

THE BOOMERANG.

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Life has been likened to a game of Chess, in which one side is always trying to gain an advantage over the other. Some cynic has said that this world is divided into two great classes, one having something and the other trying to get that something away.

There is a notable exception and that is in the matter of Love, for in that struggle the ultimate object is supposed rather to be a combination of interests and generally is until the Divorce Courts take a hand; still there are those cynical enough to say that even in this there is good cause for argument.

The title of this story might be CHECK & CHECKMATE but since Chess is a harmless game without sentiment or consequences I prefer to call it the BOOMERANG for reasons which will appear hereafter, one of which is to show that the world is a chess-board upon which are played more games than one.

CHECKED.

George Howard was a bachelor, a club man and a chess enthusiast. He had been dissatisfied in love, or thought he had, which is a very different matter.

This happened at a time in his life when his business standing and social position were not so well assured as at present and when the one, into whose eyes he had so often gazed as into a well of sincerity and truth, broke her engagement, returning the betrothal ring that had cost a month's salary and curtly informed him that "her feelings had undergone a change which would forbid her ever marrying him," without, moreover, offering any explanation. He thought that he had suffered deeply, so deeply that he believed his life was now a wreck and there was nothing left for him but to spend the rest of his days in mourning over unrequited love, but when, a few months later, he received tidings of her marriage to another who was much older and very wealthy, though far inferior to himself in other ways, he divined the true cause of that change of heart which she had been unwilling to explain and with a supreme contempt for all the fair sex he emancipated himself from the thralldom of his former melancholy, abjured society and settled down to a club life as confirmed bachelor, resolving never to trust woman again and thus barring out all possibility of matrimony forever.

It is customary, in novels, for the dissatisfied in love to commit suicide or resort, at least, to strong drink, but after the events just mentioned that idea, at times seriously entertained, seemed ridiculous.

He was led to this conclusion the more easily, perhaps, firstly, because Time had to a great extent softened the poignancy of his grief and, secondly, because he had become an earnest devotee of Chess which promised all the mental abstraction he required.

"Man proposes and woman disposes," is a maxim in which there is a world of truth as shown in this case.

The diamond solitaire, which he, at first, resolved to cherish as a sad memento of his shattered hopes, on the receipt of the blighting news of her marriage to some one else, he now discounted at the jewellers' where it was bought and cold-bloodedly pocketed the difference with little regret, thus banishing all thoughts of the once beloved Julia from his mind forever, with a conscious feeling that he had escaped, after all, from the wiles of a heartless coquette who he was now convinced had never loved him.

He also had pity for the one who had supplanted him, not in her affections, for she had none, but as her husband, which is quite another thing.

Nevertheless, Howard was a changed man. The disappointment meant for him a loss of faith in the whole female sex and the belief that they were all alike was a conviction he could not dispel.

He was not given to misanthropy for he still held a cheerful view of life, in general, but he gave up all association with the fair sex as a common enemy to be avoided.

His associates were now all gentlemen and mostly among those addicted to chess, a coterie of whom he gathered about him.

In the meantime, by strict attention to business, he was advanced in the bank which employed him until now he held the position of First Cashier with a salary of \$6,000 a year and the full confidence of the Directors.

Among his friends was Walter Dean, a chess player of strength about equal to his own; consequently they were much together.

Walter had not had the disheartening experience of Howard in affairs of the heart and, as "fools rush in where Angels fear to tread," he had quite a number of lady acquaintances.

Among these, in particular, were the Misses Grey, bright, mirthful, much given to fun and harmless mischief, especially Mabel, who was by far his favorite.

Martha, the older of the two, was rather more sedate or matter-of-fact and less demonstrative than her sister.

They were the daughters of Judge Grey, a prominent lawyer, in affluent circumstances.

It was during a pause after their usual evening game of chess that Walter, who was fast becoming a slave to Mabel's eyes, opened his heart, in confidence, to Howard as to his interest in that quarter and invited him to accompany him on his next visit to the Grey mansion, that he might give an opinion on his choice.

A sneer which might have been construed into an expression of pity played about the corners of Howard's mouth as he answered, "No, that would be useless, for I can perceive that you are already beyond the reach of any good advice on my part. Oh, yes, I have no doubt but that she is an angel in your eyes, but I love you too well to be a party to any scheme like that."

Walter, who was unacquainted with Howard's unfortunate experience, started as if offended and, with a look of inquiry at the abruptness of his refusal, demanded an explanation. Howard immediately became conscious of his mistake and apologized for it, assuring him that there was nothing personal intended in his refusal or in his remark. He did not know the Misses Grey nor had he ever met them; there were reasons why he had foresworn all ladies' society, which, if but known to him, might palliate his seemingly unkind remarks, and that, if he cared to listen to a long story of his personal experience, he would relate it.

Of course Walter was only too anxious to learn anything in the history of the life of his sphynx-like friend and chess was thrown aside for the rest of the evening.

Howard then related the event of his first experience in love as before narrated, saying at the close that his first impulse on hearing Walter's confession of his love for Mabel was that, as he said before, he would not be a party to what he thought was the immolation of his best friend, his own personal experience still

rankling in his heart. "Pshaw," said Walter, "this is a very different case, if you only knew those girls, how honest, sincere and amiable they are, you would not feel that way about it." "Oh, yes," he answered, "I know, the old, old story." And the same feeling of pity for his friend's infatuation rose uppermost in his thoughts.

The subject was then dropped for the time, as Walter fully realized how hopeless it would be to change Howard's way of thinking, just then.

Not long after that Walter's visits to Howard became less and less frequent and it soon became apparent that the time was not far distant when he must altogether lose the company of Walter whom he loved as a brother.

It was at one of the calls that Walter now so seldom made that he casually remarked, "Do you know, Howard, that those Misses Grey are fast becoming excellent chess players? They seldom miss solving the chess problems in the Chess Column of the San Francisco *Chronicle* and Martha has composed some herself which have been accepted and published and for which she has received very complimentary notices. Here is one she calls "The Love Knot." It has never been published and the solution remains entirely with herself."

He handed it to Howard who scanned it over with that feeling of distrust that the wisest of the Trojans had when presented with the wooden horse and as containing possibilities of hidden dangers.

He could not resist the temptation, however, to look it over, little realizing that he was being approached at his most vulnerable point.

The name of the problem, itself, should have been a warning to him—"Love Knot," or what would have been better, "Love Not."

After dinner he settled down in his easy chair in his luxuriously furnished bachelor quarters and while donning his dressing-gown and slippers he congratulated himself upon his happy condition and pitied poor Walter as an unfortunate and misguided young man beyond any hope of recovery.

But he had not forgotten the problem, still oblivious of the elements of danger that it might possess for him according to his present views of love and matrimony.

He brought out his board and chessmen and set up the problem, fully expecting to solve it in a few moments, but hours passed and still found him poring over that puzzle. The more he pondered the further he seemed to be from the solution. He was at last forced to abandon it for that evening, as the lateness of the hour warned him that he must take needed rest for his business of the morrow; so he retired.

To rest? No, not to rest, for that problem haunted him in his wakeful hours and followed him in his dreams, when sleep at last did come.

He had visions of knights on chargers, castles on elephants' backs which stood heavily upon him and, above all, of a woman who was smiling at his discomfiture and baffled intellect.

He rose an hour earlier the next morning, thinking a rested brain might

cope with the problem more successfully, but, when the time came that it was imperatively necessary for him to go to the bank, the problem was still unsolved and he went breakfastless to business.

Time passed on and two weeks found that problem still unraveled and mocking him.

One evening Walter called upon him for a few moments (a few moments only, these days), when the problem came up for discussion.

"Miss Grey must have a great genius for chess," Howard remarked, "to be able to compose so brilliant a masterpiece. What kind of a game does she play over the board?"

"Well," said Walter, "she plays a much better game than I; she can give me odds."

Howard looked up surprised, for Walter was quite an equal match for himself.

Walter saw his opportunity and suggested that he might go with him some evening and see what he could do with her game.

"Well, well," he answered, "some evening soon, perhaps, but not this evening." I need hardly say that this "perhaps" meant something more, that it meant a certainty and a matter of time only.

Walter, who was reading between the lines, said, on leaving, "Well, I will come for you next Thursday evening which is their evening for reception; I will say nothing about your coming so if you do not go there will be nothing to explain."

He knew Howard well enough not to seem to be too anxious about his going.

Howard made no answer, which, at least, was not a refusal and Walter left with the intention of following up this advantage by coming for him at the appointed time, though with many misgivings as to his success.

MATED.

During the ensuing interval Howard had thought the matter over many times: at first he resolved not to go for he had foresworn all ladies' society; and would it not appear weak in him to change that resolution for so trivial a purpose? But the temptation, to him, was really very great and the desire to meet any one with such chess ability was hard to resist. And, again, thought he, "What an anomaly!—the idea of a woman having brains enough to play chess well."

This aspect of the case, at first, seemed improbable and amusing, but, then, there was that problem which he had not been able to solve staring him in the face and imperceptibly he found his scepticism softening. Yet the fact of her being a woman kept coming to the front; nevertheless, he was startled at the prospect of a subversion of all his well meant intentions, now so imminent.

He was drifting rapidly to the conclusion or determination not to meet Miss Grey at all when the thought occurred to him, "Why should I not eliminate the fact of her being a woman and meet her on the broad ground of science alone? It need not follow that I must fall in love with her, albeit we might come to be the best of friends."

And so the time passed on, wavering first in one direction and then in the other, until, when the fatal Thursday came, broad science had conquered and he had decided to go. When Walter called for him he was dressed and ready to accompany him.

There was a slight fluttering of his apprehensive conscience as they neared the house, which was still more in evidence when they had entered the drawing-room and sat there waiting for the appearance of the ladies.

The weather, which was sombre and thickening up as they left the club, promising rain before long, had fulfilled that promise sooner than expected and was now making itself manifest by pattering on the window-panes, as the wind, in gusts, blew it towards the house. In consequence they were the only visitors that evening.

In the library, off the back parlor, sat Judge Grey and his wife playing backgammon; the visitors' entrance had been so noiseless and the players so intent upon their game that their coming had not disturbed them, and, as they sat there watching the lovely picture of these two elderly people enjoying each other's society in the evening of life, they could not help feeling that there was something worth living for, after all.

"You are beaten," cried Mrs. Grey, as she made her final throw of the dice for that game; "There, three sixes, and I am out."

The old gentleman smiled and, patting his wife on the shoulder, said, "Yes, you are too smart for me; let us play another game."

"Too smart for him?" Yes, it will always be thus whenever there is a woman in it.

Just then a rustling of silk and a twittering of pleasant voices was heard upon the stairway, followed by the appearance of the Misses Grey, who were introduced to the newcomer. Howard had come feeling, not only somewhat on the aggressive, but with his mind made up to resist any temptation to indulge in anything more than was strictly scientific and matter-of-fact. He was also prepared for and expected to find in the Misses Grey and in Martha particularly all the evidences of that conscious superiority which is popularly attributed to what is known as the strong-minded woman, including short hair, a manish costume and a supercilious affectation of the "know it all."

"How," he had thought, "could a woman with such chess abilities, or any other evidence of mental superiority, be otherwise than aggressive?"

He was surprised and abashed at finding them to be the exact opposite of all this.

His discomfiture was complete and Cudlip, the common enemy, scored a point.

Howard had no occasion to stand amazed at Martha's wonderful beauty, liquid eyes, alabaster brow and marble shoulders; she had none of those wonderful charms, and still she was not homely, although one might wonder how it could be otherwise without some of those enchanting attributes.

Martha's great charms did not lie in outward show, but in an amiability of character and a quiet, self-possessed, humorous manner which commanded respect and admiration immediately and encouraged a desire to know more of her, with a feeling that she would prove more than ordinarily interesting on further acquaintance.

Howard in his earlier days had been looked upon as rather above the usual type of manly beauty. He possessed a certain *distingue* appearance which at once arrested the attention of the average society belle. This interest he accepted as his just due, yet when thrown in the presence of these young ladies and saw that they received him with apparent indifference, he was not chagrined, for he felt that they, especially Martha, were far superior to the average of his former lady acquaintances.

Martha, then, though not beautiful, according to the usual romantic standard was indeed very interesting, which was more likely to prove dangerous to his future peace of mind, if he but knew it. It did not occur to him, at this time

that a man might fall in love with a woman who was merely interesting and so, upon the broad plane of science, he felt serenely safe. It also did not occur to him that this acquaintance might extend beyond the point when one or the other might be vanquished at chess.

Friendships are often run on those lines and are closed out when they cease to be interesting that way, but I fear it was not to be so in this case.

As the storm continued without any sign of abatement and the probability of other visitors that evening lessened, it was suggested that they adjourn to the library where there was a bright, cheerful fire. The suggestion was acted upon and Howard soon found himself ensconced in their cosy family circle, and now for the first time in many years he experienced the soothing influence of home life, but he kept in view the fact that it was not his own home life, after all.

The subject of chess had not been mentioned as yet, so Walter, who had not forgotten the main reason for Howard's coming and also wished to have Mabel more to himself, suggested that Martha and Howard should commence a game.

The chessmen and board were produced, the men set up and a game was soon in progress.

Martha drew the first move and launched out by offering the "Queen's Gambit."

The game had not proceeded very far before Howard became nervously aware of Martha's accurate knowledge of the literature of that opening, but solaced himself with the thought that his time would come for gaining an advantage when the well known moves were exhausted and they should come down to original moves of their own, and this soon came about.

Both, now, deliberated much in making their moves and eleven o'clock came without any positive advantage on either side. In the meantime, so intent had they become that hardly a word was being spoken, but language is not really necessary in chess, for chess, like love, is one of those universal languages in which words are but clogs to the interchange of thought and where telepathy enables brain to read brain.

If these instances are but prophecies of what is to come when, through telepathy, words will not be needed at all, where would chess or love be? Strategy, now so essential in both games, would be useless.

But we are not there yet, so this game was being played on the same old lines, notwithstanding the silence that seemed to prevail for the time.

As there was a lull in the storm just then, outside, and it might take some time to finish their game, Martha proposed that it be called a draw or that it be finished at some other time, but Howard, who, like all chess-players, was exceedingly optimistic when he should be otherwise, felt that he held an advantage and was loth to call it a draw, so the other alternative was agreed upon. It meant another meeting, at least, always upon the broad plane of science, be it understood.

Cupid looked on smilingly and said, "Things are coming my way, surely."

The next day found Howard pondering over the position, as left, and the

many different combinations that were possible, and the following days found him similarly occupied, with his supposed advantage growing less all the time, until he began to think he had better have accepted a draw. Foolish man; it would have been much better if he had, and for more reasons than one.

The vision of that lovely, quiet little home came up before him many times and, without realizing why, he caught himself saying more than once, "Is it not a pity that that should be the exception and not the rule?"

Beware, young man, stick to your chess, for you are on dangerous ground and the road that leads to matrimony is paved with just such thoughts as those. (Do not accuse me of thinking that the road that leads to matrimony is like that other road which is paved with good intentions simply because they both do sometimes end at the same place.)

The following Thursday found him at the Greys' again without much persuasion on Walter's part, but there was no accommodating storm in evidence; there was no necessity for it as it had gotten in its deadly work the week before.

As there were many interruptions, it was impossible to finish the game that evening.

In order to avoid that possibility again, a different evening was agreed upon.

When a gentleman begins to visit a young lady on any other than the regular reception evening, it begins to look ominous, but we are on the broad plane of science, as I said before, and chess being a science, there can be no time inappropriate for its study.

That game was a draw, another was played and another with equal results, as time passed on.

But the contest did not end here, for evening after evening found Howard and Martha together and, as time passed, his thoughts, it must be confessed, drifted away from strict science, and one night, after a most enjoyable seance, he found himself wondering whether, sometime in the evening of his life, they might not be found playing chess together, happily married and with a family of their own about them, as he had witnessed in that first picture of Judge Grey and his wife playing back-gammon together in the library. But he immediately pulled himself together, imagining he could hear again those words, "You are too smart for me, my dear."

Little did he think, however, that Cupid was all this time saying, "I'm after him, I'm after him."

There could be but one ending to this state of affairs and it came sooner than one would believe.

A widower or an old bachelor, especially one whose heart is broken with unrequited love, often makes short shift in filling that painful void and, as Martha was eminently practical, with no nonsense about her and truly loved Howard, it did not take long for her to make up her mind when he proposed.

He was a little surprised at the seeming abruptness, or rather promptness, of her acquiescence for, like all lovers, he rather expected to hear some of the "This is so sudden" business, but he consoled himself with the thought that it was, perhaps, owing to her great love for him. Men are so conceited. I think

that most lovers who have been on the anxious seat for some time are surprised to find that it was so easy, after all.

Accordingly, they were soon married and settled in a home of their own, thus outstripping Walter and Mabel who seemed to have so much the start of them at first.

Their matrimonial life was uneventful, at first, Martha settling down in a matter of fact, undemonstrative sort of way; she was never given to any great exuberance of manner. Those whom she loved the most dearly might be the last to think so; even to Howard, whom she almost worshipped and loved with all the depth of woman's love, she seemed cold, at times, so that Howard, who had a slight tinge of romance in his nature, caught himself, now and again, drawing comparisons with Julia, who was overwhelmingly demonstrative, while it lasted, and often wondering whether she loved him or whether she might not be following out her idea of wifely duty only.

But he felt sure of one thing and that was that whatever her feelings were they were all for him and he never dreamed of the possibility of her caring for another. There was a time, afterwards, however, when he thought differently and with apparently good cause.

Whether he was biased by his former experience or not, one might not say, but when, on returning home from business every day, he did not meet with those demonstrations of affection that he had expected, a shade of disappointment would lower over him and, as time wore on, that feeling grew upon him and, like all morbid sensations, became exaggerated in his mind until it began to assume a reality that she might not really love him, after all.

"Trifles light as air seem to the jealous mind as strong as proof of Holy Writ," and he was fast drifting in that direction.

Martha during all this time was entirely unconscious of the state of Howard's mind and her seeming indifference worked upon him still more until he exclaimed to himself one day, "Is it possible that I have made another mistake?"

The more he dwelt upon the matter the more unhappy he became.

At last he determined to have an end to his doubts and put the thing to proof.

One evening shortly after that, as Walter was leaving the house, he asked him to meet him on the morrow at lunch down town as he wanted to consult him on a matter of importance; Walter promised to do so.

Walter who had noticed and mentioned to Mabel the change in Howard's manner, of late, supposed it was owing to some business anxiety; so, when Howard asked to consult with him, he was not much surprised, but when the next day, at lunch, after exacting a promise of secrecy, Howard hesitatingly commenced and laid bare all his thoughts and suspicions of the past months and his determination to adopt a plan which he had already conceived of settling the matter, once for all, Walter stood like one paralyzed.

If he believed that his friend had become suddenly demented, he could not have looked more pained or surprised, but having great confidence in Howard's opinion, generally, he made him repeat his statements more closely and then

asked him to tell him what plan he contemplated, at the same time protesting most earnestly that it was his own belief that there was some fearful mistake somewhere and expressing his full confidence that everything could be explained satisfactorily.

He also believed that Howard would regret the step he was about to take.

Walter was governed to some extent by the remembrance of the fact that it was through him that they had become acquainted and felt a sense of responsibility for what might happen.

Howard repeated what he had before related, with additional details calculated to convince Walter, and unfolded his plans, asking for his collaboration and assistance.

Walter was so dazed that he did not fully comprehend what Howard had said or meant and asked what proof he held that Martha had been untrue to him.

"I did not say that," said Howard, "nor did I mean to convey the idea that she had been untrue; I merely intended to intimate that she might not really love me, although she herself might believe she did, whereas the fact is, possibly, that her feelings are of regard or high esteem, which is a very different thing."

Howard believed that it was not only possible, but that it was often true, that parties marry, under the impression that they love each other when, really, the fire of true love has not been kindled at all, and although such people may pass through a whole lifetime happily enough, perhaps, with a greater average of comfort than if they worshipped each other, since jealousy and great expectancy, those frequent disturbers of sensitive households, are eliminated, still, it was not sufficient for his happiness.

It is believed by the romantic that one never truly loves but once; this is a great mistake, for the heart, that great reservoir of love, is always overflowing and cannot be checked. Remove the object of one's affections and there will be plenty to take its place. Moore, whose experience and opportunities were great and, therefore, should be considered reliable, says:

"When away from the one that we hold the most dear,

We've but to make love to the one that is near."

Notwithstanding Howard's liberal way of thinking, it was humiliating for him to feel that, perhaps, he was being made use of for matrimonial purposes, and he felt that it was necessary for his peace of mind that this should be settled, and upon this he was fully bent.

His plan, as unfolded to Walter, was this:

Under pretence of being injured in an accident, runaway, for instance, he was to be brought home in a carriage apparently severely hurt. Walter was to be conveniently there; Doctor sent for; arm broken and possible internal injury; then laid up for some weeks.

The object of this was to see what effect it would have upon Martha and thereby judge of the depth of her affection for him.

When Walter heard all this he was greatly incensed. He denounced Howard's suspicions as unwarranted and cruel and declined to assist or have anything

to do with the affair whatever except to stand firmly by Martha under any circumstances.

Howard simply smiled at what he thought was Walter's ingenuous nature and answered, "Well, I cannot blame you for your way of thinking; it does not, however, change my belief nor my intention to at least bring it to a test. To live on in this way is a torture to me, for I do love her devotedly, and if she emerges from this test it will remain for me to humbly implore her forgiveness and prove to her by my actions that she is dearer to me than ever. I shall have to get someone else to assist me, and all I ask of you is that you remain true to the promise of secrecy which you have already given me."

Walter remained for a long time thinking, so long that Howard began to show signs of impatience and a desire to close the interview.

Walter found himself in a serious dilemma.

To acquiesce in Howard's request and be a party to such a scheme, if discovered and not understood, might lay him open to the suspicion of sharing in Howard's belief and be the means of his becoming estranged from Mabel, who would, under any circumstances, side with her sister.

On the other hand, being under bonds of secrecy, with no power to shape matters without being suspected by Howard, then to see a stranger take the part that Howard wished him to assume, might be the means of starting an unnecessary scandal reaching no one could tell how far into the future.

At last he chose what seemed to him the lesser horn of the dilemma, and promised to assist him, feeling sure of the result and trusting to luck that his motives might not be misconstrued by the ladies.

But can you imagine the distress it caused Walter when he considered he must try to keep so important a secret from Mabel who knew or was likely to divine his very thoughts?

Mabel had already assumed that ascendancy which does not generally come 'til after the knot is tied. She had anticipated her marital rights, so much so, that he had come to have a wholesome dread of incurring her displeasure and it was even then easy to prophesy who was to wear the breeches.

Yet he did not deplore this and was happy enough; the time had not come, as it does in after years, when he would feel it as a yoke about his neck.

Mabel was the opposite of Martha in this as well as in many other ways.

Walter would never have to complain of want of responsiveness on Mabel's part, for although her affection for him was no deeper than Martha's for Howard, yet she was all exuberance and demonstration, aggressively so, and to a degree very apt to become irksome and develop after a while into the nagging state, which is the case in five-tenths of domestic households.

I say five-tenths because I think it is about a stand-off for both sides.

Most wives, in exact proportion to their real intelligence, have an inward consciousness of being omniscient, while most husbands, in exact disproportion to their real power, fancy themselves omnipotent in their own households, whereas, to a close observer, it is painfully evident that they are the most servile of creatures. Female strategy is accountable for all this.

Whatever was to transpire in this case, however, there is no doubt but that for the next few weeks, or until the final denouement, Walter was to be on nettles.

Before separating, the details of Howard's plans were fully discussed, as well as the steps to be taken when the time came to act.

After a few days everything was arranged, and one afternoon there came a violent ringing at the door bell. Martha happened to be in the front hall at the time and opened the door.

What was her dismay when she saw a carriage outside from which was being helped an apparently injured man, whom she immediately recognized as her husband.

She screamed for Walter who was conveniently near, and then, for the first time in her life, fainted away.

The shock had been too great for her.

She was cared for by the servants who had gathered around and carried into the house and upstairs to her room.

Walter anxiously nudged Howard, at the same time looking at him deprecatingly, but Howard whispered to him, "She will soon revive; there is no danger, but look after her closely."

Howard then allowed himself to be taken upstairs to his room, and Dr. Blake, also in the plot, was sent for.

By this time Martha had recovered somewhat under restoratives. While regaining consciousness, she called out for George many times, asking, "Where am I? What horrible dream is this?" and demanded to be taken to Howard immediately.

She was informed, cautiously, as to the accident, how a span of horses attached to a carriage had run away and how Howard in his endeavor to save the occupants had rushed to their assistance, seized the horses by the bridle and had been dragged some distance, when he was thrown down and trampled under foot. Others then rushed in in time to save him from what seemed certain death; how Dr. Blake had been sent for and was now caring for him, setting his broken arm, etc.

Mabel had been summoned and sat there tearfully listening to this trumped-up story and, like Martha, believing it all.

She remembered afterwards that she did not think at the time that Walter took sufficient interest in the matter or that his alarm was equal to the occasion, and also that she thought it strange that Walter should happen to be present at that time of day, away from his business, a circumstance that had never happened before.

The events, as just narrated, were not all disclosed at once to Martha; a tempered statement, with a view to her nervous condition, was related by Walter in answer to her demands for information. The rest was supplemented by the maid who added her own surmises to what had already been told.

As soon as Dr. Blake was through caring for Howard, Martha, at her earnest solicitation, was permitted to go to his bedside.

She rushed impetuously toward him notwithstanding the Doctor's warning to be careful lest she should disturb the splints upon his broken arm.

But nothing could restrain her; she threw herself upon the bed and, with her arms clasped about Howard's neck, sobbed like a child.

Mabel stood by, pale with emotion, clasping Walter's hand, only too thankful that it was not her own dear one.

Howard, when he saw how seriously Martha was affected, began to have many apprehensions, for, although the success of his scheme thus far had been in one sense, exceedingly gratifying, he realized that it was possible he had made a serious mistake after all and already became nervously fearful lest he should not be able to go through the rest and at the same time retain the respect and love of Martha.

Dr. Blake was now about to leave and, while making a final examination to see that the splints and bandages were all right, Martha cautioned him to be careful and asked Howard whether his arm pained him greatly.

Alas for poor Howard! He did have a pain, though not in his arm, but in a far worse place; it lodged in his guilty conscience where it would rankle and grow worse all the time.

Dr. Blake then wrote a prescription, which, he said, was intended to allay any pain or fever that might arise and gave instructions to be followed until his next visit.

Martha made note of all directions to be followed.

As he was leaving he offered to send a trained nurse, but Martha would not listen to anything of the kind, saying that no one should care for him but herself.

On the way to the front door he said to Walter, "The rascal; I had a great mind to leave him some very bitter medicine to be taken at short intervals, just to punish him a little;" and fearful that Walter might think that what he was doing was lacking in dignity, he added, "I am really ashamed of the whole business." Since he was running up a large bill, however, the sincerity of this last statement might well be doubted.

There were many cards and inquiries sent up from the door that evening by friends who had heard of the accident, to which answers were given that Mr. Howard was doing well, that the Doctor had great hopes of a speedy recovery and had left orders that no visitors should be allowed to see him for the present.

After a while Walter and Mabel left, but when they were alone, on the way home, Mabel clung closer than usual to Walter and on parting cautioned him to be very careful, for her sake.

When Martha and Howard were alone, Martha, who had restrained her feelings somewhat until then, burst into tears, and drawing nearer to Howard, told how thankful she was that he was spared to her, and trembled as she spoke of the possibilities of his having been taken away in that terrible accident.

He was the only one she loved and the only one she could ever love.

Howard's guilty soul trembled, but not so much with emotion as at the mischief he had wrought.

If he had had the moral courage to confess his mistake then, she would have condoned his fault and passed it by, and thus saved him much distress in the future. There are many who would not flinch from the cannon's mouth, but who, in matters of duty and moral obligation are arrant cowards.

Martha slept little that night; she watched his every move, bathed his head, which, he said, pained him, and followed religiously every instruction Dr. Blake had left.

He never stirred but that she was at his side to see if he needed anything.

The next day Howard was better and after the Doctor had examined him carefully he pronounced him out of danger, but, on leaving, gave minute instructions for the next twenty-four hours, lest there should be a relapse.

This routine continued without much change for several days.

Martha never left the house during that time, for she would allow no one but herself to wait upon him, and every day brought forth new manifestations of her great love.

At the end of the week the Doctor allowed him to walk about the house and in a few days more to ride in the Park. Martha always accompanied him.

One day Howard said the Doctor had informed him that he would take off the splints the next day, and in three days more he could go down to the Bank and resume business.

"Why," said she, "that would be the 27th, which is the anniversary of our wedding day; all my good luck seems to come on that day, for it was on that date that Walter brought you to our house to play chess, only to play chess, you remember," and she gave him a kiss. "Stop, stop," said he, "Chess is not a kissing game, you know."

"Well, we made it one, did we not?" she said as she kissed him again.

He was glad to get down to the Bank once more, for every day added to the torture he was undergoing in trying to carry out this deception, but, although he had received his punishment right along, he was not to get off with this alone, for there was still more for him in the days to come. This, however, was not the Doctor's bill, although that was no small item in the matter of retribution.

After a while everything fell into the usual routine of their domestic life and the events of the last few weeks were fast being relegated to the past.

CHECKMATED.

Howard was happier, in one way, that is, in the sense that he was now sure of Martha's affection and disinterested love, but he felt that the price he had paid was too high for the knowledge attained, especially when he saw that it was an unnecessary extravagance, not forgetting the immense risk he had run of lowering himself in her estimation beyond repair; consequently he was ill at ease during all this time, while the impulse to confess grew stronger and stronger every day within him, but his moral courage ever failed him.

He fully believed she would have freely forgiven him, but the dread of losing her high esteem made him waver.

He had long since felt that he had impaired his own self respect.

There was another phase of the matter still more important to him, which was that, suppose she did, in her great love for him, forgive it all, how could he forgive himself? For, as Terrence says, "We may be acquitted by our enemies even, but how shall we acquit ourselves."

But the time had come when he, forced by his conscience, must throw himself upon her mercy.

He had talked with Walter several times about the matter and Walter, being well aware of his state of mind, had often urged him to make a clean breast of the whole affair.

He had his own reasons, besides those of Justice, for this; he was in constant dread of exposure and he knew well that if Mabel should discover his iniquity she would not be as indulgent with him as Martha might be with Howard and would visit condign punishment upon him for a long time to come.

The thought of her retribution, therefore, made him tremble.

His sufferings, though of a different nature, were none the less distressing.

Living thus upon the feathered edge of discovery and its consequences, it was not strange that he should be tortured by his fears and exaggerate every trivial circumstance that seemed to point in that direction.

She frequently made remarks inadvertently which, at first blush, seemed to carry a sure meaning, but, since they were not followed up, the subdued calm would continue as usual.

Mabel, like all women, was intuitive, without knowing why and, without having up till then given expression to her thoughts, had a lingering impression that there was something strange about the whole affair.

Walter's reticence and lack of proper interest attracted her attention. She often noticed that Howard was more thoughtful than usual or more than there

was any necessity for, considering that he was getting along so well with his injuries, but then he might have business annoyances of which she was unaware.

One day Walter was greatly startled when Mabel unexpectedly said, "Who were the ladies Howard rescued so nobly? Why have they not called or sent to inquire about him? It seems very strange to me."

Walter, who was chronically on the alert for any emergency these days, colored up and stammered out feebly, "Why, I don't know, I never thought of that; it might be ingratitude." But, noticing that Mabel's sharp eyes were full upon him, and realizing how absurd his answer had been, he recovered himself and said, boldly, "Oh, yes, I remember now; I understood they were just passing through the city on their way to Europe and we will, no doubt, hear from them in time."

Mabel said nothing, but Walter felt that she was not fully convinced and that some better explanation must be made, sooner or later, and realized he had made an escape that was not at all satisfactory to himself.

So the time passed during which he felt as though he were the exemplification of all the Greek Mythology; he was Ixion, upon the wheel of torture which never stopped; Sisyphus, forever rolling up the stone of falsehood which always rolled back; Tantalus, reaching out for truth which he dared not touch; Damocles, with the sword of retribution ever hanging over him. Worse than all, the sharp all-seeing eyes were constantly on him.

Things could not go on this way much longer and one day, while talking the matter over with Howard, his friend said to him, "I have made up my mind to have this thing settled, once for all, but I would like to make a test of her feelings. If it seems propitious, at present, I will then go on and make all the required explanation. I would do so at once but I would rather the way were, if possible, first a little smoothed.

"Now, I thought if you would broach the subject to them both, in a way that would not be too pronounced; for instance, relate a story you had heard, running on somewhat parallel lines, you might then draw from them an expression of their opinion. From your report I should be able to judge whether it were best to approach the subject now or wait until some more propitious opportunity should present itself.

"I have become so nervous over the matter that I feel sure that, upon the least excuse, I shall be all at sea and end by making a fool of myself or, rather, more of a fool of myself, which is unnecessary; whereas you, who are not so much involved, could be cooler and better able to stand them off."

Walter did not know; in fact, he had serious doubts on the subject. It might be all right enough as far as Martha was concerned, but with Mabel it was a very different matter, especially since he felt that, as accessory before and after the fact, he was quite as seriously compromised as Howard. At least Mabel would think so.

Walter's first impulse was to decline to have anything more to do with Howard's schemes or to make any more tests whatever, but the prospect of having the burden, which was growing heavier day by day, lifted from his guilty conscience

strangled that noble impulse at its birth. Like the child, convinced against its will, that castor oil was best for him, though hard to take, he gladly jumped at the opportunity and agreed to do his best, although, feeling his chances of becoming rattled were quite equal to Howard's, he did so with many misgivings.

It was understood that Walter should broach the subject gently in the presence of both ladies and, if all seemed propitious, that is, if Martha manifested any spirit of leniency towards such a supposititious wretch as he was, to go on and tell the whole story.

Walter was not long in finding an opportunity, which happened when Martha, Mabel and himself were together one day.

Women are intuitive if not instinctive, it is said, but it was owing to neither of these attributes that they became so suddenly interested and convinced that something serious or something of more than ordinary importance was coming.

Walter's altered and serious manner was quite sufficient for Mabel's sharp eyes and before he had gotten very far she cried out, "Oh, what are you trying to give us? Out with the truth! What is it that lies so heavily on your mind? Is it an invitation to the Grand Opera, or is it only to the Circus?"

"Mabel," said he, "it is something of far more consequence than that, it is something that concerns Martha and Howard." Curiosity and alarm now seized both the women, as shown plainly by their actions.

Martha's eyes began to fill, for since that alleged terrible accident she was ever on the *qui vive* for some direful catastrophe.

This looked favorable, for he thought the tears were a good foundation upon which to build his hopes of leniency. He thought he was getting along very well at first, but soon began to flounder as he got into deeper water and to realize that the task he had undertaken was far too complicated to manage successfully under the fire of their searching eyes.

It must be understood that when we say *their* searching eyes we mean, more particularly, Mabel's.

In short, he became so completely muddled up, as they say, that he concluded it best to take the bull by the horns and break the ice at once, which, forthwith, he did.

Without further circumlocution he blurted out, "Well, you know that accident to Howard?" "Yes, yes," they both answered at once, "what of it?" "Why, it was all a fake, don't you know." "A fake; what is that?" they queried, drawing nearer to him, while Martha's face grew anxious, lest it might be a new and more painful phase of the accident that Howard had kept from her so far.

All thoughts of his original plan to break the news gently were banished and he gave them a full history of the whole affair from beginning to end, closing with an appeal in Howard's favor.

It was curious to watch the various expressions that played about their faces during his recital.

Both were, of course, indignant at first. Martha softened as Walter pro-

ceeded, but Mabel not only retained her indignation, but grew vindictive as Walter unfolded their duplicity.

"And you," said she, "had the nerve to come here as usual, while a party to so disgraceful a scheme? It would serve you both right if we never spoke to either of you again!"

Walter was really alarmed lest she might carry that threat into execution, but he did not know women very well or he would have laughed in his sleeve at so unlikely a possibility.

As Walter continued, Martha gradually relented more and more and, at the end, to their surprise, she said feelingly, "Poor fellow, how much he must have suffered."

"Suffered!" exclaimed Mabel, and, with a glance at Walter which was intended to be fierce and portentous, added, "I'd make him suffer, yes, ten times more than he has already." And Walter fully believed that she was in earnest.

Martha was more reasonable and saw in it all the strongest evidence of Howard's love.

"There is no true love without jealousy, anxiety or suspicion," said she, "and I not only forgive him but he is dearer to me than ever. Just think of his taking all that trouble to find out whether I loved him or not; surely it is much better than indifference, which might have been the case, for we now know that we do love each other. Yet, after all, he does need a little disciplining, does he not? We must have a little fun at his expense."

"I should say that he did," replied Mabel. "He should have, not only a little disciplining, but severe punishment. I think you are letting him off easy and giving him too much encouragement."

"Any one would think you were speaking of the lower animals, to hear you talk," said Walter.

"Well, they are the lower animals, when they resort to ways like that," she said, winking slyly at Martha at the same time.

After discussing the subject some time longer, Martha, who had been busily thinking and outlining a plan for Howard's chastisement, called upon Mabel and Walter to hear what parts they were to take in it.

"In the first place," said she to Walter, "as Howard exacted a bond of secrecy to which you seem to have assented readily enough, I am going to exact the same from you for myself; and, secondly, since you have done a great deal of white lying for him, I shall expect more or less from you also, promising at the same time not to add any more to your already overlaid conscience than is absolutely necessary."

To which Mabel interpolated, "I do not see how you can do much more to compromise your already tarnished integrity and self respect."

Walter agreed to Martha's demands; indeed, it would have been disastrous to his own hopes of forgiveness had he done anything else.

The next thing for Walter to do was to inform Howard, when he saw him, that he had sounded them both cautiously and satisfied himself it was better to

drop the matter for the present, at the same time holding out some hopes for the future when a more favorable opportunity should present itself.

Her object in doing this was to throw Howard off his guard that he might not suspect anything, as well as to keep him in doubt about her forgiveness until she had had an opportunity to have some fun with him, as she called it, not thinking what might be fun for them might be a very serious matter for him, especially since the merciless Mabel was to have a hand in it.

Howard returned home that evening full of anxiety as to the result of Walter's mission, but, as Martha received him the same as usual, he concluded that Walter had not, as yet, interviewed her.

When he saw Walter and heard the result of his effort, he felt still more uneasy, for it did seem so hopeless. Yet he was forced to acquiesce in Walter's suggestion, that "the matter should be dropped for the present."

All Howard's questioning did not give him the least encouragement.

"I tell you what," said Walter, "I do not believe they would think it possible that you could do so cruel a thing."

Walter, noticing Howard's distress during the recital, was not only fully loyal to his present employer, but was taking a little revenge on his own account for being forced by Howard to be a party in the first place.

After a while it was noticeable that Walter and Martha had taken to playing chess together and, as time passed, this became more and more frequent until they did so almost every evening that he was there, while Howard was left to amuse himself by looking on or in some other way; he also noticed that Walter, who usually came with Mabel, now came more frequently alone, and that Martha evidently looked for his coming with interest.

All this did not attract Howard's attention so much but, when he came home one day to lunch and found Martha absent and, on ringing for her maid, was informed by Janet that "Madame had gone out with Mr. Dean and had left word she would not be home to lunch, and for him not to wait for her," he felt it was beyond his comprehension.

He then called to mind the chess games, his coming there alone, and the evident interest she seemed to take in Walter's company, and he began to think that Walter's relationship, as yet, did not warrant his being so attentive.

His first impulse was to ask for an explanation, but the terrible mistake he had previously made warned him not to act too hastily, for, after going to that extreme, what position might he not be placed in if, after all, these peculiar circumstances were capable of full explanation.

She had not, as a matter of fact, gone with Walter to lunch, but was at her father's house, wondering with Mabel as to Howard's state of mind.

When they thought it was fully time for Howard to be home, Mabel went around to reconnoitre. She pretended to be surprised that Martha was away and more so that Walter was with her.

She noticed Howard's anxiety but was cautious in expressing any decided

opinion. She rather treated the matter lightly and "hoped they would enjoy themselves."

She then returned to headquarters and reported progress. Martha almost relented when she heard what effect all this was having upon Howard, but she was not the one to hesitate when her mind was made up; besides she had Mabel's firmness to encourage her, it must be remembered.

After a few weeks of this sort of procedure, Walter continuing his attentions, increasing them rather, all the time. Howard had grown thoroughly despondent and Martha was becoming nervous lest she was carrying the thing too far; but the time for the grand climax was very near and she therefore restrained her emotion.

Martha, in the meantime, had not been home to lunch for several days. This was the straw that broke the camel's back and Howard determined to have some explanation that very evening and learn the worst.

Mabel had dropped in on Howard occasionally, at lunch time, always keeping Martha posted as to his state of mind. She noticed, this day, that Howard was more uneasy and manifested a spirit of determination which had been apparent before, but not so pronounced, and, moreover, he, for the first time, opened his mind to her, in confidence, regarding Walter's attention to Martha and his purpose to have some understanding that very evening.

Mabel saw in this a probable frustration of their plans, which were not quite ripe for the grand climax intended: one day more was all they needed and it was imperative that Howard should be kept quiet that much longer. She therefore pooh-poohed at all he had said and tried to talk him out of what she called his absurd notions, but it was useless. "This very evening," said he firmly, "I shall have this talk with her; I cannot comprehend the position she is taking as regards Walter."

"For Heaven's sake," cried Mabel, "do you realize you are talking about Martha? What would Papa say of this? You are certainly demented and poor Walter, too; my Walter! How dare you insinuate that he would be guilty or think of doing anything that was ungentlemanly?"

"Poor dear boy, my Walter," and she burst into tears at the idea: but Howard was obdurate and determined. Finding that it was useless to argue with him, she left the house seemingly in high dudgeon. She repaired immediately to where Martha was waiting and related all that had transpired. "It's all up," said Mabel, "unless we can do something to tide this over until to-morrow evening."

"I will see to that," said Martha, "you leave it to me." That evening, at dinner, Howard was very sedate and there was little said on either side.

Martha, aware of what was coming, had provided for a suspension of hostilities by complaining of a severe headache, behind which she intended to take refuge, if necessary.

Of course she had tears, that unfailing resource of women, but this seemed too hypocritical and unpardonable. The headache did not interfere with How-

ard's attempt to carry out his purpose, so when they went upstairs and she had thrown herself upon the lounge, still suffering with her ailment, he commenced.

"My dear," said he, "there is something that I want to talk with you about, something that has caused me much uneasiness," but, noticing a look of anxiety in her eyes, he added, "though I have no doubt but that it can be easily explained." At this she looked up, thoroughly surprised and said, inquiringly, "Well?" He then went on hesitatingly, "You see, you know,—that is, don't you think Walter is—that is, sometimes, is rather too attentive to you, considering he is engaged to Mabel and, as yet, is no relation? Don't you think there is danger of creating talk (he was about to say scandal, but checked himself in time) among our friends?"

She looked at him, utterly amazed. "Why, Howard! Poor Walter! How could you think of such a thing? Why, he seems to me just like a brother." "Yes," thought Howard to himself, "too much like a brother to suit me."

Martha begged Howard to say no more then, for her head distressed her fearfully and she feared this would make it worse.

"Oh, Howard," she exclaimed, "this is cruel, you are certainly wrong and it hardly seems worth so much anxiety on your part. Let us drop the subject until to-morrow evening when I will give you an explanation that will be perfectly satisfactory."

Howard was taken aback at this failure to bring about a crisis; he felt annoyed that she seemed to attach little importance to what was so vital to his happiness. He yielded, however, to her request, for he did not wish to appear brutal or unreasonable when she was evidently suffering. The subject was dropped for the time being, though with a poor grace, and not without a full determination on Howard's part to renew it the following evening.

The next morning, when he left, her head was still aching, tho, she assured him, she felt much better; but she noticed his parting kiss was colder than usual.

She longed to throw her arms about his neck and explain all, but the time was not ripe.

She watched him, as he left the house, to the corner where he took the cable car for the office.

She stood there soliloquizing for some time after his departure.

"Only to think," thought she, "what I have all along supposed was indifference was assumed on his part for fear of hurting my feelings; noble, thoughtful, generous man that he is; he does not deserve this treatment, but 'All's well that ends well,' and I will make up for it when this affair is all over."

She did not know that his assumed indifference was owing more to a wholesome dread of making another great mistake than to any great nobility of soul on his part, and that man is human or, rather, inhuman and not always the grand creature we give him credit for.

All that long, anxious day his thoughts kept continually reverting to that one subject; he would frequently find himself imagining all sorts of hypothetical

positions in which he would endeavor to show some reason or excuse for the apparent change in her manner.

He would, at one time, blame himself, but, in view of the fact that she was not, as yet, aware of what he had recently attempted and of the positive proof she had so lately shown of her abiding interest in him during his supposed injury, it seemed hardly tenable.

It was all a mystery: The thought of really blaming or criticising her motives he never entertained for a moment, and yet it seemed very strange.

At other times he would conclude that her attitude was a creature of his own overwrought imagination, and then again she had said she would explain this evening.

"If so, what could there be to explain? Why should there be necessity for it? Why not do so at once, before he left?"

All this pointed to the possibility that there was something to explain.

Questions like these harrassed him all day and, as evening approached, he somehow settled into the conviction that there was something he ought to know and his determination to push matters, headache or no headache, grew stronger and stronger until the time came for his return home. He went with a heavy heart.

"Oh," thought he, "what would I not give to see the sun come out bright and clear again? For then we could be so happy." In view of the possibility of everything coming out right, he endeavored to assume a cheerful exterior and to act as though he had every confidence in the world in her; for the old dread of making another *faux-pas* like the last, was ever present in his mind.

On reaching home (Home? Alas, it seemed no longer like home to him), he mechanically donned a dress suit, as was his wont, and passed directly to the dining-room, expecting to find Martha there waiting for him. Instead, upon his plate on the table lay a note: he recognized the handwriting immediately; it was Martha's.

Pale as death and trembling with emotion, he broke the seal and read. She had commenced by writing, "My dear George," as of old, but, in view of what was to follow, had changed it as being too familiar for the occasion and addressed him as Mr. Howard.

MR. HOWARD,

Once so dear to me and still my friend, I hope :

It must have become apparent to you that my feelings toward you have undergone a change.

I have for some time felt that in marrying you I made the mistake of my life. I thought then that I loved you and have tried conscientiously to live up to that belief, but I am convinced that it was friendship only.

I have now met, in Walter, the man I love and the only one that I can ever love.

We have left together. Poor Mabel; comfort her all in your power for my sake.

Good by for ever,

MARTHA.

If a thunderbolt had struck him he could not have been more astonished.

As he sat there almost paralyzed, he exclaimed, "Fool that I was; I might have seen the storm coming long since, had I but heeded the warnings so plentiful around me every day."

He was not angry, for anger comes only to those who are weak and can yet solace themselves with a desire for revenge.

He was hurt and in his inmost soul, it seemed, beyond repair.

"I was not worthy of her love," thought he; "She was far beyond my deserv-
ing." A flood of self-recrimination possessed him as he thought of the despicable manner in which he had acted, of late, towards her and, although he supposed she might not know of that, he yet felt her pitying eyes piercing him through and through.

Janet had placed the soup before him, but it remained untasted so long that she said, "You do not care for soup; shall I bring in the roast?" "Yes, yes," said he, affecting a smile and an indifference he did not feel, for he did not want the servants to witness his distress.

Janet removed the untasted food and, as she passed out, a merry twinkle was in her eye, for she had overheard the ladies planning and knew what was on the tapis.

She soon returned with the roast and placed it before him. Mechanically he took the carver and cut off a portion for himself, pretending an interest while Janet was serving the vegetables, which she did lavishly, although she knew he would not touch them; after which she stood there waiting further orders. Looking up and seeing her, he said, "You may go, Janet," and, as she was leaving the room, added, "You need not return until I ring for you."

As soon as she had left, he dropped his knife and fork and resumed his thoughtful attitude. He looked around the room where there was so much to remind him of Martha. Beside the vacant place at the table was a bouquet of her favorite flowers, chrysanthemums, which he had sent to her that afternoon. He looked at them sadly: "They are winter flowers," said he, "fitting emblems of the winter in my heart and home this day; never more will she sit there to cheer me with her pleasant smiles and greet me with loving words on my return from the daily drudgery of business life."

There he sat, disconsolate and forlorn, ruminating upon his once happy existence for so long that Janet, who was listening impatiently for the sound of his bell, had almost determined to make some excuse for entering, when there came a ring at the front door and immediately after that Mabel came bounding into the room.

Howard, as he sat there, his dinner untouched and with Martha's note clutched and crumpled in his hand, was a very picture of despair.

Mabel was a born actress and this was her opportunity of displaying it.

"For Heaven's sake, Howard, what is the matter?" cried she, pretending to be alarmed; "Where is Martha? and your dinner untouched, too? What is the matter?" she repeated still more emphatically. "Do tell me, Howard, dear; do tell me or I shall go wild."

He said nothing but held out his hand in which he held the crumpled note.

Mabel took the note and spread it out upon the table to smooth the wrinkles, pretending to read, for she already knew its contents.

"My God!" she gasped, at the same time picking up a glass of water which she placed to her lips as though fearful she was going to faint; "And Walter, too, the wretch!" she muttered in suppressed tones.

Pondering over it for a short time, seemingly to grasp its terrible import and feigning great distress, she said, after betraying a sufficient amount of agony and vindictiveness, "What are you going to do about it?" emphasizing the *you*, as though her mind had been made up.

"I don't know," said he "that I want to do anything about it, if I could."

She then proposed that they go and talk it over with Papa.

Howard was so dazed and in such a listless state of mind that he was indifferent as to what he did, so he followed her meekly to her father's house.

The house looked much as usual, but there was a light in the front hall and a single light in each drawing room. No one was in sight except in the front parlor where sat a fashionable caterer, for whose presence there was a reason. Howard was too much occupied with his troubles to notice any incongruity whatever; even certain floral decorations passed unnoticed.

They went directly into the library. Fortunately, Judge Grey was there alone.

"Oh, Papa," said Mabel, bursting into tears, "What do you think has happened? Martha and Walter have eloped."

"How? When? Where to?" he exclaimed. "Tell me all about it immediately." And while Mabel was sobbing as if her heart would break, she had Job Trotter's ability to control her emotion and tears. Howard, in deference to Mabel's utter inability to continue in her state of mind, went on to relate the events that had occurred at his home and handed him the note Martha had left, for him to read.

After Howard had finished, Judge Grey, who was matter of fact and generally not very demonstrative, did not seem, as Howard afterwards said, to be so much affected as one might expect, considering Martha was his daughter; but if Howard had noticed it at the time, he would have attributed it rather to the fact that Judge Grey was a lawyer and eminently practical in his manner of thinking than to any lack of proper feeling on his part.

Judge Grey remained silent for some time and then said, "This is a dreadful blow to me and will be to mother," as he always called Mrs. Grey. "I do not know how she ever will be able to bear it; her life has always been so happy and free from trouble of any kind and, as for you, poor fellow, I feel very sorry for you; it is all so undeserved."

Howard felt a twinge of conscience when he said that, for he did not know that Judge Grey was poking fun at him, being in the plot with the rest.

"I do not know what to advise you," he said further. "You will be entitled to a divorce, of course; it is your right."

He was going on to say more in that direction, but Howard raised his hand

deprecatingly, "No, no," said he, "I could never think of such a thing; the fault might be entirely my own; I did love her and I love her yet; I will never consent to that unless she wishes it herself."

And for the first time in all this trouble he broke down completely, so much so, that even Mabel would have been satisfied with the punishment he was undergoing at their hands.

In the meantime Mabel had slipped from the room unnoticed.

While Howard was uttering this last sentiment, the door opened and Mrs. Grey entered, when, as if to save her feelings, Judge Grey, looking towards Howard, pressed a finger upon his lips as a hint for him to say nothing.

"Come," said Mrs. Grey, "Come to the drawing-room; you two have been talking here long enough."

When she had passed out of hearing, Judge Grey said, "Poor, dear woman; she does not know of this; it will be a terrible blow to her; let us say nothing about it at present that she may be spared as long as possible."

"Let us go into the parlor," he added rising and taking Howard's arm as if to insist upon it, whereupon they passed out into and along the hall towards the front drawing-room.

What was Howard's surprise at finding the whole house brightly illuminated and hearing the sound of voices, indicative of the presence of many strangers.

At this point Judge Grey unaccountably disappeared, leaving him alone at the entrance to the drawing room.

He was still more amazed at finding the room filled with ladies and gentlemen, like himself in full dress. (He always dressed for dinner at home and still wore that apparel, neglecting to change it when he went out in the street.) The rooms were decorated with flowers which Howard now remembered to have caught a glimpse of when he entered the house, not long before.

In the back drawing-room, hanging from the chandelier was a large marriage bell made of moss and orange blossoms, beneath which stood the Rev. Mr. Adams dressed in clerical robes.

Upon one side of him stood Walter and another gentleman, who proved afterwards to be his best man.

Just then a string band commenced to play the Wedding March from *Lohengrin*, and a stir upon the stairs announced the approach of a bridal procession.

First came Mr. Grey and Mabel, followed by Mr. Dean, Walter's father, and Mrs. Grey; then came six young girls carrying wreaths of flowers and singing a wedding hymn. Entering the room they marched towards the wedding bell.

As they came near, Walter stepped forward and, taking Mabel's hand, they took their position before the clergyman. The music stopped for a moment and the ceremony was performed which made Mabel and Walter one.

Up to this time Howard had stood dazed, bewildered, as if in a dream, in which any incongruous thing that happened might seem reasonable enough.

As the wedding party entered the room and the company present moved in their direction, Howard had gone with the rest, but, as the guests knew who he was, they opened the way for him and he soon found himself close to the family

group, among whom he, for the first time, recognized Martha, dressed in the same gown in which she was married the year before.

She had kept in the background until then, but was now in the bridal group with the others, pretending she did not see him.

When he saw the ceremony, his amazement was indescribable and his bewilderment increased to such a degree that he caught himself more than once wondering whether or not he was dreaming.

He had had strange dreams a-plenty: he had seen his great-grandmother turn into a most beautiful young girl without the aid of cosmetics, and a man turned into a monkey without any process of evolution, and he had accepted these phenomena as a matter of course. But now, although he saw an equally marvelous incongruity, he was sufficiently conscious to realize that there must be some explanation.

He was wandering on in this aimless manner like one enveloped in a dense fog, when he suddenly saw creeping through the mists that gathered about him, a full perception of what was going on. He also saw that he was the victim of a trick in which all had taken part and that he had been outwitted at his own game.

When he fully realized this and that he must face them all, acknowledge his stupidity and, above all, be an object of ridicule to the ladies,—Mabel especially—the very thought oppressed him direfully and he trembled for the consequences, as well he might. But the knowledge that his agony was now over sustained him in this his hour of discomfiture.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, as usual, all flocked to kiss the bride, but, as the relatives have first privilege, the guests made way and Howard found himself thrust forward. He kissed Mabel, who mischievously said, "I came near proposing to you and marrying you instead of Walter, an hour or so ago, when we both thought he and Martha were out of the way; I mean when you were eating your dinner alone and forlorn and had crumpled note for dessert. Go to Martha, she has a word for you, you naughty boy; she might forgive you, but I never would."

He turned to Martha, who, aware of what was said, drew near. She met his gaze smiling and, with a merry twinkle in her eye, took his arm and they passed on together. As soon as they had an opportunity, she whispered, "Check-mate; the boomerang you hurled has returned and wounded the sender more than the one aimed at, but I forgive you and will take you back this time. I know everything, and have from the first. Now no more until the guests are gone.

When Martha and Howard arrived at their home, she placed her arms about her husband's neck and, with an arch smile, said, "We have both been playing a new game; you checked me and now I have checkmated you on truly scientific principles; and don't you remember, my dearest, this is my lucky day, the 27th?"

Cupid's game, the greatest of all, is now finished.

It is right to mention that Mabel has the crumpled note in her possession and holds it over Walter on the slightest provocation.

THE END.