



A Lodging for the Knight~

By
Thomas Thursday~

WHEN that light comedian of musical-comedy revues, Jim Tarbox, reached the door of his furnished room in the “Roaring Forties”—so called because the landladies and lords roar when rent is due—he tried to turn the knob. Some knobs do not always turn. The one on Jim Tarbox’s door was of that type just then. Then he struck a match, and the light gleamed on a note directly above the knob. It read:

Don’t try and bust door open. Rent passed doo 2 weeks, 2 weeks more than we generally trust anybody. Your cheep wardrobe will be helled till payment is paid. Meentime, take the air with best wishes.

(Signed) MURPHY & GOLDBUG, Props.

“Huh,” grunted Tarbox, “so I ain’t good for three weeks, hey? I’m to be treated like a regular tramp!” He leaned against the paper-shedding wall and meditated. “Well,” he mused at length, “I guess I am a bum, at that! A guy with only two bits in his poke and two weeks’ back rent staring him in the kisser ain’t exactly the lion’s bathrobe when it comes to great wealth.” After that, Tarbox descended the two flights of stairs and, following the admonition of Messrs. Murphy & Goldbug, took the air.

The light comedian was irritatingly broke, busted, and altogether strapped. His engagement with the “Zigzag Revue and Follies,” which was dated to run twenty weeks, tottered less than twenty days. That’s always the way with the good shows—ask any performer—while the punk ones run indefinitely.

Tarbox walked to the corner and watched the newest Broadway electric sign, proclaiming the wonders of “Doctor Sniffsnapper’s Oil of Onions—

A Positive Cure for Bunions, Baldness, and Hives,” flutter for a time and vanish. It was the fifteenth of February, a day that may not be so cold in either Miami or an oven, but Tarbox chanced to be in neither. He was in the land of New York City, and if the fifteenth of February isn’t cold in that country, the natives feel that nature is holding out on them. It was cold. If you doubt it, just stand beside Mr. Tarbox, draped in a spring overcoat, and see for yourself.

The crisp breeze brought him to his full senses, and you have no idea how an actor can think when he’s cold and hungry. He must have a bite to eat and a lodging for the night.

Walking toward him snappily, a block away to the south, was an officer, known to the comic sections as a cop. As he swung his nightstick to keep warm, he hummed a tune. Officer Pat Shapiro, being an excellent cop, was ever on the lookout for trouble. However, if he could spot it before it spotted him, he believed that a live bird was much better than a sermon over a dead one.

Tarbox saw the oncoming officer and forthwith brewed a bright, a very bright idea. That is, if it worked.

“I gotta eat,” he soliloquized, “and I gotta sleep, but so long as a guy is honest he can stand right here and freeze his beak off without being disturbed. How the so ever, if I bust a window in a jeweler’s, or bounce a brick off some bird’s bean, I am guaranteed a place to sleep and some cake. Not only that, but the cop will hail a green taxi with a bell on it and give me a free ride to the cooler. So I guess I’ll play the part of a intoxicated gent, and then this here copper will lock me up for busting the Eighteenth Amendment to the Can’tstitution of the United America. Let’s go!”

Tarbox ruffled his hair, tilted his hat to an angle that suggested lunacy, then staggered around in a circle.

Officer Pat Shapiro came closer. Unfortunately, however, his eagle eye was not upon the merry-go-round comedian. To make matters worse, there could be heard the shrill whistle of a brother officer in distress, just as Shapiro might have seen Tarbox. The officer dashed across the street, unaware of the remarkable performance that had been staged for his sole benefit.

Tarbox stopped his impersonation, not without disgust. His act, in the parlance of the profession, had taken a terrible flop. "Was luck apple sauce," he mused, "I'd have to nibble bean soup forever. And I hope the bird who blew that whistle swallowed it!"

II.

DISAPPOINTED, but not discouraged, Tarbox set his brain to working on a new scheme to get a lodging and a bite to eat. He gazed up and down Broadway and noted that pedestrians were few and far between, like trolley cars—or anything—when you're in a hurry. Directly across the street was an all-night, pancake-and-syrup beanery, where a white-garbed gent was tossing flapjacks in the air like dumb-bells.

The sight made Tarbox smack his lips, jam his hands into his pockets, and finger his lone quarter. Should he or should he not get some flapjacks and syrup? He should not! For he was that type of actor who will not part with their last cent, even though they have missed a whole row of meals. Tarbox had never been absolutely penniless, and he refused to be so now.

He peered up the street for the second time and noticed a portly gentleman coming his way, carrying a cane. Promptly the active brain of the light comedian originated another bright idea. That is, if it worked.

"Here's a chance of a lifetime!" he enthused. "I'll just grab the old boy's cane; he'll howl for help in six lingos, including the Scandinavian, and I'll get pinched. It looks soft, and how I can fail is beyond me. Let's go!"

The victim approached, head high, his whiskers flowing in the breeze. Tarbox also approached, head low, his fedora flapping in the wind.

"Hey, gimme that cane!" growled the comedian,

jerking the Malacca stick from the stranger. "Gimme that cane or I'll bounce—"

The old fellow relinquished the cane without the slightest struggle. "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir!" he exclaimed. "Really, I didn't intend to steal your cane—just picked it up on the next corner. You must have dropped it! Glad to have been able to return it to right owner—er—good night, sir!"

Woof!

"Was luck macaroni," mused the disgusted Tarbox, as he fingered the cane, "I'd have to eat mince pie forever! What's more, either that guy or me is plumb nutty! What and the blue sky do I want with a cane, hey? I wouldst like a place to sleep and a few crumbs of cake, and a cane ain't no good for neither. This is certainly a cockeyed world!"

He walked back to the brass railing in front of the Divided Cigar Store and dangled his new—and useless—acquisition. Once more he looked up and down Broadway for possible victims. It was getting colder and nearly two o'clock at night. A place to sleep was now imperative.

Suddenly, Tarbox observed a young lady tripping toward him from the uptown direction. Immediately, the active mind of the shivering comedian—you have no idea how you can think when you're cold and hungry—decided to play a dangerous game, a game that has wrecked many a gay Lothario and misguided Romeo.

Tarbox decided that he would flirt with the young lady. If he had the same success that attended his previous attempts at the flirting art, he would be in jail in less than no time, if not sooner. He reasoned that she would let out a screech in at least eight octaves, and then he would be in Dutch—also, he would be in jail.

"Oh, boy!" he chortled. "This is soft! I'll just walk up to this pretty maiden, and say, 'Ah, there. 'Little One,' whither thou goest, what?' Then she'll let forth a ballyhoo and tap me for a row of sandpapered eels. Let's go!"

He swung his cane grandiloquently—which you'll find in a dictionary, not that it means anything—and awaited the arrival of the girl. As she neared him, he saw that she appeared somewhat dejected and out of spirits. She was blond, dressed rather bizarre, and just the sort, he figured, to give a terrible battle to anyone who crossed her path.

"Ah, there, Little One!" began Tarbox.

“Whither thou goest, what?” Then he waited for results.

“Well, you can search me!” quoth Little One, stopping abruptly. “But I know one thing, old dear, and that is if I ever go out with another one of them bloomers called ‘Revues,’ I hope I get stranded at the North Pole! This is the third time that I ‘most hadda walk back to N’Yawk.”

Woof!

Tarbox was foiled again. However, an actor soon gets over disappointments. He recognized that he was face to face with a fellow artiste, or performer; one, like himself, in distress.

“Sorry, sister,” he said; “I’m in the same boat. Here—take this two bits from yours truly, Jim Tarbox. It’s all I got. You’re a woman, and I’m a man, and it’s always harder for a woman, sister. I guess I can get by.”

“Thanks, brother,” said the girl with a tired but thankful smile. “I won’t forget you. Annie Tenny don’t forget favors.”

“That’s all right, Annie,” remarked Jim Tarbox. “Beat it over there to that white-fronted beanery. They tell me that their flapjacks ain’t the worst in the city. Good luck!”

“Thanks—er—Jim. I’m awful hungry. Goo’-by!”

III.

OUTWITTED in his third attempt to get a lodging for the night, the comedian went back to the brass rail and was at once enveloped in assorted gloom. “Was luck a castle,” he soliloquized, “I’d have to live in a barn forever!”

It was now half past two—in the morning. Passers-by were fewer than ever. The thermometer had taken a drop as if some imp had smashed the glass, allowing the quicksilver to spurt downward. Tarbox shivered, snuggled more deeply into his spring overcoat—he had only a ticket for his winter one—and thought harder than ever.

“Believe me,” he muttered grimly, “I’m gonna get into jail, if I have to blow up the whole city!”

Immediately after that bit of flamboyant vehemence, he observed, for the first time, the fire-alarm box directly in front of him. One glance, and he was seized by a weird idea.

“I bet I get a bunk to sleep in and some eats now!” he snapped. “If I ain’t mistaken, anybody who turns in a alarm when they ain’t no fire gets all

the lodging and cakes he wants and for some time to come. How the so ever, since I ain’t noticed any offers from Frohman and Belasco cluttering up the mailbox, I figger that I might as well be a guest of the city as a guest of the gutter. Let’s go!”

He sprinted toward the red box, gave the handle a twist and a few more twists for good measure. “Atta boy!” gloated Tarbox, as he heard the bell tingle. “If that don’t land me in the cooler, then I’ll go down and paste the chief of police on the beezer!” He posed beside the box, prepared to give himself up to the first officer who came along.

Then he received another jar.

His gaze wandered toward an old-fashioned building, across the street. It was one of those brown-brick affairs that saluted John Quincy Adams when he strolled down Broadway, that is, if he did stroll. Tarbox gasped as he saw smoke and flames issuing from the top floor. That building was afire or he was crazy.

Soon fire engines came from the right, from the left, and the middle. Although the fire service of the city was rated to be the equal of any similar system in the world, Tarbox was far from willing to pay it any such compliments.

He stood boredly beside the box and hazily watched the firemen put out the blaze, which proved to be a small one. No one, it pained him to note, had accused him of ringing the alarm.

The last engine had clattered and banged away, leaving him alone. His thoughts suddenly turned to Messrs. Murphy & Goldbug, proprietors of the rooming house that had so snappily evicted him. He felt that he would just then enjoy knocking either one of those gents for a goal, as he would express it.

IV.

PRESENTLY, Tarbox heard loud talking across the street. He gazed over and observed a girl and a man, standing directly outside of the white-fronted restaurant, engaged in what seemed to be an altercation of words, many words.

“Help!” the girl cried.

“Aha,” thought the comedian, with the blood of ancient knights tingling in his veins, “guess I’ll hop over and see if I can promote a little trouble for myself! Looks like a damsel in what they call distress. Might be a neat battle between man and wife, and if I butt in, they’ll both land on my bean,

then have me pinched for interrupting a friendly fight. Let's go!"

Halfway over, he was surprised to see that the girl was Annie Tenny, the girl to whom he had given his last quarter a short while earlier. Then he hastened his pace to get a look at the man. The bird had a face that seemed familiar.

It was Murphy, of Messrs. Murphy & Goldbug. Forthwith, Tarbox became immediately active.

"Hey, what's the idea?" opened up the comedian.

"This man insulted me!" said Annie Tenny.

Murphy recognized Tarbox at once. "Well, well—so it's you, is it?" asked Murphy.

"Yeah—it's me!" snapped back the comedian. "Who did you think it was—Hamlet?"

"You poor ham, for two cents—"

Tarbox did not wait to learn what Murphy would do for two cents or even a dollar ninety-eight cents. He closed his right fist, took aim at the sneering face of his ex-landlord, then let it go. It went! In fact, it would have gone a great distance farther had not the large countenance of Murphy stopped it.

The blow, however, did not cause Murphy to hit the pavement with the thud that Tarbox had expected. Instead, the husky just blinked his eyes a few times, regained his senses, then lunged at his aggressor with both hands flying. His terrific right

swing missed Tarbox's chin by at least a yard; his left wallop, aimed at the nose, missed by six inches, and landed plumb against the iron lamppost. The lamppost did not suffer, but Murphy's hand did.

Then Officer Pat Shapiro arrived to settle the argument. Annie Tenny tried to explain, Tarbox tried to explain, ditto Murphy, all at one and the same time. However, Officer Shapiro was no Solomon, not even a Landis. So he thought it best to assist the trio to the station house and let them do their explaining therein.

Ten minutes later, Messrs. Murphy and Tarbox, locked up for the night, continued their joyous debate from cells opposite each other. After which, Tarbox fell into a happy sleep. He had accomplished his object, to get a bunk for the night, and the fact that Mr. Murphy was the cause of it gave him deep joy. What could be sweeter? Nothing, but this:

Six months later the Majestic, the Home of the World's Best Vaudeville, announced in electric lights a foot high the headline act for the week—Tarbox and Tenny, in a great comedy entitled "A Lodging for the Knight." According to the program, the act was written from life by Jim Tarbox, and his wife, Annie Tenny.

If you get a chance, drop in and see 'em.

They're good!