

BILL THE BLOODHOUND

by P.G. Wodehouse

There's a divinity that shapes our ends. Consider the case of Henry Pifield Rice, detective.

I must explain Henry early, to avoid disappointment. If I simply said he was a detective, and let it go at that, I should be obtaining the reader's interest under false pretences. He was really only a sort of detective, a species of sleuth. At Stafford's International Investigation Bureau, in the Strand, where he was employed, they did not require him to solve mysteries which had baffled the police. He had never measured a footprint in his life, and what he did not know about bloodstains would have filled a library. The sort of job they gave Henry was to stand outside a restaurant in the rain, and note what time someone inside left it. In short, it is not 'Pifield Rice, Investigator. No. 1.--The Adventure of the Maharajah's Ruby' that I submit to your notice, but the unsensational doings of a quite commonplace young man, variously known to his comrades at the Bureau as 'Fathead', 'That blighter what's-his-name', and 'Here, you!'

Henry lived in a boarding-house in Guildford Street. One day a new girl came to the boarding-house, and sat next to Henry at meals. Her name was Alice Weston. She was small and quiet, and rather pretty. They got on splendidly. Their conversation, at first confined to the weather and the moving-pictures, rapidly became more intimate. Henry was surprised to find that she was on the stage, in the chorus. Previous chorus-girls at the boarding-house had been of a more pronounced type--good girls, but noisy, and apt to wear beauty-spots. Alice Weston was different.

'I'm rehearsing at present,' she said. 'I'm going out on tour next month in "The Girl From Brighton". What do you do, Mr Rice?'

Henry paused for a moment before replying. He knew how sensational he was going to be.

'I'm a detective.'

Usually, when he told girls his profession, squeaks of amazed admiration greeted him. Now he was chagrined to perceive in the brown eyes that met his distinct disapproval.

'What's the matter?' he said, a little anxiously, for even at this early stage in their acquaintance he was conscious of a strong desire to win her approval. 'Don't you like detectives?'

'I don't know. Somehow I shouldn't have thought you were one.'

This restored Henry's equanimity somewhat. Naturally a detective does not want to look like a detective and give the whole thing away right at the start.

'I think--you won't be offended?'

'Go on.'

'I've always looked on it as rather a sneaky job.'

'Sneaky!' moaned Henry.

'Well, creeping about, spying on people.'

Henry was appalled. She had defined his own trade to a nicety. There might be detectives whose work was above this reproach, but he was a confirmed creeper, and he knew it. It wasn't his fault. The boss told him to creep, and he crept. If he declined to creep, he would be sacked instanter. It was hard, and yet he felt the sting of her words, and in his bosom the first seeds of dissatisfaction with his occupation took root.

You might have thought that this frankness on the girl's part would have kept Henry from falling in love with her. Certainly the dignified thing would have been to change his seat at table, and take his meals next to someone who appreciated the romance of detective work a little more. But no, he remained where he was, and presently Cupid, who never shoots with a surer aim than through the steam of boarding-house hash, sniped him where he sat.

He proposed to Alice Weston. She refused him.

'It's not because I'm not fond of you. I think you're the nicest man I ever met.' A good deal of assiduous attention had enabled Henry to win this place in her affections. He had worked patiently and well before actually putting his fortune to the test. 'I'd marry you tomorrow if things were different. But I'm on the stage, and I mean to stick there. Most of the girls want to get off it, but not me. And one thing I'll never do is marry someone who isn't in the profession. My sister Genevieve did, and look what happened to her. She married a commercial traveller, and take it from me he travelled. She never saw him for more than five minutes in the year, except when he was selling gent's hosiery in the same town where she was doing her refined speciality, and then he'd just wave his hand and whiz by, and start travelling again. My husband has got to be close by, where I can see him. I'm sorry, Henry, but I know I'm right.'

It seemed final, but Henry did not wholly despair. He was a resolute young man. You have to be to wait outside restaurants in the rain for any length of time.

He had an inspiration. He sought out a dramatic agent.

'I want to go on the stage, in musical comedy.'

'Let's see you dance.'

'I can't dance.'

'Sing,' said the agent. 'Stop singing,' added the agent, hastily.

'You go away and have a nice cup of hot tea,' said the agent, soothingly, 'and you'll be as right as anything in the morning.'

Henry went away.

A few days later, at the Bureau, his fellow-detective Simmonds hailed him.

'Here, you! The boss wants you. Buck up!'

Mr Stafford was talking into the telephone. He replaced the receiver as Henry entered.

'Oh, Rice, here's a woman wants her husband shadowed while he's on the road. He's an actor. I'm sending you. Go to this address, and get photographs and all particulars. You'll have to catch the eleven o'clock train on Friday.'

'Yes, sir.'

'He's in "The Girl From Brighton" company. They open at Bristol.'

It sometimes seemed to Henry as if Fate did it on purpose. If the commission had had to do with any other company, it would have been well enough, for, professionally speaking, it was the most important with which he had ever been entrusted. If he had never met Alice Weston, and heard her views upon detective work, he would have been pleased and flattered. Things being as they were, it was Henry's considered opinion that Fate had slipped one over on him.

In the first place, what torture to be always near her, unable to reveal himself; to watch her while she disported herself in the company of other men. He would be disguised, and she would not recognize him; but he would recognize her, and his sufferings would be dreadful.

In the second place, to have to do his creeping about and spying practically in her presence--

Still, business was business.

At five minutes to eleven on the morning named he was at the station, a false beard and spectacles shielding his identity from the public eye. If you had asked him he would have said that he was a Scotch business man. As a matter of fact, he looked far more like a motor-car coming through a haystack.

The platform was crowded. Friends of the company had come to see the company off. Henry looked on discreetly from behind a stout porter, whose bulk formed a capital screen. In spite of himself, he was impressed. The stage at close quarters always thrilled him. He recognized celebrities. The fat man in the brown suit was Walter Jelliffe, the comedian and star of the company. He stared keenly at him through the spectacles. Others of the famous were scattered about. He saw Alice. She was talking to a man with a face like a hatchet, and smiling, too, as if she enjoyed it. Behind the matted foliage which he had inflicted on his face, Henry's teeth came together with a snap.

In the weeks that followed, as he dogged 'The Girl From Brighton' company from town to town, it would be difficult to say whether Henry was happy or unhappy. On the one hand, to realize that Alice was so near and yet so inaccessible was a constant source of misery; yet, on the other, he could not but admit that he was having the very dickens of a time, loafing round the country like this.

He was made for this sort of life, he considered. Fate had placed him in a London office, but what he really enjoyed was this unfettered travel. Some gipsy strain in him rendered even the obvious discomforts of theatrical touring agreeable. He liked catching trains; he liked invading strange hotels; above all, he revelled in the artistic pleasure of watching unsuspecting fellow-men as if they were so many ants.

That was really the best part of the whole thing. It was all very well for Alice to talk about creeping and spying, but, if you considered it without bias, there was nothing degrading about it at all. It was an art. It took brains and a genius for disguise to make a man a successful creeper and spyer. You couldn't simply say to yourself, 'I will creep.' If you attempted to do it in your own person, you would be detected instantly. You had to be an adept at masking your personality. You had to be one man at Bristol and another quite different man at Hull--especially if, like Henry, you were of a gregarious disposition, and liked the society of actors.

The stage had always fascinated Henry. To meet even minor members of the profession off the boards gave him a thrill. There was a resting juvenile, of fit-up calibre, at his boarding-house who could always get a shilling out of him simply by talking about how he had jumped in and saved the show at the hamlets which he had visited in the course of his wanderings. And on this 'Girl From Brighton' tour he was in constant touch with men who really amounted to something. Walter Jelliffe had been a celebrity when Henry was going to school; and Sidney Crane, the baritone, and others of the lengthy cast, were all players not unknown in London. Henry courted them assiduously.

It had not been hard to scrape acquaintance with them. The principals of the company always put up at the best hotel, and--his expenses being paid by his employer--so did Henry. It was the easiest thing possible to bridge with a well-timed whisky-and-soda the gulf between non-acquaintance and warm friendship. Walter Jelliffe, in

particular, was peculiarly accessible. Every time Henry accosted him-- as a different individual, of course--and renewed in a fresh disguise the friendship which he had enjoyed at the last town, Walter Jelliffe met him more than half-way.

It was in the sixth week of the tour that the comedian, promoting him from mere casual acquaintanceship, invited him to come up to his room and smoke a cigar.

Henry was pleased and flattered. Jelliffe was a personage, always surrounded by admirers, and the compliment was consequently of a high order.

He lit his cigar. Among his friends at the Green-Room Club it was unanimously held that Walter Jelliffe's cigars brought him within the scope of the law forbidding the carrying of concealed weapons; but Henry would have smoked the gift of such a man if it had been a cabbage-leaf. He puffed away contentedly. He was made up as an old Indian colonel that week, and he complimented his host on the aroma with a fine old-world courtesy.

Walter Jelliffe seemed gratified.

'Quite comfortable?' he asked.

'Quite, I thank you,' said Henry, fondling his silver moustache.

'That's right. And now tell me, old man, which of us is it you're trailing?'

Henry nearly swallowed his cigar.

'What do you mean?'

'Oh, come,' protested Jelliffe; 'there's no need to keep it up with me. I know you're a detective. The question is, Who's the man you're after? That's what we've all been wondering all this time.'

All! They had all been wondering! It was worse than Henry could have imagined. Till now he had pictured his position with regard to 'The Girl From Brighton' company rather as that of some scientist who, seeing but unseen, keeps a watchful eye on the denizens of a drop of water under his microscope. And they had all detected him-- every one of them.

It was a stunning blow. If there was one thing on which Henry prided himself it was the impenetrability of his disguises. He might be slow; he might be on the stupid side; but he could disguise himself. He had a variety of disguises, each designed to befog the public more hopelessly than the last.

Going down the street, you would meet a typical commercial traveller, dapper and alert. Anon, you encountered a heavily bearded Australian. Later, maybe, it was a courteous old retired colonel who stopped you and inquired the way to Trafalgar Square. Still later, a rather flashy individual of the sporting type asked you for a match for his cigar. Would you have suspected for one instant that each of these widely differing personalities was in reality one man?

Certainly you would.

Henry did not know it, but he had achieved in the eyes of the small servant who answered the front-door bell at his boarding-house a well-established reputation as a humorist of the more practical kind. It was his habit to try his disguises on her. He would ring the bell, inquire for the landlady, and when Bella had gone, leap up the stairs to his room. Here he would remove the disguise, resume his normal appearance, and come downstairs again, humming a careless air.

Bella, meanwhile, in the kitchen, would be confiding to her ally the cook that 'Mr Rice had jest come in, lookin' sort o' funny again'.

He sat and gaped at Walter Jelliffe. The comedian regarded him curiously.

'You look at least a hundred years old,' he said. 'What are you made up as? A piece of Gorgonzola?'

Henry glanced hastily at the mirror. Yes, he did look rather old. He must have overdone some of the lines on his forehead. He looked something between a youngish centenarian and a nonagenarian who had seen a good deal of trouble.

'If you knew how you were demoralizing the company,' Jelliffe went on, 'you would drop it. As steady and quiet a lot of boys as ever you met till you came along. Now they do nothing but bet on what disguise you're going to choose for the next town. I don't see why you need to change so often. You were all right as the Scotchman at Bristol. We were all saying how nice you looked. You should have stuck to that. But what do you do at Hull but roll in in a scrubby moustache and a tweed suit, looking rotten. However, all that is beside the point. It's a free country. If you like to spoil your beauty, I suppose there's no law against it. What I want to know is, who's the man? Whose track are you sniffing on, Bill? You'll pardon my calling you Bill. You're known as Bill the Bloodhound in the company. Who's the man?'

'Never mind,' said Henry.

He was aware, as he made it, that it was not a very able retort, but he was feeling too limp for satisfactory repartee. Criticisms in the Bureau, dealing with his alleged solidity of skull, he did not resent. He attributed them to man's natural desire to chaff his fellow-man. But to

be unmasked by the general public in this way was another matter. It struck at the root of all things.

'But I do mind,' objected Jelliffe. 'It's most important. A lot of money hangs on it. We've got a sweepstake on in the company, the holder of the winning name to take the entire receipts. Come on. Who is he?'

Henry rose and made for the door. His feelings were too deep for words. Even a minor detective has his professional pride; and the knowledge that his espionage is being made the basis of sweepstakes by his quarry cuts this to the quick.

'Here, don't go! Where are you going?'

'Back to London,' said Henry, bitterly. 'It's a lot of good my staying here now, isn't it?'

'I should say it was--to me. Don't be in a hurry. You're thinking that, now we know all about you, your utility as a sleuth has waned to some extent. Is that it?'

'Well?'

'Well, why worry? What does it matter to you? You don't get paid by results, do you? Your boss said "Trail along." Well, do it, then. I should hate to lose you. I don't suppose you know it, but you've been the best mascot this tour that I've ever come across. Right from the start we've been playing to enormous business. I'd rather kill a black cat than lose you. Drop the disguises, and stay with us. Come behind all you want, and be sociable.'

A detective is only human. The less of a detective, the more human he is. Henry was not much of a detective, and his human traits were consequently highly developed. From a boy, he had never been able to resist curiosity. If a crowd collected in the street he always added

himself to it, and he would have stopped to gape at a window with 'Watch this window' written on it, if he had been running for his life from wild bulls. He was, and always had been, intensely desirous of some day penetrating behind the scenes of a theatre.

And there was another thing. At last, if he accepted this invitation, he would be able to see and speak to Alice Weston, and interfere with the manoeuvres of the hatchet-faced man, on whom he had brooded with suspicion and jealousy since that first morning at the station. To see Alice! Perhaps, with eloquence, to talk her out of that ridiculous resolve of hers!

'Why, there's something in that,' he said.

'Rather! Well, that's settled. And now, touching that sweep, who is it?'

'I can't tell you that. You see, so far as that goes, I'm just where I was before. I can still watch--whoever it is I'm watching.'

'Dash it, so you can. I didn't think of that,' said Jelliffe, who possessed a sensitive conscience. 'Purely between ourselves, it isn't me, is it?'

Henry eyed him inscrutably. He could look inscrutable at times.

'Ah!' he said, and left quickly, with the feeling that, however poorly he had shown up during the actual interview, his exit had been good. He might have been a failure in the matter of disguise, but nobody could have put more quiet sinister-ness into that 'Ah!' It did much to soothe him and ensure a peaceful night's rest.

On the following night, for the first time in his life, Henry found himself behind the scenes of a theatre, and instantly began to experience all the complex emotions which come to the layman in that situation. That is to say, he felt like a cat which has strayed into a strange hostile back-yard. He was in a new world, inhabited by weird

creatures, who flitted about in an eerie semi-darkness, like brightly coloured animals in a cavern.

'The Girl From Brighton' was one of those exotic productions specially designed for the Tired Business Man. It relied for a large measure of its success on the size and appearance of its chorus, and on their constant change of costume. Henry, as a consequence, was the centre of a kaleidoscopic whirl of feminine loveliness, dressed to represent such varying flora and fauna as rabbits, Parisian students, colleens, Dutch peasants, and daffodils. Musical comedy is the Irish stew of the drama. Anything may be put into it, with the certainty that it will improve the general effect.

He scanned the throng for a sight of Alice. Often as he had seen the piece in the course of its six weeks' wandering in the wilderness he had never succeeded in recognizing her from the front of the house. Quite possibly, he thought, she might be on the stage already, hidden in a rose-tree or some other shrub, ready at the signal to burst forth upon the audience in short skirts; for in 'The Girl From Brighton' almost anything could turn suddenly into a chorus-girl.

Then he saw her, among the daffodils. She was not a particularly convincing daffodil, but she looked good to Henry. With wabbling knees he butted his way through the crowd and seized her hand enthusiastically.

'Why, Henry! Where did you come from?'

'I am glad to see you!'

'How did you get here?'

'I am glad to see you!'

At this point the stage-manager, bellowing from the prompt-box, urged Henry to desist. It is one of the mysteries of behind-the-scenes acoustics that a whisper from any minor member of the company can be heard all over the house, while the stage-manager can burst himself without annoying the audience.

Henry, awed by authority, relapsed into silence. From the unseen stage came the sound of someone singing a song about the moon. June was also mentioned. He recognized the song as one that had always bored him. He disliked the woman who was singing it--a Miss Clarice Weaver, who played the heroine of the piece to Sidney Crane's hero.

In his opinion he was not alone. Miss Weaver was not popular in the company. She had secured the role rather as a testimony of personal esteem from the management than because of any innate ability. She sang badly, acted indifferently, and was uncertain what to do with her hands. All these things might have been forgiven her, but she supplemented them by the crime known in stage circles as 'throwing her weight about'. That is to say, she was hard to please, and, when not pleased, apt to say so in no uncertain voice. To his personal friends Walter Jelliffe had frequently confided that, though not a rich man, he was in the market with a substantial reward for anyone who was man enough to drop a ton of iron on Miss Weaver.

Tonight the song annoyed Henry more than usual, for he knew that very soon the daffodils were due on the stage to clinch the verisimilitude of the scene by dancing the tango with the rabbits. He endeavoured to make the most of the time at his disposal.

'I am glad to see you!' he said.

'Sh-h!' said the stage-manager.

Henry was discouraged. Romeo could not have made love under these conditions. And then, just when he was pulling himself together to begin again, she was torn from him by the exigencies of the play.

He wandered moodily off into the dusty semi-darkness. He avoided the prompt-box, whence he could have caught a glimpse of her, being loath to meet the stage-manager just at present.

Walter Jelliffe came up to him, as he sat on a box and brooded on life.

'A little less of the double forte, old man,' he said. 'Miss Weaver has been kicking about the noise on the side. She wanted you thrown out, but I said you were my mascot, and I would die sooner than part with you. But I should go easy on the chest-notes, I think, all the same.'

Henry nodded moodily. He was depressed. He had the feeling, which comes so easily to the intruder behind the scenes, that nobody loved him.

The piece proceeded. From the front of the house roars of laughter indicated the presence on the stage of Walter Jelliffe, while now and then a lethargic silence suggested that Miss Clarice Weaver was in action. From time to time the empty space about him filled with girls dressed in accordance with the exuberant fancy of the producer of the piece. When this happened, Henry would leap from his seat and endeavour to locate Alice; but always, just as he thought he had done so, the hidden orchestra would burst into melody and the chorus would be called to the front.

It was not till late in the second act that he found an opportunity for further speech.

The plot of 'The Girl From Brighton' had by then reached a critical stage. The situation was as follows: The hero, having been disinherited by his wealthy and titled father for falling in love with the

heroine, a poor shop-girl, has disguised himself (by wearing a different coloured necktie) and has come in pursuit of her to a well-known seaside resort, where, having disguised herself by changing her dress, she is serving as a waitress in the Rotunda, on the Esplanade. The family butler, disguised as a Bath-chair man, has followed the hero, and the wealthy and titled father, disguised as an Italian opera-singer, has come to the place for a reason which, though extremely sound, for the moment eludes the memory. Anyhow, he is there, and they all meet on the Esplanade. Each recognizes the other, but thinks he himself is unrecognized. Exeunt all, hurriedly, leaving the heroine alone on the stage.

It is a crisis in the heroine's life. She meets it bravely. She sings a song entitled 'My Honolulu Queen', with chorus of Japanese girls and Bulgarian officers.

Alice was one of the Japanese girls.

She was standing a little apart from the other Japanese girls. Henry was on her with a bound. Now was his time. He felt keyed up, full of persuasive words. In the interval which had elapsed since their last conversation yeasty emotions had been playing the dickens with his self-control. It is practically impossible for a novice, suddenly introduced behind the scenes of a musical comedy, not to fall in love with somebody; and, if he is already in love, his fervour is increased to a dangerous point.

Henry felt that it was now or never. He forgot that it was perfectly possible--indeed, the reasonable course--to wait till the performance was over, and renew his appeal to Alice to marry him on the way back to her hotel. He had the feeling that he had got just about a quarter of a minute. Quick action! That was Henry's slogan.

He seized her hand.

'Alice!'

'Sh-h!' hissed the stage-manager.

'Listen! I love you. I'm crazy about you. What does it matter whether I'm on the stage or not? I love you.'

'Stop that row there!'

'Won't you marry me?'

She looked at him. It seemed to him that she hesitated.

'Cut it out!' bellowed the stage-manager, and Henry cut it out.

And at this moment, when his whole fate hung in the balance, there came from the stage that devastating high note which is the sign that the solo is over and that the chorus are now about to mobilize. As if drawn by some magnetic power, she suddenly receded from him, and went on to the stage.

A man in Henry's position and frame of mind is not responsible for his actions. He saw nothing but her; he was blind to the fact that important manoeuvres were in progress. All he understood was that she was going from him, and that he must stop her and get this thing settled.

He clutched at her. She was out of range, and getting farther away every instant.

He sprang forward.

The advice that should be given to every young man starting life is--if you happen to be behind the scenes at a theatre, never spring forward. The whole architecture of the place is designed to undo those who so

spring. Hours before, the stage-carpenters have laid their traps, and in the semi-darkness you cannot but fall into them.

The trap into which Henry fell was a raised board. It was not a very highly-raised board. It was not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door, but 'twas enough--it served. Stubbing it squarely with his toe, Henry shot forward, all arms and legs.

It is the instinct of Man, in such a situation, to grab at the nearest support. Henry grabbed at the Hotel Superba, the pride of the Esplanade. It was a thin wooden edifice, and it supported him for perhaps a tenth of a second. Then he staggered with it into the limelight, tripped over a Bulgarian officer who was inflating himself for a deep note, and finally fell in a complicated heap as exactly in the centre of the stage as if he had been a star of years' standing.

It went well; there was no question of that. Previous audiences had always been rather cold towards this particular song, but this one got on its feet and yelled for more. From all over the house came rapturous demands that Henry should go back and do it again.

But Henry was giving no encores. He rose to his feet, a little stunned, and automatically began to dust his clothes. The orchestra, unnerved by this unrehearsed infusion of new business, had stopped playing. Bulgarian officers and Japanese girls alike seemed unequal to the situation. They stood about, waiting for the next thing to break loose. From somewhere far away came faintly the voice of the stage-manager inventing new words, new combinations of words, and new throat noises.

And then Henry, massaging a stricken elbow, was aware of Miss Weaver at his side. Looking up, he caught Miss Weaver's eye.

A familiar stage-direction of melodrama reads, 'Exit cautious through gap in hedge'. It was Henry's first appearance on any stage, but he did it like a veteran.

'My dear fellow,' said Walter Jelliffe. The hour was midnight, and he was sitting in Henry's bedroom at the hotel. Leaving the theatre, Henry had gone to bed almost instinctively. Bed seemed the only haven for him. 'My dear fellow, don't apologize. You have put me under lasting obligations. In the first place, with your unerring sense of the stage, you saw just the spot where the piece needed livening up, and you livened it up. That was good; but far better was it that you also sent our Miss Weaver into violent hysterics, from which she emerged to hand in her notice. She leaves us tomorrow.'

Henry was appalled at the extent of the disaster for which he was responsible.

'What will you do?'

'Do! Why, it's what we have all been praying for--a miracle which should eject Miss Weaver. It needed a genius like you to come to bring it off. Sidney Crane's wife can play the part without rehearsal. She understudied it all last season in London. Crane has just been speaking to her on the phone, and she is catching the night express.'

Henry sat up in bed.

'What!'

'What's the trouble now?'

'Sidney Crane's wife?'

'What about her?'

A bleakness fell upon Henry's soul.

'She was the woman who was employing me. Now I shall be taken off the job and have to go back to London.'

'You don't mean that it was really Crane's wife?'

Jelliffe was regarding him with a kind of awe.

'Laddie,' he said, in a hushed voice, 'you almost scare me. There seems to be no limit to your powers as a mascot. You fill the house every night, you get rid of the Weaver woman, and now you tell me this. I drew Crane in the sweep, and I would have taken twopence for my chance of winning it.'

'I shall get a telegram from my boss tomorrow recalling me.'

'Don't go. Stick with me. Join the troupe.'

Henry stared.

'What do you mean? I can't sing or act.'

Jelliffe's voice thrilled with earnestness.

'My boy, I can go down the Strand and pick up a hundred fellows who can sing and act. I don't want them. I turn them away. But a seventh son of a seventh son like you, a human horseshoe like you, a king of mascots like you--they don't make them nowadays. They've lost the pattern. If you like to come with me I'll give you a contract for any number of years you suggest. I need you in my business.' He rose. 'Think it over, laddie, and let me know tomorrow. Look here upon this picture, and on that. As a sleuth you are poor. You couldn't detect a bass-drum in a telephone-booth. You have no future. You are merely among those present. But as a mascot--my boy, you're the only thing

in sight. You can't help succeeding on the stage. You don't have to know how to act. Look at the dozens of good actors who are out of jobs. Why? Unlucky. No other reason. With your luck and a little experience you'll be a star before you know you've begun. Think it over, and let me know in the morning.'

Before Henry's eyes there rose a sudden vision of Alice: Alice no longer unattainable; Alice walking on his arm down the aisle; Alice mending his socks; Alice with her heavenly hands fingering his salary envelope.

'Don't go,' he said. 'Don't go. I'll let you know now.'

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The scene is the Strand, hard by Bedford Street; the time, that restful hour of the afternoon when they of the gnarled faces and the bright clothing gather together in groups to tell each other how good they are.

Hark! A voice.

'Rather! Courtneidge and the Guv'nor keep on trying to get me, but I turn them down every time. "No," I said to Malone only yesterday, "not for me! I'm going with old Wally Jelliffe, the same as usual, and there isn't the money in the Mint that'll get me away." Malone got all worked up. He--'

It is the voice of Pifield Rice, actor.