

Select Story. A Strange Forgery.

What Grew Out of It. (Continued.) HE next morning she did not come down to breakfast, and the omission was a fearful breach of discipline, the servant set her. She was gone! taking nothing but a bonnet and cloak in addition to the clothes that she had worn the evening before, and in which, as was to be inferred from the appearance of her bed, she had passed the night, without the covering in the early morning she had fled. Had a cat or dog strayed away, I think it would have affected Ephraim Pennypacker as much. He asked no questions, at a usual, half of what was on the table, and then went to his business. From that time forth no one mentioned the name of his daughter to him, or in his presence, and she remained as a thing that had never existed, save the whispered conversations of the clerks in my search, which for months occupied all my vacant time. And so went Lydia Pennypacker off the scene.

Once or twice after that I met Graham in the street. He looked hard, but there was no expression in his face as though he mourned the missing girl, and so I was obliged to believe that there had been nothing but fiction. A few days later I saw him no more, and on inquiry learned that he had received an engagement in some South American city, to which he had departed. I now came to the third incident, which for a time puzzled me extremely, but which can be disposed of quickly. One warm evening in the summer following the events already narrated, I was following out a rule I had adopted of walking every evening I could get away from my desk, at least five miles rapidly, as a health preservative. On this particular evening I had crossed the Schuylkill, at the Wire Bridge, and was trotting away under a bright moonlight, my back being turned to the orb, when I saw a couple coming toward me with the rays full in their faces. At a glance I took in both figures. The one was John Barret, and the other—good Heavens!—was the lady of the forged cheque; changed as to the style and every point of her dress, but the same in every lineament and in the expression of the face; for never could I mistake that cold blue eyes and stony look, which made her in the moonlight seem like an animated statue. I stared her full in the face, but to this day I cannot tell whether I stood still as they passed, or went on at my regular pace, I remember looking after them and noticing that John never turned his head; something told me that he had not recognized me. Never before had any suspicion of John entered my mind, but here was real evidence, and the duty of revealing it seemed clear and unavoidable. We had never been very friendly, but the daily intercourse of years had produced a certain intimacy, and on my part at least a feeling of regard; and I was now in a state of agony. I walked the streets till the last allowable hour, and when I reached my room found John already there. At last came the question from him: "What is the matter?" "I saw you this evening."

"Ah! did you? Why didn't you speak?" This staggered me a little, for there was a pleasant smile upon his face. "You know the reason why?" "Oh, you needn't have minded that; I would have introduced you."

"Good Heavens! What did the man mean?" "I only exclaimed."

"Introduce me?" "Yes, certainly! She's a very clever girl. I'm very fond of her, and I had met her a few months sooner, there's no knowing what might have happened. I was bringing her home from her brother's, where she had been spending the afternoon."

"I echoed his words. "A clever girl!" "Yes, very clever. What do you mean?" "Mean, why, John, do you know with whom you were walking, or do you think I have forgotten her?" "Forgotten her?" "Do I know with whom I was walking?" "What do you mean?" "Do you talk to me in this way, knowing that the woman with whom you were walking with is the one to whom you paid the forged cheque?" "The smile went out of his face now, but his lips curled in derision. I was getting frightened. There was a dead silence of some seconds. At last he spoke: "See here, Warren! If I had ever seen you drink, I should say you were drunk. As it is, I can only believe you to be laboring under some hallucination, for I know you would not try such a thing as this on me as a joke."

"I was speechless. He went on: "The young lady with whom you saw me is of unimpeachable character. I never met her until within a few months, and she was more lovely like the woman who brought that accursed cheque, than she looks like you. In the meantime, let me advise you to sleep off the wild air your countenance wears. It won't look well in the office to-morrow. Good night!" He turned to me coldly, and in a few minutes was abed and apparently asleep.

"That night I tossed and tumbled fearfully in my bed. The coolness and confidence of Barret had staggered my convictions. I turned the matter over in my thoughts, and wondered whether it were possible that the memory of this woman, dwelling always on my mind, could have led me to identify her appearance with that of another.

could have gone down on my knees on the spot and begged pardon for my blunder. On John's arrival I was as profuse in apologies as he was cold to receive them. He repeated the assertion that he had only taken the trouble of setting me right for the young lady's sake, not his own. There was a subsequent coolness between us for some weeks, but it wore off in time.

The fourth incident I have to tell is one of more importance. It occurred six months after Lydia's disappearance. One morning, coming out from breakfast and passing through the hall, I picked up a pocketbook. I did not recognize it, and as I was going to my room, took it with me, supposing I should be able to identify it by its contents. The first thing that met my eye was a small sum of money. This afforded no indication, and I drew out the first paper my fingers touched. Judge my surprise when I saw the forged cheque, which I thought safely stored in Mr. Ephraim's safe. Of course I took the book to be his, and imagined for some reason he had transferred the document to it. I was about to close it with the purpose of returning it to him, when some feeling I cannot define impelled me to draw out the next paper. This, to my dumb surprise, was a certificate of marriage, dated almost a year back, testifying that John Barret and Lydia Pennypacker had, upon a day state I have joined together in the bonds of holy matrimony. A tumbler of truth rushed over me at this discovery. I now could understand the apparent uneasiness on his part at my searches for the lost girl. Now I understood his frequent absences from the house, and his remark in reference to Miss Brinsmade, that 'had he met her a few months sooner than he was knowing what might have happened.'

I revolved all this, and many smaller things bearing upon the matter, in my mind. The discovery relieved me of a heavy anxiety in regard to the welfare of Lydia, who it made me think better of John to find that he had taken the homeliest girl and made her his wife. I felt that he must have done so unselfishly as in any hope of pecuniary benefit from the marriage concerned himself. I was certain that in Mr. Ephant's will she would not stand for a dollar, not for the old man's positive hatred for her, but from the fact that he had over and over again expressed his intention of devoting every cent of his money to the founding of a certain charity, the plan of which had long since been drawn up with all its details.

But the cheque! What was the cheque doing in John's possession? This troubled me, but I determined not to act hastily as I had done before. I closed the book, and as by personally returning it to Barret I should only be letting him know that I was in possession of his secret, I concluded to lay it upon his dressing table and wait events. I did so, and went quickly to my desk. John was already at his work, and the duty of revealing it seemed clear and unavoidable. We had never been very friendly, but the daily intercourse of years had produced a certain intimacy, and on my part at least a feeling of regard; and I was now in a state of agony. I walked the streets till the last allowable hour, and when I reached my room found John already there. At last came the question from him: "What is the matter?" "I saw you this evening."

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