

A Subscriber's Lament.
Oh, thou newspaper carrier boy
It would give me abundance of joy
For a minute or two
Upon the toe of my shoe
With the seat of thy pants
If I but get the chance
Last night and the night before
I have listened at the front door
For no paper was seen
For it never has been
Now, young man, I just wish to say
That for my newspaper I pay,
And I give you fair warning now
I catch you (I think I know how)
Your career will be over
You will peddle papers no more
So take warning my lad
Because I am mad
Good-bye!

THE SISTERS

The story, as told by himself for the information of his children (who, as children ever do, came in time to have interests of their own that transcended in importance those that were merely personal to their parents), was much more brief and bald than this, and the reading of it did not take many minutes. When he had finished it, in dead silence, the lawyer took from the packet of papers a third and smaller document, which he also proceeded to read aloud to those whom it concerned. This proved to be a certificate of the marriage of Kingscote Yelverton and Elizabeth Leigh, celebrated in an obscure London parish by a curate who had been the bridegroom's Eton and Oxford chum, and witnessed by a pair of humble folk who had had great difficulty in composing their respective signatures, on the 25th of November, in the year 1849. And, finally, half-folded round the packet, there was a slip of paper, on which was written—
"Not to be opened until my death."
"And it might never have been opened until you were all dead!" exclaimed the lawyer, holding up his hands. "He must have meant to give it to you at the last, and did not reckon on being struck helpless in a moment when his time came."
"Oh, poor father!" sobbed Elizabeth, whose head lay on the table, crushed down in her handkerchief. And the other sisters put their arms about her, Patty with a set white face and Eleanor whimpering a little. But Mr. Brion and Paul were incensed with the dead man, and could not pity him at present.
It was late before the two friendly advisers, summoned to dinner by their landlady, went back to No. 7, and they did not like going. It did not seem to them at all right that the three girls should be left alone under present circumstances. Mr. Brion wanted to summon Mrs. Duff-Scott, or even Mrs. McIntyre, to bear them company and see that they did not faint, or have hysterics, or otherwise "give way," under the exceptional strain upon their nervous systems. Then he wanted them to come next door for that dinner which he felt they must certainly stand much in need of, and for which they did not seem to have adequate materials; or let them take them to the nearest hotel, or to Mrs. Duff-Scott's; or, at least, to permit him to give them some brandy and water; and he was genuinely distressed because they refused to be nourished and comforted and appropriately cared for in any of these ways.
"We want to be quiet for a little, dear Mr. Brion, that we may talk things over by ourselves—if you don't mind," Elizabeth said; and the tone of her voice silenced all his protests. The old man kissed them, for the first time in his life, uttering a few broken words of congratulation on the wonderful change in their fortunes; and Paul shook hands with her gravely and without saying anything at all, even though Patty, looking up into his inscrutable face, mutely asked for his sympathy with her wistful, wet eyes. And they went away.
As they were letting themselves out of the house, assisted by the ground-floor domestic, who, scenting mystery in the air, politely volunteered to open the hall door in order that she might investigate the countenances of the Misses King's visitors and perchance gather some enlightenment therefrom, Patty, dry-eyed and excited, came flying downstairs, and pounced upon the old man.
"Mr. Brion, Mr. Brion, Elizabeth says she hopes you will be sure not to divulge what we have discovered to anybody," she panted breathlessly (at the same time glancing at her lover's back as he stood on the door-step). "It is of the utmost consequence to her to keep it quiet for a little longer."
"But, my dear, what object can Elizabeth have in waiting now? Surely it is better to have it over at once, and settled. I thought of walking up to the club by-and-by, with the papers, and having a word with Mr. Yelverton."
"Of course it is better to have it over," assented Patty. "I know your time is precious, and I myself am simply frantic till I can tell Mrs. Duff-Scott. So is Elizabeth. But there is something she must do first—I can't tell you the particulars—but she must have a few hours' start—say till to-morrow evening—before you speak to Mr. Yelverton or take any steps. I am sure she will do whatever you wish, after that."
The lawyer hesitated, suspicious of the wisdom of the delay, but not seeing how much harm could happen, seeing that he had all the precious documents in his own breast pocket; then he reluctantly granted Patty's request, and the girl went upstairs again with feet not quite so light as those that had carried her down. Upstairs, however, she subordinated her own interests to the consideration of her sister's more pressing affairs.
"Elizabeth," she said, with fervid and portentous solemnity, "this is a crisis for you, and you must be bold and brave. It is time for shilly-shallying—you have twenty-four hours before you, and you must

act. If you don't, you will see that he will just throw up everything, and be too proud to take it back. He will lose all his money and the influence for good that it gives him, and you will lose him."
"How shall I act?" asked Elizabeth, leaning instinctively upon this more courageous spirit.
"How?" echoed Patty, looking at her sister with brilliant eyes. "Oh!" drawing a long breath, and speaking with a yearning passion that it was beyond the power of good grammar to express—"oh, if it was only me!"

CHAPTER XXXIX. AN ASSIGNATION.

That evening Mr. Yelverton was leisurely finishing his dinner at the club when a note was brought to him. He thought he knew the writing, though he had never seen it before, and put it into his pocket until he could politely detach himself from his semi-hosts, semi-guests, with whom he was dining. Then he went upstairs rather quickly, tearing open his letter as he went, and, arrived at the reading-room, sat down at a table, took pen in hand and dashed off an immediate reply. "I will certainly be there," he wrote, in a hand more vigorous than elegant. "I will wait for you in the German picture gallery. Come as early as possible, while the place is quiet." And, having closed his missive and consigned it to the bag, he remained in a comfortable arm-chair in the quiet room, all by himself, meditating. He felt he had a great deal to think about, and it displeased him for convivialities. The week since his parting with Elizabeth, long as it had seemed to him, had not quite run out, and she had made an assignation which, though it might have appeared unbecomingly to the casual eye, was to him extremely perplexing. She had come back, and she wanted to see him, and she wanted to see him alone, and she asked him if he would meet her at the Exhibition in the morning. And she addressed him as her dearest friend, and signed herself affectionately his. He tried very hard, but he could not extract his expected comfort from such a communication, made under such circumstances.
In the morning he was amongst the first batch of breakfasters in the club coffee-room, and amongst the first to represent the public at the ticket-windows of the Carlton Palace. When he entered the great building it was in the possession of officials and workmen, and echoed in a hollow manner to his solid foot-fall. Without a glance to right or left, he walked upstairs to the gallery and into that cosiest nook of the whole Exhibition, the German room, and there waited for his mistress. This restful room, with its carpeted floor and velvety settees (so grateful to the weary), its great Meissen vases in the middle, and casts of antique statues all round, was quite empty of visitors, and looked as pleasant and convenient a place of rendezvous as lovers could desire. If only Elizabeth would come quickly, he thought, they might have the most delicious quiet talk, sitting side by side on a semi-circular ottoman opposite to Lindenschmidt's "Death of Adonis"—not regarding that unhappy subject, of course, nor any other object but themselves. He would not sit down until she came, but strolled round and round, pausing now and then to investigate a picture, but thinking of nothing but his beloved, for whose light step he was listening. If his bodily eyes were fixed on the "Cloister Pond" or "Evening" or any other of the tranquil landscapes, he pictured on the wall, he thought of Elizabeth resting with him under green trees, far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, absolutely his own, and in a world that (practically) held nobody but him and her. If he looked at autumnal rain slanting fiercely across the canvas, he thought how he would protect and shield her in all the storms that might visit her life—"My plaidie to the angry air, I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee!" And visions of a fair morning in Thuringia, of a lake in the Bavarian mountains, of a glacier in the Engadine, and of a voice in four or five aspects of sunlight and moonlight, suggested his wedding journey and how beautiful the world she had so longed to see—the world that he knew so well—would look henceforth—if—if—
There was a step upon the corridor outside, and he turned sharply from his contemplation of a little picture of an Isle of Wight sunrise to meet her as she came in.
"Well, my love," he murmured eagerly, "what is it? Don't keep me in suspense. Is it yes or no, Elizabeth?"
Her embarrassment melted away before the look he bent upon her, as a morning mist before the sun. She lifted her eyes to his—those honest eyes that he could read like a book—and her lips parted in an effort to speak. The next instant, before a word was said, he had her in his arms, and her mouth met his under the red mousethick in a long, and close, and breathless kiss; and both of them knew that they were to part no more until their lives' end. While that brief ceremony of betrothal lasted, they might have been in the black grotto where they kissed each other first, so oblivious were they of their surroundings; but they took in presently the meaning of certain sounds in the gallery on the other side of the curtain, and resumed their normal attitudes. "Come and sit down," said Mr. Yelverton, drawing her into the room. "Come and let's have a talk." And he set her down on the velvet ottoman and took a seat beside her—leaning forward with an arm on his knee to barricade her from an invasion of the public as possible. His thoughts turned, naturally enough, to their late very important interview in the caves. "We will go back there," he said, expressing his desire frankly. "When we are married, Elizabeth, we will go to your old home again together, before we set out on longer travels, and you and I will have a picnic to the caves all alone by ourselves, in that little buggy that we drove the other day. Shall we?"
"We might tumble into one of those terrible black holes," she replied, "if we went there again."
"True—we might. And when we are married we must not run any unnecessary risks. We will live together as long as we possibly can, Elizabeth."
She had drawn off her right glove, and now slipped her hand into his. He grasped it fervently, and kneaded it like a lump of stiff dough (excuse the homely simile, dear reader—it has the merit of appropriateness, which is more than you can say for the lilies and jewellery) between his two strong palms. How he did long for that dark cave!—for

any nook or corner that would have hidden him and her from sight for the next half hour.

"Why couldn't you have told me a week ago?" he demanded, with a thrill in his deep voice. "You must have known you would take me then, or you would not have come to me like this to-day. Why didn't you give yourself to me at first? Then we should have been together all this time—and we should have been by the sea at this moment, sitting under those big rocks, or wandering away into the bush, where nobody could interfere with us."
As he spoke, a party of ladies strolled into the court, and he leaned back upon his cushioned seat to wait until they were gone again. They looked at the pictures, with one eye on him, dawdled up and down for five minutes, trying to assert their right to be there if they chose; and then, too uncomfortably conscious of being *de trop*, departed. After which the lovers were alone again for a little while. Mr. Yelverton resumed possession of Elizabeth's hand, and repeated his rather cruel question.
"Didn't you know all along that it must come to this?"
"A week ago I did not know what I know now," she replied.
"Ah, my dear, you knew it in your heart, but you would not listen to your heart."
"Mr. Yelverton—"
She was beginning to speak seriously, but he stopped her. "No," he said, "I am not going to be called Mr. Yelverton by you. Never again, remember. My name is Kingscote, if you wish to know. My people at home, when I had any people, called me King. I think you might as well call me King; it will keep your dear name alive in the family when you no longer answer to it yourself. Now—as she paused, and was looking at him rather strangely—"what were you going to say?"
"I was going to say that I have not wasted this week since you went away. A great deal has happened—a great many changes—and I was helped by something outside myself to make up my mind."
"I don't believe it—I don't believe it, Elizabeth. You know you love me, and you know that, whatever your religious sentiments may be, you would not do violence to them for anything less than that. You are taking me because you love me too well to give me up—for any consideration whatever. So don't say you are not."
She touched his shoulder for a moment with her cheek. "Oh, I do love you, I do love you!" she murmured, drawing a long, sighing breath.
He knew it well, and he did not know how to bear to sit there, unable to respond to her touching confession. He could only knead her hand between his palms.
"And you are going to trust me, my love, and yourself? You are not afraid now?"
"I will trust you—I will trust you," she went on, leaning towards him as he sat beside her. "You are doing more good in the world than I had even thought of until I knew you. It is I who will not be up to the mark—not you. But I will help you as much as you will let me—I am going to give my life to helping you. And at least—at least—you believe in God," she concluded, yearning for some tangible and definite evidence of faith, as she had understood faith, wherewith to comfort her conscientious soul. "We are together in that—the chief thing of all—are we not?"
He was a scrupulously truthful man, and he hesitated for a moment. "Yes, my dear," he said, gravely. "I believe in God—that is to say, I feel him—I lean my little neck on a greatness that I know is all around me and upholding me, which is something that even God seems a word too mean for. I think," he added, "that God, to me, is not what he has been taught to seem to you."
"Never mind," she said, in a low voice, responding to the spirit rather than the letter of his words. "Whatever you believe you are sure to believe thoroughly, and if you believe in God, your God must be a true God. I feel it, though I don't know it."
"You feel that things will all come right for us if we have faith in our own hearts, and love and trust each other. So do I, Elizabeth." There was nobody looking, and he put his arm round her shoulder for a moment. "And we may consider our religious controversy closed then? We need not trouble ourselves about that any more?"
"I would not say 'closed.' Don't you think we ought to talk of all our thoughts—and especially those that trouble us—to each other?"
"I do—I do, indeed. And so we shall. Ours is going to be a real marriage. We shall be, not two, but one. Only for the present we may put this topic aside, as being no longer an obstruction in the way of our arrangements, may we not?"
"Yes," she said. "And the die was cast."
"Very well, then." He seemed to pull himself together at this point, and into his fine frame and his vigorous face a new energy was infused, the force of which seemed to be communicated to the air around her, and made her heart beat more strongly to the quicker pulse of his. "Very well, then. Now tell me, Elizabeth—without any formality, while you and I are here together—when shall we be married?"
The question had a tone of masterful command about it, for though he knew how spontaneous and straightforward she was, her natural delicacy unspooled by artificial constraint, he yet prepared himself to encounter a certain amount of maidenly reluctance to meet a man's reasonable views upon this matter. But she answered him without delay or hesitation, impelled by the terrors that beset her and thinking of Patty's awful warnings and prophesies—"I will leave you to say when."
"Will you really? Do you mean you will really?" His deep-set eyes glowed, and his voice had a thrilling tremor in it as he made this incredulous inquiry. "Then I say we will be married soon—very soon—so as not to lose a day more than we can help. Will you agree to that?"
She looked a little frightened, but she stood her ground. "If you wish," she whispered, all the tone shaken out of her voice.
"If I wish!" A palpitating silence held them for a moment. Then "What do you say to to-morrow?" he suggested.
"Ah, you are thinking how forward I am," she exclaimed, drawing her hand from him.
"Do you mean that you will?" he exclaimed, the fierceness of his delight tempered by a still evident incredulity.
"I will," she said, "if—"

"Hush—hush! Don't let there be any ifa, Elizabeth!"

"Yes—listen. If Mrs. Duff-Scott will freely consent and approve—"
"You may consider that settled, anyhow. I know she will."
"And if you will see Mr. Brion to-night—"
"Mr. Brion? What do we want with Mr. Brion? Settlements?"
"No. But he has something to tell you about me—about my family—something that you must know before we can be married."
"What is it? Can't you tell me what it is?"
"Don't frighten me, Elizabeth—it is nothing to matter, is it?"
"I don't know. I hope not. I cannot tell you myself. He will explain everything if you will see him this evening. He came back to Melbourne with us, and he is waiting to see you."
"Tell me this much, at any rate," said Mr. Yelverton, anxiously; "it is no just cause or impediment to our being married to-morrow, is it?"
"No. At least, I don't think so. I hope you won't."
"Very well. We will go and have our lunch then. We'll join the *table d'hôte* of the Exhibition, Elizabeth—that will give us a foretaste of our continental travels. To-morrow we shall have lunch—where? At Mrs. Duff-Scott's, I suppose—it would be too hard upon her to leave her literally at the church door. Yes, we shall have lunch at Mrs. Duff-Scott's, and I suppose she will insist on drinking our healths in champagne, and making us a pretty speech. Never mind, we will have our dinner in peace. To-morrow evening we shall be at home, Elizabeth, and you and I will dine *tête-à-tête*, without even a single parlor-maid to stand behind our chairs. I don't quite know yet where I shall discover those blessed four walls that we shall dine in, nor what sort of dinner it will be—but I will find out before I sleep to-night."

CHAPTER XL. MRS. DUFF-SCOTT HAS TO BE RECKONED WITH.

Prosaic as were their surroundings and their occupation—sitting at a long table, he at the end and she at the corner on his left hand, amongst a scattered crowd of hungry folk, in the refreshment room of the exhibition, eating sweetbreads and drinking champagne and soda water—it was like a dream to Elizabeth, this foretaste of continental travels. In the background of her consciousness she had a sense of having acted madly if not absurdly, in committing herself to the programme that her audacious lover had drawn out; but the thoughts and fancies floating on the surface of her mind were too absorbing for the present to leave room for serious reflections. Dreaming as she was, she not only enjoyed the homely charm of sitting at meat with him in this informal, independent manner, but she enjoyed her lunch as well, after her rather exhausting emotions. It is commonly supposed, I know, that overpowering happiness takes away the appetite, but experience has taught me that it is not invariably the case. The misery of suspense and dread can make you sicken at the sight of food, but the bliss of rest and an invigorating effect, physically as well as spiritually, if you are a healthy person. So I say that Elizabeth was unmentally hungry, and enjoyed her sweetbreads. They chattered happily over their meal, like truant children playing on the edge of a precipice. Mr. Yelverton had the lion's share in the conversation, and talked with distracting persistence of the journey to-morrow, and the lighter features of the stupendous scheme that they had so abruptly adopted. Elizabeth smiled and blushed and listened, venturing occasionally upon a gentle repartee. Presently, however, she started a topic on her own account. "Tell me," she said, "do you object to first cousins marrying?"
"Dear child, I don't object to anything to-day," he replied. "As long as I am allowed to marry you, I am quite willing to let other men please themselves."
"But tell me seriously—do you?"
"Must I be serious? Well, let me think. No, I don't know that I object—there is so very little that I object to, you see, in the way of things that people want to do—but I think, perhaps, that all things being equal, a man would not choose to marry so near a blood relation."
"You do think it wrong, then?"
"I think it not only wrong but utterly preposterous and indefensible," he said, "that it should be lawful and virtuous for a man to marry his first cousin and wicked and indecent to marry his sister-in-law—or his aunt-in-law for the matter of that—or any free woman who has no connection with him except through other people's marriages. If a legal restriction in such matters can ever be necessary or justifiable, it should be in the way of preventing the union of people of the same blood. Sense to say to that—they have nothing whatever each other. Their my sentiments, Miss King, if you particularly wish to know them."
Elizabeth put her knife and fork together on her plate softly. It was a gesture of elaborate caution, meant to cover her conscientious agitation. "Then you would not—?"
"It were your own case—marry your cousin?" she asked, after a pause, in a very small and gentle voice. He was studying the menu on her behalf, and wondering if the strawberries and cream would be fresh. Consequently he did not notice how pale she had grown, all of a sudden.
"Well," he said, "you see I have no cousin, to begin with. And if I had I could not possibly want to marry her, since I am only allowed to have one wife at a time. So my own case doesn't come in."
"But if I had been your cousin?" she urged breathlessly, but with her eyes on her plate. "Supposing, for the sake of argument, that I had been of your blood—would you still have had me?"
"Ah," he said, laughing, "that is, indeed, a home question."
"Would you?" she persisted.
"Would I?" he echoed, putting a hand under the table to touch hers. "I really think I would, Elizabeth. I'm afraid that nothing short of your having been my own full sister could have saved you."
After that she regained her color and brightness, and was able to enjoy the early strawberries and cream—which did happen to be fresh.

They did not hurry themselves over their lunch, and when they left the refreshment-room they went and sat down on two chairs by the Brinsmead pianos and listened to a little music (in that worst place that ever was for hearing it). Then Mr. Yelverton took his *fiancee* to get a cup of Indian tea. Then he looked at his watch gravely.

"Do you know," he said, "I really have an immense deal of business to get through before night if we are to be married to-morrow morning."
"There is no reason why we should be married to-morrow morning," was her immediate comment. "Indeed—indeed, it is far too soon."
"It may be soon, Elizabeth, but I deny that it is too soon, reluctant as I am to contradict you. And, whether or no, the date is fixed, irrevocably. We have only to consider"—he broke off, and consulted his watch again, thinking of railway and telegraph arrangements. "Am I obliged to see Mr. Brion to-day?" he asked abruptly.
"Can't I put him off till another time? Because, you know, he may say just whatever he likes, and it won't make the smallest particle of difference."
"Oh," she replied earnestly, "you must see him. I can't marry you till he has told you everything. I wish I could!" she added, impulsively.
"Well, if I must I must—though I know it doesn't matter the least bit. Will he keep me long, do you suppose?"
"I think, very likely, he will."
"Then, my darling, we must go. Give me your ring—you shall have it back to-night. Go and pack your portmanteau this afternoon, so that you have a little spare time for Mrs. Duff-Scott. She will be sure to want you in the evening. You need not take much, you know—just enough for a week or two. She will be only too delighted to look after your clothes while you are away, and"—with a smile—"we'll buy the trousseau in Paris on our way home. I am credibly informed that Paris is the proper place to go to for the trousseau of a lady of quality."
"Trousseau are nonsense," said Elizabeth, who perfectly understood his motives for this proposition, "in these days of rapidly changing fashions, unless the bride cannot trust her husband to give her enough pocket money."
"Precisely. That is just what I think. And I don't want to be deprived of the pleasure of dressing you. But for a week or two, Elizabeth, we are going out of the world just as far as we can get, where you won't want much dressing. Take only what is necessary for comfort, dear, enough for a fortnight—or say three weeks. That will do. And tell me where I shall find Mr. Brion."

They were passing out of the Exhibition building—passing that noble group of listening hounds and huntsman that stood between the front entrance and the gate—and Elizabeth was wondering how she should find Mr. Brion at once and make sure of that evening interview, when she caught sight of the old lawyer himself coming into the flowery enclosure from the street. "Why, there he is!" she exclaimed. "And my sisters are with him."
"We are taking him out for an airing," exclaimed Eleanor, who was glorious in her Cup-day costume, and evidently in an effervescence of good spirits, when she recognized the engaged pair. "Mr. Paul was too busy to attend to him, and he had nobody but us, poor man! So we are going to show him round. Would you believe that he has never seen the exhibition, Elizabeth?"
They had scarcely exchanged greetings with each other when, out of an open carriage at the gate, stepped Mrs. Duff-Scott, on her way to that extensive kettledrum which was held in the exhibition at this hour. When she saw her girls, their festive raiment and their cavaliers, the fairy godmother's face was a study.
"What!" she exclaimed, with heart-rending reproach, "you are back in Melbourne! You are walking about with— with your friends"—hooking on her eye-glass the better to wither poor Mr. Brion, who wasted upon her a bow that would have done credit to Lord Chesterfield—"and I am not told!"
Patty came forward, radiant with suppressed excitement. "She must be told," exclaimed the girl, breathlessly. "Elizabeth, we are all here now. And it is Mrs. Duff-Scott's right to know what we know. And Mr. Yelverton's, too."
"You may tell them now," said Elizabeth, who was as white as the muslin round her chin. "Take them all to Mrs. Duff-Scott's house, and explain everything, and get it over—while I go home."

CHAPTER XLI. MR. YELVERTON STATES HIS INTENTIONS.

"I don't think you know Mr. Brion," said Mr. Yelverton, first lifting his hat and shaking hands with Mrs. Duff-Scott, and then, with an airy and audacious cheerfulness, introducing the old man (whose name and association with her proteges she immediately recalled to mind); "Mr. Brion—Mrs. Duff-Scott."
The fairy godmother bowed frigidly, nearly shutting her eyes as she did so, and for a moment the little group kept an embarrassed silence, while a sort of electric current of intelligence passed between Patty and her new-found cousin.
"Will you come?" said Patty to him, trying not to look too conscious of the change she saw in him. "It is time to have done with all our secrets now."
"I agree with you," he replied. "And I will come with pleasure." Mrs. Duff-Scott was accordingly made to understand, with some difficulty, that the mystery which puzzled her had a deep significance, and that she was desired to take steps at once whereby she might be made acquainted with it. Much bewildered, but without relaxing her offended air—for she conceived that no explanation would make any difference in the central fact that Mr. Yelverton and Mr. Brion had taken precedence of her in the confidence of her own adopted daughters—she returned to her carriage, all the little party following meekly at her heels. The girls were put in first—even Elizabeth, who, insisting upon detaching herself from the assembling council, had to submit to be conveyed to Myrtle street; and the two men, lifting their hats to the departing vehicles, were left on the footpath together. The lawyer was very grave, and slightly nervous and embarrassed. To his companion he had all the air of a man with a necessary but disagreeable duty to perform.
(To be continued.)