

MISS GRIMES' THOUSANDS.

"The week's board to be paid to-morrow, and I'm five bob short. What shall I do?" and I cast a woe-laden glance around the room. "Now, if only some rich young lady was to fall in love with me—"

"I say, Hal, are you in?" interrupted a voice at the door.

"Yes, I'm in all right but I'm also out all right, so far as my pocket is concerned," I answered, as Wilton, a fellow-boarder, opened the door and came in.

"About how much?"

"Five bob, and board due to-morrow."

"Well, perhaps I can help you," and he handed me two half-crowns. "Pay me when you can't help it. By the way, Hal, have you seen the new boarder?"

"No—who is it?"

"Miss Grimes."

"A relative of old Grimes, perhaps; but is she rich?"

"How do you suppose I know? I never saw her till about five minutes ago; and if she is, what's that to do with you?"

"Oh, nothing. Only I've been thinking of making a speculation."

"Well, I hope you succeed," and Wilton closed the door and went downstairs.

Five minutes later I heard him singing a duet with Miss Clayton, one of the boarders.

I was bookkeeper at the time in the office of Grab and Co., wholesale drapers, and as my salary was not very large, I was always in trouble for want of "the needful." In fact, I always came out a few shillings short when board was due.

I offered myself once as shop-walker; but as the salary was no more than Grab and Co. were already paying me, I gave it up, and concluded to wait for something to turn up.

Something did "turn up." It was a trap, in which a very beautiful young lady and I were driving. I had to pay the price of the trap, and lost the young lady besides, for her mother decided that I was not to be trusted; but I have to get trusted ever since, for that drive put me so far behind in money matters that I have never been able to adopt the "cash system" since that unlucky day.

"Well, now I'll attend to Miss Grimes," said I, as I heard the dinner bell ring.

I was introduced to Miss Grimes at table.

"Not a beauty," thought I. "Eyes of a dishwater hue; nose small and flattened at end, as if she had been in the habit of pressing it against the window in her girlhood; hair black and cut short; skin cream colour. Still, she's got money."

Miss Grimes did not seem to be very much drawn towards me, for she never once raised her eyes while we sat at the table.

Wilton was going to take Miss Clayton to the theatre that night. I wanted to go, and perhaps Miss Grimes did; but "Board due to-morrow," said a still, small voice that seemed to come from the depths of my pocket.

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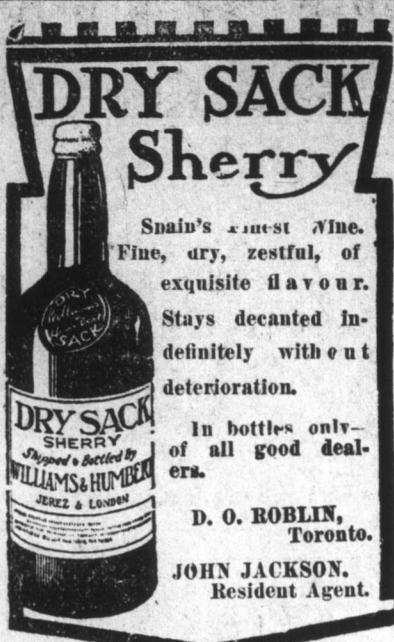
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When I strutted into the drawing room half an hour after Wilton had gone, I found her alone, the other boarders having also gone out.

We passed a very pleasant evening together, for I found her very agreeable. I gently hinted, in the course of conversation, at the meagre state of my wealth of "my uncle," when I did not tell her that he had no watch, a chain, and certain other personal effects.

"To what profession do you belong?" inquired Miss Grimes, with an abruptness so unexpected that I nearly slipped into giving her a truthful answer. But I managed to pull myself together.

"Profession? Oh—ah—yes," I stammered at last. "I am a— a member of the Bar."

By posing as a lawyer I thought I might find out the state of her finances and if they were in a good enough condition, I meant to offer myself to her as "legal adviser" for life.

There was a long pause, after which she said, tentatively: "Mr. Dawson, I have a couple of thousand that I should like to invest."

"Ah, yes," I returned, blandly. "Do you wish to make a permanent investment?"

"Well, I am not particular, provided I can let it at good interest," she said.

"Certainly," I remarked, at a loss for anything better to say.

"But, perhaps," she said, smiling, "I had better talk over business at your office. If you will give me the street and number, I'll call to-morrow."

As good luck would have it, Mr. Smith, one of the boarders, came into the room at that moment, and saved me from getting any deeper in the mire.

Next morning, before breakfast, I went to Wilton's room. He was in bed when I went in.

"I say, Wilton, I'm still in trouble," I said.

"Well, what's the matter now? Out with it, and I'll help you if I can."

"Last night," I began, taking a chair by the bedside, "you went to the theatre, and I stayed at home with Miss Grimes. I told her that I was a lawyer, and now she wants to call at my office on business."

"What the dickens did you tell her that for?" inquired Wilton, rising up in bed, his surprise at my announcement depicted strongly in his features.

"Why, she thought from what I said that I belonged to some profession, and when she asked me which, what could I say? If I'd told her the truth, I should stand but a remote chance of handling those thousands."

"Eh—thousands! What thousands?" Wilton inquired.

"Why, she's rich, my boy!" Wilton laughed.

"I see, it's the money you're after, mercenary dog! Under the circumstances I really don't think I ought to give you any help whatever. But let me see what you can do."

He tapped his forehead with the tips of his fingers thoughtfully. "There's Jack Brown," he mused, after a long pause. "You might tell him about the affair, and I don't doubt but that he'll give you the use of his office for one interview."

"Good! I never thought of that!" I cried enthusiastically.

"I'll see Brown in the morning, and if Miss Grimes says anything more about it, you'll know what to do," said Wilton, sinking back into bed again, which I interpreted as an intention that he desired to finish his

interrupted slumber, he being an incorrigible late riser.

I saw Miss Grimes at breakfast; but she said nothing, so, hoping she had forgotten it, I walked down to Grab and Co's.

"No," thought I, "as I have found that she is rich, I must ply my courtship to the best advantage, and take care that I do not upset the whole box of tricks by making some absurd slip."

I had heard a great deal about the "blessings of poverty," but for once I was ready to accept the miseries of wealth. In short, I made up my mind to marry her if I could.

I read an advertisement the other day of a patent medicine that "imparts tone and vigour to the system"; but there is nothing that imparts so much tone and vigour to my system as a well-filled purse.

So you see, it was perfectly natural for me to "fall in love" with Miss Grimes. To be sure, my love was not so deep but what it could easily have been transplanted elsewhere, had more attractive soil presented itself for so tender a plant to grow in. That is the most convenient kind of love I think for in case the lady on whom you have set your affections should prove fickle, you save a large amount of eye-water and many heartrending sighs.

These thoughts, and many others of a like nature, were chasing one another through my brain, when the door opened and Wilton came in shouting:

"It's all right, Hal. The office is at your disposal. At what hour did you tell her to call?"

"I said nothing about it this morning."

"The deuce. Perhaps she'll inquire of the landlady?"

"Well, if she does, it's all up with me."

"Just so," replied Wilton, taking a seat, and incidentally a cigar. "Du what does she want of you?"

"She wants to invest her money, and I suppose she thought that I, being a lawyer, could give her all the information that she wanted on that point—the safest investment, you know."

"Then why, in the name of Heaven did you not borrow it, and give her your heart and hand as security?"

"I should very much like to."

"You mean that you are going to it, if possible."

"Well—yes," I replied.

"And I wish you success and a very good morning," and he took his hat and departed.

When I went home that night and sat down to tea, Miss Grimes looked at me and smiled. It was a queer smile. I thought then that she had found out my real occupation; but when I met her afterwards in the drawing-room, she said nothing about it, and was even more sociable than on the previous evening, and so my fears vanished.

I had taken a seat beside her in the recess of a window, and the curtains completely screened us from the view of the rest of the company.

And here it will be fitting if I tell the reader that I do not believe in long courtships. Lovers will fall out and though it may be very pleasant "making up," there is the chance of being lost to each other for ever. A wife lost to each other for ever! Awful fate!—especially if one of the parties be the possessor of those good things, vulgarly called "riches," which can only make life worth the living.

"Miss Grimes," I said, taking her hand and giving it the suspicion of a squeeze, "we have known each other but a short time, and perhaps you will think very strange what I am going to say."

Her lips did not move, but her eyes spoke volumes.

"You know my profession?"

"Yes," she replied, while that strange smile I had noticed before again wreathed her lips. "I have never done anything romantic in my life," I went on. "What I now propose doing I think will be decidedly romantic, but, at the same time, will

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sound, I am afraid, dreadfully prosaic.

Again I received no answer. "To be brief about it, as a lawyer should, will you be my wife?"

"Why, Mr. Dawson! Your question has taken me quite by surprise," and she hung her head.

"I supposed it would; but," and I placed one knee on the floor (to command success, you must do a thing properly), "if you knew my heart you could not be so cruel as to refuse me."

I have loved you from the moment that I saw you first."

Still she did not answer.

"Dearest, say thou wilt be mine!" I cried, placing my hand on my heart, which, to tell the truth, was beginning to fail me at her prolonged silence.

"I will," she murmured.

What a relief! I hid my excited condition from her, kissed the tips of her fingers, and then resumed my seat beside her.

It was late before we parted that night. The other boarders had retired long before, leaving dear Ellen—she was my "dear Ellen" now—and I alone.

We were to be married by special license, which I borrowed the money from Wilton to procure, and no one of the boarding-house was to know it. A carriage was to be at the door on the following day to convey us to church, and then we were to go by boat to the Isle of Wight, where I had a brother-in-law living, for our honeymoon. Grab and Co. readily granted me leave of absence for a week, without pay, as business was rather slack.

It is not necessary to describe the wedding ceremony—it is a too commonplace, everyday affair to need it. The knot was tied effectually—nothing but death or divorce could separate it—and then we went off to the boat.

I have told you of the straitened circumstances of my exchequer. I had managed to raise enough to pay our fare, but for the rest I was perforce dependent upon my wife.

We were sitting quietly together upon the deck, when suddenly I placed my hands in my pockets and exclaimed:

"Bless me! I've left my pocket-book at home!"

My wife looked at me in surprise. "How did you pay for our tickets?" she asked.

"Why, I had a few shillings loose in my pocket; and my pocket-book, containing all my notes, I left at home."

"How strange!"

"Yes, how you any money with you?"

"Not a farthing," was her laconic answer.

"Why, I thought you had a couple of thousand to invest?"

"So I had—two thousand-pence. But I invested them yesterday in my rousseau."

I looked at my wife in amazement. "Did you think I was rich, dear?" she said.

"Yes," I managed to articulate.

"Well, I thought you were!"

"I am not."

"Then our surprise is mutual, darling."

"The dev—"

"Don't swear. I am exceedingly obliged to you for marrying me. I went out the other morning to get a situation as housemaid. Dearest, you have saved me the trouble, and, putting her arms around my neck, she kissed me.

When we got to the Isle of Wight, my brother-in-law lent me enough money to take us home again.

I still beard at the same place as I courted my wife, but as Grab and Co. have raised my salary I must rest content.

Fortunately, my wife has turned out a jewel, if she isn't "set in gold," and so far I have had no cause to regret the day I married her for her "thousands," nor do I think it likely that I shall have any reason to do so in the dim, uncertain future.

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