



BEWARE OF THE CRANK!

PATRON—"No, thanks; the stuff will only muddle my brain, an' I've got all the load I can carry just now as it is."

cannot be—so happy as I would have been now, had not my loved Melinda—but no, no! I must think of it no more. I will take this simple soul's advice and banish her from my mind and heart forever! Ah! Easy to say that, but she won't go. (He stops before the fire-place.) There, in that smouldering fire I see her well remembered face even now confronting mine! I see the fixed smile upon her ruby lips, and the steady gaze of the innocent, guileless eyes beneath her fluffy golden hair. Love another? 'Twere sacrilege to think of it with that dear image burned upon my heart. No, no! it cannot be, Mrs. McMurphy! I can never love anything but the image of my lost Melinda, never, never!

[He relapses into his chair. A knock at the door.]

Did I hear a rap? (another rap) Ah, it was. Who in the world can it be? (another rap) Come in!

[Enter BOODLES with a box covered with brown paper.]

BOODLES—A parcel, sir, from Toyman & Co. [Mr. J. receives box doubtfully.]

MR. J.—For me?

BOODLES—Ain't this No 474?

MR. J.—Yes,—but—

BOODLES—Then this is the place I was told. Good day, sir.

[Exit BOODLES in a business like hurry.]

MR. J.—H'm. A parcel for me! A box, apparently. Strange. I haven't purchased anything of late, that I recollect. (Weighing the box in his hand) I've no notion what

it can be. I'm quite sure I've made no purchase of late and ordered it sent—quite sure. Then—the alternative conclusion is—it must be a present. Which is still more absurd. From whom, if it's a present? I can't conjecture. Must be some friend of the olden time whom I've long since forgot, which is highly unlikely—very unlikely, indeed. Well, let us get the scissors and solve the mystery. But where are they? Ah, here. Now for the revelation—and I really don't know when I've been so interested in any operation as the snapping of this thread. The nearer I get to it the deeper the mystery grows.

[During this he has cut the string, and removed the covering and lid, and stands astounded at what is revealed. Astonishment is followed by rage.]

What hidden hand has dealt me this blow? What fiend—for it could have been no other than a fiend—has invented and carried out this so-called joke—I suppose the wretch did it for a "joke." (Bitterly) How funny, to be sure! How exceedingly witty and humorous; how very laughable! No one but the most gifted being—a person of the most delicate good taste would ever have thought of such a very humorous thing as to send to a childless man a—

[He lifts a Doll out of the box.]

Doll!! Whether a joke, or a piece of malicious meddling, I treat it as it deserves, and I only wish its author could be here to see how very successful his trick has been!

[He hurries the Doll from him to a chair.]

The miscreant! Who could it have been? I would