the pukey

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Mr. Troy's refusal to have a pukey in the house had caused enormous trouble in the family. "Pukeys are nasty, degenerate things," he said: "they make filthy messes all over the floor, they corrupt the young, they interrupt homework and sap the nation, and we have nowhere to put one." His wife would answer: "Well, well, we are getting distinguished, aren't we? It seems we're the Duke of Devonshire. Let me tell you that Blanche and Mabel both have pukeys in their drawing-rooms, and far from being corrupted, they are happier." Young Miss Troy appealed to her father's sense of status, saying: "Everywhere I go, Father, it's always: 'What did your pukey do last night?' I have to admit we haven't got one." "Oh, all right," said Mr. Troy, after a couple of years, "I'll let the pukey-man come and give a demonstration.

A few days later, the man arrived with the pukey and put its box against the wall opposite the fireplace. When Mrs. Troy asked: "Won't it catch the draught there?" the pukey-man only laughed and said: "The point about a pukey, madam, is that it's bred to be insensible." "But it is alive, isn't it?" asked Mrs. Troy quickly, "because we'd never pay for something dead. And if it's alive, won't the dog resent it?" "Both dog and budgie will be unconscious of it, madam," said the pukey-man, "a pukey speaks only to a human brain." "Well, cut the brainy cackle and open the box," said Mr. Troy roughly.

Let us admit at once that the first impression the pukey made on Mr. Troy was a good one. Even lying stupefied on the carpet, its eyes had a wondering gaze that fell hardly short of sweetness. "It's not just going to flop down like that all the time, is it?" asked Mr. Troy, to hide the fact that he liked it so far. "Give it a minute, my dear sir!" begged the pukey-man, "it's hardly got its bearings." "Pay him no attention!" exclaimed Mrs.
Troy, "he's been picking on pukeys for years." "Oh, what shall we call it?" said Miss Troy.

She had hardly spoken when the pukey shuddered from snout to stern and let its muzzle fall right open, showing six rows of vivid pink gums and bubbles of sparkling saliva: "No teeth; that's curious!" muttered Mr. Troy. Then, with no warning, it vomited all over the carpet—a perfectly-filthy, greenish-yellow mess—causing Mrs. Troy to cry spontaneously: "Oh, the filthy little beast!" and Miss Troy to say: "Oh, Mum, don't fuss!" and Mr. Troy to say: "I told you it would foul everything up. Take the little brute away!" "An ounce of patience, if you please," asked the pukey-man, "or how can it grow on you?" "I'm sure that's true—and I don't mean I don't like it," said Mrs. Troy, rallying. "Isn't it actually good for the carpet?" Miss Troy asked the pukey-man, "I know the Vicar said, reasonably used, it was." "That is perfectly correct, Miss Troy," said the pukey-man, "it's not the vomit but the abuse of it." "Now, there's a remark I always like to hear," said Mr. Troy.

At that moment the pukey, which had been staring at its own emission in a rather vague, contented way, changed its expression entirely. A sort of pathetic anguish came over its whole face; it held its snout sideways and looked at Miss Troy in a pleading, tender way. "Oh, look!" cried Mrs. Troy, "it's trying to say it didn't mean bad." They were all wracked by the pukey's fawning expression, and when it sobbered and grovelled and brownish tears dripped from the corners of its eyes, Mrs. Troy could have hugged it. "Damned sentimental, hypocritical brute!" said Mr. Troy, "I still reserve my judgement." But he was the first to jump in his seat when the pukey, suddenly throwing-up on to the carpet a clot of gritty mucus, followed this up with a string of shrieks and groans. Everyone was deafened except Miss Troy, who sensed at once that the pukey was illustrating the dilemma of girls of her own age in search of happiness. "Why, bless my soul!" said Mrs. Troy soon, "it's trying to have sex, that's what it is!—and sure enough, the pukey was now twisting its hind-parts in the most indecent way and rubbing its flanks in its own vomit. "I'll not have that in my house," said Mrs. Troy, pursing her lips, "it's just plain filth, and showing-off." "My dear madam, it never actually gets there," said the pukey-man: "nothing ever really happens." "Oh, Mother, you and Father make everything seem obscene!" said Miss Troy, "even love." "Well, as long as it only suggests but can't actually do it, I don't mind," said Mrs. Troy, watching the pukey with a new curiosity. "My mind is still unmade up," said Mr. Troy.

Worn out, it seemed, by sexual frustration, the pukey lay still for a moment. Then, suddenly fixing its eye on Miss Troy, it gave her such a glare of horrible malignancy that she reached for her husband's arm. Next minute, there was a dreadful spectacle: throwing itself into a spasm of rage, the pukey began tearing and biting at its own body, like a thing bent on suicide. "Stop it! Stop it! Put the lid on!" screamed Mrs. Troy, "it's cruel, and drawing blood." "Frankly, you'll have to adjust to that madam," said the pukey-man, "because it fights more than anything else." "Oh, then, that's decisive for me," said Mr. Troy, "because I love to see a good scrap." "It is the men who like that best," agreed the pukey-man, as the pukey went through the motions of winding its entrails round the throat of an enemy and jumping on his face. "I don't mind its fighting," said Mrs. Troy grudgingly, "but I'll put its lid on if it overheats. I like beautiful things best." The words, alas, were hardly out of her mouth when the pukey, sighting backwards, ever its spine like a mounted cowboy firing at his pursuers, shot her full in the face with an outrageous report. "Now, no grumbling, Mother!" screamed poor Miss Troy, knowing her mother's readiness to take affront. "But it's not nice!" protested Mrs. Troy, fanning herself with an evening paper. "Oh, Mother, can't you see it means nothing?" cried Miss Troy, "it's not like us, with our standards." "Standards or no," said Mrs. Troy, "I never saw Mabel's pukey do that to her." "Ah, but this is an improved model, madam," said the pukey-man.

"Am I correct in supposing," asked Mr. Troy, "that nothing substantial ever comes out of its rear end anyway?" "That is correct, sir," answered the pukey-man, "all secretion and excretion are purely visual and oral. The vent is hot air at most; hence, no
sand-box.” “Yet it has a belly on it,” said Mr. Troy, “I know because I can see one.” “You can see a belly, sir,” answered the pukey-man, “but you can’t see any guts, can you?” They all laughed at this, because it was so true.

After throwing-up another couple of times (“Mercy, what a messy little perisher it is!” said kind Mrs. Troy), the pukey became inordinately grave and a whole rash of wetish pimples spread over its face. “Well, you are in luck!” said the pukey-man, jumping up as if genuinely interested, “it never does this more than once a week at most. Can you guess what it is?” They all racked their brains, guessing everything from sewage farming to guitar-playing, and still couldn’t imagine; until Miss Troy, who was the quickest of the family, screamed: “I know! It’s thinking!” “Mes compliments, young lady,” said the pukey-man, bowing.

They all watched the pukey thinking because it was so unexpected; but none of them really liked it. “When it vomits, it only makes me laugh,” said Mr. Troy, “but when it thinks, I feel like vomiting.” “I just feel nervous and embarrassed, like it was something you’d seen and shouldn’t,” said Mrs. Troy, and even Miss Troy for once agreed with her mother, saying, “You feel it’s only doing it as a change from being sick, but it’s the same really.” “Don’t judge it too hardly,” said the pukey-man, “surely the wonder is that with no brains it can think at all.” “Has it really no brains?” asked Mr. Troy, curious. “No, sir,” said the pukey-man: “that’s why its thinking makes you sick.” “Funny sort of animal, I must say,” said Mr. Troy, “thinks without brains, bites without teeth, throws-up with no guts, and screws without sex.” “Oh, please stop it thinking!” begged Mrs. Troy. “I had an experience once that smelt like that.” At which words, the pukey’s pimples disappeared completely and, lying prone with its paws out, it gave Mrs. Troy a smug, complacent look, showing all its gums in a pleasing whimpering. “Oh, the little angel! It wants to be congratulated for having thought!” cried Mrs. Troy: “then we will—yes! we will, you smelly little darling—you little, stinking, clever, mother’s thing!” “I find that touching, too,” said Mr. Troy, “no wonder there’s so much nicker in pukeys.” “It’s for love and culture, too, Dad,” Miss Troy reminded. “Thank you, Miss Troy,” said the pukey-man, “we breeders tell ourselves that too.”

During the next hour the pukey did all manner of things—such as marching like the Coldstream Guards, dancing and balancing on one paw like Pavlova, folding its arms like a Member of Parliament, singing the national anthem, plucking away at its parts mysteriously, fighting like mad, and making such vulgar explosive noises at both ends that the Troys were all left speechless with wonder. What charmed them as much as anything was feeling that the pukey made no distinction about what it did: whether it was fawning or screeching, or thinking or puking, it made it all the same, because it loved each thing equally and looked at you always so proudly for it. “I can only say you breeders must be jolly highly-skilled,” summed-up Mr. Troy, “to root out all the natural organs and still poison the air.” “It’s more a sixth sense than a skill,” said the pukey-man modestly, “and one which your wife, I may say, seems to have instinctively.” This was the first compliment Mrs. Troy had had since she gave birth to Miss Troy, and to cover her natural embarrassment she said sharply, “Well, put its lid on again now and take it away. We’ll come and fill out the Never-never forms tomorrow.”

With the pukey gone, it wasn’t like the same home. The walls seemed to have been sprayed with a dribble the colour of maple-syrup, and dead flies kept dropping from the ceiling. The state of the carpet was beyond description, although the last thing the pukey had done before the lid closed was puff a sort of scented detergent powder over the stinking mess it had made. But the Troys were much too impressed to worry about the room: they could only think of buying the pukey and doing this every night. “It baffles me,” said Mr. Troy, as they went to bed: “it’s not human, it’s not mechanical, it’s not like any animal I’ve ever known.” “What it leaves on the carpet is human through-and-through,” said Mrs. Troy, and they all laughed at this because it was so true.