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A PROPOSAL IN THE DARK.

"YES, I will propose," said Mr. Patterson Conklin. "She expects me to, of course, and last night she gave me a pretty strong hint. When she sang, 'Why don't the men propose, Mamma?' I'm certain I caught her eye. Yes, and there was an interrogation point in her very glance. She expects it, she has a right to expect it, and I'll do it."

Mr. Conklin, having delivered himself thus, put on his coat and hat, and taking a cane under his arm, sallied out into the street.

Mr. Patterson Conklin was a bachelor of forty-five years. He was naturally predisposed to matrimony, and had been just on the point of committing it at least twenty times in as many years. There had been but one trouble—he could never bring himself to propose. He had courted more fair damsels than he had fingers and toes, and he had lost them all, merely because he couldn't or wouldn't ask them to name the day.

Now Mr. Conklin had been in love at least twenty times, and yet he remained unmarried. If you had asked him why it was thus, he would have answered you as follows: "Every true lover has these little loves before the great one comes; they are like those pretty pieces of carved wood which Columbus found floating in the Atlantic, forerunners and signs that he was drawing near his great goal and approaching the end of his wandering across the ocean.— Now I have reached the goal. The great love aforesaid has arrived. The lady upon whom I lavish this great love is most beautiful, and her name is Minnie Clelland. To-night I shall lay my heart and fortune at her feet."

This pretty little story about every true lover's little loves foretelling the greater one was not original with Mr. Conklin. He had found it in a novel that he had picked up one night at Minnie's.

But, leaving Mr. Patterson Conklin to pursue his way, we will, if you please, run on before, and taking a glimpse at the family of which his lady-love, the beautiful Minnie, was the bright particular star.

The family consisted of the Hon. Horace Clelland, M. C., very soft spoken, sweet tempered, round-bodied gentleman, over whose shining bald head fifty summers had bloomed and faded; Mrs. Clelland, a small black-eyed woman of forty, who honored her husband, and believed that his was the most towering and gigantic intellect that the world had ever seen, notwithstanding the fact that Dobbs, the editor of the opposition paper, persisted in calling him "an idiot," "a bag of wind," "a cat's paw for the party leaders," and other choice names too numerous to mention. Mrs. Clelland was slow to wrath, but if she could have fixed her hands in Dobbs' hair only once, his next editorial would have been written in pain and anguish, without a scalp to hide his emotions.

The other members of the family were Minerva, a maiden lady of forty-two, a sister of the Hon. Horace, and Minnie, the daughter, a sweet little creature, who had drunk the sunshine of twenty summers still bloomed in her cheeks, just as the old port her father had drank bloomed in his nose.

Upon this particular evening the family were gathered in an upper room, dignified by the name of Mr. Clelland's study. The honorable gentleman himself was pacing his room, with one hand behind him reading the evening paper aloud. Mrs. Clelland was listening with rapt attention to the mellow voice of her husband, the only music in which she took delight; Miss Clelland was knitting and occasionally casting a glance towards Mr. Billy Montgomery who was seated by the window with Minnie, whispering soft nonsense in her ear, as he held her little hand in his.

"I rather expected that Mr. Conklin would call this evening," said Mr. Clelland, laying down his paper.

"O, I hope he will!" cried Minnie, "and if he asks me to sing, I'll repeat the dose I gave him last evening. Did you notice how he blushed when I sang, 'Why Don't the Men Propose?'"

"And if he should propose?" queried the honorable Horace.

"I should accept of course," answered Minnie. "I never had a proposal in my life, and I am going to accept the first offer."

"Never had a proposal?" whispered the young gentleman in the window sill.

"No Bill."

"Then what the deuce—what have I been doing?"

"Well I don't know, Billy, I'm sure. I only know that you haven't asked me to marry you."

"But I'm not quite ready."

something that he had hardly ever done before.

"He is really very handsome," said Minnie, notwithstanding his age.

"Age, my dear, he is right in the prime of life."

Billy Montgomery began to feel like an infant. Poor fellow! he was only twenty-five. What made him feel still worse was the fact that the honorable Horace would not seem conscious of his appearance at all would not recognize the fact that must have been palpable enough to any one else, that he was madly in love with the fair Minnie, though the dear creature did tease him terribly. And now he was talking about her marrying another man, a man old enough to be her father, as coolly and calmly as if there was no such as a heart in the world. Was ever a young and ardent lover in a worse situation? I think not; that is, if you will be kind enough to except Leander that time he didn't swim the Hellespont.

"Well never mind his age," cried Minnie; he's a real nice gentleman, and he's very wealthy. I always thought I would like to be an old man's darling."

"But he hasn't proposed," said Miss Clelland, rising and leaving the room.

"And I pray that he never may!" groaned Billy.

"Why, upon my word, I believe Minerva is jealous," laughed Minnie.

"Nonsense!" cried the honorable Horace, "I believe I'll take a walk. Will you go Minnie?"

"No, thank you; I'll wait for my lover." The honorable gentleman went out smiling benignly. Mrs. Clelland strolled out in the garden, and Billy and Minnie were left alone.

"O Minnie how could you talk so?"

"Pshaw! Billy, I didn't mean anything or if I did, my meaning was so deep that you couldn't discover it. Don't you think I'm deep Bill?"

"You are a provoking little witch," he answered with a melancholy smile.

"Am I? Well, then, I'll try to be good. Come let us go down stairs, and I'll sing you a song, commencing:

"Thee have I loved dearly, Yes madly, sincerely," etc., etc.,

And when that song is finished I'm going to send you home, for I've got fourteen letters to write, of four pages and a postscript each. Come."

Half an hour later Mr. Conklin arrived at the Clelland mansion. He had been a long time on the way, for in the first place his courage had all oozed out at his fingers ends, and so he had to take a long walk and talk to himself like a father to rouse it once more. Now he felt that he could face anything so he rang the bell.

"Pshaw!" said he, "the door is open; I'll walk right in. What, the gas not lighted? Well, perhaps I'll find Minnie in the drawing-room alone, and if I do—"

But just at this moment Mr. Conklin, who had groped his way in the darkness through the hall, caught his foot in the rug and stumbled headlong into the middle of the drawing-room.

"O!" screamed a female voice.

"Why the deuce don't you light the gas?" growled Mr. Conklin; and then remembering where he was: "I beg pardon, Miss Clelland. It is Miss Clelland?"

"Yes."

Mr. Conklin staggered to his feet and advanced to the sofa where she was sitting.

"Are we alone?" asked he.

"Yes, Mr. Conklin."

"You tremble, darling," he said, as he took her hand and seated himself beside her. "And—hang it, Miss Clelland, but I believe I do too! And yet my dear, this is the happiest moment of my life."

"She sighed.

"Minnie, dearest, I love you!" She fell into his arms.

"Is that love reciprocated? Call me Patterson, if it is."

"O, Patterson!"

"It is Mr. Clelland. Let me sit further off," whispered Patterson; but she only clung the closer.

"What! all in the dark?" cried the honorable gentleman advanced into the drawing-room.

Mr. Conklin hardly dared to breathe and the dear creature still clung to him as does the ivy to the oak.

Mr. Clelland struck a match, and the next instant a broad flame spurted from the gas jet and flooded the whole room with light.

"What do I see?" exclaimed the Honorable Horace fixing his eyes upon Conklin and the maiden by his side.

"Do you give your consent?" stammered Patterson, blinking in the gas light.

"My consent! Dunder and blitzen! yes dash it! yes, yes, take her—take her! and go to Hades—whew! what an infernal old fool I have been! And the honorable old gentleman threw himself into a seat and groaned aloud.

Mr. Patterson Conklin couldn't understand this at all. He didn't think it either proper or becoming in an M. C. What! take his daughter, the beautiful little darling, and go to the bad place? No, he wouldn't do anything of the sort; he would wear her in his heart's core.

He waited for Mr. Clelland to explain but he only groaned. Then he turned to Minnie—

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" he screamed, springing half way across the room. "Is not this something more than fantasy? 'Twas Minnie that I loved, but by Heaven I've been making love to her aunt!" and he sank into a chair quite overcome with emotion.

But just at that moment Minnie walked into the room leaning on Billy Montgomery's arm.

"Father," said she, "I told you to-night that I would accept the first man who dared to make a proposal of marriage to me. And this is the man who has dared."

"Bless you my children," said the Honorable Horace. Then he cast a withering glance at Patterson and another at Aunt Minerva, and hurriedly left the room.

The happy couple followed him, leaving Patterson and the tear-stained Minerva alone.

"This is an infernal bad affair," muttered that gentleman, taking his hands out of his hair.

She tried to speak but could not.

"I've made a fool of myself," said Patterson.

"Yes; but you would make a greater fool of yourself by marrying that little chit of a girl," sobbed Minerva.

"Egad! I don't know but what you are right."

"I'm su-su-ure of it."

"Patterson came back and sat beside her. Presently he stole one arm around her waist.

"Will you have me now?"

"I don't know. O, Patterson! You've nearly broke my heart," she sobbed.

"Can't you forgive me, darling?" and he kissed her.

"Do you love me as well as you said you did, when—you thought I was somebody else?"

"Why, I think I can learn to."

"Well, then, I guess you may learn," said she, throwing herself upon his bosom. I left just then; but in conclusion I am happy to inform the reader that whether Patterson ever learned to love Minerva or not, I am sure of one thing that about two months after that memorable evening, there was a double wedding at the Hon. Horace Clelland's house, and Mr. Patterson Conklin and Mr. Billy Montgomery, were the happy bridegrooms, and I don't believe the former has ever regretted making his marriage proposal "in the Dark."

A Dress for Matilda.

A SOUTH STREET merchant of Philadelphia, tells the following good story, regarding the selling of a ready-made dress:

Not long since there entered the store a tall, dignified looking gentleman, with a solemn looking face, evidently of the clerical persuasion, dressed in a suit of deep black, and his neck ornamented by a stiff white tie. He was accompanied by a lady half a score of years his junior, and dressed in a manner not at all corresponding with the plain clothes he wore. They looked like a butterfly and a bat out on a promenade.

"I have called," said the lady, "to look at those cheap suits you advertise."

"What will you take for this dress?" asked the lady. "Your very lowest figures?"

The merchant named the price. "Mercy!" groaned the minister, and grasped his pocket book tighter.

"My good man, you must really be more reasonable," said the lady; "of course I am not purchasing this dress for myself. I am buying it for a dear, good servant of mine."

"Very poor girl," said the minister, "but just and upright. She is a member of my Bible class."

"I am sorry," said the merchant; "but that is the very lowest price. This is a one price store."

"Come, my beloved friend, throw a dollar off," said the minister. "Recollect the dress is not for my wife, here, but is intended as a present to poor Matilda Smith, our hired girl."

"Yes," said the lady, "I thought we could get a dress from you that would suit Matilda. I always purchase my dresses on Eighth street. But of course you know that."

"Well," said the merchant, "as it is for Matilda, I will throw off a dollar. Where shall I send the dress?"

"There is the address," said the minister, handing a card. "Rev. Nicodemus Lark, No. 49 Codfish Park."

"All right, sir. The dress shall be sent immediately."

Now the merchant had grave suspicions about the dress being intended for Matilda Smith, and believed the lady intended to wear it herself. So he decided to investigate the case by taking the dress home himself.

On arriving at 49 Codfish Park he rang the bell. A bouncing Irish girl came to the door.

"Good evening," said the gentleman, "does Matilda Smith live here?"

"Faith, and that's my name, sir," said the girl, with her eyes wide open.

"Matilda, your mistress has purchased a dress at my store, for you, as a present. She is very anxious that it should fit you, so if you will go up to your room and put it on, and then let me see how it fits, I will make any alterations that may be necessary."

"Shure, and it's big words you're after spakin', and I don't understand you at all; but if you want me to put on the dress, I'll do it in a jiffy. Just walk into the parlor, and sit down on the sofa."

The girl then ran up stairs, and was absent ten minutes. When she re-appeared, she was attired in the newly-purchased dress. It was rather a tight fit.

"How does it please you, Miss Smith?"

"It's just the tip," said Miss Smith, "but it needs a tuck or two let out in the breast."

Just then the door opened, and in came Rev. Nich. Lark and lady.

"Why, Matilda Smith!" groaned the minister.

"Matilda Smith, take off that dress immediately!" cried the lady, in a rage.— "How dare you dress up in my new clothes?"

"It was the gentleman, mum," said Matilda, frightened; "he said the dress was for me."

The minister and his lady were rather crestfallen on beholding their visitor.

"You said," remarked the visitor, "that the dress was for Matilda—so I told her to try it on."

"You were entirely too busy," said the lady, spitefully; "you can take the dress back to South street—I don't want it."

"Well, madam, the next time you come to South street to purchase a dress, don't be ashamed of your economy, and don't tell a falsehood about buying it for your servant. You will then avoid such mistakes as this."

A loud wail came from Matilda Smith. The upheaving of her troubled breast was too much for the buttons on her dress. They went flying all over the room.

"The dress is ruined now, madam," said the man of cloaks and suits. "I cannot take it back now."

"Well, I won't pay you," said the lady.

"You purchased it under a false pretence," was the reply. "But however, the price of a dress won't ruin me. Keep it, Matilda; but the next time your mistress wants another cheap dress, don't let her buy it under cover of your name. Good evening."

And he departed, leaving the good lady fuming with rage, the parson fishing a button out of his eye, and Matilda Smith energetically engaged in divesting herself of the fashionable but tight-fitting dress that has formed the subject of this narrative.

"A man whom Dr. Chalmers engaged to manage a disorderly Sunday-school, kept his eyes wide open during praying, and when one boy thrust a pin into another, he marched up the aisle, still praying, and cuffed that boy's ears, and went back again praying all the way. After that he was master of the situation, for the boys thought that a man who could watch and pray like that could not be put down."

"When I am a man," is the poetry of childhood. "When I was young," is that of old age.