

Lardner Ring

Gullible's Travels, Etc.



Ring Lardner
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Lardner R.

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CARMEN

We was playin' rummy over to Hatch's, and Hatch must of fell in a bed of four-leaf clovers on his way home the night before, because he plays rummy like he does everything else; but this night I refer to you couldn't beat him, and besides him havin' all the luck my Missus played like she'd been bought off, so when we come to settle up we was plain seven and a half out. You know who paid it. So Hatch says:

"They must be some game you can play."

"No," I says, "not and beat you. I can run two blocks w'ile you're stoopin' over to start, but if we was runnin' a foot race between each other, and suppose I was leadin' by eighty yards, a flivver'd prob'ly come up and hit you in the back and bump you over the finishin' line ahead o' me."

So Mrs. Hatch thinks I'm sore on account o' the seven-fifty, so she says:

"It don't seem fair for us to have all the luck."

"Sure it's fair!" I says. "If you didn't have the luck, what would you have?"

"I know," she says; "but I don't never feel right winnin' money at cards."

"I don't blame you," I says.

"I know," she says; "but it seems like we should ought to give it back or else stand treat, either one."

"Jim's too old to change all his habits," I says.

"Oh, well," says Mrs. Hatch, "I guess if I told him to loosen up he'd loosen up. I ain't lived with him all these years for nothin'."

"You'd be a sucker if you did," I says.

So they all laughed, and when they'd quieted down Mrs. Hatch says:

"I don't suppose you'd feel like takin' the money back?"

"Not without a gun," I says. "Jim's pretty husky."

So that give them another good laugh; but finally she says:

"What do you say, Jim, to us takin' the money they lose to us and gettin' four tickets to some show?"

Jim managed to stay conscious, but he couldn't answer nothin'; so my Missus says:

"That'd be grand of you to do it, but don't think you got to."

Well, of course, Mrs. Hatch knowed all the w'ile she didn't have to, but from what my Missus says she could tell that if they really give us the invitation we wouldn't start no fight. So they talked it over between themself w'ile I and Hatch went out in the kitchen and split a pint o' beer, and Hatch done the pourin' and his best friend couldn't say he give himself the worst of it. So when we come back my Missus and Mrs. Hatch had it all framed that the Hatches was goin' to take us to a show, and the next thing was what show would it be. So Hatch found the afternoon paper, that somebody'd left on the street-car, and read us off a list o' the shows that was in town. I spoke for the Columbia, but the Missus give me the sign to stay out; so they argued back and forth and finally Mrs. Hatch says:

"Let's see that paper a minute."

"What for?" says Hatch. "I didn't hold nothin' out on you."

But he give her the paper and she run through the list herself, and then she says:

"You did, too, hold out on us. You didn't say nothin' about the Auditorium."

"What could I say about it?" says Hatch. "I never was inside."

"It's time you was then," says Mrs. Hatch.

"What's playin' there?" I says.

"Grand op'ra," says Mrs. Hatch.

"Oh!" says my Missus. "Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

"What do you say?" says Mrs. Hatch to me.

"I think it'd be grand for you girls," I says. "I and Jim could leave you there and go down on Madison and see Charley Chaplin, and then come back after you."

"Nothin' doin'!" says Mrs. Hatch. "We'll pick a show that everybody wants to see."

Well, if I hadn't of looked at my Missus then we'd of been O. K. But my eyes happened to light on where she was settin' and she was chewin' her lips so's she wouldn't cry. That finished me. "I was just kiddin'," I says to Mrs. Hatch. "They ain't nothin' I'd like better than grand op'ra."

"Nothin' except gettin' trimmed in a rummy game," says Hatch, but he didn't get no rise.

Well, the Missus let loose of her lips so's she could smile and her and Mrs. Hatch got all excited, and I and Hatch pretended like we was excited too. So Hatch ast what night could we go, and Mrs. Hatch says that depended on what did we want to hear, because they changed the bill every day. So her and the Missus looked at the paper again and found out where Friday night was goin' to be a big special night and the bill was a musical show called *Carmen*, and all the stars was goin' to sing, includin' Mooratory and Alda and Genevieve Farr'r, that was in the movies a w'ile till they found out she could sing, and some fella they called Daddy, but I don't know his real name. So the girls both says Friday night was the best, but Hatch says he would have to go to lodge that evenin'.

"Lodge!" says Mrs. Hatch. "What do you care about lodge when you got a chance to see Genevieve Farr'r in *Carmen*?"

"Chance!" says Hatch. "If that's what you call a chance, I got a chance to buy a thousand shares o' Bethlehem Steel. Who's goin' to pay for my chance?"

"All right," says Mrs. Hatch, "go to your old lodge and spoil everything!"

So this time it was her that choked up and made like she was goin' to blubber. So Hatch changed his mind all of a sudden and decided to disappoint the brother Owls. So all of us was satisfied except fifty per cent., and I and the Missus beat it home, and on the way she says how nice Mrs. Hatch was to give us this treat.

"Yes," I says, "but if you hadn't of had a regular epidemic o' discardin' deuces and treys Hatch would of treated us to groceries for a week." I says: "I always thought they was only twelve pitcher cards in the deck till I seen them hands you saved up to-night."

"You lose as much as I did," she says.

"Yes," I says, "and I always will as long as you forget to fetch your purse along."

So they wasn't no come-back to that, so we went on home without no more dialogue.

Well, Mrs. Hatch called up the next night and says Jim had the tickets boughten and we was to be sure and be ready at seven o'clock Friday night because the show started at eight. So when I was down-town Friday the Missus sent my evenin' dress suit over to Katzes' and had it pressed up and when I come home it was laid out on the bed like a corpse.

"What's that for?" I says.

"For the op'ra," she says. "Everybody wears them to the op'ra."

"Did you ask the Hatches what was they goin' to wear?" I says.

"No," says she. "They know what to wear without me tellin' them. They ain't goin' to the Auditorium in their nightgown."

So I clumb into the soup and fish, and the Missus spent about a hour puttin' on a dress that she could have left off without nobody knowin' the difference, and she didn't have time for no supper at all, and I just managed to surround a piece o' steak as big as your eye and spill some gravy on my clo'es when the bell rung and there was the Hatches.

Well, Hatch didn't have no more evenin' dress suit on than a kewpie. I could see his pants under his overcoat and they was the same old bay pants he'd wore the day he got mad at his kid and

christened him Kenneth. And his shoes was a last year's edition o' the kind that's supposed to give your feet a chance, and if his feet had of been the kind that takes chances they was two or three places where they could of got away without much trouble.

I could tell from the expression on Mrs. Hatch's face when she seen our make-up that we'd crossed her. She looked about as comf'table as a Belgium.

"Oh!" she says. "I didn't think you'd dress up."

"We thought you would," says my Frau.

"We!" I says. "Where do you get that 'we'?"

"If it ain't too late we'll run in and change," says my Missus.

"Not me," I says. "I didn't go to all this trouble and expense for a splash o' gravy. When this here uniform retires it'll be to make room for pyjamas."

"Come on!" says Hatch. "What's the difference? You can pretend like you ain't with us."

"It don't really make no difference," says Mrs. Hatch.

And maybe it didn't. But we all stood within whisperin' distance of each other on the car goin' in, and if you had a dollar for every word that was talked among us you couldn't mail a postcard from Hammond to Gary. When we got off at Congress my Missus tried to thaw out the party.

"The prices is awful high, aren't they?" she says.

"Outrageous," says Mrs. Hatch.

Well, even if the prices was awful high, they didn't have nothin' on our seats. If I was in trainin' to be a steeple jack I'd go to grand op'ra every night and leave Hatch buy my ticket. And where he took us I'd of been more at home in overalls and a sport shirt.

"How do you like Denver?" says I to the Missus, but she'd sank for the third time.

"We're safe here," I says to Hatch. "Them French guns can't never reach us. We'd ought to brought more bumbs."

"What did the seats cost?" I says to Hatch.

"One-fifty," he says.

"Very reasonable," says I. "One o' them aviators wouldn't take you more than half this height for a five-spot."

The Hatches had their overcoats off by this time and I got a look at their full costume. Hatch had went without his vest durin' the hot months and when it was alongside his coat and pants it looked like two different families. He had a pink shirt with prune-colored horizontal bars, and a tie to match his neck, and a collar that would of took care of him and I both, and them shoes I told you about, and burlap hosiery. They wasn't nothin' the matter with Mrs. Hatch except she must of thought that, instead o' dressin' for the op'ra, she was gettin' ready for Kenneth's bath.

And there was my Missus, just within the law, and me all spicked and spanned with my soup and fish and gravy!

Well, we all set there and tried to get the focus till about a half-hour after the show was billed to commence, and finally a Lilliputhian with a match in his hand come out and started up the orchestry and they played a few o' the hits and then the lights was turned out and up went the curtain.

Well, sir, you'd be surprised at how good we could hear and see after we got used to it. But the hearin' didn't do us no good – that is, the words part of it. All the actors had been smuggled in from Europe and they wasn't none o' them that could talk English. So all their songs was gave in different languages and I wouldn't of never knew what was goin' on only for Hatch havin' all the nerve in the world.

After the first act a lady that was settin' in front of us dropped somethin' and Hatch stooped over and picked it up, and it was one o' these here books they call a libretto, and it's got all the words they're singin' on the stage wrote out in English.

So the lady begin lookin' all over for it and Hatch was goin' to give it back because he thought it was a shoe catalogue, but he happened to see at the top of it where it says "Price 25 Cents," so

he tossed it in his lap and stuck his hat over it. And the lady kept lookin' and lookin' and finally she turned round and looked Hatch right in the eye, but he dropped down inside his collar and left her wear herself out. So when she'd gave up I says somethin' about I'd like to have a drink.

"Let's go," says Hatch.

"No," I says. "I don't want it bad enough to go back to town after it. I thought maybe we could get it sent up to the room."

"I'm goin' alone then," says Hatch.

"You're liable to miss the second act," I says.

"I'd never miss it," says Hatch.

"All right," says I. "I hope you have good weather."

So he slipped me the book to keep for him and beat it. So I seen the lady had forgot us, and I opened up the book and that's how I come to find out what the show was about. I read her all through, the part that was in English, before the curtain went up again, so when the second act begin I knowed what had came off and what was comin' off, and Hatch and Mrs. Hatch hadn't no idear if the show was comical or dry. My Missus hadn't, neither, till we got home and I told her the plot.

Carmen ain't no regular musical show where a couple o' Yids comes out and pulls a few lines o' dialogue and then a girl and a he-flirt sings a song that ain't got nothin' to do with it. *Carmen's* a regular play, only instead o' them sayin' the lines, they sing them, and in for'n languages so's the actors can pick up some loose change offen the sale o' the liberettos. The music was wrote by George S. Busy, and it must of kept him that way about two mont's. The words was either throwed together by the stage carpenter or else took down by a stenographer outdoors durin' a drizzle. Anyway, they ain't nobody claims them. Every oncet in three or four pages they forget themself and rhyme. You got to read each verse over two or three times before you learn what they're hintin' at, but the management gives you plenty o' time to do it between acts and still sneak a couple o' hours' sleep.

The first act opens up somewheres in Spain, about the corner o' Chicago Avenue and Wells. On one side o' the stage they's a pill mill where the employees is all girls, or was girls a few years ago. On the other side they's a soldiers' garage where they keep the militia in case of a strike. In the back o' the stage they's a bridge, but it ain't over no water or no railroad tracks or nothin'. It's prob'ly somethin' the cat dragged in.

Well, the soldiers stands out in front o' the garage hittin' up some barber shops, and pretty soon a girl blows in from the hero's home town, Janesville or somewheres. She runs a few steps every little w'ile and then stops, like the rails was slippery. The soldiers sings at her and she tells them she's came to look for Don Joss that run the chop-suey dump up to Janesville, but when they shet down on him servin' beer he quit and joined the army. So the soldiers never heard o' the bird, but they all ask her if they won't do just as good, but she says nothin' doin' and skids off the stage. She ain't no sooner gone when the Chinaman from Janesville and some more soldiers and some alley rats comes in to help out the singin'. The book says that this new gang o' soldiers was sent on to relieve the others, but if anything happened to wear out the first ones it must of took place at rehearsal. Well, one o' the boys tells Joss about the girl askin' for him and he says: "Oh, yes; that must be the little Michaels girl from up in Wisconsin."

So pretty soon the whistle blows for noon and the girls comes out o' the pill mill smokin' up the mornin' receipts and a crowd o' the unemployed comes in to shoot the snipes. So the soldiers notices that Genevieve Farr'r ain't on yet, so they ask where she's at, and that's her cue. She puts on a song number and a Spanish dance, and then she slips her bouquet to the Chink, though he ain't sang a note since the whistle blowed. But now it's one o'clock and Genevieve and the rest o' the girls beats it back to the coffin factory and the vags chases down to the Loop to get the last home edition and look at the want ads to see if they's any jobs open with fair pay and nothin' to do. And the soldiers mosey into the garage for a well-earned rest and that leaves Don all alone on the stage.

But he ain't no more than started on his next song when back comes the Michaels girl. It oozes out here that she's in love with the Joss party, but she stalls and pretends like his mother'd sent her to get the receipt for makin' eggs *fo yung*. And she says his mother ast her to kiss him and she slips him a dime, so he leaves her kiss him on the scalp and he asks her if she can stay in town that evenin' and see a nickel show, but they's a important meetin' o' the Maccabees at Janesville that night, so away she goes to catch the two-ten and Don starts in on another song number, but the rest o' the company don't like his stuff and he ain't hardly past the vamp when they's a riot.

It seems like Genevieve and one o' the chorus girls has quarreled over a second-hand stick o' gum and the chorus girl got the gum, but Genevieve relieved her of part of a earlobe, so they pinch Genevieve and leave Joss to watch her till the wagon comes, but the wagon's went out to the night desk sergeant's house with a case o' quarts and before it gets round to pick up Genevieve she's bunked the Chink into settin' her free. So she makes a getaway, tellin' Don to meet her later on at Lily and Pat's place acrost the Indiana line. So that winds up the first act.

Well, the next act's out to Lily and Pat's, and it ain't no Y.M.C.A. headquarters, but it's a hang-out for dips and policemen. They's a cabaret and Genevieve's one o' the performers, but she forgets the words to her first song and winds up with tra-la-la, and she could of forgot the whole song as far as I'm concerned, because it wasn't nothin' you'd want to buy and take along home.

Finally Pat comes in and says it's one o'clock and he's got to close up, but they won't none o' them make a move, and pretty soon they's a live one blows into the joint and he's Eskimo Bill, one o' the butchers out to the Yards. He's got paid that day and he ain't never goin' home. He sings a song and it's the hit o' the show. Then he buys a drink and starts flirtin' with Genevieve, but Pat chases everybody but the performers and a couple o' dips that ain't got nowheres else to sleep. The dips or stick-up guys, or whatever they are, tries to get Genevieve to go along with them in the car w'ile they pull off somethin', but she's still expectin' the Chinaman. So they pass her up and blow, and along comes Don and she lets him in, and it seems like he'd been in jail for two mont's, or ever since the end o' the first act. So he asks her how everything has been goin' down to the pill mill and she tells him that she's quit and became a entertainer. So he says, "What can you do?" And she beats time with a pair o' chopsticks and dances the Chinese Blues.

After a w'ile they's a bugle call somewhere outdoors and Don says that means he's got to go back to the garage. So she gets sore and tries to bean him with a Spanish onion. Then he reaches inside his coat and pulls out the bouquet she give him in Atto First to show her he ain't changed his clo'es, and then the sheriff comes in and tries to coax him with a razor to go back to his job. They fight like it was the first time either o' them ever tried it and the sheriff's leadin' on points when Genevieve hollers for the dips, who dashes in with their gats pulled and it's good night, Mister Sheriff! They put him in moth balls and they ask Joss to join their tong. He says all right and they're all pretty well lit by this time and they've reached the singin' stage, and Pat can't get them to go home and he's scared some o' the Hammond people'll put in a complaint, so he has the curtain rang down.

Then they's a relapse of it don't say how long, and Don and Genevieve and the yeggs and their lady friends is all out in the country somewheres attendin' a Bohunk Sokol Verein picnic and Don starts whinin' about his old lady that he'd left up to Janesville.

"I wisht I was back there," he says.

"You got nothin' on me," says Genevieve. "Only Janesville ain't far enough. I wisht you was back in Hongkong."

So w'ile they're flatterin' each other back and forth, a couple o' the girls is monkeyin' with the pasteboards and tellin' their fortunes, and one o' them turns up a two-spot and that's a sign they're goin' to sing a duet. So it comes true and then Genevieve horns into the game and they play three-handed rummy, singin' all the w'ile to bother each other, but finally the fellas that's runnin' the picnic says it's time for the fat man's one-legged race and everybody goes offen the stage. So the Michaels girl comes on and is gettin' by pretty good with a song when she's scared by the noise o' the gun that's

fired to start the race for the bay-window championship. So she trips back to her dressin'-room and then Don and Eskimo Bill put on a little slap-stick stuff.

When they first meet they're pals, but as soon as they get wise that the both o' them's bugs over the same girl their relations to'rds each other becomes strange. Here's the talk they spill:

"Where do you tend bar?" says Don.

"You got me guessed wrong," says Bill. "I work out to the Yards."

"Got anything on the hip?" says Don.

"You took the words out o' my mouth," says Bill. "I'm drier than St. Petersburg."

"Stick round a w'ile and maybe we can scare up somethin'," says Don.

"I'll stick all right," says Bill. "They's a Jane in your party that's knocked me dead."

"What's her name?" says Don.

"Carmen," says Bill, Carmen bein' the girl's name in the show that Genevieve was takin' that part.

"Carmen!" says Joss. "Get offen that stuff! I and Carmen's just like two pavin' bricks."

"I should worry!" says Bill. "I ain't goin' to run away from no rat-eater."

"You're a rat-eater yourself, you rat-eater!" says Don.

"I'll rat-eat you!" says Bill.

And they go to it with a carvin' set, but they couldn't neither one o' them handle their utensils.

Don may of been all right slicin' toadstools for the suey and Bill prob'ly could of massacred a flock o' sheep with one stab, but they was all up in the air when it come to stickin' each other. They'd of did it better with dice.

Pretty soon the other actors can't stand it no longer and they come on yellin' "Fake!" So Don and Bill fold up their razors and Bill invites the whole bunch to come out and go through the Yards some mornin' and then he beats it, and the Michaels girl ain't did nothin' for fifteen minutes, so the management shoots her out for another song and she sings to Don about how he should ought to go home on account of his old lady bein' sick, so he asks Genevieve if she cares if he goes back to Janesville.

"Sure, I care," says Genevieve. "Go ahead!"

So the act winds up with everybody satisfied.

The last act's outside the Yards on the Halsted Street end. Bill's ast the entire company to come in and watch him croak a steer. The scene opens up with the crowd buyin' perfume and smellin' salts from the guys that's got the concessions. Pretty soon Eskimo Bill and Carmen drive in, all dressed up like a horse. Don's came in from Wisconsin and is hidin' in the bunch. He's sore at Carmen for not meetin' him on the Elevated platform.

He lays low till everybody's went inside, only Carmen. Then he braces her. He tells her his old lady's died and left him the laundry, and he wants her to go in with him and do the ironin'.

"Not me!" she says.

"What do you mean – 'Not me'?" says Don.

"I and Bill's goin' to run a kosher market," she says.

Just about now you can hear noises behind the scenes like the cattle's gettin' theirs, so Carmen don't want to miss none of it, so she makes a break for the gate.

"Where you goin'?" says Joss.

"I want to see the butcherin'," she says.

"Stick round and I'll show you how it's done," says Joss.

So he pulls his knife and makes a pass at her, just foolin'. He misses her as far as from here to Des Moines. But she don't know he's kiddin' and she's scared to death. Yes, sir, she topples over as dead as the Federal League.

It was prob'ly her heart.

So now the whole crowd comes dashin' out because they's been a report that the place is infested with the hoof and mouth disease. They tell Don about it, but he's all excited over Carmen dyin'. He's delirious and gets himself mixed up with a Irish policeman.

"I yield me prisoner," he says.

Then the house doctor says the curtain's got to come down to prevent the epidemic from spreadin' to the audience. So the show's over and the company's quarantined.

Well, Hatch was out all durin' the second act and part o' the third, and when he finally come back he didn't have to tell nobody where he'd been. And he dozed off the minute he hit his seat. I was for lettin' him sleep so's the rest o' the audience'd think we had one o' the op'ra bass singers in our party. But Mrs. Hatch wasn't lookin' for no publicity, on account of her costume, so she reached over and prodded him with a hatpin every time he begin a new aria.

Goin' out, I says to him:

"How'd you like it?"

"Pretty good," he says, "only they was too much gin in the last one."

"I mean the op'ra," I says.

"Don't ask him!" says Mrs. Hatch. "He didn't hear half of it and he didn't understand none of it."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," says I. "Jim here ain't no boob, and they wasn't nothin' hard about it to understand."

"Not if you know the plot," says Mrs. Hatch.

"And somethin' about music," says my Missus.

"And got a little knowledge o' French," says Mrs. Hatch.

"Was that French they was singin'?" says Hatch. "I thought it was Wop or ostrich."

"That shows you up," says his Frau.

Well, when we got on the car for home they wasn't only one vacant seat and, o' course, Hatch had to have that. So I and my Missus and Mrs. Hatch clubbed together on the straps and I got a earful o' the real dope.

"What do you think o' Farr'r's costumes?" says Mrs. Hatch.

"Heavenly!" says my Missus. "Specially the one in the second act. It was all colors o' the rainbow."

"Hatch is right in style then," I says.

"And her actin' is perfect," says Mrs. Hatch.

"Her voice too," says the Wife.

"I liked her actin' better," says Mrs. H. "I thought her voice yodeled in the up-stairs registers."

"What do you suppose killed her?" I says.

"She was stabbed by her lover," says the Missus.

"You wasn't lookin'," I says. "He never touched her. It was prob'ly tobacco heart."

"He stabs her in the book," says Mrs. Hatch.

"It never went through the bindin'," I says.

"And wasn't Mooratory grand?" says the Wife.

"Splendid!" says Mrs. Hatch. "His actin' and singin' was both grand."

"I preferred his actin'," I says. "I thought his voice hissed in the down-stairs radiators."

This give them a good laugh, but they was soon at it again.

"And how sweet Alda was!" my Missus remarks.

"Which was her?" I ast them.

"The good girl," says Mrs. Hatch. "The girl that sung that beautiful aria in Atto Three."

"Atto girl!" I says. "I liked her too; the little Michaels girl. She came from Janesville."

"She did!" says Mrs. Hatch. "How do you know?"

So I thought I'd kid them along.

"My uncle told me," I says. "He used to be postmaster up there."

"What uncle was that?" says my wife.

"He ain't really my uncle," I says. "We all used to call him our uncle just like all these here singers calls the one o' them Daddy."

"They was a lady in back o' me," says Mrs. Hatch, "that says Daddy didn't appear to-night."

"Prob'ly the Missus' night out," I says.

"How'd you like the Tor'ador?" says Mrs. Hatch.

"I thought she moaned in the chimney," says I.

"It wasn't no 'she'," says the Missus. "We're talkin' about the bull-fighter."

"I didn't see no bull-fight," I says.

"It come off behind the scenes," says the Missus.

"When was you behind the scenes?" I says.

"I wasn't never," says my Missus. "But that's where it's supposed to come off."

"Well," I says, "you can take it from me that it wasn't pulled. Do you think the mayor'd stand for that stuff when he won't even leave them stage a box fight? You two girls has got a fine idear o' this here op'ra!"

"You know all about it, I guess," says the Missus. "You talk French so good!"

"I talk as much French as you do," I says. "But not nowheres near as much English, if you could call it that."

That kept her quiet, but Mrs. Hatch buzzed all the way home, and she was scared to death that the motorman wouldn't know where she'd been spendin' the evenin'. And if there was anybody in the car besides me that knowed *Carmen* it must of been a joke to them hearin' her chatter. It wasn't no joke to me though. Hatch's berth was way off from us and they didn't nobody suspect him o' bein' in our party. I was standin' right up there with her where people couldn't help seein' that we was together.

I didn't want them to think she was my wife. So I kept smilin' at her. And when it finally come time to get off I hollered out loud at Hatch and says:

"All right, Hatch! Here's our street. Your Missus'll keep you awake the rest o' the way with her liberetto."

"It can't hurt no more than them hatpins," he says.

Well, when the paper come the next mornin' my Missus had to grab it up and turn right away to the place where the op'ras is wrote up. Under the article they was a list o' the ladies and gents in the boxes and what they wore, but it didn't say nothin' about what the gents wore, only the ladies. Prob'ly the ladies happened to have the most comical costumes that night, but I bet if the reporters could of saw Hatch they would of gave him a page to himself.

"Is your name there?" I says to the Missus.

"O' course not," she says. "They wasn't none o' them reporters tall enough to see us. You got to set in a box to be mentioned."

"Well," I says, "you don't care nothin' about bein' mentioned, do you?"

"O' course not," she says; but I could tell from how she said it that she wouldn't run down-town and horsewhip the editor if he made a mistake and printed about she and her costume; her costume wouldn't of et up all the space he had neither.

"How much does box seats cost?" I ast her.

"About six or seven dollars," she says.

"Well," I says, "let's I and you show Hatch up."

"What do you mean?" she says.

"I mean we should ought to return the compliment," says I. "We should ought to give them a party right back."

"We'd be broke for six weeks," she says.

"Oh, we'd do it with their money like they done it with ours," I says.

"Yes," she says; "but if you can ever win enough from the Hatches to buy four box seats to the op'ra I'd rather spend the money on a dress."

"Who said anything about four box seats?" I ast her.

"You did," she says.

"You're delirious!" I says. "Two box seats will be a plenty."

"Who's to set in them?" ast the Missus.

"Who do you think?" I says. "I and you is to set in them."

"But what about the Hatches?" she says.

"They'll set up where they was," says I. "Hatch picked out the seats before, and if he hadn't of wanted that altitude he'd of bought somewheres else."

"Yes," says the Missus, "but Mrs. Hatch won't think we're very polite to plant our guests in the Alps and we set down in a box."

"But they won't know where we're settin'," I says. "We'll tell them we couldn't get four seats together, so for them to set where they was the last time and we're goin' elsewheres."

"It don't seem fair," says my wife.

"I should worry about bein' fair with Hatch," I says. "If he's ever left with more than a dime's worth o' cards you got to look under the table for his hand."

"It don't seem fair," says the Missus.

"You should worry!" I says.

So we ast them over the followin' night and it looked for a minute like we was goin' to clean up. But after that one minute my Missus began collectin' pitcher cards again and every card Hatch drewed seemed like it was made to his measure. Well, sir, when we was through the lucky stiff was eight dollars to the good and Mrs. Hatch had about broke even.

"Do you suppose you can get them same seats?" I says.

"What seats?" says Hatch.

"For the op'ra," I says.

"You won't get me to no more op'ra," says Hatch. "I don't never go to the same show twicet."

"It ain't the same show, you goof!" I says. "They change the bill every day."

"They ain't goin' to change this eight-dollar bill o' mine," he says.

"You're a fine stiff!" I says.

"Call me anything you want to," says Hatch, "as long as you don't go over eight bucks' worth."

"Jim don't enjoy op'ra," says Mrs. Hatch.

"He don't enjoy nothin' that's more than a nickel," I says. "But as long as he's goin' to welsh on us I hope he lavishes the eight-spot where it'll do him some good."

"I'll do what I want to with it," says Hatch.

"Sure you will!" I says. "You'll bury it. But what you should ought to do is buy two suits o' clo'es."

So I went out in the kitchen and split a pint one way.

But don't think for a minute that I and the Missus ain't goin' to hear no more op'ra just because of a cheap stiff like him welshin'. I don't have to win in no rummy game before I spend.

We're goin' next Tuesday night, I and the Missus, and we're goin' to set somewheres near Congress Street. The show's *Armour's Do Re Me*, a new one that's bein' gave for the first time. It's prob'ly named after some soap.

THREE KINGS AND A PAIR

Accordin' to some authorities, a person, before they get married, should ought to look up your opponent's family tree and find out what all her relatives died of. But the way I got it figured out, if you're sure they did die, the rest of it don't make no difference. In exceptionable cases it may be all right to take a girl that part of her family is still livin', but not under no circumstances if the part happens to be a unmarried sister named Bessie.

We was expectin' her in about two weeks, but we got a card Saturday mornin' which she says on it that she'd come right away if it was all the same to us, because it was the dull season in Wabash society and she could tear loose better at the present time than later on. Well, I guess they ain't no time in the year when society in Wabash would collapse for she not bein' there, but if she had to come at all, the sooner it was over the better. And besides, it wouldn't of did us no good to say aye, yes or no, because the postcard only beat her here by a few hours.

Not havin' no idear she was comin' so soon I didn't meet the train, but it seems like she brought her escort right along with her. It was a guy named Bishop and she'd met him on the trip up. The news butcher introduced them, I guess. He seen her safe to the house and she was there when I got home. Her and my Missus was full of him.

"Just think!" the Missus says. "He writes motion-pitcher plays."

"And gets ten thousand a year," says Bess.

"Did you find out from the firm?" I ast her.

"He told me himself," says Bessie.

"That's the right kind o' fella," says I, "open and above the board."

"Oh, you'll like Mr. Bishop," says Bess. "He says such funny things."

"Yes," I says, "that's a pretty good one about the ten thousand a year. But I suppose it's funnier when he tells it himself. I wisht I could meet him."

"They won't be no trouble about that," says the Missus. "He's comin' to dinner to-morrow and he's comin' to play cards some evenin' next week."

"What evenin'?" I says.

"Any evenin' that's convenient for you," says Bessie.

"Well," I says, "I'm sorry, but I got engagements every night except Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday."

"What about Tuesday?" ast Bessie.

"We're goin' to the op'ra," I says.

"Oh, won't that be grand!" says Bessie. "I wonder what I can wear."

"A kimono'll be all right," I says. "If the door-bell rings, you don't have to answer it."

"What do you mean?" says the Missus. "I guess if we go, Bess'll go with us."

"You'd starve to death if you guessed for a livin'," I says.

"Never mind that kind o' talk," says the Missus. "When we got a visitor we're not goin' out places nights and leave her here alone."

"What's the matter with Bishop?" I says. "They's lots o' two-handed card games."

"I ain't goin' to force myself on to you," says Bessie. "You don't have to take me nowheres if you don't want to."

"I wisht you'd put that in writin' in case of a lawsuit," I says.

"Listen here," says the Frau. "Get this straight: Either Bess goes or I don't go."

"You can both stay home," says I. "I don't anticipate no trouble findin' a partner."

"All right, that's settled," says the Missus. "We'll have a party of our own."

And it must of been goin' to be a dandy, because just speakin' about it made her cry. So I says:

"You win! But I'll prob'ly have to change the tickets."

"What kind o' tickets have you got?" ast the Missus.

"Cheap ones," I says. "Down-stairs, five per."

"How grand!" says Bessie.

"Yes," I says, "but I'm afraid I got the last two they had. I'll prob'ly have to give them back and take three balcony seats."

"That's all right, just so's Bess goes," says the Wife.

"Mr. Bishop's wild about music," says Bessie.

"Well," I says, "he prob'ly gets passes to the pitcher houses."

"He don't hear no real music there," says Bessie.

"Well," says I, "suppose when he comes to-morrow, I mention somethin' about I and the Missus havin' tickets to the op'ra Tuesday night. Then, if he's so wild about music, he'll maybe try to horn into the party and split the expenses fifty-fifty."

"That'd be a fine thing!" says the Frau. "He'd think we was a bunch o' cheap skates. Come right out and ask him to go at your expense, or else don't ask him at all."

"I won't ask him at all," I says. "It was a mistake for me to ever suggest it."

"Yes," says Bessie, "but after makin' the suggestion it would be a mean trick to not go through with it."

"Why?" I ast her. "He won't never know the difference."

"But I will," says Bessie.

"Course you would, dear," says the Missus. "After thinkin' you was goin' to have a man of your own, the party wouldn't seem like no party if you just went along with us."

"All right, all right," I says. "Let's not argue no more. Every time I open my head it costs three dollars."

"No such a thing," says the Missus. "The whole business won't only be two dollars more than you figured on. The tickets you had for the two of us would come to ten dollars, and with Bess and Mr. Bishop goin' it's only twelve, if you get balcony seats."

"I wonder," says Bessie, "if Mr. Bishop wouldn't object to settin' in the balcony."

"Maybe he would," says the Missus.

"Well," I says, "if he gets dizzy and falls over the railin' they's plenty of ushers to point out where he come from."

"They ain't no danger of him gettin' dizzy," says Bessie. "The only thing is that he's prob'ly used to settin' in the high-priced seats and would be embarrassed amongst the riff and raff."

"He can wear a false mustache for a disguise."

"He's got a real one," says Bessie.

"He can shave it off, then," says I.

"I wouldn't have him do that for the world," says Bessie. "It's too nice a one."

"You can't judge a mustache by seein' it oncet," I says. "It may be a crook at heart."

"This ain't gettin' us nowheres," says the Missus. "They's still a question before the house."

"It's up to Bess to give the answer," I says. "Bishop and his lip shield are invited if they'll set in a three-dollar seat."

"It's off, then," says Bessie, and beats it in the guest room and slams the door.

"What's the matter with you?" says the Missus.

"Nothin' at all," I says, "except that I ain't no millionaire scenario writer. Twenty dollars is twenty dollars."

"Yes," the Missus says, "but how many times have you lost more than that playin' cards and not thought nothin' of it?"

"That's different," I says. "When I spend money in a card game it's more like a investment. I got a chance to make somethin' by it."

"And this would be a investment, too," says the Wife, "and a whole lot better chance o' winnin' than in one o' them crooked card games."

"What are you gettin' at?" I ast her.

"This is what I'm gettin' at," she says, "though you'd ought to see it without me tellin' you. This here Bishop's made a big hit with Bess."

"It's been done before," says I.

"Listen to me," says the Frau. "It's high time she was gettin' married, and I don't want her marryin' none o' them Hoosier hicks."

"They'll see to that," I says. "They ain't such hicks."

"She could do a lot worse than take this here Bishop," the Missus says. "Ten thousand a year ain't no small change. And she'd be here in Chi; maybe they could find a flat right in this buildin'."

"That's all right," I says. "We could move."

"Don't be so smart," says the Missus. "It would be mighty nice for me to have her so near and it would be nice for you and I both to have a rich brother-in-law."

"I don't know about that," says I. "Somebody might do us a mischief in a fit o' jealous rage."

"He'd show us enough good times to make up for whatever they done," says the Wife. "We're foolish if we don't make no play for him and it'd be startin' off right to take him along to this here op'ra and set him in the best seats. He likes good music and you can see he's used to doin' things in style. And besides, sis looks her best when she's dressed up."

Well, I finally give in and the Missus called Bessie out o' the despondents' ward and they was all smiles and pep, but they acted like I wasn't in the house; so, to make it realistical, I blowed down to Andy's and looked after some o' my other investments.

We always have dinner Sundays at one o'clock, but o' course Bishop didn't know that and showed up prompt at ten bells, before I was half-way through the comical section. I had to go to the door because the Missus don't never put on her shoes till she's positive the family on the first floor is all awake, and Bessie was baskin' in the kind o' water that don't come in your lease at Wabash.

"Mr. Bishop, ain't it?" I says, lookin' him straight in the upper lip.

"How'd you know?" he says, smilin'.

"The girls told me to be expectin' a handsome man o' that name," I says. "And they told me about the mustache."

"Wouldn't be much to tell," says Bishop.

"It's young yet," I says. "Come in and take a weight off your feet."

So he picked out the only chair we got that ain't upholstered with flatirons and we set down and was tryin' to think o' somethin' more to say when Bessie hollered to us from mid-channel.

"Is that Mr. Bishop?" she yelped.

"It's me, Miss Gorton," says Bishop.

"I'll be right out," says Bess.

"Take it easy," I says. "You mightn't catch cold, but they's no use riskin' it."

So then I and Bishop knocked the street-car service and President Wilson and give each other the double O. He wasn't what you could call ugly lookin', but if you'd come out in print and say he was handsome, a good lawyer'd have you at his mercy. His dimensions, what they was of them, all run perpendicular. He didn't have no latitude. If his collar slipped over his shoulders he could step out of it. If they hadn't been payin' him all them millions for pitcher plays, he could of got a job in a wire wheel. They wouldn't of been no difference in his photograph if you took it with a X-ray or a camera. But he had hair and two eyes and a mouth and all the rest of it, and his clo'es was certainly class. Why wouldn't they be? He could pick out cloth that was thirty bucks a yard and get a suit and overcoat for fifteen bucks. A umbrella cover would of made him a year's pyjamas.

Well, I seen the Missus sneak from the kitchen to her room to don the shoe leather, so I got right down to business.

"The girls tells me you're fond o' good music," I says.

"I love it," says Bishop.

"Do you ever take in the op'ra?" I ast him.

"I eat it up," he says.

"Have you been this year?" I says.

"Pretty near every night," says Bishop.

"I should think you'd be sick of it," says I.

"Oh, no," he says, "no more'n I get tired o' food."

"A man could easy get tired o' the same kind o' food," I says.

"But the op'ras is all different," says Bishop.

"Different languages, maybe," I says. "But they're all music and singin'."

"Yes," says Bishop, "but the music and singin' in the different op'ras is no more alike than lumbago and hives. They couldn't be nothin' differenter, for instance, than *Faust* and *Madame Buttermilk*."

"Unlest it was Scotch and chocolate soda," I says.

"They's good op'ras and bad op'ras," says Bishop.

"Which is the good ones?" I ast him.

"Oh," he says, "*Carmen* and *La Bohemian Girl* and *Ill Toreador*."

"*Carmen's* a bear cat," I says. "If they was all as good as *Carmen*, I'd go every night. But lots o' them is flivvers. They say they couldn't nothin' be worse than this *Armour's Dee Tree Ree*."

"It is pretty bad," says Bishop. "I seen it a year ago."

Well, I'd just been readin' in the paper where it was bran'-new and hadn't never been gave prev'ous to this season. So I thought I'd have a little sport with Mr. Smartenstein.

"What's it about?" I says.

He stalled a w'ile.

"It ain't about much of anything," he says.

"It must be about somethin'," says I.

"They got it all balled up the night I seen it," says Bishop. "The actors forgot their lines and a man couldn't make heads or tails of it."

"Did they sing in English?" I ast him.

"No; Latin," says Bishop.

"Can you understand Latin?" I says.

"Sure," says he. "I'd ought to. I studied it two years."

"What's the name of it mean in English?" I ast.

"You pronounce the Latin wrong," he says. "I can't parse it from how you say it. If I seen it wrote out I could tell."

So I handed him the paper where they give the op'ra schedule.

"That's her," I says, pointin' to the one that was billed for Tuesday night.

"Oh, yes," says Bishop. "Yes, that's the one."

"No question about that," says I. "But what does it mean?"

"I knowed you said it wrong," says Bishop. "The right pronouncement would be: *L. Armour's Day Trey Ray*. No wonder I was puzzled."

"Now the puzzle's solved," I says. "What do them last three words mean? Louie Armour's what?"

"It ain't nothin' to do with Armour," says Bishop. "The first word is the Latin for love. And *Day* means of God, and *Trey* means three, and *Ray* means Kings."

"Oh," I says, "it's a poker game. The fella's just called and the other fella shows down his hand and the first fella had a straight and thought it wasn't no good. So he's su'prised to see what the other

fella's got. So he says: 'Well, for the love o' Mike, three kings!' Only he makes it stronger. Is that the dope?"

"I don't think it's anything about poker," says Bishop.

"You'd ought to know," I says. "You seen it."

"But it was all jumbled up," says Bishop. "I couldn't get the plot."

"Do you suppose you could get it if you seen it again?" I says.

"I wouldn't set through it," he says. "It's no good."

Well, sir, I thought at the time that that little speech meant a savin' of eight dollars, because if he didn't go along, us three could set amongst the riff and raff. I dropped the subject right there and was goin' to tell the girls about it when he'd went home. But the Missus crabbed it a few minutes after her and Bess come in the room.

"Did you get your invitation?" says she to Bishop.

"What invitation?" he says.

"My husban' was goin' to ask you to go with us Tuesday night," she says. "Grand op'ra."

"Bishop won't go," I says. "He's already saw the play and says it ain't no good and he wouldn't feel like settin' through it again."

"Why, Mr. Bishop! That's a terrible disappointment," says the Missus.

"We was countin' on you," says Bessie, chokin' up.

"It's tough luck," I says, "but you can't expect things to break right all the w'ile."

"Wouldn't you change your mind?" says the Missus.

"That's up to your husban'," says Bishop. "I didn't understand that I was invited. I should certainly hate to break up a party, and if I'd knew I was goin' to be ast I would of spoke different about the op'ra. It's prob'ly a whole lot better than when I seen it. And, besides, I surely would enjoy your company."

"You can enjoy ourn most any night for nothin'," I says. "But if you don't enjoy the one down to the Auditorium, they's no use o' me payin' five iron men to have you bored to death."

"You got me wrong," says Bishop. "The piece was gave by a bunch o' supers the time I went. I'd like to see it with a real cast. They say it's a whiz when it's acted right."

"There!" says the Missus. "That settles it. You can change the tickets to-morrow."

So I was stopped and they wasn't no more to say, and after a w'ile we had dinner and then I seen why Bishop was so skinny. 'Parently he hadn't tasted fodder before for a couple o' mont's.

"It must keep you busy writin' them scenarios," I says. "No time to eat or nothin'."

"Oh, I eat oncet in a w'ile even if I don't look it," he says. "I don't often get a chance at food that's cooked like this. Your wife's some dandy little cook!"

"It runs in the family, I guess," says Bessie. "You'd ought to taste my cookin'."

"Maybe he will some day," says the Missus, and then her and Bessie pretended like they'd made a break and was embarrassed.

So when he was through I says:

"Leave Bess take Bishop out in the kitchen and show him how she can wash dishes."

"Nothin' doin'," says the Wife. "I'm goin' to stack them and then I and you's got to hurry and keep our date."

"What date?" I says.

"Over to Hatch's," says the Missus. "You hadn't forgotten, had you?"

"I hadn't forgot that the Hatches was in Benton Harbor," I says.

"Yes," says the Frau, winkin' at me, "but I promised Mrs. Hatch I'd run over there and see that everything was O. K."

So I wasn't even allowed to set down and smoke, but had to help unload the table and then go out in the cold. And it was rotten weather and Sunday and nothin' but water, water everywhere.

"What's the idear?" I ast the Missus when we was out.

"Can't you see nothin'?" she says. "I want to give Bess a chance."

"Chance to what?" I says.

"A chance to talk to him," says the Wife.

"Oh!" says I. "I thought you wanted him to get stuck on her."

"What do you think of him?" says she. "Wouldn't he fit fine in the family?"

"He'd fit in a flute," I says. "He's the skinniest thing I ever seen. It seems like a shame to pay five dollars for a seat for him when him and Bessie could sit in the same seat without contact."

"He is slender," says the Missus. "Prob'ly they been starvin' him where he boards at."

"I bet they wouldn't starve me on ten thousand a year," I says. "But maybe they don't know he's at the table or think he's just one o' the macaroni."

"It's all right for you to make jokes about him," says she, "but if you had his brains we'd be better off."

"If I had his brains," I says, "he'd go up like a balloon. If he lost an ounce, gravity wouldn't have no effect on him."

"You don't have to bulge out to be a man," says the Missus. "He's smart and he's rich and he's a swell dresser and I don't think we could find a better match for Bess."

"Match just describes him," says I.

"You're too cute to live," says the Wife. "But no matter what you say, him and Bess is goin' to hit it off. They're just suited to each other. They're a ideal pair."

"You win that argument," I says. "They're a pair all right, and they'd make a great hand if you was playin' deuces wild."

Well, we walked round till our feet was froze and then we went home, and Bishop says he would have to go, but the Missus ast him to stay to supper, and when he made the remark about havin' to go, he was referrin' to one o'clock the next mornin'. And right after supper I was gave the choice o' takin' another walk or hittin' the hay.

"Why don't we play cards?" I says.

"It's Sunday," says the Missus.

"Has the mayor stopped that, too?" I says.

But she winked at me again, the old flirt, so I stuck round the kitchen till it was pretty near time to wipe the dishes, and then I went to bed.

Monday noon I chased over to the Auditorium and they was only about eighty in line ahead o' me, and I was hopin' the house would be sold out for a week before I got up to the window. While I was markin' time I looked at the pitchers o' the different actors, hung up on the posts to advertise some kind o' hair tonic. I wisht I had Bishop along to tell me what the different names meant in English. I suppose most o' them meant Goatee or Spinach or Brush or Hedge or Thicket or somethin'. Then they was the girls' pitchers, too; Genevieve Farr'r that died in the Stockyards scene in *Carmen*, and Fanny Alda that took the part o' the Michaels girl from Janesville, and Mary Gardner, and Louise Edviney that was goin' to warble for us, and a lot more of all ages and one size.

Finally I got up to the ticket agent's cage and then I didn't only have to wait till the three women behind me done their shoppin', and then I hauled out my two tickets and ast the agent what would he give me for them.

"Do you want to exchange them?" he says.

"I did," says I, "but I heard you was sold out for to-morrow night."

"Oh, no," he says "we got plenty o' seats."

"But nothin' down-stairs, is they?" I says.

"Yes," he says "anywheres you want."

"Well," I says, "if you're sure you can spare them I want four in the place o' these two."

"Here's four nice ones in the seventh row," says he. "It'll be ten dollars more."

"I ain't partic'lar to have them nice," I says.

"It don't make no difference," says he. "The whole down-stairs is five a wallop."

"Yes," I says, "but one o' the four that's goin' is a little skinny fella and another's a refuge from Wabash."

"I don't care if they're all escapades from Milford Junction," he says. "We ain't runnin' no Hoosier Welfare League."

"You're smart, ain't you?" I says.

"I got to be," says the agent.

"But if you was a little smarter you'd be this side o' the cage instead o' that side," says I.

"Do you want these tickets or don't you?" he says.

So I seen he didn't care for no more verbal collisions with me, so I give him the two tickets and a bonus o' ten bucks and he give me back four pasteboards and throwed in a envelope free for nothin'.

I passed up lunch Tuesday because I wanted to get home early and have plenty o' time to dress. That was the idear and it worked out every bit as successful as the Peace Ship. In the first place, I couldn't get in my room because that's where the Missus and Bess was makin' up. In the second place, I didn't need to of allowed any time for supper because there wasn't none. The Wife said her and Bessie'd been so busy with their clo'es that they'd forgot a little thing like supper.

"But I didn't have no lunch," I says.

"That ain't my fault," says the Missus. "Besides, we can all go somewheres and eat after the show."

"On who?" I says.

"You're givin' the party," says she.

"The invitations didn't contain no clause about the inner man," says I. "Furthermore, if I had the ten dollars back that I spent to-day for tickets, I'd have eleven dollars altogether."

"Well," says the Missus, "maybe Mr. Bishop will have the hunch."

"He will if his hearin' 's good," says I.

Bishop showed up at six-thirty, lookin' mighty cute in his waiter uniform. After he'd came, it didn't take Bess long to finish her toilet. I'd like to fell over when I seen her. Some doll she was, too, in a fifty-meg evenin' dress marked down to thirty-seven. I know, because I had helped pick it out for the Missus.

"My, you look sweet!" says Bishop. "That's a beautiful gown."

"It's my favoright," says Bessie.

"It don't take a person long to get attached to a pretty dress," I says.

The Missus hollered for me to come in and help her.

"I don't need no help," she says, "but I didn't want you givin' no secrets away."

"What are you goin' to wear?" says I.

"Bess had one that just fits me," she says. "She's loanin' it to me."

"Her middle name's Generous," I says.

"Don't be sarcaistical," says the Missus. "I want sis to look her best this oncet."

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