

POWDER, ROUGE AND LIP-STICK

SEPTEMBER 1921 NANCY BOYD

Powder, Rouge and Lip-Stick

In which it is Suggested that—Among Women—far more often than not, Handsome is as Handsome does

NANCY BOYD

PERSONS:

Robert Avery-Thompson, *subject to recurrent attacks of acute idealism.*

Gwendolyn Avery-Thompson, *his wife.*

SCENE I: *A Dressing-Table. Discovered seated, a vision of ingenuous charm, Mrs. Avery-Thompson, putting the finishing touches to her toilet. Discovered standing, on first one foot and then the other, Mr. Avery-Thompson. The Avery-Thompsons are going out to dinner. Mr. Avery-Thompson is wondering just when.*

HE: (suddenly seized by a cramp of LetUs-Lead-the-Simple-Life) Sweetheart, I wish you wouldn't use so much powder.

SHE: *{in righteous astonishment, arrested in the act of spanking a flat, round puff upon her countenance}* Why, dearest, I don't use *any!* A little tiny box like this lasts me just *ages!*

HE: Oh, but, darling, just look at your nose!

SHE: *(considering herself in the mirror with pardonable satisfaction)* Well,—what's the matter with my nose?.

HE : There's too much powder on it.

SHE: Bob, you're crazy! I don't use *half* so much powder as most women do. I'm *frightfully* careful. I *never* go out without first taking a mirror to the window and looking at myself by daylight, and you know it.

HE: *(unimpressed, thrusting his hands into his pockets and sauntering moodily up and down the rug)* Rum idea, anyhow, pasting up the perfectly good human face with a lot of chalk dust.

SHE: *(turning to stare at him speculatively)* Come on, Bob. Out with it. Who is she?

HE: Who is who?

SHE: This blue-nosed hockey-champion you've got religion from.

HE: *{hitting the writing-desk with his fist}* I tell you there isn't anybody. It's just me. I've been thinking.

SHE: *{in a subdued voice}* Oh. *{after a moment, timidly}* Was the coffee bad, dear?

HE: *{scathingly}* I suppose you think that's funny.

SHE: *{with a puzzled, childlike stare}* Think what's funny?—Oh. *{suddenly she sniffs, and lifts her handkerchief to her eyes}* I didn't mean that at all, Bob! I wasn't trying to be funny! You're just too hateful for anything !

HE: *{contritely, coming over to her and kissing the top of her head}* I'm sorry, sweetheart. Please don't cry.

SHE: Get away! *{pushing him}* I'm not going to cry. Do you think I want to have to do my face all over again? *{she indulges herself the luxury of one sniff more, and then picks up the puff again}*

HE: *{with irritation}* There now, look at you! There you go again! It's just a habit, I tell you.

SHE: *{furiously, flinging the powder-puff wildly across the room, where it perches debonairly in a bowl of roses}* BOB! Will you leave me alone now, wuh!

HE: *{mildly}* Why, dearest.

SHE: Don't you call me dearest! Don't you call me dearest again until you mean it! I'm sick of your calling me dearest all the time, and all the time finding fault with me!

HE: Why, dearest, I was only suggesting that you-

SHE: *{in an abandonment of exasperation}* Ya-a-a-ah!

{There is a ponderous silence.}

SHE: *(calmly, picking up a stick of perfumed scarlet pigment and applying it deftly to a pursed-up scarlet mouth)* Bob, it's a queer thing. When you first met me you thought I was wonderful, just as I was, so wonderful that you insisted upon marrying me; and the minute you were married to me you began to want to change me. I can't understand men. I don't know whether it's because they're so complex or because they're so simple.

HE: But, Gwen, dear, when I first met you you weren't doing all these things to your face. It's a trick you've picked up in the last few months.

SHE: *(with a shrill and scornful giggle)* Oh, is it!—It's a trick you've caught on to in the last few months, you mean, since you began coming in here and watching me get ready! And after this you can just stay out, that's what you can do. You're no help to *me!*— Last few months.

Hmfhthph!

SILENCE falls again like a shawl over a parrot cage. Mrs. Avery-Thompson, under the impression that her countenance has become distorted by passion, proceeds to make up all over again. Having squeezed some coldcream from a tube out upon a many-coloured cloth, with one sweep of the hand, and rather in the manner of a painter scraping his paletteknife across a finished canvas, she destroys the whole effect. Then she begins. She carefully removes all traces of the cold-cream, and applies another kind of cream, which smells of camphor. This she manipulates softly about her chin and the corners of her eyes. Having as carefully removed all traces of this, she dabs her forehead, cheeks and chin with a linen cloth soaked in rose-water, and for the ensuing two minutes sits blandly at ease, doing nothing at all, allowing this to dry. Next she gently covers her whole face, avoiding the brows and lashes, with a very superior species of vanishing-cream. When this is dry, but not too dry, just dry enough, she powders heavily and lavishly, afterwards dusting her face with a bit of absorbent cotton. Having done which she rouges her cheeks thinly and skilfully to the eyelids and to the forehead, not forgetting a solicitous pat upon the chin. Now, slightly parting her Ups, she incarnadines them generously, inside and out, not too scrupulously observing their natural

contours. With a small stick of dark grease-paint she adventurously outlines for herself two admirable eyebrows.

Then come the lashes. Taking a little brush from a small red box and applying it, slightly dampened, to the dark-brown domino within, she squints and beads and grimaces as if she would never have done. But finally, having separated the clinging lashes by flicking them through the fine part of the comb, and dusted from her cheeks the cinders thus resulting, in more time than it takes to tell it, Mrs. AveryThompson is someone else again.

SHE: *(brightly)* All right, dear. I'm ready.

HE: *(rising briskly from the armchair in which he has fallen asleep)* Good.—Now I'll get ready.

SHE: *(uneasily)* What do you mean?

HE: Why, it's my turn now. Get up. *{He lifts her from her bench, deposits her in the armchair, and seats himself before the mirror.}*

SHE: Bob, don't be ridiculous! Come along! We'll be late!

HE: *(with elaborate sarcasm)* Oh, no, I don't think so.—Where's the red paint?

SHE: *(rushing to the dressing-table and rescuing the lip-stick from his jovial grasp)* Bob! You stop it! Come on! I'm hungry!

HE: *(expostulating)* Can't go like this! What do you take me for? All naked like this! Where's the eyelash-dirt? If I can't have my eyes looking like a couple of star-fish, I won't move.

(After a last ineffectual attempt to wrest his weapons from him, she goes back to the chair and sinks down in it, wringing her hands.)

HE: *{blissfully, after a moment, turning upon her two apoplectic cheeks, a nose like a tomb-stone, and the morbid eye-sockets of a coal-heaver}* All right. I'm ready.

SHE: *(bursting into terrified weeping)* Oh, Bob, darling, don't! *Please don't!*

{Two round tears force their way through the mascara and roll down her face like twin black pearls; then two more, and then several more.}

HE: Well, will you stop doing it if I will?

SHE: *(desperately)* No! It's not fair! It's altogether different! *(A thought strikes her, and she becomes calm.)* I'll tell you what I *will* do, though.

HE: *(lovingly fingering the eyebrow-pencil)* Well?

SHE: I'll swear off painting if you'll swear off—

HE: What, smoking?

SHE: *(placidly)* No,—shaving.

HE: *(astonished and hurt, but summoning a heavy smile)* Oh, come, Gwen,—that's childish! It's not the same thing at all.

SHE: (*with insolent amusement*) I thought you'd say that. It is the same thing, merely an attempt to improve our appearance for the sake of others.

HE: Aw,—but be *reasonable!*

SHE: (*airily*) I can't. I'm a woman.

HE: (*leaning forward abruptly and scrutinizing her, not without satisfaction*) You've got an awfully dirty face, whatever you are. Just look at yourself.

SHE: (*catching her breath in a wild sob*) Oh, Bob, how can you be so hay-hay-hateful! You don't lu-hu-hu-hu-huv me any more!

HE: (*conscience-stricken, falling on his knees beside her*) Oh, sweetheart, I'm a brute, —forgive me. Don't cry, darling, don't; I'm awfully sorry.—Come on, let's make it up.

SHE: (*gazing at him tenderly and bursting into a shriek of laughter*) Oh, Bob, you look so funny!

HE: (*uncomfortably, from behind a fatuously indulgent smile*) That's right, dear, laugh.

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SHE: (*putting her arms about him in a convulsive embrace*) Oh, I do love you so! I'll stop putting on the nastyhorrid make-up if you really want me to, dearest!

HE: Oh, there's the brave baby! *{He whispers in her ear.}* Whose little girl are you?

SHE: *(in a loud, proud voice, to the world at large)* Bobby'th!

SCENE II: *A Piano, Discovered seated, with her back to the ob-*

server, Mrs. Avery-Thompson, playing a simple Scotch melody. Enter Mr. Avery-Thompson in evening things, yanking at his tie. The Avery-Thompsons are going to the opera. Mrs.

Avery-Thompson is wondering just when.}

HE: Can't get the cursed tie right! Deuce of a time with it. Damn thing's alive! You better hurry up, dear, and get ready. We're late now.

SHE: *(turning on the piano-stool and rising)* I'm all ready.

(He stares at her. Then he leans forward and stares at her again.)

HE: *(in a startled voice)* Gwen! Aren't you feeling well?

SHE: *(cheerfully)* Never felt better. HE: *(waving behind him for a chair and sitting heavily upon it, without taking his eyes from her)* You look like the very devil! *(He draws from his pocket a neatly-squared handkerchief and, without waiting to unfold it, hastily mops his brow, still staring at her.)*

Gwen, for Heaven's sake, what have you been doing to yourself?

SHE: *(modestly, with awkward, purplish hands smoothing down her magnificent black and silver evening gown, above which rises a rather boyish neck, sun-burned into a V, a fairly wellshaped but sallow face with a pale mouth, a pink and gleaming nose, and no eyebrows whatsoever, from which in turn recedes honestly a flat surface of straight and sand-colored hair)* Nothing at all, dear. That's just it. I'm my own sweet, simple, natural, girlish self.

(She smiles at him shyly. He grunts at her and picks up a magazine from the table at his elbow.)

(There is silence.)

HE: *(flinging down the magazine)* Listen to me. Will you go upstairs and get yourself ready to go to the opera, or won't you?

SCENE III: *A Divan. Discovered seated with his head in his hands*

Mr. Avery-Thompson. Enter Mrs. Avery-Thompson, frou-frouing a little, delicately fragrant, scarlet-lipped, brilliant-eyed, sinuous, enchanting.)

SHE: *(in the accepted manner)* Have I kept you waiting?

HE: *(in the accepted manner, rising)* Not at all. Not at all.

SHE: *(in the accepted manner, pouting)* You might tell me that I look well. HE: *(in the accepted manner)* Charming, my dear. *(Then, roughly)* Come here to me ! *(He pulls her down beside him on the divan.)* SHE:*(wistfully)* Bob,—do you love me?

HE: *(savagely, seizing her in his arms)* I adore you! SHE: Mind the paint! *(She whispers in his ear)* Whose little girl am I now?

HE: *(ruefully, and in a low voice snuggling his head upon her shoulder)* Bobby'th.