

Kathleen's Valentine.

When Dick Howell's fortune took unto itself wings and flew, he knew not whither, everyone who knew Dick immediately took it upon himself to prophesy that he would either go to the dogs and die an outcast from society, or else would worry along in obscurity for a year or so and then quit this life with a broken heart.

Instead of doing either of these things, Dick took the one small talent he possessed and put it to its most practical use; he taught music.

"Which is rough enough on Dick, Heaven knows," as his one-time friend, Jack Gilligan, remarked one day, "but think what it must be on the neighbors!"

Dick's music teaching was not a success. He did not make a good living at it, and he soon grew weary to death of trying to hammer the science of notes and bars into unmusical heads, and finally he stopped giving lessons and left the city.

Most people thought this was because Dick was not satisfied to retrench gracefully and come down in the social scale; the truth was, he was in love with a girl whom he would never dare

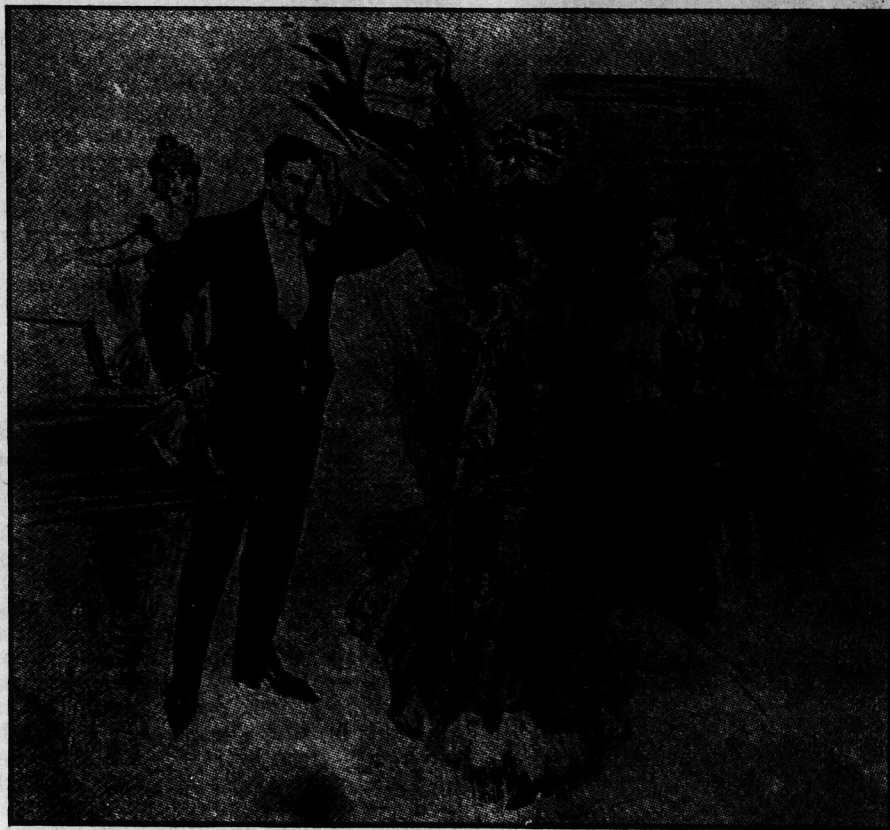
of her to cheer him in the long days to come.

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One year before he had carried her valentine to her—a bunch of the rarest, freshest violets that could be found. He remembered, too, how charming she had been on that evening, and how many times he had been ready to say the words he was glad now had been left unsaid. Of course she cared nothing for him now, because he could not give her position and a full allowance. He judged her from the standpoint that many of his friends had taken when he had lost his fortune, and in this way he wronged the girl, as many a one has been misjudged.

A year passed, and poor Dick had seen much of the world. He had observed its seamy side, not at a respectful distance, but at uncomfortably close quarters, and though the experience had left him, it had also softened him.

From teaching he had gone to playing for concerts, and then for dances, and now—now, God help him!—he was pounding out songs for music-hall singers, while the smoke choked him, the



"With a white face, Dick sprang to his feet."

to ask to marry him now that he was poor.

As has been tritely remarked before, poverty is no disgrace, but it is decidedly uncomfortable for the party most interested; and though Dick tried to tell himself that his failure in a financial way was nothing, a mere trifle, his heart misgave him, and he spent more than one unhappy evening cursing the fate that had so ruthlessly turned her back on him.

At first the surprise and excitement had deadened the pain of the real heart agony at losing the girl of his choice, but by and by, when he had settled down to cheap lunches and cheaper boarding house accommodations, the old longings came back upon him too strongly to be resisted. He went away, and no one took the trouble to ask where he had disappeared to. The public memory is apt to be short when the private purse is likewise.

She was a beautiful girl, and a truly good one, this girl that he loved, but worshipping her at a distance, as he had secretly done for two years, he had not sounded her heart. She always welcomed him cordially and smiled upon him in such a happy, winning manner that he felt sure she did not find his society a bore. All this came to him on St. Valentine's eve, as he passed and repassed her house, looking up at the windows, hoping to catch one glimpse

lights dimmed his eyes, and the coarse jests and odor of stale beer made him sick. Yet there was no choice for him; it was this or starve, and, though Dick was a gentleman, he did not care to die like one, if dying of starvation embodied that idea of a blue blood's demise.

* * *

To-night, as he was crashing away at the accompaniment of the latest song success, rendered by a painted, powdered young woman, with a shrill, cracked concert-hall voice, Dick began to think of a certain evening, two years before that very night, when he sat near a true girl, a sweet, womanly girl, who wore his valentine offering of violets on her breast. He forgot for the moment the surroundings, his own shabby appearance, and again stood on the threshold of what seemed a happy, useful life. Suddenly, as his thoughts took this turn a girl stood beside him, not the girl with the shrill voice, and the music stopped.

With a white face Dick sprang to his feet, hardly believing his eyes, while the growling of the audience and the excited voices of the proprietors of the place told that something unexpected had happened.

But he did not turn to see what it was, for before him, looking softly, quietly and happily—yes, happily—into

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his eyes, stood Kathleen herself, with one dainty gloved hand held out to him.

"Dick," she said softly, while the other woman shrank back instinctively, "Dick, you're here!"

For a moment he could not answer, then, drawing his hand across his eyes hastily, he answered:

"Kathleen! Yes, it is I, but you—"

The girl smiled gently. "Come," she said, taking his shabbily-clad arm and leading him away, "it is all right. We are only a small party. Yes, a slumming party, if you will!"

They had reached the little hallway leading to the street as she spoke, and the others of her party were already at the carriage door.

"What does it mean?" asked Dick hoarsely, stopping and shaking himself to see if he dreamed or not.

"It means that you have been a foolish, wicked boy," said she softly, placing her hand in his again, "and that some time ago I determined to find you. Do you remember what you told me—what your eyes told me—that last night on the stairs? Well, so do I, and, Dick, I couldn't stand it when you went away. I have enough for us both—and, dear, I do love you! Now will you understand? I have searched for you for months, Dick. Do not humiliate me by refusing to come with me now."

Dick, still dazed, stood on the walk, when a boy in threadbare clothes came down the street crying for sale the last remnant of his day's wares, a bunch of violets.

"My valentine," cried Kathleen, and Dick, now thoroughly roused, dived deep into his pocket, found enough to buy the flowers, and sent the boy home happy.

Among the best needle workers in the world are the men of Japan, their chief rivals being the women of Persia.