



THE DUSANTES.

A SEQUEL TO "THE CASTING AWAY OF MRS. LECKS AND MRS. ALESHINE."

(Continued from page 481.)

"Now," exclaimed Mrs. Aleshine, "if that isn't exactly like Elizabeth Grootenheimer! To think of Elizabeth Grootenheimer thinking! The Grootenheimers always was the dumbest family in the township, an' Elizabeth Grootenheimer is the dumbest of 'em all! I did say to myself when I went away: 'Now, Elizabeth Grootenheimer is so stone dumb that she'll just stay here an' do the little I tell her to do, and hasn't sense enough to get into no mischief.' And now look at her!"

She waved her hand in the direction of the invisible Elizabeth Grootenheimer.

Mrs. Lecks had said very little during this startling communication, but her face had assumed a stern and determined expression. Now she spoke.

"I guess we've heard about enough, an' we'd better be stepin' along an' see what else Mr. Enderton an' Elizabeth Grootenheimer is doin'."

The homes of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine were not far from each other, and were situated about midway between the station and the village inn, and in the direction of these our party now started. We stepped quickly, for we were all much interested in what might happen next; and very soon we reached Mrs. Aleshine's house. It was a good-sized and pleasant-looking dwelling, painted white, with green shutters and with a long covered piazza at the front.

Our approach had been perceived, for on the piazza, in front of the gayly painted door, stood Mr. Enderton, erect and with a bland and benignant smile upon his face. One hand was stretched out as if in welcome, and with the other he gracefully held the ginger-jar, now divested of its wrappings.

At this sight Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine made a simultaneous dash at the gate, but it was locked. The two women stamped their feet in fury.

"Put down that jar!" shouted Mrs. Lecks.

"Elizabeth Grootenheimer! Elizabeth Grootenheimer!" screamed Mrs. Aleshine. "Come here and open this gate."

"Break it down!" said Mrs. Lecks, turning to the sailors.

"Don't you do it!" exclaimed Mrs. Aleshine, throwing herself in front of it. "Don't you break my gate! Elizabeth Grootenheimer!"

"My friends," said Mr. Enderton in clear, distinct tones, "be calm. I have the key of that gate in my pocket. I locked it because I feared that on your first arrival you would hurry up to the house in a promiscuous way, and give heed to irrelevant matters. I hold here, my friends, the receptacle containing the money which, under a misapprehension, was paid for our board while on a desert island. This money I have taken care of and have carefully guarded for the benefit of us all. If you cannot see for yourselves the propriety of my assumption of this trust, I will not now undertake to enlighten you. For the sake of principle I have insisted that this money should be received by its rightful owners; for the sake of principle I assume the custody of it; and for the sake of principle I shall now empty the contents of this jar—which by me has not been examined or touched—upon the floor of this piazza, and I shall then proceed to divide said contents into five suitable portions—the three mariners, as I understand, having paid no board. The gate can then be opened, and each one can come forward and take the portion which belongs to him or to her. The portion of my daughter, whom I saw pass here in a carriage, going, doubtless, to the inn, will be taken charge of by myself."

"You man!" shrieked Mrs. Lecks, shaking her fist over the fence, "if you are as much as lift that paper of fish-hooks from out the top of that ginger-jar, I'll—"

Here she was interrupted by the loud, clear voice of Mr. Dusanter, who called out: "Sir, I require you to put down that jar, which is my property."

"I'll let you know," said Mrs. Lecks, "that other people have principles!"

But what more she said was drowned by the voice of Mrs. Aleshine, who screamed for Elizabeth Grootenheimer, and who was now so much excited that she was actually trying to break open her own gate.

I called out to Mr. Enderton not to make trouble by disturbing the contents of the jar; and even Miss Lucille, who was intensely amused at the scene, could be heard joining her voice to the general clamor.

But the threats and demands of our united party had no effect upon Mr. Enderton. He stood up, serene and bland, fully appreciating the advantage of having the key of the gate's padlock in his pocket and the ginger-jar in his hand.

"I will now proceed," said he. But at that moment his attention was attracted by the three mariners, who had clambered over the pointed pales of the fence and who now appeared on the piazza, Bill to the right hand of Mr. Enderton, Jim to the left, and the red-bearded coxswain at his back. They all seemed to speak at once, though what they said we could not hear, nothing but a few hoarse mutterings coming down to us.

But in consequence of what Bill said, Mr. Enderton handed him the key of the gate; and in consequence of what Jim said, Mr. Enderton delivered to him the ginger-jar; and in consequence of what the coxswain said, he and Mr. Enderton walked off the piazza; and the two proceeded to a distant corner of the yard, where they stood out of the way, as it were, while the gate was opened. Bill bungled a little, but the padlock was soon removed, and we all hurried through the gate and up to the piazza, where Jim stood, the ginger-jar held reverently in his hands.

The coxswain now left Mr. Enderton, and that gentleman proceeded to the open gate, through which he passed into the road, and then turned, and in a loud and severe tone addressed Mrs. Aleshine:

"I leave your inhospitable house and go to join my daughter at the inn, where I request you to send my valise and umbrella as soon as possible."

Mrs. Aleshine's indignation at this invasion of her home and this trampling on her right to open her own gate had entirely driven away her accustomed geniality, and in angry tones she cried:

"Just you stop at that paint-shop when you get to the village, an' pay for the paint you had charged to me; an' when you've done that you can send for your things."

"Come, now, Barb'ry," said Mrs. Lecks, "don't let your feelin's run away with you. You ought to be thankful that he's let you off so easy, and that he's gone."

"I'm all that," said Mrs. Aleshine; "an' on second thoughts, every whip-stitch of his bag and baggage shall be trundled after him as soon as I kin git it away."

We all now stood upon the piazza, and Mrs. Aleshine, in calmer tones, but with her face still flushed from her recent excitement, turned to us and said: "Now, isn't this a pretty comin' home? My front gate fastened in my very face; my front door painted red and white; the inside of the house, as like as not, turned upside down by that man just as much as the outside; an' where in the world, I'd like to know, is Elizabeth Grootenheimer?"

"Now, don't you be too hard on her," said Mrs. Lecks, "after havin' been away from her so long. I haven't a doubt, she's feedin' the pigs; and you know very well she never would leave them as long as she felt they needed her. You

needn't mind if your house is upset, for none of us is comin' in, havin' just intended to see you to your door, which I must say is a pretty blasin' one."

"And now," said Mrs. Lecks, taking, as he spoke, the ginger-jar from the hand of Jim, "I think this is a suitable opportunity for me to accomplish the object for which my present journey was undertaken, and to return to you the contents of this jar."

"Which," said Mrs. Lecks, in a very decided tone, "I don't take now no more'n I did before."

Mr. Dusanter looked surprised and troubled. After all the dangers and adventures through which that ginger-jar had gone, I believe that he expected Mrs. Lecks would at last relent and consent to accept it from him.

"Now, look here," said Mrs. Aleshine, "don't let us have any more fuss about the ginger-jar, or anything else. Let's put off talkin' about that till we're all settled and fixed. It won't do for you to take the jar to the tavern with you, Mr. Dusanter, for like as not Mr. Enderton will git hold of it ag'in, an' I know Mrs. Lecks won't let it come into her house; so, if you like, you may just leave it here for the present, and you may make up your minds nobody'll touch it while I'm about. An' about I intend to be!"

This arrangement was gladly agreed upon, and the jar being delivered to Mrs. Aleshine, we took our leave of her.

Mrs. Lecks found no difficulty in entering her gate, where she was duly welcomed by a man and his wife she had left in charge, while the Dusanter and myself walked on to the inn.

"Hotel," as its sign imported, about which the greater part of the little town clustered. The three mariners remained behind to await further orders from Mrs. Aleshine.

By the afternoon of the next day the abodes of those two most energetic and capable housewives, Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine, were fully prepared for the reception of their visitors, and the Dusanter family were ensconced beneath the roof of the one, and my wife and I were most warmly welcomed under the gayly-adorned door of the other.

Mr. Enderton remained at the inn, where he found very comfortable quarters, an arrangement satisfactory to all parties.

In Mrs. Aleshine's dwelling, where, from the very first, Lucille took her position as a most constant visitor, being equally welcomed by Ruth and the mistress of the house, all was satisfaction and high good humor. At Mrs. Leck's home the case was different. There, I could plainly see, there was a certain uneasiness amounting almost to stiffness between Mrs. Lecks and Mr. Dusanter. The latter had not accomplished the purpose for which he had made this long journey; and though, if things had turned out as he wished, he would have been very glad to be the guest of Mrs. Lecks, still, under the present circumstances, the situation did not suit him.

Mrs. Lecks, too, possessed an unsettled mind.

"He's not satisfied," said she to me, on the morning after the Dusanter had come to her; "he wants to do somethin', or else to go away. I wish that ginger-jar had dropped into the bottom of the sea while he was bringin' it, or else had smashed itself into a thousand bits while he was slidin' down the mountain, and the money had melted itself into the snow. S'posin' at the end of the week he was to come to me and offer to pay me board for himself and his family, sayin' that was no more'n I'd done to him. Of course the two cases are not a bit alike; for we went to his house strangers, with out leave or license, while he comes to mine as a friend, bein' fully invited and pressed. But I don't suppose I could make him see it in that light, and it worries me."

I was convinced that something ought to be done to end this unpleasant state of affairs, and I took my wife and Miss Lucille into council on the subject. After we had deliberated a little while an idea came to Ruth.

"In my opinion," said she, "the best thing we can do with that board-money is to give it to those three sailors. They are poor and will be glad to get it. Mr. Dusanter and Mrs. Lecks ought to be fully satisfied, for the one doesn't keep it, and the other doesn't take it back, and I'm sure that this plan will please all the rest of us."

Mr. Dusanter gave his ready consent to this proposal. "It is not what I intended to do," said he, "but it amounts to almost the same thing. The money in the jar was restored to its owners, and they agree to make a certain disposition of it. I am satisfied."

Mrs. Lecks hesitated a little. "All right," said she. "He takes the money and gives it to who he chooses. I've nothin' to say against it."

Of course no opposition to the plan was to be expected from either Mr. Dusanter or Mr. Enderton. But when I mentioned it to him I found, to my surprise, that he was not unwilling to agree to it.

That afternoon all of us, except Mr. Enderton, assembled on Mrs. Aleshine's piazza to witness the presentation of the board-money. The three sailors, who had been informed of the nature of the proceedings, stood in line on the second step of the piazza, clad in their best toggery, and with their new tarpaulin hats in their hands. Mrs. Aleshine went into the house and soon reappeared, carrying the ginger-jar, which she presented to Mr. Dusanter.

"Mr. Dusanter," said Mrs. Lecks, "from what I have seen of you myself and heard tell of you from others, I believe you are a man who tries to do his duty, as he sees it, with a single heart and no turnin' from one side to the other. You made up your mind that you'd travel over the whole world, if it had to be done with that ginger-jar and the board-money inside of it, till you'd found the people who'd been livin' in your house; and then that you'd give back that jar, just as you'd found it, to the person who'd took upon herself the overseein' of the reg'lar payin' of the money, and the puttin' of it therein. With that purpose in your mind you carried that jar over the ocean; you wandered with it up and down California; and holdin' it tight fast in your arms, you slid down the slippery mountain side, and here you are, I believe, and inside of it, had been your only infant child, you couldn't have held it firmer, nor regarded it more careful. The thing you set out to do you haven't done; an' I'm not goin' to have it to say to myself that you was the only one of all of us that wasn't satisfied, and that I was the stumblin'-block that stood in your way. So I'll back down from sayin' that I'd never touch that jar ag'in, and you can put it into my hands, as you set out to do."

Mr. Dusanter made no answer, but stepped forward, and taking Mrs. Lecks's large brown and work-worn hand, he respectfully touched it to his lips.

This little scene touched us all, and Mrs. Aleshine afterwards informed me that for a moment she hadn't a dry eye in her head.

Mr. Dusanter now handed the ginger-jar to Mrs. Lecks, who immediately stepped towards Ruth and Lucille.

"You two young ones," she said, "can just take this jar, an' your hands can be the first to lift off that paper of fish-hooks and take out the money, which you will then divide among our good friends, these sailor men."

Ruth and Lucille immediately sat down on the floor of the piazza and the one emptied the board-money into the lap of the other, where it was speedily divided into three equal portions, each of which was placed in the hands of each mariner.

The men stood motionless, each holding his money in his open right hand, and then the red-bearded coxswain spoke.

"It ain't for me, nor for Bill, nor for Jim nuther, to say a word ag'in what you all think is right and square. We've stood by ye an' obeyed orders since we first shipped on that island, an' we intend to do so straight along, don't we, Jim an' Bill?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" sang out Jim and Bill.

"But though we stand ready to obey orders," said the coxswain, "we made up our minds, when we heard what was goin' to be done, that we'd listen keener for one thing, an' we have listened keener an' we haven't heard that one thing, an' that thing was what we should do with this money. An' not havin' heard it, an' so bein' under no orders as to the spendin' of it, we take the money, an' thank you kindly, one an' all. Don't we, Jim and Bill?"

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And into the pocket of each mariner clinked the money. Mr. Dusanter now took up the ginger-jar and approached Mrs. Lecks.

"I hope, madam," he said, "that as the subject of our little differences has now been removed from this jar, you will consent to accept it from me as a memento of the somewhat remarkable experiences through which it has accompanied us."

"Take it, sir!" said she. "To be sure I will. An' very glad am I to get it. As long as I live I shall stand on the mantelpiece in my parlor; an' when I die it shall be left to my heirs, to be taken care of as long as it holds together."

Every reason for dissatisfaction having now been banished from our little company, we all settled down for a season of enjoyment. Even Mr. Enderton, who had found on the top shelf of a closet in his room a lot of old leather-bound books, appeared to be in a state of perfect content. To the Dusanter a residence in this absolutely rural portion of our Middle States in the autumnal season was an entirely novel experience.

Having enjoyed Mrs. Lecks's hospitality for a suitable period, they proposed to that sensible woman that she should receive them as boarders until the winter should set in; and to this practical proposition she gave a ready assent, hoping that the really cold weather would long defer its coming.

Ruth and I established ourselves on the same terms with Mrs. Aleshine. I could think of no place where it would better please my young wife and myself to rest for a time than here among these good friends.

A continual source of amusement to us were the acts and doings of Mrs. Aleshine and her three sailor men.

The brilliantly painted front-door, which at first had excited the good woman's ire, gradually came to command her admiration; and when her sailor men had done everything else that they could in the barns, the fields, or at the woodpile, she gave them privilege to paint various portions of her property, leaving the designs and colors to their own taste and fancy. Whether they milked the cows, cut the wood, or painted the sides of the house, they always worked like good fellows, and in nautical costume. They holy-stoned the front deck, as they called the floor of the piazza, until it seemed sacrilegious to set foot upon it; and when the house and the pale-fence had been suitably painted, they allowed their fancies lofty flights in the decoration of the smaller out-buildings and various objects in the grounds.

The greatest work of decoration, however, was reserved by the red-bearded coxswain for himself, designed by his own brain, and executed by his own hands. This was the tattooing of the barn. Around this building, the sides of which were already of a color sufficiently resembling a well-tanned human skin, the coxswain painted, in blue spots resembling tattooing, an immense cable passing several times about the structure, a sea-serpent almost as long as the cable, eight anchors, two ships under full sail, with a variety of cannons and flags which filled up all the remaining spaces. This great work was a long time in execution, and before it was half finished its fame had spread over the surrounding country.

The decoration of her premises was greatly enjoyed by Mrs. Aleshine. "It gives 'em somethin' to do," said she, "till the onion-season comes on; it makes 'em happy; an' the leaves an' flowers bein' pretty nigh gone, I like to see the place blossomin' out as if it was a cold-weather garden."

In the evenings, in the large kitchen, the sailor men danced their hornpipes, and around the great fireplace they spun long yarns of haps and mishaps on distant seas. Mrs. Aleshine always, and the rest of us often, sat by the fire and enjoyed these nautical recreations.

"Havin' myself done housekeepin' in the torrid zone," she once said, "a lot of the things they tell come home to me quite nat'ral. An' I'd do anythin' in the world to make 'em content to live on dry land like common Christians, instid of cavortin' about on the pitchin' ocean, runnin' into each other, an' springin' leaks with no likelihood of findin' a furnished island at every p'int where their ship happened to go down."

On one subject only did our trouble now come into the mind of Mrs. Aleshine, and she once had a little talk with me in regard to it.

"I've been afeared from the very beginnin'," she said, "an' after a while I more'n half believed it, that Elizabeth Grootenheimer was settin' her cap at the coxswain, so I just went to him an' I spoke to him plain. 'There's plenty of young women in this township that would make you sailor men fast-rate wives, an' glad enough I'd be to see you all married an' settled an' gone to farmin' right here amongst us, but Elizabeth Grootenheimer won't do. Settin' aside everythin' else, if there was to be any children, they might be little coxswains, but they'd be Grootenheimers too; stone dumb Grootenheimers; an' I tell you plain that this country can't stand no more Grootenheimers!' To which he says, says he, 'I want you to understand, ma'am, that if ever me or Jim or Bill makes up our minds to set sail for any sort of a weddin' port, we won't weigh anchor till we've got our clearance papers from you.' By which he meant that he'd ask my advice about courtin'."

"An' now would it be easy, an' I can look ahead with comfort to onion-time."

I found it necessary to go to Philadelphia for a day or two to attend to some business matters; and the evening before I started, the coxswain came to me and asked a favor for himself and his mates.

"It mayn't have passed out of your mind, sir," said he, "that when me an' Jim an' Bill took that money that you all give us, we listened keener to see if anything was said as to what we was to do with the money; an' nothin' bein' said, we took it, an' we wasn't long in makin' up our minds as to what we was goin' to do with it. What we wanted to do was to put up some sort of signal what couldn't get blowed away, or more like, a kind of reg'lar monument as would make them that looked at it remember the rough squalls an' the jolly larks we've gone through together, an' it was when we was talkin' about Mrs. Lecks bein' give' the ginger-jar to put on her mantelpiece an' keep forever, that me an' Jim an' Bill we said, says we, that Mrs. Aleshine should have a ginger-jar too, havin' as much right to one as her mate an' that that would be the signal-flag or the monument that we'd put up. Now, sir, as you're goin' to town, we ask you to take this money, which is the whole lot that was give' us, an' have a ginger-jar built, jus' the size an' shape an' gen'ral trim of that other one, but of no pottery-stuff, for you kin buy 'em jus' like that, an' that ain't what we want. We want her built of good oak, stout an' strong, with live-oak knees inside to keep her stiff an' save her from bein' stove in, in case of collision. We want her bottom coppered up above the water-line with real silver, an' we want a turtle-back deck with a round hatchway, with a tight-fittin' hatch, jus' like common jars. We want her sides calked with oakum, an' well scraped an' painted, so that with water inside of her or outside of her she won't leak. An' on the bottom of her, so they kin be seen if she keels over, we want the names of me, an' Jim, an' Bill, which we've wrote on this piece of paper. An' on her sides, below the water-line, on the silver copperin' we want the names of all the rest of you, an' the latitood an' longitood of that island, an' anythin' out of the logs that might 'a' been kep' by any of you, as might help to be remembered the things what happened. An' then, if there's any room left on the copperin' an' any money left to pay for 'em, you might have cut on as many anchors, an' hearin's, an' bits of cable, an' such like suitable things as would fill up. An' that jar we're goin' to give to Mrs. Aleshine to put on her mantelpiece to stay there as long as she lives, or anybody that belongs to her. An', by George, sir!" he heaved behind his hand, although there was nobody to hear, "if ever them two jars run into each other, it won't be Mrs. Aleshine's that'll go down!"

I undertook this commission, and in due course of time there came to the village the most astonishing ginger-jar that was ever built, and which satisfied the three mariners in every particular. When it was presented to Mrs. Aleshine, her admiration of this work of art, her delight in its ownership, and her gratitude to the donors were alike boundless.

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