Fifty - Fifty - Fifty By Cohen

In the Classic Words of Mr. Sidney Skigg to Miss Maudlin Weskit, "Is We Is, or Is We Ain't?"

IDNEY SKIGG majestically trod the rostrum and oozed oratory.

This was the organization meeting of the Amalgamated Order of Laboring Ladies, and Sidney Skigg was the inspired organizer. As he gazed the length and breadth of the hall upon the sea of eager. feminine Afro-American faces he knew that his project could not fall, that once more in a rather hectic career he was to be made affluent as the result of an inspiration. His fervid voice rolled sonorously over the gathering:

"An' so, my deah sister'n, I says to you that us is gwine come into our own-an' also somebody else's own. It's like the poeck says: 'T'gether we stan's an' diwided we ain't worth nothin'.' Also, 'In unions there is strength,' an' what we is gwine be is the mostest pow'ful union which is, on account the white folks ain't gwine know nothin' 'bout us bein' unioned.

"So I says to you now: All of you ladies is got jobs. Some of you is cooks an' some of you is nusses, an' some of you jes' wuks. But they ain't ary one of you which ain't willin' to git mo' money than what you now gits fo' doin' the same 'mount of wuk. An' the 'Malgamated Order of Laborin' Ladies is gwine see to it that you does that same.

'What you does is this: You jines up heah t'night. It don' cos' you 'ary centnot now n'r never. You signs up an' you takes a solemn oath which you won't never go to heavom if'n you busts it. An' that oath says that at the end of th'ee months ev'y one of you goes to the white lady which you wuks fo' an' says you is gwine quit yo' job!"

He paused impressively. There was a startled, unbelieving gasp from the enthralled assemblage, a nervous twisting in chairs. Withholding momentarily the bombshell he was about to explode, Sidney Skigg's eyes sought the dusky face of the fair Maudlin Weskit, who was seated on the aisle four rows back from the rostrum. Sidney dumbly pleaded with Maudlin to take note of his greatness. But Maudlin discouraged him with a stern stare of intransigent disapproval. Yet she was interested, they were all interested, and nearly eight hundred pairs of eyes focused upon the face of the dapper orator and tensely waited his further explanations.

"Now lis'en at me close. Th'ee months fum t'night ev'y one of you says to yo' white folks that you is quittin'. You says that-an' tha's all what you says. By that time we is gwine have a thousan' members, ev'y one of 'em fine cullud ladies, which wuks on'y fo' quality folks. An' what you reckon happens when all them cullud ladies prognosticates to ouit? What you reckons happens, huh? I asts

He hesitated dramatically, then waved his muscular arms wildly.

"I'se tellin' you wha's gwine happen. Wha's gwine happen is that 'bout th'ee or fo' hund'ed of them white ladies ain't gwine let you quit. They ain't gwine 'low it. An' when they says you ha'n't ought to quit an' why is you quittin' you says, 'Jes quitin', tha's all!' An' then they asts you will you keep yo' job if'n they gives you a dollar a week raise!"

Came a tentative handclapping. The sudience was beginning to catch the drift of Mr. Skigg's scheme.

'An' so," continued the spellbinder enthusiastically. "Mebbe two hund'ed, th'ee hund'ed, gits a dollar a week raise, an' you is jes' that much better off. An' them which the white folks lets quit, they comes down to the office of the 'Malgamated Order of Laborin' Ladies an' reports that they ain't got no job. An' tha's where I comes in. On account I keeps a record of all jobs an' the wages which each cullud lady gits in said job. So happens it that one five-dollar-a-week cook is 'lowed to quit, I sen's her to a lady which also she let a five-dollar-aweek cook quit, an' that white lady gits her another girl at the same price. In other words, them two gals jes' swaps jobs, an' not neither one of 'em loses mo'n a day's wuk, an' they gits a heap of spe-ience tryin' out new jobs. An', sister'n, I'se tellin' you, sooner or later ev'y white lady is gwine git her a gal under this plan, which she is gwine give her a raise instid of losin' her!"

He stepped back, smiling triumphantly. For a few seconds silence held - then came a wild, tumultuous outburst of applause. And Sidney Skigg knew that he had won.

"An' now I reckon you-all desiahs to know where I comes in at, on account I thunk of this idee right outen my own hald an' does all the wuk. Sister'n, I is a flanthropist. I asts no money-not none a tall. It don' cos' you one single penny to fine up. You fines an' you takes the swear-oath an' all what I gets out of it is a share in them raises which you gits fum the white folks. At the end of th'ee months ev'y sister which gits a raise pays me 25 pussent of that raise s'long's she gits it. In other words, she pays me 25 cents out of ev'y dollar she gits mo' than what she got befo'. An' then ev'v dollar raise she gits after that fust raise, she pays me on'l 10 cents. Jes' one iii thin, measly dime. Rememberin' this. sisters-you ain't payin' me outen yo' wages-you is payin' me exclusive outen the profits I gits fo' you! An' now the his's is open. I asts you to fawm on the come hence to sign yo' names an' take them oaths. Come one come

They came. They fought to inscribe their names on the list. Here was something new, something which guaranteed profit and exacted toll only from that profit. It never occurred to them that this was a very good thing indeed for the estate Mr. Sidney Skigg. The fact that at the end of three months he stood to derive an enormous weekly income did not

was three months in the future. And there wasn't a woman present who was not willing to join any society which exacted no payment in advance.

At midnight only a half dozen women were left in the hall. And the last one to sign was Miss Maudlin Weskit. She anpeared on the list as the seven hundred and sixty-first member.

Sidney Skigg had wilted visibly under the strain. He was slumped in a chair, with only the fire of exaltation in his eyes giving evidence of his triumph. For awhile he had forgotten Maudlin, but now as she reached for the pen and muttered the oath of fealty he rose and stood beside her.

"I'se pow'ful glad you has jined up, Maudlin."

Her nose became slightly elevated. "I ain't jinin' up cause'n you is the organizer, Mistuh Skigg. I'se jinin' up on account all my frien's is done so."

He gazed at her with worshipful eyes. And then, assuring himself that they were alone in the hall, his hand covered hers. "Honey."

Her hand was removed suddenly and completely. "You honey yo' ownse'f."

"But, sweetness." "When you talks to me, Mistuh Skigg, I reques' that you addresses me polite.' "But, Maudlin-ain't we engage'?"

"I ain't said we ain't." "But you ain't sayin' we is."

"I ain't sayin' nothin'." "Well," desperately, "is we is, or is we am't?"

"I reckon you should ought to know, Mistuh Skigg. If'h you mean, was we engage', I answers that we was."

"But, honeybunch-ain't us gwine an' bought furniture t'gether to put in our house when we gits one?"

"Huh!" She injected a world of scorn into the exclamation. "Says which?" "Says ain't we bought furniture t'gether? Fo' hund'ed dollars' worth?"

"No!" She bit off the word violently. "Says we stahted to buy furniture, but ever sence you paid them fust fifty dollars-I has be'n payin' the rest. One hund'd and fifty dollars I has paid on that fu'niture-an' fifty dollars I is behime in my paymints. So I reckon it's me which is buyin' it-not us!"

Sidney Skigg put out a protesting hand. "You is onfair to me, sweetness; an' that ain't the fondest thing I is of."

"What you ain't fondest of don' intrust me none whichsoever," came the cutting retort. "I goes an' gits engage' to you an'we buys a heap of fu'niture, plannin' to pay fo' same befo' we gits it. You pays the fust fifty dollars-an' then you quits payin'."

"Man cain't make no payments when he ain't got no money." "Man ain't no man which ain't got money."

"I is got brains."

"The kin' of brains you is got ain't no

"Plannin' ain't savin' me no money.

good without eggs." "But, honey," he pleaded, "ain't I plannin' to pay some mo' on our fu'niture?"

"In th'ee months," she snapped, "I is gwine have that fu'niture."

But 'bout our 'gagement?' "They's on'y one thing 'bout our 'gagement, Mistuh Sidney Skigg. I'se glad I had enough beforesight to make it a

And as she flounced from the hall, disdaining his escort, he gazed after her with eyes in which true love burned brightly. "I begins to sispec'," he moaned, "that

Maudlin don' love me no mo'!" In which conclusion he was only part Maudlin did love him, loved him as passionately as she had on that memorable moonlight night when she pledged him her heart, hand and weekly wages.

But Maudlin was slightly out of patience. It was all the fault of that furniture. Four hundred dollars' worth they had selected at a big store on Fourth avenue; four hundred dollars' worth, deliverable when the four hundredth dollar was paid. One hundred weekly instalments of four dollars each.

Their plan was glorious and sane. They were to marry when the furniture was theirs absolutely and in fee. Then they intended buying an automobile on the installment plan and so establish themselves in the forefront of colored society.

The ten dollars down had been paid cheerfully-insouciantly-by Sidney. For ten weeks thereafter he shelled out the weekly installment of four dollars. Then, finding himself forced to seek credit at Bud Peaglar's Barbecue lunch room and billiard parlors for thrice daily eatments, he informed his lady love that the financial burden was temporarily hers.

It did not bother her particularly that the partly paid for furniture stood in the name of her subrosa fiance. She gave him credit for gentlemanly instincts and knew that he would cheerfully relinquish his equity to her on presentation of the proper amount of cash. But what did bother her was that the furniture man was waxing impatient and demanding

past, present and future payments: She argued, begged, pleaded and cajoled, but the furniture man was adamant. He convinced her that despite the fact that he still held the furniture, any further delinquency on her part would result in forfeiture of the money already paid to him. And the mere though of losing Sidney's fifty, her contribution of triple that amount, and that elegant, polished furniture which they together had selected,

was intolerable. And so, after this last interview with Mr. Skigg, wherein she became convinced once and for all of his inability to help her out of the present pressing financial difficulty, she bethought herself of ways

and means of escape. And that meant that the portly figure of Mr. Zekiel Binion was uppermost in

her mind. Maudlin was not fond of Zekiel Binion. but that had nothing whatever to do with her present calculations. What did count was the fact that Mr .Binion was very fond of her. So fond, in fact, that he spoke of his own glories only 90 per cent of the time he was with her, consuming the other 10 per cent in voluminous explanations of the magnificence which

bother them. In the first place, that would be hers should she consent to become Mrs. Zekiel Binion.

The following morning, after a night of deep, headachy thought, Maudlin led Mr. Binton into a proposal of marriage. And then, at the psychological moment, she rebelled-and turned him down. He walked mournfully away from her, turning at the door for a lugubrious Parthian shot:

"One of these heah days, Maudlin, you is gwine fin' out what a swell man you ain't ma'ied to!"

Three weeks passed and as each slipped swiftly away Maudlin found her back more solidly against the wall of trouble. On each of three successive Saturday nights she visited the furniture man and handed him four dollars from her eightdollar wages. Each Sunday morning she inspected with increased interest the pompous Mr. Binion. Each Sunday noon she decided that he was less impossible. Andeach Sunday night at church she longed to take Sidney Skigg for worse or worser with furniture or without.

But it was on a Wednesday night that the decision was brought to her. On that particular day she was visited at her place of employment by an agent for the furniture store. That white gentleman talked gruffly, fluently, and damningly. He made it very clear indeed that if she did not pay in full the overdue installments the total amount paid in would be declared forfeit and her equity gone. That in Itself was sufficient to bring her to the point of surrender.

The climax was capped that night at prayer meeting. Mr. Sidney Skigg was there assisting the choir. It was his first vocal appearance in many weeks, and there was no denying the fact that he slung a wicked baritone. Not only that but he used it once in a pathetic little tallad which was introduced to relieve an obvious tedium. It had to do with broken hearts and well-tended graves, where jilted lovers lay more or less peacefully sleeping. And after the meeting he joined her in the church, surreptitiously clasped her hand, and suggested that they be married that night. He had a friend, he explained, who worked in the courthouse, knew the probate judge and could arrange an Immediate marriage license.

And the heartwrung Maudlin almost succumbed. Almost - not quite. She emerged from the love maze dazed and gasping for breath, thankful for her narescape, yet vaguely regretful. She dismissed Mr. Skigg in a manner so positive that he became quit sure his heart was hopelessly smashed and his chances of her hand forever blighted.

That night Mr. Zekiel Binion escorted her home. He proposed. And she, frightened by her narrow escape from marriage to Sidney Skigg-with its consequent inevitable loss of the already partly paid for furniture-consented to become Mrs. Binion.

They were strolling up avenue F at the time. They turned into Seventeenth street and Mr. Binion took the future Mrs. Binion up in his arms for the first kiss of their betrothal. She yielded, then broke away with the question upermost in her mind.

'Is you rilly got money saved up, Zekiel?"

nav? Ma?" He swelled with "Huh! Money is the on'y thing I ain't got nothin' else but."

She sighed relievedly. Mr. Binion was not entirely convincing, but at least it was a pleasure to be engaged to a man who possessed an optimistic tongue. After Sidney Skigg - poor Sidney! An idea came to Maudlin.

"Zekiel?"

"Call me sweetness."

"Sweetness?" "Yeh, honey?"

"I is got on'y one reques' to ast of you lefo' becomin' engage'."

"What you asts fum me is a command fo' same, my darlin'." "I asts this, sweetness. I asts that I

an' you keep our 'gagement secret fo' awhile." "Aw!"

She became impatient. "If'n you ain't willin' to keep it secret, then you nee'n't keep it a tal!' 'But if'n I an' you is engage' to git

"I never said we was engage' to git ma'ied. I jes' on'y said we was engage'." Mr. Binion shrugged resignedly. "Have

it 'yo own way, Maudlin, honey. Lovin' you like'n to what I does, they ain't nothin' I woul'n't do fo' you." He paused and looked pridefully upon her palpitant beauty. "Not nothin'."

Deliberately and with malice aforethought - her mind on the furniture -Maudlin vamped him. She flashed him an intriguing glance from beneath halfclosed lids. "You honest means that, Zekiel?"

"Call me sweetness." "You rilly, truly means what you said,

sweetness?" "Crost my healt an' hope to turn to a

tripe." "I wonder." Her head bowed: "Fo' a long time, sweetness, I is be'n thinkin' that mebbe some day I an' you was gwine to git ma'led to each other."

'Hones'?" "Hones'. And so I is be'n savin' up a 'prise fo' you." "Hot dam! Maudlin, I jes' loves

s'prises." "This is a turrible fine one." "Tell it to me, honey; tell it to me." She hesitated. "I was thinkin', sweet-

ress, that when us got ma'led we'd go to housekeepin'." She did not notice that his face fell slightly. "An' so a long time ago when I fust off decided that I was gwine ma'y you. I went down to the fu'niture man an' bought me fo' hund'ed dollars' wuth of the swellest fu'niture which is." "Fo' hund'ed!" he choked.

Zekiel Binion gasped for air. Facts were falling too fast for his comprehen-"Wh-where I comes in at?" She took the plunge. "Sence this fu'niture is bein' bought fo' you, Zekielsweetness - I wants you to loaned me them 'stalments I is behime an' lemme

pay 'em all up." "H-h-hhow much them 'stallments is?" Again she hesitated. First she decided upon the truth, then determined that there was no use piking. "Fifty dollars!"

Mr. Binion's portly figure wilted visibly. "Fifty dollars!" he gasped, incredu-

"Cash?" "Cash money. Co'se that ain't nothin' to a man which is got a heap of money like'n to what you is got. I woul'n't ma'y no man which fifty dollars was real money to."

"When you wants this heah fifty dollars?" "T'morrow."

Zekiel Binion hesitated. Here was a matter demanding severe judicial thought. Fifty dollars! But on the other hand it was a good investment, and he had worked mighty hard to obtain Maudlin's consent.

'Tain't so easy gittin' fifty dollars." "Oughtn't to be hahd fo' a fine man like'n to what you is, sweetness."

"No. Co'se not. On'y-She stamped her foot. "Does you git it fo' me tomorrow, or ain't we engage'?" He slipped. He fell. "I-I gits it for'

you t'morrow. We is engage'!" And the following afternoon he handed her ten crisp five-dollar notes. There was nothing cheerful about him as he did so. There was, in fact, a rather pathetic droop to the lips and a sagging of the ample waist line. But such a radiant girl as Maudlin, he figured, was cheap at the

"You pays up them back 'stallments," he said, "with them fifty dollars. But does you espec' me to keep on payin' fo' dollars ev'y week?"

She held her head pridefully high. "I mos' suttinly does not. I is a lady, an' a lady pays her own 'stalments."

She dared hold no converse with Mr. Skigg. She knew that she was naught but a weak woman, and that she could not hold outforever against his passionate avowals of undying, if poverty - stricken love. And Sidney, convinced now that he was definitely and permanently relegated to the discard, slumped into a slough of

Maudlin's attitude fostered that belief. For Maudlin wisely refused to trust herself in Mr. Skigg's dominating society. That was where the fifty-dollar loan from her present fiance proved a good investment. Knowing that Zekiel Binion had invested in Mr. Skigg's furniture to the tune of half a hundred dollars, she was afraid of an expose should Zekiel and Sidney get together. Sidney she could

handle. Zekiel was utterly impossible. With the approach of the end of the first three-month period in the life of the Amalgamated Order of Laboring Ladies, Sidney Skigg found himself too busy to worry constantly about Maudlin. For some weeks the dapper Mr. Skigg had found the sledding not at all to his liking. He was wearing his belt two notches tighter than usual and pork chops had become to him a mere matter of memory. For a hearty meal of that succulent delicacy he would have bartered his chances of paradise. And for a full platter of barbecue meat-

And then the three months' period ended and a cataclysm descended upon the good housewives of Birmingham.

On that memorable day precisely eight hundred and two colored servants presented themselves before their mistresses leave. In almost every case the dialogue which ensued was the same.

"Leave!" Horrified. "Going to leave?" "Yas'm."

"Why?"

"Jes' gwine leave; tha's all." "Aren't you satisfied with the place?"

'Yes'm. Puffec'ly satisfied. But I reckon I'se gwine leave."

"But you can't! Don't you know that I've got company coming and-'Awful sorry, ma'am. But I'se jes' sort of got a hankerin' to leave off fum

A few more than five hundred prostrated housekeepers allowed the conversation to end there. Approximately three hundred of them, driven to desperation,

delved more deply into the problem. "Isn't the work easy enough?"

"Yas'm, the wuk ain't so turible hahd." "The hours are easy?" "I ain't kickin' bouten the hours." 'Then why are you leaving?'

"Jes leavin', ma'am. Tha's all." "You can't leave! I refuse to allow it. Supose I raise your wages?'

'Dunno, ma'am. Reckon I might stay on if'n you was to do that." So it was that three hundred and twenty domestic servants-members of the Amal-

gamated Order of Laboring Ladies-received an average salary increase of one dollar per week. They did not reneg on the share due Sidney Skigg. Such an idea never occurred to them. And at the end of the first week of the new dispensation Mr.

Skagg found hmiself possessed of eighty dollars and some cents in cash money. As soon as the pressure of work lifted Mr. Skigg set out violently for Sally Crouch's Cozy Home hotel. He negotiated the first block in ten flat and the balance of the distance in a trifle less than nothing at all. He summoned the overstout proprietress of that colored hostelry and ordered the finest meal she had ever pre-

pared, price no object. Two hours later he shoved his chair back from the table. Within him there was a beatific sensation of unutterable fullness. For the first time in a month he was emancipated from the gnawing pangs of hunger. He sent out for a 25cent clgar. And then, beneath its cloak

of fragrant smoke, he inspected his cash. Eighty dollars! Eighty dollars this week and next week and the week after that! Confronted by the physical presence of the cash. Mr. Skigg was stunned. He knew himself now for a super-Napoleon of finance, beside whom all other Napoleons were raw amateurs. In his hand was eighty dollars in cash - and e.ighty dollars in cash is many times more important than eighty dollars in written figures. And the glory of it was that this first payment stamped the Amalgamated Order of Laboring Ladies with success. Of course, Sidney knew that eventually the society would disintegrate. But that calamity was far in the future and, meanwhile, he was to become wealthy beyond

Meanwhile, Maudlin Weskit was plumbing the nadir of misery. She knew from

all dreams of avarice

current gossip that the order had been impressed with the seal of success and that Sidney Skigg was wallowing in affluence and destined to continue wallowing. She did not love him any more for it, but certainly she did not love him any less.

For a brief instant Maudlin considered goingg to Sidney and making a clean breast of it. That idea was discarded almost as soon as born. It would never do for no man of Sidney Skigg's code of honor would tolerate for a moment the thought of another man's financial contribution to his own set of household furniture

Also Maudlin was confronted by an additional problem. Being a girl of keen perception, she was well aware of the fact that her status in the household where she was employed was none too good. Should she abide by the laws of the Amalgamated Order of Laboring Ladies and announce her intention of leaving, her mistress would bid her godspeed. She was not so poor a nurse as to be discharged; she was yet too poor a one to become the recipient of a raise in wages.

That afforded a loophole, of course. Yet Maudlin stood in terror of Zekiel Binion. She was afraid to alllow that ponderous, egoistic gentleman out of her sight. It, therefore, behooved her to remain at her present place of employment. So that she reluctantly drew 25 cents from her weekly eight dollars and carried it down to the office of the order. She placed the money on the desk of Mr Sidney Skigg.

"I gotten me a dollar raise. Heah's yo'

two bits." He tried to return it. "Aw, Maudlin, I

don't want to take money fum you." "You is got to take it, Mistuh Skigg. Tha's the oath which I done swore at."

"But, honeybunch The stark tragedy of the situation well nigh wrecked her resolve. Tears hovered close to the border. Here was the desirable Sidney Skigg still consumed with love of her and she bound - ethically and financially - to Zeekiel Binion.

"Ain't you gwine make ma'iage with me, Maudlin?"

She shook her head. "Don' you love me no mo'?" "Love ain't got nothin' to do with it.

Sidney. Not nothin' a tall." "Well," hopefully. "I'se got money now. See heah-eighty dollars less one meal. An' I'se gwine have eighty dollars or mo' coming in ev'y week fum now on henceforthward. Eighty dollars, Maudlin. Us c'n be the swellest cullud folks in

Bummin'ham. Please." "O-o-o-oh! Sidney," she wailed, speeding for the door lest her affections should overcome her. "Even fo' eight hund'ed

dollars I couldn't do it!" In the days which followed misery dwelt soggily with all three of them; with the melancholy Sidney Skigg, with the wracked Maudlin Weskit, and with the entirely bewildered Zekiel Binion. Once -and only once-Mr. Binion made the

tactical error of chiding Maudlin. "Seems like that you ain't happy 'bout bein' engage' to a fine feller like'n to

what I is." "It's most is. 'Cause if'n it seems like

is to me, then so far as I is concerned atit is is." She flung around angrily. "Ev'y time yo' opens yo' mouth, Zekiel Binion-

nothin' comes out!" "But Maudlin-"Zekiel Binion-you ha'n't better ast me no mo' questions. 'Cause if'n you does I is libel to tell you what I rilly thinks. An' if'n I does that same, Zekiel,

you is gwine be mo' unhappier than what you now is!" And for once in his self-centered life. Mr. Binion saw the handwriting on the

wall, deciphered it-and was wisely silent. And, meanwhile, Sidney Skagg was doing the heaviest thinking of a brilliantly thoughtful career. The money was coming in weekly. Eighty-four dollars the second week; eighty-six the third; nearly ninety the fourth. Money, money every-

where and nary a woman to spend it on. The Amalgamated Order of Laboring Ladies was a sensational triumph. Female domestics clamored for membership and Sidney was becoming captious. Only the best was his rule now - only members with a prospect of returning dividends. No second-class cooks or nurses or maids allowed on his roster.

Suddenly the long, wide feet of Mr. Sidney Skigg came down to the floor with a bang! For a few seconds he sat rigid. jaw dropping, eyes popped open. Then he rose and paced the room in a frenzy of thought. And finally he executed a hand stand and kicked his heels together in the air. It was the ultimate gesture of triumph. Once again mind bade fair to rise supreme above mere matter.

Sidney Skigg was nothing if not a man of action. His inspirational scheme was desperate, hazardous, demanded that he take a gambler's chance, but Sidney was in a mood and financial condition to balk

Within two hours he had rented a cozy bungalow on avenue G. It was a little gem of a place with radishes and lettuce growing in the front yard, rose vines curling above a neat veranda, and four elegantly papered rooms within. In the rear there was a chicken run and a place for

more vegetables. But Sidney did not stop there. From his battered old trunk he rescued the original furniture contract, and immedi-

ately made speed to the store. "That furniture I was buyin' down heah; Boss Man: how much money is

owin' on it now?' A consultation with the bookkeeper elicited information which tore at the heartstrings of Sidney Skigg. "One hundred and twenty-eight dollars!" Sidney was sad-yet elated: sad over the fact that Maudlin had slaved to keep up the installments-elated because there must have been good reason for so doing.

an' twen"y-eight dollars in cash money, Boss Man, could you deliver them furnitures down to my house on avenue G right

The furniture man agreed and Sidney

Skigg paid over to him one hundred and

"If'n I was to pay you all them hund'ed

twenty-eight dollars, taking therefor a receipt in full. Then he signed a new contract, paid down twenty dollars additional, and added to the delivery order a cabinet phonograph and a half dozen jazz records.

From there he went to the courthouse. where his janitor friend prevailed upon the probate office to issue a marriage license.

And, four hours later, when dark had settled gently over the city of Birmingham, Sidney Skigg presented himself at the home of Miss Maudlin Weskit.

At first she refused point blank to grant him an audience. But finally she cid, and from that moment she was lost.

Sidney did not allow the conversation to veer into personal channels. He informed the teary Maudlin that something had transpired which was epochal. There was something vitally concerning them both which she must see. He refused to go into details. And, finally, by preying upon her curlosity, he induced her to accompany him.

There was little said between them as they walked down avenue G. Rather there was a silence which was pregnant with possibility. Sidney's heart was thumping in his bosom-beneath the new lavender silk shirt purchased that afternoon. And Maudlin, sensing that something tremendous was about to transpire, was content to keep silent.

They paused before Sidney Skigg's bungalow. Maudlin gasped rapturously:

"It's elegant, Sidney!"

"You rilly think so?" "It's as sweet as-sweet as-as home-

baked ham!" "I is got the key to it," said he. "Lemme show you inside "

Nervously she waited on the porch as he stepped within and turned on the electric lights. Then he threw wide the front door and escorted her across the thresh-

At first she did not understand. And then slowly the idea penetrated her brain. There was her lounge, her center table, her dining-room suite, her ornate bric-abrac. And, in addition thereto, a phonograph valiantly spurting music into the room. Sidney stopped the music and faced her. But if he expected rapture he found only consternation.

"Oh! my Gawd! Sidney-what has you

went an' done?" He explained - explained tremulously yet fluently. No lover of romance ever argued with greater force. He sketched the hopeless history of his undying passion for her, of this last heroic plunge for success-and, as he talked, he slipped a nervous arm about her waist and held her tight against him. And then he produced the marriage license.

Maudlin wept. She longed to cuddle in the protecting arms of this magnificent man, but lurking in the mental background was the specter of the insufferable Zekiel Binion and the fifty dollars which he had paid upon this furniture which now graced the home of Sidney

Skigg. There was stark, unmitigated horror in the vision. She knew Sidney-and she realized that if he should discover her engagement to Zekiel Binion their own affair would be forever at an end. He would then think that she was marrying him for his money. And she wasn't; it was the injustice of her position which

tortured. And suddenly she faced him. "Sid-

ney? "Yes, honey?"

"You wants me to ma'y you-t'night?" "Oh, sweetness-Her face flamed lavender. "Don't call me no sweetness. I hates that word!'

"I'd ruther ma'v you than-"Then lis'en at me." She spoke with flerce passion. "I ma'ies you t'night on jes' one condition. You gimme fifty dollars-fifty dollars cash money. I goes home to get me my trousseau. back heah in two hours. You has the preacher-an' us gits ma'ied. But, Sidney-you promises you ain't ne' gwine ast me what I do with them fifty dollars you

is gwine loaned me now!" She bent forward tensely. And quietly he reached into his pocket. Therefrom he extracted two crisp twenty-dollar bills and a ten-dollar note slightly torn at one end. The remainder of his cash - a single fraved dollar-he returned to his pocket. He placed the fifty dollars in her hand.

'I'se gwine be heah with the preacher." It was a woman wildly delirious with happiness who left her future home and made amazing haste to the mansion on Highland avenue where she and Zekiel Binion were fellow servants. In the butler's pantry she found the impressive Zekiel, and into his palm she pressed the two crips new twenty-dollar bills and the ten-dollar note which was slightly torn at

'In two hours, Maudlin, honey," said he,

"There's that fifty dollars you done loant me, Zekiel. Ev'y last cent of it!" Zekiel was not averse to accepting the money. In fact, he appeared very much relieved.

"An' now," finished Maudlin, "it gives me great pleasure to tell you that I an' you ain't engage' no mo'. Not even a lil

Zekiel Binion protested, but she only laughed. And finally he turned away angrily. "I always knowed you was a idiit!" he growled surlily. "Any woman which has

got her a chance to ma'y me an' don' do same is a fool!" Maudlin flung out of the house. To her own room she went and began packing a frayed straw suitcase with her

honeymoon garments. And meanwhile Mr. Sidney Skigg had been busy. Arrangements for the marriage ceremony were satisfactorily made with Reverend Plato Tubb of the First African M. E. church on the basis of spot cash. And suddenly Mr. Skigg bethought himself of something. He delved into his pocket and produced therefrom one veteran dollar bill and a few nickels.

Clearly it would never do to get married with only that amount of cash on hand. He dived into a telephone booth and called the house where Zekiel Binion was employed. When Zekiel's voice

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