

SIDE #16

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Banjo and Sheridan Whiteside x (With Miss Preen)

Banjo has shown up unexpectedly to visit Sheridan Whiteside for Christmas. Banjo is a great comedian of the movies; his character is based on Harpo Marx. In real life, Alexander Woollcott (upon whom Whiteside is no-so-loosely based) discovered the Marx Brothers. Through his numerous and glowing reviews of their vaudeville shows, Woollcott single-handedly brought them to the attention of Hollywood and, with this assist, to international stardom. Woollcott had a particular fondness for Harpo; many speculated that he was sexually attracted to, and a little in love with, Harpo.

For his part, Harpo was a great and loyal friend of Woollcott, and never expressed discomfort or dismay at the one-way sexual attraction (Harpo was a notorious “skirt-chaser” until he married a bit later in life). The friendship struck many as an odd pairing – Woollcott, the erudite, urbane, sexually ambiguous intellectual, and Harpo, the uneducated-but-street-smart, happy-go-lucky and very heterosexual prankster who eschewed intellectualism and academic pretensions and, while he wasn’t mute in real life as he was on film, his personality was very close to that of his screen character. And yet, their friendship was, by all accounts, genuine, enduring and mutually satisfying.

In this scene, Whiteside has realized he has gone too far in his machinations to undermine Maggie’s budding romance with Bert Jefferson; Lorraine is just about to use her considerable charms to lure Burt away from Maggie and deliver the seductress’s equivalent to the coup de grace. Sheridan must improvise ways to undo the damage by getting Lorraine out of the picture as soon as possible, and Banjo’s unexpected arrival may just be the divine intervention he needs.

WHITESIDE: (To MISS PREEN.) Answer the door, will you? John is upstairs. (MISS PREEN, obviously annoyed, hurries to door. Offstage, we hear MISS PREEN: “**Who is it?**” An answering male voice: “**Polly Adler’s!**” Then a little shriek from MISS PREEN, and, in a moment, we see the reason why. She is carried into the room in the arms of a pixie-like gentleman, BANJO, who is kissing her over and over.)

BANJO: (Carrying MISS PREEN.) (Coming D.C.) I love you madly — madly. Did you hear what I said? Madly! Kiss me. Again! Don’t be afraid of my passion. Kiss me! I can feel the hot blood pounding through your varicose veins.

MISS PREEN: (Through all this.) Put me down! Put me down! Do you hear? Don’t you dare kiss me! Who are you? Put me down or I’ll scream! Mr. Whiteside! Mr. Whiteside!

WHITESIDE: Banjo, for God’s sake! Banjo!

BANJO: Hello, Whiteside. Will you sign for this package, please?

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- MISS PREEN:** Mr. Whiteside!
- WHITESIDE:** Banjo, put that woman down. That is my nurse, you mental delinquent.
- BANJO:** *(Putting MISS PREEN on her feet.)* Come to my room in half an hour and bring some rye bread. *(Slaps MISS PREEN'S fanny.)*
- MISS PREEN:** *(Outraged.)* Really, Mr. Whiteside! *(She adjusts her clothes with a quick jerk or two and marches into library — closes doors.)* (JOHN, at the same time, comes hurrying down stairs; BANJO beckons to him. Bending his leg and raising it, BANJO puts it in JOHN'S hand. Amazed, JOHN rushes off U.R.)
- BANJO:** *(Crosses to C.)* Whiteside, I'm here to spend Christmas with you. Give me a kiss.
- WHITESIDE:** Get away from me, you reform school fugitive. How did you get here, anyway?
- BANJO:** Darryl Zanuck loaned me his reindeer. Whiteside, we finished shooting the picture yesterday and I'm on my way to Nova Scotia. Flew here in twelve hours — borrowed an airplane from Howard Hughes. Whiteside, I brought you a wonderful Christmas present. *(He produces a little tissue-wrapped package Crosses to WHITESIDE.)* This brassiere was one worn by Hedy Lamar. *(Dropping it in WHITESIDE'S lap.)*
- WHITESIDE:** Listen, you idiot, how long can you stay?
- BANJO:** Just long enough to take a bath. I'm on my way to Nova Scotia. Where's Maggie?
- WHITESIDE:** Nova Scotia? What are you going to Nova Scotia for?
- BANJO:** I'm sick of Hollywood and there's a dame in New York I don't want to see. So I figured I'd go to Nova Scotia and get some smoked salmon . . . Where the hell's Maggie? I want to see her . . . What's the matter with you? Where is she?
- WHITESIDE:** Banjo, I'm glad you're here. I'm very annoyed at Maggie. Very!
- BANJO:** What's the matter?
(WHITESIDE rises, crosses to L.)
- BANJO:** Say, what is this? I thought you couldn't walk! *(Crossing to C.)*
- WHITESIDE:** Oh, I've been all right for weeks. That isn't the point. I'm furious at Maggie. She's turned on me like a viper. You know how fond I am of her. Well, after these years, she's repaying my affection by behaving like a fishwife.
- BANJO:** What are you talking about?
- WHIESIDE:** *(A step L.)* But I never believed for a moment she was really in love with him.

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BANJO: In love with who? I just got here — remember?

WHITESIDE: *(Pace L.)* Great God, I'm telling you, you Hollywood nitwit. A young newspaperman here in town.

BANJO: Maggie finally fell — well, what do you know? What kind of a guy is he?

WHITESIDE: *(Crosses to him.)* Oh, shut up and listen, will you?

BANJO: Well, go on. What happened?

WHITESIDE: *(Pacing L.)* Well, Lorraine Sheldon happened to come out here and visit me.

BANJO: Old hot-pants — here?

WHITESIDE: *(Back to BANJO.)* Now listen! This young fellow, he'd written a play. You can guess the rest. He's going away with Lorraine this afternoon. To "rewrite." So there you are. Maggie's in there now, crying her eyes out. *(Crosses to sofa — sits.)*

BANJO: *(Crosses L.)* Gee! . . . Say, wait a minute. What do you mean Lorraine Sheldon happened to come out here? I smell a rat, Sherry — a rat with a beard.

WHITESIDE: Well, all right, all right. But I did it for Maggie — because I thought it was the right thing for *her*.

BANJO: *(Crosses R.)* Oh, sure. You haven't thought of yourself in years . . . Gee, poor kid. Can I go in and talk to her?

WHITESIDE: No — no. Leave her alone.

BANJO: *(Crosses L.)* Any way I could help, Sherry? Where's this guy live — this guy she likes? Can we get hold of him?

WHITESIDE: *(Rises — crosses to BANJO.)* Now wait a minute, Banjo. We don't want any phony warrants, or you pretending to be J. Edgar Hoover. I've been through all that with you before. *(He paces again L.)* I got Lorraine out here and I've got to get her away.

BANJO: It's got to be good, Sherry. Lorraine's no dope. *(Crosses U.R.)* . . . Now, there must be *something* that would get her out of here like a bat out of hell. *(Crosses to L.)* Say! I think I've got it! That fellow she's so crazy about over in England — what's his name again? — Lord Fanny or whatever it is. Bottomley — that's it! Bottomley!

WHITESIDE: *(With a pained expression.)* No, Banjo. No.

BANJO: Wait a minute — you don't catch on. We send Lorraine a cablegram from Lord Bottomley —

WHITESIDE: I catch on, Banjo. Lorraine caught on, too. It's been tried.

BANJO: *(Crosses R.)* Oh! . . . I told you she was no dope . . .