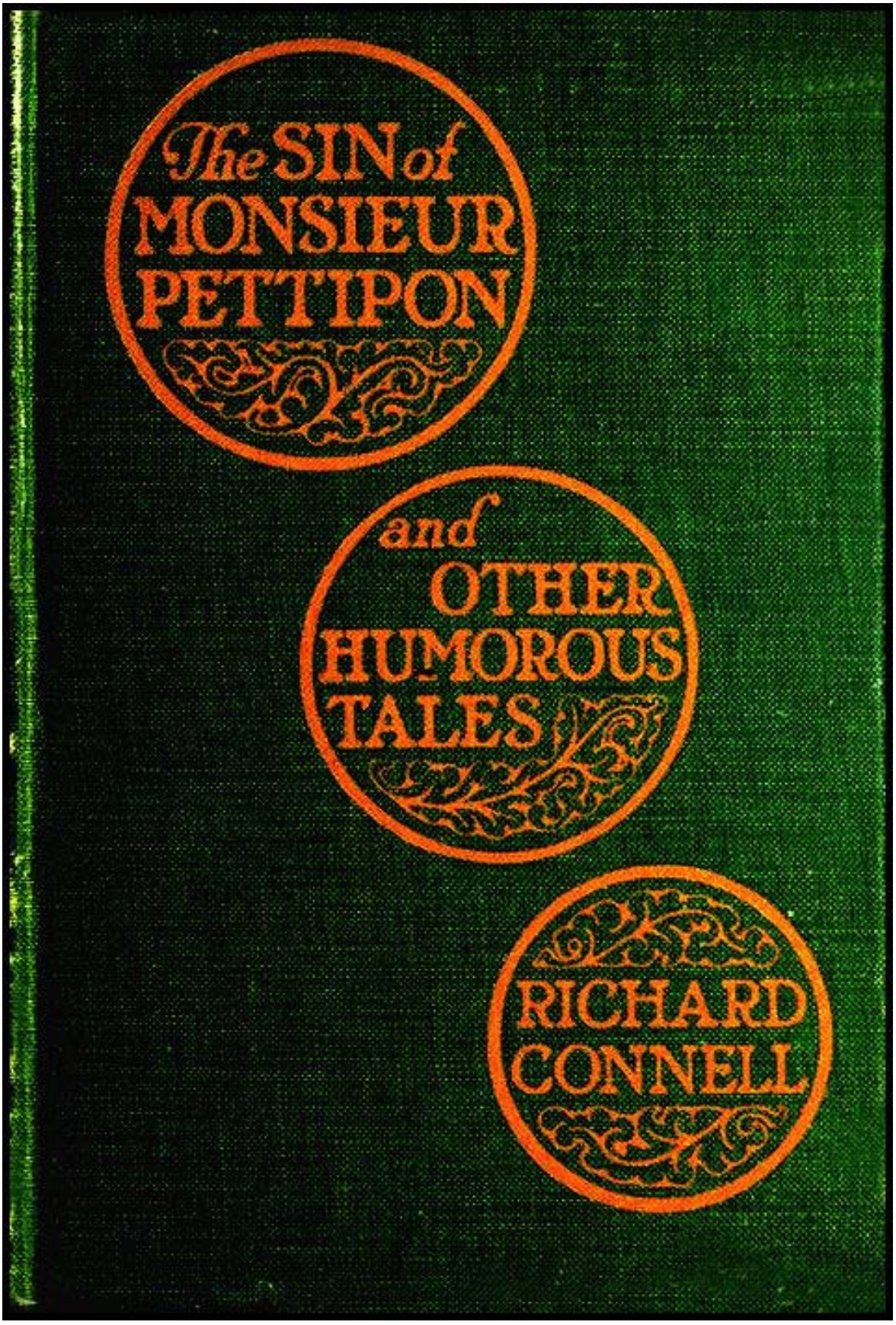
The SIN of MONSIEUR PETTIPON
and OTHER HUMOROUS TALES
RICHARD CONNELL

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Other Humorous Tales

Richard Connell

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1: The Sin of Monsieur Pettipon

MOISTENING the tip of his immaculate handkerchief, M. Alphonse Marie Louis Camille Pettipon deftly and daintily rubbed an almost imperceptible speck of dust from the mirror in Stateroom C 341 of the liner *Voltaire* of the Paris-New York Steamship Company, and a little sigh of happiness fluttered his double chins.

He set about his task of making up the berths in the stateroom with the air of a high priest performing a sacerdotal ritual. His big pink hands gently smoothed the crinkles from the linen pillow cases; the woolen blankets he arranged in neat, folded triangles and stood off to survey the effect as an artist might. And, indeed, Monsieur Pettipon considered himself an artist.

To him the art of being a steward was just as estimable as the art of being a poet; he was a Shelley of the dustpan; a Keats of the sheets. To him the making up of a berth in one of the cabins he tended was a sonnet; an orange pip or burnt match on the floor was as intolerable as a false quantity. Few poets took as much pains with their pens as he did with his whisk. He loved his work with a zeal almost fanatical.

Lowering himself to his plump knees, Monsieur Pettipon swept the floor with a busy brush, humming the while a little Provence song:

"My mama's at Paris,
My papa's at Versailles,
But me, I am here,
Sleeping in the straw.
Chorus:
"Oo la la,
Oo la la,
Oo la, oo la,
Oo la la."

As he sang the series of "Oo la las" he kept time with strokes of his brush, one stroke to each "la," until a microscope could not have detected the smallest crumb of foreign matter on the red carpet.

Then he hoisted himself wheezily to his feet and with critical eye examined the cabin. It was perfection. Once more he sighed the happy little sigh of work well done; then he gathered up his brush, his dustpan and his collection of little cleaning rags and entered the stateroom next door, where he expertly set about making things tidy to an accompaniment of "Oo la las."

Suddenly in the midst of a "la la," he broke off, and his wide brow puckered as an outward sign that some disquieting thought was stirring beneath it. He was not going to be able to buy his little son Napoleon a violin this trip either.

The look of contentment he usually wore while doing the work he loved gave way to small furrows of worry. He was saying silently to himself: "Ah, Alphonse, old boy, this violin situation is getting serious. Your little Napoleon is thirteen, and it is at that tender age that virtuosos begin to find themselves. And what is a virtuoso without a violin? You should be a steward of the first class, old turnip, where each trip you would be tipped the price of a violin; on second-class tips one cannot buy even mouth organs. Alas!"

Each trip now, for months, Monsieur Pettipon had said to his wife as he left his tiny flat in the Rue Dauphine, "This time, Thérèse, I will have a millionaire. He will see with what care I smooth his sheets and pick the banana skins from the floor, and he will say, 'This Pettipon is not such a bad lot. I will give him twenty dollars.' Or he will write to M. Victor Ronssoy about me, and Monsieur Ronssoy will order the captain to order the chief steward to make me a steward of the first class, and then, my dear, I will buy a violin the most wonderful for our little cabbage."

To which the practical Thérèse would reply, "Millionaires do not travel second class."

And Monsieur Pettipon would smile hopefully and say "Who can tell?" although he knew perfectly well that she was right.

And Thérèse would pick a nonexistent hair from the worn collar of his coat and remark, "Oh, if you were only a steward of the first class, my Alphonse!"

"Patience, my dear Thérèse, patience," he would say, secretly glowing as men do when their life ambition is touched on.

"Patience? Patience, indeed!" she would exclaim. "Have you not crossed on the *Voltaire* a hundred and twenty-seven times? Has a speck of dust ever been found in one of your cabins? You should have been promoted long ago. You are being done a dirtiness, Monsieur Pettipon."

And he would march off to his ship, wagging his big head.

This trip, clearly, there was no millionaire. In C 341 was a young painter and his bride; his tip would be two dollars, and that would be enough, for was he not a fellow artist? In C 342 were two lingerie buyers from New York; they would exact much service, give hints of much reward and, unless Monsieur Pettipon looked sharp, would slip away without tipping him at all. In C 343 were school-teachers, two to a berth; Monsieur Pettipon appraised them at five dollars for the party; C 344 contained two fat ladies— very sick; and C 345 contained two thin ladies— both sick. Say a dollar each. In C 346 was a shaggy-bearded individual— male— of unknown derivation, who spoke an explosive

brand of English, which burst out in a series of grunts, and who had economical habits in the use of soap. It was doubtful, reasoned Monsieur Pettipon, if the principle of tipping had ever penetrated the wild regions from which this being unquestionably hailed. Years of experience had taught Monsieur Pettipon to appraise with a quite uncanny accuracy the amount of tips he would get from his clients, as he called them.

Still troubled in his mind over his inability to provide a new violin for the promising Napoleon, Monsieur Pettipon went about his work, and in the course of time reached Stateroom C 346 and tapped with soft knuckles.

"Come," grunted the shaggy occupant.

Monsieur Pettipon, with an apologetic flood of "pardons," entered. He stopped in some alarm. The shaggy one, in violently striped pajamas, was standing in the center of the cabin, plainly very indignant about something. He fixed upon Monsieur Pettipon a pair of accusing eyes. With the air of a conjurer doing a trick he thrust his hand, palm upward, beneath the surprised nose of Monsieur Pettipon.

"Behold!" cried the shaggy one in a voice of thunder.

Monsieur Pettipon peered into the outstretched hand. In the cupped palm was a small dark object. It was alive.

Monsieur Pettipon, speechless with horror, regarded the thing with round unbelieving eyes. He felt as if he had been struck a heavy, stunning blow.

At last with a great effort he asked weakly, "You found him here, monsieur?"

"I found him here," declared the shaggy one, nodding his bushy head toward his berth.

The world of Monsieur Pettipon seemed to come crashing down around his ears.

"Impossible!" panted Monsieur Pettipon. "It could not be."

"It could be," said the shaggy one sternly, "because it was."

He continued to hold the damnatory evidence within a foot of Monsieur Pettipon's staring incredulous eyes.

"But, monsieur," protested the steward, "I tell you the thing could not be. One hundred and twenty-seven times have I crossed on this *Voltaire*, and such a thing has not been. Never, never, never."

"I did not make him," put in the passenger, with a show of irony.

"No, no! Of course monsieur did not make him. That is true. But perhaps monsieur—"

The gesture of the overwhelmed Pettipon was delicate but pregnant.

The shaggy passenger glared ferociously at the steward.

"Do you mean I brought him with me?" he demanded in a terrible voice.

Monsieur Pettipon shrugged his shoulders.

"Such things happen," he said soothingly. "When one travels—"

The shaggy one interrupted him.

"He is not mine!" he exploded bellicosely. "He never was mine. I found him here, I tell you. Here! Something shall be done about this."

Monsieur Pettipon had begun to tremble; tiny moist drops bedewed his expanse of brow; to lose his job would be tragedy enough; but this— this would be worse than tragedy; it would be disgrace. His artistic reputation was at stake. His career was tottering on a hideous brink. All Paris, all France would know, and would laugh at him.

"Give me the little devil," he said humbly. "I, myself, personally, will see to it that he troubles you no more. He shall perish at once, monsieur; he shall die the death. You will have fresh bedding, fresh carpet, fresh everything. There will be fumigations. I beg that monsieur will think no more of it."

Savagely he took the thing between plump thumb and forefinger and bore it from the stateroom, holding it at arm's length. In the corridor, with the door shut on the shaggy one, Monsieur Pettipon, feverishly agitated, muttered again and again, "He did bring it with him. He did bring it with him."

All that night Monsieur Pettipon lay in his berth, stark awake, and brooded. The material side of the affair was bad enough. The shaggy one would report the matter to the head steward of the second class; Monsieur Pettipon would be ignominiously discharged; the sin, he had to admit, merited the extremest penalty. Jobs are hard to get, particularly when one is fat and past forty. He saw the Pettipons ejected from their flat; he saw his little Napoleon a café waiter instead of a virtuoso. All this was misery enough. But it was the spiritual side that tortured him most poignantly, that made him toss and moan as the waves swished against the liner's sides and an ocean dawn stole foggily through the porthole. He was a failure at the work he loved.

Consider the emotions of an artist who suddenly realizes that his masterpiece is a tawdry smear; consider the shock to a gentleman, proud of his name, who finds a blot black as midnight on the escutcheon he had for many prideful years thought stainless. To the mind of the crushed Pettipon came the thought that even though his job was irretrievably lost he still might be able to save his honor.

As early as it was possible he went to the head steward of the second class, his immediate superior.

There were tears in Monsieur Pettipon's eyes and voice as he said, "Monsieur Deveau, a great misfortune, as you have doubtless been informed, has overtaken me."

The head steward of the second class looked up sharply. He was in a bearish mood, for he had lost eleven francs at cards the night before.

"Well, Monsieur Pettipon?" he asked brusquely.

"Oh, he has heard about it, he has heard about it," thought Monsieur Pettipon; and his voice trembled as he said aloud, "I have done faithful work on the *Voltaire* for twenty-two years, Monsieur Deveau, and such a thing has never before happened."

"What thing? Of what do you speak? Out with it, man."

"This!" cried Monsieur Pettipon tragically.

He thrust out his great paw of a hand; in it nestled a small dark object, now lifeless.

The head steward gave it a swift examination.

"Ah!" he exclaimed petulantly. "Must you trouble me with your pets at this time when I am busy?"

"Pets, monsieur?" The aghast Pettipon raised protesting hands toward heaven. "Oh, never in this life, monsieur the head steward."

"Then why do you bring him to me with such great care?" demanded the head steward. "Do you think perhaps, Monsieur Pettipon, that I wish to discuss entomology at six in the morning? I assure you that such a thing is not a curiosity to me. I have lived, Monsieur Pettipon."

"But— but he was in one of my cabins," groaned Monsieur Pettipon.

"Indeed?" The head steward was growing impatient. "I did not suppose you had caught him with a hook and line. Take him away. Drown him. Bury him. Burn him. Do I care?"

"He is furious," thought Monsieur Pettipon, "at my sin. But he is pretending not to be. He will save up his wrath until the *Voltaire* returns to France, and then he will denounce me before the whole ship's company. I know these long-nosed Normans. Even so, I must save my honor if I can."

He leaned toward the head steward and said with great earnestness of tone, "I assure you, monsieur the head steward, that I took every precaution. The passenger who occupies the cabin is, between ourselves, a fellow of great dirtiness. I am convinced he brought this aboard with him. I have my reasons, monsieur. Did I not say to Georges Prunier— he is steward in the corridor next to mine— 'Georges, old oyster, that hairy fellow in C 346 has a look of itchiness which I do not fancy. I must be on my guard.' You can ask Georges Prunier— an honest fellow, monsieur the head steward— if I did not say this. And Georges said, 'Alphonse, my friend, I incline to agree with you.' And I said to Georges, 'Georges, my brave, it would not surprise me if— '"

The head steward of the second class broke in tartly: "You should write a book of memoirs, Monsieur Pettipon. When I have nothing to do I will read it.

But now have I not a thousand and two things to do? Take away your pet. Have him stuffed. Present him to a museum. Do I care?" He started to turn from Monsieur Pettipon, whose cheeks were quivering like spilled jelly.

"I entreat you, Monsieur Deveau," begged Pettipon, "to consider how for twenty-two years, three months and a day, such a thing had not happened in my cabins. This little rascal— and you can see how tiny he is— is the only one that has ever been found, and I give you my word, the word of a Pettipon, that he was not there when we sailed. The passenger brought him with him. I have my reasons—"

"Enough!" broke in the head steward of the second class with mounting irritation. "I can stand no more. Go back to your work, Monsieur Pettipon."

He presented his back to Monsieur Pettipon. Sick at heart the adipose steward went back to his domain. As he made the cabins neat he did not sing the little song with the chorus of "oo la las."

"There was deep displeasure in that Norman's eye," said Monsieur Pettipon to himself. "He does not believe that the passenger is to blame. Your goose is cooked, my poor Alphonse. You must appeal to the chief steward."

To the chief steward, in his elaborate office in the first class, went Monsieur Pettipon, nervously opening and shutting his fat fists.

The chief steward, a tun of a man, bigger even than Monsieur Pettipon, peeped at his visitor from beneath waggish, furry eyebrows.

"I am Monsieur Pettipon," said the visitor timidly. "For twenty-two years, three months and a day, I have been second-class steward on the *Voltaire*, and never monsieur the chief steward, has there been a complaint, one little complaint against me. One hundred and twenty-seven trips have I made, and never has a single passenger said—"

"I'm sorry," interrupted the chief steward, "but I can't make you a first-class steward. No vacancies. Next year, perhaps; or the year after—"

"Oh, it isn't that," said Monsieur Pettipon miserably. "It is this."

He held out his hand so that the chief steward could see its contents.

"Ah?" exclaimed the chief steward, arching his furry brows. "Is this perhaps a bribe, monsieur?"

"Monsieur the chief steward is good enough to jest," said Pettipon, standing first on one foot and then on the other in his embarrassment, "but I assure you that it has been a most serious blow to me."

"Blow?" repeated the chief steward. "Blow? Is it that in the second class one comes to blows with them?"

"He knows about it all," thought Monsieur Pettipon. "He is making game of me." His moon face stricken and appealing, Monsieur Pettipon addressed the

chief steward. "He brought it with him, monsieur the chief steward. I have my reasons—"

"Who brought what with whom?" queried the chief steward with a trace of asperity.

"The passenger brought this aboard with him," explained Monsieur Pettipon. "I have good reasons, monsieur, for making so grave a charge. Did I not say to Georges Prunier— he is in charge of the corridor next to mine— 'Georges, old oyster, that hairy fellow in C 346 has a look of itchiness which I do not fancy. I must be on my guard.' You can ask Georges Prunier— a thoroughly reliable fellow, monsieur, a wearer of the military medal, and the son of the leading veterinarian in Amiens— if I did not say this. And Georges said—"

The chief steward held up a silencing hand.

"Stop, I pray you, before my head bursts," he commanded. "Your repartee with Georges is most affecting, but I do not see how it concerns a busy man like me."

"But the passenger said he found this in his berth!" wailed Monsieur Pettipon, wringing his great hands.

"My compliments to monsieur the passenger," said the chief steward, "and tell him that there is no reward."

"Now I am sure he is angry with me," said Monsieur Pettipon to himself. "These sly, smiling, fat fellows! I must convince him of my innocence."

Monsieur Pettipon laid an imploring hand on the chief steward's sleeve.

"I can only say," said Monsieur Pettipon in the accents of a man on the gallows, "that I did all within the power of one poor human to prevent this dreadful occurrence. I hope monsieur the chief steward will believe that. I cannot deny that the thing exists"— as he spoke he sadly contemplated the palm of his hand—"and that the evidence is against me. But in my heart I know I am innocent. I can only hope that monsieur will take into account my long and blameless service, my one hundred and twenty-seven trips, my twenty-two years, three months and—"

"My dear Pettipon," said the chief steward with a ponderous jocosity, "try to bear your cross. The only way the *Voltaire* can atone for this monstrous sin of yours is to be sunk, here, now and at once. But I'm afraid the captain and Monsieur Ronssoy might object. Get along now, while I think up a suitable penance for you."

As he went with slow, despairing steps to his quarters Monsieur Pettipon said to himself, "It is clear he thinks me guilty. Helas! Poor Alphonse." For long minutes he sat, his huge head in his hands, pondering.

"I must, I shall appeal to him again," he said half aloud. "There are certain points he should know. What Georges Prunier said, for instance."

So back he went to the chief steward.

"Holy Blue!" cried that official. "You? Again? Found another one?"

"No, no, monsieur the chief steward," replied Monsieur Pettipon in agonies; "there is only one. In twenty-two years there has been only one. He brought it with him. Ask Georges Prunier if I did not say—"

"Name of a name!" burst out the chief steward. "Am I to hear all that again? Did I not say to forget the matter?"

"Forget, monsieur? Could Napoleon forget Waterloo? I beg that you permit me to explain."

"Oh, bother you and your explanations!" cried the chief steward with the sudden impatience common to fat men. "Take them to some less busy man. The captain, for example."

Monsieur Pettipon bowed himself from the office, covered with confusion and despair. Had not the chief steward refused to hear him? Did not the chief steward's words imply that the crime was too heinous for any one less than the captain himself to pass judgment on it? To the captain Monsieur Pettipon would have to go, although he dreaded to do it, for the captain was notoriously the busiest and least approachable man on the ship. Desperation gave him courage. Breathless at his own temerity, pink as a peony with shame, Monsieur Pettipon found himself bowing before a blur of gold and multi-hued decorations that instinct rather than his reason told him was the captain of the *Voltaire*.

The captain was worried about the fog, and about the presence aboard of M. Victor Ronssoy, the president of the line, and his manner was brisk and chilly.

"Did I ring for you?" he asked.

"No," jerked out Monsieur Pettipon, "but if the captain will pardon the great liberty, I have a matter of the utmost importance on which I wish to address him."

"Speak, man, speak!" shot out the captain, alarmed by Monsieur Pettipon's serious aspect. "Leak? Fire? Somebody overboard? What?"

"No, no!" cried Monsieur Pettipon, trickles of moist emotion sliding down the creases of his round face. "Nobody overboard; no leak; no fire. But— monsieur the captain— behold this!"

He extended his hand and the captain bent his head over it with quick interest.

For a second the captain stared at the thing in Monsieur Pettipon's hand; then he stared at Monsieur Pettipon.

"Ten thousand million little blue devils, what does this mean?" roared the captain. "Have you been drinking?"

Monsieur Pettipon quaked to the end of his toes.

"No, no!" he stammered. "I am only too sober, monsieur the captain, and I do not blame you for being enraged. The *Voltaire* is your ship, and you love her, as I do. I feel this disgrace even more than you can, monsieur the captain, believe me. But I beg of you do not be hasty; my honor is involved. I admit that this thing was found in one of my cabins. Consider my horror when he was found. It was no less than yours, monsieur the captain. But I give you my word, the word of a Pettipon, that—"

The captain stopped the rush of words with, "Compose yourself. Come to the point."

"Point, monsieur the captain?" gasped Pettipon. "Is it not enough point that this thing was found in one of my cabins? Such a thing— in the cabin of Monsieur Alphonse Marie Louis Camille Pettipon! Is that nothing? For twenty-two years have I been steward in the second class, and not one of these, not so much as a baby one, has ever been found. I am beside myself with chagrin. My only defense is that a passenger— a fellow of dirtiness, monsieur the captain— brought it with him. He denies it. I denounce him as a liar the most barefaced. For did I not say to Georges Prunier— a fellow steward and a man of integrity— 'Georges, old oyster, that hairy fellow in C 346 has a look of itchiness which I do not fancy. I must be on my guard.' And Georges said—"

The captain, with something like a smile playing about among his whiskers, interrupted with, "So this is the first one in twenty-two years, eh? We'll have to look into this, Monsieur Pettipon. Good day."

"Look into this," groaned Pettipon as he stumbled down a gangway. "I know what that means. Ah, poor Thérèse! Poor Napoleon!"

He looked down at the great, green, hungry waves with a calculating eye; he wondered if they would be cold. He placed a tentative hand on the rail. Then an inspiration came to him. M. Victor Ronssoy was aboard; he was the last court of appeal. Monsieur Pettipon would dare, for the sake of his honor, to go to the president of the line himself. For tortured minutes Alphonse Pettipon paced up and down, and something closely resembling sobs shook his huge frame as he looked about his little kingdom and thought of his impending banishment. At last by a supreme effort of will he nerved himself to go to the suite of Monsieur Ronssoy. It was a splendid suite of five rooms, and Monsieur Pettipon had more than once peeked into it when it was empty and had noted with fascinated eyes the perfection of its appointments. But now he twice turned from the door, his courage oozing from him. On the third attempt, with the recklessness of a condemned man, he rapped on the door.

The president of the line was a white-haired giant with a chin like an anvil and bright humorous eyes, like a kingfisher.

"Monsieur Ronssoy," began the flustered, damp-browed Pettipon in a faltering voice, "I have only apologies to make for this intrusion. Only a matter of the utmost consequence could cause me to take the liberty."

The president's brow knitted anxiously.

"Out with it," he ordered. "Are we sinking? Have we hit an iceberg?"

"No, no, monsieur the president! But surely you have heard what I, Alphonse Pettipon, steward in the second class, found in one of my cabins?"

"Oh, so you're Pettipon!" exclaimed the president, and his frown vanished. "Ah, yes; ah, yes."

"He knows of my disgrace," thought Monsieur Pettipon, mopping his streaming brow. "Now all is lost indeed." Hanging his head he addressed the president: "Alas, yes, I am none other than that unhappy Pettipon," he said mournfully. "But yesterday, monsieur, I was a proud man. This was my one hundred and twenty-eighth trip on the *Voltaire*. I had not a mark against me. But the world has been black for me, monsieur the president, since I found this."

He held out his hand so that the president could view the remains lying in it.

"Ah," exclaimed the president, adjusting his pince-nez, "a perfect specimen!"

"But note, monsieur the president," begged Monsieur Pettipon, "that he is a mere infant. But a few days old, I am sure. He could not have been aboard long. One can see that. I am convinced that it was the passenger who brought him with him. I have my reasons for making this serious charge, Monsieur Ronssoy. Good reasons too. Did I not say to Georges Prunier— a steward of the strictest honesty, monsieur— 'Georges, old oyster, that hairy fellow in C 346 has a look of itchiness which I do not fancy.' And Georges said, 'Alphonse, my friend— '"

"Most interesting," murmured the president. "Pray proceed."

With a wealth of detail and with no little passion Monsieur Pettipon told his story. The eyes of the president encouraged him, and he told of little Napoleon and the violin, and of his twenty-two years on the *Voltaire* and how proud he was of his work as a steward, and how severe a blow the affair had been to him.

When he had finished, Monsieur Ronssoy said, "And you thought it necessary to report your discovery to the head steward of the second class?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And to the chief steward?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And to the captain?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And finally to me, the president of the line?"

"Even so, monsieur," said the perspiring Pettipon.

M. Victor Ronssoy regarded him thoughtfully.

"Monsieur Pettipon," he said, "the sort of man I like is the man who takes his job seriously. You would not have raised such a devil of a fuss about so small a thing as this if you were not that sort of man. I am going to have you made steward of my suite immediately, Monsieur Pettipon. Now you may toss that thing out of the porthole."

"Oh, no, monsieur!" cried Alphonse Pettipon, great, grateful tears rushing to his eyes. "Never in this life! Him I shall keep always in my watch charm."

2: Mr. Pottle and the South-Sea Cannibals

MR. POTTLE was a barber, but also a man of imagination, and as his hands went through their accustomed motions, his mind was far away, recalling what he had read the night before.

"Bright Marquesas sunlight glinted from the cutlass of the intrepid explorer as with a sweep of his arm he brought the blade down on the tattooed throat of the man-eating savage."

Mr. Pottle's errant mind was jerked back sharply from the South Seas to Granville, Ohio, by a protesting voice.

"Hey, Pottle, what's bitin' you? You took a slice out o' my Adam's apple that time."

Mr. Pottle, with apologetic murmurs, rubbed the wound with an alum stick; then he dusted his victim with talcum powder, and gave the patented chair a little kick, so that its occupant was shot bolt upright.

"Bay rum?" asked Mr. Pottle, professionally.

"Nope."

"Dandruff-Death?"

"Nope."

"Sweet Lilac Tonic?"

"Nope."

"Plain water?"

"Yep."

"Naked savages danced and howled round the great pot in which the trussed explorer had been placed. The cannibal chief, fire-brand in hand, made ready to ignite the fagots under the pot. It began to look bad for the explorer."

Again a shrill voice of protest punctured Mr. Pottle's day-dream.

"Hey, Pottle, come to life! You've went and put Sweet Lilac Tonic on me 'stead of plain water. I ain't going to no coon ball. You've gone and smelled me up like a screamin' geranium."

"Why, so I have, so I have," said Mr. Pottle, in accents of surprise and contrition. "Sorry, Luke. It'll wear off in a day or two. Guess I must be gettin' absent-minded."

"That's what you said last Saddy when you clipped a piece out o' Virgil Overholt's ear," observed Luke, with some indignation. "What's bitin' you, anyhow, Pottle? You used to be the best barber in the county before you took to readin' them books."

"What books?"

"All about cannibals and explorers and the South-Sea Islands," answered Luke.

"They're good books," said Mr. Pottle warmly. His eyes brightened. "I just got a new one," he said. "It's called 'Green Isles, Brown Man-Eaters, and a White Man.' I sat up till two readin' it. It's about the Marquesas Islands, and it's a darn' excitin' book, Luke."

"It excited you so much you sliced my Adam's apple," grumbled Luke, clamping on his rubber collar. "You had better cut out this fool readin'."

"Don't you ever read, Luke?"

"Sure I do. 'The Mornin' News-Press' for week-days, 'The P'lice Gazette' when I come here to get shaved Saddy nights, and the Bible for Sundays. That's readin' enough for any man."

"Did you ever read 'Robinson Crusoe'?"

"Nope, but I heard him."

"Heard him? Heard who?"

"Crusoe," said Luke, snapping his ready-tied tie into place.

"Heard him? You couldn't have heard him."

"I couldn't, hey? Well, I did."

"Where?" demanded Mr. Pottle.

"Singin' on a phonograph," said Luke.

Mr. Pottle said nothing; Luke was a regular customer, and in successful modern business the customer is always right. However, Mr. Pottle seized a strop and by his vigorous stroppings silently expressed his disgust at a man who hadn't heard of "Robinson Crusoe," for Robinson was one of Mr. Pottle's deities.

When Luke reached the door, he turned.

"Say, Pottle," he said, "if you're so nutty about these here South Sea Islands, why don't you go there?"

Mr. Pottle ceased his stropping.

"I am going," he said.

Luke gave a dubious hoot and vanished. He did not realize that he had heard Mr. Pottle make the big decision of his life.

THAT NIGHT Mr. Pottle finished the book, and dreamed, as he had dreamed on many a night since the lure of the South Seas first cast a spell on him, that in a distant, sun-loved isle, bright with greens and purples, he reclined beneath the *mana-mana-hine* (or umbrella fern) on his own *paepae* (or platform), a scarlet *pareu* (or breech-clout) about his middle, a yellow *hibiscus* flower in his hair, while the *kukus* (or small green turtle-doves) cooed in the branches of the *pevatvii* (or banana-tree), and *Bunnidori* (that is, she,

with the Lips of Love), a tawny maid of wondrous beauty, played softly to him on the ukulele. The tantalizing fragrance of a bowl of *popoi* (or pudding) mingled in his nostrils with the more delicate perfume of the golden blossoms of the *puu-epu* (or mulberry-tree). A sound in the jungle, a deep *boom! boom! boom!* roused him from this reverie.

"What is it, O Bunnidori?" he asked.

"'Tis a feast, O my Pottle, Lord of the Menikes (that is, white men)," lisped his companion.

"Upon what do the men in the jungle feast, O plump and pleasing daughter of delight?" inquired Mr. Pottle, who was up on Polynesian etiquette.

She lowered her already low voice still lower.

"Upon the long pig that speaks," she whispered.

A delicious shudder ran down the spine of the sleeping Mr. Pottle, for from his reading he knew that "the long pig that speaks" means— man!

For Mr. Pottle had one big ambition, one great suppressed desire. It was the dearest wish of his thirty-six years of life to meet a cannibal, a real cannibal, face to face, eye to eye.

Next day he sold his barber's shop. Two months and seventeen days later he was unpacking his trunk in the tiny settlement of Vait-hua, in the Marquesas Islands, in the heart of the South Seas.

The air was balmy, the sea deep purple, the nodding palms and giant ferns of the greenest green were exactly as advertised; but when the first week or two of enchantment had worn off, Mr. Pottle owned to a certain feeling of disappointment.

He tasted *popoi* and found it rather nasty; the hotel in which he stayed— the only one— was deficient in plumbing, but not in fauna. The natives— he had expected great things of the natives— were remarkably like underdone Pullman porters wrapped in bandana handkerchiefs. They were not exciting, they exhibited no inclination to eat Mr. Pottle or one another, they coveted his pink shirt, and begged for a drink from his bottle of Sweet Lilac Tonic.

He mentioned his disappointment at these evidences of civilization to Tiki Tiu, the astute native who kept the general store.

Mr. Pottle's mode of conversation was his own invention. From the books he had read he improvised a language. It was simple. He gave English words a barbaric sound, usually by suffixing "um" or "ee," shouted them at the top of his voice into the ear of the person with whom he was conversing, and repeated them in various permutations. He addressed Tiki Tiu with brisk and confident familiarity.

"Helloee, Tiki Tiu. Me wantum see can-balls. Can-balls me wantum see. Me see can-balls wantum."

The venerable native, who spoke seventeen island dialects and tongues, and dabbled in English, Spanish, and French, appeared to apprehend his meaning; indeed, one might almost have thought he had heard this question before, for he answered promptly:

"No more can-balls here. All Baptists."

"Where are can-balls? Can-balls where are? Where can-balls are?" demanded Mr. Pottle.

Tiki Tiu closed his eyes and let blue smoke filter through his nostrils. Finally he said:

"Isle of O-pip-ee."

"Isle of O-pip-ee?" Mr. Pottle grew excited. "Where is? Is where?"

"Two hundred miles south," answered Tiki Tiu.

Mr. Pottle's eyes sparkled. He was on the trail.

"How go there? Go there how? There go how?" he asked.

Tiki Tiu considered. Then he said:

"I take. Nice li'l' schooner."

"How much?" asked Mr. Pottle. "Much how?"

Tiki Tiu considered again.

"Ninety-three dol's," he said.

"Goodum!" cried Mr. Pottle, and counted the proceeds of 186 hair-cuts into the hand of Tiki Tiu.

"You take me to-mollow? To-mollow you take me? Me you take to-mollow? To-mollow? To-mollow? To-mollow?" asked Mr. Pottle.

"Yes," promised Tiki Tiu; "to-mollow."

Mr. Pottle stayed up all night packing; from time to time he referred to much-thumbed copies of "Robinson Crusoe" and "Green Isles, Brown Man-Eaters, and a White Man."

Tiki Tiu's nice li'l' schooner deposited Mr. Pottle and his impedimenta on the small, remote Isle of O-pip-ee; Tiki Tiu agreed to return for him in a month.

"This is something like it," exclaimed Mr. Pottle as he unpacked his camera, his ukulele, his razors, his canned soup, his heating outfit, and his bathing-suit. Only the wild parrakeets heard him; save for their calls, an ominous silence hung over the thick foliage of O-pip-ee. There was not the ghost of a sign of human habitation.

Mr. Pottle, vaguely apprehensive of sharks, pitched his pup-tent far up on the beach; to-morrow would be time enough to look for cannibals.

He lay smoking and thinking. He was happy. The realization of a life's ambition lay, so to speak, just around the corner. To-morrow he could turn that corner— if he wished.

He squirmed as something small nibbled at his hip-bone, and he wondered why writers of books on the South Seas make such scant mention of the insects. Surely they must have noticed the little creatures, which had, he discovered, a way of making their presence felt.

He wondered, too, now that he came to think of it, if he hadn't been a little rash in coming alone to a cannibal-infested isle with no weapons of defense but a shot-gun, picked up at a bargain at the last minute, and his case of razors. True, in all the books by explorers he had read, the explorer never once had actually been eaten; he always lived to write the book. But what about the explorers who had not written books? What had happened to them?

He flipped a centipede off his ankle, and wondered if he hadn't been just a little too impulsive to sell his profitable barber-shop, to come many thousand miles over strange waters, to maroon himself on the lonely Isle of O-pip-ee. At Vait-hua he had heard that cannibals do not fancy white men for culinary purposes. He gave a little start as he looked down at his own bare legs and saw that the tropic sun had already tinted them a coffee hue.

Mr. Pottle did not sleep well that night; strange sounds made his eyes fly open. Once it was a curious scuttling along the beach. Peeping out from his pup-tent, he saw half a dozen *tupa* (or giant tree-climbing crabs) on a nocturnal raid on a cocoanut-grove. Later he heard the big nuts come crashing down. The day shift of insects had quit, and the night shift, fresh and hungry, came to work; inquisitive vampire bats butted their soft heads against his tent.

At dawn he set about finding a permanent abode. He followed a small fresh-water stream two hundred yards inland, and came to a coral cave by a pool, a ready-made home, cool and, more important, well concealed. He spent the day settling down, chasing out the bats, putting up mosquito-netting, tidying up. He dined well off cocoanut milk and canned sardines, and was so tired that he fell asleep before he could change his bathing-suit for pajamas. He slept fairly well, albeit he dreamed that two cannibal kings were disputing over his prostrate form whether he would be better as a ragout or stuffed with chestnuts.

Waking, he decided to lie low and wait for the savages to show themselves, for he knew from Tiki Tiu that the Isle of O-pip-ee was not more than seven miles long and three or four miles wide; sooner or later they must pass near him. He figured that there was logic in this plan, for no cannibal had seen him land; therefore he knew that the cannibals were on the isle, but they did not know that he was. The advantage was his.

FOR DAYS he remained secluded, subsisting on canned foods, cocoanuts, *mei* (or breadfruit), and an occasional boiled baby *feke* (or young devil-fish), a nest of which Mr. Pottle found on one furtive moonlight sally to the beach.

Emboldened by this sally and by the silence of the woods, Mr. Pottle made other expeditions away from his cave; on one he penetrated fully five hundred yards into the jungle. He was prowling, like a Cooper Indian, among the *faufee* (or lacebark-trees) when he heard a sound that sent him scurrying and quaking back to his lair.

It was a faint sound that the breezes bore to him, so faint that he could not be sure; but it sounded like some far-off barbaric instrument mingling its dim notes with those of a human voice raised in a weird, primeval chant.

But the savages did not show themselves, and finding no cannibals by night, Mr. Pottle grew still bolder; he ventured on short explorations by day. He examined minutely his own cove, and then one morning crept over a low ledge and into the next cove. He made his way cautiously along the smooth, white beach. The morning was still, calm, beautiful. Its peace all but drove thoughts of cannibals from his mind. He came to a strip of land running into the sea; another cove lay beyond. Mr. Pottle was an impulsive man; he pushed through the *keoho* (or thorn-bushes); his foot slipped; he rolled down a declivity and into the next cove.

He did not stay there; he did not even tarry. What he saw sent him dashing through the thorn-bushes and along the white sand like a hundred-yard sprinter. In the sand of the cove were many imprints of naked human feet.

A less stout-hearted man than Mr. Pottle would never have come out of his cave again; but he had come eight thousand miles to see a cannibal. An over-mastering desire had spurred him on; he would not give up now. Of such stuff are Ohio barbers made.

A FEW DAYS later, at twilight, he issued forth from his cave again. Around his loins was a scarlet *pareu*; he had discarded his bathing-suit as too civilized. In his long, black hair was a yellow *hibiscus* flower.

Like a burglar, he crept along the beach to the bushy promontory that hid the cove where the foot-prints were, he wiggled through the bush, he slid down to the third beach, and crouched behind a large rock. The beach seemed deserted; the muttering of the ocean was the only sound Mr. Pottle heard. Another rock, a dozen feet away, seemed to offer better concealment, and he stepped out toward it, and then stopped short. Mr. Pottle stood face to face with a naked, brown savage.

Mr. Pottle's feet refused to take him away; a paralysis such as one has in nightmares rooted him to the spot. His returning faculties took in these facts:

first, the savage was unarmed; second, Mr. Pottle had forgotten to bring his shot-gun. It was a case of man to man-eater.

The savage was large, well-fed, almost fat; his long black hair fringed his head; he did not wear a particularly bloodthirsty expression; indeed, he appeared startled and considerably alarmed.

Reason told Mr. Pottle that friendliness was the best policy. Instinctively, he recalled the literature of his youth, and how Buffalo Bill had acted in a like circumstance. He raised his right hand solemnly in the air and ejaculated, "How!"

The savage raised his right hand solemnly in the air, and in the same tone also ejaculated, "How!" Mr. Pottle had begun famously. He said loudly:

"Who you? You who? Who you?"

The savage, to Mr. Pottle's surprise, answered after a brief moment:

"Me— Lee."

Here was luck. The man-eater could talk the Pottle lingo.

"Oh," said Mr. Pottle, to show that he understood, "you— Mealy."

The savage shook his head.

"No," he said; "Me— Lee. Me— Lee." He thumped his barrel-like chest with each word.

"Oh, I see," cried Mr. Pottle; "you Mealy-mealy."

The savage made a face that among civilized people would have meant that he did not think much of Mr. Pottle's intellect.

"Who you?" inquired Mealy-mealy.

Mr. Pottle thumped his narrow chest.

"Me, Pottle. Pottle!"

"Oh, you Pottle-pottle," said the savage, evidently pleased with his own powers of comprehension.

Mr. Pottle let it go at that. Why argue with a cannibal? He addressed the savage again.

"Mealy-mealy, you eatum long pig? Eatum long pig you? Long pig you eatum?"

This question agitated Mealy-mealy. He trembled. Then he nodded his head in the affirmative, a score of rapid nods.

Mr. Pottle's voice faltered a little as he asked the next question.

"Where you gottum tribe? You gottum tribe where? Tribe you gottum where?"

Mealy-mealy considered, scowled, and said:

"Gottum velly big tribe not far. Velly fierce. Eatum long pig. Eatum Pottle-pottle."

Mr. Pottle thought it would be a good time to go, but he could think of no polite excuse for leaving. An idea occurred to Mealy-mealy.

"Where your tribe, Pottle-pottle?"

His tribe? Mr. Pottle's eyes fell on his own scarlet *pareu* and the brownish legs beneath it. Mealy-mealy thought he was a cannibal, too. With all his terror, he had a second or two of unalloyed enjoyment of the thought. Like all barbers, he had played poker. He bluffed.

"My tribe velly, velly, velly, velly, velly, velly big," he cried.

"Where is?" asked Mealy-mealy, visibly moved by this news.

"Velly near," cried Mr. Pottle; "hungry for long pig; for long pig hungry—"

There was suddenly a brown blur on the landscape. With the agility of an ape, the huge savage had turned, darted down the beach, plunged into the bush, and disappeared.

"He's gone to get his tribe," thought Mr. Pottle, and fled in the opposite direction.

When he reached his cave, panting, he tried to fit a cartridge into his shot-gun; he'd die game, anyhow. But rust had ruined the neglected weapon, and he flung it aside and took out his best razor. But no cannibals came.

He was scared, but happy. He had seen his cannibal; more, he had talked with him; more still, he had escaped gracing the festal board by a snake's knuckle. He prudently decided to stay in his cave until the sails of Tiki Tiu's schooner hove in sight.

BUT AN INSTINCT stronger than fear drove him out into the open: his stock of canned food ran low, and large red ants got into his flour. He needed cocoanuts and breadfruit and baby *fekes* (or young octopi). He knew that numerous succulent infant *fekes* lurked in holes in his own cove, and thither he went by night to pull them from their homes. Hitherto he had encountered only small *fekes*, with tender tentacles only a few feet long; but that night Mr. Pottle had the misfortune to plunge his naked arm into the watery nest when the father of the family was at home. He realized his error too late.

A clammy tentacle, as long as a fire hose, as strong as the arm of a gorilla, coiled round his arm, and his scream was cut short as the giant devil-fish dragged him below the water.

The water was shallow. Mr. Pottle got a foothold, forced his head above water, and began to yell for help and struggle for his life.

The chances against a nude Ohio barber of 140 pounds in a wrestling match with an adult octopus are exactly a thousand to one. The giant *feke* so despised his opponent that he used only two of his eight muscular arms. In

their slimy, relentless clutch Mr. Pottle felt his strength going fast. As his favorite authors would have put it, "it began to look bad for Mr. Pottle."

The thought that Mr. Pottle thought would be his last on this earth was, "I wouldn't mind being eaten by cannibals, but to be drowned by a trick fish—"

Mr. Pottle threshed about in one final, frantic flounder; his strength gave out; he shut his eyes.

He heard a shrill cry, a splashing in the water, felt himself clutched about the neck from behind, and dragged away from the *feke*. He opened his eyes and struggled weakly. One tentacle released its grip. Mr. Pottle saw by the tropic moon's light that some large creature was doing battle with the *feke*. It was a man, a large brown man who with a busy ax hacked the gristly limbs from the *feke* as fast as they wrapped around him. Mr. Pottle staggered to the dry beach; a tentacle was still wound tight round his shoulder, but there was no octopus at the other end of it.

The angry noise of the devil-fish— for, when wounded, they snarl like kicked curs— stopped. The victorious brown man strode out of the water to where Mr. Pottle swayed on the moonlit sand. It was Mealy-mealy.

"Bad fishum!" said Mealy-mealy, with a grin.

"Good manum!" cried Mr. Pottle, heartily.

Here was romance, here was adventure, to be snatched from the jaws, so to speak, of death by a cannibal! It was unheard of. But a disquieting thought occurred to Mr. Pottle, and he voiced it.

"Mealy-mealy, why you save me? Why save you me? Why you me save?"

Mealy-mealy's grin seemed to fade, and in its place came another look that made Mr. Pottle wish he were back in the anaconda grip of the *feke*.

"My tribe hungry for long pig," growled Mealy-mealy. He seemed to be trembling with some powerful emotion. Hunger?

Mr. Pottle knew where his only chance for escape lay.

"My tribe velly, velly, velly hungry, too," he cried. "Velly, velly, velly near."

He thrust his fingers into his mouth and gave a piercing school-boy whistle. As if in answer to it there came a crashing and floundering in the bushes. His bluff had worked only too well; it must be the fellow man-eaters of Mealy-mealy.

Mr. Pottle turned and ran for his life. Fifty yards he sped, and then realized that he did not hear the padding of bare feet on the sand behind him or feel hot breath on the back of his neck. He dared to cast a look over his shoulder. Far down the beach the moonlight showed him a flying brown figure against the silver-white sand. It was Mealy-mealy, and he was going in the opposite direction as fast as ever his legs would take him.

Surprise drove fear temporarily from Mr. Pottle's mind as he watched the big cannibal become a blur, then a speck, then nothing. As he watched Mealy-mealy recede, he saw another dark figure emerge from the bush where the noise had been, and move slowly out on the moon-strewn beach.

It was a baby wild pig. It sniffed at the ocean, squealed, and trotted back into the bush.

As he gnawed his morning cocoanut, Mr. Pottle was still puzzled. He was afraid of Mealy-mealy; that he admitted. But at the same time it was quite clear that Mealy-mealy was afraid of him. He was excited and more than a little gratified. What a book he could write! Should he call it "Cannibal-Bound on O-pip-ee," or, "Cannibals Who have almost Eaten Me"?

Tiki Tiu's schooner would be coming for him very soon now,— he'd lost track of the exact time,— and he would be almost reluctant to leave the isle. Almost.

Mr. Pottle had another glimpse of a cannibal next day. Toward evening he stole out to pick some supper from a breadfruit-tree not far from his cave, a tree which produced particularly palatable *mei* (or breadfruit).

He drew his *pareu* tight around him and slipped through the bushes; as he neared the tree he saw another figure approaching it with equal stealth from the opposite direction; the setting sun was reflected from the burnished brown of the savage's shoulders. At the same time Mr. Pottle spied the man, the man spied him. The savage stopped short, wheeled about, and tore back in the direction from which he had come. Mr. Pottle did not get a good look at his face, but he ran uncommonly like Mealy-mealy.

MR. POTTLE thought it best not to climb the *mei*-tree that evening; he returned hastily to his cave, and finished up the breakfast cocoanut.

Over a pipe he thought. He was pleased, thrilled by his sight of a cannibal; but he was not wholly satisfied. He had thought it would be enough for him to get one fleeting glimpse of an undoubted man-eater in his native state, but it wasn't. Before he left the Isle of O-pip-ee he wanted to see the whole tribe in a wild dance about a bubbling pot. Tiki Tiu's schooner might come on the morrow. He must act.

He crept out of the cave and stood in the moonlight, breathing the perfume of the jungle, feeling the cool night air, hearing the mellow notes of the Polynesian nightingale. Adventure beckoned to him. He started in the direction Mealy-mealy had run.

At first he progressed on tiptoes, then he sank to all fours, and crawled along slowly, pig-wise. On, on he went; he must have crept more than a mile when a sound stopped him— a sound he had heard before. It was faint, yet it

seemed near: it was the sound of some primitive musical instrument blending with the low notes of a tribal chant. It seemed to come from a sheltered hollow not two dozen yards ahead.

He crouched down among the ferns and listened. The chant was crooned softly in a deep voice, and to the straining ears of Mr. Pottle it seemed vaguely familiar, like a song heard in dreams. The words came through the thick tangle of jungle weeds:

"Eeet slon ay a teep a ari."

Mr. Pottle, fascinated, wiggled forward to get a look at the tribe. Like a snake, he made his tortuous approach. The singing continued; he saw a faint glow through the foliage— the campfire. He eased himself to the crest of a little hummock, pushed aside a great fern leaf and looked.

Sitting comfortably in a steamer-chair was Mealy-mealy. In his big brown hands was a shiny banjo at which he plucked gently. Near his elbow food with a familiar smell bubbled in an aluminum dish over a trim canned-heat outfit; an empty baked-bean can with a gaudy label lay beside it. From time to time Mealy-mealy glanced idly at a pink periodical popular in American barber-shops. The song he sang to himself burst intelligibly on Mr. Pottle's ears—

"It's a long way to Tipperary."

Mealy-mealy stopped; his eye had fallen on the staring eyes of Mr. Pottle. He caught up his ax and was about to swing it when Mr. Pottle stood up, stepped into the circle of light, pointed an accusing finger at Mealy-mealy and said:

"Are you a cannibal?"

Mealy-mealy's ax and jaw dropped.

"What the devil are you?" he sputtered in perfect American.

"I'm a barber from Ohio," said Mr. Pottle.

Mealy-mealy emitted a sudden whooping roar of laughter.

"So am I," he said.

Mr. Pottle collapsed limply into the steamer-chair.

"What's your name?" he asked in a weak voice.

"Bert Lee, head barber at the Schmidt House, Bucyrus, Ohio," said the big man. He slapped his fat, bare chest. "Me— Lee," he said, and laughed till the jungle echoed.

"Did you read 'Green Isles, Brown Man-Eaters, and a White Man'?" asked Mr. Pottle, feebly.

"Yes."

"I'd like to meet the man who wrote it," said Mr. Pottle.

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3: Mr. Pottle and Culture

OUT OF the bathtub, rubicund and rotund, stepped Mr. Ambrose Pottle. He anointed his hair with sweet spirits of lilac and dusted his anatomy with crushed rosebud talcum. He donned a virgin union suit; a pair of socks, silk where it showed; ultra low shoes; white-flannel trousers, warm from the tailor's goose; a creamy silk shirt; an impeccable blue coat; a gala tie, perfect after five tyings; and then went forth into the spring-scented eventide to pay a call on Mrs. Blossom Gallup.

He approached her new-art bungalow as one might a shrine, with diffident steps and hesitant heart, but with delicious tinglings radiating from his spinal cord. Only the ballast of a three-pound box of Choc-O-late Nutties under his arm kept him on earth. He was in love.

To be in love for the first time at twenty is passably thrilling; but to be in love for the first time at thirty-six is exquisitely excruciating.

Mr. Pottle found Mrs. Gallup in her living room, a basket of undarned stockings on her lap. With a pretty show of confusion and many embarrassed murmurings she thrust them behind the piano, he protesting that this intimate domesticity delighted him.

She sank back with a little sigh into a gay-chintzed wicker chair, and the rosy light from a tall piano lamp fell gently on her high-piled golden hair, her surprised blue eyes, and the ripe, generous outlines of her figure. To Mr. Pottle she was a dream of loveliness, a poem, an idyl. He would have given worlds, solar systems to have been able to tell her so. But he couldn't. He couldn't find the words, for, like many another sterling character in the barbers' supply business, he was not eloquent; he did not speak with the fluent ease, the masterful flow that comes, one sees it often said, from twenty-one minutes a day of communion with the great minds of all time. His communings had been largely with boss barbers; with them he was cheery and chatty. But Mrs. Gallup and her intellectual interests were a world removed from things tonsorial; in her presence he was tongue-tied as an oyster.

Mr. Pottle's worshiping eye roved from the lady to her library, and his good-hearted face showed tiny furrows of despair; an array of fat crisp books in shiny new bindings stared at him: Twenty-one Minutes' Daily Communion With the Master Minds; Capsule Chats on Poets, Philosophers, Painters, Novelists, Interior Decorators; Culture for the Busy Man, six volumes, half calf; How to Build Up a Background; Talk Tips; YOU, Too, Can Be Interesting; Sixty Square Feet of Self-Culture— and a score more. "Culture"— always that wretched word!

"Are you fond of reading, Mr. Pottle?" asked Mrs. Gallup, popping a Choc-O-late Nuttie into her demure mouth with a daintiness almost ethereal.

"Love it," he answered promptly.

"Who is your favorite poet?"

"S-Shakspere," he ventured desperately.

"He's mine, too." Mr. Pottle breathed easier.

"But," she added, "I think Longfellow is sweet, don't you?"

"Very sweet," agreed Mr. Pottle.

She smiled at him with a sad, shy confidence.

"He did not understand," she said.

She nodded her blonde head toward an enlarged picture of the late Mr. Gallup, in the full regalia of Past Grand Master of the Beneficent Order of Beavers.

"Didn't he care for— er— literature?" asked Mr. Pottle.

"He despised it," she replied. "He was wrapped up in the hay-and-feed business. He began to talk about oats and chicken gravel on our honeymoon."

Mr. Pottle made a sympathetic noise.

"In our six years of married life," she went on, "he talked of nothing but duck fodder, carload lots, trade discounts, selling points, bran, turnover—"

How futile, how inadequate seem mere words in some situations. Mr. Pottle said nothing; timidly he took her hand in his; she did not draw it away.

"And he only shaved on Saturday nights," she said.

Mr. Pottle's free hand went to his own face, smooth as steel and art could make it.

"Blossom," he began huskily, "have you ever thought of marrying again?"

"I have," she answered, blushing— his hand on hers tightened—"and I haven't," she finished.

"Oh, Blossom—" he began once more.

"If I do marry again," she interrupted, "it will be a literary man."

"A literary man?" His tone was aghast. "A writing fella?"

"Oh, not necessarily a writer," she said. "They usually live in garrets, and I shouldn't like that. I mean a man who has read all sorts of books, and who can talk about all sorts of things."

"Blossom"— Mr. Pottle's voice was humble—"I'm not what you might call—"

There was a sound of clumping feet on the porch outside. Mrs. Gallup started up.

"Oh, that must be him now!" she cried.

"Him? Who?"

"Why, Mr. Deeley."

"Who's he?" queried Mr. Pottle.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you! He said he might call to-night. Such a nice man! I met him over in Xenia last week. Such a brilliant conversationalist. I know you'll like each other."

She hastened to answer the doorbell; Mr. Pottle sat moodily in his chair, not at all sure he'd like Mr. Deeley.

The brilliant conversationalist burst into the room breezily, confidently. He was slightly smaller than a load of hay in his belted suit of ecru pongee; he wore a satisfied air and a pleased mustache.

"Meet Mr. Pottle," said Mrs. Gallup.

"What name?" asked Mr. Deeley. His voice was high, sweet and loud; his handshake was a knuckle pulverizer.

"Pottle," said the owner of that name.

"I beg pardon?" said Mr. Deeley.

"Pottle," said Mr. Pottle more loudly.

"Sorry," said Mr. Deeley affably, "but it sounds just like 'Pottle' to me."

"That's what it is," said Mr. Pottle with dignity.

Mr. Deeley laughed a loud tittering laugh.

"Oh, well," he remarked genially, "you can't help that. We're born with our names, but"— he bestowed a dazzling smile on Mrs. Gallup—"we pick our own teeth."

"Oh, Mr. Deeley," she cried, "you do say the most ridiculously witty things!"

Mr. Pottle felt a concrete lump forming in his bosom.

Mr. Deeley addressed him tolerantly. "What line are you in, Mr. Bottle?" he asked.

"Barbers' supplies," admitted Mr. Pottle.

"Ah, yes. Barbers' supplies. How interesting," said Mr. Deeley. "Climbing the lather of success, eh?"

Mr. Pottle did not join in the merriment.

"What line are you in?" he asked. He prayed that Mr. Deeley would say "Shoes," for by a happy inspiration he was prepared to counter with, "Ah, starting at the bottom," and thus split honors with the Xenian.

But Mr. Deeley did not say "Shoes." He said "Literature." Mrs. Gallup beamed.

"Oh, are you, Mr. Deeley? How perfectly thrilling!" she said rapturously. "I didn't know that."

"Oh, yes indeed," said Mr. Deeley. He changed the subject by turning to Mr. Pottle. "By the way, Mr. Poodle, are you interested in Abyssinia?" he inquired.

"Why, no— that is, not particularly," confessed Mr. Pottle. He looked toward her who had quickened his pulse, but her eyes were fastened on Mr. Deeley.

"I'm surprised to hear you say that," said Mr. Deeley. "A most interesting place, Abyssinia— rather a specialty of mine."

He threw one plump leg over the other and leaned back comfortably.

"Abyssinia," he went on in his high voice, "is an inland country situated by the Red Sea between 5° and 15° north latitude, and 35° and 42° east longitude. Its area is 351,019 square miles. Its population is 4,501,477. It includes Shoa, Kaffa, Gallaland and Central Somaliland. Its towns include Adis-Ababa, Adowa, Adigrat, Aliu-Amber, Debra-Derhan and Bonger. It produces coffee, salt and gold. The inhabitants are morally very lax. Indeed, polygamy is a common practice, and—"

"Polly Gammy?" cried Mrs. Gallup in imitation of Mr. Deeley's pronunciation. "Oh, what is that?"

Mr. Deeley smiled blandly.

"I think," he said, "that it is hardly the sort of thing I care to discuss in— er— mixed company."

He helped himself to three of the Choc-O-late Nutties.

"That reminds me," he said, "of abbreviations."

"Abbreviations?" Mrs. Gallup looked her interest.

"The world," observed Mr. Deeley, "is full of them. For example, Mr. Puttle, do you know what R. W. D. G. M. stands for?"

"No," answered Mr. Pottle glumly.

"It stands for Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master," informed Mr. Deeley. "Do you know what N. U. T. stands for?"

"I know what it spells," said Mr. Pottle pointedly.

"You ought to," said Mr. Deeley, letting off his laugh. "But we were discussing abbreviations. Since you don't seem very well informed on this point"— he shot a smile at Mrs. Gallup—"I'll tell you that N. U. T. stands for National Union of Teachers, just as M. F. H. stands for Master of Fox Hounds, and M. I. C. E. stands for Member of Institute of Civil Engineers, and A. O. H. stands for—"

"Oh, Mr. Deeley, how perfectly thrilling!" Mrs. Gallup spoke; Mr. Pottle writhed; Mr. Deeley smiled complacently, and went on.

"I could go on indefinitely; abbreviations are rather a specialty of mine."

It developed that Mr. Deeley had many specialties.

"Are you aware," he asked, focusing his gaze on Mr. Pottle, "that there is acid in this cherry?" He held aloft a candied cherry which he had deftly exhumed from a Choc-O-late Nuttie.

"My goodness!" cried Mrs. Gallup. "Will it poison us? I've eaten six."

"My dear lady"— there was a world of tender reassurance in Mr. Deeley's tone—"only the uninformed regard all acids as poisonous. There are acids and acids. I've taken a rather special interest in them. Let's see— there are many kinds— acetic, benzoic, citric, gallic, lactic, malic, oxalic, palmitic, picric— but why go on?"

"Yes," said Mr. Pottle; "why?"

"Do not interrupt, Mr. Pottle, if you please," said Mrs. Gallup severely. "I'm sure what Mr. Deeley says interests me immensely. Go on, Mr. Deeley."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gallup; thank you," said the brilliant conversationalist. "But don't you think alligators are more interesting than acids?"

"You know about so many interesting things," she smiled. Mr. Pottle's very soul began to curdle.

"Alligators are rather a specialty of mine," remarked Mr. Deeley. "Fascinating little brutes, I think. You know alligators, Mrs. Gallup?"

"Stuffed," said the lady.

"Ah, to be sure," he said. "Perhaps, then, you do not realize that the alligator is of the family *Crocodilidœ* and the order *Eusuchia*."

"No? You don't tell me?" Mrs. Gallup's tone was almost reverent.

"Yes," continued Mr. Deeley, in the voice of a lecturer, "there are two kinds of alligators— the *lucius*, found in the Mississippi; and the *sinensis*, in the Yang-tse-Kiang. It differs from the *caiman* by having a bony septum between its nostrils, and its ventral scutes are thinly, if at all, ossified. It is carnivorous and piscivorous—"

"How fascinating!" Mrs. Gallup had edged her chair nearer the speaker. "What does that mean?"

"It means," said Mr. Deeley, "that they eat corn and pigs."

"The strong tail of the alligator," he flowed on easily, "by a lashing movement assists it in swimming, during which exercise it emits a loud bellowing."

"Do alligators bellow?" asked Mr. Pottle with open skepticism.

"I wish I had a dollar for every time I've heard them bellow," answered Mr. Deeley pugnaciously. "Apparently, Mr. Puddle, you are not familiar with the works of Ahn."

Mr. Pottle maintained a blank black silence.

"Oh, who was he?" put in Mrs. Gallup.

"Johann Franz Ahn, born 1796, died 1865, was an educationalist," said Mr. Deeley in the voice of authority. "His chief work, of which I am very fond, is a volume entitled, 'Praktischer Lehrgang zur Schnellen und Leichten Erlergung der Französischen Sprache.' You've read it, perhaps, Mr. Pobble?"

"No," said Mr. Pottle miserably. "I can't say I ever have." He felt that his case grew worse with every minute. He rose. "I guess I'd better be going," he said. Mrs. Gallup made no attempt to detain him.

As he left her presence with slow steps and a heart of lead he heard the high voice of Mr. Deeley saying, "Now, take alcohol: That's rather a specialty of mine. Alcohol is a term applied to a group of organic substances, including methyl, ethyl, propyl, butyl, amyl—"

Back in his bachelor home the heartsick Mr. Pottle flung his new tie into a corner, slammed his ultra shoes on the floor, and tossed his trousers, heedless of rumpling, at a chair, sat down, head in hand, and thought of a watery grave.

For that he could not hope to compete conversationally or otherwise with the literary Deeley of Xenia was all too apparent. Mrs. Gallup— he had called her Blossom but a few brief hours ago— said she wanted a literary man, and here was one literary to his manicured finger tips.

He would not give up. Pottles are made of stern stuff. Reason told him his cause was hopeless, but his heart told him to fight to the last. He obeyed his heart.

Arraying himself in his finest, three nights later he went to call on Mrs. Gallup, a five-pound box of Choc-O-late Nutties hugged nervously to his silk-shirted bosom.

A maid admitted him. He heard in the living room a familiar high masculine voice that made his fists double up. It was saying, "Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, was born at Stagira in 384 B. C. and—"

Mr. Deeley paused to greet Mr. Pottle casually; Mrs. Gallup took the candy with only conventional words of appreciation, and turned at once to listen, disciple-like, to the discourses of the sage from Xenia, who for the rest of the evening held the center of the stage, absorbed every beam of the calcium, and dispensed fact and fancy about a wide variety of things. He was a man with many and curious specialties. Mrs. Gallup was a willing, Mr. Pottle a most unwilling listener.

At eleven Mr. Pottle went home, having uttered but two words all evening, and those monosyllables. He left Mr. Deeley holding forth in detail on the science of astronomy, with side glances at astrology and ancestor-worship.

Mr. Pottle's heart was too full for sleep. Indeed, as he walked in the moonlight through Eastman Park, it was with the partially formed intent of flinging himself in among the swans that slept on the artificial lake.

His mind went back to the conversation of Mr. Deeley in Mrs. Gallup's salon. She had been Blossom to him once, but now— this loudly learned stranger! Mr. Pottle stopped suddenly and sat down sharply on a park bench. The topics on which Mr. Deeley had conversed so fluently passed in an orderly

array before his mind: Apes, acoustics, angels, Apollo, adders, albumen, auks, Alexander the Great, anarchy, adenoids— He had it! A light, bright as the sun at noon, dawned on Mr. Pottle.

Next morning when the public library opened, Mr. Pottle was waiting at the door.

A feverish week rushed by in Mr. Pottle's life.

"We'll be having to charge that little man with the bashful grin, rent or storage or something," said Miss Merk, the seventh assistant librarian, to Miss Heaslip, the ninth assistant librarian.

Sunday night firm determined steps took Mr. Pottle to the bungalow of Mrs. Gallup. He heard Mr. Deeley's sweet resonant voice in the living room. He smiled grimly.

"I was just telling Blossom about a curious little animal I take rather a special interest in," began the man from Xenia, with a condescending nod to Mr. Pottle.

Mr. Pottle checked the frown that had started to gather at "Blossom," and asked politely, "And what is the beast's name?"

"The aard-vark," replied Mr. Deeley. "He is—"

"The Cape ant bear," finished Mr. Pottle, "or earth pig. He lives on ants, burrows rapidly, and can be easily killed by a smart blow on his sensitive snout."

Mr. Deeley stared; Mrs. Gallup stared; Mr. Pottle sailed on serenely.

"A very interesting beast, the aard-vark. But to my mind not so interesting as the long-nosed bandicoot. You know the long-nosed bandicoot, I presume, Mr. Deeley?"

"Well, not under that name," retorted the Xenia sage. "You don't mean antelope?"

"By no means," said Mr. Pottle with a superior smile. "I said bandicoot— B-a-n-d-i-coot. He is a *Peramelidœ* of the Marsupial family, meaning he carries his young in a pouch like a kangaroo."

"How cute!" murmured Mrs. Gallup.

"There are bandicoots and bandicoots," pursued Mr. Pottle; "the *Peragale*, or rabbit bandicoot; the *Nasuta*, or long-nosed bandicoot; the *Mysouros*, or saddle-backed bandicoot; the *Chœropus*, or pig-footed bandicoot; and—"

"Speaking of antelopes—" Mr. Deeley interrupted loudly.

"By all means!" said Mr. Pottle still more loudly. "I've always taken a special interest in antelopes. Let's see now— the antelope family includes the gnus, elands, hartebeests, addax, klipspringers, chamois, gazelles, chirus, pallas, saigas, nilgais, koodoos— pretty name that, isn't it, Blossom— the blessboks, duikerboks, boneboks, gemsboks, steinboks—"

He saw that the bright blue eyes of the lady of his dreams were fastened on him. He turned toward Mr. Deeley.

"You're familiar with Bambara, aren't you?" he asked.

"I beg pardon?" The brilliant conversationalist seemed a little confused. "Did you say Arabia? I should say I do know Arabia. Population 5,078,441; area—"

"One million, two hundred and twenty-two thousand square miles," finished Mr. Pottle. "No, I did not say Arabia; I said Bambara. B-a-m-b-a-r-a."

"Oh, Bambara," said Mr. Deeley feebly; his assurance seemed to crumple.

"Yes," said Mrs. Gallup. "Do tell us about Bambara; such an intriguing name."

"It is a country in Western Africa," Mr. Pottle tossed off grandly, "with a population of 2,004,737, made up of Negroes, Mandingoes and Foulahs. Its principal products are rice, maize, cotton, millet, yams, pistachio nuts, French beans, watermelons, onions, tobacco, indigo, tamarinds, lotuses, sheep, horses, alligators, pelicans, turtles, egrets, teals and Barbary ducks."

"Oh, how interesting! Do go on, Mr. Pottle." It was the voice of Mrs. Gallup; to Mr. Pottle it seemed that there was a tender note in it.

"Bambara reminds me of baboons," he went on loudly and rapidly, checking an incipient remark from Mr. Deeley. "Baboons, you know, are *Cynocephali* or dog-headed monkeys; the species includes drills, mandrills, sphinx, chacma and hamadryas. Most baboons have ischial callosities—"

"Oh, what do they do with them?" cried wide-eyed Mrs. Gallup.

"They— er— sit on them," answered Mr. Pottle.

"I don't believe it," Mr. Deeley challenged.

Mr. Pottle froze him with a look. "Evidently," he said, "you, Mr. Deeley, are not familiar with the works of Dr. Oskar Baumann, author of 'Afrikanische Skizzen.' Are you?"

"I've glanced through it," said Mr. Deeley.

"Then you don't remember what he says on Page 489?"

"Can't say that I do," mumbled Mr. Deeley.

"And you appear unfamiliar with the works of Hosea Ballou."

"Who?"

"Hosea Ballou."

"I doubt if there is such a person," said Mr. Deeley stiffly. He did not appear to be enjoying himself.

"Oh, you do, do you?" retorted Mr. Pottle. "Suppose you look him up in your encyclopedia— if," he added with crushing emphasis—"if you have one. You'll find that Hosea Ballou was born in 1771, founded the Trumpet

Magazine, the Universalist Expositor, the Universalist Quarterly Review, and wrote Notes on the Parables."

"What has that to do with baboons?" demanded Mr. Deeley.

"A lot more than you think," was Mr. Pottle's cryptic answer. He turned from the Xenian with a shrug of dismissal, and smiled upon Mrs. Gallup.

"Don't you think, Blossom," he said, "that Babylonia is a fascinating country?"

"Oh, very," she smiled back at him. "I dote on Babylonia."

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Pottle, "Mr. Deeley will be good enough to tell us all about it."

Mr. Deeley looked extremely uncomfortable.

"Babylonia— let's see now— well, it just happens that Babylonia is not one of my specialties."

"Well, tell us about Baluchistan, then," suggested Mr. Pottle.

"Yes, do!" echoed Mrs. Gallup.

"I've forgotten about it," answered the brilliant conversationalist sullenly.

"Well, tell us about Beethoven, then," pursued Mr. Pottle relentlessly.

"I never was there," growled Mr. Deeley. "Say, when does the next trolley leave for Xenia?"

"In seven minutes," answered Mrs. Gallup coldly. "You've just got time to catch it."

The bungalow's front door snapped at the heels of the departing sage from Xenia.

Mr. Pottle hitched his chair close to the sofa where Mrs. Gallup sat.

"Oh, Mr. Pottle," she said softly, "do talk some more! I just love to hear you. You surprised me. I didn't realize you were such a well-read man."

Mr. Pottle looked into her wide blue eyes.

"I'm not," he said. "I was bluffing."

"Bluffing?"

"Yes," he said; "and so was your friend from Xenia. He's no more in the literary line than I am. His job is selling a book called 'Hog Culture.'"

"But he talks so well—" began Mrs. Gallup.

"Only about things that begin with 'A,'" said Mr. Pottle. "He memorized everything in the encyclopedia under 'A.' I simply went him one better. I memorized all of 'A,' and all of 'B' too."

"Oh, the deceitful wretch!"

"I'm sorry, Blossom. Can you forgive me?" he pleaded. "I did it because—"

She interrupted him gently.

"I know," she said, smiling. "You did it for me. I wasn't calling you a wretch, Ambrose."

He found himself on the sofa beside her, his arm about her.

"What I really want," she confessed with a happy sigh, "is a good strong man to take care of me."

"We'll go through the rest of the encyclopedia together, dearest," said Mr. Pottle.

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4: Mr. Pottle and the One Man Dog

"AMBROSE! Ambrose dear!" The new Mrs. Pottle put down the book she was reading— Volume Dec to Erd of the encyclopedia.

"Yes, Blossom dear." Mr. Pottle's tone was fraught with the tender solicitude of the recently wed. He looked up from his book— Volume Ode to Pay of the encyclopedia.

"Ambrose, we must get a dog!"

"A dog, darling?"

His tone was still tender but a thought lacking in warmth. His smile, he hoped, conveyed the impression that while he utterly approved of Blossom, herself, personally, her current idea struck no responsive chord in his bosom.

"Yes, a dog."

She sighed as she gazed at a large framed steel-engraving of Landseer's St. Bernards that occupied a space on the wall until recently tenanted by a crayon enlargement of her first husband in his lodge regalia.

"Such noble creatures," she sighed. "So intelligent. And so loyal."

"In the books they are," murmured Mr. Pottle.

"Oh, Ambrose," she protested with a pout. "How can you say such a thing? Just look at their big eyes, so full of soul. What magnificent animals! So full of understanding and fidelity and— and—"

"Fleas?" suggested Mr. Pottle.

Her glance was glacial.

"Ambrose, you are positively cruel," she said, tiny, injured tears gathering in her wide blue eyes. He was instantly penitent.

"Forgive me, dear," he begged. "I forgot. In the books they don't have 'em, do they? You see, precious, I don't take as much stock in books as I used to. I've been fooled so often."

"They're lovely books," said Mrs. Pottle, somewhat mollified. "You said yourself that you adore dog stories."

"Sure I do, honey," said Mr. Pottle, "but a man can like stories about elephants without wanting to own one, can't he?"

"A dog is not an elephant, Ambrose."

He could not deny it.

"Don't you remember," she pursued, rapturously, "that lovely book, 'Hero, the Collie Beautiful,' where a kiddie finds a puppy in an ash barrel, and takes care of it, and later the collie grows up and rescues the kiddie from a fire; or was that the book where the collie flew at the throat of the man who came to murder the kiddie's father, and the father broke down and put his arms around

the collie's neck because he had kicked the collie once and the collie used to follow him around with big, hurt eyes and yet when he was in danger Hero saved him because collies are so sensitive and so loyal?"

"Uh huh," assented Mr. Pottle.

"And that story we read, 'Almost Human'," she rippled on fluidly, "about the kiddie who was lost in a snow-storm in the mountains and the brave St. Bernard that came along with bottles of spirits around its neck— St. Bernards always carry them— and—"

"Do the bottles come with the dogs?" asked Mr. Pottle, hopefully.

She elevated disapproving eyebrows.

"Ambrose," she said, sternly, "don't always be making jests about alcohol. It's so common. You know when I married you, you promised never even to think of it again."

"Yes, Blossom," said Mr. Pottle, meekly.

She beamed.

"Well, dear, what kind of a dog shall we get?" she asked briskly. He felt that all was lost.

"There are dogs and dogs," he said moodily. "And I don't know anything about any of them."

"I'll read what it says here," she said. Mrs. Pottle was pursuing culture through the encyclopedia, and felt that she would overtake it on almost any page now.

"Dog," she read, "is the English generic term for the quadruped of the domesticated variety of *canis*."

"Well, I'll be darned!" exclaimed her husband. "Is that a fact?"

"Be serious, Ambrose, please. The choice of a dog is no jesting matter," she rebuked him, and then read on, "In the Old and New Testaments the dog is spoken of almost with abhorrence; indeed, it ranks among the unclean beasts—"

"There, Blossom," cried Mr. Pottle, clutching at a straw, "what did I tell you? Would you fly in the face of the Good Book?"

She did not deign to reply verbally; she looked refrigerators at him.

"The Egyptians, on the other hand," she read, a note of triumph in her voice, "venerated the dog, and when a dog died they shaved their heads as a badge of mourning—"

"The Egyptians did, hey?" remarked Mr. Pottle, open disgust on his apple of face. "Shaved their own heads, did they? No wonder they all turned to mummies. You can't tell me it's safe for a man to shave his own head; there ought to be a law against it."

Mr. Pottle was in the barber business.

Unheedful of this digression, Mrs. Pottle read on.

"There are many sorts of dogs. I'll read the list so we can pick out ours. You needn't look cranky, Ambrose; we're going to have one. Let me see. Ah, yes. 'There are Great Danes, mastiffs, collies, dalmatians, chows, New Foundlands, poodles, setters, pointers, retrievers— Labrador and flat-coated— spaniels, beagles, dachshunds— I'll admit they are rather nasty; they're the only sort of dog I can't bear— whippets, otterhounds, terriers, including Scotch, Irish, Welsh, Skye and fox, and St. Bernards.' St. Bernards, it says, are the largest; 'their ears are small and their foreheads white and dome-shaped, giving them the well known expression of benignity and intelligence.' Oh, Ambrose"— her eyes were full of dreams—"Oh, Ambrose, wouldn't it be just too wonderful for words to have a great, big, beautiful dog like that?"

"There isn't any too much room in this bungalow as it is," demurred Mr. Pottle. "Better get a chow."

"You don't seem to realize, Ambrose Pottle," the lady replied with some severity, "that what I want a dog for is protection."

"Protection, my angel? Can't I protect you?"

"Not when you're away on the road selling your shaving cream. Then's when I need some big, loyal creature to protect me."

"From what?"

"Well, burglars."

"Why should they come here?"

"How about all our wedding silver? And then kidnapers might come."

"Kidnapers? What could they kidnap?"

"Me," said Mrs. Pottle. "How would you like to come home from Zanesville or Bucyrus some day and find me gone, Ambrose?" Her lip quivered at the thought.

To Mr. Pottle, privately, this contingency seemed remote. His bride was not the sort of woman one might kidnap easily. She was a plentiful lady of a well developed maturity, whose clothes did not conceal her heroic mold, albeit they fitted her as tightly as if her modiste were a taxidermist. However, not for worlds would he have voiced this sacrilegious thought; he was in love; he preferred that she should think of herself as infinitely clinging and helpless; he fancied the rôle of sturdy oak.

"All right, Blossom," he gave in, patting her cheek. "If my angel wants a dog, she shall have one. That reminds me, Charley Meacham, the boss barber of the Ohio House, has a nice litter. He offered me one or two or three if I wanted them. The mother is as fine a looking spotted coach dog as ever you laid an eye on and the pups—"

"What was the father?" demanded Mrs. Pottle.

"How should I know? There's a black pup, and a spotted pup, and a yellow pup, and a white pup and a—"

Mrs. Pottle sniffed.

"No mungles for me," she stated, flatly, "I hate mungles. I want a thoroughbred, or nothing. One with a pedigree, like that adorably handsome creature there."

She nodded toward the engraving of the giant St. Bernards.

"But, darling," objected Mr. Pottle, "pedigreed pups cost money. A dog can bark and bite whether he has a family tree or not, can't he? We can't afford one of these fancy, blue-blooded ones. I've got notes at the bank right now I don't know how the dooce I'm going to pay. My shaving stick needs capital. I can't be blowing in hard-earned dough on pups."

"Oh, Ambrose, I actually believe you— don't— care— whether— I'm— kidnaped— or— not!" his wife began, a catch in her voice. A heart of wrought iron would have been melted by the pathos of her tone and face.

"There, there, honey," said Mr. Pottle, hastily, with an appropriate amatory gesture, "you shall have your pup. But remember this, Blossom Pottle. He's yours. You are to have all the responsibility and care of him."

"Oh, Ambrose, you're so good to me," she breathed.

The next evening when Mr. Pottle came home he observed something brown and fuzzy nestling in his Sunday velour hat. With a smothered exclamation of the kind that has no place in a romance, he dumped the thing out and saw it waddle away on unsteady legs, leaving him sadly contemplating the strawberry silk lining of his best hat.

"Isn't he a love? Isn't he just too sweet," cried Mrs. Pottle, emerging from the living room and catching the object up in her arms. "Come to mama, sweetie-pie. Did the nassy man frighten my precious Pershing?"

"Your precious what?"

"Pershing. I named him for a brave man and a fighter. I just know he'll be worthy of it, when he grows up, and starts to protect me."

"In how many years?" inquired Mr. Pottle, cynically.

"The man said he'd be big enough to be a watch dog in a very few months; they grow so fast."

"What man said this?"

"The kennel man. I bought Pershing at the Laddiebrook-Sunshine Kennels to-day." She paused to kiss the pink muzzle of the little animal; Mr. Pottle winced at this but she noted it not, and rushed on.

"Such an interesting place, Ambrose. Nothing but dogs and dogs and dogs. All kinds, too. They even had one mean, sneaky-looking dachshund there; I just couldn't trust a dog like that. Ugh! Well, I looked at all the dogs. The minute I

saw Pershing I knew he was my dog. His little eyes looked up at me as much as to say, 'I'll be yours, mistress, faithful to the death,' and he put out the dearest little pink tongue and licked my hand. The kennel man said, 'Now ain't that wonderful, lady, the way he's taken to you? Usually he growls at strangers. He's a one man dog, all right, all right'."

"A one man dog?" said Mr. Pottle, blankly.

"Yes. One that loves his owner, and nobody else. That's just the kind I want."

"Where do I come in?" inquired Mr. Pottle.

"Oh, he'll learn to tolerate you, I guess," she reassured him. Then she rippled on, "I just had to have him then. He was one of five, but he already had a little personality all his own, although he's only three weeks old. I saw his mother— a magnificent creature, Ambrose, big as a Shetland pony and twice as shaggy, and with the most wonderful appealing eyes, that looked at me as if it stabbed her to the heart to have her little ones taken from her. And such a pedigree! It covers pages. Her name is Gloria Audacious Indomitable; the Audacious Indomitables are a very celebrated family of St. Bernards, the kennel man said."

"What about his father?" queried Mr. Pottle, poking the ball of pup with his finger.

"I didn't see him," admitted Mrs. Pottle. "I believe they are not living together now."

She snuggled the pup to her capacious bosom.

"So," she said, "its whole name is Pershing Audacious Indomitable, isn't it, tweetums?"

"It's a swell name," admitted Mr. Pottle. "Er— Blossom dear, how much did he cost?"

She brought out the reply quickly, almost timidly.

"Fifty dollars."

"Fif—" his voice stuck in his larynx. "Great Cæsar's Ghost!"

"But think of his pedigree," cried his wife.

All he could say was:

"Great Cæsar's Ghost! Fifty dollars! Great Cæsar's Ghost!"

"Why, we can exhibit him at bench shows," she argued, "and win hundreds of dollars in prizes. And his pups will be worth fifty dollars per pup easily, with that pedigree."

"Great Cæsar's Ghost," said Mr. Pottle, despondently. "Fifty dollars! And the shaving stick business all geflooey."

"He'll be worth a thousand to me as a protector," she declared, defiantly. "You wait and see, Ambrose Pottle. Wait till he grows up to be a great, big,

handsome, intelligent dog, winning prizes and protecting your wife. He'll be the best investment we ever made, you mark my words."

Had Pershing encountered Mr. Pottle's eye at that moment the marrow of his small canine bones would have congealed.

"All right, Blossom," said her spouse, gloomily. "He's yours. You take care of him. I wonder, I just wonder, that's all."

"What do you wonder, Ambrose?"

"If they'll let him visit us when we're in the poor house."

To this his wife remarked, "Fiddlesticks," and began to feed Pershing from a nursing bottle.

"Grade A milk, I suppose," groaned Mr. Pottle.

"Cream," she corrected, calmly. "Pershing is no mungle. Remember that, Ambrose Pottle."

IT WAS a nippy, frosty night, and Mr. Pottle, after much chattering of teeth, had succeeded in getting a place warm in the family bed, and was floating peacefully into a dream in which he got a contract for ten carload lots of Pottle's Edible Shaving Cream. "Just Lather, Shave and Lick. That's All," when his wife's soft knuckles prodded him in the ribs.

"Ambrose, Ambrose, do wake up. Do you hear that?"

He sleepily opened a protesting eye. He heard faint, plaintive, peeping sounds somewhere in the house.

"It's that wretched hound," he said crossly.

"Pershing is not a hound, Ambrose Pottle."

"Oh, all right, Blossom, ALL RIGHT. It's that noble creature, G'night."

But the knuckles tattooed on his drowsy ribs again.

"Ambrose, he's lonesome."

No response.

"Ambrose, little Pershing is lonesome."

"Well, suppose you go and sing him to sleep."

"Ambrose! And us married only a month!"

Mr. Pottle sat up in bed.

"Is he your pup," he demanded, oratorically, "or is he not your pup, Mrs. Pottle? And anyhow, why pamper him? He's all right. Didn't I walk six blocks in the cold to a grocery store to get a box for his bed? Didn't you line it with some of my best towels? Isn't it under a nice, warm stove? What more can a hound—"

"Ambrose!"

"— noble creature, expect?"

He dived into his pillow as if it were oblivion.

"Ambrose," said his wife, loudly and firmly, "Pershing is lonesome. Thoroughbreds have such sensitive natures. If he thought we were lying here neglecting him, it wouldn't surprise me a bit if he died of a broken heart before morning. A pedigreed dog like Pershing has the feelings of a delicate child."

Muffled words came from the Pottle pillow.

"Well, whose one man dog is he?"

Mrs. Pottle began to sniffle audibly.

"I d-don't believe you'd c-care if I got up and c-caught my d-death of c-cold," she said. "You know how easily I c-chill, too. But I c-can't leave that poor motherless little fellow cry his heart out in that big, dark, lonely kitchen. I'll just have to get up and—"

She stirred around as if she really intended to. The chivalrous Mr. Pottle heaved up from his pillow like an irate grampus from the depths of a tank.

"I'll go," he grumbled, fumbling around with goose-fleshed limbs for his chilly slippers. "Shall I tell him about Little Red Riding Hood or Goody Two Shoes?"

"Ambrose, if you speak roughly to Pershing, I shall never forgive you. And he won't either. No. Bring him in here."

"Here?" His tone was aghast; barbers are aseptic souls.

"Yes, of course."

"In bed?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, Blossom!"

"We can't leave him in the cold, can we?"

"But, Blossom, suppose he's— suppose he has—"

The hiatus was expressive.

"He hasn't." Her voice was one of indignant denial. "Pedigreed dogs don't. Why, the kennels were immaculate."

"Humph," said Mr. Pottle dubiously. He strode into the kitchen and returned with Pershing in his arms; he plumped the small, bushy, whining animal in bed beside his wife.

"I suppose, Mrs. Pottle," he said, "that you are prepared to take the consequences."

She stroked the squirming thing, which emitted small, protesting bleats.

"Don't you mind the nassy man, sweetie-pie," she cooed. "Casting 'spersions on poor li'l lonesome doggie." Then, to her husband, "Ambrose, how can you suggest such a thing? Don't stand there in the cold."

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Pottle, oracularly, as he prepared to seek slumber at a point as remote as possible in the bed from Pershing, "I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut that I'm right."

Mr. Pottle won his doughnut. At three o'clock in the morning, with the mercury flirting with the freezing mark, he suddenly surged up from his pillow, made twitching motions with limbs and shoulders, and stalked out into the living room, where he finished the night on a hard-boiled army cot, used for guests.

AS THE DAYS hurried by, he had to admit that the kennel man's predictions about the rapid growth of the animal seemed likely of fulfillment. In a very few weeks the offspring of Gloria Audacious Indomitable had attained prodigious proportions.

"But, Blossom," said Mr. Pottle, eyeing the animal as it gnawed industriously at the golden oak legs of the player piano, "isn't he growing in a sort of funny way?"

"Funny way, Ambrose?"

"Yes, dear; funny way. Look at his legs."

She contemplated those members.

"Well?"

"They're kinda brief, aren't they, Blossom?"

"Naturally. He's no giraffe, Ambrose. Young thoroughbreds have small legs. Just like babies."

"But he seems so sorta long in proportion to his legs," said Mr. Pottle, critically. "He gets to look more like an overgrown caterpillar every day."

"You said yourself, Ambrose, that you know nothing about dogs," his wife reminded him. "The legs always develop last. Give Pershing a chance to get his growth; then you'll see."

Mr. Pottle shrugged, unconvinced.

"It's time to take Pershing out for his airing," Mrs. Pottle observed.

A fretwork of displeasure appeared on the normally bland brow of Mr. Pottle.

"Lotta good that does," he grunted. "Besides, I'm getting tired of leading him around on a string. He's so darn funny looking; the boys are beginning to kid me about him."

"Do you want me to go out," asked Mrs. Pottle, "with this heavy cold?"

"Oh, all right," said Mr. Pottle blackly.

"Now, Pershing precious, let mama put on your li'l blanket so you can go for a nice li'l walk with your papa."

"I'm not his papa," growled Mr. Pottle, rebelliously. "I'm no relation of his."

However, the neighbors along Garden Avenue presently spied a short, rotund man, progressing with reluctant step along the street, in his hand a

leathern leash at the end of which ambled a pup whose physique was the occasion of some discussion among the dog-fanciers who beheld it.

"BLOSSOM," said Mr. Pottle— it was after Pershing had outgrown two boxes and a large wash-basket—"you may say what you like but that dog of yours looks funny to me."

"How can you say that?" she retorted. "Just look at that long heavy coat. Look at that big, handsome head. Look at those knowing eyes, as if he understood every word we're saying."

"But his legs, Blossom, his legs!"

"They are a wee, tiny bit short," she confessed. "But he's still in his infancy. Perhaps we don't feed him often enough."

"No?" said Mr. Pottle with a rising inflection which had the perfume of sarcasm about it, "No? I suppose seven times a day, including once in the middle of the night isn't often enough?"

"Honestly, Ambrose, you'd think you were an early Christian martyr being devoured by tigers to hear all the fuss you make about getting up just once for five or ten minutes in the night to feed poor, hungry little Pershing."

"It hardly seems worth it," remarked Mr. Pottle, "with him turning out this way."

"What way?"

"Bandy-legged."

"St. Bernards," she said with dignity, "do not run to legs. Mungles may be all leggy, but not full blooded St. Bernards. He's a baby, remember that, Ambrose Pottle."

"He eats more than a full grown farm hand," said Mr. Pottle. "And steak at fifty cents a pound!"

"You can't bring up a delicate dog like Pershing on liver," said Mrs. Pottle, crushingly. "Now run along, Ambrose, and take him for a good airing, while I get his evening broth ready."

"They extended that note of mine at the Bank, Blossom," said Mr. Pottle.

"Don't let him eat out of ash cans, and don't let him associate with mungles," said Mrs. Pottle.

Mr. Pottle skulked along side-streets, now dragging, now being dragged by the muscular Pershing. It was Mr. Pottle's idea to escape the attention of his friends, of whom there were many in Granville, and who, of late, had shown a disposition to make remarks about his evening promenade that irked his proud spirit. But, as he rounded the corner of Cottage Row, he encountered Charlie Meacham, tonsorialist, dog-fancier, wit.

"Evening, Ambrose."

"Evening, Charlie."

Mr. Pottle tried to ignore Pershing, to pretend that there was no connection between them, but Pershing reared up on stumpy hind legs and sought to embrace Mr. Meacham.

"Where'd you get the pooch?" inquired Mr. Meacham, with some interest.

"Wife's," said Mr. Pottle, briefly.

"Where'd she find it?"

"Didn't find him. Bought him at Laddiebrook-Sunshine Kennels."

"Oho," whistled Mr. Meacham.

"Pedigreed," confided Mr. Pottle.

"You don't tell me!"

"Yep. Name's Pershing."

"Name's what?"

"Pershing. In honor of the great general."

Mr. Meacham leaned against a convenient lamp-post; he seemed of a sudden overcome by some powerful emotion.

"What's the joke?" asked Mr. Pottle.

"Pershing!" Mr. Meacham was just able to get out. "Oh, me, oh my. That's rich. That's a scream."

"Pershing," said Mr. Pottle, stoutly, "Audacious Indomitable. You ought to see his pedigree."

"I'd like to," said Mr. Meacham, "I certainly would like to."

He was studying the architecture of Pershing with the cool appraising eye of the expert. His eye rested for a long time on the short legs and long body.

"Pottle," he said, thoughtfully, "haven't they got a dachshund up at those there kennels?"

Mr. Pottle knitted perplexed brows.

"I believe they have," he said. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Mr. Meacham, struggling to keep a grip on his emotions which threatened to choke him, "Oh, nothing." And he went off, with Mr. Pottle staring at his shoulder blades which titillated oddly as Mr. Meacham walked.

Mr. Pottle, after a series of tugs-of-war, got his charge home. A worry wormed its way into his brain like an auger into a pine plank. The worry became a suspicion. The suspicion became a horrid certainty. Gallant man that he was, and lover, he did not mention it to Blossom.

But after that the evening excursion with Pershing became his cross and his wormwood. He pleaded to be allowed to take Pershing out after dark; Blossom wouldn't hear of it; the night air might injure his pedigreed lungs. In vain did he offer to hire a man— at no matter what cost— to take his place as companion

to the creature which daily grew more pronounced and remarkable as to shape. Blossom declared that she would entrust no stranger with her dog; a Pottle, and a Pottle only, could escort him. The nightly pilgrimage became almost unendurable after a total stranger, said to be a Dubuque traveling man, stopped Mr. Pottle on the street one evening and asked, gravely:

"I beg pardon, sir, but isn't that animal a peagle?"

"He is not a beagle," said Mr. Pottle, shortly.

"I didn't say 'beagle'," the stranger smiled, "I said 'peagle'— p-e-a-g-l-e."

"What's that?"

"A peagle," answered the stranger, "is a cross between a pony and a beagle." It took three men to stop the fight.

Pershing, as Mr. Pottle perceived all too plainly, was growing more curious and ludicrous to the eye every day. He had the enormous head, the heavy body, the shaggy coat, and the benign, intellectual face of his mother; but alas, he had the bandy, caster-like legs of his putative father. He was an anti-climax. Everybody in Granville, save Blossom alone, seemed to realize the stark, the awful truth about Pershing's ancestry. Even he seemed to realize his own sad state; he wore a shamefaced look as he trotted by the side of Ambrose Pottle; Mr. Pottle's own features grew hang-dog. Despite her spouse's hints, Blossom never lost faith in Pershing.

"Just you wait, Ambrose," she said. "One of these fine days you'll wake up and find he has developed a full grown set of limbs."

"Like a tadpole, I suppose," he said grimly.

"Joke all you like, Ambrose. But mark my words: you'll be proud of Pershing. Just look at him there, taking in every word we say. Why, already he can do everything but speak. I just know I could count on him if I was in danger from burglars or kidnapers or anything. I'll feel so much safer with him in the house when you take your trip East next month."

"The burglar that came on him in the dark would be scared to death," mumbled Mr. Pottle. She ignored this aside.

"Now, Ambrose," she said, "take the comb and give him a good combing. I may enter him in a bench show next month."

"You ought to," remarked Mr. Pottle, as he led Pershing away, "he looks like a bench."

It was with a distinct sense of escape that Mr. Pottle some weeks later took a train for Washington where he hoped to have patented and trade-marked his edible shaving cream, a discovery he confidently expected to make his fortune.

"Good-by, Ambrose," said Mrs. Pottle. "I'll write you every day how Pershing is getting along. At the rate he's growing you won't know him when

you come back. You needn't worry about me. My one man dog will guard me, won't you, sweetie-pie? There now, give your paw to Papa Pottle."

"I'm not his papa, I tell you," cried Mr. Pottle with some passion as he grabbed up his suit-case and crunched down the gravel path.

In all, his business in Washington kept him away from his home for twenty-four days. While he missed the society of Blossom, somehow he experienced a delicious feeling of freedom from care, shame and responsibility as he took his evening stroll about the capital. His trip was a success; the patent was secured, the trade-mark duly registered. The patent lawyer, as he pocketed his fee, perhaps to salve his conscience for its size, produced from behind a law book a bottle of an ancient and once honorable fluid and pressed it on Mr. Pottle.

"I promised the wife I'd stay on the sprinkling cart," demurred Mr. Pottle.

"Oh, take it along," urged the patent lawyer. "You may need it for a cold one of these days."

It occurred to Mr. Pottle that if there is one place in the world a man may catch his death of cold it is on a draughty railroad train, and wouldn't it be foolish of him with a fortune in his grasp, so to speak, not to take every precaution against a possibly fatal illness? Besides he knew that Blossom would never permit him to bring the bottle into their home. He preserved it in the only way possible under the circumstances. When the train reached Granville just after midnight, Mr. Pottle skipped blithely from the car, made a sweeping bow to a milk can, cocked his derby over his eye, which was uncommonly bright and playful, and started for home with the meticulous but precarious step of the tight-rope walker.

It was his plan, carefully conceived, to steal softly as thistledown falling on velvet, into his bungalow without waking the sleeping Blossom, to spend the night on the guest cot, to spring up, fresh as a dewy daisy in the morn, and wake his wife with a smiling and coherent account of his trip.

Very quietly he tip-toed along the lawn leading to his front door, his latch key out and ready. But as he was about to place a noiseless foot on his porch, something vast, low and dark barred his path, and a bass and hostile growl brought him to an abrupt halt.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't li'l Pershin'," said Mr. Pottle, pleasantly, but remembering to pitch his voice in a low key. "Waiting on the porch to welcome Papa Pottle home! Nice li'l Pershin'."

"Grrrrrrr Grrrrrrrrrr Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr," replied Pershing. He continued to bar the path, to growl ominously, to bare strong white teeth in the moonlight. In Mr. Pottle's absence he had grown enormously in head and body; but not in leg.

"Pershin'," said Mr. Pottle, plaintively, "can it be that you have forgotten Papa Pottle? Have you forgotten nice, kind mans that took you for pretty walks? That fed you pretty steaks? That gave you pretty baths? Nice li'l Pershin', nice li'l—"

Mr. Pottle reached down to pat the shaggy head and drew back his hand with something that would pass as a curse in any language; Pershing had given his finger a whole-hearted nip.

"You low-down, underslung brute," rasped Mr. Pottle. "Get out of my way or I'll kick the pedigree outa you."

Pershing's growl grew louder and more menacing. Mr. Pottle hesitated; he feared Blossom more than Pershing. He tried cajolery.

"Come, come, nice li'l St. Bernard. Great, big, noble St. Bernard. Come for li'l walk with Papa Pottle. Nice Pershin', nice Pershin', you dirty cur—"

This last remark was due to the animal's earnest but only partially successful effort to fasten its teeth in Mr. Pottle's calf. Pershing gave out a sharp, disappointed yelp.

A white, shrouded figure appeared at the window.

"Burglar, go away," it said, shrilly, "or I'll sic my savage St. Bernard on you."

"He's already sicced, Blottom," said a doleful voice. "It's me, Blottom. Your Ambrose."

"Why, Ambrose! How queer your voice sounds! Why don't you come in."

"Pershing won't let me," cried Mr. Pottle. "Call him in."

"He won't come," she wailed, "and I'm afraid of him at night like this."

"Coax him in."

"He won't coax."

"Bribe him with food."

"You can't bribe a thoroughbred."

Mr. Pottle put his hands on his hips, and standing in the exact center of his lawn, raised a high, sardonic voice.

"Oh, yes," he said, "oh, dear me, yes, I'll live to be proud of Pershing. Oh, yes indeed. I'll live to love the noble creature. I'll be glad I got up on cold nights to pour warm milk into his dear little stummick. Oh, yes. Oh, yes, he'll be worth thousands to me. Here I go down to Washington, and work my head to the bone to keep a roof over us, and when I get back I can't get under it. If you ask me, Mrs. Blottom Pottle née Gallup, if you ask me, that precious animal of yours, that noble creature is the muttiest mutt that ever—"

"Ambrose!" Her edged voice clipped his oration short. "You've been drinking!"

"Well," said Mr. Pottle in a bellowing voice, "I guess a hound like that is enough to drive a person to drink. G'night, Blottom. I'm going to sleep in the

flower bed. Frozen petunias will be my pillow. When I'm dead and gone, be kind to little Pershing for my sake."

"Ambrose! Stop. Think of the neighbors. Think of your health. Come into the house this minute."

He tried to obey her frantic command, but the low-lying, far-flung bulk of Pershing blocked the way, a growling, fanged, hairy wall. Mr. Pottle retreated to the flower bed.

"What was it the Belgiums said?" he remarked. "They shall not pash."

"Oh, what'll I do, what'll I do?" came from the window.

"Send for the militia," suggested Mr. Pottle with savage facetiousness.

"I know," cried his wife, inspired, "I'll send for a veterinarian. He'll know what to do."

"A veterinarian!" he protested loudly. "Five bones a visit, and us the joke of Granville."

But he could suggest nothing better and presently an automobile discharged a sleepy and disgusted dog-doctor at the Pottle homestead. It took the combined efforts of the two men and the woman to entice Pershing away from the door long enough for Mr. Pottle to slip into his house. During the course of Mrs. Pottle's subsequent remarks, Mr. Pottle said a number of times that he was sorry he hadn't stayed out among the petunias.

In the morning Pershing greeted him with an innocent expression.

"I hope, Mr. Pottle," said his wife, as he sipped black coffee, "that you are now convinced what a splendid watch dog Pershing is."

"I wish I had that fifty back again," he answered. "The bank won't give me another extension on that note, Blossom."

She tossed a bit of bacon to Pershing who muffed it and retrieved it with only slight damage to the pink roses on the rug.

"I can't stand this much longer, Blossom," he burst out.

"What?"

"You used to love me."

"I still do, Ambrose, despite all."

"You conceal it well. That mutt takes all your time."

"Mutt, Ambrose?"

"Mutt," said Mr. Pottle.

"See! He's heard you," she cried. "Look at that hurt expression in his face."

"Bah," said Mr. Pottle. "When do we begin to get fifty dollars per pup. I could use the money. Isn't it about time this great hulking creature did something to earn his keep? He's got the appetite of a lion."

"Don't mind the nassy mans, Pershing. We're not a mutt, are we, Pershing? Ambrose, please don't say such things in his presence. It hurts him dreadfully. Mutt, indeed. Just look at those big, gentle, knowing eyes."

"Look at those legs, woman," said Mr. Pottle.

He despondently sipped his black coffee.

"Blossom," he said. "I'm going to Chicago to-night. Got to have a conference with the men who are dickering with me about manufacturing my shaving cream. I'll be gone three days and I'll be busy every second."

"Yes, Ambrose. Pershing will protect me."

"And when I come back," he went on sternly, "I want to be able to get into my own house, do you understand?"

"I warned you Pershing was a one man dog," she replied. "You'd better come back at noon while he's at lunch. You needn't worry about us."

"I shan't worry about Pershing," promised Mr. Pottle, reaching for his suit-case.

He had not overstated how busy he would be in Chicago. His second day was crowded. After a trip to the factory, he was closeted at his hotel in solemn conference in the evening with the president, a vice-president or two, a couple of assistant vice-presidents and their assistants, and a collection of sales engineers, publicity engineers, production engineers, personnel engineers, employment engineers, and just plain engineers; for a certain large corporation scented profit in his shaving cream. They were putting him through a business third degree and he was enjoying it. They had even reached the point where they were discussing his share in the profits if they decided to manufacture his discovery. Mr. Pottle was expatiating on its merits.

"Gentlemen," he said, "there are some forty million beards every morning in these United States, and forty million breakfasts to be eaten by men in a hurry. Now, my shaving cream being edible, combines—"

"Telegram for Mr. Puddle, Mr. Puddle, Mr. Puddle," droned a bell hop, poking in a head.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said Mr. Pottle. He hoped they would think it an offer from a rival company. As he read the message his face grew white. Alarming words leaped from the yellow paper.

"*Come home. Very serious accident. Blossom.*"

That was all, but to the recently mated Mr. Pottle it was enough. He crumpled the message with quivering fingers.

"Sorry, gentlemen," he said, trying to smile bravely. "Bad news from home. We'll have to continue this discussion later."

"You can just make the 10:10 train," said one of the engineers, sympathetically. "Hard lines, old man."

Granville's lone, asthmatic taxi coughed up Mr. Pottle at the door of his house; it was dark; he did not dare look at the door-knob. His trembling hand twisted the key in the lock.

"Who's that?" called a faint voice. It was Blossom's. He thanked God she was still alive.

He was in her room in an instant, and had switched on the light. She lay in bed, her face, once rosy, now pale; her eyes, once placid, now red-lidded and tear-swollen. He bent over her with tremulous anxiety.

"Honey, what's happened? Tell your Ambrose."

She raised herself feebly in bed. He thanked God she could move.

"Oh, it's too awful," she said with a sob. "Too dreadful for words."

"What? Oh, what? Tell me, Blossom dearest. Tell me. I'll be brave, little woman. I'll try to bear it." He pressed her fevered hands in his.

"I can hardly believe it," she sobbed. "I c-can hardly believe it."

"Believe it? Believe what? Tell me, Blossom darling, in Heaven's name, tell me."

"Pershing," she sobbed in a heart-broken crescendo, "Pershing has become a mother!"

Her sobs shook her.

"And they're all mungles," she cried, "all nine of them."

THUNDERCLOUDS festooned the usually mild forehead of Mr. Pottle next morning. He was inclined to be sarcastic.

"Fifty dollars per pup, eh?" he said. "Fifty dollars per pup, eh?"

"Don't, Ambrose," his wife begged. "I can't stand it. To think with eyes like that Pershing should deceive me."

"Pershing?" snorted Mr. Pottle so violently the toast hopped from the toaster. "Pershing? Not now. Violet! Violet! Violet!"

Mrs. Pottle looked meek.

"The ash man said he'd take the pups away if I gave him two dollars," she said.

"Give him five," said Mr. Pottle, "and maybe he'll take Violet, too."

"I will not, Ambrose Pottle," she returned. "I will not desert her now that she has gotten in trouble. How could she know, having been brought up so carefully? After all, dogs are only human."

"You actually intend to keep that—"

She did not allow him to pronounce the epithet that was forming on his lips, but checked it, with—

"Certainly I'll keep her. She is still a one man dog. She can still protect me from kidnapers and burglars."

He threw up his hands, a despairing gesture.

IN THE DAYS that followed hard on the heels of Violet's disgrace, Mr. Pottle had little time to think of dogs. More pressing cares weighed on him. The Chicago men, their enthusiasm cooling when no longer under the spell of Mr. Pottle's arguments, wrote that they guessed that at this time, things being as they were, and under the circumstances, they were forced to regret that they could not make his shaving cream, but might at some later date be interested, and they were his very truly. The bank sent him a frank little message saying that it had no desire to go into the barber business, but that it might find that step necessary if Mr. Pottle did not step round rather soon with a little donation for the loan department.

It was thoughts of this cheerless nature that kept Mr. Pottle tossing uneasily in his share of the bed, and with wide-open, worried eyes doing sums on the moonlit ceiling. He waited the morrow with numb pessimism. For, though he had combed the town and borrowed every cent he could squeeze from friend or foe, though he had pawned his favorite case of razors, he was three hundred dollars short of the needed amount. Three hundred dollars is not much compared to all the money in the world, but to Mr. Pottle, on his bed of anxiety, it looked like the Great Wall of China.

He heard the town clock boom a faint two. It occurred to him that there was something singular, odd, about the silence. It took him minutes to decide what it was. Then he puzzled it out. Violet née Pershing was not barking. It was her invariable custom to make harrowing sounds at the moon from ten in the evening till dawn. He had learned to sleep through them, eventually. He pointed out to Blossom that a dog that barks all the time is a dooce of a watch-dog, and she pointed out to him that a dog that barks all the time thus advertising its presence and its ferocity, would be certain to scare off midnight prowlers. He wondered why Violet was so silent. The thought skipped through his brain that perhaps she had run away, or been poisoned, and in all his worry, he permitted himself a faint smile of hope. No, he thought, I was born unlucky. There must be another reason. It was borne into his brain cells what this reason must be.

Slipping from bed without disturbing the dormant Blossom, he crept on wary bare toes from the room and down stairs. Ever so faint chinking sounds came from the dining room. With infinite caution Mr. Pottle slid open the sliding door an inch. He caught his breath.

There, in a patch of moonlight, squatted the chunky figure of a masked man, and he was engaged in industriously wrapping up the Pottle silver in bits of cloth. Now and then he paused in his labors to pat caressingly the head of

Violet who stood beside him watching with fascinated interest, and wagging a pleased tail. Mr. Pottle was clamped to his observation post by a freezing fear. The busy burglar did not see him, but Violet did, and pointing her bushel of bushy head at him, she let slip a deep "Grrrrrrrrrrr." The burglar turned quickly, and a moonbeam rebounded from the polished steel of his revolver as he leveled it at a place where Mr. Pottle's heart would have been if it had not at that precise second been in his throat, a quarter of an inch south of his Adam's apple.

"Keep 'em up," said the burglar, "or I'll drill you like you was an oil-well."

Mr. Pottle's hands went up and his heart went down. The ultimate straw had been added; the wedding silver was neatly packed in the burglar's bag. Mr. Pottle cast an appealing look at Violet and breathed a prayer that in his dire emergency her blue-blood would tell and she would fling herself with one last heroic fling at the throat of the robber. Violet returned his look with a stony stare, and licked the free hand of the thief.

A thought wave rippled over Mr. Pottle's brain.

"You might as well take the dog with you, too," he said.

"Your dog?" asked the burglar, gruffly.

"Whose else would it be?"

"Where'd you get her?"

"Raised her from a pup up."

"From a pup up?"

"Yes, from a pup up."

The robber appeared to be thinking.

"She's some dog," he remarked. "I never seen one just like her."

For the first time in the existence of either of them, Mr. Pottle felt a faint glow of pride in Violet.

"She's the only one of her kind in the world," he said.

"I believe you," said the burglar. "And I know a thing or two about dogs, too."

"Really?" said Mr. Pottle, politely.

"Yes, I do," said the burglar and a sad note had softened the gruffness of his voice. "I used to be a dog trainer."

"You don't tell me?" said Mr. Pottle.

"Yes," said the burglar, with a touch of pride, "I had the swellest dog and pony act in big time vaudeville once."

"Where is it now?" Mr. Pottle was interested.

"Mashed to bologny," said the burglar, sadly. "Train wreck. Lost every single animal. Like that." He snapped melancholy fingers to illustrate the sudden demise of his troupe. "That's why I took to this," he added. "I ain't a

regular crook. Honest. I just want to get together enough capital to start another show. Another job or two and I'll have enough."

Mr. Pottle looked his sympathy. The burglar was studying Violet with eyes that brightened visibly.

"If," he said, slowly, "I only had a trick dog like her, I could start again. She's the funniest looking hound I ever seen, bar none. I can just hear the audiences roaring with laughter." He sighed reminiscently.

"Take her," said Mr. Pottle, handsomely. "She's yours."

The burglar impaled him with the gimlet eye of suspicion.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I could get away with a dog like that, couldn't I? You couldn't put the cops on my trail if I had a dog like that with me, oh, no. Why, I could just as easy get away with Pike's Peak or a flock of Masonic Temples as with a dog as different looking as her. No, stranger, I wasn't born yesterday."

"I won't have you pinched, I swear I won't," said Mr. Pottle earnestly. "Take her. She's yours."

The burglar resumed the pose of thinker.

"Look here, stranger," he said at length. "Tell you what I'll do. Just to make the whole thing fair and square and no questions asked, I'll buy that dog from you."

"You'll what?" Mr. Pottle articulated.

"I'll buy her," repeated the burglar.

Mr. Pottle was incapable of replying.

"Well," said the burglar, "will you take a hundred for her?"

Mr. Pottle could not get out a syllable.

"Two hundred, then?" said the burglar.

"Make it three hundred and she's yours," said Mr. Pottle.

"Sold!" said the burglar.

WHEN MORNING came to Granville, Mr. Pottle waked his wife by gently, playfully, fanning her pink and white cheek with three bills of a large denomination.

"Blossom," he said, and the smile of his early courting days had come back, "you were right. Violet was a one man dog. I just found the man."

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5: Mr. Pottle and Pageantry

"HE WOULDN'T give a cent," announced Mrs. Pottle, blotting up the nucleus of a tear on her cheek with the tip of her gloved finger. "'Not one red cent,' was the way he put it."

"What did you want a red cent for, honey?" inquired Mr. Pottle, absently, from out the depths of the sporting page. "Who wouldn't give you a red cent?"

"Old Felix Winterbottom," she answered.

Mr. Pottle put down his paper.

"Do you mean to say you tackled old frosty-face Felix himself?" he demanded with interest and some awe.

"I certainly did," replied his wife. "Right in his own office."

Her spouse made no attempt to conceal his admiration.

"What did you say; then what did he say; then what did you say?" he queried.

"I was very polite," Mrs. Pottle answered, "and tactful. I said 'See here, now, Mr. Winterbottom, you are the richest man in the county, and yet you have the reputation of being the most careful with your money— '"

"I'll bet that put him in a good humor," said Mr. Pottle in a murmured aside.

"You know perfectly well, Ambrose, that old Felix Winterbottom is never in a good humor," said his wife. "After talking with him, I really believe the story that he has never smiled in his life. Well, anyhow, I said to him, 'See here now, Mr. Winterbottom, I'm going to give you a chance to show people your heart is in the right place, after all. The Day Nursery we ladies of the Browning-Tagore Club of Granville are starting needs just one thousand dollars. Won't you let me put you down for that amount?'"

Mr. Pottle whistled.

"Did he bite you?" he asked.

"I thought for a minute he was going to," admitted Mrs. Pottle, "and then he said, 'Are the Gulicks interested in this?' I said, 'Of course, they are. Mrs. P. Bradley Gulick is Chairman of the Pink Contribution Team, and Mrs. Wendell Gulick is Chairman— ' 'Stop,' said Mr. Winterbottom, giving me that fishy look of his, like a halibut in a cake of ice, 'in that case, I wouldn't give a cent, not one red cent. Good-day, Mrs. Pottle.' I went."

Mr. Pottle wagged his head sententiously.

"You'll never get a nickel out of him now," he declared. "Never. You might have known that Felix Winterbottom would not go into anything the Gulicks

were in. And," added Mr. Pottle thoughtfully, "I can't say that I blame old Felix much."

"Ambrose!" reproved Mrs. Pottle, but her rebuke lacked a certain whole-heartedness, "The Gulicks are nice people; the nicest people in Granville."

"That's the trouble with them," retorted Mr. Pottle, "they never let you forget it. That's what ails this town; too much Gulicks. I'm not the only one who thinks so, either."

She did not attempt rebuttal, beyond saying,

"They're our oldest family."

"Bah," said Mr. Pottle. He appeared to smolder, and then he flamed out,

"Honest, Blossom, those Gulicks make me just a little bit sick to the stummick. Just because some ancestor of theirs came over in the Mayflower, and because some other ancestor happened to own the farm this town was built on, you'd think they were the Duke of Kackiack, or something. The town grew up and made 'em rich, but what did they ever do for the town?"

"Well," began Mrs. Pottle, more for the sake of debate than from conviction, "there's Gulick Avenue, and Gulick Street, and Gulick Park—"

"Oh, they give their name freely enough," said Mr. Pottle. "But what did they give to the Day Nursery fund?"

"They did disappoint me," Mrs. Pottle admitted. "They only gave fifty dollars, which isn't much for the second wealthiest family in town, but Mrs. P. Bradley Gulick said we could put her name at the head of the list—"

Mr. Pottle's affable features attained an almost sardonic look.

"Oho," he said, pointedly. "Oho."

He flamed up again,

"That's exactly the amount those pirates added to the rent of my barber shop," he stated, and then, passion seething in his ordinarily amiable bosom, he went on, "A fine lot, they are, to be snubbing a self-made man like Felix Winterbottom, and turning up their thin, blue noses at Felix Winterbottom's tannery."

"Ambrose," said his wife, with lifted blonde eyebrows, "please don't make suggestive jokes in my presence."

"Honey swat key Molly pants," returned Mr. Pottle with a touch of bellicosity. "It's no worse than other tanneries; and it's the biggest in the state. Those Gulicks give me a pain, I tell you. You can't pick up a paper without reading, 'Mr. P. Bradley Gulick, one of our leading citizens, unveiled a tablet in the Gulick Hook and Ladder Company building yesterday in honor of his ancestor, Saul Gulick, one of the pioneers who hewed our great state out of the wilderness, and whose cider-press stood on the ground now occupied by the hook and ladder company.' Or 'Mrs. Wendell Gulick read a paper before

the Society of Descendants of Officers Above the Rank of Captain on General Washington's Staff on the heroic part played by her ancestor, Major Noah Gulick, at the battle of Saratoga.' If it isn't that it's 'The Spinning Wheel Club met at Mrs. Gulick's palatial residence to observe the anniversary of the birth of Phineas Gulick, the first red-headed baby born in Massachusetts.' Bah, is what I say, Bah!"

He seethed and bubbled and broke out again.

"You'd think to hear them blow that the Gulicks discovered ancestors and had 'em patented. I guess the Pottles had an ancestor or two. Even Felix Winterbottom had ancestors."

"Probably haddocks," said Mrs. Pottle coldly. "He can keep his old red cents."

"He will, never fear," her husband assured her. "After the way he and his family have been treated by the Gulicks, I don't blame him."

Mrs. Pottle pumped up a sigh from the depths of a deep bosom and sank tearfully to a divan.

"And I'd set my heart on it," she sobbed.

"What, dear?"

"The Day Nursery. And it's to fail for want of a miserable thousand dollars."

"Don't speak disrespectfully of a thousand dollars, Blossom," Mr. Pottle enjoined his spouse. "That's five thousand shaves. And don't expect me to give anything more. You know perfectly well the barber-business is not what it used to be. I can't give another red cent."

Mrs. Pottle sniffed.

"Who asked you for your red cents?" she inquired, with spirit. "I'll make the money myself."

"You, Blossom?"

"Yes. Me."

"But how?"

She rose majestically; determination was in her pose, and the light of inspiration was in her bright blue eyes.

"We'll give a pageant," she announced.

"A pageant?" Mr. Pottle showed some dismay. "A show, Blossom?"

"Evidently," she said, "you have not read your encyclopedia under 'P.'"

"I'm only as far as 'ostriches,'" he answered, humbly.

"'A pageant,'" she quoted, "'is an elaborate exhibition or spectacle, a series of stately tableaux or living pictures, frequently historic, and often with poetic spoken interludes.'"

"Ah," beamed Mr. Pottle, nodding understandingly, "a circus!"

"Not in the least, Ambrose. Does your mind never soar? A pageant is a very beautiful and serious thing, with lots of lovely costumes, hundreds of people, horses, historic scenes—" she broke off suddenly. "When was Granville founded?"

He told her. Her eyes sparkled.

"Wonderful," she cried. "This year it will be two hundred years old. We'll give an historic pageant— the Growth of Civilization in Granville."

"It sounds expensive," objected Mr. Pottle.

"Don't be sordid, Ambrose," said his wife.

"I'm not sordid, Blossom," he returned. "I'm a practical man. I know these kermesses and feats. My cousin Julia Onderdonk got up a pageant in Peoria once and now she hasn't a friend in the place. Besides it only netted fourteen dollars for the Bide-a-wee Home. Now, honey, why not give a good, old-fashioned chicken supper in the church hall, with perhaps a minstrel show afterward? That would get my money—"

"Chicken supper! Minstrel show! Oh, Ambrose." His wife's snort was the acme of refinement. "Have you no soul? This pageant will be an inspiring thing. It will make for, I might almost say militate for, a community spirit. Other communities give pageant after pageant. Shall Granville lag behind? Here is a chance for a real community get-together. Here is a chance to give our young people the wonderful history of their native town—"

"And also a chance for all the Gulick tribe to parade around in colonial clothes with spinning wheels under their arms," put in Mr. Pottle.

"I'm afraid we can't avoid that," admitted his wife, ruefully. "After all, they are our oldest family."

She meditated.

"I suppose," she mused, "that Mrs. P. Bradley Gulick would have to be the Spirit of Progress—"

"Progress shouldn't be fat and wall-eyed," interposed Mr. Pottle. She ignored this.

"And I suppose that odious freckled daughter of hers would have to be the Spirit of Liberty or Civilization or something important, and I suppose that pompous Mr. Gulick would have to be the Pioneer Spirit— still, I think it could be managed. Now, you, Ambrose, can be—"

"I don't want to be the spirit of anything," he declared. "Count me out, Blossom."

Mrs. Pottle assumed a hurt pout.

"For my sake?" she said.

"I'm no actor," he stated.

"Oh, I don't want you to act," she said. "You're to be treasurer."

He wrinkled up his nose and brow into a frown.

"The dirty work," he exclaimed. "That's the way the world over. Us Pottles do the dirty work and the Gulicks get the glory. No, Blossom, no, no, no."

An appealing tear, and another, stole down her pink cheek.

"Mr. Gallup wouldn't have treated me that way," she said. Mr. Gallup had been her first husband.

Mr. Pottle knew resistance was futile.

"Oh, all right. I'll be treasurer."

She smiled. "Now one more tiny favor?"

"Well?"

"I want you to be the Spirit of History and read the historic epilogue."

"Me? I'm no spirit. I'm a boss barber."

"Well, if you don't take the job, I suppose I can get one of the Gulicks."

He considered a second.

"All right," he said. "I'll be the Spirit of History. But understand one thing, right here and now: I will not wear tights."

She conceded him that point.

"Say," he asked, struck by a thought, "how do you know what spirits are going to be in this? Who is going to write this thing, anyhow?"

"I am," said Mrs. Pottle.

ii

"IT'S NOT decent," objected Mr. Pottle fervidly. "How can I keep the respect of the community if I go round like this?"

He indicated his pink knees, which blushed like spring rosebuds beneath a somewhat nebulous toga of cheese-cloth.

"If I can't wear pants, I don't want to be the Spirit of History," he added.

"For the fifth and last time," said the tired and harassed voice of Mrs. Pottle, "you cannot wear pants. Spirits never do. That settles it. Not another word, Ambrose. Haven't I trouble enough without my own husband adding to it?"

She pressed her brow as if it ached. Piles of costumes, mostly tinsel and cheese-cloth, shields, tomahawks, bridles and bits of scenery were strewn about the Pottle parlor. She sank into a Morris chair, and stitched fiercely at an angel's wing. Her eyes were the eyes of one at bay.

"It's been one thing after another," she declaimed. "Those Gulicks are making my life miserable. And just now I had a note from Etta Runkle's mother saying that if in the Masque of the Fruits and Flowers of Botts County her little Etta has to be an onion while little Gertrude Crump is a violet, she won't lend

us that white horse for the Paul Revere's Ride Scene. So I had to make that hateful stupid child of hers a violet and change Gertrude Crump to an onion and now Mrs. Crump is mad and won't let any of her children appear in the pageant."

"Well," remarked Mr. Pottle, "I don't see why you had to have Paul Revere's Ride anyhow. He didn't ride all the way out here to Ohio, did he?"

"I know he didn't," she replied, tartly, "I didn't want to put him in. But Mrs. Gulick insisted. She said it was her ancestor, Elijah Gulick, who lent Paul Revere the horse. That's why I have to have Paul Revere stop in the middle of his ride and say,

"*Gallant stallion, swift and noble,*
Lent me by my good friend Gulick,
Patriot, scholar, king of horsemen,
Speed ye, speed ye, speed ye onward!"

Mr. Pottle groaned.

"Is there anything in American history the Gulicks didn't have a hand in?" he asked. "But say, Blossom, that horse of the Runkle's is no gallant stallion. She's the one Matt Runkle uses on his milk route. Every one in town knows Agnes."

"I can't help it," said Mrs. Pottle wearily. "Wendell Gulick, Jr., who plays Paul Revere, insisted on having a white horse, and Agnes was the only one I could get."

"They're the insistingest people I ever knew," observed Mr. Pottle.

His wife gave out the saddest sound in the world, the short sob of thwarted authorship.

"They've just about ruined my pageant," she said. "Mrs. Gulick insisted on having that battle between the settlers and the Indians just because a great, great uncle of hers was in it. I didn't want anything rough like that in my pageant. Besides it happened in the next county, and the true facts are that the Indians chased the settlers fourteen miles, and scalped three of them. Of course it wouldn't do to show a Gulick running from an Indian, so she insisted that I change history around and make the settlers win the battle. None of the nice young men were willing to be Indians and be chased, so I had to hire a tough young fellow named Brannigan— I believe they call him 'Beansy'— and nine other young fellows from the horseshoe works to play Indian at fifty cents apiece."

Mr. Pottle looked anxious.

"I know that Beansy Brannigan," he said. "How is that gang behaving?"

"Oh, pretty well. But ten Indians at fifty cents an Indian is five dollars, and we c-can't afford it."

She was tearful again.

"Already the costumes have cost four hundred dollars and more. We'll be lucky to make expenses if the Gulicks keep on putting in expensive scenes," she moaned.

She busied herself with the angel's wing, then paused to ask, "Ambrose, have you learned your historical epilogue?"

For answer he sprang to his feet, wrapped his cheese-cloth toga about him, struck a Ciceronian attitude, and said loudly:

"Who am I, oh list'ning peoples?
His'try's spirit, stern and truthful!
Come I here to tell you fully,
Of our Granville's thrilling story,
How Saul and other noble Gulicks,
And a few who shall be nameless,
Hewed a city from the forests,
Blazed the way for civ'lization."

"Stop," cried Mrs. Pottle. "I can't bear to hear another word about those Gulicks. You know it well enough."

"There are a few things I wish I could have put in," remarked Mr. Pottle, wistfully.

His tone made her look up with quick interest.

"What do you mean?" she inquired.

"Oh, I found out a thing or two," he replied, "when I was down at the capital last week. I happened to drop into the state historical society's library and run over some old records."

He chuckled.

"P. Bradley Gulick told me I didn't have to go down there to get the facts. He'd give them to me, he said. So he did. Some of them."

"Ambrose, what do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. All I will say is this: I'm a patient man and can be pestered a lot, but just let one of these Gulicks pester me a little too much one of these days, and I'll rear up on my hind legs, that's all."

There was a glint in his eye, and she saw it.

"Ambrose," she said, "if you do anything to spoil my pageant, I'll never forgive you."

He snorted.

"Your pageant? It's just as I said it would be. We Pottles will do the dirty work and the Gulicks will grab the glory. They've behaved so piggish that everybody in town is sore at them, and I don't see how the pageant is going to come out on top. You'd probably have gotten that thousand from old Felix Winterbottom if it hadn't been for them. Then you wouldn't have to be losing a pound a day over this pageant. Now if you'd only gotten up a nice old-fashioned chicken supper, and a minstrel show—"

"Ambrose! Go put on your trousers!"

ii

DESPITE Mr. Pottle's pessimistic predictions, there was not a vacant seat or an unused cubic foot of air in the Granville Opera House that clinging Spring night, when the asbestos curtain, tugged by tyro hands, jerkily ascended on the prologue of the Grand Historical Pageant of the Growth of Civilization in Granville for the Benefit of the Browning-Tagore Club's Day Nursery. Those who did not have relatives in the cast appeared to have been lured thither by a certain morbid curiosity as to what a pageant was. Their faces said plainly that they were prepared for anything.

After the orchestra had raced through "Poet and Peasant," with the cornet winning by a comfortable margin, Mrs. P. Bradley Gulick, somewhat short of breath and rendered doubly wall-eyed by an inexpert make-up, appeared in red, white and blue cheese-cloth, and announced in a high voice that she was the Spirit of Progress and would look on with a kindly, encouraging eye while history's storied page was turned and spread before them, and, she added, in properly poetic language, she would tell them what it was all about. The audience gave her the applause due the dowager of the town's leading family, and not one hand-clap more. Mr. P. Bradley Gulick, bony but impressive, in a Grecian robe, appeared and proclaimed that he was the Spirit of Civilization. A Ballet of the Waters followed, and as a climax, Evelyn Gulick, age thirteen, in appropriate green gauze, announced:

"*Who am I, oh friends and neighbors?*
I'm the Spirit of the Waters,
Lordly, swift, Monongahela;
Argosies float on my bosom—"

She tapped her narrow chest, and a look of horror crept into her face; her mind seemed to be groping for something. Tremulously she repeated,

"*Argosies float on my bosom.*"

The voice of Mrs. Pottle prompted from the wings,

"*And fleets of ships with treasures laden.*"

Evelyn clutched at the sound, but it slipped from her, and she wildly began,

"*Argosies float on my bosom* (Slap, slap)
And sheeps of flits— and sheeps of flits—"

She burst into tears, and turning a spiteful face toward one of the boxes, she cried,

"You stop making faces at me, Jessie Winterbottom."

Then she fled to the wings.

This served to bring to the attention of the audience the fact that a strange thing had happened: Felix Winterbottom and his family had come to the pageant. He was there, concealed as far as possible by the red plush curtains of the box, defiant and forbidding. From the glance he now and then cast at the decolleté back of his wife, it was evident that he had not come voluntarily.

Mrs. Pottle, in the wings, bit a newly manicured fingernail.

"I begged Mrs. Gulick to make that dumb child of hers learn her part," she whispered wrathfully to her husband.

"Mrs. Gulick says it's your fault for not prompting loud enough," said Mr. Pottle.

"She did, did she?" Mrs. Pottle assumed what is known in ring circles as a fighting face.

"I can't stand much more of their pestering," said Mr. Pottle darkly.

"Ssssh," said his wife. "The Paul Revere scene is going to start."

In the wings, Wendell Gulick, Junior, was making ready to mount his charger. The charger, as he had specified, was white, peculiarly white, for it had been found necessary at the last moment to conceal some harness stains by powdering her liberally with crushed lilac talcum. Agnes looked resentful but resigned. Mr. Gulick, Junior, was a plump young man, with nose-glasses, and satisfied lips, who had the distinction of being the only person in Granville who had ever ridden to hounds. He cultivated a horsey atmosphere, wore a riding crop pin in his tie, and was admittedly the local authority on things equine. He looked most formidable in hip-high leathern boots, a continental garb, and a powdered wig. It was regretable that the steed did not measure up to her rider. Save for being approximately white, Agnes had little to recommend her for the rôle. She had one of those long, sad, philosophic faces, and she appeared to be considerably taller in the hips than in the shoulders. She had a habit of looking back over her shoulder with a surprised expression, as if she missed her milk wagon.

Encouraged by a slap on the flank from a stage-hand, Agnes advanced to the center of the stage at a brisk, business-like trot, and there stopped, and nodded to the audience.

"Whoa, Agnes," shouted some bad little boy in the gallery.

Young Mr. Gulick, in the rôle of Paul Revere, affected to pat his mount's head, and in a voice of thunder, roared:

"*Gallant stallion, swift and noble,*"

Agnes reached out a long neck and nibbled at the scenery.

"*Lent me by my good friend, Gulick,*"

Agnes looked over her shoulder and smiled at her rider.

"*Patriot, scholar, king of horsemen,*"

Agnes scratched herself heartily on a property rock.

"*Speed ye, speed ye, speed ye onward!*"

The business of the scene called for a spirited exit by Paul Revere, waving his cocked hat. But Agnes had other plans. She liked the taste of scenery. She did not budge. In vain did the scion of the Gulicks beat with frantic heels upon her flat flanks.

"Speed ye onward, or we'll be late," he improvised cleverly.

She masticated a canvas leaf from a convenient shrub and did not speed onward.

"Gid-ap, Agnes," shrilled the boy in the gallery. "The folks is waitin' for their milk."

The audience grew indecorous.

Even his ruddy make-up could not conceal the fact that Mr. Wendell Gulick, Junior, was very red in the face, and that his lips were forming words not in that, or any other pageant. His leathern heels boomed hollowly on Agnes's barrel of body. To ring down the curtain was impossible; Agnes had taken her place directly beneath it.

Paul Revere turned a passionate face to the wings,

"Hey, Pottle," he bellowed, "why don't you do something instead of standing there grinning like a baboon?"

Thus charged, Mr. Pottle's toga-clad figure came nimbly from the wings, to great applause, and seized Agnes by the bridle. Pottle tugged lustily. Agnes smiled and did not give way an inch.

"Send for Matt Runkle," hissed Mr. Gulick, Junior.

"Send for Matt Runkle," echoed Mr. Pottle.

"Send for Matt Runkle," cried voices in the audience.

"He's home in bed," wailed Mrs. Pottle from the wings.

"Get one of the Runkle kids," shouted Mr. Pottle, seeking to arouse Agnes with kicks of his sandal-shod feet.

Little Etta Runkle, partly clad in the tinsel and cheese-cloth of a violet, and partly in her everyday underwear, was fetched from a dressing room. She was

a bright child and sensed the situation as soon as it had been explained to her twice.

"Oh," she said, "Pa always says Agnes won't start unless you clink two milk bottles together."

The audience was calling forth suggestions to Paul Revere, astride, and Pottle, on foot. They included a bonfire beneath Agnes, and dynamite. Even the rock-bound face of old Felix Winterbottom, in the depths of the box, showed the vestige of a crease that might, with a little imagination, be considered the start of a smile.

A fevered search back stage netted two bottles, dusty and smelling of turpentine and gin, respectively. Mr. Pottle grasped their necks and clinked them together with resounding clinks. The effect on Agnes was electrical. From utter immobility she started with a startled hop. The unready Mr. Gulick, Junior, after one mad grasp at her mane, rolled ignominiously from her broad back, and landed on the stage in a position that was undignified for a Revere and positively painful for a Gulick. Agnes bolted to the wings. The curtain darted down.

The audience seemed to take this occurrence in a spirit of levity, but not so Mrs. Pottle. Hot tears gathered in her eyes.

"That wretch would have a white horse," she said. "They would put Paul Revere's Ride in. Now look. Now look!"

"There, there, honey," said Mr. Pottle, between sympathetic teeth. "We'll fix 'em."

The pageant pursued its more or less majestic way, but as the history of Granville was unfolded, scene upon scene, it became all too apparent to Mrs. Pottle that her poetic opus could not recapture the first serious mood of the audience. It positively jeered when Miss Eltruda Gulick announced that she was the Spirit of the Bogardus Canal. But it grew more interested as the curtain slid up on the battle scene. This, Mrs. Pottle felt, was her dramatic masterpiece. There lay the peaceful pioneer settlement— artfully fashioned from paste-board— while the simple but virile settlers strolled up and down the embryo Main Street and exchanged couplets. The chief settler, an adipose young man with a lisp, was Mr. Gurnee Gulick, until then noted as the most adept practitioner of the modern dance-steps in that part of Ohio. Through a beard, he announced, falsetto,

"I give thee greeting, neighbor Gulick,
Upon this blossom-burgeoning morning,
I trust 'tis not the wily red-skin
I just heard whooping in the forest."

His trust was misplaced. It was, indeed, the wily red-skin in the persons of Mr. Edward Brannigan— known to intimates as "Beansy," and nine of his fellow horseshoe makers who had been hired to impersonate red-men, in rather loose-fitting brown cotton skins. Mr. Brannigan and fellow red-skins had done their part dutifully at rehearsals, and had permitted themselves to be knocked down, cuffed about a bit, and finally put to inglorious rout by the settlers. But on the fateful night of the pageant, while waiting for their turn to appear, they had passed the moments with a jug of cider that was standing with reluctant feet at that high point in its career where it has ceased to be sweet and has not yet become vinegar. That was no reason why they should not do their part, for it was not an intricate one. They were to rush on, with whoops, be annihilated, and retire in confusion.

They did rush on with whoops that left nothing to be desired from the standpoint of realism. Mrs. Pottle, tense in the wings, was congratulating herself that one scene at least had dramatic strength. It was at this moment that Mr. Brannigan, as Chief Winipasuki, sachem of the Algonquins, encountered Mr. Gulick, the principal settler. In his enthusiasm, Mr. Gulick over-acted his part. He smote the red-skin warrior so earnestly on the ear that Mr. Brannigan described a parabola and dented a papier-mache rock with his hundred and seventy pounds of muscular body. His part called for him to lie there, prone and impotent, while the settlers drove off his band.

It may have been a sudden rebellion of a proud spirit. It may have been the wraith of history in protest; it may have been an inherently perverse nature; or it may have been the cider. In any event, Chief Winipasuki got to his feet, war-whooped, and knocked the principal settler through the paste-board wall of the block-house. Those in the audience who were fond of realism enjoyed what ensued immensely. The settlers of the town, who were the nice young men, and the Indians, who were not so nice but were strong and willing, had at one another, and although they had only nature's weapons, the battle, as it waged up and down and back and through the shattered scenery, was stirring enough. When the curtain was at last brought down, Chief Winipasuki had a half-nelson on Settler Gulick, who was calling in a loud penetrating voice for the police.

In all the hub-bub and confusion, in all the delirium of the audience, Mr. Pottle remained calm enough to note that a miracle had taken place; Mr. Felix Winterbottom was chuckling. It was a dry, unpracticed chuckle at best, but it was a chuckle, nevertheless. Mr. Pottle was observing the phenomenon with wide eyes when he felt his elbow angrily plucked.

"You're to blame for this, Pottle," rasped a voice. It was Gurnee Gulick's irate father.

"Me?" sputtered Mr. Pottle.

"Yes. You. You knew those ruffians had been drinking."

"I did not."

"Don't contradict me, you miserable little hair-cutting fool."

"What? How dare you—" began Mr. Pottle.

"Bah. You wart!" said Mr. Gulick, and turned his square yard of fat back on the incensed little man.

Mr. Pottle was taking a step after him as if he intended to leap up and sink his teeth into the back of Mr. Gulick's overflowing neck, when another hand clutched him. It was his wife.

Her face was white and tear-stained, her lip quivering.

"They've ruined it, they've ruined it," she exclaimed. "I warned that simpleton Gurnee Gulick not to be rough with those horseshoe boys. Oh, dear, oh, dear." She pillowed her brimming eyes in his toga-draped shoulder.

"You've got to go out, now," she sobbed, "and give the historical epilogue."

"Never," said Mr. Pottle. "A thousand nevers."

"Please, Ambrose. We've got to end it, somehow."

"Very well," announced Mr. Pottle. "I'll go. But mind you, Blossom Pottle, I won't be responsible for what I say."

"Neither will I," sobbed his spouse.

Mr. Pottle hitched his toga about him, and strode out on the stage. There was some applause, but more titters. He held up his hand for silence, as orators do, and glared so fiercely at his audience that the theater grew comparatively quiet. At the top of his voice, he began,

"*Who am I, oh list'ning peoples?*"

"Pottle the barber," answered a voice in the gallery.

Mr. Pottle paused, fastened an awful eye on the owner of the voice, and, stepping out of character, remarked, succinctly:

"If you interrupt me again, Charlie Meacham, I'll come up there and knock your block off." He swept the house with a ferocious glance. "And that goes for the rest of you," he added. The intimidated audience went "ssssssh" at each other; Pottle was popular in Granville. He launched himself again.

"Who am I, oh list'ning peoples?
Hist'ry's spirit, stern and truthful!
Come I here to give you an earful,
Of our city's inside history,
How the Gulicks grabbed the real estate,
By foreclosing poor folk's mortgages."

He did not have to ask for silence now. The hush of death was on the house, and the audience bent its ears toward him; even old Felix Winterbottom, on the edge of his chair, cupped a gnarled, attentive ear. Mr. Pottle went on,

"You have heard the Gulick's blowing,
Of their wonderful relations.
Lend an ear, and I will slip you,
What the real, true, red-hot dope is."

He gave his toga a hitch, advanced to the foot-lights, and continued,

"Old Saul Gulick was a drinker,
Always full of home-made liquor,
And he got the town of Granville,
From the Indians, by cheating,
Got 'em drunk, the records tell us,
Got 'em boiled and stewed and glassy;
Ere they sobered up, they sold him,
All the land in this fair county,
For a dollar and a quarter,
Which, my friends, he never paid them."

The audience held its breath; Felix Winterbottom cupped both ears. Pottle hurried on,

"Now we come to 'Lijah Gulick,
Him that lent the noble stallion
To Revere, the midnight rider.
Honest, folks, you'll bust out laughing,
When I tell you 'Lijah stole him.
For Elijah was a horsethief,
And, as such, was hanged near Boston.
"Patriot, scholar, king of horsemen"—
Honest, folks, that makes me snicker.
Yes, he let Paul ride his stallion—
And charged him seven bucks an hour!
If you think that I am lying,
You will find all this in writing,
In the library in the state house."

Sensation! Gasps in the audience. Commotion in the wings. Felix Winterbottom made no attempt to conceal the fact that he was chuckling. Pottle drew in a deep breath, and spoke again.

"Then you've heard of Noah Gulick,
Him that won the Revolution.
If he ever was a major,
George J. Washington never knew it.
When they charged at Saratoga,
He was hiding in a cellar.
Was he on the staff of Washington?
Sure he was— but in the kitchen.
I'll admit he made good coffee—
But a soldier? Quit your kidding.
Now I'll take up Nathan Gulick,
His descendants never mention
That he spent a month in prison
More than once, for stealing chickens—"

Here Mr. Pottle abruptly stopped. The curtain had been dropped with a crashing bang by unseen hands in the wings.

As it fell, there was a curious, cackling noise in one of the boxes, the like of which had never before been heard in Granville. It was Felix Winterbottom laughing as if he were being paid a dollar a guffaw.

iv

MR. POTTLE sat beside the bedside of Mrs. Pottle, sadly going over a column of figures, as she lay there, wan, weak, tear-marred, sipping pale tea.

He cleared his throat.

"As retiring treasurer of the Granville Pageant," he announced, "I regret to report as follows:

"Receipts from tickets: $1,250.00. Expenses, including rent, music, scenery, costumes, and damages, $1,249.17

"This leaves a total net profit of eighty-three cents."

Mrs. Pottle wept softly into her pillow. A whistle outside caused her to lift a woeful head.

"There's the postman," she said, feebly. "Another bill, I suppose. We won't even make eighty-three cents."

Mr. Pottle returned with the letter; he opened it; he read it; he whistled; he read it again; then he read it aloud.

Dear Mrs. Pottle:
I never laughed at anything in my life till I saw your pageant. I pay for what I get.
Yours,
Felix Winterbottom.

P. S. Inclosed is my check for one thousand dollars for the Day Nursery.

Mrs. Pottle sat up in bed. She smiled.

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6: The Cage Man

ALL DAY LONG they kept Horace Nimms in a steel-barred cage. For twenty-one years he had perched on a tall stool in that cage, while various persons at various times poked things at him through a hole about big enough to admit an adult guinea pig.

Every evening round five-thirty they let Horace out and permitted him to go over to his half of a double-barreled house in Flatbush to sleep. At eight-thirty the next morning he returned to his cage, hung his two-dollar-and-eighty-nine-cent approximately Panama hat on a peg and changed his blue-serge-suit coat for a still more shiny alpaca. Then he sharpened two pencils to needle-point sharpness, tested his pen by writing "H. Nimms, Esq.," in a small precise hand, gave his adding machine a few preparatory pokes and was ready for the day's work.

Horace was proud, in his mild way, of being shut up in the cage with all that money. It carried the suggestion that he was a dangerous man of a possibly predatory nature. He wasn't. A more patient and docile five feet and two inches of cashier was not to be found between Spuyten Duyvil and Tottenville, Staten Island. Cashiers are mostly crabbed. It sours them somehow to hand out all that money and retain so little for their own personal use. But Horace was not of this ilk.

The timidest stenographer did not hesitate to take the pettiest petty-cash slip to his little window and twitter, according to custom: "Forty cents for carbon paper, and let me have it in large bills, please, Uncle Horace."

He would peer at the slip, pretend it was for forty dollars, smile a friendly smile that made little ripples round his eyes and— according to custom— reply: "Here you be. Now don't be buying yourself a flivver with it."

When the office force in a large corporation calls the office cashier "uncle" it is a pretty good indication of the sort of man he is.

For the rest, Horace Nimms was slightly bald, wore convict eye-glasses— the sort you shackle to your head with a chain— kept his cuffs up with lavender sleeve garters, carried a change purse, kept a small red pocket expense book, thought his company the greatest in the world and its president, Oren Hammer, the greatest man, was devoted to a wife and two growing daughters, dreamed of a cottage on Long Island with a few square yards of beets and beans and, finally, earned forty dollars a week.

Horace Nimms had a figuring mind. Those ten little Arabic symbols and their combinations and permutations held a fascination for him. To his ears six times six is thirty-six was as perfect a poem as ever a master bard penned. When on muggy Flatbush nights he tossed in his brass bed he lulled himself to

sleep by dividing 695,481,239 by 433. At other and more wakeful moments he amused himself by planning an elaborate cost-accounting system for his firm, the Amalgamated Soap Corporation, known to the ends of the earth as the Suds Trust. Sometimes he went so far as to play the entertaining game of imaginary conversations. He pictured himself sitting in one of the fat chairs in the office of President Hammer and saying between puffs on one of the presidential perfectos: "Now, looky here, Mr. Hammer. My plan for a cost-accounting system is—"

And he limned on his mental canvas that great man, spellbound, enthralled, as he, Horace Nimms, dazzled him with an array of figures, beginning: "Now, let's see, Mr. Hammer. Last year the Western works at Purity City, Iowa, made 9,576,491 cakes of Pink Petal Toilet and 6,571,233 cakes of Lily White Laundry at a manufacturing cost of 3.25571 cents a cake, unboxed; now the selling cost a cake was"— and so on. The interview always ended with vigorous hand-shakings on the part of Mr. Hammer and more salary for Mr. Nimms. But actually the interview never took place.

It wasn't that Horace didn't have confidence in his system. He did. But he didn't have an equal amount in Horace Nimms. So he worked on in his little cage and enjoyed a fair measure of contentment there, because to him it was a temple of figures, a shrine of subtraction, an altar of addition. Figures swarmed in his head as naturally as bees swarm about a locust tree. He could tell you off-hand how many cakes of Grade-B soap the Southern Works at Spotless, Louisiana, made in the month of May, 1914. He simply devoured statistics. When the door of the cage clanged shut in the morning he felt soothed, at home; he immersed his own small worries in a bath of digits and decimal points. He ate of the lotus leaves of mathematics. He could forget, while juggling with millions of cakes of soap and thousands of dollars, that his rent was due next week; that Polly, his wife, needed a new dress; and that on forty a week one must live largely on beef liver and hope.

He sometimes thought, while Subwaying to his office, that if he could only get the ear of Oren Hammer some day and tell him about that cost-accounting system he might get his salary raised to forty-five. But President Hammer, whose office was on the floor above the cage, was as remote from Horace as the Pleiades. To get to see him one had to run a gantlet of superior, inquisitive secretaries. Besides Mr. Hammer was reputed to be the busiest man in New York City.

"I wash the faces of forty million people every morning," was the way he put it himself.

But the chief reason why Horace Nimms did not approach Mr. Hammer was that Horace held him in genuine awe. The president was so big, so

masterful, so decisive. His invariable cutaway intimidated Horace; the magnificence of his top hat dazzled the little cashier and benumbed his faculties of speech. Once in a while Horace rode down in the same elevator with him and— unobserved— admired his firm profile, the concentration of his brow and the jutting jaw that some one had once said was worth fifty thousand a year in itself, merely as a symbol of determination. Horace would sooner have slapped General Pershing on the back or asked President Wilson to dinner in Flatbush than have addressed Oren Hammer. An uncommendable attitude? Yes. But after all those years behind bars, perhaps subconsciously his spirit had become a little caged.

One cool September morning Horace entered the cage humming "Annie Rooney." Coming over in the Subway he had straightened out a little quirk in his cost-accounting system that would save the company one-ninety-fifth of a cent a cake. He took off his worn serge coat, was momentarily concerned at the prospect of having to make it last another season and then with a hitch on his lavender sleeve garters he slipped into his alpaca office coat and added up a few numbers on the adding machine for the sheer joy of it.

He had not been sitting on his high stool long when he became aware that a man, a stranger, was regarding him fixedly through the steel screen. The man had calmly placed a chair just outside the cage and was examining the little cashier with the scrutinizing eye of an ornithologist studying a newly discovered species of emu.

Horace was a bit disconcerted. He knew his accounts were in order and accurate to the last penny. He had nothing to fear on that score. Nevertheless, he didn't like the way the man stared at him.

"If he has something to say to me," thought Horace, "why does he say it with glowers?"

He would have asked the starer what the devil he was looking at, but Horace was incapable of incivility. He began nervously to total up a column of figures and was not a little upset to find that under the cold gaze he had made his first mistake in addition since the spring of '98. He cast a furtive glance or two through the steel netting at the stranger outside, who continued to focus a pair of prominent blue eyes on the self-conscious cashier. Horace couldn't have explained why those particular eyes rattled him; some mysterious power— black art perhaps.

The staring man was quite bald, and his head, shaped like a pineapple cheese, had been polished until it seemed almost to glitter in the September sun. The eyes, light blue and bulgy, reminded Horace of poached eggs left out in the cold for a week. They had also a certain fishy quality; impassive, yet hungry, like a shark's. Without being actually fat, the mysterious starer had the

appearance of being plump and soft; perhaps it was the way he clasped two small, perfectly manicured hands over a perceptible rotundity at his middle, an unexpected protuberance, as if he were attempting to conceal a honeydew melon under his vest.

Horace Nimms did his best to concentrate on the little columns of figures he was so fond of drilling and parading, but his glance strayed, almost against his will, to the bald-headed man with the fishy blue eyes, who continued to fasten on Horace the glance a python aims at a rabbit before he bolts him.

At length, after half an hour, Horace could stand it no longer. He addressed the stranger politely.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" asked Horace with his avuncular smile.

The starer, without once taking his eyes off Horace, rose, advanced to the little window and thrust through it an oversized card.

"You may go on with your work," he said, "just as if you were not under observation. I am here under Mr. Hammer's orders."

His voice was peculiar— a nasal purr.

The caged cashier glanced at the card. It read:

S. WALMSLEY COWAN
EFFICIENCY EXPERT EXTRAORDINARY
AUTHOR OF "PEP, PERSONALITY, PERSONNEL,"
"HOW TO ENTHUSE EMPLOYEES"

Horace Nimms had a disquieting sensation. He had heard rumors of a man prowling about in the company, subjecting random employees to strange tests, firing some, moving others to different jobs, but he had always felt that twenty-one years of service and the steel bars of his cage protected him. And now here was the man, and he, Horace Nimms, was under observation. He had always associated the phrase with reports of lunacy cases in the newspapers. Mr. Cowan returned to his seat near the cage and resumed his silent watch on its inmate. Horace tried to do his work, but he couldn't remember when he had had such a poor day. The figures would come wrong and his hand would tremble a little no matter how hard he tried to forget the vigilant Mr. Cowan who sat watching him.

At the end of a trying day Horace dismounted from his high stool, hitched up his lavender sleeve garters and inserted himself into his worn blue serge coat. He would be glad to get back to Flatbush. Polly would have some fried beef liver and a bread pudding for supper, and they would discuss for the hundredth time just what the ground-floor plan of that cottage would be— if it ever was.

But Mr. Cowan was waiting for him.

"Step this way, will you— ple-e-ese," said the expert.

Horace never remembered when he had heard a word that retained so little of its original meaning as Mr. Cowan's "ple-e-ese." Clearly it was tossed in as a sop to the hypersensitive. His "ple-e-ese" could have been translated as "you worm."

Horace, with a worried brow, followed Mr. Cowan into one of those goldfish-bowl offices affected by large companies with many executives and a limited amount of office space. It contained only a plain table and two stiff chairs.

"Sit down," said Mr. Cowan, "ple-e-ese."

It is a difficult linguistic feat to purr and snap at the same time, but Mr. Cowan achieved it.

Horace sat down and Mr. Cowan sat opposite him, with his unwinking blue eyes but two feet from Horace's mild brown ones and with no charitable steel screen between them.

"I am going to put you to the test," said Mr. Cowan.

Horace wildly thought of thumbscrews. He sat bolt upright while Mr. Cowan whipped from his pocket a tape measure and, bending over, measured the breadth of Horace Nimms' brow. With an ominous clucking noise the expert set down the measurement on a chart in front of him. Then he carefully measured each of Horace's ears. The measurements appeared to shock him. He wrote them down. He applied his tape to Horace's nose and measured that organ. He surveyed Horace's forehead from several different angles. He measured the circumference of Horace's head. The result caused Mr. Cowan acute distress, for he set it down on his elaborate chart and glowered at it a full minute.

Then he transferred his attention and tape to Horace's stubby hands. He measured them, counted the fingers, contemplated the thumb gravely and wrote several hundred words on the chart. Horace thought he recognized one of the words as "mechanical."

"Now," said Mr. Cowan solemnly, "we will test your mental reactions."

He said this more to himself than to Horace Nimms, on whose brow tiny pearls of perspiration were appearing. Mr. Cowan drew forth a stop watch and spread another chart on the table before him.

"Fill this out— ple-e-ese," he said, pushing the chart toward Horace. "You have just five minutes to do it."

Horace Nimms, dismayed, almost dazed, seized the paper and started to work at it with feverish confusion. He boggled through a maze full of pitfalls for a tired, rattled man:

If George Washington discovered America, write the capital of Nebraska in this space.....But if he was called the Father of His Country, how much is 49 × 7?.....Now name three presidents of the United States in alphabetical order, including Jefferson, but do not do so if ice is warm.....If Adam was the first man, dot all the "i's" in "eleemosynary" and write your last name backward.....Omit the next three questions with the exception of the last two: How much is 6 × 9 = 54?.....What is the capital of Omaha?.....How many "e's" are there in the sentence, "Tell me, pretty maiden, are there any more at home like you?".....Put a cross over all the consonants in the foregoing sentence. Now fill in the missing words in the following sentences: "While picking.....I was stung in the.....by a....." "Don't bite the.....that feeds you."

How old are you? Multiply your age by the year you were born in. Erase your answer. If a pound of steel is heavier than a pound of oyster crackers, don't write anything in this space.....Otherwise write three words that rhyme with "icicle." Now write your name, and then cross out all the consonants.

Name three common garden vegetables.....

It seemed to Horace Nimms that he had floundered along for less than a minute when Mr. Cowan said briskly, "Time," and took the paper from Horace.

"Now the association test," said Mr. Cowan, drawing forth still another chart, very much as a magician draws forth a rabbit from a hat.

"I'll say a word," he went on, seeming to grow progressively more affable as Horace grew more discomfited, "and you will say the word it suggests immediately after— ple-e-ese," he added as an afterthought.

Horace Nimms moistened his dry lips. Mr. Cowan pulled out his stop watch.

"Oyster?" said Mr. Cowan.

"S-stew!" quavered Horace.

"Flat?"

"Bush!"

"Hammer?"

"President!"

"Soap?"

"Cakes!"

"Money?"

"Forty-five!"

"Up?"

"Down!"

"Man?"

"Cage!"

"Most peculiar," muttered Mr. Cowan as he noted down the answers. "We'll have to look into this."

Horace could not suppress a shudder.

"That's all," said Mr. Cowan.

When Horace arrived at his Flatbush flat, late for supper, he did not enjoy the bread pudding, though it was a particularly good one— with raisins. Nor did he go to sleep quickly, no matter how many numbers he multiplied. He was thinking what it would mean to him at his age if Mr. Cowan should have him put out of his cage. His dreams were haunted by a pair of eyes like those of a frozen owl.

The next afternoon Horace Nimms, busy in his cage, received a notice that there would be an organization meeting at the end of the day. He went. The meeting had been called by S. Walmsley Cowan, who in his talks to large groups adopted the benevolent big-brother manner and turned on and off a beaming smile.

"My friends," he began, "it is no secret to some of you that Mr. Hammer has not been pleased with the way things are going in the company. He has felt that there has been a great deal of waste of time and money; that neither the volume of business nor the profits on it are what they should be. He has commissioned me to find out what is wrong in the company and to put pep, efficiency, enthusiasm into our organization."

He smiled a modest smile.

"I rather fancy," he continued, "that I'll succeed. I have been conducting the tests with which you are all doubtless familiar through reading my books, 'Pep, Personality, Personnel,' and 'How to Enthuse Employees.' I have made a most interesting and startling discovery. Most of you are in the wrong jobs!"

He paused. The men and women looked at each other uneasily. Then he went on.

"I'll cite just one instance. Yesterday I tested the mentality of one of you. I found that he was of the cage, or solitary, type of worker. See Page 239 of my book on Getting Into Men's Brains. But he was already working in a cage! Here was a problem. Could it be that that was where he would do best? No! Then a happy solution struck me. He was in the wrong cage. So I am going to transfer him from a mathematical cage to a mechanical cage. I am going to transfer him to be an elevator operator. This may surprise you, my friends, but science is always surprising. Just fancy! This man has been working with figures for more than twenty years, and I discover by measuring that his thumbs are of the purely mechanical type, and all that time he would have been much happier running an elevator. Now by an odd coincidence I found that one of the elevator operators has a pure type of mathematical ear, so I am transferring

him to the cashier's cage. He may seem a bit awkward there at first, but we shall see, we shall see."

He turned on his smile. But the eyes of the employees had turned sympathetically to the pale face of Horace Nimms. How old and tired Uncle Horace looked, they thought. In a nightmare Horace heard his doom pronounced. After twenty-one years! His temple of figures!

S. Walmsley Cowan unconcernedly began one of his celebrated pep-and-punch talks calculated to send morale up as a candle sends up the mercury in a thermometer.

"Friends," he said, thumping the table before him, "when Opportunity comes to knock be on the front porch! Don't hold back! He who hesitates is lost. It may be that the humble will inherit the earth, but that will be when all the bold have died. Don't hide your light under a basket; don't keep your ideas locked up in your skulls. Bring 'em out! Let's have a look at them. You wouldn't wear a diamond ring inside your shirt, would you? Be sure you're right, then holler your head off. Get what is coming to you! Nobody will bring it on a platter; you've got to step up and grab it. When you have an impulse, think it over. If it looks like the real goods, obey it. Get me? Obey it! Nobody will bite you. Think all you like, but for heaven's sake, act!"

It was for such talks that Mr. Cowan was famous. Even Horace Nimms forgot his impending fall as the efficiency expert extraordinary declaimed the gospel of action and boldness.

But when the meeting was over, silent misery came into the heart of the little cashier and like an automaton he stumbled into the Subway. He ate his bread pudding without tasting it and tried to talk to Polly about the proposed living room in the Long Island cottage. He hadn't the courage to tell her what had happened; indeed he hardly realized what had happened himself.

In the morning he tried to pretend to himself that it was all a joke; surely Mr. Cowan couldn't have meant it. But when he reached his cage he saw another figure already in that temple of addition and subtraction. He rattled the wire door timidly. The figure turned.

"Wadda yah want?" it asked bellicosely.

Horace Nimms recognized the bluish jaw of Gus, one of the elevator men.

Sick at heart, Horace turned away. In the blur of his thoughts was the one that he must keep his job, some job, any job. One can't save much on forty a week in Flatbush. And that he should work for any one but the Amalgamated Soap Corporation was unthinkable. So without knowing exactly how it happened, he found himself in a blue-and-gray uniform clumsily trying to vindicate his mechanical hands and attempting to stop his car within six inches of the floors. All morning he patiently escorted his car up and down the

elevator shaft— twenty stories up, twenty stories down, twenty stories up, twenty stories down. He thought of the Song of the Shirt.

At noon he stopped his car at the eighteenth floor and two passengers got on. Horace recognized them. One was Jim Wright, assistant to President Hammer; the other was Mr. Perrine, Western sales manager. They were in animated conversation.

"That fellow has the crust of a mud turtle and the tact of a rattlesnake," Mr. Perrine was saying.

"Remember," Jim Wright reminded him, "he is an efficiency expert extraordinary. The big boss seems to have confidence in him."

"He won't have quite so much," said Mr. Perrine, "when he hears that he put an elevator man in as cashier. I hear he walked off with six hundred dollars before he'd been on the job an hour."

Horace pricked up his ears. He made the car go as slowly as possible.

"He did?" Jim Wright was excited. "And this is one of the boss' bad days too! Just before I left him he was saying, 'The Amalgamated has about as much system as a piece of cheese. Why, these high-salaried executives can't tell me how much it costs them to make and sell a cake of soap!'"

Then Horace reluctantly let them out of the elevator at the street floor.

All that afternoon he struggled with an impulse. The words of Mr. Cowan's oration of the night before began to come back to him. If only he had obeyed his impulses—

As he was a new man, they gave him the late shift. At one minute to six the indicator in his car gave two short, sharp, peremptory buzzes. Horace, who was mastering the elements of elevator operating, shot up to the eighteenth floor. A single passenger got on. With a little gasp Horace recognized the cutaway coat and top hat of the president of the Amalgamated.

Horace set his teeth. His small frame grew tense. He turned the lever and the car started to glide downward. Seventeen, sixteen, fifteen, fourteen, thirteen, twelve! Then with a quick twist of his wrist Horace stalled the car between the twelfth and eleventh floors and slipped the controlling key into his pocket. Then he turned and faced the big president.

"You don't know a hell of a lot about running an elevator," remarked Oren Hammer.

"No, I don't," said Horace Nimms in a strange, loud voice that he didn't recognize. "But I do know how much it costs a cake to make Pink Petal Toilet."

"What's that? Who the devil are you?" The great man was more surprised than angry.

"Nimms," said Horace briefly. "Office cashier on seventeenth floor twenty-one years. Elevator operator one day. Mr. Cowan's orders."

Mr. Hammer's brow contracted.

"So you think you can tell me how much Pink Petal costs a cake to make, eh?" he said.

He had the reputation of never overlooking an opportunity.

The imaginary conversations that Horace had been having crowded back into his mind.

"Now, looky here, Mr. Hammer," he began. "The Western works made 9,576,491 cakes of Pink Petal Toilet last year. Now the cost a cake was—" and so on. Horace was on familiar ground now. Figures and statistics tripped from his tongue; the details he had bottled up inside him so long came pouring forth. He knew the business of the Amalgamated down to the last stamp and rubber band. Oren Hammer, listening with keen interest, now and then put in a short, direct question. Horace Nimms snapped back short, direct answers. Once launched, he forgot all about the cutaway coat and the dazzling top hat and even about the big-jawed man who washed the faces of forty million people every morning. Horace was talking to get back into his cage and words came with a new-found eloquence.

"By George," exclaimed President Hammer, "you know more about the business than I do myself! And Cowan told you you didn't have a figuring mind, did he? I want you to report at my office the first thing to-morrow morning."

Horace Nimms, in the black suit he saved for funerals and weddings, and a new tie, was ushered into the big office of President Hammer the next morning. Outwardly, it was his hope, he was calm; inwardly, he knew, he was quaking.

"Have a cigar, Nimms," said Oren Hammer, passing Horace one of the presidential perfectos of his dreams. Then he summoned a secretary.

"Ask Mr. Cowan to come in, will you?" he said.

The efficiency expert extraordinary entered, beaming affably.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Hammer," he called out in a cheery voice. Then he stopped short as he recognized Horace.

"Oh, come here, Cowan," said President Hammer genially. "Before you go I want you to meet Mr. Nimms. He is going to install a new cost-accounting system for us. Just step down to the cashier's cage with him, will you, and get your salary to date."

VII: Where is the Tropic of Capricorn?

"ONE, TWO, THREE, bend! One, two, three, bend!" So barked the physical instructor, a bulgy man with muscles popping out all over him as if his skin had been stuffed with hard-boiled eggs.

Little Peter Mullaney oned, twoed, threed and bent with such earnest and whole-hearted violence that his blue eyes seemed likely to be jostled from their sockets and the freckles to be jarred loose from his thin, wiry arms. Though breathless, and not a little sinew-sore from the stiff setting-up exercises, his small, sharp-jawed face wore a beatified look, the look that bespeaks the rare, ecstatic thrill that comes to mortals so seldom in this life of taxes, prohibitions and denied ambitions. Such a look might a hero-worshiping boy wear if seen by his gang in the company of Jack Dempsey, or a writer if caught in the act of taking tea with Shaw. Peter Mullaney was standing at the very door of his life's ambition; he was about to be taken "on the cops."

To be taken "on the cops"— the phrase is departmental argot and is in common use by those who enjoy that distinction— this had been the ideal of Peter Mullaney since the days when he, an undersized infant, had tottered around his Christopher Street back-yard, an improvised broom-stick billy in his hand, solemnly arresting and incarcerating his small companions. To wear that spruce, brass-button studded blue uniform, and that glittering silver shield, to twirl a well-trained night-stick on its cord, to eye the layman with the cold, impassive eye of authority, to whisper mysterious messages into red iron signal boxes on street-corners, to succor the held-up citizen and pursue the crook to his underworld lair, to be addressed as "Officer"— he had lived for this dream.

And here he was, the last man on a row of thirty panting, perspiring probationary patrolmen, ranged, according to height, across the gymnasium of the police training school. From big Dan Mack, six feet four in his socks, they graded down as gently as a ramp to little Peter on the end of the line a scant, a bare five feet five and seven-eighths inches tall including the defiant bristle of his red pompadour.

Peter was happy, and with reason. It was by no generous margin that Peter had gained admission to the school that was to prepare him for his career. By the sheerest luck he had escaped being cast into the exterior darkness; by the slimmest degree he had wiggled into the school, and whether he could attain the goal on which he had kept his eye for twenty years— or ever since he was four— was still decidedly in doubt. The law said in plain, inexorable black and white that the minimum height a policeman can be is five feet and six inches. Peter Mullaney lacked that stature by the distance between a bumble-bee's

eyes; and this, despite the fact that for years he had sought most strenuously, by exercise, diet and even torture to stretch out his body to the required five feet six. When he was eighteen and it seemed certain that an unsympathetic fate had meant him to be a short man, his father found him one day in the attic, lashed to a beam, with a box full of window-weights tied to his feet, and his face gray with pain.

"Shure, me bye," remarked old man Mullaney as he cut Peter down, "are ye after thinkin' that the Mullaneys is made of Injy rubber? Don't it say in the Bible, 'What man by takin' thought can add a Cupid to his statue?'"

Peter, in hot and anguished rebellion against this all too evident law of nature had sought relief by going straight out of the house and licking the first boy he met who was twice as big as he was, in a fight that is still remembered in the Second Ward. But stretching and wishing and even eating unpleasant and expensive tablets, alleged by their makers to be made from giraffes' glands, did not bring Peter up to a full and unquestionable five feet six.

When Peter came up for a preliminary examination which was to determine whether he possessed the material from which policemen are made, Commissioner Kondorman, as coldly scientific as his steel scales and measures, surveyed the stricken Peter, as he stood there on the scales, his freckles in high relief on his skin, for he was pale all over at the thought that he might be rejected.

"Candidate Mullaney," said the Commissioner, "you're too short."

Peter felt marble lumps swelling in his throat.

"If you'd only give me a chance, Commissioner," he was able to gulp out, "I'd—"

Commissioner Kondorman, who had been studying the records spread on his desk, cut the supplicant short with:

"Your marks in the other tests are pretty good, though you seem a little weak in general education. But your strength test is unusually high for a small man. However, regulations are regulations and I believe in sticking to them. Next candidate!"

Peter did not go.

"Commissioner," he began urgently, "all I ask is a chance—"

His eyes were tense and pleading.

The Chief Inspector, grizzled Matthew McCabe, plucked at the Commissioner's coat-sleeve.

"Well, Chief?" inquired Commissioner Kondorman, a little impatiently.

"He's a good lad," put in the Chief Inspector, "and well spoke of in the Second Ward."

"He's under height," said the Commissioner, briefly.

"But he knows how to handle his fists," argued the old Chief Inspector.

"Does he?" said the Commissioner, skeptically. "He looks rather small." He examined Peter through his eye-glasses; beneath that chill and critical gaze Peter felt that he had shrunk to the size of a bantam rooster; the lumps in his throat were almost choking him; in an agony of desperation, he cried,

"Bring in the biggest man you got. I'll fight him."

The Commissioner's face was set in hard, and one would have thought, immovable lines, yet he achieved the feat of turning up, ever so slightly, the corners of his lips in an expression which might pass as the germ of a smile, as he gazed at the small, nude, freckled figure before him with its vivid shaving-brush hair, its intense eyes and its clenched fists posed in approved prize-ring form. Again the official bent over the records and studied them.

"Character recommendations seem pretty good," he mused. "Never has used tobacco or liquor—"

"'Fraid it might stunt me," muttered Peter, "so I couldn't get on the cops."

The commissioner stared at him with one degree more of interest.

"Give the lad a chance," urged the Chief Inspector. "He only lacks a fraction of an inch. He may grow."

"Now, Chief," said the Commissioner turning to the official by his side, "you know I'm a stickler for the rules. What's the good of saying officers must be five feet six and then taking men who are shorter?"

"You know how badly we need men," shrugged the Chief Inspector, "and Mullaney here strikes me as having the making of a good cop. It will do no harm to try him out."

The Commissioner considered for a moment. Then he wheeled round and faced Peter Mullaney.

"You've asked for a chance," he shot out. "You'll get it. You can attend police training school for three months. I'll waive the fact that you're below the required height, for the time being. But if in your final examinations you don't get excellent marks in every branch, by the Lord Harry, you get no shield from me. Do you understand? One slip, and good-by to you. Next candidate!"

They had to guide Peter Mullaney back to his clothes; he was in a dazed blur of happiness.

Next day, with the strut of a conqueror and with pride shining from every freckle, little Peter Mullaney entered the police training school. To fit himself physically for the task of being a limb of the law, he oned, twoed, threed and bent by the hour, twisted the toes of two hundred pound fellow students in frantic jiu jitsu, and lugged other ponderous probationers about on his shoulders in the practice of first aid to the injured. This physical side of his schooling Peter enjoyed, and, despite his lack of inches, did extremely well, for

he was quick, tough and determined. But it was the book-work that made him pucker his brow and press his head with his hands as if to keep it from bursting with the facts he had to jam into it.

It was the boast of Commissioner Kondorman that he was making his police force the most intelligent in the world. Give him time, he was fond of saying, and there would not be a man on it who could not be called well-informed. He intended to see to it that from chief inspector down to the greenest patrolman they could answer, off-hand, not only questions about routine police matters, but about the whole range of the encyclopedia.

"I want well-informed men, intelligent men," he said. "Men who can tell you the capital of Patagonia, where copra comes from, and who discovered the cotton-gin. I want men who have used their brains, have read and thought a bit. The only way I can find that out is by asking questions, isn't it?"

The anti-administration press, with intent to slight, called the policemen "Kondorman's Encyclopedias bound in blue," but he was not in the least perturbed; he made his next examination a bit stiffer.

Peter Mullaney, handicapped by the fact that his span of elementary schooling had been abbreviated by the necessity of earning his own living, struggled valiantly with weighty tomes packed with statutes, ordinances, and regulations— what a police officer can and cannot do about mayhem, snow on the sidewalks, arson, dead horses in the street, kidnaping, extricating intoxicated gentlemen from man-holes, smoking automobiles, stray goats, fires, earthquakes, lost children, blizzards, disorderly conduct and riots. He prepared himself, by no small exertion, to tell an inquiring public where Bedford street is, if traffic can go both ways on Commerce street, what car to take to get from Hudson street to Chatham Square, how to get to the nearest branch library, quick lunch, public bath, zoo, dispensary and garage, how to get to the Old Slip Station, Flower Hospital, the St. Regis, Coney Island, Duluth and Grant's Tomb. He stuffed himself with these pertinent facts; he wanted to be a good cop. He could not see exactly how it would help him to know in addition to an appalling amount of local geography and history, the name of the present ruler of Bulgaria, what a zebu is, and who wrote "Home, Sweet Home." But since questions of this sort were quite sure to bob up on the examination he toiled through many volumes with a zeal that made his head ache.

When he had been working diligently in the training school for three months lacking a day, the great moment came when he was given a chance to put theory into practice, by being sent forth, in a uniform slightly too large for him, to patrol a beat in the company of a veteran officer, so that he might observe, at first hand, how an expert handled the many and varied duties of the police job. Except that he had no shield, no night stick, and no revolver,

Peter looked exactly like any of the other guardians of law. He trudged by the side of the big Officer Gaffney, trying to look stern, and finding it hard to keep his joy from breaking out in a smile. If Judy McNulty could only see him now! They were to be married as soon as he got his shield.

But joy is never without its alloy. Even as Peter strode importantly through the streets of the upper West Side, housing delicious thrills in every corpuscle from the top of his blue cap to the thick soles and rubber heels of his shiningly new police shoes, a worry kept plucking at his mind. On the morrow he was to take his final examination in general education, and that was no small obstacle between him and his shield. He had labored to be ready, but he was afraid.

That worry grew as he paced along, trying to remember whether the Amazon is longer than the Ganges and who Gambetta was. He did not even pay close attention to his mentor, although on most occasions those five blue service stripes on Officer Gaffney's sleeve, representing a quarter of a century on the force, would have caused Peter to listen with rapt interest to Officer Gaffney's genial flow of reminiscence and advice. Dimly he heard the old policeman rumbling:

"When I was took on the cops, Pether, all they expected of a cop was two fists and a cool head. But sthyles in cops changes like sthyles in hats, I guess. I've seen a dozen commissioners come and go, and they all had their own ideas. The prisint comish is the queerest duck of the lot, wid his "Who was Pernambuco and what the divil ailed him, and who invinted the gin rickey and who discovered the Gowanus Canal." Not that I'm agin a cop bein' a learned man. Divil a bit. Learnin' won't hurt him none if he has two fists and a clear head."

He paused to take nourishment from some tabloid tobacco in his hip-pocket, and rumbled on,

"Whin I was took on the cops, as I say, they was no graduatin' exercises like a young ladies' siminary. The comish— it was auld Malachi Bannon— looked ye square in the eye and said, 'Young fella, ye're about to go forth and riprisint the majesty of the law. Whin on juty be clane and sober and raisonably honest. Keep a civil tongue in your head for ivrybody, even Republicans. Get to know your precinct like a book. Don't borrow trouble. But above all, rimimber this: a cop can do a lot of queer things and square himself wid me afterward, but there's one sin no cop can square— the sin of runnin' away whin needed. Go to your post.'"

Little Peter nodded his head.

They paced along in silence for a time. Then Peter asked,

"Jawn—"

"What, Pether?"

"Jawn, where is the Tropic of Capricorn?"

Officer Gaffney wrinkled his grey eyebrows quizzically.

"The Tropic of Whichicorn?" he inquired.

"The Tropic of Capricorn," repeated Peter.

"Pether," said Officer Gaffney, dubiously, scratching his head with the tip of his night-stick, "I disrimimber but I think— I think, mind ye, it's in the Bronx."

They continued their leisurely progress.

"'Tis a quiet beat, this," observed Officer Gaffney. "Quiet but responsible. Rich folks lives in these houses, Pether, and that draws crooks, sometimes. But mostly it's as quiet as a Sunday in Dooleyville." He laughed deep in his chest.

"It makes me think," he said, "of Tommie Toohy, him that's a lieutinant now over in Canarsie. 'Tis a lesson ye'd do well to mind, Pether."

Peter signified that he was all ears.

"He had the cop bug worse than you, even, Pether," said the veteran.

Peter flushed beneath his freckles.

"Yis, he had it bad, this Tommie Toohy," pursued Officer Gaffney. "He was crazy to be a cop as soon as he could walk. I never seen a happier man in me life than Toohy the day he swaggers out of the station-house to go on post up in the twenty-ninth precinct. In thim days there was nawthin' up there but rows of little cottages wid stoops on thim; nawthin but dacint, respictable folks lived there and they always give that beat to a recruity because it was so quiet. Well, Toohy goes on juty at six o'clock in the evenin', puffed up wid importance and polishing his shield every minute or two. 'Tis a short beat— up one side of Garden Avenue and down on the other side. Toohy paces up and down, swingin' his night-stick and lookin' hard and suspicious at every man, woman or child that passes him. He was just bustin' to show his authority. But nawthin' happened. Toohy paced up and back, up and back, up and back. It gets to be eight o'clock. Nawthin happens. Toohy can stand it no longer. He spies an auld man sittin' on his stoop, peacefully smokin' his evenin' pipe. Toohy goes up to the old fellow and glares at him.

"'What are you doin' there?' says Toohy.

"'Nawthin,' says the auld man.

"'Well,' says Toohy, wid a stern scowl, shakin' his night-stick at the scared auld gazabo, 'You go in the house.'"

Peter chuckled.

"But Toohy lived to make a good cop for all that," finished the veteran. "Wid all his recruity monkey-shines, he never ran away whin needed."

"I wonder could he bound Bolivia," said Peter Mullaney.

"I'll bet he could," said Officer Gaffney, "if it was in his precinct."

Late next afternoon, Peter sat gnawing his knuckles in a corner of the police schoolroom. All morning he had battled with the examination in general education. It had not been as hard as he had feared, but he was worried nevertheless. So much was at stake.

He was quivering all over when he was summoned to the office of the Commissioner, and his quivering grew as he saw the rigid face of Commissioner Kondorman, and read no ray of hope there. Papers were strewn over the official desk. Kondorman looked up, frowned.

"Mullaney," he said, bluntly, "you've failed."

"F-failed?" quavered Peter.

"Yes. In general education. I told you if you made excellent marks we'd overlook your deficiency in height. Your paper"— he tapped it with his finger— "isn't bad. But it isn't good. You fell down hard on question seventeen."

"Question seventeen?"

"Yes. The question is, 'Where is the Tropic of Capricorn?' And your answer is"— the Commissioner paused before he pronounced the damning words— "'The Tropic of Capricon is in the Bronx.'"

Peter gulped, blinked, opened and shut his fists, twisted his cap in his hands, a picture of abject misery. The Commissioner's voice was crisp and final.

"That's all, Mullaney. Sorry. Turn in your uniform at once. Well?"

Peter had started away, had stopped and was facing the commissioner.

"Commissioner," he begged—

"That will do," snapped the Commissioner. "I gave you your chance; you understood the conditions."

"It— it isn't that," fumbled out Peter Mullaney, "but— but wouldn't you please let me go out on post once more with Officer Gaffney?"

"I don't see what good that would do," said Commissioner Kondorman, gruffly.

Tears were in Peter's eyes.

"You see— you see—" he got out with an effort, "it would be my last chance to wear the uniform— and I— wanted— somebody— to— see— me— in— it— just— once."

The Commissioner stroked his chin reflectively.

"Were you scheduled to go out on post for instruction," he asked, "if you passed your examination?"

"Yes, sir. From eight to eleven."

The Commissioner thought a moment.

"Well," he said, "I'll let you go. It won't alter the case any, of course. You're through, here. Turn in your uniform by eleven thirty, sure."

Peter mumbled his thanks, and went out of the office with shoulders that drooped as if he were carrying a safe on them.

IT WAS with heavy steps and a heavier heart that little Peter Mullaney, by the side of his mentor, passed the corner where Judy McNulty stood proudly waiting for him. He saluted her gravely with two fingers to his visor— police officers never bow— and kept his eyes straight ahead. He did not have the heart to stop, to speak to her, to tell her what had happened to him. He hadn't even told Officer Gaffney. He stalked along in bitter silence; his eyes were fixed on his shoes, the stout, shiny police shoes he had bought to wear at his graduation, the shoes he was to have worn when he stepped up to the Commissioner and received his shield, with head erect and a high heart. His empty hands hung heavily at his sides; there was no baton of authority in them; there never would be. Beneath the place his silver shield would never cover now was a cold numbness.

"DAMN the Tropic of Capricorn," came from between clenched teeth, "Damn the Tropic of Capricorn."

Gaffney's quick ears heard him.

"Still thinkin' about the Tropic of Capricorn?" he asked, not knowing that the words made Peter wince. "Well, me bye, 'twill do no harm to know where it is. I'm not denyin' that it's a gran' thing for a cop to be a scholar. But just the same 'tis me firm belief that a man may be able to tell the difference bechune a begonia and a petunia, he may be able to tell where the— now— Tropic of Unicorn is, he may know who wrote "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," and who invented the sprinklin' cart, he may be able to tell the population of Peking and Pann Yann, but he ain't a cop at all if he iver runs away whin needed. Ye can stake your shield on that, me bye."

His shield? Peter dug his nails into the palm of his hand. Blind hate against the Commissioner, against the whole department, flared up in him. He'd strip the uniform off on the spot, he'd hurl it into the gutter, he'd—

Officer Gaffney had stopped short. A woman was coming through the night, running. As she panted up to them in the quiet, deserted street, the two men saw that she was a middle-aged woman in a wrapper, and that she was white with fright.

"Burglars," she gasped.

"Where?" rapped out Officer Gaffney.

"Number 97."

"Be calm, ma'am. What makes ye think they're burglars?"

"I heard them.... Moving around.... In the drawing room.... Upstairs."

"Who are you?" asked the old policeman, imperturbably.

"Mrs. Finn— caretaker. The family is away."

"Pether," said Officer Gaffney, "you stay here and mind the beat like a good bucko, while I stroll down to ninety-sivin wid Mrs. Finn."

"Let me come too, Jawn," cried Peter.

Gaffney laid his big hand on little Peter's chest.

"'Tis probably a cat movin' around," he said softly so that Mrs. Finn could not hear. "Lonely wimmin is always hearin' things. Besides me ambitious but diminootive frind, if they was yeggs what good could ye do wid no stick and no gun? You stay here on the corner like I'm tellin' you and I'll be back in ten minutes by the clock."

PETER MULLANEY waited on the corner. He saw the bulky figure of Officer Gaffney proceed at a dignified but rapid waddle down the block, followed by the smaller, more agitated figure of the woman. He saw Officer Gaffney go into the basement entrance, and he saw Mrs. Finn hesitate, then timidly follow. He waited. A long minute passed. Another. Another. Then the scream of a woman hit his ears. He saw Mrs. Finn dart from the house, wringing her hands, screaming. He sprinted down to her.

"They've kilt him," screamed the woman. "Oh, they've kilt the officer."

"Who? Tell me. Quick!"

"The yeggs," she wailed. "There's two of them. The officer went upstairs. They shot him. He rolled down. Don't go in. They'll shoot you. Send for help."

Peter stood still. He was not thinking of the yeggs, or of Gaffney. He was hearing Kondorman ask, "Where is the Tropic of Capricorn?" He was hearing Kondorman say, "You've failed." Something had him tight. Something was asking him, "Why go in that house? Why risk your life? You're not a cop. You'll never be a cop. They threw you out. They made a fool of you for a trifle."

Peter started back from the open door; he looked down; the street light fell on the brass buttons of his uniform; the words of the old policeman darted across his brain: "A cop never runs away when needed."

He caught his breath and plunged into the house. At the foot of the stairs leading up to the second floor he saw by the street light that came through the opened door, the sprawling form of a big man; the light glanced from the silver badge on his broad chest. Peter bent over hastily.

"Is it you, Pether?" breathed Gaffney, with difficulty. "They got me. Got me good. Wan of thim knocked me gun from me hand and the other plugged me. Through the chist. I'm done for, Pether. I can't breathe. Stop, Pether, stop!"

The veteran tried to struggle to his feet, but sank back, holding fiercely to Peter's leg.

"Let me go, Jawn. Let me go," whispered Peter hoarsely.

"They'll murder you, Pether. It's two men to wan,— and they're armed."

"Let me go in, I tell you, Jawn. Let me go. A good cop never runs— you said it yourself— let me go—"

Slowly the grip on Peter's leg relaxed; the dimming eyes of the wounded man had suddenly grown very bright.

"Ye're right, me little bucko," he said faintly. "Ye'll be a credit to the foorce, Pether." And then the light died out of his eyes and the hand that had grasped Peter fell limp to the floor.

Peter was up the stairs that led to the second floor in three swift, wary jumps. He heard a skurry of footsteps in the back of the house. Dashing a potted fern from its slender wooden stand, he grasped the end of the stand, and swinging it like a baseball bat, he pushed through velvet curtains into a large room. There was enough light there from the moon for him to see two black figures prying desperately at a door. They wheeled as he entered. Bending low he hurled himself at them as he had done when playing football on a back lot. There was a flash so near that it burned his face; he felt a sharp fork of pain cross his head as if his scalp had been slashed by a red-hot knife. With all the force in his taut body he swung the stand at the nearest man; it caught the man across the face and he went down with a broken, guttural cry. A second and a third shot from the revolver of the other man roared in Peter's ears. Still crouching, Peter dived through the darkness at the knees of the man with the gun; together they went to the floor in a cursing, grunting tangle.

The burglar struggled to jab down the butt of his revolver on the head of the small man who had fastened himself to him with the death grip of a mongoose on a cobra. They thrashed about the room. Peter had gotten a hold on the man's pistol wrist and he held to it while the man with his free hand rained blow after blow on the defenseless face and bleeding head of the little man. As they fought in the darkness, the burglar with a sudden violent wrench tore loose the clinging Peter, and hurled him against a table, which crashed to the floor with the impact of Peter's one hundred and thirty pounds of muscle and bone.

As Peter hurtled back, his arms shot out mechanically to break his fall; one groping hand closed on a heavy iron candle-stick that had stood on the table. He was up in a flash, the candle-stick in his hand. His eyes were blinded by the blood from his wound; he dashed the blood away with his coat-sleeve. With a short, sharp motion he hurled the candle-stick at his opponent's head, outlined against a window, not six feet away. At the moment the missile flew from Peter's hand, the yegg steadied himself and fired. Then he reeled to the floor as the candle-stick's heavy base struck him between the eyes.

For the ghost of a second, Peter Mullaney stood swaying; then his hands clawed at the place on his chest where his shield might have been as if his heart had caught fire and he wished to tear it out of himself; then, quite gently, he crumpled to the floor, and there was the quiet of night in the room.

AS LITTLE Peter Mullaney lay in the hospital trying to see through his bandages the flowers Judy McNulty had brought him, he heard the voice of the doctor saying:

"Here he is. Nasty chest wound. We almost lost him. He didn't seem to care much whether he pulled through or not. Was delirious for hours. Kept muttering something about the Tropic of Capricorn. But I think he'll come through all right now. You just can't kill one of these tough little micks."

Peering through his bandages, Peter Mullaney saw the square shoulders and stern face of Commissioner Kondorman.

"Good morning, Mullaney," the Commissioner said, in his formal official voice. "I'm glad to hear that you're going to get better."

"Thank you, Commissioner," murmured Peter, watching him with wondering eyes.

Commissioner Kondorman felt round in an inside pocket and brought out a small box from which he carefully took something that glittered in the morning sunlight. Bending over the bed, he pinned it on the night-shirt of Peter Mullaney. Peter felt it; stopped breathing; felt it again; slowly pulled it out so that he could look at it.

"It was Officer John Gaffney's," said the Commissioner, and his voice was trying hard to be official and formal, but it was getting husky. "He was a brave officer. I wanted another brave officer to have his shield."

"But, Commissioner," cried Peter, winking very hard with both eyes, for they were blurring, "haven't you made a mistake? You must have got the wrong man. Don't you remember? I'm the one that said the Tropic of Capricorn is in the Bronx!"

"Officer Mullaney," said Commissioner Kondorman in an odd voice, "if a cop like you says the Tropic of Capricorn is in the Bronx, then, by the lord Harry, that's where the Tropic of Capricorn is."

8: Mr. Braddy's Bottle

"THIS," said Mr. William Lum solemnly, "is the very las' bottle of this stuff in these United States!"

It was a dramatic moment. He held it aloft with the pride and tender care of a recent parent exhibiting a first-born child. Mr. Hugh Braddy emitted a long, low whistle, expressive of the awe due the occasion.

"You don't tell me!" he said.

"Yes, siree! There ain't another bottle of this wonderful old hooch left anywhere. Not anywhere. A man couldn't get one like it for love nor money. Not for love nor money." He paused to regard the bottle fondly. "Nor anything else," he added suddenly.

Mr. Braddy beamed fatly. His moon face— like a two-hundred-and-twenty-pound Kewpie's— wore a look of pride and responsibility. It was his bottle.

"You don't tell me!" he said.

"Yes, siree. Must be all of thirty years old, if it's a day. Mebbe forty. Mebbe fifty. Why, that stuff is worth a dollar a sniff, if it's worth a jit. And you not a drinking man! Wadda pity! Wadda pity!"

There was a shade of envy in Mr. Lum's tone, for Mr. Lum was, or had been, a drinking man; yet Fate, ever perverse, had decreed that Mr. Braddy, teetotaler, should find the ancient bottle while poking about in the cellar of his very modest new house— rented— in that part of Long Island City where small, wooden cottages break out in clusters, here and there, in a species of municipal measles.

Mr. Braddy, on finding the treasure, had immediately summoned Mr. Lum from his larger and more pretentious house near by, as one who would be able to appraise the find, and he and Mr. Lum now stood on the very spot in the cellar where, beneath a pile of old window blinds, the venerable liquor had been found. Mr. Braddy, it was plain, thought very highly of Mr. Lum's opinions, and that great man was good-naturedly tolerant of the more placid and adipose Mr. Braddy, who was known— behind his back— in the rug department of the Great Store as "Ole Hippopotamus." Not that he would have resented it, had the veriest cash boy called him by this uncomplimentary but descriptive nickname to his face, for Mr. Braddy was the sort of person who never resents anything.

"Y'know, Mr. Lum," he remarked, crinkling his pink brow in philosophic thought, "sometimes I wish I had been a drinking man. I never minded if a man took a drink. Not that I had any patience with these here booze fighters. No. Enough is enough, I always say. But if a fella wanted to take a drink, outside of

business hours, of course, or go off on a spree once in a while— well, I never saw no harm in it. I often wished I could do it myself."

"Well, why the dooce didn't you?" inquired Mr. Lum.

"As a matter of solid fact, I was scared to. That's the truth. I was always scared I'd get pinched or fall down a manhole or something. You see, I never did have much nerve." This was an unusual burst of confidence on the part of Mr. Braddy, who, since he had moved into Mr. Lum's neighborhood a month before, had played a listening rôle in his conferences with Mr. Lum, who was a thin, waspy man of forty-four, in ambush behind a fierce pair of mustachios. Mr. Braddy, essence of diffidence that he was, had confined his remarks to "You don't tell me!" or, occasionally, "Ain't it the truth?" in the manner of a Greek chorus.

NOW inspired, perhaps, by the discovery that he was the owner of a priceless bottle of spirits, he unbosomed himself to Mr. Lum. Mr. Lum made answer.

"Scared to drink? Scared of anything? Bosh! Tommyrot! Everybody's got nerve. Only some don't use it," said Mr. Lum, who owned a book called "The Power House in Man's Mind," and who subscribed for, and quoted from, a pamphlet for successful men, called "I Can and I Will."

"Mebbe," said Mr. Braddy. "But the first and only time I took a drink I got a bad scare. When I was a young feller, just starting in the rugs in the Great Store, I went out with the gang one night, and, just to be smart, I orders beer. Them was the days when beer was a nickel for a stein a foot tall. The minute I taste the stuff I feel uncomfortable. I don't dare not drink it, for fear the gang would give me the laugh. So I ups and drinks it, every drop, although it tastes worse and worse. Well, sir, that beer made me sicker than a dog. I haven't tried any drink stronger than malted milk since. And that was all of twenty years ago. It wasn't that I thought a little drinking a sin. I was just scared; that's all. Some of the other fellows in the rugs drank— till they passed a law against it. Why, I once seen Charley Freedman sell a party a genuine, expensive Bergamo rug for two dollars and a half when he was pickled. But when he was sober there wasn't a better salesman in the rugs."

Mr. Lum offered no comment; he was weighing the cob-webbed bottle in his hand, and holding it to the light in a vain attempt to peer through the golden-brown fluid. Mr. Braddy went on:

"I guess I was born timid. I dunno. I wanted to join a lodge, but I was scared of the 'nitiation. I wanted to move out to Jersey, but I didn't. Why, all by life I've wanted to take a Turkish bath; but somehow, every time I got to the door of the place I got cold feet and backed out. I wanted a raise, too, and by golly,

between us, I believe they'd give it to me; but I keep putting off asking for it and putting off and putting off—"

"I was like that— once," put in Mr. Lum. "But it don't pay. I'd still be selling shoes in the Great Store— and looking at thousands of feet every day and saying thousands of times, 'Yes, madam, this is a three-A, and very smart, too,' when it is really a six-D and looks like hell on her. No wonder I took a drink or two in those days."

He set down the bottle and flared up with a sudden, fierce bristling of his mustaches.

"And now they have to come along and take a man's liquor away from him— drat 'em! What did our boys fight for? Liberty, I say. And then, after being mowed down in France, they come home to find the country dry! It ain't fair, I say. Of course, don't think for a minute that I mind losing the licker. Not me. I always could take it or leave it alone. But what I hate is having them say a man can't drink this and he can't drink that. They'll be getting after our smokes, next. I read in the paper last night a piece that asked something that's been on my mind a long time: 'Whither are we drifting?'"

"I dunno," said Mr. Braddy.

"You'd think," went on Mr. Lum, not heeding, as a sense of oppression and injustice surged through him, "that liquor harmed men. As if it harmed anybody but the drunkards! Liquor never hurt a successful man; no, siree. Look at me!"

Mr. Braddy looked. He had heard Mr. Lum make the speech that customarily followed this remark a number of times, but it never failed to interest him.

"Look at me!" said Mr. Lum, slapping his chest. "Buyer in the shoes in the Great Store, and that ain't so worse, if I do say it myself. That's what nerve did. What if I did used to get a snootful now and then? I had the self-confidence, and that did the trick. When old man Briggs croaked, I heard that the big boss was looking around outside the store for a man to take his place as buyer in the shoes. So I goes right to the boss, and I says, 'Look here, Mr. Berger, I been in the shoes eighteen years, and I know shoes from A to Z, and back again. I can fill Briggs' shoes,' I says. And that gets him laughing, although I didn't mean it that way, for I don't think humor has any place in business.

"'Well,' he says, 'you certainly got confidence in yourself. I'll see what you can do in Briggs' job. It will pay forty a week.' I knew old Briggs was getting more than forty, and I could see that Berger needed me, so I spins on him and I laughs in his face. 'Forty popcorn balls!' I says to him. 'Sixty is the least that job's worth, and you know it.' Well, to make a long story short, he comes through with sixty!"

This story never failed to fascinate Mr. Braddy, for two reasons. First, he liked to be taken into the confidence of a man who made so princely a salary; and, second, it reminded him of the tormenting idea that he was worth more than the thirty dollars he found every Friday in his envelope, and it bolstered up his spirit. He felt that with the glittering example of Mr. Lum and the constant harassings by his wife, who had and expressed strong views on the subject, he would some day conquer his qualms and demand the raise he felt to be due him.

"I wish I had your crust," he said to Mr. Lum in tones of frank admiration.

"You have," rejoined Mr. Lum. "I didn't know that I had, for a long, long time, and then it struck me one day, as I was trying an Oxford-brogue style K6 on a dame, 'How did Schwab get where he is? How did Rockefeller? How did this here Vanderlip? Was it by being humble? Was it by setting still?' You bet your sweet boots it wasn't. I just been reading an article in 'I Can and I Will,' called 'Big Bugs— And How They Got That Way,' and it tells all about those fellows and how most of them wasn't nothing but newspaper reporters and puddlers— whatever that is— until one day they said, 'I'm going to do something decisive!' And they did it. That's the idea. Do something decisive. That's what I did, and look at me! Braddy, why the devil don't you do something decisive?"

"What?" asked Mr. Braddy meekly.

"Anything. Take a plunge. Why, I bet you never took a chance in your life. You got good stuff in you, Braddy, too. There ain't a better salesman in the rugs. Why, only the other day I overheard Berger say, 'That fellow Braddy knows more about rugs than the Mayor of Bagdad himself. Too bad he hasn't more push in him.'"

"I guess mebbe he's right," said Mr. Braddy.

"Right? Of course, he's right about you being a crack salesman. Why, you could sell corkscrews in Kansas," said Mr. Lum. "You got the stuff, all right. But the trouble is you can sell everything but yourself. Get busy! Act! Do something! Make a decision! Take a step!"

Mr. Braddy said nothing. Little lines furrowed his vast brow; he half closed his small eyes; his round face took on an intent, scowling look. He was thinking. Silence filled the cellar. Then, with the air of a man whose mind is made up, Hugh Braddy said a decisive and remarkable thing.

"Mr. Bill Lum," he said, "I'm going to get drunk!"

"What? You? Hugh Braddy? Drunk? My God!" The idea was too much even for the mind of Mr. Lum.

"Yes," said Mr. Braddy, in a hollow voice, like Cæsar's at the Rubicon, "I'm going to drink what's in that bottle this very night."

"Not all of it?" Mr. Lum, as an expert in such things, registered dismay.

"As much as is necessary," was the firm response. Mr. Lum brightened considerably at this.

"Better let me help you. There's enough for both of us. Plenty," he suggested.

"Are you sure?" asked Mr. Braddy anxiously.

"Sure," said Mr. Lum.

ii

AND he was right. There was more than enough. It was nine o'clock that night when the cellar door of Mr. Braddy's small house opened cautiously, and Mr. Braddy followed his stub nose into the moonlight. Mr. Lum, unsteady but gay, followed.

Mr. Braddy, whose customary pace was a slow, dignified waddle, immediately broke into a brisk trot.

"Doan' go so fas', Hoo," called Mr. Lum, for they had long since reached the first-name stage.

"Gotta get to city, N'Yawk, b'fore it's too late," explained Mr. Braddy, reining down to a walk.

"Too late for what, Hoo?" inquired Mr. Lum.

"I dunno," said Mr. Braddy.

They made their way, by a series of skirmishes and flank movements, to the subway station, and caught a train for Manhattan. Their action in doing this was purely automatic.

Once aboard, they began a duet, which they plucked out of the dim past:

"Oh, dem golden slippers! Oh, dem golden slippers!"

This, unfortunately, was all they could remember of it, but it was enough to supply them with a theme and variations that lasted until they arrived in the catacombs far below the Grand Central Station. There they were shooed out by a vigilant subway guard.

They proceeded along the brightly lighted streets. Mr. Braddy's step was that of a man walking a tight-rope. Mr. Lum's method of progression was a series of short spurts. Between the Grand Central and Times Square they passed some one thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine persons, of whom one thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine remarked, "Where did they get it?"

On Broadway they saw a crowd gathered in front of a building.

"Fight," said Mr. Braddy hopefully.

"'Naccident," thought Mr. Lum. At least a hundred men and women were industriously elbowing each other and craning necks in the hope of seeing the center of attraction. Mr. Braddy, ordinarily the most timid of innocent bystanders, was now a lion in point of courage.

"Gangway," he called. "We're 'tectives," he added bellicosely to those who protested, as he and Mr. Lum shoved and lunged their way through the rapidly growing crowd. The thing which had caused so many people to stop, to crane necks, to push, was a small newsboy who had dropped a dime down through an iron grating and who was fishing for it with a piece of chewing gum tied on the end of a string.

They spent twenty minutes giving advice and suggestions to the fisher, such as:

"A leetle to the left, now. Naw, naw. To the right. Now you got it. Shucks! You missed it. Try again." At length they were rewarded by seeing the boy retrieve the dime, just before the crowd had grown to such proportions that it blocked the traffic.

The two adventurers continued on their way, pausing once to buy four frankfurters, which they ate noisily, one in each hand.

Suddenly the veteran drinker, Mr. Lum, was struck by a disquieting thought.

"Hoo, I gotta go home. My wife'll be back from the movies by eleven, and if I ain't home and in bed when she gets there, she'll skin me alive; that's what she'll do."

Mr. Braddy was struck by the application of this to his own case.

"Waddabout me, hey? Waddabout me, B'lum?" he asked plaintively. "Angelica will just about kill me."

Mr. Lum, leaning against the Automat, darkly considered this eventuality. At length he spoke.

"You go getta Turkish bath. Tell 'Gellica y' hadda stay in store all night to take inventory. Turkish bath'll make you fresh as a daisy. Fresh as a li'l' daisy—fresh as a li'l' daisy—" Saying which Mr. Lum disappeared into the eddying crowd and was gone. Mr. Braddy was alone in the great city.

But he was not dismayed. While disposing of the ancient liquor, he and Mr. Lum had discussed philosophies of life, and Mr. Braddy had decided that his was, "A man can do what he is a-mind to." And Mr. Braddy was very much a-mind to take a Turkish bath. To him it represented the last stroke that cut the shackles of timidity. "I can and I will," he said a bit thickly, in imitation of Mr. Lum's heroes.

iii

THERE was a line of men, mostly paunchy, waiting to be assigned dressing rooms when Mr. Braddy entered the Turkish bath, egged sternly on by his new philosophy. He did not shuffle meekly into the lowest place and wait the fulfillment of the biblical promise that some one would say, "Friend, go up higher." Not he. "I can and I will," he remarked to the man at the end of the line, and, forthwith, with a majestic, if rolling, gait, advanced to the window where a rabbit of a man, with nose glasses chained to his head, was sleepily dealing out keys and taking in valuables. The other men in line were too surprised to protest. Mr. Braddy took off his huge derby hat and rapped briskly on the counter.

"Service, here. Li'l' service!"

The Rabbit with the nose glasses blinked mildly.

"Wotja want?" he inquired.

"Want t' be made fresh as a li'l' daisy," said Mr. Braddy.

"Awright," said the Rabbit, yawning. "Here's a key for locker number thirty-six. Got any valuables? One dollar, please."

Mr. Braddy, after some fumbling, produced the dollar, a dog-eared wallet, a tin watch, a patent cigar cutter, a pocket piece from a pickle exhibit at the World's Fair in Chicago, and some cigar coupons.

The Rabbit handed him a large key on a rubber band.

"Put it on your ankle. Next," he yawned.

And then Mr. Braddy stepped through the white door that, to him, led into the land of adventure and achievement.

He found himself in a brightly lighted corridor pervaded by an aroma not unlike the sort a Chinese hand laundry has. There were rows of little, white doors, with numbers painted on them. Mr. Braddy began at once a search for his own dressing room, No. 36; but after investigating the main street and numerous side alleys, in a somewhat confused but resolute frame of mind, he discovered that he was lost in a rabbit warren of white woodwork. He found Nos. 96, 66, 46, and 6, but he could not find No. 36. He tried entering one of the booths at random, but was greeted with a not-too-cordial, "Hey, bo; wrong stall. Back out!" from an ample gentleman made up as grandpa in the advertisements of Non-Skid underwear. He tried bawling, "Service, li'l' service," and rapping on the woodwork with his derby, but nothing happened, so he replaced his hat on his head and resumed his search. He came to a door with no number on it, pushed it open, and stepped boldly into the next room.

Pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat— it was the shower bath on Mr. Braddy's hat.

"'Srainin'," he remarked affably.

An attendant, clad in short, white running pants, spied him and came bounding through the spray.

"Hey, mister, why don't you take your clothes off?"

"Can't find it," replied Mr. Braddy.

"Can't find what?" the attendant demanded.

"Thirry-sizz."

"Thirry sizz?"

"Yep, thirry-sizz."

"Aw, he means room number thoity-six," said a voice from under one of the showers.

The attendant conducted Mr. Braddy up and down the white rabbit warren, across an avenue, through a lane, and paused at last before No. 36. Mr. Braddy went in, and the attendant followed.

"Undress you, mister?"

The Mr. Braddy of yesterday would have been too weak-willed to protest, but the new Mr. Braddy was the master of his fate, the captain of his soul, and he replied with some heat:

"Say, wadda you take me for? Can undress m'self." He did so, muttering the while: "Undress me? Wadda they take me for? Wadda they take me for?"

Then he strode, a bit uncertainly, out into the corridor, pink, enormous, his key dangling from his ankle like a ball and chain. The man in the white running pants piloted Mr. Braddy into the hot room. Mr. Braddy was delighted, intrigued by it. On steamer chairs reclined other large men, stripped to their diamond rings, which glittered faintly in the dim-lit room. They made guttural noises, as little rivulets glided down the salmon-pink mounds of flesh, and every now and then they drank water from large tin cups. Mr. Braddy seated himself in the hot room, and tried to read a very damp copy of an evening paper, which he decided was in a foreign language, until he discovered he was holding it upside down.

An attendant approached and offered him a cup of water. The temptation was to do the easy thing— to take the proffered cup; but Mr. Braddy didn't want a drink of anything just then, so he waved it away, remarking lightly, "Never drink water," and was rewarded by a battery of bass titters from the pink mountains about him, who, it developed from their conversation, were all very important persons, indeed, in the world of finance. But in time Mr. Braddy began to feel unhappy. The heat was making him ooze slowly away. Hell, he thought, must be like this. He must act. He stood up.

"I doan like this," he bellowed. An attendant came in response to the roar.

"What, you still in the hot room? Say, mister, it's a wonder you ain't been melted to a puddle of gravy. Here, come with me. I'll send you through the steam room to Gawge, and Gawge will give you a good rub."

He led Mr. Braddy to the door of the steam room, full of dense, white steam.

"Hey, Gawge," he shouted.

"Hello, Al, wotja want?" came a voice faintly from the room beyond the steam room.

"Oh, Gawge, catch thoity-six when he comes through," shouted Al.

He gave Mr. Braddy a little push and closed the door. Mr. Braddy found himself surrounded by steam which seemed to be boiling and scalding his very soul. He attempted to cry "Help," and got a mouthful of rich steam that made him splutter. He started to make a dash in the direction of Gawge's door, and ran full tilt into another mountain of avoirdupois, which cried indignantly, "Hey, watch where you're going, will you? You ain't back at dear old Yale, playing football." Mr. Braddy had a touch of panic. This was serious. To be lost in a labyrinth of dressing rooms was distressing enough, but here he was slowly but certainly being steamed to death, with Gawge and safety waiting for him but a few feet away. An idea! Firemen, trapped in burning buildings, he had read in the newspapers, always crawl on their hands and knees, because the lower air is purer. Laboriously he lowered himself to his hands and knees, and, like a flabby pink bear, with all sense of direction gone, he started through the steam.

"Hey!"

"Lay off me, guy!"

"Ouch, me ankle!"

"Wot's the big idea? This ain't no circus."

"Leggo me shin."

"Ouf!"

The "ouf" came from Mr. Braddy, who had been soundly kicked in the mid-riff by an angry dweller in the steam room, whose ankle he had grabbed as he careered madly but futilely around the room. Then, success! The door! He opened it.

"Where's Gawge?" he demanded faintly.

"Well, I'll be damned! It's thoity-six back again!"

It was Al's voice; not Gawge. Mr. Braddy had come back to the same door he started from!

He was unceremoniously thrust by Al back into the steaming hell from which he had just escaped, and once more Al shouted across, "Hey, Gawge, catch thoity-six when he comes through."

Mr. Braddy, on his hands and knees, steered as straight a course as he could for the door that opened to Gawge and fresh air, but the bewildering steam once again closed round him, and he butted the tumid calves of one of the Moes and was roundly cursed. Veering to the left, he bumped into the legs of another Moe so hard that this Moe went down as if he had been submarined, a tangle of plump legs, arms, and profanity. Mr. Braddy, in the confusion, reached the door and pushed it open.

"Holy jumpin' mackerel! Thoity-six again! Say, you ain't supposed to come back here. You're supposed to keep going straight across the steam room to Gawge." It was Al, enraged.

Once more Mr. Braddy was launched into the steam room. How many times he tried to traverse it— bear fashion— he never could remember, but it must have been at least six times that he reappeared at the long-suffering Al's door, and was returned, too steamed, now, to protest. Mr. Braddy's new-found persistence was not to be denied, however, and ultimately he reached the right door, to find waiting for him a large, genial soul who was none other than Gawge, and who asked, with untimely facetiousness, Mr. Braddy thought:

"Didja enjoy the trip?"

Gawge placed Mr. Braddy on a marble slab and scrubbed him with a large and very rough brush, which made Mr. Braddy scream with laughter, particularly when the rough bristles titillated the soles of his feet.

"Wot's the joke?" inquired Gawge.

"You ticker me," gasped Mr. Braddy.

He was rather enjoying himself now. It made him feel important to have so much attention. But he groaned and gurgled a little when Gawge attacked him with cupped hands and beat a tattoo up and down his spine and all over his palpitating body. Wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, wop wop went Gawge's hands.

Then he rolled Mr. Braddy from the slab, like jelly from a mold. Mr. Braddy jelled properly and was stood in a corner.

"All over?" he asked. Zizzzzzz! A stream of icy water struck him between his shoulder blades.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!" he cried. The stream, as if in response to his outcries, immediately became boiling hot. First one, then the other played on him. Then they stopped. An attendant appeared and dried Mr. Braddy vigorously with a great, shaggy towel, and then led him to a dormitory, where, on white cots, rows of Moes puffed and wheezed and snored and dreamed dreams of great profits.

Mr. Braddy tumbled happily into his cot, boiled but triumphant. He had taken a Turkish bath! The world was at his feet! He had made a decision! He

had acted on it! He had met the demon Timidity in fair fight and downed him. He had been drunk, indubitably drunk, for the first and last time. He assured himself that he never wanted to taste the stuff again. But he couldn't help but feel that his one jamboree had made a new man of him, opening new lands of adventure, showing him that "he could if he would." As he buried his head in the pillow, he rehearsed the speech he would make to Mr. Berger, the manager, in the morning. Should he begin, "Mr. Berger, if you think I'm worth it, will you please raise my pay five dollars a week?" No, by Heaven, a thousand noes! He was worth it, and he would say so. Should he begin, "See here, Mr. Berger, the time has come for you to raise my salary ten dollars?" No, he'd better ask for twenty dollars while he was about it, and compromise on ten dollars as a favor to his employers. But then, again, why stop at twenty dollars? His sales in the rugs warranted much more. "I can have thirty dollars, and I will," he said a number of times to the pillow. Carefully he rehearsed his speech: "Now, see here, Berger—" and then he was whirled away into a dream in which he saw a great hand take down the big sign from the front of the Great Store, and put up in its place a still larger sign, reading:

BRADDY'S GREATER STORE
Dry Goods and Turkish Baths
Hugh Braddy, Sole Prop.

iv

HE WOKE feeling very strange, and not exactly as fresh as a daisy. He felt much more like a cauliflower cooled after boiling. His head buzzed a bit, with a sort of gay giddiness, but for all that he knew that he was not the same Hugh Braddy that had been catapulted from bed by an alarm clock in his Long Island City home the morning before.

"A man can do what he's a mind to," he said to himself in a slightly husky voice. His first move was to get breakfast. The old Hugh Braddy would have gone humbly to a one-armed beanery for one black coffee and one doughnut— price, one dime. The new Hugh Braddy considered this breakfast, and dismissed it as beneath a man of his importance. Instead, he went to the Mortimore Grill and had a substantial club breakfast. He called up Angelica, his wife, and cut short her lecture with—"Unavoidable, m'dear. Inventory at the store." His tone, somehow, made her hesitate to question him further. "It'll be

all right about that raise," he added grandly. "Have a good supper to-night. G'by."

He bought himself an eleven-cent cigar, instead of his accustomed six-center, and, puffing it in calm defiance of a store rule, strode into the employees' entrance of the Great Store a little after nine. Without wavering, he marched straight to the office of Mr. Berger, who looked up from his morning mail in surprise.

"Well, Mr. Braddy?"

Mr. Braddy blew a smoke ring, playfully stuck his finger through it, and said:

"Mr. Berger, I'm thinking of going with another concern. A fellow was in to see me the other day, and he says to me, 'Braddy, you are the best rug man in this town.' And he hinted that if I'd come over with his concern they'd double my salary. Now, I've been with the Great Store more than twenty years, and I like the place, Mr. Berger, and I know the ropes, so naturally I don't want to change. But, of course, I must go where the most money is. I owe that to Mrs. B. But I'm going to do the square thing. I'm going to give you a chance to meet the ante. Sixty's the figure."

He waved his cigar, signifying the utter inconsequence of whether Mr. Berger met the ante or not. Before the amazed manager could frame a reply, Mr. Braddy continued:

"You needn't make up your mind right away, Mr. Berger. I don't have to give my final decision until to-night. You can think it over. I suggest you look up my sales record for last year before you reach any decision." And he was gone.

All that day Mr. Braddy did his best not to think of what he had done. Even the new Mr. Braddy— philosophy and all— could not entirely banish the vision of Angelica if he had to break the news that he had issued an ultimatum for twice his salary and had been escorted to the exit.

He threw himself into the work of selling rugs so vigorously that his fellow salesmen whispered to each other, "What ails the Ole Hippopotamus?" He even got rid of a rug that had been in the department for uncounted years— showing a dark-red lion browsing on a field of rich pink roses— by pointing out to the woman who bought it that it would amuse the children.

At four o'clock a flip office boy tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Mr. Boiger wants to see you." Mr. Braddy, whose head felt as if a hive of bees were establishing a home there, but whose philosophy still burned clear and bright, let Mr. Berger wait a full ten minutes, and then, with dignified tread that gave no hint of his inward qualms, entered the office of the manager.

It seemed an age before Mr. Berger spoke.

"I've been giving your proposition careful consideration, Mr. Braddy," he said. "I have decided that we'd like to keep you in the rugs. We'll meet that ante."

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9: Gretna Greenhorns

THE BROWN EYES of Chester Arthur Jessup, Jr., were fixed on the maroon banner of the Clintonia High School which adorned his bedroom wall, but they did not see that vivid emblem of the institution in whose academic halls he was a senior. Rather, they appeared to look through it, beyond it, into some far-away land. Bright but unseeing, they proclaimed that their owner was in that state of mild hypnosis known as "turkey-dreaming." His lips were parted in a slight smile, and the shoe which he had been in the act of removing as he sat on his bed was poised in mid-air above the floor, for reverie had overcome him in the very midst of preparations for an evening call.

The object of his pensive musings was at that moment eating her evening meal some blocks away in the home of her parents. Fondly, with that inward eye which is alleged to be the bliss of solitude, Chester followed the process. It had only been lately that he could bring himself to admit that she ate at all. She was so dainty, so ethereal. And yet reason, and the course he was taking in physiology, told him that she, even she, must sometimes give way to the unworthy promptings of necessity, and eat. But that she should eat as ordinary mortals do, was unthinkable. It was not the first time that Chester, in reverie, had permitted her a slight refection. The menu of her meals never varied. To-night, as on other occasions, it consisted of watercress salad, a mere nibble of it; a delicate dab of ice-cream, no bigger than a thimble; a small cup of tea, and, perhaps, a lady-finger. The lady-finger was a concession. On the occasion of his last call, Mildred had confessed that she could die eating lady-fingers. Of course, later in the evening she might have a candy or two, but then candy can hardly be considered food.

A mundane clatter of dishes in the kitchen below caused Chester to start from his dream, and drop the shoe. He leaped up and began to make elaborate and excited preparations for dressing.

From an ancient, battered chest of drawers he carefully took a tissue-paper package containing a Union Forever Suit, whose label proclaimed that "From Factory to You, No Human Hand Touches It." With brow puckered in abstract thought, Chester broke the seal and laid the crisp, immaculate garment on the bed. With intense seriousness, he regarded it for a moment; apparently it passed his searching examination, for he turned again to the chest of drawers and drew forth a smaller package, from which he extracted new socks of lustrous blue. These he placed on the bed. From beneath the bed he drew a pair of low shoes, which gleamed in the gaslight from arduous polishing. On their toes, fanciful artisans had pricked curves and loops and butterfly designs.

Chester gave them a few final rubs with the shirt he had just discarded and placed them on the bed. At this point there was a hiatus in the wardrobe. He went out into the hall and shouted down the back stairs.

"Oh, Ma. Oh, Ma!"

"Well?" came his mother's voice from the regions below.

"Are my trousers pressed yet?"

"My goodness, Chester," she called, "I haven't had time yet. It's only a little after six. Do come down and eat some supper."

"But I don't want any supper," protested Chester.

"There's apple pudding with cream," she announced.

"Oh, well," said Chester, reluctantly, "I suppose I'd better. Can I have a dish of it on the back stairs? I'm not dressed."

"Yes. But you have plenty of time. You know you shouldn't make an evening call before eight-fifteen at the very earliest," said Mrs. Jessup.

AFTER he had disposed of two helpings of apple pudding, Chester returned to his room and spent some moments analyzing the comparative merits of a dozen neckties hanging in an imitation brass stirrup. He had eliminated all but two, a black one and a red one, when his mother's voice floated up the back stairs.

"For goodness' sake, Chester, do be careful of that bathtub. It's running over again. How many times do I have to tell you to watch it?"

Chester bounded to the bathroom and shut off the water. It had, indeed, started to overflow the tub, and Chester, accepting the Archimedian principle without ever having heard of it, perceived that he must let some of the water out before he could put himself in. Accordingly he pulled out the plug and returned to his own room to wait for a little of the water to run off.

He made the most of this idle moment. Throwing off his multi-hued Navajo bathrobe, he surveyed the reflection of his torso in the mirror. He contracted his biceps and eyed the resulting egg-like bulges with some satisfaction. Suddenly, his ordinarily amiable face took on a fierce, dark scowl. He crouched until he was bent almost double. He lowered at the mirror. His left fist was extended and his right drawn back in the most approved scientific style of the prize-ring.

"You will, will you?" came from between his clenched teeth, and his left fist darted out rapidly, three, four, five times, and then he shot out his right fist with such violence that he all but shattered the mirror.

This last blow seemed to have a cataclysmic effect on Chester's opponent, for the victorious Chester backed off and waited, still crouching and lowering, for his victim to rise.

The opponent apparently was a tough one, and not the man to succumb easily. Chester waited for him to regain his feet and then they were at it again. Chester let loose a shower of savage uppercuts. From the way he leaped six inches into the air to deliver his blows it was evident that his opponent was considerably bigger than he. At length, when all but breathless from his exertions, Chester with one prodigious punch, a *coup de grâce* that there was no withstanding, knocked all the fight out of his foe. But, seemingly, he was not satisfied with flooring his giant opponent; with stern, set face, Chester walked to the corner where the fellow was sprawling, seized him by his collar, and dragged him across the room. Then, shaking him fiercely, Chester hissed:

"Now, you cad, apologize to this lady for daring to offer her an affront by passing remarks about her."

The apology would, no doubt, have been forthcoming had not Chester at that moment heard an unmistakable sound from the bathroom. He abandoned his prostrate foe and rushed in just in time to see the last of his bath-water go gargling and gurgling out of the tub.

Chester sat moodily on the edge of the tub until enough hot water had bubbled into it for him to perform ablutions of appalling thoroughness. He was red almost to rawness from his efforts with the bath brush, and was redolent of scented soap and talcum powder when he again returned to his bedroom.

He dressed with a sort of feverish calmness, now and again pausing to sigh gently and gaze for a moment into nothingness. By now she had finished her lady-finger—

His mother had laid his freshly pressed trousers on the bed, and he ran an appreciative eye along their razor-blade crease. From the chest of drawers he brought forth a snowy shirt, which, from the piece of cardboard shoved down its throat and the numerous pins which Chester extracted impatiently, one could surmise was fresh from the laundry. When he came to the collar-and-tie stage, he was halted for a time. Three collars of various shapes were tried and deemed unworthy, and then, at the last minute, yielding to a sudden wild impulse, he discarded the black tie in favor of the red one. He slipped on a blue serge coat, the cut of which endeavored to promote his waist-line to his shoulder blades, and was all dressed but for the crowning task— to comb his hair.

By dint of many dismal experiences, Chester knew that this would be trying, for his hair was abundant but untamed. He tried first to induce it to part while it was still dry, but the results of this operation, as he had feared, were negligible. He then attempted to achieve a part with his hair slightly moistened with witch hazel. For fully five seconds it looked like a success, but, as Chester started to leave, one parting look told him that little spikes and wisps were

rearing rebellious heads and quite ruining the perfection of his handiwork. With a sigh he fell back upon his last resort, the liberal application of a sticky, jelly-like substance derived from petroleum, which imparted to his brown hair an unwonted shine. But the part held as if it had been carved in marble. Arranging his white silk handkerchief so that it protruded a modish eighth of an inch from his breast pocket, Chester Arthur Jessup, Jr., sallied forth to make his call.

On the front porch was his family, and Chester would have avoided their critical eyes if he could. However, the gantlet had to be run, so he emerged into the family group with a saunter that he hoped might be described as "nonchalant." In the privacy of his room he often practiced that saunter; he had seen in the papers that a certain celebrated criminal had "sauntered nonchalantly into the court-room," and the phrase had fascinated him.

"What in the name of thunder have you been doing to your hair?" demanded his father, looking up from his pipe and paper.

"Combing it," replied Chester, coldly.

"With axle grease?" inquired Jessup senior, genially.

"And it does look so nice when it's dry and wavy," put in his mother.

Chester emitted a faint groan.

"Oh, Ma, you never seem to realize that I'm grown up," he protested. "Wavy hair!" He groaned again.

"Well," remarked the father, "I suppose it's better that way than not combed at all. Seems to me that last summer you didn't care much whether it was combed, or cut either, for that matter."

"A woman has come into his life," explained his twenty-two year-old sister, from behind her novel.

"You just be careful who you go callin' a woman," exclaimed Chester, turning on her, with some warmth.

"Don't you consider Mildred Wrigley a woman?" asked Hilda, mildly.

"Not in the sense you mean it."

"By the way," said Hilda, "I saw her last night."

Chester's manner instantly became eager and conciliatory. "Did you? Where?"

"At the Mill Street Baptist Church supper," said Hilda.

"At the supper?" Chester's tone suggested incredulity.

"Yes. And goodness me, I never saw a girl eat so much in my life. She—"

"Hilda Jessup, how dare you!"

Chester's voice cracked with the emotion he felt at so damnable an imputation.

"There, there, Hilda, stop your teasing," said Mrs. Jessup. "What if she did? A big, healthy girl like that—"

"Mother—" Chester's tone was anguished.

"Come, Nell," said Mr. Jessup, "leave him to his illusions. It's a bad day for romance when a man discovers that his goddess likes a second helping of corned beef."

"Father, how can you say such things! I will not stay here and listen to you say such things about one who I—"

"One whom," interrupted Hilda.

Chester flounced down the front steps and slammed the gate after him, in a manner that could not possibly be described as "nonchalant."

ii

THE WRIGLEY home was four blocks away, and Chester, once out of sight of his own home, became meditative. He stopped, and after looking about to see that he was not observed, drew from his inside pocket an envelope, and for the twelfth time that day counted its contents. Ninety-four dollars! The savings of a lifetime! It had originally been saved for the purchase of a motor-cycle, but that was before Mildred Wrigley had smiled at him one day across the senior study-hall. That seemed but yesterday, and yet it must have been fully seven weeks before! He replaced the money and continued on his way.

Chester paused at the Greek Candy Kitchen on Main Street to buy a box of candy, richly bedight with purple silk, and by carefully gauging his saunter, contrived to arrive at the Wrigley residence at fourteen minutes after eight. He gave his tie a final adjustment, his hair a last frantic smoothing, licked his dry lips— and rang the bell.

"Oh, good evening, Chester."

Mildred Wrigley had a small, birdlike voice. She was looking not so much at Chester as at the beribboned purple box he held. They went into the parlor.

"Oh, Chester," cried Mildred, as she opened the purple box, "how sweet of you to bring me such heavenly candy. I just adore chocolate-covered cherries. I could just *die* eating them."

She popped two of them into her mouth, and sighed ecstatically. They discussed, with great thoroughness, the weather of the day, the weather of the day before and the probable weather of the near future. Then Mildred moved her chair a quarter of an inch nearer Chester's.

"There, now," she said, with her dimpling smile, "let's be real comfy." A glow enveloped Chester.

"I had the most heavenly supper to-night," confided Mildred.

"I hardly ate at all," said Chester.

"Oh, you poor, poor boy," said Mildred. "Do pass me another candy."

They discussed school affairs, and the approaching examinations.

"I'm so worried," confessed Mildred. "Horrid old geometry. Stupid physics. What do I care why apples fall off trees? I'm going to go on the stage. That miserable old wretch, Miss Shufelt, has been writing nasty notes to Dad, saying I don't study enough."

Her lip trembled; she looked so small, so weak. "Look here," said Chester, hoarsely, "we've known each other for a long time now, haven't we?"

"Yes, ever so long," said Mildred, taking another chocolate-covered cherry. "Months and months."

"Do you think one person ought to be frank with another person?"

"Of course I do, Chester, if they know each other well enough."

"I mean very frank."

"Well," said Mildred, "if they know each other very, very well, I think they ought to be very frank."

"How long do you think one person ought to know another person before he, or for that matter she, ought to be very frank with that person."

"Oh, months and months," answered Mildred.

Chester passed his white silk handkerchief over his damp brow.

"When I say very frank, I mean very frank," he said.

"That's what I mean, too." She took another chocolate-covered cherry.

Chester went on, speaking rapidly.

"For example, if one person should tell another person that he liked that person and he didn't really mean like at all but another word like like, only meaning something much more than like— don't you think he ought to tell that person what he really meant? I mean, of course, providing that he had known that person months and months and knew her very well and—"

"I guess he should," she said, taking a sudden keen interest in the toe of her slipper. Chester plunged on.

"But suppose you were the person that another person had said they liked, only they really didn't mean like but another word that begins with 'l,' do you think that person ought to be very frank and tell you that the way he regarded you did not begin 'li' but began 'lo'?"

"I guess so," she said, without abandoning the minute scrutiny of her toe.

"Well," said Chester, "that's how I regard you, not with an 'li' but with an 'lo.'"

Mildred did not look up.

"Oh, Chester," she murmured. He hitched his chair an inch nearer hers, and with a quick, uncertain movement, took hold of her hand. A loud slam of the front door caused them both to start.

"It's Dad," whispered Mildred. "And he's mad about something."

Her father, large and red-faced, entered the room.

"Good evening," he said, nodding briefly at Chester.

"Mildred, come into my study a minute, will you. There's something I want to talk to you about."

THE FOLDING doors closed on father and daughter, and Chester was left balancing himself on the edge of a chair.

Mildred's father had a rumbling voice that now and then penetrated the folding doors and Chester caught the words "whippersnapper" and "callow." He heard, too, Mildred's small, high voice, protesting. She was in tears.

Presently Mildred reappeared, lacrimose. "Oh, that nasty, horrid Miss Shufelt," she burst out.

"What has she done?" asked Chester.

"The nasty old cat asked Dad to stop in to see her to-night on his way home from the office, and she told him the awfulest things about me."

"She did?" Chester's voice was rich with loathing. "I just wish I had her here, that's all I wish," he added fiercely.

"She said," went on Mildred, with fresh sobs, "she said— I— was— boy— c-c-crazy. And— I— never— studied— and—"

"Darn that woman!" cried Chester.

"And Dad's— going— to— send— me— to— S-Simpson Hall!"

The idea stunned Chester.

"Simpson Hall? Why, that's a boarding school in Massachusetts, miles and miles from here," he gasped.

"I know it," said Mildred. "I know a girl who went there. It's a nasty, horrid place." A fresh attack of sobs seized her.

"They'll— make— me— do— c-calisthenics, and— they— won't— give— me— anything— to— eat— but— b-beans."

Nothing but beans! Mildred eat beans! It was an outrage, a sacrilege.

"He's already written to Simpson Hall," wailed Mildred. "And I have to go, Monday."

"Monday? Not Monday? Why, to-day's Friday!" Chester's face became resolute; he felt in his inside pocket where his envelope was.

"You *sha'n't* go," he declared. "You and I will elope to-morrow morning."

iii

CHESTER met Mildred aboard the 8:48 train for New York City the next morning.

Mildred, clasping a small straw suit-case, had misgivings. But Chester reassured her.

"Don't worry, Mildred, please don't worry," he pleaded. "My cousin, Phil Snyder, who is at Princeton and knows all about such things, says it's a cinch to get married in New York. All you do is walk up to a window, pay a dollar, and you're married. And if we can't get married there, we can go to Hoboken. Anybody, anybody at all, can get married in Hoboken, Phil told me so."

She smiled at him.

"Our wedding day," she said, softly.

"Why are you so pensive?" he asked, after a while.

"I haven't had my breakfast," she said. "I always feel sort of weak and funny till I've had my breakfast."

Chester bought several large slabs of nut-studded chocolate from the train boy. When they passed Harmon, at Mildred's suggestion he bought a package of butter-scotch. Her flagging spirits were revived by these repasts. "I could just DIE eating butter-scotch," she said, dimpling.

"We'll always keep some in the house, little woman," Chester promised her, mentally adding butter-scotch to the menu of watercress salad, tea, ice-cream and an occasional lady-finger.

The human torrent in the Grand Central station whirled the elopers with it along the ramp and out under the zodiac dome of the great, busy hall. They stood there, wide-eyed. "New York," said Mildred.

"Our New York," said Chester.

He steered a roundabout course for the subway, for he wanted to reach the Municipal Building as soon as possible. He had fears, the worldly Phil Snyder to the contrary notwithstanding, that he might encounter difficulties in getting a marriage license there. And he and Mildred would then have to go to Hoboken. He had only a sketchy idea of where Hoboken was. And it was then nearly eleven.

But Mildred was not to be hurried.

"Couldn't we have just one little fudge sundae first?" she asked. "I haven't had my regular breakfast, you know. And I do feel so sort of weak and funny when I haven't had my regular breakfast."

To Schuyler's they went, and consumed precious minutes and two fudge sundaes. On the way out, Mildred stopped short.

"Oh, look," she exclaimed, "real New Orleans pralines. I just adore them. And you can't get them in Clintonia."

Chester looked at her a little nervously.

"It's getting sort of late," he suggested.

"All right, Mr. Hurry," Mildred pouted, "just you go on to the horrid old City Hall by your lonesome. I'm going to stop and have a praline."

Chester capitulated, contritely, so Mildred had two.

They started for the subway which was to take them far down-town to the Municipal Building. On Forty-second Street they passed a shiny, white edifice in the window of which an artist in immaculate white duck was deftly tossing griddle cakes into the air so that they described a graceful parabola and flopped on a soapstone griddle where they sizzled brownly and crisply. A faint but provoking aroma floated through the open door. Mildred's footsteps slackened, then she paused, then she came to a dead stop.

"Ummm-mmm! What a heavenly smell!" she said. "Don't you just adore griddle cakes?"

"Yes, yes," said Chester, a little desperately. "Let's have some for lunch. It's twenty-five minutes to twelve. Let's hurry."

"Why, Chester Jessup, you know I haven't had my regular breakfast yet. I just couldn't go away down to that old City Hall and get married and everything without having had some nourishment. It won't take a minute to have a little breakfast."

"Oh, all right," said Chester.

The griddle cakes tasted like rubber to Chester. Mildred ate hers with great relish and insisted on having them decorated with country sausage.

"It's so nourishing," she explained. "I could just die eating sausage."

Chester paid the check and forgot to take the change from a two-dollar bill.

"I could just die eating sausage. I could just die eating sausage." The wheels of the subway train seemed to click to this refrain as it sped down-town.

It was nearly one o'clock when the elopers at last reached the Municipal Building. They found a sign which read, "MARRIAGE LICENSES. KEEP TO THE RIGHT."

With his heart just under his collar button and his dollar grasped tightly in his hand, Chester knocked timidly. The door was opened by a stout minor politician with a cap on the back of his head.

"I want a marriage license, please," said Chester. He dropped his voice a full octave below his normal speaking-tone.

The minor politician blinked at Chester and Mildred. Then he guffawed, hoarsely.

"Say," he said, "in the foist place, you'll have to get a little more age on yuh, and in the second place, this is Satiddy and this joint closes at noon. Come back Thoisday between ten and four about eight years from now." He closed the door.

Chester turned miserably to Mildred.

"That means Hoboken," he said.

"I don't care," she said, "as long as I'm with you."

They went out into the canyons of lower Manhattan, in search of the way to Hoboken. Their wanderings took them past a restaurant whose windows were adorned with vicious-looking, green, live lobsters, scrambling about pugnaciously on cakes of ice.

"Oh, *lobsters*," cried Mildred, her eye brightening. "I've only had lobster once in my life. Couldn't you just DIE eating lobster?"

"I suppose so," said Chester, gloomily.

"Couldn't we stop in and have a teeny, weeny bit of lunch?" she asked, eyeing the lobsters wistfully. "It makes me feel sort of queer to go on long trips without food."

"I'm not hungry," said Chester.

"But I am," said Mildred. They went in.

A superior waiter handed Mildred a large menu card. "May I order just anything I want?" she asked eagerly.

"Wouldn't you like some nice watercress salad and some tea and lady-fingers?" Chester asked, hopefully.

"Pooh! Why, there's no nourishment in that at all!" Mildred was studying the menu card. "I want a great big lobster, and some asparagus. And then I want some nice chicken salad with mayonnaise. And then some pistache ice-cream. And, oh, yes, a piece of huckleberry pie."

To Chester that lunch seemed the longest experience of his life. It seemed to him that no lobster ever looked redder, no mayonnaise yellower, no pistache ice-cream greener and no huckleberry pie purpler. Mildred ate steadily. Now and then she made little joyful noises of approbation.

When lunch was over at last, they started for Hoboken.

"It's a nice pleasant trip by ferry-boat," a policeman told them.

"I don't think I'd care for a boat trip," said Mildred.

"But we have to go to Hoboken," Chester expostulated.

"Couldn't we walk?" she asked.

"No, no, of course we couldn't. It's across the river."

"I feel sort of queer, somehow," said Mildred, faintly.

The North River was choppy from darting tugs and gliding barges as the ferry-boat bore the elopers toward the Jersey side. Leaning on the rail, Chester

gazed morosely at the retreating metropolitan sky-line. Mildred plucked at his coat sleeve. He turned and looked at her. Her face was pale. "Oh, Chester, I want to go back. I want to go home," she said, tearfully.

"Why, Mildred," exclaimed Chester, and for the first time there was impatience in his voice, "what's the matter?"

"I'm going to be sick," she said.

She was.

iv

"I HATE you, Chester Jessup. I hate, hate, *hate* you. And I'm going to go back," she said, tearfully.

The elopers had never reached Hoboken. Mildred refused to leave the ferry-boat and Chester did not urge her. It bore them back to the New York side. Their flight to Gretna Green was a failure.

"You take me right home, do you hear?" cried Mildred.

"We can get the 3:59 from the Grand Central," said Chester in an icy voice. "That will get you home in time for supper."

"Chester Jessup, you're a nasty, heartless boy to mention supper to me when I'm in this condition," said Mildred.

They made the trip from New York back to Clintonia in silence. Chester, watching the scenery flow by, was thinking deeply. He was wondering at what age young men are admitted to monasteries. He left Mildred at her house.

"Good night, Mr. Jessup," she said, coolly.

"Good night, Miss Wrigley," said Chester, and stalked home.

"Where have you been all day?" demanded his mother.

"Oh, just around," said Chester.

"Why weren't you home for lunch?"

"I wasn't hungry," said Chester.

"And we had the best things, too. Just what you like— chicken salad with mayonnaise, and deep-dish huckleberry pie."

Chester shivered. "I don't think I'll take any supper to-night," he said.

"Why, what ails you, anyhow?" asked his mother, solicitously. "We're going to have such a nice supper. Your father brought home a couple of lobsters. And afterward we're going to have pistache ice-cream, and lady-fingers."

"Good Heavens, Mother, I guess I know when I'm not hungry. There are other things in life besides food, aren't there?"

"Like being in love, for example?" suggested his sister Hilda.

"I'm not in love," declared Chester, vehemently.

"How would you like to have me tell Mildred Wrigley you said that?" asked Hilda.

"I just wish you would," said Chester, "I just wish you would."

"By the way," remarked Mr. Jessup, "I met Tom Wrigley to-day and he said he was sending that girl of his off to boarding school at Simpson Hall."

"Oh, is he?" said Mrs. Jessup. "Chester, did you hear what your father said?"

"Yes, I did," said Chester, "and all I can say is that I hope she gets enough to eat."

10: Terrible Epps

THE BLUE PRINTS and specifications in the case of Tidbury Epps follow:

Age: the early thirties.

Status: bachelor.

Habitat: Mrs. Kelty's Refined Boarding House, Brooklyn.

Occupation: a lesser clerk in the wholesale selling department of Spingle & Blatter, Nifty Straw Hattings. See Advts.

Appearance: that of a lesser clerk. Weight: feather. Nose: stub. Eyes: apologetic. Teeth: obvious. Figure: brief. Manner: diffident. Nature: kind. Disposition: amiable but subdued.

Conspicuous vices: none.

Conspicuous virtues: none.

Distinguishing marks: none.

Tidbury was no Napoleon. He was aware of this, and so was everybody in the hat company, including, unfortunately, Titus Spingle, the president, who felt that he knew a thing or two about Bonapartes because he had once been referred to in a straw-hat trade paper as the Napoleon of Hatdom.

Mildly, as he did everything else in life, Tidbury admired, indeed almost envied Mr. Spingle's silk shirts, which customarily suggested an explosion in a paint factory. But such sartorial grandeur, Tidbury felt, was not for him. He stuck to plain white shirts, dark blue ties and pepper-and-salt suits. The pepper-and-salt suit was invented for Tidbury Epps.

Tidbury worked diligently and even cheerfully on a high stool and a low salary, copying neat little black figures into big black books. The salary and the stool were the same Tidbury had been given when he first came to New York from Calais, Maine, ten years before.

It probably never entered his head, as he bent over his columns of digits that crisp fall morning, that in their sanctum of real mahogany and Spanish leather his employers were discussing him.

"Whitaker has quit," announced Mr. Blatter, who acted as sales manager.

Mr. Spingle's acre of face, pink and dimpled from much good living, showed concern.

"How come you can't keep an assistant, Otto?" he inquired.

"After they've been with me for six months," explained Mr. Blatter modestly, "they get so good that they simply have to get better jobs."

"Well, got any candidates for the place?" queried the president.

"Burdette?" suggested Mr. Blatter.

Mr. Spingle eliminated Burdette with a flick of his finger.

"Too young," he said.

"Wetsel?"

"Too old."

"Fitch?"

"Too careless."

"Hydeman?"

"Too inexperienced."

"Well," ventured Mr. Blatter, "what about Tidbury Epps?"

Mr. Spingle's shrug included his shoulders, face and entire body.

"He's neither too old, too young, too careless nor too inexperienced," advanced Mr. Blatter.

"You're not serious, Otto?"

"Sure I am. Epps has been with us ten years and he's worked hard. I believe in giving our old employees a chance."

"So do I," rejoined the Napoleon of Hatdom; "but you know perfectly well, Otto, that Tidbury Epps is a dud."

"He's as conscientious as a Pilgrim father," remarked Mr. Blatter.

"That's the trouble with him," snorted Mr. Spingle.

"He spends so much time being conscientious that he hasn't time to be anything else. Not that I object to a man having a conscience, y'understand. But Epps hasn't anything else. You know how it is in the hat trade, Otto; you've got to be a good fellow."

Mr. Spingle paused to pat his silken bosom, in hue reminiscent of sunset in the Grand Cañon. That he was a good fellow, a *bon vivant*, even, was generally admitted in the hat trade.

"You see," went on the Napoleon of Hatdom, "your assistant has to be nice to the trade. That's almost his chief job. Remember the motto of our house is, 'Our business friends are our personal friends.' That's meant a lot to us, Otto. Now and then you've simply got to take a big buyer out and show him a good time— buy him a meal and take him to the Winter Garden. You and I are mostly too busy to do it, but your assistant isn't. Whitaker made us a lot of good friends, and good customers, too, because he was a regular fella and knew the ropes. But can you imagine old Epps giving a party?"

Mr. Blatter was forced to admit that he couldn't.

"But he's so willing," he argued.

"Oh, sure," agreed Mr. Spingle; "and sober and industrious and stands without hitching and all that. But he's too much of a hermit. No more personality than a parsnip. No spirit. No nerve. No fire. No zip. Sorry I can't jump him up; he may be a good man, but he's not a good fellow."

"I suppose it will have to be Hydeman, then," remarked Mr. Blatter, rising. "He's a little too slick and flip to suit me, and we don't know much about him, but I suppose he'd know how to show a buyer Broadway."

"I'll bet he would," said Mr. Spingle. "Try him out. But watch his expense account, Otto."

So Tidbury Epps continued to enjoy his high stool and his low salary and to copy endless little figures into big black books. His shoulders drooped a little when he heard of Hydeman's quick promotion, but he said nothing.

Messrs. Spingle and Blatter, being interested solely in what went on outside men's heads, did not attempt to find out what was wrong with Tidbury Epps. But had a psychoanalyst peered darkly into the interior of Tidbury's small round cranium he would have instantly noted that Mr. Epps was suffering from a bad case of inferiority complex, complicated by an acute attack of Puritanical complex.

If anybody was to blame for this it was not Tidbury himself but his Aunt Elvira, who, with the aid of a patented cat-o'-nine-tails she had sent all the way to Chicago for, willow switches from her own back yard, and an edged tongue that cut worse than either, had confined his juvenile steps to a very straight and exceedingly narrow path by the simple process of lambasting him roundly whenever he so much as glanced to the right or to the left.

Aunt Elvira was a lean woman with no digestion to speak of, and the chief tenet of her philosophy was that whatever is enjoyable is sinful. She impressed this creed on young Tidbury with her thin but sinewy arm, until one day while castigating him violently for laughing at a comic supplement that the groceries had come in she succumbed to an excess of virtue and a broken blood vessel.

Tidbury promptly came to New York with two suits of flannel underwear and many suppressed desires, and went soberly to work in the hat company. His subsequent life was as empty of adventure, variety, sin or success as the life of a Hubbard squash. His job wholly absorbed him. The little figures in the big books became his only world. He had never learned to play.

Yet people liked Tidbury, even while they thought him kin to the snail. He had a quiet twinkle in his eye and he took over mean jobs and night work without a peep of protest. It was his willingness to take on overtime work, and his quiet competence that first attracted the approving eye of Mr. Blatter. But Mr. Blatter had to admit that Mr. Spingle had diagnosed the case of Tidbury Epps all too accurately; Tidbury was indubitably, incurably a dud; and that is worse than being a dub. If any latent fire lurked beneath that pepper-and-salt bosom no one had ever glimpsed so much as a spark of it. Tidbury never lived up to that twinkle in his eye.

One would have said that Tidbury was as inconspicuous as an oyster in a fifteen-cent stew, and yet love, mysterious, ubiquitous love, found him out and laid him violently by the heels.

It was the round black eyes of Martha Ritter, the new girl at the information desk, and the way she cocked her head on one side when she smiled, that first brought to Tidbury the alarming realization that his heart was something more than a pump.

She was an alert little thing who would have been teaching school in her native Ohio village of Granville had not the glittering metropolitan magnet drawn her to it as every year it draws ten thousand Martha Ritters from ten thousand Granvilles.

She smiled at Tidbury one day as he registered his punctual arrival on the time clock, and a sudden strange warmth was kindled under his pepper-and-salt coat. Tidbury knew that it was wicked to feel so good, but he couldn't help it. Love laughs at complexes.

He saw her home; he called on her; he brought her salted peanuts; he took her to a concert in Central Park; he kept her picture on his washstand. But, characteristically, Tidbury as a lover was no volcano of imperious emotion. He was no aggressive bark, battling fiercely against wind and wave; he was a chip, floating with the tide. Matrimony, with Martha, was a desirable but distant shore; he would drift there in time. But Martha Ritter, who had more than a dash of romance in her, did not think much of this sort of courting.

The last time he had been with her— they had gone to the Aquarium to view the fishes— pent-up protest had burst from her, and she had exclaimed, "Oh, Tidbury, you are so— so quiet!"

The words had jolted him; he had said them over to himself uncounted times, and had pondered over them; indeed he was trying to keep from thinking of them as he bent over his task the day they made Hydeman assistant to the sales manager. Tidbury had noticed lately that Martha talked about Mr. Hydeman a great deal; she had mentioned his polished finger-nails; she had suggested that Tidbury would do well to get one of those high-lapeled, snug-waisted suits that Mr. Hydeman affected; she had quoted some of Mr. Hydeman's witticisms, and had retailed some incidents from his highly colored life. In short, she appeared to have taken a sudden acute interest in Mr. Hydeman.

Tidbury Epps could not drive from his mind the disquieting thought that Mr. Hydeman as a rival would be dangerous. In the washroom Mr. Hydeman made no secret of his finesse as a Don Juan. He was everything that Tidbury was not— dashing, worldly, confident. There was something about his smooth black hair, held in place by a shiny gummy substance, something about the

angle at which he tilted his short-brimmed hat, something about the way his tight little knot of brilliant tie fitted into his modishly low collar, something about the way he filliped the ash from his cigarette so that one could see the diamond twinkle on his finger— that carried a subtle suggestion of sophistication and an adventurous nature.

That morning they had entered together— Tidbury and Mr. Hydeman— and Tidbury, with icy fingers gripping his heart, had noted that Martha bestowed on Mr. Hydeman a smile with a lingering personal note in it, while her greeting to Tidbury was a curt formal nod. His bitter cup was full, and for the first time in his life he gave way to the pangs of jealousy when, at noontime, he saw Mr. Hydeman take her to lunch. Tidbury came upon them, talking and laughing together, and Martha made not the slightest attempt to conceal her interest in the suave new assistant to the sales manager; she was open, even brazen about it.

Tidbury was moodily copying figures and trying not to heed the fact that the green-eyed monster was clutching him with torturing talons when Mr. Hydeman came up to his desk and prodded him playfully in the ribs.

"Well, old Tid," remarked Mr. Hydeman, "I'll bet you wish you were going to be in my shoes to-night."

Tidbury looked up from his work.

"Why?" he asked.

For answer Mr. Hydeman thrust two tickets beneath Tidbury's stub of nose. With only a vague comprehension Tidbury glanced at what was printed on them.

ADMIT ONE
THE PAGAN ROUT
All Greenwich Village Will Be There
Webber Hall
Only Persons in Costume Admitted.
Don't Miss the Daring Garden of Eden Ballet
And Masque at Four a.m.

"Are you a Greenwich Villager?" asked Tidbury.

Mr. Hydeman smiled at the note of horror in Tidbury's voice.

"Oh, I hang out down there," he admitted airily.

"And you're going to the Pagan Rout?"

Even into the seclusion of Calais, Maine, and Mrs. Kelty's, rumors of that revel had filtered.

"I never miss one," replied Mr. Hydeman grandly. "And say, I've a costume this year that's a knockout."

"You have?"

"Yes. I've got a preacher's outfit. Can you imagine me a parson?"

Weakly Tidbury said he couldn't.

"And say," went on Mr. Hydeman, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, "I'll have a flask of hip oil on me."

"Hip oil?"

"Sure. Diamond juice."

"Diamond juice?"

"Aw, hooch. For me and the gal."

"The girl?" quavered Tidbury.

"Say," demanded Mr. Hydeman, "did you think I was going to take a hippopotamus with me?"

Tidbury's small face was pathetic.

"You don't know what you're missing, Tid," Mr. Hydeman rattled on. "It's a real naughty party. Those costumes! Oh, bebe." Mr. Hydeman rolled his eyes toward the roof and blew thither a kiss. "Last year there was a Cleopatra there and she didn't have a thing on her but a pair of—"

"The cashier's waiting for these figures," mumbled Mr. Epps. "I've got to go to him."

He heard Hydeman's sniggle of laughter behind him.

That evening the desperate Tidbury met Martha Ritter as she was leaving the hat company's building.

"May I come to see you to-night?" he asked, trying not to stammer, and hoping his ears were not as red as they felt. "There's a nice band concert in Prospect Park and I thought—"

Martha Ritter cocked her head to one side and smiled mysteriously.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Epps," she said coolly, "but I have an engagement."

"You— have— an— engagement?" He repeated the words as if they were a prison sentence.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Oh, it's a masquerade." She smiled, her head on one side.

"Whom are you going with?" he blurted; he was trembling.

"That would be telling," she laughed. "Well, good night, Mr. Epps. I must hurry home and get my costume on. I'm going as a gypsy."

And she disappeared into the maw of the Subway.

A masquerade! In gypsy costume! Tidbury was struck by the lightning of complete realization; he understood Hydeman's leer now. Feebly he leaned against a lamp-post until his numbed brain could recover from the impact. Then he committed a sin. Deliberately he kicked the lamp-post a vicious kick.

"Darn it all," he muttered through clenched teeth. "Yes, gosh darn it all!"

Then he went wearily to his boarding house. Morosely he ate of Mrs. Kelty's boiled beef and bread pudding; morosely he sat in his lonely stall of a bedroom and glowered at a hole in the red carpet.

"I'm too quiet. Too darn quiet," he kept saying to himself in a sort of litany. "Yes, too gosh darn quiet."

And when he thought of Martha, sweet simple Martha, and so short a time ago his Martha, at the Pagan Rout with Hydeman, surrounded by indecorous and no doubt inebriate denizens of Greenwich Village, his head all but burst. That she was lost, and, most poignant thought of all, lost to him, kept beating in upon his brain. He moaned.

Suddenly his spine straightened with a terrible resolve. His small guileless face was set in lines of stern decision. He leaped from his chair, dived under his brass bed, rummaged in his trunk and fished up twenty-five hard-saved dollars in a sock.

Clapping his hat on his head in emulation of the tilt of Mr. Hydeman's hat Tidbury issued forth. In the hall he passed Mrs. Kelty, who regarded him with some surprise.

"You're not going out, Mr. Epps?" she asked. "Why, it's after nine!"

"I am going out, Mrs. Kelty," announced Tidbury Epps.

"Back soon?"

"I may never come back," he answered hollowly.

"Sakes alive! Where are you going?"

"I am going," said Tidbury Epps firmly, "to the devil."

And he strode into the night.

ii

NEVER having gone to the devil before, Mr. Epps was somewhat perplexed in mind as to the direction he should take. But a moment's reflection convinced him that Greenwich Village was the most promising place for such a pilgrimage. He had never been there before; he had been afraid to go there. Startling stories of the gay profligacy rampant in that angle of old New York had reached his ears. He believed firmly that if the devil has any headquarters in New York they are somewhere below Fourteenth Street and west of Washington Square.

Mr. Epps debouched from a bus in Washington Square and started westward along West Fourth Street with the cautious but determined tread of an explorer penetrating a trackless and cannibal-infested jungle. He glanced apprehensively to right and left, his eyes wide for the sight of painted sirens,

his ears agape for gusts of ribald merriment. At each corner he paused expectantly, anticipating that he might come upon a delirious party of art students gamboling about a model. He traversed two blocks without seeing so much as a smock; what he did see was an ancient man of Italian derivation carrying a bag of charcoal on his head, and a stout woman wheeling twins stuffed uncomfortably into a single-seater gocart, and a number of nondescript humans who from their sedate air might well have been Brooklyn funeral directors. He owned, after a bit, to a certain sense of disappointment. Going to the devil was more of a chore than he had fancied.

As he trekked ever westward a sound at length smote his dilated ears and made him catch his breath. It was issuing from a dim-lit basement, and was filtering through batik curtains stenciled with strange, smeary beasts. He had heard the wild, dissipated notes of a mechanical piano. A lurid but somewhat inexpertly lettered sign above the basement door read,

YE AMIABLE OYSTER
Refreshmints at All Hrs.

With a newborn boldness Tidbury Epps thrust open the door and entered. No shower of confetti, no popping of corks, no rousing stein song greeted him. Save for the industrious piano the place seemed empty. However, by the feeble beams that came from the lights, bandaged in batik like so many sore thumbs, he discerned a mountainous matron behind a cash register, engaged in tatting.

"Where's everybody?" he asked of her.

"Oh, things will liven up after a bit," she yawned.

Tidbury sat at a small bright blue table and scanned a card affixed to the wall.

Angel's Ambrosia	$0.50
Horse's Neck	.60
Devil's Delight	.70
Dry Martini ...	.50
Very dry Martini	.60
Very, very dry Martini	.90
Champagne Sizzle	.75

A sleepy waiter with a soup-stained vest came from the inner room presently.

"Gimme a Devil's Delight," ordered Tidbury Epps recklessly.

He had heard that Greenwich Village, the untrammeled, laughs openly in the teeth of the Eighteenth Amendment. He had never in his life tasted an alcoholic drink, but to-night he was stopping at nothing. The Devil's Delight came, and Tidbury as he sipped its pink saccharinity found himself feeling that the devil is rather easily delighted. He had expected the potion to make his head buzz; but it did not. Instead it distinctly suggested rather weak and not very superior strawberry sirup and carbonated water. He crooked a summoning finger at the waiter.

"Horse's Neck," he commanded.

The Horse's Neck made its appearance, an insipid-looking amber fluid with a wan piece of lemon peel floating shamefacedly on its surface.

"Tastes just like ginger ale to me," remarked Mr. Epps. "Wadjuh expeck in a Horse's Neck?" queried the waiter bellicosely. "Chloride of lime?"

"I can't feel it at all," complained Mr. Epps.

"Feel it?" The waiter raised his brows. "Say, what do you think this joint is? A dump? We ain't bootleggers, mister."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Epps.

He was about to go elsewhere, when a babel of excited voices outside the door made him sink back into his chair; evidently the promise of the tatting matron was to be made good, and Ye Amiable Oyster was about to liven up.

The first thing that entered the door was an animal— a full-size, shaggy anthropoid ape, big as a man. Mr. Epps was too alarmed to bolt. But as the creature careened into the light Mr. Epps observed that his face was human and slightly Hibernian. Behind him came a girl, rather sketchily dressed for autumn in a pair of bead portieres, a girdle or two, and a gilt plaster bird, which was bound firmly to her head. Mr. Epps had seen things like her on cigarette boxes. A second couple followed, hilarious. The man wore a tight velvet suit, a sombrero several yards around, black mustaches of prodigious length and bristle that did not match the red of his hair, and earrings the size of cantaloupes; it was not clear whether he was intended to be a pirate or an organ grinder or a compromise between the two; but it was clear that he was in a state where it did not matter, to him, in the least. His companion wore a precarious garment of dry grass, and her arms were stained brown; at intervals she conveyed the information to the general atmosphere that she was a bimbo from a bamboo isle.

The four, after an impromptu ring-around-a-rosie, collapsed into chairs near the wide-eyed Epps. Fascinated he stared at them— the first authentic natives of Greenwich Village on whom his cloistered eye had ever rested.

"Ginger ale," bawled the ape.

It was brought. The ape dipping into a fold in his anatomy brought to light a capacious flask, kissed it solemnly, and poured its contents into the glasses of the others.

"Jake, that sure is the real old stuff," said the girl in the grass dress.

"Made it m'sef," said the ape proudly. "Y'see, I took dozen apricots, and ten pounds sugar, and some yeast and some raisins, and mixed 'em in a jug, and added water and—"

"That's nine times we heard all about that," interrupted the pirate or organ grinder. "Better be careful, anyhow. Mebbe that guy is a revnoo officer."

They all turned to stare at Mr. Epps.

"Of course he ain't 'nofficer, Ed," protested the ape, surveying Tidbury with care. "He's got too kind a face. You ain't 'nofficer, are you?"

"No," said Tidbury.

"What did I tell yuh?" cried the ape, triumphantly, to his companions. "Shove up your chair, old sport, and have a drink with us. You look like a live one. I like your face."

Thus bidden, Tidbury, with an air of abandon, joined the group. The ape named Jake tilted his flask over Tidbury's spiritless Horse's Neck with such vehement good-fellowship that a gush of pungent brown fluid spurted from the container. Tidbury downed the mixture at a gulp; it made tears start to his eyes and a conflagration flame up in his brain.

"Howzit?" demanded Jake the ape.

"'Sgoo'," answered Tidbury warmly.

"Have 'nuther. Got plenty," said Jake, producing a second flask from another recess in his shaggy skin. "I like your face."

"Don't care if I do," said Tidbury nonchalantly.

The lights in the near-café were very bright, the voices very high, the conversation exquisitely witty, the mechanical piano a symphonic rhapsody, and the heart of Tidbury Epps was pumping with wild, unwonted pumps; he smiled to himself. He was going to the devil at a great rate. He waxed loquacious. He told them anecdotes; he even sang a little.

He beamed upon Jake, and playfully plucked a tuft of hair from his costume.

"Nice li'l' monkey," he said affably.

"Not a monkey!" denied Jake indignantly.

"Wad are you? S-s-schimpaz-z-ze-e-e?"

"Nope. Not a S-s-schimpaz-z-ze-e-e."

"Ran-tan?"

"Nope. Not a ran-tan."

"Bamboo?"

"Nope. Not a bamboo."

"Well, wad are you?"

Jake thumped his hairy chest proudly.

"I'm a griller," he explained.

"Oh," said Mr. Epps, satisfied. "A griller. Of course! Is it hard work?"

"Work?" cried Jake. "Say, this ain't my real skin. It's a 'sguise."

"Oh," said Mr. Epps. "So you're 'sguised? Wad did you do?"

"Careful, Jake," the organ grinder or pirate warned. "He may be a revnoo officer."

The gorilla turned on him angrily.

"Lookahere, Ed Peterson, how dare you pass remarks like that about my ole friend, Mr. — What is your name, anyhow? Of course he ain't no revnofficer? Are you?"

"I'll fight anybody who says I am," declared Tidbury Epps, glaring fiercely around at the empty chairs and tables.

"You a fighter?" inquired the gorilla, in a voice in which awe, admiration and alcohol mingled.

Mr. Epps contracted his brow and narrowed his eyes.

"Yep," he said impressively. "I'm Terrible Battling Epps. I'd rather fight than eat." He turned sternly to the gorilla. "Why are you 'sguised? Wad did you do?"

"Why, you poor nut," put in the girl in the beads, "we're going to the Pagan Rout."

"Sure, that's it," chimed in Jake. "Goin' to the Pagan Row. Come on along, Terrible."

"Aw, I'm tired of Pagan Routs," said Mr. Epps loftily. But the suggestion speeded up the pumpings of his heart.

"Oh, do come!" urged the girl in the beads.

"Ain't got no 'sguise," said Mr. Epps. He was wavering.

"Aw, come on!" cried the gorilla, clapping him on the shoulder till his teeth rattled. "Proud to have you with us, Terrible. I know a live one when I see one. Come on along. You'll see a lot of your friends there."

His friends? Tidbury thought of Martha.

"If I only had a 'sguise—" he began.

"You can get one round at Steinbock's, on Seventh Avenue," promptly informed the organ grinder-pirate. "That is," he added with sudden suspicion, "if you ain't one of these here revnofficers."

"S-s-s-s-sh, Ed," cautioned Jake, the gorilla. "Do you want Terrible Battling Epps to take a poke at you?"

Tidbury had made up his mind.

"I'll go," he announced.

"Good!" exclaimed the gorilla delightedly. "Atta boy! Glad to have a real N'Yawk sport with us. Meet you at Webber Hall, Terrible."

"Webber Hall? Wherezat?" inquired Tidbury as he sought to negotiate the door.

"Well," confessed the gorilla, "I dunno 'zactly m'sef. Y'see, I'm from Kansas City m'sef. In the lid game, I am. Biggest firm west of the Mizzizippi. Last year we sold—"

"Aw, stop selling and tell Terrible how to get to Webber Hall," put in the girl in the beads; she appeared to be the gorilla's wife.

"Well," said Jake, thoughtfully rubbing his fuzzy head, "far as I remember, you go out to the square and you go straight along till you get to the L and you turn to the right—"

"Left!" interjected the organ grinder-pirate.

"Right," repeated the gorilla firmly. "And then you turn down another street— no, you don't— you go straight on till you see a dentist's sign, a big gold tooth, with 'Gee, it didn't hurt a bit at Dr. B. Schmuck's Parlors,' painted on it, and you turn to your right—"

"Left," corrected the pirate-organ grinder sternly.

"Waz difference?" went on the gorilla blandly. "Well, as I was saying, you turn to the right or left and then you go along three or four blocks, and then you turn to your left—"

"Right, I tell you!" roared the man in velvet.

"Oh, well, you go along until you come to a corner and you turn it and go down a little bit, and there you are!"

"Where am I?" Mr. Epps, posing against the door, asked.

"Webber Hall," said Jake. "Pagan Row."

"Oh," said Mr. Epps.

"Didn't you follow me?"

"Of course I followed you."

"Good. See you at the party, Terrible. You're hot stuff."

"I'll be there. G'night."

"G'night, Terrible, old scout."

iii

MR. EPPS emerged from Ye Amiable Oyster, walking with elaborate but difficult dignity. He had only a remote idea where he was, but he knew where he wanted to go— Steinbock's on Seventh Avenue. So with a temerity quite foreign to him he stepped up briskly to the first passing pedestrian and asked, "Say, frien', where's Sebble Abloo?"

The man accosted puckered a puzzled brow.

"I don't get you, frien'," he said.

"Sebble Abloo!" repeated Mr. Epps loudly, thinking the stranger's hearing might be defective.

"What?"

"Sebble Abloo!" roared Mr. Epps.

The man shook his head as one giving up a conundrum.

"Sebble Abloo," repeated Mr. Epps at the top of his voice "Look." He held up his fingers and counted them off. "One, two, sree, four, fi', sizz, sebble. Sebble Abloo!"

"Oh, Seventh Avenue. Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

"I did."

"I'm going that way. I'll show you."

The stranger steered Tidbury through a rabbit warren of streets— the Greenwich Village streets never have made up their minds where they are going— and started him, with a gentle push, up Seventh Avenue.

Presently by some miracle Tidbury stumbled upon Steinbock's, and pushed his way into a jumble of masks, wigs, helmets and assorted junk, till he approached a patriarch in a skullcap, hidden behind a Niagara of white beard.

"'Lo, ole fel'," said Mr. Epps affably. "What are you 'sguised as? Sandy Claws or a cough drop?"

"Did you wish something?" inquired the patriarch coldly.

"Sure," said Tidbury. "Gimme 'sguise for Pagon Row."

"Cash in advance," said the patriarch. "What sort of costume?"

Tidbury considered.

"Wadjuh got?"

The venerable Steinbock enumerated rapidly, "Bear, bandit, policeman, Turk, golliwog, ballet girl, kewpie, pantaloon, Uncle Sam, tramp, diver, Lord Fauntleroy, devil—"

The ears of Mr. Epps twitched at the last word.

"Devil?"

"Yes," said Mr. Steinbock; "a swell rig; nice red suit; hasn't been worn a dozen times." He leaned forward toward Tidbury and whispered, "And I'll throw in a brand-new pair of horns and a tail!"

"I'll take it!" cried Tidbury. "Where can I hang my pants?"

After an interval there emerged from the depths of the Steinbock establishment a small uncertain figure muffled in an old raincoat. The coat was short and from beneath it protruded bright red legs and a generous length of red tail, with a spike on the end of it that gave forth sharp metallic sounds as it bumped along the pavement. A derby hat concealed one horn, but the other

was visible; the face was Mephistophelian in its general character, but softened and rounded— the countenance of a rather amiable minor devil.

Tidbury Epps paused on a street corner to get his bearings. He had read somewhere that woodsmen, lost in the forest, can find the points of the compass because moss always grows on the north side of trees. He was carefully investigating a lamp-post for a trace of moss when a beady-eyed urchin approached him with outthrust hand.

"Give us one, mister?"

"One what?"

"A sample."

"Sample of what?"

"Ain't you advertising something?"

Tidbury drew himself up.

"No," he said with dignity. "How do I get to Wazzington Square?"

"Aw, chee," the urchin said in disgust, "you're one of them artist guys! Washington Square is two blocks south and three blocks west."

With every corpuscle in his small frame aglow with an excitement he had never before experienced Tidbury Epps started in determined search of the Pagan Rout. A grim purpose had been forming in his brain. So Martha Ritter thought he was quiet, eh? Hydeman had sniggered at him, had he? Just wait till Terrible Battling Epps reached the ball and discovered the well-fed person of Mr. Hydeman in clerical garb. There would be fireworks, he promised himself. No one was going to steal the girl of Terrible Epps and get away with it.

These, and thoughts of a similar trend, reeled through the brain of Tidbury as he hurried with a series of skips and now and then a short sprint along the curbstone.

So busy did he become planning a dramatic descent on Hydeman that he forgot the directions of the urchin, and soon found himself hopelessly astray in an eel tangle of streets, as he repeated, "Two blocks wes' and three blocks souse. Or was it three blocks souse and two blocks wes'?"

Gripping his tail firmly in his hand he tried both plans. Passers-by eyed him with the blasé curiosity of New Yorkers, as he passed at a dog trot.

Sometimes they nudged each other and remarked, "Artist. Goin' to this here Pagan Rout. Pretty snootful, too. Lucky stiff."

No one ventured to impede his slightly erratic progress; after half an hour of wandering he stopped, mopped his brow and observed, "Ought to be there by now."

As he said this he saw two figures across the street, two ladies of mature mold, picking their way along. It was their garb which made him give a shout of triumph and follow them. For one, who was fat, was dressed as a colonial

dame with powdered hair, and the other, who was fatter, was a forty-year-old edition of Little Red Riding Hood; her hair was in pigtails, but she was discreetly skirted to the ankle bones. He followed these masqueraders with the wary steps of an Indian stalking a moose, until they turned into the basement of a towering building of brick, from which issued the melodic scraping of fiddles and the pleasing bleating of horns. His heart skipped a beat. The Pagan Rout! The devil's doorway.

Tidbury Epps shucked off his raincoat and derby hat, tossed them at a fire hydrant, put on his mask, dropped his tail, squared his red shoulders, knotted up his small fists, drew in a deep breath and plunged into the hall. So engrossed was he in these preparations that he failed to note a home-made poster nailed outside the door. It read:

Come One, Come All
The Ladies' Aid Society Will Give a
COSTUME PARTY
in the
CHURCH BASEMENT TO-NIGHT

With a rolling gait Tidbury Epps entered the hall. Figures eddied about him in a dance, and, somewhat surprised, Tidbury noted that it was very like the old-fashioned waltzes he had seen in Calais, Maine. The waltzers evidently regarded dancing as a business of the utmost seriousness; their lips, beneath their dominoes, were rigid and severe, save when they counted softly but audibly, "One, two, three, turn. One, two, three, turn." In vain Tidbury searched the room for Jake the gorilla, the beaded lady, the organ-grinding pirate and the bimbo from the bamboo isle. He concluded that Jake's flasks had been too much for them. And he saw no gypsy or Hydeman. Indeed, as he watched the restrained and sober waltzers he could not escape the conviction that the Pagan Rout, for an institution so widely known for impropriety, was singularly decent in the matter of costume. There were Priscillas in ample skirts, farmerettes in baggy overalls, milkmaids in Mother Hubbards, Pilgrim fathers, sailors, and Chinese in voluminous kimonos. Tidbury, a little dazed in a corner, began to think that he had overestimated the glamour of sin.

He perceived that the obese Red Riding Hood was standing at his elbow, gazing at him with some curiosity.

He lurched toward her, and administered a slap of good-fellowship on her plump shoulder.

"'Lo, cutie," he remarked in accents slightly blurred. "Where's Cleopotter?"

The lady gave vent to a squeal of surprise.

"Sir," she said, "I do not know Miss Potter."

She sniffed the atmosphere in the vicinity of Mr. Epps, gave a little cluck of horror, and scurried away like a duck from a hawk.

The eyes of Mr. Epps followed her flight and he saw that she headed straight for a man who sat in a distant corner of the hall; the man was masked, but Tidbury felt every muscle in his five feet three inches of body stiffen as he saw that the man in the corner wore the garb of the clergy. Hydeman!

Red Riding Hood whispered in his ear and pointed an accusing finger toward Tidbury; the man in the corner gazed earnestly at the diminutive red devil teetering on red hoofs. By now Tidbury had spied another figure, sitting next to the masked preacher. She was a gypsy. And as she gazed at her companion she cocked her head to one side.

With tail bouncing along the floor after him Tidbury started briskly in their direction at a lope. Within a yard of them he reined himself down, and stood, with a hand on either hip, glaring at the cleric and the gypsy.

Hydeman stood up. He seemed larger, rounder than the assistant to the sales manager known to Tidbury in business hours, but the fierce fire of jealousy burned within Mr. Epps— and he was not to be daunted by size.

"So it's you, is it?" he remarked with biting emphasis.

"Naturally," said the man. "Whom did you expect it to be?"

His voice had a soft sweet note in it, not at all like the sharp staccato of Hydeman's crisp business New Yorkese.

"He's making fun of me," said Tidbury, and the spirit of Terrible Battling Epps wholly possessed him.

"You thought I was a dead one, eh?" remarked Mr. Epps. "Well, I'm going to show you that sometimes the quiet ones come to life and—"

The other eyed him sternly.

"Young man," he said, "I fear that you are er— a bit— er— under the weather. I fear you are not one of us."

"Not one of you?" roared Tidbury with passion mounting. "You're darn right I'm not one of you— you low, immoral Greenwich Villagers, leading innocent girls astray." He waved a thin red arm toward the gypsy.

The music had stopped in the midst of a bar; the masqueraders were crowding about. The accused ecclesiastic glared down at the small devil before him.

"How dare you say such a thing of me?" he demanded. "Who are you?"

"You know well enough who I am, Milt Hydeman," cried Tidbury, breathing jerkily. "I'm Terrible Battling Epps, and—"

"Leave our hall at once!" the other returned. "You are plainly under the influence of—"

He stretched out a hand to grasp Tidbury Epps by the shoulder, and as he did so Tidbury brought a small but angry fist into swift contact with the clerical waist-line.

"Oof!" grunted the man.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" screamed the Red Riding Hood. "The devil has struck the Reverend Doctor Bewley. Help! Help!"

But Tidbury, deaf to all things but battle, had buried his other fist so violently in his opponent's soft center that the mask popped from the man's face. It was the round, pink, frightened face of a total stranger.

With a yelp of dismay Tidbury turned to flee, but the outraged parishioners had pounced on him, torn off his mask, and were proving, at his expense, that there is still such a thing as militant, muscular Christianity in the world. As they bore him, kicking and struggling, to the door, he saw in all the blur of excited faces one face with staring, unbelieving eyes. The gypsy had removed her mask, and she was Martha Ritter. In all the babble of voices hers was the only one he heard.

"Oh, Mr. Epps! Oh, Mr. Epps!" she was sobbing. "I didn't think it of you! I didn't think it of you!"

From the gutter in front of the church Tidbury after a while picked himself, felt tenderly of his red-clad limbs, found them whole but painful, applied a bit of cold paving brick to his swelling eye, and started slowly and thoughtfully down the street, his tail, broken in the fracas, hanging limply between his legs. Despite all, the potent stimulus of Jake's concoction lingered with him, and there was a comforting buzzing in his head which all but offset the feeling of dank despair that was crowding in upon him. He had lost Martha. That was sure. He— he was a failure. He couldn't even go to the devil.

How he got back to his own room in Mrs. Kelty's boarding house he never knew, but that was where the brazen voice of the alarm clock summoned him sharply from deep slumber. His head felt like a bass drum full of bumblebees. But it was his heart, as he buttoned his pepper-and-salt vest over it, that hurt him most. He tried to drive from him the aching thoughts of the lost Martha, but the only thought he could substitute was the scarcely more cheerful one that he'd probably be cast incontinently from the hat company when news of his brawl reached the alert ears of Messrs. Spingle and Blatter.

Spurning breakfast he hurried to his office, and before Martha or the rest arrived he had climbed wearily to the pinnacle of his high stool, and had hunched himself over his figures. He was struggling to distinguish between the dancing nines and sixes when he heard a voice— an oddly familiar voice— booming out from the doorway that led to the presidential sanctum.

"Well," said the voice, "it looks to me just now, Spingle, as if we could use about ten thousand dozen of your Number 1A hats out in Kansas City this year. Of course I'll have to shop around a bit to see what the others can offer—"

"Of course, Jake, of course," replied Mr. Spingle, in the satin voice Tidbury knew he reserved for the very largest buyers. "But say, Jake, wouldn't you and your wife like to be our guests at a little party to-night? Dinner and then the Winter Garden? Our Mr. Hydeman will be delighted to take you out."

The person addressed as Jake lowered his voice, but not so low that the avid ears of Tidbury Epps missed a syllable.

"Between you and me, Spingle," said Jake, "I wouldn't care to at all."

"Why, Jake," expostulated Mr. Spingle, "I thought you and the wife always liked to whoop it up a bit when you came to the big town."

"So we do," admitted Jake, "but not with him."

"What's wrong with Hydeman?" demanded the Napoleon of Hatdom, and Tidbury read anxiety in his tone.

"Everything," replied Jake succinctly.

"You know him, then?"

"Yep, ran into him last night at the Pagan Rout," said Jake. "He didn't make much of a hit with me or the missus. Too fresh. Treated us as if we were rubes. Out in Kansas City we know a good fellow when we see one— Why, what the devil—"

Jake had chopped his sentence off short, and with a whoop of joy had bounded across the room.

"Well, if it isn't Terrible Epps!" he bellowed heartily. "How's the head, old sport? Say, Terrible, why didn't you join us at the Pagan Rout?"

"I— I couldn't find you there," said Tidbury, trembling.

"Oh, yes," remarked Jake thoughtfully. "You must have got there after they put us out."

"They put me out too," said Tidbury.

Jake's roar of laughter made the straw hats quiver on the heads of the dummies in the show cases. He turned a beaming face to Mr. Spingle.

"Say, Spingle," he cried, "what do you mean by trying to palm off a tin-horn like Hydeman on me when you've got the best little fellow, the warmest little entertainer east of the Mississippi, right here?"

To this Mr. Spingle was totally unable to make any reply. But after a minute his brain functioned sufficiently for him to say, "About that order of yours, Jake—"

"Oh," said Jake reassuringly. "I'll talk to Terrible Epps about it at dinner to-night."

"AND TO THINK," repeated Mr. Spingle for the third or fourth time to Mr. Blatter, "that Tidbury is a man-about-town who goes to Pagan Routs and everything! You'll give him Hydeman's job, won't you, Otto?"

"I already have," said Mr. Blatter.

"Good!" exclaimed the Napoleon of Hatdom. "Didn't I always say that Tidbury Epps was a live one, underneath?"

THE ROUND CHEEK of Martha Ritter was in immediate contact with the pepper-and-salt shoulder of Tidbury Epps.

"And you tried to make me think," he repeated in a tone of wonder, "that you liked Hydeman and were going to the Pagan Rout with him? Oh, Martha dear, why did you do it?"

She hid her eyes from his.

"I did it," she murmured, "because I wanted to make you jealous."

The clock ticked many ticks.

"But, Tidbury, if I marry you," she said anxiously, "you'll reform, won't you? You'll promise me you'll give up Greenwich Village and drinking, won't you, Tidbury?"

"If you'll help me, dearest," promised Tidbury Epps, "I'll try."

———————

11: Honor Among Sportsmen

EACH WITH HIS favorite hunting pig on a stout string, a band of the leading citizens of Montpont moved in dignified procession down the Rue Victor Hugo in the direction of the hunting preserve.

It was a mild, delicious Sunday, cool and tranquil as a pool in a woodland glade. To Perigord alone come such days. Peace was in the air, and the murmur of voices of men intent on a mission of moment. The men of Montpont were going forth to hunt truffles.

As Brillat-Savarin points out in his "Physiology of Taste"—"All France is inordinately truffliferous, and the province of Perigord particularly so." On week-days the hunting of that succulent subterranean fungus was a business, indeed, a vast commercial enterprise, for were there not thousands of Perigord pies to be made, and uncounted tins of *pâté de foie gras* to be given the last exquisite touch by the addition of a bit of truffle?

But on Sunday it became a sport, the chief, the only sport of the citizens of Montpont. A preserve, rich in beech, oak and chestnut trees in whose shade the shy truffle thrives, had been set apart and here the truffle was never hunted for mercenary motives but for sport and sport alone. On week-days truffle hunting was confined to professionals; on Sunday, after church, all Montpont hunted truffles. Even the sub-prefect maintained a stable of notable pigs for the purpose. For the pig is as necessary to truffle-hunting as the beagle is to beagling.

A pig, by dint of patient training, can be taught to scent the buried truffle with his sensitive snout, and to point to its hiding place, as immobile as a cast-iron setter on a profiteer's lawn, until its proud owner exhumes the prize. An experienced pointing pig, with a creditable record, brings an enormous price in the markets of Montpont.

At the head of the procession that kindly Sunday marched Monsieur Bonticu and Monsieur Pantan, with the decisive but leisurely tread of men of affairs. They spoke to each other with an elaborate, ceremonial politeness, for on this day, at least, they were rivals. On other days they were bosom friends. To-day was the last of the fall hunting season, and they were tied, with a score of some two hundred truffles each, for the championship of Montpont, an honor beside which winning the Derby is nothing and the *Grand Prix de Rome* a mere bauble in the eyes of all Perigord. To-day was to tell whether the laurels would rest on the round pink brow of Monsieur Bonticu or the oval olive brow of Monsieur Pantan.

Monsieur Bonticu was the leading undertaker of Montpont, and in his stately appearance he satisfied the traditions of his calling. He was a large man of forty or so, and in his special hunting suit of jade-hued cloth he looked, from a distance, to be an enormous green pepper. His face was vast and many chinned and his eyes had been set at the bottom of wells sunk deep in his pink face; it was said that even on a bright noon he could see the stars, as ordinary folk can by peering up from the bottom of a mine-shaft. They were small and cunning, his eyes, and a little diffident. In Montpont, he was popular. Even had his heart not been as large as it undoubtedly was, his prowess as a hunter of truffles and his complete devotion to that art— he insisted it was an art— would have endeared him to all right-thinking Montpontians. He was a bachelor, and said, more than once, as he sipped his old Anjou in the Café de l'Univers, "I marry? Bonticu marry? That is a cause of laughter, my friends. I have my little house, a good cook, and my Anastasie. What more could mortal ask? Certainly not an Eve in his paradise. I marry? I be dad to a collection of squealing, wiggling cabbages? I laugh at the idea."

Anastasie was his pig, a prodigy at detecting truffles, and his most priceless treasure. He once said, at a truffle-hunters' dinner, "I have but two passions, my comrades. The pursuit of the truffle and the flight from the female."

Monsieur Pantan had applauded this sentiment heartily. He, too, was a bachelor. He combined, lucratively, the offices of town veterinarian and apothecary, and had written an authoritative book, "The Science of Truffle Hunting." To him it was a science, the first of sciences. He was a fierce-looking little man, with bellicose eyes and bristling moustachio, and quick, nervous hands that always seemed to be rolling endless thousands of pills. He was given to fits of temper, but that is rather expected of a man in the south of France. His devotion to his pig, Clotilde, atoned, in the eyes of Montpont, for a slightly irascible nature.

The party, by now, had reached the hunting preserve, and with eager, serious faces, they lengthened the leashes on their pigs, and urged them to their task. By the laws of the chase, the choicest area had been left for Monsieur Bonticu and Monsieur Pantan, and excited galleries followed each of the two leading contestants. Bets were freely made.

IN A SCANT nine minutes by the watch, Anastasie was seen to freeze and point. Monsieur Bonticu plunged to his plump knees, whipped out his trowel, dug like a badger, and in another minute brought to light a handsome truffle, the size of a small potato, blackish-gray as the best truffles are, and studded with warts. With a gesture of triumph, he exhibited it to the umpire, and popped it into his bag. He rewarded Anastasie with a bit of cheese, and urged

her to new conquests. But a few seconds later, Monsieur Pantan gave a short hop, skip and jump, and all eyes were fastened on Clotilde, who had grown motionless, save for the tip of her snout which quivered gently. Monsieur Pantan dug feverishly and soon brandished aloft a well-developed truffle. So the battle waged.

At one time, by a series of successes, Monsieur Bonticu was three up on his rival, but Clotilde, by a bit of brilliant work beneath a chestnut tree, brought to light a nest of four truffles and sent the Pantan colors to the van.

The sun was setting; time was nearly up. The other hunters had long since stopped and were clustered about the two chief contestants, who, pale but collected, bent all their skill to the hunt. Practically every square inch of ground had been covered. But one propitious spot remained, the shadow of a giant oak, and, moved by a common impulse, the stout Bonticu and the slender Pantan simultaneously directed their pigs toward it. But a little minute of time now remained. The gallery held its breath. Then a great shout made the leaves shake and rustle. Like two perfectly synchronized machines, Anastasie and Clotilde had frozen and were pointing. They were pointing to the same spot.

Monsieur Pantan, more active than his rival, had darted to his knees, his trowel poised for action. But a large hand was laid on his shoulder, politely, and the silky voice of Monsieur Bonticu said, "If Monsieur will pardon me, may I have the honor of informing him that this is my find?"

Monsieur Pantan, trowel in mid-air, bowed as best a kneeling man can.

"I trust," he said, coolly, "that Monsieur will not consider it an impertinence if I continue to dig up what my Clotilde has, beyond peradventure, discovered, and I hope Monsieur will not take it amiss if I suggest that he step out of the light as his shadow is not exactly that of a sapling."

Monsieur Bonticu was trembling, but controlled.

"With profoundest respect," he said from deep in his chest, "I beg to be allowed to inform Monsieur that he is, if I may say so, in error. I must ask Monsieur, as a sportsman, to step back and permit me to take what is justly mine."

Monsieur Pantan's face was terrible to see, but his voice was icily formal.

"I regret," he said, "that I cannot admit Monsieur's contention. In the name of sport, and his own honor, I call upon Monsieur to retire from his position."

"That," said Monsieur Bonticu, "I will never do."

They both turned faces of appeal to the umpire. That official was bewildered.

"It is not in the rules, Messieurs," he got out, confusedly. "In my forty years as an umpire, such a thing has not happened. It is a matter to be settled between you, personally."

As he said the words, Monsieur Pantan commenced to dig furiously. Monsieur Bonticu dropped to his knees and also dug, like some great, green, panic-stricken beaver. Mounds of dirt flew up. At the same second they spied the truffle, a monster of its tribe. At the same second the plump fingers of Monsieur Bonticu and the thin fingers of Monsieur Pantan closed on it. Cries of dismay rose from the gallery.

"It is the largest of truffles," called voices. "Don't break it. Broken ones don't count." But it was too late. Monsieur Bonticu tugged violently; as violently tugged Monsieur Pantan. The truffle, indeed a giant of its species, burst asunder. The two men stood, each with his half, each glaring.

"I trust," said Monsieur Bonticu, in his hollowest death-room voice, "that Monsieur is satisfied. I have my opinion of Monsieur as a sportsman, a gentleman and a Frenchman."

"For my part," returned Monsieur Pantan, with rising passion, "it is impossible for me to consider Monsieur as any of the three."

"What's that you say?" cried Monsieur Bonticu, his big face suddenly flamingly red.

"Monsieur, in addition to the defects in his sense of honor is not also deficient in his sense of hearing," returned the smoldering Pantan.

"Monsieur is insulting."

"That is his hope."

Monsieur Bonticu was aflame with a great, seething wrath, but he had sufficient control of his sense of insult to jerk at the leash of Anastasie and say, in a tone all Montpont could hear:

"Come, Anastasie. I once did Monsieur Pantan the honor of considering him your equal. I must revise my estimate. He is not your sort of pig at all."

Monsieur Pantan's eyes were blazing dangerously, but he retained a slipping grip on his emotions long enough to say:

"Come, Clotilde. Do not demean yourself by breathing the same air as Monsieur and Madame Bonticu."

The eyes of Monsieur Bonticu, ordinarily so peaceful, now shot forth sparks. Turning a livid face to his antagonist, he cried aloud:

"Monsieur Pantan, in my opinion you are a puff-ball!"

This was too much. For to call a truffle-hunter a puff-ball is to call him a thing unspeakably vile. In the eyes of a true lover of truffles a puff-ball is a noisome, obscene thing; it is a false truffle. In truffledom it is a fighting word. With a scream of rage Monsieur Pantan advanced on the bulky Bonticu.

"By the thumbs of St. Front," he cried, "you shall pay for that, Monsieur Aristide Gontran Louis Bonticu. Here and now, before all Montpont, before all Perigord, before all France, I challenge you to a duel to the death."

Words rattled and jostled in his throat, so great was his anger. Monsieur Bonticu stood motionless; his full-moon face had gone white; the half of truffle slipped from his fingers. For he knew, as they all knew, that the dueling code of Perigord is inexorable. It is seldom nowadays that the Perigordians, even in their hottest moments, say the fighting word, for once a challenge has passed, retirement is impossible, and a duel is a most serious matter. By rigid rule, the challenger and challenged must meet at daybreak in mortal combat. At twenty paces they must each discharge two horse-pistols; then they must close on each other with sabers; should these fail to settle the issue, each man is provided with a poniard for the most intimate stages of the combat. Such duels are seldom bloodless. Monsieur Bonticu's lips formed some syllables. They were:

"You are aware of the consequences of your words, Monsieur Pantan?"

"Perfectly."

"You do not wish to withdraw them?" Monsieur Bonticu despite himself injected a hopeful note into his query.

"I withdraw? Never in this life. On the contrary, not only do I not withdraw, I reiterate," bridled Monsieur Pantan.

In a *requiescat in pace* voice, Monsieur Bonticu said:

"So be it. You have sealed your own doom, Monsieur. I shall prepare to attend you first in the capacity of an opponent, and shortly thereafter in my professional capacity."

Monsieur Pantan sneered openly.

"Monsieur the undertaker had better consider in his remaining hours whether it is feasible to embalm himself or have a stranger do it."

With this thunderbolt of defiance, the little man turned on his heel, and stumped from the field.

Monsieur Bonticu followed at last. But he walked as one whose knees have turned to *meringue glace*. He went slowly to his little shop and sat down among the coffins. For the first time in his life their presence made him uneasy. A big new one had just come from the factory. For a long time he gazed at it; then he surveyed his own full-blown physique with a measuring eye. He shuddered. The light fell on the silver plate on the lid, and his eyes seemed to see engraved there:

Monsieur Aristide Gontran Louis Bonticu
Died in the forty-first year of his life on the field of honor.
"*He was without peer as a hunter of truffles*."

May he rest in peace.

With almost a smile, he reflected that this inscription would make Monsieur Pantan very angry; yes, he would insist on it. He looked down at his fat fists and sighed profoundly, and shook his big head. They had never pulled a trigger or gripped a sword-hilt; the knife, the peaceful table knife, the fork, and the leash of Anastasie— those had occupied them. Anastasie! A globular tear rose slowly from the wells in which his eyes were set, and unchecked, wandered gently down the folds of his face. Who would care for Anastasie? With another sigh that seemed to start in the caverns of his soul, he reached out and took a dusty book from a case, and bent over it. It contained the time-honored dueling code of ancient Perigord. Suddenly, as he read, his eyes brightened, and he ceased to sigh. He snapped the book shut, took from a peg his best hat, dusted it with his elbow, and stepped out into the starry Perigord night.

AT HIGH NOON, three days later, as duly decreed by the dueling code, Monsieur Pantan, in full evening dress, appeared at the shop of Monsieur Bonticu, accompanied by two solemn-visaged seconds, to make final arrangements for the affair of honor. They found Monsieur Bonticu sitting comfortably among his coffins. He greeted them with a serene smile. Monsieur Pantan frowned portentously.

"We have come," announced the chief second, Monsieur Duffon, the town butcher, "as the representatives of this grossly insulted gentleman to demand satisfaction. The weapons and conditions are, of course, fixed by the code. It remains only to set the date. Would Friday at dawn in the truffle preserve be entirely convenient for Monsieur?"

Monsieur Bonticu's shrug contained more regret than a hundred words could convey.

"Alas, it will be impossible, Messieurs," he said, with a deep bow.

"Impossible?"

"But yes. I assure Messieurs that nothing would give me more exquisite pleasure than to grant this gentleman"— he stressed this word—"the satisfaction that his honor"— he also stressed this word—"appears to demand. However, it is impossible."

The seconds and Monsieur Pantan looked at Monsieur Bonticu and at each other.

"But this is monstrous," exclaimed the chief second. "Is it that Monsieur refuses to fight?"

Monsieur Bonticu's slowly shaken head indicated most poignant regret.

"But no, Messieurs," he said. "I do not refuse. Is it not a question of honor? Am I not a sportsman? But, alas, I am forbidden to fight."

"Forbidden."

"Alas, yes."

"But why?"

"Because," said Monsieur Bonticu, "I am a married man."

The eyes of the three men widened; they appeared stunned by surprise. Monsieur Pantan spoke first.

"You married?" he demanded.

"But certainly."

"When?"

"Only yesterday."

"To whom? I demand proof."

"To Madame Aubison of Barbaste."

"The widow of Sergeant Aubison?"

"The same."

"I do not believe it," declared Monsieur Pantan.

Monsieur Bonticu smiled, raised his voice and called.

"Angelique! Angelique, my dove. Will you come here a little moment?"

"What? And leave the lentil soup to burn?" came an undoubtedly feminine voice from the depths of the house.

"Yes, my treasure."

"What a pest you are, Aristide," said the voice, and its owner, an ample woman of perhaps thirty, appeared in the doorway. Monsieur Bonticu waved a fat hand toward her.

"My wife, Messieurs," he said.

She bowed stiffly. The three men bowed. They said nothing. They gaped at her. She spoke to her husband.

"Is it that you take me for a Punch and Judy show, Aristide?"

"Ah, never, my rosebud," cried Monsieur Bonticu, with a placating smile. "You see, my own, these gentlemen wished—"

"There!" she interrupted. "The lentil soup! It burns." She hurried back to the kitchen.

The three men— Monsieur Pantan and his seconds— consulted together.

"Beyond question," said Monsieur Duffon, "Monsieur Bonticu cannot accept the challenge. He is married; you are not. The code says plainly: 'Opponents must be on terms of absolute equality in family responsibility.' Thus, a single man cannot fight a married one, and so forth. See. Here it is in black and white."

Monsieur Pantan was boiling as he faced the calm Bonticu.

"To think," stormed the little man, "that truffles may be hunted— yes, even eaten, by such a man! I see through you, Monsieur. But think not that a Pantan can be flouted. I have my opinion of you, Monsieur the undertaker."

Monsieur Bonticu shrugged.

"Your opinions do not interest me," he said, "and only my devotion to the cause of free speech makes me concede that you are entitled to an opinion at all. Good morning, Messieurs, good morning." He bowed them down a lane of caskets and out into the afternoon sunshine. The face of Monsieur Pantan was black.

Time went by in Perigord. Other truffle-hunting seasons came and went, but Messieurs Bonticu and Pantan entered no more competitions. They hunted, of course, the one with Anastasie, the other with Clotilde, but they hunted in solitary state, and studiously avoided each other. Then one day Monsieur Pantan's hairy countenance, stern and determined, appeared like a genie at the door of Monsieur Bonticu's shop. The rivals exchanged profound bows.

"I have the honor," said Monsieur Pantan, in his most formal manner, "to announce to Monsieur that the impediment to our meeting on the field of honor has been at last removed, and that I am now in a position to send my seconds to him to arrange that meeting. May they call to-morrow at high noon?"

"I do not understand," said Monsieur Bonticu, arching his eyebrows. "I am still married."

"I too," said Monsieur Pantan, with a grim smile, "am married."

"You? Pantan? Monsieur jests."

"If Monsieur will look in the newspaper of to-day," said Monsieur Pantan, dryly, "he will see an announcement of my marriage yesterday to Madame Marselet of Pergieux."

There was astonishment and alarm in the face of the undertaker. Then reverie seemed to wrap him round. The scurrying of footsteps, the bumble of voices, in the rooms over the shop aroused him. His face was tranquil again as he spoke.

"Will Monsieur and his seconds do me the honor of calling on me day after to-morrow?" he asked.

"As you wish," replied Monsieur Pantan, a gleam of satisfaction in his eye.

Punctual to the second, Monsieur Pantan and his friends presented themselves at the shop of Monsieur Bonticu. His face, they observed, was first worried, then smiling, then worried again.

"Will to-morrow at dawn be convenient for Monsieur?" inquired the butcher, Duffon.

Monsieur Bonticu gestured regret with his shoulders, and said:

"I am desolated with chagrin, Messieurs, believe me, but it is impossible."

"Impossible. It cannot be," cried Monsieur Pantan. "Monsieur has one wife. I have one wife. Our responsibilities are equal. Is it that Monsieur is prepared to swallow his word of insult?"

"Never," declared Monsieur Bonticu. "I yearn to encounter Monsieur in mortal combat. But, alas, it is not I, but Nature that intervenes. I have, only this morning, become a father, Messieurs."

As if in confirmation there came from the room above the treble wail of a new infant.

"Behold!" exclaimed Monsieur Bonticu, with a wave of his hand.

Monsieur Pantan's face was purple.

"This is too much," he raged. "But wait, Monsieur. But wait." He clapped his high hat on his head and stamped out of the shop.

Truffles were hunted and the days flowed by and Monsieur Pantan and his seconds one high noon again called upon Monsieur Bonticu, who greeted them urbanely, albeit he appeared to have lost weight and tiny worry-wrinkles were visible in his face.

"Monsieur," began the chief second, "may I have the honor—"

"I'll speak for myself," interrupted Monsieur Pantan. "With my own voice I wish to inform Monsieur that nothing can now prevent our meeting, at dawn to-morrow. To-day, Monsieur the undertaker, I, too, became a father!"

The news seemed to interest but not to stagger Monsieur Bonticu. His smile was sad as he said:

"You are too late, Monsieur the apothecary and veterinarian. Two days ago I, also, became a father again."

Monsieur Pantan appeared to be about to burst, so terrible was his rage.

"But wait," he screamed, "but wait." And he rushed out.

Next day Monsieur Pantan and his seconds returned. The moustachios of the little man were on end with excitement and his eye was triumphant.

"We meet to-morrow at daybreak," he announced.

"Ah, that it were possible," sighed Monsieur Bonticu. "But the code forbids. As I said yesterday, Monsieur has a wife and a child, while I have a wife and children. I regret our inequality, but I cannot deny it."

"Spare your regrets, Monsieur," rejoined the small man. "I, too, have two children now."

"You?" Monsieur Bonticu stared, puzzled. "Yesterday you had but one. It cannot be, Monsieur."

"It can be," cried Monsieur Pantan. "Yesterday I adopted one!"

The peony face of Monsieur Bonticu did not blanch at this intelligence. Again he smiled with an infinite sadness.

"I appreciate," he said, "Monsieur Pantan's courtesy in affording me this opportunity, but, alas, he has not been in possession of the facts. By an almost unpardonable oversight I neglected to inform Monsieur that I had become the father not of one child, but of two. Twins, Messieurs. Would you care to inspect them?"

Monsieur Pantan's face was contorted with a wrath shocking to witness. He bit his lip; he clenched his fist.

"The end is not yet," he shouted. "No, no, Monsieur. By the thumbs of St. Front, I shall adopt another child."

At high noon next day three men in grave parade went down the Rue Victor Hugo and entered the shop of Monsieur Bonticu. Monsieur Pantan spoke.

"The adoption has been made," he announced. "Here are the papers. I, too, have a wife and three children. Shall we meet at dawn to-morrow?"

Monsieur Bonticu looked up from his account books with a rueful smile.

"Ah, if it could be," he said. "But it cannot be."

"It cannot be?" echoed Monsieur Pantan.

"No," said Monsieur Bonticu, sadly. "Last night my aged father-in-law came to live with me. He is a new, and weighty responsibility, Monsieur."

Monsieur Pantan appeared numbed for a moment; then, with a glare of concentrated fury, he rasped.

"I, too, have an aged father-in-law."

He slammed the shop door after him.

THAT NIGHT when Monsieur Bonticu went to the immaculate little stye back of his shop to see if the pride of his heart, Anastasie, was comfortable, to chat with her a moment, and to present her with a morsel of truffle to keep up her interest in the chase, he found her lying on her side moaning faintly. Between moans she breathed with a labored wheeze, and in her gentle blue eyes stood the tears of suffering. She looked up feebly, piteously, at Monsieur Bonticu. With a cry of horror and alarm he bent over her.

"Anastasie! My Anastasie! What is it? What ails my brave one?" She grunted softly, short, stifled grunts of anguish. He made a swift examination. Expert in all matters pertaining to the pig, he perceived that she had contracted an acute case of that rare and terrible disease, known locally as Perigord pip, and he knew, only too well, that her demise was but a question of hours. His Anastasie would never track down another truffle unless— He leaned weakly against the wall and clasped his warm brow. There was but one

man in all the world who could cure her. And that man was Pantan, the veterinarian. His "Elixir Pantan," a secret specific, was the only known cure for the dread malady.

Pride and love wrestled within the torn soul of the stricken Bonticu. To humble himself before his rival— it was unthinkable. He could see the sneer on Monsieur Pantan's olive face; he could hear his cutting words of refusal. The dew of conflicting emotions dampened the brow of Monsieur Bonticu. Anastasie whimpered in pain. He could not stand it. He struck his chest a resounding blow of decision. He reached for his hat.

Monsieur Bonticu knocked timidly at the door of the apothecary-veterinarian's house. A head appeared at a window.

"Who is it?" demanded a shrill, cross, female voice.

"It is I. Bonticu. I wish to speak with Monsieur Pantan."

"Nice time to come," complained the lady. She shouted into the darkness of the room: "Pantan! Pantan, you sleepy lout. Wake up. There's a great oaf of a man outside wanting to speak to you."

"Patience, my dear Rosalie, patience," came the voice of Monsieur Pantan; it was strangely meek. Presently the head of Monsieur Pantan, all nightcap and moustachios, was protruded from the window.

"You have come to fight?" he asked.

"But no."

"Bah! Then why wake me up this cold night?"

"It is a family matter, Monsieur," said the shivering Bonticu. "A matter the most pressing."

"Is it that Monsieur has adopted an orphanage," inquired Pantan. "Or brought nine old aunts to live with him?"

"No, no, Monsieur. It is most serious. It is Anastasie. She— is— dying."

"A thousand regrets, but I cannot act as pall-bearer," returned Monsieur Pantan, preparing to shut the window. "Good-night."

"I beg Monsieur to attend a little second," cried Monsieur Bonticu. "You can save her."

"I save her?" Monsieur Pantan's tone suggested that the idea was deliciously absurd.

"Yes, yes, yes," cried Bonticu, catching at a straw. "You alone. She has the Perigord pip, Monsieur."

"Ah, indeed."

"Yes, one cannot doubt it."

"Most amusing."

"You are cruel, Monsieur," cried Bonticu. "She suffers, ah, how she suffers."

"She will not suffer long," said Pantan, coldly.

There was a sob in Bonticu's voice as he said:

"I entreat Monsieur to save her. I entreat him as a sportsman."

In the window Monsieur Pantan seemed to be thinking deeply.

"I entreat him as a doctor. The ethics of his profession demand—"

"You have used me abominably, Monsieur," came the voice of Pantan, "but when you appeal to me as a sportsman and a doctor I cannot refuse. Wait."

The window banged down and in a second or so Monsieur Pantan, in hastily donned attire, joined his rival and silently they walked through the night to the bedside of the dying Anastasie. Once there, Monsieur Pantan's manner became professional, intense, impersonal.

"Warm water. Buckets of it," he ordered.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Olive oil and cotton."

"Yes, Monsieur."

With trembling hands Monsieur Bonticu brought the things desired, and hovered about, speaking gently to Anastasie, calling her pet names, soothing her. The apothecary-veterinarian was busy. He forced the contents of a huge black bottle down her throat. He anointed her with oil, water and unknown substances. He ordered his rival about briskly.

"Rub her belly."

Bonticu rubbed violently.

"Pull her tail."

Bonticu pulled.

"Massage her limbs."

Bonticu massaged till he was gasping for breath.

The light began to come back to the eyes of Anastasie, the rose hue to her pale snout; she stopped whimpering. Monsieur Pantan rose with a smile.

"The crisis is passed," he announced. "She will live. What in the name of all the devils—"

This last ejaculation was blurred and smothered, for the overjoyed Bonticu, with the impulsiveness of his warm Southern nature, had thrown his arms about the little man and planted loud kisses on both hairy cheeks. They stood facing each other, oddly shy.

"If Monsieur would do me the honor," began Monsieur Bonticu, a little thickly, "I have some ancient port. A glass or two after that walk in the cold would be good for Monsieur, perhaps."

"If Monsieur insists," murmured Pantan.

Monsieur Bonticu vanished and reappeared with a cob-webbed bottle. They drank. Pantan smacked his lips. Timidly, Monsieur Bonticu said:

"I can never sufficiently repay Monsieur for his kindness."

He glanced at Anastasie who slept tranquilly. "She is very dear to me."

"Do I not know?" replied Monsieur Pantan. "Have I not Clotilde?"

"I trust she is in excellent health, Monsieur."

"She was never better," replied Monsieur Pantan. He finished his glass, and it was promptly refilled. Only the sound of Anastasie's regular breathing could be heard. Monsieur Pantan put down his glass. In a manner that tried to be casual he remarked,

"I will not attempt to conceal from Monsieur that his devotion to his Anastasie has touched me. Believe me, Monsieur Bonticu, I am not unaware of the sacrifice you made in coming to me for her sake."

Monsieur Bonticu, deeply moved, bowed.

"Monsieur would have done the same for his Clotilde," he said. "Monsieur has demonstrated himself to be a thorough sportsman. I am grateful to him. I'd have missed Anastasie."

"But naturally."

"Ah, yes," went on Monsieur Bonticu. "When my wife scolds and the children scream, it is to her I go for a little talk. She never argues."

Monsieur Pantan looked up from a long draught.

"Does your wife scold and your children scream?" he asked.

"Alas, but too often," answered Monsieur Bonticu.

"You should hear my Rosalie," sighed Monsieur Pantan. "I too seek consolation as you do. I talk with my Clotilde."

Monsieur Bonticu nodded, sympathetically.

"My wife is always nagging me for more money," he said with a sudden burst of confidence. "And the undertaking business, my dear Pantan, is not what it was."

"Do I not know?" said Pantan. "When folks are well we both suffer."

"I stagger beneath my load," sighed Bonticu.

"My load is no less light," remarked Pantan.

"If my family responsibilities should increase," observed Bonticu, "it would be little short of a calamity."

"If mine did," said Pantan, "it would be a tragedy."

"And yet," mused Bonticu, "our responsibilities seem to go on increasing."

"Alas, it is but too true."

"The statesmen are talking of limiting armaments," remarked Bonticu.

"An excellent idea," said Pantan, warmly.

"Can it be that they are more astute than two veteran truffle-hunters?"

"They could not possibly be, my dear Bonticu."

There was a pregnant pause. Monsieur Bonticu broke the silence.

"In the heat of the chase," he said, "one does things and says things one afterwards regrets."

"Yes. That is true."

"In his excitement one might even so far forget himself as to call a fellow sportsman— a really excellent fellow— a puff-ball."

"That is true. One might."

Suddenly Monsieur Bonticu thrust his fat hand toward Monsieur Pantan.

"You are not a puff-ball, Armand," he said. "You never were a puff-ball!"

Tears leaped to the little man's eyes. He seized the extended hand in both of his and pressed it.

"Aristide!" was all he could say. "Aristide!"

"We shall drink," cried Bonticu, "to the art of truffle-hunting."

"The science—" corrected Pantan, gently.

"To the art-science of truffle-hunting," cried Bonticu, raising his glass.

The moon smiled down on Perigord. On the ancient, twisted streets of Montpont it smiled with particular brightness. Down the Rue Victor Hugo, in the middle of the street, went two men, a very stout big man and a very thin little man, arm in arm, and singing, for all Montpont, and all the world, to hear, a snatch of an old song from some forgotten revue.

"Oh, Gaby, darling Gaby.
Bam! Bam! Bam!
Why don't you come to me?
Bam! Bam! Bam!
And jump in the arms of your own true love,
While the wind blows chilly and cold?
Bam! Bam! Bam!"

12: The $25,000 Jaw

"RATHER THIRSTY this morning, eh, Mr. Addicks?" inquired Cowdin, the chief purchasing agent. The "Mister" was said with a long, hissing "s" and was distinctly not meant as a title of respect.

Cowdin, as he spoke, rested his two square hairy hands on Croly Addicks' desk, and this enabled him to lean forward and thrust his well-razored knob of blue-black jaw within a few inches of Croly Addicks' face.

"Too bad, Mr. Addicks, too bad," said Cowdin in a high, sharp voice. "Do you realize, Mr. Addicks, that every time you go up to the water cooler you waste fifteen seconds of the firm's time? I might use a stronger word than 'waste,' but I'll spare your delicate feelings. Do you think you can control your thirst until you take your lunch at the Waldorf-Astoria, or shall I have your desk piped with ice water, Mr. Addicks?"

Croly Addicks drew his convex face as far away as he could from the concave features of the chief purchasing agent and muttered, "Had kippered herring for breakfast."

A couple of the stenographers tittered. Croly's ears reddened and his hands played nervously with his blue-and-white polka-dot necktie. Cowdin eyed him for a contemptuous half second, then rotated on his rubber heel and prowled back to his big desk in the corner of the room.

Croly Addicks, inwardly full of red revolution, outwardly merely flustered and intimidated, rustled among the piles of invoices and forms on his desk, and tried desperately to concentrate on his task as assistant to the assistant purchasing agent of the Pierian Piano Company, a vast far-flung enterprise that boasted, with only slight exaggeration, "We bring melody to a million homes." He hated Cowdin at all times, and particularly when he called him "Mr. Addicks." That "Mister" hurt worse than a slap on a sunburned shoulder. What made the hate almost beyond bearing was the realization on Croly's part that it was impotent.

"Gawsh," murmured the blond stenographer from the corner of her mouth, after the manner of convicts, "Old Grizzly's pickin' on the chinless wonder again. I don't see how Croly stands it. I wouldn't if I was him."

"Aw, wadda yuh expeck of Chinless?" returned the brunette stenographer disdainfully as she crackled paper to conceal her breach of the office rules against conversation. "Feller with ingrown jaws was made to pick on."

At noon Croly went out to his lunch, not to the big hotel, as Cowdin had suggested, but to a crowded basement full of the jangle and clatter of cutlery and crockery, and the smell and sputter of frying liver. The name of this cave

was the Help Yourself Buffet. Its habitués, mostly clerks like Croly, pronounced "buffet" to rhyme with "rough it," which was incorrect but apt.

The place was, as its patrons never tired of reminding one another as they tried with practiced eye and hand to capture the largest sandwiches, a conscience beanery. As a matter of fact, one's conscience had a string tied to it by a cynical management.

The system is simple. There are piles of food everywhere, with prominent price tags. The hungry patron seizes and devours what he wishes. He then passes down a runway and reports, to the best of his mathematical and ethical ability, the amount his meal has cost— usually, for reasons unknown, forty-five cents. The report is made to a small automaton of a boy, with a blasé eye and a brassy voice. He hands the patron a ticket marked 45 and at the same instant screams in a sirenic and incredulous voice, "Fawty-fi'." Then the patron passes on down the alley and pays the cashier at the exit. The purpose of the boy's violent outcry is to signal the spotter, who roves among the foods, a derby hat cocked over one eye and an untasted sandwich in his hand, so that persons deficient in conscience may not basely report their total as forty-five when actually they have eaten ninety cents' worth.

On this day, when Croly Addicks had finished his modest lunch, the spotter was lurking near the exit. Several husky-looking young men passed him, and brazenly reported totals of twenty cents, when it was obvious that persons of their brawn would not be content with a lunch costing less than seventy-five; but the spotter noting their bull necks and bellicose air let them pass. But when Croly approached the desk and reported forty-five the spotter pounced on him. Experience had taught the spotter the type of man one may pounce on without fear of sharp words or resentful blows.

"Pahdun me a minute, frien'," said the spotter. "Ain't you made a little mistake?"

"Me?" quavered Croly. He was startled and he looked guilty, as only the innocent can look.

"Yes, you," said the spotter, scowling at the weak outlines of Croly's countenance.

"No," jerked out Croly. "Forty-five's correct." He tried to move along toward the cashier, but the spotter's bulk blocked the exit alley.

"Ain't you the guy I seen layin' away a double portion of strawb'ry shortcake wit' cream?" asked the spotter sternly.

Croly hoped that it was not apparent that his upper lip was trembling; his hands went up to his polka-dot tie and fidgeted with it. He had paused yearningly over the strawberry shortcake; but he had decided he couldn't afford it.

"Didn't have shortcake," he said huskily.

"Oh, no!" rejoined the spotter sarcastically, appealing to the ring of interested faces that had now crowded about. "I s'pose that white stuff on your upper lip ain't whipped cream?"

"It's milk," mumbled Croly. "All I had was milk and oatmeal crackers and apple pie. Honest."

The spotter snorted dubiously.

"Some guy," he declared loudly, "tucked away a double order of strawb'ry shortcake and a hamboiger steak, and it wasn't me. So come awn, young feller, you owe the house ninety cents, so cut out the arggament."

"I— I—" began Croly, incoherently rebellious; but it was clear that the crowd believed him guilty of the conscienceless swindle; so he quailed before the spotter's accusing eye, and said, "Oh, well, have it your own way. You got me wrong, but I guess you have to pick on little fellows to keep your job." He handed over ninety cents to the cashier.

"You'll never see my face in this dump again," muttered Croly savagely over his shoulder.

"That won't make me bust out cryin', Chinless," called the spotter derisively.

Croly stumbled up the steps, his eyes moist, his heart pumping fast. Chinless! The old epithet. The old curse. It blistered his soul.

Moodily he sought out a bench in Madison Square, hunched himself down and considered his case. To-day, he felt, was the critical day of his life; it was his thirtieth birthday.

His mind flashed back, as you've seen it done in the movies, to a scene the night before, in which he had had a leading rôle.

"Emily," he had said to the loveliest girl in the world, "will you marry me?"

Plainly Emily Mackie had expected something of the sort, and after the fashion of the modern business girl had given the question calm and clear-visioned consideration.

"Croly," she said softly, "I like you. You are a true friend. You are kind and honest and you work hard. But oh, Croly dear, we couldn't live on twenty-two dollars and fifty cents a week; now could we?"

That was Croly's present salary after eleven years with the Pierian Piano Company, and he had to admit that Emily was right; they could not live on it.

"But, dearest Emily," he argued, "to-morrow they appoint a new assistant purchasing agent, and I'm in line for the job. It pays fifty a week."

"But are you sure you'll get it?"

His face fell.

"N-no," he admitted, "but I deserve it. I know the job about ten times better than any of the others, and I've been there longest."

"You thought they'd promote you last year, you know," she reminded him.

"And so they should have," he replied, flushing. "If it hadn't been for old Grizzly Cowdin! He thinks I couldn't make good because I haven't one of those underslung jaws like his."

"He's a brute!" cried Emily. "You know more about the piano business than he does."

"I think I do," said Croly, "but he doesn't. And he's the boss."

"Oh, Croly, if you'd only assert yourself—"

"I guess I never learned how," said Croly sadly.

As he sat there on the park bench, plagued by the demon of introspection, he had to admit that he was not the pugnacious type, the go-getter sort that Cowdin spoke of often and admiringly. He knew his job; he could say that of himself in all fairness, for he had spent many a night studying it; some day, he told himself, they'd be surprised, the big chiefs and all of them, to find out how much he did know about the piano business. But would they ever find out?

Nobody, reflected Croly, ever listened when he talked. There was nothing about him that carried conviction. It had always been like that since his very first day in school when the boys had jeeringly noted his rather marked resemblance to a haddock, and had called out, "Chinless, Chinless, stop tryin' to swallow your face."

Around his chinlessness his character had developed; no one had ever taken him seriously, so quite naturally he found it hard to take himself seriously. It was inevitable that his character should become as chinless as his face.

His apprenticeship under the thumb and chin of the domineering Cowdin had not tended to decrease his youthful timidity. Cowdin, with a jut of jaw like a paving block, had bullied Croly for years. More than once Croly had yearned burningly to plant his fist squarely on that blue-black prong of chin, and he had even practiced up on a secondhand punching bag with this end in view. But always he weakened at the crucial instant. He let his resentment escape through the safety valve of intense application to the business of his firm. It comforted him somewhat to think that even the big-jawed president, Mr. Flagstead, probably didn't have a better grasp of the business as a whole than he, chinless Croly Addicks, assistant to the assistant purchasing agent. But—and he groaned aloud at the thought— his light was hidden under a bushel of chinlessness.

Someone had left a crumpled morning edition of an evening paper on the bench, and Croly glanced idly at it. From out the pages stared the determined

incisive features of a young man very liberally endowed with jaw. Enviously Croly read the caption beneath the picture, "The fighting face of Kid McNulty, the Chelsea Bearcat, who boxes Leonard." With a sigh Croly tossed the paper away.

He glanced up at the Metropolitan Tower clock and decided that he had just time enough for a cooling beaker of soda. He reached the soda fountain just ahead of three other thirsty men. By every right he should have been served first. But the clerk, a lofty youth with the air of a grand duke, after one swift appraising glance at the place where Croly's chin should have been, disregarded the murmured "Pineapple phosphate, please," and turned to serve the others. Of them he inquired solicitously enough, "What's yourn?" But when he came to Croly he shot him an impatient look and asked sharply, "Well, speak up, can't yuh?" The cool drink turned to galling acid as Croly drank it.

He sprinted for his office, trying to cling to a glimmering hope that Cowdin, despite his waspishness of the morning, had given him the promotion. He reached his desk a minute late.

Cowdin prowled past and remarked with a cutting geniality, harder to bear than a curse, "Well, Mr. Addicks, you dallied too long over your lobster and quail, didn't you?"

Under his desk Croly's fists knotted tightly. He made no reply. To-morrow, probably, he'd have an office of his own, and be almost free from Cowdin's ill-natured raillery. At this thought he bent almost cheerfully over his stack of work.

A girl rustled by and thumb-tacked a small notice on the bulletin board. Croly's heart ascended to a point immediately below his Adam's apple and stuck there, for the girl was Cowdin's secretary, and Croly knew what announcement that notice contained. He knew it was against the Spartan code of office etiquette to consult the board during working hours, but he thought of Emily, and what the announcement meant to him, and he rose and with quick steps crossed the room and read the notice.

Ellis G. Baldwin has this day been promoted to assistant purchasing agent.

(Signed) Samuel Cowdin C. P. A.

Croly Addicks had to steady himself against the board; the black letters on the white card jigged before his eyes; his stomach felt cold and empty. Baldwin promoted over his head! Blatant Baldwin, who was never sure of his facts, but was always sure of himself. Cocksure incompetent Baldwin! But— but— he had a bulldog jaw.

Croly Addicks, feeling old and broken, turned around slowly, to find Cowdin standing behind him, a wry smile on his lips, his pin-point eyes fastened on Croly's stricken face.

"Well, Mr. Addicks," purred the chief purchasing agent, "are you thinking of going out for a spin in your limousine or do you intend to favor us with a little work to-day?" He tilted his jaw toward Croly.

"I— I thought I was to get that job," began Croly Addicks, fingering his necktie.

Cowdin produced a rasping sound by rubbing his chin with his finger.

"Oh, did you, indeed?" he asked. "And what made you think that, Mr. Addicks?"

"I've been here longest," faltered Croly, "and I want to get married, and I know the job best, and I've been doing the work ever since Sebring quit, Mr. Cowdin."

For a long time Cowdin did not reply, but stood rubbing his chin and smiling pityingly at Croly Addicks, until Croly, his nerves tense, wanted to scream. Then Cowdin measuring his words spoke loud enough for the others in the room to hear.

"Mr. Addicks," he said, "that job needs a man with a punch. And you haven't a punch, Mr. Addicks. Mr. Addicks, that job requires a fighter. And you're not a fighter, Mr. Addicks. Mr. Addicks, that job requires a man with a jaw on him. And you haven't any jaw on you, Mr. Addicks. Get me?" He thrust out his own peninsula of chin.

It was then that Croly Addicks erupted like a long suppressed volcano. All the hate of eleven bullied years was concentrated in his knotted hand as he swung it swishingly from his hip and landed it flush on the outpointing chin.

An ox might have withstood that punch, but Cowdin was no ox. He rolled among the waste-paper baskets. Snorting furiously he scrambled to his feet and made a bull-like rush at Croly. Trembling in every nerve Croly Addicks swung at the blue-black mark again, and Cowdin reeled against a desk. As he fell his thick fingers closed on a cast-iron paperweight that lay on the desk.

Croly Addicks had a blurred split-second vision of something black shooting straight at his face; then he felt a sharp brain-jarring shock; then utter darkness.

When the light came back to him again it was in Bellevue Hospital. His face felt queer, numb and enormous; he raised his hand feebly to it; it appeared to be covered with concrete bandages.

"Don't touch it," cautioned the nurse. "It's in a cast, and is setting."

IT TOOK long weeks for it to set; they were black weeks for Croly, brightened only by a visit or two from Emily Mackie. At last the nurse removed the final bandage and he was discharged from the hospital.

Outside the hospital gate Croly paused in the sunlight. Not many blocks away he saw the shimmer of the East River, and he faced toward it. He could bury his catastrophe there, and forget his smashed-up life, his lost job and his shattered chances of ever marrying. Who would have him now? At best it meant the long weary climb up from the very bottom, and he was past thirty. He took a half step in the direction of the river. He stopped; he felt a hand plucking timidly at his coat sleeve.

The person who plucked at his sleeve was a limp youth with a limp cigarette and vociferous checked clothes and cap. There was no mistaking the awe in his tone as he spoke.

"Say," said the limp youth, "ain't you Kid McNulty, de Chelsea Bearcat?"

He? Croly Addicks? Taken for Kid McNulty, the prize fighter? A wave of pleasure swept over the despondent Croly. Life seemed suddenly worth living. He had been mistaken for a prize fighter!

He hardened his voice.

"That's me," he said.

"Gee," said the limp youth, "I seen yuh box Leonard. Gee, that was a battle! Say, next time yuh meet him you'll knock him for a row of circus tents, won't yuh?"

"I'll knock him for a row of aquariums," promised Croly. And he jauntily faced about and strolled away from the river and toward Madison Square, followed by the admiring glances of the limp youth.

He felt the need of refreshment and pushed into a familiar soda shop. The same lofty grand duke was on duty behind the marble counter, and was taking advantage of a lull by imparting a high polish to his finger nails, and consequently he did not observe the unobtrusive entrance of Croly Addicks.

Croly tapped timidly with his dime on the counter; the grand duke looked up.

"Pineapple phosphate, please," said Croly in a voice still weak from his hospital days.

The grand duke shot from his reclining position as if attached to a spring.

"Yessir, yessir, right away," he smiled, and hustled about his task.

Shortly he placed the beverage before the surprised Croly.

"Is it all right? Want a little more sirup?" inquired the grand duke anxiously.

Croly, almost bewildered by this change of demeanor, raised the glass to his lips. As he did so he saw the reflection of a face in the glistening mirror opposite. He winced, and set down the glass, untasted.

He stared, fascinated, overwhelmed; it must surely be his face, since his body was attached to it, but how could it be? The eyes were the mild blue eyes

of Croly Addicks, but the face was the face of a stranger— and a startling-looking stranger, at that!

Croly knew of course that it had been necessary to rebuild his face, shattered by the missile hurled by Cowdin, but in the hospital they had kept mirrors from him, and he had discovered, but only by sense of touch, that his countenance had been considerably altered. But he had never dreamed that the transformation would be so radical.

In the clear light he contemplated himself, and understood why he had been mistaken for the Chelsea Bearcat. Kid McNulty had a large amount of jaw, but he never had a jaw like the stranger with Croly Addicks' eyes who stared back, horrified, at Croly from the soda-fountain mirror. The plastic surgeons had done their work well; there was scarcely any scar. But they had built from Croly's crushed bones a chin that protruded like the prow of a battleship.

The mariners of mythology whom the sorceress changed into pigs could hardly have been more perplexed and alarmed than Croly Addicks. He had, in his thirty years, grown accustomed to his meek apologetic face. The face that looked back at him was not meek or apologetic. It was distinctly a hard face; it was a determined, forbidding face; it was almost sinister.

Croly had the uncanny sensation of having had his soul slipped into the body of another man, an utter stranger. Inside he was the same timorous young assistant to the assistant purchasing agent— out of work; outside he was a fearsome being, a dangerous-looking man, who made autocratic soda dispensers jump.

To him came a sinking, lost feeling; a cold emptiness; the feeling of a gentle Doctor Jekyll who wakes to find himself in the shell of a fierce Mr. Hyde. For a second or two Croly Addicks regretted that he had not gone on to the river.

The voice of the soda clerk brought him back to the world.

"If your drink isn't the way you like it, sir," said the grand duke amiably, "just say the word and I'll mix you up another."

Croly started up.

"'Sall right," he murmured, and fumbled his way out to Madison Square.

He decided to live a while longer, face and all. It was something to be deferred to by soda clerks.

He sank down on a bench and considered what he should do. At the twitter of familiar voices he looked up and saw the blond stenographer and the brunette stenographer from his former company passing on the way to lunch.

He rose, advanced a step toward them, tipped his hat and said, "Hello."

The blond stenographer drew herself up regally, as she had seen some one do in the movies, and chilled Croly with an icy stare.

"Don't get so fresh!" she said coldly. "To whom do you think you're speaking to?"

"You gotta crust," observed the brunette, outdoing her companion in crushing hauteur. "Just take yourself and your baby scarer away, Mister Masher, and get yourself a job posing for animal crackers."

They swept on as majestically as tight skirts and French heels would permit, and Croly, confused, subsided back on his bench again. Into his brain, buzzing now from the impact of so many new sensations, came a still stronger impression that he was not Croly Addicks at all, but an entirely different and fresh-born being, unrecognized by his old associates. He pondered on the trick fate had played on him until hunger beckoned him to the Help Yourself Buffet. He was inside before he realized what he was doing, and before he recalled his vow never to enter there again. The same spotter was moving in and out among the patrons, the same derby cocked over one eye, and an untasted sandwich, doubtless the same one, in his hand. He paid no special heed to the renovated Croly Addicks.

Croly was hungry and under the spotter's very nose he helped himself to hamburger steak and a double order of strawberry shortcake with thick cream. Satisfied, he started toward the blasé check boy with the brassy voice; as he went his hand felt casually in his change pocket, and he stopped short, gripped by horror. The coins he counted there amounted to exactly forty-five cents and his meal totaled a dollar at least. Furthermore, that was his last cent in the world. He cast a quick frightened glance around him. The spotter was lounging against the check desk, and his beady eye seemed focused on Croly Addicks. Croly knew that his only chance lay in bluffing; he drew in a deep breath, thrust forward his new chin, and said to the boy, "Forty-five." "Fawty-fi'," screamed the boy. The spotter pricked up his ears.

"Pahdun me a minute, frien'," said the spotter. "Ain't you made a little mistake?"

Summoning every ounce of nerve he could Croly looked straight back into the spotter's eyes.

"No," said Croly loudly.

For the briefest part of a second the spotter wavered between duty and discretion. Then the beady eyes dropped and he murmured, "Oh, I beg pahdun. I thought you was the guy that just got outside of a raft of strawb'ry shortcake and hamboiger. Guess I made a little mistake myself."

With the brisk firm step of a conqueror Croly Addicks strode into the air, away from the scene he had once left so humiliated.

Again, for many reflective minutes he occupied one of those chairs of philosophy, a park bench, and revolved in his mind the problem, "Where do I

go from here?" The vacuum in his pockets warned him that his need of a job was imperative. Suddenly he released his thoughtful clutch on his new jaw, and his eyes brightened and his spine straightened with a startling idea that at once fascinated and frightened him. He would try to get his old job back again.

Inside him the old shrinking Croly fought it out with the new Croly.

"Don't be foolish!" bleated the old Croly. "You haven't the nerve to face Cowdin again."

"Buck up!" argued back the new Croly. "You made that soda clerk hop, and that spotter quail. The worst Cowdin can say is 'No!'"

"You haven't a chance in the piano company, anyhow," demurred the old Croly. "They know you too well; your old reputation is against you. The spineless jellyfish class at twenty-two-fifty per is your limit there."

"Nonsense," declared the new Croly masterfully. "It's the one job you know. Ten to one they need you this minute. You've invested eleven years of training in it. Make that experience count."

"But— but Cowdin may take a wallop at me," protested the old Croly.

"Not while you have a face like Kid McNulty, the Chelsea Bearcat," flashed back the new Croly. The new Croly won.

Ten minutes later Samuel Cowdin swiveled round in his chair to face a young man with a pale, grim face and an oversized jaw.

"Well?" demanded Cowdin.

"Mr. Cowdin," said Croly Addicks, holding his tremors in check by a great effort of will, "I understand you need a man in the purchasing department. I want the job."

Cowdin shot him a puzzled look. The chief purchasing agent's countenance wore the expression of one who says "Where have I seen that face before?"

"We do need a man," Cowdin admitted, staring hard at Croly, "though I don't know how you knew it. Who are you?"

"I'm Addicks," said Croly, thrusting out his new chin.

Cowdin started. His brow wrinkled in perplexity; he stared even more intently at the firm-visaged man, and then shook his head as if giving up a problem.

"That's odd," he muttered, reminiscently stroking his chin. "There was a young fellow by that name here. Croly was his first name. You're not related to him, I suppose?"

Croly, the unrecognized, straightened up in his chair as if he had sat on a hornet. With difficulty he gained control over his breathing, and managed to growl, "No, I'm not related to him."

Cowdin obviously was relieved.

"Didn't think you were," he remarked, almost amiably. "You're not the same type of man at all."

"Do I get that job?" asked Croly. In his own ears his voice sounded hard.

"What experience have you had?" questioned Cowdin briskly.

"Eleven years," replied Croly.

"With what company?"

"With this company," answered Croly evenly.

"With this company?" Cowdin's voice jumped a full octave higher to an incredulous treble.

"Yes," said Croly. "You asked me if I was related to Croly Addicks. I said 'No.' That's true. I'm not related to him— because I am Croly Addicks."

With a gasp of alarm Cowdin jumped to his feet and prepared to defend himself from instant onslaught.

"The devil you are!" he cried.

"Sit down, please," said Croly, quietly.

Cowdin in a daze sank back into his chair and sat staring, hypnotized, at the man opposite him as one might stare who found a young pink elephant in his bed.

"I'll forget what happened if you will," said Croly. "Let's talk about the future. Do I get the job?"

"Eh? What's that?" Cowdin began to realize that he was not dreaming.

"Do I get the job?" Croly repeated.

A measure of his accustomed self-possession had returned to the chief purchasing agent and he answered with as much of his old manner as he could muster, "I'll give you another chance if you think you can behave yourself."

"Thanks," said Croly, and inside his new self sniggered at his old self.

The chief purchasing agent was master of himself by now, and he rapped out in the voice that Croly knew only too well, "Get right to work. Same desk. Same salary. And remember, no more monkey business, Mr. Addicks, because if—"

He stopped short. There was something in the face of Croly Addicks that told him to stop. The big new jaw was pointing straight at him as if it were a pistol.

"You said, just now," said Croly, and his voice was hoarse, "that I wasn't the same type of man as the Croly Addicks who worked here before. I'm not. I'm no longer the sort of man it's safe to ride. Please don't call me Mister unless you mean it."

Cowdin's eyes strayed from the snapping eyes of Croly Addicks to the taut jaw; he shrugged his shoulders.

"Report to Baldwin," was all he said.

As Croly turned away, his back hid from Cowdin the smile that had come to his new face.

The reincarnated Croly had been back at his old job for ten days, or, more accurately, ten days and nights, for it had taken that long to straighten out the snarl in which Baldwin, not quite so sure of himself now, had been immersed to the eyebrows. Baldwin was watching, a species of awe in his eye, while Croly swiftly and expertly checked off a complicated price list. Croly looked up.

"Baldwin," he said, laying down the work, "I'm going to make a suggestion to you. It's for your own good."

"Shoot!" said the assistant purchasing agent warily.

"You're not cut out for this game," said Croly Addicks.

"Wha-a-at?" sputtered Baldwin.

Croly leveled his chin at him. Baldwin listened as the new Addicks continued: "You're not the buying type, Baldwin. You're the selling type. Take my advice and get transferred to the selling end. You'll be happier— and you'll get farther."

"Say," began Baldwin truculently, "you've got a nerve. I've a good notion to—"

Abruptly he stopped. Croly's chin was set at an ominous angle.

"Better think it over," said Croly Addicks, taking up the price list again.

Baldwin gazed for a full minute or more at the remade jaw of his assistant. Then he conceded, "Maybe I will."

A week later Baldwin announced that he had taken Croly's advice. The old Addicks would have waited, with anxious nerves on edge, for the announcement of Baldwin's successor; the new Addicks went straight to the chief purchasing agent.

"Mr. Cowdin," said Croly, as calmly as a bumping heart would permit, "shall I take over Baldwin's work?"

The chief purchasing agent crinkled his brow petulantly.

"I had Heaton in mind for the job," he said shortly without looking up.

"I want it," said Croly Addicks, and his jaw snapped. His tone made Cowdin look up. "Heaton isn't ripe for the work," said Croly. "I am."

Cowdin could not see that inside Croly was quivering; he could not see that the new Croly was struggling with the old and was exerting every ounce of will power he possessed to wring out the words. All Cowdin could see was the big jaw, bulging and threatening.

He cautiously poked back his office chair so that it rolled on its casters out of range of the man with the dangerous face.

"I told you once before, Addicks," began the chief purchasing agent—

"You told me once before," interrupted Croly Addicks sternly, "that the job required a man with a jaw. What do you call this?"

He tapped his own remodeled prow. Cowdin found it impossible not to rest his gaze on the spot indicated by Croly's forefinger. Unconsciously, perhaps, his beads of eyes roved over his desk in search of a convenient paperweight or other weapon. Finding none the chief purchasing agent affected to consider the merits of Croly's demand.

"Well," he said with a judicial air, "I've a notion to give you a month's trial at the job."

"Good," said Croly; and inside he buzzed and tingled warmly.

Cowdin wheeled his office chair back within range again.

A month after Croly Addicks had taken up his duties as assistant purchasing agent he was sitting late one afternoon in serious conference with the chief purchasing agent. The day was an anxious one for all the employees of the great piano company. It was the day when the directors met in solemn and awful conclave, and the ancient and acidulous chairman of the board, Cephas Langdon, who owned most of the stock, emerged, woodchucklike, from his hole, to conduct his annual much-dreaded inquisition into the corporation's affairs, and to demand, with many searching queries, why in blue thunder the company was not making more money. On this day dignified and confident executives wriggled and wilted like tardy schoolboys under his grilling, and official heads were lopped off with a few sharp words.

As frightened secretaries slipped in and out of the mahogany-doored board room information seeped out, and breaths were held and tiptoes walked on as the reports flashed about from office to office.

"Old Langdon's on a rampage."

"He's raking the sales manager over the coals."

"He's fired Sherman, the advertising manager."

"He's fired the whole advertising department too."

"He's asking what in blue thunder is the matter with the purchasing department."

When this last ringside bulletin reached Cowdin he scowled, muttered, and reached for his hat.

"If anybody should come looking for me," he said to Croly, "tell 'em I went home sick."

"But," protested Croly, who knew well the habits of the exigent chairman of the board, "Mr. Langdon may send down here any minute for an explanation of the purchasing department's report."

Cowdin smiled sardonically.

"So he may, so he may," he said, clapping his hat firmly on his head. "Perhaps you'd be so good as to tell him what he wants to know."

And still smiling the chief purchasing agent hurried to the freight elevator and made his timely and prudent exit.

"Gawsh," said the blond stenographer, "Grizzly Cowdin's ducked again this year."

"Gee," said the brunette stenographer, "here's where poor Mr. Addicks gets it where Nellie wore the beads."

Croly knew what they were saying; he knew that he had been left to be a scapegoat. He looked around for his own hat. But as he did so he caught the reflection of his new face in the plate-glass top of his desk. The image of his big impressive jaw heartened him. He smiled grimly and waited.

He did not have long to wait. The door was thrust open and President Flagstead's head was thrust in.

"Where's Cowdin?" he demanded nervously. Tiny worried pearls of dew on the presidential brow bore evidence that even he had not escaped the grill.

"Home," said Croly. "Sick."

Mr. Flagstead frowned. The furrows of worry in his face deepened.

"Mr. Langdon is furious at the purchasing department," he said. "He wants some things in the report explained, and he won't wait. Confound Cowdin!"

Croly's eyes rested for a moment on the reflection of his chin in the glass on his desk; then he raised them to the president's.

"Mr. Cowdin left me in charge," he said, hoping that his voice wouldn't break. "I'll see if I can answer Mr. Langdon's questions."

The president fired a swift look at Croly; at first it was dubious; then, as it appraised Croly's set face, it grew relieved.

"Who are you?" asked the president.

"Addicks, assistant purchasing agent," said Croly.

"Oh, the new man. I've noticed you around," said the president. "Meant to introduce myself. How long have you been here?"

"Eleven years," said Croly.

"Eleven years?" The president was unbelieving. "You couldn't have been. I certainly would have noticed your face." He paused a bit awkwardly. Just then they reached the mahogany door of the board room.

Croly Addicks, outwardly a picture of determination, inwardly quaking, followed the president. Old Cephas Langdon was squatting in his chair, his face red from his efforts, his eyes, beneath their tufts of brow, irate. When he spoke, his words exploded in bunches like packs of firecrackers.

"Well, well?" he snapped. "Where's Cowdin? Why didn't Cowdin come? I sent for Cowdin, didn't I? I wanted to see the chief purchasing agent. Where's Cowdin anyhow? Who are you?"

"Cowdin's sick. I'm Addicks," said Croly.

His voice trembled, and his hands went up to play with his necktie. They came in contact with the point of his new chin, and fresh courage came back to him. He plunged his hands into his coat pockets, pushed the chin forward.

He felt the eyes under the bushy brows surveying his chin.

"Cowdin sick, eh?" inquired Cephas Langdon acidly. "Seems to me he's always sick when I want to find out what in blue thunder ails his department." He held up a report. "I installed a purchasing system in 1913," he said, slapping the report angrily, "and look here how it has been foozled." He slammed the report down on the table. "What I want to know, young man," he exploded, "is why material in the Syracuse factories cost 29 per cent more for the past three months than for the same period last year. Why? Why? Why?"

He glared at Croly Addicks as if he held him personally responsible. Croly did not drop his eyes before the glare; instead he stuck his chin out another notch. His jaw muscles knotted. His breathing was difficult. The chance he'd been working for, praying for, had come.

"Your purchasing system is all wrong, Mr. Langdon," he said, in a voice so loud that it made them all jump.

For a second it seemed as if Cephas Langdon would uncoil and leap at the presumptuous underling with the big chin. But he didn't. Instead, with a smile in which there was a lot of irony, and some interest, he asked, "Oh, indeed? Perhaps, young man, you'll be so good as to tell me what's wrong with it? You appear to think you know a thing or two."

Croly told him. Eleven years of work and study were behind what he said, and he emphasized each point with a thrust of his jaw that would have carried conviction even had his analysis of the system been less logical and concise than it was. Old Cephas Langdon leaning on the directors' table turned up his ear trumpet so that he wouldn't miss a word.

"Well? Well? And what would you suggest instead of the old way?" he interjected frequently.

Croly had the answer ready every time. Darkness and dinnertime had come before Croly had finished.

"Flagstead," said Old Cephas Langdon, turning to the president, "haven't I always told you that what we needed in the purchasing department was a man with a chin on him? Just drop a note to Cowdin to-morrow, will you, and tell him he needn't come back?"

He turned toward Croly and twisted his leathery old face into what passed for a smile.

"Young man," he said, "don't let anything happen to that jaw of yours. One of these bright days it's going to be worth twenty-five thousand dollars a year to you."

That night a young man with a prodigious jaw sat very near a young woman named Emily Mackie, who from time to time looked from his face to the ring finger of her left hand.

"Oh, Croly dear," she said softly, "how did you do it?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "Guess I just tried to live up to my jaw."

The End