

A KISS

He Was Forgiven Only Because
She Was Equally
Culpable.

By F. TOWNSEND SMITH.

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The night was dark as Erebus. It rained, the wind blew, and the streets were flooded.

There are two suburban towns—Bloomington and Rosedale—near the city in which I have an office, my residence being in one of these towns. They are five miles apart and were at the time of which I write connected by an execrable road. I live in Rosedale, but on this wild night I was in Bloomington attending a social gathering. I telephoned for a cab, but a reply came over the wire that not a conveyance was to be had.

Turning up my trousers, buttoning my coat and opening my umbrella, I sallied forth, trusting that I might pick up some conveyance to hire.

I found nothing in the way of a vehicle on the streets and, reaching the town limits, left street lamps behind me, pushing on into the darkness. I had walked or waded perhaps half a mile when, seeing something dark ahead of me close by the sidewalk, I approached it curiously. What was my surprise to find a carriage. This I knew rather by feeling than sight. I groped my way to its front, and there were two horses standing, with their heads lowered, patiently enduring the rain. I took my matchbox from my pocket and, drawing forth a match—it was the only one left—struck it. It was extinguished by the wind, but not before I had caught a glimpse of a coachman in waterproofs on the box, leaning back against the body of the carriage fast asleep.

I shouted to him, then shook him. It was some time before I aroused him and then could get nothing out of him as to how he came to be in such a singular position. Indeed, he didn't seem to know. He asked if I was the man who had been beside him awhile ago. I asked him for what point he had been headed when he had dropped off to sleep, and he said Rosedale.

"Very well," I replied, "start up your horses and we'll go there." I thought it better for me to remain beside him till he became fully awakened, fearing he would fall off the box. I stayed by him till we had gone perhaps a mile, when he seemed in better condition, and, since I was getting drenched, I concluded to get inside the carriage. I directed him to pull up and, dismounting from my perch, found the handle of the door and in another moment was sitting on the rear seat.

There was a curious odor inside which I had smelled before, but could not remember what it was. The window was closed, and I opened it. I thought I would smoke, but remembered that I had used my last match. The jolting of the carriage was such that I braced myself in my corner. Dropping my hand beside me, it lighted on some delicate fabric like silk. I was astonished, but had cause for more astonishment when in another moment, the carriage passing over a hollow place in the road, some one was thrown up against my shoulder.

Instinctively I put out my hands for protection and encountered a woman. I was seized with a desire to get out of the carriage despite the storm and without waiting for it to stop. I called to the driver, who drew up, and I asked him if he knew who was in his carriage. He seemed still dazed, at any rate so far as memory goes, and said that he didn't know that there was any one inside. Then he said he had started with a lady, but he didn't know whether she had left him or not.

There was silence for a moment, and I could hear the person beside me breathing. I judged that we were midway between Bloomington and Rosedale. We might as well go on as go back. There were few houses on the way, and the people in them were all abed. I told the driver to drive as fast as the road would admit. There was some one in the carriage who might need medical attention.

He whipped up his horses, and the jolting was terrible. It occurred to me that it would awaken any one with a spark of life. To facilitate matters I let down the other window so as to give plenty of air. Within ten minutes I had evidence that my companion was moving voluntarily; then a gasp.

"Where am I? What is it?"

"Don't be frightened," I said. "Has he gone?"

"Who?"

"The man who got in beside me and held a cloth against my face."

"Oh! That's the explanation, is it?"

"My brooch—it is gone!"

"Anything else missing?"

"I had nothing else with me. But how did you come to be here?"

All this was spoken in a frightened voice, and I knew that she was drawing away from me. I told her what she wished to know. Then she enlightened me still further. She said that while passing out of Bloomington the carriage had stopped, and she heard a man talking with the driver. Then the man got up on the box. She saw the flare of a match, and she smelt tobacco smoke. There was an odor to the smoke that made her feel ill. Presently the carriage stopped,

and the man who had got up beside the driver descended from the box and got into the carriage. Frightened, she ordered him out, but he forced a cloth over her mouth and nose, and that was all she remembered.

It was all plain to me now. A robber had persuaded the coachman to let him ride, had given him a drugged cigar and had then administered ether or chloroform to the lady inside and robbed her. This explained her asking if I was the man who had been beside her.

The lady on coming to herself was in a much better condition than the coachman. The drug used in his case had undoubtedly been different from that used on her.

"I think you must be a gentleman," she said, "judging from the tone of your voice."

"I return the compliment. Your voice is not only that of a lady, but is very soft and sweet."

"It seems to me that I have heard yours before," she said after a pause.

"I was going to say the same of yours."

"We may be acquainted."

"Quite possibly."

"Who are you?"

By this time it struck me that this was quite an adventure. I was not disposed to spoil it by giving up my identity too soon. I gave a fictitious name.

"I'm disappointed," she said. "I was sure I knew you, and I would have felt so relieved if you had turned out to be one of my friends."

"I assure you of my protection. But you have not given me your own name."

"That is not necessary since I have learned that we are not acquainted. I wish I could see you. Have you no way of making a light?"

"I had only one match, and I have used that. I do not need to see you to know that you are young and beautiful."

"I am young, but a fright. I am pitted with smallpox scars. I suppose I needn't ask you if you are handsome?"

"I am considered the homeliest man in my set."

She had so far recovered her equanimity to give a little laugh.

"Do you live hereabout?" she asked.

"Yes; in Rosedale. I have been to a musicale in Bloomington."

"And I have been to a dance there."

"At the Springers'?"

"Yes. Do you know them?"

"I do. I was invited to their dance, but had previously accepted an invitation at the Deerings'."

"We know the same people, then."

"And you are reassured?"

"Certainly."

"And don't feel any compunction at riding in pitch darkness with a strange gentleman?"

"None whatever, since I am sure he is a gentleman."

"You can trust me. I have recently become engaged."

"Oh, then I'm safe indeed!"

This was said in a tone that made me take notice. It did not seem to me that the lady cared especially about being so safe. I permitted my hand to fall upon hers. She allowed it to remain there.

"You are not the person you claim to be at all," she said. "I didn't recognize you at first, but I have done so since."

"Indeed?"

"And I question if you are one of the goody-goody kind."

"I don't know that I am."

"Are you really engaged?"

"I certainly am."

She leaned very close against me, and I felt her warm breath on my cheek. I was sure that, knowing me, she was intending to play some prank on me, get me to kiss her and tell my fiancée, or something like that. I steeled myself against her blandishments. I was really more interested in discovering who she was than anything else.

"Do you know my fiancée?" I asked.

"Yes, I do."

"Do you admire her?"

"Not especially."

"Will you give me five guesses?"

"Not one."

Just then we passed on a horrible scoop in the road. She was thrown against me, her cheek being pressed against mine. My will power was broken. I twisted my arm around her neck, held her fast and kissed her. She freed herself.

There was an ominous silence.

"Now I suppose you're going to blame me."

No answer.

"It is rather off color for me to take advantage of this peculiar situation to take a kiss."

Was that a sob?

Great heavens! What had I done? I must have mistaken her. My action had been black as the night. I would give five years of my life to recall that kiss.

"Forgive me," I pleaded.

"Never!"

Good gracious! Suppose she told this to my fiancée. Edith might forgive my kissing another, but my taking a kiss under the circumstances she would consider simply brutal.

"Are you going to tell on me?" I asked in a supplicating tone.

"Oh, no; I won't betray you."

We had reached Rosedale. An electric light flashed into the carriage.

"Edith!" I exclaimed in amazement.

"You've kissed another girl," she moaned.

"I've kissed you, sweetheart, not another girl at all."

"I'll never forgive you."

"Then I'll never forgive you."

"Why?" she asked, starting.

"You've kissed another man."

"I was even with her, so I received a free pardon."

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Muscle and Music.

A story used to be told of Paderewski that he could crack a pane of French plate glass half an inch thick merely by placing one hand upon it as if upon a piano keyboard and striking it sharply with his middle finger. Chopin's last study in C minor has a passage which takes two minutes and five seconds to play. The total pressure brought to bear on this, it is estimated, is equal to three full tons. The average "tonnage" of an hour's piano playing of Chopin's music varies from twelve to eighty-four tons.

To Market on Stilts.

An interesting and picturesque custom in southwestern France is that of going to market on stilts. Groups of young men and women mounted on high stilts may be seen daily crossing the marshy plains known as "the Landes." "The Landes" are cut up into small ditches, pools and hummocks, and stilts are in consequence almost necessary to those who desire to traverse them.

No Royalties Called "Baby."

One noteworthy feature about royalties is that none has been called "baby." From their earliest years the royal children are always called by their names or possibly by some pet name, but an English prince or princess is never called "baby" either by relatives or by his or her nurses. From the age of five a prince is styled "sir" by his attendants and a princess "madam."—London M. A. P.

A Proverb Reversed.

Friend (to interesting invalid)—Never mind, dear, you'll soon be better. Remember, it's only the good that die young. Interesting invalid—You've got it the wrong way. You mean it's only the young who die good.—London Illustrated Bits.

The Wagerworker Shop is in shape to do all the printing for your union. Call in and get acquainted with us

The strikebreakers for the Sugar Trust near New York objected to being fired when the trust capitulated and for the first time in the history of America the police clubbed the strikebreakers.

Billy Sunday, the great evangelist, never neglects an opportunity to put in a lick for organized labor. It

makes some of his Citizen Alliance and "open" shop auditors squirm, but Billy don't care.

A Spokane minister desires to be given a seat as fraternal delegate in the Central Labor Council. If he is the right kind, he will do no harm; and if he is the wrong kind, he won't stay. Let him in, boys.

The Labor Temple is an open forum in New York under the auspices of the Presbyterian church. It is open every night to hear the best thought on vital questions, and is crowded with men and women.

The "open-shop" hat manufacturers are still coming back to the union label.