

LAMBETH BRIDGE

ONE showery Saturday afternoon in April young Eric took his Margery to the Tate Gallery. He called her his Margery in day dreams, although the ownership was recognised only by himself. She was ignorant of her possession.

Now Eric was a specialist in Saturday afternoons. He could devise a programme and draw the utmost from every item of the same. Thus—a friend, some pictures, China tea, and at dusk a little organ music ; or—solitude in the Abbey at evensong, a quiet tea, a lonely walk in the twilight parts of Westminster and home on the top of a motor omnibus by way of Hyde Park and St. John's Wood, where the sun sets very well ; or, again—several friends at lunch in Soho, Chianti, brilliant conversation, cigars and a long tramp through the garden suburb with tea at a farm ; and, perhaps, in summer,

tennis in some old garden under huge chestnut trees, with girls in white dresses, and after dark dancing on the green lawns by the light of Chinese lanterns. Oh, it was sensuous!

These programmes were often more than his friends could bear; but Eric was a practitioner in eclectics.

He had conceived that Margery should spend with him one whole Saturday afternoon and evening in spring, and a very particular programme must be drawn up. After a long deliberation, which began in December and ended in February, he decided that they should go to the Tate Gallery, then to a choice and intimate dinner, and afterwards to a New Art Play. April was to be the month. It might have been February, but he deferred joy for the more excellent beauty of April.

Margery, a girl single-hearted and always ready for adventure, was willing, and her parents were Fabians, so there was no bar to the fulfilment of his dream, and for eight weeks he waited on it with trembling, lest

Fate should interpose the disastrous shears. What wonder that he should initiate a sweet damsel of nineteen into the mystery of his Saturday afternoons, especially when that damsel was his desirable Margery. A wonder almost unthinkable! But the Fates were patronesses to Eric always, and he hoped that their sympathy would prove unalienable even in this matter of his heart. The expected Saturday came as it always does.

"Shall I meet you," asked Margery in the morning, "at Trafalgar Square?"

"Indeed, no," he replied. "You are coming into my dream, and I shall guide you from the very beginning. We will set out together from your door, and together will we return."

Said she, "I think it would be good enough if I met you half-way there. Couldn't you make the dream begin at Charing Cross?" This was by way of protection, lest she should be thought too willing. Margery was always careful of herself when once an adventure was begun.

But Eric had his way, and at half-past two o'clock they set out for Westminster on the top of a motor 'bus. It was an afternoon of watery blue skies and sunshot showers, and the 'bus went skidding along wet and muddy streets. Said Eric, "I like this rain because of rainbows," but Margery replied, pouting, "I dislike these raindrops because of my plume. You see the weather clerk can provide himself with any number of free rainbows, but for my feather I have to pay, and it is therefore the only feather in the world for me."

"You never rise to my point of view," he answered, feeling it necessary that she should, for certain of his half-shaped purposes, but she said, "Your point of view is like an unresolved chord."

"Not for musicians."

"I am no musician, but an audience."

"Would you learn to play?"

"I think it is a very good chord."

Big Ben hove in sight, and a descent from the shuddering vehicle saved any strain. They walked along by the House, and Eric

dilated on the absurdity of a Peer's entrance.

"Would you see them all going in together, then, Lords and Commons, as to an amicable feast?" she asked.

"My dear Margery," the Walrus and the Carpenter and the oysters started out very peaceably, but—" he left off in a glow at having said "dear Margery."

But she destroyed the savour of that form of address, parrying with "my dear boy, those oysters are old enough to take care of themselves."

They came to the Tate Gallery.

"I often think, Margery,"—"I often think" was an equivalent expression for "it has just occurred to me"—"that the walls of this building are like divine features in a vulgar crowd. Fine thoughts within, you know, and therefore interesting and noble features."

"But," she replied, "the features came first." She had failed from his point of view.

"Not really," he said, "I will explain."
But Margery cut in with, "Never mind

and remember there are bad thoughts within."

"Why do you think always of contraries, Margery? I believe you must be practical."

By this time they were inside, and he proceeded to explain his favourite paintings, although she was already well acquainted with them. There were two he wished to keep for the end, and he steered her carefully from their neighbourhood, taking her arm to do so. It was an electric contact, but she pretended not to notice. The coolness of her remarks hid a certain agitation of soul.

They passed by that picture of King Cophetua and his beggar maid, and overheard a lady observing to her robust daughter that she never could understand why the man didn't go up and sit beside the girl. "The good woman would no doubt have invited him up," said Eric, and Margery answered, "She looks like an invitation." Eric thought this was more musicianly.

They went round the rooms, slipping on

the polished floor against one another, and making sallies on every notable picture.

"Turner's 'golden dreams' are rather like your mind, Eric."

"Do you not like visions?"

"I like to see some purpose clearly outlined."

He thought it time to show her the two special paintings. The first was "April Love." Margery thought she perceived some outline in his purpose. "What is the man doing?" she asked; "I do not understand it." So he asked her to come upstairs and see another favourite of his. She desired to know why. "Oh, because it is a very pretty picture."

"Has it a meaning?"

"Not in itself."

She allowed herself to be led up a spiral stairway to a painting in water-colours of a moonlit castle beside a forest-bordered lake.

"Yes, it is a very pretty picture," she agreed, relieved; but he asked suddenly—

"Do you think that would be a good place to spend a honeymoon in?" His

head shook: Margery tingled, and he went on: "Imagine two lovers on a night in June pacing those cloisters, or rowing up that moonbeam on the lake to disappear in the wood. Can you hear the nightingale? Do you like that lighted room up in the tower? Do you not think it a good place for a honeymoon?"

"From your point of view, yes. But one would need to be rich." He grew dull with disappointment, having hoped for a sign, and they went down to tea in silence, while an April shower pattered on the roof.

At five o'clock they left the building and strolled along by the river. Both began to be anxious about the rest of their evening. Margery wanted to know what came next in the programme.

"We can go up Whitehall to look for Cabinet Ministers and tremendous persons in great humming motor-cars, or we can go and watch the sunset from Lambeth Bridge."

She was secretly afraid of the solitude of the Bridge, but her native daring and something else bade her say "Let it be Lambeth

Bridge, then, and we will imagine that we are tremendous persons or Cabinet Ministers."

"You must play a female part, Margery, so we will be tremendous persons. Are you good at pretending things?"

"Sometimes," was her admission, "but not as good as you."

So they went on to Lambeth Bridge.

The rain had ceased from raining, and a sweet April sunset glowed in the sky, and as the two great persons stood looking down that shining water young Eric bent to his Margery and said, "Margery, let's pretend we are engaged."

"All right," she whispered, "let's pretend. But it was not in the programme, surely," she added.

So they pretended, and, as is usual on such occasions, the sun went down with a peculiar glory.

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