Mr. Braddy's Bottle

Richard Connell

1

"This," said Mr. William Lum solemnly, "is the very las' bottle of this stuff in these United States!"

It was a dramatic moment. He held it aloft with the pride and tender care of a recent parent exhibiting a first-born child. Mr. Hugh Braddy emitted a long, low whistle, expressive of the awe due the occasion.

"You don't tell me!" he said.

"Yes, siree! There ain't another bottle of this wonderful old hooch left anywhere. Not anywhere. A man couldn't get one like it for love nor money. Not for love nor money." He paused to regard the bottle fondly. "Nor anything else," he added suddenly.

Mr. Braddy beamed fatly. His moon face—like a two-hundred-and-twenty-pound Kewpie's—wore a look of pride and responsibility. It was his bottle.

"You don't tell me!" he said.

"Yes, siree. Must be all of thirty years old, if it's a day. Mebbe forty. Mebbe fifty. Why, that stuff is worth a dollar a sniff, if it's worth a jit. And you not a drinking man! Wadda pity! Wadda pity!"

There was a shade of envy in Mr. Lum's tone, for Mr. Lum was, or had been, a drinking man; yet Fate, ever perverse, had decreed that Mr. Braddy, teetotaler, should find the ancient bottle while poking about in the cellar of his very modest new house—rented—in that part of Long Island City where small, wooden cottages break out in clusters, here and there, in a species of municipal measles.

Mr. Braddy, on finding the treasure, had immediately summoned Mr. Lum from his larger and more pretentious house near by, as one who would be able to appraise the find, and he and Mr. Lum now stood on the very spot in the cellar where, beneath a pile of old window blinds, the venerable liquor had been found. Mr. Braddy, it was plain, thought very highly of Mr. Lum's opinions, and that great man was good-naturedly tolerant of the more placid and adipose Mr. Braddy, who was known—behind his back—in the rug department of the Great Store as "Ole Hippopotamus." Not that he would have resented it, had the veriest cash boy called him by this

uncomplimentary but descriptive nickname to his face, for Mr. Braddy was the sort of person who never resents anything.

“Y’know, Mr. Lum,” he remarked, crinkling his pink brow in philosophic thought, “sometimes I wish I had been a drinking man. I never minded if a man took a drink. Not that I had any patience with these here booze fighters. No. Enough is enough, I always say. But if a fella wanted to take a drink, outside of business hours, of course, or go off on a spree once in a while—well, I never saw no harm in it. I often wished I could do it myself.”

“Well, why the dooce didn’t you?” inquired Mr. Lum.

“As a matter of solid fact, I was scared to. That’s the truth. I was always scared I’d get pinched or fall down a manhole or something. You see, I never did have much nerve.” This was an unusual burst of confidence on the part of Mr. Braddy, who, since he had moved into Mr. Lum’s neighborhood a month before, had played a listening rôle in his conferences with Mr. Lum, who was a thin, waspy man of forty-four, in ambush behind a fierce pair of mustachios. Mr. Braddy, essence of diffidence that he was, had confined his remarks to “You don’t tell me!” or, occasionally, “Ain’t it the truth?” in the manner of a Greek chorus.

Now inspired, perhaps, by the discovery that he was the owner of a priceless bottle of spirits, he unbosomed himself to Mr. Lum. Mr. Lum made answer.

“Scared to drink? Scared of anything? Bosh! Tommyrot! Everybody’s got nerve. Only some don’t use it,” said Mr. Lum, who owned a book called “The Power House in Man’s Mind,” and who subscribed for, and quoted from, a pamphlet for successful men, called “I Can and I Will.”

“Mebbe,” said Mr. Braddy. “But the first and only time I took a drink I got a bad scare. When I was a young feller, just starting in the rugs in the Great Store, I went out with the gang one night, and, just to be smart, I orders beer. Them was the days when beer was a nickel for a stein a foot tall. The minute I taste the stuff I feel uncomfortable. I don’t dare not drink it, for fear the gang would give me the laugh. So I ups and drinks it, every drop, although it tastes worse and worse. Well, sir, that beer made me sicker than a dog. I haven’t tried any drink stronger than malted milk since. And that was all of twenty years ago. It wasn’t that I thought a little drinking a sin. I was just scared; that’s all. Some of the other fellows in the rugs drank—till they passed a law against it. Why, I once seen Charley Freedman sell a party a genuine, expensive Bergamo rug for two dollars and a half when he was pickled. But when he was sober there wasn’t a better salesman in the rugs.”

Mr. Lum offered no comment; he was weighing the cob-webbed bottle in his hand, and

holding it to the light in a vain attempt to peer through the golden-brown fluid. Mr. Braddy went on:

"I guess I was born timid. I dunno. I wanted to join a lodge, but I was scared of the 'nitiation. I wanted to move out to Jersey, but I didn't. Why, all by life I've wanted to take a Turkish bath; but somehow, every time I got to the door of the place I got cold feet and backed out. I wanted a raise, too, and by golly, between us, I believe they'd give it to me; but I keep putting off asking for it and putting off and putting off——"

"I was like that—once," put in Mr. Lum. "But it don't pay. I'd still be selling shoes in the Great Store—and looking at thousands of feet every day and saying thousands of times, 'Yes, madam, this is a three-A, and very smart, too,' when it is really a six-D and looks like hell on her. No wonder I took a drink or two in those days."

He set down the bottle and flared up with a sudden, fierce bristling of his mustaches.

"And now they have to come along and take a man's liquor away from him—drat 'em! What did our boys fight for? Liberty, I say. And then, after being mowed down in France, they come home to find the country dry! It ain't fair, I say. Of course, don't think for a minute that I mind losing the licker. Not me. I always could take it or leave it alone. But what I hate is having them say a man can't drink this and he can't drink that. They'll be getting after our smokes, next. I read in the paper last night a piece that asked something that's been on my mind a long time: 'Whither are we drifting?' "

"I dunno," said Mr. Braddy.

"You'd think," went on Mr. Lum, not heeding, as a sense of oppression and injustice surged through him, "that liquor harmed men. As if it harmed anybody but the drunkards! Liquor never hurt a successful man; no, siree. Look at me!"

Mr. Braddy looked. He had heard Mr. Lum make the speech that customarily followed this remark a number of times, but it never failed to interest him.

"Look at me!" said Mr. Lum, slapping his chest. "Buyer in the shoes in the Great Store, and that ain't so worse, if I do say it myself. That's what nerve did. What if I did used to get a snootful now and then? I had the self-confidence, and that did the trick. When old man Briggs croaked, I heard that the big boss was looking around outside the store for a man to take his place as buyer in the shoes. So I goes right to the boss, and I says, 'Look here, Mr. Berger, I been in the shoes eighteen years, and I know shoes from A to Z, and back again. I can fill Briggs' shoes,' I says. And that gets him laughing, although I didn't mean it that way, for I don't think humor has any place in business.

" 'Well,' he says, 'you certainly got confidence in yourself. I'll see what you can do in Briggs' job. It will pay forty a week.' I knew old Briggs was getting more than forty, and I could see that Berger needed me, so I spins on him and I laughs in his face. 'Forty popcorn balls!' I says to him. 'Sixty is the least that job's worth, and you know it.' Well, to make a long story short, he comes through with sixty!"

This story never failed to fascinate Mr. Braddy, for two reasons. First, he liked to be taken into the confidence of a man who made so princely a salary; and, second, it reminded him of the tormenting idea that he was worth more than the thirty dollars he found every Friday in his envelope, and it bolstered up his spirit. He felt that with the glittering example of Mr. Lum and the constant harassings by his wife, who had and expressed strong views on the subject, he would some day conquer his qualms and demand the raise he felt to be due him.

"I wish I had your crust," he said to Mr. Lum in tones of frank admiration.

"You have," rejoined Mr. Lum. "I didn't know that I had, for a long, long time, and then it struck me one day, as I was trying an Oxford-brogue style K6 on a dame, 'How did Schwab get where he is? How did Rockefeller? How did this here Vanderlip? Was it by being humble? Was it by setting still?' You bet your sweet boots it wasn't. I just been reading an article in 'I Can and I Will,' called 'Big Bugs—And How They Got That Way,' and it tells all about those fellows and how most of them wasn't nothing but newspaper reporters and puddlers—whatever that is—until one day they said, 'I'm going to do something decisive!' And they did it. That's the idea. Do something decisive. That's what I did, and look at me! Braddy, why the devil don't you do something decisive?"

"What?" asked Mr. Braddy meekly.

"Anything. Take a plunge. Why, I bet you never took a chance in your life. You got good stuff in you, Braddy, too. There ain't a better salesman in the rugs. Why, only the other day I overheard Berger say, 'That fellow Braddy knows more about rugs than the Mayor of Bagdad himself. Too bad he hasn't more push in him.' "

"I guess mebbe he's right," said Mr. Braddy.

"Right? Of course, he's right about you being a crack salesman. Why, you could sell corkscrews in Kansas," said Mr. Lum. "You got the stuff, all right. But the trouble is you can sell everything but yourself. Get busy! Act! Do something! Make a decision! Take a step!"

Mr. Braddy said nothing. Little lines furrowed his vast brow; he half closed his small eyes; his round face took on an intent, scowling look. He was thinking. Silence filled the cellar. Then, with the air of a man whose mind is made up, Hugh Braddy said a decisive and

remarkable thing.

“Mr. Bill Lum,” he said, “I’m going to get drunk!”

“What? You? Hugh Braddy? Drunk? My God!” The idea was too much even for the mind of Mr. Lum.

“Yes,” said Mr. Braddy, in a hollow voice, like Cæsar’s at the Rubicon, “I’m going to drink what’s in that bottle this very night.”

“Not all of it?” Mr. Lum, as an expert in such things, registered dismay.

“As much as is necessary,” was the firm response. Mr. Lum brightened considerably at this.

“Better let me help you. There’s enough for both of us. Plenty,” he suggested.

“Are you sure?” asked Mr. Braddy anxiously.

“Sure,” said Mr. Lum.

2

And he was right. There was more than enough. It was nine o’clock that night when the cellar door of Mr. Braddy’s small house opened cautiously, and Mr. Braddy followed his stub nose into the moonlight. Mr. Lum, unsteady but gay, followed.

Mr. Braddy, whose customary pace was a slow, dignified waddle, immediately broke into a brisk trot.

“Doan’ go so fas’, Hoo,” called Mr. Lum, for they had long since reached the first-name stage.

“Gotta get to city, N’Yawk, b’fore it’s too late,” explained Mr. Braddy, reining down to a walk.

“Too late for what, Hoo?” inquired Mr. Lum.

“I dunno,” said Mr. Braddy.

They made their way, by a series of skirmishes and flank movements, to the subway station, and caught a train for Manhattan. Their action in doing this was purely automatic.

Once aboard, they began a duet, which they plucked out of the dim past:

“Oh, dem golden slippers! Oh, dem golden slippers!”

This, unfortunately, was all they could remember of it, but it was enough to supply them with a theme and variations that lasted until they arrived in the catacombs far below the Grand Central Station. There they were shooed out by a vigilant subway guard.

They proceeded along the brightly lighted streets. Mr. Braddy’s step was that of a man walking a tight-rope. Mr. Lum’s method of progression was a series of short spurts. Between the Grand Central and Times Square they passed some one thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine persons, of whom one thousand eight hundred and twenty-nine remarked, “Where did they get it?”

On Broadway they saw a crowd gathered in front of a building.

“Fight,” said Mr. Braddy hopefully.

“ ’Naccident,” thought Mr. Lum. At least a hundred men and women were industriously elbowing each other and craning necks in the hope of seeing the center of attraction. Mr. Braddy, ordinarily the most timid of innocent bystanders, was now a lion in point of courage.

“Gangway,” he called. “We’re ’tectives,” he added bellicosely to those who protested, as he and Mr. Lum shoved and lunged their way through the rapidly growing crowd. The thing which had caused so many people to stop, to crane necks, to push, was a small newsboy who had dropped a dime down through an iron grating and who was fishing for it with a piece of chewing gum tied on the end of a string.

They spent twenty minutes giving advice and suggestions to the fisher, such as:

“A leetle to the left, now. Naw, naw. To the right. Now you got it. Shucks! You missed it. Try again.” At length they were rewarded by seeing the boy retrieve the dime, just before the crowd had grown to such proportions that it blocked the traffic.

The two adventurers continued on their way, pausing once to buy four frankfurters, which they ate noisily, one in each hand.

Suddenly the veteran drinker, Mr. Lum, was struck by a disquieting thought.

“Hoo, I gotta go home. My wife’ll be back from the movies by eleven, and if I ain’t home and in bed when she gets there, she’ll skin me alive; that’s what she’ll do.”

Mr. Braddy was struck by the application of this to his own case.

“Waddabout me, hey? Waddabout me, B’lum?” he asked plaintively. “Angelica will just about kill me.”

Mr. Lum, leaning against the Automat, darkly considered this eventuality. At length he spoke.

“You go getta Turkish bath. Tell ‘Gellica y’ hadda stay in store all night to take inventory. Turkish bath’ll make you fresh as a daisy. Fresh as a li’l’ daisy—fresh as a li’l’ daisy——” Saying which Mr. Lum disappeared into the eddying crowd and was gone. Mr. Braddy was alone in the great city.

But he was not dismayed. While disposing of the ancient liquor, he and Mr. Lum had discussed philosophies of life, and Mr. Braddy had decided that his was, “A man can do what he is a-mind to.” And Mr. Braddy was very much a-mind to take a Turkish bath. To him it represented the last stroke that cut the shackles of timidity. “I can and I will,” he said a bit thickly, in imitation of Mr. Lum’s heroes.

3

There was a line of men, mostly paunchy, waiting to be assigned dressing rooms when Mr. Braddy entered the Turkish bath, egged sternly on by his new philosophy. He did not shuffle meekly into the lowest place and wait the fulfillment of the biblical promise that some one would say, “Friend, go up higher.” Not he. “I can and I will,” he remarked to the man at the end of the line, and, forthwith, with a majestic, if rolling, gait, advanced to the window where a rabbit of a man, with nose glasses chained to his head, was sleepily dealing out keys and taking in valuables. The other men in line were too surprised to protest. Mr. Braddy took off his huge derby hat and rapped briskly on the counter.

“Service, here. Li’l’ service!”

The Rabbit with the nose glasses blinked mildly.

“Wotja want?” he inquired.

“Want t’ be made fresh as a li’l’ daisy,” said Mr. Braddy.

“Awright,” said the Rabbit, yawning. “Here’s a key for locker number thirty-six. Got any valuables? One dollar, please.”

Mr. Braddy, after some fumbling, produced the dollar, a dog-eared wallet, a tin watch, a patent cigar cutter, a pocket piece from a pickle exhibit at the World’s Fair in Chicago, and some cigar coupons.

The Rabbit handed him a large key on a rubber band.

“Put it on your ankle. Next,” he yawned.

And then Mr. Braddy stepped through the white door that, to him, led into the land of adventure and achievement.

He found himself in a brightly lighted corridor pervaded by an aroma not unlike the sort a Chinese hand laundry has. There were rows of little, white doors, with numbers painted on them. Mr. Braddy began at once a search for his own dressing room, No. 36; but after investigating the main street and numerous side alleys, in a somewhat confused but resolute frame of mind, he discovered that he was lost in a rabbit warren of white woodwork. He found Nos. 96, 66, 46, and 6, but he could not find No. 36. He tried entering one of the booths at random, but was greeted with a not-too-cordial, “Hey, bo; wrong stall. Back out!” from an ample gentleman made up as grandpa in the advertisements of Non-Skid underwear. He tried bawling, “Service, li’l’ service,” and rapping on the woodwork with his derby, but nothing happened, so he replaced his hat on his head and resumed his search. He came to a door with no number on it, pushed it open, and stepped boldly into the next room.

Pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat—it was the shower bath on Mr. Braddy’s hat.

“ ‘Srainin’,” he remarked affably.

An attendant, clad in short, white running pants, spied him and came bounding through the spray.

“Hey, mister, why don’t you take your clothes off?”

“Can’t find it,” replied Mr. Braddy.

“Can’t find what?” the attendant demanded.

“Thirry-sizz.”

“Thirry sizz?”

“Yep, thirry-sizz.”

“Aw, he means room number thoity-six,” said a voice from under one of the showers.

The attendant conducted Mr. Braddy up and down the white rabbit warren, across an avenue, through a lane, and paused at last before No. 36. Mr. Braddy went in, and the attendant followed.

“Undress you, mister?”

The Mr. Braddy of yesterday would have been too weak-willed to protest, but the new Mr. Braddy was the master of his fate, the captain of his soul, and he replied with some heat:

“Say, wadda you take me for? Can undress m’self.” He did so, muttering the while: “Undress me? Wadda they take me for? Wadda they take me for?”

Then he strode, a bit uncertainly, out into the corridor, pink, enormous, his key dangling from his ankle like a ball and chain. The man in the white running pants piloted Mr. Braddy into the hot room. Mr. Braddy was delighted, intrigued by it. On steamer chairs reclined other large men, stripped to their diamond rings, which glittered faintly in the dim-lit room. They made guttural noises, as little rivulets glided down the salmon-pink mounds of flesh, and every now and then they drank water from large tin cups. Mr. Braddy seated himself in the hot room, and tried to read a very damp copy of an evening paper, which he decided was in a foreign language, until he discovered he was holding it upside down.

An attendant approached and offered him a cup of water. The temptation was to do the easy thing—to take the proffered cup; but Mr. Braddy didn’t want a drink of anything just then, so he waved it away, remarking lightly, “Never drink water,” and was rewarded by a battery of bass titters from the pink mountains about him, who, it developed from their conversation, were all very important persons, indeed, in the world of finance. But in time Mr. Braddy began to feel unhappy. The heat was making him ooze slowly away. Hell, he thought, must be like this. He must act. He stood up.

“I doan like this,” he bellowed. An attendant came in response to the roar.

“What, you still in the hot room? Say, mister, it’s a wonder you ain’t been melted to a puddle of gravy. Here, come with me. I’ll send you through the steam room to Gawge, and Gawge will give you a good rub.”

He led Mr. Braddy to the door of the steam room, full of dense, white steam.

“Hey, Gawge,” he shouted.

“Hello, Al, wotja want?” came a voice faintly from the room beyond the steam room.

“Oh, Gawge, catch thoity-six when he comes through,” shouted Al.

He gave Mr. Braddy a little push and closed the door. Mr. Braddy found himself surrounded by steam which seemed to be boiling and scalding his very soul. He attempted to cry “Help,” and got a mouthful of rich steam that made him splutter. He started to make a dash in the direction of Gawge’s door, and ran full tilt into another mountain of avoirdupois, which cried indignantly, “Hey, watch where you’re going, will you? You ain’t back at dear old Yale, playing football.” Mr. Braddy had a touch of panic. This was serious. To be lost in a labyrinth of dressing rooms was distressing enough, but here he was slowly but certainly being steamed to death, with Gawge and safety waiting for him but a few feet away. An idea! Firemen, trapped in burning buildings, he had read in the newspapers, always crawl on their hands and knees, because the lower air is purer. Laboriously he lowered himself to his hands and knees, and, like a flabby pink bear, with all sense of direction gone, he started through the steam.

“Hey!”

“Lay off me, guy!”

“Ouch, me ankle!”

“Wot’s the big idea? This ain’t no circus.”

“Leggo me shin.”

“Ouf!”

The “ouf” came from Mr. Braddy, who had been soundly kicked in the mid-riff by an angry dweller in the steam room, whose ankle he had grabbed as he careered madly but futilely around the room. Then, success! The door! He opened it.

“Where’s Gawge?” he demanded faintly.

“Well, I’ll be damned! It’s thoity-six back again!”

It was Al's voice; not Gawge. Mr. Braddy had come back to the same door he started from!

He was unceremoniously thrust by Al back into the steaming hell from which he had just escaped, and once more Al shouted across, "Hey, Gawge, catch thoity-six when he comes through."

Mr. Braddy, on his hands and knees, steered as straight a course as he could for the door that opened to Gawge and fresh air, but the bewildering steam once again closed round him, and he butted the tumid calves of one of the Moes and was roundly cursed. Veering to the left, he bumped into the legs of another Moe so hard that this Moe went down as if he had been submarined, a tangle of plump legs, arms, and profanity. Mr. Braddy, in the confusion, reached the door and pushed it open.

"Holy jumpin' mackerel! Thoity-six again! Say, you ain't supposed to come back here. You're supposed to keep going straight across the steam room to Gawge." It was Al, enraged.

Once more Mr. Braddy was launched into the steam room. How many times he tried to traverse it—bear fashion—he never could remember, but it must have been at least six times that he reappeared at the long-suffering Al's door, and was returned, too steamed, now, to protest. Mr. Braddy's new-found persistence was not to be denied, however, and ultimately he reached the right door, to find waiting for him a large, genial soul who was none other than Gawge, and who asked, with untimely facetiousness, Mr. Braddy thought:

"Didja enjoy the trip?"

Gawge placed Mr. Braddy on a marble slab and scrubbed him with a large and very rough brush, which made Mr. Braddy scream with laughter, particularly when the rough bristles titillated the soles of his feet.

"Wot's the joke?" inquired Gawge.

"You ticker me," gasped Mr. Braddy.

He was rather enjoying himself now. It made him feel important to have so much attention. But he groaned and gurgled a little when Gawge attacked him with cupped hands and beat a tattoo up and down his spine and all over his palpitating body. Wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, wop, wop wop went Gawge's hands.

Then he rolled Mr. Braddy from the slab, like jelly from a mold. Mr. Braddy jelled properly and was stood in a corner.

“All over?” he asked. Zizzzzzz! A stream of icy water struck him between his shoulder blades.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!” he cried. The stream, as if in response to his outcries, immediately became boiling hot. First one, then the other played on him. Then they stopped. An attendant appeared and dried Mr. Braddy vigorously with a great, shaggy towel, and then led him to a dormitory, where, on white cots, rows of Moes puffed and wheezed and snored and dreamed dreams of great profits.

Mr. Braddy tumbled happily into his cot, boiled but triumphant. He had taken a Turkish bath! The world was at his feet! He had made a decision! He had acted on it! He had met the demon Timidity in fair fight and downed him. He had been drunk, indubitably drunk, for the first and last time. He assured himself that he never wanted to taste the stuff again. But he couldn’t help but feel that his one jamboree had made a new man of him, opening new lands of adventure, showing him that “he could if he would.” As he buried his head in the pillow, he rehearsed the speech he would make to Mr. Berger, the manager, in the morning. Should he begin, “Mr. Berger, if you think I’m worth it, will you please raise my pay five dollars a week?” No, by Heaven, a thousand noes! He was worth it, and he would say so. Should he begin, “See here, Mr. Berger, the time has come for you to raise my salary ten dollars?” No, he’d better ask for twenty dollars while he was about it, and compromise on ten dollars as a favor to his employers. But then, again, why stop at twenty dollars? His sales in the rugs warranted much more. “I can have thirty dollars, and I will,” he said a number of times to the pillow. Carefully he rehearsed his speech: “Now, see here, Berger——” and then he was whirled away into a dream in which he saw a great hand take down the big sign from the front of the Great Store, and put up in its place a still larger sign, reading:

BRADDY’S GREATER STORE

Dry Goods and Turkish Baths

Hugh Braddy, Sole Prop.

4

He woke feeling very strange, and not exactly as fresh as a daisy. He felt much more like a cauliflower cooled after boiling. His head buzzed a bit, with a sort of gay giddiness, but for all that he knew that he was not the same Hugh Braddy that had been catapulted from bed by an alarm clock in his Long Island City home the morning before.

“A man can do what he’s a mind to,” he said to himself in a slightly husky voice. His first move was to get breakfast. The old Hugh Braddy would have gone humbly to a one-armed beanery for one black coffee and one doughnut—price, one dime. The new Hugh Braddy considered this breakfast, and dismissed it as beneath a man of his importance. Instead, he went to the Mortimore Grill and had a substantial club breakfast. He called up Angelica, his wife, and cut short her lecture with—“Unavoidable, m’dear. Inventory at the store.” His tone, somehow, made her hesitate to question him further. “It’ll be all right about that raise,” he added grandly. “Have a good supper to-night. G’by.”

He bought himself an eleven-cent cigar, instead of his accustomed six-center, and, puffing it in calm defiance of a store rule, strode into the employees’ entrance of the Great Store a little after nine. Without wavering, he marched straight to the office of Mr. Berger, who looked up from his morning mail in surprise.

“Well, Mr. Braddy?”

Mr. Braddy blew a smoke ring, playfully stuck his finger through it, and said:

“Mr. Berger, I’m thinking of going with another concern. A fellow was in to see me the other day, and he says to me, ‘Braddy, you are the best rug man in this town.’ And he hinted that if I’d come over with his concern they’d double my salary. Now, I’ve been with the Great Store more than twenty years, and I like the place, Mr. Berger, and I know the ropes, so naturally I don’t want to change. But, of course, I must go where the most money is. I owe that to Mrs. B. But I’m going to do the square thing. I’m going to give you a chance to meet the ante. Sixty’s the figure.”

He waved his cigar, signifying the utter inconsequence of whether Mr. Berger met the ante or not. Before the amazed manager could frame a reply, Mr. Braddy continued:

“You needn’t make up your mind right away, Mr. Berger. I don’t have to give my final decision until to-night. You can think it over. I suggest you look up my sales record for last year before you reach any decision.” And he was gone.

All that day Mr. Braddy did his best not to think of what he had done. Even the new Mr. Braddy—philosophy and all—could not entirely banish the vision of Angelica if he had to break the news that he had issued an ultimatum for twice his salary and had been escorted to the exit.

He threw himself into the work of selling rugs so vigorously that his fellow salesmen whispered to each other, “What ails the Ole Hippopotamus?” He even got rid of a rug that had been in the department for uncounted years—showing a dark-red lion browsing on a

field of rich pink roses—by pointing out to the woman who bought it that it would amuse the children.

At four o'clock a flip office boy tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Mr. Boiger wants to see you." Mr. Braddy, whose head felt as if a hive of bees were establishing a home there, but whose philosophy still burned clear and bright, let Mr. Berger wait a full ten minutes, and then, with dignified tread that gave no hint of his inward qualms, entered the office of the manager.

It seemed an age before Mr. Berger spoke.

"I've been giving your proposition careful consideration, Mr. Braddy," he said. "I have decided that we'd like to keep you in the rugs. We'll meet that ante."