

EXCUSE ME!

RUPERT HUGHES

NOVELIZED FROM THE COMEDY OF THE SAME NAME.

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PLAY AS PRODUCED BY HENRY W. SAVAGE.

COPYRIGHT 1911 BY H. K. FLY CO.



The porter moved up with noticeable deliberation. "Did you ring, sah?"

"Did I ring? Paw-tah, you may draw my tub at eight-thirty in the mawning."

"Draw yo'-what, sah?" the porter gasped.

"My tub."
"Ba-ath tub?"
"Baht tub."

"Lawdy, man. Is you allowin' to take a ba-ath in the mawnin'?"
"Of course I am."

"Didn't you have one befo' you stahed?"
"How dare you! Of cawse I did."

"Well, that's all you git."
"Do you mean to tell me that there is no tub on this beastly train?"

Wedgewood almost fell out of bed with the shock of this news.
"We do not carry tubs—no, sah. There's a lot of tubs in San Francisco, though."

"No tub on this train for four days!" Wedgewood bellowed. "But whatever does one do in the meanwhile?"

"One just waits. Yassah, one and all waits."
"It's ghastly, that's what it is, ghastly."

"Yassah," said the porter, and mumbled as he walked away, "but the weather is gettin' cooler."

He finished preparing Marjorie's bunk, and was just suggesting that Mallory retreat to the smoking room while number three was made up, when there was a commotion in the corridor, and a man in checked overalls dashed into the car.

His ear was slightly red, and he held at arm's length, as if it were a venomous monster, Snoozeleums. And he yelled:

"Say, whose darn dog is this? He bit two men, and he makes so much noise we can't sleep in the baggage car."

Marjorie went flying down the aisle to reclaim her lost lamb in wolf's clothing, and Snoozeleums, the returned prodigal, yelled and leaped, and told her all about the indignities he had been subjected to, and his valiant struggle for liberty.

Marjorie, seeing only Snoozeleums, stepped into the fatal berth number one, and paid no heed to the dangling ribbons. Mallory, eager to restore himself to her love by loving her dog, crowded closer to her side, making a hypocritical ado over the pup.

Everybody was popping his or her face out to learn the cause of such clamor. Among the bodiless heads suspended along the curtains, like Dyak trophies, appeared the great mask of Little Jimmie Wellington. He had been unable to sleep for mourning the wanton waste of that lovely rice-trap.

Mallory, seeing that Marjorie had fled, vented his wild rage against fate in general, and rice traps in particular, by tearing the bridal bungalow to pieces, and then he stalked into the smoking room, where Ira Lathrop, homeless and dispossessed, was sound asleep, with his feet in the chair.

He was dreaming that he was a boy in Brattleboro, the worst boy in Brattleboro, trying to get up the courage to spark pretty Anne Gattie, and throwing rocks at the best boy in town, Charlie Selby, who was always at her side. The porter woke Ira, an hour later, and escorted him to the late bridal section.

Marjorie had fled with her dog, as soon as she could grope her way through the deluge of rice. She hopped into her berth, and spent an hour trying to clear her hair of the multitudinous grains. And as for Snoozeleums, his thick wool was so bericed that for two days, whenever he shook himself, he sneezed.

Eventually, the car quieted, and nothing was heard but the rumble and creak of the wheels on the rails, the creak of timbers, and the frog-like chorus of a few well-trained snorers. As the porter was turning down the last of the lights, a rumpled pate was thrust from the stateroom, and the luscious-eyed man whispered:

"Porter, what time did you say we crossed the Iowa state line?"
"Two fifty-five a. m."

From within the stateroom came a deep sigh, then with a dismal groan: "Call me at two fifty-five a. m.," the door was closed.

Poor Mallory, pyjamaless and night-shirtless, lay propped up on his pillows, staring out of the window at the swiftly shifting night scene. The state of Illinois was being pulled out from under the train like a dark rug.

Farmhouses gleamed or dreamed lamplens. The moonlight rippled on endless seas of wheat and Indian corn. Little towns slid up and away. Large towns rolled forward, and were left behind. Ponds, marshes, brooks, pastures, thickets and great gloomy groves flowed past as on a river. But the same stars and the moon seemed to accompany the train. If the flying witness had been less heavy of heart, he would have found the reeling scene full of grace and night beauty. But he could not see any charm in all the world, except his tantalizing other self, from whom a great chasm seemed to divide him, though she was only two windows away.

He had not yet fallen asleep, and he was still pondering how to attain his unmarried, unmarriageable bride, when the train rolled out in air above a great wide river, very noble under the stars. He knew it for the Mississippi. He heard a faint knocking on a door at the other end of the car. He heard sounds as of kisses, and then somebody tiptoed along the aisle stealthily. He did not know that another bridegroom was being separated from his bride because they were too much married.

Somewhere in Iowa he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

Last Call for Breakfast. It was still Iowa when Mallory awoke. Into his last moments of heavy sleep intruded a voice like a towncrier's voice, crying:

"Lass call for breakfast in the Ringing Rar," and then, again louder, "Lass call for breakfast in Ringing Rar," and, finally and faintly, "Lass-call breakfast r'rar."

Mallory pushed up his window shade. The day was broad on rolling prairies like billows established in the green soil. He peeked through his curtains. Most of the other passengers were up and about, their beds hidden and beddings stowed away behind the beilying veneer of the upperworks of the car. All the berths were made up except his own and number two, in the corner, where Little Jimmie Wellington's nose still played a bagpipe monody, and one other berth, which he recognized as Marjorie's.

His belated sleep and hers had spared them both the stares and laughing chatter of the passengers. But this bridal couple's two berths, standing like towers among the seats, had provided conversation for everybody, had already united the casual group of strangers into an organized gossip-bee.

Mallory got into his shoes and as much of his clothes as was necessary for the dash to the washroom, and took on his arm the rest of his wardrobe. Just as he issued from his lonely chamber, Marjorie appeared from hers, much disheveled and heavy-eyed. The bride and groom exchanged glances of mutual terror, and hurried in opposite directions.

The spickest and spannest of Lieutenant's soon realized that he was reduced to wearing yesterday's linen as well as yesterday's beard. This was intolerable. A brave man can endure heartbreaks, loss of love, honor and place, but a next man can't abide

the traces of a... in his... Lieutenant Mallory had seen rough service in camp and on long hikes, when he gloried in mud and disorder, and he was to see campaigns in the Philippines, when he should not take off his shoes or his uniform for three days at a time. But that was the field, and this car was a drawing room.

In this crisis in his affairs, Little Jimmie Wellington waddled into the men's room, floundering about with every lurch of the train, like a cannon loose in the hold of a ship. He fumbled with the handles on a basin, and made a crazy toilet, trying to find some abatement of his fever by filling a glass at the ice-water tank and emptying it over his head.

These drastic measures restored him to some sort of coherency, and Mallory appealed to him for help in the matter of linen. Wellington effusively offered him everything he had, and Mallory selected from his store half a dozen collars, any one of which would have gone round his neck nearly twice.

Wellington also proffered his safety razor, and made him a present of a virgin water of steel for his very own. With this assistance, Mallory was enabled to make himself fairly presentable. When he returned to his seat, the three curtained rooms had been whisked away by the porter. There was no place now to hide from the passengers.

He sat down facing the feminine end of the car, watching for Marjorie. The passengers were watching for her, too, hoping to learn what unheard-of incident could have provoked the quarrel that separated a bride and groom at this time, of all times.

To the general bewilderment, when Marjorie appeared, Mallory and she rushed together and clasped hands with an ardor that suggested a desire for even more ardent greeting. The passengers almost sprained their ears to hear how they would make up such a dreadful feud. But all they heard was: "We'll have to hurry, Marjorie, if we want to get any breakfast."

"All right, honey. Come along."
Then the inscrutable couple scurried up the aisle, and disappeared in the corridor, leaving behind them a mighty riddle. They kissed in the vestibule, kissed in the two corridors of the next car, and were caught kissing in the next vestibule by the new conductor.

The dining car conductor, who flattered himself that he knew a bride and groom when he saw them, escorted them grandly to a table for two; and the waiter fluttered about them with extraordinary consideration.

They had a plenty to talk of in prospect and retrospect. They both felt sure that a minister lurked among the cars somewhere, and they ate with a zest to prepare for the ceremony, arguing the best place for it, and quarreling amorously over details. Mallory was for one of the vestibules as the scene of their union, but Marjorie was for the baggage car, till she realized that Snoozeleums might be unwilling to attend. Then she swung round to the vestibule, but Mallory shifted to the observation platform.

Marjorie had left Snoozeleums with Mrs. Temple, who promised to hide him when the new conductor passed through the car, and she reminded Harry to get the waiter to bring them a package of bones for their only "child," so far.

On the way back from the dining car they kissed each other good-bye again at all the trying places they had sanctified before. The sun was radiant, the world good, and the very train ran with jubilant rejoicing. They could not doubt that a few more hours would see them legally man and wife.

Mallory restored Marjorie to her place in their car, and with smiles of assurance, left her for another parson-hunt through the train. She waited for him in a bridal agitation. He ransacked the train forward in vain, and returned, passing Marjorie with a shake of the head, and a sour countenance. He went out to the observation platform where he stumbled on Ira Lathrop and Anne Gattie, engaged in a conversation of evident intimacy, for they jumped when he opened the door, as if they were guilty of some plot.

Mallory mumbled his usual, "Excuse me," whirled on his heel, and dragged his discouraged steps back through the Observation Room, where various women and a few men of evident underclerkly were draped across arm chairs and absorbed in lazy conversation or bobbing their heads over magazines that trembled with the motion of the train.

Mrs. Wellington was busily writing at the desk, but he did not know who she was, and he did not care whom she was writing to. He did not observe the baleful glare of Mrs. Whitcomb, who sat watching Mrs. Wellington, knowing all too well who she was, and suspecting the correspondent—Mrs. Whitcomb was tempted to spell the word with one "r."

Mallory stumbled into the men's portion of the composite car. Here he nodded with a sickly cheer to the sole occupant, Dr. Temple, who was looking less ministerial than ever in an embroidered skull cap. The old rascal was sitting far back on his lumbar vertebrae. One of his hands clasped a long glass filled with a liquid of a hue that resembled something stronger than what it was—mere ginger ale. The other hand toyed with a long black cigar. The smoke curled round the old man's head like the fumes of a sultan's narghile, and through the wisps his face was one of Oriental luxury.

Mallory's eyes were caught from this picture of... attitude by the en-

trance, at the... of a man who had evidently swung aboard at the most recent stop—for Mallory had not seen him. His gray hair was crowned with a soft black hat, and his spare frame was swathed in a frock coat that had seen better days. His soft gray eyes seemed to search timidly, the smoke-cloaked atmosphere, and he had a bashful air which Mallory translated as one of diffidence in a place where liquors and cigars were dispensed.

With equal diffidence Mallory advanced and in a low tone accosted the newcomer cautiously:

"Excuse me—you look like a clergyman."
"The hell you say!"
Mallory pursued the question no further.

CHAPTER XVIII.

In the Composite Car. It was the gentle stranger's turn to miss his guess. He bent over the chair into which Mallory had flopped, and said in a tense, low tone: "You look like a thoroughbred sport. I'm trying to make up a game of stud poker. Will you join me?"

Mallory shook his heavy head in refusal, and with dull eyes watched the man, whose profession he no longer misunderstood, saunter up to the blissful Doctor from Ypsilanti, and murmur again:

"Will you join me?"
"Join you in what, sir?" said Dr. Temple, with alert courtesy.
"A little game."
"I don't mind," the doctor smiled, rising with amiable readiness. "The checkers are in the next room."
"Quit your kiddin'," the stranger coughed. "How about a little freeze-out?"

"Freeze-out?" said Dr. Temple. "It sounds interesting. Is it something like authors?"
The newcomer shot a quick glance at this man, whose innocent air he suspected. But he merely drawled: "Well, you play it with cards."
"Would you mind teaching me the rules?" said the old sport from Ypsilanti.

The gambler was growing suspicious of this too, too childlike innocence. He whined: "Say, what's your little game, eh?" but decided to risk the venture. He sat down at a table, and Dr. Temple, bringing along his glass, drew up a chair. The gambler took a pack of cards from his pocket, and shuffled them with a snap that startled Dr. Temple and a dexterity that delighted him.

"Go on, it's beautiful to see," he explained. The gambler set the pack down with the one word "Cut!" but since the old man made no effort to comply, the gambler did not insist. He took up the pack again and ran off five cards to each place with a grace that staggered the doctor.

Mallory was about to intervene for the protection of the guileless physician when the conductor chanced to saunter in.

The gambler, seeing him, snatched Dr. Temple's cards from his hand and slipped the pack into his pocket.
"What's the matter now?" Dr. Temple asked, but the newcomer huskily answered: "Wait a minute. Wait a minute."

The conductor took in the scene at a glance and, stalking up to the table, spoke with the grimness of a sea-captain: "Say, I've got my eye on you. Don't start nothin'!"

The stranger stared at him wonderingly and demanded: "Why, what you drivin' at?"
"You know all right," the conductor growled, and then turned on the befuddled old clergyman, "and you, too."
"Me, too?" the preacher gasped.
"Yes, you, too," the conductor repeated, shaking an accusing forefinger under his nose. "Your actions have been suspicious from the beginning. We've all been watching you."

Dr. Temple was so agitated that he nearly let fall his secret. "Why, do you realize that I'm a—"
"Ah, don't start that," sneered the conductor. "I can spot a gambler as far as I can see one. You and your side partner here want to look out, that's all, or I'll drop you at the next tank." Then he walked out, his very shoulder blades uttering threats.

Dr. Temple stared after him, but the gambler stared at Dr. Temple with a homage. "So you're one of us," he said, and seizing the old man's limp hand, shook it heartily: "I got to slip it to you. Your make-up is great. You nearly had me for a come-on. Great!"

And then he sauntered out, leaving the clergyman's head swimming. Dr. Temple turned to Mallory for explanations, but Mallory only waved him away. He was not quite convinced himself. He was convinced only that whatever else anybody might be, nobody apparently desired to be a clergyman in these degenerate days.

The conductor returned and thrust into Dr. Temple the glare of two besleek eyes. The old man put out a beseeching hand and began:

"My good man, you do me a grave injustice."
The conductor snapped back: "You say a word to me and I'll do you worse than that. And if I spot you with a pack of cards in your hand again, I'll tie you to the cow-ketcher."

Then he marched off again. The doctor fell back into a chair, trying to figure it out. Then Ashton and Fosdick and Little Jimmie Wellington and Wedgewood strolled in and, dropping into chairs, ordered drinks. Before the doctor could ask anybody to explain, Ashton was launched on a story. His mind was a suitcase full of anecdotes, mostly of the smoking-room order.

use a clearing... of our stories. The doctor listened in spite of himself, and in spite of himself he was amused, for stories that would be stupid if they were decent, take on a certain verve and thrill from their very forbiddensness.

The dear old clergyman felt that it would be priggish to take flight, but he could not make the corners of his mouth behave. Strange twitches of the lips and little steamy escapes of giggle-jets disturbed him. And when Ashton, who was a practiced raconteur, finished a drolatic adventure with the epilogue, "And the next morning they were at Niagara Falls," the old doctor was helpless with laughter. Some superior force, the devil no doubt, fairly shook him with glee.

"Oh, that's bully," he shrieked. "I haven't heard a story like that for ages."
"Why, where have you been, Dr. Temple?" asked Ashton, who could not imagine where a man could have concealed himself from such stories. But he laughed loudest of all when the doctor answered: "You see, I live in Ypsilanti. They don't tell me stories like that."

"They—who?" said Fosdick.
"Why, my pa—my patients," the doctor explained, and laughed so hard that he forgot to feel guilty, laughed so hard that his wife in the next room heard him and giggled to Mrs. Whitcomb:

"Listen to dear Walter. He hasn't laughed like that since he was a medical student." Then she buried her face guiltily in a book.
"Wasn't it good?" Dr. Temple demanded, wiping his streaming eyes and nudging the solemn-faced Englishman, who understood his own nation's humor, but had not yet learned the Yankee quirks.

Wedgewood made a hollow effort at laughter and answered: "Extremely—very droll, but what I don't quite get was—why the porter said—" The

others drowned him in a roar of laughter, but Ashton was angry. "Why, you blamed fool, that's where the joke came in. Don't you see, the bridegroom said to the bride—" then he lowered his voice and diagramed the story on his fingers.

Mrs. Temple was still shaking with sympathetic laughter, never dreaming what her husband was laughing at. She turned to Mrs. Whitcomb, but Mrs. Whitcomb was still glaring at Mrs. Wellington, who was still writing with flying fingers and underscoring every other word.

"Some people seem to think they own the train," Mrs. Whitcomb raged. "That creature has been at the writing desk an hour. The worst of it is, I'm sure she's writing to my husband."

Mrs. Temple looked shocked, but another peal of laughter came through the partition between the male and female sections of the car, and she beamed again. Then Mrs. Wellington finished her letter, glanced it over, addressed an envelope, sealed and stamped it with a deliberation that maddened Mrs. Whitcomb. When at last she rose, Mrs. Whitcomb was in the seat almost before Mrs. Wellington was out of it.

Mrs. Wellington paused at another wave of laughter from the men's room. She commented petulantly: "What good times men have. They've formed a club in there already. We women can only sit around and hate each other."

"Why, I don't hate anybody, do you?" Mrs. Temple exclaimed, looking up from the novel she had found on the book shelves. Mrs. Wellington dropped into the next chair: "On a long railroad journey I hate everybody. Don't you hate long journeys?"

"It's the first I ever took," Mrs. Temple apologized, radiantly, "and I'm having the—what my oldest boy would call the time of my life. And dear Walter—such goes on for him! A few minutes ago I strolled by the door and I saw him playing cards with a stranger, and smoking and drinking, too, all at once."

"Boys will be boys," said Mrs. Wellington.
"But for Dr. Temple of all people—" "Why shouldn't a doctor? It's a shame the way men have everything. Think of it, a special smoking room. And women have no place to take a puff except on the sly."

Mrs. Temple stared at her in awe: "The woman in this book smokes!—perfumed things!"
"All women smoke nowadays," said Mrs. Wellington, carelessly. "Don't you?"

The politest thing Mrs. Temple could think of in answer was: "Not yet."
"Really!" said Mrs. Wellington. "Don't you like tobacco?"
"I never tried it."
"It's time you did. I smoke cigars myself."

Mrs. Temple almost collapsed at this double shock: "Cl—cigars?"
"Yes; cigarettes are too strong for me; will you try one of my pets?" Mrs. Temple was about to express her repugnance at the thought, but Mrs. Wellington thrust before her a portfolio in which nestled such dainty shapes of such a warm and winsome brown, that Mrs. Temple paused to stare, and, like Mother Eve, found the fruit of knowledge too interesting once seen to reject with scorn. She hung over the cigar case in hesitant excitement one moment too long. Then she said in a trembling voice: "I—I should like to try once—just to see what it's like. But there's no place."

Mrs. Wellington felt that she had already made a proselyte to her own beloved vice, and she rushed her victim to the precipice: "There's the observation platform, my dear. Come on out."

Wherever three or four men are gathered together, they rapidly arrange

Mrs. Temple... many of the dreadful... would they say in Ypsilanti?"
"What do you care? He's a sport. Your husband smokes. It's right for him, why not for you?"

Mrs. Temple set her teeth and crossed the Rubicon with a resolute "I will!"

Mrs. Wellington led the timid neophyte along the wavering floor of the car and flung back the door of the observation car. She found Mrs. Lathrop holding Mrs. Gattie's hand and evidently explaining something of great importance, for their heads were very close together. They rose and with abashed faces and confused mumbblings of half allowed explanations, left the platform to Mrs. Wellington and her new pupil.

Shortly afterward Little Jimmie Wellington grew restive and set out for a brief constitutional and a breath of air. He carried a siphon to which he had become greatly attached, and made heavy going for the observation room, but reached the door in fairly good order. He swung it open and brought in with it the pale and wavering ghost of Mrs. Temple, who had been leaning against it for much-needed support. Wellington was stupefied to observe smoke pouring round Mrs. Temple's form, and he resolved to perform a great life-saving feat. He decided that the poor little woman was on fire and he poised the siphon like a fire extinguisher, with the noble intention of putting her out.

He pressed the handle, and a stream of vichy shot from the nozzle. Fortunately, his aim was so very wobbly that none of the extinguisher touched Mrs. Temple.

Wellington was about to play the siphon at her again when he saw her take from her lips a toy cigar and emit a stream of cough-shaken smoke. The poor little experimentalist was too wretched to notice even so large a menace as Wellington. She threw the cigar away and gasped:

"I think I've had enough."
From the platform came a voice very well known to Little Jimmie. It said: "You'll like the second one better."

Mrs. Temple shuddered at the thought, but Wellington drew himself up majestically and called out: "Like second one better, eh? I suppose it's the same way with husbands."

Then he stalked back to the smoking room, feeling that he had annihilated his wife, but knowing from experience that she always had a comeback. He knew it would be good, but he was afraid to hear it. He rolled into the smoking room, and sprawling across Doctor Temple's shoulders, dragged him from the midst of a highly improper story with alarming news.

"Doc, your wife looks kind o' seedy. Better go to her at once."
Dr. Temple leaped to his feet and ran to his wife's aid. He found her a dismal, ashen sight.

"Sally! What on earth ails you?"
"Been smok-oking," she hiccupped. The world seemed to be crashing round Dr. Temple's head. He could only gurgle, "Sally!"

Mrs. Temple drew herself up with weak defiance: "Well, I saw you playing cards and drinking."
In the presence of such innocent deviltry he could only smile: "Aren't we having an exciting vacation? But to think of you smoking!—and a cigar!"

She tossed her head in pride, "And it didn't make me sick—much." She clutched a chair. He tried to support her. He could not help pondering: "What would they say in Ypsilanti?"

"Who cares?" she laughed. "I—I wish the old train wouldn't rock so."
"I—I've smoked too much, too," said Dr. Temple with perfect truth, but Mrs. Temple, remembering that long glass she had seen, narrowed her eyes at him: "Are you sure it was the smoke?"

"Sally!" he cried, in abject horror at her implied suspicion. Then she turned a pale green. "Oh, I feel such a quail."
"In your conscience, Sally!"
"No, not in my conscience. I think I'll go back to my berth and lie down."
"Let me help you, Mother."

And Darby and Joan hurried along the corridor, crowding it as they were crowding their vacation with belated experience.

Continued next week.

Legend of the Nigger. There is a curious legend connected with the source of the Nigger. Tradition says that a devil lives inside the rock whence the river springs. The natives are very superstitious, and greatly fear this demon, who is supposed to kill any individual who dares to look at the source. Hence, when showing a stranger the spot, they cover up their faces and walk backward in the direction of the source, pointing toward it with hand outstretched behind the back.—Wide World Magazine.

The Dog Misunderstood. She stuttered, but she was awfully sweet, all the same. She went with him as far as the front door when he left, and said, "George, are you coming round next S-a-s-s—?" It was unfortunate that the dog happened to be lying on the steps and heard her remark, for he chased George half a mile before it occurred to him that possibly his mistress was going to say "Sunday" instead of "see him."

Glenn Distinction. "Did you see Jim and his penial for stealing that?" "Yes, I'm right, too. Why didn't you 'em and not get 'em for the other peddler?"