SATURDAY SHORT STORY

THE BEST MAN

By Gouverneur Morris.

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Stanislas Odeskalki, the best man, ate and drank as much as he could and O'Gosh, the interpreter, helped, set. as did old man Openta. But young Orloff Openta and Olenka were really married by the mayor. He made Or-loft hiss Olenka; shook hands with them; said that he hoped they would be a loving couple; made the remark that everybody's name began with O,

and wished them good-day. Orloff, Olenka, Stanislas Odeskalki, and old man Openta went uptown by the Elevated, and hurried to the rooms in East 123rd-street, near the river, which Orloff had hired for him-It was a bitter afternoon in January. self, his bride and his father to live in many windows lights aiready glowed. Old man Openta walked ahead, giving his arm to Olenka, who was so rosy that men turned their heads to look after her. The best man and the groom brought up the rear. The bride-groom's face was bright and smiling, and he kept his eyes steadily on the bride; but the best man scowled continually. Only once did he speak of

"You should have told me," he said, "what a pretty girl she is. You must look out or some fellow will take her

He cheered up when the four flights of stairs leading to the Opentas' new rooms had been surmounted. "Now we are going to feed,"

Old man Openta unlocked the door, and, motioning to the others to wait, crossed the threshold, turned and held

"Welgub," he said. He affected the English language with ostentation, but the others clung to Polish. Olenka hesitated, and looked at her husband, "But, go in," he said, he pushed her

gently. "This is no time to hang back." Old man Openta embraced her when she had crossed the threshold. Openta pushed Odeskalki into the

"Well, here we are," he said. "What Odeskalki began to look about criti- be, and I will wake you up." cally. "It is easy to see that a woman

"But you mustn't mind his dark ooks," said Openta to Olenka. "At

neart he is not an ill-natured fellow.' Odeskalki only scowled the more and, filling his glass, toasted Olenka. "May you be happy," he said, and thook his head gloomily.

"It is always so with him when he drinks," said Openta. "You would think him a dragon, but at heart he "You would 3 not an ill-natured fellow." "I gad ead do bore," said old man penta, suddenly. He rose and placed

himself with his back to the stove. Odeskalki drew out a fat silver vatch, and scowled at it. "Time for us to be off," he said to

"It is really too bad," said Openta to Oper.ta. the bride, "but I could not seem to make them understand. And if I were to stay with you I should lose my place. But next week I shall be put on the day shift. It was all I could do to get off this afternoon to be mar-

"When do you think you will come back," said Olenka. "Perhaps, not before one or two

o'clock," said Openta.
"Tonight," said Odeskalki, sulkily,
there is to be a large dinner for men given by a young man who is going to be married. There will be a real lake in the middle of the table, with banks of ferns and red roses, and live ducks ewimming in it. It is impossible to say when the affair will break up, for there when the altair will break up, for there will be a great deal of hard drinking—and not ordinary white wine like this, I can tell you Those young fellows will not have anything but the best imported champagne, costing you, perhaps, six dollars the bottle. That's the kind of a feast

'see," said Openta, gently, "this envious fellow and I will be kept busy serving courses and drawing corks until the last guest goes. There will be eight of us waiters, one for every four guests. But I will come home as soon as may "But I shall not go to sleep until you

and champagne. Several times during the dinner Odeskalki and Openta found walking on tiptoe, he crept into bed with hemselves alone behind the screen On one occasion Odeskalki filled two glasses awake and moaned with champagne, and said: "Quick, man-to Olenka!"

Openta hesitated. "Curse you," said Odeskalki, in a flerce whisper. "I will not be friends with a nan who will not drink to his own wife. Openta had a weak head, and that one glass stimulated him wonderfully. It was not difficult for Odeskalki to persuade him to take another.

The third glass Openta drank at his own instigation.

A few minutes later Openta droppe an armful of plates, and the other waiters cursed him.

Champagne had made its appearance with the oysters. Signs of drunkenness were now beginning to be evident unong the diners. The waiters were receiving onsiderable presents of money, and ecret directions to keep particular glasses filled.

Men left their places, and carried their chairs to more alluring neighborhoods Little groups surrounded the humorists, and roared with laughter whenever they spoke. Men whom the champagne affect. ed to seriousness drew aside in pairs, and with heads nodding close together, emptled their hearts of matters which for the moment seemed of paramount importance. Sometimes they sniffled and

shed tears. John Tombs snatched a coffee-pot



Olenka smiled over her shoulder at the three men, and, with a great show of courage, flung open the cupboard door.

has not lived here," he said.

ought to have curtains. Mrs. Openta will be lonely without curtains." Olenka went close to the stove and spread out her hands to the warmth. think a fire is so home-like," she

But the room is warming up," said Openta, "Don't stand on ceremony Let us all take our coats off." started forward to help Olenka,

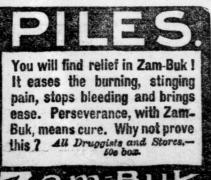
Odeskalki intervened 'No, let me do it," he said.
'All right," said Openta, "and

will help father off with his." In helping Olenka, Odeskalki pressed her shoulders with his hands, but very slightly, so as not to give offence. 'And, now," said Openta, "it is time for Olenka to enter upon her first duties as wife." He pointed to a large, broad cupboard in one corner of the

Olenka smiled over her shoulder a the three men. At times she fairly astonished by her prettiness. She was out of place in that shabby room as an orchid. You would not have been surprised to learn that she was a princess even a fairy princess-in disguise Her voice was tender and haunting, like the middle register of a fine, old cello when a master is playing. feet moved in and out under the hem of her skirt, timidly and gently, like two mice. If you had been in the hall Occasionally food was tossed to them and heard her laugh, you would have said, "Somebody is making a child

happy in that room." Presently, with a great show courage, she flung open the cupboard door, and at once began to emit exclamations of surprise and pleasure. For the shelves displayed cold meats, together, Odeskalki whispered sour comsalad, oranges, nuts, raisins, celery, jelly-cake and wine to give delight to

the moment. Soon a real feast began. presided; but so intent was she on seeing that the men's plates were altalk like a sewer."
ways filled that she did not find time He became more to eat more than a few mouthfuls herself. Old man Openta became loqua-cious. Openta himself beamed on the "Such a husband," he said. "Y party and kept jumping from his seat should have stayed with your wife toto heap fuel into the stove. It began to get red-hot. Odeskalki scowled continually, but it was noticed that



Old man Openta, from his position in front of the stove, suddenly covered his face. He clutched the seat of his trousers with both hands, and sprang forward. Then tears came into his eyes, and he

"What has happened to you, father?" ried Openta. "Id is dotig." said the old man in a choking voice. "I haf purned by pridges

pehind be.' Odeskalki scowled at the old man, "You ought to have known better than to stand so close to the stove," he said. "Come, Openta, or we shall be late!"

The old man scowled at Odeskalki. The young men put on their overcoats. Openta hesitated, looked for a moment sheepishly at Odeskalki, and then, turning to the little bride, opened his arms with complete frankness. She ran into them. "I hope you will be happy," he said, "but I do not think much even

comes of hoping." For two hours Odeskalki, Openta and six other waiters worked swiftly promote the comfort of thirty-two young gentlemen who had come to sit on the outer edges of a hollow square, and make beasts of themselves. The hollow in the white linen square was occupied by four descending banks of maidenhair and roses which terminated at the edges of square mirror-bottomed tank. In the tank a pair of gorgeous ducks swam. in the shape of bread pellets, celery ends, and even olives, which they ate with avidity But the supply became at length greater than the demand, and the water in the tank began to look less like good Crotoni than bad soup. Whenever their duties brought them close

ments to Openta. "Let them look to us for good man ers! That fellow with the red hair has no more breeding than a hog. Give me wealth and champagne, and I would not

He became more and more displeased with his own lot, and was inclined to night, even if you lost your position by doing so Instead, you are skipping about like a monkey, and currying favor with the rich. Have some spirit; imitate me

when you fill a glass. Do not look as if

he act were a pleasure, but a con-

escension. lready drunk enough champagne out of and don't curse your betters." partially emptied bottles to make his blood boil. Ever since the afternoon, when he had seen Olenka for the first time, he had been bitter with fate Her girlishness, innocence and beauty had exerted a powerful attraction on the man, and as the champagne mounted to his head, he began to imagine scenes in which he figured as her lover instead of

his friend. "Only let this silly Openta have a care!" he thought.

from a waiter and poured its contents on the floor. Openta, from whose hands he coffee-pot had been snatched, giggled, He was also drunk.

The dinner began to break up. young gentlemen left the room by twos and threes. Downstairs in the main hall of the restaurant there was a great putting on of hats and coats; many of the latter were lined with expensive Electric hansoms received drunken argoes on more pleasure bent. And, like he geese in the song.

"One flew east and one flew west, And one flew over the cuckoo's nest.

But the future groom came back to the lining-room. He was a big man, and, with his immense fur-lined coat and high silk hat looked positively mountainous. His face was red and shiny with hard drinking, but he was not drunk. 'Where is the other waiter?" he said,

a loud, assured voice. "I've got something for all of you. A swinging door was pushed open, and the anxiety which was torturing her came of the anxiety which was torturing her came it is had been hit by a locomotive. Flame to the surface. Once, as they were mountback.

Openta, very unsteady on his feet, and sure of only one thing-that he wanted to go home-had just reached the top and held her until she panted for breath. f a flight of stairs. Hearing the name alled, he turned, slipped and fell to the bottom of the stairs.

sounds of a fall, mingled with a sudden The groom hurried with the others, to he bottom of the stairs. Openta had already picked himself up

Those in the dining-room heard the

His face was white and drawn with pain. but he did not seem to have received any serious injury. He kept feeling the small of his back with one hand and taking culck, sniffling breaths.
"He's all right," said the groom, and he

began to distribute greenbacks among the waiters. The others, all but Odeskalki and Openta, hurried back to the dining-room for the remnants of the feast. "What a stupid fellow you are."

"to get drunk and fall down stairs. You might have broken your neck Come, let us go. "I have hurt my back," said Openta "Where?" said Odeskalki, brutally. He

rodded Openta's spine with his thumb Tears of anguish ran out of Openta's eyes, and he staggered. "Curse you!" he cried. Odeskalki was taken aback for a mo

said Openta meekly. "But you shouldn't have punched me so hard." "Punched you!" said Odeskalki scornfully. "I punch you! Man, if I pur hed borne. you you'd know it My fist would come out of the other side."

Avenue Elevated, and got out at 125th-street, but his back hurt him so that he could hardly walk. The pain made "I am sorry that you have noticed." he could hardly walk. The pain made

his father. All night the old man slept and snored. All night the young man lay

The next morning Odeskalki called to Openta. The invalid was asleep. Old man Openta and Olenka took Odeskalki to the furthest corner of the room, and shrilly: conversed with him in low tones

"He fell down a flight of stairs," said Odeskalki, "and injured his spine. He had just reached the head of the stairs when we called him to come back, and receive a present of money. have slipped in turning. We heard him fall, and found him at the bottom of the stairs.

"We have drawn the bed close to the stove," said Olenka, "because he complains that his legs are cold."

"It is too bad," said the old man,
"Have you consulted a physician?" asked Odeskalki. "Yes." said Olenka, "and he said that Orloff must be still for a long time." Orloff Openta stirred in his bed, and awoke. "Are you there, Olenka?" he said. Olenka flew to the bedside "Yes," she said, "and here is Mr. Odeskalki to ask

after you. "That is very friendly of him," said Openta. "I hope you are well, Odeskalki." for the moment she was "I am well," he said, "but it seems a receptacle for her tears that you are not well, my friend. Do you

"No," said Openta, "I do not think that I feel any pain, but my legs do not get warm." Olenka slipped her hand under the pedclothes and felt for his feet.

"They are like ice," she said.
"Can you move your legs?" Odeskalki "Yes," said Openta. "But if I do i hurts my back.

"Hum," said Odeskalki, and looked very wise.
"What worries me," said Openta, "is that all our savings will be spent, and

that perhaps I shall not be well enough to work even then. "But I shall find something to do, said Olenka; "and, besides, we agreed not to speak of that. Could you drink cup of soup?"

"I am not hungry," said Openta. think I feel a draught. "No," said Odeskalki "Both windows and both doors are shut." "Perhaps," said Openta, "one of the

windows in the other room is open, and the door does not fit tightly enough to keep the cold air out. "I will see," said Odeskalki, He returned in a moment, "No," he said, "the windows are closed

That room is more cheerful than this Mrs. Openta. There is an outlook."
"Bud doe stobe." said the old man?" "Haf you purned your pridges today?" said Odeskalki, and he added, "Some day you will be setting the house on fire.'

Odeskalki laid his hand on Openta's pillow, and patted it lightly "It is your duty to get well," he said. "I must go, but I will come every day to inquire about you. Mrs. Openta, will knob, turned it and pushed. The door did you speak with me a moment?"

stairs, closing the door behind her. "I do not know," said Odeskalki, "but I door he should have pulled and not

m afraid so. What I want to say is this: pushed. Do not hesitate to call on me if you run short of money. I have saved nearly a Furthermore, it would be a pleasure for me to do you a good turn. I will come again tomorrow. But you must not confine yourself entirely to "They are in there. They have been in the house. Perhaps I will make you go there for a long time. We are not wanted for a walk with me. Is it permitted?' He had taken her hand and raised it to his lips. If he kissed it with more ardor than mere friendship permits, Olenka did not know. She was very grateful to him one flight of stairs. Then he said: for his offers of help and for the kind tone which he had adopted.

"How I have misjudged this man!" she hought. Openta was waiting her return with greedy eagerness.

"But what did he say to you?" he asked most querulously. "He spoke altogether kindly," said Dlenka, "offering help, and even a loan if emptied the stobe. Look!" necessary. I tell you, he does away with that scowling habit when people are in

"Didn't I always tell you he was a good gutter. ellow at bottom?" said Openta. "I doe'd lige hib," said the old man,

Odeskalki came nearly every day. For he most part he wore a smiling mask. Sometimes he insisted on taking Olenka for a walk. Sometimes he read the papers o Openta and the old man. Meanwhile Openta got a little better, but he could ot use his legs without suffering torment. and his savings were nearly all gone. The weather was bitter cold; provisions were high, and more wood went up the stove chimney in the form of smoke than Olenka cared to think about. But through all she preserved her charm and her cheerfulness. But Odeskalki, if he had wished, could have told of moments, careing the last flight of stairs, having returned from a short walk, she began to sob. Odeskalki caught her in his arms She seemed preoccupied and not concerned with what had happened.

That same day Odeskalki informed the Opentas that in the future he would have to work on the day shift, and that it would burst of foolish laughter, and then a not be possible for him always to come deep groan. Afterward there was silence. up early enough in the evening to find them awake.

"It is a pity," said Odeskalki, "why I do not live with you and bear a portion of the expenses. But do not invite me unless you wish."

Two nights later Stanislas Odeskalki came for the first time to pass the night under the same roof which covered Olenka, and old man Openta whispered to "I doe'd lige hib."

On a certain evening, when old man Openta was sleeping heavily, Odeskalki spoke to the young Opentas of matters which were troubling him. "Will either of you deny," he said, "that

ou reached the end of your resources two days ago, and that I am bearing all the expenses: to deny this.

"It is nothing," continued Odeskalki. "Let things be as they are until Orloff might have been moved to tears, for he ment. "Don't be a fool, little man." he is well. But there is one thing which I was big and gentle and kind. But he did ready eye on opportunity, and had said presently. "Put yourself to gether, cannot endure much longer. And that is not know it, and Openta did not give it "I am sorry for what I said, Odeskalki." who is nothing but a burden, constantly edge of the platform for the train. He did shows his teeth and passes sarcasma. Let not know where he had passed the night him only show a proper gratitude, and I

> Orloff and Olenka knew there was much good luck he had ever had. That was all, truth in what their benefactor said. Old Openta went uptown by the Third man Openta hated Odeskalki and showed happened?" find out.

sald Openta. A screen on leather in the corner shielded from view a table covered with removes, and a great tub containing ice looking at her until the match which he

said Openta. "But I will speak to him the car and looked out. He saw the
myself. He does not realize, perhaps,
that he is living at your expense. FurThe sight made him feel sick, but he

thermore, father is old. It is better t laugh at his sareasms. everything will be better.'

Consternation seized even Odeskalki when at this point it was noticed that the find out what had become of Orloff old man had opened his eyes. He scowl ed malignantly at Odeskalki and said

"Id bill dod be pedder. I was dod

sleepig." He rose, took his overcoat from th

peg and put it on.
"I bill dot gum bag," he said. "I ab dot wanted.' Olenka tried to hold him, but he shool her off and made for the door. She threw her arms about him, but he struck her in

the face and the bosom. Odeskalki hurled the old man aside. "Let him go," he cried. "He will come back soon enough. It is cold, and he will be hankering for the stove.'

"I bill dot gum bag!" shouted the old Odeskalki closed the door.

"Go into the other room," he said to Olenka, "and put cold water on your face." He turned to Openta. "I will just go and see if she is hurt," he said. Olenka poured water into the basin, but for the moment she was using it only as

"Don't ery," said Odeskalki gently. He took her by the shoulders and turned her so she faced him. "Your cheek is bruised," he said, "but that is a trifle. Did he hurt you when he hit you?" She did not answer. And Odeskalki began to draw her to him, but there must have been some good in the man, for he suddenly drew

Olenka's tears ceased. "I was frightened only," she said. "If it had not been an old man," said Odeskalki, "I would have struck him dead

You do not feel any pain?" "No, but everything is going round." Odeskalki caught her as she fell and carried her to a chair. He kissed her inresisting mouth. Then he brought cold water and began to bathe her temples. Meanwhile Openta had turned his head so he could see the door leading into the

other room. "He ought not to have closed the door," he said querulously. "He ought to come back and tell me if she is hurt." In a few moments anxiety for Olenka egan to torment him.

"Maybe father really hurt her," h Then he began to call for Odeskalki Suddenly the door opened, and Odes-

kalki, looking like a man on fire with anger, appeared in the frame. "Don't scream so," he shouted angrily. Mrs. Openta has fainted. I am doing

what I can.' He disappeared, slamming the door. Half an hour passed. Orloff Openta be gan to cry. Another half-hour passed. He got out of bed and crept to the door, for he could not stand. He reached the not open. Strength came to him. He She went with him to the head of the stood and beat upon the door with his fists and hurled his light body against "Do you think he is seriously ill?" she it again and again. In his frenzy it did not occur to him that in order to open the

> He desisted after a while and leaned wearily against the door. that his father, slinking shamefacedly

> back, found him. "We must go." here. Help me put on my clothes. "But you gan't walk.

"Oh, yes, I can walk. Old man Openta helped his son down "Wait for be. I hab forgotten sum-He was gone a long time.

And when he returned he carried the key of the outer door in his hand. When they reached the street he was still carry-Coming to a drain opening he ing it. copped the key into it. "I hab locked theb id," he said, "ad The windows of the room which they had quitted glowed in the night like Openta fell face downward in the coals.

"Her heart must have been weak and he old man's blow practically killed her,' thought Odeskalki, after he had labored vainly for nearly an hour and a half to bring Olenka to.

must tell Openta." He pushed open the door and sprang ack from a storm of flames. The doo losed with a bang. Odeskalki ran to the window, threw it open, and looked out right, left, down and up. There was nothing for it, if the worst came to the worst, but to jump, unless he could make a rope out of bedding. He began to tear the bedding into broad strips. He worked with frantic haste, but not so fast as the fully screened from the Opentas, when door sprang inward from its hinges as Cries began to rise from the street be low, and the reverberations of fire-gongs Odeskalki thrust himself half out of the window and screamed for help. In that noment of agony and fear, he saw, among he upturned faces in the street, the face of old man Openta convulsed with ghastly merriment. And the old man's shrill voice was borne up to him, clarion and horrible: "I haf purned your pridges behind you

> deskalki Odeskalki sprang from the window. The ries and the reverberations of the fire bells seemed to combine in one awfu rushing shudder. The crowd fought cruelly to get back from the place where Odeskalki would land. Old man Openta did not move. He did not seem to realize He stood as if rooted, with upturned, malevolently smiling face. It seemed to those who saw the catasrophe that the old man was literally lriven into the street.

It happened that the train for which Orloff Openta was waiting at the New York Central's One Hundred and Twenty fifth street station was carrying two youn people to Greenwich on the first stage o their honeymoon. It was curious that the bridegroom was the very man whose gen Neither Orloff nor his wife were able eresity had been the cause of Openta's fall and of all his subsequent disasters. If the bridegroom had known this he or the morning, nor how he had come to will not complain. He is a trial not easily the edge of the platform. He considered to have gotten there as the only piece of "Heavens!" cried the bride. "What's

"You wait here, dear, and I'll go and and walked away with a silly smile, and

The bridegroom hurried to the end of "But I will speak to him the car and looked out. He saw the

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ome-made captive ball attached by ord to a spike diven into the ground

to his face. "Was someone hurt?" said the bride,

her face full of concern. "No, dear-a man got knocked downthat's all. They-he picked himself up tether, it came back with a jerk, and

everybody is 1-1-laughing at him." LEARNING.

Out on the swipe. The ball flew fast and true, but, alas! when it came to the end of its George cleverly stopped it with his eye, "What have you been doing?" anxiously isked Mrs. George, as he staggered into

lawn he tried a mighty

the drawing-room

George has become keen on golf, but "Learning to drive." "Learning to drive." "Which—a motor car or an aeroplane?" he could not drive. He worked out a