

Five eggs

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«I think it would be best, Larry, owing to the nature of your work, your difficult hours, and the fact that I should like to have you for week-ends from now on, that you come to live on the premises. Do you agree?»

«Oh completely,» Larry said brightly. «But Bill, dear, how am I ever going to tell this to David?»

FIVE EGGS

by O. F. SIMPSON

When I was a boy, our grandmother used to read to us children in the evening endless long and improving Victorian romances, to which, because we loved her, we used to listen for hour after hour with at least half our minds; but I and my sister could never resist bursting into helpless, uncontrollable giggles when the point was reached—as it was in nearly every story—at which the hero suddenly lost all his money and had to leave «for foreign parts» in disgrace. It always seemed to us so absurdly drastic and unthinkable; no one in our own comfortable circle ever seemed to lose all their money, just like that, it was inconceivable, so it always struck us as impossibly funny.

It struck me as much less funny when two years ago at the age of 40 I myself came to lose all my money, through the collapse of the respectable but rather backward chemical company for which I worked. There was no prospect immediately of another job of the kind I specialised in, I am just not one of those excellent people who save money—so there we were. Among other things I had to give up my car, and not liking to be entirely without personal transport I thought, though I was far beyond the motor-cycling age, I'd try a Lambretta—just the thing to buzz about on over our short crowded English roads. I found a local garage in my small town which gave me a fair deal on the exchange, and in the course of taking delivery and trying out the scooter I came across Harry—24 perhaps, a tumble of shining black curls, dark blue eyes, wide shoulders and fine narrow hips. He had nothing to do with the sales side but managed the petrol pumps, so he was always about, and I came to like and look for the pleasant, open and rather sheepish smile he always seemed to have for me.

I soon discovered that the real pride of his heart was a silver and black Triumph 648 motor-bike, which he spent all his spare time tuning, and on which, he once confided to me with shining eyes, he'd several times 'done the ton' (the current phrase for exceeding 100 m.p.h.) One day the wild idea entered my head that I too would like to do the ton before I died, and that as scooters wouldn't get me much more than half way there, why shouldn't I hitch up behind Harry next time he did his stuff? I put it to him.

«No, couldn't. Tyre pressures, you see. Then she just wouldn't carry the load that fast. Dangerous too, you might bump off.» But from the very number and variety of objections he cooked up, I was sure that the idea had somehow taken root—indeed his face was so transparently honest and attractive you could almost see the idea chasing itself round and round inside his head.

To cut a long story short, after some time and a lot of talk I persuaded him. I particularly remember one sunny evening when I stayed late working in a corner of the garage yard applying paint to the fender of my Lambretta where it had got scraped, and exchanging desultory remarks with Harry, who always thought it most odd that one of the garage customers (he always called me 'sir')

should work personally on his own machine. My last view of him that day was as he issued from the back of the garage and bestrode his Triumph to go home. Free of the shapeless dungarees he wore for work, and of the servile attitude that went with them, he was altogether a different creature: silver crash helmet with a random curl or two peeping out in front, upward tilted nose, high-waisted leather jacket and tapered trousers in some kind of shiny black gabardine. He was at the stage that many handsome boys reach, when without being directly conscious of their looks and figure, they manage to dress instinctively in a way that makes absolutely the most of them. I could hardly take my eyes off the semicircle curve of his hunched buttocks in those tight black pants, lifted and thrust out sideways by the saddle triangle forcing his thighs apart, as his right leg bent back to work the kick-starter. I saw that he was a very provocative young man indeed. I wanted to fight him, I wanted to hurt him, I wanted to love him, to spend money on him, to quarrel with him, to massage him, to instruct him, to endure hardships with him, to laugh with him, to have him always for my friend; while he—with one of those amused but slightly pitying smiles that all healthy young men keep for their elders (as much as to say 'well, and just what exactly have you made of the 20 years which separate us?')—kick-started, waddled his machine round between the petrol pumps (those gorgeous buttock curves again) and was away down the main road in a roar. He raised his hand and looked back at me just once.

On the appointed day I hardly slept a wink and was at the garage long before the 5.0. am we'd arranged for a meeting.

«Well, still got this mad idea?» he began, as he rode up. «'Cos it is mad, you know. We ought to be getting our heads examined.»

«I'm certain it'll be O.K.»

«Well, I'm not. Still they say you can only die once.» I knew then that the oddity of the idea and what he could tell his friends afterwards was still a draw with him. We didn't say much more as I climbed onto the joint saddle behind him and we rode for half an hour to the five-mile stretch of the Andover road which was to be our race track. Arrived at the starting point, it was simply: «You O.K.?»

«Yes, let's go.» I sat crouched forward as close to him as I could, my thighs tight behind his, my middle hard against his bottom, so that we were aerodynamically as far as possible one man. I steadied myself with my hands on the carrier behind me at first, but after a test run we agreed it was better to fold my arms in front of his waist and lean my head sideways against the top of his shoulders. In this position, perhaps mercifully, I couldn't see the speedometer. He was to give one pip on the horn if he got to 100 m.p.h. and two if he got to 110, which he thought was just possible.

Then we went to it. Quite soon I began to feel my 40 years, and to know real fear—all the worse because I had nothing to do but cling on. The air roared thunderously past the earflaps of my helmet, the snarling, tearing, screaming exhausts—no doubt music in his ears—were all hell let loose in mine, and the vibration shook me to pieces. The Andover road, while beautifully straight, goes up and down like a fairground switchback, and it was on one of the long downs that finally the first pip on the horn came. It was agony waiting for the two pips to follow, but they never did—we were too near the end of the run; nor was another run in the reverse direction any good, it was against the wind, and meeting some traffic coming the other way put him off. Still having done the

job we decided, after a pause for backslapping and mutual congratulation, to call it a day and get back home.

Coming to a halt back at the garage, it was again the laconic phrase that seemed most common on his lips: «You O.K.?»

«Very much so, thanks.» I uncurled my legs and dismounted. «It just about fills me with sex, though.»

He spoke slowly, and began to fiddle aimlessly with the throttle lever. «Me too, sir.»

«Well, you won't find many girls about at this time of day, will you?»

«No.» His head was turned away but I thought I saw something rather like a blush. Then, very awkwardly: «Actually the fellers and I . . . sometimes . . . we do it together . . . sounds bad, doesn't it, but you just have to, or burst. I don't think there's anything wrong in it, nor do my mates.»

«Well, suppose you come home with me.»

«What, to your house?» He spoke as if it was Buckingham Palace.

«Why not?»

«Oh, I couldn't.»

«Suppose you let me take charge for a bit and you do what you're told? Quick, jump to it.» I used the slightly bullying tone that so often brings results with young men, who as a class really prefer to have their thinking done for them.

«Ah well, O.K. . . . at least, I suppose . . .» I could see in his face that the discrepancy in our ages made him highly doubtful. «Anyway, here goes.» And when he saw me straddling my scooter, he mounted his and followed me home to my bungalow like a lamb.

It would be nice to suggest that we spent an hour of this early summer morning making leisurely and idyllic love together, but it would not be true. We were both very keyed up and, our leather clothes thrown aside, went straight to it as equals together face to face, the whole climax being reached and passed in under two minutes. At last to be able to knead those wonderful buttocks and thighs with my own fingers was a delirium for me. He was young and kept his eyes shut the whole time; and as he was just about my equal in strength, the half hour we spent on the bed afterwards developed into a sort of laughing series of muscles tests and tricks between us—it took 20 years off my age to be playing with a boy in this happy-go-lucky way, like two tiger cubs. Then I told him I'd go and get breakfast.

«Oh no, sir.»

«Sir?»

«Well, you know what I mean—can't stop the garage talk, you understand. Anyway I can't let you do that for me.»

«Well, you did the ton for me. Why not just do what you're told?» So he lay back on the bed still naked, hands behind his black curls, one knee up, following me with his bright eyes while I put on some jeans. Later—sitting at the table fully dressed again in his own black leather jacket and plastic jeans, making that soft, attractive creaking noise whenever he moved slightly—he ate not one or two, but three eggs with his bacon, feeding with the intense, silent concentration of a healthy young dog; and when he'd at last finished, I asked him: «What'll you do now? It's only seven o'clock.»

«Go home for breakfast, I think.»

«You mean you'll eat another breakfast?»

«Yes, Mum'll have it ready for me about now. She knows I often go out early on the bike.»

«And how many more eggs this time?»

«Oh two, I should think.»

«*Five* eggs for breakfast today?»

«Oh yes, I like eating. Doesn't do you any harm at all.» He put his **silver** helmet on again, flashed me one last dazzling, impudent smile, and mounted the Triumph again. «Be seeing you round the garage again soon, I expect?»

«Yes, Harry.»

And that was that.

THE PROBLEM OF THE UNIFORM

The problem of the uniform puzzled me for many years, and for a long time I could not understand its appeal nor the reason for its attractiveness. To a certain degree, most uniforms make the bodies beneath them more exciting—some in greater degree than others. For me, and perhaps for a majority of others like me, the sailor's uniform topped the list. There was a time that I thought its beguiling quality was caused mostly by its cut, for it is true that it fits so close that it adds a strange and sexual darkness to the shape of the body beneath it, almost like a coat of black mysterious paint. It is designed to make its wearer **more** desired, from the sharp contrasts of white piping on the collar and sleeves to the tight clutch of the dark wool upon the buttocks, and the inward curling of the crease down the sides of the revealing trousers with their romantic tradition of the bridge with thirteen buttons and the odd cross-lacing at the back. (Alas, that in the newer American uniforms the bridge and cross-lacing have disappeared! Has the Navy no heart at all?) The function of the sailor's uniform is more to adorn and decorate the wearer than to prove useful to him in combat, just as Genet says that the function of the French Navy is more to ornament the coast of France than to defend it.

At last, from much thinking about uniforms, I became aware that there was more to their appeal than their cut—a kind of psychic pull which did not exist in the case of every uniform. Why, for instance, did a mailman's grey seem dull and commonplace? Why did not a railroad conductor's clothes make him more glamorous? Or most bus-drivers' uniforms increase their wearers' magnetism? The sailor's dress-blues tantalized, the air force's neat powder-blue tempted—even the khaki of the soldier was persuasive—and the brilliant red and blue and yellow splash of the marines carried you captive away.

The problem worried me for many years, unsolved and tickling my subconscious. And then a little light began to show. The sailor's uniform, I decided, is glamorous because it represents a way of life that most of us can never know. The sailor knows far suns and seas, the bamboo huts of savages, the stone lace-work of Indian castles, crystal pools and sands in Persia, white columns against dark blue Greek skies, the golden suns and fountains of redwalled Rome. His background is romantic, dark, and strange. He fights for us who are left at home in the dull round of living. And then—then when he takes us in his strong young arms, we feel that beneath the rough wool there beats a heart more brave and gallant than any we have ever known, that his thighs have known the cares-