

CALL FOR MR. KENWORTHY! CALL FOR MR. BODKIN!

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Call for Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Shriner—Mr. Bodkin—Mr. Blevitch—Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Bodkin—Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Shriner—Call for Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Blevitch—Mr. Kenworthy

A GREAT many people have wondered to themselves, in print, just where the little black laundry-studs go after they have been yanked from the shirt. Others pass this by as inconsequential, but are concerned over the ultimate disposition of all the pencil stubs that are thrown away. Such futile rumination is all well enough for those who like it. As for me, give me a big, throbbing question like this: "Who are the people that one hears being paged in hotels? Are they real people or are they decoys? And if they are real people, what are they being paged for?"

Now, there's something vital to figure out. And the best of it is that it can be figured out by the simple process of following the page to see whether he ever finds any one.

In order that no expense should be spared, I picked out a hotel with poor service, which means that it was an expensive hotel. It was so expensive that all you could hear was the page's voice as he walked by you: his footfalls made no noise in the extra heavy Bokhara. It was just a mingling of floating voices, calling for "Mr. Blabla, Mr. Schwer-a-a, Mr. Twa-a-a."

Out of this wealth of experimental material I picked a boy with a discouraged voice like Wallace Eddinger's, who seemed to be saying "I'm calling these names—because that's my job—if I wasn't calling these—I'd be calling out cash totals in an honor system lunchery—but if any one should ever answer to one of these names—I'd have a poor spell."

Allowing about fifteen feet distance between us for appearance's sake, I followed him through the lobby. He had a bunch of slips in his hand and from these he read the names of the pages.

"Call for Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Shriner—Mr. Bodkin—Mr. Blevitch—Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Bodkin—Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Shriner—call for Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Blevitch—Mr. Kenworthy."

Mr. Kenworthy seemed to be standing about a 20 per cent better chance of being located than any of the other

contestants. Probably the boy was of a romantic temperament and liked the name. Sometimes that was the only name he would call for mile upon mile. It occurred to me that perhaps Mr. Kenworthy was the only one wanted, and that the other names were just put in to make it harder, or to give body to the thing.

But when we entered the bar the youth shifted his attack. The name of Kenworthy evidently had begun to cloy. He was fed up on romance and wanted something substantial, homely, perhaps, but substantial. As Mr. Hughes so cleverly puts it: "Deeds, not words."

So he dropped Kenworthy and called: "Mr. Blevitch. Call for Mr. Blevitch—Mr. Shriner—Mr. Bodkin—Mr. Blevitch"

But even this subtle change of tactics failed to net him a customer. We had gone through the main lobby, along the narrow passage lined with young men waiting on sofas for young women who would be forty minutes late, through the grill, and now had crossed the bar, and no one had raised even an eyebrow. No wonder the boy's voice sounded discouraged.

As we went through one of the lesser dining-rooms, the dining-room that seats a lot of heavy men in business suits holding cigarettes, who lean over their plates the more confidentially to converse with their blond partners, in this dining-room the plaintive call drew fire. One of the men in business suits, who was at a table with another man and two women, lifted his head when he heard the sound of names being called.

"Boy!" he said, and waved like a traffic officer signalling, "Come!"

Eagerly the page darted forward. Perhaps this was Mr. Kenworthy! Or better yet, Mr. Blevitch.

"Anything here for Studz?" said the man in the business suit, when he was sure that enough people were listening.

"No, sir," sighed the boy. "Mr. Blevitch, Mr. Kenworthy, Mr. Shriner, Mr. Bodkin?" he suggested, hopefully.

"Naw," replied the man, and turned to his associates with an air of saying: "Rotten service here—just think of it, no call for me!"

plainly skeptical. He read his lines without feeling. The management had led him into this; all he could do was to take it with as good grace as possible.

He slid past the coat-room girl at the exit (no small accomplishment in itself) and down a corridor, disappearing through a swinging door at the end. I was in no mood to lose out on the finish after following so far, and I dashed after him.

The door led into a little alcove, and another palpitating door at the opposite end showed me where he had gone. Setting my jaw for no particular reason, I pushed my way through.

At first, like the poor olive merchant in the Arabian Nights I was blinded by the glare of lights and the glitter of glass and silver. Oh, yes, and by the snowy whiteness of the napery, too. "By the napery of the neck" wouldn't be a bad line to get off a little later in the story. I'll try it.



Sometimes Mr. Tyrryghl Is Wanted.

At any rate, it was but the work of a minute for me to realize that I had entered by a service entrance into the grand dining-room of the establishment, where, if you are not in evening dress, you are left to munch bread and butter until you starve to death and are carried out with your heels dragging, like the uncouth lout that you are. It was, if I may be allowed the phrase, a galaxy of beauty, with every one dressed up like the pictures. And I had entered "way up front, by the orchestra.

Now, mind you, I am not ashamed of

my gray suit. I like it, and my wife says that I haven't had anything so becoming for a long time. But in it I didn't check up very strong against the rest of the boys in the dining-room. As a gray suit it is above reproach. As a garment in which to appear single-handed through a trapdoor before a dining-room of well dressed Middle Westerners it was a fizzle from start to finish. Add to this the items that I had to snatch a brown soft hat from my head when I found out where I was, which caused me to drop the three evening papers I had tucked under my arm, and you will see why my up-stage entrance was the signal for the impressive raising of several dozen eyebrows, and why the captain approached me just exactly as one man approaches another when he is going to throw him out.

(Blank space for insertion of "napery of neck" line, if desired. Choice optional with reader.)

Call for Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Shriner—Mr. Bodkin—Mr. Blevitch—Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Bodkin—Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Shriner—Call for Mr. Kenworthy—Mr. Blevitch—Mr. Kenworthy

any kind of ending at all. And that would never do.

Once in a while I would catch the scent, when, from the humming depths of the dining-room, I could hear a faint "Call for Mr. Kenworthy" rising above the click of the oyster shells and the soft crackling of the "potatoes Julienne" one against another. So I knew that he had not failed me, and that if I had faith and waited long enough he would come back.

And, sure enough, come back he did, and without a name lost from his list. I felt like cheering when I saw his head bobbing through the melee of waiters and 'bus-boys who were busy putting clean plates on the tables and then taking them off again in eight seconds to make room for more clean plates. Of all discouraging existences I can imagine none worse than that of an eternally clean plate. There can be no sense of accomplishment, no glow of duty done, in simply being placed before a man and then taken away again. It must be almost as bad as paging a man who you are sure is not in the hotel.

The futility of the thing had already got on the page's nerves, and in a savage attempt to wring a little pleasure out of the task he took to melding the names, grafting a syllable of one to a syllable of another, such as "Call for Mr. Kenbodkin—Mr. Shrineworthy—Mr. Blevitcher."

This gave us both amusement for a little while, but your combinations are limited in a thing like that, and by the time the grill was reached he was saying the names correctly and with a little more assurance.

It was in the grill that the happy event took place. Mr. Shriner, the one of whom we expected least, suddenly turned up at a table alone. He was a quiet man and not at all worked up over his unexpected honor. He signalled the boy with one hand and went on taking soup with the other, and learned, without emotion, that he was wanted on the telephone. He even made no move to leave his meal to answer the call, and when last seen he was adding pepper with one hand and taking soup with the other. I suspect that he was a "plant," or a plain-clothes house detective, placed there on purpose to deceive me.

We had been to every nook of the hotel by this time, except the writing-room, and, of course, no one would ever look there for patrons of the hotel. Seeing that the boy was about to totter, I went up and spoke to him. He continued to totter, thinking, perhaps, that I

was Mr. Kenworthy, his long-lost beau-ideal. But I spoke kindly to him and offered him a piece of chocolate almond-bar, and soon, in true reporter fashion, had wormed his secret from him before he knew what I was really after.

The thing I wanted to find out was, of course, just what the average is of replies to one paging trip. So I got around it in this manner: offering him another piece of chocolate almond-bar. I said, slyly: "Just what is the average number of replies to one paging trip?"

"I think that he had suspected something at first, but this question completely disarmed him, and, leaning against an elderly lady patron, he told me everything.

"Well," he said, "it's this way: sometimes I find a man, and sometimes I can go the rounds without a bite. To-night, for instance, here I've got four names and one came across. That's about the average—perhaps one in six."

I asked him why he had given Mr. Kenworthy such a handicap at the start.

A faint smile flickered across his face and then flickered back again.

"I call the names I think will be apt to hang round in the part of the hotel I'm in. Mr. Kenworthy would have to be in the dressy dining-room or in the lobby where they wait for ladies. You'd never find him in the bar or the Turkish baths. On the other hand, you'll never find a man by the name of Blevitch anywhere except in the bar. Of course, I take a chance and call every name once in so often, no matter where I am, but, on the whole, I use my own discretion."

I gave him another piece of chocolate and the address of a good bootmaker and left him. What I had heard had sobered me, and the lights and music suddenly seemed garish. It is no weak emotion to feel that you have been faced to face with a mere boy whose chances of success in his work are one to six.

And I found that he had not painted the lily in too glowing terms. I followed other pages that night—some calling for "Mr. Strudel," some for "Mr. Carmickle," and one was broad-minded enough to page a "Mrs. Bemis." But they all came back with that wan look in their eyes and a break in their voices.

And each one of them was stopped by the man in the business suit in the downstairs dining-room and each time he considered it a personal affront that there wasn't a call for "Studz."

Some time I'm going to have him paged, and when he comes out I shall untie his necktie for him.