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# AMONG THOSE PRESENT

by Stephen Vincent Benét

**M**Y dear, I'm exhausted. They just wouldn't leave El Morocco, and then we went on to hear that girl sing those songs. Irish ballads, you know, and she's really a Brazilian—it gives them a quality you simply wouldn't believe. And the wonderful thing is, she learned them from a phonograph record. She can't speak a word of English otherwise. So she just sings them over and over, and everybody cheers. But everybody. Ted said he'd always been against inventing the phonograph, and now he was sure of it—but that's just the way he talks.

Well, if I do say it myself, it was rather an amusing crowd. Larry Dunn, you know—the Duns are stuffy rich, but Larry's a darling—he does candid-camera studies that are just as good as Werbe's and you'd never know he was rich at all, except, as Ted says, when it comes to not reaching for the check. And the Necropuloffs—Russians, my dear, and so brave! Their father was actually eaten by wolves or something and they know the most ghastly stories about Stalin. And Mike Glatto—he's movies—All-American Productions—and rather unbrushed, in a way, but quite fascinating—and the Jenkinses, of course—and Jane Pierce, who does the cocktail column for *Sport and Society*. Oh, yes, and the little Lindsay girl that Ted knows—but she didn't come on to the other place. She couldn't—she works or something—so Ted dropped her and met us afterward.

Just as well, in a way. She didn't really quite fit in and she lives in some unheard-of place like Riverside Drive—Ted was hours finding us. But the rest of it—well, they're just the sort of people you can only find in New York.

I suppose it was my fault, staying quite so late. Ted growled a bit, coming home—said, wouldn't it be cheaper in the end, if we rented the house and lived in the checkroom at the Stork Club. But I think that was the guinea hen we had for dinner—guinea hen always disagrees with him, but there's a new way of basting it with brandy that Jane Pierce taught me and I couldn't resist it. And, to be utterly frank, my dear, I needed something. A little revelry. You see, I'd been to the Coles' that afternoon. And that was grim.

Oh, just a rather grim party. Hordes of people and warm Martinis. They usually give such good parties too. No, it wasn't seeing Bob and the bride—Lucille Cole phoned me they'd probably be there. And we're utterly friendly, of course—I always ask him how his work's going. I think you have to be civilized about these things. You don't scream and faint any more when you meet your ex-husband. And I'm hardly Alice Ben Bolt. But I did feel a little hurt that he hadn't told me. After all, it's still a surprise to pick up the paper and see that your former helpmeet has married somebody you've never even heard of. And in Florida, of all places! Of course, he's been painting down there. But I did send him a telegram when I married Ted.

Funny, too, I always imagined he'd pick somebody rather maternal. A nice widow or one of those hearty, earthy girls with rather flat feet. Painters are so apt. But this. . . .

Oh, that fresh, untouched type, my dear, if you happen to like it. A brave little profile, you know—a gallant little figure in sports clothes. And, I'm afraid, dancing curls. Just another Joan of Arc. They seem to produce them, nowadays. Only, I fail to see why they call her "little." She'd be quite as tall as I am if she wore heels.

No, but really an infant. Really. Twenty-one. And—oh, yes—they're going to live in the country. They were rapt about it. In fact, they've got their eye on a farmhouse. I suppose she'll raise chickens. Or doves. She's the type for doves. And Bob will turn the old stable into a studio, and they'll do it all themselves and take photographs too. It's too grim to think about, really. And she'll greet him with a flushed, happy face, when he comes home from his work, and cook little meals. Only they say she has money—so it'll probably be two very good maids. Till the children come, of course, and they have to build on the wing. . . . No, not yet, but they certainly will. Dozens of them—all Joans of Arc.

I think I'll have another cocktail, my dear, I'm a little tired. . . .

Ted? No, he was spared, though I'm sure the bride would have liked him. . . . Oh, he's very well. He liked you, my dear, by the way. . . . No, really—no, I could see. And next time it must just be ourselves and we'll have a good long talk about

the old days. Ted's so funny. He's always insisted that there never could be such a place as Little Prairie. So I was delighted when you phoned. I said, "It's little Kitty Harris—the child with the bang that used to have a crush on me in school. And she's here in New York with her husband—and, my dear, they'll be babes in the wood and we must rescue them." So, you see.

Now, tell me again just what your husband does. . . . Oh, research. That's always so intelligent. And that rather lean-jawed look—very attractive, my dear. Oh, you'll have no difficulty at all. But you must begin as you mean to go on—that's the important thing. And anything I can do—well, just treat me as a mother confessor. After all, I was a mouse myself when I first came to New York—but a mouse!

The one thing is, it's so easy to get tangled up with a lot of stodgy, unimportant people. And no husband is a help about that. Why, if Ted had his way, we'd do nothing but give dinners for his partners and his Harvard classmates—not to speak of the family. And Bob was just the same about painters. He thought putting on a dress shirt meant prostituting your art. While, as a matter of fact, it's just as easy to meet the amusing people as the dull ones. All you need is the tiniest start, and perhaps a wee bit of guidance. After that, as I've often said, it just rolls like a snowball. Ted says they'll come anywhere for free liquor. Isn't it wicked of him? Well, of course, you can hardly give a party on Aunt Emma's dandelion wine. But that's only a part of it; it needs a certain sense. Take our little party last night—well, perhaps I am supposed to have a gift for that sort of thing, but it was so simple, really. And Paul Necropuloff said it reminded him of his Great-Uncle Feodor's *dacha* in the Caucasus and nearly cried. . . .

Oh, you'll have a wonderful time. You don't really live till you're here, my dear—I assure you. I sound positively dewy-eyed, don't I? But there you are. I always knew it was going to be my town, and you'll feel the same way. Little Kitty Harris! And you'd sit reading "The Five Little Peppers" while we big girls played jacks on the porch—I can see it all so plainly. I must get some jacks; I believe they still have them in stores. We'll have a party and play them; it'll be a furor. We introduced parchesi, you know, while I was still married to Bob, and people played it for months. . . .

Well, of course, my dear, you've kept up so much more. I do think it's so brave of you. It sometimes seems to me as if I could never have lived there at all. And Mother will send me long clippings about Hick's Garage being torn down and Willy Snamm being made head teller at the Drovers' National—as if I remembered people named Willy Snamm! . . . Oh, my dear, I'm so sorry. I didn't realize that he married your cousin. But it is a quaint name. And four children—darling, how forthright of them! That's wonderful. I suppose if I'd stayed in Little Prairie, I'd have four children myself. . . . No, we haven't. . . . Somehow, one keeps putting it off.

But when I think of what we've both escaped—at least now you're here, too, my dear—it seems absolutely providential. I so well remember our first winter—Bob's and mine. And how discouraged he got. His work wasn't going well, though he was quite sweet about it, and he kept saying he'd like to feel the earth under his feet again. They will say the weirdest things. And I must say that, now and then, I felt pretty discouraged myself. Sometimes, when Bob was out, I'd take a bus uptown and then walk past the old Waldorf-Astoria and wonder if I'd ever know the people who went there. The Waldorf! Imagine! And I had to look up the Ritz in the telephone book to find out where it was. Why, we didn't even know a speak-easy, except the Italian place on Charlton Street, with the dollar dinner and the menu in purple ink. And then, that spring, I got my job on *Modes and Manners*. And we met the Halleys and things really began.

Though, as a matter of fact, it was Ben Christian who first took us to the [Charlton](#) Street place. . . . Oh, yes, my dear, very well. He used to sleep on our couch when they'd evict him. He was writing *Bitter Harvest* then, and I must say he'd read it aloud at the drop of a hat. Well, I did make a few suggestions—the women were simply impossible, and he knew it. Rather sensitive and sweet in those days, with untamed hair and a thin face—well, his face is still thin. He used to call me "The Kid from Little Prairie" and say we made him believe in marriage or something. And we'd sit around in the Charlton Street place and he and Bob would talk for hours. I still remember that awful wine. There were moth balls in it, I'm sure. But we thought it was wonderful.

Well, of course, that sort of thing is all very nice when you're new. Very picturesque and all that, when you're looking back—though the ravioli always tasted of thumbs. And Ben used the place in *Bitter Harvest*, so that was all right. In fact, it got to be quite celebrated and people would come from uptown. Ben was rather rude about that—he'd call them "slummers" and say they came to watch the quaint animals perform. Of course, I'd know now that it was just an

inferiority complex, because he was born on Hester Street himself—but I was a child in those days. I hadn't even read Jung.

He wasn't rude to the Halleys, exactly, but he was—well, suspicious. And the worst of it was, he made Bob suspicious too. I had quite a time getting him over that. And, really, I can't imagine why. Because, after all—and in spite of everything that's happened—the Halleys were our kind. But he used to say that the worst thing about the arts was the people who thought you could collect them like Pekingese. I'm sure I don't know what he meant by it. It must have been just a psychosis. Like washing your hands too much.

Now, I must say, I have an instinct about those things. I don't claim any credit for it; it's just in you or it's not. And I knew, when we first saw the Halleys, they were people we ought to know. It was weird, my dear—just like a premonition. Though I don't suppose I'd think that Miriam was quite so distinguished now. She's gone off terribly, recently. And one does get tired of Halstead's imitations. He's been doing them so long. Well, I suppose you'd have to do something if you were married to Miriam.

But they were the first real New Yorkers we really knew. I don't mean people like Ben Christian, who happened to be born here, but people that counted. They took us to our first first-night, and I'll never forget it. And Miriam wore her long gold earrings and they knew the star. But, my dear, the struggle I had to get Bob into a dinner coat! I finally just had to show him that it was an investment, as, of course, it is. And even then, he would call it a tuxedo. But the Halleys just laughed and thought it was quaint and American.

They'd have asked Ben Christian, too, if they'd thought he'd come. They were always very nice about Ben, and Miriam bought dozens of copies of *Bitter Harvest* after the reviews came out. But he simply couldn't understand them—it was a blind spot. He kept on saying they were slummers and that he'd respect Halstead a lot more if he spent his money on a racing stable instead of backing bad plays and collecting worse pictures, just to please Miriam. Because, he said, there are certain people who are born to own racing stables. And there's one thing about being a horse—now and then you get a chance to kick somebody like Halstead square in the slats.

Which I think was very unfair, when Halstead had got Bob three game rooms to decorate and Miriam had started him on book jackets. Of course, it wasn't Bob's real work, but it meant he was beginning to be known. And they'd have done just as much for Ben, if he'd let them. I used to tell him so. But he'd just grin at me and say, "Don't be fooled, kid. I know those helping hands. Remember Little Prairie!" Well, it didn't mean much, in the first place, and finally, he got to saying it all the time. And I do think that's boring.

I'm certainly the last person in the world to come between a husband and his friends. I've always been very careful about that, with both Bob and Ted. But there does come a point—you'll see. And the first big party we gave in the old studio. . . . Oh, Christian came, my dear, if you can call it coming. We were blessed with his physical presence. But he wouldn't even drink—just sat in a corner and glared. As if he wanted to get away, but didn't quite know how. And for no reason.

Of course, I didn't know as much about parties as I do now, but still it was fun. And Bob almost sold a water color because of it. I'm sure the woman would have bought it if she'd ever seen it again.

Well, we patched things up afterward, but they never were quite the same. I think it really hurt Bob—and I certainly tried to make it up to him. I even thought we might have a baby, just to take his mind off things; though where we'd have put it, I don't know. But then, thank heaven, Ben fell in love with a girl and moved to Brooklyn—and, my dear, the relief! She was years older than either of us and wore embroidered smocks—and even Bob saw there was simply no use going on.

And by that time the Charlton Street place had put in a garden and waiters, so it wasn't fun any more. There were too many people who went there, and you'd be bothered. So we took our courage in both hands and moved uptown. Beekman Place—it hadn't really begun then. Bob never liked the light quite as well, but it looked much more like a studio when I'd fixed it up, and, after all, when you're doing game rooms, you have to do them on the spot.

And then the rush began. There's nothing like it—we simply went everywhere. Of course, I'd be a little more selective now. But I remember Halstead saying to me, "Well, little one, you two have certainly taken the town," and Halstead never exaggerates. And Bob's first show went over with a bang—they even ran a photograph of him in *Vanity Fair*. I don't know why he wasn't more pleased with it; he may have thought the pastel sketches were hasty, but everybody else

thought they were divine.

Well, of course, if one critic calls your work "superficial," that's the one review you read. You ought to be glad that your husband's a scientist.

Naturally, it was prohibition then—it sounds quite prehistoric, doesn't it? But New York's always the same. We went to 42 long before it was 42. And the most amusing people were around—it's really sad to think back. That's the one sad thing about the city—the people who drop out. Of course, there are always new ones, but it isn't quite the same. Well, the Reeces, for instance—they were darlings, and had a perfect doll's house of a place. But then they started having children and now they're living in Jersey, of all places, and one never sees them any more. And Allan Lark is permanently in Hollywood and they say he drinks terribly. And Ethel Shand—my dear, you wouldn't remember her, but she made a great hit in "Welcome, Folks", and then she just dropped out of sight. The last I heard, she was doing some ghastly sort of work for a Middle Western radio station and she'd lost her looks completely. Oh, it's a casualty list. I think of it every time I go into Tony's.

One must just keep the chin up, that's all. And I've always tried. Even when Bob began drinking—and I've never quite understood that. My dear, I'm not a prude, but I can take it or leave it alone. And, as a matter of fact, it has very little effect on me. It never has. You wouldn't know I'd had a cocktail before I came here, would you? While Bob has always had a weak head. I suppose it's his shyness, partly. He needs just about two drinks to get over it and be amusing and affable. But after that you have to call in the marines.

And I certainly never tried to stop him or play the injured wife. I don't believe in that. But I did think it was a pity he should spoil things when we were having such a nice time and meeting all the right people—and I suppose he saw it. Men are so sensitive. And if I could take a cocktail or two without making a spectacle of myself, I don't see why he should feel he had to do the same. As I said, once or twice, we could just admit we were different and let it go at that. But that only seemed to make him worse. Ted says it would, but then Ted hardly knows Bob at all. And when I asked Ted what the real reason was—because men stick together so—he only said, "Well, perhaps he felt it deadened the pain." Which doesn't make sense, my dear.

Anyhow, I noticed he was just drinking milk at the Coles'. The bride, I suppose. But it's just as artificial, I always think.

I remember one enormous party at the Nesbitts'—well, I saw how things were going and I felt simply desperate—the Nesbitts are so important. And I just couldn't get to Bob. So I was perfectly frantic—and then I looked across the room, and there was Ben Christian! In a white tie and tails, my dear—imagine! Well, he'd had his second big success. Well, any port in a storm, so I went over. And he was really quite friendly. He grinned and said, "Hello, kid! Remember Little Prairie!" And I said, "Well, how do you like it?" looking at his tie. And he grinned again and said, "It's the biggest, shiniest merry-go-round in the world. That's all right. But, gosh, what funny people they get on the horses!"

Then he asked after Bob, and I said, "He's over there," and he looked, and the queerest expression came over his face. "Why, he's tight!" he said.

"Are you telling me?" I said.

"I wouldn't have believed it," he said. "But why? Oh, well. We'd better take him home."

"If you only would," I said. "He's got his keys and the light turns on by the door. And, of course, I want to pay for the taxi."

He looked at me again, with that funny expression. "No, thanks," he said. "I can manage. Well, so long, Little Prairie!"

That's the way he is, you know—abrupt. And he did take Bob home, and everything was all right when I came in. I've always been very grateful. Of course, I meant to thank Ben when he came back to the party himself, but he didn't come back. And when I tried to phone, next day, they said at his publisher's that he'd left for the Coast.

Well, of course, that was just one time, but there were others. Really, dear, I don't know how I stood it. I couldn't have, except for my friends. They were wonderful. And most of them understood so perfectly—though I must say, I always said, "You mustn't take sides. And just treat Bob as you always have. We can't all of us succeed." I've always been like

that; I try to see both sides. Though I must say it did hurt me a little, about the Halleys.

It may be very provincial of me, but I don't quite see what business it was of theirs. Though, of course, I appreciated their loyalty to Bob. I suppose that was why they did it. But, really, to hear them talk, you'd have thought I'd Led Him to the Bottle. Well, dear, you can see for yourself. And about children making a difference—why, it was pre-Victorian! When I'd told Bob in the beginning that I didn't mean to tie him down, like so many wives.

Then, finally, Halstead started on the Perils of the Big City and What New York Does to People, and it was a little too dreary. And as far as Ted was concerned—why, I'd barely met him then—though, of course, I knew who he was. But I never dreamt. Oh, well, I suppose they meant it for the best. But it rather hurt me. They didn't even offer me a cocktail—I had to stop by at Tony's afterward. And there was Bob, with the Russian friend. So that was that.

All the same, I really hated breaking up the apartment. Those things are a trifle grim. Especially when they look at you in that blond, rather appealing way. You just have to be quite sensible and talk about the furniture. Remember that, my dear. Not that I wouldn't have been glad to let Bob have it. But he meant to go South anyway—he told me so. . . .

Reno? Well, dear, it isn't New York, but it isn't bad. I met some very interesting people and let my hair grow out. That was really for Ted, and I hope he appreciated it. Of course, I never thought, at the time, we'd be anything more than very good friends. Why, he'd been a bachelor for years! But it must have been—well, predestined, for he's often said it was quite as much of a surprise to him. Don't you think that's rather sweet?

I remember how dazed he was when we drove down to City Hall for the license. . . . Oh, after I'd got back, of course—almost six months. And he hadn't even brought a ring, poor lamb; we had to stop at a jewelry store on the way. Men are such babies, aren't they, about practical things? Well, it seemed to me there was absolutely no use in putting it off, when he was supposed to go to California for the firm. He might have been out there for months, and that would have been trying for both of us. Especially as people were beginning to talk a little. You know how they are. Well, someone has to make the decisions. And, as it turned out, the business wasn't so important after all and we had a whole heavenly month at Santa Barbara. But we were glad to get back. After all, there's no place like New York.

It was quite a change, of course, but, if there's one thing I do know, it's how to make adjustments. Of course, it's rather a distinguished family, really. My dear, I should be honored, I hope you know. And a divorced woman too. Why, the family halls on the Hudson rocked to their foundations. At least, I suppose they did. But there's only Brother Eugene in New York, thank goodness. Not to speak of Sister Claudia—that's his wife. And there, my dear, is a woman. . . . Oh, you know. On the boards of schools and things, and takes an intelligent interest in politics—too tiring. And just a simple string of real pearls—the kind that look false. I asked her once if she knew the Stork Club—just to make conversation—and she said, "Was it anything like the Metropolitan?" Well, at least I've rescued Ted from people like that.

But I do what I can, and we have them at least twice a winter. I think that's only fair. When I go to see Ted's mother, I always wear my hair over my ears and knot it in the back. And we always spend two weeks with her in the summer. And that works out quite nicely—I've a definite plan for it. I just consider it a rest cure—shorts and lying around in the sun. The food's good, too—that's one comfort—and Madeira, if you like Madeira. I'm afraid Grimes—he's the butler and positively antediluvian—was rather shocked by my shorts, at first. But he's got over that.

And Ted really has a wonderful sense of humor about it all. Because I remember asking him—oh, just amusingly—if I wasn't a little of a surprise. Though, heaven knows, I do everything I can. And he looked at me in that quizzical way he has, and said, "Well, Great-Uncle Marshall married a lady called Toots Latour, and the family stood that for fourteen years. So I guess they can stand you, darling." Wasn't it quaint of him? I simply screamed. So, now and then, I call myself the Skeleton in the Closet, and he always laughs.

I asked him what happened to Toots Latour—well, the poor thing finally died and Great-Uncle Marshall married again—oh, very respectably, this time! Of course, they didn't have divorces in those days. But such interesting things happen in old families. Ted's got quite interested in the family history recently—he even found a miniature of Great-Uncle Marshall, and he's got it in his study, over his desk. He says he feels it ought to be there. Touching of him, isn't it? I asked him if he couldn't find one of Toots Latour, too, but he said he really didn't think it was necessary. . . .

Yes, I think we've adjusted very well. Of course, there's always a certain amount of weeding out to do—you'll start with

a clean slate and that's such a comfort. But when Ted's partners come to dinner, I just jolly them along and pretend they're gay and amusing, even when they aren't. I feel it's the least I can do. And Judge Willoughby—he's the senior partner—and, my dear, a real old buck, with a darling little beard. I always have a wonderful time with him. Well, his wife's one of those iron-gray women with nutcracker faces, so you can hardly blame him. I do think there's so much a woman can do for her husband, if she tries. And that's the real criticism I make of women like Mrs. Willoughby. You can see that she's never tried at all. Ted says that's because she's never had to, but I can hardly agree. And, as for distinction—my dear, I don't care if she does know that stodgy set in London. We're Americans over here, I should hope, not title hunters. Why, Paul Necropuloff hardly uses his title at all—and he's really a prince!

Of course, it's meant giving up my own work. But I was willing to make the sacrifice—I told Ted so. Though I've been wondering about it just a little bit, of late. After all, we've been married almost six years—quite an age. But then, the magazines have changed so. And people are quite different, somehow, when you ask them about real jobs. I wouldn't want a full-time one, of course, with my responsibilities. But take somebody like Dorothy Thompson. She doesn't run a column every day. And after all, what did she do but live in Germany? I'm sure I've done more interesting things than that.

Naturally, I know what Ted's family would expect. But I think rather definitely not. After all, there are plenty of grandchildren, with Claudia and Eugene. It isn't that I'm afraid in the least. But one has to look at it from a sensible point of view. Even if some people do, at all ages. And as a matter of fact, Ted hasn't even brought up the subject in a long time.

And then—well, you're lucky, my dear. After all, you are quite an infant. . . . Well, that's sweet of you, but I know. There seem to be so many of them about, nowadays. Not that it really makes any difference what age you are. But I noticed the other day how gray Miriam Halley is getting. Of course, she's years older than I am, but it gave me a turn.

Then, they're so exclusive, too, the young. One just has to grab, I suppose, and I do hate grabbing. I leave that to people like the Ingram woman. But that's what I mean. She's supposed to write, I believe, and it does make things easier. And really, one should do something. It gets to be three o'clock in the afternoon so soon.

My dear, I'll tell you a secret, I've been thinking about a novel. Or even reminiscences—they're doing them earlier now. And I haven't told a soul about it—well, of course, I mentioned it to Ted—and then, Ben Christian. I thought he'd be interested and I hadn't seen him in ages. . . .

Well, he's rather hard to get nowadays, my dear—especially since they talked about him for the Nobel prize. But we got him. Just a quiet little party.

I kept it down to twelve for dinner; though, of course, people swarmed in afterward.

Well, he's improved in some ways. His dress collars fit him, for one thing. But of course one never gets a chance to really talk at a dinner party. And then he had to leave early. Just when Marcus Leigh was doing his divinely naughty songs.

So, I just called him up the next day—and, my dear, the to-do! You'd think the man was royalty. But he finally said he was free from four to five, if I cared to run in. My dear, it's the dreariest hotel and the dingiest little cocktail bar. I can't imagine why he stays there.

He's abrupt, you know—very abrupt. The same old Ben. The first thing he said was, "I like that husband of yours. Nice guy." Well, that was pleasant of him, of course. But when I started asking his advice about writing, he hardly seemed to be listening.

Finally he said to me, "Well, Myra, you know how it is. The people who are going to write novels, write them. And the ones who want to be writers just talk about it. But I'll give you a note to my agent—he's got good nerves. By the way, have you written any of it yet?"

"Well, not exactly," I said. I'm always honest.

"I thought so," he said. "And what's it going to be about, if I may ask?"

"Why, New York, of course," I said, and he just looked at me. He has the queerest way of looking at you sometimes.

"New York?" he said. "Why not Little Prairie? You knew something, then."

"Oh, Ben—do we have to be tiresome?" I said—for, really, that old joke!

"I'm not tiresome," he said. "Just surprised. After all, I was born here. And I don't pretend to know all of it. But you—"

"What do they know of England that only England know?" I said.

"Well," he said, "you do know one thing if you're born on Hester Street. You know it's more than forty restaurants, five night clubs and a hospital."

And then he went on and talked the queerest stuff. All about little people living in the Bronx and butchers in the market, and Wall Street and corporation lawyers and the men who dig the new subways. And how it was fifty cities and you never got to the end of them, and how a man could spend his whole life looking, and still not know it all. I suppose it'll all be in his next book—it sounded like that.

"But you know it!" he said. "You know it!" and he sounded quite angry. "Forty restaurants, five night clubs and a hospital! You know it all! Well, I only hope you write the book! Can I lend you a map of the city? No, it wouldn't do any good."

Well, of course, there's no use arguing with a man in his condition, so I just thanked him for his interest, and let it go at that. He looked at me again.

"Look here, Myra. I'm going to talk to you," he said. And then he said, "No. What's the use? It's got into the bloodstream."

"I don't know what you mean," I said.

"Oh, nothing," he said. "I was just thinking aloud. Because they come every year, I suppose—ten thousand of them—the kids with a little talent and a lot of youth. And they end up thinking it's wonderful to hear a Class B heel sing dirty little songs. Or some of them. Oh, well."

"I'm glad you're so appreciative of my friends," I said.

"Oh, forget it," he said. "I was just remembering things—it's a bad practice. But remember what I said about that husband of yours. He's a nice guy, but he looks as if he might have brains. And sometimes, you know, you can make the dose too strong."

Well, that was cryptic, I suppose—poor dear Ben, he always loved to make those mysterious remarks. But, all the same, he gave me the note to his agent. So, if I burst into print, my dear, you musn't be surprised. The only thing is, I haven't quite decided just what publisher to have. I was going to start in yesterday and rough out an outline. But, of course, one must find the time. And then, seeing Bob and the bride—well, it does give one something of a shock.

So it was such a relief—just sitting and visiting with little Kitty Harris, and hearing all about your plans. You can't imagine. . . . Well, my dear, just the barest touch and then I must fly. Your husband will think me very naughty, but I did want you to see the place. It's rather a favorite *boîte* of ours, and everybody comes here, but everybody! Bob might even bring the bride here—though, really, she might as well go to the Grand Central. They have milk bars there.

And we'll see each other very soon, shan't we? I've so enjoyed chatting about the old days. And the least little thing you want advice on—I'm right on the end of the phone. We're having a party tomorrow night, but you wouldn't be interested. Just dullish people—Harvard classmates and such—but I thought this would be a good time to work some of them off. I rather wish I'd thought of you before, though—you might have helped me out with the little Lindsay. She's rather a firm-faced child. She'll fit in all right with Ted's friends—after all, they like them young. And I needed an extra woman. But I can't think how Ted happened to think of her—he doesn't often make suggestions. And we'd just had her too. But he happened to be looking at the miniature of Great-Uncle Marshall, and out it came.

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## TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

The following changes were made to the original text:

Page 228: wonderful thing it, → wonderful thing [is](#),

Page 233: Charton Street → [Charlton](#) Street

Page 242: if if you like Madeira → [if](#) you like Madeira

Minor variations in spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[The end of *Among Those Present* by Stephen Vincent Benét]