SIX SHORT STORIES

P. G. WODEHOUSE

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Etext by Dagny
and the Blandings Group

CUPID AND THE PAINT−BRUSH

Marjorie was sitting under the cedar on the tennis−lawn. It seemed to me that the best way of spending my morning would be to go and sit under the cedar on the tennis−lawn too.

"Good morning," I said as I came up. I had seen her before, but "Good morning" is such an excellent conversational gambit.

"Good morning," said Marjorie. She marked with a finger her place in the book she was reading, and tried to impress me with the idea that she was busy, but could give me two minutes if I had something of exceptional importance to say.

I declined to encourage this absurd attitude. I took away her book kindly but firmly, laid it down on the grass out of her reach, and began.

"Marjorie," I said.

From constantly playing Juliet to my Romeo, Marjorie has developed a habit of reading my thoughts, which at times I find distinctly inconvenient.

"I should make you wretched," she said.

"Not at all," said I politely. "Besides, what are you doing now but making me wretched?"

"You don't know what I'm like, really, or you wouldn't —"

"Persevere? Of course I should. I know much better than you what's good for you. Think how much older I am. We were made for one another."

Marjorie appeared to ponder.

"Say the word," I added encouragingly. Marjorie and I have known each other since I was in sailor suits.

"You'd hate the sight of me in a couple of years," said she.

"By that time you would adore me so passionately that you wouldn't notice it. I am an acquired taste; but once acquired, never lost."

"You know it wouldn't do, really."

"May I ask why on earth not? I wish we could manage this affair without argument. I hate arguing."

"So do I."

"Then why argue? Agree with me — and all shall be forgiven."

"Will it make you conceited if I tell you something?"

"Impossible."

"Well, it isn't you I object to. It's the being married at all — just yet." The last two words were added as a species of afterthought.

"Now, that is a concession. My suit, then, I take it, is practically smiled upon?"

"I knew it would make you conceited."

"Not at all. Merely natural gratification. What is your objection to marriage in the abstract? Tell me the worst. Are you a woman with a mission?"

"Well, I suppose I am, in a way. I want to paint."

"But —"

"I knew you would say that. Don't be silly. I mean paint pictures, of course. You shouldn't twist people's meanings. It's a very bad habit. Will you please pass me my book?"

I deliberately moved the inconvenient volume still further out of the way with my foot. Such a request at such a moment was simply impertinent, and I ignored it.

"Will you give me my book, please?"

"No. Couldn't you go on painting when you were Mrs. Me?

"Of course not. I should get lazy."

"We could work together. I also am an artist of peculiar merit."

"You?"

"Decidedly. You didn't see the comments of the Press on my last year's Academy picture, then?"

"No. Did you?"

"No. That, however, was simply because there was no such picture. Painting, however, is a game which two can play at. Do you know what my initials are? R. A."

"Well?"

"Well, if that is not an omen, what is an omen? Tell me that. Now, look here, Marjorie, we are going to make a sporting bargain. We will each paint a picture for the Academy this year, and whoever paints the better one has his or her (it is not likely to be her) way in the matter. Do you agree?"

"Who is to judge?"

"We will buttonhole the President and get his private opinion. Only you must not sign your name, of course. These Academicians, you know, they'd give the verdict to a lady without a second look. Now do you agree?"

"Very well. It's very silly."

"Silly! Good gracious! It's a life and death matter to me. That is all I want to say. You may now go on reading that very worthless book. I've lost your place."

"Marjorie left next day. A fortnight later I met her in town. I was coming down the steps of my club, and our ways, by some extraordinary coincidence, happened to lie in the same direction.

"How does the picture progress?" I asked. "Personally I have chosen an allegorical subject. I call it 'Waiting.'"

"That is original."

"Isn't it? Originality is quite a hobby of mine. I intend to represent a beautiful young lady dressed in a neat creation of white, standing on a rustic bridge with her back to a rather sweet thing in Turneresque sunsets."

"I see. And how does the title apply?"

"She is supposed to be waiting for a gentleman to whom she is devotedly attached. He is at present not in sight. But in one corner of the canvas an angel form, in whom the acute observer will readily recognise Fame, heralds his approach with a few notes from a gold trumpet. An expression of intense but natural gratification shines on the face of the beautiful young lady."

"I suppose so."

"And how is yours getting on, and what is it to be?"

"I am painting a landscape."

"With figures?"

"There's a cow in one corner."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

"Then I feel secure. The President, wavering between the merits of our respective landscapes, will remember my beautiful young lady, and the thing will be done. I see him at this moment, his face one large expanse of admiration."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. Now perhaps, under the circumstances, you would like to retire from the contest and acknowledge my superiority?"

"I shall do nothing of the sort. I don't believe you are painting a picture at all. I don't believe you *can* paint."

"Good morning, Miss Somerville," I said. "After that, you will hardly expect me to speak to you. Here we are at your door, and I will take my wounded self off in a hansom."

Sending−in day came and went, and one morning I called at the Somervilles' and asked to see Marjorie. The butler thought she was in the drawing−room. The rest of the family were out, but she had stopped at home. Should he tell her that I had called? I said that there was no necessity to announce me. I would go to the drawing−room.

I knocked steadily at the door for three−quarters of an hour (it may have been less) and then went in. At first the room seemed empty. Then I noticed a limp form on the sofa. It was Marjorie, and she was crying. I can stand a good many things, but one of the things which I cannot stand is to see Marjorie cry. She started up as I came in, and endeavoured to mend matters with a wholly inadequate pocket−handkerchief.

"I did knock," I said. "Marjorie, do tell me what's the matter. Has the picture been rejected?"

"Yes." A sob from the sofa.

"Never mind. We're both in the same —"

"I see now how silly I was ever to think I could paint."

I caught my own eye in the mirror and winked affectionately at it.

"Marjorie," I said, placing a hand in hers — always a sound move — "we will forget that idiotic wager. Treat me as if I had never asked you before, and tell me that you'll — will you?" At this point it seemed judicious to remove my hand from hers and slide it round her waist. I did so. She made no protest.

"Marjorie, say 'Yes.'"

"Yes." In a whisper from the sofa.

"After that, several other things seemed judicious, and I did them all. She appeared rather to like it than otherwise.

"Marjorie," I said, after a long silence, "do you know why I came today? I wanted to ask you to take me in spite of that absurd wager."

"But you won it."

"No. It was a drawn game. My allegory failed to impress the Committee."

"What! You were refused?"

"My picture was. I was accepted. By you. Don't move."

She did not move.

Another long silence.

"We'll take to photography," I said at last thoughtfully. "Share the same camera and develop off the same plate."

Marjorie sat up suddenly.

"Do you know," she said, "I don't mind so very, very much about the picture. I never did think very highly of the Academy. You know, it's so — so —"

"Yes, isn't it?" I said. Exactly what I have always thought about it. Don't move."

She did not move.

THE IDLE KING

There was once a King of Aldebaran, and he was probably the very idlest man in the world. He would sit on his throne and do nothing from morning till night. And then he would go to bed, and the next day it would be just the same. He did nothing but sit still. And he was not even nice to look at. It was not quite his fault that he was so lazy. His people would never let him do anything for himself. Sometimes he would say, "It is a fine day. I will make a law." And then the Vizier would come bustling up, murmuring, "Excuse me, your Majesty, one moment." And he would call Parliament together and take the law out of the King's hands and make it for him. And sometimes the King would say, "It is a fine day. I will go a−hunting." And then the Lord Chief Huntsman would jump on his horse, shouting, "Don't you trouble yourself, your Majesty. Allow me." And then he would blow his horn, and ride off, and not come back for the whole day. And the King began to grow very tired of doing nothing. He could not enjoy his meals or the sunshine, or his dogs, or cats, or anything. So one day when the Vizier was busy making a law which he had specially wanted to make himself, and the Lord Chief Huntsman had gone off with his hawk and his hound to save his Majesty the trouble of hunting, he took off his crown and his beautiful clothes, dressed himself up in a very old suit and a very old cap, and started out by the back door of the Palace to see the world.

It was nearly his tea−time when he had started, and he soon began to grow hungry. It was about this time that the Lord Chief Butler always brought him a pot of tea (which, of course, he was never allowed to pour out for himself, though he wanted to dreadfully), and a plate of hot buttered toast, and little cakes with chocolate on them. So he went to the nearest cottage, and knocked at the door. It was quite a treat for him to knock at a door all by himself. Generally the Lord Chief Footman did it for him.

"Come in," said a voice. "And mind the step."

The King went in. Round the table were seated the cottager, his wife, and his children.

"Please, I want some tea," said the King.

"You will have to work for it," said the cottager.

"What *is* work, please? Is it what everybody else does for me?"

"It's not what everybody else does for *me*, at any rate," said the cottager, with a jolly laugh, "and thank goodness they don't. What I should do if everybody did my work for me, I do not know. I should be so dull that I should have no appetite for tea. Whereas now," he added, taking a huge bite out of a piece of bread−and−jam, "my appetite is exceedingly good, thanks very much, and so forth."

And swallowing his bread−and−jam, he sang the following verse, to which the whole family beat time with their teaspoons.

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Oh, I think a man's crazy who's idle and lazy,
    I pity the people who shirk.
It's a pound to a shilling, you'll smile if you're willing
    To work! work! work!

If you don't see the beauty of doing your duty,
    Your happiness stops with a jerk.
So I counsel you, dunce, to start learning at once,
    And work! work! work!
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It was rather a pretty song.

"That sounds very sensible indeed," said the King, when he had finished. "I should like to begin now, if I may. What shall I do?"

"In yonder yard," replied the cottager, "is some wood. Chop it. Will somebody kindly be good enough to oblige me by passing the jam?"

So the King went out into the yard, and though he did not know very much about chopping wood (for the Lord Chief Woodman always did that for him), he somehow managed to finish it in time. And then be went back,

and settled down to a really good tea.

"Well," he said thoughtfully, as be finished the jam, "there is no denying it. This work is a wonderful thing. I have never enjoyed my tea so much in all my life. Thank you very much."

"Not at all," said the polite cottager. I beg you will not mention it." He opened the door, and the King went out again upon his travels.

He wandered some miles, until night began to come on, and he began to think about finding somewhere to sleep. At last he came to a castle, and rang the visitors' bell.

"Could you please tell me," he said, as the servant opened the door, "if I might sleep here for the night? I have come a long way, and I am tired."

The servant said he would make inquiries within. He went through a door at the side of the hall, and soon came back with his master's compliments, and he could certainly sleep there if he was willing to do some work in return.

"It certainly is a most wonderful thing, this work," thought the King. "When I remember how little of it there was in my palace, and see what a great deal there is everywhere else, it surprises me. I will certainly do the work he wants me to," he added aloud.

"That's right," said the footman. "Come to think of it, there's nothing like work."

And fixing his eyes dreamily on the ceiling, he sang the following verse:

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"Oh, work it is a gentle thing,
  Beloved from pole to pole.
It suits the fancy of a king —
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"Ah," interrupted his Majesty, "you're right there."

"And," went on the footman,

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"It satisfies his soul.

"In idleness, though sweet at first,
    Dull care is apt to lurk.
But happier he, it seems to me,
    Who spends his time in work."
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It was rather a nice song.

"Excellent!" said the King. "Now show me the work, and I will do it."

The footman led the way to a cellar, and there were two heaps of great stones, and beside them lay a hammer.

"There," he said. "If you could kindly make it convenient to break those stones up small, we should esteem it a personal favour, and in the meantime I will be getting your room ready. I'll make you a nice cup of bread−and−milk to eat in bed. That's the hammer by the stones. You grasp it firmly in the two hands by the handle — that's this end here — and hit a stone with it. And by a curious process which it would take too long to explain, the stone will break into smaller stones. You then hit each of the smaller stones in the same manner, and in time you will find that the heap has become a lot of very small stones indeed. Then you come upstairs. Good−bye."

The King knew nothing whatever about breaking stones, for the Lord Chief Roadmender always did the work of that kind in the palace, but he set to, and in quite a short time all the stones were broken up so small that he could hardly see them. Then he put his hammer down, and went upstairs. And there, as the footman had promised, was the bread−and−milk steaming at the side of the bed on a chair. He enjoyed it more than he would have believed it possible that any one could enjoy bread−and−milk.

"Really," he said to himself, "it's a wonderful thing. Here am I, the King of Aldebaran, who usually find myself unable to eat anything more than a little wing of chicken, enjoying my bread−and−milk like a baby. It is really a fine invention, is work! When I get back to my palace, I must practise it more. Now I'll go to sleep." He

went to sleep at once. He had never slept so well in his life before.

And when he got up in the morning. he felt so well that he danced twice round his room before coming down to breakfast.

To earn his breakfast he had to pump water from a well. It was quite a new experience. At the palace the Lord Chief Ostler had always done it for him. He quite enjoyed it, and when he had finished he enjoyed his breakfast still more.

After breakfast he thanked his host kindly, and went away.

After stopping to wish the cottager, whom he found working in his garden, good morning, he made his way back to the palace.

The Vizier and the other courtiers welcomed him joyfully. They thought he had been lost.

"Well" said the Vizier, when he had heard the story of the King's adventures, "if your Majesty had thought of mentioning that your Majesty intended to take a walk, the Lord Chief Tramp might have taken it instead, and saved your Majesty the trouble."

"Then I'm very glad I didn't mention the fact," said the King. "In future I intend to do everything I possibly can for myself. You do your work, and I'll do mine."

"Your Majesty is surely joking," said the startled Vizier. "No King of Aldebaran has ever worked."

"This King of Aldebaran is going to. And he is going to begin at once. Bring me the Law Book."

"Cannot I —" began the Vizier.

"Bring me the Law Book," repeated the King. "In future I mean to make all the laws myself, And this is the first of them."

And in a beautifully clear voice he sang the following verse:

"You may do whatever sort of work you please.
 You may do whatever task you're most inclined to.
You may do it on the earth or on the seas.
 You may do it in the air, if you've a mind to.
You may choose to work at sums or plough your lands.
 You may choose an ordinary or a rum thing.
You may do it with your head or with your hands.
 But every one in future must do something!"

And they did. And they all in consequence lived very happily ever afterwards.

THE DASTARDLY BEHAVIOUR OF BASHMEAD

The cynical and unblushing baseness of Rupert Alexander Bashmead had formed a subject of conversation among his friends and acquaintances from his eighth birthday onwards. At school his masters, drawing gloomy conclusions from the ingenious system of cribs for which the name of Bashmead is still a household word at St Asterisk's, were wont to observe that he would come to a bad end. They gave him to understand that if — by some miscarriage of justice — his sentence were to be commuted to penal servitude for life, they would be wounded and disappointed. At College it was an accepted axiom in his set that if there was only one comfortable chair in a room, Bashmead got it. In fact, he was Bashmead. There is no other word.

Among the friends he made at College — for even a man of his hideous moral blackness makes friends — was one James Prendergast. To sum up James's salient points, he was six−foot−two in height, frivolous in disposition, and boasted a skill amounting to genius in the art of tossing for drinks. He had a theory that a man who wishes to leave the world a better place for his presence in it should choose a walk in life, and not rest until he has made himself pre−eminent in it. James's walk in life was tossing for drinks.

It did not escape the notice of his acquaintances that Rupert Alexander Bashmead was at considerable pains to cultivate James Prendergast. To account for this phenomenon, they were divided into two schools of thought. His enemies said, in their malicious way, that they supposed he must like James. His friends generously ridiculed the idea. It was absurd, they argued, to suppose that he would make a friend of a man unless he hoped to get something out of him. He was trying to borrow money from James — that was it.

But they were wrong, and for this reason — James had no money. If he had any, we have every reason to suppose that Rupert would have endeavoured to borrow it but as he had none another explanation becomes necessary. Nor is it far to seek. James had a sister, Muriel. There was not much of her, but what there was was charming. Brown hair and grey eyes. Some people said she was clever. Her friends said it was a pity, but she was not nearly so clever as she imagined herself to be.

It was shortly after his introduction to her that Rupert discovered, with no small astonishment, that there was someone in the world whom he cared for more than himself. Matters speedily reached such a pitch that, after carefully diagnosing his symptoms, he came to the conclusion that he was madly in love. At the time at which this story opens he had reached the last stage, where the patient habitually steals small articles, such as gloves and handkerchiefs, from the Object; treasures them simply because she has touched them, and resolves to lead a better life.

It was, therefore, with immense disgust that he found that he had a rival, a person of such innate nobility of character that, though his name was George Jobson, he was not ashamed of it. Also he wore a made−up tie, and was not ashamed of that either. Moral worth could go no further.

Muriel seemed to like his surety. Nay, to judge by appearances, she preferred it to that of Rupert Alexander Bashmead. Jobson's strong suit was literature. Under the pseudonym of "Theodore Dalrymple" he had once had a short poem published in a magazine. It was not so much the fact that he had received two−and−eightpence for this effort that appealed to Muriel. For the sordid gains of the pen she had little sympathy. It was the fame that won her respect. She, too, trod the thorny paths of Literature. One of her stories, "The Love of Gabriel Undershaw" had been refused by some of the best periodicals in London. This did not make her arrogant, but it gave her a certain feeling of superiority over those of more merely mortal clay, and on the strength of it she had called Rupert Alexander Bashmead — much to the delight of Jobson, who had been present at the outrage — vapid and irreflective, and had scouted the notion that he possessed a soul. And what was left of Rupert had retired in bad order to his lonely rooms. While he was sitting there, chewing a pipe and revolving thoughts of breaking into feverish verse on his own account, James appeared.

"You seem mouldy," was James's didactic utterance. "I've got something here that'll cheer you up."

"Bet it won't," said Rupert, with gloom.

"I bet it does. It nearly killed me. I thought I should have broken something internally. It's a story of my sister's. I found it in the drawing−room. Are you ready?"

Rupert had never been privileged to hear anything from Muriel's pen before.

"I didn't know your sister wrote comic things," he said.

"Nor does she mean to," replied James briefly. "Now then."

And, having announced the title, "Stolen Lips," he embarked upon the story.

For the first two paragraphs the gloom of his listener's countenance remained unshaken. At the fourth his features relaxed. At the seventh he gulped. And, by the time the middle of the tale was reached, he was on the floor biting the carpet.

"More, more!" moaned the stricken Rupert as his friend finished. "Read it again."

He read it again.

And this is where the peculiar baseness of Rupert Alexander Bashmead begins to rear its serpent head. I find the ink on my pen growing white with horror as I write of that scoundrel's immoral doings. Briefly, his shameful conduct was this. He egged on his accomplice, the man Prendergast, to read "Stolen Lips" to him until its first freshness, and, so to speak, its suddenness, had worn off, and he could hear it administered to him without any violent upheaval. Then he put into effect the inconceivably scandalous plot which his disgraceful mind had formed. He called upon Miss Muriel Prendergast at a time when he knew that George Jobson would be there, and, by preconcerted arrangement, James, his misguided tool, entered the room.

"Oh, I say," remarked James, extending a bundle of manuscript, "I've found that story you lost, Muriel."

"Oh, I am glad!" said Muriel, clutching the recovered treasure.

"I wish," observed the snake, Bashmead, "that you would read it to us."

"Oh, please do!" cooed the unsuspecting Jobson.

"If you would *really* like it," said Muriel.

"Oh, we should," murmured Jobson.

"It is called," said Muriel, "'Stolen Lips.'"

James darted from the room, and she began to read.

"If," said the unspeakable Bashmead, severely, three minutes later, "you cannot behave like a gentleman, Mr. Jobson, wouldn't it be as well if you went?"

"Good−bye, Mr. Jobson," said Muriel. Her manner would have been noticeably chilly in a refrigerator. Jobson left.

"A man," said Bashmead, judicially, "who could find anything to laugh at in a beautiful story like 'Stolen Lips' is capable of anything."

"Yes, isn't he?" said Muriel.

"He is outside the pale; unworthy to associate with his fellow−man. A fit companion for the brutes that perish. In fine, a worm!"

"Yes, isn't he?" said Muriel.

It is a painful story. I have only to add that a wedding was arranged and shortly took place between Rupert Alexander Bashmead and Muriel, only daughter of the late Francis Prendergast; that the bride, who was given away by her uncle, Sir Theophilus Prendergast, looked charming in mousseline de soie, with heliotrope aiguillettes; and that the presents were both numerous and costly. As for George Jobson, shortly before the wedding he joined an exploring expedition to darkest Clapham, and, as he never came back, it is only too probable that he fell a victim to the bores and other beasts which infest that desolate region. Somewhere out in that trackless desert, the great Common, from which so few travellers return, lies a rapidly bleaching skeleton. In happier days that skeleton was Jobson.

ALL ABOUT THE PASTIME OF DIVORCE

BY
PELHAM GRENVILLE

Divorce, which is derived from the Latin word *divertere*, to go apart, and may be either an occasional experiment, as in the case of the ordinary citizen, or a hobby, as with Mr. Nat Goodwin, Mr. Robert Fitzsimmons, and Mr. De Wolf Hopper, is best described as the privilege accorded to the losing player (in the game of matrimony) to buy another stack of chips and start in all over again. It is an ingenious invention by which the resolute man may enjoy all the advantages of being a Mormon elder, without having plays written about him by Harriet Ford and Harvey O'Higgins. The word *divorce* is in many ways the most popular in the language, and it is by virtue of constantly repeating it to himself, like a magic charm, that the fastidious man is enabled to bear up, when first confronted by his wife's relations.

Divorce, in its earliest stages, was a crude thing. Prehistoric Man conducted his divorces, as he did his marriages, with the fat end of a stone bludgeon. The only way in which the divorce ceremony differed from the marriage ceremony was that in the former case the plaintiff hit harder.

The idea of the remarriage of a *divorcee* was repugnant to him, and he endeavored to render such a thing out of the question.

It was under the Ancient Romans that Divorce, considered as a fine art, reached its highest point. The astute husbands and wives of that epoch saw their way to doing themselves a bit of good by means of it. There is no doubt that the Romans gave divorce−presents, probably in the shape of fish−slices, egg−holders, plate−warmers and all those things which, when taken round the corner to the local pawnbroker (/avusicidus/), could be exchanged for solid and satisfactory cash (/denarii/). The Ancient Roman, therefore, got his unfortunate friends as it were, coming and going, and may be said to have known a bit.

In modern times Divorce varies greatly according to the country in which it takes place. In England for instance, it is so rare that, when it happens, the newspapers devote most of their middle page to a report of the proceedings. But as a matter of fact, divorce in England is mostly confined to the theatre. If the first act of an English play is laid either in the morning−room of Maltravers Park or in the drawing−room of Lady Beevor's town−house in Grosvenor Square, you can he pretty sure that somebody's divorce is going to be the motive of it.

It is assumed — in England, at any rate — that the United States leads the world in the matter of divorce: and it will probably be a severe blow to our patriots to learn that this is not the case. Even at the risk of inflaming Messrs. Goodwin, Fitzsimmons, and Hopper to renewed efforts, we must state the truth — that Japan makes America look like a timid novice in this particular branch of industry. In Japan there are twenty−two divorces per thousand inhabitants, while in the United States there are a mere eight per thousand. It is but a melancholy consolation that the next competitor in order, Switzerland, only scores three.

This is the sort of revelation which takes all the heart out of an energetic and persevering people. The reason is not far to seek. It lies in the fact that, while certain States are doing all that can be expected of them — we take off our hat to Washington, where there are eleven separate and distinct grounds for divorce — others are simply loafing. In South Carolina, for instance, divorce is actually not permitted, and in many states it cannot he obtained for such perfectly adequate causes as teasing the Siberian eel−spaniel, omitting to bring home candy, putting ice in the claret, wearing a straw−hat before June the fifteenth, reading the novels of Harold Bell Wright, using a last season's automobile, revoking at Bridge, and appearing in public in tortoise−shell−rimmed spectacles. Naturally the Japanese, a race which pulls together as one man in every patriotic movement, is way ahead of the United States.

But, even under existing conditions, with every obstacle placed in the way of divorce, it is astonishing that it is not more common. When we look about us and see how uniformly repulsive our fellow human−beings are, it seems extraordinary that only eight out of every thousand of them take the sensible course of breaking away from one another forever. The reason is that, in this country, the expense of divorce is so great. The male aspirant is faced with the prospect of having to part not only from his wife, which he could endure cheerfully, but from a

considerable portion of his hard−earned doubloons in the shape of alimony. Judges, as a class, display, in the matter of arranging alimony, that reckless generosity which is only found in men who are giving away somebody else's money. It is getting so that divorce, instead of being the pastime of the people, has degenerated into a relaxation for the idle rich.

Alimony in Japan is a mere matter of *yen* — a *yen* being about a thousandth part of a dollar. With a reasonable amount of luck, your Japanese can get divorced half a dozen times a year for about what it would cost him in New York to tip the head−waiter of a second−rate cabaret for getting him a table twenty−seven feet from the dancing−floor and directly behind a pillar.

AUBREY'S ARRESTED INDIVIDUALITY

BY
P. BROOKE HAVEN

What soured existence for Aubrey Devine was the fact that his wife was, in one important matter, unreasonable. She declined to go before the world as the bearer of his name. Her argument was two−fold. In the first place she claimed that, as Adelaide Brewster Moggs, she was already carrying a sufficient weight of name for one weak woman and that, in a world which contained Virginia Terhune van der Water, Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews, and Beatrice Forbes−Robertson Hale, there was not sufficient space for Adelaide Brewster Moggs Devine. In the second place, Adelaide Brewster Moggs was not so much a name as a trade−mark. The public had grown accustomed to welcoming the utterances on The Future of Woman by Adelaide Brewster Moggs, and to spring an unexpected Devine on them would perplex and annoy them. It would be as if they were suddenly confronted at their favorite vaudeville house with Eva Tanguay Robinson or Irene Franklin Chesterfield−Bodsworth.

Aubrey yielded the point, and with it his individuality. It is true that one or two intimate friends down−town knew him as Devine, but to the world at large he was "I−forget−his−name, Adelaide Brewster Moggs' husband." Earnest sociologists who tripped over Aubrey in dark corners of the Devine apartment on the occasion of Adelaide Brewster Moggs' weekly salons, in relating the episode to their wives, would not say that they had stubbed their toe on Aubrey Rockmetteller Devine, they would say that they fell foul of Miss Moggs' husband. Newspaper reports of meetings graced by the presence of America's leading exponent of Woman's Rights would record a speech from Miss Adelaide Brewster Moggs, "who was accompanied by her husband." Sometimes a snapshot of Adelaide would appear in a Sunday paper, with Aubrey at her side. The legend beneath it would run "Miss Adelaide Brewster Moggs, the famous champion of Womanhood, with her husband."

This preyed upon Aubrey's mind. It gave him a feeling of disembodied spirituality which was most unpleasant. Sometimes he had to pinch himself to make sure that he was there. When signing a check he would often pause an instant to remember what name he ought to write.

He began to brood. Lying awake at night, he would try to think up ways of making a name for himself. He went at it systematically. He made a list of the most prominent men in the country, men who had made names for themselves, as follows:

President Wilson, William J. Bryan, Jack Johnson, Vernon Castle, Billy Sunday, George M. Cohan, John D. Rockefeller.

Could he follow in these men's footsteps? No, and, briefly, for the following reasons:

He did not know how to wait watchfully. He disliked grape−juice. He could not box. He tripped over his feet when he tried to foxtrot. He did not perspire readily. He had no father. He had a good digestion.

Sometimes he thought of committing a murder or robbing a bank, but refrained because the sight of blood always made him feel faint and there seemed, for a novice, to be so few opportunities of robbing banks.

But one morning Fate relented. Genevieve O'Grady entered his life.

One really scarcely knows what to say of Miss O'Grady. She was employed by the Mammoth Store, and, except on very rare occasions, hardly ever had to work more than eleven hours a day. And she was in receipt of the excellent salary of five and half dollars a week, ample for a young girl who does not keep an automobile and has mastered the art of living on bread and weak tea. Looking at it with the eye of a dispassionate observer, one would have said that life was one long round of enjoyment for the girl. She had the whole day to herself except from eight in the morning till seven at night, and nothing to do with her money, after feeding and clothing herself, except squander it on her personal pleasure.

Yet this child of fortune, in a silly mood, flung herself off the side of a ferry−boat into the whirling waters of the Hudson River. Of the dozen or so spectators of the incident, all had some remark to make about it. One said, "What did she do *that* for?" Another said, "Would you look at that!" Others declared that somebody ought to do something about it.

The only person present to take definite action was Aubrey Rockmetteller Devine.

To Aubrey this chance seemed sent by Heaven. Pausing merely to remove his hat he plunged in and swam to where Miss O'Grady, now repenting of her rash act, kicked and called for help. The only doubt in his mind was the exact way in which the papers would feature the thing.

They might say:

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DEVINE'S DASHING DEED
   DARINGLY DRAGS DAMSEL
      FROM DIRE DESTRUCTION
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Or possibly,

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       DEVINE DID IT
Saw, Seized, Saved Suicidal
        Shop Girl
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Or again,

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DARE−DEVIL DEVINE
     DIVERTS DEATH
          BY DROWNING
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As he reached her, Miss O'Grady came up for the third time and twined herself clingingly about him. They returned below the surface together.

Just about the time when the only really suitable headline for the incident would have been

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DEVINE SWALLOWS ALL
      OF THE HUDSON RIVER
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help arrived.

After they had done all that first−aid−for−the−apparently−drowned stuff on Aubrey, they took him and the dripping lady to Park Row. There the reporters all had a good look at him.

"Why, I know that man," one of the news editors finally exclaimed. "It's — it's — I've forgotten his name, but he's Adelaide Brewster Moggs' husband."

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PODMARSH

GOOD NEWS FOR AFTER−DINNER SPEAKERS

Stuyvesant Bodger, the explorer, is back from West Africa with a strange story, — several strange stories, in fact, but one which differs from the others in that we cannot be absolutely certain that it is a lie. He claims to have seen and spoken to Robert Podmarsh.

Only the oldest members now remember Podmarsh, once the scourge of the club. It is so many years since he disappeared. He vanished one summer without warning, and I can still recall the period of anxiety we lived through. We were afraid he might be in our midst at any moment, telling us those old familiar humorous stories of his under which we had suffered so long. Then, as the days went by and he still remained absent, a new hope began to animate our breasts. And finally we came to the conclusion that he must be dead.

Those were happy days.

But Bodger says that Podmarsh is not dead.

"I will tell you the whole thing," said Bodger. "I was travelling through the Oojoobwa region, south of the M'Pongo, when, as night was falling, I came to a small village, a mere collection of mud huts. The inhabitants looked friendly, so I determined to stop for the night. There seemed to be a good deal of excitement in the place. There was a crowd of semi−naked persons of both sexes chattering and gesticulating. I enquired the reason, and learned that it was the night of the complimentary dinner to Ggbrllmx, which in the M'Pongo dialect, means "He Who Entertains." A fowl was to be roasted whole in the market−place, and human sacrifices and all sorts of jollifications, and afterwards He Who Entertains would make one of his famous speeches and tell some of his inimitable dialect stories.

Well, to cut a long story short, — which Podmarsh would never have done, — I attended the dinner, and the first thing that struck me (not counting a cocoanut thrown by one of the guests) was the extraordinary likeness of the principal guest to someone I had seen before.

That speech of his took me straight back to this club. It was Robert Podmarsh. The speech contained no fewer than six of those Irish dialect stories which he used to inflict on us. He spoke, of course, in the M'Pongo dialect, but the stories were the same.

It seems that he began to suspect from almost imperceptible signs that his anecdotes had outstayed their first strong welcome in this club.

He decided to travel, to give us time to miss him. And, while off the coast of West Africa, his vessel was wrecked. Coming ashore, he was met and captured by roving natives, and conducted to that village.

The first and only ballot taken among the inhabitants on the question of what to do with him resulted in a sweeping victory for the party the main plank in whose platform was that Podmarsh should be cooked and eaten.

The preparations were well under way, when a fowl, which had been nesting in some bushes, ran past. Habit, even in that crisis, was too much for Podmarsh.

"Why," he asked, "did that chicken cross the road?" The tribe gave the matter its attention. Opinions varied. Some said that it crossed the road to avoid a snake. Others hinted at witchcraft. "Not at all," said Podmarsh. "It crosses the road to get to the other side."

The effect, he tells me, was instantaneous. There was a riot. Dignified medicine−men held their sides: portly witch−doctors rolled in the dust. And before they could recover, Podmarsh was telling them other stories of the same vintage.

After that there was no more talk of eating Podmarsh. The tribe took him to its heart. A special hut and seven wives were assigned to him.

Podmarsh was in his element. The M'Pongo are a simple, untutored race, and such is their mental darkness that they did not even know, till Podmarsh informed them, that a door could ever be anything but a door.

"The whole affair," concluded Stuyvesant Bodger, "is a remarkable example of the law of supply and demand.

And I could not help thinking, as I left the village, where there was already talk of running Podmarsh for the office of local God, in place of a stone idol which had let the M'Pongo down badly in its last two wars with neighboring tribes, what a pity it is that all our club jesters and after−dinner speakers cannot be induced to follow his example and go to some distant spot where they would be really appreciated."

"Failing that," he added sadly, "the next best thing would be to adopt in New York the admirable M'Pongo custom of human sacrifices."