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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIDE-STEPPING WITH SHORTY ***



THEY TACKLES ANYTHING I LEADS 'EM UP TO

Side-stepping

with Shorty

By

Sewell Ford

*Illustrated by
Francis Vaux Wilson*

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THEY TACKLES ANYTHING I LEADS 'EM TO *Frontispiece*

THE TWINS ORGANIZE A GAME OF TAG

"WE—E—E—OUGH! GLORY BE!" YELLS HANK, LETTIN' OUT AN EARSPLITTER

HE HAS THE PO'TRY TAP TURNED ON FULL BLAST

I

SHORTY AND THE PLUTE

Notice any gold dust on my back? No? Well it's a wonder there ain't, for I've been up against the money bags so close I expect you can find eagle prints all over me.

That's what it is to build up a rep. Looks like all the fat wads in New York was gettin' to know about Shorty McCabe, and how I'm a sure cure for everything that ails 'em. You see, I no sooner take hold of one down and outer, sweat the high livin' out of him, and fix him up like new with a private course of rough house exercises, than he passes the word along to another; and so it goes.

This last was the limit, though. One day I'm called to the 'phone by some mealy mouth that wants to know if this is the Physical Culture Studio.

"Sure as ever," says I.

"Well," says he, "I'm secretary to Mr. Fletcher Dawes."

"That's nice," says I. "How's Fletch?"

"Mr. Dawes," says he, "will see the professah at fawh o'clock this awfternoon."

"Is that a guess," says I, "or has he been havin' his fortune told?"

"Who is this?" says the gent at the other end of the wire, real sharp and sassy.

"Only me," says I.

"Well, who are you?" says he.

"I'm the witness for the defence," says I. "I'm Professor McCabe, P. C. D., and a lot more that I don't use on week days."

"Oh!" says he, simmerin' down a bit. "This is Professor McCabe himself, is it? Well, Mr. Fletcher Dawes requiahs youah services. You are to repawt at his apartments at fawh o'clock this awfternoon—fawh o'clock, understand?"

"Oh, yes," says I. "That's as plain as a dropped egg on a plate of hash. But say, Buddy; you tell Mr. Dawes that next time he wants me just to pull the string. If that don't work, he can whistle; and when he gets tired of whistlin', and I ain't there, he'll know I ain't comin'. Got them directions? Well, think hard, and maybe you'll figure it out later. Ta, ta, Mister Secretary." With that I hangs up the receiver and winks at Swifty Joe.

"Swifty," says I, "they'll be usin' us for rubber stamps if we don't look out."

"Who was the guy?" says he.

"Some pinhead up to Fletcher Dawes's," says I.

"Hully chee!" says Swifty.

Funny, ain't it, how most everyone'll prick up their ears at that name? And it don't mean so

much money as John D.'s or Morgan's does, either. But what them two and Harriman don't own is divided up among Fletcher Dawes and a few others. Maybe it's because Dawes is such a free spender that he's better advertised. Anyway, when you say Fletcher Dawes you think of a red-faced gent with a fistful of thousand-dollar bills offerin' to buy the White House for a stable.

But say, he might have twice as much, and I wouldn't hop any quicker. I'm only livin' once, and it may be long or short, but while it lasts I don't intend to do the lackey act for anyone.

Course, I thinks the jolt I gave that secretary chap closes the incident. But around three o'clock that same day, though, I looks down from the front window and sees a heavy party in a fur lined overcoat bein' helped out of a shiny benzine wagon by a pie faced valet, and before I'd done guessin' where they was headed for they shows up in the office door.

"My name is Dawes. Fletcher Dawes," says the gent in the overcoat.

"I could have guessed that," says I. "You look somethin' like the pictures they print of you in the Sunday papers."

"I'm sorry to hear it," says he.

But say, he's less of a prize hog than you'd think, come to get near—forty-eight around the waist, I should say, and about a number sixteen collar. You wouldn't pick him out by his face as the kind of a man that you'd like to have holdin' a mortgage on the old homestead, though, nor one you'd like to sit opposite to in a poker game—eyes about a quarter of an inch apart, lima bean ears buttoned down close, and a mouth like a crack in the pavement.

He goes right at tellin' what he wants and when he wants it, sayin' he's a little out of condition and thinks a few weeks of my trainin' was just what he needed. Also he throws out that I might come up to the Brasstonia and begin next day.

"Yes?" says I. "I heard somethin' like that over the 'phone."

"From Corson, eh?" says he. "He's an ass! Never mind him. You'll be up to-morrow?"

"Say," says I, "where'd you get the idea I went out by the day?"

"Why," says he, "it seems to me I heard something about——"

"Maybe they was personal friends of mine," says I. "That's different. Anybody else comes here to see me."

"Ah!" says he, suckin' in his breath through his teeth and levelin' them blued steel eyes of his at me. "I suppose you have your price?"

"No," says I; "but I'll make one, just special for you. It'll be ten dollars a minute."

Say, what's the use? We saves up till we gets a little wad of twenties about as thick as a roll of absorbent cotton, and with what we got in the bank and some that's lent out, we feel as rich as platter gravy. Then we bumps up against a really truly plute, and gets a squint at his dinner check, and we feels like panhandlers workin' a side street. Honest, with my little ten dollars a minute gallery play, I thought I was goin' to have him stunned.

"That's satisfactory," says he. "To-morrow, at four."

That's all. I'm still standin' there with my mouth open when he's bein' tucked in among the tiger skins. And I'm bought up by the hour, like a bloomin' he massage artist! Feel? I felt like I'd fit loose in a gas pipe.

But Swifty, who's had his ear stretched out and his eyes bugged all the time, begins to do the walk around and look me over as if I was a new wax figger in a museum.

"Ten plunks a minute!" says he. "Hully chee!"

"Ah, forget it!" says I. "D'ye suppose I want to be reminded that I've broke into the bath rubber class? G'wan! Next time you see me prob'ly I'll be wearin' a leather collar and a tag. Get the mitts on, you South Brooklyn bridge rusher, and let me show you how I can hit before I lose my nerve altogether!"

Swifty says he ain't been used so rough since the time he took the count from Cans; but it was a relief to my feelin's; and when he come to reckon up that I'd handed him two hundred dollars' worth of punches without chargin' him a red, he says he'd be proud to have me do it every day.

If it hadn't been that I'd chucked the bluff myself, I'd scratched the Dawes proposition. But I ain't no hand to welch; so up I goes next afternoon, with my gym. suit in a bag, and gets my first inside view of the Brasstonia, where the plute hangs out. And say, if you think these down town twenty-five-a-day joints is swell, you ought to get some Pittsburg friend to smuggle you into one of these up town apartment hotels that's run exclusively for trust presidents. Why, they don't

have any front doors at all. You're expected to come and go in your bubble, but the rules lets you use a cab between certain hours.

I tries to walk in, and was held up by a three hundred pound special cop in grey and gold, and made to prove that I didn't belong in the baggage elevator or the ash hoist. Then I'm shown in over the Turkish rugs to a solid gold passenger lift, set in a velvet arm chair, and shot up to the umpteenth floor.

I was lookin' to find Mr. Dawes located in three or four rooms and bath, but from what I could judge of the size of his ranch he must pay by acreage instead of the square foot, for he has a whole wing to himself. And as for hired help, they was standin' around in clusters, all got up in baby blue and silver, with mugs as intelligent as so many frozen codfish. Say, it would give me chillblains on the soul to have to live with that gang lookin' on!

I'm shunted from one to the other, until I gets to Dawes, and he leads the way into a big room with rubber mats, punchin' bags, and all the fixin's you could think of.

"Will this do?" says he.

"It'll pass," says I. "And if you'll chase out that bunch of employment bureau left-overs, we'll get down to business."

"But," says he, "I thought you might need some of my men to——"

"I don't," says I, "and while you're mixin' it with me you won't, either."

At that he shoos 'em all out and shuts the door. I opens the window so's to get in some air that ain't been strained and currycombed and scented with violets, and then we starts to throw the shot bag around. I find Fletcher is short winded and soft. He's got a bad liver and a worse heart, for five or six years' trainin' on wealthy water and pâté de foie gras hasn't done him any good. Inside of ten minutes he knows just how punky he is himself, and he's ready to follow any directions I lay down.

As I'm leavin', a nice, slick haired young feller calls me over and hands me an old rose tinted check. It was for five hundred and twenty.

"Fifty-two minutes, professor," says he.

"Oh, let that pyramid," says I, tossin' it back.

Honest, I never shied so at money before, but somehow takin' that went against the grain. Maybe it was the way it was shoved at me.

I'd kind of got interested in the job of puttin' Dawes on his feet, though, and Thursday I goes up for another session. Just as I steps off the elevator at his floor I hears a scuffle, and out comes a couple of the baby blue bunch, shoving along an old party with her bonnet tilted over one ear. I gets a view of her face, though, and I sees she's a nice, decent lookin' old girl, that don't seem to be either tanked or batty, but just kind of scared. A Willie boy in a frock coat was followin' along behind, and as they gets to me he steps up, grabs her by the arm, and snaps out:

"Now you leave quietly, or I'll hand you over to the police! Understand?"

That scares her worse than ever, and she rolls her eyes up to me in that pleadin' way a dog has when he's been hurt.

"Hear that?" says one of the baby blues, shakin' her up.

My fingers went into bunches as sudden as if I'd touched a live wire, but I keeps my arms down. "Ah, say!" says I. "I don't see any call for the station-house drag out just yet. Loosen up there a bit, will you?"

"Mind your business!" says one of 'em, givin' me the glary eye.

"Thanks," says I. "I was waitin' for an invite," and I reaches out and gets a shut-off grip on their necks. It didn't take 'em long to loosen up after that.

"Here, here!" says the Willie that I'd spotted for Corson. "Oh, it's you is it, professor?"

"Yes, it's me," says I, still holdin' the pair at arms' length. "What's the row?"

"Why," says Corson, "this old woman——"

"Lady," says I.

"Aw—er—yes," says he. "She insists on fawcing her way in to see Mr. Dawes."

"Well," says I, "she ain't got no bag of dynamite, or anything like that, has she?"

"I just wanted a word with Fletcher," says she, buttin' in—"just a word or two."

"Friend of yours?" says I.

"Why— Well, we have known each other for forty years," says she.

"That ought to pass you in," says I,

"But she refuses to give her name," says Corson.

"I am Mrs. Maria Dawes," says she, holdin' her chin up and lookin' him straight between the eyes.

"You're not on the list," says Corson.

"List be blowed!" says I. "Say, you peanut head, can't you see this is some relation? You ought to have sense enough to get a report from the boss, before you carry out this quick bounce business. Perhaps you're puttin' your foot in it, son."

Then Corson weakens, and the old lady throws me a look that was as good as a vote of thanks. And say, when she'd straightened her lid and pulled herself together, she was as ladylike an old party as you'd want to meet. There wa'n't much style about her, but she was dressed expensive enough—furs, and silks, and sparks in her ears. Looked like one of the sort that had been up against a long run of hard luck and had come through without gettin' sour.

While we was arguin', in drifts Mr. Dawes himself. I gets a glimpse of his face when he first spots the old girl, and if ever I see a mouth shut like a safe door, and a jaw stiffen as if it had turned to concrete, his did.

"What does this mean, Maria?" he says between his teeth.

"I couldn't help it, Fletcher," says she. "I wanted to see you about little Bertie."

"Huh!" grunts Fletcher. "Well, step in this way. McCabe, you can come along too."

I wa'n't stuck on the way it was said, and didn't hanker for mixin' up with any such reunions; but it didn't look like Maria had any too many friends handy, so I trots along. When we're shut in, with the draperies pulled, Mr. Dawes plants his feet solid, shoves his hands down into his pockets, and looks Maria over careful.

"Then you have lost the address of my attorneys?" says he, real frosty.

That don't chill Maria at all. She acted like she was used to it. "No," says she; "but I'm tired of talking to lawyers. I couldn't tell them about Bertie, and how lonesome I've been without him these last two years. Can't I have him, Fletcher?"

About then I begins to get a glimmer of what it was all about, and by the time she'd gone on for four or five minutes I had the whole story. Maria was the ex-Mrs. Fletcher Dawes. Little Bertie was a grandson; and grandma wanted Bertie to come and live with her in the big Long Island place that Fletcher had handed her when he swapped her off for one of the sextet, and settled up after the decree was granted.

Hearin' that brought the whole thing back, for the papers printed pages about the Daweses; rakin' up everything, from the time Fletcher run a grocery store and lodgin' house out to Butte, and Maria helped him sell flour and canned goods, besides makin' beds, and jugglin' pans, and takin' in washin' on the side; to the day Fletcher euchred a prospector out of the mine that gave him his start.

"You were satisfied with the terms of the settlement, when it was made," says Mr. Dawes.

"I know," says she; "but I didn't think how badly I should miss Bertie. That is an awful big house over there, and I am getting to be an old woman now, Fletcher."

"Yes, you are," says he, his mouth corners liftin' a little. "But Bertie's in school, where he ought to be and where he is going to stay. Anything more?"

I looks at Maria. Her upper lip was wabblin' some, but that's all. "No, Fletcher," says she. "I shall go now."

She was just about startin', when there's music on the other side of the draperies. It sounds like Corson was havin' his troubles with another female. Only this one had a voice like a brass cornet, and she was usin' it too.

"Why can't I go in there?" says she. "I'd like to know why! Eh, what's that? A woman in there?"

And in she comes. She was a pippin, all right. As she yanks back the curtain and rushes in she looks about as friendly as a spotted leopard that's been stirred up with an elephant hook; but when she sizes up the comp'ny that's present she cools off and lets go a laugh that gives us an iv'ry display worth seein'.

"Oh!" says she. "Fletchy, who's the old one?"

Say, I expect Dawes has run into some mighty worryin' scenes before now, havin' been indicted once or twice and so on, but I'll bet he never bucked up against the equal of this before. He opens his mouth a couple of times, but there don't seem to be any language on tap. The missus was ready, though.

"Maria Dawes is my name, my dear," says she.

"Maria!" says the other one, lookin' some staggered. "Why—why, then you—you're Number One!"

Maria nods her head.

Then Fletcher gets his tongue out of tangle. "Maria," says he, "this is my wife, Maizie."

"Yes?" says Maria, as gentle as a summer night. "I thought this must be Maizie. You're very young and pretty, aren't you? I suppose you go about a lot? But you must be careful of Fletcher. He always was foolish about staying up too late, and eating things that hurt him. I used to have to warn him against black coffee and welsh rabbits. He will eat them, and then he has one of his bad spells. Fletcher is fifty-six now, you know, and——"

"Maria!" says Mr. Dawes, his face the colour of a boiled beet, "that's enough of this foolishness! Here, Corson! Show this lady out!"

"Yes, I was just going, Fletcher," says she.

"Good-bye, Maria!" sings out Maizie, and then lets out another of her soprano ha-ha's, holdin' her sides like she was tickled to death. Maybe it was funny to her; it wa'n't to Fletcher.

"Come, McCabe," says he; "we'll get to work."

Say, I can hold in about so long, and then I've got to blow off or else bust a cylinder head. I'd had about enough of this "Come, McCabe" business, too. "Say, Fletchy," says I, "don't be in any grand rush. I ain't so anxious to take you on as you seem to think."

"What's that?" he spits out.

"You keep your ears open long enough and you'll hear it all," says I; for I was gettin' hotter an' hotter under the necktie. "I just want to say that I've worked up a grouch against this job durin' the last few minutes. I guess I'll chuck it up."

That seemed to go in deep. Mr. Dawes, he brings his eyes together until nothin' but the wrinkle keeps 'em apart, and he gets the hectic flush on his cheek bones. "I don't understand," says he.

"This is where I quit," says I. "That's all."

"But," says he, "you must have some reason."

"Sure," says I; "two of 'em. One's just gone out. That's the other," and I jerks my thumb at Maizie.

She'd been rollin' her eyes from me to Dawes, and from Dawes back to me. "What does this fellow mean by that?" says Maizie. "Fletcher, why don't you have him thrown out?"

"Yes, Fletcher," says I, "why don't you? I'd love to be thrown out just now!"

Someway, Fletcher wasn't anxious, although he had lots of bouncers standin' idle within call. He just stands there and looks at his toes, while Maizie tongue lashes first me and then him. When she gets through I picks up my hat.

"So long, Fletchy," says I. "What work I put in on you the other day I'm goin' to make you a present of. If I was you, I'd cash that check and buy somethin' that would please Maizie."

"D'jer annex another five or six hundred up to the Brasstonia this afternoon?" asks Swifty, when I gets back.

"Nix," says I. "All I done was to organise a wife convention and get myself disliked. That ten-a-minute deal is off. But say, Swifty, just remember I've dodged makin' the bath rubber class, and I'm satisfied at that."

ROUNDING UP MAGGIE

Say, who was tellin' you? Ah, g'wan! Them sea shore press agents is full of fried eels. Disguises; nothin'! Them folks I has with me was the real things. The Rev. Doc. Akehead? Not much. That was my little old Bishop. And it wa'n't any slummin' party at all. It was just a little errand of mercy that got switched.

It was this way: The Bishop, he shows up at the Studio for his reg'lar medicine ball work, that I'm givin' him so's he can keep his equator from gettin' the best of his latitude. That's all on the quiet, though. It's somethin' I ain't puttin' on the bulletin board, or includin' in my list of references, understand?

Well, we has had our half-hour session and the Bishop has just made a break for the cold shower and the dressin' room, while I'm preparin' to shed my workin' clothes for the afternoon; when in pops Swifty Joe, closin' the gym. door behind him real soft and mysterious.

"Shorty," says he in that hoarse whisper he gets on when he's excited, "she's—she's come!"

"Who's come?" says I.

"S-s-sh!" says he, wavin' his hands. "It's the old girl; and she's got a gun!"

"Ah, say!" says I. "Come out of the trance. What old girl? And what about the gun?"

Maybe you've never seen Swifty when he's real stirred up? He wears a corrugated brow, and his lower jaw hangs loose, leavin' the Mammoth Cave wide open, and his eyes bug out like shoe buttons. His thoughts come faster than he can separate himself from the words; so it's hard gettin' at just what he means to say. But, as near as I can come to it, there's a wide female party waitin' out in the front office for me, with blood in her eye and a self cockin' section of the unwritten law in her fist.

Course, I knows right off there must be some mistake, or else it's a case of dope, and I says so. But Swifty is plumb sure she knew who she was askin' for when she calls for me, and begs me not to go out. He's for ringin' up the police.

"Ring up nobody!" says I. "S'pose I want this thing gettin' into the papers? If a Lady Bughouse has strayed in here, we got to shoo her out as quiet as possible. She can't shoot if we rush her. Come on!"

I will say for Swifty Joe that, while he ain't got any too much sense, there's no ochre streak in him. When I pulls open the gym. door and gives the word, we went through neck and neck.

"Look out!" he yells, and I sees him makin' a grab at the arm of a broad beamed old party, all done up nicely in grey silk and white lace.

And say, it's lucky I got a good mem'ry for profiles; for if I hadn't seen right away it was Purdy Bligh's Aunt Isabella, and that the gun was nothin' but her silver hearin' tube, we might have been tryin' to explain it to her yet. As it is, I'm just near enough to make a swipe for Swifty's right hand with my left, and I jerks his paw back just as she turns around from lookin' out of the window and gets her lamps on us. Say, we must have looked like a pair of batty ones, standin' there holdin' hands and starin' at her! But it seems that folks as deaf as she is ain't easy surprised. All she does is feel around her for her gold eye glasses with one hand, and fit the silver hearin' machine to her off ear with the other. It's one of these pepper box affairs, and I didn't much wonder that Swifty took it for a gun.

"Are you Professor McCabe?" says she.

"Sure!" I hollers; and Swifty, not lookin' for such strenuous conversation, goes up in the air about two feet.

"I beg pardon," says the old girl; "but will you kindly speak into the audiphone."

So I steps up closer, forgettin' that I still has the clutch on Swifty, and drags him along.

"Ahr, chee!" says Swifty. "This ain't no brother act, is it?"

With that I lets him go, and me and Aunt Isabella gets down to business. I was lookin' for some tale about Purdy—tell you about him some day—but it looks like this was a new deal; for she opens up by askin' if I knew a party by the name of Dennis Whaley.

"Do I?" says I. "I've known Dennis ever since I can remember knowin' anybody. He's runnin' my place out to Primrose Park now."

"I thought so," says Aunt Isabella. "Then perhaps you know a niece of his, Margaret Whaley?"

I didn't; but I'd heard of her. She's Terence Whaley's girl, that come over from Skibbereen four or five years back, after near starvin' to death one wet season when the potato crop was so bad. Well, it seems Maggie has worked a couple of years for Aunt Isabella as kitchen girl. Then she's got ambitious, quit service, and got a flatwork job in a hand laundry—eight per, fourteen hours a day, Saturday sixteen.

I didn't tumble why all this was worth chinnin' about until Aunt Isabella reminds me that she's president and board of directors of the Lady Pot Wrestlers' Improvement Society. She's one of the kind that spends her time tryin' to organise study classes for hired girls who have different plans for spendin' their Thursday afternoons off.

Seems that Aunt Isabella has been keepin' special tabs on Maggie, callin' at the laundry to give her good advice, and leavin' her books to read,—which I got a tintype of her readin', not,—and otherwise doin' the upliftin' act accordin' to rule. But along in the early summer Maggie had quit the laundry without consultin' the old girl about it. Aunt Isabella kept on the trail, though, run down her last boardin' place, and begun writin' her what she called helpful letters. She kept this up until she was handed the ungrateful jolt. The last letter come back to her with a few remarks scribbled across the face, indicatin' that readin' such stuff gave Maggie a pain in the small of her back. But the worst of it all was, accordin' to Aunt Isabella, that Maggie was in Coney Island.

"Think of it!" says she. "That poor, innocent girl, living in that dreadfully wicked place! Isn't it terrible?"

"Oh, I don't know," says I. "It all depends."

"Hey?" says the old girl. "What say?"

Ever try to carry on a debate through a silver salt shaker? It's the limit. Thinkin' it would be a lot easier to agree with her, I shouts out, "Sure thing!" and nods my head. She nods back and rolls her eyes.

"She must be rescued at once!" says Aunt Isabella. "Her uncle ought to be notified. Can't you send for him?"

As it happens, Dennis had come down that mornin' to see an old friend of his that was due to croak; so I figures it out that the best way would be to get him and the old lady together and let 'em have it out. I chases Swifty down to West 11th-st. to bring Dennis back in a hurry, and invites Aunt Isabella to make herself comfortable until he comes.

She's too excited to sit down, though. She goes pacin' around the front office, now and then lookin' me over suspicious,—me bein' still in my gym. suit,—and then sizin' up the sportin' pictures on the wall. My art exhibit is mostly made up of signed photos of Jeff and Fitz and Nelson in their ring costumes, and it was easy to see she's some jarred.

"I hope this is a perfectly respectable place, young man," says she.

"It ain't often pulled by the cops," says I.

Instead of calmin' her down, that seems to stir her up worse'n ever. "I should hope not!" says she. "How long must I wait here?"

"No longer'n you feel like waitin', ma'am," says I.

And just then the gym. door opens, and in walks the Bishop, that I'd clean forgot all about.

"Why, Bishop!" squeals Aunt Isabella. "You here!"

Say, it didn't need any second sight to see that the Bishop would have rather met 'most anybody else at that particular minute; but he hands her the neat return. "It appears that I am," says he. "And you?"

Well, it was up to her to do the explainin'. She gives him the whole history of Maggie Whaley, windin' up with how she's been last heard from at Coney Island.

"Isn't it dreadful, Bishop?" says she. "And can't you do something to help rescue her?"

Now I was lookin' for the Bishop to say somethin' soothin'; but hanged if he don't chime in and admit that it's a sad case and he'll do what he can to help. About then Swifty shows up with Dennis, and Aunt Isabella lays it before him. Now, accordin' to his own account, Dennis and Terence always had it in for each other at home, and he never took much stock in Maggie, either. But after he'd listened to Aunt Isabella for a few minutes, hearin' her talk about his duty to the girl, and how she ought to be yanked off the toboggan of sin, he takes it as serious as any of 'em.

"Wurrah, wurrah!" says he, "but this do be a black day for the Whaleys! It's the McGuigan blood comin' out in her. What's to be done, mum?"

Aunt Isabella has a program all mapped out. Her idea is to get up a rescue expedition on the

spot, and start for Coney. She says Dennis ought to go; for he's Maggie's uncle and has got some authority; and she wants the Bishop, to do any prayin' over her that may be needed.

"As for me," says she, "I shall do my best to persuade her to leave her wicked companions."

Well, they was all agreed, and ready to start, when it comes out that not one of the three has ever been to the island in their lives, and don't know how to get there. At that I sees the Bishop lookin' expectant at me.

"Shorty," says he, "I presume you are somewhat familiar with this—er—wicked resort?"

"Not the one you're talkin' about," says I. "I've been goin' to Coney every year since I was old enough to toddle; and I'll admit there has been seasons when some parts of it was kind of tough; but as a general proposition it never looked wicked to me."

That kind of puzzles the Bishop. He says he's always understood that the island was sort of a vent hole for the big sulphur works. Aunt Isabella is dead sure of it too, and hints that maybe I ain't much of a judge. Anyway, she thinks I'd be a good guide for a place of that kind, and prods the Bishop on to urge me to go.

"Well," says I, "just for a flier, I will."

So, as soon as I've changed my clothes, we starts for the iron steamboats, and plants ourselves on the upper deck. And say, we was a sporty lookin' bunch—I don't guess! There was the Bishop, in his little flat hat and white choker,—you couldn't mistake what he was,—and Aunt Isabella, with her grey hair and her grey and white costume, lookin' about as giddy as a marble angel on a tombstone. Then there's Dennis, who has put on the black whip cord Prince Albert he always wears when he's visitin' sick friends or attendin' funerals. The only festive lookin' point about him was the russet coloured throat hedge he wears in place of a necktie.

Honest, I felt sorry for them suds slingers that travels around the deck singin' out, "Who wants the waiter?" Every time one would come our way he'd get as far as "Who wants——" and then he'd switch off with an "Ah, chee!" and go away disgusted.

All the way down, the old girl has her eye out for wickedness. The sight of Adolph, the grocery clerk, dippin' his beak into a mug of froth, moves her to sit up and give him the stony glare; while a glimpse of a young couple snugglin' up against each other along the rail almost gives her a spasm.

"Such brazen depravity!" says she to the Bishop.

By the time we lands at the iron pier she has knocked Coney so much that I has worked up a first class grouch.

"Come on!" says I. "Let's have Maggie's address and get through with this rescue business before all you good folks is soggy with sin."

Then it turns out she ain't got any address at all. The most she knows is that Maggie's somewhere on the island.

"Well," I shouts into the tube, "Coney's something of a place, you see! What's your idea of findin' her?"

"We must search," says Aunt Isabella, prompt and decided.

"Mean to throw out a regular drag net?" says I.

She does. Well, say, if you've ever been to Coney on a good day, when there was from fifty to a hundred thousand folks circulatin' about, you've got some notion of what a proposition of that kind means. Course, I wa'n't goin to tackle the job with any hope of gettin' away with it; but right there I'm struck with a pleasin' thought.

"Do I gather that I'm to be the Commander Peary of this expedition?" says I.

It was a unanimous vote that I was.

"Well," says I, "you know you can't carry it through on hot air. It takes coin to get past the gates in this place."

Aunt Isabella says she's prepared to stand all the expense. And what do you suppose she passes out? A green five!

"Ah, say, this ain't any Sunday school excursion," says I. "Why, that wouldn't last us a block. Guess you'll have to dig deeper or call it off."

She was game, though. She brings up a couple of tens next dip, the Bishop adds two more, and I heaves in one on my own hook.

"Now understand," says I, "if I'm headin' this procession there mustn't be any hangin' back or arguin' about the course. Coney's no place for a quitter, and there's some queer corners in it; but we're lookin' for a particular party, so we can't skip any. Follow close, don't ask me fool questions, and everybody keep their eye skinned for Maggie. Is that clear?"

They said it was.

"Then we're off in a bunch. This way!" says I.

Say, it was almost too good to be true. I hadn't more'n got 'em inside of Dreamland before they has their mouths open and their eyes popped, and they was so rattled they didn't know whether they was goin' up or comin' down. The Bishop grabs me by the elbow, Aunt Isabella gets a desperate grip on his coat tails, and Dennis hooks two fingers into the back of her belt. When we lines up like that we has the fat woman takin' her first camel ride pushed behind the screen. The barkers out in front of the dime attractions takes one look at us and loses their voices for a whole minute—and it takes a good deal to choke up one of them human cyclones. I gives 'em back the merry grin and blazes ahead.

First thing I sees that looks good is the wiggle-waggle brass staircase, where half of the steps goes up as the other comes down.

"Now, altogether!" says I, feedin' the coupons to the ticket man, and I runs 'em up against the liver restorer at top speed. Say that exhibition must have done the rubbernecks good! First we was all jolted up in a heap, then we was strung out like a yard of frankfurters; but I kept 'em at it until we gets to the top. Aunt Isabella has lost her breath and her bonnet has slid over one ear, the Bishop is red in the face, and Dennis is puffin' like a freight engine.

"No Maggie here," says I. "We'll try somewhere else."

No. 2 on the event card was the water chutes, and while we was slidin' up on the escalator they has a chance to catch their wind. They didn't get any more'n they needed though; for just as Aunt Isabella has started to ask the platform man if he'd seen anything of Maggie Whaley, a boat comes up on the cogs, and I yells for 'em to jump in quick. The next thing they knew we was scootin' down that slide at the rate of a hundred miles an hour, with three of us holdin' onto our hats, and one lettin' out forty squeals to the minute.

"O-o-o o-o-o!" says Aunt Isabella, as we hits the water and does the bounding bounce.

"That's right," says I; "let 'em know you're here. It's the style."

Before they've recovered from the chute ride I've hustled 'em over to one of them scenic railroads, where you're yanked up feet first a hundred feet or so, and then shot down through painted canvas mountains for about a mile. Say, it was a hummer, too! I don't know what there is about travellin' fast; but it always warms up my blood, and about the third trip I feels like sendin' out yelps of joy.

Course, I didn't expect it would have any such effect on the Bishop; but as we went slammin' around a sharp corner I gets a look at his face. And would you believe it, he's wearin' a reg'lar breakfast food grin! Next plunge we take I hears a whoop from the back seat, and I knows that Dennis has caught it, too.

I was afraid maybe the old girl has fainted; but when we brings up at the bottom and I has a chance to turn around, I finds her still grippin' the car seat, her feet planted firm, and a kind of wild, reckless look in her eyes.

"We did that last lap a little rapid," says I. "Maybe we ought to cover the ground again, just to be sure we didn't miss Maggie. How about repeatin' eh?"

"I—I wouldn't mind," says she.

"Good!" says I. "Percy, send her off for another spiel."

And we encores the performance, with Dennis givin' the Donnybrook call, and the smile on the Bishop's face growin' wider and wider. Fun? I've done them same stunts with a gang of real sporting men, and, never had the half of it.

After that my crowd was ready for anything. They forgets all about the original proposition, and tackles anything I leads them up to, from bumpin' the bumps to ridin' down in the tubs on the tickler. When we'd got through with Dreamland and the Steeplechase, we wanders down the Bowery and hits up some hot dog and green corn rations.

By the time I gets ready to lead them across Surf-ave. to Luna Park it was dark, and about a million incandescents had been turned on. Well, you know the kind of picture they gets their first peep at. Course, it's nothin' but white stucco and gold leaf and electric light, with the blue sky beyond. But say, first glimpse you get, don't it knock your eye out?

"Whist!" says Dennis, gawpin' up at the front like lie meant to swallow it. "Is ut the Blessed Gates we're comin' to?"

"Magnificent!" says the Bishop.

And just then Aunt Isabella gives a gasp and sings out, "Maggie!"

Well, as Dennis says afterwards, in tellin' Mother Whaley about it, "Glory be, would yez think ut? I hears her spake thot name, and up I looks, and as I'm a breathin' man, there sits Maggie Whaley in a solid goold chariot all stuck with jools, her hair puffed out like a crown, and the very neck of her blazin' with pearls and di'monds. Maggie Whaley, mind ye, the own daughter of Terence, that's me brother; and her the boss of a place as big as the houses of parli'ment and finer than Windsor castle on the King's birthday!"

It was Maggie all right. She was sittin' in a chariot too—you've seen them fancy ticket booths they has down to Luna. And she has had her hair done up by an upholsterer, and put through a crimpin' machine. That and the Brazilian near-gem necklace she wears does give her a kind of a rich and fancy look, providin' you don't get too close.

She wasn't exactly bossin' the show. She was sellin' combination tickets, that let you in on so many rackets for a dollar. She'd chucked the laundry job for this, and she was lookin' like she was glad she'd made the shift. But here was four of us who'd come to rescue her and lead her back to the ironin' board.

Aunt Isabella makes the first break. She tells Maggie who she is and why she's come. "Margaret," says she, "I do hope you will consent to leave this wicked life. Please say you will, Margaret!"

"Ah, turn it off!" says Maggie. "Me back to the sweat box at eight per when I'm gettin' fourteen for this? Not on your ping pongs! Fade, Aunty, fade!"

Then the Bishop is pushed up to take his turn. He says he is glad to meet Maggie, and hopes she likes her new job. Maggie says she does. She lets out, too, that she's engaged to the gentleman what does a refined acrobatic specialty in the third attraction on the left, and that when they close in the fall he's goin' to coach her up so's they can do a double turn in the continuous houses next winter at from sixty to seventy-five per, each. So if she ever irons another shirt, it'll be just to show that she ain't proud.

And that's where the rescue expedition goes out of business with a low, hollow plunk. Among the three of 'em not one has a word left to say.

"Well, folks," says I, "what are we here for? Shall we finish the evenin' like we begun? We're only alive once, you know, and this is the only Coney there is. How about it?"

Did we? Inside of two minutes Maggie has sold us four entrance tickets, and we're headed for the biggest and wooziest thriller to be found in the lot.

"Shorty," says the Bishop, as we settles ourselves for a ride home on the last boat, "I trust I have done nothing unseemly this evening."

"What! You?" says I. "Why, Bishop, you're a reg'lar ripe old sport; and any time you feel like cuttin' loose again, with Aunt Isabella or without, just send in a call for me."

III

UP AGAINST BENTLEY

Say, where's Palopinto, anyway? Well neither did I. It's somewhere around Dallas, but that don't help me any. Texas, eh? You sure don't mean it! Why, I thought there wa'n't nothin' but one night stands down there. But this Palopinto ain't in that class at all. Not much! It's a real torrid proposition. No, I ain't been there; but I've been up against Bentley, who has.

He wa'n't mine, to begin with. I got him second hand. You see, he come along just as I was havin' a slack spell. Mr. Gordon—yes, Pyramid Gordon—he calls up on the 'phone and says he's in a hole. Seems he's got a nephew that's comin' on from somewhere out West to take a look at New York, and needs some one to keep him from fallin' off Brooklyn Bridge.

"How's he travellin'," says I; "tagged, in care of the conductor?"

"Oh, no," says Mr. Gordon. "He's about twenty-two, and able to take care of himself anywhere except in a city like this." Then he wants to know how I'm fixed for time.

"I got all there is on the clock," says I.

"And would you be willing to try keeping Bentley out of mischief until I get back?" says he.

"Sure as ever," says I. "I don't s'pose he's any holy terror; is he?"

Pyramid said he wa'n't quite so bad as that. He told me that Bentley'd been brought up on a big cattle ranch out there, and that now he was boss.

"He's been making a lot of money recently, too," says Mr. Gordon, "and he insists on a visit East. Probably he will want to let New York know that he has arrived, but you hold him down."

"Oh, I'll keep him from liftin' the lid, all right," says I.

"That's the idea, Shorty," says he. "I'll write a note telling him all about you, and giving him a few suggestions."

I had a synopsis of Bentley's time card, so as soon's he'd had a chance to open up his trunk and wash off some of the car dust I was waitin' at the desk in the Waldorf.

Now of course, bein' warned ahead, and hearin' about this cattle ranch business, I was lookin' for a husky boy in a six inch soft-brim and leather pants. I'd calculated on havin' to persuade him to take off his spurs and leave his guns with the clerk.

But what steps out of the elevator and answers to the name of Bentley is a Willie boy that might have blown in from Asbury Park or Far Rockaway. He was draped in a black and white checked suit that you could broil a steak on, with the trousers turned up so's to show the openwork silk socks, and the coat creased up the sides like it was made over a cracker box. His shirt was a MacGregor plaid, and the band around his Panama was a hand width Roman stripe.

"Gee!" thinks I, "if that's the way cow boys dress nowadays, no wonder there's scandals in the beef business!"

But if you could forget his clothes long enough to size up what was in 'em, you could see that Bentley was a mild enough looker. There's lots of bank messengers and brokers' clerks just like him comin' over from Brooklyn and Jersey every mornin'. He was about five feet eight, and skimpy built, and he had one of these recedin' faces that looked like it was tryin' to get away from his nose.

But then, it ain't always the handsome boys that behaves the best, and the more I got acquainted with Bentley, the better I thought of him. He said he was mighty glad I showed up instead of Mr. Gordon.

"Uncle Henry makes me weary," says he. "I've just been reading a letter from him, four pages, and most of it was telling me what not to do. And this the first time I was ever in New York since I've been old enough to remember!"

"You'd kind of planned to see things, eh?" says I.

"Why, yes," says Bentley. "There isn't much excitement out on the ranch, you know. Of course, we ride into Palopinto once or twice a month, and sometimes take a run up to Dallas; but that's not like getting to New York."

"No," says I. "I guess you're able to tell the difference between this burg and them places you mention, without lookin' twice. What is Dallas, a water tank stop?"

"It's a little bigger'n that," says he, kind of smilin'.

But he was a nice, quiet actin' youth; didn't talk loud, nor go through any tough motions. I see right off that I'd been handed the wrong set of specifications, and I didn't lose any time framin' him up accordin' to new lines. I knew his kind like a book. You could turn him loose in New York for a week, and the most desperate thing he'd find to do would be smokin' cigarettes on the back seat of a rubberneck waggon. And yet he'd come all the way from the jumpin' off place to have a little innocent fun.

"Uncle Henry wrote me," says he, "that while I'm here I'd better take in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and visit St. Patrick's Cathedral and Grant's Tomb. But say, I'd like something a little livelier than that, you know."

He was so mild about it that I works up enough sympathy to last an S. P. C. A. president a year. I could see just what he was achin' for. It wa'n't a sight of oil paintin's or churches. He wanted to be able to go back among the flannel shirts and tell the boys tales that would make their eyes stick out. He was ambitious to go on a regular cut up, but didn't know how, and wouldn't have had the nerve to tackle it alone if he had known.

Now, I ain't ever done any red light pilotin', and didn't have any notion of beginnin' then, especially with a youngster as nice and green as Bentley; but right there and then I did make up my mind that I'd steer him up against somethin' more excitin' than a front view of Grace Church at noon. It was comin' to him.

"See here, Bentley," says I, "I've passed my word to kind of look after you, and keep you from rippin' things up the back here in little old New York; but seein' as this is your first whack at it, if you'll promise to stop when I say 'Whoa!' and not let on about it afterwards to your Uncle Henry, I'll just show you a few things that they don't have out West," and I winks real mysterious.

"Oh, will you?" says Bentley. "By ginger! I'm your man!"

So we starts out lookin' for the menagerie. It was all I could do, though, to keep my eyes off'm that trousseau of his.

"They don't build clothes like them in Palopinto, do they?" says I.

"Oh, no," says Bentley. "I stopped off in Chicago and got this outfit. I told them I didn't care what it cost, but I wanted the latest."

"I guess you got it," says I. "That's what I'd call a night edition, base ball extra. You mustn't mind folks giraffin' at you. They always do that to strangers."

Bentley didn't mind. Fact is, there wa'n't much that did seem to faze him a whole lot. He'd never rode in the subway before, of course, but he went to readin' the soaps ads just as natural as if he lived in Harlem. I expect that was what egged me on to try and get a rise out of him. You see, when they come in from the rutabaga fields and the wheat orchards, we want 'em to open their mouths and gawp. If they do, we give 'em the laugh; but if they don't, we feel like they was throwin' down the place. So I lays out to astonish Bentley.

First I steers him across Mulberry Bend and into a Pell-st. chop suey joint that wouldn't be runnin' at all if it wa'n't for the Sagadahoc and Elmira folks the two dollar tourin' cars bring down. With all the Chinks gabblin' around outside, though, and the funny, letterin' on the bill of fare, I thought that would stun him some. He just looked around casual, though, and laid into his suey and rice like it was a plate of ham-and, not even askin' if he couldn't buy a pair of chopsticks as a souvenir.

"There's a bunch of desperate characters," says I, pointin' to a table where a gang of Park Row compositors was blowin' themselves to a platter of chow-ghi-sumen.

"Yes?" says he.

"There's Chuck Connors, and Mock Duck, and Bill the Brute, and One Eyed Mike!" I whispers.

"I'm glad I saw them," says Bentley.

"We'll take a sneak before the murderin' begins," say I. "Maybe you'll read about how many was killed, in the mornin' papers."

"I'll look for it," says he.

Say, it was discouragin'. We takes the L up to 23rd and goes across and up the east side of Madison Square.

"There," says I, pointin' out the Manhattan Club, that's about as lively as the Subtreasury on a Sunday, "that's Canfield's place. We'd go in and see 'em buck the tiger, only I got a tip that Bingham's goin' to pull it to-night. That youngster in the straw hat just goin' in is Reggie."

"Well, well!" says Bentley.

Oh, I sure did show Bentley a lot of sights that evenin', includin' a wild tour through the Tenderloin—in a Broadway car. We winds up at a roof garden, and, just to give Bentley an extra shiver, I asks the waiter if we wa'n't sittin' somewhere near the table that Harry and Evelyn had the night he was overcome by emotional insanity.

"You're at the very one, sir," he says. Considerin' we was ten blocks away, he was a knowin' waiter.

"This identical table; hear that, Bentley?" says I.

"You don't say!" says he.

"Let's have a bracer," says I. "Ever drink a soda cocktail, Bentley?"

He said he hadn't.

"Then bring us two, real stiff ones," says I. You know how they're made—a dash of bitters, a spoonful of bicarbonate, and a bottle of club soda, all stirred up in a tall glass, almost as intoxicatin' as buttermilk.

"Don't make your head dizzy, does it?" says I.

"A little," says Bentley; "but then, I'm not used to mixed drinks. We take root beer generally, when we're out on a tear."

"You cow boys must be a fierce lot when you're loose," says I.

Bentley grinned, kind of reminiscent. "We do raise the Old Harry once in awhile," says he. "The last time we went up to Dallas I drank three different kinds of soda water, and we guyed a tamale peddler so that a policeman had to speak to us."

Say! what do you think of that? Wouldn't that freeze your blood?

Once I got him started, Bentley told me a lot about life on the ranch; how they had to milk and curry down four thousand steers every night; and about their playin' checkers at the Y. M. C. A. branch evenin's, and throwin' spit balls at each other durin' mornin' prayers. I'd always thought these stage cow boys was all a pipe dream, but I never got next to the real thing before.

It was mighty interestin', the way he told it, too. They get prizes for bein' polite to each other durin' work hours, and medals for speakin' gentle to the cows. Bentley said he had four of them medals, but he hadn't worn 'em East for fear folks would think he was proud. That gave me a line on where he got his quiet ways from. It was the trainin' he got on the ranch. He said it was grand, too, when a crowd of the boys came ridin' home from town, sometimes as late as eleven o'clock at night, to hear 'em singin' "Onward, Christian Soldier" and tunes like that.

"I expect you do have a few real tough citizens out that way, though," says I.

"Yes," said he, speakin' sad and regretful, "once in awhile. There was one came up from Las Vegas last Spring, a low fellow that they called Santa Fe Bill. He tried to start a penny ante game, but we discouraged him."

"Run him off the reservation, eh?" says I.

"No," says Bentley, "we made him give up his ticket to our annual Sunday school picnic. He was never the same after that."

Well, say, I had it on the card to blow Bentley to a Welsh rabbit after the show, at some place where he could get a squint at a bunch of our night bloomin' summer girls, but I changed the program. I took him away durin' intermission, in time to dodge the new dancer that Broadway was tryin' hard to be shocked by, and after we'd had a plate of ice cream in one of them celluloid papered all-nights, I led Bentley back to the hotel and tipped a bell hop a quarter to tuck him in bed.

Somehow, I didn't feel just right about the way I'd been stringin' Bentley. I hadn't started out to do it, either; but he took things in so easy, and was so willin' to stand for anything, that I couldn't keep from it. And it did seem a shame that he must go back without any tall yarns to spring. Honest, I was so twisted up in my mind, thinkin' about Bentley, that I couldn't go to sleep, so I sat out on the front steps of the boardin' house for a couple of hours, chewin' it all over. I was just thinkin' of telephonin' to the hotel chaplain to call on Bentley in the mornin', when me friend Barney, the rounds, comes along.

"Say, Shorty," says he, "didn't I see you driftin' around town earlier in the evenin' with a young sport in mornin' glory clothes?"

"He was no sport," says I. "That was Bentley. He's a Y. M. C. A. lad in disguise."

"It's a grand disguise," says Barney. "Your quiet friend is sure livin' up to them clothes."

"You're kiddin'," says I. "It would take a live one to do credit to that harness. When I left Bentley at half-past ten he was in the elevator on his way up to bed."

"I don't want to meet any that's more alive than your Bentley," says he. "There must have been a hole in the roof. Anyway, he shows up on my beat about eleven, picks out a swell café, butts into a party of soubrettes, flashes a thousand dollar bill, and begins to buy wine for everyone in sight. Inside of half an hour he has one of his new made lady friends doin' a high kickin' act on the table, and when the manager interferes Bentley licks two waiters to a standstill and does up the house detective with a chair. Why, I has to get two of my men to help me gather him in. You can find him restin' around to the station house now."

"Barney," says I, "you must be gettin' colour blind. That can't be Bentley."

"You go around and take a look at him," says he.

Well, just to satisfy Barney, I did. And say, it was Bentley, all right! He was some mussed, but calm and contented.

"Bentley," says I, reprov'in' like, "you're a bird, you are! How did it happen? Did some one drug you?"

"Guess that ice cream must have gone to my head," says he, grinnin'.

"Come off!" says I. "I've had a report on you, and from what you've got aboard you ought to

be as full as a goat."

He wa'n't, though. He was as sober as me, and that after absorbin' a quart or so of French foam.

"If I can fix it so's to get you out on bail," says I, "will you quit this red paint business and be good?"

"G'wan!" says he. "I'd rather stay here than go around with you any more. You put me asleep, you do, and I can get all the sleep I want without a guide. Chase yourself!"

I was some sore on Bentley by that time; but I went to court the next mornin', when he paid his fine and was turned adrift. I starts in with some good advice, but Bentley shuts me off quick.

"Cut it out!" says he. "New York may seem like a hot place to Rubes like you; but you can take it from me that, for a pure joy producer, Palopinto has got it burned to a blister. Why, there's more doing on some of our back streets than you can show up on the whole length of Broadway. No more for me! I'm goin' back where I can spend my money and have my fun without bein' stopped and asked to settle before I've hardly got started."

He was dead in earnest, too. He'd got on a train headed West before I comes out of my dream. Then I begins to see a light. It was a good deal of a shock to me when it did come, but I has to own up that Bentley was a ringer. All that talk about mornin' prayers and Sunday school picnics was just dope, and while I was so busy dealin' out josh, to him, he was handin' me the lemon.

My mouth was still puckered and my teeth on edge, when Mr. Gordon gets me on the 'phone and wants to know how about Bentley.

"He's come and gone," says I.

"So soon?" says he. "I hope New York wasn't too much for him."

"Not at all," says I; "he was too much for New York. But while you was givin' him instructions, why didn't you tell him to make a noise like a hornet? It might have saved me from bein' stung."

Texas, eh? Well, say, next time I sees a map of that State I'm goin' to hunt up Palopinto and draw a ring around it with purple ink.

IV

THE TORTONIS' STAR ACT

What I was after was a souse in the Sound; but say, I never know just what's goin' to happen to me when I gets to roamin' around Westchester County!

I'd started out from Primrose Park to hoof it over to a little beach a ways down shore, when along comes Dominick with his blue dump cart. Now, Dominick's a friend of mine, and for a foreigner he's the most entertainin' cuss I ever met. I like talkin' with him. He can make the English language sound more like a lullaby than most of your high priced opera singers; and as for bein' cheerful, why, he's got a pair of eyes like sunny days.

Course, he wears rings in his ears, and likely a seven inch knife down the back of his neck. He ain't perfumed with violets either, when you get right close to; but the ash collectin' business don't call for *peau d'Espagne*, does it?

"Hallo!" says Dominick. "You lika ride?"

Well, I can't say I'm stuck on bein' bounced around in an ash chariot; but I knew Dominick meant well, so in I gets. We'd been joltin' along for about four blocks, swappin' pigeon toed conversation, when there shows up on the road behind us the fanciest rig I've seen outside of a circus. In front, hitched up tandem, was a couple of black and white patchwork ponies that looked like they'd broke out of a sportin' print. Say, with their shiny hoofs and yellor harness, it almost made your eyes ache to look at 'em. But the buggy was part of the picture, too. It was the dizziest ever—just a couple of upholstered settees, balanced back to back on a pair of rubber tired wheels, with the whole shootin' match, cushions and all, a blazin' turkey red.

On the nigh side was a coachman, with his bandy legs cased in white pants and yellor topped boots; and on the other—well, say! you talk about your polka dot symphonies! Them spots was as big as quarters, and those in the parasol matched the ones in her dress.

I'd been gawpin' at the outfit a couple of minutes before I could see anything but the dots, and then all of a sudden I tumbles that it's Sadie. She finds me about the same time, and jabs her sun shade into the small of the driver's back, to make him pull up. I tells Dominick to haul in, too, but his old skate is on his hind legs, with his ears pointed front, wakin' up for the first time in five years, so I has to drop out over the tail board.

"Well, what do you think of the rig?" says Sadie.

"I guess me and Dominick's old crow bait has about the same thoughts along that line," says I. "Can you blame us?"

"It is rather giddy, isn't it?" says she.

"Most gave me the blind staggers," says I. "You ought to distribute smoked glasses along the route of procession. Did you buy it some dark night, or was it made to order after somethin' you saw in a dream?"

"The idea!" says Sadie. "This jaunting car is one I had sent over from Paris, to help my ponies get a blue ribbon at the Hill'n'dale horse show. And that's what it did, too."

"Blue ribbon!" says I. "The judges must have been colour blind."

"Oh, I don't know," says Sadie, stickin' her tongue out at me. "After that I've a good notion to make you walk."

"I don't know as I'd have nerve enough to ride in that, anyway," says I. "Is it a funeral you're goin' to?"

"Next thing to it," says she. "But come on, Shorty; get aboard and I'll tell you all about it."

So I steps up alongside the spotted silk, and the driver lets the ponies loose. Say, it was like ridin' sideways in a roller coaster.

Sadie said she was awful glad to see me just then. She had a job on hand that she hated to do, and she needed some one to stand in her corner and cheer her up while she tackled it. Seems she'd got rash a few days before and made a promise to lug the Duke and Duchess of Kildee over to call on the Wigghorns. Sadie'd been actin' as sort of advance agent for Their Dukelets durin' their splurge over here, and Mrs. Wigghorn had mesmerised her into makin' a date for a call. This was the day.

It would have gone through all right if some one hadn't put the Duke wise to what he was up against. Maybe you know about the Wigghorns? Course, they've got the goods, for about a dozen years ago old Wigghorn choked a car patent out of some poor inventor, and his bank account's been pyramidin' so fast ever since that now he's in the eight figure class; but when it comes to bein' in the monkey dinner crowd, they ain't even counted as near-silks.

"Why," says Sadie, "I've heard that they have their champagne standing in rows on the sideboard, and that they serve charlotte russe for breakfast!"

"That's an awful thing to repeat," says I.

"Oh, well," says she, "Mrs. Wigghorn's a good natured soul, and I do think the Duke might have stood her for an afternoon. He wouldn't though, and now I've got to go there and call it off, just as she's got herself into her diamond stomacher, probably, to receive them."

"You couldn't ring in a couple of subs?" says I. For a minute Sadie's blue eyes lights up like I'd passed her a plate of peach ice cream. "If I only could!" says she. Then she shakes her head. "No," she says, "I should hate to lie. And, anyway, there's no one within reach who could play their parts."

"That bein' the case," says I, "it looks like you'd have to go ahead and break the sad news. What do you want me to do—hold a bucket for the tears?"

Sadie said all she expected of me was to help her forget it afterwards; so we rolls along towards Wigghorn Arms. We'd got within a mile of there when we meets a Greek peddler with a bunch of toy balloons on his shoulder, and in less'n no time at all them crazy-quilt ponies was tryin' to do back somersaults and other fool stunts. In the mix up one of 'em rips a shoe almost off, and Mr. Coachman says he'll have to chase back to a blacksmith shop and have it glued on.

"Oh, bother!" says Sadie. "Well, hurry up about it. We'll walk along as far as Apawattuck Inn and wait there."

It wa'n't much of a walk. The Apawattuck's a place where they deal out imitation shore dinners to trolley excursionists, and fusel oil high balls to the bubble trade. The name sounds well enough, but that ain't satisfyin' when you're real hungry. We were only killin' time, though, so it didn't matter. We strolled up just as fearless as though their clam chowders was fit to eat.

And that's what fetched us up against the Tortonis. They was well placed, at a corner veranda

table where no one could miss seein' 'em; and, as they'd just finished a plate of chicken salad and a pint of genuine San José claret, they was lookin' real comfortable and elegant.

Say, to see the droop eyed way they sized us up as we makes our entry, you'd think they was so tired doin' that sort of thing that life was hardly worth while. You'd never guess they'd been livin' in a hall bed room on crackers and bologna ever since the season closed, and that this was their first real feed of the summer, on the strength of just havin' been booked for fifty performances. He was wearin' one of them torrid suits you see in Max Blumstein's show window, with a rainbow band on his straw pancake, and one of these flannel collar shirts that you button under the chin with a brass safety pin. She was sportin' a Peter Pan peekaboo that would have made Comstock gasp. And neither of 'em had seen a pay day for the last two months.

But it was done good, though. They had the tray jugglers standin' around respectful, and the other guests wonderin' how two such real House of Mirthers should happen to stray in where the best dishes on the card wa'n't more'n sixty cents a double portion.

Course, I ain't never been real chummy with Tortoni—his boardin' house name's Skinny Welch, you know—but I've seen him knockin' around the Rialto off'n on for years; so, as I goes by to the next table, I lifts my lid and says, "Hello, Skin. How goes it?" Say, wa'n't that friendly enough? But what kind of a come back do I get? He just humps his eyebrows, as much as to say, "How bold some of these common folks is gettin' to be!" and then turns the other way. Sadie and I look at each other and swap grins.

"What happened?" says she.

"I had a fifteen cent lump of Hygeia passed to me," says I. "And with the ice trust still on top, I calls it extravagant."

"Who are the personages?" says she.

"Well, the last reports I had of 'em," says I, "they were the Tortonis, waitin' to do a parlour sketch on the bargain day matinée circuit; but from the looks now I guesses they're travellin' incog—for the afternoon, anyway."

"How lovely!" says Sadie.

Our seltzer lemonades come along just then, so there was business with the straws. I'd just fished out the last piece of pineapple when Jeems shows up on the drive with the spotted ponies and that side saddle cart. I gave Sadie the nudge to look at the Tortonis. They had their eyes glued to that outfit, like a couple of Hester-st. kids lookin' at a hoky poky waggon.

And it wa'n't no common "Oh, I wish I could swipe that" look, either. It was a heap deeper'n that. The whole get up, from the red wheels to the silver rosettes, must have hit 'em hard, for they held their breath most a minute, and never moved. The girl was the first to break away. She turns her face out towards the Sound and sighs. Say, it must be tough to have ambitions like that, and never get nearer to 'em than now and then a ten block hansom ride.

About then Jeems catches Sadie's eye, and salutes with the whip.

"Did you get it fixed?" says she.

He says it's all done like new.

Signor Tortoni hadn't been losin' a look nor a word, and the minute he ties us up to them speckled ponies he maps out a change of act. Before I could call the waiter and get my change, Tortoni was right on the ground.

"I beg pardon," says he, "but isn't this my old friend, Professor McCabe?"

"You've sure got a comin' memory, Skinny," says I.

"Why!" says he, gettin' a grip on my paw, "how stupid of me! Really, professor, you've grown so distinguished looking that I didn't place you at all. Why, this is a great pleasure, a very great pleasure, indeed!"

"Ye-e-es?" says I.

But say, I couldn't rub it in. He was so dead anxious to connect himself with that red cart before the crowd that I just let him spiel away. Inside of two minutes the honours had been done all around, and Sadie was bein' as nice to the girl as she knew how. And Sadie knows, though! She'd heard that sigh, Sadie had; and it didn't jar me a bit when she gives them the invite to take a little drive down the road with us.

Well, it was worth the money, just to watch Skinny judgin' up the house out of the corner of his eye. I'll bet there wa'n't one in the audience that he didn't know just how much of it they was takin' in; and by the easy way he leaned across the seat back and chinned to Sadie, as we got started, you'd thought he'd been brought up in one of them carts. The madam wa'n't any in the rear, either. She was just as much to home as if she'd been usin' up a green transfer across 34th.

If the style was new to her, or the motion gave her a tingly feelin' down her back, she never mentioned it.

They did lose their breath a few, though, when we struck Wiggorn Arms. It's a whackin' big place, all fenced in with fancy iron work and curlicue gates fourteen feet high.

"I've just got to run in a minute and say a word to Mrs. Wiggorn," says Sadie. "I hope you don't mind waiting?"

Oh no, they didn't. They said so in chorus, and as we looped the loop through the shrubbery and began to get glimpses of window awnings and tiled roof, I could tell by the way they acted that they'd just as soon wait inside as not.

Mrs. Wiggorn wasn't takin' any chances on havin' Their Dukelets drive up, leave their cards, and skidoo. She was right out front holdin' down a big porch rocker, with her eyes peeled up the drive. And she was costumed for the part. I don't know just what it was she had on, but I've seen plush parlour suits covered with stuff like that. She's a sizable old girl anyway, but in that rig, and with her store hair puffed out, she loomed up like a bale of hay in a door.

"Why, how do you do!" she squeals, makin' a swoop at Sadie as soon as the wheels stopped turnin'. "And you did bring them along, didn't you? Now don't say a word until I get Peter—he's just gone in to brush the cigar ashes off his vest. We want to be presented to the Duke and Duchess together, you know. Peter! Pe-ter!" she shouts, and in through the front door she waddles, yellin' for the old man.

And say, just by the look Sadie gave me I knew what was runnin' through her head.

"Shorty," says she, "I've a mind to do it."

"Flag it," says. "You ain't got time."

But there was no stoppin' her. "Listen," says she to the Tortonis. "Can't you play Duke and Duchess of Kildee for an hour or so?"

"What are the lines?" says Skinny.

"You've got to improvise as you go along," says she. "Can you do it?"

"It's a pipe for me," says he. "Flossy, do you come in on it?"

Did she? Why, Flossy was diggin' up her English accent while he was askin' the question, and by the time Mrs. Wiggorn got back, draggin' Peter by the lapel of his dress coat, the Tortonis was fairly oozin' aristocracy. It was "Chawmed, don'tcher know!" and "My word!" right along from the drop of the hat.

I didn't follow 'em inside, and was just as glad I didn't have to. Sittin' out there, expectin' to hear the lid blow off, made me nervous enough. I wasn't afraid either of 'em would go shy on front; but when I remembered Flossy's pencilled eyebrows, and Skinny's flannel collar, I says to myself, "That'll queer 'em as soon as they get in a good light and there's time for the details to soak in." And I didn't know what kind of trouble the Wiggorns might stir up for Sadie, when they found out how bad they'd been toasted.

It was half an hour before Sadie showed up again, and she was lookin' merry.

"What have they done with 'em," says I—"dropped 'em down the well?"

Sadie snickered as she climbed in and told Jeems to whip up the team. "Mr. and Mrs. Wiggorn," says she, "have persuaded the Duke and Duchess to spend the week's end at Wiggorn Arms."

"Gee!" says I. "Can they run the bluff that long?"

"It's running itself," says Sadie. "The Wiggorns are so overcome with the honour that they hardly know whether they're afoot or horseback; and as for your friends, they're more British than the real articles ever thought of being. I stayed until they'd looked through the suite of rooms they're to occupy, and when I left they were being towed out to the garage to pick out a touring car that suited them. They seemed already to be bored to death, too."

"Good!" say I. "Now maybe you'll take me over to the beach and let me get in a quarter's worth of swim."

"Can't you put it off, Shorty?" says she. "I want you to take the next train into town and do an errand for me. Go to the landlady at this number, East 15th-st., and tell her to send Mr. Tortoni's trunk by express."

Well, I did it. It took a ten to make the landlady loosen up on the wardrobe, too; but considerin' the solid joy I've had, thinkin' about Skinny and Flossy eatin' charlotte russe for breakfast, and all that, I guess I'm gettin' a lot for my money. It ain't every day you have a chance

to elevate a vaudeville team to the peerage.

V

PUTTING PINCKNEY ON THE JOB

Well, say, this is where we mark up one on Pinckney. And it's time too, for he's done the grin act at me so often he was comin' to think I was gettin' into the Slivers class. You know about Pinckney. He's the bubble on top of the glass, the snapper on the whip lash, the sunny spot at the club. He's about as serious as a kitten playin' with a string, and the cares on his mind weigh 'most as heavy as an extra rooster feather on a spring bonnet.

That's what comes of havin' a self raisin' income, a small list of relatives, and a moderate thirst. If anything bobs up that needs to be worried over—like whether he's got vests enough to last through a little trip to London and back, or whether he's doubled up on his dates—why, he just tells his man about it, and then forgets. For a trouble dodger he's got the little birds in the trees carryin' weight. Pinckney's liable to show up at the Studio here every day for a week, and then again I won't get a glimpse of him for a month. It's always safe to expect him when you see him, and it's a waste of time wonderin' what he'll be up to next. But one of the things I likes most about Pinckney is that he ain't livin' yesterday or to-morrow. It's always this A. M. with him, and the rest of the calendar takes care of itself.

So I wa'n't any surprised, as I was doin' a few laps on the avenue awhile back, to hear him give me the hail.

"Oh, I say, Shorty!" says he, wavin' his stick.

"Got anything on?"

"Nothin' but my clothes," says I.

"Good!" says he. "Come with me, then."

"Sure you know where you're goin'?" says I.

Oh, yes, he was—almost. It was some pier or other he was headed for, and he has the number wrote down on a card—if he could find the card. By luck he digs it up out of his cigarette case, where his man has put it on purpose, and then he proceeds to whistle up a cab. Say, if it wa'n't for them cabbies, I reckon Pinckney would take root somewhere.

"Meetin' some one, or seein' 'em off?" says I, as we climbs in.

"Hanged if I know yet," says Pinckney.

"Maybe it's you that's goin'?" says I.

"Oh, no," says he. "That is, I hadn't planned to, you know. And come to think of it, I believe I am to meet—er—Jack and Jill."

"Names sound kind of familiar," says I. "What's the breed?"

"What would be your guess?" says he.

"A pair of spotted ponies," says I.

"By Jove!" says he, "I hadn't thought of ponies."

"Say," says I, sizin' him up to see if he was handin' me a josh, "you don't mean to give out that you're lookin' for a brace of something to come in on the steamer, and don't know whether they'll be tame or wild, long haired or short, crated or live stock?"

"Live stock!" says he, beamin'. "That's exactly the word I have been trying to think of. That's what I shall ask for. Thanks, awfully, Shorty, for the hint."

"You're welcome," says I. "It looks like you need all the help along that line you can get. Do you remember if this pair was somethin' you sent for, or is it a birthday surprise?"

With that he unloads as much of the tale as he's accumulated up to date. Seems he'd just got a cablegram from some firm in London that signs themselves Tootle, Tupper & Tootle, sayin' that Jack and Jill would be on the *Lucania*, as per letter.

"And then you lost the letter?" says I.

No, he hadn't lost it, not that he knew of. He supposes that it's with the rest of last week's mail, that he hasn't looked over yet. The trouble was he'd been out of town, and hadn't been back more'n a day or so—and he could read letters when there wa'n't anything else to do. That's Pinckney, from the ground up.

"Why not go back and get the letter now?" says I. "Then you'll know all about Jack and Jill."

"Oh, bother!" says he. "That would spoil all the fun. Let's see what they're like first, and read about them afterwards."

"If it suits you," says I, "it's all the same to me. Only you won't know whether to send for a hostler or an animal trainer."

"Perhaps I'd better engage both," says Pinckney. If they'd been handy, he would have, too; but they wa'n't, so down we sails to the pier, where the folks was comin' ashore.

First thing Pinckney spies after we has rushed the gangplank is a gent with a healthy growth of underbrush on his face and a lot of gold on his sleeves. By the way they got together, I see that they was old friends.

"I hear you have something on board consigned to me, Captain?" says Pinckney. "Something in the way of live stock, eh?" and he pokes Cap in the ribs with his cane.

"Right you are," says Cappie, chucklin' through his whiskers. "And the liveliest kind of live stock we ever carried, sir."

Pinckney gives me the nudge, as much as to say he'd struck it first crack, and then he remarks, "Ah! And where are they now?"

"Why," says the Cap, "they were cruising around the promenade deck a minute ago; but, Lor' bless you, sir! there's no telling where they are now—up on the bridge, or down in the boiler room. They're a pair of colts, those two."

"Colts!" says Pinckney, gaspin'. "You mean ponies, don't you?"

"Well, well, ponies or colts, it's all one. They're lively enough for either, and—Heigho! Here they come, the rascals!"

There's whoop and a scamper, and along the deck rushes a couple of six- or seven-year old youngsters, that makes a dive for the Cap'n, catches him around either leg, and almost upsets him. They was twins, and it didn't need the kilt suits just alike and the hair boxed just the same to show it, either. They couldn't have been better matched if they'd been a pair of socks, and the faces of 'em was all grins and mischief. Say, anyone with a heart in him couldn't help takin' to kids like that, providin' they didn't take to him first.

"Here you are, sir," says the Cap'n,— "here's your Jack and Jill, and I wish you luck with them. It'll be a good month before I can get back discipline aboard; but I'm glad I had the bringing of 'em over. Here you are, you holy terrors,—here's the Uncle Pinckney you've been howling for!"

At that they let loose of the Cap, gives a war-whoop in chorus, and lands on Pinckney with a reg'lar flyin' tackle, both talkin' to once. Well say, he didn't know whether to holler for help or laugh. He just stands there and looks foolish, while one of 'em shins up and gets an overhand holt on his lilac necktie.

About then I notices some one bearin' down on us from the other side of the deck. She was one of these tall, straight, deep chested, wide eyed girls, built like the Goddess of Liberty, and with cheeks like a bunch of sweet peas. Say, she was all right, she was; and if it hadn't been for the Paris clothes she was wearin' home I could have made a guess whether she come from Denver, or Dallas, or St. Paul. Anyway, we don't raise many of that kind in New York. She has her eyes on the youngsters.

"Good-bye, Jack and Jill," says she, wavin' her hand at 'em.

But nobody gets past them kids as easy as that. They yells "Miss Gertrude!" at her like she was a mile off, and points to Pinckney, and inside of a minute they has towed 'em together, pushed 'em up against the rail, and is makin' 'em acquainted at the rate of a mile a minute.

"Pleased, I'm sure," says Miss Gerty. "Jack and Jill are great friends of mine. I suppose you are their Uncle Pinckney."

"I'm almost beginning to believe I am," says Pinckney.

"Why," says she, "aren't you——"

"Oh, that's my name," says he. "Only I didn't know that I was an uncle. Doubtless it's all right, though. I'll look it up."

With that she eyes him like she thought he was just out of the nut factory, and the more

Pinckney tries to explain, the worse he gets twisted. Finally he turns to the twins. "See here, youngsters," says he, "which one of you is Jack?"

"Me," says one of 'em. "I'se Jack."

"Well, Jack," says Pinckney, "what is your last name?"

"Anstruther," says the kid.

"The devil!" says Pinckney, before he could stop it. Then he begs pardon all around. "I see," says he. "I had almost forgotten about Jack Anstruther, though I shouldn't. So Jack is your papa, is he? And where is Jack now?"

Some one must have trained them to do it, for they gets their heads together, like they was goin' to sing a hymn, rolls up their eyes, and pipes out, "Our—papa—is—up—there."

"The deuce you say! I wouldn't have thought it!" gasps Pinckney. "No, no! I—I mean I hadn't heard of it."

It was a bad break, though; but the girl sees how cut up he is about it, and smooths everything out with a laugh.

"I fancy Jack and Jill know very little of such things," says she; "but they can tell you all about Marie."

"Marie's gone!" shouts the kids. "She says we drove her crazy."

That was the way the story come out, steady by jerks. The meat of it was that one of Pinckney's old chums had passed in somewhere abroad, and for some reason or other these twins of his had been shipped over to Pinckney in care of a French governess. Between not knowing how to herd a pair of lively ones like Jack and Jill, and her gettin' interested in a tall gent with a lovely black moustache, Marie had kind of shifted her job off onto the rest of the passengers, specially Gerty, and the minute the steamer touched the dock she had rolled her hoop.

"Pinckney," says I, "it's you to the bat."

He looks at the twins doubtful, then he squints at me, and next he looks at Miss Gertrude. "By Jove!" says he. "It appears that way, doesn't it? I wonder how long I am expected to keep them?"

The twins didn't know; I didn't; and neither does Gerty.

"I had planned to take a noon train west," says she; "but if you think I could help in getting Jack and Jill ashore, I'll stay over for a few hours."

"Will you?" says he. "That's ripping good of you. Really, you know, I never took care of twins before."

"How odd!" says she, tearin' off a little laugh that sounds as if it come out of a music box. "I suppose you will take them home?"

"Home!" says Pinckney. Say, you'd thought he never heard the word before. "Why—ah—er—I live at the club, you know."

"Oh," says she.

"Would a hotel do?" says Pinckney.

"You might try it," says she, throwin' me a look that was all twinkles.

Then we rounds up the kids' traps, sees to their baggage, and calls another cab. Pinckney and the girl takes Jill, I loads Jack in with me, and off we starts. It was a great ride. Ever try to answer all the questions a kid of that age can think up? Say, I was three behind and short of breath before we'd gone ten blocks.

"Is all this America?" says Mr. Jack, pointin' up Broadway.

"No, sonny," says I; "this is little old New York."

"Where's America, then?" says he.

"Around the edges," says I.

"I'm goin' to be president some day," says he. "Are you?"

"Not till Teddy lets go, anyway," says I.

"Who's Teddy?" says he.

"The man behind the stick," says I.

"I wish I had a stick," says Jack; "then I could whip the hossie. I wish I had suffin' to eat, too."

"I'd give a dollar if you had," says I.

It seems that Jill has been struck with the same idea, for pretty soon we comes together, and Pinckney shouts that we're all goin' to have lunch. Now, there's a lot of eatin' shops in this town; but I'll bet Pinckney couldn't name more'n four, to save his neck, and the Fifth-ave. joint he picks out was the one he's most used to.

It ain't what you'd call a fam'ly place. Mostly the people who hang out there belong to the Spender clan. It's where the thousand-dollar tenors, and the ex-steel presidents, and the pick of the pony ballet come for broiled birds and bottled bubbles. But that don't bother Pinckney a bit; so we blazes right in, kids and all. The head waiter most has a fit when he spots Pinckney towin' a twin with each hand; but he plants us at a round table in the middle of the room, turns on the electric light under the seashell shades, and passes out the food programs. I looks over the card; but as there wa'n't anything entered that I'd ever met before, I passes. Gerty, she takes a look around, and smiles. But the twins wa'n't a bit fazed.

"What will it be, youngsters?" says Pinckney.

"Jam," says they.

"Jam it is," says Pinckney, and orders a couple of jars.

"Don't you think they ought to have something besides sweets?" says Miss Gerty.

"Blessed if I know," says Pinckney, and he puts it up to the kids if there wa'n't anything else they'd like.

"Yep!" says they eagerly. "Pickles."

That's what they had too, jam and pickles, with a little bread on the side. Then, while we was finishin' off the grilled bones, or whatever it was Pinckney had guessed at, they slides out of their chairs and organises a game of tag. I've heard of a lot of queer doin's bein' pulled off in that partic'lar caffy, but I'll bet this was the first game of cross tag ever let loose there. It was a lively one, for the tables was most all filled, and the tray jugglers was skatin' around thick. That only made it all the more interestin' for the kids. Divin' between the legs of garçons loaded down with silver and china dishes was the best sport they'd struck in a month, and they just whooped it up.



THE TWINS ORGANIZE A GAME OF TAG

I could see the head waiter, standin' on tiptoes, watchin' 'em and holdin' his breath. Pinckney was beginnin' to look worried too, but Gerty was settin' there, as calm and smilin' as if they was playin' in a vacant lot. It was easy to see she wa'n't one of the worryin' kind.

"I wonder if I shouldn't stop them?" says Pinckney.

Before he's hardly got it out, there comes a bang and a smash, and a fat French waiter goes down with umpteen dollars' worth of fancy grub and dishes.

"Perhaps you'd better," says Gerty.

"Yes," says I, "some of them careless waiters might fall on one of 'em."

With that Pinckney starts after 'em, tall hat, cane, and all. The kids see him, and take it that he's joined the game.

"Oh, here's Uncle Pinckney!" they shouts. "You're it, Uncle Pinckney!" and off they goes.

That sets everybody roarin'—except Pinckney. He turns a nice shade of red, and gives it up. I guess they'd put the place all to the bad, if Miss Gerty hadn't stood up smilin' and held her hands out to them. They come to her like she'd pulled a string, and in a minute it was all over.

"Pinckney," says I, "you want to rehearse this uncle act some before you spring it on the public again."

"I wish I could get at that letter and find out how long this is going to last," says he, sighin' and moppin' his noble brow.

But if Pinckney was shy on time for letter readin' before, he had less of it now. The three of us put in the afternoon lookin' after that pair of kids, and we was all busy at that. Twice Miss Gerty started to break away and go for a train; but both times Pinckney sent me to call her back. Soon's she got on the scene everything was lovely.

Pinckney had picked out a suite of rooms at the Waldorf, and he thought as soon as he could get hold of a governess and a maid his troubles would be over. But it wa'n't so easy to pick up a pair of twin trainers. Three or four sets shows up; but when they starts to ask questions about who the twins belongs to, and who Pinckney was, and where Miss Gerty comes in, and what was I doin' there they gets a touch of pneumonia in the feet.

"I ain't casting any insinuations," says one; "but I never have been mixed up in a kidnapping case before, and I guess I won't begin now."

"The sassy thing!" says I, as she bangs the door.

Pinckney looks stunned; but Miss Gerty only laughs.

"Perhaps you'd better let me go out and find some one," says she. "And maybe I'll stay over for a day."

While she was gone Pinckney gets me to take a note up to his man, tellin' him to overhaul the mail and send all the London letters down. That took me less'n an hour, but when I gets back to the hotel I finds Pinckney with furrows in his brow, tryin' to make things right with the manager. He'd only left the twins locked up in the rooms for ten minutes or so, while he goes down for some cigarettes and the afternoon papers; but before he gets back they've rung up everything, from the hall maids to the fire department, run the bath tub over, and rigged the patent fire escapes out of the window.

"Was it you that was tellin' about not wantin' to miss any fun?" says I.

"Don't rub it in, Shorty," says he. "Did you get that blamed Tootle letter?"

He grabs it eager. "Now," says he, "we'll see who these youngsters are to be handed over to, and when."

The twins had got me harnessed up to a chair, and we was havin' an elegant time, when Pinckney gives a groan and hollers for me to come in and shut the door.

"Shorty," says he, "what do you think? There isn't anyone else. I've got to keep them."

Then he reads me the letter, which is from some English lawyers, sayin' that the late Mr. Anstruther, havin' no relations, has asked that his two children, Jack and Jill, should be sent over to his old and dear friend, Mr. Lionel Ogden Pinckney Bruce, with the request that he act as their guardian until they should come of age. The letter also says that there's a wad of money in the bank for expenses.

"And the deuce of it is, I can't refuse," says Pinckney. "Jack once did me a good turn that I can never forget."

"Well, this makes twice, then," says I. "But cheer up. For a bachelor, you're doin' well, ain't you? Now all you need is an account at the grocer's, and you're almost as good as a fam'ly man."

"But," says he, "I know nothing about bringing up children."

"Oh, you'll learn," says I. "You'll be manager of an orphan asylum yet."

It wa'n't until Miss Gerty shows up with a broad faced Swedish nurse that Pinckney gets his courage back. Gerty tells him he can take the night off, as she'll be on the job until mornin'; and

Pinckney says the thoughts of goin' back to the club never seemed quite so good to him as then.

"So long," says I; "but don't forget that you're an uncle."

I has a picture of Pinckney takin' them twins by the hand, about the second day, and headin' for some boardin' school or private home. I couldn't help thinkin' about what a shame it was goin' to be too, for they sure was a cute pair of youngsters—too cute to be farmed out reckless.

Course, though, I couldn't see Pinckney doin' anything else. Even if he was married to one of them lady nectarines in the crowd he travels with, and had a kid of his own, I guess it would be a case of mama and papa havin' to be introduced to little Gwendolyn every once in awhile by the head of the nursery department.

Oh, I has a real good time for a few days, stewin' over them kids, and wonderin' how they and Pinckney was comin' on. And then yesterday I runs across the whole bunch, Miss Gerty and all, paradin' down the avenue bound for a candy shop, the whole four of 'em as smilin' as if they was startin' on a picnic.

"Chee, Pinckney!" says I, "you look like you was pleased with the amateur uncle business."

"Why not?" says he. "You ought to see how glad those youngsters are to see me when I come in. And we have great sport."

"Hotel people still friendly?" says I.

"Why," says he, "I believe there have been a few complaints. But we'll soon be out of that. I've leased a country house for the summer, you know."

"A house!" says I. "You with a house! Who'll run it?"

"S-s-s-sh!" says he, pullin' me one side and talkin' into my ear. "I'm going West to-night, to bring on her mother, and——"

"Oh, I see," says I. "You're goin' to offer Gerty the job?"

Pinckney gets a colour on his cheek bones at that. "She's a charming girl, Shorty," says he.

"She's nothin' less," says I; "and them twins are all right too. But say, Pinckney, I'll bet you never meet a steamer again without knowin' all about why you're there. Eh?"

VI

THE SOARING OF THE SAGAWAS

Well, I've been doin' a little more circulatin' among the fat-wads. It's gettin' to be a reg'lar fad with me. And say, I used to think they was a simple lot; but I don't know as they're much worse than some others that ain't got so good an excuse.

I was sittin' on my front porch, at Primrose Park, when in rolls that big bubble of Sadie's, with her behind the plate glass and rubber.

"But I thought you was figurin' in that big house party out to Breeze Acres," says I, "where they've got a duchess on exhibition?"

"It's the duchess I'm running away from," says Sadie.

"You ain't gettin' stage fright this late in the game, are you?" says I.

"Hardly," says she. "I'm bored, though. The duchess is a frost. She talks of nothing but her girls' charity school and her complexion baths. Thirty of us have been shut up with her for three days now, and we know her by heart. Pinckney asked me to drop around and see if I could find you. He says he's played billiards and poker until he's lost all the friends he ever had, and that if he doesn't get some exercise soon he'll die of indigestion. Will you let me take you over for the night?"

Well, I've monkeyed with them swell house parties before, and generally I've dug up trouble at 'em; but for the sake of Pinckney's health I said I'd take another chance; so in I climbs, and we goes zippin' off through the mud. Sadie hadn't told me more'n half the cat-scraps the women had pulled off durin' them rainy days before we was 'most there.

Just as we slowed up to turn into the private road that leads up to Breeze Acres, one of them dinky little one-lunger benzine buggies comes along, missin' forty explosions to the minute and

coughin' itself to death on a grade you could hardly see. All of a sudden somethin' goes off. Bang! and the feller that was jugglin' the steerin' bar throws up both hands like he'd been shot with a ripe tomato.

"Caramba!" says he. "Likewise gadzooks!" as the antique quits movin' altogether.

I'd have known that lemon-coloured pair of lip whiskers anywhere. Leonidas Dodge has the only ones in captivity. I steps out of the show-case in time to see mister man lift off the front lid and shove his head into the works.

"Is the post mortem on?" says I.

"By the beard of the prophet!" says he, swingin' around, "Shorty McCabe!"

"Much obliged to meet you," says I, givin' him the grip. "The Electro-Polisho business must be boomin'," says I, "when you carry it around in a gasoline coach. But go on with your autopsy. Is it locomotor ataxia that ails the thing, or cirrhosis of the sparkin' plug?"

"It's nearer senile dementia," says he. "Gaze on that piece of mechanism, Shorty. There isn't another like it in the country."

"I can believe that," says I.

For an auto it was the punkiest ever. No two of the wheels was mates or the same size; the tires was bandaged like so many sore throats; the front dasher was wabbly; one of the side lamps was a tin stable lantern; and the seat was held on by a couple of cleats knocked off the end of a packing box.

"Looks like it had seen some first-aid repairin'," says I.

"Some!" says Leonidas. "Why, I've nailed this relic together at least twice a week for the last two months. I've used waggon bolts, nuts borrowed from wayside pumps, pieces of telephone wire, and horseshoe nails. Once I ran twenty miles with the sprocket chain tied up with twine. And yet they say that the age of miracles has passed! It would need a whole machine shop to get her going again," says he. "I'll await until my waggons come up, and then we'll get out the tow rope."

"Waggons!" says I. "You ain't travellin' with a retinue, are you?"

"That's the exact word for it," says he. And then Leonidas tells me about the Sagawa aggregation. Ever see one of these medicine shows? Well, that's what Leonidas had. He was sole proprietor and managing boss of the outfit.

"We carry eleven people, including drivers and canvas men," says he, "and we give a performance that the Proctor houses would charge seventy-five a head for. It's all for a dime, too—quarter for reserved—and our gentlemanly ushers offer the Sagawa for sale only between turns."

"You talk like a three-sheet poster," says I. "Where you headed for now?"

"We're making a hundred-mile jump up into the mill towns," says he, "and before we've worked up as far as Providence I expect we'll have to carry the receipts in kegs."

That was Leonidas, all over; seein' rainbows when other folks would be predictin' a Johnstown flood. Just about then, though, the bottom began to drop out of another cloud, so I lugged him over to the big bubble and put him inside.

"Sadie," says I, "I want you to know an old side pardner of mine. His name's Leonidas Dodge, or used to be, and there's nothing yellow about him but his hair."

And say, Sadie hadn't more'n heard about the Sagawa outfit than she begins to smile all over her face; so I guesses right off that she's got tangled up with some fool idea.

"It would be such a change from the duchess if we could get Mr. Dodge to stop over at Breeze Acres to-night and give his show," says Sadie.

"Madam," says Leonidas, "your wishes are my commands."

Sadie kept on grinnin' and plannin' out the program, while Leonidas passed out his high English as smooth as a demonstrator at a food show. Inside of ten minutes they has it all fixed. Then Sadie skips into the little gate cottage, where the timekeeper lives, and calls up Pinckney on the house 'phone. And say! what them two can't think of in the way of fool stunts no one else can.

By the time she'd got through, the Sagawa aggregation looms up on the road. There was two four-horse waggons. The front one had a tarpaulin top, and under cover was a bunch of the saddest lookin' actorines and specialty people you'd want to see. They didn't have life enough to look out when the driver pulled up. The second waggon carried the round top and poles.

"Your folks look as gay as a gang startin' off to do time on the island," says I.

"They're not as cheerful as they might be, that's a fact," says Leonidas.

It didn't take him long to put life into 'em, though. When he'd give off a few brisk orders they chirked up amazin'. They shed their rain coats for spangled jackets, hung out a lot of banners, and uncased a lot of pawnshop trombones and bass horns and such things. "All up for the grand street parade!" sings out Leonidas.

For an off-hand attempt, it wa'n't so slow. First comes Pinckney, ridin' a long-legged huntin' horse and keepin' the rain off his red coat with an umbrella. Then me and Sadie in her bubble, towin' the busted one-lunger behind. Leonidas was standin' up on the seat, wearin' his silk hat and handlin' a megaphone. Next came the band waggon, everybody armed with some kind of musical weapon, and tearin' the soul out of "The Merry Widow" waltz, in his own particular way. The pole waggon brings up the rear.

Pinckney must have spread the news well, for the whole crowd was out on the front veranda to see us go past. And say, when Leonidas sizes up the kind of folks that was givin' him the glad hand, he drops the imitation society talk that he likes to spout, and switches to straight Manhattanese.

"Well, well, well! Here we are!" he yells through the megaphone. "The only original Sagawa show on the road, remember! Come early, gents, and bring your lady friends. The doors of the big tent will open at eight o'clock—eight o'clock—and at eight-fifteen Mlle. Peroxide, the near queen of comedy, will cut loose on the coon songs."

"My word!" says the duchess, as she squints through her glasses at the aggregation.

But the rest of the guests was just ripe for something of the kind. Mrs. Curlew Brassett, who'd almost worried herself sick at seein' her party put on the blink by a shop-worn exhibit on the inside and rain on the out, told Pinckney he could have the medicine tent pitched in the middle of her Italian garden, if he wanted to. They didn't, though. They stuck up the round top on the lawn just in front of the stables, and they hadn't much more'n lit the gasolene flares before the folks begins to stroll out and hit up the ticket waggon.

"It's the first time I ever had the nerve to charge two dollars a throw for perches on the blue boards," says Leonidas; "but that friend of yours, Mr. Pinckney, wanted me to make it five."

Anyway, it was almost worth the money. Mlle. Peroxide, who did the high and lofty with a job lot of last year coon songs, owned a voice that would have had a Grand-st. banana huckster down and out; the monologue man was funny only when he didn't mean to be; and the black-face banjoist was the limit. Then there was a juggler, and Montana Kate, who wore buckskin leggins and did a fake rifle-shootin' act.

I tried to head Leonidas off from sendin' out his tent men, rigged up in red flannel coats, to sell bottled Sagawa; but he said Pinckney had told him to be sure and do it. They were birds, them "gentlemanly ushers."

"I'll bet I know where you picked up a lot of 'em," says I.

"Where?" says Leonidas.

"Off the benches in City Hall park," I says.

"All but one," says he, "and he had just graduated from Snake Hill. But you didn't take this for one of Frohman's road companies, did you?"

They unloaded the Sagawa, though. The audience wasn't missin' anything, and most everyone bought a bottle for a souvenir.

"It's the great Indian liver regulator and complexion beautifier," says Leonidas in his business talk. "It removes corns, takes the soreness out of stiff muscles, and restores the natural colour to grey hair. Also, ladies and gents, it can be used as a furniture polish, while a few drops in the bath is better than a week at Hot Springs."

He was right to home, Leonidas was, and it was a joy to see him. He'd got himself into a wrinkled dress suit, stuck an opera hat on the back of his head, and he jollied along that swell mob just as easy as if they'd been factory hands. And they all seemed glad they'd come. After it was over Pinckney says that it was too bad to keep such a good thing all to themselves, and he wants me to see if Leonidas wouldn't stay and give grand matinée performance next day.

"Tell him I'll guarantee him a full house," says Pinckney.

Course, Leonidas didn't need any coaxin'. "But I wish you'd find out if there isn't a butcher's shop handy," says he. "You see, we were up against it for a week or so, over in Jersey, and the rations ran kind of low. In fact, all we've had to live on for the last four days has been bean soup and pilot bread, and the artists are beginning to complain. Now that I've got a little real money, I'd like to buy a few pounds of steak. I reckon the aggregation would sleep better after a hot

supper."

I lays the case before Pinckney and Sadie, and they goes straight for Mrs. Brassett. And say! before eleven-thirty they had that whole outfit lined up in the main dinin'-room before such a feed as most of 'em hadn't ever dreamed about. There was everything, from chilled olives to hot squab, with a pint of fizz at every plate.

Right after breakfast Pinckney began warmin' the telephone wires, callin' up everyone he knew within fifteen miles. And he sure did a good job. While he was at that I strolls out to the tent to have a little chin with Leonidas, and I discovers him up to the neck in trouble. He was backed up against the centre pole, and in front of him was the whole actorette push, all jawin' at once, and raisin' seven different kinds of ructions.

"Excuse me for buttin' in," says I; "but I thought maybe this might be a happy family."

"It ought to be, but it ain't," says Leonidas. "Just listen to 'em."

And say, what kind of bats do you think had got into their belfries? Seems they'd heard about the two-dollar-a-head crowd that was comin' to the matinée. That, and bein' waited on by a butler at dinner the night before, had gone to the vacant spot where their brains ought to be. They were tellin' Leonidas that if they were goin' to play to Broadway prices they were goin' to give Broadway acts.

Mlle. Peroxide allowed that she would cut out the rag time and put in a few choice selections from grand opera. Montana Kate hears that, and sheds the buckskin leggins. No rifle shootin' for her; not much! She had Ophelia's lines down pat, and she meant to give 'em or die in the attempt. The black-face banjoist says he can impersonate Sir Henry Irving to the life; and the juggler guy wants to show 'em how he can eat up the Toreador song.

"These folks want somethin' high-toned," says Mlle. Peroxide, "and this is the chance of a lifetime for me to fill the bill. I'd been doin' grand opera long ago if it hadn't been for the trust."

"They told me at the dramatic school in Dubuque that I ought to stick to Shakespeare," says Montana Kate, "and here's where I get my hooks in."

"You talk to 'em, Shorty," says Leonidas; "I'm hoarse."

"Not me," says I. "I did think you was a real gent, but I've changed my mind, Mr. Dodge. Anyone who'll tie the can to high-class talent the way you're tryin' to do is nothin' less'n a fiend in human form."

"There, now!" says the blondine.

Leonidas chucks the sponge. "You win," says he, "I'll let you all take a stab at anything you please, even if it comes to recitin' 'Ostler Joe'; but I'll be blanked if I shut down on selling Sagawa!"

Two minutes later they were turnin' trunks upside down diggin' out costumes to fit. As soon as they began to rehearse, Leonidas goes outside and sits down behind the tent, holdin' his face in his hands, like he had the toothache.

"It makes me ashamed of my kind," says he. "Why, they're rocky enough for a third-rate waggon show, and I supposed they knew it; but I'll be hanged if every last one of 'em don't think they've got Sothern or Julia Marlowe tied in a knot. Shorty, it's human nature glimpses like this that makes bein' an optimist hard work."

"They're a bug-house bunch; all actors are," says I. "You can't change 'em, though."

"I wish I wasn't responsible for this lot," says he.

He was feelin' worse than ever when the matinée opens. It had stopped rainin' early in the mornin', and all the cottagers for miles around had come over to see what new doin's Pinckney had hatched up. There was almost a capacity house when Leonidas steps out on the stage to announce the first turn. I knew he had more green money in his clothes that minute than he'd handled in a month before, but he acted as sheepish as if he was goin' to strike 'em for a loan.

"I wish to call the attention of the audience," says he, "to a few changes of program. Mlle. Peroxide, who is billed to sing coon songs, will render by her own request the jewel song from 'Faust,' and two solos from 'Lucia di Lammermoor.'"

And say, she did it! Anyways, them was what she aimed at. For awhile the crowd held its breath, tryin' to believe it was only a freight engine whistlin' for brakes, or somethin' like that. Then they began to grin. Next some one touched off a giggle, and after that they roared until they were wipin' away the tears.

Leonidas don't look quite so glum when he comes out to present the reformed banjoist as Sir Henry Irving. He'd got his cue, all right, and he hands out a game of talk about delayed genius comin' to the front that tickled the folks clear through. The guy never seemed to drop that he was

bein' handed the lemon, and he done his worst.

I thought they'd used up all the laughs they had in 'em, but Montana Kate as Ophelia set 'em wild again. Maybe you've seen amateurs that was funny, but you never see anything to beat that combination. Amateurs are afraid to let themselves loose, but not that bunch. They were so sure of bein' the best that ever happened in their particular lines that they didn't even know the crowd was givin' 'em the ha-ha until they'd got through.

Anyway, as a rib tickler that show was all to the good. The folks nearly mobbed Pinckney, tellin' him what a case he was to think up such an exhibition, and he laid it all to Sadie and me.

Only the duchess didn't exactly seem to connect with the joke. She sat stolidly through the whole performance in a kind of a daze, and then afterwards she says: "It wasn't what I'd call really clever, you know; but, my word! the poor things tried hard enough."

Just before I starts for home I hunts up Leonidas. He was givin' orders to his boss canvasman when I found him, and feelin' the pulse of his one-lunger, that Mrs. Brassett's chauffeur had tinkered up.

"Well, Leonidas," says I, "are you goin' to put the Shakespeare-Sagawa combination on the ten-twenty-thirt circuit?"

"Not if I can prove an alibi," says he. "I've just paid a week's advance salary to that crowd of Melbas and Booths, and told 'em to go sign contracts with Frohman and Hammerstein. I may be running a medicine show, but I've got some professional pride left. Now I'm going back to New York and engage an educated pig and a troupe of trained dogs to fill out the season."

The last I saw of Montana Kate she was pacin' up and down the station platform, readin' a copy of "Romeo and Juliet." Ain't they the pippins, though?

VII

RINKEY AND THE PHONY LAMP

Say, for gettin' all the joy that's comin' to you, there's nothin' like bein' a mixer. The man who travels in one class all the time misses a lot. And I sure was mixin' it when I closes with Snick Butters and Sir Hunter Twiggle all in the same day.

Snick had first place on the card. He drifts into the Studio early in the forenoon, and when I sees the green patch over the left eye I knows what's comin'. He's shy of a lamp on that side, you know—uses the kind you buy at the store, when he's got it; and when he ain't got it, he wants money.

I s'pose if I was wise I'd scratched Snick off my list long ago; but knowin' him is one of the luxuries I've kept up. You know how it is with them old time friends you've kind of outgrown but hate to chuck in the discard, even when they work their touch as reg'lar as rent bills.

But Snick and me played on the same block when we was kids, and there was a time when I looked for Snick to be boostin' me, 'stead of me boostin' him. He's one of the near-smarts that you're always expectin' to make a record, but that never does. Bright lookin' boy, neat dresser, and all that, but never stickin' to one thing long enough to make good. You've seen 'em.

"Hello, Snick!" says I, as he levels the single barrel on me. "I see you've pulled down the shade again. What's happened to that memorial window of yours this time?"

"Same old thing," says he. "It's in at Simpson's for five, and a bookie's got the five."

"And now you want to negotiate a second mortgage, eh?" says I.

That was the case. He tells me his newest job is handlin' the josh horn on the front end of one of these Rube waggons, and just because the folks from Keokuk and Painted Post said that lookin' at the patch took their minds off seein' the skyscrapers, the boss told him he'd have to chuck it or get the run.

"He wouldn't come across with a five in advance, either," says Snick. "How's that for the granite heart?"

"It's like other tales of woe I've heard you tell," says I, "and generally they could be traced to your backin' three kings, or gettin' an inside tip on some beanery skate."

"That's right," says he, "but never again. I've quit the sportin' life for good. Just the same, if I

don't show up on the waggon for the 'leven o'clock trip I'll be turned loose. If you don't believe it Shorty, I'll—"

"Ah, don't go callin' any notary publics," says I. "Here's the V to take up that ticket. But say, Snick; how many times do I have to buy out that eye before I get an equity in it?"

"It's yours now; honest, it is," says he. "If you say so, I'll write out a bill of sale."

"No," says I, "your word goes. Do you pass it?"

He said he did.

"Thanks," says I. "I always have thought that was a fine eye, and I'm proud to own it. So long, Snick."

There's one good thing about Snick Butters; after he's made his touch he knows enough to fade; don't hang around and rub it in, or give you a chance to wish you hadn't been so easy. It's touch and go with him, and before I'd got out the last of my remarks he was on his way.

It wa'n't more'n half josh, though, that I was givin' him about that phony pane of his. It was a work of art, one of the bright blue kind. As a general thing you can always spot a bought eye as far as you can see it, they're so set and stary. But Snick got his when he was young and, bein' a cute kid, he had learned how to use it so well that most folks never knew the difference. He could do about everything but see with it.

First off he'd trained it to keep pace with the other, movin' 'em together, like they was natural; but whenever he wanted to he could make the glass one stand still and let the other roam around. He always did that on Friday afternoons when he got up to speak pieces in the grammar school. And it was no trick at all for him to look wall eyed one minute, cross eyed the next, and then straighten 'em out with a jerk of his head. Maybe if it hadn't been for that eye of Snick's I'd have got further'n the eighth grade.

His star performance, though, was when he did a jugglin' act keepin' three potatoes in the air. He'd follow the murphies with his good eye and turn the other one on the audience, and if you didn't know how it was done, it would give you the creeps up and down the back, just watchin' him.

Say, you'd thought a feller with talent like that would have made a name for himself, wouldn't you? Tryin' to be a sport was where Snick fell down, though. He had the blood, all right, but no head. Why when we used to play marbles for keeps, Snick would never know when to quit. He'd shoot away until he'd lost his last alley, and then he'd pry out that glass eye of his and chuck it in the ring for another go. Many a time Snick's gone home wearin' a striped chiny or a pink stony in place of the store eye, and then his old lady would chase around lookin' for the kid that had won it off'm him. There's such a thing as bein' too good a loser; but you could never make Snick see it.

Well, I'd marked up five to the bad on my books, and then Swifty Joe and me had worked an hour with a couple of rockin' chair commodores from the New York Yacht Club, gettin' 'em in shape to answer Lipton's batch of spring challenges, when Pinckney blows in, towin' a tubby, red faced party in a frock coat and a silk lid.

"Shorty," says he, "I want you to know Sir Hunter Twiggie. Sir Hunter, this is the Professor McCabe you've heard about."

"If you heard it from Pinckney," says I, "don't believe more'n half of it." With that we swaps the grip, and he says he's glad to meet up with me.

But say, he hadn't been in the shop two minutes 'fore I was next to the fact that he was another who'd had to mate up his lamps with a specimen from the glass counter.

"They must be runnin' in pairs," thinks I. "This'd be a good time to draw to three of a kind."

Course, I didn't mention it, but I couldn't keep from watchin' how awkward he handled his'n, compared to the smooth way Snick could do it. I guess Pinckney must have spotted me comin' the steady gaze, for pretty soon he gets me one side and whispers, "Don't appear to notice it."

"All right," says I; "I'll look at his feet."

"No, no," says Pinckney, "just pretend you haven't discovered it. He's very sensitive on the subject—thinks no one knows, and so on."

"But it's as plain as a gold tooth," says I.

"I know," says Pinckney; "but humour him. He's the right sort."

Pinckney wa'n't far off, either. For a gent that acted as though he'd been born wearin' a high collar and a shiny hat, Sir Twiggie wasn't so worse. Barrin' the stiffenin', which didn't wear off at all, he was a decent kind of a haitch eater. Bein' dignified was something he couldn't help. You'd never guessed, to look at him, that he'd ever been mixed up in anything livelier'n layin' a church

cornerstone, but it leaks out that he had been through all kinds of scraps in India, comes from the same stock as the old Marquis of Queensberry, and has followed the ring more or less himself.

"I had the doubtful honour," says he, bringin' both eyes into range on me, "of backing a certain Mr. Palmer, whom we sent over here several years ago after a belt."

"He got more'n one belt," says I.

"Quite so," says he, almost crackin' a smile; "one belt too many, I fancy."

Say, that was a real puncherino, eh? I ain't sure but what he got off more along the same line, for some of them British kind is hard to know unless you see 'em printed in the joke column. Anyway, we has quite a chin, and before he left we got real chummy.

He had a right to be feelin' gay, though; for he'd come over to marry a girl with more real estate deeds than you could pack in a trunk. Some kin of Pinckney's, this Miss Cornerlot was; a sort of faded flower that had hung too long on the stem. She'd run across Sir Hunter in London, him bein' a widower that was willin' to forget, and they'd made a go of it, nobody knew why. I judged that Pinckney was some relieved at the prospects of placin' a misfit. He'd laid out for a little dinner at the club, just to introduce Sir Hunter to his set and brace him up for bein' inspected by the girl's aunt and other relations at some swell doin's after.

I didn't pay much attention to their program at the time. It wa'n't any of my funeral who Pinckney married off his leftover second cousins to; and by evenin' I'd clean forgot all about Twiggle; when Pinckney 'phones he'd be obliged if I could step around to a Broadway hotel right off, as he's in trouble.

Pinckney meets me just inside the plate glass merry go round. "Something is the matter with Sir Hunter," says he, "and I can't find out from his fool man what it is."

"Before we gets any deeper let's clear the ground," says I. "When you left him, was he soused, or only damp around the edges?"

"Oh, it's not that at all," says Pinckney. "Sir Hunter is a gentleman—er, with a wonderful capacity."

"The Hippodrome tank's got that too," I says; "but there's enough fancy drinks mixed on Broadway every afternoon to run it over."

Sir Hunter has a set of rooms on the 'leventh floor. He wa'n't in sight, but we digs up Rinkey. By the looks, he'd just escaped from the chorus of a musical comedy, or else an Italian bakery. Near as I could make out he didn't have any proper clothes on at all, but was just done up in white buntin' that was wrapped and draped around him, like a parlour lamp on movin' day. The spots of him that you could see, around the back of his neck and the soles of his feet, was the colour of a twenty-cent maduro cigar. He was spread out on the rug with his heels toward us and his head on the sill of the door leadin' into the next room.

"Back up, Pinckney!" says I. "This must be a coloured prayer meetin' we're buttin' into."

"No, it's all right," says Pinckney. "That is Sir Hunter's man, Ringhi Singh."

"Sounds like a coon song," says I. "But he's no valet. He's a cook; can't you see by the cap?"

"That's a turban," says Pinckney. "Sir Hunter brought Ringhi from India, and he wears his native costume."

"Gee!" says I. "If that's his reg'lar get up, he's got Mark Twain's Phoebe Snow outfit beat a mile. But does Rinkey always rest on his face when he sits down?"

"It's that position which puzzles me," says Pinckney. "All I could get out of him was that Sahib Twiggle was in bed, and wouldn't see anyone."

"Oh, then the heathen is wise to United States talk, is he?" says I.

"He understands English, of course," says Pinckney, "but he declines to talk."

"That's easy fixed," says I, reachin' out and grabbin' Rinkey by the slack of his bloomers. "Maybe his conversation works is out of kink," and I up ends Rinkey into a chair.

"Be careful!" Pinckney sings out. "They're treachous chaps."

I had my eye peeled for cutlery, but he was the mildest choc'late cream you ever saw. He slumped there on the chair, shiverin' as if he had a chill comin' on, and rollin' his eyes like a cat in a fit. He was so scared he didn't know the day of the month from the time of night.

"Cheer up, Rinkey," says I, "and act sociable. Now tell the gentleman what's ailin' your boss."

It was like talkin' into a 'phone when the line's out of business. Rinkey goes on sendin' Morse

wireless with his teeth, and never unloosens a word.

"Look here, Br'er Singh," says I, "you ain't gettin' any third degree—yet! Cut out the ague act and give Mr. Pinckney the straight talk. He's got a date here and wants to know why the gate is up."

More silence from Rinkey.

"Oh, well," says I, "I expect it ain't etiquette to jump the outside guard; but if we're goin' to get next to Sir Hunter, it looks like we had to announce ourselves. Here goes!"

I starts for the inside door; but I hadn't got my knuckles on the panel before Rinkey was givin' me the knee tackle and splutterin' all kinds of language.

"Hey!" says I. "Got the cork out, have you?"

With that Rinkey gets up and beckons us over into the far corner.

"The lord sahib," says he, rollin' his eyes at the bed room door—"the lord sahib desire that none should come near. He is in great anger."

"What's he grouchy about?" says I.

"The lord sahib," says he, "will destroy to death poor Ringhi Singh if he reveals."

"Destroy to death is good," says I; "but it don't sound convincin'. I think we're bein' strung."

Pinckney has the same idea, so I gets a good grip on Rinkey's neck.

"Come off!" says I. "As a liar you're too ambitious. You tell us what's the matter with your boss, or I'll do things to you that'll make bein' destroyed to death seem like fallin' on a feather bed!"

And it come, quick. "Yes, sahib," says he. "It is that there has been lost beyond finding the lord sahib's glorious eye."

"Sizzlin' sisters! Another pane gone!" says I. "This must be my eye retrievin' day, for sure."

But Pinckney takes it mighty serious. He says that the dinner at the club don't count for so much, but that the other affair can't be sidetracked so easy. It seems that the girl has lived through one throw down, when the feller skipped off to Europe just as the tie-up was to be posted, and it wouldn't do to give her a second scare of the same kind.

Rinkey was mighty reluctant about goin' into details, but we gets it out of him by degrees that the lord sahib has a habit, when he's locked up alone, of unscrewin' the fake lamp and puttin' it away in a box full of cotton battin'.

"Always in great secret," says Rinkey; "for the lord sahib would not disclose. But I have seen, which was an evil thing—oh, very evil! To-night it was done as before; but when it was time for the return, alas! the box was down side up on the floor and the glorious eye was not anywhere. Search! We look into everything, under all things. Then comes a great rage on the lord sahib, and I be sore from it in many places."

"That accounts for your restin' on your face, eh?" says I. "Well, Pinckney, what now?"

"Why," says he, "we've simply got to get a substitute eye. I'll wait here while you go out and buy another."

"Say, Pinckney," I says, "if you was goin' down Broadway at eight-thirty P. M., shoppin' for glass eyes, where'd you hit first? Would you try a china store, Or a gent's furnishin's place?"

"Don't they have them at drug stores?" says Pinckney.

"I never seen any glass eye counters in the ones I go to," says I. And then, right in the midst of our battin' our heads, I comes to.

"Oh, splash!" says I. "Pinckney, if anyone asks you, don't let on what a hickory head I am. Why, I've got a glass eye that Sir Hunter can have the loan of over night, just as well as not."

"You!" says Pinckney, lookin' wild.

"Sure thing," says I. "It's a beaut, too. Can't a feller own a glass eye without wearin' it?"

"But where is it?" says Pinckney.

"It's with Snick Butters," says I. "He's usin' it, I expect. Fact is, it was built for Snick, but I hold a gilt edged first mortgage, and all I need to do to foreclose is say the word. Come on. Just as soon as we find Snick you can run back and fix up Sir Hunter as good as new."

"Do you think you can find him?" says Pinckney.

"We've got to find him," says I. "I'm gettin' interested in this game."

Snick was holdin' down a chair in the smokin' room at the Gilsey. He grins when he sees me, but when I puts it up to him about callin' in the loose lens for over night his jaw drops.

"Just my luck," says he. "Here I've got bill board seats for the Casino and was goin' to take the newsstand girl to the show as soon as she can get off."

"Sorry, Snick," says I, "but this is a desperate case. Won't she stand for the green curtain?"

"S-s-sh!" says he. "She don't know a thing about that. I'll have to call it off. Give me two minutes, will you?"

That was Snick, all over—losin' out just as easy as some folks wins. When he comes back, though, and I tells him what's doin', he says he'd like to know just where the lamp was goin', so he could be around after it in the mornin'.

"Sure," says I. "Bring it along up with you, then, there won't be any chance of our losin' it."

So all three of us goes back to the hotel. Pinckney wa'n't sayin' a word, actin' like he was kind of dazed, but watchin' Snick all the time. As we gets into the elevator, he pulls me by the sleeve and whispers:

"I say, Shorty, which one is it?"

"The south one," says I.

It wasn't till we got clear into Sir Hunter's reception room, under the light, that Pinckney heaves up something else.

"Oh, I say!" says he, starin' at Snick. "Beg pardon for mentioning it, but yours is a—er—you have blue eyes, haven't you, Mr. Butters?"

"That's right," says Snick.

"And Sir Hunter's are brown. It will never do," says he.

"Ah, what's the odds at night?" says I. "Maybe the girl's colour blind, anyway."

"No," says Pinckney, "Sir Hunter would never do it. Now, if you only knew of some one with a ___"

"I don't," says I. "Snick's the only glass eyed friend I got on my repertoire. It's either his or none. You send Rinkey in to ask Twiggle if a blue one won't do on a pinch."

Mr. Rinkey didn't like the sound of that program a bit, and he goes to clawin' around my knees, beggin' me not to send him in to the lord sahib.

"G'wan!" says I, pushin' him off. "You make me feel as if I was bein' measured for a pair of leggin's. Skiddo!"

As I gives him a shove my finger catches in the white stuff he has around his head, and it begins to unwind. I'd peeled off about a yard, when out rolls somethin' shiny that Snick spots and made a grab for.

"Hello!" says he. "What's this?"

It was the stray brown, all right. That Kipling coon has had it stowed away all the time. Well say, there was lively doin's in that room for the next few minutes; me tryin' to get a strangle hold on Rinkey, and him doin' his best to jump through a window, chairs bein' knocked over, Snick hoppin' around tryin' to help, and Pinckney explainin' to Sir Hunter through the keyhole what it was all about.

When it was through we held a court of inquiry. And what do you guess? That smoked Chinaman had swiped it on purpose, thinkin' if he wore it on the back of his head he could see behind him. Wouldn't that grind you?

But it all comes out happy. Sir Hunter was a little late for dinner, but he shows up two eyed before the girl, makes a hit with her folks, and has engaged Snick to give him private lessons on how to make a fake optic behave like the real goods.

VIII

PINCKNEY AND THE TWINS

Say, when it comes to gettin' himself tangled up in ways that nobody ever thought of before, you can play Pinckney clear across the board. But I never knew him to send out such a hard breathin' hurry call as the one I got the other day. It come first thing in the mornin' too, just about the time Pinckney used to be tearin' off the second coupon from the slumber card. I hadn't more'n got inside the Studio door before Swifty Joe says:

"Pinckney's been tryin' to get you on the wire."

"Gee!" says I, "he's stayin' up late last night! Did he leave the number?"

He had, and it was a sixty-cent long distance call; so the first play I makes when I rings up is to reverse the charge.

"That you, Shorty?" says he. "Then for goodness' sake come up here on the next train! Will you?"

"House afire, bone in your throat, or what?" says I.

"It's those twins," says he.

"Bad as that?" says I. "Then I'll come."

Wa'n't I tellin' you about the pair of mated orphans that was shipped over to him unexpected; and how Miss Gertie, the Western blush rose that was on the steamer with 'em, helps him out? Well, the last I hears, Pinckney is gone on Miss Gertie and gettin' farther from sight every minute. He's planned it out to have the knot tied right away, hire a furnished cottage for the summer, and put in the honeymoon gettin' acquainted with the ready made family that they starts in with. Great scheme! Suits Pinckney right down to the ground, because it's different. He begins by accumulatin' a pair of twins, next he finds a girl and then he thinks about gettin' married. By the way he talked, I thought it was all settled; but hearin' this whoop for help I suspicioned there must be some hitch.

There wa'n't any carnation in his buttonhole when he meets me at the station; he hasn't shaved since the day before; and there's trouble tracks on his brow.

"Can't you stand married life better'n this?" says I.

"Married!" says he. "No such luck. I never expect to be married, Shorty; I'm not fit."

"Is this a decision that was handed you, or was it somethin' you found out for yourself?" says I.

"It's my own discovery," says he.

"Then there's hope," says I. "So the twins have been gettin' you worried, eh? Where's Miss Gertie?"

That gives Pinckney the hard luck cue, and while we jogs along towards his new place in the tub cart he tells me all about what's been happenin'. First off he owns up that he's queered his good start with Miss Gertie by bein' in such a rush to flash the solitaire spark on her. She ain't used to Pinckney's jumpy ways. They hadn't been acquainted much more'n a week, and he hadn't gone through any of the prelim's, when he ups and asks her what day it will be and whether she chooses church or parsonage. Course she shies at that, and the next thing Pinckney knows she's taken a train West, leavin' him with the twins on his hands, and a nice little note sayin' that while she appreciates the honour she's afraid he won't do.

"And you're left at the post?" says I.

"Yes," says he. "I couldn't take the twins and follow her, but I could telegraph. My first message read like this, 'What's the matter with me?' Here is her answer to that," and he digs up a yellow envelope from his inside pocket.

"Not domestic enough. G." It was short and crisp.

He couldn't give me his come back to that, for he said it covered three blanks; but it was meant to be an ironclad affidavit that he could be just as domestic as the next man, if he only had a chance.

"And then?" says I.

"Read it," says he, handin' over Exhibit Two.

"You have the chance now," it says. "Manage the twins for a month, and I will believe you."

And that was as far as he could get. Now, first and last, I guess there's been dozens of girls, not countin' all kinds of widows, that's had their lassoes out for Pinckney. He's been more or less interested in some; but when he really runs across one that's worth taggin' she does the sudden duck and runs him up against a game like this.

"And you're tryin' to make good, eh?" says I. "What's your program?"

For Pinckney, he hadn't done so worse. First he hunts up the only aunt he's got on his list. She's a wide, heavy weight old girl, that's lost or mislaid a couple of husbands, but hasn't ever had any kids of her own, and puts in her time goin' to Europe and comin' back. She was just havin' the trunks checked for Switzerland when Pinckney locates her and tells how glad he is to see her again. Didn't she want to change her plans and stay a month or so with him and the twins at some nice place up in Westchester? One glimpse of Jack and Jill with their comp'ny manners on wins her. Sure, she will!

So it's tip to Pinckney to hire a happy home for the summer, all found. Got any idea of how he tackles a job like that? Most folks would take a week off and do a lot of travelling sizin' up different joints. They'd want to know how many bath rooms, if there was malaria, and all about the plumbin', and what the neighbours was like. But livin' at the club don't put you wise to them tricks. Pinckney, he just rings up a real estate agent, gets him to read off a list, says, "I'll take No. 3," and it's all over. Next day they move out.

Was he stung? Well, not so bad as you'd think. Course, he's stuck about two prices for rent, and he signs a lease without readin' farther than the "Whereas"; but, barrin' a few things like haircloth furniture and rooms that have been shut up so long they smell like the subcellars in a brewery, he says the ranch wa'n't so bad. The outdoors was good, anyway. There was lots of it, acres and acres, with trees, and flower gardens, and walks, and fish ponds, and everything you could want for a pair of youngsters that needed room. I could see that myself.

"Say, Pinckney," says I, as we drives in through the grounds, "if you can't get along with Jack and Jill in a place of this kind you'd better give up. Why, all you got to do is to turn 'em loose."

"Wait!" says he. "You haven't heard it all."

"Let it come, then," says I.

"We will look at the house first," says he.

The kids wa'n't anywhere in sight; so we starts right in on the tour of inspection. It was a big, old, slate roofed barracks, with jigsaw work on the eaves, and a lot of dinky towers frescoed with lightnin' rods. There was furniture to match, mostly the marble topped, black walnut kind, that was real stylish back in the '70's.

In the hall we runs across Snivens. He was the butler; but you wouldn't guess it unless you was told. Kind of a cross between a horse doctor and a missionary, I should call him—one of these short legged, barrel podded gents, with a pair of white wind harps fram'in' up a putty coloured face that was ornamented with a set of the solemnest lookin' lamps you ever saw off a stuffed owl.

"Gee, Pinckney!" says I, "who unloaded that on you!"

"Snivens came with the place," says he.

"He looks it," says I. "I should think that face would sour milk. Don't he scare the twins?"

"Frighten Jack and Jill?" says Pinckney. "Not if he had horns and a tail! They seem to take him as a joke. But he does make all the rest of us feel creepy."

"Why don't you write him his release?" says I.

"Can't," says Pinckney. "He is one of the conditions in the contract—he and the urns."

"The urns?" says I.

"Yes," says Pinckney, sighin' deep. "We are coming to them now. There they are."

With that we steps into one of the front rooms, and he lines me up before a white marble mantel that is just as cheerful and tasty as some of them pieces in Greenwood Cemetery. On either end was what looks to be a bronze flower pot.

"To your right," says Pinckney, "is Grandfather; to your left, Aunt Sabina."

"What's the josh?" says I.

"Shorty," says he, heavin' up another sigh, "you are now in the presence of sacred dust. These urns contain the sad fragments of two great Van Rusters."

"Fragments is good," says I. "Couldn't find many to keep, could they? Did they go up with a

powder mill, or fall into a stone crusher?"

"Cremated," says Pinckney.

Then I gets the whole story of the two old maids that Pinckney rented the place from. They were the last of the clan. In their day the Van Rusters had headed the Westchester battin' list, ownin' about half the county and gettin' their names in the paper reg'lar. But they'd been peterin' out for the last hundred years or so, and when it got down to the Misses Van Rusters, a pair of thin edged, old battle axes that had never wore anything but crape and jet bonnets, there wa'n't much left of the estate except the mortgages and the urns.

Rentin' the place furnished was the last card in the box, and Pinckney turns up as the willin' victim. When he comes to size up what he's drawn, and has read over the lease, he finds he's put his name to a lot he didn't dream about. Keepin' Snivens on the pay roll, promisin' not to disturb the urns, usin' the furniture careful, and havin' the grass cut in the private buryin' lot was only a few that he could think of off hand.

"You ain't a tenant, Pinckney," says I; "you're a philanthropist."

"I feel that way," says he. "At first, I didn't know which was worse, Snivens or the urns. But I know now—it is the urns. They are driving me to distraction."

"Ah, do a lap!" says I. "Course, I give in that there might be better parlour ornaments than potted ancestors, specially when they belong to someone else; but they don't come extra, do they? I thought it was the twins that was worryin' you?"

"That is where the urns come in," says he. "Here the youngsters are now. Step back in here and watch."

He pulls me into the next room, where we could see through the draperies. There's a whoop and a hurrah outside, the door bangs, and in tumbles the kids, with a nurse taggin' on behind. The youngsters makes a bee line for the mantelpiece and sings out:

"Hello, Grandfather! Hello, Aunt Sabina! Look what we brought this time!"

"Stop it! Stop it!" says the nurse, her eyes buggin' out.

"Boo! Fraid cat!" yells the twins, and nursy skips. Then they begins to unload the stuff they've lugged in, pilin' it up alongside the urns, singin' out like auctioneers, "There's some daisies for Aunt Sabina! And wild strawberries for Grandfather! And a mud turtle for aunty! And a bird's nest for Grandfather!" windin' up the performance by joinin' hands and goin' through a reg'lar war dance.

Pinckney explains how this was only a sample of what had been goin' on ever since they heard Snivens tellin' what was in the urns. They'd stood by, listenin' with their mouths and ears wide open, and then they'd asked questions until everyone was wore out tryin' to answer 'em. But the real woe came when the yarn got around among the servants and they begun leavin' faster'n Pinckney's Aunt Mary could send out new ones from town.

"Maybe the kids'll get tired of it in a few days," says I.

"Exactly what I thought," says Pinckney; "but they don't. It's the best game they can think of, and if I allow them they will stay in here by the hour, cutting up for the benefit of Grandfather and Aunt Sabina. It's morbid. It gets on one's nerves. My aunt says she can't stand it much longer, and if she goes I shall have to break up. If you're a friend of mine, Shorty, you'll think of some way to get those youngsters interested in something else."

"Why don't you buy 'em a pony cart?" says I.

"I've bought two," says he; "and games and candy, and parrots and mechanical toys enough to stock a store. Still they keep this thing up."

"And if you quit the domestic game, the kids have to go to some home, and you go back to the club?" says I.

"That's it," says he.

"And when Miss Gertie comes on, and finds you've renigged, it's all up between you and her, eh?" says I.

Pinckney groans.

"G'wan!" says I. "Go take a sleep."

With that I steps in and shows myself to the kids. They yells and makes a dash for me. Inside of two minutes I've been introduced to Grandfather and Aunt Sabina, made to do a duck before both jars, and am planted on the haircloth sofa with a kid holdin' either arm, while they puts me through the third degree. They want information.

"Did you ever see folks burned and put in jars?" says Jack.

"No," says I; "but I've seen pickled ones jugged. I hear you've got some ponies."

"Two," says Jill; "spotted ones. Would you want to be burned after you was a deader?"

"Better after than before," says I. "Where's the ponies now?"

"What do the ashes look like?" says Jack.

"Are there any clinkers?" says Jill.

Say, I was down and out in the first round. For every word I could get in about ponies they got in ten about them bloomin' jars, and when I leaves 'em they was organisin' a circus, with Grandfather and Aunt Sabina supposed to be occupyin' the reserved seats. Honest, it was enough to chill the spine of a morgue keeper. By good luck I runs across Snivens snoopin' through the hall.

"See here, you!" says I. "I want to talk to you."

"Beg pardon, sir," says he, backin' off, real stiff and dignified; "but——"

"Ah, chuck it!" says I, reachin' out and gettin' hold of his collar, playful like. "You've been listenin' at the door. Now what do you think of the way them kids is carryin' on in there?"

"It's outrageous, sir!" says he, puffin' up his cheeks, "It's scandalous! They're young imps, so they are, sir."

"Want to stop all that nonsense?" says I.

He says he does.

"Then," says I, "you take them jars down cellar and hide 'em in the coal bin."

He holds up both hands at that. "It can't be done, sir," says he. "They've been right there for twenty years without bein' so much as moved. They were very superior folks, sir, very superior."

"Couldn't you put 'em in the attic, then?" says I.

He couldn't. He says it's in the lease that the jars wa'n't to be touched.

"Snivens," says I, shovin' a twenty at him, "forget the lease."

Say, he looks at that yellowback as longin' as an East Side kid sizin' up a fruit cart. Then he gives a shiver and shakes his head. "Not for a thousand, sir," says he. "I wouldn't dare."

"You're an old billygoat, Snivens," says I.

And that's all the good I did with my little whirl at the game; but I tries to cheer Pinckney up by tellin' him the kids wa'n't doin' any harm.

"But they are," says Pinckney. "They're raising the very mischief with my plans. The maids are scared to death. They say the house is haunted. Four of them gave notice to-day. Aunt Mary is packing her trunks, and that means that I might as well give up. I'll inquire about a home to send them to this afternoon."

I guess it was about four o'clock, and I was tryin' to take a snooze in a hammock on the front porch, when I hears the twins makin' life miserable for the gard'ner that was fixin' the rose bushes.

"Lemme dig, Pat," says Jill.

"G'wan, ye young tarrier!" says Pat

"Can't I help some?" says Jack.

"Yes, if ye'll go off about a mile," says Pat.

"Why don't the roses grow any more?" asks Jill.

"It's needin' ashes on 'em they are," says Pat.

"Ashes!" says Jack.

"Ashes!" says Jill.

Then together, "Oh, we know where there's ashes—lots!"

"We'll fetch 'em!" says Jill, and with that I hears a scamperin' up the steps.

I was just gettin' up to chase after 'em, when I has another thought. "What's the use, anyway?" thinks I. "It's their last stunt." So I turns over and pretends to snooze.

When Pinckney shows up about six the twins has the pony carts out and is doin' a chariot race around the drive, as happy and innocent as a couple of pink angels. Then they eats their supper and goes to bed, with nary a mention of sayin' good-night to the jars, like they'd been in the habit of doin'. Next mornin' they gets up as frisky as colts and goes out to play wild Indians in the bushes. They was at it all the forenoon, and never a word about Grandfather and Aunt Sabina. Pinckney notices it, but he don't dare speak of it for fear he'll break the spell. About two he comes in with a telegram.

"Miss Gertie's coming on the four o'clock train," says he, lookin' wild.

"You don't act like you was much tickled," says I.

"She's sure to find out what a muss I've made of things," says he. "The moment she gets here I expect the twins will start up that confounded rigmarole about Grandfather and Aunt Sabina again. Oh, I can hear them doing it!"

I let it go at that. But while he's away at the station the kitchen talk breaks loose. The cook and two maids calls for Aunt Mary, tells her what they think of a place that has canned spooks in the parlour, and starts for the trolley. Aunt Mary gets her bonnet on and has her trunks lugged down on the front porch. That's the kind of a reception we has for Miss Gertrude and her mother when they show up.

"Anything particular the matter?" whispers Pinckney to me, as he hands the guests out of the carriage.

"Nothin' much," says I. "Me and Snivens and the twins is left. The others have gone or are goin'."

"What is the matter?" says Miss Gertie.

"Everything," says Pinckney. "I've made a flat failure. Shorty, you bring in the twins and we'll end this thing right now."

Well, I rounds up Jack and Jill, and after they've hugged Miss Gertie until her travelin' dress is fixed for a week at the cleaners', Pinckney leads us all into the front room. The urns was there on the mantel; but the kids don't even give 'em a look.

"Come on, you young rascals!" says he, as desperate as if he was pleadin' guilty to blowin' up a safe. "Tell Miss Gertrude about Grandfather and Aunt Sabina."

"Oh," says Jack, "they're out in the flower bed."

"We fed 'em to the rose bushes," says Jill.

"We didn't like to lose 'em," says Jack; "but Pat needed the ashes."

"It's straight goods," says I; "I was there."

And say, when Miss Gertrude hears the whole yarn about the urns, and the trouble they've made Pinckney, she stops laughin' and holds out one hand to him over Jill's shoulder.

"You poor boy!" says she. "Didn't you ever read Omar's—

"I sometimes think that never blows so red
The rose, as where some buried Cæsar bled?"

Say, who was this duck Omar? And what's that got to do with fertilisin' flower beds with the pulverised relations of your landladies? I give it up. All I know is that Pinckney's had them jars refilled with A-1 wood ashes, that Aunt Mary managed to 'phone up a new set of help before mornin', and that when I left Pinckney and Miss Gertie and the twins was' strollin' about, holdin' hands and lookin' to be havin' the time of their lives.

Domestic? Say, a clear Havana Punko, made in Connecticut, ain't in it with him.

IX

A LINE ON PEACOCK ALLEY

What's the use of travelin', when there's more fun stayin' home? Scenery? Say, the scenery

that suits me best is the kind they keep lit up all night. There's a lot of it between 14th-st. and the park. Folks? Why, you stand on the corner of 42d and Broadway long enough and you won't miss seein' many of 'em. They most all get here sooner or later.

Now, look at what happens last evenin'. I was just leanin' up against the street door, real comfortable and satisfied after a good dinner, when Swifty Joe comes down from the Studio and says there's a party by the name of Merrity been callin' me up on the 'phone.

"Merrity?" says I. "That sounds kind of joyous and familiar. Didn't he give any letters for the front of it?"

"Nothin' but Hank," says Swifty.

"Oh, yes," says I, gettin' the clue. "What did Hank have to say?"

"Said he was a friend of yours, and if you didn't have nothin' better on the hook he'd like to see you around the Wisteria," says Swifty.

With that I lets loose a snicker. Honest, I couldn't help it.

"Ah, chee!" says Swifty. "Is it a string, or not? I might get a laugh out of this myself."

"Yes, and then again you mightn't," says I. "Maybe it'd bring on nothin' but a brain storm. You wait until I find out if it's safe to tell you."

With that I starts down towards 34th-st to see if it was really so about Hank Merrity; for the last glimpse I got of him he was out in Colorado, wearin' spurs and fringed buckskin pants, and lookin' to be as much of a fixture there as Pike's Peak.

It was while I was trainin' for one of my big matches, that I met up with Hank. We'd picked out Bedelia for a camp. You've heard of Bedelia? No? Then you ought to study the map. Anyway, if you'd been followin' the sportin' news reg'lar a few years back, you'd remember. There was a few days about that time when more press despatches was filed from Bedelia than from Washington. And the pictures that was sent east; "Shorty Ropin' Steers"—"Mr. McCabe Swingin' a Bronco by the Tail," and all such truck. You know the kind of stuff them newspaper artists strains their imaginations on.

Course, I was too busy to bother about what they did to me, and didn't care, anyway. But it was different with Hank. Oh, they got him too! You see, he had a ranch about four miles north of our camp, and one of my reg'lar forenoon stunts was to gallop up there, take a big swig of mountain spring water—better'n anything you can buy in bottles—chin a few minutes with Hank and the boys, and then dog trot it back.

That was how the boss of Merrity's ranch came to get his picture in the sportin' page alongside of a diagram of the four different ways I had of peelin' a boiled potato. Them was the times when I took my exercise with a sportin' editor hangin' to each elbow, and fellows with drawin' pads squattin' all over the place. Just for a josh I lugged one of the papers that had a picture of Hank up to the ranch, expectin' when he saw it, he'd want to buckle on his guns and start down after the gent that did it.

You couldn't have blamed him much if he had; for Hank's features wa'n't cut on what you might call classic lines. He looked more like a copy of an old master that had been done by a sign painter on the side of a barn. Not that he was so mortal homely, but his colour scheme was kind of surprisin'. His complexion was a shade or two lighter than a new saddle, except his neck, which was a flannel red, with lovely brown speckles on it; and his eyes was sort of buttermilk blue, with eyebrows that you had to guess at. His chief decoration though, was a lip whisker that was a marvel—one of these ginger coloured droopers that took root way down below his mouth corners and looked like it was there to stay.

But up on the ranch and down in Bedelia I never heard anyone pass remarks on Hank Merrity's looks. He wa'n't no bad man either, but as mild and gentle a beef raiser as you'd want to see. He seemed to be quite a star among the cow punchers, and after I'd got used to his peculiar style of beauty I kind of took to him, too.

The picture didn't r'ile him a bit. He sat there lookin' at it for a good five minutes without sayin' a word, them buttermilk eyes just starin', kind of blank and dazed. Then he looks up, as pleased as a kid, and says, "Wall, I'll be cussed! Mighty slick, ain't it?"

Next he hollers for Reney—that was Mrs. Merrity. She was a good sized, able bodied wild rose, Reney was; not such a bad looker, but a little shy on style. A calico wrapper with the sleeves rolled up, a lot of crinkly brown hair wavin' down her back, and an old pair of carpet slippers on her feet, was Reney's mornin' costume. I shouldn't wonder but what it did for afternoon and evenin' as well.

Mrs. Merrity was more tickled with the picture than Hank. She stared from the paper to him and back again, actin' like she thought Hank had done somethin' she ought to be proud of, but couldn't exactly place.

"Sho, Hank!" says she. "I wisht they'd waited until you'd put on your Sunday shirt and slicked up a little."

He was a real torrid proposition when he did slick up. I saw him do it once, a couple of nights before I broke trainin', when they was goin' to have a dance up to the ranch. His idea of makin' a swell toilet was to take a hunk of sheep tallow and grease his boots clear to the tops. Then he ducks his head into the horse trough and polishes the back of his neck with a bar of yellow soap. Next he dries himself off on a meal sack, uses half a bottle of scented hair oil on his Buffalo Bill thatch, pulls on a striped gingham shirt, ties a red silk handkerchief around his throat, and he's ready to receive comp'ny. I didn't see Mrs. Merrity after she got herself fixed for the ball; but Hank told me she was goin' to wear a shirt waist that she'd sent clear to Kansas City for.

Oh, we got real chummy before I left. He came down to see me off the day I started for Denver, and while we was waitin' for the train he told me the story of his life: How he'd been rustlin' for himself ever since he'd graduated from an orphan asylum in Illinois; the different things he'd worked at before he learned the cow business; and how, when he'd first met Reney slingin' crockery in a railroad restaurant, and married her on sight, they'd started out with a cash capital of one five-dollar bill and thirty-eight cents in change, to make their fortune. Then he told me how many steers and yearlings he owned, and how much grazin' land he'd got inside of wire.

"That's doin' middlin' well, ain't it?" says he.

Come to figure up, it was, and I told him I didn't see why he wa'n't in a fair way to find himself cuttin' into the grape some day.

"It all depends on the Jayhawker," says he. "I've got a third int'rest in that. Course, I ain't hollerin' a lot about it yet, for it ain't much more'n a hole in the ground; but if they ever strike the yellow there maybe we'll come on and take a look at New York."

"It's worth it," says I. "Hunt me up when you do."

"I shore will," says Hank. "Good luck!"

And the last I see of him he was standin' there in his buckskin pants, gawpin' at the steam cars.

Now, I ain't been spendin' my time ever since wonderin' what was happenin' to Hank. You know how it is. Maybe I've had him in mind two or three times. But when I gets that 'phone message I didn't have any trouble about callin' up my last view of him. So, when it come to buttin' into a swell Fifth-ave. hotel and askin' for Hank Merrity, I has a sudden spasm of bashfulness. It didn't last long.

"If Hank was good enough for me to chum with in Bedelia," says I, "he ought to have some standin' with me here. There wa'n't anything I could have asked that he wouldn't have done for me out there, and I guess if he needs some one to show him where Broadway is, and tell him to take his pants out of his boot tops, it's up to me to do it."

Just the same, when I gets up to the desk, I whispers it confidential to the clerk. If he'd come back with a hee-haw I wouldn't have said a word. I was expectin' somethin' of the kind. But never a chuckle. He don't even grin.

"Hank Merrity?" says he, shakin' his head. "We have a guest here, though, by the name of Henry Merrity—Mr. Henry Merrity."

"That's him," says I. "All the Henrys are Hanks when you get west of Omaha. Where'll I find him?"

I was hopin' he'd be up in his room, practisin' with' the electric light buttons, or bracin' himself for a ride down in the elevator; but there was no answer to the call on the house 'phone; so I has to wait while a boy goes out with my card on a silver tray, squeakin', "Mister Merrity! Mis-ter Merrity!" Five minutes later I was towed through the palms into the Turkish smokin' room, and the next thing I knew I was lined up in front of a perfect gent.

Say, if it hadn't been for them buttermilk eyes, you never could have made me believe it was him. Honest, them eyes was all there was left of the Hank Merrity I'd known in Bedelia. It wa'n't just the clothes, either, though he had 'em all on,—op'ra lid, four-button white vest, shiny shoes, and the rest,—it was what had happened to his face that was stunnin' me.

The lip drooper had been wiped out—not just shaved off, mind you, but scrubbed clean. The russet colour was gone, too. He was as pink and white and smooth as a roastin' pig that's been scraped and sandpapered for a window display in a meat shop. You've noticed that electric light complexion some of our Broadway rounders gets on? Well, Hank had it. Even the neck freckles had got the magic touch.

Course, he hadn't been turned into any he Venus, at that; but as he stood, costume and all, he looked as much a part of New York as the Flatiron Buildin'. And while I'm buggin' my eyes out and holdin' my mouth open, he grabs me by the hand and slaps me on the back.

"Why, hello, Shorty! I'm mighty glad to see you. Put 'er there!" says he.

"Gee!" says I. "Then it's true! Now I guess the thing for me to do is to own up to Maude Adams that I believe in fairies. Hank, who did it?"

"Did what?" says he.

"Why, made your face over and put on the Fifth-ave. gloss?" says I.

"Do I look it?" says he, grinnin'. "Would I pass?"

"Pass!" says I. "Hank, they could use you for a sign. Lookin' as you do now, you could go to any one night stand in the country and be handed the New York papers without sayin' a word. What I want to know, though, is how it happened?"

"Happen?" says he. "Shorty, such things don't come by accident. You buy 'em. You go through torture for 'em."

"Say, Hank," says I, "you don't mean to say you've been up against the skinologists?"

Well, he had. They'd kept his face in a steam box by the hour, scrubbed him with pumice stone, electrocuted his lip fringe, made him wear a sleepin' mask, and done everything but peel him alive.

"Look at that for a paw!" says he. "Ain't it lady-like?"

It was. Every fingernail showed the half moon, and the palm was as soft as a baby's.

"You must have been makin' a business of it," says I. "How long has this thing been goin' on?"

"Nearly four months," says Hank, heavin' a groan. "Part of that time I put in five hours a day; but I've got 'em scaled down to two now. It's been awful, Shorty, but it had to be done."

"How was that?" says I.

"On Reney's account," says he. "She's powerful peart at savvyin' things, Reney is. Why, when we struck town I was wearin' a leather trimmed hat and eatin' with my knife, just as polite as I knew how. We hadn't been here a day before she saw that something was wrong. 'Hank,' says she, 'this ain't where we belong. Let's go back.'—'What for?' says I.—'Shucks!' says she. 'Can't you see? These folks are different from us. Look at 'em!' Well, I did, and it made me mad. 'Reney,' says I, 'I'll allow there is something wrong with us, but I reckon it ain't bone deep. There's such a thing as burnin' one brand over another, ain't there? Suppose we give it a whirl?' That's what we done too, and I'm beginnin' to suspicion we've made good."

"I guess you have, Hank," says I; "but ain't it expensive? You haven't gone broke to do it, have you?"

"Broke!" says he, smilin'. "Guess you ain't heard what they're takin' out of the Jayhawker these days. Why, I couldn't spend it all if I had four hands. But come on. Let's find Reney and go to a show, somewheres."

Course, seein' Hank had kind of prepared me for a change in Mrs. Merrity; so I braces myself for the shock and tries to forget the wrapper and carpet slippers. But you know the kind of birds that roost along Peacock Alley? There was a double row of 'em holdin' down the arm chairs on either side of the corridor, and lookin' like a livin' exhibit of spring millinery. I tried hard to imagine Reney in that bunch; but it was no go. The best I could do was throw up a picture of a squatty female in a Kansas City shirt waist. And then, all of a sudden, we fetches up alongside a fairy in radium silk and lace, with her hair waved to the minute, and carryin' enough sparks to light up the subway. She was the star of the collection, and I nearly loses my breath when Hank says:

"Reney, you remember Shorty McCabe, don't you?"

"Ah, rully!" says she liftin' up a pair of gold handled eye glasses and takin' a peek. "Chawmed to meet you again, Mr. McCabe."

"M-m-me too," says I. It was all the conversation I had ready to pass out.

Maybe I acted some foolish; but for the next few minutes I didn't do anything but stand there, sizin' her up and inspectin' the improvements. There hadn't been any half way business about her. If Hank was a good imitation, Mrs. Merrity was the real thing. She was it. I've often wondered where they all came from, them birds of Paradise that we see floatin' around such places; but now I've got a line on 'em. They ain't all raised in New York. It's pin spots on the map like Bedelia that keeps up the supply.

Reney hadn't stopped with takin' courses at the beauty doctors and goin' the limit on fancy clothes. She'd been plugin' on conversation lessons, voice culture, and all kind of parlour tricks. She'd been keepin' her eyes and ears open too, takin' her models from real life; and the finished

product was somethin' you'd say had never been west of Broadway or east of Fourth-ave. As for her ever doin' such a thing as juggle crockery, it was almost a libel to think of it.

"Like it here in town, do you?" says I, firin' it at both of 'em.

"Like it!" says Hank. "See what it's costin' us. We got to like it."

She gives him a look that must have felt like an icicle slipped down his neck. "Certainly we enjoy New York," says she. "It's our home, don'cha know."

"Gosh!" says I. I didn't mean to let it slip out, but it got past me before I knew.

Mrs. Merrity only raises her eyebrows and smiles, as much as to say, "Oh, what can one expect?"

That numbs me so much I didn't have life enough to back out of goin' to the theatre with 'em, as Hank had planned. Course, we has a box, and it wasn't until she'd got herself placed well up in front and was lookin' the house over through the glasses that I gets a chance for a few remarks with Hank.

"Is she like that all the time now?" I whispers.

"You bet!" says he. "Don't she do it good?"

Say, there wa'n't any mistakin' how the act hit Hank. "You ought to see her with her op'ra rig on, though—tiara, and all that," says he.

"Go reg'lar?" says I.

"Tuesdays and Fridays," says he. "We leases the box for them nights."

That gets me curious to know how they puts in their time, so I has him give me an outline. It was something like this: Coffee and rolls at ten-thirty A. M.; hair dressers, manicures, and massage artists till twelve-thirty; drivin' in the brougham till two; an hour off for lunch; more drivin' and shoppin' till five; nap till six; then the maids and valets and so on to fix 'em up for dinner; theatre or op'ra till eleven; supper at some swell café; and the pillows about two A. M.

Then the curtain goes up for the second act, and I see Hank had got his eyes glued on the stage. As we'd come late, I hadn't got the hang of the piece before, but now I notices it's one of them gunless Wild West plays that's hit Broadway so hard. It was a breezy kind of a scene they showed up. To one side was an almost truly log cabin, with a tin wash basin hung on a nail just outside the front door and some real firewood stacked up under the window. Off up the middle was mountains piled up, one on top of the other, clear up into the flies.

The thing didn't strike me at first, until I hears Hank dig up a sigh that sounds as if it started from his shoes. Then I tumbles. This stage settin' was almost a dead ringer for his old ranch out north of Bedelia. In a minute in comes a bunch of stage cowboys. They was a lot cleaner lookin' than any I ever saw around Merrity's, and some of 'em was wearin' misfit whiskers; but barrin' a few little points like that they fitted into the picture well enough. Next we hears a whoop, and in bounces the leadin' lady, rigged out in beaded leggin's, knee length skirt, leather coat, and Shy Ann hat, with her red hair flyin' loose.

Say, I'm a good deal of a come-on when it comes to the ranch business, but I've seen enough to know that if any woman had showed up at Merrity's place in that costume the cow punchers would have blushed into their hats and took for the timber line. I looks at Hank, expectin' to see him wearin' a grin; but he wa'n't. He's 'most tarin' his eyes out, lookin' at them painted mountains and that four-piece log cabin. And would you believe it, Mrs. Merrity was doin' the same! I couldn't see that either of 'em moved durin' the whole act, or took their eyes off that scenery, and when the curtain goes down they just naturally reaches out and grips each other by the hand. For quite some time they didn't say a word. Then Reney breaks the spell.

"You noticed it, didn't you, Hank?" says she.

"Couldn't help it, Reney!" says he huskily.

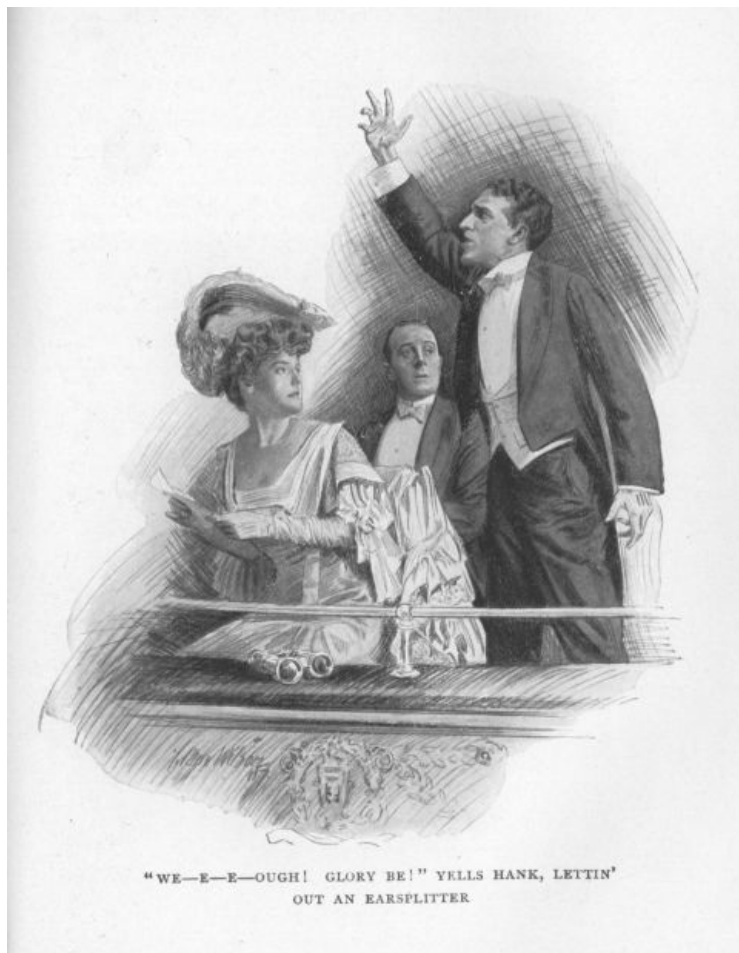
"I expect the old place is looking awful nice, just about now," she goes on.

Hank was swallowin' hard just then, so all he could do was nod, and a big drop of brine leaks out of one of them buttermilk blue eyes. Reney saw it.

"Hank," says she, still grippin' his hand and talkin' throaty—"let's quit and go back!"

Say, maybe you never heard one of them flannel shirts call the cows home from the next county. A lot of folks who'd paid good money to listen to a weak imitation was treated to the genuine article.

"We-e-e-ough! Glory be!" yells Hank, jumpin' up and knockin' over a chair.



"WE—E—E—OUGH! GLORY BE!" YELLS HANK, LETTIN' OUT AN EARSPLITTER

It was an ear splitter, that was. Inside of a minute there was a special cop and four ushers makin' a rush for the back of our box.

"Here, here now!" says one. "You'll have to leave."

"Leave!" says Hank. "Why, gol darn you white faced tenderfeet, you couldn't hold us here another minute with rawhide ropes! Come on, Reney; maybe there's a night train!"

They didn't go quite so sudden as all that. Reney got him to wait until noon next day, so she could fire a few maids and send a bale or so of Paris gowns to the second hand shop; but they made me sit up till 'most mornin' with 'em, while they planned out the kind of a ranch de luxe they was goin' to build when they got back to Bedelia. As near as I could come to it, there was goin' to be four Chinese cooks always standin' ready to fry griddle cakes for any neighbours that might drop in, a dance hall with a floor of polished mahogany, and not a bath tub on the place. What they wanted was to get back among their old friends, put on their old clothes, and enjoy themselves in their own way for the rest of their lives.

X

SHORTY AND THE STRAY

Say, I don't know whether I'll ever get to be a reg'lar week-ender or not, but I've been makin' another stab at it. What's the use ownin' property in the country house belt if you don't use it now and then? So last Saturday, after I shuts up the Studio, I scoots out to my place in Primrose Park.

Well, I puts in the afternoon with Dennis Whaley, who's head gardener and farm superintendent, and everything else a three-acre plot will stand for. Then, about supper time, as I'm just settlin' myself on the front porch with my heels on the stoop rail, wonderin' how folks can manage to live all the time where nothin' ever happens, I hears a chug-chuggin', and up the drive rolls a cute little one-seater bubble, with nobody aboard but a Boston terrier and a boy.

"Chee!" thinks I, "they'll be givin' them gasolene carts to babies next. Wonder what fetches

the kid in here?"

Maybe he was a big ten or a small twelve; anyway, he wa'n't more. He's one of these fine haired, light complected youngsters, that a few years ago would have had yellow Fauntleroy curls, and been rigged out in a lace collar and a black velvet suit, and had a nurse to lead him around by the hand. But the new crop of young Astergould Thickwads is bein' trained on different lines. This kid was a good sample. His tow coloured hair is just long enough to tousle nice, and he's bare headed at that. Then he's got on corduroy knickers, a khaki jacket, black leather leggin's, and gauntlet gloves, and he looks almost as healthy as if he was poor.

"Hello, youngster!" says I. "Did you lose the shuffer overboard?"

"Beg pardon," says he; "but I drive my own machine."

"Oh!" says I. "I might have known by the costume."

By this time he's standin' up with his hand to his ear, squintin' out through the trees to the main road, like he was listenin' for somethin'. In a second he hears one of them big six-cylinder cars go hummin' past, and it seems to be what he was waitin' for.

"Goin' to stop, are you?" says I.

"Thank you," says he, "I will stay a little while, if you don't mind," and he proceeds to shut off the gasolene and climb out. The dog follows him.

"Givin' some one the slip?" says I.

"Oh, no," says he real prompt. "I—I've been in a race, that's all."

"Ye-e-es?" says I. "Had a start, didn't you?"

"A little," says he.

With that he sits down on the steps, snuggles the terrier up alongside of him, and begins to look me and the place over careful, without sayin' any more. Course, that ain't the way boys usually act, unless they've got stage fright, and this one didn't seem at all shy. As near as I could guess, he was thinkin' hard, so I let him take his time. I figures out from his looks, and his showin' up in a runabout, that he's come from some of them big country places near by, and that when he gets ready he'll let out what he's after. Sure enough, pretty soon he opens up.

"Wouldn't you like to buy the machine, sir?" says he.

"Selling out, are you?" says I. "Well, what's your askin' price for a rig of that kind?"

He sizes me up for a minute, and then sends out a feeler. "Would five dollars be too much?"

"No," says I, "I shouldn't call that a squeeze, providin' you threw in the dog."

He looks real worried then, and hugs the terrier up closer than ever. "I couldn't sell Togo," says he. "You—you wouldn't want him too, would you?"

When I sees that it wouldn't take much more to get them big blue eyes of his to leakin', I puts him easy on the dog question. "But what's your idea of sellin' the bubble?" says I.

"Why," says he, "I won't need it any longer. I'm going to be a motorman on a trolley car."

"That's a real swell job," says I. "But how will the folks at home take it?"

"The folks at home?" says he, lookin' me straight in the eye. "Why, there aren't any. I haven't any home, you know."

Honest, the way he passed out that whopper was worth watchin'. It was done as cool and scientific as a real estate man takin' oath there wa'n't a mosquito in the whole county.

"Then you're just travelin' around loose, eh?" says I. "Where'd you strike from to-day?"

"Chicago," says he.

"Do tell!" says I. "That's quite a day's run. You must have left before breakfast."

"I had breakfast early," says he.

"Dinner in Buffalo?" says I.

"I didn't stop for dinner," says he.

"In that case—er—what's the name?" says I.

"Mister Smith," says he.

"Easy name to remember," says I.

"Ye-e-es. I'd rather you called me Gerald, though," says he.

"Good," says I. "Well, Gerald, seein' as you've made a long jump since breakfast, what do you say to grubbin' up a little with me, eh?"

That strikes him favourable, and as Mother Whaley is just bringin' in the platter, we goes inside and sits down, Togo and all. He sure didn't fall to like a half starved kid; but maybe that was because he was so busy lookin' at Mrs. Whaley. She ain't much on the French maid type, that's a fact. Her uniform is a checked apron over a faded red wrapper, and she has a way of puggin' her hair up in a little knob that makes her face look like one of the kind they cut out of a cocoanut.

Gerald eyes her for a while; then he leans over to me and whispers, "Is this the butler's night off?"

"Yes," says I. "He has seven a week. This is one of 'em."

After he's thought that over he grins. "I see," says he. "You means you haven't a butler? Why, I thought everyone did."

"There's a few of us struggles along without," says I. "We don't brag about it, though. But where do you keep your butler now, Mr. Gerald?"

That catches him with his guard down, and he begins to look mighty puzzled.

"Oh, come," says I, "you might's well own up. You've brought the runaway act right down to the minute, son; but barrin' the details, it's the same old game. I done the same when I was your age, only instead of runnin' off in a thousand-dollar bubble, I sneaked into an empty freight car."

"Did you?" says he, his eyes openin' wide. "Was it nice, riding in the freight car?"

"Never had so much fun out of a car ride since," says I. "But I was on the war path then. My outfit was a blank cartridge pistol, a scalpin' knife hooked from the kitchen, and a couple of nickel lib'ries that told all about Injun killin'. Don't lay out to slaughter any redskins, do you?"

He looks kind of weary, and shakes his head.

"Well, runnin' a trolley car has its good points, I s'pose," says I; "but I wouldn't tackle it for a year or so if I was you. You'd better give me your 'phone number, and I'll ring up the folks, so they won't be worryin' about you."

But say, this Gerald boy, alias Mr. Smith, don't fall for any smooth talk like that. He just sets his jaws hard and remarks, quiet like, "I guess I'd better be going."

"Where to?" says I.

"New Haven ought to be a good place to sell the machine," says he. "I can get a job there too."

At that I goes to pumpin' him some more, and he starts in to hand out the weirdest line of yarns I ever listened to. Maybe he wa'n't a very skilful liar, but he was a willin' one. Quick as I'd tangle him up on one story, he'd lie himself out and into another. He accounts for his not havin' any home in half a dozen different ways, sometimes killin' off his relations one by one, and then bunchin' 'em in a railroad wreck or an earthquake. But he sticks to Chicago as the place where he lived last, although the nearest he can get to the street number is by sayin' it was somewhere near Central Park.

"That happens to be in New York," says I.

"There are two in Chicago," says he.

"All right, Gerald," says I. "I give up. We'll let it go that you're playin' a lone hand; but before you start out again you'd better get a good night's rest here. What do you say?"

He didn't need much urgin'; so we runs the bubble around into the stable, and I tucks him and Togo away together in the spare bed.

"Who's the little lad?" says Dennis to me.

"For one thing," says I, "he's an honorary member of the Ananias Club. If I can dig up any more information between now and mornin', Dennis, I'll let you know."

First I calls up two or three village police stations along the line; but they hadn't had word of any stray kid.

"That's funny," thinks I. "If he'd lived down in Hester-st., there'd be four thousand cops huntin' him up by this time."

But it wa'n't my cue to do the frettin'; so I lets things rest as they are, only takin' a look at the kid before I turns in, to see that he was safe. And say, that one look gets me all broke up; for when I tiptoes in with the candle I finds that pink and white face of his all streaked up with cryin', and he has one arm around Togo, like he thought that terrier was all the friend he had left.

Gee! but that makes me feel mean! Why, if I'd known he was goin' to blubber himself to sleep that way, I'd hung around and cheered him up. He'd been so brash about this runaway business, though, that I never suspicioned he'd go to pieces the minute he was left alone. And they look different when they're asleep, don't they? I guess I must have put in the next two hours' wonderin' how it was that a nice, bright youngster like that should come to quit home. If he'd come from some tenement house, where it was a case of pop bein' on the island, and maw rushin' the can and usin' the poker on him, you wouldn't think anything of it. But here he has his bubble, and his high priced terrier, and things like that, and yet he does the skip. Well, there wa'n't any answer.

Not hearin' him stirrin' when I gets up in the mornin', I makes up my mind to let him snooze as long as he likes. So I has breakfast and goes out front with the mornin' papers. It got to be after nine o'clock, and I was just thinkin' of goin' up to see how he was gettin' on, when I sees a big green tourin' car come dashin' down into the park and turn into my front drive. There was a crowd in it; but, before I can get up, out flips a stunnin' lookin' bunch of dry goods, all veils and silk dust coat, and wants to know if I'm Shorty McCabe: which I says I am.

"Then you have my boy here, have you?" she shoots out. And, say, by the suspicious way she looks at me, you'd thought I'd been breakin' into some nursery. I'll admit she was a beaut, all right; but the hard look I gets from them big black eyes didn't win me for a cent.

"Maybe if I knew who you was, ma'am," says I, "we'd get along faster."

That don't soothe her a bit. She gives me one glare, and then whirls around and shouts to a couple of tough lookin' bruisers that was in the car.

"Quick!" she sings out. "Watch the rear and side doors. I'm sure he's here."

And the mugs pile out and proceed to plant themselves around the house.

"Sa-a-ay," says I, "this begins to look excitin'. Is it a raid, or what? Who are the husky boys?"

"Those men are in my employ," says she.

"Private sleut's?" says I.

"They are," says she, "and if you'll give up the boy without any trouble I will pay you just twice as much as you're getting to hide him. I'm going to have him, anyway."

"Well, well!" says I.

And say, maybe you can guess by that time I was feelin' like it was a warm day. If I'd had on a celluloid collar, it'd blown up. Inside of ten seconds, I've shucked my coat and am mixin' it with the plug that's guardin' the side door. The doin's was short and sweet. He's no sooner slumped down to feel what's happened to his jaw than No. 2 come up. He acts like he was ambitious to do damage, but the third punch leaves him on the grass. Then I takes each of 'em by the ear, leads 'em out to the road, and gives 'em a little leather farewell to help 'em get under way.

"Sorry to muss your hired help, ma'am," says I, comin' back to the front stoop; "but this is one place in the country where private detectives ain't wanted. And another thing, let's not have any more talk about me bein' paid. If there's anyone here belongin' to you, you can have him and welcome; but cut out the hold up business and the graft conversation. Now again, what's the name?"

She was so mad she was white around the lips; but she's one of the kind that knows when she's up against it, too. "I am Mrs. Rutgers Greene," says she.

"Oh, yes," says I. "From down on the point?"

"Mr. Greene lives at Orienta Point, I believe," says she.

Now that was plain enough, wa'n't it? You wouldn't think I'd need postin' on what they was sayin' at the clubs, after that. But these high life break-aways are so common you can't keep track of all of 'em, and she sprung it so offhand that I didn't more'n half tumble to what she meant.

"I suppose I may have Gerald now?" she goes on.

"Sure," says I. "I'll bring him down." And as I skips up the stairs I sings out, "Hey, Mr. Smith! Your maw's come for you!"

There was nothin' doin', though. I knocks on the door, and calls again. Next I goes in. And

say, it wa'n't until I'd pawed over all the clothes, and looked under the bed and into the closet, that I could believe it. He must have got up at daylight, slipped down the back way in his stockin' feet, and skipped. The note on the wash stand clinches it. It was wrote kind of wobbly, and the spellin' was some streaked; but there wa'n't any mistakin' what he meant. He was sorry he had to tell so many whoppers, but he wa'n't ever goin' home any more, and he was much obliged for my tip about the freight car. Maybe my jaw didn't drop.

"Thick head!" says I, catchin' sight of myself in the bureau glass. "You would get humorous!"

When I goes back down stairs I find Mrs. Greene pacin' the porch. "Well?" says she.

I throws up my hands. "Skipped," says I.

"Do you mean to say he has gone?" she snaps.

"That's the size of it," says I.

"Then this is Rutgers's work. Oh, the beast!" and she begins stampin' her foot and bitin' her lips.

"That's where you're off," says I; "this is a case of——"

But just then another big bubble comes dashin' up, with four men in it, and the one that jumps out and joins us is the main stem of the fam'ly. I could see that by the way the lady turns her back on him. He's a clean cut, square jawed young feller, and by the narrow set of his eyes and the sandy colour of his hair you could guess he might be some obstinate when it came to an argument. But he begins calm enough.

"I'm Rutgers Greene," says he, "and at the police station they told me Gerald was here. I'll take charge of him, if you please."

"Have you brought a bunch of sleut's too?" says I.

He admits that he has.

"Then chase 'em off the grounds before I has another mental typhoon," says I. "Shoo 'em!"

"If they're not needed," says he, "and you object to——"

"I do," says I.

So he has his machine run out to the road again.

"Now," says I, "seein' as this is a family affair——"

"I beg pardon," puts in Greene; "but you hardly understand the situation. Mrs. Greene need not be consulted at all."

"I've as much right to Gerald as you have!" says she, her eyes snappin' like a trolley wheel on a wet night.

"We will allow the courts to decide that point," says he, real frosty.

"I don't want to butt in on any tender little domestic scene," says I; "but if I was you two I'd find the kid first. He's been gone since daylight."

"Gone!" says Greene. "Where?"

"There's no tellin' that," says I. "All I know is that when he left here he was headed for the railroad track, meanin' to jump a freight train and——"

"The railroad!" squeals Mrs. Greene. "Oh, he'll be killed! Oh, Gerald! Gerald!"

Greene don't say a word, but he turns the colour of a slice of Swiss cheese.

"Oh, what can we do?" says the lady, wringin' her hands.

"Any of them detectives of yours know the kid by sight?" says I.

They didn't. Neither did Greene's bunch. They was both fresh lots.

"Well," says I, "I'll own up that part of this is up to me, and I won't feel right until I've made a try to find him. I'm goin' to start now, and I don't know how long I'll be gone. From what I've seen I can guess that this cottage will be a little small for you two; but if you're anxious to hear the first returns, I'd advise you to stay right here. So long!"

And with that I grabs my hat and makes a dash out the back way, leavin' 'em standin' there back to back. I never tracked a runaway kid along a railroad, and I hadn't much notion of how to start; but I makes for the rock ballast just as though I had the plan all mapped out.

The first place I came across was a switch tower, and I hadn't chinned the operators three minutes before I gets on to the fact that an east bound freight usually passed there about six in the mornin', and generally stopped to drill on the siding just below. That was enough to send me down the track; but there wa'n't any traces of the kid.

"New Haven for me, then," says I, and by good luck I catches a local. Maybe that was a comfortable ride, watchin' out of the rear window for somethin' I was hopin' I wouldn't see! And when it was over I hunts up the yard master and finds the freight I was lookin' for was just about due.

"Expectin' a consignment?" says he.

"Yes," says I. "I'm a committee of one to receive a stray kid."

"Oh, that's it, eh?" says he. "We get 'em 'most every week. I'll see that you have a pass to overhaul the empties."

After I'd peeked into about a dozen box cars, and dug up nothin' more encouraging than a couple of boozy 'boes, I begun to think my calculations was all wrong. I was just slidin' another door shut when I notices a bundle of somethin' over in the far corner. I had half a mind not to climb in; for it didn't look like anything alive, but I takes a chance at it for luck, and the first thing I hears is a growl. The next minute I has Togo by the collar and the kid up on my arm. It was Gerald, all right, though he was that dirty and rumped I hardly knew him.

He just groans and grabs hold of me like he was afraid I was goin' to get away. Why, the poor little cuss was so beat out and scared I couldn't get a word from him for half an hour. But after awhile I coaxed him to sit up on a stool and have a bite to eat, and when I've washed off some of the grime, and pulled out a few splinters from his hands, we gets a train back. First off I thought I'd 'phone Mr. and Mrs. Greene, but then I changes my mind. "Maybe it'll do 'em good to wait," thinks I.

We was half way back when Gerald looks up and says, "You won't take me home, will you?"

"What's the matter with home, kid?" says I.

"Well," says he, and I could see by the struggle he was havin' with his upper lip that it was comin' out hard, "mother says father isn't a nice man, and father says I mustn't believe what she says at all, and—and—I don't think I like either of them well enough to be their little boy any more. I don't like being stolen so often, either."

"Stolen!" says I.

"Yes," says he. "You see, when I'm with father, mother is always sending men to grab me up and take me off where she is. Then father sends men to get me back, and—and I don't believe I've got any real home any more. That's why I ran away. Wouldn't you?"

"Kid," says I, "I ain't got a word to say."

He was too tired and down in the mouth to do much conversing either. All he wants is to curl up with his head against my shoulder and go to sleep. After he wakes up from his nap he feels better, and when he finds we're goin' back to my place he gets quite chipper. All the way walkin' up from the station I tries to think of how it would be best to break the news to him about the grand household scrap that was due to be pulled off the minute we shows up. I couldn't do it, though, until we'd got clear to the house.

"Now, youngster," says I, "there's a little surprise on tap for you here, I guess. You walk up soft and peek through the door."

For a minute I thought maybe they'd cleared out, he was so still about it, so I steps up to rubber, too. And there's Mr. and Mrs. Rutgers Greene, sittin' on the sofa about as close as they could get, her weepin' damp streaks down his shirt front, and him pattin' her back hair gentle and lovin'.

"Turn off the sprayer!" says I. "Here's the kid!"

Well, we was all mixed up for the next few minutes. They hugs Gerald both to once, and then they hugs each other, and if I hadn't ducked just as I did I ain't sure what would have happened to me. When I comes back, half an hour later, all I needs is one glance to see that a lot of private sleut's and court lawyers is out of a job.

"Shorty," says Greene, givin' me the hearty grip, "I don't know how I'm ever goin' to——"

"Ah, lose it!" says I. "It was just by a fluke I got on the job, anyway. That's a great kid of yours, eh?"

Did I say anything about Primrose Park bein' a place where nothin' ever happened? Well, you can scratch that.

XI

WHEN ROSSITER CUT LOOSE

As a general thing I don't go much on looks, but I will say that I've seen handsomer specimens than Rossiter. He's got good height, and plenty of reach, with legs branchin' out just under his armpits—you know how them clothespin fellers are built—but when you finish out the combination with pop eyes and a couple of overhangin' front teeth— Well, what's the use? Rossy don't travel on his shape. He don't have to, with popper bossin' a couple of trunk lines.

When he first begun comin' to the Studio I sized him up for a soft boiled, and wondered how he could stray around town alone without havin' his shell cracked. Took me some time, too, before I fell to the fact that Rossy was wiser'n he looked; but at that he wa'n't no knowledge trust.

Just bein' good natured was Rossy's long suit. Course, he couldn't help grinnin'; his mouth is cut that way. There wa'n't any mistakin' the look in them wide set eyes of his, though. That was the real article, the genuine I'll-stand-for-anything kind. Say, you could spring any sort of a josh on Rossy, and he wouldn't squeal. He was one of your shy violets, too. Mostly he played a thinkin' part, and when he did talk, he didn't say much. After you got to know 'him real well, though, and was used to the way he looked, you couldn't help likin' Rossiter. I'd had both him and the old man as reg'lars for two or three months, and it's natural I was more or less chummy with them.

So when Rossy shows up here the other mornin' and shoves out his proposition to me, I don't think nothin' of it.

"Shorty," says he, kind of flushin' up, "I've got a favour to ask of you."

"You're welcome to use all I've got in the bank," says I.

"It isn't money," says he, growin' pinker.

"Oh!" says I, like I was a lot surprised. "Your usin' the touch preamble made me think it was. What's the go?"

"I—I can't tell you just now," says he; "but I'd like your assistance in a little affair, about eight o'clock this evening. Where can I find you?"

"Sounds mysterious," says I. "You ain't goin' up against any Canfield game; are you?"

"Oh, I assure——" he begins.

"That's enough," says I, and I names the particular spot I'll be decoratin' at that hour.

"You won't fail?" says he, anxious.

"Not unless an ambulance gets me," says I.

Well, I didn't go around battin' my head all the rest of the day, tryin' to think out what it was Rossiter had on the card. Somehow he ain't the kind you'd look for any hot stunts from. If I'd made a guess, maybe I'd said he wanted me to take him and a college chum down to a chop suey joint for an orgy on li-chee nuts an' weak tea.

So I wa'n't fidgetin' any that evenin', as I holds up the corner of 42nd-st., passin' the time of day with the Rounds, and watchin' the Harlem folks streak by to the roof gardens. Right on the tick a hansom fetches up at the curb, and I sees Rossiter givin' me the wig-wag to jump in.

"You're runnin' on sked," says I. "Where to now?"

"I think your Studio would be the best place," says he, "if you don't mind."

I said I didn't, and away we goes around the corner. As we does the turn I sees another cab make a wild dash to get in front, and, takin' a peek through the back window, I spots a second one followin'.

"Are we part of a procession?" says I, pointin' 'em out to him.

He only grins and looks kind of sheepish. "That's the regular thing nowadays," says he.

"What! Tin badgers?" says I.

He nods. "They made me rather nervous at first," he says; "but after I'd been shadowed for a

week or so I got used to it, and lately I've got so I would feel lost without them. To-night, though, they're rather a nuisance. I thought you might help me to throw them off the track."

"But who set 'em on?" says I.

"Oh, it's father, I suppose," says he; not grouchy mind you, but kind of tired.

"Why, Rossy!" says I. "I didn't think you was the sort that called for P. D. reports."

"I'm not," says he. "That's just father's way, you know, when he suspects anything is going on that he hasn't been told about. He runs his business that way—has a big force looking into things all the time. And maybe some of them weren't busy; so he told them to look after me."

Well say! I've heard some tough things about the old man, but I never thought he'd carry a thing that far. Why, there ain't any more sportin' blood in Rossiter than you'd look for in a ribbon clerk. Outside of the little ladylike boxin' that he does with me, as a liver regulator, the most excitin' fad of his I ever heard of was collectin' picture postals.

Now, I generally fights shy of mixin' up in family affairs, but someway or other I just ached to take a hand in this. "Rossy," says I, "you're dead anxious to hand the lemon to them two sleut's; are you?"

He said he was.

"And your game's all on the straight after that, is it?" I says.

"Pon my honour, it is," says he.

"Then count me in," says I. "I ain't never had any love for them sneak detectives, and here's where I gives 'em a whirl."

But say, they're a slippery bunch. They must have known just where we was headin', for by the time we lands on the sidewalk in front of the physical culture parlours, the man in the leadin' cab has jumped out and faded.

"He will be watching on the floor above," says Rossiter, "and the other one will stay below."

"That's the way they work it, eh?" says I. "Good! Come on in without lookin' around or lettin' 'em know you're on."

We goes up to the second floor and turns on the glim in the front office. Then I puts on a pair of gym. shoes, opens the door easy, and tiptoes down the stairs. He was just where I thought he'd be, coverin' up in the shade of the vestibule.

"Caught with the goods on!" says I, reachin' out and gettin' a good grip on his neck. "No you don't! No gun play in this!" and I gives his wrist a crack with my knuckles that puts his shootin' arm out of business.

"You're makin' a mistake," says he. "I'm a private detective."

"You're a third rate yegg," says I, "and you've been nipped tryin' to pinch a rubber door mat."

"Here's my badge," says he.

"Anybody can buy things like that at a hock shop," says I. "You come along up stairs till I see whether or no it's worth while ringin' up a cop."

He didn't want to visit, not a little bit, but I was behind, persuadin' him with my knee, and up he goes.

"Look at what the sneak thief business is comin' to," says I, standin' him under the bunch light where Rossiter could get a good look at him. He was a shifty eyed low brow that you wouldn't trust alone in a room with a hot quarter.

"My name is McGilty," says he.

"Even if it wa'n't, you could never prove an alibi with that face," says I.

"If this young gent'll 'phone to his father," he goes on, "he'll find that I'm all right."

"Don't you want us to call up Teddy at Oyster Bay? Or send for your old friend Bishop Potter? Ah, say, don't I look like I could buy fly paper without gettin' stuck? Sit down there and rest your face and hands."

With that I chucks him into a chair, grabs up a hunk of window cord that I has for the chest weights, and proceeds to do the bundle wrapping act on him. Course, he does a lot of talkin', tellin' of the things that'll happen to me if I don't let him go right off.

"I'll cheerfully pay all the expenses of a damage suit, or fines, Shorty," says Rossiter.

"Forget it!" says I. "There won't be anything of the sort. He's lettin' off a little hot air, that's all. Keep your eye on him while I goes after the other one."

I collared Number Two squattin' on the skylight stairs. For a minute or so he put up a nice little muss, but after I'd handed him a swift one on the jaw he forgot all about fightin' back.

"Attempted larceny of a tarred roof for yours," says I. "Come down till I give you the third degree."

He didn't have a word to say; just held onto his face and looked ugly. I tied him up same's I had the other and set 'em face to face, where they could see how pretty they looked. Then I led Rossiter down stairs.

"Now run along and enjoy yourself," says I. "That pair'll do no more sleut'in' for awhile. I'll keep 'em half an hour, anyway, before I throws 'em out in the street."

"I'm awfully obliged, Shorty," says he.

"Don't mention it," says I. "It's been a pleasure."

That was no dream, either. Say, it did me most as much good as a trip to Coney, stringin' them trussed up keyhole gazers.

"Your names'll look nice in the paper," says I, "and when your cases come up at Special Sessions maybe your friends'll all have reserved seats. Sweet pair of pigeon toed junk collectors, you are!"

If they wa'n't sick of the trailin' business before I turned 'em loose, it wa'n't my fault. From the remarks they made as they went down the stairs I suspicioned they was some sore on me. But now and then I runs across folks that I'm kind of proud to have feel that way. Private detectives is in that class.

I was still on the grin, and thinkin' how real cute I'd been, when I hears heavy steps on the stairs, and in blows Rossiter's old man, short of breath and wall eyed.

"Where's he gone?" says he.

"Which one?" says I.

"Why, that fool boy of mine!" says the old man. "I've just had word that he was here less than an hour ago."

"You got a straight tip," says I.

"Well, where did he go from here?" says he.

"I'm a poor guesser," says I, "and he didn't leave any word; but if you was to ask my opinion, I'd say that most likely he was behavin' himself, wherever he was."

"Huh!" growls the old man. "That shows how little you know about him. He's off being married, probably to some yellow haired chorus girl; that's where he is!"

"What! Rossy?" says I.

Honest, I thought the old man must have gone batty; but when he tells me the whole yarn I begins to feel like I'd swallowed a foolish powder. Seems that Rossiter's mother had been noticin' symptoms in him for some time; but they hadn't nailed anything until that evenin', when the chump butler turns in a note that he shouldn't have let go of until next mornin'. It was from Rossiter, and says as how, by the time she reads that, he'll have gone and done it.

"But how do you figure out that he's picked a squab for his'n?" says I.

"Because they're the kind that would be most likely to trap a young chuckle head like Rossiter," says the old man. "It's what I've been afraid of for a long time. Who else would be likely to marry him? Come! you don't imagine I think he's an Apollo, just because he's my son, do you? And don't you suppose I've found out, in all these years, that he hasn't sense enough to pound sand? But I can't stay here. I've got to try and stop it, before it's too late. If you think you can be of any help, you can come along."

Well say, I didn't see how I'd fit into a hunt of that kind; and as for knowin' what to do, I hadn't a thought in my head just then; but seein' as how I'd butted in, it didn't seem no more'n right that I should stay with the game. So I tags along, and we climbs into the old man's electric cab.

"We'll go to Dr. Piecrust's first, and see if he's there," says he, "that being our church."

Well, he wa'n't. And they hadn't seen him at another minister's that the old man said Rossy knew.

"If she was an actorine," says I, "she'd be apt to steer him to the place where they has most of their splicin' done. Why not try there?"

"Good idea!" says he, and we lights out hot foot for the Little Church Around the Corner.

And say! Talk about your long shots! As we piles out what should I see but the carrotty topped night hawk that'd had Rossy and me for fares earlier in the evenin'.

"You're a winner," says I to the old man. "It's a case of waitin' at the church. Ten to one you'll find Rossiter inside."

It was a cinch. Rossy was the first one we saw as we got into the anteroom.

It wa'n't what you'd call a real affectionate meetin'. The old man steps up and eyes him for a minute, like a dyspeptic lookin' at a piece of overdone steak in a restaurant, and then he remarks: "What blasted nonsense is this, sir?"

"Why," says Rossy, shiftin' from one foot to the other, and grinnin' foolisher'n I ever saw him grin before—"why, I just thought I'd get married, that's all."

"That's all, eh?" says the old man, and you could have filed a saw with his voice. "Sort of a happy inspiration of the moment, was it?"

"Well," says Rossy, "not—not exactly that. I'd been thinking of it for some time, sir."

"The deuce you say!" says the old man.

"I—I didn't think you'd object," says Rossy.

"Wow!" says the old man. He'd been holdin' in a long spell, for him, but then he just boiled over. "See here, you young rascal!" says he. "What do you mean by talking that way to me? Didn't think I'd object! D'ye suppose I'm anxious to have all New York know that my son's been made a fool of? Think your mother and I are aching to have one of these bleached hair chorus girls in the family? Got her inside there, have you?"

"Yes, sir," says Rossy.

"Well, bring her out here!" says the old man. "I've got something to say to her."

"All right, sir," says Rossy. If there ever was a time for throwin' the hooks into a parent, it was then. But he's as good humoured and quiet about it as though he'd just been handed a piece of peach pie. "I'll bring her right out," says he.

When he comes in with the lady, the old man takes one look at her and almost loses his breath for good.

"Eunice May Ogden!" says he. "Why—why on earth didn't you say so before, Rossy?"

"Oh, hush!" says the lady. "Do be still! Can't you see that we're right in the middle of an elopement?"

Never saw Eunice May, did you? Well, that's what you miss by not travellin' around with the swells, same as me. I had seen her. And say, she's somethin' of a sight, too! She's a prize pumpkin, Eunice is. Maybe she's some less'n seven feet in her lisle threads, but she looks every inch of it; and when it comes to curves, she has Lillian Russell pared to a lamp post. She'd be a good enough looker if she wa'n't such a whale. As twins, she'd be a pair of beauts, but the way she stands, she's most too much of a good thing.

Pinckney says they call her the Ogden sinking fund among his crowd. I've heard 'em say that old man Ogden, who's a little, dried up runt of about five feet nothin', has never got over bein' surprised at the size Eunice has growed to. When she was about fourteen and weighed only a hundred and ninety odd, he and Mother Ogden figured a lot on marryin' Eunice into the House of Lords, like they did her sister, but they gave all that up when she topped the two hundred mark.

Standin' there with Rossiter, they loomed up like a dime museum couple; but they was lookin' happy, and gazin' at each other in that mushy way—you know how.

"Say," says Rossiter's old man, sizin' 'em up careful, "is it all true? Do you think as much of one another as all that?"

There wa'n't any need of their sayin' so; but Rossy speaks up prompt for the only time in his life. He told how they'd been spoons on each other for more'n a year, but hadn't dared let on because they was afraid of bein' kidded. It was the same way about gettin' married. Course, their bein' neighbours on the avenue, and all that, he must have known that the folks on either side wouldn't kick, but neither one of 'em had the nerve to stand for a big weddin', so they just made up their minds to slide off easy and have it all through before anyone had a chance to give 'em the jolly.

"But now that you've found it out," says Rossiter, "I suppose you'll want us to wait and——"

"Wait nothing!" says the old man, jammin' on his hat. "Don't you wait a minute on my account. Go ahead with your elopement. I'll clear out. I'll go up to the club and find Ogden, and when you have had the knot tied good and fast, you come home and receive a double barrelled blessing."

About that time the minister that they'd been waitin' for shows up, and before I knows it I've been rung in. Well, say, it was my first whack playin' back stop at a weddin', and perhaps I put up a punk performance; but inside of half an hour the job was done.

And of all the happy reunions I was ever lugged into, it was when Rossiter's folks and the Ogdens got together afterwards. They were so tickled to get them two freak left overs off their hands that they almost adopted me into both families, just for the little stunt I did in bilkin' them P. D.'s.

XII

TWO ROUNDS WITH SYLVIE

If it hadn't been for givin' Chester a show to make a gallery play, you wouldn't have caught me takin' a bite out of the quince, the way I did the other night. But say, when a young sport has spent the best part of a year learnin' swings and ducks and footwork, and when fancy boxin' about all the stunt he's got on his program, it's no more'n right he should give an exhibition, specially if that's what he aches to do. And Chester did have that kind of a longin'.

"Who are you plannin' to have in the audience, Chetty?" says I.

"Why," says he, "there'll be three or four of the fellows up, and maybe some of the crowd that mother's invited will drop in too."

"Miss Angelica likely to be in the bunch?" says I.

Chester pinks up at that and tries to make out he hadn't thought anything about Angelica's bein' there at all. But I'd heard a lot about this particular young lady, and when I sees the colour on Chester his plan was as clear as if the entries was posted on a board.

"All right, Chetty," says I; "have it any way you say. I'll be up early Saturday night."

So that's what I was doin' in the smoker on the five-nine, with my gym. suit and gaslight clothes in a kit bag up on the rack. Just as they shuts the gates and gives the word to pull out, in strolls the last man aboard and piles in alongside of me. I wouldn't have noticed him special if he hadn't squinted at the ticket I'd stuck in the seat back, and asked if I was goin' to get off at that station.

"I was thinkin' some of it when I paid my fare," says I.

"Ah!" says he, kind of gentle and blinkin' his eyes. "That is my station, too. Might I trouble you to remind me of the fact when we arrive?"

"Sure," says I; "I'll wake you up."

He gives me another blink, pulls a little readin' book out of his pocket, slumps down into the seat, and proceeds to act like he'd gone into a trance.

Say, I didn't need more'n one glimpse to size him up for a freak. The Angora haircut was tag enough—reg'lar Elbert Hubbard thatch he was wearin', all fluffy and wavy, and just clearin' his coat collar. That and the artist's necktie, not to mention the eye glasses with the tortoise shell rims, put him in the self advertisin' class without his sayin' a word.

Outside of the frills, he wa'n't a bad lookin' chap, and sizable enough for a 'longshoreman, only you could tell by the lily white hands and the long fingernails that him and toil never got within speakin' distance.

"Wonder what particular brand of mollycoddle he is?" thinks I.

Now there wa'n't any call for me to put him through the catechism, just because he was headed for the same town I was; but somehow I had an itch to take a rise out of him. So I leans over and gets a peek at the book.

"Readin' po'try, eh?" says I, swallowin' a grin.

"Beg pardon?" says he, kind of shakin' himself together. "Yes, this is poetry—Swinburne, you know," and he slumps down again as if he'd said all there was to say.

But when I starts out to be sociable you can't head me off that way. "Like it?" says I.

"Why, yes," says he, "very much, indeed. Don't you?"

He thought he had me corked there; but I comes right back at him. "Nix!" says I. "Swinny's stuff always hit me as bein' kind of punk."

"Really!" says he, liftin' his eyebrows. "Perhaps you have been unfortunate in your selections. Now take this, from the Anactoria——"

And say, I got what was comin' to me then. He tears off two or three yards of it, all about moonlight and stars and kissin' and lovin', and a lot of gush like that. Honest, it would give you an ache under your vest!

"There!" says he. "Isn't that beautiful imagery?"

"Maybe," says I. "Guess I never happened to light on that part before."

"But surely you are familiar with his Madonna Mia?" says he.

"That got past me too," says I.

"It's here," says he, speakin' up quick. "Wait. Ah, this is it!" and hanged if he don't give me another dose, with more love in it than you could get in a bushel of valentines, and about as much sense as if he'd been readin' the dictionary backwards. He does it well, though, just as if it all meant something; and me settin' there listenin' until I felt like I'd been doped.

"Say, I take it all back," says I when he lets up. "That Swinny chap maybe ain't quite up to Wallace Irwin; but he's got Ella Wheeler pushed through the ropes. I've got to see a friend in the baggage car, though, and if you'll let me climb out past I'll speak to the brakeman about puttin' you off where you belong."

"You're very kind," says he. "Regret you can't stay longer."

Was that a josh, or what? Anyway, I figures I'm gettin' off easy, for there was a lot more of that blamed book he might have pumped into me if I hadn't ducked.

"Never again!" says I to myself. "Next time I gets curious I'll keep my mouth shut."

I wa'n't takin' any chances of his holdin' me up on the station platform when we got off, either. I was the first man to swing from the steps, and I makes a bee line for the road leadin' out towards Chester's place, not stoppin' for a hack. Pretty soon who should come drivin' after me but Curlylocks. He still has his book open, though; so he gets by without spottin' me, and I draws a long breath.

By the time I'd hoofed over the two miles between the stations and where Chester lives I'd done a lot of breathin'. It was quite some of a place to get to, one of these new-model houses, that wears the plasterin' on the outside and has a roof made of fancy drain pipe. It's balanced right on the edge of the rocks, with the whole of Long Island sound for a back yard and more'n a dozen acres of private park between it and the road.

"Gee!" says I to Chester, "I should think this would be as lonesome as livin' in a lighthouse."

"Not with the mob that mother usually has around," says he.

If the attendance that night was a sample, I guess he was right; for the bunch that answers the dinner gong would have done credit to a summer hotel. Seems that Chester's old man had been a sour, unsociable old party in his day, keepin' the fam'ly shut up in a thirty-foot-front city house that was about as cheerful as a tomb, and havin' comp'ny to dinner reg'lar once a year.

But when he finally quit breathin', and the lawyers had pried the checkbook out of his grip, mother had sailed in to make up for lost time. It wasn't bridge and pink teas. She'd always had a hankerin' for minglin' with the high brows, and it was them she went gunnin' for,—anything from a college president down to lady novelists. Anybody that could paint a prize picture, or break into print in the thirty-five-cent magazines, or get his name up as havin' put the scoop net over a new germ, could win a week of first class board from her by just sendin' in his card.

But it was tough on Chester, havin' that kind of a gang around all the time, clutterin' up the front hall with their extension grips and droppin' polysyllables in the soup. Chetty's brow was a low cut. Maybe he had a full set of brains; but he hadn't ever had to work 'em overtime, and he didn't seem anxious to try. About all the heavy thinkin' he did was when he was orderin' lunch at the club. But he was a big, full blooded, good natured young feller, and with the exercise he got around to the Studio he kept in pretty good trim.

How he ever come to get stuck on a girl like Angelica, though, was more'n I could account

for. She's one of these slim, big eyed, breathless, gushy sort of females; the kind that tends out on picture shows, and piano recitals, and Hindu lectures. Chester seems to have a bad case of it, though.

"Is she on hand to-night, Chetty?" says I.

He owns up that she was. "And say, Shorty," says he, "I want you to meet her. Come on, now. I've told her a lot about you."

"That bein' the case," says I, "here's where Angelica gets a treat," and we starts out to hunt for her, Chester's plan bein' to make me the excuse for the boxin' exhibit.

But Angelica didn't seem to be so easy to locate. First we strikes the music room, where a heavy weight gent lately come over from Warsaw is tearin' a thunder storm out of the southwest corner of the piano.

The room was full of folks; but nary sign of the girl with the eyes. Nor she wa'n't in the libr'y, where a four-eyed duck with a crop of rusty chin spinach was gassin' away about the sun spots, or something. Say, there was 'most any kind of brain stimulation you could name bein' handed out in diff'rent parts of that house; but Angelica wa'n't to any of 'em.

It was just by accident, as we was takin' a turn around one of the verandas facin' the water, that, we runs across a couple camped down in a corner seat under a big palm. The girl in pink radium silk was Angelica. And say, by moonlight she's a bunch' of honeysuckle! The other party was our old friend Curlylocks, and I has to grin at the easy way he has of pickin' out the best looker in sight and leadin' her off where she wouldn't have to listen to anybody but him. He has the po'try tap turned on full blast, and the girl is listenin' as pleased as if she had never heard anything better in her life.



HE HAS THE PO'TRY TAP TURNED ON FULL BLAST

HE HAS THE PO'TRY TAP TURNED ON FULL BLAST

"Confound him!" says Chester under his breath. "He's here again, is he?"

"Looks like this part of the house was gettin' crowded, Chetty," says I. "Let's back out."

"Hanged if I do!" says he, and proceeds to do the butt in act about as gentle as a truck horse boltin' through a show window. "Oh, you're here, Angelica!" he growls out. "I've been hunting all over the shop for you."

"S-s-sh!" says Angelica, holding up one finger and him off with the other hand.

"Yes, I see," says Chester; "but——"

"Oh, please run away and don't bother!" says she. "That's a good boy, now Chester."

"Oh, darn!" says Chester.

That was the best he could do too, for they don't even wait to see us start. Angelica gives us a fine view of her back hair, and Mr. Curlylocks begins where he left off, and spiels away. It was a good deal the same kind of rot he had shoved at me on the train,—all about hearts and lovin' and so on,—only here he throws in business with the eyelashes, and seems to have pulled out the soft vocal stops.

Chester stands by for a minute, tryin' to look holes through 'em, and then he lets me lead him off.

"Now what do you think of that?" says he, makin' a face like he'd tasted something that had been too long in the can.

"Why," says I, "it's touchin', if true. Who's the home destroyer with the vaseline voice and the fuzzy nut?"

"He calls himself Sylvan Vickers," says Chester. "He's a poet—a sappy, slushy, milk and water poet. Writes stuff about birds and flowers and love, and goes around spouting it to women."

"Why," says I, "he peeled off a few strips for me, comin' up on the cars, and I though it was hot stuff."

"Honest, Shorty," says Chester, swallowin' the string as fast as I could unwind the ball, "you—you don't like that kind of guff, do you?"

"Oh, well," says I, "I don't wake up in the night and cry for it, and maybe I can worry along for the next century or so without hearin' any more; but he's sure found some one that does like it, eh?"

There's no sayin' but what Chester held himself in well; for if ever a man was entitled to a grouch, it was him. But he says mighty little, just walks off scowlin' and settin' his teeth hard. I knew what was good for that; so I hints that he round up his chappies and go down into the gym. to work it off.

Chetty's enthusiasm for mitt jugglin' has all petered out, though, and it's some time before I can make him see it my way. Then we has to find his crowd, that was scattered around in the different rooms, lonesome and tired; so it's late in the evenin' before we got under way.

Chester and me have had a round or so, and he'd just wore out one of his friends and was tryin' to tease somebody else to put 'em on, when I spots a rubber neck in the back of the hall.

"O-o-h, see who's here, Chetty!" says I, whisperin' over his shoulder.

It was our poet friend, that has had to give up Angelica to her maw. He's been strayin' around loose, and has wandered in through the gym. doors by luck. Now, Chester may not have any mighty intellect, but there's times when he can think as quick as the next one. He takes one glance at Curlylocks, and stiffens like a bird dog pointin' a partridge.

"Say," says he all excited, "do you suppose—could we get him to put them on?"

"Not if you showed you was so anxious as all that," says I.

"Then you ask him, Shorty," he whispers. "I'll give a hundred for just one round—two hundred."

"S-s-sh!" says I. "Take it easy."

Ever see an old lady tryin' to shoo a rooster into a fence corner, while the old man waited around the end of the woodshed with the axe? You know how gentle and easy the trick has to be worked? Well, that was me explainin' to Curlylocks how we was havin' a little exercise with the kid pillows,—oh, just a little harmless tappin' back and forth, so's we could sleep well afterwards,—and didn't he feel like tryin' it for a minute with Chester? Smooth! Some of that talk of mine would have greased an axle.

Sylvie, old boy, he blinks at me through his glasses, like a poll parrot sizin' up a firecracker that little Jimmy wants to hand him. He don't say anything, but he seems some interested. He reaches out for one of the mitts and pokes a finger into the paddin', lookin' it over as if it was some kind of a curiosity.

"Reg'lar swan's down cushions," says I.

"Like to have you try a round or so, Vickers," puts in Chester, as careless as he could. "Professor McCabe will show you how to put them on."

"Ah, really?" says Curlylocks. Then he has to step up and inspect Chester's frame up.

"That's the finish!" thinks I; for Chetty's a well built boy, good and bunchy around the shoulders, and when he peels down to a sleeveless jersey he looks 'most as wicked as Sharkey. But, just as we're expectin' Curlylocks to show how wise he was, he throws out a bluff that leaves us gaspin' for breath.

"Do you know," says he, "if I was in the mood for that sort of thing, I'd be charmed; but—er ___"

"Oh, fudge!" says Chetty. "I expect you'd rather recite us some poetry?" And at that one of Chester's chums snickers right out. Sylvie flushes up like some one had slapped him on the wrist.

"Beg pardon," says he; "but I believe I will try it for a little while," and he holds out his paws for me to slip on the gloves.

"Better shed the parlour clothes," says I. "You're liable to get 'em dusty," which last tickles the audience a lot.

He didn't want to peel off even his Tuxedo; but jollies him into lettin' go of it, and partin' with his collar and white tie and eye glasses too. That was as far as he'd go, though.

Course, it was kind of a low down game to put up on anybody; but Curlylocks wa'n't outclassed any in height, nor much in weight; and, seein' as how he'd kind of laid himself open to something of the sort, I didn't feel as bad as I might. All the time, Chester was tryin' to keep the grin off his face, and his chums was most wearin' their elbows out nudgin' each other.

"Now," says I, when I've got Curlylocks ready for the slaughter, "what'll it be—two-minute rounds?"

"Quite satisfactory," says Sylvie; and Chetty nods.

"Then let 'er go!" says I, steppin' back.

One thing I've always coached Chester on, was openin' lively. It don't make any difference whether the mitts are hard or soft, whether it's a go to a finish or a private bout for fun, there's no sense in wastin' the first sixty seconds in stirrin' up the air. The thing to do is to bore in. And Chester didn't need any urgin'. He cuts loose with both bunches, landin' a right on the ribs and pokin' the left into the middle of Sylvie's map; so sudden that Mr. Poet heaves up a grunt way from his socks.

"Ah, string it out, Chetty," says I. "String it out, so's it'll last longer."

But he's like a hungry kid with a hokypoky sandwich,—he wants to take it all at one bite. And maybe if I'd been as much gone on Angelica as he was, and had been put on a siding for this moonlight po'try business, I'd been just as anxious. So he wades in again with as fine a set of half arm jolts as he has in stock.

By this time Sylvie has got his guard up proper, and is coverin' himself almost as good as if he knew how. He does it a little awkward; but somehow, Chetty couldn't seem to get through.

"Give him the cross hook!" sings out one of the boys.

Chester tries, but it didn't work. Then he springs another rush, and they goes around like a couple of pinwheels, with nothin' gettin' punished but the gloves.

"Time!" says I, and leads Sylvie over to a chair. He was puffin' some, but outside of that he was as good as new. "Good blockin', old man," says I. "You're doin' fine. Keep that up and you'll be all right."

"Think so?" says he, reachin' for the towel.

The second spasm starts off different. Curlylocks seems to be more awake than he was, and the first thing we knows he's fiddlin' for an openin' in the good old fashioned way.

"And there's where you lose out, son," thinks I.

I hadn't got through thinkin' before things begun happenin'. Sylvie seems to unlimber from the waist up, and his arms acted like he'd let out an extra link in 'em. Funny I hadn't noticed that reach of his before. For a second or so he only steps around Chester, shootin' out first one glove and then the other, and plantin' little love pats on different parts of him, as if he was locatin' the right spots.

Chetty don't like havin' his bumps felt of that way, and comes back with a left swing followed by an upper cut. They was both a little wild, and they didn't connect. That wa'n't the worst of it, though. Before he's through with that foolishness Sylvie turns them long arms of his into a rapid fire battery, and his mitts begin to touch up them spots he's picked out at the rate of about a hundred bull's eyes to the minute. It was bing—bing—bing—biff!—with Chetty's arms swingin'

wide, and his block rockin', and his breath comin' short, and his knees gettin' as wabbly as a new boy speakin' a piece. Before I can call the round Curlylocks has put the steam into a jaw punch that sends Chester to the mat as hard as though he'd been dropped out of a window.

"Is—is it all over?" says Chetty when he comes to, a couple of minutes later.

"If you leave it to me," says I, "I should say it was; unless Mr. What's-his-name here wants to try that same bunch of tricks on me. How about it?"

"Much obliged, professor," says Curlylocks, givin' a last hitch to his white tie; "but I've seen you in the ring."

"Well," says I, "I've heard you recite po'try; so we're even. But say, you make a whole lot better showin' in my line than I would in yours, and if you ever need a backer in either, just call on me."

We shakes hands on that; and then Chetty comes to the front, man fashion, with his flipper out, too. That starts the reunion, and when I leaves 'em, about one A. M., the Scotch and ginger ale tide was runnin' out fast.

How about Angelica? Ah, say, next mornin' there shows up a younger, fresher, gushier one than she is, and inside of half an hour her and Curlylocks is close together on a bench, and he's got the little book out again. Angelica pines in the background for about three minutes before Chester comes around with the tourin' car, and the last I see of 'em they was snuggled up together in the back of the tonneau. So I guess Chetty don't need much sympathisin' with, even if he was passed a couple of lime drops.

XIII

GIVING BOMBAZOULA THE HOOK

Maybe I was tellin' you something about them two rockin' chair commodores from the yacht club, that I've got on my reg'lar list? They're some of Pinckney's crowd, you know, and that's just as good as sayin' they're more ornamental than useful. Anyway, that description's a close fit for Purdy.

First off I couldn't stand for Purdy at all. He's one of these natty, band box chappies, with straw coloured hair slicked down as smooth as if he'd just come up from a dive, and a costume that looks as if it might have been copied from a stained glass window. You've seen them symphonies in greys and browns, with everything matched up, from their shirt studs to their shoes buttons? Now, I don't mind a man's bein' a swell dresser—I've got a few hot vests myself—but this tryin' to be a Mr. Pastelle is runnin' the thing into the ground.

Purdy could stand all the improvin' the tailor could hand him, though. His eyes was popped just enough to give him a continual surprised look, and there was more or less of his face laid out in nose. Course, he wa'n't to blame for that; but just the same, when he gets to comin' to the Studio twice a week for glove work and the chest weights, I passes him over to Swifty Joe. Honest, I couldn't trust myself to hit around that nose proper. But Swifty uses him right. Them clothes of Purdy's had got Swifty goin', and he wouldn't have mussed him for a farm.

After I'd got used to seein' Purdy around, I didn't mind him so much myself. He seemed to be a well meanin', quiet, sisterly sort of a duck, one of the kind that fills in the corners at afternoon teas, and wears out three pairs of pumps every winter leadin' cotillions. You'll see his name figurin' in the society notes: how Mrs. Burgess Jones gave a dinner dance at Sherry's for the younger set, and the cotillion was led by Mr. Purdy Bligh. Say, how's that as a steady job for a grown man, eh?

But so long as I'm treated square by anyone, and they don't try to throw any lugs around where I am, I don't feel any call to let 'em in on my private thoughts. So Purdy and me gets along first rate; and the next thing I knows he's callin' me Shorty, and bein' as glad to see me when he comes in as if I was one of his old pals. How you goin' to dodge a thing of that kind? And then, 'fore I knows what's comin', I'm right in the middle of this Bombazoula business.

It wa'n't anything I butted into on purpose, now you can take that straight. It was this way: I was doin' my reg'lar afternoon stroll up the avenue, not payin' much attention to anything in particular, when a cab pulls up at the curb, and I looks around, to see Purdy leanin' over the apron and makin' motions at me with his cane.

"Hello!" says I. "Have they got you strapped in so you can't get out?"

"By Jove!" says he, "I never thought of jumping out, you know. Beg pardon, old man, for

hailing you in that fashion, but——"

"Cut it!" says I. "I ain't so proud as all that. What's doin'?"

"It's rather a rummy go," says he; "but where can I buy some snakes?"

"That's rummy, all right," says I. "Have you tried sendin' him to an institute?"

"Sending who?" says he.

"Oh!" says I. "I figured this was a snake cure, throwin' a scare into somebody, that you was plannin'."

"Oh, dear, no," says Purdy. "They're for Valentine. He's fond of snakes, you know—can't get along without them. But they must be big ones—spotted, rings around them, and all that."

"Gee!" says I. "Vally's snake tastes must be educated 'way up! Guess you'll have to give in your order down at Lefty White's."

"And where is that?" says he.

"William street, near the bridge," says I. "Don't you know about Lefty's?"

Well, he didn't; hadn't ever been below the bridge on the East Side in his life; and wouldn't I please come along, if I could spare the time.

So I climbs in alongside Purdy and the cane, and off we goes down town, at the rate of a dollar 'n' a half an hour. I hadn't got out more'n two questions 'fore Purdy cuts loose with the story of his life.

"It's almost the same as asking me to choose my lot in the cemetery," says he, "this notion of Aunt Isabella's for sending me out to buy snakes."

"I thought it was Valentine they was for?" says I. "Where does he come in?"

That fetches us to Chapter One, which begins with Aunt Isabella. It seems that some time back, after she'd planted one hubby in Ohio and another in Greenwood, and had pinned 'em both down secure with cut granite slabs, aunty had let herself go for another try. This time she gets an Englishman. He couldn't have been very tough, to begin with, for he didn't last long. Neither did a brother of his; although you couldn't lay that up against Isabella, as brother in law got himself run over by a train. About all he left was a couple of fourteen-year-old youngsters stranded in a boarding school. That was Purdy and Valentine, and they was only half brothers at that, with nobody that they could look up to for anything more substantial than sympathy. So it was up to the step-aunt to do the rescue act.

Well, Isabella has accumulated all kinds of dough; but she figures out that the whole of one half brother was about all she wanted as a souvenir to take home from dear old England. She looks the two of 'em over for a day, tryin' to decide which to take, and then Purdy's 'lasses coloured hair wins out against Valentine's brick dust bangs. She finds a job for Vally, a place where he can almost earn a livin', gives him a nice new prayer book and her blessin', and cuts him adrift in the fog. Then she grabs Purdy by the hand and catches the next boat for New York.

From then on it's all to the downy for Purdy, barrin' the fact that the old girl's more or less tryin' to the nerves. She buys herself a double breasted house just off the avenue, gives Purdy the best there is goin', and encourages him to be as ladylike as he knows how.

And say, what would you expect? I'd hate to think of what I'd be now if I'd been brought up on a course of dancin' school, music lessons, and Fauntleroy suits. What else was there for Purdy to do but learn to drink tea with lemon in it, and lead cotillions? Aunt Isabella's been takin' on weight and losin' her hearin'. When she gets so that she can't eat chicken salad and ice cream at one A. M. without rememberin' it for three days, and she has to buy pearls to splice out her necklace, and have an extra wide chair put in her op'ra box, she begins to sour on the merry-merry life, scratches half the entries on her visitin' list, and joins old lady societies that meet once a month in the afternoon.

"Of course," says Purdy, "I had no objection to all that. It was natural. Only after she began to bring Anastasia around, and hint very plainly what she expected me to do, I began to get desperate."

"Stashy wa'n't exactly your idea of a pippin, eh?" says I.

That was what. Accordin' to Purdy's shorthand notes, Stashy was one of these square chinned females that ought to be doin' a weight liftin' act with some tent show. But she wa'n't. She had too much out at int'rest for that, and as she didn't go in for the light and frivolous she has to have something to keep her busy. So she starts out as a lady preventer. Gettin' up societies to prevent things was her fad. She splurges on 'em, from the kind that wants to put mufflers on steamboat whistles, to them that would like to button leggins on the statues of G. Wash. For all that, though, she thinks it's her duty to marry some man and train him, and between her and Aunt Isabella

they'd picked out Purdy for the victim.

"While you'd gone and tagged some pink and white, mink lined Daisy May?" says I.

"I hadn't thought about getting married at all," says Purdy.

"Then you might's well quit squirmin'," says I. "If you've got two of that kind plannin' out your future, there ain't any hope."

Then we gets down to Valentine, the half brother that has been cut loose. Just as Purdy has given it to aunty straight that he'd rather drop out of two clubs and have his allowance cut in half, than tie up to any such tailor made article as Anastasia, and right in the middle of Aunt Isabella's gettin' purple faced and puffy eyed over it, along comes a lengthy letter from Valentine.

It ain't any hard luck wheeze, either. He's no hungry prod., Vally ain't. He's been doin' some tall climbin', all these years that Purdy's been collectin' pearl stick pins and gold cigarette cases, and changin' his clothes four times a day. Vally has jumped from one job to another, played things clear across the board and the ends against the middle, chased the pay envelope almost off the edge of the map, and finished somewhere on the east coast of Africa, where he bosses a couple of hundred coloured gentlemen in the original package, and makes easy money by bein' agent for a big firm of London iv'ry importers. He'd been makin' a trip to headquarters with a cargo, and was on his way back to the iv'ry fields, when the notion struck him to stop off in New York and say howdy to Aunt Isabella and Brother Purd.

"And she hasn't talked about anything but Valentine since," says Purdy.

"It's Vally's turn to be it; eh?" says I.

"You'd think so if you could hear them," says he. "Anastasia is just as enthusiastic."

"You ain't gettin' jealous, are you?" says I.

Purdy unreefs the sickliest kind of a grin you ever saw. "I was as pleased as anyone," says he, "until I found out the whole of Aunt Isabella's plan."

And say, it was a grand right and left that she'd framed up. Matin' Stashy up with Valentine instead of Purdy was only part. Her idea was to induce Vally to settle down with her, and ship Purdy off to look after the iv'ry job.

"Only fancy!" says Purdy. "It's a place called Bombazoula! Why, you can't even find it on the chart. I'd die if I had to live in such a dreadful place."

"Is it too late to get busy and hand out the hot air to Stashy?" says I. "Looks to me like it was either you for her, or Bombazoula for you."

"Don't!" says Purdy, and he shivers like I'd slipped an icicle down his back. Honest, he was takin' it so hard I didn't have the heart to rub it in.

"Maybe Valentine'll renig—who knows?" says I. "He may be so stuck on Africa that she can't call him off."

"Oh, Aunt Isabella has thought of that," says he. "She is so provoked with me that she will do everything to make him want to stay; and if I remember Valentine, he'll be willing. Besides, who would want to live in Africa when they could stop in New York? But I do think she might have sent some one else after those snakes."

"Oh, yes!" says I. "I'd clean forgot about them. Where do they figure in this?"

"Decoration," says Purdy. "In my old rooms too!"

Seems that Stashy and aunty had been reading up on Bombazoula, and they'd got it down fine. Then they turns to and lays themselves out to fix things up for Valentine so homelike and comfortable that, even if he was ever so homesick for the jungle, like he wrote he was, he wouldn't want to go any farther.

First they'd got a lot of big rubber trees and palms, and filled the rooms full of 'em, with the floors covered with stage grass, and half a dozen grey parrots to let loose. They'd even gone so far as to try to hire a couple of fake Zulus from a museum to come up and sing the moonrise song; so's Vally wouldn't be bothered about goin' to sleep night. The snakes twinin' around the rubber trees was to add the finishin' touch. Course, they wanted the harmless kind, that's had their stingers cut out; but snakes of some sort they'd just got to have, or else they knew it wouldn't seem like home to Valentine.

"Just as though I cared whether he is going to feel at home or not!" says Purdy, real pettish. "By, Jove, Shorty! I've half a mind not to do it. So there!"

"Gee!" says I. "I wouldn't have your temper for anything. Shall we signal the driver to do a pivot and head her north?"

"N-n-n-o," says Purdy, reluctant.

And right there I gets a seventh son view of Aunt Isabella crackin' the checkbook at Purdy, and givin' him the cold spine now and then by threatenin' to tear up the will. From that on I feels different towards him. He'd got to a point where it was either please Aunt Isabella, or get out and hustle; and how to get hold of real money except by shovin' pink slips at the payin' teller was part of his education that had been left out. He was up against it for fair.

"Say, Purdy," says I, "I don't want to interfere in any family matters; but since you've put it up to me, let me get this chunk of advice off my mind: Long's you've got to be nice to aunty or go on a snowball diet, I'd be nice and do it as cheerful as I could."

Purdy thinks that over for a minute or so. Then he raps his cane on the rubber mat, straightens up his shoulders, and says, "By Jove, I'll do it! I'll get the snakes!"

That wa'n't so easy, though, as I'd thought. Lefty White says he's sorry, but he runs a mighty small stock of snakes in winter. He's got a fine line of spring goods on the way, though, and if we'll just leave our order—

"Ah, say, Lefty!" says I. "You give me shootin' pains. Here I goes and cracks up your joint as a first class snakery and all you can show is a few angleworms in bottles and a prospectus of what you'll have next month."

"Stuffed ones wouldn't do, eh?" says he.

"Why not?" says I.

Purdy wa'n't sure, but he thought he'd take a chance on 'em; so we picked out three of the biggest and spottedest ones in the shop, and makes Lefty promise to get 'em up there early next forenoon, for Valentine was due to show up by dinner time next night.

On the way back we talks it over some more, and I tries to chirk Purdy up all I could; for every time he thinks of Bombazoula he has a shiverin' fit that nearly knocks him out.

"I could never stand it to go there," says he—"never!"

"Here, here!" says I. "That's no way to meet a thing like this. What you want to do is to chuck a bluff. Jump right into this reception business with both feet and let on you're tickled to death with the prospect. Aunty won't take half the satisfaction in shunting you off to the monkey woods if she thinks you want to go."

Beats all what a little encouragement will do for some folks. By the time Purdy drops me at the Studio he's feelin' a whole lot better, and is prepared to give Vally the long lost brother grip when he comes.

But I was sorry for Purdy just the same. I could see him, over there at Bombazoula, in a suit of lavender pajamas, tryin' to organise a cotillion with a lot of heavy weight brunettes, wearin' brass rings in their noses and not much else. And all next day I kept wonderin' if Aunt Isabella's scheme was really goin' to pan. So, when Purdy rushes in about four o'clock, and wants me to come up and take a look at the layout, I was just about ripe for goin' to see the show.

"But I hope we can shy aunty," says I. "Sometimes I get along with these old battle axes first rate, and then again I don't; and what little reputation you got left at home I don't want to queer."

"Oh, that will be all right," says Purdy. "She has heard of you from Pinckney, and she knows about how you helped me to get the snakes."

"Did they fit in?" says I.

"Come up and see," says Purdy.

And it was worth the trip, just to get a view of them rooms. Nobody but a batty old woman would have ever thought up so many jungle stunts for the second floor of a brownstone front.

"There!" says Purdy. "Isn't that tropical enough?"

I took a long look. "Well," says I, "I've never been farther south than Old Point, but I've seen such things pictured out before now, and if I'm any judge, this throws up a section of the cannibal belt to the life."

It did too. They had the dark shades pulled down, and the light was kind of dim; but you could see that the place was chock full of ferns and palms and such. The parrots was hoppin' around, and you could hear water runnin' somewheres, and they'd trained them spotted snakes around the rubber trees just as natural as if they'd crawled up there by themselves.

While we was lookin' Aunt Isabella comes puffin' up the stairs.

"Isn't it just charming, Mr. McCabe?" says she, holdin' a hand up behind one ear. "I can

hardly wait for dear Valentine to come, I'm so anxious to see how pleased he'll be. He just dotes on jungle life. The dear boy! You must come up and take tea with him some afternoon. He's a very shy, diffident little chap; but——"

At that the door bell starts ringin' like the house was afire, and bang! bang! goes someone's fist on the outside panel. Course, we all chases down stairs to see what's broke loose; but before we gets to the front hall the butler has the door open, and in pushes a husky, red whiskered party, wearin' a cloth cap, a belted ulster with four checks to the square yard, and carryin' an extension leather bag about the size of a small trunk, with labels pasted all over it.

"It's a blawsted shyme, that's w'at it is!" says he—"me p'yin' 'alf a bob for a two shillin' drive. These cabbies of yours is a set of bloomink 'iw'ymen!"

"What name, sir?" says the butler.

"Nime!" roars the whiskered gent. "I'm Valentine, that's who I am! Tyke the luggage, you shiverin' pie face!"

"Oh, Valentine!" squeals Aunt Isabella, makin' a rush at him with her arms out.

"Sheer off, aunty!" says he. "Cut out the bally tommyrot and let me 'ave a wash. And sye, send some beggar for the brandy and soda. Where's me rooms?"

"I'll show you up, Valentine," chips in Purdy.

"'Ello! 'O's the little man?" says Vally. "Blow me if it ain't Purdy! Trot along up, Purdy lad, and show me the digs."

Say, he was a bird, Vally was. He talks like a Cockney, acts like a bounder, and looks 'em both.

Aunt Isabella has dropped on the hall seat, gaspin' for breath, the butler is leanin' against the wall with his mouth open; so I grabs the bag and starts up after the half brothers. Just by the peachblow tint of Vally's nose I got the idea that maybe the most entertainin' part of this whole program was billed to take place on the second floor.

"Here you are," says Purdy, swingin' open the door and shovin' him in. "Aunt Isabella has fixed things up homelike for you, you see."

"And here's your trunk," says I. "Make yourself to home," and I shuts him in to enjoy himself.

It took Valentine just about twenty seconds to size up the interior decorations; for Purdy'd turned on the incandescents so's to give him a good view, and that had stirred up the parrots some. What I was waitin' for was for him to discover the spotted snakes. I didn't think he could miss 'em, for they was mighty prominent. Nor he didn't. It wasn't only us heard it, but everyone else on the block.

"Wow!" says he. "'Elp! 'Elp! Lemme out! I'm bein' killed!"

That was Valentine, bellerin' enough to take the roof off, and clawin' around for the doorknob on the inside. He comes out as if he'd been shot through a chute, his eyes stickin' out like a couple of peeled onions, an' a grey parrot hangin' to one ear.

"What's the trouble?" says Purdy.

"Br-r-r!" says Valentine, like a clogged steam whistle. "Where's the nearest 'orspital? I'm a sick man! Br-r-r-r!"

With that he starts down the stairs, takin' three at a time, bolts through the front door, and makes a dash down the street, yellin' like a kid when a fire breaks out.

Purdy and me didn't have any time to watch how far he went, for Aunt Isabella had keeled over on the rug, the maid was havin' a fit in the parlour, and the butler was fannin' himself with the card tray. We had to use up all the alcohol and smellin' salts in the house before we could bring the bunch around. When aunty's so she can hold her head up and open her eyes, she looks about cautious, and whispers:

"Has—has he gone, Purdy, dear?"

Purdy says he has.

"Then," she says to me, "bolt that door, and never mention his name to me again."

Everything's lovely now. Purdy's back to the downy, and Bombazoula's wiped off the map for good.

And say! If you're lookin' for a set of jungle scenery and stuffed snakes, I know where you can get a job lot for the askin'.

XIV

A HUNCH FOR LANGDON

Say, the longer I knocks around and the more kinds I meet, the slower I am about sizin' folks up on a first view. I used to think there was only two classes, them that was my kind and them that wa'n't; but I've got over that. I don't try to grade 'em up any more; for they're built on so many different plans it would take a card index the size of a flat buildin' to keep 'em all on file. All I can make out is that there's some good points about the worst of 'em, and some of the best has their streak of yellow.

Anyway, I'm glad I ain't called on to write a tag for Langdon. First news I had of him was what I took for inside information, bein' as it was handed me by his maw. When I gets the note askin' me to call up in the 70's between five and six I don't know whether it's a bid to a tea fest or a bait for an auction. The stationery was real swell, though, and the writin' was this up and down kind that goes with the gilt crest. What I could puzzle out of the name, though, wa'n't familiar. But I follows up the invite and takes a chance.

So about five-thirty I'm standin' outside the glass doors pushin' the bell. A butler with boiled egg eyes looks me over real frosty from behind the lace curtains; but the minute I says I'm Shorty McCabe he takes off the tramp chain and says, "Yes, sir. This way, sir." I'm towed in over the Persian hall runner to the back parlour, where there's a lady and gent sittin' on opposite sides of the coal grate, with a tea tray between 'em.

"I'll be drinkin' that stuff yet, if I ain't careful," thinks I.

But I didn't even have to duck. The lady was so anxious to get to talkin' that she forgot to shove the cups at me, and the gent didn't act like it was his say. It was hard to tell, the way she has the lights fixed, whether she was twenty-five or fifty. Anyway, she hadn't got past the kittenish stage. Some of 'em never does. She don't overdo the thing, but just gushes natural; usin' her eyes, and eyebrows, and the end of her nose, and the tip of her chin when she spoke, as well as throwin' in a few shoulder lifts once in awhile.

"It's so good of you to come up, professor!" says she. "Isn't it, Pembroke?"

Pembroke—he's the gent on the other side of the tray—starts to say that it was, but she don't give him a chance. She blazes right ahead, tellin' how she's heard of me and my Studio through friends, and the minute she hears of it, she knows that nothing would suit Langdon better. "Langdon's my son, you know," says she.

"Honest?" says I.

"Te-he!" says she. "How sweet of you! Hardly anyone believes it at first, though. But he's a dear boy; isn't he, Pembroke?"

This was Pembroke's cue for fair. It's up to him to do the boost act. But all he produces is a double barrelled blink from behind the glasses. He's one of these chubby chaps, Pembroke is, especially around the belt. He has pink cheeks, and a nice white forehead that almost meets the back of his collar. But he knows when to let things slide with a blink.

"I guess some one's been givin' you the wrong steer," says I. "I ain't started any kindergarten class yet. The Y. M. C. A. does that sort of——"

"Oh, dear! but Langdon isn't a child, you know," says the lady. "He's a great big fellow, almost twenty-two. Yes, really. And I know you'll get to be awfully fond of him. Won't he, Pembroke?"

"We-e-e-ell——" says Pembroke.

"Oh, he's bound to," says she. "Of course, Langdon doesn't always make friends easily. He is so apt to be misunderstood. Why, they treated him perfectly horrid at prep. school, and even worse at college. A lot of the fellows, and, actually, some of the professors, were so rude to him that Langdon said he just wouldn't stay another day! I told him I didn't blame him a bit. So he came home. But it's awfully dull for a young man like Langdon here in New York, you know."

"Crippled, or blind or something, is he?" says I.

"Who, Langdon? Why, he's perfect—absolutely perfect!" says she.

"Oh, that accounts for it," says I, and Pembroke went through some motions with his cheeks like he was tryin' to blow soap bubbles up in the air.

Well, it seems that mother has been worryin' a lot over keepin' Langdon amused. Think of it, in a town like this!

"He detests business," says she, "and he doesn't care for theatres, or going to clubs, or reading, or society. But his poor dear father didn't care for any of those things either, except business. And Langdon hasn't any head for that. All he takes an interest in is his machine."

"Singer or Remington?" says I.

"Why, his auto, of course. He's perfectly devoted to that," says she; "but the police are so dreadfully particular. Oh, they make such lots of trouble for Langdon, and get him into such stupid scrapes. Don't they, Pembroke?"

Pembroke didn't blink at that. He nods twice.

"It just keeps me worried all the time," she goes on. "It isn't that I mind paying the absurd fines, of course; but—well, you can understand. No one knows what those horrid officers will do next, they're so unreasonable. Just think, that is the poor boy's only pleasure! So I thought that if we could only get Langdon interested in something of an athletic nature—he's a splendid boxer, you know—oh, splendid!"

"That's different," says I. "You might send him down a few times and——"

"Oh, but I want you to meet him first," says she, "and arouse his enthusiasm. He would never go if you didn't. I expect he will be in soon, and then— Why, that must be Langdon now!"

It might have been an axe brigade from the district attorney's office, or a hook and ladder company, by the sound. I didn't know whether he was comin' through the doors or bringin' 'em in with him. As I squints around I sees the egg eyed butler get shouldered into the hall rack; so I judges that Langdon must be in something of a hurry.

He gets over it, though, for he stamps into the middle of the room, plants his feet wide apart, throws his leather cap with the goggles on into a chair, and chucks one of them greasy bootleg gloves into the middle of the tea tray.

"Hello, maw!" he growls. "Hello, Fatty! You here again?"

Playful little cuss, Langdon was. He's about five feet nine, short necked, and broad across the chest. But he's got a nice face—for a masked ball—eyes the colour of purple writin' ink, hair of a lovely ripe tomato shade growin' down to a peak in front and standin' up stiff and bristly; a corrugated brow, like a washboard; and an undershot jaw, same's a bull terrier. Oh, yes, he was a dear boy, all right. In his leggin's and leather coat he looks too cute for any use.

"Who's this?" says he, gettin' sight of me sittin' sideways on the stuffed chair.

"Why, Langdon dear," says maw, "this is Professor McCabe. I was speaking to you of him, you know."

He looks me over as friendly as if I was some yegg man that had been hauled out of the coal cellar. "Huh!" says he. I've heard freight engines coughin' up a grade make a noise a good deal like that.

Say, as a rule I ain't anxious to take on new people, and it's gettin' so lately that we turn away two or three a week; but it didn't take me long to make up my mind that I could find time for a session with Langdon, if he wanted it.

"Your maw says you do a little boxin'?" says I, smooth and soothin'.

"What of it?" says he.

"Well," says I, "down to my Studio we juggle the kid pillows once in awhile ourselves, when we ain't doin' the wand drill, or playin' bean bag."

"Huh!" says he once more.

For a parlour conversationalist, Langdon was a frost, and he has manners that would turn a subway guard green. But maw jumps in with enough buttered talk for both, and pretty soon she tells me that Langdon's perfectly delighted and will be down next day.

"Me and Mr. Gallagher'll be on the spot," says I. "Good evenin', ma'am."

At that Pembroke jumps up, makes a quick break away, and trails along too, so we does a promenade together down West End-ave.

"Charming young fellow, eh?" says Pembroke.

"Sure!" says I. "But he hides it well."

"You think Langdon needs exercise?" says he.

"Never saw anyone that needed it much worse," says I.

"Just my notion," says he. "In fact I am so interested in seeing that Langdon gets it that I am quite willing to pay something extra for——"

"You don't have to," says I. "I'm almost willin' to do the payin' myself."

That pleases Pembroke so much he has to stop right in his tracks and shake hands. Funny, ain't it, how you can get to be such good friends with anyone so sudden? We walks thirty blocks, chinnin' like brothers, and when we stops on the corner of 42d I've got the whole story of maw and Langdon, with some of Pembroke's hist'ry thrown in.

It was just a plain case of mother bein' used as a doormat by her dear, darling boy. She was more or less broke in to it, for it seems that the late departed had been a good deal of a rough houser in his day, havin' been about as gentle in his ways as a 'Leventh-ave. bartender entertainin' the Gas House Gang. He hadn't much more'n quit the game, though, before Langdon got big enough to carry out the program, and he'd been at it ever since.

As near as I could figure, Pembroke was a boyhood friend of maw's. He'd missed his chance of bein' anything nearer, years ago, but was still anxious to try again. But it didn't look like there'd be any weddin' bells for him until Langdon either got his neck broke or was put away for life. Pemby wa'n't soured, though. He talked real nice about it. He said he could see how much maw thought of Langdon, and it showed what good stuff she was made of, her stickin' to the boy until he'd settled on something, or something had settled on him. Course, he thought it was about time she had a let up and was treated white for awhile.

Accordin' to the hints he dropped, I suspicions that Pembroke would have ranked her A-1 in the queen class, and I gathers that the size of her bank account don't cut any ice in this deal, him havin' more or less of a surplus himself. I guess he'd been a patient waiter; but he'd set his hopes hard on engagin' the bridal state room for a spring trip to Europe.

It all comes back, though, to what could be done with Langdon, and that was where the form sheet wa'n't any help. There's a million or so left in trust for him; but he don't get it until he's twenty-five. Meantime, it was a question of how you're goin' to handle a youngster that's inherited the instincts of a truck driver and the income of a bank president.

"It's a pity, too," says Pembroke. "He hasn't any vicious habits, he's rather bright, and if he could be started right he would make quite a man, even now. He needs to be caged up somewhere long enough to' have some of the bully knocked out of him. I'm hoping you can do a little along that line."

"Too big a contract," says I. "All I want is to make his ears buzz a little, just as a comeback for a few of them grunts he chucked at me."

And who do you suppose showed up at the Studio next forenoon? Him and maw; she smilin' all over and tickled to death to think she'd got him there; Langdon actin' like a bear with a sore ear.

"Maybe you hadn't better wait," says I to her.

"Oh, yes," says she. "I am going to stay and watch dear Langdon box, you know."

Well, unless I ruled her out flat, there was no way of changin' her mind; so I had to let her stay. And she saw Langdon box. Oh, yes! For an amateur, he puts up a fairly good exhibition, and as I didn't have the heart to throw the hook into him with her sittin' there lookin' so cheerful, about all I does is step around and block his swings and jabs. And say, with him carryin' his guard high, and leavin' the way to his meat safe open half the time, it was all I could do to hold myself back.

The only fun I gets is watchin' Swifty Joe's face out of the corner of my eye. He was pipin' us off from the start. First his mouth comes open a foot or so as he sees me let a chance slide, and when I misses more openin's he takes on a look like some one had fed him a ripe egg.

Langdon is havin' the time of his life. He can hit as hard as he likes, and he don't get hit back. Must have seemed real homelike to him. Anyway, soon's he dopes it out that there ain't any danger at all, he bores in like a snow plough, and between blockin' and duckin' I has my hands full.

Just how Langdon has it sized up I couldn't make out; but like as not I made somethin' of a hit with him. I put it down that way when he shows up one afternoon with his bubble, and offers to take me for a spin. It was so unexpected to find him tryin' to do somethin' agreeable that I don't feel like I ought to throw him down. So I pulls on a sweater and climbs in next to the steerin' wheel.

There wa'n't anything fancy about Langdon's oil waggon. He'd had the tonneau stripped off, and left just the front seat—no varnished wood, only a coat of primin' paint and a layer of mud

splashed over that. But we hadn't gone a dozen blocks before I am wise to the fact that nothin' was the matter with the cog wheels underneath.

"Kind of a high powered cart, ain't it?" says I.

"Only ninety horse," says Langdon, jerkin' us around a Broadway car so fast that we grazed both ends at once.

"You needn't hit 'er up on my account," says I, as we scoots across the Plaza, makin' a cab horse stand on his hind legs to give us room.

"I'm only on the second speed," says he. "Wait," and he does some monkeyin' with the lever.

Maybe it was Central Park; but it seemed to me like bein' shot through a Christmas wreath, and the next thing I knows we're tearin' up Amsterdam-ave. Say, I can see 'em yet, them folks and waggons and things we missed—women holdin' kids by the hand, old ladies steppin' out of cars, little girls runnin' across the street with their arms full of bundles, white wings with their dust cans, and boys with delivery carts. Sometimes I'd just shut my eyes and listen for the squashy sound, and when it didn't come I'd open 'em and figure on what would happen if I should reach out and get Langdon's neck in the crook of my arm.

And it wa'n't my first fast ride in town, either. But I'd never been behind the lamps when a two-ton machine was bein' sent at a fifty-mile clip up a street crowded with folks that had almost as much right to be livin' as we did.

It was a game that suited Langdon all right, though. He's squattin' behind the wheel bareheaded, with his ketchup tinted hair plastered back by the wind, them purple eyes shut to a squint, his under jaw stuck out, and a kind of half grin—if you could call it that—flickerin' on and off his thick lips. I don't wonder men shook their fists at us and women turned white and sick as we cleared 'em by the thickness of a sheet of paper. I expect we left a string of cuss words three blocks long.

I don't know how far we went, or where. It was all a nightmare to me, just a string of gasps and visions of what would be in the papers next day, after the coroner's jury got busy. But somehow we got through without any red on the tires, and pulls up in front of the Studio. I didn't jump out in a hurry, like I wanted to. I needed a minute to think, for it seemed to me something was due some one.

"Nice little plaything you've got here," says I. "And that was a great ride. But sittin' still so long has kind of cramped my legs. Don't feel like limberin' up a bit with the mitts, do you?"

"I'd just as soon," says Langdon.

I was tryin' not to look the way I felt; but when we'd sent Swifty down to sit in the machine, and I'd got Langdon peeled off and standin' on the mat, with the spring lock snapped between him and the outside door, it seemed too good to be true. I'd picked out an old set of gloves that had the hair worked away from the knuckles some, for I wa'n't plannin' on any push ball picnic this time.

Just to stir his fightin' blood, and partly so I could be sure I had a good grip on my own temper, I let him get in a few facers on me. Then I opens up with the side remarks I'd been thinkin' over.

"Say, Langy," says I, sidesteppin' one of his swings for my jaw, "s'posin' you'd hit some of them people, eh? S'posin' that car of yours had caught one of them old women—biff!—like that?" and I lets go a jolt that fetches him on the cheek bone.

"Ugh!" says Langdon, real surprised. But he shakes his head and comes back at me.

"Ever stop to think," says I, "how one of them kids would look after you'd got him—so?" and I shoots the left into that bull neck of his.

"S-s-s-say!" sputters Langdon. "What do you think you're doing, anyway?"

"Me?" says I. "I'm tryin' to get a few points on the bubble business. Is it more fun to smash 'em in the ribs—bang!—like that? Or to slug 'em in the head—biff!—so? That's right, son; come in for more. It's waitin'. There! Jarred your nut a bit, that one did, eh? Yes, here's the mate to it. There's plenty more on tap. Oh, never mind the nose claret. It'll wipe off. Keep your guard up. Careful, now! You're swingin' wide. And, as I was sayin'—there, you ran into that one—this bubble scorchin' must be great sport. When you don't—biff!—get 'em—biff! you can scare 'em to death, eh? Wabby on your feet, are you? That's the stuff! Keep it up. That eye's all right. One's all you need to see with. Gosh! Now you've got a pair of 'em."

If it hadn't been for his comin' in so ugly and strong I never could have done it. I'd have weakened and let up on him long before he'd got half what was owin'. But he was bound to have it all, and there's no sayin' he wa'n't game about it. At the last I tried to tell him he'd had enough; but as long as he could keep on his pins he kept hopin' to get in just one on me; so I finally has to

drop him with a stiff one behind the ear.

Course, if we'd had ring gloves on he'd looked like he'd been on the choppin' block; but with the pillows you can't get hurt bad. Inside of ten minutes I has him all washed off and up in a chair, lookin' not much worse than before, except for the eye swellin's. And what do you guess is the first thing he does?

"Say, McCabe," says he, shovin' out his paw, "you're all right, you are."

"So?" says I. "If I thought you was any judge that might carry weight."

"I know," says he. "Nobody likes me."

"Oh, well," says I, "I ain't rubbin' it in. I guess there's white spots in you, after all; even if you do keep 'em covered."

He pricks up his ears at that, and wants to know how and why. Almost before I knows it we've drifted into a heart to heart talk that a half hour before I would have said couldn't have happened. Langdon ain't turned cherub; but he's a whole lot milder, and he takes in what I've got to say as if it was a bulletin from headquarters.

"That's all so," says he. "But I've got to do something. Do you know what I'd like best?"

I couldn't guess.

"I'd like to be in the navy and handle one of those big thirteen-inch guns," says he.

"Why not, then?" says I.

"I don't know how to get in," says he. "I'd go in a minute, if I did."

"You're as good as there now, then," says I. "There's a recruitin' office around on Sixth-ave., not five blocks from here, and the Lieutenant's somethin' of a friend of mine. Is it a go?"

"It is," says Langdon.

Hanged if he didn't mean it too, and before he can change his mind we've had the papers all made out.

In the mornin' I 'phones Pembroke, and he comes around to lug me up while he breaks the news to maw; for he says she'll need a lot of calmin' down. I was lookin' for nothin' less than cat fits, too. But say, she don't even turn on the sprayer.

"The navy!" says she. "Why, how sweet! Oh, I'm so glad! Won't Langdon make a lovely officer?"

I don't know how it's goin' to work out; but there's one sure thing: it'll be some time before Langdon'll be pestered any more by the traffic cops.

And, now that the state room's engaged, you ought to see how well Pembroke is standin' the blow.

XV

SHORTY'S GO WITH ART

When me and art gets into the ring together, you might as well burn the form sheet and slip the band back on your bettin' roll, for there's no tellin' who'll take the count.

It was Cornelia Ann that got me closer to art than I'd ever been before, or am like to get again. Now, I didn't hunt her up, nor she didn't come gunnin' for me. It was a case of runnin' down signals and collidin' on the stair landin'; me makin' a grand rush out of the Studio for a cross town car, and she just gettin' her wind 'fore she tackled the next flight.

Not that I hit her so hard; but it was enough to spill the paper bundles she has piled up on one arm, and start 'em bouncin' down the iron steps. First comes a loaf of bread; next a bottle of pickles, that goes to the bad the third hop; and exhibit C was one of these ten-cent dishes of baked beans—the pale kind, that look like they'd floated in with the tide. Course, that dinky tin pan they was in don't land flat. It slips out of the bag as slick as if it was greased, stands up on edge, and rolls all the way down, distributin' the mess from top to bottom, as even as if it was laid on with a brush.

"My luncheon!" says she, in a reg'lar me-che-e-ild voice.

"Lunch!" says I. "That's what I'd call a spread. This one's on the house, but the next one will be on me. Will to-morrow do?"

"Ye-es," says she.

"Sorry," says I, "but I'm runnin' behind sched. now. What's the name, miss?"

"C. A. Belter, top floor," says she; "but don't mind about—"

"That'll be all right, too," says I, skippin' down over the broken glass and puntin' the five-cent white through the door for a goal.

It's little things like that, though, that keeps a man from forgettin' how he was brought up. I'm ready enough with some cheap jolly, but when it comes to throwin' in a "beg pardon" at the right place I'm a late comer. I thinks of 'em sometime next day.

Course, I tries to get even by orderin' a four-pound steak, with mushroom trimmin's, sent around from the hotel on the corner; but I couldn't get over thinkin' how disappointed she looked when she saw that pan of beans doin' the pinwheel act. I know I've seen the time when a plate of pork-and in my fist would have been worth all the turkey futures you could stack in a barn, and maybe it was that way with her.

Anyway, she didn't die of it, for a couple of days later she knocks easy on the Studio door and gets her head in far enough to say how nice it was of me to send her that lovely steak.

"Forget it," says I.

"Never," says she. "I'm going to do a bas relief of you, in memory of it."

"A barrel which?" says I.

Honest, I wa'n't within a mile of bein' next. It comes out that she does sculpturing and wants to make a kind of embossed picture of me in plaster of paris, like what the peddlers sell around on vacant stoops.

"I'd look fine on a panel, wouldn't I?" says I. "Much obliged, miss, but sittin' for my halftone is where I draws the line. I'll lend you Swifty Joe, though."

She ain't acquainted with the only registered assistant professor of physical culture in the country, but she says if he don't mind she'll try her hand on him first, and then maybe I'll let her do one of me. Now, you'd thought Swifty, with that before-takin' mug of his, would have hid in the cellar 'fore he'd let anybody make a cast of it; but when the proposition is sprung, he's as pleased as if it was for the front page of Fox's pink.

That was what fetched me up to that seven by nine joint of hers, next the roof, to have a look at what she'd done to Swifty Joe. He tows me up there. And say, blamed if she hadn't got him to the life, broken nose, ingrowin' forehead, whopper jaw, and all!

"How about it?" says Joe, grinnin' at me as proud as if he'd broke into the Fordham Heights Hall of Fame.

"I never see anything handsomer—of the kind," says I.

Then I got to askin' questions about the sculpturin' business, and how the market was; so Miss Belter and me gets more or less acquainted. She was a meek, slimpsy little thing, with big, hungry lookin' eyes, and a double hank of cinnamon coloured hair that I should have thought would have made her neck ache to carry around.

Judgin' by the outfit in her ranch, the sculp-game ain't one that brings in sable lined coats and such knickknacks. There was a bed couch in one corner, a single burner gas stove on an upended trunk in another, and chunks of clay all over the place. Light housekeepin' and art don't seem to mix very well. Maybe they're just as tasty, but I'd as soon have my eggs cooked in a fryin' pan that hadn't been used for a mortar bed.

We passed the time of day reg'lar after that, and now and then she'd drop into the front office to show me some piece she'd made. I finds out that the C. A. in her name stands for Cornelia Ann; so I drops the Miss Belter and calls her that.

"Father always calls me that, too," says she.

"Yes?" says I.

That leads up to the story of how the old folks out in Minnekeegan have been backin' her for a two years' stab at art in a big city. Seems it has been an awful drain on the fam'ly gold reserve, and none of 'em took any stock in such foolishness anyway, but she'd jollied 'em into lettin' her have a show to make good, and now the time was about up.

"Well," says I, "you ain't all in, are you?"

Her under lip starts to pucker up at that, and them hungry eyes gets foggy; but she takes a new grip on herself, makes a bluff at grinnin', and says, throaty like, "It's no use pretending any longer, I—I'm a failure!"

Say, that makes me feel like an ice cream sign in a blizzard. I hadn't been lookin' to dig up any private heart throbs like that. But there it was; so I starts in to cheer her up the best I knew how.

"Course," says I, "it's a line I couldn't shake a nickel out of in a year; but if it suited me, and I thought I was onto my job, I'd make it yield the coin, or go good and hungry tryin'."

"Perhaps I have gone hungry," says she, quiet like.

"Honest?" says I.

"That steak lasted me for a week," says she.

There was more particulars followed that throws Cornelia Ann on the screen in a new way for me. Grit! Why, she had enough to sand a tarred roof. She'd lived on ham knuckles and limed eggs and Swiss cheese for months. She'd turned her dresses inside out and upside down, lined her shoes with paper when it was wet, and wore a long sleeved shirt waist when there wa'n't another bein' used this side of the prairies. And you can judge what that means by watchin' the women size each other up in a street car.

"If they'd only given me half a chance to show what I could do!" says she. "But I didn't get the chance, and perhaps it was my fault. So what's the use? I'll just pack up and go back to Minnekeegan."

"Minnekeegan!" says I. "That sounds tough. What then?"

"Oh," says she, "my brother is foreman in a broom factory. He will get me a job at pasting labels."

"Say," says I, gettin' a quick rush of blood to the head, "s'posen I should contract for a full length of Swifty Joe to hang here in——"

"No you don't!" says she, edgin' off. "It's good of you, but charity work isn't what I want."

Say, it wa'n't any of my funeral, but that broom fact'ry proposition stayed with me quite some time. The thoughts of anyone havin' to go back to a place with a name like Minnekeegan was bilious enough; but for a girl that had laid out to give Macmonnies a run for the gold medal, the label pastin' prospect must have loomed up like a bad dream.

There's one good thing about other folks's troubles though—they're easy put on the shelf. Soon's I gets to work I forgets all about Cornelia Ann. I has to run out to Rockywold that afternoon, to put Mr. Purdy Pell through his reg'lar course of stunts that he's been takin' since some one told him he was gettin' to be a forty-fat. There was a whole bunch of swells on hand; for it's gettin' so, now they can go and come in their own tourin' cars, that winter house parties are just as common as in summer.

"Thank heaven you've come!" says Mr. Pell. "It gives me a chance to get away from cards for an hour or so."

"Guess you need it," says I. "You look like the trey of spades."

Then Pinckney shows up in the gym., and he no sooner sees us at work with the basket ball than he begins to peel off. "I say there!" says he. "Count me in on some of that, or I'll be pulled into another rubber."

About an hour later, after they'd jollied me into stayin' all night, I puts on a sweater and starts out for some hoof exercise in the young blizzard that was makin' things white outside. Sadie holds me up at the door. Her cheeks was blazin', and I could see she was holdin' the Sullivan temper down with both hands.

"Hello!" says I. "What's been stirrin' you up?"

"Bridge!" snaps she. "I guess if you'd been glared at for two hours, and called stupid when you lost, and worse names when you won, you'd feel like throwing the cards at some one."

"Well, why didn't you?" says I.

"I did," says she, "and there's an awful row on; but I don't care! And if you don't stop that grinnin', I'll——"

Well, she does it. That's the way with Sadie, words is always too slow for her. Inside of a minute she's out chasin' me around the front yard and peltin' me with snow balls.

"See here," says I, diggin' a hunk of snow out of one ear, "that kind of sport's all to the merry; but if I was you I'd dress for the part. Snowballin' in slippers and silk stockin's and a lace dress is a pneumonia bid, even if you are such a warm one on top."

"Who's a red head?" says she. "You just wait a minute, Shorty McCabe, and I'll make you sorry for that!"

It wa'n't a minute, it was nearer fifteen; but when Sadie shows up again she's wearin' the slickest Canuck costume you ever see, all blanket stripes and red tassels, like a girl on a gift calendar.

"Whe-e-e!" says she, and the snow begins to fly in chunks. It was the damp, packy kind that used to make us go out and soak the tall hats when we was kids. And Sadie hasn't forgot how to lam 'em in, either. We was havin' it hot and lively, all over the lawn, when the first thing I knows out comes Mrs. Purdy Pell and Pinckney and a lot of others, to join in the muss. They'd dragged out a whole raft of toboggan outfits from the attic, and the minute they gets 'em on they begins to act as coltish as two-year-olds.

Well say, you wouldn't have thought high rollers like them, that gets their fun out of playin' the glass works exhibit at the op'ra, and eatin' one A. M. suppers at Sherry's, and doublin' no trumps at a quarter a point, could unbuckle enough to build snow forts, and yell like Indians, and cut up like kids generally. But they does—washed each other's faces, and laughed and whooped it up until dark. Didn't need the dry Martinis to jolly up appetites for that bunch when dinner time come, and if there was anyone awake in Rockywold after ten o'clock that night it was the butler and the kitchen help.

I looked for 'em to forget it all by mornin' and start in again on their punky card games; but they was all up bright and early, plannin' out new stunts. There'd been a lot of snow dropped durin' the night, and some one gets struck with the notion that buildin' snow men would be the finest sport in the world. They couldn't hardly wait to eat breakfast before they gets on their blanket clothes and goes at it. They was rollin' up snow all over the place, as busy as 'longshoremens—all but Pinckney. He gives out that him and me has been appointed an art committee, to rake in an entrance fee of ten bones each and decide who gets the purse for doin' the best job.

"G'wan!" says I. "I couldn't referee no such fool tournament as this."

"That's right, be modest!" says he. "Don't mind our feelings at all."

Then Sadie and Mrs. Pell butts in and says I've just got to do it; so I does. We gives 'em so long to pile up their raw material, and half an hour after that to carve out what they thinks they can do best, nothin' barred. Some starts in on Teddy bears, one gent plans out a cop; but the most of 'em don't try anything harder'n plain snow men, with lumps of coal for eyes, and pipes stuck in to finish off the face.

It was about then that Count Skiphouser moves out of the background and begins to play up strong. He's one of these big, full blooded pretzels that's been everywhere, and seen everything, and knows it all, and thinks there ain't anything but what he can do a little better'n anybody else.

"Oh, well," says he, "I suppose I must show you what snow carving really is. I won a prize for this sort of thing in Berlin, you know."

"It's all over now," says I to Pinckney. "You heard Skippy pickin' himself for a winner, didn't you?"

"He's a bounder," says Pinckney, talkin' corner-wise—"lives on his bridge and poker winnings. He mustn't get the prize."

But Skiphouser ain't much more'n blocked out a head and shoulders 'fore it was a cinch he was a ringer, with nothin' but a lot of rank amateurs against him. Soon's the rest saw what they was up against they all laid down, for he was makin' 'em look like six car fares. Course, there wa'n't nothin' to do but join the gallery and watch him win in a walk.

"Oh, it's a bust of Bismarck, isn't it?" says one of the women. "How clever of you, Count!"

At that Skippy throws out his chest and begins to chuck in the flourishes. That kind of business suited him down to the ground. He cocks his head on one side, twists up his lip whiskers like Billy the Tooth, and goes through all the motions of a man that knows he's givin' folks a treat.

"Hates himself, don't he?" says I. "He must have graduated from some tombstone foundry."

Pinckney was wild. So was Sadie and Mrs. Purdy Pell, on account of the free-for-all bein' turned into a game of solitaire.

"I just wish," says Sadie, "that there was some way of taking him down a peg. If I only knew of someone who——"

"I do, if you don't," says I.

Say, what do you reckon had been cloggin' my thought works all that time. I takes the three of 'em to one side and springs my proposition, tellin' 'em I'd put it through if they'd stand for it. Would they? They're so tickled they almost squeals.

I gets Swifty Joe at the Studio on the long distance and gives him his instructions. It was a wonder he got it straight, for sometimes you can't get an idea into his head without usin' a brace and bit, but this trip he shows up for a high brow. Pretty quick we gets word that it's all O. K. Pinckney bulletins it to the crowd that, while Sadie's pulled out of the competition, she's asked leave to put on a sub, and that the prize awardin' will be delayed until after the returns are all in.

Meantime I climbs into the sleigh and goes down to meet the express. Sure enough, Cornelia Ann was aboard, a bit hazy about the kind of a stunt that's expected of her, but ready for anything. I don't go into many details, for fear of givin' her stage fright; but I lets her know that if she's got any sculpturin' tricks up her sleeve now's the time to shake 'em out.

"I've been tellin' some friends of mine," says I, "that when it comes to clay art, or plaster of paris art, you was the real lollypop; and I reckoned that if you could do pieces in mud, you could do 'em just as well in snow."

"Snow!" says she. "Why, I never tried."

Maybe I'd banked too much on Cornelia, or perhaps she was right in sayin' this was out of her line. Anyway, it was a mighty disappointed trio that sized her up when I landed her under the porte cochère.

When she's run her eye over the size and swellness of the place I've brought her to, and seen a sample of the folks, she looks half scared to death. And you wouldn't have played her for a fav'rite, either, if you'd seen the cheap figure she cut, with them big eyes rollin' around, as if she was huntin' for the nearest way out. But we give her a cup of hot tea, makes her put on a pair of fleece lined overshoes and somebody's Persian lamb jacket, and leads her out to make a try for the championship.

Some of 'em was sorry of her, and tried to be sociable; but others just stood around and snickered and whispered things behind their hands. Honest, I could have thrown brickbats at myself for bein' such a mush head. That wouldn't have helped any though, so I gets busy and rolls together a couple of chunks of snow about as big as flour barrels and piles one on top of the other.

"It's up to you, Cornie," says I. "Can't you dig something or other out of that?"

She don't say whether she can or can't, but just walks around it two or three times, lookin' at it dreamy, like she was in a trance. Next she braces up a bit, calls for an old carvin' knife and a kitchen spoon, and goes to work, the whole push watchin' her as if she was some freak in a cage.

I pipes off her motions for awhile real hopeful, and then I edges out where I could look the other way. Why say, all she'd done was to hew out something that looks like a lot of soap boxes piled up for a bonfire. It was a case of funk, I could see that; and maybe I wa'n't feelin' like I'd carried a gold brick down to the subtreasury and asked for the acid test.

Then I begins to hear the "Oh's!" and "Ah's!" come from the crowd. First off I thought they was guyin' her, but when I strolls back near enough for a peek at what she was up to, my mouth comes open, too. Say, you wouldn't believe it less'n you'd seen it done, but she was just fetchin' out of that heap of snow, most as quick and easy as if she was unpackin' it from a crate, the stunningest lookin' altogether girl that I ever see outside a museum.

I don't know who it was supposed to be, or why. She's holdin' up with one hand what draperies she's got—which wa'n't any too many—an' with the other she's reachin' above her head after somethin' or other—maybe the soap on the top shelf. But she was a beaut, all right. And all Cornelia was doin' to bring her out was just slashin' away careless with the knife and spoon handle, hardly stoppin' a second between strokes. She simply had 'em goggle eyed. I reckon they'd seen things just as fine and maybe better, but they hadn't had a front seat before, while a little ninety-pound cinnamon top like Cornelia Ann stepped up and yanked a whitewashed angel out of a snow heap.

"It's wonderful!" says Mrs. Purdy Pell.

"Looks to me like we had Skippy fingerin' the citrus, don't it?" says I.

The Count he's been standin' there with his mouth open, like the rest of us, only growin' redder 'n' redder.

But just then Cornelia makes one last swipe, drops her tools, and steps back to take a view. We all quits to see what's comin' next. Well, she looks and looks at that Lady Reacher she's dug out, never sayin' a word; and before we knows it she's slumped right down there in the snow, with both hands over her face, doin' the weep act like a kid.

In two shakes it was Sadie and Mrs. Purdy Pell to the rescue, one on each side, while the rest

of us gawks on and looks foolish.

"What is it, you poor darling?" says Sadie.

Finally, after a good weep, Cornie unloosens her trouble. "Oh, oh!" says she. "I just know it's going to rain to-morrow!"

Now wouldn't that give you a foolish fit?

"What of it?" says Sadie.

"That," says she, pointin' to the snow lady. "She'll be gone forever. Oh, it's wicked, wicked!"

"Well," says I, "she's too big to go in the ice box."

"Never mind, dear," says Mrs. Purdy Pell; "you shall stay right here and do another one, in solid marble. I'll give you a thousand for a duplicate of that."

"And then you must do something for me," says Sadie.

"And me, too," says Mrs. Dicky Madison.

I didn't wait to hear any more, for boostin' lady sculpturesses ain't my reg'lar work. But, from all I hear of Cornelia Ann, she won't paste labels in any broom fact'ry.

For your simple liver and slow quitter, art's all right; but it's a long shot, at that. What?

XVI

WHY FERDY DUCKED

Say, there's no tellin', is there? Sometimes the quietest runnin' bubbles blows up with the biggest bang. Now look at Ferdy. He was as retirin' and modest as a new lodge member at his first meetin'. Why, he's so anxious to dodge makin' a show of himself that when he comes here for a private course I has to lock the Studio door and post Swifty Joe on the outside to see that nobody butts in.

All the Dobsons is that way. They're the kind of folks that lives on Fifth-ave., with the front shades always pulled down, and they shy at gettin' their names in the papers like it was bein' served with a summons.

Course, they did have their dose of free advertisin' once, when that Tootsy Peroxide bobbed up and tried to break old Peter Dobson's will; but that case happened so long ago, and there's been so many like it since, that hardly anybody but the Dobsons remembers it. Must have been a good deal of a jolt at the time, though; for as far as I've seen, they're nice folks, and the real thing in the fat wad line, specially Ferdy. He's that genteel and refined he has to have pearl grey boxin' gloves to match his gym. suit.

Well, I wa'n't thinkin' any of him, or his set, havin' just had a session with a brewer's son that I've took on durin' the dull season, when I looks out into the front office and sees my little old Bishop standin' there moppin' his face.

"Hello, Bishop!" I sings out. "Thought you was in Newport, herdin' the flock."

"So I was, Shorty," says he, "until six hours ago. I came down to look for a stray lamb."

"Tried Wall Street?" says I.

"He is not that kind of a lamb," says the Bishop. "It is Ferdinand Dobson. Have you seen him recently?"

"What! Ferdy?" says I. "Not for weeks. They're all up at their Lenox place, ain't they?"

No, they wa'n't. And then the Bishop puts me next to a little news item that hadn't got into the society column yet. Ferdy, after gettin' to be most twenty-five, has been hooked. The girl's name was Alicia, and soon's I heard it I placed her, havin' seen her a few times at different swell ranches where I've been knockin' around in the background. As I remembers her, she has one of these long, high toned faces, and a shape to match—not what you'd call a neck twister, but somethin' real classy and high browed, just the sort you'd look for Ferdy to tag.

Seems they'd been doin' the lovey-dovey for more'n a year; but all on the sly, meetin' each other at afternoon teas, and now and then havin' a ten-minute hand holdin' match under a palm

somewhere. They was so cute about it that even their folks didn't suspect it was a case of honey and honey boy; not that anyone would have raised a kick, but because Ferdy don't want any fuss made about it.

When Alicia's mother gets the facts, though, she writes a new program. She don't stand for springin' any quiet weddin's on her set. She plans a big party, where the engagement bulletin is to be flashed on the screen reg'lar and proper, so's folks can be orderin' their dresses and weddin' presents.

Ferdy balks some at the thought of bein' dragged to the centre of the stage; but he grits his teeth and tells 'em that for this once they can go as far as they like. He even agrees to leave home for a week and mix it at a big house party, just to get himself broke in to meetin' strangers.

Up to within two days of the engagement stunt he was behavin' lovely; and the next thing they knows, just when he should be gettin' ready to show up at Newport, he can't be found. It has all the looks of his leavin' his clothes on the bank and jumpin' the night freight. Course, the Dobsons ain't sayin' a word to Alicia's folks yet. They gets their friends together to organise a still hunt for Ferdy; and the Bishop bein' one of the inside circle, he's sent out as head scout.

"And I am at my wits' ends," says he. "No one has seen him in Newport, and I can't find him at any of his clubs here."

"How about the Fifth-ave. mausoleum?" says I.

"His man is there," says the Bishop; "but he seems unable to give me any information."

"Does, eh?" says I. "Well, you take it from me that if anyone's got a line on Ferdy, it's that clam faced Kupps of his. He's been trained so fine in the silence business that he hardly dares open his mouth when he eats. Go up there and put him through the wringer."

"Do what?" says the Bishop.

"Give him the headquarters quiz," says I. "Tell him you come straight from mother and sisters, and that Ferdy's got to be found."

"I hardly feel equal to doing just that," says the Bishop in his mild way. "Now if you could only ___"

"Why, sure!" says I. "It'd do me good to take a whirl out of that Englishman. I'll make him give up!"

He's a bird though, that Kupps. I hadn't talked with him two minutes before I would have bet my pile he knew all about where Ferdy was roostin' and what he was up to; but when it come to draggin' out the details, you might just as well have been tryin' to pry up a pavin' stone with a fountain pen. Was Ferdy in town, or out of town, and when would he be back? Kupps couldn't say. He wouldn't even tell how long it was since he had seen Ferdy last. And say, you know how pig headed one of them hen brained Cockneys can be? I feels my collar gettin' tight.

"Look here, Hiccups!" says I. "You——"

"Kupps, sir," says he. "Thomas Kupps is my full nyme, sir."

"Well, Teacups, then, if that suits you better," says I. "You don't seem to have got it into your head that the Bishop ain't just buttin' in here for the fun of the thing. This matter of retrievin' Ferdy is serious. Now you're sure he didn't leave any private messages, or notes or anything of that kind?"

"Nothink of the sort, sir; nothink whatever," says Kupps.

"Well, you just show us up to his rooms," says I, "and we'll have a look around for ourselves. Eh, Bishop?"

"Perhaps it would be the best thing to do," says the Bishop.

Kupps didn't want to do it; but I gives him a look that changes his mind, and up we goes. I was thinkin' that if Ferdy had got chilly feet at the last minute and done the deep dive, maybe he'd left a few lines layin' around his desk. There wa'n't anything in sight, though; nothin' but a big photograph of a wide, full chested lady, propped up against the rail.

"That don't look much like the fair Alicia," says I.

The Bishop puts on his nigh-to glasses and says it ain't. He thinks it must have been took of a lady that he'd seen Ferdy chinnin' at the house party, where he got his last glimpse of him.

"Good deal of a hummin' bird, she is, eh?" says I, pickin' it up. "Tutty tut! Look what's here!" Behind it was a photo of Alicia.

"And here's somethin' else," says I. On the back of the big picture was scribbled, "From

Ducky to Ferdy," and the date.

"Yesterday!" gasps the Bishop.

"Well, well!" says I. "That's advancin' the spark some! If he meets her only a week or so ago, and by yesterday she's got so far as bein' his ducky, it looks like Alicia'd have to get out and take the car ahead."

The Bishop acts stunned, gazin' from me to the picture, as if he'd been handed one on the dizzy bone. "You—you don't mean," says he, "that you suspect Ferdy of—of—"

"I hate to think it," says I; "but this looks like a quick shift. Kupps, who's Ferdy's lady friend?"

"Mr. Dobson didn't sye, sir," says Kupps.

"Very thoughtless of him," says I. "Come on, Bishop, we'll take this along as a clue and see what Vandy has to say."

He's a human kodak, Vandy is—makes a livin' takin' pictures for the newspapers. You can't break into the swell push, or have an argument with Teddy, or be tried for murder, without Vandy's showin' up to make a few negatives. So I flashes the photo of Ducky on him.

"Who's the wide one?" says I.

"Why, don't you know who that is, Shorty?" says he.

"Say, do you think I'd be chasin' up any flashlight pirate like you, if I did?" says I. "What's her name?"

"That's Madam Brooklini, of course," says he.

"What, the thousand-dollar-a-minute warbler?" says I. "And me seein' her lithographs all last winter! Gee, Bishop! I thought you followed grand opera closer'n that."

"I should have recalled her," says the Bishop; "but I see so many faces——"

"Only a few like that, though," says I. "Vandy, where do you reckon Mrs. Greater New York could be located just about now?"

Vandy has the whole story down pat. Seems she's been over here out of season bringin' suit against her last manager; but havin' held him up for everything but the gold fillin' in his front teeth, she is booked to sail back to her Irish castle at four in the mornin'. He knows the steamer and the pier number.

"Four A. M., eh?" says I. "That means she's likely to be aboard now, gettin' settled. Bishop, if that Ducky business was a straight steer, it's ten to one that a friend of ours is there sayin' good-bye. Shall we follow it up?"

"I can hardly credit it," says he. "However, if you think——"

"It's no cinch," says I; "but this is a case where it won't do to bank on past performances. From all the signs, Ferdy has struck a new gait."

The Bishop throws up both hands. "How clearly you put it," says he, "and how stupid of me not to understand! Should we visit the steamer, or not?"

"Bishop," says I, "you're a good guesser. We should."

And there wa'n't any trouble about locatin' the high artist. All we has to do is to walk along the promenade deck until we comes to a suite where the cabin stewards was poppin' in and out, luggin' bunches of flowers and baskets of fruit, and gettin' the book signed for telegrams. The Bishop was for askin' questions and sendin' in his card; but I gets him by the sleeve and tows him right in.

I hadn't made any wrong guess, either. There in the corner of the state room, planted in a big wicker arm chair, with a jar of long stemmed American beauts on one side, was Madam Brooklini. On the other side, sittin' edgeways on a canvas stool and holdin' her left hand, was Ferdy.

I could make a guess as to how the thing had come around; Ferdy breakin' from his shell at the house party, runnin' across Brooklini under a soft light, and losin' his head the minute she begins cooin' low notes to him. That's what she was doin' now, him gazin' up at her, and her gazin' down at him. It was about the mushiest performance I ever see.

"Ahem!" says the Bishop, clearin' his throat and blushin' a lovely maroon colour. "I—er—we did not intend to intrude; but——"

Then it was up to Ferdy to show the red. He opens his mouth and gawps at us for a whole minute before he can get out a word. "Why—why, Bishop!" he pants. "What—how——"

Before he has time to choke, or the Bishop can work up a case of apoplexy, I jumps into the ring. "Excuse us doin' the goat act," says I; "but the Bishop has got some word for you from the folks at home, and he wants to get it off his mind."

"Ah, friends of yours, Ferdy?" says Madam Brooklini, throwin' us about four hundred dollars' worth of smile.

There was nothin' for Ferdy to do then but pull himself together and make us all acquainted. And say, I never shook hands with so much jewelry all at once before! She has three or four bunches of sparks on each finger, not to mention a thumb ring. Oh, there wa'n't any mistakin' who skimmed the cream off the box office receipts after you'd took a look at her!

And for a straight front Venus she was the real maraschino. Course, even if the complexion was true, you wouldn't put her down as one of this spring's hatch; but for a broad, heavy weight girl she was the fancy goods. And when she cuts loose with that eighteen-carat voice of hers, and begins to roll them misbehavin' eyes, you forgot how the chair was creakin' under her. The Bishop has all he can do to remember why he was there; but he manages to get out that he'd like a few minutes on the side with Ferdy.

"If your message relates in any way to my return to Newport," says Ferdy, stiffenin' up, "it is useless. I am not going there!"

"But, my dear Ferdy——" begins the Bishop, when the lady cuts in.

"That's right, Bishop," says she. "I do hope you can persuade the silly boy to stop following me around and teasing me to marry him."

"Oh, naughty!" says I under my breath.

The Bishop just looks from one to the other, and then he braces up and says, "Ferdinand, this is not possible, is it?"

It was up to Ferdy again. He gives a squirm or two as he catches the Bishop's eye, and the dew was beginnin' to break out on his noble brow, when Ducky reaches over and gives his hand a playful little squeeze. That was a nerve restorer.

"Bishop," says he, "I must tell you that I am madly, hopelessly, in love with this lady, and that I mean to make her my wife."

"Isn't he the dearest booby you ever saw!" gurgles Madam Brooklini. "He has been saying nothing but that for the last five days. And now he says he is going to follow me across the ocean and keep on saying it. But you must stop, Ferdy; really, you must."

"Never!" says Ferdy, gettin' a good grip on the cut glass exhibit.

"Such persistence!" says Ducky, shiftn' her searchlights from him to us and back again. "And he knows I have said I would not marry again. I mustn't. My managers don't like it. Why, every time I marry they raise a most dreadful row. But what can I do? Ferdy insists, you see; and if he keeps it up, I just know I shall have to take him. Please be good, Ferdy!"

Wouldn't that make you seasick? But the Bishop comes to the front like he'd heard a call to man the lifeboat.

"It may influence you somewhat," says he, "to learn that for nearly a year Ferdinand has been secretly engaged to a very estimable young woman."

"I know," says she, tearin' off a little giggle. "Ferdy has told me all about Alicia. What a wicked, deceitful wretch he is! isn't he? Aren't you ashamed, Ferdy, to act so foolish over me?"

If Ferdy was, he hid it well. All he seemed willin' to do was to sit there, holdin' her hand and lookin' as soft as a custard pie, while the Lady Williamsburg tells what a tough job she has dodgin' matrimony, on account of her yieldin' disposition. I didn't know whether to hide my face in my hat, or go out and lean over the rail. I guess the Bishop wa'n't feelin' any too comfortable either; but he was there to do his duty, so he makes one last stab.

"Ferdinand," says he, "your mother asked me to say that——"

"Tell her I was never so happy in my life," says Ferdy, pattin' a broadside of solitaires and marquise rings.

"Come on, Bishop," says I. "There's only one cure for a complaint of that kind, and it looks like Ferdy was bound to take it."

We was just startin' for the deck, when the door was blocked by a steward luggin' in another sheaf of roses, and followed by a couple of middle aged, jolly lookin' gents, smokin' cigars and marchin' arm in arm. One was a tall, well built chap in a silk hat; the other was a short, pussy, ruby beaked gent in French flannels and a Panama.

"Hello, sweetie!" says the tall one.

"Peekaboo, dearie!" sings out the other.

"Dick! Jimmy!" squeals Madam Brooklini, givin' a hand to each of 'em, and leavin' Ferdy holdin' the air. "Oh, how delightfully thoughtful of you!"

"Tried to ring in old Grubby, too," says Dick; "but he couldn't get away. He chipped in for the flowers, though."

"Dear old Grubby!" says she. "Let's see, he was my third, wasn't he?"

"Why, dearie!" says Dicky boy, "I was Number Three. Grubby was your second."

"Really!" says she. "But I do get you so mixed. Oh!" and then she remembers Ferdy. "Ducky, dear," she goes on, "I do want you to know these gentlemen—two of my former husbands."

"Wha-a-at!" gasps Ferdy, his eyes buggin' out.

I hears the Bishop groan and flop on a seat behind me. Honest, it was straight! Dick and Jimmy was a couple of discards, old Grubby was another, and inside of a minute blamed if she hadn't mentioned a fourth, that was planted somewhere on the other side. Course, for a convention there wouldn't have been a straight quorum; but there was enough answerin' roll call to make it pass for a reunion, all right.

And it was a peach while it lasted. The pair of has-beens didn't have long to stay, one havin' to get back to Chicago and the other bein' billed to start on a yachtin' trip. They'd just run over to say by-by; and tell how they was plannin' an annual dinner, with the judges and divorce lawyers for guests. Yes, yes, they was a jolly couple, them two! All the Bishop could do was lay back and fan himself as he listens, once in awhile whisperin' to himself, "My, my!" As for Ferdy, he looked like he'd been hypnotised and was waitin' to be woke up.

The pair was sayin' good-bye for the third and last time, when in rushes a high strung, nervous young feller with a pencil behind his ear and a pad in his hand.

"Well, Larry, what is it now?" snaps out Madam Brooklini, doin' the lightnin' change act with her voice. "I am engaged, you see."

"Can't help it," says Larry. "Got fourteen reporters and eight snapshot men waiting to do the sailing story for the morning editions. Shall I bring 'em up?"

"But I am entertaining two of my ex-husbands," says the lady, "and——"

"Great!" says Larry. "We'll put 'em in the group. Who's the other?"

"Oh, that's only Ferdy," says she. "I haven't married him yet."

"Bully!" says Larry. "We can get half a column of space out of him alone. He goes in the pictures too. We'll label him 'Next,' or 'Number Five Elect,' or something like that. Line 'em up outside, will you?"

"Oh, pshaw!" says Madam Brooklini. "What a nuisance these press agents are! But Larry is so enterprising. Come, we'll make a splendid group, the four of us. Come, Ferdy."

"Reporters!" Ferdy lets it come out of him kind of hoarse and husky, like he'd just seen a ghost.

But I knew the view that he was gettin'; his name in the headlines, his picture on the front page, and all the chappies at the club and the whole Newport crowd chucklin' and nudgin' each other over the story of how he was taggin' around after an op'ra singer that had a syndicate of second hand husbands.

"No, no, no!" says he. It was the only time I ever heard Ferdy come anywhere near a yell, and I wouldn't have believed he could have done it if I hadn't had my eyes on him as he jumps clear of the corner, makes a flyin' break through the bunch, and streaks it down the deck for the forward companionway.

Me and the Bishop didn't wait to see the finish of that group picture. We takes after Ferdy as fast as the Bishop's wind would let us, he bein' afraid that Ferdy was up to somethin' desperate, like jumpin' off the dock. All Ferdy does, though, is jump into a cab and drive for home, us trailin' on behind. We was close enough at the end of the run to see him bolt through the door; but Kupps tells us that Mr. Dobson has left orders not to let a soul into the house.

Early next mornin', though, the Bishop comes around and asks me to go up while he tries again, and after we've stood on the steps for ten minutes, waitin' for Kupps to take in a note, we're shown up to Ferdy's bed room. He's in silk pajamas and bath robe, lookin' white and hollow eyed. Every mornin' paper in town is scattered around the room, and not one of 'em with less than a whole column about how Madam Brooklini sailed for Europe.

"Any of 'em got anything to say about Number Five?" says I.

"Thank heaven, no!" groans Ferdy. "Bishop, what do you suppose poor dear Alicia thinks of me, though?"

"Why, my son," says the Bishop, his little eyes sparklin', "I suppose she is thinking that it is 'most time for you to arrive in Newport, as you promised."

"Then she doesn't know what an ass I've been?" says Ferdy. "No one has told her?"

"Shorty, have you?" says the Bishop.

And when Ferdy sees me grinnin', and it breaks on him that me and the Bishop are the only ones that know about this dippy streak of his, he's the thankfulest cuss you ever saw. Alicia? He could hardly get there quick enough to suit him; and the knot's to be tied inside of the next month.

"Marryin's all right," says I to Ferdy, "so long's you don't let the habit grow on you."

XVII

WHEN SWIFTY WAS GOING SOME

Say, I don't play myself for any human cheese tester, but I did think I had Swifty Joe Gallagher all framed up long ago. Not that I ever made any special study of Swifty; but knowin' him for as long as I have, and havin' him helpin' me in the Studio, I got the notion that I was wise to most of his curves. I've got both hands in the air now, though.

Goin' back over the last few months too, I can see where I might have got a line on him before. But, oh no! Nothin' could jar me out of believin' he wouldn't ever run against the form sheet I'd made out. The first glimmer I gets was when I finds Joe in the front office one day, planted before the big lookin' glass, havin' a catch as catch can with his hair.

"Hully chee!" says he, dippin' one of my military brushes in the wash basin. "That's fierce, ain't it, Shorty?"

"If it's your nerve in helpin' yourself to my bureau knickknacks," says I, "I agree with you."

"Ah, can the croak!" says he. "I ain't eatin' the bristles off, am I!"

"Oh, I'm not fussin'," says I; "but what you need to use on that thatch is a currycomb and a lawn rake."

"Ah, say!" says he, "I don't see as it's so much worse than others I know of. It's all right when I can get it to lay down in the back. How's that, now?"

"Great!" says I. "Couldn't be better if you'd used fish glue."

Maybe you never noticed how Swifty's top piece is finished off? He has a mud coloured growth that's as soft as a shoe brush. It behaves well enough when it's dry; but after he's got it good and wet it breaks up into ridges that overlap, same as shingles on a roof.

But then, you wouldn't be lookin' for any camel's hair finish on a nut like Swifty's—not with that face. Course, he ain't to blame for the undershot jaw, nor the way his ears lop, nor the width of his smile. We don't all have gifts like that, thanks be! And it wa'n't on purpose Swifty had his nose bent in. That come from not duckin' quick enough when Gans swung with his right.

So long as he kept in his class, though, and wa'n't called on to understudy Kyrle Bellew, Swifty met all the specifications. If I was wantin' a parlour ornament, I might shy some at Swifty's style of beauty; but showin' bilious brokers how to handle the medicine ball is a job that don't call for an exchange of photographs. He may have an outline that looks like a map of a stone quarry, and perhaps his ways are a little on the fritz, but Swifty's got good points that I couldn't find bunched again if I was to hunt through a crowd. So, when I find him worryin' over the set of his back hair, I gets interested.

"What's the coiffure for, anyway?" says I. "Goin' to see the girl, eh?"

Course, that was a josh. You can't look at Swifty and try to think of him doin' the Romeo act without grinnin'.

"Ahr, chee!" says he.

Now, I've sprung that same jolly on him a good many times; but I never see him work up a colour over it before. Still, the idea of him gettin' kittenish was too much of a strain on the mind for me to follow up.

It was the same about his breakin' into song. He'd never done that, either, until one mornin' I hears a noise comin' from the back room that sounds like some one blowin' on a bottle. I steps over to the door easy, and hanged if I didn't make out that it was Swifty takin' a crack at something that might be, "Oh, how I love my Lulu!"

"You must," says I, "if it makes you feel as bad as all that. Does Lulu know it?"

"Ahr, chee!" says he.

Ever hear Swifty shoot that over his shoulder without turnin' his head? Talk about your schools of expression! None of 'em could teach anyone to put as much into two words as Swifty does into them. They're a whole vocabulary, the way he uses 'em.

"Was you tryin' to sing," says I, "or just givin' an imitation of a steamboat siren on a foggy night?"

But all I could get out of Swifty was another "Ahr, chee!" He was too happy and satisfied to join in any debate, and inside of ten minutes he's at it again; so I lets him spiel away.

"Well," thinks I, "I'm glad my joy don't have any such effect on me as that. I s'pose I can stand it, if he can."

It wa'n't more'n two nights later that I gets another shock. I was feelin' a little nervous, to begin with, for I'd billed myself to do a stunt I don't often tackle. It was nothin' else than pilotin' a fluff delegation to some art studio doin's. Sounds like a Percy job, don't it? But it was somethin' put up to me in a way I couldn't dodge.

Maybe you remember me tellin' you awhile back about Cornelia Ann Belter? She was the Minnekeegan girl that had a room on the top floor over the Physical Culture Studio, and was makin' a stab at the sculpture game—the one that we got out to Rockywold as a ringer in the snow carvin' contest. Got her placed now?

Well, you know how that little trick of makin' a snow angel brought her in orders from Mrs. Purdy Pell, and Sadie, and the rest? And she didn't do a thing but make good, either. I hadn't seen her since she quit the building; but I'd heard how she was doin' fine, and here the other day I gets a card sayin' she'd be pleased to have my company on a Wednesday night at half after eight, givin' an address on Fifth avenue.

"Corny must be carvin' the cantaloup," thinks I, and then forgets all about it until Sadie holds me up and wants to know if I'm goin'.

"Nix," says I. "Them art studio stunts is over my head."

"Oh, pshaw!" says Sadie. "How long since you have been afraid of Miss Belter? Didn't you and I help her to get her start? She'll feel real badly if you don't come."

"She'll get over that," says I.

"But Mrs. Pell and I will have to go alone if you don't come with us," says she. "Mr. Pell is out of town, and Pinckney is too busy with those twins and that Western girl of his. You've got to come, Shorty."

"That settles it," says I. "Why didn't you say so first off?"

So that was what I was doin' at quarter of eight that night, in my open face vest and dinky little tuxedo, hustlin' along 42d-st., wonderin' if the folks took me for a head waiter late to his job. You see, after I gets all ragged out I finds I've left my patent leathers at the Studio. Swifty has said he was goin' to take the night off too, so I'm some surprised to see the front office all lit up like there was a ball goin' on up there. I takes the steps three at a time, expectin' to find a couple of yeggs movin' out the safe; but when I throws the door open what should I see, planted in front of the mirror, but Swifty Joe.

Not that I was sure it was him till I'd had a second look. It was Swifty's face, and Swifty's hair, but the costume was a philopena. It would have tickled a song and dance artist to death. Anywhere off'n the variety stage, unless it was at a Fourth Ward chowder party, it would have drawn a crowd. Perhaps you can throw up a view of a pin-head check in brown and white, blocked off into four-inch squares with red and green lines; a double breasted coat with scalloped cuffs on the sleeves, and silk faced lapels; a pink and white shirt striped like an awnin'; a spotted butterfly tie; yellow shoes in the latest oleomargarin tint; and a caffy-o-lay bean pot derby with a half-inch brim to finish off the picture. It was a sizzler, all right.

For a minute I stands there with my mouth open and my eyes bugged, takin' in the details. If I could, I would have skipped without sayin' a word, for I see I'd butted in on somethin' that was sacred and secret. But Swifty's heard me come in, and he's turned around waitin' for me to give a

verdict. Not wantin' to hurt his feelin's, I has to go careful.

"Swiftly," says I, "is that you?"

He only grins kind of foolish, sticks his chin out, and saws his neck against his high collar, like a cow usin' a scratchin' post.

"Blamed if I didn't take you for Henry Dixey, first shot," says I, walkin' around and gettin' a new angle. "Gee! but that's a swell outfit!"

"Think so?" says he. "Will it make 'em sit up?"

"Will it!" says I. "Why, you'll have 'em on their toes."

I didn't know how far I could go on that line without givin' him a grouch; but he seems to like it, so I tears off some more of the same.

"Swiftly," says I, "you've got a bunch of tiger lilies lookin' like a faded tea rose. You've got a get-up there that would win out at a Cakewalk, and if you'll take it over to Third-ave. Sunday afternoon you'll be the best bet on the board."

"Honest?" says he, grinnin' way back to his ears. "I was after somethin' a little fancy, I'll own up."

"Well, you got it," says I. "Where'd you have it built?"

"Over the bridge," says he.

Say, it's a wonder some of them South Brooklyn cloth carpenters don't get the blind staggers, turnin' out clothes like that; ain't it?

"Must be some special occasion?" says I.

"D'jer think I'd be blowin' myself like this if it wa'n't?" says he. "You bet, it's extra special."

"With a skirt in the background?" says I.

"Uh-huh," says he, springin' another grin.

"Naughty, naughty!" says I.

"Ahr, say," says he, tryin' to look peevish, "you oughter know better'n that! You never heard of me chasin' the Lizzies yet, did you? This is a real lady,—nice and classy, see?"

"Some one on Fifth-ave.?" says I, unwindin' a little string. But he whirls round like I'd jabbed him with a pin.

"Who tipped you off to that?" says he.

"Guessed it by the clothes," says I.

That simmers him down, and I could see he wanted to be confidential the worst way. He wouldn't let go of her name; but I gathers it's some one he's known for quite a spell, and that she's sent him a special invite for this evenin'.

"Asks me to call around, see?" says he. "Now, I put it up to you, Shorty, don't that look like I got some standin' with her?"

"She must think pretty well of you, that's a fact," says I, "and I judge that you're willin' to be her honey boy. Ain't got the ring in your vest pocket, have you?"

"Maybe that ain't so much of a joke as you think," says he, settin' the bean pod lid a little more on one side.

"Z-z-z-ipp!" says I. "That's goin' some! Well, well, but you are a cute one, Swiftly. Why, I never suspicioned such a thing. Luck to you, my lad, luck to you!" and I pats him on the back. "I don't know what chances you had before; but in that rig you can't lose."

"I guess it helps," says he, twistin' his neck to get a back view.

He was puttin' on the last touches when I left. Course, I was some stunned, specially by the Fifth-ave. part of it. But then, it's a long street, and it's gettin' so now that all kinds lives on it.

I was a little behind sched. when I gets to Sherry's, where I was to pick up Sadie and Mrs. Purdy Pell; but at that it was ten or fifteen minutes before they gets the tourin' car called up and we're all tucked away inside. It don't take us long to cover the distance, though, and at twenty to nine we hauls up at Miss Belter's number. I was just goin' to pile out when I gets a glimpse of a pair of bright yellow shoes carryin' a human checker board.

"S-s-s-sh!" says I to the ladies. "Wait up a second till we see where he goes."

"Why, who is it?" says Sadie.

"Swiftly Joe," says I. "You might not think it from the rainbow uniform, but it's him. That's the way he dresses the part when he starts out to kneel to his lady love."

"Really!" says Mrs. Pell. "Is he going to do that?"

"Got it straight from him," says I. "There! he's worked his courage up. Now he takes the plunge."

"Why!" says Sadie, "that is Miss Belter's number he's going into."

"She don't live on all five floors, does she?" says I.

"No; but it's odd, just the same," says she.

I thought so myself; so I gives 'em the whole story of how I come to know about what he was up to. By that time he was climbing the stairs, and as soon as we finds the right door I forgets all about Swiftly in sizin' up Cornelia Ann.

Say, what a difference a little of the right kind of dry goods will make in a girl, won't it? The last I saw of Cornie she was wearin' a skirt that sagged in the back, a punky lid that might have come off the top of an ash can, and shoes that had run over at the heel.

But prosperity had sure blown her way, and she'd bought a wardrobe to suit the times. Not that she'd gone and loaded herself down like she was a window display. It was just a cucumber green sort of cheese cloth that floated around her, and there wa'n't a frill on it except some silvery braid where the square hole had been chopped out to let her head and part of her shoulders through. But at that it didn't need any Paris tag.

And say, I'd always had an idea that Cornelia Ann was rated about third row back. Seein' the way she showed up there, though, with all that cinnamon coloured hair of hers piled on top of her head, and her big eyes glistenin', I had to revise the frame up. It didn't take me long to find out she'd shook the shrinkin' violet game, too. She steps up and gives us the glad hand and the gurgly jolly just as if she'd been doin' it all her life.

It wa'n't any cheap hang-out that Cornie has tacked her name plate on, either. There was expensive rugs on the floor, and brass lamps hangin' from the ceilin', and pieces of tin armor hung around on the walls, with nary a sign of an oil stove or a foldin' bed.

A lot of folks was already on the ground. They was swells too, and they was floatin' around so thick that it was two or three minutes before I gets a view of what was sittin' under the big yellow sik lamp shade in the corner. Say, who do you guess? Swiftly Joe! Honest, for a minute I thought I must be havin' a nerve spasm and seein' things that wa'n't so. But it was him, all right; big as life, and lookin' as prominent as a soap ad. on the back cover of a magazine.

There was plenty of shady places in the room that he might have picked, but he has hunted out the bright spot. He's sittin' on one of these funny cross legged Roman stools, with his toes turned in, and them grid-iron pants pulled up to show about five inches of MacGregor plaid socks. And he has a satisfied look on his face that I couldn't account for no way.

Course, I thinks right off that he's broke into the wrong ranch and is waitin' for some one to come and show him the way out. And then, all of a sudden, I begins to remember things. You know, it was Swiftly that Cornelia Ann used to get to pose for her when she had the top floor back in our building. She made an embossed clay picture of him that Joe used to gaze at by the hour. And once he showed me her photo that she'd given him. Then there was the special invite he'd been tellin' me about. Not bein' used to gettin' such things, he'd mistook that card to her studio openin' as a sort of private billy ducks, and he'd built up a dream about him and her havin' a hand-holdin' session all to themselves.

"Great cats!" thinks I. "Can it be Cornelia Ann he's gone on?"

Well, all you had to do to get the answer was to watch Swiftly follow her around with his eyes. You'd thought, findin' himself in a bunch of top-notchers like that, and rigged out the way he was, he'd been feelin' like a green strawb'ry in the bottom of the basket. But nothin' of that kind had leaked through his thick skull. Cornie was there, and he was there, dressed accordin' to his own designs, and he was contented and happy as a turtle on a log, believin' the rest of us had only butted in.

I was feelin' all cut up over his break, and tryin' to guess how Cornelia was standin' it, when she floats up to me and says:

"Wasn't it sweet of Mr. Gallagher to come? Have you seen him?"

"Seen him!" says I. "You don't notice any bandage over my eyes, do you? Notice the get up. Why, he looks like a section of a billboard."

"Oh, I don't mind his clothes a bit," says she. "I think he's real picturesque. Besides, I haven't forgotten that he used to pose for me when hiring models meant going without meals. I wish you would see that he doesn't get lonesome before I have a chance to speak to him again."

"He don't look like he needed any chirkin' up," says I; "but I'll go give him the howdy."

So I trots over to the yellow shade and ranges myself up in front of him. "You might's well own up, Swifty," says I. "Is Cornie the one?"

"Uh-huh," says he.

"Told her about it yet?" says I.

"Ahr, chee!" says he. "Give a guy a chance."

"Sure," says I. "But go slow, Joey, go slow."

I don't know how it happened, for all I told about it was Sadie and Mrs. Purdy Pell; but it wa'n't long before everyone in the joint was next to Swifty, and was pipin' him off. They all has to be introduced and make a try at gettin' him to talk. For awhile he has the time of his life. Mostly he just grins; but now and then he throws in an "Ahr, chee!" that knocks 'em silly.

The only one that don't fall for what's up is Cornelia Ann. She gets him to help her pass out the teacups and the cake, and tells everyone about how Swifty helped her out on the model business when she was livin' on pickled pigs' feet and crackers. Fin'lly folks begins to dig out their wraps and come up to tell her how they'd had a bully time. But Joe never makes a move.

Sadie and Mrs. Pell wa'n't in any hurry either, and the first thing I knows there's only the five of us left. I see Sadie lookin' from Joe to Cornie, and then passin' Mrs. Pell the smile. Cornelia Ann sees it too, and she has a synopsis of the precedin' chapters all in a minute. But she don't get flustered a bit. She sails over to the coat room, gets Swifty's lid, and comes luggin' it out.

"I'm awfully glad you came, Mr. Gallagher," says she, handin' out the bean pot, "and I hope to see you again when I have another reception—next year."

"Eh?" says Swifty, like he was wakin' up from a dream. "Next year! Why, I thought that—"

"Yes, but you shouldn't," says she. "Good night."

Then he sees the hat, and a light breaks. He grabs the lid and makes a dash for the door.

"Isn't he odd?" says Cornelia.

Well say, I didn't know whether I'd get word that night that Swifty had jumped off the bridge, or had gone back to the fusel oil. He didn't do either one, though; but when he shows up at the Studio next mornin' he was wearin' his old clothes, and his face looks like he was foreman of a lemon grove.

"Ah, brace up, Swifty," says I. "There's others."

He just shakes his head and sighs, and goes off into a corner as if he wanted to die slow and lingerin'.

Then Saturday afternoon, when it turns off so warm and we begins the noon shut down, I thinks I'll take a little run down to Coney and hear the frankfurters bark. I was watchin' 'em load the boys and girls into a roller coaster, when along comes a car that has something familiar in it. Here's Swifty, wearin' his brass band suit, a cigar stickin' out of one corner of his mouth, and an arm around a fluffy haired Flossie girl that was chewin' gum and wearin' a fruit basket hat. They was lookin' happy.

"Say, Swifty," I sings out, "don't forget about Cornie."

"Ahr, chee!" says he, and off they goes down the chute for another ten-cent ride.

But say, I'm glad all them South Brooklyn art clothes ain't goin' to be wasted.

XVIII

PLAYING WILBUR TO SHOW

It's all right. You can put the Teddy sign on anything you read in the papers about matrimony's bein' a lost art, and collectin' affinities bein' the latest fad; for the plain, straight,

old, love-honour-and-cherish business is still in the ring. I have Pinckney's word for it, and Pinckney ought to know. Oh, yes, he's an authority now. Sure, it was Miss Gerty, the twin tamer. And say, what do you suppose they did with that gift pair of terrors, Jack and Jill, while they was makin' the weddin' tour? Took 'em along. Honest, they travels for ten weeks with two kids, five trunks, and a couple of maids.

"You don't look like no honeymoon couple," says I, when I meets 'em in Jersey City. "I'd take you for an explorin' party."

"We are," says Pinckney, grinnin'. "We've been explorin' the western part of the United States. We have discovered Colorado Springs, the Yosemite, and a lot more very interesting places, all over again."

"You'll be makin' a new map, I expect," says I.

"It would be new to most New Yorkers," says he.

And I've been tryin' ever since to figure out whether or no that's a knock. Now and then I has a suspicion that Pinckney's acquired some new bug since he's been out through the alfalfa belt; but maybe his idea of the West's bein' such a great place only comes from the fact that Gerty was produced there. Perhaps it's all he says too; but I notice he seems mighty glad to get back to Main-st., N. Y. You'd thought so if you'd seen the way he trails me around over town the first day after he lands. We was on the go from noon until one A. M., and his cab bill must have split a twenty up fine.

What tickles me, though, is that he's the same old Pinckney, only more so. Bein' married don't seem to weigh no heavier on his mind than joinin' another club. So, instead of me losin' track of him altogether, he shows up here at the Studio oftener than before. And that's how it was he happens to be on hand when this overgrown party from the ham orchard blows in.

Just at the minute, though, Pinckney was back in the dressin' room, climbin' into his frock coat after our little half-hour session on the mat; so Swifty Joe and me was the reception committee.

As the door opens I looks up to see about seven foot of cinnamon brown plaid cloth,—a little the homeliest stuff I ever see used for clothes,—a red and green necktie, a face the colour of a ripe tomato, and one of these buckskin tinted felt hats on top of that. Measurin' from the peak of the Stetson to the heels of his No. 14 Cinderellas, he must have been some under ninety inches, but not much. And he has all the grace of a water tower. Whoever tried to build that suit for him must have got desperate and cut it out with their eyes shut; for it fit him only in spots, and them not very near together. But what can you do with a pair of knock knees and shoulders that slope like a hip roof?

Not expectin' any freaks that day, and bein' too stunned to make any crack on our own hook, me and Swifty does the silent gawp, and waits to see if it can talk. For a minute he looks like he can't. He just stands here with his mouth half open, grinnin' kind of sheepish and good natured, as if we could tell what he wanted just by his looks. Fin'ly I breaks the spell.

"Hello, Sport," says I. "If you see any dust on top of that chandelier, don't mention it."

He don't make any reply to that, just grins a little wider; so I gives him a new deal.

"You'll find Huber's museum down on 14th-st.," says I. "Or have you got a Bowery engagement?"

This seems to twist him up still more; but it pulls the cork. "Excuse me, friends," says he; "but I'm tryin' to round up an eatin' house that used to be hereabouts."

"Eatin' house?" says I. "If you mean the fried egg parlour that was on the ground floor, that went out of business months ago. But there's lots more just as good around on Sixth-ave., and some that carry stock enough to fill you up part way, I guess."

"I wa'n't lookin' to grub up just yet," says he. "I was huntin' for—for some one that worked there."

And say, you wouldn't have thought anyone with a natural sunset colour like that could lay on a blush. But he does, and it's like throwin' the red calcium on a brick wall.

"Oh, tush, tush!" says I. "You don't mean to tell me a man of your size is trailin' some Lizzie Maud?"

He cants his head on one side, pulls out a blue silk handkerchief, and begins to wind it around his fore finger, like a bashful kid that's been caught passin' a note in school.

"Her—her name's Zylphina," says he,— "Zylphina Beck."

"Gee!" says I. "Sounds like a new kind of music box. No relation, I hope?"

"Not yet," says he, swingin' his shoulders; "but we've swapped rings."

"Of all the cut-ups!" says I. "And just what part of the plowed fields do you and Zylphina hail from?"

"Why, I'm from Hoxie," says he, as though that told the whole story.

"Do tell!" says I. "Is that a flag station or just a four corners? Somewhere in Ohio, ain't it?"

"Sheridan County, Kansas," says he.

"Well, well!" says I. "Now I can account for your size. Have to grow tall out there, don't you, so's not to get lost in the wheat patch?"

Say, for a josh consumer, he was the easiest ever. All he does is stand there and grin, like he was the weak end of a variety team. But it seems a shame to crowd a willin' performer; so I was just tellin' him he'd better go out and hunt up a city directory in some drug store, when Pinckney shows up, lookin' interested.

"There!" says I. "Here's a man now that'll lead you straight to Zylphina in no time. Pinckney, let me make you acquainted with Mister—er——"

"Cobb," says the Hoxie gent, "Wilbur Cobb."

"From out West," I puts in, givin' Pinckney the nudge. "He's yours."

It ain't often I has a chance to unload anything like that on Pinckney, so I rubs it in. The thoughts of him towin' around town a human extension like this Wilbur strikes Swifty Joe so hard that he most has a chokin' fit.

But you never know what turn Pinckney's goin' to give to a jolly. He don't even crack a smile, but reaches up and hands Mr. Cobb the cordial shake, just as though he'd been a pattern sized gent dressed accordin' to the new fall styles.

"Ah!" says Pinckney. "I'm very glad to meet anyone from the West. What State, Mr. Cobb?"

And inside of two minutes he's gettin' all the details of this Zylphina hunt, from the ground up, includin' an outline of Wilbur's past life.

Seems that Wilbur'd got his first start in Maine; but 'way back before he could remember much his folks had moved to Kansas on a homestead. Then, when Wilbur tossed out, he takes up a quarter section near Hoxie, and goes to corn farmin' for himself, raisin' a few hogs as a side line. Barrin' bein' caught in a cyclone or two, and gettin' elected junior kazook of the Sheridan County Grange, nothin' much happened to Wilbur, until one day he took a car ride as far west as Colby Junction.

That's where he meets up with Zylphina. She was jugglin' stop over rations at the railroad lunch counter. Men must have been mighty scarce around the junction, or else she wants the most she can get for the money; for, as she passes Wilbur a hunk of petrified pie and draws him one muddy, with two lumps on the saucer, she throws in a smile that makes him feel like he'd stepped on a live third rail.

Accordin' to his tell, he must have hung around that counter all day, eatin' through the pie list from top to bottom and back again, until it's a wonder his system ever got over the shock. But Zylphina keeps tollin' him on with googoo eyes and giggles, sayin' how it does her good to see a man with a nice, hearty appetite, and before it come time for him to take the night train back they'd got real well acquainted. He finds out her first name, and how she's been a whole orphan since she was goin' on ten.

After that Wilbur makes the trip to Colby Junction reg'lar every Sunday, and they'd got to the point of talkin' about settin' the day when she was to become Mrs. Cobb, when Zylphina gets word that an aunt of hers that kept a boardin' house in Fall River, Massachusetts, wants her to come on East right away. Aunty has some kind of heart trouble that may finish her any minute, and, as Zylphina was the nearest relation she had, there was a show of her bein' heiress to the whole joint.

Course, Zylphina thinks she ought to tear herself loose from the pie counter; but before she quits the junction her and Wilbur takes one last buggy ride, with the reins wound around the whip socket most of the way. She weeps on Wilbur's shirt front, and says no matter how far off she is, or how long she has to wait for him to come, she'll always be his'n on demand. And Wilbur says that just as soon as he can make the corn and hog vineyard hump itself a little more, he'll come.

So Zylphina packs a shoe box full of fried chicken, blows two months' wages into a yard of yellow railroad ticket, and starts toward the cotton mills. It's a couple of months before Wilbur gets any letter, and then it turns out to be a hard luck tale, at that. Zylphina has found out what a lime tastes like. She's discovered that the Fall River aunt hasn't anything more the matter with her heart than the average landlady, and that what she's fell heiress to is only a chance to work

eighteen hours a day for her board. So she's disinherited herself and is about to make a bold jump for New York, which she liked the looks of as she came through, and she'll write more later on.

It was later—about six months. Zylphina says she's happy, and hopes Wilbur is the same. She's got a real elegant job as cashier in a high-toned, twenty-five cent, reg'lar-meal establishment, and all in the world she has to do is to sit behind a wire screen and make change. It's different from wearin' an apron, and the gents what takes their food there steady treats her like a perfect lady. New York is a big place; but she's getting so she knows her way around quite well now, and it would seem funny to go back to a little one-horse burg like Colby.

And that's all. Nothin' about her bein' Wilbur's on demand, or anything of that kind. Course, it's an antique old yarn; but it was all fresh to Wilbur. Not bein' much of a letter writer, he keeps on feedin' the hogs punctual, and hoein' the corn, and waitin' for more news. But there's nothin' doin'.

"Then," says he, "I got to thinkin' and thinkin', and this fall, being as how I was coming as far east as Chicago on a shipper's pass, I reckons I'd better keep right on here, hunt Zylphina up, and take her back with me."

The way he tells it was real earnest, and at some points them whey coloured eyes of his moistens up good an' dewy; but he finishes strong and smilin'. You wouldn't guess, though, that any corn fed romance like that would stir up such a blood as Pinckney? A few months back he wouldn't have listened farther'n the preamble; but now he couldn't have been more interested if this was a case of Romeo Astor and Juliet Dupeyster.

"Shorty," says he, "can't we do something to help Mr. Cobb find this young lady?"

"Do you mean it," says I, "or are you battin' up a josh?"

He means it, all right. He spiels off a lot of gush about the joy of unitin' two lovin' hearts that has got strayed; so I asks Wilbur if he can furnish any description of Zylphina. Sure, he can. He digs up a leather wallet from his inside pocket and hands out a tintype of Miss Beck, one of these portraits framed in pale pink paper, taken by a wagon artist that had wandered out to the junction.

Judgin' by the picture, Zylphina must have been a sure enough prairie-rose. She's wearin' her hair loose over her shoulders, and a genuine Shy Ann hat, one of those ten-inch brims with the front pinned back. The pug nose and the big mouth wa'n't just after the Venus model; but it's likely she looked good to Wilbur. I takes one squint and hands it back.

"Nix, never!" says I. "I've seen lots of fairies on 42d-st., but none like that. Put it back over your heart, Wilbur, and try an ad. in the lost columnn."

But Pinckney ain't willin' to give up so easy. He says how Mr. Cobb has come more'n a thousand miles on this tender mission, and it's up to us to do our best towards helping him along. I couldn't see just where we was let into this affair of Wilbur's; but as Pinckney's so set on it, I begins battin' my head for a way of takin' up the trail.

And it's wonderful what sleuth work you can do just by usin' the 'phone liberal. First I calls up the agent of the buildin', and finds that the meal fact'ry has moved over to Eighth-ave. Then I gets that number and brings Zylphina's old boss to the wire. Sure, he remembers Miss Beck. No, she ain't with him now. He thinks she took a course in manicurin', and one of the girls says she heard of her doin' the hand holdin' act in an apartment hotel on West 35th-st. After three tries we has Zylphina herself on the 'phone.

"Guess who's here," says I.

"That you, Roland?" says she.

"Aw, pickles!" says I. "Set the calendar back a year or so, and then come again. Ever hear of Wilbur, from Hoxie, Kan.?"

Whether it was a squeal or a snicker, I couldn't make out; but she was on. As I couldn't drag Wilbur up to the receiver, I has to carry through the talk myself, and I makes a date for him to meet her in front of the hotel at six-thirty that evenin', when the day shift of nail polishers goes off duty.

"Does that suit, Wilbur?" says I.

Does it? You never saw so much pure joy spread over a single countenance as what he flashes up. He gives me a grip I can feel yet, and the grin that opens his face was one of these reg'lar ear connectors. Pinckney was tickled too, and it's all I can do to get him off one side where I can whisper confidential.

"Maybe it ain't struck you yet," says I, "that Zylphina's likely to have changed some in her ideas as to what a honey boy looks like. Now Wilbur's all right in his way; but ain't he a little

rugged to spring on a lady manicure that hasn't seen him for some time?"

And when Pinckney comes to take a close view, he agrees that Mr. Cobb is a trifle fuzzy. "But we can spruce him up," says Pinckney. "There are four hours to do it in."

"Four weeks would be better," says I; "it's considerable of a contract."

That don't bother Pinckney any. He's got nothing else on hand for the afternoon, and he can't plan any better sport than improvin' Wilbur's looks so Zylphina's first impression'll be a good one.

He begins by making Wilbur peel the cinnamon brown costume, drapin' him in a couple of bath robes, while Swifty takes the suit out to one of these pants-pressed-while you wait places. When it comes back with creases in the legs, he hustles Wilbur into a cab and starts for a barber shop.

Say, I don't suppose Cobb'll ever know it; but if he'd been huntin' for expert help along that line, he couldn't have tumbled into better hands than he did when Pinckney gets interested in his case. When they floats in again, along about six o'clock, I hardly knows Wilbur for the same party. He's wearin' a long black ulster that covers up most of the plaid nightmare; he's shook the woolly lid for a fall block derby, he's had his face scraped and powdered, and his neck ringlets trimmed up; and he even sports a pair of yellow kids and a silver headed stick.

"Gosh!" says I. "Looks like you'd run him through a finishing machine. Why, he'll have Zylphina after him with a net."

"Yes," says Pinckney. "I fancy he'll do now."

As for Wilbur, he only looks good natured and happy. Course, Pinckney wants to go along with him, to see that it all turns out right; and he counts me in too, so off we starts. I was a little curious to get a glimpse of Zylphina myself, and watch how stunned she'd be. For we has it all framed up how she'll act. Havin' seen the tintype, I can't get it out of my head that she's still wearin' her hair loose and looking like M'liss in the first act.

"Hope she'll be on time," says I, as we turns the corner.

There was more or less folks goin' and comin' from the ladies' entrance; but no girl like the one we was lookin' for. So we fetches up in a bunch opposite the door and prepares to wait. We hadn't stood there a minute, before there comes a squeal from behind, and some one says:

"Why, Wilbur Cobb! Is that you?"

And what do you guess shows up? There at the curb is a big, open tourin' car,—one of the opulent, shiny kind,—with a slick looking shuffer in front, and, standin' up in the tonneau, a tart little lady wearin' Broadway clothes that was right up to the minute, hair done into breakfast rolls behind, and a long pink veil streamin' down her back. Only by the pug nose and the mouth could I guess that it might be Zylphina. And it was.

There wa'n't any gettin' away from the fact that she was a little jarred at seein' Wilbur lookin' so cute; but that was nothin' to the jolt she handed us. Mr. Cobb, he just opens his mouth and gazes at her like she was some sort of an exhibit. And Pinckney, who'd been expectin' something in a dollar-thirty-nine shirtwaist and a sagged skirt, is down and out. It didn't take me more'n a minute to see that if Zylphina has got to the stage where she wears pony jackets and rides in expensive bubbles, our little pie counter romance is headed for the ash can.

"Stung in both eyes!" says I under my breath, and falls back.

"Well, well!" says Zylphina, holdin' out three fingers. "When did you hit Broadway, Wilbur?"

It was all up to Cobb then. He drifts up to the tonneau and gathers in the fingers dazed like, as if he was walkin' in his sleep; but he gets out somethin' about bein' mighty glad to see her again.

Zylphina sizes him up kind of curious, and smiles. "You must let me introduce you to my friend," says she. "Roland, this is Mr. Cobb, from Kansas."

Mr. Shuffer grins too, as he swaps grips with Wilbur. It was a great joke.

"He's awfully nice to me, Roland is," says Zylphina, with a giggle. "And ain't this a swell car, though? Roland takes me to my boardin' house in it 'most every night. But how are the corn and hogs doin', Wilbur?"

Say, there was a topic Wilbur was up on. He throws her a grateful grin and proceeds to unlimber his conversation works. He tells Zylphina how many acres he put into corn last spring, how much it shucked to the acre, and how many head of hogs he has just sent to the ham and lard lab'ratory. That brand of talk sounds kind of foolish there under the arc lights; but Zylphina pricks up her ears.

"Ten carloads of hogs!" says she. "Is that a kid, or are you just havin' a dream?"

"I cal'late it'll be twenty next fall," says he, fishin' for somethin' in his pocket. "Here's the packing house receipts for the ten, anyway."

"Let's see," says she, and by the way she skins her eye over them documents you could tell that Zylphina'd seen the like before. Also she was somethin' of a ready reckoner.

"Oh, Wilbur!" says she, makin' a flyin' leap and landin' with her arms around his neck. "I'm yours, Wilbur, I'm yours!"

And Wilbur, he gathers her in.

"Roland," says I, steppin' up to the shuffer, "you can crank up. Hoxie's won out in the tenth."

XIX

AT HOME WITH THE DILLONS

I was expectin' to put in a couple of days doin' the sad and lonely, Sadie havin' made a date to run out to Rocky wold for the week end; but Friday night when I'm let off at the seventh floor of the Perzazzer—and say, no matter how many flights up home is, there's no place like it—who should I see but Sadie, just takin' off her hat. Across by the window is one of the chamber maids, leanin' up against the casing and sniffin' into the expensive draperies.

"Well, well!" says I. "Is this a rehearsal for a Hank Ibsen sprinkler scene, or is it a case of missin' jewels?"

"It's nothing of the sort, Shorty," says Sadie, giving me the shut-off signal. Then she turns to the girl with a "There, there, Nora! Everything will be all right. And I will be around Sunday afternoon. Run along now, and don't worry." With that she leads Nora out to the door and sends her away with a shoulder pat.

"Who's been getting friendly with the help now; eh, Sadie?" says I. "And what's the woe about?"

Course she begins at the wrong end, and throws in a lot of details that only lumbers up the record; but after she's been talkin' for half an hour—and Sadie can separate herself from a lot of language in that time—I gets a good workin' outline of this domestic tragedy that has left damp spots on our window curtains.

It ain't near so harrowin', though, as you might suspect. Seems that Nora has the weepin' habit. That's how Sadie come to remember havin' seen her before. Also it counts for Nora's shiftin' so often. Folks like Mrs. Purdy Pell and the Twombly-Cranes can't keep a girl around that's liable to weep into the soup or on the card tray. If it wa'n't for that, Nora'd been all right; for she's a neat lookin' girl, handy and willin',—one of these slim, rosy cheeked, black haired, North of Ireland kind, that can get big wages, when they have the sense, which ain't often.

Well, she'd changed around until she lands here in the fresh linen department, workin' reg'lar twelve-hour shifts, one afternoon off a week, and a four-by-six room up under the copper roof, with all the chance in the world to weep and no one to pay any attention to her, until Sadie catches her at it. Trust Sadie!

When she finds Nora leakin' her troubles out over an armful of clean towels, she drags her in here and asks for the awful facts. Then comes the fam'ly history of the Dillons, beginnin' on the old rent at Ballyshannon and endin' in a five-room flat on Double Fifth-ave. When she comes to mentionin' Larry Dillon, I pricks up my ears.

"What! Not the old flannel mouth that's chopped tickets at the 33d-st. station ever since the L was built?" says I.

"He's been discharged," says Sadie. "Did you know him?"

Did I know Larry? Could anyone live in this burg as long as I have, without gettin' acquainted with that Old Country face, or learnin' by heart his "Ha-a-a-ar-lem thr-r-rain! Ha-a-a-ar-lem!"? There's other old timers that has the brogue, but never a one could touch Larry. A purple faced, grumpy old pirate, with a disposition as cheerful as a man waitin' his turn at the dentist's, and a heart as big as a ham, he couldn't speak a civil word if he tried; but he was always ready to hand over half his lunch to any whimperin' newsy that came along, and he's lent out more nickels that he'll ever see again.

But about the other Dillons, I got my first news from Sadie. There was four of 'em, besides Nora. One was Tom, who had a fine steady job, drivin' a coal cart for the Consolidated. A credit to

the family, Tom was; havin' a wife and six kids of his own, besides votin' the straight Tammany ticket since he was nineteen. Next there was Maggie, whose man was on the stage,—shiftin' scenery. Then there was Kate, the lady sales person, who lived with the old folks. And last there was Aloysius, the stray; and wherever he was, Heaven help him! for he was no use whatever.

"I take it that 'Loyshy's the brunette Southdown of the Dillon flock," says I. "What particular brand of cussedness does he make a specialty of?"

Sadie says that Nora hadn't gone much into particulars, except that when last heard of he'd joined the Salvationists, which had left old Larry frothin' at the mouth. He'd threatened to break Aloysius into two pieces on sight, and he'd put the ban on speakin' his name around the house.

"Followin' the tambourine!" says I. "That's a queer stunt for a Dillon. The weeps was for him, then?"

They wa'n't. 'Loyshy's disappearin' act had been done two or three years back. The tears was all on account of the fortieth weddin' anniversary of the Dillons, fallin' as it did just a week after Larry had the spell of rheumatism which got him laid off for good. It's a nice little way the Inter-Met. people has of rewardin' the old vets. An inspector finds Larry, with his hand tied to the chopper handle, takes a look at his cramped up fingers, puts down his number, and next payday he gets the sack.

"So you've found another candidate for your private pension list, have you, Sadie?" says I.

But that's another wrong guess. The Dillons ain't takin' charity, not from anyone. It's the Dillon sisters to the rescue. They rustles around until they find Larry a job as night watch, in where it's warm. Then they all chips in for the new Tenth-ave. flat. Maggie brings her man and the two kids, the lady Kate sends around her trunks with the furniture, and Nora promises to give up half of her twenty to keep things going.

And then the Bradys, who lives opposite, has to spring their blow out. They'd been married forty years too; but just because one of their boys was in the Fire Department, and 'Lizzie Brady was workin' in a Sixth-ave. hair dressin' parlour, they'd no call to flash such a bluff,—frosted cake from the baker, with the date done in pink candy, candles burnin' on the mantelpiece, a whole case of St. Louis on the front fire escape, and the district boss drivin' around in one of Connely's funeral hacks. Who was the Bradys, that they should have weddin' celebrations when the Dillons had none?

Kate, the lady sales person, handed out that conundrum. She supplies the answer too. She allows that what a Brady can make a try at, a Dillon can do like it ought to be done. So they've no sooner had the gas and water turned on at the new flat than she draws up plans for a weddin' anniversary that'll make the Brady performance look like a pan of beans beside a standing rib roast.

She knows what's what, the lady Kate does. She's been to the real things, and they calls 'em "at homes" in Harlem. The Dillons will be at home Sunday the nineteenth, from half after four until eight, and the Bradys can wag their tongues off, for all she cares. It'll be in honour of the fortieth wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Dillon, and all the family connections, and all friends of the same, is to have a bid.

"Well, that's the limit!" says I. "Did you tell the girl they'd better be layin' in groceries, instead of givin' an imitation tea?"

"Certainly not!" says Sadie. "Why shouldn't they enjoy themselves in their own way?"

"Eh?" says I. "Oh, I take it all back. But what was the eye swabbin' for, then?"

By degrees I gets the enacting clause. The arrangements for the party was goin' on lovely,—Larry was havin' the buttons sewed onto the long tailed coat he was married in, the scene shifter had got the loan of some stage props to decorate the front room, there was to be ice cream and fancy cakes and ladies' punch. Father Kelley had promised to drop in, and all was runnin' smooth,—when Mother Dillon breaks loose.

And what do you guess is the matter with her? She wants her 'Loyshy. If there was to be any fam'ly convention and weddin' celebration, why couldn't she have her little Aloysius to it? She didn't care a split spud how he'd behaved, or if him and his father had had words; he was her youngest b'y, and she thought more of him than all the rest put together, and she wouldn't have a hand in any doin's that 'Loyshy was barred from comin' to.

As Nora put it, "When the old lady speaks her mind, you got to listen or go mad from her." She don't talk of anything else, and when she ain't talkin' she's cryin' her eyes out. Old Larry swore himself out of breath, the lady Kate argued, and Maggie had done her best; but there was nothin' doin'. They'd got to find Aloysius and ask him to the party, or call it off.

But findin' 'Loyshy wa'n't any cinch. He'd left the Army long ago. He wa'n't in any of the fifteen-cent lodgin' houses. The police didn't have any record of him. He didn't figure in the hospital lists. The nearest anyone came to locatin' him was a handbook man the scene shifter

knew, who said he'd heard of 'Loyshy hangin' around the Gravesend track summer before last; but there was no use lookin' for him there at this time of year. It wa'n't until they'd promised to advertise for Aloysius in the papers that Mother Dillon quit takin' on and agreed to wear the green silk she'd had made for Nora's chistenin'.

"Yes, and what then?" says I.

"Why," says Sadie, "Nora's afraid that if Aloysius doesn't turn up, her mother will spoil the party with another crying spell; and she knows if he does come, her father will throw him out."

"She has a happy way of lookin' at things," says I. "Was it for this you cut out going to Rockywold?"

"Of course," says Sadie. "I am to pour tea at the Dillons' on Sunday afternoon. You are to come at five, and bring Pinckney."

"Ah, pickles, Sadie!" says I. "This is——"

"Please, Shorty!" says she. "I've told Nora you would."

"I'll put it up to Pinckney," says I, "and if he's chump enough to let himself loose in Tenth-ave. society, just to help the Dillons put it over the Bradys, I expect I'll be a mark too. But it's a dippy move."

Course, I mistrusted how Pinckney would take it. He thinks he's got me on the rollers, and proceeds to shove. He hasn't heard more'n half the tale before he begins handin' me the josh about it's bein' my duty to spread sunshine wherever I can.

"It's calcium the Dillons want," says I. "But I hadn't got to tellin' you about Aloysius."

"What's that?" says he. "Aloysius Dillon, did you say?"

"He's the one that's playin' the part of the missing prod.," says I.

"What is he like?" says Pinckney, gettin' interested.

"Accordin' to descriptions," says I, "he's a useless little runt, about four feet nothin' high and as wide as a match, with the temper of a striped hornet and the instincts of a yellow kyoodle. But he's his mother's pet, just the same, and if he ain't found she threatens to throw fits. Don't happen to know him, do you?"

"Why," says Pinckney, "I'm not sure but I do."

It looks like a jolly; but then again, you never can tell about Pinckney. He mixes around in so many sets that he's like to know 'most anybody.

"Well," says I, "if you run across Aloysius at the club, tell him what's on for Sunday afternoon."

"I will," says Pinckney, lettin' out a chuckle and climbin' into his cab.

I was hoping that maybe Sadie would renige before the time come; but right after dinner Sunday she makes up in her second best afternoon regalia, calls a hansom, and starts for Tenth-ave., leavin' instructions how I was to show up in about an hour with Pinckney, and not to forget about handin' out our cards just as if this was a swell affair. I finds Pinckney got up in his frock coat and primrose pants, and lookin' mighty pleased about something or other.

"Huh!" says I. "You seem to take this as a reg'lar cut-up act. I call it blamed nonsense, encouragin' folks like the Dillons to——"

But there ain't any use arguin' with Pinckney when he's feelin' that way. He only grins and looks mysterious. We don't have to hunt for the number of the Dillons' flat house, for there's a gang of kids on the front steps and more out in the street gawpin' up at the lighted windows. We makes a dive through them and tackles the four flights, passin' inspection of the tenants on the way up, every door bein' open.

"Who's comin' now?" sings out a women from the Second floor back.

"Only a couple of Willies from the store," says a gent in his shirt sleeves, givin' us the stare.

From other remarks we heard passed, it was clear the Dillons had been tootin' this party as something fine and classy, and that they wa'n't making good. The signs of frost grows plainer as we gets nearer the scene of the festivities. All the Dillon family was there, right enough, from the youngest kid up. Old Larry has had his face scraped till it shines like a copper stewpan, and him and Mother Dillon is standin' under a green paper bell hung from a hook in the ceiling. I could spot Tom, the coal cart driver, by the ring of dust under his eyelashes; and there was no mistakin' lady Kate, the sales person, with the double row of coronet hair rolls pinned to the top of her head. Over in the corner, too, was Sadie, talkin' to Father Kelley. But there wa'n't any great signs

of joy.

The whole party sizes up me and Pinckney as if they was disappointed. I can't say what they was lookin' for from us; but whatever it was, we didn't seem to fill the bill. And just when the gloom is settlin' down thickest, Mother Dillon begins to sniffle.

"Now, mother," says Nora, soothin' like, "remember there's company."

"Ah, bad scran to the lot of yez!" says the old lady. "Where's my Aloysius? Where is he, will ye tell me that?"

"Divvul take such a woman!" says old Larry.

"Tut, tut!" says Father Kelley.

"Will you look at the Bradys now!" whispers Maggie, hoarselike.

It wa'n't easy guessin' which windows in the block was theirs, for every ledge has a pillow on it, and a couple of pairs of elbows on every pillow, but I took it that the Bradys was where they was grinnin' widest. You could tell, though, that the merry laugh was bein' passed up and down, and it was on the Dillons.

And then, as I was tryin' to give Sadie the get-away sign, we hears a deep honk outside, and I sees the folks across the way stretchin' their necks out. In a minute there's a scamperin' in the halls like a stampede at a synagogue, and we hears the "Ah-h-hs!" coming up from below. We all makes a rush for the front and rubbers out to see what's happenin'. By climbin' on a chair and peekin' over the top of the lady Kate's hair puffs, I catches a glimpse of a big yellow and black bodied car, with a footman in a bearskin coat holdin' open the door.

"Oh-o-o-oh! look what's here?" squeals eight little Dillons in chorus.

You couldn't blame 'em, either, for the hat that was bein' squeezed out through the door of the car was one of these Broadway thrillers, four feet across, and covered with as many green ostrich feathers as you could carry in a clothes basket. What was under the feather lid we couldn't see. Followin' it out of the machine comes somethin' cute in a butter colored overcoat and a brown derby. In a minute more we gets the report that the procession is headed up the stairs, and by the time we've grouped ourselves around the room with our mouths open, in they floats.

In the lead, wearin' the oleo coat with yellow silk facin's, was a squizzled up little squirt with rat eyes and a mean little face about as thick as a slice of toast, and the same colour. His clothes, though, is a pome in browns and yellows, from the champagne tinted No. 3 shoes to the tobacco coloured No. 5 hat, leavin' out the necktie, which was a shade somewhere between a blue store front and a bottle of purple ink.

Even if I hadn't seen the face, I could have guessed who it was, just by the get-up. Course, there's been a good many noisy dressers floatin' around the grill room district this winter, but there always has to be one real scream in every crowd; and this was it.

"If it ain't Shrimp!" says I.

"Hello, Shorty!" says he, in that little squeak of his.

And at that some one swoops past me. There's a flapping of green silk skirt, and Mother Dillon has given him the high tackle.

"Aloysius! My little 'Loyshy!" she squeals.

And say, you could have pushed me over with one finger. Here I'd been hearin' for the last two seasons about this jock that had come up from stable helper in a night, and how he'd been winning on nine out of every ten mounts, and how all the big racing men was overbiddin' each other to get him signed for their stables. Some of Pinckney's sportin' friends had towed Shrimp into the Studio once or twice, and besides that I'd read in the papers all about his giddy wardrobe, and his big Swede valet, and the English chorus girl that had married him. But in all this talk of Sadie's about the Dillon fam'ly, I'd never so much as guessed that Aloysius, the stray, was one and the same as Shrimp Dillon.

Here he was, though, in the Dillon flat, with Mother Dillon almost knockin' his breath out pattin' him on the back, and all the little Dillons jumpin' around and yellin', "Uncle 'Loyshy, Uncle 'Loyshy!" and Kate and Maggie and Nora waitin' their turns; and the rest of us, includin' old Larry and me and Sadie, lookin' foolish. The only one that acts like he wa'n't surprised is Pinckney.

Well, as soon as Shrimp can wiggle himself clear, and shake the little Dillons off his legs, he hauls Mrs. Shrimp to the front and does the honours. And say, they make a pair that would draw a crowd anywhere! You know the style of chorus ladies the Lieblers bring over,—the lengthy, high chested, golden haired kind? Well, she's one of the dizziest that ever stood up to make a background for the pony ballet. And she has on a costume—well, it goes with the hat, which it

puttin' it strong.

If the sight of her and the circus coloured car wa'n't enough to stun the neighbours and send the Bradys under the bed, they had only to wait till the Swede valet and the footman began luggin' up the sheaf of two-dollar roses and the basket of champagne.

I was watchin' old Larry to see how he was takin' it. First he looks Shrimp up and down, from the brown hat to the yellow shoes, and then he gazes at Mrs. Shrimp. Then his stiff lower jaw begins saggin' down, and his knobby old fingers unloosens from the grip they'd got into at first sight of 'Loyshy. It's plain that he was some in doubt about that chuckin' out programme he'd had all framed up. What Larry had been expectin' should the boy turn up at all, was something that looked like it had been picked out of the bread line. And here was a specimen of free spender that had "Keep the change!" pasted all over him. Then, before he has it half figured out, they're lined up in front of each other. But old Larry ain't one to do the sidestep.

"Aloysius," says he, scowlin' down at him, "where do ye be afther gettin' ut?"

"Out of the ponies, old stuff. Where else?" says Shrimp.

"Bettin'?" says Larry.

"Bettin' nothin'!" says Shrimp. "Mud ridin'."

"Allow me," says Pinckney, pushin' in, "to introduce to you all, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Shrimp Dillon, one of the best paid jockeys in America."

"And what might they be payin' the likes of him for bein' a jockey?" says old Larry.

"Why," says Pinckney, "it was something like twenty thousand this season, wasn't it, Shrimp?"

"Countin' bonuses and all," says Shrimp, "it was nearer thirty-two."

"Thirty-two thou——" But Larry's mouth is open so wide he can't get the rest out. He just catches his breath, and then, "'Loyshy, me lad, give us your hand on it."

"Ahem!" says Father Kelley, pickin' up his hat, "this seems to be a case where the prodigal has returned—and brought his veal with him."

"That's a thrue word," says Larry. "'Tis a proud day for the Dillons."

Did they put it over the Bradys? Well, say! All the Bradys has to do now, to remember who the Dillons are, is to look across the way and see the two geranium plants growin' out of solid silver pots. Course, they wa'n't meant for flower pots. They're champagne coolers; but Mother Dillon don't know the difference, so what's the odds? Anyway, they're what 'Loyshy brought for presents, and I'll bet they're the only pair west of Sixth-avenue.

XX

THE CASE OF RUSTY QUINN

Say, I ain't one of the kind to go around makin' a noise like a pickle, just because I don't happen to have the same talents that's been handed out to others. About all I got to show is a couple of punch distributors that's more or less educated, and a block that's set on some solid. Not much to get chesty over; but the combination has kept me from askin' for benefit performances, and as a rule I'm satisfied.

There's times, though, when I wish—say, don't go givin' me the hee-haw on this—when I wish I could sing. Ah, I don't mean bein' no grand opera tenor, with a throat that has to be kept in cotton battin' and a reputation that needs chloride of lime. What would suit me would be just a plain, every day la-la-la outfit of pipes, that I could turn loose on coon songs when I was alone, or out with a bunch in the moonlight. I'd like to be able to come in on a chorus now and then, without havin' the rest of the crowd turn on me and call for the hook.

What music I've got is the ingrowin' kind. When anybody starts up a real lively tune I can feel it throbbin' and bumpin' away in my head, like a blowfly in a milk bottle; but if ever I try uncorkin' one of my warbles, the people on the next block call in the children, and the truck drivers begin huntin' for the dry axle.

Now look at what bein' musical did for Rusty Quinn. Who's Rusty? Well, he ain't much of anybody. I used to wonder, when I'd see him kickin' around under foot in different places, how it was he had the nerve to go on livin'. Useless! He appeared about as much good to the world as a

pair of boxin' gloves would be to the armless wonder.

First I saw of Rusty was five or six years back, when he was hangin' around my trainin' camp. He was a long, slab sided, loose jointed, freckled up kid then, always wearin' a silly, good natured grin on his homely face. About all the good you could say of Rusty was that he could play the mouth organ, and be good natured, no matter how hard he was up against it.

If there was anything else he could do well, no one ever found it out, though he tried plenty of things. And he always had some great scheme rattlin' round in his nut, something that was goin' to win him the big stake. But it was a new scheme every other day, and, outside of grinnin' and playin' the mouth organ, all I ever noticed specially brilliant about him was the way he used cigarettes as a substitute for food. Long's he had a bag of fact'ry sweepin's and a book of rice papers he didn't mind how many meals he missed, and them long fingers of his was so well trained they could roll dope sticks while he slept.

Well, it had been a year or so since I'd run across him last, and if I'd thought about him at all, which I didn't, it would have been to guess what fin'ly finished him; when this affair out on Long Island was pulled off. The swells that owns country places along the south shore has a horse show about this time every year. As a rule they gets along without me bein' there to superintend; but last week I happens to be down that way, payin' a little call on Mr. Jarvis, an old reg'lar of mine, and in the afternoon he wants to know if I don't want to climb up on the coach with the rest of the gang and drive over to see the sport.

Now I ain't so much stuck on this four-in-hand business. It's jolty kind of ridin', anyway, and if the thing upsets you've got a long ways to fall; but I always likes takin' a look at a lot of good horses, so I plants myself up behind, alongside the gent that does the tara-tara-ta act on the copper funnel, and off we goes.

It ain't any of these common fair grounds horse shows, such as anyone can buy a badge to. This is held on the private trottin' track at Windymere—you know, that big estate that's been leased by the Twombley-Cranes since they started makin' their splurge.

And say, they know how to do things in shape, them folks. There's a big green and white striped tent set up for the judges at the home plate, and banked around that on either side was the traps and carts and bubbles of some of the crispest cracker jacks on Mrs. Astor's list. Course, there was a lot of people I knew; so as soon as our coach is backed into position I shins down from the perch and starts in to do the glad hand walk around.

That's what fetches me onto one of the side paths leadin' up towards the big house. I was takin' a short cut across the grass, when I sees a little procession comin' down through the shrubbery. First off it looks like some one was bein' helped into their coat; but then I notices that the husky chap behind was actin' more vigorous than polite. He has the other guy by the collar, and was givin' him the knee good and plenty, first shovin' him on a step or two, and then jerkin' him back solid. Loomin' up in the rear was a gent I spots right off for Mr. Twombley-Crane himself, and by the way he follows I takes it he's bossin' the job.

"Gee!" says I to myself, "here's some one gettin' the rough chuck-out for fair."

And then I has a glimpse of a freckly face and the silly grin. The party gettin' the run was Rusty Quinn. He's lookin' just as seedy as ever, being costumed in a faded blue jersey, an old pair of yellow ridin' pants, and leggin's that don't match. The bouncer is a great, ham fisted, ruddy necked Britisher, a man twice the weight of Rusty, with a face shaped like a punkin. As he sees me slow up he snorts out somethin' ugly and gives Quinn an extra hard bang in the back with his knee. And that starts my temperature to risin' right off.

"Why don't you hit him with a maul, you bloomin' aitch eater," says I. "Hey, Rusty! what you been up to now?"

"Your friend's been happre'ended a-sneak thievin', that's w'at!" growls out the beef chewer.

"G'wan," says I. "I wouldn't believe the likes of you under oath. Rusty, how about it?"

Quinn, he gives me one of them batty grins of his and spreads out his hand. "Honest, Shorty," says he, "I was only after a handful of Turkish cigarettes from the smokin' room. I wouldn't touched another thing; cross m' heart, I wouldn't!"

"Ear 'im!" says the Britisher. "And 'im caught prowlin' through the 'ouse!" With that he gives Rusty a shake that must have loosened his back teeth, and prods him on once more.

"Ah, say," says I, "you ain't got no call to break his back even if he was prowlin'. Cut it out, you big mucker, or——"

Say, I shouldn't have done it, seein' where I was; but the ugly look on his mug as he lifts his knee again seems to pull the trigger of my right arm, and I swings in one on that punkin head like I was choppin' wood. He drops Rusty and comes at me with a rush, windmill fashion, and I'm so happy for the next two minutes, givin' him what he needs, that I've mussed up his countenance a lot before I sends in the one that finds the soft spot on his jaw and lands him on the grass.

"Here, here!" shouts Mr. Twombly-Crane, comin' up just as his man does the back shoulder fall. "Why, McCabe, what does this mean?"

"Nothin' much," says I, "except that I ain't in love with your particular way of speedin' the partin' guest."

"Guest!" says he, flushin' up. "The fellow was caught prowling. Besides, by what right do you question my method of getting rid of a sneak thief?"

"Oh, I don't stop for rights in a case of this kind," says I. "I just naturally butts in. I happens to know that Rusty here, ain't any more of a thief than I am. If you've got a charge to make, though, I'll see that he's in court when——"

"I don't care to bother with the police," says he. "I merely want the fellow kicked off the place."

"Sorry to interfere with your plans," says I; "but he's been kicked enough. I'll lead him off, though, and guarantee he don't come back, if that'll do?"

We both simmered down after he agrees to that proposition. The beef eater picks himself up and limps back to the house, while I escorts Rusty as far as the gates, givin' him some good advice on the way down. Seems he'd been workin' as stable helper at Windymere for a couple of weeks, his latest dream bein' that he was cut out for a jockey; but he'd run out of dope sticks and, knowin' they was scattered around reckless in the house, he'd just walked in lookin' for some.

"Which shows you've lost what little sense you ever had," says I. "Now here's two whole dollars, Rusty. Go off somewheres and smoke yourself to death. Nobody'll miss you."

Rusty, he just grins and moseys down the road, while I goes back to see the show, feelin' about as much to home, after that run in, as a stray pup in church.

It was about an hour later, and they'd got through the program as far as the youngsters' pony cart class, to be followed by an exhibit of fancy farm teams. Well, the kids was gettin' ready to drive into the ring. There was a bunch of 'em, mostly young girls all togged out in pink and white, drivin' dinky Shetlands in wicker carts covered with daisies and ribbons. In the lead was little Miss Gladys, that the Twombly-Cranes think more of than they do their whole bank account. The rigs was crowded into the main driveway, ready to turn into the track as soon as the way was cleared, and it sure was a sight worth seein'.

I was standin' up on the coach, takin' it in, when all of a sudden there comes a rumblin', thunderin' sound from out near the gates, and folks begins askin' each other what's happened. They didn't have to wait long for the answer; for before anyone can open a mouth, around the curve comes a cloud of dust, and out dashes a pair of big greys with one of them heavy blue and yellow farm waggons rattlin' behind. It was easy to guess what's up then. One of the farm teams has been scared.

Next thing that was clear was that there wa'n't any driver on the waggon, and that them crazy horses was headed straight for that snarl of pony carts. There wa'n't any yellin' done. I guess 'most every body's throat was too choked up. I know mine was. I only hears one sound above the bang and rattle of them hoofs and wheels. That was a kind of a groan, and I looks down to see Mr. Twombly-Crane standin' up in the seat of a tourin' car, his face the colour of a wax candle, and such a look in his eyes as I ain't anxious to see on any man again.

Next minute he'd jumped. But it wa'n't any use. He was too far away, and there was too big a crowd to get through. Even if he could have got there soon enough, he couldn't have stopped them crazy brutes any more'n he could have blocked a cannon ball.

I feels sick and faint in the pit of my stomach, and the one thing I wants to do most just then is to shut my eyes. But I couldn't. I couldn't look anywhere but at that pair of tearin' horses and them broad iron wheels. And that's why I has a good view of something that jumps out of the bushes, lands in a heap in the waggon, and then scrambles toward the front seat as quick as a cat. I see the red hair and the blue jersey, and that's enough. I knows it's that useless Rusty Quinn playin' the fool.

Now, if he'd had a pair of arms like Jeffries, maybe there'd been some hope of his pullin' down them horses inside the couple of hundred feet there was between their front toe calks and where little Miss Gladys was sittin' rooted to the cushions of her pony cart. But Rusty's muscle development is about equal to that of a fourteen-year boy, and it looks like he's goin' to do more harm than good when he grabs the reins from the whip socket. But he stands up, plants his feet wide, and settles back for the pull.

Almost before anyone sees his game, he's done the trick. There's a smash that sounds like a buildin' fallin' down, a crackin' and splinterin' of oak wood and iron, a rattlin' of trace chains, a couple of soggy thumps,—and when the dust settles down we sees a grey horse rollin' feet up on either side of a big maple, and at the foot of the tree all that's left of that yellow and blue waggon. Rusty had put what strength he had into one rein at just the right time, and the pole had struck the trunk square in the middle.

For a minute or so there was a grand hurrah, with mothers and fathers rushin' to grab their youngsters out of the carts and hug 'em; which you couldn't blame 'em for doin', either. As for me, I drops off the back of the coach and makes a bee line for that wreck, so I'm among the first dozen to get there. I'm in time to shove my shoulder under the capsized waggon body and hold it up.

Well, there ain't any use goin' into details. What we took from under there didn't look much like a human bein', for it was as limp and shapeless as a bag of old rags. But the light haired young feller that said he was a medical student guessed there might be some life left. He wa'n't sure. He held his ear down, and after he'd listened for a minute he said maybe something could be done. So we laid it on one of the side boards and lugged it up to the house, while some one jumps into a sixty-horse power car and starts for a sure enough doctor.

It was durin' the next ten minutes, when the young student was cuttin' off the blue jersey and the ridin' pants, and pokin' and feelin' around, that Mr. Twombly-Crane gets the facts of the story. He didn't have much to say; but, knowin' what I did, and seein' how he looked, I could easy frame up what was on his mind. He gives orders that whatever was wanted should be handed out, and he was standin' by holdin' the brandy flask himself when them washed out blue eyes of Rusty's flickers open for the first time.

"I—I forgot my—mouth organ," says Rusty. "I wouldn't of come back—but for that."

It wa'n't much more'n a whisper, and it was a shaky one at that. So was Mr. Twombly-Crane's voice kind of shaky when he tells him he thanks the Lord he did come back. And then Rusty goes off in another faint.

Next a real doc. shows up, and he chases us all out while him and the student has a confab. In five minutes or so we gets the verdict. The doc. says Rusty is damaged pretty bad. Things have happened to his ribs and spine which ought to have ended him on the spot. As it is, he may hold out another hour, though in the shape he's in he don't see how he can. But if he could hold out that long the doc. knows of an A-1 sawbones who could mend him up if anyone could.

"Then telephone for him at once, and do your best meanwhile," says Mr. Twombly-Crane.

By that time everyone on the place knows about Rusty and his stunt. The front rooms was full of people standin' around whisperin' soft to each other and lookin' solemn,—swell, high toned folks, that half an hour before hardly knew such specimens as Rusty existed. But when the word is passed around that probably he's all in, they takes it just as hard as if he was one of their own kind. When it comes to takin' the long jump, we're all pretty much on the same grade, ain't we?

I begun to see where I hadn't any business sizin' up Rusty like I had, and was workin' up a heavy feelin' in my chest, when the doc. comes out and asks if there's such a party as Shorty McCabe present. I knew what was comin'. Rusty has got his eyes open again and is callin' for me.

I finds him half propped up with pillows on a shiny mahogany table, his face all screwed up from the hurt inside, and the freckles showin' up on his dead white skin like peach stains on a table cloth.

"They say I'm all to the bad, Shorty," says he, tryin' to spring that grin of his.

"Aw, cut it out!" says I. "You tell 'em they got another guess. You're too tough and rugged to go under so easy."

"Think so?" says he, real eager, his eyes lightin' up.

"Sure thing!" says I. Say, I put all the ginger and cheerfulness I could fake up into that lie. And it seems to do him a heap of good. When I asks him if there's anything he wants, he makes another crack at his grin, and says:

"A paper pipe would taste good about now."

"Let him have it," says the doc. So the student digs out his cigarette case, and we helps Rusty light up.

"Ain't there somethin' more, Rusty?" says I. "You know the house is yours."

"Well," says he, after a few puffs, "if this is to be a long wait, a little music would help. There's a piano over in the corner."

I looks at the doc. and shakes my head. He shakes back.

"I used to play a few hymns," says the student.

"Forget 'em, then," says Rusty. "A hymn would finish me, sure. What I'd like is somethin' lively."

"Doc.," says I, "would it hurt?"

"Couldn't," says he. Also he whispers that he'd use chloroform, only Rusty's heart's too bad, and if he wants ragtime to deal it out.

"Wish I could," says I; "but maybe I can find some one who can."

With that I slips out and hunts up Mrs. Twombly-Crane, explainin' the case to her.

"Why, certainly," says she. "Where is Effie? I'll send her in right away."

She's a real damson plum, Effie is; one of the cute, fluffy haired kind, about nineteen. She comes in lookin' scared and sober; but when she's had a look at Rusty, and he's tried his grin on her, and said how he'd like to hear somebody tear off somethin' that would remind him of Broadway, she braces right up.

"I know," says she.

And say, she did know! She has us whirl the baby grand around so's she can glance over the top at Rusty, tosses her lace handkerchief into one corner of the keyboard, pushes back her sleeves until the elbow dimples show, and the next thing we know she's teasin' the tumpety-tum out of the ivories like a professor.

She opens up with a piece you hear all the kids whistlin',—something with a swing and a rattle to it, I don't know what. But it brings Rusty up on his elbow and sets him to keepin' time with the cigarette. Then she slides off into "Poor John!" and Rusty calls out for her to sing it, if she can. Can she? Why, she's got one of them sterling silver voices, that makes Vesta Victoria's warblin' sound like blowin' a fish horn, and before she's half through the first verse Rusty has joined in.

"Come on!" says he, as they strikes the chorus. "Everybody!"

Say, the doc. was right there with the goods. He roars her out like a good one; and the student chap wa'n't far behind, either. You know how it goes—

John, he took me round to see his moth-er, his moth-er, his moth-er!
And while he introduced us to each oth-er—

Eh? Well, maybe that ain't just the way it goes; but I can think the tune right. That was what I was up against then. I knew I couldn't make my voice behave; so all I does is go through the motions with my mouth and tap the time out with my foot. But I sure did ache to jump in and help Rusty out.

It was a great concert. She gives us all them classic things, like "The Bird on Nellie's Hat," "Waiting at the Church," "No Wedding Bells for Me," and so on; her fingers just dancin', and her head noddin' to Rusty, and her eyes kind of encouragin' him to keep his grip.

Twice, though, he has to quit, as the pain twists him; and the last time, when he flops back on the pillows, we thought he'd passed in for good. But in a minute or so he's up again' callin' for more. Say, maybe you think Miss Effie didn't have some grit of her own, to sit there bangin' out songs like that, expectin' every minute to see him keel over. But she stays with it, and we was right in the middle of that chorus that goes—

In old New York, in old New York,
The peach crop's always fine—

when the foldin' doors was slid back, and in comes the big surgeon gent we'd been waitin' for. You should have seen the look on him too, as he sizes up them three singin', and Rusty there on the table, a cigarette twisted up in his fingers, fightin' down a spasm.

"What blasted idiocy is this?" he growled.

"New kind of pain killer, doc.," says I. "Tell you all about it later. What you want to do now is get busy."

Well, that's the whole of it. He knew his book, that bone repairer did. He worked four hours steady, puttin' back into place the parts of Rusty that had got skewgeed; but when he rolls down his sleeves and quits he leaves a man that's almost as good as ever, barrin' a few months to let the pieces grow together.

I was out to see Rusty yesterday, and he's doin' fine. He's plannin', when he gets around again, to take the purse that was made up for him and invest it in airship stock.

"And if ever I make a million dollars, Shorty," says he, "I'm goin' to hand over half of it to that gent that sewed me up."

"Good!" says I. "And if I was you I'd chuck the other half at the song writers."

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