

CHAPTER XXV

NEARLY EVERYBODY HAPPY

Mrs. Crocker turned to her husband.

"Well, Bingley?" she said, a steely tinkle in her voice.

"Well, Eugenia?" said Mr. Crocker.

A strange light was shining in Mr. Crocker's mild eyes. He had seen a miracle happen that night. He had seen an even more formidable woman than his wife dominated by an even meeker man than himself, and he had been amazed and impressed by the spectacle. It had never even started to occur to him before, but apparently it could be done. A little resolution, a little determination . . . nothing more was needed. He looked at Mr. Pett. And yet Mr. Pett had crumpled up Eugenia's sister with about three firm speeches. It could be done. . . .

"What have you to say, Bingley?"

Mr. Crocker drew himself up.

"Just this!" he said. "I'm an American citizen, and the way I've figured it out is that my place is in America. It's no good

talking about it, Eugenia. I'm sorry if it upsets your plans, but I--am--not--going--back--to--London!" He eyed his speechless wife unflatteringly. "I'm going to stick on here and see the pennant race out. And after that I'm going to take in the World's Series."

Mrs. Crocker opened her mouth to speak, closed it, re-opened it. Then she found that she had nothing to say.

"I hope you'll be sensible, Eugenia, and stay on this side, and we can all be happy. I'm sorry to have to take this stand, but you tried me too high. You're a woman, and you don't know what it is to go five years without seeing a ball game; but take it from me it's more than any real fan can stand. It nearly killed me, and I'm not going to risk it again. If Mr. Pett will keep me on as his butler, I'll stay here in this house. If he won't, I'll get another job somewhere. But, whatever happens, I stick to this side!"

Mr. Pett uttered a whoop of approval.

"There's always been a place for you in my house, old man!" he cried. "When I get a butler who--"

"But, Bingley! How can you be a butler?"

"You ought to watch him!" said Mr. Pett enthusiastically. "He's a wonder! He can pull all the starchy stuff as if he'd lived with the Duke of Whoosis for the last forty years, and then go right off and fling a pop-bottle at an umpire! He's all right!"

The eulogy was wasted on Mrs. Crocker. She burst into tears. It was a new experience for her husband, and he watched her awkwardly, his resolute demeanour crumbling under this unexpected assault.

"Eugenia!"

Mrs. Crocker wiped her eyes.

"I can't stand it!" she sobbed. "I've worked and worked all these years, and now, just as success has nearly come--Bingley, do come back! It will only be for a little longer."

Mr. Crocker stared.

"A little longer? Why, that Lord Percy Whipple business--I know you must have had excellent reasons for soaking him, Jimmy, but it did put the lid on it--surely, after that Lord Percy affair there's no chance--?"

"There is! There is! It has made no difference at all! Lord Percy

came to call next day with a black eye, poor boy!--and said that James was a sportsman and that he wanted to know him better! He said he had never felt so drawn towards any one in his life and he wanted him to show him how he made some blow which he called a right hook. The whole affair has simply endeared James to him, and Lady Corstorphine says that the Duke of Devizes read the account of the fight to the Premier that very evening and they both laughed till they nearly got apoplexy."

Jimmy was deeply touched. He had not suspected such a sporting spirit in his antagonist.

"Percy's all right." he said enthusiastically. "Dad, you ought to go back. It's only fair."

"But, Jimmy! Surely you can understand? There's only a game separating the Giants and the Phillies, with the Braves coming along just behind. And the season only half over!"

Mrs. Crocker looked imploringly at him.

"It will only be for a little while, Bingley. Lady Corstorphine, who has means of knowing, says that your name is certain to be in the next Honours List. After that you can come back as often as you like. We could spend the summer here and the winter in England, or whatever you pleased."

Mr. Crocker capitulated.

"All right, Eugenia. I'll come."

"Bingley! We shall have to go back by the next boat, dear. People are beginning to wonder where you are. I've told them that you are taking a rest in the country. But they will suspect something if you don't come back at once."

Mr. Crocker's face wore a drawn look. He had never felt so attached to his wife as now, when she wept these unexpected tears and begged favours of him with that unfamiliar catch in her voice. On the other hand . . . A vision rose before him of the Polo Grounds on a warm afternoon. . . . He crushed it down.

"Very well," he said.

Mr. Pett offered a word of consolation.

"Maybe you'll be able to run over for the World's Series?"

Mr. Crocker's face cleared.

"That's true."

"And I'll cable you the scores every day, dad," said Jimmy.

Mrs. Crocker looked at him with a touch of disapproval clouding the happiness of her face.

"Are you staying over here, James? There is no reason why you should not come back, too. If you make up your mind to change your habits--"

"I have made up my mind to change them. But I'm going to do it in New York. Mr. Pett is going to give me a job in his office. I am going to start at the bottom and work my way still further down."

Mr. Pett yapped with rapture. He was experiencing something of the emotion of the preacher at the camp-meeting who sees the Sinners' Bench filling up. To have secured Willie Partridge, whom he intended to lead gradually into the realms of high finance by way of envelope-addressing, was much. But that Jimmy, with a choice in the matter, should have chosen the office filled him with such content that he only just stopped himself from dancing on his bad foot.

"Don't worry about me, dad. I shall do wonders. It's quite easy to make a large fortune. I watched uncle Pete in his office this morning, and all he does is sit at a mahogany table and tell the office-boy to tell callers that he has gone away for the day. I

think I ought to rise to great heights in that branch of industry. From the little I have seen of it, it seems to have been made for me!"