

EXCUSE ME!

RUPERT HUGHES
NOVELIZED FROM THE
COMEDY OF THE SAME
NAME. T T T
ILLUSTRATED FROM
PHOTOGRAPHS OF
THE PLAY AS PRODUCED
BY HENRY W. SAVAGE.
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(Continued from Last Week)

"Go get him this minute. And bring the poor darling back to his mother."

"His mother! Ye gods!" cried Mallory, wildly. He turned away and dashed into the men's room with a furious "Where's that damned dog?"

He met the porter just returning. The porter smiled: "He's right in the heeb, sir," and opened the buffet door. His eyes popped and his jaw sagged: "Why, I left him here just a minute ago."

"You left the window open, too," Mallory observed. "Well, I guess he's gone."

The porter was panic-stricken: "Oh, I'm terrible sorry, boss, I wouldn't have lost dat dog for a fortune. If you was to hit me with a axe I wouldn't mind."

To his utter befuddlement, Mallory grinned and winked at him, and murmured: "Oh, that's all right. Don't worry." And actually laid half a dollar in his palm. Leaving the black lids hitting over the starting eyes, Mallory pulled his smile into a long face and went back to Marjorie like an undertaker: "My love, prepare yourself for bad news."

Marjorie looked up, startled and apprehensive: "Snoozeleums is ill. He did lute the darkey."

"Worse than that—he—he—fell out of the window."

"When!" she shrieked, "in heaven's name—when?"

"He was there just a minute ago, the waiter says."

Marjorie went into instant hysterics, wringing her hands and sobbing: "Oh, my darling, my poor child—stop the train at once!"

She began to pound Mallory's shoulders and shake him frantically. He had never seen her this way either. He was getting his education in advance. He tried to calm her with ineffectual words: "How can I stop the train? Now, dearie, he was a nice dog, but after all, he was only a dog."

She rounded on him like a panther: "Only a dog! He was worth a dozen men like you. You find the conductor at once, command him to stop this train—and back up! I don't care if he has to go back ten miles. Run, tell him at once. Now, you run!"

Mallory stared at her as if she had gone mad, but he set out to run somewhere, anywhere. Marjorie paced up and down distractedly, tearing her hair and moaning: "Snoozeleums, Snoozeleums! My child, my poor child!"

At length her wildly roving eyes noted the bell rope. She stared, pondered, nodded her head, clutched at it, could not reach it, jumped for it several times in vain, then seized a chair, swung it into place, stood up in it, gripped the rope, and came down on it with all her weight, dropping to the floor and jumping up and down in a frenzied dance. In the distance the engine could be heard faintly whistling, whistling for every pull.

The engineer, far ahead, could not imagine what unheard-of crisis could bring about such mad signals. The fireman yelled:

"I bet that crazy conductor is attacked with an epileptic fit."

But there was no disputing the command. The engine was reversed, the air brakes set, the sand run out and every effort made to pull the iron horse, as it were, back on its haunches.

The grinding, squealing, jolting, shook the train like an earthquake. The shrieking of the whistle froze the blood like a woman's cry of "Murder!" in the night. The women among the passengers echoed the screams. The men turned pale and braced themselves for the shock of collision. Some of them were mumbling prayers. Dr. Temple and Jimmie Wellington, with one idea in their dissimilar souls, dashed from the smoking room to go to their wives.

Ashton and Wedgewood, with no one to care for but themselves, seized windows and tried to fight them open. At last they budged a sash and knelt down to thrust their heads out.

"I don't see a beastly thing ahead," said Wedgewood, "except the heads of other fools."

"We're slowing down though," said Ashton, "she stops! We're safe. Thank God!" And he collapsed into a chair. Wedgewood collapsed into another, gasping: "Whatever are we safe from, I wonder?"

The train-crew and various passengers descended and ran alongside the train asking questions. Panic gave way to mystery. Even Dr. Temple came back into the smoking room to finish a precious cigar he had been at work on. He was followed by Little Jimmie, who had not quite reached his wife when the stopping of the train put an end to his excuse for chivalry. He was regretfully mumbling:

"It would have been such a good shanah to shave my life's wife—I mean my—I don't know what I mean." He sank into a chair and ordered a drink; then suddenly remembered his vow, and with great heroism, rescinded the order.

Mallory, finding that the train was checked just before he reached the conductor, saw that official's bewildered wrath at the stoppage and had a fearsome intuition that Marjorie had somehow done the deed. He hurried back to the observation room, where he found her charging up and down, still distraught. He paused at a safe distance and said:

"The train has stopped, my dear."

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somebody rang the bell."

"I guess somebody did!" Marjorie answered, with a proud toss of the head. "Where's the conductor?"

"He's looking for the fellow that pulled the rope."

"You go tell him to back up—and slowly, too."

"No, thank you!" said Mallory. He was a brave young man, but he was not hearding the conductors of stopped expresses. Already the conductor's voice was heard in the smoking room, where he appeared with the rush and roar of a Bashan bull.

"Well!" he bellowed, "which one of you guys pulled that rope?"

"It was nobody here, sir," Dr. Temple meekly explained. The conductor transfixed him with a baleful glare: "I wouldn't believe a gambler on oath. I bet you did it."

"I assure you, sir," Wedgewood interposed, "he didn't touch it. I was heeb."

The conductor waved him aside and charged into the observation room, rattowed by all the passengers in an awe-struck rabble. Here, too, the conductor thundered: "Who pulled that rope? Speak up somebody!"

Mallory was about to sacrifice himself to save Marjorie, but she met the conductor's black rage with the withering contempt of a young queen: "I pulled the old rope. Whom did you suppose?"

The conductor almost dropped with apoplexy at finding himself with nobody to vent his immense rage on, but this pink and white slip. "You!" he gulped, "well, what in— Say, in the name of—why, don't you know it's a penitentiary offense to stop a train this way?"

Marjorie tossed her head a little higher, grew a little calmer: "What do I care? I want you to back up."

The conductor was reduced to a wet rag, a feeble echo: "Back up—the train up!"

"Yes, back the train up," Marjorie answered, resolutely, "and go slowly till I tell you to stop."

The conductor stared at her a moment, then whirled on Mallory: "Say, what in hell's the matter with your wife?"

Mallory was saved from the problem of answering by Marjorie's abrupt change from a young Tsarina rebuking a serf, to a terrified mother. She flung out imploring palms and with a such of tears pleaded: "Won't you please back up? My darling child fell off the train!"

The conductor's rage fell away in an instant. "Your child fell off the train!" he gasped. "Good Lord! How old was he?"

With one hand he was groping for the bell cord to give the signal, with the other he opened the door to look back along the track.

"He was two years old," Marjorie sobbed.

"Oh, that's too bad!" the conductor groaned. "What did he look like?"

"He had a pink ribbon round his neck."

"A pink ribbon—oh, the poor little fellow! the poor little fellow!"

"And a long curly tail."

The conductor swung round with a yell: "A curly tail—your son?"

"My dog!" Marjorie roared back at him.

The conductor's voice cracked weakly as he shrieked: "Your dog? You stopped this train for a fool dog?"

"He wasn't a fool dog," Marjorie retorted, facing him down, "he knows more than you do."

The conductor threw up his hands: "Well, don't you women beat—" He studied Marjorie as if she were some curious freak of nature. Suddenly an idea struck into his daze: "Say, what kind of a dog was it?—a measly little cheese-bound?"

"He was a noble, beautiful soul with wonderful eyes and adorable ears."

The conductor was growing weaker and weaker: "Well, don't worry. I got him. He's in the baggage car."

Marjorie stared at him unbelievably. The news seemed too gloriously beautiful to be true. "He isn't dead—Snoozeleums is not dead!" she cried, "he lives! He lives! You have saved him." And once more she flung herself upon the conductor. He tried to bat her off like a gnat, and Mallory came to his rescue, by dragging her away and showing her into a chair. But she saw only the noble conductor:

"Oh, you dear, good, kind angel. Get him at once."

"He stays in the baggage car," the conductor answered, firmly and as he supposed, finally.

"But Snoozeleums doesn't like baggage cars," Marjorie smiled. "He won't ride in one."

"He'll ride in this one or I'll wring his neck."

"You fiend in human flesh!" Marjorie shrank away from him in horror, and he found courage to seize the bell rope and yank it viciously with a sardonic: "Please, may I start this train?"

The whistle tooted faintly. The bell began to hammer, the train to creak and writhe and click. The conductor pulled his cap down hard and started forward. Marjorie seized his sleeve: "Oh, I implore you, don't consign that poor sweet child to the horrid baggage car. If you have a human heart in your breast, hear my prayer."

The conductor surrendered unconditionally: "Oh, Lord, all right, all right. I'll lose my job, but if you'll keep quiet, I'll bring him to you." And

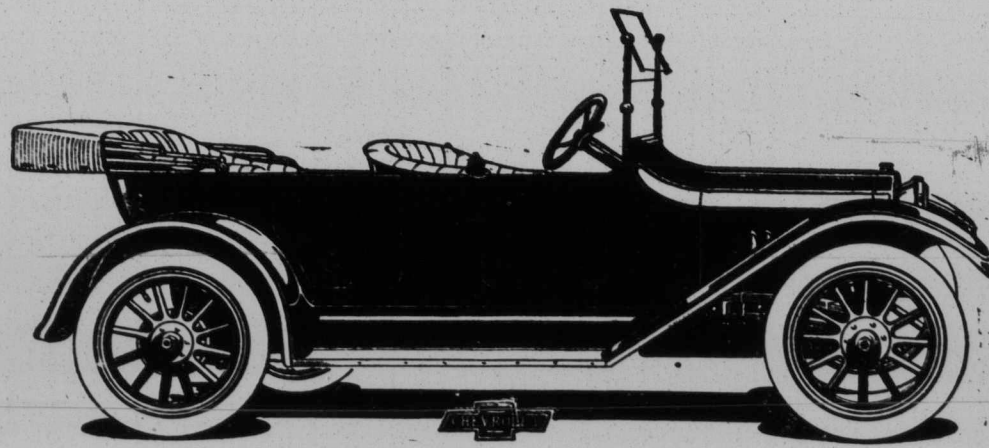
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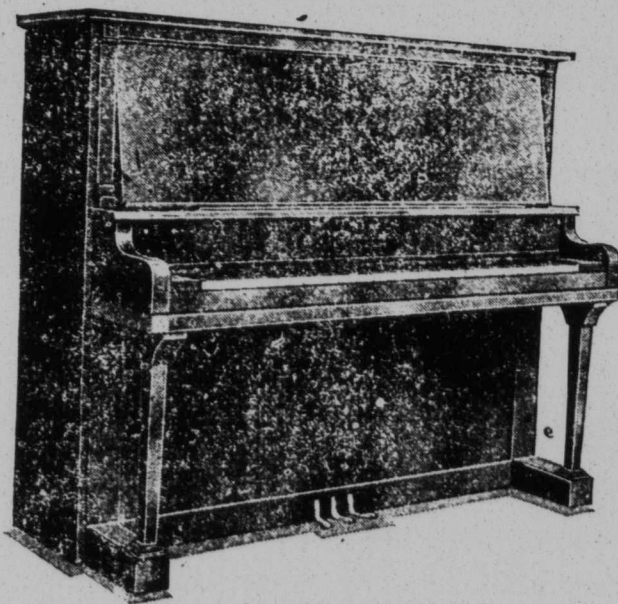


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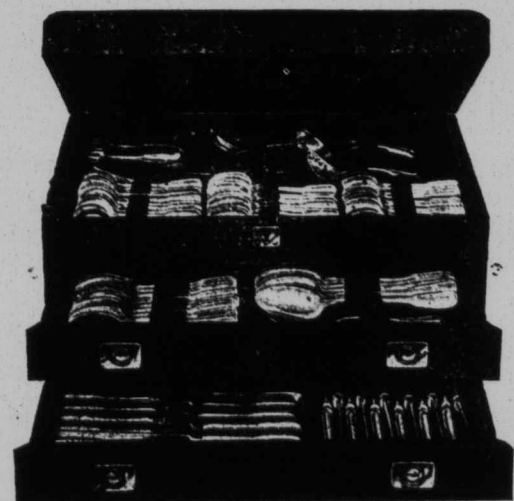
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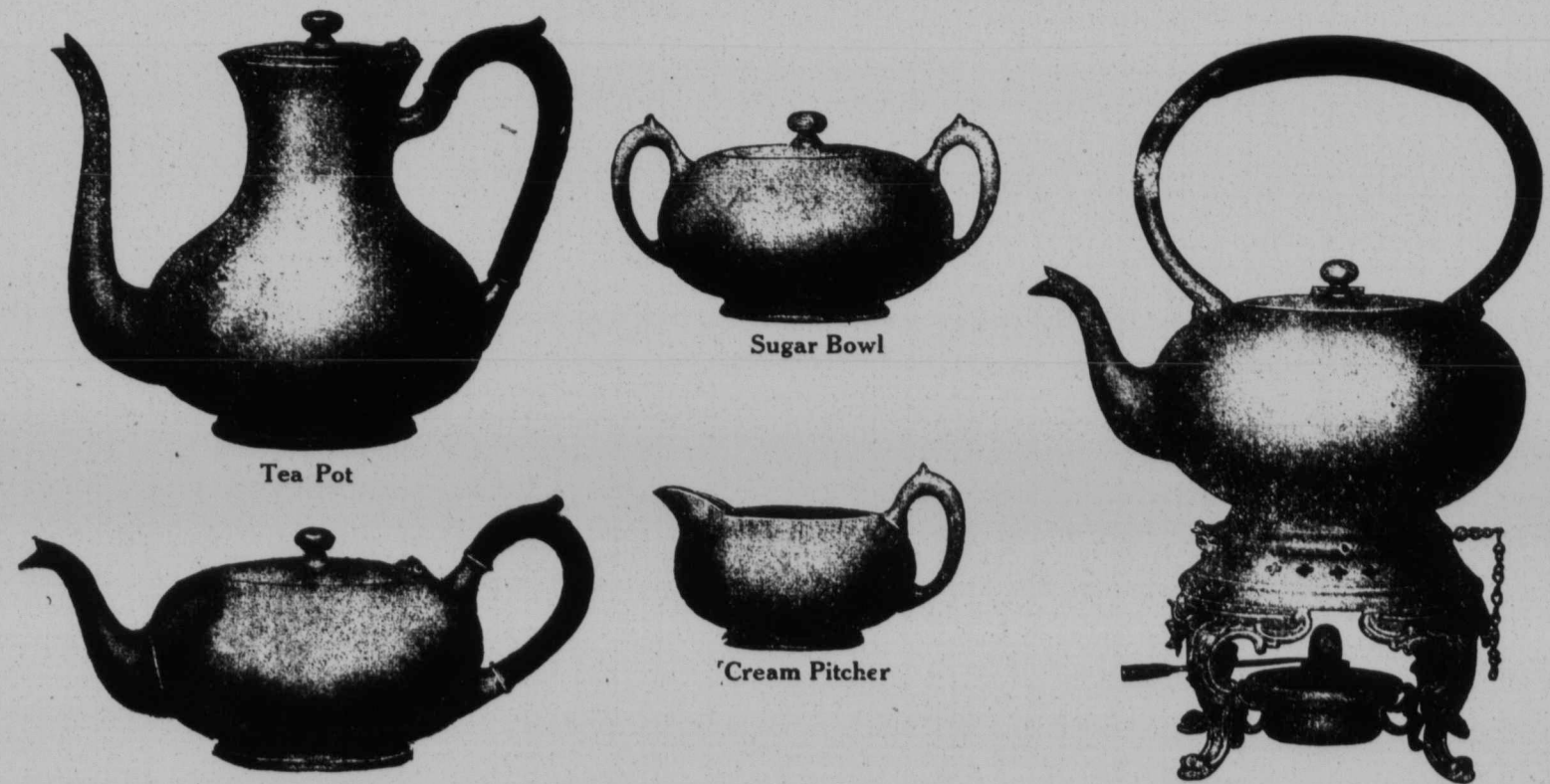
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