

SHORTY SPRINGS A NERVE CURE

By Sewell Ford

Drawings by F. Vaux Wilson

AND first off it all seemed to be goin' so smooth and easy. Eh? Why, this Giddings-Waller affair. No? Well, well! Say, you ought to read the society notes more reg'lar.

You see, Mrs. Purdy-Pell sort of had it in charge, being as how she was chaperonin' Marjorie durin' their little trip abroad. Not that Marjorie's really one of the younger set; but it happens that her dad is John Henry Waller, and that Purdy-Pell is lucky enough to handle the New York end of the Waller enterprises.

You should have heard the howl Mrs. Purdy-Pell puts up too, when the scheme of includin' Miss Waller in their party was first sprung. What! Her take in tow an unknown from Grand Forks? Why, the picture she had framed up was a young lady cowboy, who would wear a beaded buckskin skirt and amuse the passengers by shootin' seagulls on the way over. She'd heard stories of how John Henry had gone prospectin' out there in the gold hills with his little six-year-old girl strapped on a pack mule, and how the two of 'em had lived for more'n a year without ever seein' another human soul.

But, say, it ain't always safe to judge a young lady of twenty-two by the way she lived when she was six. Not when they hail from out Grand Forks direction. What shows up four days after John Henry has wired that his Peggy has started East is a well finished, classy dressed young woman with a French maid and two trunks full of flossy dresses that has had the duty paid on 'em. About all she knew of Grand Forks was what she'd acquired in a three-weeks' visit; for Marjorie had been at boardin' school and Vassar for the last ten or a dozen years, ever since Dad made his big strike.

Course, that made some diff'rence. The fact that she was half owner of the Peggy Creek mine, was a stunner in evening gowns, and could push over the table chatter in three languages helped some too. As a matter of fact, Miss Marjorie was an all around queen, and the steamer hadn't cleared Sandy Hook before Mrs. Purdy-Pell was plannin' on marryin' her off to some Count or other before they got back. So you can guess she was some jarred when Marjorie confides to her that she has made up her mind never to get married.

THEN they hadn't been over in this Passion Play joint more'n a week before Talbot Giddings begins to show up some prominent. Marjorie's found him all by herself, and she seems more or less satisfied with the discovery. She don't exactly know who he is. They've been so busy exchangin' high brow conversation on art and literature and music that she hasn't had time to find out. But he was introduced proper; so what does it matter, anyway?

When it comes to Marjorie's seein' Mr. Giddings eight hours a day reg'lar though, walkin' with him, drivin' with him, and not noticin' anybody else, Mrs. Purdy-Pell decides it's time she got busy. The joke is on her, though; for it turns out he's Talbot Giddings,—the Talbot Giddings, if you please,—talented young English dramatist, one of the Bernard Shaw crowd, first cousin to Lady Macintosh, and all that. Her smart English friends assures her that Talbot is quite all right, don't you know.

So Mrs. Purdy-Pell sits back and waits for 'em to talk each other tired. That ain't the way it turns out, though. The next thing she knows Marjorie calmly announces that, while neither she nor Mr. Giddings approves of marriage as a general proposition, they think they'll try it this once. Also she'd like to take the next steamer back and get ready.

"But, my dear," gasps Mrs. Purdy-Pell, "what about your father?"

"Oh, I've cabled Dad all about it," she says, "and I've told him to be in New York when we get there."

THAT was Marjorie's way of doin' things, and there wouldn't have been any fuss made over the business at all if Mrs. Purdy-Pell hadn't insisted on stickin' to the rules of the game. Her plan is to give a house party, by way of introducin' the young people to her set, and then makin' a regulation announcement at an engagement dinner. Marjorie says it's a good deal of a bore; but she consents.

Well, they'd all come over, and they'd got as far as havin' the house party in full swing up at the Purdy-Pells' country place near us, and everything was runnin' lovely. That is, it looked so to me. And the first rumor of any hitch that I hear was only the day before the big dinner. Seems there was some difficulty in locatin' Pa Waller. He wa'n't lost, or anything like that. He had shown up at the dock when the steamer came in, all right, and he'd lingered long enough to say hello to Marjorie; but then he explained that he was mighty busy and would see her later.

Well, it had been nearly a week, and they'd been expectin' him to blow in every day; but nothing of the kind occurs. Even Purdy-Pell has heard from him only twice, and that over the 'phone givin' him some sellin' orders. And here was Mr. Giddings, waitin' to make his little speech to Pa Waller, and the engagement dinner only twenty-four hours off!

Purdy-Pell was instructed to find John Henry and bring him out that night. That did a lot of good, too. Not seein' Mr. Waller in his down town office, or bumpin' into him at his club, Purdy-Pell reports that the gentleman ain't to be found. Their next brilliant thought is to put Pinckney on the job of roundin' up Pa Waller, explainin' to him how urgent he's needed, and

landin' him out in the country before five o'clock next afternoon. They tells him it's a hurry-up job.

SO I ain't much surprised when, along about two P. M., into the studio strolls Pinckney, wearin' his lightest bamboo stick and a faded smile. About as near as Pinckney ever gets to showin' he's real annoyed is when that smile of his wilts a little around the edges.

"What ho!" says I. "The scout! Had any luck?"

"Not a bit," says he. "Yes, I did, too; met a chap at the club who told me how to make an aviation fizz that's perfectly ripping."

"Ah, come off!" says I. "You and your gasolene flavored fancy drinks! Thought you was out scourin' the town for Pa Waller?"

"That's so, by Jove!" says he. "And I've had the deuce of a time trying to find him, Shorty."

Accordin' to the description he gives, it must have



"Really, I'm Not Up to Meetin' Him Now."

been awful, too. Startin' in at the Plaza, he'd worked down as far as 42d-st., stoppin' his taxi at seven different places on the way. Four head waiters and three club stewards along Fifth-ave. had assured him they hadn't seen a thing of any Mr. Waller, of Grand Forks, so he couldn't imagine where he could be.

"Now you try, that's a good chap," says he.

"Me?" says I. "Not on your life! As a matter of fact, Pinckney, I don't care a hoot whether this Giddings gent and his future father in law ever get together or not. I ain't marryin' Marjorie, or givin' her away, and as for chasin' around town on a hot day like this after a—"

"Say, Shorty, the missus wants you on the 'phone," says Swifty Joe, comin' out of the booth with a grin on.

AND maybe you can guess. First off Sadie wants to know have I seen Pinckney, and if I have did he say whether he'd found Mr. Waller. Well, in that case I was to hustle right out and do it myself. Yes, it had to be done. Why, there were the guests coming inside of three hours, and if Mr. Giddings couldn't have his talk with Mr. Waller before the dinner—well, I must see how embarrassing that would be, and I simply must find him.

"As I was sayin', Pinckney," says I, comin' back to the front office, "while this tragedy of the disappearin'

dad don't exactly curdle my blood, I expect we'd be a good deal safer returnin' with him than without him. So let's get busy right off."

"Bravo!" says Pinckney. "I'll call a cab and—" "Ah, say!" I breaks in. "Is that the only way of sleuthin' you know of? Just forget the taxi habit for a minute, while I ring up Purdy-Pell's office and put some one through the third degree."

What I was after was a clue to the parties that Waller was likely to be doin' business with, and after ten minutes of rapid fire talk over the wire with a bone headed chief clerk, I gets a list of firms' names, with Pyramid Gordon's among 'em.

Next I has a session with some of Mr. Gordon's understrappers, and fin'ly locates him as attendin' some sort of a directors' meetin' in a private suite up at the new Astor. Another call, a three-minute wait, and I has Pyramid himself on the wire.

"Excuse me for buttin' in if you was busy," says I; "but do you happen to know an alfalfa party by the name of John Henry Waller?"

"Do I?" he snorts. "Why, blinkety blank his measly hide, haven't I been spending the best part of the last three days in his mulish company? Know him! I know he's just bluffed five of the biggest men in Wall Street into lettin' him in on a hundred million-dollar deal. He's an obstinate ass, Waller is, if you want my private opinion!"

"Thanks," says I. "After gettin' that, it'll be entertainin' to hear his views of you. But where is he now?"

"Right in the next room," says Pyramid. "He's signing papers just now; but he'll be through in five minutes."

"Good!" says I. "I'll be there in six. Tell him to wait for Pinckney and me."

AND we catches John Henry just as he's leavin' a crowd of sour lookin' plutes. A bull necked, round headed, high colored gent, Mr. Waller is, with bristly, grayish hair, and a pair of close set, keen blue eyes. From his stooped shoulders and knobby hands you could guess he'd swung a pick some in his day; but by the set of his jaw you could forecast that he didn't have any notion of ever doin' it again. Still, if Pyramid Gordon was a sample of the bunch he'd been up against, most anything was liable to happen to him. By way of gettin' acquainted I suggests something of the kind.

"Huh!" says old John Henry. "I sort of reckon they did figure on puttin' their brand on me, as we say out in the cow country. But maybe they know now that I'm no maverick."

"You sure had your nerve with you, Mr. Waller," says I, "to tackle that combination of high finance pirates."

"I ain't exactly a tenderfoot myself, son," says he, chucklin'. "Well, how's my little Peggy getting along, eh?"

"Fine and dandy, from all accounts," says I. "but the rest of the folks are havin' a bad case of nerves for fear you won't be out in time for the doin's to-night. Ain't that so, Pinckney?"

"They were rather anxious this morning, that's a fact," says Pinckney.

"Why, the wedding isn't set for to-night, is it?" says Waller.

"Wedding nothin'!" says I. "The engagement ain't been bulletined yet, and can't be until after the young man has squared it with you."

"Oh, is that all?" says he. "Well, that needn't trouble 'em. I reckon he's all right."

"But—er—you haven't seen him yet, you know," puts in Pinckney.

"Peggy has, hasn't she?" says John Henry. "Well, if he passes inspection with her he must be O. K. And, anyway, if she's made up her mind that she's suited, it wouldn't do a bit of good for me to interfere."

"Maybe so," says I; "but on East here, in the class she's travelin' with now, there's a few preliminaries that's usually attended to. You see, they've planned to post this engagement business at dinner to-night, and before that you've got to give Mr. Giddings a chance to make his little play. Do you get me?"

"Oh, yes," says Waller. "Wants to ask me if he can have Peggy, does he? We'll soon fix that up. I'll run out with you right away."

And it wa'n't until I'd telephoned the news that we was comin' with the old man, and we was well settled in the train, and John Henry had asked a few questions about what sort of a party this Mr. Giddings was, that he begun to get chilly below the ankles.

"English, is he?" says he. "Well, well! Who would have thought Peggy would ever have picked out an Englishman? What did you say his line was—play writin'? I want to know! Must be some educated, eh?"

"Talbot took honors both at Oxford and Heidelberg," says Pinckney, "and I understand that he has recently declined the chair of ancient Hebrew at Magdalen College."

"Well, now!" says Waller, fidgetin' in his seat and moppin the dew off his brow. "Blamed if I ever thought to have a scholar like that in the family! And he's going to brace me as soon as I get out there, is he? Say, boys, honest now, what do you expect he'll think of a rough old customer like me?"

WOULD you believe it, that's all he can talk about for the rest of the way out. Why, you could see him gettin' fidgety by the minute, in spite of all the