

HERMION

NOVEL
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"MONSIEUR BEUCAIRE"
"THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN"
"PENROD" ETC.

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SYNOPSIS.
CHAPTER I—Sheridan's attempt to make a business man of his son Bibbs by starting him in the machine shop ends in a nervous wreck.

CHAPTER II—On his return Bibbs is met at the station by his sister Edith.

CHAPTER III—He finds himself an inmate of the "New House" of the Sheridans. He sees Mrs. Vertrees looking at him from a window across the street.

CHAPTER IV—The Vertrees, old town family and impoverished, call on the Sheridans, newly rich, and arrange for the young man to go into work with them.

CHAPTER V—At the Sheridan home, Mrs. Vertrees, having secured a position, is introduced to the family.

Mr. James Sheridan had been anxiously waiting for the dazzling visitor to "set through with old Roscoe" and give a bachelor a chance. "Old Roscoe" was the younger, but he had always been the steady wheel-horse of the family. As their father habitually boasted, both brothers were "capable, hard-working young business men." Physically neither was of the height, breadth or depth of the father. Both were young business men's mustaches, and either could have sat for the tailor-shop lithographs of young business men wearing "rich suitings in dark mixtures."

Jim, approving warmly of his neighbor's profile, perceived her excess of color, which increased his approbation. "What's that old Roscoe saying to you, Miss Vertrees?" he asked. "These young married men are mighty forward nowadays, but you mustn't let 'em make you bluish."

"Am I blushing?" she said. "Are you sure?" And with that she gave him ample opportunity to make sure, repeating with interest the look wasted upon Roscoe. "I think you must be mistaken," she continued. "I think it's your brother who is blushing. I've thrown him into confusion."

"How?" she laughed, and then, leaning to him a little, said in a tone as confidential as she could make it, under cover of the uproar, "By trying to begin with him a courtship I meant for you."

This might well be a style new to Jim; and it was. He supposed it a nonsensical form of badinage, and yet it took his breath. He realized that he wished what she said to be the literal truth, and he was instantly snared by that realization.

"By George!" he said. "I guess you're the kind of girl that can say anything—yes, and get away with it, too!"

She laughed again—in her way, so that he could not tell whether she was laughing at him or at herself or at the nonsense she was talking; and she said:

"But you see I don't care whether I get away with it or not. I wish you'd tell me frankly if you think I've got a chance to get away with you?"

"More like if you've got a chance to get away from me!" Jim was inspired to reply. "Not one in the world, especially after beginning by making fun of me like that."

"I mightn't be so much in fun as you think," she said, regarding him with sudden gravity.

"Well," said Jim, in simple honesty, "you're a funny girl!"

Her gravity continued an instant longer. "I may not turn out to be funny for you."

"So long as you turn out to be anything at all for me, I expect I can manage to be satisfied." And with that, to his own surprise, it was his turn to blush, whereupon she laughed again.

"Yes," he said, plaintively, not wholly lacking intonation, "I can see you're the sort of girl that would laugh the minute you see a man, really means anything!"

"Laugh!" she cried, gayly. "Why, it might be a matter of life and death! But if you want tragedy, I'd better put the question at once, considering the mistake I made with your brother."

Jim was dazed. She seemed to be playing a little game of mockery and nonsense with him, but he had glimpses of a flashing danger in it; he was but too sensible of being out-classed, and had somewhere a consciousness that he could never quite know this giddy and alluring lady, no matter how long it pleased her to play with him. But he mightily wanted her to keep on playing with him.

"Put what question?" he said, breathlessly.

"As you are a new neighbor of mine and of my family," she returned, speaking slowly and with a cross-examiner's severity, "I think it would be well for me to know at once whether you are already walking out with any young lady or not. Mr. Sheridan, think well. Are you spoken for?"

the deeper into the past they went, the brighter the pictures they brought her—and there is tragedy. Like her husband, she thought backward because she did not dare think forward definitely. What thinking forward this troubled couple ventured took the form of a slender hope which neither of them could have borne to bear put in words, and yet they had talked it over day after day, from the very hour when they heard Sheridan was to build his new house next door. For—no cliché does any ideal of human behavior become an antique—their youth was of the innocent old days, so that of "breeding" and "quality," and no craft had been more strally trained upon them than that of biding about things without mentioning them. Herein was marked the most vital difference between Mr. and Mrs. Vertrees and their big new neighbor, Sheridan, though his youth was of the same epoch, knew nothing of such matters. He had been chopping wood for the morning fire in the country grocery while they were still dancing.

It was after one o'clock when Mrs. Vertrees heard steps and the delicate clinking of the key in the lock, and then, with the opening of the door, Mary's laugh and, "Yes—if you aren't afraid—tomorrow!"

The door closed, and she rushed upstairs, bringing with her a breath of cold and bracing air into her mother's room. "Yes," she said, before Mrs. Vertrees could speak, "he brought me home!"

She let her cloak fall upon the bed, and, drawing an old red-velvet rocking chair forward, sat beside her mother, after giving her a light pat upon the shoulder and a hearty kiss upon the cheek.

"Mamma! Mary exclaimed, when Mrs. Vertrees had expressed a hope



"Why Don't You Ask Me?"

that she had enjoyed the evening and had not caught cold. "Why don't you ask me?"

This inquiry obviously made her mother uncomfortable. "I don't—" she faltered. "Ask you what, Mary?"

"How I got along and what he's like."

"Mary?"

"Oh, it isn't distressing," said Mary. "And I got along so fast—" She broke off to laugh, continuing then, "But that's the way I went at it, of course. We are in a hurry, aren't we?"

"My dear, I don't know what to—" "What to make of anything?" Mary finished for her. "So that's all right! Now I'll tell you all about it. It was gorgeous and deafening and teetotal. We could have lived a year on it. I think the orchids alone would have lasted us a couple of months. There they were, before me, but I couldn't steal 'em and sell 'em, and so—well, so I did what I could!"

She leaned back and laughed reassuringly to her troubled mother. "It seemed to be a success—what I could," she said, clasping her hands behind her neck and stirring the rocker to motion as a rhythmic accompaniment to her narrative. "The girl Edith and her sister-in-law, Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan, were too anxious about the effect of things on me. The father's worth a bushel of both of them, if he knew it. He's what he is. I like him." She paused reflectively, continuing, "Edith's interested in that Lamborn boy; he's good-looking and not stupid, but I think he's—" She interrupted herself with a cheery outcry: "Oh, I mustn't be calling him names! If he's trying to make Edith like him I ought to respect him as a colleague."

"I don't understand a thing you're talking about," Mrs. Vertrees complained.

"All the better! Well, he's a bad lot, that Lamborn boy; everybody's always known that, but the Sheridans don't know the everybody that know. He sat between Edith and Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan. She's like those people you wondered about at the theater the last time we went—dressed in ballgowns; bound to show their clothes and jewels somewhere. She fatters the father, and so did I, for that matter—but not that way. I treated him outrageously!"

"Mary?"

"That's what fattered him. After dinner he made the whole regiment of us follow him all over the house, while he lectured like a guide on the Palatine. He gave dimensions and costs, and the whole b'ob of 'em listened as

he has pleasant eyes, and it struck me that if—if one were in the Sheridan family—she laughed a little ruefully—"he might be interesting to talk to sometimes, when he wasn't too much stocks and bonds. I didn't see him after dinner."

"There must be something wrong with him," said Mrs. Vertrees. "They'd have introduced him if there weren't."

"I don't know. His father spoke of sending him back to a machine shop of some sort; glanced at him just then and he was pathetically enough before that, but the most tragic change came over him. He seemed just to die, right there at the table!"

"Mr. Sheridan must be very unfeeling."

"No," said Mary, thoughtfully. "I don't think he is; but he might be uncomprehending, and certainly he's the kind of man to do anything he once sets out to do. But I wish I hadn't been looking at that poor boy just then! I'm afraid I'll keep remembering."

"I wouldn't," Mrs. Vertrees smiled faintly, and in her smile there was the remotest ghost of a genteel roguishness. "I'd keep my mind on pleasanter things, Mary."

Mary laughed and nodded. "Yes, indeed! Dainty pleasant enough, and probably, if it were known, too good—even for me!"

And when she had some Mrs. Vertrees' law a home to go to, as if a herd dog were at her elbow, and, smiling, began to discuss a plan to reverse,

CHAPTER VII.

Edith, glancing casually into the "ready-made" library, stopped abruptly, seeing Bibbs there alone. He was standing before the pearl-framed and gold-lettered poem, "Busily inspecting it. He read it:

EVANESCENT
I will forget the things that sting;
The lasting look, the barb'd word,
I know the very hands that fling
The stones at me had never stirred
To anger but for their own scars.
They've suffered so, that's why they strike.

"I'll keep my heart among the stars
Where none shall hurt it. Oh, like
These wounded ones I must not be,
For, wounded, I might strike in turn
So, none shall hurt me. Far and free
Where my heart flies no one shall learn

"Bibbs!" Edith's voice was angry, and her color deepened suddenly as she came into the room, preceded by a scent of violets much more powerful than that warranted by the actual bunch of them upon the lapel of her coat.

Bibbs did not turn his head, but wagged it solemnly, seeming depressed by the poem. "Pretty young, isn't it?" he said. "There must have been something about your looks that got the prize, Edith; I can't believe the poem did it."

She glanced hurriedly over her shoulder and spoke sharply, but in a low voice: "I don't think it's very nice of you to bring it up at all, Bibbs. I didn't want them to frame it, and I wish to goodness papa'd quit talking about it; but here, that night, after the dinner, didn't he go and read it aloud to the whole crowd of 'em! I thought I'd die of shame!"

Bibbs looked pained. "The poem isn't that bad, Edith. You see, you were only seventeen when you wrote it."

"Oh, hush up!" she snapped. "I wish it had burnt my fingers the first time it touched it. Then I might have had sense enough to leave it where it was. I had no business to take it, and I've been ashamed."

"No, no," he said, comfortingly. "It was the very most flattering thing ever happened to me. It was almost my last fight before I went to the machine shop, and it's pleasant to think somebody liked it enough to—"

"But I don't like it!" she exclaimed. "I don't even understand it—and papa made so much fuss over its getting the prize, I just hate it! The truth is I never dreamed I'd get the prize."

"You have to live it down, Edith. Perhaps abroad and under another name you might find—"

"Oh, hush up! I'll hire someone to steal it and burn it the first chance I get!" She turned away petulantly moving to the door. "I'd like to think I could hope to hear the last of it before I die!"

"Edith!" he called, as she went into the hall.

"What's the matter?"

"I want to ask you: Do I really look better, or have you just got used to me?"

"What on earth do you mean?" she said, coming back as far as the threshold.

"When I first came you couldn't look at me," Bibbs explained, in his impersonal way. "But I've noticed you look at me lately. I wondered if I'd—"

"It's because you look so much better," she told him, cheerfully. "This month you've been here's done you no end of good. Anybody could look at you now, Bibbs, and not—not get—"

"Sick?"

"Well—almost that!" she laughed. "And you're getting a better color every day. Bibbs; you really are. You're really getting along splendidly."

"I—I'm afraid so," he said, ruefully. "Afraid so! Well, if you aren't the queerest! I suppose you mean father might send you back to the machine shop if you get well enough. I heard him say something about it the night of the—"

The jingle of a distant bell interrupted her, and she glanced at her watch. "Bobby Lamborn! I'm going to motor him out to look at a place in the country. Afternoon, Bibbs!"

When she had gone, Bibbs moaned pessimistically from shelf to shelf, his eye wandering among the titles of the books. The library consisted almost entirely of handsome "uniform edi-

tion." They made an effective decoration for the room, all these big, expensive books, with a glossy binding here and there twinkling a reflection of the flames that crackled in the splendid Gothic fireplace; but Bibbs had an impression that the bookseller who selected them considered them a relief, and that white-jacket considered them a burden of dust, and that nobody else considered them at all. Himself, he disturbed not one.

There came a plume of bells from a clock in another part of the house, and white-jacket appeared bearing down the doorway, bearing furs, a hat, and, "Mist' Bibbs," he announced, "he's here."



"It's Bibbs Taking His Constitutional."

ma say wrap up wawn f' you' ride an' she cain' go with you today, an' I'd f'git go see you' pa at fo' clock. Aw ready, suh."

He equipped Bibbs for the daily drive Doctor Gurney had commanded, and in the manner of master of cere monies unctuously led the way. In the hall they passed the Moor, and Bibbs paused before it while white-jacket opened the door with a flourish and waved condescendingly to the chauffeur in the car which stood waiting in the driveway.

"It seems to me I asked you what you thought about this statue when I first came home, George," said Bibbs, thoughtfully. "What did you tell me?"

"Yessuh!" George chuckled, perfectly understanding that for some unknown reason Bibbs enjoyed hearing him repeat his opinion of the Moor. "You ast me when you first come home, an' you ast me nex' day, an' nex' day, an' nex' day, all time you been here; an' las' Sunday you ast me twict." He shook his head solemnly. "Look to me mus' be somepin' mighty laudat' bout 'at statue!"

"Mighty what?"

"Mighty laudat'!" George burst out laughing. "What do 'at word mean, Mist' Bibbs?"

"It's exactly the word for the statue," said Bibbs, with conviction, as he climbed into the car. "It's a laudat' statue."

"Hi!" George exclaimed, "Man! Man! Listen! Well, suh, she mighty laudat' statue, but laudat' statue heap o' trouble to aas!"

"I expect she is!" said Bibbs, as the engine began to churn; and a moment later he was swept from sight.

George turned to Miss Jackson, who had been listening benevolently in the hallway. "Same he aw-ways say, Mist' Jackson—I expect she is!" Early that he try 't git me talk 'bout 'at laudat' statue, an' aw-ways, las' thing he say, 'I expect she is!' You know, Mist' Jackson, if he git well, at young man go to pride o' the family, Mist' Jackson. Yes suh, right now I pick 'in fo' firs' money!"

"Look out with all 'at money, George!" Jackson warned the enthusiast. "White folks 'n 'is house know 'im heap longer 'n you. You the only man bettin' 'n 'im!"

"I risk it!" cried George, merrily. "I put her all on now—ev' cent! 'At boy's gin' be flower o' the flock!"

This singular prophecy, founded somewhat recklessly upon gratitude for the meaning of "laudat'" differed radically from another prediction concerning Bibbs, set forth for the benefit of a fair and/or some twenty minutes later. Jim Sheridan, skirting the edges of the town with Mrs. Vertrees beside him, in his own swift machine, encountered the invalid upon the highroad. The two cars were going in opposite directions, and the occupants of Jim's had only a swaying glimpse of Bibbs sitting alone on the back seat—his white face startlingly white against cap and collar of black fur—but he flashed into recognition as Mary bowed to him.

"Jim waved his left hand carelessly. "It's Bibbs, taking his constitutional," he explained.

"Yes, I know," said Mary. "I bowed to him, too, though I've never met him in fact. I've only seen him once—no twice. I hope he won't think I'm very bold, bowing to him."

"I doubt if he noticed it," said honest Jim.

"Oh, oh!" she cried.

"What's the trouble?"

"I'm almost sure people notice 'em when I bow to them."

"Oh, I see!" said Jim. "Of course they would ordinarily, but Bibbs is funny."

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.)