



***RING
LARDNER***

***GULLIBLE'S
TRAVELS,
ETC***



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Ring Lardner

Gullible's Travels, Etc

EAN 8596547167679

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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CARMEN

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We was playin' rummy over to Hatch's, and Hatch must of fell in a bed of four-leaf clovers on his way home the night before, because he plays rummy like he does everything else; but this night I refer to you couldn't beat him, and besides him havin' all the luck my Missus played like she'd been bought off, so when we come to settle up we was plain seven and a half out. You know who paid it. So Hatch says:

"They must be some game you can play."

"No," I says, "not and beat you. I can run two blocks w'ile you're stoopin' over to start, but if we was runnin' a foot race between each other, and suppose I was leadin' by eighty yards, a flivver'd prob'ly come up and hit you in the back and bump you over the finishin' line ahead o' me."

So Mrs. Hatch thinks I'm sore on account o' the seven-fifty, so she says:

"It don't seem fair for us to have all the luck."

"Sure it's fair!" I says. "If you didn't have the luck, what would you have?"

"I know," she says; "but I don't never feel right winnin' money at cards."

"I don't blame you," I says.

"I know," she says; "but it seems like we should ought to give it back or else stand treat, either one."

"Jim's too old to change all his habits," I says.

"Oh, well," says Mrs. Hatch, "I guess if I told him to loosen up he'd loosen up. I ain't lived with him all these years for nothin'."

"You'd be a sucker if you did," I says.

So they all laughed, and when they'd quieted down Mrs. Hatch says:

"I don't suppose you'd feel like takin' the money back?"

"Not without a gun," I says. "Jim's pretty husky."

So that give them another good laugh; but finally she says:

"What do you say, Jim, to us takin' the money they lose to us and gettin' four tickets to some show?"

Jim managed to stay conscious, but he couldn't answer nothin'; so my Missus says:

"That'd be grand of you to do it, but don't think you got to."

Well, of course, Mrs. Hatch knowed all the w'ile she didn't have to, but from what my Missus says she could tell that if they really give us the invitation we wouldn't start no fight. So they talked it over between themself w'ile I and Hatch went out in the kitchen and split a pint o' beer, and Hatch done the pourin' and his best friend couldn't say he give himself the worst of it. So when we come back my Missus and Mrs. Hatch had it all framed that the Hatches was goin' to take us to a show, and the next thing was what show would it be. So Hatch found the afternoon paper, that somebody'd left on the street-car, and read us off a list o' the shows that was in town. I spoke for the Columbia, but

the Missus give me the sign to stay out; so they argued back and forth and finally Mrs. Hatch says:

"Let's see that paper a minute."

"What for?" says Hatch. "I didn't hold nothin' out on you."

But he give her the paper and she run through the list herself, and then she says:

"You did, too, hold out on us. You didn't say nothin' about the Auditorium."

"What could I say about it?" says Hatch. "I never was inside."

"It's time you was then," says Mrs. Hatch.

"What's playin' there?" I says.

"Grand op'ra," says Mrs. Hatch.

"Oh!" says my Missus. "Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

"What do you say?" says Mrs. Hatch to me.

"I think it'd be grand for you girls," I says. "I and Jim could leave you there and go down on Madison and see Charley Chaplin, and then come back after you."

"Nothin' doin'!" says Mrs. Hatch. "We'll pick a show that everybody wants to see."

Well, if I hadn't of looked at my Missus then we'd of been O. K. But my eyes happened to light on where she was settin' and she was chewin' her lips so's she wouldn't cry. That finished me. "I was just kiddin'," I says to Mrs. Hatch. "They ain't nothin' I'd like better than grand op'ra."

"Nothin' except gettin' trimmed in a rummy game," says Hatch, but he didn't get no rise.

Well, the Missus let loose of her lips so's she could smile and her and Mrs. Hatch got all excited, and I and Hatch pretended like we was excited too. So Hatch ast what night

could we go, and Mrs. Hatch says that depended on what did we want to hear, because they changed the bill every day. So her and the Missus looked at the paper again and found out where Friday night was goin' to be a big special night and the bill was a musical show called *Carmen*, and all the stars was goin' to sing, includin' Mooratory and Alda and Genevieve Farr'r, that was in the movies a w'ile till they found out she could sing, and some fella they called Daddy, but I don't know his real name. So the girls both says Friday night was the best, but Hatch says he would have to go to lodge that evenin'.

"Lodge!" says Mrs. Hatch. "What do you care about lodge when you got a chance to see Genevieve Farr'r in *Carmen*?"

"Chance!" says Hatch. "If that's what you call a chance, I got a chance to buy a thousand shares o' Bethlehem Steel. Who's goin' to pay for my chance?"

"All right," says Mrs. Hatch, "go to your old lodge and spoil everything!"

So this time it was her that choked up and made like she was goin' to blubber. So Hatch changed his mind all of a sudden and decided to disappoint the brother Owls. So all of us was satisfied except fifty per cent., and I and the Missus beat it home, and on the way she says how nice Mrs. Hatch was to give us this treat.

"Yes," I says, "but if you hadn't of had a regular epidemic o' discardin' deuces and treys Hatch would of treated us to groceries for a week." I says: "I always thought they was only twelve pitcher cards in the deck till I seen them hands you saved up to-night."

"You lose as much as I did," she says.

"Yes," I says, "and I always will as long as you forget to fetch your purse along."

So they wasn't no come-back to that, so we went on home without no more dialogue.

Well, Mrs. Hatch called up the next night and says Jim had the tickets boughten and we was to be sure and be ready at seven o'clock Friday night because the show started at eight. So when I was down-town Friday the Missus sent my evenin' dress suit over to Katzes' and had it pressed up and when I come home it was laid out on the bed like a corpse.

"What's that for?" I says.

"For the op'ra," she says. "Everybody wears them to the op'ra."

"Did you ask the Hatches what was they goin' to wear?" I says.

"No," says she. "They know what to wear without me tellin' them. They ain't goin' to the Auditorium in their nightgown."

So I clumb into the soup and fish, and the Missus spent about a hour puttin' on a dress that she could have left off without nobody knowin' the difference, and she didn't have time for no supper at all, and I just managed to surround a piece o' steak as big as your eye and spill some gravy on my clo'es when the bell rung and there was the Hatches.

Well, Hatch didn't have no more evenin' dress suit on than a kewpie. I could see his pants under his overcoat and they was the same old bay pants he'd wore the day he got mad at his kid and christened him Kenneth. And his shoes was a last year's edition o' the kind that's supposed to give

your feet a chance, and if his feet had of been the kind that takes chances they was two or three places where they could of got away without much trouble.

I could tell from the expression on Mrs. Hatch's face when she seen our make-up that we'd crossed her. She looked about as comf'table as a Belgium.

"Oh!" she says. "I didn't think you'd dress up."

"We thought you would," says my Frau.

"We!" I says. "Where do you get that 'we'?"

"If it ain't too late we'll run in and change," says my Missus.

"Not me," I says. "I didn't go to all this trouble and expense for a splash o' gravy. When this here uniform retires it'll be to make room for pyjamas."

"Come on!" says Hatch. "What's the difference? You can pretend like you ain't with us."

"It don't really make no difference," says Mrs. Hatch.

And maybe it didn't. But we all stood within whisperin' distance of each other on the car goin' in, and if you had a dollar for every word that was talked among us you couldn't mail a postcard from Hammond to Gary. When we got off at Congress my Missus tried to thaw out the party.

"The prices is awful high, aren't they?" she says.

"Outrageous," says Mrs. Hatch.

Well, even if the prices was awful high, they didn't have nothin' on our seats. If I was in trainin' to be a steeple jack I'd go to grand op'ra every night and leave Hatch buy my ticket. And where he took us I'd of been more at home in overalls and a sport shirt.

"How do you like Denver?" says I to the Missus, but she'd sank for the third time.

"We're safe here," I says to Hatch. "Them French guns can't never reach us. We'd ought to brought more bumbs."

"What did the seats cost?" I says to Hatch.

"One-fifty," he says.

"Very reasonable," says I. "One o' them aviators wouldn't take you more than half this height for a five-spot."

The Hatches had their overcoats off by this time and I got a look at their full costume. Hatch had went without his vest durin' the hot months and when it was alongside his coat and pants it looked like two different families. He had a pink shirt with prune-colored horizontal bars, and a tie to match his neck, and a collar that would of took care of him and I both, and them shoes I told you about, and burlap hosiery. They wasn't nothin' the matter with Mrs. Hatch except she must of thought that, instead o' dressin' for the op'ra, she was gettin' ready for Kenneth's bath.

And there was my Missus, just within the law, and me all spicked and spanned with my soup and fish and gravy!

Well, we all set there and tried to get the focus till about a half-hour after the show was billed to commence, and finally a Lilliputhian with a match in his hand come out and started up the orchestra and they played a few o' the hits and then the lights was turned out and up went the curtain.

Well, sir, you'd be surprised at how good we could hear and see after we got used to it. But the hearin' didn't do us no good—that is, the words part of it. All the actors had been smuggled in from Europe and they wasn't none o' them that could talk English. So all their songs was gave in

different languages and I wouldn't of never knew what was goin' on only for Hatch havin' all the nerve in the world.

After the first act a lady that was settin' in front of us dropped somethin' and Hatch stooped over and picked it up, and it was one o' these here books they call a liberetto, and it's got all the words they're singin' on the stage wrote out in English.

So the lady begin lookin' all over for it and Hatch was goin' to give it back because he thought it was a shoe catalogue, but he happened to see at the top of it where it says "Price 25 Cents," so he tossed it in his lap and stuck his hat over it. And the lady kept lookin' and lookin' and finally she turned round and looked Hatch right in the eye, but he dropped down inside his collar and left her wear herself out. So when she'd gave up I says somethin' about I'd like to have a drink.

"Let's go," says Hatch.

"No," I says. "I don't want it bad enough to go back to town after it. I thought maybe we could get it sent up to the room."

"I'm goin' alone then," says Hatch.

"You're liable to miss the second act," I says.

"I'd never miss it," says Hatch.

"All right," says I. "I hope you have good weather."

So he slipped me the book to keep for him and beat it. So I seen the lady had forgot us, and I opened up the book and that's how I come to find out what the show was about. I read her all through, the part that was in English, before the curtain went up again, so when the second act begin I knowed what had came off and what was comin' off, and

Hatch and Mrs. Hatch hadn't no idear if the show was comical or dry. My Missus hadn't, neither, till we got home and I told her the plot.

Carmen ain't no regular musical show where a couple o' Yids comes out and pulls a few lines o' dialogue and then a girl and a he-flirt sings a song that ain't got nothin' to do with it. *Carmen's* a regular play, only instead o' them sayin' the lines, they sing them, and in for'n languages so's the actors can pick up some loose change offen the sale o' the liberettos. The music was wrote by George S. Busy, and it must of kept him that way about two mont's. The words was either throwed together by the stage carpenter or else took down by a stenographer outdoors durin' a drizzle. Anyway, they ain't nobody claims them. Every oncet in three or four pages they forget themself and rhyme. You got to read each verse over two or three times before you learn what they're hintin' at, but the management gives you plenty o' time to do it between acts and still sneak a couple o' hours' sleep.

The first act opens up somewheres in Spain, about the corner o' Chicago Avenue and Wells. On one side o' the stage they's a pill mill where the employees is all girls, or was girls a few years ago. On the other side they's a soldiers' garage where they keep the militia in case of a strike. In the back o' the stage they's a bridge, but it ain't over no water or no railroad tracks or nothin'. It's prob'ly somethin' the cat dragged in.

Well, the soldiers stands out in front o' the garage hittin' up some barber shops, and pretty soon a girl blows in from the hero's home town, Janesville or somewheres. She runs a

few steps every little w'ile and then stops, like the rails was slippery. The soldiers sings at her and she tells them she's came to look for Don Joss that run the chop-suey dump up to Janesville, but when they shet down on him servin' beer he quit and joined the army. So the soldiers never heard o' the bird, but they all ask her if they won't do just as good, but she says nothin' doin' and skids off the stage. She ain't no sooner gone when the Chinaman from Janesville and some more soldiers and some alley rats comes in to help out the singin'. The book says that this new gang o' soldiers was sent on to relieve the others, but if anything happened to wear out the first ones it must of took place at rehearsal. Well, one o' the boys tells Joss about the girl askin' for him and he says: "Oh, yes; that must be the little Michaels girl from up in Wisconsin."

So pretty soon the whistle blows for noon and the girls comes out o' the pill mill smokin' up the mornin' receipts and a crowd o' the unemployed comes in to shoot the snipes. So the soldiers notices that Genevieve Farr'r ain't on yet, so they ask where she's at, and that's her cue. She puts on a song number and a Spanish dance, and then she slips her bouquet to the Chink, though he ain't sang a note since the whistle blowed. But now it's one o'clock and Genevieve and the rest o' the girls beats it back to the coffin factory and the vags chases down to the Loop to get the last home edition and look at the want ads to see if they's any jobs open with fair pay and nothin' to do. And the soldiers mosey into the garage for a well-earned rest and that leaves Don all alone on the stage.

But he ain't no more than started on his next song when back comes the Michaels girl. It oozes out here that she's in love with the Joss party, but she stalls and pretends like his mother'd sent her to get the receipt for makin' eggs *fo yung*. And she says his mother ast her to kiss him and she slips him a dime, so he leaves her kiss him on the scalp and he asks her if she can stay in town that evenin' and see a nickel show, but they's a important meetin' o' the Maccabees at Janesville that night, so away she goes to catch the two-ten and Don starts in on another song number, but the rest o' the company don't like his stuff and he ain't hardly past the vamp when they's a riot.

It seems like Genevieve and one o' the chorus girls has quarreled over a second-hand stick o' gum and the chorus girl got the gum, but Genevieve relieved her of part of a earlobe, so they pinch Genevieve and leave Joss to watch her till the wagon comes, but the wagon's went out to the night desk sergeant's house with a case o' quarts and before it gets round to pick up Genevieve she's bunked the Chink into settin' her free. So she makes a getaway, tellin' Don to meet her later on at Lily and Pat's place acrost the Indiana line. So that winds up the first act.

Well, the next act's out to Lily and Pat's, and it ain't no Y.M.C.A. headquarters, but it's a hang-out for dips and policemen. They's a cabaret and Genevieve's one o' the performers, but she forgets the words to her first song and winds up with tra-la-la, and she could of forgot the whole song as far as I'm concerned, because it wasn't nothin' you'd want to buy and take along home.

Finally Pat comes in and says it's one o'clock and he's got to close up, but they won't none o' them make a move, and pretty soon they's a live one blows into the joint and he's Eskimo Bill, one o' the butchers out to the Yards. He's got paid that day and he ain't never goin' home. He sings a song and it's the hit o' the show. Then he buys a drink and starts flirtin' with Genevieve, but Pat chases everybody but the performers and a couple o' dips that ain't got nowheres else to sleep. The dips or stick-up guys, or whatever they are, tries to get Genevieve to go along with them in the car w'ile they pull off somethin', but she's still expectin' the Chinaman. So they pass her up and blow, and along comes Don and she lets him in, and it seems like he'd been in jail for two mont's, or ever since the end o' the first act. So he asks her how everything has been goin' down to the pill mill and she tells him that she's quit and became a entertainer. So he says, "What can you do?" And she beats time with a pair o' chopsticks and dances the Chinese Blues.

After a w'ile they's a bugle call somewhere outdoors and Don says that means he's got to go back to the garage. So she gets sore and tries to bean him with a Spanish onion. Then he reaches inside his coat and pulls out the bouquet she give him in Atto First to show her he ain't changed his clo'es, and then the sheriff comes in and tries to coax him with a razor to go back to his job. They fight like it was the first time either o' them ever tried it and the sheriff's leadin' on points when Genevieve hollers for the dips, who dashes in with their gats pulled and it's good night, Mister Sheriff! They put him in moth balls and they ask Joss to join their tong. He says all right and they're all pretty well lit by this