

HOMOEOPATHIC TREATMENT: A School Story

P. G. WODEHOUSE

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In most of the houses of Wrykyn boys who had been at the school two years, and who were consequently in a sort of transition stage between fags and human beings, shared studies in couples. The fags "pigged" in a body in a common room of their own.

This rule was pleasant enough, provided you got a study-companion of tastes and habits similar to your own. But it often happened that, once in your study, an apparently perfect individual developed some deadly trait, such as a dislike for "brewing" or a taste for aesthetic furniture, and then life on the two-in-a-study system became troubled.

Liss and Buxton shared study eight at Appleby's. For some time all went well. They had much in common with one another. It is true that they were not in the same form, which is what usually cements alliances of this sort, Liss being in the Upper Fourth and Buxton in the Lower Fifth.

But otherwise the understanding seemed perfect. Both did a moderate amount of work, and both were perfectly willing to stop at a moment's notice, in order to play stump cricket or "soccer" in the passage. Liss collected stamps; so did Buxton. Buxton owned a Dr. Giles's crib to the play of "Euripides," which the Upper Fourth were translating that term. Liss replied with a Bohn's "Livy," Book One. "Livy," Book One, was what the Lower Fifth were murdering. In short, all Nature may be said to have been at first one vast substantial smile.

An ideal state of things, but one that was not destined to last.

Liss came back from school one afternoon, entered his study, and threw his books down on the table. Then he sniffed in a startled manner. The first sniff proving unsatisfactory, he encored himself. He was embarking on a third, when Buxton came in. It seemed to Liss that the aroma became stronger on his entry.

"Why, I believe it's you!" he cried.

"What's up now?" asked Buxton.

"Beastly smell somewhere. I was trying to find where it came from."

"Oh, *that!*" said Buxton, "that's all right. It's only some stuff I've got on my handkerchief. The man at the shop called it *Simpkins Idle Moments*. Don't you like it?"

Liss flung open the window, and leaned out as far as he could with safety, breathing hard.

"It's not bad when you get used to it," said Buxton. Liss, having fortified himself with a stock of fresh air, wriggled back into the study and directed an indignant glance at his friend.

"It's beastly," he said. "It's the sort of stuff an office-boy out for Bank Holiday uses."

"Oh, no," said Buxton deprecatingly, "think it's rather pleasant myself."

"But what do you want to do it *for?*" inquired Liss. "You make me sick."

"Sorry for that. The man I want it to do that to is Day."

Mr. Day was the master of the Lower Fifth.

"The fact is," proceeded Buxton, in the manner of the man who says to the hero of the melodrama, "sit down, and I will tell ye the story of me life," "I've been having rather a row with Day. He shoved me into extra last Wednesday for doing practically nothing. It wasn't *my* fault that the bit of paper hit him; I was aiming at Smith, and he strolled into the zone of fire just as I shot. I told him I was sorry, too. Well, anyway, he jammed me in extra and yesterday he slanged me about my Latin prose before the whole form, so I thought this was getting a bit too thick, so I thought something had got to be done. So I thought it over a good time, and at last I thought it would be a sound idea if I came into the form-room with some scent on me. Day bars scent awfully, you know."

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"So do I," said Liss coldly.

"Calls it clarified fat," continued Buxton, "and that kind of thing, and says using it's a filthy and effete habit only worthy of a degenerate sybarite!"

"So it is," said Liss.

"Well, it acted splendidly. I sat tight, you know, waiting for developments. I could see him getting restive, and peering round the room over his spectacles, and then he spotted me. I don't know how.

"He glared at me for a second; then he said, 'Buxton.'

"Yes, sir,' I said.

"He beckoned me solemnly and I went up. When I got to his desk he took me by the tip of the ear and examined me.

"'Boy,' he said, 'what—*what* is this abomination on your handkerchief?'

"'*Simpkins Idle Moments*, sir,' I said.

"The chaps yelled.

"A scent, I presume?'

"Yes, sir.'

"And will you kindly inform me, Buxton, for what reason you have adopted this clarified fat?'

"I told him it was for the good of my health. I said doctors recommended it.

"'Boy,' he said, 'your story leaves me sceptical. I do not credit it. Go to your seat. Pah! Throw open the door and all the windows. Buxton, translate from "Ille tamen—" and do not dare to enter this room in such a state to-morrow.'

"I went on to translate, and got ploughed, of course. He gave me the lesson to write out."

"Serve you jolly well right," said Liss.

"I don't think it would be safe," said Buxton, "to try him again with *Simpkins* after what he said."

"I should think not," said Liss.

"So," continued Buxton triumphantly, "I'm going to appear to-morrow in—(here, regardless of his friend's look of disgust, he drew a small bottle from his pocket and examined the label)—in 'Riggles's Rose of the Hills.' That'll make him sit up. And, curiously enough, doctors say it's very nearly as good for you as *Simpkins* would be."

When the somewhat searching perfume of Riggles's masterpiece reached Mr. Day on the following morning, he stiffened in his chair.

"Boy!" he shouted. With the natural result that all the form except Buxton looked up. Buxton was apparently too busy with his work to spare a moment.

"Come *here*, Buxton," added Mr. Day.

Buxton advanced to the desk with the firm step that tells of an easy conscience.

"In spite of what I said to you yesterday, you have The Audacity," began Mr. Day, speaking in capitals, "to Come Here *Again* in this [Image] DISGUSTING State." .submit()

"Si-i-r!!" interjected Buxton, moaning with righteous indignation.

"Well, boy?"

"I don't see what I've done, sir." [Image] üXd€ "You-Don't-See-What-You've-Done? Did I not tell you yesterday that I would not have you enter my form-room with *Simpkins*/—er—I forget the precise name of that abomination—on your handkerchief?"

"Oh, but, sir," said Buxton, in the pleased tone of one who sees exactly where he and a bosom friend have misunderstood one another, and sees also his way to put matters right, "This isn't *Simpkins Idle Moments*. It's 'Riggles's Rose of the Hills.'"

Mr. Day raved. What did it matter whether the abomination he affected were manufactured by Riggles, or Diggles, or Biggles, or Robinson? *WHAT* did it matter what name its degraded patentee had applied to it? The point was that it was scent, and—he-would-not- have/-scent in his form-room.

So-kindly-remember-that-once-and-for-all-and-go-to-your-seat-and-don't-let-me-have-to-speak-to-you-again.

Buxton protested. Was he a slave? That was what Buxton would like to know. He was sure that there was no school rule against the use of scent as a precaution against germs. He didn't want germs. He was certain that his

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mother would not like it if he had germs. It was a shame that you were sent to schools where you were made to have germs.

The situation was at a deadlock. Much as he disliked scent, Mr. Day was obliged to admit to himself that the law was not on his side. He was a serious man without a spark of humour in his composition, and with a tremendous enthusiasm for fairness, and he did not wish to do anything tyrannical. If the boy really was afraid of germs, he had no right to prevent him doing his best to stave them off.

He gave up the struggle in despair. Buxton walked back to his seat, and two days later entered the form-room with a cold which not only made it necessary for him to use eucalyptus, but also to speak unintelligibly through his nose. Mr. Day spent the morning with his handkerchief to his face, a pathetic figure which would have softened the heart of a less vengeful person than Buxton.

Public opinion was divided on the subject of Buxton's manoeuvres. The Lower Fifth, glad of anything to relieve the tedium of school-time, hailed him as a public benefactor. Liss openly complained that life was not worth living, and that he might just as well spend his time in a scent-factory. Greenwood, the prefect of Buxton's dormitory, took a stronger line.

Having observed without preamble that he was not going to be asphyxiated for the amusement of Buxton or anyone like him, he attached himself to the scruff of that youth's neck, and kicked him several times with much vigour and enthusiasm. He said, that if Buxton came into the dormitory like that again, he would have much pleasure in wringing his neck and chucking him out of the window.

In this delicate position, Buxton acted in statesmanlike fashion. Scented as before during the day, he left his handkerchief in the study on retiring to rest. So that, with the exception of Mr. Day and Liss, everyone was satisfied.

Liss brooded darkly over his injuries. At last, struck with an idea, he went across to the Infirmary to see Vickery. Vickery, a noted man of resource, was an Applebyite member of the Upper Fourth, and he had been down for a week or two with influenza. He was now convalescent, and visitors were admitted at stated intervals.

"I say, Vickery," began Liss, taking a seat.

"Hullo!"

"When are you coming back to the house?"

"Oh, soon. Next Monday, I believe."

"Well, look here." And Liss set forth his grievance. Vickery was amused.

"It's all very well to laugh," said Liss, complainingly, "but it's beastly for me. I say, what I really wanted to see you for was to ask if you'd mind swapping studies for a bit." (Vickery owned study three, one of the smaller rooms, only capable of accommodating one resident.) "You see," pursued Liss hurriedly, in order to forestall argument, "it wouldn't be the same for you. I don't suppose you can smell a thing after the 'flu', can you?"

"It would have to be pretty strong to worry me," agreed Vickery.

"Then will you?" said Liss. "You'll find Buxton a good enough sort of chap when he isn't playing rotten games of this sort. And he's got Giles's crib to the 'Medea.'"

This was Liss's ace of trumps, and it settled the matter. Vickery agreed to the exchange instantly, and gave his consent to the immediate removal of his goods and chattels from study three and the substitution of those of Liss. Liss went over to the house and spent the evening shifting furniture, retiring to his dormitory grubby, but jubilant, at "lights-out."

On the following Monday, Vickery was restored to Appleby's, with a doctor's certificate stating that he was cured.

Buxton welcomed him with open arms, explained the state of the game to him, and assured him that he was an improvement upon Liss.

"You don't mind this scent business, do you?" he said. "Rather not," said Vickery, "I love scent. I use it myself."

"Good man," said Buxton.

But he altered his opinion next day.

"Great Caesar," he cried, as he came into the study after a pleasant afternoon with Mr. Day. He rushed to the window, and opened it. Vickery surveyed him with amused surprise.

"What's up?" he asked.

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"Can't you smell it, you ass?" said Buxton, wildly.

"Smell it?" repeated Vickery. A light seemed to dawn upon him. "Oh," he said, "you mean the stuff I've got on my handkerchief. Don't you like it? Doctors say it's awfully good for keeping off germs."

Buxton, in a voice rendered nasal by a handkerchief pressed tightly over his face, replied that he did not. He hung out of the window again. Vickery grinned broadly, but became solemn as his companion turned round.

"Well, I didn't think *you* would have minded," he said, in a reproachful voice, "I thought you rather liked scent."

"Scent! Do you call it a scent! What on earth is the muck?"

"It's only sulphuretted hydrogen. The doctor recommended it, to keep off any bad effects after the flu. I can't smell it much, but it seems rather decent. You wouldn't like some, would you?"

"Look here," said Buxton, "how long is this going on?"

"I couldn't say exactly, till I'm quite fit again. Two or three weeks, probably."

"Weeks! Did you say weeks?"

"Yes. Not longer, I shouldn't think. A month at the outside. Hullo, you aren't off?"

Buxton left the room, and went down the passage to number three.

"Get out," said Liss briefly. "I don't want this study—"

"Then would you mind swapping with me?" put in Buxton eagerly. "I don't think I shall quite hit it off with Vickery. He's much more a pal of yours than mine."

"Oh, hang it," said Liss, "I can't always be changing about. I've got all my things fixed up here. It's too much fag to move them again."

"I'll do that. You needn't worry about it. I'll shift your things into number eight to-night, if you'll swop. Will you?"

"All right," said Liss, "don't go breaking any of my pictures."

"Rather not," said Buxton. "Thanks awfully. And, I say, you can keep that Giles, if you like."

"Thanks," said Liss, "it'll come in useful."

"What made Buxton clear out like that?" he asked Vickery, as they brewed their first pot of tea after the exchange. "Did you have a row?"

"No. It was only that he didn't like the particular brand of scent I used."

Liss's jaw dropped.

"Great Scott," he said, "you don't use scent, too, do you?"

"Only when Buxton's there," said Vickery. He related the story briefly.

"I thought it would be better for us two together than having to share the study with Buxton," he concluded; "so I laid in a little scent, as he was so fond of it. I chucked it away yesterday."

"What a ripping idea," said Liss. "I hope it made him feel jolly ill. Anyway, it paid him back for the time he gave me."

"Yes, scent per scent," murmured Vickery; and, the last round of toast being now ready, and the kettle boiling over, study number eight proceeded to keep the wolf from the door.