

ANNIE'S BIRTHDAY GIFT

A Story of Blackmail and Its Results.

The village clock was striking the hour of 5 one afternoon as Annie Graham stepped out of her trim and comfortable cottage to meet her husband at the gate.

She made a pleasant picture for the eye to rest upon. Her year of married life had been a very happy one, and never did maiden look more eagerly for her lover than did she for her husband's return from the distant city, whither he had gone a week ago on business for his employers.

Among the few ornaments she wore was a beautifully chased gold bracelet which encircled her left wrist. As her eye caught its gleam a peaceful smile lit up her sweet face, for it was her husband's gift to her on her last birthday.

She stood at the gate and looked down the road in the direction of the small mining village through which her husband must pass on his way from the station. A man's form came into view on the quiet road, but a single glance sufficed to show her that it was not the familiar figure she looked for. She scarcely observed the man further, her eyes traveling beyond him to scan the road, till he halted almost at her side.

"Can't you spare a copper for a poor fellow who has walked all the way from"—he began, with the usual plea and whine of the professional tramp, but stopped abruptly and gave vent to a low whistle.

"So it's you!" he exclaimed sneeringly, recovering from his surprise. "Aren't you glad to see an old pal?"

She looked at him for a moment, then drew back in fear.

"I suppose you've got too high and mighty for the likes of me," he continued, observing her action. "I heard you had got spliced to the gaffer of a mine somewhere about this quarter, but had no idea of such a slice of luck as this happy meeting with you. So this is where you hang out, eh? It does look rather comfortable inside."

He drew nearer the gate and made as if to enter.

"No, no, you cannot come in," she cried in alarm. "See, here is some money. Take it and go away."

He examined the contents of the purse which she handed to him. They amounted to only half a dollar, and he was dissatisfied.

"I'm as dry as a dusty road in June, and this will hardly wet my throat. Let's see that bangle on your wrist. It should be worth something," he said, looking greedily at the bracelet.

"No, indeed, I will not. I have already given you more than enough, so please go."

"Not if I know a thing or two," he said, with a cunning leer. "Did you tell your adorable husband that you got the swop from Watson's for nabbing a trinket like that? No, I guess not."

"You know how false that charge was," she cried indignantly, but with fear in her eyes at the mention of her husband.

"Oh, of course you say so, but who would believe you?" he returned. "Hand over that bit of jewelry, and mum's the word."

"It's my husband's gift to me," she pleaded, "and I cannot part with it. I will give you its value in money, but do not ask this."

She turned to enter the house for the money, but he was too quick for her.

"Not so fast, my pretty. 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' any day. I can make as good terms with your husband, so it must be that gilt thing or nothing."

She eagerly scanned the road again. Yonder at last was the well known stalwart figure of her husband. Should she tell him all and trust to his believing in her innocence? What if he should believe this man's story?

These thoughts passed quickly through her mind. The risk of losing his love and respect seemed too great to face. She slipped the bracelet from her wrist and handed it to the man.

"There, take it and go quickly," she said, with white, drawn face.

He snatched it from her and walked away, humming a lively air and looking the virtuous man he claimed to be as he passed her husband a short distance from the gate.

John Graham greeted his young wife affectionately, and together they entered the house. He observed her pallor for the first time as she turned up the light of the dining room lamp.

"What's the matter, Annie?" he inquired anxiously. "You look as if you had got a fright. Have you been moping in my absence? I meant to be back a couple of days sooner, but I could not get my business finished in time."

"It is nothing, John. I did weary for your coming, and I am glad to see you home again," she said, with an effort to keep the tremor out of her voice.

"I have news for you, dear," he said when they were seated at the table. "I met some of my people in the city and was invited home. As they appeared to be holding out the olive branch of peace of course I went, and the upshot was that matters were smoothed over. They have most graciously condescended to forgive us for marrying, and my mother and sisters are coming on the 28th to spend a few days with us."

"See what I have brought you from the city. I remembered that the 28th is your birthday and thought you would like this. You might wear it when they come, along with the one I gave you last year. I want you to be at your best before my people."

from his pocket and unfolded it, revealing a bracelet of exquisite design upon a bed of velvet. He handed the gift to her with a tender smile.

"I am not worthy of this, John," she said faintly, while a mist rose before her eyes. She was already paying dearly for her error in her transaction with the tramp.

"Nonsense, my dear. Bring out the other one and let me see how they look together."

"Not tonight, John. Please don't ask me," she said so earnestly that he looked up in surprise.

"I'm afraid you are not yourself to-night, Annie. You do look rather ghost-like. But don't trouble about the bracelets, as I can see them both on the 28th."

When the guests arrived, it struck him that his wife had never appeared to greater disadvantage. She looked pale and anxious and seemed to avoid meeting his eyes. He was annoyed to see the proud lips of his mother and sisters curl at his wife's awkwardness, and he felt that she had not done herself justice. Once he whispered:

"You are not wearing both bracelets tonight?"

"No," she answered in a low voice and with averted eyes. He turned away, with a look of disappointment.

When the visitors retired for the night, he took both her hands in his. "There is something wrong, Annie. What is it?"

Could she tell him, or must she go on deceiving him and enduring the misery of the past few days? He was a man who was upright in all his actions and hated deceit in any form. Yet she would only be doing him a further injustice by concealing the truth. In a low voice she began and recounted the whole story. When she had finished, he remained silent. She lifted her tear stained face to him.

"You do not believe me, and therefore you cannot forgive me?" she asked wistfully.

"I both believe and forgive you," he said gently. "But what you have told me is not quite new to me. I knew about the charge against you when I asked you to marry me, but I believed in you. And within the last twenty-four hours I have heard the rest of the story. Do you recognize this?"

She was astonished to see him hold up the bracelet which she had parted with so unwillingly to the tramp.

"Your friend the tramp got the worse of drink with the money you gave him and was locked up at the police station," he resumed. "This was found in his possession, and he could give no proper account of it. Lieutenant Stirling happened to mention the matter to me. I had my own reasons for being interested, and, along with Stirling, I interviewed the man. I knew him at once to be the man who was the Watsons' groom when you were with them. We wormed the matter out of him, and now it appears that it was one of the servants whom he was courting at the time who was the real thief."

"Then I am cleared at last?" she cried joyfully.

"Yes. I could have told you all this a few hours ago, but I wanted you to learn to trust your husband more fully. I am glad that you have told me everything frankly. Now let us forget the past."

"The best birthday gift you have given me is your forgiveness," she said gratefully.—Penny Pictorial Magazine.

A Kindred Soul.

They had just been introduced, and, as she looked into his thoughtful blue eyes, the young girl felt that she had at last met a man of high ideals.

"Are you interested in the elevation of the masses, Mr. McSnudge?" she asked, after she had worked up to the subject by easy conversational stages.

"Intensely, Miss Gushington," he answered. "I have dedicated my life to this great work. I am just now interesting myself in circulating a pamphlet on the subject, which I shall be pleased to send you."

"How lovely!" she murmured. She knew that she had at last found a kindred soul.

But this world is full of bitter disappointments, and it was a hard jolt to Ethel Gushington's finer sensibilities when a few days later she received, with the compliments of John Wesley McSnudge, a catalogue of passenger elevators for which he was agent.—Salt Lake Herald.

Silk in England.

King James I. was very anxious to naturalize the silkworm in England and to establish a native manufacture of the product. To this end a great many mulberry trees were imported from North America, and a fine plantation of them was made near St. James' palace on ground where Buckingham palace now stands. This plantation was known as the Mulberry Gardens and became a kind of recreation ground. Both Evelyn and Pepys record their visits here, and Dryden is said to have brought a lady friend here to enjoy the "mulberry tarts."

Close by were the necessary houses and appliances for rearing the silkworms and the manufacture of the silk. But the king's experiment failed.

A Case of Expiration Anyway. Some years ago a battery of artillery was at big gun practice at Bermuda. One of the guns—a thirty-eight ton—was found to have a serious flaw. The officer in charge, not caring to risk half a dozen valuable lives, inquired:

"Sergeant, have you any time expired men here?"

"Yes, sir," answered the sergeant. "Paddy Jackson has just completed his time."

"Well, then," replied the thoughtful officer, "Paddy Jackson will fire the gun."

And Paddy Jackson did fire the gun, happily with no fatal result.—Edinburgh Scotsman.

BREAD AND BRIDES.

THE PARTS VIANDS PLAY IN MARRIAGE CEREMONIES.

Sweetheart Cakes of a Dutch Damsel—Egyptian Bridegrooms Must Work For Their Supper—Wine in China—Married by Candy.

The important part which different viands play in marriage ceremonies makes rather an interesting story.

For example, the Swedish bride fills her pocket with bread, which she dispenses to every one she meets on her way to church, every piece she gives away averting, as she believes, a misfortune.

On the threshold of her new home a bride in Serbia is presented with a plate of bonbons, one of which she and the bridegroom share between them, the divided bonbon signifying that no bitterness shall divide them. A sieve of wheat corn is also given to the bride. Of this she takes three handfuls, throws it over her head, emptying the sieve upon the ground. The scattered corn denotes that the bride brings joy and prosperity into her new home. The bride is still outside the door, nor can she enter until she has placed two loaves of bread beneath her arms and taken a bottle of wine into her hands. With these emblems she at length crosses the threshold of her future home. At the first meal of the newly married pair bread and wine must be taken by both to denote that thenceforward all they have shall be equally divided between them and that their married life shall be passed in unity and fidelity.

A Russian wooing culminates in the betrothal feast, at which the bride elect in return for a long tress of hair which she has given to the bridegroom receives bread and salt and an almond cake.

In Holland if a young man is in love with a girl and wishes to ask her hand in marriage he buys a small sweet cake and, wrapping it up in soft paper, proceeds to the house of his innamorata. He is ushered into the midst of the family circle. Without a word he walks up to the young lady and lays the cake on the table before her. The rest of the family affect not to notice anything unusual and continue their work or their reading. The young man turns aside and talks to the father or mother on some very ordinary subject, keeping his eyes eagerly fixed on the girl while he is conversing. If she accepts his offer, she takes up the cake and eats it. If she is a coquettish damsel, she tortures the young man by turning it over and playing with it before she decides to taste it and then enraptures him by eating it to the last crumb. If, on the other hand, she wishes to have nothing more to do with her admirer, she puts it back on the table. The young man takes up the cake and, with a "vaarvoel byzamen," leaves the house. The matter is then kept a profound secret by both families, and the outer world never hears of it. In place of a wedding cake in Holland wedding candies are given—"bruid zuikers" they are called. They are passed around by children and are served in flower trimmed baskets.

Bride pudding is the name of the piece de resistance served at a Norse peasant wedding. This is not brought on the table until the last day of the festivities, three or five days being given up to feasting and merrymaking. The appearance of the bride pudding is the signal of dismissal, and at the close of the feast the guests say farewell, presenting at the same time their gifts, which consist of cash. This the bride receives, the bridegroom presenting each donor with a glass of wine.

Partaking of two tiny glasses of wine is all the ceremony necessary to make a marriage in some Chinese provinces, provided a quantity of fireworks are set off. These are to wake the "great joss" from his sleep that he may witness the ceremony.

At a Hebrew wedding man and wife sip from one cup of wine, symbolizing participation in the joys and pain of earthly life. The emptied goblet is placed on the floor and crushed into a thousand pieces by the bridegroom, who thus shows that he will put his foot on all evils that may enter the family circle.

At an Egyptian wedding feast meat is not eaten because of the belief that it would lead to future bickerings between them. Eggs, fruits and sweets are served. The first meal in the new house cannot be touched until, after every device known to the bridegroom, the bride has been at last induced to speak. Once she utters a word, he claps his hands, and supper is brought to them.

Married by candy is the plan in Burma. Of all marriage rites this takes the palm for conciseness and sweet simplicity. Here the dusky lady takes the initiative. Seeing a youth who pleases her, she offers him a sweet. If he accepts her proposal, he promptly eats the token of affection, and they are thereby made man and wife. In the act of eating alone this most primitive rite consists. If the youth be not favorably disposed, he remarks with all gallantry that that particular candy is not to his taste, and the matter is ended. In Mandalay three weeks after a marriage kinsmen bring the bridegroom a bowl of rice, a vessel of wine and a fowl, much of which collation is sacrificed to the spirits of ancestors.

A Bagoda bride—in the Philippines—if she be good looking and the daughter of a warrior, is sold by her father for about \$30, which sum is not given in money, but in vegetables and chickens. One way of estimating such things is at the price of a brass gong. Such a gong is worth thirty silver dollars, and it is a valuable maiden indeed who will bring two brass gongs.—What to Eat.

Common Sense in Law.

When we are told that every law must be enforced to the letter though the heavens fall, it has a brave sound, but a wise regard for the public good demands that the laws be so executed that the heavens may not fall. The maxim that "the extreme of the law may be the extreme of injustice"—"summum jus, summa injuria"—is of venerable age and has had the approval of the best jurisprudence as well as the best statesmanship of many centuries. It is not mere "sophistry"—as somewhat hastily, I suppose, it has been called—but it may well be quoted in support of the application of simple common sense to complicated and perplexing exigencies. I think there is not a government in the world, not even the most conscientious, that does not refrain from rigidly enforcing to the letter some laws standing on its statute books, either because they are antiquated or because such enforcement is practically impossible or, if beneficial, would result in evils greater than those which those laws are to prevent or repress.—Carl Schurz.

Preparing Dates. The preparation of dried dates is carried on largely at Awabi, and as the season had now commenced I took the opportunity to observe the process and was taken round the factories by the sheik. The dates selected are picked before they are quite ripe. The factory had a chimney about fifteen feet high and contained several open, circular, copper boilers, capable of holding five gallons each and nearly full of water. Into these vessels the dates are put and allowed to simmer over a slow fire. As the water in the copper decreased from evaporation it was filled up again, but it gradually became impregnated by the extraction of the juice of the date. The fruit is left in the water about half an hour and is then taken out and spread on mats or cloths in the sun to dry, after which it becomes hard and of a pale red color. It is exported in large quantities from Muskat to India.—Geographical Journal.

A Survival of the Primitive. A Philadelphia philosopher thus explains the general preference for a wall table in a restaurant: "Primitive man ate in peril. The cave bear, the saber tooth tiger, even some warrior of his own kind, was apt at any moment to leap upon him and to devour his food and perhaps himself. Therefore he took his meals with his back against a cliff or in the corner of two adjoining cliffs, if possible, and with the open country before him. That, you see, was the safest way for him to eat. He could not then be surprised."

Forcing a Pension. When Thomas Snodgrass, ex-collector of Ganjam, Madras, was expelled from the service of the East India company owing to his extravagance, he applied for a pension, but the company turned a deaf ear to him. Accordingly he arrayed himself in tattered clothes and, armed with a broom, set to work sweeping a crossing in Leadenhall street in front of the East India house. Immediately all London was agog with the intelligence that an old and distinguished officer of the East India company who had ruled over 100,000 people and revelled in a palace was now reduced in the evening of his life to the necessity of earning his bread by sweeping the streets. The king was thunderstruck and implored Mr. Snodgrass to take himself and his broom away. This he did when the company gave him his pension.

The Celts and Greens. The early Celts worshipped the dawn and the sunrise. It is more than probable, therefore, that their liking for the color green which we see in their flags, sashes, etc., arose from a mistake among those who had lost a thorough knowledge of the Irish language. The sun in Celtic is called by a word pronounced exactly like our word "green," and it is likely that the Irish fondness for that color arose through the striking similarity of the two words. In the same way, when we talk about a greenhouse we think they are so called because plants are kept green in them during the winter; yet it is far more probable that the word is derived from the old Celtic word for sun, because greenhouses are so built as to catch the rays and heat of the sun and store them for future use.

Eased Consciences. A well known English dean recently had the misfortune to lose his umbrella, and he rather suspected that its appropriation by another had not been altogether accidental. He therefore used the story to point a moral in a sermon in the cathedral, adding that if its present possessor would drop it over the wall of the deanery garden during that night he would say no more about it. Next morning he repaired to the spot and found his own umbrella and forty-five others.

Lifted Up Forever. Mazzini, whose name is associated with the liberation of Italy, was once asked what he would have taught in school.

"One thing, at any rate, in all," replied Mazzini, "and that is some knowledge of astronomy. A man learns nothing if he has not learned to wonder, and astronomy, better than any science, teaches him something of the mystery and grandeur of the universe."

"Now, a man who feels this will soon feel something of his own greatness and mystery, and then for the first time he is a man."

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