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A Lunatic Love

By HELEN HAYES

In her way there was no better woman than Miss Bessie Randall's Aunt Jane Pilaster, spinster, having her own farm and living according to her own lights. She was full of sympathy and charity and good deeds, but "propriety" had been her motto so long that even her best friends thought she carried matters too far when she withdrew from the church because the minister called and found her up a cherry tree picking fruit. For primness and preciseness and propriety Aunt Jane was without a rival.

In after days, and not so very long after, either, Aunt Jane admitted to herself that she must have been crazy when she wrote up to the city for her niece, Bessie, to spend July with her. She hadn't seen the girl for several years. As she remembered her, Bessie was a long-legged child with a lonesome face and demure demeanor, who would sit and play with a rag doll by the hour and ask few questions. She had two real rag dolls made before she wrote the letter of invitation. She also had decided in her own mind that she would let the child chase grasshoppers in the back lot and climb fences, but she must not chase or climb boisterously—only properly.

"You dear, darling old thing of an aunt, but I could just stand on my head for gladness!" was the greeting the spinster received one day two weeks later when a girl of eighteen was deposited at her gate by the stage from Sherlockville. The aunt felt chills of horror creep up and down her spine, but before she could do more than utter a groan the young girl seized her and waltzed her around—actually waltzed her up the path between the rows of pinks and peonies and hollyhocks, with the hired man looking on!

That evening, after Miss Bessie had talked about rowing, swinging Indian clubs, pitching quoits, bathing, climbing trees and riding about in the elec-



"She Must, Ma'am—She Must!"

tric runabout her father was to send down to her—talked and never observed the pallor of her aunt's face nor her primness of demeanor—after she had talked and gone to her room, Aunt Jane said to the hired man: "James, something has got to be done."

"Yes'm, something has," he replied. "You saw my niece waltz me around?"
"I saw, ma'am."
"And was properly shocked?"
"Very properly."
"And you may have caught some of her words about climbing trees, swinging clubs she bought of an Indian, bathing in the river and riding about the country on a machine of some kind? You were also shocked again?"
"Properly shocked, Miss Pilaster."
"Then you must agree with me that we must take certain steps to save my niece from herself. She is a dear girl and a sweet girl, and she must not be allowed to fall into hoydenish ways. She must be reduced to a state of propriety and that without offending her."

"She must, ma'am—she must," solemnly answered James.
"Fortunately for us," continued Miss Pilaster as a look of mingled hope and relief showed in her face, "we are situated within two miles of the insane asylum. Insane patients now and then escape and go roaming over the country. If my niece were to be told that a male lunatic had escaped from the place and was at liberty, and that he was a dangerous character, I don't think she would want to go gallivanting around in that what-do-you-call-it."

"She surely wouldn't, ma'am."
"Nor do any climbing of trees nor clubbing of Indian clubs. If you have heard of any male lunatic escaping from the asylum within a day or two, and haven't said anything about it because you feared to render me nervous and perturbed, it will be your duty to notify my niece early in the morning." On the following morning James found opportunity to say to the visitor: "Miss Randall, did your aunt men-

tion the fact that we have a large insane asylum not far distant?"

"Gee! A place for crazy people!" she exclaimed. "I want to go and see them this very afternoon!"

"There are dangerous lunatics among them, miss. Sometimes one escapes."

"Oh, I hope one will escape while I am here and come to the house! I shouldn't be a bit afraid. Don't you know that if you look a lion or a lunatic in the eye he will become as timid as a rabbit? If you hear of any one escaping—"

"But I have heard of one," desperately interrupted James. "If I were in your place I shouldn't go far from the house until we learn that he has been captured. Before you can look him in the eye he will murder you. This one who escaped the other day—"

But Miss Bessie was gone to tell the news to her aunt, and to add that she should spend the whole day looking for the coming of the lunatic. If he came, she would wager her runabout against a hill of potatoes that she would subdue him and lead him back to the asylum. Three days passed and the runabout arrived, and she announced her intention of taking a long ride at once. Miss Pilaster groaned and told more tales of lunatics. James groaned and predicted death by strangulation. Nevertheless, the girl went.

She started out in a cloud of dust and had gone two miles when there was a bur-r-r-r and the vehicle came to a stop. She worked away at the levers without avail. She got down and peered and peered, but it was no use. She was stamping her foot in anger when a man came out of the woods close at hand. He was a young man of 25—a good-looking young man and he had a professional air about him.

"Something wrong?" he pleasantly queried as he looked from the girl to the runabout.

"Yes; it won't go."

In three minutes he had discovered the cause of the trouble, and after running the vehicle up and down he halted and asked if she were going over to Sherlockville. When he received an affirmative reply he said: "So am I. If you have no objections I will ride with you and see that all goes well. The machine is new and must be coaxed a bit."

To her surprise Miss Bessie found herself seated beside the stranger and a bowling along at a merry gait. They had gone a mile when she suddenly remembered that the young man had not introduced himself. Then she remembered the escaped lunatic and the words of warning. For half a minute her heart was in her mouth. Then she took a sly peep and failed to see anything murderous in the man's looks. They were a bit gloomy and preoccupied, but not savage.

"Excuse me," he finally said as he turned to her. "I am from the asylum, but I haven't a card with me. My name is Ashley, and if I mistake not you are the young lady at Miss Pilaster's."

Miss Bessie bowed in acknowledgment and her heart jumped again. This man must be the escaped lunatic! She developed her plan in a moment. She became very communicative. In fact, she gushed to throw him off his guard. If he was on an errand to the village she would wait and take him back and to this he readily agreed. There was a wait of ten minutes and then he reappeared. Little was said on the return trip. The young man was moody, and Miss Bessie was wondering how to land him at the asylum without provoking a desperate resistance. Aunt Pilaster and James were waiting at the gate, and to her astonishment the vehicle came to a halt and the lunatic raised his hat to the woman and nodded to James.

"Why, Bessie, where did you find the doctor?" asked the aunt as she came forward.

"Doctor?" repeated the girl.

"Why, yes—Dr. Ashley of the asylum."

"Good heavens, but isn't he that escaped lunatic, and are all my plans for his capture to be knocked in the head?"

"Sorry for you," replied the doctor, with a smile. "I am from the asylum, but not exactly a lunatic. You have just kindly taken me to the village to have an aching tooth drawn."

"But I—I have captured you, you know."

"I won't dispute it." When it is said that from that day on for two months the doctor was a frequent caller at Miss Pilaster's, and that he and Miss Bessie have been writing twice a week to each other since her return to the city, the reader can draw his own conclusions. He will at any rate feel a bit of sympathy for Miss Pilaster, who turned to James the day her niece went home and with her apron at her eyes tearfully exclaimed:

"Oh, James, things have so changed about since I was a girl that I can't make 'em out! We told Bessie to look out for lunatics, and now she's going to marry a whole asylum full of 'em!"

Accidental.
"John was a good-natured man, and was never heard to speak ill of anyone. But now he's got an automobile."

"Has that made a difference in him?"

"A decided difference. Now he is always running his neighbors down."

From Week to Week.
"You take a good many magazines."

"Six."

"That beats my capacity. I can't carry over four sets of serial stories in my head."

FRANZ JOSEPH AND HIS UNOFFICIAL WIFE



AN AGED emperor dines alone on gold plate from the famous service whose central decorative piece is worth \$15,000.

There is only one guest, a general aide camp or high official of the court. The proudest monarch of Europe is alone with one guest. Etiquette demands it.

There are eight services. Hofburg ceremony does not permit less. Five gorgeous funkies in pale blue, pink and gold serve two men. There have been no flowers on the table since the tragic death of the Empress Elizabeth; but the lights of wax candles glint the golden service and the rare wines in cut glass; they fit from historic tapestries to carved wood furniture and panels such as no museum possesses and make dancing shadows in the distant corners.

There are faint, mysterious noises in the Hofburg, as of furtive steps up secret stairways in the walls, and there are silences in which you feel eyes peeping through holes. The great palace has an invisible population of effaced officials, gliding ecclesiastics, soft-footed domestics, noble old dames and ancient courtiers, whose only sounds are creaking joints as they slip through dim corridors where sentries stand immobile.

It is the frigid court of a lone, aged emperor bereaved by bloody loss of wife, son and favorite brother; so high that none dare offer him sympathy, stern and unbending in his haughty isolation. When his daughters, Marie Valeria, with her battalion of children, or Gelsele, became a morose old woman, are not there on some rare visit, the emperor is "alone." It is his wish. He is too old for state dinners and court functions, except the most indispensable, brief and infrequent.

The aged emperor is dreaming of the gorgeous gala dinners of the past. He sees the ideal throngs of other days. Again he hears the three taps of the Grand Chamberlain's cane to announce the entrance of their imperial and royal majesties. By enchantment doors fly open and the glittering throng, bejeweled and perfumed, flashing colors amid plumes, algarotte and flowers, laughing and murmuring to the clink of gala swords and sabers, is struck to silence. Their majesties pass.

Vanished all that. The aged emperor sighs, and plans little pleasures which the doctors will permit him. He may still hunt; doubtless he no longer climbs crags after the chamois or the woodcock; but his hand is still firm as he waits on his camp stool in the forest; and stag or roebuck that comes within range is sure of his affair. Horseback riding is more difficult and it is doubly painful to give up a favorite exercise that kept him in touch with the great love of his life—the army. Twice a year they hoist him to the back of a strong, tranquil animal, a phantom of the brilliant cavalier of other days; and Francis Joseph, stiff and bruised, watches the spring review and the finale of the autumn maneuvers. He loves his cigar and smokes continually the green and juicy marvels made for him by the two famous Cuban growers.

The aged emperor looks up from his cigar. How lonely is the immense palace—full of hidden courtiers, functionaries, servants. It is still early, not yet seven. Francis Joseph rises. His guest takes ceremonial leave and the sovereign goes to his study. What a place, that study. Suites of libraries and offices on endless corridors, from which once went out minute administration of the dual empire! Francis Joseph sighs with relief.

A confidential valet helps him into hat and overcoat. By a bijou elevator whose door imitates a bookcase he descends to the ground floor. Between the emperor's study and the waiting limousine is a trip of a short minute—saving a detour of half a mile by suites of rooms, stairways and corridors. He walks 20 steps across the little courtyard to the door, where a limousine awaits him. There is no special secrecy; it is to avoid ceremony merely. He gives no directions; the chauffeur knows where to go.

Quitting the frigid, solemn Hofburg, out into the bright lit, bustling early evening of Vienna, past crowds hastening to theater and music hall, into fair streets of residence, the auto stops at a comfortable villa. The old sovereign enters the gate alone. The front door opens as he mounts the three marble steps. When the door shuts he is no longer the dread, lonely emperor and apostolic king, but Herr Schratz, regularly called "the Colonel," careless, easy, phlegmatic and slouchy, bright, warm, cozy, snug among good old friends.

Since the tragic death of the Empress Elizabeth, Francis Joseph is a widower, 81 years old, and if all Vienna smiles at "Monsieur Schratz" it is with respectful sympathy and understanding. Years ago when the Burg theater was a wing of the Hofburg, the great actress Katharine Schratz—the Sarah Bernhardt and Rejane of Vienna—was presented to Francis Joseph by Empress Elizabeth herself. For long she, too, has lived retired, and the mourning emperor found her so intelligent, so fine and also good, that great love and sorrow having burnt out, an affectionate friendship grew up to give him a kind of peaceful solace.

The court calls her "the Bourgeois." With Katharine Schratz, for the first time in 55 years, he learned what blessed relief from frigid etiquette and numbing ceremony might be. The woman of heart, the artistic genius, who played the roles of great queens on the boards of the Court theater, before archduchesses and princesses, slowly and tactfully broke through the crust of the divinity that hedged and hampered the poor man throughout his life.

Leaving crown and scepter on the hat-rack, he enters the bright little card room that adjoins two bijou parlors, and takes the best easy chair, while Mme. Katharina hastens with the foot warmer. He lights a cigar. The bell rings and the partners of interminable games of Tarok—a sort of Austrian bridge—arrive; two ancient friends of the great actress become friends of Herr Schratz, always the same; Herr Palmer, director of the Bank des Pays Autrichiens and an international private banker so extremely illustrious that his name is as well known as Francis Joseph's.

The banker and Mons. Schratz are fast old cronies, to the sorrow and scandal of the Countess Chotek, morganatic but directing wife of Francis-Ferdinand, heir to the dual crown. Often the emperor loses all the money in his purse—a dozen florins—at the nightly game of Tarok. He plays badly. None wants him for partner; so they cut to see who takes him. He laughs boisterously.

At ten o'clock the limousine is announced and Mme. Katharina helps the "Colonel" into hat and overcoat.

The auto rolls through the streets of Vienna, still bright and boisterous, to the cold, solemn Hofburg. It stops at the little door of the small courtyard. The old man enters, and a silent valet meets him.

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Good Advice.

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The Matter Settled.
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