

be tempted to look inside. All that April Fool's day he was on the tramp from one office to another; but times were hard, and the city was so full of people that there seemed no room for Murphy, not even "at the top." The last office that he went to was Lace, Torpy Brother, architects. The letter was addressed to Joseph Lace, and he was away; which was a very fortunate thing for Murphy, or he might have still been unemployed. He then went to Joseph Lace's house in hope of finding him there, and was admitted into a room where Joseph's sisters, Anna and Rebecca, sat at their needlework. Anna told him that her brother had left town for a couple of days; and Rebecca thought that she had better read the letter addressed to him, in case it was something of importance. Her eyes had barely time to glance over the writing when she gave a little gasp and dropped the note upon the ground as though it were a hot cinder. Murphy thought she was going to be taken with hysterics or a faint; and held out his arms in readiness to catch her.

She stared at Murphy with wide open eyes and mouth; and when she had begun to regain a little composure, she said: "I did not know you were that; you do not look like it."

Murphy glanced from her to her sister, and then back at her again to try and ascertain the meaning of her words. Then he stooped and picked up the note. The words, "Send the fool further," caught his eye. His face turned red, his blue eyes gleamed, and his hand shook with fury. Rushing from the house without waiting to say farewell to Anna and Rebecca, he ran down the street and up the next until he came to Racy's house. Allie Racy, who pretended to be his friend but really had a spite against him, was playing the flute in the front drawing-room. The tune he played was "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning," which softened Murphy's heart to such a degree that he let Allie Racy live: he only thrashed him until his shillalah broke in two. He felt better after that, and, picking up the broken stick, he went home. The next afternoon Joseph Lace called upon him; and this led to a prominent position in the firm of Lace, Torpy Bro., and a comfortable home in Lace's house.

Lace's sister Anna was the house-keeper, for Mrs. Lace, being advanced in age and rather feeble, could do little. Rebecca washed the tea dishes, and did the mending; at least it was always said to be her work; but she was never known to do it to my knowledge. Anna did it; she was so clever that she seemed to get ahead of everybody, and did things while other people were thinking about them; not that it was her fault, nor was anyone else to blame. On the whole, the Laces were a very happy family. Joseph polished the boots (Anna had already cleaned them), and poked the fires (for Anna had lighted them a couple of hours before). In the evenings he read *Pickwick Papers* aloud to his mother (while Anna corrected his pronunciation); and when he had reached the end of the book he would begin at the beginning again, "for a good book will stand reading over many times," Joseph said; and his mother said, "*Pickwick Papers* was a book that could be swallowed with safety." Murphy listened to the reading sometimes out of sheer politeness towards the Lace family; "but the book was not in his line," he said, so sometimes he fell asleep, and other times

he sat and watched the faces of the four Laces as they were bent over their several duties.

Anna was handsome. She had a strong sensible face, sharp eyes, and plenty of good judgment and wit about her. Around Anna the whole household and work seemed to centre, and she managed everybody in the house. Rebecca was not handsome, neither was she plain. Her eyes were soft and mild, her voice low and sweet, her face bright and kind. Anna was always doing, and Rebecca was always undoing. They were very different these sisters; some liked one, and some liked the other, Murphy liked both. He was in love with Rebecca and had been from the very first time he saw her; but he intended to marry Anna. He did not know exactly why himself, except that Anna was somebody. She was of all people the most important in the house; the one that they would be loath to lose, and that was the reason, perhaps, why Murphy wanted her. And so it came to be quite an understood thing with himself, with Anna, and with the whole household, that he was going to marry her, although nothing as yet had been said by him to that effect. The night that he took her to the theatre to see "The Tin Soldier," he was going to ask her to be his wife; but somehow the play put it out of his head. The scenes were not those of a comfortable home, or happy married life, which may have had something to do with it; for Murphy was sensitive and impressionable and felt with the times. Towards the end of the play he fell asleep, and dreamt that he was sitting on his three-legged stool at home, in front of a table, tossing dice with Anna, Rebecca and Lace; and Rebecca won the game—which surprised them all not a little, and put him out a great deal. He and Anna got home from the theatre late and the house was in darkness. Anna went very quietly to her room that she might not disturb the rest, who had been sleeping for some hours.

Murphy ate some bread and cheese and cold potato, and then read the newspaper. When he went up stairs in the dark he saw the door of the empty store-room at the top of the landing quietly open and then shut again.

"Burglars!" he whispered to himself, for he had been reading about them in the newspaper down stairs, and the ways they had of concealing themselves. He walked on his toes to his room and took down his revolver; and then, as he passed Lace's room, he called to him in a low voice to bring his gun; for Lace, being an architect, had a good eye and had won many cigars and gold-headed canes at exhibitions. He and Murphy stood at the head of the stairs, back to back, which strengthened them. Lace aimed his gun down the front stairs, Murphy pointed his revolver at the door of the empty store-room; in this way he protected Lace's back and Lace protected his. The door of the empty store-room softly opened.

"Shut that door," called Murphy. The door closed, and all was silent again. Murphy could feel Lace shaking with fright behind him, and Lace could feel Murphy shivering with fear.

Lace drew in his right foot a little to support himself the better; he raised his gun on a level with his eye in order to be in readiness to pull the trigger, for he heard the stairs creaking as if some one was approaching; but how he was going to hit a man straight in the heart in the dark he

could not tell. He thought of the cigars and gold-headed canes and this gave him confidence. Murphy glued his feet more firmly to the ground and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Hark'ee, there they are again! Shut that door or I'll shoot you!"

Again all was still. Murphy could hear his heart beating tremendously, and he was beginning to get tired of the situation.

"I think I'll shoot him through the door," he whispered to Lace.

"No, no, not yet," said Lace; "give the fellow time to repent."

"Shut that door, or faith an' I'll shoot you."

"No," said Lace, who was getting braver as he got more used to it; "tell him to open the stoor and step out like a man and let us see what he looks like."

"But maybe there are three or four or perhaps six. No, no, faith I would rather they stayed in there," whispered Murphy.

"Shut that door, or I'll shoot you dead on the spot," called Murphy in a louder, steadier voice. Then all was silent, only the heavy breathing of Murphy, the ticking of Lace's watch, and the clock striking twelve.

They counted the strokes to themselves, and wondered if they would ever cease to clang; they rang out so loud and clear in the still darkness that it made both, brave men though they were, tremble.

Then some one came gliding quietly down the long hall.

"Ghosts and evil spirits," whispered Murphy; for, as his back was turned, he could not see, he could only hear—and then think.

"Shoot 'em, Lace; shoot 'em dead. Protect my back, man, as I'm protecting yours."

"It's Anna," whispered Lace.

"Go to the front window, girl; throw it up and call police."

Away went Anna and did as she was bid; and the shrill sound of a woman's voice rang through the midnight air, calling "Police, police." Two arrived at the front door almost at the same time; a third soon followed. Then there was some discussion as to who should go down the stairs to let them in. Murphy had to guard the store-room door; Lace had to protect his back, and Anna refused to go for she felt nervous. At length Lace went and took the gun with him. The three policemen entered the house and called for a light for they could do nothing in the dark.

"Hurry there, hurry there," called Murphy. "Faith an' I'll be killed on the spot I'm standing on, while you are all talkin' below."

A policeman mounted the stairs, lamp in hand, Lace followed with his gun, the other policeman came after him. Slowly, step by step, the procession ascended. When they reached the landing Murphy resigned his position with a deep-drawn sigh and stretched his limbs.

The first policeman with his baton pushed the door of the store-room open and entered; the others followed. In the centre of the empty store-room stood Rebecca with a mouse-trap and a bit of cheese in her hand.

"Did you find them?" she asked quite calmly.

"Find what?" roared Murphy; he was thinking of mice.

"The burglars you were talking about out there in the dark," said Rebecca. Then Murphy fainted away from sheer exhaus-