A PRISONER OF WAR

P. G. WODEHOUSE

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Mrs. Lora Delane Porter, that great woman, was condescending to argue with Herbert Nixon, a mere menial. The points under discussion were three:—

(a) Why had Herbert been absent from duty between the hours of 3 p.m. and midnight on the previous day?

(b) Why had he returned singing?

(c) Why had he divested himself of his upper garments and stood for twenty minutes before the front door, daring the Kaiser to come out and have his head knocked off?

Those were the main counts in Mrs. Porter's indictment, and she urged them with the skill of one who for many years had been in the forefront of America's Feminist movement. A trained orator and logician, she made mincemeat of Mr. Nixon.

Herbert's official position was that of odd−job man to the house which Mrs. Porter had taken for the summer in England. He had gone with the place as a sort of bonus.

"You don't understand, ma'am," he said, pityingly. "Being a female, you wouldn't understand. It's polerticks. This 'ere country 'as 'ad to go to war——"

"And so you had to go and stupefy the few brains you possess at the village inn? I don't see the connection."

"I can't *argue* with you, ma'am," said Mr. Nixon, patiently. "My 'ead don't seem just right this morning. All I know is—"

"All *I* know is that you can go right away now and look for another job."

" 'Ave it your own way, ma'am, 'ave it your own way. If you don't want me, there's others that'll be glad to 'ave me."

"Don't let me keep you from them," said Mrs. Porter. "Good morning."

Herbert vanished, and Mrs. Porter, dipping her pen in the ink, resumed the chapter of "Woman in the New Era" which his entry had interrupted.

Sybil Bannister came into the room. She was small and fluffy. Mrs. Porter greeted her with an indulgent smile. Ruthless towards the Herbert Nixons, she unbent with Sybil. Sybil was her disciple. She regarded her as a gardener regards some promising young plant.

Six months before Sybil had been what Mrs. Porter called undeveloped. That is to say, she had been content to live a peaceful life in her New York home, worshipping her husband, Mrs. Porter's nephew Hailey. The spectacle of a woman worshipping any man annoyed Mrs. Porter. To see one worshipping Hailey, for whom she entertained the contempt which only strong−minded aunts can feel for their nephews, stirred her to her depths.

Hailey, it is true, had not been a perfect husband. He was a rather pompous young man, dictatorial, and inclined to consider that the machinery of the universe should run with his personal comfort as its guiding motive. But Sybil had not noticed these things till Mrs. Porter pointed them out to her. Until Mrs. Porter urged her to assert her rights, she had not thought the matter out sufficiently to understand that she had any.

That determined woman took the situation strongly in hand. Before Hailey knew what had struck him the home was a battlefield, and when the time arrived for Mrs. Porter to go to England things came to a head. She invited Sybil to accompany her. Hailey forbade her to go. Sybil went. That is the whole campaign in a nutshell.

"I have just dismissed Nixon," said Mrs. Porter. "I have no objection in England going to war, but I will not have my odd−job man singing patriotic songs in the garden at midnight."

From the beginning of hostilities Mrs. Porter's attitude towards the European War had been clearly defined. It could continue, provided it did not bother her. If it bothered her it must stop.

Sybil looked uncomfortable.

"Aunt Lora, don't you think—I've been thinking—I believe I ought to go home."

"Ridiculous! You are perfectly safe here."

"I wasn't thinking so much about myself. I—I believe Hailey will be worried about me."

Mrs. Porter directed at her shrinking *protegee* one of the severe stares which had done so much to unman Mr. Nixon at their recent interview. This was backsliding, and must be checked.

"So much the better. It is just what Hailey wants—to have to worry about somebody except himself. The trouble with Hailey has always been that things have been made too comfortable for him. He has never had proper discipline. When Hailey was a child I once spanked him with a clothes−brush. The effects, while they lasted, were extremely gratifying. Unfortunately, immediately after the incident I ceased to be on speaking terms with his father, so was not able to follow up the good work."

Sybil shifted uneasily. She looked mutinous.

"He's my husband," she said.

"It's too late to worry about that."

"He is always very kind to me."

"Nonsense child! He treated you like a door−mat. When he was in a bad temper he snarled at you; when he was in a good temper he patronized you."

"He's very fond of me."

"Then why doesn't he try to get you back? Has he written you a single letter, asking you to go home, in the last two months?"

"You don't understand Hailey, Aunt Lora. He's so proud."

"Tchah!"

When Mrs. Porter said "Tchah!" it was final. There was nothing ill− tempered or violent about the ejaculation: it was simply final. Sybil withdrew.

It was Mrs. Porter's daily practice, when she had made her simple breakfast and given her household staff its instructions, to walk briskly out of her garden−gate, proceed for a mile down the high road, then, turning, to walk back and begin work on her current book. The procedure had two advantages. It cleared her brain, and it afforded mild exercise to Mike, her Irish terrier.

On the morning after the rout of Herbert Nixon, she had just emerged from the garden, when she was aware of a ragged figure coming towards her down the straight white road. She called to the dog, who was sniffing at an attractive−smelling dead bird which he had located under the hedge.

"Mike!"

Lora Delane Porter was not afraid of tramps; but it is no sign of fear to mobilize your forces; it is merely a sensible precaution in case of accidents. She mobilized Mike. He left the bird, on which he had intended to roll, with a back−glance of regret, and came trotting to her side.

"To heel!" said Mrs. Porter.

The tramp was a typical ruffian of his species. He was unkempt and grimy; he wore a soiled hat, a grey suit of clothes picked out with splashes of brown and green and there was no collar round his neck. He walked as if he had been partially hamstrung by a bungling amateur who had made a bad job of it.

As she drew level with him he looked at her, stopped, and said: "Aunt Lora!"

Mrs. Porter made it a rule to pass the ordinary tramp without a glance; but tramps who addressed her as "Aunt Lora" merited inspection. She accorded this inspection to the man before her, and gave a little gasp. His face was obscured by dust and perspiration, and he had a scrubby beard; but she recognized him.

"Hailey!"

To preserve a perfect poise in the face of all of life's untoward happenings was part of Mrs. Porter's religion. Though, for all her stern force of character, she was now inwardly aflame with curiosity, she did not show it in

her manner.

"What are you doing here, Hailey?" she inquired, calmly.

He passed the ruins of a silk handkerchief over his grimy face and groaned. He was a shocking spectacle.

"I've had an awful time!"

"You look it."

"I've walked every step of the way from Southampton."

"Why?"

"Why! Because I had to. Do I look as if I were doing this for my health?"

"It's an excellent thing for your health. You always did shirk exercise."

Hailey drew himself up and fixed his aunt with a gaze which was a little too bloodshot to be really dignified.

"Aunt Lora, do not misunderstand me. I have not come to you for sympathy. I have not come to you for assistance. I have not—"

"You look like a walking ploughed field."

"I have merely come—"

"Have you been sleeping in those clothes?"

Hailey's hauteur changed to a human irritation.

"Yes, I *have* been sleeping in these clothes, and I wish you wouldn't look at me as if I were a kind of freak."

"But you are."

"Aunt Lora, I have not come to you for sym—"

"Bless the boy, don't tell me all the things you have not come to me for. What *have* you come for? In the first place, why are you in England at all? Have you come to try and get Sybil to go home?"

"I have not. If Sybil is to return home, she must do so of her own free will. I shall not attempt to persuade her. I am here because, on the declaration of war, I was obliged to leave Paris, where I was spending a vacation. When I reached Southampton and tried to get a boat back to New York I found it impossible. My traveller's cheques and my letter of credit were valueless, and I was without a penny. I had lost all my luggage. I set out to walk to you because you were the only person who could tell me where Professor Tupper−Smith lived."

"Professor Tupper−Smith?"

"Certainly. Professor Tupper−Smith. The English bore you planted on me when he visited New York last year."

Hailey spoke bitterly. Over the unconscious head of this same Professor Tupper−Smith there had raged one of the most serious of the battles which had shattered his domestic peace. The professor was a well−known English writer on sociology, who had come to New York with a letter of introduction to Mrs. Porter. Mrs. Porter, wishing to house him more comfortably than he was being housed at his hotel, had taken him to Sybil. Hailey was out of town at the time, and the thing had been done in his absence. He and Sybil had had one of their first quarrels about it. In the end the professor had stayed on, and incidentally nearly driven Hailey mad.

Now, if a man had nearly driven you mad in New York, bursting with your meat the while, the least he can do, when you call on him, destitute, in England, is to honour your note−of−hand for a few hundred dollars.

That was how Hailey had argued, and that was what had driven him to his aunt. She knew the location of this human El Dorado; he did not.

"Why do you want to see Professor Tupper−Smith?"

Hailey kicked the hard road in his emotion.

"I want to ask him for his photograph. That's all. Of course, I entertain no idea of getting him to lend me money so that I can get back to New York. As he is the only man I know in England, naturally that had not occurred to me."

Mrs. Porter was a grim woman, sparing with her smiles, but at these words she laughed heartily.

"Why, of course! Do you know, Hailey, I think I must be getting stupid. I never realized till now what a complete fix you were in."

"Will you tell me that man's address?"

"No. At least, not for a long time. But I'll do something else. I'll give you a job."

"What do you mean?"

"Hailey, you always were an undisciplined child. I often told your father so—when we were on speaking

terms. Rich men's sons are always like that. I was saying to Sybil only yesterday that what you needed was discipline. Discipline and honest work! They may make something of you yet. My odd−job man left me yesterday—you shall take his place. You know what an odd−job man is, I presume? For instance"—she looked past him—"he washes the dog. I see that Mike is rolling again. He cannot understand that we don't like it. You had better catch him and wash him at once, Hailey. Take care he does not bite you. Irish terriers are quick−tempered.'

"Aunt Lora, do you imagine for a moment that I am going to—"

"You won't find out where Professor Tupper−Smith lives if you don't."

Hailey's unshaven jaw fell. There was a silence broken only by the pleased snortings of Mike.

"Aunt Lora, if it is your wish to humiliate me—"

"Don't be absurd, child. Humiliate you, indeed! You talk as if you were a prince of the blood. I am doing you a great kindness. This will be the making of you. You have been spoiled since you were a boy. You treated Sybil as if you were a Sultan. You were a mass of conceit. A month or two of this will—"

"A month or two!"

"Or three," said Mrs. Porter. "Well, make up your mind quickly. You have a perfectly free choice. If you prefer to go on tramping through England, by all means do so."

A minute later Mike, busy with his bird, felt his collar grasped. He gazed up into a set, scrubby−bearded face. It was the face of a man with a hidden sorrow.

"Under the tap in the stable−yard is the best place," said Mrs. Porter.

Of the two principals in the ablutions of Mike, the bather and the bathed, it would have been hard for an impartial spectator to have said which looked the unhappier. Mike's views on total immersion were peculiar. To plunge into any river, pond, or other sheet of water was one of his chief pleasures. In a tub, with soap playing a part in the proceedings, he became a tortured martyr.

Nor did Hailey approach the operation in a more rollicking spirit. He had never washed a dog before. When his dog in New York required washing, some underling below−stairs did it. The thought crossed his mind, as he wrought upon Mike, that whatever that underling's wages were, they were not enough.

He was concentrating tensely upon his task when Sybil entered the yard.

Sybil was in the grip of a number of emotions. When Mrs. Porter had informed her of Hailey's miraculous appearance, joy had predominated. When she learned of his misfortunes, it had been succeeded by pity. Then the curious fact came home to her that, though Hailey was apparently there, he had not yet appeared before her. And when this mystery was explained by the information that he was washing the dog in the stable−yard, her astonishment grew. Finally, when she had grasped the whole position of affairs a great dismay came upon her. She knew Hailey so well—his pride, his sensitive fastidiousness, his aloofness from all that was rough and undignified in the world. This was terrible. She pleaded with Mrs. Porter, but Mrs. Porter remained resolute.

Then she sped to the stable−yard, to witness the horror for herself.

Hailey looked up. Silence reigned in the stable−yard. Hailey looked at Sybil. Sybil stood there without a word. Mike shivered miserably, as one on the brink of the tomb.

"Well?" said Hailey, at length.

"Oh, Hailey!"

"Well?"

"Oh, Hailey, it *is* nice seeing you again!"

"*Is* it?"

Sybil's mouth quivered, and her eyes grew large and plaintive. Hailey did not soften. Sybil, he reminded himself, was in Mrs. Porter's camp, and it was Mrs. Porter who had inflicted this beast of a dog on him.

He removed Mike from the tub and enveloped him in the towel.

"Hailey, dear, don't be cross."

"Cross?"

It is difficult for a man conscious of a four days' beard and perhaps a quarter of an inch of English soil on all the exposed parts of his person to raise his eyes with chilly dignity, but Hailey did it. He did it twice.

"Cross?"

"I begged Aunt Lora not to—"

"Not to what?"

"Not to—to make you do this. I begged her to ask you to—to stay with us."

"I am staying with you."

"I mean as a guest."

A third time Hailey raised those dusty eyebrows.

"Do you imagine for a moment that I would accept my aunt's hospitality?"

There was a pause.

Hailey released Mike, who shot out of the yard like a torpedo.

"Why did you come to England, Hailey?"

"I was on a vacation in France, and had to leave."

"You didn't come to—to see me?"

"No."

"Hailey, you don't seem very fond of me."

Hailey picked up the towel and folded it.

"If Aunt Lora tells you where Mr. Tupper−Smith lives, I suppose you will go back to New York again?"

"If Mr. Tupper−Smith will lend me the money, I shall go by the first boat."

He lifted the tub with an air of finality, and emptied it down the drain. Sybil paused irresolutely for a moment, then walked slowly away.

The days which followed did nothing to relieve Hailey's depression. Indeed, they deepened it. He had not imagined that he could ever feel sorrier for himself than he had felt by bedtime that first night, but he discovered that he had merely, so to speak, scratched the surface of gloom.

On the second day he sought audience of his aunt.

"Aunt Lora, this cannot continue."

"Why? Have you decided to become a tramp again?"

"You are taking an unjustifiable advantage of my misfortune in being helpless to resent it to—"

"When you were a small boy, Hailey, you came to visit me once, and behaved like a perfect little devil. I took advantage of your misfortune in being helpless to resent it to spank you with a clothes− brush. My mistake was that I stopped the treatment before I had cured you. The treatment has now begun again, and will continue till you are out of danger."

"Aunt Lora, you cannot realize the humiliation of my position."

"Nonsense! Use your imagination. Try to think you're a pioneer out in the West."

"I have no ambition to be a pioneer out in the West."

"Your real trouble, Hailey, is that you think the society beneath you."

"I am not accustomed to hob−nob with cooks."

"It is exceedingly good of my cook to let you hob−nob with her. She knows you came here without reference, after having been a tramp. It shows she is not a snob."

Hailey returned to his hewing of wood and drawing of water.

For a rather excessively fastidious young man with an extremely high opinion of himself there are more congenial walks in life than that of odd−job man in a country house.

The duties of an odd−job man are extensive and peculiar. He is seldom idle. If the cook does not require him to chop wood, the gardener commandeers him for potato−digging. He cleans the knives; he cleans the shoes; he cleans the windows; he cleans the dog. In a way his is an altruistic life, for his primary mission is to scatter sweetness and light, and to bestow on others benefits in which he himself cannot share; but it is not an easy one.

Hailey did all these things and others besides. His work began at an hour which in happier days he had looked on as part of the night, and it ended when sheer mental fatigue made it impossible for those in command over him to think up anything else for him to do. When this happened, he would light his pipe and stroll moodily in the garden. It was one small count in his case against Fate that he, once known for his nice taste in cigars, should be reduced to a cheap wooden pipe and the sort of tobacco they sell in English villages.

His was not a nature that adapted itself readily to deviations from habit, particularly when such deviations involved manual labour. There were men of his acquaintance in New York who would have treated his predicament in a spirit of humorous adventure. But then they were men whose idea of enjoyment was to camp out in lonely woods with a guide and a fishing−rod. Newport was the wildest life that Hailey had ever known. He hated discomfort; he hated manual labour; he hated being under orders; and he hated the society of his social inferiors. To treat his present life in a whimsically adventurous spirit was beyond him.

Of all its disagreeable features, possibly that which he resented most was the sense of inferiority which it brought with it. In the real fundamentals of existence, he now perceived, such as reducing unwieldy blocks of wood to neat faggots and putting a polish on a shoe, he was useless. He, Hailey Bannister, respected in Wall Street as a coming man, was continually falling short of even the modest standard of efficiency set up by his predecessor, Mr. Nixon. The opinion below− stairs was that Herbert had been pretty bad, but that Hailey was unspeakable. They were nice about it—but impatient, distinctly impatient; and it wounded Hailey. He tried to tell himself that the good opinion of the masses was not worth having, but he could not bring himself to believe it. For the first time in his life he found himself humble, even apologetic. It was galling for a young man's self−esteem to be in Rome and fail through sheer incompetence to do as the Romans do. There were moments when a word of praise from the cook would have given Hailey more satisfaction than two successful deals in Wall Street.

It was by chance rather than design that Sybil chose the psychological moment for re−entering his life. His moods since his arrival had alternated between a wild yearning for her and positive dislike. But one night, as he stood smoking in the stable−yard, he was longing for her with a sentimental fervour of which in the days of his freedom he had never been capable. It had been a particularly hard day, and, as he stood poisoning the summer night with his tobacco, a great loneliness and remorse filled him. He had treated Sybil badly, he told himself. He went over in his mind episodes of their life together in New York, and shuddered at the picture he conjured up of himself. No wonder she shunned him.

And, as he stood there, she came to him.

"Hailey!"

She was nervous, and he did not wonder at it. A girl coming to speak to the sort of man he had just been contemplating might have been excused if she had called out the police reserves as an escort.

"Yes?"

He was horrified at the gruffness of his voice. He had meant to speak with tender softness. It was this bad tobacco.

"Hailey, dear, I've brought you this."

Wonderful intuition of Woman! It was the one thing he desired—a fat cigar, and, as his trained senses told him, a cigar of quality. He took it in a silence too deep for words.

"We were calling on some people. The man's study−door was open, and I saw the box—I hadn't time to take more than one—I thought you would like it."

Hailey could not speak. He was overcome. He kissed her.

He was conscious of a curious dizziness.

In the old days kissing Sybil had always been one of his daily acts. He had done it the first thing in the morning, last thing at night. It had not made him dizzy then. He had never even derived any particular pleasure from it, especially in the morning, when he was a little late, and the car was waiting to take him to business and the butler standing by with his hat and cane. Then it had sometimes been almost a nuisance, and only his rigid conscientiousness had made him do it. But now, in the scented dusk of this summer night—well, it was different. It was intensely different.

"I must go back," she said, quickly. "Aunt Lora is waiting for me."

Reluctantly he released her, and the night swallowed her up. It was a full minute before he moved.

He became aware of something in his right hand. It was the broken remnants of a crushed cigar.

They fell into the habit of meeting in the garden after dark. All day he looked forward to these moments. Somehow they seemed to supply something which had always been lacking in his life. He had wooed Sybil in the days before their marriage in ballrooms and drawing− rooms. It had seemed quite satisfactory to him at the time, but this— this stealthy coming together in the darkness, these whispered conversations under the stars—this was

what he had always been starving for. He realized it now.

His outlook on life seemed to change. He saw things with different eyes. Quite suddenly it was borne in upon him how amazingly fit he felt. In New York he had been exacting in the matter of food, critical, and hard to please. Now, if supper was a trifle behind time, he had to exercise restraint to keep himself from raiding the larder. Hitherto unsuspected virtues in cold mutton were revealed to him. It might be humiliating for a young man highly respected in Wall Street and in the clubs of New York to chop wood, sweep leaves, and dig potatoes, but these things certainly made for health.

Nor had his views on the society in which he moved remained unaltered. The cook—what a good, motherly soul, always ready with a glass of beer when the heat of the day made work oppressive. The gardener—what a sterling conversationalist! The parlour−maid—what a military expert! That night at supper, when the parlour−maid exposed Germany's entire plan of campaign, while the cook said that she never did hold with war, and the gardener told the story of his uncle who had lost a leg in the Indian Mutiny, was one of the most enjoyable that Hailey had ever spent.

One portion of Hailey's varied duties was to walk a mile down the road and post letters at the village post−office. He generally was not required to do this till late in the evening, but occasionally there would be an important letter for the morning post, for Mrs. Porter was a voluminous correspondent.

One morning, as he was turning in at the gate on his way back from the village, a voice addressed him, and he was aware of a man in a black suit, seated upon a tricycle.

This in itself would have been enough to rivet his interest, for he had never in his life seen a man on a tricycle. But it was not only the tricycle that excited him. The voice seemed familiar. It aroused vaguely unpleasant memories.

"My good man—why, Mr. Bannister! Bless my soul! I had no idea you were in England. I am delighted to see you. I never tire of telling my friends of your kindness to me in New York."

The landscape reeled before Hailey's blinking eyes. Speech was wiped from his lips. It was Professor Tupper−Smith.

"I must not offer to shake hands, Mr. Bannister. I have no doubt there is still risk of infection. How *is* the patient?"

"Eh?" said Hailey.

"Mumps is a painful, distressing malady, but happily not dangerous."

"Mumps?"

"Mrs. Porter told me that there was mumps in the house. I trust all is now well? That is what has kept me away. Mrs. Porter knows how apprehensive I am of all infectious ailments, and expressly forbade me to call. Previously I had been a daily visitor. It has been a great deprivation to me, I can assure you, Mr. Bannister. A woman of wonderful intelligence!"

"Do you meant to tell me—do you live near here?"

"That house you see through the trees is mine."

Hailey drew a deep breath.

"Could I speak to you," he said, "on a matter of importance?"

In the stable−yard, which their meetings had hallowed for him, Hailey stood waiting that night. there had been rain earlier in the evening, and the air was soft and mild, and heavy with the scent of flowers. But Hailey was beyond the soothing influence of cool air and sweet scents. He felt bruised.

She had been amusing herself with him, playing with him. There could be no other explanation. She had known all the time that this man Tupper−Smith was living at their very gates, and she had kept it from him. She had known what it meant to him to find the man, and she had kept it from him. He waited grimly.

"Hailey!"

There was a glimmer of white against the shadows.

"Here I am."

She came to him, her face raised, but he drew back.

"Sybil," he said, "I never asked you before. Can you tell me where this man Tupper−Smith lives?"

She started. He could only see her dimly, but he sensed it.

"N−no."

He smiled bitterly. She had the grace to hesitate. That, he supposed, must be put to her credit.

"Strange," he said. "He lives down the road. Curious your not knowing, when he used to come here so often."

When Sybil spoke her voice was a whisper.

"I was afraid it would happen."

"Yes, I'm sorry I have not been able to amuse you longer. But it must have been delightful, while it lasted. You certainly fooled me. I didn't even think it worth while asking you if you knew his address. I took it for granted that, if you had known, you would have told me. And you were laughing the whole time! Well, I suppose I ought not to blame you. I can see now that I used to treat you badly in New York, and you can't be blamed for getting even. Well, I'm afraid the joke's over now. I met him this morning."

"Hailey, you don't understand."

"Surely it couldn't be much plainer?"

"I couldn't tell you. I—I couldn't."

"Of course not. It would have spoiled everything."

"You know it was not that. it was because—do you remember the day you came here? You told me then that, directly you found him, you would go back to America."

"Well?"

"Well, I didn't want you to go. And afterwards, when we began to meet like this, I—still more didn't want you to go."

A bird rustled in the trees behind them. The rustling ceased. In the distance a corncrake was calling monotonously. The sound came faintly over the meadows, emphasizing the stillness.

"Don't you understand? You must understand. I was awfully sorry for you, but I was selfish. I wanted to keep you. It has all been so different here. Over in New York we never seemed to be together. We used to quarrel. Everything seemed to go wrong. But here it has been perfect. It was like being together on a desert island. I couldn't end it. I hated to see you unhappy, and I wanted it to go on for ever. So——"

Groping at a venture, he found her arm, and held it.

"Sybil! Sybil, dear, I'm going back to−morrow; going home. Will you come with me?"

"I though you had given me up. I thought you never wanted me back. You said—"

"Forget what I said. When you left New York I was a fool. I was a brute. I'm different now. Listen, Sybil. Tupper−Smith—I always liked that man—lent me fifty pounds this morning. In gold! He tricycled five miles to get it. That's the sort of man he is. I hired a car, went to Southampton, and fixed things up with the skipper of an American tramp. She sails to−morrow night. Sybil, will you come? There's acres of room, and you'll like the skipper. He chews tobacco. A corking chap! Will you come?"

He could hear her crying. He caught her to him in the darkness.

"Will you?"

"Oh, my dear!"

"It isn't a floating palace, you know. It's just an old, rusty tramp− ship. We may make New York in three weeks, or we may not. There won't be much to eat except corned beef and crackers. And, Sybil—er—do you object to a slight smell of pigs? The last cargo was pigs, and you can still notice it a little."

"I *love* the smell of pigs, Hailey, dear," said Sybil.

In the drawing−room Lora Delane Porter, that great woman, relaxed her powerful mind with a selected volume of Spinoza's "Ethics." She looked up as Sybil entered.

"You've been crying, child."

"I've been talking to Hailey."

Mrs. Porter dropped Spinoza and stiffened militantly in her chair.

"If that boy Hailey has been bullying you, he shall wash Mike *now*."

"Aunt Lora, I want to go home to−morrow, please."

"What!"

"Hailey has met Mr. Tupper−Smith and he lent him fifty pounds, and he motored into Southampton—"

"Mr. Tupper−Smith?"

"No, Hailey."

"*That's* where he was all the afternoon. No wonder they couldn't find him to dig the potatoes."

"And he has bought accommodation for me and himself on a tramp−steamer which has been carrying pigs. We shall live on corned beef and crackers, and we may get to New York some time or we may not. And Hailey says the captain is such a nice man, who chews tobacco."

Mrs. Porter started.

"Sybil, do you meant to tell me that Hailey proposes to sail to New York on a tramp−steamer that smells of pigs, and live on corned beef and crackers? And that he *likes* a man who chews tobacco?"

"He said he was a corking chap."

Mrs. Porter picked up her Spinoza.

"Well, well," she said. "I failed with the clothes−brush, but I seemed to have worked wonders with the simple−life treatment."