

Plum Punch: To Marry or Not to Marry

P.G. Wodehouse

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THE FINAL TEST

"Well," I said, "when is it to be?"

PETTIFER sighed gloomily.

"Never," he replied. "Never. It's all off. Absolutely off. We have parted, and for ever. I loved that girl, SMITH, with an asbestos-defying passion to which no words of mine can hope to do justice. We were made for each other, SMITH. She disliked parsnips. I loathed them. We both collected postage-stamps. We both played ping-pong. Our tastes, in short, were identical, and the union, you might have thought, was of the sort that is made in Heaven. But, no. Far from it."

"You appear broken-hearted," I said, at the same time offering him the only consolation within my reach.

"Absolutely. Thanks. When. Not too much soda. Right. Utterly broken-hearted."

"Then why?"

"I will tell you. Do you read the?"

His voice sank to a reverent whisper as he mentioned the name of one of our great halfpenny journals.

"Regularly," I said, uncovering. "It has a circulation five times as large as any penny morning paper."

"It is too true," said PETTIFER. "Well, I, like you, am a constant reader of that great periodical. It is to that fact that I owe my present misery. A few days since I saw in its columns an article, brief but replete with interest, addressed to those about to marry. 'No man,' said the writer, 'should marry without previously examining his fiancée with the utmost strictness on the subject of music.'"

"Music?"

"Precisely. The idea is that you play selections, and mark the effects. By these means, said the article, thousands of unhappy marriages might be prevented annually. I resolved to try the scheme. The result is as you see. Four days ago"

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"I know," I interrupted hurriedly; "four days ago you were a thing of life and joy, whereas now ! Well?"

"There was a good deal more of it," said PETTIFER querulously; "but that is certainly the gist of what I was about to remark. Well, I tried her first with an extract from SAINT-SAENS. It took her fancy from the first bar. That was a good beginning. Intelligence and a well-balanced character belong to the girl who admires SAINT-SAENS. I proceeded. She seemed pleased with a sonata of BEETHOVEN'S, and positively encored with the Soldiers' Chorus from *Faust*. I gathered, therefore, that she was not only artistic but exceedingly tender-hearted."

"Then why did you ?"

"I am coming to that. On the following day I opened with a few bars of OFFENBACH. To my dismay she was undeniably attracted by them."

"What did that imply?"

"Cunning. Guile and cunning of the worst description. I began to think that the pleasure she had exhibited at SAINT-SAENS and BEETHOVEN might nay, must have been a mere veneer. I resolved to stake my all on a final test. Fixing her with my eye, I began to play a little thing of my own, a beautiful little piece in five flats, key of G. Scarcely had I struck the keys, when from the street outside came the raucous strains of a peripatetic barrel-organ. The effect upon LUCINDA I should say MISS ROBINSON was electrical. She sprang to her feet, ran to the window, and began to listen with every symptom of extreme pleasure. The ruffian in charge played three airs, all extracts from that idiot BROWN'S latest comic opera."

"You don't like BROWN?" I queried.

BROWN is PETTIFER'S deadliest rival in the world of music.

He ignored the remark.

"When he had finished," he said, "she threw him half-a-crown, closed the window, and requested me to continue. I excused myself coldly, and retired."

"Yes?"

"The same evening I wrote to say that our engagement was at an end, and that, on receipt of a fully stamped and addressed envelope, I would return her letters."

THE LAST INSTANCE

"The journalistic profession," said TEBBIT, "is full of perils. Have you heard about SMYTHE?"

I said that I had not heard about SMYTHE. TEBBIT needed no further encouragement.

"It is my painful task to inform you," he said, "that SMYTHE, though still living in a sort of way, is for all practical purposes no more. He is going to be married."

"Married!" I gasped. "SMYTHE! The perfect bachelor, the chaffer at Cupid, the mocker at matrimony, the detester of domesticity! Surely you are thinking of another SMYTHE. You have mistaken the name."
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"No," said TEBBIT, "there is, alas, no mistake. She is a Mrs. ROBINSON."

"Tell me all," I said. "What were you saying about the perils of journalism?" And TEBBIT explained.

"SMYTHE," he said, "after roughing it for four years at Oxford, came down without, of course, the remotest notion of what he intended to do for a living. The Civil Service was out of the question. SMYTHE was a man of parts, but his talents did not lie in that direction. Finally, after he had rejected the Army as philistine and commerce as bourgeois, he consented to a compromise. He was to think the matter over, and in the meanwhile to read for the Bar.

"It was while he was reading for the Bar at the Millennium Palace of Varieties that he met a college friend of his. Over a social beaker they discussed the position. The friend suggested that SMYTHE should take to journalism. It was the finest profession in the world, he said. All that you had to do was to write articles and send them to different papers, and the editors sent them back by return of post. In fine, a game closely resembling Ping-pong, only easier. A child of ten could master it in five minutes.

"SMYTHE was immensely taken with the idea. He became a journalist, and shortly afterwards got the post of 'Aunt JANE' on a paper called *The Cosy Corner*. His business was to answer correspondence, much of which dealt with the subject of proposals of marriage. How should they be made? How should they be rejected?"

"Well?" I said.

"Well," said TEBBIT, "for some time these presented no difficulty to SMYTHE. During his University career it had been a sort of hobby of his to propose to at least one of his partners at every dance he attended. I remember once remonstrating with him for this, as being opposed to his known bachelor principles. But he replied, with some show of reason, that as his personal appearance was curious rather than striking there was no danger, and it all helped to make conversation. In this way he had gathered some very useful facts about the whole art of refusing a proposal of marriage. As for the question of how such proposals should be made, he held definite views on the subject, and his male correspondents never went empty away.

"After a time it occurred to him that it might be profitable if he collected these fugitive papers, and published them in book form. SPOOPENDYKE AND BROWN took the book, paid him a magnificent royalty, and asked for more. He was to write a companion volume, entitled *More Refusals*, on his own terms. SMYTHE accepted the offer, drew up a list of terms in a large and liberal spirit, and set to work to collect material.

"To all attempts on the part of his friends to dissuade him he paid no attention. You see he had been paid in advance, and long since spent the money. A week ago he told us that one more instance would complete the volume. He said he was determined to make it a good one. He was, in my opinion, intoxicated with success. Otherwise there is no accounting for his criminal rashness in proposing to Mrs. ROBINSON. We all did our best to save him."

"Alas, poor SMYTHE!" I sighed.

"And the most pitiful part of the whole business," said TEBBIT, "is that the unhappy man actually appears now to enjoy his position. And" here TEBBIT completely broke down "he he's threatened to send me a piece of the wedding-cake!"

DAMON AND PYTHIAS. A Romance

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Since Earth was first created,
 Since Time began to fly,
No friends were e'er so mated,
 So firm as JONES and I.
Since primal Man was fashioned
 To people ice and stones,
No pair, I ween, had ever been
 Such chums as I and JONES.

In fair and foulest weather,
 Beginning when but boys,
We faced our woes together,
 We shared each other's joys.
Together, sad or merry,
 We acted hand in glove,
Until 'twas careless, very
 I chanced to fall in love.

The lady's points to touch on,
 Her name was JULIA WHITE,
Her lineage high, her scutcheon
 Untarnished; manners, bright;
Complexion, soft and creamy;
 Her hair, of golden hue;
Her eyes, in aspect, dreamy,
 In colour, greyish blue.

For her I sighed, I panted;
 I saw her in my dreams;
I vowed, protested, ranted;
 I sent her chocolate creams.
Until methought one morning
 I seemed to hear a voice,
A still, small voice of warning:
 "Does JONES approve your choice?"

To JONES of my affection
 I spoke that very night.
If he had no objection,
 I said I'd wed Miss WHITE.
I asked him for his blessing,
 But, turning rather blue,
He said: "It's most distressing,
 But *I* adore her, too."

"Then, Jones," I answered, sobbing,
 "My wooing's at an end.
I couldn't think of robbing
 My best, my only friend.
The notion makes me furious
 I'd much prefer to die."

"Perhaps you'll think it curious,"
Said JONES, "but so should I."

Nor he nor I would falter
In our resolve one jot.
I bade him seek the altar,
He vowed that he would not.
"She's yours, old fellow. Make her
As happy as you can."
"Not so," said I, "you take her
You are the lucky man."

At length the situation
Had lasted now a year
I had an inspiration,
Which seemed to make things clear.
"Supposing," I suggested,
"We ask Miss WHITE to choose?
I should be interested
To hear her private views.

"Perhaps she has a preference
I own it sounds absurd
But I submit, with deference,
That she might well be heard.
In clear, commercial diction
The case in point we'll state,
Disclose the cause of friction,
And leave the rest to Fate."

We did, and on the morrow
The postman brought us news.
Miss WHITE expressed her sorrow
At having to refuse.
Of all her many reasons
This seemed to me the pith:
Six months before (or rather more)
She'd married Mr. SMITH.