

A BACHELOR WAS ROPED IN

He Had No Use For Petticoats of Their Wearers

But Fell in Love With His Secretary Before Learning Her Sex—It Was Mutual.

"All women are divided into two classes—either designing adventuresses or simpering dolls. As for me," quoth Halbert cynically, "give me the first every time. You can trust to an adventuress to have a little gray matter at least in her cranium." He was talking to his secretary, young Allen, a callow youth, almost effeminate, but nevertheless brainy, too brainy, as Halbert expressed it, for his size and weight. Allen had got used to these sinister observations concerning womankind and rarely ever offered any comment either to agree or to refute the other's statements. These two individuals were a study for one another. The hour in which Allen accepted the position of private secretary, a short time before, they found pleasant communion of tastes and ideas and a peculiar inexplicable sympathy of feeling that seemed to have puzzled both.

Halbert was a confirmed bachelor. He boasted of never having proposed to any woman. He was afraid of them. In his estimation they were all scheming politicians and ready to marry him or any man at a moment's notice. "Keep the women away from me!" snarled Halbert at times when driven by force to a crush. "I'd rather smoke or sleep." And the little secretary, with his strong, boyish ardor, kept them far away and comforted Halbert with his companionable silence.

The one measure in Allen's make up which Halbert could not understand was his reluctance to smoke. He could never get him to indulge even in a cigarette. And in the matter of drinking, though Allen could mix a punch or a cocktail with commendable art, he brought them untasted to Halbert as a kind of offering to that exalted wretch. "You should have been a woman, by gad," Halbert said once to him. "A thousand pardons, Allen, but you would have made a fine-looking girl. You've got grace and tact enough for it, you know. Why, believe me, Allen, if there were women like you today, with the brain and all, I believe I'd marry one of them." Allen actually blushed and retreated in confusion. Halbert liked this display of apparent shyness, and his affection for the boy grew. He liked to slap him on the back and he said he felt longsome when the chap was away. "I tell you what, Allen, I don't know whether to adopt you as my son, considering the fact that I shall never have one of my own, or whether to let things slide on as formerly and just double your salary."

Things slid on as formerly until Halbert announced a hunting trip to Abyssinia. He had actually completed plans for both and was sketching out in his imagination the delicious camaraderie of two in a tent in the wilds of Africa when Allen announced his intention to resign.

"You ungrateful beggar, you can't resign," Halbert shouted. "Why, my boy, I can't go without you. What's the matter?"

"The fact of the matter is, sir," Allen replied respectfully. "I don't want to go with you."

It was a blow, and it landed between Halbert's eyes. He loved Allen if he ever loved any being on earth, and this was the first time that he ever had been thwarted. Not given to sentiment or pleading, he nursed his agony silently, for Allen's abruptness stung him with all the agony of unfilial ingratitude, of unrequited love, treachery in a friend—everything. It pained Halbert as he had never been pained before. That afternoon he ordered his horse for a long ride and went out dejectedly with a load on his shoulders. He wanted to puzzle out the situation. He had never to plead with any one before in his life for what he wanted, and he hated to plead now. It might seem unmanly, he feared. He went out without calling to Allen, and he did not return for dinner.

The secretary in the meantime felt an unhappy sinking of his heart as the hours dragged by and Halbert did not return. It was his custom at least to return to dress for the evening, especially if he meant to dine out, and his continued absence made Allen uneasy. He did not know whether Halbert cared about his refusal to accompany him, but he knew that he himself

cared, and he felt he could not acquaint his friend with the real reason until he had actually gone.

At 9 o'clock Halbert came back—not exactly on a stretcher, but leaning on the arm of his valet. He had had a bad fall somewhere on the Riverside drive, and he turned his elbow badly—sprained it, in fact. They had actually subjected him to the annoyance of carrying him to a hospital because he had been too dazed to remonstrate, and when his mind was eventually clear he demanded removal to his own rooms.

His valet settled him comfortably on a divan and left the room when Halbert sank into a light slumber. In a few moments Allen came in, white, haggard, limp with anxiety, and stood there looking at Halbert with startled pain in his gaze; then, with a sudden, uncontrollable impulse, he knelt down beside the divan for a moment and, grasping one of the sufferer's hands in his own, pressed it to his lips with a sob of distress and pain.

Halbert opened his eyes and turned to look at him. He was almost too dumfounded to speak. Allen got up in confusion, and Halbert kept smiling and staring at him in a riot of bewildered ideas, groping, as he did, in a queer labyrinth of uncertainties like a man struggling to face some peculiar situation that his mind refuses to grasp.

"I trust you will pardon my intrusion," Allen said, standing by a window and looking out into the night, "but they told me you had been seriously hurt, and—and—it almost broke my heart."

Halbert sat up on the edge of the divan and, drawing his dressing gown around him closely, remained there looking at Allen like one surprised in half toilet and somewhat nervous because of it. The kiss of the youth burned still in the flesh of his hand, and it traveled along the channels of feeling and warmed his heart.

Something was groping in his mind for recognition. He still stared at Allen and took in, with careful, scrutinizing gaze, the supple lines of his tall, svelte figure, the curves of his long neck, the slender hands and feet.

"Allen," Halbert said, and he got up and walked close to the youth and stood near him, his eyes still searching the boyish face, "Allen, I want to ask you a question. In God's name, don't be offended if I am wrong. But I don't think I am wrong. It never occurred to me before, but I am a blind fool, and it unnerves me. Look at me, Allen, and answer this—Are you a woman?"

Allen winced and turned farther away and leaned against a table as if to steady himself. The young face seamed with pain. There was a long silence as Halbert awaited for the other to speak. "You are a woman," he repeated.

"Yes, I am a woman." The words came at last, firmly, almost defiantly, like thunder in Halbert's ears, stunning him.

"My God!" was all that came from between the parted, eager lips of the other. "But this costume—why this? I don't understand."

"Because everybody has a prejudice against petticoats in the professions," the girl answered, "and I was bound I would not let that interfere with my progress. Why should I be bound down, tied like a slave, because of a mere selfish, unreasonable prejudice? The color burned in her cheeks brilliantly, and Halbert stepped toward her when a sudden, quick movement, his arms outstretched, love on his tongue, in his eyes, in his gestures.

The girl stepped away from him as he would have touched her arm.

"Mr. Halbert," she said, with dignity, "I am your secretary and, in your rooms, and you have discovered that I am a woman. Please respect my unhappy position, for I want you to believe that I am neither a designing adventuress nor a simpering doll. There is another class that you seem to be acquainted with—that you do not seem to take into consideration." She looked at him steadily, her eyes burning with determination.

Halbert's head sank under the siege of her look. Her speech hurt him; it crushed him. Yes, he loved this girl; he understood it now. He had been a blind, self-absorbed fool.

"Girl don't crush me under your heel." He had not thought that there could be lack of respect where love dwelt.

"While I am your secretary you must not speak of love. It is an unfair advantage."

"Then I discharge you this moment," cried Halbert, aroused. The girl could scarcely suppress a smile, though she struggled to be adamant. She turned and walked quickly toward the door.

"Come back, girlie. Don't go and leave me like this. You've wound your self all around my heart with a million

tendrils. I can't let you go now—I want you to be my wife. Don't you love me? You won't go away now when I want you most."

She turned and smiled at him. He was pleading in abject humility. "Don't you love me?" he cried out to her—he, Halbert, the cynic—conquered! "Well, yes," she called back, "I think I do." She was laughing, but her kiss was there on his hand still. He knew.

"Then you will go to Abyssinia after all, won't you, dear?"

Her laughter still greeted him from a distance, and he flung himself back on the divan and gave himself up to love dreams such as never before thawed the chilly exterior of the man who had fled from petticoats and hid from them in smoking rooms for the last 25 years. Halbert was overcome, in love like a schoolboy, his heart fluttering, buoyant, ecstatic. And the kiss was there on his hand. He carried it to his lips and drank the honey of the spot where her own lips had been.—Chicago Tribune.

Might Have Been Fatal.

Butte, Mont., Dec. 7.—What came very nearly being the largest mining disaster in the history of the Butte camp, occurred today. Fortunately no lives were lost, but 21 unconscious and half-suffocated miners were hauled to the surface by ropes from the Bell mine, and laid out in rows, while nearly all the doctors in the city worked over them and by means of artificial respiration and strong stimulants, finally succeeded in reviving all the victims.

A month ago fire broke out in the Bell shaft, one of the Anaconda Company's properties, and so far all attempts to extinguish it have proved unavailing. A force of men were put to work today in the air shaft, 300 feet deep, with the intention of drifting to head off the fire in the main shaft. At noon the men failed to come to the surface and a second gang was sent down to investigate. The second party also failed to return and a third shift was sent below. Many of the third shift were overcome by sulphurous gases before a fourth party, protected with smoke helmets, reached the spot. The unconscious men were passed up ladders one at a time with great difficulty until all were taken to the surface. It is not believed that any of the victims will sustain permanent injury.

A Story of Anthony Hope.

Anthony Hope Hawkins, always a believer in men of letters standing by each other, worked tremendously hard to help on the fund which the Author's society of London is trying to accumulate, from which pensions are to be paid to authors whose literary merit has not brought them a corresponding income and who view increasing years with fear.

Once an unfortunate writer who visited Mr. Hawkins at his rooms in Buckingham street, by the Embankment gardens, explained on leaving with something in his pocket. "Oh, sir, I feel that Providence must have sent me to you!"

And the reply came with a twinkle in his benefactor's eye. "Let us hope, however, that Providence will not acquire the habit of doing so."—Ex.

The Train Was Stopped.

"One night last winter," said a Boston man, "I came up from the south with two friends of mine. They occupied the stateroom, and I was lodged in a section outside. They were in a hot discussion before they retired, and one of them had finally become so sleepy as to abandon the argument. I turned finally, as they did, but the man to whom the argument had been abandoned did not seem satisfied with the victory he had won, and when I left them he was busily engaged in trying to prolong the talk with his sleepy companion.

"Shortly after I had fallen asleep I was awakened by some confusion in the aisle of the car. The train was at a dead stop, and then I heard the voice of the conductor angrily ask of the porter, 'Now, who in thunder pulled that bell rope?' I had a shrewd suspicion, but deemed it safe to lie quiet and say nothing. Finally the train started, and as they could not find out who had jerked the bell rope the car assumed its customary night aspect. Presently the stateroom door opened and one of my friends requested me to step in and decide a bet. It seems that he who was not sleepy was trying to tell the man who was 'something to which the sleepy one refused to listen on the ground that the noise of the car wheels made it impossible for him to hear. The other man promptly rang the bell and stopped the train, as has already been told.

"The bet of \$50 was as to who was responsible for stopping the train. The sleepy one said the wide-awake one, be-

cause he had pulled the bell rope. The wide-awake one said it was the sleepy one, because he had averred that he could not hear what was said to him because of the rumbling of the train, which naturally led to the train being stopped. I decided in favor of the wide-awake man, which effectually faked the other up also. Which would you have decided in favor of?"—Ex.

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