

22      THE BUTTER AND EGG MAN

*of vision. She has fortified herself with evidence with which to continue the battle begun at home, and she feels pleasantly sure of herself. There is a world of insolence in her opening speech.]*

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 BEGIN

FANNY

I just been taking a peep at that trick troupe of yours.

LEHMAN

*[Flaring up.]*

Yah? Well, you keep out of them rehearsals, you hear me?

FANNY

You got a show there that's going to make history, do you know it? They're going to date things from the time you open this one.

LEHMAN

*[Walking away from her.]*

I ain't asked you what you think about it!

FANNY

*[Fondly reminiscing.]*

I caught that bit where the leading lady was supposed to be sixteen or something, climbing up apple trees. The stuff to make them trees out of is reinforced concrete.

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LEHMAN

All right! It ain't *your* money, is it?

FANNY

You bet it ain't, dearie. And I gather that so far it ain't nobody else's.

MAC

Now listen, Fanny—Joe's in a hole.

FANNY

Well, if it ain't Close-Mouth.

MAC

I only want to help you both. Now, Joe's got a nice little entertainment—that's all it is, a good entertainment, ain't it, Joe?—and he can ring up on it for ten thousand. Now, you're his own wife and he's your husband, and you got all this property—

FANNY

*[Stops him with a warning hand.]*

You're going to need your voice for the sucker.

LEHMAN

Let her alone! She don't care nothing about me! That's women!

*[Swings on to Fanny.]*

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You wouldn't 'a' had a sou if I hadn't dug you out of that Texas honky-tonk and steered you onto Broadway! I put you in regular vaudeville, that's what I done for you!

FANNY

Well, you got yours, didn't you? All the acts is on to agents like you. Twenty-per-cent Joe.

LEHMAN

[*With incredible scorn.*]

Fanita, the world's greatest juggler! Hah! If it wasn't for me you'd be keeping four clubs in the air right now for some Gus Sun that nobody ever heard of!

FANNY

Don't you go four-clubbing me! I done six clubs for the wow at the finish, and done it for years!

LEHMAN

Aaah! There ain't a stage between here and California ain't got dents in it from them clubs of yours! They wouldn't let nobody sit in the first five rows! Fanita!

FANNY

Yes, Fanita! And I'm as good today as I ever was.

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LEHMAN

Just about!

FANNY

All right, all right! I was a bum juggler and you were a great agent. But I got the house and lot in Freeport and you're trying to get it.

MAC

What are you going to do with your money, Fanny—leave it to a home for jugglers?

FANNY

You lay off the jugglers! They can take care of themselves! They ain't none of them hanging on to the edge of show business, pretending to know all about it just because they bum a lunch at the Astor every day! And what are you doing in here anyhow? Me and Joe can get along without you!

MAC

*[Works toward the door; turns to LEHMAN.]*  
I'll go down and meet that certain party.

*[LEHMAN, his eyes fixed on Fanny in a steady glare, circles slowly around her and back to his chair behind the desk. He gives his derby hat a push down over his eyes—a characteristic gesture. Then he explodes.]*

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LEHMAN

Why don't you go home if you're so crazy about it?

FANNY

Now listen, Joe—this ain't your game. Why don't you go back to agenting, where you know the ropes?

LEHMAN

Because I don't want to, see? I'm in the legit from now on.

FANNY

[*A sigh.*]

All right. But you ain't going to find nobody to back that junk show. I seen a rehearsal.

LEHMAN

I don't want no advice! Go on home!

FANNY

All right, then—go on and produce it. Produce it with some butter and egg man's coin and that dame of the Colonial Revolution that you got in the leading rôle.

LEHMAN

Never you mind about Martin! She's going to make the hit of her life!

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FANNY

*[Entirely too sweetly.]*

I ain't got nothing against her. I suppose she either had to join up with your troupe or go back to her original rôle in "The Two Orphans." Who tipped you off to her, The Evening Post?

LEHMAN

Just because you ain't never heard of her don't say she ain't good.

FANNY

Say, my not hearing of her don't prove nothing. They didn't have no rotogravure sections in them days. What's her name again?

LEHMAN

Her name is Mary Martin! And it'll be in the lights!

FANNY

*[Thoughtfully.]*

Mary Martin. And what a temper *she's* got. Why, I wasn't even talking to *her*.

LEHMAN

*[Taking a moment for it to sink in.]*

You mean you let fly one of them wise cracks at that rehearsal?

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FANNY

I didn't open my mouth.

LEHMAN

*[Not deceived for an instant.]*

What did you say?

FANNY

*[Innocently.]*

I only asked a question.

LEHMAN

What was it—when was she born?

FANNY

I told you I caught that scene where she's mama's little darling—climbing up that cherry tree.

LEHMAN

Yah—and what was your question?

FANNY

I says to the director—"What does she wear in that scene?"

LEHMAN

Go on!

FANNY

And he says—"Blue pants."

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LEHMAN

*[Fearing the worst.]*

Then comes the gag.

FANNY

I just says—"Drop your curtain on that laugh."

END

LEHMAN

Oh, you did, did you? And if Martin goes and has hysterics on me I suppose that don't mean nothing to you, does it—but what about me? I suppose you're trying to see how much you can help, when here I am sweating blood to get this show on, and worried all the time whether—

*[JANE WESTON enters somewhat uncertainly from the reception room. She is twenty or so, and, since she is the heroine of this fable, she is good-looking and neatly dressed. She is LEHMAN's stenographer and office girl.]*

I'd think the least a man's wife—

*[He breaks off as he sees Jane.]*

What is it?

JANE

Miss Martin is outside.

FANNY

Wheel her in!