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An Interrupted Honeymoon!

By HAROLD CARTER

It is generally worse when your wife bows to you coldly than when she cuts you. Especially is this the case when you have not seen her for a couple of years. So John Ferrand, who was neither divorced nor estranged from Mrs. John Ferrand, felt badly when he accidentally encountered her on the board walk at Atlantic City.

The meeting was accidental in that Jack had hoped to select the opportunity. But he had gone to Atlantic City to find her, immediately after his return from Nevada, where, as the discoverer and subsequently as owner of the Diamond Silver mine, he had leaped into meteoric fame.

He hurried after her, and Edith, seeing him, halted and faced him.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Ferrand," said John, ignoring the look of anger which she gave him. "I have always meant to return this purse to you. You left it behind at the Pennsylvania terminal."

"And you have carried it for these two years?" asked Edith Ferrand scornfully.

He bowed. "You see, I didn't know your address. And it seems to contain some papers," he said.

Edith took the purse and opened it.

Two years before Horace Mills, senior partner in the law firm of Mills and Hoppner, had called John Ferrand, one of his clerks, into his private office.

"Ferrand," said the head of the firm thoughtfully, "you have been with me for five years now."

"Yes, sir," answered the clerk.

"You have not shown a great aptitude for law, I think," said Mr. Mills, smiling faintly. "Nevertheless," he added, "I know you to be a man of sterling integrity. And I want such a man just now. Ferrand, did you ever think of getting married?"

"No, sir," John Ferrand answered.

"Would you be willing to remain a bachelor for the rest of your life for—well, say for twenty thousand dollars?"

"Twenty thousand dollars! Ferrand

thought of the men he had known, struggling to maintain families on two thousand a year—all he could ever hope to rise to, after years of service. For Ferrand had not the money-making instinct.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Come in, Miss Kent," called the lawyer briskly, and Edith Kent stepped composedly into the room from Mr. Hoppner's office.

"Now, Ferrand, the situation is this," said Mr. Mills. "Miss Kent inherits four million dollars if she marries within a certain period. That period expires to-morrow night. She, like yourself, is not inclined toward matrimony. If you will go through the form of marriage with her, you will receive not twenty, but fifty thousand dollars. Immediately after the ceremony you will depart and never see her or me again. I know I can rely on your honor. Do you agree?"

John thought of the mother whom he supported, of his little sister, destined to the drudgery of a stenographer's desk unless—

"I agree," he answered.

Love at first sight, at which we practical people scoff, is nevertheless, a not frequent phenomenon. The strangeness of that agreement, a haunting memory of Miss Kent's blue eyes, her hauteur, her superb manners, her charm—above all that indefinable and elusive thing which we suddenly see in someone of the other sex, which sets the pulses throbbing and the heart yearning—this kept John Ferrand awake all night. And when the brief ceremony in the lawyer's office was over, Ferrand realized that for the first time in his life he was in love—deeply and wildly in love with this woman, his wife, whom he was never to claim. He choked; he could not look into her face.

"I thank you, Mr. Ferrand," she said composedly. "And now, since we shall never meet again—well, you may see me to the Pennsylvania terminal. I am going west to visit my sister. You have been paid?"

"More than paid," he stammered.

There were two hours to wait. They sat down in a restaurant to dine. Ferrand never afterward knew how it happened; he was conscious only of the misery of the impending separation. Like a man in a dream, or one delirious, he stammered out his love. He asked only a chance to win her some day, when he, too, had gone west and made a man of himself, demonstrated his right to win her. He ended by tearing his check to atoms and casting them on the floor. "All the while Edith listened gravely.

"I don't think I have the right to utter a positive refusal, Mr. Ferrand," she answered. "You were foolish to destroy that check—but I honor you the more for it, and I shall not press the money on you. But I must think—I don't know."

But afterwards in the taxicab, she relented. He held her hand and poured out the words that bubbled to his lips unchecked. When they reached the booking office he knew that she could be conquered. If only there were time! Nevada.....riches.....then to renew his suit.....

She had purchased her ticket and stood on the step of the train. Her purse was in his hand. The train moved. He wanted to leap aboard, hesitated; it moved more swiftly.... Presently he was alone on the platform, still holding the little purse.

Edith opened the purse. "Suppose you look in that envelope," she said. "They are not papers, as you seem to believe."

John Ferrand tore open the flap. Inside was neatly folded a long printed slip—a railway ticket. Then from the released folds there fluttered—a second ticket, Ferrand started at it dully.

"Good God!" he muttered. "What a fool I have been. If I had known! Edith!"

"I am staying at the Hotel Lafayette," she said softly.

(The End)

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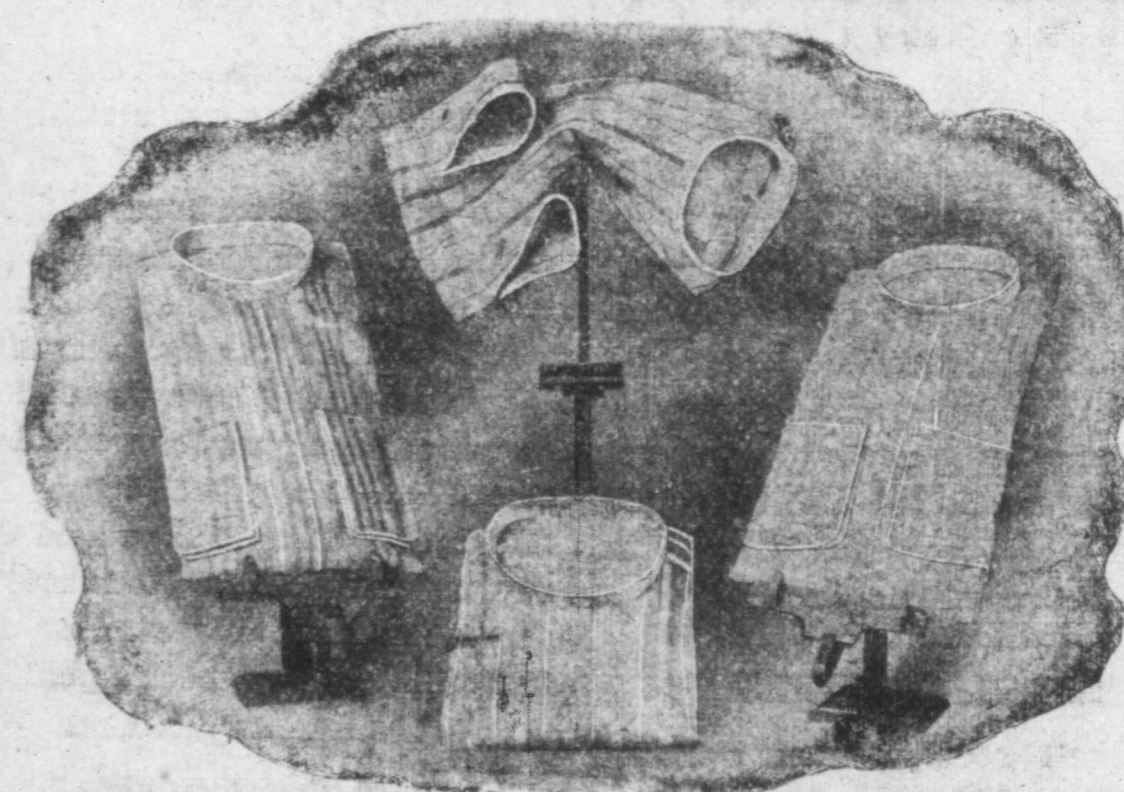
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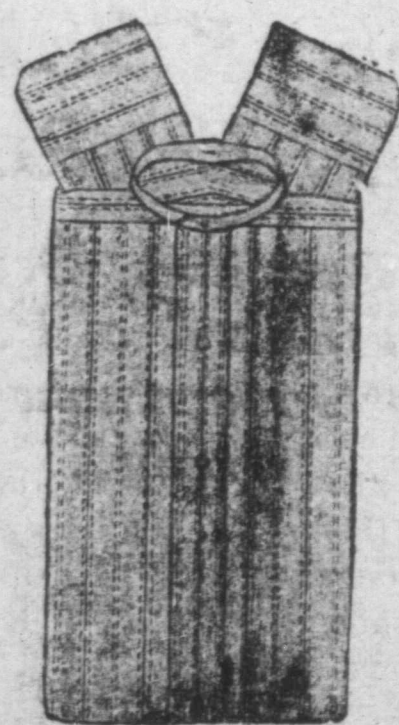
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