Piccadilly Jim

By

P.G. Wodehouse

CHAPTER I

A RED-HAIRED GIRL

The residence of Mr. Peter Pett, the well-known financier, on Riverside Drive is one of the leading eyesores of that breezy and expensive boulevard. As you pass by in your limousine, or while enjoying ten cents worth of fresh air on top of a green omnibus, it jumps out and bites at you. Architects, confronted with it, reel and throw up their hands defensively, and even the lay observer has a sense of shock. The place resembles in almost equal proportions a cathedral, a suburban villa, a hotel and a Chinese pagoda. Many of its windows are of stained glass, and above the porch stand two terra-cotta lions, considerably more repulsive even than the complacent animals which guard New York's Public Library. It is a house which is impossible to overlook: and it was probably for this reason that Mrs. Pett insisted on her husband buying it, for she was a woman who liked to be noticed.

Through the rich interior of this mansion Mr. Pett, its nominal proprietor, was wandering like a lost spirit. The hour was about ten of a fine Sunday morning, but the Sabbath calm which was upon the house had not communicated itself to him. There was a look of exasperation on his usually patient face, and a muttered oath, picked up no doubt on the godless Stock Exchange, escaped his

lips.

"Darn it!"

He was afflicted by a sense of the pathos of his position. It was not as if he demanded much from life. He asked but little here below. At that moment all that he wanted was a quiet spot where he might read his Sunday paper in solitary peace, and he could not find one. Intruders lurked behind every door. The place was congested.

This sort of thing had been growing worse and worse ever since his marriage two years previously. There was a strong literary virus in Mrs. Pett's system. She not only wrote voluminously herself--the name Nesta Ford Pett is familiar to all lovers of sensational fiction--but aimed at maintaining a salon. Starting, in pursuance of this aim, with a single specimen,--her nephew, Willie Partridge, who was working on a new explosive which would eventually revolutionise war--she had gradually added to her collections, until now she gave shelter beneath her terra-cotta roof to no fewer than six young and unrecognised geniuses. Six brilliant youths, mostly novelists who had not yet started and poets who were about to begin, cluttered up Mr. Pett's rooms on this fair June morning, while he, clutching his Sunday paper, wandered about, finding, like the dove in Genesis, no rest. It was at such times that he was almost inclined to envy his wife's

first husband, a business friend of his named Elmer Ford, who had perished suddenly of an apoplectic seizure: and the pity which he generally felt for the deceased tended to shift its focus.

Marriage had certainly complicated life for Mr. Pett, as it frequently does for the man who waits fifty years before trying it. In addition to the geniuses, Mrs. Pett had brought with her to her new home her only son, Ogden, a fourteen-year-old boy of a singularly unloveable type. Years of grown-up society and the absence of anything approaching discipline had given him a precocity on which the earnest efforts of a series of private tutors had expended themselves in vain. They came, full of optimism and self-confidence, to retire after a brief interval, shattered by the boy's stodgy resistance to education in any form or shape. To Mr. Pett, never at his ease with boys, Ogden Ford was a constant irritant. He disliked his stepson's personality, and he more than suspected him of stealing his cigarettes. It was an additional annoyance that he was fully aware of the impossibility of ever catching him at it.

Mr. Pett resumed his journey. He had interrupted it for a moment to listen at the door of the morning-room, but, a remark in a high tenor voice about the essential Christianity of the poet Shelley filtering through the oak, he had moved on.

Silence from behind another door farther down the passage

encouraged him to place his fingers on the handle, but a crashing chord from an unseen piano made him remove them swiftly. He roamed on, and a few minutes later the process of elimination had brought him to what was technically his own private library--a large, soothing room full of old books, of which his father had been a great collector. Mr. Pett did not read old books himself, but he liked to be among them, and it is proof of his pessimism that he had not tried the library first. To his depressed mind it had seemed hardly possible that there could be nobody there.

He stood outside the door, listening tensely. He could hear nothing. He went in, and for an instant experienced that ecstatic thrill which only comes to elderly gentlemen of solitary habit who in a house full of their juniors find themselves alone at last. Then a voice spoke, shattering his dream of solitude.

"Hello, pop!"

Ogden Ford was sprawling in a deep chair in the shadows.

"Come in, pop, come in. Lots of room."

Mr. Pett stood in the doorway, regarding his step-son with a sombre eye. He resented the boy's tone of easy patronage, all the harder to endure with philosophic calm at the present moment from the fact that the latter was lounging in his favourite chair.

Even from an aesthetic point of view the sight of the bulging child offended him. Ogden Ford was round and blobby and looked overfed. He had the plethoric habit of one to whom wholesome exercise is a stranger and the sallow complexion of the confirmed candy-fiend. Even now, a bare half hour after breakfast, his jaws were moving with a rhythmical, champing motion.

"What are you eating, boy?" demanded Mr. Pett, his disappointment turning to irritability.

"Candy."

"I wish you would not eat candy all day."

"Mother gave it to me," said Ogden simply. As he had anticipated, the shot silenced the enemy's battery. Mr. Pett grunted, but made no verbal comment. Ogden celebrated his victory by putting another piece of candy in his mouth.

"Got a grouch this morning, haven't you, pop?"

"I will not be spoken to like that!"

"I thought you had," said his step-son complacently. "I can always tell. I don't see why you want to come picking on me, though. I've done nothing."

Mr. Pett was sniffing suspiciously.

"You've been smoking."

"Me!!"

"Smoking cigarettes."

"No, sir!"

"There are two butts in the ash-tray."

"I didn't put them there."

"One of them is warm."

"It's a warm day."

"You dropped it there when you heard me come in."

"No, sir! I've only been here a few minutes. I guess one of the fellows was in here before me. They're always swiping your coffin-nails. You ought to do something about it, pop. You ought to assert yourself."

A sense of helplessness came upon Mr. Pett. For the thousandth time he felt himself baffled by this calm, goggle-eyed boy who treated him with such supercilious coolness.

"You ought to be out in the open air this lovely morning," he said feebly.

"All right. Let's go for a walk. I will if you will."

"I--I have other things to do," said Mr. Pett, recoiling from the prospect.

"Well, this fresh-air stuff is overrated anyway. Where's the sense of having a home if you don't stop in it?"

"When I was your age, I would have been out on a morning like this--er--bowling my hoop."

"And look at you now!"

"What do you mean?"

"Martyr to lumbago."

"I am not a martyr to lumbago," said Mr. Pett, who was touchy on the subject.

"Have it your own way. All I know is--"

"Never mind!"

"I'm only saying what mother . . ."

"Be quiet!"

Ogden made further researches in the candy box.

"Have some, pop?"

"No."

"Quite right. Got to be careful at your age."

"What do you mean?"

"Getting on, you know. Not so young as you used to be. Come in, pop, if you're coming in. There's a draft from that door."

Mr. Pett retired, fermenting. He wondered how another man would have handled this situation. The ridiculous inconsistency of the human character infuriated him. Why should he be a totally different man on Riverside Drive from the person he was in Pine

Street? Why should he be able to hold his own in Pine Street with grown men--whiskered, square-jawed financiers--and yet be unable on Riverside Drive to eject a fourteen-year-old boy from an easy chair? It seemed to him sometimes that a curious paralysis of the will came over him out of business hours.

Meanwhile, he had still to find a place where he could read his Sunday paper.

He stood for a while in thought. Then his brow cleared, and he began to mount the stairs. Reaching the top floor, he walked along the passage and knocked on a door at the end of it. From behind this door, as from behind those below, sounds proceeded, but this time they did not seem to discourage Mr. Pett. It was the tapping of a typewriter that he heard, and he listened to it with an air of benevolent approval. He loved to hear the sound of a typewriter: it made home so like the office.

"Come in," called a girl's voice.

The room in which Mr. Pett found himself was small but cosy, and its cosiness--oddly, considering the sex of its owner--had that peculiar quality which belongs as a rule to the dens of men. A large bookcase almost covered one side of it, its reds and blues and browns smiling cheerfully at whoever entered. The walls were hung with prints, judiciously chosen and arranged. Through a

window to the left, healthfully open at the bottom, the sun streamed in, bringing with it the pleasantly subdued whirring of automobiles out on the Drive. At a desk at right angles to this window, her vivid red-gold hair rippling in the breeze from the river, sat the girl who had been working at the typewriter. She turned as Mr. Pett entered, and smiled over her shoulder.

Ann Chester, Mr. Pett's niece, looked her best when she smiled. Although her hair was the most obviously striking feature of her appearance, her mouth was really the most individual thing about her. It was a mouth that suggested adventurous possibilities. In repose, it had a look of having just finished saying something humorous, a kind of demure appreciation of itself. When it smiled, a row of white teeth flashed out: or, if the lips did not part, a dimple appeared on the right cheek, giving the whole face an air of mischievous geniality. It was an enterprising, swashbuckling sort of mouth, the mouth of one who would lead forlorn hopes with a jest or plot whimsically lawless conspiracies against convention. In its corners and in the firm line of the chin beneath it there lurked, too, more than a hint of imperiousness. A physiognomist would have gathered, correctly, that Ann Chester liked having her own way and was accustomed to get it.

"Hello, uncle Peter," she said. "What's the trouble?"

"Am I interrupting you, Ann?"

"Not a bit. I'm only copying out a story for aunt Nesta. I promised her I would. Would you like to hear some of it?"

Mr. Pett said he would not.

"You're missing a good thing," said Ann, turning the pages. "I'm all worked up over it. It's called 'At Dead of Night,' and it's full of crime and everything. You would never think aunt Nesta had such a feverish imagination. There are detectives and kidnappers in it and all sorts of luxuries. I suppose it's the effect of reading it, but you look to me as if you were trailing something. You've got a sort of purposeful air."

Mr. Pett's amiable face writhed into what was intended to be a bitter smile.

"I'm only trailing a quiet place to read in. I never saw such a place as this house. It looks big enough outside for a regiment. Yet, when you're inside, there's a poet or something in every room."

"What about the library? Isn't that sacred to you?"

"The boy Ogden's there."

"What a shame!"

"Wallowing in my best chair," said Mr. Pett morosely. "Smoking cigarettes."

"Smoking? I thought he had promised aunt Nesta he wouldn't smoke."

"Well, he said he wasn't, of course, but I know he had been. I don't know what to do with that boy. It's no good my talking to him. He--he patronises me!" concluded Mr. Pett indignantly. "Sits there on his shoulder blades with his feet on the table and talks to me with his mouth full of candy as if I were his grandson."

"Little brute."

Ann was sorry for Mr. Pett. For many years now, ever since the death of her mother, they had been inseparable. Her father, who was a traveller, explorer, big-game hunter, and general sojourner in the lonelier and wilder spots of the world and paid only infrequent visits to New York, had left her almost entirely in Mr. Pett's care, and all her pleasantest memories were associated with him. Mr. Chester's was in many ways an admirable character, but not a domestic one; and his relations with his daughter were confined for the most part to letters and presents. In the past

few years she had come almost to regard Mr. Pett in the light of a father. Hers was a nature swiftly responsive to kindness; and because Mr. Pett besides being kind was also pathetic she pitied as well as loved him. There was a lingering boyishness in the financier, the boyishness of the boy who muddles along in an unsympathetic world and can never do anything right: and this quality called aloud to the youth in her. She was at the valiant age when we burn to right wrongs and succour the oppressed, and wild rebel schemes for the reformation of her small world came readily to her. From the first she had been a smouldering spectator of the trials of her uncle's married life, and if Mr. Pett had ever asked her advice and bound himself to act on it he would have solved his domestic troubles in explosive fashion. For Ann in her moments of maiden meditation had frequently devised schemes to that end which would have made his grey hair stand erect with horror.

"I've seen a good many boys," she said, "but Ogden is in a class by himself. He ought to be sent to a strict boarding-school, of course."

"He ought to be sent to Sing-Sing," amended Mr. Pett.

"Why don't you send him to school?"

"Your aunt wouldn't hear of it. She's afraid of his being

kidnapped. It happened last time he went to school. You can't blame her for wanting to keep her eye on him after that."

Ann ran her fingers meditatively over the keys.

"I've sometimes thought . . ."

"Yes?"

"Oh, nothing. I must get on with this thing for aunt Nesta."

Mr. Pett placed the bulk of the Sunday paper on the floor beside him, and began to run an appreciative eye over the comic supplement. That lingering boyishness in him which endeared him to Ann always led him to open his Sabbath reading in this fashion. Grey-headed though he was, he still retained both in art and in real life a taste for the slapstick. No one had ever known the pure pleasure it had given him when Raymond Green, his wife's novelist protege, had tripped over a loose stair-rod one morning and fallen an entire flight.

From some point farther down the corridor came a muffled thudding. Ann stopped her work to listen.

"There's Jerry Mitchell punching the bag."

"Eh?" said Mr. Pett.

"I only said I could hear Jerry Mitchell in the gymnasium."

"Yes, he's there."

Ann looked out of the window thoughtfully for a moment. Then she swung round in her swivel-chair.

"Uncle Peter."

Mr. Pett emerged slowly from the comic supplement.

"Eh?"

"Did Jerry Mitchell ever tell you about that friend of his who keeps a dogs' hospital down on Long Island somewhere? I forget his name. Smithers or Smethurst or something. People--old ladies, you know, and people--bring him their dogs to be cured when they get sick. He has an infallible remedy, Jerry tells me. He makes a lot of money at it."

"Money?" Pett, the student, became Pett, the financier, at the magic word. "There might be something in that if one got behind it. Dogs are fashionable. There would be a market for a really good medicine."

"I'm afraid you couldn't put Mr. Smethurst's remedy on the market. It only works when the dog has been overeating himself and not taking any exercise."

"Well, that's all these fancy dogs ever have the matter with them. It looks to me as if I might do business with this man. I'll get his address from Mitchell."

"It's no use thinking of it, uncle Peter. You couldn't do business with him--in that way. All Mr. Smethurst does when any one brings him a fat, unhealthy dog is to feed it next to nothing--just the simplest kind of food, you know--and make it run about a lot. And in about a week the dog's as well and happy and nice as he can possibly be."

"Oh," said Mr. Pett, disappointed.

Ann touched the keys of her machine softly.

"Why I mentioned Mr. Smethurst," she said, "it was because we had been talking of Ogden. Don't you think his treatment would be just what Ogden needs?"

Mr. Pett's eyes gleamed.

"It's a shame he can't have a week or two of it!"

Ann played a little tune with her finger-tips on the desk.

"It would do him good, wouldn't it?"

Silence fell upon the room, broken only by the tapping of the typewriter. Mr. Pett, having finished the comic supplement, turned to the sporting section, for he was a baseball fan of no lukewarm order. The claims of business did not permit him to see as many games as he could wish, but he followed the national pastime closely on the printed page and had an admiration for the Napoleonic gifts of Mr. McGraw which would have gratified that gentleman had he known of it.

"Uncle Peter," said Ann, turning round again.

"Eh?"

"It's funny you should have been talking about Ogden getting kidnapped. This story of aunt Nesta's is all about an angel-child--I suppose it's meant to be Ogden--being stolen and hidden and all that. It's odd that she should write stories like this. You wouldn't expect it of her."

"Your aunt," said Mr. Pett, "lets her mind run on that sort of

thing a good deal. She tells me there was a time, not so long ago, when half the kidnappers in America were after him. She sent him to school in England--or, rather, her husband did. They were separated then--and, as far as I can follow the story, they all took the next boat and besieged the place."

"It's a pity somebody doesn't smuggle him away now and keep him till he's a better boy."

"Ah!" said Mr. Pett wistfully.

Ann looked at him fixedly, but his eyes were once more on his paper. She gave a little sigh, and turned to her work again.

"It's quite demoralising, typing aunt Nesta's stories," she said. "They put ideas into one's head."

Mr. Pett said nothing. He was reading an article of medical interest in the magazine section, for he was a man who ploughed steadily through his Sunday paper, omitting nothing. The typewriter began tapping again.

"Great Godfrey!"

Ann swung round, and gazed at her uncle in concern. He was staring blankly at the paper.

"What's the matter?"

The page on which Mr. Pett's attention was concentrated was decorated with a fanciful picture in bold lines of a young man in evening dress pursuing a young woman similarly clad along what appeared to be a restaurant supper-table. An enjoyable time was apparently being had by both. Across the page this legend ran:

PICCADILLY JIM ONCE MORE

The Recent Adventures of Young Mr. Crocker

of New York and London

It was not upon the title, however, nor upon the illustration that Mr. Pett's fascinated eye rested. What he was looking at was a small reproduction of a photograph which had been inserted in the body of the article. It was the photograph of a woman in the early forties, rather formidably handsome, beneath which were printed the words:

Mrs. Nesta Ford Pett

Well-Known Society Leader and Authoress

Ann had risen and was peering over his shoulder. She frowned as she caught sight of the heading of the page. Then her eye fell upon the photograph.

"Good gracious! Why have they got aunt Nesta's picture there?"

Mr. Pett breathed a deep and gloomy breath.

"They've found out she's his aunt. I was afraid they would. I don't know what she will say when she sees this."

"Don't let her see it."

"She has the paper downstairs. She's probably reading it now."

Ann was glancing through the article.

"It seems to be much the same sort of thing that they have published before. I can't understand why the Chronicle takes such an interest in Jimmy Crocker."

"Well, you see he used to be a newspaper man, and the Chronicle was the paper he worked for."

Ann flushed.

"I know," she said shortly.

Something in her tone arrested Mr. Pett's attention.

"Yes, yes, of course," he said hastily. "I was forgetting."

There was an awkward silence. Mr. Pett coughed. The matter of young Mr. Crocker's erstwhile connection with the New York Chronicle was one which they had tacitly decided to refrain from mentioning.

"I didn't know he was your nephew, uncle Peter."

"Nephew by marriage," corrected Mr. Pett a little hurriedly. "Nesta's sister Eugenia married his father."

"I suppose that makes me a sort of cousin."

"A distant cousin."

"It can't be too distant for me."

There was a sound of hurried footsteps outside the door. Mrs. Pett entered, holding a paper in her hand. She waved it before Mr. Pett's sympathetic face.

"I know, my dear," he said backing. "Ann and I were just talking about it."

The little photograph had not done Mrs. Pett justice. Seen life-size, she was both handsomer and more formidable than she appeared in reproduction. She was a large woman, with a fine figure and bold and compelling eyes, and her personality crashed disturbingly into the quiet atmosphere of the room. She was the type of woman whom small, diffident men seem to marry instinctively, as unable to help themselves as cockleshell boats sucked into a maelstrom.

"What are you going to do about it?" she demanded, sinking heavily into the chair which her husband had vacated.

This was an aspect of the matter which had not occurred to Mr. Pett. He had not contemplated the possibility of actually doing anything. Nature had made him out of office hours essentially a passive organism, and it was his tendency, when he found himself in a sea of troubles, to float plaintively, not to take arms against it. To pick up the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and fling them back was not a habit of his. He scratched his chin and said nothing. He went on saying nothing.

"If Eugenia had had any sense, she would have foreseen what would happen if she took the boy away from New York where he was

working too hard to get into mischief and let him run loose in London with too much money and nothing to do. But, if she had had any sense, she would never have married that impossible Crocker man. As I told her."

Mrs. Pett paused, and her eyes glowed with reminiscent fire. She was recalling the scene which had taken place three years ago between her sister and herself, when Eugenia had told her of her intention to marry an obscure and middle-aged actor named Bingley Crocker. Mrs. Pett had never seen Bingley Crocker, but she had condemned the proposed match in terms which had ended definitely and forever her relations with her sister. Eugenia was not a woman who welcomed criticism of her actions. She was cast in the same formidable mould as Mrs. Pett and resembled her strikingly both in appearance and character.

Mrs. Pett returned to the present. The past could look after itself. The present demanded surgery.

"One would have thought it would have been obvious even to Eugenia that a boy of twenty-one needed regular work."

Mr. Pett was glad to come out of his shell here. He was the Apostle of Work, and this sentiment pleased him.

"That's right," he said. "Every boy ought to have work."

"Look at this young Crocker's record since he went to live in London. He is always doing something to make himself notorious. There was that breach-of-promise case, and that fight at the political meeting, and his escapades at Monte Carlo, and--and everything. And he must be drinking himself to death. I think Eugenia's insane. She seems to have no influence over him at all."

Mr. Pett moaned sympathetically.

"And now the papers have found out that I am his aunt, and I suppose they will print my photograph whenever they publish an article about him."

She ceased and sat rigid with just wrath. Mr. Pett, who always felt his responsibilities as chorus keenly during these wifely monologues, surmised that a remark from him was indicated.

"It's tough," he said.

Mrs. Pett turned on him like a wounded tigress.

"What is the use of saying that? It's no use saying anything."

"No, no," said Mr. Pett, prudently refraining from pointing out

that she had already said a good deal.

"You must do something."

Ann entered the conversation for the first time. She was not very fond of her aunt, and liked her least when she was bullying Mr. Pett. There was something in Mrs. Pett's character with which the imperiousness which lay beneath Ann's cheerful attitude towards the world was ever at war.

"What can uncle Peter possibly do?" she inquired.

"Why, get the boy back to America and make him work. It's the only possible thing."

"But is it possible?"

"Of course it is."

"Assuming that Jimmy Crocker would accept an invitation to come over to America, what sort of work could he do here? He couldn't get his place on the Chronicle back again after dropping out for all these years and making a public pest of himself all that while. And outside of newspaper work what is he fit for?"

"My dear child, don't make difficulties."

"I'm not. These are ready-made."

Mr. Pett interposed. He was always nervously apprehensive of a clash between these two. Ann had red hair and the nature which generally goes with red hair. She was impulsive and quick of tongue, and--as he remembered her father had always been--a little too ready for combat. She was usually as quickly remorseful as she was quickly pugnacious, like most persons of her colour. Her offer to type the story which now lay on her desk had been the amende honourable following on just such a scene with her aunt as this promised to be. Mr. Pett had no wish to see the truce thus consummated broken almost before it had had time to operate.

"I could give the boy a job in my office," he suggested.

Giving young men jobs in his office was what Mr. Pett liked doing best. There were six brilliant youths living in his house and bursting with his food at that very moment whom he would have been delighted to start addressing envelopes down-town.

Notably his wife's nephew, Willie Partridge, whom he looked on as a specious loafer. He had a stubborn disbelief in the explosive that was to revolutionise war. He knew, as all the world did, that Willie's late father had been a great inventor, but he did

not accept the fact that Willie had inherited the dead man's genius. He regarded the experiments on Partridgite, as it was to be called, with the profoundest scepticism, and considered that the only thing Willie had ever invented or was likely to invent was a series of ingenious schemes for living in fatted idleness on other people's money.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Pett, delighted at the suggestion. "The very thing."

"Will you write and suggest it?" said Mr. Pett, basking in the sunshine of unwonted commendation.

"What would be the use of writing? Eugenia would pay no attention. Besides, I could not say all I wished to in a letter. No, the only thing is to go over to England and see her. I shall speak very plainly to her. I shall point out what an advantage it will be to the boy to be in your office and to live here. . . ."

Ann started.

"You don't mean live here--in this house?"

"Of course. There would be no sense in bringing the boy all the way over from England if he was to be allowed to run loose when he got here."

Mr. Pett coughed deprecatingly.

"I don't think that would be very pleasant for Ann, dear."

"Why in the name of goodness should Ann object?"

Ann moved towards the door.

"Thank you for thinking of it, uncle Peter. You're always a dear. But don't worry about me. Do just as you want to. In any case I'm quite certain that you won't be able to get him to come over here. You can see by the paper he's having far too good a time in London. You can call Jimmy Crockers from the vasty deep, but will they come when you call for them?"

Mrs. Pett looked at the door as it closed behind her, then at her husband.

"What do you mean, Peter, about Ann? Why wouldn't it be pleasant for her if this Crocker boy came to live with us?"

Mr. Pett hesitated.

"Well, it's like this, Nesta. I hope you won't tell her I told you. She's sensitive about it, poor girl. It all happened before

you and I were married. Ann was much younger then. You know what schoolgirls are, kind of foolish and sentimental. It was my fault really, I ought to have . . ."

"Good Heavens, Peter! What are you trying to tell me?"

"She was only a child."

Mrs. Pett rose in slow horror.

"Peter! Tell me! Don't try to break it gently."

"Ann wrote a book of poetry and I had it published for her."

Mrs. Pett sank back in her chair.

"Oh!" she said--it would have been hard to say whether with relief or disappointment. "Whatever did you make such a fuss for? Why did you want to be so mysterious?"

"It was all my fault, really," proceeded Mr. Pett. "I ought to have known better. All I thought of at the time was that it would please the child to see the poems in print and be able to give the book to her friends. She did give it to her friends," he went on ruefully, "and ever since she's been trying to live it down. I've seen her bite a young fellow's head off when he tried to

make a grand-stand play with her by quoting her poems which he'd found in his sister's book-shelf."

"But, in the name of goodness, what has all this to do with young Crocker?"

"Why, it was this way. Most of the papers just gave Ann's book a mention among 'Volumes Received,' or a couple of lines that didn't amount to anything, but the Chronicle saw a Sunday feature in it, as Ann was going about a lot then and was a well-known society girl. They sent this Crocker boy to get an interview from her, all about her methods of work and inspirations and what not. We never suspected it wasn't the straight goods. Why, that very evening I mailed an order for a hundred copies to be sent to me when the thing appeared. And--" pinkness came upon Mr. Pett at the recollection "it was just a josh from start to finish. The young hound made a joke of the poems and what Ann had told him about her inspirations and quoted bits of the poems just to kid the life out of them. . . . I thought Ann would never get over it. Well, it doesn't worry her any more--she's grown out of the school-girl stage--but you can bet she isn't going to get up and give three cheers and a tiger if you bring young Crocker to live in the same house."

"Utterly ridiculous!" said Mrs. Pett. "I certainly do not intend to alter my plans because of a trivial incident that happened

years ago. We will sail on Wednesday."

"Very well, my dear," said Mr. Pett resignedly.

"Just as you say. Er--just you and I?"

"And Ogden, of course."

Mr. Pett controlled a facial spasm with a powerful effort of the will. He had feared this.

"I wouldn't dream of leaving him here while I went away, after what happened when poor dear Elmer sent him to school in England that time." The late Mr. Ford had spent most of his married life either quarrelling with or separated from his wife, but since death he had been canonised as 'poor dear Elmer.' "Besides, the sea voyage will do the poor darling good. He has not been looking at all well lately."

"If Ogden's coming, I'd like to take Ann."

"Why?"

"She can--" he sought for a euphemism.

"Keep in order" was the expression he wished to avoid. To his

mind Ann was the only known antidote for Ogden, but he felt it would be impolitic to say so."--look after him on the boat," he concluded. "You know you are a bad sailor."

"Very well. Bring Ann--Oh, Peter, that reminds me of what I wanted to say to you, which this dreadful thing in the paper drove completely out of my mind. Lord Wisbeach has asked Ann to marry him!"

Mr. Pett looked a little hurt. "She didn't tell me." Ann usually confided in him.

"She didn't tell me, either. Lord Wisbeach told me. He said Ann had promised to think it over, and give him his answer later. Meanwhile, he had come to me to assure himself that I approved. I thought that so charming of him."

Mr. Pett was frowning.

"She hasn't accepted him?"

"Not definitely."

"I hope she doesn't."

"Don't be foolish, Peter. It would be an excellent match."

Mr. Pett shuffled his feet.

"I don't like him. There's something too darned smooth about that fellow."

"If you mean that his manners are perfect, I agree with you. I shall do all in my power to induce Ann to accept him."

"I shouldn't," said Mr. Pett, with more decision than was his wont. "You know what Ann is if you try to force her to do anything. She gets her ears back and won't budge. Her father is just the same. When we were boys together, sometimes--"

"Don't be absurd, Peter. As if I should dream of trying to force Ann to do anything."

"We don't know anything of this fellow. Two weeks ago we didn't know he was on the earth."

"What do we need to know beyond his name?"

Mr. Pett said nothing, but he was not convinced. The Lord Wisbeach under discussion was a pleasant-spoken and presentable young man who had called at Mr. Pett's office a short while before to consult him about investing some money. He had brought

a letter of introduction from Hammond Chester, Ann's father, whom he had met in Canada, where the latter was at present engaged in the comparatively mild occupation of bass-fishing. With their business talk the acquaintance would have begun and finished, if Mr. Pett had been able to please himself, for he had not taken a fancy to Lord Wisbeach. But he was an American, with an American's sense of hospitality, and, the young man being a friend of Hammond Chester, he had felt bound to invite him to Riverside Drive--with misgivings which were now, he felt, completely justified.

"Ann ought to marry," said Mrs. Pett. "She gets her own way too much now. However, it is entirely her own affair, and there is nothing that we can do." She rose. "I only hope she will be sensible."

She went out, leaving Mr. Pett gloomier than she had found him. He hated the idea of Ann marrying Lord Wisbeach, who, even if he had had no faults at all, would be objectionable in that he would probably take her to live three thousand miles away in his own country. The thought of losing Ann oppressed Mr. Pett sorely.

Ann, meanwhile, had made her way down the passage to the gymnasium which Mr. Pett, in the interests of his health, had caused to be constructed in a large room at the end of the house--a room designed by the original owner, who had had artistic leanings, for a studio.

The tap-tap-tap of the leather bag had ceased, but voices from within told her that Jerry Mitchell, Mr. Pett's private physical instructor, was still there. She wondered who was his companion, and found on opening the door that it was Ogden. The boy was leaning against the wall and regarding Jerry with a dull and supercilious gaze which the latter was plainly finding it hard to bear.

"Yes, sir!" Ogden was saying, as Ann entered. "I heard Biggs asking her to come for a joyride."

"I bet she turned him down," said Jerry Mitchell sullenly.

"I bet she didn't. Why should she? Biggs is an awful good-looking fellow."

"What are you talking about, Ogden?" said Ann.

"I was telling him that Biggs asked Celestine to go for a ride in the car with him."

"I'll knock his block off," muttered the incensed Jerry.

Ogden laughed derisively.

"Yes, you will! Mother would fire you if you touched him. She wouldn't stand for having her chauffeur beaten up."

Jerry Mitchell turned an appealing face to Ann. Ogden's revelations and especially his eulogy of Biggs' personal appearance had tormented him. He knew that, in his wooing of Mrs. Pett's maid, Celestine, he was handicapped by his looks, concerning which he had no illusions. No Adonis to begin with, he had been so edited and re-edited during a long and prosperous ring career by the gloved fists of a hundred foes that in affairs of the heart he was obliged to rely exclusively on moral worth and charm of manner. He belonged to the old school of fighters who looked the part, and in these days of pugilists who resemble matinee idols he had the appearance of an anachronism. He was a stocky man with a round, solid head, small eyes, an undershot jaw, and a nose which ill-treatment had reduced to a mere scenario. A narrow strip of forehead acted as a kind of buffer-state, separating his front hair from his eyebrows, and he bore beyond hope of concealment the badge of his late employment, the cauliflower ear. Yet was he a man of worth and a good citizen, and Ann had liked him from their first meeting. As for Jerry, he worshipped Ann and would have done anything she asked him. Ever since he had discovered that Ann was willing to listen to and sympathise with his outpourings on the subject of his troubled wooing, he had been her slave.

Ann came to the rescue in characteristically direct fashion.

"Get out, Ogden," she said.

Ogden tried to meet her eye mutinously, but failed. Why he should be afraid of Ann he had never been able to understand, but it was a fact that she was the only person of his acquaintance whom he respected. She had a bright eye and a calm, imperious stare which never failed to tame him.

"Why?" he muttered. "You're not my boss."

"Be quick, Ogden."

"What's the big idea--ordering a fellow--"

"And close the door gently behind you," said Ann. She turned to Jerry, as the order was obeyed.

"Has he been bothering you, Jerry?"

Jerry Mitchell wiped his forehead.

"Say, if that kid don't quit butting in when I'm working in the gym--You heard what he was saying about Maggie, Miss Ann?"

Celestine had been born Maggie O'Toole, a name which Mrs. Pett stoutly refused to countenance in any maid of hers.

"Why on earth do you pay any attention to him, Jerry? You must have seen that he was making it all up. He spends his whole time wandering about till he finds some one he can torment, and then he enjoys himself. Maggie would never dream of going out in the car with Biggs."

Jerry Mitchell sighed a sigh of relief.

"It's great for a fellow to have you in his corner, Miss Ann."

Ann went to the door and opened it. She looked down the passage, then, satisfied as to its emptiness, returned to her seat.

"Jerry, I want to talk to you. I have an idea. Something I want you to do for me."

"Yes, Miss Ann?"

"We've got to do something about that child, Ogden. He's been worrying uncle Peter again, and I'm not going to have it. I warned him once that, if he did it again, awful things would happen to him, but he didn't believe me. I suppose, Jerry--what sort of a man is your friend, Mr. Smethurst?"

"Do you mean Smithers, Miss Ann?"

"I knew it was either Smithers or Smethurst. The dog man, I mean. Is he a man you can trust?"

"With my last buck. I've known him since we were kids."

"I don't mean as regards money. I am going to send Ogden to him for treatment, and I want to know if I can rely on him to help me."

"For the love of Mike."

Jerry Mitchell, after an instant of stunned bewilderment, was looking at her with worshipping admiration. He had always known that Miss Ann possessed a mind of no common order, but this, he felt, was genius. For a moment the magnificence of the idea took his breath away.

"Do you mean that you're going to kidnap him, Miss Ann?"

"Yes. That is to say, you are--if I can persuade you to do it for me."

"Sneak him away and send him to Bud Smithers' dog-hospital?"

"For treatment. I like Mr. Smithers' methods. I think they would

do Ogden all the good in the world."

Jerry was enthusiastic.

"Why, Bud would make him part-human. But, say, isn't it taking big chances? Kidnapping's a penitentiary offence."

"This isn't that sort of kidnapping."

"Well, it's mighty like it."

"I don't think you need be afraid of the penitentiary. I can't see aunt Nesta prosecuting, when it would mean that she would have to charge us with having sent Ogden to a dogs' hospital. She likes publicity, but it has to be the right kind of publicity.
No, we do run a risk, but it isn't that one. You run the risk of losing your job here, and I should certainly be sent to my grandmother for an indefinite sentence. You've never seen my grandmother, have you, Jerry? She's the only person in the world I'm afraid of! She lives miles from anywhere and has family prayers at seven-thirty sharp every morning. Well, I'm ready to risk her, if you're ready to risk your job, in such a good cause. You know you're just as fond of uncle Peter as I am, and Ogden is worrying him into a breakdown. Surely you won't refuse to help me, Jerry?"

Jerry rose and extended a calloused hand.

"When do we start?"

Ann shook the hand warmly.

"Thank you, Jerry. You're a jewel. I envy Maggie. Well, I don't think we can do anything till they come back from England, as aunt Nesta is sure to take Ogden with her."

"Who's going to England?"

"Uncle Peter and aunt Nesta were talking just now of sailing to try and persuade a young man named Crocker to come back here."

"Crocker? Jimmy Crocker? Piccadilly Jim?"

"Yes. Why, do you know him?"

"I used to meet him sometimes when he was working on the Chronicle here. Looks as if he was cutting a wide swathe in dear old London. Did you see the paper to-day?"

"Yes, that's what made aunt Nesta want to bring him over. Of course, there isn't the remotest chance that she will be able to make him come. Why should he come?"

"Last time I saw Jimmy Crocker," said Jerry, "it was a couple of years ago, when I went over to train Eddie Flynn for his go with Porky Jones at the National. I bumped into him at the N. S. C. He was a good deal tanked."

"He's always drinking, I believe."

"He took me to supper at some swell joint where they all had the soup-and-fish on but me. I felt like a dirty deuce in a clean deck. He used to be a regular fellow, Jimmy Crocker, but from what you read in the papers it begins to look as if he was hitting it up too swift. It's always the way with those boys when you take them off a steady job and let them run around loose with their jeans full of mazuma."

"That's exactly why I want to do something about Ogden. If he's allowed to go on as he is at present, he will grow up exactly like Jimmy Crocker."

"Aw, Jimmy Crocker ain't in Ogden's class," protested Jerry.

"Yes, he is. There's absolutely no difference between them."

"Say! You've got it in for Jim, haven't you, Miss Ann?" Jerry looked at her wonderingly. "What's your kick against him?"

Ann bit her lip. "I object to him on principle," she said. "I don't like his type. . . . Well, I'm glad we've settled this about Ogden, Jerry. I knew I could rely on you. But I won't let you do it for nothing. Uncle Peter shall give you something for it--enough to start that health-farm you talk about so much. Then you can marry Maggie and live happily ever afterwards."

"Gee! Is the boss in on this, too?"

"Not yet. I'm going to tell him now. Hush! There's some one coming."

Mr. Pett wandered in. He was still looking troubled.

"Oh, Ann--good morning, Mitchell--your aunt has decided to go to England. I want you to come, too."

"You want me? To help interview Jimmy Crocker?"

"No, no. Just to come along and be company on the voyage. You'll be such a help with Ogden, Ann. You can keep him in order. How you do it, I don't know. You seem to make another boy of him."

Ann stole a glance at Jerry, who answered with an encouraging grin. Ann was constrained to make her meaning plainer than by the

language of the eye.

"Would you mind just running away for half a moment, Jerry?" she said winningly. "I want to say something to uncle Peter."

"Sure. Sure."

Ann turned to Mr. Pett as the door closed.

"You'd like somebody to make Ogden a different boy, wouldn't you, uncle Peter?"

"I wish it was possible."

"He's been worrying you a lot lately, hasn't he?" asked Ann sympathetically.

"Yes," sighed Mr. Pett.

"Then that's all right," said Ann briskly. "I was afraid that you might not approve. But, if you do, I'll go right ahead."

Mr. Pett started violently. There was something in Ann's voice and, as he looked at her, something in her face which made him fear the worst. Her eyes were flashing with an inspired light of a highly belligerent nature, and the sun turned the red hair to

which she owed her deplorable want of balance to a mass of flame. There was something in the air. Mr. Pett sensed it with every nerve of his apprehensive person. He gazed at Ann, and as he did so the years seemed to slip from him and he was a boy again, about to be urged to lawless courses by the superior will of his boyhood's hero, Hammond Chester. In the boyhood of nearly every man there is a single outstanding figure, some one youthful hypnotic Napoleon whose will was law and at whose bidding his better judgment curled up and died. In Mr. Pett's life Ann's father had filled this role. He had dominated Mr. Pett at an age when the mind is most malleable. And now--so true is it that though Time may blunt our boyish memories the traditions of boyhood live on in us and an emotional crisis will bring them to the surface as an explosion brings up the fish that lurk in the nethermost mud--it was as if he were facing the youthful Hammond Chester again and being irresistibly impelled to some course of which he entirely disapproved but which he knew that he was destined to undertake. He watched Ann as a trapped man might watch a ticking bomb, bracing himself for the explosion and knowing that he is helpless. She was Hammond Chester's daughter, and she spoke to him with the voice of Hammond Chester. She was her father's child and she was going to start something.

"I've arranged it all with Jerry," said Ann. "He's going to help me smuggle Ogden away to that friend of his I told you about who keeps the dog-hospital: and the friend is going to keep him until

he reforms. Isn't it a perfectly splendid idea?"

Mr. Pett blanched. The frightfulness of reality had exceeded anticipation.

"But, Ann!"

The words came from him in a strangled bleat. His whole being was paralysed by a clammy horror. This was beyond the uttermost limit of his fears. And, to complete the terror of the moment, he knew, even while he rebelled against the insane lawlessness of her scheme, that he was going to agree to it, and--worst of all--that deep, deep down in him there was a feeling toward it which did not dare to come to the surface but which he knew to be approval.

"Of course Jerry would do it for nothing," said Ann, "but I promised him that you would give him something for his trouble. You can arrange all that yourselves later."

"But, Ann! . . . But, Ann! . . . Suppose your aunt finds out who did it!"

"Well, there will be a tremendous row!" said Ann composedly. "And you will have to assert yourself. It will be a splendid thing for you. You know you are much too kind to every one, uncle Peter. I don't think there's any one who would put up with what

you do. Father told me in one of his letters that he used to call you Patient Pete as a boy."

Mr. Pett started. Not for many a day had a nickname which he considered the most distasteful of all possible nicknames risen up from its grave to haunt him. Patient Pete! He had thought the repulsive title buried forever in the same tomb as his dead youth. Patient Pete! The first faint glimmer of the flame of rebellion began to burn in his bosom.

"Patient Pete!"

"Patient Pete!" said Ann inexorably.

"But, Ann,"--there was pathos in Mr. Pett's voice--"I like a peaceful life."

"You'll never have one if you don't stand up for yourself. You know quite well that father is right. You do let every one trample on you. Do you think father would let Ogden worry him and have his house filled with affected imitation geniuses so that he couldn't find a room to be alone in?"

"But, Ann, your father is different. He likes fusses. I've known your father contradict a man weighing two hundred pounds out of sheer exuberance. There's a lot of your father in you, Ann. I've

often noticed it."

"There is! That's why I'm going to make you put your foot down sooner or later. You're going to turn all these loafers out of the house. And first of all you're going to help us send Ogden away to Mr. Smithers."

There was a long silence.

"It's your red hair!" said Mr. Pett at length, with the air of a man who has been solving a problem. "It's your red hair that makes you like this, Ann. Your father has red hair, too."

Ann laughed.

"It's not my fault that I have red hair, uncle Peter. It's my misfortune."

Mr. Pett shook his head.

"Other people's misfortune, too!" he said.