

The MAN WHO MARRIED AN HOTEL

By P.G. Wodehouse

PEACE had come at last. The Great War, with all its horrors,—its spy plays, its war novels, its articles by our military expert, and its revues with patriotic first-act finales—had

passed away like a dark cloud. The time of Reconstruction had arrived, and all the old problems had sneaked back like unwanted dogs from the background into which war had thrust them. There they all were, clamouring for attention, just as they had been five years ago. England was asking herself: "How about Ireland? How about Labour: And what 'on earth are we to do with Archie?"

To be exact, this last problem was the private perplexity of the Moffam family. It exercised them to the exclusion of all the others.

Archie was a good chap. Everybody admitted that, though his family were perhaps a little less enthusiastic than the outside public. He was All Right, a sportsman, one of the lads, and a good egg. But he did not seem able to make a living. Just before the war started he had passed affably through the Bankruptcy Court and had turned up at home, cheerfully confident that somebody would do something for him. As a matter of fact, somebody did. A perfect stranger. The late Kaiser, in fact. He kept Archie busier than he had ever been in his life for just over five years. But now that period of activity was over, and Archie was back home again, very hard and fit, with a questioning look in the eye which he turned upon his family, which said plainer than if he had spoken the words: "Well, old beans, how do we go? What about it, what?"

It was his brother Rupert, the head of the family, who finally answered the question.

"I think, old man," he said to Archie in the smoking-room at the Beefsteak Club, "you'd better trot over to America and see

if you can't wangle something over there. Land of Opportunity, and all that sort of thing, you know."

Archie was agreeable. If he lacked most of the qualities that make for material success, he

had at any rate one of them—the willingness to try anything once.

"Just as you say," he replied. "I'd be glad to take a stab at it. As a matter of fact, I've one or two pretty good pals in America. Met 'em in France. There was one chappie—he was a cook in the Rainbow Division—I got very thick with. He asked me to look him up if I ever came over. His pater's a millionaire."

"I can get you several letters of introduction. There's a Mrs. van Tuyl, who was over here two or three years ago. You'll like her."

"Right-o! And as regards what you might call the sordid side of the jolly old expedition—"

"Oh, I'll see that you have plenty of money." Rupert paused for a moment a little thoughtfully. "Enough money," he went on. "But, of course, the idea is that you'll try to get a job, what?"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie.

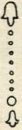
Over in New York, Daniel Brewster, the proprietor of the Cosmopolis Hotel, went placidly about his business. No sympathetic angel whispered the details of this conversation in his ear. "See," as the poet says, "how, regardless of their doom, the little victims play." That was exactly Daniel Brewster's position.

Mutual antipathy is a curious thing, odder even than love at first sight. Scores of people were extremely fond of Archie Moffam, and Daniel Brewster likewise had a large circle of friends. Each, therefore, one would say, had the elements of popularity in him, and there was no reason why they

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A. WALLIS MILLS.



should not have got along capitally together, except that they did not.

Of course, their first meeting was unfortunate. Its conditions were such that neither saw the other at his best and sunniest. It happened in the lobby of the Cosmopolis Hotel, on the morning after Archie's arrival in New York. Archie opened the proceedings by addressing the desk-clerk. There was gloom on Archie's brow, and the old fighting spirit of the Moffams gleamed in his eye.

"I say, laddie," said Archie, "I want to see the manager."

"Is there anything I could do, sir?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, old man, I want to kick up a fearful row, and it seems hardly fair to lug you into it. The blighter whose head I want on a charger is the jolly old manager!"

At this point a massive, grey-haired man, who had been standing close by, gazing on the lobby with a look of restrained severity, as if daring it to start anything, joined in the conversation.

"I am the manager," he said.

His eye was cold and hostile. Others, it seemed to say, might like Archie Moffam, but he did not. As a matter of fact, Daniel Brewster was bristling for combat. What he had overheard had shocked him to the core of his being. He owned the Cosmopolis Hotel. It was his own private, personal property, and the thing dearest to him in the world, after his daughter Lucille. He prided himself on the fact that his hotel was not like other hotels, which were run by impersonal companies and shareholders and boards of directors, and consequently lacked the paternal touch which made the Cosmopolis what it was. At other hotels things went wrong, and clients complained. At the Cosmopolis things never went wrong, because he was there on the spot to see that they didn't, and as a result clients never complained. Yet here was this long, thin, string-bean of a young man actually registering annoyance and dissatisfaction before his very eyes. His dislike of Archie Moffam began in that instant.

"What is your complaint?" he inquired, frigidly.

Archie attached himself to the top button of Mr. Brewster's coat, and was immediately dislodged by an irritable jerk of the other's body.

"I took a room here last night," said Archie, quivering with self-pity and reaching absently for the button again. "A dashed expensive room. And there was a beastly tap outside somewhere that went 'drip-drip-drip' all night and kept me awake."

Mr. Brewster was annoyed. He felt that a chink had been found in his armour. Not even the most paternal hotel-proprietor can

keep an eye on every tap in his establishment.

"And I put my boots outside my door when I went to bed, and this morning they hadn't been touched. I give you my solemn word! Not touched!"

"Naturally," said Mr. Brewster. "My employes are honest."

"But I wanted them cleaned, dash it!"

"There is a shoe-shining parlour in the basement. At the Cosmopolis shoes left outside bedroom doors are not cleaned."

"Then I think the Cosmopolis is a bally rotten hotel!"

Mr. Brewster's compact frame quivered. The unforgivable insult had been offered. Question the legitimacy of Mr. Brewster's parentage, knock Mr. Brewster down and walk on his face with spiked shoes, and you did not irremediably close all avenues to a peaceful settlement. But make a remark like Archie's about his hotel, and war was definitely declared. He stiffened.

"In that case," he said, "I must ask you to give up your room."

"I'm going to give it up! I wouldn't stay in the bally place another minute."

Mr. Brewster walked away, and Archie charged, snorting, round to the cashier's window to demand his bill. It had been his intention in any case, though for dramatic purposes he concealed it from his adversary, to leave the hotel that morning. An exchange of telegrams had resulted in an invitation from his brother Rupert's friend, Mrs. van Tuyl, to her house-party at Bar Harbour, and Archie proposed to go there at once. But oh, the difference between leaving the Cosmopolis as he would have done and leaving it as he did!

"Well," mused Archie, on his way to the station, "one thing's certain. I'll never set foot in that bally place again!"

But nothing in this world is certain.

It was about two weeks later that a telegram arrived for Mr. Daniel Brewster. Not that this was unusual, for he was a man who received many telegrams. But this one was rather interesting. It ran:—

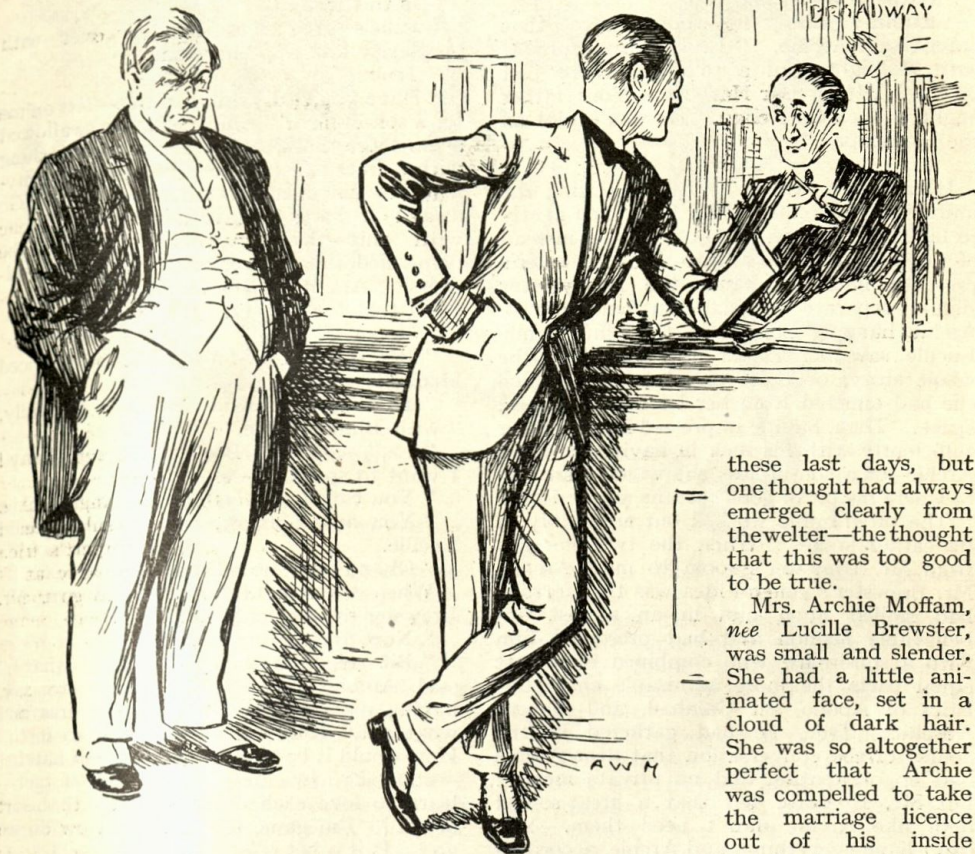
*Returning New York to-day with darling Archie. Lots of love from us both.—
Lucille.*

Mr. Brewster was puzzled, not to say startled. When you send your only daughter away to Bar Harbour for the summer minus any entanglements and she mentions in a telegram that she has acquired a darling Archie who sends you lots of love, you are naturally startled. It occurred to Mr. Brewster that by neglecting a careful study of his mail during the past week, as was his bad habit when busy, he had passed an opportunity of keeping abreast with current

happenings. He recollected now that a letter had arrived from Lucille a day or two before, and he had put it away unopened till he should have leisure to read it. He was extremely busy just now with the preliminaries of building a new hotel, and Lucille was a dear girl, but her letters when on a vacation seldom contained anything that couldn't wait a few days for a reading. He now leaped into the elevator, sprinted

Mr. Brewster sat down abruptly and breathed heavily through his nose.

At about the same time, in a drawing-room on the express from Bar Harbour, Archie Moffam sat contemplating his bride. His brain had been in something of a whirl



"'I SAY, LADDIE,' SAID ARCHIE, 'I WANT TO SEE THE MANAGER—I WANT TO KICK UP A FEARFUL ROW.'"

along the corridor leading to his suite, and made a dive for the letter.

It was a long letter. Boiling it down, it announced that Lucille had met the most angelic man, an Englishman, and they were both so much in love with each other that they had simply been compelled to slip off and get married at once. Otherwise, they would have kept him posted about things earlier. And, anyway, darling Archie had wanted a quiet wedding, because he said a fellow looked such a chump getting married. And he must learn to love Archie, because Archie was all set to love him very much.

these last days, but one thought had always emerged clearly from the welter—the thought that this was too good to be true.

Mrs. Archie Moffam, *nie* Lucille Brewster, was small and slender. She had a little animated face, set in a cloud of dark hair. She was so altogether perfect that Archie was compelled to take the marriage licence out of his inside pocket at intervals and study it furtively, to make himself realize

that this miracle of good fortune had really happened to him.

"Honestly, old bean—I mean, dear old thing—I mean darling," said Archie, "I can't believe it!"

"What?"

"What I mean is, I can't understand why you should have married me."

Lucille's eyes opened. She squeezed his hand.

"Why, you're the most wonderful thing in the world, precious! Surely you know that?"

"Absolutely escaped my notice. Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure! You wonder-child! Nobody could see you without loving you!"

Archie heaved an ecstatic sigh. Then a thought crossed his mind. "It was a thought which frequently came to mar his bliss.

"I say, I wonder if your father will think that!"

"Of course he will!"

"We've rather sprung this, as it were, on the old lad," said Archie, dubiously. "What sort of a man is your father?"

"Father's a darling, too."

"Rummy thing he should own that hotel," said Archie. "I had a frightful row with a blighter of a manager there just before I left for Bar Harbour. Your father ought to sack that chap. He was a blot on the landscape!"

It had been settled by Lucille during the journey that Archie should be broken gently to his father-in-law. That is to say, instead of bounding blithely into Mr. Brewster's presence hand in hand, the happy pair should separate for half an hour or so, Archie hanging around in the offing while Lucille saw her father and told him the whole story, or those chapters of it which she had omitted from her letter for want of space. Then, having impressed Mr. Brewster sufficiently with his luck in having acquired Archie for a son-in-law, she would lead him to where his bit of good fortune awaited him.

The programme worked out admirably in its earlier stages. When the two emerged from Mr. Brewster's room to meet Archie, Mr. Brewster's general idea was that fortune had smiled upon him in an almost unbelievable fashion and had presented him with a son-in-law who combined in almost equal parts the more admirable characteristics of Apollo, Sir Galahad, and Marcus Aurelius. True, he had gathered in the course of the conversation that dear Archie had no occupation and no private means: but Mr. Brewster felt that a great-souled man like Archie didn't need them. You can't have everything, and Archie, according to Lucille's account, was practically a hundred per cent. man in Soul, Looks, Manners, Amiability, and Breeding. These are the things that count. Mr. Brewster proceeded to the lobby in a glow of optimism and geniality.

Consequently, when he perceived Archie, he got a bit of a shock.

"Hullo-ullo-ullo!" said Archie, advancing happily.

"Archie, darling, this is father," said Lucille.

"Good Lord!" said Archie.

There was one of those silences. Mr. Brewster looked at Archie. Archie gazed at Mr. Brewster. Lucille, perceiving without

understanding why that the big introduction scene had stubbed its toe on some unlooked-for obstacle, waited anxiously for enlightenment. Meanwhile, Archie continued to inspect Mr. Brewster, and Mr. Brewster continued to drink in Archie.

After an awkward pause of about three and a quarter minutes, Mr. Brewster swallowed once or twice, and finally spoke.

"Lu!"

"Yes, father?"

"Is this true?"

Lucille's grey eyes clouded over with perplexity and apprehension.

"True?"

"Have you really inflicted this—*this* on me for a son-in-law?" Mr. Brewster swallowed a few more times, Archie the while watching with a frozen fascination the rapid shimmering of his new relative's Adam's-apple. "Go away! I want to have a few words alone with this—this—*wassyourdamname*?" he demanded, in an overwrought manner, addressing Archie for the first time.

"I told you, father. It's Moom."

"Moom?"

"It's spelt M-o-f-f-a-m, but pronounced Moom."

"To rhyme," said Archie, helpfully, "with Bluffinghame."

"Lu," said Mr. Brewster, "run away! I want to speak to—to—to—"

"You called me *this* before," said Archie.

"You aren't angry, father, dear?" said Lucille.

"Oh, no! Oh, no! I'm tickled to death!"

When his daughter had withdrawn, Mr. Brewster drew a long breath.

"Now, then!" he said.

"Bit embarrassing, all this, what!" said Archie, chattily. "I mean to say, having met before in less happy circs and what not. Rum coincidence and so forth! How would it be to bury the jolly old hatchet—start a new life—forgive and forget—learn to love each other—and all that sort of rot? I'm game if you are. How do we go? Is it a bet?"

Mr. Brewster remained entirely unsoftened by this manly appeal to his better feelings.

"What the devil do you mean by marrying my daughter?"

Archie reflected.

"Well, it sort of happened, don't you know! You know how these things *are*! Young yourself once, and all that. I was most frightfully in love, and Lu seemed to think it wouldn't be a bad scheme, and one thing led to another, and—well, there you are, don't you know!"

"And I suppose you think you've done pretty well for yourself?"

"Oh, absolutely! As far as I'm concerned,



"ARCHIE, DARLING, THIS IS FATHER." 'GOOD LORD!' SAID ARCHIE."

everything's topping! I've never felt so braced in my life!"

"Yes!" said Mr. Brewster, with bitterness. "I suppose, from your view-point, everything is 'topping.' You haven't a cent to your name, and you've managed to fool a rich man's daughter into marrying you. I suppose you looked me up in Bradstreet before committing yourself?"

This aspect of the matter had not struck Archie until this moment.

"I say!" he observed, with dismay. "I never looked at it like that before! I can see that, from your point of view, this must look like a bit of a wash-out!"

"How do you propose to support Lucille, anyway?"

Archie ran a finger round the inside of his collar. He felt embarrassed. His father-in-law was opening up all kinds of new lines of thought.

"Well, there, old bean," he admitted, frankly, "you rather have me!" He turned the matter over for a moment. "I had a sort of idea of, as it were, working, if you know what I mean."

"Working at what?"

"Now, there again you stump me somewhat! The general scheme was that I should kind of look around, you know, and nose about and buzz to and fro till something

turned up. That was, broadly speaking, the notion!"

"And how did you suppose my daughter was to live while you were doing all this?"

"Well, I think," said Archie, "I *think* we rather expected *you* to rally round a bit for the nonce!"

"I see! You expected to live on me?"

"Well, you put it a bit crudely, but—as far as I had mapped anything out—that *was* what you might call the general scheme of procedure. You don't think much of it, what? Yes? No?"

Mr. Brewster exploded.

"No! I do not think much of it! Good God! You go out of my hotel—*my* hotel—calling it all the names you could think of—roasting it to beat the band—"

"Trifle hasty!" murmured Archie, apologetically. "Spoke without thinking. Dashed tap had gone *drip-drip-drip* all night—kept me awake—hadn't had breakfast—bygones be bygones—!"

"Don't interrupt! I say, you go out of my hotel, knocking as none has ever knocked it since it was built, and you sneak straight off and marry my daughter without my knowledge."

"Did think of wiring for blessing. Slipped

the old bean, somehow. You know how one forgets things!"

"And now you come back and calmly expect me to fling my arms round you and kiss you, and support you for the rest of your life!"

"Only while I'm nosing about and buzzing to and fro."

"Well, I suppose I've got to support you. There seems no way out of it. I'll tell you exactly what I propose to do. You think my hotel is a pretty poor hotel, eh? Well, you'll have plenty of opportunity of judging, because you're coming to live here. I'll let you have a suite and I'll let you have your meals, but outside of that—nothing doing! Nothing doing! Do you understand what I mean?"

"Absolutely! You mean 'Napoo'!"

"You can sign checks for a reasonable amount in my restaurant, and the hotel will look after your laundry. But not a cent do you get out of me. And, if you want your shoes shined, you can pay for it yourself in the basement. If you leave them outside your door, I'll instruct the floor-waiter to throw them down the air-shaft. Do you understand? Good! Now, is there anything more you want to ask?"

Archie smiled a propitiatory smile.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was going to ask if you would stagger along and have a bite with us in the grill-room?"

"I will not!"

"I'll sign the check," said Archie, ingratiatingly. "You don't think much of it? Oh, right-o!"

There is a perverseness in human nature which never permits us to know when we are well off. A canvass of the opinions of the inhabitants of New York would certainly have resulted in a verdict that Archie Moffam, the perpetual free guest of the Cosmopolis, was on velvet. The Cosmopolis is the best-run hotel in the city, and famous alike for the comfort of its rooms and the excellence of its cuisine. To be set down at the Cosmopolis with a free suite and a free hand in the matter of signing checks for meals would have been most New Yorkers' idea of heaven. Yet Archie's generous soul chafed him. For a time he was perfectly happy; then, gradually, "shades of the prison-house," so to speak, "began to close upon the growing boy." In other words, he got dashed fed-up with the place.

After a month of breakfasting, lunching, and dining at the Cosmopolis, his chief problem was the difficulty of making up his mind whether he loathed the grill-room or the main dining-room the more intensely.

It was at the end of this first month that he became really intimate with Salvatore.

Salvatore was the dark, sinister-looking waiter who attended, among other tables, to the one at the far end of the grill-room, at which Archie usually sat. For several weeks Archie's conversations with the other dealt exclusively with the bill of fare and its contents; but, as time went by and he began to long for human companionship, he found himself becoming more personal. Besides, there was something about the waiter's demeanour that appealed to Archie's always sympathetic heart. Salvatore was a man with a grievance. You could tell that by looking at him; and Archie had been looking at him every day for a month. Whether he was merely homesick and brooding on the lost delights of his sunny native land, or whether his trouble was more definite, could only be ascertained by inquiry. So Archie inquired. Even before the war and its democratizing influences, Archie had always lacked that reserve which characterizes most Britons; and since the war he had looked on nearly everybody he met as a brother.

"There's something on your mind, old thing," said Archie.

"Sare?"

"I say there would appear to be something on your mind besides your hair. What seems to be the trouble?"

The waiter shrugged his shoulders, as if indicating an unwillingness to inflict his troubles upon one of the tipping classes.

"Come on!" said Archie, encouragingly. "All pals here! Barge along, old bean, and let's have it!"

Salvatore, thus urged, proceeded, in a hurried undertone—with one eye on the head waiter—to lay bare his soul. What he said was not very coherent, but Archie could make out enough of it to gather that it was a sad story of excessive hours.

"Always," said Salvatore. "Always—always—I am in this dam hotel!"

"I know what you mean, laddie!" said Archie, feelingly. He tapped the waiter earnestly on the chest with his oyster-fork. "My dear old chap," he said, "there's only one thing to be done. You must strike! It's the only scheme. Everybody's doing it now!"

Salvatore shrugged his shoulders again. It appeared that he had already sounded the other waiters guardedly on the matter of a strike, but the spineless peons seemed to be unwilling to jeopardize their jobs by making any demonstration. And you couldn't strike by yourself.

The reasonableness of this was plain to Archie. He mused a while. The waiter's hard case touched him.

"I'll tell you what," he said, at last. "You come along with me when you're

off duty, and we'll beard the old boy in his den. I'll introduce you, and you get that extract from Italian opera off your chest which you've just been singing to me. It can't fail. He'll probably hand you his bank-roll."

The result was that Mr. Brewster, busy with accounts in his private room, was infuriated that evening by the entry of his son-in-law, heading a procession consisting of himself and a dark, furtive person who looked like something connected with the executive staff of the Black Hand.

"Not interrupting you, what?" began Archie, amiably. "I say, this sportsman here has a few well-chosen words to say to you on the subject of dirty work at the cross-roads, so to speak. It seems the lad is oppressed and ground down and what not. He's a waiter in the grill-room, so I suppose you're probably old pals. If not, let me do the honours. Mr. Brewster, our courteous and popular boss. Salvatore (I wouldn't swear that's his name, but it

sounded like it), the Italian Whirlwind. Seconds out! Time! Go to it, laddie! Spill the bad news!"

And before Mr. Brewster could get his breath Salvatore had begun to spill. It was not such a long harangue as he had given Archie in the grill-room, for in the middle of it Mr. Brewster, finding speech, ejected him from the room. But it sufficed to bring the hotel-proprietor to boiling-point. Though not a linguist, he could follow the discourse closely enough to realize that the waiter was dissatisfied with conditions in his hotel. And we have already seen Mr. Brewster's attitude towards people who criticized the Cosmopolis.

"You're fired!" said Mr. Brewster.

Salvatore receded, muttering what sounded like a passage from Dante.

"And I wish to heaven," added Mr. Brewster, eyeing his son-in-law malignantly, "I could fire you!"

That night, meeting his father-in-law



"BEFORE MR. BREWSTER COULD GET HIS BREATH SALVATORE HAD BEGUN. THE HARANGUE SUFFICED TO BRING THE HOTEL-PROPRIETOR TO BOILING-POINT."

in the elevator, Archie found occasion to touch upon Salvatore again.

"I say, that chappie with the grievance, whom you slung out this evening. I don't know if it interests you, but he appears to be slightly narked. Peeved to a degree, if you know what I mean."

Mr. Brewster signified that he was not interested. Archie chuckled amusedly.

"He said he meant to pay you out. He didn't specify how. I say," said Archie, cheerfully, "perhaps he means to waylay you in a dark alley somewhere and insert about six inches of a stiletto in your lower ribs. Rather a lark, what! I understand these Italian chappies are always doing that sort of thing. Oh, well, you've had a long and happy life!"

Archie's optimism, however, was not rewarded. Day followed day, and Mr. Brewster preserved an unpunctured skin; and his manner towards his son-in-law was becoming more and more a manner that would have caused gossip on the plantation if Simon Legree had exhibited it in his relations with Uncle Tom. Mr. Brewster's normal distaste for his daughter's husband was increased about this time by the fact that he was worried over business matters; and, when your man of affairs is worried over business, he is apt to become irritable even with his nearest and dearest. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that the spectacle of his son-in-law mooning about the hotel should have afflicted Mr. Brewster to some extent. At any rate, whether it is to be wondered at or not, it did.

The details of the business which was worrying Mr. Brewster were at first hidden from Archie, and he made no effort to probe into them. It was enough for his simple, unspoiled nature that his father-in-law should be worried. That was happiness enough for him.

It was Lucille who apprised him of the nature of the trouble.

"Archie, darling," said Lucille, one afternoon as they sat at lunch, "it's such a shame about father!"

There was a troubled look in Lucille's grey eyes. Life was not running as it should these days.

"I know!" said Archie. "I was hoping that Italian chappie would have done something definite by this time."

Lucille regarded him with surprise.

"Why, has father been talking to you?"

"He hasn't been very chatty of late. What do you mean?"

"Well, you spoke as if you knew all about it. I mean, all about Salvatore. The waiter, you know, whom father dismissed."

"I remember the chappie. What's he been doing?"

"Well, you know father wants to build a new hotel."

"I heard something about it. But he doesn't confide in me much, you know."

"Well, he does want to build an hotel, and he thought he'd got the site, and everything, and could start building right away, when this hitch occurred."

"What hitch, queen of my soul?"

The waiter was hovering over their table with dishes. Lucille waited till he had gone.

"Well," she said, "this man Salvatore's mother owns a little newspaper and tobacco shop right in the middle of the site where father, poor darling, wants to build; and there's no way of getting him out without buying the shop, and he won't sell. At least, he's made his mother promise that she won't sell."

"A boy's best friend is his mother," said Archie, approvingly.

"So father's in despair."

"I knew old friend Salvatore would come out strong in the end if you only gave him time. Great pal of mine. Man of ripe intellect."

Lucille's small face lightened. She gazed at Archie with proud affection. She had known all along that he was the one to solve this difficulty.

"You're wonderful, darling! Is he really a friend of yours?"

"Absolutely! Quite the old college chum!"

"Then it's all right. If you went to him and got him to sell the shop, father would be happy."

"I know. That is the objection, of course."

"Think how grateful father would be to you! It would make all the difference."

Archie turned this over in his mind.

"I see what you mean. How much did your father offer the Johnnie for his shop?"

"I don't know. There is father. Call him over and ask him."

Archie glanced over to where Mr. Brewster had sunk moodily into a chair at a neighbouring table.

"You call him," he said. "You know him better."

"Let's go over to him."

They crossed the room. Lucille sat down opposite her father. Archie draped himself over a chair in the background.

"Father, dear," said Lucille. "Archie has got an idea!"

"Archie?" said Mr. Brewster, incredulously.

"This is me," said Archie, indicating himself with a spoon. "The tall, distinguished-looking bird."

"What new fool-thing is he up to now?"
 "It's a splendid idea, father. He wants to help you over your new hotel."
 "Wants to run it for me, I suppose?"
 "By Jove!" said Archie, reflectively.
 "That's not a bad scheme! I never thought of running an hotel. I shouldn't mind taking a stab at it."

"He has thought of a way of getting rid of Salvatore and his shop."

For the first time Mr. Brewster's interest in the conversation seemed to stir. He looked sharply at his son-in-law.

"Don't call me old companion!"

"All wrong, laddie! Nothing like it, dear heart! No good at all, friend of my youth! Take it from your Uncle Archibald! I'm a student of human nature, and I know a thing or two!"

"That's not much," growled Mr. Brewster, who was finding his son-in-law's superior manner a little trying.

"Now, don't interrupt, father!" said Lucille, severely. "Can't you see that Archie is going to be tremendously clever in a minute?"

"He's got to show me!"



"He has, has he?" he said. Archie balanced a roll on a fork and inserted a plate underneath. The roll bounded away into a corner.

"Sorry!" said Archie. "My fault, absolutely! I owe you a roll. I'll sign a check for it. Oh, about this sportsman Salvatore. Well, it's like this, you know. He and I are great pals. I've known him for years and years. At least, it seems like years and years. Lu was suggesting that I seek him out in his lair and ensnare him with my diplomatic manner and superior brain power and what not."

"It was your idea, precious," said Lucille. Mr. Brewster was silent. Much as it went against the grain to have to admit it, there seemed to be something in this.

"What do you propose to do?"

"Become a jolly old ambassador. How much did you offer the chappie?"

"Three thousand dollars. Twice as much as the place is worth. He's holding out on me for revenge."

"Ah, but how did you offer it to him, what? I mean to say, I bet you got your lawyer to write him a letter full of whereases, peradventures, and parties of the first part, and so forth. No good, old companion!"

"MY DEAR OLD TOP, I'M SORRY TO SPOIL YOUR DAY-DREAMS AND ALL THAT, BUT AREN'T YOU FORGETTING THAT THE SHOP BELONGS TO ME?"

"What you ought to do," said Archie, "is to let me go and see him, taking the stuff in crackling bills. I'll roll them about on the table in front of him. That'll fetch him!" He prodded Mr. Brewster encouragingly with a roll. "I'll tell you what to do. Give me three thousand of the best

and crispest, and I'll undertake to buy that shop. It can't fail, laddie!"

"Don't call me laddie!" Mr. Brewster pondered. "Very well," he said at last. "I didn't know you had so much sense," he added, grudgingly.

"Oh, positively!" said Archie. "Beneath a rugged exterior I hide a brain like a buzz-saw. Sense? I exude it, laddie; I drip with it!"

There were moments during the ensuing days when Mr. Brewster permitted himself to hope; but more frequent were the moments when he told himself that a pronounced chump like his son-in-law could not fail somehow to make a mess of the negotiations. His relief, therefore, when Archie curveted into his private room and announced that he had succeeded was great.

"You really managed to make that wop sell out?"

Archie brushed some papers off the desk with a careless gesture, and seated himself on the vacant spot.

"Absolutely! I spoke to him as one old friend to another, sprayed the bills all over the place; and he sang a few bars from 'Rigoletto,' and signed on the dotted line."

"You're not such a fool as you look," owned Mr. Brewster.

Archie scratched a match on the desk and lit a cigarette.

"It's a jolly little shop," he said. "I took quite a fancy to it. Full of newspapers, don't you know, and cheap novels, and some weird-looking sort of chocolates, and cigars with the most fearfully attractive labels. I think I'll make a success of it. It's bang in the middle of a dashed good neighbourhood. One of these days somebody will be building a big hotel round about there, and that'll help trade a lot. I look forward to ending my days on the other side of the counter with a full set of white whiskers and a skull-cap, beloved by everybody. Everybody'll say, 'Oh, you must patronize that quaint, delightful old blighter! He's quite a character.'"

Mr. Brewster's air of grim satisfaction had given way to a look of discomfort, almost of alarm. He presumed his son-in-law was merely indulging in badinage; but even so, his words were not soothing.

"Well, I'm much obliged," he said. "That infernal shop was holding up everything. Now I can start building right away."

Archie raised his eyebrows.

"But, my dear old top, I'm sorry to spoil your day-dreams and stop you chasing rain-bows, and all that, but aren't you forgetting that the shop belongs to me? I don't at all know that I want to sell, either!"

"I gave you the money to buy that shop!"

"And dashed generous of you it was, too!" admitted Archie, unreservedly. "It was the first money you ever gave me, and I shall always tell interviewers that it was you who founded my fortunes. Some day, when I'm the Newspaper-and-Tobacco-Shop King, I'll tell the world all about it in my autobiography."

Mr. Brewster rose dangerously from his seat.

"Do you think you can hold me up, you-wop worm?"

"Well," said Archie, "the way I look at it is this. Ever since we met, you've been after me to become one of the world's workers, and earn a living for myself, and what not; and now I see a way to repay you for your confidence and encouragement. You'll look me up sometimes at the good old shop, won't you?" He slid off the table and moved towards the door. "There won't be any formalities where you are concerned. You can sign checks for any reasonable amount any time you want a cigar or a stick of chocolate. Well, toodle-oo!"

"Stop!"

"Now what?"

"How much do you want for that damned shop?"

"I don't want money. I want a job. If you are going to take my life-work away from me, you ought to give me something else to do."

"What job?"

"You suggested it yourself the other day. I want to manage your new hotel."

"Don't be a fool! What do you know about managing an hotel?"

"Nothing. It will be your pleasing task to teach me the business while the shanty is being run up."

There was a pause, while Mr. Brewster chewed three inches off a pen-holder.

"Very well," he said at last.

"Topping!" said Archie. "I knew you'd see it. I'll study your methods, what! Adding some of my own, of course. You know, I've thought of one improvement on the Cosmopolis already."

"Improvement on the Cosmopolis!" cried Mr. Brewster, gashed in his finest feelings.

"Yes. There's one point where the old Cosmop slips up badly, and I'm going to see that it's corrected at my little shack. Customers will be entreated to leave their boots outside their doors at night, and they'll find them cleaned in the morning. Well, pip, pip! I must be popping. Time is money, you know, with us business men."

"Where are you going?" asked Mr. Brewster, suspiciously.

Archie breathed a sigh of ecstatic anticipation.

"I'm going over to the Ritz to get a bite to eat!" he said.