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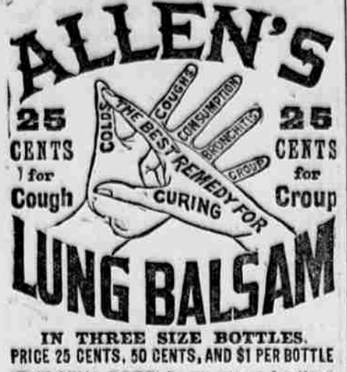

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THE STUDY OF A TYPE.

An Omaha Episode.

[WRITTEN FOR THE OMAHA BEE BY ALICE KING HAMILTON.]

[CONCLUDED.]

Mr. Blakely, junior, had returned to the bosom of his family, as the evening meal was about to be partaken of, and was duly transported at sight of the unexpected guest.

After the conclusion of the meal, which was at length brought to an abrupt close by Mrs. Blakely addressing her husband facetiously with, "Well, papa, how much longer are you going to eat?"—the company adjourned to a cheerful apartment called the sitting room, and sociability became the order of the day. Miss Murray alone was distrait and silent, listening, however, to all that Stoneleigh had to say, with such an expression of intelligent appreciation beaming from her exquisite face that the Englishman told himself she would be capable of shining in a very different sphere from this. As it was, no wonder she held herself aloof, and remained mute, as a r in will refuse to sing when imprisoned in a cage. This very attitude, and the contrast he fancied she presented to her sordid surroundings, made the girl appear interesting and fascinating in the extreme. He would cheerfully have given several acres of his newly acquired property for the privilege of conversing with her alone, and, considering the free and untrammeled condition of young women in Nebraska society, that such a consummation (devoutly to be wished) might sooner or later be brought to pass.

When Stephen Stoneleigh returned to his hotel that night, he did not, as he had previously intended, mention to Farnsworth that he had called upon the Blakelys. He scarcely could have explained to himself why he refrained from doing so, but certainly an intangible something prevented the admission from leaving his lips. The next day, by Mr. Walter Blakely's invitation, he lunched at the club, and, it being "ladies day" at that brilliant resort, Miss Blakely and Murray afterwards allowed themselves to be met in the street and entertained at the club rooms, unchaperoned by Mrs. Blakely or any other matronly incumbrance.

On the following evening a riding party was arranged by the enterprising Mr. Blakely (who had in the meantime brought several intimates to call on his new friend) and Stoneleigh accepted an invitation to use the former's spare saddle horse. It was a very good horse, and matched the one Miss Murray rode, both in the matter of speed and appearance, so that Stoneleigh found it very agreeable to gallop through the streets, with the rest of the party at his heels and Miss Murray at his side. She did not seem particularly desirous of this distinction, and a certain dark, gloomy-faced youth, in unexceptionable costume, did appear particularly anxious that she should not enjoy it. But perhaps these obvious facts merely lent to the occasion an additional zest and charm.

"Don't you think our horses go well together?" Stoneleigh asked, when, at his very urgent request, Miss Murray and he had "shown what they could do" in distancing the others.

"Oh, yes. But I—" she stopped suddenly with a blush that caused the bloom in the center of her cheeks to deepen and spread in a marvelously lovely way.

"But you?" he suggested.

"But I don't really think we ought to have come away. They generally make a rule in these parties that all must keep together."

"I am a stranger, and not supposed to know that, unless you take the trouble to inform me. It is so awfully jolly to be an exception to a rule—sometimes—and I think it is so now."

She shook her head reprovingly, but was silent.

"Oh, I see how it is," Stoneleigh went on. "You like your own friends so much the best. It bores you when somebody with whom you think you have nothing in common insists on your devoting yourself to him." And he hoped that she would contradict him.

"We might have things in common, I don't know—how can I tell? But it is not that I meant." She smiled as she spoke, in a mystic and sybilline manner.

"What is there you object to about me, then? Are you prejudiced against my countrymen?"

How would Lady Augusta have agonized could she have heard her try—the grandson of an earl—actually inquiring in anxious tones, of a little American nobody, if she "was prejudiced against his countrymen?" How frigidly would she have stared could she have heard the little nobody's reply—"Oh, I have a theory that I should like them, but the other girls have one too, perhaps. I know my cousin Dick has one, and of course she feels a sort of right in you, because it was she who discovered you, you see. Anyway, you belong to her more than you do to me, and I don't care to do anything which may provoke Dick."

"But I would rather belong to you, Miss Murray."

"Oh, you can't do that, you know. There are objections." Again she was sybilline and smiling, and Stoneleigh fascinated and curious; but at that moment Miss Blakely and the gloomy-faced youth (whose name was Morgan) galloped up and joined them. During the remainder of the ride Stoneleigh had no more conversation with Miss Murray.

After that there were other evenings on which entertainments were given in honor of the Englishman, and Lord Farnsworth had to know of them. He received invitations, too, but laughed at the idea of accepting them. However, when the week he had intended devoting to business was at an end, he found that there were some complications that would still detain him. He watched Stoneleigh with his keen, ostensibly lazy gaze, while he informed him of this necessity. "Awful bore, isn't it?" he said. "I'm no end sorry, on your account, old man."

"Oh, I don't mind," returned Stoneleigh, airily.

"No, you don't mind. I should mind less, if you minded more, perhaps. But it isn't my affair, of course, only as Lady Augusta made it so by what she said to me at parting."

"What did she say," the other queried, rather indignantly.

"She adjured me to keep you out of danger. Now, I don't think so cheaply of you as to suppose that anything you could find here, would prove in any degree dangerous, yet—." He paused and watched Stoneleigh through half-closed eyes. "You might be a fool, you know," he said reflectively.

"Enough of a fool to think that what I have found here is good enough to be talked of more respectfully than you are doing now," growled Stoneleigh, savagely.

And it was at the close of that day, during which Stoneleigh's savage mood had lasted without abatement, that Lord Farnsworth decided to keep the promise he had made in regard to writing Lady Augusta. It would take some time, however, for the letter to reach its destination, and in the interval he was obliged to see, and passively to ignore the fact that Stoneleigh continued going every day to the Blakely's. Even for the sake of his promise to Lady Augusta, he could not make up his mind to undertake the role of protective dragon, after he had essayed the part once, and Miss Dick had "been nice" to him, calling him in affectionately nasal tones, "my lord." It had been too much for his equanimity, and he had retired to the fortress of his hotel apartments, in stolid moodiness to smoke numerous Havana cigars.

Another week elapsed, and Lord Farnsworth's business had been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. He was ready to start westward, but to his infinite vexation, Stoneleigh absolutely refused to accompany him. He had made engagements, he said, and could not possibly get off under ten days, or two weeks. This was even worse than Lord Farnsworth anticipated, and he used some very strong language in hopes of combatting his friend's decision, but quite without avail. The obstinacy of the Stoneleigh race had again asserted its supremacy, and nothing remained for Farnsworth to do, but indignantly to depart on the first train bound for the west.

His absence, indeed, afforded a keen sense of relief to the misguided Stoneleigh, and he continued on the even tenor of his way, with no regard to his friend's advice and counsel.

It had finally become patent to the observation of the Blakelys that the charms of Miss Dick was as naught in the eyes of the Englishman, and that Miss Murray's was everything. Of course, if they had been allowed a choice in the matter, they would unhesitatingly have fixed his regard on the former, but as that had gone beyond their jurisdiction, they wisely remembered that the glory still remained in the family, and that it was better to shine by reflected light than not to shine at all. Stoneleigh no longer experienced the slightest difficulty in bringing himself in tete a tete with Miss Murray, as even Miss Blakely tendered a secretly reluctant, yet efficient assistance in promoting his wishes. As for Petsie, however, the most sanguine of adorers could scarcely have flattered himself that she was more than passively acquiescent to these family arrangements. She was very uncertain in her manner towards Stoneleigh, but her coyness only tended to increase his growing infatuation. He had not intended to let his regard extend beyond the limits of mere admiration at first. He had scarcely contemplated the possibility of its doing so, until suddenly he was forced to realize that it had escaped beyond his control. And by that time he was too genuinely in love to pause for regrets or the whisperings of prudence. After all, he told himself, many men of his rank at home, married American girls, and certainly there could be no American girl lovelier or in every way more presentable than this. A little crude, perhaps, but that was the fault of her surroundings; and under the right influences (which he, and he alone, could and would give to her) his jewel would become as polished and perfect as even his mother could desire. The trouble would be, gradually and cautiously to prepare the latter's mind for the proper reception of an idea so abhorrent to all her most cherished prejudices; and upon the various methods of inserting "the entering wedge," he was debating when a cablegram from Lady Augusta arrived. "Come home on next steamer," it said. "Will explain on arrival. Your letter and Farnsworth's received."

Now, as Lord Farnsworth had sufficiently drawn upon his imagination to send Lady Augusta her son's "best love" in the letter his conscience had warned him to indite, she had taken it for granted that Stephen had been made aware of the letter's existence, at least; but he had not been made so, and in revealing the fact to him she had committed a grave indiscretion. It put him upon the scent of what had actually occurred, caused him after reflecting that there could be no illness at home, or it would have been mentioned, to cable briefly that it would be impossible for him to return on the next steamer, but that Lady Augusta might expect a letter instead. This method of opposition incensed him, and increased his determination to have his own way at all hazards, far more than an honest and open disclosure of home tacties would have done. They intended him to be hurried out of harm's reach before he knew what was desired of him, forsooth! They should find that they had underrated his perspicuity. He was the possessor of an independent fortune, small though it might be, and he had a right to take his fate into his own hands. Thus, the way being now (fortunately or unfortunately) opened for him, he found very little difficulty in stating his intentions to his mother. The Stoneleighs never thought of writing to Sir George when any affair of importance was to be touched upon, on account of his peculiar tendency to "attacks" of an unexplained nature; and the letter that Stoneleigh now indicted to his mother held "more matter than art," and was altogether very much to the point. He described Miss Murray's charms and graces with all a lover's eloquence, and ended by saying that he intended seizing the earliest opportunity of proposing marriage to her, as he felt that he could make her happy unassisted, though, of course, it would be much more agreeable if his people should receive her as his wife had a right to be received.

He experienced a peculiar sense of elation when this letter was fairly off his hands, for better or worse. It was as though his lot had been decided, and he could feel in fancy the soft touch of Petsie Murray's hand within his own. He knew that he had committed himself irrevocably, and longed to exchange the mere impression of such a touch, for the reality—so greatly to be preferred.

Early that same evening, he presented himself at the Blakely's, and congratulated himself that fate meant kindly by him, when he found the object of his visit sitting in the drawing-room alone. She rose at sight of him, and thrust a bit folded paper into the bosom of her low-cut dress. Stoneleigh himself had sent her a little note with some flowers, that morning, and he wondered if it could possibly be his effusion so greatly honored by her. "Dick is out," she said, hastily, to bridge over a certain evident embarrasment. "I'm sorry, but perhaps she'll be in soon."

"I hope not," returned Stoneleigh bluntly, "as I came to talk to you." And then he sat down beside her, and in a few ardently impressive words, told her what he had meant to say. He loved her—he wanted to carry her away from all these uncongenial surroundings which were so unworthy of her. He wanted, bye and bye, when they had tried life in this country for a little while, to transplant his wild rose to an English home where she could be happy, admired and beloved. He was eloquent with the eloquence inspired by the depth and sincerity of his feelings, but he was scarcely troubled by the tender doubts and pangs of the orthodox lover, for he could not help being conscious that he was reaching down to raise his jewel from the barren soil where it had fallen, not prostrated at a sovereign lady's feet. What then was his amazement and dismay, at seeing the dainty hands he strove to hold, go upward to hide the beautiful girlish face, and to hear the beloved voice exclaim in accents of unmistakable dismay: "Oh, dear! Oh dear me! Whatever shall I do?"

It was certainly a puzzling way of receiving his suit; but nevertheless Stoneleigh summoned courage to pull down the softly resisting hands and to keep them in his own. "What shall you do?" he echoed. "Why, marry me, of course, dear child. Then after that I shall always be ready to tell you what to do, you know."

"But I can't marry you!" she protested.

"Why not?" and he searched for a solution of the mystery in her uplifted, tearful eyes.

"Because—because—"

"Because! Ah, but that is a 'woman's reason,' that I can't accept."

"Because I don't want to, then!"

He dropped her hands. "You don't want to? What do you mean? Don't you love me?"

"No, I don't; not a bit! But, oh dear, I am so miserable! Everybody is so cruel, and—and—" her sentence ended with a sob, while she sprang from her seat, and ran lightly past him, out of the room.

Stoneleigh was left standing in the centre of the floor, dazed, but half unbelieving. There was evidently some mystery, that she would come back presently and reveal to him. He waited a long time, and probably felt, from moment to moment, more unhappy than ever before in his life. His mood varied from incredulity to disappointment, from disappointment to hope, from hope to poignant despair, and while enduring the last, he would have taken his departure, had not Mrs. Blakely unexpectedly appeared and paused with the portiere in her hand—a deprecating hesitancy in her eye.

"Petsie made me come down to you," she said tremulously. "That is, she wouldn't come down herself, so of course I had to. I couldn't let you go like that. I'm so astonished. I don't hardly see how to apologize or what to say."

"She told you?" queried Stoneleigh, with an unconscious brusqueness that caused the limp lady to start and quiver.

"Well, she was crying, and I asked her what was the matter. She didn't expect very much sympathy from me, though, and she didn't get it. Flying in the face of Providence—that's what I says to her. But it does seem, somehow, as if this girl was born for a cross to us. She never could listen to reason, while it was as plain as the nose on her face. But my advice to you, Mr. Stoneleigh, is not to take no for an answer. Petsie don't seem to know what she really wants."

Stoneleigh had listened to this flow of eloquence with a very superficial comprehension of its meaning. He understood at the last, however, the idea Mrs. Blakely intended to convey, and caught eagerly at the suggestion. "Do you honestly think she cares for me at all?" he asked. "Do you think she will give me a different answer by-and-by?"

"I'm pretty near certain of it," pronounced Mrs. Blakely, with unusual decision. "Just you wait a week without seeing Petsie, and you mark my words, she'll change her mind. It wouldn't be natural she shouldn't, not if she's got the sense she ought to have."

"It is not sense I care for in her. It's something very different," said Stoneleigh gloomily, "and a week is a long time to stop away."

"That will be better than to go off now, take her at her word, and never come back at all. So, you do just as I say, and cheer up, Mr. Stoneleigh. She'll have you fast enough, next time you ask her, if you only give her a fair chance to change her mind."

Stoneleigh was doubtful, yet he was in the mood to catch gratefully at the smallest ray of hope that could be offered him. He thanked Mrs. Blakely, and departed, resolving that he would run up to the ranch for a few days, so as to escape from the ways of temptation. It was worth an effort that to put this resolve into practice, but once in the new country which, because of its novelty could scarcely help interesting him at least from a land holder's point of view, he proved it not as difficult to pass seven or eight days as he had expected. On the ninth day he left again for Omaha and found a cablegram from his mother awaiting him at the hotel—he having neglected to leave his address. It simply said, "Geoffry and I start to-day on steamer Baltic. Meet us in New York. A. Stoneleigh," and Stephen read it with a falling countenance. More than ever did he hope that his little American rose would have shed the "wilful thorns" with which she had been "set all afloat" when last he saw her, and that she might have made up her mind to be transplanted. It must be a crushing blow to his love to loose his hopes of her, and a still more crushing one, perhaps, to his pride if his mother and brother should have crossed the ocean to save him from the supposed snares of a young woman who absolutely refused to have anything to do with him. Why hadn't his people had the good sense to stay at home, and above all, why hadn't Farnsworth had the proper feeling to refrain from the step which had made all the mischief in the beginning. However, there seemed to be little wisdom in abusing "fate" so as soon as the hour would permit he started for the Blakely's to ascertain if fate did not mean to relent towards him. At least he should see her, and he thought she would find it difficult to resist some of the arguments he had prepared to combat at her mysterious resolution. Besides he believed in spite of her sobbing assurance to the contrary, that she really loved him, and as he reflected that possibly the days of his absence had been tedious to her, he quickened his walk, and went up the Blakely steps with a bound.

"No, Miss Murray was not at home," the red-fingered hand-maiden informed him, with mysterious embarrassment, but Miss Dick was in, and would be down presently, "if he would come in and wait."

Of course he would wait, and luckily for his patience, his probation proved not to be very long. Miss Blakely speedily made her apperaance, with a cobweb of a handkerchief pressed against her eyes.

Stoneleigh's first thought was that there had been a death in the family, and he sprang up with a ready sympathy expressed upon his face.

"What has happened, Miss Blakely?" he solicitously inquired.

"Oh, haven't you heard? Haven't you seen the morning papers?" and down came the handkerchief from a pair of very dry, bright eyes. "I thought of course you knew. Oh dear, I wish Walter was here to tell you, instead of me!" And yet she looked very much as though, since there was bad news, she was glad that it had fallen to her lot to relate it.

"Miss Murray—" began Stoneleigh, and then was surprised to find himself actually incapable of continuing.

But Miss Blakely was ready to finish out the broken sentence. "Yes, Petsie has caused us great trouble—great grief. She has shown herself very cruel and bad. I didn't think it was in her, really. Why, I always treated her just like a sister, and we went everywhere together, and had everything alike. She has— run away. Its all came out in the paper this morning—such a scandal!"

"Run away?" echoed Stoneleigh, helplessly.

"Yes, wasn't it horrid of her? With that Jimmy Morgan who has been so attentive to her for ever so many months. She knew she would never get him in any other way. Pa was her guardian (she pronounced it guardeen) and he wouldn't have let her have him—a fellow without a cent, and just as common as ever he could be! I wonder Petsie hadn't learned better taste through living with us so long. However, I don't believe she ever would have gone to such lengths if it hadn't been she wanted to get away from you." She giggled a little, hysterically, looking up at Stoneleigh from under her eyelashes with a shivering enjoyment, as he stared down upon her, lost in a sort of stony horror.

"It was night before-last it happened," she went on, glibly, seeing that Stoneleigh had nothing to say. "We didn't find it out till breakfast time yesterday, and then there was a commotion, I can tell you. If it had been in some other person's family I should have thought it dreadfully romantic, but I don't when it comes home like this, for there's nothing interesting about Jim Morgan, and I know he'll be awful cross to Pet as soon as she begins to seem like an old story to him. Petsie left word for Pa, actually telling him that it was because of his and ma's persecutions that she ran away. Persecutions, indeed! I must say I like that! Oh, there was a note for you, too, Mr. Stoneleigh, if you would care to have it," again glancing up at him with a mischievious triumph in her eyes.

"Yes, I would like to have it," Stoneleigh simply said. While she was gone in quest of it he stood quite still, as she had left him. He scarcely seemed to have any distinct thoughts. The words "she wanted to get away from you," seemed to stand out in red letters before his eyes.

It was hardly a moment before Miss Blakeley returned and placed a dainty, cream-colored envelope, fastened with a blue seal, in his hand. In some way he managed to take his leave, scarcely conscious of the words he spoke, although he remembered afterwards that he had left his adieux for the family, saying he would probably leave Omaha that night. He did not break the blue seal until he had reached his room at the hotel.

"Good-bye," it said, "and forgive me. I could not care for you because I loved someone else first, though I always liked you ever so much. I didn't think you ever understood me, really, or perhaps you would not have cared for me as you did. I was not a bit different from the others. They were good enough for me, and I asked nothing better. But I could see you thought I was different, and it flattered me at first, because all the others were so wild over you, and I tried to seem like what you supposed me to be. Only, when I saw you really cared a good deal I was very sorry, and didn't try any more. I hope you will forget me, and marry some sweet girl in your own land. I think it is better for you that I could not be what you wanted me to be. You would have made me happy, I know, if I could have liked you well enough, but it made me so wretched when everybody kept teasing me, and persecuting me to marry you, that I couldn't stand it, and had to go to the one I really did love. To-morrow my name will be Petsie Morgan."

Stoneleigh read the letter over twice, and then laid it down with a long sigh. "I'm sorry Miss Blakely said that about his ill-treating her," he muttered. "I feel as though I should always be haunted by the thought. Perhaps, though, she may be mistaken. But, oh, by jove. I wish my mother had only stayed at home!"

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