

## LIFE'S GREAT MOMENTS

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TRANSLATED BY LYDIA CRANFIELD

The train was hammering along the rails and the passengers were rustling their newspapers as they turned them over, or were just dozing in their comfortable corner seats. Nobody spared a glance for the stars which were beginning to appear between the scurrying autumn clouds. As the train gathers speed, so the brain slows up. There is hardly a place more conducive to sleep and listlessness than a noisy express train. Here one is set apart from life, in transit from a place, where life is being lived, to another. Here in the train nothing happens except the dry rustling of a newspaper.

The brakes jarred and some lights flew past. They had stopped at a station, but that was of no account—nothing was likely to happen here.

Suddenly the door was opened and the cold, icy air beat in around the legs of the passengers. Many voices could be heard—a whole chorus of voices—and several people started to enter the compartment. Those who were already sitting there spread themselves in their seats, ready to defend their places.

But what's this? The newcomers are filling the compartment with things—suit-cases, parcels, flowers: flowers in pots and in baskets, bouquets, three large bouquets, two of chrysanthemums and one of roses with long silk ribbons attached---

From the darkness outside a young woman is entering the lighted compartment and is taking off her coat—she is a “white” bride, complete with veil and myrtle wreath; her cheeks flushed with pleasure at the stir she is creating, she is beaming—self-confident. The young man then must be the bridegroom, and the two older, rather heavily dressed people, must be his parents.

And so it is. The mother-in-law turns apologetically to the passengers explaining that her son—he is a chauffeur at Risbro—has been married to-day and now they are going home, and it is because of this festive occasion that they are all travelling second class.

A group of wedding guests stand on the platform outside the car-

riage window. Suddenly a handful of rice is thrown over the bridal couple, and over the entire compartment as well.

The bridegroom, in the act of stacking suit-cases, clothes and flowers on the racks and the seats, turns round, surprised and cross:

“Who did that? What a mess! Was it you, Maren? How on earth could you think of doing such a thing? That's good rice!”

Maren replied with another shower of rice.

“Will you please stop it, Maren, stop it immediately! Right into the carriage! If you don't stop, we'll have to close the window. What do you mean by it, throwing rice—and into a second class carriage, too!”

“I believe it's a custom,” says the bride, and her mother-in-law agrees: “Yes, I believe that it's a custom.”

“Oh well, if it's a custom then it's another matter,” says the bridegroom, appeased. “But all the same, she shouldn't do it. Still, people have so many customs. When the solicitor was married someone threw a galoche into the car after them.”

“A slipper,” corrects the bride.

“A slipper, then!—And the solicitor tied it to his suit-case. He still had it when we reached the steamer. What an idea, to throw a galoche into the solicitor's car.”

“A slipper.”

“All right, a slipper.”

“That's supposed to mean that he'll be under his wife's slipper—be henpecked!”

“Henpecked! That's a peculiar thing to wish for anybody! I can't believe that was the idea.”

The train moves off.

“Give me my bouquet so that I can wave with it,” says the bride, eagerly. “No, not that one, my bridal bouquet, with the ribbons.”

“Good-bye, good-bye!”

“Good-bye, Sine! And thanks for the salt-cellar! Good-bye, Uncle, and thanks for the sugar-tongs!”

Bride and groom sit down for a moment's breathing space, and then the small, slight chauffeur says:

“Well, there's going to be something for us to unpack to-morrow.”

“It's all going to be unpacked to-night,” replied his young wife, emphatically.

"Not all of it," he says, apprehensively. The bride does not answer. The chauffeur's mother is afraid that her son's remark will be interpreted in a manner somewhat to his discredit, and turning to her fellow passengers she explains:

"My son couldn't sleep a wink last night – for excitement. His new suit didn't arrive until four o'clock this morning."

Here the chauffeur joins in the conversation. He is a Jutlander, calm, ruddy, clean-shaven and with lean features:

"The trains meet at Risbro junction and there I was standing on the platform at four o'clock this morning. I was going south and my suit was supposed to come on the northbound express – from Copenhagen that is. I tipped them half a crown to hold back the train for half a minute while they found the parcel."

The bride talks to herself in a dreamy voice:

"The sugar-tongs really are lovely – and then Gerda's speech."

The chauffeur agrees:

"Yes, you're right. When she got up I thought she was going to make a few jokes, but not at all. She could certainly hold her audience. There was just once when she went to pieces a little, but she managed all right, she knew just what she wanted to say."

"I wonder if she made up the speech herself?" asks his mother.

"I don't know, but it's quite possible; of course, she's clever, her brother is a teacher –"

"There were over a hundred telegrams," continues the bride, her eyes shining. "I believe there were more telegrams than greetings cards."

"Did you see the one from the solicitor?" asks the bridegroom.

"Yes, I did. 'Hearty congratulations from Mr. and Mrs. Jensen and the children', it said."

"Don't you think that there will be something to follow – later on?"

"No, that acquaintance doesn't rise to those heights."

"I believe we had two-hundred-and-forty *Kroner* in cash?"

"It was two-hundred-and-forty-two *Kroner* – that is, I didn't count it myself but Marius told me it was two-hundred-and-forty-two; he counted it in the dining room."

"Some of the money came with the greetings cards."

In the meantime the old father-in-law had been dozing; a jolt of the train wakes him.

"I believe I've been asleep sitting here!" he says, shamefacedly. But his son reassures him:

"You go on sleeping, father, sleep on. That's just why people travel second class so that they can sleep. The seats are as soft as a feather-bed."

"Well, I'm not going to sleep any more now," says the old man, "we've got to get out soon."

He and his wife start to get their things together. There is something they want to pack in a flat cardboard box. Afterwards they want to tie it up with a piece of string.

"Why don't you help your father and mother?" asks the bride.

"Well, I should hope they can manage that themselves," he replies placidly.

The bride gives her groom a cross look – probably the first since they were married – and helps them herself. She has a knack of tying string so that it holds.

"Wait a bit, mother-in-law," she says fetching out a basket of fruit which had been hidden underneath the flowers – "you must take some grapes home with you, it's seldom you get grapes and we've plenty." She puts one heavy cluster after another into the old woman's hands.

Then the train stops; the old people are getting off a couple of stations before the young ones:

"Good-bye, father-in-law, and thank you so much for the dinner-service!"

"Good-bye, mother-in-law, and thank you so much for the dinner-service!"

The two women kiss. The older one controls her emotion but the eyes of the younger one become misty.

"Good-bye and thank you for the dinner-service. Come on, wave to them, Jens. Keep waving! They can still see us."

The train glides into the darkness.

When the chauffeur leant out of the window his waistcoat rucked up a little. His bride pulls it down with an energetic tug.

"Lift your coat before you sit down," she says. "I hope you aren't crushing that little salt-cellar in your pocket."

"No," says the chauffeur, solidly and quietly. He strokes his ruddy,

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bony face. One can see that his thoughts are elsewhere. He is thinking of his car, he can feel himself streaking along endless, straight roads with similar, similar, similar poplars on either side.

He does not yet realize that he has made *a good marriage*. Love of flowers, lots of flowers, love of salt-cellars, sugar-tongs and dinner-services, care of old women and the capacity of handling her men-folk – all that forms the essence of a good wife. –

Shortly afterwards the young couple also left and the train flew into the night. The passengers sank deeper into their corner seats and yawned discreetly behind their hands. A fragment of life had disturbed them for a brief moment. Nothing could be heard except the hammering of the wheels against the lifeless rails and the dry rustling of a newspaper.