

me up into a state of feverish excitement. At the expiration of two hours I heard a commotion in an adjoining corridor, and, looking out through the bars of my door, I saw Jack tearing towards my cell, accompanied by a turnkey. A moment later the door was unlocked, and I walked out a free man with my friend. In spite of my agonized state of mind I could not, occasionally, refrain from laughing, as the unfeeling scamp made light of the terrible ordeal through which I had recently passed.

"Have some regard for my feelings, Mr. Percy," said I, rather coolly, as we walked along towards the hotel in which he resided; "this matter may be the subject of mirth to you, but it is no joke to me."

"Pardon me, Tom, old fellow, but I can not help laughing at the ridiculousness of the thing. You have been the victim of a terrible mistake."

"And who is responsible for that mistake?" I asked, savagely, for I began to think that perhaps it was one of his practical jokes, after all.

"You alone are responsible for it," said he, without any apparent effort to restrain his mirthfulness.

"For heaven's sake, Jack, try and be serious for once in your life! What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, Tom. You alone are responsible for the mistake. If you had taken the advice which I gave you that day, when we left Dieppe for England, and allowed that name of yours to remain as we had it in France, you would have escaped the trouble which befell you to-day. Mr. Thomas DeMulkins sounds altogether better, and no private or any other kind of a detective would think of suspecting the bearer of such a cognomen of being a rascally thieving villain, who is known in New York as 'Sharpy Mulkins.'"

I listened to his chatter in a strangely-perplexed mood. The mention of our experience in France called to mind a myriad of foolish episodes, but I was too chagrined to think of anything but the treatment I had been subjected to.

"All that I could learn of the affair, Tom, was that, in coming down on the boat to-day, your name by some means became known to a private detective who was on board, and he arrested you on suspicion of being the man he was after. As soon as I got your message I hurried to the Commissioner of Police, and when I had made known to him who you really were, he immediately forwarded an order for your release. That is all that I know about it. You must be able to account for the rest."

"But, Jack, the only people I spoke to on that confounded boat was an old lady and her niece. Deuced nice looking girl she is, too. I can't see how any infernal detective could have found out my name."

"An old lady and her niece, did you say?" he asked, with an extraordinary turn of earnestness. "What were their names?"

"I don't know. That's just what is bothering me. I told them mine, and would have found out theirs later on, if I had not been snapped away so unceremoniously." I then gave him a minute account of my experience on the boat, and was several times interrupted by his asking as to what my two lady friends looked like, how they were dressed? &c., &c., and when I had finished the narrative he informed me that he thought the ladies were friends of his, but could not believe they had anything to do with my mishap.

"And now, Jack, since I have got out of this mess, perhaps you will be good enough to explain more fully the drift of your letter, which is, after all, the cause of my coming here at all."

"There is no hurry, Tom," he replied; "you have had bother enough for one day; besides, I have arranged for our spending an evening or two with some friends over in Brooklyn, and I want you to have at least one evening's enjoyment before I burden you with my troubles."

"Whatever the nature of the difficulty is, Jack, you don't seem to be very much oppressed with the weight of it."

"That is because it has not come to a climax yet, and, also, because I have you to help me with your ingenuity."

"Another love-scape, I suppose," said I, carelessly.

"Let us drop the subject just now, Tom; you will have enough of it before long," he replied, with an effort at mournfulness.

"There is a woman at the bottom of it, then?" I continued. "Ah, Jack, you are everlastingly in a pickle about some women or other."

"It is not one this time, Tom."

"Not one?"

"No; it's two."

We entered the hotel at this moment, and the subject had to be dropped for the time.

"You will find Mrs. Malvern and her accomplished daughter to be very nice people," said Jack, as we proceeded along a shady street on a delightful evening towards their residence in Brooklyn. He seemed to be light-hearted and gay, and was evidently anticipating a pleasant evening.

"Have you enjoyed the honour of their acquaintance long?" I asked.

"O yes; we are old friends. I have spent many pleasant hours in their company. Their home is the centre of a most charming circle, and I am glad to be in a position to introduce you there."

"You are a lucky fellow, Jack; if there are any special favourites in any neighbourhood, their doors are always open to you. How is it?"

"I don't know; it's more than I deserve I am often inclined to think."

"I know that long ago, and I have often wondered how it is that scapegraces like you are always preferred to persons of solid worth."

"Don't be hard on me, Tom; I will have to swallow a great deal during the next month."

"Did you ever have a really serious thought in your life?" I asked.

"O, yes—but here we are at the house. Don't let us quarrel just now," he replied laughingly.

The house was a large one, and stood some distance back from the street. We were shown in without much ceremony. I was presented to Mrs. Malvern, who was, indeed, a very lady-like person. As soon as Jack had got us fairly started in conversation he stole away into another part of the house.

"I understand that you have travelled very much, Mr. Mulkins; is it possible that of all the places you have seen you actually prefer to settle in Canada?" asked the lady, some minutes after.

"Yes," I replied, quietly; "but, perhaps, early associations may have had much to do with my preference, Mrs. Malvern."

"Then you really do not think it is the best place in the world?"

"I think there is a great future in store for it," I replied, and was about to give expression to some other favourable opinions when I was startled by hearing a burst of soft laughter in another portion of the large drawing-room.

"Mrs. Malvern turned her eyes in the direction from whence came the sound, and exclaimed, in a gently reproving tone of voice, 'Why, Ada!'"

I turned intuitively, and was astonished at what my eyes beheld. Leaning against the door was that veritable Jack, while, close beside him, stood the beautiful girl whom I had met on the boat. She was elegantly attired, and, having just come in from the lawn, still wore a hat, out of which flowed a most gorgeous feather. Her eyes fairly twinkled with a merriment which she could scarcely restrain.

"Ada, dear; this is Mr. Mulkins, a friend of Mr. Percy's; Mr. Mulkins, my daughter," said Mrs. Malvern, not appearing to notice my bewilderment.

I rose, and, as the lovely girl approached and held out her hand, she said, in a sweetly tender voice, "I am glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Mulkins, or, perhaps, I should say, renew it. Although aunt and I did think we lost sight of you rather abruptly on the boat that day."

"Poor fellow," said Jack, "it seems he was suddenly taken—taken ill," and then the scamp looked at me out of the corner of his eye.

"I hope you are better now," said the young lady.

"Yes, thank you; I feel very much better now," I replied.

"You were speaking of Canada just now," she continued. "I love Canada; and you must not forget that you agreed with me about the scenery of the St. Lawrence."

"Mr. Mulkins has had the gratification of sailing on many rivers, darling," said her mother.

"Yes, I dare say he could tell you something about the Rhine, if he wanted to," remarked Jack, with a mischievous shake of the head.

"Were you with him at the time, Mr. Chatterbox?" asked Ada, looking at my friend.

"Yes, and saw the whole affair," he added.

"He was always getting us into trouble of some kind, if I remember rightly," said I.

After a while Ada sat down and played some pieces of music for us, and, as she played, I had time to think. The truth flashed across my mind in an instant. The "John" whom she adored was none other than my friend, Jack Percy. A sudden chill crept over me, and I felt like one who had heard a terrible announcement. At first I was inclined to pity the poor girl for thus "wasting her sweetness on the desert air." He was standing beside her, turning the music, and, as I gazed upon them, I had to acknowledge that they were a truly handsome couple. I hoped that she had made a deep impression upon him, and that he had found one, at least, whom he really cared for. Her playing was excellent; indeed, I had seldom heard those difficult pieces so exquisitely rendered. At the finish of one piece she turned towards me and asked:

"Do you care for Wagner's music, Mr. Mulkins?"

"Yes, Miss Malvern; the more I hear it, the more charming I find it. I think it is because I am just beginning to understand it," I replied.

"It is called the music of the future, you know; do his compositions help you to interpret that?" she asked.

"Take care, Tom," interrupted Jack; "don't profess to be able to read the future, or we may be inclined to put your pretensions to the test."

"Don't ask me to read yours in public, sir," I remarked.

"Nor his past, either," added Ada, laughingly. Thus the question which she had put to me was lost sight of before I had occasion to answer it. And so the happy minutes flew by until it was time for us to depart.

"We will be pleased to see you as often as you can find it convenient to call during your stay; indeed, as you have so few friends in New York you had better make our place your headquarters," were the kind words of Mrs. Malvern to me as we bade the ladies good-night.

Jack had many bachelor friends "to drop round to see," so that it was midnight when we reached the hotel.

IV.

The next few days were enjoyably spent with Jack and his numerous acquaintances. We saw much of the ladies, and from all I could learn I concluded that Jack had an easy course and plain sailing. Mrs. Malvern seemed to have implicit confidence in him, and her lovely daughter manifested a decided preference for his company. What could he have meant by the words "confounded mess," and "escape," &c., which his letter contained? I had, several times, attempted to question him in regard to the matter, but he seemed very reluctant to make a clean breast of it. I had caught a glimmer of an idea that there was a second lady in the field somewhere, but as yet I had seen nothing to corroborate the surmise.

One morning, soon after, while lounging outside the front of the hotel, smoking and chatting about old times, my attention was arrested by a carriage, with a dashing pair of horses, drive up and stop close beside us. The occupant was a handsome woman, attired in the most fashionable mourning costume, and appeared to me to have enjoyed the sunshine of at least thirty summers. She bowed and smiled graciously as Jack arose and saluted her. A moment later he had begged me to excuse him for an hour or two, and then, taking a seat beside her, the two drove off together. I watched them as far as I could see, and felt that the mystery was at last beginning to reveal itself.

It was late in the afternoon when he returned, and I saw at once that something had happened to make him silent and moody.

"Don't make any engagement for Saturday, Tom," said he, during the scanty conversation; "we will run down to Long Branch and spend a few days. It will be the best thing for us."

"Will the Malverns be there?" I asked.

"No, I guess not. But there will be a number of other nice people there whom I am acquainted with, and we will find it pleasant. And, by-the-by, I wish you would go over this evening and tell Mrs. Malvern that we will be away for a few days. Apologize for me, and say that I am a little unwell or I would have been over myself."

"Jack! what do you mean?" I asked, looking steadily at him, for my worst fears were being awakened.

"Don't get alarmed, old fellow; your nerves do not seem to be as steady as formerly. There was a time, Tom, when I would not hesitate to tell you anything. Be sure to go over and see our friends this evening, and meet me here at 11 o'clock to-night. I will have to leave you now for a little while, as I have some little matters to attend to in another part of the city—ta-ta."

Mrs. Malvern was sorry to hear that Mr. Percy was unwell, and hoped he would be all right again in a day or so. Ada, to my surprise, affected a perfect indifference as to Jack's excuse for his absence, and, whatever sorrow she may have felt was successfully concealed by an unusual gaiety. A few of their intimate friends had also been invited and were spending the evening with them. In the delightful company the hours flew by so quickly that ten o'clock was chimed out by the little French clock before I knew it.

"I will have to say good-evening now," Miss Malvern, said I, as we finished a pretty little talk. "Mr. Percy is going to take me to Long Branch for a couple of days, and I suppose we will not have the pleasure of meeting you again until we return."

"To Long Branch?" she asked, looking up with that same tender and beseeching expression which I first noticed when I mentioned Percy's name on the boat; "I hope you will enjoy the visit very much. You will find it a most delightful place, or, at least, most people do."

During my leave-taking she talked freely, but I noticed the idea of our going to the "Branch" concerned her more than she chose to acknowledge.

On my way back to the hotel I could not help thinking what a splendid young lady Miss Malvern was. She had pleased me before—I was charmed with her now. Just the right kind of a wife for my good old friend, Jack Percy. Before I had met that gentleman at the appointed time, I had firmly resolved that the wedding should take place before my holidays came to an end.

Jack was waiting for me at the hotel, and the first thing he asked was:

"How are our friends? Did you have a pleasant evening?"

"I had a very enjoyable evening—was sorry I had to leave so early," I answered.

"Many thanks," he asked.

"About half a dozen other charming people besides themselves," said I.

"I am glad they did not miss me very much."

"Why should you be glad of that?"

"Because I am afraid I will have to be absent a good deal for a while."

"Don't be foolish, Jack; you have been a trifle about long enough. Miss Malvern is an accomplished and charming girl. She will be an excellent companion for you, or, indeed, for any man who may be fortunate enough to win her affection."

"She is a splendid girl, Tom, and I am glad you are favourably impressed with her, for she deserves all the praise any man can bestow upon her."

"Then why are you trying to avoid her this way?"

"Because it will be better for her."

"It will not be better for her; she likes you

and so does her mother, and there is nothing to hinder you from marrying her and settling down, as a respectable citizen should do."

"But, Tom, I don't want to marry her; I am sure she would not have me if I wanted her to."

"That is all bosh, Jack; in times gone by I have helped to get you out of some entanglements which were likely to make you miserable for life, but this is a very different case. You must marry this young lady; in fact, you *shall* marry her, and that, too, inside of three weeks, or my name is not Mulkins," said I, emphatically, for I began to feel annoyed at his vacillating proclivities.

"Well, well, Tom," said he, lightly, "we won't talk about it just now. To-morrow is Saturday, you know, and we will take the two o'clock boat and run down to the Branch; we will have lots of time to discuss the matter there."

The trip down on the steamer, next day, was delightful, and we both felt the benefit of the cool and refreshing sea breeze. Our rooms had been previously secured at one of the popular hotels, so that we had no delay in domiciling ourselves at the fashionable resort. He introduced me to a number of the guests, among whom was that handsome woman who had called at the hotel in New York, and with whom he had gone off in the carriage. She was known at the Branch as Madam DeCourcey. I was not long in discovering that she was, for the time being, a kind of ruling Queen, the centre of attraction, about which the butterflies of fashion hovered and flitted like moths about a candle on a summer evening. What pained me most was to find that Jack was her special favourite. She would call and take him out in her carriage; they meandered together along the beach, like a pair of cooing doves; he was her escort in the evening; they waltzed, were partners in any little game of whist—in fact, they were always together. I learned that she had been a popular actress, some four years before, but had left the stage to marry a wealthy merchant of Philadelphia. The marriage had been an unhappy one; a divorce was the result, and now she was living upon an income of eight thousand dollars a year. She was certainly a handsome woman, and knew how to act to appear to the very best, but to anyone who was not blinded by infatuation, all her clever acting could not conceal her insincerity. I had no fear for Jack, for that gentleman had had a vast amount of experience with ladies of this stamp, and understood them vastly better than I did; but, when I thought of the sweet little angel whom we had left in Brooklyn, a feeling of terror shot through me, which I could scarcely account for. The more I saw of the Madam's preference for Jack, the more miserable I became, and I privately determined that the very moment the five days, which we had decided to stay, had elapsed, I would insist upon our immediate return to New York. I had frequently spoken to Jack about the rumours that were being whispered about, but all I could say made no more impression upon him than would a snow-flake upon an ice waggon.

As our fifth day was drawing to a close, he turned to me in one of his "happy-go-lucky" moods, and exclaimed:

"We have a jolly programme for to-morrow, Tom; the Madam and I and Miss Blank and yourself will take the boat at 11 o'clock and run down to Cape—"

"We will do nothing of the kind," said I, interrupting him. "The five days we intended to remain here are up, and to-morrow I return to the city, and I will be very much surprised if you don't go with me."

"There is no hurry; besides, it would be a terrible disappointment to our friends."

"Which friends?" I asked, looking at him keenly. He did not want to notice the insinuation, so he said:

"Madam DeCourcey has arranged the trip for our special benefit, and I don't see how we can decline."

We argued, but I remained firm, and it ended by an agreement that I was to go to the Madam and explain that I was obliged to return to New York at once, and, being the guest of Jack, he, of course, could not do else than accompany me.

"I will find it positively lonesome, Mr. Mulkins," said the Madam, when I had told her of our intention to go, and I do hope that Mr. Percy and yourself will return soon."

The ladies accompanied us to the boat next day, and I thought there was a rather tender parting between the Madam and my reckless friend, Jack.

On the way back to the city he became wonderfully serious, and told me the whole story. He had known the Madam for some time, and, a month ago, she had consented to become his wife. The wedding day had been fixed for the 1st of September.

I listened to him with blank amazement, and when he had finished he exclaimed:

"I know you will consider me a fool, Tom, but really she is the only woman I have ever loved."

I looked at him with a genuine feeling of contempt, and asked, coldly, "What about Miss Malvern?"

"She can never be more to me than a friend," he said, sadly. "I don't think she ever cared for me, or, if she did, her old aunt has turned her against me."

That evening he positively declined to go to the Malvern's, so I was obliged to present myself there alone. Ada looked pale, and I thought she had been crying, but she brightened up and was as lightsome as a sunbeam before I was there half an hour. She had heard all about Jack's