

***SEWELL
FORD***



***TORCHY
AS A PA***

Sewell Ford

Torchy As A Pa

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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CHAPTER I

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VEE TIES SOMETHING LOOSE

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I forget just what it was Vee was rummagin' for in the drawer of her writin' desk. Might have been last month's milk bill, or a stray hair net, or the plans and specifications for buildin' a spiced layer cake with only two eggs. Anyway, right in the middle of the hunt she cuts loose with the staccato stuff, indicatin' surprise, remorse, sudden grief and other emotions.

"Eh?" says I. "Is it a woman-eatin' mouse, or did you grab a hatpin by the business end?"

"Silly!" says she. "Look what I ran across, Torchy." And she flips an engraved card at me.

I picks it on the fly, reads the neat script on it, and then hunches my shoulders. "Well, well!" says I. "At home after September 15, 309 West Hundred and Umpty Umpt street. How interestin'! But who is this Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton Porter Blake, anyway?"

"Why, don't you remember?" says Vee. "We sent them that darling urn-shaped candy jar. That is Lucy Lee and her dear Captain."

"Oh, then she got him, did she?" says I. "I knew he was a goner when she went after him so strong. And now I expect they're livin' happy ever after?"

Maybe you don't remember my tellin' you about Lucy Lee, the Virginia butterfly we took in over the week-end

once and how I had to scratch around one Saturday to find some male dinner mate for her, and picked this hard-boiled egg from the bond room, one of these buddin' John D.'s who keeps an expense account and shudders every time he passes a millinery store or thinks what two orchestra seats and a double taxi fare would set him back. And, the female being the more expensive of the species, he has trained himself to be girl proof. That's what he lets on to me beforehand, but inside of forty-eight minutes by the watch, or between his first spoonful of tomato soup and his last sip of cafe noir, this Lucy Lee party had him so dizzy in the head he didn't know whether he was gazin' into her lovely eyes or being run down by a truck. Honest, some of these babidolls with high voltage lamps like that ought to be made to use dimmers. For look! Just as she's got him all wound up in the net, what does Lucy Lee do but flit sudden off to the Berkshires, where a noble young S. O. S. captain has just come back from the war and the next we know they're engaged, while in the bond room of the Corrugated Trust is one more broken heart, or what passes for the same among them young hicks.

And now here is Lucy Lee, flaggin' as young Mrs. Blake, livin' right in the same town with him.

"How stupid of me to forget!" says Vee. "We must run in and call on them right away, Torchy."

"We?" says I. "Ah, come!"

"We'll have dinner first at that cute little Cafe Bretonne you've been telling me about," says Vee, "and go up to see the Blakes afterwards."

Yes, that was the program we followed. And without the aid of a guide we located this Umpty Umpt street. The number is about half way down the block that runs from upper Broadway to Riverside Drive. It's one of the narrow streets, you know, and the scenery is just as cheerful as a section of the Hudson River tube on a foggy night. Nothing but seven-story apartment buildings on either side; human hives, where the only thing that can be raised is the rent, which the landlord attends to every quarter.

Having lived out in the near-country for a couple of years, I'd most forgotten what ugly, gloomy barracks these big apartment buildings were. Say, if they built state prisons like that, with no more sun or air in the cells, there'd be an awful howl. But the Rosenheimers and the Max Blums and the Gilottis can run up jerry built blocks with 8x10 bedrooms openin' on narrow airshafts, and livin' rooms where you need a couple of lights burnin' on sunny days, and nobody says a word except to beg the agent to let 'em pay \$150 a month or so for four rooms and bath. I can feel Vee give a shudder as we dives into the tunnel.

"But really," says she, "I suppose it must be very nice, only half a block from the Drive, and with such an imposing entrance."

"Sure!" says I. "Just as cosy as being tucked away in a safety deposit vault every night. That's what makes some of these New Yorkers so patronizin' and haughty when they happen to stray out to way stations and crossroads joints where the poor Rubes live exposed continual to sunshine and fresh air and don't seem to know any better."

"Just think!" says Vee. "Lucy Lee's home down in Virginia was one of those delightful old Colonial houses set on a hill, with more than a hundred acres of farm land around it. And Captain Blake must have been used to an outdoor life. He's a civil engineer, I believe. But then, with the honeymoon barely over, I suppose they don't mind."

"We might ask 'em," I suggests.

"Don't you dare, Torchy!" says she.

By that time, though, we're ready to interview the fuzzy-haired West Indian brunette in charge of the 'phone desk in one corner of the marble wainscoted lobby. And when he gets through givin' the hot comeback to some tenant who has dared to protest that he's had the wrong number, he takes his time findin' out for us whether or not the Blakes are in. Finally he grunts something through the gum and waves us toward the elevator. "Fourth," says he. And a slouchy young female in a dirty khaki uniform takes us up, jerky, to turn us loose in a hallway with a dozen doors openin' off.

There's such a dim light we could hardly read the cards in the door plates, and we was pawin' around, dazed, when a husky bleached blonde comes sailin' out of an apartment.

"Will you please tell me which is the Blakes' bell?" asks Vee.

"Blakes?" says the blonde. "Don't know 'em."

"Perhaps we're on the wrong floor," I suggests.

But about then a door opens and out peers Lucy Lee herself. "Why, there you are!" says she. "We were just picking up a little. You know how things get in an apartment. So good of you to hunt us up. Come right in."

So we squeezes in between a fancy hall seat and the kitchen door, edges down a three-foot hallway, and discovers Captain Blake just strugglin' into his coat, at the same time kickin' some evenin' papers, dexterous, under a davenport.

"Why, how comfy you are here, aren't you?" says Vee, gazin' around.

"Ye-e-es, aren't we?" says Lucy Lee, a bit draggy.

If you've ever made one of these flathouse first calls you can fill in the rest for yourself. We are shown how, by leanin' out one of the front windows, you can almost see the North River; what a cute little dinin' room there is, with a built-in china closet and all; and how convenient the bathroom is wedged between the two sleeping rooms.

"But really," says Lucy Lee, "the kitchen is the nicest. Do you know, the sun actually comes in for nearly an hour every afternoon. And isn't everything so handy?"

Yes, it was. You could stand in the middle and reach the gas stove with one hand and the sink with the other, and if you didn't want to use the washtub you could rest a loaf of bread on it. Then there was the dumbwaiter door just beside the ice-box, and overhead a shelf where you could store a whole dollar's worth of groceries, if you happened to have that much on hand at once. It was all as handy as an upper berth.

"You see," explains Lucy Lee, "we have no room for a maid, and couldn't possibly get one if we did have room, so I am doing my own work; that is, we are. Hamilton is really quite a wonderful cook; aren't you, Hammy, dear? Of

course, I knew how to make fudge, and I am learning to scramble eggs. We go out for dinner a lot, too."

"Isn't that nice?" says Vee, encouragin'.

Gradually we got the whole story. It seems Blake wasn't a captain any more, but had an engineerin' job on one of the new tubes, so they had to stick in New York. They had thought at first it would be thrilling, but I gathered that most of the thrills had worn off. And along towards the end Lucy Lee admits that she's awfully lonesome. You see, she'd been used to spendin' about six months of the year with Daddy in Washington, three more in flittin' around from one house party to the other, and what was left of the year restin' up down on the big plantation, where they knew all the neighbors for miles around.

"But here," says she, "we seem to know hardly anyone. Oh, yes, there are a few people in town we've met, but somehow we never see them. They live either in grand houses on Fifth Avenue, or in big hotels, or in Brooklyn."

"Then you haven't gotten acquainted with anyone in the building here?" asks Vee.

"Why," says Lucy Lee, "the janitor's wife is a Mrs. Biggs, I believe. I've spoken to her several times—about the milk."

"You poor dear!" says Vee.

"It's so tiresome," goes on Lucy Lee, "wandering out at night to some strange restaurant and eating dinner among total strangers. We go often to one perfectly dreadful little place because there's a funny old waiter that we call by his first name. He tells us about his married daughter, whose husband is a steamfitter and has been out on strike for nearly two months. But Hamilton always tips him more than

he should, so it makes our dinners quite expensive. We have to make up, next night, by having fried eggs and bacon at home."

Well, it's a tale of woe, all right. Lucy Lee don't mean to complain, but when she gets started on the subject she lets the whole thing out. Life in the great city, if you have to spend twenty hours out of the twenty-four in a four-and-bath apartment, ain't so allurin', the way she sketches it out. Course, she ain't used to it, for one thing. She thinks if she had some friends nearby it might not be so bad. As for Hamilton, he listens to her with a puzzled, hopeless expression, like he didn't understand.

Vee seems to be studyin' over something, but she don't appear to be gettin' anywhere. So we sits around and talks for an hour or so. There ain't room to do much else in a flat. And about 9:30 Mr. Blake has a brilliant thought.

"I say, Lucy," says he, "suppose we make a rinktum-diddy for the folks, eh?"

"Sounds exciting'," says I. "Do you start by joinin' hands around the table?"

No, you don't. You get out the electric chafing dish and begin by fryin' some onions. Then you melt up some cheese, add some canned tomatoes, and the result is kind of a Spanish Welsh rabbit that's almost as tasty as it is smelly.

It was while we was messin' around the vest pocket kitchen, everybody tryin' to help, that we spots this face at the window opposite. It's sort of a calm, good natured face. You wouldn't call the young lady a heart-breaker exactly, for her mouth is cut kind of generous and her big eyes are wide

set and serious; but you might guess that she was a decent sort and more or less sociable. In fact she's starin' across the ten feet or so of air space watchin' our maneuvers kind of interested and wistful.

"Who's your neighbor?" asks Vee.

"I'm sure I haven't an idea," says Lucy Lee. "I see her a lot, of course. She spends as much time in her kitchen as I do, even more. Usually she seems to be alone."

"Why don't you speak to her some time?" suggests Vee.

"Oh, I wouldn't dare," says Lucy Lee. "It—it isn't done, you know. I tried that twice when I first came, with women I met in the elevator, and I was promptly snubbed. New Yorkers don't do that sort of thing, I understand."

"But she's rather a nice looking girl," insists Vee. "And see, she's half smiling. I'm going to speak to her." Which she does, right off the bat. "I hope you don't mind the onion perfume?" says Vee.

The strange young lady doesn't slam down the window and go off tossin' her head, indignant, so she can't be a real New Yorker. Instead she smiles and shows a couple of cheek dimples. "It smells mighty good," says she. "I was just wondering what it could be."

"Won't you come over and find out?" says Vee, smilin' back.

"Yes, do come and join us," puts in Lucy Lee. "I'll open the hall door for you."

"Why, I—I'd love to if—if I may," says the young lady.

And that's how, half an hour or so later, when all that was left of this rinktum-diddy trick was some brown smears on five empty plates, we begun hearin' the story of the face at

the window. She's young Mrs. William Fairfield, and she's been that exactly three months. Before that she had been Miss Esther Hartley, of Turkey Run, Md., and Kaio Chow, China. Papa Hartley had been a medical missionary and Esther, after she got through at Wellesley, had joined him as a nurse and kindergarten teacher. She'd been living in Kaio Chow for three years and the mission outfit was getting along fine when some kind of a Boxer mess broke out and they all had to leave. Coming back on an Italian steamer from Genoa she met Bill, who'd been in aviation, and there'd been some lovely moonlight nights and—well, Bill had persuaded her that teaching young Chinks to learn c-a-t, cat, wouldn't be half as nice as being Mrs. William Hartley. Besides, he had a good position waiting for him in a big wholesale leather house right in New York, and it would be such fun living among regular people.

"I suppose it is fun, too," says Esther, "but somehow I can't seem to get used to it. Everyone here gives you such, cold, suspicious looks; even the folks you meet in the hallways and elevator, as though they meant to say, 'Don't you dare speak to me. I don't know who or what you are, so don't come near.' They're like that, yon know. Why, the street gamins of Kaio Chow were not much worse when I first went there. Yes, they did throw stones at me a few times, but in less than a month they were calling me the Doctor Lady and letting me tell them how wrong it was to spend so much time gambling around the food carts. Of course, they kept right on gambling for fried fish and rice cakes, but they would grin friendly when they saw me. Up to tonight no one in New York has even smiled at me.

"It's such a wonderful place, too; and so big, you would almost think there was enough to share with, strangers. But they seem to resent my being here at all, so I go out very little now when I am alone. And as Bill is away all day, and sometimes has to work evenings as well, I am alone a great deal. About the only place I can see the sky from and other people is this little kitchen window. So I stay there a lot, and I am sorry to say that often I'm foolish enough to wish myself back at the mission among all those familiar yellow faces, where I could stand on the bamboo shaded galleries and hear the hubbub in the compound, and watch the coolies wading about in the distant rice fields. Isn't that silly? There must be something queer about me."

"Not so awfully queer," says Vee. "You're lonesome, that's all."

"No more than I am, I'm sure," says Lucy Lee. "I wonder if there are many others?"

"Only two or three million more," says I. "That's why the cabarets and movie shows are so popular."

That starts us talking over what there was for folks to do in New York evenings, and while we can dope out quite a lot of different ways of passin' the time between 8 p. m. and midnight, nearly every one is so expensive that the average young couple can't afford to tackle 'em more'n once a week or so. The other evenings they sit at home in the flat.

"And yet," says young Mrs. Fairfield, "hardly any of them but could find a congenial group of people if—if they only knew where to look and how to get acquainted with each other. Why, right in this block I've noticed ever so many who

I'm sure are rather nice. But there seems to be no way of getting together."

"That's it, precisely!" says Vee. "So why should you wish yourself back in China?"

"I beg pardon?" says Mrs. Bill.

"I mean," says Vee, "that here is a missionary field, right at your door. If you can go off among foreigners and get them to give up some of their silly ways and organize them into groups and classes, why can't you do something of the kind for these silly New York flat dwellers? Can't they be organized, too?"

"Why," says Mrs. Bill, her eyes openin' wider, "I never thought of that. But—but there are so many of them."

"What about starting with your own block?" suggests Vee. "Perhaps with only one side of the street at first. Couldn't you find out how many were interested in one particular thing—music, or dancing, or bridge—and get them together?"

"Oh, I see!" says Mrs. Bill, clappin' her hands, enthusiastic. "Make a social survey. Why, of course. One could get up a sort of questionnaire card and drop it in the letter boxes for each family to fill out, if they cared to do so, and then you could call meetings of the various groups."

"If I could find a few home folks from Virginia, that's all I would ask," says Lucy Lee.

"Then we would start the card with 'Where born?'" says Mrs. Bill. "That would show us how many were Southerners, how many from the West, from New England, and so on. Next we would want to know something about their ages."

"Not too much," suggests Hamilton Blake. "Better ask 'em if they're over or under thirty."

"Of course," says Mrs. Bill. "Let's see how such a card would look. Next we would ask them what amusements they liked best: music, dancing, theatre going, bowling, bridge, private theatricals, chess and so on. Please check with a cross. And are you a high-brow; if so, why? Is it art, books, languages, or the snare drum?"

"Don't forget the poker fiends and the movie fans," I puts in.

Mrs. Bill writes that down. "We will have to begin by electing ourselves an organizing committee," says she, "and we will need a small printing fund."

"I'll chip in ten," says Mr. Blake.

"So will we," says Vee.

"And I am sure Bill will, too," says Mrs. Fairfield, "which will be quite enough to print all the cards we need. And tomorrow evening we will get together in our apartment and make out the questionnaire complete. Shall we?"

So when we left to catch a late train for Long Island it looked like West Hundred and Umpty Umpt street was going to have something new sprung on it. Course, we didn't know how far these two young couples would get towards reformin' New York, but they sure was in earnest, 'specially young Mrs. Bill, who seems to have more or less common sense tucked away between her ears.

That must have been a week or ten days ago, and as we hadn't heard from any of them, or seen anything in the papers, we was kind of curious. So here yesterday I has to call up Lucy Lee on the 'phone.

"Say," says I, "how's that block sociable progressin'?"

"Oh, perfectly wonderful!" says Lucy Lee. "Why, at our first meeting, in a big dance hall, we had nearly 300 persons and were almost swamped. But Esther is a perfect wizard at organizing. She got them into groups in less than half an hour, and before we adjourned they had formed all kinds of clubs and associations, from subscription dance clubs to a Lord Dunsany private theatrical club. Everyone in the block who didn't turn out at first has been clamoring to get in since and it has been keeping us busy sorting them out. You've no idea what a difference it makes up here. Why, I know almost everybody in the building now, and some of them are really charming people. They're beginning to seem like real neighbors and I don't think we shall ever pass another dull evening while we live here. Even folks across the street have heard about it and want Esther to come over and organize them."

So I had quite a bulletin to take home to Vee.

"Isn't that splendid!" says she.

"Anyway," says I, "I guess you started something. If it spreads enough, maybe New York'll be almost fit to live in. But I have my doubts."

CHAPTER II

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WHEN HALLAM WAS RUNG UP

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It ain't often Mr. Robert starts something he can't finish. When he does, though, he's shifty at passin' it on. Yes, I'll say he is. For in such cases I'm apt to be the one that's handiest, and you know what that means. It's a matter of Torchy being joshed into tacklin' any old proposition that may be batted up, with Mr. Robert standin' by ready to spring the grin.

Take this little go of his with the Hallam Beans—excuse me, the F. Hallam Beans. Doesn't that sound arty? Well, that's what they were, this pair. Nothing but. I forget where it was they drifted in from, but of course they couldn't have found each other anywhere but in Greenwich Village. And in course of time they mated up there. It was the logical, almost the brilliant thing to do. Instead of owing rent for two skylight studios they pyramided on one; besides, after that each one could borrow the makin's off the other when the cigarettes ran out, and if there came pea-green moments when they doubted whether they were real geniuses or not one could always buck up the other.

If they had stuck to the Village I expect we'd never heard anything about them, but it seems along early last spring F. Hallam had a stroke of luck. He ran across an old maid art student from Mobile who was up for the summer and was dyin' to get right into the arty atmosphere. Also she had \$300 that her grip wasn't any too tight on, and before she

knew it F. Hallam had sub-let the loft to her until Sept. 15, payable in advance. Two days later the Beans, with more'n half of the loot left, were out on Long Island prospectin' around in our locality and talking vague about taking a furnished bungalow. They were shown some neat ones, too, runnin' from eight to fifteen hundred for three months, but none of 'em seemed to be just right. But when they discovered this partly tumbled down shack out on a back lane beyond Mr. Robert Ellinses' big place they went wild over it. Years ago some guy who thought he was goin' to get rich runnin' a squab farm had put it up, but he'd quit the game and the property had been bought up by Muller, our profiteerin' provision dealer. And Muller didn't do a thing but soak 'em \$30 a month rent for the shack, that has all the conveniences of a cow shed in it.

But the Beans rented some second-hand furniture, bought some oil lamps and a two-burner kerosene stove, and settled down as happy and contented as if they'd leased a marble villa at Newport. From then on you'd be liable to run across 'em most anywhere, squattin' in a field or along the back roads with their easels and paint brushes, daubin' away industrious.

You might know it would be either Mrs. Robert or Vee who would pick 'em up and find out the whole story. As a matter of fact it was both, for they were drivin' out after ferns or something when they saw the Beans perched on a stone wall tryin' to unbutton a can of sardines with a palette knife and not having much success. You know the kind of people who either lose the key to a sardine can or break off the tab and then gaze at it helpless! That was them to the life.

And when Mrs. Robert finds how they're livin' chiefly on dry groceries and condensed milk, so's to have more to blow in on dinky little tubes of Chinese white and Prussian blue and canvas, of course she has to get busy slippin' 'em little trifles like a dozen fresh eggs, a mess of green peas and a pint of cream now and then. She follows that up by havin' 'em come over for dinner frequent. Vee has to do her share too, chippin' in a roast chicken or a cherry pie or a pan of doughnuts, so between the two the Hallam Beans were doin' fairly well. Hallam, he comes back generous by wishin' on each of 'em one of his masterpieces. The thing he gives us Vee hangs up over the livin' room mantelpiece, right while he's there.

"Isn't that perfectly stunning, Torchy?" she demands.

"I expect it is," says I, squintin' at it professional, "but—but just what is it supposed to be?" And I turns inquirin' to F. Hallam.

"Why," says he, "it is a study of afternoon light on a group of willows. We are not Futurists, you see; Revertists, rather. Our methods—at least mine—are frankly after the Barbizon school."

"Yeauh!" says I, noddin' wise. "I knew one once who could do swell designs on mirrors with a piece of soap."

"I beg pardon," says Hallam. "One what?"

"A barber's son," says I. "I got him a job as window decorator, too."

But somehow after that Hallam sort of shies talkin' art with me. A touchy party, F. Hallam. The least little thing would give him the sulks. And even when he was feelin' chipper his face was long enough. As a floorwalker in a

mournin' goods shop he'd be a perfect fit. But you couldn't suggest anything that sounded like real work to Hallam. He claims that he was livin' for his art. Maybe so, but I'll be hanged if he was livin' on it. I got to admit, though, that he dressed the part fairly well; for in that gray flannel shirt and the old velvet coat and the flowin' black tie, and with all that stringy, mud-colored hair fallin' around his ears, he couldn't be mistaken for anything else. Even a movie audience would have spotted him as an artist without a leader to that effect.

Mrs. Hallam Bean was a good runnin' mate for him, for she has her hair boxed and wears paint-smear'd smocks. Only she's a shy actin', quiet little thing, and real modest. There's no doubt whatever but that she has decided that F. Hallam is going to be a great painter some day. When she ain't sayin' as much she's lookin' it; and Hallam, I suspect, is always ready to make the vote unanimous.

I judged from a few remarks of Mr. Robert's that he wasn't quite as strong for the Hallams as Mrs. Robert was, but seein' 'em around so much he couldn't help gettin' more or less interested in the business end of their career.

"Yes," says he, "they seem to be doing fairly well this summer; but how about next winter, when they go back to town? You know they can't possibly sell any of those things. How are they going to keep from starving?"

Mrs. Robert didn't know. She said she'd mention the matter to F. Hallam. And she found he wasn't worrying a bit. His plans were vague enough. He was doing a head of Myrtle—that being Mrs. Bean—which he thought he might let some magazine have as a cover picture. And then, other things were bound to turn up. They always had, you know.

But toward the end of the season the Beans got shabbier than ever. Myrtle's smocks were torn and stained, with a few cigarette burns here and there, and her one pair of walking boots were run over at the heel and leaky in the sole. As for Hallam, that velvet coat had so many grease spots on it that it was hardly fit to wear outside of a stable, and his rubber-soled shoes gave his toes plenty of air. The Beans admitted that their finances were down to the zero point and they had to be asked in for dinner at least three times a week to keep 'em from bein' blue in the gills.

"Hang it all!" says Mr. Robert, "the fellow ought to have a regular job of some kind. I suppose he can draw after a fashion. I'll see what I can do."

And by rustlin' around among his friends he finds one who runs a big advertisin' agency and can place another man in the art department. You'd 'most thought F. Hallam would have been tickled four ways at the prospect of draggin' down a pay envelope reg'lar and being able to look the rent agent in the face. But say, what does he do but scrape his foot and wriggle around like he'd been asked to swallow a non-skid headache tablet. At last he gets out this bleat about how he'd always held his art to be too sacred a thing for him to commercialize and he really didn't know whether he could bring himself to drawin' ad. pictures or not. He'd have to have time to think it over.

"Very well," says Mr. Robert, restrainin' himself from blowin' a fuse as well as he could. "Let me know tomorrow night. If you decide to take the place, come over about 6:30; if you find that your views as to the sacredness of your art

are too strong, you needn't bother to arrive until 8:30—after dinner."

I expect it was some struggle, but Art must have gone down for the full count. Anyway the Beans were on hand when the tomato bisque was served next evenin', and in less'n a week F. Hallam was turnin' out a perfectly good freehand study of a lovely lady standin' graceful beside a Never-smoke oil stove—no-wicks, automatic feed, send for our catalogue—and other lively compositions along that line. More'n that, he made good and the boss promised him that maybe in a month or so he'd turn him loose with his oil paints on something big, a full page in color, maybe, for a leadin' breakfast food concern. Then the Beans moved back to town and we heard hardly anything more about 'em.

I understand, though, that they sort of lost caste with their old crowd in Greenwich Village. Hallam tried to keep up the bluff for a while that he wasn't workin' reg'lar, but his friends began to suspect. They noticed little things, like the half pint of cream that was left every morning for the Beans, the fact that Hallam was puttin' on weight and gettin' reckless with clean collars. And finally, after being caught coming from the butcher's with two whole pounds of lamb chops, Myrtle broke down and confessed. They say after that F. Hallam was a changed man. He had his hair trimmed, took to wearin' short bow ties, and when he dined at the Purple Pup, sneaked in and sat at a side table like any tourist from the upper West Side.

Course, on Sundays and holidays he put on the old velvet coat, and set up his easel and splashed away with his

paints. But mostly he did heads of Myrtle, and figure stuff. It was even hinted that he hired models.

It must have been on one of his days home that this Countess Zecchi person discovered him in his old rig. She'd been towed down there on a slummin' party by a club friend of Mr. Robert's who'd heard of Hallam and had the address. You remember hearin' about the Countess, maybe? She was Miss Mae Collins, of Kansas City, originally, and Zecchi was either the second or third of her hubbies, or hobbies, whichever you'd care to call 'em. A lively, flighty female, Countess Zecchi, who lives in a specially decorated suite at the Plutoria, sports a tiger cub as a pet, and indulges in other whims that get her more or less into the spotlight.

Her particular hunch on this occasion was that she must have her portrait done by a real Bohemian artist, and offhand she gives F. Hallam the job.

"You must paint me as Psyche," says she. "I've always wanted to be done as Psyche. Can't we have a sitting tomorrow?"

Hallam was almost too thrilled for words, but he managed to gasp out that she could. So he reports sick to his boss, blows in all his spare cash buyin' a big mirror and draperies to fix up a Psyche pool in the studio, and decides that at last luck has turned. For three days the Countess Zecchi shows up reg'lar, drapes herself in pink tulle, and Hallam paints away enthusiastic.

Then she don't come any more. For a week she stalls him off and finally tells him flat that posing as Psyche bores her. Besides, she's just starting south on a yachting party. The portrait? Oh, she doesn't care about that. She hadn't really

given him a commission, just told him he might paint her. And he mustn't bother her by calling up again. Positively.

So Hallam hits the earth with a dull thud. He reports back on the advertisin' job and groans every time he thinks how much he spent on the mirror and big canvas. He'd been let in, that's all. But he finishes up the Psyche picture durin' odd times. He even succeeded in unloadin' it on some dealer who supplies the department stores, so he quits about square.

Then an odd thing happens. At the advertisin' agency there's a call from a big customer for a picture to go with a Morning Glory soap ad. It's a rush order, to be done in six colors. Hallam has a bright little thought. Why wouldn't his Psyche picture fit in? The boss thinks it's worth lookin' up, and an hour later he comes back from the dealer's with the trade all made. And inside of three weeks no less than two dozen magazines was bindin' in a full page in colors showin' the fair form of the Countess Zecchi bendin' over a limpid pool tryin' to fish out a cake of Morning Glory soap. It was a big winner, that ad. The soap firm ordered a hundred thousand copies struck off on heavy plate paper, and if you sent in five wrappers with a two-cent stamp you'd be mailed a copy to tack up in the parlor.

Whether or not the general public would have recognized the Countess Zecchi as the girl in the soap ad. if she'd kept still about it is a question. Most likely it wouldn't. But the Countess didn't keep still. That wasn't her way. She proceeds to put up a holler. The very day she discovers the picture, through kind friends who almost swamped her with cut-out copies and telegrams, she rushes back to New York

and calls up the reporters. All one afternoon she throws cat fits for their benefit up at her Plutoria apartment. She tells 'em what a wicked outrage has been sprung on her by a wretched shrimp of humanity who flags under the name of Bean and pretends to be a portrait painter. She goes into details about the mental anguish that has almost prostrated her since she discovered the fiendish assault on her privacy, and she announces how she has begun action for criminal libel and started suit for damages to the tune of half a million dollars.

Well, you've seen what the papers did to that bit of news. They sure did play it up, eh? The Psyche picture, with all its sketchy draperies, was printed side by side with half tones of the Countess Zecchi. And of course they didn't neglect F. Hallam Bean. He has to be photographed and interviewed, too. Also, Hallam wasn't dodgin' either a note-book or a camera. As a result he is mentioned as "the well-known portrait painter of Greenwich Village," and so on. One headline I remember was like this: "Founder of American Revertist School Sued for Half Million."

I expect I kidded Mr. Robert more or less about his artist friend. He don't know quite how to take it, Mr. Robert. In one way he feels kind of responsible for Hallam, but of course he ain't worried much about the damage suit. The Countess might get a judgment, but she'd have a swell time collectin' anything over a dollar forty-nine, all of which she must have known as well as anybody. But she was gettin' front page space. So was F. Hallam. And the soap firm was runnin' double shifts fillin' new orders.

Then here one afternoon, as Mr. Robert and me are puttin' the finishin' touches to a quarterly report, who should drift into the Corrugated general offices but F. Hallam Bean, all dolled up in an outfit that he must have collected at some costumers. Anyway, I ain't seen one of them black cape coats for years, and the wide-brimmed black felt hat is a curio. Also he's gone back to the flowin' necktie and is lettin' his hair grow wild again.

"Well, well!" says I. "Right off the boulevard, eh?"

"Why the masquerade?" demands Mr. Robert.

He don't seem a bit disturbed at our josh, but just smiles sort of satisfied and superior. "I suppose it is different," says he, "but then, so am I. I've just been having some new photos taken. They're to be used with an article I'm contributing to a Sunday paper. It is to be entitled, 'What is a Revertist?' They are paying me \$100 for it. Not bad, eh!"

"Pretty soft, I'll say," says I. "Soak 'em while the soakin's good."

"Still getting on well with your job?" asked Mr. Robert.

"Oh, I've chucked that," says Hallam airy. "No more of that degrading grind for me. I've arrived, you know."

"Eh?" gasps Mr. Robert. "Where?"

"Why," says F. Hallam, "don't you understand what has happened during these last two weeks? Fame has found me out. I am known as the founder of a new school of art—the original Revertist. My name has become a household word. And before this absurd libel suit is finished I shall be painting the portraits of all the leading society people. They are already asking about me, and as soon as I find a suitable studio—I'm considering one on West 59th Street, facing