

duties, the traffic was too thick. But he left like a man moving in some weird dream in which the world has suddenly assumed a wrong perspective. It was only by a firm effort of will he kept his mind fixed upon the steering wheel, and brought the car safely back to the Maisonette in time for luncheon.

The boy in buttons ran down the steps and carried in the parcels.

"Dinner's ready," he grinned. "An' if you want any grub you'd better be spry."

With a nod, John Grey turned the car towards the mews. He would rather have had his meals with the Smillies, and felt a strong dislike to the present arrangement, as he sauntered back to the servants' quarters.

BELLA, the smart parlour-maid, was a decided flirt. Phebe, the house-maid, supposed to be engaged—was open to further offers; while Mrs. Law, the cook, a stout lady bordering on fifty, stated plainly that she was not averse to another trial of the matrimonial yoke, she being a "lone widder."

The boy in buttons was not a formidable rival. The females regarded John Grey as their legitimate prey. There was a warm outlook before him which it would require the diplomacy of a Secretary of State to win through, and at the same time keep the peace and his liberty intact.

Loaded with flattering attentions, and open compliments, the new chauffeur was forthwith placed in a delicate position that required great tact and caution.

There was no false modesty on the part of the ladies in the matter of seeking information respecting his past life and previous places. He drew largely on a vivid imagination to satisfy these feminine cravings, but the position, full of danger, irritated him.

John Grey was soon made familiar with the family history of the Praggs. Bella, Phebe and Mrs. Law each gave her own version. Thus he learned that Lady Assitas was Miss Pragg's married sister, and lived at Stone Hall in Kept, when she was not at her town house in Curzon Street.

"Sixteen servants, I 'ears they keeps at Stone 'All," said Bella, impressively.

"You can't believe all you 'ears, Bella," said Mrs. Law bridling.

"Mr. Smith told me hisself, he ought to know," retorted Bella. "Quite the gentleman is Mr. Smith, he's 'er ladyship's shooffer. You might like to know 'im," observed Bella, turning to John Grey.

"Delighted," he murmured politely.

"I don't know as I'd trust that man too far, Bella," warned Mrs. Law darkly.

"For why, pray?" asked Bella.

"I may 'ave my reasons, or I may not," replied the cook mysteriously.

Bella tossed her head and sniffed.

"Lady Assitas has three daughters, an' Miss Peggy is the youngest," observed Mrs. Law by way of changing the subject.

"An' she ain't too young," remarked Bella pertly.

"She won't see twenty-five no more," giggled Phebe.

"Lady Assitas can't abide 'er neither," proclaimed Mrs. Law authoritatively: "she's all for the other two wot's married titles, they done well for therselfs," she added impressively, as she helped herself to pickles.

"Enery pass that there beer! Mr. Grey, sir, you ain't a-takin' any," she exclaimed in distressed tones.

"I prefer water, thank you."

"Lor! you won't get fat on water. Ave a drop, do," urged the lady.

"I really prefer water, or lemonade." Bella sprang to serve him.

"Miss Pragg's writin' a new novel," she giggled, as she poured the lemonade for him. "You couldn't guess the title now?" She cast a side glance coquettishly at him.

"Miss Pragg says everything is in a title, I heerd her say it—an' she do get some queer ones an' no mistake. This one is called 'The Dust-bin.'"

With great gravity he declared it to be a remarkable title.

"I looked under the typewriter and saw it myself," Bella assured him with

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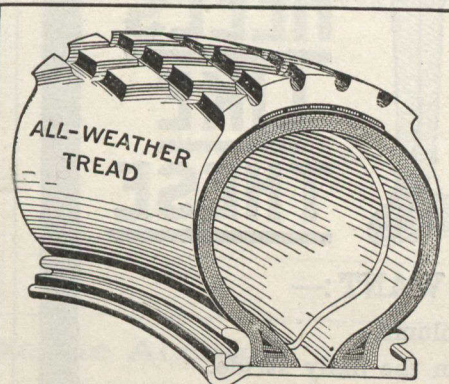
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