

HOME GROWN



By FANNIE HURST

In August the Beach hotel placed cots in its upper corridors and doubled its rates. The local Bison convention, recruited from the Great Southwest, arrived with wives and stop-over-at-Chicago tourist tickets; Little Rock, Abilene, Kokomo and Poplar Bluff rocked on the lake side of the veranda and exchanged population, sunburn lotion, cat stiches and cigars.

In the half-deserted lobby the room clerk placed a blue and white celluloid button on his left coat lapel and promised thirty-two dry towels and a mosquito netting.

Miss Birdie Fink leaned across the counter and smiled into the room clerk's eyes; her own were blue and translucent as a summer lake.

"Say, Mr. Gilly—after you've taken the sag out of the bed in fifty-seven, put an extra wardrobe in the Indianapolis grand master's room, promised thirty-four a lake view and the convention a most popular lady contest and a potato race, would you mind ordering me up some ice water and telling me what's the earliest the eight-fifty-five flyer gets out of here tomorrow?"

Mr. Gilly smiled at her until two gold molars showed—the smile of Pierrot when Pierrette peered over his shoulder and set the sides of the world a-shaking with laughter.

"Will I send you up some ice water? Say, look at me like that again,



"I Was at the Sea Lion for Three Seasons."

Queenie, and you can have anything your little heart desires."

"Fink is the way they spell my name on the fly-leaf of the family Bible, Mr. Gilly—F-i-n-k—Miss Birdie Fink. It belongs to the same language as the word 'fresh'—ever hear it?"

"Believe me, if I wasn't on duty, Birdie—you wouldn't be chirping for your key before ten."

"I wouldn't be too sure!"

"You, with the beach still warm and a path of light leading straight up to a high power moon, would make a combination that would stun a safe-blower. You only been here three hours, kiddo—you don't want that eight-fifty-five."

"If I'd known I was running into a family convention I'd stayed at home and took my vacation feeding the swans in Central park or took an ocean voyage to Coney."

"Aw, stick it out, sis; things may pick up and I'm off duty tomorrow at four."

"That don't mean anything in my life!"

"Say, I bet I've seen you down at the shore!"

"It was little me."

"I was at the Sea Lion for three seasons. I used to know all the girls from Rentley's and Langenburg's and them swell houses that used to come down on their vacations."

"Sure, I chum with all that crowd!"

"Whatta you know about that!"

"Yep!"

"Take it from me, Queenie; there ain't real class to these dumps out here; there's only been one live crowd here all season, and they was the cigar drummers. This bunch around here wouldn't have a chance in a snail Marathon."

Miss Fink glanced about the lobby, at the wicker rockers, mostly empty and tilted slightly backward; at the post-card and cigar stand, with a sleeping clerk, and above the counter a string of magazines hung like clothes from a line; at the Bison head above the dining room entrance, glass-eyed, and hung with the cheese-

cloth pennant.
"Gee!"
"Cheer up, Queenie; tomorrow I'm off at four."
"I—"
"Well, look who's here! Well, Prokes, what have you got to say for yourself? Why ain't you out with the sailing party? Say, ain't you the greatest fellow for dodging the ladies!"

Mr. Prokes lolled up to the desk, planted an elbow on the counter and flung one knee across the other so that he leaned at an oblique. An inch cone of ashes trembled and tumbled from his cigar down his waistcoat.

"I leave them things to the young ones, Gilly. What's an old one like me doing off on a party with marrieds and a bunch of striplings? I been out hitting a new trail through the pines that I'll bet the original Indians hereabouts ain't too familiar with."

"You ought to be able to find better than scenery for company around here, Prokes, get acquainted with Miss Fink, a little girl from the big town."

"How-do-do,"

"How-do-do,"

"Gowann, get acquainted and show each other a good time. Prokes is the Grand Mogul of Miami on the Miami, Birdie, and the Heap Big Chief of the Southwest Order of the Well Fed Bison."

"Quit callin' me names, Gilly."

"He says Miami on the Miami's got the Noo York water-front run clear of the picture post-cards and that the only original hayseeds are grown between Battery and the Bronx. Get together, you two, and lemme referee the game."

Miss Fink smiled, dangled her black earrings against her white neck, showed the gleam of her teeth behind her lips and raised her narrow shoulders, with the open-work blouse showing the mystery of pink ribbon through it.

"How-do-do, Mr. Prokes; what I'm trying to get at is this: if you're all the things he says you are, what ain't you?"

Mr. Prokes extended a large, warm hand; his sand-colored mustache retreated a bit to reveal the damaging gold evidence of small town dentistry.

"I ain't noticed you around here before, Miss Fink."

"He's stringing you, Queenie. For all he knows you might have been at the door to welcome him when he came last week. He's got about as much interest in skirts as I have in Miami on the Miami."

"If this young lady had been around here, I'd have seen her all right."

"You can't jolly her, Prokes—she comes from the town where they hand it out like trading stamps. This handsome young man to my right, Queenie, is as afraid of skirts as I am of having to spend another summer west of Jersey."

"Don't you believe it, Miss Fink. A fellow like me, when he gets to be fair, fat and nearly forty, knows it's time to take the flower out of his button-hole."

"Not if it's a bachelor button," quoth Mr. Gilly, slapsticking repartee a merciless whack.

"If I thought I stood a show next to my slick young friend here, maybe I'd shake the road dust of Miami out of my eyes, answer a hair restoring advertisement, climb into a narrow-shouldered, in-at-the-waist coat and twirl a flexible bamboo cane down Broadway myself!"

Miss Fink glanced at Mr. Prokes with the upward sweetness of a Fra Lippo Lippi virgin.

"Say, maybe you're right about the original hay meadows laying between Thirty-fourth and Forty-second streets; but, honest, Mr. Prokes—honest, what is Miami, a breakfast food or a disease?"

Mr. Gilly clapped his hand on his polished thatch of black hair and leaned across the counter with his elbows planted on the register book.

"That's right, go to it!"

"Miscal, Miss Fink, ain't one of the breakfast foods that helped make the Broadway electric sign famous; it ain't even an expensive disease like appendicitis or motoritis; it's a burg."

Miss Fink, that ain't even got a dot after it on the map."

"Thanks."

"A burg with grass growing between the bricks and story-and-a-half cottages with pointy roofs like the toy houses they manufacture in the Cisalpine Alps."

"Hear—hear!" cried Mr. Gilly, his mouth turned upward in a crescent.

"Every back porch in 'our town' is used for the two and sole purposes of supportin' wistaria vines and coolin' the famous pies that mother used to make—no vaudeville rural sketch is complete without the cotton-back satin finish wistaria vine or the papier mache tree stump, center left."

"No, we ain't got a swimmin' hole, Miss Fink, the—"

"That's right; keep it dark!"

"—the river's rapid clear down as far as Hamilton, but the Y. M. C. A. put a swell tank up in their rooms on High street—ten-foot concrete basin and water any temperature on the thermometer."

"Oh, you Miami!"

"Come out on the lake with me, Miss Fink, and I'll paddle you out toward the moon and tell you some more about 'our town'."

"Oh, Mr. Prokes, ain't you kind? Here I was ready to go upstairs, read the time-table and cry into my pillow."

"Come on, sister."

Forked lightning flashed from her eyes.

"I don't care if I do."

Then through the lobby with little jumps like grace notes in their walk, and the screen door of the veranda

slammed behind them. Next down wooden stairs with their light feet touching each alternate step; a brief stretch of gravel walk, gloomy with arching cedars, and finally before them the diamond beach in the diamond white moonlight.

"Some little nights we have out this way, sister—ain't they?"

"Look, the sand's all silver—all silver."

"Yes, special process we have."

"And these are the canoes Maisee ranted about—say, ain't they cute?"

"How do you like that long one there—the shell with sides like a greyhound—she cuts the water like a knife cuts butter."

"Oh, Mr. Prokes, I can't get in that little thing—it'll turn over."

"Not with me—gimme your hand there, sister—easy—easy—no, in the middle—there ain't nothing to scream about—wait—there—ah!"

They slid out into the water like a phantom shell that rides the lake without even opening the bosom of the water with its keel; then Mr. Prokes dipped his paddle and steered straight for the yellow path of the moon.

The dip-dipping of the paddle, the rustle of water against the delicate sides of the canoe—the string of village lights—the yellow windows of the hotel receding—receding.
"Life ain't much, after all, Miss

Fink, except water and air and light, and plenty of them, and the smell of pine and a nibble on your line and sunrise on wet tree-tops and God and 'ove in your heart; a fireside or steam radiator o' winter and a pretty girl with moonlight caught in her hair for August and the heated spell."

"You sound like the Salvation army gone into musical comedy."

"Lay still there, sister—a canoe's like a nervous horse if you tickle its ribs. Anyway, when you lay there like that, you look like a calendar we got hanging in the kitchen called 'Comfort in a Kitchenoff Folding Canoe.'"

"Say, Mr. Prokes—"

"Yes, sister."

"Keep your face that way a minute, with the light on the side there like that—say—say, didn't you ever buy goods from Benson & Sons—Cloaks and Suits—East Broadway?"

He dipped his first uneven stroke and regarded her with his gray eyes frankly wide.

"Say, sister, you ain't Anna Eva Fay doing the Middle West Incog, are you? I've bought misses' cloaks and ladies' cloth skirts from Benson's since before they moved up from East Eleventh street. Paw before me bought from old man Benson long before my time, when they started up with two-sewing machines and a one-window left. The Red Trunk ain't been with

out a line of Benson's goods since I can remember."

"I knew I'd seen you somewheres—your face was as familiar to me as my board bill."

"You ain't—"

"No, but I used to be—Benson's is the first firm I ever worked for—I started in when I was fourteen doin' misses' models for him."

"Well, whatta you know! To think of my ever havin' bought ulsters for the Red Trunk off'n you—a little pink and white flower like you sproutin' in Benson's."

"You used to come in with the early September buyers. I remember seein' you more'n once in the little back salesroom, with old man Benson offerin' you a cigar every time you yanked me to the daylight to see how green the lot 27 black ulsters were."

"And look at you now, living like a little lady—vacation and all."

"I may be a head lady at Rentley's now, but take it from me, Mr. Prokes, it's a long and crooked lane from Benson's and six a week to four times six and green velvet floors on the Avenue."

"Rentley's is one of them dead lookin' places, ain't it?—with no sign out and no show windows or nothin' except a butler with leather calves and white bloomers and a ribbon rosette on the side of his high hat for a door display."

"Something like a morgue, yes. I

says to Maisee the other day, I says: 'From East Broadway to that part of Fifth avenue where they quit sellin' dresses and begin to sell gowns only ain't so far if you cover it in your limousine, but when you get there by way of a three-year stopoff in a Sixth avenue cloak department and a four-year side-track in a 'Thirty-fourth street novelty shop, it's going some'."

Old-gold light lay on them and sparkled in the tiny crinkles of current they created; the ghostly sail of a pleasure boat moved across the horizon; a woman's voice, thin and full of plaint, came from its direction and died on the water as smoke dies in air. The far-off hotel windows blinked out one by one—the moon was directly above them, higher, whiter, smaller.

"You and Gilly got the wrong idea, Miss Fink; rushing through life like you do in subway trains don't give you much time to see the scenery, does it?"

"No, or to hear singin' voices over the water."

"I can show you a story-and-a-half cottage in Miami, with awnings to keep the sun out and a back yard with props under the trees to keep the fruit from breaking the limbs, that would

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