

The Joker Club.

"The Pun is mightier than the Sword."

THAT ONE DOLLAR BILL.

How it did rain that November night. None of your undecided showers, with hesitating intervals, as it were, between; none of your mild, persistent patterings on the roof, but a regular tempest, a wild deluge, a rush of arrowy drops, and a thunder of opening floods!

Squire Pratlet heard the rattling up against the casements, and drew his snug easy chair closer to the fire—a great, open mass of glimmering anthracite, and gazed with a sort of sleepy, reflective satisfaction at the crimson moreen curtains, and a gray cat fast asleep on the hearth and the canary bird rolled into a drowsy ball of yellow down upon its perch.

'This is snug,' quoth the squire. 'I'm glad I had the leaky spot in the barn fixed last week. I don't object to a stormy night once in a while, when a fellow's under cover, and there is nothing particular to be done.'

'Yes,' Mrs. Pratlet answered. She was flitting about between the kitchen and sitting room with a great blue-checked apron tied waist. 'I am nearly ready to come in now. Well, I wonder,' *sotto voce*, 'if that was a knock at the door or just a little rush of wind?'

She went to the door, nevertheless, and a minute or two afterward she went to her husband's chair:

'Joe, dear, its Luke Ruddilove,' she said, half apprehensively. The squire never looked up from his reading.

'Tell him he has made a mistake. The tavern is on the second corner beyond.'

'But he wants to know if you will lend him a dollar,' said Mrs. Pratlet.

'Couldn't you tell him no, without the ceremony of coming to me? Is it likely that I should lend a dollar, or even a cent, to Luke Ruddilove? Why, I'd a great deal rather throw it among yonder red coals. No—of course not.'

Mrs. Pratlet hesitated.

'He looks pinched, and cold, and wretched, Josiah. He says there is nobody in the world to let him have a con.'

'All the better for him, if he did but know it,' sharply enunciated the old squire. 'If he had come to that half a dozen years ago perhaps he would not have been the miserable vagabond he is now.'

'We used to go to school together,' said Mrs. Pratlet, gently. 'He was the smartest boy in the class.'

'That's probable enough,' said the squire, 'but it don't alter the fact. He is a poor, drunken wretch now. Send him about his business, Mary; and if his time is of any consequence, just let him know he had better not waste it coming here for dollars.'

And the squire leaned back in his chair, after a positive fashion, as if the whole matter was settled.

Mrs. Pratlet went back to the kitchen where Luke Ruddilove was spreading his poor fingers over the blaze of the fire, his tattered garments steaming as if he was a pillar of vapor.

'Then I've got to starve like any other dog!' said Luke Ruddilove. 'But, after all, I suppose it don't make much difference if I shuffle out of this world to-day or to-morrow.'

'Oh, Luke, no difference to your wife?'

'She'd be better off without me,' he said downheartedly.

'But she ought not to be.'

'Ought, and is, are two different things, Mrs. Pratlet. Good night. I ain't going to the tavern, although I'll wager something the squire thought I was.'

'And isn't it quite natural enough that he should think so, Luke?'

'Yes, yes, Mary; I don't say but what it is,' murmured Luke in the same dejected tone he used during the interview.

'Stop,' Mrs. Pratlet called to him as his hand lay on the door latch, in a low voice, 'here's a dollar, Luke. Mr. Pratlet gave it to me for an oilcloth to go in front of the parlor stove; but I will try and make the old one last a little longer. And, Luke, for the sake of your poor wife and the little ones at home, and for the sake of old times do try and do better. Won't you?'

Luke Ruddilove looked vacantly at the new bank bill in his hand, and then at the blooming young matron who had placed it there.

'Thank you, Mary. I will. God bless you,' he said, and crept out into the storm that reigned without. Mrs. Pratlet stood looking into the kitchen fire.

'I dare say I've done a foolish thing, but, indeed, I could not help it. If he will only take it home and not spend it at the tavern, I shall not miss my oilcloth.'

And there was a conscious flush on her cheeks as if she had done something wrong when she joined her husband in the sitting room.

'Well,' said Squire Pratlet, 'has that unfortunate gone at last?'

'Yes.'

'To the Stake's tavern, I suppose?'

'I hope not, Josiah.'

'I'm afraid it's past hoping for,' said the squire, shrugging his shoulders. But Mrs. Pratlet kept her secret in her own heart.

It was six months afterwards that the squire came into the dining room where his wife was preserving great red apples into jelly.

'Well, well,' quoth he, 'wonders will never cease. The Ruddilove's have gone away.'

'Where?'

'I don't know—out west somewhere with a colony. And they say that Luke has not drank a drop of whiskey for six months.'

'I'm glad of that,' replied Mrs. P.

'It won't last long,' he suggested, despairingly.

'Why not?'

'Oh, I don't know, I haven't any faith in these sudden reforms.'

Mrs. Pratlet was silent; she thought thankfully that, after all, Luke had not spent the dollar for liquor.

Six months; the time sped along in days and weeks, almost before busy Mrs. Pratlet knew that it was gone. The Ruddiloves had returned to Sequosset. Luke had made his fortune, so the story went, far off in Eldorado.

'They do say,' said Mrs. Buckingham, 'that he has bought that ere lot down opposite the court house, and he is going to build such a house as never was.'

'He must have prospered greatly,' observed Mrs. Partlett.

'And his wife, she wears a silk gown that will stand alone with its own richness! I can remember when Ruddilove was nothing but a poor drunken creature.'

'All the more credit to him now,' said Mrs. Pratlet, emphatically.

'It's to be all of stone, with white mantles and inlaid floors; and he has put a lot of papers and things under the corner one, like they do in public buildings.'

'Well, that is natural enough.'

'I know, yet it seems kind o' queer that he should put a dollar bill in with the other things. He must have lots o' money, to throw it away in that manner.'

Mrs. Pratlet felt her cheeks flush. Involuntarily she glanced toward the squire. But he never looked around. She met Mr. Ruddilove that afternoon for the first time since his return to Sequosset—Luke himself, save that the demon of intemperance had been completely crushed and his better nature triumphed at last. He looked her brightly in the face, and held out his hand, saying but one word:

'Mary.'

Tremulously she replied, 'I am glad to see you here again.'

When Luke had overcome his emotion he continued.

'Do you remember that stormy night when you gave me that dollar bill and begged me not to go to the tavern.'

'Yes.'

'That was the pivot on which my whole destiny turned. You were kind to me when all others gave me naught but the cold shoulder. You trusted me when all other faces were averted. That night I took a vow to myself to prove worthy of your confidence, and I have kept it. I treasured it up, and heaven has added mightily to my little store. I have put the bill in the corner stone of my new house, for it arose alone from that dollar bill.'

'I won't offer to pay you back, for I am afraid,' he said smilingly, 'the luck would go from me with it. But I'll tell you what I will do: I'll give money and words of trust and encouragement to some other poor wretches as you gave to me.'

The next day Mrs. Pratlet received from the delivery man at her door a bundle which, when she had opened it, revealed to her astonished gaze the most beautiful piece of oilcloth her eyes had ever beheld. This naturally attracted the squire's attention; and when Mrs. Pratlet told him all, he only replied, with some emotion: 'You were right, and I was wrong.'

"It is execrable taste for a waiter to wear a beard." So it is: but we prefer that he should wear it than to carry it in sections on his soup plates.

A New York man has been crazed by rum and milk. One of the very worst things a man can do is to mix drinks. He should have stuck to plain rum.

'Hades,' looks very nice in print, but it lacks the ring of true wickedness when an editor is looking for an expletive to spit in the face of a delinquent subscriber.

Some editors are born lucky, some acquire luck in after life, and others have libel suits thrust upon them. There are many bright sides to the profession.

"We reach happiness," says a philosopher, "by making others happy." Office hours—10 a. m. to 3 p. m. No matter how trifling the object sent, it will make us happy.

The greatest humorist America has yet produced is blissfully unaware of the fact.—*N. Y. News*. Well, we're glad this is settled, even if we're not the man.—*McGregor News*.

When a boy has a whole bunch of fire crackers to himself for the first time on the glorious fourth, the earth is just as big one way as the other, and he wouldn't—but you know how it is yourself.

The young men needn't think they are the only ones who are having degrees conferred on them these balmy June days. Any quantity of ladies, and young ones, too, are writing M A aft'r their names.

Vassar has one smart girl who will in the hereafter be heard of in woman's rights societies. She described straw as being "a hollow thing with a ten cent man on one end of it and a twenty cent drink on the other end."

The way to get real well acquainted with people is not to sit on their front door steps but to loaf around their back yards. The man who is the same in his back yard as he is on his front door-step is the party you want to tie to.

Dr. Franklin's mother-in-law objected to her daughter marrying a printer, because there were already two printing offices in the United States, and she didn't think the country could support three. Her prophetic vision was limited.

The "Midnight Sun" is the title of a fine descriptive article going the rounds of the press. But in these degenerate days the midnight sun is a passably good boy; it is the three o'clock in the morning sun who grieves his parents by his dissipation.