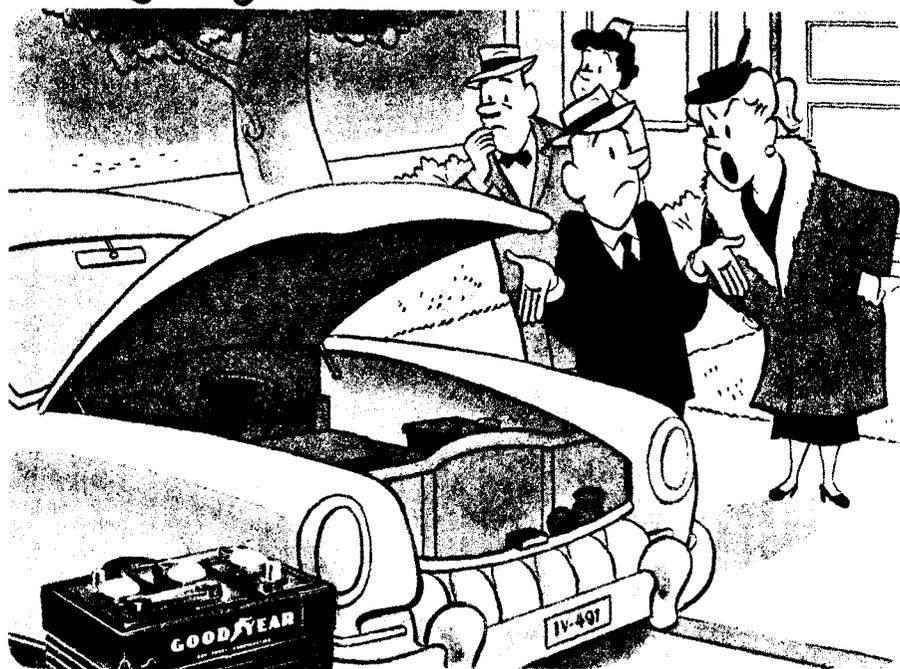


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Cady stayed put in front of Mrs. Dickle's cage, oblivious of the tension. "It's not the same as shaving cream at all," he said



# Poor Little Rich Town

By KURT VONNEGUT, JR.

*They welcomed him until he tried to make over*

NEWELL CADY had the polish, the wealth, the influence, and the middle-aged good looks of an idealized Julius Caesar. Most of all, though, Cady had know-how—know-how of a priceless variety that caused large manufacturing concerns to bid for his services like dying sultans offering half their kingdoms for a cure.

Cady could stroll through a plant that had been losing money for a generation, glance at the books, yawn and tell the manager how he could save half a million a year in materials, reduce his staff by a third, triple his output and sell the stuff he'd been throwing out as waste for more than the cost of installing air conditioning and continuous music throughout the plant. And the air conditioning and music would increase individual productivity by as much as ten per cent and cut union grievances by a fifth.

The latest firm to hire him was the Federal Apparatus Corporation, which had given him the rank of vice-president and sent him to Ilium, New York, where he was to see that the new company headquarters were built properly from the ground up. When the buildings were finished, hundreds of the company's top executives would move their offices from New York City to Ilium, a city that had virtually died when its textile mills moved South after the second World War.

There was jubilation in Ilium when the deep, thick foundations for the new headquarters were poured, but the exultation was possibly highest in the village of Spruce Falls, nine miles from

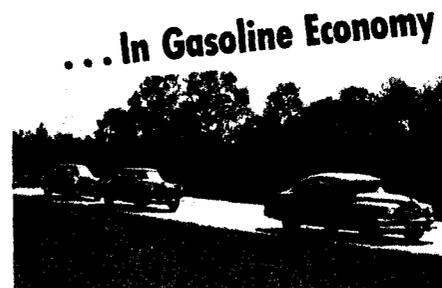
Ilium, for it was there that Newell Cady had rented, with an option to buy, one of the mansions that lined the shaded main street. The mansions had been built at the turn of the century, before the advent of income taxes, and before the discovery that bathing in and drinking from the warm mineral springs of Spruce Falls were not only without therapeutic value, but that they apparently caused an unsightly skin condition which was named by a dermatologist, with no respect for real-estate values, "Spruce Falls Acne."

Since the discovery of income taxes and Spruce Falls Acne, destiny had skirted the village, leaving it to the natives, who got honest livings from one another and the soil, avoided the springs as their forebears had, bought for songs the mansions of the departed rich and had, on an average, one bedroom with fireplace and bath for every man, woman, child and dog in town. But when Newell Cady moved in, with an option to buy, a feeling of destiny filled Spruce Falls.

"If we can make Newell Cady taste the joys of village life," said fire chief Stanley Atkins, speaking before an extraordinary meeting of the volunteer firemen on a Saturday afternoon, "he'll use that option to buy, and Spruce Falls will become *the* fashionable place for Federal Apparatus executives to live. Without further ado," said Chief Atkins expansively, "I move that Mr. Newell Cady be elected to full membership in the fire department and be named head judge of the annual Hobby Show."

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And then they knew that he had to be stopped

"*Audaces fortuna juvat!*" said Upton Beaton, who was a tall, fierce-seeming sixty-five. He was the last of what had been the first family of Spruce Falls. "Fortune," he translated after a pause, "favors the bold, that's true. But, gentlemen—" and he paused again, portentously, while Chief Atkins looked worried, and the other members of the fire department shifted about uneasily on their folding chairs. Like his forebears, Beaton had an ornamental education from Harvard; and, like them, he lived in Spruce Falls because it was no effort at all for a Beaton to feel brilliant and prosperous there, even though the government had long ago made the Beatons stop bottling and selling the spring water, because of Spruce Falls Acne, and the family wealth was gone.

"But," Beaton said again, as he stood up, "is this the kind of fortune we want? We are being asked to waive the three-year residence requirement for membership in the fire department in Mr. Cady's case, and thereby all our memberships are cheapened. If I may say so, the post of judge of the Hobby Show is of far greater significance than it would seem to an outsider. In our small village, we have only small ways of honoring our great, but we, for generations now, have taken pains to reserve those small honors for those of us who have shown such greatness as it is possible to achieve in the eyes of a village. I hasten to add that those honors that have come to me are marks of respect for my family and my age, not for myself, and are exceptions that should probably be curtailed."

He sighed. "If we waive this proud tradition, then that one, and then another, all for money, we will soon find ourselves with nothing left to wave but the white flag of an abject surrender of all we hold dear!" He sat, folded his arms, and stared at the floor.

Chief Atkins had reddened during the speech, and he avoided looking at Beaton. "The real-estate people," he mumbled, "swear property values in Spruce Falls will quadruple if Cady stays."

"What is a village profited, if it shall gain a real-estate boom and lose its own soul?" Beaton asked quietly.

Chief Atkins cleared his throat. "There's a motion on the floor," he said bleakly. "Is there a second?"

"Second," murmured someone who kept his head down.

"All in favor?" said Atkins. There was a scuffing of chair legs, and faint voices, like the sounds of a playground a mile away.

"Opposed?" Beaton was silent. The Beaton dynasty of Spruce Falls had come to an end. Its paternal guidance, unopposed for four generations, had just been voted down.

"Carried," said Atkins. He started to say something, then suddenly motioned for silence. "Shhh!" The post office was next door to the meeting hall, in the same building, and, on the other side of the thin partition, Mr. Newell Cady was asking for his mail.

"That's all, is it, Mrs. Dickle?" Cady was saying to the postmistress.

"That's more'n some people get

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around here in a year," said Mrs. Dickle. "There's still a little second-class to put around. Maybe some for you."

"Mmm," said Cady. "That the way the government teaches its people to sort?"

"Them teach me?" Mrs. Dickle said proudly. "I'd like to see anybody teach me anything about this business. I been postmistress for twenty-five years now, ever since my husband passed on."

"Um," said Cady. "Here—do you mind if I come back there and take those things for just a minute?"

"Sorry—regulations, you know," said Mrs. Dickle.

**B**UT the door of Mrs. Dickle's cage creaked open anyway. "Thank you," said Cady. "Now suppose, instead of holding these envelopes the way you were, suppose you took them like this, and, uh—ah—putting that rubber cap on your thumb instead of your index finger—"

"My land!" cried Mrs. Dickle. "Look at you go!"

"It would be even faster," said Cady, "if it weren't for that tier of boxes by the floor. Why not move them over here, at eye level, see? And what on earth is this table doing back here?"

"For my children," Mrs. Dickle said defensively.

"Your children play back here?"

"Not real children," Mrs. Dickle said wistfully. "That's what I call these on the table—the wise little cyclamen, the playful little screw pine, the temperamental little sansevieria, the—"

"Why," interrupted Mr. Cady, "do you realize that you must spend twenty man-minutes and Heaven knows how many foot-pounds a day just detouring around it?"

"Well," said Mrs. Dickle, "I'm sure it's awfully nice of you to take such an interest, but, you know, I'd just feel kind of lost without—"

"I can't help taking an interest," said Cady. "It causes me actual physical pain to see things done the wrong way, when it's so easy to do them the right way. Oops! Moved your thumb right back to where I told you not to put it!"

"Chief Atkins," whispered Upton Beaton in the meeting hall.

"Eh?"

"Don't you scratch your head like that," said Beaton. "Spread your fingers like this, see? Then dig in. Cover twice as much scalp in half the time."

"All due respect for you, sir," said Atkins, "this village could do with a little progress and perking up."

"I'd be the last to stand in its way," said Beaton. After a moment he added, "I'll fares the land, to hastening ills a prey, where wealth accumulates, and men decay."

"Cady's across the street, looking at the fire truck," said Ed Newcomb, who had served twenty years as secretary of the fire department. The Ilium real-estate man, who had put stars in every eye except Beaton's, had assured Newcomb that his twenty-six-room Georgian colonial, with a little paper and paint, would look like a steal to a corporation executive at fifty thousand dollars. "Let's tell him the good news!"

The fire department joined its newest member by the fire truck and congratulated him on his election.

"Thanks," Cady said absently, tinkering with the apparatus strapped to the side of the big red truck. "By George, but there's a lot of chromium on one of these things," he said.

"Wait till you see the new one!" said Ed Newcomb.

"They make the damn' things as ornamental as a merry-go-round," said Cady. "You'd think they were play things. Lord! What all this plating and gimcrackery must add to the cost! Neve one, you say?"

"Sure," said Newcomb. "It hasn't been voted on yet, but it's sure to pass. The joy of the prospect showed on every face."

"Fifteen hundred gallons a minute!" said a fireman.

"Two floodlights!" said another.

"Closed cab!"

"Eighteen-foot ladders!"

"Carbon-dioxide tank!"

"And a swivel-mounted nozzle in turret smack spang in the middle!" cried Atkins above them all.

In the silence that followed the passionate hymn to the new truck, Cady spoke. "Preposterous," he said. "This is a perfectly sound, adequate truck here."

"Mr. Cady is absolutely right," said Upton Beaton. "It's a sensible, sturdy truck, with many years of dependable service ahead of it. We were foolish to think of putting the fire district into debt for the next twenty years, just for an expensive plaything for the fire department. Mr. Cady has cut right to the heart of the matter."

"It's the same sort of thing I've been fighting in industry for half my life," Cady said sadly. "Men falling in love with show instead of the job to be done. The sole purpose of a fire department should be to put out fires and to do it as economically as possible."

Beaton clapped Chief Atkins on the arm. "Learn something every day, don't we, Chief?"

Atkins smiled sweetly, as though he'd just been shot in the stomach.

**T**HE Spruce Falls annual Hobby Show took place in the church basement three weeks after Newell Cady's election into the fire department. During the intervening twenty-one days, Hal Brayton, the grocer, had stopped adding bills on paper sacks and bought an adding machine, and had moved his counters around so as to transform his customer space from a jammed box canyon into a race track. Mrs. Dickle, the postmistress, had tearfully moved her leafy children and their table out of her cage and had had the lowest tier of mailboxes raised to eye level. The fire department had voted down scarlet and blue capes for the band as unnecessary for fire fighting. And startling figures had been produced in a school meeting, proving beyond any doubt that it cost seven dollars, twenty-nine cents and six mills more per student per year to maintain the Spruce Falls Grade School than it would cost to ship the children to the big, efficient, centralized school in Ilium.

The whole populace looked as though it had received a powerful stimulant. People walked and drove faster, concluded business more quickly, and every eye seemed wider and brighter—even frenzied. And moving proudly through this brave new world were the two men who were shaping it, constant companions after working hours now, Newell Cady and Upton Beaton. Beaton's function was to provide Cady with the facts and figures behind village activities and then to endorse courageously Cady's realistic suggestions for reforms, which followed facts and figures as the night the day.

The judges of the Hobby Show were Newell Cady, Upton Beaton and fire chief Stanley Atkins, and they now moved slowly along the great horseshoe

of tables on which the entries were displayed. Atkins, who seemed to have lost weight and grown listless since informed public opinion had turned against the new fire truck with the swivel-mounted nozzle turret, carried a shoebox in which lay neat stacks of blue prize ribbons.

"Surely we won't need all these ribbons," said Cady.

"Wouldn't do to run out," said Atkins. "We did one year, and there was hell to pay."

"There are a lot of classes of entries," explained Beaton, "with first prizes in each." He held out his hand to Atkins. "One with a pin, please, Chief." He fixed a ribbon to a dirty gray ball four feet in diameter.

"See here," said Cady. "I mean, aren't we going to talk this over? I mean, we shouldn't all merrily go our own ways, should we, sticking ribbons wherever we happen to take a notion to? Heavens, here you're giving first prize to this frightful blob, and I don't even know what it is."

"String," said Atkins. "It's Ted Batsford's string. Can you believe it—the very first bit he ever started saving, right in the center of this ball, he picked up during the second Cleveland administration."

"Um," said Cady. "And he decided to enter it in the show this year."

"Every show since I can remember," said Beaton. "I knew this thing when it was no bigger than a bowling ball."

"So, for brute persistence, I suppose we should at last award him a first prize, eh?" Cady said wearily.

"At last?" said Beaton. "He's always gotten first prize in the string-saving class."

Cady was about to say something caustic about this, when his attention was diverted. "Good Lord in heaven!" he said. "What is that mess of garbage you're giving first prize to now?"

Atkins looked bewildered. "Why, it's Mrs. Dickle's flower arrangement, of course."

"That jumble is a flower arrangement?" said Cady. "I could do better with a rusty bucket and a handful of toadstools. And you're giving it first prize! Where's the competition?"

"Nobody enters anybody else's class," Beaton said patiently, laying a ribbon across the poop deck of a half-finished ship model.

CADY suddenly snatched the ribbon away from the model. "Hold on! Everybody gets a prize—am I right?"

"Why, yes, in his or her own class," said Beaton.

"So what's the point of the show?" demanded Cady.

"Point?" said Beaton. "It's a show, is all. Does it have to have a point?"

"Damn it all," said Cady. "I mean it should have some sort of mission—to foster an interest in the arts and crafts, or something like that. Or to increase skills—to get better at something creative." He gestured at the displays. "Junk, every bit of it junk—and for years these misguided people have been getting top honors, as though they didn't have a single thing more to learn, or as though all it takes to gain acclaim in this world is the patience to have saved string since the second Cleveland administration."

Atkins looked shocked and hurt. "Well," said Beaton, "you're head judge. Let's do it your way."

"Listen, Mr. Cady, sir," Atkins said hollowly, "we just can't not give—"

"You're standing in the way of progress," Beaton said sharply.

"Now, then, as I see it," said Cady, "there's only one thing in this whole room that shows the slightest glimmer of real creativity and ambition." . . .

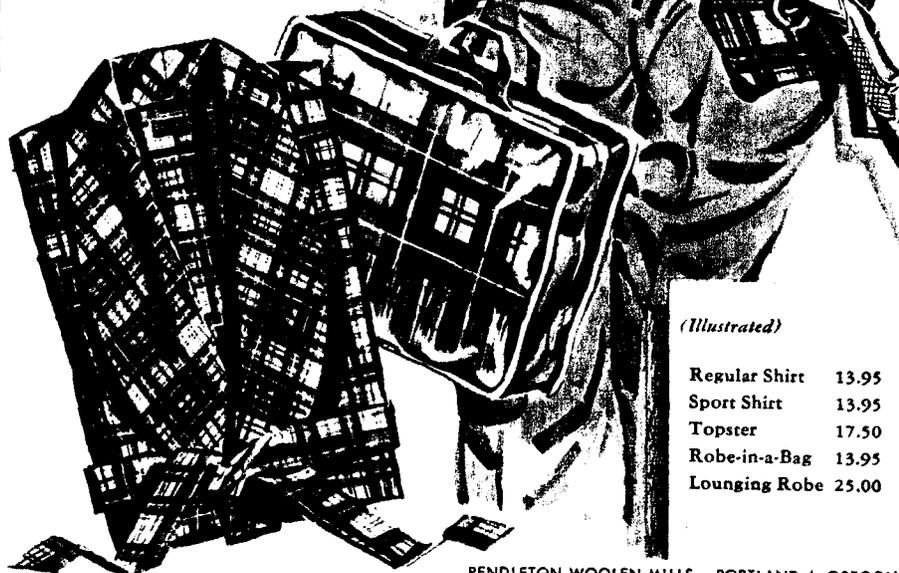
There were few lights in Spruce Falls that went off before midnight on the night of the Hobby Show opening, though the town was usually dark by ten. Those few nonparticipants who dropped in at the church to see the exhibits, and who hadn't heard about the



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## BUTCH



"If at home you do not find us, Leave a note to remind us." Well? Shall we?"

COLLIER'S

LARRY REYNOLDS

## "But, Pop—Don't You Love God, Too?"

The church bells are ringing and Jimmy and Jane are all dressed up ready to go. And so is Mother.

But not "Pop". He seems to think that "keeping the Lord's Day holy" is all right for the children. For Pop himself, though, it is his day of rest... "it even says so in the Bible." Besides, he will insist, he "is better than some people who go to church regularly."

Not all "Pops" are like this, of course. But empty pews in countless churches bear witness to the numerous fathers... and mothers also... who are either indifferent concerning their obligation to worship God, or confused as to how they should do so.

There is confusion, in fact, even among those who recognize this obligation. Some Christians insist that the Sabbath (Saturday) is the day to be kept holy, as do Orthodox Jews. In this they are following the literal meaning of the Law of Moses and ignoring the practice of the Christian Church from Apostolic times, as sanctioned by Jesus Christ.

Our Lord Himself substituted the New Covenant for the Old, abrogating the law which made the Sabbath observance obligatory. Sunday became The Lord's Day of the Christians even during the lifetime of the Apostles. After several centuries, it became a worldwide law of the Church, which Christ had authorized to make laws.

There is also confusion as to what constitutes "keeping The Lord's Day holy." Catholics, for instance, must assist at Mass, or The Lord's Supper, under penalty of serious sin. Many other



Christians also place great importance on unflinching participation in Sunday worship. But many think going to church, while a "nice thing to do," is not absolutely necessary. Christian opinion also varies concerning what work, and what pleasure, are permissible on The Lord's Day.

Even though you are not a Catholic... and perhaps never intend to be... it will be inspiring and valuable for you to learn the Catholic teaching and practice concerning The Lord's Day. For these teachings and practice date back to Apostolic times and have their origin in the teaching and example of The Master Himself. They give a clear and understandable guide to those who wish to manifest their love of the Lord on His Day.



Don't wait for your child to ask: "But, don't you love God, too?" Write today for free pamphlet explaining the Scriptural and historical authority for observing The Lord's Day as Catholics have been doing for nearly 2,000 years... pointing out what we must do—what we cannot do—if we wish rightly to honor God. For free copy, write today. Ask for Pamphlet No. C-36.

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Dr. Scholl's ARCH SUPPORTS

judging, were amazed to find one lonely object, a petit-point copy of the cover of a woman's magazine, on view. Pinned to it was the single blue ribbon awarded that day. The other exhibitors had angrily hauled home their rejected offerings, and the sole prize winner appeared late in the evening, embarrassed and furtive, to take her entry home, leaving the blue ribbon behind.

Only Newell Cady and Upton Beaton slept peacefully that night, with feelings of solid, worth-while work behind them. But when Monday came again, there was a dogged cheerfulness in the town, for, on Sunday, as though to offset the holocaust of the Hobby Show, the real-estate man had been around. He had been writing to Federal Apparatus Corporation executives in New York, telling them of the mansions in Spruce Falls that could virtually be stolen from the simplehearted natives and that were but a stone's throw from the prospective home of their esteemed colleague, Mr. Newell Cady. What the real-estate man had to show on Sunday were some letters from executives who believed him.

By late afternoon on Monday, the last bitter word about the Hobby Show had been spoken, and talk centered now on the computation of capital-gains taxes, the ruthless destruction of profit motives by the state and federal governments, the outrageous cost of building small houses—

"But I tell you," Chief Atkins said vehemently, "under this new law, you don't have to pay *any* tax on the profit you make off of selling your house. All that profit is just a paper profit, just plain, ordinary inflation, and they don't tax you on that, because it wouldn't be fair." He and Upton Beaton and Ed Newcomb were talking in the post office, while Mrs. Dickle sorted the late afternoon mail.

"Sorry," said Beaton, "but you have to buy another house for as much or more than you got for your old one, in order to come under that law."

"What would I want with a fifty-thousand-dollar house?" said Newcomb, awed.

"You can have mine for that, Ed," said Atkins. "That way, you wouldn't have to pay any tax at all."

"And have twice as many termites and four times as much rot as I've got to fight now," said Newcomb.

ATKINS didn't smile. Instead, he kicked shut the post-office door, which was ajar. "You big fool! You can't tell who might of been walking past and heard that, what you said about my house."

Beaton stepped between them. "Calm down! Nobody out there but old Mike Mansfield, and he hasn't heard anything since his boiler blew up. Lord, if the little progress we've had so far is making everybody that jumpy, what's it going to be like when we've got a Cady in every big house?"

"He's a fine gentleman," Atkins said sullenly.

Mrs. Dickle was puffing and swearing quietly in her cage. "I've bobbed up and down for that bottom tier of boxes for twenty-five years, and I can't make myself stop it, now that they're not there any more. Whoops!" The mail in her hands fell to the floor. "See what happens when I put my thumb the way he told me to?"

"Makes no difference," said Beaton. "Put it where he told you to, because here he comes."

Cady's long black car came to a stop before the post office.

"Nice day, Mr. Cady, sir," said Atkins winningly.

"H'mmm? Oh, yes, I suppose it is. I was thinking about something else." He went to Mrs. Dickle's cage for his mail but continued to talk to the group over his shoulder, not looking at Mrs. Dickle at all. "I just figured out that I go eight tenths of a mile out of my way every day to pick up my mail."

"Good excuse to get out and pass the time of day with people," said Newcomb.

"And that's 249.6 miles per year, roughly," Cady went on earnestly, "which at eight cents a mile comes out nineteen dollars and ninety-seven cents a year."

"I'm glad to hear you can still buy something worth while for nineteen dollars and ninety-seven cents," said Beaton, pointedly.

CADY was in a transport of creativeness and was apparently oblivious of the tension mounting in the small room. "And there must be at least a hundred others who drive to get their mail, which means an annual expenditure for the hundred of one thousand nine hundred and ninety-seven dollars, not to mention man-hours. Think of it!"

"Huh," Beaton said coolly, while Atkins and Newcomb shuffled their feet, and seemed eager to leave. "I'd hate to think what we spend on shaving cream." He took Cady's arm. "Come on over to my house a minute, would you? I've something I think you'd—"

Cady stayed put before Mrs. Dickle's cage. "It's not the same thing as shaving cream at all," he said. "Men have to shave, and shaving cream's the best thing there is to take whiskers off. And we have to get our mail, certainly, but I've found out something apparently nobody around here knows."

"Come on over to my house," Beaton said firmly, "and we'll talk about it."

"It's so perfectly simple, there's no need to talk about it," said Cady. "I found out that Spruce Falls can get rural free delivery, just by telling the Ilium post office and sticking out mailboxes in front of our houses the way every other village around here does. And that's been true for years!" He smiled, and glanced absently at Mrs. Dickle's hands. "Ah, ah, ah!" he chided. "Slipping back to your old ways, aren't you, Mrs. Dickle?"

Atkins and Newcomb were holding open the door, like a pair of guards at the entrance to an execution chamber, while Upton Beaton hustled Cady out.

"It's a great advantage, coming into situations from the outside, the way I do," said Cady, oblivious of the fact that he was being propelled out the door. "People inside of situations are so blinded by custom. Here you people were, supporting a post office, when you could get much better service for just a fraction of the cost and trouble." He chuckled modestly, as Atkins shut the post-office door behind him. "One-eyed man in the land of the blind, you might say."

"A one-eyed man might as well be blind," declared Upton Beaton, "if he doesn't watch people's faces and doesn't give the blind credit for the senses they do have."

"What on earth are you talking about?" said Cady.

"If you'd looked at Mrs. Dickle's face instead of how she was doing her work, you would have seen she was crying," said Beaton. "Her husband died in a fire, saving some of these people around the village you call blind. You talk a lot about wasting time, Mr. Cady; for

Collier's for October 25, 1952

really big waste of time, walk around the village someday and try to find somebody who doesn't know he can have his mail brought to his door any way he wants to."

The second extraordinary meeting of volunteer firemen, within a month, finished its business, and the full membership, save for one fireman who had been invited, seemed relaxed and contented for the first time in weeks. The business of the meeting had gone off smoothly, with Upton Beaton, the patriarch of Spruce Falls, making motions, and the membership seconding in chorus. Now they waited for the one absent member, Newell Cady, to arrive at the post office on the other side of the town wall to pick up his Saturday-afternoon mail.

"Here he is," whispered Ed Newcomb, who had been standing watch by the window.

A moment later, the rich voice came through the wall. "Good afternoon, Mr. Dickle," said Cady. "Good heavens, you've got all those plants in there that you again!"

"Just got lonesome," said Mrs. Dickle.

"But, my dear Mrs. Dickle," said Cady, "think of—"

"The motion's been carried, then," said Chief Atkins in a loud voice. "Mr. Beaton is to be a committee of one to inform Mr. Cady that his fire department membership, unfortunately, is in violation of the by-laws, which call for three years' residence in the village prior to election."

"I will make it clear to him," said Beaton, also speaking loudly, "that this is in no way a personal affront, that it's simply a matter of conforming to our by-laws, which have been in effect for years."

"Make sure he understands that we all like him," said Ed Newcomb, and tell him we're proud an important

man like him would want to live here."

"I will," said Beaton. "He's a brilliant man, and I'm sure he'll see the wisdom in the residence requirement. A village isn't like a factory, where you can walk in and see what's being made at a glance, and then look at the books and see if it's a good or bad operation. We're not manufacturing or selling anything. We're trying to live together. Every man's got to be his own expert at that, and it takes years."

The meeting was adjourned.

THE Ilium real-estate man was upset, because everyone he wanted to see in Spruce Falls was out. He stood in Hal Brayton's grocery store, looking out at the deserted street and fiddling with his fountain pen.

"They're all out with the fire-engine salesman?" he said incredulously.

"They're all going to be paying for the truck for the next twenty years," said Upton Beaton, who was tending Brayton's store, while Brayton went out for a ride on the fire engine.

"Red-hot prospects are going to start coming through here in a week, and everybody goes out joy-riding," said the real-estate man bitterly. He opened the soft-drink cooler and let the lid fall shut again. "What's the matter—this thing broken? Everything's warm."

"No, Brayton just hasn't gotten around to plugging it in since he moved things back the way they used to be."

"You said he's the one who doesn't want to sell his place?"

"One of the ones," said Beaton.

"Who else?"

"Everybody else."

"Go on!"

"Really," said Beaton. "We've decided to wait and see how Mr. Cady adapts himself, before we put anything else on the market. He's having a tough time, but he's got a good heart, I think, and we're all rooting for him." ▲▲▲▲

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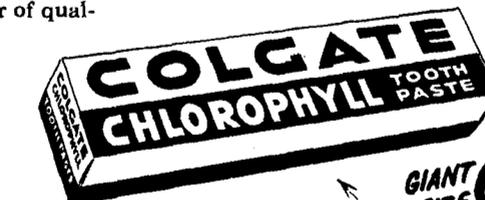
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Pfc Albert Tyde (left), once of Poland, plays chess with Latvian-born Cpl. Laimoinis Sprogis



Steve Szkupinski (l.) served in French Foreign Legion. George Homiakoff is Shanghai-born



Michael Averko Olaff von Hilderbrand, now a Marine pfc, once was in Germany's *Luftwaffe*



A Spanish refugee, Miguel Alvarez Sarmiento wears makeshift costume to entertain his buddies  
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