

CHAPTER XIV

MR. ABRAHAM'S RE-ENGAGES AN OLD EMPLOYEE

I

THE only real happiness, we are told, is to be obtained by bringing happiness to others. Bugs Butler's mood, accordingly, when some thirty hours after the painful episode recorded in the last chapter he awoke from a state of coma in the ring at Jersey City to discover that Mr. Lew Lucas had knocked him out in the middle of the third round, should have been one of quiet contentment. His inability to block a short left-hook followed by a right to the point of the jaw had ameliorated quite a number of existences.

Mr. Lew Lucas, for one, was noticeably pleased. So were Mr. Lucas's seconds, one of whom went so far as to kiss him. And most of the crowd, who had betted heavily on the champion, were delighted. Yet Bugs Butler did not rejoice. It is not too much to say that his peevish bearing struck a jarring note in the general gaiety. A heavy frown disfigured his face as he slouched from the ring.

But the happiness which he had spread went on spreading. The two Wise Guys, who had been unable to attend the fight in person, received the result on the ticker and exuberantly proclaimed themselves

the richer by five hundred dollars. The pimpled office-boy at the Fillmore Nicholas Theatrical Enterprises Ltd. caused remark in the Subway by whooping gleefully when he read the news in his morning paper, for he, too, had been rendered wealthier by the brittleness of Mr. Butler's chin. And it was with fierce satisfaction that Sally, breakfasting in her little apartment, informed herself through the sporting page of the details of the contender's downfall. She was not a girl who disliked many people, but she had acquired a lively distaste for Bugs Butler.

Lew Lucas seemed a man after her own heart. If he had been a personal friend of Ginger's he could not, considering the brief time at his disposal, have avenged him with more thoroughness. In round one he had done all sorts of diverting things to Mr. Butler's left eye: in round two he had continued the good work on that gentleman's body; and in round three he had knocked him out. Could anyone have done more? Sally thought not, and she drank Lew Lucas's health in a cup of coffee and hoped his old mother was proud of him.

The telephone bell rang at her elbow. She unhooked the receiver.

"Hullo?"

"Oh, hullo," said a voice.

"Ginger!" cried Sally delightedly.

"I say, I'm awfully glad you're back. I only got your letter this morning. Found it at the boarding-house. I happened to look in there and . . ."

"Ginger," interrupted Sally, "your voice is music, but I want to see you. Where are you?"

"I'm at a chemist's shop across the street. I was wondering if . . ."

"Come here at once!"

"I say, may I? I was just going to ask."

"You miserable creature, why haven't you been round to see me before?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I haven't been going about much for the last day. You see . . ."

"I know. Of course." Quick sympathy came into Sally's voice. She gave a sidelong glance of approval and gratitude at the large picture of Lew Lucas which beamed up at her from the morning paper. "You poor thing! How are you?"

"Oh, all right, thanks."

"Well, hurry."

There was a slight pause at the other end of the wire.

"I say."

"Well?"

"I'm not much to look at, you know."

"You never were. Stop talking and hurry over."

"I mean to say . . ."

Sally hung up the receiver firmly. She waited eagerly for some minutes, and then footsteps came along the passage. They stopped at her door and the bell rang. Sally ran to the door, flung it open, and recoiled in consternation.

"Oh, Ginger!"

He had stated the facts accurately when he had said that he was not much to look at. He gazed at her devotedly out of an unblemished right eye, but the other was hidden altogether by a puffy swelling of dull purple. A great bruise marred his left cheekbone, and he spoke with some difficulty through swollen lips.

"It's all *right*, you know," he assured her.

"It isn't. It's awful! Oh, you poor darling!" She clenched her teeth viciously. "I wish he had killed him!"

"Eh?"

"I wish Lew Lucas or whatever his name is had murdered him. Brute!"

"Oh, I don't know, you know." Ginger's sense of fairness compelled him to defend his late employer against these harsh sentiments. "He isn't a bad sort of chap, really. Bugs Butler I mean."

"Do you seriously mean to stand there and tell me you don't loathe the creature?"

"Oh, he's all right. See his point of view and all that. Can't blame him, if you come to think of it, for getting the wind up a bit in the circus. Bit thick, I mean to say, a sparring-partner going at him like that. Naturally he didn't think it much of a wheeze. It was my fault right along. Oughtn't to have done it, of course, but somehow, when he started making an ass of me and I knew you were looking on . . . well, it seemed a good idea to have a dash at doing something on my own. No right to, of course. A sparring-partner isn't supposed . . ."

"Sit down," said Sally.

Ginger sat down.

"Ginger," said Sally, "you're too good to live."

"Oh, I say!"

"I believe if someone sandbagged you and stole your watch and chain you'd say there were faults on both sides or something. I'm just a cat, and I say I wish your beast of a Bugs Butler had perished miserably. I'd have gone and danced on his grave . . . But whatever made you go in for that sort of thing?"

"Well, it seemed the only job that was going at the moment. I've always done a goodish bit of boxing and I was very fit and so on, and it looked to me rather an opening. Gave me something to get along with. You get paid quite fairly decently, you know, and it's rather a jolly life . . ."

"Jolly? Being hammered about like that?"

"Oh, you don't notice it much. I've always enjoyed scrapping rather. And, you see, when your brother gave me the push . . ."

Sally uttered an exclamation.

"What an extraordinary thing it is—I went all the way out to White Plains that afternoon to find Fillmore and tackle him about that and I didn't say a word about it. And I haven't seen or been able to get hold of him since."

"No? Busy sort of cove, your brother."

"Why did Fillmore let you go?"

"Let me go? Oh you mean . . . well, there was a sort of mix-up. A kind of misunderstanding."

"What happened?"

"Oh, it was nothing. Just a . . ."

"What happened?"

Ginger's disfigured countenance betrayed embarrassment. He looked awkwardly about the room.

"It's not worth talking about."

"It is worth talking about. I've a right to know. It was I who sent you to Fillmore . . ."

"Now *that*," said Ginger, "was jolly decent of you."

"Don't interrupt! I sent you to Fillmore, and he had no business to let you go without saying a word to me. What happened?"

Ginger twiddled his fingers unhappily.

"Well, it was rather unfortunate. You see, his wife—I don't know if you know her? . . ."

"Of course I know her."

"Why, yes, you would, wouldn't you? Your brother's wife, I mean," said Ginger acutely. "Though, as a matter of fact, you often find sisters-in-law who won't have anything to do with one another. I knew a fellow . . ."

"Ginger," said Sally, "it's no good your thinking you can get out of telling me by rambling off on other subjects. I'm grim and resolute and relentless, and I mean to get this story out of you if I have to use a corkscrew. Fillmore's wife, you were saying . . ."

Ginger came back reluctantly to the main theme.

"Well, she came into the office one morning, and we started fooling about . . ."

"Fooling about?"

"Well, kind of chivvyng each other."

"Chivvyng?"

"At least *I* was."

"You were what?"

"Sort of chasing her a bit, you know."

Sally regarded this apostle of frivolity with amazement.

"What *do* you mean?"

Ginger's embarrassment increased.

"The thing was, you see, she happened to trickle in rather quietly when I happened to be looking at something, and I didn't know she was there till she suddenly grabbed it . . ."

"Grabbed what?"

"The thing. The thing I happened to be looking at. She bagged it . . . collared it . . . took it away from me, you know, and wouldn't give it back and

generally started to rot about a bit, so I rather began to chivvy her to some extent, and I'd just caught her when your brother happened to roll in. I suppose," said Ginger, putting two and two together, "he had really come with her to the office and had happened to hang back for a minute or two, to talk to somebody or something . . . well, of course, he was considerably fed to see me apparently doing jiu-jitsu with his wife. Enough to rattle any man, if you come to think of it," said Ginger, ever fair-minded. "Well, he didn't say anything at the time, but a bit later in the day he called me in and administered the push."

Sally shook her head.

"It sounds the craziest story to me. What was it that Mrs. Fillmore took from you?"

"Oh, just something."

Sally rapped the table imperiously.

"Ginger!"

"Well, as a matter of fact," said her goaded visitor, "it was a photograph."

"Who of? Or, if you're particular, of whom?"

"Well . . . you, to be absolutely accurate."

"Me?" Sally stared. "But I've never given you a photograph of myself."

Ginger's face was a study in scarlet and purple.

"You didn't exactly give it to me," he mumbled.

"When I say give, I mean . . ."

"Good gracious!" Sudden enlightenment came upon Sally. "That photograph we were hunting for when I first came here! Had you stolen it all the time?"

"Why, yes, I did sort of pinch it . . ."

"You fraud! You humbug! And you pretended

to help me look for it." She gazed at him almost with respect. "I never knew you were so deep and snaky. I'm discovering all sorts of new things about you."

There was a brief silence. Ginger, confession over, seemed a trifle happier.

"I hope you're not frightfully sick about it?" he said at length. "It was lying about, you know, and I rather felt I must have it. Hadn' the cheek to ask you for it, so . . ."

"Don't apologize," said Sally cordially. "Great compliment. So I have caused your downfall again, have I? I'm certainly your evil genius, Ginger. I'm beginning to feel like a regular rag and a bone and a hank of hair. First I egged you on to insult your family—oh, by the way, I want to thank you about that. Now that I've met your Uncle Donald I can see how public-spirited you were. I ruined your prospects there, and now my fatal beauty—cabinet size—has led to your destruction once more. It's certainly up to me to find you another job, I can see that."

"No, really, I say, you mustn't bother. I shall be all right."

"It's my duty. Now what is there that you really *can* do? Burglary, of course, but it's not respectable. You've tried being a waiter and a prize-fighter and a right-hand man, and none of those seems to be just right. Can't you suggest anything?"

Ginger shook his head.

"I shall wangle something, I expect."

"Yes, but what? It must be something good this time. I don't want to be walking along Broadway and come on you suddenly as a street-cleaner. I

don't want to send for an express-man and find you popping up. My idea would be to go to my bank to arrange an overdraft and be told the president could give me two minutes and crawl in humbly and find you prezzing away to beat the band in a big chair. Isn't there anything in the world that you can do that's solid and substantial and will keep you out of the poor-house in your old age? Think!"

"Of course, if I had a bit of capital . . ."

"Ah! The business man! And what," inquired Sally, "would you do, Mr. Morgan, if you had a bit of capital?"

"Run a dog-thingummy," said Ginger promptly.

"What's a dog-thingummy?"

"Why, a thingamajig. For dogs, you know."

Sally nodded.

"Oh, a thingamajig for dogs? Now I understand. You will put things so obscurely at first. Ginger, you poor fish, what are you raving about? What on earth is a thingamajig for dogs?"

"I mean a sort of place like fellows have. Breeding dogs, you know, and selling them and winning prizes and all that. There are lots of them about."

"Oh, a kennels?"

"Yes, a kennels."

"What a weird mind you have, Ginger. You couldn't say kennels at first, could you? That wouldn't have made it difficult enough. I suppose, if anyone asked you where you had your lunch, you would say, 'Oh, at a thingamajig for mutton chops' . . . Ginger, my lad, there is something in this. I believe for the first time in our acquaintance you have spoken something very nearl resembling a mouthful. You're wonderful with dogs, aren't you?"

"I'm dashed keen on them, and I've studied them a bit. As a matter of fact, though it seems rather like swanking, there isn't much about dogs that I don't know."

"Of course. I believe you're a sort of honorary dog yourself. I could tell it by the way you stopped that fight at Roville. You plunged into a howling mass of about a million hounds of all species and just whispered in their ears and they stopped at once. Why, the more one examines this, the better it looks. I do believe it's the one thing you couldn't help making a success of. It's very paying, isn't it?"

"Works out at about a hundred per cent. on the original outlay, I've been told."

"A hundred per cent? That sounds too much like something of Fillmore's for comfort. Let's say ninety-nine and be conservative. Ginger, you have hit it. Say no more. You shall be the Dog King, the biggest thingamajigger for dogs in the country. But how do you start?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, while I was up at White Plains, I ran into a cove who had a place of the sort and wanted to sell out. That was what made me think of it."

"You must start to-day. Or early to-morrow."

"Yes," said Ginger doubtfully. "Of course, there's the catch, you know."

"What catch?"

"The capital. You've got to have that. This fellow wouldn't sell out under five thousand dollars."

"I'll lend you five thousand dollars."

"No!" said Ginger.

Sally looked at him with exasperation. "Ginger, I'd like to slap you," she said. It was maddening,

this intrusion of sentiment into business affairs. Why, simply because he was a man and she was a woman, should she be restrained from investing money in a sound commercial undertaking? If Columbus had taken up this bone-headed stand towards Queen Isabella, America would never have been discovered.

"I can't take five thousand dollars off you," said Ginger firmly.

"Who's talking of taking it off me, as you call it?" stormed Sally. "Can't you forget your burglarious career for a second? This isn't the same thing as going about stealing defenceless girls' photographs. This is business. I think you would make an enormous success of a dog-place, and you admit you're good, so why make frivolous objections? Why shouldn't I put money into a good thing? Don't you want me to get rich, or what is it?"

Ginger was becoming confused. Argument had never been his strong point.

"But it's such a lot of money."

"To you, perhaps. Not to me. I'm a plutocrat. Five thousand dollars! What's five thousand dollars? I feed it to the birds."

Ginger pondered woodenly for a while. His was a literal mind, and he knew nothing of Sally's finances beyond the fact that when he had first met her she had come into a legacy of some kind. Moreover, he had been hugely impressed by Fillmore's magnificence. It seemed plain enough that the Nicholases were a wealthy family.

"I don't like it, you know," he said.

"You don't have to like it," said Sally. "You just do it."

A consoling thought flashed upon Ginger.

"You'd have to let me pay you interest."

"Let you? My lad, you'll *have* to pay me interest. What do you think this is—a round 'game? It's a cold business deal."

"Topping!" said Ginger relieved. "How about twenty-five per cent."

"Don't be silly," said Sally quickly. "I want three."

"No, that's all rot," protested Ginger. "I mean to say—three. I don't," he went on, making a correction, "mind saying twenty."

"If you insist, I'll make it five. Not more."

"Well, ten, then?"

"Five!"

"Suppose" said Ginger insinuatingly, "I said seven?"

"I never saw anyone like you for haggling," said Sally with disapproval. "Listen! Six. And that's my last word"

"Six?"

"Six."

Ginger did sums in his head.

"But that would only work out at three hundred dollars a year. It isn't enough."

"What do you know about it? As if I hadn't been handling this sort of deal all my life. Six! Do you agree?"

"I suppose so."

"Then that's settled. Is this man you talk about in New York?"

"No, he's down on Long Island at a place on the south shore."

"I mean, can you get him on the 'phone and clinch the thing?"

" Oh, yes. I know his address, and I suppose his number's in the book."

" Then go off at once and settle with him before somebody else snaps him up. Don't waste a minute."

Ginger paused at the door.

" I say, you're absolutely sure about this?"

" Of course."

" I mean to say . . ."

" Get on," said Sally.

II

The window of Sally's sitting-room looked out on to a street which, while not one of the city's important arteries, was capable, nevertheless, of affording a certain amount of entertainment to the observer: and after Ginger had left, she carried the morning paper to the window-sill and proceeded to divide her attention between a third reading of the fight-report and a lazy survey of the outer world. It was a beautiful day, and the outer world was looking its best.

She had not been at her post for many minutes when a taxi-cab stopped at the apartment-house, and she was surprised and interested to see her brother Fillmore heave himself out of the interior. He paid the driver, and the cab moved off, leaving him on the sidewalk casting a large shadow in the sunshine. Sally was on the point of calling to him, when his behaviour became so odd that astonishment checked her.

From where she sat Fillmore had all the appearance of a man practising the steps of a new dance, and sheer curiosity as to what he would do next kept

Sally, watching in silence. First, he moved in a resolute sort of way towards the front door; then, suddenly stopping, scuttled back. This movement he repeated twice, after which he stood in deep thought before making another dash for the door, which, like the others, came to an abrupt end as though he had run into some invisible obstacle. And, finally, wheeling sharply, he hustled off down the street and was lost to view.

Sally could make nothing of it. If Fillmore had taken the trouble to come in a taxi-cab, obviously to call upon her, why had he abandoned the idea at her very threshold? She was still speculating on this mystery when the telephone-bell rang, and her brother's voice spoke huskily in her ear.

"Sally?"

"Hullo, Fill. What are you going to call it?"

"What am I . . . Call what?"

"The dance you were doing outside here just now. It's your own invention, isn't it?"

"Did you see me?" said Fillmore, upset.

"Of course I saw you. I was fascinated."

"I—er—I was coming to have a talk with you, Sally . . ."

Fillmore's voice trailed off.

"Well, why didn't you?"

There was a pause—on Fillmore's part, if the timbre of his voice correctly indicated his feelings, a pause of discomfort. Something was plainly vexing Fillmore's great mind.

"Sally," he said at last, and coughed hollowly into the receiver.

"Yes."

"I—that is to say, I have asked Gladys . . .

Gladys will be coming to see you very shortly; Will you be in?"

"I'll stay in. How is Gladys? I'm longing to see her again."

"She is very well. A trifle—a little upset."

"Upset? What about?"

"She will tell you when she arrives. I have just been 'phoning to her. She is coming at once." There was another pause. "I'm afraid she has bad news."

"What news?"

There was silence at the other end of the wire.

"What news?" repeated Sally, a little sharply. She hated mysteries.

But Fillmore had rung off. Sally hung up the receiver thoughtfully. She was puzzled and anxious. However, there being nothing to be gained by worrying, she carried the breakfast things into the kitchen and tried to divert herself by washing up. Presently a ring at the door-bell brought her out, to find her sister-in-law.

Marriage, even though it had brought with it the lofty position of partnership with the Hope of the American Stage, had effected no noticeable alteration in the former Miss Winch. As Mrs. Fillmore she was the same square, friendly creature. She hugged Sally in a muscular manner and went on in the sitting-room.

"Well, it's great seeing you again," she said. "I began to think you were never coming back. What was the big idea, springing over to England like that?"

Sally had been expecting the question, and answered it with composure.

"I wanted to help Mr. Faucitt."

"Who's Mr. Faucitt?"

"Hasn't Fillmore ever mentioned him? He was a dear old man at the boarding-house, and his brother died and left him a dressmaking establishment in London. He screamed to me to come and tell him what to do about it. He has sold it now and is quite happy in the country."

"Well, the trip's done you good," said Mrs. Fillmore. "You're prettier than ever!"

There was a pause. Already, in these trivial opening exchanges, Sally had sensed a suggestion of unwonted gravity in her companion. She missed that careless whimsicality which had been the chief characteristic of Miss Gladys Winch and seemed to have been cast off by Mrs. Fillmore Nicholas. At their meeting, before she had spoken, Sally had not noticed this, but now it was apparent that something was weighing on her companion. Mrs. Fillmore's honest eyes were troubled.

"What's the bad news?" asked Sally abruptly. She wanted to end the suspense. "Fillmore was telling me over the 'phone that you had some bad news for me."

Mrs. Fillmore scratched at the carpet for a moment with the end of her parasol without replying. When she spoke it was not in answer to the question.

"Sally, who's this man Carmyle over in England?"

"Oh, did Fillmore tell you about him?"

"He told me there was a rich fellow over in England who was crazy about you and had asked you to marry him, and that you had turned him down."

Sally's momentary annoyance faded. She could

hardly, she felt, have expected Fillmore to refrain from mentioning the matter to his wife.

"Yes," she said. "That's true."

"You couldn't write and say you've changed your mind?"

Sally's annoyance returned. All her life she had been intensely independent, resentful of interference with her private concerns.

"I suppose I could if I had—but I haven't. Did Fillmore tell you to try to talk me round?"

"Oh, I'm not trying to talk you round," said Mrs. Fillmore quickly. "Goodness knows, I'm the last person to try and jolly anyone into marrying anybody if they didn't feel like it. I've seen too many marriages go wrong to do that. Look at Elsa Doland."

Sally's heart jumped as if an exposed nerve had been touched.

"Elsa?" she stammered, and hated herself because her voice shook. "Has—has her marriage gone wrong?"

"Gone all to bits," said Mrs. Fillmore shortly. "You remember she married Gerald Foster, the man who wrote 'The Primrose Way'?"

Sally with an effort repressed an hysterical laugh.

"Yes, I remember," she said.

"Well, it's all gone bloo-ey. I'll tell you about that in a minute. Coming back to this man in England, if you're in any doubt about it . . . I mean, you can't always tell right away whether you're fond of a man or not . . . When first I met Fillmore, I couldn't see him with a spy-glass, and now he's just the whole shooting-match . . . But that's not what I wanted to talk about. I was saying one doesn't

always know one's own mind at first, and if this fellow really is a good fellow . . . and Fillmore tells me he's got all the money in the world . . .”

Sally stopped her.

“No, it's no good. I don't want to marry Mr. Carmyle.”

“That's that, then,” said Mrs. Fillmore. “It's a pity, though.”

“Why are you taking it so much to heart?” said Sally with a nervous laugh.

“Well . . .” Mrs. Fillmore paused. Sally's anxiety was growing. It must, she realized, be something very serious indeed that had happened if it had the power to make her forthright sister-in-law disjointed in her talk. “You see . . .” went on Mrs. Fillmore, and stopped again. “Gee! I'm hating this!” she murmured.

“What is it? I don't understand.”

“You'll find it's all too darned clear by the time I'm through,” said Mrs. Fillmore mournfully. “If I'm going to explain this thing, I guess I'd best start at the beginning. You remember that revue of Fillmore's—the one we both begged him not to put on. It flopped!”

“Oh!”

“Yes. It flopped on the road and died there. Never got to New York at all. Ike Schumann wouldn't let Fillmore have a theatre. The book wanted fixing and the numbers wanted fixing and the scenery wasn't right: and while they were tinkering with all that there was trouble about the cast and the Actors Equity closed the show. Best thing that could have happened, really, and I was glad at the time, because going on with it would only have meant

wasting more money, and it had cost a fortune already. After that Fillmore put on a play of Gerald Foster's and that was a frost, too. It ran a week at the Booth. I hear the new piece he's got in rehearsal now is no good either. It's called 'The Wild Rose,' or something. But Fillmore's got nothing to do with that."

"But . . ." Sally tried to speak, but Mrs. Fillmore went on.

"Don't talk just yet, or I shall never get this thing straight. Well, you know Fillmore, poor darling. Anyone else would have pulled in his horns and gone slow for a spell, but he's one of those fellows whose horse is always going to win the next race. The big killing is always just round the corner with him. Funny how you can see what a chump a man is and yet love him to death . . . I remember saying something like that to you before . . . He thought he could get it all back by staging this fight of his that came off in Jersey City last night. And if everything had gone right he might have got afloat again. But it seems as if he can't touch anything without it turning to mud. On the very day before the fight was to come off, the poor mutt who was going against the champion goes and lets a sparring-partner of his own knock him down and fool around with him. With all the newspaper men there too! You probably saw about it in the papers. It made a great story for them. Well, that killed the whole thing. The public had never been any too sure that this fellow Bugs Butler had a chance of putting up a scrap with the champion that would be worth paying to see; and, when they read that he couldn't even stop his sparring-partners slamming him all around the place they

simply decided to stay away. Poor old Fill! It was a finisher for him. The house wasn't a quarter full, and after he'd paid these two pluguglies their guarantees, which they insisted on having before they'd so much as go into the ring, he was just about cleared out. So there you are!"

Sally had listened with dismay to this catalogue of misfortunes.

"Oh, poor Fill!" she cried. "How dreadful!"

"Pretty tough."

"But 'The Primrose Way' is a big success, isn't it?" said Sally, anxious to discover something of brightness in the situation.

"It was." Mrs. Fillmore flushed again. "This is the part I hate having to tell you."

"It was? Do you mean it isn't still? I thought Elsa had made such a tremendous hit. I read about it when I was over in London. It was even in one of the English papers."

"Yes, she made a hit all right," said Mrs. Fillmore drily. "She made such a hit that all the other managements in New York were after her right away, and Fillmore had hardly sailed when she handed in her notice and signed up with Goble and Cohn for a new piece they are starring her in."

"Oh, she couldn't!" cried Sally.

"My dear, she did! She's out on the road with it now. I had to break the news to poor old Fillmore at the dock when he landed. It was rather a blow. I must say it wasn't what I would call playing the game. I know there isn't supposed to be any sentiment in business, but after all we had given Elsa her big chance. But Fillmore wouldn't put her name up over the theatre in electrics, and Goble and

Cohn made it a clause in her contract that they would, so nothing else mattered. People are like that."

"But Elsa . . . She used not to be like that."

"They all get that way. They must grab success if it's to be grabbed. I suppose you can't blame them. You might just as well expect a cat to keep off catnip. Still, she might have waited to the end of the New York run." Mrs. Fillmore put out her hand and touched Sally's. "Well, I've got it out now," she said, "and, believe me, it was one rotten job. You don't know how sorry I am, Sally. I wouldn't have had it happen for a million dollars. Nor would Fillmore. I'm not sure that I blame him for getting cold feet and backing out of telling you himself. He just hadn't the nerve to come and confess that he had fooled away your money. He was hoping all along that this fight would pan out big and that he'd be able to pay you back what you had loaned him, but things didn't happen right."

Sally was silent. She was thinking how strange it was that this room in which she had hoped to be so happy had been from the first moment of her occupancy a storm centre of bad news and miserable disillusionment. In this first shock of the tidings, it was the disillusionment that hurt most. She had always been so fond of Elsa, and Elsa had always seemed so fond of her. She remembered that letter of Elsa's with all its protestations of gratitude . . . It wasn't straight. It was horrible. Callous, selfish, altogether horrible . . .

"It's . . ." She choked, as a rush of indignation brought the tears to her eyes. "It's . . . beastly! I'm . . . I'm not thinking about my money. That's just bad luck. But Elsa . . ."

Mrs. Fillmore shrugged her square shoulders.

"Well, it's happening all the time in the show business," she said. "And in every other business, too, I guess, if one only knew enough about them to be able to say. Of course, it hits you hard because Elsa was a pal of yours, and you're thinking she might have considered you after all you've done for her. I can't say I'm much surprised myself." Mrs. Fillmore was talking rapidly, and dimly Sally understood that she was talking so that talk would carry her over this bad moment. Silence now would have been unendurable. "I was in the company with her, and it sometimes seems to me as if you can't get to know a person right through till you've been in the same company with them. Elsa's all right, but she's two people really, like these dual identity cases you read about. She's awfully fond of you. I know she is. She was always saying so, and it was quite genuine. If it didn't interfere with business there's nothing she wouldn't do for you. But when it's a case of her career you don't count. Nobody counts. Not even her husband. Now that's funny. If you think that sort of thing funny. Personally, it gives me the willies."

"What's funny?" asked Sally, dully.

"Well, you weren't there, so you didn't see it, but I was on the spot all the time, and I know as well as I know anything that he simply married her because he thought she could get him on in the game. He hardly paid any attention to her at all till she was such a riot in Chicago, and then he was all over her. And now he's got stung. She throws down his show and goes off to another fellow's. It's like marrying for money and finding the girl hasn't any. And she's

got stung, too, in a way, because I'm pretty sure she married him mostly because she thought he was going to be the next big man in the play-writing business and could boost her up the ladder. And now it doesn't look as though he had another success in him. The result is they're at outs. I hear he's drinking. Somebody who'd seen him told me he had gone all to pieces. You haven't seen him, I suppose?"

"No."

"I thought maybe you might have run into him. He lives right opposite."

Sally clutched at the arm of her chair.

"Lives right opposite? Gerald Foster? What do you mean?"

"Across the passage there," said Mrs. Fillmore, jerking her thumb at the door. "Didn't you know? That's right, I suppose you didn't. They moved in after you had beaten it for England. Elsa wanted to be near you, and she was tickled to death when she found there was an apartment to be had right across from you. Now, that just proves what I was saying a while ago about Elsa. If she wasn't fond of you, would she go out of her way to camp next door? And yet, though she's so fond of you, she doesn't hesitate about wrecking your property by quitting the show when she sees a chance of doing herself a bit of good. It's funny isn't it?"

The telephone bell, tinkling sharply, rescued Sally from the necessity of a reply. She forced herself across the room to answer it.

"Hullo?"

Ginger's voice spoke jubilantly.

"Hullo. Are you there? I say, it's all right, about that binge, you know."

"Oh, yes?"

"That dog fellow, you know," said Ginger, with a slight diminution of exuberance. His sensitive ear had seemed to detect a lack of animation in her voice. "I've just been talking to him over the 'phone, and it's all settled. If," he added, with a touch of doubt, "you still feel like going into it, I mean."

There was an instant in which Sally hesitated, but it was only an instant.

"Why, of course," she said, steadily. "Why should you think I had changed my mind?"

"Well, I thought . . . that is to say, you seemed . . . oh, I don't know."

"You imagine things. I was a little worried about something when you called me up, and my mind wasn't working properly. Of course, go ahead with it, Ginger. I'm delighted."

"I say, I'm awfully sorry you're worried."

"Oh, it's all right."

"Something bad?"

"Nothing that'll kill me. I'm young and strong."

Ginger was silent for a moment.

"I say, I don't want to butt in, but can I do anything?"

"No, really, Ginger, I know you would do anything you could, but this is just something I must worry through by myself. When do you go down to this place?"

"I was thinking of popping down this afternoon, just to take a look round."

"Let me know what train you're making and I'll come and see you off."

"That's ripping of you. Right ho. Well, so long."

"So long," said Sally.

Mrs. Fillmore, who had been sitting in that state of suspended animation which comes upon people who are present at a telephone conversation which has nothing to do with themselves, came to life as Sally replaced the receiver.

"Sally," she said, "I think we ought to have a talk now about what you're going to do."

Sally was not feeling equal to any discussion of the future. All she asked of the world at the moment was to be left alone.

"Oh, that's all right. I shall manage. You ought to be worrying about Fillmore."

"Fillmore's got me to look after him," said Gladys, with quiet determination. "You're the one that's on my mind. I lay awake all last night thinking about you. As far as I can make out from Fillmore, you've still a few thousand dollars left. Well, as it happens, I can put you on to a really good thing. I know a girl . . ."

"I'm afraid," interrupted Sally, "all the rest of my money, what there is of it, is tied up."

"You can't get hold of it?"

"No."

"But listen," said Mrs. Fillmore, urgently. "This is a really good thing. This girl I know started an interior decorating business some time ago and is pulling in the money in handfuls. But she wants more capital, and she's willing to let go of a third of the business to anyone who'll put in a few

thousand. She won't have any difficulty getting it, but I 'phoned her this morning to hold off till I'd heard from you. Honestly, Sally, it's the chance of a lifetime. It would put you right on easy street. Isn't there really any way you could get your money out of this other thing and take on this deal?"

"There really isn't. I'm awfully obliged to you, Gladys dear, but it's impossible."

"Well," said Mrs. Fillmore, prodding the carpet energetically with her parasol, "I don't know what you've gone into, but, unless they've given you a share in the Mint or something, you'll be losing by not making the switch. You're sure you can't do it?"

"I really can't."

Mrs. Fillmore rose, plainly disappointed.

"Well, you know best, of course. Gosh! What a muddle everything is. Sally," she said, suddenly stopping at the door, "you're not going to hate poor old Fillmore over this, are you?"

"Why, of course not. The whole thing was just bad luck."

"He's worried stiff about it."

"Well, give him my love, and tell him not to be so silly."

Mrs. Fillmore crossed the room and kissed Sally impulsively.

"You're an angel," she said. "I wish there were more like you. But I guess they've lost the pattern. Well, I'll go back and tell Fillmore that. It'll relieve him."

The door closed, and Sally sat down with her chin in her hands to think.

III

Mr. Isadore Abrahams, the founder and proprietor of that deservedly popular dancing resort poetically named "The Flower Garden," leaned back in his chair with a contented sigh and laid down the knife and fork with which he had been assailing a plateful of succulent goulash. He was dining, as was his admirable custom, in the bosom of his family at his residence at Far Rockaway. Across the table, his wife, Rebecca, beamed at him over her comfortable plinth of chins, and round the table his children, David, Jacob, Morris and Saide, would have beamed at him if they had not been too busy at the moment ingurgitating goulash. A genial, honest, domestic man was Mr. Abrahams, a credit to the community.

"Mother," he said.

"Pa?" said Mrs. Abrahams.

"Knew there was something I'd meant to tell you," said Mr. Abrahams, absently chasing a piece of bread round his plate with a stout finger. "You remember that girl I told you about some time back—girl working at the Garden—girl called Nicholas, who came into a bit of money and threw up her job . . ."

"I remember. You liked her. Jakie, dear, don't gobble."

"Ain't gobbling," said Master Abrahams.

"Everybody liked her," said Mr. Abrahams. "The nicest girl I ever hired, and I don't hire none but nice girls, because the Garden's a nice place, and I like to run it nice. I wouldn't give you a nickel for any of your tough joints where you get nothing but low-lifes and scare away all the real folks. Everybody

liked Sally Nicholas. Always pleasant and always smiling, and never anything but the lady. It was a treat to have her around. Well, what do you think?"

"Dead?" inquired Mrs. Abrahams, apprehensively. The story had sounded to her as though it were leading that way. "Wipe your mouth, Jackie dear."

"No, not dead," said Mr. Abrahams, conscious for the first time that the remainder of his narrative might be considered by a critic something of an anticlimax and lacking in drama. "But she was in to see me this afternoon and wants her job back."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Abrahams, rather tonelessly. An ardent supporter of the local motion-picture palace, she had hoped for a slightly more gingery *dénouement*, something with a bit more punch.

"Yes, but don't it show you?" continued Mr. Abrahams, gallantly trying to work up the interest. "There's this girl, goes out of my place not more'n a year ago with a good bank-roll in her pocket, and here she is, back again, all of it spent. Don't it show you what a tragedy life is, if you see what I mean, and how careful one ought to be about money? It's what I call a human document. Goodness knows how she's been and gone and spent it all. I'd never have thought she was the sort of girl to go gadding around. Always seemed to me to be kind of sensible."

"What's gadding, Pop?" asked Master Jackie, the goulash having ceased to chain his interest.

"Well, she wanted her job back and I gave it to her, and glad to get her back again. There's class to that girl. She's the sort of girl I want in the place. Don't seem quite to have so much get-up in her as she used to . . . seems kind of quieted down . . .

but she's got class, and I'm glad she's back. I hope she'll stay. But don't it show you?"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Abrahams, with more enthusiasm than before. It had not worked out such a bad story after all. In its essentials it was not unlike the film she had seen the previous evening—Gloria Gouch in "A Girl against the World."

"Pop!" said Master Abrahams.

"Yes, Jakie?"

"When I'm grown up, I won't never lose no money. I'll put it in the bank and save it."

The slight depression caused by the contemplation of Sally's troubles left Mr. Abrahams as mist melts beneath a sunbeam.

"That's a good boy, Jakie," he said.

He felt in his waistcoat pocket, found a dime, put it back again, and bent forward and patted Master Abrahams on the head.