

BROTHER BILL'S ROMANCE

—By P. G. Wodehouse
ILLUSTRATED BY JEFFERSON MACHAMER

Archie Moffam Undertakes to Act as Aid and Adviser to a Love-Sick Brother-in-Law, and Lady Luck Comes to His Aid in Surprising Fashion — "One Man's Peach Is Another Man's Poison" Is His Philosophy — A Story Full of Laughs in the Characteristic Wodehouse Style

"HER eyes," said Bill Brewster, "are like — like — what's the word I want?"

He looked across at Lucille, his sister, and at Archie Moffam, her husband. Lucille was leaning forward with an eager and interested face; Archie was leaning back with his finger-tips together and his eyes closed. This was not the first time his brother-in-law had touched on the subject of the girl he had become engaged to marry during his trip to England. Indeed, brother Bill had touched on very little else in the course of the past week, and Archie, though of a sympathetic nature, was beginning to feel that he had heard all he wanted to hear about Mabel Winchester. Lucille, on the other hand, who was now getting her first instalment of it, was absorbed. She was devoted to Bill, and his recital had thrilled her.

"Like—" said Bill. "Like—" "Stars?" suggested Lucille. "Stars," said Bill gratefully. "Exactly the word! And her hair is a lovely brown, like leaves in the autumn. In fact," concluded Bill, slipping down from the heights with something of a jerk, "she's a corker. Isn't she, Archie?" Archie opened his eyes.

"Quite right, old top!" he said. "It was the only thing to do."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Bill coldly. He had been suspicious all along of Archie's statement that he could listen better with his eyes shut.

"Eh? Oh, sorry! Thinking of something else."

"You were asleep."

"No, no; positively and distinctly not. Frightfully interested and rapt and all that—only, I didn't quite get what you said."

"I said Mabel was a corker."

"Oh, absolutely, in every respect!"

"There!" Bill turned to Lucille triumphantly: "You hear that? And Archie has only seen her photograph."

"I'm afraid," said Lucille, "that father will be the one you'll find it hard to convince."

"Yes," said her brother gloomily.

"Your Mabel sounds perfectly charming, but—well, you know what father is. It is a pity she sings in the chorus."

"She hasn't much of a voice," argued Bill in attenuation.

"All the same—"

Archie, the conversation having reached a topic on which he considered himself one of the greatest living authorities—to wit, the unfavorable disposition of his father-in-law, addressed the meeting as one who has a right to be heard.

A Man-Eating Dad

"I WOULDN'T for the world say anything derogatory, as it were, of your jolly old pater, but there's no getting away from the fact that he's by way of being one of the leading man-eating fishes. I mean to say, he's a pretty tough nut. And what makes it worse than it might be is that, ever since Lucille brought me in and laid me on the mat, he's been looking to you to restore the good old family prestige, if you know what I mean. He thinks Lucille let the proud name of Brewster down a bit, don't you know?"

"Don't be silly!" said Lucille. "You know quite well that you're a perfect little angel and that anyone would be lucky to get you for a son-in-law."

"Ah, but does he? Has that thought ever entered the parental brain? No! I fear me—no! Very well, then, laddie; it comes to this: that he's looking to you to marry some one pretty special—"

"I wish," said Bill, annoyed, "you wouldn't talk as though Mabel were the ordinary kind of chorus-girl. She's only on the stage because her mother's hard up and she wants to educate her little brother."

"I say!" said Archie, concerned. "Take my tip, old top. In chatting the matter over with the pater, don't dwell too much on that aspect of the affair. I've been watching him closely, and it's about all he can stick having to support me. If you ring in a mother and a little brother on him, he'll crack under the strain."

"Well, I've got to do something about it. Mabel will be over here in a week."

"Great Scott! You never told us that."

"Yes. She's going to be in the new Billington show. And naturally she will expect to meet my family."

"Did you explain father to her?" asked Lucille.

"Well, I just said she mustn't mind him, as his bark was worse than his bite."

"Well," said Archie, thoughtfully, "he hasn't bitten me yet; so you may be right. But you've got to admit that he's a bit of a barker."

Lucille considered.

"Really, Bill, I think your best plan would be to go straight to father and tell him the whole thing. You don't want him to hear about it in a roundabout way."

"The trouble is that, whenever I'm with father, I can't think of anything to say. I sort of lose my nerve and yammer."

"Dashed awkward," said Archie, politely. He sat up suddenly. "I say! By Jove! I know what you want, old friend. Just thought of it!"

"That busy brain is never still," explained Lucille.

"Saw it in the paper this morning. An advertisement of a book, don't you know?"

"I've no time for reading."

Developing Personality

"YOU'VE time for reading this one, laddie, for you can't afford to miss it. It's a what-d'you-call-it book. What I mean to say

is, if you read it and take its tips to heart, it guarantees to make you a convincing talker. The advertisement says so. The advertisement's all about a chap whose name I forget, whom everybody loved because he talked so well. And, mark you, before he got hold of this book—"The Personality That Wins" was the name of it, if I remember rightly—he was known to all the lads in the office as Silent Samuel or something. Or it may have been Tongue-tied Thomas. Well, one day, he happened, by good luck, to blow in the necessary for the good old P. that W's, and now, whenever they want someone to go and talk Rockefeller or someone into lending them a million or so, they send for Samuel. Only now they call him Sammy the Spellbinder, and fawn upon him pretty copiously and all that."

"What perfect nonsense!" said Lucille.

"I don't know," said Bill, plainly impressed. "There might be something in it."

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "I remember it said, 'Talk convincingly, and no man will ever treat you with cold, unresponsive indifference.' Well, cold, unresponsive indifference is just what you don't want the pater to treat you with, isn't it, or is it, or isn't it—what? I mean—what?"

"It sounds all right," said Bill.

"It is all right," said Archie. "It's a scheme. I'll go further. It's an egg!"

"The idea I had," said Bill, "was to see if I couldn't get Mabel a job in some straight comedy. That would take the curse off the thing a bit. Then I wouldn't have to dwell on the chorus end of the business, you see."

"Much more sensible," said Lucille.

"But what a deuce of a sweat!" argued Archie. "I mean to say, having to pop round and nose about and all that."

"Aren't you willing to take a little trouble for your stricken brother-in-law, worm?" said Lucille, severely.

"Oh, absolutely! My idea was to get this book and coach the dear old chap. Rehearse him, don't you know. He could bone up the early chapters a bit and then drift round and try his convincing talk on me."

"It might be a good idea," said Bill, reflectively.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do," said Lucille. "I'm going to get Bill to introduce me to his Mabel, and if she's as nice as he says she is, I'll go to father and talk convincingly to him."

"You're an ace!" said Bill.

A Queer Rehearsal

"ABSOLUTELY!" agreed Archie cordially. "My partner—what? All the same we ought to keep the book as a second string, you know. I mean to say, you are a young and delicately nurtured girl—full of sensibility and shrinking what's-its-name and all that—and you know what the jolly old pater is. He might bark at you and put you right out of action in the first round. Well, then, don't you see we could unleash old Bill, the trained silver-tongued expert, on him, and have him weak in no time? Personally, I'm all for the P. and W's."

"The Personality That Wins" cost Archie two dollars in cash and a lot of embarrassment when he asked for it at the store. To buy a treatise of that name would automatically seem to argue that you haven't a winning personality already, and Archie was at some pains to explain to the girl behind the counter that he wanted it for a friend. The girl seemed more interested in his English accent than in his explanation, and he was uncomfortably aware, as he receded, that she was practising it in an undertone for the benefit of her colleagues and fellow workers. However, what is a little discomfort, if endured in friendship's name? Archie left the book at Bill's club and went his way.

Some days later, Lucille, returning one morning to their suite, found her husband seated in an upright chair at the table, an unusually stern expression on his amiable face. A large cigar was in the corner of his mouth. The fingers of one hand rested in the armhole of his waistcoat; with the other hand he tapped menacingly on the table.

Lucille was aware of Bill's presence. He had emerged sharply from the bedroom and walked briskly across the floor.

"Father?" said Bill.

"Well, my boy," said Archie, in a rasping voice, frowning heavily over the cigar, "what is it? Speak up! Speak up!"

"What on earth are you doing?" asked Lucille.

Archie waved her away.

"Leave us, woman! We would be alone. Retire into the jolly old background and amuse yourself for a bit. Read a book. Do acrobatics. Charge ahead, laddie!"

"Father?" said Bill again.

"Yes, my boy; yes—what is it?"

"Father?"

Archie picked up the red-covered volume that lay on the table.

"Half a mo', old son. Sorry to stop you, but I knew there was something. I've just remembered. Your walk. All wrong!"

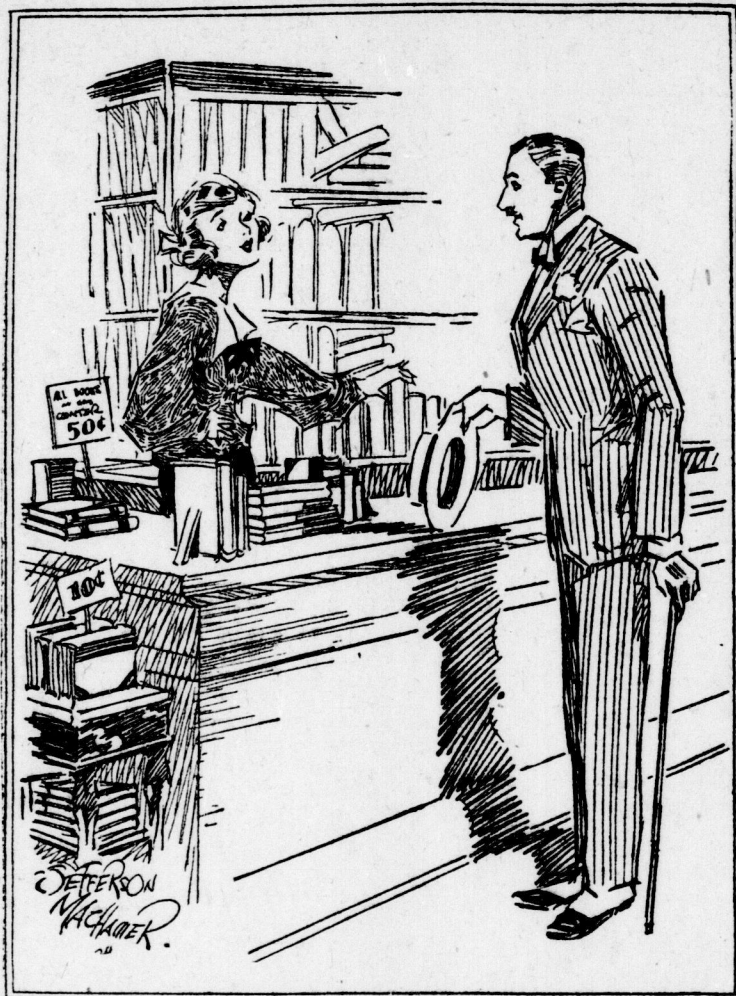
"All wrong?"

"All wrong. Where's the chapter on the art of walking? Here we are. Listen, dear old son. Drink this in: 'In walking one should strive to acquire that swinging, easy movement from the hips. The correctly poised walker seems to float along, as it were.' Now, old bean, you didn't float a darn bit. Dashed important, this walking business, you know. Get started wrong, and where are you? Try it again. Much better." He turned to Lucille. "Notice him float along that time? Absolutely skimmed—what?"

Lucille had taken a seat, and was waiting for enlightenment.

"Are you and Bill going into vaudeville?" she asked.

Archie, scrutinizing his brother-in-law closely, had further criticism to make.



Archie explained that he wanted "The Personality That Wins" for a friend.

"The man of self-respect and self-confidence," he read, "stands erect in an easy, natural, graceful attitude. Heels not too far apart, head erect, eyes to the front with a level gaze—get your gaze level, old thing!—shoulders thrown back, arms hanging naturally at the sides when not otherwise employed—that means that, if he swings on you, it's all right to guard—chest expanded naturally, and abdomen—this is no place for you, Lucille; leg it out of ear-shot—ab—what I said before, 'drawn in somewhat and, above all, not protruded.' Now, have you got all that? Yes; you look all right. Carry on, laddie; carry on. Let's have two pennorth of the dynamic voice and the tone of authority."

Bill fastened a gimlet eye upon his brother-in-law and drew a deep breath.

"Father?" he said. "Father?"

"You'll have to brighten up Bill's dialogue a lot," said Lucille critically, "or you will never get bookings."

"Father?"

"I mean, it's all right as far as it goes, but it's sort of monotonous. Besides, one of you ought to be asking questions and the other answering. Bill ought to be saying, 'Who was that lady I seen you coming down the street with?' so that you would be able to say: 'That wasn't a lady. That was my wife.' I know—I've been to lots of vaudeville shows."

Bill relaxed his attitude. He deflated his chest, spread his heels, and ceased to draw in his abdomen.

"We'd better try this another time, when we're alone," he said frigidly. "I can't do myself justice."

"Why do you want to do yourself justice?" asked Lucille.

Very Unfortunate News

"RIGHT—of," said Archie affably, casting off his forbidding expression like a garment. "Rehearsal postponed. I was just putting old Bill through it," he explained, "with a view to getting him into mid-season form for the jolly old pater."

"Oh!" Lucille's voice was the voice of one who sees light in darkness. "When Bill walked in like a cat on hot bricks and stood there looking stuffed, that was the personality that wins?"

"That was it."

"Well, now," said Lucille, "a reason why I think that Bill, however winning his personality may be, won't persuade father to let him marry a girl in the chorus is something that happened last night."

"Last night?"

"Well, at three o'clock this morning. It's on the front page of the early editions of the evening papers. I brought one in for you to see—only, you were so busy. Look! There it is!"

Archie seized the paper.

"Oh! Great Scott!"

"What is it?" asked Bill anxiously. "Don't stand goggling there. What the devil is it?"

"Listen to this, old thing:"

This is what Archie read:

REVELRY BY NIGHT

Spirited Battle Royal at Hotel Cosmopolis The House Detective Had a Good Heart, but Pauline Packed the Punch

The logical contender for Jack Dempsey's honors has been discovered; and, in an age where women are stealing men's jobs all the time, it will not come as a surprise to our readers to learn that she belongs to the sex that is more deadly than the male. Her name is Miss Pauline Preston, and her wallop is vouched for under oath—under many oaths—by Mr. Timothy O'Neill, known to his intimates as "Pie-Face," who holds down the arduous job of house detective at Hotel Cosmopolis.

At three o'clock this morning, Mr. O'Neill was advised by the night-clerk that the occupants of every room within earshot of number 618 had phoned the desk to complain of a disturbance, a noise, a vocal uproar proceeding from the room mentioned. Thither, therefore, marched Mr. O'Neill, his face full of cheese sandwich (for he had been indulging in an early breakfast or a late supper) and his heart of devotion to duty. He found there the Misses Pauline Preston and "Bobbie" St. Clair, of the personnel of the chorus of the "Frivolities," entertaining a few friends of both sexes. A pleasant time was being had by all, and at the moment of Mr. O'Neill's entry, the entire strength of the company was rendering with considerable emphasis that touching ballad: "There's a Place for Me in Heaven, for My Baby Boy Is There."

The able and efficient officer at once suggested that there was a place for them on the street and the patrol-wagon would soon be waiting there; and, being a man of action as well as words, he proceeded to gather up an armful of assorted guests as a preliminary to a personally conducted tour into the cold night. It was at

this point that Miss Preston stepped into the spotlight. Mr. O'Neill contends that she hit him with a brick, an iron casing, and the Singer building. Be that as it may, her efforts were sufficiently able to induce him to retire for reinforcements, which, arriving, arrested the super-party regardless of age or sex.

At the police court this morning, Miss Preston maintained that she and her friends were merely having a quiet home evening and that Mr. O'Neill was no gentleman. But the moral is, if you want excitement rather than sleep, stay at the Hotel Cosmopolis.

A Ripe Scheme

BILL may have quaked inwardly as he listened to this epic, but outwardly he was unmoved.

"Well," he said. "What about it?"

"What about it?" said Lucille.

"What about it?" said Archie. "Why, my dear old friend, it simply means that all the time we've been putting in making your personality winning has been chucked away. Absolutely a dead loss!"

"I don't see it," maintained Bill stoutly. "I suppose what you're driving at is that what has happened will make father pretty sure against girls who happen to be in the chorus."

"That's absolutely it, old thing. I'm sorry to say. The next person who mentions the word 'chorus-girl' in the jolly old governor's presence is going to take his life in his hands. I tell you, as one man to another, that I'd much rather be back in France hopping over the top than do it myself."

"So now," said Lucille, "having shown you that the imbecile scheme which you concocted with my poor well-meaning husband is no good at all, I will bring you words of cheer. Your own original plan—of getting your Mabel a part in a comedy—was always the best one. And you can do it. I wouldn't have broken the bad news so abruptly if I hadn't had some consolation to give you afterward. I met Reggie van Tuyl just now, and he told me that he was putting up most of the money for a new play that's going into rehearsal right away. Reggie's an old friend of yours. All you have to do is to go to him and ask him to use his influence to get your Mabel a small part. There's sure to be a maid or something with only a line or two that won't matter."

"A ripe scheme!" said Archie. "Very sound and fruity!"

The cloud did not lift from Bill's corrugated brow.

"That's all very well," he said; "but you know what a talker Reggie is. He's an obliging sort of chump, but his tongue's fastened on at the middle and wags at both ends. I don't want the whole of New York to know about my engagement and have somebody spilling the news to father before I'm ready."

"That's all right," said Lucille. "Archie can speak to him. There's no need for him to mention your name at all. He can just say there's a girl he wants to get a part for. You would do it, wouldn't you, angel-face?"

"Like a bird, queen of my soul!"

"Then that's splendid! You'd better give Archie that photograph of Mabel to take to Reggie, Bill."

"Photograph?" said Bill. "Which photograph? I have twenty-four!"

Archie found Reggie van Tuyl brooding in a window of his club that looked over Fifth avenue. Reggie was a sentimentalist. He would have liked to live in a world of ideally united couples, himself ideally united to some charming and affectionate girl. But, as a matter of cold fact, he was a bachelor, and most of the couples he knew were veterans of several divorces. In Reggie's circle, therefore, the home life of Archie and Lucille shone like a good deed in a naughty world. It inspired him. In moments of depression it restored his waning faith in human nature. Consequently, when Archie, having greeted him and slipped into a chair at his side, suddenly produced from his inside pocket the photograph of an extremely pretty girl and asked him to get her a small part in the play which was financing, he was shocked and disappointed.

Mabel's Crimson Hair

"ARCHE!"—his voice quivered with emotion—"Is it worth it? Is it worth it, old man? Think of the poor little woman at home!"

Archie was puzzled.

"Eh, old top? Which poor little woman?"

"Think of her trust in you, her faith—"

"I don't absolutely get you, old bean."

"What would Lucille say if she knew about this?"

"Oh, she does. She knows all about it."

"Good heavens!" cried Reggie. He was shocked to the core of his being.

"It was Lucille's idea," explained Archie.

"It's like this, old thing: I've never met this female, but she's a pal of Lucille's"—he comforted his conscience with the reflection that, if she wasn't now she would be in a few days—"and Lucille wants to do her a bit of good. She's been on the stage in England, you know—supporting a jolly old widowed mother and educating a little brother, and all that kind and species of rot, you understand, and now she's coming over to America, and Lucille wants you to rally round and shove her into your show and generally keep the home fires burning and so forth. How do we go?"

Reggie beamed with relief.

"Oh, I see!" he said. "Why, delighted, old man; quite delighted!"

"Any small part would do. Isn't there a maid or something in your bob's worth of refined entertainment who drifts about saying, 'Yes, madam, and all that sort of thing? Well then; that's just the thing. Topping! I knew I could rely on you, old bird! I'll get Lucille to ship her round to your address when she arrives. I fancy she's due to totter in somewhere in the next few days. Well, I must be popping. Toodle-oo!"

"Pip-pip!" said Reggie.

It was about a week later that Lucille came into the suite at the Hotel Cosmopolis that was her home, and found Archie lying on the couch, smoking a refreshing pipe after the labors of the day. It seemed to Archie that his wife was not in her usual cheerful frame of mind. He kissed her, and, having relieved her of her parasol, endeavored, without success, to balance it on his chin. Having picked it up from the floor and placed it on the table, he became aware that Lucille was looking at him in a despondent sort of way. Her grey eyes were clouded.

"Hullo, old thing!" said Archie. "What's up?"

Lucille sighed wearily.

"Archie darling, do you know any really good swear-words?"

"Well," said Archie reflectively, "let me see. I did pick up a few tolerably ripe and breezy expressions over in France. But why?"

"Because I want to relieve my feelings."

"Anything wrong?"

"Everything's wrong. I've just been having tea with Bill and his Mabel."

"Oh—ah!" said Archie, interested. "And what's the verdict?"

"Guilty," said Lucille. "And the sentence, if I had anything to do with it, would be transportation for life." She peeled off her gloves irritably. "What fools men are! Not you, precious—you're the only man in the world that isn't, it seems to me. You did marry a nice girl, didn't you? You didn't go running round after females with crimson hair, goggling at them with your eyes popping out of your head like a bulldog waiting for a bone."

"Oh, I say! Does old Bill look like that?"

"What?"

Archie rose to a point of order.

"But one moment, old lad! You speak of crimson hair. Surely old Bill—in the extremely jolly monologues he used to deliver whenever I didn't see him coming and he got me alone—used to allude to her hair as brown."

"It isn't brown now. It's bright scarlet. Good gracious—I ought to know! I've been looking at it all the afternoon. It dazzled me." Lucille brooded silently for a while over the tragedy. "I don't want to say anything against her, of course—"

"No, no; of course not."

"But of all the awful, second-rate girls I ever met, she's the worst! She has vermillion hair and an imitation Oxford manner. She's so horribly refined that it's dreadful to listen to her. She's a sly, creepy, slinky, made-up, insincere vampire! She's common! She's awful! She's a cat!"

"That Darned Girl"

LUCILLE kicked the leg of the table.

"And to think," she said, "that, when I was a little girl, I used to look up to Bill as a monument of Wisdom. I used to hug his knees and gaze into his face and wonder how anyone could be so magnificent." She gave the unfeeling table another kick. "If I could have looked into the future," she said, with feeling, "I'd have bitten him in the ankle."

A few days later, as Archie sat in the Cosmopolis grill-room, preparatory to ordering lunch, he perceived Bill bearing down upon him, obviously resolved upon jolting his meal.

To his surprise, however, Bill did not instantly embark upon his usual monologue. Indeed, he hardly spoke at all. He clamped a chop, and seemed to Archie to avoid his eye. It was not till lunch was over and they were smoking that he unburdened himself.

"Archie?" he said.

"Hullo, old thing!" said Archie. "Still there? I thought you'd died or something. Talk about our old pals, Tongue-tied Thomas and Silent Sammy—you could beat 'em both on the same evening."

"It's enough to make me silent."

"What is it?"

Bill had relapsed into a sort of waking dream. He sat frowning somberly, lost to the world. Archie, having waited what seemed to him a sufficient length of time for an answer to his question, bent forward and touched his brother-in-law's hand gently with the lighted end of his cigar. Bill came to himself with a howl.

"What is it?" said Archie.

"What is what?" said Bill.

"Now listen, old thing," protested Archie: "Life is short, and time is flying. Suppose we cut out the cross talk. You hinted there was something on your mind, and I'm waiting to hear what it is."

Bill fiddled a moment with his coffee-spoon.

"I'm in an awful hole," he said, at last.

"What's the trouble?"

"It's about that darned girl."

Archie blinked.

"That darned girl?"

Archie could hardly credit his senses. He had been prepared, indeed, he had steeled himself to hear Bill allude to his affinity in a number of ways. But "that darned girl" was not one of them.

"Companion of my riper years," he said, "let's get this thing straight. When you say 'that darned girl,' do you, by any possibility, allude to—"

"Of course I do!"

"But, William, old bird—"

"Oh, I know, I know!" said Bill irritably. "You're surprised to hear me talk like that about her?"

"A trifle, yes. Possibly a trifle. When last heard from laddie you must recollect you were speaking of the lady as your soul-mate, and at least once, if I remember rightly, you alluded to her as your little dusky-haired lamb."

A sharp howl escaped Bill.

"Don't! Don't remind me of it!"

"There's been a species of slump, then—yes; no—in dusky-haired lambs?"

"How," demanded Bill savagely, "can a girl be a dusky-haired lamb when her hair's a bright scarlet?"

"Dashed difficult," admitted Archie.

"I suppose Lucille told you about that."

"She did touch on it, lightly, as it were."

Bill's Terrible Problem

BILL threw off the last fragments of reserve.

"Archie, I'm in the devil of a fix. I don't know why it was, but directly I saw her—things seemed so different over in England, I mean—He swallowed ice-water in gulps. 'I suppose it was seeing her with Lucille. Old Lu is such a thoroughbred. Seemed to kind of show her up. And that crimson hair! It sort of put the lid on it.' Bill brooded morosely. "It ought to be a criminal offense for women to dye their hair. Especially red. What do women do that sort of thing for?"

"Don't blame me, old thing. It's not my fault."

Bill looked furtive and harassed.

"It makes me feel such a cad. Here am I, feeling that I would give all I've got in the world to get out of the thing, and all the time the poor girl seems to be getting fonder of me than ever."

"How do you know?" Archie surveyed his brother-in-law critically. "Perhaps her feelings have changed, too. Very possibly she may not like the color of your hair. I don't myself. Now, if you were to dye yourself crimson—"

"Oh, shut up! Of course a man knows when a girl's fond of him."

"By no means, laddie. When you're my age—"

"I am your age."

"So you are. I forgot that. Well now, approaching the matter from another angle, let us suppose, old son, that Miss What's-Her-Name—the party of the second part—"

"Stop it!" said Bill suddenly. "Here comes Reggie."

"Eh?"

"Here comes Reggie van Tuyl. I don't want him to hear us talking about the darned thing."

Archie looked over his shoulder, and perceived that it was indeed so. Reggie was threading his way among the tables.

"Well, he looks pleased with things, anyway," said Bill enviously. "Glad somebody's happy."

Archie was puzzled. Something had plainly happened to Reggie. But what? It was idle to suppose that somebody had left him money, for he had been left practically all the money there was a matter of ten years before.

"Hullo, old bean!" he said, as the new-comer, radiating good will and bonhomie, arrived at the table and hung over it like a noonday sun. "We've finished. But rally round and we'll watch you eat. Dashed interesting, watching old Reggie eat. Why go to the zoo?"

Reggie shook his head.

"Sorry, old man. Can't. Just on my way to the Ardmore. Stopped in because I thought you might be here. I wanted you to be the first to hear the news."

"News?"

"I'm the happiest man alive!"

"You look it, darn you!" growled Bill, on whose mood of gray gloom this human sunbeam was jarring heavily.

"I'm engaged to be married!"

Reggie's Stunning Announcement

"CONGRATULATIONS, old egg!" Archie shook his head cordially. "Dash it—I like to see you young fellows settling down?"

"I don't know how to thank you enough, Archie, old man," said Reggie fervently.

"Thank me?"

"It was through you that I met her. Don't you remember the girl you sent to me? You wanted me to get her a small part—"

He stopped, puzzled. Archie had uttered a sound that was half gasp and half gurgle, but it was swallowed up in the extraordinary noise from the other side of the table. Bill Brewster was leaning forward with bulging eyes.

"Are you engaged to Mabel Winchester?"

"Why, by George?" said Reggie. "Do you know her?"

Archie recovered himself.

"Slightly," he said. "Slightly. Old Bill knows her slightly as it were. Not very well, don't you know, but—how shall I put it?"

"Slightly," said Bill.

"Just the word. Slightly."

"Splendid!" said Reggie van Tuyl. "Why don't you come along to the Ardmore and meet her now?"

Bill stammered. Archie came to the rescue again.

"Bill can't come now. He's got a date."

"A date," said Bill.

"A date," said Archie. "An appointment, don't you know. A—ah—in fact, date."

"But—er—wish her happiness from me," said Bill cordially.

"Thanks very much, old man," said Reggie. "And say I'm delighted, will you?"

"Certainly."

"You won't forget the word, will you? Delighted."

"Delighted."

"That's right. Delighted."

"Hullo! I must rush!"

Bill and Archie watched him as he bounded out of the restaurant.

"Poor old Reggie!" said Bill, with a fleeting compunction.

"Not necessarily," said Archie, "what I mean to say is, tastes differ, don't you know. One man's peach is another man's poison, and vice versa."

"There's something in that."

"Absolutely! Well," said Archie judiciously, "this would appear to be, as it were, the maddest, merriest day in all the glad new year—yes, no?"

Bill drew a deep breath.

"You bet your sorrowful existence it is!" he said. "I'd like to do something to celebrate it." "The right spirit!" said Archie. "Absolutely the right spirit! Begin by paying for my lunch." (Copyright, 1924)

A Nasty Comeback

THE schoolmistress was about to dismiss the class for the summer holidays. "Now, children," she said, "I hope that you will have a very pleasant time, and what is more important