

The Winning of Lillian

From the day on which I first met Lillian Elsmore at a tennis party I put forth my utmost effort to win her affection. Fortune was kinder to me than I could have hoped. I soon saw that she was not averse to my attentions, and when in due time I plucked up courage and confessed my love she blushing acknowledged that she loved me, and referred me to her papa.

To my surprise and disappointment her father refused his consent to a formal engagement between us. "Lillian is all I have," he said, "and I have no wish to part with her yet awhile. You are both young and can afford to wait. Let things drift for a time; then if you both remain in the same mind—well, I may give my consent."

"Lillian and I understand each other perfectly, and we are both sure—"

"Yes, yes, I know," he interrupted. "I don't object to a secret treaty between you; all I say is that it must not be made known until I give my consent. Now run away and tell her so."

I was disappointed but not altogether discouraged by the result of my interview. Squire Elsmore was a fine type of the real old English gentleman, comprising the bluff heartiness of the typical squire with the shrewd common sense of the successful business man. If he had not been satisfied with me he would have said so in his blunt, straightforward fashion.

The more I saw of Elsmore the more I liked him. He was a self-made man and a terrible boaster, but his boasting seemed in keeping with his character, and pleased instead of irritated you.

"I started as an errand boy, and finished up as a—well—a far richer man than the Commissioners of Income Tax have any idea of," he would say. "During a long and successful business career I never made a mistake; few men can say that! But I was an early riser, and the man who wished to get before me would have to stop up all night—and many nights!"

One evening his boasting begat a kindred spirit within me.

"There is no doubt you did fairly well," I said, patronizingly. "But it was in your favor that you operated in the days before the rain came. If you lived and moved and had your being in the city to-day we'd lime the twig and catch you every time."

"I was surprised at my own temerity, but my astonishment was nothing to his. He looked at me and gasped. I thought for a minute or two that my words had choked him, but he managed to swallow them somehow."

"Well, I'm jiggered," he ejaculated. "So that is your opinion, is it?"

"I nodded."

"You think you could manage it, do you?"

I nodded again. He looked at me wonderingly—pityingly. He cleared the plate and glasses from before him and, leaning forward, rested his folded arms upon the table.

"You are keen on marrying Lillian?" he queried, slowly.

"Very," I replied.

"You love her, and I believe she loves you," he continued, deliberately. "I rather like you myself, and have only withheld my consent to your engagement because I do not want you to live an idle life. Idleness very often breeds vice, while work, with its engrossments and responsibilities, makes for health and happiness. But you are fairly established now, so I am going to make you a sporting offer."

Days passed in hopeless inactivity. Hare-brained schemes were concocted and dismissed hourly. I hadn't a mind above a practical joke.

Then an event happened which drove all other thoughts from our minds. The Dutton Diamonds were stolen—stolen so cleverly that the whole county was filled with consternation at the consummate daring of the thieves.

The Duchess, after placing the case upon her dressing table, left the room for a few moments. When she returned the case had vanished. There was absolutely no clue. The police were at their wits' end.

Like everyone else, Elsmore had a pet theory which he advanced with his usual dogmatic persistency. His idea was that the jewels had been hidden somewhere in or about the house by someone connected with the establishment, who was also a member of a clever gang of thieves and forgers, acting under the leadership of an American known to the police as Red Erick.

"As soon as the storm blows over they will remove their booty," he said; "and as they cannot communicate with each other by post, for fear of the letters falling into the hands of the police, they will have recourse to a cipher advertisement in one of the daily papers."

I shook my head doubtfully.

"The police are too clever at reading ciphers for the thieves to have recourse to such a method," I said.

"They could easily concoct a code which the whole of the Criminal Investigation Department could not read quickly enough to frustrate their plans," he said, confidently. "Watch the papers, and see if I am not right."

The manufacture and elucidation of codes and ciphers was Elsmore's pet hobby. His ambition was to compile a unique and comprehensive commercial code, and he had devoted years to that object.

Lillian's eyes twinkled merrily as she led him on to boast of his ability as a cipher reader, and once started on his favorite topic he certainly did himself justice.

"Your old dad may be behind the times in many things, but there is no expert in England who can give him points in the making and reading of codes and ciphers," he said.

Then he settled himself comfortably in a deep easy chair, and took up a paper.

Lillian challenged me to a game of billiards, and we left the room together. As soon as the door of the billiard-room closed behind us she threw her arms round my neck and kissed me.

"Isn't he the dearest old boaster that ever lived?" she said, enthusiastically.

"He certainly does not hide his light under a bushel," I answered, sarcastically.

"No, he boasts and performs; whereas some people of my acquaintance—"

"Yes, I know," I interrupted.

"You—"

"Oh, I thought perhaps you had forgotten it," she said, sweetly. "What do you propose doing? Have you any plans?"

I replied woefully that I had not the ghost of a plan.

"Well," answered Lillian, giving me another hug, "I have. A real beauty. I thought it all out while he was boasting. Now listen."

For half an hour I played the part of interested listener, then we went back to the drawing room and talked Dutton Diamonds to her father.

A few evenings later I found Elsmore in a state of suppressed excitement.

"Have you seen the 'Times'?" he asked, as I entered the room.

"Not to-day. Why? Anything special in it?"

"Come into the library and I'll show you."

I followed him into the room, where he took up the paper and pointed to the following cipher advertisement:—

"Arqohzmsf. JbKcDes 2 r 3 tcut. cvpBzCd Hirtzqrq. 5 qq. (9) 2 15 14 3' 1832 13 12."

"The man who solves that cipher will have the thief of the Dutton Diamonds in the hollow of his hand," he said impressively.

"Think so?" I queried.

"I know he will. It confirms my theory, and I intend to solve it. I wish I had seen it first thing this morning, I would have worked it out before now. Prompt solution is everything in a case of this kind. To-morrow will be too late."

"Then why bother about it?" I asked.

"Because it proves the truth of my theory," he answered, shortly.

"How do you know?"

"By the numerals at the end. There are so many cipher communications in the daily papers that interested watchers would wish to know at a glance the particular one for which they were waiting. As soon as I saw the cipher it struck me that the numerals were the signature and the key to them was in the cipher itself. I worked it out and got the following result:—

"Of. 2r. 15c. 14d. 3'E. 18r. 32i. 13c. 12k.—(F) redErick."

"Frederick," I said. "Well, and how—"

"I have not had time to do more than catch the drift of it. I believe the capitals are intended for numerals, having the value of their place in the alphabet, and that the numerals are either frequently recurring consonants or vowels. The 2 and 5 are probably the vowel e, the 2 signifying its order as a vowel and the 5 its place in the alphabet. The 3' is probably q, the third letter which occurs four times."

"You may be right," I said, as he paused to take breath, "but I doubt it. In fact, I don't believe it has anything whatever to do with the Dutton Diamonds. My opinion—"

"Your opinion," he sneered, "is like your boast—worthless. When you have fulfilled the one I shall be glad to listen to the other."

He turned angrily and seated himself at his desk. I accepted my dismissal and joined Lillian.

We strolled into the billiard-room and switched on the lights. But we did not play—at least not until we heard the sound of approaching footsteps, then I grabbed a cue, and when Elsmore entered Lillian was marking and I was busy with a sequence of nursery cannons.

There was an eager light in Elsmore's eyes and he waved a sheet of paper triumphantly.

"I've got it," he cried, "and we shall have time to clobber the beggars. The cipher was a teaser, but I managed it."

He laid the sheet of paper on the billiard-table, and we crowded eagerly around it. Instead of the solution we expected it contained the following cipher: "Bsrpiang K 2 1 3 e dresrsbty. Bwo 2 y 3 c 8 hshsatrepr. (F) red Erick."

"Why, that's another cipher," Lillian said, in a disappointed tone.

"Of course it is," he cried. "You didn't expect that Red Erick was fool enough to trust his message to a cipher which an ordinary police expert could solve at a glance, did you? He is a clever fellow, but your old dad has been one too many for him. It was a long time before I hit upon the key, and when I did the answer was a puzzler; but I stuck to it like death to a darky until it yielded up its secret, and there it is."

"It may be," said Lillian, sarcastically; "but I am not an expert. If you wish me to understand you will—"

"All right, girl," he answered, soothingly. "The cipher, though intricate, was really very simple. They had submitted 'a' for 'b' 'r' for 's', and so on, and had mixed up the words so that the answer formed a second cipher. In order to add to its difficulty and prevent the recurrence of certain letters, they had used both the preceding and following letters. To anyone who held the key to the second cipher this presented no difficulty, but it was a million to one on a stranger hitting the right sequence. Even I did not get it until I noticed that the letters separated by the numerals 2, 3, 8 were oych, and that the first letter was b; then running my eye along the remaining alternate letters I spelled out the word Boychester. After a little alteration I applied the same method to the whole cipher, and read its hidden message: 'Bring sparklers, 23, Derby street, Boychester, W., 23, 8 sharp. (F) red Erick.' Sparklers is the slang for diamonds; W. is Wednesday; 23 is the date, and as the 23rd does not occur on Wednesday again for eight months, it must be to-morrow. Now do you understand?"

"Yes," he chorused. "And what will you do now—communicate with the police?"

"No," he answered promptly; "Helstone and I will work this thing ourselves. Lawson, the Chief Constable of Boychester, is an old friend of mine. I shall go down there by the first train in the morning and ask him to find out whether Frederick—or anyone answering to the description of Red Erick—is staying at 23 Derby street. Then I will wire you, Helstone, and you can come down and be in at the death. By George! Won't the county be surprised!"

We complimented him on his cleverness, and the old boy spread himself like a green bay tree and boasted so loud and long that we reminded him that he was only at the beginning of his adventure.

At three o'clock the next day he wired me, "Come by train arriving at 7.30."

As the train steamed into the station I saw him pacing the platform excitedly.

"It's all right," he said, as I alighted. "23 is an hotel—The Albion. They have engaged two private rooms and ordered dinner for four at 8.30. Scotland Yard have not the slightest idea of the meeting. Police-like they are on another track altogether. I pledged Lawson to secrecy before I showed him the cipher. As a J.P. I'd have played the whole thing off my own bat rather than have been robbed of the glory. It's the biggest coup of my life!"

A few minutes before eight we were ushered into the private sitting-room reserved for Mr. Frederick. It was empty. As the time passed Elsmore's anxiety was painful to witness. Watch in hand, he paced the room, starting nervously at every sound.

"Do you think they have got wind of our movements?" he asked.

"Oh, no," answered Lawson, reassuringly. "There is a train at 8.15. A cab can easily do the distance in five or six minutes, and the dinner is ordered for 8.30."

The rattle of a cab drew Elsmore to the window.

"Don't look out," I cried; "they may see you."

He darted back into the middle of the room and stood with a tense, strained look, listening eagerly. The sound of footsteps in the corridor increased his excitement. We tiptoed across the room and stood so that the opening door would hide us from view. The footsteps ceased at the door of the room; there was a low knock, the door moved upon its hinges, someone entered, the door closed again, and we saw a beautifully dressed woman walking across the room to the window.

At the sound made by our movements she turned and, to his utter astonishment, Elsmore found himself face to face with Lillian. For a moment he stared at her in dumb astonishment. Her eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Lillian!" he gasped, at length.

"What on earth are you doing here?"

"I came in answer to Frederick's advertisement," she answered.

"Frederick's advertisement?" he echoed. "What advertisement?"

"The cipher advertisement in yesterday's Times, which you thought proved your theory concerning the theft of the Dutton Diamonds. These are the sparklers referred to."

As she spoke she took out the little box and handed it to me, and taking out the ring I slipped it on to her finger.

Elsmore turned and looked at Lawson, who was watching him, a smile of amusement playing about the corners of his mouth.

"You knew!" he said.

Lawson laughed and nodded.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he ejaculated. "What a sell! By Jove, Lawson, but they fooled me to the top of my bent!"

EDWARDS' TROUBLED REIGNS.

Three Rulers of That Name Have Been Murdered.

The Edwards who have preceded the present ruler of England on the throne almost uniformly have been unfortunate in their reigns. Edward the Elder, son of Alfred the Great, whom he succeeded in 901, battled with his cousin before he was the undisputed ruler of the Saxons. His reign lasted 23 years, which were marked by constant strife. Edward the Martyr, King of the West Saxons, took the crown in 955, and was murdered by order of his stepmother three years later. The last of the Saxon Edwards was "the Confessor" so called because of his reputed sanctity. He reigned from 1042 to 1066 and died without issue.

Edward I. of England was king from 1272 to 1307, a period marked by civil and foreign wars. He died while on the way to Scotland to subdue an insurrection which had placed Bruce on the throne.

Edward II., who had been the first Prince of Wales, became king in 1307. Twenty years later, after warring with his barons, he was deposed by parliament and murdered in Berkeley Castle.

Edward III. succeeded Edward II., became involved in the "Hundred-Year-War" with France and lost about all his continental possessions to Charles V. Twice during his reign did the black death devastate his kingdom. He died in 1377.

Edward IV., king from 1461 to 1483, was active in the War of the Roses before he succeeded to the throne. His reign was marked by the bloody dissensions between the Houses of York and Lancaster.

Edward V., born in Westminster Abbey in 1470, was king for three months in 1483, when in June of that year he was murdered with his brother in the Tower by order of his uncle, Richard Duke of Gloucester.

Edward VI., king from 1547 to 1553, closed a troubled reign by assigning the crown to the unfortunate Lady Jane Grey, to the exclusion of Mary and Elizabeth. He was the last English monarch of the name until the accession of the present king.

DIGNIFIED SCHOOLBOYS.

The model schoolboy is to be looked for in China. Eleven hundred college boys, all bound for Queen's College, Hong Kong, and not one of them indulging in boisterous laughter or even letting off his superfluous spirits by a run or a leap, is a sight to be witnessed any day in that Eastern city. A correspondent stood in one of the streets crowded by these Chinese schoolboys and watched them as they passed. They did not hurry, but walked sedately along, with their books under their arms. The utmost exhibition of youthful feeling was a reserved smile which lighted up the face of a boy here and there as he listened to the conversation of his companions. Boisterous behaviour would have been considered by these Chinese lads as undignified and quite contrary to all ideas of schoolboy good form. The more sedate a Chinese boy is in his behaviour, the more he conducts himself like a little old man, the more aristocratic he is considered by his schoolfellows, and the more praise he receives from his schoolmasters and his parents. There was little variety in the color and cut of their dress. They wore no hats. Some had brushed all their hair straight back into their long queues; while others had a fringe of stiff bristles dividing the shaven from the unshaven territory of their heads.

A REMARKABLE DREAM.

RAISED A FAMILY FROM POVERTY TO AFFLUENCE.

A Clergyman of the Church of England Tells a Strange Story.

The following, which our readers will probably admit is the most remarkable dream-story they have ever heard, is given in the very words in which it is told by the dreamer, a clergyman of high repute in the Church of England, of whose absolute truthfulness there can be not the faintest possibility of suspicion. It is very doubtful whether there is on record any dream every minute detail of which has been so exactly reproduced in fact, or which has so dramatically opened the door of wealth to a family at the lowest ebb of its fortunes.

A few months ago I fell asleep and dreamed. In my dream I saw spread before me the open pages of a book, which a glance showed me was a church-register book, and in clear writing I read the details of the marriage of Matthew H— to Ellen R—. It seemed in my dream, as if the register were far away, although I could read it so distinctly. I felt a strong impulse to go to the railway station without knowing my destination, except that it was a country village. I asked for a ticket, and was told by the clerk that the train in the direction I wished to go had left some time ago, but that another train was due in half an hour, and he promised to call me.

I felt no surprise at receiving the ticket without giving the name of the place to which I wished to travel. To my great annoyance, however, the man neglected to call me when the train arrived, and again I had to wait for another. This time I was more successful, and after a journey of just under an hour I alighted at a pretty LITTLE COUNTRY STATION.

I went to the vicarage and asked for the vicar, but was informed that he was not at home. I then begged the old servant, who answered the door, to lend me the key to the church. At first she hesitated, but when I persisted, saying I was myself a clergyman of the Anglican Church, she acceded to my request. I easily unlocked the church door and proceeded to the vestry. On a shelf were a number of old register books, one of which I took down and opened. My eyes instantly fell on the entry I had seen a short time before, and then suddenly I awoke.

For three successive nights I dreamed this dream, until I at last began to believe there must be something in it. I made a few cautious inquiries, and, without betraying myself, gained the information that there actually was a village, not an hour distant by rail, which answered exactly to the description of the place I had seen in my dream.

My mind was now made up. I went to the station and demanded a ticket for M—. I was told that the train had gone, but that there would be another one in half an hour, and as it was a beautiful day I resolved to take a walk; unfortunately I strayed too far, and on my returning to the station saw the train just steaming out. Instantly I remembered that it was by the third train that I had travelled in my dream.

When, two hours later, I arrived at M—, I had no difficulty in finding the way to the vicarage, and was not at all surprised to hear that the vicar was not at home. Exactly as had happened in my dream, the housekeeper at first demurred to my request for the key, BUT FINALLY YIELDED.

I went to the church and entered the vestry. Yes, there was the shelf with the row of brown leather volumes. I took one down, and my heart gave a great bound when I opened it at random and read "Matthew H— to Ellen R—." I made a note of the entry in detail and returned to the vicarage.

By this time the vicar had returned, and in a matter-of-fact way I asked for the certificate of the marriage in question, giving dates, etc. As there was nothing unusual in my request or my manner he complied as a matter of course, and I returned home armed with the certificate.

But now that I had got it, what was I to do with it? What was to be the next step?

I could think of only one course foolish as it may appear, I advertised it in one of the daily papers, and by return of post received an answer from a firm of solicitors informing me that they had vainly searched everywhere for the certificate, as it was of the highest importance to a family of good birth, but in very reduced circumstances. Now that the register had been found it would mean affluence instead of poverty, as a large fortune depended solely on the production of the certificate in question.—London Tit-Bits.

"Is Mr. Gayboy at home?" asked the caller. "Yes, sir," replied the educated butler. "He is at home—his at his club."

"You're a fraud, sir," cried the indignant patient. "You guarantee your medicine to cure after every thing else failed, and—"

"Well my dear sir," replied the fake medicine man, "probably you haven't tried everything else."