitor, bumped into him.

"Hallo, Abe," Max said. "What's that Leon Sammet was saying just now about M. Garfunkel?"

"Oh, M. Garfunkel is a good customer of his," Abe replied cautiously; "so he claims."

"Don't you believe it," said Max. "M. Garfunkel told me himself he used to do some business with Sammet Brothers, but he don't do it no more. We done a big business with M. Garfunkel ourselves."

"So?" Abe commented.

"We sold him a couple of thousand dollars at ninety days last week," Lapidus went on. "He's elegant pay, Abe. We sold him a good-size order every couple of months this season, and he pays prompt to the day. Once he discounted his bill."

"Is that so?" Abe said, as they reached the front of Potash & Perlmutter's store. "Glad to hear M. Garfunkel is so busy. Good-morning, Max." [Pg 79]

Morris Perlmutter met him at the door.

"Hallo, Abe," he cried. "What's the matter? You look pale. Is Rosie worse?"

Abe shook his head.

"Mawruss," he said, "did you ship them goods to M. Garfunkel yet?"

"They'll be out in ten minutes," Morris replied.

"Hold 'em for a while till I telephone over to Klinger & Klein," Abe said.

"What you looking for, Abe?" Morris asked. "More information? You know as well as I do, Abe, that Klinger & Klein is so conservative they wouldn't sell Andrew Carnegie unless they got a certified check in advance."

"That's all right, Mawruss," Abe rejoined. "Maybe they wouldn't sell Andrew Carnegie, but if I ain't mistaken they *did* sell M. Garfunkel. Everybody sold him, even Lapidus & Elenbogen. So I guess I'll telephone 'em."

"Well, wait a bit, Abe," Morris cried. "My Minnie's girl Lina is here with her cousin. I brought 'em down this morning so you could talk to her yourself."

"All right," Abe replied. "Tell 'em to come into the show-room."

A moment later Lina and her cousin Anna entered the show-room. Both were arrayed in Potash & Perlmutter's style forty-twenty-two, but while Lina wore a green hat approximating the hue of early spring foliage, Anna's head-covering was yellow with just a few crimson-lake roses—about eight large ones—on the side.

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"Close the window, Mawruss," said Abe. "There's so much noise coming from outside I can't hear myself think."

"The window is closed, Abe," Morris replied. "It's your imagination."

"Well, then, which one is which, Mawruss?" Abe asked.

"The roses is Anna," Morris said. "Anna, you want to work by Mr. Potash's lady?"

"Sure she does," Abe broke in. "Only I want to ask you a few questions before I hire you. Who did you work by before, Anna?"

Anna hung her head and simpered.

"Mister M. Garfunkel," she murmured.

"Is that so?" Morris exclaimed. "Why, he's a good customer of ours."

"Don't butt in, Mawruss," Abe said. "And what did you leave him for, Anna?"

"Me don't leave *them*," Anna replied. "Mrs. Garfunkel is fine lady. Mister Garfunkel, too. They leave *me*. They goin' away next month, out to the country."

"Moving out to the country, hey?" said Abe. He was outwardly calm, but his eyes glittered. "What country?"

Anna turned to her cousin Lina and spoke a few words of Lithuanian.

"She say she don't remember," Lina explained, "but she say is something sounds like '*canned* goods'."

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"*Canned* goods?" Morris murmured.

Abe bit the ends of his mustache for a moment, and then he leaped to his feet. "*Canada!*" he yelled, and Lina nodded vigorously.

He darted out of the show-room and ran to the telephone. In ten minutes he returned, his face bathed in perspiration.

"Anna," he croaked, "you come to work by me. Yes? How much you get by that—that M. Garfunkel?"

"Twenty dollars a month," Anna replied.

"All right, we'll pay you twenty-two," he said. "You're cheap at the price. So I expect you this evening."

He turned to his partner after the girls had gone.

"Mawruss," he said, "put them goods for M. Garfunkel back in stock. I rung up Klinger & Klein and they sold him four thousand. I also rung up the Perfection Cloak and Suit Company—also four thousand; Margolius & Fried—two thousand; Levy, Martin & Co.—three thousand, and so on. The way I figure it, he must of bought a hundred thousand dollars' worth of goods, all in the last few days, and all at ninety days net. He couldn't get a quarter of the goods in that First Avenue building of his, Mawruss, so where is the rest? Auction houses, Mawruss, north, south, east and west, and I bet yer he got the advance checks for each consignment deposited in Montreal right now. I bet yer he didn't even unpack the cases before he reshipped. Tell Miss Cohen to come in and bring her book."

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When Miss Cohen took her seat Abe rose and cleared his throat for an epistle worthy of the occasion.

"The Paris. M. Garfunkel, Proprietor," he said. "Gents: Owing to circumstances which has arose —No. Wait a bit."

He cleared his throat more vigorously.

"The Paris. M. Garfunkel, Proprietor," he said. "Gents: Owing to the fact that the *U*-nited States bankruptcy laws don't go nowheres except in the *U*-nited States, we are obliged to cancel the order what you give us. Thanking you for past favors and hoping to do a strictly-cash business with you in the future, we are truly yours, Potash & Perlmutter."

Miss Cohen shut her book and arose.

"Wait a bit, Miss Cohen. I ain't through yet," Abe said. He tilted backward and forward on his toes for a moment.

"P. S.," he concluded. "We hope you'll like it in Canada."

CHAPTER V

[Pg 83]

"Things goes pretty smooth for us lately, Mawruss," Abe Potash remarked, shortly after M. Garfunkel's failure. "I guess we are due for a *schlag* somewheres, ain't it?"

"Always you got to kick," Morris cried. "If you would only listen to what *I* got to say oncet in a while, Abe, things would always go smooth."

Abe emitted a raucous laugh.

"Sure, I know," he said, "like this here tenement house proposition you was talking to me about, Mawruss. You ain't content we should have our troubles in the cloak and suit business, Mawruss, you got to go outside yet and find 'em. You got to go into the real estate business too."

"Real-estaters ain't got no such trouble like *we* got it, Abe," Morris retorted. "There ain't no seasons in real estate, Abe. A tenement house this year is like a tenement house last year, Abe, also the year before. They ain't wearing stripes in tenement houses one year, Abe, and solid colors the next. All you do when you got a tenement house, Abe, is to go round and collect the rents, and when you got a customer for it you don't have to draw no report on him. Spot cash, he pays it, Abe, or else you get a mortgage as security."

"You talk like Scheuer Blumenkrohn, Mawruss, when he comes round here last year and wants to swap it two lots in Ozone Grove, Long Island, for a couple of hundred misses' reefers," Abe replied. "When I speculate, Mawruss, I take a hand at auction pinochle."

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"This ain't no speculation, Abe," said Morris. "This is an investment. I seen the house, Abe, six stories and basement stores, and you couldn't get another tenant into it with a shoehorn. It brings in a fine income, Abe."

"Well, if that's the case, Mawruss," Abe rejoined, "why does Harris Rabin want to sell it? Houses ain't like cloaks and suits, Mawruss, you admit it yourself. We sell goods because we don't get no income by keepin' 'em. If we have our store full with cloaks, Mawruss, and they brought in a good income while they was in here, Mawruss, I wouldn't want to sell 'em, Mawruss; I'd want to keep 'em."

"Sure," Morris replied. "But if the income was only four hundred and fifty dollars a month, and next month you got a daughter what was getting married to Alec Goldwasser, drummer for Klinger & Klein, and you got to give Alec a couple of thousand dollars with her, but you don't have no ready cash, *then*, Abe, you'd sell them cloaks, and so that's why Harris Rabin wants to sell the house."

"I want to tell you something, Mawruss," Abe replied. "Harris Rabin could sell a phonograft to a deaf-and-dummy. He could sell moving pictures to a home for the blind, Mawruss. He could also sell anything he wanted to anybody, Mawruss, for you know as well as I do, Mawruss, Harris Rabin is a first-class, A-number-one salesman. And so, if he wants to sell his house so cheap there's lots of real-estaters what know a bargain in houses when they see it. We don't, Mawruss. We ain't real-estaters. We're in the cloak and suit business, and why should Harris Rabin be looking for us to buy his house?"

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"He ain't looking for us, Abe," Morris went on. "That's just the point. I was by Harris Rabin's

house last night, and I seen no less than three real-estaters there. They all want that house, Abe, and if they want it, why shouldn't we? Ike Magnus makes Harris an offer of forty-eight thousand five hundred while I was sitting there already, but Harris wants forty-nine for it. I bet yer, Abe, we could get it for forty-eight seven-fifty—three thousand cash above the mortgages."

"I suppose, Mawruss, you got three thousand lying loose around your pants' pocket. What?"

"Three thousand to a firm like us is nothing, Abe. I bet yer I could go in and see Feder of the Kosciusko Bank and get it for the asking. We ain't so poor, Abe, but what we can buy a bargain when we see it."

Abe shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, Mawruss, if I got to hear about Harris Rabin's house for the rest of my life, all right. I'm agreeable, Mawruss; only, don't ask me to go to no lawyers' offices nor nothing, Mawruss. There's enough to do in the store, Mawruss, without both of us loafing around lawyers' offices." [Pg 86]

A more grudging acquiescence than this would have satisfied Morris, and, without pausing for a cigar, he put on his hat and made straight for Harris Rabin's place of business. The Equinox Clothing Company of which Harris Rabin was president, board of directors and sole stockholder, occupied the third loft of a building on Walker Street. There was no elevator, and as Morris walked upstairs he encountered Ike Magnus at the first landing.

"Hallo, Mawruss!" Ike cried. "Are you buying clothing now? I thought you was in the cloak and suit business."

"Whatever business I'm in, Ike," Morris replied, "I'm in my own business, Ike; and what is somebody else's business ain't my business, Ike. That's the way I feel about it."

He plodded slowly up the next flight, and there stood Samuel Michaelson, another real-estate operator.

"Ah, Mr. Perlmutter!" Samuel exclaimed. "You get around to see the clothing trade once in a while, too. Ain't it?"

"I get around to see all sorts of trade, Mr. Michaelson," Morris rejoined. "I got to get around and hustle to make a living, Mr. Michaelson, because, Mr. Michaelson, I can't make no living by loafing around street corners and buildings, Mr. Michaelson."

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Michaelson as Morris started up the last flight. When he entered the Equinox Clothing Company's office the clang of the bell drowned out the last words of Marks Henochstein's sentence. Mr. Henochstein, another member of the real-estate fraternity, was in intimate conference with Harris Rabin. [Pg 87]

"I think we got him going," he was saying. "My wife seen Mrs. Perlmutter at a *Kaffeeklatsch* yesterday, and she told her I made you an offer of forty-eight four-fifty for the house. Last night when he came around to your place I told him the house ain't no bargain for any one what ain't a real-estater, y'understand, and he gets quite mad about it. Also, I watched him when Ike Magnus tells you he would give forty-eight five for it, and he turned pale. If he——"

At this juncture the doorbell rang and Morris entered.

"No, siree, sir," Harris Rabin bawled. "Forty-nine thousand is my figure, and that ain't forty-eight nine ninety-nine neither."

Here he recognized Morris Perlmutter with an elaborate start and extended his hand in greeting.

"Hallo, Mawruss," he said. "Them real-estaters pester the life out of a feller. 'Tain't no use your hanging around here, Henochstein," he called in sterner tones. "When I make up my mind I make up my mind, and that's all there is to it."

Henochstein turned in crestfallen silence and passed slowly out of the room.

"Them sharks ain't satisfied that you're giving away a house, Mawruss," Harris went on. "They want it you should let 'em have coupons and trading stamps with it." [Pg 88]

"How much did he offer you?" Morris asked.

"Forty-eight five-fifty," Harris Rabin replied. "That feller's got a nerve like a horse."

"Oh, I don't know," Morris murmured. "Forty-eight five-fifty is a good price for the house, Harris."

"Is it?" Harris cried. "Well, maybe you think so, but you ain't such a *griterion*."

Morris was visibly offended at so harsh a rejoinder.

"I know I ain't, Harris," he said. "If I was I wouldn't be here, Harris. I come here like a friend, not like one of them—them—fellers what you talk about. If it wasn't that my Minnie is such a friend to your daughter Miriam I shouldn't bother myself; but, knowing Alec Goldwasser as I do, and being a friend of yours always up to now, Harris, I come to you and say I will give you forty-eight six hundred for the house, and that is my last word."

Harris Rabin laughed aloud.

"Jokes you are making it, Mawruss," he said. "A joke is a joke, but when a feller got all the trouble what I got it, as you know, Mawruss, he got a hard time seeing a joke, Mawruss."

"That ain't no joke, Harris," Morris replied. "That's an offer, and I can sit right down now and make a memorandum if you want it, and pay you fifty dollars as a binder."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Mawruss," Harris said. "You raised Henochstein fifty dollars, so I'll come down fifty dollars, and that'll be forty-eight thousand nine hundred and fifty." [Pg 89]

He grew suddenly excited and grabbed Morris by the arm.

"Don't let's waste no time about it," he cried. "What's the use of memorandums? We go right away by Henry D. Feldman and fix up the contract."

"Hold on." Morris said with a stare that blended frigidity and surprise in just the right proportions. "I ain't said nothing about forty-eight nine-fifty. What I said was forty-eight six."

"You don't mean that, Mawruss," Harris replied. "You mean forty-eight *nine*."

Morris saw that the psychological moment had arrived.

"Look-y here, now, Harris," he said. "Forty-eight six from forty-eight nine is three hundred. Ain't it?"

Harris nodded.

"Then," Morris announced, "we'll split the difference and make it forty-eight seven-fifty."

For one thoughtful moment Harris remained silent, and then he clapped his hand into that of Morris.

"Done!" he cried.

Twenty days elapsed, during which Potash & Perlmutter took title to Harris Rabin's house and paid the balance of the purchase price, moieties of which found their way into the pockets of Magnus, Michaelson and Henochstein. At length, the first of the month arrived and Abe and Morris left the store early so that they might collect the rents of their real property. [Pg 90]

"I seen the house, Abe, and *you* seen the house," Morris said as they turned the corner of the crowded East Side street on which their property fronted, "but you can't tell nothing from looking at a property, Abe. When you get the rents, Abe, *that's* when you find it out that you got a fine property, Abe."

He led the way up the front stoop of the tenement and knocked at the first door on the left-hand side. There was no response.

"They must be out. Ain't it?" Abe suggested.

Morris faced about and knocked on the opposite door, with a similar lack of response.

"I guess they go out to work and lock up their rooms," Morris explained. "We should have came here after seven o'clock."

They walked to the end of the hall and knocked on the door of one of the two rear apartments.

"Come!" said a female voice.

Morris opened the door and they entered.

"We've come for the rent," he said. "Him and me is the new landlords."

The tenant excused herself while she retired to one of the inner rooms and explored her person for the money. Then she handed Morris ten greasy one-dollar bills.

"What's this?" Morris cried. "I thought the rear rooms were fourteen dollars a month. I saw the receipts made out last month." [Pg 91]

The tenant grinned fiendishly.

"Sure you did," she replied. "We've been getting all kinds of receipts. Oncet we got a receipt for eighteen dollars, when dere was some vacancies in de house, but one of de syndicate says he'd get some more of dem 'professional' tenants, because it didn't look so good to a feller what comes snooping around for to *buy* the house, to see such high rents."

"Syndicate?" Abe murmured. "Professional tenants?"

"Sure," the tenant replied. "Dere was four to de syndicate. Magnus was one. Sumpin about a hen was de other, and den dere was dis here Rabin and a guy called Michaelson."

"And what is this about professional tenants?" Morris croaked.

"Oh, dere was twenty-four families in de house, includin' de housekeeper," the tenant replied. "Eighteen of 'em was professionals, and when de syndicate sold youse de house de professionals moved up to a house on Fourt' Street what de syndicate owns."

Abe pulled his hat over his eyes and thrust his hands into his trousers' pockets.

"S'enough, lady," he said; "I heard enough already."

He turned to Morris.

"Yes, Mawruss," he said bitterly. "You're right. There ain't no seasons in real estate nor in suckers neither, Mawruss. You can catch 'em every day in the year, Mawruss. I'm going home, but if you need an express wagon to carry away them rents, Mawruss, there's a livery stable around the corner." [Pg 92]

It was at least a week before Abe could bring himself to address his partner, save in the gruffest monosyllables; but an unusual rush of spring customers brought about a reconciliation, and Abe and Morris forgot their real-estate venture in the reception of out-of-town trade. In the conduct of their business Morris devoted himself to manufacturing and shipping the goods, while Abe attended to the selling end. Twice a year Abe made a long trip to the West or South, with shorter trips down East between times, and he never tired of reminding his partner how overworked he, Abe, was.

"I got my hands full, Mawruss," he said, after he had greeted half a dozen Western customers; "I got enough to do here, Mawruss, without running around the country. We ought to do what other houses does, Mawruss. We ought to get a good salesman. We got three thousand dollars to throw away on real estate, Mawruss; why don't we make an investment like Sammet Brothers made it? Why don't we invest in a crackerjack, A-number-one salesman?"

"I ain't stopping you, Abe," Morris replied. "Why don't we? Klinger & Klein has a good boy, Alec Goldwasser. He done a big trade for 'em, Abe, and they don't pay him much, neither."

"Alec Goldwasser!" Abe cried. "I'm surprised to hear you, Mawruss, you should talk that way. We paid Alec Goldwasser enough already, Mawruss. We paid him that two thousand dollars what he got with Miriam Rabin." [Pg 93]

Morris looked guilty.

"Ain't I told you yet, Abe?" he said. "I thought I told you."

"You ain't told me nothing," said Abe.

"Why, Alec Goldwasser and Miriam Rabin ain't engaged no longer. The way my Minnie tells me, Rabin says he don't want his daughter should marry a man without a business of his own, so the match is off."

"Well, Mawruss," Abe commented, "you can't make me feel bad by telling me *that*. But anyhow, I don't see no medals on Alec Goldwasser as a salesman, neither. He ain't such a salesman what we want it, Mawruss."

"All right," Morris replied. "It's you what goes on the road, not me, and you meet all the drummers. Suggest somebody yourself."

Abe pondered for a moment.

"There's Louis Mintz," he said finally. "He works by Sammet Brothers. He's a high-priced man, Mawruss, but he's worth it."

"Sure he's worth it," Morris rejoined, "and he knows it, too. I bet yer he's making five thousand a year by Sammet Brothers."

"I know it," said Abe, "but his contract expires in a month from now, and it ain't no cinch to work for Sammet Brothers, neither, Mawruss. I bet yer Louis' got throat trouble, talking into a customer them garments what Leon Sammet makes up, and Louis' pretty well liked in the trade, too, Mawruss." [Pg 94]

"Well, why don't you see him, Abe?"

"I'll tell you the truth, Mawruss," Abe replied. "I *did* see him. I offered him all what Sammet Brothers gives him, and I told him we make a better line for the price, but it ain't no use. Louis says a salesman's got to work hard anyhow, so he may as well work a little harder, and he says, too, it spoils a man's trade when he makes changes."

Here a customer entered the store and Abe was busy for more than half an hour. At the end of that time the customer departed and Morris returned to the show-room.

"Abe," he said, "I got an idea."

Abe looked up.

"More real estate?" he asked.

"Not more real estate, Abe," Morris corrected, "but the *same* real estate. When we're stuck we're stuck, Abe, ain't it?"

Abe nodded.

"So I got an idea," Morris went on, "that we go to Louis and tell him we give him the same money what Sammet Brothers give him, only we give him a bonus."

"A bonus!" Abe cried. "How much of a bonus?"

"A *big* bonus, Abe," Morris replied. "We'll give him the house."

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Abe remained silent.

"It'll look big, anyhow," Morris continued.

"Look big!" Abe exclaimed. "It is big. It's three thousand dollars."

"Well, you can't reckon stickers by what they cost," Morris explained. "It's what they'll sell for."

"You're right, Mawruss," Abe commented bitterly. "And that house wouldn't sell for Confederate money. I'll see Louis Mintz to-night."

Abe saw Louis that very evening, and they met by appointment at the store ten days later. In the meantime Louis had inspected the house, and when he entered Potash & Perlmutter's show-room his face wore none too cheerful an expression.

"Well, Louis," Abe cried, "you come to tell us it's all right. Ain't it?"

Louis shook his head.

"Abe," he said, "the old saying is you should never look at a horse's teeth what somebody gives you, but that house is pretty near vacant."

"What of it?" Abe asked. "It's a fine house, ain't it?"

"Sure, it's a fine house," Louis agreed. "But what good is a fine house if you can't rent it? You can't eat it, can you?"

"No," Morris replied, "but you can sell it."

"Well," Louis admitted, "selling houses ain't in my line? Maybe if I knew enough about it I could sell it."

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"But there's real-estaters what knows all about selling a house," Morris began.

"You bet there is," Abe interrupted savagely.

"And you could get a real-estater to sell it for you," Morris concluded with malevolent glance at his partner.

Louis consulted a list of the tenants which he had made.

"I'll think it over," he said, "and let you know to-morrow."

The next day he greeted Abe and Morris more cordially.

"I thought it over, Abe," he said, "and I guess it'll be all right."

"Fine!" Abe cried. "Let's go down and see Henry D. Feldman right away."

Just as a congenital dislocation of the hipbone suggests the name of Doctor Lorenz, so the slightest dislocation of the cloak and suit business immediately calls for Henry D. Feldman. No cloak and suit bankruptcy would be complete without his name as attorney, either for the petitioning creditors or the bankrupt, and no action for breach of contract of employment on the part of a designer or a salesman could successfully go to the jury unless Henry D. Feldman wept crocodile tears over the summing up of the plaintiff's case.

In the art of drawing agreements relative to the cloak and suit trade in all its phases of buying, selling, employing or renting, he was a virtuoso, and his income was that of six Supreme Court judges rolled into one. For the rest, he was of impressive, clean-shaven appearance, and he was of the opinion that a liberal sprinkling of Latin phrases rendered his conversation more pleasing to his clients.

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Louis and Abe were ushered into his office only after half an hour's waiting at the end of a line of six clients, and they wasted no time in stating their business.

"Mr. Feldman," Abe murmured, "this is Mr. Louis Mintz what comes to work by us as a salesman."

"Mr. Mintz," Mr. Feldman said, "you are to be congratulated. Potash & Perlmutter have a reputation in the trade *nulli secundum*, and it is generally admitted that the goods they produce are *summa cum laude*."

"We make fall and winter goods, too," Abe explained. "All kinds of garments, Mr. Feldman. I don't want to give Louis no wrong impression. He's got to handle lightweights as well as heavyweights, too."

Mr. Feldman stared blankly at Abe and then continued: "No doubt you have quite settled on the terms."

"We've talked it all over," said Louis, "and this is what it is."

He then specified the salary and commission to be paid, and engaged Mr. Feldman to draw the

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deed for the tenement house.

"And how long is this contract to last?" Feldman asked.

"For five years," Abe replied.

"Five years nothing," said Louis. "I wouldn't work for no one on a five years' contract. One year is what I want it."

"One year!" Abe cried. "Why, Louis, that ain't no way to talk. In one year you'd just about get well enough acquainted with our trade—of course, I'm only *talking*, y'understand—to cop it out for some other house what would pay you a couple of hundred more. No, Louis, I think it ought to be for five years."

"Of course, if you think I'm the kind what takes a job to cop out the firm's trade, Abe," Louis commenced, "why—"

"I'm only saying for the sake of argument," Abe hastened to explain. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Louis: I'll make it two years, and at the end of that time if you want to quit you can do it; only, you should agree not to work as salesman for no other house for the space of one year afterward or you can go on working for us for one year afterward. How's that?"

"I think that's eminently fair," Mr. Feldman broke in hurriedly. "You can't refuse those terms, Mr. Mintz. Mr. Potash will sign for his partner, I apprehend, and then Mr. Perlmutter will be bound under the principle of *qui fecit per alium fecit per se*."

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No one could stand up against such a flood of Latin, and Louis nodded.

"All right," he said. "Let her go that way."

Mr. Feldman immediately rang for a stenographer.

"Come back to-morrow at four o'clock," he said. "I shall send a clerk with the deed to be signed by Mrs. Potash and Mrs. Perlmutter to-night."

The next afternoon, at half an hour after the appointed time, the contract was executed and the deed delivered to Louis Mintz, and on the first of the following month Louis entered upon his new employment.

Louis' first season with his new employers was fraught with good results for Potash & Perlmutter, who reaped large profits from Louis' salesmanship; but for Louis it had been somewhat disappointing.

"I never see nothing like it," he complained to Abe. "That tenement house is like a summer hotel—people coming and going all the time; and every time a tenant moves yet I got to pay for painting and repapering the rooms. You certainly stuck me good on that house."

"Stuck you!" Abe cried. "We didn't stuck you, Louis. We just give you the house as a bonus. If it don't rent well, Louis, you ought to sell it."

"Don't I know I ought to sell it?" Louis cried; "but who's going to buy it? Real-estater after real-estater comes to look at it, and it all amounts to nix. They wouldn't take the house for the mortgages."

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For nearly a year and a half Louis and Abe repeated this conversation every time Louis came back from the road, and on the days when Louis paid interest on mortgages and premiums on fire insurance he grew positively tearful.

"Why don't you pay me what I am short from paying carrying charges on that property?" Louis asked one day. "And I'll give you the house back."

Abe laughed.

"You should make that proposition to the feller what sold us the house," Abe said jocularly.

"Any one what sold that house once, Abe," Louis rejoined, "don't want it back again."

At length, when Louis was absent on a business trip some three months before the expiration of his contract, Abe approached Morris in the show-room and mooted the subject of taking back the house.

"That house is a sticker, Mawruss," he said, "and we certainly shouldn't let Louis suffer by it. The boy done well by us, and we don't want to lose him."

"Well, Abe," Morris replied, "the way I look at it, we should wait till his time is pretty near up. Maybe he will renew the contract without our taking back the house, Abe; but if the worst comes to the worst, Abe, we give him what he spent on the house and take it back, *providing* he renews the contract for a couple of years. Ain't it?"

Abe nodded doubtfully.

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"Maybe you're right, Mawruss," he said; "but the boy done good for us, Mawruss. We made it a big profit by him this year already, and I don't want him to think that we ain't doing the right thing by him."

"Since when was you so soft-hearted, Abe?" Morris asked satirically; and when Louis came back from the road, a week later, no mention was made of the house until Louis himself broached the topic.

"Look'y here, Abe," Louis said, "what are you going to do for me about that house? Counting the rent I collected and the money I laid out for carrying charges, I'm in the hole eight hundred and fifty dollars already."

"Do for you, Louis!" Morris replied. "Why, what can we do for you? Why don't you fix it up like this, Louis? Why don't you make one last campaign among the real-estaters, and then if you don't succeed maybe we can do something."

"That's right, Louis," Abe said. "Just try it and see what comes of it."

Then Abe handed Louis a cigar and dismissed the subject, which never again arose until Louis was on his final trip.

"Ain't it funny, Mawruss," Abe said, the morning of Louis' expected return—"ain't it funny he ain't mentioned that house to us since we spoke to him the last time he was home?"

"I know it," Morris replied, "but you needn't worry, Abe. It says in the contract that Louis can't take a job as salesman with any other house till one year is up, and the boy can't afford to stay loafing around for a whole year." [Pg 102]

Abe nodded, and as he turned to look up the contract in the safe the store door opened and Louis himself entered.

"Hallo, Louis," Abe cried. "Glad to see you, Louis. Another good trip?"

Louis nodded, and they all passed into the show-room.

"Well, you're going to make many more of them for us before you're through, Louis," Abe said.

Louis grunted, and Abe and Morris exchanged disquieting glances.

"You know, Louis," Morris said in the dulcet accents of the sucking dove, "your contract is up next week, and Abe and me was talking about it the other day, Louis, and about the house, too, and we says we should do something about that house, Louis, and so we'll make another contract for about, say, three years, and we'll fix it up about the house when we all sign the contract, Louis. We meant to take back the house all the time, Louis. We was only kidding you along, Louis," he continued.

"So you was only kidding me along when you told me to see them real-estaters, hey?" Louis demanded.

"Sure," Abe and Morris replied.

"Then you was the ones what got kidded," Louis said, "for the last time I was in town I took your advice. Do you know a feller called Michaelson? And two other fellers by the name of Henochstein and Magnus?" [Pg 103]

Abe nodded.

"Well, them three fellers took that house off of my hands and paid me six hundred dollars to boot, over and above the seven hundred and fifty I sunk in it."

Abe and Morris puffed vigorously at their cigars.

"And what's more," Louis went on, "they introduced me to Harris Rabin, of the Equinox Clothing Company. I guess you know him, too, don't you?"

Morris admitted sullenly that he did.

"He's got a daughter, Miss Miriam Rabin," Louis concluded. "Her and me is going to announce our engagement in next Sunday's Herald."

He paused and watched Morris and Abe, to see the news sink in.

"And as soon as we're married," he said, "back to the road for mine, but not with Potash & Perlmutter."

"I guess you're mistaken, Louis," Abe cried. "I guess you got a contract with us what will stop you going on the road for another year yet."

"Back up, Abe," Louis said. "That there contract says I can't work as a *salesman* for any other house for a year. But Rabin and me is going as partners together in the cloak and suit business, and if there's anything in that contract about me not selling cloaks as my own boss I'll eat it."

Abe went to the safe for the contract. At last he found it, and after reading it over he handed it to Morris. [Pg 104]

"*You* eat it, Mawruss," he said. "Louis is right."

CHAPTER VI

"After all, Mawruss," Abe declared as he glanced over the columns of the Daily Cloak and Suit Record, "after all a feller feels more satisfied when he could see the customers himself and find out just exactly how they do business, y'understand. Maybe the way we lost Louis Mintz wasn't such a bad thing anyhow, Mawruss. I bet yer if Louis would of been selling goods for us, Mawruss, we would of been in that Cohen & Schondorf business too. Me, I am different, Mawruss. So soon as I went in that store, Mawruss, I could see that them fellers was in bad. I'm very funny that way, Mawruss."

"You shouldn't throw no bouquets at yourself because you got a little luck, Abe," Morris commented.

"Some people calls it luck, Mawruss, but I call it judgment, y'understand."

"Sure, I know," Morris continued, "but how about Hymie Kotzen, Abe? Always you said it that feller got lots of judgment, Abe."

"A feller could got so much judgment as Andrew Carnegie," Abe retorted, "and oncet in a while he could play in hard luck too. Yes, Mawruss, Hymie Kotzen is certainly playing in hard luck." [Pg 105]

"Is he?" Morris Perlmutter replied. "Well, he don't look it when I seen him in the Harlem Winter Garden last night, Abe. Him and Mrs. Kotzen was eating a family porterhouse between 'em with tchampanyer wine yet."

"Well, Mawruss," Abe said, "he needs it tchampanyer wine, Mawruss. Last month I seen it he gets stung two thousand by Cohen & Schondorf, and to-day he's chief mourner by the Ready Pay Store, Barnet Fischman proprietor. Barney stuck him for fifteen hundred, Mawruss, so I guess he needs it tchampanyer wine to cheer him up."

"Well, maybe he needs it diamonds to cheer him up, also, Abe," Morris added. "That feller got diamonds on him, Abe, like 'lectric lights on the front of a moving-picture show."

"Diamonds never harmed nobody's credit, Mawruss," Abe rejoined. "You can get your money out of diamonds most any time, Mawruss. I see by the papers diamonds increase in price thirty per cent. in six months already. Yes, Mawruss, diamonds goes up every day."

"And so does the feller what wears 'em, Abe," Morris went on. "In fact, the way that Hymie Kotzen does business I shouldn't be surprised if he goes up any day, too. Andrew Carnegie couldn't stand it the failures what that feller gets into, Abe."

"That's just hard luck, Mawruss," Abe replied; "and if he wears it diamonds, Mawruss, he paid for 'em himself, Mawruss, and he's got a right to wear 'em. So far what I hear it, Mawruss, he never stuck nobody for a cent." [Pg 106]

"Oh, Hymie ain't no crook, Abe," Morris admitted, "but I ain't got no use for a feller wearing diamonds. Diamonds looks good on women, Abe, and maybe also on a hotel-clerk or a feller what runs a restaurant, Abe, but a business man ain't got no right wearing diamonds."

"Of course, Mawruss, people's got their likes and dislikes," Abe said; "but all the same I seen it many a decent, respectable feller with a good business, Abe, what wants a little accommodation at his bank. But he gets turned down just because he goes around looking like a slob; while a feller what can't pay his own laundry bill, Mawruss, has no trouble getting a thousand dollars because the second vice-president is buffaloeed already by a stovepipe hat, a Prince Albert coat and a four-carat stone with a flaw in it."

"Well, a four-carat stone wouldn't affect me none, Abe," Morris said, "and believe me, Abe, Hymie Kotzen's diamonds don't worry me none, neither. All I'm troubling about now is that I got an appetite like a horse, so I guess I'll go to lunch."

Abe jumped to his feet. "Give me a chance oncet in a while, Mawruss," he protested. "Every day comes half-past twelve you got to go to your lunch. Ain't I got no stomach, neither, Mawruss?"

"Oh, go ahead if you want to," Morris grumbled, "only don't stay all day, Abe. Remember there's other people wants to eat, too, Abe." [Pg 107]

"I guess the shoe pinches on the other foot now, Mawruss," Abe retorted as he put on his hat. "When I get through eating I'll be back."

He walked across the street to Wasserbauer's Café and Restaurant and seated himself at his

favorite table.

"Well, Mr. Potash," Louis, the waiter, cried, dusting off the tablecloth with a red-and-white towel, "some nice *Metzelsuppe* to-day, huh?"

"No, Louis," Abe replied as he took a dill pickle from a dishful on the table, "I guess I won't have no soup to-day. Give me some *gedämpftes Kalbfleisch mit Kartoffelklösse*."

"Right away quick, Mr. Potash," said Louis, starting to hurry away.

"Ain't I nobody here, Louis?" cried a bass voice at the table behind Abe. "Do I sit here all day?"

"Ex-cuse me, Mr. Kotzen," Louis exclaimed. "Some nice roast chicken to-day, Mr. Kotzen?"

"I'll tell you what I want it, Louis, not you me," Mr. Kotzen grunted. "If I want to eat it roast chicken I'll say so. If I don't I won't."

"Sure, sure," Louis cried, rubbing his hands in a perfect frenzy of apology.

"Gimme a *Schweizerkäse* sandwich and a cup of coffee," Mr. Kotzen concluded, "and if you don't think you can bring it back here in half an hour, Louis, let me know, that's all, and I'll ask Wasserbauer if he can help you out." [Pg 108]

Abe had started on his second dill pickle, and he held it in his hand as he turned around in his chair. "Hallo, Hymie," he said; "ain't you feeling good to-day?"

"Oh, hallo, Abe," Kotzen cried, glancing over; "why don't you come over and sit at my table?"

"I guess I will," Abe replied. He rose to his feet with his napkin tucked into his collar and, carrying the dish of dill pickles with him, he moved over to Kotzen's table.

"What's the matter, Hymie?" Abe asked. "You ain't sick, are you?"

"That depends what you call it sick, Abe," Hymie replied. "I don't got to see no doctor exactly, Abe, if that's what you mean. But that Sam Feder by the Kosciusko Bank, I was over to see him just now, and I bet you he makes me sick."

"I thought you always got along pretty good with Sam, Hymie," Abe mumbled through a mouthful of dill pickle.

"So I do," said Hymie; "but he heard it something about this here Ready Pay Store and how I'm in it for fifteen hundred, and also this Cohen & Schondorf sticks me also, and he's getting anxious. So, either he wants me I should give him over a couple of accounts, or either I should take up some of my paper. Well, you know Feder, Abe. He don't want nothing but A Number One concerns, and then he got the bank's lawyer what is his son-in-law, De Witt C. Feinholz, that he should draw up the papers; and so it goes. I got it bills receivable due the first of the month, five thousand dollars from such people like Heller, Blumenkrohn & Co., of Cincinnati, and The Emporium, Duluth, all gilt-edge accounts, Abe, and why should I lose it twenty per cent. on them, ain't it?" [Pg 109]

"Sure," Abe murmured.

"Well, that's what I told Feder," Hymie went on. "If I got to take up a couple of thousand dollars I'll do it. But running a big plant like I got it, Abe, naturally it makes me a little short."

"Naturally," Abe agreed. He scented what was coming.

"But anyhow, I says to Feder, I got it lots of friends in the trade, and I ain't exactly broke yet, neither, Abe."

He lifted his Swiss-cheese sandwich in his left hand, holding out the third finger the better to display a five-carat stone, while Abe devoted himself to his veal.

"Of course, Abe," Hymie continued, "on the first of the month—that's only two weeks already—things will be running easy for me."

He looked at Abe for encouragement, but Abe's facial expression was completely hidden by veal stew, fragments of which were clinging to his eyebrows.

"But, naturally, I'm at present a little short," Hymie croaked, "and so I thought maybe you could help me out with, say a thousand dollars till the first of the month, say." [Pg 110]

Abe laid down his knife and fork and massaged his face with his napkin.

"For my part, Hymie," he said, "you should have it in a minute. I know it you are good as gold, and if you say that you will pay on the first of the month a U-nited States bond ain't no better."

He paused impressively and laid a hand on Hymie's knee.

"Only, Hymie," he concluded, "I got it a partner. Ain't it? And you know Mawruss Perlmutter, Hymie. He's a pretty hard customer, Hymie, and if I was to draw you the firm's check for a thousand, Hymie, that feller would have a receiver by the court to-morrow morning already. He's a holy terror, Hymie, believe me."

Hymie sipped gloomily at his coffee.

"But Mawruss Perlmutter was always a pretty good friend of mine, Abe," he said. "Why shouldn't he be willing to give it me if you are agreeable? Ain't it? And, anyhow, Abe, it can't do no harm to ask him."

"Well, Hymie, he's over at the store now," Abe replied. "Go ahead and ask him."

"I know it what he'd say if I ask him, Abe. He'd tell me I should see you; but you say I should see him, and then I'm up in the air. Ain't it?"

Abe treated himself to a final rubdown with the napkin and scrambled to his feet.

"All right, Hymie," he said. "If you want me I should ask him I'll ask him."

[Pg 111]

"Remember, Abe," Hymie said as Abe turned away, "only till the first, so sure what I'm sitting here. I'll ring you up in a quarter of an hour."

When Abe entered the firm's show-room five minutes later he found Morris consuming the last of some crullers and coffee brought in from a near-by bakery by Jake, the shipping clerk.

"Well, Abe, maybe you think that's a joke you should keep me here a couple of hours already," Morris said.

"Many a time I got to say that to you already, Mawruss," Abe rejoined. "But, anyhow, I didn't eat it so much, Mawruss. It was Hymie Kotzen what keeps me."

"Hymie Kotzen!" Morris cried. "What for should he keep you, Abe? Blows you to some tchampanyer wine, maybe?"

"Tchampanyer he ain't drinking it to-day, Mawruss, I bet yer," Abe replied. "He wants to lend it from us a thousand dollars." Morris laughed raucously.

"What a chance!" he said.

"Till the first of the month, Mawruss," Abe continued, "and I thought maybe we would let him have it."

Morris ceased laughing and glared at Abe.

"Tchampanyer you must have been drinking it, Abe," he commented.

"Why shouldn't we let him have it, Mawruss?" Abe demanded. "Hymie's a good feller, Mawruss, and a smart business man, too."

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"Is he?" Morris yelled. "Well, he ain't smart enough to keep out of failures like Barney Fischman's and Cohen & Schondorf's, Abe, but he's too smart to lend it us a thousand dollars, supposing we was short for a couple of days. No, Abe, I heard it enough about Hymie Kotzen already. I wouldn't positively not lend him nothing, Abe, and that's flat."

To end the discussion effectually he went to the cutting-room upstairs and remained there when Hymie rang up.

"It ain't no use, Hymie," Abe said. "Mawruss wouldn't think of it. We're short ourselves. You've no idee what trouble we got it with some of our collections."

"But, Abe," Hymie protested, "I got to have the money. I promised Feder I would give it him this afternoon."

Abe remained silent.

"I tell you what I'll do, Abe," Hymie insisted; "I'll come around and see you."

"It won't be no use, Hymie," Abe said, but Central was his only auditor, for Hymie had hung up the receiver. Indeed, Abe had hardly returned to the show-room before Hymie entered the store door.

"Where's Mawruss?" he asked.

"Up in the cutting-room," Abe replied. "Good!" Hymie cried. "Now look'y here, Abe, I got a proposition to make it to you."

[Pg 113]

He tugged at the diamond ring on the third finger of his left hand and laid it on a sample-table. Then from his shirt-bosom he unscrewed a miniature locomotive headlight, which he deposited beside the ring.

"See them stones, Abe?" he continued. "They costed it me one thousand three hundred dollars during the panic already, and to-day I wouldn't take two thousand for 'em. Now, Abe, you sit right down and write me out a check for a thousand dollars, and so help me I should never stir out of this here office, Abe, if I ain't on the spot with a thousand dollars in hand two weeks from to-day, Abe, you can keep them stones, settings and all."

Abe's eyes fairly bulged out of his head as he looked at the blazing diamonds.

"But, Hymie," he exclaimed, "I don't want your diamonds. If I had it the money myself, Hymie, believe me, you are welcome to it like you was my own brother."

"I know all about that, Abe," Hymie replied, "but you ain't Mawruss, and if you got such a regard for me what you claim you have, Abe, go upstairs and ask Mawruss Perlmutter will he do it me the favor and let me have that thousand dollars with the stones as security."

Without further parley Abe turned and left the show-room.

"Mawruss," he called from the foot of the stairs, "come down here once. I want to show you something." [Pg 114]

In the meantime Hymie pulled down the shades and turned on the electric lights. Then he took a swatch of black velveteen from his pocket and arranged it over the sample-table with the two gems in its folds.

"Hymie Kotzen is inside the show-room," Abe explained when Morris appeared in answer to his summons.

"Well, what have I got to do with Hymie Kotzen?" Morris demanded.

"Come inside and speak to him, Mawruss," Abe rejoined. "He won't eat you."

"Maybe you think I'm scared to turn him down, Abe?" Morris concluded as he led the way to the show-room. "Well, I'll show you different."

"Hallo, Mawruss," Hymie cried. "What's the good word?"

Morris grunted an inarticulate greeting.

"What you got all the shades down for, Abe?" he asked.

"Don't touch 'em," Hymie said. "Just you have a look at this sample-table first."

Hymie seized Morris by the arm and turned him around until he faced the velveteen.

"Ain't them peaches, Mawruss?" he asked.

Morris stared at the diamonds, almost hypnotized by their brilliancy.

"Them stones belong to you, Mawruss," Hymie went on, "if I don't pay you inside of two weeks the thousand dollars what you're going to lend me." [Pg 115]

"We ain't going to lend you no thousand dollars, Hymie," Morris said at last, "because we ain't got it to lend. We need it in our own business, Hymie, and, besides, you got the wrong idee. We ain't no pawnbrokers, Hymie; we are in the cloak and suit business."

"Hymie knows it all about that, Mawruss," Abe broke in, "and he shows he ain't no crook, neither. If he's willing to trust you with them diamonds, Mawruss, we should be willing to trust him with a thousand dollars. Ain't it?"

"He could trust me with the diamonds, Abe, because I ain't got no use for diamonds," Morris replied. "If anyone gives me diamonds that I should take care of it into the safe they go. I ain't a person what sticks diamonds all over myself, Abe, and I don't buy no tchampanyer wine one day and come around trying to lend it from people a thousand dollars the next day, Abe."

"It was my wife's birthday," Hymie explained; "and if I got to spend it my last cent, Mawruss, I always buy tchampanyer on my wife's birthday."

"All right, Hymie," Morris retorted; "if you think it so much of your wife, lend it from her a thousand dollars."

"Make an end, make an end," Abe cried; "I hear it enough already. Put them diamonds in the safe and we give Hymie a check for a thousand dollars." [Pg 116]

Morris shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, Abe," he said. "Do what you please, but remember what I tell it you now. I don't know nothing about diamonds and I don't care nothing about diamonds, and if it should be that we got to keep it the diamonds I don't want nothing to do with them. All I want it is my share of the thousand dollars."

He turned on his heel and banged the show-room door behind him, while Abe pulled up the shades and Hymie turned off the lights.

"That's a fine crank for you, Abe," Hymie exclaimed.

Abe said nothing, but sat down and wrote out a check for a thousand dollars.

"I hope them diamonds is worth it," he murmured, handing the check to Hymie.

"If they ain't," Hymie replied as he made for the door, "I'll eat 'em, Abe, and I ain't got too good a di-gestion, neither."

At intervals of fifteen minutes during the remainder of the afternoon Morris visited the safe and inspected the diamonds until Abe was moved to criticise his partner's behavior.

"Them diamonds ain't going to run away, Mawruss."

"Maybe they will, Abe," Morris replied, "if we leave the safe open and people comes in and out all the time." [Pg 117]

"So far, nobody ain't took nothing out of that safe, Mawruss," Abe retorted; "but if you want to lock the safe I'm agreeable."

"What for should we lock the safe?" Morris asked. "We are all the time getting things out of it what we need. Ain't it? A better idee I got it, Abe, is that you should put on the ring and I will wear the pin, or you wear the pin and I will put on the ring."

"No, siree, Mawruss," Abe replied. "If I put it on a big pin like that and I got to take it off again in a week's time might I would catch a cold on my chest, maybe. Besides, I ain't built for diamonds, Mawruss. So, you wear 'em both, Mawruss."

Morris forced a hollow laugh.

"Me wear 'em, Abe!" he exclaimed. "No, siree, Abe, I'm not the kind what wears diamonds. I leave that to sports like Hymie Kotzen."

Nevertheless, he placed the ring on the third finger of his left hand, with the stone turned in, and carefully wrapping up the pin in tissue-paper he placed it in his waistcoat pocket. The next day was Wednesday, and he screwed the pin into his shirt-front underneath a four-in-hand scarf. On Thursday he wore the ring with the stone exposed, and on Friday he discarded the four-in-hand scarf for a bow tie and shamelessly flaunted both ring and pin.

"Mawruss," Abe commented on Saturday, "must you stick out your little finger when you smoke it a cigar?" [Pg 118]

"Habits what I was born with, Abe," Morris replied. "I can't help it none."

"Maybe you was born with a diamond ring on your little finger. What?" Abe jeered.

Morris glared at his partner.

"If you think that I enjoy it wearing that ring, Abe," he declared, "you are much mistaken. You got us to take these here diamonds, Abe, and if they got stole on us, Abe, we are not only out the thousand dollars, but we would also got to pay it so much more as Hymie Kotzen would sue us for in the courts. I got to wear this here ring, Abe, and that's all there is to it."

He walked away to the rear of the store with the air of a martyr, while Abe gazed after him in silent admiration.

Two weeks sped quickly by, during which Morris safeguarded the diamonds with the utmost zest and enjoyment, and at length the settling day arrived. Morris was superintending the unpacking of piece goods in the cutting-room when Abe darted upstairs.

"Mawruss," he hissed, "Hymie Kotzen is downstairs."

By a feat of legerdemain that a conjurer might have envied, Morris transferred the pin and ring to his waistcoat pocket and followed Abe to the show-room.

"Well, Hymie," Morris cried, "we thought you would be prompt on the day. Ain't it?" [Pg 119]

Hymie smiled a sickly smirk in which there was as little mirth as there was friendliness.

"You got another think coming," Hymie replied.

"What d'ye mean?" Morris exclaimed.

"I'm up against it, boys," Hymie explained. "I expected to get it a check for two thousand from Heller, Blumenkrohn this morning."

"And didn't it come?" Abe asked.

"Sure it come," Hymie replied, "but it was only sixteen hundred and twenty dollars. They claim it three hundred and eighty dollars for shortage in delivery, so I returned 'em the check."

"You returned 'em the check, Hymie?" Morris cried. "And we got to wait for our thousand dollars because you made it a shortage in delivery." "I didn't make no shortage in delivery," Hymie declared.

"Well, Hymie," Abe broke in, "you say it yourself Heller, Blumenkrohn is gilt-edge, A Number One people. They ain't going to claim no shortage if there wasn't none, Hymie."

"I guess you don't know Louis Blumenkrohn, Abe," Hymie retorted. "He claims it shortage before he unpacks the goods already."

"Well, what has that got to do with us, Hymie?" Morris burst out.

"You see how it is, boys," Hymie explained; "so I got to ask it you a couple of weeks' extension."

"A couple of weeks' extension is nix, Hymie," Abe said, and Morris nodded his head in approval. [Pg 120]

"Either you give it us the thousand, Hymie," was Morris' ultimatum, "or either we keep the diamonds, and that's all there is to it."

"Now, Mawruss," Hymie protested, "you ain't going to shut down on me like that! Make it two weeks more and I'll give you a hundred dollars bonus and interest at six per cent."

Abe shook his head. "No, Hymie," he said firmly, "we ain't no loan sharks. If you got to get that thousand dollars to-day you will manage it somehow. So that's the way it stands. We keep open here till six o'clock, Hymie, and the diamonds will be waiting for you as soon so you bring us the thousand dollars. That's all."

There was a note of finality in Abe's tones that made Hymie put on his hat and leave without another word.

"Yes, Abe," Morris commented as the door closed behind Hymie, "so liberal you must be with my money. Ain't I told you from the very start that feller is a lowlife? Tchampanyer he must drink it on his wife's birthday, Abe, and also he got to wear it diamonds, Abe, when he ain't got enough money to pay his laundry bill yet."

"I ain't worrying, Mawruss," Abe replied. "He ain't going to let us keep them diamonds for a thousand dollars, Mawruss. They're worth a whole lot more as that, Mawruss."

"I don't know how much they're worth, Abe," Morris grunted, putting on his hat, "but one thing I do know; I'm going across the street to get a shave; and then I'm going right down to Sig Pollak on Maiden Lane, Abe, and I'll find out just how much they are worth." [Pg 121]

A moment later he descended the basement steps into the barber-shop under Wasserbauer's Café and Restaurant.

"Hallo, Mawruss," a voice cried from the proprietor's chair. "Ain't it a hot weather?"

It was Sam Feder, vice-president of the Kosciusko Bank, who spoke. He was midway in the divided enjoyment of a shampoo and a large black cigar, while an electric fan oscillated over his head.

"I bet yer it's hot, Mr. Feder," Morris agreed, taking off his coat.

"Why don't you take your vest off, too, Mawruss?" Sam Feder suggested.

"That's a good idee," Morris replied, peeling off his waistcoat. He hung it next to his coat and relapsed with a sigh into the nearest vacant chair.

"Just once around, Phil," he said to the barber, and closed his eyes for a short nap.

When he woke up ten minutes later Phil was spraying him with witch-hazel while the proprietor stood idly in front of the mirror and curled his flowing black mustache.

"Don't take it so particular, Phil," Morris enjoined. "I ain't got it all day to sit here in this chair." [Pg 122]

"All right, Mr. Perlmutter, all right," Phil cried, and in less than three minutes, powdered, oiled and combed, Morris climbed out of the chair. His coat was in waiting, held by a diminutive Italian brushboy, but Morris waved his hand impatiently.

"My vest," he demanded. "I don't put my coat on under my vest."

The brushboy turned to the vacant row of hooks.

"No gotta da vest," he said.

"What!" Morris gasped.

"You didn't have no vest on, did you, Mr. Perlmutter?" the proprietor asked.

"Sure I had a vest," Morris cried. "Where is it?"

On the wall hung a sign which advised customers to check their clothing with the cashier or no responsibility would be assumed by the management, and it was to this notice that the proprietor pointed before answering.

"I guess somebody must have pinched it," he replied nonchalantly.

It was not until two hours after the disappearance of his waistcoat that Morris returned to the store. In the meantime he had been to police headquarters and had inserted an advertisement in three daily newspapers. Moreover he had consulted a lawyer, the eminent Henry D. Feldman, and had received no consolation either on the score of the barber's liability to Potash & Perlmutter or of his own liability to Kotzen. [Pg 123]

"Well, Mawruss," Abe said, "how much are them diamonds worth?"

Then he looked up and for the first time saw his partner's haggard face.

"Holy smokes!" he cried. "They're winder-glass."

Morris shook his head. "I wish they was," he croaked.

"You wish they was!" Abe repeated in accents of amazement. "What d'ye mean?"

"Somebody pinched 'em on me," Morris replied.

"What!" Abe shouted.

"S-sh," Morris hissed as the door opened. It was Hymie Kotzen who entered.

"Well, boys," he cried, "every cloud is silver-plated. Ain't it? No sooner did I get back to my store than I get a letter from Henry D. Feldman that Cohen & Schondorf want to settle for forty cents cash. On the head of that, mind you, in comes Rudolph Heller from Cincinnati, and when I tell him about the check what they sent it me he fixes it up on the spot."

He beamed at Abe and Morris.

"So, bring out them diamonds, boys," he concluded, "and we'll settle up C. O. D."

He pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and toyed with them, but neither Abe nor Morris stirred.

"What's the hurry, Hymie?" Abe asked feebly.

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"What's the hurry, Abe!" Hymie repeated. "Well, ain't that a fine question for you to ask it of me! Don't sit there like a dummy, Abe. Get the diamonds and we'll fix it up."

"But wouldn't to-morrow do as well?" Morris asked.

Hymie sat back and eyed Morris suspiciously.

"What are you trying to do, Mawruss?" he asked. "Make jokes with me?"

"I ain't making no jokes, Hymie," Morris replied. "The fact is, Hymie, we got it the diamonds, now—in our—now—safety-deposit box, and it ain't convenient to get at it now."

"Oh, it ain't, ain't it?" Hymie cried. "Well, it's got to be convenient; so, Abe, you get a move on you and go down to them safety-deposit vaults and fetch them."

"Let Mawruss fetch 'em," Abe replied wearily. "The safety deposit is his idee, Hymie, not mine."

Hymie turned to Morris. "Go ahead, Mawruss," he said, "you fetch 'em."

"I was only stringing you, Hymie," Morris croaked. "We ain't got 'em in no safety-deposit vault at all."

"That settles it," Hymie cried, jumping to his feet and jamming his hat down with both hands.

"Where you going, Hymie?" Abe called after him.

"For a policeman," Hymie said. "I want them diamonds and I'm going to have 'em, too."

Morris ran to the store door and grabbed Hymie by the coattails.

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"Wait a minute," he yelled. "Hymie, I'm surprised at you that you should act that way."

Hymie stopped short.

"I ain't acting, Mawruss," he said. "It's you what's acting. All I want it is you should give me my ring and pin, and I am satisfied to pay you the thousand dollars."

They returned to the show-room and once more sat down.

"I'll tell you the truth, Hymie," Morris said at last. "I loaned them diamonds to somebody, and that's the way it is."

"You loaned 'em to somebody!" Hymie cried, jumping once more to his feet. "My diamonds you loaned it, Mawruss? Well, all I got to say is either you get them diamonds back right away, or either I will call a policeman and make you arrested."

"Make me arrested, then, Hymie," Morris replied resignedly, "because the feller what I loaned them diamonds to won't return 'em for two weeks anyhow."

Hymie sat down again.

"For two weeks, hey?" he said. He passed his handkerchief over his face and looked at Abe.

"That's a fine, nervy partner what you got it, Abe, I must say," he commented.

"Well, Hymie," Abe replied, "so long as you can't get them diamonds back for two weeks keep the thousand dollars for two weeks and we won't charge you no interest nor nothing."

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"No, siree," Hymie said; "either I pay you the thousand now, Abe, or I don't pay it you for three months, and no interest nor nothing."

Abe looked at Morris, who nodded his head slowly.

"What do we care, Abe," he said, "two weeks or three months is no difference now, ain't it?"

"I'm agreeable, then, Hymie," Abe declared.

"All right," Hymie said eagerly; "put it down in writing and sign it, and I am satisfied you should keep the diamonds three months."

Abe sat down at his desk and scratched away for five minutes.

"Here it is, Hymie," he said at last. "Hyman Kotzen and Potash & Perlmutter agrees it that one thousand dollars what he lent it off of them should not be returned for three months from date, no interest nor nothing. And also, that Potash & Perlmutter should not give up the diamonds, neither. POTASH & PERLMUTTER."

"That's all right," Hymie said. He folded the paper into his pocketbook and turned to Morris.

"Also it is understood, Mawruss, you shouldn't lend them diamonds to nobody else," he concluded, and a minute later the store door closed behind him.

After he had gone there was an ominous silence which Abe was the first to break.

"Well, Mawruss," he said, "ain't that a fine mess you got us into it? Must you wore it them diamonds, Mawruss? Why couldn't you leave 'em in the safe?"

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Morris made no answer.

"Or if you had to lose 'em, Mawruss," Abe went on, "why didn't you done it the day we loaned Hymie the money? Then we could of stopped our check by the bank. Now we can do nothing."

"I didn't lose the diamonds, Abe," Morris protested. "I left 'em in my vest in the barber-shop and somebody took it the vest."

"Well, ain't you got no suspicions, Mawruss?" Abe asked. "Think, Mawruss, who was it took the vest?"

Morris raised his head and was about to reply when the store door opened and Sam Feder, vice-president of the Kosciusko Bank, entered bearing a brown paper parcel under his arm.

A personal visit from so well-known a financier covered Abe with embarrassment, and he jumped to his feet and rushed out of the show-room with both arms outstretched.

"Mr. Feder," he exclaimed, "ain't this indeed a pleasure? Come inside, Mr. Feder. Come inside into our show-room."

He brought out a seat for the vice-president and dusted it carefully.

"I ain't come to see you, Abe," Mr. Feder said; "I come to see that partner of yours."

He untied the string that bound the brown paper parcel and pulled out its contents.

"Why!" Morris gasped. "That's my vest."

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"Sure it is," Mr. Feder replied, "and it just fits me, Mawruss. In fact, it fits me so good that when I went to the barber-shop in a two-piece suit this morning, Mawruss, I come away with a three-piece suit and a souvenir besides."

"A souvenir!" Abe cried. "What for a souvenir?"

Mr. Feder put his hand in his trousers pocket and tumbled the missing ring and pin on to a baize-covered sample table.

"That was the souvenir, Abe," he said. "In fact, two souvenirs."

Morris and Abe stared at the diamonds, too stunned for utterance.

"You're a fine feller, Mawruss," Mr. Feder continued, "to be carrying around valuable stones like them in your vest pocket. Why, I showed them stones to a feller what was in my office an hour ago and he says they must be worth pretty near five hundred dollars."

He paused and looked at Morris.

"And he was a pretty good judge of diamonds, too," he continued.

"Who was the feller, Mr. Feder?" Abe asked.

"I guess you know, Abe," Mr. Feder replied. "His name is Hymie Kotzen."

CHAPTER VII

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"Max Fried, of the A La Mode Store, was in here a few minutes since, Mawruss," said Abe Potash,

to his partner, Morris Perlmutter, after the latter had returned from lunch one busy August day, "and bought a couple of hundred of them long Trouvilles. He also wanted something to ask it of us as a favor, Mawruss."

"Sixty days is long enough, Abe," said Morris, on the principle of "once bitten, twice shy." "For a man what runs a little store like the A La Mode on Main Street, Buffalo, Abe, Max don't buy too few goods, neither. Ain't it?"

"Don't jump always for conclusions, Mawruss," Abe broke in. "This ain't no credit matter what he asks it of us. His wife got a sister what they wanted to make from her a teacher, Mawruss, but she ain't got the head. So, Max thinks we could maybe use her for a model. Her name is Miss Kreitmann and she's a perfect thirty-six, Max says, only a little fat."

"And then, when she tries on a garment for a customer," Morris rejoined, "the customer goes around telling everybody that we cut our stuff too skimpy. Ain't it? No, Abe, we got along so far good with the models what we got, and I guess we can keep it up. Besides, if Max is so anxious to get her a job, why don't he take her on himself, Abe?"

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"Because she lives here in New York with her mother," Abe explained; "and what chance has a girl got in Buffalo, anyway? That's what Max says, and he also told it me that she got a very fine personality, and if we think it over maybe he gives us an introduction to Philip Hahn, of the Flower City Credit Outfitting Company. That's a million-dollar concern, Mawruss. I bet yer they're rated J to K, first credit, and Philip Hahn's wife is Miss Kreitmann's mother's sister. Leon Sammet will go crazy if he hears that we sell them people."

"That's all right, Abe," said Morris. "We ain't doing business to spite our competitors; we're doing it to please our customers so that they'll buy goods from us and maybe they'll go crazy, too, when they see her face, Abe."

"Max Fried says she is a good-looker. Nothing extraordinary, y'understand, but good, snappy stuff and up to date."

"You talk like she was a garment, Abe," said Morris.

"Well, you wouldn't buy no garment, Mawruss, just because some one told you it was good. Would you? So, Max says he would bring her around this afternoon, and if we liked her Hahn would stop in and see us later in the day. He says Hahn picks out never less than a couple of hundred of one style, and also Hahn is a liberal buyer, Mawruss."

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"Of course, Abe," Morris commenced, "if we're doing this to oblige Philip Hahn——"

"We're doing it to oblige Philip Hahn and Max Fried both, Mawruss," Abe broke in. "Max says he ain't got a minute's peace since Miss Kreitmann is old enough to get married."

"So!" Morris cried. "A matrimonial agency we're running, Abe. Is that the idea?"

"The idea is that she should have the opportunity of meeting by us a business man, Mawruss, what can give her a good home and a good living, too. Max says he is pretty near broke, buying transportation from Buffalo to New York, Mawruss, so as he can bust up love matches between Miss Kreitmann and some good-looking retail salesman, Mawruss, what can dance the waltz A Number One and couldn't pay rent for light housekeeping on Chrystie Street."

"Well, Abe," Morris agreed, with a sigh of resignation, "if we got to hire her as a condition that Philip Hahn gives us a couple of good orders a season, Abe, I'm agreeable."

"Naturally," Abe replied, and carefully selecting a slightly-damaged cigar from the M to P first and second credit customers' box, he fell to assorting the sample line against Philip Hahn's coming that afternoon.

His task was hardly begun, however, when the store door opened to admit Max Fried and his sister-in-law. Abe immediately ceased his sample-assorting and walked forward to greet them.

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"Hello, Max," he said.

Max stopped short, and by the simple process of thrusting out his waist-line assumed a dignity befitting the ceremony of introduction.

"Mr. Potash," he said severely, "this is Miss Gussie Kreitmann, my wife's sister, what I talked to you about."

Abe grinned shyly.

"All right," he said, and shook hands with Miss Kreitmann, who returned his grin with a dazzling smile.

"Mr. Fried tells me you like to come to work by us as a model. Ain't it?" Abe continued in the accents of the sucking dove. "So, I guess you'd better go over to Miss Cohen, the bookkeeper, and she'll show you where to put your hat and coat."

"Oh, I ain't in no hurry," Miss Kreitmann replied. "To-morrow morning will do."

"Sure, sure," Abe murmured. He was somewhat shocked by Miss Kreitmann's appearance, for while Max Fried's reservation, "only a little fat," had given him some warning, he was hardly

prepared to employ so pronounced an Amazon as Miss Kreitmann. True, her features, though large, were quite regular, and she had fine black eyes and the luxurious hair that goes with them; but as Abe gazed at the convex lines of her generous figure he could not help wondering what his partner would say when he saw her.

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As a matter of fact, at that precise moment Morris was taking in the entire situation from behind a convenient rack of raincoats, and was mentally designing a new line of samples to be called The P & P System. He figured that he would launch it with a good, live ad in the Daily Cloak and Suit Record, to be headed: Let 'Em *All* Come. We Can Fit *Everybody*. *Large* Sizes a Specialty.

"Do you think you will like it here?" Abe hazarded.

"Oh, sure," Max replied for his sister-in-law. "This ain't the first time she works in a cloak and suit house. She helps me out in the store whenever she comes to Buffalo. In fact, she knows part of your line already, Abe, and the rest she learns pretty quick."

"You won't find me slow, Mr. Potash," Miss Kreitmann broke in. "Maybe I ain't such a good model except for large sizes, but I learned to sell cloaks by my brother-in-law and by my uncle, Philip Hahn, before I could talk already. What I want to do now is to meet the trade that comes into the store."

"That's what you're going to do," Abe said. "I will introduce you to everybody."

The thought that this would be, perhaps, the only way to get rid of her lent fervor to his words, and Max shook him warmly by the hand.

"I'm much obliged," he said. "Me and Philip Hahn will be in sure in a couple of hours, and Gussie comes to work to-morrow morning."

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Once more Abe proffered his hand to his new model, and a moment later the door slammed behind them.

"So, that's the party, is it?" said Morris, emerging from his hiding-place. "What's she looking for a job by us for, Abe? She could make it twice as much by a circus sideshow or a dime museum."

"Philip Hahn will be here in a couple of hours, Mawruss," Abe replied, avoiding the thrust. "I guess he's going to buy a big bill of goods, Mawruss."

"I hope so, Abe, because it needs quite a few big bills to offset the damage a model like this here Miss Kreitmann can do. In fact, Abe," he concluded, "I'd be just as well satisfied if Miss Kreitmann could give us the orders, and we could get Philip Hahn to come to work by us as a model. I ain't never seen him, Abe, but I think he's got a better shape for the line."

A singular devotion to duty marked every action of Emanuel Gubin, shipping clerk in the wholesale cloak and suit establishment of Potash & Perlmutter. That is to say, it had marked every action until the commencement of Miss Kreitmann's incumbency. In the very hour that Emanuel first observed the luster of her fine black eyes his heart gave one bound and never more regained its normal gait.

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As for Miss Kreitmann, she saw only a shipping clerk, collarless, coatless and with all the grime of his calling upon him. Two weeks elapsed, however, and one evening, on Lenox Avenue, she encountered Emanuel, freed from the chrysalis of his employment, a natty, lavender-trousered butterfly of fashion. Thereafter she called him Mannie, and during business hours she flashed upon him those same black eyes with results disastrous to the shipping end of Potash & Perlmutter's business.

Packages intended for the afternoon delivery of a local express company arrived in Florida two weeks later, while the irate buyer of a Jersey City store, who impatiently awaited an emergency shipment of ten heavy winter garments, received instead half a hundred gossamer wraps designed for the sub-tropical weather of Palm Beach.

"I don't know what's come over that fellow, Mawruss," Abe said at last. "Formerly he was a crackerjack—never made no mistakes nor nothing; and now I dassen't trust him at all, Mawruss. Everything we ship I got to look after it myself, Mawruss. We might as well have no shipping clerk at all."

"You're right, Abe," Morris replied. "He gets carelesser every day. And why, Abe? Because of that Miss Kreitmann. She breaks us all up, Abe. I bet yer if that feller Gubin has took her to the theayter once, Abe, he took her fifty times already. He spends every cent he makes on her, and the first thing you know, Abe, we'll be missing a couple of pieces of silk from the cutting-room. Ain't it?"

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"He ain't no thief, Mawruss," said Abe, "and, besides, you can't blame a young feller if he gets stuck on a nice girl like Miss Kreitmann, Mawruss. She's a smart girl, Mawruss. Mendel Immerglick, of Immerglick & Frank, was in here yesterday, Mawruss, and she showed him the line, Mawruss, and believe me, Mawruss, Immerglick says to me I couldn't have done it better myself."

"Huh!" Morris snorted. "A young feller like Immerglick, what buys it of us a couple of hundred dollars at a time, she falls all over herself to please him, Abe. And why? Because Immerglick's got a fine *mustache* and is a swell dresser and he ain't married. But you take it a good customer like

Adolph Rothstein, Abe, and what does she do? At first she was all smiles to him, because Adolph is a good-looking feller. But then she hears him telling me a hard-luck story about his wife's operation and how his eldest boy Sammie is now seven already and ain't never been sick in his life, and last month he gets the whooping cough and all six of Adolph's boys gets it one after the other. Then, Abe, she treats Adolph like a dawg, Abe, and the first thing you know he looks at his watch and says he got an appointment and he'll be back. But he don't come back at all, Abe, and this noontime I seen Leon Sammet and Adolph in Wasserbauer's Restaurant. They was eating the regular dinner *with chicken*, Abe, and I seen Leon pay for it."

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Abe received his partner's harangue in silence. His eyes gazed vacantly at the store door, which had just opened to admit the letter-carrier.

"Suppose we do lose a couple of hundred dollars trade," he said at length; "one customer like Philip Hahn will make it up ten times, Mawruss."

"Well, you'll lose him, too, Abe, if you don't look out," said Morris, who had concluded the reading of a typewritten letter with a scrawled postscript. "Just see what he writes us."

He handed over the missive, which read as follows:

MESSRS. POTASH & PERLMUTTER.

Gents: We are requested by Mrs. Kreitmann of your city to ask about a young fellow what works for you by the name of Emanuel Gubin. Has he any future, and what is his prospects? By doing so you will greatly oblige

Truly yours,
THE FLOWER CITY CREDIT OUTFITTING CO.

Dic. PH/K

P. S. I don't like such monkey business. I thought you knew it. I don't want no salesman. What is the matter with you anyway?

PHILIP HAHN

Abe folded up the letter, and his mouth became a straight line of determination under his stubby mustache.

"I guess I fix that young feller," he cried, seizing a pen. He wrote:

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FLOWER CITY CREDIT OUTFITTING COMPANY.

Gents: Your favor of the 14th inst. received and contents noted and in reply would say the young fellow what you inquire about ain't got no future with us and the prospects is he gets fired on Saturday. We trust this is satisfactory.

Truly yours,
POTASH & PERLMUTTER.

On Saturday afternoon Morris Perlmutter was putting on his hat and coat preparatory to going home. He had just fired Mannie Gubin with a relish and satisfaction second only to what would have been his sensations if the operation had been directed toward Miss Kreitmann. As he was about to leave the show-room Abe entered.

"Oh, Mawruss," Abe cried, "you ought to see Miss Kreitmann. She's all broke up about Mannie Gubin, and she's crying something terrible."

"Is she?" Morris said, peering over his partner's shoulder at the grief-stricken model, who was giving vent to her emotions in the far corner of the salesroom. "Well, Abe, you tell her to come away from them light goods and cry over the blue satinets. They don't spot so bad."

Miss Gussie Kreitmann evidently knew how to conceal a secret sorrow, for outwardly she remained unchanged. She continued to scowl at those of her employers' customers who were men of family, and beamed upon the unmarried trade with all the partiality she had displayed during Mannie Gubin's tenure of employment. Indeed, her amiability toward the bachelors was if anything intensified, especially in the case of Mendel Immerglick.

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Many times he had settled lunch checks in two figures, for Miss Kreitmann's appetite was in proportion to her size. Moreover, a prominent Broadway florist was threatening Mendel with suit for flowers supplied Miss Kreitmann at his request. Nor were there lacking other signs, such as

the brilliancy of Mendel's cravats and the careful manicuring of his nails, to indicate that he was paying court to Miss Kreitmann.

"I think, Abe," Morris said finally, "we're due for an inquiry from the Flower City Company about Immerglick & Frank."

"I hope not, Mawruss," Abe replied. "I never liked them people, Mawruss. In fact, last week Mendel Immerglick struck me for new terms—ninety instead of sixty days—and he wanted to give me a couple of thousand dollar order. I turned him down cold, Mawruss. People what throw such a bluff like Mendel Immerglick don't give me no confidence, Mawruss. I'm willing to sell him up to five hundred at sixty days, but that's all." "Oh, I don't know, Abe," Morris protested. "A couple of bright boys like Mendel Immerglick and Louis Frank can work up a nice business after a while." [Pg 140]

"Can they?" Abe rejoined. "Well, more likely they work up a nice line of credit, Mawruss, and then, little by little, they make it a big failure, Mawruss. A feller what curls his mustache like Mendel Immerglick ain't no stranger to auction houses, Mawruss. I bet yer he's got it all figured out right now where he can get advance checks on consignments."

"I think you do the feller an injury, Abe," said Morris. "I think he means well, and besides, Abe, business people is getting so conservative that there ain't no more money in failures."

"I guess there's enough for Mendel Immerglick," Abe said, and dismissed the subject.

Two weeks later the anticipated letter arrived in the following form:

MESSRS. POTASH & PERLMUTTER.

Gents: Mrs. Kreitmann of your city requests us to ask you about one of your customers by the name of Mr. Mendel Immerglick, of Immerglick & Frank. We drew a report on him by both commercial agencies and are fairly well satisfied, but would be obliged if you should make inquiries amongst the trade for us and greatly oblige

Yours truly,

THE FLOWER CITY CREDIT OUTFITTING CO.

Dic. PH/K

P. S. I hear it this fellow is a good bright young fellow. I will be in N. Y. next month and expect to lay in my spring goods.

PHILIP HAHN.

"Well, Mawruss," Abe said, as he finished reading the letter, "I'm sorry to get this letter. I don't know what I could tell it him about this fellow Immerglick. Now, if it was a responsible concern like Henry Feigenbaum, of the H. F. Cloak Company, it would be different." [Pg 141]

"Henry Feigenbaum!" Morris exclaimed. "Why, he's only got one eye."

"I know it, Mawruss," Abe replied, "but he's got six stores, and they're all making out good. But, anyhow, Mawruss, I ain't going to do nothing in a hurry. I'll make good inquiries before I answer him."

"What's the use of making inquiries?" Morris protested. "Tell him it's all right. I got enough of this Miss Kreitmann already, Abe. She's killed enough trade for us."

"What!" Abe cried. "Tell him it's all right, when for all I know Mendel Immerglick is headed straight for the bankruptcy courts, Mawruss. You must be crazy, Mawruss. Ain't Hahn said he's coming down next month to buy his spring goods? What you want to do, Mawruss? Throw three to five thousand dollars in the street, Mawruss?"

"You talk foolishness, Abe," Morris rejoined. "Once a man gets married, his wife's family has got to stand for him. Suppose he does bust up; would that be our fault, Abe? Then Philip Hahn sets him up in business again, and the first thing you know, Abe, we got two customers instead of one. And I bet yer we could get Philip Hahn to guarantee the account yet." [Pg 142]

"Them theories what you got, Mawruss, sounds good, but maybe he busts up *before* they get married, and then, Mawruss, we lose Philip Hahn's business and Max Fried's business, and we are also out a sterling silver engagement present for Miss Kreitmann. Ain't it?" He put on his hat and coat and lit a cigar.

"I guess, Mawruss, I'll go right now," he concluded, "and see what I can find out about him."

In three hours he returned and entered the show-room.

"Well, Abe," Morris cried, "what did you find out? Is it all right?"

Abe carefully selected a fresh cigar and shook his head solemnly.

"Nix, Mawruss," he said. "Mendel Immerglick is nix for a nice girl like Miss Kreitmann."

He took paper out of his waistcoat pocket for the purpose of refreshing his memory.

"First, I seen Moe Klein, of Klinger & Klein," he went on. "Moe says he seen Mendel Immerglick, in the back of Wasserbauer's Café, playing auction pinochle with a couple of loafer salesmen at three o'clock in the afternoon, and while Moe was standing there already them two low-lives set Immerglick back three times on four hundred hands at a dollar a hundred, *double double*."

"And what was Moe doing there?" Morris asked.

"I wasn't making no investigation of Moe, Mawruss," Abe replied. "Believe me, I got enough to do to find out about Immerglick. Also, Moe tells me that Immerglick comes into their place and wants to buy off them three thousand dollars at ninety days." [Pg 143]

"And did they sell him?" Morris asked.

"Did they *sell* him?" Abe cried. "If you was to meet a burglar coming into the store at midnight with a jimmy and a dark lantern, Mawruss, I suppose you'd volunteer to give him the combination of the safe. What? No, Mawruss, they didn't sell him. Such customers is for suckers like Sammet Brothers, Mawruss. Leon Sammet says they sold him three thousand at four months. Also, Elenbogen sold him a big bill, same terms, Mawruss. But big houses like Wechsel, Baum & Miller and Frederick Stettermann won't sell him at any terms, Mawruss."

"If everybody was so conservative like Wechsel, Baum & Miller," said Morris, "the retailers might as well go out of business."

"Wait a bit, Mawruss," Abe replied. "That ain't all. Louis Frank's wife is a sister to the Traders' and Merchants' Outlet, of Louisville—you know that thief, Marks Leshinsky; and Louis Frank's uncle, Mawruss, is Elkan Frank & Company, them big swindlers, them auctioneers, out in Chicago."

Abe sat down and dipped his pen in the inkwell with such force that the spotless surface of Morris' shirt, which he had donned that morning, assumed a polkadot pattern. It was, therefore, some minutes before Abe could devote himself to his task in silence. Finally, he evolved the following: [Pg 144]

THE FLOWER CITY CREDIT OUTFITTING CO.

Gents: Your favor of the 16th inst. received and contents noted, and in reply would say our Mr. Potash seen the trade extensively and we are sorry to say it in the strictest confidence that we ain't got no confidence in the party you name. You should on no consideration do anything in the matter as all accounts are very bad. We will tell your Mr. Hahn the particulars when he is next in our city.

Yours truly,

POTASH & PERLMUTTER.

"It ain't no more than he deserves, Mawruss," Abe commented after Morris had read the letter.

"No," Morris admitted, "but after the way Miss Kreitmann got that feller Gubin in the hole and the way she treated Adolph Rothstein, Abe, it ain't no more than she deserves, neither."

For several days afterward Miss Kreitmann went about her work with nothing but scowls for Potash & Perlmutter's customers, married and unmarried alike.

"The thing goes too far, Abe," Morris protested. "She kills our entire trade. Hahn or no Hahn, Abe, I say we should fire her."

Abe shook his head. "It ain't necessary, Mawruss," he replied.

"What d'ye mean?" [Pg 145]

"The girl gets desperate, Mawruss. She fires herself. She told me this morning she don't see no future here, so she's going to leave at the end of the week. She says she will maybe take up trained nursing. She hears it that there are lots of openings for a young woman that way."

Morris sat down and fairly beamed with satisfaction.

"That's the best piece of news I hear it in a long time, Abe," he said. "Now we can do maybe some business."

"Maybe we can," Abe admitted. "But not with Philip Hahn."

"Why not?" Morris cried. "We done our best by him. Ain't we? Through him we lost it a good customer, and we got to let go a good shipping clerk."

"Not a *good* shipping clerk, Mawruss," Abe corrected.

"Well, he was a good one till Miss Kreitmann comes."

Abe made no reply. He took refuge in the columns of the Daily Cloak and Suit Record and perused the business troubles items.

"Was it our fault that Immerglick is N. G., Abe?" Morris went on. "Is it——"

"Ho-ly smokes!" Abe broke in. "What d'ye think of that?"

"What do I think of what?" Morris asked.

"Immerglick & Frank," Abe read aloud. "A petition in bankruptcy was this day filed against Immerglick & Frank, doing business as the 'Vienna Store.' This firm has been a heavy purchaser throughout the trade during the past two months, but when the receiver took possession there remained only a small stock of goods. The receiver has retained counsel and will examine Louis Frank under Section 21 A of the Bankruptcy Act. It is understood that Mendel Immerglick, the senior partner, sailed for Hamburg last week on the Kaiserin Luisa Victoria and intends to remain in Germany for an indefinite time."

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Abe laid down the paper with a sigh of relief.

"If that don't make us solid with Philip Hahn, Mawruss," he said, "nothing will."

Miss Kreitmann left at the end of the week, and Abe and Morris wasted no time in vain regrets over her departure, but proceeded at once to assort and make up a new line of samples for Philip Hahn's inspection. For three days they jumped every time a customer entered the store, and Abe wore a genial smile of such fixity that his face fairly ached.

At length, on the Thursday following Miss Kreitmann's resignation, while Abe was flicking an imaginary grain of dust from the spotless array of samples, the store door burst open and a short, stout person entered. Abe looked up and, emitting an exclamation, rushed forward with both arms extended in hearty greeting.

"Mister Hahn," he cried, "how *do* you do?"

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The newcomer drew himself up haughtily, and his small mustache seemed to shed sparks of indignation.

Abe stopped short in hurt astonishment.

"Is th-there a-anything the matter?" he faltered.

"Is there anything the matter!" Mr. Hahn roared. "Is there anything the matter! That's a fine question for *you* to ask."

"W-w-why?" Abe stuttered. "Ain't everything all right?"

Mr. Hahn, with an effort that bulged every vein in his bald forehead, subsided into comparative calm.

"Mr. Potash," he said, "I bought from you six bills of goods in the last few months. Ain't it?"

Abe nodded.

"And I never claimed no shortages and never made no kicks nor nothing, but always paid up prompt on the day like a gentleman. Ain't it?"

Abe nodded again.

"And this is what I get for it," Mr. Hahn went on bitterly. "My own niece on my wife's side, I put her in your care. I ask you to take it an interest in her. You promise me you will do your best. You tell me and Max Fried you will look after her"—he hesitated, almost overcome by emotion—"like a father. You said that when I bought the second bill. And what happens? The only chance she gets to make a decent match, you write me the feller ain't no good. Naturally, I think you got some sense, and so I busts the affair up."

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"Well," Abe said, "I did write you he wasn't no good, and he wasn't no good, neither. Ain't he just made it a failure?"

Mr. Hahn grew once more infuriated.

"A failure!" he yelled. "I should say he did make a failure. *What* a failure he made! Fool! Donkey! The man got away with a hundred thousand dollars and is living like a prince in the old country. And poor Gussie, she loved him, too! She cries night and day."

He stopped to wipe a sympathetic tear.

"She cries pretty easy," Abe said. "She cried when we fired Mannie Gubin, too."

Hahn bristled again.

"You insult me. What?" he cried. "You try to get funny with me. Hey? All right. I fix you. So far what I can help it, never no more do you sell me or Max or anybody what is friends of ours a button. Not a button! Y'understand?"

He wheeled about and the next moment the store door banged with cannon-like percussion. Morris came from behind a rack of raincoats and tiptoed toward Abe.

"Well, Abe," he said, "you put your foot in it that time."

Abe mopped the perspiration from his brow and bit the end off a cigar.

"We done business before we had Philip Hahn for a customer, Mawruss," he said, "and I guess we'll do it again. Ain't it?" [Pg 149]

* * * * *

Six months later Abe was scanning the columns of the Daily Cloak and Suit Record while Morris examined the morning mail.

"Yes, Mawruss," he said at length. "Some people get only what they deserve. I always said it, some day Philip Hahn will be sorry he treated us the way he did. I bet yer he's sorry now."

"So far what I hear, Abe," Morris replied, "he ain't told us nor nobody else that he's sorry. In fact, I seen him coming out of Sammet Brothers' yesterday, and he looked at me like he would treat us worser already, if he could. What makes you think he's sorry, Abe?"

"Well," Abe went on, "if he *ain't* sorry he *ought* to be."

He handed the Daily Cloak and Suit Record to Morris and indicated the New Business column with his thumb.

"Rochester, N. Y.," it read. "Philip Hahn, doing business here as the Flower City Credit Outfitting Company, announces that he has taken into partnership Emanuel Gubin, who recently married Mr. Hahn's niece. The business will be conducted under the old firm style."

Morris handed back the paper with a smile.

"I seen Leon Sammet on the subway this morning and he told me all about it," he commented. "He says Gubin eloped with her." [Pg 150]

Abe shook his head. "You got it wrong, Mawruss. You must be mistaken," he concluded. "*She* eloped with Gubin."

CHAPTER VIII

"You carry a fine stock, Mr. Sheitlis," Abe Potash exclaimed as he glanced around the well-filled shelves of the Suffolk Credit Outfitting Company.

"That ain't all the stock I carry," Mr. Sheitlis, the proprietor, exclaimed. "I got also another stock which I am anxious to dispose of it, Mr. Potash, and you could help me out, maybe."

Abe smiled with such forced amiability that his mustache was completely engulfed between his nose and his lower lip.

"I ain't buying no cloaks, Mr. Sheitlis," he said. "I'm selling 'em."

"Not a stock from cloaks, Mr. Potash," Mr. Sheitlis explained; "but a stock from gold and silver."

"I ain't in the jewelry business, neither," Abe said.

"That ain't the stock what I mean," Mr. Sheitlis cried. "Wait a bit and I'll show you."

He went to the safe in his private office and returned with a crisp parchment-paper certificate bearing in gilt characters the legend, Texas-Nevada Gold and Silver Mining Corporation. [Pg 151]

"This is what I mean it," he said; "stock from stock exchanges. I paid one dollar a share for this hundred shares."

Abe took the certificate and gazed at it earnestly with unseeing eyes. Mr. Sheitlis had just purchased a liberal order of cloaks and suits from Potash & Perlmutter, and it was, therefore, a

difficult matter for Abe to turn down this stock proposition without offending a good customer.

"Well, Mr. Sheitlis," he commenced, "me and Mawruss Perlmutter we do business under a copartnership agreement, and it says we ain't supposed to buy no stocks from stock exchanges, and——"

"I ain't asking you to buy it," Mr. Sheitlis broke in. "I only want you to do me something for a favor. You belong in New York where all them stock brokers is, so I want you should be so kind and take this here stock to one of them stock brokers and see what I can get for it. Maybe I could get a profit for it, and then, of course, I should pay you something for your trouble."

"Pay me something!" Abe exclaimed in accents of relief. "Why, Mr. Sheitlis, what an idea! Me and Mawruss would be only too glad, Mr. Sheitlis, to try and sell it for you, and the more we get it for the stock the gladder we would be for your sake. I wouldn't take a penny for selling it if you should make a million out of it."

"A million I won't make it," Mr. Sheitlis replied, dismissing the subject. "I'll be satisfied if I get ten dollars for it." He walked toward the front door of his store with Abe. [Pg 152]

"What is the indications for spring business in the wholesale trade, Mr. Potash," he asked blandly.

Abe shook his head.

"It should be good, maybe," he replied; "only, you can't tell nothing about it. Silks is the trouble."

"Silks?" Mr. Sheitlis rejoined. "Why, silks makes goods sell high, Mr. Potash. Ain't it? Certainly, I admit it you got to pay more for silk piece goods as for cotton piece goods, but you take the same per cent. profit on the price of the silk as on the price of the cotton, and so you make more in the end. Ain't it?"

"If silk piece goods is low or middling, Mr. Sheitlis," Abe replied sadly, "there is a good deal in what you say. But silk is high this year, Mr. Sheitlis, so high you wouldn't believe me if I tell you we got to pay twicet as much this year as three years ago already."

Mr. Sheitlis clucked sympathetically.

"And if we charge the retailer twicet as much for a garment next year what he pays three years ago already, Mr. Sheitlis," Abe went on, "we won't do no business. Ain't it? So we got to cut our profits, and that's the way it goes in the cloak and suit business. You don't know where you are at no more than when you got stocks from stock exchanges." [Pg 153]

"Well, Mr. Potash," Sheitlis replied encouragingly, "next season is next season, but now is this season, and from the prices what you quoted it me, Mr. Potash, you ain't going to the poorhouse just yet a while."

"I only hope it that you make more profit on the stock than we make it on the order you just give us," Abe rejoined as he shook his customer's hand in token of farewell. "Good-by, Mr. Sheitlis, and as soon as I get back in New York I'll let you know all about it."

Two days after Abe's return to New York he sat in Potash & Perlmutter's show-room, going over next year's models as published in the Daily Cloak and Suit Record. His partner, Morris Perlmutter, puffed disconsolately at a cigar which a competitor had given him in exchange for credit information.

"Them cigars what Klinger & Klein hands out," he said to his partner, "has asbestos wrappers and excelsior fillers, I bet yer. I'd as lief smoke a kerosene lamp."

"You got your worries, Mawruss," Abe replied. "Just look at them next year's models, Mawruss, and a little thing like cigars wouldn't trouble you at all. Silk, soutache and buttons they got it, Mawruss. I guess pretty soon them Paris people will be getting out garments trimmed with solitaire diamonds."

Morris seized the paper and examined the half-tone cuts with a critical eye. [Pg 154]

"You're right, Abe," he said. "We'll have our troubles next season, but we take our profit on silk goods, Abe, the same as we do on cotton goods."

Abe was about to retort when a wave of recollection came over him, and he clutched wildly at his breast pocket.

"Ho-ly smokes!" he cried. "I forgot all about it."

"Forgot all about what?" Morris asked.

"B. Sheitlis, of the Suffolk Credit Outfitting Company," Abe replied. "He give me a stock in Pittsburg last week, and I forgot all about it."

"A stock!" Morris exclaimed. "What for a stock?"

"A stock from the stock exchange," Abe replied; "a stock from gold and silver mines. He wanted me I should do it a favor for him and see a stock broker here and sell it for him."

"Well, that's pretty easy," Morris rejoined. "There's lots of stock brokers in New York, Abe."

There's pretty near as many stock brokers as there is suckers, Abe."

"Maybe there is, Mawruss," Abe replied, "but I don't know any of them."

"No?" Morris said. "Well, Sol Klinger, of Klinger & Klein, could tell you, I guess. I seen him in the subway this morning, and he was pretty near having a fit over the financial page of the Sun. I asked him if he seen a failure there, and he says no, but Steel has went up to seventy, maybe it was eighty. So I says to him he should let Andrew Carnegie worry about that, and he says if he would of bought it at forty he would have been in thirty thousand dollars already."

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"Who?" Abe asked. "Andrew Carnegie?"

"No," Morris said; "Sol Klinger. So I says to him I could get all the excitement I wanted out of auction pinochle and he says——"

"S'enough, Mawruss," Abe broke in. "I heard enough already. I'll ring him up and ask him the name of the broker what does his business."

He went to the telephone in the back of the store and returned a moment later and put on his hat and coat.

"I rung up Sol, Mawruss," he said, "and Sol tells me that a good broker is Gunst & Baumer. They got a branch office over Hill, Arkwright & Thompson, the auctioneers, Mawruss. He says a young feller by the name Milton Fiedler is manager, and if he can't sell that stock, Mawruss, Sol says nobody can. So I guess I'll go right over and see him while I got it in my mind."

Milton Fiedler had served an arduous apprenticeship before he attained the position of branch manager for Gunst & Baumer in the dry-goods district. During the thirty odd years of his life he had been in turn stockboy, clothing salesman, bookmaker's clerk, faro dealer, poolroom cashier and, finally, bucketshop proprietor. When the police closed him up he sought employment with Gunst & Baumer, whose exchange affiliations precluded any suspicion of bucketing, but who, nevertheless, did a thriving business in curb securities of the cat-and-dog variety, and it was in this particular branch of the science of investment and speculation that Milton excelled. Despite his expert knowledge, however, he was slightly stumped, as the vernacular has it, when Abe Potash produced B. Sheitlis' stock, for in all his bucketshop and curb experience he had never even heard of the Texas-Nevada Gold and Silver Mining Corporation.

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"This is one of those smaller mines, Mr. Potash," he explained, "which sometimes get to be phenomenal profit-makers. Of course, I can't tell you offhand what the value of the stock is, but I'll make inquiries at once. The inside market at present is very strong, as you know."

Abe nodded, as he thought was expected of him, although "inside" and "outside" markets were all one to him.

"And curb securities naturally feel the influence of the bullish sentiment," Fiedler continued. "It isn't the business of a broker to try to influence a customer's choice, but I'd like you to step outside"—they were in the manager's private office—"and look at the quotation board for a moment. Interstate Copper is remarkably active this morning."

He led Abe into an adjoining room where a tall youth was taking green cardboard numbers from a girdle which he wore, and sticking them on the quotation board.

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"Hello!" Fiedler exclaimed as the youth affixed a new number. "Interstate Copper has advanced a whole point since two days ago. It's now two and an eighth."

Simultaneously, a young man in the back of the room exclaimed aloud in woeful profanity.

"What's the matter with him?" Abe asked.

"They play 'em both ways—a-hem!" Fiedler corrected himself in time. "Occasionally we have a customer who sells short of the market, and then, of course, if the market goes up he gets stung—er—he sustains a loss."

Here the door opened and Sol Klinger entered. His bulging eyes fell on the quotation board, and at once his face spread into a broad smile.

"Hello, Sol!" Abe cried. "You look like you sold a big bill of goods."

"I hope I look better than that, Abe," Sol replied. "I make it more on that Interstate Copper in two days what I could make it on ten big bills of goods. That's a great property, Abe."

"I think Mr. Klinger will have reason to congratulate himself still more by to-morrow, Mr. Potash," Fiedler broke in. "Interstate Copper is a stock with an immediate future."

"You bet," Sol agreed. "I'm going to hold on to mine. It'll go up to five inside of a week."

The young man from the rear of the room took the two rows of chairs at a jump.

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"Fiedler," he said, "I'm going to cover right away. Buy me a thousand Interstate at the market."

Sol nudged Abe, and after the young man and Fiedler had disappeared into the latter's private office Sol imparted in hoarse whispers to Abe that the young man was reported to have information from the ground-floor crowd about Interstate Copper.

"Well, if that's so," Abe replied, "why does he lose money on it?"

"Because," Sol explained, "he's got an idee that if you act just contrariwise to the inside information what you get it, why then you come out right."

Abe shook his head hopelessly.

"Pinochle, I understand it," he said, "and skat a little also. But this here stocks from stock exchanges is worsen than chess what they play it in coffee-houses."

"You don't need to understand it, Abe," Sol replied. "All you do is to buy a thousand Interstate Copper to-day or to-morrow at any price up to two and a half, Abe, and I give you a guarantee that you make twenty-five hundred dollars by next week."

When Abe returned to his place of business that day he had developed a typical case of stock-gambling fever, with which he proceeded to inoculate Morris as soon as the latter came back from lunch. Abe at once recounted all his experiences of the morning and dwelt particularly on the phenomenal rise of Interstate Copper. [Pg 159]

"Sol says he guarantees that we double our money in a week," he concluded.

"Did he say he would put it in writing?" Morris asked.

Abe glared at Morris for an instant.

"Do you think I am making jokes?" he rejoined. "He don't got to put it in writing, Mawruss. It's as plain as the nose on your face. We pay twenty-five hundred dollars for a thousand shares at two and a half to-day, and next week it goes up to five and we sell it and make it twenty-five hundred dollars. Ain't it?"

"Who do we sell it to?" Morris asked.

Abe pondered for a moment, then his face brightened up.

"Why, to the stock exchange, certainly," he replied.

"*Must* they buy it from us, Abe?" Morris inquired.

"Sure they must, Mawruss," Abe said. "Ain't Sol Klinger always selling his stocks to them people?"

"Well, Sol Klinger got his customers, Abe, and we got ours," Morris replied doubtfully. "Maybe them people would buy it from Sol and wouldn't buy it from us."

For the rest of the afternoon Morris plied Abe with questions about the technicalities of the stock market until Abe took refuge in flight and went home at half-past five. The next morning Morris resumed his quiz until Abe's replies grew personal in character. [Pg 160]

"What's the use of trying to explain something to nobody what don't understand nothing?" he exclaimed.

"Maybe I don't understand it," Morris admitted, "but also you don't understand it, too, maybe. Ain't it?"

"I understand this much, Mawruss," Abe cried—"I understand, Mawruss, that if Sol Klinger tells me he guarantees it I make twenty-five hundred dollars, and this here Milton Fiedler, too, he also says it, and a young feller actually with my own eyes I see it buys this stock because he's got information from inside people, why shouldn't *we* buy it and make money on it? Ain't it?"

Morris was about to reply when the letter carrier entered with the morning mail. Abe took the bundle of envelopes, and on the top of the pile was a missive from Gunst & Baumer. Abe tore open the envelope and looked at the letter hurriedly. "You see, Mawruss," he cried, "already it goes up a sixteenth." He handed the letter to Morris. It read as follows:

Gentlemen:

For your information we beg to advise you that Interstate Copper advanced a sixteenth at the close of the market yesterday. Should you desire us to execute a buying order in these securities, we urge you to let us know before ten o'clock to-morrow morning, as we believe that a sharp advance will follow the opening of the market.

Truly yours,

GUNST & BAUMER

Milton Fiedler, Mgr.

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"Well," Abe said, "what do you think, Mawruss?"

"Think!" Morris cried. "Why, I think that he ain't said nothing to us about them gold and silver stocks of B. Sheitlis', Abe, so I guess he ain't sold 'em yet. If he can't sell a stock from gold and silver already, Abe, what show do we stand with a stock from copper?"

"That Sheitlis stock is only a small item, Mawruss."

"Well, maybe it is," Morris admitted, "but just you ring up and ask him. Then, if we find that he sold that gold and silver stock we take a chance on the copper."

Abe hastened to the telephone in the rear of the store.

"Listen, Abe," Morris called after him, "tell him it should be no dating or discount, strictly net cash."

In less than a minute, Abe was conversing with Fiedler.

"Mr. Fiedler!" he said. "Hello, Mr. Fiedler! Is this you? Yes. Well, me and Mawruss is about decided to buy a thousand of them stocks what you showed me down at your store—at your office yesterday, only, Mawruss says, why should we buy them goods—they stocks if you ain't sold that other stocks already. First, he says, you should sell them stocks from gold and silver, Mr. Fiedler, and then we buy them copper ones."

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Mr. Fiedler, at the other end of the 'phone, hesitated before replying. The Texas-Nevada Gold and Silver Mining Corporation was a paper mine that had long since faded from the memory of every bucketshop manager he knew, and its stock was worth absolutely nothing. Yet Gunst & Baumer, as the promoters of Interstate Copper, would clear at least two thousand dollars by the sale of the stock to Abe and Morris; hence, Fiedler took a gambler's chance.

"Why, Mr. Potash," he said, "a boy is already on the way to your store with a check for that very stock. I sold it for three hundred dollars and I sent you a check for two hundred and seventy-five dollars. Twenty-five dollars is our usual charge for selling a hundred shares of stock that ain't quoted on the curb."

"Much obliged, Mr. Fiedler," Abe said. "I'll be down there with a check for twenty-five hundred."

"All right," Mr. Fiedler replied. "I'll go ahead and buy the stock for your account."

"Well," Abe said, "don't do that until I come down. I got to fix it up with my partner first, Mr. Fiedler, and just as soon as I can get there I'll bring you the check."

Twenty minutes after Abe had rung off a messenger arrived with a check for two hundred and seventy-five dollars, and Morris included it in the morning deposits which he was about to send over to the Kosciusko Bank.

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"While you're doing that, Mawruss," Abe said, "you might as well draw a check for twenty-five hundred dollars for that stock."

Morris grunted.

"That's going to bring down our balance a whole lot, Abe," he said.

"Only for a week, Mawruss," Abe corrected, "and then we'll sell it again."

"Whose order do I write it to, Abe?" Morris inquired.

"I forgot to ask that," Abe replied.

"Gunst & Baumer?" Morris asked.

"They ain't the owners of it, Mawruss," said Abe. "They're only the brokers."

"Maybe Sol Klinger is selling it to the stock-exchange people and they're selling it to us," Morris suggested.

"Sol Klinger ain't going to sell his. He's going to hang on to it. Maybe it's this young feller what I see there, Mawruss, only I don't know his name."

"Well, then, I'll make it out to Potash & Perlmutter, and you can indorse it when you get there," said Morris.

At this juncture a customer entered, and Abe took him into the show-room, while Morris wrote out the check. For almost an hour and a half Abe displayed the firm's line, from which the customer selected a generous order, and when at last Abe was free to go down to Gunst & Baumer's it was nearly twelve o'clock. He put on his hat and coat, and jumped on a passing car, and it was not until he had traveled two blocks that he remembered the check. He ran all the way back to the store and, tearing the check out of the checkbook where Morris had left it, he dashed out again and once more boarded a Broadway car. In front of Gunst & Baumer's offices he leaped wildly from the car to the street, and, escaping an imminent fire engine and a hosecart, he ran into the doorway and took the stairs three at a jump.

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On the second floor of the building was Hill, Arkwright & Thompson's salesroom, where a trade sale was in progress, and the throng of buyers collected there overflowed onto the landing, but Abe elbowed his way through the crowd and made the last flight in two seconds.

"Is Mr. Fiedler in?" he gasped as he burst into the manager's office of Gunst & Baumer's suite.

"Mr. Fiedler went out to lunch," the office-boy replied. "He says you should sit down and wait, and he'll be back in ten minutes."

But Abe was too nervous for sitting down, and the thought of the customers' room with its quotation board only agitated him the more. [Pg 165]

"I guess I'll go downstairs to Hill, Arkwright & Thompson's," he said, "and give a look around. I'll be back in ten minutes."

He descended the stairs leisurely and again elbowed his way through the crowd into the salesroom of Hill, Arkwright & Thompson. Mr. Arkwright was on the rostrum, and as Abe entered he was announcing the next lot.

"Look at them carefully, gentlemen," he said. "An opportunity like this seldom arises. They are all fresh goods, woven this season for next season's business—foulard silks of exceptionally good design and quality."

At the word silks Abe started and made at once for the tables on which the goods were piled. He examined them critically, and as he did so his mind reverted to the half-tone cuts in the Daily Cloak and Suit Record. Here was a rare chance to lay in a stock of piece goods that might not recur for several years, certainly not before next season had passed.

"It's to close an estate, gentlemen," Mr. Arkwright continued. "The proprietor of the mills died recently, and his executors have decided to wind up the business. All these silk foulards will be offered as one lot. What is the bid?"

Immediately competition became fast and furious, and Abe entered into it with a zest and excitement that completely eclipsed all thought of stock exchanges or copper shares. The bids rose by leaps and bounds, and when, half an hour later, Abe emerged from the fray his collar was melted to the consistency of a pocket handkerchief, but the light of victory shone through his perspiration. He was the purchaser of the entire lot, and by token of his ownership he indorsed the twenty-five-hundred-dollar check to the order of Hill, Arkwright & Thompson. [Pg 166]

The glow of battle continued with Abe until he reached the show-room of his own place of business at two o'clock.

"Well, Abe," Morris cried, "did you buy the stock?"

"Huh?" Abe exclaimed, and then, for the first time since he saw the silk foulards, he remembered Interstate Copper.

"I was to Wasserbauer's Restaurant for lunch," Morris continued, "and in the café I seen that thing what the baseball comes out of it, Abe."

"The tickler," Abe croaked.

"That's it," Morris went on. "Also, Sol Klinger was looking at it, and he told me Interstate Copper was up to three already."

Abe sat down in a chair and passed his hand over his forehead.

"That's the one time when you give it us good advice, Abe," said Morris. "Sol says we may make it three thousand dollars yet."

Abe nodded. He licked his dry lips and essayed to speak, but the words of confession would not come.

"It was a lucky day for us, Abe, when you seen B. Sheitlis," Morris continued. "Of course, I ain't saying it was all luck, Abe, because it wasn't. If you hadn't seen the opportunity, Abe, and practically made me go into it, I wouldn't of done nothing, Abe." [Pg 167]

Abe nodded again. If the guilt he felt inwardly had expressed itself in his face there would have been no need of confession. At length he braced himself to tell it all; but just as he cleared his throat by way of prelude Morris was summoned to the cutting-room and remained there until closing-time. Thus, when Abe went home his secret remained locked up within his breast, nor did he find it a comfortable burden, for when he looked at the quotations of curb securities in the evening paper he found that Interstate Copper had closed at four and a half, after a total day's business of sixty thousand shares.

The next morning Abe reached his store more than two hours after his usual hour. He had rolled on his pillow all night, and it was almost day before he could sleep.

"Why, Abe," Morris cried when he saw him, "you look sick. What's the matter?"

"I feel mean, Mawruss," Abe replied. "I guess I eat something what disagrees with me."

Ordinarily, Morris would have made rejoinder to the effect that when a man reached Abe's age he ought to know enough to take care of his stomach; but Morris had devoted himself to the financial column of a morning newspaper on his way downtown, and his feelings toward his partner were mollified in proportion.

"That's too bad, Abe," he said. "Why don't you see a doctor?"

Abe shook his head and was about to reply when the telephone bell rang.

"That's Sol Klinger," Morris exclaimed. "He said he would let me know at ten o'clock what this Interstate Copper opened at."

He darted for the telephone in the rear of the store, and when he returned his face was wreathed in smiles.

"It has come up to five already," he cried. "We make it twenty-five hundred dollars."

While Morris was talking over the 'phone Abe had been trying to bring his courage to the sticking point, and the confession was on the very tip of his tongue when the news which Morris brought forced it back again. He rose wearily to his feet.

"I guess you think we're getting rich quick, Mawruss," he said, and repaired to the bookkeeper's desk in the firm's private office. For the next two hours and a half he dodged about, with one eye on Morris and the other on the rear entrance to the store. He expected the silk to arrive at any moment, and he knew that when it did the jig would be up. It was with a sigh of relief that he saw Morris go out to lunch at half-past twelve, and almost immediately afterward Hill, Arkwright & Thompson's truckman arrived with the goods. Abe superintended the disposal of the packing cases in the cutting-room, and he was engaged in opening them when Miss Cohen, the bookkeeper, entered.

"Mr. Potash," she said, "Mr. Perlmutter wants to see you in the show-room."

"Did he come back from lunch so soon?" Abe asked.

"He came in right after he went out," she replied. "I guess he must be sick. He looks sick."

Abe turned pale.

"I guess he found it out," he said to himself as he descended the stairs and made for the show-room. When he entered he found Morris seated in a chair with the first edition of an evening paper clutched in his hand.

"What's the matter, Mawruss?" Abe said.

Morris gulped once or twice and made a feeble attempt to brandish the paper.

"Matter?" he croaked. "Nothing's the matter. Only, we are out twenty-five hundred dollars. That's all."

"No, we ain't, Mawruss," Abe protested. "What we are out in one way we make in another."

Morris sought to control himself, but his pent-up emotions gave themselves vent.

"We do, hey?" he roared. "Well, maybe you think because I took your fool advice this oncet that I'll do it again?"

He grew red in the face.

"Gambler!" he yelled. "Fool! You shed my blood! What? You want to ruin me! Hey?"

Abe had expected a tirade, but nothing half as violent as this.

"Mawruss," he said soothingly, "don't take it so particular."

He might as well have tried to stem Niagara with a shovel.

"Ain't the cloak and suit business good enough for you?" Morris went on. "Must you go throwing away money on stocks from stock exchanges?"

Abe scratched his head. These rhetorical questions hardly fitted the situation, especially the one about throwing away money.

"Look-y here, Mawruss," he said, "if you think you scare me by this theayter acting you're mistaken. Just calm yourself, Mawruss, and tell me what you heard it. I ain't heard nothing."

For answer Morris handed him the evening paper.

"Sensational Failure in Wall Street," was the red-letter legend on the front page. With bulging eyes Abe took in the import of the leaded type which disclosed the news that Gunst & Baumer, promoters of Interstate Copper, having boosted its price to five, were overwhelmed by a flood of profit-taking. To support their stock Gunst & Baumer were obliged to buy in all the Interstate offered at five, and when at length their resources gave out they announced their suspension. Interstate immediately collapsed and sold down in less than a quarter of an hour from five bid, five and a thirty-second asked, to a quarter bid, three-eighths asked.

Abe handed back the paper to Morris and lit a cigar.

"For a man what has just played his partner for a sucker, Abe," Morris said, "you take it nice and quiet."

Abe puffed slowly before replying.

"After all, Mawruss," he said, "I was right."

"You was right?" Morris exclaimed. "What d'ye mean?"

"I mean, Mawruss," Abe went on, "I figured it out right. I says to myself when I got that check for twenty-five hundred dollars: If I buy this here stock from stock exchanges and we make money Mawruss will go pretty near crazy. He'll want to buy it the whole stock exchange full from stocks, and in the end it will bust us. On the other hand, Mawruss, I figured it out that if we bought this here stock and lose money on it, then Mawruss'll go crazy also, and want to murder me or something."

He paused and puffed again at his cigar.

"So, Mawruss," he concluded, "I went down to Gunst & Baumer's building, Mawruss; but instead of going to Gunst & Baumer, Mawruss, I went one flight lower down to Hill, Arkwright & Thompson's, Mawruss, and I didn't buy it Interstate Copper, Mawruss, but I bought it instead silk foulards, Mawruss—seventy-five hundred dollars' worth for twenty-five hundred dollars, and it's laying right now up in the cutting-room."

He leaned back in his chair and triumphantly surveyed his partner, who had collapsed into a crushed and perspiring heap. [Pg 172]

"So, Mawruss," he said, "I am a gambler. Hey? I shed your blood? What? I ruin you with my fool advice? Ain't it?"

Morris raised a protesting hand.

"Abe," he murmured huskily, "I done you an injury. It's me what's the fool. I was carried away by B. Sheitlis' making his money so easy."

Abe jumped to his feet.

"Ho-ly smokes!" he cried and dashed out of the show-room to the telephone in the rear of the store. He returned a moment later with his cigar at a rakish angle to his jutting lower lip.

"It's all right, Mawruss," he said. "I rung up the Kosciusko Bank and the two-hundred-and-seventy-five-dollar check went through all right."

"Sure it did," Morris replied, his drooping spirits once more revived. "I deposited it at eleven o'clock yesterday morning. I don't take no chances on getting stuck, Abe, and I only hope you didn't get stuck on them foulards, neither."

Abe grinned broadly.

"You needn't worry about that, Mawruss," he replied. "Stocks from stock exchanges maybe I don't know it, Mawruss; but stocks from silk foulards I do know it, Mawruss, and don't you forget it."

CHAPTER IX

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"Sol Klinger must think he ain't taking chances enough in these here stocks, Mawruss," Abe Potash remarked a week after the slump in Interstate Copper. "He got to hire a drummer by the name Walsh yet. That feller's idee of entertaining a customer is to go into Wasserbauer's and to drink all the schnapps in stock. I bet yer when Walsh gets through, he don't know which is the customer and which is the bartender already."

"You got to treat a customer right, Abe," Morris commented, "because nowadays we are up against some stiff competition. You take this here new concern, Abe, the Small Drygoods Company of Walla Walla, Washington, Abe, and Klinger & Klein ain't lost no time. Sol tells me this morning that them Small people start in with a hundred thousand capital all paid in. Sol says also their buyer James Burke which they send it East comes from the same place in the old country as this here Frank Walsh, and I guess we got to hustle if we want to get his trade, ain't it?"

"Because a customer is a *Landsmann* of *mine*, Mawruss," Abe replied, "ain't no reason why I shall sell him goods, Mawruss. If I could sell all my *Landsleute* what is in the cloak and suit business, Mawruss, we would be doing a million-dollar business a month, ain't it?" [Pg 174]

At this juncture Morris drew on his imagination. "I hear it also, Abe," he hinted darkly, "that this here James Bourke, what the Small Drygoods Company sends East, is related by marriage to this here Walsh's wife."

"Wives' relations is nix, Mawruss," Abe replied. "I got enough with wives' relations. When me and my Rosie gets married her mother was old man Smolinski's a widow. He made an honest failure of it in the customer peddler business in eighteen eighty-five, and the lodge money was pretty near gone when I got into the family. Then my wife's mother gives my wife's brother, Scheuer Smolinski, ten dollars to go out and buy some schnapps for the wedding, and that's the last we see of *him*, Mawruss. But Rosie and me gets married, anyhow, and takes the old lady to live with us, and the first thing you know, Mawruss, she gets sick on us and dies, with a professor and two trained nurses at my expense, and that's the way it goes, Mawruss."

He rose to his feet and helped himself to a cigar from the L to N first and second credit customers' box.

"No, Mawruss," he concluded, "if you can't sell a man goods on their merits, Mawruss, you'll never get him to take them because your wife is related by marriage to his wife. Ain't it? We got a good line, Mawruss, and we stand a show to sell our goods without no theayters nor dinners nor nothing." [Pg 175]

Morris shrugged his shoulders. "All right, Abe," he said, "you can do what you like about it, but I already bought it two tickets for Saturday night."

"Of course, if you *like* to go to shows, Mawruss," Abe declared as he rose to his feet, "I can't stop you. Only one thing I got to say it, Mawruss—if you think you should charge that up to the firm's expense account, all I got to say is you're mistaken, that's all."

Abe strode out of the show-room before a retort could formulate itself, so Morris struggled into his overcoat instead and made for the store door. As he reached it his eye fell on the clock over Wasserbauer's Café on the other side of the street. The hands pointed to two o'clock, and he broke into a run, for the Southwestern Flyer which bore the person of James Burke was due at the Grand Central Station at two-ten. Fifteen minutes later Morris darted out of the subway exit at Forty-second Street and imminently avoided being run down by a hansom. Indeed, the vehicle came to a halt so suddenly that the horse reared on its haunches, while a flood of profanity from the driver testified to the nearness of Morris' escape. Far from being grateful, however, Morris paused on the curb and was about to retaliate in kind when one of the two male occupants of the hansom leaned forward and poked a derisive finger at him.

"What's the hurry, Morris?" said the passenger. [Pg 176]

Morris looked up and gasped, for in that fleeting moment he recognized his tormentor. It was Frank Walsh, and although Morris saw only the features of his competitor it needed no Sherlock Holmes to deduce that Frank's fellow-passenger was none other than James Burke, buyer for the Small Drygoods Company.

Two hours later he returned to the store, for he had seized the opportunity of visiting some of the firm's retail trade while uptown, and when he came in he found Abe sorting a pile of misses' reefers.

"Well, Mawruss," Abe cried, "you look worried."

"I bet you I'm worried, Abe," he said. "You and your wife's relations done it. Two thousand dollars thrown away in the street. I got to the Grand Central Station just in time to get there too late, Abe. This here Walsh was ahead of me already, and he took Burke away in a hansom. When I come out of the subway they pretty near run over me, Abe."

"A competitor will do anything, Mawruss," Abe said sympathetically. "But don't you worry. There's just as big fish swimming in the sea as what they sell by fish markets, Mawruss. Bigger even. We ain't going to fail yet a while just because we lose the Small Drygoods Company for a customer."

"We ain't lost 'em yet, Abe," Morris rejoined, and without taking off his coat he repaired to Wasserbauer's Restaurant and Café for a belated lunch. As he entered he encountered Frank Walsh, who had been congratulating himself at the bar. [Pg 177]

"Hello, Morris," he cried. "I cut you out, didn't I?"

"You cut me out?" Morris replied stiffly. "I don't know what you mean."

"Of course you don't," Walsh broke in heartily. "I suppose you was hustling to the Grand Central Station just because you wanted to watch the engines. Well, I won't crow over you, Morris. Better luck next time!"

His words fell on unheeding ears, for Morris was busily engaged in looking around him. He sought features that might possibly belong to James Burke, but Frank seemed to be the only representative of the Emerald Isle present, and Morris proceeded to the restaurant in the rear.

"I suppose he turned him over to Klinger," he said to himself, while from the vantage of his table he saw Frank Walsh buy cigars and pass out into the street in company with another drummer *not* of Irish extraction.

He finished his lunch without appetite, and when he reentered the store Abe walked forward to greet him.

"Well, Mawruss," he said, "I seen Sol Klinger coming down the street a few minutes ago, so I kinder naturally just stood out on the sidewalk till he comes past, Mawruss. I saw he ain't looking any too pleased, so I asked him what's the trouble; and he says, nothing, only that Frank Walsh, what they got it for a drummer, eats 'em up with expenses. So I says, How so? And he says, this here Walsh has a customer by the name of Burke come to town, and the first thing you know, he spends it three dollars for a cab for Burke, and five dollars for lunch for Burke, and also ten dollars for two tickets for a show for Burke, before this here Burke is in town two hours already. Klinger looked pretty sore about it, Mawruss."

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"What show is he taking Burke to?" Morris asked.

"It ain't a show exactly," Abe replied hastily; "it's a prize-fight."

"A fight!" Morris cried. "That's an idea, ain't it?—to take a customer to a fight."

"I know it, Mawruss," Abe rejoined, "but you got to remember that the customer's name is also Burke. What for a show did you buy it tickets for?"

Morris blushed. "Travvy-ayter," he murmured.

"Travvy-ayter!" Abe replied. "Why, that's an opera, ain't it?"

Morris nodded. He had intended to combine business with pleasure by taking Burke to hear Tetrzzini.

"Well, you got your ideas, too, Mawruss," Abe continued; "and I don't know that they're much better as this here Walsh's ideas."

"Ain't they, Abe?" Morris replied. "Well, maybe they ain't, Abe. But just because I got a loafer for a customer ain't no reason why I should be a loafer myself, Abe."

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"Must you take a customer to a show, Mawruss?" Abe rejoined. "Is there a law compelling it, Mawruss?"

Morris shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyhow, Abe," he said, "I don't see that *you* got any kick coming, because I'm going to give them tickets to you and Rosie, Abe, and youse two can take in the show."

"And where are you going, Mawruss?"

"Me?" Morris replied. "I'm going to a prize-fighting, Abe. I don't give up so easy as all that."

On his way home that night Morris consulted an evening paper, and when he turned to the sporting page he found the upper halves of seven columns effaced by a huge illustration executed in the best style of Jig, the Sporting Cartoonist. In the left-hand corner crouched Slogger Atkins, the English lightweight, while opposite to him in the right-hand corner stood Young Kilrain, poised in an attitude of defense. Underneath was the legend, "The Contestants in Tomorrow Night's Battle." By reference to Jig's column Morris ascertained that the scene of the fight would be at the Polygon Club's new arena in the vicinity of Harlem Bridge, and at half past eight Saturday night he alighted from a Third Avenue L train at One Hundred and Twenty-ninth Street and followed the crowd that poured over the bridge.

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It was nine o'clock before Morris gained admission to the huge frame structure that housed the arena of the Polygon Club. Having just paid five dollars as a condition precedent to membership in good standing, he took his seat amid a dense fog of tobacco smoke and peered around him for Frank Walsh and his customer. At length he discerned Walsh's stalwart figure at the right hand of a veritable giant, whose square jaw and tip-tilted nose would have proclaimed the customer, even though Walsh had not assiduously plied him with cigars and engaged him continually in animated conversation. They were seated well down toward the ring, while Morris found a place directly opposite them and watched their every movement. When they laughed Morris scowled, and once when the big man slapped his thigh in uproarious appreciation of one of Walsh's stories Morris fairly turned green with envy.

Morris watched with a jaundiced eye the manner in which Frank Walsh radiated good humor. Not only did Walsh hand out cigars to the big man, but also he proffered them to the person who sat next to him on the other side. This man Morris recognized as the drummer who had been in Wasserbauer's with Frank on the previous day.

"Letting him in on it, too," Morris said to himself. "What show do I stand?"

The first of the preliminary bouts began. The combatants were announced as Pig Flanagan and Tom Evans, the Welsh coal-miner. It seemed to Morris that he had seen Evans somewhere before, but as this was his initiation into the realms of pugilism he concluded that it was merely a chance resemblance and dismissed the matter from his mind.

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The opening bout more than realized Morris' conception of the sport's brutality, for Pig Flanagan was what the *cognoscenti* call a good bleeder, and during the first second of the fight he fulfilled his reputation at the instance of a light tap from his opponent's left. There are some people who

cannot stand the sight of blood; Morris was one of them, and the drummer on Frank Walsh's right was another. Both he and Morris turned pale, but the big man on Walsh's left roared his approbation.

"Eat him up!" he bellowed, and at every fresh hemorrhage from Mr. Flanagan he rocked and swayed in an ecstasy of enjoyment. For three crimson rounds Pig Flanagan and Tom Evans continued their contest, but even a good bleeder must run dry eventually, and in the first half of the fourth round Pig took the count.

By this time the arena was swimming in Morris' nauseated vision, while, as for the drummer on Frank's right, he closed his eyes and wiped a clammy perspiration from his forehead. The club meeting proceeded, however, despite the stomachs of its weaker members, and the next bout commenced with a rush. It was advertised in advance by Morris' neighboring seatholders as a scientific contest, but in pugilism, as in surgery, science is often gory. In this instance a scientific white man hit a colored savant squarely on the nose, with the inevitable sanguinary result, and as though by a prearranged signal Morris and the drummer on Walsh's right started for the door. In vain did Walsh seize his neighbor by the coat-tail. The latter shook himself loose, and he and Morris reached the sidewalk together.

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"T'phooie!" said the drummer. "That's an amusement for five dollars."

Morris wiped his face and gasped like a landed fish. At length he recovered his composure. "I seen you sitting next to Walsh," he said.

The drummer nodded. "He didn't want me to go," he replied. "He said we come together and we should go together, but I told him I would wait for him till it was over. Him and that other fellow seem to enjoy it."

"Some people has got funny idees of a good time," Morris commented.

"*That's* an idee for a loafer," said the drummer. "For my part I like it more refined."

"I believe you," Morris replied. "Might you would come and take a cup of coffee with me, maybe?"

He indicated a bathbrick dairy restaurant on the opposite side of the street.

"Much obliged," the drummer replied, "but I got to go out of town to-morrow, and coffee keeps me awake. I think I'll wait here for about half an hour, and if Walsh and his friends don't come out by then I guess I'll go home."

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Morris hesitated. A sense of duty demanded that he stay and see the matter through, since his newly-made acquaintance with the *tertium quid* of Walsh's little party might lead to an introduction to the big man, and for the rest Morris trusted to his own salesmanship. But the drummer settled the matter for him.

"On second thought," he said, "I guess I won't wait. Why should I bother with a couple like them? If you're going downtown on the L I'll go with you."

Together they walked to the Manhattan terminal of the Third Avenue road and discussed the features of the disgusting spectacle they had just witnessed. In going over its details they found sufficient conversation to cover the journey to One Hundred and Sixteenth Street, where Morris alighted. When he descended to the street it occurred to him for the first time that he had omitted to learn both the name and line of business of his new-found friend.

In the meantime Frank Walsh and his companion watched the white scientist and the colored savant conclude their exhibition and cheered themselves hoarse over the *pièce de résistance* which followed immediately. At length Slogger Atkins disposed of Young Kilrain with a well-directed punch in the solar plexus, and Walsh and his companion rose to go.

"What become of yer friend?" the big man asked.

"He had to go out, Jim," Frank replied. "He couldn't stand the sight of the blood."

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"Is that so?" the big man commented. "It beats all, the queer ideas some people has."

"Well, Mawruss," Abe cried as he greeted his partner on Monday morning, "how did it went?"

"How did what went?" Morris asked.

"The prize-fighting."

Morris shook his head. "Not for all the cloak and suit trade on the Pacific slope," he said finally, "would I go to one of them things again. First, a fat Eyetalian by the name Flanagan fights with a young feller, Tom Evans, the Welsh coal-miner, and you never seen nothing like it, Abe, outside a slaughter-house."

"Flanagan don't seem much like an Eyetalian, Mawruss," Abe commented.

"I know it," Morris replied; "but that wouldn't surprise you much if you could seen the one what they call Tom Evans, the Welsh coal-miner."

"Why not?" Abe asked.

"Well, you remember Hyman Feinsilver, what worked by us as a shipping clerk while Jake was

sick?"

"Sure I do," Abe replied. "Comes from very decent, respectable people in the old country. His father was a rabbi."

"Don't make no difference about his father, Abe," Morris went on. "That Tom Evans, the Welsh coal-miner, is Hyman Feinsilver what worked by us, and the way he treated that poor Eyetalian young feller was a shame for the people. It makes me sick to think of it."

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"Don't think of it, then," Abe replied, "because it won't do you no good, Mawruss. I seen Sol Klinger in the subway this morning, and he says that last Saturday morning already James Burke was in their place and picked out enough goods to stock the biggest suit department in the country. Sol says Burke went to Philadelphia yesterday to meet Sidney Small, the president of the concern, and they're coming over to Klinger & Klein's this morning and close the deal."

Morris sat down and lit a cigar. "Yes, Abe, that's the way it goes," he said bitterly. "You sit here and tell me a long story about your wife's relations, and the first thing you know, Abe, I miss the train and Frank Walsh takes away my trade. What do I care about your wife's relations, Abe?"

"That's what I told you, Mawruss. Wife's relations don't do nobody no good," Abe replied.

"Jokes!" Morris exclaimed as he moved off to the rear of the store. "Jokes he is making it, and two thousand dollars thrown into the street."

For the rest of the morning Morris sulked in the cutting-room upstairs, while Abe busied himself in assorting his samples for a forthcoming New England trip. At twelve o'clock a customer came in, and when he left at half-past twelve Abe escorted him to the store door and lingered there a few minutes to get a breath of fresh air. As he was about to reënter the store he discerned the corpulent figure of Frank Walsh making his way down the opposite sidewalk toward Wasserbauer's Café. With him were two other men, one of them about as big as Frank himself, the other a slight, dark person.

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Abe darted to the rear of the store. "Mawruss," he called, "come quick! Here is this Walsh feller with Small and Burke."

Morris took the first few stairs at a leap, and had his partner not caught him he would have landed in a heap at the bottom of the flight. They covered the distance from the stairway to the store door so rapidly that when they reached the sidewalk Frank and his customers had not yet arrived in front of Wasserbauer's.

"The little feller," Morris hissed, "is the same one what was up to the fighting. I guess he's a drummer."

"Him?" Abe replied. "He ain't no drummer, Mawruss. He's Jacob Berkowitz, what used to run the Up-to-Date Store in Seattle. I sold him goods when me and Pincus Vesell was partners together, way before the Spanish War already. Who's the other feller?"

At that moment the subject of Abe's inquiry looked across the street and for the first time noticed Abe and Morris standing on the sidewalk. He stopped short and stared at Abe until his bulging eyes caught the sign above the store. For one brief moment he hesitated and then he leaped from the curb to the gutter and plunged across the roadway, with Jacob Berkowitz and Frank Walsh in close pursuit. He seized Abe by both hands and shook them up and down.

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"Abe Potash!" he cried. "So sure as you live."

"That's right," Abe admitted; "that's my name."

"You don't remember me, Abe?" he went on.

"I remember Mr. Berkowitz here," Abe said, smiling at the smaller man. "I used to sell him goods oncet when he ran the Up-to-Date Store in Seattle. Ain't that so, Mr. Berkowitz?"

The smaller man nodded in an embarrassed fashion, while Frank Walsh grew red and white by turns and looked first at Abe and then at the others in blank amazement.

"But," Abe went on, "you got to excuse me, Mister—Mister—"

"Small," said the larger man, whereat Morris fairly staggered.

"Mister Small," Abe continued. "You got to excuse me. I don't remember your name. Won't you come inside?"

"Hold on!" Frank Walsh cried. "These gentlemen are going to lunch with *me*."

Small turned and fixed Walsh with a glare. "I am going to do what I please, Mr. Walsh," he said coldly. "If I want to go to lunch I go to lunch; if I don't that's something else again."

"Oh, I've got lots of time," Walsh explained. "I was just reminding you, that's all. Wasserbauer's got a few good specialties on his bill-of-fare that don't improve with waiting."

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"All right," Mr. Small said. "If that's the case go ahead and have your lunch. I won't detain you none."

He put his hand on Abe's shoulder, and the little procession passed into the store with Abe and

Mr. Small in the van, while Frank Walsh constituted a solitary rear-guard. He sat disconsolately on a pile of piece goods as the four others went into the show-room.

"Sit down, Mr. Small," Abe said genially. "Mr. Berkowitz, take that easy chair."

Then Morris produced the "gilt-edged" cigars from the safe, and they all lit up.

"First thing, Mr. Small," Abe went on, "I should like to know where I seen you before. Of course, I know you're running a big business in Walla Walla, Washington, and certainly, too, I know your *face*."

"Sure you know my face, Abe," Mr. Small replied. "But my *name* ain't familiar. The last time you seen my face, Abe, was some twenty years since."

"Twenty years is a long time," Abe commented. "I seen lots of trade in twenty years."

"Trade you seen it, yes," Mr. Small said, "but I wasn't trade."

He paused and looked straight at Abe. "Think, Abe," he said. "When did you seen me last?"

Abe gazed at him earnestly and then shook his head. "I give it up," he said.

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"Well, Abe," Mr. Small murmured, "the last time you seen me I went out to buy ten dollars' worth of schnapps."

"What!" Abe cried.

"But that afternoon there was a sure-thing mare going to start over to Guttenberg just as I happened to be passing Butch Thompson's old place, and I no more than got the ten dollars down than she blew up in the stretch. So I boarded a freight over to West Thirtieth Street and fetched up in Walla Walla, Washington."

"Look a-here!" Abe gasped. "You ain't Scheuer Smolinski, are you?"

Mr. Small nodded.

"That's me," he said. "I'm Scheuer Smolinski or Sidney Small, whichever you like. When me and Jake Berkowitz started this here Small Drygoods Company we decided that Smolinski and Berkowitz was too big a mouthful for the Pacific Slope, so we slipped the 'inski' and the 'owitz.' Scheuer Small and Jacob Burke didn't sound so well, neither. Ain't it? So, since there ain't no harm in it, we just changed our front names, too, and me and him is Sidney Small and James Burke."

Abe sat back in his chair too stunned for words, while Morris pondered bitterly on the events of Saturday night. Then the prize was well within his grasp, for even at that late hour he could have persuaded Mr. Burke to reconsider his decision and to bring Mr. Small over to see Potash & Perlmutter's line first. But now it was too late, Morris reflected, for Mr. Small had visited Klinger & Klein's establishment and had no doubt given the order.

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"Say, my friends," Frank Walsh cried, poking his head in the door, "far from me to be buttin' in, but whenever you're ready for lunch just let me know."

Mr. Small jumped to his feet. "I'll let you know," he said—"I'll let you know right now. Half an hour since already I told Mr. Klinger I would make up my mind this afternoon about giving him the order for them goods what Mr. Burke picked out. Well, you go back and tell him I made up my mind already, sooner than I expected. I ain't going to give him the order at all."

Walsh's red face grew purple. At first he gurgled incoherently, but finally recovered sufficiently to enunciate; and for ten minutes he denounced Mr. Small and Mr. Burke, their conduct and antecedents. It was a splendid exhibition of profane invective, and when he concluded he was almost breathless.

"Yah!" he jeered, "five-dollar tickets for a prize-fight for the likes of youse!"

He fixed Morris and Mr. Burke with a final glare.

"Pearls before swine!" he bellowed, and banged the show-room door behind him.

Mr. Burke looked at Morris. "That's a lowlife for you," he said. "A respectable concern should have a salesman like him! Ain't it a shame and a disgrace?"

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Morris nodded.

"He takes me to a place where nothing but loafers is," Mr. Burke continued, "and for two hours I got to sit and hear him and his friend there, that big feller—I guess you seen him, Mr. Perlmutter—he told me he keeps a beer saloon—another lowlife—for two hours I got to listen to them loafers cussing together, and then he gets mad that I don't enjoy myself yet."

Mr. Small shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's forget all about it," he said. "Come, Abe, I want to look over your line, and you and me will do business right away."

Abe and Morris spent the next two hours displaying their line, while Mr. Small and Mr. Burke selected hundred lots of every style. Finally, Abe and Mr. Small retired to the office to fill out the

order, leaving Morris to replace the samples. He worked with a will and whistled a cheerful melody by way of accompaniment.

"Mister Perlmutter," James Burke interrupted, "that tune what you are whistling it, ain't that the drinking song from Travvy-ater already?"

Morris ceased his whistling. "That's right," he replied.

"I thought it was," Mr. Burke said. "I was going to see that opera last Saturday night if that lowlife Walsh wouldn't have took me to the prize-fight."

He paused and helped himself to a fresh cigar from the "gilt-edged" box.

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"For anybody else but a loafer," he concluded, "prize-fighting is nix. Opera, Mr. Perlmutter, that's an amusement for a gentleman."

Morris nodded a vigorous acquiescence. He had nearly concluded his task when Abe and his new-found brother-in-law returned.

"Well, gentlemen," Mr. Small announced, "we figured it up and it comes to twenty-five hundred dollars. That ain't bad for a starter."

"You bet," Abe agreed fervently.

Mr. Burke smiled. "You got a good line, Mr. Potash," he said. "Ever so much better than Klinger & Klein's."

"That's what they have," Mr. Small agreed. "But it don't make no difference, anyhow. I'd give them the order if the line wasn't *near* so good."

He put his arm around Abe's shoulder. "It stands in the Talmud, an old saying, but a true one," he said—"Blood is redder than water."

CHAPTER X

The Small Drygoods Company's order was the forerunner of a busy season that taxed the energies of not only Abe and Morris but of their entire business staff as well, and when the hot weather set in, Morris could not help noticing the fagged-out appearance of Miss Cohen the bookkeeper.

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"We should give that girl a vacation, Abe," he said. "She worked hard and we ought to show her a little consideration."

"I know, Mawruss," Abe replied; "but she ain't the only person what works hard around here, Mawruss. I work hard, too, Mawruss, but I ain't getting no vacation. That's a new *idee* what you got, Mawruss."

"Everybody gives it their bookkeeper a vacation, Abe," Morris protested.

"Do they?" Abe rejoined. "Well, if bookkeepers gets vacations, Mawruss, where are we going to stop? First thing you know, Mawruss, we'll be giving cutters vacations, and operators vacations, and before we get through we got our workroom half empty yet and paying for full time already. If she wants a vacation for two weeks I ain't got no objections, Mawruss, only we don't pay her no wages while she's gone."

"You can't do that, Abe," Morris said. "That would be laying her off, Abe; that wouldn't be no vacation."

"But we got to have somebody here to keep our books while she's away, Mawruss," Abe cried. "We got to make it a living, Mawruss. We can't shut down just because Miss Cohen gets a vacation. And so it stands, Mawruss, we got to pay Miss Cohen wages for doing *nothing*, Mawruss, and also we got to pay it wages to somebody else for doing something what Miss Cohen should be doing when she ain't, ain't it?"

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"Sure, we got to get a substitute for her while she's away," Morris agreed; "but I guess it won't break us."

"All right, Mawruss," Abe replied; "if I got to hear it all summer about this here vacation business

I'm satisfied. I got enough to do in the store without worrying about that, Mawruss. Only one thing I got to say it, Mawruss: we got to have a bookkeeper to take her place while she's away, and you got to attend to *that*, Mawruss. That's all I got to say."

Morris nodded and hastened to break the good news to Miss Cohen, who for the remainder of the week divided her time between Potash & Perlmutter's accounts and a dozen multicolored railroad folders.

"Look at that, Mawruss," Abe said as he gazed through the glass paneling of the show-room toward the bookkeeper's desk. "That girl ain't done it a stroke of work since we told her she could go already. What are we running here, anyway: a cloak and suit business or a cut-rate ticket office?"

"Don't you worry about *her*, Abe," Morris replied. "She's got her cashbook and daybook posted and she also got it a substitute. He's coming this afternoon."

"*He's coming?*" Abe said. "So she got it a young *feller*, Mawruss?"

"Well, Abe," Morris replied, "what harm is there in that? He's a decent, respectable young feller by the name Tuchman, what works as bookkeeper by the Kosciusko Bank. They give him a two weeks' vacation and he comes to work by us, Abe." [Pg 195]

"That's a fine way to spend a vacation, Mawruss," Abe commented. "Why don't he go up to Tannersville or so?"

"Because he's got to help his father out nights in his cigar store what he keeps it on Avenue B," Morris answered. "His father is Max Tuchman's brother. You know Max Tuchman, drummer for Lapidus & Elenbogen?"

"Sure I know him—a loud-mouth feller, Mawruss; got a whole lot to say for himself. A sport and a gambler, too," Abe said. "He'd sooner play auction pinochle than eat, Mawruss. I bet you he turns in an expense account like he was on a honeymoon every trip. The last time I seen this here Max Tuchman was up in Duluth. He was riding in a buggy with the lady buyer from Moe Gerschel's cloak department."

"Well, I suppose he sold her a big bill of goods, too, Abe, ain't it?" Morris rejoined. "He's an up-to-date feller, Abe. If anybody wants to sell goods to lady buyers they got to be up-to-date, ain't it? And so far what I hear it nobody told it me you made such a big success with lady buyers, neither, Abe."

Abe shrugged his shoulders.

"That ain't here nor there, Mawruss," he grunted. "The thing is this: if this young feller by the name of Tuchman does Miss Cohen's work as good as Miss Cohen does it I'm satisfied." [Pg 196]

There was no need for apprehension on that score, however, for when the substitute bookkeeper arrived he proved to be an accurate and industrious young fellow, and despite Miss Cohen's absence the work of Potash & Perlmutter's office proceeded with orderly dispatch.

"That's a fine young feller, Mawruss," Abe commented as he and his partner sat in the firm's show-room on the second day of Miss Cohen's vacation.

"Who's this you're talking about?" Morris asked.

"This here bookkeeper," Abe replied. "What's his first name, now, Mawruss?"

"Ralph," Morris said.

"Ralph!" Abe cried. "That's a name I couldn't remember it in a million years, Mawruss."

"Why not, Abe?" Morris replied. "Ralph ain't no harder than Moe or Jake, Abe. For my part, I ain't got no trouble in remembering that name; and anyhow, Abe, why should an up-to-date family like the Tuchmans give their boys such back-number names like Jake or Moe?"

"Jacob and Moses was decent, respectable people in the old country, Mawruss," Abe corrected solemnly.

"I know it, Abe," Morris rejoined; "but that was long since many years ago already. *Now* is another time entirely in New York City; and anyhow, with such names what we got it in our books, Abe, you shouldn't have no trouble remembering Ralph." [Pg 197]

"Sure not," Abe agreed, dismissing the subject. "So, I'll call him Ike. For two weeks he wouldn't mind it."

Morris shrugged. "For my part, you can call him Andrew Carnegie," he said; "only, let's not stand here talking about it all day, Abe. I see by the paper this morning that Marcus Bramson, from Syracuse, is at the Prince William Hotel, Abe, and you says you was going up to see him. That's your style, Abe: an old-fashion feller like Marcus Bramson. If you couldn't sell *him* a bill of goods, Abe, you couldn't sell *nobody*. He ain't no lady buyer, Abe."

Abe glared indignantly at his partner. "Well, Mawruss," he said, "if you ain't satisfied with the way what I sell goods you know what you can do. I'll do the inside work and you can go out on the road. It's a dawg's life, Mawruss, any way you look at it; and maybe, Mawruss, you would have a

good time taking buggy rides with lady buyers. For my part, Mawruss, I got something better to do with my time."

He seized his hat, still glaring at Morris, who remained quite unmoved by his partner's indignation.

"I heard it what you tell me now several times before already, Abe," he said; "and if you want it that Max Tuchman or Klinger & Klein or some of them other fellers should cop out a good customer of ours like Marcus Bramson, Abe, maybe you'll hang around here a little longer."

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Abe retorted by banging the show-room door behind him, and as he disappeared into the street Morris indulged in a broad, triumphant grin.

When Abe returned an hour later he found Morris going over the monthly statements with Ralph Tuchman. Morris looked up as Abe entered.

"What's the matter, Abe?" he cried. "You look worried."

"Worried!" Abe replied. "I ain't worried, Mawruss."

"Did you see Marcus Bramson?" Morris asked.

"Sure I seen him," said Abe; "he's coming down here at half-past three o'clock this afternoon. You needn't trouble yourself about *him*, Mawruss."

Abe hung up his hat, while Morris and Ralph Tuchman once more fell to the work of comparing the statements.

"Look a-here, Mawruss," Abe said at length: "who d'ye think I seen it up at the Prince William Hotel?"

"I ain't no mind reader, Abe," Morris replied. "Who *did* you seen it?"

"Miss Atkinson, cloak buyer for the Emporium, Duluth," Abe replied. "That's Moe Gerschel's store."

Morris stopped comparing the statements, while Ralph Tuchman continued his writing.

"She's just come in from the West, Mawruss," Abe went on. "She ain't registered yet when I was going out, and she won't be in the Arrival of Buyers till to-morrow morning."

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"Did you speak to her?" Morris asked.

"Sure I spoke to her," Abe said. "I says good-morning, and she recognized me right away. I asked after Moe, and she says he's well; and I says if she comes down here for fall goods; and she says she ain't going to talk no business for a couple of days, as it's a long time already since she was in New York and she wants to look around her. Then I says it's a fine weather for driving just now."

He paused for a moment and looked at Morris.

"Yes," Morris said, "and what did she say?"

"She says sure it is," Abe continued, "only, she says she got thrown out of a wagon last fall, and so she's kind of sour on horses. She says nowadays she don't go out except in oitermobiles."

"Oitermobiles!" Morris exclaimed, and Ralph Tuchman, whose protruding ears, sharp-pointed nose and gold spectacles did not belie his inquisitive disposition, ceased writing to listen more closely to Abe's story.

"That's what she said, Mawruss," Abe replied; "and so I says for my part, I liked it better oitermobiles as horses."

"Why, Abe," Morris cried, "you ain't never rode in an oitermobile in all your life."

"Sure not, Mawruss, I'm lucky if I get to a funeral oncet in a while. Ike," he broke off suddenly, "you better get them statements mailed."

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Ralph Tuchman rose sadly and repaired to the office.

"That's a smart young feller, Mawruss," Abe commented, "and while you can't tell much about a feller from his face, Mawruss, I never seen them long ears on anyone that minded his own business, y'understand? And besides, I ain't taking no chances on his Uncle Max Tuchman getting advance information about this here Moe Gerschel's buyer."

Morris nodded. "Maybe you're right, Abe," he murmured.

"You was telling me what this Miss Abrahamson said, Abe."

"Miss Atkinson, Mawruss," Abe corrected, "*not* Abrahamson."

"Well, what did she say?" Morris asked.

"So she asks me if I ever went it oitermobiling," Abe went on, "and I says sure I did, and right away quick I seen it what she means; and I says how about going this afternoon; and she says she's agreeable. So I says, Mawruss, all right, I says, we'll mix business with pleasure, I says. I told her we'll go in an oitermobile to the Bronix already, and when we come back to the store at

about, say, five o'clock we'll look over the line. Then after that we'll go to dinner, and after dinner we go to theayter. How's that, Mawruss?"

"I heard it worse idees than that, Abe," Morris replied; "because if you get this here Miss Aaronson down here in the store, naturally, she thinks if she gives us the order she gets better treatment at the dinner and at the theayter afterward." [Pg 201]

"That's the way I figured it out, Mawruss," Abe agreed; "and also, I says to myself, Mawruss will enjoy it a good oitermobile ride."

"*Me!*" Morris cried. "What have I got to do with this here oitermobile ride, Abe?"

"What have *you* got to do with it, Mawruss?" Abe repeated. "Why, Mawruss, I'm surprised to hear you, you should talk that way. You got everything to do with it. I'm a back number, Mawruss; I don't know nothing about selling goods to lady buyers, ain't it? You say it yourself, a feller has got to be up-to-date to sell goods to lady buyers. So, naturally, you being the up-to-date member of this concern, you got to take Miss Atkinson out in the oitermobile."

"But, Abe," Morris protested, "I ain't never rode in an oitermobile, and there wouldn't be no pleasure in it for me, Abe. Why don't *you* go, Abe? You say it yourself you lead it a dawg's life on the road. Now, here's a chance for you to enjoy yourself, Abe, and *you* should go. Besides, Abe, you got commercial travelers' accident insurance, and I ain't."

"The oitermobile ain't coming till half-past one, Mawruss," Abe replied; "between now and then you could get it a *hundred* policies of accident insurance. No, Mawruss, this here lady-buyer business is up to you. I got a pointer from Sol Klinger to ring up a concern on Forty-sixth Street, which I done so, and fifteen dollars it costed me. That oitermobile is coming here for you at half-past one, and after that all you got to do is to go up to the Prince William Hotel and ask for Miss Atkinson." [Pg 202]

"But, Abe," Morris protested, "I don't even know this here Miss Isaacson."

"*Not* Isaacson," Abe repeated; "Atkinson. You'd better write that name down, Mawruss, before you forget it."

"Never mind, Abe," Morris rejoined. "I don't need to write down things to remember 'em. I don't have to call a young feller out of his name just because my memory is bad, Abe. The name I'll remember good enough when it comes right down *to* it. Only, why should I go out oitermobiling riding with this Miss Atkinson, Abe? I'm the inside partner, ain't it? And you're the outside man. Do you know what I think, Abe? I think you're scared to ride in an oitermobile."

"Me scared!" Abe cried. "Why should I be scared, Mawruss? A little thing like a broken leg or a broken arm, Mawruss, don't scare me. I ain't going because it ain't my business to go. It's your idee, this lady-buyer business, and if you don't want to go we'll charge the fifteen dollars what I paid out to profit and loss and call the whole thing off."

He rose to his feet, thrust out his waist-line and made a dignified exit by way of closing the discussion. A moment later, however, he returned with less dignity than haste. [Pg 203]

"Mawruss," he hissed, "that young feller—that—that—now, Ike—is telephoning."

"Well," Morris replied, "one telephone message ain't going to put us into bankruptcy, Abe."

"Bankruptcy, nothing!" Abe exclaimed. "He's telephoning to his Uncle Max Tuchman."

Morris jumped to his feet, and on the tips of their toes they darted to the rear of the store.

"All right, Uncle Max," they heard Ralph Tuchman say. "I'll see you to-night. Good-by."

Abe and Morris exchanged significant glances, while Ralph slunk guiltily away to Miss Cohen's desk.

"Let's fire him on the spot," Abe said.

Morris shook his head. "What good will *that* do, Abe?" Morris replied. "We ain't certain that he told Max Tuchman nothing, Abe. For all you and me know, Max may of rung *him* up about something quite different already."

"I believe it, Mawruss," Abe said ironically. "But, anyhow, I'm going to ring up that oitermobile concern on Forty-sixth Street and tell 'em to send it around here at twelve o'clock. Then you can go up there to the hotel, and if that Miss Atkinson ain't had her lunch yet buy it for her, Mawruss, for so sure as you stand there I bet yer that young feller, Ike, has rung up this here Max Tuchman and told him all about us going up there to take her out in an oitermobile. I bet yer Max will get the biggest oitermobile he can find up there right away, and he's going to steal her away from us, sure, if we don't hustle." [Pg 204]

"Dreams you got it, Abe," Morris said. "How should this here young feller, Ralph Tuchman, know that Miss Aaronson was a customer of his Uncle Max Tuchman, Abe?"

Abe looked at Morris more in sorrow than in anger. "Mawruss," he said, "do me the favor once and write that name down. A-T at, K-I-N kin, S-O-N son, Atkinson—*not* Aaronson."

"That's what I said—Atkinson—Abe," Morris protested; "and if you're so scared we're going to

lose her, Abe, go ahead and 'phone. We got to sell goods to lady buyers *some time*, Abe, and we may as well make the break *now*."

Abe waited to hear no more, but hastened to the 'phone, and when he returned a few minutes later he found that Morris had gone to the barber shop across the street. Twenty minutes afterward a sixty-horsepower machine arrived at the store door just as Morris came up the steps of the barber shop underneath Wasserbauer's Café and Restaurant. He almost bumped into Philip Plotkin, of Kleinberg & Plotkin, who was licking the refractory wrapper of a Wheeling stogy, with one eye fixed on the automobile in front of his competitors' store.

"Hallo, Mawruss," Philip cried. "Pretty high-toned customers you must got it when they come down to the store in oitermobiles, ain't it?" [Pg 205]

Morris flashed his gold fillings in a smile of triumphant superiority. "That ain't no customer's oitermobile, Philip," he said. "That's for *us* an oitermobile, what we take it out our customers riding in."

"Why don't you take it out credit men from commission houses riding, Mawruss?" Philip rejoined as Morris stepped from the curb to cross the street. This was an allusion to the well-known circumstance that with credit men a customer's automobile-riding inspires as much confidence as his betting on the horse races, and when Morris climbed into the tonneau he paid little attention to Abe's instructions, so busy was he glancing around him for prying credit men. At length, with a final jar and jerk the machine sprang forward, and for the rest of the journey Morris' mind was emptied of every other apprehension save that engendered of passing trucks or street cars. Finally, the machine drew up in front of the Prince William and Morris scrambled out, trembling in every limb. He made at once for the clerk's desk.

"Please send this to Miss Isaacson," he said, handing out a firm card.

The clerk consulted an index and shook his head. "No Miss Isaacson registered here," he said.

"Oh, sure not," Morris cried, smiling apologetically. "I mean Miss Aaronson."

Once more the clerk pawed over his card index. "You've got the wrong hotel," he declared. "I don't see any Miss Aaronson here, either." [Pg 206]

Morris scratched his head. He mentally passed in review Jacobson, Abrahamson, and every other Biblical proper name combined with the suffix "son," but rejected them all.

"The lady what I want to see it is buyer for a department store in Duluth, what arrived here this morning," Morris explained.

"Let me see," the clerk mused; "buyer, hey? What was she a buyer of?"

"Cloaks and suits," Morris answered.

"Suits, hey?" the clerk commented. "Let me see—buyer of suits. Was that the lady that was expecting somebody with an automobile?"

Morris nodded emphatically.

"Well, that party called for her and they left here about ten minutes ago," the clerk replied.

"What!" Morris gasped.

"Maybe it was five minutes ago," the clerk continued. "A gentleman with a red tie and a fine diamond pin. His name was Tucker or Tuckerton or——"

"Tuchman," Morris cried.

"That's right," said the clerk; "he was a——"

But Morris turned on his heel and darted wildly toward the entrance.

"Say!" he cried, hailing the carriage agent, "did you seen it a lady and a gent in an oitermobile leave here five minutes ago?"

"Ladies and gents leave here in automobiles on an average of every three minutes," said the carriage agent. [Pg 207]

"Sure, I know," Morris continued, "but the gent wore it a red tie with a big diamond."

"Red tie with a big diamond," the carriage agent repeated. "Oh, yeh—I remember now. The lady wanted to know where they was going, and the red necktie says up to the Heatherbloom Inn and something about getting back to his store afterward."

Morris nodded vigorously.

"So I guess they went up to the Heatherbloom Inn," the carriage agent said.

Once more Morris darted away without waiting to thank his informant, and again he climbed into the tonneau of the machine.

"Do you know where the Heatherbloom Inn is?" he asked the chauffeur.

"What you tryin' to do?" the chauffeur commented. "Kid me?"

"I ain't trying to do *nothing*," Morris explained. "I ask it you a simple question: Do you know where the Heatherbloom Inn is?"

"Say! do you know where Baxter Street is?" the chauffeur asked, and then without waiting for an answer he opened the throttle and they glided around the corner into Fifth Avenue. It was barely half-past twelve and the tide of fashionable traffic had not yet set in. Hence the motor car made good progress, nor was it until Fiftieth Street was reached that a block of traffic caused them to halt. An automobile had collided with a delivery wagon, and a wordy contest was waging between the driver of the wagon, the chauffeur, one of the occupants of the automobile and a traffic-squad policeman.

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"You don't know your business," a loud voice proclaimed, addressing the policeman. "If you did you wouldn't be sitting up there like a dummy already. This here driver run into *us*. We didn't run into him."

It was the male occupant of the automobile that spoke, and in vain did his fair companion clutch at the tails of the linen duster that he wore; he was in the full tide of eloquence and thoroughly enjoying himself.

The mounted policeman maintained his composure—the calm of a volcano before its eruption, the ominous lull that precedes the tornado.

"And furthermore," continued the passenger, throwing out his chest, whereon sparkled a large diamond enfolded in crimson silk—"and furthermore, I'll see to it that them superiors of yours down below hears of it."

The mounted policeman jumped nimbly from his horse, and as Morris rose in the tonneau of his automobile he saw Max Tuchman being jerked bodily to the street, while his fair companion shrieked hysterically.

Morris opened the door and sprang out. With unusual energy he wormed his way through the crowd that surrounded the policeman and approached the side of the automobile.

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"Lady, lady," he cried, "I don't remember your name, but I'm a friend of Max Tuchman here, and I'll get you out of this here crowd in a minute."

He opened the door opposite to the side out of which Tuchman had made his enforced exit, and offered his hand to Max's trembling companion.

The lady hesitated a brief moment. Any port in a storm, she argued to herself, and a moment later she was seated beside Morris in the latter's car, which was moving up the Avenue at a good twenty-mile gait. The chauffeur took advantage of the traffic policeman's professional engagement with Max Tuchman, and it was not until the next mounted officer hove into view that he brought his car down to its lawful gait.

"If you're a friend of Mr. Tuchman's," said the lady at length, "why didn't you go with him to the police station and bail him out?"

Morris grinned. "I guess you'll know when I tell it you that my name is Mr. Perlmutter," he announced, "of Potash & Perlmutter."

The lady turned around and glanced uneasily at Morris. "Is that so?" she said. "Well, I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Perlmutter."

"So, naturally, I don't feel so bad as I might about it," Morris went on.

"Naturally?" the lady commented. She looked about her apprehensively. "Perhaps we'd better go back to the Prince William. Don't you think so?"

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"Why, you was going up to the Heatherbloom Inn with Max Tuchman, wasn't you?" Morris said.

"How did you find *that* out?" she asked.

"A small-size bird told it me," Morris replied jocularly. "But, anyhow, no jokes nor nothing, why shouldn't we go up and have lunch at the Heatherbloom Inn? And then you can come down and look at our line, anyhow."

"Well," said the lady, "if you can show me those suits as well as Mr. Tuchman could, I suppose it really won't make any difference."

"I can show 'em to you *better* than Mr. Tuchman could," Morris said; "and now so long as you are content to come downtown we won't talk business no more till we get there."

They had an excellent lunch at the Heatherbloom Inn, and many a hearty laugh from the lady testified to her appreciation of Morris' naïve conversation. The hour passed pleasantly for Morris, too, since the lady's unaffected simplicity set him entirely at his ease. To be sure, she was neither young nor handsome, but she had all the charm that self-reliance and ability give to a woman.

"A good, smart, business head she's got it," Morris said to himself, "and I wish I could remember that name."

Had he not feared that his companion might think it strange, he would have asked her name outright. Once he called her Miss Aaronson, but the look of amazement with which she favored him effectually discouraged him from further experiment in that direction. Thenceforth he called her "lady," a title which made her smile and seemed to keep her in excellent humor.

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At length they concluded their meal—quite a modest repast and comparatively reasonable in price—and as they rose to leave Morris looked toward the door and gasped involuntarily. He could hardly believe his senses, for there blocking the entrance stood a familiar bearded figure. It was Marcus Bramson—the conservative, back-number Marcus Bramson—and against him leaned a tall, stout person not quite as young as her clothes and wearing a large picture hat. Obviously this was not Mrs. Bramson, and the blush with which Marcus Bramson recognized Morris only confirmed the latter's suspicions.

Mr. Bramson murmured a few words to the youthfully-dressed person at his side, and she glared venomously at Morris, who precipitately followed his companion to the automobile. Five minutes afterward he was chatting with the lady as they sped along Riverside Drive.

"Duluth must be a fine town," he suggested.

"It is indeed," the lady agreed. "I have some relatives living there."

"That should make it pleasant for you, lady," Morris went on, and thereafter the conversation touched on relatives, whereupon Morris favored his companion with a few intimate details of his family life that caused her to laugh until she was completely out of breath. To be sure, Morris could see nothing remarkably humorous about it himself, and when one or two anecdotes intended to be pathetic were received with tears of mirth rather than sympathy he felt somewhat annoyed. Nevertheless, he hid his chagrin, and it was not long before the familiar sign of Wasserbauer's Café and Restaurant warned Morris that they had reached their destination. He assisted his companion to alight and ushered her into the show-room.

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"Just a minute, lady," he said, "and I'll bring Mr. Potash here."

"But," the lady protested, "I thought Mr. Lapidus was the gentleman who had charge of it."

"*That's* all right," Morris said, "you just wait and I'll bring Mr. Potash here."

He took the stairs to the cutting-room three at a jump. "Abe," he cried, "Miss Aaronson is downstairs."

Abe's face, which wore a worried frown, grew darker still as he regarded his partner malevolently. "What's the matter with you, Mawruss?" he said. "Can't you remember a simple name like Atkinson?"

"Atkinson!" Morris cried. "That's it—*Atkinson*. I've been trying to remember it that name for four hours already. But, anyhow, she's downstairs, Abe."

Abe rose from his task and made at once for the stairs, with Morris following at his heels. In four strides he had reached the show-room, but no sooner had he crossed the threshold than he started back violently, thereby knocking the breath out of Morris, who was nearly precipitated to the floor.

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"Morris," he hissed, "who is that there lady?"

"Why," Morris answered, "that's Miss Aaronson—I mean Atkinson—ain't it?"

"Atkinson!" Abe yelled. "That ain't Miss Atkinson."

"Then who *is* she?" Morris asked.

"Who *is* she?" Abe repeated. "That's a fine question for you to ask *me*. You take a lady for a fifteen-dollar oiternobile ride, and spend it as much more for lunch in her, *and you don't even know her name!*"

A cold perspiration broke out on Morris and he fairly staggered into the show-room. "Lady," he croaked, "do me a favor and tell me what is your name, please."

The lady laughed. "Well, Mr. Perlmutter," she said, "I'm sure this is most extraordinary. Of course, there is such a thing as combining business and pleasure; but, as I told Mr. Tuchman when he insisted on taking me up to the Heatherbloom Inn, the Board of Trustees control the placing of the orders. I have only a perfunctory duty to perform when I examine the finished clothing."

"Board of Trustees!" Morris exclaimed.

"Yes, the Board of Trustees of the Home for Female Orphans of Veterans, at Oceanhurst, Long Island. I am the superintendent—Miss Taylor—and I had an appointment at Lapidus & Elenbogen's to inspect a thousand blue-serge suits. Lapidus & Elenbogen were the successful bidders, you know. And there was really no reason for Mr. Tuchman's hospitality, since I had nothing whatever to do with their receiving the contract, nor could I possibly influence the placing of any future orders."

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Morris nodded slowly. "So you ain't Miss Atkinson, then, lady?" he said.

The lady laughed again. "I'm very sorry if I'm the innocent recipient under false pretenses of a lunch and an automobile ride," she said, rising. "And you'll excuse me if I must hurry away to keep my appointment at Lapidus & Elenbogen's? I have to catch a train back to Oceanhurst at five o'clock, too."

She held out her hand and Morris took it sheepishly.

"I hope you'll forgive me," she said.

"I can't blame *you*, lady," Morris replied as they went toward the front door. "It ain't *your* fault, lady."

He held the door open for her. "And as for that Max Tuchman," he said, "I hope they send him up for life."

Abe stood in the show-room doorway as Morris returned from the front of the store and fixed his partner with a terrible glare. "Yes, Mawruss," he said, "you're a fine piece of work, I must say."

Morris shrugged his shoulders and sat down. "That's what comes of not minding your own business," he retorted. "I'm the inside, Abe, and you're the outside, and it's your business to look after the out-of-town trade. I told you I don't know nothing about this here lady-buyer business. You ordered the oitermobile. I ain't got nothing to do with it, and, anyhow, I don't want to hear no more about it."

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A pulse was beating in Abe's cheeks as he paced up and down before replying.

"*You* don't want to hear no more about it, Mawruss, I know," he said; "but *I* want to hear about it. I got a *right* to hear about it, Mawruss. I got a right to hear it how a man could make such a fool out of himself. Tell me, Mawruss, what name did you ask it for when you went to the clerk at the Prince William Hotel?"

Morris jumped to his feet. "Lillian Russell!" he roared, and banged the show-room door behind him.

For the remainder of the day Morris and Abe avoided each other, and it was not until the next morning that Morris ventured to address his partner.

"Did you get it any word from Marcus Bramson?" he asked.

"I ain't seen nor heard nothing," Abe replied. "I can't understand it, Mawruss; the man promised me, mind you, he would be here sure. Maybe you seen him up to the hotel, Mawruss?"

"I seen him," Morris replied, "but not at the hotel, Abe. I seen him up at that Heatherbloom Inn, Abe—with a lady."

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"With a lady?" Abe cried. "Are you sure it was a lady, Mawruss? Maybe she was a relation."

"Relations you don't take it to expensive places like the Heatherbloom Inn, Abe," Morris replied. "And, anyhow, this wasn't no relation, Abe; this was a lady. Why should a man blush for a relation, ain't it?"

"Did he blush?" Abe asked; but the question remained unanswered, for as Morris was about to reply the store door opened and Marcus Bramson entered.

"Ah, Mr. Bramson," Abe cried, "ain't it a beautiful weather?"

He seized the newcomer by the hand and shook it up and down. Mr. Bramson received the greeting solemnly.

"Abe," he said, "I am a man of my word, ain't it? And so I come here to buy goods; but, all the same, I tell you the truth: I was pretty near going to Lapidus & Elenbogen's."

"Lapidus & Elenbogen's!" Abe cried. "Why so?"

At this juncture Morris appeared at the show-room door and beamed at Mr. Bramson, who looked straight over his head in cold indifference; whereupon Morris found some business to attend to in the rear of the store.

"That's what I said," Mr. Bramson replied, "Lapidus & Elenbogen's; and you would of deserved it."

"Mr. Bramson," Abe protested, "did I ever done you something that you should talk that way?"

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"*Me* you never done nothing to, Abe," said Mr. Bramson, "but to treat a lady what *is* a lady, Abe, like a dawg, Abe, I must say it I'm surprised.

"*I* never treated no lady like a dawg, Mr. Bramson," Abe replied. "You must be mistaken."

"Well, maybe it wasn't you, Abe," Mr. Bramson went on; "but if it wasn't you it was your partner there, that Mawruss Perlmutter. Yesterday I seen him up to the Heatherbloom Inn, Abe, and I assure you, Abe, I was never before in my life in such a high-price place—coffee and cake, Abe, believe me, one dollar and a quarter."

He paused to let the information sink in. "But what could I do?" he asked. "I was walking through the side entrance of the Prince William Hotel yesterday, Abe, just on my way down to see you,

when I seen it a lady sitting on a bench, looking like she would like to cry only for shame for the people. Well, Abe, I looked again, Abe, and would you believe it, Abe, it was Miss Atkinson, what used to work for me as saleswoman and got a job by The Golden Rule Store, Elmira, as assistant buyer, and is now buyer by Moe Gerschel, The Emporium, Duluth."

Abe nodded; he knew what was coming.

"So, naturally, I asks her what it is the matter with her, and she says Potash & Perlmutter had an appointment to take her out in an oitermobile at two o'clock, and here it was three o'clock already and they ain't showed up yet. Potash & Perlmutter is friends of mine, Miss Atkinson, I says, and I'm sure something must have happened, or otherwise they would not of failed to be here. So I says for her to ring you up, Abe, and find out. But she says she would see you first in— she wouldn't ring you up for all the oitermobiles in New York. So I says, well, I says, if you don't want to ring 'em up *I'll* ring 'em up; and she says I should mind my own business. So then I says, if *you* wouldn't ring 'em up and *I* wouldn't ring 'em up I'll do *this* for you, Miss Atkinson: You and me will go for an oitermobile ride, I says, and we'll have just so good a time as if Potash & Perlmutter was paying for it. And so we did, Abe. I took Miss Atkinson up to the Heatherbloom Inn, and it costed me thirty dollars, Abe, including a cigar, which I wouldn't charge you nothing for."

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"Charge *me* nothing!" Abe cried. "Of course you wouldn't charge me nothing. You wouldn't charge me nothing, Mr. Bramson, because I wouldn't *pay* you nothing. I didn't ask you to take Miss Atkinson out in an oitermobile."

"I know you didn't, Abe," Mr. Bramson replied firmly, "but either you will pay for it or I will go over to Lapidus & Elenbogen's and *they* will pay for it. They'll be only too glad to pay for it, Abe, because I bet yer Miss Atkinson she give 'em a pretty big order already, Abe."

Abe frowned and then shrugged. "All right," he said; "if I must I must. So come on now, Mr. Bramson, and look over the line."

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In the meantime Morris had repaired to the bookkeeper's desk and was looking over the daybook with an unseeing eye. His mind was occupied with bitter reflections when Ralph Tuchman interrupted him.

"Mr. Perlmutter," he said, "I'm going to leave."

"Going to leave?" Morris cried. "What for?"

"Well, in the first place, I don't like it to be called out of my name," he continued. "Mr. Potash calls me Ike, and my name is Ralph. If a man's name is Ralph, Mr. Perlmutter, he naturally don't like it to be called Ike."

"I know it," Morris agreed, "but some people ain't got a good memory for names, Ralph. Even myself I forget it names, too, oncet in a while, occasionally."

"But that ain't all, Mr. Perlmutter," Ralph went on. "Yesterday, while you was out, Mr. Potash accuses me something terrible."

"Accuse you?" Morris said. "What does he accuse you for?"

"He accuse me that I ring up my Uncle Max Tuchman and tell him about a Miss Atkinson at the Prince William Hotel," Ralph continued. "I didn't do it, Mr. Perlmutter; believe me. Uncle Max rung me up, and I was going to tell you and Mr. Potash what he rung me up for if you didn't looked at me like I was a pickpocket when I was coming away from the 'phone yesterday."

"I didn't look at you like a pickpocket, Ralph," Morris said. "What did your Uncle Max ring you up for?"

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"Why, he wanted me to tell you that so long as you was so kind and gives me this here vacation job I should do you a good turn, too. He says that Miss Atkinson tells him yesterday she was going out oitermobile riding with you, and so he says I should tell you not to go to any expense by Miss Atkinson, on account that she already bought her fall line from Uncle Max when he was in Duluth three weeks ago already; and that she is now in New York strictly on her vacation only, and *not* to buy goods."

Morris nodded slowly.

"Well, Ralph," he said, "you're a good, smart boy, and I want you to stay until Miss Cohen comes back and maybe we'll raise you a couple of dollars a week till then."

He bit the end off a Heatherbloom Inn cigar. "When a man gets played it good for a sucker like we was," he mused, "a couple of dollars more or less won't harm him none."

"That's what my Uncle Max says when he seen you up at the Heatherbloom Inn yesterday," Ralph commented.

"*He* seen me up at the Heatherbloom Inn!" Morris cried. "How should he seen me up at the Heatherbloom Inn? I thought he was made it arrested."

"Sure he was made it arrested," Ralph said. "But he fixed it up all right at the station-house, and the sergeant lets him out. So he goes up to the Heatherbloom Inn because when he went right

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back to the hotel to see after that Miss Taylor the carriage agent tells him a feller chases him up in an oitermobile to the Heatherbloom Inn. But when Uncle Max gets up there you look like you was having such a good time already he hates to interrupt you, so he goes back to the store again."

Morris puffed violently at his cigar.

"That's a fine piece of work," he said, "that Max Tuchman is."

Ralph nodded.

"Sure he is," he replied. "Uncle Max is an up-to-date feller."

CHAPTER XI

"The trouble is with us, Mawruss," Abe Potash declared one afternoon in September, "that we ain't in an up-to-date neighborhood. We should get it a loft in one of them buildings up in Seventeenth, Eighteenth or Nineteenth Street, Mawruss. All the trade is up in that neighborhood."

"I ain't got such a good head for figures like you got it, Abe," Morris Perlmutter replied, "and so I am content we should stay where we are. We done it always a fair business here, Abe. Ain't it?"

"Sure, I know," Abe went on, "but the way it is with out-of-town buyers, Mawruss, they goes where the crowd is, and they ain't going to be bothered to come way downtown for us, Mawruss."

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"Well, how about Klinger & Klein, Lapidus & Elenbogen, and all them people, Abe?" Morris asked. "Ain't them out-of-town buyers going to buy goods off of them neither?"

"Klinger & Klein already hire it a fine loft on Nineteenth Street," Abe interposed.

"Well, Abe," Morris rejoined, "Klinger & Klein, like a whole lot of people what I know, acts like monkeys, Abe. They see somebody doing something and they got to do it too."

"If we could do the business what Klinger & Klein done it, Mawruss, I am willing I should act like a monkey."

"Another thing, Abe," Morris went on, "Klinger & Klein sends their work out by contractors. We got it operators and machines, Abe, and you can't have a show-room, cutting-room and machines all in one loft. Ain't it?"

"Well, then we get it two lofts, Mawruss, and then we could put our workrooms upstairs and our show-room and offices downstairs."

"And double our expenses, too, Abe," Morris added. "No, Abe, I don't want to work for no landlord all my life."

"But I seen Marks Henochstein yesterday, Mawruss, and he told it me Klinger & Klein ain't paying half the rent what they pay down here. So, if we could get it two floors we wouldn't increase our expenses, Mawruss, and could do it maybe twicet the business."

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"Marks Henochstein is a real-estater, Abe," Morris replied, "and when a real-estater tells you something, you got to make allowances fifty per cent. for facts."

"I know," Abe cried; "but we don't have to hire no loft what we don't want to, Mawruss. Henochstein can't compel you to pay twicet as much what we're paying now. Ain't it? So what is the harm if we should maybe ask him to find a couple of lofts for us? Ain't it?"

"All right, Abe," Morris concluded, "if I must go crazy listening to you talking about it I sooner move first. So go ahead and do what you like."

"Well, the fact is," said Abe, "I told Marks Henochstein he should find it a couple lofts for us this morning, Mawruss, agreeing strictly that we should not pay him nothing, as he gets a commission from the landlord already."

Morris received this admission with a scowl.

"For a feller what's got such a nerve like you got it, Abe," he declared, "I am surprised you should make it such a poor salesman."

"When a man's got it a back-number partner, Mawruss, his hands is full inside and outside the store, and so naturally he loses it a few customers oncet in a while," Abe replied. "But, somebody's got to have nerve in a business, Mawruss, and if I waited for you to make suggestions we would never get nowhere."

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Morris searched his mind for an appropriate rejoinder, and had just formulated a particularly bitter jibe when the store door opened to admit two shabbily-dressed females.

"Here, you," Abe called, "operators goes around the alley."

The elder of the two females drew herself up haughtily.

"Operators!" she said with a scornful rising inflection.

"Finishers, also," Abe continued. "This here door is for customers."

"You don't know me, Potash," she retorted. "Might you don't know this lady neither, maybe?"

She indicated her companion, who turned a mournful gaze upon the astonished Abe.

"But we know you, Potash," she went on. "We know you already when you didn't have it so much money what you got now."

Her companion nodded sadly.

"So, Potash," she concluded, "your own wife's people is operators and finishers; what?"

Abe looked at Morris, who stood grinning broadly in the show-room doorway.

"Give me an introduction once, Abe," Morris said.

"He don't have to give us no introduction," the elder female exclaimed. "Me, I am Mrs. Sarah Mashkowitz, and this here lady is my sister, Mrs. Blooma Sheikman, *geborn* Smolinski."

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"That ain't my fault that you got them names," Abe said. "I see it now that you're my wife's father's brother's daughter, ain't it? So if you're going to make a touch, make it. I got business to attend to."

"We ain't going to make no touch, Potash," Mrs. Mashkowitz declared. "We would rather die first."

"All right," Abe replied heartlessly. "Die if you got to. You can't make me mad."

Mrs. Mashkowitz ignored Abe's repartee.

"We don't ask nothing for ourselves, Potash," she said, "but we got it a sister, your wife's own cousin, Miriam Smolinski. She wants to get married."

"I'm agreeable," Abe murmured, "and I'm sure my Rosie ain't got no objections neither."

Mrs. Sheikman favored him with a look of contempt.

"What chance has a poor girl got it to get married?" she asked.

"When she ain't got a dollar in the world," Mrs. Mashkowitz added. "And her own relatives from her own blood is millionaires already."

"If you mean me," Abe replied, "I ain't no millionaire, I can assure you. Far from it."

"Plenty of money you got it, Potash," Mrs. Mashkowitz said. "Five hundred dollars to you is to me like ten cents."

"He don't think no more of five hundred dollars than you do of your life, lady," Morris broke in with a raucous laugh.

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"Do me the favor, Mawruss," Abe cried, "and tend to your own business."

"Sure," Morris replied, as he turned to go. "I thought I was helping you out, Abe, that's all."

He repaired to the rear of the store, while Abe piloted his two visitors into the show-room.

"Now what is it you want from me?" he asked.

"Not a penny she got it," Mrs. Mashkowitz declared, breaking into tears. "And she got a fine young feller what is willing to marry her and wants it only five hundred dollars."

"Only five hundred dollars," Mrs. Sheikman moaned. "Only five hundred dollars. *Ai vai!*"

"Five hundred dollars!" Abe exclaimed. "If you think you should cry till you get five hundred dollars out of me, you got a long wet spell ahead of you. That's all I got to say."

"Might he would take two hundred and fifty dollars, maybe," Mrs. Sheikman suggested hopefully through her tears.

"Don't let him do no favors on my account," Abe said; "because, if it was two hundred and fifty buttons it wouldn't make no difference to me."

"A fine young feller," Mrs. Mashkowitz sobbed. "He got six machines and two hundred dollars saved up and wants to go into the cloak and suit contracting business."

"Only a hundred dollars if the poor girl had it," Mrs. Sheikman burst forth again; "maybe he would be satisfied." [Pg 227]

"S'enough!" Abe roared. "I heard enough already."

He banged a sample table with his fist and Mrs. Sheikman jumped in her seat.

"That's a heart what you got it," she said bitterly, "like Haman."

"Haman was a pretty good feller already compared to me," Abe declared; "and also I got business to attend to."

"Come, Sarah," Mrs. Sheikman cried. "What's the use talking to a bloodsucker like him!"

"Wait!" Mrs. Mashkowitz pleaded; "I want to ask him one thing more. If Miriam got it this young feller for a husband, might you would give him some of your work, maybe?"

"Bloodsuckers don't give no work to nobody," Abe replied firmly. "And also will you get out of my store, or will you be put out?"

He turned on his heel without waiting for an answer and joined Morris in the rear of the store.

Ten minutes later he was approached by Jake, the shipping-clerk.

"Mr. Potash," Jake said, "them two ladies in the show-room wants to know if you would maybe give that party they was talking about a recommendation to the President of the Kosciusko Bank?"

"Tell 'em," Abe said, "I'll give 'em a recommendation to a policeman if they don't get right out of here. The only way what a feller should deal with a nervy proposition like that, Mawruss, is to squash it in the bud." [Pg 228]

In matters pertaining to real estate Marks Henochstein held himself to be a virtuoso.

"If anyone can put it through, I can," was his motto, and he tackled the job of procuring an uptown loft for Potash & Perlmutter with the utmost confidence.

"In the first place," he said when he called the next day, "you boys has got too much room."

"Boys!" Morris exclaimed. "Since when did we go to school together, Henochstein?"

"Anyhow, you got too much room, ain't yer?" Henochstein continued, his confidence somewhat diminished by the rebuff. "You could get your workrooms and show-rooms all on one floor, and besides——"

Morris raised his hand like a traffic policeman halting an obstreperous truckman.

"S'enough, Henochstein," he said. "S'enough about that. We ain't giving you no pointers in the real-estate business, and we don't want no suggestions about the cloak and suit business neither. We asked it you to get us two lofts on Seventeenth, Eighteenth or Nineteenth Street, the same size as here and for the same what we pay it here rent. If you can't do it let us know, that's all, and we get somebody else to do it. Y'understand?"

"Oh, I can do it all right." [Pg 229]

"Sure he can do it," Abe said encouragingly.

"And I'll bring you a list as big as the telephone directory to-morrow," Henochstein added as he went out. "But all the same, boys—I mean Mr. Perlmutter—I don't think you need it all that space."

"That's a fresh real-estater for you, Abe," Morris said after Henochstein left. "Wants to tell it us our business and calls us boys yet, like we was friends from the old country already."

"Oh, I don't know, Mawruss," Abe replied. "He means it good, I guess; and anyway, Mawruss, we give so much of our work out by contractors, we might as well give the whole thing out and be done with it. We might as well have one loft with the cutting-room in the back and a rack for piece goods. Then the whole front we could fit it up as an office and show-room yet, and we would have no noise of the machines and no more trouble with garment-makers' unions nor nothing. I think it's a good idee sending out all the work."

"Them contractors makes enough already on what we give them, Abe," Morris replied. "I bet yer Satinstein buys real estate on what he makes from us, Abe, and Ginsburg & Kaplan also."

"Well, the fact is, Mawruss," Abe went on, "I ain't at all satisfied with the way what Satinstein treats us, Mawruss, nor Ginsburg & Kaplan neither. I got an idee, Mawruss: we should give all our work to a decent, respectable young feller what is going to marry a cousin of my wife, by the name Miriam Smolinski." Morris looked long and hard at Abe before replying. [Pg 230]

"So, Abe," he said, "you squashed it in the bud!"

"Well, them two women goes right up and sees my Rosie yesterday, Mawruss," Abe admitted;

"and so my Rosie thinks it wouldn't do us no harm that we should maybe give the young feller a show."

"Is your wife Rosie running this business, Abe, or are we?" Morris asked.

"It ain't a question what Rosie thinks, Mawruss," Abe explained; "it's what I think, too. I think we should give the young feller a show. He's a decent, respectable young feller, Mawruss."

"How do I know that, Abe?" Morris replied. "I ain't never seen him, Abe; I don't even know his name."

"What difference does that make it, Mawruss?" said Abe. "I ain't never seen him neither, Mawruss, and I don't know his name, too; but he could make up our line just as good, whether his name was Thomassheffsky or Murphy. Also, what good would it do us if we did see him first? I'm sure, Mawruss, we ain't giving out our work to Satinstein because he's a good-looking feller, and Ginsburg & Kaplan ain't no John Drews neither, so far what I hear it, Mawruss."

"That ain't the idee, Abe," Morris broke in; "the idee is that we got to give up doing our work in our own shop and send it out by a contractor just starting in as a new beginner already—a young feller what you don't know and I don't know, Abe—and all this we got to do just because you want it, Abe. Me, I am nothing here, Abe, and you are everything. You are the dawg and I am the tail. You are the oitermobile and I am the smell, and that's the way it goes."

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"Who says that, Mawruss?" Abe interposed. "I didn't say it."

"You didn't say it, Abe," Morris went on, "but you think it just the same, and I'm going to show you differencely. I am content that we move, Abe, only we ain't going to move unless we can find it two lofts for the same rent what we pay it here. And we ain't going to have less room than we got it here neither, Abe, because if we move we're going to do our own business just the same like we do it here, and that's flat."

For the remainder of the day Abe avoided any reference to their impending removal, and it was not until Henochstein entered the show-room the following morning that the discussion was renewed.

"Well, boys," he said in greeting, "I got it a fine loft for you on Nineteenth Street with twicet as much floor space what you got here."

"A loft!" Morris cried.

"A loft," Henochstein repeated.

"One loft?" Morris asked.

"That's what I said," Henochstein replied, "one loft with twicet as much floor space, and it's got light on all—"

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Morris waved his hand for silence.

"Abe," he said, "this here Henochstein is a friend of yours; ain't it?"

Abe nodded sulkily.

"Well, take him out of here," Morris advised, "before I kick him out."

He banged the show-room door behind him and repaired to Wasserbauer's Café and Restaurant across the street to await Henochstein's departure.

"Mawruss is right," Abe declared. "You was told distinctively we wanted it two lofts, not one, and here you come back with a one-loft proposition."

Henochstein rose to leave.

"If you think it you could get two up-to-date lofts on Seventeenth, Eighteenth or Nineteenth Street, Abe, for what you pay it here in this dinky place," he said, "you got another think coming."

He opened the show-room door.

"And also, Abe," he concluded, "if I got it a partner what made it a slave of me, like Perlmutter does you, I'd go it alone, that's all I got to say."

After Henochstein left, Abe was a prey to bitter reflections, which were only interrupted by his partner's return to the show-room a quarter of an hour later.

"Well, Abe," Morris cried, "you got your turn at this here moving business; let me try a hand at it once."

"Go ahead, Mawruss," Abe said wearily. "You always get your own way, anyhow. You say I am the dawg, Mawruss, and you are the tail, but I guess you got it the wrong way round. I guess the tail is on the other foot."

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Morris shrugged.

"That's something what is past already, Abe," he replied. "I was just talking to Wasserbauer, and he says he got it a friend what is a sort of a real-estater, a smart young feller by the name Sam

Slotkin. He says if Slotkin couldn't find it us a couple of lofts, nobody couldn't."

"I'm satisfied, Mawruss," Abe said. "If Slotkin can get us lofts we move, otherwise we stay here. So far we made it always a living here, Mawruss, and I guess we ain't going to lose all our customers even if we don't move; and that's all there is to it."

Mr. Sam Slotkin was doubtless his own ideal of a well-dressed man. All the contestants in a chess tournament could have played on his clothes at one time, and the ox-blood stripes on his shirt exactly matched the color of his necktie and socks. He had concluded his interview with Morris on the morning following Henochstein's fiasco, before Abe's arrival at the office, and he was just leaving as Abe came in.

"Who's that, Mawruss?" Abe asked, staring after the departing figure.

"That's Sam Slotkin," Morris replied. "He looks like a bright young feller."

"I bet yer he looks bright," Abe commented. "He looks so bright in them vaudeville clothes that it almost gives me eye-strain. I suppose he says he can get us the lofts." [Pg 234]

"Sure," Morris answered; "he says he can fix us up all right."

"I hope so," Abe said skeptically, and at once repaired to the office. It was the tail-end of a busy season and Abe and Morris found no time to renew the topic of their forthcoming removal until two days later when Sam Slotkin again interviewed Morris. The result was communicated to Abe by Morris after Slotkin's departure.

"He says, Abe, that he thinks he's got the very place for us," Morris said. "He thinks he got it, Mawruss," Abe exclaimed. "Well, we can't rip out our store here on the strength of a think, Mawruss. When will he know if he's got it?"

"To-morrow morning," Morris replied, and went upstairs to the workroom, where the humming of many machines testified to the last rush of the season's work. Abe joined him there a few minutes later.

"Believe me, Mawruss," he said, "I'll be glad when this here order for the Fashion Store is out."

"It takes a week yet, Goldman tells me," Morris replied, "and I guess we might have to work nights if they don't make it a hurry-up."

"Well, we're pretty late with that Fashion Store delivery as it is, Mawruss," Abe replied. "It wouldn't hurt none if we did work nights, Mawruss. We ought to get that order out by the day after to-morrow yet." [Pg 235]

"You speak to 'em, Abe," Morris retorted, indicating the working force by a wave of his hand.

"What have I got to do with it?" Abe asked. "You're the inside man, Mawruss."

"To my sorrow, Abe," said Morris, "and if you was the inside man you would know it that if I told 'em they was working on a rush order they'd strike for more money already."

"And yet, Mawruss, you ain't in favor of giving out our work by contractors," Abe cried as he walked away.

The next morning Sam Slotkin was waiting in the show-room before Abe or Morris arrived. When they entered he advanced to meet them with a confident smile.

"I got it the very thing what you want, Mr. Perlmutter," he said. "A fine loft on Nineteenth Street."

"A loft!" Abe exclaimed.

"A fine loft," Slotkin corrected.

"How big a loft?" Morris asked.

"Well, it is maybe twicet as big as this here," Slotkin replied. "You could get into it all your machines and have a cutting-room and show-room and office besides."

"That sounds pretty good, Abe," Morris commented. "Don't you think so, Abe?"

Abe pulled off his coat with such force that he ripped the sleeve-lining. [Pg 236]

"What are you doing," he demanded, "making jokes with me?" "And it's only twenty dollars more a month as you're paying here," Slotkin concluded.

"Twenty dollars a month won't make us or break us, Abe," Morris said.

"It won't, hey?" Abe roared. "Well, that don't make no difference, Mawruss. You said you wanted it two lofts, and we got to have it two lofts. How do you think we're going to sell goods and keep our books, Mawruss, if we have all them machines kicking up a racket on the same floor?"

"Well, Abe, might we could send our work out by contractors, maybe," Morris answered with all the vivacity of a man suggesting a new and brilliant idea.

Abe stared at his partner for a minute.

"What's the matter with you, Morris, anyway?" he asked at length. "First you say it we must have two lofts and keep our work in our own shop, and now you turn right around again."

"I got to talking it over with Minnie last night," Morris replied, "and she thinks maybe if we give our work out by contractors we wouldn't need it to stay down so late, and then I wouldn't keep the dinner waiting an hour or so every other night. We lose it two good girls already by it in six months."

"Who is running this business, Mawruss?" Abe roared. "Minnie or us?"

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Sam Slotkin listened with a slightly bored air.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," he said, "what's the use of it you make all this disturbance? The loft is light on all four sides, with two elevators. Also, it is already big enough for——"

"What are you butting in for?" Abe shouted. "What business is it of yours, anyhow?"

"I am the broker," Sam Slotkin replied with simple dignity. "And also you're going to take that loft. Otherwise I lose it three hundred dollars' commission, and besides——"

"My partner is right," Morris interrupted. "You ain't got no business to say what we will or will not do. If we want to take it we will take it, otherwise not."

"Don't worry," Sam Slotkin cried, "you will take it all right and I'll be back this afternoon for an answer."

He put on his hat and left without another word, while Abe and Morris looked at each other in blank amazement.

"That's a real-estater for you," Abe said. "Henchstein's got it pretty good nerve, Mawruss, but this feller acts so independent like a doctor or a lawyer."

Morris nodded and started to hang up his hat and coat, but even as his hand was poised half-way to the hook it became paralyzed. Simultaneously Abe looked up from the column of the Daily Cloak and Suit Record and Miss Cohen, the bookkeeper, stopped writing; for the hum of sewing machines, which was as much a part of their weekday lives as the beating of their own hearts, had suddenly ceased.

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Abe and Morris took the stairs leading to the upper floor three at a jump, and arrived breathlessly in the workroom just as fifty-odd employees were putting on their coats preparatory to leaving.

"What's the matter?" Abe gasped.

"Strike," Goldman, the foreman, replied.

"A strike!" Morris cried. "What for a strike?"

Goldman shrugged his shoulders.

"Comes a walking delegate by the opposite side of the street and makes with his hands motions," he explained. "So they goes out on strike."

Few of the striking operators could speak English, but those that did nodded their corroboration.

"For what you strike?" Morris asked them.

"Moost strike," one of them replied. "Ven varking delegate say moost strike, ve moost strike."

Sadly Abe and Morris watched their employees leave the building, and then they repaired to the show-room.

"There goes two thousand dollars, Mawruss," Abe said. "For so sure as you live, Mawruss, if we don't make that delivery to the Fashion Store inside of a week we get a cancelation by the next day's mail; ain't it?"

Morris nodded gloomily, and they both remained silent for a few minutes.

"Mawruss," Abe said at last, "where is that loft what Slotkin gives us?"

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"What do you want to know for?"

"I'm going right up to have a look at it," Abe replied. "I'm sick and tired of this here strike business."

Morris heaved a great sigh.

"I believe you, Abe," he said. "The way I feel it now we will sell for junk every machine what we got."

Forthwith Abe boarded a car for uptown, and when he returned two hours later he found Goldman discussing ways and means with Morris in the show-room.

"Well, Abe," Morris cried, "what for a loft you seen it?"

Abe hung up his hat deliberately.

"I tell you the truth, Mawruss," he said, turning around, "the loft ain't bad. It's a good-looking loft, Mawruss, only it's certain sure we couldn't have no machines in that loft."

"*Ai vai!*" Goldman exclaimed, rocking to and fro in his chair and striking his head with his clenched fist.

"*Nu* Goldman?" Morris asked. "What's the trouble with you?"

"Troubles enough he got it, Mawruss," Abe said, as he watched Goldman's evolutions of woe. "If we do away with our machines he loses his job; ain't it?"

Sympathy seemed only to intensify Goldman's distress.

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"Better than that he should make me dizzy at my stomach to watch him, Abe," Morris said. "I got a suggestion."

Goldman ceased rocking and looked up.

"I got a suggestion, Abe," Morris went on, "that we sell it our machines on long terms of credit to Goldman, and he should go into the contracting business; ain't it?"

"*Ai vai!*" Goldman cried again, and commenced to rock anew.

"Stop it, Goldman," Abe yelled. "What's the trouble now?"

"What show does a feller got it what starts as a new beginner in cloak contracting already?" Goldman wailed.

"Well," Abe replied, "you could get our work."

Morris seized on this as a happy compromise between his own advocacy of Ginsburg & Kaplan and the rival claims of Abe's wife's relations.

"Sure," he agreed. "We will give him the work what we give now to Satinstein and Ginsburg & Kaplan."

Goldman's face spread into a thousand wrinkles of joy.

"You save my life!" he exclaimed.

"Only he got to agree by a lawyer he should make it up our work a whole lot cheaper as they did," Morris concluded.

Goldman nodded vigorously.

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"Sure, sure," he said.

"And also he got to help us call off this here strike," Abe added.

"I do my bestest," Goldman replied. "Only we got to see it the varking delegate first and fix it up with him."

"Who is this walking delegate, anyhow?" Morris asked.

Goldman scratched his head to aid his memory.

"I remember it now," he said at last. "It's a feller by the name Sam Slotkin."

When Abe and Morris recovered from the shock of Goldman's disclosure they vied with each other in the strength of their resolutions not to move into Sam Slotkin's loft. "I wouldn't pay it not one cent blackmail neither," Abe declared, "not if they kept it up the strike for a year."

"Better as we should let that sucker do us, Abe," Morris declared, "I would go out of the business first; ain't it?"

Abe nodded and, after a few more defiant sentiments, they went upstairs with Goldman to estimate the amount of work undone on the Fashion Store order.

"Them Fashion people was always good customers of ours, too, Mawruss," Abe commented, "and we couldn't send the work out by contractors in this shape. It would ruin the whole job."

Morris nodded sadly.

"If we could only get them devils of operators to finish up," he said, "they could strike till they was blue in the face yet."

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"But I wouldn't pay one cent to that sucker, Slotkin, Mawruss," Abe added.

"Sure not," Morris agreed.

"Might you wouldn't have to pay him nothing, maybe," Goldman suggested.

"What d'ye mean?" Abe cried.

"Might if you would take it the loft he would call off the strike," said Goldman.

"That's so, Mawruss," Abe murmured, as though this phase of the matter had just occurred to

him for the first time.

"Maybe Goldman is right, Abe," Morris replied. "Maybe if we took it the loft Slotkin would call off the strike."

"After all, Mawruss," Abe said, "the loft ain't a bad loft, Mawruss. If it wasn't such a good loft, Mawruss, I would say it no, Mawruss, we shouldn't take the loft; but the loft is a first-class A Number One loft."

"S'enough, Abe," Morris replied. "You don't have to tell it me a hundred times already. I ain't disputing it's a good loft; and so if Slotkin calls off the strike we take the loft."

At this juncture the store door opened and Slotkin himself entered.

"Good afternoon, gents," he said.

Morris and Abe greeted him with a scowl.

"I suppose you come for an answer about that loft, huh?" Morris snorted.

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Slotkin stared at Abe indignantly.

"Excuse me, Mr. Perlmutter," he said, "I ain't here as broker. I'll see you later about that already. I come here now as varking delegate."

"Sure, I know," Abe replied. "When you call it a strike on us this morning, that ain't got nothing to do with our taking the loft. We believe that, Slotkin; so go ahead and tell us something else."

"It makes me no difference whether you believe it or you don't believe it, Mr. Potash," Slotkin went on. "All I got to say is that you signed it an agreement with the union; ain't it?"

"Sure, we signed it," said Abe, "and we kept it, too. We pay 'em always union prices and we keep it union hours."

"Prices and hours is all right," Slotkin said, "but in the agreement stands it you should give 'em a proper place to work in it."

"Well," Morris cried, "ain't it a proper place here to work in it?"

Slotkin shook his head.

"As varking delegate I seen it already. I seen it your shop where your operators work," he commenced, "and——"

"Why, you ain't never been inside our shop," Goldman cried.

"I seen it from the outside—from the street already—and as varking delegate it is my duty to call on you a strike," Slotkin concluded.

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"What's the matter with the workroom?" Abe asked.

"Well, the neighborhood ain't right," Slotkin explained. "It's a narrow street already. It should be on a wider street like Nineteenth Street."

He paused to note the effect and Morris grunted involuntarily.

"Also," Slotkin continued, "it needs it light on four sides, and two elevators."

"And I suppose if we hire it such a loft, Slotkin," Abe broke in, "you will call off the strike."

"Sure I will call it off the strike," he declared. "It would be my duty as varking delegate. I moost call it off the strike."

"All right, then," Abe said; "call off the strike. We made up our mind we will take the loft."

"You mean you will take such a loft what the union agreement calls for and which I just described it to you," Slotkin corrected in his quality of walking delegate.

"That's what we mean," Abe replied.

"Why, then, that loft what I called to your attention, as broker, this morning would be exactly what you would need it!" Slotkin exclaimed, in the hearty tones of a conscientious man, glad that for once the performance of his official duty redounded to clean-handed personal profit.

"Sure," Abe grunted.

"Then, as broker, I tell it you that the leases is ready down at Henry D. Feldman's office," Slotkin replied, "and as soon as they are signed the strike is off." A week later the Fashion Store's order was finished, packed and shipped; and on the same day that Goldman, the foreman, dismissed the hands he went down to Henry D. Feldman's office. There he signed an agreement with Potash & Perlmutter to make up all their garments in the contracting shop which he proposed to open the first of the following month.

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"Where are you going to have it your shop, Goldman?" Morris asked, after they had returned from Feldman's.

"That I couldn't tell it you just yet," Goldman replied. "We ain't quite decided yet."

"We!" Abe cried excitedly. "Who's we?"

"Well, I expect to get it a partner with a couple of hundred dollars," Goldman said; "but, anyhow, Mr. Potash, I get some cards printed next week and I send you one."

"All right," Abe replied. "Only let me give it you a piece of advice, Goldman: If you get it a partner, don't make no mistake and have some feller what wants to run you and the business and everybody else, Goldman."

The thrust went home and Morris stared fiercely at his partner.

"And you should see it also that his wife ain't got no relations, Goldman," he added, "otherwise he'll want you to share the profits of the business with them."

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Goldman nodded.

"Oh, I got a good, smart feller picked out, and his wife's relations will be all right, too," he said, as he started to leave. "But, anyhow, Mr. Perlmutter, I let you know next week."

About ten days afterward, while Morris and Abe were in the throes of packing, prior to the removal of their business, the letter-carrier entered with a batch of mail, and Morris immediately took it into the show-room.

"Here, Abe," he said, as he glanced at the first envelope, "this is for you."

Then he proceeded to go through the remainder of the pile.

"Holy smokes!" he cried, as he opened the next envelope.

"What's the matter?" Abe asked. "Is it a failure?" He had read his own letter and held it between trembling fingers as he inquired.

"Look at this," Morris said, handing him a card.

It was a fragment of cheap pasteboard and bore the following legend:

PHILIP GOLDMAN

SAM SLOTKIN

GOLDMAN & SLOTKIN
CLOAK AND SUIT CONTRACTORS
SPONGING AND EXAMINING

PIKE STREET

NEW YORK

Abe read the card and handed it back in silence.

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"Well, Abe," Morris cried, "that's a fine piece of business. We not only got to take it the loft what Slotkin picks out for us, but we also got to give Slotkin our work also."

Abe shrugged his shoulders in an indifferent manner.

"You always got to run things your way, Mawruss," he said. "If you let me do it my way, Mawruss, we wouldn't of had no strike nor trouble nor nothing, and it would of been the same in the end."

"What d'ye mean?" Morris exclaimed.

"Look at this here," Abe replied, handing him the letter. It was printed in script on heavily-coated paper and read as follows:

MRS. SARAH MASHKOWITZ & MRS. BLOOMA
SHEIKMAN

SISTERS OF THE BRIDE

REQUEST THE HONOR OF YOUR Co

AT THE MARRIAGE OF THEIR SISTER

MISS MIRIAM SMOLINSKI

TO

SAM SLOTKIN

ON SUNDAY OCT 3 1907 AT 7 P M SHARP

NEW RIGA HALL

ALLEN STREET

BRIDE'S RESIDENCE

CARE OF ROTHMAN'S CORSET STORE

CHAPTER XII

"Yes, Mawruss," Abe Potash said to his partner as they stood together and surveyed the wild disorder of their business premises, "one removal is worser as a fire."

"Sure it is," Morris Perlmutter agreed. "A fire you can insure it, Abe, but a removal is a risk what you got to take yourself; and you're bound to make it a loss."

"Not if you got a little system, Mawruss," Abe went on. "The trouble with us is, Mawruss, we ain't got no system. In less than three weeks already we got to move into the loft on Nineteenth Street, Mawruss, and we ain't even made up our minds about the fixtures yet." "The fixtures!" Morris cried. "For why should we make up our minds about the fixtures, Abe?"

"We need to have fixtures, Mawruss, ain't it?"

"What's the matter with the fixtures what we got it here, Abe?" Morris asked.

"Them ain't fixtures what we got it here, Mawruss," Abe replied. "Junk is what we got it here, Mawruss, not fixtures. If we was to move them bum-looking racks and tables up to Nineteenth Street, Mawruss, it would be like an insult to our customers."

"Would it?" Morris replied. "Well, we ain't asking 'em to buy the fixtures, Abe; we only sell 'em the garments. Anyhow, if our customers was so touchy, Abe, they would of been insulted long since ago. For we got them fixtures six years already, and before we had 'em yet, Abe, Pincus Vesell bought 'em, way before the Spanish War, from Kupferman & Daiches, and then Kupferman & Daiches——"

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"S'enough, Mawruss," Abe protested. "I ain't asked you you should tell me the family history of them fixtures, Mawruss. I know it as well as you do, Mawruss, them fixtures is old-established back numbers, and I wouldn't have 'em in the store even if we was going to stay here yet."

"You wouldn't have 'em in the store," Morris broke in; "but how about me? Ain't I nobody here, Abe? I think I got something to say, too, Abe. So I made up my mind we're going to keep them fixtures and move 'em up to the new store. We done it always a good business with them fixtures, Abe."

"Yes, Mawruss, and we also lose it a good customer by 'em, too," Abe rejoined. "You know as well as I do that after one-eye Feigenbaum, of the H. F. Cloak Company, run into that big rack over by the door and busted his nose we couldn't sell him no more goods."

"Was it the rack's fault that Henry Feigenbaum only got one eye, Abe?" Morris cried. "Anyhow, Abe, when a feller got a nose like Henry Feigenbaum, Abe, he's liable to knock it against most any thing, Abe; so you couldn't blame it on the fixtures."

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"I don't know who was to blame, Mawruss," Abe said, "but I do know that he buys it always a big bill of goods from H. Rifkin, what's got that loft on the next floor above where we took it on Nineteenth Street, and Rifkin does a big business by him. I bet yer Feigenbaum's account is easy worth two thousand a year net to Rifkin, Mawruss."

"Maybe it is and maybe it ain't, Abe," Morris rejoined, "but that ain't here nor there. Instead you should be estimating Rifkin's profits, Abe, you should better be going up to Nineteenth Street and see if them people gets through painting and cleaning up. I got it my hands full down here."

Abe reached for his hat.

"I bet yer you got your hands full, Mawruss," he grumbled. "The way it looks, now, Mawruss, you got our sample lines so mixed up it'll be out of date before you get it sorted out again."

"All right," Morris retorted, "we'll get out a new one. We don't care nothing about the expenses, Abe. If the old fixtures ain't good enough our sample line ain't good enough, neither. Ain't it? What do we care about money, Abe?"

He paused to emphasize the irony.

"No, Abe," he concluded, "don't you worry about them samples, nor them fixtures, neither. You got worry enough if you tend to your own business, Abe. I'll see that them samples gets up to Nineteenth Street in good shape."

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Abe shrugged his shoulders and made for the door.

"And them fixtures also, Abe," Morris shouted after him.

The loft building on Nineteenth Street into which Potash & Perlmutter proposed to move was an imposing fifteen-story structure. Burnished metal signs of its occupants flanked its wide doorway, and the entrance hall gleamed with gold leaf and plaster porphyry, while the uniform of each elevator attendant would have graced the high admiral of a South American Navy.

So impressed was Abe with the magnificence of his surroundings that he forgot to call his floor when he entered one of the elevators, and instead of alighting at the fifth story he was carried up to the sixth floor before the car stopped.

Seven or eight men stepped out with him and passed through the door of H. Rifkin's loft, while Abe sought the stairs leading to the floor below. He walked to the westerly end of the hall, only to find that the staircase was at the extreme easterly end, and as he retraced his footsteps a young man whom he recognized as a clerk in the office of Henry D. Feldman, the prominent cloak and suit attorney, was pasting a large sheet of paper on H. Rifkin's door.

It bore the following legend:

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CLOSED
BY ORDER OF THE FEDERAL RECEIVER

HENRY D. FELDMAN
Attorney for Petitioning Creditors

Abe stopped short and shook the sticky hand of the bill-poster.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Feinstein?" he said.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Potash," Feinstein cried in his employer's best tone and manner.

"What's the matter? Is Rifkin in trouble?"

"Oh, no," Feinstein replied ironically. "Rifkin ain't in trouble; his creditors is in trouble, Mr. Potash. The Federal Textile Company, ten thousand four hundred and eighty-two dollars; Miller, Field & Simpson, three thousand dollars; the Kosciusko Bank, two thousand and fifty."

Abe whistled his astonishment.

"I always thought he done it such a fine business," he commented.

"Sure he done it a fine business," the law clerk said. "I should say he did done it a fine business. If he got away with a cent he got away with fifty thousand dollars."

"Don't nobody know where he skipped to?"

"Only his wife," Feinstein replied, "and she left home yesterday. Some says she went to Canada and some says to Mexico; but they mostly goes to Brooklyn, and who in blazes could find her there?"

Abe nodded solemnly.

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"But come inside and give a look around," Feinstein said hospitably. "Maybe there's something you would like to buy at the receiver's sale next week."

Abe handed Feinstein a cigar, and together they went into Rifkin's loft.

"He's got some fine fixtures, ain't it?" Abe said as he gazed upon the mahogany and plate-glass furnishings of Rifkin's office.

"Sure he has," Feinstein replied nonchalantly, scratching a parlor match on the veneered shelf under the cashier's window. The first attempt missed fire, and again he drew a match across the lower part of the partition, leaving a great scar on its polished surface.

"Ain't you afraid you spoil them fixtures?" Abe asked.

"They wouldn't bring nothing at the receiver's sale, anyhow," Feinstein replied, "even though they are pretty near new."

"They must have cost him a pretty big sum, ain't it?" Abe said.

"They didn't cost him a cent," Feinstein answered, "because he ain't paid a cent for 'em. Flaum & Binger sold 'em to him, and they're one of the petitioning creditors. Twenty-one hundred dollars they got stung for, and they ain't got no chattel mortgage nor nothing. Look at them racks there and all them mirrors and tables! Good enough for a saloon. I bet yer them green baize doors, what he put inside the regular door, is worth pretty near a hundred dollars."

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Abe nodded again.

"And I bet the whole shooting-match don't fetch five hundred dollars at the receiver's sale," Feinstein said.

"Why, I'd give that much for it myself," Abe cried.

Feinstein puffed away at his cigar for a minute.

"Do you honestly mean you'd like to buy them fixtures?" he said at last.

"Sure I'd like to buy them," Abe replied. "When is the receiver's sale going to be?"

"Next week, right after the order of adjudication is signed. But that won't do you no good. The dealers would bid 'em up on you, and you wouldn't stand no show at all. What you want to do is to buy 'em from the receiver at private sale."

"So?" Abe commented. "Well, how would I go about that?"

Feinstein pulled his hat over his eyes and, resting his cigar on the top of Rifkin's desk with the lighted end next to the wood, he drew Abe toward the rear of the office.

"Leave that to me," he said mysteriously. "Of course, you couldn't expect to get them fixtures much under six hundred dollars at private sale, because it's got to be done under the direction of the court; but for fifty dollars I could undertake to let you in on 'em for, say, five hundred and seventy-five dollars. How's that?"

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Abe puffed at his cigar before replying.

"I got to see it my partner first," he said.

"That's all right, too," Feinstein rejoined; "but there was one dealer in here this morning already. As soon as the rest of 'em get on to this here failure they'll be buzzing around them fixtures like flies in a meat market, and maybe I won't be able to put it through for you at all."

"I tell you what I'll do," Abe said. "I'll go right down to the store and I'll be back here at two o'clock."

"You've got to hustle if you want them fixtures," he said.

"I bet yer I got to hustle," Abe said, his eyes fixed on the marred surface of the desk, "for if you're going to smoke many more cigars around here them fixtures won't be no more good to nobody."

"That don't harm 'em none," Feinstein replied. "A cabinetmaker could fix that up with a piece of putty and some shellac so as you wouldn't know it from new."

"But if I buy it them fixtures," Abe concluded, as he turned toward the door, "I'd as lief have 'em without putty, if it's all the same to you."

"Sure," Feinstein replied, and no sooner had Abe disappeared into the hall than he drew a morning paper from his pocket and settled down to his duties as keeper for the Federal receiver by selecting the most comfortable chair in the room and cocking up his feet against the side of Rifkin's desk.

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"Well, Abe," Morris cried as his partner entered the store half an hour later, "I give you right."

"You give me right?" Abe repeated. "What d'ye mean?"

"About them fixtures," Morris explained. "I give you right. Them fixtures is nothing but junk, and we got to get some new ones."

"Sure we got to get some new ones, Mawruss," Abe agreed, "and I seen it the very thing what we want up at H. Rifkin's place."

"H. Rifkin's place," Morris exclaimed.

"That's what I said," Abe replied. "I got an idee, Mawruss, we should buy them fixtures what H. Rifkin got."

"Is that so?" Morris retorted. "Well, why should we buy it fixtures what H. Rifkin throws out?"

"He don't throw 'em out, Mawruss," Abe said. "He ain't got no more use for 'em, Mawruss. He busted up this morning."

"You can't make me feel bad by telling me that, Abe," Morris rejoined. "A sucker what takes from us a good customer like Henry Feigenbaum should of busted up long since already. But that ain't the point, Abe. If we're going to get it fixtures, we don't want no second-hand articles."

"They ain't no second-hand articles, Mawruss," Abe explained. "They're pretty near brand-new, and I got a particular reason why we should buy them fixtures, Mawruss." [Pg 257]

He paused for some expression of curiosity from his partner, but Mawruss merely pursed his lips and looked bored.

"Yes, Mawruss," Abe went on, "I got it a particular reason why we should buy them fixtures, Mawruss. You see, this here Rifkin got it the loft right upstairs one flight from us, Mawruss, and naturally he's got it lots of out-of-town trade what don't know he's busted yet, Mawruss."

"No?" Morris vouchsafed.

"So these here out-of-town customers comes up to see Rifkin. They gets in the elevator and they says 'Sixth,' see? And the elevator man thinks they says 'Fifth,' and he lets 'em off at our floor because there ain't nobody on the sixth floor. Well, Mawruss, we leave our store door open, and the customer sees Rifkin's fixtures inside, so he walks in and thinks he's in Rifkin's place. Before he finds out he ain't, Mawruss, we sell him a bill of goods ourselves."

Morris stared at Abe in silent contempt.

"Of course, Mawruss," Abe went on, "I'm only saying they might do this, y'understand, and certainly it would only be for the first week or so what we are there, ain't it? But if we should only get it one or two customers that way, Mawruss, them fixtures would pay for themselves."

"Dreams you got it, Abe," Morris cried. "You think them customers would be blind, Abe? Ain't they got eyes in their head? Since when would they mistake a back number like you for an up-to-date feller like Rifkin, Abe?" [Pg 258]

"Maybe I am a back number, Mawruss," Abe replied, "but I know a bargain when I see it. Them fixtures is practically this season's goods already. Why, H. Rifkin ain't even paid for them yet."

"There ain't no seasons in fixtures, Abe," Morris replied, "and besides, a feller like Rifkin could have it fixtures for ten years without paying for 'em. He could get 'em on the installment plan and give back a chattel mortgage, Abe. You couldn't tell me nothing about fixtures, Abe, because I know all about it."

"You don't seem to know much about it this morning when I spoke to you, Mawruss," Abe retorted.

"Sure not," Morris said, "but I learned it a whole lot since. I got to thinking it over after you left. So I rings up a feller by the name Flachsman, what is corresponding secretary in the District Grand Lodge of the Independent Order Mattai Aaron, which I belong it. This here Flachsman got a fixture business over on West Broadway."

Abe nodded. He lit a fresh cigar to sustain himself against impending bad news.

"And this here Flachsman comes around here half an hour ago and shows me pictures from fixtures, Abe; and he got it such elegant fixtures like a bank or a saloon, which he could put it in for us for two thousand dollars."

"Two thousand dollars!" Abe cried.

"Well, twenty-two fifty," Morris amended. "Comes to about the same with cash discount. Flachsman tells me he seen the kind of loft we got and knows it also the measurements; so I think to myself what's the use waiting. Abe wants it we should buy the fixtures, and we ain't got no time to lose. So I signed the contract." [Pg 259]

Abe sat down heavily in the nearest chair and pushed his hat back from his forehead.

"Yes, Mawruss," he said bitterly, "that's the way it goes when a feller's got a partner what is changeable like Paris fashions. You are all plain one minute, and the next you are all soutache and buttons. This morning you wouldn't buy no fixtures, not if you could get 'em for nix, and a couple hours later you throw it away two thousand dollars in the streets."

Morris glared indignantly at his partner.

"You are the changeable one, Abe," he cried, "not me. This morning old fixtures to you is junk. Ain't it? You got to have new fixtures and that's all there is to it. But now, Abe, new fixtures is poison to you, and you got to have second-hand fixtures. What's the matter with you, anyway, Abe?"

"I told it you a dozen times already, Mawruss," Abe replied, "them ain't no exactly second-hand fixtures what Rifkin got it. Them fixtures is like new—fine mahogany partitions and plated glass."

"That's what we bought it, Abe," Morris said, "fine mahogany partitions with plated glass. If you wouldn't jump so much over me, I would of told you about it." [Pg 260]

Abe shrugged despairingly.

"Go ahead," he said. "I ain't jumping over you."

"Well, in the first place, Abe," Morris went on, "there's a couple of swinging doors inside the hall door."

"Just like Rifkin's," Abe interrupted.

"Better as Rifkin's," Morris exclaimed. "Them doors is covered with goods, Abe, and holes in each door with glass into it."

"Sure, I know," Abe replied. "Rifkin's doors got green cashmere onto 'em like a pool table."

"Only new, not second-hand," Morris added. "Then, when you get through them doors, on the left side is the office with mahogany partitions and plated glass, with a hole into it like a bank already."

"Sure! The same what I seen it up at Rifkin's, Mawruss," Abe broke in again.

Morris drew himself up and scowled at Abe.

"How many times should I tell it you, Abe," he cried, "them fixtures what Flachsman sells it us is new, and not like Rifkin's."

"Go ahead, Mawruss," Abe replied. "Let's hear it."

"Over the hole is a sign, Cashier," Morris continued.

Abe was about to nod again, but at a warning glance from Morris he thought better of it.

"But I told it Flachsman we ain't got no cashier, only a bookkeeper," Morris said, "and so he says he could put it Bookkeeper over the hole. Inside the office is two desks, one for you and me, and a high one for the bookkeeper behind the hole. On the right-hand side as you go inside them pool-table doors is another mahogany partition, and back of that is the cutting-room already. Then you walk right straight ahead, and between them two partitions is like a hall-way, what leads to the front of the loft, and there is the show-room with showcases, racks and tables like what I got it a list here."

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"And the whole business will cost it us two thousand dollars, Mawruss," Abe commented.

"Two thousand two hundred and fifty," Morris said.

"Well, all I got to say is we would get it the positively same identical thing by H. Rifkin's place for six hundred dollars," Abe concluded.

He rose to his feet and took off his hat and coat.

"What did you say this here feller Flachsman was in the district lodge of the I. O. M. A., Mawruss?" he inquired.

"Corresponding secretary," Morris replied. "What for you ask, Abe?"

"Oh, nothing," Abe replied as he turned away. "Only, I was wondering what he would soak us for them fixtures, Mawruss, if he would of been Grand Master."

Ten days afterward the receiver in bankruptcy sold Rifkin's stock and fixtures at auction, and when Abe and Morris took possession of their new business premises on the first of the following month the topic of H. Rifkin's failure had ceased to be of interest to the cloak and suit trade. Morris alone harped upon it.

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"Well, Abe," he said for the twentieth time, gazing proudly around him, "what's the matter with them fixtures what we got it? Huh? Ain't them fixtures got H. Rifkin skinned to death?"

Abe shook his head solemnly.

"Mind you, Mawruss," he began, "I ain't saying them fixtures what we got it ain't good fixtures, y'understand; but they ain't one, two, six with H. Rifkin's fixtures."

"That's what you say, Abe," Morris retorted, "but Flachsman says different. I seen him at the lodge last night, and he tells me them fixtures what H. Rifkin got it was second quality, Abe. Flachsman says they wouldn't of stood being took down and put up again. He says he wouldn't sell them fixtures as second-hand to an East Broadway concern, without being afraid for a comeback."

"Flachsman don't know what he's talking about," Abe declared hotly. "Them fixtures was A Number One. I never seen nothing like 'em before or since."

"Bluffs you are making it, Abe," Morris replied. "You seen them fixtures for ten minutes, maybe, Abe, and in such a short time you couldn't tell nothing at all about 'em."

"Couldn't I, Mawruss?" Abe said. "Well, them fixtures was the kind what you wouldn't forget it if you seen 'em for only five minutes. I bet yer I would know them anywhere, Mawruss, if I seen them again, and what we got it here from Flachsman is a weak imitation, Mawruss. That's all."

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At this juncture a customer entered, and for half an hour Morris busied himself displaying the line. In the meantime Abe went out to lunch, and when he entered the building on his return a familiar, bulky figure preceded him into the doorway.

"Hallo!" Abe cried, and the bulky figure stopped and turned around.

"Hallo yourself!" he said.

"You don't know me, Mr. Feigenbaum," Abe went on.

"Why, how d'ye do, Mr. Potash?" Feigenbaum exclaimed. "What brings you way uptown here?"

"We m——" Abe commenced—"that is to say, I come up here to see a party. I bet yer we're going to the same place, Mr. Feigenbaum."

"Maybe," Mr. Feigenbaum grunted.

"Sixth floor, hey?" Abe cried jocularly, slapping Mr. Feigenbaum on the shoulder.

Mr. Feigenbaum's right eye assumed the glassy stare which was permanent in his left.

"What business is that from yours, Potash?" he asked.

"Excuse me, Mr. Feigenbaum," Abe said with less jocularly, "I didn't mean it no harm."

Together they entered the elevator, and Abe created a diversion by handing Mr. Feigenbaum a large, black cigar with a wide red-and-gold band on it. While Feigenbaum was murmuring his thanks the elevator man stopped the car at the fifth floor. [Pg 264]

"Here we are!" Abe cried, and hustled out of the elevator ahead of Mr. Feigenbaum. He opened the outer door of Potash & Perlmutter's loft with such rapidity that there was no time for Feigenbaum to decipher the sign on its ground-glass panel, and the next moment they stood before the green-baize swinging doors.

"After you, Mr. Feigenbaum," Abe said. He followed his late customer up the passageway between the mahogany partitions, into the show-room.

"Take a chair, Mr. Feigenbaum," Abe cried, dragging forward a comfortable, padded seat, into which Feigenbaum sank with a sigh.

"I wish we could get it furniture like this up in Bridgetown," Feigenbaum said. "A one-horse place like Bridgetown you can't get nothing there. Everything you got to come to New York for. We are dead ones in Bridgetown. We don't know nothing and we don't learn nothing."

"That's right, Mr. Feigenbaum," Abe said. "You got to come to New York to get the latest wrinkles about everything."

With one comprehensive motion he drew forward a chair for himself and waved a warning to Morris, who ducked behind a rack of cloaks in the rear of the show-room.

"You make yourself to home here, Potash, I must say," Feigenbaum observed. [Pg 265]

Abe grunted inarticulately and handed a match to Feigenbaum, who lit his cigar, a fine imported one, and blew out great clouds of smoke with every evidence of appreciative enjoyment.

"Where's Rifkin?" he inquired between puffs.

Abe shook his head and smiled.

"You got to ask me something easier than that, Mr. Feigenbaum," he murmured.

"What d'ye mean?" Feigenbaum cried, jumping to his feet.

"Ain't you heard it yet?" Abe asked.

"I ain't heard nothing," Feigenbaum exclaimed.

"Then sit down and I'll tell you all about it," Abe said.

Feigenbaum sat down again.

"You mean to tell me you ain't heard it nothing about Rifkin?" Abe went on.

"Do me the favor, Potash, and spit it out," Feigenbaum broke in impatiently.

"Well, Rifkin run away," Abe announced.

"Run away!"

"That's what I said," Abe went on. "He made it a big failure and skipped to the old country."

"You don't tell me!" Feigenbaum said. "Why, I used to buy it all my goods from Rifkin."

Abe leaned forward and placed his hand on Feigenbaum's knees.

"I know it," he murmured, "and oncet you used to buy it all your goods from us, Mr. Feigenbaum. I assure you, Mr. Feigenbaum, I don't want to make no bluffs nor nothing, but believe me, the line of garments what we carry and the line of garments what H. Rifkin carried, there ain't no comparison. Merchandise what H. Rifkin got in his place as leaders already, I wouldn't give 'em junk room." [Pg 266]

Mr. Feigenbaum nodded.

"Well, the fixtures what you was carrying at one time, Potash, I wouldn't give 'em junk room neither," Feigenbaum declared. "You're lucky I didn't sue you in the courts yet for busting my

nose against that high rack of yours. I ain't never recovered from that accident what I had in your place, Potash. I got it catarrh yet, I assure you."

"Accidents could happen with the best regulations, Mr. Feigenbaum," Abe cried, "and you see that here we got it a fine new line of fixtures."

"Not so good as what Rifkin carried," Feigenbaum said.

"Rifkin carried fine fixtures, Mr. Feigenbaum," Abe admitted, "but not so fine as what we got. We got it everything up to date. You couldn't bump your nose here, not if you was to get down on your hands and knees and try."

"I wouldn't do it," Mr. Feigenbaum said solemnly.

"Sure not," Abe agreed. "But come and look around our loft. We just moved in here, and everything we got it is new—fixtures and garments as well."

"I guess you must excuse me. I ain't got much time to spare," Mr. Feigenbaum declared. "I got to get along and buy my stuff." [Pg 267]

Abe sprang to his feet.

"Buy it here!" he cried. He seized Feigenbaum by the arm and propelled him over to the sample line of skirts, behind which Morris cowered.

"Look at them goods," Abe said. "One or two of them styles would be leaders for H. Rifkin. For us, all them different styles is our ordinary line."

In turn, he displayed the rest of the firm's line and exercised his faculties of persuasion, argument and flattery to such good purpose that in less than an hour Feigenbaum had bought three thousand dollars' worth of garments, deliveries to be made within ten days.

"And now, Mr. Feigenbaum," Abe said, "I want you to look around our place. Mawruss is in the office, and he would be delighted, I know, to see you."

He conducted his rediscovered customer to the office, where Morris was seated at the roll-top mahogany desk.

"Ah, Mr. Feigenbaum," Morris cried, effusively seizing the newcomer by both hands, "ain't it a pleasure to see you again! Take a seat."

He thrust Feigenbaum into the revolving chair that he had just vacated, and took the box of gilt-edge customers' cigars out of the safe.

"Throw away that butt and take a fresh cigar," he exclaimed, handing Feigenbaum a satiny Invincible with the broad band of the best Havana maker on it. Feigenbaum received it with a smile, for he was now completely thawed out. [Pg 268]

"You got a fine place here, Mawruss," he said. "Fixtures and everything A Number One, just like Rifkin's."

"Better as Rifkin's," Morris declared.

"Well, maybe it is better in quality," Feigenbaum admitted; "but, I mean, in arrangement and color it is just the same. Why, when I come in here with Abe, an hour ago, I assure you I thought I was in Rifkin's old place. In fact, I could almost swear this desk is the same desk what Rifkin had it."

He rose to his feet and passed his hand over the top of the desk with the touch of a connoisseur.

"No," he said at last. "It ain't the same as Rifkin's. Rifkin's desk was a fine piece of Costa Rica mahogany without a flaw. I used to be in the furniture business oncet, you know, Mawruss, and so I can tell."

Abe flashed a triumphant grin on Morris, who frowned in reply.

"But ain't this here desk that—now—what-yer-call-it mahogany, too, Mr. Feigenbaum?" Morris asked.

"Well, it's Costa Rica mahogany, all right," Feigenbaum said, "but it's got a flaw into it."

"A flaw?" Morris and Abe exclaimed with one voice.



LOOK AT THEM GOODS.

"Sure," Mr. Feigenbaum continued. "It looks to me like somebody laid a cigar on to it and burned a hole there. Then some cabinetmaker fixed it up yet with colored putty and shellac. Nobody would notice nothing except an expert like me, though." [Pg 269]

Feigenbaum looked at Morris' glum countenance with secret enjoyment, but when he turned to Abe he was startled into an exclamation, for Abe's face was ashen and large beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"What's the matter, Abe?" Feigenbaum cried. "Are you sick?"

"My stummick," Abe murmured. "I'll be all right in a minute!"

Feigenbaum took his hat and coat preparatory to leaving.

"Well, boys," he said genially, "you got to excuse me. I must be moving on."

"Wait just a minute," Abe said. "I want you to look at something."

He led Feigenbaum out of the office and down the passageway between the mahogany partitions. In front of the little cashier's window Abe stopped and pointed to the shelf and panel beneath.

"Mr. Feigenbaum," he said in shaking tones, "do you see something down there?"

Mr. Feigenbaum examined the woodwork closely.

"Yes, Abe," he answered. "I see it that some loafer has been striking matches on it, but it's been all fixed up so that you wouldn't notice nothing."

"S'enough," Abe cried. "I'm much obliged to you." [Pg 270]

In silence Abe and Morris ushered Mr. Feigenbaum to the outer door, and as soon as it closed behind him the two partners faced each other.

"What difference does it make, Abe?" Morris said. "A little hole and a little scratch don't amount to nothing."

Abe gulped once or twice before he could enunciate.

"It don't amount to nothing, Mawruss," he croaked. "Oh, no, it don't amount to nothing, but sixteen hundred and fifty dollars."

"What d'ye mean?" Morris exclaimed.

"I mean this," Abe thundered: "I mean, we paid twenty-two hundred and fifty dollars for what we could of bought for six hundred dollars. Them fixtures what we bought it from Flachsman, he bought it from Rifkin's bankruptcy sale. I mean that these here fixtures are the positively same identical fixtures what I seen it upstairs in H. Rifkin's loft."

It was now Morris' turn to change color, and his face assumed a sickly hue of green.

"How do you know that?" he gasped.

"Because I was in Rifkin's old place when that lowlife Feinstein, what works for Henry D. Feldman, had charge of it after the failure; and I seen Feinstein strike them matches and put his seegar on the top from the desk."

He led the way back to the office and once more examined the flaw in the mahogany. [Pg 271]

"Yes, Mawruss," he said, "two thousand two hundred and fifty dollars we got to pay it for this here junk. Twenty-two hundred and fifty dollars, Mawruss, you throw it into the street for damaged, second-hand stuff what ain't worth two hundred."

"Why, you say it yourself you wanted to pay six hundred for it, Abe," Morris protested, "and you

said it was first-class, A Number One fixtures."

"Me, Mawruss!" Abe exclaimed. "I'm surprised to hear you should talk that way, Mawruss. I knew all the time that them fixtures was bum stuff. I only wanted to buy 'em because I thought that they would bring us some of Rifkin's old customers, Mawruss, and I was right."

"You're always right, Abe," Morris retorted. "Maybe you was right when you said Feinstein made them marks, Abe, and maybe you wasn't. Feinstein ain't the only one what scratches matches and smokes seegars, Abe. You smoke, too, Abe."

"All right, Mawruss," Abe said. "I scratched them matches and burnt that hole, if you think so; but just the same, Mawruss, if I did or if I didn't, Ike Flachsman done us, anyhow."

"How d'ye know that, Abe?" Morris blurted out. "I don't believe them fixtures is Rifkin's fixtures at all, and I don't believe that Flachsman bought 'em at Rifkin's sale. What's more, Abe, I'm going to get Feinstein on the 'phone right away and find out who did buy 'em."

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He went to the telephone immediately and rang up Henry D. Feldman's office.

"Hallo, Mr. Feinstein," he said, after the connection had been made. "This is Mawruss Perlmutter, of Potash & Perlmutter. You know them fixtures what H. Rifkin had it?"

"I sure do," Feinstein replied.

"Well, who bought it them fixtures at the receiver's sale?"

"I got to look it up," Feinstein said. "Hold the wire for a minute."

A moment later he returned to the 'phone.

"Hallo, Mr. Perlmutter," he said. "They sold for three hundred dollars to a dealer by the name Isaac Flachsman."

CHAPTER XIII

"Say, looky here, Abe," Morris cried one rainy March morning, "we got to get some more insurance."

"What do you mean, insurance?" Abe asked. "We got enough insurance, Mawruss. Them Rifkin fixtures ain't so valuable as all that, Mawruss, and even if we wouldn't already got it for twenty thousand dollars insurance, Mawruss, the building is anyhow fireproof. In a fireproof building you don't got to have so much insurance."

"Is that so?" Morris replied. "Well, Pinkel Brothers' building where they got it a loft is fireproof, and they got it also oitermatic sprinklers, Abe, and they somehow get burned out anyhow."

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"You couldn't prove to me nothing by Pinkel Brothers, Mawruss," Abe rejoined. "Them people has already got a hundred operators and we ain't got one, Mawruss, and every operator smokes yet a cigarettel, and you know what them cigarettels is, Mawruss. They practically smokes themselves. So, if an operator throws one of them cigarettels in a bin from clippings, Mawruss, that cigarettel would burn up them clippings certain sure. For my part, I wouldn't have a cigarettel in the place; and so, Mawruss, we wouldn't have no fire, neither."

"I know, Abe," Morris protested; "but the loft upstairs is vacant and the loft downstairs is vacant, and everybody ain't so grouchy about cigarettels like you are, Abe. Might one of them lofts would be taken by a feller what is already a cigarettel fiend, Abe. And fires can start by other causes, too; and then where would we be with our twenty thousand insurance and all them piece goods what we got it?"

"But the building is fireproof, Mawruss."

"Sure I know," Morris replied; "fireproof buildings is like them gilt-edge, A Number One concerns what you sell goods to for ten years, maybe, and then all of a sudden when you don't expect it one of 'em busts up on you. And that's the way it is with fireproof buildings, Abe. They're fireproof so long as nobody has a fire in 'em."

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Abe shrugged his shoulders and lit a fresh cigar.

"All right, Mawruss," Abe said; "I'm satisfied. If you want to get some more insurance, go ahead. I got worry enough I should bother my head about trifles. A little money for insurance we can afford to spend it, Mawruss, so long as we practically throw it in the streets otherwise."

"Otherwise?" Morris repeated. "What do you mean we throw it away otherwise, Abe?"

"I mean that new style thirty-twenty-eight what you showed it me this morning, Mawruss," Abe replied. "For a popular-price line, Mawruss, them new capes has got enough buttons and soutache on to 'em to sell for twenty dollars already instead of twelve-fifty."

"That's where you talk without knowing nothing what you say, Abe," Morris replied. "That garment what you seen it is the winder sample what I made it up for Louis Feinholz's uptown store. Louis give me a big order while you was in Boston last week, a special line of capes what I got up for him to retail at eighteen-fifty. But he also wanted me to make up for him a winder sample, just one garment to hang in the winder what would look like them special capes, Abe, y'understand, something like a diamond looks like a rhinestone. Then, when a lady sees that cape in the winder, she wants to buy one just like it, so she goes into Louis' store and they show her one just like it, only three inches shorter, a yard less goods into it, about half the soutache on to it and a dozen buttons short, Abe; because that winder garment what we make for Louis costs us ourselves twenty-five dollars, and Louis retails the garment what he sells that lady for eighteen-fifty. And that's the way it goes."

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"That's a fine crook, that Louis Feinholz," Abe cried virtuously. "I wonder that you would sell people like that goods at all, Mawruss. That feller ain't no good, Mawruss. I seen him go back three times on four hundred hands up at Max Geigerman's house last week, a dollar a hundred double-double. He's a gambler, too."

"Well, Abe," Morris answered, "a feller what runs a chance on auction pinochle ain't near the gambler like a feller what is willing to run a chance on his business burning out and don't carry no insurance, Abe."

"Who is willing to run a chance, Mawruss?" Abe cried. "Just to show you I ain't willing to run a chance I will go right down to J. Blaustein and take out a ten-thousand-dollar policy, Mawruss."

Morris colored slightly.

"Why should we give it Blaustein all our business, Abe?" he said. "That feller must got it a thousand customers to Rudy Feinholz's one."

"Whose one?" Abe asked.

"Rudy Feinholz's," said Morris. "I thought I told it you that Louis Feinholz's nephew got an insurance business on Lenox Avenue, and I promised Louis I would give the young feller a show."

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"You promised you would give him a show, Mawruss?" Abe repeated. "You promised Louis you would give that kid nephew of his what used to run Louis' books a show?"

"That's what I said, Abe," Morris answered.

"Well, all I can say, Mawruss," Abe declared as he put on his hat, "is that I wouldn't insure it a pinch of snuff by that feller, Mawruss. So if you take out any policies from him you can pay for 'em yourself, Mawruss, because I won't."

He favored Morris with a final glare and banged the door behind him.

Two hours later when Abe reëntered the show-room his face was flushed with triumph and he smoked one of J. Blaustein's imported cigars.

"You see, Mawruss," he said, flourishing a folded policy, "when you deal with fellers like Blaustein it goes quick. I got it here a ten-thousand-dollar insurance by a first-class, A Number One company."

Morris seized the policy and spread it out on the table. For ten minutes he examined it closely and then handed it back in silence.

"Well, Mawruss," Abe inquired anxiously, "ain't that policy all right?"

Morris shook his head.

"In the first place, Abe," he said, "why should we insure it a loft on Nineteenth Street, New York, in the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Insurance Company, of Manchester, England? Are we English or are we American, Abe?"

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This was a poser, and Abe remained silent.

"And then again, Abe," Morris went on, "supposing we should—maybe, I am only saying—have a fire, Abe, then we must got to go all the way to Manchester, England, already to collect our money. Ain't it?"

Abe stared at his feet and made no reply, while Morris again examined the folded policy.

"Just listen here to these here names of the people what run the company, Abe," he said. "Chairman, the rutt honn Earl of Warrington."

Abe looked up suddenly.

"What kind of Chinese talk is that, Mawruss?" he said. "Rutt honn?"

"That's no Chinese talk, Abe," Morris replied. "That's printed right here on the policy. That rutt honn Earl of Warrington is president of the board of directors, Abe; and supposing we should maybe for example have a fire, Abe, what show would we stand it with this here rutt honn Earl of Warrington?"

Abe grabbed the policy, which bore on its reverse side the list of directors headed by the name of that distinguished statesman and Cabinet minister, the Rt. Hon. Earl of Warrington.

"J. Blaustein would fix it for us," Abe replied.

"J. Blaustein," Morris jeered. "I suppose, Abe, him and the rutt honn Earl of Warrington drinks coffee together every afternoon when J. Blaustein makes a trip to Manchester, England. Ain't it? No, Abe, you are up against a poor proposition, and I hope you ain't paid for that policy, Abe."

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"J. Blaustein ain't in no hurry," Abe said. "We never pay him inside of sixty days, anyway."

"Well, we ain't going to pay him for that policy inside of sixty days or six hundred and sixty days, neither, Abe. We're going to fire that policy back on him, Abe, because I got it here a policy for ten thousand dollars which Rudy Feinholz just brought it me, Abe, and we are insured in a good American company, Abe, the Farmers and Ranchers' Insurance Company, of Arizona."

Abe shrugged his shoulders.

"Why should we insure it a stock of cloaks and suits by farmers and ranchers, Mawruss?" he asked.

"Ain't it better we should insure our goods by farmers and ranchers as by somebody what we don't know what he does for a living, like the rutt honn Earl of Warrington?" Morris retorted.

"But when it comes right down to it, Mawruss," Abe said, "how are we better off, supposing we got to go all the way to Arizona to collect our money?"

"That's what I told it young Feinholz," Morris replied, "and he says supposing we should, so to speak, have a fire, he guarantees it we would collect our money every cent of it right here in New York. And anyhow, Abe, any objections what you got to this here Farmers and Ranchers' policy wouldn't be no use anyhow."

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"No?" Abe said. "Why not?"

"Because I just sent it Rudy Feinholz a check for the premium," Morris said, and walked out of the show-room before Abe could enunciate all the profanity that rose to his lips.

Louis Feinholz's order was shipped the following week, and with it went the cape for his show window. Abe himself superintended the packing, for business was dull in the firm's show-room. A particularly warm March had given way to a frigid, rainy April, and now that the promise of an early spring had failed of fulfillment cancelations were coming in thick and fast. Hence, Abe took rather a pessimistic view of things.

"I bet yer Feinholz will have yet some kicks about them goods, Mawruss," he said. "When I come down Feinholz's street this morning, Mawruss, it looked like Johnstown after the flood. I bet yer Feinholz ain't making enough in that store just now to pay electric-light bills."

"I don't know about that, Abe," said Morris. "Louis carries a mighty attractive line in his winders. Them small Fifth Avenue stores ain't got nothing on him when it comes to the line of sample garments he carries in his show winders, Abe."

"Sure I know," Abe rejoined; "but he ain't got nothing on one of them piker stores when it comes right down to the stock he carries on the inside, Mawruss. Yes, Mawruss, when I sell goods to a feller like Feinholz, Mawruss, I'm afraid for my life until I get my money."

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"Well, you needn't be afraid for Feinholz, Abe," said Morris, "because, in the first place, the feller has got a fine rating; and then again, he couldn't fire them goods back on us because, for the price, there ain't a better-made line in the country."

"I hope you're right, Mawruss," Abe replied as he rang the bell for the freight elevator. "It would be a fine comeback if he should return them goods on us after we give his nephew the insurance we did."

Again he pressed the elevator bell.

"What's the matter with that elevator, Mawruss?" he said. "It takes a year to get a package on to the sidewalk."

"That's on account of somebody moves in downstairs, Abe," Morris answered. "Kaskel Schwartz, what used to be foreman for Pinkel Brothers, him and Moe Feigel goes as partners together in skirts."

"Is that so?" Abe said, jamming his thumb on the elevator bell. "I hope he don't got the cigarettel habit."

At length the elevator arrived, and Jake, the shipping clerk, carried out the brown paper parcels comprising Feinholz's shipment.

"If that's the last I seen of them garments," Abe said as he returned to the show-room, "I'm a lucky man."

"Always you're beefing about something happening what ain't going to happen, Abe," Morris retorted. "Just a few minutes since you hoped Kaskel Schwartz ain't going to be careless about cigarettels, and now you're imagining things about Feinholz sending back the goods." [Pg 281]

"Never mind, Mawruss," Abe replied; "in two days' time I shall breathe easier yet."

For the rest of the day it rained in a steady, tropical downpour, and when Abe came downtown the next morning the weather had moderated only slightly.

"Yes, Mawruss," he said as he entered, "that's a fine weather for a cloak business, Mawruss; and I bet yer, Mawruss, if we was making cravenettes and umbrellas yet we would be having a long dry spell."

He heaved a great sigh and approached the bookkeeper's desk, where Morris had laid the morning mail.

"Did you hear from those suckers out in Kansas City what made the kick about them London Smokes, Mawruss?" he asked.

"Sure I did," Morris replied; "they says they decided to keep the goods."

"I guess it left off raining in Kansas City," Abe commented. "Them suckers only made that kick because they thought they couldn't sell nothing in wet weather. Any other kicks, Mawruss?"

"Yes," Morris replied shortly.

Abe looked up.

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"Louis Feinholz!" he gasped.

Morris nodded and handed Abe a letter. It read as follows:

THE LONGCHAMPS

L. FEINHOLZ, PROPRIETOR

"EVERYTHING FOR MADAME...."

NEW YORK, April 1st, 1908

GENTS: Your shipment of this date arrived and we must say we are surprised at the goods which you sent us. They are in no respect up to sample which we keep pending a settlement of any differences which we might have in respects to this matter.

Yours truly, L. FEINHOLZ.

Dic LF to RC

"What does that sucker mean, Mawruss?" Abe asked. "We ain't sent him no sample of them capes, Mawruss. We made 'em up according to his instructions, Mawruss. Ain't it?"

Morris nodded solemnly and again Abe read the letter.

This time he dashed the note to the floor and grew purple with rage.

"Why," he choked, "that sucker must mean it the winder sample."

Again Morris nodded solemnly.

"But a ten-year-old child could tell that them garments ain't like that winder sample, Mawruss," Abe went on.

"Sure I know," Morris replied sadly, "and a district court judge could tell it, too. Also, a jury by the city court could tell it, Abe; and also, I rung up Henry D. Feldman and asked him if he could take a case for us against Louis Feinholz, and Feldman says that Feinholz is such an old client that he couldn't do it. And that's the way it goes." [Pg 283]

"But them capes was never intended to be the same like that sample, Mawruss," Abe cried.

"That's what I told Louis Feinholz when I rung him up after I spoke to Feldman, and Feinholz says he got the goods and he got the sample, and that's all he knows about it. Then I asked him if he didn't say it distinctly we should make up a first-class, expensive winder sample and ship it along with the order, and he says he don't remember it and that I should show him a writing."

"Ain't you got it a writing?" Abe asked.

"I ain't got no writing about the winder sample, Abe," Morris replied. "I only got it a writing about the order."

"But ain't you got no witnesses, Mawruss?" Abe asked.

"Witnesses I got it plenty, Abe," Morris answered. "And so has Feinholz got it witnesses. What's the use witnesses when all Feinholz has got to do is to get Henry D. Feldman to make theayter acting over that sample? For you know as well as I do, Abe, anyone would see that them garments is *doch*, anyway, a cheap imitation of that winder sample, Abe."

At this juncture Jake, the shipping clerk, entered.

"Mr. Potash," he said, "here comes Margulies' Harlem Express with them packages what we shipped it the Longchamps Store yesterday. Should I take 'em in?" [Pg 284]

Abe jumped to his feet.

"Did Margulies bring 'em up?" he asked.

"He had 'em just now on the elevator," Jake replied.

"Wait, I go with you," Abe said. Together they walked rapidly toward the freight elevator, which opened into the cutting-room, but before they reached the door a shrill outcry rose from the floor below.

The East Side slogan of woe, "Oi gewalt," blended with women's shrieks, and at length came the cry: "Fie-urr! Fie-urr!"

Simultaneously Miss Cohen, the bookkeeper, lifted up her voice in strident despair while a great cloud of black smoke puffed from the elevator shaft, and the next moment Abe, Morris, Jake and the half-dozen cutters were pushing their way downstairs, elbowed by a frenzied mob of operators, male and female. When they arrived at the ground floor the engines were clanging around the corner, and Abe and Morris ran across the street to the opposite sidewalk. Suddenly an inarticulate cry escaped Abe and he sank onto a convenient dry-goods box.

"What's the trouble, Abe?" Morris asked. "Are you sick?"

"The policies!" Abe croaked, and closed his eyes. When he opened them a minute later his partner grinned at him reassuringly. [Pg 285]

"I got 'em in my breast pocket, Abe," Morris said. "As soon as I seen the smoke I grabbed 'em, and I locked up the safe with the books inside."

Abe revived immediately.

"That reminds me, Mawruss," he said as he took a cigar from his waistcoat pocket: "What become of Miss Cohen?"

Twenty minutes later the fire was extinguished, and Abe and Morris returned to their loft. The first person to greet them was Miss Cohen, and, aside from a slight careening of her pompadour, she seemed none the worse for her dangerous experience.

"Mr. Potash," she said in businesslike tones, "the Longchamps Store just rung up and says about them garments what they returned that it was all a mistake, and that they was all right and you should reship 'em right away."

The show-room was flooded with sunlight and a mild spring breeze had almost dissipated the acrid smell of smoke.

"What did I tell you, Mawruss?" Abe said. "Feinholz is like them suckers in Kansas City. He was scared he couldn't sell them capes in wet weather, and now it's cleared up fine he wants 'em bad, Mawruss. I'll go and see what happened to 'em."

He hustled off toward the rear of the loft while Morris turned to Miss Cohen.

"Well, Miss Cohen," he said, "how did you make out by the fire just now?" [Pg 286]

Miss Cohen blushed and patted her pompadour.

"Oh, Mr. Perlmutter," she said, "I was scared stiff, and Mr. Margulies, the expressman, pretty near carried me up to the roof and we stays there till the fireman says we should come down."

"And where's Margulies?" Morris asked.

"He's gone back to the cutting-room," Miss Cohen replied. "When he seen the smoke coming up he shuts quick the iron door on the freight elevator and everything's all right in the cutting-room, only a little water by the elevator shaft."

"And how about the packages from Feinholz?" Morris continued. But before Miss Cohen could reply Abe burst into the show-room with a broad grin on his face.

"That's a good joke on Feinholz, Mawruss," he said. "All the fire was in the elevator shaft and them garments what he returned it us is nothing but ashes."

"But, Abe," Morris began, when the telephone bell trilled impatiently. Abe took up the receiver.

"Hallo!" he said. "Yes, this is Potash. Oh, hallo, Feinholz!"

"Say, Potash," Feinholz said at the other end of the wire, "we got the store full of people here. Couldn't you send up them capes right away?"

Abe put his hand over the mouthpiece of the 'phone.

"It's Feinholz," he said to Morris. "He wants them capes right away. What shall I tell him?"

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"Tell him nothing," Morris cried. "The first thing you know you will say something to that feller, and he sues us yet for damages because we didn't deliver the goods."

Abe hesitated for a minute.

"You talk to him," he said at length.

Morris seized the receiver from his partner.

"Hallo, Feinholz," he yelled. "We don't want nothing to say to you at all. We are through with you. That's all. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver and turned to Abe.

"When I deal with a crook like Feinholz," he said, "I'm afraid for my life."

Ten minutes later he went out to lunch and when he returned he brandished the early edition of an evening paper.

"What you think it says here, Abe?" he cried. "It says the fire downstairs was caused by an operator throwing a cigarettel in the clipping bin. Ain't that a quincidence, Abe?"

"I bet yer that's a quincidence," Abe replied. "A couple more of them quincidences, Mawruss, and we got to pay double for our insurance. I only wish we would be finished collecting on our policies for this here quincidence, Mawruss."

Morris shrugged his shoulders and was about to make a reassuring answer when the door opened and two men entered.

One of them was Samuel Feder, vice-president of the Kosciusko Bank, and the other was Louis Feinholz, proprietor of the Longchamps Store.

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"Well, Abe," Feder cried, "what's this I hear about the fire?"

"Come into the office, Mr. Feder," Abe cried, while Morris greeted Feinholz. "Morris will be through soon."

"Say, Mawruss," Feinholz said. "What's the matter with you boys? Here I got to come downtown about them capes, and my whole store's full of people. Why didn't you ship them capes back to me like I told you?"

"Look a-here, Feinholz," Morris exclaimed in tones sufficiently loud for Feder to overhear, "what d'ye take us for, anyhow? Greenhorns? Do you think you can write us a dirty letter like that and then come down and get them capes just for the asking?"

"Ain't you getting touchy all of a sudden, Mawruss?" Feinholz cried excitedly. "You had no business to deliver them goods in such rotten weather. You know as well as I do that I couldn't use them goods till fine weather sets in, and now I want 'em, and I want 'em bad."

"Is that so?" Morris replied. "Why, I thought them garments was no good, Feinholz. I thought them capes wasn't up to sample."

"What are you talking about?" Feinholz shouted. "Them goods was all right and the sample's all right, too. All I want now is you should ship 'em right away. I can sell the lot this afternoon if you only get 'em up to my store in time."

[Pg 289]

Morris waved his hand deprecatingly. "S'enough, Feinholz," he said; "you got as much show of getting them goods as though you never ordered 'em."

"Why not?" Feinholz cried.

"Because them goods got burned up on our freight elevator this morning," Morris replied.

"What!" Feinholz gasped.

"That's what I said," Morris concluded; "and if you excuse me I got some business to attend to."

Feinholz turned and almost staggered from the store, while Morris joined his partner and Sam Feder in the firm's office. Feder had overheard the entire conversation and greeted Morris with a smile.

"Well, Mawruss," he said, "it serves that sucker right. A feller what confesses right up and down that the goods was all right and then he fires them back at you just because the weather was rotten ought to be sued yet."

"What do we care?" Abe replied. "We got 'em insured, and so long as we get our money out of 'em we would rather not be bothered with him."

"Did you have any other damages, boys?" Feder asked, with a solicitude engendered of a ten-thousand-dollar accommodation to Potash & Perlmutter's debit on the books of the Kosciusko Bank.

"Otherwise, everything is O. K.," Morris replied cheerfully. Together they conducted Feder on a tour of their premises and, after he was quite reassured, they presented him with a good cigar and ushered him into the elevator. [Pg 290]

"I guess you put your foot in it with Feinholz, Mawruss," Abe said after Feder had departed. "How can we go to that kid nephew of his now and ask him to adjust the loss, Mawruss?"

Morris arched his eyebrows and stared at his partner.

"What's the matter with you, anyway, Abe?" he asked. "Ain't J. Blaustein good enough for you? Ain't J. Blaustein always done it our insurance business up to now all O. K., Abe? And now that we got it our very first fire, why should you want to throw Blaustein down?"

Abe put on his hat thoroughly abashed.

"I thought we got to get Rudy Feinholz to adjust it the loss," he said. "Otherwise, I wouldn't of suggested it. But, anyway, I will go right down to Blaustein and see what he says."

Morris jumped to his feet.

"Wait," he said; "I'll go with you."

Half an hour afterward Abe and Morris were seated in J. Blaustein's office on Pine Street, recounting the details of the fire.

"How many garments was there?" Blaustein asked.

"Forty-eight, and we figured it up the loss at twelve-fifty apiece," Morris explained. "That's what we billed 'em to Feinholz for." [Pg 291]

Blaustein frowned.

"But look a-here, Perlmutter," he said: "them insurance companies won't pay you what you were going to sell them garments for. They'll only pay you what they cost to make up. They'll figure it: so much cloth—say, fifty dollars; so much trimmings—say, forty dollars; so much labor—say, thirty dollars; and that's the way it goes."

"But how could we prove that to the company, Mr. Blaustein?" Abe protested. "There ain't enough left of them garments to show even what color they was."

Blaustein rose to his feet.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "we'll discuss that later. The first thing we must do is to go up and see young Feinholz. That Farmers and Ranchers' Insurance Company is a pretty close corporation. Louis Feinholz's brother out in Arizona is the president, and they got such a board of directors that if they printed the names on the back of the policy it would look like the roster of an East Side free-burial society. Also, this here Rudy Feinholz what acted as your broker is also general agent, adjuster and office manager for the Metropolitan District; and, taking it by and large, youse gentlemen is lucky you come to me instead of him to adjust this loss."

Rudy Feinholz's insurance business occupied what had once been the front parlor of a high-stoop brown-stone residence. Similarly the basement dining-room had been converted into a delicatessen store, and the smoked meats, pickles, cheese and spices with which it was stocked provided rather a strange atmosphere for the Metropolitan Agency of the Farmers and Ranchers' Insurance Company. Moreover, the Italian barber who rented the quondam back parlor was given to practicing on the mandolin; and when Abe, Morris and J. Blaustein entered the Metropolitan Agency a very imperfect rendition of Santa Lucia came through the partition and made conversation difficult for the Metropolitan agent. [Pg 292]

"What d'ye say if we all go round to the Longchamps," he said, "and talk things over."

"I'm agreeable," Morris said, looking at his partner.

"Sure thing," Blaustein replied. "That delicatessen store smell is so thick around here that I'm getting ptomaine poisoning."

"But," Abe protested, "maybe Louis Feinholz don't want us round there. We ain't on the best of terms with Louis."

"That's all right," Rudy Feinholz said. "I arranged with him to bring you round there. Uncle Louis is a heavy stockholder in the Farmers and Ranchers', and——"

"S'enough!" Morris cried. "I hear enough about the family history of this here Farmers and Ranchers. It wouldn't make no difference to me if your mother was the vice-president and your sister the secretary. All I want is we should settle this thing up." [Pg 293]

"Well, come along, then," Rudy cried, and the two brokers and their clients repaired to Feinholz's store. Abe and Morris entered not without trepidation, but Louis received them with unaffected amiability.

"Well, Mawruss," he said, "that's too bad you got a fire in your place."

"We can stand it," Morris replied. "We was insured."

Feinholz rejoined: "Yes, you was insured by your loft, but you wasn't insured by your freight elevator."

"But by the rules of the Fire Insurance Exchange," Blaustein interrupted, "when a policy reads ___"

"What do we care about the Fire Insurance Exchange?" Feinholz broke in. "The Farmers and Ranchers' ain't members of the Fire Insurance Exchange. We got a license to do business from the Superintendent of Insurance, and we don't give a cent for the Fire Insurance Exchange. We insured it the loft, and the goods was burnt in the freight elevator."

Abe jumped to his feet.

"Do you mean," he cried, "that you ain't going to pay us nothing for our fire?"

"That's what I mean," Feinholz declared.

Morris turned to Abe.

"Come, Abe," he said, "we'll take Feder's advice."

"Feder's advice?" Feinholz repeated. "You mean that feller what I seen it in your store this morning?" [Pg 294]

"That's what I mean," Morris replied. "Feder says to us we should take it his lawyers, McMaster, Peddle & Crane, and he would see to it that they wouldn't charge us much."

Feinholz smiled.

"But the Farmers and Ranchers' Insurance Company got also a good lawyer," he said triumphantly.

"Maybe they have," Morris admitted, "but we ain't got nothing to do with the Farmers and Ranchers' Insurance Company now. We take it Feder's lawyers and sue you, Feinholz. Feder hears it all what you got to say, and he is willing to go on the stand and swear that you says that the goods was all right and the sample was all right. I guess when a banker and a gentleman like Feder swears something you could get all the Henry D. Feldmans in the world and it wouldn't make no difference."

Feinholz passed his hand over his forehead and breathed hard.

"Maybe we could settle the matter, Rudy," he said to his nephew, "if the other companies what they are insured by would contribute their share."

"The other companies," Morris announced, "is got nothing to do with it. You fired them goods back at us, and that's the reason why they got damaged. So, we wouldn't ask for a cent from the other companies."

"Then it is positively all off," cried Feinholz as one of his saleswomen entered. She held a familiar garment in her hand, and in the dim light of Feinholz's private office the buttons and soutache with which the cape was adorned sparkled like burnished gold. [Pg 295]

"Mr. Feinholz," she said, "a lady saw this on one of the racks and she wants to know how much it costs."

Morris eyed the cape for one hesitating moment, and then he sprang to his feet and snatched it from the astonished saleswoman.

"You tell the customer," he said, "that this here cape ain't for sale."

He rolled it into a tight bundle and thrust it under his coat.

"Now, Feinholz," he declared calmly, "I got you just where I want you. Feder is willing to go on the stand and swear that you said them goods was up to sample, and this here is the sample. Any feller what knows anything about the cloak and suit trade could tell in a minute that these here samples costed twenty-five dollars to make up. Forty-eight times twenty-five is twelve hundred dollars, and so sure as you are sitting there, Feinholz, Abe and me will commence suit against you for twelve hundred dollars the first thing to-morrow morning, unless we get it a certified check from the Farmers and Ranchers' Insurance Company for six hundred dollars, which is the price what you agreed to pay us for the garments."

A moment later Blaustein and Abe followed him to the sidewalk. [Pg 296]

"Well, Blaustein," Morris asked as they walked to the elevated railroad, on their way home, "what do you think of it all? Huh?"

"I think it's a good bluff you are making," Blaustein replied, "but it may work. So, if you come right down to my office I'll fix up your proof of loss and send it up to him this afternoon."

The next morning Abe and Morris reached their loft a good hour ahead of the letter-carrier, and when he entered they both made a grab for the mail which he handed them. Morris won out, and

as he shuffled the letters with the deftness of long pinochle experience he emitted a cry.

"What is it?" Abe asked.

For answer Morris tore open a long yellow envelope and flicked it up and down between his thumb and finger until a small piece of paper fluttered to the carpet. Abe swooped down on it immediately and ran to the office, hugging it to his breast. It was a certified check for six hundred dollars.

"Well, Abe," Morris said as he filled out a deposit slip of the Kosciusko Bank, "there's one feller comes out of this deal pretty lucky, all considering."

"Who's that, Mawruss?" Abe asked.

"The rutt honn Earl of Warrington," Morris replied.

CHAPTER XIV

[Pg 297]

Abe Potash entered the firm's private office one morning in mid-September and deliberately removed his hat and coat. As he did so he emitted groans calculated to melt the heart of the most hardened medical practitioner, but Morris Perlmutter remained entirely unmoved.

"Well, Abe," he said, "you've been making a hog of yourself again. Ain't it? Sol Klinger says he seen you over to the Harlem Winter Garden, and I suppose you bought it such a fine supper you couldn't sleep a wink all night. What?"

Abe started to draw himself up to his full five feet three, but lumbago brooks no hauteur, and he subsided into the nearest chair with a low, expressive "Oo-ee!"

"That's a heart you got it, Mawruss," he declared bitterly, "like a stone. I drunk it nothing but lithia water and some dry toast, which them suckers got the nerve to charge me fifty cents for."

"Well, why don't you seen it a doctor, Abe?" Morris said. "You could monkey with yourself a whole lifetime, Abe, and it would never do you no good; whilst if you seen it a doctor, Abe, he gives you a little pinch of powder, y'understand, and in five minutes you are a well man."

Abe sighed heavily.

"It don't go so quick, Mawruss," he replied. "I seen a doctor this morning and he says I am full from rheumatism. I dassen't do nothing, Mawruss, I dassen't touch coffee or schnapps. I dassen't eat no meat but lamb chops and chicken." [Pg 298]

"I tasted worser things already as lamb chops and chicken, Abe," Morris retorted.

"And the worstest thing of all, Mawruss," Abe concluded, "the doctor says he wouldn't be responsible for my life already if I go out on the road."

"What?" Morris exclaimed. In less than two weeks Abe was due to leave on his Western trip, and for the past few days Morris had been in the throes of preparing the sample line.

"This is a fine time for you to get sick, Abe," he cried.

"Could I help it, Mawruss?" Abe protested. "You talk like I got the rheumatism to spite you, Mawruss. Believe me, Mawruss, I ain't so stuck on staying in the store here with you, Mawruss. I could prefer it a million times to be out on the road."

He rose to his feet with another hollow groan.

"But, anyway, Mawruss, it won't help matters none if we sit around here all the morning. We got to get it somebody to sell our line, because even if, to hear you talk, the goods do sell themselves when I go out with them, Mawruss, we couldn't take no chances on some kid salesman. We got to get it a first-class A Number One feller what wouldn't fool away his time."

"Well, why don't you put it an ad in the Daily Cloak and Suit Record, Abe?" Morris asked. [Pg 299]

"I put it in last night already," Abe replied, "and I bet yer we get it a million answers by the first mail this afternoon."

For the remainder of the morning Morris busied himself with the sample line, while Abe moved

slowly about the show-room, well within the hearing of his partner, and moaned piteously at frequent intervals. Every half-hour he cleared his throat with a rasping noise and, when he had secured Morris' attention, ostentatiously swallowed a large gelatine capsule and rolled his eyes upward in what he conceived to be an expression of acute agony. At length Morris could stand it no longer.

"What are we running here, anyway, Abe?" he asked. "A cloak and suit business or a hospital? If you are such a sick man, Abe, why don't you go home?"

"Must I got to get your permission to be sick, Mawruss?" Abe asked. "Couldn't I take it maybe a bit of medicine oncet in a while if I want to, Mawruss?"

He snorted indignantly, but further discussion was prevented by the entrance of the letter-carrier, and immediately Abe and Morris forgot their differences in an examination of the numerous letters that were the fruit of the advertisement.

"Don't let's waste no time over fellers we don't know nothing about, Abe," Morris suggested as he tossed one envelope into the waste-paper basket. "Here's a feller called Rutherford B. H. Horowitz, what says he used to be a suit-buyer in Indianapolis. Ever hear of him, Abe?" [Pg 300]

"We don't want no fellers what used to be buyers, Mawruss," Abe retorted. "What we want is fellers what is cloak and suit salesmen. Ain't it?"

"Well, here's a feller by the name Arthur Katzen, Abe," Morris went on. "Did y'ever hear of him, Abe?"

"Sure I know him, Mawruss," Abe replied. "You know him, too, Mawruss. That's a feller by the name Osher Katzenelenbogen, what used to work for us as buttonhole-maker when we was new beginners already. Two years ago, I met that feller in the Yates House and I says to him: 'Hallo,' I says, 'ain't you Osher Katzenelenbogen?' And he says: 'Excuse me,' he says, 'you got the advantage from me,' he says. 'My name is Arthur Katzen,' he says; and I assure you, Mawruss, the business that feller was doing, Mawruss, was the sole topic what everybody was talking about."

Morris waved his hand deprecatingly.

"I seen lots of them topics in my time already, Abe," he commented. "Topics what went up with red fire already and come down like sticks. That's the way it goes in this business, Abe. A feller gets a little streak of luck, and everybody goes to work and pats him on the back and tells him he's a great salesman."

"But mind you, Mawruss, Arthur Katzen was a good salesman then and is a good salesman to-day yet. The only trouble with him is that he's a gambler, Mawruss. That feller would sooner play auction pinochle than eat, and that's the reason why he could never hold it a job." [Pg 301]

"Why shouldn't he hold a job, Abe?" Morris asked. "If I would have a crackerjack drummer, for my part he could play the whole book of Hoyle, from *klabbias* to *stuss*, and it wouldn't affect me none so long as he sold the goods."

"Maybe you're right, Mawruss," Abe admitted. "But when a feller fools away his time at auction pinochle his business is bound to suffer." "Well, then, here's a feller answers by the name Mozart Rabiner," Morris continued. "Did y'ever hear of him, Abe?"

"If you mean Moe Rabiner, Mawruss," Abe replied. "I never knew his name was Mozart before, Mawruss, but there was a feller by the name Moe Rabiner what used to work for Sammet Brothers, Mawruss, and that feller could make the pianner fairly talk, Mawruss. If he could only get a lady buyer up against a pianner, Mawruss, he could sell her every time."

Morris tore up Mozart's application.

"So long as a feller fools away his time, Abe," he said, "it don't make no difference either he plays auction pinochle or either he plays the pianner. Ain't it?"

He opened another envelope and scanned the enclosed missive.

"This sounds good to me, Abe," he said, and handed the letter to his partner. It read as follows: [Pg 302]

4042 PROSPECT AVE., September 18/08.

MESSRS POTASH & PERLMUTTER,

*Gents:—*Seeing your ad in to days Record and in reply would beg to state am a first class, womans outer garment salesman selling only to the high class trade. Was for three years with one of the largest concerns in the trade traveling to the coast and making Tooson, Denver, Shyenne and Butte, selling the best houses in Frisco, Portland, Seattle, Los Angles, Fresno &c. &c. &c. *Am all for business and can give A 1 references.* At present am unnattached but expect quick action as am neggotiating with one of the largest speciality houses in the trade. *Ask no favors of nobody but results will show.*

"By jimminy!" Abe cried after he had finished reading the letter. "That's the feller we want to hire it, Mawruss. Let's write him to call."

It would hardly be violating Marks Pasinsky's confidence to disclose that he held himself to be a forceful man. He never spoke save in italics, and when he shook hands with anyone the recipient of the honor felt it for the rest of the day. Abe watched Morris undergo the ordeal and plunged his hands in his trousers' pockets.

"And this is Mr. Potash," Pasinsky cried, releasing his grip on Morris and extending his hand toward Abe.

"How d'ye do?" Abe said without removing his hands. "I think I seen you oncet before already in Mandleberger Brothers & Co., in Chicago." [Pg 303]

"I presume you did," Marks Pasinsky replied. "Ed Mandleberger and me married cousins. That is to say, my wife's mother's sister is a sister-in-law to a brother of Ed Mandleberger's wife's mother."

"Huh, huh," Abe murmured. "Do you know Simon Kuhner, buyer for their cloak department?"

Marks Pasinsky sat down and fixed Abe with an incredulous smile.

"A question!" he exclaimed. "Do I know him? Every afternoon, when I am in Chicago, Simon and me drinks coffee together."

Abe and Morris looked at each other with glances of mixed wonder and delight.

"I'll tell you another feller I'm intimate with, too," he said. "Do you know Charles I Fichter, cloak buyer for Gardner, Baum & Miller, in Seattle?"

Abe nodded. He had been vainly trying to sell Fichter a bill of goods since 1898.

"Well, Charlie and me was delegates to the National Grand Lodge of the Independent Order Mattai Aaron, and I nominated Charlie for Grand Scribe. The way it come about was this, if you'd care to hear about it."

"That's all right," Morris interrupted. "We take your word for it. The point is, could you sell it him a big bill of goods, maybe?"

Marks Pasinsky leaned back in his chair and laughed uproariously. [Pg 304]

"Why, Mr. Perlmutter," he said, all out of breath from his mirth, "that feller is actually putting his job in danger because he's holding off in his fall buying until I get to Seattle. Fichter wouldn't buy not a dollar's worth of goods from nobody else but me, not if you was to make him a present of them for nothing."

He gave many more instances of his friendship with cloak and suit buyers. For example, it appeared that he knew Rudolph Rosenwater, buyer for Feigenson & Schiffer, of San Francisco, to the extent of an anecdote containing a long, intimate dialogue wherein Rosenwater commenced all his speeches with: "Well, Markie."

"And so I says to him," Pasinsky concluded, "'Rudie, you are all right,' I says, 'but you can't con me.'"

He looked from Abe to Morris and beamed with satisfaction. They were in a condition of partial hypnotism, which became complete after Pasinsky had concluded a ten-minutes' discourse on cloak and suit affairs. He spoke with a fluency and emphasis that left Abe and Morris literally gasping like landed fish, although, to be sure, the manner of his discourse far outshone the matter.

But his auditors were much too dazed to be critical. They were cognizant of only one circumstance: If this huge personage with his wonderful magnetism and address couldn't sell goods, nobody could. [Pg 305]

Pasinsky rose to his feet. He was six feet in height, and weighed over two hundred pounds.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, towering over his proposed employers, "think it over and see if you want me. I'll be back at noon."

"Hold on a minute," Abe cried. "You ain't told us nothing about who you worked for last. What were all them references you was telling us about?"

Pasinsky regarded Abe with a smile of amusement.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Potash, it's like this," he explained. "Of course you want to know who I worked for and all about it."

Abe nodded.

"But the way I feel about it," Marks Pasinsky went on, "is that if you advance my expenses for two weeks, understand me, and I go out with your sample line, understand me, if you don't owe me a thousand dollars commissions at the end of that time, then I don't want to work for you at all."

Morris' jaw dropped and he wiped beads of perspiration from his forehead.

"But who did you sell goods for?" Abe insisted.

Marks Pasinsky bent down and placed his hand on Abe's shoulder.

"B. Gans," he whispered.

"Let me in on this, too, Abe," Morris exclaimed.

"He says he worked for B. Gans," Abe replied.

"That's an A Number One concern, Abe," Morris said.

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"A A Number One," Pasinsky corrected. "B. Gans ain't got a garment in his entire line that retails for less than a hundred dollars."

"Well, we ain't so tony as all that," Morris commented. "We got it one or two garments, Mr. Pasinsky—just one or two, y'understand—which retails for ninety-nine dollars and ninety-eight cents, y'understand. So, naturally, you couldn't expect to sell the same class of trade for us as you sold it for B. Gans."

"Naturally," Pasinsky agreed loftily, "but when a salesman is a salesman, Mr. Perlmutter, he ain't content to sell a line of goods which sells themselves, so to speak, like B. Gans' line. He wants to handle such a line like you got it, Mr. Perlmutter, which is got to be pushed and pushed good and plenty. If I wouldn't handle an inferior line oncet in a while, Mr. Perlmutter, I would quick get out of practice."

Morris snorted.

"If our line don't suit you, Mr. Pasinsky," he began, when Abe interrupted with a wave of his hand.

"Pasinsky is right, Mawruss," he said. "You always got it an idee you made up a line of goods what practically sold themselves, and I always told you differencely. You wouldn't mind it if I went around to see B. Gans, Mr. Pasinsky."

Pasinsky stared superciliously at Abe.

"Go as far as you like," he said. "Gans wouldn't tell you nothing but good of me. But if I would work for you one week, Mr. Potash, you would know that with me recommendations is nix and results everything."

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He blew his nose like a challenge and clapped his silk hat on his flowing black curls. Then he bowed to Morris, and the next moment the elevator door clanged behind him.

B. Gans guided himself by the maxim: "In business you couldn't trust nobody to do nothing," and albeit he employed over a hundred workmen he gave practical demonstrations of their duties to all of them. Thus, on the last of the month he made out statements in the office, and when the shipping department was busy he helped tie up packages. Occasionally he would be found wielding a pressing iron, and when Abe Potash entered to inquire about Pasinsky's qualifications B. Gans had just smashed his thumb in the process of showing a shipping clerk precisely how a packing-case ought to be nailed.

"What's the matter, Gans?" Abe asked.

"Couldn't you afford it to hire shipping clerks no more?"

"I want to tell you something, Potash," Gans replied. "Jay Vanderbilt ain't got money enough to hire it a good shipping clerk, because for the simple reason there ain't no good shipping clerks. A shipping clerk ain't no good, otherwise he wouldn't be a shipping clerk."

"How about drummers?" Abe asked. "I ain't come to ask you about shipping clerks, Gans; I come to ask you about a drummer."

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"What should you ask me about drummers for, Potash?" Gans replied. "You know as well as I do what drummers is, Potash. Drummers is bluffs. I wouldn't give a pinch of snuff for the best drummers living. The way drummers figure it out nowadays, Potash, there ain't no more money in commissions. All the money is in the expense account."

Abe laughed.

"I guess you got a tale of woe to tell about designers and models, too, Gans," he said; "but with me, Gans, so long as a salesman could sell goods I don't take it so particular when it comes right down to the expense account."

"Oh, if they sell goods, Potash," Gans agreed, "then that's something else again. But the way business is to-day, Potash, salesmen don't sell goods no more. Former times a salesman wasn't

considered a salesman unless he could sell a customer goods what the customer didn't want; but nowadays it don't make no difference what kind of salesman you hire it, Potash, the goods is got to sell themselves, otherwise the salesman can't do no business. Ain't it?"

"But take a salesman like Marks Pasinsky, for instance," Abe said. "There's a feller what can sell goods. Ain't it?"

B. Gans looked up sharply.

"Did Marks Pasinsky send you here?" he asked.

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"Well, he give you as a reference," Abe replied.

"All right," B. Gans continued. "You tell Marks Pasinsky from me that I says he's a good salesman and that why he left me was by mutual consent."

"Sure," Abe said, "but I wanted to ask you more about Pasinsky. You see, Pasinsky wants to come to work by us as salesman, and I want to find out a few things about him first."

"Well, I'm just telling you, ain't I?" Gans replied. "I said Marks Pasinsky was a good salesman and the reason why he left me was by mutual consent; and you tell Pasinsky that that's what I said it, and if you'll excuse me I got business to attend to."

He turned away and fairly ran toward the rear of the loft, while Abe, now thoroughly mystified, returned to his place of business.

"Well, Abe," Morris cried as his partner entered. "What for a reference did you get it from B. Gans?"

"The reference is all right, Mawruss," Abe replied. "B. Gans says that Pasinsky is a good salesman and that the reason he left was by mutual consent."

"Mutual consent?" Morris exclaimed. "What kind of reasons is that for firing a feller?"

"Gans didn't fire him, Mawruss," Abe said. "He left by mutual consent."

"I know, Abe," Morris rejoined, "but when a feller quits by mutual consent you know as well as I do, Abe, what that means. It means that if I should say to Jake, the shipping clerk, 'Jake, you are a rotten shipping clerk and I don't want you no more, and if you don't get right out of here I will kick you out,' and then Jake says to me, 'In that case you could take your dirty job and give it to some poor sucker what wants it more as I do,' then Jake quits by mutual consent. Ain't it?"

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Abe stared indignantly at his partner.

"I'm surprised to hear you you should talk that way, Mawruss, about a decent, respectable young feller what works so hard like Jake does," he said. "That only goes to show what a judge you are. If you couldn't tell it a good shipping clerk when you see one, how should you know anything about salesmen? B. Gans says that Pasinsky is a good salesman, Mawruss, and you can do what you like about it; I'm going to hire him, Mawruss, when he comes back here."

"Go ahead, Abe," Morris retorted. "Only, if things shouldn't turn out O. K. you shouldn't blame me. That's all."

"I wouldn't blame you, Mawruss," Abe said. "All I would blame you is if you wouldn't have our sample line in good shape by next week, because I want Pasinsky to leave here by Monday sure."

"Don't you worry about them samples, Abe," Morris cried.

"Them samples is good enough to sell themselves; and the way I figure it out, they got to sell themselves, Abe, because I don't believe Pasinsky could sell nothing to nobody."

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"You don't believe nothing, Mawruss," Abe concluded as he made for the cutting-room; "you're a regular amethyst."

"With a feller like Kuhner," Marks Pasinsky declared on the following Monday, "you couldn't be a cheap skate, Mr. Potash."

"I always sold it Kuhner, too," Abe replied; "but I never spent it so much as three hundred dollars in one week in Chicago."

"Sure, I know," Pasinsky agreed, "but how much did you sell Kuhner? A thousand or two thousand at the outside. With me, Mr. Potash, I wouldn't bother myself to stop off in Chicago at all if I couldn't land at least a five-thousand-dollar order from Simon Kuhner, of Mandleberger Brothers & Co., and we will say four thousand with Chester Prosnauer, of the Arcade Mercantile Company."

It lacked half an hour of Marks Pasinsky's train-time, and, in addition, Abe had grown a little weary of his parting instructions to his newly-hired salesman. Indeed, the interview had lasted all the forenoon, and it would have been difficult to decide who was doing the instructing.

"S'enough," Abe cried. "Let's make an end. I'll speak to my partner about it, and if he says it's all right I'm agreeable."

He repaired to the cutting-room, where Morris chafed at the delay in Pasinsky's departure.

"Ain't that feller gone yet, Abe?" he asked.

"I'm just giving him a few last advices," Abe replied.

"Well, I hope you're more successful as I was, Abe," Morris rejoined. "That feller's got so much to say for himself I couldn't get a word in sideways."

Abe nodded.

"He's a good talker," he said, "only he's too ambitious, Mawruss."

"He shouldn't get ambitious around me, Abe," Morris retorted, "because I wouldn't stand for it. What's he getting ambitious with you about?"

"Well, he wants it three hundred dollars for expenses one week in Chicago already," Abe answered.

"What!" Morris cried.

"He says he got to do some tall entertaining, Mawruss," Abe went on, "because he expects to sell Simon Kuhner a five-thousand-dollars bill of goods, and the Arcade Mercantile Company also five thousand."

"Say, looky here, Abe: I want to tell you something," Morris broke in. "Of course, this ain't my affair nor nothing, because you got the rheumatism and it's your funeral. Also, I am only a partner here, y'understand, and what I says goes for nix. But the way it looks to me now, Abe, if this here Pasinsky sells all the goods he talks about, Abe, we will got to have four times more capital as we are working with now. And if he spends it three hundred dollars in every town he makes we wouldn't have no capital left at all. And that's the way it goes."

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He turned and strode angrily away, while Abe went back to the show-room.

"Well, Pasinsky," he said, "I decided I would take a chance and advance you the three hundred; but you got to do the business, Pasinsky, otherwise it is all off."

Pasinsky nodded and tucked away the yellowbacks which Abe gave him.

"All you've got to do, Mr. Potash, is to fill the orders," he said, extending his hand to Abe, "and I will do the rest. And now good-by and good luck to you."

He squeezed Abe's hand until it was completely numb, and with a parting nod to Miss Cohen, the bookkeeper, he started on his journey for the West.

"You would thought, Mawruss," Abe said afterward, "that he was staying home and that it was me what goes away on the trip."

"I wish you was, Abe," Morris replied fervently. "I ain't got no confidence in that feller at all."

"I wouldn't knock the feller until I seen what he could do, Mawruss," Abe said. "He promised me we should hear from him so soon as he gets there."

Four days later the expected mail arrived. Abe received the letter from the carrier and burst it open with his thumb. Then he drew forth the contents of the envelope and shook the folded sheet, but no order slip fell out. He sighed heavily and perused the letter, which read as follows:

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CHICAGO, ILL., SEP. '08.

MESS POTASH & PERLMUTTER

Gents:—Arrived here this A M and things look very promising. Am informed by everybody that business is good on the coast and prospects of big orders also very promising. Sales have been slow here on a/c weather is very hot. Miss Schimpfer asst buyer millinery dept Mandleberger Bros & Co says things look very promising and expects to do a big fall business. Was two hours late getting in to Chicago on a/c freight wreck and missed seeing Kuhner his sister's daughter gets married and Kuhner goes to the wedding. Will see Kuhner to morrow A M and let you know results. Have appointment with Chester Prosnauer to morrow A M and things look very promising there. Will write you to morrow. Regards to Mr. Perlmutter. Hoping things is all right in the store, I am,

MARKS PASINSKY.

Abe finished reading the letter and handed it in silence to Morris, who examined it closely.

"That's a very promising letter, Abe," he said. "I'd like to know what that feller done all day in Chicago. I bet yer that assistant millinery buyer eats a good lunch on us, Abe, if she didn't also see it a theayter on us, too. What does he think he's selling, anyway, Abe, millinery or cloaks?"

"Give the feller a show, Mawruss," Abe replied. "He ain't been in Chicago forty-eight hours yet. We'll wait till we get it another letter from him, Mawruss, before we start to kick."

Another day elapsed, but no further epistle came from Marks Pasinsky, and when the last mail arrived without any word from Chicago Morris grew worried. [Pg 315]

"Not even a weather report, Abe," he said. "If he couldn't sell no goods, Abe, at least he could write us a letter."

"Maybe he's too busy, Mawruss," Abe suggested.

"Busy taking assistant millinery buyers to lunch, Abe," Morris replied. "The way that feller acts, Abe, he ain't no stranger to auction pinochle, neither, I bet yer."

Abe put on his hat and coat preparatory to going home.

"What's the use knocking him yet a while, Mawruss?" he said. "A different tune you will sing it when we get a couple of orders from him to-morrow morning."

But the next forenoon's mail was barren of result, and when Abe went out to lunch that day he had little appetite for his food. Accordingly he sought an enameled-brick dairy restaurant, and he was midway in the consumption of a bowl of milk toast when Leon Sammet, senior partner of Sammet Brothers, entered.

"Well, Abe," he said, "do you got to diet, too?"

"*Gott sei dank*, it ain't so bad as all that, Leon," Abe replied. "No, Leon, I ain't going to die just yet a while, although that's a terrible sickness, the rheumatism. The doctor says I could only eat it certain things like chicken and chops and milk toast."

"Well, you wouldn't starve, anyhow," Leon commented. [Pg 316]

"No, I wouldn't starve," Abe admitted, "but I also couldn't go out on the road, neither. The doctor wouldn't let me, so we got to hire a feller to take care of our Western trade. I guess he's a pretty good salesman, too. His name is Marks Pasinsky. Do you know him?"

"Sure I know him," Leon Sammet replied. "He used to work by B. Gans, and he's a very close friend of a feller what used to work for us by the name Mozart Rabiner."

"You mean that musical feller?" Abe said.

"That's the one," Leon answered. "I bet yer he was musical. That feller got the artistic temperature all right, Abe. He didn't give a damn how much of our money he spent it. Every town he makes he got to have a pianner sent up to the hotel. Costs us every time three dollars for the pianner and five dollars for trucking. We got it a decent salesman now, Abe. We hired him a couple of weeks since."

"What's his name?" Abe asked.

"Arthur Katzen," Leon Sammet replied. "He had a big week last week in Buffalo, Erie, Cleveland and Detroit. He's in Chicago this week."

"Is that so?" Abe commented.

"He turned us in a fine order to-day," Leon continued, "from Simon Kuhner, of Mandleberger Brothers & Co."

"What?" Abe gasped.

"Sure," Sammet went on, "and the funny thing about it is that Kuhner never bought our line before, and I guess he wouldn't of bought it now, but this here Arthur Katzen, Abe, he is sure a wonder. That feller actually booked a five-thousand-dollar order from sample garments which didn't belong to our line at all. They're some samples which I understand Kuhner had made up already." [Pg 317]

"That's something what I never heard it before," Abe exclaimed.

"Me neither," Leon said; "but Kuhner gives him the privilege to send us the garments here, and we are to make up sample garments of our own so soon as we can copy the styles; and after we ship our samples and Kuhner's samples back to Kuhner, Kuhner sends us a confirmation. We expect Kuhner will ship us his samples to-morrow."

Abe rose wearily from his seat.

"Well, Leon," he concluded, "you certainly got it more luck with your salesman as we got it with ours. So far he ain't sent us a single, solitary order."

He passed down the aisle to the cashier's desk and had almost reached the door when a restraining hand plucked at his coat tails.

"Hallo, Abe!" a voice cried. It was Sol Klinger, whose manner of eating crullers and coffee received and merited the unfavorable attention of everybody seated at his table. "Sit down and have a cup of coffee."

"I had it my lunch already," Abe replied.

"Sit down and have a cup of coffee, anyhow," Sol Klinger coaxed.

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"I wouldn't have no coffee," Abe said as he took the vacant chair next to Sol. "I'll have a cup of chocolate. To a man in my conditions, Sol, coffee is poison already."

"Why, what's the matter, Abe?" Sol asked.

"I'm a sick feller, Sol," Abe went on. "The rheumatism I got it all over my body. I assure you I couldn't go out on the road this fall. I had to hire it a salesman."

"Is that so?" Sol Klinger replied. "Well, we had to hire it a new salesman, too—a young feller by the name Moe Rabiner. Do you know him?"

"I heard about him already," Abe said. "How is he doing?"

"Well, in Buffalo, last week, he ain't done hardly nothing," said Sol; "but he's in Chicago this week and he done a little better. He sent us a nice order this morning, I bet yer. Four thousand dollars from the Arcade Mercantile Company."

Abe was swallowing a huge mouthful of cocoa, and when Sol vouchsafed this last piece of information the cocoa found its way to Abe's pharynx, whence it was violently ejected into the face of a mild-mannered errand-boy sitting opposite. The errand-boy wiped his face while Sol slapped Abe on the back.

"What's the matter, Abe?" Sol asked solicitously. "Do you got bronchitis, too, as well as rheumatism?"

"Go ahead, Sol," Abe gasped. "Tell me about this here order."

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"There ain't much to tell, Abe," Sol went on, "except that this here Rabiner does something I never heard about before in all my experience in the cloak and suit business."

"No?" Abe croaked. "What was that?"

"Why, this here Rabiner gets an order from Prosnauer, of the Arcade Mercantile Company, for garments what we ain't got in our line at all," Sol Klinger explained; "and Prosnauer furnishes us the sample garments, which we are to return to him just so soon as we can copy them, and then ___"

"S'enough," Abe cried. "I heard enough, Sol. Don't rub it in."

"Why, what do you mean, Abe?" Sol asked.

"I mean I got it a salesman in Chicago, Sol," Abe went on, "what ain't sent us so much as a smell of an order. I guess there's only one thing for me to do, Sol, and that's to go myself to Chicago and see what he's up to."

Sol looked shocked.

"Don't you do it, Abe," he said. "Klein got a brother-in-law what got the rheumatism like you got it, Abe, and the feller insisted on going to Boston. The railroad trip finished him, I bet yer."

"Did he die?" Abe asked.

"Well, no, he didn't die exactly," Klinger replied; "but on the train the rheumatism went to his head, and that poor, sick young feller took a whole theayter troupe into the café car and blows 'em to tchampanyer wine yet. Two hundred dollars it costed him."

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"That's all right, Sol," Abe replied. "I could stand it if it stood me in three hundred dollars, so long as I could stop Marks Pasinsky making another town."

He rose to his feet with surprising alacrity for a rheumatic patient, and returned to his office, where no communication had been received from Marks Pasinsky.

"That settles it, Mawruss," Abe said as he jammed his hat farther down on his head.

"Where are you going now?" Morris asked.

"I'm going home to pack my grip," Abe announced, "and I'll get that six o'clock train to Chicago, sure."

"But, Abe," Morris protested, "I thought the doctor says if you went out on the road he wouldn't be responsible for you."

"I know he did," Abe concluded as he passed out, "but who will be responsible for Marks Pasinsky, Mawruss?"

When Abe reached Chicago the following afternoon he repaired at once to the hotel at which Marks Pasinsky was staying.

"Mr. Pasinsky ain't in his room. What?" he said to the clerk.

"Mr. Pasinsky went out about one o'clock and hasn't been back since," the clerk replied as he handed Abe over to a bell-boy. Fifteen minutes later Abe descended from his room with the marks of travel almost effaced, and again inquired for Marks Pasinsky.

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"He ain't been back since, Mr. Potash," said the clerk.

"He didn't go out with nobody. No?" Abe asked.

"I think he went out with a short, dark gentleman," the clerk answered.

Abe pondered for a moment. Simon Kuhner stood full six feet tall and was a decided blond, while Chester Prosnauer, whom he knew by sight only, was as large as Marks Pasinsky himself.

"Who could that be, I wonder?" Abe murmured.

"It was a gentleman staying over at the Altringham," the clerk said.

"Then it couldn't be them," Abe concluded. "If Pasinsky comes back you should please tell him to wait. I will be back here at six, sure."

He made immediately for the business premises of Mandleberger Brothers & Co., where he found Simon Kuhner hard at work in his office.

"Hallo, Abe!" Kuhner cried as Abe entered. "They told me you was a fit subject for crutches when I asked for you the other day."

"Who told you?" Abe said without further preface. "Marks Pasinsky?"

"Marks Pasinsky?" Kuhner repeated. "Why, no. He didn't mention your name, Abe. Do you know Marks Pasinsky, too?"

"Do I know him, too?" Abe almost shrieked. "A question! Ain't he selling goods for me?"

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"Is he?" Kuhner said.

"Is he!" Abe cried. "Why, you don't mean to tell me that feller ain't been in here yet?"

"Sure he was in here," Kuhner replied, "but he didn't say nothing about selling goods for you. In fact, he got a fine order from me, Abe, for a concern which I never done business with before. People by the name Sammet Brothers. What's the matter, Abe? Are you sick?"

Abe gurgled once or twice and clutched at his collar.

"Did you got the samples here what he shows you?" he managed to gasp.

"Why, Abe, what's troubling you?" Kuhner said. "A sick man like you shouldn't be attending to business at all."

"Never mind me," Abe cried. "What about them samples, Kuhner?"

"He left some samples with me, and I was to ship 'em to Sammet Brothers."

"Did you ship 'em yet?" Abe exclaimed.

"Why, what's the matter, Abe?" Kuhner commenced soothingly.

"The matter is," Abe shouted, "them samples is my samples, and there's some monkey business here."

"Monkey business!" Kuhner said. "What sort of monkey business?"

"I don't know," Abe replied, "but I'm going to find out right away. Promise me you wouldn't ship them samples till I come back."

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"Sure I will promise you, Abe," Kuhner declared. "When will you be back?"

"To-morrow morning some time," Abe concluded as he rose to leave. "I got to see a lawyer and make this here feller Pasinsky arrested."

"Don't do nothing rash, Abe," Kuhner advised.

"I won't do nothing rash," Abe promised. "I'll kill him, that's what I'll do."

He took the stairs three at a jump and fairly ran to the dry-goods store of the Arcade Mercantile Company.

"Mr. Prosnauer," he cried as he burst into Prosnauer's office in the cloak department, "my name is Mr. Potash, of Potash & Perlmutter, from New York. Did you seen it my salesman, Marks Pasinsky?"

"Sit down, Mr. Potash," Prosnauer said, "and don't excite yourself."

"I ain't exciting myself," Abe exclaimed. "I don't got to excite myself, Mr. Prosnauer. I am excited enough already when I think to myself that that lowlife Pasinsky takes my samples out of my store and comes here with my money and gets an order from you for four thousand dollars for Klinger & Klein."

"Not so fast, Mr. Potash," Prosnauer began. "I've known Marks Pasinsky for a number of years. He and I play auction pinochle together every Saturday night when he is in Chicago, and——"

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"Auction pinochle!" Abe interrupted, throwing up his hands. "*Das fehlt nur noch!*"

"As I was saying, Mr. Potash," Prosnauer went on with a withering glance at Abe, "those samples are outside, and Pasinsky has asked me to ship them to Klinger & Klein, and——"

"Ship 'em!" Abe cried. "You shouldn't ship nothing. Them samples belongs to me."

"How do I know that?" Prosnauer asked. "Is your name engraved on 'em?"

"All right," Abe cried, jumping to his feet. "All right, Mr. Prosnauer. If you are going to make jokes with me I got nothing to say, but I give you warning that you should do absolutely nothing with them samples till I send a sheriff round for them."

"Now you're making threats," said Prosnauer.

"With people like Marks Pasinsky," Abe retorted as he paused at the door, "I don't got to make no threats. I know who I am dealing with, Mr. Prosnauer, and so, instead I should make threats I go right away and see a lawyer, and he will deliver the goods. That's all I got to say."

"Hold on there, Mr. Potash," Prosnauer cried. "It ain't necessary for you to see a lawyer. Prove to me that you own the samples and you can have 'em."

Abe hesitated.

"Well," he said, "if you would hold it them samples till to-morrow noon, Mr. Prosnauer, I'll give you all the proofs you want." [Pg 325]

"Very well," Prosnauer said, "I'll hold them. When will you be back?"

"Before twelve to-morrow," Abe replied. "Believe me, Mr. Prosnauer, I ain't so stuck on paying lawyers. If I can settle this thing up nice and friendly I would do so."

They shook hands, and Abe retraced his steps to the hotel, where he again inquired for Marks Pasinsky.

"He hasn't come back yet, Mr. Potash," the clerk said, and Abe retired to the writing-room and smoked a cigar by way of a sedative.

From six o'clock that evening until midnight he smoked so many sedative cigars and made so many fruitless inquiries at the desk for Marks Pasinsky, that his own nerves as well as the night clerk's were completely shattered. Before Abe retired he paid a farewell visit to the desk, and both he and the clerk gave vent to their emotions in a great deal of spirited profanity.

There was no rest for Abe that night, and when at length he fell asleep it was almost daylight. He awoke at nine and, dressing himself fireman fashion, he hurried to the desk.

"What time did Marks Pasinsky come in?" he asked the clerk.

"Why, Mr. Pasinsky didn't come in at all," the clerk replied.

Abe pushed his hat back from his forehead.

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"Say, young feller," he said, "do you got the gall to tell me that Marks Pasinsky ain't come back since he went over to the Altringham with that short, dark feller yesterday afternoon?"

"Call me a liar, why don't you?" the clerk retorted.

"You're a fresh young feller!" Abe exclaimed. "Couldn't you answer a civil question?"

"Ah, don't be worrying me with your troubles!" the clerk snarled. "Go over to the Altringham yourself, if you think I'm stringing you."

Abe turned without another word and hustled over to the Altringham.

"Do you know a feller by the name Marks Pasinsky?" he asked the clerk.

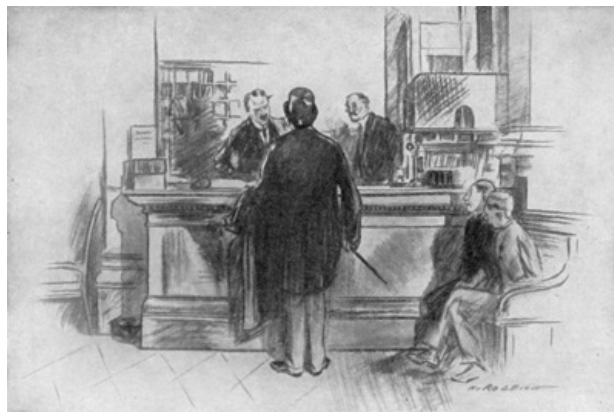
"Is he a guest of the house?" the clerk said.

"He's a big feller with a stovepipe hat and curly hair," Abe replied, "and he came in here yesterday afternoon with a short, dark feller what is stopping here. This here Pasinsky is stopping where I am, but he ain't showed up all night, and I guess he's stayed here with that short, dark feller."

The clerk touched a bell.

"Front," he said, "show this gentleman up to eighty-nine."

"Eighty-nine?" Abe cried. "Who's up in eighty-nine?"



YOU'RE A FRESH YOUNG FELLER!

"Tall, curly-haired gentleman came in here yesterday afternoon with a short, dark gentleman name of Katzen and——" [Pg 327]

Abe clapped his hand to his forehead.

"Arthur Katzen!" he cried.

The clerk nodded.

"Short, dark feller," Abe murmured as he followed the bell-boy. "Why didn't I think of Arthur Katzen before?"

He entered the elevator, feeling as though he were walking in his sleep; nor did the jolt with which he was shot up to the eighth floor awaken him. His conductor led him down the corridor and was about to knock at room eighty-nine when Abe seized him by the arm.

"Hold on," Abe whispered. "The door is open."

They tiptoed up to the half-open door and, holding himself well within the shadow of the corridor, Abe peeped in. It was ten o'clock of a sunny fall day, but the dark shades of room eighty-nine were drawn and the electric lights were blazing away as though it were still midnight. Beneath the lights was a small, oblong table at which sat three men, and in front of each of them stood a small pile of chips. Marks Pasinsky was dealing.

"A-ah, Katzen, you ruined that hand," Marks Pasinsky said as he flipped out the cards three at a time. "Why didn't you lead it out the ace of *Schüppe* right at the start? What did you expect to do with it? Eat it?"

Katzen nodded sleepily.

"The way I feel now, Pasinsky, I could eat most anything," he retorted. "I could eat a round trip, if I had a cup of coffee with it, so hungry I am. Let's have some supper." [Pg 328]

"Supper!" Pasinsky cried. "What do you want supper for? The game is young yet."

"Shall I tell you something?" the third hand—a stranger to Abe—said. "You both played that hand like *Strohschneiders*. Pasinsky sits there with two nines of trump in his hand and don't lead 'em through me. You could have beat me by a million very easy."

He waved his hand with the palm outward and flapped his four fingers derisively.

"You call yourself a pinochle player!" he jeered, and fell to twisting his huge red mustache with his fingers.

Abe nodded an involuntary approval, and then as silently as they had arrived he and the bell-boy retreated toward the elevator shaft.

"Dem guys is card fiends all right," the bell-boy commented. "Dey started in at five o'clock last night."

As they waited for the elevator the strains of a piano came from the floor below.

"What's that?" Abe exclaimed.

"Dat's anudder member of de gang," the bell-boy replied. "Dat's Mr. Rabiner. He quit a big loser about one o'clock dis mornin'."

Abe handed his informant a dime.

"Take me to his room," he said.

The bell-boy led the way to the seventh floor and conducted Abe to the door of Rabiner's room. [Pg 329]

"Dat's a pretty said spiel dat guy is tearin' off," he commented. "It makes me tink of a dago funeral."

Abe nodded. He knocked at the door, and Liszt's transcription of the *Liebestod* ceased immediately.

"Well?" Mozart Rabiner cried and, for answer, Abe opened the door.

"Hallo, Moe!" he said. "You don't know me. What? I'm Abe Potash."

"Oh, hello, Potash!" Rabiner said, rising from the piano stool.

"That's some pretty mournful music you was giving us, Moe," Abe went on. "Sounds like business was poor already. Ain't you working no more?"

"I am and I ain't," Mozart replied. "I'm supposed to be selling goods for Klinger & Klein, but since I only sold it one bill in two weeks I ain't got much hopes that I'll get enough more money out of 'em to move me out of town."

"What do you make next, Moe?" Abe asked.

"St. Paul and Minneapolis," Mozart replied.

Abe handed him a large cigar and, lighting the mate to it, puffed away complacently.

"That was a pretty good order you got it from Prosnauer which Sol Klinger tells me about," he said.

Mozart nodded sadly.

"Looky here, Moe," Abe went on, "how much money do you need to move you?"

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Mozart lifted his eyebrows and shrugged hopelessly.

"More as you would lend me, Potash," he said. "So what's the use talking about it?"

"Well, I was going to say," Abe continued, "if it was something what you might call within reason, Moe, I might advance it if——"

"If what?" Moe inquired.

"If you would tell me the insides of just how you got it that order from Prosnauer."

Mozart gave a deprecatory wave of his right hand.

"You don't got to bribe me to tell you that, Potash," he said, "because I ain't got no concern in that order no longer. I give up my commission there to a feller by the name Ignatz Kresnick."

"A white-faced feller with a big red mustache?" Abe asked.

"That's him," Mozart replied. "The luck that feller Kresnick got it is something you wouldn't believe at all. He could fall down a sewer manhole and come up in a dress suit and a clean shave already. He cleans me out last night two hundred dollars and the commission on that Prosnauer order."

"But you didn't get that order in the first place, Moe," Abe said. "Marks Pasinsky got the order."

"Sure, I know," Mozart replied, "but he got set back a couple of four hundred hands last Tuesday night with Katzen and me in the game, and the way he settles up his losing is that Katzen and me should take his commissions on a couple of orders which he says he is going to get from Simon Kuhner, of Mandleberger Brothers & Co., and Chester Prosnauer, of the Arcade Mercantile Company. Sure enough, he gets the orders from both of 'em the very next morning. That's the kind of salesman he is."

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"But why didn't Pasinsky send us along the orders, Moe," Abe protested, "and we could fix up about the commissions later? Why should he sent it the orders to Klinger & Klein and Sammet Brothers?"

"Well, you see, business was poor with me and I wanted to make good, being as this was my first trip with the concern; so, as a favor to me Pasinsky turns over the whole order to me," Mozart explained; "and then, when Katzen sees that, he wants the other order sent to his concern, too." "But this was Pasinsky's first trip by us, also," Abe cried.

"I know it," Mozart said, "but Pasinsky says that he didn't care, because a good salesman like him could always find it an opening somewhere, and anyway he wasn't stuck on working for a piker concern like yours."

Abe rose with his eyes ablaze.

"That settles it," he said, jamming his hat on his head. "I'm going for a policeman. I'll teach that sucker to steal my orders!"

He bounced out of the room and, as he rang for the elevator, Isolde's lament once more issued from beneath. Mozart Rabiner's fingers:

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While from the floor above came the full, round tones of the salesman, Marks Pasinsky.

"Sixty queens," he said.

Abe ran out of the hotel lobby straight into the arms of a short, stout person.

"Excuse me," Abe exclaimed.

"I'll excuse you, Potash," said the short, stout person, "but I wouldn't run like that if I got it the rheumatism so bad."

Abe looked at the speaker and gasped. It was B. Gans.

"What are you doing in Chicago, Potash?" Gans asked.

"You should ask me that," Abe snorted indignantly. "If it wouldn't be for you I wouldn't never got to leave New York."

"What do you mean?" Gans asked.

"I mean you gives me a good reference for this feller Marks Pasinsky," Abe shouted. "And even now I am on my way out for a policeman to make this here Pasinsky arrested."

B. Gans whistled. He surrendered to a bell-boy the small valise he carried and clutched Abe's arm.

"I wouldn't do that," he said. "Come inside the café and tell me all about it."

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Abe shook himself free.

"Why shouldn't I make him arrested?" he insisted. "He's a thief. He stole my samples."

"Well, he stole my samples, too, oncet," B. Gans replied. "Come inside the café and I'll give you a little sad story what I got, too."

A moment later they were seated at a marble-top table.

"Yes, Abe," B. Gans went on after they had given the order, "Marks Pasinsky stole my samples, too. Let's hear your story first."

Straightway Abe unfolded to B. Gans the tale of Marks Pasinsky's adventure with Mozart Rabiner and Arthur Katzen, and also told him how the orders based on Potash & Perlmutter's sample line had found their way into the respective establishments of Sammet Brothers and Klinger & Klein.

"Well, by jimminy!" B. Gans commented, "that's just the story I got to tell it you. This feller does the selfsame funny business with my samples. He gets orders from a couple of big concerns in St. Louis and then he gambles them away to a feller called Levy. So what do I do, Potash? He goes to work and has 'em both arrested, and then them two fellers turns around and fixes up a story and the first thing you know the police judge lets 'em go. Well, Potash, them two fellers goes down to New York and hires a lawyer, by the name Henry D. Feldman, and sue me in the courts yet that I made them false arrested. Cost me a thousand dollars to settle it, and I also got to agree that if anybody inquires about Pasinsky I should say only that he is a good salesman—which is the truth, Potash, because he is a good salesman—and that the reason he left me is by mutual consent, y'understand?"

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Abe nodded.

"That's a fine piece of work, that Marks Pasinsky," he commented. "I wish I had never seen him already. What shall I do, Gans? I am in a fine mess."

"No, you ain't yet," B. Gans replied. "Prosnauer and Kuhner knows me, Potash, and I am willing, as long as I got you into this, I will get you out of it. I will go with you myself, Potash, and I think I got influence enough in the trade that I could easy get them to give you back them samples."

"I know you can," Abe said enthusiastically, "and if you would put it to 'em strong enough I think we could swing back to us them orders from Sammet Brothers and Klinger & Klein."

"That I will do for you, also," B. Gans agreed. "But now, Potash, I got troubles ahead of me, too."

"How's that?" Abe inquired, much interested.

"I got it a lowlife what I hired for a salesman, also," he replied, "and three weeks ago that feller left my place with my samples and I ain't heard a word from him since. If I got to search every gamblinghouse in Chicago I will find that loafer; and when I do find him, Potash, I will crack his neck for him."

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"I wouldn't do nothing rash, Gans," Abe advised. "What for a looking feller is this salesman of yours?"

"He's a tall, white-faced loafer with a big red mustache," Gans replied, "and his name is Ignatz Kresnick."

Abe jumped to his feet.

"Come with me," he cried. Together they took the elevator to the eighth floor and, as Ignatz Kresnick dealt the cards for the five-hundredth time in that game, all unconscious of his fast-approaching Nemesis, Mozart Rabiner played the concluding measures of the *Liebestod* softly, slowly, like a benediction:

*Ertrinken—
Versinken—
Unbewusst—
Höchste Lust.*

CHAPTER XV

"Who do you think I seen it in Hammersmith's just now, Mawruss?" Abe Potash shouted as he burst into the show-room one Saturday afternoon in April.

"I ain't deaf, Abe," Morris replied. "Who did you seen it?"

"J. Edward Kleebaum from Minneapolis," Abe answered.

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Morris shrugged.

"What d'ye want *me* to do, Abe?" he asked.

Abe ignored the question.

"He promised he would come in at two o'clock and look over the line," he announced triumphantly.

"Plenty crooks looked over our line already, Abe," Morris commented, "and so far as I'm concerned, they could look over it all they want to, Abe, so long as they shouldn't buy nothing from us."

"What d'ye mean? Crooks?" Abe cried. "The way Kleebaum talks he would give us an order for a thousand dollars goods, maybe, Mawruss. He ain't no crook."

"Ain't he?" Morris replied. "What's the reason he ain't, Abe? The way I look at it, Abe, when a feller makes it a dirty failure like that feller made it in Milwaukee, Abe, and then goes to Cleveland, Abe, and opens up as the bon march, Abe, and does another bust up, Abe, and then he goes to——"

"S'enough, Mawruss," Abe interrupted. "Them things is from old times already. To-day is something else again. That feller done a tremendous business last spring, Mawruss, and this season everybody is falling over themselves to sell him goods."

"Looky here, Abe," Morris broke in, "you think the feller ain't a crook, and you're entitled to think all you want to, Abe, but I seen it Sol Klinger yesterday, and what d'ye think he told me?"

"I don't know what he told you, Mawruss," Abe replied, "but it wouldn't be the first time, Mawruss, that a feller tells lies about a concern that he couldn't sell goods to, Mawruss. It's the old story of the dawg and the grapes."

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Morris looked hurt.

"I'm surprised you should call a decent, respectable feller like Sol Klinger a dawg, Abe," he said. "That feller has always been a good friend of ours, Abe, and even if he wouldn't be, Abe, that ain't no way to talk about a concern what does a business like Klinger & Klein."

"Don't make no speeches, Mawruss," Abe retorted. "Go ahead and tell me what Sol Klinger told it you about J. Edward Kleebaum."

"Why, Sol Klinger says that he hears it on good authority, Abe, that that lowlife got it two oitermobiles, Abe. What d'ye think for a crook like that?"

"So far what I hear it, Mawruss, it ain't such a terrible crime that a feller should got it two oitermobiles. In that case, Mawruss, Andrew Carnegie would be a murderer yet. I bet yer he got already *fifty* oitermobiles."

"S'all right, Abe," Morris cried. "Andrew Carnegie ain't looking to buy off us goods, Abe, and even so, Abe, he never made it a couple of failures like Kleebaum, Abe."

"Well, Mawruss, is that all you got against him that he owns an oitermobile? Maybe he plays golluf, too, Mawruss."

"Golluf I don't know nothing about, Abe," Morris replied, "but auction pinochle he does play it, Abe. Sol Klinger says that out in Minneapolis Kleebaum hangs out with a bunch of loafers what considers a dollar a hundred chicken feed already." [Pg 338]

Abe rose to his feet.

"Let me tell you something, Mawruss," he said. "I got over them old fashioned idees that a feller shouldn't spend the money he makes in the way what he wants to. If Kleebaum wants to buy oitermobiles, that's his business, not mine, Mawruss, and for my part, Mawruss, if that feller was to come in here and buy from us a thousand dollars goods, Mawruss, I am in favor we should sell him."

"You could do what you please, Abe," Morris declared as he put on his hat. "Only one thing I beg of you, Abe, don't never put it up to me, Abe, that I was in favor of the feller from the start."

"Sure not, Mawruss," Abe replied, "because you wouldn't never let me forget it. Where are you going now, Mawruss?"

"I told you yesterday where I was going, Abe," Morris said impatiently. "Me and Minnie is going out to Johnsonhurst to see her cousin Moe Fixman."

"Moe Fixman," Abe repeated. "Ain't that the same Fixman what was partners together with Max Gudekunst?"

Morris nodded.

"Well, you want to keep your hand on your pocketbook, Mawruss," Abe went on, "because I hear it on good authority that feller ain't above selling the milk from his baby's bottle." [Pg 339]

Morris paused with his hand on the door knob.

"That's the first I hear about it, Abe," he said. "Certainly, when a feller gets together a little money, y'understand, always there is somebody what knocks him, Abe. Who told you all this about Fixman, Abe?"

"A feller by the name Sol Klinger, Mawruss," Abe replied, "and if you don't believe me you could ___"

But Morris cut off further comment by banging the door behind him and Abe turned to his task of preparing the sample line for his prospective customer's inspection. A half an hour later J. Edward Kleebaum entered the show-room and extended his hand to Abe.

"Hallo, Potash," he said. "You got to excuse me I'm a little late on account I had to look at a machine up on Fiftieth Street."

"That's a sample I suppose, ain't it?" Abe said.

"No," Kleebaum replied, "it's one of their stock machines, a Pflingst, nineteen-nine model."

"Pflingst!" Abe exclaimed, "that's a new one on me. Certainly, I believe a feller should buy the machines what suits his purpose, but with Mawruss and me, when we was running our own shop we bought nothing but standard makes like Keeler and Silcox and them other machines."

At this juncture Kleebaum broke into a hearty laugh. [Pg 340]

"This machine is all right for what I would want it," he said. "In fact, I got it right down in front of the door now. It's a nineteen-nine Pflingst, six cylinder roadster up to date and runs like a chronometer already."

"Oh, an oitermobile!" Abe cried. "Excuse me, Mr. Kleebaum. Oitermobiles ain't in my line, Mr. Kleebaum. I'm satisfied I should know something about the cloak and suit business, Mr. Kleebaum. Now, here is a garment which me and Mawruss don't consider one of our leaders at all, Mr. Kleebaum. But I bet yer that if another concern as us would put out a garment like that, Mr. Kleebaum, they would make such a holler about it that you would think nobody else knows how to make garments but them."

"When a feller's got the goods, Potash," Kleebaum replied, as he lit one of Abe's "gilt-edged" cigars, "he's got a right to holler. Now you take this here Pflingst car. It is made by the Pflingst Manufacturing Company, a millionaire concern, and them people advertise it to beat the band. And why shouldn't they advertise it? Them people got a car there which it is a wonder, Potash. How they could sell a car like that for twenty-five hundred dollars I don't know. The body alone must cost them people a couple of thousand dollars."

"That's always the way, Mr. Kleebaum," Abe broke in hurriedly. "Now, you take this here garment, Mr. Kleebaum, people would say, 'How is it possible that Potash & Perlmutter could turn out a garment like this for eighteen dollars?' And certainly, Mr. Kleebaum, I don't say we lose money on it, y'understand, only we got——" [Pg 341]

"But this here car, Potash, has selective transmission, shaft drive and——"

"Say, lookyhere, Kleebaum," Abe cried, "am I trying to sell you some cloaks or are you trying to sell me an oitermobile? Because if you are, I'm sorry I got to tell you I ain't in the market for an oitermobile just at present. On the other hand, Mr. Kleebaum, I got a line of garments here which it is a pleasure for me to show you, even if you wouldn't buy so much as a button."

"Go ahead, Potash," Kleebaum said, "and we'll talk about the car after you get through."

For over two hours Abe displayed the firm's sample line and his efforts were at last rewarded by a generous order from Kleebaum.

"That makes in all twenty-one hundred dollars' worth of goods," Kleebaum announced, "and if you think you could stand the pressure, Potash, I could smoke another cigar on you already."

"Excuse me, Mr. Kleebaum!" Abe cried, producing another of his best cigars.

"Much obliged," Kleebaum mumbled as he lit up. "And now, Abe, after business comes with me pleasure. What d'ye say to a little spin uptown in this here Pfingst car which I got it waiting for me downstairs." [Pg 342]

Abe waved his hand with the palm out.

"You could go as far as you like, Mr. Kleebaum," he replied, "but when it comes to oitermobiles, Mr. Kleebaum, you got to excuse me. I ain't never rode in one of them things yet, and I guess you couldn't learn it an old dawg he should study new tricks. Ain't it?"

"D'ye mean to tell me you ain't never rode in an oitermobile yet?" Kleebaum exclaimed.

"You got it right," Abe said, "and what's more I ain't never going to neither."

"What you trying to give me?" Kleebaum asked. "You mean to say if I would ask you you should come riding with me now, you would turn me down?"

"I bet yer I would," Abe declared. "An up-to-date feller like you, Kleebaum, is different already from an old-timer like me. I got a wife, Kleebaum, and also I don't carry a whole lot of insurance neither, y'understand."

"Come off, Potash!" Kleebaum cried. "I rode myself in oitermobiles already millions of times and I ain't never been hurted yet."

"Some people's got all the luck, Kleebaum," Abe replied. "With me I bet yer if I would ride in an oitermobile once, y'understand, the least that would happen to me is I should break my neck."

"How could you break your neck in a brand new car like that Pfingst car downstairs?" Kleebaum insisted. [Pg 343]

"Never mind," Abe answered, "if things is going to turn out that way, Mr. Kleebaum, you could break your neck in a baby carriage yet."

"Well, don't get mad about it, Potash," Kleebaum said.

"Me, I don't get mad so easy," Abe declared. "Wouldn't you come downstairs to Hammersmith's and take a cup coffee or something?"

Together they descended to the sidewalk where they were saluted by a tremendous chugging from the Pfingst roadster.

"Say, my friend," the demonstrating chauffeur cried as he caught sight of Kleebaum, "what d'ye think I'm running anyway? A taxicab?"

"You shouldn't get fresh, young feller," Kleebaum retorted, "unless you would want to lose your job."

"Aw, quit your stalling," the chauffeur protested. "Is this the guy you was telling me about?"

Kleebaum frowned and contorted one side of his face with electrical rapidity.

"Say, my friend," the chauffeur replied entirely unmoved, "them gestures don't go down with me. Is this the guy you was telling the boss you would jolly into buying a car, because——"

Kleebaum turned to Abe and elaborately assumed an expression of amiable deprecation.

"That's a salesman for you," he exclaimed.

Abe surveyed Kleebaum with a puzzled stare. [Pg 344]

"Say, lookyhere, Kleebaum," he said, "if you thought you would get me to buy an oitermobile by giving me this here order, Kleebaum, I'm satisfied you should cancel it. Because again I got to tell it you, Kleebaum, I ain't in the market for oitermobiles just yet awhile."

Kleebaum clapped Abe on the shoulder.

"The feller don't know what he's talking about, Potash," he declared. "He's thinking of somebody quite different as you. That order stands, Potash, and now if you will excuse me joining you in that cup coffee, Potash, I got to say good-by."

He wrung Abe's hand in farewell and jumped into the seat beside the chauffeur while Abe stood on the sidewalk and watched them disappear down the street.

"I bet yer that order stands," he mused. "It stands in my store until I get a couple of good reports on that feller."

"What a house that feller Fixman got it, Abe," Morris Perlmutter exclaimed on Monday morning. "A regular palace, and mind you, Abe, he don't pay ten dollars more a month as I do up in a Hundred and Eighteenth Street. And what a difference there is in the yard, Abe. Me, I look out on a bunch of fire escapes, while Fixman got a fine garden with trees and flowers pretty near as good as a cemetery."

"Well, why don't you move to Johnsonhurst, too, Mawruss," Abe Potash said. "It's an elegant neighborhood, Mawruss. Me and Rosie was over to Johnsonhurst one day last summer and it took us three hours to get out there and three hours to get back. Six cigars I busted in my vest pockets at the bridge yet and Rosie pretty near fainted in the crowd. Yes, Mawruss, it's an elegant neighborhood, I bet yer." [Pg 345]

"That was on Sunday and the summer time, Abe, but Fixman says if he leaves his house at seven o'clock, he is in his office at a quarter to eight."

"I believe it, Mawruss," Abe commented ironically. "That feller Fixman never got downtown in his life before nine o'clock. He shouldn't tell me nothing like that, Mawruss, because I know Fixman since way before the Spanish war already, and that feller was always a big bluff, y'understand. Sol Klinger tells me he's got also an oitermobile."

"Sol Klinger could talk all he wants, Abe," Morris replied. "Fixman told it me that if he had the money what Klinger sinks in one stock already, Abe, he could run a dozen oitermobiles. Sure, Fixman's got an oitermobile. With the money that feller makes, Abe, he's got a right to got on oitermobile. Klinger should be careful what he tells about people, Abe. The feller will get himself into serious trouble some day. He's all the time knocking somebody. Ain't it?"

"Is that so?" Abe said. "I thought Klinger was such a good friend to us, Mawruss. Also, Mawruss, you say yourself on Saturday that a feller what's got an oitermobile is a crook yet." [Pg 346]

"Me!" Morris cried indignantly. "I never said no such thing, Abe. Always you got to twist around what I say, Abe. What I told you was——"

"S'all right, Mawruss," Abe said. "I'll take your word for it. What I want to talk to you about now is this here J. Edward Kleebaum. He gives us an order for twenty-one hundred dollars, Mawruss."

"Good!" Morris exclaimed.

"Good?" Abe repeated with a rising inflection. "Say, Mawruss, what's the matter with you to-day, anyway?"

"Nothing's the matter with *me*, Abe. What d'ye mean?"

"I mean that on Saturday you wouldn't sell Kleebaum not a dollar's worth of goods, Mawruss, and even myself I was only willing we should go a thousand dollars on the feller, and now to-day when I tell it you he gives us an order for twenty-one hundred dollars, Mawruss, you say, 'good'."

"Sure, I say, 'good'," Morris replied. "Why not? Just because a sucker like Sol Klinger knocks a feller, Abe, that ain't saying the feller's N. G. Furthermore, Abe, suppose a feller does run a couple of oitermobiles, y'understand, Abe, does that say he's going to bust up right away? That's an idee what a back number like Klinger got it, Abe, but with me I think differently. There's worser things as oitermobiles to ride in, Abe, believe me. Fixman takes out his wife and Minnie and me on Saturday afternoon, and we had a fine time. We went pretty near to Boston, I bet yer." [Pg 347]

"To Boston!" Abe exclaimed.

"Well, we seen the Boston boats going out, and a fine view of the City College also, and a gas factory and North Beach, too. Everything went off beautiful, Abe, and I assure you Minnie and me we come home feeling fine. I tell you, Abe, a feller has got to ride in one of them things to appreciate 'em."

"S'all right, Mawruss," Abe cried. "I take your word for it. What I am worrying about now, Mawruss, is this here Kleebaum."

"Kleebaum is A Number One, Abe," Morris said. "I was talking to Fixman about him and Fixman says that there ain't a better judge of an oitermobile between Chicago and the Pacific Coast."

"Say, lookyhere, Mawruss," Abe asked, "are we in the cloak and suit business or are we in the oitermobile business? Kleebaum buys from us cloaks, not oitermobiles. And while I ain't got such good judgment when it comes to oitermobiles, I think I know something about the cloak and suit business, and I got an idea that feller is out to do us."

"Why, Abe, you don't know the feller at all," Morris protested. "Why don't you make some investigations about the feller, Abe?"

"Investigations is nix, Mawruss," Abe replied impatiently. "When a feller is a crook, Mawruss, he could fool everybody, Mawruss. He could fix things so the merchantile agencies would only find [Pg 348]

out good things about him, and he buffaloes credit men so that to hear 'em talk you would think he was a millionaire already. No, Mawruss, when you are dealing with a crook, investigations is nix. You got to depend on your own judgment."

"But, Abe," Morris cried, "you got a wrong idee about that feller. Fixman tells me Kleebaum does a fine business in Minneapolis. He has an elegant trade there and he's got a system of oitermobile delivery which Fixman says is great. He's got three light runabouts fixed up with removable tonneaus, thirty horse-power, two cylinder engines and——"

At this juncture Abe rose to his feet and hurried indignantly toward the cutting-room, where Morris joined him five minutes later.

"Say, Abe," he said, "while me and Minnie was out with Fixman on Saturday I got a fine idee for an oitermobile wrap."

Abe turned and fixed his partner with a terrible glare.

"Tell it to Kleebaum," he roared.

"I did," Morris said genially, "and he thought it would make a big hit in the trade."

"Why, when did you seen it, Kleebaum?" Abe asked.

"This morning on my way over to Lenox Avenue. I met Sol Klinger and as him and me was buying papers near the subway station, comes a big oitermobile by the curb and Kleebaum is sitting with another feller in the front seat, what they call a chauffeur, and Kleebaum says, 'Get in and I'll take you down town,' so we get in and I bet yer we come downtown in fifteen minutes."

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"Ain't Klinger scared to ride in one of them things, Mawruss?" Abe asked.

"Scared, Abe? Why should the feller be scared? Not only he wasn't scared yet, Abe, but he took up Kleebaum's offer for a ride down to Coney Island yet. Kleebaum said they'd be back by ten o'clock and so Klinger asks me to telephone over to Klein that he would be a little late this morning."

"That's a fine way for a feller to neglect his business, Mawruss," Abe commented.

Morris nodded without enthusiasm.

"By the way, Abe," he said, "me and Minnie about decided we would rent the house next door to Fixman's down in Johnsonhurst, so I guess we will go down there again this afternoon at three o'clock."

"At three o'clock!" Abe cried. "Say, lookyhere, Mawruss, what do you think this here is anyway? A bank?"

"Must I ask *you*, Abe, if I want to leave early oncet in awhile?"

"Oncet in awhile is all right, Mawruss, but when a feller does it every day that's something else again."

"When did I done it every day, Abe?" Morris demanded. "Saturday is the first time I leave here early in a year already, while pretty near every afternoon, Abe, you got an excuse you should see a customer up in Broadway and Twenty-ninth Street."

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"Shall I tell you something, Mawruss," Abe cried suddenly. "You are going for an oitermobile ride with J. Edward Kleebaum."

Morris flushed vividly.

"Supposing I am, Abe," he replied. "Ain't Kleebaum a customer from ours? And how could I turn down a customer, Abe?"

"*Maybe* he's a customer, Mawruss, but I wouldn't be certain of it because you could go oitermobile riding with him if you want to, Mawruss, but me, I am going to do something different. I am going to look that feller up, Mawruss, and I bet yer when I get through, Mawruss, we would sooner be selling goods to some of them cut-throats up in Sing Sing already."

At three o'clock Minnie entered swathed in veils and a huge fur coat.

"Well, Abe," she said, "did you hear the latest? We are going to move to Johnsonhurst."

"I wish you joy," Abe grunted.

"We got a swell place down there," she went on. "Five bedrooms, a parlor and a library with a great big kitchen and a garage."

"A what?" Abe cried.

"A place what you put oitermobiles into it," Morris explained.

"Is that so?" Abe said as he jammed his hat on with both hands. "Well, that don't do no harm, Mawruss, because you could also use it for a dawg house."

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He slammed the door behind him and five minutes later he entered the business premises of

Klinger & Klein. There he found the senior member of the firm busy over the sample line.

"Hallo, Sol!" he cried. "I just seen it Mr. Brady, credit man for the Manhattan Mills, and he says he come across you riding in an oitermobile near Coney Island at nine o'clock this morning already. He says he always thought you and Klein was pretty steady people, but I says nowadays you couldn't never tell nothing about nobody. 'Because a feller is a talmudist already, Mr. Brady,' I says, 'that don't say he ain't blowing in his money on the horse races yet.'"

Klinger turned pale.

"Ain't that a fine thing," he exclaimed, "that a feller with a responsible position like Brady should be fooling away his time at Coney Island in business hours."

Abe laughed and clapped Sol Klinger on the back.

"As a matter of fact, Sol," he said, "I ain't seen Brady in a month, y'understand, but supposing Brady *should* come across you in an oitermobile down at Coney Island at nine o'clock in the morning, y'understand. I bet yer he would call for a new statement from you and Klein the very next day, Sol, and make you swear to it on a truck load of Bibles already. A feller shouldn't take no chances, Sol."

"I was in good company anyhow, Abe," Sol declared. "I was with J. Edward Kleebaum, but I suppose Mawruss Perlmutter told it you. Ain't it?" [Pg 352]

"Sure, he did," Abe said, "and he also told it me last week that you says J. Edward Kleebaum was a crook because he runs a couple of oitermobiles out in Minneapolis."

"I made a mistake about Kleebaum, Abe," Klinger interrupted. "I changed my mind about him."

"That's all right, Sol," Abe said, "but if Kleebaum was a crook last week, Sol, and a gentleman this week, what I would like to know is, what he will be next week, because I got for twenty-one hundred dollars an order from that feller and I got to ship it next week. So if you got any information about Kleebaum, Sol, you would be doing me a favor if you would let me know all about it."

"All I know about him is this, Abe," Klinger replied. "We drew on him two reports and both of 'em gives him fifty to seventy-five thousand credit good. He's engaged to be married to Miss Julia Pfungst, who is Joseph Pfungst's a daughter."

"Joseph Pfungst," Abe repeated. "I don't know as I ever hear that name before."

"It used to be Pfungst & Gusthaler," Klinger went on, "in the rubber goods business on Wooster Street. First they made it raincoats, and then they went into rubber boots, and just naturally they got into bicycle tires, and then comes the oitermobile craze, and Gusthaler dies, and so Pfungst sells oitermobile tires, and now he's in the oitermobile business." [Pg 353]

"Certainly, he got there gradually," Abe commented.

"Maybe he did, Abe," Klinger said, "but he also got pretty near a million dollars, and you know as well as I do, Abe, a feller what's a millionaire already don't got to marry off his daughter to a crook, y'understand. No, Abe, I changed my mind about that feller. I think Kleebaum's a pretty decent feller, and ourselves we sold him goods for twenty-five hundred dollars."

Abe puffed hard on his cigar for a moment.

"Couldn't you get from the old man a guarantee of the account maybe?" he asked.

"I sent Klein around there this morning, Abe," Klinger answered, "and Pfungst says if Kleebaum is good enough to marry his daughter, he's good enough for us to sell goods to, and certainly, Abe, you couldn't blame the old man neither."

Abe nodded, and a moment later he rose to leave.

"You shouldn't look so worried about it, Abe," Sol Klinger said. "Everybody is selling that feller this year."

"Well, Mawruss," Abe cried on Tuesday morning, "I got to confess that I ain't learned nothing new about that feller Kleebaum. Everybody what I seen it speaks very highly of him, Mawruss, and the way I figure it, he bought goods for fifty thousand dollars in the last four days. Klinger & Klein sold him, Sammet Brothers sold him, and even Lapidus & Elenbogen ain't left out. I couldn't understand it at all." [Pg 354]

"Couldn't you?" Morris retorted. "Well, I could, Abe. That feller is increasing his business, Abe, because he's got good backing, y'understand. He's engaged to be married to Julie Pfungst and her father Joseph Pfungst is a millionaire."

"Sure, I know, Mawruss, I seen lots of them millionaires in my time already. Millionaires which everyone thinks is millionaires until the first meeting of creditors, and then, Mawruss, they make a composition for twenty cents cash and thirty cents notes at three, six and nine months. Multi-millionaires sometimes pay twenty-five cents cash, but otherwise the notes is the same like millionaires, three, six and nine months, and you could wrap up dill pickles in 'em for all the good they'll do you."

"What are you talking nonsense, Abe? This feller, Pflingst, is a millionaire. He's got a big oitemobile business and sells ten cars a week at twenty-five hundred dollars apiece. Here it is only Tuesday, Abe, and that feller sold two oitemobiles already."

"Did you count 'em, Mawruss?" Abe asked.

"Sure, I counted 'em," Morris replied. He looked boldly into Abe's eyes as he spoke. "One of 'em he sold to Sol Klinger and the other he sold to me."

If Morris anticipated making a sensation he was not disappointed. For ten minutes Abe struggled to sort out a few enunciable oaths from the mass of profanity that surged through his brain and at length he succeeded. [Pg 355]

"I always thought you was crazy, Mawruss," he said after the first paroxysm had exhausted itself, "and now I know it."

"Why am I crazy?" Morris asked. "When a feller lives out in Johnsonhurst you must practically got to have an oitemobile, otherwise you are a dead one. And anyhow, Abe, couldn't I spend my money the way I want to?"

"Sure, you could," Abe said. "But you didn't spend it the way *you* wanted to, Mawruss. Kleebaum got you to buy the oitemobile. Ain't it?"

"Suppose he did, Abe? Kleebaum is a customer of ours. Ain't it? And he got me also a special price on the car. Twenty-one hundred dollars he will get me the car for, Abe, and Fixman looked over the car and he says it's a great piece of work, Abe. He ain't got the slightest idee what I am paying for the car and he says it is well worth twenty-five hundred dollars."

Abe shrugged his shoulders.

"All right, Mawruss," he said. "It's your funeral. Go ahead and buy the oitemobile; only I tell you right now, Mawruss, you are sinking twenty-one hundred dollars cash."

"Not cash, Abe," Morris corrected. "Pflingst is willing to take a six months' note provided it is indorsed by Potash & Perlmutter."

It seemed hardly possible to Morris that more poignant emotion could be displayed than in Abe's first reception of his news, but this last suggestion almost finished Abe. For fifteen minutes he fought off apoplexy and then the storm burst. [Pg 356]

"Say, lookyhere, Abe," Morris protested at the first lull, "you'll make yourself sick."

But Abe paused only to regain his breath, and it was at least five minutes more before his vocabulary became exhausted. Then he sat down in a chair and mopped his brow, while Morris hastened off to the cutting-room from whence he was recalled a minute later by a shout from Abe.

"By jimminy, Mawruss!" he cried slapping his knee. "I got an idee. Go ahead and buy your oitemobile from Pflingst and I will agree that Potash & Perlmutter should endorse the note, y'understand, only one thing besides. Pflingst has got to guarantee to us Kleebaum's account of twenty-one hundred dollars."

"I'm afraid he wouldn't do it, Abe," Morris said.

"All right, then I wouldn't do it neither," Abe declared. "But anyhow, Mawruss, it wouldn't do no harm to ask him. Ain't it? Where is this here feller Pflingst?"

"At Fiftieth Street and Broadway," Morris said.

"Well, lookyhere, Mawruss," Abe announced jumping to his feet, "I'm going right away and fill out one of them guarantees what Henry D. Feldman fixes up for us, and also I will write out a note at six months for twenty-one hundred dollars and indorse it with the firm's name. Then if he wants to you could exchange the note for the guarantee, Mawruss, and we could ship the goods right away." [Pg 357]

Morris shook his head doubtfully, while Abe went into the firm's private office. He returned five minutes afterward flourishing the guarantee.

It read as follows:

In consideration of one dollar and other good and valuable considerations I do hereby agree to pay to Potash & Perlmutter Twenty-one hundred dollars (\$2100) being the amount of a purchase made by J. Edward Kleebaum from them, if he fails to pay said twenty-one hundred dollars (\$2100) on May 21st, 1909. I hereby waive notice of Kleebaum's default and Potash & Perlmutter shall not be required to exhaust their remedy against the said Kleebaum before recourse is had to me. If a petition in bankruptcy be filed by or against said Kleebaum in consideration aforesaid I promise to pay to Potash & Perlmutter on demand the said sum of twenty-one hundred dollars.

"If he signs that, Mawruss," Abe said, "you are safe in giving him the note."

Morris put on his hat and lit a cigar.

"I will do this thing to satisfy you, Abe," he said, "but I tell you right now, Abe, it ain't necessary, because Kleebaum is as good as gold, y'understand, and if you don't want to ship him the goods you don't have to."

Abe grinned ironically.

"How could you talk like that, Mawruss, when the feller is doing you a favor by selling you that oitermobile for twenty-one hundred dollars!" he said. "And besides, Mawruss, if we ship him the goods and he does bust up on us, Pfindst is got to pay the twenty-one hundred dollars, and he couldn't make no claims for shortages or extra discounts neither."

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"The idee is all right, Abe," Morris replied as he opened the show-room door, "if the feller would sign it, which I don't think he would."

With this ultimatum he hastened uptown to Pfindst's warerooms, where he assured the automobile dealer that unless the guarantee was signed, there would be no sale of the car, for he flatly declined to pay cash and Pfindst refused to accept the purchaser's note without Potash & Perlmutter's indorsement. After a lengthy discussion Pfindst receded from his position and signed the guarantee, whereupon Morris surrendered the note and returned to his place of business.

On April 21st Potash & Perlmutter shipped Kleebaum's order, and one week later Morris moved out to Johnsonhurst. Five days after his migration to that garden spot of Greater New York he entered the firm's show-room at a quarter past ten.

"We got blocked at Flatbush Avenue this morning," he said to Abe, "and——"

But Abe was paying no attention to his partner's excuses. Instead he thrust a morning paper at Morris and with a trembling forefinger indicated the following scarehead:

[Pg 359]

R I C H G I R L W E D S
O W N C H A U F F E U R
P F I N G S T F A M I L Y S H O C K E D B Y
J U L I A ' S E L O P E M E N T
P A I R R E P O R T E D I N S O U T H
H E I R E S S W A S A B O U T T O
W E D W E A L T H Y M E R C H A N T
B E F O R E F L I G H T O C C U R R E D

"What d'ye think of that, Mawruss," Abe cried.

Morris read the story carefully before replying.

"That's a hard blow to Kleebaum and old man Pfindst, Abe," he said.

"I bet yer," Abe replied, "but it ain't near the hard blow it's going to be to a couple of concerns what you and me know, Mawruss. Klinger told me only yesterday that Kleebaum would get twenty thousand with that girl, Mawruss, and I guess he needed it, Mawruss. Moe Rabiner says that they got weather like January already out in Minnesota, and every retail dry-goods concern is kicking that they ain't seen a dollar's worth of business this spring."

"But Kleebaum's got a tremendous following in Minneapolis, Abe," Morris said. "He's got an oitermobile delivery system."

"Don't pull that on me again, Mawruss," Abe broke in. "Women ain't buying summer garments in cold weather just for the pleasure of seeing the goods delivered in an oitermobile, which reminds me, Mawruss: Did Pfindst deliver you his oitermobile yet?"

[Pg 360]

Morris blushed.

"It was delivered yesterday, Abe," he replied. "But the fact is, Abe, I kinder changed my mind about that oitermobile. With oitermobiles I am a new beginner already, so I figure it out this way. Why should I go to work and try experiments with a high price car like that Pfindst car? Ain't it? Now, you take a feller like Fixman who is already an expert, y'understand, and that's something else again. Fixman tried out the car last night, Abe, and he thinks it's an elegant car. So I made an arrangement with him that he should pay me fifteen hundred dollars cash and I would swap the Pfindst car for a 1907 model, Appalachian runabout. That's a fine oitermobile, Abe, that Appalachian runabout. In the first place, it's got a detachable tonneau and holds just as many people as the Pfindst car already, only it ain't so complicated. Instead of a six cylinder engine, Abe, it's only got a two cylinder engine."

"Two is enough for a start, Mawruss," Abe commented.

"Sure," Morris agreed, "and then again instead of a double chain drive its only got a single chain drive, y'understand."

Abe nodded. To him planetary and selective transmission were even as conic sections.

"Also it's got dry battery ignition, Abe," Morris concluded triumphantly, "instead of one of them—now—magneto arrangements, which I ain't got no confidence in at all."

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Abe nodded again.

"I never had no confidence in dagoes neither," he said. "Fellers which couldn't speak the English language properly, y'understand, is bound to do you sooner or later."

"So Fixman and me goes around last night to see a feller what lives out in Johnsonhurst by the name Eleazer Levy which Fixman got it for a lawyer, and we drew a bill of sale then and there, Abe, and Fixman give me a check for fifteen hundred dollars on the Kosciusko Bank."

"Was it certified?" Abe asked.

"Well, it *wasn't*," Morris replied, "but I stopped off at the Kosciusko Bank this morning and——"

"You done right, Mawruss," Abe interrupted. "The first thing you know Fixman would claim that the oitermobile ain't the same shade of red like the sample, Mawruss, and stops the check."

"Fixman ain't that kind, Abe," Morris retorted. "The only reason I certified the check was that I happened to be in the neighborhood of the bank, because when you are at the Bridge, Abe, all you got to do is to take a Third Avenue car up Park Row to the Bowery and transfer to Grand Street. Then you ride over ten blocks and get out at Clinton Street, y'understand, and walk four blocks over. So long as it's so convenient, Abe, I just stopped in and got it certified."

"A little journey like that I would think convenient, too, if I would got to travel to Johnsonhurst every day, Mawruss," Abe commented, "and anyhow, Mawruss, in a swap one of the fellers is always got an idee he's stuck." [Pg 362]

"Well, it ain't me, Abe," Morris protested, "and just to show you, Abe, me and Minnie wants you and Rosie you should come out and take dinner with us on Sunday, and afterwards we could go out for a ride in the runabout."

"*Gott soll hüten*," Abe replied piously.

"What d'ye mean!" Morris cried. "You wouldn't come out and have dinner with us?"

"Sure, we will come to dinner, Mawruss," Abe said, "but if we want to go for a ride, Mawruss, a trolley car is good enough for Rosie and me."

Nevertheless the following Sunday found Abe and Rosie snugly enclosed in the detachable tonneau of the Appalachian runabout, while Morris sat at the tiller with Minnie by his side and negotiated the easy grades of rural Long Island at the decent speed of ten miles an hour.

"Ain't it wonderful," Abe exclaimed, "what changes comes about in a couple of years already! Former times when a lodge brother died, I used to think the ride out to Cypress Hills was a pleasure already, Mawruss, but when I think how rotten the roads was and what poor accommodations them carriages was compared to this, Mawruss, I'm surprised that I could have enjoyed myself at all. This here oitermobile riding is something what you would call really comfortable, Mawruss." [Pg 363]

But Abe's observations were ill-timed, for hardly had he finished speaking when the runabout slowed down to the accompaniment of loud explosions in the muffler. Rosie's shrieks mingled with Abe's exclamations, and when at length the car came to a stand-still and the explosions ceased Abe scrambled down and helped out the half-fainting Rosie.

"Any car is liable to do that," Morris explained as Minnie searched for a bottle of liquid restorative. "I could fix it in five minutes."

At length Minnie found the bottle in the tire box, which contained, instead of a tire, two dozen sandwiches, eight cold frankfurters, some dill pickles and a *ringkuchen*, for they did not contemplate returning to Johnsonhurst until long past supper time.

Morris' estimate of the repair job's duration proved slightly inaccurate. He messed around with his tool bag and explored the carburetter again and again until two hours had elapsed without result. During this period only a few motor cars had passed, for the road was not a popular automobile thoroughfare. At length a large red car bore down on them, and as it came within a hundred yards it slowed down and came to a stop beside the Appalachian runabout. "Well, well," cried a familiar voice, "if this ain't the whole firm of Potash & Perlmutter."

Abe looked up.

"Hallo, Kleebaum," he exclaimed, "I thought you was home in Minneapolis. What are you doing in New York?" [Pg 364]

"This ain't New York by about forty miles," Kleebaum replied. He was seated at the side of a square-jawed professional chauffeur who eyed with ill-concealed mirth Morris' very unprofessional handling of automobile tools.

"Lemme look at it," the chauffeur said, as he climbed from his seat. He gave a hasty glance at the dry battery ignition and laughed uproariously.

"You'se guys will stay here till Christmas if you expect to get that car into running condition," he said. "The only thing for you'se to do is to let me give you a tow into Jamaica. They'll fix you up at the garage there."

"I'm much obliged to you," Morris replied.

"Don't mention it," the chauffeur went on. "I won't charge you unreasonable. Ten dollars is my figure."

"What!" Abe and Morris cried with one voice.

"Why, you wouldn't charge these gentlemen nothing," Kleebaum said with a violent wink. "They're friends of mine."

"I know they was friends of yours," the chauffeur replied, "and that's why I made it ten dollars. Anyone else I'd say twenty."

For almost half an hour Abe and Morris haggled with the chauffeur. They were vigorously supported by Kleebaum, who punctuated his scathing condemnation of the chauffeur's greed with a series of surreptitious winks which encouraged the latter to remain firm in his demand. Finally Morris peeled off two five-dollar bills and an hour later the Appalachian runabout was ignominiously hauled into a Jamaica garage. [Pg 365]

The chauffeur alighted from his car and drew the proprietor of the garage aside into his private office.

"Billy," he said in a hoarse whisper, "this here baby carriage is got the oldest brand of dry battery ignition and one of the wires has come loose from the binding screw. It'll take about a minute and a half to fix."

The proprietor nodded and passed over a dollar bill. Then he sprang out onto the floor of the garage.

"Ryan," he bellowed to his foreman, "get the big jack, and tell Schwartz to start up the motor lathe."

Then he turned to Abe and Mawruss.

"This here'll be a two hours' job, gents," he said, "and I advise you to get your supper at the hotel across the street."

"But how much is it going to cost us?" Morris asked.

For five minutes the proprietor figured on the back of an envelope.

"Fifteen dollars and twenty-two cents," he said, and Abe and Morris staggered to the street, followed by their wives.

Twenty minutes later Kleebaum and the chauffeur drew up in front of a road house.

"Your blow," the chauffeur cried. [Pg 366]

Kleebaum nodded.

"Come across with that five first," he said, and after the transfer had been made they disappeared into the sabbatical entrance.

"Well, Mawruss," Abe exclaimed when Morris entered the show-room at ten o'clock the next morning. "What did I told you last week! Wasn't I right?"

"I know you told me that one party to a swap was practically bound to get stuck, Abe," Morris admitted, "but with an oitermobile——"

"Again oitermobile!" Abe cried. "You got oitermobile on the brain, Mawruss. Whenever I open my mouth, Mawruss, you got an idee I'm going to talk about oitermobiles. This is something else again. Didn't you get a morning paper, Mawruss?"

Morris shrugged.

"When a feller lives out in a place called Johnsonhurst, Abe," he replied sadly, "he is lucky if he could get a cup of coffee before he leaves the house. Our range is busted."

"Something else is busted, too, Mawruss," Abe said as he handed the morning paper to Morris. The page which contained the "Business Troubles" column was folded at the following news item:

J. EDWARD KLEEBAUM, Minneapolis, Minn. The Wonder Cloak and Suit Store, J. Edward Kleebaum, Proprietor, was closed up by the sheriff under an execution in favor of Joseph Pfingst, who recovered a judgment yesterday in the Supreme Court for \$5800, money loaned. Kleebaum is supposed to be in New York trying to make some arrangements with his creditors. Later in the day a petition in bankruptcy was filed against him by Kugler, Jacobi and Henck representing the following New York creditors:—Klinger & Klein, \$2500; Sammet Brothers, \$1800; Lapidus & Elenbogen, \$750.

Morris handed the paper back to his partner. [Pg 367]

"Well, Abe," he said, "what are we going to do about it?"

"We already done it, Mawruss," Abe replied. "I sent down Pfinger's guarantee to Henry D. Feldman at nine o'clock already, and I told him he shouldn't wait, but if Pfinger wouldn't pay up to-day yet to sue him in the courts."

Morris shrugged his shoulders.

"We shouldn't be in such a hurry, Abe," he said. "Pfinger treated us right, and why shouldn't we give him a chance to make good?"

"Because he don't deserve it, Mawruss," Abe rejoined as he started off for the show-room. "If he would of took better care of his daughter she wouldn't of run off with this here chauffeur, and Kleebaum wouldn't got to fail. Also, Mawruss, you shouldn't talk that way neither, because if it wouldn't be for Pfinger you wouldn't got stuck with that oitermobile which we rode in it yesterday."

"Well, I ain't out much on it, Abe."

"What d'ye mean you ain't out much on it?" Abe exclaimed. "It stands you in six hundred dollars, ain't it?"

"Sure, I know," Morris replied, "but this morning I come downtown with the feller what rents us the house out in Johnsonhurst and you never seen a feller so crazy about oitermobiles in all your life, Abe."

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"Except you, Mawruss," Abe broke in.

"Me, I ain't so crazy about 'em no longer," Morris declared. "So I fixed it up with this feller that he should take the Appalachian runabout off my hands for four hundred dollars and he should also give me a cancelation of the lease which we got of his house. Furthermore, Abe, he pays our moving expenses back to a Hundred and Eighteenth Street."

Abe sat down in the nearest chair.

"So you're going to move back to a Hundred and Eighteenth Street, Mawruss," he exclaimed. "Why, what's the matter with Johnsonhurst, Mawruss? I thought you told it me Johnsonhurst was such a fine place."

"So it is, Abe," Morris admitted. "The air is great out there, Abe, but at the same time, Abe, the air ain't so rotten on a Hundred and Eighteenth Street neither, y'understand, and the train service is a whole lot better."

"You're right, Mawruss," Abe said, "and with all these oitermobile rides and things you waste too much time already. A feller should always consider business ahead of pleasure."

Morris looked at his bruised and oil stained hands.

"Oitermobile riding!" he cried. "That's a pleasure, Abe. Believe me I'd as lief work in a rolling mill."

CHAPTER XVI

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Morris Perlmutter's front parlor represented an eclectic taste, and the fine arts had been liberally patronized in its decoration. On the wall hung various subjects in oil, including still life, landscapes, marine scenes and figures, all of which had been billed to Morris by a Fourteenth Street dealer as:

8/12 dozen assorted oil paintings	@ \$96	\$64
8/12 dozen shadow boxes for paintings	@ 12	8

		\$72

But it was not at the oil paintings that B. Rashkin gazed. His eyes sought instead the framed and glazed certificate of membership of Morris Perlmutter in Harmony Lodge 41, Independent Order Mattai Aaron.

"Them very people hold the mortgage, Mr. Perlmutter," Rashkin said, "and with the influence what you got it in the order, why——"

"Lookyhere, Rashkin," Perlmutter interrupted, "you're a real estater, and if you don't get up at eight o'clock then you get up at nine, and it's all the same; but me, I am in the cloak business, and I got to get downtown at seven o'clock, and so I'm going to tell you again what I told it you before. Go and see Abe to-morrow, and put this proposition up to him like it was something you never told me nothing about, y'understand? Then if he makes the suggestion to me, Rashkin, I would say all right. Because if it should be me what would make the suggestion to him, y'understand, he wouldn't have nothing to do with it. And even if he should consent to go into it, and if we lost money on the deal, Rashkin, I wouldn't never hear the end of it."

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Rashkin nodded and seized his hat.

"All right," he said, "I will do what you say, Mr. Perlmutter. But with them three lots it's like this: they're owned by——"

Morris yawned with a noise like a performing sea lion.

"Tell it to Potash to-morrow, Rashkin," he said, and led the way to the hall door.

Accordingly the next morning Rashkin entered the salesroom of Potash & Perlmutter, where Abe was scanning the "Arrival of Buyers" column in the Daily Cloak and Suit Record.

"Good morning, Mr. Potash," B. Rashkin said. "Ain't it a fine weather?"

"Oh, good morning," Abe cried.

"You don't know my face, do you?" Rashkin said.

"I know your face," Abe said, "but your name ain't familiar. I guess I seen you in Seattle, ain't it?"

B. Rashkin nodded. He had never been farther West than Jersey City Heights.

"Well, how is things in Seattle, Mister—er——"

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"Rashkin," B. Rashkin supplied.

"Rashkin?" Abe went on, and then he paused, but not for an answer. "Rashkin—why, I don't know no one from that name in Seattle."

"No?" Rashkin replied. "Well, the fact is, Mr. Potash, I ain't come to see you about Seattle. I come to see you about three lots up in Two Hundred and Sixty-fourth Street."

The urbane smile faded at once from Abe's face and gave place to a dark scowl.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "a real estater. I ain't got no time to fool away with real estaters."

"This ain't fooling away your time, Mr. Potash," Rashkin said. "Let me explain the proposition to you."

Without waiting for permission he at once divulged the object of his visit, while Abe listened with the bored air of an unemployed leading man at a professional matinée.

"Yes, Mr. Potash," B. Rashkin concluded, after half an hour's conversation, "I seen it bargains in my time, but these here lots is the biggest bargains yet."

"Vacant lots ain't never bargains, Rashkin," Abe commented. "What's the use from vacant lots, anyway? A feller what's got vacant lots is like I would say I am in the cloak business if I only get it an empty store with nothing in it."

Abe glanced proudly around him at the well-stocked racks, where the new season's goods were neatly arranged for prospective buyers.

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"But the real-estate business ain't like the cloak business, Mr. Potash," B. Rashkin said.

"Real estate!" Abe interrupted. "Vacant lots ain't no real estate, Rashkin. Vacant lots is just imitation real estate. You couldn't say you got it real estate when you only got vacant lots, no more as a feller what buys a gold setting could say he's got it a diamond ring."

"Diamonds is something else again," said B. Rashkin. "I ain't no judge of diamonds, Mr. Potash, but about real estate, Mr. Potash, I ain't no fool neither, y'understand, and these here three lots what I talk to you about is the only three vacant lots in the neighborhood."

"Might you think that's a recommendation, maybe, Rashkin," Abe replied, "but I don't. You come around here to try to sell it me a couple of lots, and you got to admit yourself they're stickers."

"They ain't stickers, Mr. Potash," B. Rashkin protested.

"No?" Abe said. "What's the reason they ain't stickers, Rashkin? If they ain't stickers why ain't somebody built on 'em?"

"You don't understand," B. Rashkin explained. "Them lots is an estate that was in litigation, and it's only just been settled up; so that they couldn't sell 'em no matter who would want to buy 'em. Now I got 'em to entertain an offer of eighty-three thirty-three apiece, or twenty-five thousand for the three lots, all cash above a blanket mortgage of ten thousand dollars held by the Independent Order Mattai Aaron. I seen it also Milton M. Sugarman, the attorney for the I. O. M. A., and he tells me that they would probably be agreeable to make a building loan on them lots of twenty-five thousand on each thirty-seven six front."

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"That don't interest me none neither," Abe replied, "because I ain't in the building business, Rashkin; I am in the cloak and suit business."

"Sure, I know," said Rashkin; "but this is an opportunity which it wouldn't occur again oncet in twenty years."

"Don't limit yourself, Rashkin," Abe retorted. "Make it fifty years. It's all the same to me, because I wouldn't touch it, Rashkin."

"But, Mr. Potash," Rashkin broke in, "if your partner, Mr. Perlmutter, would be agreeable, wouldn't you consider it?"

"What's the use asking me hypocritical questions, Rashkin?" Abe replied. "Mawruss would no more touch it as I would. You don't know what a crank I got it for a partner, Rashkin. If I would just hint that I wanted to buy real estate, y'understand, that feller would go all up in the air. And even if he would buy it with me yet, and we should lose maybe a little money, I would never hear the end of it. That's the way it goes with a feller like Mawruss Perlmutter, Rashkin."

B. Rashkin put on his hat and rose sadly.

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"Well, Mr. Potash," he concluded, "all I can say is you lost a splendid opportunity. Why, if I could only get it a feller to take over one of them thirty-seven six parcels, I would buy the other one myself and put up a fine building there?"

"I'm sure I ain't stopping you, Rashkin," Abe said. "Go ahead and build, and I wish you all the luck you could want; and if you should get somebody else to take the other one and a half lots, I wish him the same and many of 'em. Also, Rashkin, if I was a real estater I would be glad to fool away my time with you, Rashkin, but being as I am in the cloak business I—you ain't going, Rashkin, are you?"

Rashkin answered by banging the door behind him and Abe repaired to the cutting-room, where Morris Perlmutter was superintending the reception and disposal of piece goods.

"Who was that salesman you was talking to a while ago, Abe?" he asked innocently.

"That wasn't no salesman, Mawruss; that was a loafer," Abe replied.

"A loafer!" Morris said. "He didn't look like a loafer, Abe. He looked like a real estater."

"Well, Mawruss," said Abe, "to me a real estater looks like a loafer, especially, Mawruss, when he comes around with a bum proposition like he got it."

"What for a proposition was it, Abe?" Morris asked.

"Ask me!" Abe exclaimed. "That real estater gives me a long story about some vacant lots, and an estate, and the Independent Order Mattai Aaron, and a lot more stuff what I don't believe the feller understands about himself."

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"But there you was talking to that real estater pretty near an hour, Abe, and you couldn't even tell it me what he wants at all," Morris protested.

"To tell you the truth, Mawruss," Abe replied, "I ain't interested in what real estaters says. Real estaters, insurance canvassers and book agents, Mawruss, is all the same to me. They go in by one ear and come out by the other."

"Why, for all you know, Abe, the feller would have maybe some big bargains."

"If you are looking for bargains like that feller got it, Mawruss," Abe retorted, "you could find plenty of 'em by green-goods men. If you give me my choice between gold bricks and vacant lots, Mawruss, I would say gold bricks."

Morris turned away impatiently.

"What do you know about real estate, Abe?" he cried.

"Not much, Mawruss," Abe admitted, "but I know one thing about gold bricks, Mawruss: you don't got to pay no taxes on 'em."

That evening B. Rashkin again presented himself at the One Hundred and Eighteenth Street residence of Morris Perlmutter, and with him came Isaac Pinsky, of the firm of Pinsky & Gubin, architects. Mr. Pinsky had a roll of blue-prints under his arm and a strong line of convincing argument at the tip of his tongue, and the combination proved too much for Morris. Before Rashkin and Pinsky left that evening, Morris had undertaken to purchase a plot thirty-seven feet six inches by one hundred feet, adjacent to a similar plot to be purchased by Rashkin. Moreover, he and Rashkin engaged themselves to erect two houses, one on each lot, from the plans and

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specifications that Pinsky held under his arm. Each house was to be identical with the other in design, construction and material, and an appointment was then and there made for noon the next day at the office of Henry D. Feldman, attorney at law, for the purpose of more formally consummating the deal.

Thus, when Morris entered the show-room the next morning it became his duty to break the news to his partner, and he approached Abe with a now-for-it air. "Well, Abe," he said, "you was wrong."

"Sure, I was, Mawruss," Abe replied amiably. "With you I am always wrong. What's the matter now?"

"You was wrong about that feller Rashkin," Morris explained. "He was up to my house last night, and put the same proposition up to me what he told it you yesterday, and the way I figure it, Abe, we would make money on the deal."

"I ain't so good on figures what you are, Mawruss," Abe replied. "All I can figure is I got enough to do to attend to my own business, Mawruss, without going into the building business." [Pg 377]

"But we wouldn't got to go into the building business, Abe," Morris protested. "All we got to do is to put down eight thousand dollars for the lot. Then the I. O. M. A. makes us a building loan of twenty-five thousand dollars. Rashkin's got plans and specifications drawn by Pinsky & Gubin, a first-class, A Number One archy-teck concern, for which he wouldn't charge us nothing, and then, Abe——"

He paused to fix Abe's attention before finishing his explanation.

"And then, Abe," he continued, "we hire my Minnie's brother, Ferdy, what knows the building business from A to Z, to build it the house for us. All we would got to do is to put up the four thousand apiece, Abe, and when the house is finished Rashkin says we could sell it like a flash."

"I never sold a flash, Mawruss," Abe said; "and, anyhow, Mawruss, while I ain't saying nothing about your Minnie's family, y'understand, if I would got to go into a deal with a horse-thief like Ferdy Rothschild, y'understand, I would take my money first and deposit it for safety with some of them fellers up in Sing Sing. Such a show I should have of getting it back, Mawruss." "Lookyhere, Abe," Morris said, "before you would make some cracks about my Minnie's family, how about your Rosie's brother, the one what——"

"S'all right, Mawruss," Abe broke in. "I ain't saying my wife's brother is so much, neither. This is the way I feel about a feller's wife's brother: If he got a little money then he treats you like a dawg, Mawruss, and if he's broke, y'understand, then your wife gives him all your cigars and ties, and if you should happen to have the same size neck, Mawruss, then all your life you are buying collars and shirts for two. No, Mawruss, I ain't got no confidence in anybody's wife's brother, especially, Mawruss, if a feller should make it a dirty failure like Ferdy Rothschild did and then takes all the money and blows it in on the horse-races." [Pg 378]

"That's from old times already," Morris protested. "To-day he's a decent, hard-working feller, Abe, and for two years he's been working for the Rheingold Building and Construction Company. What he don't know about putting up tenement houses, Abe, ain't worth knowing."

"And what I don't know about putting up tenement houses, Mawruss," Abe said, "would fill one of them Carnegie Libraries, Mawruss; and also, furthermore, Mawruss, I don't want to know nothing about it, neither. And also, Mawruss, if you should stand there and talk to me all day it wouldn't make no difference. If you want to build tenement houses, Mawruss, you got my permission; but you could leave me out. I got my own troubles with cloaks."

Morris rose.

"All right, Abe," he said. "I give you your chance, Abe, and you wouldn't take it."

"What d'ye mean, Mawruss?" Abe asked.

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"I mean, Abe, that I will go into this alone by myself, and only one thing I beg of you, Abe: don't come to me in six months' time and claim that I wouldn't let you in on a good thing. I have done my best."

The air of simple dignity with which Morris delivered his ultimatum was marred to some extent by a raucous laugh from Abe.

"Don't do me no favors, Mawruss," he jeered. "All I got to say is that if I was you, Mawruss, I would get this here archy-teck and B. Rashkin, and also your brother-in-law, Ferdy, together, and I would make 'em an offer of settlement for, say, three thousand dollars, Mawruss. Because the way I figure it out, this thing would stand you in as much money as that and a whole lot of worry, too."

"You shouldn't be so generous with your advice, Abe," Morris retorted.

"Oh, I don't charge you nothing for it, Mawruss," Abe said, as he turned to the "Arrival of Buyers" column, and, for lack of appropriate rejoinder, Morris snorted indignantly and banged the show-room door behind him.

For the remainder of the afternoon Abe's face wore a malicious grin. It was there when Morris

left to keep his appointment at Henry D. Feldman's office, and when he returned four hours later the malice, if anything, had intensified.

"Well, Mawruss," Abe cried, "I suppose you fixed it all up?"

"It don't go so quick, Abe," Morris replied. His manner was as cheerful as only that of a man who has struggled hard to repress a fit of violent profanity can be—for the meeting at Henry D. Feldman's office had been fraught with many nerve-racking incidents. *Imprimis*, there had been Feldman's retainer, a generous one, and then had come the discussion of the building-loan agreement with Milton M. Sugarman, attorney for the I. O. M. A.

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Feldman assured Morris that it was customary for the borrower to pay the fees of the attorney for the lender, incidental to drawing and recording the necessary papers, and Morris had also learned that the high premiums of insurance for the building to be erected would come out of his pocket. Moreover, he had seen B. Rashkin credited with commissions for bringing about Morris' purchase of the lot, and for the first time he had ascertained that he also owed B. Rashkin two hundred and fifty dollars commission for procuring a building loan from the I. O. M. A.

So far he reckoned that his investment exceeded B. Rashkin's by a thousand dollars, and when he considered that B. Rashkin would be his own superintendent of construction, while he, Morris, would be obliged to hire Ferdy Rothschild, at a compensation of seven hundred and fifty dollars, to perform that same office for him, Abe's advice appeared too sound to be pleasant.

"No, Abe," he said, "it don't go so quick. I got another appointment for next week."

Abe grunted.

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"All I got to say, Mawruss," he commented, "you shouldn't forget you are a partner in a cloak and suit business."

"Don't worry," Morris replied; "you wouldn't let me forget that, Abe." He strode off toward the cutting-room and once more Abe resumed his fixed grin.

It must be confessed that through the entire six months of his building operations Morris maintained a stoic calm that effectually hid the storm raging within his breast. All the annoyances incidental to building a house were heaped on Morris, and both he and Rashkin, equally, suffered petty blackmail at the hands of the attorney and the architect for the building-loan mortgage.

In the meantime Abe's grin gained in breadth and malice, and on more than one occasion Morris had foregone the pleasure of assaulting his partner only by the exercise of remarkable self-control.

"Do me the favor, Abe," he said at length, "and let me in on this joke."

"It ain't no joke, Mawruss," Abe replied. "I thought you found that out already."

"If you mean the house, Abe," Morris answered, "all I got to say is that, if there should be any joke about it, Abe, the joke is on you, for that house is pretty near finished."

"I'm glad to hear it, Mawruss," Abe said. "I suppose Ferdy Rothschild did it a good job on the house."

"Sure, he did," Morris said.

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"He didn't get no rake-offs from material men or nothing, Mawruss. What?" Abe asked.

"Rake-offs!" Morris cried. "What d'ye mean by that?"

"I mean I seen it Gussarow, the glass man, on the subway last night, Mawruss," Abe explained, "and he says that for every pane of glass what went into your house, Mawruss, Ferdy Rothschild gets his rake-off."

"Well, what do I care?" Morris retorted. "If Gussarow could stand it, Abe, I can."

"Gussarow can stand it all right, Mawruss," Abe said reassuringly. "All he's got to do is to put it on the bill."

"Well, if he put it on my bill, Abe," Morris replied, "he also put it on Rashkin's bill, because him and me bought the same building material all the way through, and I wouldn't pay no bills till I saw that Rashkin don't get charged less as I do."

This was conclusive, and Abe's grin relaxed for several inches, nor did it resume its normal width until some days later when Morris began to negotiate for his permanent mortgage loan. Once Morris remonstrated with him for his levity.

"Must you go around looking like a crazy idiot, Abe?"

"I must got to laugh, Mawruss," Abe protested, "when I seen it Sam Feder, of the Kosciusko Bank, this morning, and he tells it me you got a permanent mortgage from the I. O. M. A. He says Milton M. Sugarman told him you got it ahead of Rashkin, because you got influence as a lodge brother of Sugarman."

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"Sure, I did," Morris admitted.

"And then, Mawruss," Abe went on, "Rashkin hears that the I. O. M. A. is going to make you a permanent loan, so he goes to see Sugarman too."

"That's right," Morris agreed.

"And he says to Sugarman that so long as Sugarman is got to search the title to your house he wouldn't have to search the title to Rashkin's house, because both houses stands on the same piece of property. So he makes a proposition that if Sugarman would charge him only a hundred dollars he would put in an application by the I. O. M. A. for a permanent loan. Otherwise he would get it from a life-insurance company."

Morris nodded ironically.

"And Sugarman says he would do it, I suppose," he broke in. "No, Abe, Sugarman ain't built that way. It costs me five hundred dollars for that loan, Abe."

"I know it did, Mawruss," Abe said, "and Feder says that Sugarman told him he charges you five hundred dollars, and so he don't want to be a hog, Mawruss, and, therefore, he closes with Rashkin for a hundred and fifty."

Morris' jaw dropped and he stared at Abe.

"Furthermore, Mawruss," Abe went on, "Rashkin comes in to see Feder the other day and tells Feder he would be glad to make a quick turn. And he tells Feder that house stands him in eight thousand dollars cash and he would be glad to sell it for forty-four five, all cash above the new first mortgage of thirty-three thousand."

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Morris nodded.

"But, Abe," he croaked, "how could he do that? Reckoning all the mortgages and everything, and what I invested and paid out for building material over and above the building loan, that house stands me in just eleven thousand two hundred and fifty dollars cash. If I would come out even on that house I got to sell it for forty-five seven-fifty, and I reckoned on forty-seven thousand as a fair price for the house."

"Sure, you did," Abe said cheerfully.

"And how that feller, Rashkin, could claim that his house stands him in eight thousand dollars cash is more as I could understand, Abe," Morris said. "Because while I know it I spent for commissions and for Ferdy Rothschild a couple thousand more as Rashkin, Abe, our building material cost the same, Abe."

"Sure it did—on the bills, Mawruss," Abe replied; "but Gussarow says that of course he don't know nothing about the other material men, but when he sends the bill to you he also sends the same bill to Rashkin, and when you send him a check for your bill, Ferdy Rothschild gets five per cent. Also Rashkin sends Gussarow a check for his bill with five per cent. discount, and Ferdy Rothschild *schmiers* Rashkin a twenty-dollar note, and that's the way it goes."

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Morris sat down in the nearest chair and blinked helplessly at Abe.

"What do you think for a couple of crooks like that, Abe?" he croaked.

"What do I think, Mawruss?" Abe repeated. "I think that one of 'em is a brother-in-law, Mawruss, and the other is a real estater, Mawruss, and that's a bad combination."

"But I could make 'em arrested, Abe?" Morris declared, "and, by jimminy, I will do it, too."

Abe shrugged.

"You couldn't do that, Mawruss," he said, "because in the first place, Mawruss, your Minnie wouldn't stand for it; and in the second place, them two fellers would fix up a fine story between 'em and the judge would let 'em go. And then, Mawruss, they would turn around and go to work and sue you for false arresting; and the first thing you know, Mawruss, it would stand you in a couple of thousand dollars more."

Morris nodded sadly.

"I believe you're right, Abe," he murmured.

"Sure, I'm right, Mawruss," Abe said; "and also, Mawruss, while I wouldn't want to say nothing to make you feel worse already, I got to say, Mawruss, that if you would believe I was right six months ago yet, you wouldn't got to believe I was right now."

Morris nodded again. He was thoroughly crushed, and he looked so appealingly at his partner that Abe was unable to withhold his comfort and advice.

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"Lookyhere, Mawruss," he said, "a feller's got to make a mistake sometimes. Ain't it? And if he didn't get stuck for a couple of thousand dollars oncet in a while he wouldn't know the value of his money. Ain't it? But as this thing stands now, Mawruss, I got an idee you ain't stuck so bad as what you think."

"No?" Morris said. "Why ain't I, Abe?"

"Well, Mawruss, I'll tell you," Abe began, with no clear conception of how he would finish. "You

know me, Mawruss; I ain't a feller what's got a whole lot to say for myself, but I ain't got such bad judgment, neither, Mawruss."

"I seen fellers with worser judgment as you, Abe," Morris said.

Abe could not forbear a stare of astonishment at this grudging admission.

"At last you got to admit it, Mawruss," he cried; "but anyhow, Mawruss, go ahead and finish up this here permanent-mortgage-loan business, and then, Mawruss, I will do all I can to help you out."

Morris rose to his feet.

"Well, Abe," he began in shaking tones, "I must got to say that I——"

"Lookyhere, Mawruss," Abe broke in savagely, "ain't we fooled away enough time here this morning? Just because you got your troubles with this here building, Mawruss, ain't no reason why we shouldn't attend to business, Mawruss."

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He handed Morris a black cigar, and as they started for the cutting-room they gave vent to their pent-up emotions in great clouds of comforting smoke.

The next fortnight was fraught with so many disagreeable experiences for Morris that he appeared to age visibly, and once more Abe was moved to express his sympathy.

"You shouldn't take on so, Mawruss," he said, the morning after the permanent loan was closed. "The first thing you know, Mawruss, you will be getting a nervous break-up, already."

"I bet yer I would get a nervous break-up, Abe," Morris agreed. "If you would be me, Abe, you would get a nervous break-up, too. In the first place, Abe, I got to pay them suckers—them archy-tecks, Pinsky & Gubin, a hundred dollars before they would give it me their final certificate, and then, Abe, I got to *schmier* it a feller in the tenement-house department another hundred dollars. And then, Abe, I told it them other two crooks what I thought of 'em, Abe, and you ought to hear the way that horse-thief talks back to me, already."

"Horse-thief!" Abe said. "Which one, Mawruss?"

"That Ferdy Rothschild, Abe," Morris continued. "So sure as I stand here, Abe, if that feller wouldn't be my wife's brother, I would make for him a couple blue eyes he wouldn't forgot so quick."

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"With a feller like that, Mawruss," Abe said, "you shouldn't bother yourself at all. If you make a lowlife bum a couple blue eyes, he will make you also a couple blue eyes, maybe, and that's all there is to it, Mawruss. But when you make it a crook like Ferdy Rothschild a couple blue eyes, then that's something else again. Such a *schwindler* like him, Mawruss, would turn right around and sue you in the courts yet for damages, and the first thing you know you are stuck for a couple thousand dollars."

"Well, I am through with him, anyhow," Morris replied, "so we wouldn't talk no more about him. A dirty dawg like him, Abe, ain't worth a—a——" He was searching his mind for a sufficiently trivial standard of comparison when Abe interrupted him.

"I thought you wasn't going to talk about him, Mawruss," he said; "and, anyhow, Mawruss, what's the use talking about things what is past already? What we got to do now, Mawruss, is to sell that house."

"I know it, Abe," Morris replied ruefully, "but how are we going to sell that house with B. Rashkin going around offering to sell the identical same house for forty-four five? If I would be lucky enough to get forty-five seven-fifty for mine, Abe, I would still be out several hundred dollars."

"You talk foolish, Mawruss; you would get forty-seven thousand, sure, for that house."

"Would I?" Morris cried. "How would I do that?"

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"Leave that to me," Abe replied.

He put on his hat and coat.

"Where are you going, Abe?" Morris asked.

Abe wagged his head solemnly.

"You shouldn't ask me, Mawruss," he said. "I got an idee."

It was a quarter to twelve when Abe left the loft building on Nineteenth Street, and he repaired immediately to the real-estate salesroom on Vesey Street, where auction sales of real estate are held at noon daily. To this center of real-estate activity comes every real-estate broker of the East Side, together with his brothers from Harlem and the Bronx, and Abe felt reasonably sure that B. Rashkin would be on hand.

Indeed, he had hardly entered the salesroom when he descried B. Rashkin standing on the outskirts of a little throng that surrounded the rostrum of a popular auctioneer.

"Now, gentlemen," said the auctioneer, "what am I offered for this six-story, four-family house.

Remember, gentlemen, it is practically new and stands on a lot forty by a hundred."

"Forty thousand," said a voice at Abe's elbow.

"Come, gentlemen," the auctioneer cried, "we ain't making you a present of this house, exactly. Do I hear forty-one? Thank you, sir. At forty-one—at forty-one—at——"

Abe sidled up to B. Rashkin and in firm tones he made the next bid.

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"Forty-one five," he said.

"Forty-one five," the auctioneer repeated, and B. Rashkin turned to look at the bidder. He started visibly as he recognized Abe, who bowed coldly.

"Why, hallo, Mr. Potash," Rashkin exclaimed. "I didn't know you was in the market for property."

"Why not?" Abe said.

"Well, on account you got a partner who——"

"You don't got to rub it in, Mr. Rashkin," Abe interrupted. "If my partner did know a good thing when he seen it, Mr. Rashkin, I don't need to be reminded of it."

"A good thing!" Rashkin said in puzzled accents. "Why, I ain't——"

He stopped in time and forced himself to smile amiably.

"Yes, Mr. Rashkin," Abe went on, as he imperceptibly edged away from the crowd. "Would you believe it, that feller tells me this morning he's got already a fine offer for the house?"

"You don't tell me," Rashkin said as they approached one of the salesroom doors. He too was edging away from the crowd and congratulated himself that Abe had made no further bid. "I'm glad he should get it. For *mein* part, Mr. Potash, I would be glad to sell my house, too."

Here he made a rapid mental calculation and arrived approximately at the price that would yield Morris a profit.

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"I had myself an offer of forty-six seven-fifty for my house, Mr. Potash," he hazarded.

Abe was ostentatiously surprised.

"So!" he said, with an elaborate assumption of recovering his composure.

"Yes, Mr. Potash," Rashkin went on. He was beginning to feel that the figure was too low. "That's the offer I received and I wouldn't take a cent less than forty-eight."

"Let me see," Abe mused, as they paused in front of a bakery and lunchroom a few doors down the street. "You got a first mortgage thirty-three thousand dollars, and that would give you a pretty big equity there, Mr. Rashkin."

"Wouldn't you come inside and take maybe a cup of coffee, Mr. Potash?" Rashkin suggested.

"I shouldn't mind if I will," Abe said; and they entered the bakery together. "Would you want all cash above the mortgage, Mr. Rashkin?"

"Just now, Mr. Potash," Rashkin replied, "I want a little something to eat. Give me a piece of *stollen* and a cup of coffee."

"Milk separate?" the waitress asked.

B. Rashkin nodded haughtily and then turned to Abe.

"What will you have, Mr. Potash?" he asked.

"Give me also a cup of coffee and a tongue sandwich," he announced to the waitress.

"White or rye bread?" said the waitress.

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"Rye bread," Abe replied.

"We ain't got no rye bread; I could give you a roll sandwich," she declared solemnly.

"All right, give me a roll tongue sandwich," Abe concluded, and once more addressed B. Rashkin.

"Of course you would take back a second mortgage, Mr. Rashkin," he said.

"Well, I might take two or three thousand dollars, a purchase-money mortgage, but no more," Rashkin replied, as the waitress returned empty-handed.

"Rolls is all out," she said. "I'll have to give you white bread."

"All right," Abe replied.

"Did you say Swiss cheese or store cheese?" she inquired mildly.

"Tongue!" Abe and B. Rashkin roared with one voice.

"Well, don't get mad about it," the waitress cried, as she whisked away toward the coffee urns.

"I'll tell you the truth, Mr. Potash," B. Rashkin continued. "I give that house to a number of real estate men, already, and I'm considering a good offer from a fellow what Ferdy Rothschild brings me. The fellow makes me a fine offer, Mr. Potash, only he wants me to take back a second mortgage of five thousand dollars; and I told Ferdy Rothschild if he could get his customer to make it all cash above a second mortgage of three thousand dollars I would consider it. Ferdy says he expects his customer in to see him this afternoon, already, and he will let me know before I go home tonight."

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In this rare instance B. Rashkin was undergoing the novel experience of speaking the truth only slightly modified, for that very morning Ferdy Rothschild had produced a purchaser who was willing to pay forty-six thousand dollars for Rashkin's house. This deal the purchaser proposed to consummate by taking the property subject to a first mortgage of thirty-three thousand dollars, by executing a second mortgage of seven thousand dollars, and by paying the six thousand balance of the purchase price in cash.

B. Rashkin had told Ferdy that if the customer would agree to pay eight thousand five hundred dollars in cash and to reduce the second mortgage proportionately, the deal would be closed; and Ferdy had promised to let him know during the afternoon.

"Lookyhere, Rashkin," Abe said at length, "what's the use beating bushes around? You know as well as I do that me and my partner don't get along well together, and I would like to teach that sucker a lesson that he shouldn't monkey no more with real estate, y'understand. I'll tell you right now, Rashkin, I would be willing to lose maybe a couple hundred dollars if I could get that house from you and sell it to the fellow what makes the offer to Mawruss Perlmutter."

"You and Perlmutter must be pretty good friends together," Rashkin commented. "But, anyhow, I am perfectly willing to help you all I can, because when a fellow practically calls you a bloodsucker and a horse-thief, Mr. Potash, naturally you don't feel too friendly toward him. But one thing I *got* to say, Mr. Potash, and that is I couldn't sell my house for a penny less than forty-eight thousand dollars."

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Abe put down his cup of coffee and stared at Rashkin.

"That's a lot of money, Mr. Rashkin," Abe said, "and that would mean pretty near twelve thousand cash."

B. Rashkin nodded calmly and Abe pondered for a moment.

"Well, Rashkin," Abe said, "I am willing I should spend some money, y'understand, and so I would make you this offer: Would you give me an option on the house at forty-eight thousand for two weeks, supposing I paid you, we will say, two hundred dollars?"

Rashkin shook his head.

"We will say then two hundred and fifty dollars," Abe said; but Rashkin declined.

Immediately they commenced to bargain vigorously, and at intervals of five minutes each modified his price for the option, until half an hour had expired, when they met at four hundred dollars.

"All right," B. Rashkin cried, "let us go and see Milton M. Sugarman and draw up the option."

"I am agreeable," Abe said; "any lawyer could draw it up, so far as I am concerned."

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They rose from the table without leaving the customary nickel for the waitress and, as they passed out of the door, she glared after them and indignantly adjusted her pompadour with both hands.

"Pipe them two high-livers," she hissed to the waitress at the next table. "I knew them guys was going to pass me up as soon as I laid me eyes on 'em."

She heaved a tremendous sigh.

"Y'orter heard the roar they put up about a tongue sandwich," she said. "Ain't it funny, Kitty, how tightwads is always fussy about their feed?"

When Abe returned to his place of business a couple of hours later, he found Morris adding up figures on the back of an envelope.

"Well, Abe," Morris cried, "what's new about the house?"

"I'll tell you what's new, Mawruss," Abe replied. "Just add four hundred dollars to them figures on that envelope, and you'll find out what that house costs you up to date."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind what I mean, Mawruss," Abe said. "I'll tell you later what I mean. The thing is now, Mawruss, I got to know one thing and I got to know it quick. Where could I find this here lowlife brother-in-law of yours?"

"Let me see," said Morris. "It's already two o'clock, so I guess, Abe, you would be liable to get him in the back room of Wasserbauer's Café. Him and a fellow by the name Feinson and that lowlife Rabiner plays there auction pinochle together."

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"But ain't he got no office, Mawruss?" Abe asked.

"Sure, he's got an office," Morris replied. "He's got it desk-room with a couple of real estaters on Liberty Street, Abe. Look him up in the telephone book. He's got a phone put in too, Abe, with my money, I bet yer."

Abe consulted the telephone book and again put on his hat.

"Where are you going now, Abe?" Morris asked.

"I'm going down to Ferdy Rothschild's office," Abe replied.

"But you wouldn't find him in, Abe," Morris protested.

"I hope not," Abe replied; and for the second time that day he left his place of business and boarded a downtown L train.

Ferdy Rothschild's office was tucked away in an obscure corner of a small office building on Liberty Street, and as Abe plodded wearily up three flights of stairs he overtook a short, stout gentleman headed in the same direction.

"A feller what's got his office on the top floor of a back-number building like this," said the exhausted traveler, "should keep it airships for his customers."

"I bet yer," Abe gasped, as they reached the landing together, and then in silence they both walked side by side to the office of Ferdy Rothschild. [Pg 397]

Abe opened the door and motioned his companion to enter first, whereat the stranger nodded politely and walked into the office.

"Is Mr. Rothschild in?" he said to the office-boy, who was the sole occupant of the room.

"Mr. Rothschild, now, telephoned," the boy replied, "and he says, now, that if a guy comes in by the name of Marks to tell him he should wait."

"Did he say he would be right in?" Mr. Marks asked.

"No," the boy answered, "but he'll be in soon, all right."

"How do you know that?" Abe asked.

"Because, now, I heard him tell the other boys that he wouldn't set no longer time limit," the boy replied; "but he says he'd play four more deals and then he'd quit. See?"

Mr. Marks looked at Abe and broke into a laugh.

"That's a fine lowlife for you," he said. "That feller tells me I should be here at three o'clock sharp and he fools away my time like this."

Abe nodded.

"What could you expect from a feller like that?" Abe commenced, and then broke off suddenly—"but excuse me. He may be a friend of yours."

"*Gott soll hüten*," Mr. Marks replied piously. "All I got to do with him is that he brings me a proposition I should buy a piece of property which he got it to sell." [Pg 398]

"That's a funny thing," Abe said. "I came here myself about a piece of property what I just bought, and I understand he tried to sell the property for the feller what I bought it from."

Abe took the option from his breast pocket and opened it on his knee, while Mr. Marks glanced at it furtively, not unnoticed by Abe, who aided his companion's inspection by spreading out the paper until its contents were plainly visible.

"Why!" Mr. Marks cried. "Why, that is the house what this here Rothschild said he would sell it me."

Abe looked up sharply.

"You don't say so?" he said. "How could he sell you that house when I got this here option on it this morning for forty-eight thousand dollars?"

"Forty-eight thousand dollars!" Mr. Marks exclaimed. "Why, he says I could buy it for forty-six thousand dollars."

Abe laughed with forced politeness.

"Well, if you could of got it for forty-six thousand you should of took it," he said. "I want forty-nine thousand for it."

It was now Mr. Marks' turn to laugh.

"You couldn't get forty-nine thousand for that house," he said, "if the window-panes was diamonds already."

"No?" Abe retorted. "Well, then, I'll keep it, Mister——"

"Marks," suggested Mr. Marks.

"Marks," Abe went on. "I'll keep it, Mr. Marks, until I can get it, so sure as my name is Abe Potash."

"Of Potash & Perlmutter?" Mr. Marks asked.

"That's my name," Abe said.

"Why, then, your partner owns yet the house next door!" Mr. Marks cried.

"That ain't no news to me, Mr. Marks," Abe said. "In fact, he built that house, Mr. Marks, and I got so tired hearing about the way that house rents and how much money he is going to get out of it that I bought the place next door myself."

"But ain't that a funny thing that one partner should build a house and the other partner shouldn't have nothing to do with it?" Mr. Marks commented.

"We was partners in cloaks, Mr. Marks, not in houses," Abe explained. "And I had my chance to go in with him and I was a big fool I didn't took it."

Mr. Marks rose to his feet.

"Well, all I can say is," he rejoined, "if I got it a partner and we was to consider a proposition of building, Mr. Potash, we would go it together, not separate."

"Yes, Mr. Marks," Abe agreed, "if you had it a partner, Mr. Marks, that would be something else again, but the partner what I got it, Mr. Marks, you got no idee what an independent feller that is. I can assure you, Mr. Marks, that feller don't let me know nothing what he is doing outside of our business. For all I would know, he might of sold his house already." [Pg 400]

"You don't mean to say that his house is on the market, do you?" Marks said sharply.

"I don't mean to say nothing," Abe replied, as he started to leave. "All I mean to say is that I am tired of waiting for that lowlife Rothschild, and I must get back to my store."

"Wait a bit; I'll go downstairs with you," Marks broke in.

As they walked down to the elevated road they exchanged further confidences, by which it appeared that Mr. Marks was in the furniture business on Third Avenue, and that he lived on Lenox Avenue near One Hundred and Sixteenth Street.

"Why, you are practically a neighbor of Mawruss Perlmutter," Abe cried.

"Is that so?" Mr. Marks said, as they reached the elevated railway.

"Yes," Abe went on, "he lives on a Hundred and Eighteenth Street and Lenox Avenue."

"You don't say so?" Mr. Marks replied. "Well, Mr. Potash, I guess I got to leave you here."

They shook hands, and after Abe had proceeded half-way up the steps to the station platform he paused to observe Mr. Marks penciling an address in his memorandum book.

When he again entered his show-room Morris had just hung up the telephone receiver.

"Yes, Abe," he said, "you've gone and stuck your feet in it all right." [Pg 401]

"What d'ye mean?" Abe asked.

"Ferdy Rothschild just rung me up," Morris explained, "and he says you went down to his office while he was out, and you seen it there a feller what he was going to sell Rashkin's house to, and you went and broke up the deal, and that he will sue you yet in the courts."

"Let him sue us," Abe said. "All he knows about is what the office-boy tells him. I didn't break up no deal, because there wasn't no deal to bust up, Mawruss."

"Why not?" Morris asked.

"Because if the deal was to sell Rashkin's house," Abe explained, "Rothschild ain't in it at all, because I myself is the only person what could sell that house."

He drew the option from his breast pocket and handed it to Morris, who read it over carefully.

"Well, Abe," Morris commented, "that's only throwing away good money with bad, because you couldn't do nothing with that house in two weeks or in two years, neither."

"I know it," Abe said confidently, "but so long as I got an option on that house nobody else couldn't do nothing with it, neither. And so long as Rashkin ain't able to undersell you, Mawruss, you got a chance to get rid of your house and to come out even, Mawruss. My advice to you is, Mawruss, that you should get a hustle on you and sell that house for the best price you could. For so sure as I sit here, after this option expires, and Rashkin is again offering his house at forty-five thousand, you would be positively stuck." [Pg 402]

"I bet yer I would be stuck, Abe," Morris agreed. "But I ain't going to let no grass grow on me, Abe. I will put in an ad. in every paper in New York this afternoon, and I'll keep it up till I sell the house."

"Maybe that wouldn't be necessary, Mawruss," Abe said, with a twinkle in his eye.

"What d'ye mean?" Morris asked.

Whereupon, Abe unfolded at great length his adventures of the day, beginning with his meeting B. Rashkin at the Real-Estate Exchange, and concluding with Mr. Marks' penciled memorandum of Morris' address.

"And now, Mawruss," Abe concluded, "you seen the position what I took it, and when that feller Marks calls at your house to-night you should be careful and not make no cracks. Remember, Mawruss, you got to tell him that as a partner I am a crank and a regular highbinder. Also, Mawruss, you got to tell him that if I wasn't held by a copartnership agreement I would do you for your shirt, y'understand?"

Morris nodded.

"I know you should, Abe," he said.

"What!" Abe roared.

"I mean I know I should," Morris explained; "I know I should tell this here Marks what you say." [Pg 403]

Abe grew calm immediately, but he left further tactics to Morris' discretion; and when Mr. Marks called at the latter's house that evening Morris showed that he possessed that discretion to a degree hardly equaled by his partner.

"Yes, Mr. Marks," he said, after he had seated his visitor in the easiest chair in the front parlor and had supplied him with a good cigar, "it is true that I got it a house and that the house is on the market for sale."

He paused and nodded sadly.

"But I also got it a partner, Mr. Marks, and no doubt you heard already what a cutthroat that feller is. I assure you, Mr. Marks, that feller goes to work and gets an option on the house next door which you know is identical the same like my house is. Yes, Mr. Marks, he gets an option on that house for forty-seven thousand five hundred dollars from the feller what owns it, when he knows I am already negotiating to sell my house for forty-seven seven-fifty."

This willful misstatement of the amount of the option produced the desired result.

"Did you seen it the option?" Marks asked cautiously.

"Well, no, I ain't seen it, but I heard it on good authority, Mr. Marks," he said, and allowed himself two bars' rest, as the musicians say, for the phrase to sink in.

"Yes, Mr. Marks, on good authority I heard it that Potash pays five hundred dollars for a two-weeks' option at forty-seven thousand five hundred dollars." [Pg 404]

"Forty-seven thousand five hundred dollars?" Marks said with a rising inflection.

"Forty-seven thousand five hundred," Morris replied blandly, "and I guess he got a pretty cheap house, too."

"Well, I ain't got the same opinion what you got," Marks retorted. "I got an opinion, Mr. Perlmutter, that your partner pays a thousand dollars too much for his house."

"Is that so?" Morris replied, and then and there began a three-hours' session which terminated when they struck a bargain at forty-seven thousand dollars. Ten minutes later Marks left with a written memorandum of the terms of sale on his person while Morris pocketed a similar memorandum and fifty dollars earnest money.

The next morning an executory contract of sale was signed in Henry D. Feldman's office, and precisely two weeks later Mr. Marks took title to Morris' property which, after deducting all expenditures, netted its builder a profit of almost two thousand dollars. This sum Morris deposited to the credit of the firm account of Potash & Perlmutter, and hardly had the certified check been dispatched to the Kosciusko Bank when the door opened and Rashkin and Ferdy Rothschild burst into the show-room.

"Bloodsucker!" Rashkin cried, shaking his fist under Abe's nose. "What for you didn't take up your option?" [Pg 405]

Abe stepped back hurriedly and put a sample table between himself and B. Rashkin.

"Must I take it up the option?" he said calmly. "Couldn't I let you keep it the four hundred dollars if I wanted to?"

Rashkin looked at Ferdy Rothschild.

"That's a fine murderer for you. What?" he exclaimed.

"Him, I ain't surprised about," Ferdy Rothschild replied, "but when a feller should do his own wife's brother out of a commission of four hundred and sixty-five dollars, Rashkin, what a heart he must have it. Like a piece of steel."

"Don't talk that way, Ferdy," Morris commented, without emotion. "You make me feel bad. I got

lots of consideration for you, Ferdy, after the way you treated me already. Yes, Ferdy, I think a whole lot of you, Ferdy. You could come to me with your tongue hanging out from hunger yet, and I wouldn't lift a little finger."

Ferdy turned and appealed to B. Rashkin.

"Ain't them fine words to hear from my own brother-in-law?" he said.

"Nobody compels you to stay here and listen to 'em, Rothschild," Abe interrupted. "And, anyhow, Rothschild, you could make it more money if instead you stayed here you would go downtown to Henry D. Feldman's office and sue this here Rashkin in the courts for your commission. I was telling Feldman all about it this morning, and he says you got it a good case."

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"Rothschild," Rashkin cried pleadingly, "where are you going?"

"You shouldn't talk to me," Rothschild answered. "Potash is right. I brought this here Marks to you and he was ready and willing to purchase at your terms, and so, therefore, you owe me a commission of four hundred and sixty-five dollars."

The next moment he banged the door behind him and five minutes later he was followed by B. Rashkin, who had filled that short space of time with an exhaustive and profane denunciation of Potash & Perlmutter, individually and as copartners.

Five days afterward Morris examined the list of real-estate conveyances in the morning paper, after the fashion of the reformed race-track gambler who occasionally consults the past performances of the day's entries.

He handed the paper to Abe and pointed his finger to the following item:

264th St. 2044 East 37.6 x 100.10; Baruch Rashkin to the Royal Piccadilly Realty Co. (mtg \$33,000), \$100.

"That's only a fake," Abe said. "I seen in the paper yesterday that Rashkin incorporated the Royal Piccadilly Realty Company with his wife, Goldie Rashkin, as president; and I guess he done it because he got scared that Rothschild would get a judgment against him. And so he transfers the house to the corporation."

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"But if he does that, Abe," Morris cried gleefully, "Ferdy Rothschild would never collect on that judgment, because that house is all the property Rashkin's got."

"I hope you don't feel bad about it, Mawruss," Abe said.

"I bet yer I feel terrible, Abe," Morris said ironically. "But why did Rashkin call it the Royal Piccadilly Realty Company, Abe?"

"For the sake of old times yet," Abe answered. "I hear it from Sol Klinger that before Rashkin busted up in the waist business he used to make up a garment called the Royal Piccadilly."

"Is that so?" Morris commented. "I never heard he busted up in the waist business, Abe. Why couldn't he make a go of it, Abe?"

"Well, Mawruss, it was the same trouble with him like with some other people, I know," Abe replied significantly. "He was a good manufacturer but a poor salesman; and you know as well as I do, Mawruss, any fool could make up an article, Mawruss, but it takes a feller with judgment to sell it."

CHAPTER XVII

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"Did the sponger send up them doctors yet?" said Morris with a far-away look in his bloodshot eyes, as he entered his place of business at half past seven one morning in March.

"Doctors?" Abe repeated. "What are you talking about—doctors?"

Morris snapped his fingers impatiently.

"Doctors! Hear me talk!" he cried. "I meant kerseys."

"Listen here, Mawruss," Abe suggested. "What's the use you monkeying with business to-day? Why don't you go home?"

"Me, I don't take things so particular, Abe," Morris replied. "Time enough when I got to go home, then I will go home."

"You could do what you please, Mawruss," Abe declared. "We ain't so busy now that you couldn't be spared, y'understand. With spring weather like we got it now, Mawruss, we could better sell arctic overshoes and raincoats as try to get rid of our line already. I tell you the truth, Mawruss, I ain't seen business so *schlecht* since way before the Spanish War already."

"We could always find *something* to do, Abe," said Morris. "Why don't you tell Miss Cohen to get out them statements which you was talking about?"

"That's a good idee, Mawruss," Abe agreed. "Half the time we don't know where we are at all. Big concerns get out what they call a balancing sheet every day yet, and we are lucky if we do it oncet a year already. How long do you think it would take her to finish 'em up, Mawruss?" [Pg 409]

The far-away look returned to Morris' eyes as he replied. "I am waiting for a telephone every minute, Abe," he said.

Abe stared indignantly at his partner, then he took a cigar out of his waistcoat pocket and handed it to Morris.

"Go and sit down and smoke this, Mawruss," he said. "Leon Sammet gives it to me in the subway this morning, and if it's anything like them souvenirs which he hands it out to his customers, it'll make you forget your troubles, Mawruss. The last time I smoked one, I couldn't remember nothing for a week."

Morris carefully cut off the end of Abe's gift with a penknife, but when he struck a match the telephone bell rang sharply. Immediately he threw the cigar and the lighted match to the floor and dashed wildly to the firm's office.

"Do you got to burn the place up yet?" Abe cried, and after he had extinguished the match with his foot, he followed his partner to the office in time to view Morris' coat tails disappearing into the elevator. For two minutes he stood still and shook his head slowly.

"Miss Cohen," he said at length, "get out them statements which I told it you yesterday, and so soon you got the drawing account finished, let me have it. I don't think Mr. Perlmutter will be back to-day, so you would have lots of time to do it in." [Pg 410]

It was almost two o'clock before Miss Cohen handed Abe the statement of the firm's drawing account, and Abe thrust it into his breast pocket.

"I'm going out for a bite, Miss Cohen," he said. "If anybody wants me, I am over at Hammersmith's and you could send Jake across for me."

He sighed heavily as he raised his umbrella and plunged out into a heavy March downpour. It had been raining steadily for about a week to the complete discouragement of garment buyers, and Hammersmith's rear café sheltered a proportionately gloomy assemblage of cloak and suit manufacturers. Abe glanced around him when he entered and selected a table at which sat Sol Klinger, who was scowling at a portion of Salisbury steak.

"Hallo, Sol," Abe cried. "What's the trouble. Ain't the oitermobile running again?"

"Do me the favor, Abe," Sol replied, "and cut out them so called alleged jokes."

He turned toward a waiter who was dusting off the tablecloth in front of Abe.

"Max," he said, stabbing at the steak with a fork held at arm's length and leaning back in his chair as though to avoid contagion. "What d'ye call this here mess anyway?"

The waiter examined the dish critically and nodded his head. [Pg 411]

"Sally's-bury steak, Mr. Klinger," he murmured. "Very nice to-day."

"Is that so?" Sol Klinger rejoined. "Well, lookyhere Max, if I would got it a dawg which I wanted to get rid of bad, y'understand, I would feed him that mess. But me, I ain't ready to die just yet awhile, y'understand, even though business *is* rotten, so you could take that thing back to the cook and bring me a slice of roast beef; and if you think I got all day to sit here, Max, and fool away my time——"

"Right away, Mr. Klinger, right away," Max cried as he hurried off the offending dish, and once more Sol subsided into a melancholy silence.

"Don't take it so hard, Sol," Abe said. "We got bad weather like this *schon* lots of times yet, and none of us busted up. Ain't it?"

"The weather is nix, Abe," Sol replied. "If it's wet to-day then it's fine to-morrow, and if a concern ain't buying goods now—all right. They'll buy 'em later on. Ain't it? *But*, Abe, the partner which you got it to-day, Abe, that's the same partner which you got it to-morrow, and that sucker Klein, Abe, he eats me up with expenses. What that feller does with his money, Abe, I don't know."

"Maybe he buys oitermobiles, Sol," Abe suggested.

"Supposing I did buy last spring an oitermobile, Abe," Sol retorted. "That is the least. I bet yer [Pg 412]

that feller Klein spends enough on taxicab rides for customers, and also one or two of 'em which she ain't customers, as he could buy a *dozen* oitermobiles already. No, Abe, that ain't the point. The first year Klein and me goes as partners together, he overdraws me two hundred and fifty dollars. *Schon gut*. If the feller is a little extravagant, y'understand, he's got to make it up next year."

Sol paused to investigate the roast beef which Max had brought, and being apparently satisfied, he proceeded with his narrative.

"Next year, Abe," he continued, "Klein not only ain't made up the two hundred and fifty, Abe, but he gets into me three hundred dollars more. Well, business is good, y'understand, and so I don't kick and that's where I am a great big fool, Abe, because every year since then, Abe, that sucker goes on and on, until to-day our balance sheet shows I got five thousand more invested in the business as Klein got it. And if I would tell him we are no longer equal partners, Abe, he would go right down to Henry D. Feldman, and to-morrow morning there would be a receiver in the store."

Sol plunged his fork into the slice of roast beef as though it were Klein himself, and he hacked at it so viciously that the gravy flew in every direction.

"Max," he roared, clapping his handkerchief to his face, "what the devil you are bringing me here—soup?"

It was at least five minutes before Sol had exhausted his stock of profanity, and when at length the tablecloth was changed and Abe had ministered to the front of his coat with a napkin dipped in water, Sol ceased to upbraid the waiter and resumed his tirade against his partner. [Pg 413]

"Yes, Abe," he said, "you are in luck. You got a partner, y'understand, which he is a decent respectable feller. I bet yer Mawruss would no more dream of overdrawing you, than he would fly in the air."

"Wait till they gets to be popular, Sol," Abe replied. "You could take it from me, Sol, Mawruss would be the first one to buy one of them airyplanes, just the same like he bought that oitermobile yet."

"That's all right," Sol said. "Mawruss is a good live partner. He sees people round him—good, decent, respectable people, mind you—is buying oitermobiles, Abe, and so he thinks he could buy one, too. There ain't no harm in that, Abe, so long as he keeps inside his drawing account, but so soon as one partner starts to take more as the other money out of the business, Abe, then there is right away trouble. But certainly, Abe, Mawruss wouldn't do nothing like that."

"Sure not," Abe replied, "because in the first place, Sol, he knows I wouldn't stand for it, and in the second place, Mawruss ain't out to do me, y'understand. I will say for Mawruss this, Sol. Of course a partner is a partner, Sol, and the best of partners behaves like cut-throats at times, but Mawruss was always white with me, Sol, and certainly I think a whole lot of that feller. Just to show you, Sol, I got Miss Cohen to fix it up for us a statement of our drawing account which I got it right here in my breast pocket, and I ain't even looked at it at all, so sure I am that everything is all O. K." [Pg 414]

"I bet yer you overdrew *him* yet," Sol observed.

"Me, I ain't such a big spender, Sol," Abe replied as he unfolded the statement. "I don't even got to look at the statement, because I know we drew just the same amount. Yes,—here it is Sol. Me, I drew six thousand two hundred dollars, and Mawruss drew—six thousand two hundred and—*Well, what do you think for a sucker like that?*"

"Why, what's the matter, Abe?" Sol cried.

Abe's face had grown white and his eyes glittered with anger.

"That's a loafer for you!" he went on. "That feller actually pocketed fifty-two dollars of my money."

"Fifty-two dollars?" Sol repeated. "What are you making such a fuss about fifty-two dollars for?"

"With you I suppose fifty-two dollars is nothing, Sol?" Abe retorted. "I suppose you could pick up fifty-two dollars in the streets, Sol. What? Wait till I see that robber to-morrow. I'll fix him. Actually, I thought that feller was above such things, Sol."

"Don't excite yourself, Abe," Sol began.

"I ain't excited, Sol," Abe replied. "I ain't a bit excited. All I would do is I will go back to the store and draw a check for fifty-two dollars. I wouldn't let that beat get ahead of me not for one cent, Sol. If I would sit down with my eyes closed for five minutes, Sol, that loafer would do me for my shirt. I must be on the job all the time, Sol, otherwise that feller would have me on the streets yet." [Pg 415]

For a quarter of an hour longer Abe reviled Morris, until Sol was moved to protest.

"If I thought that way about my partner, Abe," he said, "I'd go right down and see Feldman and have a dissolution yet."

"That's what I will do, Sol," Abe declared. "Why should I tie myself up any longer with a cutthroat

like that? I tell you what we'll do, Sol. We'll go over to the store and see what else Miss Cohen found it out. I bet you he rings in a whole lot of items on me with the petty cash while I was away on the road."

Together they left Hammersmith's and repaired at once to Potash & Perlmutter's place of business. As they entered the show-room Miss Cohen emerged from her office with a sheet of paper in her hand.

"Mr. Potash," she said, "when you were in Chicago last fall you drew on the firm for a hundred dollars, and by mistake I credited it to you on your expense account. It ought to have been charged on your drawing account. So that makes your total drawing account sixty-three hundred dollars."

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Abe stopped short and looked at Sol.

"What was that you said, Miss Cohen?" he asked.

"I said that I made a mistake in that statement, and you're overdrawn on Mr. Perlmutter forty-eight dollars," Miss Cohen concluded.

"Then hurry up quick, Miss Cohen," Abe cried, "and draw a check in my personal check book on the Kosciusko Bank to Potash & Perlmutter for forty-eight dollars and see that it's deposited the first thing to-morrow morning."

He handed Sol a cigar.

"Yes, Sol," he said, "if Mawruss would find it out that I am overdrawn on him forty-eight dollars, he would abuse me like a pickpocket. That feller never gives me credit for being square at all, Sol. I would be afraid for my life if he would get on to that forty-eight dollars. Why, the very first thing you know, Sol, he would be going around telling everybody I was a crook and a cutthroat. That's the kind of feller Mawruss is, Sol. I could treat him always like a gentleman, Sol, and if the smallest little thing happens to us, 'sucker' is the least what he calls me."

At this juncture the green baize doors leading into the hall burst open and Morris himself leaped into the show-room. His necktie was perched rakishly underneath his right ear, and his collar was of the moisture and consistency of a used wash rag. His clothes were dripping, for he carried no umbrella, and his hair hung in damp strands over his forehead. Nevertheless he was grinning broadly, as without a word he ran up to Abe and seized his hand. For two minutes Morris shook it up and down and then he collapsed into the nearest chair.

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"Well, Mawruss," Abe cried, "what's the matter? Couldn't you say nothing? What did you come downtown again for? You should have stayed uptown with Minnie."

"S'all right, Abe," Morris gasped. "S'all over, too. The doctor says instead I should be making a nuisance of myself uptown, I would be better off in the store here. He was there before I could get home."

"Who was there?" Abe asked. "The doctor?"

"*Not* the doctor," Morris went on. "The boy was there. Minnie is doing fine. The doctor said everything would be all right."

"That's good. That's good," Abe murmured.

"Y'oughter seen him, Abe. He weighed ten pounds," Morris continued. "I bet yer he could holler, too,—like an auctioneer already. Minnie says also I shouldn't forget to tell you what we agreed upon."

"What we agreed upon?" Abe repeated. "Why we ain't agreed upon nothing, so far what I hear, Mawruss. What d'ye mean—what we agreed upon?"

"Not *you* and me, Abe," Morris cried. "*Her* and me. We agreed that if it was a boy we'd call him Abraham P. P. Perlmutter already."

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He slapped Abe on the back and laughed uproariously, while Abe looked guilty and blushed a deep crimson.

"Abraham Potash Perlmutter," Morris reiterated. "That's one fine name, Sol."

It was now Sol's turn to take Morris' hand and he squeezed it hard.

"I congratulate you for the boy and for the name both," he said.

Once more Abe seized his partner's hand and shook it rhythmically up and down as though it were a patent exerciser.

"Mawruss," he said, "this is certainly something which I didn't expect at all, and all I could say is that I got to tell you you would never be sorry for it. Just a few minutes since in Hammersmith's I was telling Sol I got a partner which it is a credit and an honor for a feller to know he could always trust such a partner to do what is right and square and also, Mawruss, I—Miss Cohen," he broke off suddenly, "you should draw right away another check in my personal book for a hundred dollars."

"To whose order?" Miss Cohen asked.

Abe cleared his throat and blinked away a slight moisture before replying.

"Make it to the order of Abraham P. Perlmutter," he said, "and we will deposit it in a savings bank, Mawruss, and when he comes twenty-one years old, Mawruss, we will draw it out with anything else what you put in there for him, Mawruss, and we will deposit it in our own bank to the credit of *Potash, Perlmutter & Son.*"

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Sol Klinger's face spread into an amiable grin.

"You could put me down ten dollars on that savings bank account, too, boys," he said as he reached for his hat. "I've got to be going now."

"Don't forget you should tell Klein it's a boy," Morris called to him.

"I wouldn't forget," Sol replied. "Klein'll be glad to hear it. You know, Mawruss, Klein ain't such a grouch as most people think he is. In fact, taking him all around, Klein is a pretty decent feller."

As he turned to leave, his eye met Abe's, and both of them smiled guiltily.

"After all, Abe," Sol concluded, "it ain't what partners says about each other, Abe, but how they *acts* which counts. Ain't it?"

Abe nodded emphatically.

"An old saying but a true one," Morris declared. "Actions talk louder as words."

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes

Several spelling and punctuation inconsistencies appear in the original of this text. Punctuation has been changed when required for correct syntax. Inconsistent spelling has been retained in direct speech for pronunciation purposes and in quoted written material, but has been changed as noted below.

Page 12 Changed "good-bye" to "good-by"
Page 39 Changed "recission" to "rescission"
Page 50 Changed "Lownstein" to "Lowenstein"
Page 135 Changed "dassent" to "dassen't"
Page 146 Changed "Kreitman" to "Kreitmann"
Page 200 Changed "theeayter" to "theyayter"
Page 244 Changed "neighborhod" to "neighborhood"
Page 252 Changed "Fernstein" to "Feinstein"
Page 280 Changed "cigarrettel" to "cigarettel"
Pages 54, 300, 411 Changed "aint" to "ain't"
Page 368 Changed "cancellation" to "cancelation"
Page 374 Changed "Raskin" to "Rashkin" (twice)
Page 389 Changed "practicaly" to "practically"
Page 394 Changed "Sugarman" to "Sugarman"
Page 413 Changed "cutthroats" to "cut-throats"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK POTASH & PERLMUTTER: THEIR
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