

FICTION

Rupert Hughes

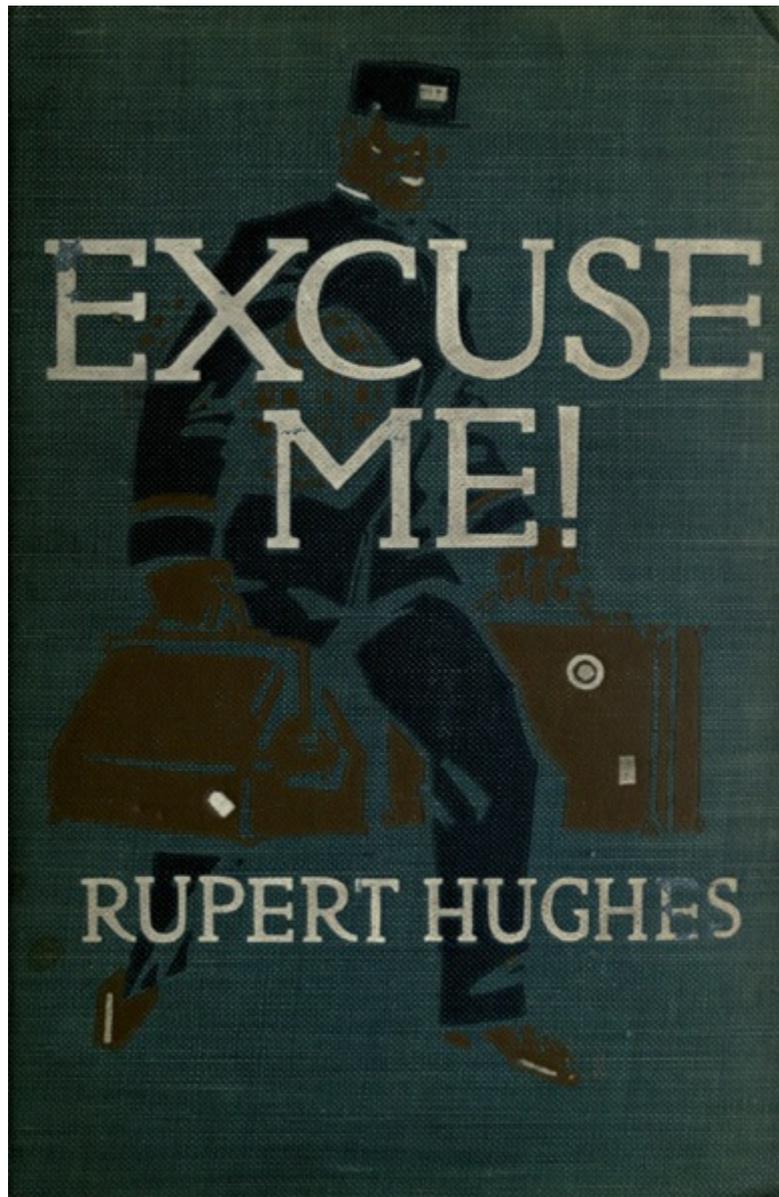
Excuse Me

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION



EXCUSE ME!



EXCUSE ME!

By RUPERT HUGHES

Author of "The Old Nest"



WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS

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EXCUSE ME!



CHAPTER I

THE WRECK OF THE TAXICAB

The young woman in the taxicab scuttling frantically down the dark street, clung to the arm of the young man alongside, as if she were terrified at the lawbreaking, neck-risking speed. But evidently some greater fear goaded her, for she gasped:

"Can't he go a little faster?"

"Can't you go a little faster?" The young man alongside howled as he thrust his head and shoulders through the window in the door.

But the self-created taxi-gale swept his voice aft, and the taut chauffeur perked his ear in vain to catch the vanishing syllables.

"What's that?" he roared.

"Can't you go a little faster?"

The indignant charioteer simply had to shoot one barbed glare of reproach into that passenger. He turned his head and growled:

"Say, do youse want to lose me me license?"

For just one instant he turned his head. One instant was just enough. The unguarded taxicab seized the opportunity, bolted from the track, and flung, as it were, its arms drunkenly around a perfectly respectable lamppost attending strictly to its business on the curb. There ensued a condensed Fourth of July. Sparks flew, tires exploded, metals ripped, two wheels spun in air and one wheel, neatly severed at the axle, went reeling down the sidewalk half a block before it leaned against a tree and rested.

A dozen or more miracles coincided to save the passengers from injury. The young man found himself standing on the pavement with the unhinged door still around his neck. The young woman's arms were round his neck. Her head was on his shoulder. It had reposed there often enough, but never before in the street under a lamppost. The chauffeur found himself in the road, walking about on all fours, like a bewildered quadruped.

Evidently some overpowering need for speed possessed the young woman, for even now she did not scream, she did not faint, she did not murmur, "Where am I?" She simply said:

"What time is it, honey?"

And the young man, not realizing how befuddled he really was, or how his hand trembled, fetched out his watch and held it under the glow of the lamppost, which was now bent over in a convenient but disreputable attitude.

"A quarter to ten, sweetheart. Plenty of time for the train."

"But the minister, honey! What about the minister? How are we going to get to the minister?"

The consideration of this riddle was interrupted by a muffled hubbub of yelps, whimpers, and canine hysterics. Immediately the young woman forgot ministers, collisions, train-schedules--everything. She showed her first sign of panic.

"Snoozleums! Get Snoozleums!"

They groped about in the topsy-turvy taxicab, rummaged among a jumble of suitcases, handbags, umbrellas and minor *impedimenta*, and fished out a small dog-basket with an inverted dog inside. Snoozleums was ridiculous in any position, but as he slid tail foremost from the wicker basket, he resembled nothing so much as a heap of tangled yarn tumbling out of a work-basket. He was an indignant skein, and had much to say before he consented to snuggle under his mistress' chin.

About this time the chauffeur came prowling into view. He was too deeply shocked to emit any language of the garage. He was too deeply shocked to achieve any comment more brilliant than:

"That mess don't look much like it ever was a taxicab, does it?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders, and stared up and down the long street for another. The young woman looked sorrowfully at the wreck, and queried:

"Do you think you can make it go?"

The chauffeur glanced her way, more in pity for her whole sex than in scorn for this one type, as he mumbled:

"Make it go? It'll take a steam winch a week to unwrap it from that lamppost."

The young man apologized.

"I oughtn't to have yelled at you."

He was evidently a very nice young man. Not to be outdone in courtesy, the chauffeur retorted:

"I hadn't ought to have turned me head."

The young woman thought, "What a nice chauffeur!" but she gasped: "Great heavens, you're hurt!"

"It's nuttin' but a scratch on me t'umb."

"Lend me a clean handkerchief, Harry."

The young man whipped out his reserve supply, and in a trice it was a bandage on the chauffeur's hand. The chauffeur decided that the young woman was even nicer than the young man. But he could not settle on a way to say to it. So he said nothing, and grinned sheepishly as he said it.

The young man named Harry was wondering how they were to proceed. He had already studied the region with dismay, when the girl resolved:

"We'll have to take another taxi, Harry."

"Yes, Marjorie, but we can't take it till we get it."

"You might wait here all night wit'out ketchin' a glimp' of one," the chauffeur ventured. "I come this way because you wanted me to take a short cut."

"It's the longest short cut I ever saw," the young man sighed, as he gazed this way and that.

The place of their shipwreck was so deserted that not even a crowd had gathered. The racket of the collision had not brought a single policeman. They were in a dead world of granite warehouses, wholesale stores and factories, all locked and forbidding, and full of silent gloom.

In the daytime this was a big trade-artery of Chicago, and all day long it was thunderous with trucks and commerce. At night it was Pompeii, so utterly abandoned that the night watchmen rarely slept outside, and no footpad found it worth while to set up shop.

The three castaways stared every which way, and every which way was peace. The ghost of a pedestrian or two hurried by in the far distance. A cat or two went furtively in search of warfare or romance. The lampposts stretched on and on in both directions in two forevers.

In the faraway there was a muffled rumble and the faint clang of a bell. Somewhere a street car was bumping along its rails.

"Our only hope," said Harry. "Come along, Marjorie."

He handed the chauffeur five dollars as a poultice to his wounds, tucked the girl under one arm and the dog-basket under the other, and set out, calling back to the chauffeur:

"Good night!"

"Good night!" the girl called back.

"Good night!" the chauffeur echoed. He stood watching them with the tender gaze that even a chauffeur may feel for young love hastening to a honeymoon.

He stood beaming so, till their footsteps died in the silence. Then he turned back to the chaotic remnants of his machine. He worked at it hopelessly for some time, before he had reason to look within. There he found the handbags and suitcases, umbrellas and other equipment. He ran to the corner to call after the owners. They were as absent of body as they had been absent of mind.

He remembered the street-number they had given him as their destination. He waited till at last a yawning policeman

sauntered that way like a lonely beach patrol, and left him in charge while he went to telephone his garage for a wagon and a wrecking crew.

It was close on midnight before he reached the number his fares had given him. It was a parsonage leaning against a church. He rang the bell and finally produced from an upper window a nightshirt topped by a frowsy head. He explained the situation, and his possession of certain properties belonging to parties unknown except by their first names. The clergyman drowsily murmured:

"Oh, yes. I remember. The young man was Lieutenant Henry Mallory, and he said he would stop here with a young lady, and get married on the way to the train. But they never turned up."

"Lieutenant Mallory, eh? Where could I reach him?"

"He said he was leaving to-night for the Philippines."

"The Philippines! Well, I'll be----"

The minister closed the window just in time.

CHAPTER II THE EARLY BIRDS AND THE WORM

In the enormous barn of the railroad station stood many strings of cars, as if a gigantic young Gulliver stabled his toys there and invisibly amused himself, now whisking this one away, now backing that other in.

Some of the trains were noble equipages, fitted to glide across the whole map with cargoes of Lilliputian millionaires and their Lilliputian ladies. Others were humble and shabby linked-up day-coaches and dingy smoking-cars, packed with workers, like ants.

Cars are mere vehicles, but locomotives have souls. The express engines roll in or stalk out with grandeur and ease. They are like emperors. They seem to look with scorn at the suburban engines snorting and grunting and shaking the arched roof with their plebeian choo-choo as they puff from shop to cottage and back.

The trainmen take their cue from the behavior of their locomotives. The conductor of a transcontinental nods to the conductor of a shuttle-train with less cordiality than to a brakeman of his own. The engineers of the limiteds look like senators in overalls. They are far-traveled men, leading a mighty life of adventure. They are pilots of land-ships across land-oceans. They have a right to a certain condescension of manner.

But no one feels or shows so much arrogance as the sleeping car porters. They cannot pronounce "supercilious," but they can be it. Their disdain for the entire crew of any train that carries merely day-coaches or half-baked chair-cars, is expressed as only a darkey in a uniform can express disdain for poor white trash.

Of all the haughty porters that ever curled a lip, the haughtiest by far was the dusky attendant in the San Francisco sleeper on the Trans-American Limited. His was the train of trains in that whole system. His car the car of cars. His passengers the surpassengers of all.

His train stood now waiting to set forth upon a voyage of two thousand miles, a journey across seven imperial States, a journey that should end only at that marge where the continent dips and vanishes under the breakers of the Pacific Ocean.

At the head of his car, with his little box-step waiting for the foot of the first arrival, the porter stood, his head swelling under his cap, his breast swelling beneath his blue blouse, with its brass buttons like reflections of his own eyes. His name was Ellsworth Jefferson, but he was called anything from "Poarr-tur" to "Pawtah," and he usually did not come when he was called.

To-night he was wondering perhaps what passengers, with what dispositions, would fall to his lot. Perhaps he was wondering what his Chicago sweetheart would be doing in the eight days before his return. Perhaps he was wondering what his San Francisco sweetheart had been doing in the five days since he left her, and how she would pass the three days that must intervene before he reached her again.

He had Othello's ebon color. Did he have Othello's green eye?

Whatever his thoughts, he chatted gaily enough with his neighbor and colleague of the Portland sleeper.

Suddenly he stopped in the midst of a soaring chuckle.

"Lordy, man, looky what's a-comin'!"

The Portland porter turned to gaze.

"I got my fingers crossed."

"I hope you git him."

"I hope I don't."

"He'll work you hard and cuss you out, and he won't give you even a Much Obliged."

"That's right. He ain't got a usher to carry his things. And he's got enough to fill a van."

The oncomer was plainly of English origin. It takes all sorts of people to make up the British Empire, and there is no sort lacking--glorious or pretty, or sour or sweet. But this was the type of English globe-trotter that makes himself as unpopular among foreigners as he is among his own people. He is almost as unendurable as the Americans abroad who twang their banjo brag through Europe, and berate France and Italy for their innocence of buckwheat cakes.

The two porters regarded Mr. Harold Wedgewood with dread, as he bore down on them. He was almost lost in the plethora of his own luggage. He asked for the San Francisco sleeper, and the Portland porter had to turn away to smother his gurgling relief.

Ellsworth Jefferson's heart sank. He made a feeble effort at self-protection. The Pullman conductor not being present at the moment, he inquired:

"Have you got yo' ticket?"

"Of cawse."

"Could I see it?"

"Of cawse not. Too much trouble to fish it out."

The porter was fading. "Do you remember yo' numba?"

"Of cawse. Take these." He began to pile things on the porter like a mountain unloading an avalanche. The porter stumbled as he clambered up the steps, and squeezed through the strait path of the corridor into the slender aisle. He turned again and again to question the invader, but he was motioned and bunted down the car, till he was halted with a "This will do."

The Englishman selected section three for his own. The porter ventured: "Are you sho' this is yo' numba?"

"Of cawse I'm shaw. How dare you question my----"

"I wasn't questionin' you, boss, I was just astin' you."

He resigned himself to the despot, and began to transfer his burdens to the seat. But he did nothing to the satisfaction of the Englishman. Everything must be placed otherwise; the catch-all here, the portmanteau there, the Gladstone there, the golfsticks there, the greatcoat there, the raincoat there. The porter was puffing like a donkey-engine, and mutiny was growing in his heart. His last commission was the hanging up of the bowler hat.

He stood on the arm of the seat to reach the high hook. From here he paused to glare down with an attempt at irony.

"Is they anything else?"

"No. You may get down."

The magnificent patronage of this wilted the porter completely. He returned to the lower level, and shuffled along the aisle in a trance. He was quickly recalled by a sharp:

"Pawtah!"

"Yassah!"

"What time does this bally train start?"

"Ten-thutty, sah."

"But it's only ten now."

"Yassah. It'll be ten-thutty a little later."

"Do you mean to tell me that I've got to sit hyah for half an hour--just waitin'?"

The porter essayed another bit of irony:

"Well," he drawled, "I might tell the conducta you're ready. And mebbe he'd start the train. But the time-table says ten-thutty."

He watched the effect of his satire, but it fell back unheeded from the granite dome of the Englishman, whose only comment was:

"Oh, never mind. I'll wait."

The porter cast his eyes up in despair, and turned away, once more to be recalled.

"Oh, pawtah!"

"Yassah!"

"I think we'll put on my slippahs."

"Will we?"

"You might hand me that large bag. No, stupid, the othah one. You might open it. No, its in the othah one. Ah, that's it. You may set it down."

Mr. Wedgewood brought forth a soft cap and a pair of red slippers. The porter made another effort to escape, his thoughts as black as his face. Again the relentless recall:

"Oh, pawtah, I think we'll unbutton my boots."

He was too weak to murmur "Yassah." He simply fell on one knee and got to work.

There was a witness to his helpless rage--a newcomer, the American counterpart of the Englishman in all that makes travel difficult for the fellow travelers. Ira Lathrop was zealous to resent anything short of perfection, quick and loud of complaint, apparently impossible to please.

In everything else he was the opposite of the Englishman. He was burly, middle-aged, rough, careless in attire, careless of speech--as uncouth and savage as one can well be who is plainly a man of means.

It was not enough that a freeborn Afro-American should be caught kneeling to an Englishman. But when he had escaped this penance, and advanced hospitably to the newcomer, he must be greeted with a snarl.

"Say, are you the porter of this car, or that man's nurse?"

"I can't tell yet. What's yo' numba, please?"

The answer was the ticket. The porter screwed up his eyes to read the pencilled scrawl.

"Numba se'm. Heah she is, boss."

"Right next to a lot of women, I'll bet. Couldn't you put me in the men's end of the car?"

"Not ve'y well, suh. I reckon the cah is done sold out."

With a growl of rage, Ira Lathrop slammed into the seat his entire hand baggage, one ancient and rusty valise.

The porter gazed upon him with increased depression. The passenger list had opened inauspiciously with two of the worst types of travelers the Anglo-Saxon race has developed.

But their anger was not their worst trait in the porter's eyes. He was, in a limited way, an expert in human character.

When you meet a stranger you reveal your own character in what you ask about his. With some, the first question is,

"Who are his people?" With others, "What has he achieved?" With others, "How much is he worth?" Each gauges his cordiality according to his estimate.

The porter was not curious on any of these points. He showed a democratic indifference to them. His one vital inquiry was:

"How much will he tip?"

His inspection of his first two charges promised small returns. He buttoned up his cordiality, and determined to waste upon them the irreducible minimum of attention.

It would take at least a bridal couple to restore the balance. But bridal couples in their first bloom rarely fell to the lot of that porter, for what bridal couple wants to lock itself in with a crowd of passengers for the first seventy-two hours of wedded bliss?

The porter banished the hope as a vanity. Little he knew how eagerly the young castaways from that wrecked taxicab desired to be a bridal couple, and to catch this train.

But the Englishman was restive again:

"Pawtah! I say, pawtah!"

"Yassah!"

"What time are we due in San Francisco?"

"San Francisco? San Francisco? We are doo thah the evenin' of the fo'th day. This bein' Monday, that ought to bring us in abote Thuzzday evenin'."

The Yankee felt called upon to check the foreign usurper.

"Porrterr!"

"Yassah!"

"Don't let that fellow monopolize you. He probably won't tip you at all."

The porter grew confidential:

"Oh, I know his kind, sah. They don't tip you for what you do do, but they're ready letter writers to the Sooperintendent for what you don't do."

"Pawtah! I say, pawtah!"

"Here, porrterr."

The porter tried to imitate the Irish bird, and be in two places at once. The American had a coin in his hand. The porter caught the gleam of it, and flitted thither. The Yankee growled:

"Don't forget that I'm on the train, and when we get to 'Frisco there may be something more."

The porter had the coin in his hand. Its heft was light. He sighed: "I hope so."

The Englishman was craning his head around owlshly to ask:

"I say, pawtah, does this train ever get wrecked?"

"Well, it hasn't yet," and he murmured to the Yankee, "but I has hopes."

The Englishman's voice was querulous again.

"I say, pawtah, open a window, will you? The air is ghastly, abso-ripping-lutely ghastly."

The Yankee growled:

"No wonder we had the Revolutionary War!"

Then he took from his pocket an envelope addressed to Ira Lathrop & Co., and from the envelope he took a contract, and studied it grimly. The envelope bore a Chinese stamp.

The porter, as he struggled with an obstinate window, wondered what sort of passenger fate would send him next.

CHAPTER III IN DARKEST CHICAGO

The castaways from the wrecked taxicab hurried along the doleful street. Both of them knew their Chicago, but this part of it was not their Chicago.

They hailed a pedestrian, to ask where the nearest street car line might be, and whither it might run. He answered indistinctly from a discreet distance, as he hastened away. Perhaps he thought their question merely a footpad's introduction to a sandbagging episode. In Chicago at night one never knows.

"As near as I can make out what he said, Marjorie," the lieutenant pondered aloud, "we walk straight ahead till we come to Umtyump Street, and there we find a Rarara car that will take us to Bloptyblop Avenue. I never heard of any such streets, did you?"

"Never," she panted, as she jog-trotted alongside his military pace. "Let's take the first car we meet, and perhaps the conductor can put us off at the street where the minister lives."

"Perhaps." There was not much confidence in that "perhaps."

When they reached the street-carred street, they found two tracks, but nothing occupying them, as far as they could peer either way. A small shopkeeper in a tiny shop proved to be a delicatessen merchant so busily selling foreign horrors to aliens, that they learned nothing from him.

At length, in the far-away, they made out a headlight, and heard the grind and squeal of a car. Lieutenant Mallory waited for it, watch in hand. He boosted Marjorie's elbow aboard and bombarded the conductor with questions. But the conductor had no more heard of their street than they had of his. Their agitation did not disturb his stoic calm, but he invited them to come along to the next crossing, where they could find another car and more learned conductors; or, what promised better, perhaps a cab.

He threw Marjorie into a panic by ordering her to jettison Snoozleums, but the lieutenant bought his soul for a small price, and overlooked the fact that he did not ring up their fares.

The young couple squeezed into a seat and talked anxiously in sharp whispers.

"Wouldn't it be terrible, Harry, if, just as we got to the minister's, we should find papa there ahead of us, waiting to forbid the bands, or whatever it is? Wouldn't it be just terrible?"

"Yes, it would, honey, but it doesn't seem probable. There are thousands of ministers in Chicago. He could never find ours. Fact is. I doubt if we find him ourselves."

Her clutch tightened till he would have winced, if he had not been a soldier.

"What do you mean, Harry?"

"Well, in the first place, honey, look what time it is. Hardly more than time enough to get the train, to say nothing of hunting for that preacher and standing up through a long rigmarole."

"Why, Harry Mallory, are you getting ready to jilt me?"

"Indeed I'm not--not for worlds, honey, but I've got to get that train, haven't I?"

"Couldn't you wait over one train--just one tiny little train?"

"My own, own honey love, you know it's impossible! You must remember that I've already waited over three trains while you tried to make up your mind."

"And you must remember, darling, that it's no easy matter for a girl to decide to sneak away from home and be married secretly, and go all the way out to that hideous Manila with no trousseau and no wedding presents and no anything."

"I know it isn't, and I waited patiently while you got up the courage. But now there are no more trains. I shudder to think of this train being late. We're not due in San Francisco till Thursday evening, and my transport sails at sunrise Friday morning. Oh, Lord, what if I should miss that transport! What if I should!"

"What if we should miss the minister?"

"It begins to look a great deal like it."

"But, Harry, you wouldn't desert me now--abandon me to my fate?"

"Well, it isn't exactly like abandonment, seeing that you could go home to your father and mother in a taxicab."

She stared at him in horror.

"So you don't want me for your wife! You've changed your mind! You're tired of me already! Only an hour together, and you're sick of your bargain! You're anxious to get rid of me! You----"

"Oh, honey, I want you more than anything else on earth, but I'm a soldier, dearie, a mere lieutenant in the regular army, and I'm the slave of the Government. I've gone through West Point, and they won't let me resign respectably and if I did, we'd starve. They wouldn't accept my resignation, but they'd be willing to courtmartial me and dismiss me the service in disgrace. Then you wouldn't want to marry me--and I shouldn't have any way of supporting you if you did. I only know one trade, and that's soldiering."

"Don't call it a trade, beloved, it's the noblest profession in all the world, and you're the noblest soldier that ever was, and in a year or two you'll be the biggest general in the army."

He could not afford to shatter such a devout illusion or quench the light of faith in those beloved and loving eyes. He tacitly admitted his ability to be promoted commander-in-chief in a year or two. He allowed that glittering possibility to remain, used it as a basis for argument.

"Then, dearest, you must help me to do my duty."

She clasped his upper arm as if it were an altar and she an Iphigenia about to be sacrificed to save the army. And she murmured with utter heroism:

"I will! Do what you like with me!"

He squeezed her hand between his biceps and his ribs and accepted the offering in a look drenched with gratitude. Then he said, matter-of-factly:

"We'll see how much time we have when we get to--whatever the name of that street is."

The car jolted and wailed on its way like an old drifting rocking chair. The motorman was in no hurry. The passengers seemed to have no occasion for haste. Somebody got on or got off at almost every corner, and paused for conversation while the car waited patiently. But eventually the conductor put his head in and drawled:

"Hay! here's where you get off at."

They hastened to debark and found themselves in a narrow, gaudily-lighted region where they saw a lordly transfer-distributor, a profound scholar in Chicago streets. He informed them that the minister's street lay far back along the path they had come; they should have taken a car in the opposite direction, transferred at some remote center, descended at some unheard-of street, walked three blocks one way and four another, and there they would have been.

Mallory looked at his watch, and Marjorie's hopes dropped like a wrecked aeroplane, for he grimly asked how long it would take them to reach the railroad station.

"Well, you'd ought to make it in forty minutes," the transfer agent said--and added, cynically, "if the car makes schedule."

"Good Lord, the train starts in twenty minutes!"

"Well, I tell you--take this here green car to Wexford Avenoo--there's usually a taxicab or two standin' there."

"Thank you. Hop on, Marjorie."

Marjorie hopped on, and they sat down, Mallory with eyes and thoughts on nothing but the watch he kept in his hand.

During this tense journey the girl perfected her soul for graceful martyrdom.

"I'll go to the train with you, Harry, and then you can send me home in a taxicab."

Her nether lip trembled and her eyes were filmed, but they were brave, and her voice was so tender that it wooed his mind from his watch. He gazed at her, and found her so dear, so devoted and so pitifully exquisite, that he was almost overcome by an impulse to gather her into his arms there and then, indifferent to the immediate passengers or to his far-off military superiors. An hour ago they were young lovers in all the lilt and thrill of elopement. She had clung to him in the gloaming of their taxicab, as it sped like a genie at their whim to the place where the minister would unite their hands and raise his own in blessing. Thence the new husband would have carried the new wife away, his very own, soul and body, duty and beauty. Then, ah, then in their minds the future was an unwaning honeymoon, the journey across the continent a stroll along a lover's lane, the Pacific ocean a garden lake, and the Philippines a chain of Fortunate Isles decreed especially for their Eden. And then the taxicab encountered a lamppost. They thought they had merely wrecked a motor car--and lo, they had wrecked a Paradise.

The railroad ceased to be a lover's lane and became a lingering torment; the ocean was a weltering Sahara, and the Philippines a Dry Tortugas of exile.

Mallory realized for the first time what heavy burdens he had taken on with his shoulder straps; what a dismal life of restrictions and hardships an officer's life is bound to be. It was hard to obey the soulless machinery of discipline, to be a brass-buttoned slave. He felt all the hot, quick resentment that turns a faithful soldier into a deserter. But it takes time to evolve a deserter, and Mallory had only twenty minutes. The handcuffs and leg-irons of discipline hobbled him. He was only a little cog in a great clock, and the other wheels were impinging on him and revolving in spite of himself.

In the close-packed seats where they were jostled and stared at, the soldier could not even attempt to explain to his fascinated bride the war of motives in his breast. He could not voice the passionate rebellion her beauty had whipped up in his soul. Perhaps if Romeo and Juliet had been forced to say farewell on a Chicago street car instead of a Veronese balcony, their language would have lacked savor, too.

Perhaps young Mr. Montague and young Miss Capulet, instead of wailing, "No, that is not the lark whose notes do beat the vaulty heaven so high above our heads," would have done no better than Mr. Mallory and Miss Newton. In any case, the best these two could squeeze out was:

"It's just too bad, honey."

"But I guess it can't be helped, dear."

"It's a mean old world, isn't it?"

"Awful!"

And then they must pile out into the street again so lost in woe that they did not know how they were trampled or elbowed. Marjorie's despair was so complete that it paralyzed instinct. She forgot Snoozleums! A thoughtful passenger ran out and tossed the basket into Mallory's arms even as the car moved off.

Fortune relented a moment and they found a taxicab waiting where they had expected to find it. Once more they were cosy in the flying twilight, but their grief was their only baggage, and the clasp of their hands talked all the talk there was.

Anxiety within anxiety tormented them and they feared another wreck. But as they swooped down upon the station, a kind-faced tower clock beamed the reassurance that they had three minutes to spare.

The taxicab drew up and halted, but they did not get out. They were kissing good-byes, fervidly and numerously, while a grinning station-porter winked at the winking chauffeur.

Marjorie simply could not have done with farewells.

"I'll go to the gate with you," she said.

He told the chauffeur to wait and take the young lady home. The lieutenant looked so honest and the girl so sad that the chauffeur simply touched his cap, though it was not his custom to allow strange fares to vanish into crowded stations, leaving behind nothing more negotiable than instructions to wait.

CHAPTER IV A MOUSE AND A MOUNTAIN

All the while the foiled elopers were eloping, the San Francisco sleeper was filling up. It had been the receptacle of assorted lots of humanity tumbling into it from all directions, with all sorts of souls, bodies, and destinations.

The porter received each with that expert eye of his. His car was his laboratory. A railroad journey is a sort of test-tube of character; strange elements meet under strange conditions and make strange combinations. The porter could never foresee the ingredients of any trip, nor their actions and reactions.

He had no sooner established Mr. Wedgewood of London and Mr. Ira Lathrop of Chicago, in comparative repose, than his car was invaded by a woman who flung herself into the first seat. She was flushed with running, and breathing hard, but she managed one gasp of relief:

"Thank goodness, I made it in time."

The mere sound of a woman's voice in the seat back of him was enough to disperse Ira Lathrop. With not so much as a glance backward to see what manner of woman it might be, he jammed his contract into his pocket, seized his newspapers and retreated to the farthest end of the car, jouncing down into berth number one, like a sullen snapping turtle.

Miss Anne Gattle's modest and homely valise had been brought aboard by a leisurely station usher, who set it down and waited with a speaking palm outstretched. She had her tickets in her hand, but transferred them to her teeth while she searched for money in a handbag old fashioned enough to be called a reticule.

The usher closed his fist on the pittance she dropped into it and departed without comment. The porter advanced on her with a demand for "Tickets, please."

She began to ransack her reticule with flurried haste, taking out of it a small purse, opening that, closing it, putting it back, taking it out, searching the reticule through, turning out a handkerchief, a few hairpins, a few trunk keys, a baggage check, a bottle of salts, a card or two and numerous other maidenly articles, restoring them to place, looking in the purse again, restoring that, closing the reticule, setting it down, shaking out a book she carried, opening her old valise, going through certain white things blushingly, closing it again, shaking her skirts, and shaking her head in bewilderment.

She was about to open the reticule again, when the porter exclaimed:

"I see it! Don't look no mo'. I see it!"

When she cast up her eyes in despair, her hatbrim had been elevated enough to disclose the whereabouts of the tickets. With a murmured apology, he removed them from her teeth and held them under the light. After a time he said:

"As neah as I can make out from the--the undigested po'tion of this ticket, yo' numba is six."

"That's it--six!"

"That's right up this way."

"Let me sit here till I get my breath," she pleaded, "I ran so hard to catch the train."

"Well, you caught it good and strong."

"I'm so glad. How soon do we start?"

"In about half a houah."

"Really? Well, better half an hour too soon than half a minute too late." She said it with such a copy-book primness that the porter set her down as a school-teacher. It was not a bad guess. She was a missionary. With a pupil-like shyness he volunteered:

"Yo' berth is all ready whenever you wishes to go to baid." He caught her swift blush and amended it to--"to retiah."

"Retire?--before all the car?" said Miss Anne Gattle, with prim timidity. "No, thank you! I intend to sit up till everybody else has retired."

The porter retired. Miss Gattle took out a bit of more or less useful fancy stitching and set to work like another Dorcas.

Her needle had not dived in and emerged many times before she was holding it up as a weapon of defense against a sudden human mountain that threatened to crush her.

A vague round face, huge and red as a rising moon, dawned before her eyes and from it came an uncertain voice:

"Esscuzhe me, mad'm, no 'fensh intended."

The words and the breath that carried them gave the startled spinster an instant proof that her vis-a-vis did not share her Prohibition principles or practices. She regarded the elephant with mouselike terror, and the elephant regarded the mouse with elephantine fright, then he removed himself from her landscape as quickly as he could and lurched along the aisle, calling out merrily to the porter:

"Chauffeur! chauffeur! don't go so fasht 'round these corners."

He collided with a small train-boy singing his nasal lay, but it was the behemoth and not the train-boy that collapsed into a seat, sprawling as helplessly as a mammoth oyster on a table-cloth.

The porter rushed to his aid and hoisted him to his feet with an uneasy sense of impending trouble. He felt as if someone had left a monstrous baby on his doorstep, but all he said was:

"Tickets, please."

There ensued a long search, fat, flabby hands flopping and fumbling from pocket to pocket. Once more the porter was the discoverer.

"I see it. Don't look no mo'. Here it is--up in yo' hatband." He lifted it out and chuckled. "Had it right next his brains and couldn't rememba!" He took up the appropriately huge luggage of the bibulous wanderer and led him to the other end of the aisle.

"Numba two is yours, sah. Right heah--all nice and cosy, and already made up."

The big man looked through the curtains into the cabined confinement, and groaned:

"That! Haven't you got a man's size berth?"

"Sorry, sah. That's as big a bunk as they is on the train."

"Have I got to be locked up in that pigeon-hole for--for how many days is it to Reno?"

"Reno?" The porter greeted that meaningful name with a smile. "We're doo in Reno the--the--the mawnin' of the fo'th day, sah. Yassah." He put the baggage down and started away, but the sad fat man seized his hand, with great emotion:

"Don't leave me all alone in there, porter, for I'm a broken-hearted man."

"Is that so? Too bad, sah."

"Were you ever a broken-hearted man, porter?"

"Always, sah."

"Did you ever put your trust in a false-hearted woman?"

"Often, sah."

"Was she ever true to you, porter?"

"Never, sah."

"Porter, we are partners in mis-sis-ery."

And he wrung the rough, black hand with a solemnity that embarrassed the porter almost as much as it would have embarrassed the passenger himself if he could have understood what he was doing. The porter disengaged himself with a patient but hasty:

"I'm afraid you'll have to 'scuse me. I got to he'p the other passengers on bode."

"Don't let me keep you from your duty. Duty is the--the----" But he could not remember what duty was, and he would have dropped off to sleep, if he had not been startled by a familiar voice which the porter had luckily escaped.

"Pawtah! Pawtah! Can't you raise this light--or rather can't you lower it? Pawtah! This light is so infernally dim I can't

read."

To the Englishman's intense amazement his call brought to him not the porter, but a rising moon with the profound query:

"Whass a li'l thing like dim light, when the light of your life has gone out?"

"I beg your pardon?"

Without further invitation, the mammoth descended on the Englishman's territory.

"I'm a broken-hearted man, Mr.--Mr.--I didn't get your name."

"Er--ah--I dare say."

"Thanks, I will sit down." He lifted a great carry-all and airily tossed it into the aisle, set the Gladstone on the lap of the infuriated Englishman, and squeezed into the seat opposite, making a sad mix-up of knees.

"My name's Wellington. Ever hear of li'l Jimmie Wellington? That's me."

"Any relation to the Duke?"

"Nagh!"

He no longer interested Mr. Wedgewood. But Mr. Wellington was not aware that he was being snubbed. He went right on getting acquainted:

"Are you married, Mr.--Mr.----?"

"No!"

"My heartfelt congrashlations. Hang on to your luck, my boy. Don't let any female take it away from you." He slapped the Englishman on the elbow amiably, and his prisoner was too stifled with wrath to emit more than one feeble "Pawtah!"

Mr. Wellington mused on aloud: "Oh, if I had only remained shingle. But she was so beautiful and she swore to love, honor and obey. Mrs. Wellington is a queen among women, mind you, and I have nothing to say against her except that she has the temper of a tarantula." He italicized the word with a light fillip of his left hand along the back of the seat. He did not notice that he filliped the angry head of Mr. Ira Lathrop in the next seat. He went on with his portrait of his wife. "She has the 'stravaganza of a sultana"--another fillip for Mr. Lathrop--"the zhealousy of a cobra, the flirtatiousness of a humming bird." Mr. Lathrop was glaring round like a man-eating tiger, but Wellington talked on. "She drinks, swears, and smokes cigars, otherwise she's fine--a queen among women."

Neither this amazing vision of womankind, nor this beautiful example of longing for confession and sympathy awakened a response in the Englishman's frozen bosom. His only action was another violent effort to disengage his cramped knees from the knees of his tormentor; his only comment a vain and weakening cry for help, "Pawtah! Pawtah!"

Wellington's bleary, teary eyes were lighted with triumph. "Finally I saw I couldn't stand it any longer so I bought a tic-hic-et to Reno. I 'stablish a residensh in six monfths--get a divorce--no shcandal. Even m'own wife won't know anything about it."

The Englishman was almost attracted by this astounding picture of the divorce laws in America. It sounded so barbarically quaint that he leaned forward to hear more, but Mr. Wellington's hand, like a mischievous runaway, had wandered back into the shaggy locks atop of Mr. Lathrop. His right hand did not let his left know what it was doing, but proceeded quite independently to grip as much of Lathrop's hair as it would hold.

Then as Mr. Wellington shook with joy at the prospect of "Dear old Reno!" he began unconsciously to draw Ira Lathrop's head after his hair across the seat. The pain of it shot the tears into Lathrop's eyes, and as he writhed and twisted he was too full of profanity to get any one word out.

When he managed to wrench his skull free, he was ready to murder his tormentor. But as soon as he confronted the doddering and blinking toper, he was helpless. Drunken men have always been treated with great tenderness in America, and when Wellington, seeing Lathrop's white hair, exclaimed with rapture: "Why, hello, Pop! here's Pop!" the most that Lathrop could do was to tear loose those fat, groping hands, slap them like a school teacher, and push the man away.

But that one shove upset Mr. Wellington and sent him toppling down upon the pit of the Englishman's stomach.

For Wedgewood, it was suddenly as if all the air had been removed from the world. He gulped like a fish drowning for lack of water. He was a long while getting breath enough for words, but his first words were wild demands that Mr. Wellington remove himself forthwith.

Wellington accepted the banishment with the sorrowful eyes of a dying deer, and tottered away wagging his fat head and wailing:

"I'm a broken-hearted man, and nobody gives a ----." At this point he caromed over into Ira Lathrop's berth and was welcomed with a savage roar:

"What the devil's the matter with you?"

"I'm a broken-hearted man, that's all."

"Oh, is that all," Lathrop snapped, vanishing behind his newspaper. The desperately melancholy seeker for a word of human kindness bleared at the blurred newspaper wall a while, then waded into a new attempt at acquaintance. Laying his hand on Lathrop's knee, he stammered: "Esscuzhe me, Mr.--Mr.----"

From behind the newspaper came a stingy answer: "Lathrop's my name--if you want to know."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Lothrop."

"Lathrop!"

"Lathrop! My name's Wellington. Li'l Jimmie Wellington. Ever hear of me?"

He waited with the genial smile of a famous man; the smile froze at Lathrop's curt, "Don't think so."

He tried again: "Ever hear of well-known Chicago belle, Mrs. Jimmie Wellington?"

"Yes, I've heard of her!" There was an ominous grin in the tone.

Wellington waved his hand with modest pride. "Well, I'm Jimmie."

"Serves you right."

This jolt was so discourteous that Wellington decided to protest: "Mister Latham!"

"Lathrop!"

The name came out with a whip-snap. He tried to echo it, "*La-throp!*" "I don't like that Throp. That's a kind of a seasick name, isn't it?" Finding the newspaper still intervening between him and his prey, he calmly tore it down the middle and pushed through it like a moon coming through a cloud. "But a man can't change his name by marrying, can he? That's the worst of it. A woman can. Think of a heartless cobra di capello in woman's form wearing my fair name--and wearing it out. Mr. *La-throp*, did you ever put your trust in a false-hearted woman?"

"Never put my trust in anybody."

"Didn't you ever love a woman?"

"No!"

"Well, then, didn't you ever marry a woman?"

"Not one. I've had the measles and the mumps, but I've never had matrimony."

"Oh, lucky man," beamed Wellington. "Hang on to your luck."

"I intend to," said Lathrop, "I was born single and I like it."

"Oh, how I envy you! You see, Mrs. Wellington--she's a queen among women, mind you--a queen among women, but she has the 'stravagance of a----"

Lathrop had endured all he could endure, even from a privileged character like little Jimmy Wellington. He rose to take refuge in the smoking-room. But the very vigor of this departure only served to help Wellington to his feet, for he seized Lathrop's coat and hung on, through the door, down the little corridor, always explaining:

"Mrs. Wellington is a queen among women, mind you, but I can't stand her temper any longer."

He had hardly squeezed into the smoking-room when the porter and an usher almost invisible under the baggage they carried brought in a new passenger. Her first question was:

"Oh, porter, did a box of flowers, or candy, or anything, come for me?"

"What name would they be in, miss?"

"Mrs. Wellington--Mrs. James Wellington."

CHAPTER V A QUEEN AMONG WOMEN

Miss Anne Gattle, seated in Mrs. Jimmie Wellington's seat, had not heard Mr. Jimmie Wellington's sketch of his wife. But she needed hardly more than a glance to satisfy herself that she and Mrs. Jimmie were as hopelessly antipathetic as only two polite women can be.

Mrs. Jimmie was accounted something of a snob in Chicago society, but perhaps the missionary was a trifle the snobbisher of the two when they met.

Miss Gattle could overlook a hundred vices in a Zulu queen more easily than a few in a fellow countrywoman. She did not like Mrs. Jimmie, and she was proud of it.

When the porter said, "I'm afraid you got this lady's seat," Miss Gattle shot one glance at the intruder and rose stiffly. "Then I suppose I'll have to----"

"Oh, please don't go, there's plenty of room," Mrs. Wellington insisted, pressing her to remain. This nettled Miss Gattle still more, but she sank back, while the porter piled up expensive traveling-bags and hat boxes till there was hardly a place to sit. But even at that Mrs. Jimmie felt called on to apologize:

"I haven't brought much luggage. How I'll ever live four days with this, I can't imagine. It will be such a relief to get my trunks at Reno."

"Reno?" echoed Miss Gattle. "Do you live there?"

"Well, theoretically, yes."

"I don't understand you."

"I've got to live there to get it."

"To get it? Oh!" A look of sudden and dreadful realization came over the missionary. Mrs. Wellington interpreted it with a smile of gay defiance:

"Do you believe in divorces?"

Anne Gattle stuck to her guns. "I must say I don't. I think a law ought to be passed stopping them."

"So do I," Mrs. Wellington amiably agreed, "and I hope they'll pass just such a law--after I get mine." Then she ventured a little shaft of her own. "You don't believe in divorces. I judge you've never been married."

"Not once!" The spinster drew herself up, but Mrs. Wellington disarmed her with an unexpected bouquet:

"Oh, lucky woman! Don't let any heartless man delude you into taking the fatal step."

Anne Gattle was nothing if not honest. She confessed frankly: "I must say that nobody has made any violent efforts to compel me to. That's why I'm going to China."

"To China!" Mrs. Wellington gasped, hardly believing her ears. "My dear! You don't intend to marry a laundryman?"

"The idea! I'm going as a missionary."

"A missionary? Why leave Chicago?" Mrs. Wellington's eye softened more or less convincingly: "Oh, lovely! How I

should dote upon being a missionary. I really think that after I get my divorce I might have a try at it. I had thought of a convent, but being a missionary must be much more exciting." She dismissed the dream with an abrupt shake of the head. "Excuse me, but do you happen to have any matches?"

"Matches! I never carry them!"

"They never have matches in the women's room, and I've used my last one."

Miss Gattle took another reef in her tight lips. "Do you smoke cigarettes?"

Mrs. Wellington's echoed disgust with disgust: "Oh, no, indeed. I loathe them. I have the most dainty little cigars. Did you ever try one?"

Miss Gattle stiffened into one exclamation point: "Cigars! Me!"

Mrs. Jimmie was so well used to being disapproved of that it never disturbed her. She went on as if the face opposite were not alive with horror: "I should think that cigars might be a great consolation to a lady missionary in the long lone hours of--what do missionaries do when they're not missionarying?"

"That depends."

There was something almost spiritual in Mrs. Jimmie's beatific look: "I can't tell you what consolation my cigars have given me in my troubles. Mr. Wellington objected--but then Mr. Wellington objected to nearly everything I did. That's why I am forced to this dreadful step."

"Cigars?"

"Divorces."

"Divorces!"

"Well, this will be only my second--my other was such a nuisance. I got that from Jimmie, too. But it didn't take. Then we made up and remarried. Rather odd, having a second honeymoon with one's first husband. But remarriage didn't succeed any better. Jimmie fell off the water-wagon with an awful splash, and he quite misunderstood my purely platonic interest in Sammy Whitcomb, a nice young fellow with a fool of a wife. Did you ever meet Mrs. Sammy Whitcomb--no? Oh, but you are a lucky woman! Indeed you are! Well, when Jimmie got jealous, I just gave him up entirely. I'm running away to Reno. I sent a note to my husband's club, saying that I had gone to Europe, and he needn't try to find me. Poor fellow, he will. He'll hunt the continent high and low for me, but all the while I'll be in Nevada. Rather good joke on little Jimmie, eh?"

"Excruciating!"

"But now I must go. Now I must go. I've really become quite addicted to them."

"Divorces?"

"Cigars. Do stay here till I come back. I have so much to say to you."

Miss Gattle shook her head in despair. She could understand a dozen heathen dialects better than the speech of so utter a foreigner as her fellow-countrywoman. Mrs. Jimmie hastened away, rather pleased at the shocks she had administered. She enjoyed her own electricity.

In the corridor she administered another thrill--this time to a tall young man--a stranger, as alert for flirtation as a weasel for mischief. He huddled himself and his suitcases into as flat a space as possible, murmuring:

"These corridors are so narrow, aren't they?"

"Aren't they?" said Mrs. Jimmie. "So sorry to trouble you."

"Don't mention it."

She passed on, their glances fencing like playful foils. Then she paused:

"Excuse me. Could you lend me a match? They never have matches in the Women's Room."

He succeeded in producing a box after much shifting of burdens, and he was rewarded with a look and a phrase:

"You have saved my life."

He started to repeat his "Don't mention it," but it seemed inappropriate, so he said nothing, and she vanished behind a door. He turned away, saying to himself that it promised to be a pleasant journey. He was halted by another voice-- another woman's voice:

"Pardon me, but is this the car for Reno?"

He turned to smile, "I believe so!" Then his eyes widened as he recognized the speaker.

"Mrs. Sammy Whitcomb!"

It promised to be a curious journey.

CHAPTER VI A CONSPIRACY IN SATIN

The tall man emptied one hand of its suitcase to clasp the hand the newcomer granted him. He held it fast as he exclaimed: "Don't tell me that you are bound for Reno!" She whimpered: "I'm afraid so, Mr. Ashton."

He put down everything to take her other hand, and tuned his voice to condolence: "Why, I thought you and Sam Whitcomb were--"

"Oh, we were until that shameless Mrs. Wellington----"

"Mrs. Wellington? Don't believe I know her."

"I thought everybody had heard of Mrs. Jimmie Wellington."

"Mrs. Jimmie--oh, yes, I've heard of her!" Everybody seemed to have heard of Mrs. Jimmie Wellington.

"What a dance she has led her poor husband!" Mrs. Whitcomb said. "And my poor Sammy fell into her trap, too."

Ashton, zealous comforter, took a wrathful tone: "I always thought your husband was the most unmitigated----" But Mrs. Whitcomb bridled at once. "How dare you criticize Sammy! He's the nicest boy in the world."

Ashton recovered quickly. "That's what I started to say. Will he contest the--divorce?"

"Of course not," she beamed. "The dear fellow would never deny me anything. Sammy offered to get it himself, but I told him he'd better stay in Chicago and stick to business. I shall need such a lot of alimony."

"Too bad he couldn't have come along," Ashton insinuated.

But the irony was wasted, for she sighed: "Yes, I shall miss him terribly. But we feared that if he were with me it might hamper me in getting a divorce on the ground of desertion."

She was trying to look earnest and thoughtful and heartbroken, but the result was hardly plausible, for Mrs. Sammy Whitcomb could not possibly have been really earnest or really thoughtful; and her heart was quite too elastic to break. She proved it instantly, for when she heard behind her the voice of a young man asking her to let him pass, she turned to protest, but seeing that he was a handsome young man, her starch was instantly changed to sugar. And she rewarded his good looks with a smile, as he rewarded hers with another.

Then Ashton intervened like a dog in the manger and dragged her off to her seat, leaving the young man to exclaim:

"Some tamarind, that!"

Another young man behind him growled: "Cut out the tamarinds and get to business. Mallory will be here any minute."

"I hate to think what he'll do to us when he sees what we've done to him."

"Oh, he won't dare to fight in the presence of his little bridey-widely. Do you see the porter in there?"

"Yes, suppose he objects."

"Well, we have the tickets. We'll claim it's our section till Mallory and Mrs. Mallory come."

They moved on into the car, where the porter confronted them. When he saw that they were loaded with bundles of all shapes and sizes, he waved them away with scorn:

"The emigrant sleepa runs only Toosdays and Thuzzdays."

From behind the first mass of packages came a brisk military answer:

"You black hound! About face--forward march! Section number one."

The porter retreated down the aisle, apologizing glibly. "'Scuse me for questionin' you, but you-all's baggage looked kind o' eccentric at first."

The two young men dumped their parcels on the seats and began to unwrap them hastily.

"If Mallory catches us, he'll kill us," said Lieutenant Shaw. Lieutenant Hudson only laughed and drew out a long streamer of white satin ribbon. Its glimmer, and the glimmering eyes of the young man excited Mrs. Whitcomb so much that after a little hesitance she moved forward, followed by the jealous Ashton.

"Oh, what's up?" she ventured. "It looks like something bridal."

"Talk about womanly intuition!" said Lieutenant Hudson, with an ingratiating salaam.

And then they explained to her that their classmate at West Point, being ordered suddenly to the Philippines, had arranged to elope with his beloved Marjorie Newton; had asked them to get the tickets and check the baggage while he stopped at a minister's to "get spliced and hike for Manila by this train."

Having recounted this plan in the full belief that it was even at that moment being carried out successfully, Lieutenant Hudson, with a ghoulisn smile, explained:

"Being old friends of the bride and groom, we want to fix their section up in style and make them truly comfortable."

"Delicious!" gushed Mrs. Whitcomb. "But you ought to have some rice and old shoes."

"Here's the rice," said Hudson.

"Here's the old shoes," said Shaw.

"Lovely!" cried Mrs. Whitcomb, but then she grew soberer. "I should think, though, that they--the young couple--would have preferred a stateroom."

"Of course," said Hudson, almost blushing, "but it was taken. This was the best we could do for them."

"That's why we want to make it nice and bridelike," said Shaw. "Perhaps you could help us--a woman's touch----"

"Oh, I'd love to," she glowed, hastening into the section among the young men and the bundles. The unusual stir attracted the porter's suspicions. He came forward with a look of authority:

"'Scuse me, but wha--what's all this?"

"Vanish--get out," said Hudson, poking a coin at him. As he turned to obey, Mrs. Whitcomb checked him with: "Oh, Porter, could you get us a hammer and some nails?"

The porter almost blanched: "Good Lawd, Miss, you ain't allowin' to drive nails in that woodwork, is you?" That woodwork was to him what the altar is to the priest.

But Hudson, resorting to heroic measures, hypnotized him with a two-dollar bill: "Here, take this and see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing." The porter caressed it and chuckled: "I'm blind, deaf and speechless." He turned away, only to come back at once with a timid "'Scuse me!"

"You here yet?" growled Hudson.

Anxiously the porter pleaded: "I just want to ast one question. Is you all fixin' up for a bridal couple?"

"Foolish question, number eight million, forty-three," said Shaw. "Answer, no, we are."

The porter's face glistened like fresh stove polish as he gloated over the prospect. "I tell you, it'll be mahty refreshin' to have a bridal couple on bode! This dog-on old Reno train don't carry nothin' much but divorcees. I'm just nachally

hungry for a bridal couple."

"Brile coup-hic-le?" came a voice, like an echo that had somehow become intoxicated in transit. It was Little Jimmie Wellington looking for more sympathy. "Whass zis about brile couple?"

"Why, here's Little Buttercup!" sang out young Hudson, looking at him in amazed amusement.

"Did I un'stan' somebody say you're preparing for a brile coup!?"

Lieutenant Shaw grinned. "I don't know what you understood, but that's what we're doing."

Immediately Wellington's great face began to churn and work like a big eddy in a river. Suddenly he was weeping. "Excuse these tears, zhentlemen, but I was once--I was once a b-b-bride myself."

"He looks like a whole wedding party," was Ashton's only comment on the copious grief. It was poor Wellington's fate to hunt as vainly for sympathy as Diogenes for honesty. The decorators either ignored him or shunted him aside. They were interested in a strange contrivance of ribbons and a box that Shaw produced.

"That," Hudson explained, "is a little rice trap. We hang that up there and when the bridal couple sit down--biff! a shower of rice all over them. It's bad, eh?"

Everybody agreed that it was a happy thought and even Jimmie Wellington, like a great baby, bounding from tears to laughter on the instant, was chortling: "A rishe trap? That's abslootly splendid--greatest invensh' modern times. I must stick around and see her when she flops." And then he lurched forward like a too-obliging elephant. "Let me help you."

Mrs. Whitcomb, who had now mounted a step ladder and poised herself as gracefully as possible, shrieked with alarm, as she saw Wellington's bulk rolling toward her frail support.

If Hudson and Shaw had not been football veterans at West Point and had not known just what to do when the center rush comes bucking the line, they could never have blocked that flying wedge. But they checked him and impelled him backward through his own curtains into his own berth.

Finding himself on his back, he decided to remain there. And there he remained, oblivious of the carnival preparations going on just outside his canopy.

CHAPTER VII THE MASKED MINISTER

Being an angel must have this great advantage at least, that one may sit in the grandstand overlooking the earth and enjoy the ludicrous blunders of that great blind man's buff we call life.

This night, if any angels were watching Chicago, the Mallory mix-up must have given them a good laugh, or a good cry--according to their natures.

Here were Mallory and Marjorie, still merely engaged, bitterly regretting their inability to get married and to continue their journey together. There in the car were the giggling conspirators preparing a bridal mockery for their sweet confusion.

Then the angels might have nudged one another and said:

"Oh, it's all right now. There goes a minister hurrying to their very car. Mallory has the license in his pocket, and here comes the parson. Hooray!"

And then the angelic cheer must have died out as the one great hurrah of a crowded ball-ground is quenched in air when the home team's vitally needed home run swerves outside the line and drops useless as a stupid foul ball.

In a shabby old hack, were two of the happiest runaways that ever sought a train. They were not miserable like the young couple in the taxicab. They were white-haired both. They had been married for thirty years. Yet this was their real honeymoon, their real elopement.

The little woman in the timid gray bonnet clapped her hands and tittered like a schoolgirl.

"Oh, Walter, I can't believe we're really going to leave Ypsilanti for a while. Oh, but you've earned it after thirty years of being a preacher."

"Hush. Don't let me hear you say the awful word," said the little old man in the little black hat and the close-fitting black bib. "I'm so tired of it, Sally, I don't want anybody on the train to know it."

"They can't help guessing it, with your collar buttoned behind."

And then the amazing minister actually dared to say, "Here's where I change it around." What's more, he actually did it. Actually took off his collar and buttoned it to the front. The old carriage seemed almost to rock with the earthquake of the deed.

"Why, Walter Temple!" his wife exclaimed. "What would they say in Ypsilanti?"

"They'll never know," he answered, defiantly.

"But your bib?" she said.

"I've thought of that, too," he cried, as he whipped it off and stuffed it into a handbag. "Look, what I've bought." And he dangled before her startled eyes a long affair which the sudden light from a passing lamppost revealed to be nothing less than a flaring red tie.

The little old lady touched it to make sure she was not dreaming it. Then, omitting further parley with fate, she snatched it away, put it round his neck, and, since her arms were embracing him, kissed him twice before she knotted the ribbon into a flaming bow. She sat back and regarded the vision a moment, then flung her arms around him and hugged him till he gasped:

"Watch out-watch out. Don't crush my cigars."

"Cigars! Cigars!" she echoed, in a daze.

And then the astounding husband produced them in proof.

"Genuine Lillian Russells--five cents straight."

"But I never saw you smoke."

"Haven't taken a puff since I was a young fellow," he grinned, wagging his head. "But now it's my vacation, and I'm going to smoke up."

She squeezed his hand with an earlier ardor: "Now you're the old Walter Temple I used to know."



"NOW IT'S MY VACATION, AND I'M GOING TO SMOKE UP"....

"Sally," he said, "I've been traveling through life on a half-fare ticket. Now I'm going to have my little fling. And you brace up, too, and be the old mischievous Sally I used to know. Aren't you glad to be away from those sewing circles and gossip-bees, and----"

"Ugh! Don't ever mention them," she shuddered. Then she, too, felt a tinge of recurring springtide. "If you start to smoking, I think I'll take up flirting once more."

He pinched her cheek and laughed. "As the saying is, go as far as you desire and I'll leave the coast clear."

He kept his promise, too, for they were no sooner on the train and snugly bestowed in section five, than he was up and off.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To the smoking-room," he swaggered, brandishing a dangerous looking cigar.

"Oh, Walter," she snickered, "I feel like a young runaway."

"You look like one. Be careful not to let anybody know that you're a"--he lowered his voice--"an old preacher's wife."

"I'm as ashamed of it as you are," she whispered. Then he threw her a kiss and a wink. She threw him a kiss and winked, too. And he went along the aisle eyeing his cigar gloatingly. As he entered the smoking-room, lighted the weed and blew out a great puff with a sigh of rapture, who could have taken him, with his feet cocked up, and his red tie rakishly askew, for a minister?

And Sally herself was busy disguising herself, loosening up her hair coquettishly, smiling the primness out of the set corners of her mouth and even--let the truth be told at all costs--even passing a pink-powdered puff over her pale cheeks with guilty surreptition.

Thus arrayed she was soon joining the conspirators bedecking the bower for the expected bride and groom. She was the youngest and most mischievous of the lot. She felt herself a bride again, and vowed to protect this timid little wife to come from too much hilarity at the hands of the conspirators.

CHAPTER VIII A MIXED PICKLE

Mrs. Whitcomb had almost blushed when she had murmured to Lieutenant Hudson:

"I should think the young couple would have preferred a stateroom."

And Mr. Hudson had flinched a little as he explained:

"Yes, of course. We tried to get it, but it was gone."

It was during the excitement over the decoration of the bridal section, that the stateroom-tenants slipped in unobserved.

First came a fluttering woman whose youthful beauty had a certain hue of experience, saddening and wisering. The porter brought her in from the station-platform, led her to the stateroom's concave door and passed in with her luggage. But she lingered without, a Peri at the gate of Paradise. When the porter returned to bow her in, she shivered and hesitated, and then demanded:

"Oh, Porter, are you sure there's nobody else in there?"

The porter chuckled, but humored her panic.

"I ain't seen nobody. Shall I look under the seat?"

To his dismay, she nodded her head violently. He rolled his eyes in wonderment, but returned to the stateroom, made a pretense of examination, and came back with a face full of reassurance. "No'm, they's nobody there. Take a mighty small-size burglar to squeeje unda that baid--er--berth. No'm, nobody there."

"Oh!"

The gasp was so equivocal that he made bold to ask:

"Is you pleased or disappointed?"

The mysterious young woman was too much agitated to rebuke the impudence. She merely sighed: "Oh, porter, I'm so anxious."

"I'm not--now," he muttered, for she handed him a coin.

"Porter, have you seen anybody on board that looks suspicious?"

"Evvabody looks suspicious to me, Missy. But what was you expecting--especial?"

"Oh, porter, have you seen anybody that looks like a detective in disguise?"

"Well, they's one man looks 's if he was disguised as a balloon, but I don't believe he's no slooch-hound."

"Well, if you see anything that looks like a detective and he asks for Mrs. Fosdick----"

"Mrs. What-dick?"

"Mrs. Fosdick! You tell him I'm not on board." And she gave him another coin.

"Yassum," said the porter, lingering willingly on such fertile soil. "I'll tell him Mrs. Fosdick done give me her word she wasn't on bode."

"Yes!--and if a woman should ask you."

"What kind of a woman?"

"The hideous kind that men call handsome."

"Oh, ain't they hideous, them handsome women?"

"Well, if such a woman asks for Mrs. Fosdick--she's my husband's first wife--but of course that doesn't interest you."

"No'm--yes'm."

"If she comes--tell her--tell her--oh, what shall we tell her?"

The porter rubbed his thick skull: "Lemme see--we might say you--I tell you what we'll tell her: we'll tell her you took the train for New York; and if she runs mighty fast she can just about ketch it."

"Fine, fine!" And she rewarded his genius with another coin. "And, porter." He had not budged. "Porter, if a very handsome man with luscious eyes and a soulful smile asks for me----"

"I'll th'ow him off the train!"

"Oh, no--no!--that's my husband--my present husband. You may let him in. Now is it all perfectly clear, porter?"

"Oh, yassum, clear as clear." Thus guaranteed she entered the stateroom, leaving the porter alone with his problem. He tried to work it out in a semi-audible mumble: "Lemme see! If your present husband's absent wife gits on bode disguised as a handsome hideous woman I'm to throw him--her--off the train and let her--him--come in--oh, yassum, you may rely on me." He bowed and held out his hand again. But she was gone. He shuffled on into the car.

He had hardly left the little space before the stateroom when a handsome man with luscious eyes, but without any smile at all, came slinking along the corridor and tapped cautiously on the door. Silence alone answered him at first, then when he had rapped again, he heard a muffled:

"Go away. I'm not in."

He put his lips close and softly called: "Edith!"

At this Sesame the door opened a trifle, but when he tried to enter, a hand thrust him back and a voice again warned him off. "You musn't come in."

"But I'm your husband."

"That's just why you musn't come in." The door opened a little wider to give him a view of a downcast beauty moaning:

"Oh, Arthur, I'm so afraid."

"A afraid?" he sniffed. "With your husband here?"

"That's the trouble, Arthur. What if your former wife should find us together?"

"But she and I are divorced."

"In some states, yes--but other states don't acknowledge the divorce. That former wife of yours is a fiend to pursue us this way."

"She's no worse than your former husband. He's pursuing us, too. My divorce was as good as yours, my dear."

"Yes, and no better."

The angels looking on might have judged from the ready tempers of the newly married and not entirely unmarried twain that their new alliance promised to be as exciting as their previous estates. Perhaps the man subtly felt the presence of those eternal eavesdroppers, for he tried to end the love-duel in the corridor with an appeasing caress and a tender appeal: "But let's not start our honeymoon with a quarrel."

His partial wife returned the caress and tried to explain: "I'm not quarreling with you, dear heart, but with the horrid divorce laws. Why, oh, why did we ever interfere with them?"

He made a brave effort with: "We ended two unhappy marriages, Edith, to make one happy one."

"But I'm so unhappy, Arthur, and so afraid."

He seemed a trifle afraid himself and his gaze was askance as he urged: "But the train will start soon, Edith--and then

we shall be safe."

Mrs. Fosdick had a genius for inventing unpleasant possibilities. "But what if your former wife or my former husband should have a detective on board?"

"A detective?--poof!" He snapped his fingers in bravado. "You are with your husband, aren't you?"

"In Illinois, yes," she admitted, very dolefully. "But when we come to Iowa, I'm a bigamist, and when we come to Nebraska, you're a bigamist, and when we come to Wyoming, we're not married at all."

It was certainly a tangled web they had woven, but a ray of light shot through it into his bewildered soul. "But we're all right in Utah. Come, dearest."

He took her by the elbow to escort her into their sanctuary, but still she hung back.

"On one condition, Arthur--that you leave me as soon as we cross the Iowa state line, and not come back till we get to Utah. Remember, the Iowa state line!"

"Oh, all right," he smiled. And seeing the porter, he beckoned him close and asked with careless indifference: "Oh, Porter, what time do we reach the Iowa state line?"

"Two fifty-five in the mawning, sah."

"Two fifty-five A.M.?" the wretch exclaimed.

"Two fifty-five A.M., yassah," the porter repeated, and wondered why this excerpt from the time-table should exert such a dramatic effect on the luscious-eyed Fosdick.

He had small time to meditate the puzzle, for the train was about to be launched upon its long voyage. He went out to the platform, and watched a couple making that way. As their only luggage was a dog-basket he supposed that they were simply come to bid some of his passengers good-bye. No tips were to be expected from such transients, so he allowed them to help themselves up the steps.

Mallory and his Marjorie had tried to kiss the farewell of farewells half a dozen times, but she could not let him go at the gate. She asked the guard to let her through, and her beauty was bribe enough.

Again and again, she and Mallory paused. He wanted to take her back to the taxicab, but she would not be so dismissed. She must spend the last available second with him.

"I'll go as far as the steps of the car," she said. When they were arrived there, two porters, a sleeping car conductor and several smoking saunterers profaned the tryst. So she whispered that she would come aboard, for the corridor would be a quiet lane for the last rites.

And now that he had her actually on the train, Mallory's whole soul revolted against letting her go. The vision of her standing on the platform sad-eyed and lorn, while the train swept him off into space was unendurable. He shut his eyes against it, but it glowed inside the lids.

And then temptation whispered him its old "Why not?" While it was working in his soul like a fermenting yeast, he was saying:

"To think that we should owe all our misfortune to an infernal taxicab's break-down."

Out of the anguish of her loneliness crept one little complaint:

"If you had really wanted me, you'd have had two taxicabs."

"Oh, how can you say that? I had the license bought and the minister waiting."

"He's waiting yet."

"And the ring--there's the ring." He fished it out of his waistcoat pocket and held it before her as a golden amulet.

"A lot of good it does now," said Marjorie. "You won't even wait over till the next train."

"I've told you a thousand times, my love," he protested, desperately, "if I don't catch the transport, I'll be courtmartialed. If this train is late, I'm lost. If you really loved me you'd come along with me."

Her very eyes gasped at this astounding proposal.

"Why, Harry Mallory, you know it's impossible."

Like a sort of benevolent Satan, he laid the ground for his abduction: "You'll leave me, then, to spend three years without you--out among those Manila women."

She shook her head in terror at this vision. "It would be too horrible for words to have you marry one of those mahogany sirens."

He held out the apple. "Better come along, then."

"But how can I? We're not married."

He answered airily: "Oh, I'm sure there's a minister on board."

"But it would be too awful to be married with all the passengers gawking. No, I couldn't face it. Good-bye, honey."

She turned away, but he caught her arm: "Don't you love me?"

"To distraction. I'll wait for you, too."

"Three years is a long wait."

"But I'll wait, if you will."

With such devotion he could not tamper. It was too beautiful to risk or endanger or besmirch with any danger of scandal. He gave up his fantastic project and gathered her into his arms, crowded her into his very soul, as he vowed: "I'll wait for you forever and ever and ever."

Her arms swept around his neck, and she gave herself up as an exile from happiness, a prisoner of a far-off love:

"Good-bye, my husband-to-be."

"Good-bye my wife-that-was-to-have-been-and-will-be-yet-maybe."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"I must go."

"Yes, you must."

"One last kiss."

"One more--one long last kiss."

And there, entwined in each other's arms, with lips wedded and eyelids clinched, they clung together, forgetting everything past, future, or present. Love's anguish made them blind, mute, and deaf.

They did not hear the conductor crying his, "All Aboard!" down the long wall of the train. They did not hear the far-off knell of the bell. They did not hear the porters banging the vestibules shut. They did not feel the floor sliding out with them.

And so the porter found them, engulfed in one embrace, swaying and swaying, and no more aware of the increasing rush of the train than we other passengers on the earth-express are aware of its speed through the ether-routes on its ancient schedule.

The porter stood with his box-step in his hand, and blinked and wondered. And they did not even know they were observed.

CHAPTER IX ALL ABOARD!

The starting of the train surprised the ironical decorators in the last stages of their work. Their smiles died out in a sudden shame, as it came over them that the joke had recoiled on their own heads. They had done their best to carry out the time-honored rite of making a newly married couple as miserable as possible--and the newly married couple had failed to do its share.

The two lieutenants glared at each other in mutual contempt. They had studied much at West Point about ambushes, and how to avoid them. Could Mallory have escaped the pit they had dugged for him? They looked at their handiwork in disgust. The cosy-corner effect of white ribbons and orange flowers, gracefully masking the concealed rice-trap, had seemed the wittiest thing ever devised. Now it looked the silliest.

The other passengers were equally downcast. Meanwhile the two lovers in the corridor were kissing good-byes as if they were hoping to store up honey enough to sustain their hearts for a three years' fast. And the porter was studying them with perplexity.

He was used, however, to waking people out of dreamland, and he began to fear that if he were discovered spying on the lovers, he might suffer. So he coughed discreetly three or four times.

Since the increasing racket of the train made no effect on the two hearts beating as one, the small matter of a cough was as nothing.

Finally the porter was compelled to reach forward and tap Mallory's arm, and stutter:

"Scuse me, but co-could I git b-by?"

The embrace was untied, and the lovers stared at him with a dazed, where-am-I? look. Marjorie was the first to realize what awakened them. She felt called upon to say something, so she said, as carelessly as if she had not just emerged from a young gentleman's arms:

"Oh, porter, how long before the train starts?"

"Train's done started, Missy."

This simple statement struck the wool from her eyes and the cotton from her ears, and she was wide enough awake when she cried: "Oh, stop it--stop it!"

"That's mo'n I can do, Missy," the porter expostulated.

"Then I'll jump off," Marjorie vowed, making a dash for the door.

But the porter filled the narrow path, and waved her back.

"Vestibule's done locked up--train's going lickety-split." Feeling that he had safely checkmated any rashness, the porter squeezed past the dumbfounded pair, and went to change his blue blouse for the white coat of his chambermaidly duties. Mallory's first wondering thought was a rapturous feeling that circumstances had forced his dream into a reality. He thrilled with triumph: "You've got to go with me now."

"Yes--I've got to go," Marjorie assented meekly; then, sublimely, "It's fate. Kismet!"

They clutched each other again in a fiercely blissful hug. Marjorie came back to earth with a bump: "Are you really sure there's a minister on board?"

"Pretty sure," said Mallory, sobering a trifle.

"But you said you were sure?"

"Well, when you say you're sure, that means you're not quite sure."

It was not an entirely satisfactory justification, and Marjorie began to quake with alarm: "Suppose there shouldn't be?"

"Oh, then," Mallory answered carelessly, "there's bound to be one to-morrow."

Marjorie realized at once the enormous abyss between then and the morrow, and she gasped: "Tomorrow! And no chaperon! Oh, I'll jump out of the window."

Mallory could prevent that, but when she pleaded, "What shall we do?" he had no solution to offer. Again it was she who received the first inspiration.

"I have it," she beamed.

"Yes, Marjorie?" he assented, dubiously.

"We'll pretend not to be married at all."

He seized the rescuing ladder: "That's it! Not married--just friends."

"Till we can get married----"

"Yes, and then we can stop being friends."

"My love--my friend!" They embraced in a most unfriendly manner.

An impatient yelp from the neglected dog-basket awoke them.

"Oh, Lord, we've brought Snoozleums."

"Of course we have." She took the dog from the prison, tucked him under her arm, and tried to compose her bridal face into a merely friendly countenance before they entered the car. But she must pause for one more kiss, one more of those bittersweet good-byes. And Mallory was nothing loath.

Hudson and Shaw were still glumly perplexed, when the porter returned in his white jacket.

"I bet they missed the train; all this work for nothing," Hudson grumbled. But Shaw, seeing the porter, caught a gleam of hope, and asked anxiously:

"Say, porter, have you seen anything anywhere that looks like a freshly married pair?"

"Well," and the porter rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand as he chuckled, "well, they's a mighty lovin' couple out theah in the corridor."

"That's them--they--it!"

Instantly everything was alive and in action. It was as if a bugle had shrilled in a dejected camp.

"Get ready!" Shaw commanded. "Here's rice for everybody."

"Everybody take an old shoe," said Hudson. "You can't miss in this narrow car."

"There's a kazoo for everyone, too," said Shaw, as the outstretched hands were equipped with wedding ammunition. "Do you know the 'Wedding March'?"

"I ought to by this time," said Mrs. Whitcomb.

Right into the tangle of preparation, old Ira Lathrop stalked, on his way back to his seat to get more cigars.

"Have some rice for the bridal couple?" said Ashton, offering him of his own double-handful.

But Lathrop brushed him aside with a romance-hater's growl.

"Watch out for your head, then," cried Hudson, and Lathrop ducked just too late to escape a neck-filling, hair-filling shower. An old shoe took him a clip abaft the ear, and the old woman-hater dropped raging into the same berth where the spinster, Anne Gattle, was trying to dodge the same downpour.

Still there was enough of the shrapnel left to overwhelm the two young "friends," who marched into the aisle, trying to look indifferent and prepared for nothing on earth less than for a wedding charivari.

Mallory should have done better than to entrust his plans to fellows like Hudson and Shaw, whom he had known at West Point for diabolically joyous hazers and practical jokers. Even as he sputtered rice and winced from the impact of flying footgear, he was cursing himself as a double-dyed idiot for asking such men to engage his berth for him. He had a sudden instinct that they had doubtless bedecked his trunk and Marjorie's with white satin furbelows and ludicrous labels. But he could not shelter himself from the white sleet and the black thumps. He could hardly shelter Marjorie, who cowered behind him and shrieked even louder than the romping tormentors.

When the assailants had exhausted the rice and shoes, they charged down the aisle for the privilege of kissing the

bride. Mallory was dragged and bunted and shunted here and there, and he had to fight his way back to Marjorie with might and main. He was tugging and striking like a demon, and yelling, "Stop it! stop it!"

Hudson took his punishment with uproarious good nature, laughing:

"Oh, shut up, or we'll kiss you!"

But Shaw was scrubbing his wry lips with a seasick wail of:

"Wow! I think I kissed the dog."

There was, of necessity, some pause for breath, and the combatants draped themselves limply about the seats. Mallory glared at the twin Benedict Arnolds and demanded:

"Are you two thugs going to San Francisco with us?"

"Don't worry," smiled Hudson, "we're only going as far as Kedzie Avenue, just to start the honeymoon properly."

If either of the elopers had been calmer, the solution of the problem would have been simple. Marjorie could get off at this suburban station and drive home from there. But their wits were like pied type, and they were further jumbled, when Shaw broke in with a sudden: "Come, see the little dovecote we fixed for you."

Before they knew it, they were both haled along the aisle to the white satin atrocity. "Love in a bungalow," said Hudson. "Sit down--make yourselves perfectly at home."

"No--never--oh, oh, oh!" cried Marjorie, darting away and throwing herself into the first empty seat--Ira Lathrop's berth. Mallory followed to console her with caresses and murmurs of, "There, there, don't cry, dearie!"

Hudson and Shaw followed close with mawkish mockery: "Don't cry, dearie."

And now Mrs. Temple intervened. She had enjoyed the initiation ceremony as well as anyone. But when the little bride began to cry, she remembered the pitiful terror and shy shame she had undergone as a girl-wife, and she hastened to Marjorie's side, brushing the men away like gnats.

"You poor thing," she comforted. "Come, my child, lean on me, and have a good cry."

Hudson grinned, and put out his own arms: "She can lean on me, if she'd rather."

Mrs. Temple glanced up with indignant rebuke: "Her mother is far away, and she wants a mother's breast to weep on. Here's mine, my dear."

The impudent Shaw tapped his own military chest: "She can use mine."

Infuriated at this bride-baiting, Mallory rose and confronted the twoimps with clenched fists: "You're a pretty pair of friends, you are!"

The imperturbable Shaw put out a pair of tickets as his only defence: "Here are your tickets, old boy."

And Hudson roared jovially: "We tried to get you a stateroom, but it was gone."

"And here are your baggage checks," laughed Shaw, forcing into his fists a few pasteboards. "We got your trunks on the train ahead, all right. Don't mention it--you're entirely welcome."

It was the porter that brought the first relief from the ordeal.

"If you gemmen is gettin' off at Kedzie Avenue, you'd better step smart. We're slowin' up now."

Marjorie was sobbing too audibly to hear, and Mallory swearing too inaudibly to heed the opportunity Kedzie Avenue offered. And Hudson was yelling: "Well, good-bye, old boy and old girl. Sorry we can't go all the way." He had the effrontery to try to kiss the bride good-bye, and Shaw was equally bold, but Mallory's fury enabled him to beat them off. He elbowed and shouldered them down the aisle, and sent after them one of his own shoes. But it just missed Shaw's flying coattails.

Mallory stood glaring after the departing traitors. He was glad that they at least were gone, till he realized with a sickening slump in his vitals, that they had not taken with them his awful dilemma. And now the train was once more clickety-clicking into the night and the West.

CHAPTER X EXCESS BAGGAGE

Never was a young soldier so stumped by a problem in tactics as Lieutenant Harry Mallory, safely aboard his train, and not daring to leave it, yet hopelessly unaware of how he was to dispose of his lovely but unlabelled baggage.

Hudson and Shaw had erected a white satin temple to Hymen in berth number one, had created such commotion, and departed in such confusion, that there had been no opportunity to proclaim that he and Marjorie were "not married--just friends."

And now the passengers had accepted them as that enormous fund of amusement to any train, a newly wedded pair. To explain the mistake would have been difficult, even among friends. But among strangers--well, perhaps a wiser and a colder brain than Harry Mallory's could have stood there and delivered a brief oration restoring truth to her pedestal. But Mallory was in no condition for such a stoic delivery.

He mopped his brow in agony, lost in a blizzard of bewilderments. He drifted back toward Marjorie, half to protect and half for companionship. He found Mrs. Temple cuddling her close and mothering her as if she were a baby instead of a bride.

"Did the poor child run away and get married?"

Marjorie's frantic "Boo-hoo-hoo" might have meant anything. Mrs. Temple took it for assent, and murmured with glowing reminiscence:

"Just the way Doctor Temple and I did."

She could not see the leaping flash of wild hope that lighted up Mallory's face. She only heard his voice across her shoulder:

"Doctor? Doctor Temple? Is your husband a reverend doctor?"

"A reverend doctor?" the little old lady repeated weakly.

"Yes--a--a preacher?"

The poor old congregation-weary soul was abruptly confronted with the ruination of all the delight in her little escapade with her pulpit-fagged husband. If she had ever dreamed that the girl who was weeping in her arms was weeping from any other fright than the usual fright of young brides, fresh from the preacher's benediction, she would have cast every other consideration aside, and told the truth.

But her husband's last behest before he left her had been to keep their precious pretend-secret. She felt--just then--that a woman's first duty is to obey her husband. Besides, what business was it of this young husband's what her old husband's business was? Before she had fairly begun to debate her duty, almost automatically, with the instantaneous instinct of self-protection, her lips had uttered the denial:

"Oh--he's--just a--plain doctor. There he is now."

Mallory cast one miserable glance down the aisle at Dr. Temple coming back from the smoking room. As the old man paused to stare at the bridal berth, whose preparation he had not seen, he was just enough befuddled by his first cigar for thirty years to look a trifle tipsy. The motion of the train and the rakish tilt of his unwonted crimson tie confirmed the suspicion and annihilated Mallory's new-born hope, that perhaps repentant fate had dropped a parson at their very feet.

He sank into the seat opposite Marjorie, who gave him one terrified glance, and burst into fresh sobs:

"Oh--oh--boo-hoo--I'm so unhap--hap--py."

Perhaps Mrs. Temple was a little miffed at the couple that had led her astray and opened her own honeymoon with a wanton fib. In any case, the best consolation she could offer Marjorie was a perfunctory pat, and a cynicism:

"There, there, dear! You don't know what real unhappiness is yet. Wait till you've been married a while."

And then she noted a startling lack of completeness in the bride's hand.

"Why--my dear!--where's your wedding ring?"

With what he considered great presence of mind, Mallory explained: "It--it slipped off--I--I picked it up. I have it here." And he took the little gold band from his waistcoat and tried to jam it on Marjorie's right thumb.

"Not on the thumb!" Mrs. Temple cried. "Don't you know?"

"You see, it's my first marriage."

"You poor boy--this finger!" And Mrs. Temple, raising Marjorie's limp hand, selected the proper digit, and held it forward, while Mallory pressed the fatal circlet home.

And then Mrs. Temple, having completed their installation as man and wife, utterly confounded their confusion by her final effort at comfort: "Well, my dears, I'll go back to my seat, and leave you alone with your dear husband."

"My dear what?" Marjorie mumbled inanely, and began to sniffle again. Whereupon Mrs. Temple resigned her to Mallory, and consigned her to fate with a consoling platitude:

"Cheer up, my dear, you'll be all right in the morning."

Marjorie and Mallory's eyes met in one wild clash, and then both stared into the window, and did not notice that the shades were down.

CHAPTER XI A CHANCE RENCONTRE

While Mrs. Temple was confiding to her husband that the agitated couple in the next seat had just come from a wedding-factory, and had got on while he was lost in tobacco land, the people in the seat on the other side of them were engaged in a little drama of their own.

Ira Lathrop, known to all who knew him as a woman-hating snapping-turtle, was so busily engaged trying to drag the farthest invading rice grains out of the back of his neck, that he was late in realizing his whereabouts. When he raised his head, he found that he had crowded into a seat with an uncomfortable looking woman, who crowded against the window with old-maidenly timidity.

He felt some apology to be necessary, and he snarled: "Disgusting things, these weddings!" After he heard this, it did not sound entirely felicitous, so he grudgingly ventured: "Excuse me--you married?"

She denied the soft impeachment so heartily that he softened a little:

"You're a sensible woman. I guess you and I are the only sensible people on this train."

"It--seems--so," she giggled. It was the first time her spinstership had been taken as material for a compliment. Something in the girlish giggle and the strangely young smile that swept twenty years from her face and belied the silver lines in her hair, seemed to catch the old bachelor's attention. He stared at her so fiercely that she looked about for a way of escape. Then a curiously anxious, almost a hungry, look softened his leonine jowls into a boyish eagerness, and his growl became a sort of gruff purr:

"Say, you look something like an old sweetheart--er--friend--of mine. Were you ever in Brattleboro, Vermont?"

A flush warmed her cheek, and a sense of home warmed her prim speech, as she confessed:

"I came from there originally."

"So did I," said Ira Lathrop, leaning closer, and beaming like a big sun: "I don't suppose you remember Ira Lathrop?"

The old maid stared at the bachelor as if she were trying to see the boy she had known, through the mask that time had modeled on his face. And then she was a girl again, and her voice chimed as she cried:

"Why, Ira!--Mr. Lathrop!--is it you?"

She gave him her hand--both her hands, and he smothered them in one big paw and laid the other on for extra warmth, as he nodded his savage head and roared as gentle as a sucking dove:

"Well, well! Annie--Anne--Miss Gattle! What do you think of that?"

They gossiped across the chasm of years about people and things, and knew nothing of the excitement so close to them, saw nothing of Chicago slipping back into the distance, with its many lights shooting across the windows like hurled torches.

Suddenly a twinge of ancient jealousy shot through the man's heart, recurring to old emotions.

"So you're not married, Annie. Whatever became of that fellow who used to hang round you all the time?"

"Charlie Selby?" She blushed at the name, and thrilled at the luxury of meeting jealousy. "Oh, he entered the church. He's a minister out in Ogden, Utah."

"I always knew he'd never amount to much," was Lathrop's epitaph on his old rival. Then he started with a new twinge: "You bound for Ogden, too?"

"Oh, no," she smiled, enraptured at the new sensation of making a man anxious, and understanding all in a flash the motives that make coquettes. Then she told him her destination. "I'm on my way to China."

"China!" he exclaimed. "So'm I!"

She stared at him with a new thought, and gushed: "Oh, Ira--are you a missionary, too?"

"Missionary? Hell, no!" he roared. "Excuse me--I'm an importer--Anne, I--I----"

But the sonorous swear reverberated in their ears like a smitten bell, and he blushed for it, but could not recall it.

CHAPTER XII THE NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK

The almost-married couple sat long in mutual terror and a common paralysis of ingenuity. Marjorie, for lack of anything better to do, was absent-mindedly twisting Snoozleums's ears, while he, that pocket abridgment of a dog, in a well meaning effort to divert her from her evident grief, made a great pretence of ferocity, growling and threatening to bite her fingers off. The new ring attracted his special jealousy. He was growing discouraged at the ill-success of his impersonation of a wolf, and dejected at being so crassly ignored, when he suddenly became, in his turn, a center of interest.

Marjorie was awakened from her trance of inanition by the porter's voice. His plantation voice was ordinarily as thick and sweet as his own New Orleans sorghum, but now it had a bitterness that curdled the blood:

"Scuse me, but how did you-all git that theah dog in this heah cah?"

"Snoozleums is always with me," said Marjorie briskly, as if that settled it, and turned for confirmation to the dog himself, "aren't you, Snoozleums?"

"Well," the porter drawled, trying to be gracious with his great power, "the rules don't 'low no live stock in the sleepin' cars, 'ceptin' humans."

Marjorie rewarded his condescension with a blunt: "Snoozleums is more human than you are."

"I p'sume he is," the porter admitted, "but he can't make up berths. Anyway, the rules says dogs goes with the baggage."

Marjorie swept rules aside with a defiant: "I don't care. I won't be separated from my Snoozleums."

She looked to Mallory for support, but he was too sorely troubled with greater anxieties to be capable of any action.

The porter tried persuasion: "You betta lemme take him, the conducta is wuss'n what I am. He th'owed a couple of dogs out the window trip befo' last."

"The brute!"

"Oh, yassum, he is a regulah brute. He just loves to hear 'm splosh when they light."

Noting the shiver that shook the girl, the porter offered a bit of consolation:

"Better lemme have the pore little thing up in the baggage cah. He'll be in charge of a lovely baggage-smasher."

"Are you sure he's a nice man?"

"Oh, yassum, he's death on trunks, but he's a natural born angel to dogs."

"Well, if I must, I must," she sobbed. "Poor little Snoozleums! Can he come back and see me to-morrow?" Marjorie's tears were splashing on the puzzled dog, who nestled close, with a foreboding of disaster.

"I reckon p'haps you'd better visit him."

"Poor dear little Snoozleums--good night, my little darling. Poor little child--it's the first night he's slept all by his 'ittle lonesome, and----"

The porter was growing desperate. He clapped his hands together impatiently and urged: "I think I hear that conducta comin'!"

The ruse succeeded. Marjorie fairly forced the dog on him. "Quick--hide him--hurry!" she gasped, and sank on the seat completely crushed. "I'll be so lonesome without Snoozleums."

Mallory felt called upon to remind her of his presence. "I--I'm here, Marjorie." She looked at him just once--at him, the source of all her troubles--buried her head in her arms, and resumed her grief. Mallory stared at her helplessly, then rose and bent over to whisper:

"I'm going to look through the train."

"Oh, don't leave me," she pleaded, clinging to him with a dependence that restored his respect.

"I must find a clergyman," he whispered. "I'll be back the minute I find one, and I'll bring him with me."



MARJORIE FAIRLY FORCED THE DOG ON HIM...

The porter thought he wanted the dog back, and quickened his pace till he reached the corridor, where Mallory overtook him and asked, in an effort at casual indifference, if he had seen anything of a clergyman on board.

"Ain't seen nothin' that even looks like one," said the porter. Then he hastened ahead to the baggage car with the squirming Snoozleums, while Mallory followed slowly, going from seat to seat and car to car, subjecting all the males to an inspection that rendered some of them indignant, others of them uneasy.

If dear old Doctor Temple could only have known what Mallory was hunting, he would have snatched off the mask, and thrown aside the secular scarlet tie at all costs. But poor Mallory, unable to recognize a clergyman so dyed-in-the-wool as Doctor Temple, sitting in the very next seat--how could he be expected to pick out another in the long and crowded train?

All clergymen look alike when they are in convention assembled, but sprinkled through a crowd they are not so easily distinguished.

In the sleeping car bound for Portland, Mallory picked one man as a clergyman. He had a lean, ascetic face, solemn eyes, and he was talking to his seat-mate in an oratorical manner. Mallory bent down and tapped the man's shoulder.

The effect was surprising. The man jumped as if he were stabbed, and turned a pale, frightened face on Mallory, who murmured:

"Excuse me, do you happen to be a clergyman?"

A look of relief stole over the man's features, followed closely by a scowl of wounded vanity:

"No, damn you, I don't happen to be a parson. I have chosen to be--well, if you had watched the billboards in Chicago during our run, you would not need to ask who I am!"

Mallory mumbled an apology and hurried on, just overhearing his victim's sigh:

"Such is fame!"

He saw two or three other clerical persons in that car, but feared to touch their shoulders. One man in the last seat held him specially, and he hid in the turn of the corridor, in the hope of eavesdropping some clue. This man was bent and scholastic of appearance, and wore heavy spectacles and a heavy beard, which Mallory took for a guaranty that he was not another actor. And he was reading what appeared to be printer's proofs. Mallory felt certain that they were a volume of sermons. He lingered timorously in the environs for some time before the man spoke at all to the dreary-looking woman at his side. Then the stranger spoke. And this is what he said and read:

"I fancy this will make the bigots sit up and take notice, mother: 'If there ever was a person named Moses, it is certain, from the writings ascribed to him, that he disbelieved the Egyptian theory of a life after death, and combated it as a heathenish superstition. The Judaic idea of a future existence was undoubtedly acquired from the Assyrians, during the captivity.'"

He doubtless read much more, but Mallory fled to the next car. There he found a man in a frock coat talking solemnly to another of equal solemnity. The seat next them was unoccupied, and Mallory dropped into it, perking his ears backward for news.

"Was you ever in Moline?" one voice asked.

"Was I?" the other muttered. "Wasn't I run out of there by one of my audiences. I was givin' hypnotic demonstrations, and I had a run-in with one of my 'horses,' and he done me dirt. Right in the midst of one of his cataleptic trances, he got down from the chairs where I had stretched him out and hollered: 'He's a bum faker, gents, and owes me two weeks' pay.' Thank Gawd, there was a back door openin' on a dark alley leadin' to the switch yard. I caught a caboose just as a freight train was pullin' out."

Mallory could hardly get strength to rise and continue his search. On his way forward he met the conductor, crossing a vestibule between cars. A happy thought occurred to Mallory. He said:

"Excuse me, but have you any preachers on board?"

"None so far."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"How can you tell?"

"Well, if a grown man offers me a half-fare ticket, I guess that's a pretty good sign, ain't it?"

Mallory guessed that it was, and turned back, hopeless and helpless.

CHAPTER XIII HOSTILITIES BEGIN

During Mallory's absence, Marjorie had met with a little adventure of her own. Ira Lathrop finished his re-encounter with Anne Gattle shortly after Mallory set out stalking clergymen. In the mingled confusion of finding his one romantic flame still glowing on a vestal altar, and of shocking her with an escape of profanity, he backed away from her presence, and sank into his own berth.

He realized that he was not alone. Somebody was alongside. He turned to find the great tear-sprent eyes of Marjorie staring at him. He rose with a recrudescence of his woman-hating wrath, and dashing up the aisle, found the porter just returning from the baggage car. He seized the black factotum and growled:

"Say, porter, there's a woman in my berth."

The porter chuckled, incredulous:

"Woman in yo' berth!"

"Yes--get her out."

"Yassah," the porter nodded, and advanced on Marjorie with a gentle, "Scuse me, missus--ye' berth is numba one."

"I don't care," snapped Marjorie, "I won't take it."

"But this un belongs to that gentleman."

"He can have mine--ours--Mr. Mallory's," cried Marjorie, pointing to the white-ribboned tent in the farther end of the car. Then she gripped the arms of the seat, as if defying eviction. The porter stared at her in helpless chagrin. Then he shuffled back and murmured: "I reckon you'd betta put her out."

Lathrop withered the coward with one contemptuous look, and strode down the aisle with a determined grimness. He took his ticket from his pocket as a clinching proof of his title, and thrust it out at Marjorie. She gave it one indifferent glance, and then her eyes and mouth puckered, as if she had munched a green persimmon, and a long low wail like a distant engine-whistle, stole from her lips. Ira Lathrop stared at her in blank wrath, doddered irresolutely, and roared:

"Agh, let her have it!"

The porter smiled triumphantly, and said: "She says you kin have her berth." He pointed at the bridal arbor. Lathrop almost exploded at the idea.

Now he felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to see Little Jimmie Wellington emerging from his berth with an enormous smile:

"Say, Pop, have you seen lovely rice-trap? Stick around till she flops."

But Lathrop flung away to the smoking room. Little Jimmie turned to the jovial negro:

"Porter, porter."

"I'm right by you."

"What time d'you say we get to Reno?"

"Mawnin' of the fo'th day, sah."

"Well, call me just before we roll in."

And he rolled in. His last words floated down the aisle and met Mrs. Little Jimmie Wellington just returning from the Women's Room, where she had sought nepenthe in more than one of her exquisite little cigars. The familiar voice, familiarly bibulous, smote her ear with amazement. She beckoned the porter to her anxiously.

"Porter! Porter! Do you know the name of the man who just hurried in?"

"No'm," said the porter. "I reckon he's so broken up he ain't got any name left."

"It couldn't be," Mrs. Jimmie mused.

"Things can be sometimes," said the porter.

"You may make up my berth now," said Mrs. Wellington, forgetting that Anne Gattle was still there. Mrs. Wellington hastened to apologize, and begged her to stay, but the spinster wanted to be far away from the disturbing atmosphere of divorce. She was dreaming already with her eyes open, and she sank into number six in a lotus-eater's reverie.

Mrs. Wellington gathered certain things together and took up her handbag, to return to the Women's Room, just as Mrs. Whitcomb came forth from the curtains of her own berth, where she had made certain preliminaries to disrobing, and put on a light, decidedly negligee negligee.

The two women collided in the aisle, whirled on one another, as women do when they jostle, recognized each other with wild stares of amazement, set their teeth, and made a simultaneous dash along the corridor, shoulder wrestling with shoulder. They reached the door marked "Women" at the same instant, and as neither would have dreamed of offering the other a courtesy, they squeezed through together in a Kilkenny jumble.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DORMITORY ON WHEELS

Of all the shocking institutions in human history, the sleeping car is the most shocking--or would be, if we were not so used to it. There can be no doubt that we are the most moral nation on earth, for we admit it ourselves. Perhaps we prove it, too, by the Arcadian prosperity of these two-story hotels on wheels, where miscellaneous travelers dwell in complete promiscuity, and sleep almost side by side, in apartments, or compartments, separated only by a plank and a curtain, and guarded only by one sleepy negro.

After the fashion of the famous country whose inhabitants earned a meagre sustenance by taking in each other's washing, so in Sleeping Carpathia we attain a meagre respectability by everybody's chaperoning everybody else.

So topsy-turvied, indeed, are our notions, once we are aboard a train, that the staterooms alone are regarded with suspicion; we question the motives of those who must have a room to themselves!--a room with a real door! that locks!!

And, now, on this sleeping car, prettily named "Snowdrop," scenes were enacting that would have thrown our great-grandmothers into fits--scenes which, if we found them in France, or Japan, we should view with alarm as almost unmentionable evidence of the moral obliquity of those nations.

But this was our own country--the part of it which admits that it is the best part--the moralest part, the staunch Middle West. This was Illinois. Yet dozens of cars were beholding similar immodesties in chastest Illinois, and all over the map, thousands of people, in hundreds of cars, were permitting total strangers to view preparations which have always, hitherto, been reserved for the most intimate and legalized relations.

The porter was deftly transforming the day-coach into a narrow lane entirely surrounded by portieres. Behind most of the portieres, fluttering in the lightest breeze, and perilously following the hasty passer-by, homely offices were being enacted. The population of this little town was going to bed. The porter was putting them to sleep as if they were children in a nursery, and he a black mammy.

The frail walls of little sanctums were bulging with the bodies of people disrobing in the aisle, with nothing between them and the beholder's eye but a clinging curtain that explained what it did not reveal. From apertures here and there disembodied feet were protruding and mysterious hands were removing shoes and other things.

Women in risky attire were scooting to one end of the car, and men in shirt sleeves, or less, were hastening to the other.

When Mallory returned to the "Snowdrop," his ear was greeted by the thud of dropping shoes. He found Marjorie being rapidly immured, like Poe's prisoner, in a jail of closing walls.

She was unspeakably ill at ease, and by the irony of custom, the one person on whom she depended for protection was the one person whose contiguity was most alarming--and all for lack of a brief dialogue, with a clergyman, as the *tertium quid*.

When Mallory's careworn face appeared round the edge of the partition now erected between her and the abode of Doctor and Mrs. Temple, Marjorie shivered anew, and asked with all anxiety:

"Did you find a minister?"

Perhaps the Recording Angel overlooked Mallory's answer: "Not a damn' minister."

When he dropped at Marjorie's side, she edged away from him, pleading: "Oh, what shall we do?"

He answered dismally and ineffectively: "We'll have to go on pretending to be--just friends."

"But everybody thinks we're married."

"That's so!" he admitted, with the imbecility of fatigued hope. They sat a while listening to the porter slipping sheets into place and thumping pillows into cases, a few doors down the street. He would be ready for them at any moment. Something must be done, but what? what?

CHAPTER XV A PREMATURE DIVORCE

Suddenly Marjorie's heart gave a leap of joy. She was having another idea. "I'll tell you, Harry. We'll pretend to quarrel, and then----"

"And then you can leave me in high dudgeon."

The ruse struck him as a trifle unconvincing. "Don't you think it looks kind of improbable on--on--such an occasion?"

Marjorie blushed, and lowered her eyes and her voice: "Can you suggest anything better?"

"No, but----"

"Then, we'll have to quarrel, darling."

He yielded, for lack of a better idea: "All right, beloved. How shall we begin?"

On close approach, the idea did seem rather impossible to her. "How could I ever quarrel with you, my love?" she cooed.

He gazed at her with a rush of lovely tenderness: "And how could I ever speak crossly to you?"

"We never shall have a harsh word, shall we?" she resolved.

"Never!" he seconded. So that resolution passed the House unanimously.

They held hands in luxury a while, then she began again: "Still, we must pretend. You start it, love."

"No, you start it," he pleaded.

"You ought to," she beamed. "You got me into this mess."

The word slipped out. Mallory started: "Mess! How is it my fault? Good Lord, are you going to begin chucking it up?"

"Well, you must admit, darling," Marjorie urged, "that you've bungled everything pretty badly."

It was so undeniable that he could only groan: "And I suppose I'll hear of this till my dying day, dearest."

Marjorie had a little temper all her own. So she defended it: "If you are so afraid of my temper, love, perhaps you'd better call it all off before it's too late."

"I didn't say anything about your temper, sweetheart," Mallory insisted.

"You did, too, honey. You said I'd chuck this up till your dying day. As if I had such a disposition! You can stay here." She rose to her feet. He pressed her back with a decisive motion, and demanded: "Where are you going?"

"Up in the baggage car with Snoozleums," she sniffled. "He's the only one that doesn't find fault with me."

Mallory was stung to action by this crisis: "Wait," he said. He leaned out and motioned down the alley. "Porter! Wait a moment, darling. Porter!"

The porter arrived with a half-folded blanket in his hands, and his usual, "Yassah!"

Beckoning him closer, Mallory mumbled in a low tone: "Is there an extra berth on this car?"

The porter's eyes seemed to rebuke his ears. "Does you want this upper made up?"

"No--of course not."

"Ex--excuse me, I thought----"

"Don't you dare to think!" Mallory thundered. "Isn't there another lower berth?"

The porter breathed hard, and gave this bridal couple up as a riddle that followed no known rules. He went to find the sleeping car conductor, and returned with the information that the diagram showed nobody assigned to number three.

"Then I'll take number three," said Mallory, poking money at the porter. And still the porter could not understand.

"Now, lemme onderstan' you-all," he stammered. "Does you both move over to numba three, or does yo'--yo' lady

remain heah, while jest you preambulates?"

"Just I preambulate, you black hound!" Mallory answered, in a threatening tone. The porter could understand that, at least, and he bristled away with a meek: "Yassah. Numba three is yours, sah."

The troubled features of the baffled porter cleared up as by magic when he arrived at number three, for there he found his tyrant and tormentor, the English invader.

He remembered how indignantly Mr. Wedgewood had refused to show his ticket, how cocksure he was of his number, how he had leased the porter's services as a sort of private nurse, and had paid no advance royalties.

And now he was sprawled and snoring majestically among his many luggages, like a sleeping lion. Revenge tasted good to the humble porter; it tasted like a candied yam smothered in 'possum gravy. He smacked his thick lips over this revenge. With all the insolence of a servant in brief authority, he gloated over his prey, and prodded him awake. Then murmured with hypocritical deference: "Excuse me, but could I see yo' ticket for yo' seat?"

"Certainly not! It's too much trouble," grumbled the half-asleeper. "Confound you!"

The porter lured him on: "Is you sho' you got one?"

Wedgewood was wide awake now, and surly as any Englishman before breakfast: "Of cawse I'm shaw. How dare you?"

"Too bad, but I'm 'bleeged to ask you to gimme a peek at it."

"This is an outrage!"

"Yassah, but I just nachelly got to see it."

Wedgewood gathered himself together, and ransacked his many pockets with increasing anger, muttering under his breath. At length he produced the ticket, and thrust it at the porter: "Thah, you idiot, are you convinced now?"

The porter gazed at the billet with ill-concealed triumph. "Yassah. I's convinced," Mr. Wedgewood settled back and closed his eyes. "I's convinced that you is in the wrong berth!"

"Impossible! I won't believe you!" the Englishman raged, getting to his feet in a fury.

"Perhaps you'll believe Mista Ticket," the porter chortled. "He says numba ten, and that's ten across the way and down the road a piece."

"This is outrageous! I decline to move."

"You may decline, but you move just the same," the porter said, reaching out for his various bags and carryalls. "The train moves and you move with it."

Wedgewood stood fast: "You had no right to put me in here in the first place."

The porter disdained to refute this slander. He stumbled down the aisle with the bundles. "It's too bad, it's sutt'nly too bad, but you sholy must come along."

Wedgewood followed, gesticulating violently.

"Here--wait--how dare you! And that berth is made up. I don't want to go to bed now!"

"Mista Ticket says, 'Go to baid!'"

"Of all the disgusting countries! Heah, don't put that thah--heah."

The porter flung his load anywhere, and absolved himself with a curt, "I's got otha passengers to wait on now."

"I shall certainly report you to the company," the Englishman fumed.

"Yassah, I p'sume so."

"Have I got to go to bed now? Really, I----" but the porter was gone, and the irate foreigner crawled under his curtains, muttering: "I shall write a letter to the *London Times* about this."

To add to his misery, Mrs. Whitcomb came from the Women's Room, and as she passed him, she prodded him with one sharp elbow and twisted the corner of her heel into his little toe. He thrust his head out with his fiercest, "How dare you!" But Mrs. Whitcomb was fresh from a prolonged encounter with Mrs. Wellington, and she flung back a

venomous glare that sent the Englishman to cover.

The porter revelled in his victory till he had to dash out to the vestibule to give vent to hilarious yelps of laughter. When he had regained composure, he came back to Mallory, and bent over him to say:

"Yo' berth is empty, sah. Shall I make it up?"

Mallory nodded, and turned to Marjorie, with a sad, "Good night, darling."

The porter rolled his eyes again, and turned away, only to be recalled by Marjorie's voice: "Porter, take this old handbag out of here."

The porter thought of the vanquished Lathrop, exiled to the smoking room, and he answered: "That belongs to the gemman what owns this berth."

"Put it in number one," Marjorie commanded, with a queenly gesture.

The porter obeyed meekly, wondering what would happen next. He had no sooner deposited Lathrop's valise among the incongruous white ribbons, than Marjorie recalled him to say: "And, Porter, you may bring me my own baggage."

"Yo' what--missus?"

"Our handbags, idiot," Mallory explained, peevishly.

"I ain't seen no handbags of you-alls," the porter protested. "You-all didn't have no handbags when you got on this cah."

Mallory jumped as if he had been shot. "Good Lord, I remember! We left 'em in the taxicab!"

The porter cast his hands up, and walked away from the tragedy. Marjorie stared at Mallory in horror.

"We had so little time to catch the train," Mallory stammered. Marjorie leaped to her feet: "I'm going up in the baggage car."

"For the dog?"

"For my trunk."

And now Mallory annihilated her completely, for he gasped: "Our trunks went on the train ahead!"

Marjorie fell back for one moment, then bounded to her feet with shrill commands: "Porter! Porter! I want you to stop this train this minute!"

The porter called back from the depths of a berth: "This train don't stop till to-morrow noon."

Marjorie had strength enough for only one vain protest: "Do you mean to say that I've got to go to San Francisco in this waist--a waist that has seen a whole day in Chicago?"

The best consolation Mallory could offer was companionship in misery. He pushed forward one not too immaculate cuff. "Well, this is the only linen I have."

"Don't speak to me," snapped Marjorie, beating her heels against the floor.

"But, my darling!"

"Go away and leave me. I hate you!"

Mallory rose up, and stumbling down the aisle, plounced into berth number three, an allegory of despair.

About this time, Little Jimmie Wellington, having completed more or less chaotic preparations for sleep, found that he had put on his pyjamas hinderside foremost. After vain efforts to whirl round quickly and get at his own back, he put out a frowsy head, and called for help.

"Say, Porter, Porter!"

"I'm still on the train," answered the porter, coming into view.

"You'll have to hook me up."

The porter rendered what aid and correction he could in Wellington's hippopotamine toilet. Wellington was just wide

enough awake to discern the undisturbed bridal-chamber. He whined:

"Say, Porter, that rice-trap. Aren't they going to flop the rice-trap?"

The porter shook his head sadly. "Don't look like that floppers a'goin' to flip. That dog-on bridal couple is done divorced a'ready!"

CHAPTER XVI GOOD NIGHT, ALL!

The car was settling gradually into peace. But there was still some murmur and drowsy energy. Shoes continued to drop, heads to bump against upper berths, the bell to ring now and then, and ring again and again.

The porter paid little heed to it; he was busy making up number five (Ira Lathrop's berth) for Marjorie, who was making what preparations she could for her trousseausless, husbandless, dogless first night out.

Finally the Englishman, who had almost rung the bell dry of electricity, shoved from his berth his indignant and undignified head. Once more the car resounded with the cry of "Pawtah! Pawtah!"

The porter moved up with noticeable deliberation. "Did you ring, sah?"

"Did I ring! Paw-tah, you may draw my tub at eight-thutty in the mawning."

"Draw yo'--what, sah?" the porter gasped.

"My tub."

"Ba-ath tub?"

"Bahth tub."

"Lawdy, man. Is you allowin' to take a ba-ath in the mawnin'?"

"Of course I am."

"Didn't you have one befo' you stahted?"

"How dare you! Of cawse I did."

"Well, that's all you git."

"Do you mean to tell me that there is no tub on this beastly train?" Wedgewood almost fell out of bed with the shock of this news.

"We do not carry tubs--no, sah. There's a lot of tubs in San Francisco, though."

"No tub on this train for four days!" Wedgewood sighed. "But whatever does one do in the meanwhile?"

"One just waits. Yassah, one and all waits."

"It's ghahstly, that's what it is, ghahstly."

"Yassah," said the porter, and mumbled as he walked away, "but the weather is gettin' cooler."

He finished preparing Marjorie's bunk, and was just suggesting that Mallory retreat to the smoking room while number three was made up, when there was a commotion in the corridor, and a man in checked overalls dashed into the car.

His ear was slightly red, and he held at arm's length, as if it were a venomous monster, Snoozleums. And he yelled:

"Say, whose dum dog is this? He bit two men, and he makes so much noise we can't sleep in the baggage car."

Marjorie went flying down the aisle to reclaim her lost lamb in wolf's clothing, and Snoozleums, the returned prodigal, yelped and leaped, and told her all about the indignities he had been subjected to, and his valiant struggle for liberty.

Marjorie, seeing only Snoozleums, stepped into the fatal berth number one, and paid no heed to the dangling ribbons. Mallory, eager to restore himself to her love by loving her dog, crowded closer to her side, making a hypocritical ado over the pup.

Everybody was popping his or her face out to learn the cause of such clamor. Among the bodiless heads suspended along the curtains, like Dyak trophies, appeared the great mask of Little Jimmie Wellington. He had been unable to sleep for mourning the wanton waste of that lovely rice-trap.

When he peered forth, his eyes hardly believed themselves. The elusive bride and groom were actually in the trap--the hen pheasant and the chanticleer. But the net did not fall. He waited to see them sit down, and spring the infernal machine. But they would not sit.

In fact, Marjorie was muttering to Harry--tenderly, now, since he had won her back by his efforts to console Snoozleums--she was muttering tenderly:

"We must not be seen together, honey. Go away, I'll see you in the morning."

And Mallory was saying with bitterest resignation: "Good night--my friend."

And they were shaking hands! This incredible bridal couple was shaking hands with itself--disintegrating! Then Wellington determined to do at least his duty by the sacred rites.

The gaping passengers saw what was probably the largest pair of pyjamas in Chicago. They saw Little Jimmie, smothering back his giggles like a schoolboy, tiptoe from his berth, enter the next berth, brushing the porter aside, climb on the seat, and clutch the ribbon that pulled the stopper from the trap.

Down upon the unsuspecting elopers came this miraculous cloudburst of ironical rice, and with it came Little Jimmie Wellington, who lost what little balance he had, and catapulted into their midst like the offspring of an iceberg.

It was at this moment that Mrs. Wellington, hearing the loud cries of the panic-stricken Marjorie, rushed from the Women's Room, absent-mindedly combing a totally detached section of her hair. She recognized familiar pyjamas waving in air, and with one faint gasp: "Jimmie! on this train!" she swooned away. She would have fallen, but seeing that no one paid any attention to her, she recovered consciousness on her own hook, and vanished into her berth, to meditate on the whys and wherefores of her husband's presence in this car.



**DOWN UPON THE UNSUSPECTING ELOPERS CAME THIS MIRACULOUS
CLOUDBURST OF IRONICAL RICE...**

Dr. Temple in a nightgown and trousers, Roger Ashton in a collarless estate, and the porter, managed to extricate Mr. Wellington from his plight, and stow him away, though it was like putting a whale to bed.

Mallory, seeing that Marjorie had fled, vented his wild rage against fate in general, and rice traps in particular, by tearing the bridal bungalow to pieces, and then he stalked into the smoking room, where Ira Lathrop, homeless and dispossessed, was sound asleep, with his feet in the chair.

He was dreaming that he was a boy in Brattleboro, the worst boy in Brattleboro, trying to get up the courage to spark pretty Anne Gattle, and throwing rocks at the best boy in town, Charlie Selby, who was always at her side. The porter woke Ira, an hour later, and escorted him to the late bridal section.

Marjorie had fled with her dog, as soon as she could grope her way through the deluge of rice. She hopped into her berth, and spent an hour trying to clear her hair of the multitudinous grains. And as for Snoozleums, his thick wool was so be-riced that for two days, whenever he shook himself, he snew.

Eventually, the car quieted, and nothing was heard but the rumble and click of the wheels on the rails, the creak of timbers, and the frog-like chorus of a few well-trained snorers. As the porter was turning down the last of the lights, a rumpled pate was thrust from the stateroom, and the luscious-eyed man whispered:

"Porter, what time did you say we crossed the Iowa State line?"

"Two fifty-five A.M."

From within the stateroom came a deep sigh, then with a dismal groan: "Call me at two fifty-five A.M.," the door was closed.

Poor Mallory, pyjamaless and night-shirtless, lay propped up on his pillows, staring out of the window at the swiftly shifting night scene. The State of Illinois was being pulled out from under the train like a dark rug.

Farmhouses gleamed or dreamed lampless. The moonlight rippled on endless seas of wheat and Indian corn. Little towns slid up and away. Large towns rolled forward, and were left behind. Ponds, marshes, brooks, pastures, thickets and great gloomy groves flowed past as on a river. But the same stars and the moon seemed to accompany the train. If the flying witness had been less heavy of heart, he would have found the reeling scene full of grace and night beauty. But he could not see any charm in all the world, except his tantalizing other self, from whom a great chasm seemed to divide him, though she was only two windows away.

He had not yet fallen asleep, and he was still pondering how to attain his unmarried, unmarriageable bride, when the train rolled out in air above a great wide river, very noble under the stars. He knew it for the Mississippi. He heard a faint knocking on a door at the other end of the car. He heard sounds as of kisses, and then somebody tiptoed along the aisle stealthily. He did not know that another bridegroom was being separated from his bride because they were too much married.

Somewhere in Iowa he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII LAST CALL FOR BREAKFAST

It was still Iowa when Mallory awoke. Into his last moments of heavy sleep intruded a voice like a town-crier's voice, crying:

"Last call for breakfast in the Ringing Car," and then, again louder, "Last call for breakfast in Ringing Car," and, finally and faintly, "Last call for breakfast in Ringing Car."

Mallory pushed up his window shade. The day was broad on rolling prairies like billows established in the green soil. He peeked through his curtains. Most of the other passengers were up and about, their beds hidden and beddings stowed away behind the bellying veneer of the upperworks of the car. All the berths were made up except his own and number two, in the corner, where Little Jimmie Wellington's nose still played a bagpipe monody, and one other berth, which he recognized as Marjorie's.

His belated sleep and hers had spared them both the stares and laughing chatter of the passengers. But this bridal couple's two berths, standing like towers among the seats had provided conversation for everybody, had already united the casual group of strangers into an organized gossip-bee.

Mallory got into his shoes and as much of his clothes as was necessary for the dash to the washroom, and took on his arm the rest of his wardrobe. Just as he issued from his lonely chamber, Marjorie appeared from hers, much disheveled and heavy-eyed. The bride and groom exchanged glances of mutual terror, and hurried in opposite directions.

The spickest and spannest of lieutenants soon realized that he was reduced to wearing yesterday's linen as well as yesterday's beard. This was intolerable. A brave man can endure heartbreaks, loss of love, honor and place, but a neat man cannot abide the traces of time in his toilet. Lieutenant Mallory had seen rough service in camp and on long hikes, when he gloried in mud and disorder, and he was to see campaigns in the Philippines, when he should not take off his shoes or his uniform for three days at a time. But that was the field, and this car was a drawing room.

In this crisis in his affairs, Little Jimmie Wellington waddled into the men's room, floundering about with every lurch of the train, like a cannon loose in the hold of a ship. He fumbled with the handles on a basin, and made a crazy toilet, trying to find some abatement of his fever by filling a glass at the ice-water tank and emptying it over his head.

These drastic measures restored him to some sort of coherency, and Mallory appealed to him for help in the matter of linen. Wellington effusively offered him everything he had, and Mallory selected from his store half a dozen collars, any one of which would have gone round his neck nearly twice.

Wellington also proffered his safety razor, and made him a present of a virgin wafer of steel for his very own.

With this assistance, Mallory was enabled to make himself fairly presentable. When he returned to his seat, the three

curtained rooms had been whisked away by the porter. There was no place now to hide from the passengers.

He sat down facing the feminine end of the car, watching for Marjorie. The passengers were watching for her, too, hoping to learn what unheard-of incident could have provoked the quarrel that separated a bride and groom at this time, of all times.

To the general bewilderment, when Marjorie appeared, Mallory and she rushed together and clasped hands with an ardor that suggested a desire for even more ardent greeting. The passengers almost sprained their ears to hear how they would make up such a dreadful feud. But all they heard was: "We'll have to hurry, Marjorie, if we want to get any breakfast."

"All right, honey. Come along."

Then the inscrutable couple scurried up the aisle, and disappeared in the corridor, leaving behind them a mighty riddle. They kissed in the corridor of that car, kissed in the vestibule, kissed in the two corridors of the next car, and were caught kissing in the next vestibule by the new conductor.

The dining car conductor, who flattered himself that he knew a bride and groom when he saw them, escorted them grandly to a table for two; and the waiter fluttered about them with extraordinary consideration.

They had a plenty to talk of in prospect and retrospect. They both felt sure that a minister lurked among the cars somewhere, and they ate with a zest to prepare for the ceremony, arguing the best place for it, and quarreling amorously over details. Mallory was for one of the vestibules as the scene of their union, but Marjorie was for the baggage car, till she realized that Snoozleums might be unwilling to attend. Then she swung round to the vestibule, but Mallory shifted to the observation platform.

Marjorie had left Snoozleums with Mrs. Temple, who promised to hide him when the new conductor passed through the car, and she reminded Harry to get the waiter to bring them a package of bones for their only "child," so far.

On the way back from the dining car they kissed each other good-bye again at all the trysting places they had sanctified before. The sun was radiant, the world good, and the very train ran with jubilant rejoicing. They could not doubt that a few more hours would see them legally man and wife.

Mallory restored Marjorie to her place in their car, and with smiles of assurance, left her for another parson-hunt through the train. She waited for him in a bridal agitation. He ransacked the train forward in vain, and returned, passing Marjorie with a shake of the head and a dour countenance. He went out to the observation platform, where he stumbled on Ira Lathrop and Anne Gattle, engaged in a conversation of evident intimacy, for they jumped when he opened the door, as if they were guilty of some plot.

Mallory mumbled his usual, "Excuse me," whirled on his heel, and dragged his discouraged steps back through the Observation Room, where various women and a few men of evident unclericality were draped across arm chairs and absorbed in lazy conversation or bobbing their heads over magazines that trembled with the motion of the train.

Mrs. Wellington was busily writing at the desk, but he did not know who she was, and he did not care whom she was writing to. He did not observe the baleful glare of Mrs. Whitcomb, who sat watching Mrs. Wellington, knowing all too well who she was, and suspecting the correspondent--Mrs. Whitcomb was tempted to spell the word with one "r."

Mallory stumbled into the men's portion of the composite car. Here he nodded with a sickly cheer to the sole occupant, Dr. Temple, who was looking less ministerial than ever in an embroidered skull cap. The old rascal was sitting far back on his lumbar vertebrae. One of his hands clasped a long glass filled with a liquid of a hue that resembled something stronger than what it was--mere ginger ale. The other hand toyed with a long black cigar. The smoke curled round the old man's head like the fumes of a sultan's narghile, and through the wisps his face was one of Oriental luxury.

Mallory's eyes were caught from this picture of beatitude by the entrance, at the other door, of a man who had evidently swung aboard at the most recent stop--for Mallory had not seen him. His gray hair was crowned with a soft black hat, and his spare frame was swathed in a frock coat that had seen better days. His soft gray eyes seemed to search timidly the smoke-clouded atmosphere, and he had a bashful air which Mallory translated as one of diffidence in a place where liquors and cigars were dispensed.

With equal diffidence Mallory advanced, and in a low tone accosted the newcomer cautiously:

"Excuse me--you look like a clergyman."

"The hell you say!"

Mallory pursued the question no further.

CHAPTER XVIII IN THE COMPOSITE CAR

It was the gentle stranger's turn to miss his guess. He bent over the chair into which Mallory had flopped, and said in a tense, low tone: "You look like a t'oroughbred sport. I'm trying to make up a game of stud poker. Will you join me?"

Mallory shook his heavy head in refusal, and with dull eyes watched the man, whose profession he no longer misunderstood, saunter up to the blissful Doctor from Ypsilanti, and murmur again:

"Will you join me?"

"Join you in what, sir?" said Dr. Temple, with alert courtesy.

"A little game."

"I don't mind," the doctor smiled, rising with amiable readiness. "The checkers are in the next room."

"Quit your kiddin'," the stranger coughed. "How about a little freeze-out?"

"Freeze-out?" said Dr. Temple. "It sounds interesting. Is it something like authors?"

The newcomer shot a quick glance at this man, whose innocent air he suspected. But he merely drawled: "Well, you play it with cards."

"Would you mind teaching me the rules?" said the old sport from Ypsilanti.

The gambler was growing suspicious of this too, too childlike innocence. He whined: "Say, what's your little game, eh?" but decided to risk the venture. He sat down at a table, and Dr. Temple, bringing along his glass, drew up a chair. The gambler took a pack of cards from his pocket, and shuffled them with a snap that startled Dr. Temple and a dexterity that delighted him.

"Go on, it's beautiful to see," he exclaimed. The gambler set the pack down with the one word "Cut!" but since the old man made no effort to comply, the gambler did not insist. He took up the pack again and ran off five cards to each place with a grace that staggered the doctor.

Mallory was about to intervene for the protection of the guileless physician when the conductor chanced to saunter in.

The gambler, seeing him, snatched Dr. Temple's cards from his hand and slipped the pack into his pocket.

"What's the matter now?" Dr. Temple asked, but the newcomer huskily answered: "Wait a minute. Wait a minute."

The conductor took in the scene at a glance and, stalking up to the table, spoke with the grimness of a sea-captain: "Say, I've got my eye on you. Don't start nothin'!"

The stranger stared at him wonderingly and demanded: "Why, what you drivin' at?"

"You know all right," the conductor growled, and then turned on the befuddled old clergyman, "and you, too."

"Me, too?" the preacher gasped.

"Yes, you, too," the conductor repeated, shaking an accusing forefinger under his nose. "Your actions have been suspicious from the beginning. We've all been watching you."

Dr. Temple was so agitated that he nearly let fall his secret. "Why, do you realize that I'm a----"

"Ah, don't start that," sneered the conductor, "I can spot a gambler as far as I can see one. You and your side partner here want to look out, that's all, or I'll drop you at the next tank." Then he walked out, his very shoulder blades uttering threats.

Dr. Temple stared after him, but the gambler stared at Dr. Temple with a mingling of accusation and of homage. "So

you're one of us," he said, and seizing the old man's limp hand, shook it heartily: "I got to slip it to you. Your make-up is great. You nearly had me for a come-on. Great!"

And then he sauntered out, leaving the clergyman's head swimming. Dr. Temple turned to Mallory for explanations, but Mallory only waved him away. He was not quite convinced himself. He was convinced only that whatever else anybody might be, nobody apparently desired to be a clergyman in these degenerate days.

The conductor returned and threw into Dr. Temple the glare of two basilisk eyes. The old man put out a beseeching hand and began:

"My good man, you do me a grave injustice."

The conductor snapped back: "You say a word to me and I'll do you worse than that. And if I spot you with a pack of cards in your hand again, I'll tie you to the cow-ketcher."

Then he marched off again. The doctor fell back into a chair, trying to figure it out. Then Ashton and Fosdick and little Jimmie Wellington and Wedgewood strolled in and, dropping into chairs, ordered drinks. Before the doctor could ask anybody to explain, Ashton was launched on a story. His mind was a suitcase full of anecdotes, mostly of the smoking-room order.

Wherever three or four men are gathered together, they rapidly organize a clearing-house of off-color stories. The doctor listened in spite of himself, and in spite of himself he was amused, for stories that would be stupid if they were decent, take on a certain verve and thrill from their very forbiddenness.

The dear old clergyman felt that it would be priggish to take flight, but he could not make the corners of his mouth behave. Strange twitchings of the lips and little steamy escapes of giggle-jets disturbed him. And when Ashton, who was a practiced raconteur, finished a drolatic adventure with the epilogue, "And the next morning they were at Niagara Falls," the old doctor was helpless with laughter. Some superior force, a devil no doubt, fairly shook him with glee.

"Oh, that's bully," he shrieked, "I haven't heard a story like that for ages."

"Why, where have you been, Dr. Temple?" asked Ashton, who could not imagine where a man could have concealed himself from such stories. But he laughed loudest of all when the doctor answered: "You see, I live in Ypsilanti. They don't tell me stories like that."

"They--who?" said Fosdick.

"Why, my pa--my patients," the doctor explained, and laughed so hard that he forgot to feel guilty, laughed so hard that his wife in the next room heard him and giggled to Mrs. Whitcomb:

"Listen to dear Walter. He hasn't laughed like that since he was a--a medical student." Then she buried her face guiltily in a book.

"Wasn't it good?" Dr. Temple demanded, wiping his streaming eyes and nudging the solemn-faced Englishman, who understood his own nation's humor, but had not yet learned the Yankee quirks.

Wedgewood made a hollow effort at laughter and answered: "Extremely--very droll, but what I don't quite get was--why the porter said----" The others drowned him in a roar of laughter, but Ashton was angry. "Why, you blamed fool, that's where the joke came in. Don't you see, the bridegroom said to the bride----" then he lowered his voice and diagrammed the story on his fingers.

Mrs. Temple was still shaking with sympathetic laughter, never dreaming what her husband was laughing at. She turned to Mrs. Whitcomb, but Mrs. Whitcomb was still glaring at Mrs. Wellington, who was still writing with flying fingers and underscoring every other word.

"Some people seem to think they own the train," Mrs. Whitcomb raged. "That creature has been at the writing desk an hour. The worst of it is, I'm sure she's writing to *my* husband."

Mrs. Temple looked shocked, but another peal of laughter came through the partition between the male and female sections of the car, and she beamed again. Then Mrs. Wellington finished her letter, glanced it over, addressed an envelope, sealed and stamped it with a deliberation that maddened Mrs. Whitcomb. When at last she rose, Mrs. Whitcomb was in the seat almost before Mrs. Wellington was out of it.

Mrs. Wellington paused at another wave of laughter from the men's room. She commented petulantly:

"What good times men have. They've formed a club in there already. We women can only sit around and hate each

other."

"Why, I don't hate anybody, do you?" Mrs. Temple exclaimed, looking up from the novel she had found on the book shelves. Mrs. Wellington dropped into the next chair:

"On a long railroad journey I hate everybody. Don't you hate long journeys?"

"It's the first I ever took," Mrs. Temple apologized, radiantly, "And I'm having the--what my oldest boy would call the time of my life. And dear Walter--such goings on for him! A few minutes ago I strolled by the door and I saw him playing cards with a stranger, and smoking and drinking, too, all at once."

"Boys will be boys," said Mrs. Wellington.

"But for Dr. Temple of all people----"

"Why shouldn't a doctor? It's a shame the way men have everything. Think of it, a special smoking room. And women have no place to take a puff except on the sly."

Mrs. Temple stared at her in awe: "The woman in this book smokes!--perfumed things!"

"All women smoke nowadays," said Mrs. Wellington, carelessly. "Don't you?"

The politest thing Mrs. Temple could think of in answer was: "Not yet."

"Really!" said Mrs. Wellington, "Don't you like tobacco?"

"I never tried it."

"It's time you did. I smoke cigars myself."

Mrs. Temple almost collapsed at this double shock: "Ci--cigars?"

"Yes; cigarettes are too strong for me; will you try one of my pets?"

Mrs. Temple was about to express her repugnance at the thought, but Mrs. Wellington thrust before her a portfolio in which nestled such dainty shapes of such a warm and winsome brown, that Mrs. Temple paused to stare, and, like Mother Eve, found the fruit of knowledge too interesting once seen to reject with scorn. She hung over the cigar case in hesitant excitement one moment too long. Then she said in a trembling voice: "I--I should like to try once--just to see what it's like. But there's no place."

Mrs. Wellington felt that she had already made a proselyte to her own beloved vice, and she rushed her victim to the precipice: "There's the observation platform, my dear. Come on out."

Mrs. Temple was shivering with dismay at the dreadful deed: "What would they say in Ypsilanti?"

"What do you care? Be a sport. Your husband smokes. If it's right for him, why not for you?"

Mrs. Temple set her teeth and crossed the Rubicon with a resolute "I will!"

Mrs. Wellington led the timid neophyte along the wavering floor of the car and flung back the door of the observation car. She found Ira Lathrop holding Anne Gattle's hand and evidently explaining something of great importance, for their heads were close together. They rose and with abashed faces and confused mumblings of half-swallowed explanations, left the platform to Mrs. Wellington and her new pupil.

Shortly afterward Little Jimmie Wellington grew restive and set out for a brief constitutional and a breath of air. He carried a siphon to which he had become greatly attached, and made heavy going of the observation room, but reached the door in fairly good order. He swung it open and brought in with it the pale and wavering ghost of Mrs. Temple, who had been leaning against it for much-needed support. Wellington was stupefied to observe smoke pouring round Mrs. Temple's form, and he resolved to perform a great life-saving feat. He decided that the poor little woman was on fire and he poised the siphon like a fire extinguisher, with the noble intention of putting her out.

He pressed the handle, and a stream of vichy shot from the nozzle.

Fortunately, his aim was so very wobbly that none of the extinguisher touched Mrs. Temple.

Wellington was about to play the siphon at her again when he saw her take from her lips a toy cigar and emit a stream of cough-shaken smoke. The poor little experimentalist was too wretched to notice even so large a menace as Wellington. She threw the cigar away and gasped:

"I think I've had enough."

From the platform came a voice very well known to Little Jimmie. It said: "You'll like the second one better."

Mrs. Temple shuddered at the thought, but Wellington drew himself up majestically and called out:

"Like second one better, eh? I suppozhe it's the same way with husbandsh."

Then he stalked back to the smoking room, feeling that he had annihilated his wife, but knowing from experience that she always had a come-back. He knew it would be good, but he was afraid to hear it. He rolled into the smoking room, and sprawling across Doctor Temple's shoulders, dragged him from the midst of a highly improper story with alarming news.

"Doc., your wife looks kind o' seedy. Better go to her at once."

Dr. Temple leaped to his feet and ran to his wife's aid. He found her a dismal, ashen sight.

"Sally! What on earth ails you?"

"Been smok-oking," she hiccoighed.

The world seemed to be crashing round Dr. Temple's head. He could only gurgle, "Sally!"

Mrs. Temple drew herself up with weak defiance: "Well, I saw you playing cards and drinking."

In the presence of such innocent deviltry he could only smile: "Aren't we having an exciting vacation? But to think of you smoking!--and a cigar!"

She tossed her head in pride. "And it didn't make me sick--much." She clutched a chair. He tried to support her. He could not help pondering: "What would they say in Yp-hip-silanti?"

"Who cares?" she laughed. "I--I wish the old train wouldn't rock so."

"I--I've smoked too much, too," said Dr. Temple with perfect truth, but Mrs. Temple, remembering that long glass she had seen, narrowed her eyes at him: "Are you sure it was the smoke?"

"Sally!" he cried, in abject horror at her implied suspicion.

Then she turned a pale green. "Oh, I feel such a qualm."

"In your conscience, Sally?"

"No, not in my conscience. I think I'll go back to my berth and lie down."

"Let me help you, Mother."

And Darby and Joan hurried along the corridor, crowding it as they were crowding their vacation with belated experience.

CHAPTER XIX FOILED!

It was late in the forenoon before the train came to the end of its iron furrow across that fertile space between two of the world's greatest rivers, which the Indians called "Iowa," nobody knows exactly why. In contrast with the palisades of the Mississippi, the Missouri twists like a great brown dragon wallowing in congenial mud. The water itself, as Bob Brudette said, is so muddy that the wind blowing across it raises a cloud of dust.

A sonorous bridge led the way into Nebraska, and the train came to a halt at Omaha. Mallory and Marjorie got out to stretch their legs and their dog. If they had only known that the train was to stop there the quarter of an hour, and if they had only known some preacher there and had had him to the station, the ceremony could have been consummated then and there.

The horizon was fairly saw-toothed with church spires. There were preachers, preachers everywhere, and not a dominie to do their deed.

After they had strolled up and down the platform, and up and down, and up and down till they were fain of their cramped quarters again, Marjorie suddenly dug her nails into Mallory's arm.

"Honey! look!--look!"

Honey looked, and there before their very eyes stood as clerical a looking person as ever announced a strawberry festival.

Mallory stared and stared, till Marjorie said:

"Don't you see? stupid! it's a preacher! a preacher!"

"It looks like one," was as far as Mallory would commit himself, and he was turning away. He had about come to the belief that anything that looked like a parson was something else. But Marjorie whirled him round again, with a shrill whisper to listen. And he overheard in tones addicted to the pulpit:

"Yes, deacon, I trust that the harvest will be plentiful at my new church. It grieves me to leave the dear brothers and sisters in the Lord in Omaha, but I felt called to wider pastures."

And a lady who was evidently Mrs. Deacon spoke up:

"We'll miss you terrible. We all say you are the best pastor our church ever had."

Mallory prepared to spring on his prey and drag him to his lair, but Marjorie held him back.

"He's taking our train, Lord bless his dear old soul."

And Mallory could have hugged him. But he kept close watch. To the rapture of the wedding-hungry twain, the preacher shook hands with such of his flock as had followed him to the station, picked up his valise and walked up to the porter, extending his ticket.

But the porter said--and Mallory could have throttled him for saying it:

"Scuse me, posson, but that's yo' train ova yonda. You betta move right smaht, for it's gettin' ready to pull out."

With a little shriek of dismay, the parson clutched his valise and set off at a run. Mallory dashed after him and Marjorie after Mallory. They shouted as they ran, but the conductor of the east-bound train sang out "All aboard!" and swung on.

The parson made a sprint and caught the ultimate rail of the moving train. Mallory made a frantic leap at a flying coat-tail and missed. As he and Marjorie stood gazing reproachfully at the train which was giving a beautiful illustration of the laws of retreating perspective, they heard wild howls of "Hi! hi!" and "Hay! hay!" and turned to see their own train in motion, and the porter dancing a Zulu step alongside.

CHAPTER XX FOILED AGAIN!

Mallory tucked Marjorie under his arm and Marjorie tucked Snoozleums under hers, and they did a Sort of three-legged race down the platform. The porter was pale blue with excitement, and it was with the last gasp of breath in all three bodies that they scrambled up the steps of the only open vestibule.

The porter was mad enough to give them a piece of his mind, and they were meek enough to take it without a word of explanation or resentment.

And the train sped on into the heart of Nebraska, along the unpoetic valley of the Platte. When lunch-time came, they ate it together, but in gloomy silence. They sat in Marjorie's berth throughout the appallingly monotonous afternoon in a stupor of disappointment and helpless dejection, speaking little and saying nothing then.

Whenever the train stopped, Mallory watched the on-getting passengers with his keenest eye. He had a theory that since most people who looked like preachers were decidedly lay, it might be well to take a gambler's chance and accost the least ministerial person next.

So, in his frantic anxiety, he selected a horsey-looking individual who got on at North Platte. He looked so much like a rawhided ranchman that Mallory stole up on him and asked him to excuse him, but did he happen to be a clergyman? The man replied by asking Mallory if he happened to be a flea-bitten maverick, and embellished his question with a copious flow of the words ministers use, but with a secular arrangement of them. In fact he split one word in two to insert a double-barrelled curse. All that Mallory could do was to admit that he was a flea-bitten what-he-said, and back away.

After that, if a vicar in full uniform had marched down the aisle heading a procession of choir-boys, Mallory would have suspected him. He vowed in his haste that Marjorie might die an old maid before he would approach anybody else on that subject.

Nebraska would have been a nice long state for a honeymoon, but its four hundred-odd miles were a dreary length for the couple so near and yet so far. The railroad clinging to the meandering Platte made the way far longer, and Mallory and Marjorie felt like Pyramus and Thisbe wandering along an eternal wall, through which they could see, but not reach, one another.

They dined together as dolefully as if they had been married for forty years. Then the slow twilight soaked them in its melancholy. The porter lighted up the car, and the angels lighted up the stars, but nothing lighted up their hopes.

"We've got to quarrel again, my beloved," Mallory groaned to Marjorie.

Somehow they were too dreary even to nag one another with an outburst for the benefit of the eager-eyed passengers.

A little excitement bestirred them as they realized that they were confronted with another night-robeless night and a morrow without change of gear.

"What a pity that we left our things in the taxicab," Marjorie sighed. And this time she said, "we left them," instead of "you left them." It was very gracious of her, but Mallory did not acknowledge the courtesy. Instead he gave a start and a gasp:

"Good Lord, Marjorie, we never paid the second taxicab!"

"Great heavens, how shall we ever pay him? He's been waiting there twenty-four hours. How much do you suppose we owe him?"

"About a year of my pay, I guess."

"You must send him a telegram of apology and ask him to read his meter. He was such a nice man--the kindest eyes--for a chauffeur."

"But how can I telegraph him? I don't know his name, or his number, or his company, or anything."

"It's too bad. He'll go through life hating us and thinking we cheated him."

"Well, he doesn't know our names either."

And then they forgot him temporarily for the more immediate need of clothes. All the passengers knew that they had left behind what baggage they had not sent ahead, and much sympathy had been expressed. But most people would rather give you their sympathy than lend you their clothes. Mallory did not mind the men, but Marjorie dreaded the women. She was afraid of all of them but Mrs. Temple.

She threw herself on the little lady's mercy and was asked to help herself. She borrowed a nightgown of extraordinary simplicity, a shirt waist of an ancient mode, and a number of other things.

If there had been anyone there to see she would have made a most anachronistic bride.

Mallory canvassed the men and obtained a shockingly purple shirt from Wedgewood, who meant to put him at his ease, but somehow failed when he said in answer to Mallory's thanks:

"God bless my soul, old top, don't you think of thanking me. I ought to thank you. You see, the idiot who makes my shirts, made that by mistake, and I'd be no end grateful if you'd jolly well take the loathsome thing off my hands. I mean to say, I shouldn't dream of being seen in it myself. You quite understand, don't you?"

Ashton contributed a maroon atrocity in hosiery, with equal tact:

"If they fit you, keep 'em. I got stung on that batch of socks. That pair was originally lavender, but they washed like that. Keep 'em. I wouldn't be found dead in 'em."

The mysterious Fosdick, who lived a lonely life in the Observation car and slept in the other sleeper, lent Mallory a pair of pyjamas evidently intended for a bridegroom of romantic disposition. Mallory blushed as he accepted them and when he found himself in them, he whisked out the light, he was so ashamed of himself.

Once more the whole car gaped at the unheard of behavior of its newly wedded pair. The poor porter had been hungry for a bridal couple, but as he went about gathering up the cast-off footwear of his large family and found Mallory's big shoes at number three and Marjorie's tiny boots at number five, he shook his head and groaned.

"Times has suttainly changed for the wuss if this is a bridal couple, gimme divorcees."

CHAPTER XXI MATRIMONY TO AND FRO

And the next morning they were in Wyoming--well toward the center of that State. They had left behind the tame levels and the truly rural towns and they were among foothills and mountains, passing cities of wildly picturesque repute, like Cheyenne, and Laramie, Bowie, and Medicine Bow, and Bitter Creek, whose very names imply literature and war whoops, cow-boy yelps, barking revolvers, another redskin biting the dust, cattle stampedes, town-paintings, humorous lynchings and bronchos in epileptic frenzy.

But the talk of this train was concerned with none of these wonders, which the novelists and the magazinist have perhaps a trifle overpublished. The talk of this train was concerned with the eighth wonder of the world, a semi-detached bridal couple.

Mrs. Whitcomb was eager enough to voice the sentiment of the whole populace, when she looked up from her novel in the observation room and, nudging Mrs. Temple, drawled: "By the way, my dear, has that bridal couple made up its second night's quarrel yet?"

"The Mallorys?" Mrs. Temple flushed as she answered, mercifully. "Oh, yes, they were very friendly again this morning."

Mrs. Whitcomb's countenance was cynical: "My dear, I've been married twice and I ought to know something about honeymoons, but this honeyless honeymoon----" she cast up her eyes and her hands in despair.

The women were so concerned about Mr. and "Mrs." Mallory, that they hardly noticed the uncomfortable plight of the Wellingtons, or the curious behavior of the lady from the stateroom who seemed to be afraid of something and never spoke to anybody. The strange behavior of Anne Gattle and Ira Lathrop even escaped much comment, though they were forever being stumbled on when anybody went out to the observation platform. When they were dislodged from there, they sat playing checkers and talking very little, but making eyes at one another and sighing like furnaces.

They had evidently concocted some secret of their own, for Ira, looking at his watch, murmured sentimentally to Anne: "Only a few hours more, Annie."

And Anne turned geranium-color and dropped a handful of checkers. "I don't know how I can face it."

Ira growled like a lovesick lion: "Aw, what do you care?"

"But I was never married before, Ira," Anne protested, "and on a train, too."

"Why, all the bridal couples take to the railroads."

"I should think it would be the last place they'd go," said Anne--a sensible woman, Anne! "Look at the Mallories--how miserable they are."

"I thought they were happy," said Ira, whose great virtue it was to pay little heed to what was none of his business.

"Oh, Ira," cried Anne, "I hope we shan't begin to quarrel as soon as we are married."

"As if anybody could quarrel with you, Anne," he said.

"Do you think I'll be so monotonous as that?" she retorted.

Her spunk delighted him beyond words. He whispered: "Anne, you're so gol-darned sweet if I don't get a chance to kiss you, I'll bust."

"Why, Ira--we're on the train."

"Da--dam the train! Who ever heard of a fellow proposing and getting engaged to a girl and not even kissing her."

"But our engagement is so short."

"Well, I'm not going to marry you till I get a kiss."

Perhaps innocent old Anne really believed this blood-curdling threat. It brought her instantly to terms, though she blushed: "But everybody's always looking."

"Come out on the observation platform."

"Oh, Ira, again?"

"I dare you."

"I take you--but" seeing that Mrs. Whitcomb was trying to overhear, she whispered: "let's pretend it's the scenery."

So Ira rose, pushed the checkers aside, and said in an unusually positive tone: "Ah, Miss Gattle, won't you have a look at the landscape?"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Lathrop," said Anne, "I just love scenery."

They wandered forth like the Sleeping Beauty and her princely awakener, and never dreamed what gigglings and nudgings and wise head-noddings went on back of them. Mrs. Wellington laughed loudest of all at the lovers whose heads had grown gray while their hearts were still so green.

It was shortly after this that the Wellingtons themselves came into prominence in the train life.

As the train approached Green River, and its copper-basined stream, the engineer began to set the air-brakes for the stop. Jimmie Wellington, boozily half-awake in the smoking room, wanted to know what the name of the station was. Everybody is always eager to oblige a drunken man, so Ashton and Fosdick tried to get a window open to look out.

The first one they labored at, they could not budge after a biceps-breaking tug. The second flew up with such ease that they went over backward. Ashton put his head out and announced that the approaching depot was labelled "Green River." Wellington burred: "What a beautiful name for a shtation."

Ashton announced that there was something beautifuller still on the platform--"Oh, a peach!--a nectarine! and she's getting on this train."

Even Doctor Temple declared that she was a dear little thing, wasn't she?

Wellington pushed him aside, saying: "Stand back, Doc., and let me see; I have a keen sense of beau'ful."

"Be careful," cried the doctor, "he'll fall out of the window."

"Not out of that window," Ashton sagely observed, seeing the bulk of Wellington. As the train started off again, Little Jimmie distributed alcoholic smiles to the Green Riverers on the platform and called out:

"Goo'bye, ever'body. You're all abslootly--ow! ow!" He clapped his hand to his eye and crawled back into the car, groaning with pain.

"What's the matter," said Wedgewood. "Got something in your eye?"

"No, you blamed fool. I'm trying to look through my thumb."

"Poor fellow!" sympathized Doctor Temple, "it's a cinder!"

"A cinder! It's at leasht a ton of coal."

"I say, old boy, let me have a peek," said Wedgewood, screwing in his monocle and peering into the depths of Wellington's eye. "I can't see a bally thing."

"Of course not, with that blinder on," growled the miserable wretch, weeping in spite of himself and rubbing his smarting orb.

"Don't rub that eye," Ashton counselled, "rub the other eye."

"It's my eye; I'll rub it if I want to. Get me a doctor, somebody. I'm dying."

"Here's Doctor Temple," said Ashton, "right on the job." Wellington turned to the old clergyman with pathetic trust, and the deceiver writhed in his disguise. The best he could think of was: "Will somebody lend me a lead pencil?"

"What for?" said Wellington, uneasily.

"I am going to roll your upper lid up on it," said the Doctor.

"Oh, no, you're not," said the patient. "You can roll your own lids!"

Then the conductor, still another conductor, wandered on the scene and asked as if it were not a world-important matter: "What's the matter--pick up a cinder?"

"Yes. Perhaps you can get it out," the alleged doctor appealed.

The conductor nodded: "The best way is this--take hold of the winkers."

"The what?" mumbled Wellington.

"Grab the winkers of your upper eyelid in your right hand----"

"I've got 'em."

"Now grab the winkers of your lower eyelid in your left hand. Now raise the right hand, push the under lid under the overlid and haul the overlid over the underlid; when you have the overlid well over the under----"

Wellington waved him away: "Say, what do you think I'm trying to do? stuff a mattress? Get out of my way. I want my wife--lead me to my wife."

"An excellent idea," said Dr. Temple, who had been praying for a reconciliation.

He guided Wellington with difficulty to the observation room and, finding Mrs. Wellington at the desk as usual, he began: "Oh, Mrs. Wellington, may I introduce you to your husband?"

Mrs. Wellington rose haughtily, caught a sight of her suffering consort and ran to him with a cry of "Jimmie!"

"Lucretia!"

"What's happened--are you killed?"

"I'm far from well. But don't worry. My life insurance is paid up."

"Oh, my poor little darling," Mrs. Jimmie fluttered, "What on earth ails you?" She turned to the doctor. "Is he going to die?"

"I think not," said the doctor. "It's only a bad case of cinder-in-the-eyetis."

Thus reassured, Mrs. Wellington went into the patient's eye with her handkerchief. "Is that the eye?" she asked.

"No!" he howled, "the other one."

She went into that and came out with the cinder.

"There! It's just a tiny speck."

Wellington regarded the mote with amazement. "Is that all? It felt as if I had Pike's Peak in my eye." Then he waxed tender. "Oh, Lucretia, how can I ever----"

But she drew away with a disdainful: "Give me back my hand, please."

"Now, Lucretia," he protested, "don't you think you're carrying this pretty far?"

"Only as far as Reno," she answered grimly, which stung him to retort: "You'd better take the beam out of your own eye, now that you've taken the cinder out of mine," but she, noting that they were the center of interest, observed: "All the passengers are enjoying this, my dear. You'd better go back to the cafe."

Wellington regarded her with a revulsion to wrath. He thundered at her: "I will go back, but allow me to inform you, my dear madam, that I'll not drink another drop--just to surprise you."

Mrs. Wellington shrugged her shoulders at this ancient threat and Jimmie stumbled back to his lair, whither the men followed him. Feeling sympathy in the atmosphere, Little Jimmie felt impelled to pour out his grief:

"Jellmen, I'm a brok'n-heartless man. Mrs. Well'n'ton is a queen among women, but she has temper of tarant----"

Wedgewood broke in: "I say, old boy, you've carried this ballast for three days now, wherever did you get it?"

Wellington drew himself up proudly for a moment before he slumped back into himself. "Well, you see, when I announced to a few friends that I was about to leave Mrs. Well'n'ton forever and that I was going out to--to--you know."

"Reno. We know. Well?"

"Well, a crowd of my friends got up a farewell sort of divorce breakfast--and some of 'em felt so very sad about my divorce that they drank a little too much, and the rest of my friends felt so very glad about my divorce, that they drank a little too much. And, of course, I had to join both parties."

"And that breakfast," said Ashton, "lasted till the train started, eh?"

Wellington glowered back triumphantly. "Lasted till the train started? Jellmen, that breakfast is going yet!"

CHAPTER XXII IN THE SMOKING ROOM

Wellington's divorce breakfast reminded Ashton of a story. Ashton was one of the great That-Reminds-Me family. Perhaps it was to the credit of the Englishman that he missed the point of this story, even though Jimmie Wellington saw it through his fog, and Dr. Temple turned red and buried his eyes in the eminently respectable pages of the *Scientific American*.

Ashton and Wellington and Fosdick exchanged winks over the Britisher's stare of incomprehension, and Ashton explained it to him again in words of one syllable, with signboards at all the difficult spots.

Finally a gleam of understanding broke over Wedgewood's face and he tried to justify his delay.

"Oh, yes, of cawse I see it now. Yes, I rather fancy I get you. It's awfully good, isn't it? I think I should have got it before but I'm not really myself; for two mawnings I haven't had my tub."

Wellington shook with laughter: "If you're like this now, what will you be when you get to Sin san frasco--I mean Frinsansisco--well, you know what I mean."

Ashton reached round for the electric button as if he were conferring a favor: "The drinks are on you, Wedgewood. I'll ring." And he rang.

"Awflly kind of you," said Wedgewood, "but how do you make that out?"

"The man that misses the point, pays for the drinks." And he rang again. Wellington protested.

"But I've jolly well paid for all the drinks for two days."

Wellington roared: "That's another point you've missed." And Ashton rang again, but the pale yellow individual who had always answered the bell with alacrity did not appear. "Where's that infernal buffet waiter?" Ashton grumbled.

Wedgewood began to titter. "We were out of Scotch, so I sent him for some more."

"When?"

"Two stations back. I fancy we must have left him behind."

"Well, why in thunder didn't you say so?" Ashton roared.

"It quite escaped my mind," Wedgewood grinned. "Rather good joke on you fellows, what?"

"Well, I don't see the point," Ashton growled, but the triumphant Englishman howled: "That's where *you* pay!"

Wedgewood had his laugh to himself, for the others wanted to murder him. Ashton advised a lynching, but the conductor arrived on the scene in time to prevent violence.

Fosdick informed him of the irretrievable loss of the useful buffet waiter. The conductor promised to get another at Ogden.

Ashton wailed: "Have we got to sit here and die of thirst till then?"

The conductor refused to "back up for a coon," but offered to send in a sleeping-car porter as a temporary substitute.

As he started to go, Fosdick, who had been incessantly consulting his watch, checked him to ask: "Oh, conductor, when do we get to the State-line of dear old Utah?"

"Dear old Utah!" the conductor grinned. "We'd 'a' been there already if we hadn't 'a' fell behind a little."

"Just my luck to be late," Fosdick moaned.

"What you so anxious to be in Utah for, Fosdick?" Ashton asked, suspiciously. "You go on to 'Frisco, don't you?"

Fosdick was evidently confused at the direct question. He tried to dodge it: "Yes, but--funny how things have changed. When we started, nobody was speaking to anybody except his wife, now----"

"Now," said Ashton, drily, "everybody's speaking to everybody except his wife."

"You're wrong there," Little Jimmie interrupted. "I wasn't speaking to my wife in the first place. We got on as strangersh and we're strangersh yet. Mrs. Well'n'ton is a----"

"A queen among women, we know! Dry up," said Ashton, and then they heard the querulous voice of the porter of their sleeping car: "I tell you, I don't know nothin' about the buffet business."

The conductor pushed him in with a gruff command: "Crawl in that cage and get busy."

Still the porter protested: "Mista Pullman engaged me for a sleepin' car, not a drinkin' car. I'm a berth-maker, not a mixer." He cast a resentful glance through the window that served also as a bar, and his whole tone changed: "Say, is you goin' to allow me loose amongst all them beautiful bottles? Say, man, if you do, I can't guarantee my conduct."

"If you even sniff one of those bottles," the conductor warned him, "I'll crack it over your head."

"That won't worry me none--as long as my mouf's open." He smacked his chops over the prospect of intimacy with that liquid treasury. "Lordy! Well, I'll try to control my emotions--but remember, I don't guarantee nothin'!"

The conductor started to go, but paused for final instructions: "And remember--after we get to Utah you can't serve any hard liquor at all."

"What's that? Don't they 'low nothin' in that old Utah but ice-cream soda?"

"That's about all. If you touch a drop, I'll leave you in Utah for life."

"Oh, Lordy, I'll be good!"

The conductor left the excited black and went his way. Ashton was the first to speak: "Say, Porter, can you mix drinks?"

The porter ruminated, then confessed: "Well, not on the outside, no, sir. If you-all is thirsty you better order the simplest things you can think of. If you was to command anything fancy, Lord knows what you'd get. Supposin' you was to say, 'Gimme a Tom Collins.' I'd be just as liable as not to pass you a Jack Johnson."

"Well, can you open beer?"

"Oh, I'm a natural born beer-opener."

"Rush it out then. My throat is as full of alkali dust as these windows."

The porter soon appeared with a tray full of cotton-topped glasses. The day was hot and the alkali dust very oppressive, and the beer was cold. Dr. Temple looked on it when it was amber, and suffered himself to be bullied into taking a glass.

He felt that he was the greatest sinner on earth, but worst of all was the fact that when he had fallen, the forbidden brew was not sweet. He was inexperienced enough to sip it and it was like foaming quinine on his palate. But he kept at it from sheer shame, and his luxurious transgression was its own punishment.

The doleful Mallory was on his way to join the "club". Crossing the vestibule he had met the conductor, and had ventured to quiz him along the old lines:

"Excuse me, haven't you taken any clergymen on board this train yet?"

"Devil a one."

"Don't you ever carry any preachers on this road?"

"Usually we get one or two. Last trip we carried a whole Methodist convention."

"A whole convention last trip! Just my luck!"

The unenlightened conductor turned to call back: "Say, up in the forward car we got a couple of undertakers. They be of any use to you?"

"Not yet."

Then Mallory dawdled on into the smoking room, where he found his own porter, who explained that he had been "promoted to the bottlery."

"Do we come to a station stop soon?" Mallory asked.

"Well, not for a considerable interval. Do you want to get out and walk up and down?"

"I don't," said Mallory, taking from under his coat Snoozleums, whom he had smuggled past the new conductor.

"Meanwhile, Porter, could you give him something to eat to distract him?"

The porter grinned, and picking up a bill of fare held it out. "I got a meenuel. It ain't written in dog, but you can explain it to him. What would yo' canine desiah, sah?"

Snoozleums put out a paw and Mallory read what it indicated: "He says he'd like a filet Chateaubriand, but if you have any old bones, he'll take those." The porter gathered Snoozleums in and disappeared with him into the buffet, Mallory calling after him: "Don't let the conductor see him."

Dr. Temple advanced on the disconsolate youth with an effort at cheer: "How is our bridegroom this beautiful afternoon?"

Mallory glanced at his costume: "I feel like a rainbow gone wrong. Just my luck to have to borrow from everybody. Look at me! This collar of Mr. Wellington's makes me feel like a peanut in a rubber tire." He turned to Fosdick.

"I say, Mr. Fosdick, what size collar do you wear?"

"Fourteen and a half," said Fosdick.

"Fourteen and a half!--why don't you get a neck? You haven't got a plain white shirt, have you? Our English friend lent me this, but it's purple, and Mr. Ashton's socks are maroon, and this peacock blue tie is very unhappy."

"I think I can fit you out," said Fosdick.

"And if you had an extra pair of socks," Mallory pleaded, "--just one pair of unemotional socks."

"I'll show you my repertoire."

"All right, I'll see you later." Then he went up to Wellington, with much hesitance of manner. "By the way, Mr. Wellington, do you suppose Mrs. Wellington could lend Miss--Mrs.--could lend Marjorie some--some----"

Wellington waved him aside with magnificent scorn: "I am no longer in Mrs. Wellington's confidence."

"Oh, excuse me," said Mallory. He had noted that the Wellingtons occupied separate compartments, but for all he knew their reason was as romantic as his own.

CHAPTER XXIII THROUGH A TUNNEL

Mrs. Jimmie Wellington, who had traveled much abroad and learned in England the habit of smoking in the corridors of expensive hotels, had acquired also the habit, as travelers do, of calling England freer than America. She determined to do her share toward the education of her native country, and chose, for her topic, tobacco as a feminine accomplishment.

She had grown indifferent to stares and audible comment and she could fight a protesting head waiter to a standstill. If monuments and tablets are ever erected to the first woman who smoked publicly in this place or that, Mrs. Jimmie Wellington will be variously remembered and occupy a large place in historical record.

The narrow confines of the women's room on the sleeping car soon palled on her, and she objected to smoking there except when she felt the added luxury of keeping some other woman outside--fuming, but not smoking. And now Mrs. Jimmie had staked out a claim on the observation platform. She sat there, puffing like a major-general, and in one portion of Nebraska two farmers fell off their agricultural vehicles at the sight of her cigar-smoke trailing after the train. In Wyoming three cowboys followed her for a mile, yipping and howling their compliments.

Feeling the smoke mood coming on, Mrs. Wellington invited Mrs. Temple to smoke with her, but Mrs. Temple felt a reminiscent qualm at the very thought, so Mrs. Jimmie sauntered out alone, to the great surprise of Ira Lathrop, whose motto was, "Two heads are better than one," and who was apparently willing to wait till Anne Gattle's head grew on his shoulder.

"I trust I don't intrude," Mrs. Wellington said.

"Oh, no. Oh, yes." Anne gasped in fiery confusion as she fled into the car, followed by the purple-faced Ira, who slammed the door with a growl: "That Wellington woman would break up anything."

The prim little missionary toppled into the nearest chair: "Oh, Ira, what will she think?"

"She can't think!" Ira grumbled. "In a little while she'll know."

"Don't you think we'd better tell everybody before they begin to talk?"

Ira glowed with pride at the thought and murmured with all the ardor of a senile Romeo: "I suppose so, ducky darling. I'll break it--I mean I'll tell it to the men, and you tell the women."

"All right, dear, I'll obey you," she answered, meekly.

"Obey me!" Ira laughed with boyish swagger. "And you a missionary!"

"Well, I've converted one heathen, anyway," said Anne as she darted down the corridor, followed by Ira, who announced his intention to "go to the baggage car and dig up his old Prince Albert."

In their flight forward they passed the mysterious woman in the stateroom. They were too full of their own mystery to give thought to hers. Mrs. Fosdick went timidly prowling toward the observation car, suspecting everybody to be a spy, as Mallory suspected everybody to be a clergyman in disguise.

As she stole along the corridor past the men's clubroom she saw her husband--her here-and-there husband--wearily counting the telegraph posts and summing them up into miles. She tapped on the glass and signalled to him, then passed on.

He answered with a look, then pretended not to have noticed, and waited a few moments before he rose with an elaborate air of carelessness. He beckoned the porter and said:

"Let me know the moment we enter Utah, will you?"

"Yassah. We'll be comin' along right soon now. We got to pass through the big Aspen tunnel, after that, befo' long, we splounce into old Utah."

"Don't forget," said Fosdick, as he sauntered out. Ashton perked up his ears at the promise of a tunnel and kept his eye on his watch.

Fosdick entered the observation room with a hungry look in his luscious eyes. His now-and-then wife put up a warning finger to indicate Mrs. Whitcomb's presence at the writing desk.

Fosdick's smile froze into a smirk of formality and he tried to chill his tone as if he were speaking to a total stranger.

"Good afternoon."

Mrs. Fosdick answered with equal ice: "Good afternoon. Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks. Very picturesque scenery, isn't it?"

"Isn't it?" Fosdick seated himself, looked about cautiously, noted that Mrs. Whitcomb was apparently absorbed in her letter, then lowered his voice confidentially. His face kept up a strained pretense of indifference, but his whisper was passionate with longing:

"Has my poor little wifey missed her poor old hubby?"

"Oh, so much!" she whispered. "Has poor little hubby missed his poor old wife?"

"Horribly. Was she lonesome in that dismal stateroom all by herself?"

"Oh, so miserable! I can't stand it much longer."

Fosdick's face blazed with good news: "In just a little while we come to the Utah line--then we're safe."

"God bless Utah!"

The rapture died from her face as she caught sight of Dr. Temple, who happened to stroll in and go to the bookshelves, and taking out a book happened to glance near-sightedly her way.

"Be careful of that man, dearie," Mrs. Fosdick hissed out of one side of her mouth. "He's a very strange character."

Her husband was infected with her own terror. He asked, huskily: "What do you think he is?"

"A detective! I'm sure he's watching us. He followed you right in here."

"We'll be very cautious--till we get to Utah."

The old clergyman, a little fuzzy in brain from his debut in beer, continued innocently to confirm the appearance of a detective by drifting aimlessly about. He was looking for his wife, but he kept glancing at the uneasy Fosdicks. He went to the door, opened it, saw Mrs. Wellington finishing a cigar, and retreated precipitately. Seeing Mrs. Temple wandering in the corridor, he motioned her to a chair near the Fosdicks and she sat by his side, wondering at his filmy eyes.

The Fosdicks, glancing uncomfortably at Dr. Temple, rose and selected other chairs further away. Then Roger Ashton sauntered in, his eyes searching for a proper companion through the tunnel.

He saw Mrs. Wellington returning from the platform, just tossing away her cigar and blowing out the last of its grateful vapor.

With an effort at sarcasm, he went to her and offered her one of his own cigars, smiling: "Have another."

She took it, looked it over, and parried his irony with a formula she had heard men use when they hate to refuse a gift-cigar: "Thanks. I'll smoke it after dinner, if you don't mind."

"Oh, I don't mind," he laughed, then bending closer he murmured: "They tell me we are coming to a tunnel, a nice, long, dark, dismal tunnel."

Mrs. Wellington would not take a dare. She felt herself already emancipated from Jimmie. So she answered Ashton's hint with a laughing challenge:

"How nice of the conductor to arrange it."

Ashton smacked his lips over the prospect.

And now the porter, having noted Ashton's impatience to reach the tunnel, thought to curry favor and a quarter by announcing its approach. He hustled in and made straight for Ashton just as the tunnel announced itself with a sudden swoop of gloom, a great increase of the train-noises and a far-off clang of the locomotive bell.

Out of the Egyptian darkness came the unmistakable sounds of osculation in various parts of the room. Doubtless, it was repeated in other parts of the train. There were numerous cooing sounds, too, but nobody spoke except Mrs. Temple, who was heard to murmur:

"Oh, Walter, dear, what makes your breath so funny!"

Next came a little yowl of pain in Mrs. Fosdick's voice, and then daylight flooded the car with a rush, as if time had made an instant leap from midnight to noon. There were interesting disclosures.

Mrs. Temple was caught with her arms round the doctor's neck, and she blushed like a spoony girl. Mrs. Fosdick was trying to disengage her hair from Mr. Fosdick's scarf-pin. Mrs. Whitcomb alone was deserted. Mr. Ashton was gazing devotion at Mrs. Wellington and trying to tell her with his eyes how velvet he had found her cheek.

But she was looking reproachfully at him from a chair, and saying, not without regret:

"I heard everybody kissing everybody, but I was cruelly neglected."

Ashton's eyes widened with unbelief, he heard a snicker at his elbow, and whirled to find the porter rubbing his black velvet cheek and writhing with pent-up laughter.

Mrs. Wellington glanced the same way, and a shriek of understanding burst from her. It sent the porter into a spasm of yah-yahs till he caught Ashton's eyes and saw murder in them. The porter fled to the platform and held the door fast, expecting to be lynched.

But Ashton dashed away in search of concealment and soap.

The porter remained on the platform for some time, planning to leap overboard and take his chances rather than fall into Ashton's hands, but at length, finding himself unpursued, he peered into the car and, seeing that Ashton had gone, he returned to his duties. He kept a close watch on Ashton, but on soberer thoughts Ashton had decided that the incident would best be consigned to silence and oblivion. But for all the rest of that day he kept rubbing his lips with his handkerchief.

The porter, noting that the train had swept into a granite gorge like an enormously magnified aisle in a made-up sleeping car, recognized the presence of Echo Canyon, and with it the entrance into Utah. He hastened to impart the tidings to Mr. Fosdick and held out his hand as he extended the information.

Fosdick could hardly believe that his twelve-hundred-mile exile was over.

"We're in Utah?" he exclaimed.

"Yassah," and the porter shoved his palm into view. Fosdick filled it with all his loose change, then whirled to his wife and cried:

"Edith! We are in Utah now! Embrace me!"

She flung herself into his arms with a gurgle of bliss. The other passengers gasped with amazement. This sort of thing was permissible enough in a tunnel, but in the full light of day----!

Fosdick, noting the sensation he had created, waved his hand reassuringly and called across his wife's shoulder:

"Don't be alarmed, ladies and gentlemen. She's my wife!" He added in a whisper meant for her ear alone: "At least till we get to Nevada!"

Then she whispered something in his ear and they hurried from the car. They left behind them a bewilderment that eclipsed the wonder of the Mallories. That couple spoke to each other at least during the day time. Here was a married pair that did not speak at all for two days and two nights and then made a sudden and public rush to each other's arms!

Dr. Temple summed up the general feeling when he said:

"I don't believe in witches, but if I did, I'd believe that this train is bewitched."

Later he decided that Fosdick was a Mormon elder and that Mrs. Fosdick was probably a twelfth or thirteenth spouse

he was smuggling in from the East. The theory was not entirely false, for Fosdick was one of the many victims of the crazy-quilt of American divorce codes, though he was the most unwilling of polygamists. And Dr. Temple gave up his theory in despair the next morning when he found the Fosdicks still on the train, and once more keeping aloof from each other.

CHAPTER XXIV THE TRAIN BUTCHER

Mallory was dragging out a miserable existence with a companion who was neither maid, wife, nor widow and to whom he was neither bachelor, husband, nor relict.

They were suffering brain-fag from their one topic of conversation, and heart-fag from rapture deferred. Marjorie had pretended to take a nap and Mallory had pretended that he would leave her for her own sake. Their contradictory chains were beginning to gall.

Mallory sat in the smoking room, and threw aside a half-finished cigar. Life was indeed nauseous when tobacco turned rank on his lips. He watched without interest the stupendous scenery whirling past the train; granite ravines, infernal grotesques of architecture and diablerie, the Giant's Teapot, the Devil's Slide, the Pulpit Rock, the Hanging Rock, splashes of mineral color, as if titanic paint pots had been spilled or flung against the cliffs, sudden hushes of green pine-worlds, dreary graveyards of sand and sagebrush, mountain streams in frothing panics.

His jaded soul could not respond to any of these thrillers, the dime-novels and melodramatic third-acts of Nature. But with the arrival of a train-boy, who had got on at Evanston with a batch of Salt Lake City newspapers, he woke a little.

The other men came trooping round, like sheep at a herd-boy's whistle or chickens when a pan of grain is brought into the yard. The train "butcher" had a nasal sing-song, but his strain might have been the Pied Piper's tune emptying Hamelin of its grown-ups. The charms of flirtation, matrimonial bliss and feminine beauty were forgotten, and the males flocked to the delights of stock-market reports, political or racing or dramatic or sporting or criminal news. Even Ashton braved the eyes of his fellow men for the luxury of burying his nose in a fresh paper.

"Papers, gents? Yes? No?" the train butcher chanted. "Salt Lake papers, Ogden papers, all the latest papers, comic papers, magazines, periodicals."

"Here, boy," said Ashton, snapping his fingers, "what's the latest New York paper?"

"Last Sat'day's."

"Six days old? I read that before I left New York. Well, give me that Salt Lake paper. It has yesterday's stock market, I suppose."

"Yes, sir." He passed over the sheet and made change, without abating his monody: "Papers, gents. Yes? No? Salt Lake pa----"

"Whash latesh from Chicago?" said Wellington.

"Monday's."

"I read that before--that breakfast began," laughed Little Jimmie. "Well, give me *Salt Lake Bazoo*. It has basheball news, I s'pose."

"Yes, sir," the butcher answered, and his tone grew reverent as he said: "The Giants won. Mr. Mattyson was pitching. Papers, gents, all the latest papers, magazines, periodicals."

Wedgewood extended a languid hand: "What's the latest issue of the *London Times*?"

"Never heard of it."

Wedgewood almost fainted, and returned to his Baedeker of the United States.

Dr. Temple summoned the lad: "I don't suppose you have the *Ypsilanti Eagle*?"

The butcher regarded him with pity, and sniffed: "I carry newspapers, not poultry."

"Well, give me the----" he saw a pink weekly of rather picturesque appearance, and the adventure attracted him. "I'll take this--also the *Outlook*." He folded the pink within the green, and entered into a new and startling world--a sort of journalistic slumming tour.

"Give me any old thing," said Mallory, and flung open an Ogden journal till he found the sporting page, where his eyes brightened. "By jove, a ten-inning game! Matthewson in the box!"

"Mattie is most intelleckshal pitcher in the world," said Little Jimmie, and then everybody disappeared behind paper ramparts, while the butcher lingered to explain to the porter the details of the great event.

About this time, Marjorie, tired of her pretence at slumber, strolled into the observation car, glancing into the men's room, where she saw nothing but newspapers. Then Mrs. Wellington saw her, and smiled: "Come in and make yourself at home."

"Thanks," said Marjorie, bashfully, "I was looking for my--my----"

"Husband?"

"My dog."

"How is he this morning?"

"My dog?"

"Your husband."

"Oh, he's as well as could be expected."

"Where did you get that love of a waist?" Mrs. Wellington laughed.

"Mrs. Temple lent it to me. Isn't it sweet?"

"Exquisite! The latest Ypsilanti mode."

Marjorie, suffering almost more acutely from being badly frocked than from being duped in her matrimonial hopes, threw herself on Mrs. Wellington's mercy.

"I'm so unhappy in this. Couldn't you lend me or sell me something a little smarter?"

"I'd love to, my dear," said Mrs. Wellington, "but I left home on short notice myself. I shall need all my divorce trousseau in Reno. Otherwise--I--but here's your husband. You two ought to have some place to spoon. I'll leave you this whole room."

And she swept out, nodding to Mallory, who had divined Marjorie's presence, and felt the need of being near her, though he also felt the need of finishing the story of the great ball game. Husband-like, he felt that he was conferring sufficient courtesy in throwing a casual smile across the top of the paper.

Marjorie studied his motley garb, and her own, and groaned:

"We're a sweet looking pair, aren't we?"

"Mr. and Miss Fit," said Mallory, from behind the paper.

"Oh, Harry, has your love grown cold?" she pleaded.

"Marjorie, how can you think such a thing?" still from behind the paper.

"Well, Mrs. Wellington said we ought to have some place to spoon, and she went away and left us, and--there you stand--and----"

This pierced even the baseball news, and he threw his arms around her with glow of devotion.

She snuggled closer, and cooed: "Aren't we having a nice long engagement? We've traveled a million miles, and the preacher isn't in sight yet. What have you been reading--wedding announcements?"

"No--I was reading about the most wonderful exhibition. Mattie was in the box--and in perfect form."

"Mattie?" Marjorie gasped uneasily.

"Mattie!" he raved, "and in perfect form."

And now the hidden serpent of jealousy, which promised to enliven their future, lifted its head for the first time, and Mallory caught his first glimpse of an unsuspected member of their household. Marjorie demanded with an ominous chill:

"And who's Mattie? Some former sweetheart of yours?"

"My dear," laughed Mallory.

But Marjorie was up and away, with apt temper: "So Mattie was in the box, was she? What is it to you, where she sits? You dare to read about her and rave over her perfect form, while you neglect your wife--or your--oh, what am I, anyway?"

Mallory stared at her in amazement. He was beginning to learn what ignorant heathen women are concerning so many of the gods and demi-gods of mankind. Then, with a tenderness he might not always show, he threw the paper down and took her in his arms: "You poor child. Mattie is a man--a pitcher--and you're the only woman I ever loved--and you are liable to be my wife any minute."

The explanation was sufficient, and she crawled into the shelter of his arm with little noises that served for apology, forgiveness and reconciliation. Then he made the mistake of mentioning the sickening topic of deferred hope:

"A minister's sure to get on at the next stop--or the next."

Marjorie's nerves were frayed by too much enduring, and it took only a word to set them jangling: "If you say minister to me again, I'll scream." Then she tried to control herself with a polite: "Where is the next stop?"

"Ogden."

"Where's that? On the map?"

"Well, it's in Utah."

"Utah!" she groaned. "They marry by wholesale there, and we can't even get a sample."

CHAPTER XXV THE TRAIN WRECKER

The train-butcher, entering the Observation Room, found only a loving couple. He took in at a glance their desire for solitude. A large part of his business was the forcing of wares on people who did not want them.

His voice and his method suggested the mosquito. Seeing Mallory and Marjorie mutually absorbed in reading each other's eyes, and evidently in need of nothing on earth less than something else to read, the train-butcher decided that his best plan of attack was to make himself a nuisance. It is a plan successfully adopted by organ-grinders, street pianists and other blackmailers under the guise of art, who have nothing so welcome to sell as their absence.

Mallory and Marjorie heard the train-boy's hum, but they tried to ignore it.

"Papers, gents and ladies? Yes? No? Paris fashions, lady?"

He shoved a large periodical between their very noses, but Marjorie threw it on the floor, with a bitter glance at her own borrowed plumage:

"Don't show me any Paris fashions!" Then she gave the boy his conge by resuming her chat with Mallory: "How long do we stop at Ogden?"

The train-boy went right on auctioning his papers and magazines, and poking them into the laps of his prey. And they went right on talking to one another and pushing his papers and magazines to the floor.

"I think I'd better get off at Ogden, and take the next train back. That's just what I'll do. Nothing, thank you!" this last to the train-boy.

"But you can't leave me like this," Mallory urged excitedly, with a side glance of "No, no!" to the train-boy.

"I can, and I must, and I will," Marjorie insisted. "I'll go pack my things now."

"But, Marjorie, listen to me."

"Will you let me alone!" This to the gadfly, but to Mallory a dejected wail: "I--I just remembered. I haven't anything to pack."

"And you'll have to give back that waist to Mrs. Temple. You can't get off at Ogden without a waist."

"I'll go anyway. I want to get home."

"Marjorie, if you talk that way--I'll throw you off the train!"

She gasped. He explained: "I wasn't talking to you; I was trying to stop this phonograph." Then he rose, and laid violent hands on the annoyer, shoved him to the corridor, seized his bundle of papers from his arm, and hurled them at his head. They fell in a shower about the train-butcher, who could only feel a certain respect for the one man who had ever treated him as he knew he deserved. He bent to pick up his scattered merchandise, and when he had gathered his stock together, put his head in, and sang out a sincere:

"Excuse me."

But Mallory did not hear him, he was excitedly trying to calm the excited girl, who, having eloped with him, was preparing now to elope back without him.

"Darling, you can't desert me now," he pleaded, "and leave me to go on alone?"

"Well, why don't you do something?" she retorted, in equal desperation. "If I were a man, and I had the girl I loved on a train, I'd get her married if I had to wreck the----" she caught her breath, paused a second in intense thought, and then, with sudden radiance, cried: "Harry, dear!"

"Yes, love!"

"I have an idea--an inspiration!"

"Yes, pet," rather dubiously from him, but with absolute exultation from her: "Let's wreck the train!"

"I don't follow you, sweetheart."

"Don't you see?" she began excitedly. "When there are train wrecks a lot of people get killed, and things. A minister always turns up to administer the last something or other--well----"

"Well?"

"Well, stupid, don't you see? We wreck a train, a minister comes, we nab him, he marries us, and--there we are! Everything's lovely!"

He gave her one of those looks with which a man usually greets what a woman calls an inspiration. He did not honor her invention with analysis. He simply put forward an objection to it, and, man-like, chose the most hateful of all objections:

"It's a lovely idea, but the wreck would delay us for hours and hours, and I'd miss my transport----"

"Harry Mallory, if you mention that odious transport to me again, I know I'll have hydrophobia. I'm going home."

"But, darling," he pleaded, "you can't desert me now, and leave me to go on alone?" She had her answer glib:

"If you really loved me, you'd----"

"Oh, I know," he cut in. "You've said that before. But I'd be court-martialled. I'd lose my career."

"What's a career to a man who truly loves?"

"It's just as much as it is to anybody else--and more."

She could hardly controvert this gracefully, so she sank back with grim resignation. "Well, I've proposed my plan, and you don't like it. Now, suppose you propose something."

The silence was oppressive. They sat like stoughton bottles. There the conductor found them some time later. He gave

them a careless look, selected a chair at the end of the car, and began to sort his tickets, spreading them out on another chair, making notes with the pencil he took from atop his ear, and shoved back from time to time.

Ages seemed to pass, and Mallory had not even a suggestion. By this time Marjorie's temper had evaporated, and when he said: "If we could only stop at some town for half an hour," she said: "Maybe the conductor would hold the train for us."

"I hardly think he would."

"He looks like an awfully nice man. You ask him."

"Oh, what's the use?"

Marjorie was getting tired of depending on this charming young man with the very bad luck. She decided to assume command herself. She took recourse naturally to the original feminine methods: "I'll take care of him," she said, with resolution. "A woman can get a man to do almost anything if she flirts a little with him."

"Marjorie!"

"Now, don't you mind anything I do. Remember, it's all for love of you--even if I have to kiss him."

"Marjorie, I won't permit----"

"You have no right to boss me--yet. You subside." She gave him the merest touch, but he fell backward into a chair, utterly aghast at the shameless siren into which desperation had altered the timid little thing he thought he had chosen to love. He was being rapidly initiated into the complex and versatile and fearfully wonderful thing a woman really is, and he was saying to himself, "What have I married?" forgetting, for the moment, that he had not married her yet, and that therein lay the whole trouble.

CHAPTER XXVI DELILAH AND THE CONDUCTOR

Like the best of women and the worst of men, Marjorie was perfectly willing to do evil, that good might come of it. She advanced on the innocent conductor, as the lady from Sorek must have sidled up to Samson, coquetting with one arch hand and snipping the shears with the other.

The stupefied Mallory saw Marjorie in a startling imitation of herself at her sweetest; only now it was brazen mimicry, yet how like! She went forward as the shyest young thing in the world, pursed her lips into an ecstatic simper, and began on the unsuspecting official:

"Isn't the country perfectly----"

"Yes, but I'm getting used to it," the conductor growled, without looking up.

His curt indifference jolted Marjorie a trifle, but she rallied her forces, and came back with: "How long do we stop at Ogden?"

"Five minutes," very bluntly.

Marjorie poured maple syrup on her tone, as she purred: "This train of yours is an awfully fast train, isn't it?"

"Sort of," said the conductor, with just a trace of thaw. What followed made him hold his breath, for the outrageous little hussy was actually saying: "The company must have a great deal of confidence in you to entrust the lives and welfare of so many people to your presence of mind and courage."

"Well, of course, I can't say as to that----" Even Mallory could see that the man's reserve was melting fast as Marjorie went on with relentless treacle:

"Talk about soldiers and firemen and life-savers! I think it takes a braver man than any of those to be a conductor--really."

"Well, it is a kind of a responsible job." The conductor swelled his chest a little at that, and Marjorie felt that he was already hers. She hammered the weak spot in his armor:

"Responsible! I should say it is. Mr. Mallory is a soldier, but soldiers are such ferocious, destructive people, while conductors save lives, and--if I were only a man I think it would be my greatest ambition to be a conductor--especially on an overland express."

The conductor told the truth, when he confessed: "Well, I never heard it put just that way." Then he spoke with a little more pride, hoping to increase the impression he felt he was making: "The main thing, of course, is to get my train through On Time!"

This was a facer. He was going to get his train through On Time just to oblige Marjorie. She stammered:

"I don't suppose the train, by any accident, would be delayed in leaving Ogden?"

"Not if I can help it," the hero averred, to reassure her.

"I wish it would," Marjorie murmured.

The conductor looked at her in surprise: "Why, what's it to you?" She turned her eyes on him at full candle power, and smiled:

"Oh, I just wanted to do a little shopping there."

"Shopping! While the train waits! Excuse me!"

"You see," Marjorie fluttered, "by a sad mistake, my baggage isn't on the train. And I haven't any--any--I really need to buy some--some things very badly. It's awfully embarrassing to be without them."

"I can imagine," the conductor mumbled. "Why don't you and your husband drop off and take the next train?"

"My husb--Mr. Mallory has to be in San Francisco by to-morrow night. He just has to!"

"So have I."

"But to oblige me? To save me from distress--don't you think you could?" Like a sweet little child she twisted one of the brass buttons on his coat sleeve, and wheedled: "Don't you think you might hold the train just a little tiny half hour?"

He was sorry, but he didn't see how he could. Then she took his breath away again by asking, out of a clear sky: "Are you married?"

He was as awkward as if she had proposed to him, she answered for him: "Oh, but of course you are. The women wouldn't let a big, handsome, noble brave giant like you escape long." He mopped his brow in agony as she went on: "I'm sure you're a very chivalrous man. I'm sure you would give your life to rescue a maiden in distress. Well, here's your chance. Won't you please hold the train?"

She actually had her cheek almost against his shoulder, though she had to poise atiptoe to reach him. Mallory's dismay was changing to a boiling rage, and the conductor was a pitiable combination of Saint Anthony and Tantalus. "I--I'd love to oblige you," he mumbled, "but it would be as much as my job's worth."

"How much is that?" Marjorie asked, and added reassuringly, "If you lost your job I'm sure my father would get you a better one."

"Maybe," said the conductor, "but--I got this one."

Then his rolling eyes caught sight of the supposed husband gesticulating wildly and evidently clearing for action. He warned Marjorie: "Say, your husband is motioning at you."

"Don't mind him," Marjorie urged, "just listen to me. I implore you. I----" Seeing that he was still resisting, she played her last card, and, crying, "Oh, you can't resist my prayers so cruelly," she threw her arms around his neck, sobbing, "Do you want to break my heart?"

Mallory rushed into the scene and the conductor, tearing Marjorie's arms loose, retreated, gasping, "No! and I don't want your husband to break my head."

Mallory dragged Marjorie away, but she shook her little fist at the conductor, crying: "Do you refuse? Do you dare refuse?"

"I've got to," the conductor abjectly insisted.

Marjorie blazed with fury and the siren became a Scylla. "Then I'll see that my father gets you discharged. If you dare to speak to me again, I'll order my husband to throw you off this train. To think of being refused a simple little favor by a mere conductor! of a stupid old emigrant train!! of all things!!!"

Then she hurled herself into a chair and pounded her heels on the floor in a tantrum that paralyzed Mallory. Even the conductor tapped him on the shoulder and said: "You have my sympathy."

CHAPTER XXVII THE DOG-ON DOG AGAIN

As the conductor left the Mallorys to their own devices, it rushed over him anew what sacrilege had been attempted--a fool bride had asked him to stop the Trans-American of all trains!--to go shopping of all things!

He stormed into the smoking room to open the safety valve of his wrath, and found the porter just coming out of the buffet cell with a tray, two hollow-stemmed glasses and a bottle swaddled in a napkin.

"Say, Ellsworth, what in ---- do you suppose that female back there wants?--wants me to hold the Trans-American while----"

But the porter was in a flurry himself. He was about to serve champagne, and he cut the conductor short:

"Scuse me, boss, but they's a lovin' couple in the stateroom forward that is in a powerful hurry for this. I can't talk to you now. I'll see you later." And he swaggered off, leaving the door of the buffet open. The conductor paused to close it, glanced in, started, stared, glared, roared: "What's this! Well, I'll be--a dog smuggled in here! I'll break that coon's head. Come out of there, you miserable or'nary hound." He seized the incredulous Snoozleums by the scruff of his neck, growling, "It's you for the baggage car ahead," and dashed out with his prey, just as Mallory, now getting new bearings on Marjorie's character, spoke across the rampart of his Napoleonically folded arms:

"Well, you're a nice one!--making violent love to a conductor before my very eyes. A minute more and I would have----"

She silenced him with a snap: "Don't you speak to me! I hate you! I hate all men. The more I know men the more I like---" this reminded her, and she asked anxiously: "Where is Snoozleums?"

Mallory, impatient at the shift of subject, snapped back: "Oh, I left him in the buffet with the waiter. What I want to know is how you dare to----"

"Was it a colored waiter?"

"Of course. But I'm not speaking of----"

"But suppose he should bite him?"

"Oh, you can't hurt those nigger waiters. I started to say----"

"But I can't have Snoozleums biting colored people. It might not agree with him. Get him at once."

Mallory trembled with suppressed rage like an overloaded boiler, but he gave up and growled: "Oh, Lord, all right. I'll get him when I've finished----"

"Go get him this minute. And bring the poor darling back to his mother."

"His mother! Ye gods!" cried Mallory, wildly. He turned away and dashed into the men's room with a furious: "Where's that damned dog?"

He met the porter just returning. The porter smiled: "He's right in heah, sir," and opened the buffet door. His eyes popped and his jaw sagged: "Why, I lef' him here just a minute ago."

"You left the window open, too," Mallory observed. "Well, I guess he's gone."

The porter was panic stricken: "Oh, I'm turrible sorry, boss, I wouldn't have lost dat dog for a fortune. If you was to hit me with a axe I wouldn't mind."

To his utter befuddlement, Mallory grinned and winked at him, and murmured: "Oh, that's all right. Don't worry." And actually laid half a dollar in his palm. Leaving the black lids batting over the starting eyes, Mallory pulled his smile into a long face and went back to Marjorie like an undertaker: "My love, prepare yourself for bad news."

Marjorie looked up, startled and apprehensive: "Snoozleums is ill. He did bite the darkey."

"Worse than that--he--he--fell out of the window."

"When!" she shrieked, "in heaven's name--when?"

"He was there just a minute ago, the waiter says."

Marjorie went into instant hysterics, wringing her hands and sobbing: "Oh, my darling, my poor child--stop the train at once!"

She began to pound Mallory's shoulders and shake him frantically. He had never seen her this way either. He was getting his education in advance. He tried to calm her with inexpert words: "How can I stop the train? Now, dearie, he was a nice dog, but after all, he was only a dog."

She rounded on him like a panther: "Only a dog! He was worth a dozen men like you. You find the conductor at once, command him to stop this train--and back up! I don't care if he has to go back ten miles. Run, tell him at once. Now, you run!"

Mallory stared at her as if she had gone mad, but he set out to run somewhere, anywhere. Marjorie paced up and down distractedly, tearing her hair and moaning, "Snoozleums, Snoozleums! My child. My poor child!" At length her wildly roving eyes noted the bell rope. She stared, pondered, nodded her head, clutched at it, could not reach it, jumped for it several times in vain, then seized a chair, swung it into place, stood up in it, gripped the rope, and came down on it with all her weight, dropping to the floor and jumping up and down in a frenzied dance. In the distance the engine could be heard faintly whistling, whistling for every pull.

The engineer, far ahead, could not imagine what unheard-of crisis could bring about such mad signals. The fireman yelled:

"I bet that crazy conductor is attacked with an epilettic fit."

But there was no disputing the command. The engine was reversed, the air brakes set, the sand run out and every effort made to pull the iron horse, as it were, back on its haunches.

The grinding, squealing, jolting, shook the train like an earthquake. The shrieking of the whistle froze the blood like a woman's cry of "Murder!" in the night. The women among the passengers echoed the screams. The men turned pale and braced themselves for the shock of collision. Some of them were mumbling prayers. Dr. Temple and Jimmie Wellington, with one idea in their dissimilar souls, dashed from the smoking room to go to their wives.

Ashton and Wedgewood, with no one to care for but themselves, seized windows and tried to fight them open. At last they budged a sash and knelt down to thrust their heads out.

"I don't see a beastly thing ahead," said Wedgewood, "except the heads of other fools."

"We're slowing down though," said Ashton, "she stops! We're safe. Thank God!" And he collapsed into a chair. Wedgewood collapsed into another, gasping: "Whatevah are we safe from, I wondah?"

The train-crew and various passengers descended and ran alongside the train asking questions. Panic gave way to mystery. Even Dr. Temple came back into the smoking room to finish a precious cigar he had been at work on. He was followed by Little Jimmie, who had not quite reached his wife when the stopping of the train put an end to his excuse for chivalry. He was regretfully mumbling:

"It would have been such a good shansh to shave my life's wife--I mean my--I don't know what I mean." He sank into a chair and ordered a drink; then suddenly remembered his vow, and with great heroism, rescinded the order.

Mallory, finding that the train was checked just before he reached the conductor, saw that official's bewildered wrath at the stoppage and had a fearsome intuition that Marjorie had somehow done the deed. He hurried back to the observation room, where he found her charging up and down, still distraught. He paused at a safe distance and said:

"The train has stopped, my dear. Somebody rang the bell."

"I guess somebody did!" Marjorie answered, with a proud toss of the head. "Where's the conductor?"

"He's looking for the fellow that pulled the rope."

"You go tell him to back up--and slowly, too."

"No, thank you!" said Mallory. He was a brave young man, but he was not bearding the conductors of stopped expresses. Already the conductor's voice was heard in the smoking room, where he appeared with the rush and roar of a Bashan bull. "Well!" he bellowed, "which one of you guys pulled that rope?"

"It was nobody here, sir," Dr. Temple meekly explained. The conductor transfixed him with a baleful glare: "I wouldn't believe a gambler on oath. I bet you did it."

"I assure you, sir," Wedgewood interposed, "he didn't touch it. I was heah."

The conductor waved him aside and charged into the observation room, followed by all the passengers in an awe struck rabble. Here, too, the conductor thundered: "Who pulled that rope? Speak up somebody."

Mallory was about to sacrifice himself to save Marjorie, but she met the conductor's black rage with the withering contempt of a young queen: "I pulled the old rope. Whom did you suppose?"

The conductor almost dropped with apoplexy at finding himself with nobody to vent his immense rage on, but this pink and white slip. "You!" he gulped, "well, what in----Say, in the name of--why, don't you know it's a penitentiary offense to stop a train this way?"

Marjorie tossed her head a little higher, grew a little calmer: "What do I care? I want you to back up."

The conductor was reduced to a wet rag, a feeble echo: "Back up--the train up?"

"Yes, back the train up," Marjorie answered, resolutely, "and go slowly till I tell you to stop."

The conductor stared at her a moment, then whirled on Mallory: "Say, what in hell's the matter with your wife?"

Mallory was saved from the problem of answering by Marjorie's abrupt change from a young Tsarina rebuking a serf, to a terrified mother. She flung out imploring palms and with a gush of tears pleaded: "Won't you please back up? My darling child fell off the train."

The conductor's rage fell away in an instant. "Your child fell off the train!" he gasped. "Good Lord! How old was he?"

With one hand he was groping for the bell cord to give the signal, with the other he opened the door to look back along the track.

"He was two years old," Marjorie sobbed.

"Oh, that's too bad!" the conductor groaned. "What did he look like?"

"He had a pink ribbon round his neck."

"A pink ribbon--oh, the poor little fellow! the poor little fellow!"

"And a long curly tail."

The conductor swung round with a yell: "A curly tail!--your son?"

"My dog!" Marjorie roared back at him.

The conductor's voice cracked weakly as he shrieked: "Your dog! You stopped this train for a fool dog?"

"He wasn't a fool dog," Marjorie retorted, facing him down, "he knows more than you do."

The conductor threw up his hands: "Well, don't you women beat----" He studied Marjorie as if she were some curious freak of nature. Suddenly an idea struck into his daze: "Say, what kind of a dog was it?--a measly little cheese-hound?"

"He was a noble, beautiful soul with wonderful eyes and adorable ears."

The conductor was growing weaker and weaker: "Well, don't worry. I got him. He's in the baggage car."

Marjorie stared at him unbelievably. The news seemed too gloriously beautiful to be true. "He isn't dead--Snoozleums is not dead!" she cried, "he lives! He lives! You have saved him." And once more she flung herself upon the conductor. He tried to bat her off like a gnat, and Mallory came to his rescue by dragging her away and shoving her into a chair.

But she saw only the noble conductor: "Oh, you dear, good, kind angel. Get him at once."

"He stays in the baggage car," the conductor answered, firmly and as he supposed, finally.

"But Snoozleums doesn't like baggage cars," Marjorie smiled. "He won't ride in one."

"He'll ride in this one or I'll wring his neck."

"You fiend in human flesh!" Marjorie shrank away from him in horror, and he found courage to seize the bell rope and yank it viciously with a sardonic: "Please, may I start this train?"

The whistle tooted faintly. The bell began to hammer, the train to creak and writhe and click. The conductor pulled his cap down hard and started forward. Marjorie seized his sleeve: "Oh, I implore you, don't consign that poor sweet child to the horrid baggage car. If you have a human heart in your breast, hear my prayer."

The conductor surrendered unconditionally: "Oh, Lord, all right, all right. I'll lose my job, but if you'll keep quiet, I'll bring him to you." And he slunk out meekly, followed by the passengers, who were shaking their heads in wonderment at this most amazing feat of this most amazing bride.

When they were alone once more, Marjorie as radiant as April after a storm, turned her sunshiny smile on Mallory:

"Isn't it glorious to have our little Snoozleums alive and well?"

But Mallory was feeling like a March day. He answered with a sleety chill: "You care more for the dog than you do for me."

"Why shouldn't I?" Marjorie answered with wide eyes, "Snoozleums never would have brought me on a wild goose elopement like this. Heaven knows he didn't want to come."

Mallory repeated the indictment: "You love a dog better than you love your husband."

"My what?" Marjorie laughed, then she spoke with lofty condescension: "Harry Mallory, if you're going to be jealous of that dog, I'll never marry you the longest day I live."

"So you'll let a dog come between us?" he demanded.

"I wouldn't give up Snoozleums for a hundred husbands," she retorted.

"I'm glad to know it in time," Mallory said. "You'd better give me back that wedding ring."

Marjorie's heart stopped at this, but her pride was in arms. She drew herself up, slid the ring from her finger, and held it out as if she scorned it: "With pleasure. Good afternoon, Mr. Mallory."

Mallory took it as if it were the merest trifle, bowed and murmured: "Good afternoon, Miss Newton."

He stalked out and she turned her back on him. A casual witness would have said that they were too indifferent to each other even to feel anger. As a matter of romantic fact, each was on fire with love, and aching madly with regret. Each longed for strength to whirl round with outflung arms of reconciliation, and neither could be so brave. And so they parted, each harking back fiercely for one word of recall from the other. But neither spoke, and Marjorie sat staring at nothing through raining eyes, while Mallory strode into the Men's Room as melancholy as Hamlet with Yorick's skull in his hands.

It was their first great quarrel, and they were convinced that the world might as well come to an end.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WOMAN-HATER'S RELAPSE

The observation room was as lonely as a deserted battle-field and Marjorie as doleful as a wounded soldier left behind, and perishing of thirst, when the conductor came back with Snoozleums in his arms.

He regarded with contemptuous awe the petty cause of so great an event as the stopping of the Trans-American. He

expected to see Marjorie receive the returned prodigal with wild rapture, but she didn't even smile when he said:

"Here's your powder-puff."

She just took Snoozleums on her lap, and, looking up with wet eyes and a sad smile, murmured:

"Thank you very much. You're the nicest conductor I ever met. If you ever want another position, I'll see that my father gets you one."

It was like offering the Kaiser a new job, but the conductor swallowed the insult and sought to repay it with irony.

"Thanks. And if you ever want to run this road for a couple of weeks, just let me know."

Marjorie nodded appreciatively and said: "I will. You're very kind."

And that completed the rout of that conductor. He retired in disorder, leaving Marjorie to fondle Snoozleums with a neglectful indifference that would have greatly flattered Mallory, if he could have seen through the partition that divided them.

But he was witnessing with the cynical superiority of an aged and disillusioned man the, to him, childish behavior of Ira Lathrop, an eleventh-hour Orlando.

For just as Mallory moped into the smoking-room at one door, Ira Lathrop swept in at the other, his face rubicund with embarrassment and ecstasy. He had donned an old frock coat with creases like ruts from long exile in his trunk. But he was feeling like an heir apparent; and he startled everybody by his jovial hail:

"Well, boys--er--gentlemen--the drinks are on me. Waiter, take the orders."

Little Jimmie woke with a start, rose hastily to his feet and saluted, saying: "Present! Who said take the orders?"

"I did," said Lathrop, "I'm giving a party. Waiter, take the orders."

"Sarsaparilla," said Dr. Temple, but they howled him down and ordered other things. The porter shook his head sadly: "Nothin' but sof' drinks in Utah, gemmen."

A groan went up from the club-members, and Lathrop groaned loudest of all:

"Well, we've got to drink something. Take the orders. We'll all have sarsaparilla."

Little Jimmie Wellington came to the rescue.

"Don't do anything desperate, gentlemen," he said, with a look of divine philanthropy. "The bar's closed, but Little Jimmie Wellington is here with the life preserver." From his hip-pocket he produced a silver flask that looked to be big enough to carry a regiment through the Alps. It was greeted with a salvo, and Lathrop said to Jimmie: "I apologize for everything I have said--and thought--about you." He turned to the porter: "There ain't any law against giving this away, is there?"

The porter grinned: "Not if you-all bribe the exercise-inspector." And he held out a glass for the bribe, murmuring, "Don't git tired," as it was poured. He set it inside his sanctum and then bustled round with ice-filled glasses and a siphon.

When Little Jimmie offered of the flask to Dr. Temple, the clergyman put out his hand with a politely horrified: "No, thank you."

Lathrop frightened him with a sudden comment: "Look at that gesture! Doc, I'd almost swear you were a parson."

Mallory whirled on him with the eyes of a hawk about to pounce, and "The very idea!" was the best disclaimer Dr. Temple could manage, suddenly finding himself suspected. Ashton put in with, "The only way to disprove it, Doc, is to join us."

The poor old clergyman, too deeply involved in his deception to brave confession now, decided to do and dare all. He stammered, "Er--ah--certainly," and held out his hand for his share of the poison. Little Jimmie winked at the others and almost filled the glass. The innocent doctor bowed his thanks. When the porter reached him and prepared to fill the remainder of the glass from the siphon, the parson waved him aside with a misguided caution:

"No, thanks. I'll not mix them."

Mallory turned away with a sigh: "He takes his straight. He's no parson."

Then they forgot the doctor in curiosity as to Lathrop's sudden spasm of generosity--with Wellington's liquor. Wedgewood voiced the general curiosity when he said:

"What's the old woman-hater up to now?"

"Woman-hater?" laughed Ira. "It's the old story. I'm going to follow Mallory's example--marriage."

"I hope you succeed," said Mallory.

"Wherever did you pick up the bride?" said Wedgewood, mellowing with the long glass in his hand.

"Brides are easy," said Mallory, with surprising cynicism. "Where do you get the parson?"

"Hang the parson," Wedgewood repeated, "Who's the gel?"

"I'll bet I know who she is," Ashton interposed; "it's that nectarine of a damsel who got on at Green River."

"Not the same!" Lathrop roared. "I found my bride blooming here all the while. Girl I used to spark back in Brattleboro, Vermont. I've been vowing for years that I'd live and die an old maid. I've kept my head out of the noose all this time--till I struck this train and met up with Anne. We got to talking over old times--waking up old sentiments. She got on my nerves. I got on hers. Finally I said, 'Aw, hell, let's get married. Save price of one stateroom to China anyway.' She says, 'Damned if I don't!'--or words to that effect."

Mallory broke in with feverish interest: "But you said you were going to get married on this train."

"Nothing easier. Here's How!" and he raised his glass, but Mallory hauled it down to demand: "How? that's what I want to know. How are you going to get married on this parsonless express. Have you got a little minister in your suitcase?"

Ira beamed with added pride as he explained:

"Well, you see, when I used to court Anne I had a rival--Charlie Selby his name was. I thought he cut me out, but he became a clergyman in Utah--Oh, Charlie! I telegraphed him that I was passing through Ogden, and would he come down to the train and marry me to a charming lady. He always wanted to marry Anne. I thought it would be a durned good joke to let him marry her--to me."

"D-did he accept?" Mallory asked, excitedly, "is he coming?"

"He is--he did--here's his telegram," said Ira. "He brings the license and the ring." He passed it over, and as Mallory read it a look of hope spread across his face. But Ira was saying: "We're going to have the wedding obsequies right here in this car. You're all invited. Will you come?"

There was a general yell of acceptance and Ashton began to sing, "There was I waiting at the church." Then he led a sort of Indian war-dance round the next victim of the matrimonial stake. At the end of the hullabaloo all the men charged their glasses, and drained them with an uproarious "How!"

Poor Doctor Temple had taken luxurious delight in the success of his disguise and in the prospect of watching some other clergyman working while he rested. He joined the dance as gaily, if not as gracefully, as any of the rest, and in a final triumph of recklessness, he tossed off a bumper of straight whisky.

Instantly his "How!" changed to "Wow!" and then his throat clamped fast with a terrific spasm that flung the tears from his eyes. He bent and writhed in a silent paroxysm till he was pounded and shaken back to life and water poured down his throat to reopen a passage.

The others thought he had merely choked and made no comment other than sympathy. They could not have dreamed that the old "physician" was as ignorant of the taste as of the vigor of pure spirits.

After a riot of handshaking and good wishes, Ira was permitted to escape with his life. Mallory followed him to the vestibule, where he caught him by the sleeve with an anxious:

"Excuse me."

"Well, my boy----"

"Your minister--after you get through with him--may I use him?"

"May you--what? Why do you want a minister?"

"To get married."

"Again? Good Lord, are you a Mormon?"

"Me a Mormon!"

"Then what do you want with an extra wife? It's against the law--even in Utah."

"You don't understand."

"My boy, one of us is disgracefully drunk."

"Well, I'm not," said Mallory, and then after a fierce inner debate, he decided to take Lathrop into his confidence. The words came hard after so long a duplicity, but at last they were out:

"Mr. Lathrop, I'm not really married to my wife."

"You young scoundrel!"

But his fury changed to pity when he heard the history of Mallory's ill-fated efforts, and he promised not only to lend Mallory his minister at secondhand, but also to keep the whole affair a secret, for Mallory explained his intention of having his own ceremony in the baggage-car, or somewhere out of sight of the other passengers.

Mallory's face was now aglow as the cold embers of hope leaped into sudden blaze. He wrung Lathrop's hand, saying: "Lord love you, you've saved my life--wife--both."

Then he turned and ran to Marjorie with the good news. He had quite forgotten their epoch-making separation. And she was so glad to see him smiling at her again that she forgot it, too. He came tearing into the observation room and took her by the shoulders, whispering: "Oh, Marjorie, Marjorie, I've got him! I've got him!"

"No, I've got him," she said, swinging Snoozleums into view.

Mallory swung him back out of the way: "I don't mean a poodle, I mean a parson. I've got a parson."

"No! I can't believe it! Where is he?" She began to dance with delight, but she stopped when he explained:

"Well, I haven't got him yet, but I'm going to get one."

"What--again?" she groaned, weary of this old bunco game of hope.

"It's a real live one this time," Mallory insisted. "Mr. Lathrop has ordered a minister and he's going to lend him to me as soon as he's through with him, and we'll be married on this train."

Marjorie was overwhelmed, but she felt it becoming in her to be a trifle coy. So she pouted: "But you won't want me for a bride now. I'm such a fright."

He took the bait, hook and all: "I never saw you looking so adorable."

"Honestly? Oh, but it will be glorious to be Mrs. First Lieutenant Mallory."

"Glorious!"

"I must telegraph home--and sign my new name. Won't mamma be pleased?"

"Won't she?" said Mallory, with just a trace of dubiety.

Then Marjorie grew serious with a new idea: "I wonder if mamma and papa have missed me yet?"

Mallory laughed: "After three days' disappearance, I shouldn't be surprised."

"Perhaps they are worrying about me."

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"The poor dears! I'd better write them a telegram at once."

"An excellent idea."

She ran to the desk, found blank forms and then paused with knitted brow: "It will be very hard to say all I've got to say in ten words."

"Hang the expense," Mallory sniffed magnificently, "I'm paying your bills now."

But Marjorie tried to look very matronly: "Send a night letter in the day time! No, indeed, we must begin to economize."

Mallory was touched by this new revelation of her future housewifely thrift. He hugged her hard and reminded her that she could send a day-letter by wire.

"An excellent idea," she said. "Now, don't bother me. You go on and read your paper, read about Mattie. I'll never be jealous of her--him--of anybody--again."

"You shall never have cause for jealousy, my own."

But fate was not finished with the initiation of the unfortunate pair, and already new trouble was strolling in their direction.

CHAPTER XXIX JEALOUSY COMES ABOARD

There was an air of domestic peace in the observation room, where Mallory and Marjorie had been left to themselves for some time. But the peace was like the ominous hush that precedes a tempest.

Mallory was so happy with everything coming his way, that he was even making up with Snoozleums, stroking the tatted coat with one hand and holding up his newspaper with the other. He did not know all that was coming his way. The blissful silence was broken first by Marjorie:

"How do you spell Utah?--with a y?"

"Utah begins with You," he said--and rather liked his wit, listened for some recognition, and rose to get it, but she waved him away.

"Don't bother me, honey. Can't you see I'm busy?"

He kissed her hair and sauntered back, dividing his attention between Snoozleums and the ten-inning game.

And now there was a small commotion in the smoking room. Through the glass along the corridor the men caught sight of the girl who had got on at Green River. Ashton saw her first and she saw him.

"There she goes," Ashton hissed to the others, "look quick! There's the nectarine."

"My word! She's a little bit of all right, isn't she?"

Even Dr. Temple stared at her with approval: "Dear little thing, isn't she?"

The girl, very consciously unconscious of the admiration, moved demurely along, with eyes downcast, but at such an angle that she could take in the sensation she was creating; she went along picking up stares as if they were bouquets.

Her demeanor was a remarkable compromise between outrageous flirtation and perfect respectability. But she was looking back so intently that when she moved into the observation room she walked right into the newspaper Mallory was holding out before him.

Both said: "I beg your pardon."

When Mallory lowered the paper, both stared till their eyes almost popped. Her amazement was one of immediate rapture. He looked as if he would have been much obliged for a volcanic crater to sink into.

"Harry!" she gasped, and let fall her handbag.

"Kitty!" he gasped, and let fall his newspaper. Both bent, he handed her the newspaper and tossed the handbag into a chair; saw his mistake, withdrew the newspaper and proffered her Snoozleums. Marjorie stopped writing, pen poised in air, as if she had suddenly been petrified.

The newcomer was the first to speak. She fairly gushed: "Harry Mallory--of all people."

"Kitty! Kathleen! Miss Llewellyn!"

"Just to think of meeting you again."

"Just to think of it."

"And on this train of all places."

"On this train of all places!"

"Oh, Harry, Harry!"

"Oh, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty!"

"You dear fellow, it's so long since I saw you last."

"So long."

"It was at that last hop at West Point, remember?--why, it seems only yesterday, and how well you are looking. You are well, aren't you?"

"Not very." He was mopping his brow in anguish, and yet the room seemed strangely cold.

"Of course you look much better in your uniform. You aren't wearing your uniform, are you?"

"No, this is not my uniform."

"You haven't left the army, have you?"

"I don't know yet."

"Don't ever do that. You are just beautiful in brass buttons."

"Thanks."

"Harry!"

"What's the matter now?"

"This tie, this green tie, isn't this the one I knitted you?"

"I am sure I don't know, I borrowed it from the conductor."

"Don't you remember? I did knit you one."

"Did you? I believe you did! I think I wore it out."

"Oh, you fickle boy. But see what I have. What's this?"

He stared through the glassy eyes of complete helplessness. "It looks like a bracelet."

"Don't tell me you don't remember this!--the little bangle bracelet you gave me."

"D-did I give you a baygled branglet?"

"Of course you did. And the inscription. Don't you remember it?"

She held her wrist in front of his aching eyes and he perused as if it were his own epitaph, what she read aloud for him. "*From Harry to Kitty, the Only Girl I Ever Loved.*"

"Good night!" he sighed to himself, and began to mop his brow with Snoozleums.

"You put it on my arm," said Kathleen, with a moonlight sigh, "and I've always worn it."

"Always?"

"Always! no matter whom I was engaged to."

The desperate wretch, who had not dared even to glance in Marjorie's direction, somehow thought he saw a straw of self-defense. "You were engaged to three or four others when I was at West Point."

"I may have been engaged to the others," said Kathleen, moon-eyeing him, "but I always liked you best, Clifford--er, Tommy--I mean Harry."

"You got me at last."

Kathleen fenced back at this: "Well, I've no doubt you have had a dozen affairs since."

"Oh, no! My heart has only known one real love." He threw this over her head at Marjorie, but Kathleen seized it, to his greater confusion: "Oh, Harry, how sweet of you to say it. It makes me feel positively faint," and she swooned his way, but he shoved a chair forward and let her collapse into that. Thinking and hoping that she was unconscious, he made ready to escape, but she caught him by the coat, and moaned: "Where am I?" and he growled back:

"In the Observation Car!"

Kathleen's life and enthusiasm returned without delay: "Fancy meeting you again! I could just scream."

"So could I."

"You must come up in our car and see mamma."

"Is Ma-mamma with you?" Mallory stammered, on the verge of imbecility.

"Oh, yes, indeed, we're going around the world."

"Don't let me detain you."

"Papa is going round the world also."

"Is papa on this train, too?"

At last something seemed to embarrass her a trifle: "No, papa went on ahead. Mamma hopes to overtake him. But papa is a very good traveler."

Then she changed the subject. "Do come and meet mamma. It would cheer her up so. She is so fond of you. Only this morning she was saying, 'Of all the boys you were ever engaged to, Kathleen, the one I like most of all was Edgar--I mean Clarence--er--Harry Mallory.'"

"Awfully kind of her."

"You must come and see her--she's some stouter now!"

"Oh, is she? Well, that's good."

Mallory was too angry to be sane, and too helpless to take advantage of his anger. He wondered how he could ever have cared for this molasses and mucilage girl. He remembered now that she had always had these same cloying ways. She had always pawed him and, like everybody but the pawers, he hated pawing.

It would have been bad enough at any time to have Kathleen hanging on his coat, straightening his tie, leaning close, smiling up in his eyes, losing him his balance, recapturing him every time he edged away. But with Marjorie as the grim witness it was maddening.

He loathed and abominated Kathleen Llewellyn, and if she had only been a man, he could cheerfully have beaten her to a pulp and chucked her out of the window. But because she was a helpless little baggage, he had to be as polite as he could while she sat and tore his plans to pieces, embittered Marjorie's heart against him, and either ended all hopes of their marriage, or furnished an everlasting rancor to be recalled in every quarrel to their dying day. Oh, etiquette, what injustices are endured in thy name!

So there he sat, sweating his soul's blood, and able only to spar for time and wonder when the gong would ring. And now she was off on a new tack:

"And where are you bound for, Harry, dear?"

"The Philippines," he said, and for the first time there was something beautiful in their remoteness.

"Perhaps we shall cross the Pacific on the same boat."

The first sincere smile he had experienced came to him: "I go on an army transport, fortu--unfortunately."

"Oh, I just love soldiers. Couldn't mamma and I go on the transport? Mamma is very fond of soldiers, too."

"I'm afraid it couldn't be arranged."

"Too bad, but perhaps we can stop off and pay you a visit. I just love army posts. So does mamma."

"Oh, do!"

"What will be your address?"

"Just the Philippines--just the Philippines."

"But aren't there quite a few of them?"

"Only about two thousand."

"Which one will you be on?"

"I'll be on the third from the left," said Mallory, who neither knew nor cared what he was saying. Marjorie had endured all that she could stand. She rose in a tightly leashed fury.

"I'm afraid I'm in the way."

Kathleen turned in surprise. She had not noticed that anyone was near. Mallory went out of his head completely. "Oh, don't go--for heaven's sake don't go," he appealed to Marjorie.

"A friend of yours?" said Kathleen, bristling.

"No, not a friend," in a chaotic tangle, "Mrs.--Miss--Miss--Er--er--er----"

Kathleen smiled: "Delighted to meet you, Miss Ererer."

"The pleasure is all mine," Marjorie said, with an acid smile.

"Have you known Harry long?" said Kathleen, jealously, "or are you just acquaintances on the train?"

"We're just acquaintances on the train!"

"I used to know Harry very well--very well indeed."

"So I should judge. You won't mind if I leave you to talk over old times together?"

"How very sweet of you."

"Oh, don't mention it."

"But, Marjorie," Mallory cried, as she turned away. Kathleen started at the ardor of his tone, and gasped: "Marjorie! Then he--you----"

"Not at all--not in the least," said Marjorie.

At this crisis the room was suddenly inundated with people. Mrs. Whitcomb, Mrs. Wellington, Mrs. Temple and Mrs. Fosdick, all trying to look like bridesmaids, danced in, shouting:

"Here they come! Make way for the bride and groom!"

CHAPTER XXX **A WEDDING ON WHEELS**

The commotion of the matrimony-mad women brought the men trooping in from the smoking room and there was much circumstance of decorating the scene with white satin ribbons, a trifle crumpled and dim of luster. Mrs. Whitcomb waved them at Mallory with a laugh:

"Recognize these?"

He nodded dismally. His own funeral baked meats were coldly furnishing forth a wedding breakfast for Ira Lathrop. Mrs. Wellington was moving about distributing kazoos and Mrs. Temple had an armload of old shoes, some of which

had thumped Mallory on an occasion which seemed so ancient as to be almost prehistoric.

Fosdick was howling to the porter to get some rice, quick!

"How many portions does you approximate?"

"All you've got."

"Boiled or fried?"

"Any old way." The porter ran forward to the dining-car for the ammunition.

Mrs. Temple whispered to her husband: "Too bad you're not officiating, Walter." But he cautioned silence:

"Hush! I'm on my vacation."

The train was already coming into Ogden. Noises were multiplying and from the increase of passing objects, the speed seemed to be taking on a spurt. The bell was clamoring like a wedding chime in a steeple.

Mrs. Wellington was on a chair fastening a ribbon round one of the lamps, and Mrs. Whitcomb was on another chair braiding the bell rope with withered orange branches, when Ashton, with kazoo all ready, called out:

"What tune shall we play?"

"I prefer the Mendelssohn Wedding March," said Mrs. Whitcomb, but Mrs. Wellington glared across at her.

"I've always used the Lohengrin."

"We'll play 'em both," said Dr. Temple, to make peace.

Mrs. Fosdick murmured to her spouse: "The old Justice of the Peace didn't give us any music at all," and received in reward one of his most luscious-eyed looks, and a whisper: "But he gave us each other."

"Now and then," she pouted.

"But where are the bride and groom?"

"Here they come--all ready," cried Ashton, and he beat time while some of the guests kazooed at Mendelssohn's and some Wagner's bridal melodies, and others just made a noise.

Ira Lathrop and Anne Gattle, looking very sheepish, crowded through the narrow corridor and stood shamefacedly blushing like two school children about to sing a duet.

The train jolted to a dead stop. The conductor called into the car: "Ogden! All out for Ogden!" and everybody stood watching and waiting.

Ira, seeing Mallory, edged close and whispered: "Stand by to catch the minister on the rebound."

But Mallory turned away. What use had he now for ministers? His plans were shattered ruins.

The porter came flying in with two large bowls of rice, and shouting, "Here comes the 'possum--er posson." Seeing Marjorie, he said: "Shall I perambulate Mista Snoozleums?"

She handed the porter her only friend and he hurried out, as a lean and professionally sad ascetic hurried in. He did not recognize his boyish enemy in the gray-haired, red-faced giant that greeted him, but he knew that voice and its gloating irony:

"Hello, Charlie."

He had always found that when Ira grinned and was cordial, some trouble was in store for him. He wondered what rock Ira held behind his back now, but he forced an uneasy cordiality: "And is this you, Ira? Well, well! It is yeahs since last we met. And you're just getting married. Is this the first time, Ira?"

"First offense, Charlie."

The levity shocked Selby, but a greater shock was in store, for when he inquired: "And who is the--er--happy--bride?" the triumphant Lathrop snickered: "I believe you used to know her. Anne Gattle."

This was the rock behind Ira's back, and Selby took it with a wince: "Not--my old----"

"The same. Anne, you remember, Charlie."

"Oh, yes," said Anne, "How do you do, Charlie?" And she put out a shy hand, which he took with one still shy. He was so unsettled that he stammered: "Well, well, I had always hoped to marry you, Anne, but not just this way."

Lathrop cut him short with a sharp: "Better get busy--before the train starts. And I'll pay you in advance before you set off the fireworks."

The flippancy pained the Rev. Charles, but he was resuscitated by one glance at the bill that Ira thrust into his palm. If a man's gratitude for his wife is measured by the size of the fee he hands the enabling parson, Ira was madly in love with Anne. The Rev. Charles had a reminiscent suspicion that it was probably a counterfeit, but for once he did Ira an injustice.

The minister was in such a flutter from losing his boyhood love, and gaining so much money all at once and from performing the marriage on a train, that he made numerous errors in the ceremony, but nobody noticed them, and the spirit, if not the letter of the occasion, was there and the contract was doubtless legal enough.

The ritual began with the pleasant murmur of the preacher's voice, and the passengers crowded round in a solemn calm, which was suddenly violated by a loud yelp of laughter from Wedgewood, who emitted guffaw after guffaw and bent double and opened out again, like an agitated umbrella.

The wedding-guests turned on him visages of horror, and hissed silence at him. Ashton seized him, shook him, and muttered:

"What the--what's the matter with you?"

The Englishman shook like a boy having a spasm of giggles at a funeral, and blurted out the explanation:

"That story about the bridegroom--I just saw the point!"

Ashton closed his jaw by brute force and watched over him through the rest of the festivity.

CHAPTER XXXI FOILED YET AGAIN

Mallory had fled from the scene at the first hum of the minister's words. His fate was like alkali on his palate. For twelve hundred miles he had ransacked the world for a minister. When one dropped on the train like manna through the roof, even this miracle had to be checkmated by a perverse miracle that sent to the train an early infatuation, a silly affair that he himself called puppy-love. And now Marjorie would never marry him. He did not blame her. He blamed fate.

He was in solitude in the smoking room. The place reeked with drifting tobacco smoke and the malodor of cigar stubs and cigarette ends. His plans were as useless and odious as cigarette ends. He dropped into a chair his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands--Napoleon on St. Helena.

And then, suddenly he heard Marjorie's voice. He turned and saw her hesitating in the doorway. He rose to welcome her, but the smile died on his lips at her chilly speech:

"May I have a word with you, sir?"

"Of course. The air's rather thick in here," he apologized.

"Just wait!" she said, ominously, and stalked in like a young Zenobia. He put out an appealing hand: "Now, Marjorie, listen to reason. Of course I know you won't marry me now."

"Oh, you know that, do you?" she said, with a squared jaw.

"But, really, you ought to marry me--not merely because I love you--and you're the only girl I ever----" He stopped short and she almost smiled as she taunted him: "Go on--I dare you to say it."

He swallowed hard and waived the point: "Well, anyway, you ought to marry me--for your own sake."

Then she took his breath away by answering: "Oh, I'm going to marry you, never fear."

"You are," he cried, with a rush of returning hope. "Oh, I knew you loved me."

She pushed his encircling arms aside: "I don't love you, and that's why I'm going to marry you."

"But I don't understand."

"Of course not," she sneered, as if she were a thousand years old, "you're only a man--and a very young man."

"You've ceased to love me," he protested, "just because of a little affair I had before I met you?"

Marjorie answered with world-old wisdom: "A woman can forgive a man anything except what he did before he met her."

He stared at her with masculine dismay at feminine logic: "If you can't forgive me, then why do you marry me?"

"For revenge!" she cried. "You brought me on this train all this distance to introduce me to a girl you used to spoon with. And I don't like her. She's awful!"

"Yes, she is awful," Mallory assented. "I don't know how I ever----"

"Oh, you admit it!"

"No."

"Well, I'm going to marry you--now--this minute--with that preacher, then I'm going to get off at Reno and divorce you."

"Divorce me! Good Lord! On what grounds?"

"On the grounds of Miss Kitty--Katty--Llewellington--or whatever her name is."

Mallory was groggy with punishment, and the vain effort to foresee her next blow. "But you can't name a woman that way," he pleaded, "for just being nice to me before I ever met you."

"That's the worst kind of unfaithfulness," she reiterated. "You should have known that some day you would meet me. You should have saved your first love for me."

"But last love is best," Mallory interposed, weakly.

"Oh, no, it isn't, and if it is, how do I know I'm to be your last love? No, sir, when I've divorced you, you can go back to your first love and go round the world with her till you get dizzy."

"But I don't want her for a wife," Mallory urged, "I want you."

"You'll get me--but not for long. And one other thing, I want you to get that bracelet away from that creature. Do you promise?"

"How can I get it away?"

"Take it away! Do you promise?"

Mallory surrendered completely. Anything to get Marjorie safely into his arms: "I promise anything, if you'll really marry me."

"Oh, I'll marry you, sir, but not really."

And while he stared in helpless awe at the cynic and termagant that jealousy had metamorphosed this timid, clinging creature into, they heard the conductor's voice at the rear door of the car: "Hurry up--we've got to start."

They heard Lathrop's protest: "Hold on there, conductor," and Selby's plea: "Oh, I say, my good man, wait a moment, can't you?"

The conductor answered with the gruffness of a despot: "Not a minute. I've my orders to make up lost time. All aboard!"

While the minister was tying the last loose ends of the matrimonial knot, Mallory and Marjorie were struggling through the crowd to get at him. Just as they were near, they were swept aside by the rush of the bride and groom, for the parson's "I pronounce you man and wife," pronounced as he backed toward the door, was the signal for another wedding riot.

Once more Ira and Anne were showered with rice. This time it was their own. Ira darted out into the corridor, haling his brand-new wife by the wrist, and the wedding guests pursued them across the vestibule, through the next car, and on, and on.

Nobody remained to notice what happened to the parson. Having performed his function, he was without further interest or use. But to Mallory and Marjorie he was vitally necessary.

Mallory caught his hand as it turned the knob of the door and drew him back. Marjorie, equally determined, caught his other elbow:

"Please don't go," Mallory urged, "until you've married us."

The Reverend Charles stared at his captors in amazement:

"But my dear man, the train's moving."

Marjorie clung all the tighter and invited him to "Come on to the next stop."

"But my dear lady," Selby gasped, "it's impossible."

"You've just got to," Mallory insisted.

"Release me, please."

"Never!"

"How dare you!" the parson shrieked, and with a sudden wriggle writhed out of his coat, leaving it in Marjorie's hands. He darted to the door and flung it open, with Mallory hot after him.

The train was kicking up a cloud of dust and getting its stride. The kidnapped clergyman paused a moment, aghast at the speed with which the ground was being paid out. Then he climbed the brass rail and, with a hasty prayer, dropped overboard.

Mallory lunged at him, and seized him by his reversed collar. But the collar alone remained in his clutch. The parson was almost lost in the dust he created as he struck, bounded and rolled till he came to a stop, with his stars and his prayers to thank for injuries to nothing worse than his dignity and other small clothes.

Mallory returned to the observation room and flung the collar and bib to the floor in a fury of despair, howling:

"He got away! He got away!"

CHAPTER XXXII THE EMPTY BERTH

The one thing Mallory was beginning to learn about Marjorie was that she would never take the point of view he expected, and never proceed along the lines of his logic.

She had grown furious at him for what he could not help. She had told him that she would marry him out of spite. She had commanded him to pursue and apprehend the flying parson. He failed and returned crestfallen and wondering what new form her rage would take.

And, lo and behold, when she saw him so downcast and helpless, she rushed to him with caresses, cuddled his broad shoulders against her breast, and smothered him. It was the sincerity of his dejection and the complete helplessness he displayed that won her woman's heart.

Mallory gazed at her with almost more wonderment than delight. This was another flashlight on her character. Most courtships are conducted under a rose-light in which wooer and wooed wear their best clothes or their best behavior; or in a starlit, moonlit, or gaslit twilight where romance softens angles and wraps everything in velvet shadow. Then the two get married and begin to live together in the cold, gray daylight of realism, with undignified necessities and harrowing situations at every step, and disillusion begins its deadly work.

This young couple was undergoing all the inconveniences and temper-exposures of marriage without its blessed compensations. They promised to be well acquainted before they were wed. If they still wanted each other after this ordeal, they were pretty well assured that their marriage would not be a failure.

Mallory rejoiced to see that the hurricane of Marjorie's jealousy had only whipped up the surface of her soul. The great depths were still calm and unmoved, and her love for him was in and of the depths.

Soon after leaving Ogden, the train entered upon the great bridge across the Great Salt Lake. The other passengers were staring at the enormous engineering masterpiece and the conductor was pointing out that, in order to save forty miles and the crossing of two mountain chains, the railroad had devoted four years of labor and millions of dollars to stretching a thirty-mile bridge across this inland ocean.

But Marjorie and Mallory never noticed it. They were absorbed in exploring each other's souls, and they had safely bridged the Great Salt Lake which the first big bitter jealousy spreads across every matrimonial route.

They were undisturbed in their voyage, for all the other passengers had their noses flattened against the window panes of the other cars--all except one couple, gazing each at each through time-wrinkled eyelids touched with the magic of a tardy honeymoon.

For all that Anne and Ira knew, the Great Salt Lake was a moon-swept lagoon, and the arid mountains of Nevada which the train went scaling, were the very hillsides of Arcadia.

But the other passengers soon came trooping back into the observation room. Ira had told them nothing of Mallory's confession. In the first place, he was a man who had learned to keep a secret, and in the second place, he had forgotten that such persons as Mallory or his Marjorie existed. All the world was summed up in the fearsomely happy little spinster who had moved up into his section--the section which had begun its career draped in satin ribbons unwittingly prophetic.

The communion of Mallory and Marjorie under the benison of reconciliation was invaded by the jokes of the other passengers, unconsciously ironic.

Dr. Temple chaffed them amiably: "You two will have to take a back seat now. We've got a new bridal couple to amuse us."

And Mrs. Temple welcomed them with: "You're only old married folks, like us."

The Mallorys were used to the misunderstanding. But the misplaced witticisms gave them reassurance that their secret was safe yet a little while. At their dinner-table, however, and in the long evening that followed they were haunted by the fact that this was their last night on the train, and no minister to be expected.

And now once more the Mallorys regained the star roles in the esteem of the audience, for once more they quarreled at good-night-kissing time. Once more they required two sections, while Anne Gattle's berth was not even made up. It remained empty, like a deserted nest, for its occupant had flown South.

CHAPTER XXXIII FRESH TROUBLE DAILY

The following morning the daylight creeping into section number one found Ira and Anne staring at each other. Ira was tousled and Anne was unkempt, but her blush still gave her cheek at least an Indian summer glow.

After a violent effort to reach the space between her shoulder blades, she was compelled to appeal to her new master to act as her new maid.

"Oh, Mr. Lathrop," she stammered--"Ira," she corrected, "won't you please hook me up?" she pleaded.

Ira beamed with a second childhood boyishness: "I'll do my best, my little ootsum-tootsums, it's the first time I ever tried it."

"Oh, I'm so glad," Anne sighed, "it's the first time I ever was hooked up by a gentleman."

He gurgled with joy and, forgetting the poverty of space, tried to reach her lips to kiss her. He almost broke her neck and bumped his head so hard that instead of saying, as he intended, "My darling," he said, "Oh, hell!"

"Ira!" she gasped. But he, with all the proprietorship he had assumed, answered cheerily: "You'll have to get used to it, ducky darling. I could never learn not to swear." He proved the fact again and again by the remarks he addressed to certain refractory hooks. He apologized, but she felt more like apologizing for herself.

"Oh, Ira," she said, "I'm so ashamed to have you see me like this--the first morning."

"Well, you haven't got anything on me--I'm not shaved."

"You don't have to tell me that," she said, rubbing her smarting cheek. Then she bumped her head and gasped: "Oh--what you said."

This made them feel so much at home that she attained the heights of frankness and honesty by reaching in her handbag for a knob of supplementary hair, which she affixed dextrously to what was homegrown. Ira, instead of looking shocked, loved her for her honesty, and grinned:

"Now, that's where you have got something on me. Say, we're like a couple of sardines trying to make love in a tin can."

"It's cosy though," she said, and then vanished through the curtains and shyly ran the gauntlet of amused glances and over-cordial "Good mornings" till she hid her blushes behind the door of the women's room and turned the key. If she had thought of it she would have said, "God bless the man that invented doors--and the other angel that invented locks."

The passengers this morning were all a little brisker than usual. It was the last day aboard for everybody and they showed a certain extra animation, like the inmates of an ocean liner when land has been sighted.

Ashton was shaving when Ira swaggered into the men's room. Without pausing to note whom he was addressing, Ashton sang out:

"Good morning. Did you rest well?"

"What!" Ira roared.

"Oh, excuse me!" said Ashton, hastily, devoting himself to a gash his safety razor had made in his cheek--even in that cheek of his.

Ira scrubbed out the basin, filled it and tried to dive into it, slapping the cold water in double handfuls over his glowing face and puffing through it like a porpoise.

Meanwhile the heavy-eyed Fosdick was slinking through the dining-car, regarded with amazement by Dr. Temple and his wife, who were already up and breakfasting.

"What's the matter with the bridal couples on this train, anyway?" said Dr. Temple.

"I can't imagine," said his wife, "we old couples are the only normal ones."

"Some more coffee, please, mother," he said.

"But your nerves," she protested.

"It's my vacation," he insisted.

Mrs. Temple stared at him and shook her head: "I wonder what mischief you'll be up to to-day? You've already been smoking, gambling, drinking--have you been swearing, yet?"

"Not yet," the old clergyman smiled, "I've been saving that up for a good occasion. Perhaps it will rise before the day's over."

And his wife choked on her tea at the wonderful train-change that had come over the best man in Ypsilanti.

By this time Fosdick had reached the stateroom from which he had been banished again at the Nevada state-line. He knocked cautiously. From within came an anxious voice: "Who's there?"

"Whom did you expect?"

Mrs. Fosdick popped her head out like a Jill in the box. "Oh, it's you, Arthur. Kiss me good morning."

He glanced round stealthily and obeyed instructions: "I guess its safe--my darling."

"Did you sleep, dovie?" she yawned.

"Not a wink. They took off the Portland car at Granger and I had to sleep in one of the chairs in the observation room."

Mrs. Fosdick shook her head at him in mournful sympathy, and asked: "What state are we in now?"

"A dreadful state--Nevada."

"Just what are we in Nevada?"

"I'm a bigamist, and you've never been married at all."

"Oh, these awful divorce laws!" she moaned, then left the general for the particular: "Won't you come in and hook me up?"

Fosdick looked shocked: "I don't dare compromise you."

"Will you take breakfast with me--in the dining-car?" she pleaded.

"Do we dare?"

"We might call it luncheon," she suggested.

He seized the chance: "All right, I'll go ahead and order, and you stroll in and I'll offer you the seat opposite me."

"But can't you hook me up?"

He was adamant: "Not till we get to California. Do you think I want to compromise my own wife? Shh! Somebody's coming!" And he darted off to the vestibule just as Mrs. Jimmie Wellington issued from number ten with hair askew, eyes only half open, and waist only half shut at the back. She made a quick spurt to the women's room, found it locked, stamped her foot, swore under her breath, and leaned against the wall of the car to wait.

About the same time, the man who was still her husband according to the law, rolled out of berth number two. There was an amazing clarity to his vision. He lurched as he made his way to the men's room, but it was plainly the train's swerve and not an inner lurch that twisted the forthright of his progress.

He squeezed into the men's room like a whole crowd at once, and sang out, "Good morning, all!" with a wonderful heartiness. Then he paused over a wash basin, rubbed his hands gleefully and proclaimed, like another Chantecler advertising a new day:

"Well--I'm sober again!"

"Three cheers for you," said his rival in radiance, bridegroom Lathrop.

"How does it feel?" demanded Ashton, smiling so broadly that he encountered the lather on his brush.

While he sputtered Wellington was flipping water over his hot head and incidentally over Ashton.

"I feel," he chortled, "I feel like the first little robin redbreast of the merry springtime. Tweet! Tweet!"

When the excitement over his redemption had somewhat calmed, Ashton reopened the old topic of conversation:

"Well, I see they had another scrap last night."

"They--who?" said Ira, through his flying toothbrush.

"The Mallorys. Once more he occupied number three and she number seven."

"Well, well, I can't understand these modern marriages," said Little Jimmie, with a side glance at Ira. Ira suddenly remembered the plight of the Mallorys and was tempted to defend them, but he saw the young lieutenant himself just entering the washroom. This was more than Wellington saw, for he went on talking from behind a towel:

"Well, if I were a bridegroom and had a bride like that, it would take more than a quarrel to send me to another berth."

The others made gestures which he could not see. His enlightenment came when Mallory snapped the towel from his hands and glared into his face with all the righteous wrath of a man hearing his domestic affairs publicly discussed.

"Were you alluding to me, Mr. Wellington?" he demanded, hotly.

Little Jimmie almost perished with apoplexy: "You, you?" he mumbled. "Why, of course not. You're not the only bridegroom on the train."

Mallory tossed him the towel again: "You meant Mr. Lathrop then?"

"Me! Not much!" roared the indignant Lathrop.

Mallory returned to Wellington with a fiercer: "Whom, then?"

He was in a dangerous mood, and Ashton came to the rescue: "Oh, don't mind Wellington. He's not sober yet."

This inspired suggestion came like a life-buoy to the hard-pressed Wellington. He seized it and spoke thickly: "Don't mind me--I'm not sober yet."

"Well, it's a good thing you're not," was Mallory's final growl as he began his own toilet.

The porter's bell began to ring furiously, with a touch they had already come to recognize as the Englishman's. The porter had learned to recognize it, too, and he always took double the necessary time to answer it. He was sauntering down the aisle at his most leisurely gait when Wedgewood's ruffled mane shot out from the curtains like a lion's from a jungle, and he bellowed: "Pawtah! Pawtah!"

"Still on the train," said the porter.

"You may give me my portmanteau."

"Yassah." He dragged it from the upper berth, and set it inside Wedgewood's berth without special care as to its destination. "Does you desire anything else, sir?"

"Yes, your absence," said Wedgewood.

"The same to you and many of them," the porter muttered to himself, and added to Marjorie, who was just starting down the aisle: "I'll suttainly be interested in that man gittin' where he's goin' to git to." Noting that she carried Snoozleums, he said: "We're comin' into a station right soon." Without further discussion she handed him the dog, and he hobbled away.

When she reached the women's door, she found Mrs. Wellington waiting with increasing exasperation: "Come, join the line at the box office," she said.

"Good morning. Who's in there?" said Marjorie, and Mrs. Wellington, not noting that Mrs. Whitcomb had come out of her berth and fallen into line, answered sharply:

"I don't know. She's been there forever. I'm sure it's that cat of a Mrs. Whitcomb."

"Good morning, Mrs. Mallory," snapped Mrs. Whitcomb.

Mrs. Wellington was rather proud that the random shot landed, but Marjorie felt most uneasy between the two tigresses: "Good morning, Mrs. Whitcomb," she said. There was a disagreeable silence, broken finally by Mrs. Wellington's: "Oh, Mrs. Mallory, would you be angelic enough to hook my gown?"

"Of course I will," said Marjorie.

"May I hook you?" said Mrs. Whitcomb.

"You're awfully kind," said Marjorie, presenting her shoulders to Mrs. Whitcomb, who asked with malicious sweetness: "Why didn't your husband do this for you this morning?"

"I--I don't remember," Marjorie stammered, and Mrs. Wellington tossed over-shoulder an apothegm: "He's no husband till he's hook-broken."

Just then Mrs. Fosdick came out of her stateroom. Seeing Mrs. Whitcomb's waist agape, she went at it with a brief, "Good morning, everybody. Permit me."

Mrs. Wellington twisted her head to say "Good morning," and to ask, "Are you hooked, Mrs. Fosdick?"

"Not yet," pouted Mrs. Fosdick.

"Turn round and back up," said Mrs. Wellington. After some maneuvering, the women formed a complete circle, and fingers plied hooks and eyes in a veritable Ladies' Mutual Aid Society.

By now, Wedgewood was ready to appear in a bathrobe about as gaudy as the royal standard of Great Britain. He stalked down the aisle, and answered the male chorus's cheery "Good morning" with a ramlike "Baw."

Ira Lathrop felt amiable even toward the foreigner, and he observed: "Glorious morning this morning."

"I dare say," growled Wedgewood. "I don't go in much for mawnings--especially when I have no tub."

Wellington felt called upon to squelch him: "You Englishmen never had a real tub till we Americans sold 'em to you."

"I dare say," said Wedgewood indifferently. "You sell 'em. We use 'em. But, do you know, I've just thought out a ripping idea. I shall have my cold bath this mawning after all."

"What are you going to do?" growled Lathrop. "Crawl in the icewater tank?"

"Oh, dear, no. I shouldn't be let," and he produced from his pocket a rubber hose. "I simply affix this little tube to one end of the spigot and wave the sprinklah hyah over my--er--my person."

Lathrop stared at him pityingly, and demanded: "What happens to the water, then?"

"What do I care?" said Wedgewood.

"You durned fool, you'd flood the car."

Wedgewood's high hopes withered. "I hadn't thought of that," he sighed. "I suppose I must continue just as I am till I reach San Francisco. The first thing I shall order to-night will be four cold tubs and a lemon squash."

While the men continued to make themselves presentable in a huddle, the hook-and-eye society at the other end of the car finished with the four waists and Mrs. Fosdick hurried away to keep her tryst in the dining-car. The three remaining relapsed into dreary attitudes. Mrs. Wellington shook the knob of the forbidding door, and turned to complain: "What in heaven's name ails the creature in there. She must have fallen out of the window."

"It's outrageous," said Marjorie, "the way women violate women's rights."

Mrs. Whitcomb saw an opportunity to insert a stiletto. She observed to Marjorie, with an innocent air: "Why, Mrs. Mallory, I've even known women to lock themselves in there and smoke!"

While Mrs. Wellington was rummaging her brain for a fitting retort, the door opened, and out stepped Miss Gattle, as was.

She blushed furiously at sight of the committee waiting to greet her, but they repented their criticisms and tried to make up for them by the excessive warmth with which they all exclaimed at once: "Good morning, Mrs. Lathrop!"

"Good morning, who?" said Anne, then blushed yet redder: "Oh, I can't seem to get used to that name! I hope I haven't kept you waiting?"

"Oh, not at all!" the women insisted, and Anne fled to number Six, remembered that this was no longer her home, and moved on to number One. Here the porter was just finishing his restoring tasks, and laying aside with some diffidence two garments which Anne hastily stuffed into her own valise.

Meanwhile Marjorie was pushing Mrs. Wellington ahead:

"You go in first, Mrs. Wellington."

"You go first. I have no husband waiting for me," said Mrs. Wellington.

"Oh, I insist," said Marjorie.

"I couldn't think of it," persisted Mrs. Wellington. "I won't allow you."

And then Mrs. Whitcomb pushed them both aside: "Pardon me, won't you? I'm getting off at Reno."

"So am I," gasped Mrs. Wellington, rushing forward, only to be faced by the slam of the door and the click of the key. She whirled back to demand of Marjorie: "Did you ever hear of such impudence?"

"I never did."

"I'll never be ready for Reno," Mrs. Wellington wailed, "and I haven't had my breakfast."

"You'd better order it in advance," said Marjorie. "It takes that chef an hour to boil an egg three minutes."

"I will, if I can ever get my face washed," sighed Mrs. Wellington.

And now Mrs. Anne Lathrop, after much hesitation, called timidly: "Porter--porter--please!"

"Yes--miss--missus!" he amended.

"Will you call my--" she gulped--"my husband?"

"Yes, ma'am," the porter chuckled, and putting his grinning head in at the men's door, he bowed to Ira and said: "Excuse me, but you are sent for by the lady in number One."

Ashton slapped him on the back and roared: "Oh, you married man!"

"Well," said Ira, in self-defence, "I don't hear anybody sending for you." Wedgewood grinned at Ashton. "I rather fancy he had you theah, old top, eh, what?"

Ira appeared at number One, and bending over his treasure-trove, spoke in a voice that was pure saccharine: "Are you ready for breakfast, dear?"

"Yes, Ira."

"Come along to the dining-car."

"It's cosier here," she said. "Couldn't we have it served here?"

"But it'll get all cold, and I'm hungry," pouted the old bachelor, to whom breakfast was a sacred institution.

"All right, Ira," said Anne, glad to be meek; "come along," and she rose.

Ira hesitated. "Still, if you'd rather, we'll eat here." He sat down.

"Oh, not at all," said Anne; "we'll go where you want to go."

"But I want to do what you want to do."

"So do I--we'll go," said Anne.

"We'll stay."

"No, I insist on the dining-car."

"Oh, all right, have your own way," said Ira, as if he were being bullied, and liked it. Anne smiled at the contrariness of men, and Ira smiled at the contrariness of women, and when they reached the vestibule they kissed each other in mutual forgiveness.

As Wedgewood stropped an old-fashioned razor, he said to Ashton, who was putting up his safety equipment: "I say, old party, are those safety razors safe? Can't you really cut yourself?"

"Cut everything but hair," said Ashton, pointing to his wounded chin.

Mallory put out his hand: "Would you be kind enough to lend me your razor again this morning?"

"Sure thing," said Ashton. "You'll find your blade in the box there."

Mallory then negotiated the loan of one more fresh shirt from the Englishman, and a clean collar from Ashton. He rejoiced that the end of the day would bring him in touch with his own baggage. Four days of foraging on the country was enough for this soldier.

Also he felt, now that he and Marjorie had lived thus long, they could survive somehow till evening brought them to San Francisco, where there were hundreds of ministers. And then the conductor must ruin his early morning optimism, though he made his appearance in the washroom with genial good mornings for all.

Mallory acknowledged the greeting, and asked offhandedly: "By the way, how's she running?"

The conductor answered even more offhandedly: "About two hours late--and losin'!"

Mallory was transfixed with a new fear: "Good Lord, my transport sails at sunrise."

"Oh, we ought to make 'Frisco by midnight, anyway."

"Midnight, and sail at daylight!"

"Unless we lose a little more time."

Mallory realized that every new day managed to create its own anxieties. With the regularity of a milkman, each morning left a fresh crisis on his doorstep.

CHAPTER XXXIV THE COMPLETE DIVORCER

The other passengers were growing nervous with their own troubles. The next stop was Reno, and in spite of all the wit that is heaped upon the town, it is a solemn place to those who must go there in purgatorial penance for matrimonial error.

Some honest souls regard such divorce-emporiums as dens of evil, where the wicked make a mockery of the sacrament and assail the foundations of society, by undermining the home. Other equally honest souls, believing that marriage is a human institution whose mishaps and mistakes should be rectified as far as possible, regard the divorce courts as cities of refuge for ill-treated or ill-mated women and men whose lives may be saved from utter ruin by the intervention of high-minded judges.

But, whichever view is right, the ordeal by divorce is terrifying enough to the poor sinners or martyrs who must undergo it.

Little Jimmie Wellington turned pale, and stammered, as he tried to ask the conductor casually:

"What kind of a place is that Reno?"

The conductor, somewhat cynical from close association with the divorce-mill and its grist, grinned: "That depends on what you're leaving behind. Most folks seem to get enough of it in about six months."

Then he went his way, leaving Wellington red, agape and perplexed. The trouble with Wellington was that he had brought along what he was leaving behind. Or, as Ashton impudently observed: "You ought to enjoy your residence there, Wellington, with your wife on hand."

The only repartee that Wellington could think of was a rather uninspired: "You go to ----."

"So long as it isn't Reno," Ashton laughed, and walked away.

Wedgewood laid a sympathetic hand on Little Jimmie's shoulder, and said:

"That Ashton is no end of a bounder, what?"

Wellington wrote his epitaph in these words:

"Well, the worst I can say of him is, he's the kind of man that doesn't lift the plug out when he's through with the basin."

He liked this so well that he wished he had thought of it in time to crack it over Ashton's head. He decided to hand it to him anyway. He forgot that the cardinal rule for repartee, is "Better never than late."

As he swung out of the men's room he was buttonholed by an individual new to the little Trans-American colony. One of the camp-followers and sutlers who prosper round the edges of all great enterprises had waylaid him on the way to the battleground of marital freedom.

The stranger had got on at an earlier stop and worked his way through the train to the car named "Snowdrop." Wellington was his first victim here. His pushing manner, the almost vulture-like rapacity of his gleaming eyes, and the very vulturine contour of his profile, his palmy gestures, his thick lisp, and everything about him gave Wellington his immediate pedigree.

It ill behooves Christendom to need reminding that the Jewish race has adorned and still adorns humanity with some of

its noblest specimens; but this interloper was of the type that must have irritated Voltaire into answering the platitude that the Jews are God's chosen people with that other platitude, "Tastes differ."

Little Jimmie Wellington, hot in pursuit of Ashton, found himself checked in spite of himself; in spite of himself deposited somehow into a seat, and in spite of himself confronted with a curvilinear person, who said:

"Excoose, pleass! but are you gettink off at R-r-reno?"

"I am," Wellington answered, curtly, essaying to rise, only to be delicately restored to his place with a gesture and a phrase:

"Then you neet me."

"Oh, I need you, do I? And who are you?"

"Who ain't I? I am Baumann and Blumen. Our cart, pleass."

Wellington found a pasteboard in his hand and read the legend:

Real Estate Agents. Baggage Transfer.

Baumann & Blumen

DIVORCE OUTFITTERS,

212 Alimony Avenue, Reno, Nev.

Notary Public. Divorces Secured.

Justice of the Peace. Satisfaction Guaranteed.

Wellington looked from the crowded card to the zealous face. "Divorce Outfitters, eh? I don't quite get you."

"Vèll, in the foist place----"

"The foist place, eh? You're from New York."

"Yes, oritchinally. How did you know it? By my feshionable clothink?"

"Yes," laughed Wellington. "But you say I need you. How?"

"Vèll, you've got maybe some beggetch, some trunks--yes?"

"Yes."

"Vèll, in the foist place, I am an expressman. I deliver 'em to your address--yes? Vère iss it?"

"I haven't got any yet."

"Also I am addressman. Do you vant it a nice hotel?--or a fine house?--or an apartment?--or maybe a boarding-house?--yes? How long do you make a residence?"

"Six months."

"No longer?"

"Not a minute."

"Take a fine house, den. I got some beauties just wacated."

"For a year?--no thanks."

"All the leases in Reno run for six months only."

"Well, I'd like to look around a little first."

"Good. Don't forget us. You come out here for six months. You want maybe a good quick divorce--yes?"

"The quickest I can get."

"Do you want it confidential? or very nice and noisy?"

"What's that?"

"We are press agents and also suppress agents. Some likes 'em one way, some likes 'em another. Which do you want it?"

"Quick and quiet."

"Painless divorce is our specialty. If you pay me an advance deposit now, I file your claim de minute de train stops and your own wife don't know you're divorced."

"I'll think it over," said Wellington, rising with resolution.

"Don't forget us. Baumann and Blumen. Satisfaction guaranteed or your wife refunded. Avoid substitutes." And then, seeing that he could not extract any cash from Little Jimmie, Mr. Baumann descended upon Mallory, who was just finishing his shave. Laying his hand on Mallory's arm, he began:

"Excuse, please. Can I fit you out with a nice divorce?"

"Divorce?--me!--that's good," laughed Mallory at the vision of it. Then a sudden idea struck him. It took no great genius to see that Mr. Baumann was not a clergyman, but there were other matters to be had. "You don't perform marriages, do you?" he asked.

Mr. Baumann drew himself up: "Who says I don't? Ain't I a justice of the peace?"

Mallory put out his hand in welcome: then a new anxiety chilled him. He had a license for Chicago, but Chicago was far away: "Do I need a license in Nevada?"

"Why shouldn't you?" said Mr. Baumann. "Don't all sorts of things got to have a license in Nevada, saloons, husbands, dogs----"

"How could I get one?" Mallory asked as he went on dressing.

"Ain't I got a few with me? Do you want to get a nice re-marriage license?"

"Re-marriage?--huh!" he looked round and, seeing that no one else was near: "I haven't taken the first step yet."

Mr. Baumann laid his hands in one another: "A bachelor? Ah, I see you want to marry a nice divorcee lady in Reno?"

"She isn't in Reno and she has never been married, either."

This simple statement seemed to astound Mr. Baumann:

"A bachelor marry a maiden!--in Reno!--oi, oi, oi! It hasn't been done yet, but it might be."

Mallory looked him over and a twinge of distaste disturbed him: "You furnish the license, but--er--ah--is there any chance of a clergyman--a Christian clergyman--being at the station?"

"Why do you want it a clergyman? Can't I do it just as good? Or a nice fat alderman I can get you?"

Mallory pondered: "I don't think she'd like anything but a clergyman."

"Well," Baumann confessed, "a lady is liable to be particular about her first marriage. Anyway I sell you the license."

"All right."

Mr. Baumann whipped out a portfolio full of documents, and as he searched them, philosophized: "A man ought always to carry a good marriage license. It might be he should need it in a hurry." He took a large iron seal from his side-pocket and stamped the paper and then, with fountain pen poised, pleaded: "What is the name, please?"

"Not so loud!" Mallory whispered.

Baumann put his finger to his nose, wisely: "I see, it is a confidential marriage. Sit down once."

When he had asked Mallory the necessary questions and taken his fee, he passed over the document by which the sovereign state of Nevada graciously permitted two souls to be made more or less one in the eyes of the law.

"Here you are," said Mr. Baumann. "Vit dat you can get married anyvere in Nevada."

Mallory realized that Nevada would be a thing of the past in a few hours more and he asked:

"It's no good in California?"

"Himmel, no. In California you bot' gotta go and be examined."

"Examined!" Mallory gasped, in dire alarm.

"Vit questions, poissonally," Mr. Baumann hastened to explain.

"Oh!"

"In Nevada," Baumann insinuated, still hopeful, "I could marry you myself--now, right here."

"Could you marry us in this smoking room?"

"In a cattle car, if you vant it."

"It's not a bad idea," said Mallory. "I'll let you know."

Seeing Marjorie coming down the aisle, he hastened to her, and hugged her good-morning with a new confidence.

Dr. and Mrs. Temple, who had returned to their berth, witnessed this greeting with amazement. After the quarrel of the night before surely some explanation should have been overheard, but the puzzling Mallorys flew to each other's arms without a moment's delay. The mystery was exciting the passengers to such a point that they were vowing to ask a few questions point blank. Nobody had quite dared to approach either of them, but frank curiosity was preferable to nervous prostration, and the secret could not be kept much longer. Fellow-passengers have some rights. Not even a stranger can be permitted to outrage their curiosity with impunity forever.

Seeing them together, Mrs. Temple watched the embrace with her daily renewal of joy that the last night's quarrel had not proved fatal. She nudged her husband:

"See, they're making up again."

Dr. Temple was moved to a violent outburst for him: "Well, that's the damedest bridal couple--I only said darn, my dear."

He was still more startled when Mr. Baumann, cruising along the aisle, bent over to murmur: "Can I fix you a nice divorce?"

Dr. Temple rose in such an attitude of horror as he assumed in the pulpit when denouncing the greatest curse of society, and Mr. Baumann retired. As he passed Mallory he cast an appreciative glance at Marjorie and, tapping Mallory's shoulder, whispered: "No vonder you want a marriage license. I'll be in the next car, should you neet me." Then he went on his route.

Marjorie stared after him in wonder and asked: "What did that person mean by what he said?"

"It's all right, Marjorie," Mallory explained, in the highest cheer: "We can get married right away."

Marjorie declined to get her hopes up again: "You're always saying that."

"But here's the license--see?"

"What good is that?" she said, "there's no preacher on board."

"But that man is a justice of the peace and he'll marry us."

Marjorie stared at him incredulously: "That creature!--before all these passengers?"

"Not at all," Mallory explained. "We'll go into the smoking room."

Marjorie leaped to her feet, aghast: "Elope two thousand miles to be married in a smoking room by a Yiddish drummer! Harry Mallory, you're crazy."

Put just that way, the proposition did not look so alluring as at first. He sank back with a sigh: "I guess I am. I resign."

He was as weary of being "foiled again" as the villain of a cheap melodrama. The two lovers sat in a twilight of deep melancholy, till Marjorie's mind dug up a new source of alarm:

"Harry, I've just thought of something terrible."

"Let's have it," he sighed, drearily.

"We reach San Francisco at midnight and you sail at daybreak. What becomes of me?"

Mallory had no answer to this problem, except a grim: "I'll not desert you."

"But we'll have no time to get married."

"Then," he declared with iron resolve, "then I'll resign from the Army."

Marjorie stared at him with awe. He was so wonderful, so heroic. "But what will the country do without you?"

"It will have to get along the best it can," he answered with finality. "Do you think I'd give you up?"

But this was too much to ask. In the presence of a ruined career and a hero-less army, Marjorie felt that her own scruples were too petty to count. She could be heroic, too.

"No!" she said, in a deep, low tone, "No, we'll get married in the smoking room. Go call your drummer!"

This opened the clouds and let in the sun again with such a radiant blaze that Mallory hesitated no longer. "Fine!" he cried, and leaped to his feet, only to be detained again by Marjorie's clutch:

"But first, what about that bracelet?"

"She's got it," Mallory groaned, slumping from the heights again.

"Do you mean to say she's still wearing it?"

"How was I to get it?"

"Couldn't you have slipped into her car last night and stolen it?"

"Good Lord, I shouldn't think you'd want me to go--why, Marjorie--I'd be arrested!"

But Marjorie set her jaw hard: "Well, you get that bracelet, or you don't get me." And then her smouldering jealousy and grief took a less hateful tone: "Oh, Harry!" she wailed, "I'm so lonely and so helpless and so far from home."

"But I'm here," he urged.

"You're farther away than anybody," she whimpered, huddling close to him.

"Poor little thing," he murmured, soothing her with voice and kiss and caress.

"Put your arm round me," she cooed, like a mourning dove, "I don't care if everybody is looking. Oh, I'm so lonely."

"I'm just as lonely as you are," he pleaded, trying to creep into the company of her misery.

"Please marry me soon," she implored, "won't you, please?"

"I'd marry you this minute if you'd say the word," he whispered.

"I'd say it if you only had that bracelet," she sobbed, like a tired child. "I should think you would understand my feelings. That awful person is wearing your bracelet and I have only your ring, and her bracelet is ten times as big as my r-i-ing, boo-hoo-hoo-oo!"

"I'll get that bracelet if I have to chop her arm off," Mallory vowed.

The sobs stopped short, as Marjorie looked up to ask: "Have you got your sword with you?"

"It's in my trunk," he said, "but I'll manage."

"Now you're speaking like a soldier," Marjorie exclaimed, "my brave, noble, beautiful, fearless husband. I'll tell you! That creature will pass through this car on her way to breakfast. You grab her and take the bracelet away from her."

"I grab her, eh?" he stammered, his heroism wavering a trifle.

"Yes, just grab her."

"Suppose she hasn't the bracelet on?" he mused.

"Grab her anyway," Marjorie answered, fiercely. "Besides, I've no doubt it's wished on." He said nothing. "You did wish it on, didn't you?"

"No, no--never--of course not--" he protested "If you'll only be calm. I'll get it if I have to throttle her."

Like a young Lady Macbeth, Marjorie gave him her utter approval in any atrocity, and they sat in ambush for their victim to pass into view.

They had not had their breakfast, but they forgot it. A dusky waiter went by chanting his "Lass call for breakfuss in Rining Rar." He chanted it thrice in their ears, but they never heard. Marjorie was gloating over the discomfiture of the odious creature who had dared to precede her in the acquaintance of her husband-to-be. The husband-to-be was miserably wishing that he had to face a tribe of bolo-brandishing Moros, instead of this trivial girl whom he had looked upon when her cheeks were red.

CHAPTER XXXV MR. AND MRS. LITTLE JIMMIE

Mrs. Sammy Whitcomb had longed for the sweet privilege of squaring matters with Mrs. Jimmie Wellington. Sneers and back-biting, shrugs and shudders of contempt were poor compensation for the ever-vivid fact that Mrs. Wellington had proved attractive to her Sammy while Mrs. Wellington's Jimmie never looked at Mrs. Whitcomb. Or if he did, his eyes had been so blurred that he had seen two of her--and avoided both.

Yesterday she had overheard Jimmie vow sobriety. To-day his shining morning face showed that he had kept his word. She could hardly wait to begin the flirtation which, she trusted, would render Mrs. Wellington helplessly furious for six long Reno months.

The Divorce Drummer interposed and held Jimmie prisoner for a time, but as soon as Mr. Baumann released him, Mrs. Whitcomb apprehended him. With a smile that beckoned and with eyes that went out like far-cast fishhooks, she drew Leviathan into her net.

She reeled him in and he plounded in the seat opposite. What she took for bashfulness was reluctance. To add the last charm to her success, Mrs. Wellington arrived to see it. Mrs. Whitcomb saw the lonely Ashton rise and offer her the seat facing him. Mrs. Wellington took it and sat down with the back of her head so close to the back of Mr. Wellington's head that the feather in her hat tickled his neck.

Jimmie Wellington had seen his wife pass by. To his sober eyes she was a fine sight as she moved up the aisle. In his alcohol-emancipated mind the keen sense of wrong endured that had driven him forth to Reno began to lose its edge. His own soul appealed from Jimmie drunk to Jimmie sober. The appellate judge began to reverse the lower court's decision, point by point.

He felt a sudden recrudescence of jealousy as he heard Ashton's voice unctuously, flirtatiously offering his wife hospitality. He wanted to trounce Ashton. But what right had he to defend from gallantry the woman he was about to forswear before the world? Jimmie's soul was in turmoil, and Mrs. Whitcomb's pretty face and alluring smile only annoyed him.

She had made several gracious speeches before he quite comprehended any of them. Then he realized that she was saying: "I'm so glad you're going to stop at Reno, Mr. Wellington."

"Thank you. So am I," he mumbled, trying to look interested and wishing that his wife's plume would not tickle his neck.

Mrs. Whitcomb went on, leaning closer: "We two poor mistreated wretches must try to console one another, musn't we?"

"Yes,--yes,--we must," Wellington nodded, with a sickly cheer.

Mrs. Whitcomb leaned a little closer. "Do you know that I feel almost related to you, Mr. Wellington?"

"Related?" he echoed, "you?--to me? How?"

"My husband knew your wife so well."

Somehow a wave of jealous rage surged over him, and he growled: "Your husband is a scoundrel."

Mrs. Whitcomb's smile turned to vinegar: "Oh, I can't permit you to slander the poor boy behind his back. It was all your wife's fault."

Wellington amazed himself by his own bravery when he heard himself volleying back: "And I can't permit you to slander my wife behind her back. It was all your husband's fault."

Mrs. Jimmie overheard this behind her back, and it strangely thrilled her. She ignored Ashton's existence and listened for Mrs. Whitcomb's next retort. It consisted of a simple, icy drawl: "I think I'll go to breakfast."

She seemed to pick up Ashton with her eyes as she glided by, for, finding himself unnoticed, he rose with a careless: "I think I'll go to breakfast," and followed Mrs. Whitcomb. The Wellingtons sat *dos-a-dos* for some exciting seconds, and then on a sudden impulse, Mrs. Jimmie rose, knelt in the seat and spoke across the back of it:

"It was very nice of you to defend me, Jimmie--er--James."

Wellington almost dislocated several joints in rising quickly and whirling round at the cordiality of her tone. But his smile vanished at her last word. He protested, feebly: "James sounds so like a--a butler. Can't you call me Little Jimmie again?"

Mrs. Wellington smiled indulgently: "Well, since it's the last time. Good-bye, Little Jimmie." And she put out her hand. He seized it hungrily and clung to it: "Good-bye?--aren't you getting off at Reno?"

"Yes, but----"

"So am I--Lucretia."

"But we can't afford to be seen together."

Still holding her hand, he temporized: "We've got to stay married for six months at least--while we establish a residence. Couldn't we--er--couldn't we establish a residence--er--together?"

Mrs. Wellington's eyes grew a little sad, as she answered: "It would be too lonesome waiting for you to roll home."

Jimmie stared at her. He felt the regret in her voice and took strange courage from it. He hauled from his pocket his huge flask, and said quickly: "Well, if you're jealous of this, I'll promise to cork it up forever."

She shook her head skeptically: "You couldn't."

"Just to prove it," he said, "I'll chuck it out of the window." He flung up the sash and made ready to hurl his enemy into the flying landscape.

"Bravo!" cried Mrs. Wellington.

But even as his hand was about to let go, he tightened his clutch again, and pondered: "It seems a shame to waste it."

"I thought so," said Mrs. Jimmie, drooping perceptibly. Her husband began to feel that, after all, she cared what became of him.

"I'll tell you," he said, "I'll give it to old Doc Temple. He takes his straight."

"Fine!"

He turned towards the seat where the clergyman and his wife were sitting, oblivious of the drama of reconciliation playing so close at hand. Little Jimmie paused, caressed the flask, and kissed it. "Good-bye, old playmate!" Then, tossing his head with bravado, he reached out and touched the clergyman's shoulder. Dr. Temple turned and rose with a questioning look. Wellington put the flask in his hand and chuckled: "Merry Christmas!"

"But, my good man----" the preacher objected, finding in his hand a donation about as welcome and as wieldy as a strange baby. Wellington winked: "It may come in handy for--your patients."

And now, struck with a sudden idea, Mrs. Wellington spoke: "Oh, Mrs. Temple."

"Yes, my dear," said the little old lady, rising. Mrs. Wellington placed in her hand a small portfolio and laughed: "Happy New Year!"

Mrs. Temple stared at her gift and gasped: "Great heavens! Your cigars!"

"They'll be such a consolation," Mrs. Wellington explained, "while the Doctor is out with his patients."

Dr. Temple and Mrs. Temple looked at each other in dismay, then at the flask and the cigars, then at the Wellingtons, then they stammered: "Thank you so much," and sank back, stupefied.

Wellington stared at his wife: "Lucretia, are you sincere?"

"Jimmie, I promise you I'll never smoke another cigar."

"My love!" he cried, and seized her hand. "You know I always said you were a queen among women, Lucretia."

She beamed back at him: "And you always were the prince of good fellows, Jimmie." Then she almost blushed as she murmured, almost shyly: "May I pour your coffee for you again this morning?"

"For life," he whispered, and they moved up the aisle, arm in arm, bumping from seat to seat and not knowing it.

When Mrs. Whitcomb, seated in the dining-car, saw Mrs. Little Jimmie pour Mr. Little Jimmie's coffee, she choked on hers. She vowed that she would not permit those odious Wellingtons to make fools of her and her Sammy. She resolved to telegraph Sammy that she had changed her mind about divorcing him, and order him to take the first train West and meet her half-way on her journey home.

CHAPTER XXXVI A DUEL FOR A BRACELET

All this while Marjorie and Mallory had sat watching, as kingfishers shadow a pool, the door wherethrough the girl with the bracelet must pass on her way to breakfast.

"She's taking forever with her toilet," sniffed Marjorie. "Probably trying to make a special impression on you."

"She's wasting her time," said Mallory. "But what if she brings her mother along? No, I guess her mother is too fat to get there and back."

"If her mother comes," Marjorie decided, "I'll hold her while you take the bracelet away from the--the--from that creature. Quick, here she comes now! Be brave!"

Mallory wore an aspect of arrant cowardice: "Er--ah--I--I--"

"You just grab her!" Marjorie explained. Then they relapsed into attitudes of impatient attention. Kathleen floated in and, seeing Mallory, she greeted him with radiant warmth: "Good morning!" and then, catching sight of Marjorie, gave her a "Good morning!" coated with ice. She flounced past and Mallory sat inert, till Marjorie gave him a ferocious pinch, whereupon he leaped to his feet:

"Oh, Miss--er--Miss Kathleen." Kathleen whirled round with a most hospitable smile. "May I have a word with you?"

"Of course you can, you dear boy." Marjorie winced at this and writhed at what followed: "Shan't we take breakfast together?"

Mallory stuttered: "I--I--no, thank you--I've had breakfast."

Kathleen froze up again as she snapped: "With that--train-acquaintance, I suppose."

"Oh, no," Mallory amended, "I mean I haven't had breakfast."

But Kathleen scowled with a jealousy of her own: "You seem to be getting along famously for mere train-acquaintances."

"Oh, that's all we are, and hardly that," Mallory hastened to say with too much truth. "Sit down here a moment, won't

you?"

"No, no, I haven't time," she said, and sat down. "Mamma will be waiting for me. You haven't been in to see her yet?"

"No. You see----"

"She cried all night."

"For me?"

"No, for papa. He's such a good traveler--and he had such a good start. She really kept the whole car awake."

"Too bad," Mallory condoled, perfunctorily, then with sudden eagerness, and a tinge of indifference: "I see you have that bracelet still."

"Of course, you dear fellow. I wouldn't be parted from it for worlds."

Marjorie gnashed her teeth, but Kathleen could not hear that. She gushed on: "And now we have met again! It looks like Fate, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does," Mallory assented, bitterly; then again, with zest: "Let me see that old bracelet, will you?"

He tried to lay hold of it, but Kathleen giggled coyly: "It's just an excuse to hold my hand." She swung her arm over the back of the seat coquettishly, and Marjorie made a desperate lunge at it, but missed, since Kathleen, finding that Mallory did not pursue the fugitive hand, brought it back at once and yielded it up:

"There--be careful, someone might look."

Mallory took her by the wrist in a gingerly manner, and said, "So that's the bracelet? Take it off, won't you?"

"Never!--it's wished on," Kathleen protested, sentimentally. "Don't you remember that evening in the moonlight?"

Mallory caught Marjorie's accusing eye and lost his head. He made a ferocious effort to snatch the bracelet off. When this onset failed, he had recourse to entreaty: "Just slip it off." Kathleen shook her head tantalizingly. Mallory urged more strenuously: "Please let me see it."

Kathleen shook her head with sophistication: "You'd never give it back. You'd pass it along to that--train-acquaintance."

"How can you think such a thing?" Mallory demurred, and once more made his appeal: "Please please, slip it off."

"What on earth makes you so anxious?" Kathleen demanded, with sudden suspicion. Mallory was stumped, till an inspiration came to him: "I'd like to--to get you a nicer one. That one isn't good enough for you."

Here was an argument that Kathleen could appreciate. "Oh, how sweet of you, Harry," she gurgled, and had the bracelet down to her knuckles, when a sudden instinct checked her: "When you bring the other, you can have this."

She pushed the circlet back, and Mallory's hopes sank at the gesture. He grew frantic at being eternally frustrated in his plans. He caught Kathleen's arm and, while his words pleaded, his hands tugged: "Please--please let me take it--for the measure--you know!"

Kathleen read the determination in his fierce eyes, and she struggled furiously: "Why, Richard--Chauncey!--er--Billy! I'm amazed at you! Let go or I'll scream!"



**"WHY, RICHARD--CHAUNCEY!--ER--BILLY! I'M AMAZED AT YOU! LET GO,
OR I'LL SCREAM!"**

She rose and, twisting her arm from his grasp, confronted him with bewildered anger. Mallory cast toward Marjorie a look of surrender and despair. Marjorie laid her hand on her throat and in pantomime suggested that Mallory should throttle Kathleen, as he had promised.

But Mallory was incapable of further violence; and when Kathleen, with all her coquetry, bent down and murmured: "You are a very naughty boy, but come to breakfast and we'll talk it over," he was so addled that he answered: "Thanks, but I never eat breakfast."

CHAPTER XXXVII DOWN BRAKES!

Just as Kathleen flung her head in baffled vexation, and Mallory started to slink back to Marjorie, with another defeat, there came an abrupt shock as if that gigantic child to whom our railroad trains are toys, had reached down and laid violent hold on the Trans-American in full career.

Its smooth, swift flight became suddenly such a spasm of jars, shivers and thuds that Mallory cried:

"We're off the track."

He was sent flopping down the aisle like a bolster hurled through the car. He brought up with a sickening slam across the seat into which Marjorie had been jounced back with a breath-taking slam. And then Kathleen came flying backwards and landed in a heap on both of them.

Several of the other passengers were just returning from breakfast and they were shot and scattered all over the car as if a great chain of human beads had burst.

Women screamed, men yelled, and then while they were still struggling against the seats and one another, the train came to a halt.

"Thank God, we stopped in time!" Mallory gasped, as he tried to disengage himself and Marjorie from Kathleen.

The passengers began to regain their courage with their equilibrium. Little Jimmie Wellington had flown the whole length of the car, clinging to his wife as if she were Francesca da Rimini, and he Paolo, flitting through Inferno. The flight ended at the stateroom door with such a thump that Mrs. Fosdick was sure a detective had come for her at last, and with a battering ram.

But when Jimmie got back breath enough to talk, he remembered the train-stopping excitement of the day before and called out:

"Has Mrs. Mallory lost that pup again?"

Everybody laughed uproariously at this. People will laugh at anything or nothing when they have been frightened almost to death and suddenly relieved of anxiety.

Everybody was cracking a joke at Marjorie's expense. Everybody felt a good-natured grudge against her for being such a mystery. The car was ringing with hilarity, when the porter came stumbling in and paused at the door, with eyes all white, hands waving frantically, and lips flapping like flannel, in a vain effort to speak.

The passengers stopped laughing at Marjorie, to laugh at the porter. Ashton sang out:

"What's the matter with you, Porter? Are you trying to crow?"

Everybody roared at this, till the porter finally managed to articulate:

"T-t-t-train rob-rob-robbers!"

Silence shut down as if the whole crowd had been smitten with paralysis. From somewhere outside and ahead came a pop-popping as of firecrackers. Everybody thought, "Revolvers!" The reports were mingled with barbaric yells that turned the marrow in every bone to snow.

These regions are full of historic terror. All along the Nevada route the conductor, the brakemen and old travelers had pointed out scene after scene where the Indians had slaked the thirst of the arid land with white man's blood. Ashton, who had traveled this way many times, had made himself fascinatingly horrifying the evening before and ruined several breakfasts that morning in the dining-car, by regaling the passengers with stories of pioneer ordeals, men and women massacred in burning wagons, or dragged away to fiendish cruelty and obscene torture, staked out supine on burning wastes with eyelids cut off, bound down within reach of rattlesnakes, subjected to every misery that human deviltry could devise.

Ashton had brought his fellow passengers to a state of ecstatic excitability, and, like many a recounter of burglar stories at night, had tuned his own nerves to high tension.

The violent stopping of the train, the heart-shaking yells and shots outside, found the passengers already apt to respond without delay to the appeals of fright. After the first hush of dread, came the reaction to panic.

Each passenger showed his own panic in his own way. Ashton whirled round and round, like a horse with the blind staggers, then bolted down the aisle, knocking aside men and women. He climbed on a seat, pulled down an upper berth, and, scrambling into it, tried to shut it on himself. Mrs. Whitcomb was so frightened that she assailed Ashton with fury and seizing his feet, dragged him back into the aisle, and beat him with her fists, demanding that he protect her and save her for Sammy's sake.

Mrs. Fosdick, rushing out of her stateroom and not finding her luscious-eyed husband, laid hold of Jimmie Wellington and ordered him to go to the rescue of her spouse. Mrs. Wellington tore her hands loose, crying: "Let him go, madam. He has a wife of his own to defend."

Jimmie was trying to pour out dying messages, and only sputtering, forgetting that he had put his watch in his mouth

to hide it, though its chain was still attached to his waistcoat.

Anne Gattle, who had read much about Chinese atrocities to missionaries, gave herself up to death, yet rejoiced greatly that she had provided a timely man to lean on and should not have to enter Paradise a spinster, providing she could manage to convert Ira in the next few seconds, before it was everlastingly too late. She was begging her first heathen to join her in a gospel hymn. But Ira was roaring curses like a pirate captain in a hurricane, and swearing that the villains should not rob him of his bride.

Mrs. Temple wrung her twitching hands and tried to drag her husband to his knees, crying:

"Oh, Walter, Walter, won't you please say a prayer?--a good strong prayer?"

But the preacher was so confused that he answered: "What's the use of prayer in an emergency like this?"

"Walter!" she shrieked.

"I'm on my va-vacation, you know," he stammered.

Marjorie was trying at the same time to compel Mallory to crawl under a seat and to find a place to hide Snoozleums, whom she was warning not to say a word. Snoozleums, understanding only that his mistress was in some distress, refused to stay in his basket and kept offering his services and his attentions.

Suddenly Marjorie realized that Kathleen was trying to faint in Mallory's arms, and forgot everything else in a determined effort to prevent her.

After the first blood-sweat of abject fright had begun to cool, the passengers came to realize that the invaders were not after lives, but loot. Then came a panic of miserly effort to conceal treasure.

Kathleen, finding herself banished from Mallory's protection, ran to Mrs. Whitcomb, who had given Ashton up as a hopeless task.

"What shall we do, oh, what, oh what shall we do, dear Mrs. Wellington?" she cried.

"Don't you dare call me Mrs. Wellington!" Mrs. Whitcomb screamed; then she began to flutter. "But we'd better hide what we can. I hope the rah-rah-robbers are ge-gentlemen-men."

She pushed a diamond locket containing a small portrait of Sammy into her back hair, leaving part of the chain dangling. Then she tried to stuff a large handbag into her stocking.

Mrs. Fosdick found her husband at last, for he made a wild dash to her side, embraced her, called her his wife and defied all the powers of Nevada to tear them apart. He had a brilliant idea. In order to save his fat wallet from capture, he tossed it through an open window. It fell at the feet of one of the robbers as he ran along the side of the car, shooting at such heads as were put out of windows. He picked it up and dropped it into the feed-bag he had swung at his side. Then running on, he clambered over the brass rail of the observation platform and entered the rear of the train, as his confederate, driving the conductor ahead of him, forged his way aft from the front, while a third masquerader aligned the engineer, the fireman, the brakeman and the baggagemen.

CHAPTER XXXVIII HANDS UP!

All this time Lieutenant Mallory had been thinking as hard as an officer in an ambush. His harrowing experiences and incessant defeats of the past days had unnerved him and shattered his self-confidence. He was not afraid, but intensely disgusted. He sat absent-mindedly patting Marjorie on the back and repeating:

"Don't worry, honey, they're not going to hurt anybody. They don't want anything but our money. Don't worry, I won't let 'em hurt you."

But he could not shake off a sense of nausea. He felt himself a representative of the military prowess of the country, and here he was as helpless as a man on parole.

The fact that Mallory was a soldier occurred to a number of the passengers simultaneously. They had been trained by early studies in those beautiful works of fiction, the school histories of the United States, and by many Fourth of July, to believe that the American soldier is an invincible being, who has never been defeated and never known fear.

They surged up to Mallory in a wave of hope. Dr. Temple, being nearest, spoke first. Having learned by experience that his own prayers were not always answered as he wished, had an impulse to try some weapon he had never used.

"Young man," he pleaded across the back of a seat, "will you kindly lend me a gun?"

Mallory answered sullenly: "Mine is in my trunk on the train ahead, damn it. If I had it I'd have a lot of fun."

Mrs. Whitcomb had an inspiration. She ran to her berth, and came back with a tiny silver-plated revolver.

"I'll lend you this. Sammy gave it to me to protect myself in Nevada!"

Mallory smiled at the .22-calibre toy, broke it open, and displayed an empty cylinder.

"Where are the pills that go with it?" he said.

"Oh, Sammy wouldn't let me have any bullets. He was afraid I'd hurt myself."

Mallory returned it, with a bow. "It would make an excellent nut-cracker."

"Aren't you going to use it?" Mrs. Whitcomb gasped.

"It's empty," Mallory explained.

"But the robbers don't know that! Couldn't you just overawe them with it?"

"Not with that," said Mallory, "unless they died laughing."

Mrs. Wellington pushed forward: "Then what the devil are you going to do when they come?"

Mallory answered meekly: "If they request it, I shall hold up my hands."

"And you won't resist?" Kathleen gasped.

"Not a resist."

"And he calls himself a soldier!" she sneered.

Mallory writhed, but all he said was: "A soldier doesn't have to be a jackass. I know just enough about guns not to monkey with the wrong end of 'em."

"Coward!" she flung at him. He turned white, but Marjorie red, and made a leap at her, crying: "He's the bravest man in the world. You say a word, and I'll scratch your eyes out."

This reheartened Mallory a little, and he laughed nervously, as he restrained her. Kathleen retreated out of danger, with a parting shot: "Our engagement is off."

"Thanks," Mallory said, and put out his hand: "Will you return the bracelet?"

"I never return such things," said Kathleen.

The scene was so painful and such an anachronism that Dr. Temple tried to renew a more pressing subject: "It's your opinion then that we'd best surrender?"

"Of course--since we can't run."

Wedgewood broke in impatiently: "Well, I consider it a dastardly outrage. I'll not submit to it. I'm a subject of His Majesty the----"

"You're a subject of His Majesty the Man Behind the Gun," said Mallory.

"I shall protest, none the less," Wedgewood insisted.

Mallory grinned a little. "Have you any last message to send home to your mother?"

Wedgewood was a trifle chilled at this. "D-don't talk of such things," he said.

And by this time the train-robbers had hastily worked their way through the other passengers, and reached the frantic

inhabitants of the sleeper, "Snowdrop."

"Hands up! Higher!! Hands up!"

With a true sense of the dramatic, the robbers sent ahead of them the most hair-raising yells. They arrived simultaneously at each end of the aisle, and with a few short sharp commands, straightened the disorderly rabble into a beautiful line, with all palms aloft and all eyes wide and wild.

One robber drove ahead of him the conductor and the other drove in Mr. Manning, whom he had found trying to crawl between the shelves of the linen-closet.

The marauders were apparently cattlemen, from their general get-up. Their hats were pulled low, and just beneath their eyes they had drawn big black silk handkerchiefs, tied behind the ears and hanging to the breast.

Over their shoulders they had slung the feed-bags of their horses, to serve as receptacles for their swag. Their shirts were chalky with alkali dust. Their legs were encased in heavy chaparejos, and they carried each a pair of well-used Colt's revolvers that looked as big as artillery.

When the passengers had shoved and jostled into line, one of the men jabbed the conductor in the back with the muzzle of his gun, and snarled: "Now speak your little piece, like I learned it to you."

The conductor, like an awkward schoolboy, grinned sheepishly, and spoke, his hands in the air the while:

"Ladies and Gents, these here parties in the black tidies says they want everybody to hold his or her hands as high as possible till you git permission to lower 'em; they advise you not to resist, because they hate the sight of blood, but prefer it to argument."

The impatient robbers, themselves the prey of fearful anxieties, broke in, barking like a pair of coyotes in a jumble of commands: "Now, line up with your backs that way, and no back talk. These guns shoot awful easy. And remember, as each party is finished with, they are to turn round and keep their hands up, on penalty of gittin' 'em shot off. Line up! Hands up! Give over there!"

Mrs. Jimmie Wellington took her time about moving into position, and her deliberation brought a howl of wrath from the robber: "Get into that line, you!"

Mrs. Wellington whirled on him: "How dare you, you brute?" And she turned up her nose at the gun.

The anxious conductor intervened: "Better obey, madame; he's an ugly lad."

"I don't mind being robbed," said Mrs. Jimmie, "but I won't endure rudeness."

The robber shook his head in despair, and he tried to wither her with sarcasm: "Pardong, mamselly, would you be so kind and condescendin' as to step into that there car before I blow your husband's gol-blame head off."

This brought her to terms. She hastened to her place, but put out a restraining hand on Jimmie, who needed no restraint. "Certainly, to save my dear husband. Don't strike him, Jimmie!"

Then each man stuck one revolver into its convenient holster, and, covering the passengers with the other, proceeded to frisk away valuables with a speed and agility that would have looked prettier if those impatient-looking muzzles had not pointed here, there and everywhere with such venomous threats.

And so they worked from each end of the car toward the middle. Their hands ran swiftly over bodies with a loathsome familiarity that could only be resented, not revenged. Their hands dived into pockets, and up sleeves, and into women's hair, everywhere that a jewel or a bill might be secreted. And always a rough growl or a swing of the revolver silenced any protest.

Their heinous fingers had hardly begun to ply, when the solemn stillness was broken by a chuckle and low hoot of laughter, a darkey's unctuous laughter. At such a place it was more shocking than at a funeral.

"What ails you?" was the nearest robber's demand.

The porter tried to wipe his streaming eyes without lowering his hands, as he chuckled on: "I--I--just thought of sumpum funny."

"Funny!" was the universal groan.

"I was just thinking," the porter snickered, "what mighty poor pickings you-all are goin' to git out of me. Whilst if you

had 'a' waited till I got to 'Frisco, I'd jest nachelly been oozin' money."

The robber relieved him of a few dimes and quarters and ordered him to turn round, but the black face whirled back as he heard from the other end of the car Wedgewood's indignant complaint: "I say, this is an outrage!"

"Ah, close your trap and turn round, or I'll----"

The porter's smile died away. "Good Lawd," he sighed, "they're goin' to skin that British lion! And I just wore myself out on him."

The far-reaching effect of the whole procedure was just beginning to dawn on the porter. This little run on the bank meant a period of financial stringency for him. He watched the hurrying hands a moment or two, then his wrath rose to terrible proportions:

"Look here, man," he shouted at the robber, "ain't you-all goin' to leave these here passengers nothin' a tall?"

"Not on purpose, nigger."

"No small change, or nothin'?"

"Nary a red."

"Then, passengers," the porter proclaimed, while the robber watched him in amazement; "then, passengers, I want to give you-all fair warnin' heah and now: No tips, no whisk-broom!"

Perhaps because their hearts were already overflowing with distress, the passengers endured this appalling threat without comment, and when there was a commotion at the other end of the line, all eyes rolled that way.

Mr. Baumann was making an effort to take his leave, with great politeness.

"Excoose, pleass. I vant to get by, pleass!"

"Get by!" the other robber gasped. "Why, you----"

"But I'm not a passenger," Mr. Baumann urged, with a confidential smile, "I've been going through the train myself."

"Much obliged! Hand over!" And a rude hand rummaged his pockets. It was a heart-rending sight.

"Oi oi!" he wailed, "don't you allow no courtesies to the profession?" And when the inexorable thief continued to pluck his money, his watch, his scarf-pin, he grew wroth indeed. "Stop, stop, I refuse to pay. I'll go into benkrupthey foist." But still the larceny continued; fingers even lifted three cigars from his pockets, two for himself and a good one for a customer. This loss was grievous, but his wildest protest was: "Oh, here, my frient, you don't vant my business carts."

"Keep 'em!" growled the thief, and then, glancing up, he saw on the tender inwards of Mr. Baumann's upheld palms two huge glisteners, which their owner had turned that way in a misguided effort to conceal the stones. The robber reached up for them.

"Take 'em. You're velcome!" said Mr. Baumann, with rare presence of mind. "Those Nevada nearlies looks almost like real."

"Keep 'em," said the robber, as he passed on, and Mr. Baumann almost swooned with joy, for, as he whispered to Wedgewood a moment later: "They're really real!"

Now the eye-chain rolled the other way, for Little Jimmie Wellington was puffing with rage. The other robber, having massaged him thoroughly, but without success, for his pocketbook, noticed that Jimmie's left heel was protruding from his left shoe, and made Jimmie perform the almost incredible feat of standing on one foot, while he unshod him and took out the hidden wealth.

"There goes our honeymoon, Lucretia," he moaned. But she whispered proudly: "Never mind, I have my rings to pawn."

"Oh, you have, have you? Well, I'll be your little uncle," the kneeling robber laughed, as he overheard, and he continued his outrageous search till he found them, knotted in a handkerchief, under her hat.

She protested: "You wouldn't leave me in Reno without a diamond, would you?"

"I wouldn't, eh?" he grunted. "Do you think I'm in this business for my health?"

And he snatched off two earrings she had forgotten to remove. Fortunately, they were affixed to her lobes with fasteners.

Mrs. Jimmie was thoroughbred enough not to wince. She simply commented: "You brutes are almost as bad as the Customs officers at New York."

And now another touch of light relieved the gloom. Kathleen was next in line, and she had been forcing her lips into their most attractive smile, and keeping her eyes winsomely mellow, for the robber's benefit. Marjorie could not see the smile; she could only see that Kathleen was next. She whispered to Mallory:

"They'll get the bracelet! They'll get the bracelet!"

And Mallory could have danced with glee. But Kathleen leaned coquettishly toward the masked stranger, and threw all her art into her tone as she murmured:

"I'm sure you're too brave to take my things. I've always admired men with the courage of Claude Duval."

The robber was taken a trifle aback, but he growled: "I don't know the party you speak of--but cough up!"

"Listen to her," Marjorie whispered in horror; "she's flirting with the train-robber."

"What won't some women flirt with!" Mallory exclaimed.

The robber studied Kathleen a little more attentively, as he whipped off her necklace and her rings. She looked good to him, and so willing, that he muttered: "Say, lady, if you'll give me a kiss, I'll give you that diamond ring you got on."

"All right!" laughed Kathleen, with triumphant compliance.

"My God!" Mallory groaned, "what won't some women do for a diamond!"

The robber bent close, and was just raising his mask to collect his ransom, when his confederate glanced his way, and knowing his susceptible nature, foresaw his intention, and shouted: "Stop it, Jake. You 'tend strictly to business, or I'll blow your nose off."

"Oh, all right," grumbled the reluctant gallant, as he drew the ring from her finger. "Sorry, miss, but I can't make the trade," and he added with an unwonted gentleness: "You can turn round now."

Kathleen was glad to hide the blushes of defeat, but Marjorie was still more bitterly disappointed. She whispered to Mallory: "He didn't get the bracelet, after all."

CHAPTER XXXIX WOLVES IN THE FOLD

Mallory's heart sank to its usual depth, but Marjorie had another of her inspirations. She startled everybody by suddenly beckoning and calling: "Excuse me, Mr. Robber. Come here, please."

The curious gallant edged her way, keeping a sharp watch along the line: "What d'you want?"

Marjorie leaned nearer, and spoke in a low tone with an amiable smile: "That lady who wanted to kiss you has a bracelet up her sleeve."

The robber stared across his mask, and wondered, but laughed, and grunted: "Much obliged." Then he went back, and tapped Kathleen on the shoulder. When she turned round, in the hope that he had reconsidered his refusal to make the trade, he infuriated her by growling: "Excuse, me, miss, I overlooked a bet."

He ran his hand along her arm, and found her bracelet, and accomplished what Mallory had failed in, its removal.

"Don't, don't," cried Kathleen, "it's wished on."

"I wish it off," the villain laughed, and it joined the growing heap in the feed-bag.

Kathleen, doubly enraged, broke out viciously: "You're a common, sneaking----"

"Ah, turn round!" the man roared, and she obeyed in silence.

Then he explored Mrs. Whitcomb, but with such small reward that he said: "Say, you'd oughter have a pocketbook somewheres. Where's it at?"

Mrs. Whitcomb brushed furiously: "None of your business, you low brute."

"Perdooce, madame," the scoundrel snorted, "perdooce the purse, or I'll hunt for it myself."

Mrs. Whitcomb turned away, and after some management of her skirts, slapped her handbag into the eager palm with a wrathful: "You're no gentleman, sir!"

"If I was, I'd be in Wall Street," he laughed. "Now you can turn round." And when she turned, he saw a bit of chain depending from her back hair. He tugged, and brought away the locket, and with laying the tress on her shoulder, and proceeded to sound Ashton for hidden wealth.

And now Mrs. Temple began to sob, as she parted with an old-fashioned brooch and two old-fashioned rings that had been her little vanities for the quarter of a century and more. The old clergyman could have wept with her at the vandalism. He turned on the wretch with a heartsick appeal:

"Can't you spare those? Didn't you ever have a mother?"

The robber started, his fierce eyes softened, his voice choked, and he gulped hard as he drew the back of his hand across his eyes.

"Aw, hell," he whimpered, "that ain't fair. If you're goin' to remind me of me poor old mo-mo-mother----"

But the one called Jake--the Claude Duval who had been prevented from a display of human sentiment, did not intend to be cheated. He thundered: "Stop it, Bill. You 'tend strictly to business, or I'll blow your mush-bowl off. You know your Maw died before you was born."

This reminder sobered the weeping thief at once, and he went back to work ruthlessly. "Oh, all right, Jake. Sorry, ma'am, but business is business." And he dumped Mrs. Temple's trinkets into the satchel. It was too much for the little old lady's little old husband. He fairly shrieked:

"Young man, you're a damned scoundrel, and the best argument I ever saw for hell-fire!"

Mrs. Temple's grief changed to horror at such a bolt from the blue: "Walter!" she gasped, "such language!"

But her husband answered in self-defence: "Even a minister has a right to swear once in his lifetime."

Mallory almost dropped in his tracks, and Marjorie keeled over on him, as he gasped: "Good Lord, Doctor Temple, you are a--a minister?"

"Yes, my boy," the old man confessed, glad that the robbers had relieved him of his guilty secret along with the rest of his private properties. Mallory looked at the collapsing Marjorie, and groaned: "And he was in the next berth all this time!"

The unmasking of the old fraud made a second sensation. Mrs. Fosdick called from far down the aisle: "Dr. Temple, you're not a detective?"

Mrs. Temple shouted back furiously: "How dare you?"

But Mrs. Fosdick was crying to her luscious-eyed mate: "Oh, Arthur, he's not a detective. Embrace me!"

And they embraced, while the robbers looked on aghast at the sudden oblivion they had fallen into. They focussed the attention on themselves again, however, with a ferocious: "Here, hands up!" But they did not see Mr. and Mrs. Fosdick steal a kiss behind their upraised arms, for the robber to whose lot Mallory fell was gloating over his well-filled wallet. Mallory saw it go with fortitude, but noting a piece of legal paper, he said: "Say, old man, you don't want that marriage license, do you?"

The robber handled it as if it were hot--as if he had burned his fingers on some such document once before, and he stuffed it back in Mallory's pocket. "I should say not. Keep it. Turn round."

Meanwhile the other felon turned up another beautiful pile of bills in Dr. Temple's pocket. "Not so worse for a parson," he grinned. "You must be one of them Fifth Avenue sky-shaffures."

And now Mrs. Temple's gentle eyes and voice filled with tears again: "Oh, don't take that. That's the money for his

vacation--after thirty long years. Please don't take that."

Her appeals seemed always to find the tender spot of this robber's heart, for he hesitated, and called out: "Shall we overlook the parson's wad, podner?"

"Take it, and shut up, you mollycoddle!" was the answer he got, and the vacation funds joined the old gewgaws.

And now everybody had been robbed but Marjorie. She happened to be at the center of the line, and both men reached her at the same time: "I seen her first," the first one shouted.

"You did not," the other roared.

"I tell you I did."

"I tell you I did." They glared threateningly at each other, and their revolvers seemed to meet, like two game cocks, beak to beak.

The porter voiced the general hope, when he sighed: "Oh, Lawd, if they'd only shoot each other."

This brought the rivals to their evil senses, and they swept the line with those terrifying muzzles and that heart-stopping yelp: "Hands up!"

Bill said: "You take the east side of her, and I'll take the west."

"All right."

And they began to snatch away her side-combs, the little gold chain at her throat, the jewelled pin that Mallory had given her as the first token of his love.

The young soldier had foreseen this. He had foreseen the wild rage that would unseat his reason when he saw the dirty hands of thieves laid rudely on the sacred body of his beloved. But his soldier-schooling had drilled him to govern his impulses, to play the coward when there was no hope of successful battle, and to strike only when the moment was ripe with perfect opportunity.

He had kept telling himself that when the finger of one of these men touched so much as Marjorie's hem, he would be forced to fling himself on the profane miscreant. And he kept telling himself that the moment he did this, the other man would calmly blow a hole through him, and drop him at Marjorie's feet, while the other passengers shrank away in terror.

He told himself that, while it might be a fine impulse to leap to her defence, it was a fool impulse to leap off a precipice and leave Marjorie alone among strangers, with a dead man and a scandal, as the only rewards for his impulse. He vowed that he would hold himself in check, and let the robbers take everything, leaving him only the name of coward, provided they left him also the power to defend Marjorie better at another time.

And now that he saw the clumsy-handed thugs rifling his sweetheart's jewelry, he felt all that he had foreseen, and his head fought almost in vain against the white fire of his heart. Between them he trembled like a leaf, and the sweat globed on his forehead.

The worst of it was the shivering terror of Marjorie, and the pitiful eyes she turned on him. But he clenched his teeth and waited, thinking fiercely, watching, like a hovering eagle, a chance to swoop.

But the robbers kept glancing this way and that, and one motion would mean death. They themselves were so overwrought with their own ordeal and its immediate conclusion, that they would have killed anybody. Mallory shifted his foot cautiously, and instantly a gun was jabbed into his stomach, with a snarl: "Don't you move!"

"Who's moving?" Mallory answered, with a poor imitation of a careless laugh.

And now the man called Bill had reached Marjorie's right hand. He chortled: "Golly, look at the shiners."

But Jake, who had chosen Marjorie's left hand, roared:

"Say, you cheated. All I get is this measly plain gold band."

"Oh, don't take that!" Marjorie gasped, clenching her hand.

Mallory's heart ached at the thought of this final sacrilege. He had the license, and the minister at last--and now the fiends were going to carry off the wedding ring. He controlled himself with a desperate effort, and stooped to plead: "Say, old man, don't take that. That's not fair."

"Shut up, both of you," Jake growled, and jabbed him again with the gun.

He gave the ring a jerk, but Marjorie, in the very face of the weapon, would not let go. She struggled and tugged, weeping and imploring: "Oh, don't, don't take that! It's my wedding ring."

"Agh, what do I care!" the ruffian snarled, and wrenched her finger so viciously that she gave a little cry of pain.

That broke Mallory's heart. With a wild, bellowing, "Damn you!" he hurled himself at the man, with only his bare hands for weapons.

CHAPTER XL A HERO IN SPITE OF HIMSELF

Passion sent Mallory into the unequal fight with two armed and desperate outlaws. But reason had planned the way. He had been studying the robber all the time, as if the villain were a war-map, studying his gestures, his way of turning, and how he held the revolver. He had noted that the man, as he frisked the passengers, did not keep his finger on the trigger, but on the guard.

Marjorie's little battle threw the desperado off his balance a trifle; as he recovered, Mallory struck him, and swept him on over against the back of a seat. At the same instant, Mallory's right hand went like lightning to the trigger guard, and gripped the fingers in a vise of steel, while he drove the man's elbow back against his side. Mallory's left hand meanwhile flung around his enemy's neck, and gave him a spinning fall that sent his left hand out for balance. It fell across the back of the seat, and Mallory pinioned it with elbow and knee before it could escape.

All in the same crowded moment, his left knuckles jolted the man's chin in air, and so bewildered him that his muscles relaxed enough for Mallory's right fingers to squirm their way to the trigger, and aim the gun at the other robber, and finally to get entire control of it.

The thing had happened in such a flash that the second outlaw could hardly believe his eyes. The shriek of the astounded passengers, and the grunt of Mallory's prisoner, as he crashed backward, woke him to the need for action. He caught his other gun from its holster, and made ready for a double volley, but there was nothing to aim at. Mallory was crouched in the seat, and almost perfectly covered by a human shield.

Still, from force of habit and foolhardy pluck, Bill aimed at Mallory's right eyebrow, just abaft Jake's right ear, and shouted his old motto:

"Hands up! you!"

"Hands up yourself!" answered Mallory, and his victim, shuddering at the fierce look in his comrade's eyes, gasped: "For God's sake, don't shoot, Bill!"

Even then the fellow stood his ground, and debated the issue, till Mallory threw such ringing determination into one last: "Hands up, or by God, I'll fire!" that he caved in, lifted his fingers from the triggers, turned the guns up, and slowly raised both hands above his head.

A profound "Ah!" of relief soughed through the car, and Mallory, still keeping his eye on Bill, got down cautiously from the seat. The moment he released Jake's left hand, it darted to the holster where his second gun was waiting. But before he could clutch the butt of it, Mallory jabbed the muzzle of his own revolver in the man's back, and growled: "Put 'em up!" And the robber's left hand joined the right in air, while Mallory's left hand lifted the revolver, and took possession of it.

Mallory stood for a moment, breathing hard and a little incredulous at his own swift, sweet triumph. Then he made an effort to speak as if this sort of thing were quite common with him, as if he overpowered a pair of outlaws every morning before breakfast, but his voice cracked as he said, in a drawing-room tone:

"Dr. Temple, would you mind relieving that man of those guns?"

Dr. Temple was so set up by this distinction that he answered: "Not by a----"

"Walter!" Mrs. Temple checked him, before he could utter the beautiful word, and Dr. Temple looked at her almost reproachfully, as he sighed: "Golly, I should like to swear just once more."

Then he reached up and disarmed the man who had taken his wallet and his wife's keepsakes. But the doctor was not half so happy over the recovery of his property as over the unbelievable luxury of finding himself taking two revolvers away from a masked train-robber.

American children breathe in this desperado romance with their earliest traditions, and Dr. Temple felt all his boyhood zest surge back with a boy's tremendous rapture in a deed of derring-do. And now nothing could check his swagger, as he said to Mallory:

"What shall we do with these dam-ned sinners?"

He felt like apologizing for the clerical relapse into a pulpitism, but Mallory answered briskly: "We'd better take them into the smoking room. They scare the ladies. But first, will the conductor take those bags and distribute the contents to their rightful owners?"

The conductor was proud to act as lieutenant to this Lieutenant, and he quickly relieved the robbers of their loot-kits.

Mallory smiled. "Don't give anybody my things," and then he jabbed his robber with one of the revolvers, and commanded: "Forward, march!"

The little triumphal procession moved off, with Bill in the lead, followed by Dr. Temple, looking like a whole field battery, followed by Jake, followed by Mallory, followed by the porter and as many of the other passengers as could crowd into the smoking room.

The rest went after those opulent feed-bags.

CHAPTER XLI CLICKETY-CLICKETY-CLICKETY

Marjorie, as the supposed wife of the rescuing angel, was permitted first search, and the first thing she hunted for was a certain gold bracelet that was none of hers. She found it and seized it with a prayer of thanks, and concealed it among her own things.

Mrs. Temple gave her a guilty start, by speaking across a barrier:

"Mrs. Mallory, your husband is the bravest man on earth."

"Oh, I know he is," Marjorie beamed, and added with a spasm of conscience: "but he isn't my husband!"

Mrs. Temple gasped in horror, but Marjorie dragged her close, and poured out the whole story, while the other passengers recovered their properties with as much joy as if they were all new gifts found on a bush.

Meanwhile, under Mallory's guidance, the porter fastened the outlaws together back to back with the straps of their own feed-bags. The porter was rejoicing that his harvest of tips was not blighted after all.

Mallory completed his bliss, by giving him Dr. Temple's brace of guns, and establishing him as jailer, with a warning: "Now, porter, don't take your eye off 'em."

"Lordy, I won't bat an eyelid."

"If either of these lads coughs, put a hole through both of 'em."

The porter chuckled: "My fingers is just a-itchin' fer them lovin' triggers."

And now Mr. Baumann, having scrambled back his possessions, hastened into the smoking room, and regarded the two hangdog culprits with magnificent generosity; he forgave them their treatment. In fact, he went so far as to say: "You gents vill be gettin' off at Reno, yes? You'll be needing a good firm of lawyers. Don't forget us. Baumann" (he put a card in Bill's hat) "and Blumen" (he put a card in Jake's hat). "Avoid substitoots."

Mallory pocketed two of the captured revolvers, lest a need might arise suddenly again. As he hurried down the aisle, he was received with cheers. The passengers gave him an ovation, but he only smiled timidly, and made haste to Marjorie's side.

She regarded him with such idolatry that he almost regretted his deed. But this mood soon passed in her excitement, and in a moment she was surreptitiously showing him the bracelet. He became an accessory after the fact, and shared her guilt, for when she groaned with a sudden droop: "She'll get it back!" he grimly answered, "Oh, no she won't!" hoisted the window, and flung the bracelet into a little pool by the side of the track, with a farewell: "Good-bye, trouble!"

As he drew his head in, a side glance showed him that up near the engine a third train-robber held the miserably weary train crew in line.

He found the conductor just about to pull the bell-rope, to proceed. The conductor had forgotten all about the rest of the staff. Mallory took him aside, and told him the situation, then turned to Marjorie, said: "Excuse me a minute," and hurried forward. The conductor followed Mallory through the train into the baggage coach.

The first news the third outlaw had of the counter-revolution occurring in the sleeping car was a mysterious bullet that flicked the dust near his heel, and a sonorous shout of "Hands up!" As he whirled in amaze, he saw two revolvers aimed point blank at him from behind a trunk. He hoisted his guns without parley, and the train crew trussed him up in short order.

Mallory ran back to Marjorie, and the conductor followed more slowly, reassuring the passengers in the other cars, and making certain that the train was ready to move on its way.

Mallory went straight to Dr. Temple, with a burning demand:

"You dear old fraud, will you marry me?"

Dr. Temple laughed and nodded. Marjorie and Mrs. Temple had been telling him the story of the prolonged elopement, and he was eager to atone for his own deception, by putting an end to their misery.

"Just wait one moment," he said, and as a final proof of affection, he unbuttoned his collar and put it on backwards. Mrs. Temple brought out the discarded bib, and he donned it meekly. The transformation explained many a mystery the old man had enmeshed himself in.

Even as he made ready for the ceremony, the conductor appeared, looked him over, grinned, and reached for the bell-cord, with a cheerful: "All aboard!"

Mallory had a sort of superstitious dread, not entirely unfounded on experience, that if the train got under way again, it would run into some new obstacle to his marriage. He turned to the conductor:

"Say, old man, just hold the train till after my wedding, won't you?"

It was not much to ask in return for his services, but the conductor was tired of being second in command. He growled:

"Not a minute. We're 'way behind time."

"You might wait till I'm married," Mallory pleaded.

"Not on your life!" the conductor answered, and he pulled the bell-rope twice; in the distance, the whistle answered twice.

Mallory's temper flared again. He cried: "This train doesn't go another step till I'm married!" He reached up and pulled the bell-rope once; in the distance the whistle sounded once.

This was high treason, and the conductor advanced on him threateningly, as he seized the cord once more. "You touch that rope again, and I'll----"

"Oh, no, you won't," said Mallory, as he whisked a revolver from his right pocket and jammed it into the conductor's watch-pocket. The conductor came to attention.

Then Mallory, standing with his right hand on military duty, put out his left hand, and gave the word: "Now, parson."

He smiled still more as he heard Kathleen's voice wailing: "But I can't find my bracelet. Where's my bracelet?"

"Silence! Silence!" Dr. Temple commanded, and then: "Join hands, my children."

Marjorie shifted Snoozeleums to her left arm, put her right hand into Mallory's, and Dr. Temple, standing between them, began to drone the ritual. Everybody said they made a right pretty picture.

When the old clergyman had done his work, the young husband-at-last graciously rescinded military law, recalled the artillery from the conductor's very midst, and remembering Manila, smiled:

"You may fire when ready, conductor."

The conductor's rage had cooled, and he slapped the bridegroom on the back with one hand, as he pulled the cord with the other. The train began to creak and tug and shift. The ding-dong of the bell floated murmurously back as from a lofty steeple, and the clickety-click, click-clickety-click quickened and softened into a pleasant gossip, as the speed grew, and the way was so smooth for the wheels that they seemed to be spinning on rails of velvet.

THE END