

Matrimonial Adventures

The Bright Bees of Toupan

BY
James Branch Cabell

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JUST A LITTLE ABOUT
JAMES BRANCH CABELL

Mr. Cabell is to me a very pleasant voice over the telephone. I called him up when I reached Richmond. He lives five miles out of town. He had already joined the Star Author Series of Matrimonial Adventures through the solicitation of Mr. Joseph Hergesheimer.

I wanted to talk to Mr. Cabell about his story for the series, but the warm sunshine and the spring flowers that the New Yorker sometimes erroneously associates with Virginia were visiting elsewhere. It was snowing when I arrived and Richmond had become a jeweled city of gleaming icicles when I left the next morning. I did not meet Mr. Cabell, because the roads to topography did not take kindly to the weather and motor traveling was unsafe.

If James Branch Cabell had written nothing else, as the author of "Jurgon" alone he would have a unique place in American letters. But Mr. Cabell's other books are an additional reason for his high place in American literature. "The Bright Bees of Toupan" follows, and I know of no other writer who would have treated the very intricate subject of marriage in this perfectly delightful fairy-tale style.

After all, should artists marry? I leave it to you—and Mr. Cabell. MARY STEWART CUTTING, JR.

Miramón Luagor had very wonderfully prospered at magic; he was, as they say, now blessed with more than any reasonable person would ask for, and the most clamant of these superfluities appeared to him to be his wife.

They tell how Miramón was one of the Leshy, born of a people that was neither human nor immortal, telling how his home was built upon the summit of the mountain called Vradex. Here in the old days, dwelt Miramón Luagor, at a discreet remove from the prurishness of men and the respectable amours of the High Gods, retired in his Doubtful Palace; wherein, as they report also, this wizard designed the dreams for sleep.

His taste was for the richly romantic. But his wife Gisele had quite other notions, a whole set of notions, and her philosophy was that of the intelligent individualism. And the wizard, to keep peace, at least in the intervals between his wife's more mordantly loquacious moments, would design such dreams as Gisele preferred. But he knew that these dreams did not express the small thoughts and fancies which harbored in the heart of Miramón Luagor, and which would perish with the falling of his doom unless he wrought the fancies into dreams that, being fleshless, might evade carnivorous time. And Miramón hungered for the lost freedom of his bachelorhood.

His wife also was discontent, because the ways of the Leshy appeared, to this mortal woman indecorous. The doom that was upon the Leshy seemed not entirely in good taste to her who had been born of a race about whom destiny did not bother; in fact, it was a continual irritation to her that her little boy Demetrius was predestinate to kill his father with the charmed sword Flamberg. This was a doom which Madame Gisele found not at all the sort of thing you cared to have imminent in your own family; and she felt that the sooner the gray Norms, who weave the fate of all that live, were spoken to quite candidly, the better it would be for everybody concerned.

She was irritated by the mere sight of Flamberg. So her thinking was not of silk and honey when, after polishing the sword as was her usage upon Thursday morning, she came into Miramón's ivory tower to hang the weapon in its right place. With Miramón sat that sleek person whom men called Ninzian. It was not known to all of Ninzian's friends that he was an evil spirit who had come out of the Bottomless Pit to work iniquity; but Miramón Luagor knew this, and therefore he made appropriate use of the demon, and indeed upon this very afternoon the two were looking at that which Ninzian had procured for the wizard at a price.

"Good-day to you, Sir Ninzian," says Madame Gisele, politely enough. And then she spoke, in a different tone, to Miramón Luagor. "And with what are you cluttering up the house now?"

"Ah, wife," replies Miramón, "these are the bees of Toupan, a treasure beyond word of thinking. They are not as other bees, for theirs is the appearance of shining ice; and they crawl fearfully, as they have crawled since Toupan's downfall, about this cross of black stone."

"That is a very likely story for you to be telling me, who can see that the disgusting creatures have wings to fly away with whenever they want to. And besides, who in the world is Toupan?"

"He is nobody in this world, wife, and it is wiser not to speak of him.

Let it suffice that he made all things as they were. Then Koshchei took the power from Toupan, and made all things as they are. Yet three of Toupan's servants endure upon earth, where they who were once lords of the Vendish have now no power remaining save to creep humbly as insects; the use of their wings is denied them, the charmed stone holds them immutably. Oho, but wife, there is a cantrap which nobody has as yet discovered, and to their releaser will be granted whatever his will may desire."

"This is some more of your stuff and nonsense, out of old fairy tales, where everybody gets three wishes, and no good out of any of them."

"No, my love, because I shall put them to quite practical uses. For you must know that when I have found out the cantrap which will release the bees of Toupan—"

Gisele showed plainly that his foolishness did not concern her. She sighed, and hung the sword in its accustomed place. "Oh, but I am weary of this endless wizardry!"

"Then, wife," says Miramón, "then why are you perpetually meddling with what you do not understand?"

"I think," said Ninzian, at once, for this demon, too, was married, "I think that I had best be going."

But Gisele's attention was reserved for her husband. "I meddle, as you so very politely call it, because you have no sense of what is right and proper, and no sense of morals, and no sense of expediency, and in fact, no sense at all."

Miramón said, "Now, dearest!" Sir Ninzian was hastily picking up his hat. But Gisele continued, with that resistless and devastating onflow which is peculiar to tidal waves and the tongue of her who speaks for her husband's own good.

"Women everywhere have a hard time of it, but in particular do I pity the woman that is married to one of you moonstruck artists. She has not half a husband, she has but the tending of a baby with long legs—"

"It is so much later than I thought, that really now—" observed Ninzian, ineffectively.

"And I might have had an earl, or a well-thought-of baron, who would have had the decency to remember our anniversary and my birthday, and in any event would never have been in the house twenty-four hours a day. Instead here I am tied to a middle-aged who fritters away his time contriving dreams that nobody cares about one way or the other. Yet if only you would be sensible about your silly business I could put up with the inconvenience of having you underfoot every moment. People need dreams to help them through the night, and nobody enjoys a really good dream more than I do when I have time for it, with the million and one things that are put upon me. But dreams ought to be wholesome, they ought to point an uplifting moral, and certainly they ought not to be about incomprehensible thin nonsense that nobody can halfway understand. They ought, in other words, to make you feel that the world is a pretty good sort of place after all—"

"But, wife, I am sure that it is," says Miramón, mildly.

"Then the more shame to you! and the very least you can do is to keep such morbid notions to yourself, and not be upsetting other people's repose with them."

"I employ my natural gift, I express myself and none other. The rosebush does not put forth wheat, nor flax either," returned the wizard, with a tired shrug. "In fine, what would you have?"

"Oh, a great deal it means to you what I prefer! But if I had my wish your silly dream-making would be taken away from you so that we might live sensibly."

Now as she spoke Gisele slapped viciously at the black cross. And a thing happened to behold which would have astonished the magi and the enchanters who had given over centuries to searching for the cantrap which would release the bees of Toupan. For now without any exercise of magic the scouring rag swept from the stone one of these insects. Koshchei, who made all things as they are, had decreed, they report, that these bright perils could be freed only in the most obvious way, because he knew this would be the last method attempted by any learned persons.

Now for an instant the walls of the ivory tower were a quiver like blown veils. And the bee passed glitteringly to the window, and through the clear glass of the closed window, leaving a small round hole there as the creature went to join its seven fellows in the Pleiades.

Toupan, afloat in the void, unclosed his ancient unappeasable eyes; and Jacy returned to his storefront estate in the moon, and all plants and trees everywhere were withered, and the sea also lost its greenness, and there were no more emeralds. And the High Gods were appalled to see their doom so near at hand, and they cried out to Koshchei who devised them.

Koshchei answered: "Have patience! When Toupan is released I fall with you. Meanwhile I have made all things as they are."

And in that instant Miramón Luagor, as he stood blinking in his ivory tower, was aware of a touch upon his forehead, as if a damp sponge were passing over it, and he perceived that he had forgotten the secret of his wizardry. Something he could yet recall, they say, of the magic of the Purlin and the cast stones, of the Horse and the Bull, of the Water, and most of the lore of the Anagras and the Faidhin rune remained to him. He could still make shift, he knew, to control the bitter Degerar, to build the fearful bridge of the White Ladies, or

to contrive the dance of the Korred. He kept his mastery of the Shedeem who devastate, of the Shehreen who terrify, and of the Mazkeen who destroy. But such accomplishments, as he despairingly knew, were the stock in trade of any fairly competent sorcerer anywhere; and that supreme secret which had made Miramón Luagor the master of all dreams was gone away from him completely.

He was very angry. "Accursed woman!" he cried out, "now indeed has your common sense completed what your nagging began. This is the doom of all artists that have to do with well-conducted women. Truly has it been said that the marriage bed is the grave of art. Well, I have put up with much from you, but this settles it, and I wish you were in the middle of next week."

With that he caught the soiled securing rag from the hand of Gisele, and he slapped at one of the remaining bees, and brushed it from the black cross. And this bee departed as the other had done.

Toupan now moved his wings, exulting, and by his moving the worlds in that part of the universe were dislodged and ran melting down the sky; Gauracy swept the fragments together and formed a sun immeasurably greater than that which he had lost. And the High Gods were frightened now with reason, for in this intolerable glare they showed as flimsy and incredible inventions, and they knew that if ever the last remaining bee were freed from the cross, the dizziness of the Pleiades would be completed, and their day would be over, and the power would return to Toupan.

Yet Koshchei, lifting never a finger, said only: "Eh, sirs, have patience! For I made all things as they are, and I know now it is my safeguard that I have made them in two ways."

But Miramón, in his ivory tower upon Vradex, knew only that his wish had been granted, for Gisele had gone just as a bubble breaks.

"And a good riddance, too," says Miramón. He turned to Ninzian, that smiling fiend. "Why, did you ever see the like of such outrageousness?"

"Oh, very often," replied this Ninzian, who too was married. Then Ninzian asked, "But what will you do next?"

Says Miramón, "I shall wish to have back the secret and the solace of my art."

But to Ninzian this seemed less obvious. "You may do that by releasing the third bee. Yes, Miramón, you can get back your art, but you will be left defenseless against the doom which is appointed. No, friend, by my advice you will employ the cantrap as you at first intended, and will secure for yourself eternal life by wishing that Flamberg may vanish from this world of men." And Ninzian waved toward the sword with which the Norms had foreordained that Miramón Luagor must be killed by his own son.

The fallen wizard answered: "Of what worth is life if it breed no more dreams?" And Miramón said also, "I wonder, Ninzian, just where is the middle of next week?"

Sleek Ninzian spoke, secure in his infernal erudition. "It will fall upon a Wednesday, but nobody knows whence. Olybrius states that it is now in Aratu, where all that enter are clothed like a bird with wings, and have only dust and clay to eat in the unchanging twilight—"

"She would not like that. She had always a delicate digestion."

"Whereas Asinius Pollio suggests, not unflatteringly, that it waits beyond Sild and Gjold, in the blue house of Nostrand, where Sereda herds the unborn Wednesday, under a roof of plaited serpents—"

"Dear me, now that would never suit a woman who had an almost morbid aversion to reptiles!"

"But Sosicles declares it is in Nibabba, where Zipacna and Cabrak play at handball, and the earthquakes are at nurse—"

"She would be none the happier there. She does not care for babies, she would not for one moment put up with a fractious young earthquake, and would make things most unpleasant for everybody. Ninzian!"—and Miramón coughed—"Ninzian, I begin to fear I have been a little hasty."

"It is the frailty of all you artists," the fiend replied. "In any event you have one wish remaining, and no more. You can at will desire to have back again the control of your lost magic, or you can have back your wife to control you."

"Yes," says Miramón, forlornly.

"And indeed," the demon went on with that glib optimism reserved for the dilemmas of many's friends. "Indeed it is in many ways a splendid thing for you to have the choice clear cut. Nobody can succeed alike at being an artist and a husband. I hold no brief for either career, because I think that art is an unreasonable mistress, and I think also that a wife is amenable to the same description. But I am certain no man can serve both."

Miramón sighed. "That is true. There is no marriage for the maker of dreams, because he is perpetually creating finer women than earth provides. The touch of flesh cannot content him who has arranged the shining hair of angels and modeled the breasts of the sphinx. The woman that shares his bed is there, of course, much as the blanket or the pillow is there, and each is an aid to comfort. But what has the maker of dreams, what has that troubled being who lives inside the creature which a mirror reveals to him, to do with women? At best, these animals afford him models to be idealized beyond the insignificant truth, somewhat as I have made a soul-containing portent with only a lizard to start on. And at worst, these animals

can live through no half-hour without meddling where they do not understand."

Now Miramón kept silence. He was fingering the magic colors with which he blazoned the first sketches of his dream. Here was his white, which was the foam of ocean made solid, and the black he had wrung from the burned bones of nine emperors. Here was the yellow slime of Scyros, and crimson clunabaris composed of the mingled blood of behemoths and dragons, and here was the poisonous blue sand of Putagoli. And Miramón, who was no longer a potent wizard, considered that loveliness and horror which a moment ago he had known how to evoke with these pigments, he who had now no power to lend life to his designs, and kept just skill enough, it might be to place the stripings on a barber's pole.

And Miramón Luagor said: "It would be a sad happening if I were never again to sway the sleeping of men, and grant them yet more dreams of distinction and clarity, of beauty and symmetry, of tenderness and truth and urbanity. For whether they like it or not, I know that it is good for them, and it affords to their starved living that which they lack and ought to have."

And Miramón said also: "Yet it would be another sad happening were my poor wife permitted eternally to scold the shivering earthquakes in the middle of next week. What does it matter that I do not especially like her? There is a great deal about myself that I do not like, such as my body's flabbiness, and the small nose which makes ludicrous the face I wear; but do I banker to be transformed into a sturdy man-at-arms? Do I view the snout of an elephant with covetousness? Why, but, Ninzian, I am astonished at your foolish talking! What need have I of perfection? What would I have in common with anybody who was patient with me and thought highly of my doings? No, Ninzian, it is in vain that you pester me with your continuous talking, for I am as used to her shortcomings as I am to my own shortcomings. I regard her tantrums with the resignation I extend to inclement weather. It is unpleasant. All tempests are unpleasant. Ah, yes, but if life should become an endless clear May afternoon we could not endure it; we who have once been lashed by storms would cross land and sea to look for snow and pelting hail. Just so, to have Gisele about keeps me perpetually fretted, but now that she is gone I am miserable. No, Ninzian, you may spare your talking, you need say no more, for I simply could not put up with being left to live in comfort."

Sir Ninzian had heard him through, with that patience which is requisite to friends. And Ninzian, shrugging, said, "Then do you choose Miramón for your wife and no more dreams, or for your art and loneliness?"

"Such wishing would be overwasteful," Miramón replied, as he dusted away the third bee. "Since I can bear to give up neither my wife nor my art, no matter how destroyingly they work against each other, I wish for everything to be put back just where it was an hour ago."

The last bee flew in a wide circle, and returned to the cross. Life reawoke in all which had perished in that hour, and Gauracy's baleful sun was gone, and the dislodged worlds and satellites were revolving trimly in their former places. And the High Gods rejoiced; for there were only seven Pleiades, and Toupan, afloat in the void, again seemed harmless enough, because the eyes were closed wherein is tireless and unappeasable malignity, and a foreknowledge which is perturbing to the Gods.

Koshchei said only: "What need was there to worry? Did I not make my creatures male and female? And did I not make the tie which is between them, that cord which I wove equally of love and of disliking?—Eh, sirs, but that is a strong cord, and though all things that are depend upon it, my weaving holds."

But Miramón in his ivory tower knew nothing of how he had played havoc with the universe; he only knew that upon the black stone cross three bees were crawling fretfully, and that his wife Gisele had come back to him enraged.

"A pretty trick that was to play on me!" she says. "Oh, but I pity the woman that is married to an artist!"

"But why do you perpetually meddle without understanding?" he replied, as fretful as the accursed bees, as angry as the intolerable woman.

And they went on very much as before.

Ireland's Famine of 1847.

In 1847, famine in Ireland shocked the sensibilities of the people of the United States, who devised means to relieve some portion of the distress concerning which many painful accounts were printed in the papers at the time, the Detroit News recalls American vessels were freighted by private subscriptions in the United States and were sent on errands of mercy to Ireland, where entire families were howling with the pangs of hunger, and dying upon the pavements of a crowded city, while speculators in breadstuffs furtively cast the "sweetened" portions of their granaries into the night, that it might be carried out to sea.

It was said that 200,000 pounds sterling were due to the Provincial Board of Ireland by one house engaged in the importation of corn, which was bought by the cargo at 415 per ton, merely to be forwarded for a rise in prices. No satisfactory report of the distribution of the articles sent from America was ever made.

Daddy's Evening
Fairy Tale
MARY GRAHAM BONNER
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THE HOSPITAL PETS

You have heard perhaps of the two rabbits who were sent to join another rabbit who was a hospital pet.

These were real, live rabbits, too, and the children of the hospital loved watching them and playing with them and seeing them in their big house and little yard which had been fixed for them at the end of the hospital ward. But warm weather had come and the rabbits were to be allowed to go out-of-doors.

Now the hospital was in a city, but there was a yard attached to the hospital and there a big yard was made for the rabbits. A little house was made for them, too.

The yard had a wire fence about it and there were constantly good things to eat about, for the matron of the hospital loved these hospital pets. There was always plenty of cabbage and lettuce and they were very happy.

The children were out upon the hospital veranda, some in coats, others who could walk about were allowed to go down to the yard in which were the rabbits. And the others watched the rabbits from the veranda.

The rabbits had been given excellent care and they had made nice beds for themselves. But the most wonderful thing of all was that though these rabbits had never been out of doors before, in their lives, and though they had never been with other rabbits who had been able to show them in any way what they would do if they were out of doors, still these rabbits at once began to dig.

No one had ever told them anything about burrowing holes in the ground; no one had ever told them or shown them any of the things they should do as soon as they were out of doors. But right away they began making back entrances to their house, digging in the hard city earth.

It was the instinct which had come down to them through generations and generations of rabbits who had done this, and as soon as they were out of doors they too followed the family ways.

One day someone came to the hospital and brought chocolate bunnies for the children, and the faces of the children were covered with chocolate.

But one little girl showed the rabbits a chocolate bunny and the rabbit wagged his little nose and took a bite of cabbage as though to say: "Chocolate? Not for me! I'll stick to the good old cabbage."

In the hospital one little boy was quite sick. He felt wretched and his pet was a pussy cat. The cat was allowed to have the other bed in a room off the big ward where the boy's bed had been put.

When the little boy would speak to him - he would purr, but he would hardly eat anything and he would not go off and play and he would not leave while the little boy was so sick.

It was not until the little boy was better that the cat began to take an interest in his food again, for the little boy was his special friend and a devoted cat could not bear to have his special friend sick. It took away a devoted cat's appetite.

Tramp, the hospital dog, was around everywhere, friendly and good-natured as he could be. There was nothing snobbish about Tramp. He had always been without foolish pride.

Of course he came of plain, every-day dog parents, but still he had heard of creatures who put on airs when they had no right to do so. In fact, it was Tramp's opinion that no one could put on airs and a mount to much. It took up all one's time putting on airs so that there was no time left over in which to amount to something and in which to be friendly and sensible.

Oh, yes, the hospital had its pets. But perhaps the greatest pets of all were the rabbits. Still - different children had their different favorites just as the animals had their different favorites.

But at any rate it was wonderful to have pets around when one was sick. Pets were so cheering and made one forget about many an ache and many a pain.

History.

"History is bunk" as history is written. We shall have no real history until humanity becomes sufficiently self-conscious to see the way by which it arrived at its present status. History is thus racial autobiography and like all autobiographies it is based on the attainment of an objective consciousness of self. Dearborn Index.

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THIS LITTLE
BABY GIRL

Was Benefited by the Good Her
Mother Got from Lydia E. Pink-
ham's Vegetable Compound

Pittsburgh, Pa.—"I took Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound before my little girl was born, and the effect it had was wonderful. This will be the first child I have nursed, as I had to nurse my two boys up on the bottle. I was very nervous and worried, tired all the time, and after I read about the Vegetable Compound I tried it and kept on with it. I still continue its use and recommend it to my friends. You may publish these facts as a testimonial for your medicine."—Mrs. Wm. Klingbe, 169 Plymouth St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

It is remarkable how many cases have been reported similar to this one. Many mothers are left in a weakened and run-down condition after the birth of the child, and for such mothers the care of the baby is well-nigh impossible. Not only is it hard for the mother, but the child itself will indirectly suffer.

Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound is an excellent tonic for the mother at this time. It is prepared from medicinal roots and herbs, and does not contain any harmful drugs. It can be taken in safety by the nursing mother.

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