

CHAPTER II

BILLY WINDSOR

Billy Windsor had started life twenty-five years before this story opens on his father's ranch in Wyoming. From there he had gone to a local paper of the type whose Society column consists of such items as "Pawnee Jim Williams was to town yesterday with a bunch of other cheap skates. We take this opportunity of once more informing Jim that he is a liar and a skunk," and whose editor works with a revolver on his desk and another in his hip-pocket. Graduating from this, he had proceeded to a reporter's post on a daily paper in a Kentucky town, where there were blood feuds and other Southern devices for preventing life from becoming dull. All this time New York, the magnet, had been tugging at him. All reporters dream of reaching New York. At last, after four years on the Kentucky paper, he had come East, minus the lobe of one ear and plus a long scar that ran diagonally across his left shoulder, and had worked without much success as a free-lance. He was tough and ready for anything that might come his way, but these things are a great deal a matter of luck. The cub-reporter cannot make a name for himself unless he is favoured by fortune. Things had not come Billy Windsor's way. His work had been confined to turning in reports of fires and small street accidents, which the various papers to which he supplied them cut down to a couple of inches.

Billy had been in a bad way when he had happened upon the sub-editorship of Cosy Moments. He despised the work with all his heart, and the salary was infinitesimal. But it was regular, and for a while Billy felt that a regular salary was the greatest thing on earth. But he still dreamed of winning through to a post on one of the big New York dailies, where there was something doing and a man would have a chance of showing what was in him.

The unfortunate thing, however, was that Cosy Moments took up his time so completely. He had no chance of attracting the notice of big editors by his present work, and he had no leisure for doing any other.

All of which may go to explain why his normal aspect was that of a caged eagle.

To him, brooding over the outpourings of Luella Granville Waterman, there entered Pugsy Maloney, the office-boy, bearing a struggling cat.

"Say!" said Pugsy.

He was a nonchalant youth, with a freckled, mask-like face, the expression of which never varied. He appeared unconscious of the cat. Its existence did not seem to occur to him.

"Well?" said Billy, looking up. "Hello, what have you got there?"

Master Maloney eyed the cat, as if he were seeing it for the first time.

"It's a kitty what I got in de street," he said.

"Don't hurt the poor brute. Put her down."

Master Maloney obediently dropped the cat, which sprang nimbly on to an upper shelf of the book-case.

"I wasn't hoitin' her," he said, without emotion. "Dere was two fellers in de street sickin' a dawg on to her. An' I comes up an' says, 'G'wan! What do youse t'ink you're doin', fussin' de poor dumb animal?' An' one of de guys, he says, 'G'wan! Who do youse t'ink youse is?' An' I says, 'I'm de guy what's goin' to swat youse one on de coco if youse don't quit fussin' de poor dumb animal.' So wit dat he makes a break at swattin' me one, but I swats him one, an' I swats de odder feller one, an' den I swats dem bote some more, an' I gets de kitty, an' I brings her in here, cos I t'inks maybe youse'll look after her."

And having finished this Homeric narrative, Master Maloney fixed an expressionless eye on the ceiling, and was silent.

Billy Windsor, like most men of the plains, combined the toughest of muscle with the softest of hearts. He was always ready at any moment to become the champion of the oppressed on the slightest provocation. His alliance with Pugsy Maloney had begun on the occasion when he had rescued that youth from the clutches of a large negro, who, probably from the soundest of motives, was endeavouring to slay him. Billy had not inquired into the rights and wrongs of the matter: he had merely sailed in and rescued the office-boy. And Pugsy, though he had made no verbal comment on the affair, had shown in many ways that he was not ungrateful.

"Bully for you, Pugsy!" he cried. "You're a little sport. Here" --he produced a dollar-bill--"go out and get some milk for the poor brute. She's probably starving. Keep the change."

"Sure thing," assented Master Maloney. He strolled slowly out, while Billy Windsor, mounting a chair, proceeded to chirrup and snap his fingers in the effort to establish the foundations of an entente cordiale with the rescued cat.

By the time that Pugsy returned, carrying a five-cent bottle of milk, the animal had vacated the book-shelf, and was sitting on the table, washing her face. The milk having been poured into the lid of a tobacco-tin, in lieu of a saucer, she suspended her operations and adjourned for refreshments. Billy, business being business, turned again to Luella Granville Waterman, but Pugsy, having no

immediate duties on hand, concentrated himself on the cat.

"Say!" he said.

"Well?"

"Dat kitty."

"What about her?"

"Pipe de leather collar she's wearing."

Billy had noticed earlier in the proceedings that a narrow leather collar encircled the cat's neck. He had not paid any particular attention to it. "What about it?" he said.

"Guess I know where dat kitty belongs. Dey all have dose collars. I guess she's one of Bat Jarvis's kitties. He's got a lot of dem for fair, and every one wit one of dem collars round deir neck."

"Who's Bat Jarvis? Do you mean the gang-leader?"

"Sure. He's a cousin of mine," said Master Maloney with pride.

"Is he?" said Billy. "Nice sort of fellow to have in the family. So you think that's his cat?"

"Sure. He's got twenty-t'ree of dem, and dey all has dose collars."

"Are you on speaking terms with the gentleman?"

"Huh?"

"Do you know Bat Jarvis to speak to?"

"Sure. He's me cousin."

"Well, tell him I've got the cat, and that if he wants it he'd better come round to my place. You know where I live?"

"Sure."

"Fancy you being a cousin of Bat's, Pugsy. Why did you never tell us? Are you going to join the gang some day?"

"Nope. Nothin' doin'. I'm goin' to be a cow-boy."

"Good for you. Well, you tell him when you see him. And now, my lad, out you get, because if I'm interrupted any more I shan't get through to-night."

"Sure," said Master Maloney, retiring.

"Oh, and Pugsy . . ."

"Huh?"

"Go out and get a good big basket. I shall want one to carry this animal home in."

"Sure," said Master Maloney.