

SHORTY ON TABASCO DRAMMER

By
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Drawings by F. Vaux Wilson

SAY, other folks are curious, ain't they? Course, you and I are plain, every day, stock pattern people, without any kinks in our thought works; that is, barrin' a few of yours that I overlook. It's no trick at all to tell how we'll behave when this or that turns up, or where to find us. But the rest of 'em—well, they're a collection, eh?

And the particular name I have in mind at this minute is Kipple. Now, when I first begun to sense that there was such a party as this Mr. Hartley Kipple, all I could connect him with was a Sunday afternoon in a side street in Brooklyn. He was as quiet as that,—one of these soft steppin', low spoken, modest dressed little men, that come and go without makin' any more disturbance than a shadow.

I don't know whether it was his always wearin' gray suits, with gray ties and gray gloves that matched his eyes, or the soft way he has of openin' and shuttin' doors. Anyway, for the first month or so of his comin' to the studio, he didn't make any more impression on me than a rubber heel leaves on an iron stair. You see, I'd turned him over to Swifty Joe for his exercise stunt, and it was all I could do to remember to put his name on the books.

There are people like that, you know. You can see 'em a hundred times, and unless you can tie 'em up with something or other, they don't get on your register. And right there you're apt to make the mistake of thinkin' they don't count and never can. Wooden clo'espins come by the dozen, and they're all just alike; but people are different. Some may look like blanks on the outside, but you don't have to scratch 'em very deep to find they're built on lines of their own, with a set of variations that can't be duplicated.

FIRST hint I got about Mr. Kipple was when Swifty comes into the front office one day and asks shall he send out the scrubwoman, who's takin' her reg'lar Thursday swipe at the woodwork.

"Why, is she gettin' under foot?" says I.
"Nah!" says Swifty. "She's swabbin' the paint in the far corner; but this Kipple gent is throwin' a fit—won't take off his collar until she's put out."

Honest, I finds him there blushin' and gettin' nervous, just because the lady mop artist is in the same room where he's supposed to peel down to his undershirt. Course, after that I tags him as the man with the Comstock mind. In time I notices other points about him, too; such as how finicky he is about not mussin' the hair that he keeps smoothed over the thin place on top of his head, and the particular way he has of drapin' his coat over the hanger.

He's a chunky built little man, not too stout for comfort, but it seems that the size of his waist measure, which couldn't have been over thirty-six, was worryin' him a lot. There's just the faint suspicion of a pod developin', and it's to reduce that that he goes through the wand drill and the settin'-up exercise three times a week. Now would you ever suspect a man with pop eyes and a button nose and a bald spot, would get anxious over a little thing like an extra inch of bulge to his belt line? But he was. Even consults me about it, and has me run the tape around him.

That's how we come to get better acquainted. And of course, when I looks him up, and finds he's a friend of Mr. Purdy-Pell, and that he's the Kipple of McKay, Kipple & Co., the big bankers, he seems a little more real.

THEN I gets another line on him one day when he 'phones up to cancel his time for the afternoon, explainin' when he shows up again that he had an engagement for a sitting.

"That's all right," says I. "Always take a sitting when you can get



it. Was this with a medium, or before the camera?"

"No, no," says he; "an artist is painting my portrait."

"Oh!" says I. "Goin' to have a real hand painted picture of yourself, to hang in the lib'ry, eh?"

"It is for Mrs. Kipple," says he. "It's to be a birthday surprise, you see."

Then hanged if he don't go into all the details, and before I can dodge he's towed me out to his cab and is takin' me up to see it, sayin' he didn't know whether he liked it or not, and he wanted to see how it struck me.

Maybe you can guess how foolish I felt when he gets me lined up in front of the easel, with him and the artist standin' by, and Mr. Kipple insists on my sayin' if I think it's a good likeness or not. Well, I looks at the picture, and then I squints at Kipple, and steps around to get a different light, and spars for

time the best I knew how. For say, that paint slinger sure knew his job! He's got Mr. Hartley Kipple, all right. You'd know it was meant for him, clear across the room. But he's toned down the pop eyes, and fixed up the button nose, and foreshortened the pod, and gen'rally improved him until he'd produced something that not only looks like Kipple, but like Kipple thinks he looks.

"Course," says I, "I don't sign for any art critic, but that hits me as a mighty smooth job."

Even that don't satisfy Mr. Kipple, though. He wondered if the pose wouldn't be better if he'd had it done with his hand restin' along the arm of the chair, instead of drooped over the edge, and after they'd debated that for half an hour or so they concludes to give it a try. Say, it ain't always us hand-some men that thinks most about how we look, is it? You watch the freaks who stop longest in front of the gum machine mirrors.

Well, Mr. Kipple gives me reg'lar reports as to how the picture's comin' on after that, and towards the finish of it he gets to droppin' in there every day after bankin' hours, to make new suggestions about this and that, and neglectin' his gym work to do it. I couldn't blame him so much, either. If I'd been born with that nose and them eyes, and I could hire some artist to swear in seven colors that it wa'n't so, maybe I'd do it, specially if the affidavit was goin' to some one I thought a lot of, but I'd want to plan the preliminaries better than Mr. Kipple did.

You see, I thought I knew most all there was about him to know by that time. If you'd asked me, I'd said I could give you his number and pedigree as complete as though I had it all wrote out on a card.

AND then one afternoon, as I'm just glancin' over the pink editions, all of a sudden the office door swings open, and in rushes a large, wide female person with a wild look on her face. She's got up fancy and expensive in a lace costume that's as near the city directory cut as a one hundred and eighty-pounder can struggle into, and her new spring lid is decorated with a bunch of brown silk roses as big as young cabbages. She's one of these baby faced women, with big round eyes, and cheek dimples, and a soft look all over—you know, the kind that wears

pearl pendants in their ears, and a marquise ring display on their fingers; the sort that weeps one minute and giggles the next, and keeps right on munchin' chocolate creams, no matter what happens. Just now she seems some excited.

"Where is he?" says she, stickin' out both hands at me, in reg'lar Mrs. Leslie Carter style.

"Eh?" says I. "Which he?"

"My wretched, deceitful husband!" says she. "Tell me where he is!"

"Guess you must have turned up the wrong alley," says I. "This ain't the bureau of lost husbands."

"But he comes here!" says she. "He told me he did. Oh, oh! The false-ness of that wretch! I see it all now! For weeks he has kept up this deceit! He is not here, then? Answer me at once! Is he here?"

"I'm the only wretch of a husband on tap here just at this minute," says I; "but you can

take a look round, if it'll ease your mind any."

"No, no! I should have known at first," says she, jabbin' at her eyes with a handkerchief. "He's not here. But where is he? Oh! where is he?"

"I expect I'd have to pass it up, anyway," says I; "but I could speak more positive if I knew what particular deceiver you meant."

"Why, Mr. Hartley Kipple," says she. "I am Mrs. Kipple, you know."

"Oh!" says I, beginnin' to grin. "Then that's different. Now just calm down, Mrs. Kipple. It's all right. He ain't here just this minute, you see; but I can give a guess," and I tips her the confidential wink, meanin' to soothe her some. But it don't act that way.

"Then—then he is with—with her, is he?" she chokes out. "With that other woman? Oh! Oh!"

"What's that?" says I, gaspin'.

"Oh, you needn't tell me any more," says she. "I have suspected it for a long time. And now I have found him out! Oh, the wretch! The villain!"

WITH that she drops on a chair and starts sobbin' out a string of charges and accusations that sounded like a bill of partic'lars in a divorce court.

"Excuse me," says I, "but ain't you statin' the case a little strong? Why, from all I've ever seen of Mr. Kipple he ain't that kind of a man. I wouldn't have said he'd so much as look cross-eyed at a wax dummy in a milliner's window."

"Ah, but if you only knew him as I do!" she sighs.

"You don't say?" says I with my mouth open.

Well, you never can tell, can you? Here I'd had this Mr. Kipple framed up as the kind of a man who spent all his off time at the fam'ly fireside, and never knew whether the lady stenographer was a peach or a dried prune. And him with all his quiet ways leadin' the double entry life! Course, I didn't have many facts to go on; but cases of that kind don't need much evidence. If she'd tried to make me believe he was a hero, or entitled to any kind of a medal, I'd had to be shown. But somehow it's a lot easier the other way round.

"Gee!" says I. "And he always acted such a mild one! What'll you do, put it up to him?"

"I shall suffer in silence for awhile," whimpers Mrs. Kipple, "and then, when I can bear it no longer, I shall—"

She didn't finish statin' her program, but goes off into another fit of sobbin'. She's still quaverin' and more or less damp when I leads her down and puts her into her carriage.

I WAS intendin' to give Sadie the whole yarn, knowin' how she'd appreciate it; but when I gets home that night she's all full of talk about comin' down to town next day, goin' to a matinee box party in the afternoon and a swell dinner in the evening. So I sidetracks the tale of the faithless Kipple, and gives my attention to puttin' up arguments that would let me out of the festivities. I manages to duck the dinner; but I'm counted in on the theater party; and I forgets all about the scandal until I finds myself wedged in the corner of the box, and notices who's occupyin' the seat in the next one, just across the rail. It's Mrs. Kipple!

"She's a quick recoverer," thinks I, and turns so she can't get a full face view.

It's no use bein' shy, though. Our crowd hadn't more'n got settled, and Pinckney was just handin' Sadie and the young girl she's brought along a josh about my lookin' so comfortable and happy, and they're all sizin' me up; when the stout party at my elbow reaches over, taps me on the shoulder with her fan, and gives me a simperin', mushy look that I can't account for. Course, Sadie sits right up and takes notice.

"Who is it?" she whispers, lookin' Mrs. Kipple over kind of puzzled. But how can I give out all that story right there? And while I'm shakin' my head, and tryin' to give Sadie the C. Q. D. signal, Pinckney has to butt in with a few comic remarks.

"By Jove!" says he. "That isn't the one you were tellin' me about, is it, Shorty?"

"Ah, can it!" says I, gettin' red and fidgety.

"Oh, certainly, my boy," he goes on. "I'm the soul of discretion. But she is rather a stunner, you know."

And say, if the asbestos hadn't gone up just then, and the music started, I might have had to tie him



I Finds Him There Blushin' and Nervous.