THE WATER CURE

Ring Lardner

Table of Contents

THE WATER CURE

Ring Lardner

WHEN it comes to makin' matches I hand it to the women. When it comes to breakin' 'em leave it to the handsomer sex. The thirteenth o' June didn't light on a Friday, but old Tuesday come through in the pinch with just as good results. Dear little Sister−in−law Bess blew in on the afternoon train from Wabash. She says she was makin' us a surprise visit. The surprise affected me a good deal like the one that was pulled on Napoleon at Waterloo, Ia. "How long are you goin' to light up our home?" I ast her at the supper table. "I haven't made up my mind," says she. "That's all you've missed, then," I says. "Don't mind him!" says my Missus.

"He's just a tease. You look grand and we're both tickled to death to have you here. You may stay with us all summer."

"No question about that," I says.

"Not only may, but li'ble to."

"If I do," says Bess, "it'll be on my sister's account, not yourn."

"But I'm the baby that settles your sister's account," I says; "and it was some account after you left us last winter. With your visit and our cute little trip to Palm Beach, I'm not what you'd call cramped for pocket space."

"I guess I can pay my board," says Bess. "I guess you won't!" says the Wife.

"The second guess is always better," says I.

"As for you entertainin' me, I don't expect nothin' like that," says Bess. "If you was lookin' for a quiet time," I says, you made a big mistake by leavin' Wabash."

"And I'm not lookin' for no quiet time, neither," Bess says right back at me. "Well," says I, "about the cheapest noisy time I can recommend is to go over and set under the elevated."

"Maybe Bess has somethin' up in her sleeve," the Missus says, smilin'. "You ain't the only man in Chicago."

"I'm the only one she knows," says I, "outside o' that millionaire scenario writer that had us all in misery last winter. And I wouldn't say he was over−ardent after he'd knew her a week."

Then the Wife winked at me to close up and I didn't get the dope till we was alone together.

"They correspond," she told me. "Absolutely, says I.

"I mean they been writin' letters to each other," says the Missus. "Who's been buyin' Bishop's stamps?"

I ast her. "I guess a man can buy his own stamps when he gets ten thousand a year," says she.

"Anyway, the reason Bess is here is to see him."

"Is it illegal for him to go to Wabash and see her?" I says. "He's too busy to go to Wabash," the Wife says. "I don't see how a man could be too busy for that," says I.

"She phoned him this noon," says the Missus. "He couldn't come over here to−night, but tomorrow he's goin' to take her to the ball game."

"Where all the rest o' the busy guys hangs out," I says. "Aren't the White Sox havin' enough bad luck without him?"

That reminded me that I'd came home before the final extras was out; so I put on my hat and went over to Tim's to look at the score−board. It took me till one A. M. to memorize the batteries and everything. The Wife was still awake yet when I got home and I had enough courage to resume hostilities. "If what you told me about Bishop and Bess is true," I says, I guess I'll pack up and go fishin' for the rest o' the summer."

"And leave me to starve, I suppose!"

says she. "Bishop'll take care of the both o' you, I says. "If he don't I'll send you home a couple o' carp."

"If you go and leave me it's the last time!" she says. "And it shows you don't care nothin' about me."

"I care about you, all right," I says; "but not enough to be drove crazy in my own house."

"They's nothin' for you to go crazy about," she says. "If Bess and Mr. Bishop wants to tie up leave 'em alone and forget about 'em."

"I'd like nothin' better," I says; "but you know they'll give us no chance to forget about 'em."

"Why not?" she ast me. "Because they'd starve to death without us," I says. "Starve to death!" she says.

"On ten thousand a year!"

"Now here!" I says. "Who told you he got that trifle?"

"He did," says the Wife. "And how do you know he wasn't overestimatin'?" I ast her. "You mean how do I know he wasn't lyin'?" she says. "Yes, says I.

"Because he's a gentleman," she says.

"And he told you that, too?" I ast.

"No," she says. "I could tell that by lookin' at him."

"All right, Clara Voyant!" I says.

"And maybe you can tell by lookin' at me how much money he borrowed off'n me and never give back."

"When? How much?" she says.

"One at a time, please," says I.

"The amount o' the cash transaction was a twenty−dollar gold certificate. And the time he shook me down was the evenin' he took us to hear Ada, and was supposed to be payin' for it."

"I can't believe it," says the Missus. "All right," I says.

"When he brings Bessie home from the ball game to−morrow I'll put it up to him right in front o' you.

"No! You mustn't do that!" she says.

"I won't have him insulted."

"You would have him insulted if I knowed how to go about it," I says. "You stayed over to Tim's too long,"

says the Wife. "Yes, says I, "and I made arrangements to stay over there every time Bishop comes here."

"Suit yourself," she says, and pretended like she was asleep. Well, the next mornin' I got to thinkin' over what I'd said and wonderin' if I'd went too strong. But I couldn't see where. This bird was a dude that had got acquainted with Bessie on the train when she was on her way here to visit us last winter. He'd infested the house all the while she was with us. He'd gave us that ten−thousand−dollar yarn and told us he made it by writin' movin'−pitcher plays, but we never seen none o' them advertised and never run into anybody that had heard of him. The Missus had picked him out for Bess the minute she seen him. Bessie herself had fell for him strong. To keep 'em both from droppin' cyanide in my gruel, I'd took him along with us to see The Love o' Three Kings, besides buyin' his groceries and provisions for pretty near a week and standin' for the upkeep on the davenport where him and Bess held hands. Finally, after he'd went six days without submittin' even circumstantial evidence that he'd ever had a dime, I burned him into sayin' he'd give us a party. Then they'd been an argument over where he'd take us. He'd suggested a vaudeville show, but I jumped on that with both feet. Bessie held out for a play, but I told her they wasn't none that I'd leave a young unmarried sister−in−law o' mine go to. "Oh," Bess had said, "they must be some that's perfectly genteel."

"Yes, I told her, "there is some; but they're not worth seein'."

So they'd ast what was left and I'd mentioned grand opera. "They're worse than plays, the most o' them," was the Wife's cut−in. "But all the risky parts is sang in Latin and Greek," I'd said. Well, Bishop put up a great fight, but I wouldn't break ground, and finally he says he would take us to opera if he could get tickets.

"I'm down−town every day, I'd told him. "I'll have 'em reserved for you.

But no; he wouldn't see me put to all that trouble for the world; he'd do the buyin' himself.

So Ada was what he took us to on a Sunday night, when the seats was cut to half price. And when I and him went out between acts to try the limes he catched me with my guard down and frisked the twenty. Now Bess had tipped off the Wife that her and Bishop was practically engaged, but the night after Ada was the last night of her visit and Bishop hadn't never came round. So Bessie'd cried all night and tried to get him by phone before she left next day; but neither o' them two acts done her any good. It looked like he was all through. On the way to the train Bess and the Missus had ruined three or four handkerchiefs and called the bird every low−down flirt they could think of. I didn't say a word; nor did I perfume my linen with brine.

Here, though, was Bess back in town and Old Man Short makin' up to her again. And they'd been correspondin'. The second time was li'ble to take, unless outside brains come to the rescue.

If I'd thought for a minute that they'd leave us out of it and go away somewhere by themself and live the North Side, or one o' the suburbs, or Wabash I wouldn't of cared how many times they married each other. But I had him spotted for a loafer that couldn't earn a livin', and I knowed what the maritile nuptials between Bess and he meant it meant that I and the Missus would have all the pleasures o' conductin' a family hotel without the pain o' makin' out receipts. Now I always wanted a boy and a girl, but I wanted 'em to be kind o' youngish when I got 'em.

I never craved addin' a married couple to my family not even if they was crazy about rummy and paid all their bills. And when it come to Bishop and Bess, well, they was just as welcome to my home as Villa and all the little Villains. It wasn't just Bishop, with his quaint habit o' never havin' car fare. Bess, in her way, was as much of a liability. You couldn't look at her without a slight relapse. She had two complexions A. M. and P. M. The P. M. wasn't so bad, but she could of put the other in her vanity box for a mirror. Her nose curved a little away from the batsman and wasn't no wider than a Julienne potato, and yet it had to draw in to get between her eyes. Her teeth was real pretty and she always kept her lips ajar. But the baseball reporters named Matty's favorite delivery after her chin, and from there down the curves was taboo. Where she made a hit with Bishop was laughin' at everything he pulled that is, he thought she was laughin'. The fact was that she was snatchin' the chance to show more o' them teeth. They wasn't no use showin' 'em to me; so I didn't get laughs from her on my stuff, only when he or some other stranger was round. And if my stuff wasn't funnier than Bishop's I'll lay down my life for Austria. As a general rule, I don't think a man is justified in interferin' with other people's hymeneal intentions, but it's different when the said intentions is goin' to make your own home a hell. It was up to me to institute proceedin's that would check the flight o' these two cooin' doves before their wings took 'em to Crown Point in a yellow flivver. And I seen my duty all the more clear when the pair come home from the ball game the day after Bessie's arrival, and not only told me that the White Sox got another trimmin' but laughed when they said it. "Well, Bishop," I says when we set down to supper, "how many six−reelers are you turnin' out a day? "About one every two weeks is the limit," says Bishop. "I'll bet it is," I says. "And who are you workin' for now?"

"The Western Film Corporation," he says. "But I'm goin' to quit 'em the first o' the month."

"What for?" I ast him. "Better offer from the Criterion," he says.

"Better'n ten thousand a year?" says I.

"Sure!" he says. "Twenty dollars better?" I says.

He blushed and the Wife sunk my shin with a patent−leather torpedo. Then Bishop says: "The raise I'm gettin' would make twenty dollars look sick."

"If you'd give it to me," I says, "I'd try and nurse it back to health."

After supper the Missus called me out in the kitchen to bawl me out. "It's rough stuff to embarrass a guest," she says. "He's always embarrassed," says I.

"But you admit now, don't you, that I was tellin' the truth about him touchin' me?"

"Yes, she says. "Well," says I, "if he's so soiled with money, why don't he pay a little puny debt?"

"He's probably forgot it," says she.

"Did he look like he'd forgot it?" I ast her. And she had no come−back. But when my Missus can overlook a guy stingin' me for legal tender, it means he's in pretty strong with her. And I couldn't count on no help from her, even if Bishop was a murderer, so long as Bess wanted him. The next mornin', just to amuse myself, I called up the

Criterion people and ast them if they was goin' to hire a scenario writer name Elmer Bishop. "Never heard of him," was what they told me. So I called up the Western. "Elmer Bishop?" they says. "He ain't no scenario writer. He's what we call an extra. He plays small parts sometimes."

"And what pay do them extras drag down?" I ast. "Five dollars a day, but nothin' when they don't work," was the thrillin' response.

My first idea was to slip this dope to the Wife and Bess both. But what'd be the use? They wouldn't believe it even if they called up and found out for themself; and if they did believe it, Bessie'd say a man's pay didn't make no difference where true love was concerned, and the Missus would take her part, and they'd cry a little, and wind up by sendin' for Bishop and a minister to make sure o' the ceremony comin' off before Bishop lost his five−dollar job and croaked himself. Then I thought o' forbiddin' him the hospitality o' my abode. But that'd be just as useless. They'd meet somewheres else, and if I threatened to lock Bess out, the Wife'd come back with a counter−proposition to not give me no more stewed beets or banana souffl s. Besides that, strong−arm methods don't never kill sweet love, but act just the opposite and make the infected parties more set on gettin' each other. This here case was somethin' delicate, and if a man didn't handle it exactly right you wouldn't never get over bein' sorry. So, instead o' me quarrelin' with the Wife and Bess, and raisin' a fuss at Bishop spendin' eight evenin's a week with us, I kept my clam closed and tried to be pleasant, even when I'd win a hand o' rummy and see this guy carelessly lose a few of his remainin' face cards under the table. We had an awful spell o' heat in July and it wasn't no fun playin' cards or goin' to pitcher shows, or nothin'. Saturday afternoons and Sundays, I and the Missus would go over to the lake and splash. Bess only went with us a couple o' times; that was because she couldn't get Bishop to come along. He'd always say he was busy, or he had a cold and was afraid o' makin' it worse. So far as I was concerned, I managed to enjoy my baths just as much with them two stayin' away.

The sight o' Bessie in a bathin' suit crabbed the exhilaratin' effects o' the swim. When she stood up in the water the minnows must of thought two people was still−fishin'. It was one night at supper, after Bessie'd been with us about a month, when the idear come to me.

Bishop was there, and I'd been lookin' at he and Bess, and wonderin' what they'd seen in each other. The Missus ast 'em if they was goin' out some place. "No," says Bessie. "It's too hot and they ain't no place to go."

"They's lots o' places to go," says the Wife. "For one thing, they're havin' grand opera out to Ravinia Park."

"I wouldn't give a nickel to see a grand opera," says Bess, "unless it was Ada, that Elmer took us to last winter."

So they went on talkin' about somethin' else.

I don't know what, because the minute she mentioned Ada I was all set. I guess maybe I'd better tell you a little about this here opera, so's you'll see how it helped me out. A fella named Gus Verdi wrote it, and the scenes is laid along the Illinois Central, round Memphis and Cairo. Ada's a big wench, with a pretty voice, and she's the hired girl in the mayor's family. The mayor's daughter gets stuck on a fat little tenor that you can't pronounce and that should of had a lawn mower ran over his chin.

The tenor likes the colored girl better than the mayor's daughter, and the mayor's daughter tries every way she can think of to bust it up and grab off the tenor for herself; but nothin' doin'! Finally the mayor has the tenor pinched for keepin' open after one o'clock, and the law's pretty strict; so, instead o' just finin' him, they lock him up in a safety−deposit vault. Well, the wench is down in the vault, too, dustin' off the papers and cleanin' the silver, and they don't know she's there; so the two o' them's locked up together and can't get out. And when they' can't get away and haven't got nobody else to look at or talk to, they get so's they hate each other; and finally they can't stand it no longer and they both die. They's pretty music in it, but if old Gus had of seen the men that was goin' to be in the show he'd of laid the scenes in i3eardstown instead o' Memphis. Well, do you get the idear? If the

mayor's daughter had of been smart, instead o' tryin' to keep the tenor and Ada from bein' with each other she'd of locked 'em up together a long while ago, and, first thing you know, they'd of been sick o' one another; and just before they died she could of let 'em out and had the tenor for herself without no argument. And the same thing would work with Bishop and Bess. In all the time o' their mutual courtship they hadn't been together for more'n five or six hours at a time, and never where one o' them couldn't make a quick duck when they got tired.

Make 'em stick round with each other for a day, or for two days, without no chance to separate, and it was a cinch that the alarm clock would break in on Love's Young Dream. But, for some reason or other, I didn't have no safety−deposit vault and they wasn't no room in the flat that they couldn't get out of by jumpin' from the window. How was I goin' to work it? I thought and thought; and figured and figured; and it wasn't till after I'd went to bed that the solution come.

A boat trip to St. Joe! I and the Missus and the two love birds. And I'd see to it that the chaperons kept their distance and let Nature take its course. We'd go over some Saturday afternoon and come back the next night. That'd give 'em eight or nine hours Saturday and from twelve to sixteen hours Sunday to get really acquainted with each other. And if they was still on speakin' terms at the end o' that time I'd pass up the case as incurable. You see, I had it doped that Bishop was afraid o' water or else he wouldn't of turned down all our swimmin' parties. I wouldn't leave him a chance to duck out o' this because I wouldn't tell nobody where we was goin'. It'd be a surprise trip. And they was a good chance that they'd both be sick if it was the least bit rough, and that'd help a lot. I thought of Milwaukee first, but picked St. Joe because it's dry. A man might stand for Bess a whole day and more if he was a little bleareyed from Milwaukee's favorite food.

The trip would cost me some money, but it was an investment with a good chance o' big returns.

I'd of been willin' to take 'em to Palm Beach for a month if that'd been the only way to save my home. When Bishop blew in the next evenin' I pulled it on 'em. "Bishop," I says, a man that does as much brain work as you ought to get more recreation."

"I guess I do work too hard," he says modestly. "I should think," I says, that you'd give yourself Saturday afternoons and Sundays off."

"I do, in summer," he says. "That's good," I says. "I was thinkin' about givin' a little party this comin' week−end; and, o' course, I wanted you to be in on it."

The two girls got all excited. "Party! says the Missus. "What kind of a party? "Well," I says, I was thinkin' about takin' you and Bishop and Bess out o' town for a little trip."

"Where to?" ast the Wife. "That's a secret," I says. "You won't know where we're goin' till we start. All I'll tell you is that we'll be gone from Saturday afternoon till Monday mornin'."

"Oh, how grand!" says Bessie.

"And think how romantic it'll be, not knowin' where we're headed!"

"I don't know if I can get away or not," says 'Bishop. "I pay all expenses," says I.

"Oh, Elmer, you've just got to go!"

says Bess. "The trip's off if you don't," I says. "If you don't say yes I'll never speak to you again," says Bessie. For a minute I hoped he wouldn't say yes; but he did. Then I told 'em that the start would be from our house at a quarter to one Saturday, and to pack up their sporty clothes. The rest o' the evenin' was spent in them tryin' to

guess where we was goin'. It got 'em nothin', because I wouldn't say aye, yes or no to none o' their guesses. When I and the Missus was alone, she says: "Well, what's the idear?"

"No idear at all," I says, "except that our honeymoon trip to Palm Beach was a flivver and I feel like as if I ought to make up to you for it. And besides that, Bessie's our guest and I ought to do somethin' nice for she and her friend."

"I'd think you must of been drinkin' if I didn't know better," she says. "You never do give me credit for nothin'," says I. "To tell the truth, I'm kind of ashamed o' myself for the way I been actin' to'rd Bishop and Bess; but I'm willin' to make amends before it's too late. If Bishop's goin' to be one o' the family I and him should ought to be good friends."

"That's the way I like to hear you talk," says the Wife. "But remember," I says, this trip ain't only for their benefit, but for our'n too. And from the minute we start till we get home us two'll pal round together just like we was alone. We don't want them buttin' in on us and we don't want to be buttin' in on them."

"That suits me fine!" says she.

"And now maybe you'll tell me where we're goin'."

"You promise not to tell?" I ast her.

"Sure!" she says. "Well," I says, that's one promise you'll keep."

And I buried my good ear in the feathers.

At twenty minutes to two, Saturday afternoon, I landed my entire party at the dock, foot o' Wabash Avenue. "Goody! says Bess. "We're goin' acrost the lake."

"If the boat stays up."

"I don't know if I ought to go or not," says Bishop. "I'd ought to be where I can keep in touch with the Criterion people."

"They got a wireless aboard," I says.

"Yes, says Bishop; "but they wouldn't know where to reach me."

"You got time to phone 'em before we sail," says I.

"No, he hasn't," says Bessie.

"He ain't goin' to take no chance o' missin' this boat. He can send 'em a wireless after we start."

So that settled Bishop, and he had to walk up the gangplank with the rest of us. He looked just as pleased as if they'd lost his laundry. I checked the baggage and sent the three o' them up on deck, sayin' I'd join 'em later. Then I ast a boy where the bar was. "Right in there," he says, pointin'.

"But you can't get nothin' till we're three miles out."

So I went back to the gangplank and started off the boat. A man about four years old, with an addin' machine in his hand, stopped me. "Are you goin' to make the trip?" he ast me. "What do you think I'm on here for to borrow a match?" says I.

"Well," he says, you can't get off."

"You're cross!" I says. "I bet your milk don't agree with you.

I started past him again, but he got in front o' me. "You can get off, o' course," he says; "but you can't get back on. That's the rules."

"What sense is they in that?" I ast him. "If I let people off, and on again, my count would get mixed up," he says. "Who are you? says I.

"I'm the government checker," he says. "Chess?" says I. "And you count all the people that gets on?"

"That's me," he says. "How many's on now?" I ast him. "Eight hundred−odd," he says. "I ast you for the number, not the description," I says. "How many's the limit?" I ast him. "Thirteen hundred," he says. "And would the boat sink if they was more'n that?" says I.

"I don't know if it would or wouldn't," he says, but that's all the law allows."

For a minute I felt like offerin' him a lump sum to let seven or eight hundred more on the boat and be sure that she went down; meantime I'd be over gettin' a drink. But then I happened to think that the Missus would be among those lost; and though a man might do a whole lot better the second time, the chances was that he'd do a whole lot worse. So I passed up the idear and stayed aboard, prayin' for the time when we'd be three miles out on Lake Michigan. It was the shortest three miles you ever seen.

We hadn't got out past the Municipal Pier when I seen a steady influx goin' past the engine−room and into the great beyond. I followed 'em and got what I was after. Then I went up on deck, lookin' for my guests. I found 'em standin' in front o' one o' the lifeboats. "Why don't you get comfortable?" I says to Bishop. "Why don't you get chairs and enjoy the breeze?"

"That's what I been tellin' 'em," says the Missus; "but Mr. Bishop acts like he was married to this spot."

"I'm only thinkin' of your wife and Bessie," says Bishop. "If anything happened, I'd want 'em to be near a lifeboat."

"Nothin's goin' to happen," I says.

"They hasn't been a wreck on this lake for over a month. And this here boat, the City o' Benton Harbor, ain't never sank in her life."

"No," says Bishop; "and the Chicora and Eastland never sank till they sunk."

"The boats that sinks," I says, "is the boats that's overloaded. I was talkin' to the government checker−player down−stairs and he tells me that you put thirteen hundred on this boat and she's perfectly safe; and they's only eight hundred aboard now."

"Then why do they have the lifeboats?" ast Bishop. "So's you can go back if you get tired o' the trip," I says. "I ought to be back now," says Bishop, "where the firm can reach me."

"We ain't more'n two miles out," I says. "If your firm's any good they'll drag the bottom farther out than this. Besides,"

I says, if trouble comes the lifeboats would handle us."

"Yes, says Bishop; "but it's women and children first."

"Sure!" I says. "That's the proper order for drownin'. The world couldn't struggle along without us ten−thousand−dollar scenario writers."

"They couldn't be no trouble on such a lovely day as this," says Bess. "That's where you make a big mistake," I says. "That shows you don't know nothin' about the history o' Lake Michigan."

"What do you mean?" ast Bishop. "All the wrecks that's took place on this lake," I says, has happened in calm weather like to−day. It's just three years ago this July, I says, when the City of Ypsilanti left Grand Haven with about as many passengers as we got to−day. The lake was just like a billiard table and no thought o' danger.

Well, it seems like they's a submerged water oak about three miles from shore that you're supposed to steer round it. But this pilot hadn't never made the trip before, and, besides that, he'd been drinkin' pretty heavy; so what does he do but run right plump into 'the tree, and the boat turned a turtle and all the passengers was lost except a tailor named Swanson."

"But that was just an unreliable officer," says Bessie. "He must of been crazy.

"Crazy! says I. "They wouldn't nobody work on these boats unless they was crazy.

It's bound to get 'em."

"I hope we got a reliable pilot to−day, says Bishop. "He's only just a kid," I says; "and I noticed him staggerin' when he come aboard. But, anyway, you couldn't ask for a better bottom than they is right along in here; nice clean sand and hardly any weeds."

"What time do we get to St. Joe?"

ast Bishop. "About seven if we don't run into a squall," I says. Then I and the Wife left 'em and went round to another part o' the deck and run into squalls of all nationalities. Their mothers had made a big mistake in bringin' 'em, because you could tell from their faces and hands that they didn't have no use for water. "They all look just alike," says the Missus. "I don't see how the different mothers can tell which is their baby.

"It's fifty−fifty, I says.

"The babies don't look no more alike than the mothers. The mothers is all named Jennie, and all perfect cubes and fond of apples, and ought to go to a dentist. Besides," I says, "suppose they did get mixed up and swap kids, none o' the parties concerned would have reasons to gloat. And the babies certainly couldn't look no more miserable under different auspices than they do now."

We walked all round the deck, threadin' our way among the banana peelin's, and lookin' our shipmates over. "Pick out somebody you think you'd like to meet," I told the Wife, "and I'll see if I can arrange it."

"Thanks," she says; "but I'll try and not get lonesome, with my husband and my sister and my sister's beau along."

"It's nice for you to say it," says I; "but you want to remember that we're leavin' Bess and Bishop to themself, and that leaves you and I to ourself, and they ain't no two people in the world that can spend two days alone together without gettin' bored stiff. Besides, you don't want to never overlook a chance to meet highclass people."

"When I get desperately anxious to meet high−class people," she says, I'll be sure and pick out the Saturday afternoon boat from Chicago to St. Joe."

"You can't judge people by their looks," says I. "You haven't heard 'em talk."

"No; and couldn't understand 'em if I did," she says. "I'll bet some o' them's just as bright as we are," I says. "I'm not lookin' for bright companionship," she says. "I want a change."

"That's just like I told you, says I. "You're bound to get tired o' one person, no matter how much they sparkle, if you live with 'em long enough."

We left the deck and went down−stairs. They was two or three people peerin' in the engine−room and the Missus made me stop there a minute. "What for?" I ast her. "I want to see how it works," she says. "Well," says I, when we'd started on again, "I can drop my insurance now."

"Why? says the Missus. "I don't never need to worry about you starvin'," I says. "With the knowledge you just picked up there, I bet you could easy land a job as engineer on one o' these boats."

"I'd do about as good as you would at it," she says. "Sure; because I didn't study it," I says. "What makes the boat run?" I ast her. "Why, the wheel," she says. "And who runs the wheel?" I ast her.

"The pilot," says she. "And what does the engineer do?" I says. "Why, I suppose he keeps the fire burnin'," she says. "But in weather like this what do they want of a fire?"

"I suppose it gets colder out in the middle o' the lake," she says. "No," says I; "but on Saturdays they got to keep a fire goin' to heat the babies' bottles."

We went in the room next to the bar. A boy set at the piano playin' Sweet Cider Time in Moonshine Valley and some Hawaiian native melodies composed by a Hungarian waiter that was too proud to fight.

Three or four couple was dancin', but none o' them was wrynecked enough to get the proper pose. The girls looked pretty good and was probably members o' the Four Hundred employed in the Fair. The boys would of been handsomer if the laundry hadn't failed to bring back their other shirt in time.

A big guy in a uniform come by and went into the next room. "Is that the captain?"

ast the Wife. "No," I says, that's the steward."

"And what does he do?" she ast me.

"He hangs round the bar," I says, "and looks after the stews."

"Have they really got a bar?" she says. "I'll find out for sure if you'll wait here a minute," says I, and led her to a chair where she could watch 'em wrestle. In the other room I stood next to a Greek that charged ten cents on Sundays and holidays. He was all lit up like the Municipal Pier. "Enjoyin' the trip?" I ast him. "Too rough; too rough!" he says, only I don't do the dialect very good. "I bet you never got that shine at your own stand," says I.

"Too hot to work!" says he. "I don't have to work. I got the mon'."

"Yes, I says; "and the bun."

A little way off from us was four other political enemies o' J. Frank Hanly, tellin' my Greek friend in tonsorial tones that if he didn't like his Uncle Sammy he knowed what he could do.

"Don't you like your Uncle Sammy? I ast him. "I don't have to work," he says.

"I got the mon'."

"Then why don't you take them boys' advice," I says, and go back to your home o'er the sea?"

"Too rough; too rough!" he says; and in the twenty minutes I stood there with him, findin' out whether they was really a bar, he didn't say nothin' except that he had the mon', and he didn't have to work, and somethin' was too rough. I and the Missus went back up on deck. I steered for the end o' the boat that was farthest from where we'd left Bess and Bishop, but they'd began to get restless, and we run into them takin' a walk. "Where you been?" ast Bessie. "Down watchin' 'em dance," says the Missus. "Is they a place to dance aboard?" ast Bishop. But I didn't want 'em to dance, because that'd be an excuse not to say nothin' to each other for a w'ile.

So I says: "They's a place, all right; but five or six couple's already on the floor, and when you get more'n that trottin' round at once it's li'ble to rock the boat and be disastrous."

I took the Wife's arm and started to move on.

"Where you goin'?" says Bishop. "Just for a stroll round the decks," says I.

"We'll go along," he says. I seen the treatment was beginnin' to work.

"Nothin' doin'!" I says. "This is one of our semi−annual honeymoons and we can't use no outside help."

A few minutes before we hit St. Joe we seen 'em again, settin' down below, afraid to dance and entirely out o' conversation. They was havin' just as good a time as Jennie's babies. "We're pretty near in," I says, "and 'twas one o' the smoothest crossin's I ever made."

"They couldn't nobody get sick in weather like this," says Bess. "No," I says, but you take a smooth Saturday afternoon and it generally always means a rough Sunday night."

"Ain't they no railroad between here and Chi?" ast Bishop. "Not direct," I says. "You have to go to Lansing and then cut across to Fort Wayne. If you make good connections you can do it in a day and two nights, but most o' the way is through the copper ranges and the trains keeps gettin' later and later, and when they try to make up time they generally always slip offen the track and spill their contents."

"If it looks like a storm to−morrow night," says Bess, "we might wait over and go home Monday.

That idear scared Bishop more'n the thought of a wreck. "Oh, no!" he says. "I got to be back on the job Monday mornin'." "If it's as rough as I think it's goin' to be," says I, "you won't feel like rippin' off no scenarios Monday.

We landed and walked up the highest hill in Michigan to the hotel. I noticed that Miss Bessie carried her own suit−case. "Well," I says, I suppose you two kids would rather eat your supper by yourself, and I and the Missus will set at another table."

"No, no!" says Bess. "It'll be pleasanter to all eat together."

So for about half an hour we had 'em with us; and they'd of stuck the rest o' the evenin' if I'd gave 'em a chance. "What about a little game o' cards?"

says Bishop, when we was through eatin'. "It's mighty nice o' you to suggest it," I says; "but I know you're only doin' it for my sake and the Wife's. We'll find some way to amuse ourself, and you and Bess can take a stroll down on the beach."

"The wind made me sleepy, says Bishop. "I believe I'll go up to my room and turn in."

"The rooms is not ready, I says.

"The clerk'll let us know as soon as we can have 'em."

But he didn't take my word; and when he'd talked to the clerk himself, and found out that he could have his room right away, they wasn't no arguin' with him. Off he went to bed at eight P.M., leavin' the Missus and I to entertain the Belle o' Wabash. Sunday mornin' I added to my investment by hirin' a flivver to take us out to the Edgewater Club. "Now," I says, we'll rent some bathin' suits and cool off."

"I don't dast go in," says Bishop.

"I'd take more cold. I'll watch the rest o' you.

Well, I didn't care whether he went in or not, the water bein' too shallow along there to drownd him; but I did want him to watch the rest of us one in particular. The suit they gave her was an Annette. I wouldn't make no attempt to describe what she looked like in it, unless it'd be a capital Y that had got turned upside down. She didn't have no displacement and she could of stayed in all day without the lake ever findin' out she was there.

But I cut the film short so's I could get 'em back to the hotel and leave the pair together again. "You're goin' to have all the rest o' the day to yourself," I told 'em. "We won't eat dinner with you. I and the Missus will just disappear and meet you here in the hotel at seven o'clock to−night."

"W'here are you goin'?" ast Bishop.

"Never you mind," I says. "Maybe we'd like to go along with you, he says. "Yes, you would!" says I.

"Remember, boy, I was in love once myself, and I know I didn't want no third parties hangin' round."

"But what can we do all day in this burg?" he says. "They's plenty to do," I says.

"You can go over there and set on them benches and watch the interurbans come in from South Bend and Niles, or you can hire a boat and go out for a sail, or you can fish for tarpons; or you can take a trolley over to Benton Harbor; or you can set on the beach and spoon. Nobody minds here only be sure you don't set in somebody's lunch basket, because they say a garlic stain's almost impossible to get out. And they's another thing you might do," I says: this town's one o' these here Gretna Greens. You can get a marriage license in any delicatessen and the street−car conductors is authorized to perform the ceremony. They didn't blush when I pulled that; they turned pale, both o' them, and I seen that I was goin' to win, sure. "Come on!" I says to the Missus.

"We must be on our way. We left 'em before they could stop us and walked acrost the street and along through the park. "Where are we headed?" ast the Wife.

"I don't know," I says; "but I don't want to spoil their good time."

"I don't believe they're havin' a good time," she says. "How could they help it?" says I.

"When two true lovers is left alone together, what more could they ast for?"

"They's somethin' wrong with 'em,"

says the Missus. "They act like they was mad at each other. And Bess told me when we was out to the Edgewater Club that she wished we was home."

"That's a fine way for her to talk,"

I says, when I'm tryin' to show her a good time!"

"And I overheard Elmer," says the Missus, "askin' one o' the bell boys where he could get somethin' to drink; and the bell boy ast him what kind of a drink, and he says, whisky or poison it didn't make no difference."

"If I was sure he'd take the poison I'd try to get it for him," I says. On the grass and the benches in the park we seen some o' the gang that'd came over on the boat with us. They looked like they'd laid there all night and the kids was cryin' louder'n ever.

Besides them we seen dozens o' young couples that was still on speakin' terms, because they'd only been together an hour or two. The girls was wearin' nice, clean, white dresses and white shoes, and was all prettied up. They seemed to be havin' the time o' their life. And by four o'clock in the afternoon their fingers would be stuck together with crackerjack and their dresses decorated with chocolate sirup, and their escorts talkin' to 'em like a section boss to a gang o' hunkies. We wandered round till dinner−time, and then dropped into a little restaurant where they give you a whole meal for thirty−five cents and make a profit of thirty−five cents. When we'd staggered out under the weight o' this repast, a street−car was standin' there that said it would take us to the House o' David. "Come on!" I says, and led the Missus aboard. "Where to?" she ast me. "I don't know," I says; "but it sounds like a road house."

It was even better'n that. You couldn't get nothin' to drink, but they was plenty to see and hear band concerts, male and female; movin' pitchers; a zoo; a bowlin' alley; and more funny−lookin' people than I ever seen in an amusement park before. It ain't a regular amusement park, but fifty−fifty between that and a kind of religious sex that calls themself the Holy Roller Skaters or somethin'. All the men that was old enough to keep a beard had one; and for a minute I thought we'd bumped into the summer home o' the people that took part in Ada. They wouldn't nobody of ever mistook the women for Follies chorus girls. They looked like they was havin' a prize contest to see which could dress the homeliest; and if I'd been one o' the judges I'd of split the first prize as many ways as they was women. "I'm goin' to talk to some o' these people," I told the Wife. "What for?" she says. "Well, for one thing," I says, "I been talkin' to one person so long I'm tired of it; and, for another thing, I want to find out what the idear o' the whole concern is."

So we walked up to one o' the most flourishin' beards and I braced him. "Who owns this joint?" I says. "All who have the faith," he says.

"What do they charge a man to join?"

I ast him. "Many's called and few chosen," he says. "How long have you been here?" I ast him. "Prove all things and hold fast to what's good," he says. "Why don't you get some of our books and study 'em?"

He led us over to where they had the books and I looked at some o' them. One was the Flyin' Roll, and another was the Livin' Roll o' Life, and another was the Rollin' Ball o' Fire. "If you had some books about coffee you could make a breakfast on 'em," I says. Well, we stuck round there till pretty near six o'clock and talked to a lot o' different ones and ast 'em all kinds o' questions; and they answered 'em all with verses from Scripture that had nothin' to do with what we'd ast. "We got a lot of information," says the Wife on the way back to St. Joe. "We don't know no more about 'em now than before we come."

"We know their politics," I says.

"How?" she ast me. "From the looks of 'em," I says.

"They're unanimous for Hughes."

We found Bess all alone, settin' in the lobby o' the hotel. "Where's your honey man?" I ast her.

She turned up her nose. "Don't call him my honey man or my anything else," she says. "Why, what's the matter?" ast the Missus. "Nothin' at all's the matter," she says. "Maybe just a lovers' quarrel," says I.

"No, and no lovers' quarrel, neither," says Bess. "They couldn't be no lovers' quarrel, because they ain't no lovers."

"You had me fooled, then," I says.

"I'd of swore that you and Bishop was just like that."

"You made a big mistake," says Bessie. "I never cared nothin' for him and he never cared nothin' for me, because he's incapable o' carin' for anything only himself."

"Why, Bess," says the Missus, "you told me just yesterday mornin' that you was practically engaged!"

"I don't care what I told you, she says; "but I'm tellin' you somethin' now: I don't never want to hear of him or see him again.

And you'll do me a favor if you'll drop the subject."

"But where is he?" I ast her. "I don't know and I don't care!" she says. "But I got to find him," I says.

"He's my guest."

"You can have him," she says. I found him up in his room. The bell boy had got him somethin', and it wasn't poison, neither.

At least I haven't never died of it. "Well, Bishop," I says, finish it up and come down−stairs. Bess and the Wife'll want some supper." "You'll have to excuse me," he says.

"I don't feel like eatin' a thing."

"But you can come down and set with us," I says. "Bess will be sore if you don't."

"Listen here!" he says. "You've took too much for granted. They's nothin' between your sister−in−law and I. If you've set your heart on us bein' somethin' more'n friends, I'm sorry.

But they's not a chance."

"Bishop," I says, this is a blow to me. It comes like a shock."

And to keep myself from faintin' I took the bottle from his dresser and completed its ruin.

"You won't even come down and set with us?" I says. "No," says Bishop. "And, if you don't mind, you can give me my ticket back home and I'll stroll down to the dock and meet you on the boat."

"Here's your ticket," says I.

"And where am I goin' to sleep?" he says. "Well," I says, I'll get you a stateroom if you really want it; but it's goin' to be a bad night, and if you was in one o' them berths, and somethin' happened, you wouldn't have a chance in the world!"

"You ain't goin' to have no berth, yourself?" he ast me. "I should say not!" I says.

"I'm goin' to get me a chair and sleep in the water−tight compartments."

Boys, my prophecy come true. They was more roll on old Lake Michigan that night than in all them books up to the Holy Roller Skaters' park.

And if the boat was filled to capacity just thirteen hundred of us was fatally ill. I don't think it was the rollin' that got me.

It was one glimpse of all the Jennies and their offsprings, and the wealthy Greek shoe shiners, and the millionaire truck drivers, and the heiresses from the Lace Department lay−in' hither and thither in the cabins and on the decks, breathin' their last. And how they must of felt to think that all their outlay for crackerjack and apples was a total loss! But Bishop wasn't sick. I searched the boat from the back to the stern and he wasn't aboard.

I guess probably he found out some way that they was such an institution as the P re Marquette, which gets into Chicago without touchin' them perilous copper ranges. But whether he arrived safe or not I don't know, because I've never saw him from that day to this, and I've lived happy ever afterward. And my investment, amountin' all told to just about what he owes me, turned out even better than I'd hoped for. Bess went back to Wabash that Monday afternoon. At supper Monday night, which was the llrst meal the Missus could face, she says: "I haven't got it figured out yet. Bess swears they didn't have no quarrel; but I'll take an oath they was in love with each other. What could of happened?"

"I know what happened," I says.

"They got acquainted!"