WOMEN'S HOUSEHOLD GIRLS'

FICTION — TWO PAGES OF RECIPES AND IDEAS — PAGE for MISSES

FIDO and the CASTAWAYS

by BROUGHTON BRANDENBURG

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THE group around the large circular, Chianti stained table in the corner at Rollino's were singing "La Bella Maria" after the manner of a vocal reconnoissance in force. Behind us a big western lawyer, who strove harder to be a Bohemian than he did to untangle the New York statutes, sat with his right hand gripped tensely around a wine bottle, repeating resonantly into the bewildered face of the velvet hatted model before him:

"There's a grave by the Pabeng river,
A grave which the Burmans shun,"

and on and on about "Subadar Prag Tewarri" and the "Snider that squibbled in the Jungle," till he came to:

"The drip—drip—drip from the baskets,
That reddened the grass by the way."

And then the press agent sitting beside me shivered so violently that he upset the jar of tall, brittle gracci before him.

He fixed me with a saddened eye.

"It's been ten years since you and I unconsciously conspired to keep 'The Maids of Malden' from paying owners and, ad interim, there is a little story which, whenever I tell it, no one seems to take as I do."

He paused.

"I'm so glad to see you again, Tom, that I will submit—"

"You never knew Nina Vardon married that shoe man in Boston and quit the business, did you? I thought not. This thing happened on their wedding trip. One day, in Chicago where we were playing to S. R. O. with Nina in fleshings in a silver moon in the prince's dream, she ran up to me in the front of the house. She had a way of putting her hand in your side pocket when she wanted you to stand hitched, while she paraded any thoughts she might have. She spiked me.

"'Tommy, you old darling,' says she, 'I've got to have a father quick. You've got to be it.'

"'Rather late in the family history, aint it?' says I.

"'More's the pity,' says she. 'Listen like a jury, Tommy. This certain person, Endicott Stotesbury Williams, that camped in the stage box in Boston our week, is on here with a butterfly net and a wedding ring and I'm likely to be took by surprise. How'd you feel to be lined up before a man and wife factory with nobody to give you away?'

"'If I was some people I know, I'd refuse to believe my luck,' says I.

"'Tommy, you're a horrible old darling. I'm not that bad—'

"'Oh, I know,' says I, 'there's lots worse.'

"'You can bet that seven ways and win,' says she with the hot needle eye. 'But I've got no family. I have told him my father is a retired broker who has just returned from London. He's out buying me a dfamond ta-ra-ra and a diamond collar for Fido, and hunting up some of the boys, and he wants me to marry him as soon as I can get papa on from New York. Then we are going aboard a yacht he has bought, cruise down some of this fool fresh water, where all this wind comes from, around Niagara Falls and down the St. Lawrence, then around to Boston. I like him, Tommy dear; he's got loads of it, and if you'll play Respectable Father for me till he deeds me a house, you can die and leave me an orphan. Tommy, do you hear money talking in a whisper? Don't you hear this wad here in my bag saying: 'Be a father to poor little orphan Nina and poor little grandson Fido, at a hundred bills per Saturday night?'

"'Little girl, how much you look like your poor dead mother. Who was she?' says I.

"Well, that yacht had anchored in Buffalo creek among the grain elevators before I could hear proper after the yell that the management let out when Nina and I quit company.

"I had played old man from King Lear to Uncle Tom, and Nina told me I was the best father she ever had. But as grandpa to Fido, I was a fiasco. I suppose he was all right as far as dogs go, but I don't go that way. He was a kind of unraveled black spaniel, and every time we went ashore, Papa Stotesbury or Grandpapa Thomas, being me, had to pick out the burrs. Still, I ought not to bear him any hard feelings. He was a nice little dog in a show, or on the front page of an A B C book, or to belong to the house across the street, but daughter dear put him to sleep with grandpa because otherwise he roamed the deck and barked down the forward companion way at Chew Wop, the Chinese cook-steward-engineer, all night. Something told the little beast what Chew Wop always thought, when he looked at the little fat body scurrying around the deck, like a Scotchman hunting a bargain in Ireland. But, I am leaving out the rest of the party aboard the Marvella, that was her name.

"Besides the Vardon family and its connection by marriage, there was Jimmy Hammil, who had been the bridegroom's classmate and had been best man at the wedding, and the young Ralph Wallace. Jimmy had never recovered from his college education and had floated from college club to college club for twenty-five years, growing gray in changing clothes and accepting invitations such as this. Wallace had graduated the year before, and, after waiting vainly for the world to appreciate him, had begun to look around for some one to tell him how to make a living, despite his educational handicaps. He had found the Marvella for Stotesbury darling, and had been dragged along to run it, a sort of a gentleman jockey to the good craft. I often wonder how we ever got to the end of Lake Ontario. Maybe it was because there was plenty of room on the lakes, and somebody to tow us through the narrow places.

"I was about out of paternal advice, and beginning to long for Forty-second street and Broadway one evening, when Wallie made an effort to anchor in the shelter of an island, in among the Thousand ones, and picked out a spot where the current was running like a night freight. Bing! we went right up on the shore against the rocks, and the Marvella went pounding and jouncing around on them like an Irishman jigging with a jag. Nina wouldn't stay aboard a minute, and she screeched like an Iroquois. So with Stotesbury bearing grandbaby Fido, we all fled to the shore.

"Well, I got out the camp stuff and got it on the rocks, told Chew Wop to get some provender, and calmed Jimmy with some verbal kicks, and we got off on the rocks. Wallie was wrestling with the boat and, about the time Jimmy and I were coming back from the island to get something besides the tents, the boat kicked up her keel and started down stream. Chew Wop had come rushing on deck, one box of biscuits in his hand and a salt shaker, and made a record run for the rocks. He made it, dry as a bone. It took about two seconds and a half to see the yacht was sinking, and Wallie plunged in and swam ashore just as she settled out of sight. All around were islands with houses on them, but it was late October. The cottagers were gone and we were as completely marooned as if we were in the South Pacific.

"We yelled in turn for help that would not come, watched for lights that we knew would not shine, and then built a fire and settled down. All were in dinner clothes. Wallie was a little wet, Chew Wop, after despositing his salt shaker and biscuits in Nina's lap, entered into a state of coma.

"We got the tents and unfolded the cots, and then faced the situation: Pitched out of civilization, up against first principles, in evening clothes, with a salt shaker and a box of biscuits!

"In the morning I was out first, saye Chew Wop. He had found a frying pan in the camp stuff, had built up a fine fire, and set the pan beside it.

"What me cook bleckfess?" says he, with a lovely smile.

"'Go down to the grocery and get some ham and eggs and a loaf of bread,' says I, 'and tell the butcher to call around at nine for the order.'

"Then I turned my back on him, and when I looked around, he was gone.

"Wallie and Jimmy came out and we sat around the fire. Just then Chew Wop emerged from the brush, wet with dew, and a strange, dazed look in his eyes.

"'Glosly man, bluchah man aint not,' says he, trying to pull a smile.

"'It's this way, Chew Wop,' says Wallie. 'There is nothing for breakfast, nothing for lunch, nothing for dinner, and the same tomorrow and forevermore, amen.'

"'All light,' says Chew Wop, happy once more, as he picked up the pan, washed it in the river, and hung it on a tree.

"Just then the bride and groom appeared. Nina was munching crackers; there were about four left in the box.

"'Hello, boys!' says she. 'Have a biscuit, papa dear.'

"Papa dear takes one, and as sad as at a child's funeral, breaks it into two pieces, gives one-half to Chew Wop, and eats what is left. Nina's eyes got as big as the front end of an opera glass. Her jaw dropped and her mouth came down at the corners.

"'My gosh, Tommy, I never was hep for a minute. I've et 'em all. Honest, I didn't think.' Her relapse was total.

"The three Harvard men looked at it up all of a sudden, put both hands on his stomach and says, in a way to tear your heart:

"'Mliser Tom, me so glosh blame hunglee.'

"All that day Fido was chasing over the island trying to dig up something to eat for himself, and I caught myself watching him wherever he went, and beginning to worry about his making himself thin. He was so plump and fat, and I, too, was so 'glosh blame honglee.'

"We built fires to send up signal smoke columns like the Indians; we set notes afloat on rafts and saw them go down stream; we did everything we could think of, even to more fishing, but just before dark we ate the last seeds and slippery elm bark we could find, and then turned in.

"Somewhere in the night an owl hooted in the trees, and Wallie and I got out and tried to knock him out with stones, at which the owl flew heavily away toward the next island, and we had set Fido barking so that Nina put him out of the tent. It was very chilly, so we took him in with us.

ONE HAND HE HELD OUT TO FIDO, COAXINGLY; THE OTHER BORE A SHARP POINTED STONE

"Tom,' says Wallie, as Fido jumped up to crawl in with him, 'I want you to take this dog away from me.'

"'I don't want him, Wallie.'

"'He's your grandbaby.'

"'Why remind him of his misfortune?'

"'Well, I won't have him near me.'

"'Why not? He's a nice, clean dog, just as loving and snuggly as a baby. Why not, Wallie?'

"'Tom! Don't you realize what he is?'

"Then I sat up.

"'Yes I do, Wallie. That's why I don't want him.'

"'Put him in with Chew Wop.'

"'Never, Wallie.'

"'Why not?'

"'Because — there — would — be — nothing—left in—the morning.'

"After a few seconds Wallie says:

"'Oh!'

"Then he thought a little while and remarked:

"'Guess I'll keep him in here with me, Tom. He might be hard to catch if he got loose.'

"In the morning early we were awake long before it was time to get up, and I looked over and saw Fido snuggled up at Wallie's neck, playfully nibbling at Wallie's ear, and Wallie watching him out of the corner of his eye in a way that made me feel funny all over.

"'Fido, Fido! Mamma want you, darlin',' calls Nina outside, and Wallie grabs Fido as he starts to jump down. Fido wriggles, whines, and tries to bite. He thought maybe it meant breakfast. Jimmy was watching the performance, a look of horror on his face, a plain as a sign of fresh paint.

"'Let him go, quick,' says I to Wallie, and Fido scooted out.

"'Here's my dumplin, bess his ittle heart; kiss him good morning, papa.'

"Wallie turned over and groaned. Jimmy got up and sat on the edge of his cot, his gray hair on end, one side of his mustache brushed up, the other down, and the look of a seven time pallbearer in his eyes.

"'Gentlemen, I understand I may be starving, but I shall neither participate in nor interfere with your reversion to barbarism. I will have none of this—this—this—food.'

"'Not even a tender little, well browned, well salted second joint?' says I.

"TOMMY"

Nina, he looked at me and said, softly:

"'He is plump, isn't he?'

"When the pup was asleep in Nina's lap I beckoned Wallie aside.

"'Wallie, we have got to get Stotesbury to look at this thing in the right light,' I said.

"'Yes—before it is too late,' he agreed.

"I beckoned to the bridegroom and we strolled off behind the tent, where we caught poor Jimmy chewing on some old sumach burrs.

"'What's up, boys?' says the bridegroom, brushing the morning dew off his evening dress.

"'A proposition to arrange something to go down.'

"'Naturally—naturally.'

"'Yes, very naturally, even primitively. Let us look at this matter logically. Here we are starving—a woman, four white men, a Mongolian and—a dog.'

"Fido's papa by marriage stared hard, then staggered a little, and began to smile joyously.

"'Well, you have my consent, gentlemen,' said he. 'I might have known he would be good for something some time. Just go and tell her what's what.'

"'All right, Jimmy, you are the most tactful—'

"'Gentlemen, you do me great honor. Something tells me I might, in the madness of nature's cravings, even sink so low as to—as to—as I might say subsist on—on a little creature whose playful, affectionate capers have beguiled our affections.'

"And Jimmy began to cry right there. I saw I must be wrong.

"'No, Stotesbury, you must do it. You are her husband.'

"'I—I—go ask for Fido—'

"'Sure, you're her husband.'

"'Well, you've been her father a dashed sight longer.'

"'S-sh-sh—not so loud,' says Jimmy, 'why don't you toss a coin?'

"'Or draw lots among four of us,' says I.

"We did it. I broke four sticks, the drawer of the short one to get Fido.

"Jimmy drew the short stick.

"We hid behind the trees while he backed, filled and drew on just like a stage widower about to propose. At last he stood quivering in front of Nina.

"'Mrs.—Mrs. Williams, may I request Fido of you—'

"'Sure, take him, Billy, and don't missis me any more. Take him, I'm going to lie down; do anything you want to with him, but be sure to bring him back. Goodby, darling, kiss mamma.'

"The little devil knew what was up. No sooner did Nina have her back turned than he began to claw and bite, till Jimmy had to drop him, and he made one break for the brush.

"'Head him off, Wallie! Get after him, Stotesbury!' I yelled.

"We were off in pursuit. He must not get back to Nina's tent. Chew Wop heard and saw, built up the fire, and got down the frying pan.

"Do you know that little imp was like a flea? He felt the survival of the fittest strong within him. He ducked, he dodged, he scooted, and evening dress was scattered the length and breadth of the island, but, weak as we were, we kept him away from camp. At last he shot into a low pine thicket. We surrounded it and crawled in on our hands and knees until the four of us came face to face in the middle. No Fido!

"Sadly we turned toward camp.

"'He knows better than to come back until— '

"'Until—Chew Wop—'

"'Yes, until there are bones to pick,' says I.

"'Oh, mercy,' says Jimmy.

"'Boys!' gasped Wallie. 'Smell!'

"Down the breeze, in the tang of the pinewood smoke from the fire, was borne an exquisite odor, and some one of us was the first to start to run.

"Chew Wop was dancing a solemn Confucian measure as he tended the frying pan, and singing a chilling minor song as he smiled.

"'Stotesbury, sweetheart! Father, dear—why—look at you—what on earth were you chasing out there?' says the bereaved but unknowing mother.

"Jimmy headed back to the woods. The bridegroom was looking around for a hole in the ground.

"'Oh, we—we caught a big rabbit for Chew Wop a while ago, Nina,' says I.

"'Yes, if it hadn't been for Fido we wouldn't have found him,' volunteered Wallie.

"'Oh, where is mamma's peshous little hunter dawgie?'

"I couldn't speak and I heard son in law's teeth chattering.

"'Hlim chasin' more rabbits—mebbe,' says Chew Wop, grinning and poking the fire.

"'Here, grandpapa Tommie,' exclaimed Nina, 'don't you dare throw that bone away. Don't you see I've saved all the others fo' my precious child. Why don't you lazy fellows go get him now that your own stomachs are full?'

"I didn't look at anything but the ground, as I passed over the bone and got up. Jimmy went one way, Wallie another, and the bridegroom couldn't get away quick enough.

"In about 10 minutes I heard Nina giving her little whistle for Stotesbury, and I looked out to see him hiding behind a tree and motioning to me to go in and break the news. I motioned back to him to do it.

"'Stotesburyee—ee, Nina'll be mad if you don't come here this very minute.'

"Then Papa Stotesbury began to whistle for Fido. It is the first and last time I ever heard a man whistle a lie.

"From somewhere behind the pine trees came the cling—cling—cling of a motor boat. I heard Wallie's wild halloo and he came running through the brush yelling:

"'There's a duck hunter's boat coming straight for the island!'

"Sure enough. There it was, a good, big river launch and two men in hunting coats.

"On the bow was a dripping wet little black water spaniel, barking furiously. Around his neck was a diamond studded collar we knew well.

"'Is this your dog?' cried one of the men. 'We picked him up swimming away from this island.'

"I turned on Chew Wop in a blinded, smothering sort of way. He had a dark, raw skin he was about to spread on a sheet of bark.

"'You—you—say—what is that?'

"'Him fline mink skiin; me gettee club and killee toudlay.'

"And he pointed to the heaps of rocks at the water's edge."

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