

A SLIGHT INDISC

GOOD MORNING, PROFESSOR, I have wanted so much to see you, even the day before yesterday," panted Emosia, who has followed Professor Pensor to his office, where she noiselessly flung her books on the Professor's table and fussed with handkerchief between her teeth. "I thought I could not stand waiting for you to dismiss your class! You see, sir, I... I..."

"Why the excitement, my dear child? This is a very fine day; we have not been having this kind of warm weather the last few days. I don't see what you have to fuss about? ... Oh, I see, is that why you were off key when I called you in class?"

"Yes, sir. It was very kind of you, cracking that joke at my expense just because I didn't follow the question directed to me."

"But you see, my dear, when I realized that you were seeing something in your seat fidgeting as if you were on a hot trail of splendid ideas, I had to ask you, 'Were you following me, Miss Blanca?' When you retorted, 'Following you, sir? I wanted to see you!' I realized that you were not thinking about the magnificent theory of the word 'THE'. So I had to throw cold water on your back by that crackling joke, unfortunately at your expense; forgive me. But say, if you wanted to see me that bad why didn't you come up and see me in the office?"

"I tried to, twice, but as each time there was your beer circle overbearing on you and I had to see you *alone*."

"Well, it must be very serious, indeed! What do you want to know or do, now?"

"Sir, I want to know what my father knows or is thinking

CASE OF RETION

by P. R. Ricardo

about. *Please*, try to figure out what he knows, or thinks he knows."

"Fair enough. Young lady this is not just wasting your time or mine, eh? Proceed, but cautiously now, because I do not want to have knowledge of any fact which your father does not know, for that will mislead me."

"It is like this, sir. For two late afternoons, a certain youngish member of the faculty escorted me home," began Emosia with faltering speech and troubled accent. "Maybe she is still weighing in her mind whether she is committing an act of indiscretion in confiding to me," thought the Professor. Professor Fensor appeared and acted nonchalantly and gave the air of cold unconcern and dealt with this case as he would on anything that could be the subject of logical deduction.

"I will do better than the bargain we struck. I shall not ask you his name, though no doubt you must have introduced him to your parents as Professor So-and-So, let us call him Mr. X for our present purposes." The professor threw this line, calculating that obvious unconcern would encourage her to regain her ease.

THAT IS VERY kind of you, Professor. You are saving me a lot of embarrassment. Yes, I introduced him to my parents who were then engaged in family conversation. I placed my books on the middle of the sofa and invited him to sit on one side, while I took a chair and faced him. After a few preliminaries on distant subjects, more for the benefit of my folks than for us, he picked up the trail of his conversation begun at the bus on our way home. Then, he asked me to

sit on the sofa, which at first I declined, with an eye on my mother's censure of the propriety of my action. But later, I complied with it in order to avert any possible suspicion on the part of my parents—what with the whispers and persistent cajoling and insistent rejection. I took my place on the sofa being careful to preserve the line of division created by the books I place there."

"At this instant, when you took your seat on the sofa, was he careful to make a loud conversation calculated to be heard by your parents?" interposed the Professor.

"How did you know that sir?" The professor waved a hand, as if that must be taken for granted.

"Of course, he talked about a subject of your study, say Mathematics, did he not? Well, whatever subject is really immaterial, since it was merely indulged in for the benefit of your folks, shall we say? Go on."

"As soon as I sat, I threw a glance at my mother's way to ascertain what kind of reaction she would have; he took advantage of that moment in taking away the books between us and slid to my side. In response I had to edge to the farthest end. He followed me and there we were, side by side with me hugging the arm of the sofa and

he edging to me to the last inch. In that sorry state, a highly embarrassing situation even without thinking of my mother, he again indulged in whispers. Intermittently, of course, he had to speak aloud sometimes on a particular problem in a subject and at other times on the importance of the subject for an individual like me. All in all, if what my parents could hear would be collected they would present quite an incoherent conversation and would be quite embarrassing for one who was supposed to be a professor. This affair dragged on till supper time."

"Did your parent make an effort to invite him to supper? Who?"

"My mother interrupted us and invited him to supper. I made a special effort to invite him to sup with us, for I was myself getting hungry."

"What did he do? Of course, he did not take up the invitation, or did he?"

HE DID NOT SUP with us, excusing himself as not being hungry just then. But I could not leave him there and he would not leave either. I was getting hungrier and hungrier and yet I could not do anything that would hurt his feelings for he was very good, otherwise to me specially. Then my folks left us at the receiving room to

have their supper in the dining room. He resumed the whisperings broken occasionally with loud conversation that had nothing to do with what he was whispering to me. This situation dragged on till about nine o'clock when he took his leave."

"One moment, to his whispers how do you answer? In whispers also?"

"Precisely in order to avert my mother's suspicion, I gave my answers aloud, but since I could not only answer mostly in monosyllables, that would not be intelligible to my parents either."

"I see, . . . weren't your answers mostly in the negative? That is, 'No,' or 'It can't be,' or 'I can't, or something like that?'"

"Professor, I am almost tempted to say that it was you I was talking with, then. How did you know? But of course, I gave an occasional 'Yes, perhaps,' or 'Maybe, why not?'"

"Very interesting, indeed. Then, what happened on the next occasion?" led the professor.

"On the next occasion, he acted very boyishly. Could you imagine that he greeted my father, 'Oh, hello' and just dismissed it at that? Well, that was what he did. Except for this and for the fact that when he took his leave at nine o'clock, he did not bother to say good bye to my parents,

the events of the second occasion followed exactly the pattern of the first. Of course the subject matter of his whispers went further on the second occasion than on the first."

"Will you describe to me the reaction of your parents to such happenings?" inquired the Professor.

"There is nothing much to say about their reaction. Everything went on as usual, except for one or two things. I remember distinctly that on the following morning after the first occasion, I purposely belated myself at breakfast expecting that my father and mother would have gone by the time I came down. But my mother insisted on calling me to come down, and so I did. As I took my place, my father casually remarked to my mother, 'Ma-ma, did you notice that our baby is now becoming a young woman?' My mother did not utter anything but I could see in my side glances that she was suppressing a smile."

VERY WELL. Was that all? Did not your mother speak to you after breakfast or other occasion?"

"Yes, she did. But that was in the morning after the second visit. After my father left, my mother took me aside and queried, "Child, do you know whether he is married or not?" Of

course, I could not say anything and I did not utter any word. That must have made me appear very guilty of something, or other."

"Of course, you could not say anything, for you thought then that if you say he is married, which he is, your mother would think that you are encouraging a married man to take interest in you. And if you say he is not, you would be lying, which you could not do. But it was not wise of you to keep silent either, as you did, for that would confirm what your mother suspects by then."

"Oh, my gosh! What would my mother think of me? You know, Professor, since that time I felt guilty of something. And whenever I was in front of my folks that guilt must have been revealed in my face. Well, sir, that is all, and now I want to know what my parents think or think they know."

"Certainly the most natural thing for your parents to be curious about would be the subject of your conversation. Let us go over the facts briefly. You are a young woman only nineteen, marriageable, yes, but to your parents totally innocent, especially of such which other females of the same age, otherwise situated, would not anymore be gullible about, for they 'know whereof they speak'.

You described him as a youngish faculty member but introduced him as Professor X. I shall say that he is not quite thirty, perhaps twenty eight or twenty nine."

"Professor, how could you? You speak as if you know him already. How?"

"My dear child, the facts speak for themselves. Indiscretion is borne by youth or ignorants. Ignorance is to be ruled out since we are dealing with a professor. He must therefore be a young fellow. Since I know all the young faculty members here and in my mind... I think I know him, personally. But so much for that; you see, my knowledge of him is irrelevant to our present analysis. To continue, in carrying on your conversation, the situation is such that you *had* to sit close to him, for reasons quite immaterial to our present query...."

"But sir, I think I mentioned the circumstances of how I came to sit beside him on the sofa. Don't forget, sir, that it was much against my will," butted in Emosia.

"Tsk, tsk, ... young lady, your parents could not know the circumstances you mentioned or the reason you entertained. They would not even know that you had a will against your action. All they knew was that at first you were sit-

ting on a chair in front of the sofa, where Prof. X sat, and then you and he were later sitting on the same quite close to each other, without the books between you; and, of course, you were hugging the edge of the sofa."

"Well, if you put it that way, it will certainly appear like that."

SHALL WE PROCEED? Most of your conversation was inaudible to them, which naturally aroused their curiosity. That portion which reached their ears were quite uninteresting and incoherent. That these loud statements were made for the old folks was very obvious from the way they were made. For instance, Professor X spoke aloud as intentional response to a meaningful clearing of the throat by your father or to an audible innuendo, from your mother. Furthermore, your answers which were audible enough, good for you, were almost all negative and in monosyllables. It must have given your parents the impression that if the subject of your conversation was a scientific one, which the audible statements of Prof. X were about, then, either you were too ignorant of it, as per your answer, or that your conversation was about some subject not at all the one he was endeavoring

to impress your folks with. Now, it would be easier for your parents to admit that you two were talking of another matter than that you, their daughter, are too ignorant—for it is difficult, if not impossible, for parents to admit their children ignorant or incapable, without making the statement apply to themselves. And your parents, being what they are, are not ignorant or stupid persons, either, Presto! But what can that subject be?"

"You interest me professor. You have said some kind words about my parents."

"Don't think that I am playing a psychological trick on you to enlist your admiration for my professional technique or person. What I said was a veritable part of a necessary analysis, which you, consequently your parents, are the admirable subject. Emotion is here counted only as long as it is part of the analytical process. To return to our subject. Then, there were the indiscreet stayings over till past supper time with his staunch refusal to sit at the table and his apparent oversight of your situation in relation of your evening meal. The length of time you two spent together was something like three hours, say from six to nine o'clock. Those were visits guilty of some ulterior designs and not merely for the

purpose of escorting a girl home, or saying 'how do you do'. Then add the fact that when he came the second time he merely said, 'Oh, hello' to your father and when he left he did not bother to take his leave with your folks. The guilty conscience is obviously introducing itself."

"Indeed, sir, I was kind of embarrassed on that occasion."

"Now to revert to our question. What did your parents think the subject of your conversation was? Checked against all these facts together, it would be easy to answer that question. For circumstances would not all contrive to mislead us in arriving at the subject. Well, young lady the subject of your conversation can only be LOVE!"

LOVE! SIR? Yes, er no! But, you don't understand."

"If it is not love, my dear child, why are you in the defensive? You see you asked me what your parents thought of the situation and my answer is *love*. Your mother would not have asked you if Professor X was married or not, unless she was thinking that *love* was the subject of the evenings' talks. Your father would not have thrown such line, 'Did you know, Mama, that our baby is now a young woman?' unless he was thinking that Professor X had more than a profession-

al interest in you. They were led to this by numerous facts to which we have referred. Well, I am now telling you that your parents thought that the Professor was talking of love to you. Your mother was suspecting that the professor was making love to her poor child, hence, her inquiry. Your silence more or less confirmed her suspicion."

"But Professor..."

"...at, child, I am not through yet. I did not say that I shared their opinion. But I don't believe that X was making love to you. I believe that he talked of love, of his love to be sure not to you but to someone else, though of course, you are also a possibility as an object of that professed affection. However, right now, he is concentrating on that other one, let us call Miss Y."

"Professor, you are amazing. You see..."

"Wait, not yet; don't interrupt me. You see, if he were making love to you, he would not do that in your own home and in the eyes of your parents for being a married man, he is still conscious of his responsibility. He would do that in school, in the campus, or cafeteria. I can predict, I think, that when he turns towards you as an object of affection, he would not see you home any more. He had to stay long,

for he had a long story to tell by means of which he expects you to believe that he really loves Miss Y, so that you would accede to his request of helping to convince her. He is more likely urging you to tell her how much he loves her and he is doing this, for Miss Y knows that he is a married man, and, therefore the cold and indifferent reaction to the advances of a married man must first be broken by somebody else, you see. He is not sure yet of her feelings towards him, in spite of her outward closeness towards him. Perhaps, she did not attempt to hide her admiration of him, or talk of him to some mutual friends, who in turn made him acquainted with such. This fact, of course, aroused such affection in him for her, which of course, he claims to be merely Platonic, as the saying goes. For you see, dear child, for any obvious guilt of human frailty, Platonic idealism is the common refuge, expecting that once human frailty is clothed with *innocence* of idealistic pretence, there is immunity to human guilt, and there is no telling where it will end. Now, true, all too true. You see, I

have a friend, a friend who... well she and I are in full admiration of this Professor X and we never hide our feelings to anyone, not expecting that Professor X would be such a heel to take advantage of our innocent crush. Now what shall I do, sir?"

"Well, you can tell Professor X what you now think of him, yes, a *heel* and Miss Y that you know the danger that lurks between X and her. In that way you would awaken Y to her sense of propriety and Prof. X to his sense of responsibility as a mentor, for as such he is supposed to be looked up to as teacher and not cheater parent and not parrot, example and not sampler."

"Thanks, very much professor, you have given me enough strength and courage to face and tell X what he is," finished speaking against my friend...

The professor still mused, Emosia and left.

Sir, I am speechless. It is over his analysis and when he came to, he realized that Emosia was on her way to make war with X. He caught himself saying: "My gosh, but I was or is he still my friend?"

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