

Vol. XXXII

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For a brief hour or so there is peace. Then Miss Larkspur, the "jolly" English girl, will throw open her window and yell: "Hullo everybody! What a ripping morning!"



LET me admit, as I start to write, that the whole thing is my own fault. I should never have come. I knew better. I have known better for years. I have known that it is sheer madness to go and pay visits in other people's houses.

Yet in a moment of insanity I have let myself in for it and here I am. There is no hope, no outlet now till the first of September when my visit is to terminate. Either that or death. I do not greatly care which.

I write this, where no human eye can see me, down by the pond—they call it the lake—at the foot of Beverly-Jones's estate. It is six o'clock in the morning. No one is up. For a brief hour or so there is peace. But presently Miss Larkspur—the jolly English girl who arrived last week—will throw open her casement window and call across the lawn, "Hullo everybody! What a ripping morning!"—and young Poppleton will call back in a Swiss yodel from somewhere in the shrubbery, and Beverly-Jones will appear on the piazza with big towels round his neck and shout, "Who's coming for an early dip?" And so the day's fun and jollity—heaven help me—will begin again.

Presently they will all come trooping in to breakfast, in colored blazers and fancy blouses, laughing and grabbing at the food with mimic rudeness and bursts of hilarity. And to think that I might have been breakfasting at my club with the morning paper propped against the coffee-pot, in a silent room in the quiet of the city.

I repeat that it is my own fault that I am here. For many years it had been a principle of my life to visit nobody. I had long since learned that visiting only brings misery. If I got a card or telegram that said, "Won't you run up to the Adirondacks and spend the week-end with us?" I sent back word: "No, not unless the Adirondacks can run faster than I can," or words to that effect. If the owner of a country house wrote to me: "Our man will meet you with a trap any afternoon that you care to name," I answered, in spirit at least: "No, he won't, not unless he has a bear-trap or one of those traps in which they catch wild antelope." If any fashionable lady friend wrote to me in the peculiar jargon that they use:

# The Sorrows of a Summer Guest

By Stephen Leacock  
Illustrated by E. Strothmann

"Can you give us from July the twelfth at half-after-three till the fourteenth at four?" I replied: "Madam, take the whole month, take a year, but leave me in peace."

Such at least was the spirit of my answers to invitations. In practice I used to find it sufficient to send a telegram that read: "Crushed with work impossible to get away," and then stroll back into the reading-room of the club and fall asleep again.

But my coming here was my own fault. It resulted from one of those unhappy moments of expansiveness such as occur, I imagine,

to everybody—moments when one appears to be something quite different from what one really is, when one feels oneself a thorough good fellow, sociable, merry, appreciative, and finds the people around one the same. Such

moods are known to all of us. Some people say that it is the superself asserting itself. Others say it is from drinking. But let it pass. That at any rate was the kind of mood that I was in when I met Beverly-Jones and when he asked me here.

It was in the afternoon, at the club. As I recall it, we were drinking cocktails and I was thinking what a bright, genial fellow Beverly-Jones was, and how completely I had mistaken him. For myself—I admit it—I am a brighter, better man after drinking two cocktails than at any other time—quicker, kindlier, more genial. And higher, morally. I had been telling stories in that inimitable way that one has after two cocktails. In reality, I only know four stories, and a fifth that I don't quite remember, but in moments of expansiveness they feel like a fund or flow.

It was under such circumstances that I sat with Beverly-Jones. And it was in shaking hands at leaving that he said: "I do wish, old chap, that you could run up to our summer place and give us the whole of August!" and I answered, as I

shook him warmly by the hand: "My dear fellow, I'd simply love to!" "By gad, then, it's a go!" he said. "You must come up for August, and wake us all up!"

Wake them up! Ye gods! Me, wake them up!

One hour later I was repenting of my folly, and wishing, when I thought of the two cocktails, that the prohibition wave could be hurried up so as to leave us all high and dry—bone-dry, silent and unsociable.

Then I clung to the hope that Beverly-Jones would forget. But no. In due time his wife wrote to me. They were looking forward so much, she said, to my visit; they felt—she repeated her husband's ominous phrase—that I should wake them all up!

What sort of alarm-clock did they take me for anyway!

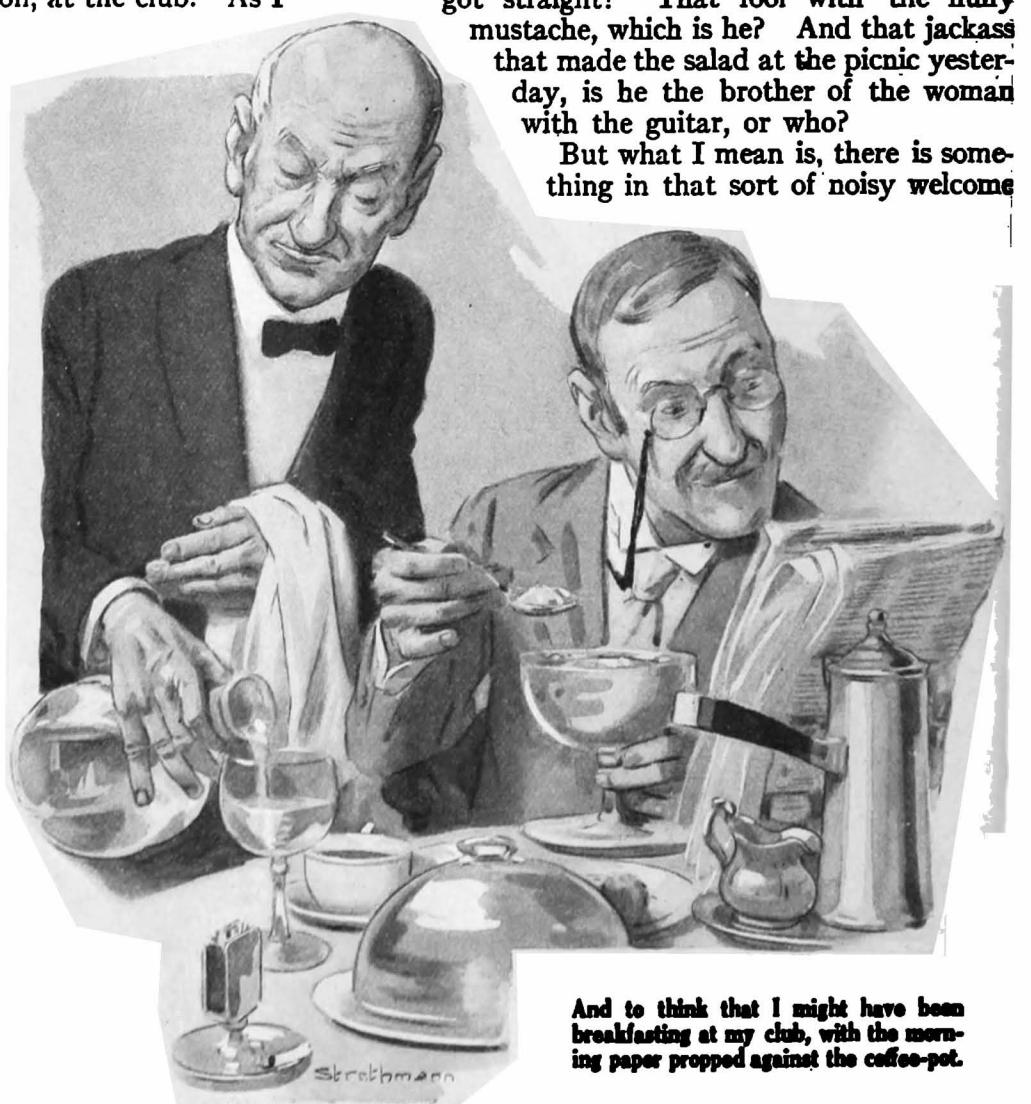
Ah, well! They know better now. It was only yesterday afternoon that Beverly-Jones found me standing here in the gloom of some cedar-trees beside the edge of the pond and took me back so quietly to the house that I realized he thought I meant to drown myself. So I did.

I could have stood it better—my coming here, I mean—if they hadn't come down to the station in a body to meet me in one of those long vehicles with seats down the sides—silly-looking men in colored blazers and girls with no hats, all making a hullabaloo of welcome. "We are quite a small party," Mrs. Beverly-Jones had written. Small! Great heavens, what would they call a large one? And even those at the station turned out to be only half of them. There were just as many more all lined up on the piazza of the house as we drove up, all waving a fool welcome with tennis rackets and golf clubs.

Small party, indeed! Why, after six days there are still some of the idiots whose names I haven't

got straight! That fool with the fluffy mustache, which is he? And that jackass that made the salad at the picnic yesterday, is he the brother of the woman with the guitar, or who?

But what I mean is, there is something in that sort of noisy welcome



And to think that I might have been breakfasting at my club, with the morning paper propped against the coffee-pot.



I could have stood it better—my arrival here, I mean—if they hadn't all come down to the station to meet me, silly-looking men in blazers and girls with no hats, all making a hullabaloo of welcome!

that puts me to the bad at the start. It always does. A group of strangers all laughing together and with a set of catchwords and jokes all their own, always throws me into a fit of sadness, deeper than words. I had thought when Mrs. Beverly-Jones said a *small* party, she really meant small. I had had a mental picture of a few sad people, greeting me very quietly and gently, and of myself, quiet, too, but cheerful—somehow lifting them up, with no great effort, by my mere presence.

Somehow from the very first I could feel that Beverly-Jones was disappointed in me. He said nothing. But I knew it. On that first afternoon, between my arrival and evening dinner, he took me about his place, to show it to me. I wish that at some proper time I had learned just what it is that you say when a man shows you about his place. I never knew before how deficient I am in it. I am all right to be shown an iron-and-steel plant, or a soda-water factory, or anything really wonderful, but being shown a house and grounds and trees, things that I have seen all my life, leaves me absolutely silent.

"These big gates," said Beverly-Jones, "we only put up this year." I said, "Oh." That was all. Why shouldn't they put them up this year? I didn't care if they'd put them up this year or a thousand years ago. "We had quite a struggle," he continued, "before we finally decided on sandstone." I said: "You did, eh?" There seemed nothing more to say; I didn't know what sort of struggle he meant, or who fought who; and personally sandstone or soapstone or any other stone is all the same to me.

"This lawn," said Beverly-Jones, "we laid down the first year we were here." I answered nothing. He looked me right in the face as he said it and I looked straight back at him, but I saw no reason to challenge his statement.

"These geraniums along the border," he went on, "are rather an experiment. They're Dutch." I looked fixedly at the geraniums but

never said a word. They were Dutch; all; right why not? They were an experiment. Very good; let them be so. I know nothing in particular to say about a Dutch experiment.

I could feel that Beverly-Jones grew depressed as he showed me round. I was sorry for him, but unable to help. I realized that there were certain sections of my education that had been neglected. How to be shown things and make appropriate comments seems to be an art in itself. I don't possess it. It is not likely now, as I look at this pond, that I ever shall.

Yet how simple a thing it seems when done by others. I saw the difference at once the very next day, the second day of my visit, when Beverly-Jones took round young Poppleton, the man that I mentioned above who will presently give a Swiss yodel from a clump of laurel bushes to indicate that the day's fun has begun.

Poppleton I had known before, slightly. I used to see him at the club. In club surroundings he always struck me as an ineffable young ass, loud and talkative and perpetually breaking the silence rules. Yet I have to admit that in his summer flannels and with a straw hat on he can do things that I can't.

"These big gates," began Beverly-Jones as he showed Poppleton round the place with me trailing beside them, "we only put up this year."

Poppleton, who has a summer place of his own, looked at the gates very critically. "Now, do you know what *I'd* have done with those gates, if they were mine?" he said.

"No," said Beverly-Jones.

"I'd have set them two feet wider apart; they're too narrow, old chap, too narrow."

Poppleton shook his head sadly at the gates. "We had quite a struggle," said Beverly-Jones "before we finally decided on sandstone."

I realized that he had one and the same line of talk that he always used. I resented it. No wonder it was easy for him.

"Great mistake," said Poppleton. "Too soft. Look at this,"—here he picked up a big stone and began pounding at the gate-post. "See how easily it chips! Smashes right off. Look at that—the whole corner knocks right off, see!"

Beverly-Jones entered no protest. I began to see that there is a sort of understanding, a kind of freemasonry, among men who have summer places. One shows his things; the other runs them down, and smashes them. This makes the whole thing easy at once.

Beverly-Jones showed his lawn. "Your turf is all wrong, old boy," said Poppleton. "Look! it has no body to it. See, I can kick holes in it with my heel. Look at that, and that! If I had on stronger boots I could kick this lawn all to pieces."

"These geraniums along the border," said Beverly-Jones, "are rather an experiment. They're Dutch."

"But my dear fellow," said Poppleton, "you've got them set in wrongly. They ought to slope from the sun you know, never to it. Wait a bit,"—here he picked up a spade that was lying where a gardener had been working. "I'll throw a few out—notice how easily they come up—ah!—that fellow broke; they're apt to—there, I won't bother to reset them, but tell your man to slope them over from the sun. That's the idea."

Beverly-Jones showed his new boathouse next and Poppleton knocked a hole in the side with a hammer to show that the lumber was too thin. "If that were my boathouse," he said, "I'd rip the outside clean off it and use shingle and stucco."

It was, I noticed, Poppleton's plan first to imagine Beverly-Jones's things his own, and then to smash them, and then give them back smashed to Beverly-Jones. This seemed to please them both. Apparently it is a well-understood method of entertaining a guest and being entertained. Beverly-Jones and Poppleton, after an hour or so of it, were delighted with one another.

Yet somehow, when I tried it myself, it failed to work.

(Concluded on page 136)

# THE SORROWS OF A SUMMER GUEST

(Concluded from page 127)

"Do you know what I would do with that cedar summer-house if it was mine?" I asked my host the next day.

"No," he said.

"I'd knock the thing down and burn it," I answered. But I think I must have said it too fiercely. Beverly-Jones looked hurt and said nothing.

Not that these people are not doing all they can for me. I know that. I admit it. If I should meet my end here and if—to put the thing straight out—my lifeless body is found floating on the surface of this pond, I should like there to be documentary evidence of *that* much. They are trying their best. "This is Liberty Hall," Mrs. Beverly-Jones said to me on the first day of my visit. "We want you to feel that you are to do absolutely as you like!"

Absolutely as I like! How little they know me. I should like to have answered:

"Madam, I have now reached a time of

life when human society at breakfast is

impossible to me; when any conversation

prior to eleven A.M. must be considered out

of the question; when I prefer to eat my meals

in quiet, or with only such mild hilarity as

can be got from a comic paper; when I can no

longer wear nankeen pants and a colored

blazer without a sense of personal indignity;

when I can no longer leap and play in the

water like a young fish; when I do not yodel,

cannot sing and, to my regret, dance even

worse than I did when young; and when the

mood of mirth and hilarity comes to me

only as a rare visitant—shall we say at a

barbecue performance—and never as a

daily part of my existence. Madam, I am

unfit to be a summer guest. If this is

Liberty Hall indeed, let me, oh, let me go!"

Such is the speech that I would make if

it were possible. As it is I can only rehearse

it to myself.

Indeed, the more I analyze it the more im-

possible it seems, for a man of my temperament at any rate, to be a summer guest. These people, and I imagine, all other summer people, seem to be trying to live in a perpetual joke. Everything, all day, has to be taken in a mood of uproarious fun.

However, I can speak of it all now in quiet retrospect and without bitterness. It will soon be over now. Indeed, the reason why I have come down at this early hour to this quiet water is that things have reached a crisis. The situation has become extreme and I must end it.

It happened last night. Beverly-Jones took me aside while the others were dancing the foxtrot to the victrola on the piazza.

"We're planning to have some rather good fun to-morrow night," he said, "something that will be a good deal more in your line than a lot of it, I'm afraid, has been up here. In fact, my wife says that this will be the very thing for you."

"Oh," I said.

"We're going to get all the people from the other houses over and the girls"—this term Beverly-Jones uses to mean his wife and her friends—"are going to get up a sort of entertainment with charades and things, all impromptu, more or less, of course—"

"Oh," I said. I saw already what was coming.

"And they want you to act as a sort of master-of-ceremonies, to make up the gags and introduce the different stunts and all that. I was telling the girls about that afternoon at the club, when you were simply killing us all with those funny stories of yours, and they're all wild over it."

"Wild?" I repeated.

"Yes, quite wild over it. They say it will be the hit of the summer."

Beverly-Jones shook hands with great warmth as we parted for the night. I knew that he was thinking that my character

was about to be triumphantly vindicated, and that he was glad for my sake.

Last night I did not sleep. I remained awake all night thinking of the "entertainment." In my whole life I have done nothing in public except once when I presented a walking-stick to the vice-president of our club on the occasion of his taking a trip to Europe. Even for that I used to rehearse to myself far into the night sentences that began: "This walking-stick, gentlemen, means far more than a mere walking-stick."

And now they expect me to come out as a merry master-of-ceremonies before an assembled crowd of summer guests.

But never mind. It is nearly over now. I have come down to this quiet water in the early morning to throw myself in. They will find me floating here among the lilies. Some few will understand. I can see it written, as it will be, in the newspapers.

But what is this? I raise my eyes from the paper and I see Beverly-Jones hurriedly approaching from the house. He is hastily dressed, with flannel trousers and a dressing-gown. His face looks grave. Something has happened. Thank God, something has happened. Some accident! Some tragedy! Something to prevent the charades!

I write these last few lines on a fast train that is carrying me back to New York, a cool, comfortable train, with a deserted club-car where I can sit in a leather armchair, with my feet up on another, smoking, silent, and at peace.

Villages, farms and summer places are flying by. Let them fly. I, too, am flying—back to the rest and quiet of the city.

"Old man," Beverly-Jones said, as he laid his hand on mine very kindly (he is a decent fellow, after all, is Jones), "they're calling you by long-distance from New York."

"What is it?" I asked, or tried to gasp.

"It's bad news, old chap—fire in your

office last evening—I'm afraid a lot of you private papers were burned. Robinson—that's your senior clerk, isn't it—seems to have been on the spot trying to save things. He's badly singed about the face and hands. I'm afraid you must go at once."

"Yes, yes," I said, "at once."

"I know. I've told the man to get the trap ready right away. You've just time to catch the seven-ten. Come along."

"Right," I said. I kept my face as well as I could, trying to hide my exultation. The office burnt! Fine! Robinson singed Glorious! I hurriedly packed my things and whispered to Beverly-Jones farewell message for the sleeping household. I never felt so jolly and facetious in my life. I could see that Beverly-Jones was admiring the spirit and pluck with which I took my misfortune. Later on he would tell them all about it.

"The trap ready! Hoorah! Good-by old man! Hoorah! All right. I'll telegraph . . . right you are, good-by . . . hip, hip hoorah! . . . Here we are! Train right on time. . . . Just these two bags, porter and there's a dollar for you. What merry merry fellows these darky porters are anyway!"

And so here I am in the train, safe bound for home and the summer quiet of my club.

Well done for Robinson! I was afraid that it had missed fire, or that my message to him had gone wrong. It was on the second day of my visit that I sent word to him to invent an accident—something, any thing—to call me back. I thought the message had failed. I had lost hope. He certainly pitched the note pretty high.

Of course I can't let the Beverly-Joneses know that it was a put-up job. I must set fire to the office as soon as I get back. But it's worth it. And I'll have to sing Robinson about the face and hands. But it's worth that, too!