Motto for Success

by P.Y. Betts

Percy Bones had had always desired to shine, but personal distinction had been denied him. He had, in his time desired to shine in almost every way—among the other children as a runner or a spinner of tops, at school as a scholar, and in the various jobs he had tried, as a goahead young chap with a future; in all these ways he had desired to shine, but his brightest and most constant desire was to shine socially.

Percy Bones would have liked to be liked—not just not disliked but actively liked and sought after, welcome to drop in at any time at lots of houses and aware that even in his absence people spoke well of him and went about saying what an awfully nice chap Bones was. His ambition was to be the life and soul of the party ,and to have dewy-eyed girls looking up at him with parted lips and telling him he was a one and imploring him, amid trills of delighted giggles, to give over or he would be the death of them. He had known of several such fortunate men and had observed with a painful envy the success which they enjoyed. What was the little something, he had so often asked himself, which they obviously had and he seemed to lack?

It was true that his appearance was perhaps against him—or rather that it was not exactly for him for his was not positively ill-favoured. He was obliged to admit, that his was not the sort of face and figure they use for advertising hair lotion or high-class tobacco, yet at the same time he could not fail to notice that far uglier men than he often had far better fun. After the first shock, people did not care much one way or the other about what a man looked like so long as he was able to compel their attention. Once you had got people interested enough to take notice of you you were well on the way to being the life and soul of the part. The difficulty was to get people to notice you at all .

Percy Bones had done all the things of course. He had joined a social club. He had joined a rambling club. He had rambled until his feet felt as if they had been bastinadoed, and he had been sociable until his face ached with the fixity of his smile: yet still success had not come his way.

"What are you doing for Christmas, Mr. Bones?" people at the social club would ask him during conversational pauses towards the end of November, just as earlier in the year people at the rambling club would ask him during conversational pauses what he was doing for Whitsun. The answer was always the same; nothing special, just spending the holiday quietly at home. And what, Percy Bones would inquire brightly, were they doing?

Oh, they were going away. Friends had invited them down. five of them were motoring down in Bob's car—a bit of squash. but it al made more fun. mucking in together. Though, of course, a quiet Christmas, or a quiet Whitsun or Easter as the case might be, took a lot of beating; that is if you liked that sort of thing.

If you liked that sort of thing Percy Bones didn't like that sort of thing. Christmas in lodgings—who in their senses could like that sort of thing? The sort of thing that Percy Bones liked was parties nice friendly parties with everybody liking him and listening to him and hanging on his words. He had never actually been to a party like that, but always at the back of his mind harboured the vision of this ideal party to which he would one day be bidden, and where he would shine like the star on the wand of the fairy on top of the Christmas tree.

This year it looked like being the same.

"And what are you doing for Christmas, Mr. Bones?" asked Miss Haver, a new member with whom Percy Bones had happened to be thrown together for a few minutes at the winter social of the rambling club.

"Oh, nothing special. I think I shall spend it quietly at home this year," he said. Before Miss Haver had time to repond with the remark that there was nothing to beat a quiet Christmas, their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of young Larkin, the popular man of the club, to claim a dance with Miss Haver who, as Percy had been quick to note, was a personable young woman.

He had no further speech with her that evening, but some ten days later he was surprised and delighted to receive from her a note, addressed to him in care of the club, and forwarded on asking him whether he would care to accompany Miss Haver to a small Christmas party given by some friends of hers on the other side of town on Boxing Night. It would be quite informal. There would be coffee and sandwiches. There was a convenient bus that would take them almost to the door. Would he let her know by telephone as soon as possible at her office.

In a inferment of pleasure he rang her office at nine o'clock that morning, before she had so much as arrived. Half an hour later he rang her office again. He spoke to her then. Yes, he would be delighted. Absolutely delighted, Miss Haver. It was not till some time afterwards, when the first flush of his excitement had cooled a little, that it came back into his mind that though her voice had sounded polite, it had not sounded thrilled.

It was at the lack-lustre hour of three o'clock in the afternoon that this remebrance came back into his mind. and he felt himself pierced with the familiar pang of doubt.. Why, after all, had this girl asked him? She scarcely knew him. If, as was highly improbable, considering his past experience, she had been so much taken with him at first blush that she had been moved to invite him to this party with her, why had she ignored him for the rest of the evening after those few words with him about his plans for Christmas.

No, the explanation could only be that he had been invited as a makeweight. Some better man, some hearty good fellow with so many invitations that he could pick and choose where he would spend his Boxing Night, some rousing young party chap had failed them at the last minute, and Miss Haver had been implored to bring along another man—any man —to make the numbers even, and Percy Bones the only man who had not long ago completed his arrangements for the holiday, the only man who has not been snapped up already. Percy Bones was invited to the party. He knew. He knew. He knew all right. He was being made a convenience of. He turned over in his mind the possibility of withdrawing his acceptance and leaving them in the lurch, and perhaps for twenty minutes he pretended to believe he was not going to the party, that he had his pride and was simply not going. But in his heart of hearts he knew all along that he could not really bring himself to deny himself this party and that in the end he would be tamely accompanying Miss Haver on the long bus ride to the other side of town; and so he was.

During the journey Miss Haver's manner though polite was hardly warm, and as soon as they reached the house she was engulfed in a laughing crowd of overheated people already flaunting paper hats. Percy Bones was perfunctorily introduced to one or two guests, who promptly left him flat, and was soon left hovering, eking out a ham sandwich and a glass of port. All the other people seemed to know each other. Several couples were treading an immobilized foxtrot by the gramophone at one end of the room, others were playing some paper game that consisted in identifying cryptic pencil sketches pinned onto the backs of other guests. Nobody pinned a sketch on Percy Bone's back or indeed took any notice of him except to shake a plate of sandwiches with curled-up edges under his nose from time to time. He hung about on the fringes of groups, joining in the laughter at rattling fine jokes whose point he had missed because the tellers had their backs to him. One man particularly, a tall fat

"M is the first and the last is R" it said.

man with a shiny face and a green-paper jockey cap was, in the eyes of Percy Bones insufferable. It was plain as a pikestaff that he was that envied and inimitable type, the life and soul of the party. Percy Bones, retired now to a corner of a settee under the pretence of looking at Christmas cards, watched him with loathing.

The man took the floor in front of the fireplace. With his loud voice and butcher's presence, little by little he drew the attention of the other guests upon himself. He was the rallying point of the evening, the life and soul of the party. He whisked a large yellow handkercheif out of his pocket.

"Anybod know this trick?" he asked. "Anybody here know how to pass a tumbler full of water through a handkerchief without upsetting the tumbelr or making a hole in the handkerchief?"

He looked about him questioningly. Nobody did of course. He could count on nobody's knowing. With a look of fatuous complacency on his face, the fat man spread the yellow handkerchief on a table, set a brimming glass of water on the handkerchief, waved his hands and muttered an abracadabra, smirked knowingly at his audience, gathered the four corners of the handkerchief together raised them—raised them—and there preposterously sitting by itself undisturbed upon the polished table glinted the tumbler brimful of water.

"What d'you know about that?" cried the fat man. Eh? Eh?" He stood back with his stomach stuck out and received the applause. "And now I'll show you another little trick," he offered. "Not at all a bad little trick. Quite simple of course A child could do it. All I need is a pack of cards and a young lady to hold the cards so that everybody can see what is going on —fair and square and above-board that's me. Now what about you holding the cards, Gladys? Eh? Come on, don't be shy, they won't bite and nor will I!".

And there stood, Miss Haver giggling with embarrassed pleasure holding a fan of cards facing the company while the fat man, the patry fellow, stood behind her and reached over her shoulder and picked out by magic, it seemed, whichever card the audience named. The success of this trick was terrific. The fat man was patted on the back. More drinks were called for. People changed paper hats with one another . A new box of crackers was opened. The funny man put on a false nose. Alone in his corner, Percy Bones watched the party going with a swing without him—ignoring him. Something boiled in Percy Bones.

"What about another trick, Alf?" somebody suggested.

The fat man laughed.

"Well," he said, "if you really want me to, I don't mind showing you. . . ."

"I know a good trick," said a voice surprisingly loud and hitherto unheard, from the settee in the corner. "I'll show you a very good trick." The voice was slightly tremulous, but it had something commanding in it almost threatening: a queer tone, you would have thought, to be heard at a party. People paused and listened. They turned and looked with interest at Percy Bones. Percy Bones stood up.

"You get a length of string," the fat man was saying. "You get hold of a length of string," he repeated in a louder voice. But they were not listening any longer to the fat man. They were listening to Percy Bones and looking at Percy Bones as, rather white but with shining eyes, Percy Bones moved over to the front of the fireplace.

"This," he said. "is not really a trick at all; it is a demonstration of clairvoyance. If there are any people in this room sceptical of the genuineness of occult phenomena, will they please leave the room while this demonstration is taking place, as their presence may cause unpleasant physical vibrations."

"He's a medium," someone whispered. Nobody left the room.

"What I am going to do," continued Percy Bones, "is to ask you to blindfold me as heavily as you wish, and when you are completely satisfied that I can see nothing that is going on in the room, to pull a cracker. There will probably be a printed motto on a piece of paper inside the cracker, and if you will hold this piece of paper in front of my bandaged eyes and tell me the first and the last letters of the motto, so that I can tune in to the proper vibration, I will read the motto out loud to you by clairvoyance. But please satisfy yourselves first that the blindfolding is as effective as you can make it," concluded Percy Bones in an aloof and distinterested voice. He stood with folded hands , waiting for them to blindfold him.

There was a good deal of nervous giggling. Nobody moved to begin with. Then a young man stepped forward and bound Percy's eyes firmly with the yellow handkerchief which was lying on the table. "This scarf too," somebody else suggested. "Just to make sure." He felt it being tightened, none too gently round his temples.

"Now see what you can see," remarked with a trace of malice a voice which he recognized as the fat man's, and immediately there was a deafening crack! as a cracker went off a few inches from his left ear, and at once another crack! a few inches from his right. Roars of laughter went up all round him. He felt slightly dazed with the noise and the excitement.

"Read me the first and the last letters of the motto, please," he said quietly.

A strange voice answered.

"M is the first and the last is R." it said.

"M and R?"

"That's right."

There was silence, broken by a little snirtle of gigging, suickly suppressed. Percy Bones stood with bent head, concentrating. Perhaps ten seconds passed. Then he drew up his head, he threw back his shoulders and in a clear and ringing voice he declaimed:

"Misrust new friends who coax and flatter.
Tried comrades are the ones that matter.'

"Good Lord!" It was the fat man's voice

TAKE 3 MOTTO.. .. ..

"Let me see the motto myself," came Miss Haver's voice then: Well I never!"

"Best trick I ever saw." said someone else.

"That was no trick", remarked a third voice, a woman's. "That was second sight.

"And the second cracker I heard you pull? What are the first and last letters of the motto' in that?' asked Percy still blindfolded.

"That's right: Try him with another."

"The first letter is F and the last is U," they told him. This time the answer came without hesitation

"From beyond the ocean blue
Your fate is drawing near to you.".

"Never seen anything like it!"

"Uncanny, I call it."

"Let's pull another cracker."

"O.K."

Crack! Crack! went the crackers. Crack! Crack! Crack! It was the trick of the evening, trick of the season, the trick of a lifetime. Crack! Crack! and never a single mistake, never so much as a falter in the voice of Percy Bones'

They kept it up until all the crackers were pulled. Then they took the bandage from his eyes. He felt the soft hands of a woman round his brow and ears as they loosened the bandage. His eyes opening to the bright light, had a dazzled look, as if returned from gazing on a far-off country. There was a kind of hush. Then Miss Haver said:

"You must be worn out Mr. Bones. Come and sit down and have a drink."

Another girl, a tender blonde, brought him the drink as he settled back on the settee; but now he was no longer withdrawn into a corner. The settee was now the focal point of the room. It was the fat man with his cards and tumblers of water that was forgotten now.

"I had no idea you had such gifts!" exclaimed Miss Haver looking deep into the eyes of Percy Bones. "A proper dark horse that's what you are," she said.

"You must come along to our New Year's party ' next week, cried another woman rather breathlessly, as if the treasure migth be snapped up before her eyes.

The blonde just sat and looked at him her eyes were dewy her delicious lips slightly parted with wonder.

"Oh Mr. Bones, you are a one!" she murmured.

* * *

Percy Bones woke late in his lodgings the next morning. His head pained him, but the pulse that beat in it was not so much the pulse of a physical malaise as the heady pulse of bliss. Then he remembered. He had become a social success overnight.

With the weak but thankful gait of a convalesant he tottered out of bed and into his clothes. There was a knock at his bedroom door. Elsie, the housemaid entered with a cup of tea

"I thought you might like a cup of tea Mr. Bones," she said shyly, "after your late night. And here's a letter for you, Mr. Bones," she said. She watched him open the letter and read it.

Dear Mr. Bones,

It is with great pleasure that we are able to inform you that our previous year's trading has been so successful that we are planning to enlarge our business by launching out in a hitherto untried direction. Our new line will be birthday greetings cards and we are hoping that you will be willing to help us by supplying at the usual rates a selection of tasteful greeting verses suitable to the trade. We shall of course continue as before with the manufacture of our ten brands of high-class Christmas fancy crackers, and take this oportunity of reminding you that our cracker campaign for next Christmas is already underway and that we look forward to receiving in the near future six dozen two-line cracker mottoes as per order.

With the season's greetings,
Yours very truly
Joseph Godbein
Specialist in fancy crackers

"Good news, Mr. Bones?" asked Elsie eagerly.

"Good news, Elsie" resplied Percy Bones, sugaring his tea.

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The FASHION SHOPPE

Great George Street

The King Who Couldn't Laugh

(Continued from page 4)

The King said: "What an ugly face he has, and now he's making peculiar grimaces.

The King: What an ugly face he has, and now he is making the most peculiar grimaces!

(The Queen and Princess gaze over the King's shoulder).

The Queen: He is rely most amusing.

Stranger: the amusing part is to come. This man declares he is the most handsome in the kingdom.

The King: Who?--this miserable looking fellow. That's the funniest thing I have heard for years

(Throws head back and laughs gaily).

(The Stranger throws off his cloak and cap and is revealed as Prince Valiant). Your Majesty has laughed and I claim my reward. (Takes the hand of the Princess). I claim the hand of Princess Merryheart.

The King: You have earned your reward--my blessing on you both

(looks in mirror again and bursts out laughing).

(Enter the Fairy Queen). Smiles and laughter! So all is well! Your Majesty will be glad to hear that I have dealt with Bluffeye; no more will he trouble you. Now return my magic picture and I will leave you all happy.

The King (hands over the mirror but takes a last look): Fancy calling him handsome; he is quite the funniest person I have ever seen.

(Everyone laughs, curtain falls with Prince and Princess holding hands and Fairy Queen waving her wand over them).

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