



"Every time I get alone I just giggle myself into spasms. Isn't it the funniest?"

To H.G. WELLS

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter I

Chapter II

Chapter III

Chapter IV

Chapter V

Chapter VI

Chapter VII

Chapter VIII

Chapter IX

Chapter X

Chapter XI

Chapter XII

Chapter XIII

Chapter XIV

Chapter XV

ILLUSTRATIONS

"Every time I get alone I just giggle myself into spasms. Isn't it the funniest?"

It was a friendly young face he saw there, but troubled

"I feared he was discommoding you," ventured the Countess, elegantly apologetic

"Daughter!" said Breede with half a glance at the flapper

In that instant Bean read the flapper's look, the look she had puzzled him with from their first meeting

"Oh, put up your trinkets!" said Bean, with a fine affectation of weariness

Thereafter, until late at night, the red car was trailed by the taxicab

"Lumbago!" said Bean, both hands upon the life-belt

BUNKER BEAN

I

Bunker Bean was wishing he could be different. This discontent with himself was suffered in a moment of idleness as he sat at a desk on a high floor of a very high office-building in "downtown" New York. The first correction he would have made was that he should be "well over six feet" tall. He had observed that this was the accepted stature for a hero.

And the name, almost any name but "Bunker Bean!" Often he wrote good ones on casual slips of paper and fancied them his; names like Trevellyan or Montessoro or Delancey, with musical prefixes; or a good, short, beautiful, but dignified name like "Gordon Dane." He liked that one. It suggested something. But Bean! And Bunker Bean, at that! True, it also suggested something, but this had never been anything desirable. Just now the people in the outside office were calling him "Boston."

"Gordon Dane," well over six feet, abundant dark hair, a bit inclined to "wave" and showing faint lines of gray "above the temples"; for Bean also wished to be thirty years old and to have learned about women; in short, to have suffered. Gordon Dane's was a face before which the eyes of women would fall in half-frightened, half-ecstatic subjection, and men would feel the inexplicable magnetism of his presence. He would be widely remarked for his taste in dress. He would don stripes or checks without a trace of timidity. He would quail before no violence of colour in a cravat.

A certain insignificant Bunker Bean was not like this. With a soul aspiring to stripes and checks that should make him a man to be looked at twice in a city street, he lacked courage for any but the quietest patterns. Longing for the cravat of brilliant hue, he ate out his heart under neutral tints. Had he not, in the intoxication of his first free afternoon in New York, boldly purchased a glorious thing of silk entirely, flatly red, an article to stamp its wearer with distinction; and had he not, in the seclusion of his rented room, that night hidden the flaming thing at the bottom of a bottom drawer, knowing in his sickened soul he dared not flaunt it?

Once, truly, had he worn it, but only for a brief stroll on a rainy Sunday, with an entirely opaque raincoat buttoned closely under his chin. Even so, he fancied that people stared through and through that guaranteed fabric straight to his red secret. The rag burned on his breast. Afterward it was something to look at beyond the locked door; perhaps to try on behind drawn shades, late of a night. And how little Gordon Dane would have made of such a matter! Floated in Bean's mind the refrain of a clothing advertisement. "The more advanced dressers will seek this fashion." "Something dignified yet different!" Gordon Dane would be "an advanced dresser."

But if you have been afraid of nearly everything nearly all your life, how then? You must be "dignified" only. The brave only may be "different." It was all well enough to gaze at striking fabrics in windows; but to buy and to wear openly, and get yourself pointed at—laughed at! Again sounded the refrain of the hired bard of dress. *"It is cut to give the wearer the appearance of perfect physical development. And the effect so produced so improves his form that he unconsciously strives to attain the appearance which the garment gives him; he expands his chest, draws in his waist and stands erect."*

A rustling of papers from the opposite side of the desk promised a diversion of his thoughts. Bean was a hireling and the person who rustled the papers was his master, but the youth bestowed upon the great man a look of profound, albeit not unkindly, contempt. It could be seen, even as he sat in the desk-chair, that he was a short man; not an inch better than Bean, there. He was old. Bean, when he thought of the matter, was satisfied to guess him as something between fifty and eighty. He didn't know and didn't care how many might be the years of little Jim Breede. Breede was the most negligible person he knew.

He was nearly nothing, in Bean's view, if you came right down to it. Besides being of too few inches for a man and unspeakably old, he was unsightly. Nothing of the Gordon Dane about Breede. The little hair left him was an atrocious foggy gray; never in order, never combed, Bean thought. The brows were heavy, and still curiously dark, which made them look threatening. The eyes were the coldest of gray, a match for the hair in colour, and set far back in caverns. The nose was blunt, the chin a mere knobby challenge, and between

them was the unloveliest moustache Bean had ever been compelled to observe; short, ragged, faded in streaks. And wrinkles—wrinkles wheresoever there was room for them: across the forehead that lost itself in shining yellow scalp; under the eyes, down the cheeks, about the traplike mouth. He especially loathed the smaller wrinkles that made tiny squares and diamonds around the back of Breede's neck.

Sartorially, also, Bean found Breede objectionable. He forever wore the same kind of suit. The very same suit, one might have thought, only Bean knew it was renewed from time to time; it was the kind called "a decent gray," and it had emphatically not been cut "to give the wearer the appearance of perfect physical development." So far as Bean could determine the sole intention had been to give the wearer plenty of room under the arms and at the waist. Bean found it disgusting—a man who had at least enough leisure to give a little thought to such matters.

Breede's shoes offended him. Couldn't the man pick out something natty, a shapelier toe, buttons, a neat upper of tan or blue cloth—patent leather, of course? But nothing of the sort; a strange, thin, nameless leather, never either shiny or quite dull, as broad at the toe as any place, no buttons; not even laces; elastic at the sides! Not *shoes*, in any dressy sense. Things to be pulled on. And always the same, like the contemptible suits of clothes.

He might have done a little something with his shirts, Bean thought; a stripe or crossed lines, a bit of gay colour; but no! Stiff-bosomed white shirts, cuffs that "came off," cuffs that fastened with hideous metallic devices that Bean had learned to scorn. A collar too loose, a black satin cravat, *and* no scarf-pin; not even a cluster of tiny diamonds.

From Breede and his ignoble attire Bean shifted the disfavour of his glance to Breede's luncheon tray on the desk between them. Breede's unvarying luncheon consisted of four crackers composed of a substance that was said, on the outside of the package, to be "predigested," one apple, and a glass of milk moderately inflated with seltzer. Bean himself had fared in princely fashion that day on two veal cutlets bathed in a German sauce of oily richness, a salad of purple cabbage, a profusion of vegetables, two cups of coffee and

a German pancake that of itself would have disabled almost any but the young and hardy, or, presumably, a German.

Bean guessed the cost of Breede's meal to be a bit under eight cents. His own had cost sixty-five. He despised Breede for a petty economist.

Breede glanced up from his papers to encounter in Bean's eyes only a look of respectful waiting.

"Take letter G.S. Hubbell gen' traffic mag'r lines Wes' Chicago dear sir your favour twen'th instant—"

The words came from under that unacceptable moustache of Breede's like a series of exhausts from a motorcycle. Bean recorded them in his note-book. His shorthand was a marvel of condensed neatness. Breede had had trouble with stenographers; he was not easy to "take." He spoke swiftly, often indistinctly, and it maddened him to be asked to repeat. Bean had never asked him to repeat, and he inserted the a's and the's and all the minor words that Breede could not pause to utter. The letter continued:

"—mus' have report at your earl's' convenience of earnings and expenses of Grand Valley branch for las' four months with engineer's est'mate of prob'le cost of repairs and maintenance for nex' year—"

Breede halted to consult a document. Bean glanced up with his look of respectful waiting. Then he glanced down at his notes and wrote two other lines of shorthand. Breede might have supposed these to record the last sentence he had spoken, but one able to decipher the notes could have read: "That is one rotten suit of clothes. For God's sake, why not get some decent shoes next time—"

The letter was resumed. It came to its end with a phrase that almost won the difficult respect of Bean. Of a rumour that the C. & G.W. would build into certain coveted territory Breede exploded: "I can imagine nothing of less consequence!" Bean rather liked the phrase and the way Breede emitted it. That was a good thing to say to some one who might think you were afraid. He treasured the words; fondled them with the point of his pencil. He saw himself speaking them pithily to various persons with whom he might be in conflict. There was a thing now that Gordon Dane might have

hurled at his enemies a dozen times in his adventurous career. Breede must have something in him—but look at his shiny white cuffs with the metal clasps, on the desk at his elbow!

Bean had lately read of Breede in a newspaper that "Conservative judges estimate his present fortune at a round hundred million." Bean's own stipend was thirty dollars a week, but he pitied Breede. Bean could learn to make millions if he should happen to want them; but poor old Breede could never learn to *look* like anybody.

There you have Bunker Bean at a familiar, prosaic moment in an afternoon of his twenty-third year. But his prosaic moments are numbered. How few they are to be! Already the door of Enchantment has swung to his scared touch. The times will show a scar or two from Bean. Bean the prodigious! The choicely perfect toy of Destiny at frolic! Bean the innocent—the monstrous!

Those who long since gave Bean up as an insoluble problem were denied the advantages of an early association with him. Only an acquaintance with his innermost soul of souls could permit any sane understanding of his works, and this it is our privilege, and our necessity, to make, if we are to comprehend with any sympathy that which was later termed his "madness." The examination shall be made quickly and with all decency.

Let us regard Bean through the glass of his earliest reactions to an environment that was commonplace, unstimulating, dull—the little wooden town set among cornfields, "Wellsville" they called it, where he came from out of the Infinite to put on a casual body.

Of Bean at birth, it may be said frankly that he was not imposing. He was not chubby nor rosy; had no dimples. His face was a puckered protest at the infliction of animal life. In the white garments conventional to his age he was a distressing travesty, even when he gurgled. In the nude he was quite impossible to all but the most hardened mothers, and he was never photographed thus in a wash-bowl. Even his own mother, before he had survived to her one short year, began to harbour the accursed suspicion that his beauty was not flawless nor his intelligence supreme. To put it brutally, she almost admitted to herself that he was not the most remarkable child in all the world. To be sure, this is a bit less incredible when we know that Bean's mother, at his advent, thought far less highly

of Bean's father than on the occasion, seven years before, when she had consented to be endowed with all his worldly goods. In the course of those years she came to believe that she had married beneath her, a fact of which she made no secret to her intimates and least of all to her mate, who, it may be added, privately agreed with her. Alonzo Bean, after that one delirious moment at the altar, had always disbelieved in himself pathetically. Who was he—to have wed a Bunker!

When little Bean's years began to permit small activities it was seen that his courage was amazing: a courage, however, that quickly overreached itself, and was sapped by small defeats. Tumbles down the slippery stairway, burns from the kitchen stove, began it. When a prized new sailor hat was blown to the centre of a duck-pond he sought to recover it without any fearsome self-communing. If faith alone could uphold one, Bean would have walked upon the face of the waters that day. But the result was a bald experience of the sensations of the drowning, and a lasting fear of any considerable body of water. Ever after it was an adventure not to be lightly dared to cross even the stoutest bridge.

And flying! A belief that we can fly as the birds is surely not unreasonable at the age when he essayed it. Nor should a mere failure to rise from the ground destroy it. One must leap from high places, and Bean did so. The roof of the chicken house was the last eminence to have an experimental value. On his bed of pain he realized that we may not fly as the birds; nor ever after could he look without tremors from any high place.

Such domestic animals as he encountered taught him further fear. Even the cat became contemptuous of him, knowing itself dreaded. That splendid courage he was born with had faded to an extreme timidity. Before physical phenomena that pique most children to cunning endeavour, little Bean was aghast.

And very soon to this burden of fear was added the graver problems of human association. From being the butt of capricious physical forces he became a social unit and found this more terrifying than all that had gone before. At least in the physical world, if you kept pretty still, didn't touch things, didn't climb, stayed away from edges and windows and water and cows and looked carefully

where you stepped, probably nothing would hurt you. But these new terrors of the social world lay in wait for you; clutched you in moments of the most inoffensive enjoyment.

His mother seemed to be director-general of these monsters, a ruthless deviser of exquisite tortures. There were unseasonable washings, dressings, combings and curlings—admonitions to be "a little gentleman." Loathsomely garbed, he was made to sit stiffly on a chair in the presence of falsely enthusiastic callers; or he was taken to call on those same callers and made to sit stiffly again while they, with feverish affectations of curiosity, asked him what his name was, something they already knew at least as well as he did; made to overhear their ensuing declarations that the cat had got his tongue, which he always denied bitterly until he came to see through the plot and learned to receive the accusation in stony silence.

Boys of his own age took hold of him roughly and laid him in the dust, jeeringly threw his hat to some high roof, spat on his new shoes. Even little girls, divining his abjectness, were prone to act rowdyish with him. And this especially made him suffer. He comprehended, somehow, that it was ignoble for a man child to be afraid of little girls.

Money was another source of grief. Not an exciting thing in itself, he had yet learned that people possessing desirable objects would insanely part with them for money. Then came one of the Uncle Bunkers from over Walnut Shade way, who scowled at him when leaving and gave him a dime. He voiced a wish to exchange this for sweets with a certain madman in the village who had no understanding of the value of his stock. His mother demurred; not alone because candy was unwholesome, but because the only right thing to do with money was to "save" it. And his mother prevailed, even though his father coarsely suggested that all the candy he could ever buy with Bunker money wouldn't hurt him none. The mother said that this was "low," and the father retorted with equal lowness that a rigid saving of all Bunker-given money wouldn't make no one a "Croosus," neither, if you come down to *that*.

It resulted in his being told that he could play freely with his dime one whole afternoon before the unexciting process of saving it

began. Well enough, that! He had grown too fearful of life to lose that coin vulgarly out in the grass, as another would almost surely have done.

But he was beguiled in the mart of the money changers. To him, standing safely within the front gate where nothing could burn him, fall upon him, or chase him, "playing" respectfully with his new dime, came one of slightly superior years and criminal instincts demanding to inspect the treasure. The privilege was readily accorded, to arouse only contempt. The piece was too small. The critic himself had a bigger one, and showed it.

The two coins were held side by side. Bean was envious. The small coin was of silver, the larger of copper, but he was no petty metallurgist. He wanted to trade and said so. The newcomer assented with a large air of benevolence, snatched the despised smaller coin and ran hastily off—doubtless into a life of prosperous endeavour. And little Bean, presently found by his mother crooning over a large copper cent, was appalled by what followed. He had brought back "a bigger money," yet he had done something infamous. It was the first gleam of an incapacity for finance that was one day to become brilliant. He came to think money was a pretty queer thing. People cheated it from you or took it away for your own good. Anyhow, it was not a matter to bother about. You never had it long enough.

Then there was language. Language was words, and politeness. Certain phrases had to be mouthed to strangers, designed to imply a respect he was generally far from feeling. This was bad enough, but what was worse was that you couldn't use just any word you might hear, however beautiful it sounded. For example, there was the compelling utterance he got from the two merry gentlemen who passed him at the gate one day. So jolly were they with their songs and laughter that he followed them a little way to where they sat under a tree and drank turn by turn from a bottle. His ear caught the thing and his lips shaped it so cunningly that they laughed more than ever. He returned to his gate, intoning it; the fresh voice rose higher as the phrasing became more familiar. Then he was on the porch, chanting as a bard from the mere sensuous beauty of the

words. Through the open door he saw three faces. The minister and his wife were calling on his mother.

The immediate happenings need not be set down. After events again became coherent he was choking back sobs and listening to the minister pray for those of unclean lips. And the minister prayed especially for one among them that he might cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord. He knew this to mean himself, for his mother glared over at him where he knelt; he was grateful for the kneeling posture at that moment; he would not have cared to sit. But all he had learned was that if you are going to use words freely it had much better be when you are alone; this, and that the minister had enormous feet, kneeling there with the toes of his boots dug into the carpet.

No sooner was this language spectre laid than another confronted him; that of class distinction. Certain people were "low" and must be shunned by the high, unless the high perversely wished to be thought equally low. His mother was again the arbiter. Her rule as applied to children of his own age wrought but little hardship. She considered other children generally to be low, and her son feared them for their deeds of coarsely humorous violence. But he was never quite able to believe that his father was an undesirable associate.

In all his young life he had found no sport so good as riding on the seat beside that father while he drove the express wagon; a shiny green wagon with a seat close to the front and a tilted rest for one's feet, drawn by a grand black horse with a high-flung head, that would make nothing of eating a small boy if it ever had the chance. You drove to incoming trains, which was high adventure. But that was not all. You loaded the wagon with packages from the trains and these you proceeded to deliver in a leisurely and important manner. And some citizen of weight was sure to halt the wagon and ask if that there package of stuff from Chicago hadn't showed up yet, and it was mighty funny if it hadn't, because it was ordered special. Whereupon you said curtly that you didn't know anything about *that*—you couldn't fetch any package if it hadn't come, could you? And you drove on with pleased indignation.

Yet so fine a game as this was held by his mother to be unedifying. He would pick up a fashion of speech not genteel; he would grow to be a "rough." She, the inconsequent fair, who had herself been captivated by the driver of that very wagon, a gay blade directing his steed with a flourish! To be sure, she had found him doing this in a mist of romance, as one who must have his gallant fling at life before settling down. But the mist had cleared. Alonzo Bean, no longer the gay blade, had settled down upon the seat of his wagon. Once he had touched the guitar, sung an acceptable tenor, jested with life. Now he drove soberly, sang no more, and was concerned chiefly that his meals be served at set hours.

Small wonder, perhaps, that the mother should have feared the Bean and laboured to cultivate the true Bunker strain in her offspring. Small wonder that she kept him when she could from the seat of that wagon and from the deadening influence of a father to whom Romance had broken its fine promises. Little Bean distressed her enough by playing at express-wagon in preference to all other games. He meant to drive a real one when he was big enough—that is, at first. Secretly he aspired beyond that. Some day, when he would not be afraid to climb to a higher seat, he meant to drive the great yellow 'bus that also went to trains. But that was a dream too splendid to tell.

In the summer of his seventh year, when his mother was finding it increasingly difficult to supply antidotes for this poison, she even consented to his visiting some other Beans. Unfortunately, there were no Bunkers to harbour the child of one who had made so palpable a *mésalliance*; but the elder Beans would gladly receive him, and they at least had never driven express wagons.

To the little boy, who had no sense of their relationship, they were persons named "Gramper" and "Grammer" whom he would do well to look down upon because they were not Bunkers. So much he understood, and that he was to ride in a stage and find them on a remote farm. It was to be the summer of his first feat of daring since he had reached years of moral discretion.

He was still so timid at the beginning of the wonderful journey that when the kind old gentleman who drove the stage stopped his horses at a point on the road where ripe red apples hung thickly on