

## CHAPTER V

### THE MORNING AFTER

Bayliss took a spectacle-case from the recesses of his costume, opened it, took out a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, dived into the jungle again, came out with a handkerchief, polished the spectacles, put them on his nose, closed the case, restored it to its original position, replaced the handkerchief, and took up the paper.

"Why the hesitation, Bayliss? Why the coyness?" enquired Jimmy, lying with closed eyes. "Begin!"

"I was adjusting my glasses, sir."

"All set now?"

"Yes, sir. Shall I read the headlines first?"

"Read everything."

The butler cleared his throat.

"Good Heavens, Bayliss," moaned Jimmy, starting, "don't gargle. Have a heart! Go on!"

Bayliss began to read.

FRACAS IN FASHIONABLE NIGHT-CLUB

SPRIGS OF NOBILITY BRAWL

Jimmy opened his eyes, interested.

"Am I a sprig of nobility?"

"It is what the paper says, sir."

"We live and learn. Carry on."

The butler started to clear his throat, but checked himself.

SENSATIONAL INTERNATIONAL CONTEST

BATTLING PERCY

(England)

v

CYCLONE JIM

(America)

FULL DESCRIPTION BY OUR EXPERT

Jimmy sat up.

"Bayliss, you're indulging that distorted sense of humour of yours again. That isn't in the paper?"

"Yes, sir. Very large headlines."

Jimmy groaned.

"Bayliss, I'll give you a piece of advice which may be useful to you when you grow up. Never go about with newspaper men. It all comes back to me. Out of pure kindness of heart I took young Bill Blake of the Sun to supper at the Six Hundred last night. This is my reward. I suppose he thinks it funny. Newspaper men are a low lot, Bayliss."

"Shall I go on, sir?"

"Most doubtless. Let me hear all."

Bayliss resumed. He was one of those readers who, whether their

subject be a murder case or a funny anecdote, adopt a measured and sepulchral delivery which gives a suggestion of tragedy and horror to whatever they read. At the church which he attended on Sundays, of which he was one of the most influential and respected members, children would turn pale and snuggle up to their mothers when Bayliss read the lessons. Young Mr. Blake's account of the overnight proceedings at the Six Hundred Club he rendered with a gloomy gusto more marked even than his wont. It had a topical interest for him which urged him to extend himself.

"At an early hour this morning, when our myriad readers were enjoying that refreshing and brain-restoring sleep so necessary to the proper appreciation of the Daily Sun at the breakfast table, one of the most interesting sporting events of the season was being pulled off at the Six Hundred Club in Regent Street, where, after three rounds of fast exchanges, James B. Crocker, the well-known American welter-weight scrapper, succeeded in stopping Lord Percy Whipple, second son of the Duke of Devizes, better known as the Pride of Old England. Once again the superiority of the American over the English style of boxing was demonstrated. Battling Percy has a kind heart, but Cyclone Jim packs the punch."

"The immediate cause of the encounter had to do with a disputed table, which each gladiator claimed to have

engaged in advance over the telephone."

"I begin to remember," said Jimmy meditatively. "A pill with butter-coloured hair tried to jump my claim. Honeyed words proving fruitless, I soaked him on the jaw. It may be that I was not wholly myself. I seem to remember an animated session at the Empire earlier in the evening, which may have impaired my self-control. Proceed!"

"One word leading to others, which in their turn led to several more, Cyclone Jim struck Battling Percy on what our rude forefathers were accustomed to describe as the mazzard, and the gong sounded for

#### "ROUND ONE

"Both men came up fresh and eager to mix things, though it seems only too probable that they had already been mixing more things than was good for them. Battling Percy tried a right swing which got home on a waiter. Cyclone Jim put in a rapid one-two punch which opened a large gash in the atmosphere. Both men sparred cautiously, being hampered in their movements by the fact, which neither had at this stage of the proceedings perceived, that they were on opposite sides of the disputed table. A clever Fitzsimmons' shift on the part of the Battler removed this obstacle,

and some brisk work ensued in neutral territory. Percy landed twice without a return. The Battler's round by a shade.

#### "ROUND TWO

"The Cyclone came out of his corner with a rush, getting home on the Battler's shirt-front and following it up with a right to the chin. Percy swung wildly and upset a bottle of champagne on a neighbouring table. A good rally followed, both men doing impressive in-fighting. The Cyclone landed three without a return. The Cyclone's round.

#### "ROUND THREE

"Percy came up weak, seeming to be overtrained. The Cyclone waded in, using both hands effectively. The Battler fell into a clinch, but the Cyclone broke away and, measuring his distance, picked up a haymaker from the floor and put it over. Percy down and out.

"Interviewed by our representative after the fight, Cyclone Jim said: 'The issue was never in doubt. I was handicapped at the outset by the fact that I was under the impression that I was fighting three twin-brothers, and I

missed several opportunities of putting over the winning wallop by attacking the outside ones. It was only in the second round that I decided to concentrate my assault on the one in the middle, when the affair speedily came to a conclusion. I shall not adopt pugilism as a profession. The prizes are attractive, but it is too much like work."

Bayliss ceased, and silence fell upon the room.

"Is that all?"

"That is all, sir."

"And about enough."

"Very true, sir."

"You know, Bayliss," said Jimmy thoughtfully, rolling over on the couch, "life is peculiar, not to say odd. You never know what is waiting for you round the corner. You start the day with the fairest prospects, and before nightfall everything is as rocky and ding-basted as stig tossed full of doodlegammon. Why is this, Bayliss?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"Look at me. I go out to spend a happy evening, meaning no harm to any one, and I come back all blue with the blood of the aristocracy. We now come to a serious point. Do you think my lady stepmother has read that sporting chronicle?"

"I fancy not, Mr. James."

"On what do you base these words of comfort?"

"Mrs. Crocker does not read the halfpenny papers, sir."

"True! She does not. I had forgotten. On the other hand the probability that she will learn about the little incident from other sources is great. I think the merest prudence suggests that I keep out of the way for the time being, lest I be fallen upon and questioned. I am not equal to being questioned this morning. I have a headache which starts at the soles of my feet and gets worse all the way up. Where is my stepmother?"

"Mrs. Crocker is in her room, Mr. James. She ordered the car to be brought round at once. It should be here at any moment now, sir. I think Mrs. Crocker intends to visit the Park before luncheon."

"Is she lunching out?"



"Yes, sir."

"Then, if I pursue the excellent common-sense tactics of the lesser sand-eel, which as you doubtless know buries itself tail upwards in the mud on hearing the baying of the eel-hounds and remains in that position till the danger is past, I shall be able to postpone an interview. Should you be questioned as to my whereabouts, inflate your chest and reply in a clear and manly voice that I have gone out, you know not where. May I rely on your benevolent neutrality, Bayliss?"

"Very good, Mr. James."

"I think I will go and sit in my father's den. A man may lie hid there with some success as a rule."

Jimmy heaved himself painfully off the sofa, blinked, and set out for the den, where his father, in a deep arm-chair, was smoking a restful pipe and reading the portions of the daily papers which did not deal with the game of cricket.

Mr. Crocker's den was a small room at the back of the house. It was not luxurious, and it looked out onto a blank wall, but it was the spot he liked best in all that vast pile which had once echoed to the tread of titled shoes; for, as he sometimes observed to his son, it had the distinction of being the only

room on the ground floor where a fellow could move without stubbing his toe on a countess or an honourable. In this peaceful backwater he could smoke a pipe, put his feet up, take off his coat, and generally indulge in that liberty and pursuit of happiness to which the Constitution entitles a free-born American. Nobody ever came there except Jimmy and himself.

He did not suspend his reading at his son's entrance. He muttered a welcome through the clouds, but he did not raise his eyes. Jimmy took the other arm-chair, and began to smoke silently. It was the unwritten law of the den that soothing silence rather than aimless chatter should prevail. It was not until a quarter of an hour had passed that Mr. Crocker dropped his paper and spoke.

"Say, Jimmy, I want to talk to you."

"Say on. You have our ear."

"Seriously."

"Continue--always, however, keeping before you the fact that I am a sick man. Last night was a wild night on the moors, dad."

"It's about your stepmother. She was talking at breakfast about you. She's sore at you for giving Spike Dillon lunch at the

Carlton. You oughtn't to have taken him there, Jimmy. That's what got her goat. She was there with a bunch of swells and they had to sit and listen to Spike talking about his half-scissors hook."

"What's their kick against Spike's half-scissors hook? It's a darned good one."

"She said she was going to speak to you about it. I thought I'd let you know."

"Thanks, dad. But was that all?"

"All."

"All that she was going to speak to me about? Sure there was nothing else?"

"She didn't say anything about anything else."

"Then she doesn't know! Fine!"

Mr. Crocker's feet came down from the mantelpiece with a crash.

"Jimmy! You haven't been raising Cain again?"

"No, no, dad. Nothing serious. High-spirited Young Patrician

stuff, the sort of thing that's expected of a fellow in my position."

Mr. Crocker was not to be comforted.

"Jimmy, you've got to pull up. Honest, you have. I don't care for myself. I like to see a boy having a good time. But your stepmother says you're apt to queer us with the people up top, the way you're going on. Lord knows I wouldn't care if things were different, but I'll tell you exactly how I stand. I didn't get wise till this morning. Your stepmother sprang it on me suddenly. I've often wondered what all this stuff was about, this living in London and trailing the swells. I couldn't think what was your stepmother's idea. Now I know. Jimmy, she's trying to get them to make me a peer!"

"What!"

"Just that. And she says--"

"But, dad, this is rich! This is comedy of a high order! A peer! Good Heavens, if it comes off, what shall I be? This title business is all so complicated. I know I should have to change my name to Hon. Rollo Cholmondeley or the Hon. Aubrey Marjoribanks, but what I want to know is which? I want to be prepared for the worst."

"And you see, Jimmy, these people up top, the guys who arrange the giving of titles, are keeping an eye on you, because you would have the title after me and naturally they don't want to get stung. I gathered all that from your stepmother. Say, Jimmy, I'm not asking a lot of you, but there is just one thing you can do for me without putting yourself out too much."

"I'll do it, dad, if it kills me. Slip me the info!"

"Your stepmother's friend Lady Corstorphine's nephew . . ."

"It's not the sort of story to ask a man with a headache to follow. I hope it gets simpler as it goes along."

"Your stepmother wants you to be a good fellow and make friends with this boy. You see, his father is in right with the Premier and has the biggest kind of a pull when it comes to handing out titles."

"Is that all you want? Leave it to me. Inside of a week I'll be playing kiss-in-the-ring with him. The whole force of my sunny personality shall be directed towards making him love me. What's his name?"

"Lord Percy Whipple."

Jimmy's pipe fell with a clatter.

"Dad, pull yourself together! Reflect! You know you don't seriously mean Lord Percy Whipple."

"Eh?"

Jimmy laid a soothing hand on his father's shoulder.

"Dad, prepare yourself for the big laugh. This is where you throw your head back and roar with honest mirth. I met Lord Percy Whipple last night at the Six Hundred Club. Words ensued. I fell upon Percy and beat his block off! How it started, except that we both wanted the same table, I couldn't say. 'Why, that I cannot tell,' said he, 'but 'twas a famous victory!' If I had known, dad, nothing would have induced me to lay a hand upon Perce, save in the way of kindness, but, not even knowing who he was, it would appear from contemporary accounts of the affair that I just naturally sailed in and expunged the poor, dear boy!"

The stunning nature of this information had much the same effect on Mr. Crocker as the announcement of his ruin has upon the Good Old Man in melodrama. He sat clutching the arms of his chair and staring into space, saying nothing. Dismay was written upon his anguished countenance.

His collapse sobered Jimmy. For the first time he perceived that the situation had another side than the humorous one which had appealed to him. He had anticipated that Mr. Crocker, who as a general thing shared his notions of what was funny and could be relied on to laugh in the right place, would have been struck, like himself, by the odd and pleasing coincidence of his having picked on for purposes of assault and battery the one young man with whom his stepmother wished him to form a firm and lasting friendship. He perceived now that his father was seriously upset. Neither Jimmy nor Mr. Crocker possessed a demonstrative nature, but there had always existed between them the deepest affection. Jimmy loved his father as he loved nobody else in the world, and the thought of having hurt him was like a physical pain. His laughter died away and he set himself with a sinking heart to try to undo the effect of his words.

"I'm awfully sorry, dad. I had no idea you would care. I wouldn't have done a fool thing like that for a million dollars if I'd known. Isn't there anything I can do? Gee whiz! I'll go right round to Percy now and apologise. I'll lick his boots. Don't you worry, dad. I'll make it all right."

The whirl of words roused Mr. Crocker from his thoughts.

"It doesn't matter, Jimmy. Don't worry yourself. It's only a

little unfortunate, because your stepmother says she won't think of our going back to America till these people here have given me a title. She wants to put one over on her sister. That's all that's troubling me, the thought that this affair will set us back, this Lord Percy being in so strong with the guys who give the titles. I guess it will mean my staying on here for a while longer, and I'd liked to have seen another ball-game. Jimmy, do you know they call baseball Rounders in this country, and children play it with a soft ball!"

Jimmy was striding up and down the little room. Remorse had him in its grip.

"What a damned fool I am!"

"Never mind, Jimmy. It's unfortunate, but it wasn't your fault. You couldn't know."

"It was my fault. Nobody but a fool like me would go about beating people up. But don't worry, dad. It's going to be all right. I'll fix it. I'm going right round to this fellow Percy now to make things all right. I won't come back till I've squared him. Don't you bother yourself about it any longer, dad. It's going to be all right."