

"Greetings!" Says I.
"What's the News
from Timbuktu?"



little babies. Would you truly care to see them, though?"

"Very much indeed," says Rodney.
"Then you shall," says she, clapping her hands. "In fact, I believe you're Heaven sent. Here I've been worrying myself mad to know whom I could send up to be with them for the next few days, while I fight it out with the stage manager about the setting of that second act. You see, my dear old Rod, they're up at my Narragansett Bay cottage, having a ripping time, and I do loathe dragging them back to town with me in this weather. You'll go up, eh, and be Unky Rod to them again, until I can get away? Then we'll have a nice visit, and be sentimental for a whole week end. What do you say?"

And Rodney, he takes the hand she reaches across and lugs it up to his whiskers like he was being presented at court. "I am yours to command, always," says he.

"Why, Rodney!" says she, glancing around foolish at a gawpin' waiter. "Oh, you're almost too good to be true! But I'm going to send you off to my darling babies this very night. You're just the one."

Course, that works me out of my cinch job; but the twenty Rodney slips me as I backs out graceful more'n made up for any fun I might have missed, and I wishes him luck.

SO it was me showin' up reg'lar at the office next mornin', and when I explains the case to Mr. Robert he chuckles. "So China didn't cure him of that, eh? Poor Rod!"

"Huh!" says I. "He seemed to be enjoyin' the agony."
"He always did," says Mr. Robert. "But he'll be blue enough by the time he turns up here again."

Prophesvin', though, ain't Mr. Robert's strong suit. What happens was somethin' along a different line; for two days later he comes out to me with a telegram.

"Torchy," says he, "our friend Rodney seems to be in some sort of trouble up there."

"Kids pullin' his whiskers too hard?" says I.

"He doesn't state," says Mr. Robert; "but he calls for help. And what do you suppose he suggests?"

"Wants you to go up?" says I.

"No, you," says he. "Send up that red-headed youth if you can possibly spare him, is what he says. But I shall leave this entirely to you. Care to go, eh?"

"The Brodie family's a big one," says I. "I'll take a chance."

TALK about bridge jumpin', though! Say, I didn't stop to think what a blindfold proposition this was until I was on the tram. I land up there in the quibang-saw belt about four-thirty p. m., and finds Rodney waitin' for me at the station with a carriage.

"Thanks awfully for comin'," says he. "It was something I couldn't ask Bob to do, and I could think of no one else."

"Kids ain't got smallpox, have they?" says I.

"No such luck!" says Rodney, sort of gloomy.

I looks him over surprised, and notices the lovely ivory color on his brow and nose and the sun blisters on his wrists.

"Looks like you'd been sunnin' yourself wene," says I.

"Been out playin' games with the darlin's, eh?"

"Playing tool would be nearer the mark," growls Rodney. "The darlings, as you call them, happen to be sixteen and eighteen, and, and, well, I've been trying to chaperon them, and it's worn me out."

"Eh?" says I, smickin'. "You've been chaperonin'?"

"I know!" he groans. "No one sees the absurdity of my position more clearly. But I thought—well, they were only little tots when I knew them. And now—But I can't describe them. It's a type new to me, abominably new."

"Lively pair, are they?" says I.

Rodney throws up his hands. "I don't know," says he. "I thought you might. You belong to the same generation. I don't. But tell me, is it quite proper for girls nowadays to run about all day and half the night with strange young men, sailing, bathing, dancing, hammocking? Is it right?"

"Search me," says I. "Where and when has something to do with it, I guess. Been actin' up real kittenish, have they?"

"It struck me as scandalous, nothing less," says Rodney. "Of course, I couldn't forbid these youths coming around; but I thought it my duty to be present when the girls had company. I've never been a chaperon before; but I'm sure that's what they used to do. So I went with them. And it's been a siege, all one day on a yacht sailed by a pair of rattle-headed youngsters who tried to see how near capsizing they could come. I was seasick, and scared, and blistered in the sun; but that night they kept me up until two A. M. at a dance. Next day it was a motorcating, more sun, more daredevil risks, then another dance, I'm used up, finished. They had me out at the tennis courts all day, and this evening, I believe, two of their young

admirers are to call on Dot and Dimple. I can't go to bed and leave them. Someone must stay up around for the sake of propriety; so I—I—well, can't you help me out?"

"Me?" says I. "Say, I'd make a hot chaperon, wouldn't I?"

"But I should give them to understand that I had delegated my authority to you. And really I'm done up," says Rodney, pleadin'. "Only take my place for this evening, while I get a little rest."

"Oh, well," says I. "I expect I could kind of loaf around, if that's all."

"Thank you, thank you!" says he. "And if they try chaffing, or are rude to you, as I regret to say they have been to me at times, why, simply—"

"Huh!" says I. "The fresh things! Say, Mr. Blake, don't you worry about me. If they hurt my feelin's too bad I'll just cry into my hat and not let on. This is the ranch, is it?"

WE'D pulled up in front of a cummin' little cottage perched up on some rocks overlookin' the water. It had good, generous verandas, with plenty of hammocks and swings and easy chairs; but nobody's in sight.

"Dot and Dimple must be taking a nap," sighs Rodney, "preparing for the evening campaign. I wish I could!"

They appears at dinner, though, and while they don't say much they looks me over thorough and curious. Course, that's natural enough, specially as Uncle Rodney was explainin' delicate how, in a way, I was goin' to sub for him tonight. Nice and innocent enough lookin' girls they was too, and costumed in the regulation summer girl uniforms,—white middle blouses, hobble skirts, canvas pumps, and broad pink willie ribbons over their ears. But I didn't enjoy the silent, impish way they eyed me, nor the looks they swap, ed.

Yes, I'll admit I was some nervous before dinner was over, and when Rodney pikes right off to hit the feathers, leavin' me holdin' the bid down all alone, I begin to get chilly below the ankles. Of all the fool propositions I ever had unloaded on me, this was a little the rummyest. But I'd passed my word, and there was nothin' left to do but stick around.

I was inside when the company arrived; but I got a glimpse of the young chaps under the porch light, and I sized 'em up right off for the regulation prep school cutups; the kind that wears white silk socks and subsists chiefly on a diet of cork tipped cigarettes.

For half an hour or so I lays low, until I heard the chains of the porch swings creakin', and then I braces myself to do picket duty. The moon was well up by this time, and, though it was some dusky on the veranda, I makes out the whole bunch of 'em crowded into one porch swing. So I starts that way to do the casual march past,

and whisperin' stops sudden, and not a remark made until I'm within a dozen feet of them. That they says loose with, "Tar-r-rum! Tar-r-rum! Tar-r-rum—am—tump! All hail the chaper-on!"

It's fairly good teamwork, and the effect on me was some jarrin'. I stops and grins sort of foolish.

"Oh, isn't he cute, Dot?" observes Dimple, sidin'.

"Yes, and such cheerful hair!" says Dot.

"Hee-hee! Haw-haw!" comes from the young chaps.

"Only fahncy!" says Dot. "We're being chaper-oned!"

More years of merriment from the prep school delegates. And me? Well, I just stood and took it that's all. Maybe my ears was burnin' some, but I leans back careless against the rail and lets 'em enjoy themselves.

"And I suppose we mustn't do anything, Mamma wouldn't approve of?" remarks Dimple.

"Too-heel!" explodes Dot, nudgin' with each elbow.

Then I hears her whisper, "Come on, Boys. One, two, three—now!" and at the signal they all go to the head clinch,—boys' arms around the girls' waists, girls with theirs around the boys' necks, a regular double Romeo and Juliet act, while the next number on the program is to start singin' the chorus of one of them gamin' rag-time songs:

Cuddle up beside me, Deary,
Hold my hand awhile;
For I could learn to love you
When you smile, smile, smile!

But I'd held in about as long as I could. "Fine," says I. "Say, no wonder you made Uncle Rodney seasick! But I guess he hadn't come home from Coney on the last boat as many times as I have. Got anything more up your sleeves? If you have, let it come."

"Go away, Fellow," pipes up one of the boys. "Don't you see we're busy?"

"Ah, a few low-gear remarks from Percy!" says I.

"Are those your callin' manners, Sen?"

"Pooh!" says Dot. "Don't mind him."

"But I want a lock of his hair for a souvenir," says Dimple.

"I'll get you one if he doesn't clear out soon," says Percy.

"Honest?" says I. "Well, you wait right here a minute and maybe I'll hand it to you. Just a minute, now!"

With that I hops over the rail, grabs a garden hose I'd seen coiled up neat and handy, turns the wheel, and scrambles back just as the water comes on full force. Does Percy get it? Slam in the face. The girls scream and jump, and Master Percy opens his mouth to howl.

"Ug-ug-guggle-guggle!" observes Percy, blanchin' around wild and splutterin'.

Then Harold tries a rush in, and he gets it too.

"You will buck up against a perfectly good chaperon, will you?" says I. "Such nice lads, too! Eh? Another souse for you, Percy? Still got that cuddly feelin', have you? Well, this ought to cure it. Ain't you ashamed, shockin' the neighbors that way? Got enough? Well, see you don't drip on the veranda as you leave, and be sure to tell Mother it rained hard where you were this evenin'. Don't forget!"

Peeved? Oh, sure! And I expect if there hadn't been ladies present they might have mussed me up some; but with Dot and Dimple standin' one side and meat double!



"Only Fahncy!" Says Dot. "We're Being Chaperoned!"