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SELECT STORY. THE MAN OF MANY VAGARIES.

A Seaside Sketch.

Mr. Lundy was a peculiar-looking man, with a thin face, and long, straight hair, that he fancied never needed cutting. He had, at one time, been very unfortunate in his business; but, though made rich since by a large legacy, he was not in a condition to enjoy it. The fact is, Mr. Lundy was a confirmed hypochondriac.

For many years Mrs. L. had staid at home and humored his whims; but one season her pretty daughter wanted to go to a watering place, not for any disease in particular, but to see the world and the young folks in it.

Behold, then, then, comfortably established in a seaside hotel. For two days Mr. Lundy had been all right; but one morning his good wife knew what was coming by the peculiarity of his looks and motions. Her look fell from her hand; Minnie turned pale.

"He's been slightly all the morning," said Mrs. L. "Dear, dear, see him whirl—what is it, Lundy?"

"A feather, my dear—a feather; catch me—hold me. Don't you see the wind is blowing me everywhere? It will take me out to sea, and I shall get saturated—yes, wet through, Mrs. Lundy, I beg you to catch me; pin me to your bonnet; I shall be safe there. Just see how frightfully I ruffle; the slightest puff of air agitates me throughout. I'd rather be anything than this; do put me in your bonnet, my dear."

"I'll put you in a mad-house, before long," muttered the exasperated wife, "if you cut up such capers. Come into the hotel, Mr. Lundy."

"Come into the hotel, madam; you talk as if I had legs. Did you ever see a feather walk? Why, I'm lighter than a snow-drift; I wish I had a brick in my hat to keep me down. Ah! I envy everything stationary. Observe how I quiver; stick a pin in me, my dear, and fasten me to the floor. Is there enough of me for a pin? Am I a hen-feather, or a duck-feather, or what?"

"Goose-feather, if anything, you tiresome mortal," cried his wife. "I'm sick of your vagaries. First you're a cat on the roof, mewling and keeping everybody awake; then you're a glass bottle, full of water, freezing and snapping; you're anything and everything but a reasonable man. I'm tired of it."

"Mrs. Lundy, will you have the goodness to put me in your pocket? squeeze me in your hand, anything, that I may feel safe in your protecting care, I'm floating—(singing.)

"I'm afloat, I'm afloat!"—ah—what's that?"

"Nothing, Mr. Lundy, but Joe's whip. I called him from the coach-house; lay on Joe."

"But, my love, my legs!"

"Nonsense, Mr. Lundy; lay on Joe. Feathers haven't got legs."

"True, Mrs. L. but they have marrow, and that's what feels. Pray beg Joe to stop."

"Madam—I heard you speak of—the—ahem—need of a doctor. Excuse my forwardness—but I am a physician."

Of course Minnie was more beautiful than ever in her confusion. "My poor husband has an unfortunate tendency that annoys everybody near him."

"Perhaps he is a hypochondriac. I think I have seen him. Where is he, madam?"

"On the north porch," said Minnie. "And I am sure we are very much obliged," added the mother, "if you can only help him."

The first sound that struck their ears, as they issued from the door was a grand and sonorous "cock-a-doo-dle-do!"

"John—Mr. Lundy," cried his wife, "what a sad spectacle you are making of yourself!"

"I'm not a spectacle, good woman; I'm a rooster. Get out of my way—do you not notice the expanse of my wings? Cock-a-doo-dle-do!"

"What shall we do?" cried the poor wife, turning to the doctor. "O, sir, can you stop this ridiculous exhibition?"

"Trust me, madam," said the young man, biting his lip, for the sight was almost too ridiculous for his gravity.

"Upon my word," he continued, addressing the deluded man, "what a magnificent creature! Why, his feathers are a yard long. Where did you get such a splendid specimen? Is he imported?"

"Cock-a-doo-dle-do!" yelled the human biped, strutting more than ever. "That woman has nothing to do with me, sir—nothing at all. I'm a rooster on my own account—cock-a-doo-dle-do."

Here the doctor gave orders aside to one of the servants, who went away grinning. Then, turning to the rooster, who was by this time red in the face with exertion, he said:

"I declare it makes my mouth water to think what a capital dinner that bird would furnish. May I wring his neck, madam? It will take but a few seconds."

"No, you don't," cried the other; "I'm tough—I'm very tough—I'm an old bird, sir—not to be caught with chaff."

"But you are a rooster; what else are you good for?"

"Good to crow, sir; good to crow," and forthwith ensued the loudest screech of all, succeeded by a somersault and a sensation of suffocation. Another moment and the servant appeared with a dead fowl in his arms.

"I assure you, sir, it had to be done," said the doctor, gravely, and Mr. Lundy rubbed his face and pinched his throat.

"Did you really wring my neck, sir?" the hypochondriac asked gravely.

"When you were a rooster, certainly."

"Did I die game?" asked the other, with a manner of solemn importance.

"You did—particularly game," replied the doctor.

"Thank you, sir. If I should happen to turn into a rooster again, I shall know where to go."

"I shall be most happy to—wring your neck for you, sir, on any such interesting occasion."

"Very kind, I'm sure. If you should ever get into trouble, John Lundy will stand your friend."

"Do you promise me that, sir?"

"I do, and I never break my word."

THE IRONY OF FORTUNE. THE LADY AND THE LOCKSMITH.

I live in San Francisco, and am a locksmith by trade. My calling is a strange one, and possesses a fascination rendering it one of the most agreeable of pursuits. Many who follow it, see nothing in it but labor—think of nothing but its returns in gold and silver.—To me, it has other charms than the money it produces. I am called upon, almost daily, to open doors and peer in to long-neglected apartments; to spring the stubborn locks of safes, and gloat upon the treasures piled within; to quietly enter the apartments of ladies with more beauty than discretion, and pick the locks of drawers containing peace destroying missives, that the dangerous evidences of wandering affection may not reach the eye of a husband, or father, possessing the missing key; to force the fastenings of cash boxes, and depositories of records, telling of men made suddenly rich, of corporations plundered, of orphans robbed, of hopes crushed, of families ruined. Is there no charm in all this?—no food for speculation?—no scope for the range of pleasant fancy? Then, who would not be a locksmith, though his face is begrimed with the soot of the forge, and his hands are stained with rust?

But I have a story to tell—not exactly a story, either—for a story implies the completion as well as the beginning of a narrative—and mine is scarcely more than the introduction to one.—Let him who deals in fancy write the rest. In the spring of 1856—I think it was in April—I opened a little shop on Kearney street, and soon worked myself into a fair business. Late one evening, a lady, closely veiled, entered my shop, and pulling from beneath a cloak a small japanned box requested me to open it. The lock was curiously constructed, and I was all of an hour fitting it with a key. The lady seemed nervous at the delay, and at length requested me to close the door. I was a little surprised at the suggestion, but of course complied. Shutting the door, and returning to my work, the lady withdrew her veil, disclosing as sweet a face as can well be imagined. There was a restlessness in the eye and a pallor in the cheek, however, which plainly told of a heart ill at ease, and in a moment every emotion for her had given place to that of pity.

"Perhaps you are not well, madam, and the night air is too chilly?" said I rather inquisitively.

I felt a rebuke in her reply: "In requesting you to close the door, I had no other object than to escape the attention of persons."

I did not reply, but thoughtfully continued my work. She resumed, "That little box contains valuable papers—private papers—and I have lost the key, or it has been stolen. I should not wish to have you remember that ever I came here on such an errand," she continued with some hesitation, and giving me a look which it was not difficult to understand.

"Certainly, madam, if you desire it. If I cannot forget your face, I will at least attempt to lose the recollection of ever seeing it here."

The lady bowed rather coldly at what I considered a fine compliment, and I proceeded with my work, satisfied that a sudden discovered partiality for me had nothing to do with the visit. Having succeeded, after much filing and cutting, in turning the lock, I was seized with a curiosity to get a glimpse at the precious contents of the box, and suddenly raising the lid, discovered a bundle of letters and a daguerreotype, as I slowly passed the box to its owner. She seized it hurriedly, and placing the letter and picture in her pocket, locked the box, and drawing the veil over her face, pointed to the door. I opened it, and as she passed into the street, she merely whispered—"Remember!"—We met again, and I have been thus particular in describing her visit to the shop, to render probable a subsequent recognition.

About two o'clock in the morning, in the latter part of May following, I was awoke by a gentle tap upon the window of the little room back of the shop, in which I lodged. Thinking of burglars, I sprang out of bed, and in a moment was at the window, with a heavy hammer in my hand, which I usually kept at that time within convenient reach of my bedside.

"Who's there?" I inquired, raising the hammer and peering out into the darkness—for it was as dark as Egypt when under the curse of Israel's God.

"What do you want?" I abruptly inquired.

"I will tell you," answered the same soft voice, "if you open the door wide enough for me to enter."

"Come in," said I, resolutely throwing the door ajar, and proceeding to light a candle. Having succeeded, I turned to examine the visitor. He was a small and neatly dressed gentleman, with a heavy bagdad around his shoulders, and a blue navy cap drawn suspiciously over the eyes. As I advanced toward him he seemed to hesitate a moment, then raised the cap from his forehead, and looked me curiously in the face. I did not drop the candle but I acknowledged to a little nervousness as I hurriedly placed the light on a little table, and silently proceeded to invest myself with two or three very necessary articles of clothing. As the Lord liveth, my visitor was a lady, and the same for whom I had opened the little box about a month before! Having completed my hasty toilet, I attempted to stammer an apology for my rudeness, but utterly failed. The fact is I was confounded.

Smiling at my discomfiture, she said: "Disguise is useless; I presume you recognize me?"

"I believe I told you, madam, I should not soon forget your face. In what way can I serve you?"

"By doing half an hour's work before daylight to-morrow, and receiving five hundred dollars for your labor," was the reply.

"It is not ordinary work," said I, inquiringly, "that commands so munificent a compensation."

"It is a labor common to your calling," replied the lady. "The price is not so much for the labor, as the condition under which it is to be performed."

"And what is the condition," I inquired.

"That you will submit to being conveyed from and returned to your own door blindfolded."

I do not mistake the truth or the fearful meaning of the remark, and I shuddered as I bent my head to the handkerchief. My eyes were carefully bandaged as before, and I was led to the cab, and thence driven home by a more circuitous route, if possible, than the one by which we came. Arriving in front of the house, the handkerchief was removed, and I stepped from the vehicle. A purse of five hundred dollars was placed in my hand, and in a moment the cab and its mysterious occupant were out of sight.

I entered the shop, and the purse of gold was the only evidence that I could summon in my bewilderment, that all that I had just done and witnessed was not a dream.

A month after that, I saw the lady and the gentleman taken from the vault walking leisurely along Montgomery street. I do not know, but I believe the sleeping husband awoke within the vault, and his bones are there to this day!—The wife is still a resident of San Francisco.

Examining the bandage to see that my vision was completely obscured, the lady handed me the bundle of tools with which I was provided, then taking me by the arm, led me through a grate into a house which I knew was of brick, and after taking me through a passage way which could not have been less fifty feet in length, and down a flight of stairs into what was evidently an underground basement, stopped beside a vault, and removed the handkerchief from my eyes.

"Here is the vault—open it," said she, springing the door of a dark lantern, and throwing a beam of light upon the lock.

I seized a bunch of skeleton keys, and after a few trials, which the lady seemed to watch with the most painful anxiety, sprang the bolt. The door swung upon its hinges, and my companion, telling me not to close it, as it was self-locking, sprang into the vault. I heard the murmur of low voices within, and the next moment a lady appeared, and leaning upon her arm a man, with a face so pale and haggard that I started at the sight. (How he must have suffered during the three long days of his confinement!

"Remain here," she said, handing me the lantern; "I will be back in a moment."

The two slowly ascended the stairs, and I heard them enter a room immediately above where I was standing. In less than a minute the lady returned.

"Shall I close it, madam?" said I, placing my hand upon the door of the vault.

"No! no!" she exclaimed, "hastily seizing my arm; it awaits another occupant!"

"Madam, you certainly do not intend to—"

"Are you ready?" she interrupted, impatiently holding the handkerchief to my eyes. The thought flashed across my mind that she intended to push me into the vault, and bury me and my secret together. She seemed to read the suspicion and remarked: "Do not be alarmed. You are not the man!"

I could not mistake the truth or the fearful meaning of the remark, and I shuddered as I bent my head to the handkerchief. My eyes were carefully bandaged as before, and I was led to the cab, and thence driven home by a more circuitous route, if possible, than the one by which we came. Arriving in front of the house, the handkerchief was removed, and I stepped from the vehicle. A purse of five hundred dollars was placed in my hand, and in a moment the cab and its mysterious occupant were out of sight.

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What workman never turns to the left? A wheelwright.

The whole duty of man is frequently only to please himself.

Women guilty of the folly of tight lacing, dress to kill.

The Height of Absurdity.—A vegetarian attending a cattle show.

Why is a horse like the letter O? Because G makes it go.

Why is a French franc of no value compared with an American dollar?—Because it is worth less.

Why is a man in search of a philosopher's stone like Neptune? Because he is seeking what don't exist.

Tennyson speaks of the angel of the rainbow. The angel must be an arch-angel.

There is a bankruptcy even in the natural world. The day breaks and the light fails.

Why is a sieve-cloth of a flour mill like a balky horse? Because it bates the coarse.

It has been asked when rain falls, does it get up again? Of course it does, in dew time.

Why is the fly one of the tallest insects? Because he stands over six feet without shoes or stockings.

The American Gardener says that a hen will sit upon an oval brickbat as readily as an egg. She must in such a case fancy herself a brick-layer.

Why may a foolish fellow reckon on the sympathy of a hatter? Because a hatter has always felt for a fellow in want of a head piece.