

# The Great Lottery

(By W. Phillip Sheppard.)

(Continued from last week.)

"I'm half afraid I did, Miss Lomas," answered Challis, "but I did not know you had decided to win it yourself. The Padre must be satisfied with the pearl and diamond earrings or a sewing machine."

They laughed, and the young man continued:

"While, as for me, I suppose I must put up with a tea-cosy or a butter knife."

"You?"

"My hopes of anything better rested on ticket No. 1,000,001," he said, producing one from his pocket and flourishing it before them, "but that was before I knew Miss Lomas was so deeply interested in it. If she insists on the first prize, I relegate the second to Father David, and am content to come in lower down the list."

"So we all three have tickets!" said Claire, feeling that some of the ecstacy of her announcement had fizzled out. Then she tossed back a curl which was straying rather impudently across her forehead, and added: "I am so sorry for you both! Of course we cannot all win it, and I shall not go back from my word. I said 'must and shall,' and 'must and shall' it will be."

"And \$500 is for my school!" asked Father David, his eyes glistening at the thought of it. "How like my sweet Claire to think of that! Thank you, my child, thank you—and as much as though the gift were actually at your bidding."

Wilfred Challis had been thinking.

"Will you take my ticket too, Miss Lomas?" he asked. "Two chances are better than one, but she exercised woman's first prerogative."

"It is kind of you to offer, but—no. It would imply a want of trust in the ticket with which I have declared to win, and that would not be fair. And I don't want the tea-cosy or the butter knife in addition to the \$3,000."

Again they laughed, and there the matter ended.

It occurred to Wilfred Challis as later on he walked with her as far as her lodgings, that for three usually sane and sensible persons they had been talking a great deal of nonsense, but he did not express his opinion. The fact was that he liked Miss Claire's nonsense—liked it as he had already found out he liked many other of her attributes—and he should have known perfectly well how flimsy were the excuses which he invented for visiting Westborough so frequently. Last time it had been the need of a few days' rest, and as he dared not give the same reason again for fear of being considered delicate, he had travelled the fifty miles this time to bring down the lottery ticket, which he considered a safer if not a cheaper way than sending it by post. His conscience was becoming more plastic, and he had already docketed one or two equally brilliant excuses for further visits, which deceived no one—except himself.

After that evening not even he was deceived, for as he left for London in the morning he confessed to himself that his admiration for Father David's schoolmistress had passed the confines of friendliness and crossed the borderland of love.

For seven days he contented himself with taking a mental review of his "excuse for visiting Westborough," turning them over in his mind and flattering himself that some of them were really rather clever. At the end of the week he returned to Westborough, leaving the selection of the best excuse for settlement on the way down. They were all brilliant—it was only a matter of selection. At the end of the journey they seemed less brilliant than they had done in his chambers in town, and their brilliancy evaporated so rapidly afterwards that when he eventually arrived at Father David's he merely said "I've come."

"You find me getting more attractive in my old age—eh Wilfred?"

"Not in the least, Padre. I'm in love with Miss Lomas."

Father David laughed in his usual hearty manner.

"That's frank, anyhow," he said. "How long have you known it?"

"Oh, about a week, I think."

"Ah! I have known it just a month."

"From whom?" he said quickly, with a flash of unreasonable hope that Claire herself had told him.

"From yourself, Wilfred; from yourself. The usual extra sight of the intelligent onlooker. But I approve of your choice: she is a good girl as well as beautiful. You have all my wishes for a successful conquest."

"You don't happen to know, I suppose—it's scarcely likely you would—whether she cares for me at all in that way?" the young man asked, with a great deal more hesitation and difficulty than a young barrister should have shown over so short a speech.

"On the contrary, I have a very shrewd idea that she does care for

you, at least a little. She never mentions your name."

The lover looked glum.

"If you were half clever you would know that was a good sign, my boy," continued Father David. "It is one of the occasions where a girl divulges her thoughts by keeping a still tongue."

Wilfred Challis was not equal to such subtle deductions in a love matter where his own interests were so vitally concerned, though in business he would probably have made as good deductions for himself.

"She cannot keep silence much down on purpose to put the matter longer," he said. "I have come to the test. To-morrow I propose."

"Yes. You propose—"

"That's all. Don't tease, Padre."

"You have a very best wish, Wilfred. You know that."

A silence followed in which it might be reasonable to imagine the careful weighing and balancing of judicious phrases which would be certainly forgotten at the intense moment in contemplation. Suddenly, and without warning, Father David laughed loud and long, and Challis started as though from a reverie.

"You think the situation amusing?" he said, somewhat testily.

"The particular situation I contemplate was amusing. It just flashed across my mind whether our dear Claire would fancy you were impressed with her intention to win that big lottery prize, or were wooing her on that account."

The young man looked first astonished and then amused.

"You don't think it possible?" he asked. "Why, what chance has she? One in half a million. I have just as good a chance myself."

"Not so. You lack her earnest faith in the matter, and as we know, faith worketh wonders—even miracles at times. I should say her chance was better than yours, and I daresay she thinks so herself."

"Pooh! One chance in half a million! It would be wooing a very considerable uncertainty."

But the Padre's wild idea seemed based on more intimate knowledge of Claire Lomas's mind than her lover had as yet acquired; for after the latter had blurted out the truth next day—not in any of his pre-arranged sentences, but still manfully and hopefully—she turned upon him with a look of arch amusement.

"I know what put this into your head," she said—"my intention to win that \$3,000. You think my chance is a better one than yours, and you want to make sure of me before I win it."

It was certainly not a gracious answer to a proposal of marriage, and its startling coincidence with the previous night's conversation rather shocked him; but there was a softness behind the irrelevant reply which encouraged him to persevere.

"Some say that marriage is a lottery," he continued, "and if you

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answer me 'yes' I shall be winning the first prize in that I do not want the other prize as well."

"You must not take tickets in so many lotteries at once," she answered in the same bantering, teasing manner. "I shall not acknowledge that you have even a chance in this one until the other lottery is settled."

(To be continued.)

## What Dan Wanted for Christmas.

"I just feel sure I'll get a sled at Christmas time. Uncle Tom has been talking a great deal lately, about the different kinds of sleds which the boys are using now. I believe his interest in sleds must mean that he is going to get one for me."

"Perhaps he wants to buy one for some other boy," said Michael Burns, who with Dan Noonan, the first speaker was returning home from school one day in the first week of December.

"What other boy is there?" and Dan looked astonished. "He is my own uncle and he has no nephew but me. He understands boys and knows what they want. You ought to hear him sometimes telling about when he was a boy. Here he comes now; I forgot that I promised to go with him on a visit to some friend. Good-bye, Michael; I'll see you to-morrow."

Away ran Dan, and soon he was walking down the street with a tall gray-haired man who seemed to have nothing in the world to do but listen to the chatter of the bright-faced boy by his side. Down the main street, then into a short cross street, and next a narrow alley, until at last Dan said:

"Why! Where are we going? This is 'Hangman's Paradise,' one of the lowest places in the city. You've made a mistake, Uncle Tom."

"I have a friend living down here and I want to see him to-day."

"A friend here?" and Dan looked at his uncle in astonishment; but without appearing to notice the surprise on his nephew's face, Uncle Tom kept on talking and going farther into the quarters known as "Hangman's Paradise."

Into one of the most dilapidated places, the uncle turned, and taking Dan by the hand led him through dark halls and up rickety stairs, until at last they came to a room within which some one was singing with what Dan thought was the sweetest and happiest voice he had ever heard.

In answer to Uncle Tom's tap at the door, a cheery voice called out, "Welcome to enter."

"How are you, Ernest? As happy as ever?" said Uncle Tom to a crippled boy who was the only occupant of the room.

"Happy as a king, sir," showing by his face the "uncle Tom" was no unwelcome visitor. "Take seats, gentlemen," he said. "My servants are all out. Help yourself to the cushioned chairs," pointing to a broken old chair and a dry goods box.

"How is the pain to-day?" said Uncle Tom.

"Good and strong, sir, good and strong. Did you hear me singing just as you came in? Well, sir, here's how it is. That old pain in my hip and back began growling early this morning, and it has been disobedient and impudent all day long. I just thought I'd conquer it if I sang right out some of my best pieces. Singing is a powerful prize fighter. It just wins every time if you keep it up long enough."

"It is a good plan to make singing do some of your fighting for you. This is my nephew, Dan. He is interested in about all the things which boys usually like. Tell him about your plans for Christmas presents."

"My plans don't amount to much, but it looks as if they would make some poor lads happy. You know," and he turned toward Dan, "there are two cripples in this block—poor lame boys who can't get around, and who don't know how to sing a note. Well, we are trying to get chairs for those boys—the chairs that wheel up and down without any trouble. You see it they had those chairs they

could get around some, and then they would be happier."

"How are you managing?" asked Dan.

"We are working, sir. See all the tops I've made for sale," and the boy deftly leaned over and brought up from somewhere a box containing about a hundred tops made from old spoons. I've a friend who knows some dressmakers, and they send me the spoons. Do you like the way they are decorated?"

"Yes, I do," answered Dan, as he looked at the neat rows of pretty, colored tops.

"I take considerable pride in the decorating. There is a kindergarten near here, and one day the teacher called to bring me a book. When she saw the spoons she asked me to allow her children to decorate them. She was that eager to get the job for her children, that she offered to pay me something if I'd let her have the tops to decorate. Now, there they are, as handsome tops as you can find in this city."

Putting his hand under his bed he brought out another box. "See that," he said, as he removed the lid and exhibited a large number of little white circular pieces of silk upon which were pictures of the Sacred Heart.

"I did not do very much of the things in this box. I drew the circles, and some ladies who come here painted the pictures, and then I cut them out. The young men will buy them for their watches."

"Where are you going to sell them?" inquired the uncle.

"Well, the teacher at the kindergarten is going to help about that. She thinks the sale ought to be in some good public place, and she will arrange all that. There are a good many helping, and we think we can get the chairs without any doubt."

"Would you like a chair?" asked Dan, who for once in his life had been doing more listening than talking.

"I don't need a chair; I'm happy without one. Not but that it is a great help, and if I had one I could get to Church without Father John's sexton coming after me every Sunday. Must you go now? Well, call again."

The good-byes were said and Dan and his uncle were soon out of "Hangman's Paradise," and on the main street going toward home.

"See, Uncle Tom, I know something I want more for Christmas than the sled I've been talking about. I want a roller chair for the boy we've just visited."

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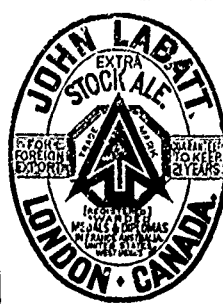
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