

## CHAPTER XX. THE-SAUSAGE-CHAPPIE-CLICKS

Rendered restless by relief, Bill Brewster did not linger long at the luncheon-table. Shortly after Reggie van Tuyl had retired, he got up and announced his intention of going for a bit of a walk to calm his excited mind. Archie dismissed him with a courteous wave of the hand; and, beckoning to the Sausage Chappie, who in his role of waiter was hovering near, requested him to bring the best cigar the hotel could supply. The padded seat in which he sat was comfortable; he had no engagements; and it seemed to him that a pleasant half-hour could be passed in smoking dreamily and watching his fellow-men eat.

The grill-room had filled up. The Sausage Chappie, having brought Archie his cigar, was attending to a table close by, at which a woman with a small boy in a sailor suit had seated themselves. The woman was engrossed with the bill of fare, but the child's attention seemed riveted upon the Sausage Chappie. He was drinking him in with wide eyes. He seemed to be brooding on him.

Archie, too, was brooding on the Sausage Chappie. The latter made an excellent waiter: he was brisk and attentive, and did the work as if he liked it; but Archie was not satisfied. Something seemed to tell him that the man was fitted for higher things. Archie was a grateful soul. That sausage, coming at the end of a five-hour hike, had made a deep impression on his plastic nature. Reason told him that only an

exceptional man could have parted with half a sausage at such a moment; and he could not feel that a job as waiter at a New York hotel was an adequate job for an exceptional man. Of course, the root of the trouble lay in the fact that the fellow could not remember what his real life-work had been before the war. It was exasperating to reflect, as the other moved away to take his order to the kitchen, that there, for all one knew, went the dickens of a lawyer or doctor or architect or what not.

His meditations were broken by the voice of the child.

"Mummie," asked the child interestedly, following the Sausage Chappie with his eyes as the latter disappeared towards the kitchen, "why has that man got such a funny face?"

"Hush, darling."

"Yes, but why HAS he?"

"I don't know, darling."

The child's faith in the maternal omniscience seemed to have received a shock. He had the air of a seeker after truth who has been baffled. His eyes roamed the room discontentedly.

"He's got a funnier face than that man there," he said, pointing to

Archie.

"Hush, darling!"

"But he has. Much funnier."

In a way it was a sort of compliment, but Archie felt embarrassed. He withdrew coyly into the cushioned recess. Presently the Sausage Chappie returned, attended to the needs of the woman and the child, and came over to Archie. His homely face was beaming.

"Say, I had a big night last night," he said, leaning on the table.

"Yes?" said Archie. "Party or something?"

"No, I mean I suddenly began to remember things. Something seems to have happened to the works."

Archie sat up excitedly. This was great news.

"No, really? My dear old lad, this is absolutely topping. This is priceless."

"Yessir! First thing I remembered was that I was born at Springfield, Ohio. It was like a mist starting to life. Springfield, Ohio. That was it. It suddenly came back to me."

"Splendid! Anything else?"

"Yessir! Just before I went to sleep I remembered my name as well."

Archie was stirred to his depths.

"Why, the thing's a walk-over!" he exclaimed. "Now you've once got started, nothing can stop you. What is your name?"

"Why, it's--That's funny! It's gone again. I have an idea it began with an S. What was it? Skeffington? Skillington?"

"Sanderson?"

"No; I'll get it in a moment. Cunningham? Carrington? Wilberforce? Debenham?"

"Dennison?" suggested Archie, helpfully.--"No, no, no. It's on the tip of my tongue. Barrington? Montgomery? Hepplethwaite? I've got it! Smith!"

"By Jove! Really?"

"Certain of it."

"What's the first name?"

An anxious expression came into the man's eyes. He hesitated. He lowered his voice.

"I have a horrible feeling that it's Lancelot!"

"Good God!" said Archie.

"It couldn't really be that, could it?"

Archie looked grave. He hated to give pain, but he felt he must be honest.

"It might," he said. "People give their children all sorts of rummy names. My second name's Tracy. And I have a pal in England who was christened Cuthbert de la Hay Horace. Fortunately everyone calls him Stinker."

The head-waiter began to drift up like a bank of fog, and the Sausage Chappie returned to his professional duties. When he came back, he was beaming again.

"Something else I remembered," he said, removing the cover. "I'm married!"

"Good Lord!"

"At least I was before the war. She had blue eyes and brown hair and a Pekingese dog."

"What was her name?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you're coming on," said Archie. "I'll admit that. You've still got a bit of a way to go before you become like one of those blighters who take the Memory Training Courses in the magazine advertisements--I mean to say, you know, the lads who meet a fellow once for five minutes, and then come across him again ten years later and grasp him by the hand and say, 'Surely this is Mr. Watkins of Seattle?' Still, you're doing fine. You only need patience. Everything comes to him who waits." Archie sat up, electrified. "I say, by Jove, that's rather good, what! Everything comes to him who waits, and you're a waiter, what, what. I mean to say, what!"

"Mummie," said the child at the other table, still speculative, "do you think something trod on his face?"

"Hush, darling."

"Perhaps it was bitten by something?"

"Eat your nice fish, darling," said the mother, who seemed to be one of those dull-witted persons whom it is impossible to interest in a discussion on first causes.

Archie felt stimulated. Not even the advent of his father-in-law, who came in a few moments later and sat down at the other end of the room, could depress his spirits.

The Sausage Chappie came to his table again.

"It's a funny thing," he said. "Like waking up after you've been asleep. Everything seems to be getting clearer. The dog's name was Marie. My wife's dog, you know. And she had a mole on her chin."

"The dog?"

"No. My wife. Little beast! She bit me in the leg once."

"Your wife?"

"No. The dog. Good Lord!" said the Sausage Chappie.

Archie looked up and followed his gaze.

A couple of tables away, next to a sideboard on which the management

exposed for view the cold meats and puddings and pies mentioned in volume two of the bill of fare ("Buffet Froid"), a man and a girl had just seated themselves. The man was stout and middle-aged. He bulged in practically every place in which a man can bulge, and his head was almost entirely free from hair. The girl was young and pretty. Her eyes were blue. Her hair was brown. She had a rather attractive little mole on the left side of her chin.

"Good Lord!" said the Sausage Chappie.

"Now what?" said Archie.

"Who's that? Over at the table there?"

Archie, through long attendance at the Cosmopolis Grill, knew most of the habitués by sight.

"That's a man named Gossett. James J. Gossett. He's a motion-picture man. You must have seen his name around."

"I don't mean him. Who's the girl?"

"I've never seen her before."

"It's my wife!" said the Sausage Chappie.



"Your wife!"

"Yes!"

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure!"

"Well, well, well!" said Archie. "Many happy returns of the day!"

At the other table, the girl, unconscious of the drama which was about to enter her life, was engrossed in conversation with the stout man. And at this moment the stout man leaned forward and patted her on the cheek.

It was a paternal pat, the pat which a genial uncle might bestow on a favourite niece, but it did not strike the Sausage Chappie in that light. He had been advancing on the table at a fairly rapid pace, and now, stirred to his depths, he bounded forward with a hoarse cry.

Archie was at some pains to explain to his father-in-law later that, if the management left cold pies and things about all over the place, this sort of thing was bound to happen sooner or later. He urged that it was putting temptation in people's way, and that Mr. Brewster had only himself to blame. Whatever the rights of the case, the Buffet Froid undoubtedly came in remarkably handy at this crisis in the Sausage Chappie's life. He had almost reached the sideboard when the stout man

patted the girl's cheek, and to seize a huckleberry pie was with him the work of a moment. The next instant the pie had whizzed past the other's head and burst like a shell against the wall.

There are, no doubt, restaurants where this sort of thing would have excited little comment, but the Cosmopolis was not one of them. Everybody had something to say, but the only one among those present who had anything sensible to say was the child in the sailor suit.

"Do it again!" said the child, cordially.

The Sausage Chappie did it again. He took up a fruit salad, poised it for a moment, then decanted it over Mr. Gossett's bald head. The child's happy laughter rang over the restaurant. Whatever anybody else might think of the affair, this child liked it and was prepared to go on record to that effect.

Epic events have a stunning quality. They paralyse the faculties. For a moment there was a pause. The world stood still. Mr. Brewster bubbled inarticulately. Mr. Gossett dried himself sketchily with a napkin. The Sausage Chappie snorted.

The girl had risen to her feet and was staring wildly.

"John!" she cried.

Even at this moment of crisis the Sausage Chappie was able to look relieved.

"So it is!" he said. "And I thought it was Lancelot!"

"I thought you were dead!"

"I'm not!" said the Sausage Chappie.

Mr. Gossett, speaking thickly through the fruit-salad, was understood to say that he regretted this. And then confusion broke loose again. Everybody began to talk at once.

"I say!" said Archie. "I say! One moment!"

Of the first stages of this interesting episode Archie had been a paralysed spectator. The thing had numbed him. And then--

Sudden a thought came, like a full-blown rose.

Flushing his brow.

When he reached the gesticulating group, he was calm and business-like. He had a constructive policy to suggest.

"I say," he said. "I've got an idea!"

"Go away!" said Mr. Brewster. "This is bad enough without you butting in."

Archie quelled him with a gesture.

"Leave us," he said. "We would be alone. I want to have a little business-talk with Mr. Gossett." He turned to the movie-magnate, who was gradually emerging from the fruit-salad rather after the manner of a stout Venus rising from the sea. "Can you spare me a moment of your valuable time?"

"I'll have him arrested!"

"Don't you do it, laddie. Listen!"

"The man's mad. Throwing pies!"

Archie attached himself to his coat-button.

"Be calm, laddie. Calm and reasonable!"

For the first time Mr. Gossett seemed to become aware that what he had been looking on as a vague annoyance was really an individual.

"Who the devil are you?"

Archie drew himself up with dignity.

"I am this gentleman's representative," he replied, indicating the Sausage Chappie with a motion of the hand. "His jolly old personal representative. I act for him. And on his behalf I have a pretty ripe proposition to lay before you. Reflect, dear old bean," he proceeded earnestly. "Are you going to let this chance slip? The opportunity of a lifetime which will not occur again. By Jove, you ought to rise up and embrace this bird. You ought to clasp the chappie to your bosom! He has thrown pies at you, hasn't he? Very well. You are a movie-magnate. Your whole fortune is founded on chappies who throw pies. You probably scour the world for chappies who throw pies. Yet, when one comes right to you without any fuss or trouble and demonstrates before your very eyes the fact that he is without a peer as a pie-propeller, you get the wind up and talk about having him arrested. Consider! (There's a bit of cherry just behind your left ear.) Be sensible. Why let your personal feeling stand in the way of doing yourself a bit of good? Give this chappie a job and give it him quick, or we go elsewhere. Did you ever see Fatty Arbuckle handle pastry with a surer touch? Has Charlie Chaplin got this fellow's speed and control. Absolutely not. I tell you, old friend, you're in danger of throwing away a good thing!"

He paused. The Sausage Chappie beamed.

"I've always wanted to go into the movies," he said. "I was an actor before the war. Just remembered."

Mr. Brewster attempted to speak. Archie waved him down.

"How many times have I got to tell you not to butt in?" he said, severely.

Mr. Gossett's militant demeanour had become a trifle modified during Archie's harangue. First and foremost a man of business, Mr. Gossett was not insensible to the arguments which had been put forward. He brushed a slice of orange from the back of his neck, and mused awhile.

"How do I know this fellow would screen well?" he said, at length.

"Screen well!" cried Archie. "Of course he'll screen well. Look at his face. I ask you! The map! I call your attention to it." He turned apologetically to the Sausage Chappie. "Awfully sorry, old lad, for dwelling on this, but it's business, you know." He turned to Mr. Gossett. "Did you ever see a face like that? Of course not. Why should I, as this gentleman's personal representative, let a face like that go to waste? There's a fortune in it. By Jove, I'll give you two minutes to think the thing over, and, if you don't talk business then, I'll jolly well take my man straight round to Mack Sennett or someone. We don't have to ask for jobs. We consider offers."

There was a silence. And then the clear voice of the child in the sailor suit made itself heard again.

"Mummie!"

"Yes, darling?"

"Is the man with the funny face going to throw any more pies?"

"No, darling."

The child uttered a scream of disappointed fury.

"I want the funny man to throw some more pies! I want the funny man to throw some more pies!"

A look almost of awe came into Mr. Gossett's face. He had heard the voice of the Public. He had felt the beating of the Public's pulse.

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings," he said, picking a piece of banana off his right eyebrow, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. Come round to my office!"