

The Universal Need--a Valentine Story

By Louise Montgomery, in the "Congregationalist."

DID I ever tell ye how I gave me old man a Valentine party?" asked Mrs. Mahoney.

"You never did," cried Mrs. Hoelsing, gravely.

"But you're going to," said Mrs. Mooney, reaching for another lump of sugar.

"They're nothin' like tay," resumed Mrs. Mahoney, refilling the three cups. "t' warms ye up for the present an' makes ye raymimber the good times past, an' gives a rosy light to the unsartin' future."

The other women were silent. They had learned from experience that when a story was brewing in the old woman's mind she would need no urging to bring it forth.

"Twas just such another day as this," she began, "an' that made me think iv it. The cold wind drove the sleet an' the snow to the heart, an' there was small reasons to be joyful with me old man out iv work since the Christmas an' the landlord gettin' onaisy about the rint, which is a way with thim landlords, an' me gettin' sight iv the bottom iv the taycan whin I went to get a pinch to warm the marrow iv me old bones."

"An' the worst iv it was me old man was fair disheartened. Ivery mornin' he wint out with his gray head droopin' like an old ox under a heavy yoke. An' he says to me, 'I'm gettin' old an' nobody wants me anny more.' 'Go along

"You might have got credit," suggested Mrs. Mooney.

"Ye'er partly right an' not altogether wrong. 'Tis no shame to tell ye iv the few times in me life whin I borrowed money from thim as wudn't be missin' it if I was to call for me funeral sudden an' lave a small debt for me only raymimbrance. 'Twas a cold day, as I was tellin' ye, an' I bundled me figure in a big shawl an' with me head up as high as me bent shoulders cud carry it, I wint straight to the charity office. Wurra, wurra, there was many a poor soul shiverin' in the outer room that day an' lookin', the Lord help thim, as if they'd been stealin' sheep. But I want to tell ye now, 'tis not the way to go for a small favor in the winter. I walked be the shakin' group straight into the next room an' up to the head lady sittin' in a kitchen chair an' playin' with a lot iv cards with names on thim. We'd

done business together afore, an' she knew me, an' I knew her. She was the trim and tidy sort, for all the world like wan iv these pictures hangin' in the shops in the spring with the sign, 'Tailor-made,' under them. But she'd a kind heart an' I asked her without a blush or any kind iv excuses to lend me the loan iv three dollars an' a half."

"You didn't get it," said Mrs. Mooney.

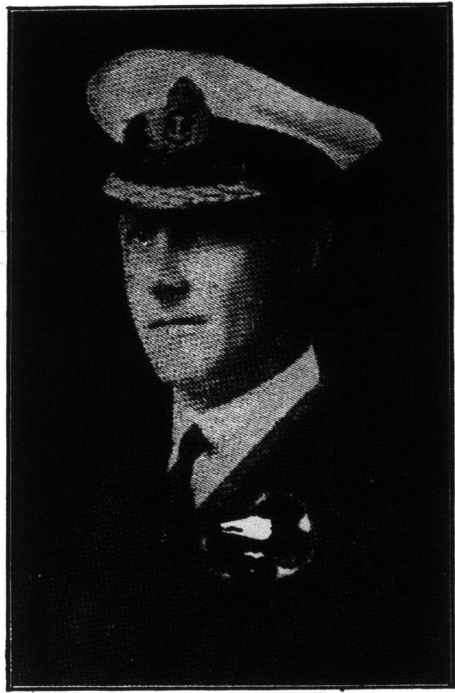
"They never give money at such places."

"Not without you answer all manner of questions you'd sooner die than tell them," explained Mrs. Hoelsing.

"As I was tellin' ye," continued the old woman, calmly, "we'd done business afore an' me reputation was good for returnin' small change. She looked at me an' asked if it was really necessary I shud take the cash, hintin' perhaps she cud do some other way, but I turned her off iv that quick an' sudden. 'This a cold day whin old Kathleen Mahoney lets anybody else order beans an' useless charity truck for her. Haven't I always returned cash for cash?' I asked her, holdin' up me head an' lookin' her square in the eye."

"Yes, I know ye have," says she, gentle-like, but with a suspicion iv mistrust in the waitin'. Ye see she'd been down to me house an' I'd invited her into the front room an' give her a cup iv tay like any decent woman, so she got it into her head me an' the old man lived pretty well for folks called poor. 'Ye've always returned the money ye've borrowed, but ain't ye just a little bit improvident,' says she, 'or ye wudn't be out again so soon,' says she. Thin I explained how me old man was out iv work since the blessed Christmas Day an' money was most necessary, 'for the universal need,' says I.

"True," says she, "but ye certainly spend money pretty good when ye have it. I noticed all the new things in ye're front room," says she, "an' that fine green carpet." 'Luk at that now!' says I, interruptin' most impolite, 'to think ye shud notice wan green carpet—the same I'd bought twinty year back for me grandmother's funeral. Besides,' says I, 'what's wan green carpet in the month iv February? Ye can nayther ate it nor wear it!'



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with ye," says I. 'Ye'er as young an' likely lookin' a man as I lay me eyes on annywhere on the street,' says I, for ye know, whin trouble comes 'tis always the woman must cheer up."

"'Tis so," assented Mrs. Hoelsing.

"Why is it?" asked Mrs. Mooney. "Why is it? and we what they call the 'weaker sex,' and men always putting themselves first, and so full of the brag."

"'Tis strange," continued Mrs. Mahoney, "but so it is, an' so ivery woman finds it out come soon or late. I see how things was goin' whin he niver smiled at me jokin', an' I says to meself, 'Something's got to be done!' Thin be a sudden inspiration iv the Saint iv the Day, I looked up at the Christmas calendar hangin' on me wall, an' see it was the fourteenth day iv this same month, an' good St. Valentine's Day at that. 'Sure an' I'll have a Valentine party,' I says to meself."

"And how long ago was it a white-haired old woman like you was courtin' the Patron Saint of Love and Youth?" interrupted Mrs. Mooney.

"Why not, if it was just for her husband?" interposed Mrs. Hoelsing so seriously that Mrs. Mooney broke into a delightful chuckle.

"Niver ye mind. Sure, 'twas not me first Valentine party. I've seen parties in me day an' no lack iv partners for the dancin'. Wurra, wurra, the good Saint give me the thought but where was the money? 'For me pocketbook was as empty as the dreams iv youth,' as the poet says."



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