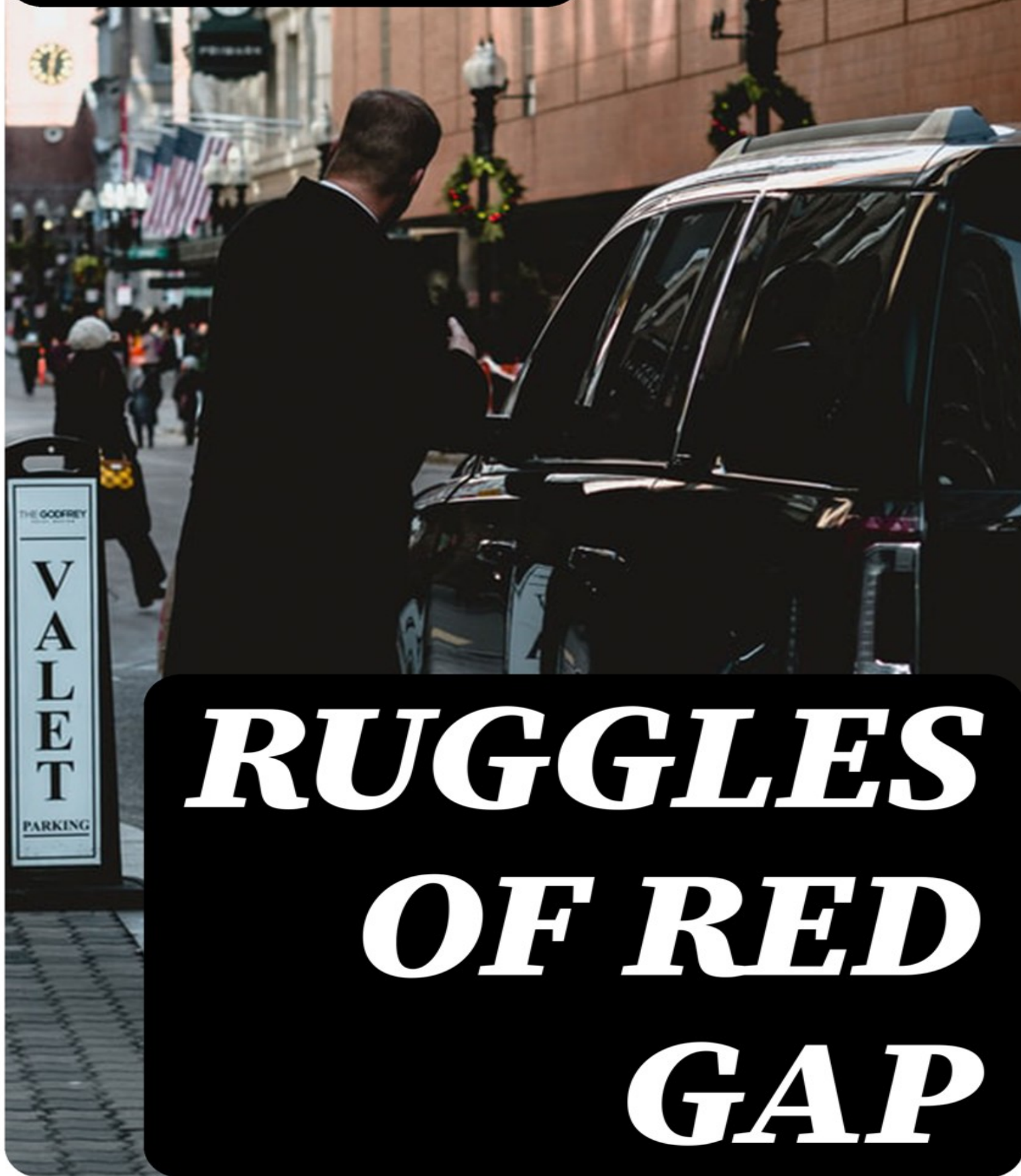


***HARRY LEON
WILSON***



***RUGGLES
OF RED
GAP***

Harry Leon Wilson

Ruggles of Red Gap

EAN 8596547248873

DigiCat, 2022

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CHAPTER ONE

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At 6:30 in our Paris apartment I had finished the Honourable George, performing those final touches that make the difference between a man well turned out and a man merely dressed. In the main I was not dissatisfied. His dress waistcoats, it is true, no longer permit the inhalation of anything like a full breath, and his collars clasp too closely. (I have always held that a collar may provide quite ample room for the throat without sacrifice of smartness if the depth be at least two and one quarter inches.) And it is no secret to either the Honourable George or our intimates that I have never approved his fashion of beard, a reddish, enveloping, brushlike affair never nicely enough trimmed. I prefer, indeed, no beard at all, but he stubbornly refuses to shave, possessing a difficult chin. Still, I repeat, he was not nearly impossible as he now left my hands.

“Dining with the Americans,” he remarked, as I conveyed the hat, gloves, and stick to him in their proper order.

“Yes, sir,” I replied. “And might I suggest, sir, that your choice be a grilled undercut or something simple, bearing in mind the undoubted effects of shell-fish upon one’s complexion?” The hard truth is that after even a very little lobster the Honourable George has a way of coming out in spots. A single oyster patty, too, will often spot him quite all over.

“What cheek! Decide that for myself,” he retorted with a lame effort at dignity which he was unable to sustain. His

eyes fell from mine. "Besides, I'm almost quite certain that the last time it was the melon. Wretched things, melons!"

Then, as if to divert me, he rather fussily refused the correct evening stick I had chosen for him and seized a knobby bit of thornwood suitable only for moor and upland work, and brazenly quite discarded the gloves.

"Feel a silly fool wearing gloves when there's no reason!" he exclaimed pettishly.

"Quite so, sir," I replied, freezing instantly.

"Now, don't play the juggins," he retorted. "Let me be comfortable. And I don't mind telling you I stand to win a hundred quid this very evening."

"I dare say," I replied. The sum was more than needed, but I had cause to be thus cynical.

"From the American Johnny with the eyebrows," he went on with a quite pathetic enthusiasm. "We're to play their American game of poker—drawing poker as they call it. I've watched them play for near a fortnight. It's beastly simple. One has only to know when to bluff."

"A hundred pounds, yes, sir. And if one loses——"

He flashed me a look so deucedly queer that it fair chilled me.

"I fancy you'll be even more interested than I if I lose," he remarked in tones of a curious evenness that were somehow rather deadly. The words seemed pregnant with meaning, but before I could weigh them I heard him noisily descending the stairs. It was only then I recalled having noticed that he had not changed to his varnished boots, having still on his feet the doggish and battered pair he most favoured. It was a trick of his to evade me with them. I

did for them each day all that human boot-cream could do, but they were things no sensitive gentleman would endure with evening dress. I was glad to reflect that doubtless only Americans would observe them.

So began the final hours of a 14th of July in Paris that must ever be memorable. My own birthday, it is also chosen by the French as one on which to celebrate with carnival some one of those regrettable events in their own distressing past.

To begin with, the day was marked first of all by the breezing in of his lordship the Earl of Brinstead, brother of the Honourable George, on his way to England from the Engadine. More peppery than usual had his lordship been, his grayish side-whiskers in angry upheaval and his inflamed words exploding quite all over the place, so that the Honourable George and I had both perceived it to be no time for admitting our recent financial reverse at the gaming tables of Ostend. On the contrary, we had gamely affirmed the last quarter's allowance to be practically untouched—a desperate stand, indeed! But there was that in his lordship's manner to urge us to it, though even so he appeared to be not more than half deceived.

“No good greening me!” he exploded to both of us. “Tell in a flash—gambling, or a woman—typing-girl, milliner, dancing person, what, what! Guilty faces, both of you. Know you too well. My word, what, what!”

Again we stoutly protested while his lordship on the hearthrug rocked in his boots and glared. The Honourable George gamely rattled some loose coin of the baser sort in his pockets and tried in return for a glare of innocence foully

aspersed. I dare say he fell short of it. His histrionic gifts are but meagre.

“Fools, quite fools, both of you!” exploded his lordship anew. “And, make it worse, no longer young fools. Young and a fool, people make excuses. Say, ‘Fool? Yes, but so young!’ But old and a fool—not a word to say, what, what! Silly rot at forty.” He clutched his side-whiskers with frenzied hands. He seemed to comb them to a more bristling rage.

“Dare say you’ll both come croppers. Not surprise me. Silly old George, course, course! Hoped better of Ruggles, though. Ruggles different from old George. Got a brain. But can’t use it. Have old George wed to a charwoman presently. Hope she’ll be a worker. Need to be—support you both, what, what!”

I mean to say, he was coming it pretty thick, since he could not have forgotten that each time I had warned him so he could hasten to save his brother from distressing *mésalliances*. I refer to the affair with the typing-girl and to the later entanglement with a Brixton milliner encountered informally under the portico of a theatre in Charing Cross Road. But he was in no mood to concede that I had thus far shown a scrupulous care in these emergencies. Peppery he was, indeed. He gathered hat and stick, glaring indignantly at each of them and then at us.

“Greened me fair, haven’t you, about money? Quite so, quite so! Not hear from you then till next quarter. No telegraphing—no begging letters. Shouldn’t a bit know what to make of them. Plenty you got to last. Say so yourselves.” He laughed villainously here. “Morning,” said he, and was out.

“Old Nevil been annoyed by something,” said the Honourable George after a long silence. “Know the old boy too well. Always tell when he’s been annoyed. Rather wish he hadn’t been.”

So we had come to the night of this memorable day, and to the Honourable George’s departure on his mysterious words about the hundred pounds.

Left alone, I began to meditate profoundly. It was the closing of a day I had seen dawn with the keenest misgiving, having had reason to believe it might be fraught with significance if not disaster to myself. The year before a gypsy at Epsom had solemnly warned me that a great change would come into my life on or before my fortieth birthday. To this I might have paid less heed but for its disquieting confirmation on a later day at a psychic parlour in Edgware Road. Proceeding there in company with my eldest brother-in-law, a plate-layer and surfaceman on the Northern (he being uncertain about the Derby winner for that year), I was told by the person for a trifle of two shillings that I was soon to cross water and to meet many strange adventures. True, later events proved her to have been psychically unsound as to the Derby winner (so that my brother-in-law, who was out two pounds ten, thereby threatened to have an action against her); yet her reference to myself had confirmed the words of the gypsy; so it will be plain why I had been anxious the whole of this birthday.

For one thing, I had gone on the streets as little as possible, though I should naturally have done that, for the behaviour of the French on this bank holiday of theirs is repugnant in the extreme to the sane English point of view

—I mean their frivolous public dancing and marked conversational levity. Indeed, in their soberest moments, they have too little of British weight. Their best-dressed men are apparently turned out not by menservants but by modistes. I will not say their women are without a gift for wearing gowns, and their chefs have unquestionably got at the inner meaning of food, but as a people at large they would never do with us. Even their language is not based on reason. I have had occasion, for example, to acquire their word for bread, which is “pain.” As if that were not wild enough, they mispronounce it atrociously. Yet for years these people have been separated from us only by a narrow strip of water!

By keeping close to our rooms, then, I had thought to evade what of evil might have been in store for me on this day. Another evening I might have ventured abroad to a cinema palace, but this was no time for daring, and I took a further precaution of locking our doors. Then, indeed, I had no misgiving save that inspired by the last words of the Honourable George. In the event of his losing the game of poker I was to be even more concerned than he. Yet how could evil come to me, even should the American do him in the eye rather frightfully? In truth, I had not the faintest belief that the Honourable George would win the game. He fancies himself a card-player, though why he should, God knows. At bridge with him every hand is a no-trumper. I need not say more. Also it occurred to me that the American would be a person not accustomed to losing. There was that about him.

More than once I had deplored this rather Bohemian taste of the Honourable George which led him to associate with Americans as readily as with persons of his own class; and especially had I regretted his intimacy with the family in question. Several times I had observed them, on the occasion of bearing messages from the Honourable George—usually his acceptance of an invitation to dine. Too obviously they were rather a handful. I mean to say, they were people who could perhaps matter in their own wilds, but they would never do with us.

Their leader, with whom the Honourable George had consented to game this evening, was a tall, careless-spoken person, with a narrow, dark face marked with heavy black brows that were rather tremendous in their effect when he did not smile. Almost at my first meeting him I divined something of the public man in his bearing, a suggestion, perhaps, of the confirmed orator, a notion in which I was somehow further set by the gesture with which he swept back his carelessly falling forelock. I was not surprised, then, to hear him referred to as the “Senator.” In some unexplained manner, the Honourable George, who is never as reserved in public as I could wish him to be, had chummed up with this person at one of the race-tracks, and had thereafter been almost quite too pally with him and with the very curious other members of his family—the name being Floud.

The wife might still be called youngish, a bit florid in type, plumpish, with yellow hair, though to this a stain had been applied, leaving it in deficient consonance with her eyebrows; these shading grayish eyes that crackled with

determination. Rather on the large side she was, forcible of speech and manner, yet curiously eager, I had at once detected, for the exactly correct thing in dress and deportment.

The remaining member of the family was a male cousin of the so-called Senator, his senior evidently by half a score of years, since I took him to have reached the late fifties. "Cousin Egbert" he was called, and it was at once apparent to me that he had been most direly subjugated by the woman whom he addressed with great respect as "Mrs. Effie." Rather a seamed and drooping chap he was, with mild, whitish-blue eyes like a porcelain doll's, a mournfully drooped gray moustache, and a grayish jumble of hair. I early remarked his hunted look in the presence of the woman. Timid and soft-stepping he was beyond measure.

Such were the impressions I had been able to glean of these altogether queer people during the fortnight since the Honourable George had so lawlessly taken them up. Lodged they were in an hotel among the most expensive situated near what would have been our Trafalgar Square, and I later recalled that I had been most interestedly studied by the so-called "Mrs. Effie" on each of the few occasions I appeared there. I mean to say, she would not be above putting to me intimate questions concerning my term of service with the Honourable George Augustus Vane-Basingwell, the precise nature of the duties I performed for him, and even the exact sum of my honourarium. On the last occasion she had remarked—and too well I recall a strange glitter in her competent eyes—"You are just the man needed by poor Cousin Egbert there—you could make something of him.

Look at the way he's tied that cravat after all I've said to him."

The person referred to here shivered noticeably, stroked his chin in a manner enabling him to conceal the cravat, and affected nervously to be taken with a sight in the street below. In some embarrassment I withdrew, conscious of a cold, speculative scrutiny bent upon me by the woman.

If I have seemed tedious in my recital of the known facts concerning these extraordinary North American natives, it will, I am sure, be forgiven me in the light of those tragic developments about to ensue.

Meantime, let me be pictured as reposing in fancied security from all evil predictions while I awaited the return of the Honourable George. I was only too certain he would come suffering from an acute acid dyspepsia, for I had seen lobster in his shifty eyes as he left me; but beyond this I apprehended nothing poignant, and I gave myself up to meditating profoundly upon our situation.

Frankly, it was not good. I had done my best to cheer the Honourable George, but since our brief sojourn at Ostend, and despite the almost continuous hospitality of the Americans, he had been having, to put it bluntly, an awful hump. At Ostend, despite my remonstrance, he had staked and lost the major portion of his quarter's allowance in testing a system at the wheel which had been warranted by the person who sold it to him in London to break any bank in a day's play. He had meant to pause but briefly at Ostend, for little more than a test of the system, then proceed to Monte Carlo, where his proposed terrific winnings would occasion less alarm to the managers. Yet at Ostend the

system developed such grave faults in the first hour of play that we were forced to lay up in Paris to economize.

For myself I had entertained doubts of the system from the moment of its purchase, for it seemed awfully certain to me that the vendor would have used it himself instead of parting with it for a couple of quid, he being in plain need of fresh linen and smarter boots, to say nothing of the quite impossible lounge-suit he wore the night we met him in a cab shelter near Covent Garden. But the Honourable George had not listened to me. He insisted the chap had made it all enormously clear; that those mathematical Johnnies never valued money for its own sake, and that we should presently be as right as two sparrows in a crate.

Fearfully annoyed I was at the dénouement. For now we were in Paris, rather meanly lodged in a dingy hotel on a narrow street leading from what with us might have been Piccadilly Circus. Our rooms were rather a good height with a carved cornice and plaster enrichments, but the furnishings were musty and the general air depressing, notwithstanding the effect of a few good mantel ornaments which I have long made it a rule to carry with me.

Then had come the meeting with the Americans. Glad I was to reflect that this had occurred in Paris instead of London. That sort of thing gets about so. Even from Paris I was not a little fearful that news of his mixing with this raffish set might get to the ears of his lordship either at the town house or at Chaynes-Wotten. True, his lordship is not over-liberal with his brother, but that is small reason for affronting the pride of a family that attained its earldom in the fourteenth century. Indeed the family had become

important quite long before this time, the first Vane-Basingwell having been beheaded by no less a personage than William the Conqueror, as I learned in one of the many hours I have been privileged to browse in the Chaynes-Wotten library.

It need hardly be said that in my long term of service with the Honourable George, beginning almost from the time my mother nursed him, I have endeavoured to keep him up to his class, combating a certain laxness that has hampered him. And most stubborn he is, and wilful. At games he is almost quite a duffer. I once got him to play outside left on a hockey eleven and he excited much comment, some of which was of a favourable nature, but he cares little for hunting or shooting and, though it is scarce a matter to be gossiped of, he loathes cricket. Perhaps I have disclosed enough concerning him. Although the Vane-Basingwells have quite almost always married the right people, the Honourable George was beyond question born queer.

Again, in the matter of marriage, he was difficult. His lordship, having married early into a family of poor lives, was now long a widower, and meaning to remain so he had been especially concerned that the Honourable George should contract a proper alliance. Hence our constant worry lest he prove too susceptible out of his class. More than once had he shamefully funk'd his fences. There was the distressing instance of the Honourable Agatha Cradleigh. Quite all that could be desired of family and dower she was, thirty-two years old, a bit faded though still eager, with the rather

immensely high forehead and long, thin, slightly curved Cradleigh nose.

The Honourable George at his lordship's peppery urging had at last consented to a betrothal, and our troubles for a time promised to be over, but it came to precisely nothing. I gathered it might have been because she wore beads on her gown and was interested in uplift work, or that she bred canaries, these birds being loathed by the Honourable George with remarkable intensity, though it might equally have been that she still mourned a deceased fiancé of her early girlhood, a curate, I believe, whose faded letters she had preserved and would read to the Honourable George at intimate moments, weeping bitterly the while. Whatever may have been his fancied objection—that is the time we disappeared and were not heard of for near a twelvemonth.

Wondering now I was how we should last until the next quarter's allowance. We always had lasted, but each time it was a different way. The Honourable George at a crisis of this sort invariably spoke of entering trade, and had actually talked of selling motor-cars, pointing out to me that even certain rulers of Europe had frankly entered this trade as agents. It might have proved remunerative had he known anything of motor-cars, but I was more than glad he did not, for I have always considered machinery to be unrefined. Much I preferred that he be a company promoter or something of that sort in the city, knowing about bonds and debentures, as many of the best of our families are not above doing. It seemed all he could do with propriety, having failed in examinations for the army and the church,

and being incurably hostile to politics, which he declared silly rot.

Sharply at midnight I aroused myself from these gloomy thoughts and breathed a long sigh of relief. Both gipsy and psychic expert had failed in their prophecies. With a lightened heart I set about the preparations I knew would be needed against the Honourable George's return. Strong in my conviction that he would not have been able to resist lobster, I made ready his hot foot-bath with its solution of brine-crystals and put the absorbent fruit-lozenges close by, together with his sleeping-suit, his bed-cap, and his knitted night-socks. Scarcely was all ready when I heard his step.

He greeted me curtly on entering, swiftly averting his face as I took his stick, hat, and top-coat. But I had seen the worst at one glance. The Honourable George was more than spotted—he was splotchy. It was as bad as that.

"Lobster *and* oysters," I made bold to remark, but he affected not to have heard, and proceeded rapidly to disrobe. He accepted the foot-bath without demur, pulling a blanket well about his shoulders, complaining of the water's temperature, and demanding three of the fruit-lozenges.

"Not what you think at all," he then said. "It was that cursed bar-le-duc jelly. Always puts me this way, and you quite well know it."

"Yes, sir, to be sure," I answered gravely, and had the satisfaction of noting that he looked quite a little foolish. Too well he knew I could not be deceived, and even now I could surmise that the lobster had been supported by sherry. How many times have I not explained to him that sherry has double the tonic vinosity of any other wine and may not be

tampered with by the sensitive. But he chose at present to make light of it, almost as if he were chaffing above his knowledge of some calamity.

“Some book Johnny says a chap is either a fool or a physician at forty,” he remarked, drawing the blanket more closely about him.

“I should hardly rank you as a Harley Street consultant, sir,” I swiftly retorted, which was slanging him enormously because he had turned forty. I mean to say, there was but one thing he could take me as meaning him to be, since at forty I considered him no physician. But at least I had not been too blunt, the touch about the Harley Street consultant being rather neat, I thought, yet not too subtle for him.

He now demanded a pipe of tobacco, and for a time smoked in silence. I could see that his mind worked painfully.

“Stiffish lot, those Americans,” he said at last.

“They do so many things one doesn’t do,” I answered.

“And their brogue is not what one could call top-hole, is it now? How often they say ‘I guess!’ I fancy they must say it a score of times in a half-hour.”

“I fancy they do, sir,” I agreed.

“I fancy that Johnny with the eyebrows will say it even oftener.”

“I fancy so, sir. I fancy I’ve counted it well up to that.”

“I fancy you’re quite right. And the chap ‘guesses’ when he awfully well knows, too. That’s the essential rabbit. Tonight he said ‘I guess I’ve got you beaten to a pulp,’ when I fancy he wasn’t guessing at all. I mean to say, I swear he knew it perfectly.”

“You lost the game of drawing poker?” I asked coldly, though I knew he had carried little to lose.

“I lost——” he began. I observed he was strangely embarrassed. He strangled over his pipe and began anew: “I said that to play the game soundly you’ve only to know when to bluff. Studied it out myself, and jolly well right I was, too, as far as I went. But there’s further to go in the silly game. I hadn’t observed that to play it greatly one must also know when one’s opponent is bluffing.”

“Really, sir?”

“Oh, really; quite important, I assure you. More important than one would have believed, watching their silly ways. You fancy a chap’s bluffing when he’s doing nothing of the sort. I’d enormously have liked to know it before we played. Things would have been so awfully different for us”—he broke off curiously, paused, then added—“for you.”

“Different for me, sir?” His words seemed gruesome. They seemed open to some vaguely sinister interpretation. But I kept myself steady.

“We live and learn, sir,” I said, lightly enough.

“Some of us learn too late,” he replied, increasingly ominous.

“I take it you failed to win the hundred pounds, sir?”

{Illustration: “I TAKE IT YOU FAILED TO WIN THE HUNDRED POUNDS, SIR?”}

“I have the hundred pounds; I won it—by losing.”

Again he evaded my eye.

“Played, indeed, sir,” said I.

“You jolly well won’t believe that for long.”

Now as he had the hundred pounds, I couldn't fancy what the deuce and all he meant by such prattle. I was half afraid he might be having me on, as I have known him do now and again when he fancied he could get me. I fearfully wanted to ask questions. Again I saw the dark, absorbed face of the gipsy as he studied my future.

"Rotten shift, life is," now murmured the Honourable George quite as if he had forgotten me. "If I'd have but put through that Monte Carlo affair I dare say I'd have chucked the whole business—gone to South Africa, perhaps, and set up a mine or a plantation. Shouldn't have come back. Just cut off, and good-bye to this mess. But no capital. Can't do things without capital. Where these American Johnnies have the pull of us. Do anything. Nearly do what they jolly well like to. No sense to money. Stuff that runs blind. Look at the silly beggars that have it——" On he went quite alarmingly with his tirade. Almost as violent he was as an ugly-headed chap I once heard ranting when I went with my brother-in-law to a meeting of the North Brixton Radical Club. Quite like an anarchist he was. Presently he quieted. After a long pull at his pipe he regarded me with an entire change of manner. Well I knew something was coming; coming swift as a rocketing woodcock. Word for word I put down our incredible speeches:

"You are going out to America, Ruggles."

"Yes, sir; North or South, sir?"

"North, I fancy; somewhere on the West coast—Ohio, Omaha, one of those Indian places."

"Perhaps Indiana or the Yellowstone Valley, sir."

"The chap's a sort of millionaire."

“The chap, sir?”

“Eyebrow chap. Money no end—mines, lumber, domestic animals, that sort of thing.”

“Beg pardon, sir! I’m to go——”

“Chap’s wife taken a great fancy to you. Would have you to do for the funny, sad beggar. So he’s won you. Won you in a game of drawing poker. Another man would have done as well, but the creature was keen for you. Great strength of character. Determined sort. Hope you won’t think I didn’t play soundly, but it’s not a forthright game. Think they’re bluffing when they aren’t. When they are you mayn’t think it. So far as hiding one’s intentions, it’s a most rottenly immoral game. Low, animal cunning—that sort of thing.”

“Do I understand I was the stake, sir?” I controlled myself to say. The heavens seemed bursting about my head.

“Ultimately lost you were by the very trifling margin of superiority that a hand known as a club flush bears over another hand consisting of three of the eights—not quite all of them, you understand, only three, and two other quite meaningless cards.”

I could but stammer piteously, I fear. I heard myself make a wretched failure of words that crowded to my lips.

“But it’s quite simple, I tell you. I dare say I could show it you in a moment if you’ve cards in your box.”

“Thank you, sir, I’ll not trouble you. I’m certain it was simple. But would you mind telling me what exactly the game was played for?”

“Knew you’d not understand at once. My word, it was not too bally simple. If I won I’d a hundred pounds. If I lost I’d to give you up to them but still to receive a hundred pounds. I

suspect the Johnny's conscience pricked him. Thought you were worth a hundred pounds, and guessed all the time he could do me awfully in the eye with his poker. Quite set they were on having you. Eyebrow chap seemed to think it a jolly good wheeze. She didn't, though. Quite off her head at having you for that glum one who does himself so badly."

Dazed I was, to be sure, scarce comprehending the calamity that had befallen us.

"Am I to understand, sir, that I am now in the service of the Americans?"

"Stupid! Of course, of course! Explained clearly, haven't I, about the club flush and the three eights. Only three of them, mind you. If the other one had been in my hand, I'd have done him. As narrow a squeak as that. But I lost. And you may be certain I lost gamely, as a gentleman should. No laughing matter, but I laughed with them—except the funny, sad one. He was worried and made no secret of it. They were good enough to say I took my loss like a dead sport."

More of it followed, but always the same. Ever he came back to the sickening, concise point that I was to go out to the American wilderness with these grotesque folk who had but the most elementary notions of what one does and what one does not do. Always he concluded with his boast that he had taken his loss like a dead sport. He became vexed at last by my painful efforts to understand how, precisely, the dreadful thing had come about. But neither could I endure more. I fled to my room. He had tried again to impress upon me that three eights are but slightly inferior to the flush of clubs.

I faced my glass. My ordinary smooth, full face seemed to have shrivelled. The marks of my anguish were upon me. Vainly had I locked myself in. The gipsy's warning had borne its evil fruit. Sold, I'd been; even as once the poor blackamoors were sold into American bondage. I recalled one of their pathetic folk-songs in which the wretches were wont to make light of their lamentable estate; a thing I had often heard sung by a black with a banjo on the pier at Brighton; not a genuine black, only dyed for the moment he was, but I had never lost the plaintive quality of the verses:
"Away down South in Michigan,
Where I was so happy and so gay,
'Twas there I mowed the cotton and the cane——"

How poignantly the simple words came back to me! A slave, day after day mowing his owner's cotton and cane, plucking the maize from the savannahs, yet happy and gay! Should I be equal to this spirit? The Honourable George had lost; so I, his pawn, must also submit like a dead sport.

How little I then dreamed what adventures, what adversities, what ignominies—yes, and what triumphs were to be mine in those back blocks of North America! I saw but a bleak wilderness, a distressing contact with people who never for a moment would do with us. I shuddered. I despaired.

And outside the windows gay Paris laughed and sang in the dance, ever unheeding my plight!

CHAPTER TWO

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In that first sleep how often do we dream that our calamity has been only a dream. It was so in my first moments of awakening. Vestiges of some grotesquely hideous nightmare remained with me. Wearing the shackles of the slave, I had been mowing the corn under the fierce sun that beats down upon the American savannahs. Sickeningly, then, a wind of memory blew upon me and I was alive to my situation.

Nor was I forgetful of the plight in which the Honourable George would now find himself. He is as good as lost when not properly looked after. In the ordinary affairs of life he is a simple, trusting, incompetent duffer, if ever there was one. Even in so rudimentary a matter as collar-studs he is like a storm-tossed mariner—I mean to say, like a chap in a boat on the ocean who doesn't know what sails to pull up nor how to steer the silly rudder.

One rather feels exactly that about him.

And now he was bound to go seedy beyond description—like the time at Mentone when he dreamed a system for playing the little horses, after which for a fortnight I was obliged to nurse a well-connected invalid in order that we might last over till next remittance day. The havoc he managed to wreak among his belongings in that time would scarce be believed should I set it down—not even a single boot properly treed—and his appearance when I was enabled to recover him (my client having behaved most handsomely on the eve of his departure for Spain) being

such that I passed him in the hotel lounge without even a nod—climbing-boots, with trousers from his one suit of boating flannels, a blazered golfing waistcoat, his best morning-coat with the wide braid, a hunting-stock and a motoring-cap, with his beard more than discursive, as one might say, than I had ever seen it. If I disclose this thing it is only that my fears for him may be comprehended when I pictured him being permanently out of hand.

Meditating thus bitterly, I had but finished dressing when I was startled by a knock on my door and by the entrance, to my summons, of the elder and more subdued Floud, he of the drooping mustaches and the mournful eyes of pale blue. One glance at his attire brought freshly to my mind the atrocious difficulties of my new situation. I may be credited or not, but combined with tan boots and wretchedly fitting trousers of a purple hue he wore a black frock-coat, revealing far, far too much of a blue satin “made” cravat on which was painted a cluster of tiny white flowers—lilies of the valley, I should say. Unbelievably above this monstrous mélange was a rather low-crowned bowler hat.

Hardly repressing a shudder, I bowed, whereupon he advanced solemnly to me and put out his hand. To cover the embarrassing situation tactfully I extended my own, and we actually shook hands, although the clasp was limply quite formal.

“How do you do, Mr. Ruggles?” he began.

I bowed again, but speech failed me.

“She sent me over to get you,” he went on. He uttered the word “She” with such profound awe that I knew he could mean none other than Mrs. Effie. It was most extraordinary,

but I dare say only what was to have been expected from persons of this sort. In any good-class club or among gentlemen at large it is customary to allow one at least twenty-four hours for the payment of one's gambling debts. Yet there I was being collected by the winner at so early an hour as half-after seven. If I had been a five-pound note instead of myself, I fancy it would have been quite the same. These Americans would most indecently have sent for their winnings before the Honourable George had awakened. One would have thought they had expected him to refuse payment of me after losing me the night before. How little they seemed to realize that we were both intending to be dead sportsmen.

"Very good, sir," I said, "but I trust I may be allowed to brew the Honourable George his tea before leaving? I'd hardly like to trust to him alone with it, sir."

"Yes, sir," he said, so respectfully that it gave me an odd feeling. "Take your time, Mr. Ruggles. I don't know as I am in any hurry on my own account. It's only account of Her."

I trust it will be remembered that in reporting this person's speeches I am making an earnest effort to set them down word for word in all their terrific peculiarities. I mean to say, I would not be held accountable for his phrasing, and if I corrected his speech, as of course the tendency is, our identities might become confused. I hope this will be understood when I report him as saying things in ways one doesn't word them. I mean to say that it should not be thought that I would say them in this way if it chanced that I were saying the same things in my proper person. I fancy this should now be plain.

“Very well, sir,” I said.

“If it was me,” he went on, “I wouldn’t want you a little bit. But it’s Her. She’s got her mind made up to do the right thing and have us all be somebody, and when she makes her mind up——” He hesitated and studied the ceiling for some seconds. “Believe me,” he continued, “Mrs. Effie is some wildcat!”

“Yes, sir—some wildcat,” I repeated.

“Believe *me*, Bill,” he said again, quaintly addressing me by a name not my own—“believe me, she’d fight a rattlesnake and give it the first two bites.”

Again let it be recalled that I put down this extraordinary speech exactly as I heard it. I thought to detect in it that grotesque exaggeration with which the Americans so distressingly embellish their humour. I mean to say, it could hardly have been meant in all seriousness. So far as my researches have extended, the rattlesnake is an invariably poisonous reptile. Fancy giving one so downright an advantage as the first two bites, or even one bite, although I believe the thing does not in fact bite at all, but does one down with its forked tongue, of which there is an excellent drawing in my little volume, “Inquire Within; 1,000 Useful Facts.”

“Yes, sir,” I replied, somewhat at a loss; “quite so, sir!”

“I just thought I’d wise you up beforehand.”

“Thank you, sir,” I said, for his intention beneath the weird jargon was somehow benevolent. “And if you’ll be good enough to wait until I have taken tea to the Honourable George——”

“How is the Judge this morning?” he broke in.

“The Judge, sir?” I was at a loss, until he gestured toward the room of the Honourable George.

“The Judge, yes. Ain’t he a justice of the peace or something?”

“But no, sir; not at all, sir.”

“Then what do you call him ‘Honourable’ for, if he ain’t a judge or something?”

“Well, sir, it’s done, sir,” I explained, but I fear he was unable to catch my meaning, for a moment later (the Honourable George, hearing our voices, had thrown a boot smartly against the door) he was addressing him as “Judge” and thereafter continued to do so, nor did the Honourable George seem to make any moment of being thus miscalled.

I served the Ceylon tea, together with biscuits and marmalade, the while our caller chatted nervously. He had, it appeared, procured his own breakfast while on his way to us.

“I got to have my ham and eggs of a morning,” he confided. “But she won’t let me have anything at that hotel but a continental breakfast, which is nothing but coffee and toast and some of that there sauce you’re eating. She says when I’m on the continent I got to eat a continental breakfast, because that’s the smart thing to do, and not stuff myself like I was on the ranch; but I got that game beat both ways from the jack. I duck out every morning before she’s up. I found a place where you can get regular ham and eggs.”

“Regular ham and eggs?” murmured the Honourable George.

“French ham and eggs is a joke. They put a slice of boiled ham in a little dish, slosh a couple of eggs on it, and tuck the dish into the oven a few minutes. Say, they won’t ever believe that back in Red Gap when I tell it. But I found this here little place where they do it right, account of Americans having made trouble so much over the other way. But, mind you, don’t let on to her,” he warned me suddenly.

“Certainly not, sir,” I said. “Trust me to be discreet, sir.”

“All right, then. Maybe we’ll get on better than what I thought we would. I was looking for trouble with you, the way she’s been talking about what you’d do for me.”

“I trust matters will be pleasant, sir,” I replied.

“I can be pushed just so far,” he curiously warned me, “and no farther—not by any man that wears hair.”

“Yes, sir,” I said again, wondering what the wearing of hair might mean to this process of pushing him, and feeling rather absurdly glad that my own face is smoothly shaven.

“You’ll find Ruggles fairish enough after you’ve got used to his ways,” put in the Honourable George.

“All right, Judge; and remember it wasn’t my doings,” said my new employer, rising and pulling down to his ears his fearful bowler hat. “And now we better report to her before she does a hot-foot over here. You can pack your grip later in the day,” he added to me.

“Pack my grip—yes, sir,” I said numbly, for I was on the tick of leaving the Honourable George helpless in bed. In a voice that I fear was broken I spoke of clothes for the day’s wear which I had laid out for him the night before. He waved a hand bravely at us and sank back into his pillow as my

new employer led me forth. There had been barely a glance between us to betoken the dreadfulness of the moment.

At our door I was pleased to note that a taximetre cab awaited us. I had acutely dreaded a walk through the streets, even of Paris, with my new employer garbed as he was. The blue satin cravat of itself would have been bound to insure us more attention than one would care for.

I fear we were both somewhat moody during the short ride. Each of us seemed to have matters of weight to reflect upon. Only upon reaching our destination did my companion brighten a bit. For a fare of five francs forty centimes he gave the driver a ten-franc piece and waited for no change.

"I always get around them that way," he said with an expression of the brightest cunning. "She used to have the laugh on me because I got so much counterfeit money handed to me. Now I don't take any change at all."

"Yes, sir," I said. "Quite right, sir."

"There's more than one way to skin a cat," he added as we ascended to the Floud's drawing-room, though why his mind should have flown to this brutal sport, if it be a sport, was quite beyond me. At the door he paused and hissed at me: "Remember, no matter what she says, if you treat me white I'll treat you white." And before I could frame any suitable response to this puzzling announcement he had opened the door and pushed me in, almost before I could remove my cap.

Seated at the table over coffee and rolls was Mrs. Effie. Her face brightened as she saw me, then froze to disapproval as her glance rested upon him I was to know as