What to Do About It, F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

The girl hung around under the pink sky waiting for something to happen. She was not a particularly vague person but she was vague tonight: the special dusk was new, practically new, after years under far skies; it had strange little lines in the trees, strange little insects, unfamiliar night cries of strange small beasts beginning.

—Those arc frogs, she thought, or no, those are grillons—what is it in English?—those are crickets up by the pond.

—That is either a swallow or a bat, she thought; then again the difference of trees—then back to love and such practical things. And back again to the different trees and shadows, skies and noises—such as the auto horns and the barking dog up by the Philadelphia turnpike…

The dog was barking at a man at whom it presently sniffed; finding nothing either hostile or ingratiating, he nosed around and wanted to play. The man was on his way to meet the girl, though as yet he was unaware of it; he continued to sit in the middle of the dirt lane and try to wrest a 1927 tire-lock of its prey.

"Get away, you animal!" he exuded, and muttering unwillingly he returned to the lock, which was an excellent job of steel and ingenuity and had only half yielded to his inadequate chisel.

He was not a burglar—he was a doctor and this was his car and had been for some months, during which the "rubber on it" in salesmen's jargon had endured beyond modest expectations. Turning into the lane from the main road he became aware that the rubber had yielded gently to the pressure of time, thus accounting for the inaccuracy of the steering wheel. This he had noticed immediately after leaving the hospital.

"The old boy could have come in his sedan," he muttered, "He's getting lazy. In most businesses they'd send him to the minors—in ours we endow them."

From overhearing this bellyache an interested observer might have deduced that Doctor Bill Hardy belonged to the latest and most irreverent of generations. He was little less than tall, and standardly welded, rather like the 1927 tire lock, and his thoughts in this moment of recuperation were inspired by the fact that his boss, the distinguished Doctor C.H.L Hines, had delegated to him the most unpleasant of duties—to visit, console and administer to a chronic female hypochondriac of a certain age, on an evening when he had important business of his own.

He was too good a doctor to have confused duty with personal pleasure but in this case the line between the two was drawn very close: there was the woman in a southerly suburb of the city who must be called upon, consoled, or at least got rid of with tact, and there was this woman in the mansion at the lane's end who needed nothing yet considered that she did, but who poured twenty-five dollars fortnightly into Doctor C.H.L. Hines' coffers for the reassurance that her heart was not stopping and that she had neither leprosy nor what she referred to as "the bubonic." Usually Dr. Hines did the reassuring. This evening he had merely rolled to the telephone and mumbled, "Look, Bill, I'm about to begin dressing for an engagement m'wife'nI've looked for'd to for ages. Go out see what you can do with the damn—with Mrs. Brickster."

Bill adjusted the chisel and the gong—it was a curious thing he had found under the seat that he thought of as a gong because it gave out a ringing sound—and struck a discouraged blow. To his surprise the lock yielded: he was so inspired by his own mechanical, or archaeological, achievement that ten minutes later he was able to roll down the lane to face his case. Shutting off the motor and backing out of the car he confronted the girl.

Confronted is exact: for on her part she noticed his arrival with merely a hopeful surprise. She was eighteen with such a skin as the Italian painters of the decadence used for corner angels, and all the wishing in the world glistening in her grey eyes.

“How do you do—I’m Doctor Hardy, Dr. Hines’ assistant. Mrs.

Brickster phoned—”

“Oh, how do you do. I’m Miss Mason, Mrs. Brickster’s daughter.”

The red dusk was nearly gone but she had advanced into the last patch of it.“Mother’s out but is there anything I can do?” she asked.

“Is there anything I can do,” he corrected her.

She smiled a little. “Well, I don’t think I know you well enough to decide that for you.”

“I mean tonight—is there anything I can do tonight?”

“I couldn’t even tell you that, Dr. Hines—”

“No. I’m Dr. Hardy, Dr. Hines’ assistant.”

“—excuse me, Doctor Hardy. We give a cup of coffee in the kitchen and what small change is in the house.”

Bill realized in the course of this last that all was not according to Aristotelian logic. He reconsidered, began again;

“I was called from this house, Miss Mason, to treat your mother. If she has been taken away—”

“Father took her away.”

“Oh—I’m sorry—what was the matter?”

“She found that the Chicago Opera Company was doing Louise.”

“Oh I see,” Bill agreed. Yet he didn't see, for in the thickening dust the girl was dazzling his vision a little, “You mean she can’t stand Louise—I know;

I had an aunt who could never—”

“This is getting sadder and sadder, Dr. Hines—”

“No. Hardy, Dr. Hines’ assistant.”

“—excuse me, Doctor Hardy. But when aunts begin to appear in the picture you wonder just what are we driving at! Mother went toward Louise, not away from it. But she left rather suddenly with father carrying his cuff buttons. I’ve just come home after some years away and just met my new father and I’m trying to get adjusted. If somebody in the house is sick I don’t know who it is. Mother said nothing about it to me.”

“Then your mother isn’t sick? She didn’t phone Dr. Hines? It’s all a mistake?”

“She didn’t seem sick starting for the opera.”

“Well, suppose—well, suppose we give it up.” He looked at Miss Mason once more and decided not to. “I mean suppose we check up. I’ll give you the address of a physicians’ exchange and you phone and see if they received such a call. I won’t even take coffee or small change—I’ll wait out here in the car.”

“All right,” she agreed. “It’d be better to straighten out the situation.” … When she appeared on the verandah some minutes later she had an envelope in her hand.

“Excuse me, Dr. Hines—you were perfectly right. Mother did call the doctor—”

“My name is Hardy.”

“Well—let’s not start that over again; she called up whichever you two is which; I’m sorry to seem discourteous, but for all I know you might be a racketeersman.”

He kept his laugh secret as he said:

“That leaves us where we were before—unless your mother expects me between the acts at the opera.”

She handed him the envelope.

“I found this on the hall table going out—addressed to Doctor—”—stopping herself in time she said gently while he took the letter to his headlights, for it had grown too dark for the sky’s light. “…I hope it clarifies matters.”

Dear Doctor

I really called you about the boy, as I am again growing interested in domestic affairs, as you suggested, and it is very successful But my husband and I thought it would be better for me to go out so, I went out, especially as there was an opera I especially wanted to see. Or we may go to a movie. Almost anything to get one's mind off myself, as you suggested. So sorry if I hare caused you any trouble.

Sincerely

Anne Marshall Mason Brickster

P.S. I meant to stay and tell you about the boy but my husband felt I should get away. He told me he stole the bluga. I don't know what the bluga is but I’m sure he shouldn’t do it at his age.

A.M.M.B.

Bill switched his car lights from dim to white; by the new brilliance he looked at the letter again—it read the same; the boy had stolen the bluga, the woman wanted something done about it. For the first time a dim appreciation of the problems which Dr. Hines was called upon to face, and to which he himself was to succeed, brought a dim, sympathetic sweat to his temples. He turned abruptly to the girl.

“Now, when did you miss the bruga?”

“What bruga?”

No go.

“The brunga?”

She edged away, faintly but perceptibly, and Bill covered himself by telling all:

“Here: your brother has evidently taken something that doesn’t belong to him. Your parents want to see the why and wherefore of it. Can you make out this word?”

Their heads were close together under the light, so that his brisk blond sidelocks scratched her cheek while a longer tenuous end of gold silk touched him materially in the corner of his eye, but really all over.

“I can’t help you out,” she said after a moment.

“I feel I should investigate,” he suggested.

“All right,” she agreed. “His light’s still on.”

She led the way through a hall adorned with the remnants of slain game. “Will you see him down here?” She paused at the foot of the stairs—“or in his boudoir?”

“Let's go up,” Bill suggested; he had a lingering hope that the bruga might be triumphantly snatched up from under a pillow, and the whole situation cleared up by that moral lecture carried in the knapsack for instant production. The Loveliness led the way upstairs like a beacon that afterwards upon the verandah might illume the problems of a young doctor—or some such matter.

There seemed justification for the beginning of his hope, the solution of the mystery, when, promptly upon their entrance into a presumably lighted room they were plunged into blackness. Miss Mason wielded the switch: whereupon Bill stared at a boy of thirteen clad in a pajama top that feebly covered an undoffed union suit, upon a bed blatantly uninhabited, yet used, and upon a book still quivering from its hasty transition under the pillow.

“That must be the igloo,” he thought. His mind had now transformed the object sought-for into North Arctic form; but as he reached deftly under the pillow beneath the boy’s hostile stare, and snatched a glance at the book in bringing it out he found it to be a faint blue volume entitled “EX-WHITE-SLAVER,”—the authorship being identified with touching modesty as “by a Man Who Still is one.”

He put it down coolly, as if it existed for him only in the sense that a copy of, say, My Forty Years in the Fountains of Tivoli can be said to exist in the memory of a guest, and remarked;

“Well, how’re you, young man?”

But the young man had long given up dealing with such palaver. He looked disgustedly at Bill, back at his sister, back at Bill: then treated them both to what, in the euphemistic tradition of their great-grandparents, might have been termed The Robin.

But Bill was of stern stuff; he seized the boy by his shoulder, lowered him firmly to the sheet and announced: “If you want to play that game you’ll find I’m bigger than you.”

The boy, reaching the surface of the sheet unresistingly, looked up at him with uncommunicative eyes and answered:

“What you goan do about it?”

This was a question. Bill was good at certain subjects but something told him this wasn’t one of them. He glanced at the girl, but he found in her glistening eyes the age-old look of one who says: “In a man-managed world I’ve got to be told where I am being led before I agree to go there or not.” Bill sat down beside the bed and descended to conversation which, marred by pauses, stammers and total stops would have been reported as follows by an adequate court stenographer.

“What do you like?”

“Me?”

Pause while boy looks over doctor.

“What do you lick?” the doctor asked again.

“I like books,” says the little boy in an unconvinced voice.

“I like books too.”

“If you don’t mind,” the girl interrupted as she saw the beginning of the tranquil and parental flow, “I’ll go about some things I must do.”

Bill felt that the door behind her shut rather quickly. He wished now that he had gone away when he discovered that Mrs. Brickster was out—he was no psychiatrist, nor was he a moralist—it was as a scientist that he considered himself. He had enough confidence to have dealt sensibly with a sick woman in an emergency—but with a glance at the patient some forgotten revulsion for boys of thirteen arose upon his head like the crest of a rooster and he thought angrily: and I’m not a detective either.

But he kept his temper and offered to the young man in the purest syrup:

“What games do you like?”

“Oh, all right.”

“No, but which ones?”

“Gangster’s the only game I like.”

“Well, that’s fun.”

Like Diamond Dick Bill thought, but something prompted him to ask: “Who do you like to win—the gangster or the police?”

The boy looked at him scornfully:

“Mobsmen, naturally. You half-witted?”

“Don’t get rude again!”

“What you goan do about it.”

“I’m going to—”

Another dream of his childhood recurred to Bill; this was just like being a pirate anyhow…

“What books do you read?” he kept the same control of his face as though he were going over the boy’s body with a stethoscope.

“I don’t know, now.”

“Do you see pictures?” He saw the boy’s face light as if he saw a way out, “Gangster pictures?”

“They don’t allow me much.” But the new tone was too smug to be convincing, “They don’t allow us and the other rich boys to go to anything except comedies and kidnapping and things like that. The comedies are the things I like.”

“Who? Chaplin?”

“Who?”

“Charlie Chaplin.”

Obviously the words failed to record.

“No, the—you know, the comedies.”

“Who do you lick?” Bill asked.

“Oh—” The boy considered, “Well, I like Garbo and Dietrich and Constance Bennett.”

“Their things are comedies?”

“They’re the funniest ones.”

“Funniest what?”

“Funniest comedies.”

“Why?”

“Oh, they try to do this passionate stuff all the time.”

“This what?”

“Oh, this looking around.”

“Like what?”

“Oh, you know. This uhm—like on Christmas.”

Bill started to delve into that but he remembered the still unsolved matter of the igloo and thought better of it. It seemed more prudent to return to books.

“What books have you got?” he asked.

The boy looked at him attentively.

“Hey, you’re not a heel, are you?”

Bill considered quickly whether he was or wasn’t a heel.

“No,” he conceded himself.

“Well—” The boy rose in bed, “I got two kina kinds. I got that one about the four girls named Meg who fall down the rabbit hole and that—and I got a lot like that.” He hesitated. “And I got some books of my own.”

“Can I see them?”

The boy considered.

“What you goan do about it?”

For the third time Bill considered, and finally answered:

“Nothing.”

“Lift up the end of the mattress then.”

Bill lifted. Afterwards he debated with himself whether he counted ten or twenty. The ones he remembered were: The Facts of Love; War and Peace, Volume I; Prize Short Stories of 1926; Psychiatry, its Permutations in Eighty Years; Fifty Popular Secret Stories of the World's Fair of 1876.

The boy’s voice cut soft and sharp over Bill’s meditation upon the cache—“You a heel maybe then. You’ve seen them. What you goan do about it?”

“Take out your tonsils probably,” said Bill; he ducked out of the way as the mattress slammed down, the event being obviously prompted by approaching footsteps.

“It’s all right with me, old boy,” Bill said, “I haven’t—”

“Old stuff—”

He stopped at the appearance of his sister, to whom he was unused and who vaguely frightened him.

“Mother and father arc home,” she announced to Bill, “you want to see them downstairs?”

“You’d make a good doctor’s assistant,” he said.

“I lived with a doctor for three months.”

Bill breathed deeply, as she continued, “His wife became very ill. You know not gravement but chronicqument. I like doctors.”

The little boy was concentrated upon whether or not he had been betrayed as Bill followed her out of the room, looking backward and beginning two trial sentences; but on a last glance at the boy’s incorrigible expression he finished with: “I won’t give you away but I’d like to talk to you some more,” adding at the door: “At least I won’t tell any of your friends that you talked to me confidentially.”

He had done his best but he had never felt clumsier than in the minute of following Miss Mason through the long hall and down the stairs. At their ending he bucked up for he was projected into the scene he had imagined.

An obviously silly, but not quite persecutable, woman stood at the entrance to the main room, for which no adequate name has yet been found in the Republic; she stood there waving him breezily into a study; there they displaced a husband who was being signalled to go away by that hand which was not occupied at the moment in encouraging Bill forward.

“I knew who you were,” said Mrs. Brickster, “I recognized you from Dr. Hines’ prescriptions. He describes everything so well. This movie tonight, he could have described it as well as a reviewer.” He relaxed as he refused her proffered highball and said in a professional voice:

“Now, Mrs. Brickster, what seems to be the trouble?”

She began:

“Of course the thing commenced with a twitching…“

And she ended two hours later with:

“…probably you’re right, it was just the strain of my daughter coming home.”

She had worn out the false force of her nervous fatigue suddenly and she turned against him.

“And as you’re leaving, Doctor, could I beg you to remind Dr. Hines that when it’s him I want it’s him I want.” The telephone rang and, still talking, she picked it up. “—in future I expect the principal not the assistant—yes, he’s here … at 6632 Beaming Avenue … very personal and urgent and mention Ellis S. to him.” She pronounced the words as individual discoveries of villainy and said as she rang up: “I hope you discover no more trouble there, Doctor, than you have found here.”

And as the door closed in back of him a few minutes later Bill wondered indeed it he was now to confront difficulties more sinister than those he had left behind.

He rested a minute on the verandah—resting his eyes on a big honey suckle that cut across a low sickle moon—then as he started down the steps his abstracted glance fell upon a trailer from it sleeping in the moonlight.

She was the girl from foreign places; she was so asleep that you could see the dream of those places in the faint lift of her forehead. The doctor took out his watch—it was after three. He walked with practiced dexterity across the wooden verandah but he struck the inevitable creaky strip and promptly the map of wonderland written on the surface of women's eyebrows creased into invisibility.

"I was asleep," she said. "I slept."

As if he had told her to wait here for him. Or as if the hair that had brushed his forehead had said stay to him; but she seemed too young to play with so he picked up his satchel and said, "Well, I must—" and left, remembering that he had been a long time in the house and that all the time the girl had been asleep.

II

He drove rapidly for he had far to go—from a spot north of the city, through the city itself, to a colony of suburban houses a dozen miles south: the message on the phone had sounded frightened—perhaps this was not the night to break things off. But his thoughts were still concentrated on the scene from which he drove away to an extent that minutes and miles raced past and it was with surprise that he found his car before the familiar house on the familiar street.

A light burned inside the house; a sedan stood in front of it; as Bill stepped from his own car the door of the sedan opened and a burly figure emerged from it.

"Are you a doctor?" said the figure advancing toward him. "Do you happen to be the doctor who's a personal friend of Mrs. Dykes?"

"Yes—is she sick?"

"No. But I'm Mr. Dykes. I got home today from Den—from Honolulu."

So this ghost had materialized at last—and materialized indeed, for in the bright moonlight he seemed eight feet tall with long, prehensile arms. Bill took a preparatory step backward.

"Don't worry—I'm not going to slam you—not yet. Let's get into your car and have a little talk before we go in the house."

"What is this?" Bill demanded, "A hold up?"

The man laughed—formidably.

"Something like that. I want a couple of your signatures—one on a check, and the other on a letter you haven't written yet."

Trying to think fast Bill got into the car.

"A letter to who?" he asked.

"To my wife. You were pretty smart, weren't you, not to write her a letter—I've turned the house upside down looking for one."

"Look here, Mr. Dykes—I've known your wife only a month and professionally."

“Oh yeah? Then why is a picture of you plastered right beside her dressing table?”

Bill gave a spiritual groan.

“That’s her affair,” he explained, “I happen to know she got it from a classmate of mine in medical school who’s married to a friend of hers. I didn’t give it to her—”

“I see, I see,” the big man interrupted scoffingly, “And you’re not the man she wants to marry—with me away in Den—in Honolulu. And I like to come, don’t I, and find my wife has taken up with one of the medical boys? And I’m going to take it lying down like a sap? You’re going to pay off, and you’re going to give me evidence I can get a divorce on. And you’re going to like it.”

Bill was not going to like it at all, but he was in a position that, as he cast about in his mind, seemed at its mildest somewhat circumscribed. Whether his reaction to what happened next was relief or terror he could never afterwards decide, but at the sharp order “Stickum up!” from the rumble seat both men jumped forward as if they had been pricked. But even in the split second before a figure appeared on Bill’s side of the car there was something faintly familiar in the voice. Then the voice said:

“You didn’t know he had one of his rod men along, big boy. Just step out so there won’t be any blood on the upholstery. Quick!”

Trembling piteously the large man fumbled at the handle, and in this moment Bill identified his savior. It was that boy. And at the classic word: “Scram!” he recognized something vaguely recognizable about the instrument which was causing Mr. Dykes to retreat, to stumble to get up and then to tear down the street at the gait of a likely pacemaker. Being closer to the instrument Bill had identified it as something like a revolver and yet not quite a revolver. By the time Mr. Dykes’ heels were faint in the distance he identified it as that mysterious piece of steel which he still thought of as The Gong.

III

The boy got into the car and Bill, somewhat shaken by the heavy grasp of events, turned and started toward the city.

“That guy certainly was yellow,” remarked the boy with satisfaction.

“Yes, he was,” said Bill, rather automatically, as his professional habits began to reassert themselves, “What I’d like to know is what you were doing here.”

“I just came for the ride,” said the boy airily.

“Can’t you ride in the daytime?”

“For your ride. I was pretending to take you for a ride. All the time we were on the road I had a gat pressed so close to your back—”

“Oh, cut it out, cut it out,” said Bill ungratefully, “I don’t like that kind of talk.”

"Oak. But no spill-over to the parents, see? Or I'll tell what I saw—wolfing that guy's Jane away from him when he was in Den—in Hula-hula. How'll that sound to the fair you left on the verandah?"

"The who?" Once more Bill was startled, yet he rode easier to it as he became more accustomed to the shocks.

"Don't think I didn't see that last look around. How'd she like to hear about this—"

"You don't know what you're talking about," Bill argued, "You wouldn't understand this situation if I explained every detail to you."

"Explain it to her then."

On second thought Bill decided he wouldn't; he very definitely wouldn't care to have to explain it to her; he could at least get some hold on this incorrigible boy.

"I'm going to begin your education here and now," he announced. "First place I sympathize with you—to some extent. Certainly it's better to be a fighter than one of these softies brought up full of tender feelings about themselves. And you can pick your cause—there's good and bad fighting, and a lot in the world to fight for; your beliefs, your honor, your family and—I mean, you'll find out later there is a lot you'll decide is worth fighting for. At present confine yourself to the defense. This crime stuff doesn't touch you—you oughtn't even to think about it. You ought to be just like older people and put it out of your head—"

He was becoming convinced minute by minute that he didn't know what he was talking about himself, and he stole a side glance to see if the boy had noticed the fact.

But the boy had dozed—some time back he had dozed.

IV

It was false dawn when they turned into the lane: on the outskirts of the acres Bill awoke his protector.

"We're here. Now the thing is to hope to God you haven't been missed—and to try to get you in without anybody seeing you."

Sluggish from his night's operations the future criminal stared blank at Bill. "Wake up!" said Bill impatiently, "It's practically daylight."

"What you goan do about it?"

"I'm going to assume you have enough common sense to get in without being noticed."

"The French girl would."

"Would what? What French girl?"

"I mean my sister." The boy pulled himself together visibly. "You know—the fair. She just got back from France or somewhere. She'd let me in."

The project had the effect of bringing Bill almost up to normal.

“How would you wake her up?” he asked.

“I'll think of some way.”

“Just to be sure of that I’ll come along.”

Through the new trees, the new quivering life, the new shadows that designed new terrain on the old, through the sounds of different strange insects, they traversed the lawn and stopped under a window.

“Now what?” Bill whispered.

“That’s her room—and the window’s open.”

Bill went through a hasty mental review of the classical ways in which one assaulted a sleeping house.

“We could throw pebbles up,” he suggested doubtfully.

“No—we throw in one of these flowers. You know how frails are—if a stone sails in they put up a yelp—if it’s a rose they think there’s the Prince of Wales at last.”

The first rose missed; the boy missed; then Bill made two perfect throws which cleared the sill. The acoustical result was inaudible below and they waited breathlessly.

“Try another—” began the boy, then paused as a tender trusting face appeared at the window and tried to focus sleepy eyes upon whatever should be below.

There were moments of whispering that could only be reproduced by one of the fabled mimics employed on the radio. After the face disappeared the boy turned to Bill disgustedly: “You see, they’re all alike. Half they understand and half they miss. Just half, that’s all you can ever expect. She’s going to dress herself up in clothes, as if we were going to take her downtown to business.”

Miss Mason, however, dressed herself up in clothes remarkably quickly and remarkably well, opening a side door to them seven minutes later. After seeing her Bill decided he could better explain matters without any comment from a third party, so, taking advantage of a yawn detected on the boy’s face he pointed sternly inward and upward. The boy winked once, started to open his lips, found his unspoken word changing irresistibly into a new yawn, gave up, and disappeared.

“Now Miss Brickster—” began the doctor and stopped.

“Miss Mason,” she corrected him. She countered, “I bet I can half guess already what happened. My brother stayed in the rumble seat; I saw him climb into it just before I went to sleep myself.”

—What an illusion that they only get half of it, Bill thought. That devil doesn’t know everything. Why, this girl—

“Don’t tell your parents on him,” he said, “I’ve come to like him. I don’t want him to get in trouble.”

“Dr. Hardy.”

“Yes, Miss Mason.”

“I’ve been home from Europe two months and I've seen so many strange things happen here that I wouldn’t dare open my mouth about anything that wasn’t my business.”

—Just the wife for a doctor in every way, he thought.

“Miss Mason.”

“Yes, Doctor.”

“Miss Mason—naturally under the circumstances I haven’t been able—” He passed his hand over the new stubble of his beard, “—to complete my toilet. So I'll ask you to—”

“Yes, doctor.”

“—say goodnight or good morning.”

“Certainly, I understand.”

“—with the privilege that tomorrow—or today—when I come back to see your mother—”

“Yes, doctor.”

“—of saying good afternoon.”

“That would be a pleasure.”

“Goodnight, Miss Brickster.”

“Goodnight, Dr. Hines.”

V

Bill arrived at the office in a state of irritation caused not only by loss of sleep but to indefinable objections to his situation that he lacked the alertness to analyze. One of them, though, he was sure of; it was that Doctor Hines never arrived till noon anymore and that fact threw double harness, sometimes fire-horse harness, upon his assistant. Bill saw no justification for this growing laziness of a man in his middle forties.

—Maybe I’m just sore because I’m late myself this morning. Maybe I’m trying to switch it off on him.

Thus he tried to stay within bounds of equity, but as Dr. Hines arrived at the moment when Bill was regarding a mass of twenty obligations and twenty messages he lost his temper.

“It’s hard for me to do all this detail and keep reading.” he implied fairly faintly but fairly audibly.

Dr. Hines looked at him surprised, then fell back into vacuous placidity.

“But in these times,” He spoke with the imitation heartiness that he used for patients, “—it’s good to have anything to do at all, ha-ha.” He arrested the last “ha” on what he read in Bill’s face.

“I mean it, Doctor Hines. I don’t know why you don’t get down here and I don’t care, but it’s damned unjust considering the percentage I take. I suggest you get to bed earlier at night.”

Dr. Hines’ eyes widened; his lower lip dropped.

“All right,” he said, piling up his resentment, “But have you forgotten I picked you up as a raw interne and brought you into the practise that I had built up in this city—” He paused to blow and Bill said patiently:

“I admit that,” suddenly he added an afterthought that had been passed up to him from below the night before, “What are you going to do about it?”

“I’ll tell you what I’m going to do about it and I’ll tell you quick.” Dr. Hines paused at this moment and, being no fool himself, examined his conscience and blew but with less wind, “I’m going to—”

He suddenly realized he was going to do nothing about it. After a big start he had let himself grow soft over a long period; lately he had handed over everything difficult, even his personal secrets, to Bill Hardy. With Bill no longer there the very structure of the firm collapsed. Dr. Hines simply sat and stared at the younger man.

Bill guessed the older man’s thoughts; he realized that he had gotten his point over, and granting his senior enough time to recuperate and preserve his dignity he retired; tossing the most necessary directions about the afternoon to the competent Miss Weiss as he went out the door.

He drove quickly north, and as he drove he thought, or concluded a thought he had been thinking for the last fatigued hours, that the little boy was fighting a battle with realities on his own, that there would eternally continue to be Mrs. Bricksters, that romance was for children and work and danger for men, and the best he could hope was that at day’s end something softer and different would be waiting at the turning of a lane.

It was only afternoon then, but Bill thought he saw just that across the shrill early afternoon with an entirely new opera of insect sounds and the trees’ shadows thrown a new way. He was not absolutely sure he saw it; then he was suddenly sure.

In a few minutes he said:

“I’ve got something to tell you. Unfortunately very quickly, because there seems to be a lot of stuff I’ve got to do at the minute—”

“Awll—ll right,” said the little boy sitting with them, “Awll—ll right—” And without even being told, “I can always take orders from a big shot—I’m gone.” And amazingly he was.

Bill looked after him with a faint touch of regret that he probably would never find out what the Bluga was and how it was that people looked at each other on Christmas. Then he turned to the girl.

“Look,” he began, “You are so beautiful—practically unearthly. You—”

“Yes.”

“You have everything a girl could have—” He hesitated. “In short—”

And as she knew he'd be a long time, since he had said "in short," she decided to speed up things.

"What are you going to do about it?" she asked.

Become impatient of all the explaining that seemed to be demanded in this household Bill Hardy took matters into his own arms and began a practical demonstration.