

## CHAPTER V

### PLANNING IMPROVEMENTS

"By the way," said Psmith, "what is your exact position on this paper? Practically, we know well, you are its back-bone, its life-blood; but what is your technical position? When your proprietor is congratulating himself on having secured the ideal man for your job, what precise job does he congratulate himself on having secured the ideal man for?"

"I'm sub-editor."

"Merely sub? You deserve a more responsible post than that, Comrade Windsor. Where is your proprietor? I must buttonhole him and point out to him what a wealth of talent he is allowing to waste itself. You must have scope."

"He's in Europe. At Carlsbad, or somewhere. He never comes near the paper. He just sits tight and draws the profits. He lets the editor look after things. Just at present I'm acting as editor."

"Ah! then at last you have your big chance. You are free, untrammelled."

"You bet I'm not," said Billy Windsor. "Guess again. There's no

room for developing free untrammelled ideas on this paper. When you've looked at it, you'll see that each page is run by some one. I'm simply the fellow who minds the shop."

Psmith clicked his tongue sympathetically. "It is like setting a gifted French chef to wash up dishes," he said. "A man of your undoubted powers, Comrade Windsor, should have more scope. That is the cry, 'more scope!' I must look into this matter. When I gaze at your broad, bulging forehead, when I see the clear light of intelligence in your eyes, and hear the grey matter splashing restlessly about in your cerebellum, I say to myself without hesitation, 'Comrade Windsor must have more scope.'" He looked at Mike, who was turning over the leaves of his copy of *Cosy Moments* in a sort of dull despair. "Well, Comrade Jackson, and what is your verdict?"

Mike looked at Billy Windsor. He wished to be polite, yet he could find nothing polite to say. Billy interpreted the look.

"Go on," he said. "Say it. It can't be worse than what I think."

"I expect some people would like it awfully," said Mike.

"They must, or they wouldn't buy it. I've never met any of them yet, though."

Psmith was deep in Lucia Granville Waterman's "Moments in the Nursery." He turned to Billy Windsor.

"Luella Granville Waterman," he said, "is not by any chance your nom-de-plume, Comrade Windsor?"

"Not on your life. Don't think it."

"I am glad," said Psmith courteously. "For, speaking as man to man, I must confess that for sheer, concentrated bilge she gets away with the biscuit with almost insolent ease. Luella Granville Waterman must go."

"How do you mean?"

"She must go," repeated Psmith firmly. "Your first act, now that you have swiped the editorial chair, must be to sack her."

"But, say, I can't. The editor thinks a heap of her stuff."

"We cannot help his troubles. We must act for the good of the paper. Moreover, you said, I think, that he was away?"

"So he is. But he'll come back."

"Sufficient unto the day, Comrade Windsor. I have a suspicion that

he will be the first to approve your action. His holiday will have cleared his brain. Make a note of improvement number one--the sacking of Luella Granville Waterman."

"I guess it'll be followed pretty quick by improvement number two--the sacking of William Windsor. I can't go monkeying about with the paper that way."

Psmith reflected for a moment.

"Has this job of yours any special attractions for you, Comrade Windsor?"

"I guess not."

"As I suspected. You yearn for scope. What exactly are your ambitions?"

"I want to get a job on one of the big dailies. I don't see how I'm going to fix it, though, at the present rate."

Psmith rose, and tapped him earnestly on the chest.

"Comrade Windsor, you have touched the spot. You are wasting the golden hours of your youth. You must move. You must hustle. You must make Windsor of Cosy Moments a name to conjure with. You must

boost this sheet up till New York rings with your exploits. On the present lines that is impossible. You must strike out a line for yourself. You must show the world that even Cosy Moments cannot keep a good man down."

He resumed his seat.

"How do you mean?" said Billy Windsor.

Psmith turned to Mike.

"Comrade Jackson, if you were editing this paper, is there a single feature you would willingly retain?"

"I don't think there is," said Mike. "It's all pretty bad rot."

"My opinion in a nutshell," said Psmith, approvingly. "Comrade Jackson," he explained, turning to Billy, "has a secure reputation on the other side for the keenness and lucidity of his views upon literature. You may safely build upon him. In England when Comrade Jackson says 'Turn' we all turn. Now, my views on the matter are as follows. Cosy Moments, in my opinion (worthless, were it not backed by such a virtuoso as Comrade Jackson), needs more snap, more go. All these putrid pages must disappear. Letters must be despatched to-morrow morning, informing Luella Granville Waterman and the others (and in particular B. Henderson Asher, who from a cursory

glance strikes me as an ideal candidate for a lethal chamber) that, unless they cease their contributions instantly, you will be compelled to place yourself under police protection. After that we can begin to move."

Billy Windsor sat and rocked himself in his chair without replying. He was trying to assimilate this idea. So far the grandeur of it had dazed him. It was too spacious, too revolutionary. Could it be done? It would undoubtedly mean the sack when Mr. J. Fillken Wilberfloss returned and found the apple of his eye torn asunder and, so to speak, deprived of its choicest pips. On the other hand . . . His brow suddenly cleared. After all, what was the sack? One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name, and he would have no name as long as he clung to his present position. The editor would be away ten weeks. He would have ten weeks in which to try himself out. Hope leaped within him. In ten weeks he could change *Cosy Moments* into a real live paper. He wondered that the idea had not occurred to him before. The trifling fact that the despised journal was the property of Mr. Benjamin White, and that he had no right whatever to tinker with it without that gentleman's approval, may have occurred to him, but, if it did, it occurred so momentarily that he did not notice it. In these crises one cannot think of everything.

"I'm on," he said, briefly.

Psmith smiled approvingly.

"That," he said, "is the right spirit. You will, I fancy, have little cause to regret your decision. Fortunately, if I may say so, I happen to have a certain amount of leisure just now. It is at your disposal. I have had little experience of journalistic work, but I foresee that I shall be a quick learner. I will become your sub-editor, without salary."

"Bully for you," said Billy Windsor.

"Comrade Jackson," continued Psmith, "is unhappily more fettered. The exigencies of his cricket tour will compel him constantly to be gadding about, now to Philadelphia, now to Saskatchewan, anon to Onehorseville, Ga. His services, therefore, cannot be relied upon continuously. From him, accordingly, we shall expect little but moral support. An occasional congratulatory telegram. Now and then a bright smile of approval. The bulk of the work will devolve upon our two selves."

"Let it devolve," said Billy Windsor, enthusiastically.

"Assuredly," said Psmith. "And now to decide upon our main scheme. You, of course, are the editor, and my suggestions are merely suggestions, subject to your approval. But, briefly, my idea is that Cosy Moments should become red-hot stuff. I could wish its

tone to be such that the public will wonder why we do not print it on asbestos. We must chronicle all the live events of the day, murders, fires, and the like in a manner which will make our readers' spines thrill. Above all, we must be the guardians of the People's rights. We must be a search-light, showing up the dark spot in the souls of those who would endeavour in any way to do the PEOPLE in the eye. We must detect the wrong-doer, and deliver him such a series of resentful buffs that he will abandon his little games and become a model citizen. The details of the campaign we must think out after, but I fancy that, if we follow those main lines, we shall produce a bright, readable little sheet which will in a measure make this city sit up and take notice. Are you with me, Comrade Windsor?"

"Surest thing you know," said Billy with fervour.