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The Project Gutenberg eBook of Forsyte's Retreat, by Winston Marks

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FORSYTE'S RETREAT

By Winston Marks

Illustration by Kelly Freas

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Sextus Rollo Forsyte had his trouble with the bottle, but nothing out of a bottle ever produced such a hotel as the Mahoney-Plaza: only 260 rooms ... only two guests to a room ... but accommodating 5200 guests—all at the same time!... Floor please?

At last he was second in line. He squared his shoulders and pulled at the lower edges of his black double-breasted suitcoat to erase the travel wrinkles. The applicant ahead of him exploded the words, "Nuts! I'll leave town first. I just *came* from the Phony-Plaza. You can take that squirrel-cage and—"

"Next!" the employment agent called sadly. Sextus Rollo Forsyte moved up and sat in the oak chair before the oak desk and faced the oak-featured man with the jobs.

"Forsyte is the name," Sextus reminded. The man riffled through the application cards.

"Yes. Indeed. Lucky you came back. I have a fine position for you, Mr. Forsyte. Right in your line." He held out a blue slip. "The general manager's position is open at the Mahoney-Plaza. Six hundred a month, board and room. Now if you will...."

Sextus staggered from the employment office stunned.

He could handle the job, all right. As he'd said on the application form, in his forty years he had managed half a dozen large hotels. But they were handing him this plum without comment on his failure to fill in the spaces marked: COMPLETE REFERENCES (names and addresses).

He shrugged. They did a lot of things different in California. The most he had hoped for was a waiter's job or maybe a short order cook in a fry joint. But if they wanted to ignore the hotel associations' black list, he wouldn't argue.

Sextus Forsyte craved anonymity with the passion that most men seek fame and glory. Beneath his suave, mature exterior beat the shrinking heart of a perennial hermit whose delight was an adventure book and a bottle of whiskey.

His recent employer had not objected to his fondness for reading nor solitude, but his appetite for liquor had revealed itself in a series of unfortunate crises which plague the life of any hotel executive.

Yes, Sextus Forsyte had sought his solitude in that remotest of all places, the large city hotel. His career of smiling at strange faces, welcoming famous people and snapping crisp commands to assistant managers had provided the near-perfect isolation from normal society. To the transient eye he was the poised, gregarious greeter. Actually he lived in a deep well of introversion. Of course, this was no affair of the succession of boards of directors who had uttered the harsh charges of "dipsomania" and fired him. But then boards of directors are never notable for their sympathy or understanding.

And finally word got around the eastern seaboard about Sextus. "A competent man, yes. Drinks on the job. Wouldn't have him as a busboy."

Worse than the mere prospect of unemployment was the notoriety. Coldly sober, Sextus had fled panic-stricken to the west coast, vaguely determined to become a beach-comber or an oyster-fisherman or whatever they did out there.

He stared now at the blue slip and turned in to a florist shop. He broke his last five-dollar bill to buy a pink carnation for his buttonhole then headed down the sunny walk to the hotel. It was a fine December morning in the little beach town, such as only Florida and California can advertise. He breathed the salt air and turned an appreciative ear to the gentle wash of the Pacific surf. He felt so good he might even take a little breakfast before his first drink of whiskey of the day.



At the bus depot he traded his baggage checks for two old, but fine leather, two-suiters. Then he taxied the remaining two blocks to the Mahoney-Plaza.

He paused at the entrance, stepped from under the marquis and looked up mystified. The frontage indicated a rather small hostelry to pay such munificent salary to its general manager. Only five stories high, it was squeezed in by low office buildings on either side like an ancient, narrow-chested old man.

He handed his bags to a bell-hop and stepped into a spacious lobby. It was decorated with fine furniture, thick carpets and throngs of expensively undressed people.

The boy put his bags down before a remarkably long room-desk manned by three white-suited clerks, but Sextus touched his arm. "Just take them up to the manager's suite, please." The boy eyed him from carnation to dusty shoes.

"Right off a park bench. It figures, though." He got a key from the desk clerk, picked up the bags again and they started for the elevator alcove.

Sextus' practiced eye vacuumed details from the lobby, the well-swept carpets, freshly emptied sand-jars and the modern elevators. The place seemed well-ordered and enjoying convention-magnitude business.

He started into the first elevator, but the operator warned, "To Wing 'A' only!" with such a question in his voice that Sextus looked back for his bellman. That person, a sandy-haired stripling of some five-feet-four, was trying to wave him on with his head.

"Not that one," he said impatiently. "Over here. Wing 'H'." Then Sextus noticed there were five elevators on either side of the alcove. Each was plainly marked with a letter, running from "A" through "J". This was a new wrinkle. Elevators were a mode of strictly vertical transportation, meaning, as a safe generality, that they travelled in parallel routes. Why, then, differentiate for separate wings when they were all grouped together in the first place?

And, incidentally, why *ten* elevators for a 200 or so room hotel, anyway?

They rode to the fourth floor in one-level leaps, stopping to unload several guests on each floor. The upper floor hall was of modest length, running fore and aft of the long, narrow building, as he had first sized it up. Where were all the *wings*—the wings with the separate elevators?

The boy let him into the light, airy apartment, dropped his bags in the middle of the floor and started out abruptly. Sextus called him back.

"Yeah, what'll it be—Chief?" His voice was derisive.

"How many rooms do we have here, fellow?"

"Twenny-six hunnerd and all full for the season, so if you'll just leggo of me—"

"Don't you enjoy your work here?"

"I detest it. Go ahead, fire me, chum. I'm lookin' for an excuse to clear out."

"Very well, you have one. Check out with the captain." Sextus couldn't tolerate discourteous familiarity. Friendly familiarity was bad enough, but the "chum" did it.

The boy banged the door behind him.

Sextus opened his bag. From it he extracted a fifth of whiskey which he took to the tiled bathroom. He stripped the cellophane from a drinking glass, poured it half-full of the amber liquor and drained it.

He was in the shower when the phone rang. He dripped to the night stand with the patience of one who has soaked many a rug and discovered that they don't stain. "Forsyte here!" he answered.

"The new manager? Well, this is Jackson, bell-captain. Whadda you mean canning Jerry? I'm down to twelve skippers and you start out by firing one of my fastest boys!"

"The boy was sarcastic and insolent. Take it up with the service manager. Anyway, how many bellmen do you need to run this cracker-box? Twelve is about eight too many."

There was a brief silence, then: "In the first place *I am* your service manager, or all you got at the present. In the second damned place, you tell me where I can lay my hands on ten more boys before you go canning any more. I'm rehiring Jerry as of now!" He banged the receiver in Sextus' ear.

Unperturbed, Sextus finished his shower, dressed in a lighter weight suit and picked up the phone. The house switchboard apparently was jammed. It took a full minute to get an operator. "Forsyte here. Your new manager, that is. Instruct all department heads to be in my office in seven minutes. General conference."



Another short nip at the bottle served nicely to quiet a small hunger pang. He went in search of his office. He found it on the mezzanine, suitably lavish, clean and well-furnished.

He adjusted the fragrant carnation on his lapel in the large wall mirror, not entirely displeased with what it reflected. Except for the suitcase wrinkles in his morning coat, he should pass inspection. His thinning hair, square jaw and wide-set eyes radiated a quiet dignity. The slight pink of his cheeks and nose was a bit more prominent than he liked. He should have had some breakfast.

The phone rang and he let it. He was not yet ready to assume his duties. But as time passed and none of his staff appeared, the ring became more significant. He gave in.

"Forsyte here!"

"Sorry, Mr. Forsyte," it was the operator, "but none of your staff can join you just now. They send their regrets."

"Regrets?" Sextus said icily. "Did you explain who called this meeting, young lady?"

Her voice dropped the synthetic sweetness and became a throaty rasp. "Look, Buster, we're short-handed enough without you should call meetings at eleven A. M. Plug the hole in your head. It's suckin' air." He broke the connection. The place was busy, he'd grant, but this was rank insubordination. His whole staff! Everyone seemed keyed to the *boingg!* point.

He decided to mull it over breakfast. The spacious, well-appointed coffee-shop served his juice gelid and his coffee hot, his egg tender and his toast crisp. The bit of tension vanished as he ate with relish. He signed the check with his tight, little introverted signature.

Now for a quick inspection tour to see just how rough things really were. He told the boy on the service elevator, "To the bottom." His stomach writhed as the cage plummeted four floors below the street level. The kitchens, laundry, warehouse, baggage-room, switchboard room, ice-plant and personnel spaces sprawled through an acre of underground levels. They boiled with sweating men and dishevelled women engaged in the intricate business of housing, feeding, clothing, liquoring and catering to a small city under one roof. Then he remembered how small the quarters were upstairs.

How could they *house* enough guests to justify all this?

Returning to his office he called the employment bureau. "Mr. Crowson? Forsyte here! I'm at the hotel."

"Oh dear, what's wrong now?"

"You didn't tell me to whom I should report. This, ah, is my first experience with employment agencies. Usually there is a board of directors."

"Is that all?" Crowson sighed audibly. "You are in full charge, I assure you. Our little interview was quite satisfactory. I have certified you to your bookkeeping department, and you may draw upon your salary after a week. Anything else?"

"Where may I reach the owner or the chairman in an emergency?"

"The owner is a Dr. Bradford who is in Hanford, Washington. Top secret government work. He may not be contacted until he returns. Sorry, that's all I can tell you. Getting on all right, Mr. Forsyte?" he asked with obvious reluctance.

Sextus cut off. Two lights on the intercom were blinking at him. One call was from the kitchen. The first chef had just heaved a cleaver at the steward, and the head salad girl was in hysterics.

Sextus said he'd be right down. The second call was from the chief house-detective. He had caught a bell-hop peddling marijuana to the waitresses. What was the manager's new policy? Sextus told him to hold the boy in the locker room for him. Then one of the room clerks rang to say that Gary Gable, the movie star, was raising hell in the lobby because he couldn't get the bridal suite and demanded to see the manager.

Sextus smiled. These things were the routine of running a large hotel. He stopped at the bar for a quick one and then started for the kitchen.



The day passed pleasantly enough, and he looked forward to retiring to his quiet rooms upstairs. He thought to get some intelligent answers from his assistant manager when he walked in promptly at five P. M., but he turned out to be a university student from Southern Cal, working days on his master's degree in

business administration and nights at the hotel. No wonder he hadn't been promoted. Not that he wasn't bright—just not experienced.

Sextus formally offered his hand and introduced himself. The lad said, "I'm Horace Smith the phone is ringing excuse me." He snatched the phone with a harried look.

Somehow the phone never stopped ringing. Sextus gave up and retired to dress for dinner. He finished his fifth of whiskey and descended to the hotel's swank Oceania Room, where he made himself known to the maitre d'hotel. That frenzied little moustachioed person sniffed Sextus' breath and seated him behind a potted palm.

Discreetly avoiding the wine list, Sextus dined well, noting several movie stars and other vip's in the crowded dining room. He couldn't escape the illusion that he was dining at the Ambassador or the Waldorf Astoria—instead of in a five-story rat-trap. Where did they all come from?

As he awaited the elevator, he was approached by the bell-captain. "Mr. Forsyte?" Sextus nodded stiffly. "Here's an envelope Mr. Patterson left for you. He was the last G. M. Incidentally, sorry I was a little rough on the phone, but you can see our situation here. Understaffed and overcrowded. It gets thick, real thick, brother."

Sextus felt his belly muscles tighten. "Confusion is never improved by discourtesy or insubordination," he said coldly.

At that moment a bellman rushed up to the rebuffed captain who was regarding Sextus with a restrained loathing. "The guy in C332 keeps screaming for his beer, but the service elevator to 'C' vector keeps dumping me off in 'F'."

The captain said, "Try riding to fourth on 'C' and then walk down a deck and come out through the linen room."

"Can't I just ride up the guest elevator, Jack?"

The captain stared at Sextus. "Our Mr. Forsyte wouldn't approve. Now, move!"

He turned to Sextus and said acidly, "Just one of our little extra problems." He moved off with a disgusted shake of his carefully barbered head.

The nature of the bell-captain's special problem sounded interesting, but the

details confused Sextus. *Ride to four on "C", walk down to three and out by the linen closet.* Sounded like three-dimensional chess.

His cage arrived and he returned to his suite. He removed his shoes, stripped to the waist and sank gratefully into the soft bed, nestling the last bottle of his suitcase reserve in the crook of his bare arm.

He considered the sealed envelope marked: TO MY SUCCESSOR. URGENT MATTERS.

First he opened a fresh bottle and then the envelope. He flipped through the papers. There were some tax reports ready for signature, two union contracts up for renegotiation and an estimate on re-doing 520 rooms in vectors "B" and "F". Vectors? Did they mean "Wings"?

The last paper was a personal letter, apparently addressed to him. Before he could begin it the phone at his bedside jangled. Operator said, "Would you take this, please, Mr. Forsythe? I dispatched a house man, but the guest is hysterical."

Without awaiting his permission she cut in the woman. "Hello, manager? There's a man in my bed!"

"What is your room number, madame?" Sextus asked with drowsy detachment.

"I'm in H-408," she said, and on the "8" her voice ran up the scale in a quivering crescendo that launched Sextus briskly from his bed. H-408 was his floor and his wing, luckily. He tore out of the suite and down the hall without shirt or shoes.

The door stood ajar, and he pushed it open. In the middle of the floor, still gabbling into the phone, stood a lumpy, pallid woman about his own age, naked except for a pillow which she hugged fiercely to her navel. Her bleached hair was a frayed bird's-nest.

In bed, decently clad in a pair of blue and white striped pajamas, was a rather distinguished, gray-haired gentleman of about fifty, leaning on one elbow and watching the woman with an expression of mild astonishment and interest. To Sextus' practiced eye, the man was guilty of nothing.

The house detective arrived at that moment, but Sextus dismissed him with a wave of his hand. He went in alone.

"I'm the manager, madam," he assured her. He noted that despite her excited

wails, her eyes drooped half shut. A bottle of sleeping pills on the table was uncapped.

"Thizz man, thizz man, thizz man!" she kept repeating and pointing her elbow at the bed. The man in question raised his eyebrows and shook his head.

"Damndest sensation I ever felt," he said. "I'm Johnathan P. Turner, attorney. Before I tell you my story, please check with the desk and verify that I was assigned this room."

Sextus took the phone from the woman's pudgy hand which darted to rescue the sagging pillow. The room-clerk reported that Mr. J. P. Turner was registered to room 408, but in "J" vector, not "H".

Sextus' eyes swept the room. It was an unexplainable mess. Two sets of luggage were jumbled on and around the baggage rack at the foot of the bed. Rinsed out nylons hung from the shower rod, but a man's shaving kit occupied the shelf over the lavatory. Despairing of ever arriving at a sensible explanation, Sextus went to work.

Although hampered somewhat without his shirt, coat and tie, Sextus managed to get Turner and his belongings transferred peaceably to another room and the woman quieted down in bed with another sleeping pill.

Then Turner was allowed to tell his story. "I had turned in early and was lying there on my back reading the paper when suddenly I got the most messy feeling all through me. It was like—oh, hell, I can't say it. Anyhow, in just about a second, something went *thub!*—and there she was in bed with me—naked!" he added with a shiver.

Sextus grasped at a straw. "How many did you have to drink this evening, Mr. Turner?"

The attorney squirmed uncomfortably. "Well, quite a few, maybe, but not enough to—"

Sextus shrugged one shoulder and turned to leave. "Understand, we don't blame you a bit, sir. You know how these middle-aged women can carry on when they get out on the town. You must have dozed off before she slipped in."

"But my door was locked! I think," he added uncertainly.

"We won't breathe a word of it, Mr. Turner. Rest well!"

Sextus padded silently back to his room in his stocking feet and took a long pull at the whiskey. Funny thing, this. People often got into the wrong hotel beds, but rarely with such impalpable excuses. He sighed and picked up the letter from his predecessor again. It read:

Welcome to the Phony-Plaza. (That name again.) You will be the fifth manager in 30 days. If you need the job as much as I thought I did you will probably ignore my advice, but here goes, anyway: RESIGN! BAIL OUT! SKIDOO! (The man was emphatic.) I can't tell you where they've got the 2600 rooms in this haunted ant-hill, but believe me, they are there, and you'll be sorry if you hang around long enough to prove it.

My predecessor left a garbled note about some *hyperspace* system that the owner, Dr. Bradford, has figured out. Actually, there are only 260 rooms, as you've probably surmised. But this Bradford, who is a nuclear physicist, by the way, has installed some sort of field generator in each elevator shaft that gives entry to these rooms at *ten different locations in time*. Room 500, for instance, in Vector A is 10 years from Vector B. So when you run to capacity with, say, two people to the room, you have 5200 guests in 260 rooms! They all live by the same calendar, but in their rooms they are actually centuries apart. How do you like those apples?

It's all quite neat and economical, what with the cost per front foot of this beach area zoned for business, and you'll find a dandy profit on the books, but start worrying, fellow! Things are beginning to happen. The maintenance engineer, who, incidentally, is quitting, too, says that the equipment in the shafts is wearing out, and the fields are pulsating or decaying or some damned thing. And we can't contact Dr. Bradford, who took the service manual with him.

Maybe you are more experienced in this hotel business than I am, but I couldn't stand the gaff. One more mess like I barely managed to clean up this week and someone's going to the pokey. It won't be me.

Good luck, if you insist on staying, but I warned you.

(signed) Thornton K. Patterson

P.S. The fire-marshall is on our necks because the windows are all sealed, but for God's sake, DON'T UNSEAL THEM!

Sextus tossed the fantastic communication aside in disgust, but his mind began to unreel a picture of the confusion he had witnessed down in the service quarters: Bellboys and room-service waiters fighting for service elevators; chambermaids trundling their little carts on the dead run; the overworked laundry staff, laboring in a veritable sweatshop of steamy chaos, swamped in a billowing backlog of sheets and towels. It all pointed to a large hotel operation.

If so, where were the rooms? Refusing to argue further with himself, he got undressed. Hyperspace or not, the people apparently were there, and it was his job to serve them. He got a bucket of ice from room-service, mixed an ice and whiskey highball and retreated into his private little world between crisp sheets and the pages of a twenty-five-cent mystery novel.

Arising early, he was girded for the summons from Miss Genevieve Hafner in room H-408. He went to her room. Fully dressed and in the daylight she was still a hollow-eyed mess. The only visible improvement was in the bleached bird's-nest, now a prim, rolled circle on her unlovely pate.

"What amends," she demanded, "do you intend to make for my terrible experience last night? Is that horrid creature in jail?"

"Experience? Jail?" Sextus asked innocent-eyed. He asked that she tell him about it. Exasperated, she went over the details. When she finished he patted her hand and pointed to the sleeping pills. "You should see your doctor."

"But my doctor *prescribed* those pills," she whimpered, looking down shyly at the hand which Sextus held gingerly. "They never made me dream—before."

He bent and kissed the revolting hand. "You are much too lovely a lady to have escaped from such a predicament as you describe without suffering—shall we say, a more romantic—fate?"

Miss Hafner blushed at the thought and wavered between outrage and ecstasy for a dangerous moment. With time-tested genius, Sextus withdrew quietly and left

her to her thoughts.

He *must* get in touch with Dr. Bradford, atom business or not. This place could blow sky-high any minute.

He slipped the key into his own door and entered his suite. He took two brisk strides into his bedroom, tripped over a lady's overnight case and sprawled into his unmade bed. Even as he landed he realized it had an occupant, a gorgeous, strangely familiar blonde creature, touselled and asleep hugging her pillow with a creamy arm. A crash from the bathroom brought his head bouncing off the silken coverlet even as the girl awakened with a scream and tangled them both with the bed clothes.

Gary Gable charged from the bathroom, face dripping and a tuft of lather under each ear. "What in the Goddam hell—" He leaped for Sextus with his internationally famous shoulders knotted into bunches of muscular menace.

"I'm the hotel manager," Sextus blurted loudly. For once his self-assurance wavered under fire. Even to himself his words explained nothing.

Meanwhile, Gable tripped over one of Sextus' heavy suitcases and joined the pair in bed. Another male voice issued from the bathroom, and as they all thrashed about, Sextus became aware that a second female had somehow appeared between Gable and his brand new bride. They came up together, face to face, the beautiful, sleepy blonde and the very wide-awake, queenly brunette. Now a pot-bellied little man in shorts and undershirt emerged from the bathroom, his mouth a gaping hole in a fully lathered face.

Sextus wriggled free, made for the door and off down the hall. To his horror, the automatic signal light on the vector "H" elevator was flickering and fading. The whole H-vector must be collapsing. He dashed for the stairwell and then reconsidered. He moved to the end of the hall which overlooked the low roof of the adjacent building. He tried the window and remembered that it was sealed. Back in the alcove he seized one of the sand jars and headed back for the window. A growing tide of commotion swelled from behind almost every door now. Grunts, screams and wrestling sounds came over the transoms.

He dashed the sand jar through the window, chipped off the jagged edges with his heel and climbed out. It was a twenty-foot drop to security, and he made it without hesitation. What could a man hope to do with a mess like—

Spang! His feet struck, not with a crunch on gravelled tar, but into a springy fabric that sagged under his 180 pounds, tossed him six feet in the air, caught him on the rebound and then juggled him down with diminishing bounces.



They were waiting for him, as he regained his feet on the quivering surface of a spring-loaded, canvas trampoline. The bright, mid-morning sun blinded him for an instant, but their voices assailed his ears in a mighty roar of approval as he squinted under his hand and peered around him.

"Attaboy, Sexy," a shrill female voice piped. The roof-top was jammed with a pressing throng of—nearly naked people. In the cleared semi-circle about him a cordon of male bodies-beautiful restrained the mob behind a rope from which a long streamer hung with letters reading:

"WELCOME, SEXTUS, TO 2153 A. D."

Reaching over the edge of the canvas platform with outstretched hand was a single, willowy, sun-baked oldster in a purple loin-cloth. His hair and beard were a dazzling white, and his face was wreathed in a silly smile, the kind officials always wear when presenting the keys to the city.

He shuffled his white kid sandals and spoke with an accent: "Welcome to 2153, Sextus Rollo Forsyte! California salutes you!"

Somewhere down on the street a raucous brass band broke into the *Stars and Stripes Forever* that quickly medlied into *California, Here We Come!*

Sextus shrank back against the wall and felt ancient bricks crumble into dust against his hands. The magnitude of his disaster crushed in upon shrinking soul, and as his nimble imagination grasped the stunning significance every molecule of his being vibrated with horror. *He had been warned not to open a window.*

"You have fulfilled the legend," the old man sang joyously. "You are a famous man." How famous, Sextus was forced to acknowledge as a television boom snaked over the heads of the crowd trailing a wisp of cable and cast its baleful, glassy eye full into his face.

"Two hundred years to the day, as my great-great-grandfather predicted. I am

Clark Bradford, direct descendent of—"

Sextus stared wildly up at the open window. He bounced once experimentally. It was a fine trampoline, and he flipped a foot off the surface. Next bounce he flexed his knees a little and gained another foot. Now he doubled up purposefully.

The one-man-delegate in purple frowned. "Stop that. We are here to welcome you and start the celebration at the Hollywood Bowl and—Stop that, I say!" Now he sensed Sextus' incredible intent. "Officer, help out here, please!"

A bulgy, bronzed fellow clad mainly in an immaculately white brassard left the rope barrier and joined Bradford.

The Elder screamed, "You can't go back, Forsyte! Don't you understand? You disappeared two centuries ago when the vector field collapsed. You can't go back! You can't! This is your destiny!"

Sextus' heels soared five feet above the canvas and gained precious altitude with each spring, but it was a precarious business the higher he went. One slip and he'd glance off at a tangent and be captured by those reaching, grasping obscene hands in the crowd. The thought almost unseated his reason.

The police officer asked Bradford, "What would happen if he did go back?" Then he added, "Ain't he got a right to?"

Bradford shuffled nervously. "I don't quite know. We never considered such a—my God! Stop, man, stop. You'll change the whole course of history! Stop him!"

The barelegged minion tried, but as he climbed up on the edge of the trampoline Sextus bounced and kicked out with accuracy and determination. The policeman sprawled back clutching air, and the crowd roared.

One more bounce and a half twist, now. Sextus soared up, up, and his hands touched the sill.

With the agility of desperation he clawed up and through the paneless window.

"You don't know what you are doing," the old man screeched. "Stay here and you'll be famous. If you go back it is to oblivion. Oblivion! Very, well, *go back!* Go back, you—you nonentity!"

"You bet," Sextus panted to himself and tumbled onto the carpeted fourth floor

hallway of the Mahoney-Plaza hotel.

Instantly, another voice, but without accent, accosted him shrilly from down the hall. "You, there. You mister manager." Sextus sighed mightily with relief. It was only Miss Genevieve Hafner holding a pimply-faced, red-haired youth by the ear.

True, Gary Gable and two hair-pulling, female starlets bore down right behind her, and rooms along both sides of the corridor were disgorging eddies of indignant displaced persons.

But these were things he understood. These were just beefs. Somewhat more involved than usual, but nothing much worse than a full-fledged convention at mid-night.

He adjusted his mashed carnation, brushed the crumbles of old brick dust from his morning coat and moved into the fray.

"Now, now, Miss Hafner! *What* are you up to *this* time?"

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