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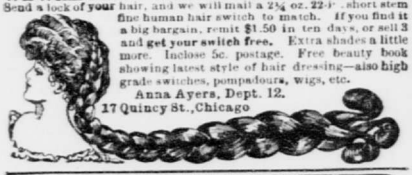

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POROUS PLASTER

When Bug Hooper Got By

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up by a couple of advertisin' boards hung over his shoulders. The advice painted on the marble cloth is that for the best fifty-cent table d'hôte in town you should go to Fragini's; but the wreck that's wearin' the banner looks like he needed a dinner more'n anybody who might read the sign.

"That's the bottom of the chute," says I, noddin' at the specimen. "Int'restin' exhibit."

But Mr. Hooper don't seem to hear this side remark. He sits there open faced and still starin'. The wreck has shuffled up to within a few feet of us, his hands in his pockets, his battered old lid pulled down over his eyes, and his neck hunched into his collar. Just then he hauls out a thin grimy claw and swabs the end of his red nose with it, which gives us a full face view. I hears a gasp from Bug Hooper.

"Great coyotes!" says he. "Doc!"

"Eh?" says I.

"It's Doc Keezar!" says he, strugglin' with the handle of the tonneau door. "Hey, driver! Hold up! Doc! Doc! Don't you know me?"

And the next thing I knew Mr. Hooper is out there in front of a swell Broadway florist's, tryin' to hug that scousy lookin' old sandwich man. And say, Bug Hooper's stock goes up to ninety above par with me that same minute. I wouldn't have said he'd done it. There he is, though, right in the middle of the sidewalk, shoutin' at Doc and askin' him over and over if he don't remember him. The object tries to back away, with his head down.

"Sure you ain't claimed the wrong party?" says I.

"What!" says Hooper. "Don't you suppose I can tell an old side partner when I see him, especially Doc Keezar? Come on, Doc; shake hands! What in heaven's name has happened to you? I'm your friend, old Bug Hooper! Speak! What are you afraid of?"

That's what it seems to be, fear. He keeps glancin' back over his shoulder, as if he expected some one to land a kick on him, and although his trembly old jaws keep on movin', he don't say anything we can make out.

"Sufferin' catamounts!" says Hooper, "but isn't this fierce, McCabe? Look at the state he's in! Here, help me get him into the car!"

SO he takes hold on one side, and I on the other, and we half drags, half lifts him into the tonneau, while a crowd begins to collect, and the chauffeur sits there gawpin' at us like he thought we'd gone dippy.

"Spark her up, Roland," says I. "Jump us out of here before we're pinched for kidnappin'. That's it! Pull around that truck."

Well, we've gone three blocks before it occurs to Hooper to yank the sandwich boards off his old friend. And when he gets 'em in his hands he seems to boil over all at once.

"Who did it, Doc?" says he. "Who's rigged you up this way? Tell me the name of the measly, flea bitten son of a gun, and I'll—"

"Ah, don't get excited, Hooper," says I. "It's the common thing to send out men with the boards on. They get ten cents an hour for doin' the promenade. Ain't that it, Doc?"

"Yes, yes," says the wreck, noddin' his head and talkin' in a voice that's a cross between a whine and a sniffle,—"ten cents an hour. But they'll take my job away from me for this. Please—please let me out!"

"Good Gawd!" groans Hooper. "If I could only lay my hands on the skunk that did this!"

"Ah, say!" says I. "Didn't I tell you it was the reg'lar thing?"

"Is it?" says Hooper, his wide set blue eyes blazin', as he smashes a big fist down on the seat cushion. "Then lemme tell you one thing, McCabe, it ain't regular in the part of the country I come from. Hang signs on a poor, miserable old wretch like that and send him out to walk up and down in sight of his fellow men! Why, I wouldn't treat a blind cayuse that way, let alone a human being! And him a man, as good as you or I once; yes, and better! Yet just because they find him down and out, and sick, and half starved, they use him for a billboard to advertise some picayune, dirty business, and parade him on a street like this!"

Well, say, I expect I've seen as many sandwich men as anybody; but blamed if I ever looked at the game in just that light. It don't take me long to see it the way Bug Hooper does, though, after he's made his point.

"Mr. Hooper," says I, "you're dead right. It's a shame."

"It's right down cussed!" says he. "And if I could only find out who—"

"That's easy," says I. "There's the name and address of the firm on both boards."

MAYBE in cold blood I'd have tried to steer him off from what he starts out to do then. But at the minute, with poor old Doc Keezar sittin' there shiverin' and mumblin', I was most as warm under the collar as Hooper was. Anyway, I don't make any move to hold him back as we rolls up in front of the Fragini joint.

"Where's the boss?" yells Hooper as he pushes through the door.

An oily, curly headed, foreign lookin' gent, big as the side of a house and wearin' one of these black, Fra Diavolo mustaches, steps out from behind a little desk, smirks, and comes up rubbin' his hands.

"I am ze proprietair,—Signor Fragini," says he.

"You are, eh?" says Hooper. "Then—then—I—" Honest, he gets purple in the face tryin' to get out whatever sentiments he has on tap; but he has to give it up. "Blast you!" he explodes. "Here's some of your property you can have to keep!" and with that he hits up the sandwich boards and smashes 'em down over that head of curly black hair.

"Good eye!" says I, grabbin' him by the arm and steerin' him toward the door. "But that's enough. Now let's slide out."

It was like leavin' in the middle of the last act, too; but as we got under way I had a satisfyin' glimpse of Fragini, tearin' around the front of the restaurant, strikin' out wild, and wearin' his table d'hôte signs the way you sometimes see a cow wearin' a jumpin' board. And I expect the language he was usin' would have scorched the spaghetti. Prob'bly he'll never know, either, what it was all about.

DOC and Hooper? Oh, it comes out that while Keezar was on here waitin' for some one to buy his patent—which they'd found a lot cheaper to steal—he gets up against the breadline good and hard. He's as empty as a cast off lard pail, and he ain't got any more spirit left than a puppy kicked under the bed. By degrees, though, Hooper gets him to understand that he's safe now, and that he owns some mighty valuable minin' stock, and that the last year or so is only a nightmare. Bug calls me up on the 'phone yesterday, to say that him and the Doc are about to start back for Bedelia.

"So long, then," says I. "Remember me to Hank, you know. And don't forget about not usin' too many rainbow colors in describin' New York to the boys."

"Rainbow colors!" he grunts. "Say, if I was to tell you what I think of this cussed town of yours right now, it would melt the wires!"

A Brief Bohemiography

Continued from page 4

try, though the number is almost negligible in Boston and Philadelphia. They exist in each of those cities sporadically, but they are extremely shy and are out of harmony with their environment. Yet Bohemians elsewhere have been known to eat scrapple with avidity and to live for weeks at a time on the esculent bean with pork trimmings. It may not have been from choice, perhaps, but Bohemians do not always have their choice of fare.

One may not definitively state what a Bohemian is; for he is nothing if he is not anything and everything, except that which is conventional. Bohemians are connoisseurs in contraconventions, idealized sinners against social tenets; but they are not socialists or anarchists,—they want the traditional conventions of society to continue in full force, in order that they may have a definite object of existence; to wit, the open disregard of them. If there were no conventions, there would still remain socialists and anarchists, but there would be no Bohemians. This statement may not be perfectly clear to the careless reader, but if he will direct the rays of his attention upon it for a moment, the clouds about it will break away.

Among many—too many, indeed—outside the bounds of Bohemia an impression prevails that to be Bohemian implies a condition not wholly respectable. Either the impression is erroneous, or opinions differ as to what respectability is. As among all classes, there are variants in Bohemia, and it is admitted, without a word of complaint against the immutable, that some Bohemians are punk from center to circumference. But this may be said with equal verity of other classes of clay creation, not omitting the sacred circle of the Church and of our best Society, that creature of conventions.

But Bohemia is not so exacting as they in her demands for observance of artificial rules of propriety, and is content with a fair average degree of decency without being distressingly exacting. This applies no less to moral than to social conventions; for Bohemians have a code of morals adapted to their temperaments. They may not keep all commandments; and by the same token they may not break all of them. They recognize a limit to liberty, and draw a distinct line of demarcation between the unconventional and the criminal. It must be confessed that they love a broken commandment but they have no desire to wreck the entire decalogue. Nor do they perpetrate infractions from an innate love of sin. It is done as schoolboys love to break the teacher's rules,—simply because they are the teacher's rules.

That is the spirit of the true Bohemians, and that is why the conscientious conventionalist delights in the atmosphere of Bohemia when he sometimes gets out of the close air of law and order and breathes the ozone of freedom. As an individual, the Bohemian, like any other human being, may be weak against temptation, and fall for lack of strength to stay him upward, that is to say, he is a born transgressor, naturally defective in ethical construction; but Bohemians wander from the paths of Sunday school rectitude merely for the sake of good fellowship without evil intent. Their motto might well be, "With malice toward none and charity for all, let everybody do as he pleases."

Bohemia has its slums, and there the undesirable Bohemians prevail; but, unlike the conventional slums, the slums of Bohemia are peopled by men and women of like abilities with those in the higher circles, only they are the unlucky ones. Bohemians are sensitive and superstitious, and when the Angel of Luck shakes a black wing over them they lose cour-