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THE "GENTEEL" PIGEONS.

A HOUSEHOLD STORY.

BY DOUGLAS JERRALD.

"Not at home!" exclaimed Captain Albatross.

"Not in town!" cried the Captain's lady.

"No, Ma'am," replied the maid, as with some trepidation she followed the visitors, who with no ceremony forced themselves into the parlour.

Captain Albatross, looking very sagaciously at the maid, observed, "I see you don't know us; say Albatross—Captain Albatross."

"As friends—early friends, the Captain was your master's god-father——"

"The only son I ever had," remarked Captain Albatross, with a sigh.

"They'll be glad to see us," was the assurance of the Captain's lady to the hesitating maid.

"I dare say, Ma'am; delighted no doubt," said the girl, "very much pleased, I'm sure; that is, when they come home, Ma'am; but, you know, Ma'am; the very day they married they left home for a month, Ma'am; and as that's only a fortnight ago, Ma'am, why, it is plain, Ma'am, that their time isn't up, Ma'am."

Captain Albatross, though only an officer of disbanded militia, had the sternness of a Frederick; hence, lowering his bushy black eyebrows, and advancing one step towards the maid, who received the fiery looks of the inquisitor with admirable coolness, he cried in sounds of thunder, "Young woman, can you look in my face?"

"I'll try, Sir," said the girl, with a simplicity lost upon the guest, who only roared the louder.

"I mean, wench, can you look in my face, and, without blushing, tell me that Mr. & Mrs. Pigeon are not in town?" asked the Captain.

The maid, twitted by the dictatorial tones of the Captain, and resolved at any cost to maintain the ground she had taken, replied with praiseworthy firmness, looking boldly at Albatross, "Mr. and Mrs. Pigeon are not at home."

"Young woman," remarked Captain Albatross, raising his forefinger, and shaking his head in the serene countenance of the domestic, "Young woman, I don't know what wages they give you, but to some families you'd be worth any money."

"My dearest Albatross," said his charitable lady, "may you not have been mistaken?"

"Mistaken, Leonora!" cried the captain; "I—Captain Albatross, mistaken! Did I not see him—see him last night with a lady in the opposite box? How can any man in such a case mistake or be mistaken?"

"Exactly what I said," replied Mrs. Albatross, with a significant glance at the Captain, "when I heard that you and a certain lady were at the Surrey Gardens, feeding the monkeys with macaroons."

"And I, ha! ha!"—here the Captain made a very pains taking attempt to laugh—"I, ha! ha! as I proved it by my dear friend, Captain Nibble, was at Hampton, fishing. You know, Leonora, that was the very day I caught that extraordinary gudgeon. You remember its picture was taken, and now hangs in the hall at the Bell;" and again Captain Albatross essayed a laugh.

"I only know, Edward," replied the Captain's lady, and her voice trembled, and she took her handkerchief from her reticule, "I only knew that there are times when those macaroons lie very heavy at my heart."

"Now, Leonora," exclaimed Captain Albatross, evidently hurt by the unjust suspicious of his too fond wife, "I did think this subject buried for ever between us. Many men might be mistaken for me; for I trust there's nothing odd, nothing peculiar about me. I have, I hope, merely the easy demeanour, the sustained repose of a gentleman; there's no character, as it's called, about me; but for Pigeon—is it possible to mistake him?"

"Oh, yes, Sir," cried the anxious maid, "very possible."

"How do you know?" asked the stern Albatross.

"I'm sure of it," answered the self-satisfied girl.

"Sure!" echoed the Captain's lady, with a look of contempt at the domestic, "sure!"

"Sure, Ma'am," replied the servant; "for I've lived in many families, and I never yet knew the master of a house that there wasn't somebody about the town the very image of him."

"There is something in that, Leonora," remarked the Captain; "still it was Pigeon."

"Never mind; perhaps they don't wish to be at home to us," said the Captain's lady, who with a sudden dignity prepared to depart.

"They're not at home," was the unnecessary avowal of the maid, as she readily followed the visitors to the door.

"Not the slightest consequence," remarked the Captain, as he stepped into the street.

"None whatever," said the Captain's lady.

"Not at home, I assure you," again asserted the maid, as she closed the door.

"Susan! Susan!" exclaimed a voice, and presently a pretty female head peeped over the staircase; "Who was that, Susan?"

"Captain Albatross and his wife," said Susan.

"Dear me!" cried the lady.

"They wanted to stand me out that you were at home, Ma'am; but I was too much for them. The Captain would have it that he saw my master last night with a lady at—"

"What! Samuel!" and the owner of the pretty face almost screamed.

"Charlotte!" cried a masculine voice, and the lady was led back to her apartment by a gentleman. We know not whether to laud the firmness of Susan, or to blush for her hypocrisy, when we assure the reader that the lady and gentleman were the newly-paired Pigeons. The Pigeons were in town! Yes, they had passed only half the honey-moon at the sea-side, and had returned to London a fortnight before the time.

Sam Pigeon and Charlotte Blue had been drawn to each other by a similarity of sentiment: their union was the happy result of sympathy—they both idolized the genteel; albeit, they were not too well skilled in the knowledge of its elements. Of this, however, they were well assured, that to be seen in London—to be confronted by any of their five hundred bosom friends within a month of their union:—was to sink forever in the judgment of the world—to go down a frightful descent in the estimation of all mankind. Mr. and Mrs. Pigeon belonged to that numerous and unhappy class of people who believe that "the world"—in reality represented by some fifteen acquaintances—has no other aim, no other thought, than that of watching the important movements of their important selves—of marking the cut of their coats and the colour of their gowns; nay, of duly registering their walks abroad and tarryings at home, the said world being all the time inhumanly indifferent to their very existence. "The world" is thought by these poor folks to be a very despotic, watchful, tyrannous, unforgiving creature:—they may be assured that, as far as regards them and their works, the world is a very easy, careless kind of person. "What will the world say?" asks Henpeck, when advised to separate from his wife. "I'd leave the wretch, take my little boy, and go into a lodging to-morrow, my dear," says Mrs. Sweetlips; "but then, my love, what will the world say?" "What! not go into mourning for your wife's uncle's cousin; why, my good Mr. Carib, what do you think the world will say?"—"Well, that is a good one:—a dustman with an umbrella! I should like to know what the world will say to that?" There never was such a goblin—such a mere bugbear, as that we make out of the unconscious, the indifferent world: it is the scooped turnip fixed on a sheeted mop-stick, and lighted with a candle; a hideous apparition scaring the stoutest traveller in his highways and byways of life. Happy the man, who with a clear breast goes whistling on, easy that he knows the harmless things the spectre is made of! However, our immediate business is with the Pigeons.

The blissful couple—their loves consecrated by Hymen—found themselves, ere their wedding-day was over, on the sea-shore. They had quitted the busy, bustling scene of Kennington, with all its picturesque and grassy spots, for the sweet retirement of Brighton. It was there they proposed to perform matrimonial quarantine—it was there they intended to illustrate their devotion to the genteel; there they would wear away the rapturous month, returning in proper season to receive the condolence—we mean, congratulations—of their army of friends. Mr. and Mrs. Pigeon had already got through ten days, when it struck them that the sea—at least in summer—always appeared the same; there was no alteration whatever in the beach; even the chain-pier remained provokingly unchangeable.

"My love," said the bride, as, on the eleventh day, she arm-in-arm with her Pigeon trod the shore, "my love," said she, with touching simplicity, "what do you think?"

Pigeon smiled, squeezed his wife's hand, and after a moment's intense thought said, "I can't tell."

"Would you believe it?—I last night dreamt of Kennington Oval," said the bride.

"God bless me!" said the bridegroom, "how very odd! I too dreamt of it—I thought I was there."

"Ha!" and Mrs. Pigeon sighed.

"What's the matter, Charlotte?" inquired the fond Pigeon, with the fondest voice.

"Our home will be a sweet place, Samuel!" observed the wife.

"A bower of love, Charlotte," was the opinion of the husband. "How can it be otherwise?"

"I hope Susan will be kind to my canaries; poor things! they'll not sing a note while I'm away—they'll not, indeed, Samuel."

"Well, we shall be at home at the end of the month," said Samuel.

"And there's fifteen days gone already," said Charlotte.

"No, my dear, only eleven, love; to-day is the eleventh day—not fifteen yet," said Mr. Pigeon.

"To be sure! what a head I have! I hope Susan will be careful of the furniture—and then those poor dear birds! Bless me! and those sweet gold-fish—I forgot to give her particular directions. Pretty creatures! how they will miss me! Lovely things! how they will miss the flies I used to catch for them!"

"Nay, my dearest, Susan has a kind heart, and will let 'em want for nothing."

"It would be very wrong to return to London in the honeymoon," remarked Mrs. Pigeon.

"What would the world say?" exclaimed Mr. Pigeon.

"We should be lost for ever in genteel society," said the wife.

"We should, indeed," said the solemn husband.

"And yet, Samuel, those dear canaries!"

Enough: two more dreary, sultry days did the ecstatic couple endure "body's banishment" from Kennington; when, on the fourteenth morning of their wedded life, they took their seats in the coach for London.

"La! Ma'am, is it you?" exclaimed Susan, as she opened the door to the rejoicing couple. "Come back so soon!"

"Hush! Susan, not a word," cried Mrs. Pigeon. "Thank heaven! we are at home," and she sank in a chair.

"Susan," said Mr. Pigeon, who called up a serious look, and spoke in the voice of a polite house-breaker "though we are at home, remember, Susan, as you value your place, nobody must know it."

"Not know it!" cried Susan.

"Certainly not," said the wife.

"For what would the world say?" asked Mr. Pigeon.

The happy couple had remained a whole day in secret in their own house, when Mr. Pigeon, in opposition to the judicious wishes of his wife, resolved at night to take the air. He assured Mrs. Pigeon that he could never stay in the house for four-and-twenty hours together; he should die if he attempted it; he must for a brief time enjoy the cool—the breeze—and added, to the astonishment of Mrs. Pigeon, that he thought no time so grand as the three hours before, or, on some occasions, after midnight. Such was the liberating avowal of Mr. Pigeon—of the same Pigeon, whose landlady had given him for a character, as she thought, all the domestic virtues of a household god. "Pray, Ma'am," inquired Charlotte's busy mother-in-law, "what are the habits of Mr. Pigeon? He is about to marry into our family, and, you'll pardon the question, what are his habits?"—"Habits!" replied the landlady; "the woman blessed who gets Mr. Pigeon—genteel as one can find at eleven." And these moral prophecies on the part of her future husband were imposed upon the brain and heart of the bride by the aunt aforesaid. "Genteel at ten, and but eleven," reiterated the spinster; "it seems Bibb to speak of, child, but what a deal of happiness is insured by the custom." Mr. Pigeon, hearing his wife that he would keep aloof from all acquaintance, took his hat. Mrs. Pigeon looked at her lord with a mild mixture of matrimonial sorrow and anger. Can the female reader wonder at this? It was already half-past nine, and Mr. Pigeon sighed as she thought of her aunt; yea, she sighed deeply at the visionary happiness of—genteel at ten, and bed at eleven.

"All men," said Susan, marking the melancholy of her mistress, "all men are alike, Ma'am."

"They are, Susan," said Mrs. Pigeon,—"Where's my handkerchief?"

Not wild horses, or, what is better, or worse, an Act of Parliament, should not tear away the secret which shall lie with us, wrapped in undertakers' lead. We will not point the finger of scorn at the house of Pigeon—we will not be such be wicked or leer at it; the man has seen the wickedness of his ways, and why should we throw an evil name upon a habitation, probably at this moment tenanted by worthy people who honour their father and mother, and regularly pay their rates? Houses, albeit of bricks and mortar, are delicate things, and take their character from the folks who use them; hence, we will not specify the house to which, at half-past five in the morning, Samuel Pigeon—a husband of little better than fifteen days old—took his timorous way. The sentence will fall upon the reader like a thunder-bolt—the female reader will clutch her petticoat and utter a piercing shriek,—but it must be said—

Samuel Pigeon had not been home all night! As the man crept homeward there was culprit in his looks, in his hesitating pace. He had, it was true, fallen into a most delightful party—had been so happy so very jolly; but now, alas! it wanted only seven-and-twenty minutes to six. What a beautiful morning!—yet what a reproach came with the bright sun! Sam blushed as he met the milk-maids: artisans, passing to their work, made him turn his head away; the chimney-sweepers, crying their noisome trade, struck him compunctious: yea, the very sparrows, chirping and playing in his path, gave him a twitch of the conscience. Let not the reader think that Samuel Pigeon had any fear of the violence of his ill-used spouse; no, she would only weep—for she was a young wife, and had not yet come to her nails. It was a nobler feeling that possessed Pigeon—not base dread, but bitter repentance. He had been beguiled into cards—had, moreover, been very lucky—but what was luck at nearly six in the morning! He had held the most wonderful hands at loo, and had never played but when justified by both king and queen. And then he thought, and in the dissatisfaction of his soul almost gave vent to the words—"'Tis six in the morning—my wife is sitting up, and, compared to domestic peace, oh! what are trumps?"

Pigeon, with heavy legs, walks on; and now he approaches his door. He scrapes his shoes, as tenderly as though he scraped his bare feet—he wants to cough, but he hasn't sufficient nerve to risk the operation. He looks at his knocker; the lion's head orna-