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The trouble with women is, they are always trying to improve themselves. Don't they know that somewhere there is a man who loves them just the (ugh!) way they are.

the Orginorg Way

By JACK SHARKEY

Illustrator FINLAY

HECTOR PAMSON, no different from ninety-nine percent of the Earth's population, was not a rich man. He had, however, two things going for him: 1 Chronic unemployment, and an unquenchable desire to marry Vivian Canfield. The first of these advantages gave him an endless future of leisure time, fully as much as any rich man might desire, possibly more; the second gave his ambition the

rose-colored spur it only needed to carry him to the heights.

Vivian, as in most cases of unrequited love, did not know Hector was alive; or, if when she encountered him on the street, she suspected something of the sort, she made no sign. But she did lower her fabulous eyes in a sort of greeting whenever their paths crossed, and that was enough to incite Hector's innards to burn with hot white



flames of craving. "She's noticed me!" he would tell himself on returning to his rude grass hut outside the perimeter of the sprawling city of Rio de Janeiro. "She may not speak, she may not smile, she may not wave—But she notices me, nonetheless! I'm sure of it."

As a matter of public record, Hector was correct. She *had* noticed him. One could not help but notice a man who had a face as large and colorless as the surface of a honeydew melon, yet whose features were so tiny and close in this convex expanse that they might have been hidden behind a small hamburger bun, albeit this form of nourishment was beyond Hector's economic capacity to provide, had he desired the anonymity. Nor could she, or anyone else, help but observe his lumpy clothing (hand-woven by Hector from pounded palmetto-leaf fiber), his ears that jutted outward from his head like loving-cup handles, his dust-hued hair that lay lifelessly along the curve of his scalp, his short, skinny arms, his long, knucky fingers, and the distinctive sound made by the calluses of his bare feet on the city sidewalks when he scuffed by.

Hector had no particular ancestry or citizenship to boast of. His parents had been lost in the surf during a seaside holiday

when he was but three, and whether they had been Brazilians or simple tourists was a question he had not thought to put to them before their passing. His name he constructed himself at age six from the tag on a passing dog collar and the vague memory that his mother had answered to the name "Pam". Though without formal schooling, he had a knack for tongues, and was proficient in both English and Portuguese, and had a passable acquaintance with a dozen other languages. But his main focal point in life, his greatest interest, and the area of his highest proficiency was plant life.

LIVING, as he did, so near the spreading fingers of untamed green jungle, he could not help but notice how varied were the kinds and colors and shapes of plants, how they grew, bred, bloomed, fruited, and died in the golden warmth and tepid rains of equatorial Brazil. They asked nothing of life but light and water and a place to take root, and Hector himself asked little more, until the day—shortly after his forty-third birthday—when he first set eyes on Vivian Canfield, and knew that a career of relaxed vegetation was no longer enough.

Why he loved her, he did not know. He suspected, from the

start, that—due to the love he bore the growing things about his hand-made hut at the murky jungle rim—he cared for her because she so reminded him of his leafy companions.

He scratched soaring love-ballads to her in the warm brown soil that carpeted his hut's dim interior, letting his fertile imagination compare her—from top-knot to toenails—to all the lovely growing things within his personal experience. And, for all his uncomeliness of self, he was an accurate objective observer. Vivian Canfield *was* like something seen in a hothouse.

Her long, thick hair was the friendly shade of warm, brown mulch; her slightly protruding eyes—when closed—resembled nothing so much as sap-gorged hibiscus buds; her nose had that graceful curve seen only in the lineaments of a growing banana; her long arms were as sturdy and angular as the arching limbs of the banyan tree; her wide, heavily veined hands might, in the twilight, have passed for splay-ended palm fronds; her torso had the endlessly delightful variety and surprise of a well-noded tree bole; her legs, when she chose to sun herself on the sandy beach before the glazed-brick facade of her hotel, could have been accidentally enbasketed by a near-sighted collector of driftwood; and the like

of her feet was seen nowhere but in the slender, moist pit of the mango. "She belongs," Hector nightly breathed into his pillow, "in a jungle!"

How long her sojourn at the hotel would last, he had no way of telling. She might stay out the season. She might sail on the next day's boat. The agonies Hector endured when he contemplated losing her without ever really knowing her are beyond genteel description.

But a girl who spends even a short time in a posh hotel in Rio is not the sort, Hector knew, who would take kindly to an invitation to share a grass hut with a stranger. "Money," he sighed, "calls to money. And, since she is not likely to ever toy with the notion of trying poverty for a change of pace, I must be the one whose manner of living turns aside from its erstwhile course: I must become a rich man, a very rich man, and soon, before somebody else snaps her up."

But how?! That was the hitch. Had he even dreamed of such a lovely vision entering his life, when he was still a stripling lad of eight or nine, Hector might have taken a job, and saved his money (All of it; he needed none to survive as it was), gotten together a great attractive bundle of hard cash, and then swept her off her feet

with an enormous fiscal broom of the stuff. But time was against him. She would, he mourned, depart the tropic shores with no *first* meeting with Hector, even, let alone the planned series of rendezvous his hopeful heart nurtured itself upon.

PURUSING his valiant dream while he was still able to hope, he pored over a thick dictionary in the public library, hoping wildly to find some clue as to how men became financial wizards overnight, as sometimes occurred. But he overshot his page, so frantic was his thumbing, and passed quite beyond the "Financier" definition he sought to a more prosaic one: "Fish". Though the word itself did not halt him, the accompanying illustration did.

It was a full-page, full-color melange of undersea creatures, varying from grampus to clam, from seahorse to starfish, from octopus to eel. And there, at the very bottom of the page, was a sketch of a deep-sea fish, one of those oft-reported but seldom-seen creatures that thrive under umpteen fathoms of cold ocean water, in regions of unimaginable darkness, who have therefore deviated oddly from whatever constitutes fish-norm.

This particular eye-catching animal had—growing from a

curved spike on its forehead—a thread of tissue at whose tip (just in front of the fish's broad underslung jaw) was pendant a luminous blob resembling something that would make a strong man retch, but undoubtedly looked tasty as anything to a fish, being worm-shaped, decay-toned and slimy. The thus-appendaged fish, was, in effect, a living chain of things in a single body: Angler, rod, line, bait and consumer all rolled up into one. Pamson stared and stared at this tiny picture, his close-set eyes distending ever so slightly, his tiny mouth pursing in trembling speculation, his small moist nose twitching, and his broad, featureless forehead beaded with a galaxy of twinkling perspiration-beads.

He never turned back to find "Financier". Hector Pamson had had The Idea. The Idea to make money; money to win the broadly veined hand of Vivian Canfield. He turned from the opened pages of the book and fled from the library, making haste to return to his hut and his leafy companions thereat. Hector was going to parlay a green thumb into a Matto Grosso of money.

His first experiment involved the development of a fishing-plant, a choice based partly upon gratitude to the finny inspiration in the illustration and partly upon the fact that the newly

dawned possibility of actually having his chance to possess Vivian Canfield for his own made it hard to dream up something fancier in his dizzied mind.

For this horticultural tampering, he selected a bamboo copse near his hut, cuttings from a burgeoning liana that snaked its viny way through the nearby treetops, and the barbed thorn of a prickly-stemmed flower that thrived on the iron-rich soil. Then he settled down to the task of enforcing miscegenation among the three, ignoring the thought of the blighted romances and breaking hearts in the surrounding shrubbery.

TRUE to Mendel's laws—or damn-near-indisputable theories, if you prefer—not all the offspring of his unhappy little families turned out as he wished.

Some of the seedlings sprouted into rope-limp rods with stiff iron lines and wooden hooks.

Some were monsters; like the species of tree-climbing bamboo that clutched the hapless bark with steely tendrils.

He even developed a gigantic flower with rod-shaped metal anthers that dangled upside-down like a red velvet chandelier from self-grown vine-chains.

But finally, after splicing and binding and watering and fertilizing and not a little swearing, Hector got a crop of true bam-

boo poles with vine-lines dangling from their tips, and neat iron hooks dangling from the ends of the vines. (He was most pleased by the hooks, since—to his knowledge—it was the first instance of an organic species growing an inorganic appendage. Hence the name he dubbed his process: *Orginorg*, the non-Darwinian missing link!)

Success now within his grasp, he left his hut and hurried to the hotel, at last certain enough of the future to beg Vivian to wait for him until the money rolled in. There he received a cruel blow: Vivian Canfield had sailed, just that morning, for New Orleans, where she was to attend the Mardi Gras celebrations with Wilton Sedge, the man she would marry in June of the current year.

Heartsick and dazed, Hector somehow stumbled back into the hinterlands, located his hut, and sat in deep thought until nearly sunset. Then, his plans made, he rose, bid the hut goodbye, gathered what he needed (mostly the seeds of his new hybrid, seeds which grew near the base of the bamboo pole in a stout pod that—had he had more time—Hector had planned to coax into the form of a workable reel), and set off for the coast.

There, by selling those rods he'd already grown to a number of fishermen—he was able to get

enough money to rent an outrigger canoe, load it to the gunwales with fresh water and dried fish, and start paddling for the U.S.A.

We can skim lightly over the events of the next few weeks; his skirmishes with the immigration authorities, his painful series of anti-tropical-disease shots; his barefoot trek through late-winter snows to the Patent Office in Washington; his lack of money to pay for the patent; his fierce stormings of newspaper offices to get the publicity to get the funds (in the articles Hector occasioned, he had the fortune to be a major campaign issue; timing is everything in success stories); his struggles against the powerful fishing-equipment lobbies in Congress; and his final fantastic success as the owner of the Picaplant Conservatories (a non-sectarian organization). All this has been duly noted in the press and does not bear repetition except as a jog to the reader's memory.

THESE conservatories maintained a lush tropical climate, and the all-in-one rod-line-hooks grew aplenty. This single plant (commercially termed the Piscarex, after Hector himself, since he was undisputed fish king of the nation) sold by the millions to happy anglers everywhere in the country, a feat all the more

remarkable when one considers that the new Piscarex went on sale in February, when only the buyers in the southern rim of the continent could get any use out of them. (Ice-fishers found that the line coiled in shock when they tried to immerse it in frigid waters.) Hector Pamson, in person, made speeches in the deep south to push his sales skyward during the first day of his business, but he was secretly scouring the crowds for that one particular face his heart longed to look upon again. He managed, too, to be in New Orleans when the Mardi Gras was celebrated, but the omnipresence of garish costumes and dominoed faces made absolute identification uncertain, although he did startle a few mulch-haired ladies out of their wits by proposing marriage to them before he'd even finished brushing off the confetti from their features. Mardi Gras ended, and the tourists departed, and still Hector had not again found Vivian Canfield. Sorrowfully, he plunged himself into his work, trying to ease his sorrow in a cleansing bath of sweat.

His affinity for knowing the very emotions of plants was still a gift even his most trusted botanists did not possess. He could coax even the most recalcitrant of plants and sprouts to bend to his will, using a judicious mixture of authority and

sympathy, the same sort of punishment-and-reward system one uses in training a pet. He'd withhold water from a pond-lily until it fairly squeaked in protest, then inundate it with tons of liquid the moment it produced the particular sepal, petal, hue, shape, or whatever he was seeking. His plants knew him on sight, and not a few cowered at his approach down the winding greenhouse paths, though a considerable number of the more sycophantic species (clinging vines and their ilk) positively fawned upon his favor.

Therefore, by late March, Hector was able to announce the development of the Arborlux, a species of tree that—in lieu of buds, leaves or fruit—grew lightbulbs. That is, grey globules on the tip of every twig soaked up sunlight by day, and gave it off by night. The notoriety given his proposed announcement of this discovery to the world brought in enough investors' cash to enable Hector to televise the historic event. "No more electric bills for cities!" he cried, to a rapt nation, his speech having cleverly been inserted in the middle of a big-name variety show that would draw every viewer in the land. "A simple injection of my newly developed hormone: Luminogen, that's all it takes! And short weeks from now, every injected tree will be

shedding soft, yellow-green lights that push back the night! No more dark, dingy neighborhoods! No more gloomy, dangerous parks! And, thanks to the fact that avian life cannot slumber well nor thrive except in areas of comparative darkness, no more *pigeons!*" One hundred million throats across the land opened in a concerted cheer, nearly drowning out Hector's final words, "Vivian Canfield, late of Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans, I want you!" (The FCC complained about his use of a public medium for a private message, of benefit only to himself, but he stymied their lawyers with, "Then what's an election speech?", and the matter was hastily hushed up.)

HUNDREDS of "philanthropic" organizations sprang up overnight, after his speech, determined to buy up Hector's hormone and inject it (for a reasonable rate) into the property of each and every tree-owner in the land, and the presidents of six electric corporations went on relief. But no word at all from Vivian Canfield. Detectives Hector had hired checked everywhere, Rio to New Orleans, to all points between. No luck. No girl of that description had been seen since Hector's last view of her. "Keep trying!" raged Hector, sending them all dashing

out of his office to pick up new expense-account sheets at the front desk.

Hardly were the cities and country lanes of the land glowing nightly with soft, unflickering plant-light, just a few weeks after his TV speech, when Hector Pamson (now fully incorporated, entrusted, and carteled like crazy) brought forth his incredible Herbiphone.

One tiny additive to the Luminogen hormone produced (at a modest rate of one per tree) a different sort of growth from the grey globule it replaced. It became a long black creeper that hated fresh air, and so crept into the nearest domicile and then—at its inner tip—blossomed into a two-segment gourd which—by placing the cupped ends of the banana-shaped segment to ear and mouth, then pressing in proper sequence the ten nodules on the supporting companion gourd—could connect the user to anyone else in the land. In short, a free telephone, with messages transmitted instantly by a synaptic root-system of the trees themselves. (Bell Telephone frantically tried to call this move of his off, but, of course, he could not be contacted by their suddenly antiquated system.)

Then, on the first of June, Hector's desk-gourd rattled, and a long-lost voice that sang

against his eardrum like the sundering of rotting timbers whispered, "Hector—This is Vivian. I did not marry Wilton. I could not, after hearing your plea. I would have called sooner, but I was a houseguest in the Sierras, above the timber-line, till just today."

"Tell me where you are, and then stay right there and I will come for you!" he cried ecstatically. She did, and he did.

"Miss Canfield will be right down," said the smiling young woman in the pale white starched gown. "She has a sort of surprise for you." A gnawing apprehension began in Hector's breast, but he hung on bravely, studying the old magazines that lay in profusion in the waiting room of this strange, not-quite-a-hospital edifice wherein Vivian had told him she might be found. He counted off fifteen minutes on his watch, and—

"Hector! Hector Pamson!" gurgled the voice that belonged to the woman that he longed to have belong to him. He dropped the magazine, lurched to his feet, and shrieked in dismay.

"Your face!" he cried. "Your form!" he added. "Your coloring, even!" he finished.

No longer even slightly plant, but all sheer, hot-blooded animal, Vivian Canfield smiled upon him. Her nose was now quite short, snub and proportionate to

her face; her hair was a radiant mink-shade; her form bulged in newfound bilateral symmetries; and her hands were slender, white and softly rounded things with blood-red fingernails. "I hocked Wilton's engagement ring," she explained toothily, "and came here to lovely myself up! Great improvement, huh?" She did a graceful pirouette to demonstrate her accomplishments, and when it was completed, she saw nothing but the spinning revolving doors of the establishment, marking the tearful exit of a shattered little billionaire.

* * *

She is the last person to ever report seeing Hector Pamson, and despite a search only half-heartedly begun by his greedy board of directors, he was never found, nor his whereabouts, either.

And, in October of that year, all his creations (none of which had any non-deciduous genes in its enforced ancestry) began lazily changing color, turning lovely shades of russet red, frosty gold, and lambent orange, before slowly but surely shedding hooks, lines, bulbs, and phones with wild abandon, leaving the U.S.A. without power, communications, or fish, and in a year, nothing was left but the bison.

There is one vague report of a tropic island out in the thousands of such that make up Oceania which has for its Emperor a tiny-featured white man with a melon-like head, who might possibly be the missing Hector, but this is doubtful, since this Emperor is known to shun anything resembling even the most rudimentary of modern conveniences.

THE END