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**MRS. GRAHAM'S MYSTERY.**

"DID you ever know anything so provoking?" exclaimed Nina Goodall.

The words were addressed to Janet Keelder, who, all ready to attend the same reunion, had entered the room to assist her pretty cousin.

"Provoking! What is provoking?" she asked, as her eyes rested on the vexed features of the other. What has put you out dear?"

"Nothing less than this letter—come this instant from papa. Only think, he writes that he has just heard that an old friend of his in London, arrived lately from India, and that he is going to call here this evening. So, as papa has business which will keep him late, he says I must stop at home and receive this importation. It's some Nabob, I suppose, with a face as yellow as his gold."

"Perhaps he may not be quite as bad as that," smiled Janet.

"It little matters, coz, whether he be or no," was the petulant response. "He will hinder my being present at the Gramms to-night, that is certain; and I did so wish to go! When I am almost dressed, too! I wish I had started half an hour earlier!"

"Poor George Merston! He will bear no love to this nabob," remarked Janet, "when he finds he is the cause of your absence."

"George Merston, indeed!" exclaimed Nina, with a coquettish toss of her golden curls. "Janet, I must request you will not thus mention his name in connection with mine. He is well enough to flirt with, but further—why, he is only a bar-rister, and I suspect, briefcase."

No, dear, the true reason why I am so vexed at remaining at home is by being disappointed in seeing that rich stranger who is to be there. Mrs. Graham's Mystery I call him, for she will not tell us a word about him, save that his wealth is enormous; while in her lively way, she has set all the girls mad about him, by declaring he is yet perfectly heart whole, and is looking for a wife; so that all of us have a chance—and I think I stand as good a one as any."

And the bright blue eyes looked with conscious pride into the glass.

"As good, if not better, Nina. You know you are the acknowledged belle of our set," answered Janet, the expression of whose sweet face denoted a mind far above mean jealousy.

"Oh, what a terrible flatterer you are Janet—worse, I declare, than poor George Merston! But," and the fair features again became sadly overcast, "I cannot tell how I can laugh when I am so ex-cruciatingly vexed. Not to go, after I have been building up my hopes all the week! After I have resolved to make conquest of this stranger; because of an Indian, too! It is provoking!"

"Can nothing be arranged?"

"That I might go? Oh, you darling Janet. I wish there could. You have a wise little head, but I don't think you can do that."

"Well, I don't know; if you think that I could receive this Nabob as well as you, Nina?"

"You? But then you would have to give up the party. Oh, I will not permit that!"

"No hardship to me!" laughed Janet. "I care nothing for this lion of the evening, this Mystery; and, having a headache, as I told you at dinner, I shall be only delighted for an excuse to stop away."

At first Nina, who was at heart very good-natured, but rather vain, would not hear of this proposition; but gradually her refusals grew fainter, yielding and yielding to her great desire to go, and finally succumbing to Janet's persuasions, she finished her toilet, while her cousin gladly removed her own. Then, kissing the latter over and over again, declaring she was the kindest, sweetest and most generous girl in existence, Nina Goodall, all her light-heartedness returned, and her pretty face a picture of dimples, stepped into the cab, and drove off to do homage to the "Mystery;" while with a sigh of relief, Janet proceeded to the drawing room to await the arrival of the Nabob.

An hour passed, during which Janet had worked a little, sang a little, and played a little, when a loud knock at the hall door informed her the Nabob had arrived. Rather curious, she hurried from the piano, and taking up her work, awaited his coming.

Her impatience was not put to a severe test; the door soon opened and the servant announced:

"Mr. Edmund Webster."

Janet quietly arose, then was seized with an embarrassment foreign to her calm nature. The fact being that Nina's words had so impressed her that she should behold in the stranger a true specimen of one who had lost all his best years, and dried up all his healthful blood in the East, that she was fairly startled when, instead, her eyes rested on a gentleman scarcely more than thirty, the possessor of an erect figure, pleasant, genial face, adorned with a large beard and moustache of a deep red brown, and large soft eyes of the same hue, which seemed to penetrate into the spectator's inmost soul, as, partly surprised, partly amused at her confusion, he advanced toward her,

Speedily recovering herself, however, with an easy grace, she welcomed the stranger, and apologized for her uncle's absence.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Miss Goodall?" asked Mr. Webster, as he took the seat she assigned him near the fire.

"Oh, no," smiled Janet. "I am Janet Keelder, Mr. Goodall's niece. He is my guardian. But as Miss Goodall had unavoidably to be absent this evening I offered to fill her place, and endeavor to make the time pass as pleasantly as I could to one whom my uncle seems so to esteem, till he should return."

"There is little doubt of your easily succeeding in that endeavor," rejoined the gentleman, gallantly. "Besides those natural capabilities I am sure you possess, I observe here many means to kill time," he said, as his eyes rested on the harp, piano and music books; then added: "If it be not a rudeness, might I ask whether it was your voice I heard singing that old, old English ballad of Dr. Ahn's, 'Water Parted From the Sea?'"

"Oh, it is 'old, old' indeed," laughed Janet. "So very old and out of date, that I only treat myself to it when alone."

"Why so, may I ask? Yet I can guess. The English ballad now a days, is banished from our drawing rooms, its place usurped by bravuras, endless trills, and senseless runs. But when we come across it, how sweet, how soothing are its soft, simple tones!—especially, my dear Miss Keelder, to those who have been long absent from home, and accustomed to the shrieking (called melody) of young ladies, who, after having been well coached, are drifted to India on matrimonial speculations. Pardon my disparaging the sex to one who forms so charming a member; but I speak, I hope, of the exception not the rule. To me the English ballad is a passion. Dare I, therefore, ask you to kindly humor my hobby, Miss Keelder, by imagining yourself still alone, and again singing that song. I remember it was one of my mother's."

Janet never required any of that absurd persuasion to do anything she knew she could do. So going to the piano, she tried to do her best; and that best was sweet, harmonious, soul-inspiring melody—at least Edmund Webster thought so.

Ballad after ballad was sung. Then chancing to come across "Flow on, thou Shining River," and Janet regretting she had no second, Edmund Webster offered to attempt it, and speedily proved himself the possessor of an excellent baritone, and a voice of good compass.

To both, the hours passed so pleasantly that each started when the clock struck out ten.

"Ten," exclaimed Edmund Webster, laughing. "Why, I had an appointment at nine, which I certainly ought to have kept. It is too late now, however. It is all owing to your ballads, Miss Keelder; therefore, as a penance, I must ask you to put up with my company, a little longer, to see if your uncle comes in."

Janet seemed no way loth, and the ballads proceeded, till interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Goodall.

It was about two in the morning when Janet was aroused from her first sleep by a light step in her room. Looking up, she perceived Nina, just returned, looking rather fatigued, her dress limp, and flowers faded.

"Well, dear coz," asked Janet, "how have you enjoyed the evening?"

"Oh, very much; excessively! but such a disappointment!"

"How? Anything about the rich stranger—the Mystery?" smiled Janet.

"Was he so dull and senseless as not to be caught?"

"I cannot tell, for he was never put to the test dear. Really everything has been provoking this evening. 'The Mystery,' after promising Mrs. Graham for certain he would look in to-night, never came."

"That was vexing, indeed!" remarked Janet. "You see, these millionaires are so conceited about their wealth, that they think etiquette has no rules for them."

"It appears so, indeed. But one thing I have learned, which is, he, too, comes from India, like our Nabob. By-the-by, dear, how did you get on with the old fellow? Was he not very yellow, besides a considerable bore? And did he not shiver at the mention of every draft, save that in reference to his banker's. Poor coz, what an evening you must have passed for my sake!"

"Believe me my darling, I am not a fit subject for commiseration, as I never spent such an agreeable evening before in all my life, for your description of the Nabob is the very reverse of what he is."

"Truly? Pray, in that case, describe him, Janet."

"Certainly. Then his complexion is healthy, and just bronzed enough to be manly. He is tall, has a good figure, a pleasant handsome face, an agreeable, winning smile, and large, clear brown eyes that seem to ask for, and deserve confidence. In conclusion, he is about thirty, and a passionate admirer of old English ballads."

"In which passion you could well humor him, coz. I declare, with your fervent description, I should fancy he had made an impression already. Eie! what

a blush! And now what is the name of this Amandis of Ind?"

"Edmund Webster. Why, Nina, what is the matter?"

Nina Goodall had suddenly sat down on the bedside, and was looking at her cousin with the profoundest amazement.

"Why—why, Edmund Webster is the name of Mrs. Graham's millionaire—her 'mystery.'"

Need more be said? Mrs. Graham's mystery and Mr. Goodall's friend were one and the same.

There is no knowing what the effect would have been, had the whole battery of Nina's bright eyes been leveled at Edward Webster when heart whole; but one quiet evening with sweet, good-tempered Janet, and her simple English ballads, had placed one image in his heart which an hour from Paradise would have been unable to efface.

Thus, four months after, Edmund Webster married Janet Keelder, or his little ballad singer, as he called her, who had made him on that evening of their introduction feel how the comforts of an English fireside might be realized.

Nina was woefully disappointed at first, but recovered after a while on finding that George Merston was more lovable, and not nearly so briefcase as she imagined. Eventually, she even got so far over her disappointment, as to laugh merrily with her cousin, when recalling how Janet's good nature had been the means of catching the substance, while she, Nina, was running after the shadow.

**Romantic Marriages.**

SOME months ago a gentleman residing in Illinois, wrote to an official in the youngest city of New England, stating that he was desirous of procuring a good wife; that he had heard so much of the excellence of the daughters of the Bay State, he was fully persuaded they would make the best of wives, and he requested the names of a few Haverhill ladies. The official, satisfied of the good standing of his correspondent, promptly forwarded to him the names of a few ladies, to each of whom the would-be Benedict despatched a letter, requesting an answer, with a view to further correspondence if mutually agreeable. One of the answers he received was from a native of this town, who at that time was in Haverhill, teaching the young idea how to shoot. Her's was a well-worded, straightforward epistle, and the recipient was at once impressed with the intelligence and good sense manifested by the writer. A correspondence ensued, which as it progressed served to strengthen the favorable opinion each had formed of the other; photographs were exchanged, and, to make a long story short, an engagement of marriage was entered into, and the gentleman is expected here shortly, when he will return to the Western home with his singular won bride. The lady is well educated, of spotless reputation, and possesses the necessary qualifications to make happy the home of her husband, who is a gentleman of integrity, culture and wealth, and well provided with the goods of this world. He is largely engaged in mercantile pursuits.

But this is not a solitary instance of an excellent lady contracting marriage under such romantic circumstances. A few years ago one of our factory operatives was recommended to a gentleman residing in San Francisco as a person likely to make him a good wife, by a mutual friend. He wrote to her, a correspondence was opened, cartes de visite were exchanged, and in a short time they were betrothed. Being unable conveniently to leave his business to come on here, the gentleman sent his fiancé a check for \$500, with which she procured a bridal outfit, and started alone for San Francisco, to marry the man she had never yet seen. Their nuptials were celebrated soon after her arrival, and the union has proved a most felicitous one. — *Boston Traveller.*

**Rather Long.**

BROOKS is an office boy, and is quite a character. He is about sixteen years old, and five feet ten inches in height, and proportionally narrow. A more brief and very graphic description of his physical build is expressed by him when speaking of himself. He says "Very little Brooks—principally legs." Brooks needed a renewal of that useful article of raiment known to him as "trousers," wherewith to protect the before-mentioned legs from the inclemency of the weather, and the vulgar gaze.

Brooks applied to a gentleman of the Jewish persuasion, who published to the world the fact that he manufactured raiment of every description. "By particular request," the tailor measured Brooks for the required article of clothing, insuring, at the same time, "a dead fit."—Our friend of the shears being of inquiring turn of mind—though we suspect some irony in his remark—thought to question his customer, as he inquired addressing Brooks:

"Does my fine shentleman wish any body to his pantaloon?"

Brooks answered, "Of course, I want a body to them. Who ever heard of breeches without a body?"

"Vell den," said the Jew, "if such is the case, den you must tie dem round your neck; vor help me Moses, I never saw such long legs before."

**SUNDAY READING.**

**The Little Loaf.**  
In a time of famine a rich man sent for the poorest children in the town, and said to them:

"There is a basket full of bread; you may each come every day and take a loaf until it pleases God to send better times."

The children attacked the basket, and disputed as to which should have the largest loaf, and then went away without once thanking their benefactor.

Only Frances, a very poor but cleanly girl, modestly remained behind, and had the smallest loaf which was left in the basket. She gratefully returned thanks and went home quietly. One day the children behaved very badly indeed, and poor Frances received a loaf very much smaller than the rest; but, when she took it home, and her mother cut it open, a number of pieces of silver fell on the floor.

The poor woman was astonished and said:

"Go and return this money immediately; it must have been put in the bread by mistake."

Frances went directly with it to the gentleman, who said:

"My dear child, it was no mistake. I had the money put in the loaf to reward you. Remain always as peaceable and contented. Those who are satisfied with little always bring blessings upon themselves and family, and will pass happy through the world. Do not thank me, but thank God, who put into your heart the treasure of a contented and grateful spirit, and who has given me the will and opportunity to be useful to those who are in need of assistance."

**The Great Want.**

Napoleon the Great was once asked by a distinguished woman, "What is the great want of France?" His reply was comprised in one word, "Mothers!" Should this question be asked to-day of this our land, what more appropriate and truthful answers could be given. Our wants! Mothers! true mothers! for it is the mother's influence which molds the character of the child, for good or evil; the mother makes the home, and homes make the State. Would we know the character of the State, we have but to enter the homes.

If it is true that the child is father to the man, does it not behoove us to search, with the most diligent scrutiny, into the influences which are brought to bear upon these young and plastic minds, and to mold those influences, so far as may be possible to us, by all and every lawful means which may present themselves, or rightfully be sought by us?

How much is contained in the small acorn cup! When a little child holds an acorn in his hand, it holds not a small nut only, but the whole forest; for, folded within its tiny shell lie trees and their children trees—even a whole forest. How wonderful was the command of God: "Let the earth bring forth \* \* \* the trees yielding fruit whose seed is within itself!" It is a great work to make a tree; but how much more wonderful to give to the tree the power of producing other trees for countless years! There is this self-multiplying power in all our acts. Love begets love, hate produces hate. Christian patience and courage have in them the seed of future heroism. Of nothing is it more true that its seed is itself than of our moral influences. How careful, then, should we be of each trivial act, since in its minute compass is enfolded the forest of a thousand full-grown deeds, each in their turn to fill the earth with germs of right or wrong.

Many men pass fifty or sixty years in the world, and when they are just going out of it they bethink themselves, and step back, as it were, to do something, which they had all the while forgotten—to wit, the main business for which they came into the world, to repent of their sins, and reform their lives, and make their peace with God, and in time prepare for eternity.

Dew falls but little upon the smooth and brilliant surface of polished steel or burnished gold, while coarser and less costly objects are freely wet. The gentle dew of the heavenly grace often takes effect upon the rude and uncultivated, while the refined, the tasteful and the critical are left, like frostwork, brilliant and beautiful, but cold and dead.

It is a terrible thought to remember that nothing can be forgotten. I have somewhere read, that not an oath is uttered that does not continue to vibrate through all time, in the wide-spreading current of sound; not a prayer lisped, that its record is not found stamped on the laws of nature by the indelible seal of the Almighty's will.—*Cooper.*

A worthy Quaker thus wrote: "I expect to pass through this world but once. If therefore, there can be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I will not pass this way again."

The darkest day in any man's year is that wherein he fancies there is some easier way of getting a dollar than by squarely earning it.