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One Too Many

By Fred Jay

It was springtime. Mr. Samuel Gudge, a house-decorator by trade, had plenty of work. But springtime is credited with more responsibilities than one; and Mr. Gudge contemplating a second and belated venture in matrimony, was unable to give to his business the full scope of a remarkable energy and imagination, and kept his clients waiting.

Twice that day had he strolled past the widow's house, an intention of calling resolving itself into an amorous smile at the neat window-curtains. Supplementing a third failure by a note, he received a gratifying reply at the hand of his messenger, to the effect that Mrs. Maple would have much pleasure in joining Mr. Gudge at a game of cribbage at eight o'clock that evening.

In spite of the fact that he had not the slightest misgivings as to the result of his suit, Mr. Gudge was not free from anxiety. There was an embarrassment, an encumbrance in the person of a self-willed daughter; and, turning this one difficulty over in his mind, he went home to tea in a state of irritable preoccupation.

He toyed with two eggs and a considerable quantity of toast in gloomy silence, only once addressing his

"You done it on purpose!" repeated Mr. Gudge, with a roar.

"Oh, well, if you choose to think so, you must," said Winnie. "I don't know what's come over you lately—nothing I do for you is right. When Mrs. Maple was here the other day, you couldn't find things nice enough to say about me, and yet when we are alone you're so disagreeable, and make such a fuss about trifles—"

"Trifles!" exclaimed Mr. Gudge, with self-pitying indignation.

Winnie laughed. "There," she said, crossing behind his chair and putting her arms over his shoulders. "I'll kiss another bare place to make it well. I'm sorry if it really hurt, but you're very ungrateful, dad! Don't I work hard enough and cheerfully enough to make you comfortable and happy, when any other girl of my age would be thinking more about some bit of a boy? Haven't I promised to devote myself to you as long as you live, and don't I mean to keep that promise?"

Mr. Gudge, shuddering at the ominous determination in her voice, took hold of the hands that clung tightly about his neck, and hastily disengaged himself.

"Ah," he exclaimed nervously, "that's it—that's just it!"



A Baby Goat mothered by Airedale Terrier

daughter, when, in a complaining, peevish manner, he drew attention to the unwashed condition of his teacup. Miss Gudge, having expressed surprise that he should disturb himself on that account when his saucer—the vessel he invariably drank from—was perfectly clean, finished a hearty meal with unruffled temper, and proceeded to remove the platters, humming the while with exasperating cheerfulness.

Mr. Gudge took off his muddied boots, filled a pipe, and sat in the armchair, sulkily regarding his socked feet. A big toe protruding its nakedness gave him a much desired opportunity of venting his feelings.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed sourly. "Pity you can't find time to do a little darnin' now and ag'in! You'll spend hours of a evenin' trimmin' of a 'at, while your father, wot keeps you idle at 'ome when other gals 'ave to work for a livin', can go about in that disgraceful condition!"

"You'll get holes in your socks, of course," said Winnie, "if you will go about without your boots. I'm tired of complainin'; it ain't pleasant. Nice people don't do it."

"I'll go about in bare feet if I think I will!" said Mr. Gudge threateningly.

"Please yourself," rejoined the girl. She lifted the tray from the table, and, carrying it from the room, trod on something soft. With a terrible exclamation of mingled pain and blasphemy, Mr. Gudge sprang from his chair and hopped about the hearthrug. "You done that on purpose!" he cried furiously.

"Ridiculous!" declared Winnie. "It would 'ave hurt your corn just the same if you'd got your boot on."

"Just what?"
"Why, I can't help feelin', my dear," added Mr. Gudge, striving to impart a kindly inflection into his words, "that it's about time you deserted your old dad for somebody as 'ud appreciate you. A clever, sweet-tempered, industrious 'ighly domesticated gal like you ought to 'ave a 'ome of your own."

"I've got a home of my own," said Winnie.

"Er—yes; but it ain't quite the same thing," said Mr. Gudge. "You've sacrificed yourself, my gal, too long; and afore I go I want to see you married and 'appy."

"Before you go where?"
"Afore I'm dead," replied Mr. Gudge solemnly.

Winnie laughed. "Why, only the other day I heard you tellin' Mrs. Maple that you felt like a boy o' twenty!"

"Idle chaff, my dear," said Mr. Gudge, hastily opening a cupboard-door and hiding his face behind it. "Mere idle chaff. I'm fifty-five next birthday."

"Fifty-eight," corrected his daughter.

"Fifty-five!" declared Mr. Gudge.

"Well, it ain't worth while gettin' red in the face over three years," said Winnie.

"I don't know what you mean—gettin' red in the face!" said Mr. Gudge, diving into the cupboard again. "Where's the matches?" "Nothin's kept in the proper place in this 'ouse!"

"Not even you!" agreed Winnie.

"I won't 'ave no more of your sauce," said Mr. Gudge wrathfully. "I've put up with it long enough. It's time you got married and off my 'ands!"

"I ain't never goin' to marry," declared Winnie.

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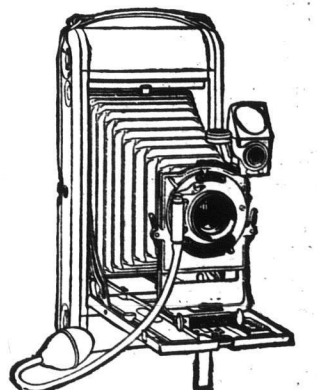
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