

THREE WITHOUT, DOUBLED

Ring Lardner

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I

THEY ain't no immediate chance o' you gettin' ast out to our house to dinner—not w'ile round steak and General Motors is sellin' at the same price and common dog biscuit's ten cents a loaf.

But you might have nothin' decent to do some evenin' and happen to drop in on the Missus and I for a call; so I feel like I ought to give you a little warnin' in case that comes off. You know they's lots o' words that's called fightin' words. Some o' them starts a brawl, no matter who they're spoke to. You can't call nobody a liar without expectin' to lose a couple o' milk teeth—that is, if the party addressed has got somethin' besides lemon juice in his veins and ain't had the misfortune to fall asleep on the Panhandle tracks and be separated from his most prominent legs and arms. Then they's terms that don't hit you so much yourself, but reflects on your ancestors and prodigies, and you're supposed to resent 'em for the sake of honor and fix the speaker's map so as when he goes home his wife'll say: Oh, kiddies! Come and look at the rainbow!"

Then they's other words and terms that you can call 'em to somebody and not get no rise; but call 'em to somebody else and the insurance companies could hold out on your widow by claimin' it was suicide. For instance, they's young Harold Greiner, one o' the bookkeepers down to the office. I could tell him he was an A. P. A., with a few adjectives, and he'd just smile and say: Quit your flirtin'!" But I wouldn't never try that expression on Dan Cahill, the elevator starter, without bein' well out of his earshots. And I don't know what it means, at that. Well, if you do come out to the house they's a term that you want to lay off of when the Missus is in the room. Don't say: San Susie!"

It sounds harmless enough, don't it? They ain't nothin' to it even when it's transferred over from the Latin, "Without no cares."

But just leave her hear it mentioned and watch her grab the two deadliest weapons that's within reach, one to use on you or whoever said it, and the other on me, on general principles. You think I'm stringin' you, and I admit you got cause—that is, till you've heard the details of our latest plunge in the cesspools o' Society.

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II

It was a Friday evenin' about three weeks ago when I come home and found the Wife quaverin' with excitement. "Who do you think called up?" she ast me. "I got no idear," I says. "Guess!" says she. So I had to guess. "Josephus Daniels," I says. "Or Henry Ford. Or maybe it was that guy with the scar on his lip that you thought was smilin' at you the other day.

"You couldn't never guess," she says.

"It was Mrs. Messenger."

"Which one?" I ast her. "You can't mean Mrs. A. D. T. Messenger."

"If you're so cute I won't tell you nothin' about it," says she. "Don't make no rash threats," I says.

"You're goin' to tell me some time and they's no use makin' yourself sick by tryin' to hold it in."

"You know very well what Mrs. Messenger I mean," she says. "It was Mrs. Robert Messenger that's husband owns this buildin' and the one at the corner, where they live at."

"Haven't you paid the rent?" I says.

"Do you think a woman like Mrs. Messenger would be buttin' into her husband's business?"

says the Missus. "I don't know what kind of a woman Mrs.

Messenger is," I says. "But if I owned these here apartments and somebody fell behind in their rent, I wouldn't be surprised to see the owner's wife goin' right over to their flat and takin' it out o' their trousers pocket."

"Well," says the Wife, "we don't owe them no rent and that wasn't what she called up about. It wasn't no business call."

"Go ahead and spill it," I says.

"My heart's weak."

"Well," she says, "I was just gettin' through with the lunch dishes and the phone rang." "I bet you wondered who it was," says I.

"I thought it was Mrs. Hatch or somebody, says the Wife. "So I run to the phone and it was Mrs. Messenger. So the first thing she says was to explain who she was—just like I didn't know. And the next thing she ast was did I play bridge."

"And what did you tell her?" says I.

"What do you think I'd tell her?"

says the Missus. "I told her yes.

"Wasn't you triflin' a little with the truth?" I ast her. "Certainly not!" she says.

"Haven't I played twice over to Hatches'? So then she ast me if my husband played bridge, too.

And I told her yes, he did."

"What was the idear?" I says.

"You know I didn't never play it in my life."

"I don't know no such a thing," she says. "For all as I know, you may play all day down to the office."

"No," I says; "we spend all our time down there playin' post-office with the scrubwomen."

"Well, anyway, I told her you did,"

says the Missus. "Don't you see they wasn't nothin' else I could tell her, because if I told her you didn't, that would of ended it."

"Ended what?" I says. "We wouldn't of been ast to the party, says the Missus. "Who told you they was goin' to be a party? I says. "I don't have to be told everything,"

says the Missus. "I got brains enough to know that Mrs. Messenger ain't callin' me up and astin' me do we play bridge just because she's got a headache or feels lonesome or somethin'. But it ain't only one party after all, and that's the best part of it. She ast us if we'd care to join the club."

"What club?" says I.

"Mrs. Messenger's club, the San Susie Club," says the Missus. "You've heard me speak about it a hundred times, and it's been mentioned in the papers once or twice, too—once, anyway, when the members give away them Christmas dinners last year."

"We can get into the papers," I says, "without givin' away no Christmas dinners."

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"Who wants to get into the papers?"

says the Wife. "I don't care nothin' about that."

"No," I says; "I suppose if a reporter come out here and ast for your pitcher to stick in the society columns, you'd pick up the carvin' knife and run him ragged."

"I'd be polite to him, at least," she says. "Yes, says I; "it wouldn't pay to treat him rude; it'd even be justifiable to lock him in w'ile you was lookin' for the pitcher."

"If you'll kindly leave me talk you may find out what I got to say, she says.

"I've told you about this club, but I don't suppose you ever paid any attention. It's a club that's made up from people that just lives in this block, twenty o' them altogether; and all but one couple either lives in this buildin' or in the buildin' the Messengers lives in. And they're all nice people, people with real class to them; not no tramps like most o' the ones we been runnin' round with. One o' them's Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Collins that used to live on Sheridan Road and still goes over to parties at some o' the most exclusive homes on the North Side. And they don't have nobody in the club that isn't congenial with each other, but all just a nice crowd o' real people that gets together once a week at one o' the members' houses and have a good time."

"How did these pillows o' Society happen to light on to us?" I ast her. "Well," she says, it seems like the Baileys, who belonged to the club, went to California last week to spend the winter. And they had to have a couple to take their place.

And Mrs. Messenger says they wouldn't take nobody that didn't live in our block, and her and her husband looked over the list and we was the ones they picked out."

"Probably, I says, that's because we was the only eligibles that can go out nights on account o' not havin' no children."

"The Pearsons ain't ast," she says, "and they ain't got no children."

"Well," I says, what's the dues?"

"They ain't no dues," says the Missus. "But once in a w'ile, instead o' playin' bridge, everybody puts in two dollars apiece and have a theater party. But the regular program is for an evenin' o' bridge every Tuesday night, at different members' houses, somebody different actin' as hosts every week.

And each couple puts up two dollars, makin' ten dollars for a gent's prize and ten dollars for a lady's. And the prizes is picked out by the lady that happens to be the hostess."

"That's a swell proposition for me,"

I says. "In the first place they wouldn't be a chance in the world for me to win a prize, because I don't know nothin' about the game. And, in the second place, suppose I had a whole lot o' luck and did win the prize, and come to find out it was a silver mustache cup that I wouldn't have no more use for than another Adam's apple! If they paid in cash they might be somethin' to it."

"If you win a prize you can sell it, can't you? says the Missus. "Besides, the prizes don't count. It's gettin' in with the right kind o' people that makes the difference."

"Another thing," I says: When it come our turn to have the party, where would we stick 'em all? We'd have to spread a sheet over the bathtub for one table, and have one couple set on the edges and the other couple toss up for the washbasin and the clothes-hamper. And another two couple'd have to kneel round the bed, and another bunch could stand up round the bureau. That'd leave the dinin'room table for the fourth set; and for a special treat the remainin' four could play in the parlor."

"We could hire chairs and tables," says the Missus. "We're goin' to have to some time, anyway, when you or I die."

"You don't need to hire no tables for my funeral," I says. "If the pallbearers or the quartet insists on shootin' craps they can use the kitchen floor; or if they want beer and sandwiches you can slip 'em the money to go down to the corner."

"They's no use worryin' about our end of it yet, says the Wife. "We'll be new members and they won't expect us to give no party till everybody else has had their turn."

"I only got one objection left," I says. "How am I goin' to get by at a bridge party when I haven't no idear how many cards to deal?"

"I guess you can learn if I learnt,"

she says. "You're always talkin' about what a swell card player you are. And besides, you've played w'ist, and

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they ain't hardly any difference."

"And the next party is next Tuesday night?" I says. "Yes, says the Missus, "at Mrs.

Garrett's, the best player in the club, and one o' the smartest women in Chicago, Mrs. Messenger says. She lives in the same buildin' with the Messengers. And they's dinner first and then we play bridge all evenin'." "And maybe, I says, before the evenin's over, I'll find out what's trumps."

"You'll know all about the game before that," she says. "Right after supper we'll get out the cards and I'll show you.

So right after supper she got out the cards and begun to show me. But about all as I learnt was one thing, and that was that if I died without no insurance, the Missus would stand a better show o' supportin' herself by umpirin' baseball in the National League than by teachin' in a bridge-w'ist university. She knew everything except how much the different suits counted, and how many points was in a game, and what honors meant, and who done the first biddin', and how much to bid on what.

After about an hour of it I says: "I can see you got this thing mastered, but you're like a whole lot of other people that knows somethin' perfect themselves but can't learn it to nobody else."

"No," she says; "I got to admit that I don't know as much as I thought I did. I didn't have no trouble when I was playin' with Mrs. Hatch and Mrs. Pearson and Mrs. Kramer; but it seems like I forgot all they learnt me."

"It's a crime," I says, that we should have to pass up this chance to get in right just because we can't play a fool game o' cards.

Why don't you call up Mrs. Messenger and suggest that the San Susies switches to pedro or five hundred or rummy, or somethin' that you don't need to take no college course in?"

"You're full o' brilliant idears,"

says the Missus. "They's only just the one game that Society plays, and that's bridge. Them other games is jokes."

"I've noticed you always treated 'em that way, I says. "But they wasn't so funny to me when it come time to settle."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," says the Missus: "We'll call up Mr. and Mrs.

Hatch and tell 'em to come over here to-morrow night and give us a lesson."

"That'd be sweet," I says, "askin' them to learn us a game so as we could join a club that's right here in their neighborhood, but they ain't even been ast to join it!"

"Why, you rummy! she says. "We don't have to tell 'em why we want to learn.

We'll just say that my two attempts over to their house has got me interested and I and you want to master the game so as we can spend many pleasant evenin's with them; because Mrs. Hatch has told me a hundred times that her and her husband would rather play bridge than eat."

So she called up Mrs. Hatch and sprung it on her; but it seemed like the Hatches had an engagement for Saturday night, but would be tickled to death to come over Monday evenin' and give us a work-out. After that was fixed we both felt kind of ashamed of ourselves, deceivin' people that was supposed to be our best friends.

"But, anyway, the Missus says, "the Hatches wouldn't never fit in with that crowd. Jim always looks like he'd dressed on the elevated and Mrs. Hatch can't talk about nothin' only shiropody.

On the Saturday I tried to slip one over by buyin' a book called Auction Bridge, and I read it all the way home from town and then left it on the car. It was a great book for a man that had learnt the rudderments and wanted to find out how to play the game right. But for me to try and get somethin' out of it was just like as though some kid'd learn the baseball guide by heart in kindeygarden and then ask Hugh Jennin's for the job in centerfield. I did find out one thing from it though: it says that in every deal one o' the players was a dummy and just laid his cards down and left somebody else play 'em. So when I got home I says: "We won't need no help from Jim Hatch and his wife. We can just be dummies all the evenin' and they won't nobody know if we're ignorant or not." "That's impossible, to be dummy all the time," says the Missus. "Not for me," I says. "I know it'll be tough for you, but you can chew a lot o' gum and you won't mind it so much."

"You don't understand," she says.

"The dummy is the pardner o' the party that gets the bid. Suppose one o' the people that was playin' against you got the bid; then the other one'd be dummy and you'd have to play your hand."

"But I don't need to leave 'em have the bid," I says. "I can take it away from 'em."

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"And if you take it away from 'em,"

she says, then you got the bid yourself, and your pardner's dummy, not you.

Well, the Hatches breezed in Monday night and Mrs. Hatch remarked how tickled she was that we was goin' to learn, and what good times we four'd have playin' together. And the Missus and I pretended like we shared her raptures. "Ain't you never played at all?" she ast me; and I told her no. "The first thing," she says, is how much the different suits counts; and then they's the bids. And you got to pay attention to the conventions."

"I'm through with 'em forever," I says, since they turned down Roosevelt."

Well, we started in and Hatch and the Missus played Mrs. Hatch and I. We kept at it till pretty near midnight, with three or four intermissions so as Hatch could relieve the strain on the ice-box. My w'ist education kept me from bein' much of a flivver when it come to playin' the cards; but, I don't care how bright a guy is, you can't learn everything about biddin' in one evenin', and you can't remember half what you learnt. I don't know what the score was when we got through, but the Hatches done most o' the execution and held most o' the cards, which is their regular habit. "You'll get along all right," says Mrs. Hatch when they was ready to go. "But, o' course, you can't expect to master a game like bridge in a few hours. You want to keep at it."

"We're goin' to," says the Missus.

"Maybe it'd be a good idear," says Mrs. Hatch, "to play again soon before you forget what we learnt you. Why don't you come over to our house for another session to-morrow night?"

"Let's see; to-morrow night?" says the Missus, stallin'. "Why, no, we can't. We got an engagement."

So Mrs. Hatch stood there like she was expectin' to hear what it was. "We're goin' to a party, says the Wife. "Oh, tell me about it!" says Mrs.

Hatch. "Well," says the Missus, "it ain't really a party; it's just a kind of a party; some old friends that's visitin' in town."

"Maybe they'll play bridge with you, says Mrs. Hatch. "Oh, no," says the Missus, blushin'.

"It'll probably be rummy or pedro; or maybe we'll just go to the pitchers."

"Why don't you go over to the Acme?"

says Mrs. Hatch. "They got Chaplin in The Street Sweeper. We're goin', and we could meet you and all go together."

"N-no," says the Wife. "You see, one of our friends has just lost his wife and I know he wouldn't feel like goin' to see somethin' funny.

"He's already laughed himself sick,"

I says. Well, we wouldn't make no date with 'em and they finally blew with the understandin' that we was to go to their house and play some night soon. When they'd went the Missus says: "I feel like a criminal, deceivin' 'em like that. But I just couldn't tell 'em the truth. Bertha Hatch is the most jealous thing in the world and it would just about kill her to know that we was in on somethin' good without she and Jim."

"If you hadn't ast 'em over," I says, "we'd of been just as well off and you wouldn't of had to make a perjure out o' yourself."

"What do you mean, we'd of been just as well off?" she says. "They done what we expected of 'em, learnt us the game. "Yes, I says; "and you could take all I remember o' the lesson and feed it to a gnat and he'd say: 'Hurry up with the soup course!'"

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III

Well, Mrs. Garrett had called up to say that the feed before the game would begin at seven bells; so I and the Missus figured on bein' on hand at half past six, so as to get acquainted with some of our fellow club members and know what to call 'em when we wanted the gravy passed or somethin'. But I had trouble with my studs and it wasn't till pretty near twenty minutes to seven that we rung the Garretts' bell. The hired girl let us in and left us standin' in the hail w'ile she went to tell Mrs. Garrett we was there.

Pretty soon the girl come back and says she would take our wraps and that Mrs. Garrett would be with us in a few minutes. So we was showed into the livin'-room. The apartment was on the second floor and looked about twice as big as our'n

"What do you suppose this costs 'em?" ast the Missus. "About fifty-five a month," I says.

"You're crazy! says she. "They got this big livin'-room and two big bedrooms, and a maid's room and a sun parlor, besides their dinin'-room and kitchen and bath. They're lucky if they ain't stuck for seventy.

"I'll bet you! I says. "I'll bet you it's nearer fifty-five than seventy.

"How much'll you bet?" she says.

"Anything you say, says I.

"Well," she says, I've got a cinch, and I need a pair o' black silk stockin's.

My others has begun to run."

"All right," I says. "A pair o' black silk stockin's to fifty cents cash."

"You're on," she says. "And I'll call up the agent to-morrow and find out."

Well, it must of been pretty near seven o'clock when Mrs. Garrett finally showed up. "Good evenin'," she says. "I suppose this must be our new members. I'm awfully glad you could come and I'm sorry I wasn't quite ready.

"That's all right," I says.

"I'm glad to know they's others has trouble gettin' into their evenin clo'es. I suppose people that does it often enough finally get to be experts."

"I didn't have no trouble," says Mrs.

Garrett; "only I didn't expect nobody till seven o'clock. You must of misunderstood me and thought I said half past six.

Then Mr. Garrett come in and shook hands with us, and then the rest o' the folks begun to arrive and we was introduced to them all. I didn't catch all their names, only Mr. and Mrs. Messenger and Mr. and Mrs. Collins and a Mr. and Mrs.

Sparks. Mrs. Garrett says dinner was ready and I was glad to hear it. They set me down between Mrs. Messenger and a lady that I didn't get her name. "Well," I says to Mrs. Messenger, "now we know you personally, we can pay the rent direct without botherin' to go to the real-estate office."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't do," she says. "Our agent's entitled to his commissions. And besides, I wouldn't know how much to take or nothin' about it."

"We pay thirty-five," I says, "and that's all as you could ast for, seein' we only got the four rooms and no sun parlor.

Thirty-two and a half would be about the right price."

"You'll have to argue that out with the agent," she says. I was kind of expectin' a cocktail; but nothin' doin'. The hired girl brought in some half sandwiches, made o' toast, with somethin' on 'em that looked like BB shot and tasted like New Year's mornin'. "Don't we get no liquid refreshments?" I ast Mrs. Messenger. "No, indeed," she says. "The San Susie's a dry club."

"You should ought to call it the San Sousy, then," says I.

The Missus was settin' next to Mr. Garrett and I could hear 'em talkin' about what a nice neighborhood it was and how they liked their flats. I thought I and the Missus might as well settle our bet then and there, so I spoke to Mr.

Garrett acrost the table. "Mr. Garrett," I says, w'ile we was waitin' for you and your wife to get dressed, I and the Missus made a little bet, a pair o' silk stockin' against half a buck. I got to pay out two dollars here for the prize and the Missus claims her other stockin's has begun to run; so you might say we're both a little anxious."

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"Is it somethin' I can settle?" he ast. "Yes, sir," I says, because we was bettin' on the rent you paid for this apartment. The Missus says seventy a month and I says fifty-five."

"I never decide against a lady, he says. "You better buy the stockin's before the others run so far that they can't find their way home."

"If I lose, I lose," says I.

"But if you're stuck sixty-five or better, the Missus must of steered me wrong about the number o' rooms you got. I'll pay, though, because I don't never welsh on a bet. So this party's really costin' me two and a half instead o' two."

"Maybe you'll win the prize," says Mr. Garrett. "They ain't much chance," I says.

"I ain't played this game for a long w'ile."

"Why, your wife was just tellin' me you played last night," he says. "I mean," says I, "that I didn't play for a long w'ile before last night; not for thirty-six years," I says. Well, when everybody'd got through chokin' down the shot, they brought in some drowned toadstools, and then some little slices o' beef about the size of a checker, and seven Saratoga chips apiece, and half a dozen string beans. Those that was still able to set up under this load finished up on sliced tomatoes that was caught too young and a nickel's worth of ice-cream and an eyedropper full o' coffee. "Before I forget it," says Mrs.

Collins, w'ile we was staggerin' out o' the dinin'-room, "you're all comin' to my house next Tuesday night."

I was walkin' right behind her. "And I got a suggestion for you, I says, low enough so as they couldn't nobody else hear: "Throw some o' the prize money into the dinner; and if they's any skimpin' to be done, do it on the prizes."

She didn't say nothin' back, because Mrs.

Garrett had started to hand us the little cards that showed where we was to play. "I suppose I better tell you our rules," she says to me. "Each table plays four deals. Then the winners moves w'ile the losers sets still, except at the first table, where the winners sets still and the losers moves.

You change pardners after every four deals. You count fifty for a game and a hundred and fifty for a rubber."

"The way I been playin'," I says, "it was thirty for a game." "I never heard o' that," she says; but I noticed when we got to playin' that everybody that made thirty points called it a game. "Don't we see the prizes before we start?" I ast her. "I want to know whether to play my best or not."

"If you win the prize and don't like it," she says, I guess you can get it exchanged."

"They tell me you're the shark amongst the womenfolks," says I; "so it's a safe bet that you didn't pick out no lady's prize that isn't O.K."

I noticed some o' the other men was slippin' her their ante; so I parted with a two-spot. Then I found where I was to set at. It was Table Number Three, Couple Number One. My pardner was a strappin' big woman with a name somethin' like Rowley or Phillips.

Our opponents was Mrs. Garrett and Mr. Messenger. Mrs. Garrett looked like she'd been livin' on the kind of a meal she'd gave us, and Mr. Messenger could of set in the back seat of a flivver with two regular people without crowdin' nobody. So I says to my pardner: "Well, pardner, we got 'em outweighed, anyway.

They was two decks o' cards on the table. I grabbed one o' them and begun to deal 'em face up.

"First jack," I says. "If you don't mind, we'll cut for deal," says Mrs. Garrett. So we cut the cards and it seemed like the low cut got the deal and that was Mrs. Garrett herself. "Which deck'll we play with?" I ast.

"Both o' them," says Mrs. Garrett.

"Mr. Messenger'll make them red ones for you.

"Make 'em!" I says. "Well, Messenger, I didn't know you was a card factory.

Messenger laughed; but the two ladies didn't get it. Mrs. Garrett dealt and it was her turn to bid. "One without," she says. "I'd feel better if I had one within," says I. "Are you goin' to bid or not?" she ast me. "I thought it was the dealer's turn first," I says. "I've made my bid," she says.

"I bid one without."

"One without lookin', or what?" I says. "One no trump, if I got to explain it," she says. "Oh, that's different," I says; but I found out that most all o' them said "One without" when they meant one no trump. I looked at my hand; but about all as I had was four hearts, with the king and jack high. "Pardner," I says, I don't see nothin' I can bid, unless it'd be one heart. Does that hit you? "No talkin' acrost the boards," says Mrs. Garrett. "And besides,

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one heart ain't over my bid."

So I passed and Mr. Messenger bid two spades.

Then my pardner passed and Mrs. Garrett thought it over a w'ile and then bid two without. So I passed again and the rest o' them passed, and it was my first lead. Well, I didn't have only one spade—the eight-spot—and I knew it wouldn't do my hand no good as long as I couldn't trump in with it; so I led it out. Messenger was dummy, and he laid his hand down. He had about eight spades, with the ace and queen high. "I might as well take a chance," says Mrs. Garrett, and she throwed on Messenger's tenspot. Out come my pardner with the king, and it was our trick. "What kind of a lead was that?" says Mrs. Garrett to me. "Pretty good one, I guess," says I.

"It fooled you, anyway.

And she acted like she was sore as a boil.

Come to find out, she'd thought I was leadin' from the king and was goin' to catch it later on. Well, her and Messenger took all the rest o' the tricks except my king o' hearts, and they had a game on us, besides forty for their four aces.

"I could of made a little slam as well as not," she says when it was over. "But I misunderstood our friend's lead. It's the first time I ever seen a man lead from a sneak in no trump."

"I'll do a whole lot o' things you never seen before," I says. "I don't doubt it," says she, still actin' like I'd spilled salad dressin' on her skirt. It was my first bid next time and hearts was my only suit again. I had the ace, queen and three others. "Pardner," I says, I'm goin' to bid one heart and if you got somethin' to help me out with, don't let 'em take it away from me.

"I'll double a heart," says Messenger. "Oh, somebody else is gettin' cute!"

says I. "Well, I'll double right back at you.

"Will you just wait till it comes your turn?" says Mrs. Garrett. "And besides, you can't redouble."

"I guess I can," says I. "I got five o' them."

"It's against our rules," she says.

So my partner done nothin', as usual, and Mrs.

Garrett bid one without again. "I guess you want to play 'em all," I says; "but you'll have to come higher'n that. I'm goin' to bid two hearts."

"Two no trump," says Messenger, and my pardner says Pass" once more. "You'll get a sore throat sayin' that," I told her. "Don't you never hold nothin'?"

"It don't look like it," she says.

"Maybe you don't know what's worth biddin' on," I says. "Maybe she'd better take a few lessons from you," says Mrs. Garrett. "No," I says, kiddin' her. "You don't want no more female experts in the club or you might have to buy some cut glass once in a w'ile instead o' winnin' it."

Well, I bid three hearts; but Mrs. Garrett come up to three no trump and I couldn't go no higher. This time I led out my ace o' hearts, hopin' maybe to catch their king; but I didn't get it. And Mrs. Garrett copped all the rest of 'em for a little slam. "If your husband ever starts drinkin' hard," I says, you can support yourself by sellin' some o' your horseshoes to the Russian government."

It wasn't no lie, neither. I never seen such hands as that woman held, and Messenger's was pretty near as good. In the four deals they grabbed two rubbers and a couple o' little slams, and when they left our table they had over nine hundred to our nothin'. Mr. Collins and another woman was the next ones to set down with us. The rules was to change pardners and Collins took the one I'd been playin' with. And what does she do but get lucky and they give us another trimmin', though nothin' near as bad as the first one. My pardner, this time, was a woman about forty-eight, and she acted like it was way past her bedtime. When it was her turn to say somethin' we always had to wait about five minutes, and all the other tables was through a long w'ile before us. Once she says: "You'll have to excuse me to-night. I don't somehow seem to be able to keep my mind on the game."

"No," I says; "but I bet you'd perk up if the lady's prize was a mattress. When you're goin' to be up late you should ought to take a nap in the afternoon."

Well, sir, my next pardner wasn't nobody else but the Missus. She'd started at the fourth table and lost the first time, but win the second. She come along with the husband o' the pardner I'd just had; so here we was family against family, you might say. "What kind o' luck you been havin'?"

the fella ast me. "No luck at all," I says. "But if you're anywheres near as sleepy as your Missus, I and my wife

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should ought to clean up this time."

We didn't. They held all the cards except in one hand, and that was one my Missus tried to play. I bid first and made it a no trump, as they was three aces in my hand. Old Slumber began to talk in her sleep and says: Two diamonds." The Missus bid two hearts. Mr.

Sleeper passed, and so did I, as I didn't have a single heart in my hand and figured the Missus probably had 'em all. She had six, with the king high and then the nine-spot. Our female opponent had only two, and that left five for her husband, includin' the ace, queen and jack. We was set three. "Nice work!" I says to the Missus.

"You're the Philadelphia Athletics of auction bridge."

"What was you biddin' no trump on?"

she says. "I thought, o' course, you'd have one high heart and some suit."

"You don't want to start thinkin' at your age," I says. "You can't learn an old dog new tricks."

Mrs. Nap's husband cut in. "O' course," he says, it's a man's privilege to call your wife anything you feel like callin' her. But your Missus don't hardly look old to me."

"No, not comparatively speakin'," I says, and he shut up. They moved on and along come Garrett and Mrs.

Messenger. I and Mrs. Messenger was pardners and I thought for a w'ile we was goin' to win. But Garrett and the Missus had a bouquet o' four-leaf clovers in the last two deals and licked us.

Garrett wasn't supposed to be as smart as his wife, but he was fox enough to keep biddin' over my Missus, so as he'd do the playin' instead o' she. It wasn't till pretty near the close o' the evenin's entertainment that I got away from that table and moved to Number Two. When I set down there it was I and Mrs. Collins against her husband and Mrs. Sleeper. "Well, Mrs. Collins," I says, "I'll try and hold some good hands for you and maybe I can have two helpin's o' the meat when we come to your house."

The other lady opened her eyes long enough to ask who was winnin'. "Oh, Mrs. Garrett's way ahead," says Mrs. Collins. "She's got a score o' somethin' like three thousand. And Mr. Messenger is high amongst the men."

"Who's next to the leadin' lady? I ast her. "I guess I am," she says. "But I'm three hundred behind Mrs. Garrett."

Well, the luck I'd just bumped into stayed with me and I and Mrs. Collins won and moved to the head table. Waitin' there for us was our darlin' hostess and Messenger, the two leaders in the pennant race. It was give out that this was to be the last game. When Mrs. Garrett realized who was goin' to be her pardner I wisht you could of seen her face! "This is an unexpected pleasure," she says to me. "I thought you liked the third table so well you was goin' to stay there all evenin'."

"I did intend to," I says; "but I seen you up here and I heard you was leadin' the league, so I thought I'd like to help you finish in front."

"I don't need no help," she says.

"All I ast is for you to not overbid your hands, and I'll do the rest."

"How many are you, Mrs. Garrett?" ast Mrs. Collins. "Thirty-two hundred and sixty, she says. "Oh, my! says Mrs. Collins, "I'm hopeless. I'm only twenty-nine hundred and forty-eight. And how about you, Mr. Messenger?"

"Round thirty-one hundred," he says.

"Yes, says Mrs. Garrett, "and I don't believe any o' the rest o' the men is within five hundred o' that."

"Well, Messenger," I says, if the men's prize happens to be a case o' beer or a steak smothered in onions, don't forget that I'm payin' you thirty-five a month for a thirty-dollar flat."

Now, I'd of gave my right eye to see Mrs. Collins beat Mrs. Garrett out. But I was goin' to do my best for Mrs. Garrett just the same, because I don't think it's square for a man to not try and play your hardest all the time in any kind of a game, no matter where your sympathies lays.

So when it come my turn to bid on the first hand, and I seen the ace and king and four other hearts in my hand, I raised Mrs. Collins' bid o' two diamonds, and Mrs. Garrett made it two no trump and got away with it. On the next two deals Messenger and Mrs. Collins made a game, and Mrs.

Garrett got set a trick once on a bid o' five clubs. The way the score was when it come to the last deal, I figured that if Mrs. Collins and Messenger made another game and rubber, the two women'd be mighty close to even. Mrs. Garrett dealt 'em, and says: "One without."

"Two spades," says Mrs. Collins.

Well, sir, they wasn't a spade in my hand, and I seen that if Mrs. Collins got it we was ruined on account o' me

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not havin' a trump. And w'ile I wanted Mrs. Collins to win I was goin' to do my best to not let her. So I says:
"Two without."

"You know what you're doin', do you? says Mrs. Garrett. "What do you mean, know what I'm doin'?" I says.
"No talkin' acrost the boards," says Messenger. "All right," I says; "but you can depend on me, pardner, not to throw you down."

Well, Messenger passed and so did Mrs.

Garrett; but Mrs. Collins wasn't through. "Three spades," she says. "Three without," says I.

"I hope it's all right," says Mrs.

Garrett "I'll tell you one thing," I says; "it's a whole lot all-righter than if she played it in spades."

Messenger passed again and ditto for my pardner. "I'll double," says Mrs. Collins, and we let it go at that Man, oh, man! You ought to seen our genial hostess when I laid down my cards! And heard her, too! Her face turned all three colors o' Old Glory. She slammed her hand down on the table, face up. "I won't play it!" she hollers.

"I won't be made a fool of! This poor idiot deliberately told me he had spades stopped, and look at his hand!"

"You're mistaken, Mrs. Garrett," I says. "I didn't say nothin' about spades."

"Shut your mouth!" she says.

"That's what you ought to done all evenin'."

"I might as well of," I says, "for all the good it done me to keep it open at dinner."

Everybody in the room quit playin' and rubbered. Finally Garrett got up from where he was settin' and come over. "What seems to be the trouble?" he says. "This ain't no barroom."

"Nobody'd ever suspect it o' bein'," I says.

"Look what he done!" says Mrs. Garrett "He raised my no-trump bid over three spades without a spade in his hand."

"Well," says Mr. Garrett, "they's no use gettin' all fussed up over a game o' cards. The thing to do is pick up your hand and play it out and take your medicine."

"I can set her three," said Mrs.

Collins. "I got seven spades, with the ace, king and queen, and I'll catch her jack on the third lead."

"And I got the ace o' hearts," says Messenger. "Even if it didn't take a trick it'd make aces easy; so our three hundred above the line gives Mrs. Collins a score of about ten more'n Mrs. Garrett."

"All right, then," says Garrett.

"Mrs. Collins is entitled to the lady's prize."

"I don't want to take it," says Mrs.

Collins. "You got to take it," says Garrett.

And he give his wife a look that meant business. Anyway, she got up and went out o' the room, and when she come back she was smilin'. She had two packages in her hand, and she give one to Messenger and one to Mrs. Collins. "There's the prizes," she says; "and I hope you'll like 'em."

Messenger unwrapped his'n and it was one o' them round leather cases that you use to carry extra collars in when you're travelin'. Messenger had told me earlier in the evenin' that he hadn't been outside o' Chicago in six years. Mrs. Collins' prize was a chafin'-dish. "I don't blame Mrs. Garrett for bein' so crazy to win it," I says to her when they couldn't nobody hear. "Her and Garrett both must get hungry along about nine or ten P. M."

"I hate to take it," says Mrs. Collins. "I wouldn't feel that way, I says. "I guess Mrs. Garrett will chafe enough without it."

When we was ready to go I shook hands with the host and hostess and says I was sorry if I'd pulled a boner. "It was to be expected," says Mrs. Garrett. "Yes, I says; "a man's liable to do most anything when he's starvin' to death."

The Messengers and Collinses was a little ways ahead of us on the stairs and I wanted we should hurry and catch up with 'em. "You let 'em go!" says the Missus.

"You've spoiled everything now without doin' nothin' more. Every time you talk you insult somebody.

"I ain't goin' to insult them," I says. "I'm just goin' to ask 'em to go down to the corner and have a drink,"

"You are not!" she says. But she's just as good a prophet as she is a bridge player. They wouldn't go along, though, sayin' it was late and they wanted to get to bed.

"Well, if you won't, you won't," says I. "We'll see you all a week from to-night."

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And don't forget, Mrs. Collins, that I'm responsible for you winnin' that chafin'-dish, and I'm fond o' welsh rabbits."

I was glad that we didn't have to go far to our buildin'. The Missus was pleasant company, just like a bloodhound with the rabies. I left her in the vestibule and went down to help Mike close up.

He likes to be amongst friends at a sad hour like that. At breakfast the next mornin' the Wife was more calm. "Dearie," she says, they don't neither one of us class as bridge experts. I'll admit I got a lot to learn about the game. What we want to do is play with the Hatches every evenin' this week, and maybe by next Tuesday night we'll know somethin'."

"I'm willin'," I says. "I'll call Mrs. Hatch up this forenoon," she says, and see if they want us to come over there this evenin'. But if we do go remember not to mention our club or tell 'em anything about the party.

Well, she had news for me when I got home.

"The San Susies is busted up," she says. "Not forever, but for a few months anyway. Mrs. Messenger called up to tell me."

"What's the idear?" I says. "I don't know exactly, says the Missus. "Mrs. Messenger says that the Collinses had boxes for the opera every Tuesday night and the rest didn't feel like goin' on without the Collinses, and they couldn't all o' them agree on another night."

"I don't see why they should bust it up on account o' one couple," I says. "Why didn't you tell 'em about the Hatches? They're right here in the neighborhood and can play bridge as good as anybody.

"I wouldn't think o' doin' it," says she. "They may play all right, but think o' how they talk and how they dress!"

"Well," I says, between you and I, I ain't goin' to take cyanide over a piece o' news like this. Somehow it don't appeal to me to vote myself dry every Tuesday night all winter—to say nothin' o' two dollars a week annual dues to help buy a prize that I got no chance o' winnin' and wouldn't know what to do with it if I had it."

"It'd of been nice, though," she says, to make friends with them people."

"Well," I says, I'll feel a little more confident o' doin' that if I see 'em once a year—or not at all."

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IV

I can tell you the rest of it in about a minute. The Missus had became resigned and everything was goin' along smooth till last Tuesday evenin'. They was a new Chaplin show over to the Acme and we was on our way to see it. At the entrance to the buildin' where the Messengers lives we seen Mr. and Mrs. Hatch. "Hello, there!" says the Wife.

"Better come along with us to the Acme."

"Not to—night," says Mrs. Hatch.

"We're tied up every Tuesday evenin'. "Some club?" ast the Missus. "Yes, says Mrs. Hatch. "It's a bridge club—the San Susie. The Messengers and Collinses and Garretts and us and some other people's in it. Two weeks ago we was to Collinses', and last week to Beardsleys'; and to—night the Messengers is the hosts."

The Missus tried to say somethin', and couldn't.

"I been awful lucky, says Mrs. Hatch. "I win the prize at Collinses'. It was a silver pitcher—the prettiest you ever seen!"

The Missus found her voice. "Do you have dinner, too?" she ast "I should say we do!" says Mrs.

Hatch. "And simply grand stuff to eat! It was nice last week at Beardsleys'; but you ought to been at Collinses'! First, they was an old—fashioned beefsteak supper; and then, when we was through playin', Mrs. Collins made us welsh rabbits in her chafin'—dish."

"That don't tempt me," I says.

"I'd just as soon try and eat a raw mushrat as a welsh rabbit."

"Well, we got to be goin' in," says Hatch. "Good night," says Mrs. Hatch; "and I wisht you was comin' with us."

The pitcher we seen was called The Fly Cop.

Don't never waste a dime on it They ain't a laugh in the whole show!