

## **Hector.**

by H. C. Bunner

It was such a quiet old home, so comfortably covered with wistaria from basement to chimney-tops, and it stood on the corner of two such quiet, old-fashioned streets on the East side of New York that you would never have imagined that it held six of the most agitated and perturbed women in the great city. But the three Miss Pellicoes, their maid, their waitress and their cook, could not have been more troubled in their feminine minds had they been six exceptionally attractive Sabines with the Roman soldiery in full cry.

For twenty years—ever since the death of old Mr. Pellicoe—these six women had lived in mortal fear of the marauding man, and the Man had come at last. That very evening, at a quarter past eight o'clock, a creature who called himself a book-agent had rung the front door bell. Honora, the waitress, had opened the door a couple of inches, inquired the stranger's business, learned it, told him to depart, tried to close the door, and discovered that the man had inserted his toe in the opening. She had closed the door violently, and the man had emitted a single oath of deep and sincere profanity. He had then kicked the door and departed, with a marked limp.

At least this was the story as Honora first related it. But as she stood before the assembled household and recounted it for the seventh time, it had assumed proportions that left no room for the charitable hypothesis that an innocent vendor of literature had been the hapless victim of his own carelessness or clumsiness.

“And whin he had the half of his big ugly body in the crack o' th' dure,” she said, in excited tones and with fine dramatic action, “and him yellin' an' swearin' and cussin' iv'ry holy name he could lay his black tongue to, and me six years cook in a convent, and I t'rew th' whole weight o' me on th' dure, an'—“

“That will do, Honora,” said Miss Pellicoe, who was the head of the household. She perceived that the combat was deepening too rapidly. “You may go. We will decide what is to be done.”

And Miss Pellicoe had decided what was to be done.

“Sisters,” she said to her two juniors, “we must keep a dog.”

“A dog!” cried Miss Angela, the youngest; “oh, how nice!”

“I do not think it is nice at all,” said Miss Pellicoe, somewhat sternly, “nor would you, Angela, if you had any conception of what it really meant. I do not propose to keep a lap-dog, or a King Charles spaniel, but a *dog*—a mastiff, or a bloodhound, or some animal of that nature, such as would spring at the throat of an invader, and bear him to the ground!”

“Oh, dear!” gasped Miss Angela. “I should be afraid of him!”

“You do not understand as yet, Angela,” Miss Pellicoe explained, knitting her brows. “My intention is to procure the animal as a—in fact—a puppy, and thus enable him to grow up and to regard us with affection, and be willing to hold himself at all times in readiness to afford us the protection we desire. It is clearly impossible to have a man in the house. I have decided upon a mastiff.”

When Miss Pellicoe decided upon a thing, Miss Angela Pellicoe and her other sister promptly acquiesced. On this occasion they did not, even in their inmost hearts, question the wisdom of the decision of the head of the house. A man, they knew, was not to be thought of. For twenty years the Pellicoe house had been a bower of virginity. The only men who ever entered it were the old family doctor, the older family lawyer, and annually, on New Year’s Day, in accordance with an obsolete custom, Major Kitsedge, their father’s old partner, once junior of the firm of Pellicoe & Kitsedge. Not ever the butcher or the baker or the candlestick-maker forced an entrance to that innocent dovecote. They handed in their wares through a wicket-gate in the back yard and were sent about their business by the chaste Honora.

The next morning, having awakened to find themselves and the silver still safe, Miss Pellicoe and Miss Angela set out for a dog store which they had seen advertised in the papers. It was in an unpleasantly low and ill-bred part of the town, and when the two ladies reached it, they paused outside the door, and listened, with lengthened faces, to the combined clamor and smell that emanated from its open door.

“This,” said Miss Pellicoe, after a brief deliberation, “is not a place for *us*. If we are to procure a dog, he must be procured in some other way. It need not entail a loss of self-respect.”

“I have it!” she added with a sudden inspiration. “I will write to Hector.”

Hector was the sole male representative of the Pellicoe family. He was a second cousin of the Misses Pellicoe. He lived out West—his address varying from year to year. Once in a long while Miss Pellicoe wrote to him, just to keep herself in communication with the Man of the family. It made her feel more secure, in view of possible emergencies. She had not seen Hector since he was nineteen. He was perhaps the last person of any positive virility who had had the freedom of the Pellicoe household. He had used that freedom mainly in making attempts to kiss Honora, who was then in her buxom prime, and in decorating the family portraits with cork moustaches and whiskers. Miss Pellicoe clung to the Man of the family as an abstraction; but she was always glad that he lived in the West. Addressing him in his capacity of Man of the family, she wrote to him and asked him to supply her with a young mastiff, and to send her bill therefor. She explained the situation to him, and made him understand that the dog must be of a character to be regarded as a male relative.

Hector responded at once. He would send a mastiff pup within a week. The pup’s pedigree was, unfortunately, lost, but the breed was high. Fifty dollars would cover the cost and expenses of transportation. The pup was six months old.

For ten days the Pellicoe household was in a fever of expectation. Miss Pellicoe called in a carpenter, and, chaperoned by the entire household, held an interview with him, and directed him how to construct a dog-house in the back-yard—a dog-house with one door about six inches square, to admit the occupant in his innocent puphood, and with another door about four feet in height to emit him, when, in the pride of his mature masculinity, he should rush forth upon the burglar and the book-agent. The carpenter remarked that he “never seen no such a dorg as that;” but Miss Pellicoe thought him at once ignorant and ungrammatical, and paid no heed to him.

In conclave assembled, the Misses Pellicoe decided to name the dog Hector. Beside the consideration of the claims of gratitude and family affection, they remembered that Hector was a classical hero.

The ten days came to an end when, just at dusk of a dull January day, two stalwart expressmen, with much open grumbling and smothered cursing, deposited a huge packing-case in the vestibule of the Pellicoe house, and departed, slamming the doors behind them. From this box proceeded such yelps and howls that the entire household rushed affrighted to peer through the slats that gridironed the top. Within was a mighty black beast, as high as a table, that flopped itself wildly about, clawed at the sides of the box, and swung in every direction a tail as large as a policeman's night-club.

It was Hector. There was no mistake about it, for Mr. Hector Pellicoe's card was nailed to a slat. It was Hector, the six-months-old pup, for whose diminutive proportions the small door in the dog-house had been devised; Hector, for whom a saucer of lukewarm milk was even then waiting by the kitchen range.

"Oh, Sister!" cried Miss Angela, "we *never* can get him out! You'll have to send for a *man*!"

"I certainly shall not send for a *man* at this hour of the evening," said Miss Pellicoe, white, but firm; "and I shall not leave the poor creature imprisoned during the night." Here Hector yawped madly.

"I shall take him out," concluded Miss Pellicoe, "*myself*!"

They hung upon her neck, and entreated her not to risk her life; but Miss Pellicoe had made up her mind. The three maids shoved the box into the butler's pantry, shrieking with terror every time that Hector leaped at the slats, and at last, with the two younger Pellicoes holding one door a foot open, and the three maids holding the other door an inch open, Miss Pellicoe seized the household hatchet, and began her awful task. One slat! Miss Pellicoe was white but firm. Two slats! Miss Pellicoe was whiter and firmer. Three slats!—and a vast black body leaped high in the air. With five simultaneous shrieks, the two doors were slammed to, and Miss Pellicoe and Hector were left together in the butler's pantry.

The courage of the younger Pellicoes asserted itself after a moment, and they flung open the pantry door. Miss Pellicoe, looking as though she needed aromatic vinegar, leaned against the wall. Hector had his fore-paws on her shoulders, and was licking her face in exuberant affection.

“Sisters,” gasped Miss Pellicoe, “will you kindly remove him? I should like to faint.”

But Hector had already released her to dash at Miss Angela, who frightened him by going into such hysterics that Miss Pellicoe was obliged to deny herself the luxury of a faint. Then he found the maids, and, after driving them before him like chaff for five minutes, succeeded in convincing Honora of the affectionate purpose of his demonstrations, and accepted her invitation to the kitchen, where he emptied the saucer of milk in three laps.

“I think, Honora,” suggested Miss Pellicoe, who had resumed command, “that you might, perhaps, give him a slice or two of last night’s leg of mutton. Perhaps he needs something more sustaining.”

Honora produced the mutton-leg. It was clearly what Hector wanted. He took it from her without ceremony, bore it under the sink and ate all of it except about six inches of the bone, which he took to bed with him.

The next day, feeling the need of masculine advice, Miss Pellicoe resolved to address herself to the policeman on the beat, and she astonished him with the following question:

“Sir,” she said, in true Johnsonian style, “what height should a mastiff dog attain at the age of six months?”

The policeman stared at her in utter astonishment.

“They do be all sizes, Mum,” he replied, blankly, “like a piece of cheese.”

“My relative in the West,” explained Miss Pellicoe, “has sent me a dog, and I am given to understand that his age is six months. As he is phenomenally large, I have thought it best to seek for information. Has my relative been imposed upon?”

“It’s har–r–rd to tell, Mum,” replied the policeman, dubiously. Then his countenance brightened. “Does his feet fit him?” he inquired.

“What—what do you mean?” asked Miss Pellicoe, shrinking back a little.

“Is his feet like blackin’–boxes on th’ ind of his legs?”

“They are certainly very large.”

“Thin ’tis a pup. You see, Mum, with a pup, ’tis this way. The feet starts first, an’ the pup grows up to ’em, like. Av they match him, he’s grown. Av he has arctics on, he’s a pup.”

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Hector’s growth in the next six months dissipated all doubts as to his puphood. He became a four–legged Colossus, martial toward cats, aggressive toward the tradesmen at the wicket–gate, impartially affectionate toward all the household, and voracious beyond all imagining. But he might have eaten the gentle ladies out of house and home, and they would never have dreamed of protesting. The house had found a Head—even a Head above Miss Pellicoe.

The deposed monarch gloried in her subjection. She said “Hector likes this,” or “Hector likes that,” with the tone of submissive deference in which you may hear a good wife say, “Mr. Smith *will not* eat cold boiled mutton,” or “Mr. Smith is very particular about his shirt–bosoms.”

As for Miss Angela, she never looked at Hector, gamboling about the back–yard in all his superabundance of strength and vitality, without feeling a half–agreeable nervous shock, and a flutter of the heart. He stood for her as the type of that vast outside world of puissant manhood of which she had known but two specimens—her father and Cousin Hector. Perhaps, in the old days, if Cousin Hector had not been so engrossed in frivolity and making of practical jokes, he might have learned of something to his advantage. But he never did.

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For the first time in her life, Miss Angela found herself left to watch the house through the horrors of the Fourth of July. This had always been Miss Pellicoe's duty; but this year Miss Pellicoe failed to come back from the quiet place in the Catskills, where no children were admitted, and where the Pellicoe family, two at a time, spent the Summer in the society of other old maids and of aged widows.

"I feel that you are safe with Hector," she wrote.

Alack and alack for Miss Pellicoe's faith in Hector! The first fire-cracker filled him with excitement, and before the noises of the day had fairly begun, he was careering around the yard, barking in uncontrollable frenzy. At twelve o'clock, when the butcher-boy came with the chops for luncheon, Hector bounded through the open wicket, right into the arms of a dog-catcher. Miss Angela wrung her hands as she gazed from her window and saw the Head of the House cast into the cage with a dozen curs of the street and driven rapidly off.

In her lorn anguish she sought the functionary who was known in the house as "Miss Pellicoe's policeman."

"Be aisy, Miss," he said. "Av the dog is worth five dollars, say, to yez, I have a friend will get him out for th' accommodation."

"Oh, take it, take it!" cried Miss Angela, trembling and weeping.

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After six hours of anxious waiting, Miss Angela received Hector at the front door, from a boy who turned and fled as soon as his mission was accomplished. Hector was extremely glad to be at home, and his health seemed to be unimpaired; but to Miss Angela's delicate fancy, contact with the vulgar of his kind had left a vague aroma of degradation about him. With her own hands she washed him in tepid water and sprinkled him with eau de cologne. And even then she could not help feeling that to some extent the bloom had been brushed from the peach.

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Hector was ill—very ill. The family conclave assembled every night and discussed the situation with knit brows and tearful eyes. They

could not decide whether the cause of his malady was the unwholesomeness of the Summer air in the city, or whether it was simply over-feeding. He was certainly shockingly fat, and much indisposed to exertion. He had lost all his activity; all his animal spirits. He spent most of the time in his house. Even his good-nature was going. He had actually snapped at Honora. They had tried to make up their minds to reduce his rations; but their hearts had failed them. They had hoped that the cool air of September would help him; but September was well nigh half gone; and Hector grew worse and worse.

“Sisters,” said Miss Pellicoe, at last, “we shall have to send for a Veterinary!” She spoke as though she had just decided to send for an executioner. And even as the words left her lips there came from Hector such a wail of anguish that Miss Pellicoe’s face turned a ghastly white.

“He is going mad!” she cried.

There was no sleep in the Pellicoe household that night, although Hector wailed no more. At the break of day, Miss Pellicoe led five other white-faced women into the back yard.

Hector’s head lay on the sill of his door. He seemed too weak to rise, but he thrashed his tail pleasantly against the walls, and appeared amiable and even cheerful. The six advanced.

Miss Pellicoe knelt down and put her hand in to pet him. Then a strange expression came over her face.

“Sister,” she said, “I *think*—a cat has got in and bitten him.”

She closed her hand on something soft, lifted it out and laid it on the ground. It was small, it was black, it was dumpy. It moved a round head in an uncertain, inquiring way, and tried to open its tightly-closed eyes. Then it squeaked.

Thrice more did Miss Pellicoe thrust her hand into the house. Thrice again did she bring out an object exactly similar.

“Wee-e-e-e!” squeaked the four objects. Hector thrashed her tail about and blinked joyfully, all unconscious of the utter wreck of her



masculinity, looking as though it were the most natural thing in the world for her to have a litter of pups—as, indeed, it was.

Honora broke the awful silence,—Miss Angela was sobbing so softly you could scarcely hear her.

“Be thim Hector’s?” Honora inquired.

“Honora!” said Miss Pellicoe, rising, “never utter that name in my presence again.”

“An’ fwat shall I call the dog?”

“Call *it*”—and Miss Pellicoe made a pause of impressive severity, “call *it*—Andromache.”