

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

THE CONSPIRACY.

By George Franklin.

"You must help me, Ken," said Priscilla.

Now, since the great ambition of my life was to help Priscilla then and always, I felt quite equal to this particular emergency, and said so. I also suggested that she should tell me all about it.

"It's about Evelyn," she said, pouring cream into the cups with an air of great precision. "You know, Ken—or perhaps you don't know—that Mr. Denham is awfully in love with her."

"Oh—er—you're quite sure?"

"Quite. He brought me a box of chocolates. They all do that."

"That's not conclusive evidence. I gave you a box of chocolates last week, and I'm not in love with your sister Evelyn."

Priscilla looked offended.

"Don't be silly, or I shan't tell you any more."

"All right, old girl—go on."

We had been chums, Priscilla and I, since the days of our childhood, when we had climbed trees and forded streams together. The years had gone by, and I was still her comrade; once that had satisfied me, it was only lately I had begun to find out that I wanted something more.

"I'll state the case properly," said Priscilla, replenishing our cups, "so don't interrupt. It's like this. I've always helped Evelyn with her love affairs, and we've talked them over together, but I can't get her to say a word about Mr. Denham. I'm very nearly sure she likes him—the right sort of liking I mean,—and yet because she promised mother to look after me, she'll think she oughtn't to marry him."

"Why ever not? You could live with them, couldn't you?"

Priscilla shook her head.

"That's just it. I couldn't. He'd drive me mad in a week. Oh, of course he is an old dear in his way, and he worships the ground Evie walks on; but oh, Ken, I simply can't live with him, and Evelyn must have guessed how I feel."

"You had better have some cake," I said, and while she ate it I considered the points carefully.

Evelyn and Priscilla Morden were orphans; their parents having been killed in a railway accident fifteen years before.

"Be sure you take care of Priscilla, Evelyn darling," was the last thing Mrs. Morden had said as she waved good-bye from the carriage window; and the words had rung in Evelyn's ears whenever she had been tempted to put aside the little sister's happiness in finding her own. Yes, Priscilla was quite right: Evelyn was just the woman to send her lover away, because of that same Priscilla's whim.

"So you see, Ken," continued Priscilla, "we must find some way out of the difficulty. I'm not going to have Evelyn giving up what I know she wants, just because she thinks I shan't be able to get on without her. Now, what have you to suggest?"

A solution had already occurred to me. A very simple one, it is true, but one that to my way of thinking met the case most admirably. The only thing was to bring it before Priscilla in a proper light.

I was still considering this when Evelyn and Mr. Denham came in.

One look at the elder sister's face told me that Priscilla had made no

mistake. Evelyn Morden loved this grave, silent man.

I made my adieux soon afterwards and Priscilla came with me to the gate.

"I was right, wasn't I?" she asked gleefully: "it's crystallized fruits this time. I saw the edge of the box sticking out of his pocket." Then her face grew serious.

"You really must help me, Kenneth. Could I find a 'vocation,' do you think? Art, or music, or literature—anything, so that I can get out of Evelyn's way."

"I think it's likely; anyway, I'll consider the matter," I told her, "and let you know."

Then I hurried away, for I knew right well that that pretty peasant face would probably wrest my secret from me if I stayed any longer, and its time was not yet.

Priscilla was in the garden the next time I went to The Hollies. She sat in the hammock, and her hair—it was such pretty hair, all wavy and fluffy—blew round her face in a most bewitching manner.

"They're in the drawing-room," she said, glancing towards the house, "Mr. Denham and Evelyn, and I'm almost sure he is going to come to the point. When I heard him ring, I said to myself, 'That man means business.' Now, Kenneth, if she refuses him—and I know she will—what am I to do?"

"Priscilla," I said seriously, "I came this afternoon to tell you something."

Priscilla was at once all attention—for the moment she forgot Evelyn and the proposal that was probably taking place in the drawing-room.

"What is it?" she said.

"Priscilla, I'm in love."

"What did you say?"

"I'm in love—in love."

"Oh!"

There was wonder, and surprise, and something I couldn't quite define in Priscilla's voice.

"Is she—is she nice?"

"Nice isn't the word,—she's perfect."

"Oh!" said Priscilla again, with still that strange inflexion in her voice.

"Priscilla," I said desperately, "can't you guess who she is?"

"I suppose," she said slowly, ignoring my question, "that you won't be my chum any more. She mightn't like it. I don't think I should myself."

"Priscilla, you haven't answered my question. Can't you guess who the girl is?"

She began to pick ivy leaves from the wall, so that I couldn't see her face.

"It's that Miss Mason, I suppose," she said at last, "that you met in Scotland last year. You told me she was extremely nice."

"Did I? Oh, well, it isn't Miss Mason. The girl I want is fifty million times nicer, and if she won't have me, I shall go to Africa and settle among the blacks."

"Oh, Ken, not really?"

"I shall. Honest Injun."

It was delicious to tease Priscilla, and I was thoroughly enjoying myself, but at that moment she turned on me a pair of anxious, troubled eyes which suddenly brimmed with tears. Then I lost my head.

I took her dear hands in mine—such soft dimpled hands—and blurted out the truth like any schoolboy.

"Priscilla," I said, "you're the only girl I love,—I wonder you haven't guessed it long ago. You won't send me to Africa, will you?"

I am not going to tell you, or any one else, what Priscilla said.

"Priscilla—Priscilla, where are you?"

It was Evelyn's voice, and we both started guiltily; we had clean forgotten those other lovers in the drawing-room.

They came towards us now, Mr. Denham and Evelyn, with radiant faces.

"Priscilla darling," said the elder sister, "I've great news for you, and of course Kenneth can hear it. Mr. Denham and I are going to be married. I know you like each other, any one can see that (oh, poor blind Evelyn!) and of course you must live with us—we both wish it."

Then I felt it was my turn.

"Evelyn," I said, "your plan is admirable, but Priscilla and I have made one this afternoon that I really think is even better." And then I told them.

Evelyn professed herself delighted, but I thought her finance seemed particularly elated.

"A most happy arrangement," he declared, "very happy indeed; I must congratulate you both on your ingenuity."

"It was Ken's idea," said Priscilla meekly.—The Family Friend.

TO PUMP A SEA DRY.

Little Holland, with its 5,000,000 people living safely behind their wave-washed dikes, is about to make a new conquest from its old enemy, the ocean. Already Dutch engineers have begun the tremendous task which will result in turning the Zuyder Zee into 1,400 square miles of dry land. Where of old the great Dutch war fleets gathered, where now 4,000 fishermen sink their nets, there will rise happy villages, broad pastures, popular-bordered roads and sleepy canals—new farms and homes for 50,000 Dutchmen.

The task to be undertaken is a tremendous one. It will cost nearly \$76,000,000. In return the government expects to secure annual rentals of more than \$5,000,000 from those who occupy and till the hard-won ground.

The Zuyder Zee has occupied a most prominent place in Dutch history. On its shores are the ancient towns of Medemblik, Hoorn, Harderwyk, Norden and Enkhuizen, under whose walls the Dutch fleet used to lie at anchor in the days when Holland disputed with England the supremacy of the seas. It seems peculiarly appropriate now that Holland has turned from the ways of war to the paths of peace, that she should win in a great fight with the sea—a fight that has continued throughout hundreds of years—attaining victory only by ceaseless vigilance and fierce endeavor. And yet one cannot but experience a feeling of regret that those ancient cities, which, though nations rose and fell, made good the circles of their battered ramparts, defying alike the power of the sea and the might of Spain, should become quaint inland towns, far removed from the roar of the breakers against the dikes.—Herald and Presbyterian.

Life is a casket, not precious in itself, but valuable in proportion to what fortune or industry or virtue has placed within it.—Landon.

There are two kinds of trouble in this world—the kind that we find, and the kind that finds us. The former is by far the hardest to bear.

The conception of thanksgiving as a sacrifice needs to be retained. "Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving," is the word of the palmist to our age as truly as it was a message to his own times. Genuine thanksgiving costs, nowadays, just as it always has done.