Small Talk

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Abstract

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Joe’s only topic of conversation these days is “making out” which means getting along with women. Joe isn’t a bad looking guy at all, and he has brains too. He’s doing all right in Farm Operation.

So I say, “Well, why don’t you do something about it? I’m getting to where I can hear you griping in my sleep.”

“I’m doing something about it,” Joe says. “You bet I am. I have been doing some research, just like in the books, and I have a feeling that I am on to something big.”

“Like what?” I say, moving the pretzels out of his reach. Too much salt isn’t good for a man.

“After sober thought and investigation, I have reached a conclusion that should irretrievably solve my problem.”

That’s just the way he said it. Just like he was a professor. He isn’t so dumb.

“I have found,” he says, “that in college a guy has to learn bridge or small talk to make out.”

“So you learn bridge—that I can see—but what is this small talk?”

“Small talk is like when a guy sees a dame he knows so he goes up to her and starts talking. Is he saying anything?”

“He’s talking to her, isn’t he?”

“Sure, he’s talking, but he isn’t saying anything. When you call a dorm number, do you ever get a busy signal?”

“Always,” I admit.

“All right,” he says, “You want to know what’s going on? Small talk.”

“Well,” I say, “maybe you have something there. I hadn’t thought of this before.”

“You got to think these things out. Tomorrow I start learning small talk. At the Union. That’s where the smallest talk of all is.”

A few days later I see Joe at this same place. “How is it going?” I say. “Are you making out?”

“Hell,” Joe says, glaring into the foam. “I can’t do it. I can’t learn small talk. Why, do you know what they talk about when they are talking small talk? Wheels and coke
dates and who pinned who for God's sake. I just can't do it. These other guys just let their mouths run, but I can't even remember their lines, let alone make up a line of my own.”

“Well,” I say, “you can always learn bridge.”

“Hell, that's out too. You can't have bridge without small talk, unless you are playing with guys. And it ain't with guys that I want to make out.”  


### Edith

She turned on her stomach, on her back, on her left side, on her stomach again. The pain did not go away. But it did not get worse. Perhaps later, she thought. Perhaps later it would go away.

If she had to have an operation now all her nice little plans were doomed to destruction. She couldn't have that new dress, and she needed new shoes and all those other things. Harvey would be back this fall, and she wouldn't be there. And how could you go back to school without decent clothes? She rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes.

She turned on her left side and then quickly to her back. Perhaps if she got up it would go away. She pushed the covers back and sat on the edge of the bed. It was better while she sat there, but as she dressed it came back. Thank God, Mama was at church. She could throw away her breakfast without eating any. In the kitchen she took her fruit juice and poured it in the sink. She put the cereal in a bowl and carried it outside where she emptied it into the garbage can. She left the dishes on the table and went out the backdoor again. She sat on the steps and looked at the roses and the grass. When she sat like this the pain almost went away. It was only when she moved.

“Edith.”

“Here, Mama.”

Her mother sat down on the step beside Edith and removed her hat. “That old car won't go many more miles. What we are going to do when the thing falls apart I don't know. We can't have it fixed, I know that much.”