

Pinkelephant

THE Chaffinches were a peculiar family, but they became more peculiar after the witch switched the vitamins. . . . This short story, by BRIAN SNOWDON, is rather a departure from our usual type, but we think you will enjoy it.

THIS is the story of Sid Chaffinch, who could do nothing with women. Don't get the wrong idea from that! Sid was a thoroughly nice fellow. He lived in an army hut at the back of his married sister's place. His grandfather, who was an alcoholic, and saw things, lived with him. Sid didn't mind his grandfather's being an alcoholic, because he believed that age, as well as youth, should have its fling. He was, as stated before, a nice chap.

But he couldn't do anything with women.

His sister, Nancy, was a nice girl; quite happily married. She spent some of her spare time looking after her brother and her grandfather, under the current female supposition that men can't look after themselves. She made their beds sometimes, and would often come down the yard on her bicycle—the path was long and very muddy in winter—ringing her bicycle bell, because there wasn't a bell on the whare, and bringing them some dainty recently achieved by her own hands.

She was desperately interested in Sid's love life, and his inability to get a girl, and her desire to help Sid, and act as mother-confessor to him, was both sisterly and female. Altogether, they constituted—well, perhaps, a rather *unusual* family. But the grandfather was a charming old man! Nancy was a fine type of girl! Sid was a nice chap!

But still, he couldn't do anything with women.

ONE day Sid's grandfather, having quaffed a quart of formalin, was lying on the sofa studying natural history—the sort of natural history that floats before the eyes of everybody who makes a habit of quaffing quarts of formalin. Sid was working on a crossword puzzle, but his mind wasn't on it. He was thinking of girls, and one in particular.

Came the ringing of a bicycle bell. Sid's grandfather stirred uneasily, but kept his gaze steadily fixed on the subject of his study. "You go, Sid," he muttered. "I'm busy."

"What is it this time?" asked Sid, going to the door.

"Don't interrupt! You'll make it disappear."

Nancy was at the door, simmering with news. She stopped short in dismay, seeing her grandfather prone on the sofa.

"What's wrong with grandfather?"

"Shush," whispered Sid. "Don't disturb him."

Nancy obediently lowered her voice. "What's he doing?"

"Studying natural history."

"Oh!" said Nancy. The ease with which she accepted the explanation suggested past experience. However, in case of doubt, Sid volunteered elucidation.

"You know—pinkelephants."

"How's his sketch-book going?" asked Nancy. "I haven't seen it lately."

Sid fetched his grandfather's book of water-colours. "He's added a couple since you saw them last. Look."

"He's clever, isn't he," said Nancy admiringly. "Who'd have thought he'd be so good at water-colours!" Sid flipped a page and showed her another. "Pretty, aren't they?" said Nancy. "But Sid—they're not a bit like elephants."

"Don't be ignorant," protested Sid. "Pinkelephant is a generic term. Anything you see when you've got the D.T.'s is a pinkelephant."

"Grandfather looks thoroughly rapt. The one he's gazing at now should be a beauty when he starts to draw it. . . . Well, what I came to see you about—I nearly forgot—I've just heard of the very thing for you."

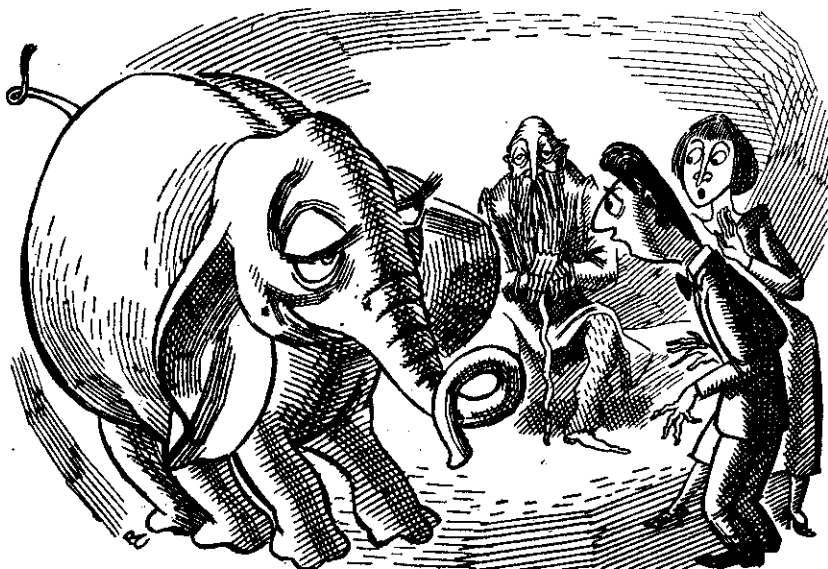
"For me?" said Sid. "How come?"

"Well, you know, Sid, you can't do anything with women. Mrs. Smith tells me she knows a witch who can give you a potion that will make you irresistible to women."

Sid looked deprecatingly at his toes. "I don't go much for these old-fashioned witches, Nance, with their mixtures of dandelion roots and chopped toe-nails."

"But this is a *modern* witch, Sid," insisted Nancy. "She says it's all in the vitamins."

"Vitamins, huh?" Sid was obviously impressed. "Do you think it would be worth while going to see her?"



"The pinkelephant had received the full impact"



"To tell you the truth, she's coming here. I rang her just a few minutes ago. She said she'd be right along."

RIGHT on cue came the mournful cadence of a vacuum cleaner. The door opened and shut almost simultaneously, but in the interim moment Mrs. Cauldron inserted herself squarely in the middle of the room and switched off the vacuum cleaner. Her steed pawed the carpet and waited to a halt. "Oh, Mrs. Cauldron," exclaimed Nancy. "I didn't expect you so early!"

"Bless your soul, child," snorted Mrs. Cauldron. "I haven't been all this time on my way! I was held up. A young devil made a pass at me!"

Sid looked puzzled. "Technical terms," whispered Nancy in explanation. Comprehension came into Sid's face.

"Did you come in on—that?" asked Sid.

"What, the vacuum cleaner?" said Mrs. Cauldron. "Of course. What do you think?"

"I thought witches rode broomsticks."

"We prefer to be called 'Adepts,'" said Mrs. Cauldron, somewhat stiffly. "And as for broomsticks, we Adepts haven't ridden broomsticks since the roaring twenties."

"Oh!" said Sid.

"Now, you wanted a potion, didn't you? Speak up quickly. I haven't time to waste!"

Sid felt a fool. "Well, it's like this—there's a girl I know. . . ."

"All right, all right," Mrs. Cauldron interrupted him. "You want a potion to make you irresistible to women, just like all the rest of you men. Well now, let's see what we've got in the little black bag. . . . Do you eat plenty of rose hips?"

"Never touch 'em," said Sid briefly.

Mrs. Cauldron crowded. "Ah! Bull's eye first shot! A marked deficiency of vitamin V. And it just so happens that I've got an ample supply of vitamin V right here. . . . Take it now!"

Sid didn't like to be rushed. He wanted time to think it over. "Er," he said by way of protest. Mrs. Cauldron stood no nonsense.