

"I sincerely hope that none of the men who proposed to me meant it. If they did, it's going to make the end of the week busy."

The atmosphere had been distinctly sulphurous at dinner-time, when she fancied for the first time those four self-complacent beings had become aware of each other's presence in the field of action. Pork Sausage passed plates frigidly to Clubs, while he, Clubs, was enjoying the discomfiture of the Telegraph-pole and imagining the reason thereof. The Mad Galloway tore at his hair distractedly, and ate little. Hilda ate nothing, but sat silent, cowed, and frightened.

She was sitting on the floor lacing her boots madly, with the notion that she would dress and pack in time for the eight o'clock train that went somewhere away from Winnipeg, and that she would write back explaining all, when there arose a commotion in the sitting-room. An alien voice mingled with the drawl of the Westerners, a decisive, commanding voice that could only come from a very big and a very irate man. It curdled every drop of guilty blood in Hilda's veins. Unconsciously, she pressed her ear to the keyhole, but the blood thumped so in her head, that she caught only fragments of the conversation.

"Yes," she heard the drawl of Clubs, "we have a lady boarder here. Ran away? You don't say!"

"Her brother?" presumed the poet in a purring voice, and the girl heard the man's decisive "No."

She opened the door and fled down the stairs, bumping into every object that chanced in her way. On the

threshold, she stood transfixed by his accusing eyes, blue-lipped, terror-still.

"Jack! Jack!"

The man swallowed hard.

"Hilda, you foolish little thing, come."

The boarders fell back respectfully before a scene of much tenderness, and when the girl took the man into the library and gently closed the door, there was no demur. Every one of them had been fighting fairly, and there were no hard feelings in their defeat. They had done what they had done as a mere show of politeness to a stranger. If the Pork Sausage regretted his mad outlay of cash, he refrained from saying so. The poet was in a state of positive exultation. "She has given me the theme for my masterpiece," he confided to the Telegraph-pole, who had tears somewhere away back in his eyes.

"Dust and ashes.

Trust not a woman's smile,

For in a little while, etc."

Finally, Clubs went around the crowd and pocketed something he got from each. On Hilda Hurd's wedding day this took the shape of a substantial present, with best wishes from Winnipeg.

"What the dickens do those fellows mean?" inquired Jack.

"They mean what they say—best wishes," said Hilda complacently.

"Westerners have a quick, impulsive way," he mused.

"They have," agreed Hilda.

Our Mean Member

By F. BLAKE CROFTON

THE meanest member of the United Club of Philastons was a decidedly clever fellow, and his coolness sometimes extricated him from an awkward position. On one occasion, a soft scion of the plutocracy fancied he had discovered him cheating at poker and informed the habitués of the card-room that he would expose him at the next session. There was a large and expectant gathering, and young Softie opened the proceedings by asking, "What would you do Flint, if you found that a man you were in the habit of playing with stacked the cards?"

"Does he win or lose?" inquired Flint, promptly.

"Oh, of course he wins all the time."

"Then," said Flint, calmly, "I should stand by and back him."

A roar of laughter, in which Softie could not help joining, greeted this unexpected turn. And, as you cannot crucify a man you are laughing with, the incident closed there, and Flint did not win so regularly hereafter.

It is true that the ruse which thus converted a tragedy into a farce illustrated Flint's coolness rather than his wit, for a similar escape from a similar danger was recorded in a book of card anecdotes published many years earlier.

When the laugh was not with Flint, but against him, the members enjoyed it all the more, for Flint was a close-fisted fellow. He was not averse to accepting liquid hospitality from a fellow-member, but he was never known to ring the waiters' bells in the billiard or card rooms, except once or twice when he had a guest from outside. Once, at a special club dinner, a humorous speaker had excelled himself and Flint complimented him across the table.

"It must have taken you some time to get up that speech," observed Flint.

"Oh, yes, quite a time," said the humorist, disingenuously.

"A couple of hours?" queried Flint.

"Oh, longer than that."

"A day, perhaps?"

"Longer than that."

"It didn't take you a week, did it?"

"Yes, much longer than that."

"Then, confound it, how long did it take you?"

"It took me most of the time," said the humorist, with a mischievous smile, "since you last rang the bell!"

Flint always, but especially when he was once a member of the Directory, got the club servants to do a part of his private business. They had sometimes to deliver his private parcels, and once, when he was leaving town, he was heard charging the porter not to forget to telephone a private message for him at a fixed hour on the following day. Yet he was never known to give

a Christmas box in the club, and he used his influence to prevent a subscription list for the servants being posted in the morning-room at Yule time. He argued that gratuities to domestics were contrary to the constitution of the club and induced servants to wait more promptly on some members than on others. He only served a single term on the directorate, as it transpired that he had induced the steward to order some cigars which he himself had imported and which his fellow-members did not appreciate at the price charged.

One evening Flint's horse was frightened by an automobile, upset the boy who was holding it and started to run away from the club door. A waiter who had just left the club seized the reins and, though pulled off his feet and run over by the trap, he pluckily held on and saved the horse and vehicle. He was bruised, his hat was trampled and his coat torn. On this occasion it is said that Flint actually went so far as to thank him!

Flint's bets on miscellaneous subjects were dead certainties. Whether on the correct version of a familiar quotation, or on the rule of a game, or on a date, a name or a statistic, his wagers were based on positive and usually on recent information.

Sorrows come in battalions. Three old members of the club, which was founded in the sixties, had died within a week, when Flint got a cablegram announcing the death of his elder brother, who was one of the original members. He did not mention his private affliction when he sought the smoking room and began commenting on the recent mortality among the old members.

"There can hardly be a dozen of our original members alive," he observed.

"Oh, there must be," cried Smith.

"I should be inclined to bet there were not," said Flint.

"I'll bet you fifty that there are," said Smith.

"Done," said Flint.

Brown called for the list of original members and carefully went over it.

"There are exactly a dozen," he said, and he read the names of the survivors.

"But excuse me, Flint (James 2) is dead," said Flint.

"You never told me so," cried Brown.

"I fancied you would know it," said Flint; "I told Jones downstairs an hour ago."

"Yes, he had told Jones, who had just put on his hat to leave the club. The matter came before the Directory, who took no action, as they had no positive evidence that Flint had consulted the list of original members before making his bet, and without such evidence it could not be proved that Flint's exclusive knowledge of his brother's death made his bet a certainty.