

When Bug Hooper Got By

By Sewell Ford

Drawings by F. Vaux Wilson

IT was like this: I'm back in the gym gettin' into my street harness after a lively little go with one of my reg'lars, when I hears some party doin' the megaphone act out in the front office. Swifty Joe is giving 'em the loud come-back, both sides hollerin' like they was tryin' to carry on a conversation by long distance wireless.

"What's all the whisperin' about?" says I, giving the last strong pull at the four-in-hand tie, as Swifty comes through the door.

"Gent out there wants to see you," says Swifty. "Says he's a friend of a friend of yours."

"Is that all?" says I. "Sounded like dockin' a Cunnarder. Well, what does this friend-once-removed look like?"

"Ahr chee!" says Swifty. "He's a freak."

"Then he's come to headquarters," says I, and with that I goes out prepared for the worst.

He wa'n't so bad, though, as I was lookin' for. Course, the square topped derby, and the plaid cutaway with the patch pockets, and the figured lavender tie, combined with the long terracotta mustache and the cerise tinted complexion, does give him kind of a gay and fancy look; but I've seen vividder specimens drift in from the alfalfa fields before now. He's a wide built, substantial party, with one of these serviceable, knockabout faces, and a hearty, joyful look from one end of his mouth to the other; but there's nothing about him that suggests which partic'lar old bunky of mine he comes from.

HE has camped down in my desk chair, with his legs crossed, one elbow restin' on the inkstand, and he's sprinklin' the rug with ashes off a cigar the size of a mailin' tube; so I knows he feels perfectly at home.

"Did I hear you mention," says I, "that you was in' for me?"

"We-e-ough!" says he, lettin' out a sound like a steam siren and jumpin' up with his hand out. "I reckon you're Shorty McCabe. Well, now! Little cuss, ain't you? Sho! Put 'er there!"

Say, it was like holding your ear to an automobile horn while some one dances on the bulb, and you could have heard him from the subcellar to the roof.

"Pleased to meet you," says I. "Let's see, your name is—"

"Hooper," says he. "Bug Hooper."

"Ah!" says I. "Spell it with a W, do you?"

"Haw, haw!" says he. "No, not Whooper; but Hooper. I'm a partner of somebody you know right well. Heard of Hank Merrity, eh?"

"Of Bedelia?" says I.

"You bet!" says he.

Maybe you remember my tellin' you how Hank and Mrs. Merrity came East after the Jayhawker began to pan out so rich, and how they discovered Peacock Alley, and why they went back? Anyway, this Mr. Hooper was in the mine ownin' business with Hank. He says it over four times in as many minutes, roarin' it out like he thought my eardrums wa'n't workin'.

"All right," says I. "Any friend of Hank's is a friend of mine. Remember me to him when you get back. Glad you dropped in; but I expect you're so busy seein' the town that—"

"Busy!" says he. "Why, I ain't got a dad blamed thing to do except get acquainted with you. Know what Hank says to me the last time? 'Bug,' says he, 'if you come back without gettin' to know my old friend McCabe, I'll shore take it hard.' And you know how Hank is, eh?"

Yes, I knew. He's as sensitive as a schoolgirl, and the quietest man for his size I ever ran across. Also this Mr. Bug Hooper is the noisiest. And somehow I never can seem to get up much enthusiasm for these human calliopes. Mr. Hooper might be all right, and have his good points; but I couldn't help wishin' he'd take out his friendship in sendin' me picture postals that I could drop in the waste basket.

BUT that ain't his style. He explains how he's spent three days around town, closin' a big deal for a lot of new ore stamps and cyanide tanks and so on, and how he's been in tow of a bunch of free spenders detailed by the machinery concerns to entertain him. Now that he's placed his orders, though, and the hospitality committee has been called off, he means to



have a couple of days' fun in his own way, and dispense some of his own coin in doin' it.

And for the partic'lar style of Indian he looks to be, his program ain't so wild and woolly. It consists in charterin' the biggest and vividest colored tourin' car he can pick up on Gasolene Row, and havin' himself run around town, with stops now and then to throw in a pony of St. Louis or light up a fresh fifty-cent cigar.

Mr. Hooper says the machine is waitin' outside now, and his proposition is that we should finish the afternoon goin' up and down Fifth-ave. and Broadway, just lookin' at the show. Well, I could figure out who'd be the chief performers; but I couldn't dodge doin' that much on Hank's account. So down stairs we trails, and piles into the back seat, while Bug passes over a gold banded perfecto to the chauffeur and tells him to roll us out among the nobility.

HOW does life in the great city strike you?" says I, by way of being sociable. "Like it, or not?"

"Like it!" says Bug, almost explodin'. "Why, if the Pearly Gates settlement has got anything on this town in the way of gilt edged luxury and glad handed greetings, then hanged if I ain't sorry for a lot of these poor paid ministers that are sure of admission! Why, they won't know how to act when they get there. Now the prospects are I don't get in at all; but if I should chance to make it, I'll know I've had some training. Haw, haw!" and Bug separates himself from a mirthful snort that brings a mounted traffic cop up in his stirrups lookin' to see what the explosion was. All the way up the avenue he keeps givin' me details as to how good New York seems to him and what a barrel of fun he's had.

"Talk about fancy eatin'!" says he. "We think out in Bedelia that Lee Chin, head grub rustler at Hank's, is mighty skilful and talented when it comes to building a six-tier dinner; but, say, I had a meal the other night that made Lee Chin's best offer look like a stand-up snack at a mule driver's stopover. And flourishes! Well, I don't care if my eyes did stick out like knobs on a pair of hames,—whole brass band playing in the gallery, a stream of real water tumbling down over a staircase of solid glass, and the ceiling painted up to imitate the starry firmament, with genuine twinklers in it. How do you reckon the table was lit up? From underneath! Honest! Top was glass, and the electric lights were

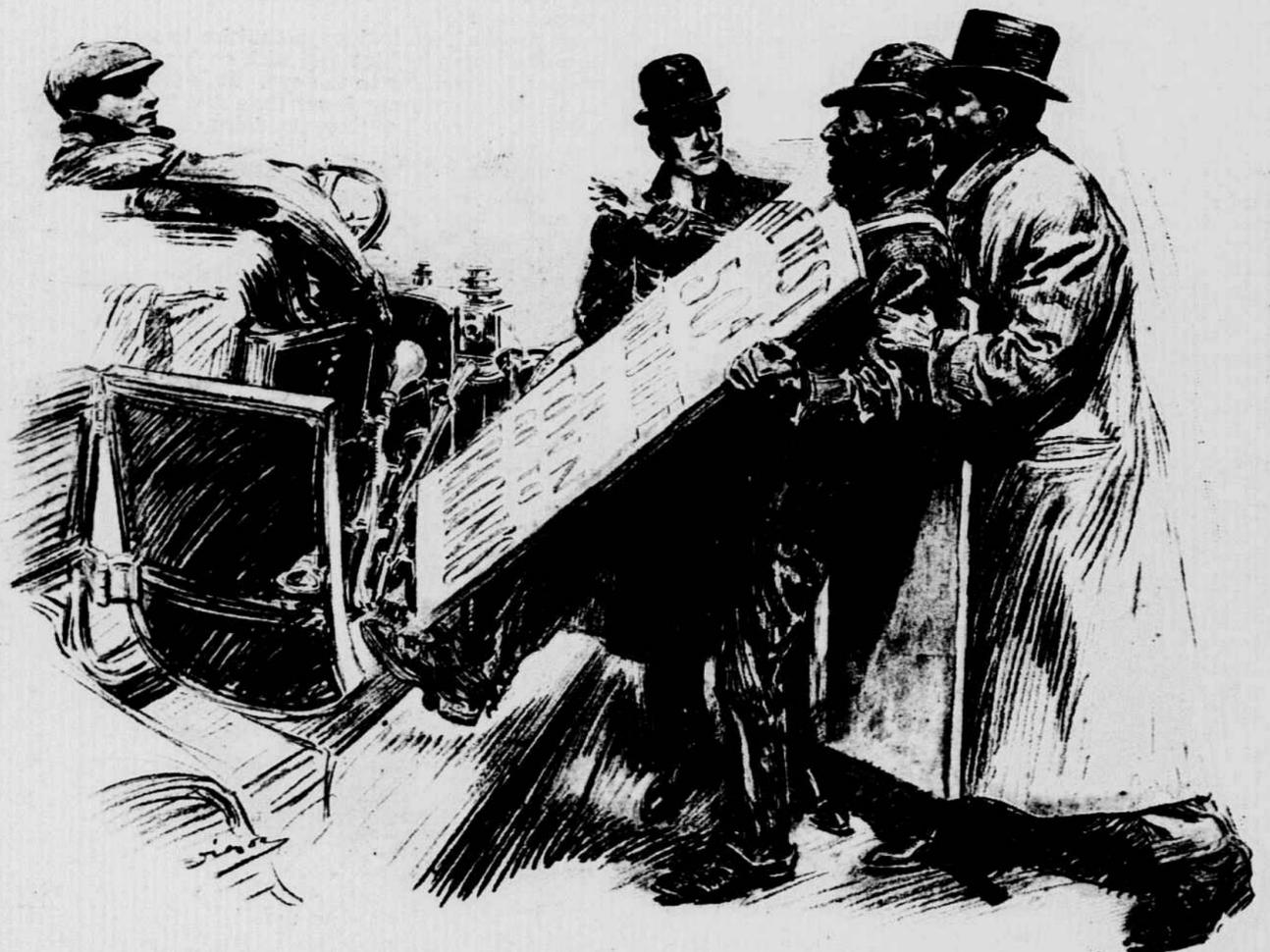
shining right up through the tablecloth. Think the boys'll believe that back in Bedelia?"

Mr. Hooper has about made up his mind that they won't; so I agrees with him. "You can work your descriptions off on Hank, though," says I. "He's been here."

"Yes; but somehow Hank's powerful sore on New York," says Hooper. "I can't account for it no way. Why, Hank told me I'd find the folks out here mighty cold propositions. But, say, I couldn't have been treated whiter if I was visitin' home. It was going out to lunch with the general manager one day, and to dinner and the theater with the boss of the sales department at night, and so on. Course, I was placing some fat orders here and there, ten off for spot cash; but that didn't count with those boys. They were just naturally glad to see me. Said so. And, honest, the friendly way they used me made me feel as comfortable as if I was back in the smoking parlor of the Bullfrog hotel. It's a first class town, that's what it is, and full of first class people,—folks that's got hearts under their ribs, as well as good clothes on their backs. Look at 'em! Don't they show up for that?" and Mr. Hooper waves one of his big hands out toward Fifth-ave. in general, while that generous mouth of his spreads itself in a smile that would have done for the whole membership of an optimists' club.

AND who was I to shatter the dream? It's a fact, too, that we do try to make our out of town buyers feel like they was among friends. They come on here from counties that have gone dry, towns where the curfew is rung reg'lar, and from Main streets where they can't drop into the back room of the cigar store for a game of bottle pool without being reported to the choir leader or the Mothers' Club. But there in the seed catalogue and mail order districts they figure as bank directors, and vice presidents of the board of trade, and right worthy grand masters, and they have to live up to it. But once Mr. Buyer has followed the bellhop into room 1123, and found out how to work the patent faucets in the bath room, and slicked the hair over his bald spot, and got a peek down at Broadway, runnin' northwest by southeast as far as the eye can see, it begins to dawn on him that he's a long way from home, with the cable cut. That coltish feelin' gets into his heels, and inside of an hour he's askin' confidential of the room clerk what's the hottest show in town. It's a good deal on his account that we burn the white lights so late, and build so many new lobster palaces.

So I can get Mr. Hooper's point of view easy enough. He comes on here a willin' yielder, ready to disconnect himself from the outer layers of a roll



The Chauffeur Sits There Gawpin' at Us Like He Thought We'd Gone Dippy.