

BROADWAY JONES

FROM THE PLAY OF
GEORGE M. COHAN

EDWARD MARSHALL

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS FROM SCENES IN THE PLAY

CHAPTER IV.

The asphalt glittered with the glaze of recent rain, reflecting countless lights of many colors. The sidewalks, crowded with gay theater-goers, were as colorful and animated as the changing figures of a child's kaleidoscope, and he smiled at them. Even the odor of burned gasoline which drowned the perfume of fair women's presence seemed as frankincense and myrrh to him—for this was Broadway, the beloved thoroughfare.

And was it not to be his last night in its glitter, his last hearing of its medley, his last glimpsing of its nervous safety? He smiled—the wan smile of the prisoner who sees his friends and joys in them before he marches to the guillotine.

In the restaurant there was obvious stir when he arrived. There always was a stir in restaurants when he arrived. With a practiced and a clever eye he examined with great care the private dining-room wherein was to be sung the swan-song of his spendthriftiness. It was extremely well arranged, the table was a dazzling sight, the flowers were gorgeous and of all-perfuming fragrance, the colored candle-shades cast a subdued, artistic glow upon the whole. The head waiter himself, his neck enchained in sign of office, was in personal control of details, his staff had been well picked from Broadway's favorites among subordinates; a very pretty girl, who smiled at Broadway sweetly, wistfully, as a peasant maid might smile at a crown prince, was ready to accept and check the ladies' wraps, while the small boy in buttons, who was to sort and store the outer garments of the gentlemen, was ready with bright eyes—and itching palms.

The party arrived promptly, coming in a bunch and greeting Broadway variously from the firm and hearty hand-clasp of Bob Wallace, to the merry kiss of Inez Vasquez Marquez, Spanish dancer, born in Kookuk, who would leave early so that she might dance late on the bill at the Spring Garden. There was a flutter with the entrance of Mrs. Gerard, for, as ever, she brought with her her own maid, while her footman waited in the corridor, not for emergencies, but for appearances.

Her once pretty but now age-puckered face had been as thoroughly concealed as possible with various expensive substances which are found in beauty parlors, and her hair was probably the most costly in that part of town that night, and this is saying much, for very costly treasures sometimes deck the fair on Broadway.

The restaurant had wrought evidences of its pride in its allegiance to Broadway's favorite delicacy. A gigantic floral lobster occupied the center of the table, its antennae extended toward the host, one of its claws stretched toward the seat reserved for Mrs. Gerard, the other somewhat less fond of the ladies, for it yearned hungrily toward Bob Wallace's place. At each lady's place were little lobsters, nicely wrought of gold, with jeweled eyes, for each male guest a silver cigarette case had been fashioned into a disconsolate lobster's shape with curled-up tail and drooping claws devoutly tolled on its breast.

Broadway was a perfect host, loquacious, easy, ready to listen than declaim, full of admiration for the ladies, full of the perfection of good fellowship for his men guests.

At first he found it difficult to put out of his mind the thought that this would be the last of all his gorgeous nights on Broadway. The notion fought for permanent position in his head that after these wild hours he would be as far from Broadway as that earnest co-explorer which was credited with having first laid out the street. The thought continually obtruded that this must be to him a funeral, not a festal feast. His hand shook as he raised his glass to the first toast.

Visions of that blue-steel automatic pistol and that bottle with its crimson label floated momentarily before his eyes. Ah, that steel was not the blue of the diaphanous gown which the pretty Winter Garden dancer wore across the table from him; oh, how the red of that red label differed from the red of the red roses! It was not at all the red of the red lobster!

In his dining he had reached that stage where over-stimulated emotion found an outlet in the bitterest self-condemnation which he yet had managed to evoke since the beginning of his self-condemnatory days—that is, since he had been awakened to the realization of the disappearance of his patrimony and the utter hopelessness of everything. He looked at the great decorations in the center of the table and saw gravely, so that all might see, though he was addressing no one, that he was addressing no one.

"You may be big, old chap, but I know a bigger lobster than you ever were."

It happened at that instant that a pause had come in the excited joyousness about him—one of those brief, unexpected silences which never fail, at least once in every dinner-party, to reveal to everyone some saying which the sayer wished to have unheard by the majority. Always it is something awkward, inadvertent, stupid or unwholesome which is thus made blatantly the property of everybody's ears. This night it was our young host's confidential statement to the great, red decorative lobster in the center of his dinner table.

There was a chorus of inquiry. If Broadway knew a bigger lobster, who was he, and where?

"Be careful, Broadway! Don't name any friend of ours! We'd get peevish, for that is—some—lobster."

"Who is it, Broadway?"

"Name, Broadway; name!" demanded the whole tableful.

Gloomy and dissatisfied with that life which he loathed to quit, yet felt that he could not continue, Broadway rose and bowed. "I'm it!" he answered. "I."

Protests chorused.

"What hard-hearted girl has turned you down, Broadway?" asked the lovely Inez.

"Who is it, Broadway? Who could possibly have the heart or been the fool to do it?"

Mrs. Gerard, his neighbor, bent on him a glance so languishing that he almost had to turn his face away.

"No girl has ever turned me down," he said, endeavoring to be gay. "No girl has ever had a chance to turn me down. I mean—"

Realizing that this did not sound gallant, being instinctively, by nature, a gallant, he would have modified it if he could, but the howl of approbation which arose from all the men, the chorus of mock criticism which arose from all the women, drowned his voice. From all the women except one. That one sat on his right, that woman was a widow and was worth a million.

"No girl could turn you down," she murmured.

Ah, that thought which so repeatedly had festered in his brain! Here were millions which admired him! Here were millions which would pay the debts which had piled up, which would make the bottle with the crimson label and the weapon with the blue-steel barrel quite unnecessary! Here were millions which would solve the last one of his difficulties and for which, if he accepted them, he could offer adequate return in a devotion which should be at once that of a son for an indulgent mother and a near-drowned man for his rescuer! Why not? Why not? Why not marry Mrs. Gerard?

"No girl could turn you down," had been her words.

In the hurly-burly of the questions and the answers, the frolic and the nonsense, he scarcely had an opportunity to speak to her in tender words, but he answered her by scribbling on her menu card:

"Couldn't you?"

He felt certain that she gasped with pleasure.

"Why do you say such things?" she scribbled.

"Because I love you," the unfortunate youth answered.

"I love you, too," she scribbled in reply.

"What sort of game are you two playing here?" demanded Robert Wallace gaily.

"Don't interrupt, Bob," Broadway ordered. "It's a new kind of game of hearts. It's played with menu cards. Shut up!"

He turned again to his delighted, if ancient partner in the novel pastime.

"It can't be true," he scribbled.

"It is true," she wrote.

"Will you marry me?" he scrawled.

With a coy look at him which made him feel a little faint, but without an instant's hesitation, "Yes," she answered.

It was tremendously to the relief of the young host that Bob Wallace, at about this moment, rose and said that he must leave.

There were proprietary details even of movement of her hands and some shrewd wits suspected for an instant, even though they put the wild idea from them as absurd before it gained firm foothold in their minds.

"Who is she, Broadway? Name! Name! Name!" the shouts insisted.

"Guess!" said Broadway strangely.

He felt less worry than he would have felt before he had imbibed the last few glasses of champagne. He had been drinking very busily since the dreadful thought had been put into execution. He had been certain he would need some artificial courage.

It gathered in his soul and helped him fashion an extraordinary smile—vacuous and tremulous, but none the less a smile.

"Viola?" hazarded a reckless youth across the table, and Viola (who was present in the makeup which she had worn from the stage of a near theater, where she had, that evening, acted powerfully the part of a wronged and innocent maidenhood) hoped wildly for an instant. Perhaps Broadway, in his cups, had decided on this most unusual way of asking her the fateful question! She had had high hopes of him. Perhaps—

"No," he answered thickly. "Guess again. Three guesses. It's going to take some brains, I tell you that! Intellect's the only thing'll do it. Who ever guesses right gets a cigar."

There was only one among the ladies present who was not favored by some speculative mind, and that one was the right one.

Guesser after guesser named some of the young and vivid creatures of that almost wholly young and vivid feminine company, none guessed the only faded flower in the gay group. Broadway, never dreaming of the agony which filled the faded flower's much powdered bosom because of the omission of her name, feeling few emotions, really, other than the keen sensation of relief from his financial worries, stood smiling somewhat vacantly, but, on the whole, without much pain, upon the puzzled party.

"Go on, guess with your brains," he genially suggested. "It's mind, not foot-work, that will win the prize."

But none guessed.

Realizing that in this was something like reflection on her fitness for the coveted position of consort to the youth, Mrs. Gerard attracted everybody's attention, presently, by a wonderfully feigned embarrassment as she rose and stood by Broadway's side.

The party gasped, but rose to the occasion as soon as it could get its breath again. It was incredible, and there were those among the guests who were so sure of this that they believed a joke was hidden somewhere in the episode, but the majority were well trained to Broadway's genius for producing mad extravagance, that they simply charged this up as one of them.

A dancer who had been brought up from the cabaret below after one o'clock and closing time had come, sprang lightly to a table, and to the destruction of the floral lobster and some notably fine glassware, did a gay pas-senl among the wrecks of sanguinary shells and emptied bottles. The head waiter smiled, knowing that whatever might be broken would be charged up in the bill at double value and paid for without question by the sensational spendthrift, to whose own wealth was now linked the extraordinary fortune of the recent John Gerard (wholesale leather) who had made his millions, married a very vital lady of his own ripe years and then died of sheer antiquity, to leave her, triumphant in superior vitality, reliot and craving for that gaily which life with him had not provided.

"Broadway!" breathed the ancient lady with a skillful simulation of embarrassment. "You naughty, naughty boy!"

"Naughty, possibly; but how extremely lucky!" said the wholly unexpected bridegroom-elect without a quiver, much to his own surprise and self-congratulation.

As it broke up the party rioted with joy, very largely alcoholic. Mrs. Gerard's car, when it came up from its hiding place around the corner, was flustered encumbered with the flowers from ladies' corsages, table bouquets and men's boutonnières. One enthusiast thrust in a potted palm, and Mrs. Gerard screamed when she sat on it. Another made a thoughtful contribution of two lobster-claws which, to his astonishment, he had found in his hands as he arrived upon the sidewalk. A lady, being under the impression that the wedding had been celebrated while she briefly napped up at the table, insisted upon throwing one white satin slipper at her whom she believed to be the bride, refusing to accept the theory that Mrs. Gerard was, as yet, only Broadway's fiancée.

"But you can't walk without it," her

insisted, missed Mrs. Gerard's cuff by a quarter of an inch and then burst into tears.

Four yellow government notes were placed in circulation in police circles before the long and rangy touring car reached the granite archway which invited entrance ten stories underneath the bachelor apartment in which Rankin waited for him, sleeping, but with one ear open for the riot which frequently attended the home-coming of his master.

The car had scarcely come to a standstill before both eyes were open. And as the eyes appeared from their snug hiding places behind fat lids, his ears achieved astonishment. His master had returned at early hours on previous occasions accompanied by merry friends, but they had never chosen as their happy, matin song, the "Wedding March from Lohengrin."

What could it mean?

Going to the window he craned out, trying to see what was going on upon the sidewalk, but the extending cornice underneath the window made this quite impossible, although the touring car beyond the curb was visible. This lacked interest, so he hurried to the outer hall, where he stood near the elevator shaft and listened earnestly. Presently, as the group succeeded in getting up the three stairs leading from the sidewalk into the ground floor hall, he caught a word or two of thick, congratulatory talk.

"Sh'ou joy, ol' man," was the most frequent of the crowding, earnest words.

What could it mean?

As he heard the elevator door close and the swift swish of the ascending car, Rankin withdrew to the apartment, there to linger, waiting for his master, consumed with carefully mastered curiosity.

Devoured with curiosity he stood waiting as his master entered through the outer door which he considerably had left ajar for him. He had guessed at certain details of his young employer's probable condition and knew that in the midst of just those details Broadway was impatient of latch-keys, bell-ringing or even knuckle-tapping on the door.

The first thing he noted as the unsteady Broadway entered was the fact that his silk hat had been reversed upon his head; the second was that someone evidently had been sitting on his ragnan cape while it had been rolled rather carelessly; the third was that his face wore an expression of relief and peace with all the world.

Not so unsteadily that he failed entirely to reach the goal Jackson tacked across the room and found the window. His friendly escort was still evidently in his mind, for from the open window he now waved a genial handkerchief, whispering meanwhile "Night-night," as if the hearty spirit which induced the words would take them to the sidewalk ten score feet below.

Having performed this sacred rite of friendship he regained the center of the room, looked about him as if curiously, and then went unsteadily to the grand piano, upon which he placed his elbow with a nestling search for comfort which seemed to indicate a firm decision to lean against the instrument and go to sleep without delay. This would never do, for when his slumber became deep he would be sure to lose his balance. Rankin saw the deep necessity for rousing him from his intention.

"Mr. Jones, Mr. Jones," he urged, tapping him upon the shoulder.

Jackson looked up, sleepily, as if astonished at the interruption of his slumber. "Hello," he said good naturedly, "who's there?"

"It's Rankin, sir," said Rankin.

"Who's Rankin, sir?" The tone was that of tolerant curiosity to learn a total stranger's unimportant identity.

"I'm the butler, sir."

"Butler?"

"Yes, Mr. Jones, the butler." This seemed to rouse his master and he looked him over with some show of interest. "A butler!" he exclaimed in tones of deep reproach. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? When you were a little boy your mother had great hopes of you—thought you were going to be president of the United States, or something like that."

Rankin bowed impassively; he did not deny it.

"Now," said his employer with the deepest of reproach, you've disappointed everybody. You've turned out to be nothing but a butler. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Rankin was not offended; instead his air was that of triumph. "Ah, but see who's butler I am, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Who's butler are you?" inquired Broadway, apparently with idlest curiosity.

"I'm your butler, sir."

"Oh, you're my butler?" This seemed not to be especially astonishing, though deeply interesting to the master of the house.

"Yes, sir."

Broadway looked at him with a glad smile, then with an earnest and enthusiastic gravity. He warmly shook his hand. "I congratulate you, Rankin. I'm very fond of my butler." His sentiment rose higher, and he patted Rankin on the cheek. "I love my little butler. You must come out with me some night, Rankin."

"I should like to, sir," said Rankin truthfully.

Broadway became gay, mysterious. He looked at Rankin wily and himself essayed to whistle some bars of the wedding march. "I know something you don't know," he cried irreverently.

Rankin listened with respect and close attention. His curiosity was almost painful.

But his master did not satisfy it.

"Now I'll bid you good-night, Rankin. Night-night! Goodnight!" he waved

his hand.

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