

Annie's Birthday Present

The village clock was striking the hour of 5 one afternoon as Annie Graham stepped out of her trim and comfortable cottage to meet her husband at the gate.

She made a pleasant picture for the eye to rest upon. Her year of married life had been a very happy one, and never did a maiden look more eagerly for her lover than did she for her husband's return from the distant city, whither he had gone a week ago on business for his employers.

Among the few ornaments she wore was a beautifully chased gold bracelet which encircled her left wrist. As her eye caught its gleam a peaceful smile lit up her sweet face, for it was her husband's gift to her on her last birthday.

She stood at the gate and looked down the road in the direction of the small mining village through which her husband must pass on his way from the station. A man's form came into view on the quiet road, but a single glance sufficed to show her that it was not the familiar figure she looked for. She scarcely observed the man further, her eyes traveling beyond him to scan the road, till he halted almost at her side.

"Can't you spare a copper for a poor fellow who has walked all the way from—" he began, with the usual plea and whine of the professional tramp, but stopped abruptly and gave vent to a low whistle.

"So it's you!" he exclaimed sneeringly, recovering from his surprise. "Aren't you glad to see an old pal?"

She looked at him for a moment, then drew back in fear.

"I suppose you've got too high and mighty for the likes of me," he continued, observing her action. "I heard you had got spiced to the gaffer of a mine somewhere about this quarter, but had no idea of such a slice of luck as this happy meeting with you. So this is where you hang out, eh? It does look rather comfortable inside."

He drew nearer the gate and made as if to enter.

"No, no, you cannot come in," she cried in alarm. "See, here is some money. Take it and go away."

He examined the contents of the purse which she handed to him. They amounted to only half a dollar, and he was dissatisfied.

"I'm as dry as a dusty road in June, and this will hardly wet my throat. Let's see that badble on your wrist. It should be worth something," he said, looking greedily at the bracelet.

"No, indeed, I will not. I have already given you more than enough, so please go."

"Not if I know a thing or two," he said, with a cunning leer. "Did you tell your adorable husband that you got the swop from Watson's for nabbing a trinket like that? No, I guess not."

"You know how false that charge was," she cried indignantly, but with fear in her eyes at the mention of her husband.

"Oh, of course you say so, but who would believe you?" he returned. "Hand over that bit of jewelry, and mum's the word."

"It's my husband's gift to me," she pleaded, "and I cannot part with it. I will give you its value in money, but do not ask this."

She turned to enter the house for the money, but he was too quick for her.

"Not so fast, my pretty. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush any day. I can make as good terms with your husband, so it must be that gilt thing or nothing."

She eagerly scanned the road again. Yonder at last was the well known stalwart figure of her husband. Should she tell him all and trust to his believing in her innocence? What if he should believe this man's story? These thoughts passed quickly through her mind. The risk of losing his love and respect seemed too great to face. She slipped the bracelet from her wrist and handed it to the man.

"There, take it and go quickly," she said, with white, drawn face.

He snatched it from her and walked away, humming a lively air and looking the virtuous man he claimed to be as he passed her husband a short distance from the gate.

John Graham greeted his young wife affectionately, and together they entered the house. He observed her pallor for the first time as she turned up the light of the dining room lamp.

"What's the matter, Annie?" he inquired anxiously. "You look as if you had got a fright. Have you been moping in my absence? I meant to be back a couple of days sooner, but I could not get my business finished in time."

"It is nothing, John. I did weary for your coming, and I am glad to

see you home again," she said, with an effort to keep the tremor out of her voice.

"I have news for you, dear," he said when they were seated at the teatable. "I met some of my people in the city and was invited home. As they appeared to be holding out the olive branch of peace of course I went and the upshot was that matters were smoothed over. They have most graciously condescended to forgive us for marrying, and my mother and sisters are coming on the 28th to spend a few days with us."

"See what I have brought you from the city. I remembered that the 28th is your birthday and thought you would like this. You might wear it when they come, along with the one I gave you last year. I want you to be at your best before my people."

As he spoke he drew a small parcel from his pocket and unfolded it, revealing a bracelet of exquisite design upon a bed of velvet. He handed the gift to her with a tender smile.

"I am not worthy of this, John," she said faintly, while a mist rose before her eyes. She was already paying dearly for her error in her transaction with the tramp.

"Nonsense, my dear. Bring out the other one and let me see how they look together."

"Not tonight, John. Please don't ask me," she said so earnestly that he looked up in surprise.

"I'm afraid you are not yourself tonight, Annie. You do look rather ghostlike. But don't trouble about the bracelets, as I can see them both on the 28th."

When the guests arrived, it struck him that his wife had never appeared to greater disadvantage. She looked pale and anxious and seemed to avoid meeting his eyes. He was annoyed to see the proud lips of his mother and sisters curl at his wife's awkwardness, and he felt that she had not done herself justice. Once he whispered:

"You are not wearing both bracelets tonight?"

"No," she answered in a low voice and with averted eyes. He turned away with a look of disappointment.

When the visitors retired for the night, he took both her hands in his.

"There is something wrong, Annie? What is it?"

Could she tell him, or must she go on deceiving him and enduring the misery of the past few days? He was a man who was upright in all his actions and hated deceit in any form. Yet she would only be doing him a further injustice by concealing the truth. In a low voice she began and recounted the whole story. When she had finished, he remained silent. She lifted her tear-stained face to him.

"You do not believe me, and therefore you cannot forgive me?" she asked wistfully.

"I both believe and forgive you," he said gently. "But what you have told me is not quite new to me. I knew about the charge against you when I asked you to marry me, but I believed in you. And within the last twenty-four hours I have heard the rest of the story. Do you recognize this?"

She was astonished to see him hold up the bracelet which she had parted with so unwillingly to the tramp.

"Your friend the tramp got the worse of drink with the money you gave him and was locked up at the police station," he resumed. "This was found in his possession, and he could give no proper account of it. Lieutenant Stirling happened to mention the matter to me. I had my own reasons for being interested, and along with Stirling, I interviewed the man. I knew him at once to be the man who was the Watsons' groom when you were with them. We wormed the matter out of him, and now it appears that it was one of the servants whom he was courting at the time who was the real thief."

"Then I am cleared at last?" she cried joyfully.

"Yes. I could have told you all this a few hours ago, but I wanted you to learn to trust your husband more fully. I am glad that you have told me everything frankly. Now let us forget the past."

"The best birthday gift you have given me is your forgiveness," she said gratefully. — Penny Pictorial Magazine.

A Kindred Soul.

They had just been introduced, and as she looked into his thoughtful blue eyes, the young girl felt that she had at last met a man of high ideals.

"Are you interested in the elevation of the masses, Mr. McSmudge?" she asked, after she had worked up to the subject by easy conversational stages.

"Intensely, Miss Gushington," he answered. "I have dedicated my life

to their own business, and do not meddle with other people's; to those who know how to make the best of things; to those who can make up their minds; to those who, in cases of emergency, immediately know what to do, and have enough character to immediately do it.

In every branch of life, men who possess these qualities are the masters of the world. The fittest who survive; men who do not possess these qualities take the back seats and are the servants of the others. Even if the most successful form of socialism started today a society composed of men equally educated and equally rich, in twenty years society would be what it is at the present time, composed of masters and servants.

It will ever be the story of the man with experience who advertises for a partner with money. Shortly after, the man with experience has the money, and the man with the money has the experience.

The stupidest piece of nonsense is to declare that all men are equals. A crowd of men will always resemble a pack of hounds, in this, that they are composed of those who lead and those who are led.

When hunting, a pack of hounds never fail to follow the lead of the shrewdest and cleverest among them. In so doing dogs give a great lesson to men who, jealous of their natural superiors, reject them to often follow the lead of the noisiest, a thing which hounds never do. — Max O'Rell.

Not a Joke.

"So your wife found some white and blue chips that you had in your pockets?" said the breezy and over-familiar person.

"Yes," she saw them roll out on the floor.

"Ha, ha! Good joke!"

"No; it wasn't a good joke."

"Was she angry?"

"No, not angry, disappointed. She said it was a little hard to love a man who was small enough to hide away chips in a friendly game of poker." — Washington Star.

One on Melikoff.

One of the authors of "The Czar and His People" gives the following instance of Tolstol's independence of thought and action.

"General Loris Melikoff had been given such unbounded power to act against the Nihilists that, as he said,

he was virtually created vice-Emperor. He discovered in the course of his official investigations that one of the leading Nihilist chiefs was in the habit of visiting Tolstol, and one day Melikoff himself went out to the novelist's country house. Before the visitor had announced himself Tolstol recognized him and said:

"You are Loris Melikoff. Do you come to see me officially or as a private man? If you come officially, here are my keys. Search, open everything. You are free to do so."

"I do not come officially," replied Melikoff.

"Very good," answered Tolstol, and calling two stalwart servants, he said to them, "Throw this man out of the house!"

The order was obeyed to the letter, and Melikoff dared not seek redress.

A Case of Expiration Anyways.

Some years ago a battery of artillery was at big gun practice at Munda. One of the guns — a heavy eight-ton — was found to have a serious flaw. The officer in charge, caring to risk half a dozen valuable lives, inquired:

"Sergeant, have you any spare tired men here?"

"Yes, sir," answered the sergeant. "Paddy Jackson has just come from his time."

"Well, then," replied the commanding officer, "Paddy Jackson will do the gun."

And Paddy Jackson did fire the gun happily with no fatal result to the burgh Scotsman.

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LEW CRADEN Acting Manager.

THURSDAY, MAR 9, 1911

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