

A Perfect Analysis Given by a Parrot

Flora and Bessie enter. Flora is thin to the point of emaciation and Bessie is correspondingly stout. They are dressed much alike. Both have on big cartwheel hats and black dresses and long black gloves, but the hats and in vividly contrasting colors, Bessie's being magenta and Flora's chartreuse. When and if they want to look at each other, it is necessary to tilt their heads far back. They are both loaded with ornaments, brass hoops and bangles, so that every movement is accompanied by a small percussion. A grotesque and garish effect should prevail in everything.

BESSIE

Wild horses couldn't hold you in that cab!

FLORA

Two more blocks and we couldn't of paid the fare!

BESSIE

"Driver, driver, stop here, this place looks lively!"

FLORA

It did, outside!

BESSIE

Yes, it looked like a tacky funeral parlor! A snare and a delusion if I've ever seen one!

FLORA

Am I responsible?

BESSIE

Yes!

FLORA

We passed five places I would have been willing to stop at, including Dante's Inferno! But you kept telling the driver, "Go on, go on," like it was a chariot race in a Roman forum!

BESSIE

He sure in hell took us out of the lively district!

FLORA

At your insistence, honey—a child shall lead them! But now that we're here we might as well make the best of it.

The girls signal to a waiter. He brings them two huge pitchers of beer.

BESSIE

The trouble with you is your mind wanders off a subject but you go right on chopping your gums together as if you weighed every single word that was spoken.

Bessie powders furiously.

BESSIE (CONT'D)

That's what makes it so difficult to talk with you!

FLORA

Oh—foot!

Flora looks slowly and wearily away from Bessie, but Bessie's look remains on Flora. Flora's head begins to droop like a heavy flower on a thin stem.

BESSIE

(Suspiciously.)

A penny for your thoughts, Miss Merriweather.

FLORA

I had my character read this afternoon.

BESSIE

Who by? A gypsy?

FLORA

No, it was read by a parrot.

BESSIE

Are you kidding?

FLORA

No. I gave a man a dime and he opened the parrot's cage and the parrot hopped out and stuck his head in a box and picked up a piece of paper in his beak. I took the piece of paper, and guess what it said?

BESSIE

How would I guess what it said on that piece of paper?

FLORA

I'll tell you, Bessie. "You have a sensitive nature, and are frequently misunderstood by your close companions!"

BESSIE

Huh!

FLORA

Imagine it, Bessie. A perfect analysis given by a parrot!

BESSIE

I don't have very much faith in that sort of thing.

Flora tilts her head way back to give Bessie a long and critical look.

BESSIE (CONT'D)

(Nervously.)

Well?

FLORA

Wipe your chin off, Bessie. You've got foam on it.

BESSIE

Thank you, Miss Merriweather. *(A pause.)* May I ask you a question?

FLORA

(Suspiciously.)

What, Miss Higginbotham?

BESSIE

Are you still keeping up those Youthful Beauty treatments?

FLORA

I had a Youthful Beauty treatment this afternoon.

BESSIE

How are you satisfied with what they're doing?

FLORA

I have noticed one hundred percent improvement in my skin since I started taking those Youthful Beauty treatments, Bessie.

BESSIE

I'm glad you've noticed it, honey.

FLORA

Why, haven't you?

Bessie lights a cigarette.

BESSIE

Flora, your main beauty problem is not blackheads. It's large pores, honey.

FLORA

(With fierce conviction.)

I haven't a single blackhead left in my face, just a few little whiteheads, and this little do-hickey here which is just a spot where I squeezed out one with a hairpin!

BESSIE

Well, Flora, your problem is skin and you might as well face it.

FLORA

Everyone's problem is skin, including yours, Bessie. But of course your primary problem is keeping down weight.

BESSIE

I am a type that can carry a good deal of weight because I have large bone structure. However, it's always been well-distributed on me.

FLORA

As long as you won't face facts, it's no use talking. Complacency's on thing and-optimism's another!

BESSIE

What does a man look at with greater int'rest, a straight-back chair or a rocker?

FLORA

Depends on the man an' the relative size of the rocker.

Bessie tilts her head way back to study Flora's face, but gravity brings it back again with a jolting motion.

FLORA (CONT'D)

(Continuing sweetly.)

You know what would do you an awful lot of good, Bessie?

BESSIE

No. What?

FLORA

Bending exercise!

BESSIE

I thought you was going to say "Yogi"—but who wants to bend?

FLORA

Everyone does who wants to keep youthful contours! You've got to resign yourself to making some effort, unless you prefer to let things take their course.

Flora takes a reflective pause, and then continues slowly and gravely.

FLORA (CONT'D)

Nature is not on the side of a girl over thirty.

BESSIE

For once in your life you are not just whistling Dixie.

Another brief meditation.

FLORA

(Brightly.)

Honey, why don't you and I play golf on Sundays?

BESSIE

Have you struck oil on your property?

FLORA

What's that got t' do with it?

BESSIE

Expense! It's a millionaire's sport!

FLORA

It's not so expensive except you pay caddies and all.

BESSIE

And all is correct. Buying the balls and losing them and buying more. You can't take up golf without an initial outlay of something like thirty-five dollars. And that's the beginning—only!

FLORA

(Mournfully.)

You don't have to lose balls, do you?

BESSIE

(Vaguely.)

Maybe you don't have to, but you do.

FLORA

Well, outdoor sports are a wonderful basis for friendship.

BESSIE

(Gravely.)

You mean with men?

FLORA

Uh-huh.

BESSIE

Eunice McPheeters, to mention a case in point, has been playing golf for going on fifteen years. Has she ever made such brilliant contacts with men?

FLORA

Probably has; don't see enny reason t' doubt it! Consider the number and types of men that play golf!

BESSIE

Consider—Eunice! Her face is frozen in a perpetual sneer. A girl like her could be marooned on an island and, though outnumbered fifty to one by males, escape without even so much as a mild flirtation!

FLORA

You don't appreciate Eunice. Eunice has got common sense and it shows in her face.

BESSIE

Is that what shows in her face?

FLORA

Any girl's been through what Eunice McPheeter's been through with her home situation and all can't be expected to look upon life as one continual joy ride.

BESSIE

But why talk of golf as the be-all and end-all of living?

FLORA

Who did, and who ever does?

BESSIE

(Vaguely.)

Eunice and you—although she does and you don't.

FLORA

I'm just attempting to think of something to help you.

BESSIE

Accept my thanks, my heartfelt appreciation—but please don't strain your thinking apparatus!

FLORA

Sarcasm, Bessie?

BESSIE

No, honey, but I came out for the purpose of seeking diversion. That's my whole purpose in leaving my hotel bedroom. If you're in accord with that purpose—good! If otherwise—good by! Separation is simple. You go to the Statler and I to the Coronado, or whichever way you prefer it, but don't try to pull me into a state of depression! I've had rotten luck with men. Not once but always! You've had your share of disappointments also. So far, so good. But when you start harping on Yogi—on Eunice's home situation—girlie, good-bye! We have

come to the sad, sweet parting! I mean
of the ways...

Bessie takes a long drink of beer, gags and spews it up.
Both girls scramble back from the table in time to avoid a
deluge. The incident is quickly forgotten.

FLORA
(*Dreamily.*)

Bessie—

BESSIE

Huh?

FLORA
After Howard, you know you let yourself
go.

BESSIE
Just like you after Vernon. I went
through an awful period for a while...

FLORA
You took a negative attitude toward
things. Acted as if all hope had gone
out of life. But instead of wasting
away, you put on flesh. Honestly,
Bessie, you blew up like a balloon!

BESSIE
I used to wear a sixteen.

FLORA
Bessie, that must've been long before I
knew you.

BESSIE
In 1930.

FLORA
That recently, honey?

BESSIE
I had no figure problem until Winter of
1932. But you were always bedeviled by
your complexion. Isn't that so?

FLORA

Only because I have such a fine-grained skin.

BESSIE

(Doubtfully.)

Possibly, but also—

FLORA

What?

BESSIE

You never have hit on a really becoming hair-do!

FLORA

What's wrong with the one I got last week at Antoinette's?

BESSIE

Honey, the upswept style is not for your face. Every type of face requires a different style of hair-do, just in the way diff'rent figures can't put on the same type of clothes. Now what you call for is horizontal lines because of the distance between your chin and your forehead.

FLORA

(Slowly.)

I haven't forgotten the time you called me "Horse-Face."

BESSIE

All I meant is you have the long type of face the same as I have the broad one. Now what you need is bushing out at the temples, the aureole type.

FLORA

Oriole? Like a bird?

BESSIE

No, honey. The spelling is diff'rent. But never mind that. What I mean is Antoinette's is not a good friend of yours—not from the grotesque things which they do to your face?

A pause. Flora stares at Bessie and her lips begin to tremble. Slowly her face droops downward on the delicate stem of her throat and the cartwheel hides her tears.

BESSIE (CONT'D)

(Gently and sorrowfully.)

You harp on Yogi and Eunice McPheeter's golf, and claim that your sensitive nature is misunderstood by everyone but a parrot! But let me give you some well-intended advice—and tears, tears, tears! A regular fountain of them!

Bessie opens her purse and produces assorted cosmetics.

BESSIE (CONT'D)

Repair the ravages and we'll go to the Statler.

Bessie has picked up a lipstick and Flora a sheet of Kleenex, when all at once the front door of the tavern erupts on a pair of male figures in the blue-and-white summer parade uniforms of the Sons of Mars. One crouches by the door and the other leaps over his back which action is repeated until they arrive at the girls' table where they abruptly halt, blow shrill blasts on toy bugles and extend their elbow. Electrified with joy, the girls have sprung to their feet. Bessie seizes one's arm, Flora the other's, and they strut gaily around the table, singing Mademoiselle From Armentieres.