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LITERATURE.

A FAMILY ELOPEMENT

(*St James's Budget.*)

"Your wife does not notice our being together?" asked Miss Hawkins.

"I think not," said Mr Gabbitas; she is talking to that Theosophist. The Theosophist was a slender young man from India, but his hair might have come from the Scotch. Mrs Gabbitas was a lady with intellectual features of a Roman type, and a shallow desire for profundity. She was clearly very much interested in what the Hindoo had to say; so Miss Hawkins turned again to Gabbitas.

"I said, I cannot go on like this," said Gabbitas.

"Speak lower," said Miss Hawkins.

"I cannot go on like this—*dearest*," said Gabbitas, trying to put as much tender passion as possible into a hoarse whisper.

"What can we do?" said Miss Hawkins.

"So much as we dare do—flight," said Gabbitas. "Let us get out of all this into a sunnier clime ——"

"Hush! They are coming to ask me to sing," said Miss Hawkins. "Presently. Wait."

Mr Gabbitas yielded her up at this crisis with the best grace he could, and went and propped himself against a wall where he could watch her profile.

"She is awf'ly clever," said the refined young gentleman to the left of him, to his friend.

"And virtuous," said his friend. "But that's a mistake. She really ought to do something just a little—cheerful, you know. People are not going to run after singers just because they sing, you know."

"She knows that," said the refined young gentleman. "She's clever enough. There will be an explosion——"

"Good Heavens!" said Gabbitas under his breath, "Such motives in my sweet little Minnie. I can't stand this." And he hastily sought a vacant piece of wall elsewhere.

"It is sweet to be with you again," he whispered to her presently, with a sense of infinite relief. "And now, dearest, frankly, will you, dare you—come with me? If you knew, dearest, how I have longed for you, how my soul craves—— So" (very loud) "I had a very jolly time indeed."

The latter inane sentence because somebody had loomed up just behind Miss Hawkins's chair.

"Gone now," said Gabbitas. "Tell me, dearest, quickly. Whisper. Dare you?" [*Pause.*]

"For you," whispered Miss Hawkins very softly, looking down.

Gabbitas took that as an affirmative. "My darling, my own! The warmth will show. I mean to say—— Do you find the room hot?"

"What disconcerts you now?"

"I caught Mrs Gabbitas's eye just then. I think she wants to go home. That Theosophist has left her."

Now qualified observers state that a man who means to run away from his wife, even if that wife have features Roman rather than beautiful and a tendency to theosophy, suffers considerable twinges of compunction. Gabbitas certainly did. Even if one's marriage is chiefly a success from the mercenary point of view, a habit of mutual consideration grows insensibly out of the necessity of a common life.

"It was a very successful affair, dear," he remarked. "They had some lovely sandwiches, I noticed."

"Yes," said Mrs Gabbitas, turning dreamy eyes upon him. "The sandwiches were lovely, and the decorations were lovely too. And the music. It has been the most lovely evening I can imagine."

"I am glad you liked it so much, dear."

She smiled mysteriously at him. She seemed to be suddenly affected with an unusual tenderness. "*Dear* husband," she said.

"What is up now?" thought Gabbitas. "She is not going to pump me." And he remarked, "Yes, dear."

"You have always been a good husband to me, dear."

"Ra-ther," said Gabbitas privately; and aloud, "Always."

"You may kiss me, dear."

Gabbitas did as he was bid, and that was all. After this treat Mrs Gabbitas relapsed into her corner. She did not suspect, then, after all. Gabbitas was greatly relieved. Yet she had never spoken in quite this way before. If she meant to develop sentimentality, a new inducement was added to elopement.

And again and again, and yet again, three times altogether in a fortnight, Mrs Gabbitas returned to this same peculiar soft mood. One or two things she said startled Gabbitas extremely at the time. However, he kept on accumulating his luggage at his chambers nevertheless, for he was a hard man.

"She cannot *know*," he said to himself, following her with his eyes, after one of these conversations. "No; if she knew she would make a shindy. She would certainly make a shindy. I know her disposition. I suppose she has got this new style from some novel. Poor old Minnie!"

As he went by her door he paused momentarily, for she seemed to be on her knees and weeping by the bed-side. That was through looking out of the corners of his eyes. When he looked straight he saw that she was only packing a dress-basket, and he went on downstairs relieved.

Five days after the last of these remarkable conversations Gabbitas found himself on the Southampton platform of Waterloo Station with a large pile of boxes, masculine and feminine, in his care, and an exhilarating sense of wrongdoing in his heart. Miss Hawkins mingled timidity and self-possession delightfully.

"This is the end of London and respectability," said Gabbitas.

"And the beginning of life, dear," said Miss Hawkins.

"Here is our luggage," said Gabbitas.

By the side of their heap was a similar one. A little portmanteau in this caught his eye. It seemed familiar. "Is not that mine?" he asked the porter.

"Mrs Da Costa," read the porter on the label; "for Lisbon."

"No, that is not mine," said Gabbitas, "And yet it seemed * * * somehow * * * funny. We should see that our seats have not been taken, I think, now, dear."

At the door of their compartment a man was standing with his back towards them. He was evidently a foreigner; his hair formed a peculiar frizzy mat, such as no Englishman could or would exhibit. As they approached he turned.

There was a pause of mutual inquiry.

"Mr Jamasji Ganpat!" said Gabbitas.

Mr Ganpat, the eminent theosophist, looked at them stupidly. He seemed scared for a moment. Then his face lit up. He raised his hat. "Mr Gabbitas—with Miss Hawkins!"

Miss Hawkins turned half round to pull a loose thread out of her travelling-rug.

"We are going down to Southampton," said Mr Gabbitas, collecting his resources. "Together. To meet Mrs Gabbitas."

"Indeed!" said Mr Ganpat, and his eye wandered round to the waiting room door. He seemed nervous. "Do you know," he said, "I think I must * * * I had better * * * It is unfortunate. Excuse me." He turned his back suddenly and hurried away.

"It was better to recognize him," said Gabbitas. "How nervous he seems. I wonder if he suspects. Perhaps he is shocked. Hullo!"

Ganpat had not been able to reach the door of the waiting-room in time. It opened. Somebody appeared in a grey travelling-dress—a flaxen-haired lady, with Roman features, smiling sweetly at him.

"Minnie!" exclaimed Gabbitas, with addenda.

"Mrs Gabbitas!" said Miss Hawkins.

The smile of Mrs Gabbitas died away at the sight of Ganpat's alarmed visage. She sought over his shoulder for the cause.

"Oh, my poor George!" she exclaimed faintly. And then she saw Miss Hawkins. "You!"

"Take your seats!" howled the guard; "take your seats, please!"

"I suppose," said Gabbitas, finding *cursus sotto voce* no comfort, "under the circumstances we had all better get in together and explain."

And in a minute four singularly depressed and silent people were travelling in a first-class compartment out of Waterloo Station. It was one of those conversations that are difficult to begin. Mrs Gabbitas broke the silence at Vauxhall.

"This is *perfectly* ridiculous," she said abruptly and hotly. "Idiotic! We can't do anything now."

"That, dear, is just what I feel," said Miss Hawkins very slowly and without looking up, making a new kind of sinuous strip.

"It will not be even a romantic scandal," said Mrs Gabbitas, with tears in her voice. "Nothing original. It will be just *funny*. Horrible! *basely!*"

The meeting lapsed into silence.

"I do not know," said Mr Ganpat with a half laugh. "What. It is funny."

Again meditation reigned.

Beyond Clapham Gabbitas cleared his throat.

"Yes?" said Mrs Gabbitas.

"We have," said Gabbitas, "got into this mess, and we have to get out of it. I and Ganpat might fight ——"

"No," said Ganpat. "Ladies present! No fight."

"We might fight," said Gabbitas; "but I do not see exactly what we should be fighting for."

"Precisely," said Ganpat. "Nothing worth fighting for." He smiled reassuringly at Mrs Gabbitas.

"The reputations of the ladies must not suffer," said Gabbitas.

"Again precisely," said Ganpat, becoming animated. "And now you hear *me*. Now I will tell you. What will we do? Here is Mrs Gabbitas and Miss Hawkins. They go—they go with us to Southampton. Quite proper that, eh? Hear me to my final end. Then we part. I and you, Mr Gabbitas, I and you go to Paris. Is not that well? It is an excursion that we have planned. You, my—I mean Madam—you, Madam, go with Miss Hawkins. You go to—go to—"

"Lisbon will be far enough, as the things are labelled."

"Ye-es," said Miss Hawkins, taking her strips and tearing them transversely into squares. "It's sensible. I am sure I don't mind. Now,"

"That is admirable. What do you say, Gabbitas?"

The eye of Gabbitas rested on Miss Hawkins for a moment. "This is a beastly mess," he said.

Miss Hawkins glanced up, and he fancied she nodded imperceptibly. He turned to Ganpat.

"Very well, that will do."

"We have all been very silly," said Mrs Gabbitas—"idiots, in fact."

"And, as far as I can see," said her husband, "nobody can throw stones."

"Here is no injured innocents in this carriage at all," said Mr Jamasji Ganpat.

"And now," said Mrs Gabbitas, "everything being settled, let us talk of something else."

"Ringlets," said Miss Hawkins, making her paper scraps into two heaps in her lap; "ringlets, dear, are coming into fashion after all."