

Well, she looked me up and down as if she spotted me for a tenderfoot, and then she said in a bored voice:

"Foot-warmers? Why, my dear man, you get them in the knit goods."

"I get them *nit!*" I said to myself, beginning to sort of stagger down the aisle.

I was getting weak by this time as I'd been breaking trail since early morning and it was long past chuck time. I guess the law of natural attraction made my eyes spot a sign, "Tea Room." For once in my life a bunch of fillies did n't make me shy off. I just stampeded in there and rounded up a little table all to myself. It must have been a pitiful sight to see me, a grown man, putting away the things them women folks lunch on.

Well, it did me some temporary good, and then I backed out and started on after knit goods. I have been out with a sheriff's posse and chased cattle rustlers all over the state, so I was n't going back to Louise and let her know she had a husband that could get cold feet looking for foot-warmers, even in the rush of Christmas shopping. So, I took the trail again. By this time I was fighting shy of floorwalkers, for I knew they were only ornaments, though salesladies were worse. I remembered Aunt Jane used to knit, so it was me to locate some nice old stray ladies in the herd, with kind, motherly faces. I walked around for about an hour; but it seemed to be the closed season for them. There were plenty of ladies who had been side-stepping Time till he got tired of their dodging and let them get by. But I did n't dare to talk about knitting to them—there being masculine limits to brevity.

In the end, I hit upon a high idea. I located an elevator, went to the top and began to do the thing right, floor by floor, until I struck the bottom and discovered I was floored. I got to the basement and gave up—I was plain tuckered out. I calculated I had gone about eighteen miles over the roughest kind of trails in the territory. I looked around for some way out and saw a sign, "Subway," and broke for it thinking the street would look good. I walked and walked and walked, but did n't come to the station. After a long while, I ran up against the elevator again; but I could n't account for the coincidence, because I knew I had n't been turned around. When I got right up to it to make sure I had n't been going in a circle—it was n't the same elevator. I stepped in thinking to ask the boy about it when the cage filled up with birds and he shot her up calling, "Arts, crafts, statuary," and when I heard that I got out.

The place was a new one on me, and I could n't figure how I had missed it. It was all chairs and tables and pictures and lo-and-behold figures. I sat down on one of the chairs and I surely needed it. I knew I'd been all over the place from the snow line to the deepest canyon, and how I missed this bunch of timber I could n't figure. Then, a young fellow stepped up and after looking at me funny for a minute he said: "The lounging room is upstairs; you are sitting on the furniture samples." It seemed there was n't any rest for me at all.

Finally, I saw a little boy who seemed to be attached to the place in some way. In spite of the fact that I was going to make a mark of myself to a youngster, I thought he would kid me less than a long boen; so, I grabbed him. "Say, sonny," I said, slipping him a quarter, "where am I?"

He looked me over and edged away. "Aw, go on!" he said.

"Sure," I answered, "that's what I'm trying to do, but I lost my bearings. I followed a sign that said 'Subway.' Where am I?"

"Aw, you come through the tunnel from the other store," he said.

"Then, where am I?"

"In the annex," and he walked off leaving me milling around with all my signs tangled. Here I was worse off than ever. I got into a mystic maze in a park out West once, but it was a pipe to this.

I went down some steps and on to another floor. All of a sudden, I saw hope ahead. There was a counter with a lot of bottles standing behind it just like

a swell bar. There was a nice looking girl behind it, but I had heard of barmaids in England and seen girls slinging booze in a hurdy-gurdy, so I stepped up to her. "Say, miss, can you give me a little whiskey?" I asked.

"Certainly *not!*" she said, giving me a look that pretty near floored me.

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

"This is the drug counter, not a saloon;" and as I could n't think of any drug that would answer the purpose I wandered away again; but I was getting pretty weak.

Just then, I caught a scent of something green and woody. It was n't pine, it was n't redwood; but it had the smell of the big out of doors. It just naturally drew me like an old hunting coat will a pointer pup, and I rounded a corner into the toy department. There she was, a big Christmas tree took clean off its home range and set down here all dressed up like a Greaser horse. And wandering round it, mixing up with the toy counters, their eyes all big and shiny, were the kids that were going to stay here till they passed out or grew up—just wandering, wandering like I was, only they were happy. A big lump rose in my throat as I thought of the kid I'd intended to have before I took up this lost trail. Then, I thought what fools people were to bring children into the world and what criminals, having done it, to bring them into this kind of a bedlam. I caught sight of a sign, all twined round with green stuff and the little red berries like grow on the hills out West. It said, "Peace on earth, good will to men;" but I was n't in the big outdoors, and there was n't any peace or good will here, just a long, crooked trail that led nowhere and I was due to hit it again.

By this time it must have been close to sundown. All the lights were lit and I thought of poor Louise all alone in New York, and thanked God I had staked her to more than enough to get her back home. I knew now all about the mysterious disappearance of strangers in this great city. I was getting weaker and weaker. Now and then I would ask somebody the way out. They would tell me this or that, but it was always a blind trail. I began to get mighty dizzy and finally wandered into a bunch that was milling around a counter with a sign, "Bargain Sale," over it. I went down into the rush, and then everything went black.

I remember my own voice waking me, babbling, "I want the knit goods; I want them soft; my feet are sore." And then another voice a woman's—and I thought it was Louise's waking me out of a nightmare. But it was n't Louise's. I listened. "Poor fellow, he's coming to, now." I opened my eyes. A girl in a white dress with a red cross on her arm was bending over me. I sat up.

"Now, you are all right," she said soothingly. "We can let him go now, can't we, doctor?"

"Certainly," said a man's voice, and with just one look around that nice white room I spotted the door and made for it. Opening it I looked out. There it all was, the goods, the counter, the girls behind it, the narrow aisle, the people crowding through it. I slammed the door and would have fallen if they had n't caught me.

"Now tell me, Doc," I said as calm as I could, "I can stand it all right, but be honest: Am I in the booby hatch?"

"Oh, no!" he said kindly, "you are in the emergency hospital of the Blank Department Store."

"What," I cried, "am I still here? How long have I been here?"

"You fainted in the crush at the Elderdown Foot-warmer sale on the third floor an hour ago."

I pretty near went out again. They helped me back to the bed, and I sat down on it.

"Had n't we better telephone for a taxi for you?" the nurse asked.

"Telephone to Mrs. Jim Lawrence at the Park View Hotel and tell her to get one and bring me home." And I laid down till Louise came for me.



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