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## A SINGULAR BET

BY F. A. MITCHELL

Two men were conversing in a wing of the winter palace in St. Petersburg, the one the Grand Duke Nicholas, the other Captain Dmitre Warascoff of the Russian army. The grand duke was sitting behind an ebony desk; the captain was standing before him.

"Your treachery is an unpardonable sin," said Nicholas. "I have advanced your interests by attaching you to the Czar's staff, thus opening to you a career. You have repaid me by diabolical conspiracy against the majesty's life."

"I have not!" exclaimed the captain, indignantly.

"I have the proof."

"Let me see it."

The grand duke held before the young man a letter written in the captain's handwriting and signed by him. The accused man started back, a sudden pallor overspreading his face.

"Ah!" said Nicholas, icily. "When confronted with evidence, your assurance deserts you."

"I never wrote that letter!"

"It is in your handwriting."

"So nearly like it that I could not tell it from mine. Nevertheless it is a forgery."

"What do you mean?"

"I suspect certain men, a certain man especially, owing to an accidental discovery I recently made of an attempt not on the life of the Czar, but on yours. It may be that, thinking I would inform upon them, they have determined to forestall my information."

"One of them is my friend. If I accused him, it might be wrongfully. I would rather go to Siberia than harm him if he is innocent."

"You will go to Siberia if you do not give me his name."

"Then I will go to Siberia."

The door opened, and a young man named Pertof entered.

"How fortunate," exclaimed the newcomer, "to find you two together! I have heard that Warascoff is in trouble, and I came to say to your imperial highness that any accusations against him are absurd."

"The capital is full of plotting," he said. "I believe no accusations, for I am as likely to be accused as any one. Dismiss this matter from your mind, Nicholas. We three are intimate friends. None of us knows how soon he may fall a victim to intrigue. Therefore let us not worry, but enjoy what of life remains to us. Bring out some of that wine I tasted when we were last together and let us make merry."

"Let us drink to Russian life—short, but merry."

Pertof emptied his glass; the grand duke sipped his; Captain Warascoff left his untouched.

"What's the matter, Dmitri?" cried Pertof. "Isn't his highness' wine good enough for you?"

"I cannot drink under accusation."

"You're squeamish, man. Whoever troubles himself at being suspected or even accused in these days is in danger of nervous collapse. I'll make you a bet of one hundred rubles even that within thirty days I will be accused of some conspiracy. I'll make another bet of one hundred to one thousand rubles that within sixty days I go to Siberia and a third bet of one hundred to ten thousand rubles that I am executed."

"You are trifling with serious matters," said Nicholas, uneasily.

"I will take that bet," said Warascoff, with a singular look in his eyes.

"Done," said Pertof, taking his hand. "The grand duke looked at both men as if he thought they had taken leave of their senses.

Pertof took a cigar case from his pocket and was about to strike a match when, recollecting himself, he handed the case to the grand duke.

## The Perfect Wife

So impenetrable a mask is the human countenance, when the human brain wills it to be so, that not one of the guests at the castle could have declared decisively whether Cosmo was highly gratified by the joyful proceedings or unutterably bored. He behaved, from his mother's point of view, in the most exemplary fashion. If the weather happened to be fine he rode with the lovely Lady Ermytrude in the morning, motored with the wealthy Miss Dinorben in the afternoon, and danced all the evening with the witty Rachel Burney. If, as was more often the case, the weather was wet or lowering, he sang duets with Lady Ermytrude in the morning, played billiards with Phemie in the afternoon, and again danced with Rachel throughout the evening.

"My dear boy!" cried Lady Strathpey. "My dear, cultivated, sensible boy! Be quite sure of your own heart, by all means, before you take the plunge; but do not wait too long. Delays are dangerous."

Nevertheless, Cosmo waited until the last evening, and still no decision had, apparently, been arrived at. Lady Strathpey lost all patience.

The castle party was to come to a brilliant conclusion with the performance by the "Naughty Little Grille" Company from the Frivolity Theater, including Miss Esmee Chaloner and Mr. Handel Browne in their original parts.

"Whichever of the girls you elect to make your wife," said Lady Strathpey to her son, "you must escort to the seats I have reserved for you and your future bride. I am tired of this long suspense, and am anxious to welcome with open arms the woman of your choice. Pray let there be an end of this dilly-dallying."

He strolled into the great hall at the hour devoted to afternoon tea, and there, scattered about in small groups, he found the greater part of his guests. Under a pretense of fetching her another cup of tea, he managed to whisper to Miss Burney, "May I have the pleasure of taking you to see the 'Naughty Little Grille' this evening?"

"Oh, thank you immensely, Lord Strathpey. I should have been tremendously glad, only I have promised Mr. Kilby to go with him. We are going to collaborate in writing a play, you know; and while the 'Naughty Grille' is going we shall have a splendid chance for talking over our plot."

"What an extraordinary coincidence!" observed Cosmo. "I was going to talk to you about a title."

"Really! How exasperatingly funny! But the title can wait till we have finished our play, can't it?"

"I don't know," returned Cosmo. "We'll see about that, later on."

And he deftly intercepted Miss Dinorben, who, with a yellow novel under her arm, was making her way up the grand staircase.

"Say, Miss Dinorben," he drawled. "She turned slowly on the fourth step and looked down at him.

"Will you escort to me the honor of accepting my escort to the theater tonight?" he asked.

"Oh, why didn't you ask me before?" she said, with palpable dismay.

"Sorry; but I really didn't think of it."

"Ah! That's your slow English way. So fatal in a race you know."

"Yes. Between you and the Duke of Burslem. He has won by a head."

"H'm! A bald victory."

After much searching Cosmo found Lady Ermytrude in the orchid house.

"Come with me to the theater tonight."

"I cannot, I have promised Lord Francis."

Thus it fell out that the two chairs set apart for Cosmo and his fiancée by Lady Strathpey were vacant. The Earl was nowise to be seen, and his mother tortured herself with surmises as to his whereabouts. The three ladies were present in the theater, so evidently the three hopes to which she had clung were completely shattered.

When the guests had raced away in their motors, and the house-party were retiring to their respective rooms, Lady Strathpey sat dejectedly alone in her boudoir. There entered to her suddenly, flushed with enthusiasm, and stammering with unwonted excitement her beloved son.

"Give me joy, dear mother!" he cried. "I have found her! I have offered my hand and heart, and they have both been accepted. We are betrothed! The bridal morn is fixed, and nothing remains but to invite the wedding guests. At last I have unearthed her!"

"Let me see her at once," she cried, in an ecstasy. "Bring her to me that I may give you both my blessing."

Cosmo drew aside a silken portiere, and led forth into his mother's presence Miss Esmee Chaloner, the original Naughty Little Grille from the Frivolity Theater.

She is now the Countess of Strathpey, and, according to general opinion, she plays her latest part extremely well. The Dowager Countess has retired to the dower house, and has ceased to meddle in her son's affairs.—Modern Society.

Substitute for Flowers.

If there are no flowers for the table break off a few of the fern sprays of the Boston fern, arrange loosely in a low glass bowl with water, and the delicate green spray will last for a week and make a dainty centerpiece.

## When Burroughs Beat the Record

BY NELLIE SARGENT

"Then that is your final answer?" demanded Bob Burroughs, as he stood with uncovered head at the foot of the Pullman steps.

"It is final—so far as New York is concerned," declared Nellie Prescott with a laugh as she tripped up the steps. "You are at liberty to repeat the question in San Francisco, and perhaps I may give a different answer there."

Bob followed her up the steps and presently he was standing beside the section in which she was to make the journey from New York to Chicago—the first of her transcontinental trip.

Now, as soon as the porter had gone, he faced her eagerly. "Tell me," he pleaded, "why might there be a different answer in San Francisco?"

Nellie's face grew suddenly grave. "There was perhaps no need of such mystery, Mr. Burroughs," she said, "but before I came east I promised my mother that I would not accept any proposal seriously until she had opportunity to pass judgment."

"I will see you," he said, "in San Francisco."

Four days later he presented himself at the Prescott home in Van Ness Avenue. Mrs. Prescott, stately but clearly puzzled, presented herself before the agitated young man.

"What is it?" she demanded breathlessly. "Is Nellie ill or dead, and have they sent you to tell me?"

"Then you know me?" he commented joyously.

"I know the name from Nellie's letters," she said, "but that does not answer the question."

"Miss Prescott is all right so far as I know," he answered. "I left her in New York in the best of health, and for all I know, nothing has happened, please God! I just wanted to find out if you liked me."

Mrs. Prescott sank into a chair. "I am afraid that I cannot follow your conversation. Why should I like you, and why should you come to San Francisco to find out?"

Burroughs laughed a hearty infectious laugh.

"You are not expected to understand," he explained, "until I tell you that I want to marry your daughter, and she told me that I should have to gain your consent first. I imagine from the way she said it that I may hope, if you approve, and I thought I would get out here first so that I might ask her as soon as she arrived."

"She said you had to pass judgment personally," he exclaimed modestly, "and I was in a hurry."

This time it was Mrs. Prescott who laughed, and Burroughs, interpreting it as a favorable sign, laughed too.

"I can see clearly, that you are not lacking in ardor. I have had the best reports of you from those who thought that I might be interested in knowing. If Nellie will accept you, Mr. Burroughs, I shall be glad to acknowledge such an enterprising young man as my son-in-law."

Meanwhile Nellie Prescott had been beguiling her dreary trip over the plains at intervals by quietly weeping. She had grown very fond of Bob Burroughs, and had it not been for the promise she had given her mother she would have journeyed West with a ring upon the engagement finger.

She had been at a loss to account for his abrupt departure, even in spite of the kiss upon her hand. There had been a 10-minute wait before the train started.

Then the train began to run through the Sierras and Nellie dried her eyes, for the Sierra Nevada mountains are good even for the heartache, and the grandeur of the scenery causes one to forget such pitiable things as the human emotions.

Once in the station she looked about her for her people. Surely some one must have come across the bay. But in all the crowd there was not a familiar face, and her heart grew more heavy as she passed the different family parties happy in their reunion.

Then suddenly she stood still. There, on the edge of the crowd, was Burroughs. She shook herself. Surely this was some trick of her tear-dimmed eyes, some hallucination of a tired brain.

But there was no deception in the hearty voice at her elbow.

"Your mother approves, dear!" She did not stop to ask how he had come to be there. She only raised a mute, questioning face to his. To her it mattered not how he came to be there. The important fact was that he was there.

She Had Waited Long Enough.

A Maine girl of ideals told a young man who asked her for her hand that she could not think of marrying a man with less than ten thousand dollars.

The young man went to Boston and worked very hard for several years, returned, and called on the young lady, who said, "Well, John, how are you getting along?"

"Pretty well," he said, "I have almost gotten nineteen dollars towards the ten thousand."

"Well, John," she said, "I do not know but that is enough. I guess we can get along with that."

## The Whistling Girl

BY R. HABBELL

An old-fashioned burgh was Glimptown, full of old-fashioned people, not one of whom pretended to deny that Mellie Rose was the prettiest, liveliest girl in the place.

Thus it happened that while other girls were "spoke for" as soon as they became of age, sweet Mellie Rose wasted her sweetness upon transient lovers.

Joshua Jones, the most appreciative of these, had remarked to his mother—

"Naow, mammy, I don't believe there's a thing wrong with Mellie. I like her mighty well."

"Gracious, Josh!" said she, holding up her hands in horror. "If you're a-bittin' struck on that gal, you had just better git over it, as quick as possible. My grief! A whistlin' girl!"

"I don't know why Mellie can't be like other girls," said her Aunt Dorothy, who didn't believe in old maids. "Can't you stop this pesky whistling, Mellie?" she asked her one day.

"Got a new minister. They say he's a young man—right smart too. Guess I'll invite him in. No tellin' he might—but no, of course not! Well, I'll invite him, anyhow," said Aunt Dorothy.

A week or two after this, she was busying herself making the little parlor look "spry," when a knock sounded on the door. She ushered in a fine looking young man with a decided clerical air, but pleasant and kindly withal.

"I'll call Mellie as soon as she finishes her chores," Aunt Dorothy was saying, when horrors! there arose in that young lady's clear, peevish whistle, the familiar notes of "Old Hundred."

Aunt Dorothy turned red and then white; forgot about, and finally, when the assortment of noises stopped, went into the kitchen, saying as she went—

"Excuse me, Mr. Haviland, and I'll tell Mellie to come in."

"The new minister's in here. Come in and be introduced."

Mellie followed the frate lady.

"Mr. Haviland, my niece, Miss Rose."

When Mr. Haviland said, in an amused tone, "Your brother is a fine whistler."

"I—I have no brother," she replied honestly; so the evidently painful subject was dropped.

So the fleeting summer days found the reverend Haviland often at Aunt Dorothy's house, or in Mellie's company, wandering upon the rocky banks of Little River.

Glimptown in general said it was almost scandalous that so fine a young man should be "took in" by a pretty face, when every one knew that that face was disfigured by a whistling mouth.

Miss Smith, whose age was an unkindly quantity between twenty and forty, and who had set her cap so often that that article was badly frayed around its figurative edges, said—

"No, he sha'n't be bamboozled, not if I have to warn him myself!" And it is on record that she did warn the daring man.

One bright September day he walked over to Aunt Dorothy's little cottage, intending to invite Mellie to accompany him upon an errand of mercy. As he reached the gate he stopped a moment. The front door was wide open. Mellie, dressed in pink calico, with a cap of the same material only partly concealing her ruffy brown hair, was busily engaged with broom and dust brush in the hall. There was a happy look upon her innocent face. When, as if, bird-like, she could not restrain her joy, the ruby lips puckered bewitchingly, and the notes of a hymn trilled forth with startling clearness and truth.

Suddenly the unconscious warbler was electrified into silence by the sharp words—

"Perfectly shockin' ain't it?"

Glancing up, she saw Aunt Dorothy standing with watering-can in hand. She was staring at Mr. Haviland, who leaned upon the gate with a puzzling expression upon his face.

Not waiting to hear his answer Mellie fled to her own room, where she indulged in that which seldom spoiled her happy face—a good "cry." For she doubted not that she had forfeited her place in the minister's esteem.

But Mellie was surprised when her aunt handed her a note from Mr. Haviland containing his request to accompany him to the house of some poor people, who lived several miles away.

"Shall I go?" she asked her aunt.

"Of course! No use makin' matters worse than they be by refusin'."

So Mellie said she would accompany the minister, though her sensitive nature rebelled against the trial.

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