

An Absurd Client

There were two desks in the room and but one was occupied. A tall young man was seated by it busy with a sheaf of papers that were piled before him. She was a fine young woman with clear cut features, clear gray eyes, and a clear complexion that harmonized nicely with her thick, brown hair. She was neatly dressed in a close fitting suit and there was an unmistakable air of good breeding about her.

No doubt the young man who presently opened the outer door thought as he paused on the threshold and hesitatingly glanced across at the occupied desk.

"Pardon me," he said, "but I am looking for Frank J. Pendleton. Who will be in?"

The young woman at the desk looked around.

"Well," she said.

The young man smiled again.

"I was looking for Attorney Pendleton. When will he be in?"

"He will not be in for some time," said the young woman.

The stranger advanced from the doorway.

"I will wait," he remarked, and took a seat near one of the windows.

"Just as you please," said the young woman.

The young man scarcely looked at the nine-and-twenty year old girl as he made acknowledgment of this privilege and then took advantage of the point of vision and carefully studied the young woman's pose and general appearance. It was a pleasant study and the stranger found it agreeable that he quite neglected to look out of the window at his elbow and enjoy the remarkably fine panoramic view of the city that spread itself in the distance for many miles. But presently he took out a letter and read it, and then replaced it in his pocket with a sudden smile. Presently he glanced at his watch, and having noted the time, pressed the cover down with a sharp click. The girl looked up from her papers.

"Did you speak?" she asked.

"I think not," the stranger replied. Then he somewhat hastily added, "Frank hasn't gone abroad, has he?"

"Frank?"

"Yes, Frank. Great boy, Frank. I remember once how he put a card on the door 'Back in ten minutes,' and didn't show up again for two years. How is his health?"

The young woman had turned round still further and her gray eyes were regarding the stranger with a somewhat unpleasant expression.

"Of whom are you talking, sir?" the stranger's eyes opened wide.

"Why, of Frank Pendleton, of course. He was plain Frank Pendleton then. I don't know where he got that extra 'J' on the sign. I suppose he has greatly changed. Why, we were boys together and almost inseparable friends. But I haven't seen Frank in half a dozen years. Pretty gray by this time I suppose? He's one of the kind that gets gray early. Dear old Frank!"

The young woman slightly flushed.

"You are quite mistaken," she said. "Frank Pendleton is neither gray nor old."

"Well, well," said the stranger with a delightful smile. "I'm glad to hear it. Married, I suppose?"

"Not still unmarried?"

"Yes."

"Well, well! Whose fault is it?"

"Sir! How should I know?"

"True. It seems strange though Frank always was such a terrible flirt."

"You are mistaken, sir."

The stranger smiled.

"Perhaps. Anyway, I see I have made a mistake by saying anything about the flirting. Frank seems to have turned over a new leaf, and of course it's all right to forget the frivolities of youth."

"You have made a serious mistake, sir."

"Oh, I see. You think I have misjudged Frank. Then let me tell you that I'm very sorry if I have lowered him in your estimation. It was inadvertent on my part."

The young woman's grey eyes regarded the stranger attentively.

"There is but one Frank Pendleton in this building," she said.

"And that's quite enough," laughed the stranger. "I didn't expect to find Hyde Pendleton as well as Jekyll Pendleton. One is enough for me."

"Sir," cried the young woman, "you are laboring under an unpleasant delusion. I tell you there is but one Frank Pendleton in this building and I am the one."

The young man stared at her.

"You!" he cried. "Well, well! There, I beg your pardon. I have made a stupid blunder. If there is but one Frank Pendleton in the building it is easy enough to see that you are not the one. I mean that you are not the other one. That is, you are not my Frank Pendleton. I beg your pardon again."

And he arose and bowed low.

"I have no doubt," and there was a more gracious tone in the young woman's voice, "that I was somewhat accountable in letting you take it for granted that your friend was here."

"Pray don't assume any of the

blame," cried the young man. "I repeat that it was all my stupidity. Why, when I come to look closer at you I can't discover the slightest resemblance to my friend—or anybody else."

The young woman slightly frowned. Perhaps she was ruffled by the closeness of his scrutiny. She reddened a little, too. This was a decidedly presuming young man. He presumed too much, no doubt, on his good looks and his good clothes—and, perhaps, a little on the fact that she was alone.

"I think we may regard the incident as closed," she said in icy tones. "Good morning."

"Good morning," said the stranger, and turned towards the door. But he paused before he reached it. "I was looking for a lawyer," he suddenly remarked, "when I saw your friend's sign—I mean your sign. Might I ask if you could recommend one whose legal skill and discretion could both be relied upon—especially his discretion?"

The professional instinct was too strong in the young woman to be crowded down.

"I am a lawyer," she said.

"You!" cried the young man. "But how stupid of me. Of course it says so on Frank's sign. I mean your sign. And yet to hear you admit it is really like a shock. We don't associate the legal profession with the bloom of youth, and grace, and tailor-made suits, and—"

"I think that will be quite enough," the young woman sharply interrupted. "I am a lawyer, and I practice my profession. I have been reasonably successful, and have no cause to feel discouraged over my progress. If your case does not exceed my limitations I would be glad to have you state it to me. And you may rest assured that I will give you my honest opinion untrammelled by any selfish desire to secure your money."

The young man hastily brought a chair and placed it near the young woman.

"I like your frank manner," he said, "and I can see no reason why you are not competent to handle my case. I believe you could swing a jury with admirable ease. I know how I would feel about it if I had the good luck to be on a jury in any case in which you happened to be interested."

The young woman reddened.

"Will you kindly state your case?" she said.

"My case," he repeated, and paused in some confusion. "This is the worst part of it," he murmured, and swallowed hard.

The young woman took note of these signs of perturbation.

"I have no doubt," she said, "that you are seeking a divorce."

He gasped a little at this and then slowly nodded.

"I didn't imagine I exposed my errand in my 'very looks,'" he said. "Or was it intuition on your part?"

"Not exactly either of them," she mitted. "The fact is, about all the practice I get is along the divorce line. I have come to expect it. Although," and she hesitated a little, "it has hitherto been the injured wife who has sought my aid."

"But that wouldn't prejudice you against an injured husband, would it?" the stranger quickly inquired.

"No," was the reply. "If you can really prove that you are injured."

"I will have to let you be the judge of that," said the young man, with a sigh. "And I realize that in order to put you in possession of all the facts it will be necessary for me to tell you the story of my life—at least of my married life."

"Is it long?"

"It seems long—very long." And the young man sighed again.

"Proceed," said the lawyer.

"She was my ideal. I believe they always are. Of course, I was sure we would be happy. I think this is not uncommon."

And he looked appealingly at the lawyer.

"I know nothing about it," said the young woman in her crispest way. "Pray proceed."

"Naturally, I saw only her perfections. I never dreamed she had defects. Still, I do not imagine my case is an isolated one." And he threw another appealing look at the young woman. She regarded him with a stony stare. He sighed again and resumed: "I found our tastes did not agree. I learned that she had carefully choked down her preferences in order to make herself agreeable to me. I more than half suspected that she was anxious—very anxious—to hook me. Does this surprise you?"

The lawyer frowned.

"You are a man of wealth?" she said.

"I didn't mean that, exactly," he hastily remarked. "It is true I have a comfortable income, but I fondly imagined she loved me, for myself alone."

"I have heard of such cases," said the lawyer drily. "But are you aware that time is flying?"

"I expected your sympathy," said the young man, reproachfully.

"I will endeavor to proceed faster," he said. "But you must bear with me. Try to put yourself in my place."

"Certainly not."

"Well, we disagreed. Our tastes were all dissimilar. She likes four pancakes; I prefer buckwheat. I

love Dickens; she can't abide him. I hate onions; she wants them in everything. Tennyson is my favorite poet; hers is Riley. When I read Tennyson aloud—I always read him aloud—she tried to drown me out with Riley. And if she can't succeed—my voice being the stronger—she routs me in confusion by breathing onions in my direction. What is the natural consequence of such a division of tastes—anarchy and chaos. But you are smiling?"

The lawyer smoothed her fair face.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "The picture you draw is somewhat amusing."

"Amusing, madam!"

"For an outsider," the lawyer hastily added. "What else?"

"What else, madam! Is this not enough?"

"Enough for you, sir, perhaps, but hardly enough for the court."

"But, madam, I rely upon your skill to move the court—your skill and your beauty?"

"Sir! That's a strange way to address a lawyer."

"Madam, you expected me to be frank and open. If I have awaked case I must have a strong advocate. I have every confidence in you. I can even picture you facing that obdurate jury, tears in your eyes, and a sympathetic thrill in your voice. Gentlemen, you say, look at my unfortunate client. See the ravages that a wrecked domestic hearthstone have chiseled deep across his pallid face. Look—"

"That will be quite enough," said the lawyer. "There will be no such scene—no such impassioned appeal.

Our courts handle divorce cases without the aid of juries."

"Do they?" said the young man. "That's unfortunate. But perhaps you will find it easier to impress one man than twelve. I'll leave that to you."

The lawyer frowned.

"I'd like to impress you," she said, "that you are on the wrong track entirely. If you haven't any case impressions will count for nothing."

"Haven't any case?" he repeated. "Didn't I just tell you that we can't agree on any of the subjects that are of the most vital interest to domestic happiness?"

"Pooh," said the lawyer, "they are trifles."

"Trifles from the legal point of view. I advise you to drop this matter at once. It is really absurd. Just imagine the young woman arising from the witness chair and hysterically declaring that you deprived her of onions. It would be enough to bring tears to every eye."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. And remember what the reporters and the newspaper artists would have with it. There would be the injured husband shrieking Tennyson at the cringing wife, and the cringing wife flinging her flour pancakes at the injured husband. It would never do never."

The young man looked dejected.

"Then you refuse to take the case?" he said.

The young woman glanced at him with a peculiar expression.

"It depends a little on how much

you would lose by my refusal," she slowly said.

"How much I would lose?" he blankly repeated.

The young woman slowly smiled.

"That's just what I said, Mr. Jack Harmon."

"Eh?" he cried, "you know me?"

"She smiled again.

"I'm a good guesser," she said. "And I am guessing that Brother Jim has been telling you about me, and especially about what he calls my latest fad. And then he has suddenly conceived the brilliant idea of sending you to me as a client. And you have made a wager about it— you claim you could get me to take a case and Brother Jim bet that I would see through your 'Helle game'."

"You are a witch," gasped the young man.

"I'll admit that Jim wrote to me the other day that you had returned from South America and that he meant to bring you to see me. But he said nothing about your charming wife."

The young man laughed.

"She's just as real as the rest of the story," he said. "And you are going to let Jim take my money?"

"I owe Jim a little punishment," she said, "for endeavoring to bring contempt upon my profession— will take your case under advisement."

"Thank you," he said. "And how won't you shake hands and forgive the little comedy?"

She put her slim hand in his, and

he looked at her with admiring eyes.

"This is a happy moment," he murmured. "I've wanted to meet you for such a long time. And, by the way, there was something else in our wager—but, of course, you couldn't guess what it was. Perhaps some day," and his voice trembled a little, "I may be able to tell it to you. Anyway, I don't mean to lose my money if—if you will again help me to win it."

She blushed a little as she withdrew her hand, and strange to say evinced no curiosity concerning this mysterious wager.—W. R. Rose in Cleveland Plain Dealer

The Politic Man and the Lady

"Lady," said he, stepping into the front hall, "I like to show you one of our little double reflecting window mirrors, which—"

"It's no use to show it to me," she interrupted, impatiently. "I shan't buy it."

"I know; but it's a pleasure to show it to people who have sense enough to appreciate a good thing, even if they don't want to buy it. You see, you just hang it up by this little ring in your front window. Then when your door bell rings you can look in the mirror and see whether you're at home or not."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you can see who's at the door. If it's somebody you don't want to let in you don't have to go to the door. Suppose it was Mrs. Astor, for instance, dropping around for an informal morning call and you had on your blue wrapper and a towel tied over your head; maybe you'd rather not let her see you. Or

it might be the dominie coming to make a pastoral call about lunch time and you with nothing in the house but the scrag end of the breakfast beefsteak. All you got to do is to look into the little mirror and sit quiet till the devastating famine drifts by."

"No doubt it's a very nice thing," said she, "but I guess I won't take one today."

"Or it can be hung in the side window and you can see into your next-door neighbor's house without anybody knowing it. Of course, you wouldn't care to do that, but some folks like to know everything that's going on in their neighbor's houses without letting on that they care a rap."

"No, thank goodness! I'm not one of that kind. How much did you say these mirrors were?"

"The regular price is \$5 a pair, but I'll make this one to you for \$4.98 if you'll promise not to sell anybody."

"Very well, I'll take one, and I won't even tell anybody I've got it."

—Brooklyn Eagle.

"Why is it," asked the athletic young man, "that a girl can never catch a ball like a man?"

"Because," replied the girl with violet eyes, "a man is so much larger and easier to catch."

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Jewett—I've been awfully lonesome on account of not hearing the voice of that ten you borrowed of me."

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