

## TOLD AT THE CLUB.

PERHAPS you will say that this is not exactly a club story. But my excuse for giving it to you is that the Old Beau told it to me one night while we sat in the cozy, curtained alcove just behind the buffet. And long before he had finished I called the steward to refill our glasses, for it sent a creepy feeling down my back.

"I have been a member of the club for five and twenty years," said my friend, "and in that time I have come to know intimately the lives of many men. Some curious things have happened within these rooms, but none so strange as this thing in the life of a man who was once the very soul of our inner circle. There! I did not mean to use that word, for before I have finished you may think it was misplaced. But no matter. Other and wiser men than we have had their doubts.

"His name was Eugene Wallace. We used to sit here and talk and drink 'B and S,' just as you and I are doing now. One night we fell to talking about marriage.

"If I wanted to marry any woman," said Eugene, "which, thank heaven, I do not, nothing should stand in the way."

"I can readily believe," I said, for I liked to urge Eugene on, "that you would permit no little matter of conscience or sentiment to stand in your way—or prevent you from accomplishing your desires. Yet I do think, my dear fellow, that it is possible there may be obstacles in this life which even you will find it difficult to surmount."

"Don't be sarcastic," he returned; "time enough to twit me with lack of conscience or sentiment when I have set up a claim to the possession of either."

"Truly, Eugene," I said, "if a man could only throw overboard some little things that hamper him from within, he might work to better advantage at times."

"Nothing but the externals are worth considering," he replied, slowly. "In fact nothing is worth considering—much."

"Thinking," he went on presently, and in a manner calculated to give source to his words, "is a heavy task, and it does not make things go any better at the end. If I wanted to marry any woman, I should do it, and let the future bring what it would."

"It was not long after this that Eugene met Bertha Voisdene, I must give you a word about her. Orphaned in childhood, she had been carefully reared within cloistered walls, and at the dawning of womanhood had come out upon the broader stage of the world as unsophisticated as a child. Her youth and innocence charmed him as the attributes of no other woman had ever done. Now, add to this that her father had been my

boyhood's friend, and it will help you to understand what follows.

"I soon saw how things were going between them, and I knew what Eugene's past had been. No worse than yours or mine, perhaps, but he had lived the life of a man of the world. I am not meddlesome, but I felt I must speak a word of caution to him—and I did so.

"Ah! you are about to turn moralist," he said, lifting his eyebrows at me. "But do you think it worth while to waste your maiden effort on so unlikely a subject?"

"Miss Voisdene," I answered, not heeding this, "has known so few men that any passably decent fellow who would make love to her violently might interest her. There is no doubt you can succeed. But you have been through too many fires. If she should, later, find there was such a thing as real passion in the world the result might prove a little annoying for all concerned."

"Eugene answered this lazily, as if the matter after all did not much interest him.

"I told you once," he said, "that conscience should never stand in my way. The reason was—I think I have no conscience. Nor do I think I have that other attribute which is supposed to be co-ordinate with it—the soul, you know. That little place at the base of the brain where the soul is supposed to reside I verily believe is hollow. If a clever anatomist ever has me on his table I hope he will not neglect to investigate this matter."

"What has all this rigmarole to do with Miss Voisdene?" I demanded, growing impatient with his nonsense.

"I am coming to that," he answered quickly. "By the way, it is curious," putting his hand to the back of his head, "that the saw-bones say the very easiest place to cut off life is just here, right below where the soul—the incarnation of life—should be. Now, it is true," handling a long, thin knife such as surgeons use, "it is true that such a thing as this thrust right in at the base of the skull, would cut off that which we call life, on the very instant."

"Yes, yes, I suppose it would," I answered, annoyed at the way he kept from the question, "it would sever the spinal cord. But let us stop this idle talk. I would like to know what you intend in regard to Bertha Voisdene?"

"Ah, yes," he said, laughing a little; "I had forgotten the important matter in hand. I said I would marry any woman if I wanted to. But I don't want to, thank heaven. I love Bertha Voisdene, and I think she loves me. But you are right in what you have said. I am not a fit mate for that poor child."

"With the last word, so quickly that I

could not interpose, he had driven the knife with which he had been playing directly to the vital spot—and what had once been Eugene Wallace, and my friend—was only a lifeless thing upon the floor.

"An hour later I stood beside his body alone with the surgeon whom I had summoned, and his words came back to me with startling distinctness. I told this to the medical man, and, with the cold passion of an anatomist, he put his implements into play and laid bare the base of the skull and deftly removed the necessary portions of bone.

"Just as he had done this the outside door of the room opened, and I stepped hastily toward it. Bertha stood there quiet, pale, beautiful.

"Where is he?" she asked; "he told me to come to him, here, at this hour. We are to fly, together."

"This was the woman who had killed my friend. I grew hard and cold toward her.

"Your punishment be on your own head," I said; "you would have thrown yourself away on a man who had no soul. Look."

"I flung a book open upon the table before her, and pointed to a passage which the sawbones had just shown me. These were the words:

"The seat of the soul is in the Corpus Callosum, a spongy little body at the base of the brain." Then, motioning her toward the form, I threw back the wrappings and exposed the incision that had just been made.

"Look," I said, "this man never had a soul."

"But poor Bertha Voisdene saw only the face of him whom she had learned to love, and the eyes, now wide and staring that had charmed her heart away. And with a single bound she fell fainting across the body of her lover."

The Old Beau paused, while I hastily swallowed a glass of something warm to still that creepy feeling. Then my friend asked me, as usual:

"Do you want the end of the story?"

I nodded, though half afraid to hear it.

"Well," he said, quietly, "all this might have happened, I suppose, but it did not. I know no happier couple than my dear friends, Eugene and Bertha Wallace. We will go around and see them some night and tell them this story. And remember, young man, you need never look for such grim tragedies among the records of our club."

Afterward I asked the Old Beau why he had done this thing to me.

"To show you fellows, who are so fond of spinning yarns for the public, that some others can spin yarns as well."

Extremely pretty costumes for girls are made with kilt-plaited skirts. The plaits are about four inches wide and pressed flat.