

Bothering a Bit about Betty

by

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I.

YOU know the sort of girl—daddy worth a couple of millions or more, and daughter just enough of an iconoclast to be a good-looking, bad-acting little democrat.

When Betty got into the newspapers by riding, dressed in a suit of overalls, perched on the hood of a friend's gasoline runabout, father Bodkins didn't give the item a second thought.

But now he had received information that his daughter, this same Betty, had fallen in love with a promising young clergyman. A more serious matter, this, according to the Wall Street code.

It worried father. He knew that his companions on 'change would joke if his daughter succeeded in presenting him with a clerical son-in-law, and he himself did not relish the idea of having a minister in the family. And, being unacquainted with gentlemen of the cloth, he held them in not very high esteem; he didn't have the heart to wish one of them on his daughter.

He loved Betty, just as did every one that knew her—only, perhaps, better. Consequently, as was his wont in time of trouble, Mr. Bodkins sent for his friend, Pudge Rupert, of the Elite Boxing Academy. The two men went into consultation.

"Pudge," began the worried father, "being the proprietor of an institution purporting to teach the noble and manly art of self-defense, you undoubtedly are acquainted with most of the wild young bloods in town."

Pudge nodded.

"I've sort of lost track of them," explained Mr. Bodkins. "I've been so busy teasing the loose change away from their *paters* that I haven't kept very close tab on the younger generation. My daughter thinks she's fallen in love with a minister. You can see the disgrace in that, Pudge.

"Now, I'm looking for a young fellow with all kinds of zip to him. Lots of pep—heavy on the pep—but there must be a big streak of true decency in him, too. Can you furnish me with the name of such an individual?"

"Freddy Frazer," announced Pudge promptly. "Son of 'Freezeout' Frazer. Young 'un just finished my course in fancy fightin'. Got a fist like a ham; muscle like a donkey-engine; eye like an automatic; nerve like a dentist—an' heart an' brains back of it all, too.

"Only trouble with Freddy is—too much imagination. Ol' man cut him off. Young 'un come to me and ast how was the best way to crack a time-lock. The young fool had his eye on the vault in the First National."

"Is he good looking?" asked Mr. Bodkins, thoroughly interested.

"Too babylike," criticized Pudge. "You know—got them twinkling big blue eyes."

"Son of Freezeout Frazer. eh?" mused Mr. Bodkins. "He married Mable Jackson from down home. The kid comes from good stock, all right. Say, Pudge, I believe he suits. Send him up, will you? Tell him I want to make him a proposition."

Pudge nodded.

"Buy J. C. O. common to-morrow morning—

and hold it," suggested Mr. Bodkins. "Don't say that I made you the whisper."

Pudge nodded again.

"Sure not," he promised—and vanished.

II.

"FOURTEENTH floor, if you please," requested Frederick Ellingham Frazer, stepping into the cage and arranging his cream-colored cravat with minute care.

"That's one above the roof," objected the elevator-boy sourly. "Twelve's as high as we go."

"Perfectly satisfactory, if it's the best you can do," sighed Freddy. "And take your time about it."

At floor twelve the car stopped. Freddy transferred a pink carnation from his own coat-lapel to that of the elevator-boy, and then stroked that red-haired individual fondly on the cheek.

The boy had observed the shape of the arm under Freddy's coat-sleeve. So he did nothing more disrespectful than to say "Cheese it!"

"Which way to Mr. Bodkin's office?" asked Freddy. The boy pointed. "I'm much obliged to you, Lilly-of-the-Valley," acknowledged Freddy with mock politeness.

The boy stuck out his tongue and made a marvelous face. Freddy grinned delightedly, turned sadly away, walked down the spacious hall, and entered a door marked in letters of gold:

DEWITTE J. BODKINS,
Broker.

"I must see his majesty at once, please," he briefly told the pretty girl at the telephone desk.

"What name shall I say?" she asked.

"Oh, J. P. Morgan is as good as any, I guess," replied the unabashed youth carelessly. "You might say that."

Mr. Bodkins, at the other end of the wire, turned pale as he heard the name the girl whispered to him. Then he thought of his appointment with young Frazer, and he grinned.

"Have the young man shown in," he requested the girl.

Having reached the inner sanctum, Freddy took the largest chair the room afforded, and gazed with manifest curiosity at one of the two other men who,

beside his own father, could set the big street at playing hide and seek. And DeWitte J. Bodkins gazed with manifest curiosity, and with some enthusiasm, at Frederick Ellingham Frazer.

The older man coughed, and Freddy recovered himself.

"Beautiful day," he remarked. "Rather rainy, though. However, the humidity isn't so noticeable as it would be if the air were damper."

"Mr. Frazer," replied Bodkins, "I understand that you were graduated with honors last June from one of America's most distinguished institutions of learning. Am I correct in my belief?"

For several moments Freddy gazed at the broker. His face had taken on an abused look.

"Now, Mr. Bodkins!" he protested, pouting. "If you sent for me just to rub that in, I must say that I consider your motive most unkind. I didn't come back from New Haven wearing dark glasses. I admitted to my parents and to the gentlemen of the press that the Yale faculty fired me. So now, cut the fatherly talk, if you please, and get down to dollar signs and decimals. That's your specialty. What is it you want done, and what's there in it for me?"

"You are to name your own salary," stated Mr. Bodkins.

"Make it twice that and I'll accept," responded Freddy. "Whom do you want murdered?"

Mr. Bodkins had thought out a plan to divert Betty's attention.

"What I want, young man," he explained, "is for you to give my daughter lessons in painting."

He had reasoned that a young society man must be interested in art.

Freddy jumped at the suggestion, but retrieved himself instantly.

"Why don't you send your daughter to a beauty-shop, like other girls?" he asked. "Home-made-over features are a poor imitation at best. You can always tell when a Jane puts on the rouge herself—it's smeary, and usually she uses too much. It's no use, I tell you, an amateur—"

"No, no!" objected Mr. Bodkins. "You are to give her lessons in art. That's what I want you to give her."

Freddy thought it all over for a moment. Finally he realized just what it was that the broker proposed he should do.

"Oh, art—painting! I seize your brain germ," he acknowledged. "You want me to teach her how

to become an old master!"

"That's the idea," approved the broker.

"When do I commence?" asked Freddy.

"To-morrow morning. I'll make a date with you for eight o'clock."

"I'll be there," agreed the young man, "with bells on. But listen, old hedgeball. I'm no old master myself. The only thing I ever painted was the town, and I used only one color then."

"So much the better," declared the father. "That will make it all the more interesting for Betty, I'm sure. Bring your paints with you."

The youth nodded.

"One stipulation," continued Mr. Bodkins. "You agree with me not to attempt to make love to Betty."

"I do," acquiesced Freddy. "You flatter your family."

"You don't know my daughter," replied Mr. Bodkins. "Betty's a bird."

He opened his check-book.

"Wait," he said. "I'll give you a hundred dollars advance tuition on account."

"Double it," suggested Freddy.

He took the broker's paper for two hundred dollars, also his speedy departure.

"She'll like him fine!" declared Mr. Bodkins to himself as his door crashed shut. "And she ought to make a big hit with him. They trot about the same clip."

III.

AT eight o'clock sharp the following morning a motor delivery-truck pulled up before the Bodkins residence. The driver and Frederick Ellingham Frazer alighted, and together they carried the cargo to the front porch. The load consisted of twelve cans of paint, holding one gallon each, and a dozen chisel-shaped brushes.

The driver and his vehicle departed. Freddy pushed the door-bell button. He instructed the Bodkins butler to summon Miss Bodkins, and not to stop on the way to play solitaire.

The man in livery glanced wonderingly from the house-painting paraphernalia to the card Freddy had handed him. It was Freddy's engraved bristol, and in the corner had been scribbled, "Professor of Art-Painting."

Betty Bodkins, stunningly beautiful in a glorious morning frock of pink, seemed a bit startled as she gazed at the visitor who was awaiting her in the reception hall.

"Why, Mr. Frazer! " she exclaimed. "When papa told me, I wondered if it could be the same Mr. Frazer!"

Freddy seemed a bit surprised, too.

"'Belle Bravo' is your stage name, I suppose," he remarked. "Your father didn't say anything about your theatrical career."

Each, you see, had fibbed to the other.

They'd chanced to meet, upon one occasion, in Central Park. Her motor had choked, and Freddy happened along just in time to crank it.

Indulging a sudden, unaccountable whim, he introduced himself to her as the Rev. Frederick Frazer. And, to duly shock him, she told him that she was a Miss Belle Bravo, of vaudeville fame. She drove him to one of his clubs, and they had not seen each other since.

"You haven't given up the ministry?" asked Betty.

"Oh, no!" answered Freddy. "I go in for art as a sort of side line. We clergymen can't study our text and prepare sermons all of the time."

"I should think that would be wearisome," sympathized Betty.

"Not wearisome," amended the young man, slight reproach showing in his innocent blue eyes. "Just kind of monotonous. So, if I can do any good work of a slightly different nature, such as showing a young lady how to become an old master, I regard it as a pleasure, indeed."

Betty looked up at him, enraptured. She never had known young clergymen. All the young men of her previous acquaintance had been young men of the world, worldly. This was a novel, an entertaining experience.

"Are you going to begin teaching me this morning?" she asked eagerly. "Daddy didn't say anything to me about your being a minister."

"He probably isn't wise to it," Freddy explained. "I didn't mention the fact to him. Brokers, as a rule, aren't generally very keen for that sort of thing, you know; and I don't believe in arousing animosity where there's no need.

"That 'animosity' is a great word, isn't it? I got it out of an advertisement. Sure, I'm ready to teach you this morning if it's convenient for you. We

can't get started any too soon. I left my kit of tools outside."

"Oh," said Betty, "let me see it! " Together they went to the porch. She helped him carry his equipment to her pink-and-white sewing-room on the second floor. It took them three trips. "Aren't these brushes rather big, Mr. Frazer?" Betty asked, surveying doubtfully the assortment he had secured.

They were the kind of brushes fence-decorators and calciminers use.

"And how odd to get the paint in big cans like these," she continued. "I always thought that artists' paint came in little tubes—like tooth paste."

He almost said. "By crickey, that's right, isn't it?" Instead, he replied, smiling tolerantly: "Well, you see, my dear young lady, while that was true in times past, nowadays artists strive for the big, broad, bold effects. They make heavy strokes. Perhaps you've noticed the work of present-day old masters. It's all done that way."

"That is true!" she declared.

He grinned.

"Is it, honestly?" he asked curiously.

"Now, if you're going to talk to me as if I were a little girl!" Betty demurred, somewhat displeased.

"Certainly not!" he protested. "Excuse me. It was just my absent-mindedness. All of us clergymen are more or less absent-minded."

"Are they?" she asked. "It's the fashion," he explained. "Well, let's begin. Oh, Helen! Oh, Helen, I forgot to bring a canvas!"

"My name isn't Helen!" she corrected innocently. "It's Betty!"

"Oh, yes—so it is!" He gazed down into her great brown-and-white eyes, and realized, suddenly, their greatness.

"Well, Betty," he suggested with a sigh, "let's begin. We'll paint the first picture right on that wall over there. It's white, and it'll take the paint fine. You paint the picture, and I'll paint a frame round it. I brought a can of gold paint along. When we're finished every one will think it's an old master in a frame hanging there. I'll paint a nail, too, to hang it up by."

She danced and clapped her hands joyously..

"That'll be jolly!" said she. "What shall I paint, portrait or landscape?"

"You'd best start with a simple pastoral scene," he decided. "Maybe by the time you're through it'll be a portrait or something else. One never can tell

about those things."

"Pastoral?" she repeated with a rising inflection. "What kind of a painting is that, Mr. Frazer?"

For a moment he thought the matter over, trying to recall just where he'd heard the term used.

"Oh, yes!" he replied firmly. "Oh, pastoral? Pastoral—pastures—don't you see, my dear? A pastoral scene is a picture of pastures—green pastures. I brought along a can of green—so it's all right."

"May I put a house in it, please?" she asked.

"That wouldn't be a bad idea at all," he admitted thoughtfully. "I'll pry the tops off these cans."

He broke all three blades of his pearl penknife and spotted the carpet generously, but at last off all the twelve lids came. He handed her a three-inch brush.

"How shall I begin?" Betty asked.

He considered the matter studiously.

"Just begin, Betty," he directed at last.

"Oh," said she, "it's much easier I than I thought! I had an idea there I were a lot of rules and things to it."

"No, that's a popular misconception," he assured her. "Nothing like rules in the old master game. When a j painter wants to paint, why he just goes ahead and does it, don't you see? It's very simple. One needn't learn it, like one would horseshoeing, or something hard like that."

"My!" she exclaimed. "I like the way you teach, Mr. Frazer. You don't make it tedious at all. My violin teacher is just terribly particular! How do I hold the brush, Mr. Frazer?"

He took his pupil's fingers in his and showed her how—an artist grips his paint-brush exactly as a carpenter does his hammer.

"Let's hurry and begin," he suggested eagerly. "You start on the picture, and I'll start to paint a gold frame around it."

He dipped a brush into the gilt can and started making scrolls on her white sewing-room wall.

"Hadn't I better get a piece of chalk from my work-basket and mark off a square where the picture's to be?" Betty asked.

"That wouldn't be a bad idea, considering that you're only a beginner," he said. "Professionals and old masters never do that, though."

He helped her with the dimensions, then again

joyously besieged the wall with a volley of gold.

For an hour, then for another, then for a third, they worked industriously. His frame was a marvel to behold. And her landscape—a blind man could have seen the noise from miles away.

He stepped back and surveyed her work critically.

“Very good indeed, Betty,” he pronounced, after having given the wall minute inspection. “Very good, indeed. The only criticism I can offer is that you painted your perspective in the wrong color.”

She became dismayed—she had tried so hard.

“Oh, it’s nothing serious, Betty,” he assured her, feeling very guilty as he noted her chagrin. “It’s nothing serious at all, dear. It doesn’t mar the picture, viewing it as a whole. Perspective in painting isn’t important, anyway.”

Betty felt relieved—and looked it. Her face was flushed; she had worked industriously.

“The only thing that I would suggest,” he added, “is that you put a flag on that farmhouse. We’ve plenty of paint left, and a red, white and blue pennant would add considerably to the tone, as well as improve the perspective.”

“That’s a glorious suggestion,” she declared. “I’m a wee bit tired, though,” she confessed. “Would you mind painting it in for me, Mr. Frazer?”

“Object? Well, I should say not!”

Joyously he fetched a chair for her, and then set about erecting a staff and unfurling our national flag,

“It’s really beautiful!” Betty declared.

“I think it is,” he agreed. “It isn’t all dull and shadowy, like so many of the pictures one sees.”

“The frame helps out the picture wonderfully,” said Betty generously.

“It’s not such a worse frame,” Freddy confessed modestly.

“Will you come again to-morrow morning to give me my second lesson, Mr. Frazer?” Betty asked anxiously.

“Most certain thing you know,” he promised. “You’re the most apt pupil I’ve ever had. I’m getting very fond of you. Now your eyes, for example; I’ve never seen other eyes that reflect the soul as those of yours do. I’ll bet you can waltz like the very dickens, too. Betty dear, do you suppose you could ever learn to care—”

Suddenly he thought of the promise he so

readily had given her father.

He looked down at her. Betty’s lips were pursed temptingly. He readied—for his hat.

“I beg your pardon, Betty,” he attempted to explain. “I just happened to think of something I’d entirely forgotten.”

She looked at him inquiringly.

“My Scripture study,” he told her. “I must hasten thither. I study an hour every morning, and I’m late.”

He bolted down the stairs. She followed and opened the outside door for him. He gravely shook hands with her, hailing a passing taxi, and was gone.

IV

“DADDY,” began Betty that noon—“daddy, do come up and see the pastoral painting I made. Mr. Frazer painted the frame.”

Mr. Bodkins obediently puffed up the stairs. The mural decoration came into view. He made a surprised exclamation that sounded somewhat profane. Betty understood, though, when he told her that his admiration had given incentive to the outburst.

“We’re going to decorate all the walls this way; all the walls in all the rooms,” explained Betty enthusiastically. “One wall a morning.”

Mr. Bodkins swallowed. He possessed no critical knowledge of art—and he knew it. But neither did he possess a love for the horrible. He sighed resignedly. It wasn’t the expense that worried him; but he did hate the idea of having a papering crew round again.

“That’ll be lovely, dear,” said he bravely. One last glance he took at the pastoral painting. “Come on, Betty; let’s go down to lunch.”

During the meal Mr. Bodkins noticed that his daughter merely nibbled. She usually had a healthy appetite, but to-day her thoughts were miles above chicken *en casserole*.

At the last the inner-man Bodkins was satisfied. The broker folded his napkin, shoved his plate aside, and lighted a perfecto.

“Daddy,” spoke his charming daughter, a deeper, softer glow in her great, brown eyes—“daddy, how would you like to have a lovely young clergyman for a son-in-law? It would be perfectly glorious, wouldn’t it, daddy dear?”

Daddy placed his newly lighted cigar on a saucer, arose with sad determination, and walked to the window.

Looking out he saw a hideous, multicolored landscape. In the foreground loomed a purple farmhouse. On it, floating in an ochre breeze, was a flag of pronounced red, white, and blue.

He saw a natty youth, with baby-blue eyes, and silently, but none the less fervently, cursed him for neglect of duty. He saw his own boon companions poking him in the ribs and “kidding” him on the minister question. He recalled, indignantly, that he always had been respected by his colleagues.

He wheeled round and faced his daughter.

“Betty darling,” he asked kindly, “you love your daddy, don’t you?”

She put two deliciously curved arms up round his neck.

“You’re the dearest daddy in all the world—the only one I have,” she declared softly.

“Listen, Betty,” said he. “You’re not to speak to me of that clergyman for a week. Promise?”

Sorrowfully, Betty promised. He left for his office, deep in gloom.

V.

THE door of the broker’s private office flew open and Freddy Frazer flew in. His hair was mussed and his tie awry. Manifestly, something had at last been able to excite him.

“Pudge Rupert said you’re looking for me,” blurted the young man. “I was coming up, anyway. I tender my resignation as professor of art-painting for your daughter. I want to quit.”

“You’re a rotten poor specimen of an art professor, you are!” shouted Bodkins. He pounded his mahogany desk with a tightly clenched fist. “You’re a bungler, an incompetent—that’s what you are!”

Freddy stood as though changed to stone. His blue eyes shot fire. Finally words came.

“You’re no judge of fine art, you money-ridden plute!” he yelled.

Bodkins’s anger was contagious, and Freddy thought he had a grievance of his own.

“Who do you think you are to offer criticism on a pastoral painting?”

“Pastoral painting, prunes!” ejaculated

Bodkins—and he pounded his desk in a new spot.

“I quit,” continued Freddy. “And that releases me from my promise. Hereafter I’ll make love to your daughter all I ding please! Nobody but a cad of a cowardly Wall Street broker would tie a young man with a promise like you did me.

“I’m not so black as I’m painted. I’m a free-born American citizen. I’ve always been straight—poker’s the worst I’ve done—it was for cards that the old man kicked me out.

“I love your daughter, and I think she’s going to learn to love me. I think she’s half-way in love with me already. Anyway, whether she is or not, I’ll court her whenever I feel like it. Get that straight, you wall-eyed son of Mammon!”

Mr. Bodkins wiped his brow.

“She’s in love with you!” he sneered. “You’re crazy, Frazer. You’re crazy as a loon. I thought if I told you not to win the girl that would be what you’d surely do. But you beefed it, you ignoramus. She’s determined to marry a stick of a clergyman. Confound it, Frazer, I won’t have a minister in my family! The boys here on the Street would kid the life out of me.

“Pudge Rupert said you had nerve and brains. I’ll sign blank checks and let you fill in figures to suit yourself. If there’s a spark of manhood in that big, husky hulk of yours, go down to my house and win my daughter. Your father and I went to the same school. We fight each other on ‘Change. Working together, he and I could elect a President. If you don’t do as I tell you I’ll poke your pie face!”

For sixty seconds after the close of Bodkins’s oration Freddy stood stock still and blinked. Then he grinned. Then he chuckled. Then he laughed aloud.

“You’re dippy,” stated Mr. Bodkins.

“Why, you mutton-head!” declared the youth. “I’m the young clergyman Betty’s raving about. I’m your promising young minister. Why, you old fool rutabaga, a girl will fall for that kind of bunk, but I didn’t expect it of a Wall Street broker. I believe I’ll go over to your house and paint a bit.”

He approached the elder man and extended his hand. Tears were coursing down the cheeks of De Witte J. Bodkins.

“What is it to be this time?” he asked, overcome with joy.

He found that he had become exceedingly fond of the blue-eyed, muscular son of his old friend and competitor.

“Portrait, this afternoon,” replied Frederick Ellingham Frazer. “Picture of Daniel Cupid.” He grinned. “Say, old crocodile, better come along with me. You’re needed bad.”

“What for?” asked Betty’s father.
Freddy grinned anew.
“To pose.” he replied.