Poor Little Eddie

William Slavens McNutt

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Part 1.1

Be helpless — that's what wins. Be a harmless, wide−eyed boob, and you won't have to rise early to get the money. No! All you have to do is lie in bed and wait for some sympathetic moneyed person to bring you plenty on a tray.

Let George do it — that's the idea. If you can't, there's always some George that will. Sure!

Of course, helpless stupidity is like every other accomplishment — you've got to be perfect to get the best results. You can't expect to have a silver spoon rammed down your throat if you're capable of guiding it to your lips by your own efforts. Oh, no! Nobody drops pennies into a cup held by a man owning one perfectly good eye. A blind man must be totally so to go into business for himself.

Same way with a boob that grows fat on his own folly — he must be a Simon−pure simp. He must believe politicians before an election and patent−medicine advertisements when he's sick.

Absolutely! He must be of the order of intelligence that derives no amusement from political editorials in partizan{sic} newspapers. He must be the kind of a fellow that stops on a moonlight evening when a pretty girl tells him to.

If you know any man as foolish as all that, cultivate his friendship while he's young and accessible, because later on he'll have money to lend and so many office−boys as a body−guard in front of his door that no card but that of a very old friend or a millionaire can get through to him.

Brains are a misfortune, I tell you. If you have brains, you have to use them, and the use of brains is work, and work is a curse. Therefore, brains being a curse, the lack of them must necessarily be a blessing.

And good looks? Hub! If a man's good−looking, some girl with no more sense than to marry him just because he's handsome, will. Then, if he's a gentleman, he's got to work like a dog for the rest of his life, to make enough to atone, so far as he can with money — which is some distance — for the irreparable mistake his manly cow−lick caused her to make.

And money? Why, if you've got money to start with, you're nothing but shark−bait. You can't be friends with anybody. No! You're either an opportunity or a pest. The first time you knock at a man's door you're opportunity, and he comes on the run at the first tap and borrows money from you. The next time you knock you're a pest, and he's not in.

If a man laughs at a funny story you tell, you don't get any pleasure from listening to his mirth. You're wondering how much it will cost you when he gets you alone and tells you his funny one about the check that should have been in the day before, but probably got lost in the mail. Isn't that right? Absolutely!

And, girls! Why, if you've got money, and a pretty girl tells you that you're different from any man she's ever known, and sits over a few inches nearer, you get a thrill all right, but it's not a thrill of ecstasy. It's apprehension that makes you shiver. You recall that you've told her she waltzes nicely, and you call your lawyer out of bed to ask him how much she can collect on the strength of that remark. Isn't that right? Absolutely!

But a mouse−haired, fish−eyed, pigeon−toed, bow−legged, brain−shy, poverty−stricken boob is immune. He hasn't got anything that anybody wants, whereas everybody has something that be needs.

Everything comes his way. The law of supply and demand, I suppose; but it's discouraging to an industrious striver like myself, who's been brought up in a humble but Presbyterian atmosphere, to believe that the early bird gets the worm, when I sit by and see a worm too stupid to know when it's time to get up, fall out of his bole in the late afternoon, and gobble the classiest bird on the lawn!

Part 1.2

I have Eddie May in mind when I speak of a boob. He's the model from which I draw my description.

And yet, come to think of it, Eddie's not so bad. He's not ugly enough to attract attention, nor bow−legged enough to be called deformed. His feet are cross−eyed, but not to such an extent but what his toes point in the general direction of his immediate destination. He knows that Christopher Columbus discovered America, and he can count and read, and vote, and perform other little parlor tricks indicative of the possession of a certain something akin to human intelligence.

It's a bit hard to explain just what it is about Eddie that makes him such a perfect boob. I think, perhaps, it's the consistency of his low average. He can do almost anything not very well.

I remember him chiefly as a sort of concrete absence. He was flesh−and−blood substance, and yet you could sit in the room with him for hours and act as if you were alone without effort. If you wanted to talk, he was something that had the capacity to listen, and if you didn't you could just mentally erase him. If you didn't go out of your way to notice him, he wouldn't register on your consciousness at all.

The little shrimp roomed with me and Dick Scanlon at college. He was welcome, because we could remember him when the rent came due just long enough to collect his share of it, and then forget him for the rest of the time.

Of course, he did occupy a certain amount of space, but he didn't bother us any more than a bureau or desk that would have taken up the same room. Why, I'd ask Dick to run out and leave me alone for a time, and then, when he was gone, I'd compose love−letters under the inspiration of complete solitude, with Eddie sitting on the sofa watching me all the time.

There was only one thing that Dick and me had as little of as Eddie. That was money!

Our youth was the only license we had for being out of the poorhouse. Of course Dick and I had great futures. We've still got 'em. Poor Eddie didn't even have the promise of a brilliant career to cheer him while he worked the college for his way through.

Teaching was the only hope Eddie's very best friends had for him. Funny! Nobody ever advises a blind man to try for a position as a guide, but an educated boob who doesn't know enough to get by at anything else is unanimously elected to teach.

Things financial got steadily worse with Eddie and Dick and me for three years. We started with nothing and went in debt. By the end of our junior year we all had plenty of debts, but no credit. It was up to us to coin our vacation or vacate permanently.

Dick and I might have booked up with some beach as life−guards, and there was always the possibility of Eddie getting on as a waiter in a summer hotel; but after figuring a bit we decided that that wouldn't do. Life−savers get very little, whether they operate in the surf or the dining−room.

"Well, what 'll we do?" Eddie piped up, after Dick and I had settled what not to do. Eddie never suggested; he always asked.

"We'll use a little sense," Dick said. Of course we didn't, but he said we would. "Who is it," he asked, "that makes the most money — the man who does things or the man who sells things?"

"Cinch!" I told him. "The winner is the man who sells things that other people produce. Am I right?"

You're as right as the city−hall clock," Dick complimented me. "We're going to sell things that other people produce."

"What things?" Eddie asked.

He was that way — a slave to petty details. He had no breadth of vision. His mind always dealt with little things.

"Anything," Dick told him. "It isn't the thing you have for sale that counts, it's the way you offer it. Now get that into your head, Eddie," he said. "It doesn't make any difference whether you've got ice in the Arctic or steam−heating plants in Panama. If you're a salesman, you'll sell 'em. If you're not a salesman, you couldn't sell gum−drops to an Eskimo. People don't buy what they need; they buy what the salesman makes them think they want. And if you can hypnotize them into buying one thing they haven't any use for, you can another. I don't know or particularly care what we're going to sell this summer; we're going to sell something to somebody for

more than it cost us to buy it from somebody else. That's success!"

So we weren't as careful in selecting our article of commerce as we might have been. Dick suggested books, but I balked. I pointed out to Dick that while I was willing to practise ordinary business dishonesty to get along in the world, there were depths of deceit I didn't feel capable of dropping to. After three years in college, I knew I couldn't look a man in the eye and advise him to buy a book. That was too much!

Dick argued that there was no sentiment in business, and that we shouldn't allow our personal prejudices, or likes and dislikes, to color our salesmanship in any way, or to affect our choice of an article to sell.

"You know, we're not going to buy ourselves something to keep," Dick told me. "We're going to buy something to get rid of. Doesn't it seem reasonable to believe that you could more easily sell something you have an aversion to than something you like? You've had your nose in some sort of a book for so long that your idea of a perfectly happy man is one who doesn't know the letters of the alphabet. Suppose you had books with you this summer. Wouldn't you work all the harder to get rid of them, feeling as you do?"

It seemed reasonable to believe that, but I didn't. I thought it would be nice to arrange with some motor company to act as automobile salesmen, and have them furnish us a sample car to travel around the country in and demonstrate with. Dick agreed with me, but no motor−car company would; so we compromised on patent potato−peelers.

Part 1.3

We were all genuinely enthusiastic about the merits of those machines. During our freshman year we'd all done our bit of barbering spuds at Mrs. Rariden's respectable boarding−house, in return for a pallid meal now and then; so we were capable of appreciating the fine points of Popple's Patent Potato−Peeler.

It was a sort of an adaptation of the safety−razor idea. A child, or even a cooking−school graduate, could handle it. It took all the art out of potato−peeling. You just took the instrument in one hand and the spud in the other, and thought about something else for a while. Then you glanced casually down at the spud, and — presto, you found it shaved as smooth as a con man's lip!

We figured on making quite a cleanup out of those vegetable safety−razors. In fact, Dick and I felt that if we were lucky we might make enough to afford a room without Eddie during our senior year. We both of us liked Eddie in a way, but we looked upon him as a sort of youthful frivolity. We felt that the loss of him would add to our dignity, and you know how prospective seniors have to reckon on those things.

But what do the common people care about progress, science, art, political economy? Nothing! That's why they're common. I talked to some of the commonest people during the first week we were on the road with those spud−skinners. Common people? I was just like a candidate to 'em; and all that any of them gave me was a pain!

Pay two bits for a little article absolutely indispensable to the successful conduct of any well−run household? Kick in with the price of a hair−cut for an invention as necessary to the orderly development of culinary science as strangers to Broadway? Part with twenty−five ordinary pennies, five nickels, two dimes and a jitney, the mere fourth part of an insignificant dollar, to save wife or cook from the danger of a lacerated hand and probable death from poisoning thereby?

Common people? Don't argue with me! I know the answer. I proved it to my own disgust. Say, if the fountain of youth was a potato−peeler and Ponce de Leon was the common people, he wouldn't give a worthy young college man a postal−card to write home for money in exchange for a whole gross of them!

Sell Popple's Patent Potato−Peelers? Why, we couldn't trade 'em for their weight in skimmed milk at a dairy−farm! Don't ever tell me farmers are suckers. If they're sea−food, they're crabs. Why, I used every form of argument from pure, cold, business logic to a consumptive cough, and all I got for my work was a variety of negative answers. A farmer can think up more mean ways of saying no than a total abstainer!

Dick and I at least held our own. If we couldn't lift the price of a patent potato−peeler from a wayside farm, we didn't stop off and try to lift the mortgage. Do you know what Eddie did? Just to show you — he let a woman up in northern Massachusetts tell him why she couldn't buy one of his patent potato−peelers to help a poor boy get a college education.

It was a sad story, mates. The year of the big wind it hadn't rained enough, and the year of the big rain there hadn't been any wind. Both years there hadn't been any crops. The only things she'd been able to raise on her little farm were nine kids and one hog. Her husband drank vile liquor and had the rheumatism. He and the hog had both been sick, and the old lady's luck ran true to form. It was the boy that died.

Well, Eddie loaned her his ears, and after she'd poured them full he gave her the ten dollars he had left. Then he hunted Dick and me up, and tried to make us weep with a second−hand version of the story he went broke on. That was Eddie — boob to the bone!

Dick and I had already decided to go to Paskamatqua Beach, a summer resort on the Maine coast about forty miles distant. A college man with a crease in his trousers and no pride can always make some sort of a living at a Maine beach. We had no intention of leaving Eddie alone with himself, but we thought a good scare might instil into him a proper regard for the gentle art of self−preservation, and teach him the value of a deaf ear when impecunious ladies with rheumatic husbands and no hog tell hard−luck stories.

"I'm sorry you're broke, Eddie," I told him. "Dick and I would both like to help you out, but neither of us can. We're practically broke, too. We made a mistake in bringing patent potato−peelers with us; what we need is some kind of a scalpel to peel the surrounding farmer away from his money. Dick and I are going to Paskamatqua Beach to make a living. We've only got money enough between us for two tickets, so you see how it is."

"But what am I going to do?" Eddie asked. He spoke in such a pitiful way that I almost felt sorry for him.

Eddie could arouse sympathy. "I haven't a cent, and I don't know where I can get one. You won't leave me alone, will you?"

"You might go back to the lady you gave the ten to, and ask her for a job," Dick suggested. "There ought to be some leftovers now that the hog is dead. The prodigal son got by on husks."

"But he had an address to wire to when they disagreed with him," Eddie pointed out. "I haven't."

"Try beating your way to the beach, Eddie," I advised him. "We'll help you. You get on the train with us, and we'll turn two seats together. You scrooch down on the floor between them, and we'll pile our suit−cases around you. Then we'll put our coats over you and take a chance."

"You'll take a chance!" Eddie said. "You! What chance do you take?"

"Why, think of the embarrassment we should suffer if we're found in the company of a hobo," Dick explained. "We're taking all the chances; you're not taking any. You've got nothing to lose. If they catch you, all they can do is to put you off the train. Wherever they dump you, you won't be any worse off than you are here. You can't lose!"

So Eddie got on the train with us and huddled up between the seats. We stacked the suit−cases around him and spread our coats over them.

The other passengers in the car were interested in watching us. One fat, red−faced fellow right across the aisle, with a diamond in his tie the size of an early strawberry, was particularly curious. Dick tapped his forehead, to indicate that our traveling−companion was suffering from an absence of tenants on the upper floor.

Then the conductor came along, and Dick showed him three tickets to Paskamatqua Beach. The conductor looked at Dick, and then at me, and then at the three tickets.

Who's the other ticket for?" he asked.

Dick took the coats off the top of the suit−cases and pointed at poor little Eddie, all doubled up on the floor and looking at the conductor like a rabbit in a trap sizing up a hungry dog. The conductor leaned over and looked down at him.

What's be doing down there on the floor?" he asked.

"He's peculiar," Dick explained. "He likes to ride that way."

"Well, there's no law against it," the conductor admitted; "but if he gets violent I shall hold you two responsible for him!"

Eddie never did have a sense of humor. He couldn't see anything funny in the situation, even after we explained it to him in detail; but I thought the fat, red−faced fellow across the aisle would melt himself laughing. I actually feared for him.

Eddie was mad at all of us, but particularly so at the fat fellow who was having hysterics. The fat fellow saw how Eddie felt about it, and gave him some good advice.

"Don't get mad, my boy," he said in the tone of a man giving a baccalaureate address. "I can tell by the look of you that you haven't the faculty for entering into the spirit of things. That's bad! Be a mixer. I have to be in my business, and I know the commercial value of it. Always be ready to appreciate a good joke, whether it's on the other fellow or on you. Never be discomfited and grouchy!"

And just then — whango! The train we were on started an argument over the issue of right of way with another train coming in the opposite direction on the same track.

Part 1.4

To us, in the coaches, the collision seemed like the production of an imaginative person's conception of the end of the world. I bounced around between the floor and the roof until what was left of the thing that had been a train once more established a comparative equilibrium. Then I crawled out through a ragged absence of floor, and took a look at the corn−field we had entered and broken. We hadn't plowed quite as much of that field as the farmer had, but we'd gone deeper. I gave thanks for my deliverance and resolved to start going to church again.

Just then Dick crawled beside me.

"Eddie's pinned down," he gasped.

"Give me a hand with him!"

So I crawled back inside, and we started trying to lift things off poor Eddie. There was an awful lot on him. And what a screaming came from underneath! It sent the shivers up and down my spine to hear it.

"Don't yell so, Eddie!" I begged.

"We'll have you out in a minute."

We had taken enough carpentry and upholstery off him by that time to enable him to twist his head around. He looked up at me and said:

"I'm not yelling. What you hear is this humorist under me laughing at another joke."

It was the fat man! Eddie was bedded down on him as comfortable as a Persian princess on forty−seven sofa−pillows. The fat man was speaking extemporaneously, and the form of his remarks was an argument for the use of a manuscript. The tenor of his speech was something like this:

"Save me! Save me! Help! Help! Take your foot out of my eye! You're gouging my ear off! Oh, Lord, I'm dying! Now I lay me down to sleep — quit digging your knee into my stomach, will you? If I ever get up out of this I'll knock your block! Oh, Lord, I'm dying! Help!

There wasn't a thing holding him down but Eddie. As soon as we got Eddie loose the fat one could have got up all right; but I thought of the big diamond in his tie, and of my own destitute condition. When I lifted Eddie off him, I slipped a stray seat−back on, and knelt on it to give it weight.

"Are you in much pain?" I asked him.

"I'm dying!" he said. "I can feel myself getting weaker. Can't you save me?"

"There's a heavy timber across your back," I told him. "We'll do our best. Have courage! We won't desert you."

"I just want a crack at that sharp−angled fool who used me for a mattress," he wailed. "Oh, Lord, I'm dying! Help! Save me!"

After I'd sat for a while on the seat−back I'd laid across him, in order to make the rescue seem more difficult, and Dick and I had both heaved and groaned as if we were straining our ligaments to free him from the death−trap in which he was imprisoned, I got up and we saved him.

He wasn't much hurt. Between cussing Eddie and praying, he'd injured his vocal chords somewhat; but aside from that and a few bruises he was all right. He was peeved because we wouldn't let him lick Eddie.

"The little rabbit used my face for a foot−rest," he complained. "When the crash came, he picked out my softest spots and settled down on 'em. Don't tell me he didn't do it purposely! If he'd had an osteopath's map of my anatomy he couldn't have picked out the tender places better. It was cold−blooded, scientific, intentional torture, I tell you!"

But we finally cooled him off and he introduced himself. He was Roland B. Kemmer, proprietor of the Bonavita Hotel at Paskamatqua Beach.

"You gentlemen saved my life," he told Dick and me. "Any time I can do anything for you, just let me know."

I spoke for our side. I didn't dictate or even suggest just what he should do for us, but I intimated that almost anything would be welcome, and that there was no time like the present.

"It's fate!" Kemmer declared. "I can use you two boys to our mutual advantage. We need presentable young men at the beach — young college men who can dance and play tennis, handle a canoe conservatively, and flirt discreetly. We've been frightfully shy of men this year. That's bad, very bad! Where there are no men, the women

leave; and where the women have left, no men will come. The absence of men at a summer hotel is apt to be the first link in a chain of misfortune that leads directly to bankruptcy. Come with me! I'll give you free room and board at the hotel, all the privileges of the place, and a salary of — say twenty dollars a week for the summer. In return you have a good time, and see to it that the young ladies stopping at my hostelry do the same. Agreeable?"

Agreeable? Could he ask such a question and keep a straight face? I looked at Dick, and Dick looked at me, and then we both looked at Eddie. That was a mistake. If we hadn't looked at him we might have been able to leave him. Poor little Eddie!

His expression of pitiful appeal would have made a cat stay in a dog−kennel. I wanted to leave him, but I couldn't. His utter helplessness preyed on my conscience.

What would he do if we left him? Starve, probably! Sit out in the open and patiently wait for death, like the boob he was! If he'd had just a modicum of sense — enough, say, to know better than to waste his time pounding sand in a rat−hole, I could have laughed harshly and done my duty by myself; but he didn't. There he stood, a helpless, hopeless, pitiful boob, waiting to be left to his fate.

The claim for protection that his helplessness presented compelled me to take a chance with the first law of nature.

"Will it be possible for you to make use of our friend in some way?" I asked Kemmer. "He's with us, and I feel responsible for him in a way."

"Use him?" Kemmer shouted. "Him? I'll give him good money to hang by the heels and let me use him for a punching−bag! He deliberately stuck his foot in my eye, I tell you! Use him? I'll pay his way if he'll go down to old man Carlson's hotel, at the other end of the beach from us and hoodoo the place!"

I didn't try to defend Eddie. What was the use? There's no sense in arguing that two and two don't make four.

"I know," I said. "But he doesn't mean any harm, and he's with us, you see. We can't very well leave him."

"Admirable!" Kemmer said. "Shows a splendid spirit of loyalty. Too bad it's wasted on such a poor cause! Well, if he'll obey my orders, I'll give him his board and room, but no salary. We have some elderly ladies at the Bonavita who enjoy croquet and leisurely strolls. I can use him as an escort for them. They frequently require some one to carry their lunches and camp−stools for them."

"I'm sure you can depend upon me to do my best," Eddie said humbly.

"I'm sorry I put my foot in your eye, sir."

"If you didn't have two good friends to intercede for you, you'd be a darn sight sorrier!" Kemmer blustered. "I don't want you around, but I'm going to try and put up with you as a favor to your two friends, who saved my life while you were trying to murder me."

So the three of us went with Kemmer to the Bonavita Hotel at Paskamatqua Beach. Dick and I got right into the swim as regular bathers, and Eddie took up his duties as the old ladies' life−guard. While Dick and I swam and played tennis and golf and danced and canoed with as fine a bunch of peacherinoes as ever troubled a boarding−school, Eddie carried chairs and tables for the hens who had ceased to cackle when they laid a birthday, and did his bit with croquet−mallets and parasols. Between times he sat on the veranda and read nice novels out loud to his flock.

Part 1.5

The first week in July, Clarice Claremont, the musical−comedy star, arrived at the Bonavita. She said she'd come for a rest, but Dick and I didn't give her any. She was a corking good fellow, and we had some great times together for a couple of weeks. Dick and I had cooperated up to the time when she arrived, but she developed a certain amount of competition between us.

Then Kemmer's niece, Helen Ardsley, arrived from the West, and our friendship entirely ceased. So did our attentions to Miss Claremont.

Miss Ardsley was an orphan, and while it was evident from the way she dressed and acted that she was more or less of a poor relation, we both noticed that Kemmer was very fond of her. There was a strong probability that he might do pretty well by the man who married his niece.

Not that that had anything whatever to do with my feelings, or Dick's — positively not! With both of us it was a case of love at first sight, and fair play go bang! She was about twenty, a tall, quiet, reserved girl, with light hair and big, blue eyes, and as pretty as — oh, what's the use? She was to her sex what Shelley is to poets. Turn your imagination loose with that for a tip. You can't go too far.

Within a week Dick and I were as popular with all the rest of the girls at the place as a divorced husband at his ex−wife's second wedding. When Dick was out with Miss Ardsley, I was too miserable to bother with anybody else. When I was out with her, Dick would sit in his room and read Poe.

Several of the girls we'd been attentive to left the hotel in somewhat of a huff, and in my rare, lucid moments, when I was temporarily able to forget Miss Ardsley, it occurred to me that Kemmer had a kick coming. However, he seemed satisfied with the way things were going. He was fond of his niece, and I suppose he was gratified by the court we paid her, even if it did cost him a few guests.

Miss Claremont was the only one of our former playmates who didn't get offended. She was so nice and sympathetic that I used to hunt her up and knock Dick when he had Miss Ardsley out. Dick employed the same means of solace when I was the lucky one. She'd tell me what Dick said about me, and then tell Dick what I said about him. She was nice that way.

After a few days Dick and I quit speaking to each other, and only conversed through her. Then she asked me to do her a favor.

"Anything," I promised fervently. "Anything you ask."

Isn't it funny? When a man's in love he'll promise anything fervently, not only to the one he's in love with, but to anybody else. Love seems to be a kind of promissory mood, doesn't it?

"I want you to help me in a little press−agent stunt," she said. "My husband's coming on Monday — "

"Your husband!" I said, with a foolish expression. "Your husband!"

Yes," she said. "Didn't you know I was married? I thought every one knew that. Jack's a dear! Don't you remember reading how he horsewhipped that Italian count who was attentive to me? No? The story went all over the country. Jack's supposed to be murderously jealous of me. Of course, he's not — he knows he's the only man in the world I ever give a thought to — but it makes good press stuff. Now, I want you to take me out sailing on Monday morning. We'll sail out beyond the reef to Perch Island, and go ashore there for a few hours. Jack will arrive a little before noon, and will ask for me. When he finds out I've gone sailing with you, he'll storm around and make a terrible disturbance. Then he'll pace up and down the beach, waiting for us to come back. We'll get back about sunset, and Jack will make a most frightful scene."

I was as dumb as a man in love usually is.

"But if you know he's coming, why get caught?" I asked.

Press stuff, silly!" she said. "Well−known actress — ardent college boy — jealous husband — don't you see it?"

"I see the scene," I told her, "but not with myself as any part of the scenery!"

"But you said you'd do anything for me," she reminded me.

"Anything but that," I qualified my proffer of assistance.

I was thinking of Miss Ardsley. I'd have a fine chance with her after being mixed up in a mess like that,

wouldn't I? Thinking of Miss Ardsley naturally reminded me of Dick, who was playing tennis with her at the time.

"Ask Dick," I advised Miss Claremont.

"I did," Miss Claremont said. "He recommended you."

The unprincipled trickster! Trying to get me in wrong with Helen Ardsley!

Then I had an inspiration. Eddie! Why not? Of course, Eddie had a perfectly good reputation, but it didn't do him a particle of good. It was reasonable to assume that the loss of it wouldn't do him any harm, wasn't it? Absolutely!

So I nominated Eddie, and Miss Claremont and I elected him unanimously. We decided not to tell him what his duties would be.

"Why worry him?" I asked Miss Claremont. "If he doesn't know what's coming off, he'll act the part all the better. He'll be more convincing in it. Then it 'll be fun to watch him when he thinks he's in danger of being murdered by an irate husband!"

"I'd better be seen with him as much as possible between now and Monday," Miss Claremont said. "Sort of work up Jack's entrance, you know."

Part 1.6

Work it up? She exploded it! Woof! I've heard some scandal in my time, but never any as juicy as the gossip resulting from the friendship that suddenly sprang up between Miss Claremont and poor little Eddie.

Of course, the friendship didn't really spring up; Miss Claremont reared it — carefully. And, also of course, it wasn't a friendship; it was a combination of hypnotic terror and business expediency. Eddie was hypnotized and terrified, while Miss Claremont was simply working at her trade.

And the things that were said of Miss Claremont! Tell me, why do all women hate an actress? Oh, yes, they do! All women hate actresses they've met. I know they write notes to some they've never seen off the stage, but after they once get as much as an introduction they write notes about them. Why? Sour grapes?

Anyhow, what the ladies at the Bonavita, married, single, young, and otherwise, said about Miss Claremont after she took up with Eddie would have scorched the ears of an asbestos idol.

She was delighted with the way people had taken notice.

"It couldn't be better," she told me. "Poor little Eddie's been the old ladies' friend for so long that his sudden attachment to a wicked actress stirs up real talk. You know," she said, "if a bartender marries a burlesque queen, it's hardly worth a mention; but if a Methodist minister elopes with a show−girl, it's good for columns, and the A. P. wires get all choked up with the horrible details. Of course, Eddie isn't a minister, but be ought to be. He's the shyest man! I have to locate him every morning by keen deduction, and kidnap him by force. If he could escape me by guile or main strength, he would. If he's ever been kissed, some female brute must have sneaked up on him when he wasn't looking, and held him helpless. I'm only afraid he'll run out on me before Jack gets here!"

Helen Ardsley was as indignant over poor little Eddie's capture by the Thespian enemy as anybody. She besought me to do something about it before it was too late.

"He seems such a nice boy," she said. "It's a shame! I know he hasn't taken up with that woman of his own accord. She's hypnotized him. Heretofore he's always been so courteous and attentive to the elderly ladies at the hotel, and now he spends his entire time with that hussy! And I know he doesn't do it willingly, either. I can see by his expression when he's with her that he's ashamed."

"It 'll do Eddie good," I assured her. "He needs experience. Poor little Eddie! I don't think he ever went twice with the same girl before; never could find one foolish enough to repeat the mistake of going out with him. He's all right, but he's simple."

I didn't realize how simple he was till he came to me with his trouble.

"I don't love Miss Claremont, old man," he said, as solemn as a sign−painter talking about art. "And I'm afraid she's becoming attached to me. I wouldn't cause her pain for the world. I've tried to make her see that I can never return her love, but she insists on my going about with her. I simply can't marry her."

"Why not?" I asked him. "She seems a nice girl."

"I love another," he said, like a man making his last statement. "I love another."

That was the first time I ever had a real case of hysterics.

"I didn't know you'd ever had a girl, Eddie," I said, when I'd recovered sufficiently to speak. "I never saw you twice with the same one."

"I am poor," Eddie said. "I am unworthy. I have never told her of my love; but I love her!"

That was like him! If he ever loved a girl, he wouldn't tell her. He'd keep it a secret. Boob to the bone, I tell you — absolutely!

Part 1.7

Dick had a date with Helen Ardsley on the morning of the Monday when husband Jack was to arrive and yell for lover Eddie's gore, so I rose early and went for a long, lone walk to nurse black thoughts and hatred for the double−dyed villain who had once been my friend.

I got back to the hotel a little before noon, in order to be on hand for Jack's entrance. Miss Claremont met me on the veranda.

"It's all off!" she told me sorrowfully. "Eddie ran out on me. He promised to take me sailing this morning as per schedule, but he's gone!"

"Must be around some place," I said. "I'll hunt him up. There's still time for him to take you sailing before your husband gets here."

Miss Claremont shook her head.

"He's gone, I tell you. Think I haven't hunted for him? He took the train for Portsmouth last night. A good story all gone to pot!"

Just then Dick came up and looked me over as if I were a sickness he was afraid of having.

"Pretty smart, aren't you?" he sneered.

"Yes," I admitted. "You just find it out?"

"I've just found out that you're treacherous!" he said. You knew that I had a date with Miss Ardsley this morning."

"Certainly," I said. "What of it?"

"Where is she?" he asked.

"How do I know?" I returned.

"Didn't she go walking with you?" Dick inquired.

"No," I said. "Didn't she go with you?"

"No," Dick replied.

Then the house automobile from the noon train drove up, and we found out where Helen Ardsley was. She was right there — with Eddie.

We knew before he told us. A man looks as foolish as that only once in a lifetime, unless he's married twice.

"My wife!" Eddie blatted. "My wife! We were married last night in Portsmouth."

We followed them inside and watched Kemmer get his shock. I was looking for him to rave at Eddie, but he was strangely amiable. I didn't understand it then, but I did later.

"I'm so happy, boys!" Helen Ardsley — I mean Mrs. May, dog−gone it! — told us. "Do you know, I proposed to Eddie! I suppose I ought to be ashamed of that, but as a matter of fact I'm proud of it! I knew he loved me all the time, and I also knew that he was too bashful to speak. He's the finest man in the world, but he lacks self−confidence. He doesn't realize what a perfectly splendid fellow he is. He felt himself unworthy of me, and wouldn't court me at all. Wasn't that silly of him? I have that horrible Miss Claremont to thank for my happiness. If it hadn't been for her shameless attempt to win him, I should never have got up the courage to speak; but I wasn't going to stand by and see the man whom I loved, and who I knew loved me, dragged down by that dreadful person! Oh, boys, I'm so happy about everything! I could almost forgive Miss Claremont. You know, I'm really the first and only woman Eddie ever loved. He's such a dear! And so modest! Oh!

Well, that was about all that I could stand at one time. I drifted out on the veranda, and Dick followed me. We'd just got done shaking hands and renewing our friendship when Kemmer came up.

He looked awfully blue — almost as blue as I felt. I didn't blame him. Terrible thing to have a pill like Eddie married on you!

"Between us we sort of spilled the beans, boys," he said gloomily. "I was rather hoping one of you two would catch on with my niece."

"We were rather hoping the same thing," I admitted. "I suppose you'll have to give Eddie something to do around the hotel to support him. He hasn't a thing, you know."

Give him something to do around the hotel?" Kemmer gasped. "Give him — you're crazy! I get a salary for

running this place. My brother−in−law — my niece's father — put this hotel up before he died, just to give me something to do. Not a nickel's worth of it belongs to me. She owns it, and this is only a little plaything of hers. It would take an expert accountant six months to figure up all she owns. Why, you boobs, I'm only a poor relation of hers! I was hoping she might marry one of you two boys, because I thought you might be friendly to me afterward. Give Eddie something to do around the hotel? Why, I'm scared stiff for fear he'll remember some of the things I've said to him, and have me fired!"

Be a boob, I tell you — that's what wins. I admit I have brains and good looks, and I still have my future, but — ah, but! Eddie's in Florida at his winter home. I'm in debt at my tailor's, and haven't got any home that I can lay claim to if I miss paying the rent for a week.

Be a boob, I tell you. Be helpless — that's the idea. Poor little Eddie! Waugh!