

EXCUSE ME!

RUPERT HUGHES

NOVELIZED FROM THE COMEDY OF THE SAME NAME.

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

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Lieut. Harry Mallory is ordered to the Philippines. He and Marjorie Newton 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 maudlin 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 housing.

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. Coquetry 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.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Complete Divorcer.

The other passengers were growing nervous with their own troubles. The next stop was Reno, and in spite of all the wit that is heaped upon the town, it is a solemn place to those who must go there in purgatorial penance for matrimonial error.

Some honest souls regard such divorce-emporiums as dens of evil, where the wicked make a mockery of the sacrament and assail the foundations of society, by undermining the home. Other equally honest souls, believing that marriage is a human institution whose mishaps and mistakes should be rectified as far as possible, regard the divorce courts as cities of refuge for ill-treated or ill-mated women and men whose lives may be saved from utter ruination by the intervention of high-minded judges.

But, whichever view is right, the ordeal by divorce is terrifying enough to the poor sinners or martyrs who 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 grit, 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 Well-

ington 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 reprieve 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 bouncer, 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 suitors 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 vulture contour of his profile, his palmy gestures, his thick lip, and everything about him gave Wellington his immediate pedigree.

It ill behooves 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 platitudes 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-reno?"

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

"Then you need 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:

Real Estate Agents Baggage Transfer
Baumann & Blumen
Divorce Outfitters
212 Hillmore Avenue, Reno, Nevada
Notary Public Divorces Secured
Justice of the Peace Satisfaction Guaranteed

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, originally. 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 beggetch, some trunks—yes?"

"Yes."

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

"I haven't got any yet."

"Also I am 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?"

"We are press agents and also suppress agents. Some likes 'em one way, some likes 'em another. Vich do you want it?"

"Quick and quiet."

"Painless divorce is our specialty. If you pay me an advance deposit now, 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 refunded. Avoid substitutes." And then, seeing that he could not extract any cash from Little Jimmie, 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 vit 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-reno?"

"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, ol, ol! 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 clogyman? 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 iron seal 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, polissonally." 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 hugged her good-morning with a new confidence.

Dr. and Mrs. Temple, who had returned to their berth, witnessed this greeting with amazement. After the quarrel of the night before surely some explanation should have been overheard, but the puzzling Mallorys flew to each other's arms without a moment's delay. The mystery was exciting the passengers to such a point that they were vowing to ask a few questions point blank. Nobody had quite dared to approach either of them, but frank curiosity was preferable to nervous prostration, and the secret could not be kept much longer. Fellow-passengers have some rights. Not even a stranger can be permitted to outrage their curiosity with impunity forever.

Seeing them together, Mrs. Temple watched the embrace with her daily renewal of joy that the last night's quarrel had not proved fatal. She nudged her husband:

"See, they're making up again."

Dr. Temple was moved to a violent outbreak for him: "Well, that the damndest bridal couple—I only said darn, my dear."

He was still more startled when Mr. Baumann, cruising along the aisle, bent over to murmur: "Can I fix you a nice divorce?"

Dr. Temple rose in such an attitude of horror as he assumed in the pulpit when denouncing the greatest curse

of society, and Mr. Baumann retired. As he passed Mallory he cast an appreciative glance at Marjorie and, tapping Mallory's shoulder, whispered: "No vonder you want a marriage license. I'll be in the next car, should you need me." Then he went on his route.

Marjorie stared after him in wonder and asked: "What did not person mean by what he said?"

"It's all right, Marjorie," Mallory explained, in the highest cheer: "We can get married right away."

Marjorie declined to get her hopes up again: "You're always saying that."

"But here's the license—see?"

"What good is that?" she said; "there's no preacher on board."

"But that man is a justice of the peace and he'll marry us."

Marjorie stared at him incredulously: "That creature!—before all these passengers?"

"Not at all," Mallory explained. "We'll go into the smoking room."

Marjorie leaped to her feet, aghast: "Elope two thousand miles to be married in a smoking room by a Yiddish drummer! Harry Mallory, you're crazy."

Put just that way, the proposition did not look so alluring as at first. He sank back with a sigh: "I guess I am. I resign."

He was as weary of being "foiled again" as the villain of a cheap melodrama. The two lovers sat in a twilight of deep melancholy, till Marjorie's mind dug up a new source of alarm:

"Harry, I've just thought of something terrible."

"Let's have it," he sighed, drearily.

"We reach San Francisco at midnight and you sail at daybreak. What becomes of me?"

Mallory had no answer to this problem, except a grim: "I'll not desert you."

"But we'll have no time to get married."

"Then," he declared with iron resolve, "then I'll resign from the army."

Marjorie stared at him with awe. He was so wonderful, so heroic. "But what will the country do without you?"

"It will have to get along the best it can," he answered with finality. "Do you think I'd give you up?"

But this was too much to ask. In the presence of a ruined career and a heroless army, Marjorie felt that her own scruples were too petty to count. She could be heroic, too.

"No!" she said, in a deep, low tone. "No, we'll get married in the smoking room. Go call your drummer!"

This opened the clouds and let in the sun again with such a radiant blaze that Mallory hesitated no longer. "Fine!" he cried, and leaped to his feet, only to be detained again by Marjorie's clutch:

"But first, what about that bracelet?"

"She's got it," Mallory groaned, slumping from the heights again.

"Do you mean to say she's still wearing it?"

"How was I to get it?"

"Couldn't you have slipped into her car last night and stolen it?"

"Good Lord, I shouldn't think you'd want me to go—why, Marjorie—I'd be arrested!"

But Marjorie set her jaw hard: "Well, you get that bracelet, or you don't get me." And then her smouldering jealousy and grief took a less hateful tone: "Oh, Harry!" she wailed, "I'm so lonely and so helpless and so far from home."

"But I'm here," he urged.

"You're farther away than anybody," she whimpered, huddling close to him.

"Poor little thing," he murmured, soothing her with voice and kiss and caress.

"Put your arm round me," she cooed, like a mourning dove, "I don't care if everybody is looking. Oh, I'm so lonely."

"I'm just as lonely as you are," he pleaded, trying to creep into the company of her misery.

"Please marry me soon," she implored, "won't you, please?"

"I'd marry you this minute if you'd say the word," he whispered.

"I'd say it if you only had that bracelet," she sobbed, like a tired child. "I should think you would understand my feelings. That awful person is wearing your bracelet and I have only your ring, and her bracelet is ten times as big as my ring, boo-hoo-hoo-oo!"

"I'll get that bracelet if I have to chop her arm off," Mallory vowed.

The sobs stopped short, as Marjorie looked up to ask: "Have you got your sword with you?"

"It's in my trunk," he said, "but I'll manage."

"Now you're speaking like a soldier," Marjorie exclaimed, "my brave, noble, beautiful, fearless husband. I'll tell you! That creature will pass through this car on her way to breakfast. You grab her and take the bracelet away from her."

"I grab her, eh?" he stammered, his heroism wavering a trifle.

"Yes, just grab her."

"Suppose she hasn't the bracelet on?" he mused.

"Grab her anyway," Marjorie answered, fiercely. "Besides, I've no doubt it's washed on." He said nothing. "You did wish it on, didn't you?"

"No, no—never—of course not—"

be protested. "If you'll only be calm, I'll get it if I have to throttle her."

Like a young Lady Macbeth, Marjorie gave him her utter approval in any atrocity, and they sat in ambush for their victim to pass into view.

They had not had their breakfast, but they forgot it. A dusky waiter went by chanting his "Lass call for breakfast in Riting Bar." He chanted it thrice in their ears, but they never heard. Marjorie was glowing

over the discomfiture of the odious creature who had dared to precede her in the acquaintance of her husband-to-be. The husband-to-be was miserably wishing that he had to face a tribe of bolo-brandishing Moros, instead of this trivial girl whom he had looked upon when her cheeks were red.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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