

Digging Up Elmer

A SHORT STORY

By SEWELL FORD

It ain't often I push away their coin when I might just as easy let it trickle into the cash drawer. But now and then I do. Sometimes just as a luxury, because I don't like a face, and then again—well, because I can't take it and look in the mirror without blushing. Same as in the case of Ridley Hatch.

"No use, Mr. Hatch," says I, after he'd been coming to the Physical Culture Studio reg'lar every day for a couple of weeks.

"Eh?" says he, bristlin' them bushy gray eyebrows of his.

"We ain't gettin' anywhere," says I. "And what's more, we ain't likely to."

"But why not, Professor McCabe?" he demands.

I expect, too, that was my cue to shoot it to him cold. Any of these thousand-dollar-fee specialists would have told him flat, without battin' an eye. But I'd rather not. Still, it was plain enough how near the rocks he was. He comes toddlin' in here on his swollen feet, his breath short and puffy, bags under his eyes and his face the color of cigar ashes. You know! rheumatic gout, arteries full of carbon, liver on the frizz and a few other little complaints. And he expects me to put him in trim by half-hour sessions with the medicine ball and the apparatus.

"You're making the handicap too heavy, Mr. Hatch," says I.

"I don't quite get you, McCabe," says he.

"Course, I'm only guessin'," says I, "but ain't you hoistin' in the private stock kind of liberal?"

"Oh, that!" says he, shruggin' his shoulders careless. "Have to have about so much to get along on. Used to it, you know. But perhaps I might ease up a little if you think that would do the trick."

"It would help," says I, "but I judge there's other things you'd have to skip, too. This 2 A. M. stuff, for instance. Kind of strong for the cabarets and the roof gardens and the little supper afterwards, ain't you?"

"Oh, come!" says he. "Got to do something evenings, haven't I?"

"Maybe," says I. "Depends on what you call evenin'. And after you've turned sixty—"

"Yes, that's all very well, McCabe," says he. "But Mrs. Hatch hasn't turned sixty—barely forty."

"Oh, I see!" says I. "Then it ain't for me to map out any program. So we'll just call it off."

"But see here, Professor," he goes on, "I'm in no condition to be dropped. If you can't help me you can at least suggest something, can't you?"

"Sure," says I. "You won't follow it though."

"Let's hear, anyway," says he.

"Well, says I, "where and how do you live—house, apartment—"

"Hotel suite," says he, "at the Plutonia. Big, airy, sunny rooms, nice and convenient, too."

"That's it," says I, "too blamed convenient to the roof gardens and cabarets. What you need is the country; way out, where it'll be too long a trip to motor in after dinner. I'd prescribe golf, too. Silly game, but it keeps you out in the open, and after you've whaled around a three-mile course you'll be glad to hit the hay and let somebody else stay up to watch the Broadway chickens do the new shiver steps and consume filet mignon at 1:30 A. M. That's my dope. Swap your Looey cans suite for a 20-acre estate near some country club and go to it with a nubile. After six months of that I might be able to find something to build on. Not that I look for you to do anything of the kind. The midnight rounder habit is too hard to break, specially when there's two in the family that's got it."

"Huh!" says he, startin' at me, and I could see that jatty chin of his sort of stiffenin'. "Think I couldn't eh? I'll just show you, young man. Get your hat."

"Why the hat?" says I.

"Want you to help me pick out a place," says he. "Oh, I know your time is valuable. I'll square that, all right. Let's go."

I must say I hadn't figured on gettin' in quite so deep as that when I unloaded all that near-expert advice. But Ridley Hatch had sort of called my hand. Besides, he's one of these impetuous old boys who wants what he wants when he wants it, and generally gets it. He has the limousine waitin' at the curb, too. So off we goes.

About the second block he concludes he ought to stop for a word with Mrs. Hatch, as he might be late gettin' back. I expect it was the wise thing to do, but when he comes out of the hotel the lady trails along, too. She's some flossy dame, I'll say; one of these ex-show girl types that still remembers when she was a perfect 36 and ain't quit strugglin' to hold somewhere near that. And with the help of the henna bottle and French face enamel she can show rather a vivid color scheme. The little domestic debate which must have started up on the tenth floor is still going on.

"But what's the big idea, Dearie?" she is askin' him. "Why the sudden dash out into the country?"

"A suggestion of Professor McCabe's," says he, "that I'm followin' up. I doubt if you'd be interested, Gladys. Hadn't you better let us drop

you somewhere and—"

"No," breaks in Gladys decided. "You may not be hitting on all six just now, Dearie, but you're rather a frisky old boy and you'll stand watchin'. Of course, what you and the Professor have framed up may be perfectly all right, but if I go along I won't need to ask Oufja to be sure. Will I, old dear?" And she pats him playful on the shoulder.

Surprisin', ain't it, how sometimes you can sketch the complete status quo of a couple, just by hearin' 'em swap a little off-hand repartee? I hadn't known much of this Ridley Hatch party before, except that he was vice-president of the whisk-broom trust, or some useful combine like that, anyway, he was a minor plate, with an income runnin' into six figures, since the war profits had begun rollin' in, and he'd gone groggy in the knees tryin' to spend it the way he thought a perfect gent ought to scatter it around.

But now I get the rest of the picture. Not that I could tell just how long ago it was since he discovered Gladys on the Casino roof or the Winter Garden chorus. Maybe their little romance was six or eight years old. He hadn't picked out a broiler exactly. If you ask me I'd say it was Gladys who did the pickin', and that mainly, she had her eye on his check book. Anyhow, here they were, millin' around under the white lights every night with thousands of other couples more or less like 'em, tryin' to buy a good time, no matter what the cost. Which is why so many head waiters can afford to retire and own hotels of their own and the cabarets can still soak on a \$3 cover charge and get away with it.

Anyhow, it's clear that Gladys had a good line on her Dearie and that while Ridley Hatch might be the big noise in some circles he wasn't the whole show when he opened the door to what he called home. Still, he had kind of a rugged jaw and there was no tellin' when he might grab the helm.

"Whereabouts in the country are we headed, Dearie?" asks Gladys as we roll out through Penham Parkway.

"Can't say," says Ridley. "Just exploring."

"What a cute little notion!" says Mrs. Hatch. "Oh, well." And she settles back in her corner of the limousine registerin' patience.

"She needed it, I'll say, for we bowls on and on, through Stamford and Darien and other interestin' spots, finally branchin' off the Post Road and strikin' due north into the heart of the breakfast doughnut zone. Course, Ridley hadn't given the chauffeur any definite sailin' orders, and with all them Connecticut cross roads branchin' in every which way it's no wonder he finally got twisted up.

"If the game is to get yourself lost, Dearie," suggests Mrs. Hatch, "I think you've won. That being the case, why not have luncheon?"

"Show me a place and we will," says Ridley. "I've been hoping to see something that looked like a hotel for the last hour."

"Back on the main road," says Gladys, "I saw several signs tellin' how far it was to Hollyhock Inn. Couldn't we find that?"

"We'll try," says Ridley. "Sounds like one of these silly roadside tea rooms, though, where they need nearly an hour to build an imitation club sandwich. Perhaps we can run across a regular place."

We couldn't though, and when we sighted another Hollyhock Inn sign, along about 3:15, Ridley tells the driver to make for it. So half an hour later we roll in between a row of tall elms and upwards at this neat painted white farmhouse affair with the green shutters. On the south side, probably where the cow yard used to be, they've built a wide brick terrace and around three sides is laid out an old-fashioned garden. That, with the green iron tables and the striped umbrellas over 'em, and the view down the valley, makes it kind of a nice spot.

"If the eats are as good as the lay-out," says I, "we're in luck."

The rosy-cheeked country girl who comes out to take our order recommends the broiled chicken with waffles and strained honey if we can wait less'n half an hour.

"Listens good to me," says Ridley. "Eh! Shall we make it unanimous?"

There wasn't a dissentin' note, and while Mrs. Hatch wanders into the house to fix up her permanent wave and touch up her facial scenery Ridley picks a menu off one of the tables and glances over it casual, to see if he's missed a bet probably. All of a sudden I hears him let out something gassy.

"Well, what have you found?" I asks.

"Look," says he, holdin' out the card.

I has to study it a minute before I saw. "Oh, yes!" "Oh, yes!" says I. "Elmer T. Hatch, Proprietor." Some relations of yours?"

"I—I don't know," says Ridley. "I had a brother by that name."

"Had one, eh?" says I. "And lost him?"

"We—er—we lost each other," says he.

"I don't quite follow you," says I. "It wasn't all my fault," goes on

Ridley, gazin' sort of vague at the name on the menu. "Elmer had the same chance that I had, only he wouldn't take it. I even offered to help him get a start in the same line. I'd gone into. But no, he would stick to the little one-horse town. Said he didn't like the city. Wanted to get out and moon around over the hills, watch the birds and all that tommyrot. Mushy, sentimental cuss, Elmer. You'd never think we were brothers all at all. I tried to talk some sense into his head. No use. He thought he knew."

"So by the time I had piled up my first ten thousand and bought a third interest in the business Elmer was still raising a few chickens and fussing with flowers. The last time I was back there I made him one more offer, which he turned down. I told him I was through—then there was Kitty."

"Girl in the case, too, was there?" Ridley nods. "One of the finest," says he. "When I first went away she half promised to wait until I came back for her. I thought she would, too. Oh, I don't mean that I wrote her every week, or anything like that. I suppose I'd been playing around some with others, too. But when I found her again, looking sweeter and daintier than ever, I knew she was the only one. I told her so. But she didn't care to listen. It seems Elmer had cut me out. She was teaching school and waiting until Elmer could save up enough to marry her. As though Elmer ever would. I put it to him flat, tried to show what an injustice it was to Kitty and to me. But all I could get out of Elmer was a sneer and an invitation to win Kitty if I could, and if I couldn't to clear out and let him alone. So I cleared out and I haven't heard from him since."

"More than thirty years," says Ridley. "I wonder if this—this Elmer Hatch could be the—I say, Shorty, here come out a waitress. Suppose you send her out a bit."

"Sure," says I. And while the girl is settin' up the table I proceeded to quiz her. "I say, sister," says I, "who is this Hatch party that runs the place?"

"You mean Elmer?" says she. "Why he—he's just Elmer, you know."

"I see," says I, nudgin' Ridley. "Somewhere around, is he?"

"Oh, yes," says she. "He's in the kitchen."

"Sort of superintendin', eh?" I suggests.

"He's broiling the chickens," says she. "He's the cook."

"You don't say?" says I. "A man cook? What sort of a party now, is this Elmer?"

"Why, he's awfully nice," says the girl. "Everybody likes Elmer, you know."

"Of course there is," says the girl. "What does she do while Elmer's cooking?" I asks.

"Why, she manages things," says the girl. "She's awfully smart, Mrs. Hatch is."

"I expect she has a first name, too?" I suggests.

"Oh, yes," says the girl "Elmer calls her Kitty."

"There you are, Ridley," says I, as the waitress fits back towards the kitchen. "Odd, ain't it?"

"It's all of that," says he. So Elmer has dropped to this—cook in a road house; while Kitty is—say, I wonder what Kitty thinks of him now?"

"There's no tellin'," says I. "Maybe she thinks he's a good cook. We'll soon have a chance to judge for ourselves."

"S-s-sh!" says Ridley. "Here's Gladys. She mustn't know."

But Gladys has made a discovery of her own that she's enthusiastic about. "Say, Dearie," she breaks out "you ought to see the swell old mahogany in there. Every room just full of it, and the dearest lot of old braided rugs. There's the nicest landlady, too; oh, a perfect peach, with gray hair and natural pink in her cheeks and the stunninest figure. But perhaps I'd better not let you see her. You'd fall for that sweet voice of hers, even if she isn't as young as she was once. No, I think you'd better stay out. How about that broiled chicken?"

"Comin' up," says I, as the waitress staggers in with a big tray.

Uh-huh! It was the real article, the kind blamed few mothers used to make. And the waffles—M-m-m-m!

"Some cook, I'll tell the jury," says Gladys. "Let's steal her, Dearie, and start housekeepin'."

"There's a proposition for you, Ridley," says I, grinnin'.

"Careful, Shorty," says he, "or you'll start something. It doesn't happen, Gladys, to be a her. They have a he-cook here."

"Oh, hush up, old dear!" says Gladys. Run along, Miss, and bring the cook man."

"In—in here?" asks the waitress.

"I—I must ask the manager." "Bring 'em both. Meanwhile Professor McCabe, pass the waffles, will you? And the honey, please. Isn't that the most heavenly combination? Say, I'm liable to hug somebody before I get through. Maybe it'll be the cook."

Course, I has to chuckle at that. As for Ridley, he seems to have lost his appetite sudden. He sits there gazin' starey at the kitchen door and crumplin' his napkin nervous.

"I—I think I'll step out and have a word with the chauffeur," says he. "Better not, Dearie," says Gladys. "I may need a chaperone when I meet that—Oh, here he is now! And the lady manager, too."

It was the manager lady who opens the talk. "I am very glad our cooking pleases you," says she. "And did one of you wish to—why, isn't this Ridley?"

At that the cook person follows her glance and opens his mouth. "Sure it's Ridley," says he. "Well, of all things!"

"Hello, Kitty," says Ridley. "Howdy, Elmer."

"But I say," gasps Gladys, "How long has this been going on, anyway. This Kitty-Elmer stuff? Dearie, 'less up. Who is this Elmer?"

"Only my brother," says Ridley. "What's that?" says Gladys. "Your—your brother? Why, you never told me you had one!"

"No," says Ridley. "I wasn't sure that I had, and even if I had been sure—well, I might not have mentioned him. So you've taken up cooking, eh, Elmer? How long since?"

"About five years ago," says Elmer. "H-m-m!" says Ridley. "Couldn't make a go of anything else?"

"Couldn't seem to," says Elmer, smilin' cheerily. "Guess cooking was what I was cut out for, after all."

"I dare say," comments Ridley, sort of curlin' his lip. "Like it, do you?"

"Oh, yes," says Elmer. "That is, next to raising flowers. But here I can do both, you see," and he waves towards the garden.

"Huh!" says Ridley. Not much money in either, I judge."

"No," says Elmer. "Not much, but enough."

"What about you, Kitty?" demands Ridley. "Enough for you, too?"

"Quite," says Kitty. "We are very happy and contented here, Elmer and I. He's the same dear, absurd Elmer, you see."

Ridley grunts. "I suppose so," says he. "How about winters? What do you do then?"

"Oh, Elmer builds his wooden bird houses and garden sticks," says she, "and I attend to filling his mail orders. You've seen them advertised, haven't you—Hatch's bird houses? And evenings we do a lot of reading. It's quite cozy here with the furnace and the big fireplace. Elmer likes being in the country so much, you know, and we keep so well and—But you've changed a lot, Ridley."

"Why not?" says he. "One does at—our age."

"Of course," says Kitty. "And this is your wife, I suppose?" With which she glances curious at Gladys.

Ridley only nods and keeps his chin down.

"Oh, come, Dearie!" breaks in Gladys. "Why so enthusiastic? Then she turns to Kitty. "But don't you mind him," she goes on. "He's a good deal of a wreck, Ridley is, and his disposition is something fierce. But he has managed to connect with the big money, I'll say that for him. So I guess we ought to be satisfied."

"That's the main thing, isn't it?" says Kitty.

"I don't know how chummy they'd have gotten to be if Ridley hadn't crashed in with a growl about havin' to start back for town."

"But I thought you wanted to explore the country?" protests Gladys.

"Oh, that was McCabe's fool idea," says Ridley. "I've explored enough for one day; quite enough thank you."

"What's the matter?" says I, "as we piles into the limousine. "Got some more cook brothers scattered around, and afraid you'll dig 'em up, eh?"

"Do you know," says Gladys, half an hour late, "I think Elmer must be rather nice. One of the quiet kind, and I'll bet there's a lot of fun in him. And he certainly can cook."

"Huh!" grunts Ridley, glarin' out of the window.

the credit of our farmers that the loose bottom hamper and the Georgia carrier were almost forced upon them by the manufacturers and the produce dealers. Even the present standard weights and measures act did not originate with those who are most affected and most benefited. For years, unscrupulous hucksters have bought fruit in 16-quart baskets and sold them again in baskets holding but 14 quarts. The cranberry growers through their well-organized society have adopted a particular barrel suited to the purpose.

Quantity Buying

There are numerous groups of people, especially in the large office buildings, who buy certain standard articles in quantity. In this way 50 to 200 pounds of butter are bought each week, direct from the creamery. Although the custom of buying such things as potatoes in the fall has gone out of practice among women in general, a number of carloads are purchased each fall by women's organizations in many cities. Apples and oranges also are bought in quantities in this way.

During periods of market glut, when farmers find it unprofitable to harvest certain products for ordinary wholesale prices, a group of housewives can, by ordering a large quantity, get excellent food for preserving at a minimum price while the farmer finds a fair market.

Many such products of less perishable nature can be bought in quantity at a considerable saving. There is little excuse for any one to buy potatoes in less than bushel lots. It is to be regretted that house building in our cities has now developed to the stage where hardly any place is available for food storing.

Caution as to Huckster Trade

The huckster trade which has grown to such large proportions in recent years offers an excellent way of distributing perishables. The hucksters do it quickly, and as they are under slight expense, can compete successfully for housewives' trade. The sanitary phase of the huckster trade is rarely appalling, and should be given thought by housewives and municipal authorities. The flies, pet cats, and stray dogs which abound around the homes of some of these hucksters offer excellent facilities for spreading disease. The proper storing of market food supplies at these places is just as important from a sanitary standpoint as the producing and handling of milk on the farm. No doubt this matter will receive more attention from our health authorities.

Retail Markets

Farmers' retail markets are not popular in New Jersey, or at least they are not common, and they are thought by many to be impracticable. At Perth Amboy, N. J., is a market which utterly refutes the idea in many ways. In 1909 the city authorities set aside a street and an adjoining open lot as a market place. Farmers were encouraged to display their goods in small quantities and the people of the city came to learn that that they could do their marketing there at less cost than anywhere else. It is not unusual to find over one hundred farmers' wagons in the market place at one time. Such markets as this are very common in many of the cities of Pennsylvania and in other sections of the country. They offer certain very definite advantages to the thoughtful housewife. In the first place, she is able to buy her goods in the best possible condition, and by attending the market and personally selecting her goods she can pick out just the kind and quality she desires and be sure of getting full value for her money. By paying cash and carrying the goods home she saves the greater part of the extra charge which the retail distributors find necessary to add to the goods. She is provided with an opportunity for learning kinds and qualities, seasons of ripening, and other various characteristics of the many kinds of fruits and vegetables of which most housewives know very little. The importance of a public market as an educational institution cannot be over emphasized. If the housewives of the nation spend two-thirds of the national income for food, how necessary is it that they should know as much as possible about the value and qualities of food products.

Standard Packages

Many shippers believe that certain products can be very materially helped by the use of better adapted containers. Most new packages introduced have originated with manufacturers' selling agencies. It is not greatly to

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Milk That Is Electrically Sterilized

A new process of sterilizing milk by the use of electricity is said to have a great many advantages over the old process. It has originated in England and was recently the subject of a consular report made by one of our representatives abroad. The investigation into this subject was carried on at the Liverpool University. Professors Beattie and Lewis having made a large number of experiments. In the report they enumerate the results of fifteen different experiments under varying conditions, with different degrees of current and with several quantities of milk, as well as showing two types of apparatus used. The final conclusions arrived at by the investigators are:

"Milk can be rendered free from B. coli and B. tuberculosis by the new electrical method described without raising the temperature higher than 63 degrees or 64 degrees C. This temperature effect is very short in duration, and in itself is not the principal factor in the destruction of the bacteria. Though the milk is not sterilized in the strict sense of the word, yet the percentage reduction in the bacteria, taken over a period of a fortnight, is 99.93. The keeping power of the milk is considerably increased.

"The taste of the milk is not altered and so far as careful chemical examination can determine the properties of the milk are not in any way impaired. The milk can accurately be described as 'raw milk' free from pathogenic bacteria."

In the introduction of the report, which was issued by the British Medical Research Committee, it is pointed out that the earliest description of an electrical method having in view the destruction of bacteria in milk by electricity was published by the Liverpool (England) Corporation in 1915, the investigator being Professor J. Martin Beattie, of the University of Liverpool. Subsequently independent trials of the method were undertaken at Birmingham, and the opinion of the committee is that the latter experiments, while supporting the practical results obtained at Liverpool, did not entirely prove whether the electrical current in the method adopted had a directly bactericidal action or acted as a thermal agent—Exchange.

Dutch Adopting U. S. School Inspection Rule

European schools are adopting principals of American institutions in regards to the health of pupils.

This fact is verified by the report recently submitted by school authorities in this city regarding the inspection of 20,000 children of the Netherlands by members of the National Dental Association, assisted by the Green Cross Society. Of the 20,000 children examined, 80 per cent of them showed defective teeth.

This percentage is about 10 per cent worse than the average in local schools. The children of the Netherlands are to be treated by American dentists. School boards there are planning to raise a sufficient amount of money through taxes to enable the dentists to go ahead with their movement.

Inspection of eyes has already been instigated by American doctors, interested in school movements over there.

Whatever is worth doing on the farm is worth doing well.

American Puff Adders

South Africa is what herpetologists call "rich in snakes," and especially in puff adders, which, on account of their size, are among the most dangerous. During the warm months scarcely a day passes without a puff adder incident being recorded. And, in consequence of the towns spreading sparsely over wild districts, with detached residences and extensive gardens, it is no uncommon occurrence to see a puff adder meandering down the "street."

Happily, in the majority of cases, the people know how to avoid them or deal with them; but, notwithstanding prudence of mind and good courage, fatalities do occur. The reptile even gets into houses, sometimes, as do the cobras of India.

A gentleman was walking across his dining room, when he felt something knock against him, and looking down, he found a puff adder hanging on to his trousers. It had struck at him, but most providentially the fangs had caught only the garment. The astonished wearer, to shake off the reptile, performed, as he afterwards declared, "the most vigorous horripile that ever was danced," until he got free of the snake, which was then quickly dispatched.

Dogs become frequent victims through their keen sense of smell and their determination to investigate. One splendid large dog and two fox terriers met with their death last summer near Port Elizabeth through the bite of puff adders.

Though there are other highly venomous and equally abundant snakes at the Cape, they are more of the active cobra kind; while the puff adders are extremely sluggish and inactive reptiles, which do not get out of the way, but lay half hidden among the herbage or among roots and stones, with which they assimilate in color. By their hiss they betray themselves when danger threatens, and that is all. Happily, these great deadly serpents are not aggressive, and do not attack unless provoked.

Wireless for Lifeboats

However well equipped with wireless a ship may be, an accident that results in its sinking puts an end to its distress signals and may not even allow time to begin them, leaving its hurriedly manned lifeboats without any means of communication with each other or with a rescue ship. An Eastern inventor has designed a simple and compact radio system intended as permanent equipment for one or more lifeboats on each vessel, says Popular Mechanics Magazine. The wireless apparatus, used for both telegraphing and telephoning, is inclosed in a water-tight box at the stern, and grounded through a metal plate in the bottom of the boat. To shut out extraneous sounds and add to the sensitiveness of the set, the operator is equipped with a helmet containing the telephone receiver.

Judge West says "A pedestrian needn't run or jump when he hears an automobile horn honking." O wise and noble judge! Mourners please pass around to the left.

The Pennsylvania farmers expended last year approximately \$13,080,853 for commercial fertilizer.

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