

THE CASE OF BILL

By JOSEPHINE DASKAM BACON

The Brother Who Just Couldn't Settle Down Gives the Whole Family the Shock of Its Life

Of course it all depends upon what you think of the family as an institution. And I freely admit that the more you think about it the more confusing it gets. Take my sister's family, for instance. I don't see how a woman could consider her family more thoroughly or worry over it more efficiently than Clarissa does. And it is surely all the more credit to her, because she has so many other objects and interests in life, and so much more to worry about than the average woman.

You know my sister, of course—Clarissa Etheridge. You have probably read her novels and stories. You have probably been to her plays, and if you are not familiar with either of these you probably know about her child-placing society. It's quite likely that in your own town at the present moment there are one or more children that have been adopted through the "Help a Homeless Child" society, which has done as much for the Help a Home by writing and speaking and organizing branches of it as any other one person.

I feel that I ought to mention these facts in the very beginning, out of fairness to Rissa, so that nobody will get the idea that she is one of those geniuses that neglects her family; how could she, feeling as she does about families? You can see that for yourself.

And there's no doubt in the world that Bill is and always was (and always will be, probably) a terrific problem. He is our brother, Rissa's and mine, and very much younger. He was a surprise to begin with—mother never expected him—and I suppose he got a little spoiled, maybe, on the account of my well-remembered trying to rock him to sleep when he had a sore throat once and I was so small I couldn't get him into my lap with all the blankets, too. It was being simply rather small for my age and Bill being simply huge that made the trouble.

Nobody can blame Rissa for being a little impatient with Bill, and a little hard on him, sometimes. She's been so splendid about him and so generous to him and everything, that it is certainly rather trying to have him more trouble to her than her own three children put together. And he is; he certainly is.

You see, Bill unfortunately seems to have inherited a lot of Rissa's brilliancy and fascinating ways without her common sense and managing ability, if you see what I mean.

"What's the good of his brains if he doesn't get anywhere with 'em?" she often asks me, and, of course, in a way she's right; what is the good of 'em?

I never had any brilliancy or any fascinating ways myself, and this makes it much easier for me, of course, as I've noticed for many years that both of these things seem to get you in a lot of trouble. Always living with Rissa, more or less, and seeing her through a great many difficulties (connected with different men, and then the children and her professional engagements and all the accounts of the Help a Home national committee) I have necessarily got used to the artistic temperament, you see; and I don't mind admitting to you that sometimes when things have been at their most complicated (Clarry overdriving her allowance at boarding school, or the Fenelon and Fenelon sneaking off to the moving pictures when we thought she was at dancing school, and little Sarley running an awful temperature and it was only a pound of milk chocolate he'd eaten), I don't mind, as I say, admitting that to have Rissa walking the floor tearing her hair at the imbecility of the National Help a Home board and refusing to give a nice interview to the Theater Magazine man—with the photographer waiting in the hall and the drawing room all arranged for a simple domestic picture—I don't mind admitting, I have to repeat again, that I have sometimes felt that it was almost better to have had her than to have had anything like the artistic temperament in the world.

Having Rissa so well known, has always made it hard for Bill in a way, too. He really writes very well himself and was an editor on the Harvard Lampoon, and I shall always feel that he might have been a real writer (though of course not so good as Rissa, probably, but I don't know) if he had never been anything like the artistic temperament in the world.

Always thought that what made Rissa the most furious of the girls being a socialist and wearing glasses.

"It's so idiotic!" she said, "just like Bill to go and make a fool of himself over a thin woman with spectacles!"

She had a baby, too, about 2 years old, and a very tiresome husband who didn't know how to manage her and played on the French horn to amuse himself—it really was annoying to have him make such a racket, and he didn't seem to care to try to do anything about it. He only seemed to want to be left alone to practice on that French horn.

It wasn't at all like a love affair in a book or a play; none of us knew how to go about it, exactly, because nobody was angry or tragic or made any scenes, and it didn't seem to be a matter of me going to see Mr. Witpen (that was his name) and try to get him to forbid Bill to come to the house, but I couldn't seem to accomplish anything, somehow.

"O, well," he would say, and after that "O, well," it really was very difficult.

Finally, when Bill was actually going to run away with her, Mr. Witpen seemed to wake up to it and settled the whole thing, after all, but how do you think he did it? Nobody would have dreamed of such a thing, and yet it was really very simple. He told Crystal (that was her name) that she must take the baby if she went, as he simply couldn't be responsible for her. It was a little girl, named Margold. He was very firm about this, and of course Bill and Crystal hadn't planned to, the child being so young. Even Bill saw that they couldn't manage it, and then, while they were in the thick of it, and I was getting notes to come immediately, and Rissa was simply white as a sheet and perfectly speechless which always worries me frightfully, Crystal finished the whole thing (though she never knew it) by calmly suggesting that Margold should be placed for a while by the Help a Home till she was big enough not to be such a problem! I suppose it was being such a socialist that made it seem so simple to her, but it shocked Bill terribly, though he never admitted it, and he told me that he had decided they were both to try to attempt to bring about such a big social reform and that had as the marriage laws were, people would have to be educated out of their gradually.

Of course it was a great relief, and I should have supposed Rissa would have been glad enough to let it go at that, but she never let Bill alone, from then on. She really almost nagged him, you might say. And of course he got rather sneering and made a point of being late at the office and kept hinting at oil stock he was going to buy, and teased Rissa generally.

It got very unpleasant and I finally spoke to him about it.

"Why will you act this way, Bill?" I said. "You know as well as I do how sweet and reasonable Rissa always is if only you manage her a little. What is the use of exasperating her?"

"My dear Flops," he said, in that absurd man-of-the-world way, "not having made the management of our celebrated sister a profession, as you have, I can't quite see why I should take it up now. She can't expect to have the entire population of the globe kow-towing to her, you know."

"That's perfect nonsense and very unfair, Bill," I said, but he only sneered and put his hands in his pockets like John Drew.

"You know that Rissa only wants—"

"I know that she only wants her own way. She is the worst spoiled woman on this planet," he interrupted me.

"She certainly has a right to what she wants in her own house," I said, "and since you and I live here I should suppose that the least we do—"

"Ah," he said, "now you've said it! Too many of us live here, I suppose you mean. Well, I've felt that for some time and I agree with you that I'd better leave."

"Why, Bill, how can you say such a thing?" I said. "You know I never meant—"

"But I meant," he said, "and as a matter of fact I've already made other arrangements, so there's no use jawing about it, Flops."

"What other arrangements?" I asked. I was quite worried, for you never know, with Bill.

"I am going in with two of my friends and we're going to have some rooms together."

"O," I said, "how are you—how are you going to be able to—"

"O, by the way, Flops," he added, "can you lend me a few hundred to begin with and my share of the furnishing and so forth? I'm a little low just now."

Wasn't that exactly like Bill?

It just happened that I had only a few dollars in the bank myself. It was after Christmas and the children all get behind then, and Rissa is strict about their allowances, which is perfectly all right, of course, only it never works, so they borrow it from me and make it up when they can. And it seems very silly, seeing how well I know the Help a Home, but I had just been to a big meeting where Rissa spoke for it, and she got me so wrought up that I subscribed for six months of a probationary child before I knew what I was doing!

Well I went to Rissa and simply said, "Can you lend me some money, dear?"

And she said, "Why, certainly, Flops! Just make it out with the other checks. You know how much we can stand this month—don't forget the school bills are coming, that's all."

That's just like Rissa. She'll give you the shoes off her feet if you need them. And never asks what for.

So I took \$250, and as a matter of fact he always pays it back. Only he says he'd rather borrow from me than Rissa, which is absurd, she being generosity itself. I offered to help him pick out some things for the new apartment, but he didn't want any help, he said he had his own ideas. I was a little worried about that because it's not to be expected that three young men should make a really satisfactory interior, you know, but really, when I went there to tea with them I had to admit they had done very well indeed. And they said it was all Bill's ideas, too. He'd been poking about at auctions and picked up some real bargains, surprisingly cheap.

Of course Rissa was furious. She thought he shouldn't have gone away and got quite angry with me because I said that after all he wasn't a baby, and young people had to decide those things for themselves. Sarles agreed with me.

"Let the boy go, Rissa," he said, "it may be the best thing for him."

Sarles is Rissa's husband—I don't know if I mentioned him before—and a very nice man. There's not much to say about him. He's quite a well known throat specialist and very fond of chess. He always got on very well with Bill, but he always admitted he was spoiled.

"If only he'd show some real bent for something—anything!" Rissa used to say. "I don't care what it is—if he'd even had a hobby! Why, he never even collected stamps!"

She always insisted that Bill would never amount to anything, because he never wanted to collect stamps. Of course I see what she meant, but I never cared for stamps myself; I never could see why anyone should want them. So that always made me easier on Bill, perhaps.

He doesn't care for music, he doesn't go in for sports, he hates business, of course medicine and law are out of the question—how can a human being have so few interests?" she used to complain and walk up and down the floor.

"He loves to fish," I would remind her.

"Fishing? She would fish back at me, 'fishing!' He likes fishing, in my opinion, because it's the laziest sport there is! I believe he just lies in the boat and smokes!"

I often wondered myself just what Bill did at the office. He was in marine insurance and went into New York every day, but it never seemed to interest him at all. Rissa used to complain that he never talked about it at home.

"Talk about it," he said, "what is there to talk about, sis? Did you want to insure the Phantom?"

The Phantom is our canoe, and the children all laughed and Rissa got rather vexed. There's no doubt Bill was difficult.

One reason I was glad that Bill left was that I was afraid he was getting a little accustomed to having everything done for him. You see, after all, he only made \$25 a week, and although he always paid in \$15 of that every week, which was the most he could have afforded, still he wouldn't ordinarily have had the services of a butler for that, you know, and his clothes taken care of, and a lift into town nearly every day. And yet, as Rissa always said, why shouldn't he have all those things? With three able-bodied men servants attached

to the family, why should Bill press his trousers? There really had to be three, you see: Houghton, the butler, and the two chauffeurs—Rissa's and Sarles'. Of course Sarles had to have one to get him to the hospital and his clinics and the calls he had to make. And if he was using Eldredge in town, how could Rissa get any good out of him in Oak Ridge? How could she ever go anywhere? So Joseph did most of the repairs and really looked after both cars, and Eldredge, who used to be a valet, took care of Sarles' clothes. And Bill's clothes weren't much more for him to do, and as a matter of fact, Eldredge adored Bill and would rather fuss over him than Sarles; Bill did him more credit, he said. But all the servants adored Bill. He was ever so much lofter with them than Sarles was and I must say they seemed to like it. Bill teased Houghton dreadfully and Houghton only blushed and laughed and said:

"Certainly, Mr. William, certainly, sir. 'Ow you do go on, sir!'"

"You don't seem ever to remember, Bill, that

Bill was always joking him about the money he made. You see Houghton had a good deal of spare time, like all butlers, and he was always improving it. As Rissa used to say, if only Bill could use his odd minutes as Houghton did, she'd have more respect for him!

"Odds minutes!" Bill would reply, "heavens above, Riss, all that man's minutes are odd! He's a joke. The heaviest job he has to look like a butler. I'll admit it does that to the queen's taste. But if he ever had to do any real work he'd die of surprise."

"That's a very efficient man. You have no idea what you're talking about, as usual, Bill," Rissa would say. Then they would go at it and argue for minutes together.

One day at the shore Bill came up to my room with a sheet of typewriter paper in his hand. He was grinning from ear to ear, and quite pleased with himself. I could see that.

"Look here, Flops," he said, "I think I may say I've got this question of Houghton's time pretty well settled. I made a point of keeping tabs on him all day yesterday, and here's the result. Now perhaps I'm wrong!"

The ridiculous boy had a regular time table of what Houghton had done all day and really it was rather amusing.

"In the morning," said Bill "he got up at seven-thirty, had his breakfast at eight, waited at ours, at eight forty-five poked about a bit in that pantry of his, answered the phone six times, made a bluff at arranging those flowers you brought in, and rowed Annie for upsetting his glass or something, and rowed Jessie for not dusting his bedroom, and rowed Asa Dodd for mislaying the row locks on his boat. That took all the morning. Then he waited at lunch."

"Well, Bill, you know we're always very particular about their time off at the shore," I reminded him.

"Gosh, yes, I know it," he said. "I sat in the apple tree and watched 'em going down to their dock for their swim. I nearly died."

It was rather funny. First Marietta the cook waddled down in an immense bathtub, then Joseph (if he's free) and his two children, then Jessie (she's a beautiful swimmer and our guests often watch her diving with field glasses), then Annie in a scarlet suit and cap; then the kitchen maid, who is awfully pretty, and Mrs. Joseph is jealous of her, unfortunately; then Asa, the odd-job man. Eldredge's daughter is with me in the summer, so she goes in with them, too. Then last of all Houghton strides along, looking perfectly magnificent in his jersey and trunks. He is a very powerful swimmer and has two life saving medals he won in England. He gets into his boat and takes one or two of the girls and rows out like a 'varse' crew man beyond Dead Man's Reef and fishes there before he swims.

"Well," Bill went on, "after his majesty had his row and his swim he came back and changed, and then he sat in his shirt sleeves and made lace until tea time. Two telephone calls and one ring at the front bell. Then tea. He hustled you through with that double check and got Nellie to set his dinner table, because he was late with a lace order that had to go off parcel post insured last night. After dinner he read one of Rissa's stories to Nellie and Marietta, and he brought Sarles' Scotch and soda at ten. He's a bird, he is."

"Why, Bill," I said (I couldn't help laughing), "how did you see all this? Did you—"

"O, I snooped about and Sherlocked around. I can usually manage when I have to, Flops," he said.

It is rather funny about Houghton's lace work. To see him with his tiny bobbin and hundreds of fine linen threads, sticking pins into a cushion with those big, broad tipped fingers of his, is quite a shock till you're used to it. His mother made and repaired lace in England and taught all her children—there were eleven of them—how to do it. And Houghton took it up for a sort of wager, to prove that he could, you see, and Rissa heard of it and bought it—it was a lovely pattern, like a Spanish Rose Point, a sort of mixture, the best he could remember. And then some of our guests come, and as soon as he got all he could do. He has a book of patterns under the silver cleaning drawer, and some of the people who come to the house always remember him and bring him new ones.

"You don't seem ever to remember, Bill, that



"Shame on you, Miss Blair, for knowing your place no better than you do!"

So, of course, I guessed that it was a girl, and that Bill was in love again. I did hope she wasn't married.

At last Houghton came up to Bill.

"A lady for you, sir," he said, looking a little puzzled. "I couldn't get the name, sir, unless it might be Blair?"

"Oh, yes, yes, that's it," said Bill, and jumped off.

"It was in the matter of a—"

"Yes, yes, that's all right. I know, I know," Bill interrupted, and ran into the little telephone room.

"Beg pardon, Mr. William, but that receiver's out of order—I've put you on in the library," said Houghton.

"Oh, fudge!" said Bill.

He was plainly very much embarrassed, and I couldn't help feeling that this must be the real thing, this time, because Bill was never embarrassed about a girl before.

"Yes," we heard him say (Sarles and I were in the morning room) "this is Mr. Etheridge, yes, indeed, Miss Blair . . . yes, she asked me to take it up with you . . . oh, immensely busy, of course, yes . . . anything we can do to take things off her, as you say."

"Oh—a long time, yes—several years. Absolutely . . . not a fault, so far as we know . . . Of course we are, terribly sorry, but what's the use? The city, you know! Oh, no, we've made other arrangements. Any time that suits you. Not at all, please, don't. I'll be glad to turn away from the telephone, looking very relieved and happy."

"There!" he said, "that's done!"

"For heaven's sake, Bill, what devilry are you up to now?" Sarles asked.

"Rissa's upstairs, you know, if anybody wanted her," I put in.

"Devilry!" said Bill, "how little you know me, Dr. Elton! As a matter of fact, I've just arranged one of the most sensible, practical, really useful things I ever did in my life."

"Of course, that's saying a great deal," said Sarles, in that funny dry way he has.

"You sounded as if you were giving a reference for a waitress, or something," said I.

"I think he's selling a dog for somebody on a commission basis," said Sarles.

Then Bill sat down on the floor and laughed till he choked. We had to laugh, too, he kept it up so long.

I shall always remember the queer, settled sort of look that came over Rissa's face when we got his note, a day or two after that visit. It was a very worrying little note. He wrote in the airiest possible way that he'd left the Marine Insurance for good, as he never had liked it, and never got enough time to himself, there! He had enough money to live on for a while, he said, and meanwhile he'd look about with a view to going into something entirely different, ultimately.

"Don't be alarmed, Flops," he ended, "it's nothing to do with a girl!"

He also said he'd look in on Sarles from time to time, to reassure us all.

"Very well," said Rissa quietly; "that's enough. I'm through."

Of course, I knew she didn't mean it, but she looked awfully settled.

I slipped up to the new apartment, a few days later, and took them some rhubarb jam and some nut-cakes. George Hankworth was there, and he didn't seem at all perturbed about Bill. He admitted to me that he hadn't the remotest idea what he was doing, but that he had no doubt it was all right.

I couldn't make out whether Bill was actually living there, but all his things were there. Even the clothes in his bureau drawers.

Sarles called up the Marine Insurance and they told him that Bill, though a young man of undoubted ability, had not seemed for some time to be noticeably adapted to office routine of their particular kind.

"Nor to routine of any kind," Rissa said, and put her lips together very tightly.

Bill asked me to tea with him at the Ritz one day the next week, and looked very well and happy, though rather mysterious and excited, I thought. Hardly had we got seated before he jumped up and said the table was tippy and he wanted another glass, I hadn't noticed it, and it's usually quite enough to put a bit of paper under the leg, anyway, but he insisted upon going over into a corner, absolutely under the orchestra. He turned his back squarely on the room—you would have almost thought he didn't want to be seen. Only that isn't at all like Bill, and even if it was so, why go to the Ritz?

But there was no good asking him anything—I knew Bill when he was in that state of mind. You've just got to take him on his own terms. So I did (which Rissa said was disastrous).

After that, I determined not to worry. Goodness knows how long it might not have gone on if it hadn't been for the "Help a Home." They had just formed a new upper West Side Manhattan local committee, and Rissa went up and made a big speech in the ball room of one of the big hotels there. The chairman was a Mrs. Plympton, a very rich woman. Indeed, and when she asked if she was one of Headquarters could come up and talk with her personally about the work, they asked Rissa if she would go, since after all, it was her speech that had got the woman so interested. Of course, Rissa agreed immediately, and went with me.

Mrs. Plympton lived in an enormous white stone house on the Riverside Drive. There was a great stone hall all full of red velvet and palms and a large marble statue and a tall footman. We went up a wide marble staircase with rugs hanging over the rail and a suit of armor on the landing, into a simply enormous drawing room all full of gold furniture. Rissa kept saying:

"For heaven's sake!" under her breath, and glancing at me, but I couldn't answer anything because I was so busy trying not to fall over the heads of the polar bear rugs, which always make me frightfully nervous. By and by Mrs. Plympton called in, in a beautiful but rather elaborate dress, wearing a great many pearls and diamonds, but really a very kind, good sort of woman, all the same.

"Oh, I am so pleased to meet you—for so many reasons!" she burst out, and Rissa smiled very sweetly and thanked her very easily; she is so accustomed to that sort of thing, you see, it means nothing to her. I should be embarrassed to death, I know.

"You have given us all so many beautiful and interesting things, Mrs. Elton, but your last gift, though only we have the benefit, is such a treasure to us," the lady gushed on.

Rissa looked a bit bored, but I was really puzzled—I thought maybe Mrs. Plympton had adopted a baby through the Help a Home.

"I can't thank you enough—oh, here is my daughter—"

She went on, "Marjory, this is Mrs. Elton—Mrs. Clarissa Etheridge Elton, you know."

Such a lovely girl came in, with chocolate brown hair and beautiful, clear, brown eyes, and a very high color, like an English girl.

"She is going to tell us all about those dear, poor little babies," said Mrs. Plympton; "my daughter, Marjory, Mrs. Elton, Miss Etheridge. Is the tea coming, dearest?"

"Yes, mother, he—it's just here," said the girl, and I saw the butler, myself, far down the room, stepping carefully over the polar bears, just as I had done. Indeed he was trying to peer over his large silver tray, to see them.

I turned away my face, so as not to smile, and suddenly there was a terrible clatter and clashing, and the butler whirled entirely around and hurried back again as fast as he could go!

"Why, what is that?" said Mrs. Plympton, looking nervously around. Her daughter stared and half got up and then sat back again.

"I—I don't know, mother," she said. She looked worried, I thought.

"He seems quite agile," said Rissa coldly, and I knew she was wishing she hadn't come. "It

must be very difficult to prouette, like that and not break anything!"

"He never did it before," said Mrs. Plympton, staring at us. "Do you suppose it could have been the shock of seeing me?"

"The shock of seeing me?" Rissa repeated, sitting up about a foot higher in her golden chair and looking rather terrible. "My dear Mrs. Plympton, what can you mean? Butlers have withstood the shock before, at any rate."

"Oh, no, mother doesn't mean . . . she means . . ." poor Marjory tried to explain. "I ought to have told him you were coming," Mrs. Plympton went on very mournfully, "but, to tell the truth, I thought he would be so pleased—"

"Pleased! Pleased!" Rissa repeated, flashing an awful glance at me. (I knew she would say, "Why did you bring me to this mad house?" the minute we got into the car.)

"Yes. He always speaks so beautifully of you," Mrs. Plympton gasped, and Rissa gasped, too.

"I am, of course, deeply grateful for his commendation," she began, but Mrs. Plympton kept on.

"And I'm sure he would be pleased, really," "He takes an extraordinary method of displaying it, to say the least," said Rissa. "I think, Florence, we must—"

"Oh, don't go!" cried Marjory. "The tea is here, and please don't. I know, Elton!"

A very pretty parlor maid with yellow hair came hurrying over the parlor bears, which she managed very cleverly, and put down the tray on a golden table with twisted legs. She was breathing fast, but otherwise calm.

"Ah, now we shall feel better," said Mrs. Plympton. "May I give you cream or do you take lemon, dear Mrs. Elton?"

"I take it clear, thanks," said Rissa.

"Marjory darling, pass the muffins to Mrs. Elton. Ettie, what is the matter with—"

"He had a turn, Mrs. Plympton, a bad one. He's very sorry, but it's passing off," said the girl, with a queer, quick glance at Marjory.

"Oh, mother, perhaps I'd better—Marjory looked quite concerned and got up again.

"Nonsense, sit still," said her mother. "Did he have them with you, Mrs. Elton, ever?"

Rissa put her cup down very decidedly.

"My dear Mrs. Plympton," she began, as cold as ice and sharp as a razor, "I cannot imagine what you can possibly mean. I never, naturally, saw your butler before, and his constitution is entirely a mystery to me!"

"You never saw Houghton before?" cried Mrs. Plympton and Marjory, staring at us curiously. "Why, Mrs. Elton, how can you say such a thing, when you sent him to us, and I have seen your references—yours and Lady What's-her-name's!"

"Houghton?" said Rissa. "Houghton?"

"Certainly, Houghton. Your old butler, Houghton," said Mrs. Plympton firmly. "You admit that he left you, I suppose?"

Rissa turned and stared at me.

"Unless he has left since he waited on us at luncheon, I can hardly admit it and retain my reason," she answered.

"But we've had him a month!" wailed Mrs. Plympton.

"We all looked at each other.

"I am afraid some one has been deceiving you, Mrs. Plympton," Rissa said, chilly, but very polite. "These things do happen, unfortunately—"

"Mother! I must go!" cried Marjory suddenly, and she jumped up and hurried down the room.

"My dear," her mother began, but the parlor maid dropped the little tray that I had noticed was shaking in her hand and stamped her foot.

"Indeed, your dear is not the only one that's been deceived in this house!" she burst out and dashed off after Marjory and passed her at the door.

Poor Mrs. Plympton was utterly stunned.

"Why, why, this is terrible!" she murmured. "I don't know what you'll think of us, Mrs.—"

Just then we heard a loud angry scream that quite echoed through the house. We all jumped and Rissa got up and walked straight out, past our hostess.

"I think our little talk had better take place under more favorable circumstances, at some later date, Mrs. Plympton," said she. "Come Florence," and I came.

Unfortunately, in order to avoid the bears (though Rissa stalked grandly, right through them) I turned off to the right and went down the wrong red stairs. I pushed nervously at a dark red baize door and tumbled into a big, beautiful pantry. The butler was sitting all bent over in a chair with Marjory leaning over him, and the parlor maid trying to drag her away.

"Houghton! Houghton! What does it all mean?" Marjory was saying, half sobbing, and the maid screamed out:

"Shame on you, Miss Blair, for knowing your place no better than you do! Get out of this pantry!"

In her excitement she slapped Marjory's arm, and the girl turned on her, caught both her wrists and shook her like a doll. She began to cry and scream and the butler turned around—and it was Bill!

"Oh! B—!" I cried, but I never got it out. He look stopped me. Even in my fright and confusion I realized that he looked just like Rissa. It was one of her terrible, lightning looks, and my voice stuck in my throat.

"Get out. Get out," he said, very low. "I'll see you tomorrow. Get out, for God's sake!"

I turned right around and started for the door, and as I turned I heard him say very sharply:

"Ettie! Shut up! Go out of here, you little fool!"

I turned back as I pushed through the baize door, and saw him looking at Marjory, and I felt very queer suddenly at something I saw in his eyes. I realized all at once that Bill was a man.

"Marjory," he said, "listen to me . . . I stumbled up the stairs and when I got to the drawing room door I glanced in, not thinking, really."

There sat poor Mrs. Plympton in the big gold chair, just as I had left her, with her mouth open like a scared pink and white rabbit, and all her pearls and diamonds shining!

I plunged into the car and Rissa was waiting, perfectly furious.

"Another moment, and I should have sent the police into that mad house!" she said. "Home, Joseph!"

Bill turned up the next day. We thought he would be quite chastened and ashamed, and he wasn't at all. He told us all about it. He said it dawned on him when he made that timetable about Houghton, that there was the only job where he'd get any leisure. He wanted time to plan out furnishing apartments, he said, like Houghton had married, and he thought it would be a lark, anyway. So he borrowed the English reference and wrote one from Rissa and went about till he found a new rich person who didn't know much about butlers, and then he simply did everything just as he liked. Mrs. Plympton had married again and Marjory's father had fallen quite different though poor.

She had fallen head over heels in love with Bill, though she didn't know it, and when the crash came, he realized that he was in love with her, too. And he was. He never looked that way at Mrs. Writen.

And so all Rissa's plans for disciplining him simply went for nothing, because Mr. Plympton thought it was a rich joke and gave Marjory a million immediately and told Rissa that she might write plays, but Bill acted 'em! He has a big insurance department in his business and a year to begin. And he isn't so much, as he says, Bill can always be a butler!

(Copyright, 1921, by Josephine Daskam Bacon)