

The People's Choice

By GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER

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The last envelope on the list was addressed and tossed—with the quite natural jerk of completion, no doubt—on the smooth white pile. It slipped and slid, and with a flash disappeared into the treacherous opening at the rear of Mrs. Limber's sweet little boudoir desk! Mrs. Limber saw that envelope slip and slide, but she firmly closed her eyes and, after the invitations for the mayor's ball had been mailed, she lowered the lid of her desk without once looking down into that always avaricious opening, thus violating a firmly established habit. The deed accomplished, the lady sat down to breathe, for she was a woman of startling amplitude; but in spite of her absorbing occupation she found time to smile far into the folds of her pendulous cheeks.

Once a year the mayor's wife occupied a social position of Jovian power. After the official ball was over she would relapse into her normal orbit of satellite to the once supreme Clara Pikyune, but in the meantime all gayeties awaited this opening function of the season, and Mrs. Limber had controlled that function for many years. It was a joy to favor all these nice people, except for that last name on the list. Again she smiled into the folds of her countenance.

Mrs. Cordelia Blossom saw by the Sunday morning paper that the invitations for the mayor's annual ball were out; but the Monday morning mail brought no square white envelope to the charming round-eyed and round-mouthed and round-voiced woman who had inaugurated the City Beautiful movement, and had won the bitterly contested presidency of the Isis Club, and had wrested the reins of acknowledged social leadership from Mrs. Clara Pikyune.

Colonel Watterson Blossom, gray-mustached and gray-goateed and gray-haired and slender and stiff as a ramrod, noted with distress the deepening shade of annoyance on the features of the handsomest, most agreeable and most brilliant young woman in the world, but, being a gentleman of supernatural delicacy, he forbore to ply his wife with any impertinent questions. When Cordelia Blossom wished to confide in him she would do so, and until such time, and after, she possessed the colonel's complete confidence, approbation and applause.

At the end of certain days Mrs. Cordelia Blossom, unable any longer to bear her burden in silence, called on Mrs. Jim Fleecer, with no other purpose in mind than to obtain her dear friend's recipe for that delicious maraschino punch.

Mrs. Jim Fleecer, who was fair and slender and splendidly poised, and a perfect foil to the dark-eyed Cordelia, betrayed the secret of the punch with charmingly generous explicitness and, chatting easily meanwhile, waited for the real errand. While marking time she mentioned the absurd prevalence of purple in the early winter fashions, the quality of the ice cream in the gaudy new confectionery store, the delicious work of the latest Russian violinist, the superiority of a certain merchant's silk and the approaching mayor's ball.

Cordelia Blossom never batted an eyelash when this topic was reached: "Really, are you going?" she wondered in a bored sort of way.

Mrs. Fleecer quickly suppressed the spasm of pain which writhed to appear upon her exquisitely controlled features. "I scarcely know," she carelessly responded with a sinking heart. Cordelia Blossom did not want her to go! "I suppose you will attend?"

"I think not," returned Cordelia with a smile, whereat Mrs. Fleecer, who owed her social recognition entirely to the powerful and clever Cordelia, felt her heart descend another notch. At all previous mayor's balls she had been endured and snubbed as the wife of the notorious political boss, and this was to have been her first big function since she had borne the seal of the elect upon her brow. Why wasn't Cordelia going? "There's so much gayety planned for this winter that we must really keep fresh for it," went on Cordelia brightly. "What delicious macaroons, Georgia! Where do you get them?"

"Jemima makes them," boasted Mrs. Fleecer, pondering closely Mrs. Blossom's reason. It scarcely seemed adequate. Moreover, there was the hint that she was to be included in Cordelia's gayeties. "I'll get her recipe for you. You're quite right about keeping fresh for the more sprightly affairs. The early formal functions are usually so poky anyway, and they do take so much out of one."

There was the barest flicker of satisfaction in Cordelia's beautifully curving eyelashes.

"Anything that is the same year after year is bound to become poky," she agreed, delicately dipping a thin slice of lemon in her tea. "When one has the same duty to perform so often one becomes careless, don't you think? An

exquisite taste. I must take you down sometime for a trial bonnet."

II
Jim Fleecer, who was a tall, large-boned man with a quite visible jaw, scowled at "Chunky" Dwyer, who wore a cigar as if it were part of his original countenance.

"We need a shake up," he finally declared. "Look at this list. Half dead ones!"

Dwyer glanced at the list apologetically.

"They're part of the organization, Jim," he urged.

"That's what I'm telling you," returned Fleecer impatiently. "You'd think the party was a soldiers' home."

"They were all good workers once," persisted Dwyer.



THE PREMIER AT HIS FAVORITE RECREATION

Rt. Hon. E. L. Borden on the Golf Links at Hot Springs, Virginia, where he recently spent a holiday

invitation list for an official function requires rare and delicate judgment."

The haze began to clear from Mrs. Fleecer's usually quite lucid mind and she felt better. Fogginess always annoyed her.

"Doesn't it," she noncommittally agreed smiling inwardly at the thought of delicate judgment and the substantial Mrs. Limber in combination, but making no foolish political admissions.

Cordelia Blossom stirred her tea meditatively.

"How long has Mr. Limber been mayor?" she inquired.

"Forever, I think," laughed Mrs. Fleecer. "It has come to be a sort of tradition."

"It must be dreadfully exciting to be in politics," commented Mrs. Blossom. "I wish the Colonel took more interest in such things. By-the-way, I found the dearest little milliner just off Grace Square. She's French and has the most

"Just once," admitted Fleecer. "They hustled till they got on the payroll, and they think it's a pension."

"I don't see how we're going to get rid of them," puzzled the other.

"I do," snapped Fleecer. "I'm going to split the party. You just pass the word to these sleep-walkers that they're going to wake up in the cold." Dwyer looked most uncomfortable. He drew a fat city salary himself. He had drawn it for years.

"You don't mean a regular shake-up, Jim?" he protested. "Why, you'd cut all our throats."

"They need to be cut—yours with the rest," decided Fleecer.

"You'll destroy the organization," pleaded Dwyer.

"A fancy guess," returned Fleecer. "Then I'll take the good half that's left and build a better one."

"All right, captain, if that's your

program," sighed Dwyer mournfully. "Just count me in on it."

Fleecer turned to him coldly.

"No," he decreed; "you're out of it. You're dead."

Dwyer wobbled his cigar rapidly to the other corner.

"I don't see any use in coming to an open break," he argued, rising.

"Go 'way!" ordered Fleecer, taking some papers from his dingy desk. "I'm busy."

Dwyer stood a moment with his big hands on the back of his chair. "All right, captain," he huskily charged, and wagged a red forefinger. "I'll pass the word; and you want to remember you started this."

Fleecer got up and for a second, with his big jaw protruding and his eyes narrowing, he simply glared down on Dwyer; then he strode to the door and opened it.

"Get out!" he said curtly.

"Sure," agreed Dwyer with the swagger of an independent man. As he approached Fleecer, however, his eye lost its dignity, and as he passed he suddenly bobbed his head. Fleecer, angered, reached a long arm after him, grabbed him by the collar and jerked him back.

"Look here, you cheap bluff!" he observed, turning the man round. "If I wanted to punch you you couldn't duck quick enough."

Satisfied with this simple statement of facts, he let the man go, and returned to his desk with a thoughtfully corrugated brow. He drew toward him the list which he had previously consulted, and with the grave care of a judge pondered over each name. He was still at this when the telephone bell rang and if any of his hard-driven allies or serfs had been in that room they would have marveled at the change in his voice as he answered!

"Why, hello, Frills!"

"I hope you are not too busy, Jim," came the confident voice of Mrs. Fleecer.

"Nothing on my mind but dinnertime," he heartily assured her. "What's the fuss?"

"I'm in a state of mind about my black-pearl necklace, Jim. Would it compromise you in any way if I didn't go to the mayor's ball?"

"Certainly not," he quickly assured her. "Limber's got nothing on me."

"Then don't make them hurry on the resetting of the necklace, please," she requested. "I'm so afraid they might spoil it if they rush it."

"All right, Tumpelly," he agreed. "What's the dispute between you and the mayor's ball?"

"Oh, it's sure to be a poky affair," she told him. "A lot of us aren't going. Mrs. Blossom won't be there."

"Then it's in bad," he decided. "If that little lady don't like it you're smart to stick away. Why isn't she going?"

Mrs. Fleecer laughed.

"You won't believe it when I tell you," she replied, lowering her voice. "Jim she wasn't invited!"

"What!" he gasped. "Well, what do you think of that! How do you know?"

"Mrs. Blossom called on me this afternoon."

"Good stunt," he approved. "She came to the right place to tell her troubles. Of course you told her you'd fix it?"

"Why, certainly not!" choked Mrs. Fleecer. "She would never really say that she wasn't invited."

"How did you find it out then?" he persisted, puzzled.

"I honestly can't tell you how I found it out," she confessed, perplexed and worried by the masculine necessity for proof. "I just know it, that's all. She—she told me so, but she didn't say it."

"Oh," responded Jim Fleecer blankly. He knew better than to question the accuracy of his wife's information, but how in blazes did women do these things? Did they have a sort of unspoken language?

"So just you stop them on the necklace," Mrs. Fleecer went on. "Coming home to dinner? Jemima's making noodles for tonight."

"You bet I'm coming," he promised, with a preliminary pain of hunger.

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