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Self-Assembled Edward Bangs



By Elizabeth Jordan

In Which It Appears That the Leopard Can, After All, Change His Spots If He Is a College Leopard.

YOUNG Edward Bangs, better known to his intimates as "Teddy," was pursuing a Big Idea. It was a very big idea—so big that Teddy had even ceased smoking to give it his full attention. Smoking, he had discovered, went with pleasant reveries, and with huge easy chairs, and with boots comfortably elevated to a restful position on desk or table. But on the rare occasions when young Bangs went in for real thought he found it advisable to lay aside his cigaret, to bring his feet to the floor, and even to assume a more conventional attitude in his easy chair. He was going in for real thought now—hence he was physically uncomfortable but mentally alert.

It will be no surprise to the gentle reader to know that the center of his thoughts was a girl—a very nice girl, a charmingly pretty girl—in short, The Girl. She was from Ted's home town, and he had known her since she was 2 and he himself 5. They had gone to kindergarten together, to school together. Without pausing to analyze the grounds of his hope, Teddy had assumed that they would always be together—except, of course, during those intervals in which the currents in the life of a young Captain of Industry would temporarily carry him out of her reach, only to sweep him triumphantly back again.

While he was in college he had spent his vacations considerably with his devoted parents, but in reality with the girl. His father openly grumbled that he "slept at home, but that was all there was to it." His mother had a daily talk with him during the late breakfast she kept hot for him. Then she resignedly watched him leave for Mabel's house. Her name was Mabel. Both families—Mabel's and his own—took it for granted, as Ted himself did, that he and Mabel would always be together. It was not until this very night that young Mr. Bangs had been visited by a horrible doubt as to the permanence of their association.

It was all his own fault. Loyal to himself that. He had invited Mabel and her mother to New Haven to be his guests during graduation week. He had planned his program very nicely. His own father and mother, would, of course, take Mabel's mother off his hands, thus leaving Mabel exclusively in his care. All that part of the plan had worked out beautifully. Mabel's mother, Mrs. Burke, had been kept busy and happy by Mr. and Mrs. Bangs, who recognized a clear duty when they saw one. But—there was no getting away from the fact—the rest of the program had gone all awry.

Teddy had known, of course, that Mabel would make a hit. He had felt an immense satisfaction in the knowledge, and had looked forward to Mabel's "howling over" Rexford and Whipple and Morgan and Sanderson, the four classmates he himself most admired and looked up to. What he had not expected, had not even remotely dreamed, was that Rexford and Whipple and Morgan and Sanderson would bowl over Mabel, would smother her, would finally and enthusiastically monopolize her during her visit. Yet this was exactly what these fellows had done—with the result that tonight, at the class dance, Teddy, who had of course escorted Mabel there, had been given by her only the opening number of the dance program. It was then revealed to him that, consciously or unconsciously, she had promised all the dances to Rexford and Whipple and Morgan and Sanderson, possibly without realizing how short the program would be. All Teddy could do was to drop himself picturesquely against a wall and momentarily watch Mabel enjoy herself. He was not even permitted to take her in to supper. Rexford and Whipple did that. Teddy saw the three pairs by a chum on each side of the girl he loved, who seemed too much absorbed in her new friends to observe him as she made her triumphant little journey into the supper room between the mighty football captain and the popular ball back. Ted watched her till she was out of sight, then turned abruptly at the touch of a hand on his arm. His mother stood beside him, smiling into his wonder young eyes.

"Well, you get the same supper, dear," she asked cheerfully. "Your father has vanished with Mrs. Burke. There's a table for the mother of these dear little girls. Suppose you get yourself a sandwich and salad for us both and bring them here, and I will hold the place against all comers until you see Fred."

Teddy bowed as he acquiesced. Was she sympathizing with him? Had she come to realize that in his mother's eyes he was a loser? If she gave the sandwich to the mother, she would be giving her the prize. If she ate it, she would be giving it to the mother. If she gave it to the mother, she would be giving it to the mother. If she gave it to the mother, she would be giving it to the mother.

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tions. She welcomed him with a soft little crow of exultation which he remembered as running through his childhood and youth and accompanying her gayest moments. Under it his heart softened and lightened. He was glad to be with his mother. She was the dearest thing in the world—save only one other. Though she was the mother of the 23-year-old young man at her side, she had kept her youth, her beauty, her figure, and her knowledge of the art of dressing. He was very proud of her—almost as proud as he was—had been—no, was, of Mabel.

Mrs. Bangs ate her sandwiches dutifully but with obvious enjoyment.

"You might have given me a dance, Teddy," she said at last. "As it is, I have been thrown on the mercy of your father and a poor freshman who was led up to me and hadn't the force of character to get away. To get rid of him I finally took him to Mabel. I suppose he is still on the fringe of her circle."

Ted produced a short sound in his throat. It was what novelists might call a sardonic laugh, but his mother did not appear to observe anything unusual about it. Almost simultaneously her son uttered the last words which he had intended should leave his lips.

"O, no, he won't," he said. "There isn't room near the circle."

Mrs. Bangs raised her handsome eyebrows, as if in surprise.

"You mean that she is surrounded all the time?" she asked, as if she herself had not observed the phenomena.



He had planned his program very nicely.

"Well, that's perfectly natural. It's what you expected, isn't it? Mabel was sure to be a great success with your friends. You would have been horribly disappointed if she hadn't been, wouldn't you?"

Ted frowned. All this was true, but there was such a thing as a happy medium between having one's guest admired and having her altogether swept away from one. However, he was not sure he cared to discuss the matter. If he began he might say more than he wished to say. But his mother was already discussing it, in a casual voice, frequently interrupted by the consumption of salad.

"It must be a wonderful experience for Mabel," she was saying. "This is such a good salad, Ted. You ought to eat some. You see, you are the only college man Mabel has met till now. They don't abound in our little town. And the whole atmosphere here is different from anything she has ever seen. It must be simply fascinating for her to be in the life here and watch the different types. Any girl would find it so. If you are not going to eat that picnic sandwich, dear, I will. It's the novelty, you see, with a girl, and it's really Mabel's one chance to see and enjoy a phase she has not known anything about except what you have told her. And, of course," she added reflectively, "she would be more than human if she didn't enjoy showing off before you—letting you see her effect on others. Do eat something, dear."

Her son turned quickly and for the first time met her eyes. Under the look of misery in his the expression of her own changed.

"Do you really think there is anything in that?" he asked, abruptly dropping his guard—"that she is just showing off a bit, I mean?" You see, what puzzled her most of all is that she seems so different—so unlike herself.

"Of course she is showing off," his mother warmly asserted. "And she is too young to realize that she is not being fair to you, nor courteous either. As for those boys—"

She had said too much. Her son replaced his guard—perhaps that she could depend on it slipping into place again. Then, with an air of indifference, he said:

"O, that was all understood between us. She told me of her experiences. Now, if you'd like a turn, we might try some. The crowd is almost empty," he added tactfully. His mother looked at him and shook her head.

"My dear boy," she said, your mother need patience.

I hope you don't say that sort of thing of Mabel. You ought to copy the manners of that nice Mr. Rexford. And Fred, too," she added, as she took his arm. "Your dancing has improved. You know I figured you'd give some lessons this year. Any girl wishes to have a dance lesson on her feet instead of his own?"

Now the dance was over and Ted had taken Mabel and her mother back to the hotel, where the olive lady had revealed a sad lapse of her usual tact. Reflecting to herself, she had assumed that her daughter was snugly as just had swept Mabel off to her room without giving the young couple a moment for a parting word. "Teddy took back to his room only the memory of Mabel's excited eyes and her whisper, 'I have had a wonderful evening, Ted!'"

It was of that remark he thought now as he sat alone in his college room. It was, indeed, that remark which had been the turn of the screw. He had had a "wonderful evening"—and she had had it without him, even without the slightest realization of the outrage she had done to him. Never, in all the years of their association, had he seen her eyes shine like that. Never had he detected of the passion for pleasure which burned within her and illuminated her face like a flame. She had the look of a girl lifted outside of herself into a new world, a new life—and for an hour he had resolutely faced it, was the discovery of this new Mabel who, however much he had in common with her, suddenly appeared to have nothing whatever in common with him. If that was so if that was so—

—Teddy's mind approached the thought again, unwillingly, and approached a hurdle, but finally made the leap. If that was so, then all his past had been leading up to nothing, or worse than nothing. For life without Mabel would be just that. If he had ever had her, and he realized now how big an if that had been, he had won her only because, as his mother had put it, there was no one else. At the first appearance of possible rivals she had turned from him with an ease that was appalling. She had turned to the "new types" of whom her mother had spoken to the girl, debonair young chaps who were such a contrast to the quiet fellow, Rexford. Rexford, whose society was not only uninteresting but odd, old ways. If that was it he must accept the fact—or must he?

It was at this point that the door began to creak, slowly lifting him out of the abyss into which he had stepped. Down there he had expected to see the end of all his hopes. If the Mabel he had watched this year—the new Mabel he had himself he was just beginning to know—was the real Mabel, then there was nothing in the simple personality of Edward Bangs to justify his wanting to win her. These days among strangers at a she had almost forgotten his existence, save when he was necessary to the carrying out of her plans. Away from this

new environment, far from these agreeable strangers who might once more revert to the accustomed personality of the girl he thought he had known. But he had not looked her. He would never know her, because there was nothing in himself to call out the new nature which he had just discovered. And if after this discovery he married, he later someone else might call it out.

"Nothing in himself." Or was there? Or, if there was, could the necessary qualities be acquired? The thought was becoming more definite for Ted's brain, wounded by his misery and his need was working for him clearly and eagerly. He had it told him, his chance of losing the girl he loved, or of meeting her on her own ground, of confronting her new personality by something new, in his own. What should that something be? Obviously, something she admired—the things the other fellows had and which he, Teddy, lacked.

Resolutely, he laid the difference between them out himself. Yes, he was a quiet chap—a very quiet chap. He had been a quiet chap willing to listen while others talked. He would have to change that, and other things as well if he meant to keep Mabel in his life. For certainly, when his doing mother had told him he could be an Rexford's charming manner. What one would be better—would he drop to acquire? This question was one that was to be used only to call up the imagination of the man who for days had monopolized Mabel, and who, in the end, with the most desirable eyes. There was no one else to be decided. Rexford's manner, especially his eyes, was a perfect blend of admiration, respect, and a certain potential devotion. It was Ted's aim and that a part of his equipment. His own manner, he considered, was an entirely too matter-of-fact.

Next, there was Whipple. Whipple, that is, was now Whipple that could help him to be the other—was Mabel must have a husband! Well, a husband was his chief business. He was the most successful and kind-hearted of human beings, as evidenced by the fact that he had a day. Ted, deliriously studying himself with the eyes of a stranger, thought that he, too, was a failure. He had rarely had any cause for being optimistic, but his cheerfulness was his chief asset—his chief equipment. That did not mean that, however much he had in common with Whipple, he would be a failure. He had

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