



YOUNG man of 25 stood in a handsomely furnished drawing room.

hat which looked all the more shabby by contrast with the rich curtain against which it brushed. In the other he held the round white hand of a girl who was looking into his eyes. There were two pairs of eyes peering straight into each other. The girl was speaking.

"Mamma says—that— Her voice trembled. "Well, what does she say?" "She says that you mustn't—you mustn't come— There was more faltering. "That I mustn't come here any more?" "Yes."

"Well, your mother is right in this; at least for the present. What else does she say?" "That I'm not to— O, I can't do it." "Well, go on."

"I'm not to correspond with you or hear from you, ever, ever, ever." The last three words were spoken in despair, with a crescendo intonation.

"Right again. Now, Kitty, I understand your mother's purpose well. It is to marry you to a rich man. She wishes your fortune to be added to fortune."

"But I haven't any fortune." "Your mother has a very large one." "Then why can't she let us be happy?" and she dashed away a tear—a tear of mingled disappointment and vexation.

"Kitty!" called a cold, imperious woman's voice in an adjoining room. "Yes, mamma, in a minute." "Good-by," he said. "We must do as she wishes; at least now. If I could take you I would, but I can't and the prospect isn't hopeful. Better forget me, Kitty."

"I will not!" cried the girl passionately. She put both her arms about him and held him. "Kitty," he said, disengaging himself and looking her square in the face with a pair of honest eyes, "if the day ever comes when I can take care of you on a small income, will you leave her—pointing to the adjoining room—"and come to me?"

"Yes." "Then you shall hear from me; not through her, but direct." "She won't let me have your letter." "I'll find a way to reach you."

"Catherine!" called the voice in the other room, more imperious than before. He moved into the hall. The girl followed him. He caught her in his arms again and held her for a few moments, during which it seemed to the mother in the adjoining room that the clock on the parlor mantel was ticking very loud. Then he was gone. Kitty flew back into the drawing room and to the window. The look he gave her as he turned his head for the last time was very sad and very earnest, but it was a resolute look.

"I can't—I can't bear it," she said to herself mournfully, as he disappeared from her sight. "Kitty," called the mother again, this time in a more kindly tone. The daughter entered the sitting room and stood in the presence of her mother. She was the picture of unhappiness. Her form was too young, her cheek too round, her brow too smooth to present such a picture. She was barely 18, and this was the first trouble she had ever known. Mrs. Cloverlie was sitting in a high backed chair of antique pattern. She was knitting. There was a rigid look on her face, a squareness about her mouth that indicated a strong will.

"Kitty," she said, "when you come to be my age you will thank me for this." "Perhaps so, mamma." She was summoning all her own will power to keep from bursting into tears. "You told Mr. Horton all I directed you to tell him?" asked the mother, still plying her fingers on her knitting.

"Yes, mamma." "That he was not to come here any more?" "Yes, mamma." "You will not communicate with him?" "Yes, mamma." "What do you mean?" demanded the mother, fixing her eye severely upon her daughter.

"I mean no, mamma." "Can I depend upon you?" "Yes, mamma. At least I think so." "You think so?" "I will try, mamma." "Come here," said the mother. The daughter approached. Mrs. Cloverlie drew her down and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek. The kiss was to gild the pill she was forcing her daughter to swallow. Kitty seemed to understand that this was to end the interview. She went out of her stately mother's presence and upstairs to her own room. There she threw herself on the bed and the tears that had been ready to come burst forth in a torrent.

Mrs. Cloverlie touched an electric bell. A servant with a neat white apron ruffled at the bottom and a French cap entered. "Jane," said the mistress, "hereafter when the mail comes you are to bring it directly to me."

"Yes, m'm." "And remember in no case to give any letter to Miss Kitty."

"Yes, m'm." "Not even if it is addressed to her." The servant was about to withdraw. "Jane," called the mistress. "Jane paused."

"Hereafter I shall give you \$10 a month extra. This will be for taking care of the mail. Do you understand?" Jane signified that she understood. Indeed she comprehended perfectly. She knew very well that if any letter were suffered to pass through from the postman direct to Miss Kitty, her extra allowance as mail superintendent would cease, and that she would get her discharge besides.

It was about six weeks after all this happened that Mr. Tom Horton entered the office where he was employed, at \$75 a month, in a light coat, put on a light one, with ink marks on the sleeve, which admirably represented a shower—they were black enough for a storm—perched himself on a stool and took up a bundle of papers, on the head of each of which was printed "Daily Report." Tom was a clerk in an insurance office.

"The president would like to speak with you," said a boy, who suddenly poked his head into the compartment where Horton worked and withdrew it as suddenly. Tom got down off his stool, changed his coat, and went to the president's private office.

"Mr. Horton," said the president, "the superintendent of the state insurance department will come next week to examine into our condition. I want you to figure the re-insurance fund."

"All right, sir," said Tom, somewhat surprised at being called on for this duty. "And, Mr. Horton," the official went on, looking at Tom knowingly, "it is necessary that it should be so figured as to show no impairment of our capital."

Tom was astonished. "I can't figure it any other than the true way, Mr. Lester," he said, flushing up.

"Mr. Horton," the president went on in an insidious tone, "there is a great deal of latitude in these figures; no one really knows what they are. They are all assumed."

Tom said nothing. The president was sitting sideways at his desk, tapping on it lightly with the fingers of his right hand. "How would you like to be assistant secretary, Mr. Horton, with a salary of \$3,000 a year? I am considering the propriety of offering you that position."

"Not at such a price," said Tom. His eyes were big as saucers. All this was a frightful revelation to him. He saw only a man more than double his age tempting him. "I will make no figures that are not correct," he added, firmly.

"Don't you think you are a trifle squeamish?" "No, sir." Tom began to get angry. "And you decline?" "I do, most assuredly."

"Very well, sir," said the president quietly. "You may go back to your desk." Tom did go back to his desk—not to write, but to lay his head on it with a crushed sensation about his heart. He did not doubt for a moment that his discharge would soon follow. Of course there would be some pretext, but the discharge was sure to come. Then he thought of the assistant secretaryship and the \$3,000 a year and Kitty, and got up and took his hat and went out into the fresh air. It didn't seem possible for him to return to the office. Indeed, he remained away till the afternoon. When he went to his desk he found an order to go to the president's office. Tom felt no more doubt as to what he was called there for than of his own existence. He proceeded up the three or four steps which led to Mr. Lester's room and stood again in the presence of the official who held his destiny in his hands.

"Mr. Horton," the president began in a matter of fact, business like tone, "this being the last of December, we are arranging our force for the coming year."

Tom shuddered. "We are going to discharge several of the clerks, as we have more than we need." It was coming out as Tom had expected. He turned pale.

"In fact we are to have a complete reorganization." Mr. Lester stopped and looked over a paper on which there was, a long list of names. Tom's heart stopped, too.

"Mr. Warren is to be vice president next year," the president went on. Tom was obliged for the information, but didn't see how it concerned him. "And Mr. Minks is to be secretary in Mr. Warren's place?" "Yes, sir."

"There is to be a new assistant secretary appointed to take charge of all the securities." "Just so," said Tom, by this time scarcely knowing what he was saying. He wished his discharge would be spoken and over with.

A boy entered with a telegram. Mr. Lester read it and studied over it. Meanwhile he seemed to have forgotten that he was not alone.

"Ah!" he said, suddenly, "where was I. Oh, yes, I remember." "Mr. Horton, you are doubtless a very honest young man." Tom did not reply. He saw no necessity for taunts because he would not be dishonest. "But a very stupid one."

Still Tom had nothing to say. He stared at the president. "If you knew as much about the affairs of this company as you might know, you would see the absurdity of my asking you to tamper with the statement. Our net surplus is \$750,000."

last one test. I have applied such a test with a satisfactory result." "If Tom had been wender stricken before during the interview, he was now paralyzed with astonishment."

"You will be elected assistant secretary at the annual meeting next week, and your salary will be \$5,000 a year." "You don't mean it, sir," gasped Tom. "I certainly do," said the president, smiling. "You may be ready to enter on your duties on the 10th of January. The directors' meeting will occur on the 11th."

"Are you sure they will elect me?" asked Tom, with a sudden stopping of his heart. "I manage this company," replied the president sentimentally. "But why do you give me so much salary?" "On account of the responsibility you will assume. I would rather pay \$5,000 to a man I put faith in than \$1,000 to a man I'm not sure of."

"And you're sure of me?" "Perfectly." Tom tried to say something, but there was a choking sensation about the throat which prevented. Mr. Lester bowed him out politely, and he went to his desk.

"A letter for Miss Kitty, m'm." Jane handed her mistress an envelope on a silver salver. It was covered over with flowers and naughty looking little cupids, stamped on the paper, except a small island space in the center for the address. Mrs. Cloverlie took the missive, put on her glasses and examined the address.

"I expect it's a valentine," said Jane. The mistress did not reply. The writing somewhat resembled that of a Mr. Flint, an elderly suitor for Miss Kitty's hand, and one who would be decidedly acceptable to her mother. Mr. Flint was a millionaire.

"Bring me some warm water, Jane." The water was brought, the gum softened and out came a valentine. The matron read the contents over two or three times to be sure there was nothing in it indicating that it could be from Tom Horton.

"What nonsense some people can write. If John Flint wrote that he's a fool," she muttered. But that mattered not. Flint had millions to gild his "straightened forehead." Miss Cloverlie put the valentine back in the envelope, sealed it over and directed Jane to take it to Miss Kitty.

Why is it that a woman must always examine a superscription before she opens a letter? We don't know why it is so; we only know it to be a fact.

Kitty held the valentine up and read the address a number of times before she tore it open. Then she read:

A laden February cloud Lies on the sky this morn,
Each tree with ice is covered o'er,
The shrubs of leaves are shorn.

"That's pretty likely," observed Kitty to herself. "If the trees are covered with ice, there can't very well be leaves on the shrubs. I think that's from Mr. Flint. He scribbles, I know."

To be to thee
Eternally
Revered, beloved maid,
All my love ever can be,
Through gore I'd gladly wade.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Kitty. "To think of putting 'gore' in a valentine! It's certainly from Mr. Flint. He hasn't any better taste."

Pure maiden began this morn to look
On your dependent love;
Sweet are to me the slightest smiles
That round your red lips hover.

"That's very nice. It's much better than talking about 'gore'! But I can't look on him when he isn't here."

On your blue eyes
Fair bowing lips,
Fair blushes spread
In clouds of rest,
Coming and going on your cheek divine,
Eternal be our love, my Valentine.

"Isn't that lovely? Mr. Flint never wrote the last part of it, I know. I wish a valentine would come from Tom. Dear Tom," she said dreamily. "What a beautiful valentine he could write if he only would. But he wouldn't waste his time that way; he's too practical."

She threw the valentine on a table carelessly, and sitting down by a window took up a book. She had read half a dozen pages when something seemed to sting her right in the center of the brain. She sprang to the valentine, seized it eagerly, read and reread it, turned it wrong side foremost, upside down and cat-a-cornered. Then she held it up to the window to look through it. After that she laid it on the table and rubbed her hand all over the surface, both the face and back. Presently her eye took in a word composed of six first letters of as many lines—the word "letter." That gave her the clue. In a moment she read, "A letter at the postoffice." The valentine was a simple acrostic.

A neighbor opposite looking in at Kitty's window remarked that Miss Cloverlie had gone stark mad. She was whirling around the room holding a letter above her head, like a lunatic.

"Is there anything for Kitty Cloverlie?" asked a timid voice of a man standing behind a diminutive window at the general delivery of the postoffice.

"What name?" asked the man brusquely. "Kitty Cloverlie," repeated the girl blushing.

"Nothing for Kitty Cloverlie!" said the man after looking over the letters in "C." "Cloverlie," said Kitty nervously. "Can't you speak louder, miss?" "Cloverlie!" repeated the girl scarcely above a whisper, though she thought she was shouting, and in terror lest some one except the delivery clerk would hear her.

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