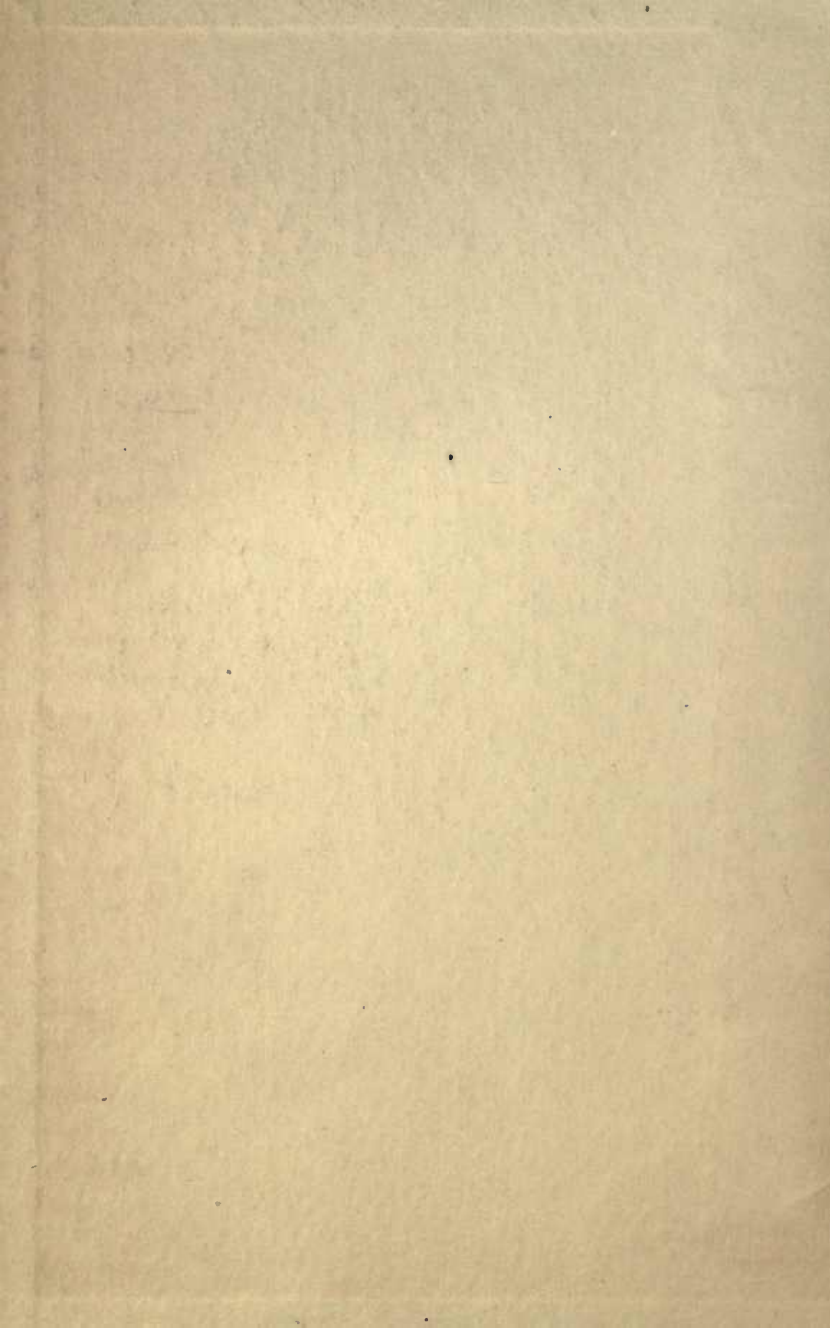


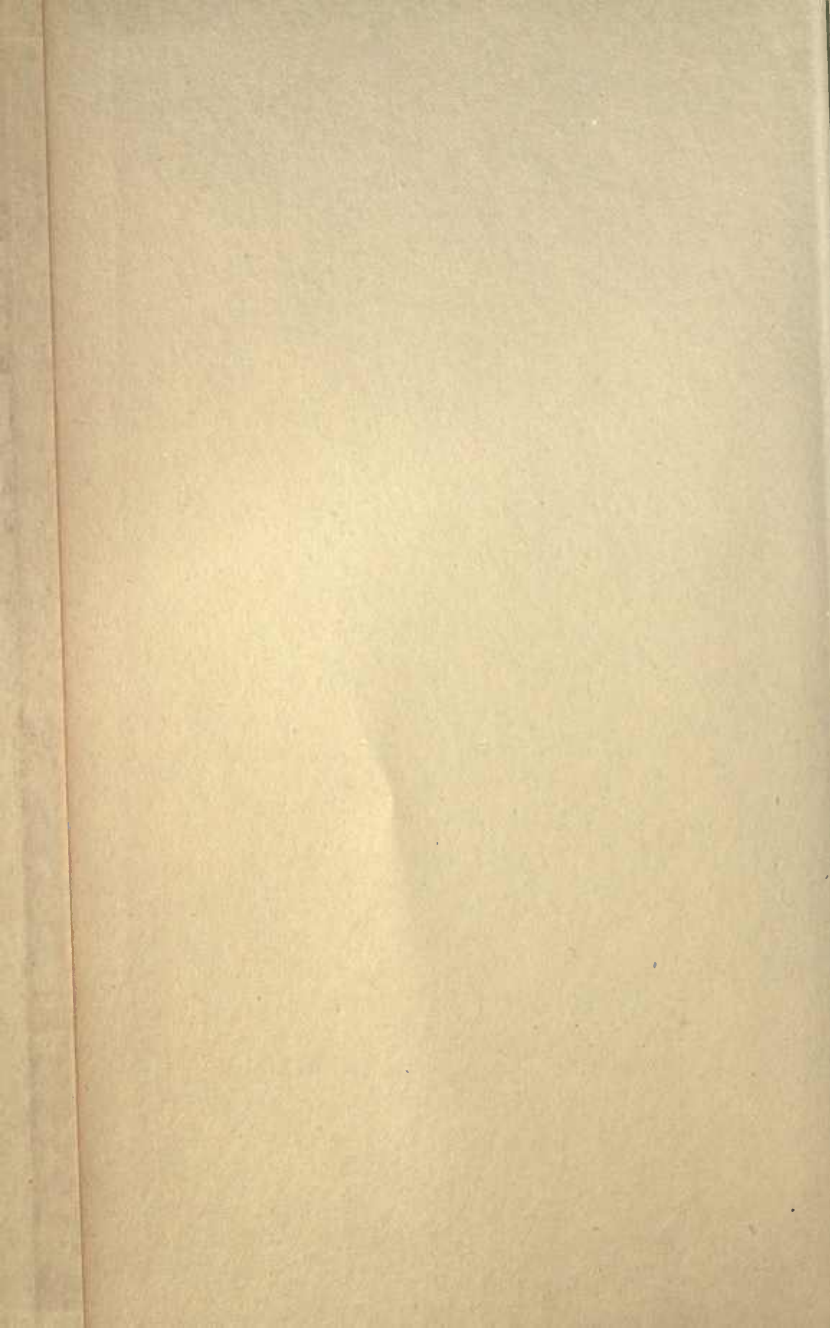
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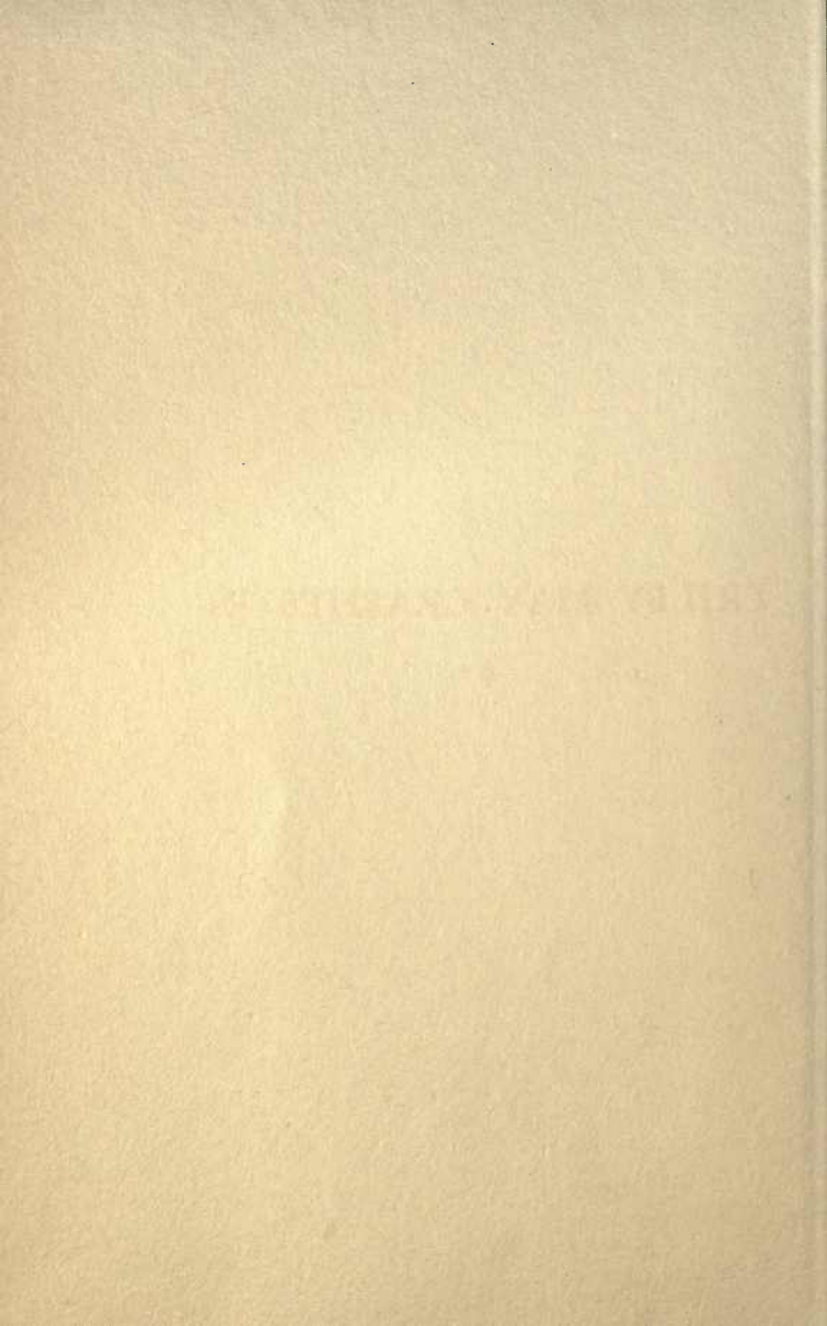


1 of 2 of 50

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TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN



**Books By
SEWELL FORD**

**INEZ AND TRILBY MAY
TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN
TORCHY**

**Harper & Brothers
Established 1817**



ANNETTE COMES BACK FROM TIDYING UP HIS ROOM, AND EXHIBITS SOME
DISCOVERIES SHE'S MADE

[See p. 185

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN
By Sewell Ford author of
"Inez and Trilby May" "Torchy" Etc.
With Illustrations by Marshall Frantz



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TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

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First Edition

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	EASING OUT OF A CLINCH.....	3
II.	TRILBY MAY IN TIMES SQUARE.....	22
III.	SUBBING IN FOR GLORIA.....	39
IV.	HOW INEZ CALLED THE TURN.....	55
V.	TAKING THE BUMPS WITH BARRY.....	71
VI.	BACK STAGE WITH TRILBY MAY.....	86
VII.	GETTING TAGGED BY GERALD.....	103
VIII.	ONE UP ON THE TWINS.....	120
IX.	FAME NODS AT TRILBY MAY.....	137
X.	INEZ HANGS UP A RECORD.....	155
XI.	GUESSING ON UNCLE NELS.....	174
XII.	DEEP STUFF BY UNCLE NELS.....	191
XIII.	LISTENING IN ON ZADA.....	207
XIV.	WILLARD LOOKS IN.....	223
XV.	INEZ AND THE VILLAGE BLIGHT.....	239
XVI.	INEZ SAYS IT WITH TURKEY.....	255
XVII.	A NEW SLANT ON INEZ.....	272

ILLUSTRATIONS

ANNETTE COMES BACK FROM TIDYING UP HIS
ROOM, AND EXHIBITS SOME DISCOVERIES SHE'S MADE

Frontispiece

AND AS SOON AS I GOT MY BREATH I CAUGHT HIM
BY THE COAT SLEEVE. "YOU MEAN," SAYS I, "THAT
SHE WOULD RANK A-1 ABOVE ALL THE OTHERS?"

Facing page 172

"SAY, YOU WANNA KNOW TOO MUCH, YOU," SAYS
HE, AND HE SHUFFLES OFF ACTIVE TO HOLD UP A
COUPÉ THAT'S DRIVEN UP WITH AN OWNER
CHAUFFEUR*Facing page 184*

I WAS GONNA FIX IT UP, WHEN I GET SOME MONEY,
THAT WE GO GET MARRIED.....*Facing page 196*

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN



Chapter I

Easing Out of a Clinch

I'M strong for my friends, the few that I've got. But say, they do keep you busy, don't they? Take Inez and Barry Platt. Miss Peterson first. Here I thought I had her all placed. Her rich Uncle Nels, after a good deal of skittering around, had asked her to come and share his nine-room elevator apartment, keep him from being lonesome, and help spend some of his income. What could be fairer than that, or softer?

Yet at the end of the one day Inez takes to think it over she calmly shakes her head and announces that it's all off.

"Whaddye mean, off?" says I. "What's the idea?"

"I gotta job," says Inez.

"It must be a snap de luxe," says I, "to make

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

you turn down all Uncle Nels' offers. What sort of a job?"

"Ticket lady in big movie house," says Inez. "Twenty dollars a week and I see all the reels."

"Great lollypops!" says I. "You'd rather do that than be the favorite niece of a kind old plute whose only out is that he likes to sail tin boats in the bathtub!"

"Huh!" says Inez. "Old dumhuvud!"

"Eh?" says I. "Doom-what?"

"By Sweden," exclaims Inez, "they would call him that."

"Oh!" says I. "Scandinavian for dumb-bell, eh? I'm not so sure, though. He strikes me as being rather a shrewd old scout in a good many ways. He must have worked up good credit at the bank. You can't hate him for that, can you?"

Inez shrugs her shoulders. "In ticket booth," says she, "I see everybody and—and I do my hair swell every night."

"I know," says I. "You'd be Exhibit A, under the bright lights. And all the young hicks and the old sports would be giving you the double O as they filed by. And you'd hear the orchestra playing, and by stretching your neck around you could see the pictures, all free gratis for nothing. But after you'd seen the same feature five

EASING OUT OF A CLINCH

or six nights, and heard the same tunes for a month, and got the cut-up wink from a thousand frisky males every night; don't you think, Inez, you'd get sort of fed up on it all?"

Inez comes as near pouting as her placid disposition will let her and I can guess that she looks on me as a crepe hanger. "Maybe I like it all time," she insists.

I can tell, though, that she's not so sure. And while she's wobbling I slides out into the hall and phones for Uncle Nels to come around. "Stop on your way and tuck under your arm a box of fancy chocolates for Inez," says I. "You'll have to talk soothing to her, too, or she'll give you the cold eye. She's been offered a sit-down job in a movie palace and she's wearing her chin high."

"Such a girl!" I can hear the old boy groan.

But when he shows up at the boarding house he has a cargo of candy and humility and there's a pleading look in his skim-milk blue eyes. A quaint old duffer, this Uncle Nels. With his round, pink and white face and the thin grayish hair he looks something like a wrinkled baby who needs a shave. He gazes friendly at Inez and sighs.

"Yust like your mother, you are," says he, "when we come from Sweden together long ago. We had hard times for while, but we stick to-

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

gether. Then she gets married and lives on farm and has big family. Always hard work for her. She get sick and die. You remember?"

Inez nods but goes on munching chocolates.

"You was ten, twelve years old then," says Uncle Nels, rubbing his chin reminiscent, "and bymeby that step-mother came. What a tongue! She make you work, too. I no like her. I don't come any more. When they hear I make money she writes letters to beg. No. Not a krone for her. But you don't ask nothing. Like your mother. She wouldn't. What would she think of me if I didn't do something for her girl? Anyway, I'm gettin' old man now. I don't like to be alone so much, and if I talk with strangers I get in trouble. So you come, eh?"

Inez may have been touched, but you'd never guess it. What she seems most interested in is peeling the tinfoil off a fancy bonbon. But finally she looks up and asks: "Could Trilby May come, too?"

"Oh, come, Inez, be fair!" I breaks in. "You can't expect to saddle me on your Uncle Nels as well. That would be a bit thick."

"I no go, then," says Inez decided.

"Sure," says Uncle Nels. "I like to have you both come. Plenty room."

And after a half hour debate I had to com-

EASING OUT OF A CLINCH

promise. I'd go for a while, but not as a grafting friend. I'd have to be free to take any job I found and I'd want to pay at least as much board as I did here.

"Then it gets settled, eh?" asks Uncle Nels.

"I dunno," says Inez. "Can I have maid to fix my hair and—and everything?"

"Gosh, Inez!" I gasps. "How do you get that way so sudden? You with a lady's maid! Say!"

"O, well," says Uncle Nels, shrugging his shoulders. "Why not? It don't cost so much, I guess."

"And breakfast before I get dressed?" insists Inez.

"If you want," says Uncle Nels. "I go for early walk in park and eat mine in little place with motormen. You could have yours in your room when you like."

"Swell!" says Inez. "I think I come."

"I should think you would," says I. "A personal maid and breakfast in bed! Say, Inez, what are you qualifying for—a movie star?"

Inez ducks her chin and rolls her eyes. "You know that stuck-up Miss Nordsen who bosses us so much when we work by Druot's in Duluth?" she asks. "I write her about everything."

Yes, there's a lot that's quite human about Inez, after all. Same with Barry Platt, only he

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

may express it different. For you know while this was going on Barry was up in Utica hovering around while a sick aunt decided whether to get well or not. And that next night, when I was back at Miss Wellby's collecting some odds and ends that Inez has forgotten to move, he drifts in.

"Then Aunt Louella must have made a quick recovery?" says I.

Barry shakes his head. "I was almost too late," says he. "Perhaps it was just as well. We hadn't been on the best of terms lately, you know, she wouldn't have been much cheered up at seeing me."

"Oh, you can't tell," says I. "You were about the only relative she had, weren't you?"

"Absolutely," says Barry. "I suppose that's why she left all her property to the Old Ladies' Home and the fund for pensioning retired missionaries."

"You don't mean it, Barry!" says I. "Scratched you completely?"

"All but a life insurance policy that she forgot to change," says he. "And she was always telling me how fond she was of me, and getting sore if I did not write to her every week! Had this up her sleeve all the while, too. The will was dated nearly three years ago. I remember now.

EASING OUT OF A CLINCH

That was about the time I was fussing a little blonde from Richmond who was visiting next door, and Auntie was wild about it. Oh, well! Now I've simply got to get going. If I could only place a one-act play or something."

"You can't by keepin' em in your trunk," says I. "Few managers get their stuff by second-story work. You gotta make yourself a pest, Barry boy, and let 'em know you're a comer. Load up with manuscripts and hang around Times Square; that would be my program."

"If I thought my stuff was any good, perhaps I might," says he. "But I'm not sure."

"Haven't I admitted that some of it wasn't so rotten," says I.

"I know, Trilby May," says he. "You've been perfectly bully about it. And there's one I had almost finished that I thought you'd really like. Say, suppose I lick it into shape and read it to you? I could get through in a couple of days."

"All right," says I. "I'll brace myself for the ordeal. Come around and shoot, when you're ready."

"Eh?" says he, staring. "Around?"

"Oh, you hadn't heard, had you?" says I. "Well, we're no common boarding-house persons any longer, Inez and I. I should say not. We're

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

carriage trade, charge account people. Oh, my, yes!"

Then I told him how Inez had worked Uncle Nels and what grand style we were living in. "Especially Inez," I added. "All she wants is breakfast in bed, a personal maid, two kinds of dessert at dinner, and some form of entertainment every evening. She's going to get it, too. Well, why so late with the congratulations? What's the idea of the droopy jaw?"

"Oh, nothing much," says Barry. "Only I suppose I've no chance with her now—just a scrubby newspaper man. And I had rather thought, you know, that sometime I'd be in a position to—but that's all off, thanks to Aunt Louella. I—I'd like to see Inez, though, just once more."

"She'll be on view," says I. "Better give us a ring, and lug around the new piece. We'll make her play dog, too, and if it doesn't put her to sleep you can send it to some of the Barrymores."

He was feeling low when I left, however, and his heels dragged as he started for his second-floor back to burn the midnight kilowatt and hammer his rented typewriter. That's the way with Barry Platt. He's either real chirky, with his head up among the pink clouds, or else he's

EASING OUT OF A CLINCH

struggling with the blue willies and coming off second best.

So I wasn't quite prepared for what crashed in on us three or four nights later, all gussied up in a sporty black and white checked suit and with a crook-handled bamboo stick hung on his arm. It's hardly the same Barry Platt. For he's shaken the slump out of his shoulders, there's a confident flicker in his blue eyes, and he has that winning smile of his set on a hair trigger.

"Look who we have in our midst, Inez," says I. "The young crown prince of Oklahoma is my guess. What's yours?"

She looks him over approving and chuckles.

"Some outfit, eh?" asks Barry, grinning.

"It's a knockout," says I. "No scion of the oily rich could dress the part noisier. But what's the answer? Have the Shuberts given you an advance on something?"

Barry denies it. "Auntie's life insurance," says he. "I thought it might be a thousand or so. But say, it was ten! Whaddye know about that? Of course, I haven't cashed in on it yet, but I shall within a few weeks. And then—oh, boy!"

"Just the high spots, eh?" says I. "Going to burn a streak along the primrose path and make the Prodigal Son look like a piker, are you? A

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

green and gold suite at the Ambassador, I suppose?"

"Not a chance," says Barry. "I'm not going to cast myself among the tip hounds. No lobster palace food for me, nor tribute for bootleggers. But regal raiment? Yes. A costume for every day in the week. I mean to array myself as a successful young dramatist and try getting past the office boys. That's how I dope it out. If you can impress the boy on the gate you've taken the hardest hurdle. Am I right?"

"Sounds reasonable," says I. "But what's done up in the tissue paper?"

"Oh!" says Barry, pinking up. "Just a trifle for Miss Inez. Allow me."

"M-m-m-m!" says I, as she unwraps 'em. "Posies of passion! Orchids, no less. Now, what do you say, Inez?"

She confines herself to the usual adjective, though. "Swell!" says she, letting the lavender silk cord run through her fingers.

"Cost a lot, don't they?" asks Uncle Nels.

"Tut, tut!" says I. "That's a question one doesn't ask, you know."

"Huh!" says he. "These young fellers!"

But just as Barry was getting red in the ears I shifted the subject by asking if he'd brought around the new play. He had. They always

EASING OUT OF A CLINCH

do, I find. And with a little gentle urging he agrees to read it to us. It's only a one-act comedy piece, all about how a General Motors plutess from Detroit, Mich., comes down to dinner with Mumm-mah at the Grand Royal in Switzerland and discovers that the head waiter is none other than the romantic Prince Alex who had been so helpful when she was making a bluff at doing Red Cross reconstruction work in Vienna two years before. It seems they had danced together and taken walks in the moonlight and swapped mushy conversation. And here he was in a bob-tailed soup-and-fish, bowing thankful over a fifty-franc note that Mother had slipped him for a table overlooking the terrace.

But the thing doesn't develop the way those plots usually do. Barry has given it a new twist. The Detroit plutess is just as strong for her dark-eyed Prince as ever; stronger, in fact, for now she decides that she has a look-in, where before she was only a passing fancy. And she gets out the net without putting mother wise. At first, too, Prince Alex is right there with the come-back. Then he notes that his American charmer has been taking on weight. There is a hint of Mother's double chin, and the arm she rests on the chair back is more or less beefy. Also he is somewhat staggered by the size of the

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

dinner order the pair reel off for him to write down, including everything from thick soup to double portions of patisserie and three kinds of fromage. And the frothy line of chatter the young lady gives off, as well as the way she rolls her r's and flats her a's makes him cringe. So when she comes back after the feather fan she has carefully planted under the table, and tries to date him up for a Romeo act later on, he hunches his slim shoulders and shakes his head. He tells her that as a prince he was a good deal of a washout, but that as a head waiter he's getting on fine and if she don't mind he'll stick to it. As a final stab he says he hopes the service was satisfactory and trusts that Mam'selle has been adequately nourished.

Course, it's kind of thin, high-brow stuff; but some of the lines are quite snappy, and here and there you could get a laugh. At least, I could. All Inez could work up, though, was a yawn. She didn't merely go through the motions behind her hand. Inez has no subtle tricks like that. When she yawns she makes a thorough job of it. You not only get a glimpse of most of her molars, but you hear the ennui escaping, like when they open the air-brakes on a Pullman. And she lets that loose right in the middle of one of Barry's cleverest speeches.

EASING OUT OF A CLINCH

It was a blow, all right. You could almost see him go groggy from it. For he has a good deal of the sensitive artistic temperament, and a jolt like that gets to him hard. Still, he stares across at Inez hopeful, as if it might have been a mistake.

"I—I beg pardon," says he. "Hope I haven't been boring you?"

"I no like readin' much," says Inez, in that flat-footed way of hers. "That's all, hey? Then maybe Uncle Nels and I go to movies, second show."

"Sure," says Uncle Nels, rousing up from the cat nap he's been indulging in.

And inside of three minutes they were on their way, leaving Barry with his chin down and his precious play tossed on the floor.

"It must be pretty punk," he groans.

"Well, it's no great whizz," I admits. "Too much talky-talk and too little doing, if you want my honest opinion. Besides, you're no great shakes as a reader, Barry. You do dialogue like a Western Union desk clerk checking up a night message. No expression, no pep. Say, if you ever got the chance to read that to a manager you'd either put him to sleep or have him pushing the button for the bouncer. And some of those snappy lines would get across if they weren't mumbled. Here, let me take a whirl at it."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

With that I picked up the sheets and finished reading the play. Before I was through I had Barry sitting up with his mouth open.

"Why, say!" says he. "That does sound like something, after all. How—where did you learn the trick, Trilby May?"

"Didn't know I used to be a child elocutionist, did you?" says I. "Well, that was one of my early vices. Paw trained me, at the tender age of nine, and at thirteen or so I used to perform at Grange Hall in Tamarack Junction. Not 'Curfew' or any of that Fifth Reader stuff, but chunks of 'Les Miserables' and 'Pickwick Papers' and 'Quo Vadis.' But, of course, I've outgrown all that childish folly."

"By George!" says Barry. "If—if I could get you to read 'em some of my things I'll bet I'd have a show. Why couldn't you, now?"

"Is this a business proposition, Barry," says I, "or just talk?"

"Twenty per cent commission," says he, "on anything you land."

"Might be worth while chasing around the theatrical district then," says I. "That is, if you can produce something besides clever chat—something with a punch to it. You know?"

Barry shakes his head gloomy.

"I'll bet you could, though," says I. "And

EASING OUT OF A CLINCH

that zippy dialogue of yours deserves a good stiff plot to hang it on. Sure you can dope it out. You're rather a brainy youth, you know. All you need is to get the little old bean working at top speed and the first thing you know you'll be grinding out regular stuff. I'm backing you for a winner, anyway. Why not make a stab at it?"

Doesn't take much to chirk Barry up. He says he will. He admits that he's had a couple of ideas knocking around in his loft that seemed good to him, but he hadn't quite had the nerve to tackle 'em. He would, though, if I'd promise to read them over and tell him exactly what I thought.

"Trust me," says I. "That's the easiest thing I do. But I may be way off in my decisions, Barry. I don't set up for any dramatic cheese tester, understand."

"I'm beginning to think you are, however," insists Barry.

Then for a while we sat there at the open window, looking south over New York's roof-scape. And say, when it's all lighted up it isn't such a poor picture, is it? Standing up slim and graceful off at the left were the gray spires of St. Patrick's, almost black against the deep blue of the sky. To the right and lower down blazed Times Square, with the chewing gum and tire

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

signs rippling and twinkling; and high up, like a visiting star, the lantern in the Metropolitan tower burned steadily except when it winked red for the quarter hours. Then from some skyscraper over west of Broadway a big searchlight beam played over the roofs, as if paging a lost building.

"Some town, eh?" I remarks.

But Barry had been looking without seeing.

"What a poor nut I am!" says he.

"Why admit it, though?" I asks.

"Can't help it," says he. "I've just tumbled to myself, Trilby May."

"Well, that sometimes helps," says I. "What have you discovered now?"

"About my craze for Inez," says he. "She—she wouldn't do. Not at all."

"No?" says I. "She's a nice girl, Inez."

"I know," says Barry. "Wonderful disposition, stunning complexion, and eyes that make you dizzy to look into. And that wheat colored hair! A crown fit for a goddess. But very little under the hair."

"Oh, I don't know," says I.

"But I do," insists Barry. "And I'm sure of something else now. It hasn't been Inez at all; at least, not altogether."

"Listens complicated, Barry," I suggests.

EASING OUT OF A CLINCH

"It is," he goes on. "You see, I've been seeing you two together, almost every time we've met, and I—well, I guess I've sort of got you mixed, or combined. I've been listening to you and looking at Inez, and I've just found out, Trilby May, that it's you I'm crazy about, after all."

"Z-z-zing!" says I, catching my breath. "Say, Barry boy, when you're going to drop a bomb like that why don't you give a person some warning? You didn't even fizz first. My, but I feel fluttery. Of course, it may be indigestion, or stage fright."

That doesn't block him off, though. He's an intense young person, when he really gets started. Here he is squeezing my fingers with one hand and reaching around for a Romeo clinch with the other arm. And me letting him get away with it, too. It isn't so poisonous, either, sitting in the gloaming and being cuddled up. Anyway, I don't remember struggling to break away.

"Honest, Trilby May," says he, "I mean every word of it. You're the girl I want."

"I've always felt," says I, "that my only chance was to be picked in the dark, when my green eyes and carrotty hair wouldn't be such a handicap."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"They're all right, take it from me," says Barry.

"Only a real nice boy would say that," says I.

"Then you will?" says Barry, tightening up on the side hold. "You—you'll——"

"Say, let's not get ahead of our signals," I breaks in. "You're such a fast worker, Barry, when you get in high gear, that you leave me breathless. Ease up on the gas a moment and let's make this next lap safe and sane. You've made a pretty quick shift, you know, and perhaps you're just running wild down the track."

"No, I'm not, Trilby May," says he. "I know exactly what I'm doing and what I want. It's you, and if you'll just——"

"No, Barry," says I. "I'm not grabbing you as if you were a life raft. I'm floating around nice and comfortable just at present and I may not care to be rescued for some time yet. When I do—well, if you're near by and handy, I might think it over."

"Oh, I say!" protests Barry. "Why wait? I've got enough to start on. We could find a minister tomorrow. Then we could take a nice little furnished apartment somewhere and——"

"I've got the picture, Barry," says I. "Me cooking the eggs and bacon on the gas stove, and having words with the janitor, and curbing

EASING OUT OF A CLINCH

your ambition to blow all that insurance money the first six months. No, Barry. It's too wide a jump to take so hasty. Besides, I can make perfectly vile coffee. Let's hang this wilt-thou proposition on the hook for a while, and go on with the campaign against the Times Square people. I think it would be better, too, if you eased off on the strangle hold. Inez and Uncle Nels are due back from the picture show soon, and we don't want to give 'em any real life close-up that will make 'em gasp, do we?"

It wasn't just the way Ethel Barrymore would do it, I suspect; but then, I've had so little practice. Anyway, we parted as good pals half an hour before Inez showed up.

"How was the movie?" I asks.

"Swell!" says Inez. "Lotta lovin'. You should of been there."

"I'm always missing something good," says I.

Chapter II

Trilby May in Times Square

DO you know how to get to Room 39 in the Klaubert theater building? If you do you've had a liberal education and Mr. Edison is probably waiting to start you in pasting watt labels on electric bulbs at sixteen a week.

From which you might gather that I've begun my career as a dramatic agent. Uh-huh. You win. Anyway, I've made my first stab. I haven't taken floor space fronting on Times Square yet, or had Trilby May Dodge painted in gold letters on a ground glass door; but I've crashed into the game, and up to date I'm the sole representative of one of our most promising young playwrights. Absolutely. There's hardly anything worth having that Barry hasn't promised me, or isn't ready to.

Wasn't I telling you that he admitted having a big idea? Well, that was the last I heard from him for nearly a week, and when he finally did appear I could guess from the flicker in his blue eyes that he had a script concealed about

TRILBY MAY IN TIMES SQUARE

him. He had. Inez was the first to spot it, though.

"You go readin' again?" she asks.

Barry tints up pink in the ears. "Why," says he, "if you and Trilby May don't mind I should like to——"

"All right," says Inez cheerful. "Uncle Nels and I go to movies."

"She's such a thoughtful girl," says I, as the door slams behind them.

But Barry only hunches his shoulders and hands me the typed sheets. "You said you'd do the reading, you know," he suggests.

So I did, beginning with the title—"The Prince and the Flapper."

"That's a good touch, Barry," says I. "Yes, I like that. Now let's see how you've followed it up."

I'll own that I was surprised. He'd taken the same character he'd used in the first sketch—that Alex chap who flivvered at being a prince but who had achieved a knockout as a head waiter—and he'd built up an entirely new yarn, with a 17-year-old boarding-school vamp featured as the leading lady and a comic king who grouches about being recalled to the throne just as he's got his golf game going strong enough to beat the vamp's Daddy, a reckless breakfast

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

food plute from Buffalo who never plays for less than a dollar a hole. And in the first two pages he works up a situation that got me chuckling through the lines.

"I believe you've done it, Barry!" says I, as I finished.

"You really think so?" he asks. "I wish I could get Morris Klaubert or some of those fellows to listen while you read it."

"If they don't," says I, "it will be because the thing can't be done. I'm going out with this tomorrow."

"You're a good pal, Trilby May," says he.

"Shush on the soft stuff," says I. "I'm a commission hound with no mercy in my heart and a low cash reserve in the Rolled Top National. If you hear of the police reserves answering a riot call from the theatrical district you can guess that I've staged a whirlwind offensive and failed. Otherwise you can begin figuring out your royalties."

Which was just by way of keeping Barry chirked up, of course. Yet it did seem simple enough to get a hearing. Perhaps this wasn't the regular style of submitting plays, but so much the better. I'm all for the new and untried. And I found out where the Klaubert offices were by looking up the number in the 'phone directory.

TRILBY MAY IN TIMES SQUARE

You know who it is that's ready to rush in where bright angels are apt to hang back? Then you've got my description. Cordially yours. And I may as well confess that my ideas on how a big theatrical magnate runs his business—well, they were about as clear as a pool of pea soup. I rather think I expected to find a large, imposing personage sitting in a striped velour easy chair chatting confidentially with John Drew and Julia Marlowe, or running over a new Barrie play with Maude Adams. There would be a tall silver vase filled with gladioli on the polished mahogany desk, and a soft-footed secretary tiptoeing about.

It wasn't like that. Not at all. After the elevator man had shooed me off at the third floor I had to push my way through a mixed lot of females who were either chattering chummy to each other or glaring around sullen. From the liberal make-up on their faces and some of the expressions I caught on the fly I could guess that they were ladies of the chorus, or wanted to be.

"Say, where do I find Mr. Klaubert?" I asked one of them.

"You don't, Dearie," says she. "If you're lucky, he finds you. But if you're crazy for a peek, that's him, over behind the rail."

What she points out is a runty, bald-headed

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

little man with a beak like a parrot and a complexion like a first-run pancake before the griddle gets working properly. He acts worried and peeved, and as he paces up and down he seems to be yapping hostile through a black cigar at several low-brow assistants who registered manly independence by wearing a sly smirk. Some of 'em were yapping back, though, and a squeaky-voiced office boy chanted every few seconds: "Ballet squad now rehearsing on the roof! Ballet squad now rehearsing on the roof! Ballet squad now rehearsing on the roof!" So the place is about as restful as Saturday night in a bowling alley.

I couldn't figure that this would be a nice spot or the proper time to read anything to anybody, unless it was the riot act through a megaphone. But after having gone so far I didn't want to back out like a timid country girl edging away from the monkey cage at a circus. Besides, I'm no shrinking violet, as a rule. So I pushes up to the railing, elbowing aside a perfect 36 with plucked eyebrows, and springs my most winning smile in the general direction of the over-beaked little man. That move was just as useful as jiggling the receiver hook when the operator tells you the line is busy. Leaning over and waving a hand at him produced no results either,

TRILBY MAY IN TIMES SQUARE

except that it stirred up all the mulish quality in my disposition.

"Say, Mr. Klaubert," I called out.

"Eh?" says he, whirling sharp. And then, seeing it was a stranger, and only me, he simply stares.

"Just a moment," says I, beckoning him up.

At first I thought he was going to make a flying jump and bite me on the shoulder. As it was he only took a hop-skip my way and brought up two feet from me with a wrathful finger quivering under my nose.

"Say, how many times have you Janes gotta be told we ain't takin' on any bobbed blondes for this piece?" he demands. "And you're only a terra-cotta pink, at that."

"Excuse me," says I. "Natural near-henna is my color scheme, and I'm no chorus candidate anyway. All I want is to——"

"Bah!" he snorts. "Think I've got time to listen to all the hard luck tales any ginger-haired skirt wants to lug in. Couldn't use you anywhere. Your figure's no good and your face is worse."

"How sweet of you to mention it, kind sir," says I. "But, say, you're nothing to tell the world about yourself."

"What's that?" he barks.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"I don't want to get personal," says I, "but all you lack is a few green feathers to qualify you for hopping around on a swing perch in a brass wire cage asking for a cracker."

"Ya-a-ah!" he yaps. "Hey, Louie! Lead this fresh Jane out and drop her down the elevator well. Gag her, if necessary."

"It isn't, Curly Locks," says I to the wire-haired young sport who jumps through the gate. "But if you don't want to feel how hard I can pat you'll keep your paws in your pockets. I know the way out."

And I was still biting my under lip as I waited for the car to come down when who should drift out but Budge Fisher, a chubby-faced, pleasant eyed young chap who had been down to our Greenwich Village joint a few times with Barry Platt. He had something to do with the advertising department on Barry's paper, as I remembered. Anyway, he was a folksy youth.

"Well, look who's going to give the drammer a boost now!" says he. "It's Trilby May Dodge, isn't it?"

"If there's enough left of me to call by name," says I.

"Eh?" says Budge. "Haven't been trying to horn into a squab sextette, have you?"

"That seems to be the chronic idea," says I,

TRILBY MAY IN TIMES SQUARE

"but there's no truth in the rumor. My simple thought in coming here was to read a play of Barry Platt's to Mr. Klaubert. Cute notion, wasn't it? Either the thing can't be done, or I'm the world's worst dramatic agent. All the success I had was in causing Mr. K. to blow a gasket and almost getting myself thrown out. We exchanged bitter words."

"Who? Where?" asks Budge.

I nods towards the door behind us.

"Oh, Abie!" says he. "Say, you don't mean you tried to read something to him?"

"I didn't get that far," says I.

"I should say not!" says Budge. "Wouldn't have done you any good if you had. Why, he wouldn't know a Maeterlinck tragedy from a Guy Bolton lyric. He's the beanless brother, Abie is. Does the dirty work, picks the choruses, that sort of thing. Morrie is the one you want to see—Morrie Klaubert."

"I'm afraid I've queered myself with the whole family," says I, "after what I said to the one I've just left."

"Nothing to it," insists Budge. "If Morrie knew you'd bawled Abie out he'd be tickled to death. He can't stand him either. Nobody can."

"In that case," says I, "I ought to be a lifelong

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

friend of this Morrie person. Can he be seen?"

"Well, of course," admits Mr. Fisher, "it ain't so easy. I don't get to him myself often, and I'm assistant dramatic ad manager. Do all the press stuff, you know. But I can tell you how to get as far as Max Gold, the outer guard. If you can get by him——"

"Show me Max," says I. "I have a teaspoonful of courage left, I think!"

So Budge led me around four turns of the hallway, through a door marked "Keep Out," across a fire escape, and showed me how to ring for the private elevator. "Get off at the top floor," he advised, turn to the left, and keep going until you come to Room 39. That's where the great Morrie hangs out."

And three minutes later I was getting the cold stare from this aloof young party with the oily hair and the black bone glasses. But I was bound not to let anything curdle my sweet disposition again, and I put all the friendliness I had into that-twisty smile of mine.

"Where's Morrie?" I cooed to him.

"I beg pardon," says the youth. "Have you an appointment with Mr. Klaubert?"

"Me?" says I, arching my eyebrows. "Why should I? No, no, Mr. Gold. I'm planning

TRILBY MAY IN TIMES SQUARE

this as a surprise for dear old Morrie. Don't say a word. I'll just slip in quietly."

And before he could block me off I had slid past him, opened the door lettered "Private," and had closed it behind me. And there, with one leg draped over the arm of a swivel desk chair is this perfectly nice man with the cameo profile, the broad shoulders and the long, slender fingers. He's frightfully busy making aimless pencil marks on a scratch pad. He didn't seem half as much surprised to see me as I had expected. All he does is glance up casually and then go on sketching nothing in particular. But I'd done all the waiting around I cared for. My line was to rush him off his feet and I went to it strong.

"What luck!" says I. "I simply know you're going to give me ten or fifteen minutes of your precious time. I wouldn't ask it for myself, but I'm doing this for a clever young fellow whose work you're simply bound to want sooner or later and——"

"Oh, I say!" he breaks in.

"No, I can't leave it," says I. "He wants me to read it to you. It's only a short thing anyway and I can run through it in twenty minutes or so. Awfully good of you, Mr. Klaubert, to——"

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"But—but see here——" he protests.

"I know," says I. "You have an important conference on hand. The other people are bound to be a little late, though, and meanwhile—Well, the title is perfectly bully. 'The Prince and the Flapper.' Isn't it, now? I was sure you'd think so. And the scene is laid on the terrace of a Swiss hotel with——"

"I'm sorry, young lady," says he, starting to get up.

I hope I wasn't rude, but I just had to push him back in the chair. If necessary, I was prepared to sit on him to keep him quiet. I didn't quite get to that, though. I merely stood near enough to shove him back if he made another move, and almost before he knew it I was galloping through the lines of the first act. Twice he squirmed and I reached for him, but he didn't escape. The third time, however, I thought he'd got away. But he hadn't.

"Beg pardon," says he. "Leg's asleep. Go on."

And as he merely settles down comfortably in the chair I was able to use both hands for the script and give more time to the reading. I did it as well as I knew how, too, and I could see that the humor was beginning to register. At first he smiled rather patronizingly. It was a

TRILBY MAY IN TIMES SQUARE

nice smile, though. That is, he did it with his eyes as well as his mouth. And the next thing I knew he was chuckling. After that I was sure he was following closely. The chuckles came oftener and heartier. Once he slapped his knee enthusiastic, and I was just romping to the finish when a door at the back of the office swung open and in trotted this short, thick set, spectacled person who stopped to stare at us with his mouth open.

"What the devil!" he explodes.

"Just a moment," says my nice man, holding up a warning hand. "And then——?"

I went on with the last few lines.

"Perfectly ripping! Thank you so much, young lady," says he.

"I'm so glad you like it, Mr. Klaubert," says I.

"Hear that, Morrie?" says he. "I've been holding down your job for you. Doing it much better than you could have, I'll dare say, even if I was rather impressed into the service against my will."

"Oh!" says I, looking from one to the other.

"Then—then you're not Mr. Klaubert?"

"Allow me," says he, getting out of the chair and bowing. "This is the great Morris Klaubert, while I—well, you tell her, Morrie."

"A loafer, chiefly," says Klaubert, appro-

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

priating the desk chair, "but at times the most temperamental painter of weird scenery in the business. And now, Hadley, if we can get rid of this young woman——"

"But you mustn't, Morrie," says Hadley. "At least, not until you have heard one of the cleverest little comedies it has been my privilege to listen to in a long while."

"Bah!" says Klaubert. "You! What do you know about such things? Crazy interiors and impossible outside sets with trick lighting, yes. But plays! Hah!"

Hadley shrugs his shoulders. "I stagger under your scorn, Morrie," says he. "Of course, a mighty and discriminating intelligence such as yours is not to be questioned. Yet you did turn down 'Number, Please!' last season, didn't you; and drop fifty thousand in putting on 'Once Upon a Time'? Eh? And here is a delightful little thing that could be——"

"Don't want it, I tell you," insists Klaubert. "I've a trunkful that I brought back from the other side. Besides, the public doesn't like one-act pieces."

"You could work it into a revue," suggests Hadley.

"No," says Klaubert. "Amateur stuff, isn't it? That's enough."

TRILBY MAY IN TIMES SQUARE

It looked as if I'd flivvered again. Here I'd begun my campaign by having a row with the wrong brother, and then I had crashed into the right office only to pick out another wrong one. I had placed my nice man now. He was Hadley Hall, who had made such a hit with his stage settings for some of the Guild plays. It was kind of him to praise Barry's little piece, of course, but I couldn't see that it was going to do much good.

"All right," says I, folding up the manuscript. "If Mr. Klaubert has made up his mind there's no use in my sticking around and being a nuisance. Sorry I made such a stupid mistake, but I'm awfully green at this sort of thing. Perhaps I'd better quit."

"Don't you do it, young lady," says Hadley. "You're all right. And if Klaubert here wasn't such a stubborn old bonehead he'd take my word for it that your friend's play was worth while."

"Huh!" sneers Klaubert. "You're at liberty to back your own judgment, you know, Hadley. Why not put it on yourself if it's such a gem?"

"I'll tell you what I will do, Morrie," says he. "I'll bet you an even five hundred that I can get it put on."

"Oh, by some settlement house players perhaps," says Klaubert.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"What of it?" asks Hadley. "I'll add to the terms that it comes uptown to take the place of one of your imported failures before New Years."

"You're on, Hadley," says Klaubert. "I suppose you'll hang that much on your next contract if you lose, though. How do you mean to work it?"

"I've just thought," says Hadley. "I'm going to do a perfectly corking setting for this piece. Have it all planned—hotel terrace in the foreground, bare and simple; but beyond, just over the stone balustrade, an illusion of space. Do you get it? That wonderful shimmery blue of the Swiss twilight stretching out and away, miles and miles, to the Jungfrau rising majestic and solemn in the distance. It'll make 'em dizzy just to glance at it, and it will give exactly the right contrast to those whimsical lines. There's an exiled king who's been recalled but who wants to keep on playing golf, and an ex-prince who's having the time of his life as a head waiter. Then there's that delicious flapper from Buffalo—but why waste words on you, Morris?"

"You've said it," says Klaubert. "I don't see anything in it. But if you could settle down to anything so commonplace as planning a

TRILBY MAY IN TIMES SQUARE

\$10,000 set for the closing number of 'Oh, Susanna,' I should like to get to work."

"Tomorrow, perhaps," says Hadley. "I'm not in the mood now. Head's too full of other things. And if you'll excuse us, maybe, Miss—er——"

"Dodge," says I.

"Ah, thank you," says he. "Can you come down to my shop, Miss Dodge? I'd like to have you run over that again, so that I can visualize the scenes better, and then I'll just dash off a few sketches while the impressions are clear. Eh? Got the time?"

"I'm long on time," says I.

And I could hardly wait until six-thirty that night to get Barry Platt on the 'phone. "What do you think I've done, Barry?" I asked.

"The first day?" says he. "Well, let's see. Talked with Morris Klaubert's secretary, have you?"

"Huh!" says I. "Klaubert! He's no good. I spent an hour or more in his private office. But say, you know Ames Hunt?"

"Manager of the Players?" says he.

"Uh-huh!" says I. "He's heard the Prince piece. I read it to him while he was eating sweitzer sandwiches in Hadley Hall's studio. Hadley's painting the scenery for it. Oh, sure!

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

Ames Hunt is going to feature your piece in his new show. You're to drop down tomorrow and sign the contract."

I could hear Barry gasp. Then, after he gets his breath, he remarks excited: "Honest? Well, I'll say you're a whizz, Trilby May. If you were close enough I—I'd——"

"No, Barry," says I. "Your next move will be to write out a check for my commission. Oh, well! Perhaps we will celebrate with a little dinner somewhere—with Inez for a chaperone. Sh-h-h! She's only in the next room, you know."

Some of which must have hit Inez in the ear. "Hey?" she calls out. "Somebody want me?"

"No, Inez," says I. "You're not being paged; just being mentioned as a possibility."

"Oh!" says Inez satisfied, and lapses back into the gum habit,

Chapter III

Subbing in for Gloria

“JUST think!” says Barry Platt.

“Uh-huh!” says I. “I’m trying to.”

And I was. But I couldn’t quite work up the rosy pink thoughts that were going on under Barry’s slick light hair and registering in the flickery smile he wore. They even beamed from his blue eyes.

“The rehearsals have begun,” he adds. “Ames Hunt thought I’d better not come down at first. They just read their lines to start with. But by tomorrow they ought to know them fairly well, and I’m to be there. You, too, Trilby May. You must come along.”

“Me?” says I. “I’d be a great help, wouldn’t I?”

“But you’re the one who got it put on,” insists Barry. “Besides, I want you to hear how it sounds and tell me how you think it’s going. And anyway, you’re the only one who really knows what this means to me.”

At which I looks across at Inez to see if this

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

gets her at all green in the eyes. It doesn't. In fact she is wrapped in that after-dinner calm which nothing less than an earthquake would disturb. But she is dimly conscious that something important is being discussed.

"They gonna play that piece you read?" she asks. "On the stage?"

Barry nods enthusiastic. "'The Prince and the Flapper,' you know," says he.

"Huh!" says Inez. Then she yawns, heaves herself up from the easy chair, and drifts into the next room to wind the music machine and put on a new jazz record.

"It's her way of expressing how thrilled she is," I explains. "She has such an emotional nature."

But Barry is soaring too high to be affected by little things like that. He merely shrugs his shoulders. "I haven't told you the best yet," he goes on. "Who do you suppose they've engaged to play the Flapper?"

"Billy Burke," is my guess.

"No joshing," says Barry. "Listen: Ames Hunt has found the real thing. Gloria Whitney!"

"Sounds genuine," says I, "but I'm afraid I don't locate Gloria. Has she been in the movies, or what?"

Barry looks shocked. "She's never been any-

SUBBING IN FOR GLORIA

where before," says he, "except at Newport and Monte Carlo and Palm Beach and places like that. Her mother is Mrs. Stuyvesant Breese Whitney—the Mrs. Whitney—and an older sister is the Countess de Grau. Of course, Gloria has been in amateur things—school plays, pageants, charity shows and so on. They say she's clever, too. No one but Ames Hunt, though, would have had the nerve to have asked her to go on as a professional. Trust him! He goes after what he wants. 'For this flapper part,' he told me, 'we must have the real, right thing, as Henry James put it. I mean to get one, too.' And next day he wires Gloria Whitney. She left a Newport house party to come on and sign up. How about that?"

I got as excited over the news as I could without turning a handspring, and listened to other intimate details about the production with almost human intelligence, I hope. For while I had gone out and placed the piece for Barry, I'd pulled it off more or less by accident and what I still had to learn about the stage was a heap. Especially drama as it is done south of Jefferson Market. If you must know, too, it was nearly all new to Barry boy; but he was passing it on to me as though it was something he had inhaled with his first cigarette.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Hunt has sent for O. P. Biggs to do the King," goes on Barry. "Did some good work in stock last season at the Hollis Street, Boston, but of course he'll jump at a chance to get to New York. Then for the Prince we have one of Hunt's discoveries—a chap by the name of Sczernoff—Russian, I believe. I've forgotten just where Ames dug him up, but he has a speaking voice like Tyrone Power's and looks something like Jack Barrymore. Isn't that corking?"

I admitted that it was. I raved over the scenery which Hadley Hall was painting. And we sat there on the big davenport under a parchment shaded electrolier and talked and talked. That is, Barry did. He was full of conversation, and I let it bubble along until he began to get personal. I could see it coming by the look in his eyes.

"And I shall never forget, Trilby May," he begins, "that if it hadn't been for you——"

"Yes, I get you, Barry," says I.

"But, really," he insists, "it almost seems as if——"

"Uh-huh!" I breaks in. "When you were a Wollygumpus and I was your pet Gazoo. All down the ages we've been meeting and parting, from Babylon to Bayonne. But just now it's after 11 P.M., Barry, and I hear Inez yawning

SUBBING IN FOR GLORIA

her head off in the next room. Not that I want to throw out any hints, but——”

“Doggone it!” grumbles Barry, reaching for his hat.

Inez was quite cordial in bidding him good-night. And as the door closed she remarked: “He talk all time about the play, eh?”

“Mostly,” says I, “although there was one other subject touched on.”

“Huh!” says she, indulging in another yawn.

“Odd, isn’t it,” says I, “but that’s not the way I feel about it at all?”

I failed to confess, though, that there was something else I should have done next forenoon, besides go with Barry to the rehearsal. I’d heard of a perfectly good job as secretary-bookkeeper in an automobile sundries house and I really ought to have been trailing around there to find out about it. Perhaps it would keep for another day, though. Anyway, I took a chance and let Barry lead me down to this Sheridan Square Theatre where I took my first plunge through a stage entrance.

We were both prepared to be thrilled, I expect, but we soon found that an early rehearsal is rather a draggy affair. Only a few people were scattered around the bare stage and none of them seemed very busy. They were just

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

standing about looking bored. A stout, motherly looking woman was perched on a property rock smoking a cigarette; and a tall, lean, dark-eyed man was lounging in the wings reading a race track dope sheet by a poor light. Finally a thin, nervous acting chap with a long nose and huge bone-rimmed eyeglasses hustled in from somewhere and hailed Barry. He proved to be the great Ames Hunt.

"Ah, Platt!" says he. "Sorry you came today. We're not getting on very well. And Miss Whitney is late again. She'll show up soon I suppose and we'll get going. If you have any suggestions just shoot them over."

"Oh, no, no!" protests Barry. "Miss Dodge and I will camp around somewhere out of the way and look on, if you don't mind."

"Help yourself," says Mr. Hunt. "Anywhere."

So Barry and I groped our way down to some seats in about the middle of the empty auditorium and waited, whispering a word now and then, but chiefly straining our eyes and holding our breath. It was nearly half an hour longer, though, before this wispy, big-eyed young person with the very short shirt and the wonderful silver fox neck-piece came bouncing in. Gloria Whitney, of course.

SUBBING IN FOR GLORIA

"Are you going to be frightfully cross with me, Mr. Hunt?" she asked. "If you are, let's have it over with, but I simply couldn't get here a moment sooner. Really! Two long distance calls and a maid who will not let me go out unless she can spend just so much time on my hair. But I think I'm well up on the lines. Shall we start?"

Ames Hunt said that they would. And they did. They made several starts, in fact, but none of them quite suited Mr. Hunt. He was rather patient about it, I thought, but he would insist that Miss Whitney stick to the script, instead of improvising.

"But it means just the same, doesn't it?" she pouted.

"Almost," admitted Mr. Hunt, "but I think it would be better to give the lines exactly as they have been written. Now again."

So the leading lady who was the real thing made another try. It was surprising, though, what a change came over her when she began to recite her part. As Gloria Whitney she had been full of exactly the right kind of pert vivacity. She could use her eyes and her shoulders and her fingers to give emphasis and point to whatever she had to say. She was a sub-deb vamp from the tip of her expensive pumps to the chic little feather on her Paris toque.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

But as The Flapper she was quite different. She got stiff and wooden. She was as vivacious as a plume on a hearse. Her elbows stuck out and her feet toed in, and she couldn't make her voice behave. She watched the other players for her cues as eager as a puppy waiting for a bone to be tossed to him, and she put about as much expression into her lines as an Erie train announcer calling off the stations on the Oradell local. Ames Hunt ran his fingers through his long forelock and went through other agonized motions, but he couldn't seem to get her to do any different.

Barry was squirming about in his chair, almost as though somebody was jabbing him gentle with pins, but he didn't know exactly what to do about it. Finally, though, when Gloria proceeded to murder in cold blood one of the Flapper's cleverest speeches, he half jumped from his chair and groaned out, "Oh, I say!"

Everybody heard him, including Ames Hunt. "Well?" asks Mr. Hunt, stepping down to the footlights and staring out into the gloom.

"If Miss Whitney will pardon me," says Barry, "I—er—I think perhaps she might do that a bit differently."

"Who is that person, may I ask?" demands Gloria.

SUBBING IN FOR GLORIA

"Only the author," apologizes Ames Hunt.

"Oh!" says she. "Must he remain?"

"It is quite usual," says Mr. Hunt. "And if you don't mind, Miss Whitney, we will get him to come up here and give us his ideas. They're often helpful, you know. Come, Platt."

"I—I couldn't," stammers Barry. "Really."

"Sure you can," I whispers, nudging him. "You must."

But if I hadn't half dragged him he'd never have budged. Even after I'd got him up there he protests that he can't tell anybody how to read the lines, but only knows when they don't sound right.

"Helps a lot, doesn't it?" says Gloria, tossing her chin. "If I was a mind reader now——"

At which Barry goes pink in the ears and starts scraping his right toe. He doesn't funk it absolutely, though. After a painful minute or so he turns to Ames Hunt. "I say," says he, "couldn't you—that is, would it be all right if Trilby May—er, Miss Dodge, here, should do that speech once? She gets exactly my idea of it and—er——"

"Very well," says Mr. Hunt. "If Miss Dodge will oblige?" And he hands me the prompt script.

"Me?" says I. "Why, I'm no actress."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"What charming modesty!" comments Miss Whitney.

"I was born with it," says I. "Some aren't, you know."

"Some would be absurd without it," she snaps back.

"How well we agree?" says I, springing my crooked smile at her.

They tell me that's the most maddening thing I do in an argument. Anyway, it had Gloria biting her upper lip.

"But surely," breaks in Ames Hunt, "if the author has a vicarious suggestion to make, we may listen to it. Go on, Miss Dodge."

"Please, Trilby May," adds Barry.

Well, there I was, an innocent young thing from Minnesota, with no experience except a few appearances in Tamarack Junction, surrounded by real actors, and with perhaps the most critical stage manager in the business looking on, not to mention the sister of the Countess de Grau. But there was Barry, too, a pleading look in his eyes.

"Oh, well!" says I. "I've never been a Flapper talking to a Prince, but if I was I think I should do it something like this."

And say, I put all the zipp I had into that speech. I'll admit I was scared blue inside, but

SUBBING IN FOR GLORIA

I didn't let that bother me. I hardly looked at the script, either, for I'd been over the thing so many times with Barry that I almost knew it by heart. And the first thing I knew I was letting myself go, getting my eyes and arms and shoulders into it, and cuddling up to this Russian person as coy as though we were out on the front porch in the moonlight.

"Perfectly bully!" says Ames Hunt, patting me on the shoulder. "Precisely my idea, too. Now, Miss Whitney, see if you can't make it go something like that. I'm sure you can. Let's try."

"Thank you," says Gloria, "but I don't think I care to."

"Beg pardon?" says Mr. Hunt, lifting his eyebrows.

"I don't mind in the least being coached by you, Mr. Hunt," says Gloria, "but if you're going to call on anyone who happens to be standing around—well, that's a little too much. Why not ask in some shop girl or a tearoom waitress? They'd do it much after that fashion, I think."

But there's a good deal of pepper in Ames Hunt's cosmos, after all. "Wholly uncalled for, Miss Whitney," he remarks crisp. "And if you will permit me to point out——"

"I'll not!" says Gloria. "I—I don't care

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

to hear another word. I—I'm through with this stupid old play. Through! And I—I——"

Well, it was a regular tantrum she went into, including foot stamping, tears and the whole bag of tricks. And she finished by throwing the expensive silver fox fur around her neck and dashing out to the limousine, her high heels clicking defiance as she went.

"I'm sorry," says I.

"Oh, it was due," says Ames Hunt, shrugging his shoulders. "She wouldn't have done, anyway. My mistake. Oh, I make 'em. But they don't leave me wholly crushed. I still believe there's a Santa Claus. And I have someone else in mind for the part."

At which the motherly lady wants to know if the rehearsal is off for the day. If it is——

"Not at all," says Ames Hunt. "A few of us are left. And I'm going to ask Miss Dodge to finish reading the Flapper's lines. Will you?"

"I'll make a try at it," says I.

It was barely that for a while. I was more or less fussed when they all got into action and three or four times I either cut in too soon or was late catching my cue. But Mr. Hunt talked soothing to me, told me to take it easy, and before we finished I was going strong once more and rather enjoying the work. That's what the

SUBBING IN FOR GLORIA

actors call it, you know, and I'd always rather smiled when I heard the word used that way. But now I know that they're right. It is work, and good hard work at that. I was as trembly and as excited when it was over as if I'd been in a shipwreck or a subway smash. Tired, too. And at the end the Russian came up to me and shook hands.

"Thank you so much," says he.

And I'm afraid all I did was to stare at him with my mouth open.

Then Ames Hunt beckoned me to the front of the stage, where he and Barry had been talking confidential. "Young woman," says he, "what have you been doing before this?"

"Oh, a lot of useful things," says I, "such as tending a soft-drink booth, demonstrating electric washers, and managing a Greenwich Village cafe. Nothing to bring me before a grand jury, I trust."

"And just at present?" he goes on.

"Job hunting," says I.

"Don't tell me, Miss Dodge," says he, "that you haven't been secretly yearning to go on the stage."

"Me?" says I. "Oh, come, Mr. Hunt, you don't think I could kid myself that much, do you?"

He stares at me suspicious. "You are either

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

quite subtle, or an extremely rare type," says he, shaking his head. "I'm sure I don't know which. But we have decided to give you a try-out as the Flapper."

Perhaps I should have guessed what he was leading up to, but I didn't. So I suppose I stared back at him just as lifelike as two poached eggs on a platter.

"Not—not truly?" says I.

He nods. "Platt believes you can do the part to perfection," says Mr. Hunt.

"Oh, Barry!" says I. "He's no judge."

"They tell me I am, however," said Ames Hunt, "although at times I am inclined to doubt it. Still, I've made something of a record along that line, you know. And I agree heartily with Platt. At least, I'm willing to chance it. I think with the proper drilling you'd be a knock-out in the part."

"That's real nice of you," says I, "but you haven't seen me in a good light yet. Not that I'm crazy about handing myself any poor words, but I'm afraid I'd hardly qualify as a sweet young thing. Not with my carrotty hair, goose-berry eyes, and general lack of curves. Unless you mean to have Barry rewrite the piece and make his Prince color blind."

"Oh, I say!" protests Barry. "You're per-

SUBBING IN FOR GLORIA

fectly all right, Trilby May, just as you are. Isn't she, Mr. Hunt?"

Which gets a smile out of Amos Hunt, of course. "Anyway," says he, "Miss Dodge has vocal organs which she can use rather effectively, she has rather more intelligence than we are apt to find, and with these gifts to start on I think we may trust to the wigmaker and the make-up box for the rest."

So I gave in. "But it's going to put a strain on the beauty shop, I'll say," says I.

"Flappers is as flappers does," says Mr. Hunt. "We can make a grandmother look like one, but to talk and move and create a convincing flapper illusion, that is an art. You'll need to work hard and fast, though, Miss Dodge, for we intend to open two weeks from Monday."

I nodded as careless as I could, just as though this was nothing in my young life. Pooh! This morning I was wondering if I couldn't break in as somebody's secretary at maybe twenty-five a week, and before lunch time I'm promising to go on as one of Ames Hunt's stars. Just like that. But as I wandered out into the sunlight with Barry and figured how short two weeks could be I'll admit I got a bit wabby in the knees. So I didn't mind if Barry was tucking one arm under my left elbow rather folksy.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"I've got a new name for you, Trilby May," he whispers.

"Miss Brodie Bluff?" I asks.

"No," says he. "The perfect pal. That's what you are, you know. I wish I'd had sense enough to have seen it, months ago. But I'm wise to it now. I have felt all along that——"

"Check!" says I. "I get the picture. When you are Sir Barry Goofus and I have a talcum powder named after me. Pretty, pretty! But just now I feel like I'd sneaked up on an airplane, got the motor going, and was discovering that I didn't know how to fly the blamed thing."

"Oh, you'll come through all right," says Barry.

"Anyway," says I, "I mean to make a stagger at being the flappiest flapper ever put on the stage. If I crash it won't be because I was afraid to step on the gas."

Chapter IV

How Inez Called the Turn

YOU know how it is when you've had a lucky break? Even if it's only something you've pulled accidental, like winning out in a raffle, or being promoted at the office because somebody has quit sudden. Whether you deserve it or not, the fact remains that you've landed, and you can't help feeling a little puffy in the chest. But the big moment comes when you spring it on the folks at home.

That is, it should. So when I strolled back to the apartment, after having been picked by Ames Hunt to play the Flapper part in Barry's play, I expect I was wearing my chin high and stepping firm on my rubber heels. Of course, the only ones I could reckon as home folks were Uncle Nels and Inez. Counting on them in that role was stretching it a bit, I don't deny, but when you're a runaway double orphan you can't be choosey about such things. So I tried to break it to 'em as modest as I knew how.

Inez was the first to get a glimmer. "Hey?"

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

says she. "You mean you gonna be talk actress on the stage?"

Not that I was crazy about her way of distinguishing a movie person from a real actress, but I nodded enthusiastic.

"Huh!" says Inez. "You!"

"Why so flattering?" says I. "But I don't wonder at the tone, Inez. That's a good deal the way I felt about it myself at first. Who would have thought, hardly a year ago, when we were juggling ice cream orders and soft drinks on Superior Street, Duluth, that I would ever make a broad jump like this? And in a star part, too?"

For one thoughtful moment Inez relaxes her rhythmic assault on the spearmint and lets her calm gray eyes rest on me curious. "You—you get your name printed?" she asks.

"Absolutely," says I. "On the billboards outside, probably; anyway on the programs and in the newspapers; and if the thing makes a hit later on and we move uptown, maybe you'll see Trilby May Dodge spelled out in electric lights. How about that?"

But Inez hasn't such a frisky imagination. She simply gawks and shakes her head. "I gotta see it first," says she.

Which gives Uncle Nels a chance to come in.

HOW INEZ CALLED THE TURN

"You don't get paid for doin' that play actin'?" he asks.

"Real money," says I. "More than I ever dreamed I'd be getting a week."

He wags his gray head and squints at me from his shrewd eyes. "Lotta fools ain't dead yet, eh?" says he.

"No," says I, "and some haven't discovered what beanless old pests they are, either."

This doesn't register with Uncle Nels at all, for he just blinks satisfied and goes on pruning his nails with the young tool-shop he carries moored to his right forward suspender by a steel chain. It's one of the tall timber tricks I've tried to break him of, without any success. I had already pointed out to Inez that nail trimming wasn't a parlor pastime practiced in the best circles, but I couldn't get her to drop a hint to the old boy.

"If he don't, he whittle," Inez has said. "Likes to show off his knife."

It was more than a knife, as a matter of fact. It was a whole carpenter's outfit—sixteen blades, I believe, including a saw, screwdriver, a gimlet and I don't know what else. Given that weapon and a set of plans, any handy man could build a house, or dig a well, or scuttle a battleship. It had a pearl handle and a ring in one end, and

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

must have weighed a couple of pounds. Uncle Nels had seen it in a store window, gone back to view it for three days in succession before he dared price it, and at the end of the week had worked up enough courage to buy it. I'll bet it hurt, at that, for when it comes to little things, such as spending real money for a haircut or a new necktie, he's as hard boiled as a picnic egg. Yet he'll write a fifteen-hundred-dollar check for a month's rent for this de luxe apartment without batting an eyelash. Odd old codger.

But when Annette—the Montreal French maid who has been induced to join our entourage and do Inez' hair and keep her hooked up in the back—when Annette caught sight of Uncle Nels doing his pruning acts she shivered, clear from her high heels to her shoulder blades.

"Eet ees not nice, zat!" says she.

"Hey?" says Inez.

"For river drivers, yes," goes on Annette, "but for gentlemens—bas non! I will do heem manicure."

She got as far as soaking one hand in warm soapsuds and starting to reveal the half moons when Uncle Nels, who had gone red in the ears, broke away. "Tam foolishness!" he declared, and although Inez backed up Annette strong,

HOW INEZ CALLED THE TURN

and I added a word here and there, the three of us have had to give up.

She's proving a great help in many ways, though, Annette. She has reformed Inez from doing her wheat-colored hair in a double braid and winding it around her head as if she was preparing to balance a basket of fish on it. Also she restrains her from getting on some of the vivid color combinations she's so fond of, and she has nearly broken her from taking a Babe Ruth grip on her fork when she tackles steak. Other little things, too. And while Inez began by ordering her about rather brisk, she's coming to be more like a new pupil who's afraid of the teacher.

At first Annette looked on me, I blush to say, with a good deal of scorn. She had me framed for a poor relation who might or might not be paying her board. But when she caught the news that I was about to become an actress all was changed. Annette began to smile on me, offered to do my hair, and secretly tempted me with one of her own cork-tipped cigarettes.

"Mees Trilby will have coffee and rolls in bed, yes?" she asked.

"None of that 10 A.M. boudoir day-journey stuff for me," says I. "Thanks all the same, Annette, but I've got to get something more over the footlights than just my ankles and a few

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

vampish hip motions. Mine is a regular job and I'm none too sure I can get away with it. So it's me for an early fall from the feathers."

And honest, I went into training like I was due to meet a world champ. in the ring. Uh-huh. By the time the sun was lighting up the top of the St. Patrick's spires I was starting my half-hour setting-up exercises that I was learning out of a book. Then fifteen minutes of breathing stunts, a cold shower, and I was ready for two or three soft-boiled eggs and toast with hot water and milk on the side. After that did a brisk mile or so through Central Park, wishing I could afford a saddle horse and a sporty riding suit, and by 8 o'clock I was back in my room getting letter perfect in my lines and working up new business. Then, after two or three hours rehearsing at the theater, all I was fit for was a session on the day-bed and maybe a snooze before I dressed for dinner.

"They make you do all that?" asks Inez.

"No, I make myself do it," says I. "That's the silly part."

"If—if I was talk actress," goes on Inez, "I'd take it easy—have lotta fun."

"But I'm not elected yet," says I. "All I've got so far is the nomination. So excuse me if I seem to bustle around."

HOW INEZ CALLED THE TURN

Inez, though, has a mind that's a good deal like a rubber stamp. She's strong for the conventions and traditions. Her notion of anyone who's on the stage is that they must trip jauntily along the primrose path, using the powder puff and lip stick liberal as they go. And somehow she collects the brilliant idea that, having an actress in the family, it's up to one member of the sketch to go through the regulation motions. And she picks herself as the one.

So she gets up later and later, until I find her yawning over her bacon and eggs at ten-thirty. Annette seems to fall in with the scheme, too, for she's none too fond of leaving the hay early herself. Also she takes to improving Inez's color scheme, which is fully as useful as gilding the lily. Then she suggests new things for Inez to buy, and charge to Uncle Nels—zippy afternoon costumes, with hats to match, and a spangled dinner frock. I'm just waiting to hear the old boy groan when the bills come in.

But Inez certainly is blooming out, for although Annette may have been born in Prairie la Chine, south of Montreal, her taste in dress goods is real Frenchy. She seems to know by instinct where to find the little shops that have the smartest things, and the cost of them means nothing at all in her young life. It has been rather

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

interesting to watch the transformation, but when she proposed sending back a skirt to have four inches taken off the bottom I had to protest.

"Have a heart, Annette!" says I. "You wouldn't air calves like that on the Avenue, would you? Can't you leave something to the imagination of the passerby?" You know Inez isn't built on Chippendale lines.

"But zees ees New York!" insists Annette.

"True," says I, "but Park Avenue isn't the Winter Garden stage, either."

So we compromised on two inches, and at that they'll know Inez isn't suspended by a steel wire when she boards a surface car.

"You may not have joined the Follies yet, Inez," says I, "but you look the part."

"Swell, eh?" says Inez, showing her dimples.

"In spots, yes," says I, and retired to go over my lines in "The Prince and The Flapper."

We had been rehearsing for a week when I accepted the hints Inez had been throwing out for an invitation to go along with me some afternoon. I'd been stalling off Barry Platt for the same length of time, making him promise to keep away until the piece was going somewhere near right. But finally, after getting an O. K. from Ames Hunt, I told 'em they might horn in on an afternoon workout.

HOW INEZ CALLED THE TURN

"Bully!" says Barry. "Not that I doubt you're doing it well, but I'm anxious to see just how it will strike me."

"Oh, you'll be easy to please," says I. "Naturally. They're your lines. But I'm curious to know how the piece will hit Inez. If I can get it over to her——"

"Oh, you're bound to," says Barry.

I thought so myself. In fact, I figured on giving Inez quite a grand little surprise; for, if you remember, she'd been rather cold to the play when she'd heard Barry read it over; and I don't think she'd taken very seriously my first stab as an actress. As long as I didn't behave like one off stage she seemed to believe I wasn't the real thing. Then again, there was her notion that nothing but movie acting really counted, anyway. I meant to show her that she was wrong.

So when we got to the theater I whispered to Barry to tow her to a certain spot out front under a skylight, where I could watch her as the rehearsal went on. Besides that, word had been passed around the company that the short, bristly haired gent with Mr. Hunt was a scout sent down by an uptown manager who might make an offer later on if the report was favorable.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

And I must say that we got it moving as it had never moved before. I know I was putting all the pep I had into the part, and Sczernoff, who does the Prince, was playing up strong. Of course, we weren't using anything but improvised props—a bare pine table with two kitchen chairs for a scene on the terrace of a Swiss hotel, a spring water bottle with an old feather duster stuck in it for table decoration, and so on. Then, in place of Hadley Hall's stunning set showing the distant Alps and suggesting the deep valleys between, there was only the ugly brick back wall of the theatre, smeared over with scene-shifters' initials and "No Smoking" signs. But for the first time we were playing at someone, trying to get the lines across, and it seemed as though we were actually doing it.

That is, until I felt sure enough of myself to take a glimpse at Inez. I'd been rather dreading to make the test, but at the finish of a little scene where we had swapped some of Barry's clever repartee, I turned my head and peered out at her. Bing! It was just like running up a window shade to get the view and finding that somebody had closed the iron shutters. No more trace of interest than as if she'd been at a crossing watching a freight train go by. Not the ghost of a smile, no expression of any kind. She

HOW INEZ CALLED THE TURN

was simply chewing her gum, undisturbed and placid.

But there were even better lines coming, and the situation was intended to be a funny one. Not a scream, perhaps, but decidedly humorous. I waited and tried harder than before. Then I took another peek. Nothing doing. Inez chewed on, just as animated as though she'd been given the wrong connection and was waiting for central to discover that she was still there.

I expect I started biting my upper lip about then, but I wasn't beaten. We had worked up a neat little bit of business that was due in a minute or so, so I boomed along. It was where the Prince tries to do a little sly finger squeezing, holding out his hand for me to take while he's talking to Mum-mah, and I slip my glove into his palm. Not having any glove, I grabbed the water bottle off the table and shoved that into his hand. And as he had his head turned the other way, Sczernoff was naturally a bit surprised. He's a fidgety, quick-tempered person, too, when he's working. He gave one disgusted glance at the bottle and threw it peevish on the floor. Of course there was a fine crash.

"I'm sorry," says I. "I didn't mean to——"

And then there comes this hearty "Hee-haw!" from out front which nearly breaks up the show.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

I knew what had happened. The bottle smashing had hit Inez full on the funny-bone. At last her sense of humor had been reached. For no one else that I ever met can express their mirth quite so explosively or so unexpected. It's mighty seldom, also that Inez lets go of a real laugh. In all the years I've known her I don't suppose I've heard her cut loose with a genuine Hee-haw more than half a dozen times. Once I remember was up in Coleraine when some refined joker loaded a Montenegrin ore handler's pipe with a pinch of dynamite, and another happy incident that got a rise out of Inez was one sleety day in Duluth when she saw a coal truck skid through a show window into a display of china and glassware. Anything less than that merely got a chuckle or a smile. So I was sure this must be Inez. Yes, I could see her shoulders still heaving with joy.

But the Prince had had his dignity punctured. "If you don't mind, Miss Dodge," he protests, "I'd rather you wouldn't do that again."

Which is where Ames Hunt breaks in. "By all means!" says he. "Leave that bit in. There'll be a glass vase on the table, eh? Corking! And be sure to slam it down hard, Sczer-noff. Make a good smash of it. Very clever of you, Miss Dodge."

HOW INEZ CALLED THE TURN

Maybe it was low-brow stuff, but Ames Hunt knows his job. Anyway, from then on we had Inez sitting on the edge of her chair with her gum stowed to leeward. True, she failed to voice any more loud merriment, but she was with us to the last line.

I was feeling rather pleased with myself as I joined Inez and Barry down in the fifth row. I knew about what to expect from Barry. I could see it flickering in his eyes as he pulled me down into a chair beside him and patted me on the shoulder. He put it quite nicely, too, without getting very personal or mushy.

"Thanks, old dear," says I. "But you're a rotten critic, you know."

Then I turned to Inez. "Well?" says I.

"Funny gink, that Prince," says she, dodging the point.

"You mean he's foreign looking?" says I. "Most princes are. They're born that way, and can't help it. He's a Russian, or was."

"Huh!" says Inez, meaning that this is enough.

"But outside of that," I goes on, "how did you like the piece?"

Inez shrugs her shoulders. "Lotta talk," says she.

"I know," says I. "This isn't a pantomime,

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

or a movie, and dialogue is somewhat necessary in a play. But was it good talk, or otherwise?"

"All right, I guess," says she. "Not much lovin'."

"But we were working up to it all the time," says I. "You got that, didn't you?"

Inez blinks unresponsive. "You act kinda silly," she volunteers.

"Many thanks," says I. "I was trying to be a flapper, you see, and I must have come somewhere near it. You're sure I seemed silly enough, are you?"

Inez nods. "Carrying on with that man!" says she.

"Precisely," says I. "Why, you're almost flattering, Inez."

She stares at me doubtful for a minute and then asks: "Do—do you get him after all?"

"Wasn't that made plain?" says I. "You heard the last few lines, didn't you?"

"But you—you don't hug," protests Inez.

"That's true," says I. "We finish at arm's length, merely holding hands and gazing into each others' eyes. No rushing to a clinch, no record-breaking osculation. But the terrace of a tourist hotel would be rather a public place for that sort of a gummy wind-up, wouldn't it? Barry's fault. He wrote it that way. But you

HOW INEZ CALLED THE TURN

could imagine, couldn't you, what might take place when we were alone at last?"

Inez doesn't admit that she could. "They ought to hug at the end," she insists.

"I'll speak to Ames Hunt about that," says I, winking at Barry. "I wouldn't mind. Sczernoff looks like a chap who could do a good job of it. But how did the lines go, Inez? Get any chuckles from 'em?"

"Mostly foolish," says she.

"You did laugh once, though," I reminds her.

Inez grins reminiscent. "When he smash the bottle, yes," she admits. "Kinda funny. I like to see him do that again."

"There you are, Barry!" says I. "Your play has been saved from oblivion by a spring water bottle."

"Horse-play!" says Barry. "Slapstick stuff. I wish Hunt would cut that out."

"You're dead wrong, Barry," says I. "Inez has proved it. Just think; if we ever move up-town we'll have Inez scattered all over the house—in the orchestra chairs, in the boxes, in the balconies. And their Hee-haws will help."

"What you mean?" demands Inez. "I gotta be all over?"

"Mere figure of speech, Inez," says I. "And if one smashed bottle will work the trick—Say,

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

Barry, I'll tell you! Why not have the dessert a squash pie, and then I could throw it at the Prince, or he could throw it at——”

“Gr-r-r-r!” says Barry. “Stop kidding me, Trilby May.”

“Ask Inez,” I insists.

“Uh-huh!” says Inez. “Swell! But custard, that would be best.”

“If you only knew it, Barry boy,” says I, “vox populi has spoken.”

By the way he glared at us as he left I take it that Barry's ego was about to froth at the mouth.

“You get him mad about something, eh?” asks Inez.

“It was either that or get hugged,” says I, “and I didn't want to spoil an otherwise perfect afternoon.”

Chapter V

Taking the Bumps With Barry

I'LL say we're a queer lot. Us talk actors, as Inez would put it. Oh, yes! I expect I'm qualified to class myself with the profession. Anyway, I've figured in a first night and I've discovered that I have a fully developed temperament. I'm not boasting about owning such a thing. I'm sort of jarred to think that I have it. It must be something like being told your heart is located on the wrong side, or that you have gift for playing the snare drum.

And I would have insisted that I was a perfectly normal young female person up to within twenty-four hours before the dress rehearsal. It was about then I began to develop a case of jumpy nerves. I didn't realize it at the time, but I must have caught it from the others. For it swept through the company like a flu epidemic.

The old hands showed it first. Mrs. Bates, who does Mum-mah and has been on the stage since the days of "The Black Crook," was the first to throw a cat-fit. She began to stumble

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

over lines that she'd been letter perfect in from the first, bungled the best piece of business in the part, and finished the afternoon so hysterical that someone had to light a cigarette for her. Then Sczernoff went fidgety and took it out by snapping at me.

"Easy on the rough stuff, old dear!" I warned him. "Go take a bite out of the scenery if you feel that way."

But the next thing I knew I was slipping myself. I missed a couple of cues, nearly wrecked the big scene, and found myself digging my finger nails into my palms and getting red in the ears. I'd just overheard a side remark by O. P. Biggs, who plays the King. "If this keeps up," he said, "I should advise Ames Hunt to buy a tent and send us out on the medicine circuit."

You should have been in on that dress rehearsal, though. It was too awful for words, and by the time it was over hardly any two of us were on speaking terms. I was in such a state of mind that I couldn't even be sorry for Barry Platt, who stood around with his jaw dropped and his face white while we murdered his lines. But Mr. Hunt seemed quite calm. He's some manager, I'll tell the grand jury.

"Yes, you're all pretty rotten, thank you," says he, smiling as though it was a good joke.

TAKING THE BUMPS WITH BARRY

"The usual thing, however. It will go differently tomorrow night, when you have an audience to buck you up. Don't worry, and everybody get a good night's sleep."

He had the true dope. We put over "The Prince and the Flapper" as smooth and strong as if we'd had it on the try-out stands for a month. It went big, too. No, I'm not going to make a noise like a press agent, so you'll have to fill in the details. And anyway, you know what first nights are apt to be when an organization like the Village Players puts on a new bill—and the manager's friends out, most of the directors with their friends, and the friends of the actors, if any. Every entrance greeted with enthusiasm and as many curtain calls as there are members of the cast.

I didn't know it then, but a big noise by first nighters doesn't always mean a long run. Sometimes it's merely a sign like the singing of crickets—six weeks to a frost. The others should have been wise to it, but they weren't. They went around patting each other on the shoulder, the women kissed and wept, and everybody agreed that the piece was a sure-fire knockout.

"Really, I didn't think there were so many laughs in the lines," says O. P. Biggs. "But you heard 'em, didn't you? Real haw-haws."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

I nodded with the others. Yet I knew who had started it all. Inez, of course. She was sitting in the fourth row with Uncle Nels, all primed and loaded, waiting for that scene where the Prince finds I've slipped a glass vase into his palm instead of my hand. And when he slams it on the floor with a crash Inez uncorked that hee-haw of hers, just as she did at the rehearsal. And it touched off all the other hearty laughs, clear to the back rows. That was enough. From then on they all seemed to be dead sure this was a comedy they were listening to and that it was perfectly all right to laugh at the slightest excuse. So they did. It was a regular epidemic. Those who were too dignified to haw-haw chimed in with chuckles or giggles. And every bit of it was sweet and cheering to us. For we knew we were good.

"We'll make Broadway before Christmas; you'll see, dearie," says Mrs. Bates, hugging me impetuous. "I'm going to take an uptown flat."

"I knew we had a winner from the first," says Sczernoff. "Just wait until you see the notices the newspapers give us."

Even Barry had as bad a case as any of 'em. True, he still had on tap that little speech he'd worked up to spring if there should be wild cries for the author. Three days before the opening

TAKING THE BUMPS WITH BARRY

he had stated quite emphatic that he would give way to no such weakness, didn't believe in that sort of thing, and that any author who did it always made a boob of himself. Yet I caught him going over his notes and he had admitted sheepish that if the audience did insist on having a few words from him he might give in. But they didn't insist. Hardly any of 'em had ever heard of Barry Platt, anyway, and probably only a few wondered who he was.

But the applause had gone to Barry's head and the next thing I knew he was inviting us all out for a midnight supper at The Purple Pup. That was where we had a chance to hand ourselves all these verbal bouquets. And after I'd listened a while I was convinced that we had taken part in a dramatic sensation that would soon be the talk of the town. I could see long lines of limousines and taxis streaming down to Greenwich Village every night, box-office queues three blocks long, and the S.R.O. sign hung out for every performance. I wondered if the Mayor or Governor happened to be out front for the premiere, and if not why not. Would the critics give our piece a full column in the morning papers? And what should I say when they came to interview me at the apartment later on? Ought I to admit that I was just breaking into

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

the game, or kid 'em along with mystery stuff? How about that Morrie Klaubert person, too? Suppose he sent for me to come up and sign a contract for next year; should I stick to Ames Hunt a while longer, or take the candy while the taking was good?

Gosh, but it does get you! This listening to the laugh ripples grow into roars, watching the fat man in the middle row rock his shoulders, and seeing the open face motions spread from double A to the back rail. And then to have everybody you meet tell you how clever you were. You can hardly blame us for collecting the notion that we've got the world by the ear, can you?

Of course Barry insists on taking me home in a taxi. If I'd been living on Staten Island I believe he'd have chartered a steam yacht for the trip provided there was one to be had. For he certainly was feeling rich and generous. Also grateful.

"You've turned the trick for me, Trilby May," says he. "Made me write the thing, got it placed, and then made it go. I—I'm going to kiss you."

"When?" says I.

"Right now, as the cab's swinging into Fifth Avenue," says he.

TAKING THE BUMPS WITH BARRY

"Well, why all the chatter about it, then?" says I.

And he was so hasty about it that he almost missed.

"Were you ever a brakeman, Barry boy?" I asks.

"Why?" says he.

"I was only judging by the performance," says I. "You know you don't have to do that as if you were catching a mail sack on the Century Limited. This is no juggling trick. Here, lemme show you!"

It was a huge success, if I do say it. Not that we hung up any duration record, or held the pose for a fadeaway; but it wasn't any half portion peck, either. And Barry knew he'd executed something when it was over.

"Say!" says he, taking a deep breath. "That sure was a hummer. I—I'm afraid you're no amateur, Trilby May."

"Absolutely," says I. "We do it right simply from instinct. No! That's the finish. If you think you've started on a marathon you've got another guess. Besides, I'd rather hear you talk. Go on, Barry, tell me what a great man you're going to be. Wait until I take off my hat. There! Now we're cozy and comfy—unless my hair tickles your ear. No? I suppose

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

it is rather scandalous, but it's rather nice. Eh?"

I hope there were no shocked old ladies out on lower Fifth Avenue at that time of night, or no blue law reformers. For we might have given 'em a jolt. But I didn't feel the least bit wicked. He's such a clean, wholesome youth, Barry Platt, and such a good pal. And between us we owned the whole town that night. We'd earned it. It was ours to play with, or give away, or make over new. We weren't at all timid about doing it, either.

"Some day," says Barry, "there'll be a new playhouse built up near Columbus Circle. We shall call it 'The Trilby May,' I think."

"With my portrait done in oils hung opposite the box-office in the lobby?" I asked.

"Uh-huh," says he. "And another in the smoking room downstairs—a full length."

"Then the color scheme of the decorations ought to be freckle brown and gooseberry green, to match my complexion and eyes," I suggests.

"Your eyes were wonderful tonight," says Barry. "Like opals in the firelight. How's that? Good line, what? I'll use that in the next play I write for you. Eh? Of course, it'll be for you, and it will be a heap better than this one, for I know what I want to do now, and I'm

TAKING THE BUMPS WITH BARRY

sure of myself. Yes, I have the part nearly thought out. And next time we'll start on Broadway."

"What a clever thought?" says I.

"Oh, I'm not kidding myself," says he. "I know a hit when I see one. And 'The Flapper's' it. You'll see when you get the morning papers. Let's read 'em together. I'll come over about ten-thirty and bring the lot with me. Eh?"

"All right," says I. "We will mingle our blushes, as it were. Oh-hum! But I'm tired, Barry boy. I feel as if I could sleep right through to next week."

"Happy dreams," says Barry, as he left me at the elevator.

"If any," says I. "I think I'm going to be too busy for dreams."

For it's generally when I've flivvered at something that the thought works insists on running a night shift. Worries and failures will follow you to the feathers, I find; but success only rocks you to sleep gentle and then steps outside to wait until it can ride in again on a sunbeam. And now, for the first time in my young career, I was soothed by the thought that Trilby May Dodge was about to become a regular person, and not a walking joke from Tamarack Junction, Minn. It looked like I had arrived, and that maybe I

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

was going to be somebody to tell the world about. So I snuggled down under the covers and hardly wiggled a toe for eight hours.

I was just finishing my second corn muffin and the twin of the first soft-boiled egg when Barry came breezing in with a bundle of newspapers under his arm.

"Wux-tree! Wux-tree! All about the big comedy hit. Here's yer Woild, Hurr'ld, Times and Try-bune. Poiper, lady?" he calls out.

"Bad boy!" says I. "Have you read them all?"

"Not a line," says Barry. "I'll admit I was tempted, but I've saved 'em all up until I saw you. Haven't even taken a peek."

"Noble youth!" says I. "He has Tantalus looking like an also-ran. Well, steam ahead."

"Let's see," says he. "Who'll we have first? Old Hey Broun, eh?"

I nods, so Barry opens *The World*. For a minute or so he scans the columns eager and then his eyes take on a puzzled look.

"Can't you find it?" I asks.

He shakes his head and then goes up and down the page again. "There—there isn't a word about 'The Prince and the Flapper,'" he finally announces.

"No?" says I. "Perhaps your Mr. Broun was sick, or out of town, or something."

TAKING THE BUMPS WITH BARRY

"Nothing like that," says Barry. "See here! He has nearly a column about 'The Antics of 1922,' though. All that about a cheesy girl show full of revamped vaudeville acts and whiskered jokes! But for a real play, not an inch of space! What do you know about that?"

I didn't have the answer. I couldn't even make a good guess at the mystery. So I did the next best thing. "Oh, well, he isn't the only dramatic critic in town, is he?" I asks.

"No," says Barry. "And he'll probably have something in tomorrow. Let's see what Alex. Wolcott gives us."

Barry threw *The World* on the floor and grabbed *The Times*. But I could see by his expression that he was getting another hard bump.

"More oblivion?" I asked.

"Might as well call it that," says Barry. "Wolcott favors 'The Antics,' too. Whole column, display head, signed. And 'The Flapper' gets half a stickful in the dramatic notes! That's all. A paragraph done by some assistant, probably an ad. man. No criticism at all. Just says that the Village Players put on a new bill and that O. P. Biggs, formerly with the Jewett company in Boston, was in the cast. Biggs! Say, that's the final stroke."

"But Biggs was pretty good," I suggests.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Bah!" says Barry. "Nothing about the new leading lady, Miss Dodge. Nothing about the play. Say, what's the use?"

"Tough luck, Barry boy," says I. "But there are a few others. Perhaps some of 'em left the girl show early and looked in on us."

It was a poor guess. They hadn't. The longest notice printed about "The Prince and the Flapper" was a ten-line paragraph which Barry says is merely a rehash of some press stuff sent out by Ames Hunt a week ago. And there sits Barry Platt, who a few hours before was talking about dictating terms to Klaubert, slumped in a chair with his chin on his necktie and a lot of crumpled newspapers at his feet.

"All because Hunt doesn't take big advertising space," grumbles Barry. "Can't, you know, with that little house way down town. And what do the critics care about art? Bah!"

"Then we haven't made the town sit up and take notice, eh?" I asked.

"It seems not," says Barry.

"How disappointing!" says I. "From what I heard last night I thought—well, I thought Brooklyn Bridge would be jammed with the people coming over, and that extra ferries would be running from Jersey. I had myself all posted up, too, as a new theatrical star, just discovered.

TAKING THE BUMPS WITH BARRY

And it seems that nobody knows I'm even twinkling."

Barry gives a ghost of a smile. "There was one notice I didn't read to you," says he. "It's a boost, too. Listen: 'A play called *The Prince and the Flapper*, by'—Get this now—'by Perry Blatt, was produced last night by the Village Players. The scenery, painted by Hadley Hall, was very well done.' Ye gods! The scenery! And I crash into fame as Perry Blatt! Say, I could murder the linotyper who did that to me."

He almost looked as if he could. In fact, he glared at the rug so vicious that I had to chuckle.

"Funny, isn't it?" he asks bitter.

"Oh, buck up, old dear!" says I. "And doesn't it strike you, Barry, that we've all been taking ourselves just a bit too seriously? Let's see, how many did we have in the house last night? Eight hundred? And there are about five million more who were not among those present. Think it over. Lemme see one of those newspapers. Huh! Quite a lot going on besides play openings, isn't there? There's an election coming off soon. I suppose some folks are more or less interested in that. And here's that New Rochelle murder mystery that seems to be figuring prominently. There's the news from Ireland, too; and something about the new tariff

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

bill, and another scandal in the police department, and an account of a big railroad smash out in Indiana. Say, I'm beginning to suspect, Barry, that maybe our first night wasn't such a great and thrilling event as we had it sized up for. Eh?"

Barry stares at me a moment, and then grins. "I guess you're right, Trilby May," says he. "We threw a pebble into the Atlantic and then looked for a tidal wave. All but you. You seem to have kept your head on your shoulders."

"It was a bit wobbly along about midnight," says I. "Of course, I don't understand this newspaper game at all. But everything isn't lost, is it?"

No, he admits that there is still hope. And sure enough, there was. Two of the evening editions had real nice things to say about us and the play. One critic was almost enthusiastic. True, he did squander more adjectives on Hadley Hall's Swiss mountain set than on the piece proper, but he added that Miss Dodge as The Flapper did a very creditable bit of work. And by dinner time Barry had been assured that the big critics would be down later in the week to see if there really was anything in his play worth mentioning.

I'd had my hunch, though. I knew that I'd

TAKING THE BUMPS WITH BARRY

made a broad jump and had landed fairly well; better than I ever hoped for. It was a big thing—for me. But I was also getting hep to the fact that I hadn't shaken Manhattan Island to its foundations. The Subway hadn't caved in, the Metropolitan tower was still standing, and there was no panic in the theatrical district. Tonight folks would stream into the movie houses, or have late dinners, or gather in somebody's apartment for poker or bridge just as usual. Not one in a hundred would even know that such a piece as "The Flapper" was being played, and ten chances to one the party who did would forget it before morning. So why kid myself that I had made it easy for Maude Adams to retire? I chirked up and hummed a tune as I got ready to start for the theater. I caught Inez staring curious at me out of those calm gray eyes of hers.

"It's swell, eh," she asks, "being talk actress?"

"In the head, yes," says I. "That is, if you don't watch out."

"You feel that way?" says Inez.

"I did," says I. "But I've had a puncture, and just at present, Inez, I'm bumping along on the rim."

Chapter VI

Back Stage With Trilby May

“**Y**OU’LL see, Dearie,” says Mrs. Bates. “By another week everything will be running smooth and we’ll be just like a big family.”

“Eh?” says I. “Big family? I hope not. That was one of the seven mystic reasons why I left home, Mrs. Bates.”

“Please, Trilby May!” she protests. “All the others are calling me Auntie Bates. They always do.”

“Very well,” says I. “I don’t want to shatter any good old back-stage traditions. Auntie Bates it is.”

Which was where I got folded to her ample bosom and had a warm, moist dab planted under my left ear. One of these impetuous, warm-hearted females, Mrs. Bates is. She admits it herself. “I’m such a silly goose,” she’s apt to say, “but I do get awfully fond of people.”

“Is it a trick,” says I, “or a habit?”

She merely simpers at that and shows her double chins, for anything that isn’t as plain as

BACK STAGE WITH TRILBY MAY

a "Go-Stop" sign she don't get at all. For some time I couldn't figure how a manager such as Ames Hunt, who specializes in raw material and is always curling his lip at the average Broadway productions, should have picked an old timer like Mrs. Bates. She does the "Mum-mah" part in "The Prince and the Flapper," you know, and from the start her work was as stagey and Al-Woodsy as it well could be. But Hunt never called her for it, never asked her to change an inflection. "Just be natural, Mrs. Bates," he told her once when she asked how she should read a line.

Then of course I got wise to his idea. This "Mum-mah" person in Barry's play is a beanless, gushy old soul who is still kittenish at fifty-five and doesn't care who knows it. So when Ames Hunt had gone to a theatrical agency, which he usually avoids, and had picked out Auntie Bates, he got someone who fitted the character like the skin on a banana. She hardly needed any extra make-up, for even on the street and at rehearsals she shows those little touches which any druggist can supply. Even her hair is perfect. Heaven only knows what shade it was originally and I shouldn't wonder but Mrs. Bates herself has forgotten; she's been an experimental blonde so long, ranging from the old peroxide

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

dip to the henna wash; until now her crowning glory has most of the tints of a fading rainbow, including faint yellows and sickly greens. Neither could her voice be improved on, for it ranges from a cooey gurgle to a rasping cackle.

Let her tell it, and she's had some career, beginning as the little child in "Lights o' London" and working through until she was singing with The Bostonians back in the days when De Wolf Hopper was new to Broadway and "After the Ball" was a popular song hit. She has told me a lot about such things, but most of 'em were about as familiar to me as the fall of Nineveh or the rise of the Hanseatic League. I knew they'd happened, but not why or when.

It wasn't until after "The Flapper" had gone into its second week and promised to linger on for a month or so that Auntie Bates got to be real folksy, however. She would come waddling into my dressing-room for a ten-minute chat before first call, generally opening by feeding me a bit of taffy she'd thought up for the occasion, and then shifting to a chapter of her personal history. I didn't mind, for half the time I didn't listen close, and her monologue wasn't disturbing.

Likewise it was only gradually that she sprung her family on us. I had rather thought she was

BACK STAGE WITH TRILBY MAY

a widow of some kind, sod or statutory, but it developed that there was a hubby in the background. "Daddy Bates," she called him, although what he was a daddy of was more than I ever discovered. Of course there was Thespy.

"You must know Thespy," Auntie Bates said one night. "She's a dear. I'll have Daddy bring her around some evening."

"She's—er—your daughter?" I asked.

"How absurd!" says Auntie Bates. "Why, Thespy is the dearest little Pom. you ever saw. I've had her nearly twelve years."

"Oh!" says I. "A dog! I like dogs."

So do I, as a rule. But I wasn't crazy about Thespy. And anyway, I've always classed these Pomeranians as more like parlor insects than real dogs. Besides, Thespy had got to the moulting stage, when a lot of her fluffy black hair was missing, and more of it had turned gray. She was wheezy and short tempered, too, and looked at you out of her watery little eyes in a supercilious, unfriendly stare.

"Poor dear," explains Auntie Bates, "she doesn't see very well now."

What I would have prescribed for Thespy if she had been mine would have been a nice tight soap box and two ounces of chloroform on a roll of cotton. But as I felt no responsi-

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

bility in the matter I merely patted her gingerly and backed off.

I couldn't admire Daddy Bates, either. Until I got used to him he seemed to be more like someone who had stepped out of a comic strip than a real person. One of these short-legged, dumpy built men, with a big solemn face that in some way had gotten out of drawing. I couldn't tell just what was the matter with his face; whether the hooked nose was too long, or the owl-like eyes too wide apart, or the grayish mustache too much like the tusks of a walrus.

Anyway, he was rather a weird old boy who seemed quite devoted to Thespy and had very little to say. He was given to wearing fancy vests that didn't at all go with his coat, purple neckties that clashed violently with his ruddy cheeks, and across his wide chest he always had draped a heavy watch chain with a huge Shriners' emblem dangling from it.

"Are you an actor, too, Mr. Bates?" I asked.

"Me! Lor', no, Miss," he protested. "Flo, here, she's the only one in our fam'ly that's got any talent. I'm just Daddy Bates."

"Dear old silly!" says Auntie Bates, ducking her double chin coy and patting him on the shoulder.

Later on she confided to me that Daddy Bates

BACK STAGE WITH TRILBY MAY

had been quite a personage in his day. He'd been mayor of Paramus, N. J., for two terms, had run a roadhouse near there for fifteen years, and long ago had been a promoter of bicycle races and other big sporting events. She had met him when she was a member of a stranded road company, and he'd been so kind to her that she'd married him.

"And you've lived happily ever after?" I suggests.

"Oh, yes," says Auntie Bates, shrugging her shoulders. "He's an old darling, Daddy Bates. Follows me around everywhere, you know, even when I'm on tour. You see, my dear," here she drops her voice to a hoarse whisper, "the old stupid is frightfully jealous."

I hope I smothered the grin. "No!" says I. "You don't mean it?"

Auntie Bates nods and sighs. "He wasn't so at first," she goes on, "or else he hid it from me. But in the last five or ten years it has been growing on him. He doesn't even deny it. Says he's afraid of losing me. I have to be very careful, you know."

"Yes," says I, "I should think you would."

And for fear I couldn't keep back the chuckles any longer I had to shoo her out and send for Barry Platt, so I could share the secret with

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

someone. "I'm sure I can't imagine who would want to steal her from him," says Barry, "unless it was some collector of antiques."

"Oh, let's not be rough, Barry," says I. "And I shouldn't wonder but what she was quite a vamp in her day."

"I've heard that Cleopatra was, too," says he, "but she had the good taste not to outlive her reputation."

"Anyway," says I, "it's too late to send Auntie Bates a snake in a basket of fruit. She might not take the hint."

"After hearing what a fire-eater Daddy Bates is," says Barry, "I wouldn't risk sending her anything."

But it was interesting, after that, to watch the old girl, especially in her livelier moments. For when she was sure Daddy Bates wasn't hanging around somewhere back stage she was fond of twinkling her eyes at almost any male who happened to be handy, from Ames Hunt to a scene shifter. She would paw 'em, too, if she got a chance, and of course she called everybody "Dearie."

Not that any of the men really fell for Auntie Bates, but they didn't seem to dislike being petted by her. You know how they are? Even O. P. Biggs, who is a good deal of a grouch

BACK STAGE WITH TRILBY MAY

when he's working, would let her cuddle up to him occasionally and he would listen while she related how, when she was singing in "Nanon" once, as the landlord's daughter, an audience in Brockton, Mass., gave her nine encores, and she did wish he could have known her then.

But Sczernoff, the reformed Russian, seemed to be her pet. "He's such a sad-eyed, lonely boy," she explained to me once, "that I just can't help mothering him."

"You're welcome," says I. "I guess he needs it, too."

One of these silent, brooding men, Sczernoff is, and it wasn't until Auntie Bates had several confidential chats with him that any of us suspected he was the only surviving member of a noble Russian family. The Reds had done for the rest and Sczernoff himself had only escaped by walking clear across Finland disguised as an old woman and had worked his passage to New York as a coal passer on a Swedish tramp steamer. He had nearly starved after getting here, at that, but finally he had run across an old family servant who was holding down a waiter's job in a Fifth Avenue hotel and the faithful retainer had grub-staked him until he had been signed on for a small part by an East Side manager. That was where Ames Hunt had discov-

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

ered him and asked him to play the part of the Prince in "The Flapper."

Perhaps Auntie Bates gave him soothing words of sympathy. She has a good line of chat when she cares to unload it. Anyway, they got quite chummy and it was the usual thing to see them hobnobbing in the wings during the waits. Generally she would have one hand on his shoulder, or an arm tucked through his. All quite motherly and innocent.

"The dear boy has asked me out for supper," she whispered to me one night. "I wish I dared."

"Think Daddy would raise a row?" I asked.

"Oh, he'd be furious," says she.

He was nearly always apt to drift around, too, Daddy Bates, at some time during the evening. Not that he acted suspicious or went through any sleuthy motions. Mainly he spent his time out with old Mike, at the stage door, where the two of them would sit smoking their pipes and telling stale jokes. But now and then Daddy Bates would stroll in, camp on a box or something, and watch his Flo go through her part. Rather a genial, kindly old soul he looked, too, and it was hard to think of him getting green in the eyes and ranting around. I said as much to Auntie Bates.

BACK STAGE WITH TRILBY MAY

"Oh, you should hear him go on after we get home," she insisted. "Why, only the other night, when he had seen me talking to that dear boy, he actually threatened to shoot himself. I'm afraid he'll do it sometime. Honestly! But I'm such a silly goose I just can't help talking to the men."

"Of course you can't," says I.

It was the next Friday night, I think, that this little talk of ours came back to me so strong. Anyway, there was a light house, and it had been raining for forty-eight hours without a let up, and we were all feeling rather soggy and low in our minds. Auntie Bates, having more temperament than most of us and being shy on self-control, showed symptoms of the blue willies the plainest. Before the curtain went up she wept a little on my shoulder and told me all about it.

"Everything seems to come together, doesn't it, Dearie?" says she. "This dreadful weather is bad enough. And then Thespy had to have another spell—asthma, or something like that which dogs have. The poor dear! I held her in my lap all the afternoon. And I supposed Daddy would be there to take care of her tonight, but instead of that he insisted on going off to some foolish banquet. I was real cross with him, too, but he said it was the annual something or other,

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

and as he was the Grand Past What-you-callum he just had to be there. I suppose he did have to go, but I was so worried about Thespy that I didn't care what I said and we—we——”

“Uh-huh!” says I. “I can guess the rest. You kept the home brew boiling and slammed the door as you left. You'll both get over it by tomorrow noon, and the sun will be shining, and every little thing will be lovely once more. So there!”

“It—it's such a comfort,” sniffed Auntie Bates, “having good friends who understand you. If it wasn't for you and that dear boy I don't know what I should do.”

So it was Sczernoff's turn next, but somehow she didn't get a chance to confide in him until well along in the evening. When she did, though, she made up for lost time. She didn't stop at merely pawing him. When I saw them she had gone to a regular clinch, with both arms around his neck and her much-revised hair nestling on his shirt front. He did look a bit fussed at this sudden burst of affection, but he patted her shoulder soothing and said the proper thing, I suppose. He could hardly do anything else, you know.

And then all of a sudden I saw her make a quick break-away and stand rigid, looking back

BACK STAGE WITH TRILBY MAY

into the wings. From where I was I couldn't see what had startled her so, but she didn't leave me in doubt long, for she came dashing over to me and grabbed me by the arm.

"Oh, oh!" she moaned. "Now there will be the devil to pay."

"Eh?" says I. "What's the trouble? You act as if you'd seen a ghost."

"Don't!" says she. "Don't say that."

"Well, what did you see that got you so panicky?" I demands.

"Didn't you see him, too?" she asks. "Back there in the wings, watching me? Daddy Bates!"

"But I thought he was off at a banquet," I suggests.

"So he was," said she. "At least, that's where he said he was going. But perhaps he didn't go at all and came here to—to watch me. And he saw! He must have seen!"

"You and the dear boy?" I suggests. "Well, if he did he got an eyeful."

"And he won't understand," wails Auntie Bates. "I'm sure he won't understand."

"If he's the kind you've described," says I, "I'm afraid he'll not."

"Oh, oh!" she groans. "I hope he isn't going to do anything desperate. I—I told you what he said he'd do, you know."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Yes, I remember," says I. "Carries one with him, does he?"

"I—I think so," says she. "And he must have gone into my dressing room. He—he's waiting for me there, or else he—means to——"

"Pooh!" says I. "They don't mean half they say. Probably he's just gone off to sulk and in half an hour or so——"

Which was where this "Bang!" came in. It wasn't a real loud one—rather dull and muffled, in fact—but it sounded ominous enough. I'll admit it brought me up on my toes. As for Auntie Bates, she simply surged at me, grabbed me as though I was a life raft, and proceeded to cut loose with the hysterics.

"Hold the curtain, somebody!" I calls out. "Don't let it go up."

"What?" asks two or three, rushing up. "What's the matter?"

"It's Mrs. Bates," says I. "She's—she's had a shock or something. Can't go on just yet. Hold her, will you, Mr. Biggs. And take her somewhere. No, not to her dressing-room. Anywhere else."

They had quite a job handling her, but they finally managed to lug her into my room and stretch her out on a wicker couch. And about then Ames Hunt happened to stroll in from the box-office.

BACK STAGE WITH TRILBY MAY

"What's it all about?" he demands. "What has happened?"

"I don't know, quite," says I. "I've got to see. Just a moment."

It's odd, too, how calm you can be at a time like that. I remember glancing in the mirror to see if I could be pale in spite of my make-up. Then I hurried to Auntie Bates' dressing-room. I didn't want to go. I'm no tragedy hound that likes to horn in on the scene. But I was the only one who knew what to expect. So I went.

As I opened the door I couldn't help shutting my eyes, though, and it was not until I'd eased myself in that I had courage to open them. No, I didn't find Daddy Bates weltering on the floor. He was sitting in a rocking-chair mopping his face with a handkerchief. And the stuff he was wiping off his cheeks and out of his eyes was red.

"Mr. Bates!" I gasped.

"Wha—what?" says he. "Oh, it's you, Miss Dodge, is it?"

"Have you shot yourself—really?" I demands.

"Eh?" says he, staring out of his funny eyes. "Me? Shot myself? Well, not exactly. Almost, though, by crickey. Haw, haw!"

He has a real hearty laugh, Daddy Bates, but it struck me as an odd time to pull it. "S-s-s-sh!"

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

says I. "They'll hear you. Where did the bullet go?"

"Bullet?" says he. "What you talking about, girl? Wa'n't no bullet. Only this."

At first I couldn't make it out. It looked like a cigar with the end cut off. Then I took it and saw. It was a trick cigar—one of the anti-Volstead brand, made by pasting brown paper around a glass tube and adding to the illusion by having a cigar band around the middle. You've seen 'em. They're almost as common as toddle tops now, and are said to hold a fair-sized drink. Sporty people spring 'em at dinner parties and pass 'em around.

"But they don't explode, do they?" I asked.

"I'll say they do," says Daddy Bates. "This one did, by crickety! Never thought of that, either. You see, at the annual banquet we had some wine—sparkling burgundy. I didn't. I'm on the wagon myself. But it was going around and I—Well, I thought it was a shame Flo couldn't have some, and when my old friend Bill Devins passed me this fake cigar it gave me the idea. I'd just fill it up with the fuzzy stuff and take it home to the wife. So I did. I was waiting until she got through though, planning to surprise her with a nice little drink. Left early just to do it. The stuff must have got

BACK STAGE WITH TRILBY MAY

shook up on the way here, though, and maybe it got kind of warm in my vest pocket. Anyway, first thing I knew it popped the cork out and sprinkled me good. By crickey! Every drop gone!"

"Then—then you didn't try to shoot yourself?" I asked.

"Do I look like that kind of a boob?" he demands. "Why should I?"

"Oh!" says I. "You—you didn't notice anything particular as you came in?"

"Only Flo," says he. "She was lallygaggin' a bit with that young black-haired chap, wasn't she. Flo will if she gets a chance, you know. That's her."

"Then you're not furious with her or—anything like that?" I asks.

"Lord, no!" says he. "I'm used to it. She don't mean any harm."

"You're an old dear, Daddy Bates," says I. "I must go and tell her."

"Tut, tut, young woman," says he. "Don't you go tellin' Flo anything. If you please."

"But surely," says I, "you must want her to know that you're not jealous."

"See here," says he. "You don't get the idea. You don't know Flo the way I do. She was a mighty good lookin' woman once, Flo was. I

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

thought a heap of her. I do yet. And some day, I expect, she's goin' to wake up to the fact that she's gettin' on in years and ain't such a charmer as she was once. But listen, Miss Dodge, she ain't goin' to hear it from me. Never. And if she thought I wasn't jealous—well, it would just about break her heart. Eh? Thought I'd shot myself? Well, you go tell her I missed by about a foot, but that I'm stampin' and ragin' up and down in here something awful and I'm just waitin' to bawl her out good. Get me, don't you? That's the girl! Lay it on as thick as you want."

I must have done a good job, too. First I cleared all of them out of the way, took the smelling salts from her hand, and whispered in her ear. And inside of three minutes we had the curtain up and the play was going on as usual.

At breakfast Inez asks me if I still like being a talk actress and I admit that I do.

"Them funny people that act with you," she goes on, "you—you get along all right with 'em?"

"We're just like one big family, Inez," says I.

"Huh!" says she, being one of fourteen.

"I know," says I. "But it's better than being lonesome."

Chapter VII

Getting Tagged by Gerald

OF course, Barry Platt had to discover them. Not that I took any particular pains to hide them away, but I had rather hoped he wouldn't be around that night, or if he was that he'd fail to notice what was displayed on the corner table in my dressing room. He had trickled in, though, to tell me the good news about his aunt's estate being settled and how the ten thousand would soon be in the bank in his name, when those restless eyes of his spotted the exhibit.

"What's all this?" he asks.

"Eh?" says I careless. "Oh, that! Just another little tribute, Barry boy."

"Another! Oh, come, Trilby May!" says he. "Just as though this was a regular thing."

"Last night it was roses," says I. "You missed those. They were beauties, too."

"And tonight English violets and a box of Lady Betty bonbons!" he goes on. "Say, who is the fond admirer?"

I registered indifference with a shoulder

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

shrug. "Oh, read the card if you're curious," says I.

"I'm not," says he. But he reached for the card, all the same. "Gerald Osborn Pitt. Say, who's he?"

"How should I know?" says I. "The stupid girl usher couldn't remember what he looked like and didn't notice which row he was in, but I rather think he must be a nice man. Don't you?"

"No doubt," sneers Barry. "They usually are, these old sports who send flowers and candy to actresses. Huh!"

"Perhaps he isn't so old, after all," says I. "I'm not sure which one he was, but there was a man in the third row, middle aisle seat, who fairly beamed at me all through the performance. He was a little bald and his neck was rather thick and short, but he did have nice eyes. I wonder if he'll come again tomorrow night."

"Bah!" says Barry. "I haven't a doubt that he will—if his wife is still away."

"They're such a nuisance at times, wives," says I.

Which almost had Barry pawing his front hoof. You can kid him so easy. For as a matter of fact I hadn't the least idea who this Pitt

GETTING TAGGED BY GERALD

person might be. Perhaps he was thick-necked and shiny on the dome. You can always see dozens like that out front if you look for 'em, and I suppose one could work up any number of little across-the-footlight romances if one had nothing else to do. But take it from me, when you're playing a part like the flapper, you have just as much time for that sort of thing as a slack wire juggler has for scratching himself between the shoulder blades.

I will admit being a bit thrilled when the second contribution with the same card came in. If I had been a village belle in my schoolgirl days, or even a fairly good looker, I might have taken it as a matter of course. But the fatal gift of beauty has never been mine. Not so that it has bothered me. Up to date nobody has ever gone crazy over my gooseberry green eyes, my carrotty hair, or my cornstalk figure. Even Barry Platt doesn't try to tell me that I could qualify for a carnival queen. True, in my make-up and the nifty costume I wear as a Detroit plutess who's been shopping on the Rue Marchand, I expect I'm not altogether poisonous to the view; but at that the average male ought to be able to watch me from the fourth row without going dizzy in the head.

Still, here was this bunch of hothouse violets

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

almost as big as my head and a round box of candy all embossed with gold and tied up with a full yard of cerise satin ribbon. Somehow I'd made an impression on somebody. A Mr. Pitt. Well, I couldn't hate him for that. Not if he was old enough to make Methuselah look like a quitter. But he'd gone far enough. Absolutely. He'd said it with flowers, and he'd repeated with bonbons, and so far as I was concerned that covered the subject. I'd made up my mind that any tiaras or gold vanity boxes, if he got that silly, would have to go back. No old man's darling stuff for me.

I do think Barry might have given me credit for that much sense, too. But it seems he didn't, for I'd hardly gotten home before he calls up on the 'phone to tell me that he'd just remembered who my unknown friend was.

"Really!" says I. "How clever of you!"

"Not at all," says Barry. "Thought you'd like to know before—well, before you got in too deep. He's the Osborn Pitt who figured in the double divorce case that was in the papers a couple of months ago. He began it by bringing suit against Mrs. Pitt on account of a bathing-suit party at Deal Beach, and she came back by naming a movie actress and telling tales about a yachting trip to Jekyll Island. Nice mess all

GETTING TAGGED BY GERALD

around, but the lady got a verdict and a big allowance. She promptly married her lawyer, and it seems that old man Pitt still favors the stage, eh?"

"It would look that way, wouldn't it?" says I. "So sweet of you to keep me posted, Barry."

"Oh, I say, Trilby May," he protests. "Don't get grouchy over it. I didn't mean to ——"

"No, of course not," says I. "Good night."

Well, that was the way matters stood at 10.45 P.M. next evening when one of the stage hands passed me this note as I came off after the final curtain. I didn't read it until I'd shut the dressing-room door and I was glad I hadn't, for I'm afraid I was a bit impetuous in tearing it up. There was only a line, scribbled on a card. "Must see you tonight. Please!" And the card was Gerald Osborn Pitt's.

"The old fool!" I muttered.

But that didn't help such a lot. Neither did throwing my costume at the chairs, nor stamping my foot. For the fact remained that I was almost as much frightened as I was peeved. And as a rule, you know, I'm not one of the timid kind. Hardly. Yet here I was, just as courageous as a rabbit hiding under a bush. For the first time, I believe, I felt that I was alone in the world with no one to call on.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

If Barry had been around that night it would have been different. But he hadn't shown up. Letting me get over our little tiff of last night, I suppose. I might have asked Sczernoff, or O. P. Biggs to go with me as far as the subway entrance. But what should I tell them? That an old Wall Street sport had thrown a scare into me by sending in a mash note? No, I couldn't quite see myself doing that. The Russian was too hot-headed. He'd make a scene of it. And I didn't know Biggs well enough to guess how he would take it.

But before I'd finished getting into my street dress I had my chin in the air once more. Pooh! If I couldn't handle a goggle-eyed old sport I'd better quit the business. I still had a tongue, and even if I hadn't had much practice in telling fond admirers where they got off I could improvise something. Anyway, I'd have a try.

So, without saying a word to any of the company, or even waiting to tag along with Auntie Bates and Daddy, I marched through the stage door. And sure enough, waiting near the exit, was a poddy old party in evening clothes. Perhaps I didn't give him the cold eye, though. It was just a glance, but it sure was frigid. Maybe I imagined it, but I was certain he started to follow me. Anyway, I must have speeded up,

GETTING TAGGED BY GERALD

for I nearly collided with a youth standing by the curb.

"Sorry!" says I.

"My fault, entirely," says he. "I was hoping you'd see me, though."

"Eh?" says I, a bit gaspy.

"You'll let me drive you home, won't you?" he went on. "The car's right here."

Then I took a good look at him. A pale, light-haired, stringy young chap, with sloping shoulders and limp arms—a human wax bean. And very, very youthful. I couldn't guess just how young he was, but I knew he couldn't be quite so young as he looked. Still, there was a weary look about his mouth. Only his eyes showed any signs of his really being a live one. Dark, glowing eyes they were, and they were watching me steadily.

"Got your nerve with you, haven't you, sonny?" says I.

"I'm glad you think so," says he. "My knees are almost knocking together, though. But you will come, eh? Please!"

I threw another glimpse over my shoulder at the poddy party. He had stopped and was watching us curious. To see what I'd do, probably. And if I went on alone——

"All right, Percival," says I. "Where's your bus?"

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"This one," says he, opening the door of a classy coupe. "But my name isn't Percival, you know."

"My error," says I, climbing in and settling myself next to the driver's seat.

"I—I thought you knew," he goes on, "that I was——"

"Say, let's get started, if you don't mind," says I. "You can tell me all about yourself after you've put a few blocks between us and that two-chinned old Romeo over there."

"That one!" says the youth, glaring back as he shifted gears. "Say, I've a good notion to stop and——"

"Now don't blow a gasket, sonny, or do anything rash," I advises him. "He'd brush you one side as if you were a mosquito. Besides, you have only a temporary rating yourself. Here's your turn for Fifth Avenue. Now let's see; who is it you say you are?"

"Why," says he, rounding past the Arch, "I'm Gerald Pitt, you know."

"Wh-a-at!" says I, edging into the corner of the seat. "Not the Gerald Osborn Pitt, who's been sending me flowers?"

He nods. "I'd intended to let it stop there," says he. "Really! But I just couldn't."

"Oh, couldn't you?" says I. "See here, sonny,

GETTING TAGGED BY GERALD

there must be some mistake. Don't tell me you are the party with a crimson past—divorced on account of a movie star and all that?"

"How tiresome!" says he. "No, no! That's Dad, of course. Osborn Pitt. I'm Gerald Osborn, and I've had nothing to do with my father since—well, since he stirred up all that fuss about mother."

"Oh, ho!" says I. "So you thought you'd work up a little affair on your own account, did you? Just to keep the family name on the front page, eh?"

"I say, Miss Dodge!" he protests. "Isn't that rather rough? Of course, I'm no blushing school kid. I've been about some. But I'm no rotter."

"That's comforting," says I. "Honest, now, Gerald, just how old are you?"

"It isn't mere years that count, is it?" he comes back.

"But I'm curious," says I. "Eighteen?"

"Nearly nineteen," says he.

"Well, well!" says I, chuckling. "Runs in the family, doesn't it?"

"But you don't understand," says Gerald, slowing up for the cross town traffic.

"Perhaps not," says I. "Still, I should say you were showing some speed—waiting for actresses at the stage door."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"I never have before, truly," says he. "And I wouldn't have this time only—well, I wanted to know you, Miss Dodge, and I couldn't find any other way. I know it must seem a bit crude to you, but I—I just had to do it that way."

"Why?" I asks.

He shrugs his shoulders. "I wish I could tell you," he goes on.

"I'm stretching my ear," says I. "What more do you want?"

"I can't do it and dodge these taxi drivers," says Gerald. "But if you wouldn't mind we might stop for a bite to eat somewhere. There's quite a decent grill a few blocks up where we could get a chop or a rarebit. That is, if you can trust me that far."

"It'll be taking an awful risk, Gerald," says I, "but I think I'll chance it, for I am hungry. You see, I'm letting you get away with the whole program—the pick-up at the curb, the drive in the closed car, and the midnight supper."

"You—you're perfectly bully, Miss Dodge," says he. "I just knew you were."

I didn't deny it. And I must say Gerald had all the airs of a man about town as he tipped the head waiter for a cozy corner table, waved away the Japanese flower girl, and ordered a pot of tea instead of highball glasses.

GETTING TAGGED BY GERALD

"I suppose you're tired of being told how utterly charming you are as 'The Flapper'?" he begins.

"Not quite wearied to extinction," says I. "The other one who said anything like that was the man who wrote the play."

"No!" says he. "But you are. Perfectly delicious. I'm almost ashamed to tell you how many times I've seen the piece. Dropped in just by accident one night, and I've hardly missed a performance since. It was only after the third night that I had courage enough to send you the roses. You weren't offended, I hope?"

"At least," says I, "I was able to restrain my rage. So you think I make a good flapper, do you? But are you a good judge?"

"I ought to be," says Gerald. "I've been surrounded by 'em all summer long. You see, I've been stopping with an aunt while mother was—er——"

"I see," says I. "Honeymooning."

He pinks up in the ears a little and then hurries on. "Auntie has one of those big places in the Berkshires where my cousins have continuous house parties. You know—golf and tennis and jazz, dashing back and forth to the country club; mixed doubles in the morning, mixed foursomes in the afternoon, and dancing

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

half the night, with fool picnics and motor trips thrown in."

I nods. "The social whirl, eh?" says I. "Doings of the younger set. You're not complaining of the life, are you?"

"Bitterly," says he. "I don't care for sports. But when there are three girls to one man what can you do? And such silly girls!"

"Any flappers?" I asked.

"They were nearly all flappers," says Gerald. "That was the trouble. Even the older ones were the giddy, frivolous sort. But they were all alike. They all did their hair just the same, danced the same, dressed the same, and said the same things. Not one had an original thought or ever had a serious moment. A lot of butterflies flitting about in the sun. You can't imagine how tiresome such a crowd can be."

"Then I don't quite see," says I, "why you should like me in a part such as that."

"Oh, but you add the satirical touch," says Gerald. "I don't know just how you do it, either. You're the perfect flapper, and yet you point the finger of scorn. You express exactly what I've been thinking of them and couldn't put into words. Anyone can see, too, that behind it all you're a real person. If you weren't you couldn't make the flapper in the play such a silly. That's

GETTING TAGGED BY GERALD

why I had to come night after night. And the oftener I came the more I wanted to know you. Say, tell me about yourself, Miss Dodge. How long have you been on the stage?"

"Oh, ages," says I. "Almost a month."

"Really!" says he. "Is that all? And before then?"

"No," says I. "I'm not going deep into my past. It's not thrilling enough. Besides, here comes the welsh rarebit and the tea."

"But I—I want to know all about you," insists Gerald.

"That's a whale of an ambition," says I. "What's the big idea?"

"Because I need someone like you in my life," says he, paying no attention to the waiter. "I've been looking for you for years. Honestly. I've been lonely. There were one or two fellows at prep. school who were more or less worth while. But they've rather dropped out. And all the girls I've known have been useless. So now that I've found you I mean to——"

"Shall I serve the rarebit, sir?" breaks in the waiter.

"Yes, yes, of course," says Gerald. "You see, Miss Dodge,—Say, do you care if I call you Trilby May?"

"I can stand it if the waiter can," says I.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Oh, bother him!" says Gerald.

"Quite so, sir," says the waiter. "Don't mind me, sir."

"I'm not, thank you," says Gerald. "And please, Trilby May——"

"Couldn't you save it up," I breaks in, "until after we've had something to eat?"

"Oh, I suppose so," sighs Gerald.

The waiter seemed a bit disappointed, too. Anyway, he hovered around doing useless things until we were well under way with our supper and Gerald had shooed him off.

"Now," says Gerald, "perhaps we can really talk."

"You weren't doing such a poor job at it before," says I. "But what's it all leading up to?"

"Just this," says he prompt. "I don't want to lose you, now that I've found you, Trilby May."

"Eh?" says I, and I expect I was gawping a trifle. "Whaddye mean, lose?"

"I want you for my very own," he rushes on. "Of course, you'll not want to leave the stage at once, but I think it will be better that you should in a month or so. Then we can go abroad and—I know just the spot. It's in southern France, down in the old Basque country, where——"

GETTING TAGGED BY GERALD

"Just a moment, Gerald boy," I interrupts. "Let me get this straight. Is this something like matrimony you're proposing?"

"Oh, naturally," says he. "I know a minister—the one who officiated at mother's affair. I can get him on the 'phone in the morning. Let's see, what date shall I tell him? Today is Friday. Well, how about Sunday afternoon at 5 o'clock?"

He asked it as easily and as offhand as if he was making a date with his dentist. And for a minute or so all I could do was sit there and stare at him. Then I came to and chuckled. I reached over and took his hand.

"No, no!" says I, as he tried to squeeze my fingers. "I just wanted to look at your wrist-watch. Twelve-fifteen. You've hung up a record, Gerald."

"I beg pardon," says he.

"Almost one hour flat," says I. "And if that isn't getting a jump on Cupid then I'd like to hear the other returns."

"You—you mean I've been a little abrupt about it?" he asks.

"Something like that," says I.

"Perhaps I was," says he. "It didn't seem like that to me. Why, it seems as if I'd always known you, Trilby May. But this isn't getting us anywhere, is it? Will Sunday do?"

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

I shook my head. "Nor Monday, nor Tuesday, nor any day of the week that I can think of just now," says I.

"You—you're not saying you won't have me at all?" he demands.

"I'm trying to keep up with you, Gerald," says I. "Yes, that's the thought. I'm turning you down. Absolutely."

He took it like a little man, too. "You think I'm too young, I suppose?" says he.

"If I'd had time to think at all," says I, "I believe that would be the first mark against you."

"Oh, well!" says he. "Then I might as well go back to prep. school and take up the old grind again. I'd cut all that, you know."

"Since when?" says I.

"Oh, I left a week ago Saturday," says he.

"With your speed they'll hardly know you've been gone," I suggests.

"Oh, I can fix that up all right," says Gerald. "And say, it's been bully to know you. We can still be friends, can't we?"

"Old, old friends," says I. "I'll send you my photo with that written on it."

"Will you," says he. "Say, that will be perfectly corking."

I hope it was, and that all the senior class envied Gerald when they saw it on his chiffonier.

GETTING TAGGED BY GERALD

Only I wonder what he told them. As for me, I haven't confessed to anybody. The nearest I came to telling anyone was that night when I came in at twelve-thirty and found Inez yawning in her chair.

"Where you been so long?" she asks.

"Me?" says I. "Oh, I stopped to rock the cradle."

Chapter VIII

One Up On the Twins

TWICE I heard it before I paid much attention. It sounded like a scraping on the window ledge. And if I hadn't been busy counting the number of motions to this pull-the-string stunt I should have stopped and taken a look. But you mustn't. Stop, I mean. That's what the Professor says, and when I part with a whole twenty-five for expert advice you bet I'm going to follow it.

You see, the Professor told me to start with twenty times and add five a day until I'd worked up to forty. Thirty was my mark this day and I was nearly there when there came this scraping noise once more. And say, I wasn't costumed to give any public exhibition. Hardly.

You get me, I expect. Morning exercises. May sound foolish, but I just gotta have 'em, on account of my restless disposition and early bringing up. Do you know how I used to start the day when I was a girl back in Minnesota? At Dodge's Clearing, to be exact? I'm afraid

ONE UP ON THE TWINS

it would make your back ache if I went through the whole list, but my before-breakfast activities included such things as chopping an armful of wood, building a fire in the kitchen stove, lugging two pails of water from the spring, feeding Old Bill, the white horse, milking two cows, and other little tricks that Maw Dodge insisted were good for a growing girl.

Some might think that now I'd make up for all that by pounding the pillow an hour or so extra every morning. That's the way Inez figures to get even for all the early toil that was wished on her. But we have different temperaments, Inez and I. She can seem to get all the exercise she needs by chewing gum, while I have to thrash around. First I tried following a diagram I found in a health magazine, but that got kind of monotonous and I hunted up this physical culture specialist who invented these little games for me.

And say, when you've pulled the string thirty times or more hand running, you've worked up a circulation. Try it once. Knees and arms out as you make the squat, and hands sharply to your hips as you come up. You'll look like a human jumping jack, but you'll feel fine afterwards. That is, if you're not too lame. And gradually you can take on the rest of the program.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

That's how I keep myself down to 130 and am able to put real pep into my part as The Flapper every night. What I'd like better would be a five-mile romp through real fields and real woods, but when you're living on Park Avenue it can't be done. So I get all the sunlight and air I can by staging my jumping-jack act in front of a big south window pulled all the way down from the top. Of course, I had to have the shade fixed so it could be run up over the lower half from the bottom, and it was a hunch that somebody was scrabbling around on the fire-escape behind that shade that made me finally stop and stretch my ear.

Odd, isn't it, how suspicious you are of your neighbors here in New York? Especially, if you live in one of these big apartment houses that covers nearly a whole block. Ours is that kind. It's built around a big court in the middle, where there are a few dusty cedars and a dry fountain. The taxis drive in around this circle and unload at the carriage entrance. Some of the apartments have windows opening only on the court, but I'm thankful that Uncle Nels had sense enough to pick one with outside exposure. We have all the air there is between us and New Jersey and these clear fall mornings we can almost see Miss Liberty turning her back on the

ONE UP ON THE TWINS

home of the brave and the land where the free lunch once flourished but doesn't any more.

I suppose there are enough folks living in this one building to populate two places like Tamarack Junction. And out there I would have known most of 'em by their first names; how many times they'd been married, if any; what church they took of, or let alone; and whether they had the Saturday night bath habit or saved it up for Fourth of July.

But here in this eleven-story structural steel hive all I know by sight are the elevator boys and the day and night doormen who nod to me friendly in the hope of getting another tip. Of course, I get glimpses of people in the vestibule and riding up and down, but I can't tell whether they're regular neighbors of ours or visiting piano tuners. There are parties living over us and on either side, but we're just as well acquainted with 'em as though they inhabited Patagonia, Finland and Mozambique. Occasionally we hear a dull thud and we guess that the people upstairs have dropped something, but we don't know what or why, and don't try to figure out. They might be tossing the bric-a-brac at each other, and then again it might be a game of leap-frog. We always suspect the worst, though.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

So when I heard this noise on the fire escape I thought at once of sneak thieves, even though it was only 9.30 A.M., which wouldn't be sticking to union hours for second-story workers. I slipped on a baby-blue kimono and looked around for some lethal weapon. The deadliest thing I could find was a papier-maché battle-ax that hung from an imitation bronze shield over the mantel-piece. Tearing that loose I hopped up on the windowsill, stuck my head over the lower sash and looked out.

And there, crouching on the fire escape, was about the weirdest looking female person I've ever met. She was a lop-sided, skinny, goggle-eyed, middle-aged party with mud-colored hair twisted into a knob on the top of her head, jutting front teeth and a loose under-lip. From her sloppy costume I guessed that she must be somebody's cook or maid, and the fact that she has on neither hat nor wrap shows that she'd probably climbed either up or down from one of the other apartments. Anyway, she was squatting there trying to peek through a crack in the shade and listen at the same time.

"Say, what's the big idea?" I called out.

And when she rolled those bulgy eyes of hers up and saw me just above her she nearly collapsed. After a gasp or two she muttered some-

ONE UP ON THE TWINS

thing I couldn't get and started wriggling toward the iron stairs leading down.

"No, you don't!" says I, waving the fake battle-ax menacing. "Another move like that and I'll make a banana split out of you. Understand?"

"Holy Mother!" says she, crossing herself.

"Stick where you are until I open this window from the bottom," I warns her. "There you are! Well, shinny in here, old girl, and tell us what it's all about."

She wasn't anxious to come. Not a little bit. But a few fancy motions with the trick ax persuaded her. She slid inside and stood knock-kneed and trembling.

"Come, now!" says I. "What's your line; jewelry, furs, or aren't you particular? And who told you I had anything worth stealing?"

"No, no, Miss!" she protests. "True as Heaven, I ain't no thief."

"Of course not," says I. "Just climbed up there to sun yourself, I suppose?"

"Yuh—y—y—yes!" she agrees hasty.

"See here, you comic valentine," says I, "tell me who you are, where you came from, and why, or I'll——"

"I—I'm Gussie," she breaks in. "Just Gussie, that's all."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Who's Gussie?" I demands.

"Downstairs," says she, pointing. "Just under."

"Oh, I see," says I. "You work for the folks below, do you?"

She nods and adds: "The Veilhoffs. Yes, I works for the Veilhoffs."

"Why not keep at it, then?" says I. "Why go skittering around like this? You know you're giving a realistic imitation of a lady burglar?"

At that Gussie protests long and vigorous. She calls on most of the saints to defend her. She gets down on her knees and pleads with me to believe that she's an honest woman. Why, she says she has been with the Veilhoffs for seventeen years and has never been accused of taking so much as a penny. It's all more or less convincing, too, for the poor thing is scared almost stiff, and if she wasn't lovely to look at before she's less so now, with her pop eyes rolled up, her lips trembling, and her bony fingers weaving themselves in and out.

"All right, all right!" says I. "But if you didn't come to steal, what were you doing there?"

She admits draggy that she was trying to peek in, that's all. "I—I wants to—to see what youse was doin'," she adds.

ONE UP ON THE TWINS

I shook my head. "No, Gussie," says I. "I'm afraid you can't get away with that. I don't believe you'd take such a big chance just because you were curious. I expect the best thing I can do is to call in the police and——"

"I'll tell," she announces sudden. "It—it was Anna Veilhoff made me come."

"Eh?" says I.

"The fattest twin," says she. "That's Anna. But Rosie, she didn't say I shouldn't. She wanted to know, too, Rosie did, just as much as Anna."

"Know what?" I demands.

"About you," says Gussie, "and what you do every mornin' when you go thump-thump on the floor."

"Oh, come!" says I. "I'll admit I've known some nosey females, but never any quite so bad as that. Why, they don't even know me by sight, do they?"

Gussie says the Veilhoffs have seen me once or twice in the elevator; at least, they thought they had. And somebody about the place had told 'em I was an actress.

"Still," says I, "that hardly accounts for their sending you on such a risky spying trip as this. Who are the Veilhoffs, anyway?"

And by pumping Gussie freely I got a fairly

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

good description. They were old maid twins who lived with an old bachelor brother. They'd been born and brought up in Brooklyn, and until last winter had always lived in an old-fashioned house down on Jeroloman street. But when brother sold the old home as part of a site for an office building, and the house had to be torn down, they moved across the river and became regular New Yorkers; that is, instead of a home that they owned, they had so many cubic feet of space that they rented. And they didn't like it, either.

On Jeroloman street they'd had a little patch of back yard where Anna used to set out the geraniums in the spring. Here they couldn't even keep a single flower pot on the fire escape or window ledge without getting a call from some inspector. And they were so high up that they couldn't see people down in the street. Not to know 'em, anyhow. Only the tops of their hats. On Jeroloman street they used to sit every afternoon at the front windows and watch folks come and go from the apartment houses across the street, and guess who they were and where they were going. Anna had a little strip of mirror fastened outside her window and she could see anybody coming from way down the street, and would tell Rosie about 'em, and if it was worth

ONE UP ON THE TWINS

while Rosie would stretch her neck out and look down, too, as they went by. And all the time they would talk the people over.

"You don't mean they did this every afternoon?" I asked.

"From three to six," says Gussie.

"Must have been an exciting indoor sport," says I. "How about the rest of the day? What did they do mornings?"

According to Gussie the twins didn't leave the hay until about nine o'clock, when she took their breakfast in to them. Then they just fussed around in their rooms, combing their hair and polishing their finger nails and getting dressed. That took them until nearly noon. Then they sat up in the living room and did some kind of crochet until lunch time. After lunch they had to have their naps.

"Must have needed a rest by then," says I. "But I don't suppose they really did any sleeping?"

"Uh-huh," says Gussie. "Nournahalf. Oughta hear 'em snore."

Then came the three-hour rubberneck orgie, and at six they got ready for dinner. Brother Herman came in at six-thirty to the minute. They sat and listened for him to open the front door. If he was a bit late they began to worry.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

If he was as much as a quarter of an hour overdue they were almost in a panic and talked of telephoning to police headquarters. When he did show up, on those tragic occasions, he had to tell them over and over again just what had happened. Then in the evening they sat around, all three of 'em. Sometimes Anna and Herman played rummy, or double solitaire. Rosie didn't play cards. It made her head bad. Maybe once a month they went to the movies. Herman wanted to go out oftener, but the twins wouldn't let him go alone and it was too much trouble for 'em to get ready.

"They watch him close, them two," says Gussie. "Afraid he'll get married. Huh! Him!"

"He's no gay charmer, eh?" I suggests.

"Old and fat and bald," says Gussie. "Makes lotta money, though. Makes paper boxes. Big factory. Three hundred girls in it. He don't pay 'em much. Gets 'em in to learn the trade and when they want more pay he turns 'em off. That's the way he fools the unions. Hates labor unions, Herman does. I hear him talk about 'em a lot."

"Yes, Gussie," says I, "I imagine you do. You may not look like much of a mental absorber, but I can see that there's mighty little

ONE UP ON THE TWINS

you miss. What about to-day's report, though? If I let you go back what kind of a tale are you going to feed the twins?"

"I—I dunno," says Gussie, blinking. "I don't find out yet what makes the thumps."

"Now, honest to goodness, Gussie," says I, "do you mean that those two fat old maids got so curious over a little thing like that? Enough to send you climbing up a fire escape?"

She insists that it's so. "What for should I risk my neck, then?" she demands. "I'm scared to do it, but that Anna says I gotta come. She look soft, Anna, but she's hard. In here." And Gussie taps herself on the left side; to indicate her heart, I suppose. Then she adds: "I oughta go back. They'll be gettin' worried."

"Serve 'em right," says I. "I only wish there was some way we could—Oh, I say!"

One of my foolish thoughts had struck me and as usual I proceeded to carry it out at once.

"You can't go, Gussie," says I. "No. Absolutely not. You're a prisoner. Understand? You've been captured by a desperate actress," I goes on, grabbing up the fake ax and flourishing it. "You're locked in this room, tied to a chair. See? Like this."

With that I picked up a silk scarf, passed it around her waist, and knotted it behind the chair.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"But your arms are free, Gussie," says I. "And you're not gagged. So you can telephone for help. Go on. Call up Anna."

I shoved the 'phone over where she could reach it and made her ask for the Veilhoff apartment. Also I whispered to her just what she should say. So this is the way the message reached the fattest twin:

"Yes, this is Gussie. I'm upstairs. Uh-huh! Inside. That actress did it. I think she's crazy. She's got me tied to a chair and she wants me to tell what for I came. She say if I don't she get the police. I think that's what she's gone for now. If you don't come up quick and let me out I hafta tell. Yes, or go to jail. Then you'll hafta come to court and tell. So you gotta hurry. By the fire escape. It's the only way."

"Well?" I asks. "What did she say?"

"I dunno," says Gussie. "Anna, she make funny noises."

"Sort of gaspy?" says I. "Yes, she naturally would. But I'll bet she comes. Let me take a look out of the window. Oh, gosh, what a sight! I hope the folks in the opposite apartment aren't missing this."

For as I gazed down the fire escape to the next landing I could see this fat female in a boudoir cap and dressing robe crawling out of the window

ONE UP ON THE TWINS

directly beneath. She was having some struggle, too, for she wasn't built for that sort of an exit. Somebody behind was helping her, evidently the other twin. At last she was out, but she was afraid to stand up so she poised there on hands and knees. Then I heard her arguing with the one inside.

"Come on, Rosie," she was saying. "Yes, you must, too. I can't ever get up there alone. And suppose that crazy woman gets back before we can untie that fool Gussie? I don't care. You've got to come. Here! I'll pull you through. Give me your hand."

"It's Anna, the master mind," I bulletined to Gussie. "She's making Rosie come along with her. She's dragging her out. My, but they *are* fat! The Veal-loaf sisters, I'd call 'em. Now they're started. They're scrambling up on all fours, just as graceful as cows climbing a ladder."

"I'll bet they're scared," chuckles Gussie.

"They look it," says I. "Especially Anna. What a face! Like a prize pig's. And those little eyes of hers are sticking out like shoe-buttons. Now she's stopping for breath. It makes her shudder every time she glances down. I can see her fat shoulders shiver."

"I wish I could see, too," says Gussie.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"No," says I. "You're a prisoner. Besides, they'll be here in a minute or so. Never would win a climbing contest, either of 'em. But they're almost up. Now you sit perfectly still, Gussie, while I hide behind this closet door. Don't say a word, either."

"What—what you gonna do to Anna?" demands Gussie.

"I'm going to hand her the thrill of her life," says I. "Watch."

Through the crack between the door and the jamb I could watch the window. And when these two purple-tinted faces appeared over the ledge I had all I could do to hold in the snickers. For they did look foolish, staring in bug-eyed. Particularly after they'd spotted Gussie tied to the chair.

"It—it's so," gasps Anna. "You—you go in and untie her, Rosie."

"Oh, I can't!" protests the other sister. "I—I'm afraid."

"But you must," insists Anna. "My heart is bad enough now. Go on. I'll boost you in."

She was about to do it, too, when I cut loose with my little mad scene. First I let go a regular cowboy yell. "Ye-e-couw! Wow! Wheel!" Then I came bounding from behind the closet door, waving the battle-ax and doing a war

ONE UP ON THE TWINS

dance about the room. I brought up alongside of Gussie, grabbed her firmly by the topknot, and went through the motions of scalping her.

"Ha, ha!" I shouted. "You will come spying on the Mad Prairie Flower, will you? Ha, ha!"

I paid no attention to the two at the window, and pretended not to see them, but out of the corner of my eye I could watch every move they made. At first they clutched each other by the arm and poised spellbound. Then they began to wriggle back and in a moment or so they had disappeared. Tiptoeing over to the window I could see them floundering backward down the iron stairs, like a pair of overfed seals doing a vaudeville stunt for the first time. They may have been slow coming up, but they were speedy enough going back.

"Come on, Gussie," says I, slipping the scarf loose. "Come see the twins doing the crab act."

Gussie seemed to enjoy the performance, too. "Look!" says she. "See Anna dive in the window. I never see her move so quick before. Now she's safe home again. And she don't care if I get killed. Not her."

"I fear, Gussie," says I, "that your Anna is a more or less self-centered old girl. But she's had a jolt this morning that ought to last her a long time. Now you may go down and relieve

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

their minds. Tell them I came out of my spell and turned you loose. No, you needn't climb down the fire escape. I'll let you out into the hallway. And say, tell 'em if they're still curious about the thumps on the floor they can climb up and pay another windowsill call any time they feel like it."

As I shut the hall door behind her I heard Inez call from her room. She wants to know who's been here and what has been going on.

"Oh, not much," says I. "I've just been giving the Veal-loaf twins the first before-breakfast exercise they ever indulged in. You should have been on hand. It was worth watching."

"Huh!" says Inez, "I don't know any twins like that."

"No?" says I. "Then you've missed a lot."

Chapter IX

Fame Nods at Trilby May

EVERYBODY seemed quite cheered up over it except me. And I'll admit I was just as much pleased at the prospect as a cat that's about to be thrown into the pond.

"Oh, I say, Barry!" I pleaded. "Couldn't this be avoided somehow?"

"Why, Trilby May Dodge!" says he, shocked. "After I've schemed and pulled wires for a week to bring it off! Besides, this isn't the sort of thing one tries to duck. Distinctly not. Why, they'll probably give you a half page on the front of the Sunday dramatic section, and play up your pictures strong. Do you know what that's worth?"

I didn't. "But can't it be done without my being interviewed?" I insists. "Can't you write up something and give it to 'em, or let Mr. Chick Bradley, the official press agent, do it?"

No, Barry says it can't be worked that way. And it's only because he happens to be a friend of a friend of Ollie Owens, who is probably the

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

best known dramatic editor in town, that he was able to arrange the thing at all.

"Oh!" says I. "Then this isn't Fame tapping at the door; it's just a case of dragging the old girl in at the end of a rope, eh? How disappointing!"

You know I'd always thought that when actresses got written up in the papers that way it was because they'd been kind to some poor devil of a reporter, and that what was printed about 'em was just another laurel wreath laid reverently at their feet. But Barry explains different.

"Real fame," says he, "is when the producer sends out three road companies, each advertised as 'the original New York cast.' No danger of that happening this season, though. In fact, Trilby May, it's a question as to how much longer 'The Flapper' can be induced to flap at all. You've noticed how slim the houses have been lately? But if Ollie Owens gives us the sort of boost he's capable of that may pull us through. So you want to be all primed to give him something worth printing."

"But Barry," says I, "that's just what I can't do. Only think! I've been born oftener than I've been interviewed and I'm sure I shall make a mess of it. Besides, this Mr. Owens is a frightful highbrow, isn't he?"

FAME NODS AT TRILBY MAY

"Oh, Ollie's a decent chap, all right," says Barry. "Of course, he's a wonder at phrase slinging, but he doesn't put on any lugs when he meets folks. Kind of big and fat and good-natured looking, you know, and wears his hair long and dresses rather sloppy, with his pockets stuffed full of papers and two or three books tucked under one arm. You'll get on fine with him. He's heard how clever you are and all you'll have to do will be to shoot over some of your snappy repartee."

"Huh!" says I. "Listens simple, doesn't it? Just be clever, eh? About what, for instance?"

"Oh, tell him about your fads," suggests Barry, "and your pets. Leading ladies always get a lot of space that way."

"But I haven't any fads, Barry," says I, "and you know very well there isn't an animal of any sort about the place. I don't even own a canary."

"Fake 'em, then," says Barry. "Now let's see—fads. How about mountain climbing? Crazy over it, aren't you? And you're just waiting for next summer so that you can get out into the Canadian Rockies and conquer a peak that you've already tried to scale twice before. There you are! Feed that to him. Fill in the details. As for pets—well, how about a big

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

alligator? Keep him in a bathtub here in the apartment, don't you, and exercise him on the roof every morning? Say, that would get you in the headlines."

"No, Barry," says I. "You don't know what a poor liar I am. I couldn't do it well at all. If I had your practice now——"

But when Barry is in earnest about a thing there's no use trying to throw the switch. At such times he has a single-track mind and his blue eyes are steady and serious. He argues that it is my duty to be interviewed. It is something I owe to Ames Hunt, the producer, to myself, and to him. I really ought to look on it as a privilege, a lucky turn of the wheel. Even the biggest people in the profession would jump at the chance of being interviewed for such a paper as the one Ollie Owens writes for.

"Think of the thousands and thousands who will read what you tell me," suggests Barry.

"That's precisely what sends the cold shivers up and down my back, Barry boy," says I. "I can see them reading that piece; nice, pink-cheeked old gentlemen, at their clubs. And they'll look over the top of their gold-rimmed glasses at some other pink-cheeked old gentleman and snort: "Trilby May Dodge, eh? Who the syncopated synonyms is she anyway?" Or

FAME NODS AT TRILBY MAY

the honest working man will run across it, after he's read the sporting page and looked over the comics. He'll be sitting in his trousers and undershirt with his heels up on the sill of the flat's one front window, overlooking the elevated road. And he'll shout out to his wife in the kitchen: 'Hey, Maw! Liss'n to this what some fool actorine has got to say.' And honest, Barry, I can't think of a thing I want to tell all those people. Not a word."

"Oh, that'll be all right," says Barry soothing. "Ollie will see that you say the right thing. He'll get something interesting out of you. That's his specialty. And anyway, the chief thing is to get your name and your picture printed and let folks know that 'The Prince and the Flapper' is still running. You may not like doing it, but it's necessary."

"Like taking a pill or paying your taxes, eh?" says I. "Very well. Let me know when he's coming."

Of course, Inez and Uncle Nels had to have it all explained to them, and I'll say it was some job. At first Inez seemed to have a wild idea that being interviewed was like having your adenoids removed, and asks if they're not going to give me gas or anything."

"That's a clever idea, Inez," says I. "I wish

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

it could be done under an anaesthetic. But it isn't that kind of an operation. No. Mr. Owens is coming here without any instruments of any kind, except a fountain pen, perhaps. He's going to ask me questions and then print what I say in the Sunday paper."

Inez looks shocked and indignant. "You—you ain't gonna let him?" she demands.

"That's the sad part of it," says I. "I'm supposed to encourage him."

"Must be funny," says Inez. "Can I watch?"

"Absolutely no," says I. "I shall be fussed enough as it is without having you sitting there blinking at me and perhaps indulging in an occasional snicker. Besides, as I understand it, interviewing is a private and personal performance. It isn't done as a threesome, nor by mixed doubles. You'll stay in the other room, with the door shut."

"Huh!" says Inez, indicating indifference. But I could see her sizing up the key-hole at the same time.

As for Uncle Nels, when he got the drift of what was scheduled, he shook his head solemn. "Don't you do it," says he. "Never say anything to them newspaper fellers. I did once when I didn't know who he was. About some timber I was selling up by Hibbing. He puts it

FAME NODS AT TRILBY MAY

in the paper, too, the dumhuvud, and it gets me into a lawsuit with the government."

"But wasn't it timber on an Indian reservation you were selling, Uncle Nels?" I asks.

"What's the difference?" says he. "The government don't know unless that fool newspaper feller puts it in the paper. Lotta trouble come after that. Don't you tell 'em nothing."

"No fear of my telling much," says I. "I'm short of things to tell."

I really thought so, too. But you never know what you can do until you try. By 5 P.M. next afternoon I'd found out.

It was just after luncheon that Barry 'phoned.

"What do you think?" says he. "Ollie Owens can't come. Has to go over to Washington to watch a try-out of a play he's interested in."

"Good!" says I. "Then it's all off?"

"No," says Barry. "He's sending an assistant of his—T. Temple Fogg—a young college hick who's been in the ad. department, but has wormed his way into handling some of the press stuff. I remember seeing him when I was on the staff. Looks like a poor prune. Thinks he's a whizz as a writer, though. Lord knows what he'll turn out. But it'll be better than nothing. He'll be there at four o'clock. Wish I could be on hand to help you out with him. I'll

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

see if I can't get Ames Hunt to run up. Doubt it, though. So long. Best of luck."

So I was in for it. I was going to be plugged in, as the 'phone girls say, on the public press, with a direct wire to the ear of Old Subscriber, Pro Bono and A Mother of Four, not to mention a million Smiths and half the Cohens. And I was expected to talk for their amusement and instruction. Me! Say, as I sat thinking that over I was caught by a wave of modesty that came rushing in from space and had me floundering about panicky. I got up and paced around the apartment restless.

"You want him to come quick, eh?" asks Inez, watching me curious.

"I do, and then again I don't," says I. "Maybe you never waited for the dentist? No. Then you can't appreciate the sensation."

Even at that the wretch was nearly half an hour late. But finally I heard the buzzer ring and Annette came in to announce that Mr. Fogg was in the sitting room.

"What does he look like, Annette?" I asked.

"Oh, he ain't such a much," says she.

Annette isn't such a poor describer, either. There was nothing awesome or impressive about T. Temple Fogg. That is, unless you count the black pompadour which sprouted from his pallid

FAME NODS AT TRILBY MAY

brow and waved in heavy magnificence over his narrow, pasty face. It was a bumper crop of hair, all right; more than you would look for on such a peanut-shaped head, and you could guess that he must have a well-trained barber to have kept it safe from the shears. Outside of that, though, Mr. Fogg was just a slim, finicky dressed youth with a pair of big, dark eyes that seemed to wear a tired expression. And in spite of the fact that I wasn't crazy about his looks I tried to greet him as chirky and friendly as I knew how. I believe I said something about how nice it was of him to take all this trouble just to see poor little me. I'm sure I meant well enough, but it seemed to be just the wrong thing to say.

"If you don't mind," says he, dropping into a chair, "we will—ah—eliminate all that sort of thing. Bromidic openings irritate me excessively."

"Sorry," says I. "Perhaps you'll be kind enough to——"

"Quite so," says he. "No prologues, then. The direct attack. That is the method of the French writers and I vastly prefer it. Now let's see, I presume you wish to begin with a paragraph about how fascinated you are with your art. But please don't insist that you are wedded to it. I really couldn't write that, you know,

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

without feeling ill. Will fascinated do, or shall we say merely that acting is to you the breath of life?"

He was such a bored, patronizing youth that all I could think of for a moment or so was what a joy it would be just at that instant to grab something soft and mushy and rub it into his pompadour. A squash pie, say. But there was nothing of the kind handy, so, of course, I didn't.

"No," says I. "Let's ditch any talk about art. You mean my work, I expect; my job on the stage? Well, I've got nothing to offer on that subject."

Mr. Fogg looks a little jarred, but he merely humps his eyebrows and goes on. "As you choose," says he. "I suppose, though, you had rather tell how you created the character of 'The Flapper' almost out of whole cloth; evolved it, as it were, from your inner consciousness, with but very little help from the meager outlines furnished by the author. Eh?"

"Say, where do you get a slant like that?" says I.

"I—I beg pardon?" says he. "But that is the usual line for a star to take."

"Is it?" says I. "Well, I'm off it—clean. And don't you make me out as handing any knocks to Barry Platt. Not even a tap. They're

FAME NODS AT TRILBY MAY

his lines in the piece, understand, and they're mighty good ones. Most of the business, too, he wrote in himself, and what he didn't he helped me work up. Anything else I do that's worth while was drilled into me by Ames Hunt."

"Oh, I say! Really?" says he, staring at me with his mouth open.

"Quite," says I, echoing his pet word.

For a while there Mr. Fogg didn't seem to know just where he was at. It looked as if I'd completely wrecked his running schedule. But after he had soothed himself by lighting a cigarette he recovered enough to try another tack.

"I see," says he. "An abnormal case. Rather interesting, too. Then suppose we pass on to your career. Perhaps you would care to sketch that out for an eager public; your first appearances, well-known actors with whom you have been associated, your early triumphs, and so on."

I threw my head back and laughed. It wasn't a polite, rippling little laugh, either. I'm afraid it was a rather coarse, out-door cackle, such as I used to give back home when Paw tried to lead a frisky calf out to pasture and got tangled up in the rope.

You know there are some persons who bring out the best and smoothest traits you have. And then again there are others who affect you just

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

the opposite. T. Temple Fogg was in Class 2. He had a Back Bay, Boston, accent, for one thing. Oh my yes! Every a as broad as the back of your hand, and all the r's buttered until they slid so easy from the tongue you couldn't tell them from h's. He fairly oozed culture and even when he flicked his cigarette ashes into a potted fern he did it with a refined flick. So I simply ached to jolt him. Besides, he showed so plainly how bored he was at having to pump an interview out of a third-rate actress that I couldn't resist cutting loose.

"Listen, Foggy, old dear," says I. "You've started something now. For years I've been wanting to unload on the yearning public the true story of my climb to fame. Ever hear of Tamarack Junction? Well, it's a water-tank station on the Iron Range railroad that runs north from Duluth. There's Feltner's general store, the Bon Ton Ice Cream Parlor, and Ole Swenson's pool room. That's the gay white way of Tamarack Junction. Scattered around within half a mile of the station are perhaps forty palatial residences, some with corrugated iron roofs and some shingled. Also there is Ham Bigger's feed store, with Red Men's Hall overhead. I've kept that for the last because that was the scene of my first histrionic triumph

FAME NODS AT TRILBY MAY

—in the hall, I mean, not in the feed store. Uh-huh. My genius burst forth there when I was going on fifteen and thrilled an audience of nearly eighty-five, counting the janitor and all the Bigger youngsters, who got in free. I gave 'em 'Lasca.' You remember——

the crack of the whips,
the clatter of hoofs—
And Lasca.

“Say, I nearly woke up Jim Feltner, who was taking his usual evening nap in the far corner by the big stove. Then I followed that up with that chapter from ‘The Pilot,’ where the ship is taken through the shoals during a northeaster. And the next issue of The Biwabik Weekly Herald said that I had held my audience spellbound. Wait! I think I can get you the clipping.”

T. Temple gave me a cold, pained look. “If you’re through trying to spoof me, we’ll get on,” says he. “What I really want you to tell me is this: Is there a definite stage psychology that has to do with the character of your audiences?”

“O-o-o, such long ones!” says I. “Couldn’t you slip that to me simpler; in freshman English, say?”

It pains him to do it, but he makes the try. “I mean,” says he, “doesn’t there come a moment during each performance when you feel

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

that you have won your audience; that you have them with you, as it were?"

"Sure!" says I. "When you get 'em going."

"And this feeling comes regularly every night, does it?" he goes on. "Perhaps not at the same point in the play, but at some point."

I nods careless. "Usually about in the middle of my first scene with the Prince," says I. "They're apt to be a bit soggy up to then."

"But it is something that you are distinctly conscious of?" he insists. "You feel it approaching, don't you, quite gradually; you know that it has arrived?"

"Generally it is some fat man who starts chuckling," says I.

He waves that aside peevish. "I mean," says he, "that there is a pervasive quality to the thing, which is not to be mistaken? Eh? Like—er—like——"

"Like a skunk on a damp night," I suggests.

Which not only brought a shudder out of T. Temple, but made him squirm in his chair.

"Really, Miss Dodge!" he protests.

"Oh, well, strike out the skunk," says I. "But if you've ever been near one with the wind south-east you'll—however, spiel along. What next?"

But Mr. Fogg had lost the thread. He tosses away his cigarette and wipes his pallid brow.

FAME NODS AT TRILBY MAY

"Perhaps," says he, "we shall be safer if we continue along the personal line. You stepped into this part of *The Flapper*, as I understand, quite by accident. But, of course, you'd had a certain amount of dramatic experience. Tell me, what had you done before this?"

"Couldn't we skip that?" I asks.

"My dear Miss Dodge!" says he, spreading out his hands. "I am supposed to write something about you, remember. Thus far I have succeeded in getting absolutely nothing out of which I can make copy. Now, if you please, your training."

"All right," says I, "if I must. I taught school for two terms at Tamarack. Then, after I ran away from home, I was waitress in a miners' boarding house at Coleraine, up on the Range. From there I drifted to Druot's, in Duluth—ice cream parlor—and later to New York, where I've done almost everything from dipping orangeade in a sidewalk booth to doing a window demonstration of an electric washer. There! How's that?"

If I'd given him the squash pie shampoo I don't believe he'd have been a bit madder. His slim fingers twitched, a spot of color fired up in his pasty cheeks, and his big eyes glowered resentful. He was even gnawing his under lip.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Oh, snap it out!" says I. "Don't keep it all bottled up or you're liable to blow a gasket."

But he couldn't be tempted. He's altogether too nice and refined a young Phi Delta Kappa to talk back to a lady. "Very well," says he, cold and scornful. "You have seen fit to waste my time and your own, and having no better material, I shall be obliged to——"

Which was just where Annette bounces in to say that Mr. Ames Hunt has arrived. In he comes at her heels, too, and proceeds to be genial and friendly.

"Ah, Trilby May!" says he. "Well, how are you two getting on, eh?"

"He hasn't bitten me on the arm," says I, "but I think he was just about to."

"What!" says Hunt. "You don't mean it, surely?"

"Miss Dodge has been pleased," says Foggy, "to be absurd; and, if I may say so, rather ill bred."

"Why, hello!" says Hunt, peering into the dim corner at him. "It isn't Owens at all, is it? Let's see, you are——"

T. Temple stated his full name.

"Hm-m-m!" says Ames Hunt, rubbing his chin. "Fogg? Fogg? Can't we have a little light here, Trilby May? Thanks. Ah, now I remember!"

FAME NODS AT TRILBY MAY

"Me, sir?" asks T. Temple.

"Exactly!" says the great manager. "The name should have been enough, but that hair clinched it. Come from up near Scarborough, Maine, don't you?"

"Why—er—yes," admits Foggy.

"I knew you must be the same youth," says Hunt. "You brought in the steamed clams and melted butter. Wonderful clams, too. And the friend who was entertaining me with his shore dinner told me that your mother was the best clam cook along the Maine coast. Unique place she had there, too. I've often bragged about it since. Quite a famous resort, I understand. And let's see, she has made enough out of it to send how many children through college?"

T. Temple gulps once or twice, but finally he answers. "Three," says he. "My two sisters and myself. But I—ah—I'd rather not have that known here in New York. I'm just starting on my literary career, you see, and—er——"

"I see," breaks in Hunt. "We will consider that. Just a moment, though. What was it, Miss Dodge, which you said to Mr. Foggy that he resented so strongly?"

"Nothing but a few facts about myself," says I. "You know—Tamarack Junction, Druot's and the rest. He wanted to know what I'd been

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

doing and I gave it to him straight. That's all, Mr. Hunt."

He's some diplomat, I'll say. "Well," says he, "I think that Mr. Fogg is going to find all that entirely satisfactory, and I'm very sure he will turn out a corking good article for the Sunday dramatic page. Eh, Mr. Fogg?"

T. Temple was pink in the ears about then, but he muttered something about doing his best and then he made a quick exit.

Did he produce? You bet he did. Say, after I read that piece, all about what an original and fascinating young lady genius I was, I had to go look in the glass to see if I'd changed any overnight. And the witty repartee he'd printed as having been tossed off by me, and the clever remarks! I read 'em all to Inez.

"When you say that?" she asks. "I don't hear such things."

"How careless!" says I. "Somebody must have left some cotton in that keyhole."

Chapter X

Inez Hangs Up a Record

INEZ had yawned three times and then she had sighed, so I knew she was about to register something in the way of discontent.

"Well," says I, "is it anything on your mind, or is it too much chicken a la king on the digestion? Shoot."

But Inez only blinks at me and shakes her head, from which I gather that her thought, whatever it was, had not yet got itself pictured out on the background of her limited vocabulary. It was on the way, though, so I went ahead draping myself in a snappy new street costume I'd acquired since last pay day and gave her time. And when she did break into speech she didn't say much.

"You gonna walk again?" she asked.

"That's the leading idea," says I. "East Nineteenth Street, to have tea in a studio apartment with a Mrs. Blair, someone Ames Hunt towed in at the last matinee. She's a gushy female who wears jade ear danglers and has a

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

streak of gray through her front hair; a widow, I understand, with a past that has had its hectic spots."

"Huh!" says Inez. "Why you go there?"

"Chiefly because it's somewhere to go," say I. "Then, in a rash moment, I promised her I would. Rather a patron of the arts, Mrs. Blair is, you know; specializes in young comers—budding painters, musicians making their first concert tours, actors who have made a hit in some part, and so on. Her fad is to get 'em together. She told me there was a young Hungarian sculptor who was crazy to meet me. Maybe. Most of those birds are half locoed anyway. But it'll be a change from tramping through the park and I may get a laugh out of that bunch of freaks. Also this talented goulash fancier may have a good line to spring. You never can tell."

My idea was that a little chatter like this might cheer Inez up for the afternoon, but it works just the opposite. In fact, she comes as near getting a sulk on as she can with that placid face of hers.

"I don't go nowhere," she complains. "Nobody wants to meet me."

"And no garden handy where you can find a fuzzy worm to eat, eh?" says I. "Tough luck,

INEZ HANGS UP A RECORD

Inez. But then, yours is a hard lot. You have to get up every forenoon, decide how you'll have your eggs, allow Annette to help you get dressed, worry along until lunch time, drive or shop or something to kill the whole afternoon, change for dinner, struggle through five or six courses, take Uncle Nels to the movies, and so to bed. It's an awful grind, isn't it, for anyone with your delicate constitution?"

But it's just as much use trying to kid Inez as giving a traffic cop an argument. Anything as subtle as sarcasm she sheds as easy as hail bouncing off a battleship.

"Fellers don't go crazy over me," she insists.

As usual, Inez had stated her case with bald frankness. No beating about the bush for her, but a plain, honest fessing up of facts. I knew just what the answer ought to be, too, but I hated to hand her anything so raw. Still, I'd been looking for an opening like this for some time; and after all, what are friends for if you can't depend on them to bat you between the eyes now and then?"

"Brace yourself, Inez dear," says I, "for I'm going to shoot it to you rough. Are you all set? Then listen: the male of the species seldom stretches his neck after anything that tips the scales over 120, unless it's a side-show freak

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

who needs a special chair when she sits down. No. He may measure forty inches or more around the equator himself, and shave over two chins every morning, and have to guess whether his shoelaces are tied or not; but when he rolls a wistful and romantic orb you'll notice that it's generally as some slim Jane swishes by."

Inez squirms a bit and the chair creaks under her, but she's one of the kind that not only swallows the whole dose but laps the spoon. "You—you think I'm too fat?" she asks.

"That's something between you and the bathroom scales, Inez," says I. "You know where the hand points when you step on the platform these days. And what else can you expect when you play the desert both ways and take your exercise climbing into taxi cabs?"

Perhaps it took two minutes for all that to sink in, but when Inez makes a shift she's apt to do it prompt. "I'm gonna walk, too," says she. "With you, eh?"

"Good!" says I. "It's only a matter of thirty blocks or so, and I don't think Mrs. Blair will mind if I ring you in on the tea. — I'll call her up and make sure."

Mrs. Blair said she'd be delighted, so half an hour later we started out, and although those pumps Inez put on weren't exactly hiking shoes

INEZ HANGS UP A RECORD

she made the trip in fairly good shape. Also Inez got away with her first sandwich fight without making any particular breaks, mainly because I parked her in a corner and led up to her early in the game a parlor Bolshevik who had started to give me an earful about the downtrodden. He was a wild-eyed old scout who only wanted someone to listen to him and he talked to Inez for nearly an hour without discovering that she hadn't said a word. Meanwhile a poet and a couple of Greenwich Village painters had asked to be presented, but had failed to edge in with any remarks.

"What a stunning creature your friend is," observes Mrs. Blair, eyeing Inez. "Who is she and what does she do?"

"Oh, she's just Miss Petersen," says I, "and she doesn't indulge in any form of art."

"Anyway, she's simply superb," insists Mrs. Blair.

And, come to notice her close, Inez did look rather classy in that black, fur-trimmed walking dress with the nifty feather toque. It was a new outfit that Annette had helped her pick out, and it seemed to show up her transparent rose-leaf complexion and the wheat-colored hair better than ever. Too bad to waste all that on an antique pink red, but I thought it was safer than

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

letting the others snicker over her one-syllable conversation.

As for the promised Hungarian sculptor, he wasn't there at all—got his dates mixed, most likely—and while nobody else showed signs of going nutty over me I did swap more or less friendly chatter with two or three near-celebrities whose names and fame I didn't get quite straight. One impulsive party—a Russian dancer—insisted that I was just the person he'd been looking for to go on as his partner in a charity turn he'd promised to do at the Ritz, and before I could stop him he'd put a record on the music machine and was tossing me around reckless, an act which got quite a hand from the other guests.

"That," says he, finishing up with a bear hug, "I will call 'The Dance of the North Wind and the Sapling.' I am the North Wind, and you, Miss Dodge, are the Sapling. You are delicious, my dear."

"Well, you're some breeze, I'll say," says I, prying myself loose and straightening my hat.

I think it must have been that little incident which got Inez green in the eye again, for as we starts up the avenue once more she asks, "Who was that black-eyed feller you carried on so with?"

INEZ HANGS UP A RECORD

"Oh, some Owski or other," says I. "Fresh as paint, eh?"

Inez nods. "He look at you like he'd eat you up," says she. "Huh! Nothing like that happens to me, ever."

"Listen to that!" says I. "Say, Inez, he'd have to be some husk who could bounce you around that way."

"I know," says Inez. "Nobody likes big girls. What's the use?"

We hadn't walked more than five blocks further before she began to complain that her feet hurt, so to soothe her I hailed a taxi. It happened to be one of these near-limousines from a hotel stand, the kind that soak you a double rate on the clock, but with Inez's arches sagging I couldn't wait for any bargains to come along.

That's how we were riding in such state when we got held up by the cross-town traffic at Thirty-fourth Street. I expect I was just gazing moony up Fifth Avenue, wondering where all the people came from who filled that endless procession of cars and taxis, when I woke up to the fact that Inez was nudging me with her elbow.

"Eh?" says I, turning.

"Nice feller, hey?" she whispers.

And I saw that in the open touring car on her

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

left, which had pulled up not more than a foot away, was a collection of foreign-looking men who seemed to be making a sight-seeing tour. Most of them had on frock coats and shiny silk hats and somehow they wore 'em just as if they were making their first appearance in such costumes. They were all dark-skinned, undersized birds, with glossy black hair and smooth faces.

But the one nearest Inez was dressed different. He was got up real sporty in a gray tweed suit with a soft hat to match. He was the youngest of the lot, too, somewhere in the twenties, I should say, although it's hard to judge. Anyway his bright brown eyes seemed to be glued on Inez and his full red lips were half open in a childish smile. He had even put one of his little, well-gloved hands on the door of the car, as if he had half a mind to hop out.

"He—he look at me funny, hey?" asks Inez in my ear, and swings back toward him.

"Another minute and he'll be in your lap," says I. "Say, when did you throw the net over that?"

"I dunno," says Inez. "He just come. Who you think he is?"

"Sensible question!" says I. "How should I know? Colored up like a brown vase, isn't he? If it wasn't for his straight hair and his John

INEZ HANGS UP A RECORD

Drew nose I should suspect he had more or less Pullman porter blood in him. But he might be anything, from a Peruvian to a Hindu. Anyway, you seem to have made a big hit with him and he doesn't mind letting you know it, either."

"Yes-s-s!" says Inez, still returning the stare.

By this time some of the other men in the car had grown wise to this little exchange of goo-goo looks and they acted somewhat disturbed by it. One tried to point out the windows of the Waldorf dining room to the youngster, but he didn't succeed in shifting that pleased gaze.

Just about then, though, the white light flashed on in the control tower and the dammed-up traffic dashed forward, three cars abreast on either side of the avenue, our driver leading by a nose. A minute later and another taxi had crowded in ahead of the touring car and this little by-play between Inez and her unknown seemed to be wrecked.

I was just curious enough, to twist my neck and peek through the back window and I could see that the little sport in gray tweeds was not losing without a struggle. He seemed to be having a hot argument with the other three and the next thing I knew he had hopped up and was talking excited to the chauffeur, trying to make him understand something or other.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Hello!" says I. "It's a chase. Inez, you're being trailed."

Doesn't appear to worry her a bit. In fact, she acts rather pleased.

"Kinda cute, that one, hey?" she remarks, ducking her chin coy.

"I don't know about that," says I, "but I must say, Inez, I'm a little surprised at you. Why, you don't know this young sport from Adam."

"You should talk!" says Inez. "Gettin' hugged by that Russian!"

"But that was different," I protests. "We'd been introduced and all. And anyway, I didn't start vamping him at first sight. Yet here you go and——"

"See!" breaks in Inez. "He's comin' yet."

"Absolutely," says I, taking another glance behind. "I suppose you'd throw him a rope if you had one. Say, where do you figure this is going to finish? I'm no prune-faced old maid, Inez, but there are limits, you know."

"Huh!" says Inez. "I can't help if a feller like me, can I?"

And with Inez in that mood what was the sense wasting breath? Besides, we were nearly home and when the taxi swung into our court driveway the other chauffeur would hardly have nerve enough to crash in, too. He did, though.

INEZ HANGS UP A RECORD

Yes, sir, right on our heels. But by a stroke of luck there was Uncle Nels, swapping his usual daily chat with the imposing looking carriage man. It was a relief to see him. Not that I didn't feel equal to facing this persistent young sport and telling him exactly where he got off, but it's so much easier to shift that sort of thing to a man, even if he is only a dried-up little old Swede who couldn't scare anybody.

"Here, Uncle Nels," says I. "Block off that brunette Romeo in the gray suit. Find out who he is and what he wants, or else get your friend Mike to give him the quick shunt, while I hustle Inez upstairs and lock her in her room."

"Hey? Wha-a-at?" says Uncle Nels, gawping at me dazed.

I didn't want to explain the case but pushed Inez into the elevator and soon had her safe in the apartment.

"Well, that's that!" says I. "And listen here, Inez, if your Uncle Nels shows up with a dagger sticking out of his back or otherwise mused it'll be all your fault. Giving the come-hither to any stray foreigner you happen to pick up! I'm shocked!"

But Inez doesn't care a rap. "I'm gonna make Uncle Nels tell me what he say, that one," she announces.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

And five minutes later, when Uncle Nels does shuffle in, she tries. She didn't get much out of him, though. Neither did I when I took a hand.

"Such foolishness!" says he. "How can I say what he talk about, all that outlandish lingo? Nor Mike either. He think maybe it's Dago language, Mike. Anyway, it don't mean anything to us. The young feller, though, he talk a lot, until the old ones pull him back in the car. Then they all go off."

"You don't mean you didn't even find out who he was?" I asks.

"Oh, sure!" says Uncle Nels. "He gimme a card. Now what did I——"

"Now we're getting somewhere," says I, while Uncle Nels is rummaging through his pockets. "Gave you his card, did he? And did you give him yours?"

Uncle Nels nods. "Why not?" says he. "They don't cost much. Now what I do with— Oh! Here's his card. Funny lookin'."

"Allow me," says I, picking it out of his fingers. "Well, I should say it was a bit odd. Some names for a youth of that size—five, six, seven—and hardly a one I could pronounce without—Say, folks! I've got the answer. Who do you guess Inez has picked out to get up a flirtation with?"

INEZ HANGS UP A RECORD

"Who?" demands Inez eager.

"Only his royal and Oriental magnificence, the Ginkwah of Kassan," says I.

"Hey?" says Inez, staring over my shoulder at the card. "Who's he?"

"Proving what I've so often told you, Inez," says I, "that you really should read a newspaper now and then. Why, they've been full of the Ginkwah's doings for the last two days—how many rooms he has at the Plutoria, what he has sent up for breakfast, and how he balked when they tried to get him to ride in the subway. The reporters have followed him everywhere, from Grant's Tomb to the Winter Garden, but so far he hasn't had a word to say to them. Sensible guy, I'll say."

"He—he's big man, eh?" asks Inez.

"In Kassan he is, wherever that may be," says I. "He's the Junior Grand Kleagle, I take it; sort of a crown prince, you know, although Ginkwah seems to be his proper title. And I gather that he's been sent out by his royal daddy to make the grand tour. Just come from doing Japan and rolled in from 'Frisco only the other day. He's being chaperoned by the Grand Chamberlain and a whole string of secretaries and so on. Must have been some of 'em in that car. According to accounts the Ginkwah is all

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

kinds of a plute, and by the way he's said to have tried to view all the bright spots along the way he must be more or less of a regular fellow. Anyway, he's no common gink. He's the Ginkwah of Kassan. That's who you pick out casually to vamp on Fifth Avenue, Inez."

At which Inez tosses her head. "I no care," says she. "I think I like him. He—he's nice feller."

"Sure!" chimes in Uncle Nels. "He gimme a cigar. See?"

"Good night!" says I. "Say, you two are a pair. How far do you think you're going to get, Inez, with visiting royalty? You don't kid yourself he's coming around and take you to the movies and try to hold hands with you, do you? A crown prince! Say, how do you get that way?"

Of course, I figured that this little flash-in-the-pan romance of Inez's was all over. Something about her had caught his fancy and he'd rushed after her. Maybe that was a habit of his. But probably he was a quick forgetter, and if he wasn't, the Grand Chamberlain would talk some sense into his head as soon as he had a good chance. So I kidded Inez all through dinner and went to the theater without being at all uneasy.

Yet when I drifts back to the apartment again about eleven-forty-five, who do you think I find

INEZ HANGS UP A RECORD

in the living room beaming enthusiastic at Uncle Nels and Inez? Uh-huh! The Ginkwah. He hasn't come alone. With him is a dapper dressed, dark-eyed party who, as I came in, seemed to be doing his best to make Uncle Nels understand some of the worst hashed up English I ever heard. An interpreter, evidently, but by no means a certified one.

Even when he was wide awake, though, I doubt if Uncle Nels could have guessed what was being fed to him, but having been routed out of bed at 11.30 P.M., as I find is the case, he stands there shivering in his bath robe and blinking stupid. I could get the rest of the plot without asking any questions. The Ginkwah has broken loose from the Grand Chamberlain and other official chaperons and has come to put his proposition.

"Well, well!" says I. "What a cozy little party? What's it all about?"

Inez ducks her chin kittenish and indulges in that sappy smile of hers. "He come back," says she.

"So I notice," says I. "But what's the idea?"

"That one," says Inez, nodding at the interpreter, "he say the Ginkwah wanna talk to Uncle Nels, and—and he bring me present. Look!"

I looked and gasped. It was some trinket—

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

a girdle made of openwork gold links set with green stones—emeralds, I should say—and if it was worth anything at all it must have been worth a fortune.

“Hand that here,” says I. “Now, mister, what does all this lead up to? What’s the Ginkwah’s little plan, if any?”

The interpreter was right there with the comeback. “It is as I say,” he announces, patting himself on the chest. “His Royal Highness have viewed the so lovely lady and he is much charmed in his heart, quite much charmed. Yes. So he would speak with her—with him, there.”

“I get you, so far,” says I. “Well, what does he want to tell Uncle Nels? That he wants to marry Miss Inez? Is that it—marry?”

“Ah-h-h! Marry! That is the word I forget,” says he.

“Some do,” says I. “Glad I was able to remind you of it. Well, that’s a bit sudden of the young man, and I hope he knows exactly what he’s doing. They don’t always when they are so much charmed in the heart, as you put it. Now let’s get this straight from the Ginkwah himself. You bat it up to him. Ask him if he’s in dead earnest about wanting to marry Inez.”

They must speak a kind of shorthand in Kasan for the interpreter shoots over only a few

INEZ HANGS UP A RECORD

syllables to the Ginkwah, who immediately unreefs a broad smile and nods violently.

"It is so, yes," announces the interpreter. "His Royal Highest say he would have her for wife—for his head wife."

"Eh?" says I, straining my ears. "Once more with that last."

"For his chief wife of all," says he, beaming first at me and then at the Ginkwah.

And as soon as I got my breath I caught him by the coat sleeve. "You mean," says I, "that she would rank A-1—above all—all the others?"

"True," says he, bowing low.

"Get that, Inez?" says I. "You'd head the list. But just one thing more, Mister; how many would there be—that is, when he got his full quota?"

The dapper young man shrugs his shoulders careless. "Who should tell?" says he. "His Royal Highness has much riches. He can pay for many wives, as many as he wants. But he pay most for her which should be first wife. So I make to tell to her Uncleness. You speak and ask how much he want. Yes?"

But as Uncle Nels was standing there with his mouth open, and as Inez had turned her back and was sniffing into the portieres, it was all left up to me. I hardly knew whether I wanted to

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

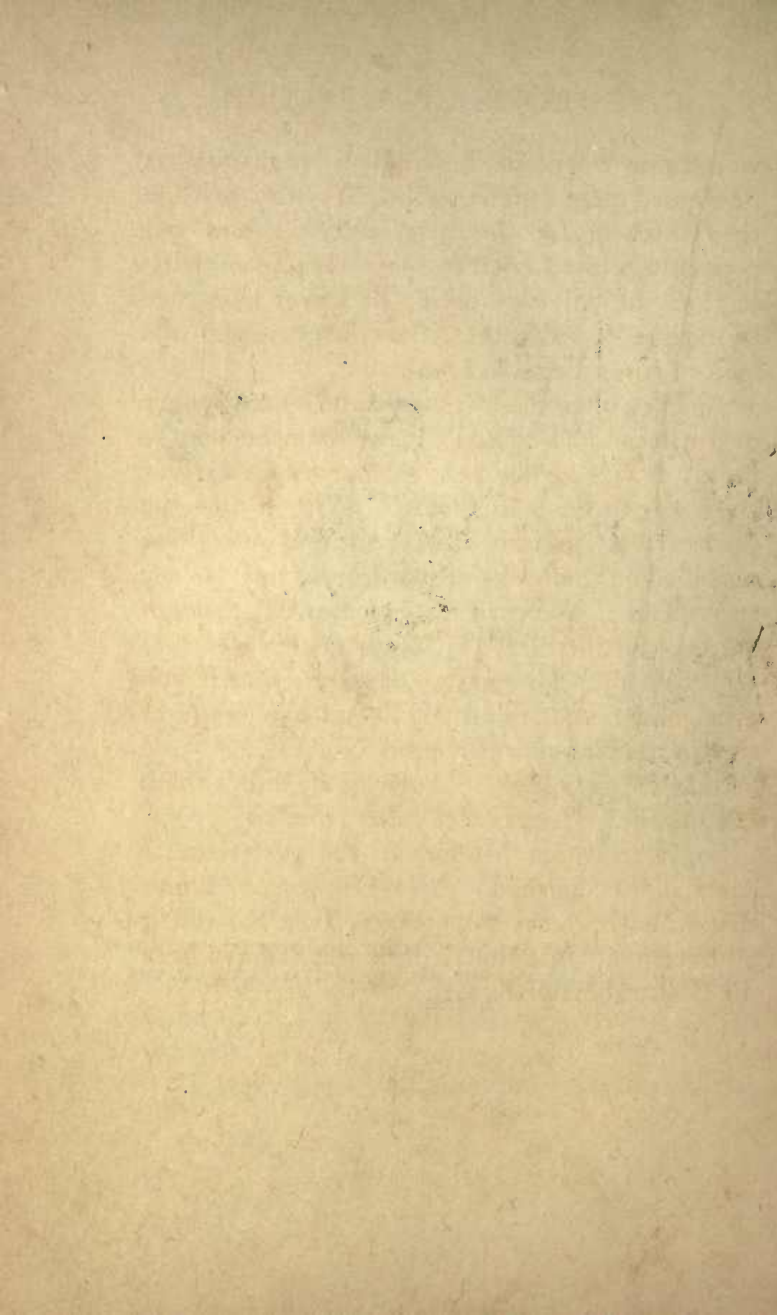
snicker or to hit this foreigner whipsnapper over the head with something hard. But he was so frank and friendly about it, and the Ginkwah did look so boyish and chummy standing there trying to dope out how the affair was progressing, that I didn't have the heart even to be rough.

"Listen, old son," says I. "You lead the Ginkwah out and explain to him that he's made the prize break of his young career. Go have him look up the marriage customs of the U. S. A. in some thick book. He'll find that our young men don't start in at twenty-one to make a collection of wives, and that it isn't the proper thing to come right out and offer to buy 'em, on the hoof or otherwise. Besides, if he did get Inez over to Kassan, and she should find a No. 2 wife being unloaded at the front door she wouldn't do a thing but treat her messy and probably she'd wreck the palace before she got through. No, Mister, Inez isn't in the market for wife shoppers, and by the red tint spreading up the back of her neck I should guess that it would be much safer for you and His Highest to make a quick exit. This way out. Yes, that door. And here! Better take this partial payment trinket along with you."

He wasn't much of an interpreter, but there



AND AS SOON AS I GOT MY BREATH I CAUGHT HIM BY THE COAT SLEEVE.
"YOU MEAN," SAYS I, "THAT SHE WOULD RANK A-I ABOVE ALL THE
OTHERS?"



INEZ HANGS UP A RECORD.

were some words in the English language that he seemed quite familiar with. Anyway, he took the Ginkwah by the arm and led him out promptly, while I tried to sooth Inez from drifting into the only real crying fit I ever knew her to indulge in. Whether it was because she was mad or sorry I couldn't make out.

And yet when this package came by messenger next afternoon I couldn't insist that she send it back. It was a ruby pendant hung on a curious chain of woven gold thread. With it was the card of the Ginkwah of Kassan, and something scribbled on the back—a word or so just as easy to read as if a cockroach had crawled through the ink and then left his footprints.

"Probably," I suggests, "it means that if you ever change your mind you'll find him ready to start a new series with you as No. 1."

"Huh!" says Inez. "Anyway, he didn't think I'm too fat. He was nice feller, too."

So, hearing her list him in the past tense, I knew it was finished. Also I'm free to admit that when it comes to romance, Inez has got it all over me. Just think! She might have been the Ginkwahess of Kassan.

Chapter XI

Guessing On Uncle Nels

YOU might think it was pretty soft for us, living here in this swell apartment house, with real palms in the foyer and a doorman dressed like a real admiral, and Inez's rich uncle to sign checks for everything. Course, I insist on paying the same board I did at Miss Wellby's, but that's a good deal of a fancy gesture. As a matter of fact what I turn in doesn't help much to scale down the grand monthly total, whatever it is. But Uncle Nels seems satisfied. He says it's worth it just to have us with him, and once he hinted that I had more'n saved all we both cost him by keeping him out of the hands of slick grafters. I'll admit he's right, too. I guess I've told you of two or three cases where he'd have been nicked good and plenty if Trilby May Dodge hadn't crashed in just at the right moment to show up a crooked game. So I should worry. Besides, he must have an income that runs into husky figures.

But, as I try to make Inez understand, part

GUESSING ON UNCLE NELS

of our bargain, besides seeing that Uncle Nels is more or less entertained, is to keep track of him and see that he doesn't get into mischief. And I'll say that's no cinch.

You wouldn't mistrust, though, to look at this dried-up, little old shrimp with the skim-milk blue eyes and the slumped shoulders, that he would ever start anything on his own hook. Although we've succeeded in getting him to wear fairly decent clothes, there's no disguising the fact that he's a hick dressed up. You can tell that just by his shuffling, aimless walk, and he will continue to go gawping about as if he'd just drifted in from the rutabaga fields. So, of course, he's an easy mark. He might just as well wear a sign.

It isn't so easy, either, to find things that will interest him. When we discovered him here, you remember, he had a fad for sailing mechanical toy boats in three bathtubs he'd hooked up in the living room. But he soon got tired of that as an indoor sport and we induced him to have the tubs taken out. For awhile, there, too, Inez thought she'd made a movie fan out of him, but somehow—I think it was having to see Bill Hart three times in one week—he kind of soured on the movies, and Inez had to fall back on Annette, our near-French maid, as a matinee

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

escort. Uncle Nels seemed to prefer wandering around through the streets and the park by himself.

If he liked to read, or to play solitaire, or join in a two-handed game of dominoes or parcheesi, it would be different. But about all the reading Uncle Nels does is in a Swedish paper that comes once a week by mail, and he's never learned to play any kind of games at all. He's led too busy a life for that. He isn't much of a sitter, either. Restless old boy. And when he does camp down quiet he seems to put himself into a sort of coma, staring at nothing at all, and, so far as I can discover, not even thinking.

So he's more or less of a puzzle. As for Inez, she's no help at all. She will sit directly opposite him for an hour at a time without opening her head and perfectly contented to yank away on her gum. She's one of the non-thinkers, too. She can be just as lively and animated as a cold boiled potato. Anything in the world might be going on—big strikes, more wars threatened, kings and presidents blown to bits by bombs—but if nothing joggled her elbow she'd take no notice.

That's why I'm so desperate, at times, to find things for 'em to do. One of my experiments was taking them to a professional matinee. I

GUESSING ON UNCLE NELS

knew it was going to be kind of a weird play and probably something they wouldn't be crazy over, but Ames Hunt had given me these four free tickets and I hated to waste 'em. Besides, Barry Platt had offered to take us down in his car.

The piece was weird, all right. No wonder the producer wanted to open in the afternoon with a lot of his friends present and the house well papered. My guess is that it will run about a week before it joins the other dramatic discards of the season. Inez yawned through the whole four acts and Uncle Nels hypnotized himself into a two-hour nap so he didn't suffer much. I couldn't blame either of them.

It was only after we had walked a block and a half, to where Barry had parked his car, that Uncle Nels offered any remark.

"Your automobeel don't get stole, eh?" he suggests.

"Not this time," says Barry. "You see, there's a fellow on this block who's supposed to watch your car for you. Yes, he's right on the job. Anyway, he's coming to collect his tip."

Uncle Nels watches as this rough-looking person in the faded ulster slouches up with his hand out. "How much you have to give him?" he asks.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Oh, he'll take anything from a quarter to a half," says Barry.

That seems to impress Uncle Nels more than anything he'd seen on the stage. "Huh!" he remarks. "Lotta cars on this block, hey?"

"Fifty or more," says Barry. "Maybe a hundred. He doesn't get 'em all, though. Some don't give up, some do. It's a little private graft, of course."

"Huh!" says Uncle Nels, and lapses into his usual silent mood.

"He does get so excited over the drama, doesn't he?" I whispers to Barry.

It must have been only a few days after this that I began to get puzzled about Uncle Nels. He took to sliding out promptly after lunch every day, and instead of dolling up in any of his new clothes he would dig out his oldest suit. On cold days, too, he would wrap himself in an old plaid mackinaw coat, such as he used to wear in the woods, and pull a faded old woolen cap down over his ears.

"What's the big notion?" I asked him once. "Going out to drive a truck, or something like that?"

"Truck!" says he. "How foolish!"

"What's the matter with the new overcoat?" I demands.

GUESSING ON UNCLE NELS

"Well, it ain't Sunday, is it?" says he, as he shuffles through the door.

I noticed, too, that he stayed out all the afternoon, no matter what the weather, and that when he'd show up around six o'clock his Baldwin-apple cheeks would be redder than ever, his old eyes bright and twinkly, and his appetite more like a hired man's than like a retired plute's. But all the response I could get out of him as to where he'd been or what he'd been doing was vague and sketchy. In fact, whenever I opened the subject it seemed as if Uncle Nels was just stalling me off.

"Now what do you guess that old boy is up to?" I asks Inez.

"Him?" says she. "I dunno. He walk around, don't he?"

"Must be exciting sport, tramping the streets, especially in the rain," I suggests. "Yesterday when he came in he was dripping wet."

"He's tough, Uncle Nels," says Inez. "Funny old man, too."

I couldn't deny either proposition. So far as his health went, he's about as delicate as a pine knot. I never knew him to have anything the matter with him, not even a cold. And he certainly could indulge in some odd habits. Still, I was more or less curious about these afternoon

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

disappearances and his reluctance to talk over his daily doings.

And the next thing I knew Inez reports that he's begun to stay out evenings. In fact, it was only a few nights later that I came home from the theater to find Uncle Nels just letting himself into the apartment. He has on the same backwoods outfit that he'd been wearing afternoons.

"Aren't you keeping rather late hours, Uncle Nels?" says I.

"I get tired going to bed so soon," says he. "Wake up too early."

"That's fairly plausible," says I. "But I hope you haven't been promenading Fifth Avenue in that costume."

"Huh!" says he. "Can't I wear what I like? I ain't all time asking where you girls go or what you put on."

He's generally such a mild old bird, but believe me he can get up on his ear once in a while, and I saw that this was once when he needed to be handled gentle. Which I proceeded to do.

"Far be it from me," says I, "to tell you how to amuse yourself. If you want to see how New York behaves itself up to midnight and whether or not prohibition prohibits, that's up to you. I was only wondering what you found so interesting?"

GUESSING ON UNCLE NELS

He squints his eyes cagey and nods. "Well," says he, "it don't do no harm, Trilby May—wondering. Me, I gonna go to bed."

And I was just as well informed as if I'd been interviewing a mummy in a museum. What could an old boy like that find to do every night? Must be some outdoor sport or else he wouldn't have to be dressed so warm. Why, he looked like a night watchman guarding some new building. Could he have found some old crony with a job like that and was he spending his evenings chatting around a bucket bonfire? Or did he have some reason for trailing around in disguise? After a few more futile stabs like that I gave it up. But I didn't quit wondering. The feminine mind doesn't, they say.

Of course, I talked it over with Barry Platt. Usually he has some bright ideas on almost any subject, but he had nothing sensible to offer on this one. "Oh, maybe he's turned Bolshevik, and is attending meetings on the East Side somewhere," he suggests. "Or perhaps he's been taken into a Kelley pool crowd, or has run across some old side-kick who's pilot of a ferry-boat. Why worry if it doesn't seem to do him any harm?"

"I wouldn't, Barry," says I, "if there was any way of taking out insurance on a rich uncle's bank

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

account. There should be, you know. How are we to tell when he's going to get reckless with his check book, wandering around that way? Besides, I'd just like to know how he passes the time."

Yet it was Barry, after all, who brought in the first clue only a day or so later. "Say, you remember the chap who has worked up a street parking graft down in the theater district?" he asks. "The one I tipped the day we all went to that professional matinee? Well, who do you think I saw him chatting chummy with this afternoon?"

"The Mayor?" says I.

"Uncle Nels," says he. "He was so busy he didn't notice me as I passed by."

"Oh ho!" says I. "Thanks, Barry. I think that gives me a hunch."

I didn't lose any time in following it, either. I persuades Barry to drive me down to that block the next afternoon about two-fifteen. And sure enough, who should show up with an offer to watch the car but dear old Uncle Nels. He was more or less fussed, too, when he found who was in the machine.

"How enterprising of you, Uncle Nels!" says I. "So this is your new job, eh?"

"Well, why not?" he mumbles.

GUESSING ON UNCLE NELS

"Oh, I suppose you need the money," says I. "But how are you working it? Running an opposition, or have you gone into partnership with the other pirate?"

"Say, you wanna know too much, you," says he, and shuffles off active to hold up a coupé that's just driven up with an owner-driver.

But it looked like I'd solved the mystery. At least, we knew what Uncle Nels was doing afternoons and evenings. No great harm in it, of course, but it did seem rather absurd for an old boy with as much money as he has to be exposing himself that way just for the sake of a few dollars that he surely didn't need.

"Must be gettin' foolish in the head," is all the comment Inez makes when she hears.

I agreed with her. And for awhile we tried to josh him into quitting.

"Next thing we know," says I, "you'll be out with a wheezy accordion squatting in some doorway with a tin cup in your lap."

"Maybe," says he. "You would drop in some pennies, hey?"

We tried shaming him out of it, too. "Suppose," says Inez, "somebody asks me what my uncle do? What should I say?"

"You tell 'em," says Uncle Nels, "that he does what he likes."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"But it's so absurd," says I, "for you to be knocking around the streets with your hand out for a few half dollars."

"Yes?" says he. "But I'm only a foolish old man, ain't I? Well?"

"You've said it," says I. "And I thought you had better sense."

Even at that I couldn't figure out why he stuck to it, unless it was because we'd stirred up that stubborn streak in his disposition. Anyway, we had to let the thing ride, although Inez was beginning to take the situation hard.

"We think we're livin' swell and all," says she, "and here Uncle Nels has to act like that. Suppose somebody found out?"

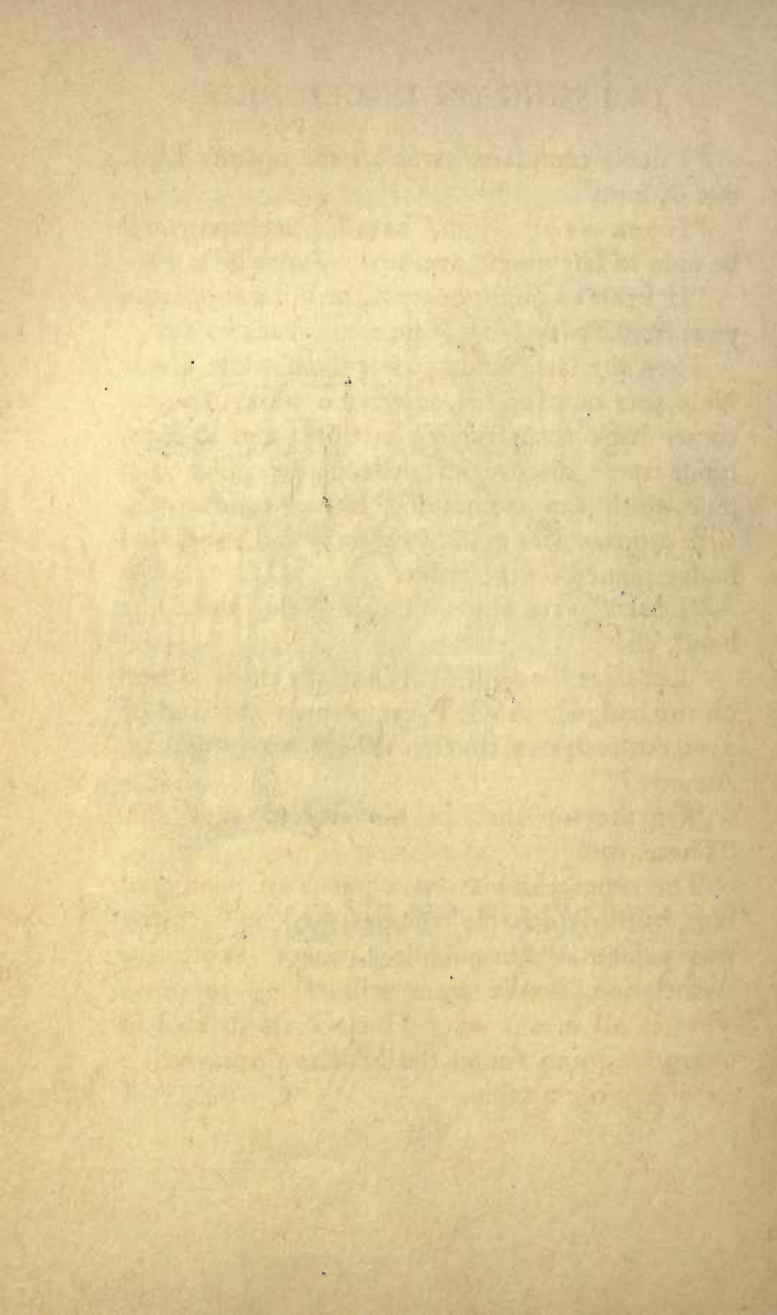
"Don't make me shudder, Inez," says I. "Why, our social position would be utterly ruined. That is, the doorman might stop nodding cordial to us."

Next we noticed that Uncle Nels was doing a lot of figuring in a cheap paper-bound account-book that he'd haul out of his pocket at odd times. He seemed to get a lot of satisfaction going over items on various pages and adding up columns. You could tell that by the pleased flicker in his eyes.

"Have a good collection last night?" I asked him once.



"SAY, YOU WANNA KNOW TOO MUCH, YOU," SAYS HE, AND SHUFFLES OFF
ACTIVE TO HOLD UP A COUPÉ THAT'S DRIVEN UP WITH AN
OWNER DRIVER



GUESSING ON UNCLE NELS

"I don't complain," was all the answer I got out of him.

"If you save it all up," says I, "perhaps you'll be able to buy a new overcoat by spring."

"If I can't I might borrow the difference from you; hey, Trilby May?" he comes back at me.

Then the last Sunday afternoon, while Uncle Nels was out for his afternoon walk, Annette comes back from tidying up his room and exhibits some discoveries she's made. One is a blue cloth cap, something like a conductor's, with more or less gold braid on it and a nickeled badge pinned on the front.

"Look!" says she. "Uncle Nels joined the band, eh?"

"Let's see," says I. "What are those letters on the badge? A. O. P. A. Now what kind of a secret order is that? Where was this cap, Annette?"

"On the top shelf in his closet," says she. "These, too."

The other exhibit was a bunch of numbered tags, with detachable coupons, and on each tag was printed, "Automobile Owners' Protective Association." We were still trying to guess what it all meant when Uncle Nels drifted in unexpected and found the articles displayed on the living-room table.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Huh!" says he. "Somebody's been snoopin' around, eh?"

"Looks that way, doesn't it?" says I. "And we're more curious than ever. You wear the cap, do you?"

He nods.

"And you've got to the stage where you give 'em real checks for their cars, have you?" I guess on.

"It's a foolish idea, hey?" he asks.

"No, I should say that it was rather bright," says I. "I take it you have organized the business a bit?"

"Maybe," says he.

"Are you working more than one block now?" I asks.

He shrugs his shoulders careless and digs up his old notebook. "By to-morrow it will be twenty-two blocks," says he.

"Oh, come!" says I. "You and your partner couldn't possibly cover that number of blocks."

"Partner!" says he. "That old bum ain't no partner any more. I buy him out long time ago. He works for me now. Lot of others, too."

"What!" says I. "You mean you've developed a little side-street graft into a regular enterprise?"

He had. In about every block where the

GUESSING ON UNCLE NELS

police regulations allowed parking he had an assistant wearing a uniform cap, and when you drove up you were hailed. That is, almost anywhere in the theatrical district. And if you wanted to be sure of finding your car again when you came out you gave up half a dollar.

"But how many of them do?" I asked.

"Most all," says Uncle Nels. "Some think they have to, on account of the badge and the cap. Like an officer, you know. I thought that out first thing. But some wouldn't give money unless they had something to show for it. So I gets up the coupon tags, just like they have in big garages. Only I prints the price on it, so they know they ain't gettin' stuck. I start with one man, Old Pete. Then I get another, and more and more. First off I give 'em half, but so many want to work for me that I give 'em three dollars a night, and if they don't like that they get the chuck. But they do. Tips is why. Folks who drive to shows in cars don't care how they spend money. And they can leave robes and coats. My men watch everything. And me, I watch them."

"You mean you go around and check up each block?" says I.

"You bet!" says Uncle Nels. "They don't hold out nothing on me. And I have 'em make

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

the drivers park their cars in tight, so I get more to a block. It ain't bad, twenty-two blocks."

"I should say not, at fifty cents a throw," says I. "Why, if you had only one hundred cars to a block that would be—great guns!—over a thousand dollars a night, less a hundred or so for expenses."

"Uh-huh!" says he. "It counts up."

"Wowey!" says I, staring at him. "Do you mean to say, Uncle Nels, that you can drift around New York and pick up a cinch like that right from under the noses of all these grafters who were born and brought up here? Say, you're some wizard."

"Me?" says Uncle Nels. "No. I'm just a foolish old man who came from Sweden long ago and don't know many Yankee tricks. Yes, I did make a little in lumber business. But that was luck, they say."

"I'll admit I always thought so," says I. "But I'm beginning to suspect some of it was due to shrewd moves. Didn't you sell standing timber on Indian reservations?"

"Lotta lumberjacks do that," says Uncle Nels. "You could sell anything them days to suckers from the East. And some way I used to see the suckers first."

"Yes, I can imagine you did," says I. "Those

GUESSING ON UNCLE NELS

honest blue eyes and the simple look in 'em must have been quite a help, too. But to put anything like this over in New York—that's what I call a regular stunt. Using the public streets as a storage garage, and getting away with it! To the tune of a thousand or more a day, too! Say, I wonder the cops don't get onto your scheme, or that the Tammany bunch don't find out what a good bet they're missing."

Uncle Nels gives another hunch to his shoulders. "They have," says he. "Both the cops and the politicians. I kept the cops squared at first with little presents. Then they wanted more—twenty-five dollars a week. I gave it, but said I was a poor man. They could figure up, though. Then somebody told the district leader. He was around to see me yesterday. He say I must take out a license and he can fix it for me but it might cost a lot. I guess so."

"So the parking cinch is going to be short lived, eh?" says I.

"Look so," says Uncle Nels. "That's why I sell out today."

"Eh?" says I.

"To a Mr. Morrie Blum," says he. "Ticket speculator. He's been figurin', too. Gets up syndicate to take over business from me. Lotta men in it—Mr. Hirshfield, Mr. Goldstein, Mr.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

Cohen. Bright fellers. I meet 'em this afternoon. They had the cash. No checks, I tell 'em. Just bills. So it don't take long. I get the money in one hand and sign paper with the other. See?"

He displays a long envelope full of big denomination bank notes—the biggest I'd ever seen. Had me gasping.

"How—how many thousand?" I asked.

"Say, you wanna know a lot, don't you?" says he. "But I got enough, I guess. Maybe they think so when Tammany leader comes around. Eh?"

And he's such a dear, simple old soul, too, Uncle Nels. Too bad he's lost his job, isn't it?

Chapter XII

Deep Stuff By Uncle Nels

I'VE got to hand it to Uncle Nels; he's a great old boy. Deep, shifty, cagey, all that sort of thing. And you'd never guess it to look at him. Not unless you're a heap better guesser than I am. Why, he'll sit here in the apartment, slumped in his favorite chair by one of the south windows, his back turned to what strikes me as a regular fairyland picture—especially just at dusk when New York starts to light itself up for the night—and he'll neither stir nor speak for sometimes an hour at a stretch; even when the weather man stages an early snowfall and you can see the big hotels and tall office buildings doing a sort of ghost dance through the shifting white curtain that lifts and closes in, thins and thickens, until you get the weird feeling that the Metropolitan Tower and the Bush Terminal must be trying out some new shimmy steps.

But Uncle Nels doesn't bother to turn his head. He seems content just to sit and stare at nothing at all, like some mummy in a museum.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

Say, what goes on in that old head of his, if anything, I'd give a lot to know. For now and then he shows some queer quirks.

Take him lately. I thought I'd noticed an occasional flicker in those faded blue eyes of his, as if he was kind of pleased with himself. Just a faint flash that would show for an instant, but would fade out the moment he caught you watching him. Seemed so, anyway. I couldn't be sure. Once I tried pumping him.

"Who's the joke on, Uncle Nels?" I asked him.

"Hey?" says he, staring stupid. "I don't make jokes, Trilby May. Never."

"Oh, come!" says I. "You forget, maybe. I'll bet as a youngster you were a regular village cut-up, larking around with the corner gang, banging your stein on the table and shouting, 'Vell, skoll!' with the best of 'em. Now didn't you?"

But Uncle Nels shakes his head. "Lot you don't know about Sweden," says he. "It ain't like Minnesota. No. When I was young feller I got no time for such foolishness. I don't loaf around pool playing rooms and we don't have no movie places. All time we work. Fishin' village I live in, and I am no more than twelve years old when I have to help mend the nets and turn

DEEP STUFF BY UNCLE NELLS

the fish on dryin' flakes. Then when I'm bigger I get sent out with the boats. It ain't so bad in summer, but when big storms comes and it's cold—Ugh! You're lucky to get back alive. We're all poor by Sweden, too, and nobody feels like carryin' on same as young folks do in this country."

"Not even a dance now and then?" I asks.

"Oh, maybe," says Uncle Nels. "Not like here, though. No fox trotters. Just Swedish dances."

"You had a girl, though, didn't you?" I goes on.

"Me?" says Uncle Nels. Then he stops and rubs his chin. "Yes, I had a girl—once. Nice girl, too."

"Lena who?" I suggests.

"Not Lena," says he. "Matilda. Ain't none any nicer than her."

"Yes," says I, "that's the usual line. But tell me, Uncle Nels; why didn't you marry Matilda?"

"Hey?" says he, staring at me. "What you say that for?"

"Oh, come!" says I. "It must have been a long time ago. Doesn't hurt yet, does it? And it's a subject Inez and I have often discussed—why you happened to stay an old bachelor. Let's have the tale."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

Of course, I wasn't expecting any kind of a yarn. I was simply stringing Uncle Nels along, mainly because I had nothing better to do. I didn't really think he'd open up, either. He so seldom does. But somehow I seemed to have jarred something loose in Uncle Nels, for the next thing I knew he had glanced around cautious to see if any one else was listening in and had given his chair a hitch toward mine.

"You—you wanna know about Matilda?" he asks.

I nods and registers sympathetic attention.

"More as thirty years I don't speak about her to anybody," says he. "I think I forget. But I don't. And lately—well, I remember again. She live near me, Matilda. Her father owns fish boat. It was him I work for. Poor mans, but not so poor as me. But Matilda—you'd think she was rich lady. She walk that way, look with her eyes like that, hold her chin up so. Not much for dress, but she don't need fine clothes, Matilda. You say Inez looks swell in her new clothes sometimes. I wish you could have seen Matilda in things like that. In just old skirt and torn waist she look as well. No shoes, no stockings, no hat; but when she stand on shore waitin' for fish boat to come in—well, she look good to me."

DEEP STUFF BY UNCLE NELS

"I get the picture, Uncle Nels," says I. "A village queen, eh? And would she let you walk home with her?"

"Sometime," says he. "That make me feel good. And sometime we sit on rocks and have long talk. I was gonna fix it up, when I get money, that we go get married. She knows. And then—then comes this other feller."

"As per schedule," says I. "Enter the villain of the piece. Who was the scoundrel, Uncle Nels?"

For a minute or so he scowled at the rug, his chin on his necktie. Then he shrugged his shoulders and lifted his head. "His name Neil Lindgren," says he. "He's a big, rough feller. Owns fish boat himself. Makes good catches, him. Spends his money free. Talks big. And he sees Matilda, too. She don't like him so much at first. No. She say so. And once when we was walkin' together this Neil Lindgren, he comes by and stops. 'Go long,' she tells him. 'I talk with Nels now.' He laughs loud, that Neil. 'Hol' says he. 'That little dumhuvud! He no fit for nice girl like you to talk with. You should talk with big man—like me. Get out, Nels—little herring head.' Shove me away. Well, we fight. I'm little feller, you know, like I am now. I ain't much good for fight. But I do what I can. I punch

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

him, kick him, bite him. But he's strong, Neil Lindgren. Knock me down, break my jaw, kick in my ribs. Then he lift me up and throw me on rocks. I think I'm dead. And for long time I can't walk straight any more. Something goes bust in my hip. He don't care. He laugh when he see me limp around. He make joke of me with other fellers. Tell Matilda's father he did that because I was botherin' her. So I lose my job, too."

"Say, he was a bad actor, wasn't he?" I puts in. "But how about the girl? Does she fall for the rough stuff?"

"She's afraid of Neil," says Uncle Nels. "But she's afraid of her old man, too. He want her to marry with Lindgren. And bymbye she does. That's why I leave Sweden when I'm young feller and go by Minnesota."

"Some tragedy, Uncle Nels," says I. "Who would have thought it? And I suppose Neil and Matilda lived happy ever after?"

"Huh!" says Uncle Nels. "They ain't married a month when he gets drunk and beats her. All time like that. Children come; four, five. Matilda, she look like old woman. Don't hold her chin up any more. That Neil beats her too much. It makes her get sick. She die. After that Neil have lotta bad luck. He don't make



"I WAS GONNA FIX IT UP, WHEN I GET SOME MONEY, THAT WE GO GET
MARRIED"

DEEP STUFF BY UNCLE NELS

good catch, lose fish boat in storm. So he go ship for stoker on tramp steamer. Never come back. No. He was strong man once, Neil Lindgren. But now——” Uncle Nels stops with another shoulder shrug.

“And you went to Minnesota and got rich in the lumber business,” I adds. “Well, that’s where you got the edge on him. But no Matilda, eh?”

“No,” says he. “And if I went back I could own all the town, all the fish boats, everything. If Matilda was there I would. But what’s the use?”

Still, he didn’t seem as broken-hearted as he talked. Even as he finished the tale I thought I could see sort of a grim smile curling his mouth corners. He had me guessing, all right. But then, I never could quite follow all of his curves. For instance, when Inez reports about his coming in afternoons with his new suit all dusty and how he wouldn’t say where he’d been.

“Where he go?” asks Inez.

“It’s by me,” says I. “Since that last snow-fall there’s been no dust in the streets. And you say he comes in covered with it, eh? Overcoat and all?”

“He don’t wear overcoat when he goes out now,” says Inez.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"That's funny," says I. "We've had some snappy days recently, too, and he generally bundles up well when it's at all cold. I don't get the idea."

"Maybe he's up to something again," suggests Inez.

I couldn't dope it out, not even after I'd stayed in one afternoon and laid for him to appear. He was dusty, I'll say. His hat was powdered, it was on his mustache and eyebrows. I had to lead him out in the hall, open a window, and go at him with a whiskbroom.

"Say, you look as if you'd been subbing in a bakery," says I. "How do you get this way, Uncle Nels?"

"I dunno," says he. "I just been 'round."

And then I got a clue. It wasn't street dust at all. It was ashes. I didn't let on, though. But the next day when he was ready to go out I beat him to it. I caught an elevator before he did and parked himself casually behind some tubbed palms down by the main entrance, ready to trail him. I meant to find out where he went to accumulate that sprinkling of ashes.

After I'd waited fifteen or twenty minutes, though, and no sign of Uncle Nels, I stepped out and interviewed the doorman. I asked if he'd seen Uncle Nels go out recently.

DEEP STUFF BY UNCLE NELS

"The old boy?" says Mike. "No, he ain't passed, yet, Miss. More like you'll be findin' him downstairs."

"Not in the basement?" says I.

"Sub-basement, Miss," says Mike. "Furnace room. You'll find the stairs through the third door at your left. Two flights down."

I wasn't crazy about poking down there alone, but when I start on a sleuthing expedition I generally finish it. So down the dark iron stairway I felt my way. And I never knew before that so much of these big apartment houses was underground. For a minute or so I thought I was lost in that tangle of whitewashed corridors, but at last I caught a glimpse of some big boilers through an open door and located the furnace room. I tiptoed up and took a peek. It was worth while.

Over at one side a patch of daylight filtered in from above—through the grating of the ash-hoist, I guessed, from the row of iron cans standing near. And sitting in this dull light were two men. One was a heavily built old pirate dressed sketchily in a ragged woolen undershirt and overalls. His pasty gray face was lined and rugged, his wide shoulders slumped, and his head almost bald. He was squatting on a box puffing away at an old corn-cob pipe. Opposite him, in a

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

somewhat rickety armchair with the seat upholstered with old newspapers, is Uncle Nels. He's as much dressed up as if he was ready for a Sunday stroll down Fifth Avenue, even to gray castor gloves and gold-headed cane. Also he is smoking a long, expensive-looking cigar.

They were not more than three feet apart, these two, and facing each other. At first I supposed they were having a confidential chat about something or other. So I waited and stretched an ear. Three minutes, five. But not a word came from either of 'em. In fact, as I got used to the dim light, I could see that their expressions, as they stared at each other, were absolutely wooden. They were looking, not so much at, as through one another. It was absurd, and a bit weird. I don't know that I've ever seen two human beings in just that pose. Cows, sometimes. You know how they'll stand in the pasture, head to head, not even flicking an ear or batting an eye? Well, that was Uncle Nels and this underground chum of his. I couldn't guess how long it had kept up, or how much longer it was going to last. But I meant to watch the show to the finish. Surely they must say something sooner or later that would give me a line on what this was all about.

Anyway, I had found out where Uncle Nels

DEEP STUFF BY UNCLE NELS

got his coating of ashes. Evidently his friend there could not spend the entire afternoon sitting on his box. At intervals he must have been obliged to get up and shovel ashes from the fire-boxes. Judging from the appearance of Uncle Nels' clothes and the fact that half of the cans were full, he'd not been neglecting his job. This was one of his rest periods. And he chose to spend it staring at Uncle Nels. But why?

Just as I had given up for the third time Uncle Nels seemed to rouse up. He fished out his watch with a flourish, squinted at it, and hunched his shoulders.

"Huh!" he remarked.

Then he got up, went through the motions of brushing ashes from the front of his coat, stuck the cigar rakish in one corner of his mouth, and started to shuffle out. The other man didn't move. Didn't as much as shift his gaze.

I did, however. I slipped back of the open door and let Uncle Nels go by without seeing me. When he was safely down the corridor I stepped boldly into the furnace room. But I had to walk directly up to the man on the box before he would notice me. And at that he didn't seem a bit surprised. He simply stared at me, dull and stupid.

"Who's your friend that just left?" I asked.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Hey?" says he.

"Your friend?" I repeats.

"Him?" says he. "He no friend to me, I no friend to him."

"But you were sitting here together," I protests, "as chummy as two old pals."

"Yah!" he growls, knocking out his pipe ashes on the concrete floor. "No friend."

"Aren't you a Svenga, too?" I asks.

He nods sullen.

"What name?" I goes on.

"Me?" says he. "Lindgren."

"I guessed as much," says I. "Neil Lindgren, aren't you?"

"How you know that?" he demands

"Oh, from something Uncle Nels let drop," says I. "Then you don't love each other any better than you used to, eh?"

"Yah!" says he. "Love him! Say, you know what I do some tam with that one—that Nels?"

"No," says I. "What?"

For a second his gnarled, knobby old hands bunched together, his slack jaw stiffened, and a dull glow came into his watery eyes. Then the glow flickered out and his hands dropped limp at his side.

"Never you mind," says he. "I—I'm old man—sick."

DEEP STUFF BY UNCLE NELS

"Yes," says I, "you look like a good deal of a wreck. I must be going, though. So long. Pleasant dreams."

And when I got back upstairs I found Uncle Nels camped in his favorite chair, gazing at nothing at all, but with that grim smile playing around his mouth corners. I thought he ought to be warned, though, and I did no beating about the bush in doing it.

"See here, Uncle Nels," says I, "you want to look out for that old pirate, Neil Lindgren."

"Hey!" says he, turning on me startled.

"Oh, I've found where you spend your afternoons," says I. "And I'll say it's a dangerous indoor pastime. Some day Neil is going to swing on you with an ash shovel."

"Him!" says Uncle Nels. "That one? Huh! Once he could, maybe. But he ain't strong any more. And me, I'm tough. He knows. He don't dare."

"All the same, I wouldn't trust him," says I. "You should have seen how murderous he looked when I spoke of you. Besides, I shouldn't think you two would be so much company for each other, so what's the sense of your running the risk? And what can you find to talk about so long?"

"Talk?" says Uncle Nels. "We don't talk."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Wha-a-at!" says I. "You don't mean that you two sit and stare at each other every afternoon without swapping a word?"

Uncle Nels admits that to be the general program.

"But how long has this been going on?" I asked. "When did you first discover that this old enemy of yours was in the building?"

"Two weeks ago," says Uncle Nels. "I see him standin' by ash-lifter one mornin'. I know him right off. He know me, too. He say 'Hello, Nels.' I say 'Hello, Neil.' That's all."

"And you didn't even ask him how he got here?" says I.

"What for?" says Uncle Nels. "I can tell. He's too old for ship stoker now, so he have to work on shore—any job he can get. He's glad to shovel ashes where it's warm, you bet; glad for little wages so he don't starve."

"I should think though," I went on, "that you'd want to ask him something about Matilda."

Uncle Nels shakes his head. "No," says he. "I hear all about her long time ago. I get letters. She's gone, Matilda. I don't wanna talk to him about her."

"Then what is the big idea, sitting down there blinking at him, and him blinking at you?" I demands.

DEEP STUFF BY UNCLE NELS

Uncle Nels gives me one of those blank, simple looks of his and rubs his chin. "I—I dunno," says he. "It's kinda nice, seein' that feller who made a joke of me once, and took my girl away, and kicked me 'round—seein' him old and poor and all bust up. And I like havin' him see me dressed up swell, cane and gloves and all. Him shovelin' ashes and me sittin' smokin' big cigar. Eh?"

Say, can you beat that? For a sample of human nature in its bare bones this frank confession of Uncle Nels is about the most genuine I ever ran across. I expect he had me gawping for a minute. And then I wondered if he wasn't drawing it a little strong; if, after all, he wasn't holding out something on me.

"Oh, come!" says I. "I expect you're planning, one of these fine days, to surprise him by some kind act. Going to get him into a sailors' home somewhere, aren't you, and have him kept warm and well fed and supplied with tobacco for the rest of his days? Isn't that your little scheme?"

"Huh!" snorts Uncle Nels. "You think I'm foolish? That Neil Lindgren! I wouldn't get him nowhere, unless kicked out on street, maybe. I could do that, too. But it's better he stays here where I can watch him shovel ashes."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"You win, Uncle Nels," says I. "You look like a mild, gentle old boy who might be used as a doormat by almost anybody. But I'll say you can't. Not much. And for a consistent, long-distance hater I'm willing to back you against any in the business. Also you seem to be getting more fun out of it than they generally do. Well, something like that was coming to you; and to this Lindgren person as well. Only watch him close when he has an ash shovel in his hands. Now stand up while I go over you with a whisk-broom."

Chapter XIII

Listening In On Zada

THAT Collins girl comin' here again to-day?" demands Inez.

"Naturally," says I. "It's Thursday, isn't it, and my bobbed hair needs curling in the back. I know it's a bit extravagant, but when you're asking people to part with two-seventy-five each for orchestra chairs you've at least got to look convincing as a flapper. Hence the weekly session with Sudie."

"Huh!" says Inez. "Plenty other hairdressers."

"Why, Inez!" says I. "What has Miss Collins ever done to you?"

"Her?" says Inez. "She don't do anything to me. I wouldn't let her. I no like her, that's all."

"Oh!" says I.

And after I'd thought it over for a while I could dope out very little that was worth much. There are certain types of their own species, I knew, that some women dislike and distrust from instinct. Perhaps Sudie Collins was of this class.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

Not having even a second mortgage on any particular man myself, I had nothing to worry about, and I couldn't quite see where Inez needed to get green in the eye.

"But just how does Miss Collins manage to start your day all wrong, Inez?" I asks. "She strikes me as rather a chirky, pleasant young person, and she certainly knows her job."

"Maybe," admits Inez. "She has bold look, though. Me, I wouldn't trust her."

Well, you know how a knock like that, even if you don't agree with it at the time, will start you working up suspicions. Anyway, while she was busy on my revised near-henna hair that morning I couldn't help watching her in the mirror. Yes, there might be something in Inez's hunch, for if she was inclined that way Sudie could qualify for a vamp. One of these slim, long-waisted girls with an easy, glidy sort of walk and a soothing voice. Besides, she had cheek dimples, a fresh, healthy complexion that didn't need to be touched up from a box, and dangerous hair—that true copper-red shade that no wash can quite duplicate. With all that was her quick, eager way of looking at you and doing things, as if she was full of life and in love with life. Real pep. Yes, she could get 'em stretching their necks, if that was her line. But was it?

LISTENING IN ON ZADA

So I gave her an opening for confidential chat. But Miss Collins didn't respond by pouring out the story of her life. She smiled friendly enough but just went on making two curls grow where only one grew before. And at that I did get curious. Only I didn't make the mistake of starting right out to pump her. I began by telling her something about myself.

"Do you know, Miss Collins," says I, "it's a wonder I never tried hair-dressing, for before I side-slipped into acting I'd tackled almost everything else. I believe I should have gone around distributing permanent waves and so on if I'd known how to break in. I suppose you take lessons?"

She admits that you do.

"You were in something else first, weren't you?" I suggests.

"Manicuring," says she.

"Oh!" says I. "In one of those beauty parlors?"

"No," says she. "Hotel barber shop."

"I see," says I, although I didn't. "You weren't satisfied with that, eh? I've heard that the tipping was good."

"It is if you can stand for all the mush the men hand you," says Miss Collins. "I couldn't. So as soon as I'd saved up enough I hunted up

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

a woman who agreed to give me a full course for twenty-five dollars and for the next month I spent most of my evenings with her."

"Then you had to find some clients, didn't you?" I asked. "How did you manage that?"

"That was the hardest part," says she. "I had business cards printed and persuaded the room clerk to put them in the guests' letter-boxes. For a week or so nobody seemed to pay any attention to them. Then I had two or three calls, and those ladies must have told some of their friends about me, for inside of six weeks I was making enough to live on."

"And now?" I suggested.

"I'm on the go from eight in the morning until sometimes nine and ten o'clock at night," says Miss Collins. "You see, I have to do so much skipping about. First I'll have an appointment at some hotel down on West Forty-fifth, and perhaps the next one will be up on East Ninety-sixth. That's what makes it hard, especially in weather like this. And I lose so much time jumping around. Honest, when I get home at night I'm just dead."

Which was where I came in with the pointed remark: "Some day, though," says I, "you'll be getting married and then you'll quit it all."

LISTENING IN ON ZADA

"Do you think so?" says she, gazing dreamy over the top of my head into the mirror.

"It's being done every day," says I. "You must be around twenty-five, Miss Collins, and you're not going to get any younger, especially if you keep up this fourteen-hour schedule. A grind like that will fade the cheek roses and put wrinkles in the eye-corners that massage can't keep out. Besides, the right man is bound to be knocking around somewhere, waiting for a nod from you. My guess is, too, that you've got a whole string you could pick from."

"That's nice of you to think so," says she.

"Oh, come!" says I. "You're not going to try to tell me that all the men you've met so far have been duds, or blind in both eyes? I'll bet you could call up any one of a dozen 'phone numbers and have a perfectly good man hot-footing it for the license bureau within an hour. Eh?"

She let loose a gurgly little laugh at that. "You would lose your bet," says she, "for I've been married nearly two years."

Of course, after springing that one on me, she couldn't do any less than give me the rest of the tale. It dated back to the big war, when she was living with her folks at Dorchester, just outside of Boston. Seems there was a naval flying sta-

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

tion somewhere near, and through a friend whose brother was in the service she met this Ted Collins, who'd been jammed through three months of intensive and useless drills in navigation, given an ensign's commission, outfitted with some dazzling white uniforms, and sent up over Boston harbor in a double-control bomber with an instructor who had finished doing his hundred hours solo flying not more than three weeks before. I gathered that Ted and Sudie had hit it off right from the start.

"Yes," says I, "those first aviation uniforms, with all the gold braid on them, were hard to resist, weren't they?"

"I'd seen plenty and kept my head," says Sudie, "until I met Ted Collins. And it wasn't the gold braid or the brass buttons, or the wings on his collar that I fell for. It was just Ted himself. He was such a clean, wholesome fellow. Why, even in greasy overalls and with his face and hands all smeared up after working over a balky motor, he could look clean. And clean he was, all the way through. Some of 'em weren't that way, you know. But my Ted— Well, I couldn't tell you. Nor about that brave, happy look in his blue eyes. For he was brave. He had to be to keep that smile in his eyes and go up every day in a rickety old bus that was due

LISTENING IN ON ZADA

to crash with him almost any minute. All the boys knew the sort of junk the Navy had wished on 'em for flying practice, and not all of 'em smiled. But Ted did. Perhaps that was why he got through so lucky. Twice he was fished out of the water after a wing collapsed, but neither time was he much hurt. Anyway, it didn't get his nerve. It was after the second smash that we got engaged. Of course, Ted wanted to be married right off, but I wouldn't have it. His mother needed all of his pay that he could spare, and my folks were just scrubbing along. I promised to wait until he came back. We thought it might be six months, maybe eight. You know?"

I nodded. "Yes," says I. "We were going to finish things in a hurry, there at first. He got across, did he?"

Sudie said he was among the first lot sent over, and that for a while he was stationed on the west coast of Scotland, helping the English patrol the Irish Sea. That was dull but easy and fairly safe. Then, after the big Hindenburg drive, when the British lost so many of their flying men, he was transferred to a land squadron, taught to handle a scout plane, and sent out over the lines. That was where he got smashed up. Not in an heroic above-the-clouds battle. No. She said he wouldn't have minded

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

if it had come that way. But to get it miles from the front, and simply because the driver of a supply truck had been on too lively a party the night before—that was what Ted Collins called rotten luck. He'd been sent out from the rest camp to scour the country for a Thanksgiving turkey, so it wasn't even official business. However, when the bleary-eyed truck driver had swerved into an ammunition camion the crash had been just as complete as if he'd taken a header into a mine hole. It finished Ted's flying days—very nearly finished him.

It took months to patch him up, and one of the best surgeons in Paris, who happened to take an interest in Ted's case. The rib and arm fractures were rather complicated, too, but they finally got those straightened out. Also the big doctor did wonders in restoring the right side of Ted's face. He almost gave him back his old smile. The right hip, though, was stubborn. It just wouldn't heal properly. So, months after the armistice, Ted Collins came limping off a transport at Hoboken and was farmed out to a badly managed reconstruction hospital for treatment.

So he was out of luck generally. He had come straggling home after everything was over. The war had been won. The parading and shouting

LISTENING IN ON ZADA

had stopped. We were busy getting back to normalcy, so busy that Ted Collins and thousands like him were forgotten by most of us. Sudie Keefe remembered, though. She sold two Liberty bonds for what they would bring and came on to New York, where she could be near her Ted. For a week or so she tried to do what she could for him during visiting hours. But she found that she couldn't help much. She could do nothing to better the wretchedly cooked meals or the sloppy nursing. Then she formed her plan. With no practical experience at all and very little idea of what she was letting herself in for, she went after a job as manicure and got it.

"In a hotel barber shop," said she, shrugging her fine shoulders. "You don't quite know what that means. Well, you're lucky. But I stood it somehow. And just as soon as I found out how much I could make I told Ted he had to marry me. He wouldn't, at first. Said I didn't know what a wreck he was. Maybe he'd never be any good, anyhow. Well, I wouldn't listen to talk like that. I'd got to take care of him, and the only way I could do it was as his wife. I fairly dragged him to the minister. Then I found three little rooms, one a kitchenette, and we set up housekeeping with what few things I could buy from an installment house.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"It's been up-hill work, but we've been getting on. I'm bringing him around, gradually. I found a young surgeon who was sure he could fix up that hip. He's almost done it. Ted walked three whole blocks all by himself yesterday and he does most of the work around the flat. Six months more and he may be able to look for a job—he's an electrical engineer, you know. Of course, he'll always be lame, and his right arm never will be quite strong. We're happy, though, even if we do see little of each other, and when I open my shop——"

"Oh!" says I. "You're going to have an establishment of your own, are you?"

"Only a small one," says she, "but it's in a good location. Here's the number on one of my cards and I hope you'll be able to come to me, for I'm depending on keeping most of my customers. You see, I've had to run frightfully into debt getting the shop fitted up, and if I can't swing it—Well, I've got to, that's all, on account of Ted. I shall start in there next week. Wish me luck, won't you?"

"I'll do more than that, Sudie Collins," says I. "I shall round up all the trade I can for you, for I think you're a perfect brick."

That got her choked up so she couldn't say a word and when she left those bright eyes of hers

LISTENING IN ON ZADA

were somewhat misty. Inez noticed it as she passed her in the hallway and, of course, was curious.

"What's the matter with that Collins girl?" she asks. "You been findin' out things about her that makes her cry, Trilby May?"

"Yes and no," says I. "And listen, Inez, your dope about her was all wrong. Vamping isn't her specialty, any more than playing the saxophone is yours. She isn't Miss Collins at all, except for business reasons, for she's married to a bunged-up war hero that she's supporting by working herself to a frazzle. So you've got to line up, Inez, as one of her regulars when she opens her new shop."

And after she'd heard the whole tale Inez is almost as strong for Sudie as I am. She has a good heart, Inez, when you can get at it. But she's bound to have her suspicions, even if she has to shift 'em to somebody else.

"That's a lot to do for any man," says she. "If he's worth it, all right; but some of them war heroes ain't much good, I hear."

"Well," says I, "I have her word for it that this Ted of hers is a regular fellow. Let's hope she's a good judge."

"Suppose he wasn't all she thinks," suggests Inez. "That would be tough, eh?"

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Say, Inez," I protests, "for the love of soup quit the crape hanging."

And you'd think, to hear me press-agenting for Miss Collins' new shop those next few days, that I had a half interest in the business. I went around telling everybody I knew about what a swell hairdresser she was, even to a casual acquaintance I met in Auntie Bates' dressing room at the theater.

Perhaps you remember my mentioning Mrs. Bates, who plays the mother role in "The Flapper." Giddy old girl who used to be in burlesque and never got over it. This friend of hers, a Miss Zada Leclair, is in vaudeville on the big-time circuit, and looks it. Rather a brilliant brunette, but with a selfish little mouth and hard black eyes. What I noticed most, though, was her wonderful glossy hair and the atrocious "do" she had on it. So I skimped my make-up time long enough to tell her about Sudie Collins and give her the address. She promised to look her up.

I might not have been so enthusiastic if I'd known she was going to horn in on my appointment hour the very next day and keep me warming a chair in the new shop for a full half hour. But there I found her, having a full facial and all the trimmings, so I settled myself in the little waiting room and made the best of it.

LISTENING IN ON ZADA

She proved to be a chatty person, Miss Leclair. I listened in while she told Sudie all about what a good act she had with Morrie Kahn, whose stage name was Victor Vaughn. But finally, when she'd nearly exhausted that subject, she switched to personal remarks about Sudie.

"That's natural henna, ain't it?" she asks. "Your hair, I mean. I thought so. I can generally tell. And that's a stunning waist you got on, Miss Collins. So simple and all. I see you're still wearin' one of them aviator pins. Don't see so many of 'em now, do you? Gee, wa'n't the girls crazy over 'em a few years ago. Only it got so you could buy 'em at the five-and-ten stores. Imitations, you know. I had a pair of real wings, though. Got 'em off a reg'lar flyer, one I met in Paris while I was over doin' my act on the Y circuit, back of the lines. Is that a real pin of yours, Miss Collins?"

Sudie admits that it is.

"You got it off'm a flyer?" asks Miss Leclair. Sudie nods.

"Well, I hope you didn't lose track of him, the way I did mine," goes on Miss Leclair. "Say, he was some boy, that young feller, even if he had been badly busted up and was still supposed to be in the hospital. Met him at a party some officer friends of mine was giving to

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

celebrate gettin' the Huns on the run. It was a whale of a party, all right. Fizz water! Say, I never saw so much opened in one night. Not that I generally monkey much with that stuff. Never when I'm working. But I was all through then and ready to sail back on the next transport for good old New York. Besides, this was a special occasion. And the first thing I knew I was cuttin' loose. Everybody was, that night."

"Ye-e-es?" says Sudie, sort of draggy. "Now will that be all today?"

"You might thin out the eyebrows a little," says Miss Leclair. "And as I was sayin', I certainly did get going. So did this boy with the nice eyes that sat next to me. He forgot all about being a "blessé" and everything else. All he remembered was that he had a thirst and that I was in reach of his good arm. I didn't care much what I did, either. So when the party broke up, along toward mornin'—Well, maybe you can guess. I'm not sayin' a word more. Only he was some boy, that feller, some boy!"

Glancing through the door and into the mirror I could see Sudie biting her upper lip. I thought I could tell why. She seemed to be in a hurry to get through with Miss Leclair and shunt her out of the chair. Before she went, though, Miss Leclair had one more thought.

LISTENING IN ON ZADA

"The wings he gave me," she added, "had his squadron number on the front. I remember now, just as plain what it was. And say—Why, yours has the same number! And he was tellin' me about a girl of his back home that he was goin' to marry. Yes. Say, didn't somebody say your first name was Sudie?"

"I—I shouldn't wonder," says Miss Collins, dropping her chin like a badgered witness.

"Why, then," goes on Miss Leclair, "it must have been the same feller. What do you know about that, eh? Ted! Wasn't that his name?"

Sudie nods.

"You don't say!" exclaims Miss Leclair. "Well, he was some boy, all right. Wonder if he ever got back or what happened to him? Did you ever hear?"

"Yes," says Sudie. "I married him."

"Oh, you did!" gasps Miss Leclair. "Say, dearie, don't you pay no attention to that guff I was givin' you about the party. I—I might have been stretchin' it some; and maybe he wasn't the one."

But by that time Sudie Collins had her chin up once more and she had those clear steady eyes of hers fixed on the other woman. "Oh, yes," says she. "It was Ted. He told me all about it—before we were married."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

“Good Gawd!” says Zada Leclair. “What a poor nut! But don’t you worry about it. Men ain’t worth worryin’ about, anyway.”

“My Ted is,” says Sudie. “That’s why he told. But now that I’ve seen you, I’m wondering why he bothered. That’s all, Miss Leclair. Come again, won’t you?”

And as Zada passed me on her way out she whispered husky: “Say, did you get that? Ain’t she got proper feelin’s, or—or was she slippin’ me something?”

“I think one of your propositions,” says I, “is a good guess.”

And after Sudie had sobbed a little on my shoulder she proceeded to get busy with the curling tongs.

It was that same afternoon, too, that Inez urges me to go with her to see a new movie feature that’s advertised as an emotional thriller.

“No, thanks, Inez,” says I. “I don’t need to. I’ve just been to the hairdresser.”

Chapter XIV.

Willard Looks In

AT first I thought it might be a hold-up, for I'd been breezing along in my afternoon walk through Central Park without noticing much where I was going until I found myself up on that out-of-the-way knoll that's decorated, more or less, by the Garibaldi statue. And suddenly I discovered that I was being trailed. Being such a brisk day, there wasn't even a nursemaid in sight—just Garibaldi and me, and this man in the heavy gray ulster.

Well, old Garibaldi might have been useful in his time, but he wasn't going to be much use to me then, and as there was no path down except the one behind me, where this party of the second part was blocking the way, it seemed to be up to me to make some kind of a snappy move if I was going to save my silver-fox scarf and wrist-watch. So with my usual shrinking modesty I whirls on him abrupt and gives him the scornful double O.

“Say, old Rubber Heels,” says I, “who do you think you're sleuthing, anyway?”

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

That stops him, all right. He makes a couple of fishy motions with his mouth, as if he was gasping for breath, and then he comes out with the glad hail.

"Why, Trilby May!" says he. "I just knew it must be you, but I wasn't quite sure until you spoke. You remember me, of course?"

"Eh?" says I, taking another squint between the high points of the ulster collar, for as a matter of fact I'd been too nervous to really see anything before. "Why it's—er—Willard Bigler, isn't it?"

"Yes," says he, beaming.

"From Duluth," I added, just to make talk.

He nods enthusiastic. As though there could be a Willard Bigler from anywhere else! Not that Duluth makes a specialty of Willard Biglers, but he isn't exactly the type you'd expect to find duplicated anywhere. No, Willard is in a class by himself—I hope.

"I've been following you for the last half hour," says he, "trying to get near enough to make sure before I spoke. I didn't want to make any mistake and get in trouble, you know."

"I know, Willard," says I. "Caution is your middle name."

"Well," says he, "you got to be careful in a

WILLARD LOOKS IN

strange town. Especially a place like New York. What you doing—just taking a walk?"

"You've guessed it, Willard," says I. "And you—I suppose you're measuring Central Park for building lots or something like that?"

"No," says he. "I'm on a business trip, though. Client of mine back home sent me on to close a lease with one of these chain-store concerns for a corner property on Superior Street. Big thing for me, expenses paid and all."

"I'll bet that item of expenses was thoroughly understood before you started," says I.

Willard stiffens his neck at that, just as he used to, and does a shoulder pivot to stare at me, but when I spring my crooked smile on him he thinks better of it. "You're just the same Trilby May, aren't you?" he says.

"Absolutely not," says I.

"Oh, yes you are," he insists. "And say, couldn't we find a place to sit down somewhere and have a good long talk?"

"Think it's perfectly safe, do you?" I asks.

"Oh, come!" he protests. "Nobody in this town knows me. Besides, I—I've been thinking a lot about you since you left."

Which ought to give you the situation. Yes, from out the dead and buried past I'd gone and dug up an old admirer. I expect I can call him

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

that without kidding myself much, even if he did manage to keep it such a dark secret back in Duluth. In fact, he used to be so quiet and subtle about it that I might have missed most of it myself if there had been any other entries. But when a girl has to struggle along with such unalluring hair and eyes as mine you can gamble she doesn't overlook any friendly glances from the hip-pocket sex.

You see, it was when Inez and I were doing our zippy waitress act in Druot's, juggling plates of ice cream and dealing soft drinks off the arm, that I got to know Willard Bigler real well. Some kind of a lawyer, I understood Willard to be; not one of the leading legal lights of Duluth or anything like that, with big corporations paying him an annual fee. No, I believe he and his partner specialized in rent cases, leases, and other real estate doings. I was told that Willard was rather well off, to; with a good bank balance and a half interest in a business block that had been left to him and his sister.

You'd never guess it, though, to watch him lurching in Druot's off a chocolate milk-shake and one of our thin ham sandwiches. That's how I first got a line on his thrifty habits. Say, when you see 'em squeeze two dimes and a nickel out of a change purse and then tip you with a

WILLARD LOOKS IN

smile you can guess the rest. Uh-huh. Willard was just as free with his money as if he had glue on his fingers. He shed it as easy as a catfish does its skin.

Why he should pick me out as the target for his shifty eye rolling was always a puzzle, when there was Inez and a lot more flossy waitresses on the force. Maybe he misunderstood that friendly smile of mine and didn't notice that I spread it around careless on all the customers. But the first thing I knew Willard was planting himself regularly every noon at one of my tables and getting chummy, in his stiff, shy way. He'd try to hold my hand when I passed him the check and he'd ask in a husky whisper, "Well, how is Trilby to-day, eh?"

Course, that was nothing at all to what the average young hick pulled when he dropped in at Druot's for a sundae or a box of mixed chocolates. Stella, our wash blonde at the candy counter, used to get pouty if she wasn't tipped or complimented once every ten minutes, or dated up for an Armory dance or a show at the Orpheum.

But Willard was no dashing young sport. In fact, he was a good deal of an old bach, well along in the thirties, I should judge. And you wouldn't exactly call him a he-vamp either. No,

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

he didn't have patent leather hair or the profile of a collar ad. chappie. Perhaps the slightly popped eyes and the stiff joint in his neck disqualified him from the quick action Romeo class, too. So I didn't work up a high-cheek color and a fluttery heart when he gave me a sly finger squeeze and called me Trilby.

Besides, he was so foxy about it. One of these subtle, shifty workers, Willard was, who never took a chance of getting caught. Even when we got well enough acquainted for him to ask me out for a Sunday-night drive in the old roadster he'd inherited he would arrange to pick me up on a dark corner and he'd never hit anything but back streets and dirt roads.

Of course, when I got wise to these little tricks I didn't do a thing but call for a diagram. I asked him what was the idea of all this secrecy stuff, why we didn't edge into Lakeside amusement park with the other Sunday night revelers, and how about taking me to Chin Long's for a chow main banquet. Say, I got some fine squirms out of Willard during that session, but mighty little else. For the best part of an hour he ducked and stalled around, but I finally made him sketch out his objections to being seen in public with me. And I'll say they were rich.

WILLARD LOOKS IN

Not that Willard put 'em crude or brutal. He didn't have that much courage. But here's what it amounted to: he was Willard Yates Bigler, a member of the Minnesota bar, and a professional man of a certain standing in the social world. He had to consider that. How would it look to some of his friends or relatives if he was seen going around with—Well, somebody they'd never seen or heard of? Or perhaps they had seen me—in Druot's. Suppose some of his clients found out? Or his married sister? Surely I could see how he stood.

"You bet I do, Willard," I told him. "You're standing at the kitchen door trying to kid along the hired girl. But say, it's all off. You better beat it before she gets careless and pushes you into the ash can. Get me? Here, let me out on this next corner where I can catch a street car home. Sure I mean it. And from now on, Willard, remember we're perfect strangers."

I may have said a lot more, but that's all I remember now. Anyway, that was the finish of my little affair with Willard. At least, I thought it was. He shifted his trade to a quick lunch joint and from then on I only saw him occasionally as he flitted past. A few months later Inez and I made our quick exit from Duluth and did a wild dash for New York to hunt for her

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

Uncle Nels, and Willard Bigler faded into the background as a serio-comic memory that got fainter and fainter.

Yet here he bobs up again, big as life, staring mushy at me out of those near pop eyes from the other end of a Central Park bench.

"I say, Trilby," he begins, "you—you're looking mighty fine."

"Like the bobbed hair, do you?" I asks.

"It's stunning," says he. "Very becoming to you."

"Same old carroty red, though," says I. "There's less of it than before. I couldn't do anything to change my green eyes, however."

"You don't need to," says he. "I—I always did like your eyes, Trilby. There's so much life and snap to 'em. And you're dressing rather smart now, aren't you? Real New Yorky. What—what are you doing?"

"Oh, working, as usual," says I.

"Hm-m-m!" says Willard. "Must have a good job. You—you get an afternoon off occasionally, do you?"

"My work is mostly on the night shift," says I. "Why?"

"Well," says he, "I was just thinking. You see, I've got to stay around town several days, maybe a week more. And it's pretty

WILLARD LOOKS IN

dull and lonesome poking about by yourself. So I didn't know but what you might like to—er——”

“Take in the art museum with you on a free day,” says I, “or visit the Aquarium, or Grant's Tomb?”

“Oh, come now!” protests Willard. “I'm not such a tight-wad as all that. What about vaudeville, or hunting up one of these tea-dancing places?”

“How reckless, Willard!” says I. “Suppose some one from home should see you?”

“I'll risk that,” says he, wagging his head bold. “Besides, this isn't Duluth, and I can do what I please.”

I shook my head. “I don't think you should, Willard,” says I. “It wouldn't be worth while.”

“But it would be to me,” he insists. “I guess you never knew how much I liked you, Trilby May. Fact! You're so different from most girls—always so lively and cheerful. Of course, while you were in that ice cream place I couldn't take you around as I wanted to. It wouldn't have looked well. You understood that. But here——” Willard finishes with a careless wave of his hand.

I suppose I should have laughed in his face and left him sitting there. But I couldn't help

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

stringing him along and watching that wonderful ego of his develop itself.

"You're taking an awful chance, Willard," says I, "but since you're bound to be a tourist cut-up, I think I'll just go you once. I'd love to have a few dances, and I wouldn't mind a little tea and cinnamon toast to go with it. I know a bully place, too."

"Then let's go," says he.

We went. And if Willard was expecting me to tow him to some cut-rate jazz hall, where you buy so many dance tickets for a dollar, he missed his guess. For my first move after we got out of the park was to hail a taxi and tell the driver to take us to the Plutoria. Perhaps you know what they nick you for when you stray in there and ask for a table in the Pompeiian grill? So far as I know it's the stiffest afternoon cover charge in town. But then, wasn't I thoughtful enough to slip into the ladies' cloak room while Willard was getting over the first shock? And when I came out after renewing that schoolgirl complexion and a slight contact with the lip-stick I did my best to make him forget what had happened to his pocketbook.

"Isn't this a gorgeous room, Willard?" I asked.

"It ought to be," gasps Willard.

WILLARD LOOKS IN

"And such a perfectly corking dance orchestra," I goes on. "It's said to be the best in town."

"I believe it," says he. "They just sold it to me."

"They're playing 'Mon Homme,'" says I, "my favorite fox trot. Shall we try it?"

"All right," says Willard. "I'm afraid, though, that my dancing is a bit rusty."

He hadn't overstated the case. Rusty was the word. Or else corroded. Yes, Willard's fox trotting was as obsolete as a day coach on an Erie local. He did the one-two, one-two, turn, just as they did when I first saw it performed in Red Men's Hall up in Coleraine, Minn., four years ago. Only Willard never did have any spring in his knees or the least notion of keeping time to the music. He simply bobbed around, bumping and getting bumped, holding me firmly but respectfully at arm's length. Anyway, we finished without any casualties except that I'd had both feet stepped on and Willard's collar was limp at the edges.

He would have tackled the second encore, but I suggested that we sit it out and after he'd ordered tea and fancy toast he had time to watch what the other dancers were doing. I suppose he'd been so dazed when he first came in that he

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

hadn't noticed some of the new stunts that were being pulled by various couples. But he saw now, and his mouth came open.

"I say, Trilby," he whispers, "is—is that the fox trot they're dancing?"

"Oh, yes," says I, "with a few variations, such as the 'Frisco shiver, the triple pivot, and the scandal walk."

"But—but I don't know how to do any of those things," says he.

"So I noticed," says I. "They'll play a one-step next. Perhaps you'll be better at that."

"I—I think I'd like to see how it goes first," says Willard.

But after a few minutes of watching he concluded that he didn't care to dance any more. In fact, just thinking of his first exhibition on the floor of the Plutoria grill got him pink in the ears.

"Why," says he, "I must have made a show of myself. I—I didn't know I was such a back number, Trilby."

"Oh, what's the difference?" says I. "You don't know any of these people. What do you care for a lot of strangers?"

Willard wouldn't be consoled, though. He's a sensitive plant, all right, and if he hadn't just ordered about three dollars' worth of tea and

WILLARD LOOKS IN

toast I believe he would have sneaked out then and there. As it was he slumped in his chair and watched the dancing fascinated.

"Look at those girls!" he gasped. "What bold, hard faces they have. But I suppose most of them are professionals—chorus girls and actresses, aren't they?"

"Just flappers," says I.

"Oh, I'm sure some of them must be actresses," insists Willard.

"Well, what then?" says I. "Are you actress shy?"

"Why, not exactly," says he. "Only I wouldn't care to get mixed up with—with that sort of persons, you know."

"How quaint!" says I. "People used to talk like that, but I thought such ideas had gone out. Perhaps, though, you've had a bitter personal experience, Willard?"

"No," says he promptly. "But it isn't just an old-fashioned prejudice of mine, either. Maybe you never heard of Freddie Benson? No? Well, he was in my class at Northwestern and one of my best friends. Bright, clever young fellow; good family, and all that. Went into his father's business after he graduated and was sent on as assistant manager of the New York branch. You know, Benson blankets. Freddie

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

got mixed up with an actress. Spent a fortune on her. Had to forge checks to keep up the pace. Simply ruined him. Of course, all actresses are not like that, but they—they're expensive acquaintances."

"Really!" says I, smothering a chuckle. "Perhaps you think I'm an expensive friend, too?" And I glanced at the waiter's check Willard was fingering.

"Oh, you!" says he. "You're different, Trilby. And I guess I can stand this sort of thing—er—once in a while. Anyway, I want to see a lot of you while I'm here. Got to make up for lost time. How about getting off for one evening and going to a play with me? Something good."

"Sorry," says I, "but Sunday night is the only one I have off."

"A little late supper somewhere, then," he goes on.

"I'll tell you," says I, getting a sudden hunch. "If you're bound to be a real sport I'll meet you at eleven to-night at the Sheridan Square subway station, uptown side. And I'll stake you to a theater ticket myself. Oh, it isn't going to cost me anything. It's a play written by a friend of mine, 'The Prince and the Flapper.' They say it's rather good. It's down in Greenwich Vil-

WILLARD LOOKS IN

lage, you know, and all you have to do is call at the box office. I'll arrange to have the ticket waiting for you. Then afterward—the little supper. Eh?"

It sounded good to Willard. He fell for it. And when I got to my dressing room that night I sent word to the office to have a front-row aisle seat saved for a Mr. Bigler, who would call. So at precisely eight-fifty-three that evening, when I dashed on as *The Flapper*, Willard got the prize jolt of his whole career.

Just how soon he recognized me after I came on I couldn't judge, being too busy getting over my lines and business, but by the time I could locate him there was no doubt that he had sustained the full shock. His mouth was open and his eyes popped. He had discovered that the *Trilby May* he had known as a waitress in *Druot's*, Duluth, and the *Trilby May Dodge* on the program, were one and the same. Whether he was admitting that I was a real actress or not is something else again, but if he'd been wondering what sort of a job I had that kept me busy every evening he had the full particulars. I don't know when I've enjoyed my work so much or put more real pep into a performance.

As usual, I found Barry Platt waiting back

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

stage after the curtain. "Sorry, old dear," says I, "but I'm dated up for a supper party to-night."

"Who's the favored one, I'd like to know?" says Barry.

"An old flame of mine from back home," says I. "But you might see me as far as the subway entrance."

Barry grumbled a bit, but he came along, and there was no Willard in sight. We waited fully ten minutes for him, too.

"Huh!" says Barry. "What's happened to this old flame of yours?"

"Jarred out, I'm afraid," says I. "Now isn't that just my luck! I'll bet he's back at his hotel by this time, packing his bag for Duluth. Oh, well! Perhaps I can survive the blow."

"How about my subbing in on that supper date, Trilby May?" asks Barry.

"What a clever thought, Barry boy!" says I, taking his arm. "And I think a broiled lobster would be most soothing."

Chapter XV

Inez and the Village Blight

IF you ask me, I'll say it was a combination of indoor croquet and too many sausage-and-pancake breakfasts. Anyway, something went wrong with the peace and quiet of our ninth-floor southern-exposure home. I hardly noticed it at first, but the next thing I knew our domestic happiness was on the rocks. In other words, Inez and her Uncle Nels had worked up a mutual grouch that left them barely on speaking terms.

And yet I can see how I was partly to blame, in a way; for when Inez came to me, about a week before Christmas asking what in the world she should get for Uncle Nels, I had suggested games. It had seemed a good hunch at the time, for he's a simple-minded old boy, you know, and what he lacked most was amusement. And perhaps you remember how we found him sailing toy boats in bathtubs when we first discovered him here. So I told her to get games.

"What kinda games?" Inez demanded.

"Oh, any kind that don't make too much noise

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

or clatter," says I. "Go scout around the toy shops."

But I want to state right here that I had nothing like croquet in mind. Absolutely. It's a game I don't care for at all. I don't know who invented it, but I'll say he had a grudge against his own kind and got up this scheme for getting even. Probably he was the village pest, for croquet is small-town stuff. It's a hick vice, a flag-station blight.

Our cities may be wicked, with their gunmen gangs and dens of iniquity, but at least there's no room for croquet in them. And only a person whose childhood has been embittered by the game knows what the city-bred youngsters has escaped. I'm not airing any second-hand prejudice, either. About the first thing I remember was hearing Paw and Maw Dodge squabbling over whose turn it was to shoot. That was out at the Clearing, three miles from Tamarack Junction. Oh yes, even there we had a croquet set. We always had one. When most of the balls got lost and all the mallet heads came loose Paw would send a dollar eighty-nine to a mail-order house and get another outfit. We were too poor to have window screens, or shoes for all the kids, or fresh meat more than once a month, but we never passed a whole summer

INEZ AND THE VILLAGE BLIGHT

without the equipment for getting up a family row.

Did you ever watch a croquet game that didn't end in a row? Say, I used to think I belonged to the scrappiest family in Minnesota, for about three times a day during the croquet season a young riot would break out in our front yard and before it was settled half our collection of youngsters would have to be spanked and put to bed. Being the oldest of nine and the only one of the first crop, I was generally too busy washing dishes and so on to really get into the muss very often. Mostly I was called on to settle disputes and disarm fractious step-brothers or half-sisters who threatened to run amuck with a mallet, so if I have any disposition left it's due to the fact that I was seldom in the game myself. I used to wonder, too, if they'd all grow up without killing one another.

But later on, as I grew older and got down to the Junction oftener, I found the other folks reacted to croquet about the same. I noticed that you didn't have to play with your brothers or sisters to get scrappy over the game. Neighbors would jaw at each other over the fine points, and even the Baptist and Methodist ministers got into a row at a union lawn festival and didn't speak to each other for months afterward. As

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

I remember, one of 'em claimed he'd gone through the birdcage wicket fair and the other insisted that he'd hit the wire and bounced around it. Anyway, the debate nearly busted up the lawn festival and if the Methodist minister hadn't been moved to another town I expect the squabble would still be going on.

Just what there is about knocking painted wooden balls through wire hoops that will bring out all the pettiness and meanness of human nature I don't know, but that's the way it works. If a town can get big enough to outgrow croquet it's all right; if not, there's no hope for it. And no matter what else they tell you about the small burgs, that's what ails Main Street. Croquet.

So when Inez brought home this indoor set I shook my head. "That's one game," says I, "that I hoped couldn't be played except on a front lawn. And here some wretch with a curdled disposition has gone and made it an indoor pastime."

"Lotta fun, croquet," says Inez. "We used to play it at the Larsens, back home. I bet Uncle Nels has played it, too."

She was right. Mighty few rubes have escaped. And while Uncle Nels had indulged in very little else but hard work during most of his horny-handed career, there were just two games

INEZ AND THE VILLAGE BLIGHT

that he had a speaking acquaintance with. One was pitching horseshoes, the other was this village blight, croquet. He seemed tickled to pieces with this fancy outfit with the short-handled mallets, bright-colored balls, and wickets with lead bases that could be set around on the floor or rug. And right after breakfast Christmas morning he and Inez had pushed back the furniture in the living room, placed the wickets and posts, and were going at it strong.

At ten-thirty the first debate opened and it had been under way for fully twenty minutes before I was called in as referee. Uncle Nels claimed that when his ball rolled under the davenport he had a right to lift out a mallet's length without penalty, while Inez insisted that he must play the lie, wherever it was. And they wanted me to settle the point.

"Nothing doing," says I. "Half my unhappy childhood days I spent trying to lay down rules for this fool game, and never once did I satisfy both sides. So I'm not going to begin again now. Absolutely not. You'll have to settle your own disputes."

Well, that was the start. From then on I never knew what minute another squabble might break loose, and with every fresh one I was hoping they'd quit the game and let me chuck

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

the outfit into the trash can. But the more rows they got into the keener they seemed to be to keep on. They'd brag to me about how clever they were getting, the wonderful shots they'd make, and how many wickets they'd run without missing.

Besides, with this stormy weather we were having, there was nothing for either of 'em to do, especially during the forenoons. Uncle Nels would get out after luncheon and tramp around, no matter how bad the going was under foot. Generally Inez did, too. And evenings there was always a movie show for 'em to go to. But their mornings they had no program for, so they'd get out the balls and mallets and go to it. Uncle Nels was keeping a running score where he could mark up the result of each day's games, and he was dead set on being the family champion. So was Inez.

If they'd had a book of rules as thick as a city directory and a Judge Landis on the side lines to give off-hand decisions on what could be done and what couldn't, the tournament might have been fought to a finish. But, with first one and then the other protesting a play, the progress was slow and uncertain. And then one day Inez threw her mallet into the corner and crashed in where I was having breakfast, announcing that

INEZ AND THE VILLAGE BLIGHT

she wouldn't play with Uncle Nels again. The placid look was gone from her big gray eyes and her ears were pinked up.

"No more!" says she. "Never."

"Good job," says I. "I hope you stick to it, for I sure have had an earful of your squabbling. Say, anyone would think you two were a couple of kids in a back lot."

"But—but Uncle Nels, he—he cheats," declares Inez, and she didn't whisper it, either.

"S-s-s-sh!" says I.

It was too late, though. The old boy was standing in the door and he heard. "What you say I do?" he demands.

"You say you hit the stake when you don't," comes back Inez. "You cheat. Yes, lotta times."

"Say, for the love of soup!" I breaks in. "Don't take this so serious. You don't really mean that, Inez."

She did, though. And I could tell by the hard glitter in those pale blue eyes of Uncle Nels that at last he had his Swedish up.

"Huh!" says he. "So that's what I get when I give you good home and fine clothes and nothing to do. I'm a cheater, hey? All right! We'll see."

Of course, I looked for a day or two of sulking from 'em, but if it put an end to this squab-

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

bling I would be more than satisfied. And I lost no time in wishing that indoor croquet outfit on the janitor. I wasn't a bit surprised, either, when Uncle Nels failed to show up at luncheon. He had shut himself in his room and for a while we heard him rattling things around in there. Later he slipped out. And at dinner time he wasn't back.

"He's mad, Uncle Nels," says Inez, who had recovered from her tantrum.

"You've made a good guess, Inez," says I. "I'll say you were a bit rough with him, too."

It wasn't until the middle of the next forenoon that we begun to be real worried. Inez announces that Uncle Nels hadn't had his breakfast.

"Then it's time he was called," says I. "Go give him a rap."

But Inez got no response when she hammered on the door. Then she rang for Annette, the maid, to come and call him. More silence. So I had to leave my coffee and eggs and have a try at it. But no reply from Uncle Nels. It was only when I started to shake the door that I found it was unlocked, and one glance showed us that the room was empty.

"See!" says Inez, pointing to the bed. "He don't sleep here last night."

INEZ AND THE VILLAGE BLIGHT

"That's so," says I. "And look at that empty wardrobe and those bureau drawers. His suitcase is gone, too. Inez, I believe he has flitted once more."

"Him?" says she. "Oh, he come back."

I thought he would, too. Why not? This was the only home the old boy had, and it was one that he was paying a good big rent for. He had no other relative in the city, and no friends that we knew about. Of course, he was bound to come back after he'd cooled off. Probably he had gone to some hotel to sulk it out.

So we just waited for him to get over his fit and come sneaking back. Two days, three days, a week. Inez begun to have regrets.

"Maybe—maybe he did hit the stake that time," she admits.

"You're a trifle late, Inez," says I. "If you'd said that while the big debate was on it might have helped."

"I didn't know he was gonna get so mad," says she.

"Well, you weren't in such an amiable mood yourself," I suggests. "I don't wonder much, with those breakfasts. Sausage and pancakes! And then sitting around the house all the forenoon. That would ruffle a saint. Anyway, it was no preparation for indoor croquet."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"I—I tell him I'm sorry when he comes," says Inez.

It was the same afternoon that Annette reminded us that her month's wages were overdue. Then came the building agent with a lease renewal for Uncle Nels to sign and I found that the rent for the apartment had been paid only until the end of the month. So Inez and I had a serious talk.

"He oughta come back pretty quick, Uncle Nels," was all Inez could contribute.

"Yes, but suppose he doesn't?" I asks.

Inez only rolled her eyes.

My next move was to scout through his room. Possibly he'd left some signed checks or some cash which we'd overlooked. But I couldn't dig up anything so cheering. What I did find, though, was a pamphlet of a Swedish steamship line with some recent sailing dates checked off. Then I remembered about this old Swede down in the furnace room; the one Uncle Nels had discovered and told me the story about. You know? He'd married the girl Uncle Nels had been sweet on and played it low down on him in other ways. And they'd sat and glared at each other by the hour, down there in the sub-basement. Of course, the girl had died years ago. But hadn't Uncle Nels said something

INEZ AND THE VILLAGE BLIGHT

about going back to that little Swedish fishing village?

Just on a chance I called up the steamship office on the 'phone. Not that I was simple enough to ask them if Uncle Nels had booked a passage with them, for I knew they wouldn't tell me that. My line was that I was sending a steamer basket to him and wanted to know when it should reach the pier. The clerk at the other end of the wire chuckled.

"Better send it parcel post to Stockholm," says he. "Your party sailed day before yesterday on the Ingenhaven."

"Oh, did he?" says I.

And as usual Inez don't seem to get the full significance of the bulletin when it's sprung on her.

"By Sweden!" says she. "How foolish! In winter time, too. He don't come back for long time, eh?"

"If at all," says I.

"Huh!" says Inez. "Now who goes to the movies with me nights?"

"Listen, Inez," says I, firm but patient; "try to get it through your head what's happened. This trick uncle of yours has left you flat. He has gone away, probably for good, and what's more important, he's taken his check book with

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

him. If you want to know the worst, you're stranded."

Inez stares at me placid for a while, yanking her gum with a smooth, easy jaw stroke. Then she remarks: "You, too, Trilby May. He leaves you just the same as me. Eh?"

"I don't see it," says I. "It wasn't me that scrapped with him over croquet. I didn't call him a cheat. And I'm far from stranded. Thank goodness, I've got my job."

"Well, that's all right, then," says Inez.

There are times when that calmness of hers is almost maddening. But it's no use talking rough to her.

"Sure, Inez," says I. "Everything is perfectly lovely. Only here we are, with a French maid and one of the most expensive apartments in New York, and nothing but my salary to feed to the bill collectors. As a matter of fact, it can't be done."

It doesn't seem to discourage Inez a bit. She just smiles and wags her head. "I get a job, too," says she.

"Yes?" says I. "At twenty or twenty-five a week, if you're lucky. But where would that get us? Say, haven't you ever figured up how much a month this big apartment was costing Uncle Nels?"

INEZ AND THE VILLAGE BLIGHT

Inez nods. "Once I did," says she. "I forget now. Lotta money. Too much. We can move, can't we? Little place. Let's go hunt one up, eh?"

And here I'd been planning to break it to her gentle. You'd most think, too, that a sudden change like this would be some jar to her. Why, for nearly a year she'd been living as expensive as a bootlegger's bride; having her breakfast in bed, running a taxi account ad lib., buying any kind of clothes she took a fancy to, and simply having the bills sent to Uncle Nels, who had settled without a whimper. It had been months since she had ever done up her own hair. Now she sees all that fade out with not even a shoulder shrug.

"Inez," says I, "you're either a lot simpler in the head than I mistrusted, or else you're a better sport than I've had you rated. Anyway, we'll go look up a two-room and bath joint."

"We could go back to boarding house on Fifty-seventh Street," she suggests.

"The prunery?" says I. "Where we used to be so happy and so poor? No, not that. I've eaten all the meals I care to in that basement dining room. Besides, I want my own bathtub, and if we can afford it I'd like to splurge on a kitchenette. You're not such a poor cook, you

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

know, and it's just possible you'll not land a job right away."

So I paid off Annette, notified the agent that we were not renewing the lease, and we began to look for new quarters. Maybe you know what that means in New York, especially in mid-winter. It's no cinch. At the end of the third day's hunt I was almost willing to give up and take any old thing that was offered, even to an inside flat over a garage. And then the faithful Barry Platt came to the rescue.

"Why don't you take Dicky White's studio?" he asked. "He's quitting art and going back to Utica as shipping clerk in his uncle's factory, and he has a six months' lease on this renovated loft down in the East Twenties somewhere. It's in rather a messy neighborhood, four flights up with no elevator; but there's a whaling big room, plenty of light, a bath in one alcove and a gas stove in another. All for seventy-five a month, too."

"Lead me to it, Barry," says I, "and if it's all you say I—I'll—Well, I may surprise you."

True, Barry had omitted to mention how near the Third Avenue L this so-called studio was, or that there was an Armenian café on the ground floor, an artificial flower factory on the second, and a varied assortment of weird enterprises in

INEZ AND THE VILLAGE BLIGHT

the adjoining lofts, from a wigmaker to a rug renovator. But when we found how cosy Dicky White had made his section of the top floor, and that there was plenty of room for two single beds in separate corners, and an east window that would let in the morning sun, we made a bargain on the spot.

Yesterday we moved in and this morning we had our first studio breakfast. I had sent Inez out early for milk and eggs and bread, but she was fully three-quarters of an hour getting back with them.

"Don't tell me you got lost, Inez?" says I.

"No," says she. "But I ask the lady that bosses the flower factory where to go and she talks a lot. Kinda nice, that one. An' who you think runs the delicatessen store? Swedish lady! I hafta talk with her, too. An' the old gentlemans on the floor below that gives violin lessons, he helps me carry up the things and say he hopes we like it here. I guess we will, too. Eh, Trilby May?"

"We'll do our best," says I, "but if you're going to get chatty with everybody in the neighborhood you'll have to start earlier to do your marketing. Now, let's get busy with those eggs."

For a while Inez made a noise like a cook and inside of half an hour we sat down to coffee, eggs

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

and toast at a cute little painted table in a square of sunlight that was bright and cheerful. Not until then did Inez sketch out her philosophy for me.

"By Park Avenue," says she, "nobody speaks to me."

"You forget Mike, the doorman," I suggests.

"Huh!" says Inez. "That grafter! All he wants is tip. But the others, all them people that we go up and down in the elevator with every day, they don't seem to see us."

"No, they were not what you'd call a folksy bunch," I admits. "But then, maybe they were such swells that they couldn't afford to be. We were living in quite a classy neighborhood there, you know. All rich folks. They had to be."

"I know," says Inez, dipping a piece of toast thoughtful in her coffee. "And we was rich, too. It ain't so much fun being rich when—when you don't know how."

"Eh?" says I, staring at her.

"If you try to be swell," says Inez, "you get lonesome."

"Even if you were handicapped by more or less toast, Inez," says I. "I think you've said a mouthful. Pass the top of the bottle, will you?"

Chapter XVI

Inez Says It With Turkey

IT looks like I was giving Inez what she wants, which still seems to be the main proposition. Anyway, since she managed to croquet herself out of a rich uncle and we've had to shift from a swell Park Avenue apartment to a top-floor studio loft just around the corner from Third Avenue, Inez has shaken off that peevish disposition she was acquiring and appears to enjoy her gum once more.

"It's nice here; eh, Trilby May?" she remarks the other day after she'd finished scrubbing everything about the place, including the floors, windows and ceiling.

"Quite cozy," says I. "Of course, every time an L train goes by in the night I wonder if it isn't going to graze my toes, but I suppose we'll get used to that before long. And we sure have a weird looking lot of neighbors."

"Yes," admits Inez. "Some of 'em looks funny, but they're all nice people. Not stuck up or anything."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Folksy, eh?" says I.

"Sure!" says Inez.

It's a fact. In all the months we lived on Park Avenue nobody ever dropped in at 8.15 P.M. to borrow a pair of eggs, or at noon to wish a hunk of Gorgonzola cheese on us, or at midnight to tell us the story of their lives. But here, where stores and factories and living quarters were jumbled in the same buildings; where almost anyone you met could speak at least three languages, including a little English; where the scent of garlic hung heavy in the air and people stopped in doorways to chat—well, here it was different.

Small town stuff, that's what it was, only in place of a Main Street there was the block. You spoke of it as "our block." Inez hadn't been here three days before she sprung that on me. And she meant just the block front that we lived on. The other three fronts, facing on different streets and avenues, might have been foreign countries, as far as she knew. In fact, they were. For instance, to the west of us was Poland, with a Polish club, a Polish newspaper and stores with Polish signs over the windows. To the east was Palestine, with a kosher market and a second-floor synagogue. On the south we were bounded by Bohemia. Of course, it was only a

INEZ SAYS IT WITH TURKEY

fake Bohemia, so called by the colony of artists and near-artists who lived in the renovated tenements with tiled and stuccoed fronts. Our back windows looked into their skylights.

As for our block front, it was a near-East mixture, with Syrians and Armenians in the majority, but with a sprinkling of almost any race you could name. We were about the only American delegates, so far as I could discover.

"Almost makes me feel," I told Inez, "that we ought to have passports, or something. I'll bet they call us 'those foreigners,' don't they?"

"They don't call names, them," insists Inez. "All nice people."

"That'll help, then," says I, "and I'm just as ready to be friendly as the next one."

So when A. Kourken, the rug restorer on the floor below, slips me the Armenian for "Good morning, Dearie," I smiles back at him and suggests that it's a rotten day outside. Also I nods chummy to Mme. Rosier as I passes the door of her artificial flower establishment, and when Signor Bardoni, the violin teacher, sweeps off his dusty black felt hat and makes me a low bow I stop and ask him if he has many pupils this winter.

But Inez seems to get on with our neighbors even better than that. For one thing, she has more time, and for another she's simply hungry

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

to gossip with some one. I don't think I quite realized how lonesome she used to get there in the apartment, with no one but Uncle Nels and the maid to talk to. For while Inez isn't what you might call a fluent converser on general topics, when it comes to discussing small personal affairs she can be really eloquent.

"That Dicky White who live here and who go way when we rent his rooms," says Inez, "he ain't much good."

"No?" says I.

"He don't speak to anybody here," she goes on, "except to get gay with some of the girls what make flowers. All he does is make bluff he's an artist. Don't paint much, though. Never got up until noon, and nights he'd have poker parties. Once they had a big row and somebody got thrown down stairs bumpety-bump. All such goings on, until his folks don't send him any more money and he have to go back to Utica and take a job with his uncle. Good thing for him, I guess."

"Sounds reasonable," says I. "But how did you get so well posted on Dicky's affairs?"

"Madame Rosier, she tell me about him," says Inez. "Nice lady, that one. Widow. French, too. She's been in this country fifteen years. But not all time running flower factory.

INEZ SAYS IT WITH TURKEY

No. Only since Mr. Rosier got killed in the war. He was chef in big hotel, making big money, and they had fine place up in the Bronx; little flower garden out front, grapevine in back, piano and everything elegant. But after the war was going on two years he had to go back and fight, and the Germans got him. Big shell came and blew him up. Nothing but little pieces left. She showed me the letter from his captain. I couldn't read, but she told me what it said. Got out his picture, too. Then she cried. I cried some, too."

"What a nice, comfy time you two must have had," says I.

"Wouldn't you be sorry for anybody like that?" demands Inez. "She has to sell her nice place in the Bronx and look for some work. Lucky she knew about making flowers. She did that in France when she was a girl. And when she first went to work here she was just one of the hands. Pretty soon they make her boss, though, and she saves until she buys in as one of the firm. She's smart, Madame Rosier, and sometime when she gets money enough she's gonna go back to France for good. That's why she lives in one little room off the factory and don't spend much for clothes."

"I get the picture, Inez," says I. "And I

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

shall feel real well acquainted with her after this. Any others in the building that have been so confidential with you?"

Inez shakes her head. "But Madame Rosier tells me about the rug man," she adds. "That Armenian. He had big family and was going to send for 'em to come over, but the Turks killed 'em all. Now he's lonesome and don't care what comes. He just cleans rugs and reads over old letters that he got before. Too bad, eh?"

"Some tragedy, I'll say, to be sketched out so simple," says I. "Did you shed a few tears over the missing Kourkens?"

"No," says Inez. "But I'm sorry for him. For that Signor Bardoni, too, who lives across the hall."

"Go on, break my heart," says I. "What dark shadow fell over his life?"

"He don't tell me much," says Inez, "but yesterday when you are out for walk and I am cooking spaghetti and things for dinner I find him standing by the door to sniff the smell. Then he comes in and shows me how to make that sauce I put on it. So I give him some on a plate and he's awful glad. I guess he don't eat much but bread and cheese and hard sausage. Too poor. But he says he was big man in Italy. Rich and everything. Not here, though."

INEZ SAYS IT WITH TURKEY

"Anyway," says I, "he's a picturesque old ruin, but unless I have more details of his past greatness I'm afraid I can't spill any great amount of sympathy."

I couldn't deny that he looked the part, especially when he draped that rusty black cape over his stooped shoulders and pulled the wide-brimmed old hat down over his long gray hair. He has a long thin nose, like an eagle's beak, a pair of sad brown eyes and the dull greenish complexion of a dill pickle. Personally I don't think I'd have worked up much interest in Bardoni, but so long as Inez found him interesting I couldn't do less than pretend I did, too.

For Inez seemed like a person who'd just escaped from a long term in an isolation ward, or one who'd been spending a year or two on a lonely ranch. She made friends on all sides and developed a sudden mania for extending the helping hand to all and sundry. The first thing I knew she was subbing in during the rush hours at the delicatessen store for her friend Mrs. Lindgren.

"That clerk, he get sick," explains Inez, "and Miss Lindgren can't make up all those sandwiches at noon time. No, she don't pay me. I do it for fun."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Strikes me as an odd form of indoor sport," says I.

"Oh, it ain't so bad," insists Inez. "I see everybody when they come in, and Miss Lindgren she makes jokes with 'em, and we cut bread and cheese and ham like everything. Then afterward she tells me about where she live in Sweden. I tell her about Uncle Nels, too, and she say he ought to send back some money to me. Maybe she have her brother find him over there. She's nice, Miss Lindgren."

I couldn't dispute it. Maybe she was. From the glimpses I'd had of her as I'd passed the store I should have classed her as a shrewd-eyed, middle-aged female with a bulgy figure and thin faded hair done up in a doorknob effect on top of her head. But then, she and Inez probably mis-used English in the same way and had much else in common.

I did rather gasp, though, when Inez first proposed this birthday dinner party and I found she had all these freaks on her list of guests to be invited. Even A. Kourken.

"But whose birthday?" I asked.

"That Signor Bardoni's," says she. "It's next Sunday, and you don't have to play at the theater that night. He tells me about it to-day. Sixty-nine years he will be. And only think,

INEZ SAYS IT WITH TURKEY

Trilby May; maybe he don't have anything to eat but bread and cheese. Ain't it a shame, when he was such a big man once?"

"Well, what's the proposition?" says I.

Inez is so excited that she can hardly give me her plan, but I gather that she and Mrs. Lindgren and Madame Rosier have been talking it over and that they've decided to give Signor Bardoni a big surprise. Each one has agreed to donate something for the dinner, which is to be held here in our studio Sunday night. That is, if I don't object.

"Far be it from me, Inez," says I, "to queer any such worthy deed. And while it seems to me you're going to have an odd mixture of guests at this affair, all I can say is go to it. Sure, I'll be there. I'll try anything once. How about inviting Barry Platt, too? He'll get either a shock or a thrill out of it, maybe both."

I could see Inez wasn't crazy about having Barry, but she doesn't say as much. "All right," says Inez, "if—if he don't laugh at 'em."

"I'll warn him," says I. "And, anyway, Barry wouldn't."

So for the next three days Inez was busy and mysterious, dashing down stairs at intervals to consult in whispers with Madame Rosier, or around the corner to get the advice of Mrs.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

Lindgren. I made my contribution in cash and was rewarded by a bear hug from Inez. Then all of Sunday afternoon the three of them took turns edging in and out of our kitchenette and the studio reeked with appetizing scents. When they began to bring in extra chairs and a big work table from the flower factory I slid out and joined Barry for a long walk through Central Park.

"We must be back by six o'clock, though," says I, "so we can have plenty of time to dress for the party."

"Eh?" says Barry. "Not a dinner coat and all?"

"Certainly," says I. "Inez insists that this must be a swell affair. I'm going to appear in my three best pieces."

"He must be some guy, this Signor Bardoni," says Barry.

Bardoni couldn't be blamed for thinking as much, a couple of hours later, when he was towed into the studio triumphant by Inez. She hadn't said a word to him about a party, just asked him to come in and have a bite with us about seven. I expect he'd slicked himself up all he could, for his mop of gray hair was brushed back fairly neat, he'd had a shave, and his shiny black suit was more or less free from dust if not from grease spots.

INEZ SAYS IT WITH TURKEY

But here was Inez in her spiffiest dinner gown and with her wonderful hair water-waved to the last notch, me all fussed up in a jade green frock to match my gooseberry green eyes, Barry Platt in his soup-and-fish, and Madame Rosier—But I can't throw in Madame Rosier offhand like that. I need to take a full breath and start in fresh.

She's a large, imposing old girl even in her working clothes. But in that gorgeous costume which she must have dug from the bottom of an old trunk—Well, she had a plush horse looking like a clipped broncho. Even the figured cretonne window hangings looked modest beside her, and when you considered the huge velvet hat with the waving plumes, and the puffs and ringlets under it, and the bracelets and brooches and rings she wore, you could only gasp. To state it baldly, the Madame was a knockout.

As for Mrs. Lindgren, she was simply vivid in a plaid waist and a striped skirt. She'd jabbed a rhinestone pin through her door-knob hair knot and let it go at that. A. Kourken had done his best, too, for he'd leased a real braid-bound frockcoat for the evening and blown himself to a new fez as bright as a fire hydrant.

No wonder Signor Bardoni stood blinking at us. Then when he saw the table all gay with

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

artificial cherry blossoms and paper jonquils, and the big roast turkey at one end, and his name on the place card in front of it, he seemed to get the drift. For a minute I thought the old boy was going to break down and do the sob act, but after a few gulps he got a grip on himself.

"You—you have done zees for me?" he asked.

"Sure!" says Madame Rosier. "Pour vous, certainment. It is your birthdays, is it not?"

"Ah-h-h, my good frien's!" says he, spreading out his lean hands. "Eet ees too much for a poor old mans. I—I have not the speech for thank you all, but I can say that I feel a great joy—here," and he thumps his chest to indicate the exact spot.

"Say," whispers Barry, "he's got Dave Warfield beaten a mile."

I must say, though, that he made a poor job of carving that turkey, but finally Mrs. Lindgren helped out with some expert assistance and the feast got under way. I doubt if Sherry could have sent in a better one, for there were all sorts of little dainties to go with the turkey. Snails, for instance, roasted in a pan by Madame Rosier. And a nameless Swedish vegetable that Mrs. Lindgren had brought. What helped most, though, were the two bottles of Chateau Yquem which the Madame must have found when she

INEZ SAYS IT WITH TURKEY

dug out that amazing dress. Barry nearly caused a riot, however, when he called for a lump of ice to put in his wine glass.

"Non, non!" roared Madame Rosier. "I have warm it for two hours so it should be chaud. It is a vintage wine that. No ice."

"My error," says Barry, grinning across at me.

Probably she knew what she was talking about, but I'll say that when you let this Yquem stuff run a temperature it certainly has a kick in it. Bardoni doesn't seem to mind, however. Maybe he was too busy to notice that his glass was being refilled oftener than that of anyone else. By the time we got to the patisserie and coffee he was talking real confidential to Inez. Evidently he was telling her something too thrilling to keep, for suddenly she makes an announcement.

"I find out now," she says, "who Signor Bardoni is. He is the great Italian music composer—operas and all that."

"Is it true?" demands Madame Rosier.

Bardoni nods solemn. "I would say it only to my good friend's," says he. "But in Milano they knew. Yes, the whole city. The King himself has come to hear my work, and he pinned on my coat a decoration. My great opera, though, was never heard. I had finished that,

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

eet was to be produce, when misfortune came. I am accuse of being a Malatesta. Me! But an enemy tell that to the police. They find papers he had put in my house. I am arrest, placed in prison. Then my friends arrive. They make for me an escape, hide me on a steamer, and say I must go to America. Ten years I am here, and all the time I try to have my great opera produce. But no. In zees country there is no room for the opera of Italy. So in my little room here I go hungry and when I am most sad I take my old violin and play the great music—to myself.”

Say, he almost had me choked up. Even Barry was staring sober at him. As for Madame Rosier, she made no bones about wiping away the tears.

“Ah, my poor friend, how unjust is fate!” says she. “But stop! Attendez moi, Signor. To us you must play. Quick! Your violin, your music. Now we shall hear it.”

“Sure, sure!” echoes Inez and Mrs. Lindgren.

So, after a little more arguing, Bardoni goes to his room and brings out his old violin.

“A Raditzi, true genuine,” says he, patting the instrument. “I bring eet on the steamer, with little else. And now, the duet from the first act!”

I’m no judge of such things, but it sounded

INEZ SAYS IT WITH TURKEY

like the real thing to me. It's a catchy sort of piece, and the old boy played it with a lot of zip and flourishes. Anyway, I was impressed. So were the others. They applauded wildly. All but Barry. He was smiling knowing when I nudged him. Then he whispered something behind his hand.

"Eh?" says I.

"From 'Rigoletto,'" says he. "Got his nerve with him, hasn't he?"

"You don't mean," says I, "that the old boy is putting something over on us?"

"Absolutely," says Barry.

Of course, we didn't give him away. He was having too good a time, and so were the others. Inez was positively beaming. So was Madame Rosier. She toasted Signor Bardoni in the last of the wine and made a little speech assuring him that some day his genius would be discovered and that once more he would be rich and famous. So the party ended late and was voted a great success.

Needing a little fresh air, I told Barry to wait until I slipped on a coat and hat and I'd walk a few blocks with him. We had stopped in the lower hallway while Barry lighted a cigarette when we heard footsteps behind us. It was Bardoni.

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Excuse," says he, "but I—I could not sleep until I had spoken again."

"Yes?" says Barry.

"That which I played," went on Bardoni. "You know, eh?"

"Couldn't help it," says Barry. "It's an old favorite of mine."

"I—I am shamed," says Bardoni, "to tell such lies to frien's who have been so kind. But eet—eet was the wine. Eet get in my head, and make me think I have compose great opera. Yes, before I have said I was big man back in Milano. Me, who only played in cheap wine rooms. Ah, it was wrong to do."

"And all that about the Malatesta, and getting out of jail and escaping on the steamer?" says Barry. "Was that fiction, too?"

"Not everything," says Bardoni. "Me, I was friend to the Malatestas. I have to run away. But the great opera—I don't write him, never. Just make him up in my mind. Eet was that wine which was warm. Yes. You must forgive."

"That's the easiest thing I do," says Barry. "If I'd had as much of that Chateau stuff as you got away with I might have told a few fairy tales myself."

"And you, Mees Dodge," says Bardoni, turn-

INEZ SAYS IT WITH TURKEY

ing to me. "You will not tell your so kind sister, eh?"

"Never a word," says I. "This is the first real unselfish evening Inez has had in a year, and I wouldn't spoil it for a farm. Good night, Signor. I guess we've all enjoyed your birthday."

And with that the old boy climbed back upstairs.

"Rummy old scout, eh?" says Barry.

"I know," says I. "An Italian, too. But quite as human as if he'd been born in Minnesota, or Utica, N. Y. I'm glad we gave him such a good time, too. I almost wish I'd thought of it myself."

Chapter XVII

A New Slant On Inez

AND I thought I knew all about Inez, too, from her taste in gum to the quirks in her disposition. I would have made a stab at forecasting just how she'd be liable to react under almost any conditions, even to giving her very words if she found a burglar under the bed or a hairpin in the soup. I had an idea I could read the thoughts behind her big gray eyes and guess what she'd do next.

But it can't be done. No. The only real true slant on life that I'm sure of now is that human nature is too complicated for one person to have more than a sketchy notion of another, no matter how close they've been or for how long. And I wouldn't bar brothers and sisters, mothers and daughters, or married couples who've had their silver wedding.

Which is more or less tied up to what's happened to us within the last few days. It began when I held off telling Inez the poor news that I'd brought home from the theater the night

A NEW SLANT ON INEZ

before. I figured that she was bound to be a bit panicky over it, so I waited until after luncheon and then sprung it on her easy. She gave me the opening by asking if it wasn't nearly time for me to start for the matinee.

"No more matinees, Inez," says I.

"Eh?" says she, turning her head, but keeping right on stacking the luncheon dishes.

"Not of 'The Prince and the Flapper,' anyway," says I. "Nor evening performances either."

"What for?" she asks.

"Because it's been taken off," says I. "We've all seen it coming; that is, everyone but Mother Bates, who never sees anything except that her gray hair needs another henna dip. We didn't believe the crash was quite so near, though. But with a week of rotten weather, and the houses getting slimmer and slimmer—Well, I suppose Ames Hunt got sick of paying out more than he was taking in. He's a sporty manager, all right; but he's a shifty one, too. So last night he made us a little speech, gave us all a full week's salary, and said he hoped that next time we'd all edge in on a piece that would have a two-season run. And that's the sad, sad story."

Inez stares at me for a full minute, while the news trickles down through the bone. Then

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

she asks: "You—you lose your job, Trilby May?"

"To put it crudely, yes," says I. "As The Flapper I've flapped by last flap."

"But—but you can be talk actress at some other theater, eh?" she suggests.

"Probably not," says I. "For one thing, too many houses have gone dark, or are going that way soon; and for another, I'm not sure that I'm such a whale of an actress anyway. My making good in this piece of Barry's was rather a fluke, you know, and the other managers haven't been begging me to sign contracts. So I guess it's just a case of being at liberty for me."

Inez pours the hot water into the dishpan thoughtful, after which she remarks: "I lose my rich uncle, you lose your job."

"And here we are," says I.

"What you gonna do?" demands Inez.

"Not a blessed thing for two whole weeks," says I. "I'm going to lay off, not even think. I'm going to shed no tears for the past, or take any scared peeks at the future. I'm not going within a block of any theater, or even walk through Times Square. Probably I shall gawp into all the Fifth Avenue show windows one day and prowl through the East Side pushcart market the next. One afternoon I'm going to spend

A NEW SLANT ON INEZ

up at Bronx Park watching the polar bears duck each other; for next to half-grown pigs I think polar bears are true comedians. Also I mean to hang around some dock and see an ocean liner pull out, and walk the whole length of Mulberry Street the first fine afternoon that comes along. That's equal to a trip to Italy and it doesn't cost a cent. Outside of that I shall water the geraniums in our window box and try my luck at making onion soup. Restful program, isn't it?"

Inez doesn't say, but for the next few minutes she handles the dish mop absent-mindedly, as if her thoughts were centered on something utterly remote from our kitchenette sink. Finally she comes out with it.

"Somebody gotta work, ain't they?" she demands.

"You mean of us two, I suppose?" says I. "Quite so. Much as the neighborhood may appreciate having us here, and thick as you are with Mrs. Lindgren at the delicatessen store, we can hardly buffalo the landlord or the grocer so they'll forget to send in their bills. But I've got a cash reserve that will carry us along for a while. So why worry?"

"Huh!" says Inez. "All right for you. Me, I get a job."

Which starts a long but friendly debate. I

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

tried to show Inez, without stating it too raw or hurting her feelings, that she's never been much of a go-getter when she's tried on her own hook. I reminded her gentle that I'd always been the one who had gone out and rustled something that would connect us with a pay envelope, and I hope I merely hinted that the art of grabbing a good job, when the grabbing was poor, called for a certain brand of rapid-fire dome work such as she'd never been especially noted for.

"Just let things ride for a little while," says I, "until I've had a good rest, and then I'll tackle this work proposition for both of us."

Inez shakes her head. "You think I'm no good, eh?" says she.

"Not at all, Inez," says I. "You're a wonderful girl. But crashing into commerce and picking out something soft hasn't been your long suit. They'll look you over, note how husky you are, and the next thing you know you'll be signed up for hard work at long hours and poor pay. Haven't anything in mind, I suppose?"

"Sure!" says Inez. "I see Annette the other day. "She got swell job."

"But she's a trained lady's maid," says I. "You wouldn't want to go in for domestic service, I hope."

"Annette, she ain't maid any more," says Inez.

A NEW SLANT ON INEZ

"She's in that Maison Noir, up by Fifty-seventh Street, and all she does is wear elegant things—dresses and opera robes and fur capes—to show off to rich ladies, all day long."

"Oh!" says I. "A modiste's mannequin, eh? Well, Annette could."

"Good pay, too," goes on Inez. "I like to do that. I'm gonna see."

"Go to it, then," says I. "If you can land anything like that I shall have only myself to look out for. But hadn't you better let me——"

"No," says she, decided. "You get rested. I been loafin' long enough. I get my own job. To-day I'm gonna go there."

And as soon as she could slip into a plain black work dress she started, chirky and ambitious. Two hours later she came back, a beaten look in her gray eyes and a sullen droop to her jaw.

"You needn't tell me, Inez," says I. "I can guess. The boss of the Maison Blanc turned you down."

"I don't see the boss at all," says Inez. "Just snippy young thing with made-up face and bad eyes. She turn her nose up and say they don't need anybody. Won't let me see, boss, either. She says he's too busy and that I wouldn't do, anyway. Says I'm too fat. The fresh thing! I could have slapped her on the face."

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Tut, tut, Inez!" says I. "Don't go getting your Swedish up. What else could you expect, breaking in casual like that? I don't suppose you even made a date with Annette to tow you in to the proper party?"

She admits that she hadn't.

"Well, that's where you made your big mistake," says I. "Now if I'd been after a job there I should have planned out my campaign in advance. I'd have found out who to ask for, what was the best way of bracing 'em, and so on. Finesse, Inez! Diplomacy! Speed work with the little old bean. That's what's needed and what you lack."

"Oh, is that so!" says Inez. "I ain't so smart as Annette, eh?"

"That doesn't follow," says I. "Annette may have gotten in through a friend, or perhaps she's done that sort of thing before. But I'll bet she didn't just drift in the front door and state her case to the first person she met. She's too clever for that."

"Huh!" says Inez. "I guess I can think up things, too."

I wanted to ask her "What with?" but I held it back. Even if you do believe it, it's hardly friendly to suggest that anybody has nothing but hair above the eyebrows. I couldn't help chuck-

A NEW SLANT ON INEZ

ling now and then the next day or two, when I'd find Inez staring blank at the ceiling and her lips moving without making a sound. For I knew she thought she was thinking, and when Inez cerebrates deep like that she simply has to go through the motions of speech. She does the same when she's reading to herself. And she's one of those persons who always say over the titles at a movie play.

Of course, I could guess she was trying to plan out some way of getting that job, but what vague schemes were milling around under that pile of wheat-colored hair I couldn't tell. I was sure they would be entertaining if she would only sketch 'em out to me. Inez wouldn't, however, even when I gave her a good lead.

Then here the other day she seems to veer off on an entirely new tack. All the forenoon she'd been busy digging into her trunk and laying out some of the flossiest clothes she owned—the ones she'd bought so free when her Uncle Nels was on hand to pay the bills. Next she gets out the electric iron and starts in on a pressing and cleaning orgie that lasts until after luncheon. I noticed, too, that she'd put a fresh water-wave in her hair and was doing it up the way Annette used to fix it when we were living on Park Avenue. But I asked no questions until

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

I came back from a walk and found her costumed as if for a tea dance at the Plutoria—best hat, furs, pearl necklace and everything. There's no denying, either, that when Inez is well dressed she's an impressive looking creature. Rather a stunner, too; especially in black when that wonderful complexion of hers gets a chance. I had to stop and gaze admiring.

"You're a knockout, Inez," says I. "But who's giving the party?"

"No party," says she. "I—I'm gonna go shoppin'."

"Ouch!" says I. "Shopping! You're crazy. This is no time to go buying things, with our finances what they are. Have a heart."

"Maybe I don't buy anything," says Inez. "Just shop. But I need some money for taxi cab."

"But how foolish, Inez!" says I. "Splurging on taxi fares when we don't know when either of us will be earning a dollar again!"

"Ah, don't be tightwad!" she protests. "And how can I walk far in such things?"

True enough, she has on her newest high-heeled pumps and her choicest nude silk hose. So I staked her to a couple of dollars, which she stows in the gold mesh purse that she'd kidded her Uncle Nels into buying for her birthday,

A NEW SLANT ON INEZ

and off she went without telling me where or why.

My best guess was that Bill Hart, or some other movie hero, was to appear in person at some picture theater and that Inez had gone to worship in what seemed to her a fitting costume. Or else she'd heard of some friend from Duluth being in town and meant to pay a call in state.

So I tidied up the studio and sat down to wait. At 5 o'clock she hadn't come in, nor at half past. At 6 I started in to get dinner and I had things nicely under way when back she came. I could see at a glance, too, that it was a different Inez. She had her chin up and there was a confident look in her eyes.

"For the love of soup," says I, "who have you been vamping? Not Doug. Fairbanks?"

"Me?" says Inez. "No, I don't vamp nobody. I been to see about gettin' a job."

"Where?" I demands.

"At that Maison Noir," says she.

"Oh!" says I. "Did you get past the snippy young person this time?"

"Did I?" says Inez. "You ought to see. She opens the door for me and almost breaks her neck bowin' so low. She don't know me at all, that one. And when I ask for the boss she says 'Oui, oui, Madame! Certainment! Toot

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

sweet.' Takes me upstairs to swell parlor right off."

"And then?" I urges.

"I see him, all right," says Inez. "Funny Frenchman, with cute little black moustache and rouge on his face. I guess he wears corsets, too. But he's nice to me; awful nice."

"Even when you braced him for a job?" I asked.

"I don't," says Inez. "I tell him I like to see dinner dresses like some friends of mine get there. Maybe opera wraps, too. And say, you should have been there, Trilby May. It—it was like a show. He makes me sit in big chair with tall back and cushion under my feet. Then he rings a bell and in come that snippy girl with something to drink in a glass and cigarettes with gold ends."

"You didn't go that far, did you, Inez?" I asks.

"Sure I did," says she. "It was reg'lar drink, too. Make me feel like I don't care for anything. I smoke cigarette, too. The Mister Lefleur—that's his name, Lefleur—he claps his hands and somebody pulls back velvet curtains from little stage. Next he turns on lotta lights and those girls come walkin' on grand and wiggly, one after the other. Every time he claps

A NEW SLANT ON INEZ

his hands comes a new one. And such elegant dresses they had on! All right from Paris. Mister Lefleur says so. He stands by me and whispers in my ear like he was tellin' secrets, tellin' me what swell dresses they are, and how nice I'd look in some, and how the others wouldn't do for me at all. He don't say what they cost, though. I ask about one or two and he just hunches his shoulders and says: 'Pouff, Madame. Zat we shall arrange satisfactory.' So I don't ask any more, but just watch. And when I see some I like that he thinks will do for me he has the girl come where I am and turn 'round and 'round. Then I feel the goods, and put my head on one side and say it ain't just what I want. Huh!"

"I know," says I. "With that grand duchess air of yours? Well, Inez, that's one way of getting hunk with an establishment that had turned you down. That was your big idea, I suppose?"

"I ain't so silly," protests Inez. "Lotta ladies do that. But me, I do that so I can see the boss. After I don't buy any dresses he has 'em come in with opera wraps on. Such swell ones—white fur on collars and cuffs and all like rosebuds inside. But them girls is so slim and skinny. Some of 'em half portions, too. They look smothered in them elegant things. I laugh and

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

tell Mister Lefleur, 'Why you don't have one big girl to show 'em right?' I says. 'Not all lady customers are little, like that. They can't tell how they'd look.' And him, he don't think of that before. He says it is true and asks will I try on one of the wraps. You bet I do. And when I walk around with my head up and my shoulders swingin' slow Mister Lefleur he lets on he's tickled to pieces. He says I am like a lady of the Empire and that I must buy that wrap. It would be a crime if I didn't."

"And then," says I, "you were up against it, eh?"

"Not so much," says Inez. "I know what to tell him. I got it all thought out. 'No,' says I, 'I couldn't buy anything so expensive until my rich uncle comes back from Sweden.' 'Too bad,' says Mr. Lefleur. 'I hope he comes back soon.' Then I tell him maybe he will, but that he's a cheapskate uncle at times and I gotta get square with him for runnin' off and not leavin' me money enough for what I want. 'I know what would make him mad, too,' I tells Mister Lefleur. 'What?' he wants to know. 'If he should come back and find I was workin' for you as model,' I says. 'Mais oui!' says he, rubbin' his hands. 'It would be good joke on him, and the Maison Noir would have such a model as no other estab-

A NEW SLANT ON INEZ

ishment in town. Why don't you do it, Madame? Only for afternoons I would ask you to come. Please! Then I shakes my head. 'It would be lotta fun,' I tells him, 'but lotta trouble, too. And you wouldn't want to pay enough.' At that he waves his hand grand and lifts up on his toes. He says the Maison Noir can pay what it likes. 'Sixty dollars a week?' I asks. 'Oui, Madame,' he says. 'Certainment! You will come, eh?' And me, I tell him I come to-morrow."

After which Inez throws her chin back and lets loose one of those rare Minnesota hee-haws of hers, while I simply stand there and gawp at her.

"You don't mean to tell me, Inez," says I, "that you've gone and worked a joint like the Maison Noir for a sixty-dollar part-time job?"

Inez nods. "Mister Lefleur," says she, "he says I must sign contract for six months. He's a wise guy, that Frenchman. I might wanna go back with my rich uncle, eh?"

And once more Inez rattles the window panes with her merriment.

"Then I've got to hand it to you, Inez," says I. "You're a winner. But tell me; where did you dig up the plot of the piece? From some movie play?"

TRILBY MAY CRASHES IN

"Huh!" says Inez. "Don't I tell you I can think up things out of my own head? But it's hard, that thinkin'. Three days, and sometimes in the night I am at it, until everything goes 'round and 'round. After a while it comes, though. I see how I can do it if I don't make any slip. And I guess I put one over, eh, Trilby May?"

"I'll tell that much to any jury," says I. "And I want to take back some unjust thoughts, Inez. You've got a whole lot more above the ears than I've ever given you credit for. Sixty a week! Say, let's celebrate with a dinner at Tortoni's, my blow. You're all costumed for the party. Wait until I climb into my three best pieces and you be making up your mind whether the big dish will be breast of pheasant or grilled pigs' feet. I get you, Inez. Ring 'em up on the 'phone and have 'em put those trotters on the grill."

THE END

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