

THREE KINGS AND A PAIR

Ring Lardner

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ACCORDIN' to some authorities, a person, before they get married, should ought to look up your opponent's family tree and find out what all her relatives died of. But the way I got it figured out, if you're sure they did die, the rest of it don't make no difference. In exceptionable cases it may be all right to take a girl that part of her family is still livin', but not under no circumstances if the part happens to be a unmarried sister named Bessie. We was expectin' her in about two weeks, but we got a card Saturday mornin' which she says on it that she'd come right away if it was all the same to us, because it was the dull season in Wabash society and she could tear loose better at the present time than later on. Well, I guess they ain't no time in the year when society in Wabash would collapse for she not bein' there, but if she had to come at all, the sooner it was over the better. And besides, it wouldn't of did us no good to say aye, yes or no, because the postcard only beat her here by a few hours. Not havin' no idear she was comin' so soon I didn't meet the train, but it seems like she brought her escort right along with her. It was a guy named Bishop and she'd met him on the trip up.

The news butcher introduced them, I guess. He seen her safe to the house and she was there when I got home. Her and my Missus was full of him.

Just think! the Missus says.

He writes motion-pitcher plays.

And gets ten thousand a year," says Bess. Did you find out from the firm? I ast her. He told me himself, says Bessie.

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

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

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

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

What evenin'?" I says. Any evenin' that's convenient for you, says Bessie. Well," I says, I'm sorry, but I got engagements every night except Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

What about Tuesday? ast Bessie.

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

Oh, won't that be grand! says Bessie.

I wonder what I can wear.

A kimono'll be all right," I says.

If the door-bell rings, you don't have to answer it.

What do you mean? says the Missus.

I guess if we go, Bess'll go with us.

"You'd starve to death if you guessed for a livin'," I says. Never mind that kind o' talk, says the Missus. When we got a visitor we're not goin' out places nights and leave her here alone.

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

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

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

Get this straight: Either Bess goes or I don't go. You can both stay home, says I.

I don't anticipate no trouble findin' a partner.

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

And it must of been goin' to be a dandy, because just speakin' about it made her cry. So I says: You win! But I'll prob'ly have to change the tickets.

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What kind o' tickets have you got? ast the Missus. "Cheap ones, I says.

Down—stairs, five per. How grand! says Bessie. Yes, I says, but I'm afraid I got the last two they had. I'll prob'ly have to give them back and take three balcony seats.

That's all right, just so's Bess goes, says the Wife. Mr. Bishop's wild about music, says Bessie. "Well, I says, he prob'ly gets passes to the pitcher houses.

He don't hear no real music there, says Bessie. Well, says I, suppose when he comes tomorrow, I mention somethin' about I and the Missus havin' tickets to the op'ra Tuesday night. Then, if he's so wild about music, he'll maybe try to horn into the party and split the expenses fifty—fifty.

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

I won't ask him at all, I says.

It was a mistake for me to ever suggest it.

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

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

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

All right, all right, I says.

Let's not argue no more. Every time I open my head it costs three dollars.

"No such a thing, says the Missus.

"The whole business won't only be two dollars more than you figured on. The tickets you had for the two of us would come to ten dollars, and with Bess and Mr. Bishop goin' it's only twelve, if you get balcony seats.

I wonder, says Bessie, if Mr.

Bishop wouldn't object to settin' in the balcony.

"Maybe he would, says the Missus.

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

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

He can wear a false mustache for a disguise.

He's got a real one, says Bessie.

He can shave it off, then, says I.

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

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

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

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

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

What's the matter with you? says the Missus. "Nothin' at all, I says, except that I ain't no millionaire scenario writer. Twenty dollars is twenty dollars.

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

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

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

What are you gettin' at? I ast her.

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

"It's been done before, says I.

"Listen to me, says the Frau.

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

They'll see to that, I says.

"They ain't such hicks.

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

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

Don't be so smart, says the Missus.

It would be mighty nice for me to have her so near and it would be nice for you and I both to have a rich brother-in-law.

I don't know about that, says I.

Somebody might do us a mischief in a fit o' jealous rage." He'd show us enough good times to make up for whatever they done, says the Wife.

We're foolish if we don't make no play for him and it'd be startin' off right to take him along to this here op'ra and set him in the best seats. He likes good music and you can see he's used to doin' things in style. And besides, sis looks her best when she's dressed up." Well, I finally give in and the Missus called Bessie out o' the despondents' ward and they was all smiles and pep, but they acted like I wasn't in the house; so, to make it realistical, I blowed down to Andy's and looked after some o' my other investments.

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

The girls told me to be expectin' a handsome man o' that name, I says.

And they told me about the mustache.

Wouldn't be much to tell, says Bishop. It's young yet, I says. Come in and take a weight off your feet.

So he picked out the only chair we got that ain't upholstered with flatirons and we set down and was tryin' to think o' somethin' more to say when Bessie hollered to us from midchannel. Is that Mr. Bishop? she yelped.

It's me, Miss Gorton, says Bishop.

I'll be right out, says Bess. Take it easy, I says. You mightn't catch cold, but they's no use riskin' it.

So then I and Bishop knocked the street-car service and President Wilson and give each other the double O. He wasn't what you could call ugly lookin', but if you'd come out in print and say he was handsome, a good lawyer'd have you at his mercy. His dimensions, what they was of them, all run perpendicular. He didn't have no latitude.

If his collar slipped over his shoulders he could step out of it. If they hadn't been payin' him all them millions for pitcher plays, he could of got a job in a wire wheel. They wouldn't of been no difference in his photograph if you took it with a X-ray or a camera. But he had hair and two eyes and a mouth and all the rest of it, and his clo'es was certainly class. Why wouldn't they be? He could pick out cloth that was thirty bucks a yard and get a suit and overcoat for fifteen bucks. A umbrella cover would of made him a year's pyjamas. Well, I seen the Missus sneak from the kitchen to her room to don the shoe leather, so I got right down to business. The girls tells me you're fond o' good music, I says. I love it," says Bishop. Do you ever take in the op'ra? I ast him. I eat it up," he says. Have you been this year?" I says.

Pretty near every night," says Bishop. I should think you'd be sick of it, says I.

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

A man could easy get tired o' the same kind o' food, I says. But the op'ras is all different, says Bishop. "Different languages, maybe, I says.

"But they're all music and singin'.

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

Unlest it was Scotch and chocolate soda, I says. "They's good op'ras and bad op'ras," says Bishop. Which is the good ones?" I ast him.

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

Carmen's a bear cat, I says.

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

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It is pretty bad, says Bishop.

I seen it a year ago.

Well, I'd just been readin' in the paper where it was bran'-new and hadn't never been gave prev'ous to this season. So I thought I'd have a little sport with Mr. Smartenstein. What's it about? I says. He stalled a w'ile. It ain't about much of anything, he says. It must be about somethin', says I.

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

"Did they sing in English? I ast him. No; Latin, says Bishop. "Can you understand Latin? I says.

"Sure, says be. I'd ought to.

I studied it two years.

What's the name of it mean in English? I ast. You pronounce the Latin wrong, he says. "I can't parse it from how you say it.

If I seen it wrote out I could tell.

So I handed him the paper where they give the op'ra schedule. That's her, I says, pointin' to the one that was billed for Tuesday night. "Oh, yes, says Bishop. Yes, that's the one.

No question about that, says I.

But what does it mean?"

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

Now the puzzle's solved," I says.

What do them last three words mean? Louie Armour's what? "It ain't nothin' to do with Armour, says Bishop. The first word is the Latin for love. And Day means of God, and Trey means three, and Ray means Kings.

Oh," I says, it's a poker game. The fella's just called and the other fella shows down his hand and the first fella had a straight and thought it wasn't no good. So he's su'prised to see what the other fella's got. So he says: Well, for the love o' Mike, three kings!' Only he makes it stronger. Is that the dope? "I don't think it's anything about poker," says Bishop. You'd ought to know," I says.

You seen it.

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

Do you suppose you could get it if you seen it again?" I says. I wouldn't set through it," he says.

It's no good.

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

Did you get your invitation?" says she to Bishop. What invitation?" he says. My husban' was goin' to ask you to go with us Tuesday night, she says.

Grand op'ra.

Bishop won't go, I says.

He's already saw the play and says it ain't no good and he wouldn't feel like settin' through it again.

"Why, Mr. Bishop! That's a terrible disappointment, says the Missus. We was countin' on you, says Bessie, chokin' up. "It's tough luck, I says, but you can't expect things to break right all the w'ile.

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

And, besides, I surely would enjoy your company.

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

You got me wrong, says Bishop.

"The piece was gave by a bunch o' supers the time I went. I'd like to see it with a real cast.

They say it's a whiz when it's acted right.

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

So I was stopped and they wasn't no more to say, and after a w'ile we had dinner and then I seen why Bishop

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was so skinny. 'Parently he hadn't tasted fodder before for a couple o' mont's. It must keep you busy writin' them scenarios, I says. "No time to eat or nothin'.

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

Your wife's some dandy little cook! It runs in the family, I guess, says Bessie. "You'd ought to taste my cookin'.

"Maybe he will some day, says the Missus, and then her and Bessie pretended like they'd made a break and was embarrassed. So when he was through I says: Leave Bess take Bishop out in the kitchen and show him how she can wash dishes.

Nothin' doin', says the Wife.

I'm goin' to stack them and then I and you's got to hurry and keep our date."

What date? I says. "Over to Hatch's, says the Missus.

"You hadn't forgotten, had you? I hadn't forgot that the Hatches was in Benton Harbor," I says. Yes, says the Frau, winkin' at me, but I promised Mrs. Hatch I'd run over there and see that everything was O. K.

So I wasn't even allowed to set down and smoke, but had to help unload the table and then go out in the cold. And it was rotten weather and Sunday and nothin' but water, water everywhere. What's the idear?" I ast the Missus when we was out. Can't you see nothin'? she says.

I want to give Bess a chance.

Chance to what? I says. A chance to talk to him, says the Wife. Oh! says I. I thought you wanted him to get stuck on her.

What do you think of him?" says she.

Wouldn't he fit fine in the family? He'd fit in a flute," I says.

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

"He is slender, says the Missus.

"Prob'ly they been starvin' him where he boards at.

I bet they wouldn't starve me on ten thousand a year, I says. "But maybe they don't know he's at the table or think he's just one o' the macaroni. "It's all right for you to make jokes about him, says she, but if you had his brains we'd be better off.

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

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

Match just describes him, says I.

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

You win that argument, I says.

They're a pair all right, and they'd make a great hand if you was playin' deuces wild.

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

Why don't we play cards? I says.

"It's Sunday, says the Missus. Has the mayor stopped that, too? I says. But she winked at me again, the old flirt, so I stuck round the kitchen till it was pretty near time to wipe the dishes, and then I went to bed. Monday noon I chased over to the Auditorium and they was only about eighty in line ahead o' me, and I was hopin' the house would be sold out for a week before I got up to the window. While I was markin' time I looked at the pitchers o' the different actors, hung up on the posts to advertise some kind o' hair tonic. I wisht I had Bishop along to tell me what the different names meant in English. I suppose most o' them meant Goatee or Spinach or Brush or Hedge or Thicket or somethin'. Then they was the girls' pitchers, too; Genevieve Farr'r that died in the Stockyards scene in Carmen, and Fanny Alda that took the part o' the Michaels girl from Janesville, and Mary Gardner, and Louise Edviney that was goin' to warble for us, and a lot more of all ages and one size. Finally I got

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up to the ticket agent's cage and then I didn't only have to wait till the three women behind me done their shoppin', and then I hauled out my two tickets and ast the agent what would he give me for them. Do you want to exchange them?" he says. I did, says I, "but I heard you was sold out for to-morrow night.

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

But nothin' down-stairs, is they? I says. "Yes, he says anywheres yuu want."

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

Here's four nice ones in the seventh row, says he. "It'll be ten dollars more. I ain't partic'lar to have them nice, I says. "It don't make no difference, says he. The whole down-stairs is five a wallop."

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

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

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

"I got to be, says the agent. But if you was a little smarter you'd be this side o' the cage instead o' that side, says I. Do you want these tickets or don't you? he says. So I seen he didn't care for no more verbal collisions with me, so I give him the two tickets and a bonus o' ten bucks and he give me back four pasteboards and throwed in a envelope free for nothin'. I passed up lunch Tuesday because I wanted to get home early and have plenty o' time to dress.

That was the idear and it worked out every bit as successful as the Peace Ship. In the first place, I couldn't get in my room because that's where the Missus and Bess was wakin' up. In the second place, I didn't need to of allowed any time for supper because there wasn't none. The Wife said her and Bessie'd been so busy with their clo'es that they'd forgot a little thing like supper. "But I didn't have no lunch, I says.

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

On who?" I says. You're givin' the party, says she.

The invitations didn't contain no clause about the inner man, says I.

"Furthermore, if I had the ten dollars back that I spent today for tickets, I'd have eleven dollars altogether.

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

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

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

"That's a beautiful gown."

It's my favoright, says Bessie.

It don't take a person long to get attached to a pretty dress, I says. The Missus hollered for me to come in and help her. I don't need no help, she say, but I didn't want you givin' no secrets away.

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

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

Her middle name's Generous," I says.

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

And I suppose it don't make no difference how you look, says I, "as long as you only got me to please. If Bishop's friends sees him with Bessie they'll say: 'My! he's copped out a bigleaguer.' But if I run into any o' my pals they'll think I married the hired girl.

You should worry, says the Missus.

And besides that, I says, if you succeed in tyin' Bishop up to a long-term lease he's bound to see that there dress on you some time and then what'll he think? Bess can keep the gown, says the Missus. I'll make her give me one of her'n for it.

"With your tradin' ability, I says, "you'd ought to be the Cincinnati Reds' manager. But if you do give the dress to her, I says, warn her not to wear it in Wabash—except when the marshal's over on the other street.

Well, we was ready in a few minutes, because I'm gettin' used to the soup and fish, and everything went on easy owin' to my vacuum, and I was too weak to shave; and the Missus didn't have no trouble with Bessie's creation, which was built like the Cottage Grove cars, enter at front. I don't think I'm so bad," says the Missus,

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lookin' in the glass. "You'd be just right, I says, "if we was goin' to the annual meetin' o' the Woman's Guild.

I and Bishop had a race gettin' on the streetcar. I was first and he won. "I just got paid to-day, he says, "and I didn't have time to get change."

They wasn't only one seat. Bess took it first and then offered it to the Missus. I'll be mad at you if you don't take it, says Bess. But the wife remained standin' and Bessie by a great effort kept her temper. Goin' into the theayter we passed a fella that was sellin' liberettos. I bet this guy's got lots o' change, I says. Them things is for people that ain't never saw no op'ra," says Bishop. I'm goin' to have one," I says.

Don't buy none for me," says Bishop.

You just spoke in time," I says. I laid down a quarter and grabbed one o' the books.

It's thirty-five cents," says the guy. Carmen wasn't only a quarter, I says. Is this show better'n Carmen? This is a new one," the guy says.

This fella," I says, pointin' to Bishop, seen it a year ago.

He must have a good imagination, says the guy. No, I says, he writes movin'-pitcher plays.

I give up a extra dime, because they didn't seem to be nothin' else to do. Then I handed over my tickets to the fella at the door and we was took right down amongst the high polloi. Say, I thought the dress Bess was wearin' was low; ought to been, seein' it was cut down from fifty bucks to thirty-seven. But the rest o' the gowns round us must of been sixty per cent. off. I says to the Missus: I bet you wisht now you hadn't swapped costumes.

"Oh, I don't know, she says.

It's chilly in here.

Well, it may of been chilly then, but not after the op'ra got goin' good. Carmen was a human refrigerator compared to the leadin' lady in this show. Set through two acts and you couldn't hardly believe it was December. But the curtain was supposed to go up at eight-ten, and it wasn't only about that time when we got there, so they was over half a hour to kill before the show begin. I looked in my program and seen the real translation o' the title. The Love o' Three Kings, it says, and no "of God to it. I'd of knew anyway, when I'd read the plot, that He didn't have nothin' to do with it.

I listened a w'ile to Bishop and Bess. And you've saw all the op'ras? she ast him. Most o' them," he says. How grand! says Bessie. I wisht I could see a lot o' them."

Well, he says, you're goin' to be here for some time.

Oh, Mr. Bishop, I don't want you throwin' all your money away on me, she says. I don't call it throwin' money away, says Bishop. I wouldn't neither, I says.

"I'd say Bishop was muscle-bound.

They didn't pay no attention to me. What ones would you like to see? he ast her. "What are your favorights? says Bess. "Oh, says Bishop, I've saw them all so many times that it don't really make no difference to me. Sometimes they give two the same night, two short ones, and then you ain't so liable to get bored.

Saturday nights is when they usually give the two, and Saturday nights they cut the prices.

This here Bishop wasn't no boob. One good combination," he says, is Polly Archer and Cavalier Rusticana.

They're both awful pretty.

"Oh, I'd love to see them, says Bessie. What are they like? So he says Polly Archer was a leadin' lady in a stock company and the leadin' man and another fella was both stuck on her and she loved one o' them—I forget which one; whichever wasn't her husbun'—and they was a place in one o' their shows where the one that was her husbun' was supposed to get jealous and stab she and her lover, just actin', but, instead o' just pretendin', this one night he played a joke on them and done the stabbin' in earnest, and they was both killed. Well, that'd be a good one to see if you happened to be there the night he really kills them; otherwise, it sounds pretty tame. And Bishop also told her about Cavalier Rusticana that means Rural Free Delivery in English, and I didn't get the plot only that the mail carrier flirts with one o' the farmers' wives and o' course the rube spears him with a pitchfork. The state's attorneys must of been on the jump all the w'ile in them days. Finally the orchestra was all in their places and an old guy with a beard come out in front o' them. That's the conductor, says Bishop.

He looks like he'd been a long time with the road," I says. Then up went the curtain and the thermometer.

The scene's laid in Little Italy, but you can't see nothin' when it starts off because it's supposed to be just before mornin'. Pretty soon one o' the three kings comes in with a grouch. He's old and blind as a bat and he ain't slept good and he's sore at the conductor on account o' the train bein' a half-hour late, and the conductor's jealous

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of him because his beard's longer, and Archibald, that's the old king's name, won't sing what the orchestra's playin', but just snarls and growls, and the orchestra can't locate what key he's snarlin' in, so they don't get along at all, and finally Flamingo, that's the old king's chauffeur, steers him off'n the stage.

Acrost on the other side o' the stage from where they go off they's a bungalow, and out of it comes Flora and another o' the kings, a young fella with a tenor voice named Veto. They sing about what a fine mornin' it is in Wop and she tells him he'd better fly his kite before Archibald catches him. It seems like she's married to Archibald's son, Fred, but o' course she likes Veto better or it wouldn't be no op'ra. Her and Veto was raised in the same ward and they was oncet engaged to be married, but Archibald's gang trimmed Veto's in a big roughhouse one night and Flora was part o' the spoils. When Archibald seen how good she could fix spaghetti' he was bound she'd stick in the family, so he give her the choice o' bein' killed or marryin' his boy, so she took Fred but didn't really mean it in earnest. So Veto hangs round the house a lot, because old Archibald's blind and Fred's generally always on the road with the Erie section gang. But old Archibald's eyes bein' no good, his ears is so much the better, even if he don't sometimes keep with the orchestra, so he comes back on the stage just after Veto's went and he hears Flora tryin' to snoop back in her bungalow.

Who was you talkin' to? he says.

Myself," says Flora. Great stuff! says Archibald.

Up and outdoors at five A. M. to talk to yourself! Feed that to the goldfish!"

So she ain't got him fooled for a minute, but w'ile they're arguin' Fred blows in. So Archibald don't say nothin' about his superstition because he ain't sure, so Fred and his Missus goes in the bungalow to have breakfast and Archibald stays on the stage quarrelin' with the conductor. If Fred was eatin' all through the intermission, he must of been as hungry as me, because it was plain forty minutes before the second act begin. Him and Flora comes out o' their house and Fred says he's got to go right away again because they's a bad wash-out this side o' Huntington. He ain't no sooner gone than Veto's back on the job, but Flora's kind o' sorry for her husbun', and Veto don't get the reception that a star ought to expect. Why don't you smile at me? he says.

So she says: It don't seem proper, dearie, with a husbun' on the Erie.

But before long she can't resist his high notes and the next five or ten minutes is a love scene between the two, and they was a couple o' times when I thought the management would ring down the asbestos curtain. Finally old Archibald snoops back on the stage with Flamingo, and Veto runs, but Archie hears him and it's good night. The old boy gives Flora the third degree and she owns up, and then Flamingo says that Fred's comin' back to get his dinner pail. So Archibald insists on known' the fella's name that he heard him runnin' away, but Flora's either forgot it or else she's stubborn, so Archie looses his temper and wrings her neck. So when Fred arrives he gets the su'prise of his life and finds out he's a widow.

I slayed her, says Archibald.

"She wasn't no good.

She was the best cook we ever had, says Fred. "What was the matter with her? She had a gentleman friend, says his old man. Well, so far, they's only one dead and nothin' original about how it was pulled. You can go over to the Victoria and see any number o' throtlin's at fifty cents for the best seats. So it was up to the management to get a wallop into the last act. It took them pretty near forty minutes to think of it, but it was good when it come. The scene is Colosimo's undertakin' rooms and Flora's ruins is laid out on the counter. All the Wops from her ward stand round singin' gospel hymns. When they've beat it Veto approaches the bier bar and wastes some pretty fair singin' on the late Flora. Then all of a sudden he leans over and gives her a kiss. That's all for Veto. You see, Old Fox Archibald had figured that the bird that loved her would pull somethin' like this and he'd doped out a way to learn who he was and make him regret it at the same time, besides springin' some bran'-new stuff in the killin' line. So he's mixed up some rat poison and garlic and spread it on the lips of his fair daughter-in-law. W'ile Veto's dyin' Fred comes in and finds him.

So it was you, was it? he says.

I'm the guy, says Veto. Well, says Fred, this'll learn you a lesson, you old masher, you! I'll mash you in a minute, says Veto, but the way he was now, he couldn't of mashed turnips. I kissed her last, anyway, says Veto. "You think you did! says Fred, and helps himself to the garlic. So Veto's dead and Fred's leanin' over the counter, dyin', when Archibald wabbles in. He finds his way up to Fred and grabs a hold of him, thinkin' it's the stranger. Lay off'n me, pa, says Fred.

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"This ain't the other bird. He's dead and it's got me, too.

Well, says the old man, that'd ought to satisfy them. But it's pretty tough on the Erie.

"How grand! says Bess when it was over. "But it leaves you with a bad taste,"

says Bishop. And a big appetite," I says. Did that old man kill them all?" ast the Missus. All but hisself and Flamingo, says I.

What was he mad at? says she. He was drove crazy by hunger, I says. His wife and his sister-in-law and her fella was starvin' him to death.

Bein' blind, he prob'ly spilled things at table, says the Missus. Blind men sometimes has trouble gettin' their food.

The trouble ain't confined to the blind, says I.

When we got outside I left Bess and Bishop lead the way, hopin' they'd head to'rds a steak garage.

"No hurry about gettin' home, I hollered to them. The night's still young yet.

Bishop turned round. Is they any good eatin' places out by your place? he says. I thought I had him. Not as good as down-town, says I, and I named the Loop restaurants. How's the car service after midnight? he says. Grand!" says I. All night long.

I wondered where he would take us. Him and Bess crossed the avenue and stopped where the crowd was waitin' for south-bound cars. He's got some favorite place a ways south, says the Missus. A car come and I and her clumb aboard. We looked back just in time to see Bessie and Bishop wavin' us farewell. They missed the car, says the Missus. Yes, I says, and they was just as anxious to catch it as if it'd been the leprosy.

"Never mind, says the Missus.

"If he wants to be alone with her it's a good sign.

I can't eat a sign, says I.

We'll stop at The Ideal and have a little supper of our own, she says. "We won't, says I.

Why not? says the Missus. Because, I says, they's exactly thirty-five cents in my pocket. And offerin' my stomach seventeen and a half cents' worth o' food now would be just about like sendin' one blank cartridge to the Russian army.

I think they's some crackers in the house she says. Prob'ly, says I. We're usually that way—overstocked. You don't seem to realize that our household goods is only insured for a thousand."

About one o'clock I went to sleep from sheer weakness. About one-thirty the Missus shook me and woke me up. We win, Joe!" she says, all excited.

I think Bishop and Bess is engaged! Win! says I. Say, if you was a Frenchman you'd have a big celebration every anniversary o' the Battle o' Waterloo.

I was goin' out in the kitchen to get a drink, she says. "Bess was home, but I didn't know it. And when I was comin' back from the kitchen I happened to glance in the livin'room. And I seen Bishop kiss her! Isn't it great! "Yes, I says. But I wisht she'd of had Archibald fix up her lips.