

The Troubles of the Night Reporter

A Tale of Tribulations

By Maude Conger

Twelve-thirty o'clock! I glanced quickly at my watch, then shoved it into my vest-pocket. Only thirty minutes to get in. All my copy and I had the junior senator's speech to write up, two interviews to stretch out to two columns and, a half, the last installment of a murder trial to finish for McCarty, our police editor, who was on the sick list, and several other minor articles which must be made to occupy a whole column.

I tossed my coat and hat into a corner, threw myself into a chair and pulled out my notes. The speech was a long one, so long that I regarded it with despair while I swore gently beneath my breath inwardly debating what ethical right any man has to impose his long-winded opinions upon an innocent public—and hardworking reporter—who cares not a jot for them. Then I fell to scribbling as fast as a man can who has left only a few minutes before the scene of a ghastly murder and has just made his rapid exit from a down-town morgue. The minutes passed then I looked at my watch—12:40, so far so good. The junior senator was disposed of and now to the interviews. The first was with a prominent Wall street broker who gave some very important information concerning a certain new deal, in stocks. The second concerned a man who was known to possess some knowledge of a controversy at issue on the underside of politics.

I hurriedly scanned the notes, decided on the latter and had got as far as:

"Mr. B—was very meagre in his information, evidently reserving some essential details, although— when the door opened with a rush and Carew plunged into the room.

"I say, Mr. Couver, I got 'em!" I wrote on without looking up.

"What? The 'D. T.'s?" "Not much, the whole gang, Vitrio included. Caught as slick as a hunk of cheese, Gad! It was great." He paused, breathless.

"Glad of it," I answered, "but I can't be bothered now. Got to hand the copy into the Old Man in fifteen minutes," and bent to my task.

Carew threw himself into a chair. "But I say, don't you want to hear about it?" he asked, excitedly. He was just a young one.

"Sorry, but I can't now. Do you spell anticipate with a 'c' or an 's'?"

"Hanged if I know," he started up and began stalling about the fax room. I endured it three minutes then I said, drily:

"Really, Carew, that stalling isn't exactly inspiring."

He stopped, suddenly.

"Oh—a—I beg pardon. I was thinking about that haul of mine. Gad! I wish you'd seen it!" Then he placed himself on the edge of my desk and commenced beating a nerve-rendering tattoo on the top, with his fingers.

Finally I could stand it no longer. "Say just hoist yourself, will you? I'm not made of saw-dust and I've got to get this in, right away. I've a host of other things to make up yet," and with that he vacated.

I started again. "Let's see—since he declared he knew of nothing more. There is reason to believe that, under the face of things, he and his comrades have done more to— Oh, yes, 'done more to—to establish operations with the other factions than any other members of the party. Mr. B— gave as his opinion—"

It was the night editor this time. "For Heaven's sake, Van, haven't you that ready, yet?"

"If you'll leave me alone, I'll have this and a dozen others in eight minutes," I growled, and with that he shut the door.

Again I continued: "As his opinion that the governor-elect is a secret, deadly enemy to Mr. B— However, Mr. B— asserted that no one was aware —" A knock at the door.

"Come in!" I shouted at the top of my voice. It was Spike, the call-boy, office-boy and 'in general' boy.

"Ef yo' please, sah, dah's a gemman what would like to see yo'—" He got no further. My answer, if not exactly polite, was, to say the least, decidedly explicit. Spike grinned.

"Yes, sah, I'll tell de gemman, sah. Putty wa'am place, sah," and the black head vanished.

Again I glanced at my watch. Eight minutes, yet. Could I do it? With an effort which only I was able to appreciate, and at the rate of one hundred words a minute I hastily wound up the first interview and started on the next.

When just about half finished, I felt my pencil-point give. In vain I searched for another pencil. With a muttered imprecation I pulled out my knife and managed to cut myself two or ending one of the smaller articles, three times and broke the lead several others before I could resume my work. I felt my temper rising unpleasantly and my hair, too, for that matter, but I wrote on and on until, when about there came a call from the tube.

"What you want?" I yelled down.

"What's the matter with you?" came back in the Old Man's musical voice. "Don't you know it's time for that copy? Why in Heaven's name don't you hurry?"

Hurry! With a groan I turned back to my desk. My brain was in a whirl and for all the money in the world I couldn't have told what I was writing. And to top it all, that office boy who was cleaning up the next room and making all the noise in the universe in the effort, began to sing:

"Dah's ol' Sim Simons and young Sim Simons, an' young Sim Simons' son.

"Will young Sim Simons be ol' Sim Simons when ol' Sim Simons is gone?" I ran my hands through my hair and tried to think whether it was the girl's mother who eloped with the young man or the young man's father who ran off with the girl. And when I could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion, I began to wonder, dully, if my brains were oozing out and if it were that which made my head feel so wet. Finally, however, I pulled myself together, finished the article and began on my last copy. I could still hear the office-boy banging the chairs about in the other rooms as he worked. Then:

"Dah's ol' Sim Simons an' young Sim Simons an' young Sim Simons' son."

Came to me from the next office, yelled with all the gusto of a healthy, dark, voice.

I could contain myself no longer.

"Spike!"

A curly head popped in at the door and a broad grin greeted me.

"Yes, sah!"

"Spike," I said, solemnly (impressively, "if you sing that again, I'll blow your brains out."

The grin broadened.

"Yes, sah! All right, sah," and disappeared.

I heaved a long sigh. "Three lines more and I am done. If he'll keep still one little minute, I'll try to live to bless his memory.

A full sixty seconds passed, while not a sound broke the stillness. Two words more and a call from the tube:

"Van! Van! I say, are you ready?"

With a mighty effort I articulated: "Yes!"

In a moment the last two words were added, a boy came after my copy, and it was gone.

I sank back in my chair and closed my eyes. Then, from the other room I heard, in a low, chanting, dark voice:

"Dah's ol' Sim Simons, and dah's young Sim Simons and young Sim Simons' son.

"Will young Sim Simons be ol' Sim Simons when ol' Sim Simons is gone?"

"It's lucky," I murmured, as my head sank wearily on my breast. "It's lucky that I left my revolver in—in—my other pocket." MAUDE E. CONGER.

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