

# SO WE ABOLISHED THE CHAPERONE

By Daniel A. Lord, S.J.

It had been a good movie (motion picture, if you happen to have Hollywood's dislike for the word movie), and the Bradley twins had thoroughly enjoyed it. Lots of action, plenty of romance, a good dash of boisterous but clean comedy, amusing lines, surprise, suspense, and a final chase, resulting in the near death of the hero before the fade-out.

So, after getting a hamburger and a soda, they dropped their dates and drove home, at peace with the world. Sue's mind was still a bit preoccupied with the hero of the picture (in certain ways he was not unlike the young man she had met during the Christmas holidays). Whenever Dick saw an exciting picture, he was always left with the feeling that he, too, could lick the world. Somehow, as the hero flashed his blade and held off half a dozen trained fencers as if he were encased in high-powered steel, Dick found himself doing precisely the same magnificent deeds. And any heroine, blonde, brunette, or redhead, bore for the duration of the picture—and for a few hours afterwards—a striking resemblance to Sue; at least, Sue always thought so.

## **Straight to Food**

They put the car in the garage and thumped up into the house, the noise that they were making clearly indicating that the night was relatively young. Since dad and mother had gone to hear "*Parsifal*," which lasted until well after midnight from well before dinner, the twins had caught a late-afternoon sandwich, picked up their companions of the evening, and seen the earliest show.

"I asked Hester to leave food," Sue explained, unnecessarily, as they opened the hall door. "In spite of the hamburger I'm ready for more."

Dick shook a tolerant but deliberately perplexed head.

"Girls' capacity for food amazes me," he said. "You must eat your weight in sandwiches every twenty-four hours."

"You're confusing me with a robin," Sue retorted.

"You're both about the same: You eat your weight in sandwiches; the robin eats its weight in worms."

"Don't be disgusting. Anyhow I've never heard you refuse a sandwich. . . ."

## **Unexpected Guest**

Sue stopped. They had shed their topcoats and extraordinarily bright scarfs and flung their gloves on to the hall table. The lights in the hall were on. But they noticed to their surprise, as they turned toward the dining room, that the lights there were brightly burning, too.

"Well!" said Sue, the instinctive housewife, "it was nice of Hester to leave food, but we could have turned on the lights ourselves. After all, having these lights burning since she went up to her room. . . ."

Dick, full of the spirit of the motion picture's adventure, instinctively thought of thieves. In fact, he had to fight a strong hope that there might be thieves in the house. Tyrone Power had handled a brace of robbers with a candelabra; and Dick realized that, if Hester had set the table properly, there was in the dining room a brace of candelabra all ready to be swung at the heads of . . .

Simultaneously the twins said: "Let's go . . ." But Sue ended the sentence with "eat" and Dick with "see," a lack of choral effect which they failed to notice. For just at that moment a cheery voice called from the dining room:

"Hurry up, you youngsters. I'm on my third sandwich now. And if you don't get here, blame yourselves for your starvation."

"Father Hall!" they shouted together, and dashed toward the dining room.

## **Friend Indeed**

“Come in! come in!” he cried, as they appeared in the doorway. “Make yourselves right at home. Act as if you lived here. I’m doing it.”

He certainly was.

Hester, the faithful cook of the Bradley family, had left a positive fortification of sandwiches in expectation of their return—and of the possibility of their bringing home with them a young raiding force. Near the sandwiches was a powerful outwork of chocolate cake, and two thermos bottles flanked the solid food.

Only it happened that Father Hall had already made preliminary forays into the embattled food. His cup was still half filled with hot chocolate. His plate bore the crumbs of demolished sandwiches. He gestured a welcome with the hand in which he held a sandwich.

“Why Father!” Sue cried. “You didn’t let us know you were coming to town.”

“Indeed, and I did,” he retorted. “I wired late this afternoon. But with the father and mother of the family off for the opera, dinnerless, and the twins patronizing the earliest of the early movies, nobody was here to get my wire. So Hester let me in, and my own ingenuity led me to the sandwiches. My bags are parked in the guest room upstairs; I shall pass the night under this hospitable roof; and I shall be on the road to Lakeside after Mass at St. Joseph’s Hospital in the morning.”

## **Retrospect**

“Delighted!” said Dick, sincerely. So it was a matter of shaking hands all round before the twins settled down in adjacent chairs and completed the capitulation of the barricades of food.

They talked of new ski-ing boots, their plans for a small, swift motorboat for the summer, and Sue’s art-class projects in wax; of the dinner they’d attended on the preceding evening, and of dictators who’d replaced kings. . . . And then, naturally, the conversation drifted to the picture they had seen and enjoyed.

“He’s really so good-looking,” commented Sue, not realizing that she was taking for granted the proper name of that he. “And he had a new leading lady. I wonder just how she managed that smooth look of her hair.”

“Why do we have to live in an age when you can shoot at a fellow only through a twenty-mile gun and a table of logarithms?” Dick was stifling sighs, too. “In those days you gave a man a horse, a rapier . . . and it was his courage against the world. Today man doesn’t fight against man; he is pitted against a tank.”

“It is all so romantic,” Father Hall agreed. “Garden walls . . . and soldiers with flowing capes . . . and balconies . . . and duennas. . . .”

## **Duennas**

Sue laughed deliberately.

“You really should have seen that duenna tonight, Father.” She was amused all the way through. “Edna May Oliver, you know, and she’s such a delightful fool. She followed the poor girl around like a particularly black shadow. Every time the girl and the hero met, up popped the duenna. Poor kids! They had all the privacy of a couple in a subway station at rush hour.”

Dick poured himself another cup of chocolate.

“Silly custom, the duenna,” he said. “I like the romantic part of an age like that—the fighting and the riding and the free life. But duennas? Thanks be, we’ve got over them. I’m powerful glad we’ve abolished the chaperone,” he said with mock solemnity.

## **What’s ‘Chaperone’?**

Father Hall’s face took on a look of solemnity.

“The chaperone?” he inquired, as if the word puzzled him.

“You know,” Sue explained, unnecessarily, “that funny old-maid aunt who acted as female policeman when boys and

girls got together.”

Father Hall shook his head dubiously. “Didn’t I see one of them stuffed in the Smithsonian?” he asked.

“Probably,” Dick agreed. “Right next to the case with the dodo and the roc and the other extinct birds.”

They all laughed.

“Whenever you run across a duenna or a chaperone in a book, she’s always a comic character, isn’t she?” Sue laughed again, as she thought of the plight of many a chaperone in literature.

“Pretty much like the ancient Keystone cops,” agreed Father Hall.

### **Just Think of It!**

“Just imagine,” said Dick, “a world in which every girl had a duenna! and every time boy met girl, a chaperone popped out of the underbrush!”

“Marmaduke goes courting Clarabella,” continued Sue. “They meet in the parlour, and all evening long mama or Aunt Mathilda or Cousin Hyacinthe sits guard, one eye on her knitting and one eye on the happy young couple.”

“And when Marmaduke takes Clarabella on a picnic, he carries up the hill to the picnic spot first the baskets and then Aunt Sophrinisba.”

“What a pleasant time is had by all!” Father Hall joined in the laughter. The pictures the twins painted were funny enough, no doubt of that. And Father could understand why the duenna or chaperone was a subject for so much comedy. The same element of essential dignity that makes the policeman a target for dramatic humour marks the chaperone for low comedy.

“Anyhow, I’m glad I live in a chaperone-less age,” said Dick. “I don’t need a female cop watching me.”

“Me either,” Sue agreed, ungrammatically.

### **What, None at All?**

“Don’t you ever have chaperones any more?” asked Father Hall, for a moment genuinely perplexed.

“Oh, on parties we generally have some—mothers and fathers of the gang, friends of the school, you see. But the kids usually have something to do with the picking of their chaperones. And we manage to pick ‘em a little blind and deaf and lame. Anyhow, they know they’re ornaments, like the potted palms and the flowers. They stay where nothing is likely to happen. Chaperones shouldn’t be seen or heard.”

“Nice,” said Father Hall, without any particular inflection. He didn’t want to stop the flow of conversation.

“The whole idea was so loony,” Dick continued. “Pretending that young people couldn’t be together without getting into trouble. Just imagine a poor fellow inviting a girl to see a show and then having to buy a third ticket for Aunt Bertha! Or taking a girl out for a ride and having to park Miss Nosey Whatsername in the rumble seat! Iron-age stuff!”

Sue wrinkled her forehead in thought. “I wonder how the idea of chaperones ever started? Who thought it up?”

### **Silly Stuff**

Father Hall kept his voice light.

“Oh, some old fogy, I suppose. He—or possibly she—got the entirely silly and stupid idea that young people are hot-blooded. Without having any slightest reason for thinking that way, they imagined that young men and young women might get into trouble if they were left alone together too much. I don’t know where on earth they dug up such a silly, unfounded notion, but they fancied that young men and boys might have a lot of temptations—and girls might be tempted, too—and that it wasn’t smart to give temptation too much opportunity to operate.

“Then they had another crazy idea: They thought that future mothers ought to be protected against the weakness or selfishness or possible poaching of the male of the species. Of course, everyone knows that men are always strong and unselfish and never, never poach; so the whole plan of the chaperone was just a waste of time.

“I suppose the old skin-and-bones dried herring who first thought up the idea (it was probably somebody’s relic of a

father or antique of a mother or thwarted-in-love Aunt Kate) knew nothing whatever of life. He or she had never been any place or done anything. He didn't know that on a date young men are always gentlemen and young girls always ladies, and that the men always brought the ladies home intact. He really thought that the young people might be not only tempted to misbehave a little but might—if they had the chance—actually misbehave. He didn't know that young people have far, far fewer temptations than older people have; that youth has, through long years of experience, learned self-mastery and self-control; that youth can be trusted to be ladies or gentlemen anywhere, at any time, with anyone; that young people are always intent on safe-guarding themselves and their future as mothers or fathers.

“Isn't it amazing what absolutely mad ideas oldsters get?”

### **Kidding?**

Dick and Sue had, through this amazing series of sentences, been watching their priest friend with growing astonishment. At first they took his words literally. Then they began to realize that he was talking in reverse English. Dick's face flushed a little as it dawned on him that he was being “joshed”—and that without too much finesse or delicacy. When the priest ended his talk with a deep draught of chocolate, the twins interchanged one of their quick ‘entre-nous’ glances.

Then Dick said, in a low, hurt-indignant voice, “What's the big idea? Putting us on?”

“Me?” The priest's eyes were wide in innocence. “Putting you on? Why, my dear young friends . . .”

“Don't my-dear-young-friends us,” retorted Sue. “We won't be put in our place like that.”

“Who's putting whom in whose place?” Father Hall replied, all open-eyed amazement.

The twins looked at him with undisguised suspicion. Dick finally rumbled, way back near his collar line:

“I still think the whole chaperone idea was nonsense. And I'm glad we don't have chaperones any more.”

### **You Asked: We Agreed**

Father Hall pushed his plate a little away from him and watched the young people tear into second sandwiches as if the food were some argument they intended to destroy. He produced, filled, and lighted his pipe.

“All right,” he said. “You asked us to abolish the chaperone, and we did. Now she walks through formal affairs like a sort of pleasantly wistful figure out of the past. She knows better than to try to interfere with young people at their parties. Except at big gatherings, she hardly exists any more.

“You can take a young lady to a movie or to the theatre, Dick, and no third person tags along to watch over the pair of you. You get an invitation for a ride or a picnic, Sue, and you all trek off with only your guardian angels for companions. When two couples go off for the evening, there's no fifth wheel in evidence. You lead your social lives minus chaperones. You asked for that, and we let you have it.”

“Fine!” said Dick.

“Second the motion,” added Sue.

Father Hall blew out a cloud of gray-blue smoke that settled amid the crystals of the light fixture over the table. He fixed his gaze upon the cloud as if it were filled with visions or with loitering planes ready to swoop down.

### **You Said All This**

“We abolished the chaperone,” he repeated. “You see we are a trustful lot, we oldsters, and we believe what you youngsters tell us about yourselves.”

The twins looked up suddenly and then looked down at their plates once more. “You told us some things about yourselves that we liked to hear. You said, with great emphasis, ‘Look here, you old people: We don't need anyone to watch us. We're trustworthy, we are. Leave us alone; throw us on our own; you needn't be afraid that we'll do anything to shame you or ourselves.’”

“You gave us a very logical and convincing argument. You said, ‘Don't you see, you old-timers you, that the mere

presence of the chaperone is a kind of challenge? The very fact that she's there makes us think that you old-timers expect us to misbehave. She acts as if we were all headed for mischief. Maybe we never even thought of misbehaving. Maybe we were a mile away from mischief. But her very presence in our midst challenges us to see what we can get by with; suggests that we OUGHT to be tempted; makes us think about misbehaving. So, you see, far from being a reason for our being good, a chaperone is positively an incentive for our being bad. If you'll get rid of her, we won't even think of evil. Remove her, and we'll be amazingly good.' Very convincing . . . very, very convincing indeed.

### **Young Men Promised**

"Then up spoke the young men. 'Listen, you old dodderers: Young men are by nature chivalrous. We'll take care of the young women if you'll just trust us. Oh, I know; there is the predatory type among us, the kind that goes about seeking whom he may devour. But even that kind of man respects the fine, decent girl. He may try something with a loose girl, a girl from the underworld or the half-world. But he's known as a cad and a scamp if he tries anything low with a girl who may one day be his own wife or the wife of one of his friends. Trust us. We're knights in the making and in fact. If you'll abolish the chaperone, we young men will take care of your young women far better than they have ever been taken care of. Quite a speech, eh, Dick? Yes; quite a speech.'"

Dick was very busy with his sandwich.

### **Girls Pledged**

Father Hall turned to Sue.

"As for the girls, with tears in their eyes they told us how we had misjudged them. 'We need a chaperone? Oh, how could you think such things? Believe us, we can be trusted. We are good. We'll stay good. You don't have to worry about us; not a bit. It is our lovely task to inspire young men to goodness, and we can do that most effectively when there is no chaperone haunting us.

" 'But if by any unbelievable chance some young man did forget himself, tried some familiarity that we should rightly resent, some suggestion or gesture that was an insult to our goodness, you may be sure we'd resent it most emphatically. No chaperone could ever protect us so carefully as we will protect ourselves. We promise you that with all our hearts.'

"Very good indeed, Sue. And we oldsters listened and were proud."

### **You Convinced Us**

The priest blew another bank of clouds to the ceiling of the room.

"Well, you were all very convincing, you young people. We heard you guarantee your trustworthiness and pooh-pooh any need for supervision. You protested your goodness and virtue—not too much but enough to be very persuading. The young men boasted of their strength. The young women modestly stressed their virtue. And you made us feel that we had long been insulting you by our thinking that it was smart to have an older person around during your recreation, not to spoil your good times, of course, but merely to make less likely the danger of evil times and the sad consequences of evil."

The priest didn't look at either of the twins. In fact, he seemed bent on locating that vision or those planes in the clouds of tobacco smoke.

"So all this preamble leads to a simple question, or maybe a series of interlocked questions. You don't have to answer the questions if you don't want to. But here's a preliminary statement:

"You asked us to trust you and to abolish the chaperone. In the main, we have done as you've asked.

### **And so?**

"Now the questions, and you can talk up.

"Are young people today notably good? Have the young men been protecting the young women? Have the young

women been as careful of their conduct as they would have been under the eyes of a duenna?

“What about the parties, the dances, that happen to be unchaperoned or chaperoned by someone who is blind or lame?”

“When young people go out together in a car, is their conduct the kind of which we’d approve for the future mothers and fathers of our race, the strong young sons and lovely daughters of Christ?”

“Now that you have experimented without chaperones in your social life, do you find that youthful virtue is triumphant over vice? Have you proved to us that you need no supervising? That you are even better without an older person’s overseeing than you would be with it?”

“You made certain guarantees when you asked us to abolish the chaperone. You’re honest young people. You mean to tell the truth. You mean to keep your promises.

“Well, what about all these questions? Suppose you tell me?”

### **The Strange Answer**

Dick let out a snort that sounded suspiciously like a choked fit of laughter. Sue answered with a nervous little giggle high in the roof of her mouth.

Then there was silence.

Father Hall spread his hands in an expressive gesture.

“Well, kids, I put those same questions to a crowd of college students at a convention once, and they answered me in exactly the same way that you’ve answered—with half a laugh and a nervous giggle. Why? Go ahead; don’t hold it back. Tell me why that was their answer and yours.”

But Dick and Sue were singularly without reply.

Father Hall tamped his tobacco with a hardened thumb.

“That,” said he, slowly, “is, I’m very much afraid, your answer.” He continued as slowly. “Parents, modern parents who love their children perhaps too foolishly, let young people go out together in cars, on picnics, even across the face of the map. Dick and Sue, believe me; I think you’re fine, and I believe in both of you. But what’s this I hear about parked cars? What about the conduct of boys and girls when they are off alone together? You tell me. I’m not a youngster any longer, so all I know is what I hear or what the young people tell me. Are you proud of your contemporaries, very proud of their truthworthiness? Do you think they’ve been faithful to the guarantees they made when they asked us to abolish the chaperone?”

### **We Try**

Dick swallowed something more than part of his sandwich.

“Oh,” he said, “young people will be young people.”

“Which, said the priest, quietly, “is precisely the reason why once on a time old people decided to have chaperones for young people.”

Sue kept her eyes fixed on a remote object.

“I think we can say honestly, Father, that Dick and I are trying to be decent. I think that necking is cheap and that parking for purpose of necking is inexcusable. I don’t think I have to pay for a movie and a soda by letting my escort make love to me. I don’t think Dick expects that sort of thing from the girls he takes out. We have our ideals, and we try to live up to them. But there are a lot of young people . . . Dick knows them . . . I know them, too. . . .”

Her voice trailed off into silence. Nobody spoke for a minute or two, and then it was Sue who resumed.

### **Chaperones Again?**

“What are you trying to do, Father? Re-establish the chaperone idea?”

“Gosh,” groaned Dick, “I can’t see it! Me taking a girl out with a spinster aunt trailing along behind us?”

“This isn’t Spain of the seventeenth century.”

“You might as well bring back swords and flowing cloaks.”

Father Hall’s clear, honest laughter relieved the tension.

“You know me well enough,” he said “to be sure that I’m not trying to thrust anything—chaperone, duenna, swords, flowing cloaks—on either of you. But I’m willing to make the two of you a little bet, which unfortunately I may not live to collect. I’ll bet that you put some kind of chaperonage back when you, Sue, are a mother, and you, Dick, are a father.”

### **When You Have Children**

They looked at him, half in doubt, half in agreement.

“You see, you are going to remember the temptations that you saw unchaperoned youth encounter. You’re going to think of the dangers you yourselves ran. You’re going to recall how your contemporaries, boys and girls from good homes with fine family traditions, went more than a little wild when they were turned loose and had nothing to protect them but their honour and their common sense. The result of all this recalling is going to be—or I miss my guess and lose my bet—that you’ll decide not to let your beloved sons and daughters run risks like those your contemporaries ran.

“Here’s a very modern young man who thinks that it’s quite all right conveniently to run out of gas on the top of a shady hill. In a few years he marries. Many years later his charming daughter is at the dating age. A young man comes calling in a coupe. What do you want to bet that dad will think a couple of times before he allows daughter to go off with the young man—alone?

“Here’s a very modern young woman who has had to suffer being bothered by some slightly spiflicated youth who just can’t keep his hands where they belong. In time she marries and has a fine young boy. Comes the day when the boy wants to take a girl out on a picnic—alone. I’ll be willing to double my former bet that the mother does a lot of thinking before she says, ‘Perfectly all right, my dear.’

### **Trust, But?**

“I have never conducted anything for young people—parties, conventions, outings, pilgrimages—without providing most careful supervision. That’s because I remember the temptations of youth. That’s because I love youth. I can honestly say that the supervision I have provided has never been even slightly obtrusive or annoying. I know that it has never cut down anyone’s legitimate fun the least bit. The fact is that I love youth, you young people, too much to increase your problems in life by placing you where temptation might be easy and its gratification simple.

“And though we have, in the main, taken you youngsters at your word and trusted you, I wonder how far you will trust your own children, since you know what you know of the general trustworthiness of your associates.”

Neither Dick nor Sue spoke. Dick was concentrating elaborately on a large block of chocolate cake that needed undivided attention. Sue was diligently stirring a cup of chocolate, in which the sugar had long since dissolved beyond any further need of rotary motion.

### **Your Pledged Word**

“Then the answer is chaperones?” Sue said, at last, in a question.

“As you yourselves will probably solve it later, yes. Though don’t get me wrong about that. I’m not thinking about a gaunt female with a mantilla over her head and a look on her face that would sour milk.

“But that’s not the immediate question. I’m thinking less of chaperones and duennas than of you. You young people made us promises. How have you kept them? You were proud to believe. Are those things true? We fulfilled our part of the bargain. We said, ‘All right, then; you’re trustworthy, all of you. We can count on you boys to protect the girls. We can be sure that you girls will set high ideals for the young men you go with. We hereby abolish the chaperone.’ We did our part. So what?

“Well, if I were a young person. I should consider myself bound by an implicit contract. If in a war a gentleman officer who is a prisoner gives his word not to try to escape, his guards are removed; he would consider it the most frightful

breach of honour to try to escape. Any honourable person who is party to a contract breaks his neck if it is necessary to fulfil his part of the agreement.

### **It's Up to You**

“Well, we accepted your words; we told you that we had faith in you, and we settled back to watch all of you make good. Shouldn't you be ashamed of yourselves if you fall short of our faith? And shouldn't you consider that young man or woman who failed a real traitor to youth?”

“I hate to think that the graceful, beautiful figure of the chaperone has disappeared from our parties and receptions. Let's hope that you'll have sense enough to be glad when some older person is willing to be with you when you are having a good time.

“But it seems to me that on the unchaperoned occasions which constitute most of your social life right now the whole problem is on your shoulders. You said that you young men were chivalrous. Fine. Then make good. You said that you young women were pure and decent and knew how to take care of yourselves. Splendid. But do more than just say these things; prove them. You said with all the emphasis of youthful honesty that you didn't need anybody to watch you, that you could be good and could stay good on your own. That's a large order. You had better be doing all you can to prove that you are not liars or the worst type of self-deceivers.

### **Not Fooling Us**

“You see, while we oldsters are a trustful lot, we're not blind. And when you think you're fooling us, the plain fact is that you are fooling yourselves. The young man who says, 'I don't need any chaperone,' when he really means, 'I don't want to be annoyed with having to look out for a chaperone,' isn't fooling us. We know why he dislikes chaperones. And you know why, too.

“The young woman who says, 'Chaperones are obsolete—we girls know how to take care of ourselves'—may be telling the truth. I'd like to think that she is. If what she really means is, 'Chaperones are a nuisance—we would get into hot water if one of them saw what we are doing,' it doesn't take us long to catch on. She's kidding only herself.

“But the result is that a lot of decent young men and pure young women who probably don't need chaperones to watch over them are going to suffer for the scamps who use the absence of a chaperone to get away with murder. The whole mass of young people must bear the reputation of the liars and the treaty breakers, who have used the repeal of the chaperone as a repeal of the laws of common decency and human safety.

### **A New Society—Maybe**

“Let's start a new society. No; I take that back. I don't want to have anything to do with it. An oldster like me has no right to try to thrust a thing like this on you youngsters. But how about your starting a new society?”

“What's it to be for?” asked Dick, interested.

“What's it to be called?” asked Sue, thinking at once of a possible name.

“I'll bet it's going to be a society to abolish something,” said Dick, trying to be light and facetious.

“Oh, another anti-something-or-other society,” groaned Sue.

The priest looked at them challengingly. “What a minute, you two. Have you in all your dealings with me ever known me to start a society agin' anything?”

“We were funnin',” said Sue, apologetically.

“Go ahead,” Dick supplemented. “We're listening.”

“Well, my society—rather the society I'd like to see you start—would have for its purpose simply this: to make it unnecessary ever to bring back the chaperone.”

### **Too Easy?**

“My stars!” cried Dick. “I thought you were making a plea for chaperones.”

“You thought nothing of the sort,” retorted the priest. “not if you’ve been listening to me with even a fraction of your not-over-ample mind.”

“Ouch!”

“Give it to him, Father,” scoffed Sue. “Him and his two-for-a-quarter mind!”

“Call her off, Father. It’s bad enough to have you making me feel like a heel and one of a generation of heels.” Dick was quasi-humorous, or, as the Irish put it, half joking, whole earnest. “How does our society go about achieving its noble purpose? Down with chaperones? Never may they wave? And when we accomplish our purpose, what do we do to make it a permanent accomplishment?”

Father Hall knocked the ashes out of his pipe and bit on the stem.

“That’s easy. In fact it’s so easy that I’m almost afraid that it won’t be done. You see, human beings get all het up over hard things, and they tackle them with vim, vigour, and vibrancy. But simple things . . . Who wants to tackle simple things?”

### **Chivalry—1958**

“Well, chaperones really wouldn’t be necessary if young men were chivalrous and young women were charming and good.

“So, our society would aim first at the establishment of real chivalry among young men which would be asking the young men to be, in reality, no more than what they have always liked to pretend they are.

“The chivalrous young man going out with a young woman remembers that the name he bears for the evening is escort. That word is used to designate the cruisers that protect a line of merchantmen during a war. The job of an escort is to protect that which is being escorted. What would you think of an escort cruiser that suddenly started to try to sink the ship it was sent to protect?”

“The commander of that escort ship would be hung from the yardarm,” replied Dick, promptly.

“Spoken like an old salt—or a reader of Conrad and Nordhoff and Hall. He’d be hung for a traitor.

### **Escort**

“So out into the evening goes the young man escorting the girl. He is by virtue of his title supposed to protect her. Indeed, he insists with indignant emphasis that he is a representative of the stronger sex. Woman is the frail vessel—which term we can for the minute consider as another nautical term. The young man is to protect the young girl against all molestation. Any insult to her is an insult to him. Certainly with even more force he is to protect her—and himself—against any treasonable gesture on his part. This is a frail vessel in his keeping, and he is certainly not going to be the one to sink it.

“That’s the idea.

“Now, I’m far from young, and I am really far from the young, too. But if the floating rumours that come to my ear have any degree of truth in them, the attitude of many an escort who takes a young girl under his protecting wing may be expressed in any of these rather current and practised principles,” said Father Hall, taking his napkin and using it as if it were a document.

### **A Code—of How Not to be a Civilized Christian Gentleman—Is This You on a Date? This Code is an Advocate of the Devil.**

“Code of a Modern Young Man Escorting a Young Lady for the Evening.

“Rule One: It’s up to the girl. If she wants to be good and is willing to struggle for her goodness, I suppose I’ll have to

comply with her wishes. If she lets me get away with murder, then it's her responsibility.

"Rule Two: Every young man should find out as soon as possible how much a girl will let him get away with.

"Rule Three: If a girl says no, pretend that she has said yes. No doesn't mean no unless it is accompanied by a persistent and vigorous struggle.

"Rule Four: If you have paid for a girl's evening, she ought to be willing to pay you back, which she can do only by permitting you familiarities that are the accepted signs of love.

"Rule Five: Chivalry is a fine thing in poetry; it has no place in a taxicab.

"Rule Six: Knights are as extinct as dragons. Maidens in distress, however, are the normal development of an evening."

### **Protector**

Father Hall paused. The inclination of the twins was to laugh. The whole roster sounded so absurd. But even as they started to laugh a sense of the unfortunate truth behind Father Hall's pretended document hit them both and made them feel decidedly sheepish.

So Father Hall continued.

"Now, my new society, which either is going to be your society or isn't going to be at all, will start off by reminding the young man that, since he is a civilized Christian gentleman, he is supposed to be master of his lower nature. He is not supposed to be a ravening wolf making life difficult for the girl who goes out with him for an evening. He is supposed to be the protector of the weaker sex. Certainly nothing in his nature or his training could justify his being the peril against which she must constantly be on guard.

"He is the logical successor of the true knights. Dragons snorting fire and brimstone may all be dead; dragons snorting cigarette smoke and the fumes of too much alcohol are very, very much alive. Wizards no longer threaten fair maidens; young men with the charm of a smooth line and a polished approach are quite too common.

And evil men are still wandering the world in quest of fair victims.

### **Knights**

"It was assigned to the Christian gentleman to protect woman against these perils. Certainly he resorts to the lowest form of treason if he becomes one of her perils, perhaps her most pressing, dangerous, and insistent peril.

"By the lovely intention of the God of nature, by the strength of his own body, and by the training of Christian tradition, man is supposed to be the protector of woman. He should be quick to resent any phrase that would—to use the ancient and consecrated word—sully her ear. I don't quite see as fitting into that picture the boy who insists on a girl's listening to his dirty stories, do you?"

"The finest concept—whatever the actual practice—of man's relationship to a woman is man the champion of all women and against all forms of evil. He, the strong man on horseback (that is what we mean by the cavalier), protects the woman against all possible harm.

"Naturally, any smart man, any man who knows anything about himself, realizes that there is no evil against which woman has to be more carefully protected than against the passion in his own heart.

### **Let's Skip . . .**

"Beautiful picture, isn't it? How does it check with the facts as you find them to-day, Dick? Or shall we skip that?"

"I know, Father," said Dick. "Honestly, I do try to keep that ideal. But, anyhow, you tell us. Skip my answers, will you?"

Father Hall nodded.

"Consider them skipped," he replied.

"So the chaperone disappeared. And I think that at this point I can again thrust in that nasty little phrase: So what? The

chaperone disappeared; the police protection was removed; the safety of young women was left to chivalrous young men. And I'm inclined to think that too, too many of the chivalrous of our nation got down from their horses and became dragons snorting temptations, wizards spinning the magic web of a line, hunters of willing and unwilling womanhood.

"I'm not calling the chaperone back—not just yet. But would you or wouldn't you say that in the world to-day there is a job for her?"

### **As for Girls . . .**

Neither of the twins answered that one. So Father Hall filled his pipe again, and Sue knew that the next barrage would be over her lines. She braced herself. After all, she and Dick had started the discussion. But finishing it . . . She found that a phrase was humming in her brain: Don't start anything you can't finish. It made her smile. Also, it made her a little uncomfortable.

"Well, Sue," the priest resumed, "the modern girl was liberated from the chaperone. She was turned loose to take care of herself. Of course, she had assured us with emphasis that she was quite able to take care of herself. She knew her way around. She was even more certain of her ability to handle her own problems. She was good. She was virtuous. She was strong. And we could trust her.

"The current issue of one of our supposedly important illustrated magazines (why read when you can look at pictures?) has an important article on the college girl. The technique she employs to get her man is described and illustrated. If twenty years ago in the 1930s a woman of the street tried such tactics, she was clapped into the nearest goal. Those tactics are vulgar, crude, indecent. And the girls who are using them to-day are the American elite, the foremost representatives of the brains, beauty and home training of the country.

"What about it?"

### **What Do Girls Expect?**

"Surely, Father," Sue cried, impulsively, "you don't think I'm like that."

Father Hall's tone was deep and serious. "I'm sure you're not like that. But do you or do you not think that girls of that type need a chaperone or even positive police protection when they go out with a young man? Would you say that such girls justified young women's claim to trustworthiness?"

"I've talked with quite a number of young men on the subject of girls. They are brutally frank about their own faults and inconsistencies, and they are not too kind in their judgement on the girls. One young man—merely the spokesman for dozens I've met who have a like viewpoint—said to me recently: 'Don't blame us, Father. If you go out with a girl and you don't make a pass at her, she thinks you don't like her. She probably looks at herself in the mirror when she gets home and wonders what's wrong. Do you think we fellows make the advances? Well, we do. But you'd be surprised if you knew how often those advances are made in response to the frankest of invitations from the girls.'

"Know any girls like that, Sue?"

Sue sought refuge in equivocation. "Must a girl tell on her own sex?"

"Let's skip that, too," said Dick.

### **Betrayed by Girls**

"Fine; consider it skipped," the priest replied. "But your new and as-yet-nameless society will have as its second method of obtaining its objective a few simple rules for girls.

"Girls won't need a chaperone when they have acquired a high respect for themselves . . . when they have taken it for granted. not that the young man is going to make the evening difficult, but that he is going to be an escort and a protector . . . when they begin to remember their world importance as future mothers . . . when they once more hold up before young men high ideals.

"Right now I wonder.

“I’d say that girls have betrayed girls pretty badly. Too many girls have taken advantage of the no-chaperone custom to such an extent that they’ve made things pretty difficult for other girls. Every girl who is easy makes the going tough for the rest of womankind. The young man who finds a lot of girls quite willing to go his casual way soon takes it for granted that he is irresistible, or that girls like to be annoyed. So he treats with contempt and neglect any girl who has ideals. If some young man begins to be annoyingly amorous when he is with you, Sue, you can with perfect justice blame him. But you can also blame the last girl he went out with; probably by her ready acquiescence she made him think that you, her successor, would be easy, too.

“Your fair sisters have given you literally a dirty deal, Sue. All decent girls like yourself are suffering from betrayal by the careless members of your sex. So many girls have been easy that young men think most girls are easy. So many girls are morally pliant that they make it hard for the girls who want to be good. So many girls have taken advantage of the absent chaperone that nice girls who want to act as they would act were a chaperone present are regarded as sissies and prudes by a host of young men.

“Hence in your new society the young ladies are going to set their standards—sans chaperones—as high as they would set them if the chaperone were glaring down upon them. Their conscience and their ideals are going to be their chaperones; then they’ll need no other policing.

### **Why Pay?**

“It makes me sick when I realize that some young men think that a girl should pay her escort in mock affection and easy virtue. It makes me ill when I realize that girls should think it the men’s right to demand payment for the girl’s high and mighty privilege of having been taken out. We must provide self-protection if we are not going to have chaperones; and self-protection is based entirely on the value one sets on oneself. If one is precious, one protects oneself and demands that protection from others. If one is cheap—well, all the chaperones in the world won’t protect a girl who doesn’t think herself worth protecting.”

### **Mottoes**

“How about some mottoes for your society? How about something like this?

“‘We’re without chaperones because we don’t need chaperones.’ Or,”

‘Trust us minus chaperones, for we are worthy of our trust (and of your trust, too).’ Or,”

‘Trust us to protect ourselves; we believe we are worth protecting.’ Any other ideas?”

“A lot of ‘em,” Dick replied, “but none of them has quite gelled as yet. Give me time.”

“I’ll take a longer lease, too, if I may,” said Sue.

“Granted to both,” Father Hall agreed. “Into the constitution of your society, however, you’ll write a few fundamental principles like these:

“‘The stronger sex will be really strong.’

“‘Before they ask respect from others, young women will respect themselves.’

“‘I need no chaperone but Christ and His mother.’

“‘You can trust us, for our ideals are high.’

“‘We cavaliers will protect young womanhood—mostly against ourselves.’

“‘We young women will expect our escorts to be knights without armour.’”

### **Return**

There was silence round the table. Suddenly the outer hall door opened, and a cheery voice, unmistakably that of Bradley Père, sang out:

“Anybody still up?”

The three in the dining room answered with a single chord.

Mr. and Mrs. Bradley came into the room, and there were mutual greetings, welcomes, and queries. Then the father of the family slipped away “to get off this starched armour they call a dress shirt,” and the mother followed him, promising to return as soon as she had changed into a house dress.

“Funny,” said Sue, when Mr. and Mrs. had disappeared, “that dad and mother don’t seem to worry more than they do about—well, about what they ought to worry about.”

Father Hall looked at the twins shrewdly.

“That, my lass, only goes to show how unobservant youth is. Worry? You bet they worry, and worry plenty. Of course, they feel that they can’t curtail your liberty in the face of the modern customs and your demands. But when you’re out, mother lies awake until you’re safely in the house . . . as you have certainly noticed. . . . Well, haven’t you?”

### **Worried?**

Dick nodded wryly.

“It sometimes makes me a little angry; no matter what hour of the night . . .”

“. . . or morning . . .”

“. . . mother’s awake.”

“And dad worries, too,” Father Hall pursued. “When that young Smythe chap came for you, Sue, the night he was a little high, dad told me he wanted to boot him down the stairs. He was worried sick—his Sue going off in a car with a fellow whose eyes were blurred with drink and whose hands were probably in the straying stage.”

Sue looked off into space.

“I didn’t think dad noticed,” she said.

“What do you kids think we oldsters are made of, quartersawed oak? When you started playing around with the Colvin girl last summer, Dick, (her language was that of a dock hand and her manners those of an ex-burlesque queen), don’t you think that your mother and your dad talked it over, with real worry gripping their hearts? You can bet they did. And I happen to know that they did.

### **Informal Chaperones**

“Well, because they’re splendid parents . . .”

“. . . as wonderful as ever lived,” agreed Sue.

“Understatement,” appended Dick.

“. . . they exercise an informal chaperonage that you know is there but that you don’t feel. All decent parents do that. If they don’t, if they simply toss their youngsters off as a dog does its pups, they’re not worthy of their tremendously responsible, God-given job. Your parents want you to have parties in the house here and at Lakeside; and they’re somewhere in the offing when the parties develop. They like to meet your friends—first of all because they are your friends, and then because they like to look them over. They know how to discourage the type of young person who needs a chaperone, a police escort, and a few members of the F.B.I.”

“Don’t I know though,” said Dick, a little ruefully.

“And when they ask you, ‘Where were you?’ or ‘With whom were you?’ they know, less from what you say than from the way in which you say it, how your evening has been. If your answers are vague, if you don’t tell them the names of your friends, but answer, ‘Oh, just some of the gang,’ they wish all over again that the chaperone had not been abolished. When you tell them easily and gladly with whom you were and where you went and how much fun you had doing this or that . . . they are happy that they can trust their children even when there’s no chaperone to supervise them.

### **When It’s Your Turn**

“Some day when you, Sue, are a mother and you, Dick, are a father, and your youngsters sally forth into the darkness, you’ll follow them with yearning heart and the winged angels of prayer. If the chaperone hasn’t been reinstated by that

time, you'll do your share of worrying, too. That will be a bit of the balancing of accounts with your mother and your dad, who worry about you out of their deep love for you."

Bradley Père came back wearing a lounging robe and a soft shirt.

"That's better," he said, of his own attire. "Well, what have you three been talking about?"

"Believe it or not, dad . . ." Sue began.

"Chaperones." Dick concluded.

Mr. Bradley laughed.

"Days of my youth!" he replied. "Whatever got you on an ancient institution like that?" Then he stopped laughing, and for the first time Dick and Sue understood the almost brooding look that came into his eyes, as he said, under his breath yet audibly, "I wish to high heaven they had 'em nowadays."

Nobody said anything. But their guardian angels heard the twins, who, in their deepest souls, determined not to need any chaperonage other than their own strength, honour, high ideals, and purity.

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