

bar-room as boot-black and general messenger, he was allowed to eat with the landlord's colored servants. His wardrobe was supplied from the cast-off clothing of the stable-boys, yet his dress was never as unsightly as his countenance. Only two friends of his youthful days remained to him—rum and the river; the latter could not cast him off if it would, and he would not abandon the former if he could; when he could get rum he was happy; when he could not, he solaced himself by lounging on the river bank and listening to the only village babbler that talked as it used to do, and never upbraided him.

Late in the afternoon of the day preceding the beginning of the New Year's calls in Thornton, Tom Dolser returned from a long errand and entered the bar of the tavern in a doleful frame of mind, for the trip was to yield him only ten cents; the next day, New Years, could hardly bring him business of any kind, there being no travelers with boots to black in town on holidays, so how was he to get his customary stimulus? The prospect unmanned him—as almost anything could—and he felt like crying, but after some effort he succeeded in swearing instead. As he shuffled to his place on the boot-black's bench, he was startled by shouts of:

"Here he is now!" "Tom you're in luck!" "There's a week of solid bliss ahead of you!" and other remarks of similar purport.

The sot looked about him defiantly; he had been the subject of very rough jokes in that bar room. He stared inquiringly at the bar keeper, who always spoke with authority when he spoke at all.

"They mean it, Tom," said the great poisoner. "The New Year's calls is to be taken up here to-morrow—Arthray's wife started it—and the fellows here think 'twill be fun to keep the women and the men who are to call on 'em awake all through to night, so they'll feel good and stale to-morrow."

"I don't want to get in the lock-up," said Tom, shuffling again toward the bootblack's bench and looking much disappointed.

"There's no danger of that, Tom," explained one of the opponents of New Year's innovations from New York. "All the bells of Thornton are always rung at midnight of the last year, but the racket sometime 'n is pretty soon, because the ringers get tired and haven't anything to br 'em up. Now, just see how lovely we've arrang'd the whole thing. The old school-house is right in the middle of the town, and its bell is the easiest of the whole lot to ring, and yet its jingle is so infernally loud that nobody can help hearin' it. We've got the keys; you take 'em, go in just before twelve, lock yourself in so nobody can get at you, take life easy until the other bells shut up, and then begin nd ring, first with one hand then with the other, straight through till daylight. We'll lend you a horse-blanket to keep you warm, give you a pi it of whisky to keep you company, and, if you see the job through, you shal have free rum at the bar here all day to-morrow and a week afterward—eh, Teetis?"

"Fact," replied the bar keeper. "The boys are to pay the score."

"I'll do it," said Tom, "if you'll see me through till midnight," said Tom.

"Oh, no," laughed the expounder of the conspiracy, "or you won't be fit to do the job."

Tom curled up resignedly on his bench; eight hours would be a long time to wait, but then he would have a pint—a pint at a time of his favorite substitute for food and clothing. Soon he was aroused, however, by some one saying:

"Teetis, you forgot to give Tom his letter."

"By the shillelah of St. Patrick, so I did!" exclaimed the bar keeper, hastily taking a small envelope from behind the bar where it had rested against a bottle labeled "Old Tom Gin."

"What cowardly trick are they playing on me now!" thought Tom to himself, as he rose slowly to his feet. Again he appealed, with his eyes, to the bar-keeper, and that official responded:

"It's no joke, Tom. One of the post office clerks said he put it in our box because he heard you c. me here oftener than anywhere else."

Tom slowly extended his hand and took the letter.

"Better hire a room an' lock yourself in 'fore you open it," suggested one lounge. "P'rhaps it's from the Secretary uv the Treasury, an' got a check in it for interest on yer registered bonds."

"More likely it's from a tailor that trusted Tom when the bummer wore good clothes," said another.

The envelope was thin enough for Tom to read through it the name, "Mrs. Oscar Arthray" in remarkably uniform letters. As he read, some one remarked:

"Like enough its from some woman who's taken with his style, an' wants him to make love to her."

Tom began to lay the letter on the bar; but as the speaker ended the remark, the drunkard changed his mind and placed the missive between his teeth—then he picked up a chair and felled his tormentor to the floor. There was dead silence for a moment, such as usually follows any manifestation of honorable feeling in a bar room. Tom went to a basin in a corner, washed his hands, took the envelope from his somewhat inappropriate position, and left the room.

What could Mrs. Arthray want of him? He supposed she had forgotten him long ago. Not that he had forgotten her; he never saw her in the street—where she always passed him without recognition—without realizing keenly for a moment how wide and deep was the gulf that separated him from the friends of his youth: for had not the glorious woman's hand often

made his coat sleeve feel a little fuller than usual in the old days—had not his voice and hers blended in the church choir—had not he and she taken part in many an innocent village frolic? Some of his early acquaintances had grown sad and old, but she seemed to have discovered the secret of perpetual youth. Could it be that—enraging thought—that now she, who once had been his companion, wanted him for some menial service on the morrow, some service such as he was often called on to do for other people?

He went to the stable loft and broke the envelope; it contained merely a card bearing the lady's name, and the line: "At home, January 1; from 10 a. m. to 10 p. m."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Tom, it must mean that I'm invited to call on her! Then she can't know that—she can't ever have seen or heard—she—oh, my God!"

The poor wretch imagined for a moment Mrs. Arthray and himself standing face to face, and his little strength deserted him so entirely that he fell as if struck by paralysis. He covered his face with his hands, groaned, swore, cried, and exclaimed, "Awful, awful, awful!"

Suddenly he sprang to his feet, hurried out of the stable and toward the river. The sun had set, the shop-keepers were lighting their lamps, but no matter, "the darker the better," muttered Tom to himself; "I don't want anybody to see me now." He went through the least frequented streets, he almost ran, and before the darkness had entirely closed around him, he reached the shore.

He had meant to end his misery by a sudden plunge, but his feeble nerves were already exhausted by his unusual exertion, and he paused to recover courage. He tried to regain strength and resolution by withdrawing from his pocket the little bit of pasteboard that had worked such a sudden change in his apathetic, brutish life. But the spell did not work as he wished. Into his bewildered brain came the thought that Alice Arthray herself—the handsomest woman in Thornton, the noblest woman he had ever known or heard of, had touched that same card—had sent it to him. He seemed to profane the card by touching it, yet at the same time the insensate thing seemed to be placing before his eyes incident after incident of his arly life. In imagination he became his old self again, and at last he turned again toward the town, saying to himself:

"Better be a happy fool, while it lasts, than a dead one."

But the charm did not last. By the time he reached the tavern he had sworn to reform and then sworn to steal rum and get blind drunk as soon as possible; he did not keep either oath, but slung into his own place in the bar room and gratefully took a glass of rum with the bar-keeper, in admiration of the only man who had ever in that room resented an insult to a lady, silently handed him. The stuff made him entirely his own self again; he forgot Mrs. Arthray, his good resolutions, his bad resolves, and everything else but the thought that at twelve o'clock he was to have a pint of whisky, and from daylight of the next morning he was to have unlimited liquor for a week.

It seemed to him the hours from six o'clock to twelve would never pass. He tried to sleep, but could not. The smell of the liquor that began to flow in profusion as the evening loungers gathered, almost maddened him, and he begged one man after another to give him just one drink, but all were obdurate, for they knew the part that Tom was to play, and they wanted him to be sober enough to do all that was planned for him.

At the stroke of eleven he arose in desperation and went out of doors to keep the sight and smell of his liquid enemy from tormenting him any longer. The night was bitter cold, so he sneaked into a little bedroom in the stable, and stole the sleeping coachman's ulster to keep him warm while he walked; in a short time he would have a pint of rum, then he would be warm enough. He turned up the great collar of the coat, so that it covered his ears; he thrust his hands deep in his pockets; he felt gloves; he put them on. Then he laughed to himself and muttered:

"Nobody could tell me from a gentleman—here in the dark. I wonder how it would feel to wear overcoat and gloves by daylight again? Why, I feel as if I was a man again; I wonder—"

What he wondered he could never afterward remember, for he suddenly encountered something that felt like a post, but which, as it fell over, proved to be a man with a lantern, beside whom a woman appeared to be walking.

"You stupid fellow!" exclaimed the man as he regained his feet; "who are you?"

"Tom Dolser," replied the drunkard defiantly; he seemed to have absorbed a great deal of courage from the coachman's coat and gloves. "Now do you know?"

The man with the lantern brushed snow from his sleeves and muttered something to himself, to the effect that he had never heard the name before, and hoped he might never meet its owner again, but the lady broke into a musical laugh and exclaimed:

"What an odd way to meet an old friend! Don't you remember me, Tom, Alice Rarrow? and let me make you acquainted with my husband, Mr. Arthray."

"This materially alters the case," said Arthray, extending his hand. "Any old friend of my wife may run against me in the street whenever he likes."

"Oscar is going to ring the chimes in our old church to-night, and I'm with him for company," said Mrs. Arthray. "Won't you come with us, so