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JOHN MARSTON'S RETURN

A STORY FOR THE NEW YEAR BY V. J. LAMPTON.

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As I how easily things go wrong, a word too much, or a kiss too long, and there cometh a mist and a blinding rain, and life is never the same again.

So wrote the poet, with regretful tears in every word, and so have hearts moaned, when quivering lips could not put into meter and rhyme the thoughts which lay heavy upon them. It has been true always, and the poet wrote of no new discovery; he merely put words to the old, old chords in a minor key, which have beaten upon the sounding boards of men's and women's hearts since men and women were.

If one who had been interested in them had asked John Marston and Mary Palvey why they were no longer friends, as they had been since childhood, neither she in her quiet home in New England, nor he in the active, thriving western town could have given a definite answer. They would have made the attempt, of course, each according to the light possessed, for who has ever known lovers who quarreled to be unable to give a most explicit and satisfactory explanation—to themselves—of the course of their estrangement, carefully omitting none of the factors making the integer of their alienation?

Marston was quite positive in his own mind that Mary had been entirely too whimsical for any sane man to tolerate for a moment, much less a lifetime, and Mary was quite as sure in her mind that John Marston was the most perfectly outrageous man she had ever met in the whole course of her existence.

Observe, gentle reader, that these two people were sure "in their minds" of this thing. What degree of certainty was registered in their hearts will appear later.

Be it as it may, the years had crept along slowly enough, until as many as three lay between the New Year's day when John had turned his back on the east and Mary and the one which, God willing, was to find him once more under the old roof where he had known all the world seemed to have for him, until this unkindly parting had suddenly rung him into such a chaos of unknown things that at first he wandered about among them as one bewildered and blinded by a great shock.

In it all, however, and through it all, the spirit of the girl he had left behind him shone as a soft light in a misty atmosphere, and do what he would, her face came ever between him and the faces of all other women.

He flirted with the pretty maidens of the west, of course; he would scarcely have been a man if he had not, but he was proof against all their womanly wiles and willingness, and they had him listed as "heartless," but he only smiled at that and went on his way untouched, but not unfeeling.

Now, when he was on the point of returning to the place of beginning, they saw a bit of newer sunlight in his face, a tenderer look from his eyes than any of them had ever won from him, and some said that it might be Mr. Marston was not such an emotional Gibraltar as they had fancied him to be.

He got away at last, and in the rattle of the train and the whirr of the wheels the west began to fall away backward along the straight lines of steel stretching across the prairie, and Marston dreamed of the east.

The east, where the sun rose—would it ever rise again? In the little New England town among the hills, up to its knees in the snow, there was the usual holiday hilarity, not unmingled with that intangible sadness which ever falls about and unfolds the days of the dying year. Christmas had come and gone, and the children were as happy as children only are at Christmas, and the older grown were drawing their dividends of enjoyment as well from Santa Claus and the season.

away into the stillness under the voiceless stars, over the crisp and crystal snow, until she came to the little chapel at the edge of the town where on Sundays she played the organ for the choir. Unconsciously she turned into the churchyard.

She knew where the sexton kept the key under a corner of the step, and opening the door, she passed in and down the aisle to her accustomed place.

The chapel was not cold, for services had been held there earlier in the evening, but she drew her heavy cloak about her shoulders with a little shiver and sat down on the organ stool.

But not with music or song in her heart. She had waited for John and he had not come. She had longed for him and there was no response. She had wept for him, down there among the watchers, and she was angry with herself.

But here, alone in the silent darkness, she bowed her head upon her hands and prayed. Prayed that he might come safely home; prayed for him and for her.

Evidently Mary's heart was triumphing over her head, but the end was not yet. It lacked but a few minutes until midnight, she knew, and she arose to go back

to the meeting, so that her absence might not be observed and commented upon as the conclusion of the services, when she heard a man's footfall on the steps outside.

Her heart beat quick at first, for Mary had read novels, and she knew that lovers sometimes came to their sweethearts thus; but this was not the fearless tread of a hero.

It was stealthy, so stealthy that if her ear had not been accustomed to every noise about the familiar old building she might not have noted it.

It was a burglar, she was certain, after that first, heart thump, for it was known the communion plate was of silver and worth at least enough to tempt a rural robber, and everybody knew the strong box of the chapel was a strong box only in name.

She was frightened nearly out of her senses, but enough remained to warn her that her only safety lay in hiding behind the organ and giving the thief the right of way to everything in his path.

Slowly, she heard that dreadful step slipping along the aisle, creaking as it came. She had to exert every energy of her will to keep from screaming, and the slip-slip-creak-creak came nearer and nearer.

At the end of the aisle it stopped, as if in doubt which way to turn, and her heart beat slower; then it passed, still slipping, over to the other corner, and she gave a faint sigh of relief.

was inside had come in and caught me there, wasn't it?"

"Yes," responded the conductor, who had known her from childhood, "and if I hadn't been late that night there's no telling what wouldn't have happened either, is there?"

And there isn't.



"You mustn't ask me for a kiss, You really mustn't, dear; Just give me time," she murmured, "for, You know it's now leap year."

THE WAY OF A BASHFUL YOUTH. He was a very bashful youth. Who always was afraid; So when he called on New Year's eve, He simply staid and staid;

TA, TA! The spinster met, one leap year morn, A man she held most dear, And asked him if he'd call. Said he, "I cannot come this year."

OUT OF DANGER. He feels quite safe when leap year comes, For time has so abused him, That all the girls he's ever known, Have long ere this refused him.

A Peanut Boom in the World's Fair City. The Fulton street merchant who sells four green gumdrops for a cent was feeling rather despondent yesterday.

"What's the trouble," inquired the reporter. "Is it the tariff?"

"No, 'tain't politics; it's bananas," said the dealer, emphatically. "Bananas has killed the gumdrop business. dead. There ain't no show at all wid Eyzetalian workin off cut rate bananas on each side of yer, and them grape and peanut fellers hoverin 'round to get in too. I tell yer, the gum drop trade is dead."

"What are you going to do?" inquired the reporter sympathetically.

"Sherawgo," said the dealer, winking mysteriously.

"What?"

"Sherawgo. I'm up to a thing or two, and I'm goin out there this week. A friend of mine has went out there and struck it rich."

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