

food," she said. "You're upset—that's what it is."

"Quite right, I am," said Madeleine. "Go to Bournemouth, and I'll go somewhere on my own."

"But there isn't anywhere else—no nice place," her mother protested.

"Then I'll go somewhere nasty. Write to Mrs. Pink, mother, and fix it up."

"For thirty-nine years," said Mrs. Perret oratorically, "you and I have spent our holidays together——"

"And now we are going to have a change," said Madeleine, with such inexorable finality that Mrs. Perret did not even say "Never!" or "Gracious!"

Madeleine Perret kept very dark about her plans. There was no good inviting a domestic storm. If she had mentioned that her destination was Dieppe a storm would have been inevitable, and in the calm which followed there would have been more than a danger of her mother's deciding to accompany her.

Apart from this, Madeleine's intentions were too dark for public discussion. Realising how dark they were, she had patriotically and modestly determined to carry them out off British soil. What she contemplated may be summarised as the intention to speak to a man. If Fate intervened and arranged that the man should speak first, so much the better, but if not he was going to get spoken to.

There was no argument about it—the thing was decided.

MADELEINE PERRET'S appearance on her departure from Victoria Station was ill assorted to the forward programme she had outlined. In no sense had she dressed the part. Her coat and skirt of navy blue were of such regimental primness as to have given rise to the impression that she was about to inspect a Continental contingent of the Girl Guides. This effect was heightened by a felt hat turned up defiantly over the left ear. The umbrella she bore appeared to be a weapon of defence.

In character with a number of ladies travelling abroad for the first time, she refused to surrender her luggage to a porter and constantly reassured herself

that the wallet containing her passport and money had not slipped past the equatorial regions of her corsets and become lost for ever.

Although Madeleine was reluctant to admit it, the journey to Dieppe was accomplished without incident. It is true that, when the Channel steamer berthed, a blue-smocked *apache*, with a brass number on his sleeve, made a grab at her fibre suitcase. But Madeleine drove him off with the point of her umbrella.

In the Customs house a uniformed official took one look and passed her luggage without examining what it contained. He had guessed that she was not a smuggler, and Madeleine passed across the railway lines and into the cobbled street chagrined at his prescience.

The pension at which she had taken a room was at the station end of the Plage and overlooked an expanse of leprous grass and the harbour mole.

It boasted the name Villa Watteau and was defended in front by a wall, high railings, and a screen of tamarisk. Behind these defences was a gravel courtyard dotted with iron tables and chairs. The house itself was tall and grey, with peeling plaster and shutters of a pleasant blue.

There were quite a lot of girls, mainly English, but some Norwegian, in sleeveless muslin frocks, at the tables. They had bound silk handkerchiefs about their heads and, as a result of sunburn, many of them wore peeled deltoids and noses. They seemed on excellent terms with one another—shouted exuberantly and laughed excessively.

At a table apart two sleek-headed French boys with flannel black-lined trousers, striped blazers, and very *décolleté* shirts sucked citronade through straws and watched the girls.

Madeleine was deciding to have nothing to do with boys of that kind when the hostess of Villa Watteau descended upon her with resounding hospitality.

The hostess's name was Miss Pearks, "Miss by preference," as she hastened to assure her guests. Slipping an arm through Madeleine's, she conveyed her to the house through a barrage of eyes from the various tables.

She Talked to a Man

"YOU'D like to see your room and have a wash, and then, my dear, I expect you'd fancy some tea, or perhaps a glass of *vin blanc*."

Madeleine replied non-committally. Wary of feminine friendship, she did not intend to allow herself to be absorbed by the establishment or its hostess. She was, moreover, a little taken aback at being accompanied into her bedroom by a baize-aproned *valet de chambre* who wore a yellow waistcoat, smiled continuously, and responded to the name of Benoit.

Benoit, who lingered after Miss Pearks had retired, displayed an intimacy with the details of the room that was quite shocking to Madeleine, who did not realise that he was marking time for a tip.

By word and gesture he proved that real water ran from the taps into the basin. He opened the window and introduced her to a view of the Channel. "*La Manche, n'est-ce pas?*" He threw back the coverlet of the bed and bounced the springs with the palms of his hands with abominable familiarity.

"*Allez—allez,*" said Madeleine, who was not without a bit of French when the emergency demanded.

Apart from a garland of dusty-looking roses painted on the ceiling the room was austere French. A bed, two plain Normandy tables, three chairs, a hanging closet built into the wall, and a mirror over the mantelpiece. By comparison with her own bedchamber in Belsize Park, with its water-colours, knick-knacks, and pile carpet, there was little to recommend it. It is unfortunate that the first feeling it provoked was of nostalgia.

"However," thought Madeleine, "I shan't be spending much of my time up here."

She changed into something cooler and went out.

Proceeding in a westerly direction by way of the neglected greens that fringed the seaboard, Madeleine marked, with satisfaction, that the town was sprucing itself up. The leprous grass gave way to thronged tennis courts with, beyond, glittering splendours of the new casino and the strains of a jazz band. From a little wooden pier people of both sexes were diving into the water.

Viewed from a distance, their arched backs and outstretched limbs appeared classical and romantic. Madeleine determined to have a nearer view.

In this, however, she was frustrated by an official, who headed her off to a little wicket for a membership card. It struck Madeleine as rather degenerate that she should pay thirty francs for the privilege of watching people bathe for a fortnight, but she paid it and also another franc for the occupation of a deck chair in a forward position.

The afternoon sun was warm and delicious. Children romped and quarrelled about her. A sweet-vendor in a white coat sold her a bunch of muscatel-grapes dipped in toffee.

Young people poured to and fro between the bathing huts and the water. Joy was in the air. A wet dog shook his coat all over Madeleine and looked at her as who should say: "That's the stuff to give 'em."

YOUNG girls with gleaming bodies swung their legs and dried their hair with rough towels. Handsome and dripping youths lay face downward on the pebbles that the sun might tan them at its pleasure. Black heads, golden heads, red and even grey heads bobbed in the billows. A godlike young man in a white and orange two-piece suit paddled a tiny canoe among the bathers. The muscles of his arms rippled like water, waves of strength flowed from them. A cigarette hung lazily from the corner of his laughing mouth.

Madeleine watched him in a trance. Was it possible that her ideal had already come to life—that he rode towards her on the breast of the kindly sea—"lazy—insolent—laughing—and immensely strong?"

The phrase was not hers, but it fitted—oh, how admirably it fitted!

Spellbound, she sucked at a sugar-coated muscatel and let her fancy run. The breaking wavelets chimed like wedding bells on the pebbles at her feet.

A voice behind her said:

"You know who it is?"

And named a French boxer of international repute.

"I met his wife in the baccarat rooms last night. A charming girl."

Madeleine Perret rose abruptly from her chair. Her wonderings had received their answer :

"Not for me."

It was not until the fourth day of her holiday in Dieppe that Madeleine Perret met her fate.

Certain modifications of her usual habits had led to the purchase of clothes of rather less severe aspect. Also she had bought a bathing dress, but until this particular morning had shrunk from appearing in it.

Her record of adventure in the past four days was not considerable. Five men had spoken to her. Three of them had said "Pardon," one had said "Sorry," and the other "I say, was that your foot?"

This was the total accountancy, and during those four days she had spent several evenings in the Boule Rooms, had drunk sirops at the Café des Tribunaux, and had dined alone at "La Sole Dieppoise." Add to this the hours passed daily on the crowded Plage and it will be admitted that results were disappointing.

The morning that she subdued her natural modesty to the extent of taking to the water happened to be a grey one, with a wind to encourage the addition of raiment rather than the discarding of it. But Madeleine had made up her mind, and mobbled in a wrap of plum-coloured towelling, she valiantly marched down the pier towards the water.

ON account of the weather, the usual crowd was absent. What few had determined to brave the elements entered with a rush, floundered about for a few minutes, and raced back to their huts. But one figure—a man—hesitated to pursue this courageous course. He had discarded his wrap and now stood at the pier end with knees bent and knocking and his hands folded across his breast after the manner of a saint in a cathedral niche. Thus he stood in a curiously ill-fitting swimming suit, exposed to the blasts of heaven, equally fearful to advance or retire.

From the Plage behind him came derisive encouragement in the words "Allez oop!"

But the man did not move. A capricious wind ruffled his hair and revealed a bald patch on the top of his head.

Madeleine Perret threw her mantle over the wooden rail and stepped timidly forward.

"Hoop-la!" came the voice from the Plage.

But although she was able to swim, Madeleine had not yet strung up her courage to the pitch of stepping into space. She hesitated in a posture strongly resembling the one adopted by the shrinking male.

"*Et maintenant! Ensemble! Allez OOP!*"

Outraged by this impertinence, Madeleine turned her back on France and met the eyes of the man.

"I don't know whether you mean to stand here for ever," she said, "but I don't."

There! She had done it—she had spoken to a man.

To do him justice, he did not seem shocked. The chill wind had made him too miserable to be sensitive.

"Nor do I," he answered, "but it is awfully cold."

"It may be all the warmer in," she retorted.

"It may be," he nodded, "but I daren't hope for that."

Madeleine realised that he was in no sense a fearless or spirited man, but he seemed companionable.

Greatly daring, she made a suggestion.

"Let's hold hands and jump in together."

"All right," he assented. "If you will—I will."

It was curious he should have used the words "I will"—those wonderful, significant, binding words which, ever since the Church rescued humanity from the primitive, have united men and women in bonds of holy matrimony.

Madeleine put out a hand.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Lamb," he replied. "George Lamb."

"Mine is Madeleine Perret."

His hand closed meekly about hers.

"Now, if you are ready."

"Howah nice! All togezzah! Whoosh!" cried the voice.

She Talked to a Man

THEY leapt, and a column of water rose and fell upon their distracted heads. A moment later George Lamb was clinging to one of the pier piles gasping for breath.

"Goodness, it's even worse than I feared. Let's get out at once. We could wade in under the pier. No one would see."

It was not a romantic climax, except that it is rather romantic to bark one's shins on the barnacles of a pier pile in company with a strange man. But they had forgotten their wraps and had to return in full view to fetch them.

"When you're dressed," Mr. Lamb suggested, "p'r'aps we could have coffee or something at Charlie's."

The name "Charlie's" made even coffee sound adventurous.

"Very well," said Madeleine.

After all, they had taken the plunge together—gone in off the deep end—careless of consequences.

The sun was riding the sky again when they occupied a small table under the shade of the peristyle that fronts the casino.

"*Deux cafés, fines,*" Mr. Lamb ordered rather proudly, for his acquaintance with the phrase was only two days old.

The cognac was comforting after the chill embraces of the water. Madeleine, although temperate, had a good head, and the spirits dissolved the Antwerp blue at the end of Mr. Lamb's nose and restored a normal complexion.

"I shan't do that again," he said reflectively. "Oof! Always had a poor circulation for bathing."

It was intimate, discussing circulation like that.

"Still, I rather enjoyed it," Madeleine admitted.

"So did I—in a way. I mean it was nice meeting like that. Very nice. I've been here a week without speaking to a soul."

Madeleine said it was funny how one got to know people, but really she meant it was tragic how one didn't.

"I've been feeling very low," Mr. Lamb confessed, "very low indeed. A bereavement—my housekeeper—my nurse she was before that, when I was quite a little tot. Of course, people can't live for ever, but she was a good soul. Did everything for me—cooked—

darned my clothes—oh, everything. I'll never replace her. Mrs. Pennycuick her name was."

"How sad," said Madeleine.

"Used to put out my clothes for me and even buy them. Was always in the hall when I got back at night and had just what I wanted for my dinner waiting. No one could grill a steak like she could. And when I was ill——"

"Do you get ill?" Madeleine asked.

"A few colds in the winter, and sometimes a liver chill."

"I believe in calomel for that."

"Calomel is good," he admitted, "but it doesn't suit everyone."

HE became lost in a remote silence. "Yes, I'm not looking forward to going back to that empty flat."

"I don't expect you are," said Madeleine. A great tenderness swept over her.

"Poor Mr. Lamb," she said.

Sitting on her bed that night, reviewing what had taken place, Madeleine was conscious of surprise at herself. Her romance, if it might be distinguished by such a title, was not running true to form. A heroine might well encounter her hero after the fashion of their meeting—aye, and cleave the bright waters by his side. And later they might talk intimately over a café table. It was possible, too, that a heroine even on so short an acquaintance might be stirred to say: "Oh, wonderful Mr. Stag," but literature supplied no precedent for such phrases as "Poor Mr. Lamb."

Could love—real love—spring from words like that—from pity rather than admiration—from tenderness rather than passion?

To Madeleine it seemed that it could.

Her hero shivering at the pier end—lamenting the loss of a cook-housekeeper-nurse—and describing the loneliness of his four-roomed flat in Maida Vale, had cut, it must be confessed, a craven figure. His strength lay in his apparent weakness—and in a quality of helplessness which to a true woman was almost irresistible. In the few hours they had spent together he had contrived to give Madeleine the impression that she was responsible for him. He had told her

everything about himself. He had told her his salary—five hundred a year and bonuses, which often came to another fifty or sixty—and his place of employment—a firm of ecclesiastical printers in the Brompton Road.

“The front of the shop is so severe,” he had said, “you might almost think you were passing an undertaker’s. Sometimes we put nothing in the window but a brass vase with a lily in it.”

He pronounced vase vaize—to rhyme with glaze—and talked at length about the fumed oak screen, with Biblical quotations carved on it, which masked the interior of the shop from eyes of the pedestrians.

It is probably that no two people ever conducted a more bloodless and at the same time reckless conversation. They had chosen the Boule Room in which to talk, and in that atmosphere of changing fortunes were at work gambling away their lives and futures.

They were, of course, blissfully unconscious of the hazards they approached. A community of soul had robbed Madeleine of all sense of danger. For the sake of an unknown and purely hypothetical blessing she was staking upon the green cloth of Chance every habit and custom accumulated in thirty-nine years of industrious and contented celibacy. All her gains and possessions lay in a heap before her. Independence, the suite in Belsize Park, her job with Chater, Winsome, and Gulp, the pleasure of propping love tales against a cruet, potato salad, fruit salad, her season on the Underground, and the thousand and one spinsterish little tricks and bricks that had formed the fabric of her life were trembling in the balance.

BY appointment they met next day, and the next and the next, until one morning, the weather inviting them, they boarded a char-à-banc and visited the Forest of Arques and sundry other places. They were decanted for luncheon in the orchard of the Clos Normand at Martin-Eglise, where they occupied a white table under an apple tree. Beside them drawled a river. A kingfisher drew blue lines across its broken surface. Dragonflies, amber and turquoise, buzzed round them like tiny, jewelled aeroplanes.

Love was in the air.

Madeleine was aware of it and palpitated.

A light almost courageous was beginning to sparkle in Mr. Lamb’s eyes. In passing the bread his hand brushed hers.

She knew that he was going to speak, and he did. She half closed her eyes the better to hear the words he was bound to utter.

The first line of her life’s poem was to be spoken.

“Miss Perret,” he said, “or may I call you Madeleine?”

The opening was hackneyed. Almost irritably she nodded assent.

George Lamb drew breath to speak.

Madeleine held breath to hear.

“Do you know, when I look at you, Madeleine, what thoughts fill my mind?”

Yes, she knew, but would not sacrifice the rapture of hearing him say it.

“You have taught me,” he said, and his voice trembled, “you have taught me that no one in this world is irreplaceable.”

The compliment, if compliment were intended, was obtuse. Madeleine’s forehead wrinkled.

“How do you mean?”

“I mean that I had thought my future was empty.”

This was better.

“Well?”

“Empty,” he repeated, “but you have proved to me that it need not be empty.”

“Have I?” she breathed.

“Am I right or am I wrong, Madeleine, in the belief that in you I have found someone to fill the place in my home left by Mrs. Pennycuick?”

If it had been any other name but Pennycuick—if it had been Warren or Villiers or Lovelace—if it had been a graceful, comely name, the effect on Madeleine might have been different, but to have lived for thirty-nine and three-quarter years for no higher purpose than to supplant a Pennycuick in a man’s home and esteem wasn’t good enough.

To be loved for oneself, yes—but to deputise for a Pennycuick, no!

The mind of Madeleine Perret was pierced by a shaft of hard white light by which many things hitherto concealed and unguessed at by her were startlingly

She Talked to a Man

revealed. The new landscape it illumined showed in its true colours the inherent selfishness of a man of forty-five. It revealed the love he offered as merely a handle to a kitchen door—and a bolt and chain for the suppression of independence. It revealed the suite in Belsize Park as possessing charms and allurements that even the architect who designed it had never dreamed of. It revealed herself as a woman who had safely weathered the romantic years and come into a port of her own choosing. It revealed the infinite blessings of common sense.

IN a sudden flash Madeleine Perret knew when she was well off, and answered his inquiry and summarised her new understandings in a single phrase.

“You are wrong, George Lamb.”

An expression of complete bewilderment o’erspread his face.

“What’s that?” said he.

“You are wrong,” she repeated, and proceeded to tell him why.

When she had finished she detected in his eyes a look of relief. He had always been accustomed to yield to stronger wills than his own, and the arguments she had used had been prevailing and incontrovertible.

“Not but what we might have got on very well together,” he said.

“We might, but we shouldn’t—we’re too set,” she replied, and added: “It isn’t only the woman who sacrifices her liberty by marrying.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” he said, and was grateful.

Madeleine pushed back her chair.

“As we are, we can have a wonderful time pretending things about ourselves—and these things will always be wonderful because they will never wear themselves out by coming true. Marriage is a fact, George Lamb, and you and I are too old to face that kind of fact.”

George Lamb tilted back his chair and looked at her ruefully.

“You’re a nice woman,” he said; “I like you very much.

“And I like you.”

“But not well enough to take me as a husband?”

Madeleine smiled and shook her head. Free of his thrall, the doors of romance were once more open to her. She entered them shamelessly.

“There is only one man in my life I shall ever allow to dictate to me.”

So that was it. A rival. He was too late.

Sulkily he asked:

“What’s his name?”

“Mr. Chater,” said Madeleine, softly, tenderly, adoringly, as Juliet might have breathed the name of Romeo.

FAITHLESS LOVER

THEY tell me you are gone!
I have no tears, yet I must weep
Because I have no tears for you,
For still the memory I keep;
My days are wan.

You wrought the wrong I reap,
You twined for me a wreath of rue,
I wore it proudly as a crown,
But now I have no tears for you,
And so I weep.

EVE ST. JOHN KING.

TECHNIQUE

By

MAY

EDGINTON

“WE hesitate to trouble you, dear Amy——”

“When you’re so busy packing and all——”

“To go on such a terribly, terribly long journey——”

“But we do so value your good judgment, my dear——”

“It is about Miss Ring.”

Lady Duske had breakfasted with them—the two worried old ladies—rather earlier than usual on this morning of her departure for America. She had her hat on, and looked the immaculate traveller in her neat frock of fine tweed. Now it was after breakfast and they had detained her in the sunny breakfast room whose windows looked out over a thick hedge of privet to the summery blue of the sea.

“Miss Ring?” said Lady Duske in her sympathetic voice.

“As you know, dear, Miss Ring has been with us twelve years; long before we ever had the great pleasure of your company, my dear. And she has always behaved herself like a lady——”

“Well, *almost* a lady,” said Miss Annie.

Miss Elizabeth continued: “*Almost* a

“You’ve heard downstairs all about me?”

“Poor, dear Miss Ring!”

“I’ve loved him! I’ve loved him so! I love him!”

lady, as my sister says. She has been invaluable. And now we hear this gossip, which we are sorry to say is quite authentic——”

“Quite authentic. I didn’t want to tell you, Amy dear, just when you were going away from us, but your Aunt Elizabeth said: ‘Amy has such wonderful sense,’ and though we know it will shock you——”

“Let us tell Amy at once, Annie. She has no time to waste. The car will soon be here. Dear, dear! How we shall miss you! . . .”

“But two months will soon pass.”

“Don’t interrupt, Annie, because we must tell Amy about Miss Ring. It is the butcher, dear. A most prosperous man with a chain of shops, they say. But, Amy, Miss Ring is carrying on a—a——”

“A—a clandestine understanding with him, dear——”

“A married man with children!”

“They have been seen walking together through the bluebell woods.”

“She has confessed to us that it has been going on for some time.”

“And that she loves him!”

“Annie! You will shock Amy!”

Technique

Lady Duske made a little sound of sympathy.

"What we want to ask you, dear, is : what do you advise us to do ? "

"Elizabeth is in favour of giving her another chance."

"If she will promise us to stop it."

"That," said Lady Duske, "is what I would advise you to do if she will promise to stop it."

"But we couldn't have it going on, could we, Amy ? "

"Certainly you could not have it going on."

AND now, relieved at her advice coinciding with their wishes for their own convenience, the old ladies patted Lady Duske, kissed her, and let her go upstairs to finish her packing, for the car was nearly due. Releasing their minds from painful contemplation of the problem of Miss Ring, they contemplated, with pleasure, the vision of Amy, their niece by marriage, widow of their only nephew Ralph—Ralph who had been so clever and scientific and had received a knighthood, and who would have inherited their money if he hadn't died. But now it was going to his sweet widow who, five years ago, had come, at their invitation, to see them ; and then, at their invitation, to live with them.

"We'll have to leave it all to the Cats and Dogs now," said Miss Annie when news of Ralph's death had come.

But Miss Elizabeth had replied : "There's his wife whom we've never seen ; and we ought, perhaps, at least to see her, to see if she is our sort—before deciding a thing like that."

Well, how happy the last five years had been, with dear Amy still almost a girl, still not far into her thirties ! Dear Amy, of whom one could feel so proud, who was—the ultimate requirement of both sisters—such a lady. Who had got up so carefully Ralph's notes on his various subjects, and gave lovely little lectures here in Hexton, presided over by the vicar ; and who had been twice invited—this was the second time—to give those lovely little lectures before some women's clubs in America.

A Mr. Merriam—an American who had known Ralph—arranged those lectures, they understood. How kind it was of

him, this unknown, far-away man, to do so much for Ralph's sake, for Ralph's widow !

Miss Annie spoke, breaking a silence full of this sort of reflection :

"Perhaps dear Amy will use her influence with Miss Ring."

"Say a few words ? . . . I hope so too."

II

LADY DUSKE locked her suitcase, and straightened herself. From her window also she could see the shimmery sea. Her bedroom was very neat and chaste—flowered wallpaper, nice white curtains, a little water colour or two that Miss Annie had done years ago, and a framed text, beautifully embroidered on satin by Miss Elizabeth. The labels were on trunk and suitcase, and as she straightened up, Lady Duske heard from below the sweep of the car in which the old ladies were sending her to Southampton. And she heard another sound through the half opened door, a stifled sob.

Lady Duske spoke in her voice of sympathy : "Miss Ring ? Come in."

The companion came in, bundling over the threshold in her nervous grief, and the two looked at each other—Lady Duske with distress, with kindness, and yet with calm ; the other red, tear-soaked, frightened, unhappy.

"I—I came to see—if I could help you finish."

"It is all done, thank you, Miss Ring."

A pause.

"The car has come, I think," said Lady Duske, with a slight movement.

Then the other burst out : "Oh, you're so kind ! So kind ! I can see you've been told ; you know it all." A sob. "You've always been so kind to me—I don't know what you must think of me now—but I do assure you, Lady Duske, it—it"—a sob—"it hasn't gone far. Except—in my heart it's gone far ; and he loves me too. He—he's not happy at home, and—and—we used to talk when—sometimes he was in his shop when I took an order—though not often ; he doesn't often serve. But sometimes it was ; and then—and then—gradually—but how should you know

how it all happened? You couldn't know. You're so good; so good and sweet yourself, you'd never understand the feelings of a woman like me—I haven't understood myself till lately." Sobs and sobs. "Did—didn't know a w-w-woman could feel so!"

"Poor, dear Miss Ring. I'm so sorry! So sorry!"

"Thank you. I knew *you* would be. So sweet—so sweet and kind and *good*. I wish I could feel *good* like you. So calm." A turgid effort to choke back the sobs. "I know you think, like they do, and like I do, and that I must give him up. It mustn't ever happen again."

"My poor, dear Miss Ring."

"I've promised. I'll never go for a walk with him again. I'm wrong. I'm wicked. But—I'll try——"

Lady Duske stood near the short, broad woman, who shook with her emotion; and again they looked at each other. Lady Duske's cool white hand played with a pendant that she wore; a huge black opal, its changing fire rimmed in old silver and slung from an almost invisibly thin silver chain. It hung below her waist. And the companion's eyes went to the cool white hand on the fiery opal, and rested there. The opal—she'd admired it always; it seemed a part of the beauty of Lady Duske—for beautiful she seemed to the other woman.

So they stood, in passionate and compassionate quiet.

Miss Ring stammered: "You believe me? It hasn't gone far. I—I—I've never let him even hold my hand. Never! Never!"

Lady Duske nodded.

"It's the first time—a—a man has ever—said he loved me. And I—I'm thirty-seven. I—I . . . it's meant so much; but of course I—I've promised the Miss Bertons it shall—END!" Again a sob broke. "Oh, as I look at you it makes me wish I could be like you. So cool; and so good, and so wise."

"Try to be wise," said Lady Duske.

SHE was in the old-fashioned car, bowling along, looking at the back of the old-fashioned chauffeur who had been the aunts' coachman. She

leaned back, slight, pale—colourless, Hexton called her, even while it approved and admired—her very fair hair in a very smooth wing on either side of her little felt hat. Her lips, pale too, and rather thick, quivered a little. Her excellent tweed coat folded slimly round her.

She had a hand inside it holding the black opal that sent out its blue and green fires, seeming to warm her hand.

Soon—soon Southampton!

It was a good thing the old ladies had decided against coming to see her off; although, of course, there would have been no danger. . . .

III

THERE would have been no danger. One arranged. One did not look for anyone one knew as one reached the dock, showed one's passport, went calmly up the gangway on to the boat. But calm as one was, one was alive! Hexton was behind; one was all alight and burning. One had a thousand eyes and ears seeing and hearing. One knew, anyway, that he would not greet one on the dock, in case. . . .

She walked alone onto the boat. There were few passengers and she was early—a slight, pale, colourless woman, but with a beautiful way of walking; not a way that Hexton would notice, but a significant, beautiful way, nevertheless. She walked as only some very slender women walk, narrow feet straight as arrows placed like the feet of a trained dancer, one after the other in line. As she came aboard she knew with some of her thousand eyes and ears that someone was looking at her feet as they came.

Then someone looked to her face as she passed. She looked up, too, losing none of her pallor, her limpid colourlessness.

She saw the stripes on his sleeve instantly. Second officer. Black-haired. Intensely black-haired. There was a moment's vibration between them. She knew and he knew that it would be rather a pity if they did not know each other better.

That was all. Because it was arranged that she should go straight to her cabin

Technique

on a lower deck. She dismissed from any lingering in her vision the intensely black hair. One often saw, met, passed—and thought. . . .

But a reminder: "I have booked a return passage on this same ship," came to her.

She went steadily down to her cabin.

There was a cablegram lying on her dressing table. She picked it up; opened it; read it; put it away in a pocket of her travelling handbag. It was signed "Norton." There was not time for any dreaming anticipation over that, though, because of someone more imminent. At any moment someone might come. And then, even as the cablegram's message still went through her like wine warming her veins, she heard the rap on the door, the rap gay and rhythmic—not needing to be subdued at this time of day.

The door opened swiftly, shut swiftly. She was in Bernard's arms.

"Oh, at last!"

"At last!"

They listened every now and then acutely for the steward with baggage. When he came the door was hooked back and they were standing apart. Bernard was saying: ". . . So unexpected to see you, Lady Duske. If there's anything I can do for you . . ."

Stewards are knowledgeable but prefer to have nothing to know. He was gone again. Again the door was shut.

A GAIN they kissed consumingly.

"It's going to be a wonderful voyage, sweetheart."

"Where's your cabin?"

"Where do you think? Next to yours."

"About the ship we'll be very formal——"

"Of course. But we shan't always be 'about' the ship. . . . We're both at the captain's table. I've looked."

"You would be. I suppose I naturally would too."

"Lovely girl! You look too wonderful. Your face has changed since I came in."

Her face had softened; flowered. She had slipped her mask off for him. She laughed.

She sighed: "It's been just starvation. . . ."

"It was bad luck my being sent to Berlin for so long; but what magnificent luck to be sent to Washington! And to have you able to cross too!"

"It's a year since——"

"The one and only time when we——"

She stood closely enfolded by his arms, stroking his eyebrow with the tip of a finger, smiling into his eyes, her own half closed.

"And at New York——"

"We part again—if you can't join me in Washington."

"Not safe! Not safe!"

"Let's forget Washington, anyway. We have a week."

SHE was unpacking some of her things alone. The first dinner bugle had sounded. The ship was moving smoothly over the waters of the Channel. She took out the kind of *lingerie* that she bought secretly—the old ladies would have thrown fits—and her great extravagance which cost her yearly nearly half of the pittance Ralph had been able to leave—of Chanel perfumes, a rich stock of them; and the simple black dinner frock. Her mind roved past the dinner table, past the intervening wasted hours reading in the lounge, to the time when she would again be in this cabin, only a dim light switched on; waiting for someone to slip in.

Carefulness. Caution. They would be very, very formal "about" the ship. Bernard in the Diplomatic, with his queer but nobly born and influential wife, who didn't live with him, and yet wouldn't live without him . . . no scandals must brush him.

And she herself? Didn't she love her final release from her prim husband, orderly wedded life? Didn't she love her surreptitious freedoms that she took with both hands, greedily, whenever the moment came? Did she even dream of wanting to wrest Bernard from his wife?

A million times no.

THE captain had a round dinner-table; a half-dozen pleasant people. Bernard was later than she. That looked well. Before he came in the rest of them were settled; herself, another woman—elderly and dis-

tinguished ; and a couple of men. One of the men looked at her swiftly, and his glance stayed, as she drifted up to them, and sat down. An aloof, pale woman in black, with a subtle perfume wafting from her person. . . . And as she unfolded her napkin—with the reserved half-smile of a stranger greeting strangers—she was attracted by his regard.

She looked across at him.

The last five years had held few hesitations for her. Her senses always spoke to her instantly and certainly of their desire, and she never now pretended to misunderstand them. She was one of the rare women who understood herself and did not flinch from what she understood. She savoured, revelled in it. She saw a heavy, burly man in good dinner clothes, with an air of power.

Curious. Ever fascinating and curious and delicious, these sudden encounters ! She sat formal, reserved, dignified, detached. She knew that he, for his part, knew what she knew—that this, all at once, was one of those encounters. . . . Then Bernard, with the Captain, was approaching the table.

She smiled formally to Bernard.

The other man was introduced to her by the Captain :

“ May I introduce your opposite neighbour, Lady Duske ? . . . Sir Simon Valley.”

She left the table rather early. She was seen in the lounge, writing a letter ; and then she went down to her cabin, and undressed slowly and luxuriously ; and lay waiting, just lit dimly by one shaded lamp above her bed.

Flirtations began here and there on the ship next morning. Quite flagrant, really. Lady Duske lay in her steamer chair, reading “ The Letters of Queen Victoria.” The officer with the intensely black hair came by, his steps hovered ; she looked up and he saluted her. She looked down, and he went on. Bernard, in flannels, passed, bowed, and strode on. She did not even look after him, to note his excellent shoulders, his high, bare head with the crisper brown hair, as other women were stealthily doing. She knew it all ; all of him ! She read on. Bernard passed again, called : “ Are you quite fit this morning, Lady Duske ? Did you sleep well ? ”

She replied politely : “ Splendidly, thank you ; and you ? ”

Life was fun ; full of such jokes ; full of deep excitements.

SOMEONE stood beside her.

It was Sir Simon Valley.

She looked up, as if reluctantly, from her book.

“ Good morning, Lady Duske.”

“ Oh . . . ” she said faintly, as if trying to remember him, “ good morning.”

“ Are you quite fit this morning ? Sleep well ? ”

“ Excellently, thank you.”

“ A good sailor ? ”

“ Quite.”

“ May I take this chair next to you ? Unless, of course, I’m interrupting your reading ? ”

She made a polite little sound, and he sat down.

“ You disappeared early last night.”

“ I—I am afraid I am one of those very unfriendly travellers, Sir Simon. Ships bore me.”

“ They do ? Do you know anyone on board ? Oh, of course, you know that chap at our table—chap in the Diplomatic, I’m told.”

She demurred : “ Very slightly.” And the formula : “ He knows friends of mine.”

“ Ah, then. . . . Won’t you walk ? ”

“ No, thank you.”

“ May I stay awhile ? If I’m really not interrupting your reading ? ”

She made again the kind, faint disclaimer.

What a lot they knew about each other, she and this burly, discreet, experienced man, before the morning was out ! And yet they had said nothing beyond : “ Do you do any flying ? ” And : “ Oh ! Geneva ! . . . Did you meet the So-and-So’s out there ? ” And “ Is that Victoria book any good ? ” And so on.

Bernard liked her black opal !—that she seldom took off. Bernard loved her ; and she loved him—just enough ; not enough to be hurt. He hated the impending parting more than she did. “ What a waste of us and our love, Amy ! What a waste, darling ! And you—going back to that starvation life, when you should have this love all the time ! When I’ve gone to Washington, and then

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right away to Tokio, what'll you do, darling? What'll you do?"

"Oh, darling, darling, what'll I do?"

"It isn't as if you weren't *you*, sweetheart. Some women console themselves—not you! You're a one-man woman, aren't you, Amy, and that man's me? Your husband never meant anything to you, dear. I feel it. You were just a girl when I woke you up—just a girl."

And he would murmur: "If only I'd met you first. If only things didn't come too late!"

IT was the last night before reaching New York that Valley made a definite move. She had been thinking about Valley quite a good deal. Between her and Bernard was the chill of the shadow of their impending parting. He did not feel the chill; she did. The impending parting only made him the more ardent, but with her it was different, because there was Valley.

She had doused the flame that indubitably Valley awoke in her all that week; but now, soon Bernard would leave her, the final consuming kiss would be kissed between them, and he would be gone. This last evening. . . .

Bernard had never been at all jealous of Valley; had never even surmised a necessity. That had been due to her quiet aloofness that had held Valley off time after time, day after day. But here was the last evening. . . .

He followed her out from dinner, stayed by her side; somehow had her up upon the boat deck under the stars.

It was almost deserted, and they leaned close together on the rail. He began to feast his eyes upon her, undisguised, in the starlight half-dusk; he took her hand fast in his. She stayed quite quiet, knowing that here and now would be made some . . . arrangement; and yet, what arrangement was possible, since she had in a pocket of her travelling handbag a cablegram signed "Norton"?

She stayed quiet, but there was a flame in her hand, running to Valley's. He said: "You aren't as calm as you seem."

She did not answer. It was her frequent habit to use silence instead of words.

He said: "Your name is Amy; I've found that out. Pretty, soft name.

I'll use it. Amy, why haven't you let me know you better? Why have you kept me at arm's length? That first night I thought——"

She sighed. The sigh was better than words.

He said: "Dine with me to-morrow in New York."

How could she, with those so minutely schemed weeks ahead of her—weeks planned for the maximum of pleasure and the minimum of risk and exposure, and with that cablegram in her bag, signed "Norton"? Again she sighed; her lips parted. She murmured:

"Engagements . . . appointments . . ."

"Oh yes!" he said rapidly, impatiently—this man used to power. "I know you're not staying in New York. You're off to give some little lectures here and there. I have to stay in New York. Darling, one evening! Give me one evening, Amy. Don't you know how much I want to know you better?"

She shook her head slowly, thinking.

"It's impossible now." She invented: "Friends expect me. . . . I . . . it's impossible *now*. . . ."

A BRIEF silence hung between them. She was waiting, breathless, for him to take her in his arms, for his kiss. Suddenly it came. And after the kiss he whispered: "Can't you feel, child? We're made for each other! Are you really so inaccessible, dear? Tell me the truth."

She murmured and murmured words, fragments, details for him to seize on. He seized. "Then when are you sailing back?" She murmured. "On this ship! Hang. . . . I can't make it anyhow! Listen! I'll come back on the next boat. I'll be in London on September the nineteenth. If I've got to wait I'll wait. Darling, dine with me in London on September the nineteenth."

She yielded herself up to him in a passionate kiss of promise. He held her, and said: "You know you're only a girl, Amy. Just a girl. No man has ever really waked you up before. You don't know yourself yet, you know. Perhaps I'm going to show you yourself, sweetheart. You're the kind of woman who could be very, very wonderful just to one man, aren't you? Am I that man? You aloof little sweetheart,

thinking herself so cold! And still you're half afraid of me, aren't you? Living as you've described your life to me—you don't know what living is! My dear, I could love you so! . . . Why does one always meet a wonderful woman when it is too late!"

His hand caught the black opal swinging below her breast. "This opal, so mysterious, it seems a part of you, Amy. Do you always wear it?"

"Nearly always."

". . . Always?"

She made one of her murmurs.

"Are you a prude, dear?" smiled Valley. "If you are, how I shall adore you for it. . . . Amy, kiss me again; and remember."

So, September the nineteenth.

IV

THE little lectures had been given, to audiences of the most serious women, bent—just as was dear Lady Duske, widow of Sir Ralph Duske—on improving and cultivating and uplifting the world, even by such modest means as discourse on: "Secret Psychology of the Immature," or, more gravely disturbing and important: "Is Sex Life Significant?" It was understood that Sir Ralph—who had been a high, refined type—had thought not.

The short lecture tour that Mr. Merriam—through some agency or other—had arranged for her on receipt of her letter from England, "*I want to escape again*"—was mainly in very small towns, six of them, a hundred dollars a time and expenses. And now the comic month of lecturing was over and she was traveling through Idaho towards Norton. She had had sweet letters from Bernard, but he was behind her. Norton was in the foreground of the picture. Merriam, the instigator of all this, was, curiously enough, not in it at all.

Merriam—that had happened four years ago; it had been amazing; a fiery, exultant experience; he was a man of vast affairs in a whirl of theatrical and artistic enterprises always. He had said: "Let me know if you want to escape again from the old ladies and all you tell me of. It's been good, hasn't it? Good-bye, sweet girl. Good-bye. Good-bye."

No sign of life from him on this trip though. Well, of course, it was all over. She did not even know at this moment where he was; in Chicago, perhaps, trying out a new play for the fall, or trying one out at Buffalo or Philadelphia.

As she travelled towards Norton in the dusty, commodious Pullman, she closed her eyes and remembered Merriam; wondered enjoyably how many people looked below the exterior—"queer little man"—past the striking head with its red hair, the pale, swift eyes, and the mellow voice, to get the panther strength of his shoulders, the whole virility of him. She could still see him. But it was over. Over.

She registered a decision to write and thank him, before she left, for the arrangements she had found so nicely made; and Norton's face rose before her, fresh, adoring.

At Yellowstone Norton was to meet her with his car, sweep her to his summer camp away up among the terrestrial mountains, the lakes, the vast gorges that she imagined, the pine forests, the rivers with their torrential falls. She had his cable still in her hand-bag.

HE was there—big, sunburnt boy, not so long down from Yale. A glow came into her eyes as she looked at him, but nothing like the glow that lit his. He had a battered Packard to receive her and her suitcases. They did not embrace on the station; he was in love with her, but also in awe of her, because she was so cool, so dainty, so fastidious, and so aloof from all men except himself. He thrilled all through to the mightiness of his conquest and his privileges, and tried to throttle himself down. It was evening.

"Let's have dinner at a place you'd like, not so far away—Old Faithful Inn," he murmured reverently, "and then drive right on into the night. We'll have to, if you won't be tired."

"Tired!"

"Well, you're my delicate lady."

Presently the Packard was rushing through the Madison Canyon. Behind Tobacco Root Range the sun was setting in mighty colours. The sun went, and the moonlight came; moon and stars; hot air, windless except for the wind of

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their going; soft as silk. The mountains and the forests thrust up into the sky.

Honeymoon.

There in his summer camp of three log cabins—two of which stayed empty; he hadn't brought any servant, ". . . because I know how you feel about all this, delicate lady; even an old guide isn't to know anything of this"—he waited on her himself. No one but this unofficial bridegroom saw her in her silk shirt and her shorts looking so adorable and so vital; or saw her swimming beside him in the lake beside which his camp was built. It was a small lake; insignificant to fishermen and hunters; his camp had been built there from a desire for solitude; they were gloriously alone.

The harvest moon would rise over the heads of the rocky Tetans, and the lake would shimmer before them, a great mirror of silver with dark shadows as clearly painted upon it as if some giant had wielded a black brush. It would be:

"I can't realise I've got you. That other time—it's so long ago that I never believed it could happen again."

"But I've written, boy."

"I've nearly come over to your country to—just to see how you looked."

"Listen! You mustn't."

"I couldn't. Hadn't the dollars. My dad keeps me on pretty short tether. What do dollars matter? I'm rich—with you!"

How young! How sweet!

It would be:

"I don't see," doggedly, "why we can't marry. I haven't made much yet. But then you're so simple, you wouldn't care. I don't see——"

She had a perfect answer to that always, sad and tender: "I'm too old for you, dear boy. Yes, I'm thirty-two. Too old."

"Oh, gosh! Age! Shucks! You're a girl—just a girl. I'm more grown-up than you. I know far more."

How young! How sweet!

"**Y**OU'VE told me all about your quiet life with those old ladies; that sump of a husband too old for you. No real man at all in your life till I came along! Are you going to quit with men altogether then, honey?"

"Except you, boy dear. Except you." And then she would croon. "And never, never again, even with you."

His quick, sensitive alarm: "Oh, you aren't sorry? You don't regret? I'd rather kill myself than give you one regret——"

How young! How sweet! And he meant it. She loved being with him, so young and sweet and anxious, and passionate—the big, bronzed baby—by this lake, under this moon, walled high by those peaks, those armies of pines.

"I . . . shan't . . . regret."

He looked at her almost with awe. "I guess it surely takes courage for a woman to do what you've done; to come out here alone with me even though I love you enough to keep a mile away from you, if you want me to."

"But I didn't come here to live a mile away from you."

That moon! And even if she wore the masculinity of shirt and shorts, he knew intriguingly that there was that great opal sleeping against her white body under the shirt.

"Aw! Gosh! Honey! Darling! Baby! . . ."

They experienced a great storm together—lovely, exultant storm—but she did not tell him so, because she divined that he wanted to play Big-Protector. So young and sweet! The storm appeared slowly in degrees from a clear blue sky. Snowy clouds drifted over, and all the pines sighed. The mirror of the lake was rippled. The mountains drummed with thunder. The sage brush in the meadows bowed and twisted. There came a wondrous lightning flash against a grey-black peak. The lightning crackled and struck. A tree smoked. The lake tossed in white wave-crests all lashed by the onslaughts of wind. An enormous downpour of rain drenched the earth.

The resin smell of wet sage brush rose sweetly afterwards. All the clouds lifted and edged away, hurrying to leave the sky clear for the effects of sunset. And the wind sank and the lake was still, lying as if spent, a ruby pool under the red gorgeousness of the sky.

Passion! Passion of earth and sky. Passion of the boy who hugged her in his arms through the storm. Passion in

herself. Passion. How she ate and drank it! Lying against the Big-Protector breast—ah, how dear of him!—she seemed to hear, hazily, a voice, saying something again. "Life," said the voice, "is made up of sensations." Merriam had instructed her thus four years ago. It was true.

She put up a hand, felt for the back of Norton's head, dragged it down, kissed him. "Norton. Life is just sensations." Earth and sky were quiet while they lived through a storm of their own.

The day must come when it was over, when the suitcases were packed, when the tweed frock was on once more, when the Packard was ready—outside Honey-moon Cabin.

"I can't believe we're going; *you're* going—from me." How fiercely he held her! "Yes, yes, I know I've promised. I'm not going to follow, nor write to you much. If you say it's over, it's over. I don't want you to have one little teeny regret. But kiss me again, Baby. Baby, I—I—I—I just must come to New York and see you off. Yes! They won't expect me home from this vacation yet—not back at dad's office yet. So, see Baby. You're such a lonely girl—only got me. I'm coming."

V

WHY not?

She travelled back to New York just in time to catch the boat, and Norton was with her.

Reserved and quiet, she stepped on board.

The boy was in an agony of parting; an agony which, she insisted, for her sake he should hide! Poor darling! Only, with her cool, clear look into the common sense of things, she knew that it wouldn't last; that when the ship slid from the pier most of his agony would slide from him too.

There was very little time for good-byes, anyway. That was always best. But:

"We'll dream again." Who had said that? She thought back. Why, that was "little queer man" Merriam too.

Suddenly, as she stood with Norton against the bulwark, watching the east-bound passengers—a sparse number this time of the year—coming aboard, she

saw, hurrying up the gangway, a burly man, with an air of power. Simon Valley was not losing sight of her so easily! Simon Valley also had come to see her off—to ratify that September the nineteenth appointment.

"What is it?" Norton murmured jealously. "A friend?"

"Just an acquaintance who—who knows friends of mine. *Quite* unexpected! Darling boy, play up!"

Then, just before Valley reached her, someone else came bounding up the companion from a search of the deck below, saw her, saw Norton, checked a rush of emotion and a rush of speech, said easily: "Ah, Lady Duske, here you are. I happened to be in New York and remembered you were sailing to-day."

Bernard had come up from Washington to say "good-bye."

But Norton was with her; and now Simon Valley, saying in his powerful voice, looking at the other two men with his speculative eyes: "Ah, Lady Duske, I was quite afraid I wouldn't be in time. You remember that I told you I should see you off if I was in New York, and I am a tiresome fellow who always keeps his word." He gave Bernard a nod of recognition: "Here *you* are, too."

She introduced Norton to them both.

"Play up!" she had said to the boy. And he remarked: "I'm only just back from camping right out in the middle of Idaho, and my Aunt Jane told me I'd got to hare away at once and see a charming lady off on this ship."

His "Aunt Jane"! The lamb!

She stood easy and poised, chatting without a qualm. Men were nice. Men were very nice. Trust them. They were wonderful. Listen to them all playing up! "I'm really in New York meeting my wife, who is landing to-morrow, and we're going through to Japan. Yes, Tokio for the next year for us." And Valley, with his polite concern: "I wish I could have had the pleasure of seeing you while you were over here, Lady Duske. But you're a busy lecturing lady I understand." And the boy addressing her as a charming stranger met rather too late!

"Shan't we go down and sit in my stateroom?"

Technique

SHE went down with her three cavaliers.

The same stateroom.

And then Bernard inquired politely: "Were you on this deck before?"

And each man was thinking with a secret satisfaction: "If either of these fellows had the slightest idea of how wonderful she can be! . . . But thank God for fools!" And each man was playing up.

Ah, men were nice. Men were chivalrous; disciplined admirably; well behaved.

"Someone has sent me some cigarettes," she said, unwrapping a package on her dressing-table, "that is *very* kind of someone." It would be Norton. "That must be your Aunt Jane. Shall we smoke?"

Big, unmistakable flower-boxes lay on her bed. She touched them. Neither Valley nor Bernard batted an eyelash. "Isn't that lovely?" she said with feeling. "Those will be from those dear women I lectured to."

There was a sudden appearance in the open door of her stateroom. Here was an erect, broad-shouldered, short man, with pale, swift eyes, red hair on a striking head, a clever look, a melodious voice.

He stood there, arrested for a lightning survey of the stateroom.

Lady Duske put down the cigarette box she was handing, smiled her well-bred smile, moved forward:

"Why, Mr. Merriam!"

"My dear Lady Duske." Their hands met. "I had your kind note of unnecessary thanks, and I really felt I must get at least one glimpse of you before you sailed back. I have been *too* remiss."

She introduced him. His pale, swift eyes played over the others.

"I have the great honour to arrange Lady Duske's lecture tours," he explained to them genially.

Now they were all playing up; each man playing his hand beautifully, each man guarding her fair fame with all his discretion; each man keeping his charming secret, and hers.

And the bells began ringing furiously for all visitors to leave the ship, and stewards hurried down all gangways, calling: "All visitors off the ship, please!"

"You'll forgive me if I don't come up?" She was shaking hands with all of them, smiling her thanks. "It's been too kind of you all to come down and wish me *bon voyage*. So unexpected. I thought I'd be quite alone! Good-bye. Good-bye. Good-bye."

For a full minute she sat in the basket chair by her dressing-table, alone. The curtain was dropped over her doorway. She could hear all the people about to leave hastening along the gangway outside. She looked towards the long flower-boxes on the bed. Bernard's would be his usual white roses; the bigger box would be Valley's. . . . The curtain over her doorway lifted and dropped. She sat very still. Merriam darted in.

She looked up and sighed sharply. She was suddenly tensed all over. She had forgotten him, put him aside, thought "that is over." But here he was.

He seized her shoulders, and kissed her in the way she remembered; the way that, after four years, could remind her in a flash of that first lovely savage breaking of all the damned codes that had been imposed upon her—yes, and upon all women. All women!

HE was like a calm, ordered, resistless whirlwind; shutting the door, wheeling back upon her; saying: "Stand up!" She stood up so that he could crush her into his arms.

"You thought I'd let you go like that! What if I was in Chicago? Couldn't you have come to me? Written earlier? Too proud, eh, too proud? Was the reason why you made no sign just because you were too proud?"

Her silences were effectual answers, it seemed, even to so clever a man. He coaxed: "Little fool to be so proud. And so you were actually going to all the mothers' meetings, and then going, starved, away, were you? Were you, then?"

But again her pale, pouting silence did very well.

"My dear, when I came in just now—saw you with those sumps—I could have laughed. I could laugh when I think how no one knows you but I. No one but I, you white, proud woman. Not one of those fellows ever guessed—ever dreamed . . . Thank God for fools!"

I've often said that. Listen; there's only a moment to spare now. So listen. I'm horribly, devastatingly busy, but I'll breathe again around Christmas. About Christmas I'm coming to Europe—I'll be in Paris. You'll have to join me in Paris. Leave the old ladies for a week. Live again. Live!"

His swift eyes questioned her. She nodded with a little gasp; a half-smile. He smiled too. He had a wonderful fascination, this little, short man with the strong panther shoulders. "*Au 'voir*, then, darling. . . . I shall cable you when I'm coming."

The stewards sang monotonously without: "All visitors off the ship, please."

He was gone.

She looked at her face in the glass; smooth, unmarked; a laugh lurked on it, and she subdued that instantly. She powdered her face, and went up on deck. There below on the pier stood Valley, Bernard, and Norton, all looking up, questing for her; and Merriam was hastening down the gangway to join them.

He was the last across the gangway. It was pulled in. Then the four of them stood among the jostling throng, with faces turned upwards.

Lady Duske leaned over the bulwarks, waved, and nodded, smiling her sweet, friendly smile of farewell.

The ship slid slowly, almost imperceptibly at first; then, gaining definite purpose, left the pier. The tugs were pulling her out into the harbour. The pier and the throng of upturned faces, waving hats and handkerchiefs, receded. Lady Duske still stood leaning on the bulwarks, looking at the busy tugs, the purposeful ferries, and then back at the high-glittering peaks of New York against a brazen blue sky. Good-bye; adventure, good-bye; good-bye. But—

"We'll dream again."

LADY DUSKE turned to go below; the flower-boxes awaited her. But, first, she felt her eyes drawn by someone standing near. Raising her look slowly she saw gold stripes on a uniform sleeve, intensely black hair under a peaked cap. The second officer saluted her tentatively. Her mind was curiously busy for the two seconds before she smiled at him.

"Good-day."

"Good-day, Lady Duske." So he had her name, as well as remembering her personality. "You are crossing back with us, then. You made a very short stay in the States."

She smiled: "Yes."

"I hope we shall have pleasant weather for you again this trip."

"It was delightful coming over."

"I hope you have good accommodation."

"I booked the same stateroom. That's nice, I think."

He said quietly: "B.50."

There was a very brief pause. She said: "It's comfortable to have a room on a deck this weather; one's window open all the time."

"Very nice. Yes. You will be able to keep your window open, I think."

"Of course, a deck is a little noisy, perhaps. People will sit out late!"

"Not this trip very much, I think. People look rather old; quiet. Not many people on board. It's late in the season to be going this way."

A brief pause; her ungloved hand held and caressed the opal that hung as usual from its infinitesimally slender chain.

"I think you will find your deck quiet at night," he said.

And he said: "I'm on night watch now. It's really beautiful this hot weather with the stars out."

She smiled again, not looking at him. But as she moved away she glanced back, and he was standing looking after her. She went below. Bernard's box held, as she had guessed, long-stemmed pure white roses. Valley's was opulent with a sheaf of orchids. She arranged them in vases with a sensitive precision. . . . How densely black that young man's hair was; how discreet his talk, how direct his eyes!

A quiet ship; yes; and she the quietest passenger of them all. When he came off watch at midnight, or at four in the September dawn, how blind the little world of the ship would be! How obviously the ship would be sleeping!

VI

THE old chauffeur drew the old car up sedately on the gravelled drive before the big, prim villa, and Lady Duske roused herself.

Technique

The old ladies were both on the doorstep, trying obviously to control a great twitter, for Miss Annie's dry old cheekbones were hectic, and Miss Elizabeth's garden hat sat askew upon her head.

They drew her in, two pairs of hands upon her.

"Dear Amy."

"Tch, tch! We've missed you. We would have come to Southampton to meet you in the car, but that something really dreadful has happened——"

"We can let Amy get her things off, Annie, before——"

"Tch, tch! I didn't mean—but I'm so upset! How well you look, Amy."

"Those pale cheeks are pink! We've kept tea back. Well, well! We shan't let you leave us again in a hurry!"

"No! No! You'll stay with your aunties now! Not any more business about poor dear Ralph's lectures, is there?"

Paris was four months away; but:

"No, dears, no! I'm settling down at home here with you. There's only—I've had the most awful toothache, and I wrote to my dentist from the ship and suggested I ought to run up to London to see him—about the nineteenth——"

"Dear, dear! Dear, dear, dear! Still, you're right to attend to your teeth."

"She is always right."

"We've kept tea back, and unless you would like to take off your things——"

"If she's going upstairs, we'd better tell her what's happened. You'll be very shocked, Amy love, at what's happened——"

"Miss Ring——"

"Is upstairs packing this very minute."

"Ah, my dears!" said Lady Duske in deep concern.

"I'll tell her, Annie. You do agitate yourself so. Your Aunt Annie is quite ill. She's made herself quite ill. Miss Ring, as you know, love, promised us that she would end that dreadful, wicked affair with that man. Well, Amy——"

"It didn't end!" cried Aunt Annie, quivering.

"Annie. I will tell Amy. It broke out again, Amy. Unknown to us, of course, they must have been meeting——"

"Although we watched. No one can say that your Aunt Elizabeth and I——"

"Annie. You do agitate yourself so. The day before yesterday, Amy, *they were seen kissing——*"

"Just as it was getting dusk——"

"Annie! Just as it was getting dusk, Amy. We had sent her to match some wool, and she must have stolen off to meet this man. It was seen. And this morning the vicar's wife called to tell me."

Miss Annie was unable to restrain herself: "By which time it was all over Hexton. The man's poor wife had been told about it. But she must be a good woman, for she forgave him at once on condition that he——"

"Repudiated Miss Ring."

"Which he did, of course. Naturally."

"We decided at once we could not keep her. That, at least, we owe to the town. The General came in this morning, too, and he agreed that it was our only possible course."

"We appealed to him as a man of the world."

"And that is what he said."

"I AM very, very sorry, darlings," said Lady Duske, in a voice almost fatigued with distress, "very, very sorry indeed."

"Sit down, Annie. You are making yourself ill. If you would care to take your things off before tea, dear Amy, pray do."

"We are longing to hear all about your t-t-travels——"

"There, Annie, your teeth are chattering. Let Amy take her things off before tea."

Lady Duske went quietly up the ugly staircase and she stood again between the flower-patterned walls of her bedroom, looking about her at the water-colours and the text. She removed her coat, took her keys to unlock her suitcases.

But then, through the half-open door, came a sound, a sound to be expected this afternoon in this house, yet which people might have demanded that the culprit should control. It was a sob. And Lady Duske looked up, and saw the companion hovering on the threshold, a little blowsy; red-faced with shame and grief; and, between their tear-swollen lids, look at her eyes!

Lady Duske looked full into the living, reddened, famished eyes of Miss Ring,

but her look was so brief that it was no embarrassment to either of them.

The excuse :

" I—I came to see if I could help you unpack."

Lady Duske emitted one of her little sympathetic sounds ; negative.

" I heard you arrive, Lady Duske," said the companion in a voice hoarse from tears. " And I was glad I hadn't gone before you came. You've heard downstairs all about me ? "

" Poor, dear Miss Ring ! "

" I've loved him ! I've loved him so ! I love him ! "

" Miss Ring. . . . "

" Your voice sounds so sweet and kind, so sorry for me. Oh, you are sorry ! Thank you for your kindness, Lady Duske. Because of your kindness and goodness I want you to believe the best of me. Yes, please, Lady Duske ! There was never anything—anything—really more than just that kiss between us. Nothing more. It had gone no further. Those walks and talks, and that kiss— "

" My poor Miss Ring."

" Because you are a woman I admire so much, I want you to believe me."

" I believe you, God help you," said Lady Duske.

" Oh, if God will help me ! Perhaps He will. . . . I have something here for you, Lady Duske, if you will accept it.

It is an embroidered linen cover for the cushion in your armchair there."

The companion laid a small parcel upon the bed.

" Thank you. Thank you, dear Miss Ring."

THE companion stood now again on the threshold of the room, withdrawing, her eyes looking in a last dim look of admiration upon the other, who stood there so superior—superior—to the sordid storms of life ; yes, superior.

" That is how I always think of you, Lady Duske, looking so remote, so calm, so wise ; just—just with your fingers playing round your beautiful opal as they are playing now. Your beautiful, beautiful opal."

Lady Duske made a movement forward.

" Miss Ring. I want you, too, to take a little parting gift from me. A souvenir, poor, dear Miss Ring."

The opal hung from its slender chain about the blowsy, astounded woman's neck.

" Oh, but Lady Duske ! Oh, Lady Duske ! The thing you've worn yourself—a part of you—to give it to me ! Oh, Lady Duske, perhaps it will make me more as I ought to be ; more like you."

" Dear Miss Ring," said Lady Duske deprecatingly, " if you hope so, I am sure I hope so too."

HAPPINESS

HAPPINESS comes as softly
As the flush of rose
In the sky at evening,
And as softly goes.

There is no trumpet blast ;
It is as gentle, quiet
As the faintest colours merging
With the night.

STELLA REINHARDT.

"May I be quite frank with you?"

"Oh, rather."

"Then I must tell you this. I am fond of you. I will marry you. I will do my best to make you a good wife. But my affection for you can never be the flame-like passion I felt for Augustus."

RIGHT HO,

JEEVES

By

P. G. WODEHOUSE

THE OPENING CHAPTERS

IT was on Bertie Wooster's return from Cannes that Jeeves, as they chatted of this and that, brought the name of Gussie Fink-Nottle into the conversation. Augustus Fink-Nottle, it appeared, was in love with Madeline Bassett, but was too bashful to propose, and he had appealed to Jeeves for advice.

It was becoming a habit of Bertie's friends to take their troubles to Jeeves, and Bertie could not but feel somewhat peeved at the implicit slight on his own resourcefulness and diplomacy. Therefore, discovering that Gussie's suit had not so far progressed very rapidly on the lines laid down by his valet, Bertie took over the case.

As a first step, he despatched Gussie to Brinkley Court, his Aunt Dahlia's country place, where Madeline was staying.

His desire to escape a personal visit to Brinkley Court was defeated by word that his cousin Angela had broken her engagement to Tuppy Glossop. Bertie

felt compelled to leave at once for Brinkley to "rally round"; and thus found himself with two languishing love affairs to straighten out.

Unfortunately, things did not go very well. Owing to a misunderstanding with Jeeves, Gussie's orange-juice was laced with a too-liberal quantity of gin just before he left to distribute the prizes for Aunt Dahlia at the Market Snodsbury Grammar School; with the result that the ceremony went off anything but smoothly, and Madeline Bassett declined to have anything further to do with him.

Bertie's difficulties were not lightened by the fact that Tuppy believed him to be making up to Angela on his own account; and he was definitely out of favour with Aunt Dahlia, whose chef, Anatole—famous through the land for his cuisine—had given notice as a result of Bertie's well-meant efforts to unite the two pairs of lovers.

Jeeves had little encouragement to offer in this emergency, and Bertie was doubtfully considering what his next step should be when Tuppy himself,

plainly in a state of considerable agitation, entered his room. The story continues:

I EYED him narrowly. I didn't like his looks. Mark you, I don't say I ever had, much, because Nature, when planning this sterling fellow, shoved in a lot more lower jaw than was absolutely necessary and made the eyes a bit too keen and piercing for one who was neither an Empire builder nor a traffic policeman. But on the present occasion, in addition to offending the æsthetic sense, this Glossop seemed to me to be wearing a distinct air of menace, and I found myself wishing that Jeeves wasn't always so dashed tactful.

I mean, it's all very well to remove yourself like an eel sliding into mud when the employer has a visitor, but there are moments—and it looked to me as if this was going to be one of them—when the truer tact is to stick round and stand ready to lend a hand in the free-for-all.

For Jeeves was no longer with us. I hadn't seen him go, and I hadn't heard him go, but he had gone. As far as the eye could reach, one noted nobody but Tuppy. And in Tuppy's demeanour, as I say, there was a certain something that tended to disquiet. He looked to me very much like a man who had come to reopen that matter of my tickling Angela's ankles.

However, his opening remark told me that I had been alarming myself unduly. It was of a pacific nature, and came as a great relief.

"Bertie," he said, "I owe you an apology. I have come to make it."

My relief on hearing these words, containing as they did no reference of any sort to tickled ankles, was, as I say, great. But I don't think it was any greater than my surprise. Months had passed since that painful episode at the Drones, and until now he hadn't given a sign of remorse and contrition. Indeed, word had reached me through private sources that he frequently told the story at dinners and other gatherings and, when doing so, laughed his silly head off.

I found it hard to understand, accordingly, what could have caused him to abase himself at this late date. Pre-

sumably he had been given the elbow by his better self, but why?

Still, there it was.

"My dear chap," I said, gentlemanly to the gills, "don't mention it."

"What's the sense of saying, 'Don't mention it?' I have mentioned it."

"I mean, don't mention it any more. Don't give the matter another thought. We all of us forget ourselves sometimes and do things which, in our calmer moments, we regret. No doubt you were a bit tight at the time."

"What the devil do you think you're talking about?"

I didn't like his tone. Brusque.

"CORRECT me if I am wrong," I said, with a certain stiffness, "but I assumed that you were apologising for your foul conduct in looping back the last ring that night at the Drones, causing me to plunge into the swimming b. in the full soup and fish."

"Ass! Not that, at all."

"Then what?"

"This Bassett business."

"What Bassett business?"

"Bertie," said Tuppy, "when you told me last night that you were in love with Madeline Bassett, I gave you the impression that I believed you, but I didn't. The thing seemed too incredible. However, since then I have made inquiries, and the facts appear to square with your statement. I have now come to apologise for doubting you."

"Made inquiries?"

"I asked her if you had proposed to her, and she said, yes, you had."

"Tuppy! You didn't?"

"I did."

"Have you no delicacy, no proper feeling?"

"No."

"Oh? Well, right ho, of course, but I think you ought to have."

"Delicacy be dashed. I wanted to be certain that it was not you who stole Angela from me. I now know it wasn't."

So long as he knew that, I didn't so much mind him having no delicacy.

"Ah," I said. "Well, that's fine. Hold that thought."

"I have found out who it was."

"What?"

Right Ho, Jeeves

He stood brooding for a moment. His eyes were smouldering with an evil fire. His jaw stuck out like the back of Jeeves' head.

"Bertie," he said, "do you remember what I swore I would do to the chap who stole Angela from me?"

"As nearly as I recall, you planned to pull him inside out——"

"—— and make him swallow himself. Correct. The programme still holds good."

"But, Tuppy, I keep assuring you, as a competent eye-witness, that nobody snatched Angela from you during that Cannes trip."

"No. But they did after she got back."

"What?"

"Don't keep saying, 'What?' You heard."

"But she hasn't seen anybody since she got back."

"Oh, no? How about that newt bloke?"

"Gussie?"

"Precisely. The serpent Fink-Nottle."

This seemed to me absolute gibbering.

"But Gussie loves the Bassett."

"You can't all love this blighted Bassett. What astonishes me is that anyone can do it. He loves Angela, I tell you. And she loves him."

"**B**UT Angela handed you your hat before Gussie ever got here."

"No, she didn't. Couple of hours after."

"He couldn't have fallen in love with her in a couple of hours."

"Why not? I fell in love with her in a couple of minutes. I worshipped her immediately we met, the pop-eyed little excrescence."

"But, dash it——"

"Don't argue, Bertie. The facts are all docketed. She loves this newt-nuzzling blister."

"Quite absurd, laddie—quite absurd."

"Oh?" He ground a heel into the carpet—a thing I've often read about, but had never seen done before. "Then perhaps you will explain how it is that she happens to come to be engaged to him?"

You could have knocked me down with a f.

"Engaged to him?"

"She told me herself."

"She was kidding you."

"She was not kidding me. Shortly after the conclusion of this afternoon's binge at Market Snodsbury Grammar School, he asked her to marry him, and she appears to have right hoed without a murmur."

"There must be some mistake."

"There was. The snake Fink-Nottle made it, and by now I bet he realises it. I've been chasing him since 5.30."

"Chasing him?"

"All over the place. I want to pull his head off."

"I see. Quite."

"You haven't seen him, by any chance?"

"No."

"Well, if you do, say good-bye to him quickly and put in your order for lilies. . . . Oh, Jeeves."

"Sir?"

I hadn't heard the door open, but the man was on the spot once more. My private belief, as I think I have mentioned before, is that Jeeves doesn't have to open doors. He's like one of those birds in India who bung their astral bodies about—the chaps, I mean, who, having gone into thin air in Bombay, reassemble the parts and appear two minutes later in Calcutta. Only some such theory will account for the fact that he's not there one moment and is there the next. He just seems to float from Spot A to Spot B like some form of gas.

"Have you seen Mr. Fink-Nottle, Jeeves?"

"No, sir."

"I'm going to murder him."

"Very good, sir."

Tuppy withdrew, banging the door behind him, and I put Jeeves abreast.

"**J**EEVES," I said, "do you know what? Mr. Fink-Nottle is engaged to my Cousin Angela."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Well, how about it? Do you grasp the psychology? Does it make sense? Only a few hours ago he was engaged to Miss Bassett."

"Gentlemen who have been discarded by one young lady are often apt to attach themselves without delay to another, sir. It is what is known as a gesture."

I began to grasp.

"I see what you mean. Defiant stuff."

"Yes, sir."

"A sort of 'Oh, right ho, please yourself, but if you don't want me, there are plenty who do.'"

"Precisely, sir. My Cousin George —"

"Never mind about your Cousin George, Jeeves."

"Very good, sir."

"Keep him for the long winter evenings, what?"

"Just as you wish, sir."

"And, anyway, I bet your Cousin George wasn't a shrinking, non-goose-bo-ing jellyfish like Gussie. That is what astounds me, Jeeves—that it should be Gussie who has been putting in all this heavy gesture-making stuff."

"You must remember, sir, that Mr. Fink-Nottle is in a somewhat inflamed cerebral condition."

"That's true. A bit above par at the moment, as it were?"

"Exactly, sir."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing—he'll be in a jolly sight more inflamed cerebral condition if Tuppy gets hold of him."

... What's the time?"

"Just on eight o'clock, sir."

"Then Tuppy has been chasing him for two hours and a half. We must save the unfortunate blighter, Jeeves."

"Yes, sir."

"A human life is a human life, what?"

"Exceedingly true, sir."

"The first thing, then, is to find him. After that we can discuss plans and schemes. Go forth, Jeeves, and scour the neighbourhood."

"It will not be necessary, sir. If you will glance behind you, you will see Mr. Fink-Nottle coming out from beneath your bed."

And, by Jove, he was absolutely right.

There was Gussie, emerging as stated. He was covered with fluff and looked like a tortoise popping forth for a bit of a breather.

"Gussie!" I said.

"Jeeves," said Gussie.

"Sir?" said Jeeves.

"Is that door locked, Jeeves?"

"No, sir, but I will attend to the matter immediately."

GUSSIE sat down on the bed, and I thought for a moment that he was going to be in the mode by burying his face in his hands. However, he merely brushed a dead spider from his brow.

"Have you locked the door, Jeeves?"

"Yes, sir."

"Because you can never tell that that ghastly Glossop may not take it into his head to come——"

The word "back" froze on his lips. He hadn't got any further than a *b*-ish sound, when the handle of the door began to twist and rattle. He sprang from the bed, and for an instant stood looking exactly like a picture my Aunt Agatha has in her dining-room—The Stag at Bay—Landseer. Then he made a dive for the cupboard and was inside it before one really got on to it that he had started leaping. I have seen fellows late for the 9.15 move less nippily.

I shot a glance at Jeeves. He allowed his right eyebrow to flicker slightly, which is as near as he ever gets to a display of the emotions.

"Hullo?" I yipped.

"Let me in, blast you!" responded Tuppy's voice from without. "Who locked this door?"

I consulted Jeeves once more in the language of the eyebrow. He raised one of his. I raised one of mine. He raised his other. I raised my other. Then we both raised both. Finally, there seeming no other policy to pursue, I flung wide the gates and Tuppy came shooting in.

"Now what?" I said, as nonchalantly as I could manage.

"Why was the door locked?" demanded Tuppy.

I was in pretty good eyebrow-raising form by now, so I gave him a touch of it.

"Is one to have no privacy, Glossop?" I said coldly. "I instructed Jeeves to lock the door because I was about to disrobe."

"A likely story!" said Tuppy, and I'm not sure he didn't add "Forsooth!"

"You needn't try to make me believe that you're afraid people are going to run excursion trains to see you in your underwear. You locked that door because you've got the snake Fink-Nottle

Right Ho, Jeeves

concealed in here. I suspected it the moment I'd left, and I decided to come back and investigate. I'm going to search this room from end to end. I believe he's in that cupboard. . . . What's in this cupboard?"

"Just clothes," I said, having another stab at the nonchalant, though extremely dubious as to whether it would come off. "The usual wardrobe of the English gentleman paying a country-house visit."

"You're lying!"

Well, I wouldn't have been if he had only waited a minute before speaking, because the words were hardly out of his mouth before Gussie was out of the cupboard. I have commented on the speed with which he had gone in. It was as nothing to the speed with which he emerged. There was a sort of whir and blur, and he was no longer with us.

I THINK Tuppy was surprised. In fact, I'm sure he was. Despite the confidence with which he had stated his view that the cupboard contained Fink-Nottle, it plainly disconcerted him to have the chap fizzing out at him like this. He gargled sharply, and jumped back about five feet. The next moment, however, he had recovered his poise and was galloping down the corridor in pursuit. It only needed Aunt Dahlia after them, shouting "Yoicks!" or whatever is customary on these occasions, to complete the resemblance to a brisk run with the Quorn.

I sank into a handy chair. I am not a man whom it is easy to discourage, but it seemed to me that things had at last begun to get too complex for Bertram.

"Jeeves," I said, "all this is a bit thick."

"Yes, sir."

"The head rather swims."

"Yes, sir."

"I think you had better leave me, Jeeves. I shall need to devote the very closest thought to the situation which has arisen."

"Very good, sir."

The door closed. I lit a cigarette and began to ponder.

XIX

MOST chaps in my position, I imagine, would have pondered all the rest of the evening without getting a bite, but we Woosters have an uncanny knack of going straight to the heart of things, and I don't suppose it was much more than ten minutes after I had started pondering before I saw what had to be done.

What was needed to straighten matters out, I perceived, was a heart-to-heart talk with Angela. She had caused all the trouble by her mutton-headed behaviour in saying "Yes" instead of "No" when Gussie, in the grip of mixed drinks and cerebral excitement, had suggested teaming up. She must obviously be properly ticked off and made to return him to store. A quarter of an hour later, I had tracked her down to the summerhouse in which she was taking a cooler and was seating myself by her side.

"Angela," I said, and if my voice was stern, well, whose wouldn't have been, "this is all perfect drivel."

She seemed to come out of a reverie. She looked at me inquiringly.

"I'm sorry, Bertie, I didn't hear. What were you talking drivel about?"

"I was not talking drivel."

"Oh, sorry, I thought you said you were."

"Is it likely that I would come out here in order to talk drivel?"

"Very likely."

I thought it best to haul off and approach the matter from another angle.

"I've just been seeing Tuppy."

"Oh?"

"And Gussie Fink-Nottle."

"Oh, yes?"

"It appears that you have gone and got engaged to the latter."

"Quite right."

"Well, that's what I meant when I said it was all perfect drivel. You can't possibly love a chap like Gussie."

"Why not?"

"You simply can't."

Well, I mean to say, of course she couldn't. Nobody could love a freak like Gussie except a similar freak like the Bassett. The shot wasn't on the board. A splendid chap, of course, in many ways—courteous, amiable, and just the fellow to tell you what to do

till the doctor came, if you had a sick newt on your hands—but quite obviously not of Mendelssohn's March timbre. I have no doubt that you could have flung bricks by the hour in England's most densely populated districts without endangering the safety of a single girl capable of becoming Mrs. Augustus Fink-Nottle without an anæsthetic.

I put this to her, and she was forced to admit the justice of it.

"All right, then. Perhaps I don't."

"Then what," I said keenly, "did you want to go and get engaged to him for, you unreasonable young fathead?"

"I thought it would be fun."

"Fun!"

"And so it has been. I've had a lot of fun out of it. You should have seen Tuppy's face when I told him."

A sudden bright light shone upon me.

"Ha! A gesture!"

"What?"

"You got engaged to Gussie just to score off Tuppy?"

"I did."

"Well, then, that was what I was saying. It was a gesture."

"Yes, I suppose you could call it that."

"And I'll tell you something else I'll call it—viz., a dashed low trick. I'm surprised at you, young Angela."

"I don't see why."

I CURLED the lip about half an inch.

"Being a female, you wouldn't.

You gentler sexers are like that. You pull off the rawest stuff without a pang. You pride yourselves on it. Look at Jael, the wife of Heber."

"Where did you ever hear of Jael, the wife of Heber?"

"Possibly you are not aware that I once won a Scripture-knowledge prize at school?"

"Oh, yes. I remember Augustus mentioning it in his speech."

"Quite," I said, a little hurriedly. I had no wish to be reminded of Augustus's speech. "Well, as I say, look at Jael, the wife of Heber. Dug spikes into the guest's coconut while he was asleep, and then went swanking about the place like a Girl Guide. No wonder they say 'Oh, woman, woman!'"

"Who?"

"The chaps who do. Coo, what a sex! But you aren't proposing to keep this up, of course?"

"Keep what up?"

"This rot of being engaged to Gussie."

"I certainly am."

"Just to make Tuppy look silly."

"Do you think he looks silly?"

"I do."

"So he ought to."

I began to get the idea that I wasn't making real headway. I remember when I won that Scripture-knowledge prize, having to go into the facts about Balaam's ass. I can't quite recall what they were, but I still retain a sort of general impression of something digging its feet in and putting its ears back and refusing to co-operate; and it seemed to me that this was what Angela was doing now. She and Balaam's ass were, so to speak, sisters under the skin. There's a word beginning with *r*—"re" something—"re-cal" something—No, it's gone. But what I am driving at is that is what this Angela was showing herself.

"Silly young geezer," I said.

She pinkened.

"I'm not a silly young geezer."

"You are a silly young geezer. And, what's more, you know it."

"I don't know anything of the kind."

"Here you are, wrecking Tuppy's life, wrecking Gussie's life, all for the sake of a cheap score."

"Well, it's no business of yours."

I sat on this promptly:

"No business of mine when I see two lives I used to go to school with wrecked? Ha! Besides, you know you're potty about Tuppy."

"I'm not!"

"Is that so? If I had a quid for every time I've seen you gaze at him with the lovelight in your eyes——"

She gazed at me, but without the lovelight.

"Oh, for goodness sake, go away and boil your head, Bertie!"

I drew myself up.

"That," I replied, with dignity, "is just what I am going to go away and boil. At least, I mean, I shall now leave you. I have said my say."

"Good."

Right Ho, Jeeves

"But permit me to add——"

"I won't."

"Very good," I said coldly. "In that case, tinkerty tonk."

And I meant it to sting.

"Moody" and "discouraged" were about the two adjectives you would have selected to describe me as I left the summerhouse. It would be idle to deny that I had expected better results from this little chat.

I WAS surprised at Angela. Odd how you never realise that every girl is at heart a vicious specimen until something goes wrong with her love affair. This cousin and I had been meeting freely since the days when I wore sailor suits and she hadn't any front teeth, yet only now was I beginning to get on to her hidden depths. A simple, jolly, kindly young pimple she had always struck me as—the sort you could more or less rely on not to hurt a fly. But here she was now laughing heartlessly—at least, I seemed to remember hearing her laugh heartlessly—like something cold and callous out of a sophisticated talkie, and fairly spitting on her hands in her determination to bring Tuppy's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again—girls are rummy. Old Pop Kipling never said a truer word than when he made that crack about the f. of the s. being more d. than the m.

It seemed to me in the circo. that there was but one thing to do—that is head for the dining-room and take a slash at that cold collation of which Jeeves had spoken. I felt in urgent need of sustenance, for the recent interview had pulled me down a bit. There is no gainsaying the fact that all this naked-emotion stuff reduces a chap's vitality and puts him in the vein for a good whack at the beef and ham.

To the dining-room, accordingly, I repaired, and had barely crossed the threshold when I perceived Aunt Dahlia at the sideboard, tucking into salmon mayonnaise.

The spectacle drew from me a quick "Oh, ah," for I was somewhat embarrassed. The last time this relative and I had enjoyed a tête-à-tête, it will be remembered, she had sketched out

plans for drowning me in the kitchen-garden pond, and I was not quite sure what my present standing with her was.

I was relieved to find her in genial mood. Nothing could have exceeded the cordiality with which she waved her fork.

"Hullo, Bertie, you old ass," was her very matey greeting. "I thought I shouldn't find you far away from the food. Try some of this salmon. Excellent."

"Anatole's?" I queried.

"No. He's still in bed. But the kitchen maid has struck an inspired streak. It suddenly seems to have come home to her that she isn't catering for a covey of buzzards in the Sahara Desert, and she has put out something quite fit for human consumption. There is good in the girl, after all, and I hope she enjoys herself at the dance."

I ladled out a portion of salmon, and we fell into pleasant conversation, chatting of this servants' ball at the Stretchley-Budds and speculating idly, I recall, as to what Seppings, the butler, would look like, doing the rumba.

It was not till I had cleaned up the first platter and was embarking on a second that the subject of Gussie came up. Considering what had passed at Market Snodsbury that afternoon, it was one which I had been expecting her to touch on earlier. When she did touch on it, I could see that she had not yet been informed of Angela's engagement.

"I SAY, Bertie," she said, meditatively chewing fruit salad. "This Spink-Bottle."

"Nottle."

"Bottle," insisted the aunt firmly.

"After that exhibition of his this afternoon, Bottle, and nothing but Bottle, is how I shall always think of him. However, what I was going to say was that, if you see him, I wish you would tell him that he has made an old woman very, very happy. Except for the time when the curate tripped over a loose shoelace and fell down the pulpit steps, I don't think I have ever had a more wonderful moment than when good old Bottle suddenly started tick-

ing Tom off from the platform. In fact, I thought his whole performance in the most perfect taste."

I could not but demur.

"Those references to myself——"

"Those were what I liked next best. I thought they were fine. Is it true that you cheated when you won that Scripture-knowledge prize?"

"Certainly not. My victory was the outcome of the most strenuous and unremitting efforts."

"And how about this pessimism we hear of? Are you a pessimist, Bertie?"

I could have told her that what was occurring in this house was rapidly making me one, but I said no, I wasn't.

"That's right. Never be a pessimist. Everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. It's a long lane that has no turning. It's always darkest before the dawn. Have patience and all will come right. The sun will shine, although the day's a grey one. . . . Try some of this salad."

I followed her advice, but even as I plied the spoon my thoughts were elsewhere. I was perplexed. It may have been the fact that I had recently been hobnobbing with so many bowed-down hearts that made this cheeriness of hers seem so bizarre, but bizarre was certainly what I found it.

"I thought you might have been a trifle peeved," I said.

"Peeved?"

"By Gussie's manœuvres on the platform this afternoon. I confess that I had rather expected the tapping foot and the drawn brow."

"Nonsense. What was there to be peeved about? I took the whole thing as a great compliment, proud to feel that any drink from my cellars could have produced such a majestic jag. It restores one's faith in post-war whisky. Besides, I couldn't be peeved at anything to-night. I am like a little child clapping its hands and dancing in the sunshine. For though it has been some time getting a move on, Bertie, the sun has at last broken through the clouds. Ring out those joy bells. Anatole has withdrawn his notice."

"What? Oh, very hearty congratulations."

"Thanks. Yes, I worked on him like a beaver after I got back this after-

noon, and finally, vowing he would ne'er consent, he consented. He stays on, praises be, and the way I look at it now is that God's in His heaven and all's right with——"

She broke off. The door had opened, and we were plus a butler.

"Hullo, Seppings," said Aunt Dahlia. "I thought you had gone."

"Not yet, madam."

"Well, I hope you will all have a good time."

"Thank you, madam."

"Was there something you wanted to see me about?"

"Yes, madam. It is with reference to Monsieur Anatole. Is it by your wish, madam, that Mr. Fink-Nottle is making faces at Monsieur Anatole through the skylight of his bedroom?"

XX

THERE was one of those longish silences. Pregnant, I believe, is what they're generally called. Aunt looked at butler. Butler looked at aunt. I looked at both of them. An eerie stillness seemed to envelop the room like a linseed poultice. I happened to be biting on a slice of apple in my fruit salad at the moment, and it sounded as if Carnera had jumped off the top of the Eiffel Tower onto a cucumber frame.

Aunt Dahlia steadied herself against the sideboard, and spoke in a low, husky voice:

"Faces?"

"Yes, madam."

"Through the skylight?"

"Yes, madam."

"You mean he's sitting on the roof?"

"Yes, madam. It has upset Monsieur Anatole very much."

I suppose it was that word "upset" that touched Aunt Dahlia off. Experience had taught her what happened when Anatole got upset. I had always known her as a woman who was quite active on her pins, but I had never suspected her of being capable of the magnificent burst of speed which she now showed. Pausing merely to get a rich hunting-field expletive off her chest, she was out of the room and making for the stairs before I could

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swallow a sliver of—I think—banana. And feeling, as I had felt when I got that telegram of hers about Angela and Tuppy, that my place was by her side, I put down my plate and hastened after her, Seppings following at a loping gallop.

I say that my place was by her side, but it was not so dashed easy to get there, for she was setting a cracking pace. At the top of the first flight she must have led by a matter of half a dozen lengths, and was still shaking off my challenge when she rounded into the second. At the next landing, however the gruelling going appeared to tell on her, for she slackened off a trifle and showed symptoms of roaring, and by the time we were in the straight we were running practically neck and neck. Our entry into Anatole's room was as close a finish as you could have wished to see.

Result :

1. *Aunt Dahlia.*
2. *Bertram.*
3. *Seppings.*

Won by a short head. Half a staircase separated second and third.

The first thing that met the eye on entering was Anatole. This wizard of the cooking-stove is a tubby little man with a moustache of the outsize or soup-strainer type, and you can generally take a line through it as to the state of his emotions. When all is well, it turns up at the ends like a sergeant-major's. When the soul is bruised, it droops.

It was dropping now, striking a sinister note. And if any shadow of doubt had remained as to how he was feeling, the way he was carrying on would have dispelled it. He was standing by the bed in pink pyjamas, waving his fists at the skylight. Through the glass, Gussie was staring down. His eyes were bulging and his mouth was open, giving him so striking a resemblance to some rare fish in an aquarium that one's primary impulse was to offer him an ant's egg.

Watching this fist-waving cook and this goggling guest, I must say that my sympathies were completely with the former. I considered him thoroughly

justified in waving all the fists he wanted to.

REVIEW the facts, I mean to say. There he had been, lying in bed, thinking idly of whatever French cooks do think about when in bed, and he had suddenly become aware of that frightful face at the window. A thing to jar the most phlegmatic. I know I should hate to be lying in bed and have Gussie popping up like that. A chap's bedroom—you can't get away from it—is his castle, and he has every right to look askance if gargoyles come glaring in at him.

While I stood musing thus, Aunt Dahlia, in her practical way, was coming straight to the point :

“What's all this?”

Anatole did a sort of Swedish exercise, starting at the base of the spine, carrying on through the shoulder-blades and finishing up among the back hair.

Then he told her.

In the chats I have had with this wonder man, I have always found his English fluent, but a bit on the mixed side. If you remember, he was with Mrs. Bingo Little for a time before coming to Brinkley, and no doubt he picked up a good deal from Bingo. Before that, he had been a couple of years with an American family at Nice and had studied under their chauffeur, one of the Maloneys of Brooklyn. So, what with Bingo and what with Maloney, he is, as I say, fluent but a bit mixed.

He spoke, in part, as follows :

“Hot dog! You ask me what is it? Listen. Make some attention a little. Me, I have hit the hay, but I do not sleep so good, and presently I wake and up I look, and there is one who make faces against me through the dashed window. Is that a pretty affair? Is that convenient? If you think I like it, you jolly well mistake yourself. I am so mad as a wet hen. And why not? I am somebody, isn't it? This is a bedroom, what-what, not a house for some apes? Then for what do blighters sit on my window as cool as a few cucumbers, making some faces?”

“Quite,” I said. Dashed reasonable, was my verdict.

He threw another look up at Gussie,

and did Exercise 2—the one where you clutch the moustache, give it a tug and then start catching flies.

“Wait yet a little. I am not finish. I say I see this type on my window, making a few faces. But what then? Does he buzz off when I shout a cry, and leave me peaceable? Not on your life. He remain planted there, not giving any damns, and sit regarding me like a cat watching a duck. He make faces against me and again he make faces against me, and the more I command that he should get to hell out of here, the more he do not get to hell out of here. He cry something toward me, and I demand what is his desire, but he do not explain. Oh, no, that arrives never. He does but shrug his head. What damn silliness! Is this amusing for me? You think I like it? I am not content with such folly. I think the poor mutt’s loony. *Je me fiche de cet type infect. C’est idiot de faire comme ça l’oiseau. . . . Allez-vous-en, louffier. . . .* Tell the boob to go away. He is so mad as some March hatters.”

I must say I thought he was making out a jolly good case, and evidently Aunt Dahlia felt the same. She laid a quivering hand on his shoulder.

“I will, Monsieur Anatole, I will,” she said, and I couldn’t have believed that robust voice capable of sinking to such an absolute coo. More like a turtle dove calling to its mate than anything else. “It’s quite all right.”

SHE had said the wrong thing. He did Exercise 3.

“All right? *Nom d’un nom d’un nom!* The hell you say it’s all right! Of what use to pull stuff of that like? Wait one half moment. Not yet quite so quick, my old sport. It is by no means all right. See yet again a little. It is some very different dishes of fish. I can take a few smooths with a rough, it is true, but I do not find it agreeable when one play larks against me on my windows. That cannot do. A nice thing, no. I am a serious man. I do not wish a few larks on my windows. I enjoy larks on my windows worse as any. It is very little all right. If such rannygazoo is to arrive, I do not remain any longer in this house no more. I buzz off and do not stay planted.”

Sinister words, I had to admit, and I was not surprised that Aunt Dahlia, hearing them, should have uttered a cry like the wail of a master of hounds seeing a fox shot. Anatole had begun to wave his fists again at Gussie, and she now joined him. Seppings, who was puffing respectfully in the background, didn’t actually wave his fists, but he gave Gussie a pretty austere look. It was plain to the thoughtful observer that this Fink-Nottle, in getting on to that skylight, had done a mistaken thing. He couldn’t have been more unpopular in the home of G. G. Simmons.

“Go away, you crazy loon!” cried Aunt Dahlia, in that ringing voice of hers which had once caused nervous members of the Quorn to lose stirrups and take tosses from the saddle.

Gussie’s reply was to waggle his eyebrows. I could read the message he was trying to convey.

“I think he means,” I said—reasonable old Bertram, always trying to throw oil on the troubled w’s—“that if he does he will fall down the side of the house and break his neck.”

“Well, why not?” said Aunt Dahlia.

I could see her point, of course, but it seemed to me that there might be a neater solution. This skylight happened to be the only window in the house which Uncle Tom had not festooned with his bally bars. I suppose he felt that if a burglar had the nerve to climb up as far as this, he deserved what was coming to him.

“If you opened the skylight, he could jump in.”

The idea got across.

“Seppings, how does this skylight open?”

“With a pole, madam.”

“Then get a pole. Get two poles. Ten.”

And presently Gussie was mixing with the company. Like one of those chaps you read about in the papers, the wretched man seemed deeply conscious of his position.

I must say Aunt Dahlia’s bearing and demeanour did nothing to assist toward a restored composure. Of the amiability which she had exhibited when discussing this unhappy chump’s activities with me over the fruit salad,

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no trace remained, and I was not surprised that speech more or less froze on the Fink-Nottle lips. It isn't often that Aunt Dahlia, normally as genial a bird as ever encouraged a gaggle of hounds to get their noses down to it, lets her angry passions rise, but when she does, strong men climb trees and pull them up after them.

"WELL?" she said.

In answer to this, all that Gussie could produce was a sort of strangled hiccough.

"Well?"

Aunt Dahlia's face grew darker. Hunting, if indulged in regularly over a period of years, is a pastime that seldom fails to lend a fairly deepish tinge to the patient's complexion, and her best friends could not have denied that even at normal times the relative's map tended a little toward the crushed strawberry. But never had I seen it take on so pronounced a richness as now. She looked like a tomato struggling for self-expression.

"Well?"

Gussie tried hard. And for a moment it seemed as if something was going to come through. But in the end it turned out nothing more than a sort of death-rattle.

"Oh, take him away, Bertie, and put ice on his head," said Aunt Dahlia, giving the thing up. And she turned to tackle what looked like the rather man's-size job of soothing Anatole, who was now carrying on a muttered conversation with himself in a rapid sort of way.

Seeming to feel that the situation was one to which he could not do justice in Bingo-cum-Maloney Anglo-American, he had fallen back on his native tongue. Words like "*marminton de Domange*," "*pignouf*," "*hurlubier*," and "*roustisseur*" were fluttering from him like bats out of a barn. Lost on me, of course, because, though I sweated a bit at the Gallic language during that Cannes visit, I'm still more or less in the Esker-vous-avez stage. I regretted this, for they sounded good.

I assisted Gussie down the stairs. A cooler thinker than Aunt Dahlia, I had already guessed the hidden springs and

motives which had led him to the roof. Where she had seen only a cockeyed reveller indulging himself in a drunken prank or whimsy, I had spotted the hunted fawn.

"Was Tuppy after you?" I asked sympathetically.

What I believe is called a *frisson* shook him.

"He nearly got me on the top landing. I shinned out through a passage window and scrambled along a sort of ledge."

"That baffled him, what?"

"Yes. But then I found I had stuck. The roof sloped down in all directions. I couldn't go back. I had to go on, crawling along this ledge. And then I found myself looking down the skylight. Who was that chap?"

"That was Anatole, Aunt Dahlia's chef."

"French?"

"To the core."

"That explains why I couldn't make him understand. What asses these Frenchmen are. They don't seem able to grasp the simplest thing. You'd have thought if a chap saw a chap on a skylight, the chap would realise the chap wanted to be let in. But no, he just stood there."

"Waving a few fists."

"Yes. Silly idiot. Still, here I am."

"Here you are, yes—for the moment."

"Eh?"

"I was thinking that Tuppy is probably lurking somewhere."

He leaped like a lamb in springtime.

"What shall I do?"

I CONSIDERED this.

"Sneak back to your room and barricade the door. That is the manly policy."

"Suppose that's where he's lurking?"

"In that case, move elsewhere."

But on arrival at the room, it transpired that Tuppy, if anywhere, was infesting some other portion of the house. Gussie shot in, and I heard the key turn. And feeling that there was no more that I could do in that quarter, I returned to the dining-room for further fruit salad and a quiet think. And I had barely filled my plate when the

door opened and Aunt Dahlia came in. She sank into a chair, looking a bit shopworn.

"Give me a drink, Bertie."

"What sort?"

"Any sort, so long as it's strong."

Approach Bertram Wooster along these lines, and you catch him at his best. St. Bernard dogs doing the square thing by Alpine travellers could not have hustled about more assiduously. I filled the order, and for some moments nothing was to be heard but the sloshing sound of an aunt restoring her tissues.

"Shove it down, Aunt Dahlia," I said sympathetically. "These things take it out of one, don't they? You've had a toughish time, no doubt, soothing Anatole," I proceeded, helping myself to anchovy paste on toast. "Everything pretty smooth now, I trust?"

She gazed at me in a long, lingering sort of way, her brow wrinkled as if in thought.

"Attila," she said, at length. "That's the name. Attila the Hun."

"Eh?"

"I was trying to think who you reminded me of. Somebody who went about strewing ruin and desolation and breaking up homes which, until he came along, had been happy and peaceful. Attila is the man. It's amazing," she said, drinking me in once more. "To look at you, one would think you were just an ordinary sort of amiable idiot—certifiable, perhaps, but quite harmless. Yet, in reality, you are a worse scourge than the Black Death. I tell you, Bertie, when I contemplate you I seem to come up against all the underlying sorrow and horror of life with such a thud that I feel as if I had walked into a lamp-post."

Pained and surprised, I would have spoken, but the stuff I had thought was anchovy paste had turned out to be something far more gooey and adhesive. It seemed to wrap itself round the tongue and impede utterance like a gag. And while I was still endeavouring to clear the vocal cords for action, she went on:

"Do you realise what you started when you sent that Spink-Bottle man down here? As regards his getting blotto and turning the prize-giving ceremonies at Market Snodsbury Gram-

mar School into a sort of two-reel comic film, I will say nothing, for frankly I enjoyed it. But when he comes leering at Anatole through skylights, just after I had with infinite pains and tact induced him to withdraw his notice, and makes him so temperamental that he won't hear of staying on after to-morrow——"

The paste stuff gave way. I was able to speak:

"What?"

"YES, Anatole goes to-morrow, and I suppose poor old Tom will have indigestion for the rest of his life. And that is not all. I have just seen Angela, and she tells me she is engaged to this Bottle."

"Temporarily, yes," I had to admit.

"Temporarily be blowed. She's definitely engaged to him and talks with a sort of hideous coolness of getting married in October. So there it is. If the prophet Job were to walk into the room at this moment, I could sit swapping hard-luck stories with him till bedtime. Not that Job was in my class."

"He had boils."

"Well, what are boils?"

"Dashed painful, I understand."

"Nonsense. I'd take all the boils on the market in exchange for my troubles. Can't you realise the position? I've lost the best cook in England. My husband, poor soul, will probably die of dyspepsia. And my only daughter, for whom I had dreamed such a wonderful future, is engaged to be married to an inebriated newt fancier. And you talk about boils!"

I corrected her on a small point:

"I don't absolutely talk about boils. I merely mentioned that Job had them. Yes, I agree with you, Aunt Dahlia, that things are not looking too oojah-cum-spiff at the moment, but be of good cheer. A Wooster is seldom baffled for more than the nonce."

"You rather expect to be coming along shortly with another of your schemes?"

"At any minute."

She sighed resignedly.

"I thought as much. Well, it needed but this. I don't see how things could possibly be worse than they are, but no

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doubt you will succeed in making them so. Your genius and insight will find the way. Carry on, Bertie. Yes, carry on. I am past caring now. I shall even find a faint interest in seeing into what darker and profounder abysses of hell you can plunge this home. Go to it, lad. . . . What's that stuff you're eating?"

"I find it a little difficult to classify. Some sort of paste on toast. Rather like glue flavoured with beef extract."

"Gimme," said Aunt Dahlia listlessly.

"Be careful how you chew," I advised. "It sticketh closer than a brother. . . . Yes, Jeeves?"

The man had materialised on the carpet. Absolutely noiseless, as usual.

"A note for you, sir."

"A note for me, Jeeves?"

"A note for you, sir."

"From whom, Jeeves?"

"From Miss Bassett, sir."

"From whom, Jeeves?"

"From Miss Bassett, sir."

"From Miss Bassett, Jeeves?"

"From Miss Bassett, sir."

At this point, Aunt Dahlia, who had taken one nibble at her whatever-it-was-on-toast and laid it down, begged us—a little fretfully, I thought—for heaven's sake to cut out the cross-talk vaudeville stuff, as she had enough to bear already without having to listen to us doing our imitation of the Two Macs. Always willing to oblige, I dismissed Jeeves with a nod, and he flickered for a moment and was gone. Many a spectre would have been less slippery.

"**B**UT what," I mused, toying with the envelope, "can this female be writing to me about?"

"Why not open the damn thing and see?"

"A very excellent idea," I said, and did so.

"And if you are interested in my movements," proceeded Aunt Dahlia, heading for the door, "I propose to go to my room, do some Yogi deep breathing, and try to forget."

"Quite," I said absently, skimming p. 1. And then, as I turned over, a sharp howl broke from my lips, causing

Aunt Dahlia to shy like a startled mustang.

"Don't do it!" she exclaimed, quivering in every limb.

"Yes, but dash it——"

"What a pest you are, you miserable object." She sighed. "I remember years ago, when you were in your cradle, being left alone with you one day and you nearly swallowed your rubber comforter and started turning purple. And I, ass that I was, took it out and saved your life. Let me tell you, young Bertie, it will go very hard with you if you ever swallow a rubber comforter again when only I am by to aid."

"But, dash it!" I cried. "Do you know what's happened? Madeline Bassett says she's going to marry me!"

"I hope it keeps fine for you," said the relative, and passed from the room looking like something out of an Edgar Allan Poe story.

XXI

I DON'T suppose I was looking so dashed unlike something out of an Edgar Allan Poe story myself, for, as you can readily imagine, the news item which I have just recorded had got in amongst me properly. If the Bassett, in the belief that the Wooster heart had long been hers and was waiting, ready to be scooped in on demand, had decided to take up her option, I should, as a man of honour and sensibility, have no choice but to come across and kick in. The matter was obviously not one that could be straightened out with a curt *nolle prosequi*. All the evidence, therefore, seemed to point to the fact that the doom had come upon me and, what was more, had come to stay.

And yet, though it would be idle to pretend that my grip on the situation was quite the grip I would have liked it to be, I did not despair of arriving at a solution. A lesser man, caught in this awful snare, would no doubt have thrown the towel in at once and ceased to struggle; but the whole point about the Woosters is that they are not lesser men.

By way of a start, I read the note again. Not that I had any hope that a second perusal would enable me to

place a different construction on its contents, but it helped to fill in while the brain was limbering up. I then, to assist thought, had another go at the fruit salad, and in addition ate a slice of sponge cake. And it was as I passed on to the cheese that the machinery started working. I saw what had to be done.

To the question which had been exercising the mind—viz, can Bertram cope?—I was now able to reply with a confident “Absolutely.”

The great wheeze on these occasions of dirty work at the crossroads is not to lose your head but to keep cool and try to find the ringleaders. Once find the ringleaders, and you know where you are.

The ringleader here was plainly the Bassett. It was she who had started the whole imbroglio by chucking Gussie, and it was clear that before anything could be done to solve and clarify, she must be induced to revise her views and take him on again. This would put Angela back into circulation, and that would cause Tuppy to simmer down a bit, and then we could begin to get somewhere.

I decided that as soon as I had had another morsel of cheese I would seek this Bassett out and be pretty eloquent.

And at this moment in she came. I might have foreseen that she would be turning up shortly. I mean to say, hearts may ache, but if they knew that there is a cold collation set out in the dining-room, they are pretty sure to come popping in sooner or later.

Her eyes, as she entered the room, were fixed on the salmon mayonnaise, and she would no doubt have made a bee-line for it and started getting hers, had I not, in the emotion of seeing her, dropped a glass of the best with which I was endeavouring to bring about a calmer frame of mind. The noise caused her to turn, and for an instant embarrassment supervened. A slight flush mantled the cheek, and the eyes popped a bit.

“Oh!” she said.

I HAVE always found that there is nothing that helps to ease you over one of these awkward moments like a spot of stage business. Find something

to do with your hands, and it's half the battle. I grabbed a plate and hastened forward.

“A touch of salmon?”

“Thank you.”

“With a suspicion of salad?”

“If you please.”

“And to drink? Name the poison.”

“I think I would like a little orange juice.”

She gave a gulp. Not at the orange juice, I don't mean, because she hadn't got it yet, but at all the tender associations those two words provoked. It was as if someone had mentioned spaghetti to the relict of an Italian organ-grinder. Her face flushed a deeper shade, she registered anguish, and I saw that it was no longer within the sphere of practical politics to try to confine the conversation to neutral topics like cold, boiled salmon.

So did she, I imagine, for when I, as a preliminary to getting down to brass tacks, said “Er,” she said “Er,” too, simultaneously, the brace of “Ers” clashing in mid-air.

“I'm sorry.”

“I beg your pardon.”

“You were saying——”

“You were saying——”

“No, please go on.”

“Oh, right ho.”

I straightened the tie, my habit when in this girl's society, and had at it:

“With reference to yours of even date——”

She flushed again, and took a rather strained forkful of salmon.

“You got my note?”

“Yes, I got your note.”

“I gave it to Jeeves to give to you.”

“Yes, he gave it to me. That's how I got it.”

There was another silence. And as she was plainly shrinking from talking turkey, I was reluctantly compelled to do so. I mean, somebody had got to. Too dashed silly, a male and a female in our position simply standing eating salmon and cheese at one another without a word.

“Yes, I got it all right.”

“I see. You got it.”

“Yes, I got it. I've just been reading it. And what I was rather wanting to ask you, if we happened to run into

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each other, was—well, what about it?"

"What about it?"

"That's what I say: What about it?"

"But it was quite clear."

"Oh, quite. Perfectly clear. Very well expressed and all that. But—I mean—Well, I mean, deeply sensible of the honour, and so forth—but—Well, dash it!"

She had polished off her salmon, and now put the plate down.

"Fruit salad?"

"No, thank you."

"Spot of pie?"

"No, thanks."

"One of those glue things on toast?"

"No, thank you."

She took a cheese straw. I found a cold egg which I had overlooked. Then I said "I mean to say" just as she said "I think I know," and there was another collision.

"I beg your pardon."

"I'm sorry."

"Do go on."

"No, you go on."

I waved my cold egg courteously, to indicate that she had the floor, and she started again:

"I think I know what you are trying to say. You are surprised."

"Yes."

"You are thinking of——"

"Exactly."

"—— Mr. Fink-Nottle."

"The very man."

"You find what I have done hard to understand."

"Absolutely."

"I don't wonder."

"I do."

"And yet it is quite simple."

She took another cheese straw. She seemed to like cheese straws.

"Quite simple, really. I want to make you happy."

"Dashed decent of you."

"I am going to devote the rest of my life to making you happy."

"A very matey scheme."

"I can at least do that. But—may I be quite frank with you, Bertie?"

"Oh, rather."

"Then I must tell you this. I am fond of you. I will marry you. I will do my best to make you a good wife.

But my affection for you can never be the flamelike passion I felt for Augustus."

"Just the very point I was working round to. There, as you say, is the snag. Why not chuck the whole idea of hitching up with me? Wash it out altogether. I mean, if you love old Gussie——"

"No longer."

"Oh, come."

"No. What happened this afternoon has killed my love. A smear of ugliness has been drawn across a thing of beauty, and I can never feel towards him as I did."

Saw what she meant, of course. Gussie had bunged his heart at her feet; she had picked it up, and, almost immediately after doing so, had discovered that he had been stewed to the eyebrows all the time. The shock must have been severe. No girl likes to feel that a chap has got to be thoroughly plastered before he can ask her to marry him. It wounds the pride.

Nevertheless, I persevered.

"But have you considered," I said, "that you may have got a wrong line on Gussie's performance this afternoon? Admitted that all the evidence points to a more sinister theory, what price him simply having got a touch of the sun? Chaps do get touches of the sun, you know, especially when the weather's hot."

She looked at me, and I saw that she was putting in a bit of the old drenched-irises stuff.

"It was like you to say that, Bertie. I respect you for it."

"Oh, no."

"Yes. You have a splendid, chivalrous soul."

"Not a bit."

"Yes, you have. You remind me of Cyrano."

"Who?"

"Cyrano de Bergerac."

"The chap with the nose?"

"Yes."

I can't say I was any too pleased. I felt the old beak furtively. It was a bit on the prominent side, perhaps, but, dash it, not in the Cyrano class. It began to look as if the next thing this girl would do would be to compare me to Schnozzle Durante.

"HE loved, but pleaded another's cause."

"Oh, I see what you mean now."

"I like you for that, Bertie. It was fine of you—fine and big. But it is no use. There are things which kill love. I can never forget Augustus, but my love for him is dead. I will be your wife."

Well, one has to be civil.

"Right ho," I said. "Thanks awfully."

Then the dialogue sort of poofed out once more, and we stood eating cheese straws and cold eggs respectively in silence. There seemed to exist some little uncertainty as to what the next move was.

Fortunately, before embarrassment could do much more supervening, Angela came in, and this broke up the meeting. The Bassett announced our engagement, and Angela kissed her and said she hoped she would be very, very happy, and the Bassett kissed her and said she hoped she would be very, very happy with Gussie, and Angela said she was sure she would, because Augustus was such a dear, and the Bassett kissed her again, and Angela kissed her again, and, in a word, the whole thing got so bally feminine that I was glad to edge away.

I would have been glad to do so, of course, in any case, for if ever there was a moment when it was up to Bertram to think, and think hard, this moment was that moment.

It was, it seemed to me, the end. Not even on the occasion, some years earlier, when I had inadvertently become betrothed to Tuppy's frightful Cousin Honoria, had I experienced a deeper sense of being waist high in the gumbo and about to sink without trace. I wandered out into the garden, smoking a tortured gasper, with the iron well imbedded in the soul. And I had fallen into a sort of trance, trying to picture what it would be like having the Bassett on the premises for the rest of my life and at the same time, if you follow me, trying not to picture what it would be like, when I charged into something which might have been a tree, but was not—being, in point of fact, Jeeves.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "I should have moved to one side."

I did not reply. I stood looking at him in silence. For the sight of him had opened up a new line of thought.

This Jeeves, now, I reflected. I had formed the opinion that he had lost his grip and was no longer the force he had been, but was it not possible, I asked myself, that I might be mistaken? Start him off exploring avenues, and might he not discover one through which I would be enabled to sneak off to safety, leaving no hard feelings behind? I found myself answering that it was quite on the cards that he might.

After all, his head still bulged out at the back as of old. One noted in the eyes the same intelligent glitter.

Mind you, after what has passed between us in the matter of that white mess jacket with the brass buttons, I was not prepared absolutely to hand over to the man. I would, of course, merely take him into consultation. But, recalling some of his earlier triumphs—the Sipperley Case, the Episode of My Aunt Agatha and the Dog McIntosh, and the smoothly handled Affair of Uncle George and The Barmaid's Niece were a few that sprang to the mind—I felt justified at least in offering him the opportunity of coming to the aid of the young master in his hour of peril.

BUT before proceeding further, there was one thing that had got to be understood between us, and understood clearly.

"Jeeves," I said, "a word with you."

"Sir?"

"I am up against it a bit, Jeeves."

"I am sorry to hear that, sir. Can I be of any assistance?"

"Quite possibly you can, if you have not lost your grip. Tell me frankly, Jeeves, are you in pretty good shape mentally?"

"Yes, sir."

"Still eating plenty of fish?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it may be all right. But there is just one point before I begin. In the past, when you have contrived to extricate self or some pal from some little difficulty, you have frequently shown a disposition to take advantage

Right Ho, Jeeves

of my gratitude to gain some private end. Those purple socks, for instance. Also the plus fours and the Old Etonian spats. Choosing your moment with subtle cunning, you came to me when I was weakened by relief and got me to get rid of them. And what I am saying now is that if you are successful on the present occasion there must be no rot of that description about that mess jacket of mine."

"Very good, sir."

"You will not come to me when all is over and ask me to jettison the jacket?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"On that understanding, then, I will carry on. Jeeves, I'm engaged."

"I hope you will be very happy, sir."

"Don't be an ass. I'm engaged to Miss Bassett."

"Indeed, sir? I was not aware——"

"Nor was I. It came as a complete surprise. However, there it is. The official intimation was in that note you brought me."

"Odd, sir."

"What is?"

"Odd, sir, that the contents of that note should have been as you describe. It seemed to me that Miss Bassett, when she handed me the communication, was far from being in a happy frame of mind."

"She is far from being in a happy frame of mind. You don't suppose she really wants to marry me, do you? Pshaw, Jeeves! Can't you see that this is simply another of those bally gestures which are rapidly rendering Brinkley Court a hell for man and beast? Dash all gestures, is my view."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what's to be done?"

"You feel that Miss Bassett, despite what has occurred, still retains a fondness for Mr. Fink-Nottle, sir?"

"She's pining for him."

"In that case, sir, surely the best plan would be to bring about a reconciliation between them."

"How? You see. You stand silent and twiddle the fingers. You are stumped."

"No, sir. If I twiddled my fingers, it was merely to assist thought."

"Then continue twiddling."

"It will not be necessary, sir."

"You don't mean you've got a bite already?"

"Yes, sir."

"You astound me, Jeeves. Let's have it."

"THE device which I have in mind is one that I have already mentioned to you, sir."

"When did you ever mention any device to me?"

"If you will throw your mind back to the evening of our arrival, sir. You were good enough to inquire of me if I had any plan to put forward with a view to bringing Miss Angela and Mr. Glossop together, and I ventured to suggest——"

"Good Lord! Not the old fire-alarm thing?"

"Precisely, sir."

"You're still sticking to that?"

"Yes, sir."

It shows how much the ghastly blow I had received had shaken me when I say that, instead of dismissing the proposal with a curt "Tchah!" or anything like that, I found myself speculating as to whether there might not be something in it after all.

When he had first mooted this fire-alarm scheme of his, I had sat upon it, if you remember, with the maximum of promptitude and vigour. "Rotten" was the adjective I had employed to describe it, and you may recall that I mused a bit sadly, considering the idea conclusive proof of the general breakdown of a once fine mind. But now it somehow began to look as if it might have possibilities. The fact of the matter was that I had about reached the stage where I was prepared to try anything once, however goofy.

"Just run through that wheeze again, Jeeves," I said thoughtfully. "I remember thinking it cuckoo, but it may be that I missed some of the finer shades."

"Your criticism of it at the time, sir, was that it was too elaborate, but I do not think it is so in reality. As I see it, sir, the occupants of the house, hearing the fire bell ring, will suppose that a conflagration has broken out."

I nodded. One could follow the train of thought.

"Yes, that seems reasonable."

"Whereupon, Mr. Glossop will hasten to save Miss Angela, while Mr. Fink-Nottle performs the same office for Miss Bassett."

"Is that based on psychology?"

"Yes, sir. Possibly you may recollect that it was an axiom of the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, that the instinct of everyone, upon an alarm of fire, is to save the object dearest to them."

"It seems to me that there is a grave danger of seeing Tuppy come out carrying a steak-and-kidney pie, but resume, Jeeves, resume. You think that this would clean everything up?"

"The relations of the two young couples could scarcely continue distant after such an occurrence, sir."

"Perhaps you're right. But, dash it, if we go ringing fire bells in the night watches, shan't we scare half the domestic staff into fits? There is one of the housemaids—Jane, I believe—who already skips like the high hills if I so much as come on her unexpectedly round a corner."

"A neurotic girl, sir, I agree. I have noticed her. But by acting promptly we should avoid such a contingency. The entire staff, with the exception of Monsieur Anatole, will be at the ball at Kingham Manor to-night."

"Of course. That just shows the condition this thing has reduced me to. Forget my own name next. Well, then, let's just try to envisage. Bong goes

the bell. Gussie rushes and grabs the Bassett. . . . Wait. Why wouldn't she simply walk downstairs?"

"YOU are overlooking the effect of the sudden alarm on the feminine temperament, sir."

"That's true."

"Miss Bassett's impulse, I would imagine, sir, would be to leap from her window."

"Well, that's worse. We don't want her spread out in a sort of *purée* on the lawn. It seems to me that the flaw in this scheme of yours, Jeeves, is that it's going to litter the garden with mangled corpses."

"No, sir. You will recall that Mr. Travers' fear of burglars has caused him to have stout bars fixed to all the windows."

"Of course, yes. Well, it sounds all right," I said, though still a bit doubtfully. "Quite possibly it may come off. But I have a feeling that it will slip up somewhere. However, I am in no position to cavil at even a 100 to 1 shot. I will adopt this policy of yours, Jeeves, though, as I say, with misgivings. At what hour would you suggest bonging the bell?"

"Not before midnight, sir."

"That is to say, some time after midnight."

"Yes, sir."

"Right ho, then. At 12.30 on the dot, I will bong."

"Very good, sir."

(Jeeves' plan had unexpected consequences—see next month's "GRAND")

THE TINKER

THE moon's indifference the nightingale
 Protests with song each warm hushed night in June,
 And pairs of brazen lovers down the vale
 Applaud the snatches of his lovesick tune.

A tinker, camping, with the moon is wise;
 Lovers and nightingales may have desire;
 He is content if only there may rise
 Smoke and the smell of cooking from his fire.

C. J. M. TURNER.

Bill

Parker's

LEGACY

By

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

FULL of fine, promising ideas was John Jordan—bursting with 'em, you might say; but one idea that never did strike him was the task next to hand. He always scorned that; and while he dreamed of great things the year after next, what was crying for instant attention got left. And you might say of Johnny that the wonders he planned to do, he couldn't, and the deeds he might have done, he wouldn't; so he ended by darn nearly doing nothing at all.

As his head man, Job Blades, said of him behind his back: he was a proper balloon for soaring; only a balloon ain't no use if you've got no gas in it.

John himself always cried that it was shortness of money stood betwixt him and his schemes, and kept him so humble at "Three Larches" Farm; but in truth the man's own nature, and nought else, could be blamed. Character is all that counts; and a royal prince may go to the dogs, or a workhouse boy rise to five thousand a year and a park.

It depends on how you were mixed afore you was born, and what was put in and what left out.

"You leave that man to me," Milly said. "I'll handle him and tell him all he needs to know. There's something I want to know, too—and I will know."

One clever thing John Jordan did do, and that was to get a fine daughter; and when Mrs. Jordan went home—and not particularly sorry to go by all accounts (for he was a tiring man)—Mildred Jordan had reached twenty-one years old, and was long since got to be her father's right hand.

A towser for work, and big, hearty and patient, and never tired. Old for her years, owing to never having no children to play with; but she'd more common sense in her little finger than her father had in his head. A strapping, big-boned creature, with a fine sense of reality, and brown eyes and hair black as a crow. Tall and sturdy, and a right down nice face, with a fighting nose and a good big chin, firm lips, and very fine, orderly teeth behind 'em.

That did ought to bring the woman afore you.

"THREE LARCHES" was a small farm on the edge of Dartmoor, and you might say poverty looked out from under the tar-pitched roof of it. Yet, thanks to Milly, the place was always water-sweet and

comely inside, and stood up four-square and solid to the task of keeping a roof over the family. It weren't ashamed of itself—"Three Larches" weren't—and seemed in a measure to share John Jordan's sleepless hope that things were going to mend.

And a day came when a new man was due—a man that Job Blades had heard of down to the "in country." So Walter Passmore, the farmer's old horse-man, left, and Bill Parker came along to take his place.

Job Blades was head man, you understand, and he'd been with farmer for a year, and knew the length of his foot pretty well, and had his own plans about the future; and on the day that Parker arrived, with a yellow tin-box and the rest of his wordly goods in a paper parcel, Mr. Jordan and Blades were sowing swedes. The second week in May be the time for that, because every seed goes to ground later on Dartmoor than any place else, and us don't drop oats till end of March, nor venture a potato till April most times, along of the peril of late frosts.

And Parker hove up, and Job called Mr. Jordan to the man, and farmer shook his hand and made him welcome. The new horseman was a powerful chap—fair and red, with blue eyes; and he proved a remarkable good listener, but very scant of speech. In fact, till they got used to his silences, Jordan and his daughter thought he must be tongue-tied; but it weren't so. William was just the listening sort (as are a godsend to the talking sort), and very well-natured and uncommon straight and honest in his mind.

EVERYBODY liked him from the start, and Milly best of all, for the way he stood to work delighted her; while as for her father, he thanked Job Blades many a time for finding Bill, and vowed that it was a gracious sight to see his appetite for labour.

"If us could put our hand on a few million more like him in England," said Johnny, "the work of the nation would be done. But while wages are the first thought in our minds and work the last, we still go down. For why? Because by the laws of Nature, good wages only come out of hard work. And if the

people was to earn big money, they'd get big money and all grow into capitalists, and us should hear no more of the wickedness of capital; but while they won't work, they can't save, and so we move round in a vicious circle, and nobody's witty enough to break it, and the working nations get ahead of us."

He was full of ideas like that, John Jordan was. Never a man said wiser things; and now he aired all his famous opinions for Parker's ears; and Parker listened by the hour, but said nought, and went on with his work the while.

As horseman, he did the ploughing and drove the carts and such-like; but Job Blades was cowman, and looked after the things—stock. They ran a good bit of stock on the Moor, of course, like all Dartmoor farmers; but there wasn't much arable to the place, and that poor and hungry. However, Will set to work and broke up some neglected land, and his master was soon dreaming new dreams and telling how he'd grow wheat presently and astonish everybody.

Milly never turned down her father's ideas, but welcomed 'em, as if they was Heaven-sent, and smiled upon his wildest dreams, well knowing they'd go where dreams mostly do. She had a tolerable tight hold on the farm really, and was amazing practical for such a young thing; and she knew that the way to keep Jordan happy was to applaud his plans. If he had said he was going to grow sugar-cane, or pine-apples, she'd have vowed 'twas the cleverest thought ever come to him.

And she loved him very well indeed, for he was a most kindly fashion of man, and a rare good father to her. He worshipped her, in fact; and he weren't the only one, for by the time Parker came to "Three Larches," a big idea had happened to Job Blades, and, in a word, he found himself much inclined to win Milly, and disposed to think it would pay to do so in the long run.

Blades was thirty-two, and a very handsome man, with russet-red hair and grey eyes. People rather wondered why he stopped on such a poor job, because he was pretty well educated, and very clever, indeed, with cattle, and good for higher things than a poor Moor farm.

He'd gone to Jordan when at a loose