

"Immediately, please! I want to be sure you take it."

Sid swallowed and grimaced. Mrs. Cauldron mounted her vacuum cleaner. "What do I owe you?" asked Sid, hastily, not wishing to be under obligation to an Adept.

"Not a thing," called Mrs. Cauldron, waving her hand back to him airily. "It's all for the Cause!" The vacuum cleaner whined into life: the door opened and shut—click, clock, just like that; and Mrs. Cauldron was gone.

Without moving his eyes, and barely his lips, Sid's grandfather grumbled: "Thank goodness she's gone! . . . I never could concentrate above the noise of a vacuum cleaner."

"Do you feel any different, Sid?" asked Nancy.

"Don't feel anything," said Sid. "Still, I can't grumble. It doesn't cost me anything."

"You will feel different, Sid. I'm sure you'll feel different. You wait." The way she said it, Sid felt there was almost a threat in it.

\* \* \*

THE particular young lady who was responsible for Sid's inability to concentrate on crossword puzzles was Miss Kay Nine. She was very fond of dogs. That, indeed, had something to do with her repeated rejection of Sid's suit, because Sid, as well as being unable to do anything with women, was particularly hopeless with dogs. Nancy thought it would be a good idea for Sid to go along and propose to Kay for the umpteenth time, just to see if the potion was as good as Mrs. Cauldron thought it was. Sid thought it would be a good idea too.

When Sid reached Miss Nine's home, he was met by several dogs, large and small, but mostly large. They barked at him. Kay, following her livestock, barked at him. "You again," barked Miss Nine. "What do you want?"

"Same thing," said Sid, holding his breath as a Newfoundland sniffed his ankles with dreadful menace.

"The answer's no!"

"Can you look me in the eye and say that?" asked Sid hopefully.

"Don't be absurd! Of course I can. . . . Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, look me in the eye," Sid invited.

"You really are a terrible nuisance," sighed Kay. "Aren't you? All right. I'm looking you straight in the eye. What about it?"

"Do you feel anything?" demanded Sid, mysteriously.

"Just the usual sickish feeling."

"Fiff! It doesn't work! And I can't even ask for my money back."

"Why can't you?"

"Because I didn't pay anything for it."

"Pay anything for what? Really, you talk the most awful rubbish, Sid."

At that moment the Newfoundland rose up on its back legs and tried to lick Sid's face. Sid spluttered. It was like being stroked across the face with half a yard of wet pink flannel. "Lie down, you brute," shouted Sid.

"Don't be so rude to my dog!" cried Kay, angrily.

"I wasn't rude to him!"

"You were! You treated him like . . . like a dog!"

"I don't like dogs!" shouted Sid.

"If it comes to that, they don't care for you," retorted Kay. "And you ask me to marry a man who isn't a dog-lover! . . . Pinto! Come here!" . . .

Pinto, who usually obeyed his mistress's slightest whim with worshipful adoration, showed more interest in lavishing his unwelcome affection on Sid. Kay refused to recognise the sudden pang she felt as jealousy. It was, she reasoned, the pity we feel when we see unreciprocated love lavished on an unworthy object. "Pinto," she cried, more sharply, feeling sorry for the poor dumb beast, "Come here!"

Pinto, deaf to all save the voice of love, disobeyed his mistress for the first time. He danced cheek-to-cheek with Sid, gazing adoringly into his eyes.

"He likes you!" breathed Kay, in consternation.

"I'm going!" shouted Sid, disengaging himself from Pinto's embrace.

"They all like you!" said Kay, still in wonderment. "King Kong! Ogre! Acre! Come here!"

"Call them off!"

"They won't come! They like you! Go away, you thief, you stealer-away of a dog's affection!"

"I'm going as fast as I can." And Sid, breaking loose again, made for the gate.

"Come back to me," cried Kay. Sid turned, unable to believe his ears. "No, not you, you fool! King Kong, Corn cob! Come back! Don't follow him! He doesn't love you like I do!"

Sid turned and went. And so did the dogs.

(continued on next page)

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