



THE bird who slips you the idea that he's the eighth wonder of the world couldn't convince a squirrel that nuts are good. I'm positive that the flipper who thinks he's It, tagged himself by slanting in a mirror. Anyway, who peddled the world the idea that the female is vainer than the male, hey? Don't tell it to a cameraman! That's me.

I had no more than wiggled on board a job with Plunko Pictures than I was made aware of the presence of Chesterfield Criddle, the same being what they call a leading man. But you'll have to show me! He couldn't lead a parrot to a biscuit factory. But I'll admit at once and immediately that Chesterfield's looks could tie those collared birds without getting winded, having a face that was O.K.—till he opened it.

The first three days that I was on the job I did nothing but get out of his way, and listen to him tell Director Jimmie Muffoon that he couldn't direct a rabbit to a cabbage patch.

Well, one morning the well-known mail slipped Jimmie a scenario that contained enough thrills to make a desperado call it a sunset. It was from the New York office, and I'll say now that they must have selected the same while the lights were out.

"Looks like the real stuff, Oscar," says Jimmie, handing me a copy. "Have a slant at it."

It was called "The Clammy Clue," and was scrambled up by a bird named Van Camp Addle. It started off something like this:

Artemus Reem, accountant, comes to New York to investigate the books of Penn & Parker, bankers. Stops at hotel. That night Artemus is tapped on the

knob with a monkey-wrench, or something, and is discovered the next morning by bell-hop. Bell-hop hops down and tells clerk, clerk tells manager, manager tells police. Police must have told it to Sweeney, because when they inspect the room they don't find trace of anything but two cigars that Artemus had in his pocket. Leave it to them. Captain is as puzzled as a cross-eyed eel and wastes about twenty feet of film rubbing his bean. Bright stuff. Like charcoal in a tunnel. You'll say so.

Enter now the woman in the case. You might expect the same, sooner or later. This happened to be sooner.

While friend captain is jazzing around the room, in floats Anice Milland who happened to be camping in the adjoining apartment. Anice is described by Van Camp as one of those dashing young blondes. Where they get that stuff from, I don't know. Guess they mean a dash of peroxid, hey? Well, I could see right away that our staress, Lulu Lovegood, née Marbelle Header, was slated to play Anice. But to go on with the story: Soon as Anice pipes Artemus doing a Rip Van Winkle on the floor, she registers fear, surprise, emotion, agitation, and then wants to know if anything happened!

And right there I'll give Van Camp credit for knowing just what a blond lady would do under the circumstances. Captain squints at her from under a set of bushy eyebrows—that should have been on his chin—and becomes suspicious. Ha! thinks he, this dame knows what's what and who's who! He questions Anice till she's as groggy as a phone

operator, then takes her to headquarters. Anice sprinkles a few tears over the chief's desk and claims that she can't say a word, but says she's innocent of everything but being the daughter of a millionaire.

Chief lets Anice go home to papa. Mystery begins to get as thick as glue, and everybody goes up in the air. Enter now one Tod Tracer, the famous detective. You might guess that this bird is due to solve the case, be the hero, do the grandstand stuff and, somehow, marry Anice. Right away I could see where Mr. Criddle was gonna play the part of T. Tracer. Well, the scenario went on to cheep that Tod sniffed around the room, looked wise for a few moments, and then sniffed out. And I'll say no detective ever had anything on Mr. Tracer. What do you suppose that gent did? Oh, he merely dashed down to the offices of Penn & Parker, told Mr. Penn that he wished to open a large account, and promised to return later with the money. Return he did—but not at the stated time. He arrived at two A.M. Is received by the watchman—who chanced to be awake—watchman, in turn, receives a tap on the noodle, after which friend Tracer takes a trick key from his pocket and enters the offices. In twenty seconds he has the safe door as wide open as Alaska—they do it in the movies—and yanks out the books.

Discovers from said books that some bird in the firm was buying at least one new apartment house per day with the depositors' coin. Which same you'll say is a new idea. Like "Way Down Easy Lynne," or "Ten Fights in a Bar Room."

The rest is as slow as a turtle, with the exception of the mob scene, which takes place in the offices of Penn & Parker soon as the enraged depositors find they've been defrauded.

Take it from me, Van Camp Addle couldn't write home for money. Not that I'm knocking, understand. But I'll leave it to you if Old Sleuth couldn't hatch out a better gem than that with a hunk of chalk and a slate.

"Listen, Jimmie," I says, "what's this supposed to be—a comedy?"

"Certainly not, Oscar. That's high-class mellerdrammer. Don't you know what real litterchoor is?"

"Maybe not," I hurled back. "But that stuff is old enough to tell about the landing of Columbus! What do you think, Chesterfield?" I asked, turning to the new star.

No answer. He stroked his puzzle mustache fondly and kept on reading like I was out in Honolulu or Sweden.

"I say, Old Timer," I went on, "what do you think of the new scenario, hey?"

"My name, sir, to you, is *Mister* Criddle," he drawled. "Besides, I rarely enter converse with those who are not familiar with the arts."

I admit that I stood with my mouth as wide open as Broadway used to be, and couldn't say a word. I felt like telling him that if his mustache had a handle it would make a corking toothbrush, but didn't.

Just then Lulu Lovegood breezed in, dabbing a little lady flour on her nose as she entered, and slipped us all a smile that would have made Dante melt. And I'll say that Lulu was not so many yards behind Cleopatra when it came to looks. She was between twenty-five and common-sense and owned a pair of eyes that would have made any man leave home. You get me, one of those infant-faced dames that the college professors marry to make 'em forget what they know. Meaning the professors, not the Lulu's.

"Hello, folks!" she cheeped. "I hear we got a new thriller. When do we shoot it?"

"It's dead already," I chimed in.

"Tomorrow, Miss Lovegood," says Jimmie. "And it's a peach! It's called 'The Clammy Clue,' and there's enough action to suit the Marines. Real litterchoor, and it ought to go great out in Kneecap, Nebraska, and such like. You'll play the dashing young heroine, while Mr. Criddle takes the part of the dare-devil detective. See?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Muffoon," says Chesterfield, "but I think it most desirable to revise that Tracer character considerably. I note that his mannerisms are unduly vulgar, you know. It is quite difficult for a gentleman of breeding and culture to grasp the spirit of such affairs."

See what I mean? That was him all over. He didn't think no more of himself than a second loot thinks of mirrors, and was just as democratic as the Sultan. He claimed that he was a direct descendent of one of the five hundred thousand who rocked over on the Mayflower and disturbed the Indians.

"Well, Oscar," says Jimmie, soon as Chesterfield blew out, "what do you think of the new star?"

"I ain't saying anything, Jimmie; but, grab it from me, there's something phony about all those

Mister guys. I never bumped one yet who didn't take a header downhill sooner or later."

"Well, you know what that artistic temperament is, Oscar. Besides, I got orders from New York to go easy with the bunch."

"Artistic temperament, hey?" I says. "Believe me, that's old Benjamin B. Bunk himself! The birds who flop in the battle of life all fall back on that artistic stuff. Did you ever hear of a plumber with anything like that hanging on to him?"

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that friend A. Temperament is nothing but a yard of laziness played to the tune of 'The Whole World's Wrong.' If a guy is a frost he tries to get thawed out by taking a home-run fit and somersaulting into imaginary hysterics. Forget it, Jimmie! This here Chesterfield flipper has a cluck sound to his make-up somewhere and he's due to make a lead-nickel echo before long."

The next morning Jimmie told me to go down to the "yard" and yank out about twenty extras for the mob scene. I found enough birds there to raise a couple of armies. Long ones with short faces, and short ones with long faces, and the like. I selected the best of the bunch and paraded them up to the studio. One bird attracted my attention at a single glance. He looked as hard as the Rocky Mountains and seemed to be between twenty-seven and a rough life. At the window he gave his name as Purcell Agnew Crimpit. Profession: bricklayer. Mr. Crimpit claimed to be on strike for skyer wages, or something, and was willing to cop off a few extra cherries by honoring the movies with his personal appearance. According to Purcell's own cheep, some bean had told him that he was a "type," and ought to make a hit. If so, good-by bricklaying.

Well, we got the first set ready, the one where Artemus is found in the hotel room. Jimmie picked Purcell to play the part, since it didn't require much acting to lay still on the floor.

I was about to shoot the set when Chesterfield butted in.

"My dear Mr. Muffoon," he says, "is it possible that you are employing a common extra to characterize such a delicate interpretation?"

"Well," replied Jimmie, "I didn't think it required much talent to play the part of a dead man."

At the sound of the talking, Purcell Agnew rolled over to see what was going on. When he got a slant at Chesterfield, he registered six kinds of

surprise and a couple of scowls. Ditto Mr. Criddle.

"Oh, well, suit your own plebeian tastes!" snorted Chesterfield, and raced out.

"Who's that guy?" asked Purcell from the floor. "The Emperor of the World?"

"That's our leading man, Mr. Chesterfield Criddle," says Jimmie.

"Oh, yeah?" cheeped Purcell. "I may be mistooked, but that bird looks familiar."

After we shot the set, he came up to me and got curious.

"Listen," he says, "what did you say that fellow's name was, huh?"

"Chesterfield Criddle—*Mister* Criddle," I told him.

"He musta stole that off a Pullman!"

"Maybe," I says.

"Know anything good about 'im?" he wants to know.

"Nope."

"Uhuh," he grunted, and breezed away.

Chesterfield's first appearance came in the same set, where he comes into the room to discover who harmed Artemus.

"Now, my man," he says to me, "when I give the order to crank, crank—not before. I assume that you understand?"

"I ain't taking orders from nobody but Mr. Muffoon," I fired at 'im. "See?"

"Well, I had an idea that I was supposed to be the director," mumbled poor Jimmie, fingering his ear.

"To be suah—to be suah!" says Chesterfield. "But when one has studied the art of cinematography as I have, is it not feasible to suppose that my assistance is inestimable?"

"Aw, trow the machine at 'im!" hissed Purcell in my ear.

Further gabbing was interrupted by Lulu dashing in dressed up like a jeweler's window. She was wearing one of those \$2.75 evening gowns that must have been made with less than a yard of cloth, and looked altogether great.

"Ah, Miss Lovegood," drawled Chesterfield. "How charming. But I'm afraid that your apparel is somewhat *outré*. Not suited to the occasion, as it were. May I not suggest that you change to a more modest attire?"

I expected Lulu to toss a tripod at Mr. Criddle, but what do you suppose that dame says? And I'll leave it to you, if some poor flipper said that to his

wife, she'd battle him all over the works.

"Oh, thank you so much!" she purred, killing him with a spring morning smile. "Really, it's so nice to have someone in the studio possessing the artistic taste. I will do as you suggest." Exit Lulu.

"I will now have but one rehearsal," went on Chesterfield, turning to Jimmie, "showing my own conception of a talented detective investigating a hotel room for evidence of crime. And I will permit you, Mr. Muffoon, to call my attention to anything that appears to you as misinterpretations."

He then walked into the set, looked it over a moment, after which he took out one of those riddle spy-glasses and piped the carpet. And I'll say now that a Hindu could give a better imitation of "A Swan Dance in B Flat" than Chesterfield did of a detective. Next, he held an imaginary conversation with the captain, captain shakes head, and Chesterfield walked out. Wonderful stuff. Like shooting off fireworks while wearing a celluloid collar.

"Satisfactory, Mr. Muffoon?"

"Great!" says Jimmie.

I felt a poke in the ribs; it was Purcell. "I got a canary home what kin do better 'n that," he buzzed. "If that guy's a' actor, then I won the war!"

During the shooting of the next ten sets I noticed that Chesterfield frowned each time he came near Purcell, while Purcell kept looking him over as if he was for sale. And then one night Chesterfield ambled up to Jimmie and demanded to know who selected the extras.

"I refer especially to that uncouth person—the one who seems to stare at me so constantly."

"Who?" asked Jimmie.

"The person with the red hair and extremely vulgah personality. It's quite irritating, to be suah."

"I guess you mean Purcell, Mr. Criddle."

"Is that the fellow's name? Well, I wish you'd keep him out of my sight as much as possible."

"Can you beat that?" asked Jimmie soon as Chesterfield blew. "First thing you know that bird will object to the color of the sky."

"Never mind, Jimmie," I says, "I ain't no fortune-teller, but I expect something to happen in the quickly approaching future."

Comes now the mob scene. You remember, the part where the irate depositors swoop down on the works and mop up. On that morning I marshaled all the extras into the studio where Jimmie gave them the dope on what to do.

"Gentlemen," says Jimmie, addressing the bunch, "what we want is considerable action. No namby-pamby stuff goes. Get me? Soon as I give the signal you guys crash down the door and disarrange the furniture. Never mind a couple of bumps on the nose. Make it real. See? When you get in, dash around looking for Penn & Parker. Remember that they're the birds who have been spending your hard-earned coin—without your permission. Try to imagine that each one of you has been defrauded outa about two thousand each—I know you never even *heard* of that much but try to imagine it. Get me? Well, with that happy thought in your mind, you discover Mr. Penn hiding behind a desk. You spend a few moments shaking fists at 'im and then you lose control of your temper and shake up Mr. Penn like a scenic railway. While you're exercising with Mr. Penn, the great detective, Tod Tracer, comes in and demands quietness. You stop and listen to what Tracer has to say—and that's all."

"Just a moment, Mr. Muffoon," crashed in Purcell, "who's gonna take the part of Penn, the bird who gets walloped for a three-bagger?"

"Well, I can't think of a better man than you. It means a little extra cash, you know. And the boys won't really hurt you, understand? All you've gotta do is to make out you're being hurt, see? Now, run into the prop-room and tell Hennesey to rig you out in a nifty business suit, and tell 'm to stick a mustache under your nose. Hurry!"

While Purcell was being fixed up Chesterfield strolled in and inspected the works.

"All ready, Mr. Muffoon?"

"Yep."

"And the—er—fight, I take it, will be stopped by a signal from you? I mean to say, although it will appear as if I had caused the lull in hostilities, you are to instruct the extras, at my entrance, to cease action?"

"Yeah, that's right," says Jimmie. "Everything's mapped out O.K."

Purcell breezed in and took his place at the desk.

"Now, remember," says Jimmie, "you're sitting at the desk looking over accounts, see? You're kinda nervous because you know you've been cheating honest folks outa hard-earned cash. Get me?"

"Gotcher!" says Purcell.

"Now, you guys," went on Jimmie to the extras,

“get behind that drop, near the entrance, and when I say ‘Enter!’ you crash down the door and confront the man at the desk. He’ll look surprised for a moment, and then attempt to go to his hip-pocket for a gun. When he does that you start to treat ‘im rough. Not rough, understand. But make it *look* rough.

“Ready, Oscar?”

“Let’s go!” I snapped.

“Shoot!”

I whirled the old handle, and Purcell didn’t look half bad at the desk. From behind the drop I could hear the mob muttering and mumbling.

“All right, boys—enter!” cheeped Jimmie.

And I’ll say that the battle of Bull Chase had nothing on that entrance. Down went the door, after which the finest collection of drivers, ex-bartenders, and plumbers in the world crashed into the room. The first bird to enter picked up a chair and tossed it over his head onto the bean of some poor flipper who chanced to be looking elsewhere. Next, some iron-worker yanked the carpet off the floor and upset about ten piano-movers.

“Take it easy!” shouted Jimmie. “Take it easy—the war’s over!”

They paid less attention to Jimmie than they would to a stuffed crow. Some bird jumped for the trick chandeliers, and they managed to anchor on Purcell’s head.

“Hey! you guys lay off the rough stuff,” snarled Purcell. “Whaddaya—”

Wham! Purcell Agnew Crimpit was interrupted by six gents falling onto him like he was the mint, and proceeded to roll him over the floor.

“Kinda rough, Jimmie,” I says, cranking away.

“Yeah; kinda rough is right.”

“Get off me neck!” howled Purcell. “Get off me neck!”

“Ready, Mr. Criddle,” says Jimmie. “Here’s where you dash in and calm the angry waters.”

Chesterfield replaced his handkerchief up his sleeve and walked to the back drop.

“That’s enough, boys,” shouted Jimmie. “Tod

Tracer is about to enter. Ready—stop!”

Nothing stirring. Take it from me, that bunch of alley-bandits were enjoying themselves like they never did before. Chairs to the right, pictures to the left, and desks to the middle. Then ten of ‘em sat all over Purcell, and that gent squeaked for mercy. Chesterfield entered with one of those “Cease-this-affair-at-once” looks, and the bunch fell back. The star ambled to Purcell and stood looking at him as stern as a pilgrim.

And then it happened.

Soon as Purcell got half a slant at Chesterfield, he wrapped his legs around Mr. Criddle’s shins and caused that bird to flop over like a tent in a cyclone. Not a word said Purcell Agnew. The next thing we knew Chesterfield was being rolled around the floor, with Purcell doing the rolling. Now and then he’d step on the star’s chest, twist his nose and the like.

“Hey! cut it,” hissed Jimmie. “That ain’t my instructions.”

“Help! Police!” howled the star.

Bam! Purcell started a left-hand swing from the carpet, aimed at Chesterfield’s chin, missed same by a yard, and it crashed against the desk. While Purcell was sucking his injured hand, Chesterfield dashed out.

I stopped cranking and went over with Jimmie to see what happened to Purcell.

“Well, you poor flounder!” raved Jimmie. “Whaddaya mean by breaking up the works, hey?”

“I’m satisfied,” says Purcell, feeling a couple of bumps on his bean. “Now I’m even.”

“Even?” asked Jimmie, puzzled.

“Yeah—even! I’ve been looking for a chance to crack Mike for more ‘n five years, I have!”

“Whose Mike—Mr. Criddle?” I demanded.

“Mr. Criddle me grandmother! That bird’s right name is Mike Maloney, and he owes me mother nine weeks’ board, and I told ma I’d run across him some day and get it. And I think I’ll chase out and collect now.”

See what I mean?