

CAPT. G. What?

MRS. G. That last terrible night.

CAPT. G. Then just you forget all about it.

MRS. G. (Softly, her eyes filling.) Never. It has brought us very close together, my husband. There! (Interlude.) I'm going to give Junda a saree.

CAPT. G. I gave her fifty dibs.

MRS. G. So she told me. It was a 'normous reward. Was I worth it? (Several interludes.) Don't! Here's the khitmatgar.--Two lumps or one, Sir?

THE SWELLING OF JORDAN

If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace wherein thou trustedst they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?

SCENE.--The GADSEYS' bungalow in the Plains, on a January morning.

MRS. G. arguing with bearer in back veranda.

CAPT. M. rides up.

CAPT. M. 'Mornin', Mrs. Gadsby. How's the Infant Phenomenon and the Proud Proprietor?

MRS. G. You'll find them in the front veranda; go through the house. I'm Martha just now.

CAPT. M. 'Cumbered about with cares of khitmatgars? I fly.

Passes into front veranda, where GADSBY is watching GADSBY JUNIOR, aged ten months, crawling about the matting.

CAPT. M. What's the trouble, Gaddy--spoiling an honest man's Europe morning this way? (Seeing G. JUNIOR.) By Jove, that yearling's comin' on amazingly! Any amount of bone below the knee there.

CAPT. G. Yes, he's a healthy little scoundrel. Don't you think his hair's growing?

M. Let's have a look. Hi! Hst! Come here, General Luck, and we'll report on you.

MRS. G. (Within.) What absurd name will you give him next? Why do you call him that?

M. Isn't he our Inspector-General of Cavalry? Doesn't he come down in his seventy-two perambulator every morning the Pink Hussars parade? Don't wriggle, Brigadier. Give us your private opinion on the way the third squadron went past. 'Trifle ragged, weren't they?

G. A bigger set of tailors than the new draft I don't wish to see. They've given me more than my fair share--knocking the squadron out of shape. It's sickening!

M. When you're in command, you'll do better, young 'un. Can't you walk yet? Get my finger and try. (To G.) 'Twon't hurt his hocks, will it?

G. Oh, no. Don't let him flop, though, or he'll lick all the blacking off your boots.

MRS. G. (Within.) Who's destroying my son's character?

M. And my Godson's. I'm ashamed of you, Gaddy. Punch your father in the eye, Jack! Don't you stand it! Hit him again!

G. (Sotto voce.) Put The Butcha down and come to the end of the veranda. I'd rather the Wife didn't hear--just now.

M. You look awfully serious. Anything wrong?

G. 'Depends on your view entirely. I say, Jack, you won't think more hardly of me than you can help, will you? Come further this way.--The fact of the matter is, that I've made up my mind--at least I'm thinking seriously of--cutting the Service.

M. Hwhatt?

G. Don't shout. I'm going to send in my papers.

M. You! Are you mad?

G. No--only married.

M. Look here! What's the meaning of it all? You never intend to leave us. You can't. Isn't the best squadron of the best regiment of the best cavalry in all the world good enough for you?

G. (Jerking his head over his shoulder.) She doesn't seem to thrive in this God-forsaken country, and there's The Butcha to be considered and all that, you know.

M. Does she say that she doesn't like India?

G. That's the worst of it. She won't for fear of leaving me.

M. What are the Hills made for?

G. Not for my wife at any rate.

M. You know too much, Gaddy, and--I don't like you any the better for it!

G. Never mind that. She wants England, and The Butcha would be all the better for it. I'm going to chuck. You don't understand.

M. (Hotly.) I understand this. One hundred and thirty-seven new horses to be licked into shape somehow before Luck comes round again; a hairy-heeled draft who'll give more trouble than the horses; a camp next cold weather for a certainty; ourselves the first on the roster; the Russian shindy ready to come to a head at five minutes' notice, and you, the best of us all, backing out of it all! Think a little, Gaddy. You won't do it.

G. Hang it, a man has some duties towards his family, I suppose.

M. I remember a man, though, who told me, the night after Amdheran, when we were picketed under Jagai, and he'd left his sword--by the way, did you ever pay Ranken for that sword?--in an Utmanzai's head--that man told me that he'd stick by me and the Pinks as long as he lived. I don't blame him for not sticking by me--I'm not much of a man--but I do blame him for not sticking by the Pink Hussars.

G. (Uneasily.) We were little more than boys then. Can't you see,

Jack, how things stand? 'Tisn't as if we were serving for our bread. We've all of us, more or less, got the filthy lucre. I'm luckier than some, perhaps. There's no call for me to serve on.

M. None in the world for you or for us, except the Regimental. If you don't choose to answer to that, of course--

G. Don't be too hard on a man. You know that a lot of us only take up the thing for a few years and then go back to Town and catch on with the rest.

M. Not lots, and they aren't some of Us.

G. And then there are one's affairs at Home to be considered--my place and the rents, and all that. I don't suppose my father can last much longer, and that means the title, and so on.

M. 'Fraid you won't be entered in the Stud Book correctly unless you go Home? Take six months, then, and come out in October. If I could slay off a brother or two, I s'pose I should be a Marquis of sorts. Any fool can be that; but it needs men, Gaddy--men like you--to lead flanking squadrons properly. Don't you delude yourself into the belief that you're going Home to take your place and prance about among pink-nosed Kabuli dowagers. You aren't built that way. I know better.

G. A man has a right to live his life as happily as he can. You aren't married.

M. No--praise be to Providence and the one or two women who have had the good sense to jawab me.

G. Then you don't know what it is to go into your own room and see your wife's head on the pillow, and when everything else is safe and the house shut up for the night, to wonder whether the roof-beams won't give and kill her.

M. (Aside.) Revelations first and second! (Aloud.) So-o! I knew a man who got squiffy at our Mess once and confided to me that he never helped his wife on to her horse without praying that she'd break her neck before she came back. All husbands aren't alike, you see.

G. What on earth has that to do with my case? The man must ha' been mad, or his wife as bad as they make 'em.

M. (Aside.) 'No fault of yours if either weren't all you say. You've forgotten the tune when you were insane about the Herriott woman. You always were a good hand at forgetting. (Aloud.) Not more mad than men who go to the other extreme. Be reasonable, Gaddy. Your roof-beams are sound enough.

G. That was only a way of speaking. I've been uneasy and worried about the Wife ever since that awful business three years ago--when--I nearly lost her. Can you wonder?

M. Oh, a shell never falls twice in the same place. You've paid your toll to misfortune--why should your wife be picked out more than anybody else's?

G. I can talk just as reasonably as you can, but you don't understand--you don't understand. And then there's The Butcha. Deuce knows where the Ayah takes him to sit in the evening! He has a bit of a cough. Haven't you noticed it?

M. Bosh! The Brigadier's jumping out of his skin with pure condition. He's got a muzzle like a rose-leaf and the chest of a two-year-old. What's demoralised you?

G. Funk. That's the long and the short of it. Funk!

M. But what is there to funk?

G. Everything. It's ghastly.

M. Ah! I see.

You don't want to fight,
And by Jingo when we do,
You've got the kid, you've got the Wife,
You've got the money, too.

That's about the case, eh?

G. I suppose that's it. But it's not for myself. It's because of them.
At least I think it is.

M. Are you sure? Looking at the matter in a cold-blooded light, the
Wife is provided for even if you were wiped out to-night. She has an
ancestral home to go to, money, and the Brigadier to carry on the
illustrious name.

G. Then it is for myself or because they are part of me. You don't see
it. My life's so good, so pleasant, as it is, that I want to make it
quite safe. Can't you understand?

M. Perfectly. 'Shelter-pit for the Officer's charger,' as they say in
the Line.

G. And I have everything to my hand to make it so. I'm sick of the
strain and the worry for their sakes out here; and there isn't a single
real difficulty to prevent my dropping it altogether. It'll only cost
me--Jack, I hope you'll never know the shame that I've been going
through for the past six months.

M. Hold on there! I don't wish to be told. Every man has his moods and
tenses sometimes.

G. (Laughing bitterly.) Has he? What do you call craning over to see
where your near-fore lands?

M. In my case it means that I have been on the Considerable Bend, and have come to parade with a Head and a Hand. It passes in three strides.

G. (Lowering voice.) It never passes with me, Jack. I'm always thinking about it. Phil Gadsby funking a fall on parade! Sweet picture, isn't it! Draw it for me.

M. (Gravely.) Heaven forbid! A man like you can't be as bad as that. A fall is no nice thing, but one never gives it a thought.

G. Doesn't one? Wait till you've got a wife and a youngster of your own, and then you'll know how the roar of the squadron behind you turns you cold all up the back.

M. (Aside.) And this man led at Amdheran after Bagal-Deasin went under, and we were all mixed up together, and he came out of the show dripping like a butcher. (Aloud.) Skittles! The men can always open out, and you can always pick your way more or less. We haven't the dust to bother us, as the men have, and whoever heard of a horse stepping on a man?

G. Never--as long as he can see. But did they open out for poor Errington?

M. Oh, this is childish!

G. I know it is, worse than that. I don't care. You've ridden Van Loo. Is he the sort of brute to pick his way--'specially when we're coming up in column of troop with any pace on?

M. Once in a Blue Moon do we gallop in column of troop, and then only to save time. Aren't three lengths enough for you?

G. Yes--quite enough. They just allow for the full development of the smash. I'm talking like a cur, I know: but I tell you that, for the past three months, I've felt every hoof of the squadron in the small of my back every time that I've led.

M. But, Gaddy, this is awful!

G. Isn't it lovely? Isn't it royal? A Captain of the Pink Hussars watering up his charger before parade like the blasted boozing Colonel of a Black Regiment!

M. You never did!

G. Once only. He squelched like a mussuck, and the Troop-Sergeant-Major cocked his eye at me. You know old Haffy's eye. I was afraid to do it again.

M. I should think so. That was the best way to rupture old Van Loo's tummy, and make him crumple you up. You knew that.

G. I didn't care. It took the edge off him.

M. 'Took the edge off him'? Gaddy, you--you--you mustn't, you know!
Think of the men.

G. That's another thing I am afraid of. D'you s'pose they know?

M. Let's hope not; but they're deadly quick to spot skrim--little things of that kind. See here, old man, send the Wife Home for the hot weather and come to Kashmir with me. We'll start a boat on the Dal or cross the Rhotang--shoot ibex or loaf--which you please. Only come! You're a bit off your oats and you're talking nonsense. Look at the Colonel--swag-bellied rascal that he is. He has a wife and no end of a bow-window of his own. Can any one of us ride round him--chalk-stones and all? I can't, and I think I can shove a crock along a bit.

G. Some men are different. I haven't the nerve. Lord help me, I haven't the nerve! I've taken up a hole and a half to get my knees well under the wallets. I can't help it. I'm so afraid of anything happening to me. On my soul, I ought to be broke in front of the squadron, for cowardice.

M. Ugly word, that. I should never have the courage to own up.

G. I meant to lie about my reasons when I began, but--I've got out of the habit of lying to you, old man. Jack, you won't?--But I know you won't.

M. Of course not. (Half aloud.) The Pinks are paying dearly for their Pride.

G. Eh! Wha-at?

M. Don't you know? The men have called Mrs. Gadsby the Pride of the Pink Hussars ever since she came to us.

G. 'Tisn't her fault. Don't think that. It's all mine.

M. What does she say?

G. I haven't exactly put it before her. She's the best little woman in the world, Jack, and all that--but she wouldn't counsel a man to stick to his calling if it came between him and her. At least, I think--

M. Never mind. Don't tell her what you told me. Go on the Peerage and Landed-Gentry tack.

G. She'd see through it. She's five times cleverer than I am.

M. (Aside.) Then she'll accept the sacrifice and think a little bit worse of him for the rest of her days.

G. (Absently.) I say, do you despise me?

M. 'Queer way of putting it. Have you ever been asked that question? Think a minute. What answer used you to give?

G. So bad as that? I'm not entitled to expect anything more, but it's a bit hard when one's best friend turns round and--

M. So I have found. But you will have consolations--Bailiffs and Drains and Liquid Manure and the Primrose League, and, perhaps, if you're lucky, the Colonelcy of a Yeomanry Cav-al-ry Regiment--all uniform and no riding, I believe. How old are you?

G. Thirty-three. I know it's--

M. At forty you'll be a fool of a J.P. landlord. At fifty you'll own a bath-chair, and The Brigadier, if he takes after you, will be fluttering the doves of--what's the particular dunghill you're going to? Also, Mrs. Gadsby will be fat.

G. (Limp.) This is rather more than a joke.

M. D'you think so? Isn't cutting the Service a joke? It generally takes a man fifty years to arrive at it. You're quite right, though. It is more than a joke. You've managed it in thirty-three.

G. Don't make me feel worse than I do. Will it satisfy you if I own that I am a shirker, a skrim-shanker, and a coward?

M. It will not, because I'm the only man in the world who can talk to you like this without being knocked down. You mustn't take all that I've said to heart in this way. I only spoke--a lot of it at least--out of pure selfishness, because, because--Oh, damn it all, old man,--I don't know what I shall do without you. Of course, you've got the money and the place and all that--and there are two very good reasons why you should take care of yourself.

G. 'Doesn't make it any the sweeter. I'm backing out--I know I am. I always had a soft drop in me somewhere--and I daren't risk any danger to them.

M. Why in the world should you? You're bound to think of your family--bound to think. Er-hmm. If I wasn't a younger son I'd go too--be shot if I wouldn't!

G. Thank you, Jack. It's a kind lie, but it's the blackest you've told for some time. I know what I'm doing, and I'm going into it with my eyes open. Old man, I can't help it. What would you do if you were in my place?

M. (Aside.) 'Couldn't conceive any woman getting permanently between me and the Regiment. (Aloud.) 'Can't say. 'Very likely I should do no better. I'm sorry for you--awf'ly sorry--but 'if them's your sentiments,' I believe, I really do, that you are acting wisely.

G. Do you? I hope you do. (In a whisper.) Jack, be very sure of

yourself before you marry. I'm an ungrateful ruffian to say this, but marriage--even as good a marriage as mine has been--hampers a man's work, it cripples his sword-arm, and oh, it plays Hell with his notions of duty! Sometimes--good and sweet as she is--sometimes I could wish that I had kept my freedom--No, I don't mean that exactly.

MRS. G. (Coming down the veranda.) What are you wagging your head over, Pip?

M. (Turning quickly.) Me, as usual. The old sermon. Your husband is recommending me to get married. 'Never saw such a one-ideaed man!

MRS. G. Well, why don't you? I daresay you would make some woman very happy.

G. There's the Law and the Prophets, Jack. Never mind the Regiment. Make a woman happy. (Aside.) O Lord!

M. We'll see. I must be off to make a Troop Cook desperately unhappy. I won't have the wily Hussar fed on Government Bullock Train shinbones--(Hastily.) Surely black ants can't be good for The Brigadier. He's picking 'em off the matting and eating 'em. Here, Senor Commandante Don Grubbynose, come and talk to me. (Lifts G. JUNIOR in his arms.) 'Want my watch? You won't be able to put it into your mouth, but you can try. (G. JUNIOR drops watch, breaking dial and hands.)

MRS. G. Oh, Captain Mafflin, I am so sorry! Jack, you bad, bad little villain. Ahhh!

M. It's not the least consequence, I assure you. He'd treat the world in the same way if he could get it into his hands. Everything's made to be played with and broken, isn't it, young 'un?

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MRS. G. Mafflin didn't at all like his watch being broken, though he was too polite to say so. It was entirely his fault for giving it to the child. Dem little puds are werry, werry feeble, aren't dey, my Jack-in-de-box? (To G.) What did he want to see you for?

G. Regimental shop as usual.

MRS. G. The Regiment! Always the Regiment. On my word, I sometimes feel jealous of Mafflin.

G. (Wearily.) Poor old Jack? I don't think you need. Isn't it time for The Butcha to have his nap? Bring a chair out here, dear. I've got something to talk over with you.

AND THIS IS THE END OF THE STORY OF THE
GADSBYS.

L'ENVOI

What is the moral? Who rides may read.

When the night is thick and the tracks are blind.

A friend at a pinch is a friend indeed;

But a fool to wait for the laggard behind:

Down to Gehenna or up to the Throne

He travels the fastest who travels alone.

White hands cling to the tightened rein,

Slipping the spur from the booted heel,

Tenderest voices cry, 'Turn again,'

Red lips tarnish the scabbarded steel,

High hopes faint on a warm hearth-stone--

He travels the fastest who travels alone.

One may fall but he falls by himself--

Falls by himself with himself to blame;

One may attain and to him is the pelf,

Loot of the city in Gold of Fame;

Plunder of earth shall be all his own

Who travels the fastest and travels alone.

Wherefore the more ye be holpen and stayed--

Stayed by a friend in the hour of toil,

Sing the heretical song I have made--

His be the labour and yours be the spoil.

Win by his aid and the aid of disown--

He travels the fastest who travels alone.

DRAY WARA YOW DEE

For jealousy is the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance.

--Prov. vi. 34.

Almonds and raisins, Sahib? Grapes from Kabul? Or a pony of the rarest if the Sahib will only come with me. He is thirteen three, Sahib, plays polo, goes in a cart, carries a lady and--Holy Kurshed and the Blessed Imams, it is the Sahib himself! My heart is made fat and my eye glad. May you never be tired! As is cold water in the Tirah, so is the sight of a friend in a far place. And what do you in this accursed land? South of Delhi, Sahib, you know the saying--'Rats are the men and trulls the women.' It was an order? Ahoo! An order is an order till one is strong enough to disobey. O my brother, O my friend, we have met in an auspicious hour! Is all well in the heart and the body and the house? In a lucky day have we two come together again.

I am to go with you? Your favour is great. Will there be picket-room in the compound? I have three horses and the bundles and the horse-boy. Moreover, remember that the police here hold me a horse-thief. What do these Lowland bastards know of horse-thieves? Do you remember that