

How Dan Kent Missed His Thanksgiving Banquet

By John H. Raftery



"I am the Dan of that letter."

THE Kents—father and son—came to Chicago when Dan was a small boy, so that the latter soon forgot about all he knew of Odsburg and its people. If he had been older he might have been glad to forget it, for there misfortune had overtaken his family, his mother had died, and his vague recollection of the place pictured the one long, dismal street down which he rode in a carriage to the cemetery where the autumn leaves reeked in a cold rain and the clay falling into a grave sounded like the thump of his old toy drum.

Dan Kent, having a merry heart, didn't want to cherish any such dreary memories. So he had grown to manhood without revisiting the home of his infancy. Not so his father. The old man managed to stay away from the scene of his disaster till Joshua Colvin died. Then he went to the funeral of his old friend and partner, and ever after, up to the time of his death, maintained a habit of periodical visits to the old home town. Dan thought this odd at first; then he began to suspect that there was some old, long buried romance between his father and the Widow Colvin.

"You're right, Dan," said the old man, when his son twisted him about the Odsburg visits. "I'd marry her now if I wasn't so old and poor, and if you take my advice you'll go after her daughter, Kate."

They were like brothers in their frank and loving relationship in those days, and Dan, who liked to banter his father, was almost glad to "have something" on the old man. But when the elder Kent grew feeble he talked always more and more of the Colvins. If they were a joke with Dan, they were not so with his father.

It was a stifled, studied letter. She was grateful for kind words from the son of her mother's kind friend. She would do quite well, she thought, when she got back to her work as a school teacher. Her work might help her to forget. It was a dismal letter—just like Odsburg, he thought—and he did not answer it. A month later he got another from her. Would he kindly buy for her Kinyon's pedagogical chart? It would cost about \$1, which she enclosed. "I will be ever so much obliged," she concluded. He found the chart, which cost \$3, and sent her a note in which he said he was glad to be of service. He didn't mention that he was loser by \$2 in the transaction.

Within a fortnight another letter came to him from Kate Colvin in which she said that she had just learned the chart had cost \$3, perhaps more, and that she "would return the balance the moment her salary was paid." They are in arrears with me for the last two months," the letter said, "but I am sure they will pay us before Christmas."

To Dan Kent there was something poignantly sad in the plain, simple, but uncompensating statement of the country school teacher's poverty. Two dollars! He was making money and spending it as lavishly as a self-respecting young man could. Evidently poor Kate Colvin could not spare \$2 from a scanty hoard that might not be replenished for months. He was a generous, tender fellow, and somehow that bald, almost childlike confession of a girl's lonely struggle for the benefits which he won so easily and regarded so lightly, gave a sharp sting to his gentle spirit and clouded his radiant face.

Then he made a natural, but a most egregious mistake. He wanted to write a kind, sympathetic, and helpful letter, but he let a lot of sentiment into it. Sentimental passages never look right to a sensible girl who reads them in a

letter from a man she has never seen. Besides, Dan wasn't exactly a master of rhetoric at that time, and what he wrote could have been couched in terms of infinitely greater tact and delicacy by any second rate romance writer. His worst faux pas, however, was in inclosing a postoffice order for \$30, "a loan, of course," he wrote, "which I trust you will accept until such time," etc., etc.

It was awful, of course, but Dan was young, and he meant to do a kind office to the orphan girl in Odsburg. When he mailed the letter it dawned upon him that he had made an ass of himself. The more he conned over the sentences which he had meant to be the finest, the surer he was that they were coarse, impertinent, idiotic. She would be offended at his tone, insulted at his offer to loan her money. "I feel that there is a bond of sympathy between us," etc., had been the best he could think of as "an approach" to the mention of a loan, but now it sounded inexpressibly silly.

He got her answer by return mail, and when he tore open the envelope the \$30 fell on the floor. "Servos me right," he gasped, but his eyes began to bulge when he saw the first line of the letter itself:

"Dear, dear friend," it began. "Sad, sad, indeed, must that heart — which cannot be cheered by the sweet delicacy and soulful sympathy of a friend like you. O, how my lonely heart goes out responsive, and yet—"

"Rats!"

That's what Dan said. He could hardly force himself to read it. If his letter had been badly framed, hers was the dregs of gush. A wild hope that Kate Colvin hadn't written it seized him, but the narrowest comparison showed it to be her handwriting. There was nothing absolutely immodest in her hysterical epistle, but it fairly oozed sentimentality, which Dan was sure he would always despise in a woman.

"Glad to get back my fifty, anyhow," he sneered, pocketing the order and tearing the letter with one angry jerk. Then he paused, put the torn edge of her communication together, and reread it. "O, how my lonely heart goes out responsive." That line started him, and he laughed till the bookkeeper stared and the stenographer joined in the merriment.

"I'll get back at her," thought Dan Kent as he opened his desk. And he spent two hours that evening trying to outdo the florid periods of his Odsburg protégé. But he didn't send back the fifty. On Saturday he got an answer that fairly scintillated with flashes of Cupid's arrows. He had supposed that his letter rose to every flight of sentimental hyperbole, but it seemed commonplace and tawdry beside the glittering fabric of her latest epistolary composition.

He had to get "The Children of the Abbey" from the public library before he could answer that letter, and in order to stimulate her to a still more gorgeous effusion, he wound up his ecstatic billet with a superbly servile petition for her picture. He said "counterfeit presentment" first, but for fear she'd regard that as a mercenary allusion he scratched the words away and substituted "fair images." The photograph that arrived in the next letter was worthy of the foolish girl's correspondence. A simpering weak smile, evidently calculated to display two pretty dimples and a row of the white teeth; a mass of fluffy blond hair, falling almost to the eyebrows; a white lawn dress of the style that had been considered "smart" a few years ago; bangle rings on the dainty fingers!

"She looks the part," laughed Dan, "and if I don't send her my picture now this sport will come to a sudden end."

The letter suggested an exchange, and Dan, in the exuberance of what seemed such a capital joke, determined to send her the picture of his barber, a dashing young gallant with melancholy black eyes and a tightly waxed Wilhelm mustache.

It was Kent's irrepressible love of fun that had led him into this thoughtless and, for him, unkind correspondence. But the letters had passed so rapidly and with such increasing and almost outlandish expressions of romantic emotion that he had not taken time to look at any but the funny side of the affair. He had shown the letters to nobody, destroying them as soon as they were read. When he had mailed the barber's photograph to Kate with his autograph on its back he resolved to make an end of an escapade which was just beginning to cloy.

As he grew serious, he reflected upon the folly—folly? Perhaps it was mean of me," he thought; and this last idea held him so that he went home and wrote an honest, manly letter to the girl in which he strove to exonerate himself. He knew she would forgive him for returning her photograph, he said, and for asking her to forget the whole episode, which, he hoped, had given her as much harmless merriment as it had given to him. The tone of this letter was so modest, so sensible, so self-deprecating, and so completely disillusioning that Dan thought as he dropped it in the mailbox:

"Dad would have liked that letter. I would never have written the others if he had been with me."

That was Monday, Thursday was Thanksgiving day, and as Dan Kent was to be the guest at a banquet that evening, he resolved to get a substantial meal in his favorite cafe. The place was crowded with diners, and he looked in vain for a familiar face. The head waiter found a place for him at a table at which sat a woman alone. She was modestly but quite fashionably attired, young—perhaps 20—at ease, with an odd mixture of confidence and shyness. Her black eyes shone with the light of a brave and quick intelligence. Her smart hair drooped about her small ears in smooth and glistening tresses. Her red mouth catalogued of the beautiful woman opposite him when she darted one angry glance at him in which there was an unanswerable proof for his fascinated stare. It vanished as quickly as it came. She drew from her reticule a parcel of papers, read a clipping and then unfolded his letter to Kate Colvin with the same photograph of the Odsburg school teacher that he had mailed on Monday! He started, looked again, stood up, and betrayed his curiosity by leaning forward.

She glared at him, looked frightened for an instant, and then flushed with anger.

"How dare you!" was all she said, but the emphasis of her low voice helped him.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he answered, sitting down. "I wrote that letter myself to the girl whose picture you have there, and it started me to see it in your hand. 'I am the Dan' of that letter, Daniel Kent—"

He stopped short. Her face was wreathed in smiles.

"Why, Dan," she commenced, in that same sweetly stinging voice. "No! Are you Daniel Kent? The picture? Anyhow, if you're Daniel Kent, or just a friend of his who helped him try to make a fool of a country girl, you're both mistaken. I'm Kate Colvin."

She began the sentence with a gasp and ended it with a rasp.

Dan was dumfounded, but he got out his card and gave it to her.

"Well, you might have known I wasn't the kind to borrow money from a man I had never seen," she said, smiling, and her brune cheeks red. "You might have known I wasn't fool enough to write driven to an utter stranger. As for you, I thought you were a downright idiot until I got that last letter. That ran true. I came down to Chicago to pay you the \$30 I owe you, and to—"

"But, Kate," asked the delighted Daniel, "what prompted you to start the—foolishness?"

"O, I didn't like your sending that money and—well, I didn't want to be puffed, either. I imagined you were one of those Chicago smarties and—well, it was dull in Odsburg; it's always dull there."

"And now we've met and found each other out, Kate?"

"The laughed like children, looking frankly into one another's happy faces."

"It's Thanksgiving, Dan," she said.

"I'll give thanks that this [holding out the picture of the pudgy blonde] isn't you," he laughed.

"And I'll give thanks that you couldn't look like that!" And she held out the picture of the dashing barber.

And they dined so merrily together that Dan forgot everything but Kate, and Kate nearly forgot to pay back the \$2.

The Millionaire's Honeymoon.

By Jesse Northlin.

THE bartender peered timidly out of the door, like a bather confronting a maximum of spine chilling sea with a minimum of clothing and courage.

"Ugh!" he shivered. "Cold, ain't it?"

"There's a knife in the air, there is," replied the policeman, who had been praying for hours for that door to open.

Inside there was fresh sawdust on the floor, the urn was steaming, and there was a smell of hot whisky. It was the atmosphere of luxury to the stragglers who wandered in—battered hulks of humanity, who, with twitching fingers, scraped out of hidden recesses the toll that admitted them to this haven.

A woman was amongst the little crowd, though not of them. Some trace of better days, of gentility, differentiated her. But she was falling into the lowest pit. This was the first time she had ever entered a saloon and called for drink.

It was gin she ordered—a large gin, and she gulped it down hot. When she emerged into the street again her worldly wealth amounted to a nickel and a cent. She had had that cent a long time, for she had kept it for luck. And when the nickel was spent she would still have the penny and the same luck.

It was near the end of the journey now. She had struggled and had failed, and she was going to be turned adrift without a roof to crouch under.

The previous day her landlord had sued her for arrears of rent. She had gone to the court, and told her story—a pitiful story blurted out with all the eloquence of unstudied simplicity. The judge had looked severely upon her, though he had spoken kindly; the landlord had reminded her of a hungry wolf. There was a sea of faces in a gloomy, dirty room, and she had stood in a box high up for the view of every one. She remembered this much, and then the picture was blurred. It appeared that she had fainted and was carried out.

Her senses recovered, they gave her a quarter and said something about making inquiries. She did not know what they meant; but she knew she had 25 cents and that she was hungry. She was always hungry, but she had not always a quarter. She went straightway and spent 15 cents in one fall swoop—in one riotous Lucullan orgie! What a feast it was!

After it she crawled back sated to her garret, cast her sewing aside, and slept. She awoke in the early morning,

shivering, and recourse to liquor—to something fiery and potent—suggested itself. Now she was going again to her garret, without a banquet this time; but with the warmth of the alcohol in her veins.

In the little squallid room at the top of the creaking stairs she threw herself on the bare mattress, and half sleeping, half awake, dreamed the hours away.

Was she still dreaming when there came a knock at the door, and a beautiful woman in a rustling gown stepped anxiously towards her bed?

Her face was anguished with the sweetness of youth, and kindness and concern beamed from her eyes.

"You are Mrs. Albert Forshaw?" she said, touching her on the shoulder. "How you frightened me, lying there so still!"

The woman rose from the bed. No, it was not a dream.

"I read of your case in the papers," the visitor went on, "and, O, how glad I am to be able to help you! In this envelope are five \$25 notes, and here is some loose silver. This is a letter to a dressmaker who will give you work. No, don't thank me. Mine is the blessing to be able to give—to help. How easily might fate have ordained that you should be in my place and I in yours. Then you would have done something to help me, wouldn't you?"

She laughed brightly, with tears glistening in her eyes. It was good to look upon her.

"Good-by! I shall hear how you get on through my dressmaker."

The room seemed to grow suddenly dark. She had gone. The rumble of carriage wheels came up from the street below.

It was early morning at sea, and sunbeam and breeze waded a friendly contest as to which could be the pleasantest. Gilbert Rhode Jeans, a tall, alert figure in white ducks, stood on the deck of the great liner, taking a dose, as he said, of the tonic of the scene.

"I'll give the prize to the breeze," he remarked to the woman who leaned gently on his arm.

"And I to the sunshine."

"You love the sunshine?"

"I would that it was in every one's life as it is, and has been, in mine."

He gazed at her with proud admiration.

"You are really happy, Beatrice?"

"Really, really."

In the bright morning light it was easy to guess their

ages. Here you would have fixed at 25, his at 42. They had married a week, and were on their honeymoon trip to America. He was a British millionaire.

"And you, Gilbert, are you happy?" She asked the question placidly, as one confident of the answer. "You are not money making now, you know?"

"No," he replied musingly. "I am not money making now. And this is the first week for fifteen years that I have not been. Ah, America! he exclaimed—his eyes were grave, his voice bantering—"you never had but blows and cuffs for me. But now I've got you on the hip. I can compel you to drop your surliness and smile upon me. The sun shines when it rains dollars."

"You are cynical, Gilbert. I don't like to hear you talk like that. I don't think it is your true self."

"My dear child, my true self is much worse and was worse still before I met you!" He placed a hand caressingly on hers. "Since I grew to love you, Beatrice, and know the gentleness of your heart, it has opened, as it were, a new department in my nature. I never traded in these goods before, but now the demand seems—"

She held up a warning finger, laughing.

"Hush, hush!" she cried. "Cannot you keep commercialism out of your sentiment?"

"No," he answered. "Sentiment is valueless without commercialism. You, with your soft hearted passion for helping people, would have found your sorrow unavailing without the means to give practical assistance. Pity is a grand thing, but it does not fill an empty stomach."

"Which reminds me that it is time for breakfast," said she.

"That is practical sentiment," he acquiesced, as they went below.

In the glow of a hot afternoon sun the same day they lounged on deck chairs. He was reading from a notebook.

"And all these are your retainers?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who is Marcelle Bruniere? Quite a romantic name."

"She is a millionaire who would have died but for a fortunate accident. She was wrongly arrested for theft, and her whole story came out."

"Sure it was wrong?"

"Yes. A case of mistaken identity. It was fully proved."

"And Hester Gwynne? Another pretty name."

In brief chapter heads she recounted her story, too, and that of half a dozen others whose names appeared in the book. He kept turning over the leaves and calling them out.

"What a host of them," he commented. "Surely you don't act as banker to them all!"

"Ah, no! I could not have afforded it, unhappily. Some are dead, some are doing so well as not to need further help, some I have lost sight of."

He closed the book and handed it to her. For awhile he was strangely silent. His cigar went out and dropped from his fingers on to the deck.

"And Mrs. Forshaw," he asked at last—"Mrs. Albert Forshaw, who was she?"

"A pitiful case, Gilbert, had been trying to exist on 50 cents a week. Think of it, millionaire, 50 cents a week! A woman of some gentility at one time, too, I should fancy."

"She belongs to those who are dead, I suppose?"

"Indeed, no; I hope not. It was only two months ago that I knew of her."

Outwardly he was quite calm, but there was a deadly sickness in his heart. Some one passed by and said that land was in sight.

"The land and the old luck!" muttered Gilbert under his breath.

His eyes sought the woman by his side. She was intent upon her needlework, beautiful, radiant, happy—a woman as "good as gold"; how much better than his gold?

"What must I do for her sake?" he thought.

New York is a great, rambling place, but to Gilbert Rhode Jeans it was stifling. At times he contemplated a sudden flight on the pretense of urgent business. But she was so happy amid the whirl of visits and receptions, and he could not leave her side. No; he must wait and meet the blow. He felt it was inevitable, but, fascinated, he could not retreat.

And one day it came—though it was not exactly the kind of blow he had expected.

There was a prelude to its delivery. It happened in his wife's boudoir, when Mrs. Albert Forshaw, now a successful dressmaker, came to visit her old patroness.

She fell on her knees and kissed her hand, big, earnest tears in her eyes.

"Angel," she murmured, "how can I ever bless and thank you enough?"

Her benefactress raised her gently. Could this be the wreck of a woman she had seen lying in the gutter? The hollow cheeks were filled out, the wasted figure rounded, the rag had given place to a neat black gown. A glow of pride swept through her veins. Yes, she had rescued this woman;

she had picked her out of the morass and put her on the high road to a life worthy of the name.

"You must not call me angel," she said, choking back her emotion. "I will have no title except my husband's. I am Mrs. Rhode Jeans."

"I read all about your marriage. How I hope you will always be happy!"

"Ah! I am happy; I shall always be happy! I have the dearest husband in the world!" She laughed gayly in the fullness of her joy; then checked herself, remembering the tragedy of the other's life.

"Forgive me for parading my happiness. Your fate was so different. Have you ever heard anything of—of him?"

"No, nothing." Her eyes gleamed. "But if I did! Ah, I have dreamed such revenges!"

"You loved him?"

"Yes, I loved him once; but now—"

She turned aside, hatred fierce and relentless imprinted on her face. And as she turned there was Albert Forshaw, her husband, looking straight at her. It was his portrait on the mantel shelf, and it bore the autograph, "Gilbert Rhode Jeans."

So the great millionaire was Albert Forshaw, a scamp and a bigamist! What a revenge was here! Fate had done well as well as the man—was a "but." There was the woman as well as the man—the woman who stood near her, the woman through whom she was alive today, through whom she was well nourished and warmly clothed, through whom she lived no longer in a filthy garret.

"That's in the garret!" She saw it all again, and heard that gentle voice saying, "How sorry might my fate have ordained that you should be in my place and I in yours; then you would have helped me, wouldn't you?"

There are moments in life when we seem to go through ages of torment. Here was this woman goaded one way by the cry for revenge, urged the other by the soft voice of gratitude. The contending forces seemed to wage an endless battle. And yet, weak woman though she was, she beat down the stronger force and gave forgiveness the victory. Her lips never told of her discovery.

It was the next morning that the blow fell upon him—not the shattering blow he had anticipated, but a blow that left a wound that would not heal.

It came in a long letter. "Your gold is dress," she concluded; "but she is gold, true gold, and shall not be the washed. Though I have broken my oath to be revenged, I shall take it gladly again if you blot one speck of sunshine out of her life."