

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE

"Oh, I really think there's no danger," said Mr. Fitzallyn Fitz Smythe. He was a tall, slender young man, with a long curled mustache, eyeglasses mounted in gold, and a general aspect of self complacency, about twenty-seven and a lawyer by profession.

Minnie Martin shook her curly head. "There's always danger for a bachelor in leap year," she said solemnly. "Only think, girls, how dreadful it would be for Cousin Fitzallyn to be married! Nobody to take us to the opera—nobody to send us bouquets—no escort at the promenade concerts!" "Dreadful!" echoed the other girls in chorus.

"Now—now—you're really too bad," said Mr. Fitz Smythe, with a flattered sort of simper. "I shan't be married, leap year, or no leap year."

"Don't speak too rashly, Fitzallyn," said Miss Pennifer, gravely. "There's no knowing how near you may be to your fate. Miss Deborah Suffem looked very longing at you in church last Sunday."

"Miss Deborah Suffem, indeed! An old maid with green spectacles and a twisted mouth."

"Well, that is the very reason; her chances are growing desperate."

Mr. Fitz Smythe laughed.

"Do you really believe that any woman would be bold and unfeminine enough to come wooing to a man, Josie Pennifer?"

"Dear!" said Josie demurely. "We don't get a chance but once in four years, and if I didn't happen to be engaged to Mark Aubrey—"

"Nonsense!"

"But it's no nonsense—you are really a very handsome, attractive man."

"Really, now, girls."

Fitzallyn made good his retreat, among the gigglings of his fair friends and cousins; but nevertheless he carried away with him a pleasant internal sensation of being a very fine sort of fellow, dangerously fascinating, and rather in peril at this period of his rolling years, so conspicuous to feminine prowess.

"I don't know but that the girls are right, after all—that is, to a certain degree," he mused within his own mind as he bent his steps toward his bachelor domains. "It won't do to be too demonstrative—the women must be held in check just at present—and yet I don't know, either. It seems to me the sensation of receiving a proposal from one of the fair sex would be very delightful; but then the embarrassment of saying no!"

Fitzallyn Fitz Smythe stroked his chin meditatively, and almost wished that some young lady would take advantage of the propitious season and select him as a subject for the experiment.

It was about nine o'clock that same evening, and our hero sat, slipped and dressing gown, before his shining sea-coal fire, enjoying a novel and cigar, when Scipio, the boy of all work, knocked at the door.

"Well, Scip, what's waiting?"

"Please, sir, there's a lady downstairs called to see you—Miss Lacy, she said the name was—and if you wasn't particularly engaged—"

"Engaged? No, of course not. Show her up."

Mr. Fitz Smythe threw his cigar on the fire, poked his slippers under the table, and shoved a whole drift of old newspapers at the back of the sofa in nervous haste.

"Ceil Lacy! What on earth does she want? I wonder if my hair is parted properly behind? Confound the boots, they won't go on! And my collar is crumpled, I know perfectly well."

He strove to conceal his embarrassment with a sickly smile as a slight figure, dressed in black and closely veiled, glided in.

"Miss Lacy, pray take a seat. I assure you I am highly honored by this visit. What can I have the honor of doing for you?"

Miss Lacy, however, remained silent, but Mr. Fitz Smythe could see the nervous thrill of timidity fluttering through her whole figure.

"Won't you lay aside your veil and cloak?"

"Oh, not for worlds," she whispered. "I have come upon such a delicate errand."

"Indeed?"

Mr. Fitz Smythe's heart began to throb irregularly and fast.

Long as he had worshipped Ceil Lacy from afar off, as an Eastern devotee worships the sun, he had never dreamed of such an episode as this.

"It is leap year," resumed the fair visitor—again that nervous tremble—and surely you will deem it not unwomanly, Fitzallyn, if I take advantage of the privilege universally accorded to my sex?"

"Unwomanly, dearest Ceil?"

"Nay," she archly motioned him away. "You are abrupt—too premature. But you will, then, really and actually be mine?"

"You're sweet queen of my inmost heart, until death!" ejaculated Fitzallyn, radiantly.

"Hush!" She held up a warning finger. "We are interrupted; someone is coming! Breathe not a word of this to mortal soul, but come to-morrow evening to receive once more the eternal vows of your own Ceil!"

She was gone before Mr. Fitz Smythe could plead for a longer interview.

How he detested those clumsy club fellows, whose heavy footsteps on the stairs had disturbed her half-murmured vows!

What did he care for their about-town gossip and stale anecdotes!

"Ceil! Ceil! Ceil! was the burden of his every heartbeat, every thought!

If he could only have witnessed the unceremonious manner in which the fair Ceil of his exciting interview leaped downstairs four steps at a time, if he could only have heard the shrilly-whistled air from "Traviata" which cleft the silence of the winter's night as she strode along, he might have wondered a little.

"Off with your toggery, girls!" she ejaculated, rushing into the midst of the laughing circle who still sat round the fire, and, with cloak and crinoline removed, Mr. Alfred Pennifer stood mischievously revealed—a handsome, roguish lad of seventeen, slender and graceful enough to have personated Venus herself.

"Now, now, don't overwhelm a fellow with such a deluge of questions! Fitz believes that Miss Lacy has fallen desperately in love with him—proposed—all that sort of thing! He's the biggest donkey out, or he would have seen me giggling behind my veil the whole time. You should have heard how charmingly he capitulated, the great, conceited calf! And he's to call on Miss Lacy to-morrow morning by special appointment. Won't there be lots of fun? Just you go, then, girls, all of you, and get behind the door, or under the table, or somewhere, and it'll be better than the theatre. How Ceil will open her magnificent blue eyes! How she will wither him with the weight of her royal scorn! Jupiter! I only wish I could be there to see him shrink up like a dead leaf on the fire."

"But how angry Ceil will be with us!" faltered Minnie Martin, a little frightened.

"Angry? Of course she will," said Josie Pennifer; "but she can't help laughing when all's come and gone, and Alfred. It's such a grand joke on Fitzallyn."

"We'll all go round there early to-morrow morning, to spend the day," said Bell Martin, rubbing her plump little hands joyously together. "It will be such fun!"

III.

Cecil Lacy and her half dozen girl friends were busy in the little boudoir over worsted work, crochet, and embroidery, when a card was brought up to her.

"It's your cousin, Mr. Fitz Smythe, Minnie," she said, glancing at it. "He's an early caller. Shall we go into the next room?"

"Certainly not," said Minnie decidedly. "He hasn't called to see us. We will excuse you, Cecil, until his visit is over. Run along, quick."

Cecil Lacy never ran. She was one of those tall, queenly creatures who move like bending willows and glide along with an ease and grace vainly sighed after by less-favored mortals. A handsome blonde, with deep-blue eyes, golden hair, surrounding her well-shaped head like a mist, and a complexion only less pure and delicate than tint was.

Miss Lacy was the spoiled belle of society this season.

Like one conscious of her manifold advantages, Miss Lacy walked into the parlor where Fitzallyn Fitz Smythe was eagerly awaiting her.

"Good morning, Mr. Fitz Smythe." Rather a chilling reception, but women were proverbially fickle and capricious.

"Have you forgotten last night, Cecil? Sweet one, I have come to make all the arrangements for our speedy marriage."

Miss Lacy stared at him blankly.

"Last night? Our marriage?"

"When you breathed into my rapturous ear the sweet confession of your love."

Cecil drew back a step or two. Was the young man actually mad?

"I have not the least idea of what you mean, Mr. Fitz Smythe," she said with a cold glimmer in the blue eyes sufficiently unlike the melting glances of a damsel willing to be wooed and won.

Fitzallyn began to doubt his own identity strangely; the edifice of his self complacency tottered dubiously on its very insufficient foundation.

"Ceil, do you mean to say—"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Fitz Smythe," interrupted the inexorable beauty, "but you will please address me as Miss Lacy until you have permission to speak otherwise."

"Miss Lacy, then—do you mean to assert that you did not come to my office last night and tell that—that you loved me? In short, did you not entreat me to become yours?"

Cecil opened her blue eyes wider and more haughtily than ever.

"Mr. Fitz Smythe, I don't know whether you are mad or intoxicated. Only one or the other plea could excuse the very singular language you are using. I have never been into your office in my life. I was at the opera last night with the gentleman to whom I am engaged to be married; and I should as soon think of telling my footman that I loved him as of making any such confession to you!"

Fitzallyn sat looking helplessly at Miss Lacy. Surely he could not mistrust his own reason and memory—surely his senses had not deceived him.

"It's very strange," he muttered.

"You have probably been asleep and dreaming," said Cecil, with a patronizing toss of her gold-misted head. "Take less champagne or supper to-night, Mr. Fitzallyn Fitz Smythe, and you will doubtless be troubled with no more apparitions of young ladies making love to you."

Fitzallyn blushed a hot, uncomfortable scarlet. It was only just beginning to occur to him what a fool he had made of himself.

"I—I must be going," he faltered, seizing nervously on the cat, who lay fast asleep in a chair, in lieu of his hat.

Cecil smiled.

"Spare my poor Grimalkin," she interposed, and Fitzallyn, stumbled out of the room, he scarce knew how, in an agony of embarrassment and mortification.

He had just closed the door, when the portals of the little boudoir flew open, and the mischievous bevy of laughing girls swarmed round Cecil.

"We have heard it all, Cecy. The door was just the least bit in the world ajar," they cried. "Poor dear Fitzallyn! How could you be so cruel!"

"But it is the strangest thing in the world that he should fancy I had been to his office!" said Cecil with a puzzled look. "I could have laughed outright if I had not been dreadfully angry!"

"Ceil," said Bell Martin, in a low, mysterious voice, "will you promise never, never, never to tell if we give

you the clew to the mystery?"

"And will you promise not to be angry?" pleaded pretty Josie Pennifer in her most coaxing tone.

Of course Cecil promised—what else could she do? And Bell told her the story of Master Alfred's masquerading frolic.

"Fitz thinks every girl is in love with him, you know," said Josie, "and we thought it would be such a splendid check to his horrid, smirking self conceit!"

Cecil tried her best to look grave, but she couldn't keep back the laughter, do what she would.

It was a cruel joke, girls," she said, endeavoring to straighten her countenance; "but—but—it will be a pretty good lesson for him."

So Fitzallyn Fitz Smythe got no sympathy whatever.

The secret of whom his mysterious veiled visitor was remained an inscrutable enigma to him always.

"Some girl proposed to me," he said, "but I'm blessed if I ever found out who it was!"

"You're dreaming, Fitz," said his boon companions.

But Fitz Smythe's ordeal had not been entirely without a favorable result.

He became a meeker and a humbler man after Cecil Lacy's naughty repulse, and the pretty plotters congratulated themselves accordingly.

UNDER A HIGH PRESSURE

TRIP INTO BLACKWELL TUNNEL, UNDER THE THAMES.

Peculiar Intoxication Under Atmospheric Pressure—Curious Sensations While the Air Was Being Pumped Into the Chamber—The Voice Was shrill and Ghostly

It may surprise the general public to learn that for three years hundreds of workmen have been living in compressed air, each carrying a hundred-weight of air to every square inch of his body, while he, on the surface, have borne but fifteen pounds to the square inch. This has occurred in the making of the tunnel beneath the Thames at Blackwell, London, which is described by Mr. J. M. Bulloch, in a vivid article on the subject in the English Illustrated Magazine for January, as the greatest feat in subaqueous engineering.

You may understand the process better, he says, if I describe a journey I made into the compressed air. Having half stripped and equipped myself with a rough woollen shirt, huge jackboots and leather jacket—so that I looked like an old fashioned pirate—my guides and I sallied forth from Kent and trudged along the entire passage through mud and mire, noticing en route, an army of men engaged on all sorts of work.

Along the roof ran a line of electric lights, while in the dark corners the men used pink colored candles. A little north of Shaft 2, in which a lift was tearing up and down, taking the excavated soil to the surface, we came on the twelve feet brick barricade, which effectually corked up the compressed air and which, of course, had been moved several times as the work proceeded.

Through this barricade ran two narrow passages, about the height of an ordinary man. These were the air-locks. A little air-tight door, just like the door of a safe, opened—the air, of course, being let out in the process—and we entered. The door was closed after us, and we were left for some minutes in the lock to become acclimatized to the new atmospheric conditions of the tunnel beyond. To this end certain valves were turned on, and the compressed air from the inner tunnel poured in with the deafening roar of a steam nozzle.

A CURIOUS PANTOMIME.

Then followed a curious little pantomime. My guides holding their noses between their fingers, began swallowing vigorously, and signalled me to follow their example, speech being almost impossible, as sound depends so much an atmosphere. I felt a crackling in the drum of my ear, and little by little was being pumped in every minute was curving the membrane inward, so that I had to swallow in order to clear the Eustachian tube and get the pressure on each side of the tympanum equal.

Then I began to feel distinctly exhilarated. The increased amount of oxygen pumped in was intoxicating me a trifle.

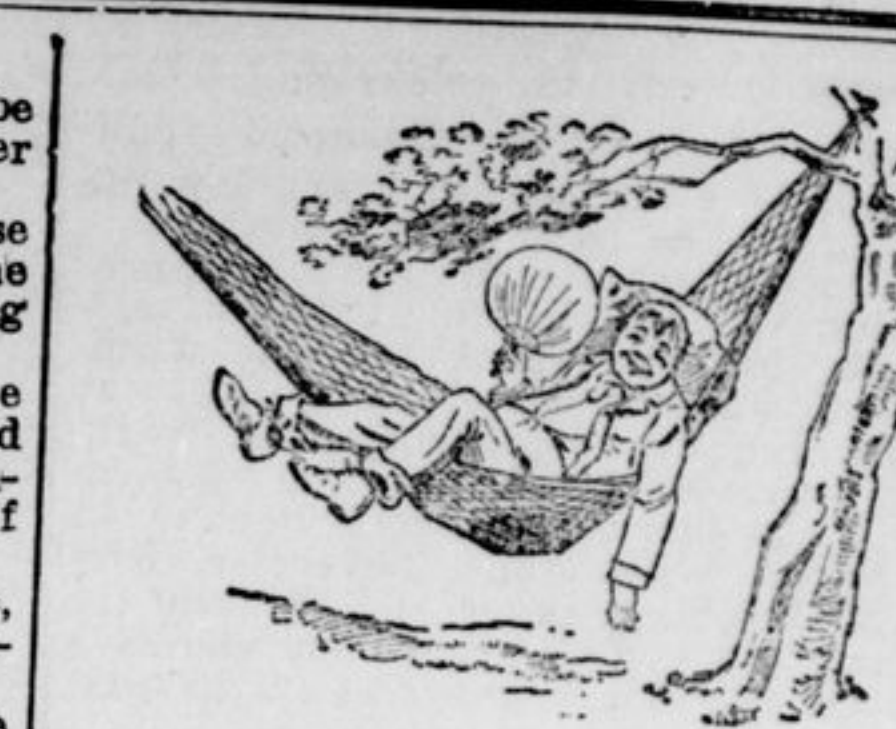
The journey along the tunnel had been a little tiring, but now I felt sprightly. Here was the secret of youth; here was a practical demonstration of Jekyl and Hydeism. But at what an expense!

I was living ever so much quicker than the man at the surface above. Everything was living quicker. My cigar burned to ashes with the rapidity of a cigarette.

When the process of acclimatization was complete we emerged from the safe-like door at the opposite end of this marvellous chamber of youth, to find ourselves in the section of the tunnel which was worked under compressed air.

That presented a strange, unearthly appearance. Black darkness all around, save for the line of electric lights running along the roof; a strange, deathly chill; a touch of clamminess infecting everything. Our voices piped shrill and strange and ghostly.

A long caravan of mud laden trolleys from the shield were running down on rails to be emptied on the other side of the barricade, and here and there the shadowy figures of the mud-splashed workers were just visible. Three hundred feet further on we came to the shield, working as I have described. In that little journey from the barricade to the shield one saw in exaggerated operation a series of physical laws that ordinarily escapes one's attention—acoustics, pneumatics, hydraulics—in short, the entire range of physics.



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NOTES AND COMMENTS

The repeal by the Transvaal of the Alien Immigration Act is accepted in England as the willingness of the Boer government to lessen the obligations of the Boer government towards the two governments between the two governments that law foreigners in the Transvaal were compelled to furnish them could support their government being thus given refuse admission to or to exit from the republic at its subjects seems probable. London convention provided subjects shall have freedom of movement in the Transvaal, and treated as regards their property like citizens of the law is deemed a violation of the treaty. The Fourth African issued a fortnight ago by is so regarded in London, demand tantamount to as was made in March last for or formal suspension of the law, and to its passage of the law, and the Transvaal to submit to government the treaties with Netherlands and other deemed to go so far in its provisions of the treaty, as to destroy its value. For the government and contain stipulations between the two for the past two years, as such infringement, if upheld, be to make the Transvaal and thus to preclude the establishment of a South African union, at least under the

The settled policy of Great Britain is that South Africa should be a self-governing state, not an appendix to the British empire. The London convention would be defeated, it is the London convention by which the British colonial secretary the repeal or suspension of the law as especially the treaty, a demand for a naval demonstration in the despatch of troops, and the vote of a million additional defences in South Africa which seeks the repeal of the law, and the President Kruger declares, no violation of the London convention cause it is distasteful to states. As a compromise reached on one essential point, it is hoped that, President Kruger's reply in tone, an understanding reached on others, and the African problem undergoes that the Transvaal suffer outrage in the Jameson raid the Cape premier and at imperial officers participate there is an English party in Africa which seeks the repeal of the law in order to settle its past question. But it is maintained that the Transvaal under British suzerainty, sequence its breaches of the law, and that as a result hemmed in on all sides, one, it is the part of wisdom to accept the inevitable and work with it.

AN EXPERT AMATEUR DECLARES Certain Would-be Politicians

Rule 1—Never return your partner's trumps, let him call; you trump. What right has he to take it to humiliate your insignificance in the game?

Rule 2—If your partner's trump, let him call; you trump. What right has he to take it to humiliate your insignificance in the game?

Rule 3—Always trump your partner's trump. What right has he to take it to humiliate your insignificance in the game?

Rule 4—Always lead your partner's countenance. What right has he to take it to humiliate your insignificance in the game?

Rule 5—Always throw your long suit, so that your partner's trump, you can't blame you for your opponent's trick.

Rule 6—Engage in across the table and assert cards played in the suits.

Rule 7—Revoke occasionally to shorten the game your opponents three extra tricks, and call your attention to what has happened.

Rule 8—Insist on looking three tricks, and call your attention to what has happened.

Rule 9—After each hand get up a "post mortem" what might have happened if your partner had played differently.

Rule 10—As a matter of course, so as to keep the players off the game.

Rule 11—If you have a room it is expected that you look into the hands of your opponent and prompt you what to do.

Rule 12—In dealing, thumbs in your mouth as a sign, so you can enjoy the more cleanly players.

Rule 13—If you have a queen, always play out of it. It is only good for one of your adversaries ought to take a trick with their king.

Rule 14—Play second-hand first round, and if you lose be thankful you are rid of it.

Rule 15—Always assist in getting up a "Seaside" rare fun to see them squawk.

Rule 16—Any mistake (by your partner) should be downright stupidity, while any only errors of judgment