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**BRUTO THE BOLT BREAKER**

Continued from page 4

shall tyke her plyce! Hi feel it my duty to stand beside my 'usband in such case, 'e bein' ighly susceptible, poor 'Orace, and those pynted, brazen 'ussies settin' their caps at im wherever 'e goes! So tell me, once and for hall, is there a 'ussy with 'im?"

"Mrs. Bruto," said Maxey, "there is not! And if I have my way, there won't be!"

"Hi 'ope not," she said. "Hi am not keen to perform; though if Hi say so myself when Hi do there's some does it less successful than me. Why, in Birming'm, as me card states truthfully, they called me the 'Brummagem Belle,' an' in Manchester—"

"I believe every word of it, Mrs. Bruto," said Maxey, cutting her short from the narration of her triumphs; "but you don't need to worry about your husband while he's in my charge."

"And you give me your word there's no female in the hact with 'im?"

"Lady," said Maxey, opening the door, "come with me and prove it for yourself!"

She swished by him to the elevator, disdaining the offer of his arm.

"H'm!" said he to himself. "I can see who's the real strong man in this fam'ly, all right!"

**WHO'S** the chicken?" asked Benny, when they arrived at the theater, and Mrs. 'iggins hurried to her husband's dressing room, where he was enjoying a moment's rest from his labors.

Maxey told him. "And, believe me," he said, "it's a good thing for you you ain't your sister, because she's that jealous of poor old Bruty she'd throw a fit if she eyer catched him lookin' at a copy o' the Ladies' Portfolio."

Mr. and Mrs. 'Orace 'iggins—which Bruto confessed was his real name—came out of the dressing room. There was a smile—grim, but yet a smile—on the face of the Brummagem Belle, and Maxey saw that her suspicions were lulled. But he cut the rehearsal short.

"It's a case o' hustle, Bruto," he told his star. "Mr. Schell wants to see the act to-morrow, and we gotta be ready. Benny, you see about the new costumes quick, and I'll get the setting up here tonight. So come on downtown, everyone."

"Just a mo'," said Bruto. "Who'll 'elp me with me truck? Hi can't leave it 'ere."

"You'll have to handle it yourself today, then," said Maxey. "Come on, Benny—I need you!"

"But listen!" said Benny, as they went downtown in the subway. "If you ain't goin' ter leave her go on,—an' I don't blame you,—who're you goin' ter get for Bruto's helper?"

"You're elected unanimous," said Maxey. "You gotta," he insisted, as Benny looked doubtful; "at least till the openin'." For Heaven's sake don't throw me down now! I got enough to worry about, swingin' Starr & Gaylord to leave me take them velvet curtains out without payin' fer 'em in advance."

**THE** tryout next day was a tremendous success. To be sure, Schell himself did not get there; but he sent Charley Hamill, his right-hand man, and it went off swimmingly. At the close of it Charley called Maxey to the back of the house, and said, patting him on the back:

"Maxey, it's all right. It's a good act, and you got it dressed something great. Them velvet curtains alone would be worth a hundred a week, for the class they give. As for this new What's His Name, that guy's a world beater, and why he's never been brought over before I don't know. I s'pose mebbe half what he does is fake; but what do we care if he can pull 'em in public and get away with it?"

"Oh, he can," said Maxey. "As for their bein' fakes, I give you my word—"

"All right! I'm goin' ter tell Billy you've come across in grand style, and you know that means bookin' right off the reel. But the's one thing."

Maxey's heart sank. There always was "one thing"! The deputy went on:

"And that ain't much," he said. "It's his side kicker."

"What's the matter with Benny?"

"All right, all right! I never knew he was a comedian before. But you know Schell—he's bugs on havin' a girl in any single man act like that. Why, even this here Quick Firin' Perkins, the War Artist, that's been workin' single all season, before Schell'd book him at the Palatial he made him put a skirt in, just to hand him his chalk and things. Schell thinks it adds class to an act, and if you want me to cap it up good, just tell me right now that by the end o' the

week you'll have a nice, pretty girl doin' Benny's act. Say," he exclaimed, glancing at Maxey, "don't look so glum over it. It won't be any trouble. I can get the girl for you."

"Don't get excited over me!" said Maxey, with a laugh. "I'll get the girl."

"Then go to it. I won't mention to Schell you didn't have her in right from the start. I'll just put my O. K. on the act, and you can ship your printin' to Wilmington for Monday."

**MAXEY** hurried downtown; but before startin he rushed into a drugstore and telephoned to Minnie Quigley to meet him at his office. She was there when he arrived.

"Minnie," he said, "this ain't much, but since you've busted your voice, reachin' for them skyscraper notes—"

"Maxey!" said the girl. "If you knew!"

"Shoosh!" he said. "Here's the gag, anyhow. You're the lady end of a strong-man act." And he explained. "And above all," he said cautiously, as he concluded, "if you was to happen to be in here any time in the next couple o' days, an' a little woman o' the name o' Missis 'iggins was to be round, for Heaven's sake don't mention bein' with Bruto!"

"Why not?" asked Minnie.

"Because," he said, "she—well, she's been kinder after the job herself. Be here to-morrow mornin' and meet the Bolt Breaker."

He sent word to Bruto to drop in in the morning before going uptown for rehearsal, and his star was on hand early; alone too, Maxey was glad to note. He congratulated Bruto on the success of the tryout, and then said:

"But that ain't all, old top. We ain't goin' ter leave things rest there, an' I got an improvement already. I'm goin' ter put a lady in the act with you."

Bruto seemed surprised and, Maxey thought, not overenthusiastic at the news. He said, "Why, thank you; but, Hi say, Missus 'iggins, while she's rawther fond o' performin', hisn't quite so keen now that—"

"She's saw Benny, eh?" said Maxey. "Well, don't worry about Missus 'iggins. It ain't goin' ter be her. It's a swell—a queen, a— Not that I wouldn't say Missis 'iggins wasn't; but—well, she's a little too petite, as you might call it. This other lady's—"

"Himpossible!" cried Bruto, and Maxey gazed at him in astonishment. "Hi mean," the Bolt Breaker went on, "she wouldn't hever, hever stand for it! Ho, Mr. Maxey, hif you know 'er as I do! She's that jealous of me! No, no—not hif she knew it!"

"Then," said Maxey quietly but firmly, "she mustn't know it. Listen, Bruto. Mr. Schell's man said the act couldn't go without a gir. . . it, and what he says goes. And do you think I'm goin' ter leave a lady's foolish notions do me out o' all the money I've already put in this act? If you do, you go put another record on your machine! As for what Missis 'iggins'll say—I got a look at her, an' I know she ain't the kind o' lady that'd like to have you lose your chance to make a nice wad o' money. No, not even if it is nasty American money! So say nothin'." She's seen Benny in the act, an' if she'll stay from the rehearsals next couple o' days, she'll never be wise. As for the openin'—"

Bruto took his bulldog pipe from his mouth and gasped. "Ho, the hopenin'!" he said. "My heyes! but there's the facer!"

"Is it?" said Maxey. "Listen! We open at Wilmington. Know where that is?"

"Is it anywhere near this Sawm Frawncisco?"

"Not so very far from it," said Maxey. "It's out by Chicago, but a little nearer Portland, Maine. And the railroad fare is something fierce. Now, if Missis 'iggins wants to go to the openin', you've gotta pay her fare an' all expenses."

"Me!" cried Bruto. "Hi'm stony!"

"Then that holds her," said Maxey. "And now here's Miss Quigley. You and her fix it up. And remember, when you go home, say nothin' to the Missis about the change."

"No fear," said Bruto. "Hi only 'ope she don't get hon'!"

"If she does," said Maxey, "you get hoff!"

**ALL** went well, and Monday morning came, when Bruto and Minnie Quigley were to meet Maxey at his office. Bruto arrived in high spirits.

"Hit's hall right, old top!" he said. "Hi left the Missis quite reconciled, doncher know, an' readin' the mornin' pypers to see if there's hannytin' in about me."

"You're not going to play the matinée, then?" asked Minnie, when she came in



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