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BY

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Judkins' Elopement

—OR—

AN UNPLEASANT SITUATION.

MR. JUDSON JUDKINS was a widower. He had been in this state of uncertainty for about five years, when the little affair which I am about to tell you of occurred. At that time Mr. Judson Judkins was about fifty-two years of age, and he ought to have known better than to get himself into a situation from which he could not extricate himself. But then people hardly ever do know what they really ought to know, and Mr. Judkins was no exception. And then he didn't think that he was getting himself into a bad fix, though if he had just stopped to consider—but you see, he didn't have any time to consider. He was obliged to go somewhere, and so he went, and the result was that he found himself in a very unpleasant situation indeed. Mr. Judkins was the father of two lovely children. The eldest, Harry, was about the loveliest child, I think, that I ever saw. He had the most beautiful brown curls, and the handsomest eyes, and sweet mouth! And then he had such pretty ways, and he was so "tunin'" for a child of his age (he was only twenty-seven years and two months old), that I'm sure no properly constructed female could help loving him.

The second child, named Mary, was also very lovely. At least, all the young men in Bradford thought so; and if a complexion like new milk, hair like threads of gold, eyes like violets, and an indescribable expression over all, that was charming in itself, could make any female child of twenty-four summers lovely, then Mary Judkins was.

Mr. Judkins owned a fine house, situated in the outskirts of the town of Bradford, and Mary had the entire charge of it, and every summer they had it filled with company, generally their relations from the city, who came out of the dust and smoke once a year to breathe the fresh air, drink real milk, revel in strawberries and cream, and enjoy themselves to their heart's content, in the way best suited to themselves.

It was a day in June. "Then, if ever, come perfect days," as the poet says, and this was a perfect day. Warm, cloudless, beautiful!

Miss Mary Judkins was seated at the window of their cosy little sitting-room, Miss Florence Richmond, Mary's cousin, was reclining on the lounge, reading one of Miss Muloch's novels, Mrs. Mugworth, Mr. Judkin's half-sister, fast asleep in the great rocking-chair, and Mr. Judkins himself was out on the veranda, smoking a cigar, and reading "Tristram Shandy," when Harry drove into the yard, with a young lady in the carriage beside him.

"There's Jennie!" cried Mary, starting up and running to the door.

Harry was just helping her out of the carriage when Mary appeared, and of course they fell into each other's arms, and kissed.

How Harry's mouth must have watered! and I think my mouth would have watered too, had I been there, for Miss Jane Louisa Gushington was one of the most bewitching little beauties that ever wore button-boots. A laughing-eyed brunette, with rosy cheeks, and ripe luscious lips, through which the pearls shone; a round plump little form, a neat foot, and an ankle—O! Hiram Powers!

Well, we won't say anything about that ankle, or those ankles, (for she had two of 'em), because, well, because my wife says that it would be decidedly improper.

Mary and her friend came toward the house, leaving Harry to drive round to the stable, and as they stepped onto the veranda, Mr. Judkins, who had thrown down "Tristram," came forward to meet the new guest.

"O father," said Mary, "this is my dear friend, Jennie Gushington, whom I have so often spoken of to you. We were school-mates you know, at Madame De Vinchy's."

"Ah, indeed! And so this is Jennie? Well, my dear, how do you do?" and Mr. Judkins held out both of his great hands and took both of Jane Louisa's little hands and he squeezed them, and he looked, for all the world, as if he was tickled half to death.

Well Jane Louisa said she was "pretty well, I thank you, sir," and then Mr. Judkins released her hands, and Mary conducted her into the house, where she had to be introduced to Florence and Mrs. Mugworth, and then they went up stairs, and Jane Louisa was seen no more until tea-time.

Meantime Mr. Judson Judkins walked up and down the veranda, holding "Tristram Shandy" before his eyes, with a cigar in his mouth, and a smile on his face, dreaming with his eyes wide open.

Yes, Mr. Judson Judkins was dreaming of love. To state the case plainly, he was in love, and that was what tickled him so.

Now Mr. Judkins wasn't like some widowers that you've seen. He wasn't the man to fall in love with the first pretty face that crossed his path. I should rather think not. He had married once to please somebody else, and now he was going to marry to please himself—that is, if he married at all, which he really had no notion of doing, until he saw Miss Jane Louisa Gushington.

The moment he saw her, he felt that he loved her. He fancied that she was the woman for whom he had been waiting all his life—his "spirit-mate," you understand; and he didn't stop to think, or bother himself about disparity of age, though of course he knew that she wasn't more than twenty-five, while he was over fifty-two.

But pshaw! what are years to a man in love? Mr. Judkins looked young. There wasn't a gray hair in his head, and hardly a wrinkle on his face, and he felt as youthful, as a boy of fifteen.

Miss Gushington was bewitching enough in her travelling dress, but when she appeared at the tea-table, in a filmy muslin I am sure she was lovely enough to have melted the heart of a stone, to say nothing about such a very soft heart as that which beat in the capacious bosom of Mr. Judson Judkins.

He led her to the piano, and turned the music for her, and he sang an old love song, and he looked a whole volume of love songs, and he felt himself the very personification of love. And she sang, and Mr. Judkins believed himself in some enchanted land. He was entranced, bewitched, intoxicated with melodious sounds, and sweet imaginings.

To quote the words of his son, "The old gentleman was fairly bedeviled."

You would have thought so could you have seen him shortly afterwards. Mary was at the piano, and Jane Louisa and Mr. Judkins were out on the veranda, waltzing by moonlight. He hadn't waltzed before in twenty years, and he never had been a natural waltzer. He whirled about as gracefully as a clothes-horse might be expected to, should the kitchen furniture be suddenly seized with a mania for waltzing; and he grew dizzy and Jane Louisa supported him—but that was rather agreeable, of course.

The courtship of Mr. Judkins, thus happily begun, went on smoothly. Gradually he gave Miss Gushington to understand the state of his heart. She was just a little bit surprised at first, but that was all. She confessed to herself that she could have loved Harry better than Judson, but Harry wouldn't give her a chance to love him, and so she concluded that she might as well

set her affections on his father, particularly as she could see that the latter was terribly in love.

There was no sentimentalism about Miss Gushington. She was one of that kind of women that would make almost any man a good and affectionate wife, but there was no danger of her ever dying of a broken heart. She was determined to marry, and if she couldn't get just the man that she wanted, she would take the next best. And so, failing, as she thought, to reach the heart of Harry, she accepted the heart of Mr. Judkins, and promised to become his bride.

There was only one person in the world that Mr. Judkins was afraid of, and that person was his daughter Mary. He didn't dare to tell her that he was about to do what would generally be considered a very ridiculous thing; and so he cautioned Miss Gushington against telling any one of their engagement.

"We can't be married here," said he. "And no one must know that we have any thought of marrying. But I'll tell you how we can manage it, my dear. Name the day yourself, and the sooner it comes the better it will please me;" and Mr. Judkins stopped to squeeze Jane Louisa's hand and I believe he kissed her, but I'm not so certain of that.

"There's a train passes through Bradford for the city, at fifteen minutes past five in the morning. Not one of the family will be up at that time, and we can leave the house and the town without disturbing anybody. Upon arriving in the city we can be married, and then we can start on our wedding tour, to be gone as long as we please, long enough certainly, to give the Bradford people time to get through talking about us. And by that time, probably Mary, will have become resigned to the state of affairs."

Mr. Judkins wasn't quite sure that she would be resigned, but he tried to flatter himself that she would.

"But," said Jane Louisa, "wont the family be anxious when they find we are both gone?"

"O, I'll make that all right," replied Mr. Judkins. "I'll tell Mary the night before that I am going away in the early morning train, and when we get ready to start, I'll place a note on the table for Mary, explaining all."

And so that was the way it was settled, and meantime everything went on as usual, and no one suspected that Mr. Judkins was in love with Miss Gushington, and that they had their elopement already planned.

I said that no one suspected that Mr. Judkins was in love. Perhaps, I had better take that back, for Harry did suspect that something was the matter with the paternal Judkins. As he said to Mary, he didn't know whether the old gentleman was really in love, or only a little 'loony,' but he thought that he was rather too fond of Miss Gushington's society, considering his age.

"Why, you don't think father would marry, do you, Harry?"

"I hope he won't marry Miss Gushington," said he.

"But do you think he would marry any woman?" asked Mary.

But Harry didn't know how to answer that question, and so didn't try.

"He's apparently very fond of Jennie," said he.

"And are you jealous," returned his sister, laughing; "but you need not be, for Jennie wouldn't marry father, if he wanted her ever so bad. Why, only think, father is fifty-two, and Jennie is only twenty-five."

But Harry wasn't convinced. He was still suspicious, very suspicious, and he hadn't the courage to settle his doubts by making a marriage proposal to the young lady, for, singular as it may seem, he was in love with Jennie, although she knew it not.

And that is strange, you say, and I admit it. Most women will read a man's heart

better than he can read it himself, and why Miss Jane Louisa Gushington did not see that Harry adored her, is a question that I cannot answer.

But to continue: The fifth day of August was the day appointed for the elopement. Mr. Judson had made all necessary preparation, and he had told Mary that he was going into the city on the early morning train, to be gone all day, and he had written an explanatory letter to be left on the table on the morning of the fifth, and he had retired to his room, there to pack his valise, which being soon done, he undressed and got into bed.

Now the night of the fourth of August was excessively warm. To be plain about the matter, it was decidedly hot.

Mr. Judkins couldn't sleep a wink. He rolled all over the bed, and then he rolled all over the floor, and the perspiration rolled from every pore but there was no sleep for Mr. Judkins.

The hours rolled on, but they rolled very slowly, or so thought Mr. Judkins. He heard the clock strike every hour. At last when it struck four he bounced out of bed and throwing on a dressing-gown, he left the room.

"I'll take a shower-bath," said Mr. Judkins as he went down stairs.

Now the shower-bath was situated in the rear of the kitchen, and to reach it he had to pass through the sitting-room and a long entry. But at that hour in the morning there was little danger of his meeting any one.

Mr. Judkins reached it in safety, took his bath, which was really the most comfortable thing he had taken for the last twenty-four hours, "and now," said he "where is the towel?"

He should have thought of that before, for there wasn't any towel there.

"But I know where Mary keeps 'em," said he. "They're in the sitting-room closet; and as it's so early in the morning I'll run in just as I am, for I don't want to wet my dressing-gown."

And so Mr. Judkins ran in just as he was, and he got the towel, and was running back, when he heard Bridget coming down the back stairs, for she, having heard Mr. Judkins, thought it was time to get up, and was now coming down the stairs into the long entry, just in time to intercept her master.

"Well, I'll go back to my room then," said Mr. Judkins, jumping out of the long entry just as Bridget stepped in.

"But, hush! egad, there's somebody coming down the front stairs," cried he, "and I believe it's Jane Louisa. O, what shall I do?"

What could he do? He must hide somewhere, of course. He wasn't dressed to receive callers you know. He hadn't got his watch-guard on, and consequently he felt rather embarrassed.

Well, right across one corner of the sitting-room was a sofa, and in behind it there was room enough for a man to hide quite comfortably, and there Mr. Judson Judkins hid, and he wasn't a moment too soon, for Miss Gushington came in immediately, and seated herself upon the sofa to wait for her lover.

Mr. Judkins waited for her to go, and she waited for him to come, and, of course, they both waited in vain.

At length the clock struck five, but still Mr. Judkins didn't put in an appearance. Jane Louisa asked herself what could be the matter, but she could give no satisfactory answer. Had her lover overslept himself? It looked very much like it, and so she determined to wait until he did come down and then ask him if that was the way he kept his appointments.

"Well, this is a go," thought Mr. Judkins, as the time passed on, and his lady-love showed no signs of leaving the room. Then he came to the conclusion that it didn't seem so much like "a go," as it did like a stay.

The early train had gone, but still Miss Gushington waited. She was getting angry,

not only with Mr. Judkins, but with herself. An elopement was well enough. It was romantic but she could see no romance in getting ready to elope with a lover who was so lethargic as to sleep when the god of love was calling upon him to awaken; and she was angry with herself for ever having allowed such a sleepy lover to beguile her.

At six o'clock Mary came down, and was much surprised to find that Jennie had become such an early riser.

"Were you up when father went away?" "I haven't seen your father this morning," replied Jennie.

"And I hope you won't, just at present," thought Mr. Judkins.

Mary went out to the kitchen to see about the breakfast, but Jennie kept her post, and Mr. Judkins kept his.

By-and-by the rest of the family came down, and they all went out to breakfast.

"Now is my time," whispered Mr. Judkins, as he rose from his cramped position.

But just as he arose, Bridget entered the room, passed through, and went up stairs.

"What shall I do now?" Mr. Judkins asked himself. "Bridget has gone up to make the beds, and if I run up stairs, I shall be sure to meet her. O dear, what a fix I am in!"

But as there didn't seem to be anything that he could do, he was obliged to remain a fixture, and soon the family returned to the sitting-room. Shortly after, the ladies with the exception of Jennie, went out for a ride. Harry was in his room.

"And now," thought Mr. Judkins, "if Miss Gushington would only go out for a walk, why I should be all right."

But unfortunately for that gentleman, she showed no disposition to "take the air." Seating herself on the sofa, with her work in her hands, and a book on her lap, she began to read, and between sentences, she would stop to think.

People don't generally like to be made fools of, and Miss Gushington was no exception; but that she had been made a fool of she did not for one moment doubt, for what else could she think? Mr. Judkins had certainly gone to the city. Harry had heard his father go down stairs at about four o'clock, he said. He had gone and left her without one word of explanation. What could she think of such conduct? She knew not what to think.

"I'll leave Bradford this very day," she said to herself; but just then Harry came down stairs.

This young gentleman took a turn up and down the room, revolving a very serious question in his mind.

Miss Gushington was watching him from under her long eyelashes. Suddenly he turned and stood before her, but she did not raise her eyes.

"Miss Gushington," said Harry, "you know me pretty well. Do you know me well enough, think you, to trust your happiness in my keeping?"

"Why—why, Mr. Judkins what do you mean?" cried Jennie throwing down her work.

Mr. Judson Judkins groaned.

"O!" screamed Jane Louisa, "what was that?"

"The dog," answered Harry. "Come here, Tiger;" but Tiger didn't come.

"I was sure some one groaned," said Jane Louisa.

"'Twas but the dog."

"Well, you were saying," said she, once more reassured, "that, well I didn't understand exactly what you meant."

Harry took her hand. She didn't try to withdraw it.

"Will you, dear, give me this hand, and with it your heart? Will you give them to keep always?"

"On conditions," she answered, and she spoke very calmly indeed.

"The conditions are not very hard."

"What are they?"

"There is only one—that you marry me to-day."

"Why such haste?"

"It is a foolish whim of mine perhaps. You can call it so. I am going to leave Bradford to-day, and it only remains for you to say whether it shall be as Mrs. Judkins or Miss Jennie Gushington."

Again Mr. Judson Judkins groaned.

"Confound the dog!—you shall leave here as Mrs. Harry Judkins."

"O! the house is haunted!" screamed Miss Gushington, falling into her lover's arms.

"Pshaw! 'twas Tiger," and then Harry kissed her.

That kiss restored her, and she gave Harry one in return.

"Will you go to the minister's now, darling?" she asked.

"What, before Mary returns? Shall we go alone?"

"Yes, alone, and at once."

"Why, one would think that you hadn't