GULLIBLE'S TRAVELS

Ring Lardner

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GULLIBLE'S TRAVELS

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I

I PROMISED the Wife that if anybody ast me what kind of a time did I have at Palm Beach I'd say I had a swell time. And if they ast me who did we meet I'd tell 'em everybody that was worth meetin'. And if they ast me didn't the trip cost a lot I'd say Yes; but it was worth the money. I promised her I wouldn't spill none o' the real details. But if you can't break a promise you made to your own wife what kind of a promise can you break? Answer me that, Edgar. I'm not one o' these kind o' people that'd keep a joke to themself just because the joke was on them. But they's plenty of our friends that I wouldn't have 'em hear about it for the world. I wouldn't tell you, only I know you're not the village gossip and won't crack it to anybody. Not even to your own Missus, see? I don't trust no women. It was along last January when I and the Wife was both hit by the society bacillus. I think it was at the opera. You remember me tellin' you about us and the Hatches goin' to Carmen and then me takin' my Missus and her sister, Bess, and four of one suit named Bishop to see The Three Kings? Well, I'll own up that I enjoyed wearin' the soup and fish and minglin' amongst the high polloi and pretendin' we really was somebody. And I know my wife enjoyed it, too, though they was nothin' said between us at the time. The next stage was where our friends wasn't good enough for us no more. We used to be tickled to death to spend an evenin' playin' rummy with the Hatches. But all of a sudden they didn't seem to be no fun in it and when Hatch'd call up we'd stall out of it. From the number o' times I told him that I or the Missus was tired out and goin' right to bed, he must of thought we'd got jobs as telephone linemen. We quit attendin' pitcher shows because the rest o' the audience wasn't the kind o' people you'd care to mix with. We didn't go over to Ben's and dance because they wasn't no class to the crowd there. About once a week we'd beat it to one o' the good hotels down−town, all dressed up like a horse, and have our dinner with the rest o' the E−light. They wasn't nobody talked to us only the waiters, but we could look as much as we liked and it was sport tryin' to guess the names o' the gang at the next table. Then we took to readin' the society news at breakfast. It used to be that I didn't waste time on nothin' but the market and sportin' pages, but now I pass 'em up and listen w'ile the Missus rattled off what was doin' on the Lake Shore Drive. Every little w'ile we'd see where So−and−So was at Palm Beach or just goin' there or just comin' back: We got to kiddin' about it. Well, I'd say, we'd better be startin' pretty soon or we'll miss the best part o' the season.

Yes, the Wife'd say back, we'd go right now if it wasn't for all them engagements next week.

We kidded and kidded till finally, one night, she forgot we was just kiddin'. You didn't take no vacation last summer, she says. No, says I. They wasn't no chance to get away.

But you promised me, she says, that you'd take one this winter to make up for it.

I know I did, I says; but it'd be a sucker play to take a vacation in weather like this.

The weather ain't like this everywheres, she says. You must of been goin' to night school, I says. Another thing you promised me, says she, was that when you could afford it you'd take me on a real honeymoon trip to make up for the dinky one we had.

That still goes, I says, when I can afford it.

You can afford it now, says she.

We don't owe nothin' and we got money in the bank.

Yes, I says. Pretty close to three hundred bucks.

You forgot somethin', she says.

You forgot them war babies.

Did I tell you about that? Last fall I done a little dabblin' in Crucial Steel and at this time I'm tellin' you about I still had a hold of it, but stood to pull down six hundred. Not bad, eh? It'd be a mistake to let loose now, I says. All right, she says.

Hold on, and I hope you lose every cent.

You never did care nothin' for me.

Then we done a little spoonin' and then I ast her what was the big idear. We ain't swelled on ourself, she says; but I know and you know that the friends we been associatin' with ain't in our class. They don't know how to dress and they can't talk about nothin' but their goldfish and their meat bills. They don't try to get nowheres, but all they do is play rummy and take in the Majestic. I and you like nice people and good music and things that's worth w'ile. It's a crime for us to be wastin' our time with riff and raff that'd run round barefooted if it wasn't for the police.

I wouldn't say we'd wasted much time on 'em lately, I says. No, says she, and I've had a better time these last three weeks than I ever had in my life.

And you can keep right on havin' it, I says. I could have a whole lot better time, and you could, too, she says, if we could get acquainted with some congenial people to go round with; people that's tastes is the same as ourn.

If any o' them people calls up on the phone, I says, I'll be as pleasant to 'em as I can.

You're always too smart, says the Wife. You don't never pay attention to no schemes o' mine. What's the scheme now? You'll find fault with it because I thought it up, she says. If it was your scheme you'd think it was grand.

If it really was good you wouldn't be scared to spring it, I says. Will you promise to go through with it? says she. If it ain't too ridic'lous, I told her. See! I knowed that'd be the way, she says. Don't talk crazy, I says. Where'd we be if we'd went through with every plan you ever sprang? Will you promise to listen to my side of it without actin' cute? she says. So I didn't see no harm in goin' that far.

I want you to take me to Palm Beach, says she. I want you to take a vacation, and that's where we'll spend it.

And that ain't all we'd spend, I says. Remember your promise, says she.

So I shut up and listened. The dope she give me was along these lines: We could get special round−trip rates on any o' the railroads and that part of it wouldn't cost nowheres near as much as a man'd naturally think.

The hotel rates was pretty steep, but the meals was throwed in, and just imagine what them meals would be! And we'd be stayin' under the same roof with the Vanderbilts and Goulds, and eatin' at the same table, and probably, before we was there a week, callin' 'em Steve and Gus. They was dancin' every night and all the guests danced with each other, and how would it feel fox−trottin' with the president o' the B. & O., or the Delmonico girls from New York! And all Chicago society was down there, and when we met 'em we'd know 'em for life and have some real friends amongst 'em when we got back home. That's how she had it figured and she must of been practisin' her speech, because it certainly did sound good to me. To make it short, I fell, and dated her up to meet me down−town the next day and call on the railroad bandits. The first one we seen admitted that his was the best route and that he wouldn't only soak us one hundred and forty−seven dollars and seventy cents to and from Palm Beach and back, includin' an apartment from here to Jacksonville and as many stop−overs as we wanted to make. He told us we wouldn't have to write for no hotel accommodations because the hotels had an agent right over on Madison Street that'd be glad to do everything to us. So we says we'd be back later and then we beat it over to the Florida East Coast's local studio.

How much for a double room by the week? I ast the man. They ain't no weekly rates, he says. By the day it'd be twelve dollars and up for two at the Breakers, and fourteen dollars and up at the Poinciana.

I like the Breakers better, says I.

You can't get in there, he says.

They're full for the season.

That's a long spree, I says.

Can we get in the other hotel? ast the Wife. I can find out, says the man.

We want a room with bath, says she.

That'd be more, says he. That'd be fifteen dollars or sixteen dollars and up.

What do we want of a bath, I says, with the whole Atlantic Ocean in the front yard? I'm afraid you'd have trouble gettin' a bath, says the man. The hotels is both o' them pretty well filled up on account o' the war in Europe. What's that got to do with it? I ast him. A whole lot, he says.

The people that usually goes abroad is all down to Palm Beach this winter.

I don't see why, I says. If one o' them U−boats hit 'em they'd at least be gettin' their bath for nothin'.

We left him with the understandin' that he was to wire down there and find out what was the best they could give us. We called him up in a couple o' days and he told us we could have a double room, without no bath, at the Poinciana, beginnin' the fifteenth o' February. He didn't know just what the price would be. Well, I fixed it up to take my vacation startin' the tenth, and sold out my Crucial Steel, and divided the spoils with the railroad company.

We decided we'd stop off in St. Augustine two days, because the Missus found out somewheres that they might be two or three o' the Four Hundred lingerin' there, and we didn't want to miss nobody. Now, I says, all we got to do is set round and wait for the tenth o' the month.

Is that so! says the Wife. I suppose you're perfectly satisfied with your clo'es.

I've got to be, I says, unless the Salvation Army has somethin' that'll fit me.

What's the matter with our charge account? she says. I don't like to charge nothin', I says, when I know they ain't no chance of ever payin' for it.

All right, she says, then we're not goin' to Palm Beach. I'd rather stay home than go down there lookin' like general housework.

Do you need clo'es yourself? I ast her. I certainly do, she says.

About two hundred dollars' worth. But I got one hundred and fifty dollars o' my own.

All right, I says. I'll stand for the other fifty and then we're all set.

No, we're not, she says.

That just fixes me. But I want you to look as good as I do.

Nature'll see to that, I says.

But they was no arguin' with her. Our trip, she says, was an investment; it was goin' to get us in right with people worth w'ile. And we wouldn't have a chance in the world unless we looked the part. So before the tenth come round, we was long two new evenin' gowns, two female sport suits, four or five pairs o' shoes, all colors, one Tuxedo dinner coat, three dress shirts, half a dozen other kinds o' shirts, two pairs o' transparent white trousers, one new business suit and Lord knows how much underwear and how many hats and stockin's.

And I had till the fifteenth o' March to pay off the mortgage on the old homestead. Just as we was gettin' ready to leave for the train the phone rung. It was Mrs. Hatch and she wanted us to come over for a little rummy. I was shavin' and the Missus done the talkin'. What did you tell her? I ast. I told her we was goin' away, says the Wife. I bet you forgot to mention where we was goin', I says. Pay me, says she.

II

I thought we was in Venice when we woke up next mornin', but the porter says it was just Cairo, Illinois. The river'd went crazy and I bet they wasn't a room without a bath in that old burg.

As we set down in the diner for breakfast the train was goin' acrost the longest bridge I ever seen, and it looked like we was so near the water that you could reach right out and grab a handful.

The Wife was a little wabbly. I wonder if it's really safe, she says. If the bridge stays up we're all right, says I.

But the question is, Will it stay up? she says. I wouldn't bet a nickel either way on a bridge, I says. They're treacherous little devils. They'd cross you as quick as they'd cross this river. The trainmen must be nervous, she says. Just see how we're draggin' along.

They're givin' the fish a chance to get off en the track, I says. It's against the law to spear fish with a cowcatcher this time o' year."

Well, the Wife was so nervous she couldn't eat nothin' but toast and coffee, so I figured I was justified in goin' to the prunes and steak and eggs. After breakfast we went out in what they call the sun parlor. It was a glassed−in room on the tail−end o' the rear coach and it must of been a pleasant place to set and watch the scenery. But they was a gang o' missionaries or somethin' had all the seats and they never budged out o' them all day. Every time they'd come to a crossroads they'd toss a stack o' Bible studies out o' the back window for the southern heathen to pick up and read. I suppose they thought they was doin' a lot o' good for their fellow men, but their fellow passengers meanw'ile was gettin' the worst of it.

Speakin' o' the scenery, it certainly was somethin' grand. First we'd pass a few pine trees with fuzz on 'em and then a couple o' acres o' yellow mud. Then they'd be more pine trees and more fuzz and then more yellow mud. And after a w'ile we'd come to some pine trees with fuzz on 'em and then, if we watched close, we'd see some yellow mud. Every few minutes the train'd stop and then start up again on low. That meant the engineer suspected he was comin' to a station and was scared that if he run too fast he wouldn't see it, and if he run past it without stoppin' the inhabitants wouldn't never forgive him. You see, they's a regular schedule o' duties that's followed out by the more prominent citizens down those parts.

After their wife's attended to the chores and got the breakfast they roll out o' bed and put on their overalls and eat. Then they get on their horse or mule or cow or dog and ride down to the station and wait for the next train. When it comes they have a contest to see which can count the passengers first. The losers has to promise to work one day the followin' month. If one fella loses three times in the same month he generally always kills himself. All the towns has got five or six private residences and seven or eight two−apartment buildin's and a grocery and a post−office. They told me that somebody in one o' them burgs, I forget which one, got a letter the day before we come through. It was misdirected, I guess. The two−apartment buildin's is constructed on the ground floor, with a porch to divide one flat from the other. One's the housekeepin' side and the other's just a place for the husband and father to lay round in so's they won't be disturbed by watchin' the women work. It was a blessin' to them boys when their states went dry. Just think what a strain it must of been to keep liftin' glasses and huntin' in their overalls for a dime! In the afternoon the Missus went into our apartment and took a nap and I moseyed into the readin'−room and looked over some o' the comical magazines. They was a fat guy come in and set next to me. I'd heard him, in at lunch, tellin' the dinin'−car conductor what Wilson should of done, so I wasn't su'prised when he opened up on me. "Tiresome trip," he says. I didn't think it was worth w'ile arguin' with him. "Must of been a lot o' rain through here," he says. "Either that," says I, "or else the sprinklin' wagon run shy o' streets."

He laughed as much as it was worth. "Where do you come from?" he ast me.

"Dear old Chicago," I says. "I'm from St. Louis," he says. "You're frank," says I.

"I'm really as much at home one place as another," he says. "The Wife likes to travel and why shouldn't I humor her?"

"I don't know," I says. "I haven't the pleasure."

"Seems like we're goin' all the w'ile," says he. "It's Hot Springs or New Orleans or Florida or Atlantic City or California or somewheres."

"Do you get passes?" I ast him. "I guess I could if I wanted to," he says. "Some o' my best friends is way up in the railroad business."

"I got one like that," I says.

"He generally stands on the fourth or fifth car behind the engine."

"Do you travel much?" he ast me.

"I don't live in St. Louis," says I.

"Is this your first trip south?" he ast. "Oh, no," I says. "I live on Sixty−fifth Street."

"I meant, have you ever been down this way before?"

"Oh, yes, says I. "I come down every winter."

"Where do you go?" he ast. That's what I was layin' for. "Palm Beach," says I.

"I used to go there," he says.

"But I've cut it out. It ain't like it used to be. They leave everybody in now."

"Yes, I says; "but a man don't have to mix up with 'em."

"You can't just ignore people that comes up and talks to you, he says. "Are you bothered that way much?" I ast. "It's what drove me away from Palm Beach," he says. "How long since you been there?" I ast him. "How long you been goin' there?" he says. "Me?" says I. "Five years."

"We just missed each other," says he.

"I quit six years ago this winter."

"Then it couldn't of been there I seen you, says I. "But I know I seen you somewheres before."

"It might of been most anywheres," he says. "They's few places I haven't been at."

"Maybe it was acrost the pond," says I.

"Very likely, he says. "But not since the war started. I been steerin' clear of Europe for two years."

"So have I, for longer'n that," I says. "It's certainly an awful thing, this war," says he. "I believe you're right," says I; "but I haven't heard nobody express it just that way before."

"I only hope," he says, that we succeed in keepin' out of it."

"If we got in, would you go?"I ast him. "Yes, sir," he says. "You wouldn't beat me," says I.

"I bet I'd reach Brazil as quick as you.

"Oh, I don't think they'd be any action in South America," he says. "We'd fight defensive at first and most of it would be along the Atlantic Coast."

"Then maybe we could get accommodations in Yellowstone Park," says I.

"They's no sense in this country gettin' involved," he says. "Wilson hasn't handled it right. He either ought to of went stronger or not so strong. He's wrote too many notes."

"You certainly get right to the root of a thing," says I. "You must of thought a good deal about it."

"I know the conditions pretty well,"

he says. "I know how far you can go with them people over there. I been amongst 'em a good part o' the time."

"I suppose," says I, "that a fella just naturally don't like to butt in. But if I was you I'd consider it my duty to romp down to Washington and give 'em all the information I had."

"Wilson picked his own advisers,"

says he. "Let him learn his lesson."

"That ain't hardly fair," I says.

"Maybe you was out o' town, or your phone was busy or somethin'." "I don't know Wilson nor he don't know me," he says. "That oughtn't to stop you from helpin' him out," says I. "If you seen a man drownin' would you wait for some friend o' the both o' you to come along and make the introduction?"

"They ain't no comparison in them two cases," he says. "Wilson ain't never called on me for help."

"You don't know if he has or not," I says. "You don't stick in one place long enough for a man to reach you.

"My office in St. Louis always knows where I'm at," says he. "My stenographer can reach me any time within ten to twelve hours."

"I don't think it's right to have this country's whole future dependin' on a St. Louis stenographer," I says. "That's nonsense!" says he. "I ain't makin' no claim that I could save or not save this country. But if I and Wilson was acquainted I might tell him some facts that'd help him out in his foreign policy.

"Well, then," I says, it's up to you to get acquainted. I'd introduce you myself only I don't know your name." "My name's Gould," says he; "but you're not acquainted with Wilson."

"I could be, easy, says I. "I could get on a train he was goin' somewheres on and then go and set beside him and begin to talk.

Lots o' people make friends that way.

It was gettin' along to'rd supper−time, so I excused myself and went back to the apartment.

The Missus had woke up and wasn't feelin' good.

"What's the matter?" I ast her. "This old train," she says.

"I'll die if it don't stop goin' round them curves. "As long as the track curves, the best thing the train can do is curve with it," I says. "You may die if it keeps curvin', but you'd die a whole lot sooner if it left the rails and went straight ahead."

"What you been doin'?" she ast me.

"Just talkin' to one o' the Goulds," I says. "Gould!" she says. "What Gould?"

"Well," I says, I didn't ask him his first name, but he's from St.

Louis, so I suppose it's Ludwig or Heinie."

"Oh," she says, disgusted. "I thought you meant one o' the real ones."

"He's a real one, all right," says I.

"He's so classy that he's passed up Palm Beach. He says it's gettin' too common."

"I don't believe it," says the Wife.

"And besides, we don't have to mix up with everybody.

"He says they butt right in on you, I told her. "They'll get a cold reception from me," she says. But between the curves and the fear o' Palm Beach not bein' so exclusive as it used to be, she couldn't eat no supper, and I had another big meal. The next mornin' we landed in Jacksonville three hours behind time and narrowly missed connections for St. Augustine by over an hour and a half. They wasn't another train till one−thirty in the afternoon, so we had some time to kill. I went shoppin' and bought a shave and five or six rickeys. The Wife helped herself to a chair in the writin'−room of one o' the hotels and told pretty near everybody in Chicago that she wished they was along with us, accompanied by a pitcher o' the Elks' Home or the Germania Club, or Trout Fishin' at Atlantic Beach. W'ile I was gettin' my dime's worth in the tonsorial parlors, I happened to look up at a calendar on the wall, and noticed it was the twelfth o' February. "How does it come that everything's open here to−day? I says to the barber.

"Don't you−all know it's Lincoln's birthday? "Is that so?" he says. "How old is he?"

III

We'd wired ahead for rooms at the Alcazar, and when we landed in St. Augustine they was a motor−bus from the hotel to meet us at the station. "Southern hospitality, I says to the Wife, and we was both pleased till they relieved us o' four bits apiece for the ride. Well, they hadn't neither one of us slept good the night before, w'ile we was joltin' through Georgia; so when I suggested a nap they wasn't no argument. "But our clo'es ought to be pressed,"

says the Missus. "Call up the valet and have it done w'ile we sleep."

So I called up the valet, and sure enough, he come. "Hello, George!" I says. "You see, we're goin' to lay down and take a nap, and we was wonderin' if you could crease up these two suits and have 'em back here by the time we want 'em."

"Certainly, sir," says he. "And how much will it cost?" I ast him. "One dollar a suit," he says. "Are you on parole or haven't you never been caught?" says I.

"Yes, sir," he says, and smiled like it was a joke. "Let's talk business, George," I says. "The tailor we go to on Sixty−third walks two blocks to get our clo'es, and two blocks to take 'em to his joint, and two blocks to bring 'em back, and he only soaks us thirty−five cents a suit."

"He gets poor pay and he does poor work," says the burglar. "When I press clo'es I press 'em right."

"Well," I says, the tailor on Sixty−third satisfies us. Suppose you don't do your best this time, but just give us seventy cents' worth."

But they wasn't no chance for a bargain. He'd been in the business so long he'd become hardened and lost all regard for his fellow men. The Missus slept, but I didn't. Instead, I done a few problems in arithmetic. Outside o' what she'd gave up for postcards and stamps in Jacksonville, I'd spent two bucks for our lunch, about two more for my shave and my refreshments, one for a rough ride in a bus, one more for gettin' our trunk and grips carried round, two for havin' the clo'es pressed, and about half a buck in tips to people that I wouldn't never see again.

Somewheres near nine dollars a day, not countin' no hotel bill, and over two weeks of it yet to come! Oh, you rummy game at home, at half a cent a point! When our clo'es come back I woke her up and give her the figures. "But to−day's an exception," she says. "After this our meals will be included in the hotel bill and we won't need to get our suits pressed only once a week and you'll be shavin' yourself and they won't be no bus fare when we're stayin' in one place. Besides, we can practise economy all spring and all summer."

"I guess we need the practise," I says. "And if you're goin' to crab all the time about expenses," says she, "I'll wish we had of stayed home."

"That'll make it unanimous," says I.

Then she begin sobbin' about how I'd spoiled the trip and I had to promise I wouldn't think no more o' what we were spendin'. I might just as well of promised to not worry when the White Sox lost or when I'd forgot to come home to supper.

We went in the dinin'−room about six−thirty and was showed to a table where they was another couple settin'. They was husband and wife, I guess, but I don't know which was which. She was wieldin' the pencil and writin' down their order.

"I guess I'll have clams," he says.

"They disagreed with you last night,"

says she. "All right," he says. "I won't try 'em. Give me cream−o'−tomato soup."

"You don't like tomatoes," she says.

"Well, I won't have no soup," says he. "A little o' the blue−fish."

"The blue−fish wasn't no good at noon," she says. "You better try the bass."

"All right, make it bass," he says.

"And them sweet−breads and a little roast beef and sweet potatoes and peas and vanilla ice−cream and coffee."

"You wouldn't touch sweet−breads at home," says she, "and you can't tell what they'll be in a hotel."

"All right, cut out the sweet−breads," he says. "I should think you'd have the stewed chicken," she says, and leave out the roast beef."

"Stewed chicken it is," says he.

"Stewed chicken and mashed potatoes and string beans and buttered toast and coffee. Will that suit you? "Sure!" he says, and she give the slip to the waiter. George looked at it long enough to of read it three times if he could of read it once and then went out in the kitchen and got a trayful o' whatever was handy. But the poor guy didn't get more'n a taste of anything. She was watchin' him like a hawk, and no sooner would he delve into one victual than she'd yank the dish away from him and tell him to remember that health was more important than temporary happiness. I felt so sorry for him that I couldn't enjoy my own repast and I told the Wife that we'd have our breakfast apart from that stricken soul if I had to carry the case to old Al Cazar himself. In the evenin' we strolled acrost the street to the Ponce that's supposed to be even sweller yet than where we were stoppin' at. We walked all over the place without recognizin' nobody from our set. I finally warned the Missus that if we didn't duck back to our room I'd probably have a heart attack from excitement; but she'd read in her Florida guide that the decorations and pitchers was worth goin' miles to see, so we had to stand in front o' them for a couple hours and try to keep awake. Four or five o' them was thrillers, at that. Their names was Adventure, Discovery, Contest, and so on, but what they all should of been called was Lady Who Had Mislaid Her Clo'es. The hotel's named after the fella that built it. He come from Spain and they say he was huntin' for some water that if he'd drunk it he'd feel young. I don't see myself how you could expect to feel young on water. But, anyway, he'd heard that this here kind o' water could be found in St. Augustine, and when he couldn't find it he went into the hotel business and got even with the United States by chargin' five dollars a day and up for a room. Sunday mornin' we went in to breakfast early and I ast the head waiter if we could set at another table where they wasn't no convalescent and his mate. At the same time I give the said head waiter somethin' that spoke louder than words. We was showed to a place way acrost the room from where we'd been the night before. It was a table for six, but the other four didn't come into our life till that night at supper.

Meanw'ile we went sight−seein'. We visited Fort Marion, that'd be a great protection against the Germans, provided they fought with paper wads. We seen the city gate and the cathedral and the slave market, and then we took the boat over to Anastasia Island, that the ocean's on the other side of it. This trip made me homesick, because the people that was along with us on the boat looked just like the ones we'd often went with to Michigan City on the Fourth o' July. The boat landed on the bay side o' the island and from there we was drug over to the ocean side on a horse car, the the horse walkin' to one side o' the car instead of in front, so's he wouldn't get ran over. We stuck on the beach till dinner−time and then took the chariot back to the pavilion on the bay side, where a whole family served the meal and their pigs put on a cabaret. It was the best meal I had in dear old Dixie fresh oysters and chicken and mashed potatoes and gravy and fish and pie.

And they charged two bits a plate. "Goodness gracious!" says the Missus, when I told her the price. "This is certainly reasonable. I wonder how it happens."

"Well," I says, the family was probably washed up here by the tide and don't know they're in Florida."

When we got back to the hotel they was only just time to clean up and go down to supper. We hadn't no sooner got seated when our table companions breezed in. It was a man about forty−five, that looked like he'd made his money in express and general haulin', and he had his wife along and both their mother−in−laws. The shirt he had on was the one he'd started from home with, if he lived in Yokohama. His womenfolks wore mournin' with a touch o' gravy here and there. "You order for us, Jake," says one o' the ladies. So Jake grabbed the bill o' fare and his wife took the slip and pencil and waited for the dictation. "Let's see," he says. "How about oyster cocktail?"

"Yes, says the three Mrs. Black.

"Four oyster cocktails, then," says Jake, "and four orders o' bluepoints."

"The oysters is nice, too," says I.

They all give me a cordial smile and the ice was broke. "Everything's good here," says Jake.

"I bet you know," I says. He seemed pleased at the compliment and went on dictatin'. "Four chicken soups with rice," he says, and four o' the blue−fish and four veal chops breaded and four roast chicken and four boiled potatoes "

But it seemed his wife would rather have sweet potatoes. "All right," says Jake; "four boiled potatoes and four sweets. And chicken salad and some o' that tapioca puddin' and ice−cream and tea. Is that satisfactory? "Fine!" says one o' the mother−in−laws. "Are you goin' to stay long?" says Mrs. Jake to my Missus. The party addressed didn't look very clubby, but she was too polite to pull the cut direct.

"We leave to−morrow night," she says.

Nobody ast her where we was goin'. "We leave for Palm Beach," she says. "That's a nice place, I guess," says one the old ones.

"More people goes there than comes here. It ain't so expensive there, I guess."

"You're some guesser," says the Missus and freezes up. I ast Jake if he'd been to Florida before.

"No," he says; "this is our first trip, but we're makin' up for lost time. We're all they is to see and havin' everything the best."

"You're havin' everything, all right," I says, but I don't know if it's the best or not. How long have you been here?"

"A week to−morrow," says he.

"And we stay another week and then go to Ormond."

"Are you standin' the trip O. K.?" I ast him. "Well," he says, I don't feel quite as good as when we first come. "Kind o' logy? I says. "Yes; kind o' heavy, says Jake.

"I know what you ought to do," says I. "You ought to go to a European plan hotel."

"Not w'ile this war's on," he says, "and besides, my mother's a poor sailor."

"Yes, says his mother; "I'm a very, poor sailor."

"Jake's mother can't stand the water," says Mrs. Jake. So I begun to believe that Jake's wife's mother−in−law was a total failure as a jolly tar.

Social intercourse was put an end to when the waiter staggered in with their order and our'n.

The Missus seemed to of lost her appetite and just set there lookin' grouchy and tappin' her fingers on the table−cloth and actin' like she was in a hurry to get away. I didn't eat much, neither. It was more fun watchin'. "Well," I says, when we was out in the lobby, we finally got acquainted with some real people."

"Real people!" says the Missus, curlin' her lip. "What did you talk to 'em for?"

"I couldn't resist," I says.

"Anybody that'd order four oyster cocktails and four rounds o' blue−points is worth knowin'."

"Well," she says, if they're there when we go in to−morrow mornin' we'll get our table changed again or you can eat with 'em alone."

But they was absent from the breakfast board.

"They're probably stayin' in bed to−day to get their clo'es washed," says the Missus.

"Or maybe they're sick," I says.

"A change of oysters affects some people."

I was for goin' over to the island again and gettin' another o' them quarter banquets, but the program was for us to walk round town all mornin' and take a ride in the afternoon. First, we went to St. George Street and visited the oldest house in the United States.

Then we went to Hospital Street and seen the oldest house in the United States. Then we turned the corner and went down St. Francis Street and inspected the oldest house in the United States.

Then we dropped into a soda fountain and I had an egg phosphate, made from the oldest egg in the Western Hemisphere. We passed up lunch and got into a carriage drawn by the oldest horse in Florida, and we rode through the country all afternoon and the driver told us some o' the oldest jokes in the book. He felt it was only fair to give his customers a good time when he was chargin' a dollar an hour, and he had his gags rehearsed so's he could tell the same one a thousand times and never change a word. And the horse knowed where the point come in every one and stopped to laugh. We done our packin' before supper, and by the time we got to our table Jake and the mourners was through and gone. We didn't have to ask the waiter if they'd been there. He was perspirin' like an evangelist. After supper we said good−by to the night clerk and twenty−two bucks. Then we bought ourself another ride in the motor−bus and landed at the station ten minutes before train−time; so we only had an hour to wait for the train. Say, I don't know how many stations they is between New York and San Francisco, but they's twice as many between St. Augustine and Palm Beach. And our train stopped twice and started twice at every one. I give up tryin' to sleep and looked out the window, amusin' myself by readin' the names o' the different stops. The only one that expressed my sentiments was Eau Gallie. We was an hour and a half late pullin' out o' that joint and I figured we'd be two hours to the bad gettin' into our destination. But the guy that made out the time−table must of had the engineer down pat, because when we went acrost the bridge over Lake Worth and landed at the Poinciana depot, we was ten minutes ahead o' time. They was about two dozen uniformed Ephs on the job to meet us. And when I seen 'em all grab for our baggage with one hand and hold the other out, face up, I knowed why they called it Palm Beach.

IV

The Poinciana station's a couple hundred yards from one end o' the hotel, and that means it's close to five miles from the clerk's desk. By the time we'd registered and been gave our key and marathoned another five miles or so to where our room was located at, I was about ready for the inquest. But the Missus was full o' pep and wild to get down to breakfast and look over our stable mates. She says we would eat without changin' our clo'es; people'd forgive us for not dressin' up on account o' just gettin' there. W'ile she was lookin' out the window at the royal palms and buzzards, I moseyed round the room inspectin' where the different doors led to. Pretty near the first one I opened went into a private bath. "Here," I says; "they've give us the wrong room."

Then my wife seen it and begin to squeal. "Goody! she says. "We've got a bath! We've got a bath!"

"But," says I, "they promised we wouldn't have none. It must be a mistake."

"Never you mind about a mistake," she says. "This is our room and they can't chase us out of it."

"We'll chase ourself out," says I.

"Rooms with a bath is fifteen and sixteen dollars and up. Rooms without no bath is bad enough."

"We'll keep this room or I won't stay here," she says. "All right, you win," I says; but I didn't mean it. I made her set in the lobby down−stairs w'ile I went to the clerk pretendin' that I had to see about our trunk. "Say, I says to him, "you've made a bad mistake. You told your man in Chicago that we couldn't have no room with a bath, and now you've give us one."

"You're lucky, he says. "A party who had a bath ordered for these two weeks canceled their reservation and now you've got it."

"Lucky, am I?" I says. "And how much is the luck goin' to cost me?"

"It'll be seventeen dollars per day for that room," he says, and turned away to hide a blush. I went back to the Wife. "Do you know what we're payin' for that room?" I says. "We're payin' seventeen dollars."

"Well," she says, our meals is throwed in."

"Yes, says I, "and the hotel furnishes a key.

"You promised in St. Augustine," she says, that you wouldn't worry no more about expenses."

Well, rather than make a scene in front o' the bellhops and the few millionaires that was able to be about at that hour o' the mornin', I just says All right!" and led her into the dinin'−room. The head waiter met us at the door and turned us over to his assistant. Then some more assistants took hold of us one at a time and we was relayed to a beautiful spot next door to the kitchen and bounded on all sides by posts and pillars. It was all right for me, but a whole lot too private for the Missus; so I had to call the fella that had been our pacemaker on the last lap.

"We don't like this table," I says.

"It's the only one I can give you, he says. I slipped him half a buck. "Come to think of it," he says, "I believe they's one I forgot all about."

And he moved us way up near the middle o' the place. Say, you ought to seen that dinin'−room! From one end of it to the other is a toll call, and if a man that was settin' at the table farthest from the kitchen ordered roast lamb he'd get mutton.

At that, they was crowded for fair and it kept the head waiters hustlin' to find trough space for one and all. It was round nine o'clock when we put in our modest order for orange juice, oatmeal, liver and bacon, and cakes and coffee, and a quarter to ten or so when our waiter returned from the nearest orange grove with Exhibit A. We amused ourself meanw'ile by givin' our neighbors the once over and wonderin' which o' them was goin' to pal with us. As far as I could tell from the glances we received, they wasn't no immediate danger of us bein' annoyed by attentions. They was only a few womenfolks on deck and they was dressed pretty quiet; so quiet that the Missus was scared she'd shock 'em with the sport skirt she'd bought in Chi. Later on in the day, when the girls come out for their dress parade, the Missus' costume made about as much noise as eatin' marshmallows in a foundry. After breakfast we went to the room for a change o' raiment. I put on my white trousers and wished to

heaven that the sun'd go under a cloud till I got used to tellin' people without words just where my linen began and I left off. The rest o' my outfit was white shoes that hurt, and white sox, and a two−dollar silk shirt that showed up a zebra, and a red tie and a soft collar and a blue coat. The Missus wore a sport suit that I won't try and describe you'll probably see it on her sometime in the next five years. We went down−stairs again and out on the porch, where some o' the old birds was takin' a sun bath.

"Where now?" I says. "The beach, o' course," says the Missus. "Where is it at?" I ast her. "I suppose," she says, that we'll find it somewheres near the oeean."

"I don't believe you can stand this climate," says I.

"The ocean," she says, must be down at the end o' that avenue, where most everybody seems to be headed."

"Havin' went to our room and back twice, I don't feel like another five−mile hike," I says. "It ain't no five miles," she says; "but let's ride, anyway.

"Come on," says I, pointin' to a street−car that was standin' in the middle o' the avenue. "Oh, no," she says. "I've watched and found out that the real people takes them funnylookin' wheel chairs."

I was wonderin' what she meant when one o' them pretty near run over us. It was part bicycle, part go−cart and part African. In the one we dodged they was room for one passenger, but some o' them carried two. "I wonder what they'd soak us for the trip," I says. "Not more'n a dime, I don't believe," says the Missus.

But when we'd hired one and been w'isked down under the palms and past the golf field to the bath−house, we was obliged to part with fifty cents legal and tender. "I feel much refreshed," I says.

"I believe when it comes time to go back I'll be able to walk."

The bath−house is acrost the street from the other hotel, the Breakers, that the man had told us was full for the season. Both buildin's fronts on the ocean; and, boy, it's some ocean! I bet they's fish in there that never seen each other! "Oh, let's go bathin' right away! says the Missus. "Our suits is up to the other beanery, says I, and I was glad of it. They wasn't nothin' temptin' to me about them man−eatin' waves. But the Wife's a persistent cuss. "We won't go to−day, she says, "but we'll go in the bath−house and get some rooms for to−morrow."

The bath−house porch was a ringer for the Follies. Here and down on the beach was where you seen the costumes at this time o' day. I was so busy rubberin' that I passed the entrance door three times without noticin' it. From the top o' their heads to the bottom o' their feet the girls was a mess o' colors. They wasn't no two dressed alike and if any one them had of walked down State Street we'd of had an epidemic o' stiff neck to contend with in Chi. Finally the Missus grabbed me and hauled me into the office. "Two private rooms," she says to the clerk. "One lady and one gent."

"Five dollars a week apiece," he says. "But we're all filled up."

"You ought to be all locked up!" I says. "Will you have anything open to−morrow?" ast the Missus. "I think I can fix you then," he says. "What do we get for the five?" I ast him. "Private room and we take care o' your bathin' suit," says he. "How much if you don't take care o' the suit?" I ast him. "My suit's been gettin' along fine with very little care."

"Five dollars a week apiece," he says, and if you want the rooms you better take 'em, because they're in big demand."

By the time we'd closed this grand bargain, everybody'd moved offen the porch and down to the water, where a couple dozen o' them went in for a swim and the rest set and watched. They was a long row o' chairs on the beach for spectators and we was just goin' to flop into two o' them when another bandit come up and told us it'd cost a dime apiece per hour. "We're goin' to be here two weeks," I says. "Will you sell us two chairs?"

He wasn't in no comical mood, so we sunk down on the sand and seen the show from there. We had plenty o' company that preferred these kind o' seats free to the chairs at ten cents a whack.

Besides the people that was in the water gettin' knocked down by the waves and pretendin' like they enjoyed it, about half o' the gang on the sand was wearin' bathin' suits just to be clubby. You could tell by lookin' at the suits that they hadn't never been wet and wasn't intended for no such ridic'lous purpose. I wisht I could describe 'em to you, but it'd take a female to do it right. One little girl, either fourteen or twenty−four, had white silk slippers and sox that come pretty near up to her ankles, and from there to her knees it was just plain Nature. Northbound from her knees was a pair o' bicycle trousers that disappeared when they come to the bottom of her Mother Hubbard. This here garment was a thing without no neck or sleeves that begin bulgin' at the top and spread out gradual all the way down, like a croquette. To top her off, she had a jockey cap; and believe me I'd of played her mount acrost the board. They was plenty o' class in the field with her, but nothin' that approached her speed. Later on I seen her several times round the hotel, wearin' somethin' near the same outfit, without the jockey cap and with longer croquettes. We set there in the sand till people begun to get up and leave. Then we trailed along back o' them to the Breakers' porch, where they was music to dance and stuff to inhale. "We'll grab a table," I says to the Missus. "I'm dyin' o' thirst."

But I was allowed to keep on dyin'. "I can serve you somethin' soft,"

says the waiter. "I'll bet you can't!" I says. "You ain't got no locker here?" he says. "What do you mean locker?" I ast him. "It's the locker liquor law," he says. "We can serve you a drink if you own your own bottles."

"I'd just as soon own a bottle," I says. "I'll become the proprietor of a bottle o' beer."

"It'll take three or four hours to get it for you, he says, and you'd have to order it through the order desk. If you're stoppin' at one o' the hotels and want a drink once in a w'ile, you better get busy and put in an order."

So I had to watch the Missus put away a glass of orange juice that cost forty cents and was just the same size as they give us for breakfast free for nothin'. And, not havin' had nothin' to make me forget that my feet hurt, I was obliged to pay another four bits for an Afromobile to cart us back to our own boardin' house. "Well," says the Missus when we got there, "it's time to wash up and go to lunch."

"Wash up and go to lunch, then," I says but I'm goin' to investigate this here locker liquor or liquor locker law."

So she got her key and beat it, and I limped to the bar. "I want a highball," I says to the boy. "What's your number?" says he. "It varies," I says. "Sometimes I can hold twenty and sometimes four or five makes me sing."

"I mean, have you got a locker here?"

he says. "No; but I want to get one," says I.

"The gent over there to the desk will fix you, says he. So over to the desk I went and ast for a locker. "What do you drink?" ast the gent.

"I'm from Chicago," I says. "I drink bourbon."

"What's your name and room number?"

he says, and I told him. Then he ast me how often did I shave and what did I think o' the Kaiser and what my name was before I got married, and if I had any intentions of ever running an elevator. Finally he says I was all right. "I'll order you some bourbon," he says. "Anything else?"

I was goin' to say no, but I happened to remember that the Wife generally always wants a bronix before dinner. So I had to also put in a bid for a bottle o' gin and bottles o' the Vermouth brothers, Tony and Pierre. It wasn't till later that I appreciated what a grand law this here law was. When I got my drinks I paid ten cents apiece for 'em for service, besides payin' for the bottles o' stuff to drink. And, besides that, about every third highball or bronix I ordered, the waiter'd bring back word that I was just out of ingredients and then they'd be another delay w'ile they sent to the garage for more. If they had that law all over the country they'd soon be an end o' drinkin', because everybody'd get so mad they'd kill each other. My cross−examination had took quite a long time, but when I got to my room the Wife wasn't back from lunch yet and I had to cover the Marathon route all over again and look her up. We only had the one key to the room, and o' course couldn't expect no more'n that at the price. The Missus had bought one o' the daily programs they get out and she knowed just what we had to do the rest o' the day. "For the next couple hours," she says, we can suit ourself."

"All right," says I. "It suits me to take off my shoes and lay down."

"I'll rest, too," she says; "but at half past four we have to be in the Cocoanut Grove for tea and dancin'. And then we come back to the room and dress for dinner. Then we eat and then we set around till the evenin' dance starts.

Then we dance till we're ready for bed."

"Who do we dance all these dances with?" I ast her. "With whoever we get acquainted with," she says. "All right," says I; "but let's be careful."

Well, we took our nap and then we followed schedule and had our tea in the Cocoanut Grove.

You know how I love tea! My feet was still achin' and the Missus couldn't talk me into no dance.

When we'd set there an hour and was saturated with tea, the Wife says it was time to go up and change into our Tuxedos. I was all in when we reached the room and willin' to even pass up supper and nestle in the hay, but I was informed that the biggest part o' the day's doin's was yet to come. So from six o'clock till after seven I wrestled with studs, and hooks and eyes that didn't act like they'd ever met before and wasn't anxious to get acquainted, and then down we went again to the dinin'−room. "How about a little bronix before the feed?" I says. "It would taste good," says the Missus. So I called Eph and give him the order.

In somethin' less than half an hour he come back empty−handed. "You ain't got no cocktail stuff," he says. "I certainly have," says I.

"I ordered it early this afternoon."

"Where at?" he ast me. "Over in the bar," I says. "Oh, the regular bar!" he says.

"That don't count. You got to have stuff at the service bar to get it served in here."

"I ain't as thirsty as I thought I was," says I.

"Me, neither," says the Missus. So we went ahead and ordered our meal, and w'ile we was waitin' for it a young couple come and took the other two chairs at our table. They didn't have to announce through a megaphone that they was honeymooners. It was wrote all over 'em.

They was reachin' under the table for each other's hand every other minute, and when they wasn't doin' that they was smilin' at each other or gigglin' at nothin'. You couldn't feel that good and be payin' seventeen dollars a day for room and board unless you was just married or somethin'.

I thought at first their company'd be fun, but after a few meals it got like the southern cookin' and begun to undermine the health. The conversation between they and us was what you could call limited. It took place the next day at lunch. The young husband thought he was about to take a bite o' the entry, which happened to be roast mutton with sirup; but he couldn't help from lookin' at her at the same time and his empty fork started for his face prongs up. "Look out for your eye' I says. He dropped the fork and they both blushed till you could see it right through the sunburn. Then they give me a Mexican look and our acquaintance was at an end. This first night, when we was through eatin', we wandered out in the lobby and took seats where we could watch the passin' show. The men was all dressed like me, except I was up to date and had on a mushroom shirt, w'ile they was sportin' the old−fashioned concrete bosom. The women's dresses begun at the top with a belt, and some o' them stopped at the mezzanine floor, w'ile others went clear down to the basement and helped keep the rugs clean. They was one that must of thought it was the Fourth o' July. From the top of her head to where the top of her bathin' suit had left off, she was a red, red rose. From there to the top of her gown was white, and her gown, what they was of it was blue. "My! says the Missus. "What stunnin' gowns!"

"Yes, I says; "and you could have one just like 'em if you'd take the shade offen the piano lamp at home and cut it down to the right size."

Round ten o'clock we wandered in the Palm Garden, where the dancin' had been renewed. The Wife wanted to plunge right in the mazes 0' the foxy trot. "I'll take some courage first," says I. Arid then was when I found out that it cost you ten cents extra besides the tip to pay for a drink that you already owned in fee simple. Well, I guess we must of danced about six dances together and had that many quarrels before she was ready to go to bed. And oh, how grand that old hay−pile felt when I finally bounced into it! The next day we went to the ocean at the legal hour half past eleven. I never had so much fun in my life. The surf was runnin' high, I heard 'em say; and I don't know which I'd rather do, go bathin' in the ocean at Palm Beach when the surf is runnin' high, or have a dentist get one o' my molars ready for a big inlay at a big outlay.

Once in a w ile I managed to not get throwed on my head when a wave hit me. As for swimmin', you had just as much chance as if you was at State and Madison at the noon hour. And before I'd been in a minute they was enough salt in my different features to keep the Blackstone hotel runnin' all through the onion season. The Missus enjoyed it just as much as me. She tried to pretend at first, and when she got floored she'd give a squeal that was supposed to mean heavenly bliss. But after she'd been bruised from head to feet and her hair looked and felt like spinach with French dressin', and she'd drank all she could hold o' the Gulf Stream, she didn't resist none when I drug her in to shore and staggered with her up to our private rooms at five a week per each. Without consultin' her, I went to the desk at the Casino and told 'em they could have them rooms back. "All right," says the clerk, and turned our keys over to the next in line. "How about a refund?" I ast him; but he was waitin' on somebody else. After that we done our bathin' in the tub. But we was down to the beach every morning at eleven−thirty to watch the rest o' them get batted round. And at half past twelve every day we'd follow the crowd to the Breakers' porch and dance together, the Missus and I. Then it'd be back to the other hostelry, sometimes limpin' and sometimes in an Afromobile, and a drink or two in the Palm Garden before lunch. And after lunch we'd lay down; or we'd pay some Eph two or three dollars to pedal us through the windin' jungle trail, that was every bit as wild as the Art Institute; or we'd ferry acrost Lake Worth to West Palm Beach and take in a movie, or we'd stand in front o' the portable Fifth Avenue stores w'ile the Missus wished she could have this dress or that hat, or somethin' else that she wouldn't of looked at if she'd been home and in her right mind. But always at half past four we had to

live up to the rules and be in the Cocoanut Grove for tea and some more foxy trottin'. And then it was dress for dinner, eat dinner, watch the parade and wind up the glorious day with more dancin'. I bet you any amount you name that the Castles in their whole life haven't danced together as much as I and the Missus did at Palm Beach. I'd of gave five dollars if even one the waiters had took her off en my hands for one dance. But I knowed that if I made the offer public they'd of been a really serious quarrel between us instead o' just the minor brawls occasioned by steppin' on each other's feet. She made a discovery one night. She found out that they was a place called the Beach Club where most o' the real people disappeared to every evenin' after dinner. She says we would have to go there too. "But I ain't a member," I says. "Then find out how you get to be one," she says. So to the Beach Club I went and made inquiries.

"You'll have to be introduced by a guy that already belongs," says the man at the door. "Who belongs?" I ast him. "Hundreds o' people," he says.

"Who do you know?"

"Two waiters, two barkeepers and one elevator boy, I says. He laughed, but his laugh didn't get me no membership card and I had to dance three or four extra times the next day to square myself with the Missus. She made another discovery and it cost me six bucks. She found out that, though the meals in the regular dinin'−room was included in the triflin' rates per day, the real people had at least two o' their meals in the garden grill and paid extra for 'em. We tried it for one meal and I must say I enjoyed it all but the check. "We can't keep up that clip," I says to her. "We could," says she, "if you wasn't spendin' so much on your locker."

"The locker's a matter o' life and death," I says. "They ain't no man in the world that could dance as much with their own wife as I do and live without liquid stimulus."

When we'd been there four days she got to be on speakin' terms with the ladies' maid that hung round the lobby and helped put the costumes back on when they slipped off. From this here maid the Missus learned who was who, and the information was relayed to me as soon as they was a chance.

We'd be settin' on the porch when I'd feel an elbow in my ribs all of a sudden. I'd look up at who was passin' and then try and pretend I was excited. "Who is it?" I'd whisper. "That's Mrs. Vandeventer," the Wife'd say. Her husband's the biggest street−car conductor in Philadelphia."

Or somebody'd set beside us at the beach or in the Palm Garden and my ribs would be all battered up before the Missus was calm enough to tip me off. "The Vincents," she'd say; "the canned prune people."

It was a little bit thrilin' at first to be rubbin' elbows with all them celeb's; but it got so finally that I could walk out o' the dinin'−roorn right behind Scotti, the opera singer, without forgettin' that my feet hurt.

The Washington's Birthday Ball brought 'em all together at once, and the Missus pointed out eight and nine at a time and got me so mixed up that I didn't know Pat Vanderbilt from Maggie Rockefeller. The only one you couldn't make no mistake about was a Russian count that you couldn't pronounce. He was buyin' bay mules or somethin' for the Russian government, and he was in ambush. "They say he can't hardly speak a word of English," says the Missus. "If I knowed the word for barber shop in Russia," says I, "I'd tell him they was one in this hotel"

V

In our mail box the next mornin' they was a notice that our first week was up and all we owed was one hundred and forty−six dollars and fifty cents. The bill for room and meals was one hundred and nineteen dollars. The rest was for gettin' clo'es pressed and keepin' the locker damp. I didn't have no appetite for breakfast. I told the Wife

I'd wait up in the room and for her to come when she got through. When she blew in I had my speech prepared. "Look here," I says; "this is our eighth day in Palm Beach society. You're on speakin' terms with a maid and I've got acquainted with half a dozen o' the male hired help. It's cost us about a hundred and sixty−five dollars, includin' them private rooms down to the Casino and our Afromobile trips, and this and that. You know a whole lot o' swell people by sight, but you can't talk to 'em. It'd be just as much satisfaction and hundreds o' dollars cheaper to look up their names in the telephone directory at home; then phone to 'em and, when you got 'em, tell 'em it was the wrong number. That way, you'd get 'em to speak to you at least. "As for sport," I says, we don't play golf and we don't play tennis and we don't swim. We go through the same program o' doin' nothin' every day. We dance, but we don't never change partners. For twelve dollars I could buy a phonograph up home and I and you could trot round the livin'−room all evenin' without no danger o' havin' some o' them fancy birds cave our shins in. And we could have twice as much liquid refreshments up there at about a twentieth the cost. "That Gould I met on the train comin' down," I says, was a even bigger liar than I give him credit for. He says that when he was here people pestered him to death by comin' up and speakin' to him. We ain't had to dodge nobody or hide behind a cocoanut tree to remain exclusive. He says Palm Beach was too common for him. What he should of said was that it was too lonesome. If they was just one white man here that'd listen to my stuff I wouldn't have no kick.

But it ain't no pleasure tellin' stories to the Ephs. They laugh whether it's good or not, and then want a dime for laughin'. "As for our clo'es," I says, "they would be all right for a couple o' days' stay. But the dames round here, and the men, too, has somethin' different to put on for every morin', afternoon and night. You've wore your two evenin' gowns so much that I just have to snap my finger at the hooks and they go and grab the right eyes. "The meals would be grand," I says, "if the cook didn't keep gettin' mixed up and puttin' puddin' sauce on the meat and gravy on the pie. "I'm glad we've been to Palm Beach,"

I says. "I wouldn't of missed it for nothin'. But the ocean won't be no different to−morrow than it was yesterday, and the same for the daily program. It don't even rain here, to give us a little variety. "Now what do you say, I says, "to us just settlin' this bill, and whatever we owe since then, and beatin' it out o' here just as fast as we can go?"

The Missus didn't say nothin' for a w'ile. She was too busy cryin'. She knowed that what I'd said was the truth, but she wouldn't give up without a struggle. "Just three more days, she says finally. If we don't meet somebody worth meetin' in the next three days I'll go wherever you want to take me."

"All right," I says; "three more days it is. What's a little matter o' sixty dollars?"

Well, in them next two days and a half she done some desperate flirtin', but as it was all with women I didn't get jealous. She picked out some o' the E−light o' Chicago and tried every trick she could think up. She told 'em their noses was shiny and offered 'em her powder. She stepped on their white shoes just so's to get a chance to beg their pardon. She told 'em their clo'es was unhooked, and then unhooked 'em so's she could hook 'em up again. She tried to loan 'em her finger−nail tools. When she seen one fannin' herself she'd say: Excuse me, Mrs.

So−and−So; but we got the coolest room in the hotel, and I'd be glad to have you go up there and quit perspirin'." But not a rise did she get.

Not till the afternoon o' the third day o' grace. And I don't know if I ought to tell you this or not only I'm sure you won't spill it nowheres. We'd went up in our room after lunch. I was tired out and she was discouraged. We'd set round for over an hour, not sayin' or doin' nothin'.

I wanted to talk about the chance of us gettin' away the next mornin', but I didn't dast bring up the subject. The Missus complained of it bein' hot and opened the door to leave the breeze go through.

She was settin' in a chair near the doorway, pretendin' to read the Palm Beach News. All of a sudden she jumped up and kind o' hissed at me.

"What's the matter?" I says, springin' from the lounge. "Come here!" she says, and went out the door into the hall. I got there as fast as I could, thinkin' it was a rat or a fire. But the Missus just pointed to a lady walkin' away from us, six or seven doors down. "It's Mrs. Potter," she says; "the Mrs. Potter from Chicago!"

"Oh!" I says, puttin' all the excitement I could into my voice. And I was just startin' back into the room when I seen Mrs. Potter stop and turn round and come to'rd us. She stopped again maybe twenty feet from where the Missus was standin'. "Are you on this floor?" she says.

The Missus shook like a leaf. "Yes, says she, so low you couldn't hardly hear her. "Please see that they's some towels put in 559," says the Mrs. Potter from Chicago.

VI

About five o'clock the Wife quieted down and I thought it was safe to talk to her. "I've been readin' in the guide about a pretty river trip," I says. "We can start from here on the boat to−morrow mornin'. They run to Fort Pierce to−morrow and stay there to−morrow night.

The next day they go from Fort Pierce to Rockledge, and the day after that from Rockledge to Daytona. The fare's only five dollars apiece.

And we can catch a north−bound train at Daytona."

"All right, I don't care," says the Missus. So I left her and went down−stairs and acrost the street to ask Mr. Foster. Ask Mr. Foster happened to be a girl. She sold me the boat tickets and promised she would reserve a room with bath for us at Fort Pierce, where we was to spend the followin' night. I bet she knowed all the w'ile that rooms with a bath in Fort Pierce is scarcer than toes on a sturgeon. I went back to the room and helped with the packin' in an advisory capacity. Neither one of us had the heart to dress for dinner. We ordered somethin' sent up and got soaked an extra dollar for service. But we was past carin' for a little thing like that. At nine o'clock next mornin' the good ship Constitution stopped at the Poinciana dock w'ile we piled aboard. One bellhop was down to see us off and it cost me a quarter to get that much attention. Mrs. Potter must of overslept herself. The boat was loaded to the guards and I ain't braggin' when I say that we was the bestlookin' people aboard. And as for manners, why, say, old Bill Sykes could of passed off for Henry Chesterfield in that gang! Each one o' them occupied three o' the deck chairs and sprayed orange juice all over their neighbors. We could of talked to plenty o' people here, all right; they were as clubby a gang as I ever seen. But I was afraid if I said somethin' they'd have to answer; and, with their mouths as full o' citrus fruit as they was, the results might of been fatal to my light suit. We went up the lake to a canal and then through it to Indian River. The boat run aground every few minutes and had to be pried loose. About twelve o'clock a cullud gemman come up on deck and told us lunch was ready. At half past one he served it at a long family table in the cabin. As far as I was concerned, he might as well of left it on the stove. Even if you could of bit into the food, a glimpse of your fellow diners would of strangled your appetite. After the repast I called the Missus aside.

"Somethin' tells me we're not goin' to live through three days o' this," I says.

"What about takin' the train from Fort Pierce and beatin' it for Jacksonville, and then home?"

"But that'd get us to Chicago too quick," says she. "We told people how long we was goin' to be gone and if we got back ahead o' time they'd think they was somethin' queer."

"They's too much queer on this boat,"

I says. "But you're goin' to have your own way from now on."

We landed in Fort Pierce about six. It was only two or three blocks to the hotel, but when they laid out that part o' town they overlooked some o' the modern conveniences, includin' sidewalks. We staggered through the sand with our grips and sure had worked up a hunger by the time we reached Ye Inn. "Got reservations for us here?" I ast the clerk. "Yes, he says, and led us to 'em in person. The room he showed us didn't have no bath, or even a chair that you could set on w'ile you pulled off your socks. "Where's the bath?" I ast him. "This way, he says, and I followed him down the hall, outdoors and up an alley. Finally we come to a bathroom complete in all details, except that it didn't have no door. I went back to the room, got the Missus and went down to supper. Well, sir, I wish you could of been present at that supper. The choice o' meats was calves' liver and onions or calves' liver and onions. And I bet if them calves had of been still livin' yet they could of gave us some personal reminiscences about Garfield. The Missus give the banquet one look and then laughed for the first time in several days.. "The guy that named this burg got the capitals mixed, I says. "It should of been Port Fierce."

And she laughed still heartier. Takin' advantage, I says: "How about the train from here to Jacksonville?"

"You win!" says she. "We can't get home too soon to suit me."

VII

The mornin' we landed in Chicago it was about eight above and a wind was comin' offen the Lake a mile a minute. But it didn't feaze us. "Lord!" says the Missus. "Ain't it grand to be home!"

"You said somethin'," says I.

"But wouldn't it of been grander if we hadn't never left?"

"I don't know about that," she says.

"I think we both of us learned a lesson."

"Yes, I says; "and the tuition wasn't only a matter o' close to seven hundred bucks!"

"Oh," says she, "we'll get that back easy! "How?" I ast her. "Do you expect some tips on the market from Mrs. Potter and the rest o' your new friends?"

"No," she says. "We'll win it.

We'll win it in the rummy game with the Hatches."