

ROLLS AND SALT

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Rolls and Salt

A Distressing Dialogue, Showing that it is the Little Things that Count—Against One

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PHILIP: any fairly tall, dark-complexioned, very good-looking young man, just now a little preoccupied, who has been married six months to

Lucile: any fairly small, rather blonde, very pretty young woman, just now a little restless.

Place: The dining-room of any fashionable hotel.

Time: Quarter to eight o'clock of any evening.

She: Philip, will you please pass me a roll?—You have the most annoying habit of keeping all the rolls on your side of the table. And you know perfectly well that, whenever I reach for things in this dress, I get my sleeve in the Sauce Bearnaise.

He: I beg your pardon, my love. I was thinking of something else.

She: Too obviously. I do wish, Philip, that, at least when we are dining out, you would show me some slight attention. I don't mind being neglected, but I hate to *look* neglected.

He: Is this a quarrel?

She: No, it is not a quarrel. I have no desire to quarrel with you, Philip. Whenever you quarrel you lose your English accent.

He (a little touched, but nonchalant): I say, old dear, will you have a roll?

She: Thank you.

He: And, in exchange, would you mind taking your hand-bag off the salt for a moment.

She (-flushing): Oh, I'm sorry! . . . Phil, *please* don't salt the meat, before you taste it! If you knew how that irritates me! It is one of the six most irritating things you do!

He (pleasantly, attacking his dinner): Indeed? And what are the others?

She: Never mind.

He (courteously): Ah, but yes. Tell me. *She (quite obviously struggling with sweet temptation):* Oh, no, my dear. Please don't ask me to. We'll just get to quarreling.

He (quite amiably): Well, that's what you're after.

She: I am not!

He: Oh, yes you are.

She: Oh, very well, then! Since you insist. But remember, you asked me to do it. *There ensues an interval of taut silence.*

He (looking at her with amusement): Well?

SHE: Well, then,—you *never* notice what I am wearing, that's one thing! One might as well dress for one's grandfather!

He: Why, Lu, isn't that just a little bit unfair? I distinctly remember saying, this very evening, when I was helping you into your coat, "What a pretty new dress, my dear!"

She (furiously): It's *not* a new dress! And you ought to know it's not! I've had it two years. It's just been made shorter and had the sleeves changed! A new dress!

He: Well, I'm sorry. You always look lovely to me, no matter what you wear, that's the truth of it. And it needn't make you so angry.

She: Well, it does. And that's why I'm always making you take me to dinner to places where there are sure to be people I know. So that *somebody'll* appreciate me!

He: Well, go on.

She (belligerently): I will. This is something else on the same plan, and they both come right down to the fact that what you want is your dinner, and not to be dining out with me. You're always and forever saying, when I'm not *nearly* ready, "Oh, come on,—you look all right!"—and it makes me perfectly furious! You may as well know it.

He (very gently): And then?

She (a little frightened, but persistent): Then—then you're forever kissing me in railway stations, and doing things like that. You have no discretion. Besides, you don't do it because you want to kiss me. All the time your mind is on whether or not the train will be late and make you miss your connections, and if you can get an accommodation in the chair-car. You don't really want to kiss me at all. You just do it to get one more thing attended to and out of the way. I know.

He: Ah, but my dear Lucile—

She: No, this is my turn. You may have yours later (*with increasing venom and mounting eloquence*). And please don't sit smiling at your fingers all the time I'm talking, thinking up some flabby cynicism with which to squelch me the minute I pause for breath!

He (still more gently): Go on. Go on.

She (recklessly): All right! Next to the ones already mentioned, your most abominable trait is that of nudging my arm ever)' time we cross a street, in a feeble and preoccupied symbolism of hoisting me up the curbs. I'm not a cripple,—and if I were, I'd do much better to stand on the curb and yodel to a policeman than rely upon the absent-minded and desultory personal conduction of such an escort as you!

He (after a pause): Is that all?

She (sullenly): It's all I think of at the moment. May I have a roll?

He: What, another?

She: Phil, that's rude!

He: Not at all, my dear. I am only glad that you have an appetite.

She: And that's another irritating thing you do.

He: What?

She: Make remarks about my having an appetite.

He: But you *have* an appetite!

She: I have several. But it's not necessary to discuss them.

He: Take care—you'll have your sleeve in the butter.

She: Thank you.

There is a silence for some moments. They look studiously away from each other, he with his jaw slightly protruding, she with drooping eyelids and her chin in the air.

She (after one timorous and one remorseful glance in his direction, to which he is apparently oblivious): Phil, I think I'm going to cry.

He (instantly and vehemently concerned): My Lord, Lu, don't! See here,—eat your dinner! Lu, for heaven's sake! Shall we go?

She (her eyes wide open and ominously brilliant) : No—no—I'll be all right in a minute—only—oh, Phil, all of a sudden I felt so cruel! *Was I cruel?*

He: Nonsense, you couldn't be cruel if you wanted to. Come, eat your dinner, darling. To please Phil. If you don't stop, I shall kiss you, right here. I can't stand it. I never get used to seeing you cry. It makes you look so helpless, it nearly kills me.—There, that's better.

She (tremulously inserting her fork into her filet mignon and sawing at it without assurance): Oh, Phil, you're so sweet! Why do I say such dreadful things to you when I love you so?

He (fervently): God knows.

She (brightly): Phil, dear, listen. Now, I'll tell you the six *nice* things about you. Shall I?

He (indulgently): All right, dear,—if you wish.

HE: First of all, you never boast of how much liquor you can drink without becoming intoxicated. I can't *bear* that. Then, you never recite the Spell of the Yukon to me. And so many people have! I listened carefully, after we married, fearfully, for weeks, but you never did. And, when you proposed to me you did not do so by saying that you were not worthy of me. And then, you never arrange matches in squares on the table-cloth, with the enthusiastic suggestion that I try to do something with them without doing something else. And you don't make me tell you my dreams. Finally, you don't wear a pheasant feather in your hat. Oh, and I forgot, you never do card tricks.

He: I'd no idea I was possessed of so many sterling attributes. You've quite put me in a good humor. Won't you have some dessert?

She (uncertainly): No, I think not. I'm not very hungry. Philip, *please* don't laugh!

He: My love, I'm not laughing. I'm disguising a yawn.

She: Oh,—are you so bored?

He (ingenuously): Yes. It always bores me to talk about myself. Let us talk about you.

She (eagerly): Very well! Tell me what *I* do that *you* hate.

He: Nothing. You're perfect. We will discuss two or three of your perfections.

She (with enthusiasm): All right!

He: First of all, you are by far the most sensible woman in my acquaintance—

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She: Why, Philip, I am no such thing! How can you!

He: Then, of course, you have in common with most of the members of your sex—beauty, wit, gentleness—

She: Now, really, Philip, you know perfectly well that many women are very ugly, and most of them are stupid! Besides, I'm *not* gentle!

He: I take it all back. I will begin again. You have nothing whatever in common with other women. You are entirely different. In fact, sometimes when I am talking with you, discussing matters concerning which most women are utterly uninformed,—duckshooting, politics, craps—I find myself under the impression that I am talking with another man.

She (flattered): Yes?

He: Yes. And sometimes, even when I am sitting alone with you, my arm about your waist, your head on my shoulder, the warmth of our friendship comes over me in a great wave, and I almost forget that you are a woman, in the sweetness of our perfect companionship.

She {doubtfully}: Yes?—Oh, Philip, don't you love me any more?

He: Lucile, I adore you. ... Of course, there are annoying little things— *She {very eagerly}:* What things? Tell me!

He: Oh, no, dear. I was only teasing.

She: You were not, Phil, and you know it. You were in earnest. Tell me —it's only fair—tell me the dreadful things *I* do.

He: Well, dear—you *will* pick threads off me in public places. And it's so—so proprietary.

She: But, sweetheart, I only do it because I am proud of you, and want everybody to know you're mine. You shouldn't mind that.

He: Well, now that we're about it, you have one really irritating habit. Almost invariably, twenty minutes after you have ordered some special dish to be prepared for you at a restaurant, you have a sudden inspiration to change your order for something else. And you can't *do* those things, Lu,—at least, not night after night.

She {bitterly}: Go on.

He {warming to his subject}: Then, you behave so childishly when we're crossing an avenue through the traffic, darting ahead and almost throwing yourself under a truck, or scuttling along in a breathless rush when there's nothing within a block of you. But then, all women do that.

She {in a tragic voice}: I'm sorry, Philip, that I shame you in public places.

He {speaking a greater truth than he is himself aware of}: That's why I loved you, dear.

She is somewhat appeased.

HE: These are just little things, Lurile. In the big things you are wonderful. For instance: you have never been known to say, "How just like a man"; you rouge incomparably well, so well that it is necessary to observe the kind of shoes you wear, in order to be sure that you rouge at all; and your digestion is excellent, which augurs that you will never nag me. You never scold the waiter, make remarks about the telephone service or the stupidity of Sunday afternoon in town, or the fact that I enjoy the comic section; and you never ask me with wide-eyed innocence why I suppose everybody is staring at you.

She {with a sudden sally of charm}: I must be a terribly nice person.

He: You are. *{He gazes into her eyes a moment.}* You are. Er—but of that more anon. Er—to continue: you always ask me to give up for your sake the thing I was just about to give up anyway. You dislike all beverages that come through a straw. And your relatives all live in California.

She: Oh, Philip, that's brutal of you!

He: It's you who are sentimental.

She: Well, perhaps it's just as well for you that I am!

He: And just what do you mean by that?

She: All right, then, I mean that you're brutal and conceited and cynical and, clumsy and tiresome and selfish and coarse; and if I weren't so hopelessly in love with you I'd never speak to you again!

He {delicately}: Ah !' And now permit me, compliment aside, to enumerate your own lasting charms. As I said before, you are perfect. You are sentimental, indolent, cruel, timid, extravagant, untruthful and vain,—in other words,, perfect.

She {emotionally}: Oh, Philip,—you do love me, don't you?

He: I do , . . . Check, please!