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# MACHIAVELLI

A Story of Love in a Bird Store

By GEORGE WESTON

Mr. Hopper was a philosopher, but, alas for philosophy, Mr. Hopper was also in love. Nature had made him stout, and a sedentary life had left him stout, so that when he moved around his bird-store, with a slow deliberation which must have been very soothing to the canaries and the chaffinches, it was hard to believe that there were times when he thought in empires and sighed in lovelorn madrigals. But Minerva knew differently, and so did Dr. Faust.

Minerva was the owl which occupied the cage of honor at one end of the counter, and Dr. Faust was the parrot which graced the large cage opposite. At night, when the blinds were drawn, Mr. Hopper would often sit between this attentive pair reading Marcus Aurelius or Swinburne and talking first to Minerva and then to the doctor.

"Now I could have thought of these things too," complained Mr. Hopper one night, looking up from a volume of the noble Marcus and addressing Minerva. "Yes, and I could have thought of them even deeper than he did. But suppose I finish my American Machiavelli. What then? Hardly anybody will want to read it because I haven't the name. People will say, 'Who is this man Hopper who has written the American Machiavelli?' And when they find out that I keep a bird-store."

Minerva blinked her eyes. "No," said the philosopher, "and I don't know that I blame them so much myself. The most exciting things I did

And after he had given a sigh that woke up half the birds in the shop, he stood still and listened to a heavy tread overhead.

"That's him," he said, turning a jaundiced eye to Dr. Faust. "He's calling on her twice a week now—him and his little fox-terrier. First thing we know they'll be married, and that will be the end of that." He dropped his voice to a sly, revengeful note. "If I could only get him to eat the biscuits which he buys for his terrier . . ." He hastily turned his thoughts from the contemplation of strychnine and prussic acid and drew a number of unfinished manuscripts from underneath the counter.

"Now, what shall I work on to-night?" he reflected. "Here's The Drawbacks of Speech, Based on Observing the So-called Dumb Animals and Birds. Shall I give that a go? And here's the American Machiavelli, or, Only the Strongest Survive. I guess I'll tackle the American Machiavelli to-night. Somehow I feel in the humor for it."

He was sharpening a pencil (from his expression it might have been a dagger), when he heard a commotion in Mrs. Stebbins's rooms overhead.

"Has something happened to him?" Mr. Hopper hopefully asked himself, his head on one side like that of a listening roan. "Has he gone and fallen off a chair, or set fire to himself, or something?" The next minute there was a knock on his door, and when Mr. Hopper unlocked it a worried-looking man strode into the shop carrying an even more



Mr. Hopper reading his Marcus Aurelius

to-day were to sell three canaries, two bird-cages, stuff a squirrel, and open another barrel of dog-biscuit. Put Machiavelli in a bird-store and he would have been buried by circumstances, too. Well, such is life."

And having uttered this unconscious summary of all the philosophies, he closed the Meditations of M. Aurelius and turned his attention to Swinburne, first moving his chair around to face Dr. Faust.

"Unrequited affection," said Mr. Hopper, wagging his head over the book. "No wonder the poets are always singing about it. If I hadn't gone in so strong for philosophy, I think I would have gone in for poetry. Why, I could write on 'unrequited affection, Doctor,' said Mr. Hopper, feelingly, "in such terms as would bring tears to the eyes of a—of a—blue-jay."

He put the book down and walked around the store.

"And after all, who am I to think of her?" he asked, stopping in front of the Doctor's cage. "I'm only her tenant. There she lives above the store and never gives me a second thought after I have paid my month's rent. Buys a little catnip every once in a while for her Angora cat, and thinks more of the cat than she does of me. And that's my life. I can't be a philosopher or a Machiavelli because I haven't the opportunity, and I can't show my regards for Mrs. Stebbins because I'm not supposed to have any."

worried-looking fox terrier under his arm.

"You'll have to leave him," said Mr. Hopper, speaking with great dignity after he had completed his diagnosis. "In addition to the scratches and contusions this hind-leg seems out of joint. I'll have to bandage it and keep my eye on it for a week or two before he can run around much."

The worried-looking man had hardly left when another knock sounded on the bird-man's door. Again he unlocked it, and his landlady entered, tenderly carrying a basket. A bright-eyed, bright-faced widow of forty was Mrs. Stebbins, but when she placed her burden in Mr. Hopper's hands she was too upset to speak. She pointed to the panting bundle of fur that lay in the bottom of the basket and sank into the chair by the side of the counter.

Again Mr. Hopper made his diagnosis, and when at last he shook his head there was a very ominous atmosphere in the bird-shop.

"I should judge, Ma'am," said Mr. Hopper, in tones which Talleyrand would have envied, "that a dog has done this."

"Yes, and would have killed her if I hadn't hit him with the poker. You do whatever you can, and if anything happens to her . . ."

"If anything happens to her," thought Mr. Hopper as Mrs. Stebbins left, "he will never call to see her again—he nor his fox-terrier, either. . . ."

The door closed. Mr. Hopper locked