

Concerning David Jogram

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

MOIRA broke off our engagement to-day and gave me back the ring. The reason she advanced for this ridiculous behavior was that I am not in love with her.

It is a vexatious business to explain to a blue-eyed fiancée of considerable personal attractions that sensible people do not marry on account of a romantic infatuation. I know, for I attempted such enlightenment. And the more feelingly I pointed out that a partnership founded by two persons temporarily out of their minds is in the nature of things more than apt to end in disaster, the more irritated she appeared to become. She entertains, I think, the not uncommon delusion that love is something graver than an infantile disorder of the system.

"Yet I can perfectly understand," she said, cruelly, "that elderly gentlemen always want somebody to comfort their declining years. And I suppose they naturally prefer some one who is rather—or at least, not *exactly*—"

"As ugly as a dead monkey?" I suggested. "Yes, I believe they do try to avoid all unbearable strain on the eyesight. I am not, however, sufficiently intimate with any elderly gentlemen for them to babble out to me their hearts' dear secrets. Personally I do not see why looks need matter much."

This was spoken with point, for so many whippersnappers have raved over what they describe as Moira's "beauty" that the girl is in danger of having her head turned. Besides, she was insinuating—and thirty-seven is not elderly.

"And of course you have lots of money. It must be rather delightful to be Harrowby & Sons, Inc."—she spoke as if I were some sort of writing-fluid—"and to have your products on sale all over the world; to realize, so to speak, that daily you are gladdening Calcutta with your soaps and comforting Nova Zembla with your talcum powder."

"Well, but I inherited all that. It isn't fair to fling ancestral soap-vats in my face."

"I have been far too carefully brought up to take such liberties with wealthy persons. And—of course I wouldn't have thought of marrying you if I hadn't liked you tremendously. But it was pleasant to think of the money, too. Oh, Dick, I am so tired of scrimping and contriving!"

"I know," I said. "There is no concealing that the Knapmans, *père* and *mère*, are the earthen pots of the fable. They "go everywhere," as the phrase runs; but everybody knows their only assets are several well-to-do kinspeople and three handsome daughters.

"And I thought that just liking you would be enough. But David Jogram says it isn't."

"Oh?" said I. "Does this—er—Jogram gentleman disseminate his ravings in the form of verse, or does he conduct a column of advice to the love-lorn?"

"He—why, he is just a man I know," said Moira. The color had mounted to her cheeks. Then she told me about this David Jogram.

It seems she met the young idiot last summer. He is a bookkeeper in a bank at Lichfield. Of course he had the impudence to fall in love with her. And that was not the worst. Moira was not at pains to conceal that if he had not been very poor and with a mother dependent on him already she would have cheerfully married the blatherskite; the epithet is hurled advisedly, for she repeated some of his sentiments concerning "loveless marriages." All I will say of those sentiments is that they seemed out of place on the orchestra side of the footlights.

I voiced my opinion of such notions. I was fairly generous, I think. I conceded that this "falling in love," this mutual attraction of two people, was a

law of nature and primarily designed to useful ends. So were the laws of gravity; yet it did not follow that aeroplanes were immoral, or that tumbling down the cellar steps was a commendable action. In fact, the laws of nature were all very well for people who were living in a state of nature. But if, through no fault of your own, you happened to be living in the twentieth century, it was judicious to remember that this state also shaped its laws according to its circumstances.

In the outcome Moira agreed to keep on being engaged to me. She said with acerbity that I deserved no milder fate.

"And, my dear," I began, "I don't at all mind about this Gingham—"

"Jogram," she indignantly prompted.

"Well, in any event, it isn't a name I would saddle upon a person I was sincerely fond of. 'Moira Jogram' sounds as if you had three English walnuts in your mouth. But according to your own account, it is not possible for you to marry him. Now, it is perfectly possible for you to marry me. It would make me very happy, your parents would be happy, and I honestly believe you would be happy too."

"Oh yes, it would be a *sensible* match. But David Jogram says—"

"Confound the man! and does he never stop talking?"

"He doesn't talk so very much. But when he is excited he talks rather fast—and he combs his hair straight back, you know—"

"I know nothing whatever about it."

"I mean he keeps pushing it back from his forehead until it is like a plume," said Moira, in the most inane and dreamy way. "He has really beautiful hair."

"So has any other good-looking poodle," said I.

Moira appears to be carrying on an intermittent correspondence with this David Jogram. She asked me if I minded. I told her of course not.

I cannot help thinking, though, it would be better for the boy if they avoided such nonsense. Looking back, I remember divers letters I wrote at twenty-six and thereabouts—this Jogram is twenty-six—and I prayerfully trust the recipients have destroyed them.

It is simply on young Jogram's ac-

count that I do not wholly approve of this letter-writing.

I have been using a hair tonic for some time. No sensible man wants to be bald. I have a plenty of hair, and I mean to retain it as long as I can. I notice, though, that after the tonic has been well rubbed into the scalp—as the directions tell you to do—it is rather difficult to part the hair neatly. In future I shall simply brush it straight back. It saves trouble.

Moira says that in addition it is more becoming. She mentioned it the instant I came into the room, and seemed tremendously pleased.

I was wondering last night how it happened that I escaped falling in love with Moira Knapman. She is an attractive girl, and Jogram, for instance, seems to adore her. I judge this by the absurdities he writes her. She occasionally tells me bits of his letters.

If by any chance I had fallen in love with Moira it need not necessarily have interfered with my marrying her. She would still have been the wife my common sense selected. And of course she would have been pleased by my being foolish about her, as is the nature of women.

It seems almost a pity that I am not that sort of a tragic ass. I even wrote some verses concerning it—a silly habit I thought I had outlived. I read them to Moira, because they are principally about this young Jogram, and I do not wish her to believe that I object to her intimacy with him. This sounds as if I did, but I do not. I rarely ever think of him.

This is what I read to Moira:

"How very heartily I hate
The man that will love you,
Some day, somewhere, and more than I,
And with a love more true;—

"Whom for that reason you will love
As you do not love me,—
Though I might hold your heart, I think,
Held I one heart in fee.

"My dear, too many ghosts arise
Between us when I woo,

One mocking me with softer lips,
And one with eyes more blue,

“And one with hands more fine than yours,
And one with lovelier hair—”

“I think they are impudent trollops,”
said Moira.

So I looked up. She was regarding her hands held out in front of her, and every finger was rigid with indignation. Moira has wonderful hands, though—the sort that Van Dyck painted, only more beautiful.

I must change that line about their hands.

I said: “It is not seemly thus to interrupt the careless rapture of a poet. And for the rest, these are the ghosts of—er—personal friends of mine, who have either died or turned into other people, you understand. So I really cannot have them abused. ‘And one with lovelier hair,’” I iterated, firmly,

“Proclaiming, *She is fair enough,*
But then . . . I too was fair.”

“Part of your heart you gave to me—
(‘And me!’—‘And me!’)—*long syne*
And may not give again. That part
Is mine.—(‘And mine!’—‘And mine!’)”

“Since these be truthful ghosts, I shrug
And woo you without tears
Or too much laughter, till with time
A properer Prince appears,

“Whom very heartily I hate,—
The man that will love you,
Some day, somewhere, and more than I,
And with a love more true.”

“And do you really hate poor David?”
Moira asked, not displeased.

“Why, of course I don’t. That is simply poetic license,” I explained.

I honestly do not hate this young Jogram. To the contrary, I frequently induce Moira to talk about him. It amuses me. And, from what she tells me, he is in every way an admirable lad whose only fault is his poverty.

I am perfectly willing for Moira to keep on being friends with him.

I suppose he thinks of me as the abandoned nobleman of melodrama who is bent on severing purity in muslin from honest worth in homespun. Lord, how the lad must loathe me!

Moira had not mentioned him for three days. I hardly like this reticence. Why should she avoid in this marked fashion even a passing mention of his name, unless it were that her feeling is such she cannot trust herself to talk about him?

If I have somewhat altered my style of dressing nowadays in little matters, it was done simply to please Moira. Nobody else has anything to do with it.

If Moira likes a particular shade of blue in cravats—so much that, having seen it worn by a person, she remembers it—it is entirely natural for me to get a cravat of that color. Moreover, on her part the preference for the cravat is impersonal. If she had first seen it on a tailor’s dummy she would have approved of it just as much.

Everybody agrees that gray is more becoming to me. I do not mean in cravats, but in coats. I shall order two more from the same place.

Sketchly was asking me to-day about that London appointment. It seems we need a new man there to supervise accounts. The duties are so light and the place pays so well that he has some thirty applicants for me to choose among. I wish he would not bother me with such matters. I am not a judge of bookkeepers. I suppose, now, this David Jogram is—in addition to his other perfections—since he keeps books himself.

I do not know how I happened to think of Jogram. He has nothing whatever to do with my appointments.

I would not have thought that Moira could care so much for any one. When she speaks of him she positively—“croons” is, I think, the word. She is like a mother over a child. Her eyes are big and wistful, and she forgets all about my existence, and I could almost weep, I am so sorry for her.

She tells me all the little trifles concerning him, so proudly and naïvely, just like a mother speaking of her child. I suppose all women really mother the man they love. . . . It would be a beautiful thing if these two young people could be married. They would be like demigods.

I only mean it would be beautiful from an artistic standpoint. Rationally considered, the notion is preposterous.

Sketchly was after me again to-day about that London appointment. . . .

But if I were to give it to this Jogram, Moira could throw me over and marry him.

Besides, I do not even know if he is a competent bookkeeper. It is not my place to be running after him. It would be idiotic.

And I want her. I find that I want Moira very much.

I may as well confess it. I am probably in love with Moira Knapman.

It seems unbelievable that I once thought of her—to phrase it truthfully—as a desirable article in household furnishings on which I had an option. But Jogram came with his covetous rhapsodies, and I amusedly began for the first time to appraise the actual merits of my intended purchase, in order to get a good laugh out of the boy's delusion. Well, intelligent scrutiny showed that he really undervalued her.

So I ought to be very happy. For I want Moira more than I want anything else in life, and her parents are ready to sell her to me.

No, I was wrong; there is that which I want more than I want Moira, a thing I lack the means to purchase for myself and have not the bravery to buy for her. I saw it when, this afternoon, I passed the Prothero cabin.

This Tom Prothero is a farm-laborer. He was lounging on the porch, and had been teasing that brat of his, who was standing between the man's knees. His wife had come to the door to call them in to supper. He was looking up at her, and she down at her husband, over the child's yellow head. That was all. She is a tall woman, pinched of face, unlovely and a slattern, but her eyes were beautiful just then. Her eyes are blue, but more pale than Moira's.

And these Protheros think that I am wealthy!

I am again composing verses. I suppose I shall soon be writing those rhymed advertisements of Harrowby & Sons' products which contribute to the discomforts of riding on a street-car.

Eh, well, it is an old, old tale, no more peculiar to Verona than elsewhere, but for the moment I am prefiguring myself as one of the guests at Juliet's *début*. Here are my verses:

I had not thought the house of Capulet
Might boast a daughter of such marvelous
grace

As this capricious girl, with flower-soft
face

Round which the glory of her hair is set
Like some great golden halo—while, as yet,
Love is to her a word that, spoken, stirs
Wonder alone, since love administers
In nothing to the mirth of Juliet.

What if anon I woke this heart unharried
As yet by love, and won these lips more
red

Than rain-tossed cherries? — *Look, the
dancers go.*

*What's he that would not dance? If he
be married*

*My grave is like to be my wedding-bed.—
God rest you, sweet! the knave is Romeo.*

There are unscrupulous persons who will tell you that Juliet was not a blonde. I would as willingly believe she was a blackamoor. What man has ever slept the worse because a woman had dark hair?

But gold hair flames through sick, half-waking dreams—such dreams as trouble you by their slow movings rather than their incidents. And then—then the dawn comes, jaded and reluctant and comfortless. And time moves so slowly that it breeds a sort of hysteria. It is unendurable.

What right has he to everything when I have nothing? It is not fair.

When I think of him, tears come into my eyes and I shudder. I know how murderers feel. May Heaven forgive me, but I long to have this Jogram's throat between my hands—his beautiful, warm young throat whose comeliness is unmarred by time as mine is. He is the younger man, and it may be that in the ordinary affairs of life he is the stronger, but I would be the stronger then.

What right has he to everything? It is not fair.

I told Moira to-day that Sketchly had written to offer the London appointment to David Jogram.

“He will doubtless think that Harrowby & Sons have been smitten with insanity. But unless you have had the misfortune to grow enamoured of an imbecile, he will jump at the chance.”

Moira did not say anything. There was only meditation in her eyes as yet.

"You see, it will give you and him and his infernal mother enough to live on."

"Oh—!" said Moira. She said no more than this. But her face had altered, just as I had known it would alter. And all the joy and beauty of the world was gathered in her brightly colored face, and I too was almost happy, because of her great happiness.

"There will be trouble with your parents and other sensible people. That need not matter where love is. They will tell you that you are throwing away your chances. They will be alluding to me. That will be rather funny. The single opportunity you have of throwing away any really important chance is to permit long-headed idiots to bully you into marrying Harrowby & Sons. Oh, you must not do that! Oh, Moira, you are very lovely—!"

My voice was not behaving properly, and I was beginning to talk at random.

And mercifully I was permitted to get no further. Moira had risen. I remember that she stood in silence, trembling a little, it seemed to me, and that the dear hands I had blasphemed went to her breast and stayed so for a long while. Then without haste she came to me and touched my arm, almost as if she were afraid.

"You are looking badly, Dick."

"I didn't sleep last night—not well, that is." I think my face showed I was speaking truthfully.

"I—I am sorry." And now she held

her eyes away from me. I suppose that my eyes had been telling tales.

"You shouldn't be anything but pleased by such a pretty compliment," I complained. "It is a really sweeping tribute to your charms, my dear. You see, my fondest hopes in life being thus irrevocably blighted, I am gallantly beginning to become a devotee of sleepless nights—"

But Moira would have none of flippancy. She raised her face, and, to my anguish, tears were in her eyes. Her eyes are colored then like the April heavens after a brief storm.

"I didn't mean to hurt you, Dick—oh, not so much!" she said.

I did not try to pretend ignorance of what she meant. It did not seem worth while.

"But I couldn't let you marry me as—as if you were engaging a housekeeper—"

"Eh, what a fool I was!" I groaned to think of past complacency. All that seemed so long ago.

"—Because I was too proud. And besides, I was in love with you before you wanted me. And afterward you—oh, you *hurt* me with your common sense!"

My face, I have since learned, expressed bewilderment.

"And David Jogram was just what I wanted you to be and you weren't. He said the things I wanted you to say, and you wouldn't. I know, because I invented David Jogram. You see, there was never any such person," Moira explained, "and I am wondering what in the world will become of Mr. Sketchly's letter."

