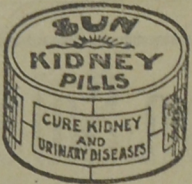


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When Phyllis Took Me Seriously

By Hubert McBean Johnston

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"Phyllis," I asked, "will you marry me?"

"Seven!" said Phyllis. I looked at her in astonishment. "Seven?" I questioned. "Seven what?"

"Why, the score, you silly," she responded demurely. "Some one has to keep track of it."

That's the trouble with Phyllis. If her sense of humor were not so highly developed, I'm quite sure I should have had her ages ago. She never will take me seriously.

"Both the score!" I cried desperately. "Anyway we'll not count the other six times."

"But I would very much rather." Phyllis was staring into the fire. I didn't know just what she meant. I never was much good at guessing.

"Well," I answered indifferently, "just as you please. Count them if you like. All I meant was that none of them mattered so much as this time."

"Positively your last chance, ladies and gentlemen!" she cried gayly.

I assented in my most dignified manner. Phyllis laughed. I do wish she would take me seriously once in awhile.

"Why do you keep on proposing to me like this?" she asked me.

I shrugged my shoulders. "If you must have it," I replied flippantly, "I suppose it's my little form of diversion—my hobby, if you will. We all have our hobbies more or less, you know."

Phyllis frowned. I like that frown immensely. Then she looked at me quickly when I was not expecting it. "You appear to be enjoying yourself," she complained.

"Me?" I queried in mock innocence. "Oh, I protest! Really I'm not!"

Phyllis frowned again.

"Well, then, you ought to be." "I know," I agreed; "I ought to be. Seven times ought to be productive of more than it has shown so far. I wonder," I concluded dreamily to myself—"I wonder if eight will do it."

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"I haven't been answered for seven yet," said Phyllis.

"No," said I, "nor for any of the other six either."

"Now, there was Darcy Graham," said Phyllis inconsequently. "He asked me to marry him nineteen times and swore eternal devotion each time whether I would have him or no. There's a man for you!"

"And then went and married Kitty Macpherson," said I almost to myself. "No," corrected Phyllis. "Kitty married him."

"Willie Atkinson came next," I ventured.

"I can't remember who was next," said Phyllis quickly. "Do you know?"

"I think," said I reflectively, "I added about two to my own score that day. I always liked you in white, you know."

"One," said Phyllis, consulting her tablets.

"Hold your head that way again," I said. "What long eyelashes you have!"

Phyllis deliberately turned the other way.

"Hold it round," I commanded. "I want to look at it."

Phyllis held it round. Phyllis likes to be commanded at times, only a fellow's got to know when to do it.

"A rather pretty mouth, too," said I gravely, "and your color is also very fair yet. One would never guess you were getting up in years."

"I'm not," denied Phyllis, with a certain assumption of dignity. "I'm only twenty-three."

"You don't show it," I responded gallantly. "Were I asked to make a guess I should say 'sweet sixteen and'—"

"Quite so!" said Phyllis dryly.

"How awful it must be to be laid on the shelf!" I remarked sympathetically.

"I'm not!" asserted Phyllis indignantly.

"The very idea!" I murmured in a surprised sort of way. "I never even insinuated such a thing. But you know," I concluded dismally, "you haven't had a proposal in three weeks."

"I have," insisted Phyllis. "I had one just tonight."

"Oh, but that doesn't count!" said I. "You told me so yourself. These are only sort of trial heats to keep you in form, you know."

"Oh!" sniffed Phyllis.

"Besides," I added, "I need material for my stories."

"What a risk you are willing to run for the sake of material," said Phyllis.

"It is necessary that one make some sacrifices for the sake of art," I explained.

"Suppose, though, I were to accept

"He only ran up to thirteen," said Phyllis.

"Which accounts for his failure," I suggested.

"I think the little fellow—from the bank whom I met in the summer came after that?" she murmured interrogatively.

"Surely you don't count him?" I questioned in surprise. "Why, you told me yourself that he only lasted till the second round."

"He would probably have stayed longer if you hadn't come down that Sunday," said Phyllis in a vexed way.

"You always do turn up at the most inopportune moments."

"Had I only known you didn't want me?" I began.

"You some time?" queried Phyllis in an awful tone.

"I would have a new climax for the next one," said I. I flatter myself I said it indifferently.

I had expected Phyllis to be affected. Instead she burst out laughing.

That's the trouble with Phyllis. She never will take me seriously.

"You're a goose," she complimented me.

"Aw, thanks," I murmured. "So good of you."

Phyllis regarded me gravely. Now, it's an odd thing, but whenever Phyllis looks at a fellow just like that he feels sort of funny all over, you know. I don't just know what it is. I think it must be what they call personal magnetism.

"Jack," she said, "you have some gray hairs."

"It's not polite of you to remind me of it," I said.

"And your complexion isn't as good as it used to be," she continued. "Besides, there are a lot of little things, particularly about your clothes."

"Nothing serious, I trust?" I asked in alarm.

"No; nothing serious," said Phyllis. "But an awful lot of little things. I think you need some one to take care of you."

"Parks is an exceptional valet," said I in his defense.

"Now, a wife!" began Phyllis musingly.

I laughed.

"Yes," said Phyllis, taking no notice, "I think you need a wife. Why don't you propose to some nice girl, Jack?"

"I have," said I stoutly.

"Huh!" snorted Phyllis in disbelief. "How many proposals have you ever made?"

"Seven," said I.

I think Phyllis was pleased. Anyway she smiled a little.

"There was the Rawshaw girl," she said warningly.

"Nice girl," I assented warmly.

"Nothing particularly queenlike about a girl's carriage, though, when she's only five feet three."

"And Bessie Fleming?"

Phyllis was getting back at me.

"A sweet creature," I agreed. "But I really prefer blonds."

"And then there's a whole host of others you might have if you wanted them. You're a catch, you know."

"I know," said I wearily. "You might have been nicer, though, and said that I was very popular. It all means the same, perhaps, but there are prettier ways of saying it."

"Oh, no," said Phyllis sweetly. "You're rather nice as well."

"Thanks," I replied. "But with a score of seven it does not seem to have benefited me greatly. Will it do me any good to make it eight?"

Phyllis toyed with the corner of the sofa cushion.

"You might do a great deal better," said she deprecatingly.

"Then I don't have to make it eight?" cried I, for once in my life comprehending.

"I did not say just that, sir," said Phyllis saucily.

I don't believe I ever saw Phyllis look so beautiful, and the odd part of it was I couldn't see her eyes either. She was staring full into the fire all the time. If it makes her look that way I wish she would look into the fire always.

"But I do make it eight, Phyllis," said I soberly.

I took hold of her arm and turned her round so that she was facing me, but she still held her head down and I could see only her eyelashes. Phyllis has long eyelashes.

"And you'll marry me, Phyllis!" I whispered. I don't know whether I raised my tone interrogatively or not. I hadn't the same control over my voice that I had the other seven times.

Phyllis looked at me, with a funny little smile. She never will take me seriously.

"I suppose this will make a new climax," said she.

But her looks belied her words, and for once I was bright enough to see.

"No," said I as distinctly as my throat would let me. "This is not a climax. This is a beginning."

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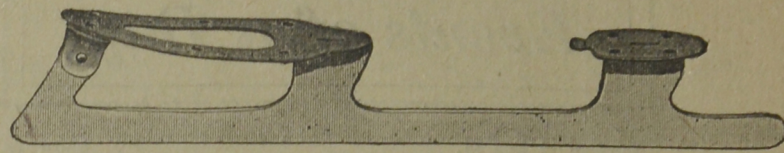
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