

Little Grains of Grit

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might have been wearing overalls that day, he reflected bitterly. He revealed his knife.

"Isn't it elegant!" admired Beulah in her most excited lisp. "Wait." She dived into her left hip pocket and drew out a present wrapped in shaving paper. "I didn't forget your birthday. Mine's in a week. Then I'll be as old as you are again."

"Of course you will," agreed Tommy, moved by the mystery of the present. "Seven, growing on eight. That's what you'll be." He unrolled, and unrolled, and finally gazed perplexed at an oblong, hard, slate-colored stone.

"It's a hone she cried. "Jack got him a new one. Gimme your knife!"

"What for?"

"We can put a razor edge on it. See, this way."

Beulah grasped the knife and began to grind. "Pretty soon it'll cut a hair."

Tommy caught the idea and took up the grinding himself. The minute she was out of occupation Beulah transferred her bright attention to the new spade and bucket.

"Goin' to fill the bucket with angle-worms?" she asked.

Tommy could not forego the honor of being the originator of this inspired scheme.

"Yes. There's lots where Polly Voo has hoed. Come on."

Tommy would have led her past the bearded Frenchman with the terrible voice, but Beulah paused politely.

"Good morning, Mr. Voo," she said. "How are you feeling this fine weather?"

"G-r-r-reat!" returned Polly with a terrible rumble of r's.

The r's sent delightful chills up and down Tommy's back. He had never continued a conversation with Polly Voo past the opening words. But Madam Tower herself, Tommy remembered, had admitted that Beulah had nice manners.

"I should think gardening would give you a fine appetite," she continued, pleasantly.

"G-r-r-reat! I could eat ze ox, ze sheep, ze goat." He rolled his eyes. Tommy wondered if he could eat children.

"Your whiskers grow clear down to your wrists, don't they!" Beulah asked politely.

"Oui." Polly was turning great clods as he spoke.

"We've just put a razor edge on Tom's new knife. Wouldn't you like to shave them?"

"No, no, no!" rumbled from Polly's huge boots. "No, no, no, no, no!" He might have been laughing, but it sounded like thunder. "I am pr-r-roud! Ze hairy arm, zey show ze strength, ze grit. I am ze man of grit!" He flexed his arm till his very teeth echoed.

"How did you get to be so strong?" Tommy drew nearer.

Polly Voo struck his chest. "How do I get ze strength, ze airy arm? Me, I am born in France! When I am little, more little as ze Tom-mie, I go to ze abattoir—how you say it?—ze slaughter, ze butcher place. I drink ze cup of hot blood, so!" He opened his bearded lips, contracted his great throat muscles to illustrate, and resumed his hoeing.

Plainly, he had spoken. Not until they had put several rows of poles between themselves and the blood-drinking Frenchman, did they speak. Then Tommy swaggered.

"I know what he eats, too."

"What does he eat?"

"He eats frogs legs!"

Beulah began filling the bucket with earth-worms. "I guess he's not afraid of anything," she said.

But Tommy was not ready to dismiss the subject. He knew now what he wanted to be: he wanted to be strong, to be gritty, to have hair on his arms!

"I've got to go," sighed Beulah, at last. "I ran away. Jack will miss me. He's fixin' over the fourth act of Castle Gray-rag right now, I guess."

"What for?" Tommy was keenly interested in Jack Kingdom's play.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you! We're just goin' t' wallow in money, Jack sayth, an' he's bought him a motor boat! The star he sent it t' is going t' take his play, only she sayth Lady Jessica has jus'

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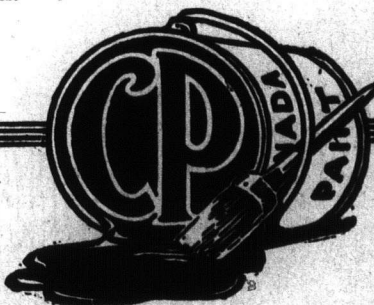
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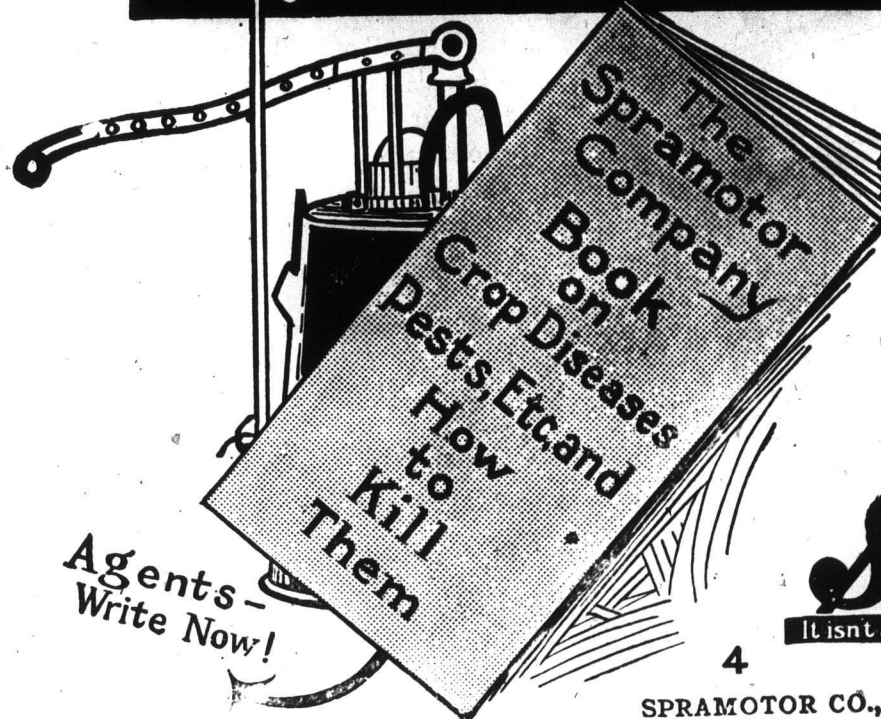
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