

EXCUSE ME!
RUPERT AUGHES
 NOVELIZED FROM THE
 COMEDY OF THE SAME
 NAME. Y Y Y
 ILLUSTRATED FROM
 PHOTOGRAPHS OF
 THE PLAY AS PRODUCED
 BY HENRY W. SAVAGE.
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(Continued from Last Week)

He stunk out meekly, followed by the passengers, who were shaking their heads in wonderment at this most amazing feat of this most amazing bride.

When they were alone once more, Marjorie, as radiant as April after a storm, turned her sunny smile on Mallory:

"Isn't it glorious to have our little Snoozeleums alive and well?"

But Mallory was feeling like a March day. He answered with a sleetly chill: "You care more for the dog than you do for me."

"Why shouldn't I?" Marjorie answered with wide eyes, "Snoozeleums never would have brought me on a wild goose chase like this. Heaven knows he didn't want to come."

Mallory repeated the indictment: "You love a dog better than you love your husband."

"My what?" Marjorie laughed, then she spoke with lofty condescension: "Harry Mallory, if you're going to be jealous of that dog, I'll never marry you the longest day I live."

"So you'll let a dog come between us?" he demanded.

"I wouldn't give up Snoozeleums for a hundred husbands," she retorted.

"I'm glad to know it in time," Mallory said. "You'd better give me back that wedding ring."

Marjorie's heart stopped at this, but her pride was in arms. She drew herself up, slid the ring from her finger, and held it out as if she scorned it: "With pleasure. Good afternoon, Mr. Mallory."

Mallory took it as if it were the most interesting trifle he had ever seen: "Good afternoon, Miss Newton."

He stalked out and she, turned her back on him. A casual witness would have said that they were too indifferent to each other even to feel anger. As a matter of fact, each was on fire with love, and aching madly with regret. Each longed for strength to whip round with outflung arms of reconciliation, and neither could he so brave. And so they parted, each harking back fiercely for one word of recall from the other. But neither spoke, and Marjorie sat staring at nothing through raining eyes, while Mallory strode into the Men's Room as melancholy as Hamlet with Yorick's skull in his hands.

It was their first great quarrel, and they were convinced that the world might as well come to an end.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Woman-Hater's Relapse.

The observation room was as lonely as a deserted battlefield and Marjorie as doleful as a wounded soldier left behind, and perishing of thirst, when the conductor came back with Snoozeleums in his arms.

He regarded with contemptuous awe the petty cause of so great an event as the stopping of the Trans-American. He expected to see Marjorie receive the returned prodigal with wild rapture, but she didn't even smile when he said:

"Here's your powder-puff."

She just took Snoozeleums on her lap, and, looking up with wet eyes and a sad smile, murmured:

"Thank you very much. You're the nicest conductor I ever met. If you ever want another position, I'll see that my father gets you one."

It was like offering the kaiser a new job, but the conductor swallowed the insult and sought to repay it with irony.

"Thanks. And if you ever want to run this road for a couple of weeks, just let me know."

Marjorie nodded appreciatively and said: "I will. You're very kind."

And that completed the rout of that conductor. He retired in disorder, leaving Marjorie to fondle Snoozeleums with a neglectful indifference that would have greatly flattered Mallory, if he could have seen through the partition that divided them.

But he was witnessing with the cynical superiority of an aged and disillusioned man the, to him, childish behavior of Ira Lathrop, an eleven-hour Orlando.

For just as Mallory moped into the smoking-room at one door, Ira Lathrop swept in at the other, his face rubicund with embarrassment and ecstasy. He had donned an old frock coat with creases like ruts from long exile in his trunk. But he was feeling like an heir apparent; and he started everybody by his jovial hail:

"Well, boys—er—gentlemen—the drinks are on me. Walter, take the orders."

Little Jimmie woke with a start, rose hastily to his feet and saluted, saying: "Present! Who said take the orders?"

"I did," said Lathrop, "I'm giving a party. Walter, take the orders."

"Sarsaparilla," said Dr. Temple, but they howled him down and ordered other things. The porter shook his head sadly: "Nothin' but soft drinks in Utah, gemmen."

A groan went up from the club-members, and Lathrop groaned loudest of all.

"Well, we've got to drink something. Take the orders. We'll all have sarsaparilla."

Little Jimmie Wellington came to the rescue.

"Don't do anything desperate, gentlemen," he said, with a look of divine philanthropy. "The bar's closed, but Little Jimmie Wellington is here with the life preserver." From his sarsaparilla he produced a silver flask

that looked to be big enough to carry a regiment through the Alps. It was greeted with a salvo, and Lathrop said to Jimmie: "I apologize for everything I have said—and thought—about you." He turned to the porter: "There ain't any law against giving this way, is there?"

The porter grinned: "Not if you all bribe the exercise-inspector." And he held out a glass for the bride, murmuring, "Don't get tired," as it was poured. He set it inside his sanctum and then bustled round with ice-filled glasses and a siphon.

When Little Jimmie offered of the flask to Dr. Temple, the clergyman put out his hand with a politely horrified: "No, thank you."

Lathrop frightened him with a sudden comment: "Look at that gesture! Doc, I'd almost swear you were a parson."

Mallory whirled on him with the eyes of a hawk about to pounce: "The very idea!" was the best disclaimer Dr. Temple could manage, suddenly finding himself suspected. Ashton put in with, "The only way to disprove it, Doc, is to join us."

The poor old clergyman, too deeply involved in his deception to brave confession now, decided to do and dare all. He stammered, "Er—al—certainly," and held out his hand for his share of the poison. Little Jimmie winked at the others and almost filled the glass. The innocent doctor bowed his thanks. When the porter reached him and prepared to fill the remainder of the glass from the siphon, the parson waved him aside with a misguided caution:

"No, thanks. I'll not mix them."

Mallory turned away with a sigh: "He takes his straight. He's no parson."

Then they forgot the doctor in curiosity as to Lathrop's sudden spasm of generosity—with Wellington's liquor. Wedgewood voiced the general curiosity when he said:

"What's the old woman-hater up to now?"

"Woman-hater?" laughed Ira. "It's the old story. I'm going to follow Mallory's example—marriage."

"I hope you succeed," said Mallory.

"Wherever did you pick up the bride?" said Wedgewood, mellowing with the long glass in his hand.

"Brides are easy," said Mallory, with surprising cynicism. "Where do you get the parson?"

"Hang the parson," Wedgewood retorted. "Who's the girl?"

"I'll bet I know who she is," Ashton interposed; "it's that nectarine of a damsel who got on at Green River."

"Not the same!" Lathrop roared.

"I found my bride blooming here all the while. Girl I used to spark back in Brattleboro, Vt. I've been vowing for years that I'd live and die an old maid. I've kept my head out of the nose all this time—till I struck this train and met up with Anne. We got to talking over old times—waking up old sentiments. She got on my nerves. I got on hers. Finally I said, 'Aw, hell, let's get married. Save price of one steamer to China anyway.' She says, 'Damned if I don't!'—or words to that effect."

Mallory broke in with feverish interest: "But you said you were going to get married on this train."

"Nothing easier—Here's how!"—and he raised his glass, but Mallory hauled it down to demand: "How? that's what I want to know. How are you going to get married on this parsonless express. Have you got a little minister in your suitcase?"

Ira beamed with added pride as he explained:

"Well, you see, when I used to court Anne I had a rival—Charlie Selby by his name was. I thought he cut me out, but he became a clergyman in Utah—Oh, Charlie! I telegraphed him that I was passing through Ogden, and would he come down to the train and marry me to a charming lady. He always wanted to marry Anne. I thought it would be a darned good joke to let him marry her—to me."

"Did he accept?" Mallory asked, excitedly, "is he coming?"

"He is—he did—here's his telegram," said Ira. "He brings the license and the ring." He passed it over, and as Mallory read it a look of hope spread across his face. But Ira was saying: "We're going to have the wedding obsequies right here in this car. You're all invited. Will you come?"

There was a general yell of acceptance and Ashton began to sing, "There Was I Waiting at the Church." Then he led a sort of Indian waltz dance round the next victim of the matrimonial stake. At the end of the hullabaloo all the men charged their glasses, and drained them with an uproarious "How!"

Poor Dr. Temple had taken luxurious delight in the success of his disguise and in the prospect of watching some other clergyman working while he rested. He joined the dance as gaily, if not as gracefully, as any of the rest, and in a final triumph of recklessness, he tossed off a bumper of straight whisky.

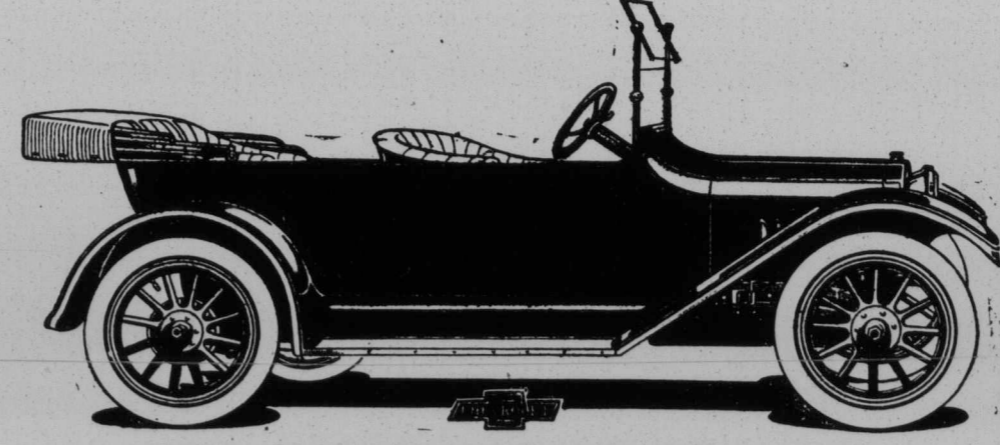
Instantly his "How!" changed to "Wow!" and then his throat clamped fast with a terrific spasm that flung the tears from his eyes. He bent and writhed in a silent paroxysm till he was pounded and shaken back to life and water poured down his throat to reopen a passage.

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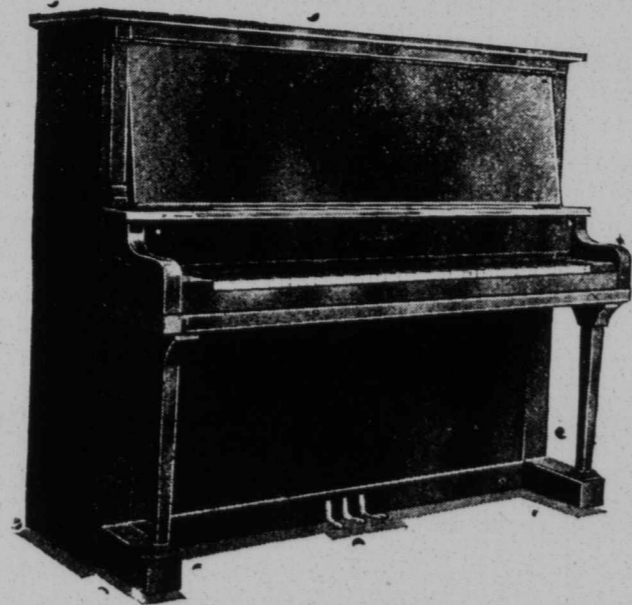
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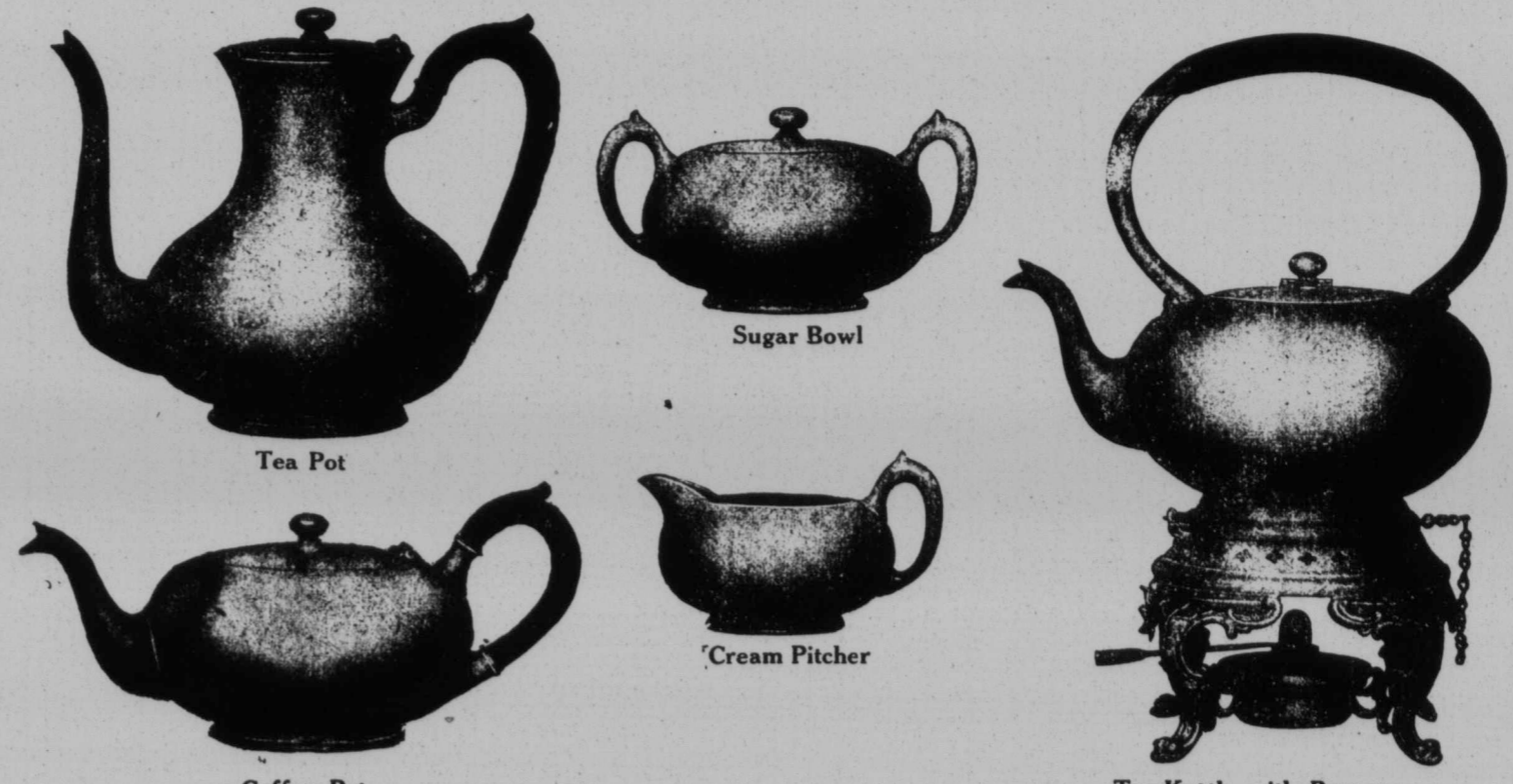
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