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*Untold Tales*

***XXVIII -How Ajax Ajaccio Became a Bohemian, and Subsequently Reformed.***

Ajax Pluto Ajaccio was the son of the famous J. Cato Ajaccio, who made a barrel in a land steal in the year 221 A. D., and was afterward mayor of Rome and a member of the Senate. Young Ajax was allowed 2500 denarii a year by his father, and permitted to do as he pleased with it, which might have been lucky for him had he been a normal young man. But he wasn't. He was foolish. He had foolish ambitions. He had a zoo in his mansard. He wanted to be a bohemian.

Ajax first became acquainted with bohemianism through a novel called "Clarice, the Artist's Model, or the World of the Chafing Dish." Upon the title page of this book there was a clear intimation that it was a work of fiction, but Ajax, charmed by the delightful domain it described, did not heed the intimation.

He took the dope dreams of the volume for truth, and immediately decided that he would be a bohemian.

He would make the acquaintance of actors and artists and men of the world, and actresses and chorus girls and gay grisettes and journalists-thus he then denominated newspaper reporters-and all of the other delightful dramatis personae of the world of bohemia.

He would meet them late at night, when all dull and matter of fact people were snoring in bed, and with them he would live the life of a true bohemian-careless in dress, gay of soul, simple of taste and regardless of the morrow.

He would listen while poets recited their rhymes to audiences of toe dancers and dry point etchers, and with them he would negotiate gay small hour suppers of Welsh rarebits and lobster salad.

He would cast aside the dry, lifeless world of daylight and make his entry into the brilliant, witty other world of the studio, the greenroom, and bohemia.

He would be a bohemian.

In accordance with this ambition Ajax set about scraping an acquaintance with such bohemians as he might chance to meet. After he knew them, he thought, and had shown them that he was true blue and one of them at heart, they would remove the barriers separating them from the Philistines, and permit him to enter their joyous world and become a naturalized denizen of it.

After a week's search Ajax encountered his first bohemian-a newspaper artist named Gracchus Pistachio. Grac at the moment was in the act of drinking a glass of beer, and after shaking hands with Ajax he asked the loan of a plug of tobacco. Then, after cutting off a generous piece, he asked if Ajax would favor him with a few denarii to meet a pressing bill.

Ajax, delighted to render him a service, readily consented and the bohemian departed in a zigzag manner up the street.

“How delightful !” exclaimed Ajax under his breath. “How delightfully unconventional. An ordinary sordid citizen would have never requested a loan in such a charmingly unconventional manner. And neither would he have democratically leaned against the bar and called for a mug of beer. How delightful these bohemians are !”

Next day Ajax was transported to the seventh heaven of bliss by meeting three bohemians in a bunch. The one he had met the day before introduced him. One of his new formed acquaintances was an actor named Leviticus Nero, who had made a tremendous hit, he said, in the provinces, but was now out of a job, he said, because of the fiendish plotting of a rival. Another was a charming young woman named Juliana Bozzo, who was the third villager from the left end in the second line of the chorus of “The Frogs,” then being performed at the Rome Opera House. The third member of the group was Presto Seraglio, a journalist and bon vivant.

Ajax, delighted, insisted upon taking the party out to lunch, and greatly to his delight, received in return an invitation to attend a midnight supper the next night at the studio of J. Islii Virtuoso, a rising young artist. Virtuoso and Seraglio lived together in a hall room adjoining the studio, taking turns sleeping in the bed. Therefore Seraglio was free to invite guests to the supper. He pressed Ajax to come, and incidentally borrowed 8 denarii from him.

Ajax hardly knew how to kill time while waiting for the moment fixed for the beginning of the feast. Scores of bohemians, he knew, would be there- there in all their delightfully unconventional costumes and with all their charming democratic abandon. There would be young artists in velvet coats and plush Tam O’Shanters, and fascinating ladies of the merry-merry, with the rouge still upon their fair cheeks, and great journalists fresh from interviews with presidents and emperors and millionaires, and famous actors, with sock and buskin laid aside for the nonce, and all of the other gay and light hearted and unconventional dwellers in the land of bohemia. There would be cute little cozv corners hung with oriental tapestry, and seated amid ancient armor and wet canvases Ajax personally would listen to the talk of real bohemians and eat Welsh rarebit and pate de foies gras and Ajax dreamed on in rapture until it was dark, and then he went to the opera house and waited for the entrance of Miss Bozzo. But he could not find her on account of the height of the girls in the line ahead of her, and so the show bored him and he was glad when it was over.

Then jumping into a cab, he was whirled along to the Virtuoso studio. The streets were half deserted and but few pedestrians wandered along. They were on their way home, thought Ajax, anxious and in a hurry to reach their beds. What soulless brutes they were. And what a colorless desert of matter of fact inanity must be their lives! Ajax pitied them, and just as he was fairly on the verge of tears the cab stopped and he was set down at Virtuoso’s address.

It was a dirty looking, four story house in a back street, and on the sidewalk Ajax tripped over an ash can. Picking himself up, he climbed the high steps and rang the bell. After a long interval it was opened and a slovenly old woman told him that Virtuoso’s apartments were on the fourth floor back. In negotiating the high stairs he stumbled twice and nearly fell all the way down again. By and by, after what seemed a month, he reached the top and rapped upon the only door in sight. It was opened by Seraglio.

“Come in,” exclaimed the latter, with a hearty handshake, and Ajax walked in-into the world of bohemia, that gay world of fancy and delight, where cares never worry and the morrow is never mentioned, where joy is king and art is greater than money.

The room was a small one, and in the middle of it a dozen bohemians of both sexes were seated about a table. The table was made of two soap boxes surmounted by a shutter, and there was no table cloth. As Ajax entered a tall young man with long hair and eyeglasses was dropping pieces of corned beef through the slats of the shutter to a little dog beneath. The dog made great jumps for the scraps, and the entire party laughed heartily.

Then Ajax was presented by Seragilo. The tall young man was Gazzazus Iffrius, the actor. Ajax blamed himself as an ass for never having heard of him. The short red faced man in the tattered golf jacket was Augustus Plutarch, the illustrator; the beardless youth in the corner he had been drinking, apparently, and had to be aroused to shake hands with Ajax-was Virtuoso, his host; the stout old lady eating beans with her knife at the head of the table, was the toe dancer, Mariana Caramba-and so on, down the line.

Ajax stared in astonishment.

Were these bohemians?

Was this bohemia ?

Was that slanting browed swine in the corner really an artist?

Did he not look like a discharged bartender? Was that red faced woman really the famous toe dancer? Evidently she was careless. She had forgotten, in washing up, to pay attention to her entire physiognomy. There was grease paint on her neck.

Was that evil faced ruffian beside her really an actor?

Was there not some mistake?

Was he not, in truth, an anarchist?

Ajax felt dizzy. The air was heavy. It was heavy with the odor of friend onions, Mile, Mariana, the toe dancer, was fond of onions. Even now she was lifting a big one from her plate to her face on the end of her knife. In swallowing it she cut her lip, and the others laughed.

Was this really bohemia?

Was this a studio?

Ajax had read of studios. All were described as having oriental hangings and Turkish cozy corners. Ajax had seen such a cozy corner in the show window of a furniture bazaar. But this!

The walls were kalsomined in neutral blue, and on one of them hung a calendar of a life insurance company. Opposite it was a huge chalk sketch of a plaster cast, and on one of the end walls hung an umbrella. At the sole window, which opened into a sort of side yard or areaway, a young man in his shirt sleeves was busy lowering a can to the yard below. Five minutes later he drew it up again with a rope. It contained beer, and the guests fought for it. As soon as it had been emptied it was dropped out of the window again.

Soon someone suggested that it was Ajax's treat. Rather unwilling, he produced 6 piastres, and the can came up overflowing. Then someone suggested that he treat again. While the can was out of sight Plutarch, the illustrator, touched him for a loan of 10 denarii. A moment later another guest touched him for 15. Then, deciding that it was time to go, he reached for his watch. It was gone.

He raised a holler. Mariana, the toe dancer, threw a bottle of pickles at him, and the vinegar spoiled his waistcoat. Plutarch, the illustrator, helped him to a straight one under the chin. Iffrius, the actor, kicked him, and Seraglio-Seraglio, his friend-prodded him with a broom. Then they attacked him en masse, stripped him of his clothes and valuables and dropped him down the stairs. As he sailed through the air, striking only the corners, he meditated.

“This,” he muttered, “is bohemia. Bohemia of which I dreamed (bump). The land of gay and jolly good fellowship (bang), with no thought (biff) for the mor-(boom)-row. Is this-is this-is this-oh! Goodness gracious is this--is this-bohemia? Ah me! (bang). Alas! Is this- is this’-

When Ajax was able to get about again he was civilized.

Moral: Go to bed at 9:30.