

## CHAPTER IX

### FULL STEAM AHEAD

When Psmith returned to the office, he found Billy Windsor in the doorway, just parting from a thick-set young man, who seemed to be expressing his gratitude to the editor for some good turn. He was shaking him warmly by the hand.

Psmith stood aside to let him pass.

"An old college chum, Comrade Windsor?" he asked.

"That was Kid Brady."

"The name is unfamiliar to me. Another contributor?"

"He's from my part of the country--Wyoming. He wants to fight any one in the world at a hundred and thirty-three pounds."

"We all have our hobbies. Comrade Brady appears to have selected a somewhat exciting one. He would find stamp-collecting less exacting."

"It hasn't given him much excitement so far, poor chap," said Billy Windsor. "He's in the championship class, and here he has been

pottering about New York for a month without being able to get a fight. It's always the way in this rotten East," continued Billy, warming up as was his custom when discussing a case of oppression and injustice. "It's all graft here. You've got to let half a dozen brutes dip into every dollar you earn, or you don't get a chance. If the kid had a manager, he'd get all the fights he wanted. And the manager would get nearly all the money. I've told him that we will back him up."

"You have hit it, Comrade Windsor," said Psmith with enthusiasm. "Cosy Moments shall be Comrade Brady's manager. We will give him a much-needed boost up in our columns. A sporting section is what the paper requires more than anything."

"If things go on as they've started, what it will require still more will be a fighting-editor. Pugsy tells me you had visitors while I was out."

"A few," said Psmith. "One or two very entertaining fellows. Comrades Asher, Philpotts, and others. I have just been giving them a bite of lunch at the Knickerbocker."

"Lunch!"

"A most pleasant little lunch. We are now as brothers. I fear I have made you perhaps a shade unpopular with our late contributors;

but these things must be. We must clench our teeth and face them manfully. If I were you, I think I should not drop in at the house of Comrade Asher and the rest to take pot-luck for some little time to come. In order to soothe the squad I was compelled to curse you to some extent."

"Don't mind me."

"I think I may say I didn't."

"Say, look here, you must charge up the price of that lunch to the office. Necessary expenses, you know."

"I could not dream of doing such a thing, Comrade Windsor. The whole affair was a great treat to me. I have few pleasures. Comrade Asher alone was worth the money. I found his society intensely interesting. I have always believed in the Darwinian theory. Comrade Asher confirmed my views."

They went into the inner office. Psmith removed his hat and coat.

"And now once more to work," he said. "Psmith the flaneur of Fifth Avenue ceases to exist. In his place we find Psmith the hard-headed sub-editor. Be so good as to indicate a job of work for me, Comrade Windsor. I am champing at my bit."

Billy Windsor sat down, and lit his pipe.

"What we want most," he said thoughtfully, "is some big topic. That's the only way to get a paper going. Look at Everybody's Magazine. They didn't amount to a row of beans till Lawson started his 'Frenzied Finance' articles. Directly they began, the whole country was squealing for copies. Everybody's put up their price from ten to fifteen cents, and now they lead the field."

"The country must squeal for Cosy Moments," said Psmith firmly. "I fancy I have a scheme which may not prove wholly scaly. Wandering yesterday with Comrade Jackson in a search for Fourth Avenue, I happened upon a spot called Pleasant Street. Do you know it?"

Billy Windsor nodded.

"I went down there once or twice when I was a reporter. It's a beastly place."

"It is a singularly beastly place. We went into one of the houses."

"They're pretty bad."

"Who owns them?"

"I don't know. Probably some millionaire. Those tenement houses

are about as paying an investment as you can have."

"Hasn't anybody ever tried to do anything about them?"

"Not so far as I know. It's pretty difficult to get at these fellows, you see. But they're fierce, aren't they, those houses!"

"What," asked Psmith, "is the precise difficulty of getting at these merchants?"

"Well, it's this way. There are all sorts of laws about the places, but any one who wants can get round them as easy as falling off a log. The law says a tenement house is a building occupied by more than two families. Well, when there's a fuss, all the man has to do is to clear out all the families but two. Then, when the inspector fellow comes along, and says, let's say, 'Where's your running water on each floor? That's what the law says you've got to have, and here are these people having to go downstairs and out of doors to fetch their water supplies,' the landlord simply replies, 'Nothing doing. This isn't a tenement house at all. There are only two families here.' And when the fuss has blown over, back come the rest of the crowd, and things go on the same as before."

"I see," said Psmith. "A very cheery scheme."

"Then there's another thing. You can't get hold of the man who's

really responsible, unless you're prepared to spend thousands ferreting out evidence. The land belongs in the first place to some corporation or other. They lease it to a lessee. When there's a fuss, they say they aren't responsible, it's up to the lessee. And he lies so low that you can't find out who he is. It's all just like the East. Everything in the East is as crooked as Pearl Street. If you want a square deal, you've got to come out Wyoming way."

"The main problem, then," said Psmith, "appears to be the discovery of the lessee, lad? Surely a powerful organ like *Cosy Moments*, with its vast ramifications, could bring off a thing like that?"

"I doubt it. We'll try, anyway. There's no knowing but what we may have luck."

"Precisely," said Psmith. "Full steam ahead, and trust to luck. The chances are that, if we go on long enough, we shall eventually arrive somewhere. After all, Columbus didn't know that America existed when he set out. All he knew was some highly interesting fact about an egg. What that was, I do not at the moment recall, but it bucked Columbus up like a tonic. It made him fizz ahead like a two-year-old. The facts which will nerve us to effort are two. In the first place, we know that there must be some one at the bottom of the business. Secondly, as there appears to be no law of libel whatsoever in this great and free country, we shall be enabled to

haul up our slacks with a considerable absence of restraint."

"Sure," said Billy Windsor. "Which of us is going to write the first article?"

"You may leave it to me, Comrade Windsor. I am no hardened old journalist, I fear, but I have certain qualifications for the post. A young man once called at the office of a certain newspaper, and asked for a job. 'Have you any special line?' asked the editor. 'Yes,' said the bright lad, 'I am rather good at invective.' 'Any special kind of invective?' queried the man up top. 'No,' replied our hero, 'just general invective.' Such is my own case, Comrade Windsor. I am a very fair purveyor of good, general invective. And as my visit to Pleasant Street is of such recent date, I am tolerably full of my subject. Taking full advantage of the benevolent laws of this country governing libel, I fancy I will produce a screed which will make this anonymous lessee feel as if he had inadvertently seated himself upon a tin-tack. Give me pen and paper, Comrade Windsor, instruct Comrade Maloney to suspend his whistling till such time as I am better able to listen to it; and I think we have got a success."