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EXCUSE ME!

Novelized from the Comedy of the Same Name
By Rupert Hughes
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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Lieut. Harry Mallory is ordered to the Philippines. He and Marjorie decide to elope, but wreck of taxicab prevents their seeing minister on the way to the train.

CHAPTER II.—Transcontinental train is taking on passengers. Porter has a lively time with an Englishman and Ira Lathrop, a Yankee business man.

CHAPTER III.—The elopers have an exciting time getting to the train.

CHAPTER IV.—"Little Jimmie" Wellington, bound for Reno to get a divorce, boards train in maidin condition. Later Mrs. Jimmie appears.

CHAPTER V.—She is also bound for Reno with same object. Likewise Mrs. Sammy Whitcomb.

CHAPTER VI.—Latter blames Mrs. Jimmie for her marital troubles. Classmates of Mallory decorate bridal berth.

CHAPTER VII.—Rev. and Mrs. Temple start on a vacation. They decide to cut loose and Temple removes evidence of his calling.

CHAPTER VIII.—Marjorie decides to let Mallory proceed alone, but train starts while they are lost in farewell.

CHAPTER IX.—Passengers join Mallory's classmates in giving couple wedding hazing.

CHAPTER X.—Marjorie is distracted over their situation.

CHAPTER XI.—Ira Lathrop, woman-hating bachelor, discovers an old sweetheart, Anne Gattie, a fellow passenger.

CHAPTER XII.—Mallory vainly hunts for a preacher among the passengers.

CHAPTER XIII.—Mrs. Wellington hears Little Jimmie's voice. Later she meets Mrs. Whitcomb.

CHAPTER XIV.—Mallory reports to Marjorie his failure to find a preacher.

CHAPTER XV.—They decide to pretend a quarrel and Mallory finds a vacant berth.

CHAPTER XVI.—Mrs. Jimmie discovers Wellington on the train.

CHAPTER XVII.—Mallory again makes an unsuccessful hunt for a preacher.

CHAPTER XVIII.—Dr. Temple poses as a physician. Mrs. Temple is induced by Mrs. Wellington to smoke a cigar.

CHAPTER XIX.—Slight of preacher on a station platform raises Mallory's hopes, but he takes another train.

CHAPTER XX.—Missing hand baggage compels the couple to borrow from passengers.

CHAPTER XXI.—Jimmie gets a cinder in his eye and Mrs. Jimmie gives first-aid. Coolness is then resumed.

CHAPTER XXII.—Still no clergyman. More borrowing.

CHAPTER XXIII.—Dr. Temple puzzled by behavior of different couples.

CHAPTER XXIV.—Marjorie's jealousy aroused by Mallory's baseball jargon.

CHAPTER XXV.—Marjorie suggests wrecking the train in hopes that accident will produce a preacher.

CHAPTER XXVI.—Marjorie tries to induce the conductor to hold the train so she can shop.

CHAPTER XXVII.—Marjorie's dog is missing. She pulls the cord, stopping the train. Conductor restores dog and lovers quarrel.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—Lathrop wires for a preacher to marry him and Miss Gattie. Mallory tells Lathrop of his predicament and arranges to borrow the preacher.

CHAPTER XXIX.—Kitty Lewellyn, former sweetheart of Mallory's, appears and arouses Marjorie's jealousy.

CHAPTER XXX.—Preacher boards train.

CHAPTER XXXI.—After marrying Lathrop and Miss Gattie the preacher escapes Mallory by leaping from moving train.

CHAPTER XXXII.—Mallory's dejection moves Marjorie to reconciliation.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—The last day on the train brings to Mallory the fear of missing his transport.

While the men continued to make themselves presentable in a huddle, the hook-and-eye society at the other end of the car finished with the four waists, and Mrs. Posdick hurried away to keep her tryst in the dining-car. The three remaining relapsed into dreary attitudes. Mrs. Wellington shook the knob of the forbidding door, and turned to complain: "What in heaven's name ails the creature in there. She must have fallen out of the window."

"It's outrageous," said Marjorie, "the way women violate women's rights."

Mrs. Whitcomb saw an opportunity to insert a stiletto. She observed to Marjorie, with an innocent air: "Why, Mrs. Mallory, I've even known women to lock themselves in there and smoke!"

While Mrs. Wellington was ruminating her brain for a fitting retort the door opened, and out stepped Miss Gattie, as was.

She blushed furiously at sight of the committee waiting to greet her, but they repented their criticisms and tried to make up for them by the excessive warmth with which they exclaimed at once: "Good morning, Mrs. Lathrop!"

"Good morning, who?" said Anne, then blushed yet redder: "Oh, I can't seem to get used to that name! I hope I haven't kept you waiting?"

"Oh, not at all!" the women insisted, and Anne led to number six, remembered that this was no longer her home, and moved on to number

one. Here the porter was just finishing his restoring tasks, and laying aside with some diffidence two garments which Anne hastily stuffed into her own valise.

Meanwhile Marjorie was pushing Mrs. Wellington ahead: "You go in first, Mrs. Wellington." "You go first. I have no husband waiting for me," said Mrs. Wellington.

"Oh, I insist," said Marjorie. "I couldn't think of it," persisted Mrs. Wellington. "I won't allow you."

And then Mrs. Whitcomb pushed them both aside: "Pardon me, won't you? I'm getting off at Reno."

"So am I," gasped Mrs. Wellington, rushing forward, only to be faced by the slam of the door and the click of the key. She whirled back to the demand of Marjorie: "Did you ever hear of such impudence?"

"I never did."

"I'll never be ready for Reno," Mrs. Wellington wailed, "and I haven't had my breakfast."

"You'd better order it in advance," said Marjorie. "It takes that chef an hour to boil an egg three minutes."

"I will, if I can ever get my face washed," sighed Mrs. Wellington.

And now Mrs. Anne Lathrop, after much hesitation, called timidly, "Porter—porter—please!"

"Yes—miss—missus!" he amended. "Will you call my—" she gulped—"my husband?"

"Yes, ma'am," the porter chuckled, and putting his grinning head in at the men's door, he bowed to Ira and said: "Excuse me, but you are sent for by the lady in number one."

Ashton slapped him on the back and roared: "Oh, you married man!"

"Well," said Ira, in self-defense, "I don't hear anybody sending for you."

Wedgewood grinned at Ashton. "I rather fancy he had you theah, old top, eh, what?"

Ira appeared at number one, and bending over his treasure-trove, spoke in a voice that was pure saccharine: "Are you ready for breakfast, dear?"

"Yes, Ira."

"Come along to the dining-car." "It's cosier here," she said. "Couldn't we have it served here?"

"But it'll get all cold, and I'm hungry," pouted the old bachelor, to whom breakfast was a sacred institution.

"All right, Ira," said Anne, glad to be meek; "come along," and she rose. Ira hesitated. "Still, if you'd rather, we'll eat here." He sat down.

"Oh, not at all," said Anne; "we'll go where you want to go."

"But I want to do what you want to do."

"So do I—we'll go," said Anne. "We'll stay."

"No, I insist on the dining-car."

"Oh, all right, have your own way," said Ira, as if he were being bullied, and liked it. Anne smiled at the contrast of the platitude that the Jews are God's chosen people with that other platitude, "Tastes differ."

Little Jimmie Wellington, hot in pursuit of Ashton, found himself checked in spite of himself; in spite of himself deposited somehow into a seat, and in spite of himself confronted with a curvilinear person, who said:

"Excuse, please! but are you getting off at R-r-eno?"

"I am," Wellington answered, curtly, essaying to rise, only to be delicately restored to his place with a gesture and a phrase:

"Then you meet me."

"Oh, I need you, do I? And who are you?"

"Who ain't I? I am Baumann and Blumen. Our cart, please."

Wellington found a pasteboard in his hand and read the legend:

must undergo it. Little Jimmie Wellington turned pale, and stammered, as he tried to ask the conductor casually:

"What kind of a place is that Reno?"

The conductor, somewhat cynical from close association with the divorce-mill and its grist, grinned: "That depends on what you're leaving behind. Most folks seem to get enough of it in about six months."

Then he went his way, leaving Wellington red, agape and perplexed. The trouble with Wellington was that he had brought along what he was leaving behind. Or, as Ashton impudently observed: "You ought to enjoy your residence there, Wellington, with your wife on hand."

The only repartee that Wellington could think of was a rather uninspired: "You go to—"

"So long as it isn't Reno," Ashton laughed, and walked away.

Wedgewood laid a sympathetic hand on Little Jimmie's shoulder, and said:

"That Ashton is no end of a bounder, what?"

Wellington wrote his epitaph in these words:

"Well, the worst I can say of him is, he's the kind of man that doesn't lift the plug out when he's through with the basin."

He liked this so well that he wished he had thought of it in time to crack it over Ashton's head. He decided to hand it to him anyway. He forgot that the cardinal rule for repartee, is "Better never than late."

As he swung out of the men's room he was buttonholed by an individual new to the little Trans-American colony. One of the camp-followers and sutlers who prosper round the edges of all great enterprises had waylaid him on the way to the battleground of marital freedom.

The stranger had got on at an earlier stop and worked his way through the train to the car named "Snowdrop." Wellington was his first victim here. His pushing manner, the almost vulture-like rapacity of his gleaming eyes, and the very vulturine contour of his profile, his palmy gestures, his thick lip, and everything about him gave Wellington his immediate pedigree.

It ill behoves Christendom to need reminding that the Jewish race has adorned and still adorns humanity with some of its noblest specimens; but this interloper was of the type that must have irritated Voltaire into answering the platitude that the Jews are God's chosen people with that other platitude, "Tastes differ."

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Wellington found a pasteboard in his hand and read the legend:

Real Estate Agents Baggage Transfer

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Divorce Outfitters
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Wellington looked from the crowded card to the zealous face. "Divorce Outfitters, eh? I don't quite get you."

"Well, in the foist place—"

"The foist place, eh? You're from New York."

"Yes, crithinally. How did you know it? By my fashionable clothing."

"Yes," laughed Wellington. "But you say I need you. How?"

"Well, you've got maybe some baggage, some trunks—yes?"

"Yes."

"Well, in the foist place, I am an expressman. I deliver 'em to your address—yes? Vere is it?"

"I haven't got any yet."

"Also I am an addressman. Do you want it a nice hotel?—or a fine house?—or an apartment?—or maybe a boarding-house?—yes? How long do you make a residence?"

"Six months."

"No longer?"

"Not a minute."

"Take a fine house, den. I got some beauties just wacated."

"For a year?—no thanks."

"All the leases in Reno run for six months only."

"Well, I'd like to look around a little first."

"Good. Don't forget us. You come out here for six months. You want maybe a good quick divorce—yes?"

"The quickest I can get."

"Do you want it confidential? or very nice and noisy?"

"What's that?"

"Ve are press agents and also suppress agents. Some likes 'em on way, some likes 'em snudder. Ve do you want it?"

"Quick and quiet."

"Painless divorce is our specialty. If you pay me an advance deposit, I file your claim de minute de train stops and your own wife don't know you're divorced."

"I'll think it over," said Wellington, rising with resolution.

"Don't forget us. Baumann and Blumen. Satisfaction guaranteed or your wife returned. Avoid substitutes. And then, seeing that he could not extract any cash from Little Jim-

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me, Mr. Baumann descended upon Mallory, who was just finishing his shave. Laying his hand on Mallory's arm, he began:

"Excuse, please. Can I fit you out with a nice divorce?"

"Divorce?—me!—that's good," laughed Mallory at the vision of it. Then a sudden idea struck him. It took no great genius to see that Mr. Baumann was not a clergyman, but there were other marriers to be had. "You don't perform marriages, do you?" he asked.

Mr. Baumann drew himself up: "Who says I don't? Ain't I a justice of the peaces?"

Mallory put out his hand in welcome; then a new anxiety chilled him. He had a license for Chicago, but Chicago was far away: "Do I need a license in Nevada?"

"Why shouldn't you?" said Mr. Baumann. "Don't all sorts of things got to have a license in Nevada, saloons, husbands, dogs—"

"How could I get one?" Mallory asked as he went on dressing.

"Ain't I got a few vit me? Do you want to get a nice re-marriage license?"

"Re-marriage?—huh!" he looked round, and seeing that no one else was near: "I haven't taken the first step yet."

Mr. Baumann laved his hands in one another: "A betchelor? Ah, I see you want to marry a nice divorcee lady in R-r-eno?"

"She isn't in Reno and she has never been married, either."

This simple statement seemed to astound Mr. Baumann:

"A betchelor marry a maiden!—in Reno!—oh, oh, oh! It hasn't been done yet, but it might be."

Mallory looked him over and a twinge of distaste disturbed him: "You furnish the license, but—er—ah—Is there any chance of a clergyman—a Christian clergyman—being at the station?"

"Vy do you want it a cloigyman?—Can't I do it just as good? Or a nice fat alderman I can get you?"

Mallory pondered: "I don't think she'd like anything but a clergyman."

"Well," Baumann confessed, "a lady is liable to be particular about her foist marriage. Anyvay I sell you de license."

"All right."

Mr. Baumann whipped out a portfolio full of documents, and as he searched them, philosophized: "A man ought always to carry a good marriage license. It might be he should need it in a hurry." He took a large roll from his side-pocket and stamped the paper and then, with fountain pen poised, pleaded: "Vat is the names, please?"

"Not so loud!" Mallory whispered. Baumann put his finger to his nose, wisely: "I see, it is a confidential marriage. Sit down once."

When he had asked Mallory the necessary questions and taken his fee, he passed over the document by which the sovereign state of Nevada graciously permitted two souls to be made more or less one in the eyes of the law.

"Here you are," said Mr. Baumann. "Vit dat you can get married anyvare in Nevada."

Mallory realized that Nevada would be a thing of the past in a few hours more and he asked:

"It's no good in California?"

"Himmel, no. In California you bot gotta go and be examined."

"Examined!" Mallory gasped, in dire alarm.

"Vit questions, poisonally," Mr. Baumann hastened to explain.

"Oh!"

"In Nevada," Baumann insinuated, still hopeful, "I could marry you myself—now, right here."

"Could you marry us in this smoking room?"

"In a cattle car, if you want it."

"It's not a bad idea," said Mallory. "I'll let you know."

Seeing Marjorie coming down the aisle, he hastened to her, and begged her good-morning with a new confidence.

Dr. and Mrs. Temple, who had returned to their berth, witnessed this greeting with amazement. After the

Continued on page 7.

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