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An April Fool's Paradise.

Mr. Bud Bennington was responsible for it. So, naturally, was the first of April—our ancient feast day sacred to the observance of practical jokes.

It must be explained just here that Bud was a born joker, having a sense of humor which might truly be called "saving," from the fact that he invariably practised it at other people's expense. On this particular morning, for instance, literally no pains had been spared.

The day was still young, the hour being eight a. m., but already in order to celebrate it properly old Miss Skipworth, a fellow boarder, had been operated upon with most satisfactory results.

Miss Skipworth hated travelling and had a cat-like horror of rain. And it was a rainy morning. She had also been overheard referring to Bud as "an empty-headed young idler." Therefore and imperative telegram from her lawyer had just arrived, summoning her to New York on "urgent business." And even as the author of it sat by his cosy sitting room fire, he could hear from the next room the sounds of excited feminine bustle, and a shrill voice issuing unintelligible directions. From time to time other tones chimed in, too, at which Bud looked a little pensive; for that second voice belonged to Miss Skipworth's niece and his own Best Girl,—the sole reason, in fact, why he at twenty-one, with a fortune and an automobile, was wasting both at a suburban family hotel instead of disporting them at Newport or at Palm Beach.

The thought of Phyllys Folsom, on this especial morning, however, was not entirely welcome, as it reminded Bennington of some one else in the house, and he became suddenly irritably conscious of noises coming from the verandah underneath his room.

"There's that Pomeroy now!" he mused disgustedly. "Tramping about and mooning up at her window, as usual. Oh, the unutterable fool! Just because Phyllys is kind enough to notice him occasionally, when I'm not 'round, he has the brass to fall in love with her! Or rather,"—sacriliciously,—"he hasn't the brass, with only a miserable law business to depend upon."

Mr. Bennington stretched himself luxuriously in his silk-lined dressing-gown and continued his reflection.

"I suppose the truth is, Phyllys is sorry for Pomeroy. . . . Well, who wouldn't be? . . . What a life! Every day hard at work in the city—grinding away half the night over his law-books! Gee! I wonder what the poor devil would do if some one left him a fortune—or a fake fortune! Jimminy! Crickets! How's that for an April fool?"

Chewing his pencil excitedly, he sat, revolving a scheme that was positively diabolical in its inspiration.

And yet, Bennington was not the fiend incarnate, merely young, considerably in love, and—Pomeroy was his rival. Though the youthful Bud would not have admitted this for worlds.

"Now, the question is," he meditated rapidly, "how one can come into a nice little sum of money unexpectedly—say a few thousand, for instance. Let me see,—'Will of a defunct relative?' . . . The fellow hasn't and relatives. 'Stock dividends,' . . . Never owned any stock. 'Bad debt?' . . . That's the style! Pomeroy's father was one of those unpractical chaps who are always lending money."

Pulling a piece of paper toward him, he selected a pen with care and began to write:
New York April 1, 1906.

MY DEAR SIR:

I have just deposited to your credit at

the Fifth Avenue Bank of this city the sum of \$2,500, the amount, with interest at 6 per cent., of a loan made to me by your father ten years ago. I regret very much that I was unable to repay it during his life-time, but am only just in condition to discharge an obligation which has laid very heavily on my mind.

Believe me, with sincere regards,
Very truly yours,
DOUGLAS WALLACE.

"Good old name," commented Bennington complacently, as he made the signature. "Suggests ancient Scottish chiefs—and modern bankruptcy. No one could succeed now a days with a name like that!"

Pursing his lips thoughtfully, he now proceeded to forge a check, and then, cramming the letter with its enclosure into a business envelope, turned the latter over in order to write on its back in tiny letters two meaningful words appropriate to the season.

"Perhaps he'll see them when he doesn't find the money at the bank," Bennington surmised, with a grim chuckle, "and then won't he be ripping!"

He was still hard at work five minutes later when a knock at the door made him start guiltily. But it was only one of the numerous "Buttons" in the house, bearing a steaming, smoking, breakfast-tray. Bennington hailed both jubilantly. "Got a job for you, Sam," he announced. "Just put the things by the fire and close the door. Let me see—mail's in already, isn't it? and a registered letter's out of the question. Jehoshaphat! I've got the idea! Yes, and the special delivery stamp, too! Now listen, my boy."

Wheeling around, he dropped his voice in a few whispered directions. There was the clink of coin, followed by the gleam of African teeth, and a fervent "Tank ye, sah. Trus' me, sah!"

Following his chocolate-colored ally to the staircase, Bennington now peeped over the banisters, noting with dismay that the hotel 'bus was already in front of the door waiting to take passengers to the nine o'clock train. What if Pomeroy got off without reading his letter!

Gazing anxiously at the dining-room door, Bennington saw it open suddenly.

"Dear me!" cried a familiar high-pitched voice. "Here's the trap already! Phyllys, dear, just get my bag; hurry. Oh, see how it's raining! Those tiresome lawyers!"

"Those tiresome lawyers 'will be a good deal surprised to see her," mused Bennington, as Miss Skipworth disappeared under an umbrella.

"Ah! there's Pomeroy!"

He glanced down at a tall young man putting on his hat in the hall, and then drew back, with an irresistible chuckle, as the form of Sam appeared solemnly in the door-way holding out an envelope, with these portentous words, "Special-delivery lettah, sah!"

Pomeroy took it. So far, so good!

There was the crisp rending of paper, followed by silence.

One minute passed. Two! Outside, the horses champed impatiently; but Pomeroy, reading his letter with his back turned, seemed oblivious to the flight of time and trains.

At last some one looked in through the front door, a girlish figure in a white duck suit. "I hope you haven't any bad news, Mr. Pomeroy!" asked a voice that made Bennington start consciously.

Pomeroy started too. "No, indeed, Miss Phyllys," he stammered; "but I—I don't think I'll go to town today. You see—"

He finished his explanation on the piazza, while the 'bus rattled off and Sam in the door-way waited respectfully.

"Dere's a boy hysr dat brought de lettah, sah," he ventured at length, with a discreet cough, "an' he wants a quarter."

It was just here that a wonderful thing happened. Bennington saw it over the banisters, and then slipping into his room, he closed the door noiselessly and subsided quite suddenly on the floor from pure emotion.

"A one-dollar tip!" he gasped. "Pomeroy giving dollar tips?"

Convulsed at the sheer absurdity of the situation, he checked himself all at once, and pricked up his ears at the sound of footsteps coming along the passage-way. Then, stealing to his key-hole, he listened intently. The expression of bewilderment on his face gradually changed to one of incredulous, startled indignation.

"Are these Cedarhurst Conservatories?" a guarded voice was asking at the telephone across the hall.

"This is 'Grey Gables'—Mr. Walter Pomeroy. Just send over three dozen of your finest American Beauty roses at once, please, C. O. D. That's all. Good-bye." And the speaker rung off.

That pauper venturing to send Phyllys flowers from a swell florist! In his horrified dismay Bennington felt inclined to fling the door open and hurl at the idiot outside that not undeserved epithet, "April fool!"

But he restrained himself. After all, Pomeroy was a man—and a rival. Let him reap the full consequences of his folly. Let the joke go on.

"It's getting pretty costly, though," reflected the joker complacently, as he settled down to his neglected breakfast.



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"Roses are selling at two dollars a dozen. That makes seven dollars spent in fifteen minutes. Why, Pomeroy will be dead-broke before he gets through the day. Great guns! I wonder what he's going to do next."

Bennington was not destined to be left long in doubt. He was completing a lengthy toilet an hour later, when something—a mysterious, prophetic something—made him glance out of his front window, through which the April sun was now shining effulgently. Its beams lay in golden shafts over the shaven lawn, and across it, from the direction of the hotel, could be seen strolling leisurely a man and a girl! There was no mistaking them. Pomeroy had stolen a march on Bennington, or—what was worse—a walk with Phyllys.

It was an unprecedented state of affairs. In vain Bud reminded himself that a day of reckoning was coming for the Fool. His Paradise would soon be ended! Alas! The unpardonable fact remained that, for the time being, Pomeroy was in Paradise!

The rest of the morning seemed interminable to Bennington. It had cleared off beautifully, after all, with a turquoise sky above, and under-foot a hard earthiness that positively cried for motoring. But Bennington's machine stood neglected in the garage, while its owner tramped moodily up and down the hotel piazza smoking frequent cigars and wondering when that couple would return. They had not come back by luncheon, which meal Bud devoured hastily, stationing himself immediately afterward in his first front window, where with an impatience which turned gradually into positive alarm, he sat scanning the drive as the minutes rolled by.

What had happened? What could have become of them?

At three o'clock a distant whistle proclaimed the New York train, and some minutes later the hotel 'bus drew up in front of the door, depositing Miss Skipworth, not to mention her umbrella, waterproof, valise, and sundry parcels.

"Such a nice day as I've had!" she announced cheerfully to a little group assembled on the hotel piazza. "Whom should I meet as I got out at the Grand Central Station but my old friends, the Allertons, just in town for the day! We lunched together at the Waldorf and had a delightful talk. But, what do you think? Mr. S. I. I. and his partner were both out of town and the 'dices' closed! Isn't it the most extraordinary thing about that telegram?"

"She's had a lovely time, however, thanks to it," thought Bennington, rather sadly. Somehow, although his jokes were brilliantly successful, they had not turned out quite to his satisfaction.

Grimly he watched a certain pair come into sight at last along the drive, the girl swinging her hat, while the youth ambled beside her with a jauntiness that struck Bennington as positively asinine. Listening anxiously he heard them come into the house, and a moment later steps ascended the stairs and stopped at Bennington's door.

"May I come in?" inquired a masculine voice. And without waiting for permission Pomeroy entered the room—a beaming, glorified, altogether incomprehensible Pomeroy.

"Hello!" he said, grinning idiotically. "haven't seen you before to-day."

Here, quite unnecessarily, he strode across and shook Bennington warmly by the hand. "Well, old boy—"

The reserved, diffident Pomeroy calling any one "old boy!"

"Fork out your congratulations—every one of 'em. She accepted me. I tell you, man, Phyllys has accepted me!"

What else he said in his exuberant frenzy the stricken Bennington could not quite take in. There was a good deal about Miss Folsom's angelic characteristics, Pomeroy's own incredible good fortune, and then a confidential out-pouring on the subject of an unexpected couple of thousand that had drifted in that morning—the very capital he had "wanted for so long in order to get into Green & Waldrop's real estate office."

"And, do you know, Bud," Pomeroy volunteered huskily, as he at length verged toward the door, "if it hadn't been for that blessed money coming, I don't believe I'd ever have had the courage to propose. It just made everything possible."

Oddly enough, it was these last words that settled Pomeroy's fate, up to that time hanging on the balance of his listener's distracted mind.

For a moment after the door closed on his happy, unconscious victim, Bennington stood struggling fiercely with the resolution that was gaining possession of him.

Then, squaring his shoulders determinedly "Yes," he said, between his teeth. "It's the only thing to do now—the only thing for a gentleman to do."

And, seating himself at his writing-desk, Pomeroy's involuntary benefactor, with a few strokes of the pen, converted an April Fool's Paradise into a tangible bank account.—Lippincott's Magazine.

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