

## A SLIGHT COMPLICATION.

How a Chicago Man Exercised His Judgment.

And Saved a Young Girl From an Unfortunate Marriage—Romance of the Windy City.

As I was leaving the office Baxter called to me that if I was going to walk home he would go with me. I was going to walk, as I always do on nice days, but I was not anxious for his company. I could not think of anything that would turn him off, however, so I replied, with what heartiness I could summon: "All right. Come long." The reason for my not wanting him or any one else with me was an absurd one, and I had the grace to be ashamed of myself even while acknowledging its weight. For the last month I had become foolishly in love with a girl I did not know, and the only time I saw her was in the afternoon on Michigan avenue, when I was going back from town and she was coming down. I did not always meet her, but I always hoped to when I left the office, and I liked to be alone when I passed her. Absurd as it may seem, another person always seemed intruding. Therefore I cursed Baxter inwardly and talked business outwardly as we left Jackson boulevard and turned into Michigan avenue.

It was a beautiful autumn afternoon. The grass in the park was still green, and a fresh, exhilarating breeze blew from the lake. She could certainly not miss such a day for her walk, I argued, and fixed my eyes on the stream of people flowing steadily past me on the walk, trying to catch a glimpse of a slim figure in a gray walking suit. I had often wondered where she went every afternoon and even planned to follow her, but I was positively timid for once and afraid to make an advance which would give information about my unknown. Possibly she went to meet and walk back with a lover, a brother or a husband. I was rather inclined to the brother idea, though I don't know why. She did not look married, and why should such a girl care enough for any man to meet him and walk home with him? No, I was convinced that no such fortunate creature existed.

She wore a black hat, tilted over her forehead, and she always gave me a quick, comprehensive look from under it, as we passed. As for me, I fixed my eyes on her, and never took them off until she had gone by; it was only by a superhuman effort of will power that I did not stop and stare after her.

We usually met near Twelfth street, but today we had reached Sixteenth and I had given up hope, when I saw her coming toward me. Baxter was telling me some troubles of his, for I believe he mistook my silence for sympathy.

We were nearly opposite to her before Baxter saw her, at the same moment that she saw him. She bowed and smiled—I had never seen her smile before—and just one little corner of that one belonged to me and with it the sweetest of glances that set my heart beating idiotically.

Suddenly I realized that my talkative companion had not spoken a word since his muttered "How do you?" I looked at him. His face was profoundly gloomy.

"What's the matter?" I asked. I felt good natured enough to talk to any one, and I suddenly conceived a great interest in Baxter. He could tell me who she was—perhaps be the means in time of my meeting her.

"Did you see that girl I bowed to just now?" he said.

"The one in gray? Yes, I noticed her."

"Well, that's she. She's the one."

"What one? Whom you are talking about?" I was at a loss to account for his tone of gloomy emphasis.

"The girl I was telling you about. Funny we should have met her just as I finished. Well, you can see for yourself that she is pretty."

I looked at Jim Baxter in absolute amazement.

"When did you tell me this history you are alluding to?" I spoke calmly, but I was agitated. There was something the matter with one of us, and the effect of my question on Jim showed that there was no question in his mind as to which of us it was.

"When did I tell you? For heaven's sake, Ray, do you mean to tell me that you haven't heard what I've been saying for the last mile? You had better consult a specialist if you are subject to such attacks of mental aberration."

"I didn't hear a word," I said humbly. "To tell the truth, I was

thinking so hard on a certain subject that my mind was incapable of taking anything else. Tell me again, and I swear you'll have my undivided attention."

"Thanks, but I won't trouble you. That isn't the sort of story a man cares about dwelling on, you know. And, come to think of it, it's better that no one should know about the business anyway."

In vain I assured him of my interest in his affairs, of my desire and ability to help him if he needed help. He would tell me nothing. What an unmitigated fool I had been! I had missed a chance to learn all about her, and I might never get another.

"At least tell me her name," I said finally in desperation.

"Miss Norwood—Ethel Norwood. Why do you want to know her name?"

"Oh, nothing," I said indifferently.

"I suppose she goes down town to meet somebody, doesn't she?"

"Yes."

"Her brother, I suppose?"

"Hasn't any brother."

I had gone too far to back out. "Who does she go to meet, then?"

"She goes to walk home with her sister, who studies at the art institute. And now I should like very much to know if Miss Norwood has aroused your interest merely through her being an acquaintance of mine. That conclusion is flattering, but doubtful."

"To walk home with her sister? In a sudden burst of joyful confidence I told him what had been going on inside of me for the last month. I used extravagant language to describe my state of mind. I colored every trivial incident to produce the rose colored effect of romance."

We had reached Twentieth street and stopped on the corner where our ways divided. I looked at Baxter and saw that he was amazed, as I had been a few moments before.

"That's why I wanted to hear your story and also why I didn't hear it—because I've lost the little head I ever had over your Miss Norwood."

"And so it's you!" exclaimed Jim.

"Well, I never!"

"You seem to enjoy being mysterious," I replied, annoyed at another such remark from him. "Is that connected with a story which I am not to be allowed to hear?"

"I'll walk along with you. I suppose you ought to know." We turned into Twentieth street. "What I told you before was simply this: Ethel Norwood is the most ungrateful girl in the world. We've always known each other, went to school together in the beginning, and all that. I never cared for any other girl. Well, last summer she told me that she was engaged to Tom Camp. Know him? He lives in Boston and visited some people here last spring. If there ever was a villain in these commonplace times, he is one. I told Ethel so, and she dared me to prove it. I was in college with him, and I proved something about him, even to her satisfaction. She broke her engagement and told me she never could be grateful enough to me. She continued to treat me as though I were the one thing necessary to her happiness until I became convinced that I had only to declare myself to receive my reward for saving her from that fellow. I spoke last night, and she turned me down without asking for time to consider even; said she liked me, though, and thought we were just good friends."

I tried to feel sorry for Jim and say something appropriate, but I couldn't think of anything.

"But the worst of it was that when I asked her if there was any one else she said, 'Well, no; not exactly.' And then she went on and told me that she was very much ashamed of herself, but she believed she was half in love with some one she didn't even know; saw him every day and looked forward to meeting him, and a lot of that sort of stuff. I was disgusted and told her so and that the fellow was probably some one not worthy of tying her shoes. She said she wasn't afraid as long as she had me to rescue her. Then I left, feeling pretty sore. And now it turns out to be you, and you tell me the same thing."

My feelings were indescribable.

"There's only one thing for you to do—be a good fellow, Jim," I said.

"Well, I won't do it," said Jim emphatically.

"Very well; just as you feel about it. We probably have other mutual acquaintances," I replied nonchalantly.

"You, being an old family friend, could so easily take me to call, but of course if you don't want to—"

"Oh, I suppose I'll have to," groaned Baxter. "She'd make me anyway on some pretext or other after seeing us together."

With this ungracious consent I was satisfied. Inside of a week I had met her. If I had thought her charming on the street, I found her in her own home utterly bewitching. I am waiting for a

decent and reasonable length of time to elapse before telling her what she can see if she isn't blind. I am not blind either, and yet I try to remember how mistaken Jim was about her feeling for him and not let myself be too sure.

I am sure, though, that she never looked at Baxter the way she looks at me sometimes when I meet her on the avenue and turn to walk back with her. —Chicago News.

**To Say Nothing of Getting Married.** "Sometimes," said Mr. Blykins, "I'm surprised at my own courage."

"Why, you never went to war," answered his wife.

"There are other risks than those of the battlefield. Every time I pick up a paper I find an article on the dangers to our political system, 'dangers to public morals,' 'dangers of eating,' 'dangers that lurk in the atmosphere' and so on without end. I tell you it takes a mighty nifty man to go on eating and breathing." —Washington Star.

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