

# The Bull

by HELEN SHAW

**S**TAGGERING under the weight of a hamper basket Miss Valentine burst out of the hall of the house on to the verandah, defiantly attempting to look less than her years in flamboyant scarlet, but in blissful ignorance of a black petticoat dipping below the hem.

"There you are father dear," she warbled, and brushed Mr. Valentine's ear with her grey curls as she kissed him.

"I've told you before to be careful of my ear, Lulu, CAREFUL!" the old man snapped back. Cantankerous as usual he sat in the sun in pyjamas and plum coloured velvet coat near the red and blue glass that closed in one end of the verandah. And where was his daughter going with "her cabin trunk" he inquired sarcastically, then, when she said it held currants she had picked for a neighbour he scoffed and groped through his pockets for the brush to groom his venerable dog. "Why don't your friends cultivate their own garden, my girl?" he asked as he explored his dog's black and tan coat for fleas. "Sit up, Skipper, and listen to the human race following-my-leader calling baa, baa, baa, just listen to us, sir," Mr. Valentine mimicked menacingly smacking up clouds of dust from the tartan rug tucked round his knees. "I'll remind you, Lulu, you're standing IN MY SUN, girl, in my S-U-N," he bellowed suddenly.

"Now father, I'll only be gone a minute father, really father," Miss Valentine said gaily, fluttered, hovered



"The bull, glaring at him out of the geraniums with unpredictably mean eyes"

over him, kissed the white plume on his bald head and hurtled across the tennis court in youth's gaudy colours that so accentuated her age.

The Valentines' dog stretched itself, rose, and walked round in a circle, an unforgettable smell wafting up from its body, then it yawned and lay down, servile nose on its master's boot. Through binoculars Joseph Valentine watched his daughter retreating into the shubbery. "There goes a supporter of lost causes, sir," he said down to the dog, and thought of the dining room plastered with Lulu's paintings of waterfalls and pungas. "Pungas! Scatter my ashes over the honest to God tussocks, Skipper, and preserve me from the sly dripping green

bush," he shivered, "though I suppose she enjoys herself, sir," the old man continued, his voice more charitable as the sun warmed his hands.

He sat very still staring at bees crawling in and out of geraniums that lapped the edge of the verandah. He could see them cleaning their thin, active legs. Legs! He hadn't the strength for sky-larking left in HIS legs. "And the whole place to ourselves, sir," Mr. Valentine grunted, but the dog, bothered by flies, scratched its rump half-heartedly, and snored off to sleep again, and soon the old man followed suit, falling rapidly into a light nap of troublesome dreams.

Back again in the Supreme Court he was up defending his great grandfather

Ebenezer Valentine, for an unknown and mysterious crime, with magnificent eloquence until Old Judge Y intimated it was futile proving a dead man's innocence, but would Joseph rid the court of the bees swarming in a corner of the gallery, whereupon Joseph gallantly removed his wig and pitched it overhand into the heart of the swarm which caused one bee to sail down straight into Joseph's eye and sting him so that he couldn't move, speak or breathe. Softly, softly he crumpled up and fell down at Judge Y's feet, paralysed.

"What the devil's the meaning of it, sir?" Mr. Valentine snapped, as he woke with pins and needles and the dog on his knees. "Down, sir," he commanded, and it was then old Joseph saw the bull—enormous, cinnamon brown, dirty cream, hulking brute, all ugly head and shoulders glaring at him out of the geraniums, with mean, unpredictably mean eyes—and less than a couple of yards between himself and the danger.

"Almighty God," the old man swore and laid stiff, mitted fingers on the dog's snout. "It's going to be a case of mind over matter, over matter, do you see Skipper, over matter," he babbled, still keeping his eyes on the bull, and feeling excitedly around for his binoculars, at the same time trying to steady his feet in preparation for the move he had got into his head was essential. Slowly the old barrister rose up out of his bursting leather chair that for years had been disgorging horsehair. "Forgive us our sins and trespasses, and trespasses," he repeated until he had his spindly legs under control, then up he swung the binoculars and hurled them backwards through the coloured glass behind his head. The window broke and the bull bellowed. Its head went down, but then it lumbered round into a wanton retreat crashing over precious shrubs and tearing its way like a tornado through hedges.

Never in all his life had the old man felt so cold. His head was empty, his fingers were ice; he slapped his dog's sides and pulled its ears for warmth and friendship, then set off along the verandah in his queer, high stepping way to see the men who swarmed in from the street with ropes and pitchforks settle their account with the recalcitrant bull, and presently was rewarded with a view of the captured beast being led away meek as a lamb.

Now was the Valentines' garden emptied of danger and filled with the aftermath of alarm as Lulu rushed towards him screaming "Dear father, coming father, speak to me father," and stumbled up the step onto the verandah throwing her hectic freckled and sunburned arms around his scraggy neck. "Father, speak to me," she panted, "father!"

He snapped his violet lips shut in her flaming face and proceeded inside, very shaky, and leaning on her until they reached the high white-ceilinged bottle green bedroom where he undressed and climbed up into the double bed and stretched out under linen sheets and a crackling white counterpane.

"What are you looking at? Don't stare at me," he roared. "Brandy! And a hot bottle! And don't dream, girl," he

(continued on next page)

(Solution to No. 692)

W	R	O	N	G		M	E	R	M	A	I	D	
E	C		R			A	A		M			E	
A	V	E	R	A	G	E		Z	E	B	R	A	
T		A	D	N			E		L			D	
H	A	N	D	I	C	A	P		H	E	E	L	
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R						T	A	P		E			G
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R		G	S										E
T	R	O	U	S	E	R		S	A	G	A	S	

## Clues Across

- A mixture of ink and meths, it seems to me.
- Make a start with a binge.
- This continental title indicates a coy sort of nobleman.
- Gain a portion by being engaging.
- Here in a confused tale.
- Suitable means of ventilation for a famous French art museum.
- The peer without a pound or the beloved without a penny?
- Surname of the man responsible for the children's Encyclopedia.
- They are very hard to balance!
- Kind of gum resin.

## "THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

- "You — snakes with double tongue.  
Thorny hedge-hogs be not seen."  
(Song from "Midsummer Night's Dream").
- Component parts.
- Here you find her following us, although she usually precedes us.
- Sighed poetically.
- Having a greater incline.
- The coloured woman loses her head on the way out.
- "Now — the crimson petal, now the white" (Tennyson).
- Excited activity, not peculiar, however, to Victorian women.

No. 693 (Constructed by R.W.H.)

## Clues down

- Olivine provides a Persian fairy's dowry?
- I've followed the young lady with a letter.
- Lesser white Heron (plural).
- Una is upset in front of the sea. Is this the natural result?
- Ocean dandies?
- Mohammedan title.
- Took notice of.
- Reg and Ava make havoc.
- Mother has an afterthought, and the result is a painful complaint.
- He is full of self-conceit and selfishness.

