An Interview with Sir Eustace Brackenstall

– Steve Clarkson

ANNOUNCER: Periodically, it is the pleasure of the editors of "Peek" Magazine, the favorite of gossips everywhere, to bring to you an actual recording of an interview with someone whose name has been in the headlines – or between the lines, as the case may be. Recently, we sent our roving reporter to the Mother Country, Merrie England, to interview a scion of one of the oldest families in that country. Those of you who are conversant with continental affairs already know of whom I am speaking: Sir Eustace Brackenstall; Baronet of Abbey Grange, Marsham, Kent, and darling of the ocean-liner set. Ugly rumors of certain improprieties in Sir Eustace's home life have set the peerage buzzing. "Peek" thought you would like to hear HIS side of the matter. We'll be talking with Sir Eustace after this word from the publishers of "Peek."

As Mark Twain once remarked, "Man is the only animal that blushes – or needs to." And blush he does, day after day, as he commits incredible blunders and improprieties. "Peek" Magazine is dedicated to prying into the shady corners of the private lives of famous people, and to presenting the facts as we see them. Our motto, "All the news that's sh*t to print," is symbolic of our high standards. We urge you to give us a try; only a mere dollar ninety-five from your favorite one-legged news vendor. And now, we will go to the ancestral estate of Abbey Grange, steeped in tradition but shadowed by rumors.

INTERVIEWER: Sir Eustace Brackenstall, "Peek" Magazine has asked me to interview you concerning the scandalous reports relating to certain elements of your home life. It is rumored, for instance, that you beat and otherwise abuse your wife, that you have exhibited extreme cruelty to animals, and that in a drunken fit you hurled a decanter at milady's maid, Theresa Wright. May I have your comments on these allegations?

SIR EUSTACE BRACKENSTALL: A pack of infamous lies, sir! Why, I believe myself to be the most misunderstood and maligned peer in England!

INTERVIEWER: Well, sir, about the reports of wife-abuse...

SIR EUSTACE: What, beat my wife? (INDIGNANTLY) Never, sir! I was simply making an emphatic point about something or other, pounding my fist into my palm, when she stumbled and fell between the fist and palm.

INTERVIEWER: Some say that you have even jabbed her with a hatpin.

SIR EUSTACE: (HAUGHTILY) I am not accustomed, sir, to discuss my most intimate affairs in this public fashion. However, in the interests of clearing my good name I shall explain in as delicate a manner as possible. You see, Lady Brackenstall is...ah...shall we say, "excited" by a certain amount of physical discomfort. When the mood strikes her, I occasionally...er...gratify her by employing a hatpin. But it would be most incorrect to say that I jab her with it. I merely give her a little prick.

INTERVIEWER: I see. Thank you for your frankness, Sir Eustace. Now, then, what about the alleged cruelty to dogs?

SIR EUSTACE: Just a moment. It's becoming quite dark in here. Just let me light this lamp...oh, drat! I'm out of kerosene. Excuse me one second. (CALLS) Coo-ee! Now then, what were we...oh, yes, the dog. The poor beast was a classic instance of self-immolation. In frisking about, the creature somehow managed to tip over the kerosene jug and get the contents all over himself. Then, as!...ah, Theresa, here you are!

THERESA WRIGHT: You called, Sir Eustace?

SIR EUSTACE: Be a good lass and run out for some kerosene, will you? Here's the jug ...catch!

THERESA WRIGHT: Oh, do be careful, sir! Remember, just last week you tossed that decanter to me, and I dropped the bonny thing.

SIR EUSTACE: (KINDLY) Never mind, Theresa, it wasn't of any value. Here you are, then. Run along, now!

ANNOUNCER: We'll get back to this fascinating interview with Sir Eustace Brackenstall in just one minute. Right now, here's a word from Westhouse and Marbank, claret importers for Her Majesty, the Queen.

Are you tired of beeswing in your wine? Our bottles have cobwebs on the outside, not on the inside. For nearly two centuries, Westhouse and Marbanks have been importing the finest in claret and Tokay for all occasions, from affairs of state to gasfitters' balls. We engage only the most expert travelers in wines to select the choice vintages which have made our name a household word since 1708. Our specialty is to provide that little "something extra" for weddings. So, the next time you have a thirst like a camel, apply to Westhouse and Marbanks, centrally located on Fenchurch Street. Like many others before you, you'll say, "It IS a good wine."

And now, back to our interview.

INTERVIEWER: We were discussing the dog, Sir Eustace...

SIR EUSTACE: Ah, yes, well, in my anxiety to clean the kerosene off the animal – it was Lady B.'s favorite, y'know – I reached down to pick the creature up, and wouldn't you know, a spark fell from my cigar just at that moment and ignited the poor thing. Well, I couldn't have a flaming dog running about the house – never cared for hot dogs, y'know. Haw, haw! So, in any case, I reacted quickly and hurled the dog through the window over there. (THOUGHTFULLY) Rather scorched the bell-rope, didn't it?

INTERVIEWER: It certainly appears that way. Rather unfortunate incident, wasn't it? No, thank you, Sir Eustace, I don't drink.

SIR EUSTACE: Really? This is Imperial Tokay, from the Schoenbrunn Palace cellars. You're sure you wouldn't care for something a little choice in wines?

INTERVIEWER: No, thanks just the same. Well, about the... (IS INTERRUPTED BY SIR E.B., ALLOWS VOICE TO TRAIL OFF.)

SIR EUSTACE: (MUSING) Pity about that wretched dog. I told you it was my wife's favorite? Yes. She got it in the Far East, y'know. Purchased it from some Buddhist monks, I believe. Strange creature – the dog, I mean. Well, you were about to say...?

INTERVIEWER: There have been rumors that – forgive me, Sir Eustace, if I give offense – that Lady Brackenstall has been displaying some interest in a seafaring man by the name of Croker.

SIR EUSTACE: Preposterous! My wife is a decent, law-abiding person who would no more look at another man than she would look at a – at a rotten pumpkin!

INTERVIEWER: Then you have never heard of Captain Jack Croker?

SIR EUSTACE: Croker...Croker...I recall a first officer by that name, I believe. Yes, by George! It was on that same voyage that I wooed and won Lady Brackenstall!

INTERVIEWER: That's the man. Have you seen him since that voyage?

SIR EUSTACE: No, can't say that I have. Curious fellow, that. Always running about the ship with his lips full of splinters.

INTERVIEWER: (INCREDULOUS) Splinters!

SIR EUSTACE: Either that or he had a severely ingrown moustache. Haw, haw! Oh, hello, m'dear. This gentleman and I were just discussing an old acquaintance of yours. Oh, beg your pardon, I'm sure...allow me to present my wife, Lady Mary Fraser Brackenstall.

INTERVIEWER: Charmed, I'm sure, Lady Mary.

LADY MARY BRACKENSTALL: (ABSENTLY) Likewise, I'm sure. Eustace, have you seen my hatpin?

SIR EUSTACE: No, m'dear. Perhaps in the bedroom?

LADY MARY: Ah! I didn't think to look there! How silly of me! Well, if you gentlemen will excuse me...oh, and Eustace, do you happen to know the length of the bell-rope by the window?

SIR EUSTACE: Oh, I daresay it's about eight feet to the bracket. Are you going to have it replaced?

LADY MARY: Yes, I thought I'd get the new handyman to cut it down for me and put up a new one. Well, good day, sir. Will you be long, Eustace?

INTERVIEWER: Good day, Lady Mary.

SIR EUSTACE: No, dear, I shan't be long. Well, sir, do you have any more questions?

INTERVIEWER: No, sir. If I may say so, Sir Eustace, you appear to have been much maligned. Never fear, though – "Peek" Magazine will set things right.

SIR EUSTACE: I knew that someday the true story would be told. Well, if you'll excuse me, I believe I shall just nip up and see whether Lady Mary has found her, ah, hatpin, y'know. Oh, I say, on your way out, would you mind awfully to hand me that blackthorn cudgel there by the door? ...Ah, thanks. Well, good day. I shall look forward to seeing your report of this interview.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much, Sir Eustace Brackenstall. It has been a pleasure talking with you.

ANNOUNCER:

This concludes the fifth in our series of interviews with scandalous – and scandalized – people. The publishers of "Peek" Magazine regret to report that, shortly after this interview was conducted, Sir Eustace Brackenstall suddenly passed to his reward. Although rumor had it that he met his end by foul play, "Peek" has learned from reliable sources at Scotland Yard that his death was in fact deemed accidental, inasmuch as he was found immersed in a butt of Malmsey wine supplied by that great import firm, Westhouse and Marbank, of Fenchurch Street.

Yes, folks, for those who have a discerning taste in wines, Westhouse and Marbank is the place to go. For wakes, weddings, or just for drowning your sorrows, try our wines.

And now, on to our regularly-scheduled program, I Love Loosely, starring Miss Kitty Winters and Shinwell Johnson.