

SHORTY M' CABE
ON THE JOB

SEWELL FORD

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SHORTY McCABE ON THE JOB





"IT MIGHT GIVE US SOME CLEW," SAYS I, "AS TO WHAT HIM AND YOUR PAW
HAD A RUN-IN ABOUT."

SHORTY McCABE ON THE JOB

457

BY
SEWELL FORD

AUTHOR OF
SHORTY McCABE, SIDE-STEPPING WITH
SHORTY, Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
F. VAUX WILSON



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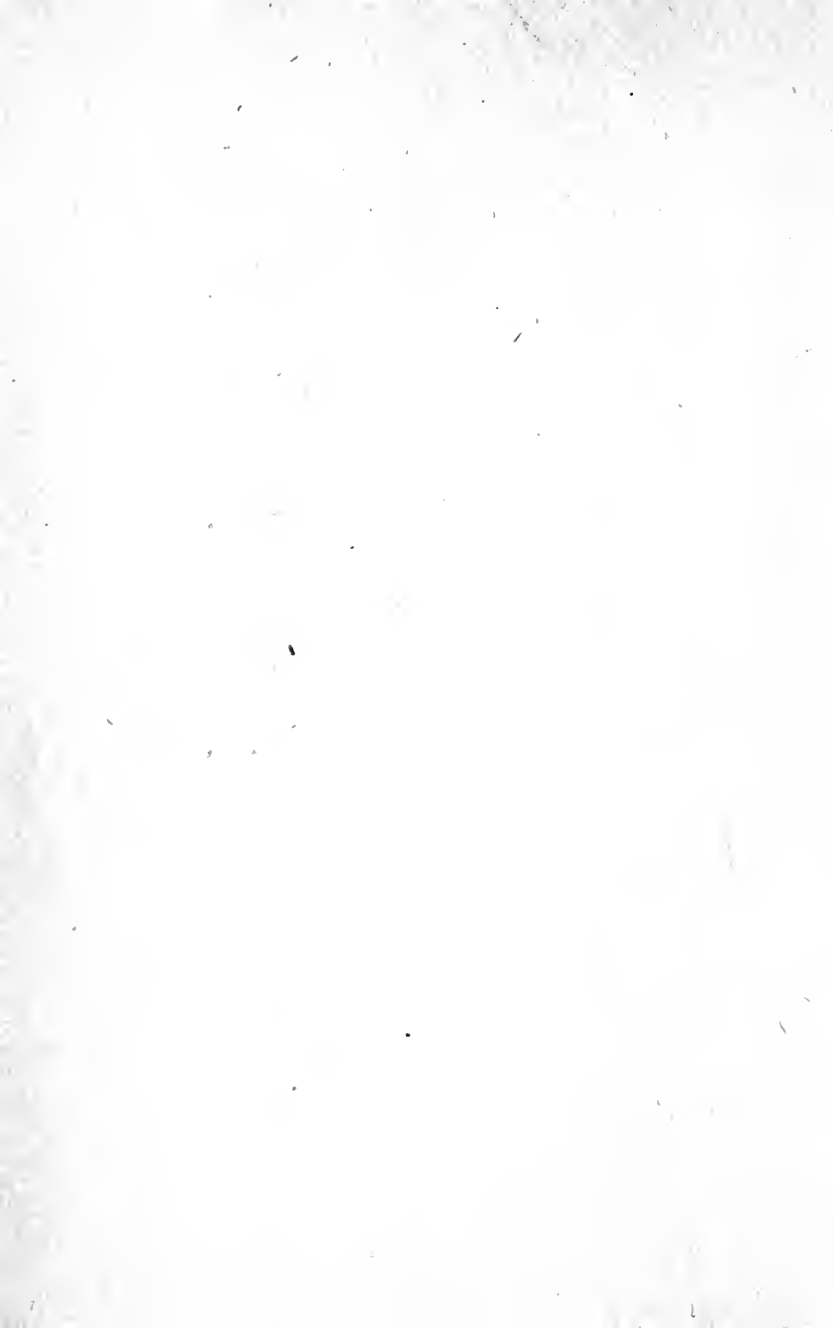
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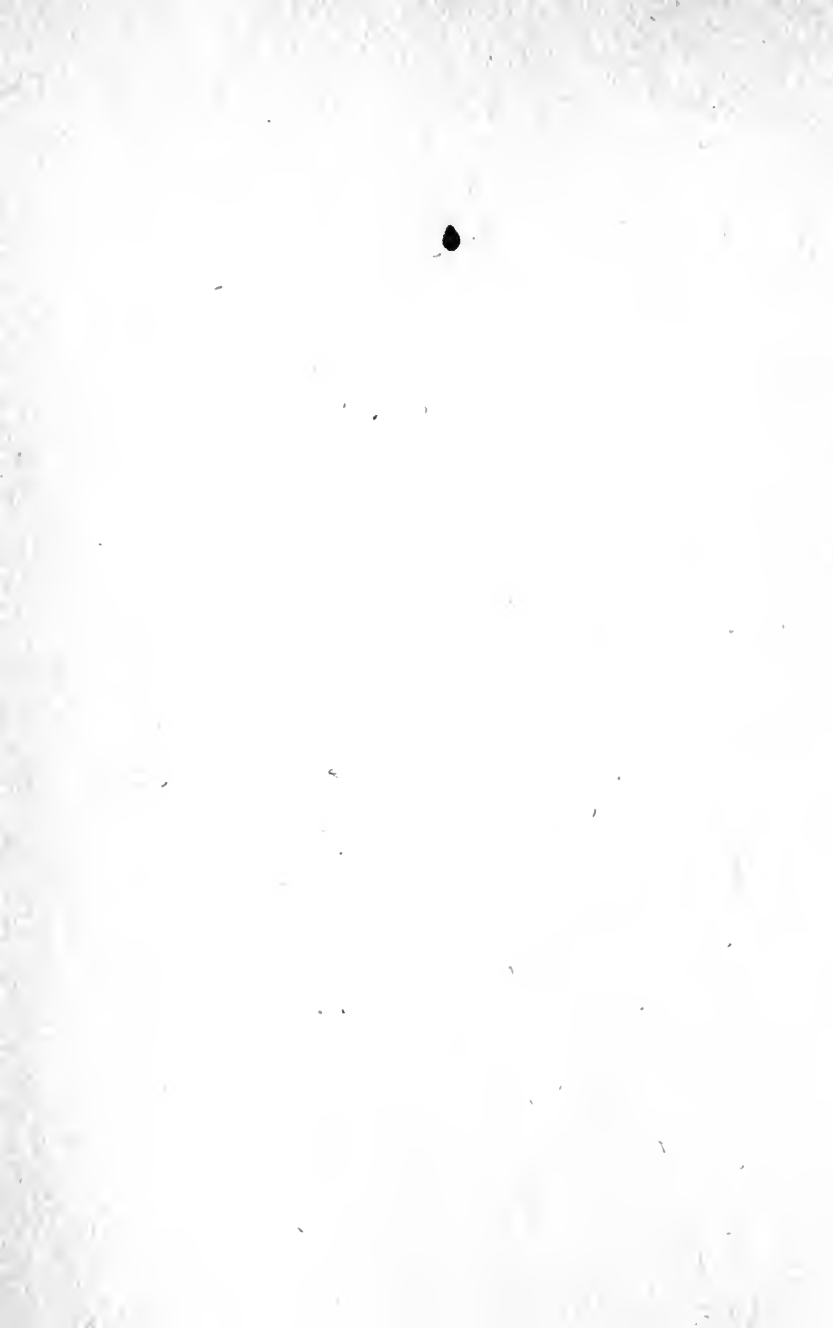
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SHORTY McCABE ON THE JOB



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CHAPTER I

WISHING A NEW ONE ON SHORTY

DO things just happen, like peculiar changes in the weather, or is there a general scheme on file somewhere? Is it a free-for-all we're mixed up in—with our Harry Thaws and our Helen Kellers; our white slavers, our white hopes, and our white plague campaigns; our trunk murders, and our fire heroes? Or are we runnin' on schedule and headed somewhere?

I ain't givin' you the answer. I'm just slip-pin' you the proposition, with the side remark that now and then, when the jumble seems worse than ever, you can get a glimpse of what might be a clew, or might not.

Anyway, here I was, busy as a little bee, block-in' right hooks and body jabs that was bein' shot at me by a husky young uptown minister who's a headliner at his job, I understand, but who's developin' a good, useful punch on the side. I was just landin' a cross wallop to the ribs, by way of keepin' him from bein' too ambitious with his left, when out of the tail of

my eye I notices Swifty Joe edgin' in with a card in his paw.

"Time out!" says I, steppin' back and droppin' my guard. "Well, Swifty, what's the scandal?"

"Gent waitin' to see you," says he.

"Let him wait, then," says I.

"Ah-r-r-r, but he's a reg'lar gent!" protests Swifty, fingerin' the card.

"Even so, he'll keep five minutes more, won't he?" says I.

"But he—he's——" begins Swifty, strugglin' to connect that mighty intellect of his with his tongue.

"Ah, read off the name," says I. "Is it Mayor Mitchel, Doc Wilson, or who?"

"It says J. B-a-y-a-r-d Ste—Steele," says Swifty.

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'. "Lemme see. Him! Say, Swifty, you go back and tell J. Bayard that if he's got nerve enough to want to see me, it'll be a case of wait. And if he's at all messy about it, I give you leave to roll him downstairs. The front of some folks! Come on now, Dominie! Cover up better with that right mitt: I'm goin' to push in a few on you this time."

And if you never saw a Fifth avenue preacher well lathered up you should have had a glimpse of this one at the end of the next round. He's game, though; even thanks me for it puffy.

“ You’re welcome,” says I. “ Maybe I did steam ’em in a bit; but I expect it was because I had my mind on that party out front. While you’re rubbin’ down I’ll step in and attend to his case. If I could only wish a pair of eight-ounce gloves on him for a few minutes! ”

So, without stoppin’ to change, or even sheddin’ the mitts, I walks into the front office, to discover this elegant party in the stream-line cutaway pacin’ restless up and down the room. Yes, he sure is some imposin’ to look at, with his pearl gray spats, and the red necktie blazin’ brilliant under the close-clipped crop of Grand Duke whiskers. I don’t know what there is special about a set of frosted face shubb’ry that sort of suggests bank presidents and so on, but somehow they do. Them and the long, thin nose gives him a pluty, distinguished look, in spite of the shifty eyes and the weak mouth lines. But I ain’t in a mood to be impressed.

“ Well? ” says I snappy.

I expect my appearin’ in a cut-out jersey, with my shoulder muscles still bunched, must have jarred him a little; for he lifts his eyebrows doubtful and asks, “ Er—Professor McCabe, is it? ”

“ Uh-huh,” says I. “ What’ll it be? ”

“ My name,” says he, “ is Steele.”

“ I know,” says I. “ Snug fit too, I judge.”

He flushes quick and stiffens. “ Do you mean to infer, Sir, that——”

“ You’re on,” says I. “ The minute I heard

your name I placed you for the smooth party that tried to unload a lot of that phony Radio stock on Mrs. Benny Sherwood. Wanted to euchre her out of the twenty thousand life insurance she got when Benny took the booze count last winter, eh? Well, it happens she's a friend of Mrs. McCabe, and it was through me your little scheme was blocked. Now I guess we ought to be real well acquainted."

But I might have known such crude stuff wouldn't get under the hide of a polished article like J. Bayard. He only shrugs his shoulders and smiles sarcastic.

"The pleasure seems to be all mine," says he. "But as you choose. Who am I to contend with the defender of the widow and the orphan that between issuing a stock and trading in it there is a slight difference? However deeply I am distressed by your private opinion of me, I shall try to——"

"Ah, ditch the sarcasm," says I, "and spring your game! What is it this trip, a wire-tappin' scheme, or just plain green goods?"

"You flatter me," says J. Bayard. "No, my business of the moment is not to appropriate any of the princely profits of your—er—honest toil," and he stops for another of them acetic-acid smiles.

"Yes," says I, "it is a batty way of gettin' money—workin' for it, eh? But go on. Whatcher mean you lost your dog?"

"I—er—I beg pardon?" says he.

“ Ah, get down to brass tacks! ” says I. “ You ain’t payin’ a society call, I take it? ”

He gets that. And what do you guess comes next? Well, he hands over a note. It’s from a lawyer’s office, askin’ him to call at two P.M. that day to meet with me, as it reads, “ and discuss a matter of mutual interest and advantage. ” It’s signed “ R. K. Judson, Attorney. ”

“ Well, couldn’t you wait? ” says I. “ It’s only eleven-thirty now, you know. ”

“ It is merely a question, ” says Steele, “ of whether or not I shall go at all. ”

“ So you hunt me up to do a little private sleuthin’ first, eh? ” says I.

“ It is only natural, ” says he. “ I don’t know this Mr.—er—Judson, or what he wants of me. ”

“ No more do I, ” says I. “ And the notice I got didn’t mention you at all; so you have that much edge on me. ”

“ And you are going? ” says he.

“ I’ll take a chance, sure, ” says I. “ Maybe I’ll button my pockets a little tighter, and tuck my watchfob out of sight; but no lawyer can throw a scare into me just by askin’ me to call. Besides, it says ‘ mutual interest and advantage, ’ don’t it? ”

“ H-m-m-m! ” says Mr. Steele, after gazin’ at the note thoughtful. “ So it does. But lawyers have a way of—— ” Here he breaks off sudden and asks, “ You say you never heard of this Mr. Judson before? ”

“That’s where you fool yourself,” says I. “I said I didn’t know him; but if it’ll relieve your mind any, I’ve heard him mentioned. He used to handle Pyramid Gordon’s private affairs.”

“Ah! Gordon!” says Steele, his shifty eyes narrowin’. “Yes, yes! Died abroad a month or so ago, didn’t he?”

“In Rome,” says I. “The rheumatism got to his heart. He could see it comin’ to him before he left. Poor old Pyramid!”

“Indeed?” says Steele. “And was Gordon—er—a friend of yours, may I ask?”

“One of my best,” says I. “Know him, did you?”

Mr. Steele darts a quick glance at me. “Rather!” says he.

“Then there can’t be so much myst’ry about this note, then,” says I. “Maybe he’s willed us a trinket or so. Friend of yours too, I expect?”

J. Bayard almost grins at that. “I have no good reason to doubt,” says he, “that Pyramid Gordon hated me quite as thoroughly and actively as I disliked him.”

“He was good at that too,” says I. “Had a little run-in with him, did you?”

“One that lasted something like twenty years,” says Steele.

“Oh!” says I. “Fluffs or finance?”

“Purely a business matter,” says he. “It began in Chicago, back in the good old days

when trade was unhampered by fool administrations. At the time, if I may mention the fact, I had some little prominence as a pool organizer. We were trying to corner July wheat,—getting along very nicely too,—when your friend Gordon got in our way. He had managed to secure control of a dinky grain-carrying railroad and a few elevators. On the strength of that he demanded that we let him in. So we were forced to take measures to—er—eliminate him.”

“And Pyramid wouldn’t be eliminated, eh?” says I.

J. Bayard shrugs his shoulders careless and spreads out his hands. “Gordon luck!” says he. “Of course we were unprepared for such methods as he employed against us. Up to that time no one had thought of stealing an advance copy of the government crop report and using it to break the market. However, it worked. Our corner went to smash. I was cleaned out. You might have thought that would have satisfied most men; but not Pyramid Gordon! Why, he even pushed things so far as to sell out my office furniture, and bought the brass signs, with my name on them, to hang in his own office, as a Sioux Indian displays a scalp, or a Mindanao head hunter ornaments his gatepost with his enemy’s skull. That was the beginning; and while my opportunities for paying off the score have been somewhat limited, I trust I have neglected none. And now—well,

I can't possibly see why the closing up of his affairs should interest me at all. Can you? "

" Say, you don't think I'm doin' any volunteer frettin' on your account, do you? " says I.

" I quite understand," says he. " But about seeing this lawyer—do you advise me to go? "

He's squintin' at me foxy out of them shifty eyes of his, cagy and suspicious, like we was playin' some kind of a game. You know the sort of party J. Bayard is—if you don't, you're lucky. So what's the use wastin' breath? I steps over and opens the front office door.

" Don't chance it," says I. " I wouldn't have anything happen to you for the world. I'll tell Judson I've come alone, to talk for the dictograph and stand on the trapdoor. And as you go down the stairs there better walk close to the wall."

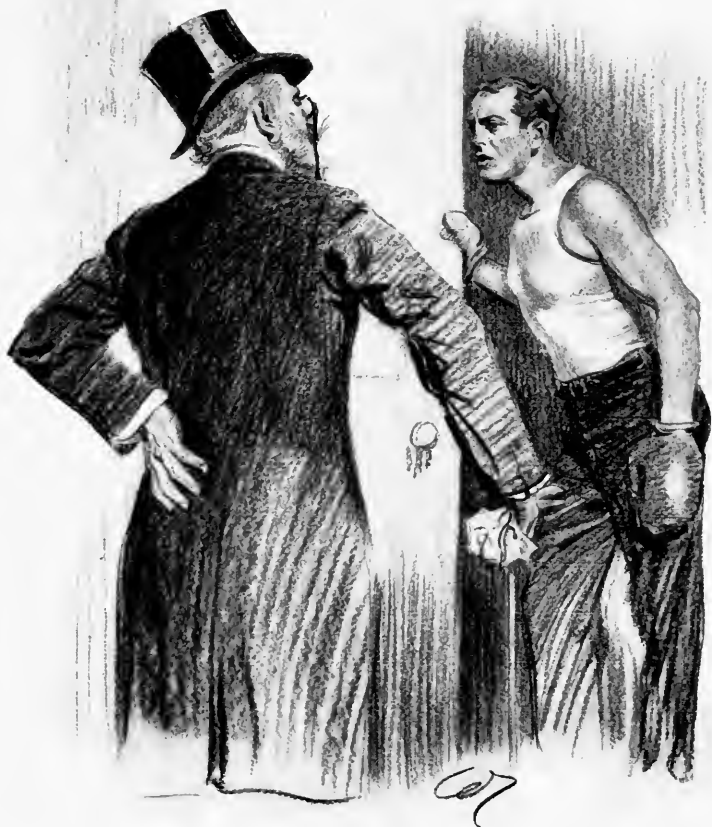
J. Bayard, still smilin', takes the hint. " Oh, I may turn up, after all," says he as he leaves.

" Huh! " says I, indicatin' deep scorn.

But if I'd been curious before about this invite to the law office, I was more so now. So shortly after two I was on hand. And I find Mr. Steele has beat me to it by a minute or so. He's camped in the waitin' room, lookin' as imposin' and elegant as ever.

" Well, you ain't been sandbagged or jabbed with a poison needle yet, I see," says I.

He glances around uneasy. " Mr. Judson is coming," says he. " They said he was—here he is! "



"I WOULDN'T HAVE ANYTHING HAPPEN TO YOU FOR
THE WORLD," SAYS I.

Nothin' terrifyin' about Judson, either. He's a slim-built, youngish lookin' party, with an easy, quiet way of talkin', a friendly, confidin' smile; but about the keenest, steadiest pair of brown eyes I ever had turned loose on me. He shakes us cordial by the hand, thanks us for bein' prompt, and tows us into his private office.

"I have the papers all ready," says he.

"That's nice," says I. "And maybe sometime or other you can tell us what it's all about?"

"At once," says he. "You are named as co-executors with me for the estate of the late Curtis B. Gordon."

At which J. Bayard gasps. "I?" says he. "An executor for Pyramid Gordon?"

Judson nods. "I understand," says he, "that you were—ah—not on friendly terms with Mr. Gordon. But he was a somewhat unusual man, you know. In this instance, for example, he has selected Professor McCabe, whom he designates as one of his most trusted friends, and yourself, whom he designates as his—ah—oldest enemy. No offense, I hope?"

"Quite accurate, so far as I am concerned," says Steele.

"Very well," says the lawyer. "Then I may read the terms of his will that he wishes us to carry out."

And, believe me, even knowin' some of the odd streaks of Pyramid Gordon the way I did, this

last and final sample had me bug-eyed before Judson got through! It starts off straight enough, with instructions to deal out five thousand here and ten there, to various parties,—his old office manager, his man Minturn, that niece of his out in Denver, and so on. But when it come to his scheme for disposin' of the bulk of his pile—well, just lemme sketch it for you!

Course, I can't give it to you the way Pyramid had it put down; but here was the gen'ral plan: Knowin' he had to take the count, he'd been chewin' things over. He wa'n't squealin', or tryin' to square himself either here or beyond. He'd lived his own life in his own way, and he was standin' pat on his record. He knew he'd put over some raw deals; but the same had been handed to him. Maybe he'd hit back at times harder'n he'd been hit. If he had, he wa'n't sorry. He'd only played the game accordin' to the rules he knew.

Still, now that it was most over, he had in mind a few cases where he'd always meant to sort of even things up if he could. There was certain parties he'd thrown the hooks into kind of deep maybe, durin' the heat of the scrap; and afterwards, from time to time, he'd thought he might have a chance to do 'em a good turn,—help 'em back to their feet again, or something like that. But somehow, with bein' so busy, and kind of out of practice at that sort of thing, he'd never got around to any of 'em.

So now he was handin' over the job to us, all in a lump.

"And I have here," goes on Mr. Judson, exhibitin' a paper, "a list of names and addresses. They are the persons, Mr. Steele, on whose behalf you are requested, with the advice and help of Professor McCabe, to perform some kind and generous act. My part will be merely to handle the funds." And he smiles confidin' at J. Bayard.

Mr. Steele has been listenin' close, his ears cocked, and them shifty eyes of his takin' in every move; but at this last he snorts. "Do you mean to say," says he, "that I am asked to—er—to play the good fairy to persons who have been wronged by Pyramid Gordon?"

"Precisely," says the lawyer. "They number something over twenty, I believe; but the fund provided is quite ample—nearly three millions, if we are able to realize on all the securities."

"But this is absurd," says J. Bayard, "askin' me to distribute gifts and so on to a lot of strangers with whom I have nothing in common, except, perhaps, a common enemy! A fine time I'd have, wouldn't I, explainin' that——"

"Pardon me," breaks in Judson, "but one of the conditions is that it must all be done anonymously; at least, so far as the late Mr. Gordon is concerned. As for your own identity

in the several cases, you may make it known or not, as you see fit."

"How truly fascinating!" sneers Mr. Steele, gettin' up and reachin' for his hat. "To go about like an unseen ministering angel, trying to salve the bygone bruises of those who were unlucky enough to get in Pyramid Gordon's way! Beautiful! But unfortunately I have other affairs."

He was startin' for the door too, when Judson smiles quiet and holds up a stayin' hand. "Just a moment more," says the lawyer. "You may be interested to hear of another disposition decided upon by Mr. Gordon in the event of your refusal to act in this capacity."

"He might have known me better," says Steele.

"Perhaps he did," says Judson. "I should hardly say that he lacked insight or shrewdness. He was a man too, who was quite accustomed to having his own way. In this instance he had rather a respectable fortune to dispose of according to his own somewhat original ideas. Leave it to public institutions he would not. He was thoroughly opposed to what he termed post-mortem philanthropy of the general kind. To quote his own words, 'I am not enough of a hypocrite to believe that a society based on organized selfishness can right its many wrongs by spasmodic gifts to organized charity.'"

J. Bayard shifts uneasy on his feet and smothers a yawn. "All very interesting, I'm

sure," says he; "but really, you know, Pyramid Gordon's theories on such matters do not——"

"I am merely suggesting," breaks in the lawyer, "that you may care to glance over another list of twenty names. These are the persons among whom Mr. Gordon's estate will be divided if the first plan cannot be carried out."

Mr. Steele hesitates; but he fin'ly fishes out a pair of swell nose pinchers that he wears hung from a wide ribbon, and assumes a bored expression. He don't hold that pose long. He couldn't have read more'n a third of the names before he shows signs of bein' mighty int'rested.

"Why, see here!" says he. "I'd like to know, Sir, where in thunder you got this list!"

"Yes, I thought you would," says Judson. "It was quite simple. Perhaps you remember, a few days ago, meeting a friendly, engaging young man in the café of your hotel? Asked you to join him at luncheon, I believe, and talked vaguely about making investments?"

"Young Churchill?" says J. Bayard.

"Correct," says the lawyer. "One of our brightest young men. Entertaining talker too. And if I'm not mistaken, it was he who opened a good-natured discussion as to the limit of actual personal acquaintance which the average man has, ending by his betting fifty dollars—rather foolishly, I admit—that you could not

remember the names and addresses of twenty persons whom you actually disliked. Well, you won. Here is the list you made out."

And the stunned way J. Bayard gawps at the piece of paper brings out a snicker from me. He flushes up at that and glares down at Judson.

"Tactics worthy of a Tombs lawyer!" says he. "I congratulate you on your high-class legal methods!"

"Oh, not at all," says Judson. "A suggestion of Mr. Gordon's. Another evidence of his insight into character, as well as his foresight into events. So, you see, Mr. Steele, if you decline to become the benefactor of Mr. Gordon's enemies, his money goes to yours!"

"The old fox!" snarls J. Bayard. "Why—I—let me see that list again."

It's no more'n gripped in his fingers than he steps back quick and begins tearin' it to bits. I'd jumped for him and had his wrists clinched when Judson waves me off.

"Only a copy," says he smilin'. "I have several more. Sit down, Mr. Steele, and let me give you another."

Kind of dazed and subdued, J. Bayard submits to bein' pushed into a chair. After a minute or so he fixes his glasses again, and begins starin' at the fresh list, mumblin' over some of the names to himself.

"To them! Three millions!" says he gaspy.

"Roughly estimated," says Judson, "that

would be about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars apiece which you would, in effect, hand over."

"And the only way to keep them from getting it," goes on Steele, "is for me to spend my time hunting up Pyramid Gordon's lot?"

"Not entirely without recompense," adds the lawyer. "As an inducement for doing the work thoroughly, I am authorized to give you a commission on all you spend in that way."

"How much?" demands the other.

"Twenty per cent.," says Judson. "For instance, if in doing some kind and generous deed for a person on Mr. Gordon's list, you spend, say, five thousand, you get a thousand for yourself."

"Ah!" says Steele, perkin' up consider'ble.

"The only condition being," goes on the lawyer, "that in each case your kind and generous proposals must have the indorsement and approval of Professor McCabe, who is asked to give his advice in these matters on a five per cent. basis. I may add that a like amount comes to me in place of any other fee. So you see this is to be a joint enterprise. Is that satisfactory to you, Mr. McCabe?"

"It's more'n I usually get for my advice," says I, "and I guess Pyramid Gordon knew well enough he didn't have to pay for anything like that from me. But if that's the way he planned it out, it goes."

"And you, Mr. Steele?" says Judson.

“ One dollar for every five that I can spend of Pyramid Gordon’s money? ” says he, wrinkl’n his eye corners. “ With pleasure! When may I begin? ”

“ Now, ” says Judson, reachin’ prompt into a pigeonhole and producin’ a sealed envelope. “ Here is the first name on the list. When you bring me Professor McCabe’s indorsement of any expenses incurred, or sum to be paid out, I shall give you a check at once. ”

And, say, the last I see of J. Bayard he was driftin’ through the door, gazin’ absent-minded at the envelope, like he was figurin’ on how much he could grab off at the first swipe. I gazes after him thoughtful until the comic side of it struck me.

“ This is a hot combination we’re in, eh? ” I chuckles to the lawyer gent. “ Steele, Judson & McCabe, Joy Distributers; with J. Bayard there wieldin’ the fairy wand. Why, say, I’d as quick think of askin’ Scrappy McGraw to preside at a peace conference! ”

Mr. Judson’s busy packin’ away his papers in a document case; but he smiles vague over his shoulder.

“ Honest now, ” I goes on, “ do you think our friend will make good as the head of the sunshine department? ”

“ That, ” says Judson, “ is a matter which Mr. Gordon seems to have left wholly to you. ”

“ Eh? ” says I, doin’ the gawp act sudden on my own account. “ Well, post me for a Bush

League yannigan if it don't listen that way!
Then I can see where I'll be earnin' my five
per cent. all right, and yet some! Referee
for a kind deeds campaign! Good night, Sister
Sue! But it's on old Pyramid's account; so let
J. Bayard shoot 'em in!"

CHAPTER II

A FEW SQUIRMS BY BAYARD

SAY, take it from me, this job of umpirin' a little-deeds-of-kindness campaign, as conducted by J. Bayard Steele, Esq., ain't any careless gladsome romp through the daisy fields. It's a real job!

He's the one, you know, that poor old Pyramid Gordon—rest his soul!—picked out to round up all the hangover grouches he'd strewed behind him durin' a long and active career, with instructions to soothe the same with whatever balm seemed best, regardless of expense.

And the hard part of it for Steele is that he has to get my O.K. on all his schemes before he can collect from the estate. And while I don't bill myself for any expert on lovin'-kindness, and as a gen'ral thing I ain't of a suspicious nature, I'm wise enough to apply the acid test and bore for lead fillin' on anything he hands in. Course maybe I'm too hard on him, but it strikes me that an ex-pool organizer, who makes a livin' as capper for a hotel branch of a shady stock-brokin' firm, ain't had the best kind of trainin' as an angel of mercy.

So when he shows up at my Physical Culture Studio again, the day after Lawyer Judson has explained for us the fine points of that batty will of Pyramid's, I'm about as friendly and guileless as a dyspeptic customs inspector preparin' to go through the trunks of a Fifth avenue dressmaker. He comes in smilin' and chirky, though, slaps me chummy on the shoulder, and remarks cordial:

"Well, my trusty coworker in well doing, I have come to report progress."

"Shoot it, then," says I, settlin' back in my chair.

"You will be surprised," he goes on, "to learn who is first to benefit by my vicarious philanthropy."

"Your which?" says I.

"Merely another simile for our glorious work," says he. "You couldn't guess whose name was in that envelope,—Twombley-Crane's!"

"The Long Island plute?" says I. "You don't say! Why, when did Pyramid ever get the best of him, I wonder?"

"I had almost forgotten the affair myself," says Steele. "It was more than a dozen years ago, when Twombley-Crane was still actively interested in the railroad game. He was president of the Q., L. & M.; made a hobby of it, you know. Used to deliver flowery speeches to the stockholders, and was fond of boasting that his road had never passed a dividend. About

that time Gordon was organizing the Water Level System. He needed the Q., L. & M. as a connecting link. But Twombly-Crane would listen to no scheme of consolidation. Rather an arrogant aristocrat, Twombly-Crane, as perhaps you know? ”

“ Yes, he’s a bit stiff in the neck,” says I.

“ He gave Gordon a flat no,” goes on Steele. “ Had him shown out of his office, so the story went. And of course Pyramid started gunning for him. Twombly-Crane had many interests at the time, financial, social, political. But suddenly his appointment as Ambassador to Germany, which had seemed so certain, was blocked in the Senate; his plans for getting control of all the ore-carrying steamer lines on the Lakes were upset by the appearance of a rival steamship pool; and then came the annual meeting of the Q., L. & M., at which Gordon presented a dark horse candidate. You see, for months Pyramid had been buying in loose holdings and gathering proxies, and on the first ballot he fired Twombly-Crane out of the Q., L. & M. so abruptly that he never quite knew how it happened. And you know how Gordon milked the line during the next few years. It was a bitter pill for Twombly-Crane; for it hurt his pride as well as his pocketbook. That was why he quit Chicago for New York. Not a bad move, either; for he bought into Manhattan Transportation at just the right time. But I imagine he never forgave Gordon.”

“ Huh! ” says I. “ So that’s why they used to act so standoffish whenever they’d run across each other here at the studio. Well, well! And what’s your idea of applyin’ a poultice to Twombly-Crane’s twelve-year-old sting? ”

“ Ah-h-h! ” says J. Bayard, rubbin’ his hands genial, and at the same time watchin’ me narrow to see how I’m goin’ to take it. “ Rather difficult, eh? I confess that I was almost stumped at first. Why, he’s worth to-day twice as much as Gordon ever was! So it ought to be something handsome, hadn’t it? ”

“ That depends, ” says I. “ Have anything special in mind, did you? ”

“ Oh, yes, ” says Steele. “ Now what do you say to presenting him with a nice, comfortable steam yacht, all equipped for cruising, with a captain and—— ”

“ Flag it! ” says I. “ Twombly-Crane ain’t a yachty person, at all. He’s a punk sailor, to begin with. Besides, he’s tried ownin’ a yacht, and she almost rusted apart waitin’ for him to use her. Nothing like that for him. ”

J. Bayard looks mighty disappointed. He’d planned on spendin’ a couple of hundred thousand or so of Pyramid’s money at one lick, you see, which would have been some haul for him, and my turnin’ the scheme down so prompt was a hard blow. He continued to argue the case for ten minutes before he gives up.

“ Well, what is the objection, then,” he goes on, “ to a handsome limousine, with one of those luxurious French bodies, solid silver fittings, and——”

“ He’s got a garage full of cars now,” says I, “ and hardly ever steps into one himself. His fad is to stick to horses, you know.”

More long-face business by J. Bayard. But he’s a quick recoverer. “ In that case,” says he, “ suppose I send over for a pair of Arabs, the best blood to be found, and have them put into his stable as a surprise? ”

“ Steele,” says I, tappin’ him encouragin’ on the knee, “ you’ve got the spendin’ part down fine; but that alone don’t fill the bill. As I take it, Pyramid meant for us to do more than just scatter around a lot of expensive gifts reckless like. ‘ Some kind and generous act,’ is the way he put it. Let’s remember that.”

“ But,” says he, shruggin’ his shoulders eloquent, “ here is a man who has everything he wants, money enough to gratify every wish. How am I to do anything kind and generous for him? ”

“ That’s all up to you,” says I. “ As a matter of fact, I don’t believe there ever was anybody, no matter how rich, who had everything he wanted. There’s always something, maybe so simple as to sound absurd, that he’d like and can’t get. I’ll bet it’s that way with Twombly-Crane. Now if you don’t know him

well enough to find out, my advice would be to——”

“ Oh, I know him well enough,” breaks in J. Bayard, “ even if he doesn’t know me. I share the distinction with Gordon of having been, on one occasion, barred out of Twombley-Crane’s office; only I got no farther than his private secretary. It meant a good deal to me at the time too, and wouldn’t have hurt him at all. I merely wanted his firm to handle some bonds of a concern I was trying to promote. With merely a nod he could have opened the door of success for me. But he wouldn’t. Oh, no! Played the rôle of haughty aristocrat, as usual, and never gave me another thought. But I managed to get back at him, in a small way.”

“ Oh, you did, eh? ” says I.

“ It was a couple of years later, in Paris,” goes on Steele. “ I was dining in one of those big cafés—Maxime’s, I think,—when I recognized him at the next table. He was telling a friend of a find he’d made in an old printshop,—a pencil sketch by Whistler. He collects such things, I believe. Well, this was something he wanted very badly; but he’d happened to be caught without cash enough to pay for it. So he’d asked the dealer to put it aside until next day. There was my chance. I know something about etchings; own a few, in fact, although I’d never splurged on Whistlers. But I was on hand next morning when that shop

opened, and for a bonus of twenty francs I persuaded the old pirate to sell me the sketch he was holding for Twombley-Crane. It was a beauty too; one of the half-dozen Whistler did in working up that portrait of his mother, perhaps his most famous piece. It's about the only sketch of the kind, too, not in a public gallery. How Twombley-Crane must have raved at that Frenchman! So, as the English put it, I did score off him a bit, you see."

"You sure did," says I. "That picture collection is what he's daffy over; even more so than over his horses. And right there, J. Bayard, is your cue."

"Eh?" says he, starin' puzzled.

"Simple as swearin' off taxes," says I. "Send him the sketch."

Mr. Steele gasps. "Wha-a-at!" says he. "Why, I've been offered ten times what I paid for it, and refused; although there have been times when—well, you understand. My dear McCabe, that little pencil drawing is much more to me than a fragment of genius. It stands for satisfaction. It's something that I own and he wants."

"And there you are," says I. "Been rackin' your nut to dig up something kind and generous to do for him, ain't you? Well?"

Say, you should have seen the look J. Bayard gives me at that! It's a mixture of seven different kinds of surprise, reproach, and indignation. And the line of argument he puts up

too! How he does wiggle and squirm over the very thought of givin' that picture to Twombly-Crane, after he'd done the gloat act so long!

But I had the net over Mr. Steele good and fast, and while I was about it I dragged him over a few bumps; just for the good of his soul, as Father Reardon would say.

"Oh, come!" says I. "You're makin' the bluff that you want to scatter deeds of kindness; but when I point one out, right under your nose, you beef about it like you was bein' frisked for your watch. A hot idea of bein' an angel of mercy you've got, ain't you? Honest now, in your whole career, was you ever guilty of wastin' a kind word, or puttin' out the helpin' hand, if you couldn't see where it might turn a trick for J. Bayard Steele?"

Makes him wince a little, that jab does, and he flushes up under the eyes.

"I don't know that I have ever posed either as a philanthropist or a saint," says he. "If I seem to have assumed a rôle of that sort now, it is because it has been thrust upon me, because I have been caught in a web of circumstances, a tangle of things, without purpose, without meaning. That's what life has always been to me, always will be, I suppose,—a blind, ruthless maze, where I've snatched what I could for myself, and given up what I couldn't hold. Your friend Gordon did his share in making it so for me; this man Twombly-Crane as well.

Do you expect me to be inspired with goodness and kindness by them? ”

“ Oh, Pyramid had his good points,” says I. “ You’d find Twombley-Crane has his, if you knew him well enough.”

“ And who knows,” adds Steele, defiant and bitter, “ but that I may have mine? ”

I glances at him curious. And, say, with that set, hard look in them narrow eyes, and the saggy droop to his mouth corners, he’s almost pathetic. For the first time since he’d drifted across my path I didn’t feel like pitchin’ him down the stairs.

“ Well, well! ” says I soothin’. “ Maybe you have. But you don’t force ’em on folks, do you? That ain’t the point, though. The question before the house is about that——”

“ Suppose I hand back Twombley-Crane’s name,” says he, “ and try another? ”

I shakes my head decided. “ No dodgin’,” says I. “ That point was covered in Pyramid’s gen’ral directions. If you do it at all, you got to take the list as it runs. But what’s a picture more or less? All you got to do is wrap it up, ship it to Twombley-Crane, and——”

“ I—I couldn’t! ” says J. Bayard, almost groanin’. “ Why, I’ve disliked him for years, ever since he sent out that cold no! I’ve always hoped that something would happen to bend that stiff neck of his; that a panic would smash him, as I was smashed. But he has gone on, growing richer and richer, colder and

colder. And when I got this sketch away from him—well, that was a crumb of comfort. Don't you see? ”

“ Kind of stale and picayune, Steele, it strikes me,” says I. “ Course, you're the doctor. If you'd rather see all them other folks that you dislike come in for a hundred and fifty thousand apiece, with no rakeoff for you—why, that's your business. But I'd think it over.”

“ Ye-e-es,” says he draggy. “ I—I suppose I must.”

With that he shakes his shoulders, gets on his feet, and walks out with his chin well up; leavin' me feelin' like I'd been tryin' to wish a dose of castor oil on a bad boy.

“ Huh! ” thinks I. “ I wonder if Pyramid guessed all he was lettin' me in for? ”

What J. Bayard would decide to do—drop the whole shootin' match, or knuckle under in this case in the hopes of gettin' a fat commission on the next—was more'n I could dope out. But inside of an hour I had the answer. A messenger boy shows up with a package. It's the sketch from Steele, with a note sayin' I might send it to Twombly-Crane, if that would answer. He'd be hanged if he would! So I rings up another boy and ships it down to Twombly-Crane's office, as the easiest way of gettin' rid of it. I didn't know whether he was in town or not. If he wa'n't, he'd find the thing when he did come in. And while maybe that

don't quite cover all the specifications, it's near enough so I can let it pass. Then I goes out to lunch.

Must have been about three o'clock that afternoon, and I'd just finished a session in the gym, when who should show up at the studio but Twombly-Crane. What do you suppose? Why, in spite of the fact that I'd sent the picture without any name or anything, he'd been so excited over gettin' it that he'd rung up the messenger office and bluffed 'em into tellin' where the call had come in from. And as long as I'd known him I've never seen Twombly-Crane thaw out so much. Why, he acts almost human as he shakes hands! Then he takes the package from under his arm and unwraps it.

"The Whistler that I'd given up all hope of ever getting!" says he, gazin' at it admirin' and enthusiastic.

"So?" says I, noncommittal.

"And now it appears mysteriously, sent from here," says he. "Why, my dear fellow, how can I ever——"

"You don't have to," I breaks in, "because it wa'n't from me at all."

"But they told me at the district office," he goes on, "that the call came from——"

"I know," says I. "That's straight enough as far as it goes. But you know that ain't in my line. I was only passin' it on for someone else."

"For whom?" he demands.

“ That’s tellin’,” says I. “ It’s a secret.”

“ Oh, but I must know,” says he, “ to whom I am indebted so deeply. You don’t realize, McCabe, how delighted I am to get hold of this gem of Whistler’s. Why, it makes my collection the most complete to be found in any private gallery! ”

“ Well, you ought to be satisfied then,” says I. “ Why not let it go at that? ”

But not him. No, he’d got to thank somebody; to pay ’em, if he could.

“ How much, for instance? ” says I.

“ Why, I should readily have given five thousand for it,” says he; “ ten, if necessary.”

“ Not fifteen? ” says I.

“ I think I would,” says he.

“ Huh! ” says I. “ Some folks don’t care what they do with money. We’ll split the difference though, and call it twelve and a half. But it don’t cost you a cent. It’s yours because you wanted it, that’s all; and maybe the one that sent it is glad you’ve got it. That’s as far as I can go.”

“ But see here, McCabe! ” he insists. “ Delighted as I am, I must know who it is that——”

Just here the front office door opens, and in walks J. Bayard. For a second he don’t notice Twombly-Crane, who’s standin’ between me and the window.

“ Oh, I say! ” says Steele, sort of breathless and hasty. “ Have you sent that away yet? ”

A freak hunch hit me and I couldn’t shake it:

I guess I wanted to see what would happen. So I nudges Twombly-Crane.

“Here’s the party now, if you must know,” says I. “This is Mr. J. Bayard Steele.”

“Eh?” says he, steppin’ forward. “Steele, did you say? Why, my dear Sir, although I must admit that I am stupid enough not to remember you, I must express my most——”

Say, he did it handsome too. He grabs J. Bayard brotherly by the mitt, and passes him an enthusiastic vote of thanks that don’t leave out a single detail. Yes, he sure did unload the gratitude; with J. Bayard standin’ there, turnin’ first one color and then another, and not bein’ able to get out a word.

“And surely, my dear Sir,” he winds up, “you will allow me to recompense you in some way?”

Steele shakes his head. “It’s not precisely,” he begins, “as if I—er——”

“Ah-h-h!” says Twombly-Crane, beamin’ friendly. “I think I see. You had heard of my collection.”

J. Bayard nods.

“And you conceived the idea,” goes on Twombly-Crane, “of completing it in this anonymous and kindly manner? Believe me, Sir, I am touched, deeply touched. It is indeed good to know that such generous impulses are felt, that they are sometimes acted upon. I must try to be worthy of such a splendid spirit. I will have this hung at once, and to-morrow

night, Friend Steele, you must come to see it; at my country place, you know. We dine at seven. I shall expect you, Sir." And with a final brotherly grip he goes out.

"Well," says I to J. Bayard, "that's over, ain't it? You've put across the genuine article. How does it feel?"

He brushes his hand over his eyes sort of dazed. "Really," says he, "I—I don't know. I was coming, as a matter of fact, to take the sketch back. The more I thought it over, the worse I—— But he was pleased, wasn't he? And Twombly-Crane too! I would not have believed that he could act so decently."

"Well, he believed it of you," says I. "You don't stand to lose so much either, by the way. Here! Wait until I write a voucher for twenty per cent. of twelve thousand five hundred. His figures, you know. There! Now you can collect from Judson and call for name Number Two."

CHAPTER III

PEEKING IN ON PEDDERS

WHO started that dope about Heaven givin' us our relations but thanks be we can pick friends to suit ourselves? Anyway, it's phony. Strikes me we often have friends wished on us; sort of accumulate 'em by chance, as we do appendicitis, or shingles, or lawsuits. And at best it's a matter of who you meet most, and how.

Take J. Bayard Steele. Think I'd ever hunted him out and extended the fraternal grip, or him me? Not if everyone else in the world was deaf and dumb and had the itch! We're about as much alike in our tastes and gen'ral run of ideas as Bill Taft and Bill Haywood; about as congenial as our bull terrier and the chow dog next door. Yet here we are, him hailin' me as Shorty, and me callin' him anything from J. B. to Old Top, and confabbin' reg'lar most every day, as chummy as you please.

All on account of our bein' mixed up in car-ryin' out this batty will of Pyramid Gordon's. First off I didn't think I'd have to see him more'n once a month, and then only for a short

session; but since he put through that first deal and collected his twenty-four hundred commission, he's been showin' up at the studio frequent, with next to no excuse for comin'.

You remember how he drew Twombley-Crane as the first one that he had to unload a kind and gen'rous act on, and how I made him give up the picture that he'd gloated over so long? Well, J. Bayard can't seem to get over the way that turned out. Here he'd been forced into doin' something nice for a party he had a grudge against, has discovered that Twombley-Crane ain't such a bad lot after all, and has been well paid for it besides, out of money left by his old enemy.

"Rather a remarkable set of circumstances, eh, Shorty?" says he, tiltin' back comf'table in one of my front office chairs and lightin' up a fresh twenty-five-cent cigar. "An instance of virtue being rewarded on a cash basis. Not only that, but I was royally entertained down at Twombley-Crane's the other night, you know. I think too I interested him in a little development scheme of mine."

"Jump off!" says I. "You're standin' on your foot. If you dream you can slip any of your fake stock onto him, you're due to wake up. Better stick to widows and orphans."

At which jab Mr. Steele only chuckles easy. "What an engagingly frank person you are!"

says he. "As though rich widows weren't fair game! But with the practice of philanthropy so liberally compensated I'm not troubling them. Your friend, the late Mr. Gordon, has banished the wolf from my door; for the immediate present, at least. I wonder if he anticipated just how much I should enjoy his post-mortem munificence?"

And here J. Bayard gives a caressin' pat to his Grand Duke whiskers and glances approv'in' down at the patent leathers which finish off a costume that's the last word in afternoon elegance. You've seen a pet cat stretch himself luxurious after a full meal? Well, that's J. Bayard. He'd hypothecated the canary. If he hadn't been such a dear friend of mine too, I could have kicked him hearty.

"Say, you're a wonder, you are!" says I. "But I expect if your kind was common, all the decent people would be demandin' to be jailed, out of self-respect."

Another chuckle from J. Bayard. "Is that envy," says he, "or merely epigram? But at least we will agree that our ethical standards vary. You scorn mine; I find yours curiously entertaining. The best thing about you is that you seem to bring me good luck."

"Don't trust that too far," says I. "I'm neither hump-backed, nor a live Billiken. How soon are you going to start on proposition Number Two?"

"Ah!" says he, straightenin'. "That is

the real business of the moment, isn't it? As a matter of fact, I was just about to seek your valuable advice on the subject."

"Shoot it, then," says I. "Who's the party?"

He explores his inside pockets, fishes out an envelop, and inspects it deliberate. It's sealed; but he makes no move to open it. "My next assignment in altruism," says he, holdin' it to the light. "Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief—I wonder?"

"Ah, come!" says I, handin' him a paper knife.

"But there's no need for haste," says J. Bayard. "Just consider, Shorty: In this envelop is the name of some individual who was the victim of injustice, large or small, at the hands of Pyramid Gordon, someone who got in his way, perhaps years ago. Now I am to do something that will offset that old injury. While the name remains unread, we have a bit of mystery, an unknown adventure ahead of us, perhaps. And that, my dear McCabe, is the salt of life."

"Say, you ought to take that lecture out on the Chautauqua," says I. "Get busy—slit or quit!"

"Very well," says he, jabbin' the knife under the flap. "To discover the identity of the next in line!"

"Well?" says I, as he stares at the slip of paper. "Who do you pluck this time?"

“ An enigma, so far as I am concerned,” says he. “ Listen: ‘ John Wesley Pedders, in 1894 cashier of the Merchants’ Exchange Bank, at Tullington, Connecticut.’ Ever hear of such a person, Shorty? ”

“ Not me,” says I, “ nor the place either.”

“ Then it remains to be discovered first,” says Steele, “ whether for twenty years Pedders has stayed put or not. Haven’t a Pathfinder handy, have you? Never mind, there are plenty at the hotel. And if to-morrow is such another fine spring day as this, I’ll run up there. I’ll let you know the results later; and then, my trusty colleague, we will plot joyously for the well-being of John Wesley Pedders.”

“ Huh! ” says I. “ Don’t try to pull any steam yachts or French limousines on me this time. The kind stuff goes, remember.”

“ To your acute sense of fitness in such matters, McCabe,” says he, “ I bow profoundly,” and with a jaunty wave of his hand he drifts out.

Honest, compared to the shifty-eyed, suspicious-actin’ party that blew into my studio a few weeks back, he seems like a kid on a Coney Island holiday. I expect it’s the prospects of easy money that’s chirked him up so; but he sure is a misfit to be subbin’ on a deeds-of-kindness job. That ain’t my lookout, though. All I got to do is pass on his plans and see that he carries ’em out accordin’ to specifications.

So I don't even look up this tank station on the map.

A couple of days go by, three, and no bulletin from J. Bayard. Then here the other mornin' I gets a long distance call. It's from Steele.

"Eh?" says I. "Where the blazes are you?"

"Tullington," says he.

"Oh!" says I. "Still there, are you? Found Pedders?"

"Ye-e-es," says he; "but I am completely at a loss to know what to do for him. I say, McCabe, couldn't you run up here? It's a curious situation, and I—well, I need your advice badly. There's a train at eleven-thirty that connects at Danbury. Couldn't you?"

Well, I hadn't figured on bein' any travelin' inspector when I took this executor job; but as J. Bayard sends out the S O S so strong I can't very well duck. Besides, I might have been a little int'rested to know what he'd dug up.

So about three-fifteen that afternoon finds me pilin' off a branch accommodation at Tullington. Mr. Steele is waitin' on the platform to meet me, silk lid and all.

"What about Pedders?" says I.

"I want you to see him first," says J. Bayard.

"On exhibition, is he?" says I.

"In a town of this size," says he, "everyone is on exhibition continuously. It's the penalty

one pays for being rural, I suppose. I've been here only two days; but I'll venture to say that most of the inhabitants know me by name and have made their guess as to what my business here may be. It's the most pitiless kind of publicity I ever experienced. But come on up to the postoffice, and I'll show you Pedders."

"Fixture there, is he?" says I.

"Twice a day he comes for the mail," says J. Bayard. "Your train brought it up. He'll be on hand."

So we strolls up Main street from the station, while Steele points out the brass works, the carpet mill, the opera house, and Judge Hanks' slate-roofed mansion. It sure is a jay burg, but a lively one. Oh, yes! Why, the Ladies' Aid Society was holdin' a cake sale in a vacant store next to the Bijou movie show, and everybody was decoratin' for a firemen's parade to be pulled off next Saturday. We struck the postoffice just as they brought the mail sacks up in a pushcart and dragged 'em in through the front door.

"There he is," says Steele, nudgin' me, "over in the corner by the writing shelf!"

What he points out is a long-haired, gray-whiskered old guy, with a faded overcoat slung over his shoulders like a cape, and an old slouch hat pulled down over his eyes. He's standin' there as still and quiet as if his feet was stuck to the floor.

"Kind of a seedy old party, eh?" says I.

“ Why not? ” says J. Bayard. “ He’s an ex-jailbird.”

“ You don’t say! ” says I. “ What brand? ”

“ Absconder,” says he. “ Got away with a hundred and fifty thousand from the local bank.”

“ Well, well! ” says I. “ Didn’t spend it dollin’ himself up, did he? ”

“ Oh, all that happened twenty years ago,” says Steele. “ The odd part of it is, though— But come over to the hotel, where I can tell you the whole story.”

And, say, he had a tale, all right. Seems Pedders had been one of the leadin’ citizens,—cashier of the bank, pillar of the church, member of the town council, and all that,—with a wife who was a social fav’rite, and a girl that promised to be a beauty when she grew up. The Pedders never tried to cut any gash, though. They lived simple and respectable and happy. About the only wild plunge the neighbors ever laid up against him was when he paid out ten dollars once for some imported tulip bulbs.

Then all of a sudden it was discovered that a bunch of negotiable securities had disappeared from the bank vaults. The arrow pointed straight to Pedders. He denied; but he couldn’t explain. He just shut up like a clam, and let ’em do their worst. He got ten years. Before he was put away they tried to make him confess, or give ’em some hint as to what he’d

done with the bonds. But there was nothin' doin' in that line. He just stood pat and took his medicine.

Bein' a quiet prisoner, that gave no trouble and kept his cell tidy, he scaled it down a couple of years. Nobody looked for him to come back to Tullington after he got loose. They all had it doped out that he'd salted away that hundred and fifty thousand somewhere, and would proceed to dig it up and enjoy it where he wa'n't known.

But Pedders fooled 'em again. Straight back from the bars he come, back to Tullington and the little white story-and-a-half cottage on a side street, where Mrs. Pedders and Luella was waitin' for him.

She'd had some hand-to-hand tussle meanwhile, Mrs. Pedders had; but she'd stuck it out noble. At the start about nine out of ten of her neighbors and kind friends was dead sure she knew where that bunch of securities was stowed, and some of 'em didn't make any bones of sayin' she ought to be in jail along with Pedders. So of course that made it nice and comfy for her all around. But she opened up a little millinery shop in her front parlor, and put up jams and jellies, and raised a few violets under a window sash in the back yard. She didn't quite starve that first year or so; though nobody knew just how close she shaved it. And in time even them that had been her closest friends begun to be sorry for her.

When Pedders showed up again all the old stories was hashed over, and the whole of Tullington held its breath watchin' for some sign that he's dug up his bank loot. But it didn't come. Pedders just camped down silent in his old home and let his whiskers grow. Twice a day he made reg'lar trips back and forth from the postoffice, lookin' at nobody, speakin' to nobody. Mrs. Pedders held her usual fall and spring openin's of freak millinery, while Luella taught in the fourth grade of the grammar school and gave a few piano lessons on the side. They didn't act like a fam'ly that had buried treasure.

But what had he done with that hundred and fifty thousand? How could he have blown so much without even acquirin' a toddy blossom? Or had he scattered it in the good old way, buckin' Wall Street? But he'd never seemed like that kind. No, they didn't think he had the nerve to take a chance on a turkey raffle. So that left the mystery deeper'n ever.

"No chance of him bein' not guilty to begin with, eh?" I suggests.

J. Bayard smiles cynical. "So far as I am able to learn," says he, "there is just one person, aside from Mrs. Pedders and her daughter, who believes him innocent. Strangely enough too, that's Norris, who was teller at the time. He's president of the bank now. I had a talk with him this morning. He insists that Pedders was too honest to touch a dollar; says he

knew him too well. But he offers no explanation as to where the securities went. So there you are! Everyone else regards him as a convicted thief, who scarcely got his just deserts. He's a social outcast, and a broken, spiritless wretch besides. How can I do anything kind and generous for such a man? "

Well, I didn't know any more'n he did. "What gets me," I goes on, "is how he ever come to be mixed up with Pyramid Gordon. Got that traced out? "

"I sounded Norris on that point," says Steele; "but he'd never heard of Gordon's having been in Tullington, and was sure Pedders didn't know him."

"Then you ain't had a talk with Pedders himself? " says I.

"Why, no," says J. Bayard, shruggin' his shoulders scornful. "The poor devil! I didn't see what good it would do—an ex-convict, and——"

"You can't always be dealin' with Twombly-Cranes," I breaks in. "And it's Pedders you're after this trip. Come on. Let's go tackle him."

"What! Now? " says Steele, liftin' his eyebrows.

"Ah, you ain't plannin' to spend the summer here, are you? " says I. "Besides, it'll do you good to learn not to shy at a man just because he's done time. Show us the house."

I could have put it even stronger to him, if

I'd wanted to rub it in. Had about as much sympathy for a down-and-out, Steele did, as you'd find milk in a turnip. You should see the finicky airs he puts on as he follows me into the Pedders cottage, and sniffs at the worn, old-fashioned furniture in the sittin' room.

It's Mrs. Pedders that comes in from the shop to greet us. Must have been quite a good looker once, from the fine face and the still slim figure. But her hair has been frosted up pretty well, and there's plenty of trouble lines around the eyes. No, we couldn't see Mr. Pedders. She was sorry, but he didn't see anyone. If there was any business, perhaps she could—

"Maybe you can," says I; "although it ain't exactly business, either. It's a delayed boost we're agents for; friendly, and all that."

"I—I don't believe I understand," says she.

"We'll get to that later on," says I, "if you'll take our word and help. What we're tryin' to get a line on first off is where and how Mr. Pedders run against Pyramid Gordon."

"Gordon?" says she. "I don't think I ever heard him mention the name."

"Think 'way back, then," says I, "back before he was—before he had his trouble."

She tried, but couldn't dig it up. We was still on the subject when in floats Daughter. She's one of these nice, sweet, sensible lookin' girls, almost vergin' on the old maid. She'd just come home from her school. The case was

explained to her; but she don't remember hearin' the name either.

"You see, I was only nine at the time," says she, "and there was so much going on, and Papa was so upset about all those letters."

"Which letters?" says I.

"Oh, the people who wrote to him during the trial," says she. "You've no idea—hundreds and hundreds of letters, from all over the country; from strangers, you know, who'd read that he was—well, an absconder. They were awful letters. I think that's what hurt Papa most, that people were so ready to condemn him before he'd had a chance to show that he didn't do it. He would just sit at his old desk there by the hour, reading them over, and everyone seemed like another pound loaded on his poor shoulders. The letters kept coming long after he was sent away. There's a whole boxful in the garret that have never been opened."

"And he never shall see them!" announced Mrs. Pedders emphatic.

"H-m-m-m!" says I. "A whole boxful that nobody's opened? But suppose now that some of 'em wa'n't—say, why not take a look at the lot, just the outsides?"

Neither Mrs. Pedders nor Luella took kind to that proposition; but somehow I had a vague hunch it ought to be done. I couldn't say exactly why, either. But I kept urgin' and arguin', and at last they gave in. They'd show

me the outsides, anyway; that is, Luella might, if she wanted to. Mrs. Pedders didn't even want to see the box.

"I meant to have burned them long ago," says she. "They're just letters from idle, cruel people, that's all. And you don't know how many such there are in the world, Mr. McCabe. I hope you never will know. But go up with Luella if you wish."

So we did, J. Bayard glancin' suspicious at the dust and cobwebs and protectin' his silk hat and clothes cautiously. It's a good-sized box too, with a staple and padlock to keep the cover down. Luella hunted up the key and handed out bunch after bunch. Why do people want to write to parties they've read about in the newspapers? What's the good too, of jumpin' on bank wreckers and such at long range? Why, some even let their spite slop over on the envelopes. To see such a lot of letters, and think how many hard thoughts they stood for, almost gave you chills on the spine.

Didn't seem to do much good to paw 'em over now, at this late date, either. I was almost givin' up my notion and tellin' Luella that would be about enough, when I noticed a long yellow document envelope stowed away by itself in a corner.

"There's a fat one," says I.

She hands it out mechanical, as she'd done the rest.

"Hello!" says I, glancin' at the corner.

“Gordon & Co., Broad Street, New York! Why, say, that’s the Pyramid Gordon I was askin’ about.”

“Is it?” says she. “I hadn’t noticed.”

“Might give us some clew,” I goes on, “as to what him and your Paw had a run-in about.”

“Well, open it, if you like,” says Luella careless.

J. Bayard and I takes it over to the window and inspects the cancel date.

“June, 1894,” says I. “Twenty-eight cents postage; registered too. Quite a package. Well, here goes!”

“Bonds,” says Steele, takin’ a look. “That old Water Level Development Company’s too.”

“And here’s a note inside,” says I. “Read it.”

It was to John Wesley Pedders, cashier of the Merchants’ Exchange Bank, from Mr. Gordon. “In depositing securities for a loan, on my recent visit to your bank,” it runs on, “I found I had brought the wrong set; so I took the liberty, without consulting your president, of substituting, for a few days, a bundle of blanks. I am now sending by registered mail the proper bonds, which you may file. Trusting this slight delay has caused you no inconvenience, I am——”

“The old fox!” cuts in J. Bayard. “A fair sample of his methods! Had to have a loan on those securities, and wanted to use them somewhere else at the same time; so he picked

out this little country bank to work the deal through. Oh, that was Pyramid Gordon, every time! And calmly allowed a poor cashier to go to State's prison for it!"

"Not Pyramid," says I. "I don't believe he ever heard a word of the trouble."

"Then why did he put Pedders' name on his list?" demands Steele.

"Maybe he thought sendin' on the bonds would clear up the mess," says I. "So it would, if they hadn't come a day or two late and got stowed away here. And here they've been for twenty years!"

"Yes, and quite as valuable to the bank as if they'd been in the vaults," sneers J. Bayard. "That Water Level stock never was worth the paper it was printed on, any more than it is now."

"We'll make it useful, then," says I. "Why, it's got Aladdin's lamp beat four ways for Wednesday! These bonds go to Pedders. Then Pedders shaves off his whiskers, puts on his Sunday suit, braces his shoulders back, walks down to the bank, and chucks this bunch of securities at 'em triumphant."

"But if the bank is still out a hundred and fifty thousand," objects Steele, "I don't see how——"

"They ain't out a cent," says I. "We'll find a customer for these bonds."

"Who?" says he.

"J. Bayard Steele," says I. "Ain't you

actin' for a certain party that would have wanted it done?"

"By Jove!" says he. "Shorty, you've hit it! Why, I'd never have thought of——"

"No," says I; "you're still seein' only that twenty per cent. commission. Well, you get that. But I want to see the look in Mrs. Pedders' eyes when she hears the news."

Say, it was worth makin' a way train trip to Tullington, believe me!

"I knew," says she. "Oh, I always have known John didn't do it! And now others will know. Oh, I'm glad, so glad!"

Even brought a slight dew to them shifty eyes of J. Bayard's, that little scene did. "McCabe," says he, as we settles ourselves in the night express headed towards Broadway, "this isn't such a bad game, after all, is it?"

CHAPTER IV

TWO SINGLES TO GOOBER

“SHORTY,” says Sadie, hangin’ up the ’phone and turnin’ to me excited, “what do you think? Young Hollister is back in town!”

“So are lots of other folks,” says I, “and more comin’ every day.”

“But you know he promised to stay away,” she goes on, “and his mother will feel dreadfully about it when she hears.”

“I know,” says I. “And a livelier widow never hailed from Peachtree street, Atlanta; which is sayin’ a lot. Who sends in this bulletin about Sonny?”

“Purdy-Pell,” says Sadie, “and he doesn’t know what to do.”

“Never does,” says I.

Sadie flickers a grin. “It seems Robin came two days ago, and has hardly been seen about the house since. Besides, Purdy-Pell could do nothing with him when he was here before, you remember.”

“Awful state of things, ain’t it?” says I. “The youngster’s all of nineteen, ain’t he?”

“He’s nearly twenty-one,” says Sadie. “And Mrs. Hollister’s such a dear!”

“ All of which leads up to what? ” says I, tearin’ my eyes from the sportin’ page reluctant.

“ Why,” says Sadie, cuddlin’ up on the chair arm, “ Purdy-Pell suggests that, as Robin appeared to take such a fancy to you, perhaps you wouldn’t mind——”

“ Say,” I breaks in, “ he’s a perfectly punk suggester! I’d mind a lot! ”

Course that opened the debate, and while I begins by statin’ flat-footed that Robin could come or go for all I cared, it ends in the usual compromise. I agrees to take the eight-forty-five into town and skirmish for Sonny. He’d be almost sure to show up at Purdy-Pell’s tonight, Sadie says, and if I was on hand I might induce him to quit wreckin’ the city and be good.

“ Shouldn’t I wear a nurse’s cap and apron? ” I remarks as I grabs my hat.

For, honest, so far as I’ve ever seen, this young Hollister was a nice, quiet, peaceable chap, with all the earmarks of a perfect gent. He’d been brought up from the South and put into Purdy-Pell’s offices, and he’d made a fair stab at holdin’ down his job. But of course, bein’ turned loose in New York for the first time, I expect he went out now and then to see what was goin’ on under the white lights.

From some youngsters that might have called for such panicky protests as Mother and Mrs. Purdy-Pell put up; but young Robin had a

good head on him, and didn't act like he meant to develop into a rounder. Course I didn't hear the details; but all of a sudden something happened that caused a grand howl. I know Sadie was consulted, then Mrs. Hollister was sent for, and it ended by Robin marchin' into the studio one mornin' to say good-by. He explains that he's bein' shipped home. They'd got a job for him with an uncle out in the country somewhere. That must have been a year or so ago, and now it looked like he'd slipped his halter and had headed back for Broadway.

I finds Purdy-Pell peeved and sarcastic. "To be sure," he says, "I feel honored that the young man should make my house his headquarters whenever his fancy leads him to indulge his sportive instincts. Youth must be served, you know. But Mrs. Hollister has such a charmingly unreasonable way of holding me responsible for her son's conduct! And since she happens just now to be our guest—well, you get the idea, McCabe."

"What do you think he's up to?" says I.

Purdy-Pell shrugs his shoulders. "If he were the average youth, one might guess," says he; "but Robin Hollister is different. His mother is a Pitt Medway, one of the Georgia Medways."

"You don't say!" says I. I expect I ought to know just how a Georgia Medway differs from a New Jersey Medway, or the Connecticut brand; but, sad to say, I don't. Purdy-

Pell, though, havin' been raised in the South himself, seems to think that everyone ought to know the traits of all the leadin' fam'lies between the Potomac and the Chattahoochee.

“ Last time, you know,” goes on Purdy-Pell, “ it was a Miss Maggie Toots, a restaurant cashier, and a perfectly impossible person. We broke that up, though.”

“ Ye-e-es? ” says I.

“ Robin's mother seemed to think then,” says he, “ that it was largely my fault. I suppose she'll feel the same about whatever mischief he's in now. If I could only find the young scamp! But really I haven't time. I'm an hour late at the Boomer Days' as it is.”

“ Then toddle along,” says I. “ If I'm unanimously elected to do this kid-reformin' act, I expect I might as well get busy.”

So as soon as the butler's through loadin' Purdy-Pell into the limousine I cross-examines Jarvis about young Mr. Hollister's motions. Yes, he'd shown up at the house both nights. It might have been late, perhaps quite late. Then this afternoon he'd 'phoned to have his evenin' clothes sent uptown by messenger. No, he couldn't remember the number, or the name of the hotel.

“ Ah, come, Jarvis! ” says I. “ We know you're strong for the young man, and all that. But this is for the best. Dig it up now! You must have put the number down at the time. Where's the 'phone pad? ”

He produces it, blank. "You see, Sir," says he, "I tore off the leaf and gave it to the messenger."

"But you're a heavy writer, ain't you?" says I. "Find me a readin' glass."

And, sure enough, by holdin' the pad under the big electrolier in the lib'ry, we could trace out the address.

"Huh!" says I. "The Maison Maxixe, one of them new trot palaces! Ring up a taxi, Jarvis."

Didn't happen to be up around there yourself that night, did you? If you had, you couldn't missed seein' him,—the old guy with the Dixie lid and the prophet's beard, and the snake-killer staff in his fist,—for with that gold and green entrance as a background, and in all that glare of electric lights, he was some prominent.

Sort of a cross between Father Time and Santa Claus, he looks like, with his bumper crop of white alfalfa, his rosy cheeks, and his husky build. Also he's attired in a wide-brimmed black felt hat, considerable dusty, and a long black coat with a rip in the shoulder seam. I heard a couple of squabs just ahead of me giggle, and one of 'em gasps:

"Heavings, Lulu! Will you lamp the movie grandpop! I wonder if them lambrequins are real?"

She says it loud enough to be heard around on Broadway, and I looks to see how the old boy

takes it; but he keeps right on beamin' mild and sort of curious at the crowds pushin' in. It was them calm, gentle old blue eyes of his, gazin' steady, like he was lookin' for someone, that caught me. First thing, I knew he was smilin' folksy straight at me, and liftin' one hand hesitatin', as if he wanted to give me the hail.

"Well, old scout?" says I, haltin' on the first step.

"Excuse me, Neighbor," says he, drawlin' it out deep and soft, "but be yo' goin' in thayah?"

"I don't say it boastin'," says I, "but that was the intention."

"We-e-e-ell," he drawls, half chucklin', half sing-songy, "I wisht I could get you to kind of look around for a young fellah in thayah,—sort of a well favored, upstandin' young man, straight as a cornstalk, and with his front haiah a little wavy. Would you?"

"I might find fifty that would answer to that description," says I.

"No, Suh, I reckon not," says he, waggin' his noble old head. "Not fifty like him, nor one! He'll have his chin up, Suh, and there'll be a twinkle in his brown eyes you can't mistake."

"Maybe so," says I. "I'll scout around a bit. And if I find him, what then?"

"Jes' give him the word, Neighbor," says he, "that Uncle Noah's a waitin' outside,

wantin' to see him a minute when he gets through. He'll understand, Robin will."

"Eh?" says I. "Robin who?"

"Young Mistuh Hollister I should say, Suh," says he.

"Well, well!" says I, gawpin' at him. "You lookin' for Robin Hollister too? Why, so am I!"

"Then we ought to find him between us, hadn't we?" says he, smilin' friendly. "Lott's my name, Suh."

"Wha-a-at!" says I, grinnin' broad as the combination strikes me. "Not Uncle Noah Lott?"

"It's a powerful misleadin' name, I got to admit," says he, returnin' the grin; "but I reckon my folks didn't figure jes' how it was goin' to sound when they tacked the Noah onto me, or else they didn't allow for my growin' up so simple. But I've had it so long I'm used to it, and so is most everyone else down in my part of Jawgy."

"Ah!" says I. "Then you're from Georgia, eh? Down where they sent Robin, I expect?"

"That's right," says he. "I'm from Goober."

"Goober!" I echoes. "Say, that's a choice one too! No wonder Robin couldn't stand it! Sent you up to fetch him back, did they?"

"No, Suh," says he. "Mistuh Phil Hollister didn't send me at all. I jes' come, Suh, and

I can't say if I'm goin' to carry him back or no. You see it's like this: Robin, he's a good boy. We set a heap by him, we do. And Robin was doin' well, keepin' the bale books, lookin' after the weighin', and takin' general charge around the cotton gin. Always had a good word for me in the mornin' when I hands over the keys, me bein' night watchman, Suh. 'Well, Uncle Noah,' it would be, 'didn't let anybody steal presses, did you?' 'No, Mistuh Robin,' I'd say, 'didn't lose nary press last night, and only part of the smokestack.' We was that way, me and Robin. And when Mistuh Phil and his folks started off to visit their married daughter, up in Richmond, he says to me, 'Uncle Noah, I expect you to look after Robin while I'm gone, and see that he don't git into no trouble.' Them was his very words, Suh."

"And Robin's kept you busy, eh?" says I.

"Well, he's a good boy, Robin is," insists Uncle Noah. "I reckon it took him sort of sudden, this wantin' to leave Goober. Just had to come to New York, it seems like. I dunno what for, and I ain't askin'; only I promised his Uncle Phil I'd see he didn't git into no trouble, and—well, I'm a waitin' around, you see, waitin' around."

"How'd you come to locate him, Uncle?" says I.

"We-e-ell," says he, "I reckon I shouldn't a done it nohow, but he left the envelope to her

letter on his desk,—a Miss Toots it come from,—and the address was on the back. It was directly afterwards that Robin quits Goober so sudden.”

“ Ah-ha! ” says I. “ Maggie Toots again, eh? ”

Looked like the myst’ry was solved too, and while I wa’n’t plannin’ to restrict any inter-state romance, or throw the switch on love’s young dream, I thought as long as I’d gone this far I might as well take a look.

“ Maybe he’ll be too busy to receive any home delegation just now,” says I; “ but if you want to stick around while I do a little scoutin’ inside, Uncle, I’ll be out after a bit.”

“ I’ll be a waitin’,” says Uncle Noah, smilin’ patient, and I leaves him backed up against the front of the buildin’ with his hands crossed peaceful on the top of his home-made walkin’ stick.

It’s some giddy push I gets into after I’ve put up my dollar for a ballroom ticket and crowded in where a twenty-piece orchestra was busy with the toe-throbby stuff. And there’s such a mob on the floor and along the side lines that pickin’ out one particular young gent seems like a hopeless job.

I drifts around, though, elbowin’ in and out, gettin’ glared at by fat old dames, and bein’ bumped by tangoin’ couples, until I finds a spot in a corner where I could hang up and have a fair view. About then someone blows a whistle,

and out on the platform in front of the orchestra appears a tall, bullet-headed, pimple-faced young gent, wearin' white spats with his frock-coat costume, and leadin' by the hand a zippy young lady who's attired mostly in black net and a pair of gauze wings growin' out between her shoulder blades. It's announced that they will do a fancy hesitation.

Take it from me, I never saw it danced like that before! It was more'n a dance: it was an acrobatic act, an assault with intent to maim, and other things we won't talk about. The careless way that young sport tossed around this party with the gauze wings was enough to make you wonder what was happenin' to her wishbone. First he'd swing her round with her head bent back until her barrette almost scraped the floor; then he'd yank her up, toss her in the air, and let her trickle graceful down his shirt front, like he was a human stair rail. Next, as the music hit the high spots, they'd go to a close clinch, and whirl and dip and pivot until she breaks loose, takes a flyin' leap, and lands shoulder high in his hands, while he walks around with her like she was something he was bringin' in on a tray.

The hesitation, eh? Say, that's what Mrs. McCabe has been at me to take lessons in. I can see myself, with Sadie tippin' the scales at one hundred and sixty-eight! But when I go home to-night I'll agree to try it if she's willin' to have her spine removed first.

The young lady in black, though, don't seem to mind. 'She bows smilin' at the finish, and then trips off with Pimple Face, lookin' whole and happy. I was watchin' 'em as they made their way out towards the front. Seemed to be gen'ral fav'rites with the crowd, for they were swappin' hails right and left, and she was makin' dates for the next ground and lofty number, I expect; when all of a sudden they're stopped by someone, there's a brief but breezy little argument, and I hears a soft thud that listens like a short arm jab bein' nestled up against a jawbone. And there's Pimple Face doin' a back flip that ain't in his repertoire at all.

Course that spilled the beans. There was squeals, and shrieks, and a gen'ral mixup; some tryin' to get closer, others beatin' it to get away, and all the makin's of a young riot. But the management at the Maison Maxixe don't stand for any rough stuff. In less than a minute a bunch of house detectives was on the spot, the young hesitationer was whisked into a cloakroom, and the other gent was bein' shot towards the fresh air.

Just a glimpse that I caught of his flushed face as it was bein' tucked under a bouncer's arm set me in action. I made a break for a side exit; but there's such a jam everywhere that it's two or three minutes before I can get around to the front.

And there's young Hollister, with an end of

his dress collar draped jaunty over his right ear, tryin' to kick the belt buckle off a two-hundred-pound cop who's holdin' him at arm's length with one hand and rappin' his nightstick for help with the other; while Uncle Noah stands one side, starin' some disturbed at the spectacle. I knew that was no time to butt in!

In that section of the White Light district too you can call up plenty of help by a few taps from the locust. Cops came on the jump from two adjoinin' posts,—big husky Broadway cops,—and they swoops down on young Robin like a bunch of Rockefeller deacons on a Ferrer school graduate who rises in prayer meetin' to ask the latest news from Paint Creek.

“What you got, Jim?” puffs one.

“Young hick that got messy in the tango joint,” says Jim.

“Ah, fan him a few!” remarks the other.

“Hold him still now while I——”

At which Uncle Noah pushes in and holds up a protestin' hand. “Now see heah, Mistuh Constable,” says he, “I wouldn't go for to do anything like that!”

“Wha-a-at?” snarls the copper. “Say, you old billy-goat, beat it!” And he proceeds to clip young Mr. Hollister a glancin' blow on the side of the head. His next aim was better; but this time the nightstick didn't connect.

There's been let loose a weird, high-pitched howl, which I didn't recognize at the time as the old Rebel yell, but know now that it was. Uncle

Noah had gone into action. That walkin' stick of his was a second-growth hickory club as thick as your wrist at the big end. He swung it quick and accurate, and if that cop ain't nursin' a broken forearm to-day he's lucky. I expect his dome was solid iv'ry,—most of them sluggers have that kind,—and in this case he needed it; for, once he gets goin', Uncle Noah makes a thorough job of it. He lands his next swipe square on the copper's head and tumbles him to the sidewalk like a bag of meal. The other two was at him with their clubs by this time, swingin' on him vicious; but somehow they couldn't get in anything but body blows that echoed on Uncle Noah's ribs like thumpin' a barrel. Must have been a tough old boy; for that never fazed him. And the crowd, that was a block deep by this time, seemed to be right with him.

“ Slug the clubbers! ” they yelled. “ Knock their blocks off! Go to it, old man! ”

He didn't need that to encourage him; for he wades in lively, raps first one head and then the other, until he had 'em all three on the pavement. That set the crowd wild.

“ Now sneak while the sneakin's good, old top! ” shouts one.

“ Jump a cab! ” sings out another.

Say, the idea that either of 'em might get out of this muss without goin' to the station house hadn't occurred to me before. But here was a taxi, jam up against the curb not a dozen feet

off, with the chauffeur swingin' his cap enthusiastic.

“ Quick, Uncle! ” says I, gettin' him by the arm. “ It's your one chance. You too, Robin. But show some speed about it. ”

At that, if it hadn't been for half a dozen chaps in the front row of the crowd that helped me shove 'em in, and the others that blocked off the groggy coppers who were wabblin' to their feet, we couldn't have pulled it off. But we piled 'em in, I gave the cabby the Purdy-Pells' street number, and away they was whirled. And you can bet I didn't linger in front of the Maison Maxixe long after that.

Twenty minutes later we had a little reunion in the Purdy-Pell lib'ry. Robin was holdin' some cracked ice to a lump on his forehead, and Uncle Noah was sittin' uncomf'table on the edge of a big leather chair.

“ How cheery! ” says I. “ But take it from me, Uncle, you're some two-fisted scrapper! I didn't think it was in you. ”

“ We-e-ell, ” he drawls out, still breathin' a bit hard, but gettin' back his gentle smile, “ I didn't want to do no fursin' with them constables; but you know Mistuh Phil he told me to see that Robin didn't git into no trouble, and—and—we-e-ell, I didn't care for their motions none at all, I didn't. So I jes' had to tap 'em a little. ”

“ Tappin' is good! ” says I. “ And how



"NOW SEE HEA-UII, MISTUH CONSTABLE," SAYS HE, "I WOULDN'T GO FOR TO DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT."

about you, Robin? How do you come to be mixin' it up so conspicuous?"

"I'm sorry," says he. "I suppose I made an awful ass of myself. But even if she is a public dancer, that snipe shouldn't have insulted her. Of course I'd found out long before that Miss Toots was no longer anything to me; but——"

"Then that was the famous Maggie, was it?" I breaks in. "The one that lured you up from Dixie?"

"Not exactly a lure," says he. "She didn't think I'd be chump enough to come. But that's all off now."

"I ain't curious," says I, "but the fam'ly has sort of delegated me to keep track of your moves. What's next, if you know?"

Robin shrugs his shoulders sort of listless. "I don't know," says he. Then he turns to Uncle Noah. "Uncle," says he, "how will those scuppernongs be about now on the big arbor in front of Uncle Phil's?"

"Bless you, Mistuh Robin," says old Noah, "they'll be dead ripe by now, and there's jes' doodlins of 'em. Miss Peggy Culpepper, she'll be mighty lonesome, a pickin' of 'em all by herself."

"Humph!" says Robin, tintin' up. "Think so, do you?"

"I don't have to think, Mistuh Robin," says Uncle Noah. "Miss Peggy told me that herself the mornin' I come away."

Young Mr. Hollister gazes earnest into them gentle old blue eyes for a second, then he takes a turn or two up and down the lib'ry, and fin'ly claps Uncle Noah on the shoulder. "I've been waiting all summer for a taste of those grapes," says he. "Come, we can just catch the midnight. I've had enough of Broadway to last me for a long time."

And my partin' glimpse of 'em was at eleven-fifty-six, when they pushed through the gate bound for Goober, Georgia.

"After all," thinks I, "it may not be so bad as it sounds."

CHAPTER V

THE CASE OF A FEMALE PARTY

You know how free this J. Bayard Steele has been in callin' on me for help in puttin' over his little deeds of kindness, at so 'much per deed? Well, here the other day he shows up at the studio with sealed envelope No. 3 in his pocket, and after springin' his usual guff about the door of fate he opens it.

"Well, who's the party of the second part this time?" says I.

But he just gazes at the slip of paper he's taken out and smiles mushy.

"All right," says I. "Keep it to yourself. This is my busy day, anyway."

"Pardon me, McCabe," says he. "I was lost in wonder at the varied character of the persons whom the late Pyramid Gordon numbered on his conscience list. This time it is a lady."

"Huh!" says I. "Didn't know Pyramid ever had any skirt complications."

"From Adam down has any man escaped?" says J. Bayard, wavin' his cigarette jaunty. "No, your friend Gordon was no wiser than the rest of us, as this shows. Hearken to the name—Josie Vernon!"

“ That does listen flossy,” says I. “ But I never heard him mention any Josie as long as I knew him. Any details? ”

“ There’s an address,” says J. Bayard, “ and in one corner is written, ‘ Mrs. Fletcher Shaw.’ Probably a friend, or next of kin. Ah, but this is something like! Knight-errantry for the fair sex! Here, McCabe, is where I shine! ”

“ You do, eh? ” says I. “ Think you can handle this case all by your lonesome? ”

Did he? Why, to see him turkeyin’ round, glancin’ at himself approvin’ in the mirror, and pattin’ them Grand Duke whiskers of his into shape, you’d think he had some matinée idol as an understudy. Oh, yes, he rather fancied he understood women, knew how to handle ’em, and all that. He would look up Josie Vernon at once, find out what had been the trouble between her and Pyramid, and decide on some kind and generous way of evenin’ the score, accordin’ to the terms of Mr. Gordon’s will.

“ And in this instance, Shorty,” says he, “ I shall probably not be compelled to trouble you at all until I submit my plans for your indorsement. Now I’m off. The ladies, bless ’em! ” and he winks giddy as he trips through the door.

Ain’t they the nutty ones, these old cut-ups? Look at Steele now,—in the late fifties, but just at the mention of a name like Josie Vernon he gets kittenish!

Well, it's nothin' to me, and I'm glad to duck any dealin's with stray dames; for when it comes to the surprisin' sex you never know what you're goin' to be let in for. Besides, my part of his executor game was only to O.K. J. Bayard's final schemes and see that he spent the money somewhere near the way I judged Pyramid meant to have it distributed. Course, I hadn't been able to stick to that very strict in the first two cases; but this time it looked like I would.

So by the next afternoon, havin' been busy in the gym since nine A.M., I'd forgotten the incident complete, and I'm some surprised when Swifty Joe announces that there's a female party askin' for me in the front office.

"Wha' d'ye mean—female party?" says I. "Is it a lady?"

"Ah-r-r-r chee!" says Swifty. "How do I know?"

That's some surprisin' too; for as a rule he ain't strong on drawin' fine distinctions. If they're young and flossy dressed, he calls 'em "fluffs"; but anything over twenty-five, no matter how she's costumed, is a lady to Swifty, even a scrubwoman. So his describin' this visitor as a female party gets me curious.

The minute I steps into the office and gets a glimpse at her, though, I got Swifty's point of view. The battered old lid had been gay enough once, a few seasons back, when the willow plume

hadn't been dislocated in four places, and before the velvet trimmin' had faded into so many differ'nt shades. It had been a lady's hat once. And the face under it, in spite of the red tip to the nose and the puffs under the eyes, might have belonged to a lady. Anyway, there was traces of good looks there. But the rusty black cloak that hung limp over the sagged shoulders, only part hidin' the sloppy shirt waist and reachin' but halfway down the side-hiked, draggled-edge skirt—that's the sure mark of a female party. I don't know why, but it is.

Where they get cloaks like that is a mystery. You see 'em on women panhandlers, on the old nags that camp on park benches, and in the jag line at police courts. But you never see a new one. Perhaps they're made special by second-hand shops for the female party trade.

"Well?" says I, lookin' her over cold and curious.

But you can't faze a female party so simple. They're used to that. She stares back at me just as cool, and then remarks, "I guess you know who I am well enough."

"Sure!" says I. "You're the long lost Duchess of Gainsborough, ain't you?"

She just gazes at me brassy and shakes her head.

"Then you must be a lady snake agent," says I.

“What?” says she, scowlin’ puzzled.

“I don’t know the answer, either,” says I. “Called for Professor McCabe, didn’t you? Well, you’re connected. Shoot the rest of it.”

“I’m Mrs. Fletcher Shaw,” says she.

And for a minute there I couldn’t place the name. Then it came to me. “Oh!” says I. “Some relation of Josie Vernon’s, eh?”

“Suppose I am?” she demands, eyin’ me suspicious.

“Tut, tut, now!” says I. “You’re the one that’s occupyin’ the witness stand, you know. You were about to tell why you came.”

“Was I?” says she. “You might guess that: you’ve had a man pryin’ and snoopin’ around my flat for two days.”

I gawps at her for a second, and then chuckles. “You mean a classy-dressed gent with whiskers?” says I.

She nods.

“Mr. J. Bayard Steele,” says I. “He’s the one to see. He’ll give you all the partic’lars.”

“Humph!” says she, sniffin’. “What does he want of Josie Vernon? What’s his game?”

“Deeds of kindness, that’s all,” says I.

Mrs. Shaw indulges in a hard, throaty cackle. “There ain’t no such animal,” says she. “Come now, you’re in on this with him. He said so. What’s it all about?”

“Mrs. Shaw,” says I, “you’ve heard all I

got to say on the subject. I'm more or less busy too, and——"

"How impolite!" she breaks in. "And me a lady too! Heavings! how faint I feel!" With that she sidles towards my desk chair and slumps into it.

"Very distressin' symptoms," says I. "But I got a quick cure for attacks like that. It's fresh air, taken outside."

"I sha'n't budge until I've found why you're hounding me!" says she, grippin' the chair arms.

"So?" says I. "Maybe you didn't notice the size of my assistant, Swifty Joe, as you came in? His specialty is escortin' obstreperous parties downstairs and dumpin' 'em on the curb."

"You try any strong-arm stuff on me and I'll scream for help!" says she. "I'll make a charge against you too."

She looked equal to it, and for a minute I stands there gazin' puzzled at her and scratchin' my head.

"You win," says I. "I can't have Swifty scratched up. He's too handsome. It ain't any secret I'm keepin' away from you, anyway. All Mr. Steele wants to do is to locate Josie Vernon. It's a will case, and there may be something in it for her. There! That's the whole story."

"It's a fishy one," says she.

"Maybe," says I; "but I'm givin' you

my word on it. Produce Josie, and you'll see."

She squints at me doubtful, glances around the room cautious once or twice, and then remarks quiet, "Very well. I'll take a chance. I'm Josie."

"Eh?" says I. "You!"

"Ask the Sergeant over at the Nineteenth," says she. "He ran me out of his precinct because I wouldn't give up enough. Fortune-telling, you know. He wanted twenty a month. Think of that!"

"Never mind the Sarge," says I. "Did you know Mr. Gordon?"

"Pyramid?" says she. "Rather! Back in the '90's, that was. I was in his offices for awhile."

"Oh—ho!" says I. "Then you must be the one. Would you mind givin' me a sketch of the affair?"

Mrs. Shaw shrugs her shoulders under the old cape. "Why should I care now?" says she. "I sprung a breach of promise suit on him, that's all. I might have known better. He was a hard man, Pyramid Gordon. What with lawyers and the private detectives he set after me, I was glad to get out of the city alive. It was two years before I dared come back—and a rough two years they were too! But you're not raking that up against me at this late date, are you?"

"I'm not," says I. "Any move I make will

be for your good. But Steele's the man. I'll have to call him in."

"Call away, then," says she. "I ain't afraid of him, either."

And by luck I catches J. Bayard at his hotel and gets him on the 'phone.

"Well?" says I. "How about the fair Josie?"

I could hear him groan over the wire. "Hang Josie!" says he. "See here, McCabe, I've had a deuce of a time with that case. Must have been something wrong with the address, you know."

"How's that?" says I.

"Why," says he, "it led me to a smelly, top-floor flat up in Harlem, and all I could find there was this impossible person, Mrs. Fletcher Shaw. Of all the sniveling, lying, vicious-tongued old harridans! Do you know what she did? Chased me down four flights of stairs with a broom, just because I insisted on seeing Josie Vernon!"

"You don't say!" says I. "And you such a star at this knight-errant business! Still want to see Josie, do you?"

"Why, of course," says he.

"Then come down to the studio," says I. "She's here."

"Wha-a-at!" he gasps. "I—I'll be right down."

And inside of ten minutes he swings in, all dolled up elegant with a pink carnation in his

buttonhole. You should have seen the smile come off his face, though, when he sees what's occupyin' my desk chair. He'd have done a sneak back through the door too, if I hadn't blocked him off.

"Steady there, J. Bayard!" says I. "On the job, now!"

"But—but this isn't Josie Vernon," says he. "It's that Mrs.—"

"One and the same," says I. "The lady says so herself. She's proved it too."

"I had you sized up as a police spotter," puts in Mrs. Shaw, "trying to get me for palm reading. Thought you might have run across one of my cards. Josie Vernon's the name I use on them. Sorry if I was too free with the broom."

"I was merely returning to tell you, Madam," says Steele, "that I had discovered you to be an impostor. Those five children you claimed as yours did not belong to you at all. The janitor of the building informed me that——"

"Yes, I heard him through the dumb-waiter shaft," says Mrs. Shaw. "But I always borrow some youngsters for my poor widow act when I think I'm being shadowed; so you needn't get peevd."

"Of course not. How silly of him!" I puts in. "There, Steele, that's all straightened out, and here is the original Josie Vernon. What have you got to suggest?"

He stares at me blank, and then takes another look at Mrs. Shaw. I'll admit she wa'n't a fascinatin' sight.

"You don't mean," says he, whisperin' husky in my ear, "that you would do anything for such a creature?"

"She's on the list, ain't she?" says I.

"Ye-e-es," he admits; "but——"

"Let's ask the lady herself for a few more details, so we can have something definite to go on," says I. "Excuse us, Mrs. Shaw, for this little side debate; but we ain't quite made up our minds about you yet. Let's see—you was tellin' me about bringin' a breach of promise suit against Pyramid, and how he ran you out of town. You had a good case too, I expect?"

"What's the use of lying about it now?" says she. "It was a cheap bluff, that's all; one of Mr. Shaw's brilliant schemes. Oh, he was a schemer, Shaw was! Pretended to be a lawyer, Fletcher did, in those days. He was smooth enough for one, but too lazy. I didn't know that when I married him. What I didn't know about him then! But I learned. He thought he could scare Mr. Gordon into settling for a few thousand. Of course my claim was all bosh. Pyramid Gordon hardly knew I was in his office. Besides, I was married, anyway. He didn't guess that. But the bluff didn't work. We were the ones who were scared; scared stiff, too."

“H-m-m-m!” says I. “Not what you might call a pretty affair, was it?”

Mrs. Shaw don't wince at that. She just sneers cynical. “Life with Fletcher Shaw wasn't pretty at any stage of the game,” says she. “Say, you don't think I picked my career, do you? True, I was only a girl; but I wasn't quite a fool. You will laugh, I suppose, but at twenty-two I had dreams, ambitions. I meant to be a woman doctor. I was teaching physiology and chemistry in a high school up in Connecticut, where I was born. In another year I could have begun my medical course. Then Fletcher came along, with his curly brown hair, his happy, careless smile, and his fascinating way of avoiding the truth. I gave up all my hopes and plans to go with him. That's what a woman does when she marries. I don't know why it should be so, but it is. Take my case: I had more brains, more energy, more character, than he. But he was a man; so I had to live his life. A rotten sort of life it was. And when it was over—well, look at me. I've learned to drink gin and to make a living as a fortune-teller. And the worst of it is, I don't care who knows it. Wanted details, didn't you? Well, you've got 'em.”

I glances at J. Bayard, and finds him lookin' the other way with his lip curled. You couldn't blame him so much. Listenin' to a female party tell the story of her life ain't inspirin', and we're all apt to duck things of that

kind. They may be true; but it's easier and pleasanter to look the other way. As for me, I want to, but can't. I just got to take things as they are and as they come. Forgettin' weeds in the back yard don't get rid of 'em. I'm apt to paw around and see where the roots spread to.

Meanwhile J. Bayard has stepped over by the window and signals me to follow. "Disgusting, isn't it?" says he. "And you see by this creature's own story that she doesn't deserve a penny of Pyramid's money. He was fooled by her, that's all."

"Not Pyramid," says I. "Didn't he have her married name on the slip too? So he must have found out."

"That's so," says Steele. "Well, suppose we give her fifty or so, and ship her off."

"That's kind of small, considerin' the pile we got to draw on, ain't it?" says I. "And it strikes me that since Pyramid put her name down he meant—— Let's see if there ain't something special she wants."

"Say," sings out Mrs. Shaw, "what about that will business? If it was old Gordon, I suppose he wouldn't leave me much. He had no call to."

"About what would you expect, now?" says I, as we drifts back to her.

She squints foxy at us for a minute. "After all this fuss," says she, "it ought to be two or

three hundred—maybe five. No, I mean a thousand.”

“Huh!” says I. “A thousand! Got your nerve with you, ain’t you? But suppose it was that much, what would you do with it?”

“Do?” says she, her eyes brightenin’.
“Why, I would—I— Ah, what’s the use! I’d make a fool of myself, of course. And inside of ten days I’d be in a D.T. ward somewhere.”

“No old home or folks that you could go back to?” I suggests.

She shakes her head. “It’s too late for me to go back,” says she. “Too late!” She don’t try to be tragic, don’t even whine it out, but just states it dull and flat.

“But most everyone has a friend or so somewhere,” says I.

At first that don’t make any impression at all. Then all of a sudden she sits up and gazes vague over the top of my head.

“There’s the Baron!” says she.

“The which?” says I.

“Von Blatzer,” says she. “Oh, he’s a real Baron, all right; an odd-looking, dried up little chap with a wig and painted eyebrows. Yet he’s hardly sixty. I got to know him at Atlantic City, where I had a Board Walk pitch one season. Queer? That’s no word for it! Shy and lonesome he was; but after you got to know him, one of the brightest, jolliest old

duffers. Our first talk was out on the end of one of those long piers, by moonlight.

“After that it was a regular thing. We’d walk up and down like two kids, telling each other all about ourselves. I’d never stated my full opinion of Fletcher Shaw to a soul before; but somehow old Von was so friendly and sympathetic that I cut loose. The Baron ground his teeth over it. He said that Fletcher should have been caught young and shot from a cannon. Good old Von Blatzer! Wanted me to go back to Vienna as the Baroness. Think of it—me! But I was having a good season. Besides, I didn’t think I could stand for a wig. I didn’t know how much I was going to miss him.”

“You wouldn’t shy at the wig now, eh?” says I.

“Would I?” says she. “Honest, I liked Von Blatzer, for all his freaky ways. He was human, he was, and we understood each other. He’ll be at Monte Carlo now. Roulette, you know. That’s all he lives for. Plays a system. Nice little income he has; not big, but comfortable. And during the season he feeds it all into the wheel. Someone ought to cure him of that.”

“Think you could, I expect?” says I. “But how about you and the juniper juice?”

“Oh, I could quit that easy if there was anything else to do,” says she. “But there isn’t.”

“Then here’s a proposition,” says I. “You

query him by cable to see if he's changed his mind; and if he's still a candidate for matrimony—well, I guess Mr. Steele will see that you get to the Baron."

"You—you mean that?" says she gaspy.

"Uh-huh," says I. "It's up to you."

"But—but I—— Why, look at me!" says she.

"Two weeks on the water wagon, a few visits to the beauty parlors, and an outfit of tango skirts ought to make some diff'rence, hadn't it?" says I. "Those items would be included. What do you say?"

I expect it was a good deal of a proposition to spring on a female party. No wonder she choked up over it.

"If I thought you were just guying me," says she, "I—I'd——"

"Here's a cable blank," says I. "Frame up your call to the Baron while I state the case to Mr. Steele."

He couldn't see it at all, J. Bayard couldn't. "What!" says he. "Waste all that money on such a wretch! Why, the woman is unworthy of even the most——"

"What's that got to do with it?" says I. "Pyramid didn't put that in the bill of partic'lars, did he? Maybe he had doubts about himself. And how would we qualify? How would you? Come, what's your battin' average, Steele, in the worthy league?"

J. Bayard squirms a little at that, and then

hunches his shoulders. "Oh, if you're going to put it that way," says he, "go ahead. But when she starts to be a Baroness, I'd like to see her."

"You'll be there to hand her the tickets," says I. "You'll get her ready. That's part of your job."

He saw the point. And, say, he did his work thorough. I saw no more of Mrs. Shaw until nearly two weeks later, when Steele towed me down to the steamer.

"Which one?" says I, lookin' at the crowd along the rail. "Ah, come off! That with the veils and the stunnin' figure—the one wavin' this way? That ain't never Mrs. Fletcher Shaw!"

"That's Josie," says he. "And before the end of the month she'll be the Baroness Von Blatzer. Changed? Why, I hardly recognized her myself after her first day's shopping! She must have been quite a beauty once. But what a wreck she was when——"

"When she chased you with the broom, eh?" says I, chucklin'. "And now you're as chesty over her as though you'd been workin' a miracle. Just beamin' for joy, you are!"

"I know," says he. "And really, McCabe, I've never had a hand in anything which has given me so much genuine pleasure. It—it's weird, you know. I can't think what's happenin' to me."

"Maybe," says I, "you're sproutin' a soul."

CHAPTER VI

HOW MILLIE SHOOK THE JINX

KIND of odd the way the Morans and Elisha Porter Bayne coincided. You'd think so if you could see 'em bunched once; for Elisha P. is a mighty fine man; you know, one of our most prominent and highly respected citizens. Everybody says so. The local weekly always prints it that way. Besides, he's president of the Trust Company, head of the Buildin' and Loan, chairman of the School Board, and a director of such things as the Old Ladies' Home, the Hospital, and the Nut and Bolt Works. Always wears a black frock coat and a white string tie too,—tall, thin jawed, distinguished lookin' gent.

While the Morans—say, let's put them off as long as we can. And the more we linger in the society of Mr. Bayne the better we ought to be. Up to last spring, I blush to admit, I'd never been favored much. Course, commutin' in and out the way I do, I didn't have a good show. But we passes the nod when we meets. Elisha P. never strains his neck durin' the exercise. You could detect his nod with the naked eye, though, and I expect that was a good deal from

him to me. You get the idea. That nod includes only the Mr. McCabe that owns a shore-front place and votes in Rockhurst-on-the-Sound. It don't stretch so far as to take in Shorty McCabe who runs a Physical Culture Studio on 42d-st. And that's all right too. I'm satisfied.

Then here one day back in April, as I'm drivin' home from the station with Sadie, who should step to the curb and hold me up but Mr. Bayne. Does it offhand, friendly, mind you. Course I stops sudden. Sadie bows and smiles. I lifts my lid. Mr. Bayne holds his square-topped derby against his white shirt front. We shakes hands cordial. And I'm most gaspin' for breath when it's over.

“ Ah, by the way, Mr. McCabe,” says he, “ about that—er— Sucker Brook tract? Have you thought it over yet? ”

Just like that, you know; as if it was something we'd been talkin' about for months, while as a matter of fact this is the first hint I'd had that Elisha P. was interested at all.

Not that it hadn't been put up to me. Why, three diff'rent parties had interviewed me confidential on the proposition, offerin' to let me in on the ground floor, and givin' as many diff'rent but more or less convincin' reasons for bein' so generous. One explains how he wanted to see the tract go to some local man instead of New York speculators; another confesses that their little syndicate is swingin' too much

undeveloped property and has got to start a bargain counter; while the third man slaps me hearty on the back and whispers that he just wants to put me next to a good thing.

I come near swallowin' the bait too; for I'd turned over some Bronx buildin' lots not long before at a nice little advance, and the kale was only drawin' three per cent. Course this Sucker Brook chunk ain't much to look at, a strip of marshy ground along the railroad; but half a mile away they're sellin' villa plots, and acreage is mighty scarce so near the city line as we are. Took me a week of scoutin' among my friends to discover that this gang of real estate philanthropists had bought up the Sucker Brook tract on a private tip that a trolley extension was goin' to be put through there. So it might have been too, only a couple of the County Board members who was tryin' to pull off another deal got busy and blocked the franchise. Then it was a case of unload, with me runnin' as favorite in the Easy Mark Handicap. And now here comes Elisha P., straight out of the Trust Company, to spring the trapdoor himself.

"Why, yes, Mr. Bayne," says I. "I've chewed it over some; but I ain't quite made up my mind to take it on."

"You haven't!" says he, his nice, white, respectable eyebrows showin' great surprise. "But, my dear man, I personally had that offer made to you. Why, we could have—— But

never mind that. I hope you may see fit to give us your answer by Saturday noon."

"That depends," says I, "on whether you come for it or not."

"I beg pardon?" says he, starin'.

"At the studio," says I, shovin' over one of my professional cards. "That's where I do business. So long, Mr. Bayne." And with that I throws in the clutch and leaves him gawpin'!

"Why, Shorty!" says Sadie. "How horrid of you! And Mr. Bayne is such a nice old gentleman too!"

"Yes, ain't he?" says I. "And for smoothness he's got a greased plank lookin' like a graveled walk."

I didn't think he'd come after that. But the other lines they had out must have been hauled in empty; for not ten days later I has a 'phone call from him sayin' he's in town and that if it's convenient he'll drop around about three P.M.

"I'll be here," says I.

"And I trust," he adds, "that I—er—may not encounter any pugilists or—er——"

"You'll be safe," says I, "unless some of my Wall Street customers break office rules and try to ring you in on a margin deal. Outside of them, or now and then a railroad president, the studio has a quiet, refined patronage."

"Ah, thanks," says he.

"Swifty," says I to my assistant, "don't show yourself in the front office after three to-day. I'm goin' to entertain a pillar of so-

ciety, and a sight of that mug of yours might get him divin' through the window."

"Ahr-r-r-r chee!" remarks Swifty Joe, catchin' the wink.

Course, I might have got real peevish over Mr. Bayne's suspicions, and told him to go chase himself; but I'm feelin' sort of good-humored that day. Besides, thinks I, it won't do any harm to show him just how peaceful and respectable a physical culture studio can be. You know the ideas some people get. And as a rule our floor here is the quietest in the buildin'. I knew it would be that day specially; for all we had on the slate was a couple of poddy old parties who'd be workin' away at the apparatus, havin' about as strenuous a time as a baby playin' with its toes.

But I hadn't counted in that Sieger & Bloom combination, up on the fourth. They run a third-rate theatrical agency, you know, and just about then they was fillin' out contracts for summer snaps, and what you saw driftin' up and down the stairs didn't make you yearn to be a vaudeville actor. So later on, when I heard an argument in progress out in the hall, I glances nervous at the clock. It's almost on the tick of three.

"Hey, cut out the riot!" I calls through the transom; but as there's no letup to the debate I strolls over to the door, prepared to reprove someone real severe.

It's quite some spirited scene out on the

landin'. There's old man Bloom, a short, squatty, fish-eyed old pirate with a complexion like sour dough. He has one foot on the next flight, and seems to be retreatin' as he waves his pudgy hands and sputters. Followin' him up is a tall, willowy, black-eyed young woman in a giddy Longchamps creation direct from Canal-st. She's pleadin' earnest that Bloom mustn't forget he's talkin' to a lady. Behind her is a husky, red-haired young gent with his fingers bunched menacin'; while just below, hesitatin' whether to push through the hostilities or beat it back to the street, is Elisha P. Bayne, Esq.

"Give us a show to make good, that's all we ask," the young woman is sayin'. "Put us on somewhere, as you said you would when you took our money."

"Bah!" snorts old Bloom. "I wouldn't sign you for a Third-ave. cabaret. Your act is rotten. A pair of cheab skaters, you are—cheab skaters!"

"Oh, we are, are we?" explodes the young woman. Then, biff! out flashes one of her long arms, and the next thing Bloom knows his silk lid has been smashed down over his eyes.

"Helb! Helb!" he squeals. "Bolice! I vill ged the bolice after you." With that he makes a break past her and goes waddlin' down-stairs on the run.

"Now, I've done it, I reckon," says the

young woman. "And that about finishes us, Timothy dear. He's after a cop."

"Yes, and he'll bring one back," I puts in, "or I don't know Abie Bloom. About five and costs will be the bill. But it ought to be worth it."

"It would, every cent," says she, "if we had the five."

"In that case," says I, "you'd better do a sudden duck."

"But where to?" says she, glancin' desperate down the stairs.

And, say, the thought of how comic old Bloom looked strugglin' out of his hat, and of how eager he'd be to get her sent to the Island for it, was too much for me.

"In here," says I, steppin' out of the studio door. "You too," and I motions to the red-haired gent. Then, turnin' to Elisha P., I goes on, "Better join the group, Mr. Bayne."

"But, you know," he protests, "this is the very thing I wished to avoid. I do not care to mingle with such—er——"

"I expect not," says I; "but if you stay here you'll be gathered in as a witness to the assault. Course, if you'd rather do that—why——"

"No, no!" says he. "I—I think I will step in, for a moment at least."

He made up his mind just in time; for I'd no sooner herded the bunch into the front office and locked the door than we hears Bloom towin'

the cop up the stairs and describin' puffy how he'd been most murdered. We listens while they searches the hallways clear to the top, and then hears the cop trampin' down again. He calls back to Bloom that he'll keep an eye out for the female assaulter.

"That's Roundsman Foley," says I, "and he's got a four-mile beat to cover between now and five o'clock. Inside of twenty minutes he'll be blocks away. Might as well sit down, Folks."

"Say, Mister," speaks up the young woman, "I don't know who you are, but we're much obliged. Tim, speak up."

Timothy wanted to; but he ain't an easy converser, and the language seems to clog his tongue.

"Don't mention it," says I. "I ain't got any personal grudge against Mr. Bloom; but I've been achin' to see someone hand him a pat, just for greens. There's my name on the door."

"Oh!" says the young woman. "Then you're Professor McCabe? Well, we're the Morans, Millie and Tim. Tango is our line."

I can see Elisha P. shudder visible at that. He hesitates a second, and then comes to the front. "McCabe," says he, "I feel that I must protest. An assault was committed in your presence. As a law-abiding citizen it should be your duty to turn the offender over

to the authorities instead of furnishing a hiding place."

"Now listen to that!" says I. "All right, Mr. Bayne, if you insist. But you go along as a witness too."

"In a police court!" he gasps. "Why—really, you know, I—I couldn't do such a thing."

"Case quashed then," says I. "I'm too bashful to go alone."

"But you know," says he, "I came here merely on a matter of business."

"Yes, we'll get to that pretty soon," says I. "Our friends here are only goin' to stop until the travelin' is safer." Then I turns to the Morans. "Dancers, eh?" says I. "Where have you been on?"

"Nowhere," says Millie. "We're tryin' to break in."

"Oh!" says I. "Candidates for amateur night?"

"Not much!" says Millie. "We're as good as any. Maurice ain't got a thing on us, honest; nor that Ripple combination, either. Why, we got steps of our own that the rest haven't thought of!"

"Ye-e-es?" says I.

"Oh, I know," says she, shruggin' her shoulders. "Maybe we don't look it; but, say, we've got the goods."

"Case of undiscovered genius, eh?" says I. Millie flushes a little at that; but bites her

lips to keep back the hot retort. Bright lookin' girl, Millie; and if she hadn't been costumed so vivid she wouldn't have been such a bad looker. But in that tight, striped dress with the slashed skirt, and that foolish lid with the two skimpy pink feathers curlin' over the back—well, believe me, she was some zippy!

“ Say, lemme tell you how it happened, won't you? ” says she.

“ If it ain't too long,” says I.

“ I'll make it sketchy,” says she. “ In the first place, when I landed here in New York about a year and a half ago, I'd made up my mind to connect with big money. I didn't know exactly how; the stage, maybe. Anyway, I knew the coin was here, and that it wasn't in Saskatoon.”

“ Sass—which? ” says I.

“ Saskatoon,” says she. “ It's on the map, up in Saskatchewan, you know. No, I wasn't born there. Hardly anybody was. It's too new. I went there with Mother and Brother Phil when the Northwest boom first started. It was all right for Philip. He could do surveying, and then he got to dipping into real estate. But there was no chance for me; so I started for the white lights. While I was looking around here I took on anything that would furnish a meal ticket. Oh, you can't starve Millie! I did fancy ironin' in a hand laundry, was window demonstrator for an electric vibrator concern, did a turn as a dress model,

and sold soda checks in a drugstore. They don't load you down on payday in any of them places; but that didn't worry me. I was sizing up the good things, and I'd about decided on the front row of a musical comedy for mine, when what did I have to go and do but get soft on Tim here! ”

Tim blushes embarrassed and scrapes his hoof.

“ Enough to wreck most any career, wasn't it? ” goes on Millie. “ Think of it! Me, who'd come down to New York with my head so full of ambitions there wasn't any room to catch cold, and then in a little over a year to go and marry the first good-natured Irishman that asked me! You see, I'm only half Irish myself,—Mother was Argentine Spanish,—which makes me so different from Tim. Look at him! Would you dream he had a bit of sense? But he's—oh, he's Tim, that's all. And not many of 'em come better. Driving a motor truck, he was, and satisfied at that. It was up at a Terrace Garden dance we got acquainted. No music at all in his head; but in his feet—say, he just naturally has to let his toes follow the tune, and if ragtime hadn't been invented he'd have walked slow all his life. And me? Well, I ought to dance, with Father a born fiddler, and Mother brought up with castanets in her hands. We danced twelve of the fourteen numbers together that night, and I never even noticed he had red hair. I'd been dying to dance for

months. Some partner, Tim was too. That began it. We joined a class and started learning the new steps. And almost before I knew it I was Mrs. Moran. We'd been married nearly a month before I woke up to what a fool thing I'd done. There I was, tryin' to feed and clothe two people, besides payin' the rent and furniture installments, all on sixteen per. I got a job as cashier in a quick lunch place next day. Tim didn't like it a bit; did you, Tim?"

Mr. Moran grins good-natured.

"That's the way he stormed around at home," says Millie. "But I had a scheme. We'd seen some of this dancing done on the stage, not much better than we could do ourselves. 'Tim dear,' says I, 'we've been dancing for the fun of it. It's the best thing you do. Now let's make it pay.' He thought I was crazy. I believe he had an idea he was born to drive a gasoline truck, and that it would be wicked to try anything else. But I do the heavy thinking for the Moran family. I nearly starved him until I'd saved out a tenspot. Then I went to the best tango professor I could find and took an hour lesson. Next I taught Tim. We cleared out our little dining room and had our meals off the gas range. My next splurge was a music machine and some dance records. One Saturday Tim brought home two dollars for overtime, and that night we watched Maurice from the second balcony. Then we really began practicing. Why, some nights I

kept him at it for four hours on a stretch. He weighed one hundred and eighty at the start; but now he's down to one hundred and forty-three. But it's been good for him. And trying to keep all those new variations in his head—why, he's almost learned to think! Say, you know you can get almost anything by keeping at it. And Tim and I have learned rag dancing, all there is to it, besides some I've made up. All we need now is a chance, and it's such scum as old Bloom that keeps us out. Do you blame me for landing on his hat? ”

“ Not me,” says I. “ And I hope you break in sometime or other.”

“ It's got to be now,” says Millie. “ I've made Tim quit the truck, and we're down to our last dollar. Think of that! Just when I can see daylight ahead too! Why, if I knew where I could get hold of two hundred——”

She pauses and gazes around sort of desperate, until she and Elisha P. Bayne are starin' at each other.

I couldn't resist the temptation, either. “ There you are,” says I. “ Mr. Bayne runs a bank. Lendin' money's his business.”

“ Really, McCabe!” says Bayne indignant. “ But Millie ain't lettin' any hints get by. “ Why wouldn't someone lend me that much? ” says she, gazin' earnest at me once more. “ Just two hundred! I could pay it back in less than six months. Oh, I'm sure I could! Mr. McCabe, wouldn't you? ”

Almost took my breath away, the quick way she turned my josh back on me. "Why," says I, "I—I might—on security."

"Security?" says she, kind of vague. Then all of a sudden she brightens up. "Why, yes; of course you'd want security. I'd put up Tim."

"Eh?" says I, and something of the kind comes from Timothy too.

"He can always earn from twelve to fifteen a week," says Millie, eager. "You could have ten of it for twenty weeks. We could live in one room, and I would keep things running. Honest, if we don't make a go of it we'll come back and pay up."

"But what's the scheme?" says I. "Going off somewhere, are you?"

"That's what I want the money for, to take us there," says she. "I—I don't want to tell the rest. I haven't even told Tim. But we can win out. I'm sure we can if you'll stake us. Won't you, please, Professor McCabe?"

And I expect it was all due to that sneer of Elisha P. Bayne's. For while this was about as batty a business proposition as I ever had put up to me, this scheme of Millie's for hockin' her hubby, I'd got more or less int'rested in her yarn. And it struck me that a girl who'd done what she had wa'n't any quitter. Elisha puts on such a hard, cold sneer too; and comin' from this wise, foxy old near-plute who'd been playin' lead pipe cinches all his life, I expect,



"SAY, I'M A BEAR FOR PARIS."

and never lettin' go of a nickel until he had a dime's worth of goods in his fist—well, it got to me, all right.

“ You win,” says I, flashin' my roll and startin' to count off the twenties.

“ But, McCabe!” gasps Elisha P. “ Surely you're not going to lend two hundred dollars to—to such a person as this? ”

“ Yep,” says I. “ This is my foolish day. And I'm goin' to write you a check for two hundred more for a six months' option on that Sucker Brook tract. Here you are, Mrs. Moran. Never mind the ticket for Tim. I'm takin' your word.”

“ Talk about miracles!” says Millie, countin' the money dazed.

“ Bless you, Sorr!” says Tim husky as I shows 'em out.

And I finds Elisha P. sittin' there rubbin' his hands expectant. He must have suspicioned I was easy all the while, or he wouldn't have hung on so; but after this exhibition I expect he felt it was only a matter of makin' a few passes and then walkin' off with everything but my shirt. Fact is, though, I'd had some new dope on this property, and while it looked like a thirty-to-one shot I thought I'd take a chance. Course, he tries to close the deal outright; but the option is as far as I'll go.

For weeks after that, though, I carried four hundred on the books with a minus sign in front. Then I crossed it off altogether. Not a

word from the Morans. Nothing doing in the way of buying booms around Sucker Brook. But you got to stand some losses now and then if you're goin' to keep in line for an occasional big cleanup. And, anyway, it was worth while to head Elisha P. Bayne's boob list. You ought to see the sarcastic smiles he used to shoot over when we'd meet and he'd ask if I'd heard from my dancing friends yet. Say, I expect I furnished the one joke of his life.

I did bank on gettin' back something from Millie, though, if only a money order for ten on account. But all through June and July, clear into August, not a whisper. Whatever her scheme had been, it must have gone wrong.

And then here one mornin' last week as I'm gazin' idle out the front window onto 42d-st., up rolls a taxi, and out climbs a couple that you might have said had been shot over by aëroplane from the Rue de Rivoli. Couldn't tell that so much from her getup as from the Frenchy hat and boulevard whiskers he's sportin'. First brick red imperial I ever remember seein' too. It ain't until they've climbed the stairs and walked in the studio door, though, that I even had a glimmer as to who they was. But one glance at them black eyes of the lady's was enough.

“ Well, I'll be singed! ” says I. “ The Morans! ”

“ Of London and Paris, ” adds Millie.

“ Gwan! ” says I.

“Show him, Tim,” says she. At which Timothy extracts from the inside of his silk tile a billboard poster announcing the comin’, for a limited engagement only, of those European tango wizards, Mons. and Mlle. Moran.

“I cabled our agents we wouldn’t sail until we’d seen a sample of the paper,” says Millie.

“Gee!” says I. “You must have got next!”

“Did we?” says Millie. “My word! Why, when we hit London the craze was just striking in over there. We was among the advance guard. Say, we hadn’t been over ten days before we headed the bill at the Alcazar as the famous New York tango artists. Inside of two weeks more we were doing three turns a night, with all kinds of private dates on the side. Say, would you believe it? I’ve danced with a real Duke! And Tim—why if it hadn’t been for me on the spot there’d been no telling what would have happened. Those English society women are the limit. Then Paris. Ah, *ma chère Paris!* Say, I’m a bear for Paris. Didn’t we soak the price on when that Moulin Rouge guy came after us, though? *Ma foi!* Say, he used to weep when he paid me the money. ‘*Mon Dieu!* Five hundred francs for so small a *danse!*’ But he paid. Trust Millie Moran! Say, I collected a few glad rags over there too. What about this one?”

“It don’t need any Paris label,” says I.

“Don’t see how you got upstairs in it, though.”

“I can do a cartwheel in it,” says she. “We’ve learned to handle ourselves some, Tim and I. And now I guess I’ll take him out of hock. You’ll find two hundred gold in the package.”

“Thanks,” says I, openin’ the long envelope. “But what’s this other?”

“Oh, that!” says she. “Interest. Deed for a few lots in the new North Addition to Saskatoon.”

“Tut, tut!” says I. “I can’t take ’em. That wa’n’t any loan I staked you to; just bread on the waters.”

“Well, you can’t kick if it comes back a ham sandwich,” says she. “Besides, the lots stand in your name now. They were a mile out of town when I bought ’em; but Brother Phil says the city’s bulged that way since. They’ve got the boom, you know. That’s where we’ve been sending all our spare salary. Phil’s down here to see us open.”

“Eh?” says I. “Not the surveyor!”

“He still does some of that,” says she.

“Do you suppose,” says I, “I could get him to do a little stunt for me while he’s here?”

“Do I?” says she. “Why, he knows all about it. Brother Phil will go the limit for you.”

Uh-huh. Philip was up to all the fine points of the game, and the imitation he gave of layin’

out a two-million-dollar factory site along Sucker Brook was perfect, even to loadin' his transit and target jugglers into a tourin' car right in front of the Rockhurst Trust Company.

Maybe that's how it come to be noised around that the Western Electric Company was goin' to locate a big plant on the tract. Anyway, before night I had three of the syndicate biddin' against each other confidential; but when Elisha P. runs it up to four figures, offerin' to meet me at the station with a certified check, I closes the deal with a bang.

"Swifty," says I, hangin' up the 'phone, "trot around to the Casino and get a lower box for to-night, while I find a florist's and order an eight-foot horseshoe of American beauties."

"Chee!" says Swifty, gawpin'. "What's doin'?"

"I'm tryin' to celebrate a doubleheader," says I.

CHAPTER VII

REVERSE ENGLISH ON SONNY BOY

“Do you know, Shorty,” says J. Bayard Steele, balancin’ his bamboo walkin’ stick thoughtful on one forefinger, “I’m getting to be a regular expert in altruism.”

“Can’t you take something for it?” says I.

But he waves aside my comedy stab and proceeds, chesty and serious, “Really, I am, though. It’s this philanthropic executor work that I’ve been dragged into doing by that whimsical will of your friend, the late Pyramid Gordon, of course. I must admit that at first it came a little awkward, not being used to thinkin’ much about others; but now—why, I’m getting so I can tell almost at a glance what people want and how to help them!”

“Huh!” says I. “Then you’re some wizard. It often bothers me to dope out just what I need myself; and when it comes to decidin’ for other folks— Say, have you tackled envelope No. 4 on Pyramid’s list yet?”

“I have,” says J. Bayard, smilin’ confident. “Peculiar case too. A month or so ago I should have been puzzled. Now it seems very simple. I’ve done all my investigating, made

my plans, and if you will run downtown to a lawyer's office with me after luncheon we shall meet the beneficiaries-to-be and fix up the details of a nice little deed of kindness of which I am the proud author."

"Fat commission in it for you, eh?" says I.

J. Bayard looks pained and hurt. "Really," says he, "I hadn't thought of that. No, the outlay will be slight. In fact, it's merely a matter of launching a young man in society."

"Well, well!" says I. "That's a husky job for a couple of grown men like us, ain't it? Who's the young gent—Clarence what?"

"Ever hear of Hungry Jim Hammond?" says he.

I had, but couldn't quite place him; so J. Bayard supplies the description. He'd started out as a railroad man, Hammond had, back in the days when Pyramid Gordon was first beginnin' to discover that swappin' hot air for votin' shares was perfectly good business so long as you could get away with the goods. Only Hammond was the real thing. He was a construction expert.

Mr. Gordon had found him on the payroll of a line he'd annexed by a midnight deal; concluded he knew too much about the job to be a safe man to have around; so he transfers him to the Far West and sets him to work on a scheme to lay out a road parallelin' the Southern Pacific. Hammond couldn't tell it was a stall. He blazes merrily ahead surveyin' a

right of way across three States, and had got as far as Death Valley when the rumor comes to camp that this new line is all a fake.

Hammond had a gang of twenty-five or thirty men with him, and his weekly pay check hadn't shown up for about a month. But he couldn't believe that Pyramid had laid down on him. He'd got mighty int'ested in buildin' that road across the desert, and had dreamed some rosy dreams about it. But his men felt diff'rent. They wanted action on the cashier's part, or they'd quit. Hammond begged 'em to stay. He even blew in his own bank account settlin' part of the back wages. But inside of three days his crew had dwindled to a Chinese cook and a Greaser mule driver. Took him a couple of weeks more to get wise to the fact that he was stranded there in the sand, six miles from a water hole, with a few cases of canned beef and a sack of corn meal.

Even then he didn't give up for good. He made his way back to a stage station and sent through a wire to Pyramid askin' for instructions. More than a month he waited, with no word from Gordon. Seems that by then Pyramid was too busy with other things. He'd cashed in on his bluff and was sortin' a new hand. And maybe he wa'n't anxious to have Hammond come East again. Anyway, he let him shift.

That was when Hammond came so near starvin'. But he didn't—quite. For a year or

more he managed to live somehow. Then one day he drove a team of boneyard mules into Blue Dog with a wagonload of stuff that the natives stared at. It was white, shiny stuff. Hammond said it was borax. He'd discovered a big deposit of it out there in the blisterin' sand. He was goin' to ship it back East and sell it. They thought he was nutty. He wasn't, though. On East they was usin' a lot of borax and demandin' more.

With a few thousand back of him Hammond might have got to be the Borax King right then; but as it was he held onto an interest big enough to make him quite a plute, and inside of a year he was located in Denver and earnin' his nickname of Hungry Jim. His desert appetite had stayed with him, you see, and such little whims as orderin' a three-inch tenderloin steak frescoed with a pound of mushrooms and swimmin' in the juice squeezed from a pair of canvasback ducks got to be a reg'lar thing for him.

It was there he met and married the husky built head waitress and moved into a double-breasted mansion up on Capitol Hill. Also he begun wearin' diamond shirtstuds and givin' wine dinners.

"But, like others of his kind," goes on J. Bayard, "his luck didn't last. Because he'd made one big strike, he thought he knew the mining game from top to bottom. He lost hundreds of thousands on wild ventures. His

long drawn out suit against Pyramid was another expensive luxury; for in the end Gordon beat him.

“It was Hammond’s big appetite that finished him off, though,—acute indigestion. So that is why Pyramid leaves us this item in his list: ‘The widow or other survivor of James R. Hammond.’ Well, I’ve found them both, Mrs. Hammond and her son Royce. I haven’t actually seen either of ’em as yet; but I have located Mrs. Hammond’s attorney and had several conferences with him. And what do you think? She won’t take a dollar of Gordon’s money for herself; nor will Royce directly. There’s one thing, however, that she will probably not refuse,—any social assistance we may give to her son. That’s her chief ambition, it seems,—to see Royce get into what she considers smart society. Well, what do you say, McCabe? Can’t we help?”

“Depends a good deal on Royce,” says I. “Course, if he’s too raw a roughneck——”

“Precisely!” breaks in J. Bayard. “And as the son of such a man we must look for rather a crude youth, I suppose. But in order to carry out the terms of Gordon’s will we must do some kind and generous act for these people. This seems to be our only chance. Now here is my plan.”

And he’s comin’ on, J. Bayard is! He proposes that we use our combined pull with Mr. Twombly-Crane to land Royce—for one con-

secutive night, anyway—plunk in the middle of the younger set. He's leased a nice furnished cottage from one of the Meadowbrook bunch, not more'n a mile from the Twombly-Crane estate, got the promise of havin' the youngster's name put up at the Hunt Club for the summer privileges, and has arranged to have mother and son move in right in the height of the season.

"In time for the Twombly-Cranes' big costume ball?" I suggests.

"Nothing less," says he. "And if we could manage to have them invited to that—well, what more could a fond parent ask?"

"H-m-m-m!" says I, rubbin' my chin. "Might get ourselves disliked if we sprung a ringer on 'em that way. Course, if this Royce boy could be trained to pull a broad A now and then, and be drilled into doin' a maxixe that would pass, I might take a chance. Mrs. McCabe could get their names on the guest list, all right. But I'd have to have a peek at Sonny first."

You see, with an ex-waitress mother, and a Hungry Jim for a father, Royce might be too tough for anything but a Coney Island spiel-fest. In that case J. Bayard would have to dig up a new scheme. So we starts out to look 'em up.

Accordin' to schedule we should have found 'em both waitin' for us at the lawyer's, sittin' side by side and lookin' scared. But the

boy that shows us into the reception room says how Mrs. Hammond is in the private office with the boss, and it looks like Sonny was late.

“ I’ll tell you,” says I to J. Bayard. “ You push in and interview Mother, while I stick around out here and wait for the other half of the sketch.”

He agrees to that, and has disappeared behind the ground-glass door when I discover this slick-haired young gent sittin’ at a desk over by the window,—a buddin’ law clerk, most likely. And by way of bein’ sociable I remarks casual that I hear how McGraw is puttin’ Teseau on the mound again to-day against the Cubs.

That don’t get much of a rise out of him. “ Aw, rully! ” says he.

“ I expect you’ll be hikin’ out for the grandstand yourself pretty quick? ” I goes on.

“ No,” says he, shruggin’ his shoulders annoyed. “ I take no interest in baseball; none whatever, I assure you.”

“ Excuse my mentionin’ it, then,” says I. “ But just what is your line,—croquet? ”

“ My favorite recreation,” says he, “ is dawncing.” And with that he turns away like he’d exhausted the subject.

But this gives me an idea. Maybe he could be hired to coach Royce.

“ It’s a thrillin’ sport,” says I. “ And, by the way, there’s a young chap due to show up

here soon. I wonder if you've seen him around before,—“young Hammond?”

“I beg pardon,” says he, “but do you refer to Royce Hammond?”

“That's the guy,” says I. “Kind of a husky young hick, eh?”

He stares at me cold and disapprovin'. “I am Royce Hammond!” says he.

You could have bought me for a yesterday's rain check. “Wha-a-at!” says I, gawpin'. “You—you are——”

Say, come to look him over close, I might have known he was no ten-a-week process server. He's costumed neat but expensive, and his lily-white hands are manicured to the last notch. Nice lookin' youth he is, with a good head on him and a fine pair of shoulders. And for conversation he uses the kind of near-English accent you hear along the Harvard Gold Coast. Cul-chaw? Why, it fairly dripped from Royce, like moisture from the ice water tank on a hot day!

“Excuse,” says I. “I'm Professor McCabe, and I was only——”

“Oh, yes,” says he, sighin' weary, “I understand. Something absurd about a will, isn't it? Mother is quite keen over it; and I wish she wouldn't, you know.”

“Eh?” says I, a bit dizzy from tryin' to follow him.

“Oh, I've no doubt you mean well enough,” he goes on; “but we cawn't accept favors from

utter strangers—really, we cawn't. And besides, old Gordon was such a rotter!"

To relieve his feelin's he lights a cigarette and gives me the shoulder once more. I felt like I'd been slapped on the wrist and sent to stand in the corner.

"Maybe you'd like my apology in writin'?" says I. "Just point out a real dusty spot on the floor, and I'll grovel in it. But remember, Son, all we laid out to do, in our humble way, was to give you a boost. So don't be too hard on us."

He smiles patronizin' at that. "No offense intended, I'm suah," says he. "I merely wished to make clear my own position in this ridiculous affair. Of course, if Mother insists, I presume I must— Bah Jove! Here they are, though!"

And out through the door comes J. Bayard and the lawyer, escortin' a stunnin'-built lady with her face half hid by veils. I'd been introduced too, and was just handin' her a chair, when we got a good square look at each other. So it was simultaneous. She gives a little gasp and stiffens, and I expect I did some open-face work myself. I glances from her to J. Bayard and stares foolish.

"Did you say Mrs. Hammond?" says I.

"Of course, McCabe," says he sort of peevish. "You know I explained beforehand."

"Yes," says I; "but—but——"

Then the lady steps to the front herself, her

chin up and her lips pressed tight. "Professor McCabe and I have met before," says she, "under—well, under different circumstances. That is all. And now, Mr. Steele, you spoke of securing an invitation for my son and myself to an important social affair. At just whose house, please?"

"Why," says J. Bayard, "at Mr. Twombly-Crane's."

She don't wince. Near as I could tell she don't make a move, and a second later she's turned to me with a sketchy sort of a smile. "I think I may trust you to explain to Mr. Steele later on," says she, "how impossible it would be for me to accept such an invitation."

I nods, still gawpin' at her. You'd most thought that would have been hint enough for J. Bayard; but he's such a fathead at times, and he's so strong for carryin' through any proposition of his own, that it don't get to him.

"But, my dear lady," says he, "such an opportunity! Why, the Twombly-Cranes, you know, are——"

"Ah, ditch it, J. B.!" I cuts in, and shakes my head menacin'.

The lady smiles grateful and lifts one hand. "It's no use," says she. "I've given up. And you might as well know the whole story at once; Royce too. I didn't mean that he should ever know; but I see now that he is bound to hear it sooner or later. Professor McCabe, you tell them."

It's some attentive audience I faced too; J. Bayard starin' puzzled, the lawyer with his eyes squinted hard at her, and young Royce growin' pale around the gills. It was that look of his that hurried me on.

"Why, it ain't so much," says I; "only when I knew you you was housekeeper at the Twombly-Cranes, wa'n't you?"

"Mother!" says the young gent choky, jumpin' to his feet.

"I was," says she. "That was four years ago, when Royce was a freshman. Very glad I was to get the position too, and not a little pleased that I was able to fill it. Why? Because it gave me a chance to learn there the things I wanted to know; the things I needed to know, Royce, as your mother."

But he only gazes at her blank and shocked.

"Can't you understand, Royce?" she goes on pleadin'. "You know how we have moved from place to place; how at times my cards have read 'Mrs. James R. Hammond,' then 'Mrs. J. Royce Hammond,' and finally 'Mrs. Royce Hammond'? But it was all useless. Always someone came who knew, and after that—well, I was just the widow of Hungry Jim Hammond."

"Not that I cared for myself. I was never ashamed of Hungry Jim while he lived. He was a real man, Jim Hammond was, honest and kind and brave. And if he was crude and rough, it was only because he'd lived that way,

because he'd had to. He let them call him Hungry Jim too. No one ever knew him to resent it. But it hurt, just the same. He tried to live it down, there in Denver, tried to be refined and polite; but those years in the desert couldn't be wiped out so easily. He was Hungry Jim to the last.

“ He wanted his son to be different, though. ‘ Outfit him to travel with the best, Annie,’ he used to say to me during those last days, ‘ and see that he gets on a polish. Promise, now!’ I promised. And I've done as well as I could. I've lived for that. But I soon found that real refinement was something you couldn't order at the store. I found that before I could get it for Royce I must have at least a speaking acquaintance with it myself.

“ That meant associating with nice people. But nice people didn't care to mix with Mrs. Jim Hammond. I didn't blame them for shutting their front doors to me. I had to get in, though. So I slipped in by the back way—as housekeeper. I kept my eyes and ears open. I picked up their little tricks of speech and manner, their ways of doing things. I toned my voice down, schooled myself, until I knew the things that Royce ought to know. It wasn't easy, especially the giving him up during his holidays and sending him off with his college friends, when I wanted him to be with me. Oh, how much I did miss him those two summers! But I had promised Jim, and—and—well, I

think I've made of Royce what he wanted me to make of him."

Somehow or other, as she stops, we all turns towards young Hammond. His face ain't pale any more. It's well pinked up.

"By Jove!" says J. Bayard enthusiastic. "But that's what I call real pluck, Mrs. Hammond. And your son does you credit too. So what if the Twombly-Cranes might remember you as a former housekeeper? They don't know the young man, needn't know just who he is. Why not accept for him? Why not give him a chance? What do you say, McCabe?"

"Sure!" says I. "I'm backin' him to qualify."

"It might mean," goes on J. Bayard insinuat'ing, "an opportunity to—well, to meet the right girl, you know."

—Mrs. Hammond draws in her breath sharp and clasps her hands tight. I could see the picture she was watchin' on the screen,—Royce and a real swell young lady plutess trippin' towards the altar; maybe a crest on the fam'ly note paper.

"Oh!" says she. "And he should have the chance, shouldn't he? Well then, he must go. And you can just leave me out."

That seemed to settle it, and we was all takin' a deep breath, when Royce steps to the center of the stage. He puts his arm gentle around Mrs. Hammond and pats her on the shoulder.

"Sorry, Mother," says he, "but I'm going

to do nothing of the sort. You're an old dear, and the best mother a boy ever had. I never knew how much you had given up for me, never dreamed. But from now on it's going to be different. It's my turn now!"

"But—but, Royce," protests Mrs. Hammond, "you—you don't quite understand. We can't go on living as we have. Our income isn't so much as it was once, and——"

"I know," said Royce. "I had a talk with your attorney last week. It's the fault of that Honduras rubber plantation, where most of our funds are tied up. That Alvarez, your rascally Spanish superintendent, has been robbing you right and left. Well, I'm going to put a stop to that."

"You, Royce!" says Mother.

"Yes," says he quiet but earnest, "I'm going down there and fire him. I'm going to run the plantation myself for awhile."

"Why, Royce!" gasps Mrs. Hammond.

He smiles and pats her on the shoulder again. "I know," he goes on. "I seem useless enough. I've been trained to shine at dinner parties, and balls, and *thés dansants*. I suppose I can too. And I've learned to sound my final G's, and to use the right forks, and how to make a parting speech to my hostess. So you've kept your promise to Father. But I've been thinking it all over lately. That isn't the sort of person I want to be. You say Father was a real man. I want to be a real man too. I

mean to try, anyway. This little affair with Alvarez ought to test me. They say he's rather a bad one, that he can't be fired. We'll see about that. There's a steamer for Belize next Thursday. I'm going to sail on her. Will you go along too?"

For a minute they stood there, Mother and Sonny boy, gazin' into each other's eyes without sayin' a word; and then—well, we turns our backs as they goes to a clinch and Mother turns on the sprinkler.

But J. Bayard's programme for helpin' Royce break into the younger set is bugged for fair. Instead we've dug up an expert in rubber farmin' and are preparin' to send him down as first assistant to the classiest plantation manager that ever started for Honduras. Mrs. Hammond announces that she's goin' too.

"There's good stuff in that young chap," says J. Bayard. "He isn't the son of Hungry Jim for nothing. I'll bet he wins out!"

"Win or lose," says I, "he's ducked bein' a parlor rat for life, which is something."

CHAPTER VIII

GUMMING GOPHER TO THE MAP

I'd heard the front office door pushed open and listened to a couple of heavy steps on the floor runner before I glances round to find this high party with the wide, stooped shoulders and the rugged face standin' there beamin' at me genial and folksy. In one hand he has a green cloth bag with somethin' square in it, and in the other he has a broad-brimmed soft hat about the color of Camembert cheese. A tank station delegate and no mistake!

“The Horse Dealers' Exchange is over east of Fourth avenue, about eight blocks down,” says I.

He chuckles good-natured and shakes his head. “You got two more comin' to you, Brother,” says he.

“Is it sawmill machinery you're lookin' for, then,” says I, “or the home office of Marriage Bells?”

“Struck out!” says he. “Now it's my bat. Are you J. Bayard Steele, Mister?”

“Honest, now,” says I, “do I look it?”

“Then I reckon you're the other one—Professor McCabe,” says he.

“Line hit over center field!” says I.
“What’s the follow up to that?”

“No hurry,” says he. “Have a button first.”

“Eh?” says I, gawpin’, as he tosses the green bag and yellow lid onto a chair, dives into his side pocket, and proceeds to pin something on my coat lapel.

“Plenty of ’em,” says he. “Here, take some for your friends. How’s that for a slogan, anyway? ‘Go to Gopher!’ Good advice too. Gopher’s the garden spot of the universe.”

“Gopher what—where is it?” says I.

“Why,” says he, “Gopher, U.S.A. That’s the idea! I’m from there. Hubbs is the name,—Nelson Hubbs, secretary of the Gopher Board of Trade,—and I never miss a chance to give Gopher a boost.”

“If this is a sample,” says I, “you don’t need to make an affidavit. But you wanted to see J. Bayard Steele, didn’t you?”

It was as I’d suspicioned. Mr. Hubbs was No. 5 on the kindly deeds list that Pyramid Gordon had wished on Steele and me. We was to apply soothin’ acts and financial balm to all the old grouches that Pyramid had left behind him, you remember, on a commission basis.

Seems J. Bayard had been tracin’ Hubbs up by mail for more’n a month, and at that it was just by chance one of his letters had been for-

warded to the right place. So Hubbs had come on to see what it was all about.

“Course,” says he, “I remember this Gordon; but I didn’t think he would me, and I can’t see how settlin’ up his will could——”

“Threw the hooks into you sometime or other, didn’t he?” says I.

“I dun’no’s you’d rightly call it that, either,” says Hubbs, runnin’ his long fingers reflective through his heavy mop of wavy hair. “I was station agent and dispatcher out at Kayuse Creek the only time we met up—and of all the forsaken, dreary, one-mule towns along the line that was the worst. I’d been there a year and a half, with no signs of ever gettin’ out, and I’d got so I hated every human being in sight, includin’ myself. I even hated the people in the trains that went through, because they was goin’ somewhere, and I wasn’t. You know how it is.”

“Well?” says I.

“So when this special pulled in, two private cars and a blind baggage,” he goes on, “and a potty conductor asked me for a clear track to Omaha, I turned him down flat. Might of done it, you know, for the express was four hours behind schedule; but I was just too ornery. I let on I hadn’t got the order, made ’em back their old special on a siding, and held ’em there all one blisterin’ hot afternoon, while they come in by turns and cussed me. But your Mr. Gordon was the only one that talked straight to the

point. 'Let us through, or I'll see that you're fired before morning!' says he, and fired I was. The night freight dropped, a new agent, and by breakfast time I was a wanderer on the face of the earth. Which was the best thing, Sir, that ever happened to me! I might have stuck in Kayuse Creek until this day.'

"How long was it until you discovered this Gopher spot?" says I. "Near a dozen years," says he, "and during that time, Sir, I've had a whirl at more different kinds of industry than you'd believe existed, from runnin' a self-binder to canvassin' for the Life of James A. Garfield. It was Possum Oil that brought me good luck. Boiled linseed with camphor and a little tincture of iron was what it was really made of; but there was a 'possum picture on the label, and I've had testimonials provin' that it has cured nearly every disease known to man, from ringworm to curvature of the spine. I'd worked up a fifteen-minute spiel too that was a gem of street corner eloquence, and no matter where I stuck up my flare I could do an evenin's business runnin' from ten to forty dollars.

"So when I hit them corn fritters of Mrs. Whipple's that night in Gopher I had no more notion of quittin' the road than a prairie chicken has of breakin' into a hencoop. But say, Brother, no human being ever made tastier corn fritters than them. 'Young lady,' says I to the half-grown girl that waited on table, 'who built these?'—'Mrs. Whipple,' says she.

‘ Present my best compliments to her,’ says I, ‘ and tell me where I can find Mr. Whipple. I want to congratulate him.’—‘ Lawzee! Whipple?’ says she. ‘ Why, he died back East goin’ on six years ago.’—‘ Then,’ says I, ‘ I’ll take the message to Mrs. Whipple myself. She’s around, I suppose?’—‘ No,’ says the girl. ‘ Soon’s she got supper ready she had to go down to the square ’lectioneerin’. She’s runnin’ for Mayor.’

“ Say, Professor McCabe, it was a fact! Besides conductin’ her boardin’ house and bein’ president of the Civic League, she was candidate for Mayor on an independent ticket. Got it too, Sir! They have the vote out in our State, you know.

“ Well, hearin’ that sort of cooled me down a bit. I thought she’d be a hatchet-faced female with a voice like a guinea hen. So I didn’t see her until I was all packed up to leave next day and hunted her up to pay my bill. And say, Brother, doggoned if she don’t turn out to be about the plumpest, cheeriest, winningest little body that ever I see unclaimed! Nothin’ stand-offish about her, either. ‘ There!’ says she. ‘ Look at you, going off with all that dandruff on your coat collar! Mamie, bring me that whisk broom.’—‘ Ma’am,’ says I, when she’d finished the job and added a little pat to my necktie, ‘ my name is Hubbs. It’s a homely name, and I’m a homely man; but if there’s any chance of ever persuadin’ you to be Mrs. Nel-

son Hubbs, I'll stick around this town until the crack of doom.'—'Now don't be foolish,' says she. 'Run along. I'm busy.' Wa'n't so encouragin', was it? 'Let's see,' says I, 'what place is this anyhow?'—'The idea!' says she. 'It's Gopher; and let me tell you, Mr. Hubbs, some day it's going to be one of the finest cities west of Chicago!'—'While you're in it,' says I, 'it's goin' to be good enough for me. I'm goin' to stay right here.'

"Well, that's what I did, Sir. The Gopher Gazette was for sale, and inside of twenty-four hours I'd bought it, one-third cash, and I've been runnin' it ever since. And I've proposed to Mrs. Whipple once a week reg'lar the whole ten months."

"Only to get more of that run-along-now advice?" says I.

He winks rapid two or three times by way of relievin' his feelin's. "It ain't exactly as bad as that," says he. "I reckon she's kind of got used to my homely face, and if I have any good points at all, you can bet she's found 'em. Anyway, one night a couple of months ago she dropped a hint that was like manna from the sky. I've been livin' on it ever since. 'Nelson,' says she, 'there's only one man I'd have, and that's the man who will put Gopher on the map.'"

"Oh-ho!" says I. "Hence the buttons?"

"That's only part of my scheme," says Hubbs. "The rest I worked out between the

time I got word from this Mr. Steele and the day I left for New York. Up to then I hadn't thought of comin' East to boost Gopher; but the letter settled me. 'I'm goin' on,' says I to Mrs. Whipple, 'and if Gopher ain't on the map when I come back, I'll never ask you again to change your name to Hubbs. I'll change mine to Dubb!' So you see, Professor, I ain't got any time to waste. Where can I find Mr. Steele?"

I gave him directions for locatin' J. Bayard, and off he pikes, swingin' the green bag jaunty in one big paw. He'd been here ten minutes, and he'd told me the story of his life. Now see what Steele gets out of him.

"Shorty," says J. Bayard, driftin' in languid after lunch and caressin' his bank president whiskers approvin' as he camps down by the desk, "the deeper I get into the career of your late friend, Pyramid Gordon, the more I am amazed at the infinite pains he took to deal unjustly with so many different persons of no account."

"All of which means, I expect," says I, "that you've been havin' a talk with Hubbs. Well, what you goin' to do for him?"

Mr. Steele shrugs his shoulders. "He is simply impossible!" says he.

"How's that?" says I.

"I was unable to decide," says J. Bayard, "whether he was mentally unbalanced, or just plain crank. Comes from some absurd little

hole out West, and has but one idea in his head, —to boom that place. Tried to pin a beastly button on me. Ah! I see you have one.”

“ Sure! ” says I. “ ‘Go to Gopher!’ Catchy, ain’t it? ”

“ Bah! ” says he. “ What do I care for his little two-by-four village? What does anyone care, save the poor wretches who must live there? And yet he insisted on boring me for one mortal hour with his preposterous schemes. It appears that he has raised an advertising fund of a thousand dollars, and means to open a publicity bureau somewhere downtown.”

“ Well, that’s enterprisin’, ain’t it? ” says I.

“ It’s imbecile! ” says J. Bayard. “ What can he do with a thousand in New York. You might as well try to sprinkle Central Park with a quart watering can. I told him so. I tried to get out of him too some suggestion as to how we could best carry out the terms of Gordon’s crazy will; some kind and generous act that we could do for him, you know. But he would talk of nothing but Gopher—everlastingly and eternally Gopher! ”

“ Yes, ” says I, “ that’s his long suit.”

“ And do you know what he thinks he’s going to do? ” goes on Steele. “ Why, he’s had the nerve to plot out a whole quarter-section around his infernal town, organized a realty company, and had half a million dollars’ worth of Gopher Development shares printed! Thinks he’s going to unload trash like that here

in New York! Now what can I do for such a man? ”

“ Ain’t that right in your line, though? ” says I.

“ It may have been at one time, ” admits J. Bayard; “ but to-day you couldn’t give away nickel chances on the national gold reserve. The market is dead. Even the curb brokers have fallen back on racing tin rolling toys and matching quarters. ”

Well, I couldn’t dispute it. If anyone knows the phony finance game at all, it’s J. Bayard Steele. And the best I could do was to get him to agree to sort of keep track of Hubbs and maybe, after he’d blown all his cash against this bloomin’ stunt, step in and send him back to Gopher before he hit the bread line.

Must have been a week that I didn’t hear from either of ’em, and then here the other afternoon J. Bayard calls up on the ’phone.

“ Shorty, ” says he, “ if you want to see our friend Hubbs reach the pinnacle of his folly, come down to Broad street right away. I’ll meet you in front of the Hancock National! ”

As there’s no rush on at the studio just then I goes down.

“ It’s rich, ” says Steele. “ Actually, that country clown is trying on, right here in New York, the same primitive methods that real estate boomers use in the soggy South and the woolly West. Would you believe it? Come have a look. ”

Well, say, it wa'n't easy gettin' near enough, at that. But we works our way through the mob until we're in front of the buildin', where there's a big, yellow-lettered sign that reads:

GOPHER, U.S.A.
HEADQUARTERS

Underneath the sign was a big window with the sash out and a sort of platform juttin' over the sidewalk. Just as we arrives out steps Nelson Hubbs, wearin' the same rube rig and carryin' the same green bag. He looks just as big and homely and good-natured as ever.

“ Friends,” says he, sweepin' off the alfalfa lid with a flourish, “ out in Gopher we always like to open up with a little music; and while I ain't no Caruso, or anything like that, I'm goin' to do my best.”

A snicker runs through the crowd at that, turnin' to haw-haws as he proceeds to unlimber something from the green bag. It's an accordion, one of these push and pull organs. Believe me, though, he could sing some! Throwin' back his head and shakin' that heavy mop of hair, he roars out deep and strong the first advertisin' solo, I guess, that New York ever heard.

“ Now, Friends, everybody in on the chorus!” he calls. “ Every-body! Here she goes!

“Oh, I want to go to Gopher—Gopher—
 Oh, I want to go to Gopher—Gopher!
 The streets are straight, the sky/is high,
 You’ll strike it rich, and live on pie,
 You can’t get sick, and you never die,
 In Gopher, U. S. A.”

Did they join in? Say, it was a swingin’ tune, the words was easy to follow, and the crowd was ready for anything. They simply cut loose, and by the time they’d done that chorus two or three times he had ’em right with him. Then he springs his business spiel.

Talk about your boost orations—say, that was a classic! He tells ’em confidential how Gopher is the comin’ metropolis of the great West; how, “with its main boulevard laid out along the sinuous, lovely banks of the pellucid Pinto River, and its western boundaries stretching off to the sunset-tinted tops of Soup Kettle Range, it has a scenic setting unsurpassed anywhere this side of Switzerland.” And when it comes to predictin’ how prosperity has picked Gopher for its very own, he goes the limit. Next he tells ’em about the development company and the shares.

“Remember, Friends,” says he, “every share means a front foot, and every front foot a fortune. Send in fifty shares, and we’ll give you a deed to a city lot. First come first served, and the early bird laps up the cream. I don’t urge you to buy ’em. I’m just giving you a chance to get in on the ground floor. And if

you don't want to come in to-day, maybe you will to-morrow. Anyway, have a button. Wear it! Tell your friends about Gopher. Here you are! Every-body have a button!"

With that he scatters handful after handful broadcast into the crowd, which catches 'em eager. Even J. Bayard gets excited and grabs for one.

"By George, Shorty!" says he. "Hanged if there isn't the germ of a good idea in this scheme of his! Every share a front foot! And if he could only get the buying started——"

Steele is gazin' over the heads of the crowd absentminded. All of a sudden he breaks out again. "I have it!" says he. "I'll get that curb gang to fooling with Gopher."

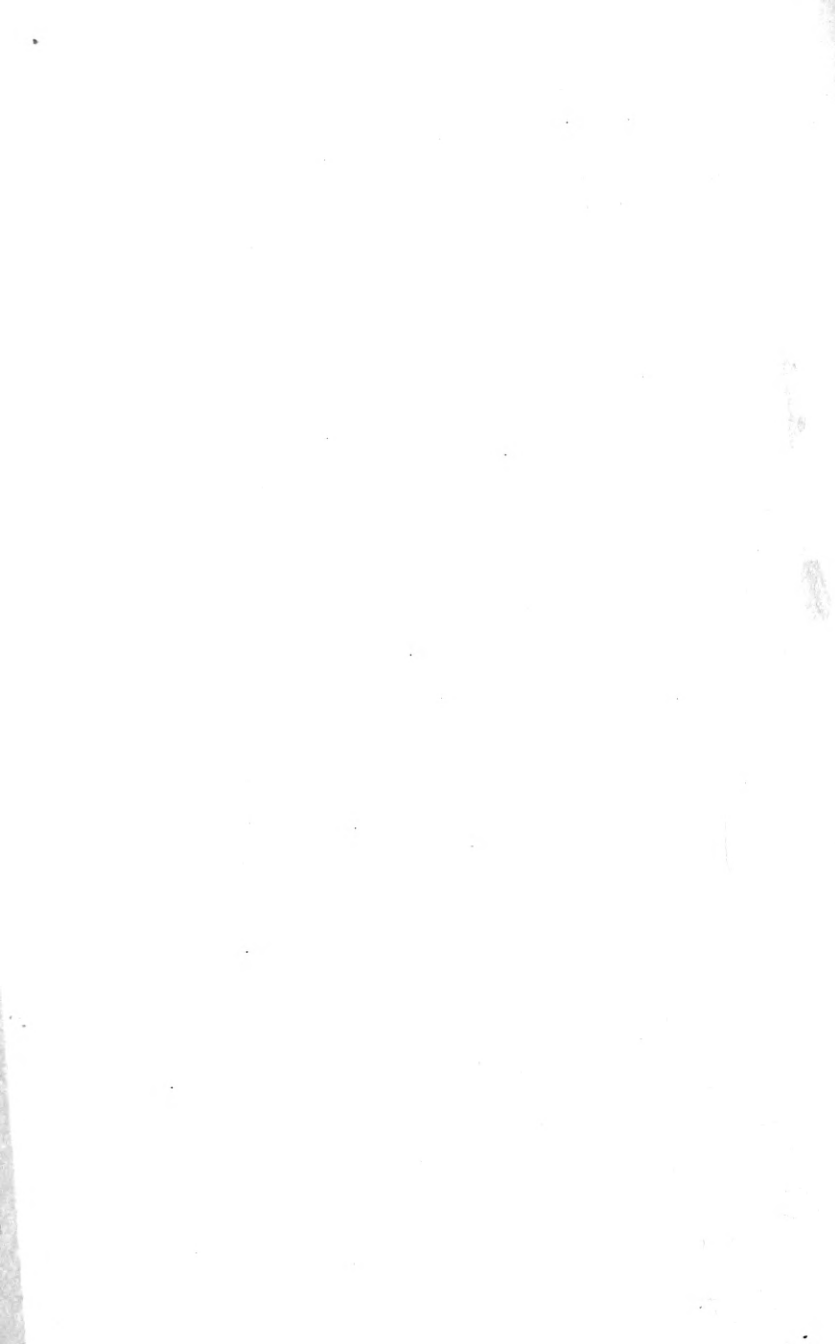
But, foxy as he was, I don't believe J. Bayard knew just how big a bonfire he was touchin' off. I know I thought he was nutty when he wants me to o.k. his plan for buyin' a hundred shares to distribute free.

"Bait!" says he. "They'll bite! You watch 'em!"

Well, if you've been followin' the market close, you know what happened. I expect the first bids was made just as a josh. I hear that Gopher Development started at ten cents. Then someone sold a block at fifteen. By noon they'd gone to twenty. Durin' luncheon time a sporty bunch in a rathskeller cooked up the bright idea that it would be humorous to sell Gopher short and hammer the price down to



"NOW, FRIENDS!" HE CALLS, "EVERYBODY IN ON THE CHORUS."



five cents. Before three P.M. the gross transactions had run into the thousands.

I was in Hubbs' office when the first real money was paid over for Gopher. A hook-nosed young broker in a shepherd plaid suit and a pink felt hat rushes in and plunks down twenty dollars for fifty shares at the market. Hubbs was just passin' 'em over too, when Steele interferes.

"Five more, please," says J. Bayard. "We are holding Gopher at 50."

"Wha'd'ye mean, fifty?" gasps the curb man. But he was short on a three-fifteen delivery, and he had to put up the extra five.

"Stick to that rule," Steele advises Hubbs. "Ask 'em ten points more than outside quotations."

What really got things goin', though, was when some of the stock clerks and bookkeepers, who'd heard and talked nothin' but Gopher these last two days, begun buyin' lots outright and turnin' 'em in for deeds. Whether or not they believed all Hubbs had fed 'em about Gopher don't matter. They was takin' a chance. So they slips out at noon and gives real orders. Course, they wa'n't plungin'; but the combined effect was the same.

And it don't take the curb long to get wise. "The suckers are buying Gopher," was the word passed round. Then maybe the quotations didn't jump! There wa'n't any quarter matchin' down in Broad street after that.

They was too busy yellin' Gopher at each other. Up she went,—75, then 85, then 110, and when closin' hour come the third day it was the liveliest scene inside the ropes that the margin district had known in years.

I expect the newspapers helped a lot too. They had a heap of fun with Hubbs and his Gopher proposition,—Hubbs of Gopher, U.S.A. They printed pictures of him playin' the accordion, and interviews reproducin' his descriptive gems about "the banks of the pellucid Pinto," and such.

But you never can tell how a comedy stab is goin' to turn out. This game of buyin' real estate shares for a dollar or so, with the prospects that before night it might be worth twice as much, was one that hit 'em hard. By Friday Gopher stock was being advertised like Steel preferred, and the brokers was flooded with buyin' orders. Some of the big firms got into the game too. A fat German butcher came all the way down from the Bronx, counted out a thousand dollars in bills to Nelson Hubbs, and was satisfied to walk away with a deed for a hundred front feet of Gopher realty. He wasn't such a boob, either. Two hours later he could have closed out five hundred to the good.

It wa'n't like a stock flurry, where there's an inside gang manipulin' the wires. All the guidin' hand there was in this deal was that of J. Bayard Steele, and he contents himself with

eggin' Hubbs on to stand firm on that ten-cent raise.

“Not a penny more, not a penny less,” says he, beamin'. “It'll get 'em.”

And I don't know when I've seen him look more contented. As for Nelson Hubbs, he seems a little dazed at it all; but he keeps his head and smiles good-natured on everybody. Not until Gopher Development hits twenty-five dollars a share does he show any signs of gettin' restless.

“Boys,” says he, bangin' his fist down on the desk, “it's great! I've turned that thousand-dollar fund into fifty, and as near as I can figure it property values along our Main street have been jumped about eight hundred per cent. They've heard of it out home, and they're just wild. I expect I ought to stay right here and push things; but—well, McCabe, maybe you can guess.”

“No word from a certain party, eh?” says I.

Hubbs shakes his head and starts pacin' up and down in front of the window. He hadn't done more'n three laps, though, before in blows a messenger boy and hands him a telegram.

“We-e-e-yow!” yells Hubbs. “Hey, Shorty, it's come—doggoned if it ain't come! Look at that!”

It was a brief bulletin, but full of meat. It runs like this:

Good work, Nelson. You've done it. Gopher's on the map.

And the last we saw of him, after he'd turned the stock business over to Mendell & Co., he was pikin' for a west-bound train with his grip in one fist and that old accordion in the other.

J. Bayard smiles after him friendly and indulgent. "A woman in the case, I suppose?" says he.

"Uh-huh," says I. "The plumpest, cheeriest, winnin'est little body ever left unclaimed,—his description. She's the lady Mayor out there. And if I'm any judge, with them two holdin' it down, Gopher's on the map to stay."

CHAPTER IX

WHAT LINDY HAD UP HER SLEEVE

“ BUT think of it, Shorty! ” says Sadie. “ What an existence! ”

“ There’s plenty worse off than her, ” says I; “ so what’s the use? ”

“ I can’t help it, ” says she. “ Twenty years! No holidays, no home, no relatives: nothing but sew and mend, sew and mend—and for strangers, at that! Talk about dull gray lives—ugh! ”

“ Well, she’s satisfied, ain’t she? ” says I.

“ That’s the worst of it, ” says Sadie. “ She seems to live for her work. Goodness knows how early she’s up and at it in the morning, and at night I have to drive her out of the sewing room! ”

“ And you kick at that? ” says I. “ Huh! Why, on lower Fifth-ave. they capitalize such habits and make ’em pay for fifteen-story build-in’s. Strikes me this Lindy of yours is perfectly good sweatshop material. You don’t know a good thing when you see it, Sadie. ”

“ There, there, Shorty! ” says she. “ Don’t try to be comic about it. There’s nothing in the least funny about Lindy. ”

She was dead right too; and all I meant by my feeble little cracks was that a chronic case of acute industry was too rare a disease for me to diagnose offhand. Honest, it almost gave me the fidgets, havin' Lindy around the house. Say, she had the busy bee lookin' like a corner loafer with his hands in his pockets!

About once a month we had Lindy with us, for three or four days at a stretch, and durin' that time she'd be gallopin' through all kinds of work, from darnin' my socks or rippin' up an old skirt, to embroiderin' the fam'ly monogram on the comp'ny tablecloths; all for a dollar'n a half per, which I understand is under union rates. Course, Sadie always insists on throwin' in something for overtime; but winnin' the extra didn't seem to be Lindy's main object. She just wanted to keep goin', and if the work campaign wa'n't all planned out for her to cut loose on the minute she arrived, she'd most have a fit. Even insisted on havin' her meals served on the sewin' table, so she wouldn't lose any time. Sounds too good to be true, don't it? But remember this ain't a class I'm describin': it's just Lindy.

And of all the dried-up little old maids I ever see, Lindy was the queerest specimen. Seems she was well enough posted on the styles, and kept the run of whether sleeves was bein' worn full or tight, down over the knuckles or above the elbow, and all that; but her own costume was always the same,—a dingy brown dress

that fits her like she'd cut it out in the dark and had put it together with her eyes shut,—a faded old brown coat with funny sleeves that had little humps over the shoulders, and a dusty black straw lid of no partic'lar shape, that sported a bunch of the saddest lookin' violets ever rescued from the ashheap.

Then she had such a weird way of glidin' around silent, and of shrinkin' into corners, and flattenin' herself against the wall whenever she met anyone. Meek and lowly? Say, every motion she made seemed to be sort of a dumb apology for existin' at all! And if she had to go through a room where I was, or pass me in the hall, she'd sort of duck her head, hold one hand over her mouth, and scuttle along like a mouse beatin' it for his hole.

You needn't think I'm pilin' on the agony, either. I couldn't exaggerate Lindy if I tried. And if you imagine it's cheerin' to have a human being as humble as all that around, you're mistaken. Kind of made me feel as if I was a slave driver crackin' the whip.

And there wa'n't any special reason that I could see for her actin' that way. Outside of her clothes, she wa'n't such a freak. That is, she wa'n't deformed, or anything like that. She wa'n't even wrinkled or gray haired; though how she kept from growin' that way I couldn't figure out. I put it down that her lonesome, old maid existence must have struck in and paralyzed her soul.

There was another queer quirk to her too. Work up as much sympathy as you wanted to, you couldn't do anything for her. Sadie ain't slow at that, you know. She got int'rested in her right off, and when she discovers how Lindy lives in a couple of cheap rooms down in the Bronx all by herself, and never goes anywhere or has any fun, she proceeds to spring her usual uplift methods. Wouldn't Lindy like a ticket to a nice concert? No, thanks, Lindy didn't care much about music. Or the theater? No, Lindy says she's afraid to go trapesin' around town after dark. Wouldn't she quit work for an hour or so and come for a spin in the car, just to get the air? Lindy puts her hand over her mouth and shakes her head. Automobiles made her nervous. She tried one once, and was so scared she couldn't work for two hours after. The subway trains were bad enough, goodness knows!

I couldn't begin to tell you all the things Lindy was afraid of,—crowds, the dark, of getting lost, of meetin' strangers, of tryin' anything new. I remember seein' her once, comin' out on the train. She's squeezed into the end seat behind the door, and was huddled up there, grippin' a little black travelin' bag in one hand and a rusty umbrella in the other, and keepin' her eyes on the floor, for all the world like she'd run away from somewhere and was stealin' a ride. Get it, do you?

But wait! There was one point where Lindy

had it on most of us. She knew where she was goin'. Didn't seem to have any past worth speakin' about, except that she'd been born in England,—father used to keep a little store on some side street in Dover,—and she'd come over here alone when she was quite a girl. As for the present—well, I've been tryin' to give you a bird's-eye view of that.

But when it comes to the future Lindy was right there with the goods. Had it all mapped out for twenty years to come. Uh-huh! She told Sadie about it, ownin' up to bein' near forty, and said that when she was sixty she was goin' to get into an Old Ladies' Home. Some prospect—what? She'd even picked out the joint and had 'em put her name down. It would cost her three hundred and fifty dollars, which she had salted away in the savings bank already, and now she was just driftin' along until she could qualify in the age limit. Livin' just for that!

“ Ah, can the gloom stuff, Sadie! ” says I as she whispers this latest bulletin. “ You give me the willies, you and your Lindy! Why, that old horse chestnut out there in the yard leads a more excitin' existence than that! It's preparin' to leaf out again next spring. But Lindy! Bah! Say, just havin' her in the house makes the air seem moldy. I'm goin' out and tramp around the grounds a bit before dinner. ”

That was a good hunch. It's a clear, crisp evenin' outside, with the last red of the sun

just showin' in the northwest and a thin new moon hangin' over Long Island Sound off in the east, and in a couple of turns I shook off the whole business. I'd taken one circle and was roundin' the back of the garage, when I sees something dark slip into a tree shadow up near the house.

"That you, Dominick?" I sings out.

There's no answer to that, and, knowin' that if there's one failin' Dominick don't possess it's bein' tonguetied, I gets suspicious. Besides, a couple of porch-climbin' jobs had been pulled off in the neighborhood recent, and, even though I do carry a burglar policy, I ain't crazy about havin' strangers messin' through the bureau drawers while I'm tryin' to sleep. So I sneaks along the hedge for a ways, and then does the sleuthy approach across the lawn on the right flank. Another minute and I've made a quick spring and has my man pinned against the tree with both his wrists fast and my knee in his chest.

"Woof!" says he, deep and guttural.

"Excuse the warm welcome," says I, "but that's only a sample of what we pass out to stray visitors like you. Sizin' up the premises, were you, and gettin' ready to collect a few souvenirs?"

"A thousand pardons," says he, "if I have seem to intrude!"

"Eh?" says I. That wa'n't exactly the comeback you'd expect from a second-story

worker, and he has a queer foreign twist to his words.

“It is possible,” he goes on, “that I have achieved the grand mistake.”

“Maybe,” says I, loosenin’ up on him a little. “What was it you thought you was after?”

“The house of one McCah-be,” says he, “a professor of fists, I am told.”

“That’s a new description of me,” says I, “but I’m the party. All of which don’t prove, though, that you ain’t a crook.”

“Crook?” says he. “Ah, a felon! But no, Effendi. I come on an errand of peace, as Allah is good.”

How was that now, havin’ Allah sprung on me in my own front yard? Why travel?

“Say, come out here where I can get a better look,” says I, draggin’ him out of the shadow. “There! Well, of all the——”

No wonder I lost my breath; for what I’ve picked up off the front lawn looks like a stray villain from a comic opera. He’s a short, barrel-podded gent, mostly costumed in a long black cape affair and one of these tasseled Turkish caps. About all the features I can make out are a pair of bushy eyebrows, a prominent hooked beak, and a set of crisp, curlin’ black whiskers. Hardly the kind to go shinnin’ up waterspouts or squeezin’ through upper windows. Still, I’d almost caught him in the act.

“ If that’s a disguise you’ve got on,” says I, “ it’s a bird. And if it ain’t—say, let’s hear the tale. Who do you claim to be, anyway? ”

“ Many pardons again, Effendi,” says he, “ but it is my wish to remain—what you call it?—incognito.”

“ Then you don’t get your wish,” says I. “ No John Doe game goes with me. Out with it! Who and what? ”

“ But I make protest,” says he. “ Rather would I depart on my way.”

“ Ah, ditch that! ” says I. “ I caught you actin’ like a suspicious character. Now, if you can account for yourself, I may turn you loose; but if you don’t, it’s a case for the police.”

“ Ah, no, no! ” he objects. “ Not the constables! Allah forbid! I—I will make explanation.”

“ Then let it come across quick,” says I. “ First off, what name are you flaggin’ under? ”

“ At my home,” says he, “ I am known as Pasha Dar Bunda.”

“ Well, that’s some name, all right,” says I. “ Now the next item, Pasha, is this, What set you to prowlin’ around the home of one McCabe? ”

“ Ah, but you would not persist thus far! ” says he, pleadin’. “ That is a personal thing, something between myself and Allah alone.”

“ You don’t say,” says I. “ Sorry to butt in, but I’ve got to have it all. Come, now! ”

“ But, Effendi——” he begins.

“ No, not Fender,” says I, “ nor Footboard, or anything like that: just plain McCabe.”

“ It is a word of respect,” says he, “ such as Sir Lord; thus, Effendi McCabe.”

“ Well, cut out the frills and let’s get down to brass tacks,” says I. “ You’re here because you’re here, I expect. But what else? ”

He sighs, and then proceeds to let go of a little information. “ You have under your roof,” says he, “ a Meesis Vogel, is it not? ”

“ Vogel? ” says I, puzzled for a second. “ You don’t mean Lindy, do you? ”

“ She was called that, yes,” says the Pasha, “ Meelinda.”

“ But she’s a Miss—old maid,” says I.

“ Ah? ” says he, liftin’ his bushy eyebrows. “ A Mees, eh? It may be so. They tell me at her place of living that she is to be found here. *Voilà!* That is all.”

“ But what about her? ” says I. “ Where do you come in? ”

“ Once when I am in England,” says he, “ many years gone past, I know her. I learn that she is in New York. Well, I find myself in America too. I thought to see her. Why not? A glimpse, no more.”

“ Is it the style where you come from,” says I, “ to gumshoe around and peek in the windows to see old friends? ”

“ In my country,” says he, “ men do not—but then we have our own customs. I have explain. Now I may depart.”

“ Not so fast, old scout! ” says I. “ If it’s so you’re a friend of Lindy, she’ll be wantin’ to see you, and all we got to do is to step inside and call her down.”

“ But thanks,” says he. “ It is very kind. I will not trouble, however. It need not be.”

“ Needn’t, eh? ” says I. “ Look here, Pasha So and So, you can’t put over anything so thin on me! You’re up to something or other. You sure look it. Anyway, I’m goin’ to march you in and find out from Lindy herself whether she knows you or not. Understand? ”

He sighs resigned. “ Since you are a professor of fists, it must be so,” says he. “ But remark this, I do not make the request to see her, and—and you may say to her that it is Don Carlos who is here.”

“ Ah-ha! ” says I. “ Another pen name, eh? Don Carlos! Low Dago, or Hidalgo? ”

“ My father,” says he, “ was a Spanish gentleman of Hebrew origin. My mother was French.”

“ Some combination! ” says I. “ And Lindy knows you best as Don Carlos, does she? We’ll soon test that.”

So I escorts him in by the side door, plants him in the livin’ room where I can keep an eye on him, and hoohoos gentle up the stairs to Sadie.

“ Yes? ” says she.

“ Shut the sewin’ room door,” says I.

“ All right,” says she. “ Well? ”

“ There’s a gent down here, Sadie,” says I, “ that looks like a cross between a stage pirate and an Armenian rug peddler.”

“ For goodness’ sake!” says Sadie. “ Not in the house! What on earth did you let him in for?”

“ Because,” says I, “ he claims to be an old friend of Lindy’s.”

“ Of Lindy’s!” she gasps. “ Why, what _____”

“ I don’t know the rest,” says I. “ You spring it on her. Tell her it’s Don Carlos, and then let me know what she says.”

That seems like a simple proposition; but Sadie takes a long time over it. I could hear her give a squeal of surprise at something, and then she seems to be askin’ a lot of fool questions. In the course of five or six minutes, though, she leans over the stair rail lookin’ sort of excited.

“ Well?” says I. “ Does she know him?”

“ Know him!” says Sadie. “ Why, she says he’s her husband!”

“ Not Lindy’s!” I gasps.

“ That’s what she says,” insists Sadie.

“ Great Scott!” says I. “ Must be some mistake about this. Wait a minute. Here, you, Pasha! Come here! Lindy says you’re her husband. Is that so?”

“ Oh, yes,” says he, as easy as you please. “ Under your laws I suppose I am.”

“ Well, wouldn’t that frost you!” says I.

“ But, say, Sadie, why don’t she come down and see him, then? ”

“ Just what I’ve been asking her,” says Sadie. “ She says she’s too busy, and that if he wants to see her he must come up.”

“ Well, what do you know! ” says I. “ Pasha, do you want to see her? ”

“ As I have told,” says he, “ there is no need. I do not demand it.”

“ Well, of all the cold-blooded pairs! ” says I. “ How long since you’ve seen her? ”

“ Very long,” says he; “ perhaps twenty years.”

“ And now all you can work up is a mild curiosity for a glimpse through the window, eh? ” says I.

He shrugs his shoulders careless.

“ Then, by the great horned spoon,” I goes on, “ you’re goin’ to get what you came after! Trail along upstairs after me. This way. In through here. There you are, Pasha! Lindy, here’s your Don Carlos! ”

“ Oh! ” says she, lookin’ up from the shirt-waist she was bastin’ a sleeve on, and not even botherin’ to take the pins out of her mouth.

And maybe they ain’t some cross-mated couple too! This Pasha party shows up ponderous and imposin’, in spite of the funny little fez arrangement on his head. He’s thrown his cloak back, revealin’ a regulation frock coat; but under that is some sort of a giddy-tinted silk-blouse effect, and the fringed ends of a

bright red sash hangs down below his knee on the left side. He's got a color on him like the inside of an old coffeepot, and the heavy, crinkly beard makes him look like some foreign Ambassador. While Lindy—well, in her black sewin' dress and white apron, she looks slimmer and more old maidish than ever.

He confines his greetin' to a nod of the head, and stands there gazin' at her as calm as if he was starin' at some stranger in the street.

"I suppose you've come to take me away with you, Carlos?" says she.

"No," says he.

"But I thought," says Lindy, "I—I thought some day you might. I didn't know, though. I haven't planned on it."

"Is it your wish to go with me?" says he.

"Why, I'm your wife, you know," says she.

"You had my letters, did you?" he goes on.

"Four," says she. "There was one from Spain, when you were a brigand, and another——"

"A brigand!" breaks in Sadie. "Do you mean that, Lindy?"

"Wasn't that it?" asks Lindy of him.

"For two years, Madam," says Don Carlos, bowin' polite. "A dull sort of business, mingling so much with stupid tourists. Bah! And such small gains! By the time you have divided with the soldiers little is left. So I gave it up."

“The next came from that queer place,” says Lindy, “Port—Port——”

“Port Said,” helps out Pasha, “where I had a gambling house. That was good for a time. Rather lively also. We had too much shooting and stabbing, though. It was an English officer, that last one. What a row! In the night I left for Tunisia.”

“Oh, yes, Tunis,” says Lindy. “Something about slaves there, wasn’t it?”

“Camels also,” says Pasha. “I traded in both stolen camels and smuggled slaves.”

He throws this off as casual as if he was tellin’ about sellin’ sewin’ machines. I glances over to see how Sadie’s takin’ it, and finds her drawin’ in a long breath.

“Well, I never!” says she explosive. “What a shameless wretch! And you dared confess all this to Lindy?”

“Pardon, Madam,” says he, smilin’ until he shows most of his white teeth, “but I desired no misunderstanding. It is my way with women, to tell them only what is true. If they dislike that—well, there are many others.”

“Humph!” says Sadie, tossin’ her head. “Lindy, do you hear that?”

Lindy nods and keeps right on bastin’ the sleeve.

“But how did you ever come to marry such a person, Lindy?” Sadie demands.

Carlos executes another smile at this and bows polite. “It was my fault,” says he. “I

was in England, waiting for a little affair that happened in Barcelona to blow over. By chance I saw her in her father's shop. Ah, you may find it difficult to believe now, Madam, but she was quite charming,—cheeks flushed like dawn on the desert, eyes like the sea, and limbs as lithe as an Arab maiden's! I talked. She listened. My English was poor; but it is not always words that win. These British girls, though! They cannot fully understand romance. It was she who insisted on marriage. I cared not a green fig. What to me was the mumbling of a churchman, I who cared not for the priests of my mother nor the rabbi of my father? Pah! Two weeks later I gave her some money and left her. Once more in the mountains of Spain I could breathe again—and I made the first English we caught settle the whole bill. That is how it came to be, Madam. Ask her."

Sadie looks at Lindy, who nods. "Father drove me out when I went back," says she; "so I came over here. Carlos had told me where to write. You got all my letters, did you, Carlos?"

"Oh, yes," says he. Then, turnin' to Sadie, "A wonderful writer of letters, Madam,—one every month!"

"Then you knew about little Carlos?" puts in Lindy. "It was a pity. Such lovely big black eyes. He was nearly two. I wish you could have seen him."

“ I also had regret,” says Carlos. “ I read that letter many times. It was because of that, I think, that I continued to read the others, and was at pains to have them sent to me. They would fill a hamper, all of them.”

“ What! ” says Sadie. “ After you knew the kind of monster he was, Lindy, did you keep on writing to him? ”

“ But he was still my husband,” protested Lindy.

“ Bah! ” says Sadie, throwin’ a scornful glance at the Pasha.

Don Carlos he spreads out his hands, and shrugs his shoulders. “ These English! ” says he. “ At first I laughed at the letters. They would come at such odd times; for you can imagine, Madam, that my life has been—well, not as the saints’. And to many different women have I read bits of these letters that came from so far,—to dancing girls, others. Some laughed with me, some wept. One tried to stab me with a dagger afterward. Women are like that. You never know when they will change into serpents. All but this one. Think! Month after month, year after year, letters, letters; about nothing much, it is true, but wishing me good health, happiness, asking me to have care for myself, and saying always that I was loved! Well? Can one go on laughing at things like that? Once I was dangerously hurt, a spearthrust that I got near Biskra, and the letter came to me where I lay in my tent. It

was like a soothing voice, comforting one in the dark. Since then I have watched for those letters. When chance brought me to this side of the world, I found myself wishing for sight of the one who could remain ever the same, could hold the faith in the faithless for so long. So here I am."

"Yes, and you ought to be in jail," says Sadie emphatic. "But, since you're not, what do you propose doing next?"

"I return day after to-morrow," says Don Carlos, "and if the lady who is my wife so wills it she shall go with me."

"Oh, shall she!" says Sadie sarcastic. "Where to, pray?"

"To El Kurfah," says he.

"And just where," says Sadie, "is that?"

"Three days by camel south from Moor-zook," says he. "It is an oasis in the Libyan Desert."

"Indeed!" says Sadie. "And what particular business are you engaged in there,—gambling, robbing, slave selling, or——"

"In El Kurfah," breaks in Don Carlos, bowin' dignified, "I am Pasha Dar Bunda, Minister of Foreign Affairs and chief business agent to Hamid-al-Illa; who, as you may know, is one of the half-dozen rulers claiming to be Emperor of the Desert. Frankly, I admit he has no right to such a title; but neither has any of the others. Hamid, however, is one of the most up-to-date and successful of all the desert

chieftains. My presence here is proof of that. I came to arrange for large shipments of dates and ivory, and to take back to Hamid an automobile and the latest phonograph records."

"I don't like automobiles," says Lindy, finishin' up the sleeve.

"Neither does Hamid," says Pasha; "but he says we ought to have one standing in front of the royal palace to impress the hill tribesmen when they come in. Do you go back to El Kurfah with me, Mrs. Vogel?"

"Yes," says Lindy, rollin' up her apron.

"But, Lindy!" gasps Sadie. "To such a place, with such a man!"

"He is my husband, you know," says she.

And Lindy seems to think when she's put that over that she's said all there was to say on the subject. Sadie protests and threatens and begs. She reminds her what a deep-dyed villain this Carlos party is, and forecasts all sorts of dreadful things that will likely happen to her if she follows him off. But it's all wasted breath.

And all the while Pasha Dar Bunda, alias Don Carlos Vogel, stands there smilin' polite and waitin' patient. But in the end he walks out triumphant, with Lindy, holdin' her little black bag in one hand and her old umbrella in the other, followin' along in his wake.

Then last Friday we went down to one of them Mediterranean steamers to see 'em actually start. And, say, this slim, graceful party,

in the snappy gray travelin' dress, with the smart lid and all the gray veils on, looks about as much like the Lindy we'd known as a hard-boiled egg looks like a frosted cake. Lindy has bloomed out.

“ And when we get to El Kurfah guess what Carlos is going to give me! ” she confides to Sadie. “ A riding camel and Batime. He's one of the best camel drivers in the place, Batime. And I have learned to salaam and say ‘ Allah il Allah. ’ Evryone must do that there. And in our garden are dates and oranges growing. Only fancy! There will be five slaves to wait on me, and when we go to the palace I shall wear gold bracelets on my ankles. Won't that seem odd? It's rather warm in El Kurfah, you know; but I sha'n't mind. Early in the morning, when it is cool, I shall ride out into the sandhills with Carlos. He is going to teach me how to shoot a lion. ”

She was chatterin' along like a schoolgirl, and when the boat pulls out of the slip she waves jaunty to us. Don Carlos, leanin' over the rail alongside of her, gazes at her sort of admirin'.

“ El Kurfah, eh? ” says I to Sadie. “ That's missin' the Old Ladies' Home by some margin, ain't it? ”

CHAPTER X

A CASE OF NOBODY HOME

“YES,” says J. Bayard Steele, adjustin’ the chin part in his whiskers and tiltin’ back comfortable in his chair, “I am beginning to think that the late Pyramid Gordon must have been a remarkably good judge of human nature.”

“For instance?” says I.

“His selection of me as an executor of his whimsical will,” says he.

“Huh!” says I. “How some people do dislike themselves! Now, if you want to know my views on that subject, J. B., I’ve always thought that was one of his battiest moves.”

But he’s got a hide like a sample trunk, Mr. Steele has. He only shrugs his shoulders. “Yes, you have given me similar subtle hints to that effect,” says he. “And I will admit that at first I had doubts as to my fitness. The doing of kind and generous acts for utter strangers has not been a ruling passion with me. But so far I have handled several assignments—in which have I failed?”

“Look who’s been coachin’ you, though!” says I.

J. Bayard bows and waves a manicured hand

graceful. "True," he goes on, "your advice has been invaluable on occasions, friend McCabe; especially in the early stages of my career as a commissioned agent of philanthropy. But I rather fancy that of late I have developed an altruistic instinct of my own; an instinct, if I may say so, in which kindly zeal is tempered by a certain amount of practical wisdom."

"Fine!" says I. "Bein' a little floral tribute, I take it, from Mr. Steele to himself."

"Unless it should occur to you, McCabe," says he, "to make the distinction between offensive egoism and pardonable pride."

"I don't get you," says I; "but I feel the jab. Anyhow, it's instructin' and elevatin' to hear you run on. Maybe you've got somethin' special on your mind?"

"I have," says he, producin' an envelope with some notes scribbled on the back.

"Is that No. 6 on the list?" says I. "Who's the party?"

"Here," says he, tappin' the envelope impressive, "are my findings and recommendations in the case of Hackett Wells."

"Shoot it," says I, settlin' back in the desk chair.

It's a pity too I can't give you all the high English J. Bayard uses up in statin' this simple proposition; for he's in one of them comfortable, expandin', after-luncheon moods, when his waist band fits tight and the elegant lan-

guage just flows from him like he had hydrant connection with the dictionary.

It seems, though, that this Wells party had been sort of a partner of Pyramid's back in the early days. Some sort of a buyers' pool for Eastern coal deliveries, I believe it was, that Hackett had got into accidental and nursed along until he found himself dividin' the cream of the profits with only half a dozen others. Then along came Pyramid with his grand consolidation scheme, holdin' out the bait of makin' Mr. Wells head of the new concern and freezin' out all the rest.

Wells, he swallows it whole: only to wake up a few months later and discover that he's been double crossed. Havin' served his turn, Gordon has just casually spilled him overboard, thinkin' no more of doin' it than he would of chuckin' away a half-smoked cigar.

But to Hackett Wells this was a national calamity. Havin' got in with the easy-money bunch by a fluke in the first place, he wa'n't a man who could come back. Course he brought suit, and wasted a lot of breath callin' Pyramid hard names from a safe distance; but Pyramid's lawyers wore him out in the courts, and he was too busy to care who was cussin' him.

So Mr. Wells and his woe drops out of sight. He's managed to keep hold of a little property that brings him in just enough to scrub along on, and he joins that hungry-eyed, trembly-fingered fringe of margin pikers that hangs

around every hotel broker's branch in town, takin' a timid flier now and then, but tappin' the free lunch hard and reg'lar. You know the kind,—seedy hasbeens, with their futures all behind 'em.

And in time, broodin' over things in gen'ral, it got to Hackett Wells in his weak spot,—heart, or liver, or something. Didn't quite finish him, you understand, but left him on the scrapheap, just totterin' around and stavin' off an obituary item by bein' mighty careful.

“ I suppose Gordon must have heard something of the shape he was in,” says J. Bayard, “ when he included him in his list. Well, I hunted him up the other day, in a cheap, messy flat-house to the deuce and gone up Eighth avenue, got his story from him, and decided on a way of helping him out.”

“ Want to buy him a coal mine, or something like that? ” says I.

J. Bayard refuses to notice my little sarcastic play. “ I am sure Pyramid would have wanted this worn-out, cast-off tool of his to end his days decently,” goes on Mr. Steele; “ but to give him a lump sum would be worse than useless. Two or three plunges, and it would be all gone.”

“ Think of puttin' him in a home somewhere? ” says I.

“ That might be a good plan,” says Steele, “ if he was still a widower; but it appears that he has married again,—a young woman too,

some waitress that he met in a quick-lunch place. I saw her. Bah! One of these plump, stupid young females, who appeared in a dingy dressing gown with her hair down. What an old fool! But I suppose she takes care of him, in a way. So I thought that an annuity, of say a thousand or two, paid in monthly installments, would be the wisest. That would enable them to move out into the country, get a nice little house, with a garden, and really live. It was pathetic to see how grateful he was when I told him of my scheme. Of course, McCabe, all this is subject to your indorsement. Thought you might like to have a talk with them first, and see for yourself; so I asked them to meet me here about——”

“ Guess they’re right on time,” says I as the studio door opens, and in drifts a December-and-May pair that answers all the details of his description.

The old boy might have been still in the sixties; but with his remnant of white hair, watery eyes, and ashy cheeks he looks like a reg’lar antique. Must have been one of these heavy-set sports in his day, a good feeder, and a consistent drinker; but by the flabby dewlaps and the meal-bag way his clothes hang on him I judge he’s slumped quite a lot. Still, he’s kind of a dignified, impressive old ruin, which makes the contrast with the other half of the sketch all the more startlin’.

She’s a bunchy blonde, she is, about four foot

six in her French heels, with yellow hair, China-doll eyes, a snub nose, and a waxy pink and white complexion like these show-window models you see in department stores. She's costumed cheap but gaudy in a wrinkled, tango-colored dress that she must have picked off some Grand street bargain counter late last spring. The ninety-nine-cent soup-plate lid cocked over one ear adds a rakish touch that almost puts her in the comic valentine class.

But when I'm introduced to the old scout he glances fond at her and does the honors graceful. "Mrs. Wells, Professor," says he, and she executes an awkward duck response.

While the three of us are talkin' over J. Bayard's proposition she sits at one side, starin' blank and absentminded, as if this was somethin' that don't concern her at all.

It ain't a long debate, either. Hackett Wells seems satisfied with most any arrangement we want to make. He's a meek, broken old sport, grateful for anything that comes his way. That's what led me to insist on boostin' the ante up to twenty-five hundred, I guess; for it didn't look like he could go on pullin' that down for many years more. And of course J. Bayard is tickled to get my O.K. so easy.

"Then it's all settled," says Mr. Steele. "You will receive a check from the attorney of Mr. Gordon's estate on the first of every month. You and Mrs. Wells ought to start to-morrow to look for a place in some nice little country

town and—why, what's the matter with your wife? ”

She has her face in her hands, and her dumpy shoulders are heavin' up and down passionate. At first I couldn't make out whether it's woe, or if she's swallowed a safety pin. Anyway, it's deep emotion of some kind.

“ Why, Deary! ” says Mr. Wells, steppin' over and pattin' her on the back.

But that don't have any effect. The heavin' motion goes right on, and no answer comes from Deary.

“ Mabel! Mabel, dear! ” insists Hackett. “ Tell me what is wrong. Come now! ”

Mabel just shakes off his hand and continues her chest gymnastics. Also she begins kickin' her heels against the chair rungs. And as Hubby stands there lookin' helpless, with J. Bayard starin' disturbed, but makin' no move, it appears like it was up to me to take a hand.

“ Don't mind the furniture, Ma'am, ” says I. “ Take a whack at the desk too, if you like; but after you're through throwin' the fit maybe you'll let us know what it's all about. ”

At which she begins rockin' back and forth and moanin' doleful. A couple of hairpins works loose and drops to the floor.

“ Excuse me, Ma'am, ” says I, “ but you're goin' to lose the inside of that French roll if you keep on. ”

That fetched her out of it in a hurry. Grabbin' wild at her back hair, she sat up and faced

us, with no signs at all of real weeps in her eyes.

“ I won’t live in the country, I won’t! ” she states explosive.

“ Why, Mabel dear! ” protests Mr. Wells.

“ Ah, don’t be an old bonehead! ” comes back Mabel. “ What’s the idea, wishin’ this Rube stuff on us? You can just count me out, Hacky, if that’s the game. Do you get me? ”

Hacky does. “ I’m very sorry, Gentlemen, ” says he, “ to ask you to modify your generous terms; but I feel that my wife’s wishes in the matter ought to be taken into account. ”

“ Why—er—to be sure, ” says J. Bayard. “ I merely suggested your living in the country because it seemed to me the wisest plan; but after all—— ”

“ Do we look like a pair of jays, I’d like to know? ” demands Mrs. Wells indignant. “ And another thing: I don’t stand for this so much a month dope, either. What’s the good of a little now and then? If we’ve got anything coming to us, why not hand it over annual? There’d be some sense to that. Stick out for once a year, Hacky. ”

Which he done. She had him well trained, Mabel did. He shrugs his shoulders, tries to smile feeble, and spreads out his hands. “ You see, Gentlemen, ” says he.

I must say too that Mr. Steele puts up a mighty convincin’ line of talk, tryin’ to show ’em how much better it would be to have a

couple of hundred or so comin' in fresh on the first of every month, than to be handed a lump sum and maybe lose some of it, or run shy before next payday. He explains how he was tryin' to plan so the money might do 'em the most good, and unless it did how he couldn't feel that he'd done his part right.

"All of which," he goes on, "I am quite sure, Mrs. Wells, you will appreciate."

"Go on, you whiskered old stuff!" comes back Mabel spiteful. "How do you know so much what's good for us? You and your nutty dreams about cows and flower gardens and hens! I'd rather go back to Second avenue and frisk another quick-lunch job. Hand us a wad: that's all we want."

Course it was a batty piece of work, tryin' to persuade people to let you push money on 'em; but that's just where we stood. And in the end J. Bayard wipes his brow weary and turns to me.

"Well, McCabe, what do you say?" he asks. "Shall we?"

"I leave it with you," says I. "You're the one that's developed this what-do-you-call-it instinct, temperin' kindly zeal with practical wisdom, ain't you? Then go to it!"

So five minutes later Hackett Wells shuffles out with an order good for the whole twenty-five hundred in his pocket, and Mabel clingin' tight to his arm.

"So long, Profess," says she over her shoul-



"WHAT'S THE IDEA," SAYS MABEL, "WISHIN' THIS RUBE STUFF ON US?"

der, as I holds the door open for 'em. "We're headed for happy days."

And J. Bayard Steele, gazin' after her, remarks puzzled, "Now just precisely what can she mean by that?"

"Bein' only a crude and simple soul, J. B.," says I, "I got to give it up. Anyhow, Mabel's entirely too thick a girl for me to see through."

Besides, not knowin' her tastes or little fads, how was I to guess her notion of happy days? Then again, I didn't have to. All that's clear is that Pyramid had wanted us to do some good turn for this old goat, to sort of even up for that spill of years gone by, and we'd done our best. Whether the money was to be used wise or not accordin' to our view was a problem that don't worry me at all. Might have once, when I was dead sure my dope on things in gen'ral was the only true dope. But I'm getting over that, I hope, and allowin' other folks to have theirs now and then. In fact, I proceeded to forget this pair as quick as possible, like you try to shake a bad dream when you wake up in the night. And I warned J. Bayard that if he didn't quit luggin' his punk philanthropy specimens into my studio I'd bar him out entirely.

Let's see; that was early in the summer, and it must have been just before Labor Day that I broke away for a week or so to run up into the White Mountains and bring back Sadie and little Sully. First off Sadie was plannin' to

come by train; but by the time I got there she'd changed her mind and wanted to tour back in the machine.

"It's such gorgeous weather," says she, "and the leaves are turning so nicely! We'll take three days for it, making short runs and stopping at night wherever we like."

"You mean," says I, "stoppin' wherever you can find an imitation Waldorf-Castoria."

"Not at all," says she. "And you know some of these little automobile inns are perfectly charming."

Well, that's what brought us to this Sunset Lake joint the first night out. Somewhere in New Hampshire it was, or maybe Vermont. Anyway, it was right in the heart of the summer boarder belt, and it had all the usual vacation apparatus cluttered around,—tennis courts, bowling alleys, bathing floats, dancing pavilion, and a five-piece Hungarian orchestra, four parts kosher, that helped the crockery jugglers put the din in dinner.

It was a clean, well-kept place, though, and by the quality of the tomato bisque and the steamed clams that we started with I judged we was actually goin' to be surprised with some real food. We'd watched the last of the sunset glow fade out from the little toy lake, and while we was waitin' to see what the roast and vegetables might be like we gazed around at the dinner push that was filterin' in.

And what a job lot of humanity does have

the coin to spend the summer, or part of it, at these four-a-day resorts! There's middle-aged sports, in the fifties or over, some of 'em with their fat, fussed-up wives, others with giddy young Number Twos; then there's jolly, sunburned, comf'table lookin' fam'ly parties, includin' little Brother with the peeled nose, and Grandmother with her white lace cap. Also there's quite a sprinklin' of widows, gay and otherwise, and the usual bunch of young folks, addin' lively touches here and there. All city people, you know, playin' at bein' in the country, but insistin' on Broadway food at Broadway prices.

Our waitress was just staggerin' in with a loaded tray, and Sadie was tryin' to induce little Sully not to give the college yell when he asked personal questions about folks at the next table, when I notices her glance curious at something over my head, then lower her eyes and sort of smile. Course I suspects something worth lookin' at might be floatin' down the aisle; so I half swings around to get a view. And I'd no sooner got it than I wished I hadn't been so curious; for the next second there comes, shrillin' sharp and raspy above the dinin' room clatter, a free and happy hail.

“ Well, what do you know! Professor McCabe, ain't it? ”

Me—I just sat there and gawped. I don't know as I could be blamed. Course, I'd seen bunchy little blondes before; but this was the

first time I'd ever seen one that had draped herself in a rainbow. That's the only word for it. The thin, fluttery silk thing with the butterfly sleeves is shaded from cream white to royal purple, and underneath is one of these Dolly Varden gowns of flowered pink, set off by a Roman striped sash two feet wide. And when you add to that such details as gold shoes, pink silk stockin's, long pearl ear dangles, and a weird lid perched on a mountain of yellow hair—well, it's no wonder I was sometime rememberin' where I'd seen them China-doll eyes before.

“Deary,” she goes on, turnin' to what's followin' her, “look who's here! Our old friend, the Profess!”

And with that she motions up a dignified old wreck dolled out in a white flannel suit and a red tie. If it hadn't been for that touch of red too, he sure would have looked ghastly; for there was about as much color in his face as there was in his white buckskin shoes. But he steps up spry and active and shoves out a greetin' hand.

I ain't got the nerve, either, to look at Sadie while I'm doin' the introducin'. I was watchin' Mrs. Hackett Wells sort of fascinated and listenin' to her chatter on.

“Well, if this don't froth the eggs!” says she, pattin' me chummy on the shoulder. “Havin' you show up like this! And, say, lemme put you wise,—here's where you want

to stick around for a week or so. Yea, Bo! Perfectly swell bunch here, and something doin' every minute. Why, say, me and Deary has been here six weeks, and we've been havin' the time of our lives. Know what they call me here? Well, I'm the Hot Baby of Sunset Lake; and that ain't any bellboy's dream, either! I'm the one that starts things. Yes, and I keep 'em goin' too. Just picked this place out from the resort ads in the Sunday edition; and it was some prize pick, believe me! 'A quiet, refined patronage of exclusive people,' the picture pamphlet puts it, and I says to Deary, 'Me for that, with three wardrobe trunks full of glad rags.' So you can tell your friend with the face privet that we got to the country after all. Did I miss my guess? Never a miss! Why, say, some of these swell parties lives on West End avenue and the Drive, and I can call half of 'em by their first names. Can't I, Deary? "

And Hackett Wells nods, smilin' at her fond and sappy.

"Drop round to the dancin' pavilion later," says she, "and watch me push him through the onestep. After that me and one of the boys is goin' to tear off a little Maxixe stuff that'll be as good as a cabaret act, and about ten-thirt we'll tease Deary into openin' a couple of quarts in the café. So long! Don't forget, now!" And off she floats, noddin' cheerful right and left, and bein' escorted to her table by both head waiters.

I couldn't stave off meetin' Sadie's glance any longer. "Eh?" says I. "Why, that's only Mabel. Cunnin' little thing, ain't she?"

"Shorty," demands Sadie, "where on earth did you ever meet such a person?"

Then, of course, I had to sketch out the whole story. It was high time; for Sadie's lips was set more or less firm. But when she hears about J. Bayard's wise-boy plans for settlin' the Hackett Wells in some pastoral paradise, and how they got ditched by militant Mabel, she indulges in a grim smile.

"A brilliant pair of executors you and Mr. Steele are," says she, "if this is a sample of your work!"

"Ah, come, don't be rough, Sadie!" says I. "It's hard to tell, you know. What's the odds if they do have to go back to their little Eighth avenue flat next week? They're satisfied. Anyway, Mabel is. She's New York born and bred, she is, and now that she's had her annual blow she don't care what happens. Next year, if Deary hangs on, they'll have another."

"But it's so foolish of them!" insists Sadie.

"What else do you expect from a pair like that?" says I. "It's what they want most, ain't it? And there's plenty like 'em. No, they ain't such bad folks, either. Their hearts are all there. Just a case of vacancy in the upper stories: nobody home, you know."

CHAPTER XI

UNDER THE WIRE WITH EDWIN

IF you must know, I was doin' a social duck. Not that I ain't more or less parlor broke by this time, or am apt to shy at a dinner coat, like a selfmade Tammany statesman when addressin' his fellow Peruvians. Nothing like that! Pick out the right comp'ny, and I can get through quite some swell feed without usin' the wrong fork more'n once or twice. I don't mind little fam'ly gatherin's at Pinckney's or the Purdy-Pells' now. I can even look a butler in the eye without feelin' shivery along the spine. But these forty-cover affairs at the Twombly-Cranes', with a dinner dance crush afterwards and a buffet supper at one-thirty A.M.—that's where I get off.

Sadie likes to take 'em in once in awhile, though, and as long as she'll spend what there's left of the night with friends in town, and don't keep me hangin' round until the brewery trucks and milk wagons begin to get busy, I ain't got any kick comin'.

It was one of these fussy functions I was dodgin'. I'd had my dinner at home, peaceable and quiet, while Sadie was dressin', and at that

there was plenty of time left for me to tow her into town and land her at the Twombley-Cranes', where they had the sidewalk canopy out and an extra carriage caller on duty. I'd quit at the mat, though, and was slopin' down the front steps, when I'm held up by this sharp-spoken old girl with the fam'ly umbrella and the string bonnet.

"Young man," says she, plantin' herself square in front of me, "is this Mr. Twombley-Crane's house?"

"This is where it begins," says I, lookin' her over some amused; for that lid of hers sure was the quaintest thing on Fifth-ave.

"Humph!" says she. "Looks more like the way into a circus! What's this thing for?" and she waves the umbrella scornful at the canopy.

"Why," says I, "this is to protect the guests from the rude stares of the common herd; also it's useful in case of a shower."

"Of all things!" says she, sniffin' contemptuous.

"If you don't like the idea," says I, "suppose I mention it to Mr. Twombley-Crane? Maybe he'll take it down."

"That'll do, young man!" says she. "Don't try to be smart with me! And don't think I'm asking fool questions just out of curiosity! I'm related to Twombley-Crane."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin' at her.

“Cousin by marriage,” says she.

“I—I take it all back then,” says I. “Excuse my gettin’ so gay. Come on a visit, have you?”

“Ye-é-es,” says she hesitatin’; “that is, I s’pose we have. We ain’t made up our minds exactly.”

“We?” says I, gazin’ around.

“Mr. Leavitt is behind the tent there, as usual,” says she, “and he—— My land! I guess it’s jest as well he is,” she gasps, as a limousine rolls up to the front of the canopy, a liveried footman hops off the driver’s seat, whisks open the door, and helps unload Mrs. K. Taylor French.

Quite some wishbone in front and more or less spinal column aft Mrs. K. Taylor is exposin’ as she brushes past us up the strip of red carpet. So you could hardly blame the old girl for bein’ jarred.

“Young man,” says she, turnin’ on me severe, “what’s going on here to-night?”

“Dinner dance, that’s all,” says I.

“You mean they’re having a lot of company in?” says she.

I nods.

“Then that settles it!” says she. “We don’t go a step nearer to-night. But where we will stay, goodness only knows!”

She was pikin’ off, her chin in the air, when it struck me that if these really was jay relations of the Twombly-Cranes, maybe I ought

to lend 'em a helpin' hand. So I trails along until she brings up beside another party who seems to be waitin' patient just under the front windows.

He's a tall, stoop-shouldered gent, with a grayish mustache and a good deal of gold watch chain looped across his vest. In each hand he's holdin' a package careful by the strings, and between his feet is one of these extension canvas grips that you still see in use out in the kerosene circuit.

"Excuse me, Ma'am," says I, "but I'm more or less a friend of the fam'ly, and if you've come on special to visit 'em, maybe you'd better wait while I let 'em know you're here. My name's McCabe, and if you'll give me yours, why——"

"I'm Mrs. Sallie Leavitt, of Clarks Mills," says the old girl.

"Oh, yes," says I, "Clarks Mills. Up Skowhegan way, ain't it?"

"Vermont," says she. "This is Mr. Leavitt. I'm much obliged to you, Mr. McCabe, but you needn't bother about tellin' anyone anything. If they've got company, that's enough. I wish I'd never left Clarks Mills, that's what I wish!"

"Now, Sallie!" protests the other half of the sketch, speakin' mild and gentle.

"That'll do, Mr. Leavitt!" says she decided. "You know very well it was all along of your fussing and fretting about never hav-

ing seen your cousin that we come to make this fool trip, anyway."

"I realize that, Sallie," says he; "but——"

"Mr. Leavitt," she breaks in, "will you be careful of them pies?" Then she turns to me apologizin'. "Course, it does seem sort of silly, travelin' around New York with two pumpkin pies; but I didn't know how good a cook the folks had here; and besides I don't take a back seat for anybody when it comes to mince or pumpkin. You see, I was planning to surprise Cousin Twombley by slipping 'em onto the table to-morrow for breakfast."

Say, the thought of what the Twombley-Cranes' English flunkies would do at the sight of pumpkin pie on the breakfast table was most too much for me. As it was, I had a bad coughin' fit, and when I recovered I suggests eager, "Well, why not? They'll keep a day or so, won't they?"

"Not while I'm as hungry as I am now," says she. "And I'm dog tired too. Young man, where'll we find a good, respectable tavern around here?"

"A which?" says I. "Oh! I get you—hotel. Now let's see. Why, I expect the best thing you can do is to jump in one of these motor buses and ride down to—no, I might's well go along, as it's right on my way home. Here's one coming now."

So we piles in, umbrella, pies, and all, and

inside of half an hour I've landed the whole shootin' match safe in a two-fifty air-shaft room in one of those punk little ten-story hotels down in the 40's. I showed 'em how to work the electric light switch, got 'em some ice water, and pointed out the fire escape. In fact, I done everything but tuck 'em in bed, and I had said good-night twice and was makin' my getaway, when Mrs. Leavitt follows me out into the hall, shuttin' Hubby in by himself.

"Just one thing more, Mr. McCabe," says she. "I guess you needn't say anything to Twombly-Crane about our bein' here."

"Oh!" says I. "Goin' to spring it on him to-morrow yourself?"

"Maybe," says she, "and then again maybe I won't go near 'em at all. I'm going to think it over."

"I see," says I. "But I expect Mr. Leavitt will be up."

"What, alone?" says she. "Him? Not much!"

"Oh!" says I, and while I didn't mean it to show, I expect I must have humped my eyebrows a little. Anyway, she comes right back at me.

"Well, why should he?" she demands.

"Why, I don't know," says I; "only he—he's the head of the house, ain't he?"

"No, he ain't," says she. "I don't say it in a boasting spirit, for it's always been one of the trials of my life; but Mr. Leavitt ain't at

the head of anything—never was, and never will be.”

“Had plenty of chance, I expect?” says I sarcastic.

“Just the same chances other men have had, and better,” says she. “Why, when we was first married I thought he was going to be one of the biggest men in this country. Everyone did. He looked it and talked it. Talk? He was the best talker in the county! Is yet, for that matter. Course, he’d been around a lot as a young man—taught school in Rutland for two terms, and visited a whole summer in Bel-lows Falls. Besides there was the blood, him being an own cousin to Twombly-Crane. Just that was most enough to turn my head, even if that branch of the family never did have much to do with the Leavitt side. But it’s a fact that Mr. Leavitt’s mother and Twombly-Crane’s father were brother and sister.”

“You don’t mean it!” says I.

“Of course,” she goes on, “the Leavitts always stayed poor country folks, and the Cranes went to the city and got rich. When the old homestead was left to Mr. Leavitt, though, he said he wasn’t going to spend the rest of his life on an old, worn-out farm. No, Sir! He was going to do something better than that, something big! We all believed it too. For the first six months of our married life I kept my trunk packed, ready to start any minute for anywhere, expecting him to find that grand

career he'd talked so much about. But somehow we never started. That wa'n't the worst of it, either. A year slipped by, and we hadn't done a thing,—didn't even raise enough potatoes to last us through Thanksgivin', and if we hadn't sold the hay standing and the apple crop on the trees I don't know how we'd got through the winter.

“ Along about the middle of March I got my eyes wide open. I saw that if anything was done to keep us out of the poorhouse I'd got to do it. Old Mr. Clark wanted someone to help in the general store about then, and I took the job at six dollars a week. Inside of a year I was actin' postmistress, had full charge of the drygoods side, did all the grocery buyin', and was agent for a horse rake and mower concern. Six months later, when Mr. Clark gave up altogether and the store was for sale, I jumped in, mortgaged the Leavitt place all it would stand, borrowed fifteen hundred dollars from a brother-in-law back in Nova Scotia, and put a new sign over the door. That was over thirty years ago; but it's there yet. It reads, 'Mrs. Sallie Leavitt, General Merchandise.' ”

“ But where did Mr. Leavitt fit in? ” says I.

“ Humph! ” says she. “ Mostly he's set around the store and talked. Oh, he helps with the mail, cooks a little when I'm too rushed and ain't got any hired girl, and washes dishes. That's always been the one useful thing he could do,—wash dishes. I expect that's why

everybody at the Mills calls him Mr. Sallie Leavitt. There! It's out. I don't know as I ever said that aloud before in my life. I've been too much ashamed. But I might's well face the truth now. He's just Mr. Sallie Leavitt. And if you don't think that hurts for me to have to own up to it, then you're mighty mistaken. Maybe you can guess too why I ain't so anxious to parade a husband like that before folks."

"Oh, well," says I, "sometimes a man gets tagged with a nickname like that and don't half deserve it."

"Huh!" says she. "You don't know Mr. Leavitt as I do. I wa'n't goin' to mention it; but—but—well, he's a book reader."

"A what?" says I.

"Reads books," says she. "Just reads and reads and reads. He's got what he calls our circulatin' lib'ry in a room he's fixed up over the store. Lends out books at five cents a week, you know. But, land! he reads more of 'em himself than any ten customers. History, explorin' books, and novels—specially novels about English society folks, like 'Lady Thingumbob's Daughter,' and so on. And the fool ideas he gets from 'em! I expect you'll laugh, but he actually tries to talk and act like them people he reads about. Learned to drink tea out of books, Mr. Leavitt has, and wants me to quit the store every afternoon about half past four and drink it with him. Think of that!

And instead of havin' his supper at night he wants to call it dinner. Did you ever? Yes, Sir, that's the kind of tomfoolery I've been puttin' up with all these years, and tryin' to hide from the neighbors! Maybe you'll notice I always call him Mr. Leavitt? That's why; to cover up the fact that he's only—well, what they call him. And so, cousin or no cousin, I don't see how I'm goin' to bring myself to let the Twombly-Cranes know. Anyway, I want to sleep on it first. That's why I'd just as soon you wouldn't tell 'em we're here."

"I see," says I. "And you can bank on me."

I didn't peep a word, either. It's only the followin' evenin', though, that Sadie announces:

"What do you think, Shorty? A Vermont cousin of Mr. Twombly-Crane is in town, with his wife, and they're going to give them a dinner party Friday night."

"Gee!" says I. "I'd like to be there."

"You will be," says she; "for you are specially invited."

"Eh?" says I. "To meet the poor relations? How's that?"

"Who said they were poor?" says Sadie. "Why, Twombly-Crane says that his cousin's wife is one of the shrewdest business women he's ever heard of. He has been handling her investments, and says she must be worth half a million, at least; all made out of a country

store, maple sugar-bushes, and farm mortgages. I'm crazy to see her, aren't you?"

"What—Sallie?" says I. "Half a million! Must be some mistake."

Course I had to tell her then about the couple I'd run across, and about Mr. Sallie, and the pies, and the string bonnet. We had such a warm debate too, as to whether she was really well off or not, that next day my curiosity got the best of me, and I calls up the hotel to see if the Leavitts are in. Well, they was, and Mrs. Leavitt, when she finds who it is, asks pleadin' if I won't run up and see 'em a little while.

"Please come," says she; "for I'm completely flabbergasted. It's—it's about Mr. Leavitt."

"Why, sure," says I. "I'll come right up."

I finds 'em sittin' in their dull, bare little hotel room, one on each side of the bed, with the extension grip half packed on the floor. "Well," says I, "what's up?"

"Ask him," says she, noddin' at Mr. Sallie.

But Leavitt only hangs his head guilty and shuffles his feet. "Then I'll tell you," says she. "Yesterday he slipped out, hunted up his cousin, and got us invited to dinner. More'n that, he said we'd come."

"Well, why not go?" says I.

"Because," says she, "I—I just can't do it. I—I'm—well, we've been around some since we got here, lookin' into the big stores and so on, and I've been noticin' the women, how they

talk and act and dress and—and—oh, I'm afraid, that's all!"

"Why, Sallie!" says Mr. Leavitt.

"Yes, I am," she insists. "I'm plumb scared at the thought of mixin' with folks like that—just plumb scared. And, as you know, Mr. Leavitt, it's the first time in my life I've ever been afraid of anything."

"Yes, that's so," says he, "that's so, Sallie. But you're not going to be afraid now. Why should you?"

"Listen to him, Mr. McCabe!" says she. "Do you know what he wants me to do? Spend a lot of money on clothes and rig myself up like—like that woman we saw the other night!"

"And you're going to do it too," says Mr. Leavitt. "You can afford to have the best there is,—a Paris frock, and the things that go with it. I mean you shall, not for my sake, but for your own. You're a wonderful woman, Sallie, and you ought to know it for once in your life. I want my cousin to know it too. You've not only got more brains than most women, but you're mighty good looking, and in the proper clothes you could hold up your head in any company."

"Pshaw!" says Mrs. Leavitt, almost blushin'. "Right before Mr. McCabe too!"

"Well, isn't it so?" demands Mr. Leavitt, turnin' to me.

"Why—er—of course it is," says I.

I tried to make it enthusiastic, and if it come

out a little draggy it must have been on account of that ancient lid of hers that's hangin' in full view on one of the bedposts. As a matter of fact, she's one of these straight-built, husky, well-colored dames, with fairly good lines in spite of what the village dressmaker had done to her.

"There!" says Mr. Leavitt. "Now let's have no more talk of going home. Let's go out and get the clothes right now. Perhaps Mr. McCabe can show us where we can buy the right things."

"Land sakes! What a man you are, Mr. Leavitt!" says Sallie, weakenin' a little.

Five minutes more of that kind of talk, and he'd got her to tie on her bonnet. Then, with me leadin' the way and him urgin' her on from behind, we starts on our shoppin' expedition.

"It's to be a complete outfit, from the ground up, ain't it?" says I.

"That's it," says Mr. Leavitt.

So, instead of botherin' with any department stores, I steers 'em straight for Madame Laplante's, where they set you back hard, but can furnish a whole trousseau, I'm told, at an hour's notice.

Mrs. Leavitt was still protestin' that maybe she wouldn't do any more than look at the things, and how she wouldn't promise to wear 'em even if she did buy a few; but you know what smooth salesladies they have in such

places. When I left two of 'em was gushin' over Mrs. Leavitt's chestnut-tinted hair that she had piled up in slick coils under the bonnet, and a third was runnin' a tape over her skillful. If it had been anybody but Mrs. Sallie Leavitt, I'd have hated to take chances on havin' to write the check when it was all over.

"Well, is she coming?" asks Sadie that night.

"Search me," says I. "I wouldn't bet a nickel either way."

That was Wednesday. All day Thursday I was expectin' to be called in again, or hear that Sallie had made a break back for Vermont. But not a word. Nor on Friday, either. So at seven o'clock that night, as we collected in the Twombly-Cranes' drawin' room, there was some suspense; for at least half of us were wise to the situation. At seven-fifteen, though, they arrives.

And, say, I wish you could have seen Mrs. Sallie Leavitt of Clarks Mills! I don't know what it cost to work the miracle, but, believe me, it was worth twice the money! Leavitt was dead right. All she needed was the regalia. And she'd got it too,—sort of a black lacy creation, with jet spangles all over it, and long, sweepin' folds from the waist down, and with all that hair of hers done up flossy and topped with a fancy rhinestone headdress, she looked tall and classy. And stunnin'? Say, she had a

neck and shoulders that made that Mrs. K. Taylor French party look like a museum exhibit!

Then there was Mr. Leavitt, all dolled up as correct as any cotillion leader, balancin' his silk tile graceful on one wrist, and strokin' his close-cropped mustache with his white glove, just as Mrs. Humphry Ward describes on page 147.

"Well!" gasps Sadie. "I thought you said they were a pair of countrified freaks!"

"You should have seen 'em when they landed with the pies," says I.

And, if you'll believe me, Mr. Leavitt not only had on the costume, but he had the lines too. Sounded a little booky in spots maybe; but he was right there with the whole bag of chatty tricks,—the polite salute for the hostess, a neat little epigram when it come his turn to fill in the talk, a flash or so of repartee, and an anecdote that got a good hand all round the table. You see, he was sort of doublin' in brass, as it were; conversin' for two, you know. For Sallie was playin' it safe, watchin' how the others negotiated the asparagus, passin' up all the dishes she couldn't dope out, and sayin' mighty little. Mostly she's watchin' Mr. Leavitt, her eyes growin' brighter and rounder as the meal progresses, and at last fairly beamin' across the table at him.

I didn't quite get the slant of all this until later, when we'd finished and was trailin' into

the lib'ry. Mrs. Leavitt breaks loose from Twombly-Crane and falls back alongside of me.

“ Well, how goes it? ” says I. “ Wasn't so bad, after all, was it? ”

“ Don't tell anyone, ” she whispers, “ but I'm so scared I'd like to yell and run away. I would too, if it wasn't for Edwin. ”

“ Who? ” says I.

“ Mr. Leavitt, ” says she. “ He's going to be Edwin to me after this, though—my Edwin. Isn't he great, though? Course, I always knew he was a good talker, and all that; but to do it in comp'ny, before a lot of city folks—well, I must say I'm mighty proud of such a husband, mighty proud! And anybody who ever calls him Mr. Sallie Leavitt again has got to reckon with me! They'll never have a chance to do it in Clarks Mills. The Mills ain't good enough for Edwin. I've just found that out. And to think that all these years I've believed it was the other way round! But I'm going to make up for all that. You'll see! ”

Uh-huh! Mrs. Leavitt's a woman of her word. Soon as she can settle up things at the store, foreclose a few mortgages, and unload a few blocks of stock that can't be carried safe without watchin', it's goin' to be the grand European tour for her and Edwin, and maybe a house in town when they come back.

“ Which only goes to show, Mrs. McCabe, ”

says I, "how it's never too late to discover that, after all, old Hubby's the one best bet on the card."

"Pooh!" says Sadie. "It isn't always safe to let him know it, even if you have."

CHAPTER XII

A FIFTY-FIFTY SPLIT WITH HUNK

“AND believe me, Shorty,” goes on Mr. Hunk Burley, tappin’ a stubby forefinger on my knee, and waggin’ his choppin’-block head energetic, “when I get behind a proposition yuh goin’ to get some action.”

“Sure, I know, Hunk,” says I, glancin’ up at the clock uneasy and squirmin’ a bit in the swing chair.

You see, this had been goin’ on now for near an hour, and while it might be more or less entertainin’ as well as true, I wa’n’t crazy about listenin’ to it all the afternoon. For one thing, I wa’n’t comin’ in on his scheme. Not a chance. I can be bilked into buyin’ tickets for a raffle, even when I wouldn’t take the junk that’s put up as a gift, and I’m easy in other ways; but when it comes to any gate-money game, from launchin’ a musical comedy to openin’ a new boxin’ club, I’m Tight Tommy with the time lock set. None in mine! I’ve had my guesses as to what the public wants, and I know I’m a perfectly punk prophet.

Besides, it was about time for J. Bayard Steele to show up with this gent from Wash-

ington, Cuyler Morrison De Kay, and—well, I'd just as soon not be bothered to explain Hunk Burley to a pair like that. You know the kind of bygone friends that do need explainin'—well, Hunk needed it bad; for as far as looks went he was about the crudest party that ever sported a diamond elephant stickpin or chewed twenty-five-cent cigars for a steady diet.

Built wide and substantial, Hunk was, with the longest arms you ever saw outside an iron cage, and a set of rugged features that had the Old Man of the Mountain lookin' like a ribbon clerk. Reg'lar cave dweller's face, it was; and with his bristly hair growin' down to a point just above his eyes, and the ear tufts, and the mossy-backed paws—well, if there ever was a throw-back to the Stone Age he was it.

As a rubber in my old trainin' camp outfit, though, Hunk had his good points. I've gone on the table to him with a set of shoulder muscles as stiff as a truck trace and inside of half an hour jumped up as limber as a whale-bone whip. And I'd never sign up for more'n a ten-round go without sendin' for Hunk first thing after the forfeits was up. Course, when it come to society, there was others I liked better, and I expect after I quit the ring I didn't take any particular pains to keep his name in my address book.

But Hunk was one of the old crowd that didn't need much dodgin'. He went his way like I went mine, and I hadn't seen him for

years when he tramps into the studio here the other noon, treadin' heavy on his heels and wearin' this suit of peace-disturbin' plaids. He hadn't climbed the stairs just for any Auld Lang Syne nonsense, either. He was there on business.

That is, it seemed like business to him; for, in his special way, Hunk had been comin' along. He hadn't stuck to bein' a rubber. He'd done a strong-man turn with a medicine top for awhile, then he'd worked into the concession game on the county fair circuit, managed a Ferris wheel and carrousel outfit, and even swung an Uncle Tom troupe, with six real bloodhounds, through the town halls of fourteen States.

“ Pullin' down the kale by the double handful, mind you,” says Hunk. “ But no more! The movies has queered the Topsy business. Absolutely! I seen it comin' just in time, and I've been layin' low until I could find something to beat it. Say, I've got it too. Not for this territory. I'll give the film people two years more to kill themselves in the North, with the rot they're puttin' out. But in the South they ain't got such a hold, and the folks are different. They're just old style enough down there to fall for a street parade and fifty-cent seats on the blue benches. They got the coin too—don't make no mistake about that. And this Great Australian Hippodrome will make 'em loosen up like a Rube showin' his best girl what

he can do throwin' baseballs at the dummies. Yea, Bo! It's the biggest bargain on the market too. Come in with me, Shorty, on a half int'rest, splittin' fifty-fifty."

"Too big a gamble, Hunk," says I. "I've seen more money dropped on ring shows than——"

"But we carry a pair of boxin' kangaroos," he breaks in eager, "that pulls an act they go nutty over. And our tribe of original wild Bush people has never been shown this side of Melbourne."

"Sorry, Hunk," says I, "but if I had all that money tied up in billboard sheets and smoky canvas, I couldn't sleep well on windy nights. None of your flat-car hippodromes for me. That's final! Besides, I got a date with a couple of swells that's liable to show up here any minute, and I ought to——"

What I really ought to have done was to have chucked a table cover over Hunk and played him for a piece of statuary; but before I can make a move in walks J. Bayard and this Washington gent. Next minute we was bein' introduced, and all I can do is stand in front of Hunk with one hand behind me, givin' him the fade-away signal energetic.

Does he get it? Not Hunk! The one real sensitive spot in his system can be reached only by sluggin' him behind the ear with a bung starter, and I didn't have one handy. He shoves his chair back into the corner and con-

tinues to gawp; so I just has to let on that he ain't there at all.

Course I'd been put wise to who this Cuyler Morrison De Kay was. He's what Mr. Steele calls an object of altruism. In other words, he's No. 7 on Pyramid Gordon's list, and our job is to frame up for him some kind and generous deed, accordin' to the specifications of the will. As usual too, J. Bayard had got all balled up over doin' it; for while Mr. De Kay ain't quite the plute he looks, it turns out he's holdin' down one of them government cinches, with a fat salary, mighty little real work, and no worry. He's a widower, and a real elegant gent too. You could tell that by the wide ribbon on his shell eyeglasses and the gray suède gloves.

I could see in a minute that he'd sort of put the spell on Steele, most likely because he was a genuine sample of what J. Bayard was givin' only a fair imitation of. You know, one of these straight-backed, aristocratic old boys that somehow has the marks of havin' been everywhere, seen everything, and done everything. You'd expect him to be able to mix a salad dressin' *à la Montmartre*, and reel off anecdotes about the time when he was a guest of the Grand Duke So and So at his huntin' lodge. Kind of a faded, thin-blooded, listless party, somewhere in the late fifties, with droopy eye corners and a sarcastic bite to his offhand remarks.

I may as well admit that I didn't take so kindly to Cuyler from the first. Also I was a little peeved at J. Bayard when I discovers he's lugged him up here without findin' out much about him. Hadn't even asked De Kay how it was him and Pyramid Gordon had bumped up against one another. So I fires that at him straight.

"Let's see," says I, "where was it you and Mr. Gordon got mixed up?"

"Gordon?" says he, shruggin' his shoulders and smilin' cynical. "Really, I can't conceive just why he should remember me. True, during our brief acquaintance, he showed a most active dislike for me; but I assure you it was not mutual. A man of Gordon's type— Bah! One simply ignores them, you know."

"You don't say!" says I. "Now I had an idea that wa'n't so dead easy—ignorin' Pyramid."

Cuyler humps his gray eyebrows as if he was slightly annoyed. "I was referring merely to his offensive personality," he goes on. "One does not quarrel with a bulldog for its lack of manners."

"Ah, come!" says I. "Maybe he took you for one of these parlor spaniels and was tryin' to throw a scare into you with a few growls."

I could hear J. Bayard gasp protestin'; but Cuyler shrugs it off without wincin'. "Just how he regarded me was a subject to which I

gave not the slightest thought," says he. "I was concerned only with his enterprise of crossing the Peoria & Dayton at grade in the face of an injunction issued by the State supreme court. You see, I happened to be president of the road at the time."

"Now we're gettin' to the plot of the piece," says I. "You blocked him off, eh?"

"I did my best," says Mr. De Kay. "Of course I was not a practical railroad man. I'd been somewhat of a figurehead, you understand. But in this emergency I was called back from Europe and at the urgent request of the directors I assumed active charge. My first step was to secure the injunction."

"Which worried him, I expect?" says I, winkin' at J. Bayard.

"Quite as much as if I had sent a note by my office boy," says Cuyler. "He rushed a construction train with two hundred men to the spot and gave the order himself to tear up our tracks. Well, it was rather a spirited contest. I mobilized our entire working force, had them sworn in as deputy sheriffs, and kept three switch engines moving up and down the line. For forty-eight hours we held them back."

"And then?" says I.

Cuyler executes that careless shoulder shrug once more. "Rifles," says he. "I suppose I should have retaliated with machine guns; but I preferred to put my trust in the law of the

land. . Of course I found out how absurd that was later on. Gordon crossed our grade. After four or five years of expensive litigation we gave up. By that time our road had become part of the Gordon system. I was glad to get 48 for my holdings; so you see his victory was quite complete. But the only real personal contact I had with him was during those two days of the crossing war when we took our meals at the wretched little hotel, facing each other across the table. Fancy! His coarse attempts to treat the situation humorously were more offensive, if anything, than his guerrilla business tactics. An ill-bred, barbarous fellow, this Gordon of yours."

"Huh!" says I. "He wa'n't any parlor entertainer, that's a fact; but take it from me, Mr. De Kay, he was a good deal of a man, for all that."

"So, I presume, was Captain Kidd," sneers Cuyler, "and Jesse James."

"Maybe," I comes back kind of hot. "But Pyramid Gordon was white enough to want to divide his pile among the poor prunes he'd put out here and there along the way. You're on the list too, and the chief object of this little tête-à-tête is to frame up some plan of givin' you a boost."

"So Mr. Steele gave me to understand," says Cuyler. "In my case, however, the reparation comes a little late. The fact is, Gentlemen, that I—well, why quibble? I may

be good for another ten or a dozen years. But I shall go on just as I've been going on, following my daily routine in the department, at my club, at my bachelor quarters. You get into it, you know,—bath, breakfast, desk, dinner, a rubber or two of bridge, and bed. A trifle monotonous, but a comfortable, undisturbed, assured existence. I may have had ambitions once,—yes, I'm quite sure,—but no longer. After my—er—my elimination, I got this place in the department. There I've stuck for fifteen years. I've settled into official routine; I'm fixed there hard and fast. It's so with many of us. Most of us recognize the hopelessness of ever pulling out. At least I do, fully. As I sometimes confess, I am merely one of the unburied dead. And there you are!"

Kind of took me off my guard, that did. And me about to knock him so hard! I glances over at J. Bayard sort of foolish, and he stares back vacant and helpless. Somehow we'd never been up against a proposition like this, and it had us fannin' the air.

"Unburied dead, eh?" says I. "Oh come, Mr. De Kay, ain't that drawin' it a little strong? Why, you ought to have lots of punch left in you yet. All you got to do is buck up."

"The optimism of youth!" says he. "I suppose I ought to feel grateful, Professor McCabe, for your well intentioned advice. And I can almost say that I wish I might——"

He don't get a chance to finish; for this is right where Hunk Burley, that I'd almost forgot was in the room, suddenly kicks into the debate. I'd felt one or two tugs at my coat; but this last one was so vigorous it nearly whirls me around. And as I turns I finds him blinkin' and splutterin' excited, like he'd swallowed his cigar.

"Eh?" says I. "What's troublin' you, Hunk?"

"He—he's the guy," says Hunk, "the very guy!"

"Wha-a-at?" says I, followin' the look in them wide-set pop eyes of his. "Who is?"

"Him," says he, pointin' to Cuyler. "He's a reg'lar guy, he is; the spit and image of what I been wantin' to connect with these last six months. Say, Shorty, put me next."

"Gwan!" says I. "You ain't supposed to exist. Paint your funnels black and run the blockade."

At which Cuyler, who has been starin' curious through his glasses, steps forward. "What is it?" says he. "Do I understand that the gentleman wishes to speak to me?"

"You're hootin'," says Hunk. "Only I ain't no gent. I'm just Hunk Burley, managin' producer. Tent shows is my line, ring or stage, and I'm carryin' a proposition up my cuff that means a lot of easy money to whoever grabs it first. Do you get me?"

"Ah, stow it, Hunk!" says I. "Mr. De

Kay ain't one of your crowd. Can't you see he's——”

“ But with him out front,” breaks in Hunk eager, “ and pullin' that swell line of patter, we could pack the reserved benches from dirt to canvas. Honest, we could! Say, Mister, lemme put it to you on the level. You buy in with me on this Great Australian Hippodrome, a half int'rest for twelve thou cash, leave me the transportation and talent end, while you do the polite gab at the main entrance, and if we don't lug away the daily receipts in sugar barrels I'll own the boxin' kangaroos for first cousins. Why, it's the chance of a lifetime! What do you say to it? ”

And you should have seen the look on Cuyler Morrison's aristocratic map as he inspects Hunk up and down and it dawns on him that he's bein' invited to break into the circus business. But after the first shock has passed off he ends by smilin' indulgent.

“ My good fellow,” says he, “ you flatter me. My qualifications for such a partnership are entirely too limited.”

“ If you mean you couldn't get away with it,” says Hunk, “ you got another guess. Why, in one forenoon I could coach you up for a spiel that would set 'em mobbin' the ticket wagons! And with you in a white silk lid drivin' four spotted ponies and leadin' the grand street parade—say they'd be lettin' out the schools for our matinées.”

Out of the tail of my eye I could see that J. Bayard was speechless with indignation. But what could I do? The only way of stoppin' Hunk was to choke him, which wa'n't any pink tea proceedin'. Besides, Cuyler seems to be mildly entertained at it all.

"A fascinating picture, truly!" says he. "I have often envied those important personages at the head of street parades without ever dreaming that some day the opportunity might come to me of—— But alas! I have no twelve thousand to invest in such an estimable enterprise."

"Ah, quit your kiddin'!" says Hunk.

He wouldn't believe for a minute that Cuyler couldn't cash a check for twice that, wouldn't even listen to Mr. De Kay while he protests that really he's a poor man livin' on a government salary. Hunk knew better. The ribbon on the shell-rim eyeglasses had got him, too.

"Very well," laughs Cuyler, givin' up the attempt. "But I must insist that I have no surging ambition, at my time of life, to drive spotted ponies in public. In fact, I've no ambitions at all."

"Then that's just why you ought to hook up with me," says Hunk. "Wait until you've been out a week on the road; that'll be enough to get you interested. And take it from me, there ain't any game like it,—pilin' out of your berth at a new pitch every mornin', breakfast

in the mess car on the sidin', strollin' out to the grounds and watchin' the pegs sunk, drivin' around town to take a glance at the paper display, formin' on for the parade, sizin' up the sidewalk crowds, and a couple of hours later seein' 'em collectin' from all sides around the big top; then at night, when you've had two big houses, to check up the receipts and figure out how much you are to the good. Say, don't make any mistake, that's livin'! It ain't layin' back easy and havin' things handed you on a platter: it's goin' out after what you want, your jaw set and your shoulders braced, and bringin' home the bacon."

Cuyler, he's still listenin' sort of amused; but he's inspectin' this crude specimen in front of him with a little more int'rest. He shakes his head though.

"I've no doubt the life is all you describe," says he. "However, it is not for me."

"Why not?" demands Hunk. "Didn't I just hear you tellin' how you was travelin' with a bunch of dead ones? Ain't stuck on it, are you? And the answer is, Come out of your trance. I take it you ain't anybody special where you are now; just one of the cogs. Buy in with me, and I'll make you the main belt. That's right! Say, I'll tell you what! We'll feature you on the four-sheets—De Kay & Co.'s Grand Australian Hippodrome. Your picture in a wreath of roses,—no, a horseshoe's better,—and we'll play up the show as a refined, edu-

catin', moral exhibition. They'll believe it when they see you. You'll be the big noise, the man in front. You'll hear 'em passin' the tip along the curb as the parade swings by, 'That's him—Mr. De Kay!' And you'll be the one to receive the Mayor and his wife and show 'em to their arena box. Every day a new Mayor in a new town. And you'll know 'em all, and they'll know you. What! That'll be bein' somebody, eh? "

He'd stepped up, right in front of Cuyler, talkin' free and easy, as one man to another. But then he always was that way. Not fresh, you know, nor cocky; but just as if he was as good as anybody, and allowed everybody was as good as him. He's lookin' Mr. De Kay straight in between the eyes, good-natured but earnest, and all of a sudden he reaches out a big paw and slaps him folksy on the shoulder.

"Well, Brother," says he, "how about it? "

I don't know how it struck J. Bayard Steele, but as for me, right then and there I got wise to, the fact that, in spite of the ear tufts and low-brow manners, Hunk Burley, man for man, would measure up with De Kay or anyone else; that is, within his limits. For he'd found his job. He was there with the goods!

The same thought must have hit Cuyler too. Couldn't help it. He was lookin' level into them steady eyes, hearin' that husky, even voice, and watchin' that calm, rugged face that had so much strength behind it. A party to

depend on, to tie to. Anyway, something of the kind got him, got him hard.

“By George!” says he. “I—I wish I could!” And with that he gives Hunk the grip, quick and impulsive.

Which was when I developed this foolish idea. I looks over to J. Bayard and grins. Then I turns back to Cuyler. “Well, it can be fixed,” says I.

“Eh?” says he. “I beg pardon?”

“Your bit from Pyramid’s pile,” says I. “If you’ll take the chance of chuckin’ your salary and quittin’ the ranks of the unburied dead, we’ll stake you to enough so you can buy in with Hunk. Won’t we, Steele?”

J. Bayard gulps once or twice and looks sort of dazed. “If Mr. De Kay really wishes to connect himself with such a venture,” says he, “of course I——”

“I do,” breaks in Cuyler. “And I assure you, Gentlemen, that I feel more alive at this moment than I have for the last twenty years. My friend Burley here has done that. I want to go on feeling that way. I am willing to follow him anywhere.”

“Then it’s a go,” says I. “Steele, write a voucher and I’ll O.K. it.”

“Good work!” says Hunk, givin’ Cuyler another bone crushing grip. “And remember, we split fifty-fifty on all the net. I’ll close the deal by to-morrow noon, and three weeks from to-day we open in Savannah.”

Half an hour after they'd both gone J. Bayard still sits there gazin' vague and puzzled at the silver crook on his walkin' stick.

"Just fancy!" he mutters. "A circus!"

"Oh, well," says I, "maybe it's better to be keepin' step to 'Rockin' the Boat' than draggin' your heels along in the wake of the unburied dead."

One thing I'm sure of, Cuyler wa'n't indulgin' in any momentary fit. He meant business. I saw him last night, just as he was startin' for the steamer.

"How you and Hunk comin' on?" says I.

"Excellent!" says he. "We've made some compromises, naturally. For instance, he is to drive the spotted ponies, and I am to wear an ordinary black silk hat when I lead the street parade."

CHAPTER XIII

A FOLLOW THROUGH BY EGGY

MIGHT have been a wrong hunch, as it turned out; but for awhile there what I wanted to do most was to take this Eggleston K. Ham, wad him up in a neat little lump, and stuff him into the waste basket. I wouldn't have been exertin' myself much, at that.

He's one of that kind, you know. Insignificant? Why, in full daylight you almost had to look twice to see him—and then you'd be guessin' whether it was a lath that had sprouted whiskers, or whiskers that was tryin' to bud a man! Them and the thick, gold-rimmed glasses sure did give him a comic, top-heavy look.

Course, we get all kinds in our buildin'; but when the lady voice culturist on the top floor sublets her studio for the summer to this freak I thought we'd gone from bad to worse. And she even has the nerve to leave the key with me, sayin' Mr. Ham would call for it in the course of a week or so.

We'd enjoyed about ten days of peace too, with no bloodcurdlin' sounds floatin' down the light shaft, and I was hopin' maybe the subtenant had renigged, when one mornin' the



HE SIDLES UP TO THE DESK AND PROCEEDS TO MAKE
SOME THROATY NOISES.

front office door opens easy, and in slips this face herbage exhibit. It's no scattered, hillside crop, either, but a full blown Vandyke. When he'd got through growin' the alfalfa, though, his pep seemed to give out, and the rest of him was as wispy as a schoolgirl.

He sidles up to the desk, where I have my heels elevated restful, and proceeds to make some throaty noises behind his hand. I'm just readin' how Tesreau pulled out of a bad hole in the seventh with two on bases; but I breaks away long enough to glance over the top of the paper.

"Go on, shoot it," says I.

"I—I'm very sorry," says he, "but—but I am Mr. Ham."

"Never mind apologizin'," says I. "Maybe it ain't all your fault. After the key, ain't you?"

"Yes, thank you," says he.

"Eggleston K., I suppose?" says I.

"Oh, yes," says he.

"Here you are, then, Eggy," says I, reachin' into a pigeonhole and producin' it. "What's your instrument of torture, the xylophone?"

"I—I beg pardon?" says he.

"Come now," says I, "don't tell me you're a trombone fiend!"

"Oh, I see," says he. "No, no, I—I'm not a musician."

"Shake, Eggy!" says I, reachin' out my hand impulsive. "And I don't care how many

cubist pictures you paint up there so long as you ain't noisy about it."

He fingers his soft hat nervous, smiles sort of embarrassed, and remarks, "But—but I'm not an artist either, you know."

"Well, well!" says I. "Two misses, and still in the air. Is it anything you can speak of in public?"

"Why," says he, "I—I've said very little about it, as a matter of fact, but—but I am doing a little research work in—in anthropology."

"Good night!" says I. "Mixin' things up that's liable to blow the roof off, ain't it?"

"Why, no," says he, starin' at me puzzled. "It's merely studying racial characteristics, making comparisons, and so on. Incidentally, I—I'm writing a book, I suppose."

"Oh!" says I. "Authoring? Well, there's no law against it, and ink is cheap. Go to it, Eggy! Top floor, first door to your left."

And that seems to be the finish of the Ham incident. All was peaceful in the light shaft,—no squeaky high C's, no tump-tump-tump on the piano: just the faint tinkle of a typewriter bell now and then to remind us that Eggy was still there. Once in awhile I'd pass him on the stairs, and he'd nod bashful but friendly and then scuttle by like a rabbit.

"Must be a hot book he's writin'!" thinks I, and forgets his existence until the next time. The summer moseys along, me bein' busy

with this and that, goin' and comin' back, until here the other day when things is dullest Pinckney calls up from the club and announces that he's got a new customer for me, someone very special.

" Visitin' royalty, or what? " says I.

" Winthrop Hubbard," says he impressive.

" The guy that invented squash pie? " says I.

" No, no! " peeves Pinckney. " The son of Joshua Q. Hubbard, you know."

" I get you," says I. " The Boston cotton mill plute that come so near bitin' a chunk out of the new tariff bill. But I thought he was entertainin' the French Ambassador or someone at his Newport place? "

Well, he was; but this is only a flyin' trip. Seems Son Winthrop had fin'ly been persuaded to begin his business career by bein' made first vice president of the General Sales Company, that handled the export end of the trust's affairs. So, right in the height of his season, he's had to scratch his Horse Show entries, drop polo practice, and move into a measly six-room suite in one of them new Fifth-ave. hotels, with three hours of soul-wearin' officework ahead of him five days out of seven. He'd been at the grind a month now, and Mother had worried so about his health that Joshua Q. himself had come down to observe the awful results. Meanwhile Josh had been listenin' to Pinckney boostin' the Physical Culture Studio as the great restorer, and he'd been about persuaded

that Son ought to take on something of the kind.

“ But he wants to see you first,” says Pinckney. “ You understand. They’re rather particular persons, the Hubbards,—fine old Plymouth stock, and all that.”

“ Me too,” says I. “ I’m just as fussy as the next—old Ellis Island stock, remember.”

“ Oh, bother!” says Pinckney. “ Will you come up and meet him, or won’t you? ”

It wa’n’t reg’lar; but as long as he’s a friend of Pinckney’s I said I would.

And, say, Joshua Q. looks the part, all right. One of these imposin’, dignified, well kept old sports, with pink cheeks, a long, straight nose, and close-set, gray-blue eyes. They’re the real crusty stuff, after all, them Back Bay plutes. For one thing, most of ’em have been at it longer. Take J. Q. Hubbard. Why, I expect he begun havin’ his nails manicured before he was ten, and has had his own man to lay out his dinner clothes ever since he got into long pants.

Nothin’ provincial about him, either. Takes his trip across every winter reg’lar, and I suppose he’s as much at home on Unter den Linden, or the Place de Concord or Neva Prospect as he is on Tremont-st. And, sittin’ there sippin’ his hock and seltzer, gazin’ languid out on Fifth-ave., he gives kind of a classy tone to one of the swellest clubs in New York. There ain’t any snobbish frills to him, though. He gets right down to brass tacks.

“McCabe,” says he, “what class of persons do you have as patrons.”

“Why,” says I, “mostly Wall Street men, with a sprinklin’ of afternoon tea Johnnies, such as Pinckney here.”

“No objectionable persons, I trust?” says he.

“Any roughneck gets the quick dump,” says I.

“Ah, I think I catch your meaning,” says he, “and I’ve no doubt your establishment can supply precisely what my son needs in the way of exercise. I suppose, however, I’d best see for myself. May we go now?”

“Sure,” says I. “No special visitin’ days.”

“Then I’ll ’phone Winthrop to meet us there,” says he.

Seems he couldn’t get Son direct; but he leaves word at his office, and then off we goes in Pinckney’s limousine de luxe. It ain’t often I worry any about the outside looks of things at the joint; but somehow, with this elegant old party comin’ to inspect, I was kind of hopin’ the stairs had been swept and that Swifty Joe wouldn’t have any of his Red Hook friends callin’ on him.

So I most gasps when we piles out in front of the studio and finds a mob that extends from the curb to the front door. Not only that, but the lower hall is crowded, and they line the stairs halfway up. And such a bunch!

Waps, Dagoes, Matzers, Syrians, all varieties.

“By Jove, though!” says Pinckney. “What’s all this?”

“Looks like someone was openin’ a sweat-shop in the buildin’, don’t it?” says I. “If that’s so, here’s where I break my lease.”

“Really,” says Mr. Hubbard, eyin’ the crowd doubtful, “I hardly believe I care to——”

“Ah, I’ll clear ’em out in two shakes,” says I. “Just follow after me. Hey, you! *Heimgagen*. Mushong! Gangway, gangway!” and I motions threatenin’. “Ah, beat it, you garlic destroyers!” I sings out. “Back up there, and take your feet with you! Back, you fatheads!” and I sends one caromin’ to the right and another spinnin’ to the left.

The best I could do, though, was to open a three-foot lane through ’em, and there they stuck, lined up on either side like they was waitin’ for a parade. It was something like that too,—me leadin’ the way, Pinckney steerin’ J. Q. by the arm. We’d got inside the doorway without a word bein’ said, when a bright-eyed Dago girl with a rainbow-tinted handkerchief about her neck breaks the spell.

“Picture, Meester—take-a da picture?” says she pleadin’. With that the others breaks loose. “Picture, Meester! Please-a, Meester? Picture, picture!” They says it in all sorts of dialects, with all sorts of variations, all beggin’

for the same thing. "Picture, picture!" They reaches out, grabbin' at our coat sleeves. Three of 'em had hold of J. Q. at once when I whirls on 'em.

"Ah, ditch the chorus!" I yells at 'em. "What do you think this is, anyway, a movie outfit? Get back there! Hands off, or I call the cops!"

It's strenuous work; but I manages to quiet 'em long enough for Pinckney and Mr. Hubbard to get through and slip up to the studio. Then I tries to shoo the bunch into the street; but they don't shoo for a cent. They still demands to have their pictures taken.

"Say, you Carlotta, there!" says I, singlin' out the Dago girl. "Who gave you this nutty picture hunch?"

"Why, Meester Hama," says she. "Nice-a man, Meester Hama."

"Is he?" says I. "Well, you wait here until I see him about this. Wait—understand?" With that I skips upstairs, and explains the mystery of our bein' mobbed. "It's a whiskered freak on the top floor they're after," says I. "Swifty, run up and get that Ham and Eggs gent. I'm yearnin' for speech with him. I don't know what this is all about; but I'll soon see, and block any encores."

"Quite right," says Mr. Hubbard. "This is all extremely annoying. Such a rabble!"

"Positively disgusting!" adds Pinckney.

“ A crowd of smelly foreigners! Shorty, you should put a stop to this.”

“ Trust me,” says I. “ Ah, here we have the guilty party!” and in comes Swifty towin’ Eggleston K. by the collar. No wonder Eggy is some agitated, after bein’ hauled down two flights in that fashion!

“ Well,” says I, as Swifty stands him up in front of us. “ Who are your outside friends, and why? ”

“ My—my friends? ” says he. “ I—I don’t understand. And I must protest, you know, against this manner of——”

“ Gwan! ” says I. “ I’m doin’ all the protestin’ here. And I want to know what you mean by collectin’ such a crowd of steerage junk that my customers can’t get in without bein’ mobbed? Howled for us to take their pictures, and mentioned your name.”

“ Oh! Pictures! ” and Eggy seems to get the key. “ Why, I—I’d forgotten.”

“ Can you beat that? ” says I. “ He’d forgotten! Well, they hadn’t. But what’s the idea, anyway? Collectin’ fam’ly portraits of prominent gunmen, or what? ”

“ It—it’s my way of getting material for my work,” says Eggleston. “ You see, through some friends in a settlement house, I get to know these people. I take snapshots of them for nothing. They like to send the pictures back home, you know, and I can use some of them myself.”

“ In the book? ” says I.

“ Perhaps,” says Eggy, blushin’. “ I had promised a few of them to take some studio pictures if they would come up to-day.”

“ And they didn’t do a thing but bring all their friends,” says I. “ Must be fifty of them down there. You’ll have a thick book before you get through.”

“ I beg pardon,” puts in Mr. Hubbard, leanin’ forward int’rested, “ but may I ask the nature of the book? ”

“ It—it’s to be about our foreign-born citizens,” says Eggy.

“ Ah, I see! ” says J. Q. “ Pointing out the evils of unrestricted immigration, I presume? ”

“ Well—er—not exactly,” says Eggy.

“ Then I should advise you to make it so,” says Mr. Hubbard. “ In fact, if the subject were well handled, and the case put strongly enough to meet my views, I think I could assure its immediate publication.”

“ Oh, would you? ” says Eggleston, real eager. “ But—but what are your views as to our treatment of aliens? ”

“ My programme is quite simple,” says Mr. Hubbard. “ I would stop all immigration at once, absolutely. Then I would deport all persons of foreign birth who had not become citizens.”

Eggy gasped. “ But—but that would be unjust! ” says he. “ Why, it would be monstrous! Surely, you are not in earnest? ”

Mr. Hubbard's eyelids narrow, his jaw stiffens, and he emphasizes each word by tappin' his knee. "I'd like to see it done to-morrow," says he. "Check this flood of immigration, and you solvé half of our economic and industrial problems. Too long we have allowed this country to be a general dumping ground for the scum of Europe. Everyone admits that."

"If you please," says Eggy, runnin' his fingers through his beard nervous, "I could not agree to that. On the contrary, my theory is that we owe a great deal of our progress and our success to the foreign born."

"Oh, indeed!" remarks Mr. Hubbard, cold and sharp. "And you mean to try to prove that in your book?"

"Something like that," admits Eggy.

"Then, Sir," goes on J. Q., "I must tell you that I consider you a most mischievous, if not dangerous person, and I feel it my duty to discourage such misdirected enterprise. Aren't you an instructor in economics under Professor Hartnett?"

Eggy pleads guilty.

"I thought I recognized the name," says J. Q. "Well, Mr. Ham, I am Joshua Q. Hubbard, and, as you may know, I happen to be one of the governing board of that college; so I warn you now, if you insist on publishing such a book as you have suggested, you may expect consequences."

For a minute that seems to stun Eggleston. He stares at Mr. Hubbard, blinkin' his eyes rapid and swallowin' hard. Then he appears to recover. "But—but are you not somewhat prejudiced?" says he. "I think I could show you, Sir, that these poor aliens——"

"Mr. Ham," says J. Q. decided, "I know exactly what I am talking about; not from hearsay, but from actual experience. Hundreds of thousands of dollars these wretched foreigners have cost me within the last few years. Why, that last big strike cut dividends almost in half! And who causes all the strikes, is at the bottom of all labor disturbances? The foreign element. If I had my way, I'd call out the regular army and drive every last one of them into the sea."

You'd most thought that would have squelched Eggy. I was lookin' for him to back through the door on his hands and knees. But all he does is stand there lookin' J. Q. Hubbard square in the eye and smilin' quiet.

"Yes, I've heard sentiments like that before," says he. "I presume, Mr. Hubbard, that you know many of your mill operatives personally?"

"No," says J. Q., "and I have no desire to. I haven't been inside one of our mills in fifteen years."

"I see," says Eggy. "You keep in touch with your employees through—er—your bank-book? But is it fair to judge them as men and

women wholly on their ability to produce dividends for you? ”

“ As an employer of labor, what other test would you have me apply? ” says J. Q.

“ Then you are classing them with machines,” says Eggy.

“ No,” says Mr. Hubbard. “ I can depend upon my looms not to go on strike.”

“ But you own your looms,” says Eggleston. “ Your loom tenders are human beings.”

“ When they mob strike breakers they behave more like wild animals, and then you’ve got to treat ’em as such,” raps back J. Q.

“ Are you quite certain that the standards of humanity you set up are just? ” asks Eggy. “ You know people are beginning to question your absolute right to fix arbitrarily the hours and wages and conditions of labor. They are suggesting that your mills produce tuberculosis as well as cloth. They are showing that, in your eagerness for dividends, you work women and children too long, and that you don’t pay them a living wage.”

“ Rot! ” snorts J. Q. “ These are all the mushy theories of sentimentalists. What else are these foreigners good for? ”

“ Ah, there you get to it! ” says Eggy. “ Aren’t they too valuable to be ground up in your dusty mills? Can they not be made into useful citizens? ”

“ No, they can’t,” snaps Mr. Hubbard. “ It’s been tried too often. Look at the results.

Who fill our jails? Foreigners! Who swarm in our filthy city slums? Foreigners! They are the curse of this country. Look at the wretched mob you have brought about your heels to-day, those outside there. There's a sample."

"If you only would look and understand!" says Eggleston. "Won't you—now? It will take only a little of your time, and I'll promise to keep them in order. Oh, if you'd only let me!"

"Let you what?" demands J. Q., starin' puzzled.

"Introduce a few of them to you properly," says Eggy; "only four or five. Come, a handful of simple-minded peasants can't hurt you. They're poor, and ignorant, and not especially clean, I'll admit; but I'll keep them at a proper distance. You see, I want to show you something about them. Of course, you're afraid you'll lose your cherished prejudices——"

"I'm afraid of nothing of the sort," breaks in Mr. Hubbard. "Go on. Have 'em up, if McCabe is willing."

"Eh?" says I. "Bring that mob up here?"

"Just a few," pleads Eggy, "and for ten minutes only."

"It might be sport," suggests Pinckney.

"I'll take a chance," says I. "We can disinfect afterwards."

Eggy dashes off, and after a lively jabberin' below comes back with his selected specimens. Not a one looks as though he'd been over

more'n a year, and some are still wearin' the outlandish rigs they landed in. Then Eggy begins introducin' 'em. And, say, you'd hardly know him for the same bashful, wispy party that Swifty had dragged in a little while before. Honest, as he warms to it, he sort of swells up and straightens, he squares his shoulders, his voice rings out confident, and his eyes behind the thick glasses are all aglow.

“ We will dispense with names,” says he; “ but here is a native of Sicily. He is about thirty-five years old, and he worked in the salt mines for something like twelve cents a day from the time he was ten until he came over here under contract to a padrone a few months ago. So you see his possibilities for mental development have been limited. But his muscles have been put to use in helping dig a new subway for us. We hope, however, that in the future his latent talents may be brought out. That being the case, he is possibly the grandfather of the man who in 1965 will write for us an American opera better than anything ever produced by Verdi. Why not? ”

We gawps at the grandfather of the musical genius of 1965 and grins. He's a short, squatty, low-browed party with gold rings in his ears and a smallpox-pitted face. He gazes doubtful at Eggleston durin' the talk, and at the finish grins back at us. Likely he thought Eggy'd been makin' a comic speech.

“ An ingenious prophecy,” says Mr. Hub-

bard; "but unfortunately all Italians are not Verdis."

"Few have the chance to be," says Eggy. "That is what America should mean to them,—opportunity. We shall benefit by giving it to them too. Look at our famous bands: at least one-third Italians. Why, nine-tenths of the music that delights us is made for us by the foreign born! Would you drive all those into the sea?"

"Absurd!" says Mr. Hubbard. "I referred only to the lower classes, of course. But let's get on. What next?"

Eggy looks over the line, picks out a square-jawed, bull-headed, pie-faced Yon Yonson, with stupid, stary, skim-milk eyes, and leads him to the front. "A direct descendant of the old Vikings," says he, "a fellow countryman of the heroic Stefansson, of Amundsen. Just now he works as a longshoreman. But give him a fair chance, and his son's son will turn out to be the first Admiral of the Federal Fleet of Commerce that is to be,—a fleet of swift government freighters that shall knit closely together our ports with all the ports of the Seven Seas. Gentlemen, I present to you the ancestor of an Admiral!"

Pinckney chuckles and nudges Mr. Hubbard. Yonson bats his stupid eyes once or twice, and lets himself be pushed back.

"Go on," says J. Q., scowlin'. "I suppose you'll produce next the grandfather of a genius

who will head the National Pie Bureau of the next century? ”

“ Not precisely, ” says Eggy, beckonin’ up a black-haired, brown-eyed Polish Jewess. “ A potential grandmother this time. She helps an aunt who conducts a little kosher delicatessen shop in a Hester-st. basement. Her granddaughter is to organize the movement for communal dietetics, by means of which our children’s children are all to be fed on properly cooked food, scientifically prepared, and delivered hot at a nominal price. She will banish dyspepsia from the land, make obsolete the household drudge, and eliminate the antique kitchen from twenty million homes. Perhaps they will put up a statue in her memory. ”

“ Humph! ” snorts Mr. Hubbard. “ Is that one of H. G. Wells’ silly dreams? ”

“ You flatter me, ” says Eggy; “ but you give me courage to venture still further. Now we come to the Slav. ” He calls up a thin, peak-nosed, wild-eyed gink who’s wearin’ a greasy waiter’s coat and a coffee-stained white shirt. “ From a forty-cent table d’hôte restaurant, ” goes on Eggleston. “ An alert, quick-moving, deft-handed person—valuable qualities, you will admit. Develop those in his grandson, give him the training of a National Academy of Technical Arts, bring out the repressed courage and self-confidence, and you will produce—well, let us say, the Chief Pilot of the Aëro Transportation Department, the man to whom Congress will

vote an honorary pension for winning the first Washington-to-Buenos Ayres race in a three-hundred-foot Lippmann Stabilized quadroplane, carrying fifty passengers and two tons of mail and baggage."

Mr. Hubbard gazes squint-eyed at the waiter and sniffs.

"Come, now, who knows?" insists Eggy. "These humble people whom you so despise need only an opportunity. Can we afford to shut them out? Don't we need them as much as they need us?"

"Mr. Ham," says J. Q., shuttin' his jaws grim, "my motto is, 'America for Americans!'"

"And mine," says Eggy, facin' him defiant, "is 'Americans for America!'"

"You're a scatterbrained visionary!" snaps J. Q. "You and your potential grandfather rubbish! What about the grandsons of good Americans? Do you not reckon them in at all in your——"

"Whe-e-e-e! Whoop!" comes from the hall, the front office door is kicked open joyous, and in comes a tall, light-haired, blue-eyed young gent, with his face well pinked up and his hat on the back of his head. He's arm in arm with a shrimp, Frenchy lookin' party wearin' a silk lid and a frock coat. They pushes unsteady through Eggy's illustrious ancestor bunch and comes to parade rest in the center of the stage.

"Winthrop!" gasps Mr. Hubbard.

“ Eh? ” gasps the young gent, starin’ round uncertain until he locates J. Q. Then he makes a stab at straightenin’ up. “ ’S a’ right, Governor,” he goes on, “ ’s a’ right. Been givin’ lil’ lu-luncheon to for’n rep’sen’tives. Put ’em all out but An-Andorvski, and he’s nothing but a fish—deuced Russian fish. Eh, Droski? ”

Believe me, with J. Q. Hubbard turnin’ purple in the gills, and all them cheap foreigners lookin’ on bug-eyed, it wa’n’t any humorous scene. With the help of the waiter and the longshoreman they loads Winthrop and his friend into a taxi, and Pinckney starts with ’em for the nearest Turkish bath. The grandfather debate is adjourned for good.

I was talkin’ it over with Swifty Joe, who, havin’ been born in County Kerry and brought up in South Brooklyn, is sore on foreigners of all kinds. Course, he sides hearty with Mr. Hubbard.

“ Ahr-r-r-chee! ” says he. “ That Ham-and boob, stickin’ up for the Waps and Guineas, he—he’s a nut, a last year’s nut! ”

“ Hardly that, Swifty,” says I. “ A next year’s nut, I should say.”

CHAPTER XIV

CATCHING UP WITH GERALD

“ It seemed so absurdly simple at first too,” says J. Bayard Steele, tappin’ one of his pearl-gray spats with his walkin’ stick. “ But now—well, the more I see of this Gerald Webb, the less I understand.”

“ Then you’re comin’ on,” says I. “ In time you’ll get wise to the fact that everybody’s that way,—no two alike and every last one of us neither all this nor all that, but constructed complicated, with a surprise package done up in each one.”

“ Ah! Some of your homespun philosophy, eh? ” says J. Bayard. “ Interesting perhaps, but inaccurate—quite! The fellow is not at all difficult to read: it’s what we ought to do for him that is puzzling.”

Which gives you a line, I expect, on this little debate of ours. Yep! Gerald is No. 8 on Pyramid Gordon’s list. He’d been a private secretary for Mr. Gordon at one time or another; but he’d been handed his passports kind of abrupt one mornin’, and had been set adrift in a cold world without warnin’.

“ In fact,” goes on Steele, “ I am told that

Gordon actually kicked him out of his office; in rather a public manner too."

"Huh!" says I. "I expect he deserved it, then."

"Not at all," says Steele. "I've looked that point up. It was over a letter which Gordon himself had dictated to Webb not forty-eight hours before; you know, one of his hot-headed, arrogant, go-to-blazes retorts, during the thick of a fight. But this happened to be in reply to an ultimatum from the Reamur-Brooks Syndicate, and by next morning he'd discovered that he was in no position to talk that way to them. Well, as you know, Pyramid Gordon wasn't the man to eat his own words."

"No," says I, "that wa'n't his fav'rite diet. So he made Gerald the goat, eh?"

"Precisely!" says Steele. "Called him in before the indignant delegation, headed by old Reamur himself, and demanded of poor Webb what he meant by sending out such a letter. The youngster was so flustered that he could only stammer a confused denial. He started sniveling. Then Gordon collared him and booted him into the corridor. That should have closed the incident, but a few moments later back comes Webb, blubbering like a whipped schoolboy, and perfectly wild with rage. He was armed with a mop that he'd snatched from an astonished scrubwoman, and he stormed in whimpering that he was going to kill Gordon. Absurd, of course. A mop isn't a deadly

weapon. Some of the clerks promptly rushed in and held Webb until an officer could be called. Then Pyramid laughed it off and refused to prosecute. But the story got into the papers, you may remember; and while more or less fun was poked at Gordon, young Webb came in for a good share. And naturally his career as a private secretary ended right there."

"Yes," says I. "If I was takin' on a secretary myself, I wouldn't pick one that was subject to fits of mop wieldin'. What happened to him after that? How low did he fall?"

J. Bayard tosses over a fancy business card printed in three colors and carryin' this inscription in old English letterin':

AT THE SIGN OF THE BRASS CANDLESTICK
Tea Room and Gift Shop
Mr. Gerald Webb, Manager.

"Oh, well," says I, "that ain't so bad. Must have run across a backer somewhere."

"His sisters," says Steele. "He has five, and some of the four married ones are quite well to do. Then there is Evelyn, the old maid sister, who went in with him. It's from her I've found out so much about Gerald. Nice, refined, pleasant old maid; although somewhat plain featured. She tells me they have a shop at some seashore resort in summer,—Atlantic City, or the Pier,—and occasionally have quite a successful season. Then in the fall they open up again here. The last two summers, though,

they've barely made expenses, and she fears that Gerald is becoming discouraged."

"Well, what you beefin' about?" says I. "There's your chance, ain't it? Jump in and cheer him up. Go round every day and drink yourself full of tea. Lug along your friends—anything. Got the whole Gordon estate back of you, you know. And it's plain Pyramid had in mind squarin' accounts for that raw deal he handed Gerald years back, or he wouldn't have named him in the will. And if your dope is right, I judge there ought to be something nice comin' to him."

"Of course, of course," says Steele. "But you see, McCabe, as an expert in altruism, I have reached the point where I no longer act hastily on crude conclusions. Possibly you will fail to understand, but now I take a certain pride in doing just the right thing in exactly the right way."

"I knew you was developin' into some variety of nut," says I. "So that's it, eh? Well, go on."

J. Bayard smiles indulgent and shrugs his shoulders. "For instance," says he, "this Gerald Webb seems to be one of those highly sensitive, delicately organized persons; somewhat effeminate in fact. He needs considerate, judicious handling."

"Then why not present him with an inlaid dressin' table and a set of eyebrow pencils?" I suggest.

Steele brushes that little persiflage aside too. "He's no doubt an idealist of some sort," says he, "a man with high hopes, ambitions. If I only knew what they were——"

"Ain't tried askin' him, have you?" says I.

"Certainly not!" says J. Bayard. "Those are things which such persons can rarely be induced to talk about. I've been studying him at close range, however, by dropping in now and then for a cup of tea and incidentally a chat with his sister; but to no effect. I can't seem to make him out. And I was wondering, Shorty, if you, in your rough and ready way——"

"P.O.F.!" I breaks in.

"What?" says Steele.

"Please omit floral tributes," says I. "You was wonderin' if I couldn't what—size him up for you?"

"Just that," says J. Bayard. "While your methods are not always of the subtlest, I must concede that at times your—er—native intuition——"

"Top floor—all out!" I breaks in. "You mean I can do a quick frame-up without feelin' the party's bumps or consultin' the cards? Maybe I can. But I ain't strong for moochin' around these oolong joints among the draped tunics and vanity boxes."

He's a persistent party, though, J. Bayard is, and after he's guaranteed that we won't run into any mob of shoppers this late in the day,

and urged me real hard, I consents to trail along with him and pass on Gerald.

One of the usual teashop joints, the Brass Candlestick is, tucked away in a dwelling house basement on a side street about half a block east of Fifth avenue, with a freaky sign over the door and a pair of moultin' bay trees at the entrance. Inside we finds a collection of little white tables with chairs to match, a showcase full of arty jew'lry, and some shelves loaded with a job lot of odd-shaped vases and jugs and teapots and such truck.

A tall, lopyy female with mustard-colored hair and haughty manners tows us to a place in a dark corner and shoves a menu at us. You know the tearoom brand of waitress maybe, and how distant they can be? But this one fairly sneers at us as she takes our order; although I kind of shrivels up in the chair and acts as humble as I know how.

"That ain't Sister Evelyn, is it?" says I, as she disappears towards the back.

"No, no," says Steele. "Miss Webb is at the little cashier's desk, by the door. And that is Webb, behind the counter, talking to those ladies."

"Oh!" says I. "Him with the pale hair and the narrow mouth? Huh! He is Lizzie-like, ain't he?"

He's a slim, thin-blooded, sharp-faced gent, well along in the thirties, I should judge, with gray showin' in his forelock, and a dear little

mustache pointed at the ends; the sort of chappy who wears a braid-bound cutaway and a wrist watch, you know. He's temptin' his customers with silver-set turquoise necklaces, and abalone cuff links, and moonstone sets, and such; doin' it dainty and airy, and incidentally displayin' a job of manicurin' that's the last word in fingernail decoration. Such smooth, highbrow conversation goes with it too!

"Oh, yes, Madam," I overhears him gurgle. "Quite so, I assuah you. We import these direct from Cairo; genuine scarabs, taken from ancient mummy cases. No, not Rameses; these are of the Thetos period. Rather rare, you know. And here is an odd trifle, if you will permit me. Oh, no trouble at all. Really! When we find persons of such discriminating taste as you undoubtedly have we——"

"Say," I remarks low to Steele, "he's some swell kidder, ain't he? He'll be chuckin' her under the chin next. What a sweet thing he is! It's a shame to waste all that on a side street too. He ought to be farther up in the shoppin' district and on the avenue."

"Do you think so?" says J. Bayard. "I've been considering that—setting him up in first-class style on a big scale. But of course I should like to be sure that is what he wants most."

"That's my best guess," says I. "I'll bet he'd eat it up. Spring it on him and see."

“ Perhaps I will when he’s through,” says J. Bayard. “ There! They’re going now.”

He was wrong: they was only startin’ to go. They had to come back twice and look at something all over again, after which Gerald follows ’em to the door and holds it open for ’em while they exchange a few last words. So it’s ten minutes or more before Steele has a chance to call him over, get him planted in the extra chair, and begin breakin’ the news to him about Pyramid’s batty will.

And even after all them years Webb flushes pink in the ears at the mention of the name. “ Oh, yes, Gordon,” says he. “ I—I did hold a position at one time in his office. Misunderstanding? Not at all. He treated me shamefully. Rank injustice, it was! He—he was by no means a gentleman, by no means! ”

“ I hear you tried to assassinate him with a mop,” says I.

“ I—I was not quite myself,” says Gerald, colorin’ still more. “ You see, he put me in such a false position before those Chicago men; and when I tried to tell them the truth he—well, he acted brutally. I ask you, Mr. McCabe, what would you have done? ”

“ Me? ” says I. “ I expect I’d slapped him rough on the wrist, or something like that. But you know he was always a little quick about such things, and when it was all over he was gen’rally sorry—if he had time. You see he

remembered your case. Now the idea is, how can that little affair of yours be squared? ”

“ It may have been a little affair to him, ” says Gerald, poutin’ a bit sulky; “ but it wasn’t so to me. It—it changed my whole life—utterly! ”

“ Of course, ” puts in J. Bayard soothin’. “ We understand that, Mr. Webb. ”

“ But you’ve come out all right; you struck something just as good, or better, eh? ” and I waves round at the teashop. “ Course, you ain’t catchin’ the business here you might if you was located better. And I expect you feel like you was wastin’ your talents on a place this size. But with a whole second floor near some of the big Fifth avenue department stores, where you could soak ’em half a dollar for a club sandwich and a quarter for a cup of tea,—a flossy, big joint with a hundred tables, real French waiters from Staten Island, and a genuine Hungarian orchestra, imported from East 176th street, where you could handle a line of Mexican drawnwork, and Navajo blankets, and Russian samovars, and——”

“ No, no! ” breaks in Gerald peevish. “ Stop! ”

“ Eh? ” says I, gawpin’ at him.

“ If you are proposing all that as a—recompense for being publicly humiliated, ” says he, “ and having my career entirely spoiled—well, you just needn’t, that’s all. I do not care for anything of the kind. ”

I gasps. Then I gazes foolish over at J. Bayard to see if he has anything to offer. He just scowls at me and shakes his head, as much as to say:

“ There, you see! You’ve messed things all up.”

“ All right, Mr. Webb,” says I. “ Then you name it.”

“ Do you mean,” says he, “ that Mr. Gordon intended to leave me something in his will; that he—er—considered I was entitled to some—ah——”

“ That’s the idea, more or less,” says I. “ Only Mr. Steele here, he’s been tryin’ to dope out what would suit you best.”

“ Could—could it be in the form of a—a cash sum? ” asks Gerald.

I sighs relieved and looks inquirin’ at Steele. He nods, and I nods back.

“ Sure thing,” says I.

“ How much? ” demands Webb.

“ Time out,” says I, “ until Mr. Steele and I can get together.”

So while Gerald is pacin’ nervous up and down between the tables we makes figures on the back of the menu. We begins by guessin’ what he was gettin’ when he was fired, then what salary he might have been pullin’ down in five years, at the end of ten, and so on, deductin’ some for black times and makin’ allowances for hard luck. But inside of five minutes we’d agreed on a lump sum.

“What about twenty thousand?” says I.

Gerald gulps once or twice, turns a little pale, and then asks choky, “Would—would you put that in writing?”

“I can give you a voucher for the whole amount,” says Steele.

“Then—then please!” says Gerald, and he stands over J. Bayard, starin’ eager, while the paper is bein’ made out. He watches us both sign our names.

“This is drawn,” says Steele, “on the attorney for the estate, and when you present it he will give you a check for——”

“Thanks,” says Gerald, reachin’ trembly for the voucher.

For a minute he stands gazin’ at it before he stows it away careful in an inside vest pocket. Then all of a sudden he seems to straighten up. He squares his shoulders and stiffens his jaw.

“Evelyn!” he sings out. “Ho, Evelyn!”

It ain’t any smooth, ladylike tone he uses, either. A couple of stout female parties, that’s been toyin’ with lobster Newburg patties and chocolate éclairs and gooseberry tarts, stops their gossipin’ and glares round at him indignant.

“Evelyn, I say!” he goes on, fairly roarin’ it out.

At that out comes Sister from behind her little coop lookin’ panicky. Also in from the kitchen piles the haughty waitress with the mustard-tinted hair, and a dumpy, frowzy one

that I hadn't noticed before. The haughty one glares at Gerald scornful, almost as if he'd been a customer.

"Why—why, Brother dear!" begins Evelyn, still holdin' open the novel she'd been readin'. "What is the matter?"

"I'm through, that's all," he announces crisp.

"You—you are what?" asks his sister.

"Through," says Gerald loud and snappy. "I'm going to quit all this—now, too. I'm going to close up, going out of the business. Understand? So get those women out of here at once."

"But—but, Gerald," gasps Evelyn, "they—you see they are——"

"I don't care whether they've finished or not," says he. "It doesn't matter. They needn't pay. But clear 'em out. Right away!"

She had big dark eyes, Sister Evelyn. She was thinner than Gerald, and a few years older, I should guess. Anyway, her hair showed more gray streaks. She had a soft, easy voice and gentle ways. She didn't faint, or throw any emotional fit. She just looks at Gerald mildly reproachful and remarks:

"Very well, Brother dear," and then glides down the aisle to the two heavy-weight food destroyers.

We couldn't hear just what she told 'em, but it must have been convincin'. They gathers up

their wraps and shoppin' bags and sails out, sputterin' peevish.

"Here, Celia!" commands Gerald, turnin' to the waitresses. "You and Bertha pull down those front shades—tight, mind you! Then turn on the dome and side lights—all of 'em."

We sat watchin' the proceedin's, Steele and me, with our mouths open, not knowin' whether to go or stay. Evelyn stands starin' at him too. In a minute, though, he whirls on her.

"You needn't think I've gone crazy, Evelyn," he says. "I was never more sane. But something has happened. I've just had a windfall. You'd never guess. From old Gordon; you remember, the beast who——"

"Yes, I know," says Evelyn. "Mr. Steele has been talking to me about it."

"Has, eh?" says Gerald. "Well, I trust it wasn't you who gave him that idea about keepin' me in this fool business for the rest of my life. Ugh! Talking sappy to an endless stream of silly women, palming off on them such useless junk as this! Look at it! Egyptian scarabs, made in Connecticut; Ceylonese coral, from North Attleboro, Mass.; Bohemian glassware, from Sandsburg, Pa.; Indian baskets woven by the Papago tribe, meaning Rutherford, N. J. Bah! For nearly twelve years I've been doing this. And you're to blame for it, you and Irene and Georgianna. You got me into it when I could find nothing else to do, and then somehow I couldn't seem to get out. Ly-

ing and smirking and dickering day after day—sickening! But I'm through. And just as a relief to my feelings I'm going to finish off a lot of this rubbish before I go. Watch!"

With that he picks a teapot from our table, balances it careful in one hand, and sends it bang at a shelf full of blue and yellow pitchers.

Crash! Smash! Tinkle-tinkle!

It was a good shot. He got three or four of 'em at one clip.

Next he reaches for the sugar bowl and chucks that. More crash. More tinkle-tinkle. This time it was sort of a side-wipin' blow, and a full half-dozen fancy cream jugs bit the dust.

"Good eye!" says I, chucklin'. Even J. Bayard has to grin.

As for Sister Evelyn, she says never a word, but braces herself against a table and grips her hands together, like she was preparin' to have a tooth out. The dumpy waitress clutches the haughty one around the waist and breathes wheezy.

"Vases!" says Gerald, scowlin' at a shelf. "Silly vases!"

And with that he ups with a chair, swings it over his shoulder, and mows down a whole row of 'em. They goes crashin' onto the floor.

"Muh Gord!" gasps the dumpy tea juggler.

"Clean alley! Set 'em up on the other!" I sings out.

But Gerald is too busy to notice side remarks. His thin face is flushed and his eyes sparkle.

Peelin' off the cutaway, he tosses it careless on a table.

"Look out for splinters!" says he as he heaves a chair into the showcase among the fake jew'lry, and with another proceeds to make vicious swipes at whatever's left on the shelves.

As a tearoom wrecker he was some artist, believe me! Not a blessed thing that could be smashed did he miss, and what he couldn't break he bent or dented.

"Ain't he just grand!" observes Celia to her dumpy friend. "My! I didn't think it was in him."

It was, though. A village fire department couldn't have done a neater job, or been more thorough. He even tosses down a lot of work baskets and jumps on 'em and kicks 'em about.

"There!" says he, after a lively session, when the place looks like it had been through a German siege. "Now it's all genuine junk, I guess."

Sister Evelyn gazes at him placid. "No doubt about that," she remarks. "And I hope you feel better, Brother dear. Perhaps you will tell me, though, what is to become of me now."

"I am going to leave some money for you," says he. "If you're silly enough, you can buy a lot more of this stuff and keep on. If you have any sense, you'll quit and go live with Irene."

"And you, Gerald?" asks Evelyn.

“ I’m off,” says he. “ I’m going to do some real work, man’s work. You saw that dark-looking chap who was in here a few days ago? That was Bentley, who used to be bank messenger in old Gordon’s office. He was discharged without cause too. But he had no five sisters to make a sappy tearoom manager out of him. He went to the Argentine. Owns a big cattle ranch down there. Wants me to go in with him and buy the adjoining ranch. He sails day after to-morrow. I’m going with him, to live a wild, rough life; and the wilder and rougher it is the better I shall like it.”

“ Oh! ” says Sister Evelyn, liftin’ her eyebrows sarcastic. “ Will you? ”

Well, that’s just what J. Bayard and I have been askin’ each other ever since. Anyway, he’s gone. Showed up here in the studio the last thing, wearin’ a wide-brimmed felt hat with a leather band—and if that don’t signify somethin’ wild and rough, I don’t know what does.

“ Rather an impetuous nature, Gerald’s,” observes Steele. “ I hope it doesn’t get him into trouble down there.”

“ Who knows? ” says I. “ Next thing we may be hearin’ how he’s tried to stab some Spaniard with a whisk broom.”

CHAPTER XV

SHORTY HEARS FROM PEMAQUID

It was mostly my fault. I'd left the Physical Culture Studio and was swingin' east across 42d-st. absentminded, when I takes a sudden notion to have lunch at my favorite chophouse joint on Broadway, and it was the quick turn I made that causes the collision.

I must have hit him kind of solid too; for his steel-rimmed glasses are jarred off, and before I can pick 'em up they've been stepped on.

"Sorry, old scout," says I. "Didn't know you'd dodged in behind. And it's my buy on the eyeglasses."

"Sho!" says he. "No great harm done, young man. But them specs did cost me a quarter in Portland, and if you feel like you——"

"Sure thing!" says I. "Here's a half—get a good pair this time."

"No, Son," says he, "a quarter's all they cost, and Jim Isham never takes more'n his due. Just wait till I git out the change."

So I stands there lookin' him over while he unwraps about four yards of fishline from around the neck of a leather money pouch. Odd

old Rube he was, straight and lean, and smoked up like a dried herring.

“There you be,” says he, countin’ out two tens and a five.

Course, I’d felt better if he’d kept the half. The kale pouch wa’n’t so heavy, and from the seedy blue suit and the faded old cap I judged he could use that extra quarter. But somehow I couldn’t insist.

“All right, Cap,” says I. “Next time I turn sudden I’ll stick my hand out.” I was movin’ off when I notices him still standin’ sort of hesitatin’. “Well?” I adds. “Can I help?”

“You don’t happen to know,” says he, “of a good eatin’ house where it don’t cost too all-fired much to git a square meal, do you?”

“Why,” says I, “I expect over on Eighth-ave., you could——” And then I gets this rash notion of squarin’ the account by blowin’ him to a real feed. Course, I might be sorry; but he looks so sort of lonesome and helpless that I decides on takin’ a chance. “Say, you come with me,” says I, “and lemme stack you up against the real thing in Canadian mutton chops.”

“If it don’t cost over twenty-five cents,” says he.

“It won’t,” says I, smotherin’ a grin. He wa’n’t a grafter, anyway, and the only way I could ease his mind on the expense question was to let him hand me a quarter before we went in, and make him think that covered his share.

Max, the head waiter, winks humorous as he sees who I'm towin' in; but he gives us a table by a Broadway window and surprises the old boy by pullin' out his chair respectful.

"Much obliged, Mister," says Jim Isham. "Much obliged."

With that he hangs his old cap careful on the candle shade. It's one of these oldtime blizzard headpieces, with sides that you can turn down over your ears and neck. Must have worn that some constant; for from the bushy eyebrows up he's as white as a piece of chalk, and with the rest of his face so coppery it gives him an odd, skewbald look.

I expected a place like Collins's, with all its pictures and rugs and fancy silverware, would surprise him some; but he don't seem at all fussed. He tucks his napkin under his chin natural and gazes around int'rested. He glances suspicious at a wine cooler that's carted by, and when the two gents at the next table are served with tall glasses of ale he looks around as if he was locatin' an exit. Next he digs into an inside pocket, hauls out a paper, spreads it on the table, and remarks:

"Let's see, Mister—jest about where are we now?"

I gives him the cross street and the Broadway number, and he begins tracin' eager with his finger. Fin'llly he says:

"All correct. Right in the best of the water."

“ Eh? ” says I. “ What’s that you’ve got there? ”

“ Sailin’ directions,” says he, smilin’ apologetic. “ You mustn’t mind; but for a minute there, seein’ all the liquor bein’ passed around, I didn’t know but what I’d got among the rocks and shoals. But it’s all right. Full ten fathom, and plenty of sea room.”

“ Too tarry for me,” says I. “ Meanin’ what, now? ”

He chuckles easy. “ Why, it’s this way,” says he: “ You see, before I starts from home I talks it over with Cap’n Bill Logan. ‘ Jim,’ says he, ‘ if you’re goin’ to cruise around New York you need a chart.’—‘ Guess you’re right, Cap’n Bill,’ says I. ‘ Fix me up one, won’t ye?’ And that’s what he done. You see, Cap’n Bill knows New York like a book. Used to sail down here with ice from the Kennebec, and sometimes, while he was dischargin’ cargo, he’d lay in here for a week at a time. Great hand to knock around too, Cap’n Bill is, and mighty observin’.”

“ So he made a map for you, did he? ” says I.

“ Not exactly,” says Mr. Isham. “ Found one in an old guide book and fixed it up like a chart, markin’ off the reefs and shoals in red ink, and the main channels in black fathom figures. Now here’s Front and South-sts., very shoal, dangerous passin’ at any tide. There’s a channel up the Bowery; but it’s crooked and full of buoys and beacons. I ain’t tackled that

yet. I've stuck to Broadway and Fifth-ave. All clear sailin' there."

"Think so?" says I. "Let's see that chart?"

He passes it over willin' enough. And, say, for a sailor's guide to New York, that was a peach! Cap'n Bill Logan's idea seems to have been to indicate all the crooked joints, gamblin' halls, and such with red daggers. Must have been some investigator too; for in spots they was sprinkled thick, with the names written alongside. When I begun readin' some of 'em, though, I snickers.

"What's this on the Bowery?" says I. "Suicide Hall?"

"You bet!" says he. "Cap'n Bill warned me about that special."

"Did, eh?" says I. "Well, he needn't; for it's been out of business for years. So has Honest John Kelly's, and Theiss's, and Stevenson's. What vintage is this, anyway? When was it your friend took in the sights last?"

"Wall, I guess it's been quite awhile," says Jim Isham, rubbin' his chin. "Let's see, Bill opened the store in '95, and for a couple of years before that he was runnin' the shingle mill. Yes, it must have been nigh twenty years ago."

"Back in the days of the Parkhurst crusade," says I. "Yes, I expect all them dives was runnin' full blast once. But there ain't one of 'em left."

“ Sho! ” says he. “ You don’t say! Gov’tment been improvin’ the channels, same as they done in Hell Gate? ”

“ Something like that, ” says I. “ Only not quite the same; for when them Hell Gate rocks was blown up that was the end of ’em. But we get a fresh crop of red light joints every season. You tell Cap’n Bill when you get back that his wickedness chart needs revisin’.”

“ I’ll write him that, b’gum! ” says Mr. Isham. “ Maybe that’s why I couldn’t locate this reservoir he said I ought to see, the one I was huntin’ for when we fouled. See, it says corner of 42d and Fifth-ave., plain as day; but all I could find was that big white buildin’ with the stone lions in front.”

“ Naturally, ” says I; “ for they tore the old reservoir down years ago and built the new city lib’ry on the spot. But how was it your friend put in so many warnin’s against them old dives? You didn’t come on to cultivate a late crop of wild oats, did you? ”

“ Nary an oat, ” says he, shakin’ his head solemn. “ I ain’t much of a churchgoer; but I’ve always been a moderate, steady-goin’ man. It was on account of my havin’ this money to invest.”

“ Oh! ” says I. “ Much? ”

“ Fifty thousand dollars, ” says he.

I glances at him puzzled. Was it a case of loose wirin’, or was this old jay tryin’ to hand me the end of the twine ball? Just then,

though, along comes Hermann with a couple of three-inch, combination chops and a dish of baked potatoes all broke open and decorated with butter and paprika; and for the next half-hour Mr. Isham's conversation works are clogged for fair. Not that he's one of these human sausage machines; but he has a good hearty Down East appetite and a habit of attendin' strictly to business at mealtime.

But when he's finished off with a section of deep-dish apple pie and a big cup of coffee he sighs satisfied, unhooks the napkin, lights up a perfecto I've ordered for him, and resumes where he left off.

"It's a heap of money ain't it?" says he. "I didn't know at first whether or no I ought to take it. That's one thing I come on for."

"Ye-e-es?" says I, a little sarcastic maybe. "Had to be urged, did you?"

"Wall," says he, "I wa'n't sure the fam'ly could afford it exactly."

"It was a gift, then?" says I.

"Willed to me," says he. "Kind of curious too. Shucks! when I took them folks off the yacht that time I wa'n't thinkin' of anything like this. Course, the young feller did offer me some bills at the time; but he did it like he thought I was expectin' to be paid, and I—well, I couldn't take it that way. So I didn't git a cent. I thought the whole thing had been forgotten too, when that letter from the law-

yers comes sayin' how this Mr. Fowler had——”

“ Not Roswell K. ? ” I breaks in.

“ Yes, that's the man,” says he.

“ Why, I remember now,” says I. “ It was the yacht his son and his new wife was takin' a honeymoon trip on. And she went on some rocks up on the coast of Maine durin' a storm. The papers was full of it at the time. And how they was all rescued by an old lobsterman who made two trips in a leaky tub of a motorboat out through a howlin' northeaster. And—why, say, you don't mean to tell me you're Uncle Jimmy Isham, the hero ? ”

“ Sho ! ” says he. “ Don't you begin all that nonsense again. I was pestered enough by the summer folks that next season. You ought to see them schoolma'ams takin' snapshots of me every time I turned around. And gushin' ! Why, it was enough to make a dog laugh ! Course I ain't no hero.”

“ But that must have been some risky stunt of yours, just the same,” I insists.

“ Wall,” he admits, “ it wa'n't just the weather I'd pick to take the old Curlew out in; but when I see through the glasses what the white thing was that's poundin' around on Razor Back Ledges, and seen the distress signal run up—why, I couldn't stay ashore. There was others would have gone, I guess, if I hadn't. But there I was, an old bach, and not much good to anybody anyway, you know.”

“Come, come!” says I. “Why wa’n’t you as good as the next?”

“I dun’no,” says he, sighin’ a little. “Only—only you know the kind of a chap that everybody calls Uncle Jimmy? That—that’s me.”

“But you went out and got ’em!” I goes on.

“Yes,” says he. “It wa’n’t so much, though. You know how the papers run on?”

I didn’t say yes or no to that. I was sittin’ there starin’ across the table, tryin’ to size up this leather-faced old party with the bashful ways and the simple look in his steady eyes. The grizzled mustache curlin’ close around his mouth corners, the heavy eyebrows, and the thick head of gray hair somehow reminds me of Mark Twain, as we used to see him a few years back walkin’ up Fifth-ave. Only Uncle Jimmy was a little softer around the chin.

“Let’s see,” says I, “something like three summers ago, that was, wa’n’t it?”

“Four,” says he, “the eighteenth of September.”

“And since then?” says I.

“Just the same as before,” says he. “I’ve been right at Pemaquid.”

“At what?” says I.

“Pemaquid,” he repeats, leanin’ hard on the “quid.” “I’ve been there goin’ on forty years, now.”

“Doin’ what?” says I.

“Oh, lobsterin’ mostly,” says he. “But late years they’ve been runnin’ so scurce that

summers I've been usin' the Curlew as a party boat. Ain't much money in it, though."

"How much, for instance?" says I.

"Wall, this season I cleaned up about one hundred and twenty dollars from the Fourth to Labor Day," says he. "But there was lots of good days when I didn't git any parties at all. You see, I look kind of old and shabby. So does the Curlew; and the spruce young fellers with the new boats gits the cream of the trade. But it don't take much to keep me."

"I should say not," says I, "if you can winter on that!"

"Oh, I can pick up a few dollars now and then lobsterin' and fishin'," says he. "But it's rough work in the winter time."

"And then all of a sudden, you say," says I, "you get fifty thousand."

"I couldn't believe it at fust," says he. "Neither did Cap'n Bill Logan. He was the only one I showed the letter to. 'Mebbe it's just some fake,' says he, 'gittin' you on there to sign papers. Tell 'em to send twenty dollars for travelin' expenses.' Wall, I did, and what do you think? They sends back two hundred, b'gum! Yes, Sir, Cap'n Bill took the check up to Wiscasset and got the money on it from the bank. Two hundred dollars! Why, say, that would take me putty nigh round the world, I guess. I left part of it with the Cap'n, and made him promise not to tell a soul. You see, I didn't want Cynthy to git wind of it."

“ Oh-ho! ” says I. “ Some relation, is she? ”

“ Cynthy? Land, no! ” says he. “ She’s just the Widow Allen, over to the Neck—Cynthy Hamill that was. I’ve known her ever since she taught school at Bristol Mills. She’s been a widow goin’ on twenty years now, and most of that time we’ve been—well, I ain’t missed goin’ across the bay once or twice a week in all that time. You see, Cynthy not havin’ any man, I kind of putter around for her, see that she has plenty of stovewood and kindlin’ chopped, and so on. She’s real good company, Cynthy is,—plays hymns on the organ, knits socks for me, and hanged if she can’t make the best fish chowder I ever e’t! Course, I know the neighbors laugh some about Cynthy and me; but they’re welcome. Always askin’ me when the weddin’s comin’ off. But sho! They know well enough I never had the money to git married on.”

“ Got enough now, though, ain’t you, Uncle Jimmy? ” says I, winkin’.

“ Too blamed much, ” says he. “ Cap’n Bill showed me that plain at our last talk. ‘ Why, you old fool, ’ says he, ‘ if it turns out true, then you’re a mighty rich man, ’most a millionaire! You can’t stay on livin’ here in your old shack at Pemaquid. You got to have the luxuries and the refinements of life now, ’ says he, ‘ and you got to go to the city to git ’em. Boston might do for some; but if it was me I’d

camp right down in New York at one of them swell hotels, and just enjoy myself to the end of my days.' Wall, here I be, and I'm gittin' used to the luxuries gradual."

"How hard have you splurged?" says I.

"Had two sodas yesterday," says he, "and maybe I'll tackle one of them movin' picture shows to-morrow. I been aimin' to. It'd be all right, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, I wouldn't call that any wild extravagance, with fifty thousand to draw on," says I. "How have you got it?"

He fishes out an old wallet, unstraps it careful, and shoves over a cashier's check. No bluff about it. He had the goods.

"Said you was goin' to invest it, didn't you?" I suggests cautious.

"That's what's botherin' me most about this whole business," says Uncle Jimmy. "It's an awful lot of money for an old codger like me to handle. I tried to git young Mr. Fowler to take half of it back; but he only laughs and says he couldn't do that, and guessed how he and the wife was worth that much, anyway. Besides, I expect he don't need it."

"I should say that was a safe bet," says I. "If I remember right, his share of the estate was ten or twelve millions."

"Gorry!" says Uncle Jimmy. "No wonder he couldn't tell me what to put it into, either. Maybe you could give me an idea, though."

"Me?" says I. "Why, you don't know me,

Uncle Jimmy. You wouldn't want to take a stranger's advice about investin' your money."

"Sho!" says he. "Why not? I've asked most everybody I've had a chance to talk with ever since I got here, and most of 'em has been mighty accommodatin'. Why, there was one young man that followed me out of the lawyer's office just to tell me of some gold mine stock he knew about that inside of six months was goin' to be worth ten times what it's sellin' for now. Offered to buy me a controllin' interest too."

"You don't mean it!" says I.

"Yes, Sir. Nice, bright feller that didn't know me from Adam," says Uncle Jimmy. "Took me ridin' in one of these here taxicabs and bought me a bang-up hotel dinner. And if it hadn't been that I knew of a Methodist minister once who lost twenty dollars in gold mine stocks, hanged if I wouldn't have invested heavy! But somehow, ever since hearin' of that, I've had an idea gold mines was sort of risky."

"Which ain't such a fool hunch, either," says I.

"Then only this mornin'," goes on Uncle Jimmy enthusiastic, "I runs across a mighty friendly, spruce-dressed pair,—big Pittsburgh fi-nanciers, they said they was,—who was makin' money hand over fist bettin' on hoss races somewheres."

“ Well, well! ” says I. “ Had an operator who’d tapped a poolroom wire and could hold up returns, didn’t they? ”

“ That’s it! ” says Uncle Jimmy. “ They explained just how it was done; but I’m a little slow understandin’ such things. Anyway, they took me to a place where I saw one of ’em win two thousand inside of ten minutes; and b’gum, if I’d been a bettin’ man, I could have made a heap! I did let one of ’em put up fifty cents for me, and he brought back five dollars in no time. They seemed real put out too when I wouldn’t take the chance of a lifetime and bet a thousand on the next race. But somehow I couldn’t bring myself to it. What would Cynthy think if she knew I was down here in New York, bettin’ on hoss races? No, Sir, I couldn’t.”

“ And you got away with the five, did you? ” says I.

“ Don’t tell,” says Uncle Jimmy, “ but I slipped it in an envelope and sent it to that shiftless Hank Tuttle, over at the point. You see, Hank guzzles hard cider, and plays penny ante, and is always hard up. He won’t know where it come from, and won’t care. The fine cigars them two handed out so free I’m keepin’ to smoke Sunday afternoons.”

“ Huh! ” says I. “ That’s a good record so far, Uncle Jimmy. Anything more along that line? ”

“ Wall,” says he, “ there was one chance I

expect I shouldn't have let slip. Got to talkin' with a feller in the hotel, sort of a hook-nosed, foreign-speakin' man, who's in the show business. He says his brother-in-law, by the name of Goldberg, has got an idea for a musical comedy that would just set Broadway wild and make a mint of money. All he needed to start it was twenty or thirty thousand, and he figured it would bring in four times that the first season. And he was willin' to let me have a half interest in his scheme. I'd gone in too, only from what he said I thought it must be one of these pieces where they have a lot of girls in tights, and—well, I thought of Cynthy again. What would she say to me bein' mixed up with a show of that kind? So I had to drop it."

"Any taxi rides or cigars in that?" says I.

"Just cigars," says Uncle Jimmy.

"But you mean to invest that fifty thousand sooner or later, don't you?" says I.

"Cap'n Bill said I ought to," says he, "and live off'm the interest. He's a mighty smart business man, Cap'n Bill is. And I guess I'll find something before long."

"You can't miss it," says I, "specially if you keep on as you've started. But see here, Uncle Jimmy, while I ain't got any wonderful deal of my own for you to put your money in, I might throw out a useful hint or two as to other folk's plans. Suppose you just take my card, and before you tie up with any accommodatin'

financiers drop in at the studio, and talk it over with me."

"Why, much obliged, Mr.—er—Professor McCabe," says he, readin' the name off the card. "Mebbe I will."

"Better make it a promise," says I. "I hate to knock our fair village; but now and then you might find a crook in New York."

"So I've heard," says he; "but I kind of think I'd know one if he run afoul of me. And everybody I've met so far has been mighty nice."

Well, what else was there for me to say? There wa'n't any more suspicion in them gentle blue eyes of his than in a baby's. Forty years in Pemaquid! Must be some moss-grown, peaceful spot, where a man can grow up so innocent and simple, and yet have the stuff in him Uncle Jimmy must have had. So I tows him back to 42d-st., points him towards the new lib'ry again, and turns him loose; him in his old blue suit and faded cap, with Cap'n Bill's antique dive chart and certified check for fifty thousand in his inside pocket.

I thought he might show up at the studio in a day or so, to submit some get-rich-quick fake to me. But he didn't. A couple of weeks goes by. Still no Uncle Jimmy. I was beginnin' to look for accounts in the papers of how an old jay from the coast of Maine had been bunkoed and gone to the police with his tale of woe; but nothin' of the kind appears. They don't al-

ways squeal, you know. Maybe he was that kind.

Then here the other day in that big storm we had, as I'm standin' in the doorway hesitatin' about dodgin' out into them slantwise sheets of rain, who should come paddlin' along, his coat collar turned up and his cap pulled down, but Uncle Jimmy Isham.

"Well, well!" says I, makin' room for him in the hallway. "Still here, eh? Gettin' to be a reg'lar Broadway rounder, I expect?"

"No," says he, shakin' the water off of him like a terrier, "I—I can't seem to get used to bein' a city man. Fact is, McCabe, I guess I begun too late. I don't like it at all."

"Homesick for Pemaquid?" says I.

"That's it," says he. "I stove it off until this mornin'. I'd been doin' fust rate too, goin' to picture shows reg'lar, takin' in the sights, and tryin' to make myself believe I was enjoyin' all the luxuries and refinements of life, like Cap'n Bill said I ought to. But when I woke up at daylight and heard this nor'easter snortin' through the streets I couldn't stand it a mite longer. I dun'no's I can make it plain to you, but—well, this ain't no place to be in a storm. Never saw the surf pile up on Pemaquid Point, did you? Then you ought to once. And I bet it's rollin' in some there now. Yes, Sir! The old graybacks are jest thunderin' in on them rocks with a roar you can hear three miles back in the woods. Roarin' and smashin',

they are, grand and mighty and awful. And I want to be there to see and hear. I got to, that's all. What's shows and museums and ridin' in the subway, compared to a storm on Pemaquid? No, Sir, I can't stand it any longer. I'm goin' back on the Boston boat to-night, and before it's calmed down at the point I'll be there. I'm goin' to stay there too; that is, if I don't move over to the Neck."

"With Cynthy?" says I.

"If she'll let me," says he.

"Got the fifty thousand invested yet?" says I.

"No," says he, droppin' his chin guilty, "I ain't. And I expect Cap'n Bill will call me an old fool. But I couldn't jest seem to find the right thing to put it into. So I'm goin' to stop at Wiscasset and leave it at the bank and git 'em to buy me some gover'ment bonds or something. That won't bring me in much; but it'll be more'n I'll know what to do with. Then I got to see Cynthy. If she says she'll have me, I suppose I'll have to break it to her about the money. I dun'no what she's goin' to say, either. That's what's botherin' me."

"Yes, Uncle Jimmy," says I, givin' him a farewell grip. "Like the cat in the bird store—you should worry!"

Pemaquid, eh? Say, I'm goin' to hire a guide in Portland and discover that place sometime. I'd like to see Uncle Jimmy again.

CHAPTER XVI

SCRATCH ONE ON BULGAROO

I'd strolled into the front office in my shirt sleeves, and was leanin' against the gym door listenin' to Pinckney and his friend slangin' each other—and, believe me, it's a wonderful gift to be able to throw the harpoon refined and polite that way!

“Larry,” says Pinckney, lookin' him over reproachful, “you are hopeless. You merely cumber the earth.”

“Having made an art of being useless,” says Larry, “you should be an excellent judge.”

“You think you flatter me,” says Pinckney; “but you don't. I live my life as it comes. You are botching yours.”

“Hear, hear!” says Larry. “The butterfly sermonizes!”

“Insect yourself!” says Pinckney.

“My word!” says Larry. “Chuckin' entomology at me too! Well, have it that I'm a grasshopper. My legs are long enough.”

“It's your ears that are long, Larry,” says Pinckney.

“There you go, mixing the metaphor!” says Larry. “So I'm an ass, eh?”

“The word strikes me as beautifully descriptive,” says Pinckney.

“Excuse me,” says I, breakin’ in, “but is this to a finish? If it is, I’ll send out for some throat troches.”

Larry grins and settles himself back easy in my desk chair. Great lad, this Mr. T. Lawrence Bolan! All he needs is a cape coat and a sugar-loaf hat with a silver buckle to be a stage Irishman. One of these tall, loose-hinged, awkward-gaited chaps, with wavy red hair the color of a new copper pan, also a chin dimple and a crooked mouth. By rights he should have been homely. Maybe he was too; but somehow, with that twisty smile of his workin’, and them gray-blue eyes twinklin’ at you, the word couldn’t be said.

“Look at him, Shorty!” says Pinckney. “Six feet of futile clay; a waster of time, money, and opportunity.”

“The three gifts that a fool tries to save and a wise man spends with a free hand,” says Larry. “Give me a cigarette.”

“How much, now, did you lose to that crowd of bridge sharks last night?” demands Pinckney, passin’ over a gold case.

“Not my self-respect, anyway,” says Larry. “Was I to pass cowardly with a hundred aces in hand? And I had the fun of making that Boomer-Day person quit bidding on eight hearts. How she did glare as she doubled me!”

“ Set you six hundred, I hear,” says Pinckney. “ At a quarter the point that’s no cheap fun.”

“ Who asks for cheap fun? ” says Larry. “ I paid the shot, didn’t I? ”

“ And now? ” asks Pinckney.

Larry shrugs his shoulders. “ The usual thing,” says he; “ only it happens a little earlier in the month. I’m flat broke, of course.”

“ Then why in the name of all folly will you not borrow a couple of hundred from me? ” demands Pinckney.

“ Would I pay it back? ” says Larry. “ No, I would not. So it would be begging, or stealing? You see how awkward that makes it, old chap? ”

“ But, deuce take it! what are you to do for the next three weeks, you know? ” insists Pinckney.

“ Disappear,” says Larry, wavin’ his cigarette jaunty, “ and then—

“ The haunts that knew him once
 No more shall know.
 The halls where once he trod
 With stately tread—er—
 Tum-ti-iddity—
 As the dead—

or words, my dear Pinckney, much to that effect. My next remittance should be here by the third.”

“ When you’ll reappear and do it all over again,” says Pinckney.

“ In which you’re quite wrong,” says Larry. “ Not that I am bitten by remorse; but I weary of your game. It’s a bit stupid, you know,—your mad rushing about here and there, plays, dinners, dances, week-ends. You’re mostly a good sort; but you’ve no poise, no repose. Kittens chasing your tails! It leaves no chance to dream dreams.”

“ Listen,” says Pinckney, “ to that superior being, the lordly Briton, utter his usual piffle! I suppose you’d like to marry, settle down on a hundred-acre estate nine miles from nowhere, and do the country gentleman? ”

“ It would be the making of me,” says Larry, “ and I could be reasonably happy at it.”

“ Then why not do it? ” demands Pinckney.

“ On a thousand pounds a year? ” says Larry. “ Go to! ”

“ The fact remains,” says Pinckney, “ that you have for an uncle the Earl of Kerrymull.”

“ And that I’m his best hated nephew, paid to keep out of his sight,” comes back Larry.

“ But you are where an Earl-uncle counts for most,” suggests Pinckney. “ By judicious choice of a father-in-law——”

“ Rot! ” breaks in Larry. “ Am I a cheap adventurer in a third-rate melodrama? Waster I may be; but no dowry hunter.”

“ As though you could not like, for herself alone, any one of the half-dozen pretty girls who are foolish enough to be crazy over you,” says Pinckney.

“As though I’d be blighter enough to let myself fall in love with any of the sweet dears!” says Larry. “I’m in my thirties, Man.”

“There’s widows aplenty,” hints Pinckney.

“Bless ’em all!” says Larry. “I’d not load one of them with a wild, impecunious Irishman like myself.”

“Then what?” says Pinckney. “Also where, and whither?”

“Bulgaroo,” says Larry, wavin’ vague into space.

“Is that a form of self-destruction?” asks Pinckney.

“Almost,” says Larry. “It’s the nearest town to Sir Horace Vaughn’s No. 6 sheep ranch. Quaint little spot, Bulgaroo; chiefly corrugated iron villas and kangaroo scrub, two hundred-odd miles back from Sidney. I’m due there at the end of next month.”

“My regards to the Bulgaroovians,” says I.

“Is this just a whim of yours, or a crazy plan?” says Pinckney.

“Both,” says Larry. “No. 6 is where I went to do penance when the Earl and I had our grand smashup. Eighteen months I put in before he settled an allowance on me. They’ll give me another foreman’s job. I’ll stay three years this time, saving pay and remittance drafts, and at the end I’ll have hoarded enough to buy an interest, or a ranch of my own. That’s the theory. Actually, I shall probably

take an amazing thirst into Bulgaroo about once a month, buy vile champagne at the Queen's Arms, and otherwise disport myself like a true shepherd. The finis will not sound pretty."

Pinckney stares at him puzzled for a minute, and then turns to me. "Shorty," says he, "you're a Celt. What do you make of him?"

"My guess is that there's a skirt in the background," says I.

"Oh-ho!" says Pinckney.

"Touched!" says Larry.

Pinckney aims the cigarette case at him, remarkin' savage, "The story or your life. Come, now!"

Larry springs that wistful, twisty smile of his and goes on. "It happened here, eight years ago, as I was on my way to No. 6. I'd picked up a beastly fever somewhere, and I knew not a soul in your blessed city. So I wobbled into a hospital and let them tuck me away in a cot. Now grin, blast you! Yes, she was one of the day nurses, Katie McDevitt. No raving beauty, you know. Ah, but the starry bright eyes of her, the tender touch of her soft hand, and the quick wits under her white cap! It wasn't just the mushy sentiment of a convalescent, either. Three grand weeks afterwards I waited around, going walks with her in the park, taking her on foolish steamer rides, sending her flowers, notes, candy. We were rare spoons, and she was as good as she was

witty. There was an idyl for you! Then, when I woke up one day—why, I ran away without a word! What else could I do? I was bound for an Australian sheep ranch. And there I went. Since then not a whisper of her. By now it's quite likely she's the wife of some lucky dog of a doctor, and never gives me a thought. So why shouldn't I go back?"

"Because, you crack-brained Irishman," says Pinckney, "when you're not maundering over some such idiocy as this, you're the most entertaining good-for-nothing that ever graced a dinner table or spread the joy of life through a dull drawing room. Come home with me for the week-end, anyway."

"I'll not," says Larry. "I'm a pauper."

"Will you go with Shorty, then?" says Pinckney. "At times he's as absurd as yourself."

"He's not asked me," says Larry.

"My tongue's drippin' with it," says I. "I had an own cousin come over from Kerrymull. You'll be welcome."

"Done!" says Larry. "And for board and lodging I'll sing you Ballyshone after dinner."

So he did too, and if you've ever heard it well sung, you'll know the lump I had in my throat as I listened. Also I had him tell Sadie about Katie McDevitt; and when he'd made friends with little Sully and the dog we could have kept him for a year and a day.

But that Sunday afternoon, while we was

swingin' out of the front gates for a walk, we stops to let a limousine whizz by, and we gets a glimpse of a woman's face through the windows.

"Lord love you, McCabe!" says Larry, grippin' me by the arm, "but who was that?"

"In the car?" says I. "No one but Mrs. Sam Steele."

"Mrs., did you say?" says he.

"The rich widow," says I, "that lives in the big house over on the Shore Drive." I pointed it out.

"A widow!" says he. "Thanks be! Shorty, she's the one!"

"Not your Miss McDevitt?" says I.

"No other," says he. "I'd swear it!"

"Then you're nutty in the head, Mr. Larry Bolan," says I; "for I've known her these two years, and never heard of her being an ex-nurse."

"She might not care to boast of it," says he. "Rich, did you say?"

"Near a million, they say," says I; "which don't fit in with the nurse idea, does it?"

"I couldn't mistake Katie McDevitt," says he, waggin' his head mulish. "But who was this Steele beggar?"

"She moved here after plantin' him West somewhere," says I. "One of the big lumber crowd, I've heard. Sadie can tell you more."

"Thanks," says he; "but I'll have it from Katie herself. Take me there."

“ Eh? ” says I. “ On a chance shot? I’d look well, wouldn’t I? ”

“ But you must, ” says he. “ Now! ”

“ Come off! ” says I. “ You with only a glance at her! Besides, she’s one of these stiff, distant parties that keeps to herself. ”

“ McCabe, ” says he, “ I mean to talk with her within the hour if I have to smash in her front door and wring a butler’s neck. ”

There’s a thrill in his voice as he says it, and from all I know of Larry Bolan there’s no stoppin’ him. We started off.

The nearer we got to the big house, though, the battier the enterprise seemed to me. First off, I’d been nursin’ a dislike for Mrs. Steele ever since I’d overheard a little séance between her and one of the outside men. She’d caught him smugglin’ home a few measly vegetables from her big garden, and after tongue lashin’ him lively she fires him on the spot—him a poor Dago with a big fam’ly. Then there’d been tales told by the butcher, the plumber, and half a dozen others, all goin’ to show she was a lady tightwad, or worse.

So I’d sized her up as a cold, hard proposition. And when I work up feelin’s like that I’m apt to show ’em. I couldn’t help thinkin’ but maybe I had. Here I was, though, cartin’ a strange gent up to her front door, on his guess that he’s her long lost Romeo.

“ Ah, be good, Larry! ” says I. “ Let’s call it off. ”

He shakes his head stubborn.

“ All right,” says I; “ but take it from me we’re about to pull down trouble. What’s the plan? ”

He thinks, as long as I know the lady, I’d better send in my name and then break it to her easy. So, while I’m waitin’ in the reception hall, he kicks his heels impatient against the veranda rail outside.

Rather a classy lookin’ party, Mrs. Steele is as she shows up in a stunnin’ house gown,—good lines, fine complexion, and all that. Takes mighty good care of herself, so Sadie says, with two French maids to help. She don’t stint herself that way. And the little streak of early gray through her front hair gives her sort of a distinguished look. There’s nothin’ friendly, though, about the straight, tight-lipped mouth, or the surprised look in her eyes as she discovers me standin’ there.

“ Mr. McCabe? ” says she.

“ You see,” says I, grinnin’ foolish, “ there’s a chap outside who—who has a batty idea he used to know you.”

“ Really? ” says she, narrowin’ her eyes a bit.

“ Bolan’s the name, Ma’am,” I goes on, “ Larry Bolan.”

It wa’n’t much,—just a quiver, a little lift of the shoulders, a bunchin’ of the fingers. Then she bites her lip and gets a grip on herself. “ Well? ” says she. “ What of it? ”

“ Why,” says I, “ he—he wants to have a talk with you. Course, though, if you don’t know him, or don’t remember, all you got to do——”

“ Yes, yes!” she breaks in. “ I understand. Wait!”

A couple of minutes she stands there, never makin’ a crack or givin’ any sign, except that the toe of one slipper taps the rug restless. Then she gives her decision. “ You may bring him in,” says she.

“ How about sendin’ him?” I suggests.

“ No, not alone,” says she. “ I want you to stay.”

So I steps to the door. “ Larky,” says I, “ you’re called on the carpet; but for the love of soup don’t pull any of that old sweetheart stuff reckless! The signs ain’t right.”

And a fat lot of notice he takes of my advice. Trust Larry! He pushes in eager ahead of me, marches straight to where she is, gives her one mushy, admirin’ look, and the next thing I know he has reached for one of her hands and is kissin’ it as graceful and romantic as James K. Hackett doin’ a Zenda stunt.

Gave Mrs. Steele some jolt, that play did; for it’s plain she was fixin’ to frost him at the start. But it’s all over before she has time to draw a breath, and he has let her fingers slip through his caressin’.

“ Katie!” says he.

She flushes and stiffens up. "Silly as ever, I see," says she.

"More so," says he. "But it's only seeing you again that brings on the attack. Katie, you're glorious!"

"Please!" says she, protestin'. "I've rather outgrown my liking for sentimental speeches. Tell me, why do you hunt me up like this, after so long?"

"Can you ask?" says he. "Look! No—in my eyes, Katie."

And, say, with things gettin' that gummy, I was beginnin' to feel like a cold boiled potato served accidental with the pie.

"Excuse me," says I, "but maybe I'd better wait in the next room."

"Not at all," says Mrs. Steele, real crisp and businesslike. "It will be only for a moment, while Mr. Bolan states very briefly his exact purpose in coming here."

Larry bows. "To see once more the girl he could not forget," says he.

"Humph!" says she, curlin' her upper lip. "Very pretty, I suppose. But let me assure you that foolish young person ceased to exist several years ago."

"She lives for me—here," says Larry, placin' one hand on his left vest pocket.

Mrs. Steele indulges in a thin little cold-storage laugh that sounds almost as pleasant as tappin' a gas pipe. "What a sudden revival of an old, worn-out affection!" says

she. "When did you first hear I was a widow?"

"Less than an hour ago," says Larry.

"Did they say I was rich, or poor?" she goes on sarcastic.

"Katie!" says he gaspy. "Surely you—you can't think——"

"It's what I ask them all," says she, "domestic and imported. Naturally I am a little suspicious when they declare passionate love at the first or second meeting; for, in spite of what my maids tell me, my mirror insists that I'm not ravishingly beautiful. So I've begun to suspect that perhaps my money may be the attraction. And I'm not in the market for a husband, you know."

"Bing-g-g!" says I under my breath.

As for Larry Bolan, it leaves him with his chin down. For, after all, he ain't one of your walrus-hided gents. As a matter of fact, he's as sensitive as they come, and she couldn't have handed it out rougher.

"My dear lady," says he, "you are pleased to be cruel. Perhaps, though, it's only my due. I admit that I'm only a poor pensioner posing as a gentleman. But within a month I shall be on my way to bury myself on the other side of the world. Meanwhile, I see you pass. Could I help wanting a few kind words of yours to take with me?"

"If that is really all, Mr. Bolan," says she, "I would advise you to outlive your nonsense,

as I've outlived mine. Try paying your tailor with kind words."

"Katie," says he, with a sob in his voice, "you—you've broken the heart of me. Come, McCabe, we will go."

She stands watchin' us, smilin' cynical, until we're almost through the door; and then—well, it's a sigh that comes out explosive. She starts as if she meant to dash after us, and then stops with her arms out.

"Larry!" says she, almost in a whisper.

It pulls him up, and he stares at her a minute over his shoulder. "It's no use, Katie," says he. "What's turned you hard and cold I don't know; but you can't unsay what's been said. And it hurt—bitter."

"Oh, I know, I know!" says she. "But you must hear what it was that changed me from the girl you knew. Money, Larry, the money for which I married. As for the man—oh, I suppose he was no worse than the rest; only he taught me to love a dollar more than anything else in earth or heaven. He'd wrung all of his from a grudging world with his bare hands,—starved and slaved and plotted for it, in mean ways, against mean men; then fought to hold it. And he knew to a penny's worth what every dollar he spent should buy for him. Among other things, he bought me. Sixty-odd he was; I barely twenty. Why call it differently? I was fool enough, too, to think I was a lucky girl. Ah, what a fool! Seven years of fear and

hate! It's an awful thing, Larry, to live so long with hate in you for one at your side. But he—he never knew."

She leaves off, squeezin' one hand in the other until the ends of the fingers went white, her chest heavin', her eyes stary. Larry watches her without a word.

"Tell me," says she after a bit, "why you ran away that time and left me to—to make such a mess of things. Why?"

"For the same reason that I'm going away again now," says he. "I've a thousand pounds a year, and not sense enough to keep myself on it, let alone a wife. So it's good-by, Katie."

Then the weeps came, open eyed; but she didn't try to hide 'em. "Oh, oh!" she moans. "But I was so lonely then, and—and I'm so lonely now!"

Them few drops of brine turned the trick. "Ah, Katie McDevitt!" says he. "If I could bring back the old Katie! By the soul of me, but I will? You never heard of my old uncle, did you? Come with me to him, and see me make it up; for I can't leave you this way, Katie, I just can't!"

"Larry!" says she, and with that they goes to a fond clinch.

"Help!" says I, and slides through the door.

When I gets home Sadie wants to know what I've done with Mr. Bolan.

"Towed him up to Hymen's gate," says I,

“ and left him bein’ yanked through by Mrs. Sam Steele.”

“ Wha-a-at? ” says she. “ Of all persons! And when did that start, I’d like to know? ”

“ Eight years back,” says I. “ She was Katie the nurse, and this is their second act. Anyway, he ducks Bulgaroo by it.”

CHAPTER XVII

BAYARD DUCKS HIS PAST

FIRST place, Swifty Joe should have let the subject drop. Anyway, he needn't have come paradin' into the front office in his gym suit to show me his nutty theory of how Young Disko landed that knockout on the Australian in the breakaway.

"Turn over!" says I. "You're on your back! He couldn't have done anything of the kind."

"Couldn't, eh?" growls Swifty. "Ahr-r-r-ree! Couldn't give him the shoulder on the jaw! Ain't I seen it done? Say, lemme show you——"

"Show nothing!" says I. "I'm tellin' you it was a right hook the kid put him out with, from chancery. Now see!"

With that I sheds my coat, gets Swifty's neck in the crook of my left elbow, swings him round for a side hip-lock, and bends his head forward.

"Now, you South Brooklyn kike," I goes on, maybe more realistic than I meant, "I got you right, ain't I? And all I got to do is push in a half-arm jolt like this, and——"

Well, then I looks up. Neither of us has noticed her come in, hadn't even heard the knob turn; but standin' there in the middle of the room and starin' straight at us is a perfectly good female lady.

That don't half tell it, either. She's all lady, from the tips of her double-A pumps to the little gray wing peekin' over the top of her dingy gray bonnet. One of these slim, dainty, graceful built parties, with white, lacy stuff at her wrists and throat, and the rest of her costume all gray: not the puckered-waist, half-masted skirt effects all the women are wearin' now. I can't say what year's model it was, or how far back; but it's a style that seems just fitted to her: maybe one that she's invented herself. Around thirty-five, I should judge she was, from the little streak of gray runnin' through her front hair.

What got me, though, was the calm, remote, superior look that she's givin' us. She don't seem nervous or panicky at all, like most women would, breakin' in on a roughhouse scene like that. She don't even stare reprovin', but stands there watchin' us as serene as if we wa'n't anything more'n pictures on a movie sheet. And there we was, holdin' the pose; me with my right all bunched for action, and Swifty with his face to the mat. Seemed minutes we was clinched there, and everything so still you could hear Swifty's heavy breathin' all over the room.

Course I was waitin' for some remarks from her. You'd most think they was due, wouldn't you? It's my private office, remember, and she's sort of crashed in unannounced. If any explainin' was done, it was up to her to start it. And waitin' for what don't come is apt to get on your nerves.

"Eh?" I throws over my shoulder at her.

Her straight eyebrows kind of humps in the middle—that's all.

"Did you say anything?" I goes on.

"No," says she. If she'd smiled sort of faint, or even glared stern at us, it wouldn't have been so bad. But she just presses her lips together—thin, narrow-gage lips, they was—and goes on givin' us that distant, unconcerned look.

Meanwhile Swifty, with his face bent towards the floor, ain't gettin' any view at all, and is only guessin' what's happenin'. He squirms impatient.

"Say, Shorty," he grumbles, "I got a few bones in me neck, remember. Break, can't you?"

And as I loosens my hold he straightens up, only to get the full benefit of that placid, lady-like lookover.

"Ahr-r-r chee!" says he, glancin' disgusted at me. Then he starts gettin' rosy in the ears, like he always does when there's fluffs around, and after one more hasty look he bolts back into the gym.

The strange lady watches this move like she has everything else, only she shrugs her shoulders a bit. What she meant by that I couldn't make out. I was gettin' to the point where I didn't care so much, either.

"Well, Ma'am?" says I.

"Poor fellow!" says she. "I am glad he escaped that brutal blow."

"Are you?" says I. "Well, don't waste too much sympathy on him; for I was only demonstratin' how——"

"You might offer me a chair," she breaks in sort of casual.

"Why—er—sure!" says I, and before I knew it I was jumpin' to drag one up.

She settles into it without even a nod of thanks.

"You see," I goes on, "he's my assistant, and I was tryin' to show him how——"

"It's rather stuffy here," observes the lady. "Couldn't you open a window?"

It's more an order than anything else; but I hops over and shoves the sash wide open.

"That's too much," says she. "It causes a draft."

So I shuts it halfway. Then I gets her a glass of water. "Anything else you'd like?" says I, tryin' to be sarcastic. "The mornin' paper, or——"

"Where is Mr. Steele?" she demands.

"Oh!" says I, gettin' a little light on the mystery. "J. Bayard, you mean?"

“Of course,” says she. “He was not at his hotel, and as this was the other address I was given I expected to find him here.”

“Huh!” says I. “Gave you this number, did he? Well, you see, this is my Physical Culture Studio, and while he’s apt to be here off and on, it ain’t his——”

“Just such a place as I might have anticipated finding Bayard in,” says she, glancin’ around the front office at the portraits in ring costume and so on. “Quite!”

“Let’s see,” says I, “you are—er——”

“I am Mrs. Lee Hollister,” says she, “of Richmond, Virginyah.”

“I might have suspicioned that last,” says I, “by the way you——”

But she don’t give me a show to register any little slam I might have thought of puttin’ over. She’s the kind that conducts a conversation accordin’ to her own rules, and she never hesitates to cut in.

“I want to know what there is about this will of Mr. Gordon’s,” she demands. “Some absurd legacy, I presume; at least, my solicitor, Colonel Henderson, seemed to think so. I suppose you’ve heard of Colonel Britt Henderson?”

“Not a whisper,” says I, as defiant as I know how.

She expresses her opinion of such ignorance with a little lift of her pointed chin. “Colonel Henderson,” she goes on, “is perhaps the

ablest and most brilliant attorney in Virginyah. He is connected with the best families in the State."

"Never heard of anybody from down there that wa'n't," says I. "And while I ain't disputin' him, mind you, his guess about this bein' a legacy is——"

"Will Mr. Steele be in soon?" she asks crisp.

"Might," says I, "and then again he mightn't."

"It's rather rude of him to keep me waiting," says she.

"Maybe if you'd sent word ahead," I suggests, "he'd been on hand. But now you've come all this way——"

"You don't suppose," breaks in Mrs. Hollister, "that I came north just for that? Not at all. It was to select a design for the memorial window I am having placed in our church, in memory of poor, dear Professor Hollister. My late husband, you know; and a most noble, talented, courtly gentleman he was too."

"Ye-e-es'm," says I.

"What are those objects on the wall?" says she, shiftin' sudden.

"Boxin' gloves, Ma'am," says I. "That's the pair of mitts that won me the championship, back in——"

"Has Mr. Steele become a pugilist, too?" she asks.

“ Not so you'd notice it,” says I.

“ Hm-m-m-m! ” says she, tappin' the toe of one of her pumps and gazin' around critical.

Not that she takes any notice of me. Honest, if I'd been a yellow pup tied in the corner, she couldn't have been more offhand. I was gettin' warm in the neck by the minute too, and in three more shakes I'd been cuttin' loose with the acid remarks, when the door opens and in blows J. Bayard Steele. I sighs relieved when I sees him too.

“ Oh! ” says he, gettin' a back view of her. “ I beg pardon. I—er—— ” Then she turns and faces him. “ Alice! ” he gasps.

“ My dear Bayard! ” she protests. “ Please let's not have any scene. It was all so long ago, and I'm sure you must have gotten over that.”

“ But how—why—er—— ” he goes on.

“ You wrote to Mrs. Lee Hollister, didn't you? ” she demands. “ I am Mrs. Hollister.”

Another gasp from Steele. “ You? ” says he. “ Then you—you—— ”

“ To be sure I married,” says she. “ And Professor Hollister was one of the truest, noblest Southern gentlemen who ever lived. I have mourned his loss for nearly ten years, and—— But don't stand there twiddling your hat in that absurd fashion! You may sit, if you like. Get Mr. Steele a chair, will you? ”

I'd jumped and done it too, before I had time to think.

“ Now what is this about Mr. Gordon’s will? ” says she.

Well, between us, whenever she’d let us get in a word, we managed to sketch out the idea.

“ You see,” says Steele, “ Pyramid Gordon wished to make what reparation he could for any injustice he might have done during the course of his business career. He left a list of names, among them being this, ‘ the widow of Professor Lee Hollister.’ Now possibly Gordon, in some way——”

“ He did,” breaks in Mrs. Hollister. “ My husband had issued an elaborate and exhaustive geological report on a certain district. It had attracted wide attention. He was to have been appointed State Geologist, when suddenly this Mr. Gordon appeared and began his unwarranted campaign of abuse and opposition. Something about some coal and iron deposits, I believe it was, on land which he was trying to sell to an English syndicate. Professor Hollister’s report failed to mention any such deposits. As a matter of fact they did not exist. But Mr. Gordon summoned experts of his own, who attacked my husband’s statements. The professor declined to enter into a public controversy. His dignity would not permit him. Underhanded influence was brought to bear on the Governor, and the appointment was given to another. But time has shown. Discredited and beaten though he seemed to be, my husband was right. The Gordon lands proved valueless.

Those in which Professor Hollister invested his savings were rich in minerals."

"Ah!" says Steele. "Quite like Pyramid. And it has been left to us, Mrs. Hollister, to recompense, if we may, the bitterness of that——"

"Please!" says the lady. "Professor Hollister was not an embittered man. Such methods were beneath his contempt. He merely withdrew from public life. As for recompense—surely you would not think of asking me to accept it from such a source! Never! Besides, I have more than enough. Several years ago I disposed of our mineral holdings, bought back the old Hollister mansion, and I am now living there in as much comfort as poor Lee could have wished me to enjoy. What could Gordon's money add to that?"

If I'd been J. Bayard, hanged if I wouldn't called it quits right there! But he's gettin' so chesty over this job of sunshine distributor that there's no holdin' him in.

"Surely, Alice," he insists, "there must be some way in which I, as—er—an old friend, might——"

Mrs. Hollister cuts him off with a wave of her hand. "You don't understand," says she. "I am no longer the vain, frivolous young girl whom you knew that winter in Chicago. My first season, that was. I was being lavishly entertained. I suppose I became dazzled by it all,—the attention, the new scenes, the many

men I met. I've no doubt I behaved very silly. But now—well, I have realized all my social ambitions. Now I am devoting my life to the memory of my sainted husband, to charity, to our dear church."

I gawps curious over at J. Bayard to see what comeback he has to this dose of mush, and finds him starin' foolish at her.

"There is only one thing——" she begins.

"Yes?" says Steele, kind of faint. "Something in which we might——"

"I am interested in a group of girls," says she, "factory girls; one of our Guild Mission classes, you know. They have been anxious to have some dances. Now I am strongly opposed to the modern dances, all of them. True, I've seen very little, almost nothing. So I decided that, in order to convince myself that I am right, I might as well, while I am in New York—well—er——"

"I get you," I puts in. "You want to watch the real thing pulled—the fox trot, and the new polkas, and so on. Eh?"

"Not for my own personal amusement," corrects Mrs. Hollister. "I am sure I shall be bored, perhaps shocked; but then I shall be better able to warn my girls."

"The old gag!" says I. "I know what would fit your case,—a late dinner at the Maison Maxixe. Eh, Steele?" and I tips him the knowin' wink.

"Why—er—yes," says J. Bayard. "I pre-

sume Mr. McCabe is correct. And I am sure we should be delighted to have Mrs. Hollister as our guest."

"We!" I gasps under my breath. Say, the nerve of him! But before I can think up any previous date the lady has accepted.

"I have heard of the place," says she. "I am quite willing to endure an evening there. I am wondering, though, if I should not be rather conspicuous. You see, I brought with me none but simple gowns such as this, and perhaps the contrast——"

"You'd be about as prominent at the Maxixe in that outfit," says I, "as a one-legged albino at a coon cakewalk. Besides, they don't let you in there unless you're in full evenin'. Course, there's other joints where——"

"No," says she. "Let it be the Maison Maxixe, if that is the worst. And for once too I may as well submit myself to the horrors of the new fashions. I will order a costume to-day, and I can be ready for my plunge into Gotham vanities by—let me see—we will say Saturday night. I am at the Lady Louise. You may call for me there about eight. Good-by. Don't be late, Gentlemen." And with that she does the abrupt flit, leavin' us gawpin' at each other stupid.

"Much obliged, Steele," says I, "for ringin' me in on this nutty reunion of yours. Say, J. B., you got a head like a tack, you have! Have a heart, can't you?"

“ My dear Shorty,” says he, “ permit me to point out that it was you who suggested taking her to——”

“ Because you was sittin’ there like a gump,” says I. “ Only helpin’ you out, that’s all. And I’m goin’ to look nice, ain’t I, trailin’ into a place like that with you and this—say, just where does the lady fit into your past, anyway? Never heard you mention her, did I? ”

“ Naturally not,” says he. “ One doesn’t boast of having been thrown over.”

“ Eh? ” says I. “ You was engaged—to *her?* ”

He nods and gazes sentimental at the ceilin’.

“ My one genuine romance,” says he. “ I suppose she wasn’t really the radiant beauty I imagined; but she was charming, vivacious, fascinating. It was a bad case of love at first sight. At eleven o’clock that evening, I remember, I took her in to supper. At twelve I was leading her into a palm-sheltered nook, and the next thing I knew I had taken her in my arms and—well, the usual thing. No one could have made a more complete ass of himself. She should have boxed my ears. She didn’t. The engagement lasted all of one week.”

“ Then you recovered from the attack? ” says I.

“ No,” says he. “ She had discovered another, several others. She told me quite casually that she really hadn’t meant it; and wasn’t I, after all, rather a wild young man? I

assured her that if I wasn't wild I should be after that. She only shrugged her shoulders. So I gave her up. The others did too. And she went back to Richmond, it seems, and married a sainted geologist; while I—well, I never did get over it, quite. Silly, of course; but when I met other girls later I—I remembered, that's all."

"Which accounts for you bein' a bach so long, does it?" says I. "Well, it's never too late. Here's your chance once more. At the Maison Maxixe you can pull any kind of romance, stale or recent, and nobody'll care a hoot. I'll duck the dinner, and you can——"

"No, no!" protests J. Bayard. "I—er—I wouldn't take her to dinner alone for worlds. Really!" he waves his hands almost tragic.

"Why not?" says I. "Thought you hadn't got over it."

"Oh, but I have," insists Steele, "thoroughly."

"Must have been lately then," says I.

"To-day—just now," says he. "I never dreamed she would develop into—er—a woman like that,—the way she looks at you, you know."

"You don't need to describe it," says I. "That wa'n't a marker to the way she looked at Swifty and me. But wait! We'll hand her a jolt Saturday night."

Steele groans. "I wish I could—— By George!" he explodes. "I'd forgotten Major Ben Cutter."

“What about him?” says I.

“An old friend,” says J. Bayard. “He’s landing Saturday, from Santa Marta. I haven’t seen him for years,—been down there running a banana plantation, you know. He cabled up, and I’d promised to take him around that evening, dinner at the club, and——”

“Ah, ditch it, J. B.!” says I. “No old-friend alibi goes in this case.”

“But, Shorty,” he protests, “how can I——”

“You can lug him along, can’t you?” says I. “Make it a four-cornered affair. The more the merrier.”

“He’s such a diffident, shy chap, though,” goes on Steele, “and after five years in the bush——”

“Oh, a dose of Mrs. Hollister will do him good,” says I. “She won’t mind. She’ll be bein’ bored. Just ’phone her and explain. And remind her when she’s gettin’ her costume that this ain’t any church sociable we’re attendin’.”

Honest, I was more leery on that point than about anything else; for you know how giddy they doll up at them joints, and while her taste in stained glass windows might be strictly up to date, when it comes to flossin’ up for the Maison Maxixe—well, no gray-and-white, back-number regalia would do there. If we wa’n’t shut out, we’d be guyed to death.

So about seven-thirty Saturday night I was

some chilly in the ankles. I'd called for J. Bayard at his hotel, and he'd shown up with the Major. No figment of the imagination, either, the Major. He's a big, husky, rich-colored party that's some imposin' and decorative in open-faced togs; quiet and shy actin', though, just as Steele had said. I sort of took to him, and we swaps friendly greetin's.

"All aboard now," says I, "and we'll collect our widow."

Which seems to startle the Major more or less. "I say, Bayard," he puts in, "you didn't tell me she was a widow, you know. Perhaps, after all, I'd best not——"

"Ah, she ain't the net-wieldin' kind," says I soothin'. "She'll tell you all about her dear departed and the memorial window. About as gay as Trinity Church on Ash Wednesday, she is. Come along."

Can you blame him, then, for glancin' reproachful at me when he sees what answers our call at the Lady Louise a few minutes later? I lets go of a few gasps myself; while J. Bayard—well, he just stares at her with his mouth open.

For, take it from me, Mrs. Hollister had connected! Uh-huh! Not with any last fall outfit, nor yesterday's. About day after to-morrow's, I should call it. And if there wa'n't zipp and scream to it, then I'm shortsighted in the eyes. My guess is that it's a mixture of the last word in Byzantine effects, with a Cleopatra girde

and a Martha Washington polonaise. Anyway, if there ain't much above the waist line but gauze and strips of fur, there's plenty of flare below, as far as the ankles. Lucky she'd invested in a generous fur-lined wrap to go with it, or I wouldn't have stirred a step until we'd draped her in a rug or something. I ain't sayin' much about the feather affair clamped around her head in place of a hat; only it reminds me of an Indian war bonnet that's been through a hard blow.

"Well, Bayard," says she, floatin' up to us wabbly on her high heels, "you see I'm ready."

"Ye-e-es," says Steele draggy. And while I pushes the Major to the front almost by main strength, J. Bayard presents him.

After that, though—say, I don't know when I've seen two parties indulge in such a long and earnest look at each other as Major Ben and Mrs. Hollister did then. While the Major flushes rosy and hardly has a word to say for himself, he just naturally glues his lamps to her and don't let 'em roam. Believe me too, she was some giddy picture! Wa'n't such a bad looker, you know, in her other rig; but in this zippy regalia—well, I got to admit that she's some ripe pippin. Her big brown eyes is sparklin', she's smilin' coy as she looks the Major up and down, and the next thing we know blamed if she ain't cuddled right up to him and remarked kittenish:

“ You dear man! I’m going to let you take me out to the cab.”

Well, that was the programme from then on. It was the Major and Mrs. Hollister first, with me and J. Bayard trailin’ on behind. We’d had some debate beforehand as to whether this should be a dry dinner or not, endin’ by Steele announcin’ he was goin’ to take a chance on Martinis anyhow. Does she shy at the appetizer? Say, she was clinkin’ glasses with the Major before J. Bayard has a chance to reach for his. Same way with the fizz that J. B. has put in a hurry order for.

“ Bored to death, ain’t she? ” I remarks behind my hand.

And before the fillet of sole was served the Major had unlimbered his conversation works, and that pair was havin’ about the chattiest time of any couple in the place, with me and J. Bayard stranded on the side lines.

“ Do you know, my dear Major, ” we hears her announce about nine-fifteen, as she toys with a three-dollar portion of roast pheasant, “ I had no idea New York could be like this. Then there are the theaters, the opera. I believe I shall stay up for the rest of the season.”

“ Good! ” says the Major. “ I shall stay too.”

Half an hour later, while he was showin’ her how to burn brandy on her demitasse, I nudges Steele.

“ Say,” I whispers, “ me for a spot where I ain’t formin’ a crowd! ”

Steele takes a hasty glance at ’em. “ I—I’m with you,” says he.

“ What! ” says I. “ Goin’ to hand him over to her? ”

He nods. “ Well,” says I, “ I guess that’ll pass for a kind deed.”

“ Also somewhat of a generous one,” says he, exhibitin’ the footin’ of the dinner bill he’s just settled for.

I don’t think they noticed, either of ’em, when we did our sneak. Once outside, J. Bayard takes a long breath, like he was relieved at havin’ shifted something. Then he sort of sighs.

“ Poor old Ben! ” says he.

“ Gwan! ” says I. “ You never can tell. Maybe he’ll like playin’ the devoted slave act for the rest of his life. Besides, she’s on a new tack. The Major’s quite a husk too. I’ll bet he don’t qualify for any memorial window. Not him! ”

CHAPTER XVIII

TRAILING DUDLEY THROUGH A TRANCE

THE Adamses hadn't been in the neighborhood two weeks before Sadie's discovered Veronica and was ravin' over her. "Isn't she perfectly stunning, Shorty?" she demands.

"Now that you mention it, I expect she is," says I, playin' safe and foxy. It's a useful phrase to pull in such cases; but here was once when I must have worked it overtime. Sadie sniffs.

"Pooh!" says she. "Just as though you couldn't see for yourself! Don't be absurd, Shorty."

"Gee! but you're hard to suit!" says I. "If I remember right, the last time I got enthusiastic over the looks of a young queen you wrinkled your nose and made remarks about my taste."

"It was that snippy little Marjorie Lowry with the baby face, wasn't it?" says she. "Oh, very well, if you prefer that kind. Just like a man!"

"Do I have to pick either one?" says I. "I hope not; for, between you and me, Sadie, I'm satisfied as it stands."

“Goose!” says she, snugglin’ up forgivin’.
“And—would you guess it?—they say she’s twenty-six! I wonder why she isn’t married?”

“There you go!” says I. “I could see it comin’.”

“But she is such an attractive girl,” goes on Sadie, “so well poised, graceful, dignified, all that! And she has such exquisite coloring, and such charming manners!”

Yep, I guess it was all so. One of these wavin’ palm models, Veronica was,—tall and willowy, with all the classy points of a heroine in a thirty-five-cent magazine serial,—dark eyes, dark, wavy hair, good color scheme in her cheeks,—the whole bag of tricks,—and specially long on dignity. Say, she had me muffled from the first tap of the bell, and you know how apt I am to try to break that sort of spell with a few frivolous cracks. Not when Veronica swings on me with that calm gaze of hers, though!

For Sadie don’t do a thing but call on the Adamses, give a tea for Veronica, and proceed to round up all the Johnnies in sight to meet her. It’s her reg’lar campaign, you know.

“Ah, why not let the poor girl alone?” says I. “Maybe she’s got one in trainin’ somewhere herself. There’s no tellin’, too, but what she’s stayin’ single from choice.”

“Humph!” says Sadie. “Only the homely ones are entitled to give that excuse, because they have no other; and only a stupid man

would believe it in either case. I suppose Miss Adams hasn't married because the right man hasn't asked her. Sometimes they don't, you know. But it's a perfect shame, and if I can help the right one to find her I'm going to do it."

"Sure you are," says I. "That's the skirt instinct. But, say, while the men still have the vote all to themselves they ought to revise the game laws by declarin' a close season on bachelors, say from the fifteenth of August to the fifteenth of December."

"Too bad about the young men, isn't it?" says Sadie. "Anyone would think we set traps for them."

"Show me a trap easier to fall into and harder to get out of," says I, "and I'll make my fortune by puttin' it on the market as a new puzzle. But blaze ahead. I ain't worryin'. I'm on the inside lookin' out, anyway. Wish a hubby on her if you can."

And I must say it ain't any amateur effort Sadie puts over. From far and near she rounds 'em up on one excuse or another, and manages to have 'em meet Veronica. She don't take 'em miscellaneous or casual, like she would for most girls. I notices that she sifts 'em out skillful, and them that don't come somewhere near the six-foot mark gets the gate early in the game. You catch the idea? Course, nobody would expect Veronica to fall for any stunted Romeo that would give her a crick in the

back when it come to nestlin' her head on his shoulder.

So with size added to the other elimination tests it must have made hard scratchin' at times. But somehow or other Sadie produces a dozen or more husky young chaps with good fam'ly connections and the proper financial ratin's. Among 'em was a polo player, two ex-varsity fullbacks, and a blond German military aide that she borrowed from a friend in Washington for the occasion. She tries 'em out single and in groups, using Mrs. Purdy-Pell's horseshow box and town house as liberal as railroad waitin' rooms. And, say, when it comes to arrangin' chance tête-à-têtes, and cozy little dinner parties where the guests are placed just right, she develops more ingenuity than a lady book agent runnin' down her victims. Talk about shifty work! She makes this fly-and-spider fable sound clumsy.

Course, she had a cinch in one way. All she has to do is exhibit Veronica in some public place, and she has every man in sight twistin' his neck. They dropped for her at the first glimpse. It didn't need any elaborate scenic effects to cause a stampede, either; for the simpler she gets herself up the more dangerous she is, and in a plain black velvet dress, with an old lace collar cut a little low in front, all she lacks is a gold frame and a number to look like a prize portrait at the National Academy. Say, I ain't got much of an eye that way my-

self, but the first time I saw her in that rig I held my breath for two minutes on a stretch, and just gawped.

Another thing that helped was the fact that Veronica could sing,—no common parlor warblin', mind you, of such pieces as "The Rosary" or "Land of the Sky Blue Water," but genuine operatic stuff, such as you hear Louise Homer and Schumann-Heink shootin' on the three-dollar records. Why not? Hadn't Veronica studied abroad for two years under Parcheesi, who'd begged her almost on his knees to do the title rôle in a new opera he was goin' to try out before the King of Bavaria? Uh-huh! We had that straight from Mrs. Adams, who wa'n't much for boostin' the fam'ly. But no stagework for her!

In private, though, Veronica was good-natured and obligin'; so it was an easy after-dinner cue for a young gent to lead her to the piano and persuade her to tear ôff a few little operatic gems, while he leaned on one elbow and gazed soulful at her. And I expect they didn't have to know such a lot about grand opera to play the leanin' part, either.

Just how much tumult was caused under dress shirt fronts durin' them few weeks I couldn't say for certain, but at least four or five of the young gents had bad attacks. The odd thing about it, though, was the sudden way they dropped out. One day they'd be sendin' her flowers, and followin' her around to teas and

lunches and dances, gazin' longin' at her every chance they got, and displayin' the usual mush symptoms, and the next they wouldn't show up at all. They'd disappeared.

That's what puzzled Sadie so much at first. She couldn't make out what had happened,—whether they'd got rash and gone on the rug too soon, or had been run over by a truck while crossin' the street. Fin'ly she comes across one of the quitters one afternoon as I'm towin' her down Fifth-ave. on her way home from somewhere, and she puts me up to give him the quiz.

“There, Shorty!” says she, stoppin' sudden. “There's Monty Willetts, who was so crazy about Veronica. No one has seen him for a week. Couldn't you ask if anything serious has happened to him?”

I expect her idea was for me to put him through the third degree so subtle he wouldn't suspect. Well, leavin' Sadie gazin' into a jew'lry window, I overhauls him and does my best.

“Say, Monty,” says I, jabbin' him playful in the ribs, “how about you and that Miss Adams? Did you follow her to the frost line, or what?”

“That's an excellent way to put it, McCabe,” says he. “And I'm chilly yet from the experience.”

“Sporty lad!” says I. “Did you try to hold her hand, or something like that?”

“What!” he gasps. “Try to hold hands with the stately Miss Adams? Heaven forbid! I’m not absolutely reckless, you know. It was in our first confidential chat that I went on the rocks. We’d discussed polo for half an hour, until I found she knew more about the English team than I did. Why, she’d visited at Hurlingham House during the practice matches. So I floundered about, trying to shift the subject, until we hit on antique vases—deuced if I know why. But my Governor dabbled in such junk a bit, you know, and I suppose I thought, from having heard him talk, that I was up on antiques. But, say, hanged if she couldn’t name more kinds than I ever knew existed! Rippled on about Pompeian art, and Satsuma ware, and Egyptian tear jugs as readily as Ted Keefe, my stable manager, would about ponies. I tried again and asked if she’d seen many of the new plays, and the next thing I knew I was bluffing through a dialogue about Galsworthy and Masefield and Sudermann on an experience strictly limited to musical comedies and Belasco’s latest. Whe-e-e-ew! I made my escape after that. Say, isn’t it a shame a girl with eyes like hers should know so blamed much?”

I couldn’t help grinnin’ at Monty, and when I picks up Sadie again I gives her the diagnosis.

“Case of springin’ the highbrow chatter on a sportin’ chappy that wears a fifteen and a half collar and a six and three-quarters hat,”

says I. "He's as thankful as if he'd come through a train wreck with his cigarette still lighted. You ought to tip Veronica to chop her lines and work the spell with her eyes."

"Pooh!" says Sadie. "Monty never had a chance, anyway. You can't expect a brilliant girl like Veronica to be satisfied with a husband who's at his best only when he's knocking a goal or leading a hunt, even if he is big and handsome."

But with this as a clew I figured out how two or three of the other candidates came to side-step so abrupt. The average Johnny is all right so long as the debate is confined to gossip bits about the latest Reno recruits, or who's to be asked to Mrs. Stuyve Fish's next dinner dance; but cut loose on anything serious and you have him grabbin' for the lifeline.

There was two, though, that came through to the finals, as you might say. One was this German guy, Baron Düsseldorf; and the other was young Beverley Duer, whose fad is takin' movin' pictures of wild animals in their native jungles and givin' private movie shows in the Plaza ballroom. Some strong on the wise conversation himself, Beverley is. He paints a bit, plays the 'cello pretty fair, has a collection of ivory carvin's, and has traveled all over the lot. You can't faze him with the snappy repartee, either; for that's his specialty.

As for the Baron, his long suit was listenin'. He was a bear for it. He'd sit there, big and

ornamental, with his light blue eyes glued on Veronica, takin' it all in as fast as she could feed it to him, and lookin' almost intelligent. Course, when he did try a comeback in English he chopped his words up comic; but he could speak four other languages, and Veronica seemed pleased enough to find someone she could practice her French and German on.

For awhile there I'd have picked either of the two as a winner; only I couldn't just make up my mind which would get the decision. But somehow the affair don't seem to progress the way it should. Each one appeared to get about so far, and then stick. They both seemed anxious enough too; but just as one would take an extra spurt Veronica would somehow cool him down. She didn't seem to be playin' one against the other, either. Looked like careless work to me. Sadie gets almost peeved with her.

Then one night at our house a lot of the mystery was cleared up by some friendly joshin' across the dinner table. We had all the Adamses there that evenin',—Pa Adams, a tall, dignified, white-whiskered old sport, who looked like he might have been quite a gay boy in his day; Mother, a cheery, twinklin'-eyed, rather chubby old girl; and Veronica, all in white satin and dazzlin' to look at. Also Sadie had asked in Miss Prescott, an old maid neighbor of ours, who's so rich it hurts, but who's as plain and simple as they come. She's a fruit preservin'

specialist, and every fall her and Sadie gets real chummy over swappin' cannin' receipts.

About five P.M., though, Miss Prescott 'phones over her regrets, sayin' how her nephew had arrived unexpected; so of course she gets the word to bring Dudley Byron along with her. Emerson, his last name is, and while I hadn't seen much of him lately we'd been more or less friendly when he was takin' special post-graduate work at some agricultural college and was around home durin' vacations. An odd, quiet chap, Dudley Byron, who never figured much anywhere,—one of the kind you can fill in with reckless and depend on not to make a break or get in the way. He's a slim, sharp-faced young gent, with pale hair plastered down tight, and deep-set gray eyes that sort of wander around aimless.

It might have been kind of dull if it hadn't been for the Adamses; but Veronica and her Pa are lively enough to wake up any crowd. They're gen'rally jollyin' each other about something. This time what started it was someone remarkin' about a weddin' that was to be pulled off soon, and how the bride was to be the last of five daughters.

"Fortunate parent!" says Pa Adams. "Five! And here I've been unable to get rid of one."

"You didn't begin early enough," comes back Veronica. "Do you know, Mrs. McCabe, when I was nineteen Daddy used to be so afraid

I would be stolen away from him that he would almost lie in wait for young men with a shotgun. After I passed twenty-four he began meeting them at the gate with a box of cigars in one hand and a shaker full of cocktails in the other."

Pa Adams joins in the laugh. "It's quite true," says he. "For the last two or three years Mother and I have been doing our best to marry her off. We gave up the United States as hopeless, and carted her all over Europe. No use. Even younger sons wouldn't have her. Now we're back again, trying the dodge of staying longer in one place. But I fail to see any encouraging signs."

"I'm sure I've tried to do my part too," says Veronica, smilin' gay. "I really shouldn't mind being married. My tastes are wholly domestic. But, dear me, one must find somewhere near the right sort of man, you know! And so far——" She ends with a shrug of her white shoulders and a puckerin' of her rosy lips.

"Poor Baron!" sighs Sadie, teasin'.

"I know," says Veronica. "And what a big, handsome creature he is too! But I fear I'm not equal to carrying on a lifelong monologue."

"Surely that wouldn't be the case with Beverley Duer," suggests Sadie.

"Isn't he entertaining!" says Veronica enthusiastic. "But wouldn't it be a bit selfish,

appropriating all that brilliance just for oneself? And could it be done? I'm afraid not. About once a month, I imagine, Beverley would need a new audience. Besides—well, I'm sure I don't know; only I don't seem thrilled in the way I ought to be."

With chat like that bein' batted back and forth, I expect I wa'n't takin' much notice of Dudley Byron, who's sittin' quiet between me and Aunty; but all of a sudden he leans over and whispers eager:

"Isn't she perfectly splendid, though?"

"Eh?" says I, tearin' myself away from what's still goin' on at the other end of the table. "Oh! Miss Adams? Sure, she's a star."

"I—I would like to know her better," says Dudley, sort of plaintive.

"Crash in, then," says I. "No opposition here."

I thought I was bein' humorous; for Dudley's about as much of a lady's man as he is a heavy shot putter. I never knew of his lookin' twice at a girl before; but to-night he seems to be makin' up for lost time. All durin' the rest of the meal he does the steady, admirin' gaze at Veronica. He don't try to hide it, either, but fixes them gray eyes of his her way and neglects to eat five perfectly good courses. When we adjourns to the livin' room for coffee he keeps it up too. Couldn't have been much suddener if he'd been struck by lightnin'.

I don't know how many others noticed it, but it was as plain as day to me that Dudley Byron is on the point of makin' a chump of himself. I begun to feel kind of sorry for him too; for he's a decent, well meanin' young chap. So I edges around where I can get a word with him on the side.

"Come out of the trance, Dudley," says I.

"I—I beg pardon?" says he, startin' guilty.

"You'll only get your wings singed," says I.

"Forget Veronica while there's a chance."

"But I don't wish to forget her," says he.

"She—she's beautiful."

"Ah, what's the use?" says I. "She's mighty particular too."

"She has every right to be," says Dudley.

"What delicious coloring! What a carriage! She has the bearing of a Queen."

"Maybe," says I. "But wouldn't you rattle around some on a throne? Keep that in mind, Dudley."

"Yes, yes," says he. "I suppose I must remember how unimpressive I am."

He's an easy forgetter that evenin', though. When Sadie suggests that Miss Adams favor us, blessed if it ain't Dudley who's right there doin' the music turnin' act. I wonder how many others has struck that same pose, and lost good sleep thinkin' it over afterwards? But never a one, I'll bet, that looked like such a hopeless starter.

He seemed to be enjoyin' it as much as any,

though. And afterwards, when the other four settles themselves around the card table for the usual three rubbers, blamed if Dudley don't have the nerve to tow Veronica into the next room, stretchin' on tiptoe to talk earnest in her ear.

I could guess what it was all about. Veronica had a nice way of soundin' people for their pet hobbies, and she must have got Dudley started on his; for it's the only subject I ever knew him to get real gabby over. And you'd never guess from his looks what it was. Farmin'!

Course he ain't doin' the reg'lar Rube kind,—hay and hogs, hogs and hay. He goes at it scientific,—one of these book farmers, you understand. Establishin' model farms is his fad. Dudley told me all about it once,—intensive cultivation, soil doctorin', harvestin' efficiency, all such dope, with a cost-bearin' side line to fall back on in the winter.

Not that he needs the money, but he says he wants to keep busy and make himself useful. So his scheme is to buy up farms here and there, take each one in turn, put it on a payin' basis by studyin' the best stuff to raise and gettin' wise to the market, and then showin' his neighbors how to turn the trick too. No rollin' out at four A.M. to milk the cows for Dudley! He hires a good crew at topnotch wages, and puts in his time plannin' irrigatin' ditches, experimentin' with fertilizers, doin' the seed testin',



BLAMED IF DUDLEY DON'T HAVE THE NERVE TO TOW
VERONICA INTO THE NEXT ROOM, STRETCHIN'
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and readin' government reports; even has a farm bookkeeper.

Then when cold weather comes, instead of turnin' off his help, he springs his side line,—maybe workin' up the wood lot into shippin' crates, or developin' a stone quarry. Last I heard he was settin' out willows he'd imported from Holland, and was growin' and makin' fancy veranda furniture. He's rung in a whole town on the deal, and they was all gettin' a good thing out of it. Establishing community industries, is the way Dudley puts it. Says every jay burg ought to have one of its own.

Most likely this was what he was so busy explainin' to Veronica. He's a good talker when he gets started too, and for such a quiet appearin' chap he can liven up a lot. Must have been goin' into the details deep with her; for they don't come back—and they don't come back. I'd read the evenin' papers, and poked up the log fire half a dozen times, and stood around watchin' the bridge game until I nearly yawned my head off; but they're still missin'.

I'd just strolled around into the front hall, kind of scoutin' to see if he'd talked her to sleep, or whether she'd come back at him with some brainy fad of her own and was givin' him the chilly spine, when out through the door dashes Dudley Byron, runnin' his fingers through his hair desperate and glarin' around wild.

“Aha!” says I. “So you got it too, did you?”

“McCabe,” says he, hoarse and husky, “I—I’ve done a dreadful thing!”

“Why, Dudley!” says I. “I can’t believe it.”

“But I have,” says he, clawin’ me on the shoulder. “Oh, I—I’ve disgraced myself!”

“How?” says I. “Called some German composer out of his right name, or what?”

“No, no!” says he. “I—I can’t tell you.”

“Eh?” says I, starin’ puzzled. “Well, you’d better.”

“True, I’m your guest,” says he. “But—but I forgot myself.”

“Ah, cheer up,” says I. “Veronica’s a good sport. She wouldn’t mind if you let slip a cussword.”

“Oh, you don’t understand,” says Dudley, wringin’ his hands. “Really, I have done something awful!”

“Come, come!” says I. “Let’s have it, then.”

“Believe me,” says he, “I was carried away, quite intoxicated.”

“Gwan!” says I. “Where’d you get the stuff?”

“I mean,” says he, “by her wonderful beauty. And then, McCabe, in one moment I—I kissed her!”

“Great guns!” says I. “Didn’t plant a reg’lar smack, did you?”

He bows his head solemn. "Right on the lips," says he. "You see, we were talking, her lovely face was very close, her glorious eyes were shining into mine, when suddenly—well, it seemed as if I became dizzy, and the next moment I seized her brutally in my arms and—and——"

"Good night!" says I, gaspin'. "What did she hit you with?"

"I—I can't say exactly what happened next," says Dudley. "I think I dropped her and ran out here."

"Of all the boob plays!" says I. "To take a Brodie plunge like that, and then do the fade-away!"

"But what must I do now?" groans Dudley. "Oh, what can I do?"

"Is she still in there?" says I.

"I—I suppose so," says he.

"Well, so far as I can see," says I, "you got to go back and apologize."

"What! Now?" says he.

"Before she has time to sick the old man on you with a gun," says I.

"Yes, yes!" says he. "Not that I am afraid of that. I wish he would shoot me! I hope someone does! But I suppose I ought to beg her pardon."

"In with you, then!" says I, leadin' him towards the door.

With his hand on the knob he balks. "Oh, I can't!" says he. "I simply cannot trust my-

self. If I should try, if I should find myself close to her once more. McCabe, I—I might do it all over again.”

“ Say, look here, Dudley! ” says I. “ This ain’t a habit you’re breakin’ yourself of, you know: it’s just a single slip you’ve got to apologize for.”

“ I know,” says he; “ but you cannot imagine how madly in love with her I am.”

“ I’m glad I can’t,” says I.

And, say, he sticks to it. No, Sir, I can’t push him in there with Veronica again. I had him out on the front steps for fifteen minutes, tryin’ to argue some sense into him; but all he wants to do is go jump off the rocks into the Sound and have me tell Aunty he died disgraced but happy. Fin’ly, though, he agrees to wait while I go sleuthin’ in and find whether Veronica has rushed in tears to Daddy, or is still curled up on the davenport bitin’ the cushions in rage.

I slips into the livin’ room, where I find ’em addin’ up the scores and talkin’ over the last hand, but otherwise calm and peaceful. Then I opens the door soft into the next room, steps in, and shuts the door behind me. No wild sobs. No broken furniture. There’s Veronica, rockin’ back and forth under the readin’ light, with a book in her lap.

“ Well? ” says I, waitin’ breathless for the storm to break.

She gives a little jump, glances up quick, and

pinks up like a poppy. "Oh!" says she, "It's you?"

"Uh-huh," says I. "I—er—I've just been talkin' with Dudley."

"Ye-e-es?" says she, rollin' a leaf of the book over her finger nervous and droopin' her long lashes.

"You see," says I, fidgetin' some on my own account, "he—he's goin' home in a minute or two."

"Oh, is he?" says she. "There! And I meant to ask him if he wouldn't call to-morrow. Won't you do it for me, Mr. McCabe?"

How about that for a reverse jolt, eh? I backs out of the room lookin' foolish. And Dudley he near collapses when I brings him the glad news.

As for Sadie, she couldn't believe me at all when I tells her Dudley looks like a sure winner. She had to wait until a few days later when she catches 'em just breakin' a clinch, before she'll admit I ain't stringin' her.

"But a shy, diffident fellow like Dudley!" says she. "I don't see how he did it."

"Neither does Dudley," says I. "Guess it must have been a case of a guy with the goods comin' across with the swift tackle. Maybe that's what she'd been waitin' for all along."

CHAPTER XIX

A LITTLE WHILE WITH ALVIN

I CAN'T say just how I got roped in; whether it was me that discovered Alvin, or him who took to me. Must have been some my fault; for here was a whole subway car full of people, and I'm the one he seems to pick. I might lay it to an odd break, only things of that kind has happened to me so often.

Anyway, here I am, doin' the strap-swingin' act patient, without makin' any mad dash for a seat at stations, but hangin' on and watchin' the crowds shift sort of curious. You might as well, you know; for if you do get a chance to camp down durin' the rush hours, along comes some fat lady and stands puffin' in front of you, or a thin, tired lookin' one who glares at you over the top of your paper. But if you're a standee yourself you feel free to look any of 'em in the eye.

And, say, ain't we a glum, peevish, sour lookin' lot, here in New York? You'd most think that showin' any signs of good nature was violatin' a city ordinance, and that all our dispositions had been treated with acetic acid. Why, by the suspicious looks we give the

stranger who rubs elbows with us, you might suppose our population was ninety per cent. escaped criminals.

As the idea struck me I may have loosened my mouth corners a little, or may not. Anyway, as we pulls into 72d-st., and the wild scramble to catch a packed express begins, I finds myself gazin' absentminded at this slim, stoop-shouldered gent in the corner. Next thing I know he's smilin' friendly and pointin' to a vacant seat alongside.

First off, of course, I thinks he must be someone I've met casual and forgot; but as I slides in beside him and gets a closer view I know that he's one of the ninety-odd millions of unfortunates who, up to date, ain't had the benefit of my acquaintance. In other words, he's one of the common suspects, an utter stranger.

Course, as far as his looks go, he might be a perfect gent. He's dressed neat and plain, except for the brown spats; but as you run across a spat wearer only now and then, you're bound to guess they ain't just right somewhere. The sallow-complected face with the prominent cheekbones don't count so much against him. Them points are common. What caught me, though, was the lively brown eyes with just the hint of a twinkle in 'em. Always does. I know some like the wide-set, stary kind that go with an open-faced smile and a loud haw-haw; but for me the quiet chuckle and the twinklin' eye!

Still, he hadn't proved yet that he wa'n't a pickpocket or a wife beater; so I just nods non-committal over my shoulder and resumes my usual aristocratic reserve.

"How does it happen," says he, "that you aren't on your way to the funeral too?"

"Eh?" says I, a little jarred at this odd openin'.

"Or is it that they have all been indulgin' in family rows? Look at them!" he goes on, wavin' his hand at the carful.

"Oh, I get you," says I. "Not so cheerful as they might be, are they?"

"But is it necessary for us all to be so selfishly sad," says he, "so gloomily stern? True, we have each our troubles, some little, some big; but why wear them always on our faces? Why inflict them on others? Why not, when we can, the brave, kindly smile?"

"Just the way it struck me a minute ago," says I.

"Did it?" says he, beamin'. "Then I claim you for our clan."

"Your which?" says I.

"Our brotherhood," says he.

"Can't be very exclusive," says I, "if I've qualified so easy. Any partic'lar passwords or grip to it?"

"We rehearsed the whole ritual before you sat down," says he. "The friendly glance, that's all. And now—well, I prefer to be called Alvin."

“So-o-o?” says I sort of distant. But I’d no more’n got it out than I felt mean. What if he was a con man, or worse? I ought to be able to take care of myself. So I goes on, “McCabe’s my name; but among friends I’m gen’rally known as Shorty.”

“The best of credentials!” says he. “Then hail, Shorty, and welcome to the Free Brotherhood of Ego Tamers!”

I shakes my head puzzled. “Now I’ve lost you,” says I. “If it’s a comedy line, shoot it.”

“Ah, but it’s only tragedy,” says Alvin, “the original tragedy of man. See how its blight rests on these around us! Simply overstimulation of the ego; our souls in the strait-jacket of self; no freedom of thought or word or deed to our fellows. Ego, the tyrant, rules us. Only we of the Free Brotherhood are seeking to tame ours. Do I put it clumsily?”

“If you was readin’ it off a laundry ticket, it couldn’t be clearer,” says I. “Something about tappin’ the upper-case I too frequent, ain’t it?”

“An excellent paraphrase,” says he. “You have it!”

“Gee!” says I. “Didn’t know I was so close behind you. But whisper, I ain’t got my Ego on the mat with his tongue out, not yet.”

“And who of us has?” says he. “But at least we give him a tussle now and then. We’ve

broken a fetter here and there. We have worked loose the gag."

Say, he had, all right, or else he'd swallowed it; for as an easy and fluent converser Alvin headed the bill. Course, it's an odd line he hands out, the kind that keeps you guessin'. In spots it listens like highbrow book stuff, and then again it don't. But somehow I finds it sort of entertainin'. Besides, he seems like such a good-natured, well meanin' gink that I lets him run on, clear to 42d-st.

"Well, so long," says I. "I get out here."

"To leave me among the Ishmaelites!" says he. "And I've two useless hours to dispose of. Let me go a way with you?"

I hadn't counted on annexin' Alvin for the rest of the day, and I expect I could have shook him if I'd tried; but by that time he'd got me kind of curious to know who and what he was, and why. So I tows him over as far as the Physical Culture Studio.

"Here's where I make some of 'em forget their egos, at so much per," says I, pointin' to the sign.

"Ah, the red corpuscle method!" says he. "Primitive; but effective, I've no doubt. I must see it in operation."

And an hour later he's still there, reposin' comfy in an office chair with his feet on the windowsill, smokin' cigarettes, and throwin' off chunks of classy dialogue that had Swifty Joe

gawpin' at him like he was listenin' to a foreign language.

"My assistant, Mr. Gallagher," says I, by way of apologizin'.

Alvin jumps up and shakes him hearty by the mitt. "Allow me to offer you a cigarette, Sir," says he.

"Much obliged," says Swifty, eyin' the thin silver case with the gold linin'. "Gee! what a swell box!"

"Do you fancy it?" says Alvin. "Then it is yours, with my best compliments."

"Ah-r-r-r chee, no!" protests Swifty.

"Please, as a favor to me," insists Alvin, pushin' the case into his hand. "One finds so few ways of giving pleasure. In return I shall remember gratefully the direct sincerity of your manner. Charming!"

And, say, I expect it's the first time in his whole career that anybody ever discovered any good points about Swifty Joe Gallagher on first sight. He backs out with his mouth open and his face tinted up like an old maid's that's been kissed in the dark.

But that little play only makes it all the harder for me to shoo him out. The fact is, though, it's gettin' almost time for a directors' meetin' that's to be pulled off in my front office. Sounds imposin', don't it? Didn't know I was on a board, eh? Well, I am, and up to date it's been one of the richest luxuries I ever blew myself to. I'd been roped, that's all.

Young Blair Woodbury, one of my downtown reg'lars, had opened the cellar door for me. Thinks he's a great promoter, Blair does. And somewhere he'd dug up this nutty inventor with his milk container scheme. Oh, it listens good, the way he put it. Just a two-ounce, woodpulp, mailin' cartridge lined with oiled paper, that could be turned out for a dollar a thousand, pint and quart sizes, indestructible, absolutely sanitary, air tight, germ proof, and so on.

Simple little thing; but it was goin' to put the Milk Trust out of business inside of six months, set back the high cost of livin' a full notch, give every dairy farmer an automobile, and land the Universal Container Company's stockholders at No. 1 Easy-st. For, instead of payin' two prices for an imitation blend doctored up with formaldehyde, you got the real, creamy stuff straight from the farm at five a quart, and passed in at the front door with your morning mail. Didn't the parcel post bring your drygoods? Why not your milk? And when it got to be common the P.O. Department would put on carts for a six A.M. delivery. There you are!

So I'd subscribed for a thousand shares, payin' fifty per cent. down for development expenses, the rest on call. Yes, I know. But you should have heard Blair Woodbury pull the prospectus stuff, and describe how the dividends would come rollin' in!

That was six or eight months ago, and we'd stood for two assessments. Then it turned out there was something wrong with the pulp compressor dingus that was to have shot out containers at the rate of two hundred a minute. Some of us went over to Jersey to see it work; but all it produced while we was there was a groanin' sound and a smell of sour dough. I could have bought out the holdin's of the entire bunch for my return ticket. But the ticket looked above par to me.

After that our board meetin's wa'n't such gay affairs. A grouchy lot of tinhorn investors we was, believe me; for the parties young Mr. Woodbury had decoyed into this fool scheme wa'n't Standard Oil plutes or any of the Morgan crowd: mostly salaried men, with a couple of dentists, a retail grocer, and a real estate agent! None of us was stuck on droppin' a thousand or so into a smelly machine that wouldn't behave. Maybe it would next time; but we had our doubts. What we wanted most was to get from under, and this meetin' to-day was called to chew over a proposition for dumpin' the stock on the Curb on the chance that there might be enough suckers to go around. It wouldn't be a cheerful séance, either, and bystanders might not be exactly welcome. Misery may like comp'ny; but it don't yearn for a gallery.

So I has to hint to Alvin that as I had a little

business meetin' comin' on maybe he wouldn't find it so entertainin'.

"Nothing bores me," says he. "Humanity, in all its phases, all its efforts, is interesting."

"Huh!" says I. "Humanity beefin' over a dollar it's dropped through a crack wouldn't furnish any Easter card scheme. Talk about grouchy people! You ought to see this bunch, with their egos clutchin' their checkbooks."

"Ah!" says Alvin. "A financial deal, is it?"

"It was," says I. "These are the obsequies we're about to hold."

And he's so prompt with the sympathy dope that I has to sketch the disaster out for him, includin' a description of the container scheme.

"Why," says he, "that seems quite practical. Rather a brilliant idea, and far too good to be abandoned without a thorough trial. It appeals strongly to me, Friend McCabe. Besides, I've had some experience in such affairs. Perhaps I could help. Let me try."

"I'll put it up to the board," says I. "If they say— Ah, here comes Doc Fosdick and Meyers the grocer now."

They don't appear arm in arm. In fact, at the last session they'd had a hot run-in; so now they takes chairs on opposite sides of the room and glares at each other hostile. A thin, nervous little dyspeptic, Doc Fosdick is; while Meyers is bull necked and red faced. They'd mix about as well as a cruet of vinegar and a

pail of lard. Course I has to introduce Alvin, and he insists on shakin' hands cordial.

"You professional chaps," says he to the Doc, "are such fine fellows to know. Ah, a bit crusty on the surface perhaps; but underneath—what big hearts! Delighted, Mr. Meyers! One can readily see how you translate good health into good nature. And I congratulate you both on being associated in such a splendid enterprise as this milk container scheme. Bound to be a big thing; for it is founded on the public good. Altruism always wins in the long run, you know, always."

Doc he tries to sniff disagreeable, and Meyers grunts disapprovin'; but Alvin had 'em goin' for all that. You could tell by the satisfied way the grocer lights up a cigar, and the soothed actions of Fosdick. As the others drops in one by one, Alvin kept on spreadin' seeds of sunshine, and before the meetin' was called to order he was on chummy terms with nearly everyone in the room. The point of whether he was to stay or not wa'n't even raised.

It was Manning, the real estate man, who sprung the new proposition. "That fool inventor Nevins," says he, "insists that if we can give him two weeks more and raise twenty-five thousand, he can perfect his machine and start manufacturing. Now if we could only find buyers for half those unsubscribed shares——"

"Bah!" snorts Fosdick. "Hasn't Wood-

bury hawked 'em all over town? Why isn't he here now? Tell me that, will you? Because he's done with us! We're squeezed lemons, we are, and he can't find any more to squeeze!"

"Pardon me," says Alvin, "but I wish to state that I believe fully in this enterprise. It's sound, it's scientific, it's progressive. And while as a rule I don't go in for speculative investments, I shall be very glad, in this instance, providing you all agree to stand by and see it through with me, to take—say ten thousand shares at par. In fact, I stand ready to write a check for the full amount this minute. What do you say?"

Well, we gasps and gawps at Alvin like so many orphan asylum kids when Santa Claus bounces in at the Christmas exercises.

Manning gets his breath back first. "Gentlemen," says he, "isn't this offer worth considering? Let's see, did I get your name right, Mr.—er——"

"Alvin Pratt Barton," says our Santa Claus.

"Pratt Barton?" repeats Manning. "Any connection with the brokerage firm of that name?"

Alvin shrugs his shoulders and smiles. "The late Mr. Barton was my father," says he. "Mr. Pratt is my uncle by marriage. But I am doing this on my own initiative, you know. I should like an expression of opinion."

Say, he got it! Inside of three minutes we'd

voted unanimous to hold on for two months longer, made Alvin vice president of the comp'ny, and his check has been handed over to the treasurer, which is me. Then he'd shaken hands hearty with each one, patted 'em on the back, and even got Doc Fosdick smilin' amiable as he leaves.

"Alvin," says I after they'd all gone, "take it from me, you're some pacifier! Why, if it hadn't been for you jumpin' in, I expect we'd jawed away here for hours until we broke up in a free-for-all. Honest, you got the white dove of peace lookin' like a mad fish hawk."

"Tut, tut!" says Alvin. "No spoofing, you know. Really, it takes very little to bring men together; for, after all, we are brothers. Only at times we forget."

"You mean most of us never remember," says I. "But you're a true sport, anyway, and the least I can do is to blow you to the best lunch on Fifth-ave. Come on."

He consents ready enough, providin' I'll stroll over to the Grand Central with him first, while he sees about some baggage. We was makin' a dash through the traffic across Sixth-ave. when I misses Alvin, and turns around to find him apologizin' to a young female he's managed to bump into and spill in the slush just as he fetched the curb. He has his hat off and is beggin' her pardon in his best society way too; although he must have seen at a glance what she was,—one of these brassy-

eyed parties with a hand-decorated complexion and a hangover breath.

“ Ah, chop the soft stuff! ” says she, brushin’ the mud off her slit skirt vigorous. “ And next time lamp who you’re buttin’ into, you pie-faced, turkey-shanked—— ”

Well, maybe that’s enough of the lady’s repartee to quote exact; for the rest wa’n’t strictly ladylike. And the more Alvin tries to convince her how sorry he is, the livelier she cuts loose with her tongue, until a crowd collects to enjoy the performance.

“ Beat it! ” says I, tuggin’ Alvin by the arm.

“ Please wait here a moment, Madam, ” says he, and then starts off, leavin’ her starin’ after him and still statin’ her opinion of him reckless. He only goes as far as the florist’s, next to the corner, and I follows.

“ A dozen of those American beauties quickly, please, ” says Alvin, fishin’ hasty through his pockets. “ Oh, I say, McCabe, can you lend me fifteen for a few moments? Thank you. ”

And in a jiffy he’s back at the curb, presentin’ that armful of roses to Tessie of the tabasco tongue, and doin’ it as graceful and dignified as if he was handin’ ’em to a Pittsburgh Duchess. He don’t wait for any thanks, either; but takes me by the arm and hurries off. I had to have one more look, though, and as I glances back she’s still standin’ there starin’

at the flowers sort of stupid, with the brine leakin' from both eyes.

"Alvin," says I, "it's some education to travel with you."

"I'm a clumsy ass!" says he. "Poor wretch! I could think of nothing sensible to do for her. Let's say no more about it. I must get that suitcase from the baggage room."

He greets the grumpy checkroom tyrant like a friend and brother, and has just slipped him a cigar when a husky-built square-jawed gent steps up behind and taps Alvin familiar on the shoulder.

Alvin's jaw sags disappointed for a second as he turns; but he recovers quick and gives the cheerful hail. "Oh, it's you, is it, Scully?" says he. "I thought I'd given you the slip completely this time. Hope I haven't made you a lot of trouble."

"Not a bit, Mr. Barton," says Scully. "You know it's a change for us, Sir, getting out this way, with all expenses paid. They sent Talcott with me, Sir."

"Fine!" says Alvin. "Of course I like them all; but I'm glad it happened to be you and Talcott this trip."

"Hope you're ready to go back, Sir," says Scully.

"Oh, quite," says Alvin. "I've had a bully good time; but I'm getting a little tired. And, by the way, please remember to have the doctor

send fifteen dollars to my friend McCabe here. You explain, will you, Scully?"

Scully does. "From Dr. Slade's Restorium," says he, noddin' at Alvin and tappin' his forehead. "Quite a harmless gentleman, Sir."

"Eh?" says I, turnin' to Alvin. "You from a nut factory? Good night!"

"It's a whim of Uncle's," says Alvin, chucklin'. "He's gone a little cracked over making and saving money. Poor old chap! Ego developed most abnormally. But the Judge he took me before was that kind too; so I am compelled to live with Dr. Slade. Jolly crowd up there, though. Come along, Scully; we mustn't be late for dinner."

And off he goes, smilin' contented and friendly at anyone who happens to look his way. Wouldn't that crimp you?

Course, my first move after gettin' back to the studio was to dig that check of his out of the safe and query the bank. "No account here," the clerk 'phones back prompt, and I could see the Universal Liquid Container Company takin' a final plunge down the coal chute.

For days, though, I put off callin' the bunch together and announcin' the sad fact. More'n a week went by, and I was still dreadin' to do it. Then here this mornin' in romps young Blair Woodbury, his eyes sparklin' and a broad grin on his face. He's flourishin' a bundle

about the size of a two weeks' fam'ly wash, and as he sees me he lets out a joy yelp.

"Well, why the riot?" says I. "What you got there?"

"Containers!" says he. "Old Nevins has got the compressor working. Sixty seconds to make these, my boy—two hundred in one minute! Count 'em!"

"I'll take your word for it," says I. "That's fine, too. But I'm carryin' all the comp'ny stock I can stand. Go out and convince some other come-ons."

"I don't have to," says he. "Why, during the last four days the issue has been oversubscribed. It was getting that Mr. Barton, of Pratt & Barton, on our list that turned the trick."

"Alvin!" I gasps. "Why—why, he's only a batty nephew, that they keep under guard. Bughouse, you know. His check's no good."

"Doesn't matter in the least," says Blair. "He made good bait. We're established, I tell you! Get the board together, and we'll let the contracts for the factory. And then—well, McCabe, if our stock doesn't hit one hundred and fifty inside of six months, I—I'll eat every one of these!"

And, say, allowin' for all his extra enthusiasm, it looks like we stood to win. I expect the other directors'll be some jarred, though, when they hear about Alvin. I started in to break it to Swifty Joe.

“By the way, Swifty,” says I, “you remember that Barton party who was in here one day?”

“*Mister* Barton,” says he reprov’in’. “Say, he was a reg’lar guy, he was!”

“Think so?” says I.

“Think!” explodes Swifty indignant. “Ahr-r-r chee! Why, say, any bonehead could see he was a real gent to the last tap of the gong.”

And, say, I didn’t have the heart to break the spell. For, after all, admittin’ the state of his belfry, I don’t know that many of us has so much on Alvin, at that.

THE END

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