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MARKDALE STANDARD

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THE COLOR OF BABY'S EYES

Though they were now middle-aged, successful men of business, and partners in the same concern, Mr. John Harding and Mr. Gilbert Mason had been the closest friends ever since those remote days when, in the humble capacity of office boys, they daily travelled together to the City.

Both of them had married; each of them had one child. But Harding's wife was dead, and Mason's a quiet little woman with a vast respect for her husband and all his doings—was still alive.

It was in their children that these two partners had had, as they themselves said, the only real failure in their lives.

Harding's child was a boy; Mason's a girl. Romantic folks, quite small, the children were both out that a marriage between them would be an ideal match. There was nothing which irritated Harding or Mason more than to hear this remark.

As a matter of fact, each had alluring ideas with regard to his son's future. Harding had dreamed that his son, Francis, should aspire to the most conspicuous heights in the world of commerce.

Mason, on the other hand, had social aspirations for his daughter, Ethel. He looked forward with the keenest anticipation to the day when, by virtue of her marriage, she should take her place among the exalted society to which he was convinced she rightly belonged.

And, in the meantime, the children grew up practically together, quarrelling and making it up again, going off on expeditions, just as though they were brother and sister.

Affairs went on easily enough for the next few years. Francis was making capital progress in business; Ethel had developed into a charming young lady.

And then came the bombshell. In the coldest way, they announced to their respective fathers one day that they had become engaged, and purposed to get married in the immediate future.

Gilbert Mason stormed at his daughter; John Harding raved at his son. Finding both young people obdurate to the point of defiance, the two fathers came together to discuss this impending catastrophe.

"Never was so astounded in my life!" declared Mr. Harding, staking up and down his dining-room. "Never!"

"I never even guessed at such a

fasco!" said Mr. Mason, staring gloomily through the window. "Thwarted—thwarted at my time of life!" fumed Mr. Harding. "We've spoken to them about each other dozens of times, said years. And now, after all these years, there must be an end to this with Frank!"

"And I shall turn Ethel off with-out a penny," promised Mr. Mason. "To be thwarted like this at my time of life!"

The interview signalled the beginning of a week of storm and stress. Then there came one hard, bitter evening when Frank and Ethel and the two fathers had a final interview in Mason's study, while Mrs. Mason was crying in her bedroom.

"Can't think where you got your obstinacy from!" complained Mr. Harding, rather unreasonably, addressing his son. "For a whole week I've been trying to persuade you to act sensibly, and now—"

"I think I shall be acting extremely sensibly in marrying Ethel," replied the son calmly.

"Understand me, sir," said the enraged Harding. "If you marry her, I've done with you!"

"And you needn't think," broke in Mr. Mason, "that I shall help you on account of Ethel, because I shan't! I disown her!"

There was only one possible end to such an interview. Both Frank and Ethel were high-spirited young people, with more than a touch of obstinacy in their composition. Firmly they declined to alter their minds.

"Very well, then," said Harding, striving to speak calmly. "I think that settles it. Henceforth you're utter strangers to us, Mason!"

"Exactly," agreed Mason. "Utter strangers!"

And next morning Frank and Ethel had left their homes and got married at the earliest opportunity.

Several attempts did they make to hold out the olive-branch, but their fathers were firm in their decision. Letters sent were returned unopened; at a chance meeting of father and son, Harding's face had set stonily, and he had marched past Frank without a look over of recognition.

A couple of years passed, and the chance of reconciliation grew less and less. Frank left his position in the City to take up a better one elsewhere. The news of his success did not appear to please his father in the least.

And when, one day, the fathers received an enthusiastic telegram informing them that they were grandfathers now, they simply crumpled up the message and threw it into the wastepaper-basket.

"Bah," growled Mason sourly, as it makes any difference!"

By the end of another six months they had lost all traces of the young couple. Frank, they learned indirectly, was still doing well, and had moved to yet another post; but received, he made no further attempt to regain his father's interest.

And finally, it seemed that the two old friends had completely dropped their heads among children out of their lives, and sought to find in business a solace for their shattered daydreams. They never so much as mentioned Frank or Ethel.

This, then, was the position one morning when Harding swung son doubtfully.

"Extraordinary thing," he mentioned. "I had an anonymous letter last night."

"So did I," said Mason, hesitatingly. "Was it about—"

"Harding nodded.

"I know Frank would come to grief," he declared. "I know he couldn't go on improving his position so fast without coming to a work."

"And how he's out of it?"

"And very hard up," said Mason. "That's what I find of the family," says in his anonymous note to me."

"Save him right!" muttered Harding.

"Of course it does," agreed Mason. "Serve him both right—headstrong young fools!"

For a few minutes there was silence. Then Mason looked round at his partner, and he remarked, "I—I am not a vicious man," he remarked, "but now that they're thoroughly humbled, there's just one satisfaction I should like to give myself. I'd like to see the scalded little street they've been forced to live in. I've got the address."

"So would I," said Harding. "Nothing would please me more. Let's go now and have a look at it."

Some while later, a taxi deposited the partners at the corner of a small street in a distinctly unfashionable quarter of London.

"Respectable—that's the very most you can say for it," remarked Mr. Harding, eyeing the thoroughfare with distaste. "That'll be the house—Number 17 down there. Looks very drab, doesn't it?"

"Like they were regarding the little house, a diminutive maid appeared from the side, a paramour in the shelter of a waiting butcher's cart, as a feminine form came out of the house and, with elaborate care, deposited a baby in the perambulator.

"That'll be the brat," observed Mr. Mason.

"Skinny, half-starved-looking little thing, I expect," replied Mr. Harding. "Do you know, I think I'd like to have a look at it, just out of curiosity."

"So would I," agreed Mr. Mason eagerly, and then added, more carelessly, "out of sheer curiosity, of course."

They waited till the feminine form had re-entered the house, and then they layd the baby and its diminutive nurse. Despite Mr. Harding's conjectures, the infant proved to be a bonny, healthy little kiddie.

The small girl evidenced a remarkable pride in her charge, and readily enough to the old gentleman's questions. "Yes," she said. "A dear, good little fellow, he was too. One should see him eat his meals! Of course," she answered triumphantly, "he had teeth—at least, he had a tooth." A feat which the small girl appeared to consider prodigious in a baby boy's tender months. His name? That, she informed them, with a flourish, was Master Francis Gilbert John Harding.

"His father's name," said Harding, across the pram to Mason, "and yours, and mine?"

"Done to curry favor with us, I expect," replied Mason, obviously responding to the remark.

Continuing, the small nurse solemnly averred that her charge knew a gee-gee, and proceeded to give further instances of his adorable precocity. The two grandfathers stood staring down at the infant in silence.

"Oh, well," said the little nurse at last, with an air of importance. "I can't stand 'ere gossiping all day with you two, much as I'd like to. I got a bit of shopping to do."

Both Mason and Harding had been furtively fumbling in their pockets, and now they confusedly bent over the pram, pretending to straighten the child's covering.

The nurse went off with her charge, and the two partners, as though waking from a dream, turned and looked at each other.

"He'd got his eyes," said Mason thoughtfully—"the same as his mother."

"No," contradicted Harding. "Grey—his father's color."

"Nonsense!" snapped Mason. "It's so long since you've turned your boy outdoors that you've forgotten the color of his eyes."

"Look here," said Harding, "I'm positive the baby's eyes are the color of his father's!"

"No, his mother's," persisted Mason. "I wouldn't mind making a bet on it!"

"I'll take you—for five pounds," said Harding.

"How could we decide it, though?" queried Mason.

"For a moment the two eyed each other speculatively.

"We'll call—just for speak once," said Harding, trying to speak carelessly. "Just to prove you're wrong; I don't mind going to see the young pair of fools just once. Mind you, I'm only going for one reason—simply to decide the question raised by the color of the baby's eyes."

"If that's the reason," said Mason, keeping a very straight face. "I don't mind going, either—just for once. It—it won't take us more than a minute or so."

But here he was wrong, for when his daughter opened the door to him and cried "Dad!" he was so moved that, forgetting all his bitterness of the past years, he simply took her in his arms and held her tightly.

And Mr. Harding, affecting utter reluctance, stared past them and wondered why his son did not appear to see what all the noise was about.

"Don't be buoyed up by false hopes," said Harding. "We've simply come to settle a little friendly wager. Has the baby got your eyes or his father's?"

"Both," the answered. "My eyes are blue, and his father's are grey. Baby's a real blue-grey."

"Then we're both right," observed Mr. Harding.

Before he had time to say any more, there was confusion, occasioned by the cyclonic return of the little nurse, bearing the baby.

"Look what I found in baby's pram, mum!" cried. "A five-pound note and four guineas in gold! Them two—she pointed an incriminating finger—"must have put 'em there."

"I thought it might come in useful," said Harding, avoiding his partner's eye.

"Muttered Mason, looking down." "But he's not," cried his wife, happily. "He's doing splendidly. Only you wouldn't have anything to do with him while you thought him prosperous, and we knew you both well enough to be sure you'd come to help us if we were poor. And we were right, weren't we? Oh, please forgive us, but we did so want to make it up with you! So we moved into these tiny lodgings for a week, and Frank wrote the anonymous notes himself. Now, you will forgive us, won't you?"

"I will, at any rate," said Mason. "I've been an old fool, but I'm not going to go on being one."

"And you, Mr. Harding?" she asked.

He was standing by the baby, and it had his forehead in the firm grasp of both of his hands.

"Me?" said Harding, gravely. "Oh, I forgive you of course. The baby says I've got to." Then he smiled happily. "Can't I send a telegram to my boy to meet us all somewhere as soon as possible?" he asked.—London Answers.

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDY

INTERNATIONAL LESSON, AUGUST 11.

Lesson VI. A troubled sea and a troubled soul, Mark 4.35 to 5.20.

Golden Text, Psa. 46. 1, 2.

Verse 35. On that day—The particular afternoon of the day; on which Jesus sat in a boat and taught the multitudes in parables; Unlike Luke (8. 22), Mark associates the events so that he remembers the very day.

The other side.—The eastern shore of the lake, about opposite Capernaum.

37. Storm of wind—Greek, a great equal. Matthew calls it a "tempest" (8. 24).

38. The cushion.—On the helmsman's seat. The mention of the cushion and other little details indicates the careful detail of Mark's narrative.

39. Heed, be still.—Silence, he muzzled. He addresses the waves as though speaking to an unruly ox. The Greek word carries with it not only the meaning that the sea should become quiet, but also that it should remain so.

A great palm.—In contrast with the great storm.

40. Have ye not yet faith?—This question seems to indicate the principal lesson which the incident is intended to teach. In view of all the preceding miracles, it would intimate that those men, who had been associated with Jesus, should have been confident of his power and disposition to care for them, yet the incident discloses a woeful lack of faith. The startled appeal to their sleeping Master speaks the distrust which possessed them when confronted with danger.

The stilling of the storm is one more incident added to the long list of miracles which were designed to inspire the disciples with a constant faith in Jesus as the master of every situation.

41. Feared exceedingly.—At first on account of their danger, later because of the mysterious power which Jesus exercised.

Even the wind and the sea obey him. Recorded in all three synoptic Gospels, indicating the marked impression made. Jesus not only spoke disease and demons subject to Jesus, but the natural elements as well.

42. Gerases.—Luke 8. 26 gives this rendering, while Matthew 8. 28 reads Gadarenes. The city Gerases is derived, as is the name of the eastern side of the lake, about midway from north to south, and about a mile from the shore. The shore at the point of issue is narrow and steep, dropping abruptly from the high table-land to the water's edge. Here there is another heap of ruins designated by the same name. The other heap, on Gadarenes, on the city six miles south-west of the lake and south of the Hieronax or Farnuk gorge. Gadara was fortified in ancient times and was one of the principal cities of Decapolis.

Compare verse 20. Because of its importance it was known more widely outside of Palestine than was Gerases, and this fact may have led to the substitution of Gadarenes for Gerases by some ancient copyists. When we remember how often the manuscripts, copied during the many centuries preceding the invention of printing, the word is that more copyist's errors are not found than actually do occur.

2. Straightway.—A common word in Mark's rapid sketch of events. Tombs—Caves in the limestone cliffs in the vicinity of Gerases. A man—Matthew mentions two. Luke, however, mentions only one. It is not improbable that there were two of whom one was the fiercer and the other the spokesman.

Unclean spirits.—Compare Lesson Text Studies for March 10 for note on Demon Possession.

6. Worshipped him.—Paid him reverence. This was an act of obeisance which did not necessarily amount to the worship of deity, but was a common means by which one person acknowledged the superiority of another.

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