

CHAPTER VII

VISITORS AT THE OFFICE

On the following morning Mike had to leave with the team for Philadelphia. Psmith came down to the ferry to see him off, and hung about moodily until the time of departure.

"It is saddening me to a great extent, Comrade Jackson," he said, "this perpetual parting of the ways. When I think of the happy moments we have spent hand-in-hand across the seas, it fills me with a certain melancholy to have you flitting off in this manner without me. Yet there is another side to the picture. To me there is something singularly impressive in our unhesitating reply to the calls of Duty. Your Duty summons you to Philadelphia, to knock the cover off the local bowling. Mine retains me here, to play my part in the great work of making New York sit up. By the time you return, with a century or two, I trust, in your bag, the good work should, I fancy, be getting something of a move on. I will complete the arrangements with regard to the flat."

After leaving Pleasant Street they had found Fourth Avenue by a devious route, and had opened negotiations for a large flat near Thirtieth Street. It was immediately above a saloon, which was something of a drawback, but the landlord had assured them that the voices of the revellers did not penetrate to it.

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When the ferry-boat had borne Mike off across the river, Psmith turned to stroll to the office of Cosy Moments. The day was fine, and on the whole, despite Mike's desertion, he felt pleased with life. Psmith's was a nature which required a certain amount of stimulus in the way of gentle excitement; and it seemed to him that the conduct of the remodelled Cosy Moments might supply this. He liked Billy Windsor, and looked forward to a not unenjoyable time till Mike should return.

The offices of Cosy Moments were in a large building in the street off Madison Avenue. They consisted of a sort of outer lair, where Pugsy Maloney spent his time reading tales of life in the prairies and heading off undesirable visitors; a small room, which would have belonged to the stenographer if Cosy Moments had possessed one; and a larger room beyond, which was the editorial sanctum.

As Psmith passed through the front door, Pugsy Maloney rose.

"Say!" said Master Maloney.

"Say on, Comrade Maloney," said Psmith.

"Dey're in dere."

"Who, precisely?"

"A whole bunch of dem."

Psmith inspected Master Maloney through his eye-glass. "Can you give me any particulars?" he asked patiently. "You are well-meaning, but vague, Comrade Maloney. Who are in there?"

"De whole bunch of dem. Dere's Mr. Asher and the Rev. Philpotts and a gazebo what calls himself Waterman and about 'steen more of dem."

A faint smile appeared upon Psmith's face.

"And is Comrade Windsor in there, too, in the middle of them?"

"Nope. Mr. Windsor's out to lunch."

"Comrade Windsor knows his business. Why did you let them in?"

"Sure, dey just butted in," said Master Maloney complainingly. "I was sittin' here, readin' me book, when de foist of de guys blew in. 'Boy,' says he, 'is de editor in?' 'Nope,' I says. 'I'll go in an' wait,' says he. 'Nuttin' doin',' says I. 'Nix on de goin' in act.' I might as well have saved me breat'. In he butts, and he's in der now. Well, in about t'ree minutes along comes another

gazebo. 'Boy,' says he, 'is de editor in?' 'Nope,' I says. 'I'll wait,' says he lightin' out for de door. Wit dat I sees de proposition's too fierce for muh. I can't keep dese big husky guys out if dey's for buttin' in. So when de rest of de bunch comes along, I don't try to give dem de t'run down. I says, 'Well, gents,' I says, 'it's up to youse. De editor ain't in, but if youse wants to join de giddy t'rong, push t'roo inter de inner room. I can't be boddered.'"

"And what more could you have said?" agreed Psmith approvingly.

"Tell me, Comrade Maloney, what was the general average aspect of these determined spirits?"

"Huh?"

"Did they seem to you to be gay, lighthearted? Did they carol snatches of song as they went? Or did they appear to be looking for some one with a hatchet?"

"Dey was hoppin'-mad, de whole bunch of dem."

"As I suspected. But we must not repine, Comrade Maloney. These trifling contretemps are the penalties we pay for our high journalistic aims. I will interview these merchants. I fancy that with the aid of the Diplomatic Smile and the Honeyed Word I may manage to pull through. It is as well, perhaps, that Comrade

Windsor is out. The situation calls for the handling of a man of delicate culture and nice tact. Comrade Windsor would probably have endeavoured to clear the room with a chair. If he should arrive during the seance, Comrade Maloney, be so good as to inform him of the state of affairs, and tell him not to come in. Give him my compliments, and tell him to go out and watch the snowdrops growing in Madison Square Garden."

"Sure," said Master Maloney.

Then Psmith, having smoothed the nap of his hat and flicked a speck of dust from his coat-sleeve, walked to the door of the inner room and went in.