## CHAPTER IX

### GINGER BECOMES A RIGHT-HAND MAN

IT was not till she saw him actually standing there before her with his hair rumpled and a large smut on the tip of his nose, that Sally really understood how profoundly troubled she had been about this young man, and how vivid had been that vision of him bobbing about on the waters of the Thames, a cold and unappreciated corpse. She was a girl of keen imagination, and she had allowed her imagination to riot unchecked. Astonishment, therefore, at the extraordinary fact of his being there was for the moment thrust aside by relief. Never before in her life had she experienced such an overwhelming rush of exhilaration. She flung herself into a chair and burst into a screech of laughter which even to her own ears sounded strange. It struck Ginger as hysterical.

"I say, you know!" said Ginger, as the merriment showed no signs of abating. Ginger was concerned. Nasty shock for a girl, finding blighters under her bed.

Sally sat up, gurgling, and wiped her eyes.

"Oh, I *am* glad to see you," she gasped.

"No, really?" said Ginger, gratified. "That's fine." It occurred to him that some sort of apology

would be a graceful act. "I say, you know, awfully sorry. About barging in here, I mean. Never dreamed it was your room. Unoccupied, I thought."

"Don't mention it. I ought not to have disturbed you. You were having a nice sleep, of course. Do you always sleep on the floor?"

"It was like this . . ."

"Of course, if you're wearing it for ornament, as a sort of beauty-spot," said Sally, "all right. But in case you don't know, you've a smut on your nose."

"Oh, my aunt! Not really?"

"Now would I deceive you on an important point like that?"

"Do you mind if I have a look in the glass?"

"Certainly, if you can stand it."

Ginger moved hurriedly to the dressing-table.

"You're perfectly right," he announced, applying his handkerchief.

"I thought I was. I'm very quick at noticing things."

"My hair's a bit rumpled, too."

"Very much so."

"You take my tip," said Ginger, earnestly, "and never lie about under beds. There's nothing in it."

"That reminds me. You won't be offended if I asked you something?"

"No, no. Go ahead."

"It's rather an impertinent question. You may resent it."

"No, no."

"Well, then, what *were* you doing under my bed?"

"Oh, under your bed?"

"Yes. Under my bed. This. It's a bed, you know. Mine. My bed. You were under it. Why?

Or putting it another way, why were you under my bed?"

"I was hiding."

"Playing hide-and-seek? That explains it."

"Mrs. What's-her-name—Beecher—Meecher—was after me."

Sally shook her head disapprovingly.

"You mustn't encourage Mrs. Meecher in these childish pastimes. It unsettles her."

Ginger passed an agitated hand over his forehead.

"It's like this . . ."

"I hate to keep criticizing your appearance," said Sally, "and personally I like it; but, when you clutched your brow just then, you put about a pound of dust on it. Your hands are probably grubby."

Ginger inspected them.

"They are!"

"Why not make a really good job of it and have a wash?"

"Do you mind?"

"I'd prefer it."

"Thanks awfully. I mean to say it's your basin, you know, and all that. What I mean is, I seem to be making myself pretty well at home."

"Oh, no."

"Touching the matter of soap . . ."

"Use mine. We Americans are famous for our hospitality."

"Thanks awfully."

"The towel is on your right."

"Thanks awfully."

"And I've a clothes brush in my bag."

"Thanks awfully."

Splashing followed like a sea-lion taking a dip.

"Now, then," said Sally, "why were you hiding from Mrs. Meecher?"

A careworn, almost hunted look came into Ginger's face.

"I say, you know, that woman is rather by way of being one of the lads, what! Scares *me!* Word was brought that she was on the prowl, so it seemed to me a judicious move to take cover till she sort of blew over. If she'd found me, she'd have made me take that dog of hers for a walk."

"Toto?"

"Toto. You know," said Ginger, with a strong sense of injury, "no dog's got a right to be a dog like that. I don't suppose there's anyone keener on dogs than I am, but a thing like a woolly rat." He shuddered slightly. "Well, one hates to be seen about with it in the public streets."

"Why couldn't you have refused in a firm but gentlemanly manner to take Toto out?"

"Ah! There you rather touch the spot. You see, the fact of the matter is, I'm a bit behind with the rent, and that makes it rather hard to take what you might call a firm stand."

"But how can you be behind with the rent? I only left here the Saturday before last and you weren't in the place then. You can't have been here more than a week."

"I've been here just a week. That's the week I'm behind with."

"But why? You were a millionaire when I left you at Roville."

"Well, the fact of the matter is, I went back to the tables that night and lost a goodish bit of what I'd

won. And, somehow or another, when I got to America, the stuff seemed to slip away."

"What made you come to America at all?" said Sally, asking the question which, she felt, any sensible person would have asked at the opening of the conversation.

One of his familiar blushes raced over Ginger's face.

"Oh, I thought I would. 'Land of opportunity, you know."

"Have you managed to find any of the opportunities yet?"

"Well, I have got a job of sorts. I'm a waiter at a rummy little place on Second Avenue. The salary isn't big, but I'd have wangled enough out of it to pay last week's rent, only they docked me a goodish bit for breaking plates and what not. The fact is, I'm making rather a hash of it."

"Oh, Ginger! You oughtn't to be a waiter!"

"That's what the boss seems to think."

"I mean, you ought to be doing something ever so much better."

"But what? You've no notion how well all these blighters here seem to be able to get along without my help. I've tramped all over the place, offering my services, but they all say they'll try to carry on as they are."

Sally reflected.

"I know!"

"What?"

"I'll make Fillmore give you a job. I wonder I didn't think of it before."

"Fillmore?"

"My brother. Yes, he'll be able to use you."

"What as?"

Sally considered.

"As a—as a—oh, as his right-hand man."

"Does he want a right-hand man?"

"Sure to. He's a young fellow trying to get along. Sure to want a right-hand man."

"'M yes," said Ginger reflectively. "Of course, I've never been a right-hand man, you know."

"Oh, you'd pick it up. I'll take you round to him now. He's staying at the Astor."

"There's just one thing," said Ginger.

"What's that?"

"I might make a hash of it."

"Heavens, Ginger! There must be something in this world that you wouldn't make a hash of. Don't stand arguing any longer. Are you dry? and clean? Very well, then. Let's be off."

"Right ho."

Ginger took a step towards the door, then paused, rigid, with one leg in the air, as though some spell had been cast upon him. From the passage outside there had sounded a shrill yapping. Ginger looked at Sally. Then he looked—longingly—at the bed.

"Don't be such a coward," said Sally, severely.

"Yes, but . . ."

"How much do you owe Mrs. Meecher?"

"Round about twelve dollars, I think it is."

"I'll pay her."

Ginger flushed awkwardly.

"No, I'm hanged if you will! I mean," he stammered, "it's frightfully good of you and all that, and I can't tell you how grateful I am, but honestly, I couldn't . . ."

Sally did not press the point. She liked him the

better for a rugged independence, which in the days of his impecuniousness her brother Fillmore had never dreamed of exhibiting.

"Very well," she said. "Have it your own way. Proud. That's me all over, Mabel. Ginger!" She broke off sharply. "Pull yourself together. Where is your manly spirit? I'd be ashamed to be such a coward."

"Awfully sorry, but, honestly, that woolly dog. . ."

"Never mind the dog. I'll see you through."

They came out into the passage almost on top of Toto, who was stalking phantom rats. Mrs. Meecher was manœuvring in the background. Her face lit up grimly at the sight of Ginger.

"*Mister Kemp!* I been looking for you."

Sally intervened brightly.

"Oh, Mrs. Meecher," she said, shepherding her young charge through the danger zone, "I was so surprised to meet Mr. Kemp here. He is a great friend of mine. We met in France. We're going off now to have a long talk about old times, and then I'm taking him to see my brother . . ."

"Toto . . ."

"Dear little thing! You ought to take him for a walk," said Sally. "It's a lovely day. Mr. Kemp was saying just now that he would have liked to take him, but we're rather in a hurry and shall probably have to get into a taxi. You've no idea how busy my brother is just now. If we're late, he'll never forgive us."

She passed on down the stairs, leaving Mrs. Meecher dissatisfied but irresolute. There was something about Sally which even in her pre-wealthy days had always

baffled Mrs. Meecher and cramped her style, and now that she was rich and independent she inspired in the châtelaine of the boarding-house an emotion which was almost awe. The front door had closed before Mrs. Meecher had collected her faculties; and Ginger, pausing on the sidewalk, drew a long breath.

"You know, you're wonderful!" he said, regarding Sally with unconcealed admiration.

She accepted the compliment composedly.

"Now we'll go and hunt up Fillmore," she said. "But there's no need to hurry, of course, really. We'll go for a walk first, and then call at the Astor and make him give us lunch. I want to hear all about you. I've heard something already. I met your cousin, Mr. Carmyle. He was on the train coming from Detroit. Did you know that he was in America?"

"No. I've—er—rather lost touch with the Family."

"So I gathered from Mr. Carmyle. And I feel hideously responsible. It was all through me that all this happened."

"Oh, no."

"Of course it was. I made you what you are to-day—I hope I'm satisfied—I dragged and dragged you down until the soul within you died, so to speak. I know perfectly well that you wouldn't have dreamed of savaging the Family as you seem to have done if it hadn't been for what I said to you at Roville. Ginger, tell me, what *did* happen? I'm dying to know. Mr. Carmyle said you insulted your uncle!"

"Donald. Yes, we did have a bit of a scrap, as a matter of fact. He made me go out to dinner with him and we—er—sort of disagreed. To start with, he

wanted me to apologize to old Scrymgeour, and I rather gave it a miss."

"Noble fellow!"

"Scrymgeour?"

"No, silly! You."

"Oh, ah!" Ginger blushed. "And then there was all that about the soup, you know."

"How do you mean, 'all that about the soup'? What about the soup? What soup?"

"Well, things sort of hotted up a bit when the soup arrived."

"I don't understand."

"I mean, the trouble seemed to start, as it were, when the waiter had finished ladling out the mulligatawny. Thick soup, you know."

"I know mulligatawny is a thick soup. Yes?"

"Well, my old uncle—I'm not blaming him, don't you know—more his misfortune than his fault—I can see that now—but he's got a heavy moustache. Like a walrus, rather, and he's a bit apt to inhale the stuff through it. And I—well, I asked him not to. It was just a suggestion, you know. He cut up fairly rough, and by the time the fish came round we were more or less down on the mat chewing holes in one another. My fault, probably. I wasn't feeling particularly well-disposed towards the Family that night. I'd just had a talk with Bruce—my cousin, you know—in Piccadilly, and that had rather got the wind up me. Bruce always seems to get on my nerves a bit somehow and—Uncle Donald asking me to dinner and all that. By the way, did you get the books?"

"What books?"

"Bruce said he wanted to send you some books. That was why I gave him your address."

Sally stared.

"He never sent me any books."

"Well, he said he was going to, and I had to tell him where to send them."

Sally walked on, a little thoughtfully. She was not a vain girl, but it was impossible not to perceive in the light of this fresh evidence that Mr. Carmyle had made a journey of three thousand miles with the sole object of renewing his acquaintance with her. It did not matter, of course, but it was vaguely disturbing. No girl cares to be dogged by a man she rather dislikes.

"Go on telling me about your uncle," she said.

"Well, there's not much more to tell. I'd happened to get that wireless of yours just before I started out to dinner with him, and I was more or less feeling that I wasn't going to stand any rot from the Family. I'd got to the fish course, hadn't I? Well, we managed to get through that somehow, but we didn't survive the fillet steak. One thing seemed to lead to another, and the show sort of bust up. He called me a good many things, and I got a bit fed, and finally I told him I hadn't any more use for the Family and was going to start out on my own. And—well, I did, don't you know. And here I am."

Sally listened to this saga breathlessly. More than ever did she feel responsible for her young protégé, and any faint qualms which she had entertained as to the wisdom of transferring practically the whole of her patrimony to the care of so erratic a financier as her brother vanished. It was her plain duty to see that Ginger was started well in the race of life, and Fillmore was going to come in uncommonly handy.

"We'll go to the Astor now," she said, "and I'll

introduce you to Fillmore? He's a theatrical manager and he's sure to have something for you."

"It's awfully good of you to bother about me."

"Ginger," said Sally, "I regard you as a grandson. Hail that cab, will you?"