

BREAKFAST IN BED

MAY 1921 NANCY BOYD

Breakfast in Bed

Demonstrating that, while Home may be Where the Heart is, the Office is a Fine Place to Work

NANCY BOYD

Persons: Carey Turner, a prosperous monger of overflavored motion-picture scenarios and other indigestible literary pastry.

Janet Turner, his wife, who thinks him almost as great a man as Mr. Griffith.

Time: The Living Present.

Place: Just West of the Park.

Scene: A bed-room, furnished caressingly and at the outlay of no contemptible expense in what might be termed the Lingerie Period—twin beds, dressing-table, writing-desk, etc., of hand-painted hepatica-lilac wood, with insertions of woven cane; hangings and counterpanes of lacerated-raspberry. On the dressing-table, suspended from one horn of the mirror, an arresting assortment of neckties; suspended from the other, six elaborate boudoir-caps which have never been worn; on the writing-desk note-paper and envelopes of dove-grey embossed in violet with

an abandoned and inarticulate monogram, also two quill-pens, one black and one rose, which have never been bitten; on the floor a large black rug; on the table between the beds an upright but rather crumpled doll, which rings instead of saying, "Mamma!" In one bed, asleep, Mrs. Turner: twenty-one, short black hair and straight bangs (formally Chinese), speedwell-blue pyjamas several sizes too large, heart-breakingly pretty. In the other bed, asleep, Mr. Turner: twenty-six, smooth blonde hair, collar-advertisement chin and jaw, sardonic mouth—the ensemble rendered piquant by a nose that is undeniably retroussé. Nine o'clock of a spring morning. In the chamber a lurid gloom. Silence.

In the midst of this silence there comes a discreet tap at the door. Mrs. Turner lifts her arms above her head, stretches and sighs, then lapses again into slumber. The door opens slowly, and there enters the room a steaming tray, containing coffee, chocolate, toast, and two eggs sitting up like hour-glasses.

SHE: *(sleepily)* Oh, good-morning, Anna. —Wait a minute. I'll stick the phone on the floor.

(Anna deposits the tray on the table between the two beds.)

SHE: Thanks.—Close the window, will you, Anna?—And hand me that thing on the foot of the bed. I just can't reach it.

(Anna having softly retired, Mrs. Turner lies down again, sighs once more, closes her eyes, opens them, then sits up abruptly and thrusts her arms into her vermillion-satin and gold-bedragoned dressing-gown.)

SHE: Carey! Oh, Carey! Here's breakfast again!

HE: Huh?

SHE: Breakfast! Breakfast!—Coffee, sweetheart, and lovely eggs!

HE: Oh, the devil!

SHE: Well, all right.—Oh, Carey, sit up, you lazy dog, and eat your breakfast! You can't lie here in bed all day today. I'm going to have the room cleaned.

HE: *(sighing, and thrusting his nose into his pillow)* What's matter the room?

SHE: Oh, well—there's no use trying to explain. Here's your coffee, dear.

(Without opening his eyes, Mr. Turner extends one arm and gropes about the seat of a chair beside the bed.)

SHE: Oh, sweetheart, *must* you smoke before breakfast ? You know what the doctor said.

HE: *(pinching a cigarette from a soft package and lighting it doggedly)* Well, he's paid, isn't he?—He should kick.

SHE: Oh, all right *(after watching him a moment, tremulously)*. Six months ago you used to say you had to take care of your health for my sake.

(He does not reply. He is staring at the end of his cigarette.)

SHE: *(gently)* Drink your coffee, dear, before it gets cold.

(He picks up his coffee 'without focusing his eyes upon it.)

SHE: There's a good boy.

(There is silence for some minutes, save for that gentle sound of toast between the teeth of the well-bred.)

SHE: Eat your egg, dearest.

HE: *(musingly)* "Eat your egg, dearest." Oh, if I could only describe how I hate eggs, I'd be a great author.

(She starts to say something, but decides not to. He sits lost in thought, absently pressing a buttered knife against a slice of toast.)

SHE: *(briskly)* You'd better eat it. You'll be hungry before luncheon—and you know you're not supposed to eat between meals.

HE: Hm?—Oh.*(He seizes an egg and crushes in its skull with a knife-handle.)*

SHE: Oh, darling, why don't you use the cutter? It's ever so much easier.

HE: Cutter? Oh, those button-hole scissors. I should say not.

SHE: Well, all right—struggle.*(She scalps her egg neatly and wedges a spoon into it.)*

HE: *(irritably)* Oh, dammit all! This is a hell of a way for a civilized man to eat an egg—out of the shell like a weasel!

(She laughs, a lovely, bright sound that might be a bird on the window-sill. After which she considers him for a moment with a small, puckered smile.)

SHE: Sweet, old thing. You're so hateful this morning that you're cute.

(He does not reply. He pours himself the rest of the coffee, and turns the sugar-bowl upside over his cup. There is a little splash, followed by a pause. As she drinks her chocolate, Mrs. Turner's eyes wander about the room.)

SHE: Darling, don't you think that new waste-basket is sweet?

HE : *(glancing up)* Mm—ayah. Very nice.

SHE: I came upon it yesterday quite by accident—I wasn't looking for waste-baskets at all—and I saw it in a window quite by accident, part of one of those sets, you know, that they're always arranging, with tall lamps, you know, and kimonos thrown carelessly over chairs.

(He does not reply.)

SHE : I thought it would just exactly match the quill-pen. But it doesn't—not quite.— Still, I rather like things a little bit off. *(She smiles, and regards the waste-basket with her head to one side.)*

(Presently, as her husband does not .reply, she glances at him. He is sitting with his coffee-cup half-way to his lips, on his face an expression of ' frozen horror, staring at the closet door.)

SHE: For *heaven's* sake, Carey, what's the matter? What are you looking at?

(He starts violently, and blinks, then begins calmly drinking his coffee.)

HE : Beg your pardon, dear. '

SHE: What in the world's the matter?

HE: *(reaching for another cigarette)* Nothing. I was just thinking.

SHE: Mercy! If just thinking does that to you, I should say you might as well dream!

(He does not reply. He lights a match, and holds it in his fingers until it wizens and charrs, while, he regards the window-curtain through narrowed lids.)

SHE: *(anxiously)* Dearest, *don't* let it burn your fingers!

HE: *(with irritation)* Oh, for the love of— anybody'd think you taught me to smoke! *(He lights his cigarette angrily and drops the match into his coffee-cup)*

SHE: *(desolately)* I'm sorry. I just was afraid you'd bum your fingers. You're so absent-minded.

HE:*(after a moment, absent-mindedly)* Er —beg your pardon, dear.*(There is a pause.)*

SHE: *(aloud, but as if to herself, with a sudden heightening of spirits)* I know what I'll do. I'll do my nails. *(She throws back the covers, leaps to the black rug, and patters over to the dressing-table. Here, darting and peering like some gaudy, tropical bird, she collects a trayful of pastes, chinks, scissors, emeryboards, and little ivory playthings of different shapes and sizes. With these she returns to the bed and jumps in.)*

SHE:(*after an industrious minute and a half*) Dearest, does the sound of this annoy you?

HE:(*starting violently, and drawing in his gaze from the far corner of the room, where a little knob sticks out from the wall to keep the wall and door from ill-treating one another*)
Hm—what?—What's that? Sound of what?

SHE: (*in a tiny voice*) Oh.—I'm sorry.

(*He stares at her a moment, then picks up the package of cigarettes and lights one feverishly. Having done which, he reaches out for the telephone-directory and hoists it into bed with him.*)

SHE: (*polishing the fingers of one hand on the palm of the other*) You mustn't forget to call up Flo, dear. She's expecting us, and she'll be terribly disappointed. But it can't be helped. (*She regards the tips of her fingers critically, then starts polishing again.*) Or shall I call her up?

HE: (*running his eye slowly down a column*) Mm—you'd better call her up.

SHE:(*musingly, inserting an orange-wood stick into a little pot of white paste and rubbing it gently under her left thumb-nail*) *I've got to call up Dickey some time to-day.*

(*He does not reply.*)

SHE: (*stretching out her arm and wiggling her fingers, the nails of which are now whetted to that sinister degree of brilliancy at which it becomes possible to cut window-panes with them*)
Look, sweetheart—aren't they beautiful? (He does not reply.)

SHE: (*glancing up*) Can't you find the number, darling?

HE: *(in a thundering voice, laying down the book)* What number?

SHE: *(astonished)* Why, the number you're looking for, silly?

HE: I'm not looking for any number.. I'm reading. *(He picks up the book again)* You seem to forget you're married to a literary guy. *(He laughs a short laugh.)*

SHE: *(quietly)* Well, really, Carey—I don't know when I've seen you in such a bad temper.

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HE: *(slapping the book together and hurling it at the footboard)* Oh, you don't—well, I do!—*The last time I tried to work out a scenario in bed, and you decided, in your own inimitable way, you'd like to drive me crazy !*

SHE: *(pitifully, utterly contrite)* Oh, Carey, are you working out a scenario ? I'm so sorry—*why* didn't you tell me?

HE: I *hate* to tell people. I like to just think about 'em without saying a word about 'em to anybody. When I begin to talk about 'em I get sick of 'em. *(He flings down the covers)* I'm going to get up.

SHE: *(jumping out of bed so hastily as to scatter the manicuring apparatus in all directions)* No, Carey—no, no, dear—you stay right there. *I'm* going to get up!

HE: (*ungraciously*) Oh, it's no use now. (*He drops one foot to the floor*)

SHE: Carey, *please I Please* stay there and think, dearest! If you don't I'll be so miserable I—*{she drags a small blue handkerchief from her pyjama pocket and presses it against her mouth for a moment, then continues, brightly }* Listen, darling, I have a wonderful idea, which will fix everything all right! I know I'm always bothering you when you're busy. You see I can't tell when you're busy, and when you're just cross. People that work in their heads are *terribly* difficult. If you were a—a paper-hanger, or something, it would be *much* more simple to know when you were at work. But anyway, the only thing for us to do is this: (*She pauses for a moment; her lip quivers, and she twists her little handkerchief*) I'll move into the blue guest-room. We don't need two guest-rooms. And you can have this room all to yourself. After a while you can—you can get a larger bed—or we can—sell these, maybe —*{she turns abruptly and starts toward the door}*

HE: (*leaping to his feet*) Janet!

SHE: (*brightly, not looking around*) Get back into bed, dear. I won't bother you again until luncheon—Carey 1 *{with a shriek}* Don't you come near me! Don't you touch me!

HE: (*huskily, catching her in his arms*) If you think I'm going to sleep in this room with that other bed empty—as if you'd died, or something—*(he gulps)*—or sell—*sell* those—oh, my sweetheart, are you crying?

SHE: (*bursting into a flood of tears and laying her head on his shoulder*) Of course I'm crying! My heart is broken!

HE: Oh, *don't*, honey! Oh, I'm a brute!

SHE: (*sobbing*) You're no such thing! It's all my fault! I'm always trying to think of something to help you, and all the time I'm just ruining your life!

HE: (*kissing the top of her head*) Hush—hush, dear. I couldn't live without you—if that's what you call ruining my life.

SHE: (*wildly*) But I want to *help* you! That's what I want, to *help* you!

HE: There—there. You do help me, darling. (*He takes his handkerchief and tenderly dries her wet cheeks*) It's a help just having you around.

CURTAIN