

UNENDING.

There is an end to kisses and to sighs:
There is an end to laughter and to tears.
An end to faint things that delight our eyes.
An end to pleasant sounds that charm our ears.

LAMBSWORTHY'S BURGLAR

It did not end happily—not for Harry Seymour, that is to say; but it provided some excellent entertainment while it lasted and is talked about in Wicketsfield to-day.

I don't want to attribute unworthy motives to him. As a matter of fact, I liked him very much; so let us give him the benefit of the doubt and say he had grown to adore Miss Cardonnel because Miss Cardonnel was adorable.

No two fellows could possibly have been more unlike than Stephen and Harry Seymour. Harry, dashing, good-humored, high spirited and handsome; Stephen, meek, nervous and with next to nothing to say for himself.

"Confound him!" he said, "what does he want here? Can't he read in town just as well?"

"Well, you forget," I said, "Lambsworthy may be said to be the discoverer of Wicketsfield. At all events, neither you nor I would ever have come down here if it had not been that he was always talking about it.

"I don't want him," he said, "I don't get on with him; he is your friend, not mine, and he bores me. He is like a young lady and he wears spectacles."

"He wears spectacles because he is short-sighted," I observed; "and as to being like a young lady, that is all rot, Seymour! Anyhow, if he is such a complete duffer, why need you mind his coming?"

"What do you mean?" asked Harry, sharply. "You are annoyed at his arrival because you are afraid you may find your nose out of joint when he appears. I say if he is such a duffer why need you be alarmed?"

"Oh! pooh, pooh, rubbish!" said Seymour, "I'm afraid of Stephen Lambsworthy? That is too rich—that is really funny!" He made a loud noise, which I understood was meant to represent laughter.

"Well, that's all right," I said. "I am glad for your sake, you are so confident. I assume, however, that you won't deny she encouraged him when we all came down here? Because I saw her with you, and I saw her with him, and I say she did!"

"She flirted with him," said Seymour, tolerantly; "she flirted with him a little, yes! Why not? A girl must amuse herself. I do not complain of that."

"That's lucky," I replied; "singularly fortunate—for your own piece of mind. His letter says he will be with us tomorrow. He wants me to look out for a room for him."

"Cannot our landlady accommodate the gentleman?"

"No," I said, "she can't now with a bedroom, that is! He will come in here to meals, of course, but he will have to sleep out of the house."

Seymour shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say that he was really indifferent as to the arrangements, and lounged away in the direction of the Parade, where, I have no doubt, he expected to meet the Cardonnels, as was his daily custom.

I am ashamed to say that I neglected to engage a shake-down for Lambsworthy that afternoon, and as he arrived by an earlier train than the one he had mentioned on the morrow, it devolved upon him to go around and explore for himself after he got in.

he had had tea at his friend's, the Cardonnels, in the mean time, and as he told us he had secured a comfortable little room in the next street to us. He inquired at what hour we breakfasted and promised us not to be late. He was so very lively and talkative for Lambsworthy that I felt the fair Norah had been agreeable in their interview, and I fancy Harry Seymour had the same idea, for he scowled at his whiskey and water daskly and failed to chaff the other as brilliantly as was his wont.

I do not think that Seymour and I had turned in more than a quarter of an hour, when there came a violent knocking at the street door, and peering out from my window, I saw Lambsworthy standing on the step, with his portmanteau in his hand and his hat on the back of his head.

"Wondering what he had come back for, I slipped on some things and ran down and let him in.

"What is it?" called Seymour, as I passed his room.

"It's Lambsworthy," I answered; "perhaps his landlady is out, and he can't get in."

It transpired that the house in which he had been going to sleep had been broken into. Lambsworthy was greatly upset. The landlady, who had been spending the evening out, and had only returned a few minutes before himself, met him in the passage in a state of terrible consternation. Her bedroom door, which she had locked before she left had been forced open. The hasp was wrenched off, and the wardrobe and chest of drawers had been rifled of all their contents.

"The room is in a most dreadful condition," said Stephen, "and the woman, poor creature, is almost off her head. She said that she had never had such an experience before. I waited till a neighbor came in to keep her company—she was frightened to be left alone in the house—or I should have been back sooner. You must make up a bed on the sofa for to-night, you fellows."

"Why didn't you stay there as you intended?" said Seymour, who had joined us. "They haven't stolen the beds have they?"

"Well," said Lambsworthy, slowly. "Do you know, it is strange, but it didn't occur to me. It gave me such a shock the whole thing; it was so unexpected, that my own idea was to get away as soon as I could. And they have sent to the station and the police will be here very soon. There is no sign of how the burglars effected an entrance. It would really have been very unpleasant to sleep there."

"Funks!" said Seymour, under his breath; and though I know that Lambsworthy was not a coward, I could see myself his nerves were a little out of order, too.

If confirmation had been needed, I should have got it, as a banging came at the street door again, and a thrill voice was heard asking if "Mr. Lambsworthy" lived there.

Stephen jumped up and went out, coming back to say that it was the servant, who had been sent to inquire if he would step around at 11 o'clock to-morrow, or if he would be here at the cottage, in case his evidence was wanted.

"I said I would go with pleasure," he explained. "But I do not see what 'evidence' I can give."

"Nor can anybody else see it either!" returned Seymour. "My dear fellow, is it possible you don't understand what the girl came for really? She was sent to see if you had given a false address of not. The police are suspecting you."

I thought Mr. Lambsworthy would have fallen.

"Suspecting me?" he ejaculated. "Certainly; very naturally, too. You go to a house, a perfect stranger. You engage a room, are furnished with a latch-key; and the same evening, while the landlady is out, a burglary takes place—a burglary never having occurred there before. If they had found no 'Mr. Lambsworthy' living here, there would have been a warrant issued for your arrest."

"Do you think that is so, old fellow?" asked Stephen, appealing to me with big eyes.

I admitted that it sounded probable. I, however, added that his respectability was a very easy matter to prove, even if it should still be doubted, and after he had regained his composure, we improvised a shake down for him on the couch, and we all retired.

How can I describe the development? Lambsworthy went around to the scene of the late commotion at 11 o'clock next morning as he had promised; and, when he came back, he was in the nearest approach of a rage that I had ever seen him in.

"Old chap, the wretch does suspect me!" he exclaimed. "Seymour was right! She gave my deposit back, and said if it was all the same to me she would rather not let the room. Of course, I said I did not mind; and as she was rather inclined to be high-handed, I added that on the whole, I did not know that I should fancy bringing my luggage there. I said it was 'rather a dangerous proceeding for a lady to go out and leave a house to take care of itself.' And what do you think she answered?"

"I cannot guess, Lambsworthy."

"She said it was a good deal more dangerous to take a lodger without a reference. I told her if she dared to hint at her infernal suspicions to her neighbors I'd have her held up for slander, and so I will! I never heard of such a thing."

He was in a state of great excitement all day, recounting the affair over and over again to Seymour and Miss Cardonnel and myself. I am bound to say that I got a little tired of it, but Seymour roared with laughter every time, and I caught a look in Norah Cardonnel's eyes that augured badly for him in consequence. If nobody else was sympathetic the young lady was.

Harry Seymour disappeared during the afternoon—went for a long tramp, he said—and I had the indignant Lambsworthy all to myself until he returned.

When he did come back he said he had noticed a card with "Apartments to Let" on it in a window just around the corner, and suggested to Stephen obtaining a room in the house.

"This looks a good, substantial kind of domicile," he said; "one not likely to be burglarized! Wouldn't do for the next place you choose to be broken into you know, Lambsworthy; that would be really damning!"

He came back and told us he had settled. "But," he said, "do you know I'm nervous! What Seymour said is true, and it might happen that the same kind of thing occurred there! What should I do if there were a robbery there, too, to-night. Why, I should be taken up; I am certain I should!"

"Sure thing!" said Seymour, exploding afresh. "Console yourself by remembering that coincidences like that don't happen!"

He was very amiable to Lambsworthy that evening, pressing him to try his tobacco after supper, and shaking hands with him warmly when they said "Good night." He, however, did not want to go to bed after the other's departure; he said he should sit up and smoke, and begged me to do likewise.

"It's quite early," he said, "not 11. Sit up with me, and we'll turn in, if you want to, as soon as I've finished this pipe."

I consented. As a matter of fact, he had never been better company, and I was just laughing heartily at a story he was telling me when—

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, turning pale, "that can't be Lambsworthy come back again to-night? Who is it?"

"Better open the door and see," replied Seymour philosophically.

It was being beaten wildly as I bolted into the passage. Another instant and my worst fears were verified. Lambsworthy stood before me with chattering teeth, the portmanteau—the accused portmanteau—by his side.

"Burglars?" he gasped. "Yes! For the Lord's sake, give me some whiskey, old man, I'm feeling ill!"

He followed me into the sitting room and fell into a chair.

"It is the same thing," he muttered. "Just the same thing. The house had been broken into when I got there, and no clue—no clue. The man showed me the room; everything scattered and upside down. Seymour, I shall go mad!"

He seemed in measurable distance of it—even Seymour was concerned. It certainly seemed like fatality. Wherever the poor fellow went there was a burglary; his name would be one the tongues of all Wicketsfield directly. There was never anything known like it.

We gave him whiskey and more whiskey, and after that whiskey again. Whether he slept when we left him at last on the couch I do not know, but his face was as white as a sheet in the morning and when Mr. and Mrs. Cardonnel called with their daughter they were aghast at his appearance.

"It is perfectly extraordinary!" exclaimed Norah, "and as to the police, who can allow such things?"

Words failed her to express her contempt for the stupidity of the police.

"I tell you what," said Mr. Cardonnel, "I should go to the station myself if I were you. Confound it all, we will go at once. Something must be done, and without delay."

I noticed that in a moment Seymour was almost as pale as Lambsworthy. I was even prepared to hear him offer an objection.

"I should not do that, sir—if I may presume to advise," he said. "I should wait a day or two."

"And why, sir?" demanded Mr. Cardonnel, peremptorily; "why should we wait an hour?"

"Yes," echoed Norah, haughtily; "why should we wait five minutes, Mr. Seymour?"

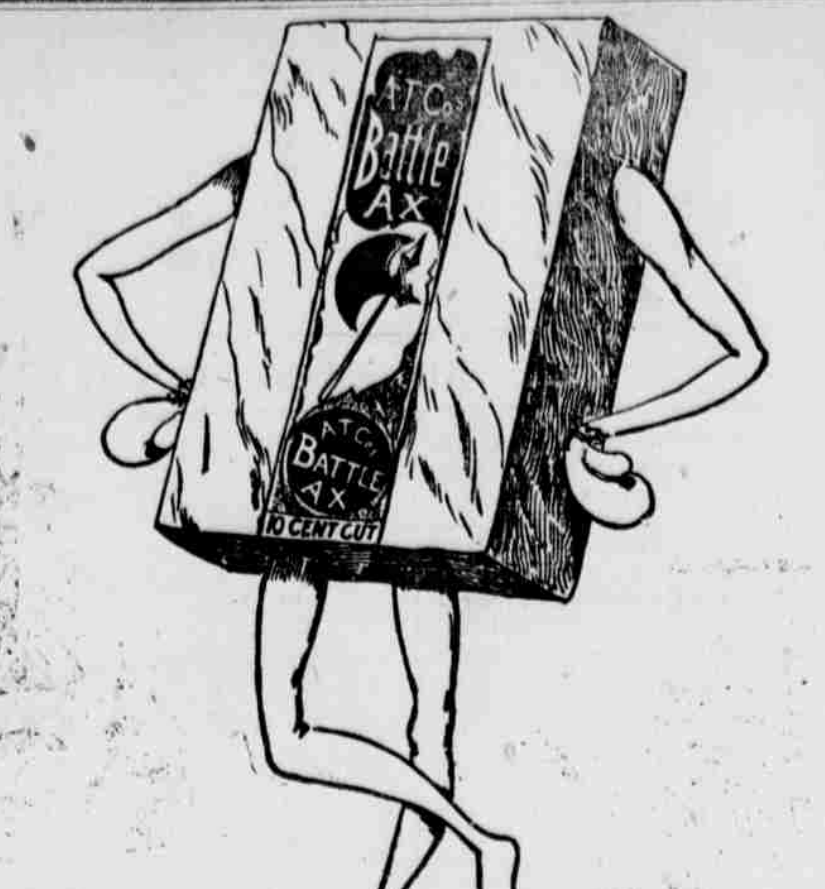
"We will go now," cried Stephen; "I thank you for the suggestion. We will go at once, and I will see the inspector myself."

Seymour sat playing nervously with an ash tray on the table. He seemed to be trying to speak, and to have lost his voice. At last he said jerkily, and with an attempt to laugh.

"To tell the truth, everybody, you are spoiling a practical joke of mine. Lambsworthy was so very concerned at the first burglary that I thought how extremely funny it would be if the same thing occurred in the next house he tried. The landlord is my tobaccoist, and—well there wasn't a burglary last night at all; it was just arranged between us for a lark!—that's all."

If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget Miss Cardonnel's look of contempt as he finished speaking; and I don't think Seymour will forget it either. Her papa's violent opinion of practical jokes and jokers paled into insignificance beside it, and Lambsworthy's good-natured assurance that "no harm was done" fell perfectly unheeded in the room.

Yes; Norah became Mrs. Stephen Lambsworthy, and refused to invite Seymour to the wedding. Whether affairs would have ended like that in the ordinary course, I don't know; but that is how they did end, and Seymour, at least, has always been convinced that he has only himself to thank for it.



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