

Three Men and a Maid

By P. G. WODEHOUSE

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FUN AND ACTION GALORE

Here's something new in the way of humor—a broadly humorous novel of English life by an Englishman who has had the advantage of a post-graduate course in American humor, lives in the United States and writes largely for the American public—P. G. Wodehouse. There are not many Englishmen who have succeeded in adapting their talents to American ideas of humor—Charlie Chaplin and Stephen Leacock are two conspicuous examples. Mr. Wodehouse got his education in England and began his literary career by conducting a funny newspaper column. He made his debut as a novelist in 1902 and now has a dozen or more books to his credit. In 1909 he came to the United States and his address is now Bellport, L. I.

"Three Men and a Maid" is clean, full of action and chockablock with amusing situations. The maid is Wilhelmina Bennett, a nice American girl, red-headed and full of pep. One of the three men is Sam Marlowe, an amateur British golfer, son of an eminent London lawyer. Another is Eustace Hignett, Sam's cousin, son of Mrs. Horace Hignett, the world-famous writer and lecturer on theosophy. The third is Bream Mortimer, American; his father and Wilhelmina's father are lifelong friends and are bent on a match between their children.

The story opens in New York. Mrs. Hignett is about to begin a lecture tour. She has Eustace with her; her constant care is to shoe the girls away from him, since she is a widow and Windles, the ancestral Hignett estate, belongs to him. Bennett has been pestering her to lease Windles—a crime in her eyes.

Bream informs Mrs. Hignett that Wilhelmina is waiting for Eustace at the Little Church Round the Corner. Mrs. Hignett "pinches the trousers" of her son. Wilhelmina—Billie for short—thereupon calls the wedding off.

The author then gets his three men and a maid on the liner Atlantic, bound for England. Sam runs into Billie and falls in love at first sight. Eustace mopes in his cabin, heart-broken. Bream is tentatively engaged to Billie. Mrs. Hignett does not know Billie is on board; neither does Eustace. Sam poses as a hero and wins Billie only to lose her. Eustace falls in love with Jane, a big-game hunter, Billie's traveling companion. A pretty lively voyage, that!

Eustace leaves Windles to Bennett and presently the three men and the maid are all at the Hignett home. Sam has rehabilitated himself with Billie by another display of heroism. Eustace and Jane are engaged. Bream is hanging around. Then appears Mrs. Hignett, with red in her eye. Action and fun galore!

CHAPTER I

Through the curtained windows of the furnished apartment which Mrs. Horace Hignett had rented for her stay in New York rays of golden sunlight peeped in like the foremost spies of some advancing army. It was exactly eight; and Mrs. Hignett acknowledged the fact by moving her head on the pillow, opening her eyes, and sitting up in bed. She always woke at eight precisely.

Was this Mrs. Hignett THE Mrs. Hignett, the world-famous writer on theosophy, the author of "The Spreading Light," "What of the Morrow," and all the rest of that well-known series? I'm glad you asked me. Yes, she was. She had come over to America on a lecturing tour.

The year 1921, it will be remembered, was a trying one for the inhabitants of the United States. Every boat that arrived from England brought a fresh swarm of British lecturers to the country. Novelists, poets, scientists, philosophers and plain, ordinary bores; some herd instinct seemed to affect them all simultaneously.

Mrs. Hignett had come over with the first batch of immigrants; for, spiritual as her writings were, there was a solid streak of business sense in this woman and she meant to get hers while the getting was good.

She had not left England without a pang, for departure had involved sacrifices. More than anything else in the world she loved her charming home, Windles, in the county of Hampshire, for so many years the seat of the Hignett family. Windles was as the breath of life to her. Its shady walks, its silver lake, its noble elms, the old gray stone of its walls—these were bound up with her very being. She felt that she belonged to Windles, and Windles to her. Unfortunately, as a matter of cold, legal accuracy, it did not. She did but hold it in trust for her son, Eustace, until such time as he should marry and take possession of it himself. There were times when the thought of Eustace marrying and bringing a strange woman to Windles chilled Mrs. Hignett to her very marrow. Happily, her firm policy of keeping her son permanently under her eye at home and never permitting him to have speech with a female below the age of fifty had averted the peril up till now.

Eustace had accompanied his mother to America. It was his faint snoring which she could hear in the adjoining room, as, having bathed and dressed, she went down the hall to where breakfast awaited her. She smiled tolerantly. She had never desired to convert her son to her own early rising habits, for, apart from not allowing him to call his soul his own, she was an indulgent mother. Eustace would get up at half-past nine, long after she had finished breakfast, read her mail, and started her duties for the day.

Breakfast was on the table in the sitting-room. Beside it was a little pile of letters. Mrs. Hignett opened them as she ate. The majority were from disciples and dealt with matters of purely theosophical interest. There was an invitation from the Butterfly Club asking her to be the guest of honor at their weekly dinner. There was a letter from her brother Mallock—Sir Mallock Marlowe, the eminent London lawyer—saying that his son Sam, of whom she had never ap-

proved, would be in New York shortly, passing through on his way back to England, and hoping that she would see something of him. Altogether a dull mail. Mrs. Hignett had just risen from the table when there was a sound of voices in the hall, and presently the domestic staff, a gaunt Irish lady of advanced years, entered the room.

"Ma'am, there was a gentleman," Mrs. Hignett was annoyed. Her mornings were sacred.

"Didn't you tell him I was not to be disturbed?"

"I did not. I loosed him into the parlor."

The staff remained for a moment in melancholy silence, then resumed. "He says he's your nephew. His name's Marlowe."

Mrs. Hignett experienced no diminution of her annoyance. She had not seen her nephew Sam for ten years and would have been willing to extend the period. She remembered him as an untidy small boy who, once or twice, during his school holidays, had disturbed the cloistral peace of Windles with his beastly presence. However, blood being thicker than water, and all that sort of thing, she supposed she would have to give him five minutes. She went into the sitting-room and found there a young man who looked more or less like all other young men, though perhaps rather fitter than most. He had a brown and amiable face, marred at the moment by an expression of discomfort somewhat akin to that of a cat in a strange alley.

"Hallo, Aunt Adeline!" he said awkwardly.

"Well, Samuel," said Mrs. Hignett. There was a pause. Mrs. Hignett, who was not fond of young men and disliked having her mornings broken into, was thinking that he had not improved in the slightest degree since their last meeting; and Sam, who imagined that he had long since grown to man's estate and put off childish things, was embarrassed to discover that his aunt still affected him as of old. That is to say, she made him feel as if he had omitted to shave, and, in addition to that, had swallowed some drug which had caused him to swell unpleasantly, particularly about the hands and feet.

"Jolly morning," said Sam, perseveringly.

"So I imagine. I have not yet been out."

"Thought I'd look in and see how you were."

"That was very kind of you. The morning is my busy time, but . . . yes, that was very kind of you!"

There was another pause. "How do you like America?" said Sam.

"I dislike it exceedingly."

"Yes? Well, of course some people do. Prohibition and all that. Personally, it doesn't affect me. I can take it or leave it alone."

"The reason I dislike America—" began Mrs. Hignett bridling.

"I like it, myself," said Sam. "I've had a wonderful time. Everybody's treated me like a rich uncle. I've been in Detroit, you know, and they practically gave me the city and asked me if I'd like another to take home in my pocket. Never saw anything like it. I might have been the missing heir. I think America's the greatest invention on record."

"And what brought you to America?" said Mrs. Hignett, unmoved by this rhapsody.

"Oh, I came over to play golf. In a tournament, you know."

"Surely at your age," said Mrs. Hignett, disapprovingly, "you could be better occupied. Do you spend your whole time playing golf?"

"Oh, no. I hunt a bit and shoot a bit and I swim a good lot, and I still play football occasionally."

"I wonder your father does not insist on your doing some useful work."

"He is beginning to harp on the subject rather. I suppose I shall take a stab at it sooner or later. Father says I ought to get married, too."

"He is perfectly right."

"I suppose old Eustace will be getting hitched up one of these days?" said Sam.

Mrs. Hignett started violently.

"Why do you say that?"

"Eh?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh, well, he's a romantic sort of fellow. Writes poetry and all that."

"There is no likelihood of Eustace marrying. He is of a shy and retiring temperament and sees few women. He is almost a recluse."

Sam was aware of this and had frequently regretted it. He had always been fond of his cousin and in that half-amused and rather patronizing way in which men of the thews and sinews are fond of the weaker brethren who run more to pallor and intellect; and he had always felt that if Eustace had not had to retire to Windles to spend his life with a woman whom from his earliest years he always considered the Empress of the Wash-outs much might have been made of him. Both at school and at Oxford, Eustace had been—if not a sport—at least a decidedly cheery old bean. Sam remembered Eustace at school breaking gas globes with a slipper in a positively rollicking manner. He remembered him at Oxford playing up to him manfully at the piano on the occasion when he had done that imitation of Frank Tinney which had been such a hit at the Trinity smoker. Yes, Eustace had had the making of a pretty sound egg, and it was too bad that he had allowed his mother to coop him up down in the country miles away from anywhere.

"Eustace is returning to England on Saturday," said Mrs. Hignett. She spoke a little wistfully. She had not been parted from her son since he had come down from Oxford; and she would have liked to keep him with her till the end of her lecturing tour. That, however, was out of the question. It was imperative that while she was away, he should be at Windles. Nothing would have induced her to leave the place at the mercy of servants who might trample over the flower-beds, scratch the polished floors, and forget to cover up the canary at night. "He sails on the Atlantic."

"That's splendid," said Sam. "I'm sailing on the Atlantic myself. I'll go down to the office and see if we can't have a stateroom together. But where is he going to live when he gets to England?"

"Where is he going to live? Why, at Windles, of course. Where else?"

"But I thought you were letting Windles for the summer?"

Mrs. Hignett stared.

"Letting Windles!" She spoke as one might address a lunatic. "What one might address a lunatic. 'What

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Mrs. J. M. Cruze



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