

(continued from previous page)

"Then he can't be Charles Stamford," said Vera. "That wasn't a Charles Stamford. He hasn't any oils in the show."

I flipped back the pages of the catalogue.

"Then he must have been Eric Coates-Forbes. There was an Eric Coates-Forbes right next to that Evening at Hick's Bay. And there's another right next to that still life."

"Look for the initials on his suitcase," suggested Vera.

I glanced furtively round the room. Once again he had retired to a corner with his companion and was casting meaningful glances in our direction. There wasn't a suitcase in sight.

"Well," said Vera, "we should be safe enough here. Nothing but Olive Bowes-Digbys and Geraldine Gerthwins and Alison Whittiers for miles around. He can't very well be any of those."

"Why not?" I asked. "Look at George Eliot."

"Where?" said Vera.

Beautiful, but dumb. Even Vera, great girl though she is.

\* \* \*

THEN I had a sudden inspiration.

Yes, Vera was beautiful. I hadn't really given the matter much thought before, not being a husband or a fiancé but only a cousin. But even from the cousinly viewpoint she looked attractive. She was wearing a sort of cross between a frock and a costume in a middling shade of blue, and one of those small hats with a veil. Provocative, they call them in the fashion journals. It was obvious that this man in red had been trying to strike up an acquaintance. And him with a wife of his own, or was she a wife? Anyway, you never can tell with these artistic blokes.

"Vera," I said, firmly, "we're going home."

"Nonsense, Morris," said Vera, and moved on to the next group of paintings.

And then I understood.

"Vera," I gasped; "your skirt!"

Vera's back should have presented an expanse of unbroken blue. But her skirt had somehow been looped in to the waistband so that a considerable area of pink slip was revealed. Vera felt gingerly. For the first time I saw her appear a shade discomfited. She gave a jerk. Nothing happened.

"Hell!" she said. "It must be hooked somewhere. Quick, into this little bay."

She jerked me round the corner. There were footsteps behind us. I tried to look undisturbed.

It was the Man in Red, his face pinker than ever, his Adam's Apple working prominently.

"I beg your pardon, Madam. Your skirt."

Vera stood, back to the wall. She gazed with wide-eyed sweetness upon him.

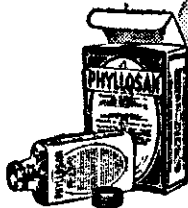
"Thank you so much," she said, "but I always wear it this way. It's more comfortable. You see, it's rather tight."

She's a great girl, Vera.

The prize exhibits were still casting meaningful glances at us as we passed them on the way out. I overheard the man in red muttering to his wife (or was it his wife?) something about the queer types one meets at art exhibitions.

We got home just in time for the football.

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