

Witwer Harry Charles

Alex the Great



Harry Witwer
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H. C. Witwer

Alex the Great

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING ALEX THE GREAT

Girls, listen – if friend hubby comes home to-night and while hurlin' the cat off his favorite chair, remarks that he's got a scheme to make gold out of mud or pennant winners out of the St. Looney Cardinals, don't threaten to leave him flat and accuse him of givin' aid and comfort to the breweries. Turn the gas out under the steak, be seated and register attention – because maybe he *has*!

Scattered around all the department stores, coal mines, butcher shops, the police force and banks, there's guys which can sing as well as Caruso, lead a band better than Sousa, stand Dempsey on his ear, show Rockefeller how to make money or teach Chaplin some new falls. Yet these birds go through life on eighteen dollars every Saturday with prospects, and never get their names in the papers unless they get caught in a trolley smash-up. They're like a guy with the ice cream concession at the North Pole. They got the goods, but what of it? As far as the universe is concerned it's a secret – they're there with chimes on, but nobody knows it but them!

Y'know this stuff about us all bein' neck and neck when we hit the nursery may be true, but, believe me, some guys are born to run second! They get off on the wrong foot, trailin' the leaders until the undertaker stops the race. They plod through life takin' orders from guys that don't know half as much about any given thing as they do; they never get a crack at the big job or the big money, although accordin' to Hoyle they got everything that's needed for both. Take Joey Green who used to be so stupid at dear old college that the faculty once considered givin' him education by injectin' it into his dome with a hypodermic. At forty he comes back to the campus to make 'em a present of a few new buildin's out of last month's winnin's from the cruel world. Where is Elbert Huntington, which copped all the diplomas, did algebra by ear and was give medals for out-brainin' the class? Where is *he*, teacher? And the echo chirps, "Workin' for Joey Green, drawin' twenty a week and on the payroll as No. 543!"

The answer to this little thumb sketch is easy. Elbert Huntington had brains and Joey Green had confidence. Elbert *expected* to dumfound the world with what he knew, and Joey *did* dumfound it with what he didn't. Now if Joseph made good with nothin' but nerve, what could a guy do that had brains and nerve both?

I'll tell you.

After we won the world's series in 1914 and the dough had been divided up to the satisfaction of everybody but the guys that was in on the split, me and the wife had figured on one of them trips to Europe. You prob'bly know the kind I mean, "\$900 and up. Bus to hotel on fifth morning out included." I had looked forward to this here expedition for thirty years, like a guy looks forward to eight o'clock the night he's gonna call on his first girl. We had learned French and Eytalian off of a phonograph record and from givin' them spaghetti dives a play. Also, I had collected a trousseau that would of made John Drew take arsenic if he'd ever of flashed me when I was dolled up for the street.

Prob'ly you have seen somethin' in the papers about how the old country was closed to traffic right then. From what I hear it was all dug up like lower Broadway and tourists had to detour by way of So. America, so we never got nearer Europe than the Williamsburg Bridge, and you can't see a thing from there.

Well, when we found out that as far as trips to Europe was concerned they was nothin' stirrin', the wife took both bank books and went down to Lakewood, while I stayed in New York as a deposit

on the new flat. I went to the station with her and I'll betcha from the fond farewells we give each other, people must of thought she was gonna take the veil or somethin', instead of just goin' to entomb herself in Jersey for a month. I swore I'd be in every night at ten, although that's kinda late to start out for the night, and she promised not to get in no bridge mêlées where the sum they battled for was over six bits. Then we took some more bows on the lovin' good-by stuff, and I'm alone in the big city.

I managed somehow to live through the day, but the next afternoon I lured a bunch up to the flat for a little pinochle. I begin by invitin' two guys, but by the time we got to Harlem we was a dozen strong. Once inside the portals, it turns out that only six of them is wild about pinochle, so the rest of 'em take up the rugs, start the victrola and give themselves up to dancin'. Pretty soon the telephone rings with great violence. I grabbed the receiver and learned it was the woman which lives underneath.

"Them steamfitters you got rehearsin' up there has got to call it a day!" she says. "Otherwise I'll moan to the landlord. The chandelier has left the ceilin' already and four pieces of my chocolate set is busted. I never heard tell of such carryin' on!"

"Wait till you been here a little longer," I says, "I ain't carryin' on, me and some boy friends of mine is tryin' to kill a dull afternoon and – "

"If them's friends makin' that racket," she butts in, "I hope I have moved when your enemies call! What am I gonna do about that chocolate set, hey? D'ye hear – there goes another piece!"

"If I was in your place," I tells her, "I'd drink coffee, and if your furnishings is all as frail as that chocolate set you're featurin', you better grab hold of the piano, because I'm gonna sneeze!"

"Don't you dare make no cracks about my furniture!" she yells. "I got my opinion of what you do for a livin' when you can afford to be home in the daytime!"

"I make chocolate sets," I says. "We're workin' on one now and – "

"Wait till my husband comes home!" she cuts in. "He'll take care of you!"

"I don't need nobody to take care of me," I comes back, "I'm self supportin'."

"Why don't you let go there?" yells Eddie Brannan. "Are you and that dame doin' an act or what?"

Zip! she hangs up and just then the front door-bell makes good.

"See who it is!" I calls to one of the gang, sittin' in the game again. "Tell 'em I'm in Brazil and – " Oh, boy!

One of them dead silences took place in the hall and – in walks the wife!

For the next five seconds it was so quiet in that flat that a graveyard would seem like a locomotive works alongside of it. Joe Leity starts to whistle soft and low, Abe Katz opens the dumbwaiter and looks down to see what kind of a jump it is and I dropped a hundred aces on the floor. The rest of the gang eases over to the door.

"Why – ah – eh – ah, what does this mean?" I says kinda weak. "I thought you had went to Lakewood."

"Well," she says, turnin' the eyes, that used to fill the Winter Garden every night, on the gang, "where d'ye figure I am now? I'll give you three guesses!"

"Ahem!" says Joe Leity, "I guess I'll blow! I – "

"Me, too!" pipes the gang like a chorus and does a few more vamps to the door.

"Why don't you introduce your friends?" says the wife. "Or maybe you just run across these boys yourself when you come in, heh?"

"Excuse!" I says. "This here's Joe Leity, Abe Katz, Phil Young, Red Dailey, Steve – "

"Never mind callin' the roll," she butts in. "I'll let it go en masse. I'm delighted to meet you all, and I hope you won't run away simply because I'm here."

"Oh, no – not at all – we ain't runnin' away!" they says.

"There's no reason for you boys *runnin'* anyways," the wife goes on, "because the elevator is right outside now and I think the boy is holdin' the car for you – "

They blowed!

"And now," says the wife to me, "what d'ye mean by bringin' them plumbers up here for a union meetin', eh?"

"Don't be always knockin'!" I answers, gettin' peeved. "Them boys is all honest and true, even if they do look a little rough to the naked eye. But how is it you come back to-day when you wasn't due for a month?"

"You're tickled to death to see me, ain't you?" she asks, pullin' the pout that formerly helped sell the magazines.

To be level with you, I was – mad and all.

"Why, dearie!" I remarks, kissin' her. "You know I –"

"Easy with the oil!" she cuts me off. "Get on your hat and coat; we're goin' right down to Grand Central Station."

"Don't you think it's liable to tire you, honey," I asks her, "runnin' back and forth from Lakewood like this?"

"I'm not goin' to Lakewood, Stupid," she says. "We're goin' down to meet Alex Hanley – of course you remember him?"

I threw in the self-starter on the old brain, but there was nothin' doin'.

"No!" I says. "To come right out with it – I don't. I realize though that he must be a lu-lu when we're goin' down and meet him at the station. What did he do – lick Dempsey?"

"Idiot!" says the wife, callin' me by her favorite pet name. "He's my cousin."

Oh, boy!

We was goin' down in the elevator and I sunk in the seat with a low moan. In the short space since me and the wife had been wed, I had met her father, six brothers, four nephews, three cousins and a bevy of her uncles. They all claimed they was pleased to meet me, though they couldn't figure how their favorite female relative come to fall for me – and then they folleyed that lead up with a request for everything from a job to ten bucks.

"All right, dearie," I says, finally, "I'm game! Believe me, though, while your family is all aces to me on account of bein' related to you, I often find myself wishin' that you had been an orphan!"

"I could of married a couple of millionaires!" sighs the wife. "And to think I turned 'em down for you!"

"If you had married a *couple* of millionaires, you would of been pinched!" I says. "What d'ye think this cousin of yours will want to start off with, from your affectionate husband?"

"Nothin'!" she tells me. "Alex never asked a favor in his life. Believe me, this one is different!"

"I can see that from here!" I says. "If you claim he won't take me for something he's different, all right. In fact I can hardly believe he belongs to the family at all."

"I was brought up never to brawl in the open," says the wife, "so I'm lettin' your insults go. This boy is fresh from the mountains of Vermont. He's never been to New York in his life and he's comin' here now to make his mark."

"I'll lay you eight to five I'm the mark!" I says.

We was at the station then, so we had to practise self-denial and quit scrappin'. The wife explained that she had hardly got to Lakewood when she found a telegram there from her cousin Alex sayin' that he was comin' down for a visit. So she beat it right back to meet him, not wantin' the poor kid to breeze into a town like New York, all by his lonesome.

Well, we stand in the middle of the waitin'-room like a couple of boobs for a while, and then a guy, which I figured must be a college devil bustin' into a new fraternity, comes gallopin' across the floor, slams a suitcase down on my foot and throws his arms around the wife's neck. He had on a cap which could of been used as a checker board when you got tired of wearin' it, a suit of clothes that must of been made by a maniac tailor and the yellowest tan shoes I ever seen in my life. If he had been three inches taller and an ounce thinner, you could of put a tent around him and got

a dime admission. On his upper lip, which was of a retirin' disposition, he had a mustache that was an outright steal from Chaplin.

I watched him and my wife embrace as long as I could stand it and then I tapped her on the shoulder.

"I suppose this is Alex, eh?" I says – while he looks at me for the first time.

"You got Sherlock Holmes lookin' stupid!" admits the wife. "Alex, meet my lord and master."

"Howdy, cousin!" hollers Alex. "I knowed you the minute I seen you from them, now, big ears you got. Y'know they went to work and printed your picture in the Sunday papers last month on a charge of havin' won the, now, pennant for – Well, that's neither here nor there. I come here to make good! A feller with brains can always do that in these big rube towns like New York. Of course a baseball player don't need no brains – you know that yourself and – "

"C'mon, Alex," butts in the wife quickly, seein' I was gettin' ready to grab Alex by the neck. "We'll go right up to the flat and have something to eat. I'll bet you haven't had a bite since you left home – you ought to be starved by this time!"

"I'd rather see him shot, myself!" I growls, taggin' along after them, carryin' this bird's suitcase. If they was clothes in there, Alex must of dressed in armor up in Vermont. The thing was as heavy as two dollars' worth of corn beef and cabbage. However, I figured I'd get back at Alex the minute he asked me for a job. I was all set for this bird, believe me!

"So this is New York, hey?" he pipes through his nose the minute we get outside the station. He stops dead in the street, gazin' up at the big buildin's and then down at the crowds like a guy in a trance. All he needed was a streamer of hay in his mouth and the first seven guys that passed would of offered to sell him the Bronx. He gasps a couple of times and wipes his eyes.

"Well, Alex," I says, tryin' hard not to laugh in his face, "what d'ye think of New York? Considerable burg, eh?"

He shakes his head kinda sad and sighs.

"I'll speak plain to you, cousin," he says. "Of all the rube burgs I ever seen, this here's the limit!"

I liked to fell down one of them Subway holes!

"Rube town?" I yells. "Where d'ye get that stuff? Are you seekin' to kid me?"

He grabs me by the shoulders and swings me around.

"Just you look at that crowd of folks on the corner there!" he tells me. He points over to where half New York is bein' held up in a traffic jam – wagons, autos, surface cars and guys usin' rubber heels as a means of locomotion, all waitin' for the cop to say, "Go!"

"Just look at 'em!" repeats Alex, sneering at me. "From the reports that have reached me, this here's the town where all the brains in the world is gathered. There's a couple hundred of them brains on the corner there now, I reckon, and they can't go nowheres till that constabule gives the word! Huh!" he snorts, turnin' away. "All just a lot of rubes, that's all!"

We get in a taxi and all the way up Alex kept lookin' out the window, shakin' his head and mutterin' somethin' about Manhattan bein' a well-advertised bunk and all the inhabitants thereof bein' hicks. I don't know whether he was after my goat or not, but in a few minutes he had it.

"Listen, gentle stranger," I says, when nature could stand no more, "I realize that New York is nothin' but a flag station and that we're all Reubens and chew hay, but we have, amongst other things, six million merry villagers, the biggest buildings in the world, the subway, gunmen, cabarets, Broadway, and – well, a lot of things that you gotta admit ain't hit dear old Vermont as yet!"

"And I most sincerely hope and trust they never will!" pipes Alex. "We don't need 'em! We got good, clean mountain air, plenty of honest green grass and – and —*neighbors!* There's just a few things you ain't got in New York. Cousin Alice tells me she was here two years before she knowed the folks in the next flat. That shows you people is suspicious. You know you're rubes and you're afraid to welcome the stranger for fear he'll sell you one of them, now, gold bricks. I also hear you pay five and six dollars for a seat at an entertainment. You so-called wise New Yorkers pays that

much for tickets and then go in and laugh your fool heads off at a scene showin' a, now, farmer bein' stung! Ha, ha, ha! You – "

We was up at the flat then, and I let him rave on, tryin' not to get peeved, so's we'd have some peace and quiet in the family. I knew if he kept on pannin' my town, I'd get sore and bite him or somethin' – and then the wife wouldn't gimme no smile for a month. Alex was a new one on me so far, but I figured that in a couple of days he'd be tellin' the world that New York was the greatest place on earth and people that lived anywheres else must be nutty – the way they all do.

After supper the wife calls up a girl friend of hers so's we can make up a little theatre party. Me and Alex goes into the parlor for a smoke, and I asked him how he come to be in our mongst if he already knowed what a hick town New York was.

"I come here to make good," he tells me, "because, in my opinion, this is the easiest place in the world to do that thing. This town is no different than Ann Harbor or New Haven, except that it's bigger – that's all! The trouble with most fellows that come here from a small town is, they let New York get under their skin and it takes their nerve before they get started. Advertisin' is what has made this town what it is to-day and nothin' else. It's easier to make good here than it is in a burg, because in your own town everybody knows you and now fourflushin' will get you nothin'. There's so many people here that a feller can keep *some* of 'em guessin' all the time. All anybody needs to get ahead here is confidence – "

"Well," I butts in, "if all a guy needs is confidence, you ought to be a knockout! What are you figurin' on doin' first?"

"I'll look around to-morrow," he says. "I wanna start off with the hardest proposition in the town right away. Out in my town five of us fellers formed a little club. Each of us has swore to come to New York one after the other and make good in six months to a year, just to show you folks how easy it is. For one thing, we all got our own private little plans for winnin' out here and every one of us is goin' to go at the proposition from a brand new angle. I was elected to be the first one, and that's why I'm here."

"Alex," I says, "you're an ambitious feller, and I gotta hand it to you. I don't doubt you'll go a long ways at that, if you don't get pinched for speedin'. But this stuff you're pullin' about dear old Manhattan gets under my collar! I hate to hear you pan the capital of the world in that rough way of yours, and when you claim it's a simple matter to make good here, you have gone and pulled a bone. If it's as soft as you say, I must of lost the combination or somethin', because it took me thirty years to get over right here, and, at that, I ain't causin' Rockefeller or George M. Cohan no worry! So just to show you that your dope is all wrong and that you're due to hit the bumps if you play it out, I'll lay you eight to five you muff the very first thing you try here – what d'ye say?"

He looks at me for a minute and shakes his head.

"I don't want to deprive my Cousin Alice of no luxuries," he tells me, "or I'd snap you right up on that."

"I see they're still makin' 'em yellah up in Vermont!" I sneers.

"D'ye mean to insinuate that I'm a quitter?" he asks me, gettin' red.

"You ought to be a fortune teller!" I says.

"By gravy, I'll take you up!" he hollers. "I got five hundred dollars in my left shoe and I might as well add to it now as later. I'll bet you the five hundred to your eight hundred that the first thing I tackle here, I make good!"

"You hate yourself, don't you?" I says.

"Who's yellah now?" he comes back.

"The canary," I tells him. "You're on!"

Just then the door-bell rings, and they was sounds of kissin' by women principals in the hall. In walks the wife with what looks to me like a opium-eater's dream and a Fifth Avenue evenin' gown model combined. Alex takes one flash and turns red, white and blue.

"This is my friend Eve Rossiter," says the wife. "My husband, Eve, and my cousin, Alex Hanley."

"Charmed!" breathes Eve, pullin' a smile that lit up the room.

"Me and you both!" I says.

But Alex clears his throat, grits his teeth and flushes up. They was a glitter in his eye and he begins to talk fast and hard.

"Howdy, Miss Rossiter!" he says, shakin' hands like he was bein' give a knockdown to the new bartender. "I'm astounded to meet you! I just come to New York to-day, but if I'd of knowed you was here, I'd of been here long ago. However, I'm here now and better late than forever, as the feller says. I just bet my cousin here that the first thing I tried my hand at in New York I'd make good. I'm goin' out to-morrow and show him how easy it is for a feller to get to the top in this here prize rube burg, provided he has now gumption and his methods is new. I'll see you to-morrow night and let you know how I made out; I know you won't have no peace till you hear about it!" He digs into his pockets feverishly and grabs out a handful of letters. "Here's what they thought of me up in Vermont!" he goes on, never takin' his eyes off the girl's face. The wife is starin' at him with her mouth and eyes as open as a crap tourney, like she figured he'd gone nutty – and me and Little Eva is runnin' neck and neck at tryin' to keep from laughin'. "They say a man that can make good in New York can make good anywhere," he goes on, throwin' the clutch into high again. "I say a man that can make good anywhere can make good in New York! What's the difference between New York and Goose Creek, Iowa? – New York's got more people in it, that's all! It's harder – "

"Alex, Alex!" butts in the wife, finally regainin' control of her voice. "What is the matter with you? You – "

"Hush!" says Alex, turnin' back to Eve again. "It's harder to make good in a little town than it is in a big one, because – "

"Alex, look here!" cuts in the wife, gettin' sore. "Miss Rossiter ain't interested in that patter of yours – we're goin' to the theatre. Now both you men run along and dress, we'll miss half the show as it is!"

"I'll be right back!" chirps Alex to Eve. "Them eyes of yours is simply now dumfoundin'!"

I took Alex in my boudoir and while I'm gettin' in the banquet uneyform, he takes a thing that was a cross between a tuxedo and a dress suit out of his bag and dolls up. When set for the street, Alex was no Greek god, but he was fairly easy to look at, if you closed one eye. He wanted to know what kind of an entertainment they had at the opry house this week, and I told him I'd show him somethin' that had them huskin' bees, he was used to up in Vermont, beat eighty ways from the jack.

Well, we go to the biggest musical show on Broadway, and instead of faintin' dead away from joy, Alex claims it was rotten and spent the night explainin' to Eve how he was gonna take New York the next mornin'. After the show we went to a cabaret and still no rise out of Alex. He was off the gay whirl, he says, and his idea of a holiday was to sit beside his own fireside, readin' yesterday's mail, while his wife made the room resound with melody by hummin' "Silver Threads Among The Gold," the while knittin' a doily for the front-room table.

At this, Eve, which has been gazin' at Alex all night like he was Coney Island and she was gettin' her first peep, asks if he was married.

"Don't crowd me!" he tells her, tappin' her arm playfully. "I ain't gonna get married till I make good. By to-morrow night, though, I reckon I'll be in a position to talk it over with you!"

"Ooooh!!" gasps Eve, turnin' a becomin' shade of red. Can you tell me why them big league dames fall for these guys like Alex? If you can do that, I got an easy one for you – I wanna know who started the world. From one flash at Eve, bein' a married man, I could tell where she'd be the next night when Alex called – and it wouldn't be – out! The next minute Eve laughed and tells Alex if he's got as much ability as he has nerve, he ought to have New York on its ear in twenty-four hours. The

wife asks him will he kindly lay off pesterin' her girl friend to death and quit boostin' himself for a minute, because we was out for pleasure and he had played the one record all night.

"Go on, Mister Hanley," butts in Eve, "I love to hear you talk. You're so different from any one else I've met, and I really believe you *will* do something big here, because you're – well – new!"

"You have remarked somethin'!" agrees Alex. "I'm gonna show 'em somethin' they never seen before and make 'em like it!"

Well, he takes Eve home that night for a starter, and the next mornin' he's up bright and early at seven, ready to startle Manhattan. He said he wanted me to go out with him and watch him win my eight hundred bucks and also to notice the way he worked. He picks up the mornin' paper, runs through the "Help Wanted" columns for a minute and finally clears his throat.

"Aha!" he says. "Listen to this – 'Wanted. High class automobile salesman for the Gaflooy light delivery wagon. We have no time for experiments and successful applicant must make good at once. We don't want an order taker, but an order *maker*– a real, live, simon-pure hustler who will start delivering the goods the morning he goes on the payroll. This job pays ten thousand a year, if you show us you're worth it. Apply personally all day and bring references. This is imperative. We want to see your past record of sales elsewhere. Ask for Mr. Grattan, 1346 Broadway. If you haven't the experience, don't come!"

"Well?" I says.

He puts down the paper and reaches for his hat.

"They'll probably be a lot after that there job, hey?" he asks me.

"About four thousand, I'd say offhand!" I grins.

"Fine!" he says, rubbin' his hands and smilin', "I love competition because it puts a feller on his mettle. Now look here, if I go down there and secure that job this mornin', do I get your eight hundred dollars?"

"What?" I hollers. "What d'ye mean, do you get my eight hundred?"

"Listen!" he says. "The bet was that I make good at the first thing I tackle, wasn't it – all right! Now this here job looks good to me. Ten thousand a year is nice money to start. If you're fair minded, you'll admit that in goin' after this job I'm up against a pretty stiff proposition. In the first place I don't know no more about automobiles than you do about raisin' hogs. I never sold one in my life. I don't know a soul in New York outside of you, Cousin Alice and that girl I took home last night, so I can't furnish no references on my ability as a salesman. The advertisement says you have to have 'em. As you say, they'll be thousands after that job. Fellers with swell fronts, high soundin' records in back of 'em and gilt-edged references. Now under all that handicap, if I walk in there and get the job, won't you admit I made good?"

"If you go down and ask for that job and they turn you down, you'll pay me, eh?" I asks him.

"At once!" he says, firmly.

"C'mon, Alex!" I tells him, puttin' on my hat. "I hate to cop a sucker bet like this, but maybe losin' it will reduce the size of your head a trifle and do you good!"

Once out in the street, he stretches his arms, pulls his hat down hard over his dome and stamps his feet.

"Watch me close!" he says. "Watch me close and you'll get some valuable tips on how to put yourself over. I told you I was gonna be new – just observe how I go after this job. The average New Yorker who wanted it would go right down to the office, present his, now, credentials and ask for it, wouldn't he?"

I nodded.

"The early worm catches the fish, y'know!" I says; "and in New York here – the town that made pep and hustle famous – a man would be down there at six a.m. waitin' for the place to open. Why, there's prob'ly a hundred or more there right now!"

"I hope there's a million!" he comes back. "It'll be more satisfaction when they hire me over all them others. Now I ain't goin' near that there office as yet. My system gets away from the old stuff – just keep your eye on Cousin Alex from now on!"

He buys a newspaper, finds the automobile section and, finally, a big display advertisement of the Gaflooy Auto Company. He takes out a letter from his pocket and on the back of it he marks the price, style, and a lot of other dope about Gaflooy light delivery wagons and then throws the paper away.

"Now," he grins, "I'm all ready, except to give them folks my full name for the payroll!"

At that minute, somebody slaps me on the back and I swing around to see Buck Rice chucklin' at me. Buck used to be one of the best second basemen that ever picked up a bat, till his legs went back on him and he got into the automobile game. I remember thinkin' how funny it was that he come along right then when me and Alex was talkin' about autos.

"Well, how are they breakin', Buck?" I says, shakin' hands and introducin' Alex.

"I think I have fanned with the bases loaded again," he laughs. "I put in five hours to-day tryin' to get the Mastadon Department Store to put in a line of six-cylinder Katzes on their delivery system. I got a private tip that they're changin' from the Mutz-36 and the first order will be about eighty cars. Of course that's a sweet piece of money for somebody and everybody in New York will be there to-day tryin' to grab that order off. You might as well try to sell radiators in Hades though, because Munson, the bird that does the purchasin', is stuck on the Clarendon and he wouldn't buy anything else if they was givin' 'em away!"

"Well, that's tough, Buck!" I sympathizes.

"Sure is!" he says, givin' me and Alex a quarter perfecto and grinnin' some more to show how disappointed he feels. "But I should worry! If I lose that one, I'll get another, so what's the difference?" He turns to Alex, "Y'know in New York here," he confides, "we don't have no time to hold no coroner's inquests over failures. We forget about 'em and go after somethin' else – always on the job, get me? You'll learn after you're here a while – that's what makes the town what it is. If I stopped to moan over every order I didn't put across, I'd be nowhere to-day. Nope, you can't do that in New York!"

"Another of them there New Yorkers, hey?" sneers Alex to me, after Buck has blowed. "Don't you see how that feller proves my argyment about how simple it is to make good here? From the way he's dressed – them, now, diamonds and so forth – he's probably a big feller in his line. Makin' plenty of money and looked on as a success by the ig'rant. Yet he lets a big order get away from him when it was practically a cinch to land it!"

"Say, listen!" I yelps – this bird was gettin' on my nerves. "If four-flushin' was water, you'd be the Pacific Ocean! You gimme a pain with that line of patter you got, and as far as salesmanship is concerned, I'll bet you couldn't sell a porterhouse steak to a guy dyin' of hunger. I'd like to see *you* land an order like Buck spoke of, you – "

"That's just what you're gonna do!" he butts in. "You're gonna see *me* land that very order he told us about – what d'ye think of that, hey?"

I stopped dead and gazed upon him.

"You're gonna which?" I asks him.

"I'm gonna land that order from that department store!" he repeats, grabbin' my arm. "C'mon – show me how to get there!"

I fell up against a lamp post and laughed till a passin' dame remarked to her friend that it was an outrage the way some guys drank. Then I led Alex to the subway.

"Listen," I says. "What about this job you was gonna get? Of course you know if you quit, I win the bet."

"Quit?" he says. "Where have I heard the word before? Who said anything about quittin'? I'm gonna get that order and I'm gonna get that job!"

"Fair enough!" I tells him, "but you're goin' at the thing backwards. How are you gonna take an order for autos when you ain't got no autos to sell? I suppose you figure on grabbin' the ten thousand dollar job first and then makin' good with a loud crash by landin' the big order, eh?"

He shakes his head and sighs pityin'ly.

"Would there be anything new and original about that?" he asks.

"No!" I says, "there wouldn't! But I don't see how you're gonna win out any other way."

"Of course you don't!" he sneers. "You're a New Yorker, ain't you? I'm supposed to be the rube, simply because I wasn't born on Sixth Avenue. Now I already told you my methods was new, didn't I? Anybody would work the thing the way you lay it out – and probably land neither the job nor the order. What a chance would I have goin' up there and askin' for that job first? Where would I come out against all them sellin' experts with letters and so forth to prove it? Why, they'd laugh me outa the office! *B-u-t!* – if I go to them with an order for fifty or sixty of their cars as actual proof that I can sell not only autos, but their autos, what will they say, then? D'ye see the point now? They ask me for a reference and I reach in my pocket and give them the order, *which I've got before applyin' for the job*, to prove to myself and them that I can sell automobiles!"

Oh, boy!

"Alex," I says, when I got my breath, "I gotta hand it to you! When it comes to inventin' things, you got Edison lookin' like a backward pupil. Go to it, old kid! If you put this over the way you have just told it to me, you'll own Broadway in a week!"

"I'm figurin' on ten days!" he says.

We arrive at the Mastadon Department Store and shoot up in the elevator to the office of G. C. Munson, the general manager. Alex has been readin' the notes he made on Gaflooney delivery wagons like the same was a French novel, and, by the time we got there, he could repeat their advertisement by heart. He starts to breeze right into the office and some dame appears on the scene and nails him.

"One moment, please!" she says, very cold – givin' Alex a look that took in everything from his hick clothes to his rube haircut. "This happens to be a private office. Whom did you desire to see?"

"If I thought they was anybody prettier than you here, I'd ask to have them brought out," says Alex, in that simple rube way of his which give no offense, "but of course I know that's impossible. Still, as long as I'm here, I'd like to see Mister Munson."

The dame melts and releases a smile.

"What did you wish to see him about?" she asks.

"About ten minutes," pipes Alex. "D'ye know there's somethin' about them navy blue eyes of yours that makes me think of my mother – isn't that funny?"

The dame surrenders and shows Alex all her nice front teeth.

"I'll see if Mister Munson is in," she says, handin' him a card, "but you'll have to fill this out."

Alex looks at the card which had this on it,

Mr
Desires to see
Regarding

He laughs suddenly, takes out his fountain pen and fills the thing out. Lookin' over his shoulder I seen him write this,

Mr... *Alex Hanley*
Desires to see ... *Mr. Munson.*
Regarding ... *The price of petrified noodles in Siberia.*

"There," he says, handin' it to the girl without a smile, "give that to Mister Munson."

She takes it in without lookin' at it.

"Well, you crabbed any chance you might of had, right off the bat!" I says to Alex. "He'll get so sore when he reads that, he won't even let you in."

"Let him get sore!" chirps Alex. "He'll not only get sore, he'll get curious and then again I'm figurin' on him bein' human, besides bein' general manager and havin' a sense of humor! He's probably been pestered with auto salesmen all day – if I wrote my real business on that card he'd send word he was out. As it is, he'll read it and he won't be able to resist the, now, temptation to get one look at a feller which would want to know from a man in his position the price of petrified noodles in Siberia. No matter what happens afterwards, he'll want one look – wouldn't you?"

Before I can answer, the dame comes out laughin'.

"Step in," she says. "Mister Munson will see you."

"Now!" hisses Alex, as we ease in on the velvet carpet. "Watch how *I* go about sellin' autos. Y'see I got a nibble already because I was new! I – Howdy, Mister Munson!"

We was in the private office.

Munson was a little, keen-faced guy – bald, nervous and fat. He looks up over his glasses with Alex's card in his hand – and Alex looks back. In one second they had each found out all they wanted to know about the other.

"What's the meaning of this nonsense?" barks Munson.

Alex walks over to the desk, wets his lips and gets goin'.

"Mister Munson," he says, "if you called on a man at his office, would you care to write your business on a card for the office boy to read? No – you would not! A big man like you would probably tear the card up, leave the office in a, now, rage and never return! You'd be insulted, your, now, dignity would be hurt, eh? You might be from out of town and comin' here to leave a big order and that little thing – prob'ly invented by one of your New York efficiency stars – would make you so mad you'd go away and order where they wasn't so efficient, but a little more courteous! Look at that card – the, now, wordin' of it. Look how cold and hard it is! No warmth, no 'glad-to-see-you-stranger what-can-my-house-do-for-you?' about it. It's like a slap in the face! Maybe it does keep the panhandlers away, but did you ever figure how many orders it must have cost you, hey?"

Munson has listened to every word, first with a heavy frown and then with a kind of thoughtful look on his face. He taps the desk with a lead pencil, reads the card a couple of times and then slams his fist on the desk.

"By Peter, young man!" he snaps out suddenly, "you may be right! The wording of that office blank *is* rather insulting, now that I dissect it – been too busy before to notice it. Yes, sir, I *would* resent having my business blatted out before a whole staff of subordinates! There must be some way, of course, to keep out the hordes of jobless and what not who would get in if it wasn't for that blank and now, by the eternal, we'll find one less liable to turn away gold with the – er – grist! I thank you for the suggestion. And now, what did you want to see me about?"

"Automobiles," says Alex, "and – "

Munson freezes right up and slaps his hands together.

"That's enough!" he snarls. "Perhaps that office blank of ours is not so bad after all! If you had filled it out properly, you wouldn't be here. I've heard enough about autos to-day to last me for the rest of my life. Yesterday, I mentioned casually, and I thought in confidence, that we were considering a change in our delivery system. Beginning at eight this morning, there has been a constant stream of automobile salesmen in this office! The only persons who have not tried to sell me automobiles are George Washington, Jack Dempsey and Billy Sunday! I'm quite sure every one else has been here. The air has been filled with magnetos, self-starters, sliding gear transmissions, aluminum crank cases and all that other damnable technical stuff that goes with automobiles! You need not open your mouth – I know exactly what your sales talk is, they're all alike, more or less. Your car is far and away the best on the market, of course, and – "

"Excuse me, Mister Munson!" butts in Alex. "You get me all wrong. Our car – the Gaflooney – is *not* the best on the market. There are others just as good and some of the higher priced ones are, naturally, better. You can't expect the best on the market for the price we sell at – 750. A man of

your intelligence knows that and when a salesman tells you his five hundred dollar car is better than a standard make at five thousand, he's insulting your intelligence. We make a good, honest car – that's all. I ain't gonna take up your time tellin' you about the – eh – ah – the – eh, magneto and so forth. Unless you're a mechanic, you wouldn't understand about 'em anyways. All the parts that go with any car are on ours, or it wouldn't work – that's understood. However, as I said before, I ain't gonna take up your time. I know how you New Yorkers do business, and you've probably made your mind up already. You big men are all zip! – like that. Mind made up and nothin' can change you. Even if you do miss somethin' good now and then, you don't mind because you have the satisfaction of bein' known as a quick thinker. We just got in a new consignment of cars to-day and if you're interested our place is at 1346 Broadway. Well, good-day, sir!" he winds up, reachin' for his hat.

"Wait!" says Munson, takin' off his glasses and wipin' 'em. "You're a new one on me, son! So you admit you haven't got the greatest auto that was ever made, eh?" he chuckles. "By Peter! That sounds strange after all the talk I been listening to to-day. If your car is as honest as you seem to be, it's all right!" He sits lookin' off in the air, tappin' the desk with the pencil again.

Alex nudges me and we start for the door. Halfway he stops and looks at a photo that's framed over the desk. It's a picture of a barn, some chickens and a couple of cows.

"Right fine landscape, that!" chirps Alex to Munson. "Makes a feller like me homesick to look at it. Them are sure fine Jerseys, too – and say, see them pullets, would you!"

"That's my little farm down on Long Island," says Munson, throwin' out his chest. "I suppose that makes you laugh, eh? Big, grown New Yorker having a farm, eh?"

"Mister," says Alex, sadly, "it don't make *me* laugh! I was raised on a farm in Vermont and – "

"That so?" cuts in Munson, lookin' interested. "Country boy, eh?"

"Yep," goes on Alex. "Now, speakin' of them pullets there – if you'd try 'em on a straight diet of bran and potatoes – pound of each – they'll fatten up quicker."

"Yes?" pipes Munson, brightenin' up some more. "Well, well! And – hmph! Thanks, Mister Hanley, I'll make a note of that. Now – eh – sit down a minute! I don't want to take your time, but – eh, what did you find best back home for saving the young chicks? What foods – "

"I'll just leave you a few little rules," says Alex, his eyes glitterin', as he rams his elbow a mile in my ribs. "I got to call on another department store this afternoon, where I'm almost certain to take an order and – "

"Young man!" Munson shuts him off, "I'm frank enough to say that you've made a very favorable impression on me. You're honest about your car, and you didn't try to overawe me by hurling a lot of unintelligible technical terms into my ear. You don't claim it's the bargain of the age. Now we have recently inaugurated right here in this store a policy of absolute honesty with regard to our merchandise. No misrepresentations are permitted. We sell our goods for what they are – we don't allow a clerk to tell a customer that he's getting a five-dollar shirt for two dollars. I can't get the car I want to put in here – they want too much money and their salesman spent most of his time here speaking in terms that none but a master mechanic on their own auto would understand. I'm a pretty good judge of character and you look good to me. Give me a price on fifty of your cars for immediate delivery and – well, let's hear your figures!"

Alex drops his hat on the floor, but when he picked it up, he was as cool as a dollar's worth of ice.

"Just a minute," he says, sittin' down and reachin' for a desk telephone. He gets the Gaflooy Company on the wire.

"Hello!" he says. "Say – I want a lump price on fifty delivery wagons – what? – never mind who this is, if the price is right I'll come up." He winks at Munson like he's lettin' him in on somethin' – and, by gravy, Munson winks back! "Yes – fifty," says Alex on the wire. "Thirty-five thousand dollars? – thank you!" He hangs up the phone and turns to Munson. "They'll give you twenty-five hundred off, accordin' to that figure," he says.

Munson grabs up a pad and writes somethin' on it.

"There!" he says, givin' it to Alex. "Tell 'em to get as many cars over here to-morrow as they can. Get your bill and I'll O.K. it. Now – " he pulls his chair over closer, "About those chicks and – oh, yes, I want your opinion on some figures I have here on my truck – "

An hour later, me and Alex walks into the salesroom of the Gaflooy Automobile Company. I was in a trance, and if he had of promised to lift the Singer Buildin' with one hand I would of laid the world eight to five he could do it! The whole place is in confusion – salesmen chasin' around, telephonin' and actin' like they just heard they was a bomb in the basement. Alex asks for the manager, and some guy chances over and asks what he wants.

"I have come for that ten thousand a year job you advertised this mornin'," says Alex.

"Job?" howls the manager, glarin' at him. "You poor boob, can't you see how busy we are here now? We just got a tip on a real order – fifty cars, and we can't trace the thing!" He rubs his hands together. "Fifty cars! That's how the Gaflooy sells – fifty at a time!" He sneers at Alex. "Your approach is terrible!" he says. "You'll never land a job in this town like that, my boy. Go somewhere first and learn how to interest a busy man with the first thing you say and – "

"Listen!" butts in Alex. "Gimme that job, will you, or I'll have to go somewhere else."

The manager laughs, as a couple of salesmen come along and join him. They all sneer at Alex and the manager nudges his minions and winks.

"So you think you're a ten thousand dollar auto salesman, eh?" he says. "Ah – who can you refer to?" He makes a bluff at takin' down notes.

"Mister Munson, of the Mastadon Department Store," says Alex.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roars the manager. "Department store, eh – that's rich! You quit the shirtwaist department to sell autos, eh? Ha, ha, ha! What does a department store manager know of your ability to sell autos?" he snarls.

"Well, – I just sold him fifty of *yours*!" remarks Alex. "So I thought – "

"What?" shrieks the manager, grabbin' his arm.

Alex hands over the order Munson give him.

"Now before I go to work here," he says, "it might be a good idea to let me look over one of your cars, because, to tell you the truth, I ain't never seen one of 'em in my life!"

Well, they had Munson on the phone in a minute and in another one the manager hangs up the receiver and comes back.

"Do I get the job?" asks Alex.

"Do you get the job!" yells friend manager, slappin' him on the back. "No, you don't get it – only if you leave here without signing your name to a five-year contract and accepting a check for fifteen hundred dollars' commission and as much more as you want to draw on your expense account, I'll – I'll – murder you! But first, you lunch with me at the Fitz-Barlton and we'll map out a campaign – "

"Gimme that eight hundred!" says Alex to me.

I passed it over still semi-conscious.

Alex stretches his arms, puts the money away and grins.

"Get me that Eve girl on the phone, will you?" he tells me. "I – I had a little bet with her, too!" He lights the cigar Buck Rice had give him in the mornin', blows out some smoke and looks over at Broadway, jammed with the matinée crowd. "Some burg!" he says, shakin' his head and grinnin' at me!

CHAPTER II

THE SELF-COMMENCER

There's nothin' the world loves so much as a good tryer. I don't mean the birds that havin' everything in their favor, includin' a ten-mile start, finishes first in the Big Race – I'm talkin' about the guys that never get better than second or third, but generally land in the money. The old Consistent Charlies that, no matter how many times they're beaten, figures the time to quit is when you're dead and buried!

Did you ever stop to think that the tryers which never get nowhere is responsible for the other guys' success? They're the babies that make a race or a fight out of it, and if it wasn't for them dubs there'd be no successes at all. In order to have winners, we got to have *losers*, don't we? And don't forget that yesterday's losers are to-morrow's winners and vice-president or vice versa, whatever it is.

A fighter knows that these birds which come up smilin' no matter how many times he drops 'em for the count is as dangerous as dynamite, until he knocks 'em cold. No matter how bad this loser may be battered up, he's always got a chance while he's tryin'. I've seen guys that was winnin' by two miles curl up and quit before a dub they had beaten till the crowd was yellin' for mercy, simply because this poor bunged-up simp kept comin' in all the time – battered, bloody, drunk with wallops —*but tryin' up to the last bell!*

Now these guys may never get nowhere, but they're the birds that's put most of the guys that *do* where they are. Why? Think it over! You gotta be *good* to beat them birds, don't you? They make competition keen, they keep the other guys on their toes, they're the gasoline that keeps the old world goin' forward on high and the birds that get over are only the chauffeurs. You gotta have both to run the car and the universe wouldn't move forward six inches if we didn't have one failure for every success.

So if you've failed to set the world on fire up to date, don't walk out on the dock to see what kind of a jump it is. If you can't be a winner, you can be a good loser and it's a toss-up which is the bigger thing! A guy who can beat the yellah streak we all pack somewheres, every time he fails to register a win, and will keep rememberin' that to-morrow has got yesterday beat eighty-seven ways, is no loser! On paper he mightn't be a winner, but he *is*. He's a bigger winner than the bird that gets over, because he's whipped the quit in him without no kind applause to cheer him on. I've seen losers that attracted more attention in runnin' *last* than any six winners in the same precinct.

Them kind of birds can't help tryin'. They couldn't quit if they wanted to, which they don't! They got somethin' in 'em that keeps shovin' 'em along whether they're regrettin' the breaks or not. They're always full of the old ambish no matter what the score is in the ninth. They're what you might call self-starters in the automobile of life – they don't need a *win* now and then to crank 'em up, they keep goin' forward hittin' on all cylinders from the nursery to the embalmer!

Alex was one of them guys.

The Big Town fell for his stuff because it was *new*, the same as it will fall for *yours* to-morrow if you get somethin' it never seen and the nerve to try it out!

About a month after Alex was workin' as head salesman for the Gaflooley Auto Company at a pittance of ten thousand a year, he come up to the flat for dinner one night. I seen right away that somethin' was wrong, because he only eat about half of the roast duck and brung along his own cigars. After nature could stand no more, and we had dragged ourselves away from the table to let the servant girl make good, we adjourn to the parlor and the wife gets ready to punish the neighbors with the victrola.

"Well," says Alex, sittin' down in the only rocker, of course, "it looks like they have finally gimme somethin' that even *I* can't do!"

"Can that be possible?" I says, pickin' up the sportin' final.

"Wait till you hear this one!" remarks the wife, crankin' up the victrola. "John McCormack singin' 'If Beauty Was Water, You'd Be Niagara Falls!' It's a knockout!"

"Say!" snorts Alex, gettin' peeved. "Can't a man find no attention here?"

"Look in the telephone book under the A's," I says.

"Never mind, dearie!" the wife tells him. "I'll listen. What's on your mind?" She goes over and sits on the arm of his chair, knowin' full well it gets my goat.

"I see you're the only one in this family that's got any sense!" pipes Alex, pattin' her hand.

"Yen," I says, "I ain't got enough sense to turn on a radiator. All I'm good for is to get the dollars, which of course is nothin' at all in keepin' up the home!"

"Well, you'll never have Rockefeller and that crowd gnashin' their teeth with all the dollars you'll get!" says Alex, "and that ain't no lie!"

"Now, boys," butts in the wife, "let's all be friends even if we do belong to the same family. What is it, Alex? Speak up like a man."

"Well," he says, "the Gaflooy people has started to make tourin' cars and roadsters! What d'ye think of that?"

"I'm simply dumfounded!" I says. "Has Congress heard about this?"

"There you go again!" snorts Alex. "Always tryin' to ridicule everything I do. It's simply a case of sour grapes with you – jealousy, that's all!"

"Sour grapes ain't jealousy," I says. "Sour grapes is brandy. Go on with your story, Alex."

"Don't mind him," whispers the wife in his ear. "He'd laugh in church!"

"Why not?" I says. "I ain't done no gigglin' since you and me first went there together."

"Will you let go?" she says. "Go on, Alex."

"Well," he says, "they called me into the president's office to-day, and the former begins by tellin' me I'm the best salesman they ever had."

"He don't care what he says, does he?" I butts in. "I suppose you admitted the charge, eh?"

"After that," goes on Alex, snubbin' me, "he tells me they have decided to get into the pleasure car game, instead of just makin' trucks and the like. Their first offerin' is gonna be one of them chummy, clover-leaf roadsters which will hold five people comfortably."

"If they're well acquainted!" I says.

"Will you leave the boy alone?" asks the wife. "I never saw anybody like you in my life!"

"Don't I know it?" I says. "Otherwise, how would we ever of got married?"

"Now," goes on Alex, "they want me to go up and see Runyon Q. Sampson, the well-to-do millionaire, and get him to buy the first car. You can imagine what a terrible good advertisement that will be for us if he should buy it, can't you?"

"It'll be O.K. till he tries to ride in it," I says, "and then the chances are you'll have to leave town and the Gaflooy people will be facin' a suit!"

"There ain't another car on the market that can hold a match to the Gaflooy!" hollers Alex, his goat prancin' madly about.

"What's it made out of – celluloid?" I says.

"You may think you're funny!" he tells me, "but that's nothin' more or less than ig'rance. Here I am wastin' valuable time tryin' to explain somethin' to Cousin Alice and you keep interruptin' till a man don't know where he's at! Let's see now, where was I?" he asks the wife.

"The beautiful and good-lookin' princess had just promised to wed you," I says, "but the crusty old king couldn't see into it!"

The wife throws a pillow at me and it busted a vase that cost me three hundred green certificates. After a short brawl over the remains, I laid off Alex and he went ahead.

"As I said before," he goes on, "the president of the Gaflooy Company has selected me to go up and sell old Sampson this here chummy roadster. If I land the order, which naturally enough

I will, it means I get made manager of the New York salesrooms. Then me and Eve Rossiter will prob'ly get married and – "

"What?" squeals the wife. "Are you and Eve engaged? And she never said a word to me!"

"How could she?" I says. "When he prob'ly had her doped?"

"No, we ain't engaged," says Alex. "I ain't even asked the girl will she be mine yet."

"Then how do you know she'll marry you?" asks the wife.

"Well," says Alex, "I figure if you married this here pest, I ought to be able to marry anybody! But what I'm up against is this – I got to take one of them roadsters up there to-day and demonstrate it to Sampson. They have gone to work and made an appointment for me, and what I don't know about automobiles would fill seven large libraries. Here I'm supposed to show Mister Sampson the points on our car which is better than any other and I can't tell the windshield from the magneto. Now d'ye blame me for bein' worried?"

"I thought you was the world's greatest salesman," I sneers. "You don't mean to say this job has got you yellin' for the police already, do you? What are you gonna do, quit?"

"Speak English!" he comes back. "That word quit don't belong in our language. Who said anything about quittin'? Even though I don't know a thing about automobiles, I'm gonna sell Runyon Q. Sampson a Gaflooeey chummy roadster. A feller don't need knowledge to be a success half as much as he needs confidence and I got more confidence than a feller shootin' at a barn with a double-barrelled shot gun. Anyhow, I'll betcha a rich millionaire like Sampson don't know any too much about automobiles himself, bein' too busy with makin' money and the like, eh?"

"I suppose you're gonna make him think that you know more about them gas buckboards than the guy which wrote 'em, eh?" I says.

"You'll never get nowhere!" he answers, lookin' at me like how can a guy live and be so thick behind the ears. "You'll never be nothin' but an average citizen, because you never get a new idea! No, I ain't gonna make Sampson think *I* know more about automobiles than anybody in the world – that's what has queered many a sale. I'm gonna make him think *he* does, and that him buyin' our roadster proves it!"

"I'll bet you could make Rockefeller think they wasn't a nickel in oil!" says the wife admirin'ly. Alex gets up and reaches for his hat.

"If they was enough money in it for me, I'd try it," he says, "and that ain't no lie!"

I didn't see Alex till the next mornin' and then he blows in the flat.

"Hello!" he says. "Here you are as usual, loafin' away the hull mornin'. It's almost eight o'clock, d'ye know that?"

"Sure!" I says. "You can't get me on that one. The answer is seven fifty-five!"

"What d'ye mean, seven fifty-five?" he asks.

"Ain't seven fifty-five almost eight o'clock," I says, "and didn't you ask me if I knew it?"

"Ain't he clever?" says the wife, pattin' me on the back.

Alex looks at me in open disgust.

"If that's bein' clever," he says, "I'm a professor from Harvard! Where d'ye get that stuff?"

"It's a gift!" I says. "What are you doin' here this hour of the day?"

"Hurry up and git through eatin'," he says, "I want you to take a ride with me."

"What have you been pinched for?" I says.

"Will you leave him be?" butts in the wife. "Don't mind him, Alex, he'll go with you. Where are you going?"

"Up to Runyon Q. Sampson's to sell him a Gaflooeey roadster," says Alex. "I got the car right outside now. Just wait till you git a look at it, you'll be crazy to buy one yourself!"

"You said it!" I tells him, puttin' on my coat. "I certainly would be crazy if I bought one of them! Who's gonna drive this up there?"

"I got a mechanic from the shop," says Alex. "A feller which knows so much about automobiles that he could take a pair of pliers and a lug wrench and go clear to Frisco with nothin' else!"

"Not even a car, eh?" I says. "*Some* mechanic!"

"Be still!" says the wife. "Well, Alex, I certainly hope you have all kinds of luck. Let me know how you make out, will you?"

"Sure!" I tells her. "Call up police headquarters in about an hour and you'll prob'ly be able to get all the details, right off the blotter."

We go outside and there's the Gaflooy chummy roadster leanin' right up against the curb. It looked like it might be a regular automobile when it grew up, but just then it seemed like it had been snatched from the cradle before its features was fully formed. Two of them roadsters would of made a nice pair of roller skates and the expense for tires must of been practically nothin', because the ones that was on it looked like a set of washers. The body was painted yellah and the trimmin's was in Alice blue and catsup red.

In the front seat is this guy which Alex claimed was the world's greatest mechanic. You could see that at a glance anyhow, because he was dressed in a pair of overalls that had lasted him ever since he first broke into the automobile game and he carried about three quarts of medium oil on his face and hands.

"Well," says Alex, throwin' out his chest, "what d'ye think old Runyon Q. Sampson will say when he casts his eye over that, eh?"

"You'd only get sore if I told you," I says, "but I'll say this much, Alex. If you can sell him that mechanical toy there on the pretense that it's an automobile, I'm goin' up to-morrow and sell him Grant's Tomb for a paperweight!"

"Git in," pipes Alex, "and stop knockin'!"

"I won't have to knock after we get started – that's if we do," I tells him, forcin' myself into the rear, "the motor will look after that!"

Alex nudges the mechanic.

"This here's my cousin," he tells him. "He ain't a bad feller in spite of that."

He turns around to me, "Joe," he says, "I want you to meet Mister Eddie Worth, the best man on gas engines that ever burnt his hands on an exhaust pipe!"

"Greetin's, Eddie!" I says, shakin' hands with him and gettin' a half pound of grease for nothin'.

"Gimme a cigarette!" answers Eddie. "I been waitin' here an hour for youse guys. The motor is prob'ly all cold now and the starter may gimme an argument."

He gets out and monkeys around the front of the car.

"Ain't it nice and roomy back there?" Alex asks me.

I moved my knees away from my chin so's I could talk.

"Great!" I says. "Only the Gaflooy people is liable to get in trouble on account of them coppin' the design from somebody else."

"What d'ye mean?" he asks me, lookin' puzzled.

"Well," I tells him, "you gotta admit that the seatin' arrangements back here is a dead steal from a can of sardines!"

"Did you ever see anything you couldn't find fault with?" he sneers.

"Yeh," I says. "I once got three nickels in change for a dime."

At this critical moment, the mechanic gets down on his hands and knees in the street and begins to worry the car like a dog with a bone. Then all of a sudden he crawls underneath it and disappears from the public eye. A lot of shippin' clerks, bookkeepers, salesgirls, brokers, lawyers and the like, on their way downtown to their jobs, figures that you can go to work any day, but an auto bein' fixed calls for immediate attention and gets around us in a circle. This seemed to get Alex's goat, but it was huckleberry pie to the mechanic. He crawls out from under, rolls up his sleeves, ruffles his hair, looks over the crowd and rubs his hands together.

"Gimme a cigarette!" he says. "And reach down in that tool box there and hand me up them pliers, a couple of S wrenches, the hammer and a screwdriver!"

The crowd sighs with delight, but Alex leaps off the seat like they was bees in the upholstery.

"What d'ye want all them there tools for?" he yells. "Stop this monkey business, I'm an hour late now! What's the matter with the car?"

The mechanic looks around at the crowd and shakes his head pityin'ly. They give Alex the laugh, and a manicure tells her friend that if she was the mechanic she wouldn't bother with it, but would make Alex fix it himself for gettin' so bold.

"What's the matter with the car?" repeats the mechanic, waggin' his head from side to side with a sarcastic movement. "It's been abused, that's all! I ain't had time to go over it carefully; it'll have to be towed down to the shop where we can git it up on jacks and take it apart. I found a leak in the radiator, the bolts is missin' from the muffler, there's a crack in the rear housin' and the clutch seems to grind a bit."

Alex grits his teeth and grabs hold of the windshield.

"Is that all?" he hisses.

"Well, not *all*, no!" says the mechanic, scratchin' his chin. "They must be a couple of pins sheered off of the differential and the – "

"They ain't no sich a thing!" roars Alex. "This here's a brand new car, right from our factory – you wooden-headed fule! It ain't been run a mile and they ain't a thing the matter with it, not even a scratch on the paint! You was sent up here to drive this car, not to wreck it. You – "

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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