

Dill Pickle in a New Role

BY MARIA C. SCHERMEHORN.
In Los Angeles Times.

"YOU surely can't mean that, Margery," and Bob's coffee cup came down with a crash that nearly shattered it.

"Indeed, I do," she declared with a pout, rising quickly from the table to avoid the surprise and indignation gathering in his wide blue eyes.

"And for such a trifle," he groaned. For one silent moment he watched her, resentment plainly struggling with amusement in his face, then tossing his napkin to the floor in masculine disregard of table amenities, he swung impatiently from his chair and started for the door.

Margery walked over to the buffet and rearranged with studied but perfunctory care some of the dainty china and cut glass that filled its shelves, while she maintained a frigid silence. She was conscious that his eyes were following her, but she ignored them, and her girlish figure presented an uncompromising back. She heard him pause at the door as if offering a last opportunity for reconciliation, but she only clattered the cups and saucers noisily with nervous fingers and stiffened into greater rigidity. When, a moment later, he stole over and whispered, "Let's kiss and make up, darling," she flung herself from him and rushed from the room, leaving him standing, dazed and angry.

In a few moments the front door closed with a bang, and she knew that he had left the house. Her first impulse was to run and call him back, but instead she watched him from the window limp stiffly down the street and disappear around the corner. His football leg seemed lammer than usual, she noticed with a little pang. For some time she stood there straining eager eyes out of the window, then turning slowly she rang the bell for Nora and restlessly awaited her coming, her brow crinkled into a thoughtful frown.

"Are there any dill pickles in the house, Nora?" she asked.

"No, mum."

"Then go down to the grocery, please, and get me the largest one you can find."

"Yes, mum. Anything else, mum?"

"No. And you may have the afternoon off, Nora, as we shall dine out this evening," and Mrs. Osterhout turned her back quickly.

When left alone she sprang to the window and again peered anxiously down the street; after a moment she turned away with a half-checked sigh. "The mean, selfish fellow!" she murmured as she picked up a small picture from the dressing table and stared resentfully at a round, boyish face that looked up at her with a teasing smile in the eyes. "And to think that we've been married only three months, and he should treat me like this!" and the angry tears dropped with moist reproach upon the upturned face.

A slight tap at the door was unheeded, and a gentle "Good morning, dear," started her out of her self-pitying musings.

"Why mother!" she exclaimed, and then turned aside, chagrined that anyone—even the dear mother—should find her in tears.

"Are you not well, daughter dear?" her mother asked with anxious concern.

"Yes, I'm well," was the reserved reply.

With a reserved look her mother subsided comfortably into an arm chair.

"I'm going out for the day, mummy," Margery announced as she pinned on her hat. "It's so lovely," she declared, and again her quick glance sought the window. "After paying a little visit I'm to meet Muriel Van Rensselaer at the Palace Grill for luncheon, and then we're going to the matinee."

"That sounds pleasant, dear. It will cheer you up and you'll come home to Bob with a smiling face."

Then Margery knew that her foolish tears had not escaped the mother's keen eyes.

"Bob's going to take dinner at the club, and—and—I was coming round to have mine with you, mummy dear," and there was a quivery tremble in the voice that brought a questioning look from the mother.

Margery faltered on.

"The truth is," coloring deeply, "we've had a little quarrel, our very first, and I told him he needn't come home or speak to me till he'd apologized," she confessed miserably.

"Why, Margery!" her mother exclaimed.

"Yes, I know it, and he said he never would, and he looked so queer and stubborn that—oh, mummy, I'm

so unhappy," and with a little sob she turned again and sought the solace of the window, but could see nothing through the treacherous tears.

After a moment's silence, her mother said gravely:

"You are sure, dear, that you were not at fault? You know Bob's proud, independent spirit. He'll surely take you at your word."

A petulant shrug was Margery's answer.

"I don't care if he does. But he won't, you'll see," she asserted confidently as she gathered up some angular-looking parcels. "Besides," she straightened up with all the impressive dignity of her five-foot-one-in-her-stockings, "besides, I wasn't a bit unreasonable, either. I only asked him to get some stationery engraved with his family crest, and he just laughed; said it was stupid and snobbish and un-American, and I don't know what all. It's the first thing he's refused me since we were married, and I think he's the unreasonable one," and she sniffed after the manner of a spoiled child.

"Is that all?" questioned the quiet voice.

"Oh, we talked a good deal about it," Margery admitted with slow reluctance, "and I tried to show him that with such a fine old name he ought to be proud of it and do as the Van Amsterdams and other old families are doing, and use the coat-of-arms on our house linen and silver and—and—limousine—when we get it. It would be so classy, mummy, dear," and Margery's eyes danced with anticipatory pleasure.

Her mother shook her head.

Embarrassed and a trifle nettled by the wordless disapproval, Margery hurried on in confused explanation.

"But Bob only laughed; he said I was a little snob; he made remarks about the effete aristocracy, and a whole lot of other rubbish. When I told him he was a democrat and a—plebeian he laughed all the harder. That made me angry," and Margery glanced a bit anxiously at the clock. "I must catch the next car, mother. Will you come with me?" and she snatched up her parcels and started for the door.

"No, I'll go home, dear. A happy day to you. And—I wouldn't—she started to say, then thinking better of it she kissed her daughter tenderly and hurried away.

Margery stood for a moment looking down absently at the toe of her dainty pump.

"Mother doesn't approve, I can see that," she admitted with a frown. "I suppose she's right, but, oh, dear, we can't all be sensible." Margery sighed as she stooped to pick a thread from her skirt. "He might have done it if only to please me. I wonder," she mused as she took a last survey of herself in the glass, "I wonder if he really will be mean enough to take me at my word and not speak till we make up," and a shadow of anxiety had crept into her face when she left the room.

As she hurried down the street, Nora called after her.

"Did ye want the pickle, mum?"

"Oh, I came near forgetting it," Margery exclaimed, flushing with annoyance as she caught a glimpse of an amused smile on the face of a passing neighbor. "What a bother that would have been!" She reached out a daintily-gloved hand for the dripping, slippery confection which she saw to her dismay was wrapped loosely in a single piece of paraffine paper, quite innocent of a confining string. A car was coming with a precipitate directness that left no time to cover the plebeian parcel more securely, so clutching it gingerly, she tried to conceal it among her parcels and hastened on. As the onrushing electric approached the corner a shrill voice yelled after her:

"You've dropped something, ma'am," and a small boy, grinning wickedly, overtook and handed her the elusive pickle just as she stepped aboard the crowded car.

Breathless and embarrassed, painfully conscious of the amused faces of the curious passengers, she sat down in the nearest seat next the aristocratic Mrs. Van Houten, whom she had recently met at an afternoon function.

"Good morning, Mrs. Osterhout. Lovely day," greeted her neighbor, glancing with well-bred curiosity at the bundles, which, to Margery's palpitating confusion, had never seemed in such offensive evidence.

Before she could answer, a dull, unmistakable thud struck her ear, and with an exclamation of horror she saw that depreaved pickle lying at her feet in the middle of the passageway, grinning defiance at the aston-

ished looks of the convulsed passengers. It seemed incredible to her that an inanimate object could express such insolence.

As she reached to pick it up, a gentleman sitting opposite who had been apparently absorbed in the morning coffee, deftly rolled it in its scanty wrapping and handed it to her with a profound bow. Not a quiver of an eyelash betrayed his amusement.

She took it in haughty silence, with a bare inclination of her head in acknowledgment of the courtesy.

A good-natured but sympathetic smile flickered around the car. She flushed crimson, but smiled back.

"This wretched pickle!" she laughed in spite of her embarrassment. "You see," she began to explain, and then checked herself. She had suddenly become aware by an infallible feminine instinct that the immaculate and shiny black shoulders of the aristocratic Mrs. Van Houten had stiffened into rigid lines, and that the head surmounting them was poised at an angle that no longer brought her discomfited neighbor within the range of her vision. Then, too, as a gauzy handkerchief was raised languidly to the averted face Margery caught a glimpse in one corner of an elaborately embroidered family crest.

Her lips closed tightly. There should be no explanations from her. She settled back in her seat and clung in grim silence to her pickle, at the same time glancing across resentfully at the man behind the paper.

He was deeply engrossed in his reading, and showed no further interest in either pickle or passenger.

Margery was strangely silent the rest of the way, answering the perfunctory remarks of her neighbor with grudging monosyllables. When she left the car, eager to escape the scene of her humiliation, she shot a quick, backward glance at the man behind the paper.

A hurried walk of three blocks brought her to a small cottage whose shabbiness was softened and all but concealed behind a tangle of climbing vines and roses. As she was about to knock she discovered to her dismay that the precious pickle was missing. She searched for it with desperate eagerness among her parcels, but it had quite disappeared. After all the humiliation it had cost her to think that the perverse green thing had escaped at last! She began to think it had life and deliberate intent to annoy and mortify her. With an angry exclamation she looked about wondering what she should do.

As she turned, a startled cry broke from her, for there HE stood—the man behind the paper—mutely holding out to her, like a green olive branch, the lost offender. She only stared. They looked at each other in silence, her sensitive face betraying all sorts of emotions, he with a faint suspicion of a smile lurking in his eyes.

"Oh, Bob!" she cried. "where—how—why?" and she burst into a ringing laugh in which he finally joined.

"Where did you find it?" she demanded, pointing tragically at the erratic object.

Bob shook his head solemnly, but said nothing.

"Why don't you speak?" she urged with a guilty look.

"May I?" he asked with a twinkle that contradicted his meekness.

"Of course, you foolish fellow! It was mean of you not to recognize me on the car," and a suspicion of a pout began to hang about her lips. It was quickly dissipated, though, when she looked up at him and said with bewitching sweetness: "I'm sorry I was so silly and unreasonable this morning, Bob."

He placed a silencing finger over her lips.

"I was a brute, dear, for laughing at you," and he caught up her hand and kissed it eagerly.

"You haven't told me where you found the pickle," she reminded him after they had read forgiveness in each other's eyes.

"Why, just where you dropped it on the car as you got off. It fell at the conductor's feet and I told him I'd see that you got it. Otherwise it would have been turned into the company's office to be claimed by you later," he teased.

Margery looked unutterable things. "Bob," she whispered, looking fearfully about. "Do you know I could almost swear!"

"Well, what in thunder are you doing traveling about the city with all those parcels and this confounded thing anyway, Margery?" and he held up and viewed with infinite scorn the limp, inanimate thing.

She laughed happily. Nothing

mattered now that Bob was there and they'd made up.

"Why, you see," she explained, "Gottlieb, our gardener," she nodded toward the little cottage, "has a small boy, Fritzzy, who's sick, and the doctor says he can't get well. Has hip disease," her eyes softened with ready sympathy. "The last time I called I asked the little fellow what he'd like me to bring him, and he said so eagerly: 'A dill pickle, if you please, ma'am, and here it is,'" she smiled ruefully. "I brought a few toys, too," she added, following Bob's curious glance at a tin head and some wooden legs that were protruding aggressively from the dishevelled packages.

Again their eyes met in smiling understanding.

"You crazy little democrat! You plebeian American!" he murmured, squeezing her hand fervently. "And YOU want a crest!" he mocked.

"Well, I'm going straight down now to order the die for it."

"Are you, Bob? That's just dear of you," she gazed at him adoringly. "But—I don't believe I want it now," she confessed as a fleeting vision of a pair of rigid black satin shoulders rose before her.

"But you will when you know what the design is to be," he smiled back.

"Why, what is it?" she looked puzzled.

He paused and watched with mock seriousness the question grow in her face; then with a teasing twinkle he announced:

"Yes, it's to be—A DILL PICKLE RAMPANT."

One swift look into his eyes, and her face broke into a ripple of merry smiles.

"Oh, Bob! You droll, aristocratic humbug!" she exclaimed. Then, unmindful of the curious gaze of a passing stranger, she slipped for one ecstatic instant into his out-stretched arms.

And the unconscious "peacemaker," having fulfilled its mission, fell to the ground and lay inert, forgotten and neglected between them; while a pair of big, wistful eyes, deep set in a pain-drawn face, watched it hungrily from the near-by cottage window.



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