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## SHE'S A GREAT GIRL, VERA

(Written for "The Listener"  
by L.W.T.)

I REALLY wanted to go to the football, but, as Vera pointed out, we had gone to the football last Saturday. So I said all right, I'd go to the Society of Arts Exhibition, but only if she got me home by 4 o'clock in time to hear the football from Eden Park. Not that I really cared about hearing the football, but I feel there should be a time limit to these educational bouts. On the way down to the Art Gallery I tried to sidetrack Vera into a matinee, but she said that only pre-adults went to that kind of picture on a Saturday afternoon, and anyway, what about the football?

So I followed her meekly enough. The place was almost deserted—it was fairly early in the afternoon—and about the only other people there, apart from the man selling catalogues, were a couple of prize gallery exhibits. The man had a sparse beard, falling into two halves down the middle, and wore a wine-red corded velvet coat and trousers to match. The woman sported navy slacks with a white pin stripe, rimless pince-nez and a thick plait of golden hair coronet-wise round her head.

"Good God!" I said.

"What's the matter?" asked Vera, irritably.

"Those people," I said. "I told you that only queer types go to art exhibitions, and especially on a Saturday afternoon, when there are so many better things to do."

"Well, if it's any consolation to you," said Vera acidly, "no one could possibly mistake you for a queer type—you look too disgustingly normal."

I patted my well-worn tweeds and hand-knitted tie affectionately.

"Would you," I asked her, "have gone out with me if I had been wearing a false beard and one of those hats flat on top?"

"Certainly not, but you're not an artist. If you're an artist you're allowed to look like an artist. You're a football fan and you look exactly like one."

"Thanks," I said. It isn't often I end on top in an argument with Vera.

\* \* \*

WE began at Number One. If I've got to see an art exhibition, I like to do it properly. And actually this one wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it might be. There were a lot of water colours to begin with, things like Lake Wanaka on a Dull Day, and By George, they looked exactly like Lake Wanaka on a dull day. Not that I've seen it that way. The day I was there it was beautifully fine. But I mean none of these things like a chest-of-drawers with the things spilling out, three skeletons, and a broken-down alarm clock, and when you look at the catalogue, you find it's called "The Soul's Awakening." And there was one called "High Tide at the Waikato Heads." I liked it. I come from near there, and I ought to know.



"... Only queer types go to art exhibitions"

I called to Vera. "Look," I said. "High tide at the Waikato Heads. It couldn't be anything else. It's just as if I were standing there myself."

"Oh, Morris," said Vera. "Don't be so damning!" And giggled. There are times when I don't understand Vera.

We were up to about 40 (Evening, Hick's Bay) when I noticed that the young man in corduroy, who had been at about 50 when we started at one, and who should therefore by rights have been somewhere near 100, had moved back, and was standing directly behind us. Vera was muttering something about Filthy Brushwork and Why Didn't He Take His Camera Instead, thought I didn't see quite why, though, of course, I don't know anything about Art. Anyway, I happened to catch a glimpse of the man's face. It was a bright poster-pink, and his lips were moving. I glanced at my catalogue. A dreadful suspicion seized me.

"Quick," I said to Vera, and clutched her by the arm. "We simply must see this 'Pensioner with the Purple Glove.'" I whisked her across the room.

"Why, in Heaven's name?" gasped Vera, somewhat breathless. "You were the one who wanted to do everything scientifically."

"Don't you see," I explained, with careful patience. "He must be Charles Stamford. And you were being disgustingly rude about his pictures."

"Well, they deserved it," pronounced Vera, no whit taken aback. She's a great girl, Vera. In her position I'd have been no end embarrassed. "Well, I suppose I can say what I like here. Now that—she pointed to an innocent opus entitled "Bird Songs at Eventide"—"is a daub. Nothing but a daub."

I cast a hurried glance over my shoulder. The Man in Red was the width of the room away, discussing something with his wife. Or was it his wife? Anyway, they both seemed to be casting meaning glances in our direction. Fortunately, the gallery was filling up.

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WE got past the 200's without mishap. Then Vera fetched up in front of a still life with apples and a pitcher of water.

"I like that," she said. "It has a sort of rhythm."

"Nonsense," I said. "Nobody could have rhythm and own a tablecloth like that. It's inconsistent."

There was a worried cough from behind me. I half-turned. It was the Man in Red, looking pinker than ever. No one should wear red in the circumstances. Even I, inartistic as I am, know that.

I jerked Vera on 50 places. This time it was the Flower Designs.

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