

Hosiery News

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AUNT MABEL—

"AFTER all," said my wife, "she's your aunt."

"I have never attempted to deny it," I said coldly.

"And I do think you ought to spend one evening at home entertaining her. You've scarcely seen anything of her. Monday lodge, Tuesday R.S.A., Wednesday overtime, Thursday brewing at the Blenkinsopp's. And I promised Mrs. Anderson I'd be up one night this week to teach her to tat because she wants to make handkerchiefs for everybody for Christmas. And you know I can't go to-morrow night because the Wilsons are coming, and she doesn't hold with sewing on Sundays."

"O.K." I said magnanimously, realising that magnanimity was the only policy. "I'll look after Aunt M. And I can't see why you want to make such a fuss about it. I shan't mind an evening at home to finish that library book."

"She'll talk," said my wife.

"Nonsense," I said. "You don't know how to handle her. And if she was up, till 11 last night telling you about Second-Cousin Henry and the missing bank balance she'll be quite ready to toddle off to bed at nine. After all, she's seventy-six."

"Born in 1872 and still going strong," said my wife, and stomped into the bedroom to put on her hat.

* * *

NO one could deny, I thought, as Aunt Mabel and I settled ourselves in the lounge, that my Aunt Mabel was a fine woman. There she sat, bifocals a trifle askew, reading her bit of the paper lovingly word by word. Even the small print of the Situations Vacant could not stomp her. When she had finished her bit she would ask for my bit. That would take us almost till nine o'clock, at which time my Aunt Mabel always stood by for the weather report and the local and overseas news.

At 9.30 I would get her a nice cup of tea, fill her hot water bottle and see her to her room. After which my library book and I would be free to stage our long-deferred reunion.

At 9.30 I switched off the radio.

"Don't you want to hear the band music?" asked my Aunt Mabel wistfully.

"Certainly not," I said firmly. "I was just thinking it was about time to put the pot on for a cup of tea."

"Nonsense," said Aunt Mabel. "It's far too early for supper. When I was your age I never thought of going to bed before 11.30. Father (your Grandfather) always considered going to bed early a sign of sloth. From 10 to 11.30



— or You Can't Put a Good Woman Down

we always took turns reading aloud while the others sewed. Aunt Emily (your father's step-mother by my Uncle John's second marriage) was a great reader. I remember she won a copy of *The Daisy Chain* for being the best reciter at the Sunday School concert. And do you remember when you were six she taught you to say that little piece, 'The Letter'? 'T's a letter, Mummy darling' and it ends up 'Papa's letter was with God'."

"No, I don't," I said

"I'm sure you must," said Aunt Mabel. "I can see you standing up there now with a little velvet suit with a lace collar and curls over the top of your head. That was at your Cousin Hester's wedding. You must remember her. She was the one who married a Methodist minister and had three sets of twins. That was later, of course."

"No, I don't," I said suddenly.

"Nonsense," said Aunt Mabel. "You must remember Agnes at any rate. She was the eldest twin, the one who got lost with you at Great-Uncle Horace's Anniversary Picnic. And Grandfather said you'd have to marry her."

"When I was six," I said desperately, "I wore navy serge pants buttoning on to tussore shirts and I recited things like 'Casabianca' and 'Play up, play up and play the game!'"

Aunt Mabel blinked at me.

"How stupid of me," she said, "I keep thinking you're Percy. Your Uncle Percy, that is. He was exactly like you when he was your age. A rather peculiar boy in many ways, but he turned out all right in the end."

"I'm glad to hear it," I said stiffly. My Uncle Percy was not my favourite relative. Even the fact that he had died in comfortable circumstances,

(continued on next page)

Written for "The Listener" by M.B.