

Sauce for the Gander

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powers of initiative, at least, when it came to carrying these into effect, she proceeded in a way quite different from that taken, on a certain memorable occasion, by Mr. Piper. You may remember that, on the occasion in question, Mr. Piper, led by an irresistible impulse towards freedom, just allowed himself to be carried by that impulse, almost recklessly, without heed or care of consequences, and without more consideration for the feelings of those left behind than was shown by the despatch, at the last moment, of a telegram.

"I want a change," said Mr. Piper in effect. "I must have it. I want to taste life, to see something of the big world, to be free for once in this miserable routine existence of mine." So, the means coming in his way, and a certain measure of temptation, Mr. Piper, after a qualm or two of conscience, put foot aboard the boat for Tangier and went out to taste life in the big world.

Now Mrs. Piper felt nothing at all of that irresistible impulse towards freedom. She was of the tame cat species. Home and its duties; the society of friends, children, husband; a little diversion now and again; three weeks at the seaside once a year: all this was nearly enough to satisfy the cravings of her placid nature. Had she lived to the age of a patriarch it would never have been her own inspiration to adventure as Henry had done. Personally she needed nothing of the kind; in fact, she shrank from anything of the kind. Consequently, in arriving at that momentous decision and in determining to realise it, she was yielding to nothing more urgent than the plain dictates of duty. It would be no pleasure at all to leave her home and to stay from it. She knew what her feelings would be. She felt that, wherever she went and for how short a period, conscience would be with her, admonishing always and giving her cause for ceaseless worryment. If duty called her to make sacrifice, no less did it proclaim that in making sacrifice she would be deserting the path of duty—that path which for her began at the front gate and ended by the wall beyond the grass plot and the flower beds there at the foot of the little garden. To that her feet had kept faithfully these thirty years or more, hardly without deviating a step; to stray from it now, even at call of duty and following the example set by none other than Henry, was something of an ordeal.

"How can I?" Mrs. Piper asked of herself, over and over again. "I mustn't," she said. "What will the children think? How can they manage without me? The neighbors . . . the friends . . . the worrying . . . the coming back!" And then, before her once more stood Henry in his grey flannel suit, perhaps enjoying himself in Brittany or Ostend or Paris (good heavens!); and she braced herself and cried: "I must, I will."

In the circumstances, had she been Mr. Piper (or any other man, for that matter), Mrs. Piper would have flung down the fawn-colored socks, gone indoors, packed a bag, left a note (perhaps) on the dining-room table, and departed within an hour. But women, you see, are happily so much the superiors of men in their observance of the laws of conduct; and Mrs. Piper surely, in this respect at least, was worthy of her kind.

It happened, therefore, that, despite certain signs of unrest in Henry which gave her reason for swift action, Mrs. Piper actually spent the most of two anxious days in deciding where to go. There were so many things in the way, she found, so much to find out, so much to plan; always before Henry had directed the travelling arrangements. Madeira was too far, too expensive, too risky; so was Morocco; so was the Norwegian coast; and even against the idea of a small coasting trip, "always in sight of land, frequently drawing up at the side," was the decisive objection of that terrible, merciless sea.

"Think of there being a storm," exclaimed Mrs. Piper. "Think of struggling for my precious life in the cold waves. Ugh! And then the sickness," said she to her harassed self; so with a shudder went hunting through timetables and guides and advertisement columns until at last, almost by process of exhaustion, she decided to teach Henry his lesson by leaving home on at latest the Saturday morning (that is, within three days more) and journeying to Edinburgh.

"I can do that without any changing," said she. "I'll be able to find a good, cheap hotel. I want to see Holyrood. And—and I'll not be very far from home, and I'll be able to come back whenever I like. There! That's settled," said Mrs. Piper, with a great sigh of relief; and turned her mind to the no less complex and exhausting problems of what to travel in, what to take, and how to take it.

How many hours she spent in pondering these matters I know not; but I do know that it was whilst returning from a long round of shopping on the Friday afternoon that all of a heap she was struck by the fact that, supposing her to take four dresses, her long jacket, her three best hats, her mackintosh, her strong boots, her small dressing case, to say nothing of a spirit stove and kettle for her early morning cup of tea—why, then it would be necessary to pack a trunk at least, and that would mean a cab

to the station, and a cab would . . .

"No, no," said Mrs. Piper, "whatever happens I mustn't be seen. Besides, no one will know me in Edinburgh—and cabs are expensive—and . . . Yes. I'll just put a few things in that brown bag of Henry's and slip out quietly."

But before the brown bag was ready and Mrs. Piper prepared to slip out quietly (as though on an errand to the dress-maker's) much had to be done and much endured; and even when all at last was ended—the house perfectly ordered from roof to cellar, everything belonging to Henry and the children clean and mended, ample supplies of household necessities stored away, a letter for Henry carefully composed, money drawn secretly from the savings bank, the brown bag smuggled out and sent by carrier to the station—even then it seemed to this poor faithful soul that the worst by far was yet to come. A thousand conflicting thoughts and emotions racked her without cease. How could she go? How stand there on the step bidding Henry just an ordinary good-bye, and within her such unfathomable stores of secret intent?

"You look a bit pale and worried this morning, Emily. Anything wrong, eh? Bit of a headache? No. Well, good-bye, my dear. Shall try to get home by three this afternoon. Have a bit of dinner for me. And, I say, perhaps you could manage another of those black-currant puddings. I do like them."

How stand on the step hearing Henry say all that, and how at thought of her monstrous hypocrisy keep from breaking into sudden passion of confession—she there with Henry's parting kiss on her cheek, and in her heart the knowledge that when at three o'clock he returned there would be no Emily in the house and no black-currant pudding steaming on the gas stove.

Ah, it was terrible, thought Mrs. Piper. "I'm wicked," said she, closing the door. "Perhaps I may never see him again. An accident on the line—a slip on those cobble stones in Edinburgh—damp sheets in the hotel—anything—everything."

. . . I know I'll be unhappy and miserable," said she, and slowly climbed the stairs to her bedroom. "I know I shall. I'll never sleep a wink. I'll worry night and day. . . . How can they manage without me? Jenny is sure to spoil Henry's toast. The butcher will send in anything. I know I'll find all the account books in a muddle. . . . And those children? What will they think of their mother? How can I leave them with a lie on my lips? A lie. A lie. Oh, it's all a lie!" cried Mrs. Piper, and closed the door, and sinking by the bedside, buried her face in her hands. "I can't go," she cried. "It's wicked. I daren't. I mustn't. I'm afraid—I'm afraid."

But after a while she rose slowly, crossed to the wardrobe, deliberately took out the hat and jacket in which she had decided to travel, and courageously facing the haggard reflection of herself in the mirror, began to dress.

"It's my duty," Mrs. Piper spoke to that drawn-lipped reflection of herself. "If I don't go I'll be sorry for it afterwards when it's too late. I'm going," she said; and then took a hasty look round the room, as though bidding it farewell, went steadily down the stairs, along the hall, and without halt or sign of faltering passed out into the street.

No one called her back. Not one of the children came to the dining-room window to watch her go through the gateway. Not even Jenny ran that morning to the doorway with word of something needed for the house.

"Well—why didn't Jenny come? Why—why didn't the children call her back?" cried Mrs. Piper to herself; so, with a furtive backward glance at the home which perhaps she might never see again, she hurried towards Camberwell Green.

III.

Once in the omnibus and without manner of doubt started upon her journey, Mrs. Piper felt a measure of relief. The die was cast. The worst was over. Remained now only to close her eyes, keep from thinking, and go straight on. In an hour she would be at St. Pancras; in two hours he started on her journey; at three o'clock he hundreds of miles from Henry. What would he say and do when he found her gone? Above the turmoil of the streets, as she sat with closed eyes, she heard his key in the lock, heard his step in the hall, heard him hang up his hat, go into the dining-room, come to foot of the stairs and call, "Emily—Emily, where are you?" And then there would be no response, and he would climb the stairs, and find the letter on the dressing-table.

Was she doing right? By three o'clock there would be no choice of turning back? Hundreds of miles away—hundreds—hundreds! . . . Despite her resolve, and despite her efforts to keep from thinking, Mrs. Piper went miserably, like one bound on a tumbrel cart, all the way to St. Pancras.

As in a dream, her mind working mechanically in unison with her unwilling feet, she followed the porter to the cloak-room and then to the main line booking office.

As it happened, a small crowd of excursionists was in line by the barrier, and as Mrs. Piper, moving slowly with it, came nearer the ticket-window, something like a refrain worked in her mind, slowly, feebly at first, then quicker and stronger with each advancing step,

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"Shall I?" went on the refrain. "It's not too late—it's not too late! Hundreds of miles—hundreds of miles! Shall I? Shall I?"

And, as it happened, it was just when she reached the window that the refrain came to a climax, and then that something forced her to answer, "I shan't," and to pass on without taking a ticket. "It's—it's the wrong place," she explained to the porter, and even he noticed the little gush of emotion in which the explanation came. "It's not Edinburgh. At least, not yet. The fact is, I am going to Edinburgh, but later on, by a later train, you know. I don't feel quite well this morning, not at present. And—and—"

Mrs. Piper stopped short as though at bidding of something scornful in the porter's wondering eyes. She thought a moment. And then, prompted, it seemed, by that inner something which was not quite herself, she said in her own voice and manner, "Would you please put me in the next train for Haverstock Hill and help me to get a ticket. No, a single will do. Second class, of course. And I'll keep the brown bag in the carriage."

So it came about that, nearing noon, when, as she had decreed, she should have been speeding on the way to Edinburgh, Mrs. Piper had really got no further than the doorstep of the villa at Haverstock Hill, where lived her married sister Jane. Since leaving St. Pancras she had found that improvement in appearance which comes only of mental relief; and when presently Jane herself opened the door it was with a genuine access of joy that Mrs. Piper fell upon her neck. Perhaps that access may seem not less surprising to us than it did to Jane—to us who see no reason why the shortening of a journey by some hundreds of miles should work such a change in a mother, and who know that Mrs. Piper was still determined to teach Henry his lesson. But, it must be remembered, there is for one of Mrs. Piper's kind a world of difference between a lesson taught from a hotel in Edinburgh and one taught from a sister's villa in Haverstock Hill. There she would be as at home. There she could think calmly, and rest content; could confide, perhaps, in Jane; could have the satisfaction, maybe, of seeing Henry come in search of her.

"The fact is, Jane," she explained upstairs, "I haven't been quite myself lately, so I thought—well, I thought a little change would do me good, and so I've come to stay with you for a few days. I've left my things at the station—"

"But, my dear! Oh, I'm so sorry. On earth, why didn't you let me know? But you see Herbert and I have promised to go to St. Alban's for the week end, and I'm going to meet him at two o'clock at St. Pancras, and we can't possibly get out of the engagement. Why on earth, Emily, why ever didn't you send me a post card?"

Emily had sat down, slowly and somewhat heavily. Surely it was fate! Through the great sense of relief that filled her passed a slight feeling of faintness, and she knew that she was pale and that her breath came quickly.

"Never mind, Jane," she said, striving to smile and to regain her composure. "It's really of no consequence. Some other time will do me just as well. Of course I ought to have written. But—but—no. It's nothing, really. I feel the heat, and that walk from the station tired me a little. Go on dressing, dear. And then you'll give me a bit of lunch and—What time did you say you are meeting Herbert at St. Pancras? Ah,

That will be rather late for me. I want, now, if I can to be at home before three o'clock. Yes, I positively must be there before Henry. . . . Oh, no matter. I'll treat myself to a cab for once. . . . Jane, dear. Jane, dear! . . ."

And with that Mrs. Piper bent low in her sister's wicker chair, put her face in her hands, and cried blessedly.

By three o'clock she was at home. That night she had a long interview with Henry in the dining-room, and, in course of it, taught him the lesson of his life by confessing to him everything.



RECALLED.

"Professor," said Mrs. Newly-Rich to the distinguished musician who had been engaged to entertain her guests, "what was that lovely selection you played just now?"

"That, madam," he answered, glaring at her, "was an improvisation."

"Ah, yes, I remember now. I knew it was an old favorite of mine, but I couldn't think of the name of it for the moment!"



FINANCIAL WISDOM.

A school teacher was endeavoring to convey the idea of pity to the members of his class. "Now, supposing," he said, "a man working on the river bank suddenly fell in. He could not swim and would be in danger of drowning. Picture the scene, boys and girls. The man's sudden fall, the cry for help. His wife, knowing his peril and hearing his screams, rushes immediately to the bank. Why does she rush to the bank? There was a pause, and then, "Please, sir, to draw his insurance money."



TRUTHFUL.

At a Scotch Burns dinner a number of kindred spirits had foregathered. During the convivial evening songs were rendered by all present except a medical gentleman who occupied the vice-chair. "Come, come, Dr. Macdonald," said the chairman, "we cannot let you escape." The doctor protested that he could not sing. "As a matter of fact," he explained, "my voice is altogether unmusical, and resembles the sound caused by the act of rubbing a brick along the panels of a door." The company attributed this to the doctor's modesty, and reminded him that good singers always needed a lot of pressing. "Very well," said the doctor, "if you can stand it I will sing." Long before he had finished his auditors were uneasy—he had faithfully described his voice. There was a painful silence as the doctor sat down, broken at length by the voice of a braw Scot at the end of the table. "Mon," he exclaimed, "your singin's no' up to much, but your veracity's just awfu'! Ye're right about that brick."