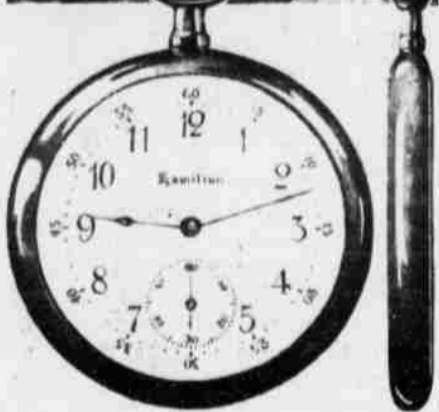


THE COWBOY WHO WENT SHOPPING

A CHRISTMAS TRIBULATION

By THOMAS GRANT SPRINGER

ILLUSTRATIONS by R. G. VOSBURGH



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AM A young Lochinvar and have just come East. I'm no short-horn maverick just off the range that ain't wise enough to side-step a barb wire fence. In fact, I'd gone some previous, even as far East as Chicago, and that is some East from my home range; but nobody ever roped me. So, when Louise and I decided to trot double, why I thought Fifth Avenue was about the best speedway for our honeymoon sprint, and we broke into it like two mule colts into an alfalfa patch. Well, we hit the Avenue about Christmas time when the ice was on it, and Louise got cold feet, literally, not figuratively; so, when she got next to the radiator and proceeded to cultivate chillblanes why I, with the devotion of a week-old husband, offered to go out shopping for her.

"What can I get you, dear?" I asked. She looked sadly at her little pink toes rapidly blossoming to a bright cerise and said: "Jim, as a starter, you better try to get me a pair of those eiderdown foot-warmers like Aunt Jane had out at the ranch."

"Blue?" I asked. "No," she replied sort of scornful, "red;" and I might have known by the tone of her voice that I had a lot to learn about eiderdown foot-warmers.

As I was the prince to Cinderella and elected to foot all the shoe bills, I thought all I needed was the size. To show how wise I was I took that and my conceit, never thought of engaging a guide, but left Louise in the cold gray morning room of the hotel and headed for the nearest department store.

I didn't know what was in store for me in that emporium. I walked right in, bold as a man with a handful of salt into a dairy corral and asked the floor-walker for foot-warmers. He unloosed his face long enough to say: "Two aisles to your right and down stairs," and then walked off, giving the girls a treat. I checked off two runways, headed down the chute and hardware counter. I sort of knew I had been given the wrong steer, but thought the best way to pick up the trail was to inquire; so I asked a small man who had evidently learned the cooking trade at home under his wife and compulsion, where I could find foot-warmers.

"This way," he said and trotted briskly down the line, me trailing him. Then, he stooped down and pulled out an iron contraption. "No," I said, "you don't get me. I want them to stand in, not stand on."

"Oh," he replied with the smile of a chorus girl, "you mean footwear!"

"Sure," I said hopefully, "where are they?"

"Really, I could n't say," he retorted, "ask the floorwalker." And he lost all interest in me, turning to a

large blond lady who was inspecting chafing dishes.

I saw she had me on the chutes, and started to back trail to the floor-walker. I had n't blazed my way and must have taken the wrong turning for I brought up against a line of hose; so, being a modest man, I ducked, rounded a corner, and finding a nice-looking girl busily engaged in a day-dream I woke her with the gentle question: "Can you tell me where I can find foot-warmers?" She handed me a look as cold as an open door in January.

"Shoe department—over there," waving her lily-white hand in a Delsort gesture that indicated the wide, wide world.

I took my choice of the direction she gave me and got out where it was warmer—for me, not for my game. I saw I could n't pick up any marks for myself, for there were too many tracks crossing every way—so I looked for the walking information bureau. Finally, I saw a tall, well dressed gentleman without any hat standing at the end of a counter. "Say, m' friend," I asks, "can you tell me where I can get foot-warmers?" He just stood there staring at me, and when I was getting mad enough to hand him the branding iron I heard a woman snicker behind me. Then I got wise he was wax, and dived into the crowd to hide my embarrassment.

I milled around with the heifers awhile before I began to look for a wise bell cow. At last, I spotted one with all the earmarks of an old-timer, sort of ruminating behind a counter. I sidled up to her, coughed three times, attracted her attention, aroused her suspicions, and then said: "Can you tell me where I can get foot-warmers?"

"You better hot-foot it or I'll call the house detective!" she snapped, and I took her advice; for what's the use of



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arguing with that sort of a woman! This gave me such a scare that I sort of unconsciously wandered over to the more human, that is the men's, side of the store. It was plain blind instinct like a horse's finding water.

I ranged up to the shoe-horner like a puncher to the chuck wagon. "Have you got any foot-warmers?" I asked. Never a word he answered, but turned on his heel and left me; but just when I started after him he reached down a box, brought out a pair of arties that would have delighted North Pole Peary's sole and tried to force me into a seat. "Not for mine!" I almost yelled. "I'm no explorer, if I have been on the long trail I want them for the missis."

"Oh, Christmas presents!" he said. "Ladies' department," and turned away as if he was sore at being disturbed.

Well, the ladies' department backed right up against the men's like a cow shed against a barn, so I backed it to win. I lost, for they thought I was Peary taking his wife for an outing and tried to sell me a pair of ladies' arties. I finally got them to understand that I wanted them for house, not street, wear.

"Notion department, upstairs," said the clerk. I started upstairs, but I had n't a notion where, so I went it blind for a while farther.

I've found my way through a country that nature cluttered up with mountains, canyons, rivers, forests and underbrush without a compass to guide me; but I felt myself going loco when I got to trailing through this Garden of the Goddesses. In the first place, there were too many people roaming round through its deefies and they blurred all the land marks. Finally, I took for my bearings one of the salesladies that was standing stationary, and after I got back to her eight times I concluded I was lost. There was n't any sun to guide me, and I decided daughters were poor things to steer by unless they were stars.

I stood there as helpless as an orphan calf till at last a little girl for a nickel took me by the hand and led me to the floorwalker who was n't working—what ever that means to him. I told him I was looking for something and had a notion.

"Notions, fourth floor?" he snapped out.

"Fourth floor?" I gasped.

"Elevator to the right," and he was off. I did n't dare stir till I had located my right hand; then, I stuck that same out cautiously and followed it. After I had gone about half a mile over a bad trail I wound up at the water hole—I mean the notion counter.

There I spoke my little piece to a richly upholstered lady who just stays there days because she likes it; for her regular job is second from the end on the right hand side at the Follies Bogus-Louise and I saw her Thursday night



"But I'll get a doctor's prescription," I pleaded. "I tell you I'm a sick man"