

WELLINGTON ROUNABOUT

By "Thid"

Country Dance

HAVE you ever been to a dance in the country? They hold them in the Coronation Hall, usually; and, it seems, when George (or was it Edward?) was crowned, it was customary to select any odd corner of any odd paddock and build thereon. So that now, to the stranger—and I am speaking to all strangers—it is the very devil to find the place.

In my memory it has always rained for the country dance. No disadvantage, for the mud and wet obscurity of the car's groping on the way pleasantly set off the warmth, the rosy wenches and sly lads, and the pricelessly artificial simplicity of the atmosphere inside.

We strangers have to sit somewhat apart; even more isolated than the young men are isolated, between dances, from the young women.

It is only the boldest of us who can go straight to a partner as the M.C. rises to announce the next, put the question, and slide across the dusting of ballroom powder on the floor of wide-hewn knotty timber.

The timid soon give up even the preliminary tentative glance and chain-smoke for refuge with furious nonchalance.

Rain makes the escape more of an exciting adventure. If restraint has not utterly infuriated us into utter and utterly lonely subjection

to the discomfort of a hard and solitary seat in the shadow, we sooner or later find some other thirsty soul to share with us the beer brought in the car for just this purpose: a bribe to buy friendship, cheap and safely fugitive.

Agonising Journey

To reach it means first the agony of a promenade across the floor. Arms swing unnaturally. Our gait staggers into a swagger. Overcome by embarrassment, we pocket the offending hands and tip-toe the last painful five yards.

But in the porch we are men again, bold, and boldly shouldering our way among men, purpose in our bearing.

The hood leaks by now. The fifty-yard dash has soaked pants, sox, and pumps. But the beer is good—all the better for leaving the opener behind in favour of a tobacco tin: and when we are back in the hall there is not a damsel who will not look for our coming—and for our going home, especi-

ally if she came on her bicycle and there is rope to tie it to the spare wheel of our car.

Then the good-night, when no one knows quite what to do. And finally, the sinking into the cool kindness of sheets, that would soon smooth away trouble—if the rough blankets were not a go-to-sleep reminder that the ways of town folk in the country, any way, are the wrong ways.

Everything Changes

I hope it will always be so, for the faults seem to be virtues now that I am away from them—although they would infuriate me again if I returned.

But I wonder. Is anything the same? Are country folk still country folks? Or are they tipped a little out of perspective, too?

Is this really October? Will summer follow spring, in New Zealand? Will they remember in Poland to mark the change from autumn into winter?

Or does the best we've known change always, break, grow old?

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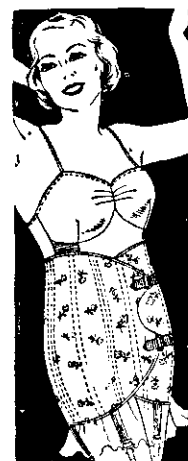
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