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THE PARSON WAS CALLED.

Here Miss Penelope paused for the space of half an hour to consider how best to sign herself. Her heart prompted her to put "Your loving, Fannie Woollie," or "Your own little Pat," or some other friendly name; and it was only when she reflected that he had called her "Fannie" under the rigid formality of "Your Affectionate Fannie," that she remembered the fact that she had not signed herself in any way before he even opened his eyes, and had only done so in a little shaky when she wrote it, and that for all the world like, "Yours, Fannie Woollie."

That the Rev. Josiah was surprised at the contents of this note would be to put it mildly. He was thunderstruck even to speechlessness. He had written, so he said to himself, a plain, unpretentious letter to a maiden lady, intimating his purpose of calling upon her on a matter of business, and had got in reply—what? an unintelligible riddle which would have done credit to an arch-spirator. "Burn, Miss Penelope! you have read it!" Guy Fawkes would have said no more. "I think I can make some guess at the nature of the offer—now, how could she possibly know anything about it, when her name had come before the Board for the first time yesterday, and all the members were pledged to silence? And then to sign herself—"Yours, washing the Pope!" It was past his comprehension.

Then light slowly broke on him. *It was insanity!* The dread malady, latent for years, perhaps, had at length broken out in this strange form. He had read of such cases, and remembered that they were usually the most violent. He shuddered as he thought of his appointment for the morrow. And he had arranged for a teete-tete too—"I shall take care to be at home to no one but you." What was that but a declaration of insanity—the cutting of a diseased mind? He thought of many things—of showing the letter to the Board and asking their advice—of writing to postpone the interview till he should be satisfied of Miss Penelope's mental state—of arming himself in case of attack. But each course had its own difficulties, and he ended where he had begun. He must face the danger alone and unaided.

On the afternoon of the following day the Rev. gentleman might have been seen picking his way through the snow in the direction of Laburnum Cottage. Perhaps his cheeks were a little paler than usual, and he certainly had exchanged his usual black frock for a stout oak club; but beyond that there was nothing to show that he was on his way to a meeting with one whom he firmly believed to be a dangerous lunatic. This assumption of course was for him a great achievement. He had reasoned himself into it over night; "for," said he, "after all she is only a little woman, up to my shoulder." And as he passed along now he kept up his spirit by growling over to himself, as if it were a kind of talisman—"Little woman up to my shoulder—little woman, up to my shoulder."

arranged between us by the medium of epistolary communication." Having got thus far he paused, for it had just then occurred to him that if Miss Webb were not *compos mentis* (as there was only too good reason to suppose), he would be acting very unwisely in communicating the Board's views regarding her. He was still debating the point when Miss Penelope solved it for him. "Oh, yes, Mr. Clutterbuck," she smiled; "you've something really quite important to say to me—have you not? I wonder what it can be? And she feigned a fine air of innocent curiosity.

Here was more food for Mr. Clutterbuck's fears. In her letter she had hinted at some knowledge of his purpose: now she professed entire ignorance of it. However, there was nothing for it now but to get through with the job as soon as possible. Yes, even in this present plight—face to face with one whom he felt convinced was insane—his constitutional bashfulness pressed rather and kept him from going direct to the point. "You are right, Miss Webb," he said, assuming a soothing tone, which he remembered to have heard or read somewhere was that proper to the treatment of insanity, "but which in his case resembled nothing so much as the effect of a little stranger to propitiate an ugly-looking house dog—"you are entirely right. The communication could never tell—it might have been of the utmost importance." Then after a slight pause—"As I think I stated in my letter, I have an offer to make to you—yes, I believe I may call it an offer—it is at least a request, which—er—which—"

"Which is of a somewhat delicate nature," quoted the spinster, with an exquisite blush. "You see how I have your words by heart, dear Mr. Clutterbuck. But do not let me interrupt you." "For Josiah had opened his mouth, to speak as the poet says, but really in consternation at 'dear Mr. Clutterbuck'—"I am dying to hear what you have to say."

Well, continued Josiah fidgeting nervously in his seat, "I fear you will be disappointed when you have heard it. It is even possible you may be annoyed, perhaps insulted. So before proceeding further, I should like to make sure of your pardon should your feelings be in any way hurt, Miss Penelope." Miss Webb assured him with one of her sweetest smiles that there would be little chance of that. Her pardon indeed!

shrieking and flapping its wings—and each drowning the other. "Oh, Josiah," said Penelope. "Pray consider," began the curate. "Miserable sinners," shrieked the bird. "If anyone should come," groaned Josiah. "Polly's got her eye on you, your miserable sinners—Polly's got her eye on you, miserable sinners—miserable sinners! miserable sinners!" yelled the parrot, in crescendo, outwincing the other two.

At length the bird stopped through sheer exhaustion, by which time Miss Penelope's emotion had grown more articulate. "Oh, Josiah she cried, 'I am so happy, I am so happy. I have loved you so long, Josiah, and now you are mine—mine—my very, very own. Oh, it is too good to be true.' Then the truth flashed on the Rev. Josiah. Miss Penelope had mistaken his offer of the matrimonial ship for an offer of matrimony. The letter—the lavender ink—the subsequent endearments—all were explained. It was not insanity; it was love. What was to be done? He tried to disengage himself from Penelope's embraces, but she clung the tighter. He tried to reason with her; she only sobbed the louder. And force he could not bring himself to use.

How long they stood thus, Josiah could never tell—it might have been one, it might have been twenty minutes—when a step was heard on the gravel outside, and a portly figure darkened the window. In an agony of apprehension, poor Josiah glanced over his shoulder and beheld Dr. Jones. He was looking straight in at the window, holding his sides for laughter; and when he caught Josiah's eye, he shook his fist at him and winked. The feelings of a thief when the policeman's hand is on his collar were nothing to those of the Rev. Josiah Clutterbuck when thus detected by the arrantest gossip of the town, as it were in *flagrant delicto*. Why, in that position, was he innocent? In his seat, "I fear you will be disappointed when you have heard it. It is even possible you may be annoyed, perhaps insulted. So before proceeding further, I should like to make sure of your pardon should your feelings be in any way hurt, Miss Penelope."

Next morning had an ever-dropper been posted outside the parlor door at Laburnum Cottage, he might have heard the sound of a kiss silently given and returned, and a voice like unto Rev. Josiah Clutterbuck's which said—"When shall we be, Penelope?" Thus it came to pass that the Orphan Homes lost an excellent matron, and the Rev. Josiah Clutterbuck won a loving and careful spouse.

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