



The Madness of Method

by Frank Leon Smith

WE sat on the window-sill, Bob, my roommate, George Tyler, an artist friend, and I, watching the paper-hangers pack up their kits.

We had learned by previous experience that it is wise to watch paper-hangers perform this operation. Collector's craze is not peculiar to museum curators.

After they had departed we continued to sit and to cogitate.

Our studio was a sight for the wanton and the malicious. To be sure, the ceilings were unbelievably white and the walls reflected the art of the designer, the craft of the paper-maker, and the cunning of the hanger. But the floors—plural; we had three rooms and a bath—were spattered with paint and calcimine, and scraps of pasty wall-paper clung tenaciously to the boards.

In the center of the rooms were heaped our belongings: chairs, carved—initials and dates—tables, easels, photograph files, shelves, cabinets, books—some with covers—pictures, and the various what-not that two young men with more time than money gather about themselves.

Bob and I were confronted by a monstrous problem—we didn't know just where or how to begin the task of putting our house in order. To us it seemed barely possible that a head-on collision could duplicate the chaos before us. We realized that there was men's work to be done, yet we hesitated.

"Lempky would enjoy this," George observed. "He would revel in this wreckage."

Bob lit his pipe and I eased myself into a more

comfortable position.

"Continue, George; anything to delay the ordeal," I encouraged.

"Lempky was a sealhead I roomed with three years ago up in Fifty-Sixth Street. When I said he would enjoy this break in the levee I had my fingers crossed. Though he has reformed somewhat, he is the neatest and most methodical man in the world, and if he should see a street torn up for a new sewer he would be upset for a week. But I am dealing out the cognac before the consomme.

"How I happened to team up with Lempky doesn't matter. A man does strange things when he is broke, and I was nicked all round the edge and cracked across the middle in those days. You see, my salary as a frame-maker on the *Chronicle* art staff wouldn't keep a Salvation Army lass in tambourine skins. I guess what drew me to him first was the fact that he had a good civil-service job and couldn't be fired for anything short of arson.

"He was a big, bald-headed chap and a slow talker—weighed his words as carefully as a grocer weighs his hand with each pound of butter. But I knew something was wrong as soon as he moved his traps into the room.

"You see, he had two trunks full of the usual gear, and in addition he brought in three big filing cabinets and a roll-top desk. Strange ornaments for a narrow-chested, third-floor room, I thought, but said nothing at the time. It took him about a month to get settled, and I observed his technique with amazement and alarm. Gradually it dawned on me that he had been bitten by an adding-machine when a mere child, for he was precision on casters. That

made me wonder if we would get along well together, because I am as neat and tidy as a rummage sale at closing time.

“Well, the desk and cabinets were tried out in a dozen different poses before he was satisfied, and then he gave his attention to the wardrobe. We shared the one closet, and while I could have worn all my clothes at once without increasing my temperature half a degree, any one could see that the garments of two men hung on our hooks.

“So long as the closet door swung freely I didn’t care how I jammed things in; but he made his section look like a well-conducted haberdashery. There was a separate hanger for each pair of trousers and coat, a rack for his shoes, a shelf for his hats, and a stand for his three sticks.

“Then he added the finishing touch by tacking on the door a chart he got in a gents’ furnishing store. It was one of those score-cards that tell just what the well-dressed man should wear; you know: Morning, for business—gray striped overalls with jumper to match; brown button boots; gray fedora, and oak cane. Afternoon, social—plaid swimming trunks; blue spectacles; black derby, and bamboo-stick, straight handle—and so on. Yup, that was Lempky.

“Then he went to work on his cabinets. Night after night I would say: “ ‘ Come on, Lempky, let’s see a show or something,’ and he would shake his head.

“No, I’ve got a lot of work to do. I am cross-indexing my files.’

“And what do you suppose he had in those files. There were bales of newspaper clippings; magazine stories he fancied; bills, paid and the usual kind; pamphlets on all sort of subjects; cards advertising restaurants, tailors, yes—and old-clothes men; catalogues of everything from automobiles to zithers; canceled checks; valentines—

“But why continue with the list? He saved everything and kept a record of it in a card-index. It was a hard question he couldn’t answer after consulting his cabinets.

“When he had the files under control he dived at the desk, dry-docked it and overhauled it thoroughly. There was a proper place for everything, and the top—you would think he had laid it out with a T-square and compass. The desk-pad, ink-well, paste-pot, scissors, pin-box, ruler, and letter-basket were arranged so exactly that he could

label ‘em ‘ABC-XYZ’ and work out any problem in geometry by ‘em.

“I must have everything where I can put my hands on it in the dark,” he explained to me.

“Much more simple to carry a box of matches,’ I said.

“He stared as though he had heard the sphinx sneeze, but my suggestion blossomed and bore fruit. Always after that he carried a box of matches in the lower left corner of his waistcoat.

“After he had systematized his junk he devoted the long winter evenings to the study of automobiles, trying to decide just which car he would build a garage round when he could afford it. That was Lempky—every breath he drew was arranged for earlier in the day.

“Yes—and to see him scan a menu-card would remind you of a pawnbroker examining a watch. Each dish he ordered was selected because of the calories, proteids, hypophosphites, vim, and ginger infesting it.

“Anyhow, he supplemented his automobile education with a lot of miscellaneous lore. He read furniture catalogues and home-builders’ guides by the score, and began to watch the classified columns in the newspapers for bargains in house-furnishings.

“The landlady let him store stuff in a spare room on the top floor, and it wasn’t long before he had quite a collection of assorted furniture. He told me it was a good investment and an ideal way for a young man to save his money.

“But what will you do with this stuff?’ I asked him.

“I will need it when I am married,’ he said in that careful way of his.

“That staggered me, and I went down for the count when I saw him reading up on a lot of statistics about marriage, the selection of the ideal wife, and such. He had a ton of that variety of literature in his files. I kicked myself for not suspecting it before—he intended to choose a wife in the same cautious manner he ordered his food.

“But, Lempky.’ I argued. ‘here’s a stunt where method is nix. You can’t run through a card index like this—blondes, brunettes—tall—short, there, now for the cross file—130 pounds—140—145—Ah, here we are: Miss Nellie Jones, 143 Mendelssohn Mall—brunette—tall—145 pounds, just the lady! and order the wedding announcements from your favorite stationer. When that system was

made up the key was thrown away and you must take your chances with the rest of us.’

“‘I am a big, strong, serious man. I will choose a suitable wife,’ he answered with ponderous dignity.

“‘Gus, there is only one thing to prevent you from becoming a great general,’ I said. ‘They wouldn’t let you take your filing cabinets out on the battle-field.’

“Do you know, he was looking for the one woman even then. Had been for two years. Always on the street, in the theater, restaurant, or street-car, he inspected every girl he saw and considered her qualifications. There was nothing of the flirt about him—no butterfly stuff. He was a serious, slow-moving ox.

“One night after I had turned in he came home, and when I woke up he was at his desk, writing. Just to make a little conversation, I asked him if he had succeeded in locating his soul-mate.

“‘I have seen the lady I intend to marry,’ he said.

“‘Her name is Miss Rachel Spalding, and she lives at 2004 West Eightieth Street. I followed her to her home and asked her name at the corner drug-store.

“‘I am writing to her now. I shall tell her why I must see her and ask for an interview.’

“The next morning he mailed her the letter telling all about himself and why he wanted to meet her, and inclosing several good references and a photograph taken for precisely that occasion. A couple of nights later, when I came in after dinner, I found him getting into his dress-clothes.

“‘What’s up, Gus? Going out among them to-night?’ I asked.

“He was reading the well dressed man chart at the moment and didn’t answer. I heard him mumbling: ‘Pearl studs—white waistcoat—lawn tie—no jewelry,’ Then he looked up.

“‘To-night I am to call on Miss Spalding.’

“‘Is this an open meet or an invitation affair?’

“‘I have received a note from the lady, requesting me to call at her home,’ he said and continued with his preparations.

“‘Gus,’ I said sadly, ‘I fear for you. If you only had a saving sense of humor—’

“‘In my files, under A-Anecdotes, you will find some excellent jokes and quips,’ he interrupted, and then he wunk—wa—well, winked at me and went

his way.

“Somehow I envied him the adventure, and all the evening I was wondering how he was making out. I waited up that night to get the returns, but when he came home he wouldn’t say much, although he seemed well pleased with everything.

“To make a long story short, he called regularly on the lady, and after he had worn out two doormats saying fond farewells in the Spalding vestibule he asked me if I cared to go up there with him some night. Said Rachel had a sister I would like.

“I went. I will not dwell on Rachel’s charms beyond saying that she was Rowena, Annette Kellerman, and Kathleen Mavourneen in one. It was quite evident that she was a strong personality.

“Sister was an attractive little party with a boyish face, curly hair, snub nose and freckles, and jammed so full of life that she couldn’t be still a minute. We got on well from the start.

“She led me to a retired corner, and in five minutes she had read my palm, secured my opinion of the shows in town, and confided to me that she wished she was a man so she could play short-stop for the Giants. It seemed that her mother was dead, and father was too busy making money to devote much time to the fireside.

“Sister—her name was Glen—had been attending some sort of school. Rachel, being very independent, was secretary to the president of a steamship company down-town.

“As the evening wore on Glen told me that Rachel had answered Gus’s letter partly for a lark and partly because he seemed so sincere that she was curious to see him. From time to time we could hear Rachel and Gus talking and all their topics of conversation would sink like a rock if placed in the duck-pond.

“Well, ‘a nice time was had by all,’ as the country newspapers say; and when we left I promised Glen I would call her up and send postcards, and all that sort of thing. Rachel was very cordial and nice to me, and told me to be neighborly now that I knew the address, or words to that effect.

“Going home I said: ‘You’re a wiz, Gus; tally one hundred for the filing cabinets.’

“He smiled but said nothing, and we continued on our way, busy with our own private ideas.

“The next day I asked my boss for a raise and got it. Then I took a bunch of my drawings for

samples, went round to the magazine offices, and dragged away three manuscripts to illustrate.

“My first investment was a new dress-suit, and thereafter, when Gus boarded the car for Eightieth Street I was right on deck and matched him for the fares.

“One night, when we were preparing to hit the hay, I said to Gus:

“I don’t want to hurt your feelings, old man,

and perhaps it isn’t quite the square thing for me to do; but Rachel has promised to marry me.’

“Not at all, George; don’t worry a minute about me. I congratulate you. Rachel is an estimable woman, but Glen is sort of different, and I—well, we—’

“We shook hands on it.

“The double wedding came off without a hitch.”