

The Order of the Garter.

His name was Fitzmaurice, but we all called him Fitz at the office; and somehow you could not help liking the fellow, however much his capers might distress you.

Fitz was always getting into scrapes and being scolded; but he was so droll and wore such a placid smile when you were doing your best to be severe, that no matter how angry you were at the start, that placid smile would generally melt your wrath, and the scolding would end in a laugh at some quaint anecdote of the scold's.

I say "generally," because it did not always. There was one notable exception, and that is why Fitz is now keeping books in a New York Insurance office, instead of sipping absinthe in front of a Paris café.

Five years ago Fitz was living in Paris somewhere in the jolly Quartier Latin.

He was alone, and supposed to be studying art by his rich maiden aunt, who lived in New York, and furnished him with a generous allowance. But bless you, Fitz had no more taste for art than a Berkshire cow, and it took him but a short time to find this out.

He said to himself: "I am not suited for a painter. Why impose on common sense by trying to become one! I will not do it. I will study life and amuse myself; it will be much wiser."

Into this study he plunged with an ardor that bade fair to undermine his health, if the records be correct.

It did amuse him at first, but a time came when his dissipation began to pall.

Into Fitz's life entered love, leading a plump and pretty little maiden by the name of Elise, who had come from the country to visit relations in Paris. She crossed his path, and showed him the error of his ways.

Fitz fell in love, desperately and hopelessly in love, and Elise—well, Elise also fell in love.

How could she help it? He was so clever, so handsome, and so very rich.

How he asked her to be his wife, and how she accepted him, and allowed him to salute her ruby lips, the deponent sayeth not.

Suffice it to know that they were very quietly married, and went to live in a pretty little apartment in the Rue de la Boétie.

They were monstrously happy, for people can be happy under those circumstances, however much we may hear to the contrary. Life was one long, sunny holiday; they neither of them sought care, and it, very considerably left them alone.

But the sun does not always shine, and a rainy day will come. It did come, likewise a cable message for Fitz, which read: "Come at once. Your aunt seriously ill."

Now, Fitz knew that it was most important for him to be in at the death, or, rather, the bedside of his rich relative.

She was the only rich relative he had, and he was entirely dependent on her for his income; but he did not like the idea of leaving his wife. He loved her very dearly, and if he crossed the ocean it was uncertain how long he might be away. It was very annoying, this interruption to the honeymoon.

For reasons best known to himself he had deemed it inexpedient to advise his aunt of his marriage. It might prove unwise to take Elise with him; besides, he had been spending too much money.

Une voiture de remise is an exceedingly nice thing to have, but it costs money; so does a box at the opera, and so do those recherché breakfasts and dinner parties at the Lion d'Or and other places.

He had just received his month's allowance, and his outstanding debts were more than enough to swallow it up.

He explained to Elise how matters stood. "I must go to New York, and you, sweetheart, must remain here until I return. Then I shall have lots of money and we will have no end of a good time to make up for the parting; but, dearest, for the present you will have to economize. You won't mind giving up the opera box and the carriage for a little time, will you, my darling?"

"I don't mind giving them up, mon cher," she murmured, "but I don't want you to go, Fitzie;" and then she added, very prettily: "I'm sure you will meet some designing American girl who will win your affections from me, and then I shall die of a broken heart, and I am so young to die," she sighed.

"Don't talk nonsense, angel," he said; "but come, sit on my knee, and help me to arrange matters."

This, I believe, she did; at all events, matters were arranged, and the following day he boarded the steamer at Havre.

It was a trying ordeal to say good-bye, and there was a big lump in his throat which refused to be swallowed as he waved his handkerchief to Elise, who stood on the dock sobbing as if her poor little heart would break, while her faithful maid tried to console her as only a kind-hearted Frenchwoman can, by whispering "Courage, madame; il reviendra bientôt; courage, madame!"

Then they gradually faded out of Fitz's sight, and he went below.

On arriving in New York, he went at once to his aunt's home, fully expecting to find a note on the door bell.

He was, however, disappointed in this, and, on being admitted, was surprised to learn that she had so far recovered as to

be able to go out for her drive in the Park.

When she returned she greeted him in the cold, hard way that is indigenous to females whose fountains of affection have been slowly drying up for years.

That welcome was enough to make Fitz resolve not to mention the fact of his marriage.

He knew that relatives, especially rich ones, were apt to go off in tantrums on learning that a move, such as his, had been taken without consulting them. He must wait and bide his time, also he taking off.

But the prospect was not encouraging, she looked so abominably well.

He showed more judgment than one would accord to a youth of his years; more, so much more than on a subsequent occasion.

He had been in New York two months but it seemed a year to him, for his aunt continued to gain in health, and showed a desire to have him continue living with her that was dangerous to thwart.

The long evenings over the cribbage board with her were intolerable to him.

He had led such a gay life for the past two years, and the thought of poor, lonely little Elise in Paris waiting for him to return, and struggling hard to make both ends meet on the scanty sums he was able to send her from his very much curtailed allowance, was simply maddening.

"He has no expenses living with me," his aunt remarked to herself, "why give him money to squander and get into mischief with? A small amount will suffice him." A small amount was accordingly allowed him, and nearly every penny was sent to Elise.

What the poor boy denied himself scarcely anyone but myself knows. He gave up smoking, did not drink a drop, avoided his friends and his club, so as not to be led into extravagance, and by degrees sold all the little articles of his wardrobe that he could possibly get along without, in order to provide for his wife.

He wrote long loving effusions every day, and rented a box in a cigar store, where her replies could be sent in safety. Letters came frequently at first, but gradually commenced to dwindle down to one or two a month.

His aunt was the secretary of numerous societies of a quasi-charitable order, and every morning he was kept busy answering her correspondence for her.

He worked as he never imagined it was possible for man to work. It seemed to ward off the gloominess of his surroundings, and help him to pass the time until he could gain her consent to return to Paris.

He even went so far as to suggest that as she was so much better, in fact quite well, he would like to continue his studies. But his aunt did not see it in that light; she said she was not as well as he supposed (which gave him some slight encouragement); that he was a help and comfort to her, and she wished him to remain with her for the present.

It was a few days before Christmas when she told him this, and the poor boy had been racking his brain to devise how he could send his dear little Elise a present. He had sold everything that he could spare to send her the last draft, and was counting on a check from his aunt to help him out of his trouble.

The next morning he was presented with a small box marked Tiffany & Co. In it was a large horseshoe scarf-pin of diamonds and rubies. On a card underneath was written: "Merrie Xmas to Maurice, from his affectionate aunt."

Now, Fitz, whatever else he may have been, was a man of decidedly quiet tastes, and this flashy ornament did not suit his fancy at all; in fact, he had no use for jewels at that time except as collateral security for loans, and it was out of the question to dispose of it.

"It is so loud," he groaned, "that its very absence would make it conspicuous," and he stuck it into his scarf, preparatory to returning thanks to the donor.

The giver was not well, she had taken cold, and received him in her bedroom.

"It is a beauty," he said, "but don't you think it a little fast looking for me to wear?" and that placid smile lit up his handsome face.

Now such a sentiment as this from a young man who had been considered extravagant and worldly was a masterstroke of diplomacy. She was delighted, and agreed with him, telling him to change it for something quieter, and this he forthwith proceeded to do.

The salesman at the great silversmith's was very obliging and immediately lifted out a tray of pins, but Fitz did not want pins; he had seen a case of garters with jeweled clasps which corresponded to his idea of a gift to his wife. The salesman took out the garters, and Fitz having selected a pair that pleased his fancy, asked:

"You have a branch in Paris?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you've garters like these, there?"

"Yes, sir; those all came from Paris."

"I wish to have a pair like these delivered to Mrs. Maurice Fitzmaurice, No. Rue de la Boétie, Paris, the day before Christmas."

"If you will come to the office I think it can be arranged," the salesman replied.

With a light heart and placid smile Fitz sauntered up Broadway to a shop where imitation jewelry was offered for sale. He selected a handsome pearl pin, for which he paid two dollars, and returned

home to receive congratulations from his aunt on his good taste.

After this he sat down and wrote a long letter to Elise, telling her that his aunt had been taken ill again; that he was sure this was the beginning of the end, and that soon he would be able to go to her, never to leave her again—"only be patient, sweetheart; your loving Fitz."

A fortnight slipped by. The old lady was still ill, no better and not much worse. "Fitz" was growing desperate; the letters from Elise had been coming less frequently, were shorter and not as affectionate as was her wont to write.

He sat in the library watching the rain-drops beat against the window pane.

"Poor little drops," he murmured, "you beat with all your force, as my heart did when I bade her good-bye, and then you roll down the pane as the tears rolled down her cheeks."

A knock at the door disturbed his reverie.

"Your aunt wishes to see you, sir!"

"Can the critical moment that I have been praying for have come at last?" he asked himself.

He mounted the staircase to the room of his helpless jailress.

There she sat all bolstered up with pillows. Her face was ghastly pale, and she looked positively hideous. On the table beside her was the morning's mail, which she had evidently been perusing.

"Good morning, aunt, can I help you with the letters?"

"Yes, sir, you can explain one particular communication that I have just received," and she handed him the following:

MISS BEATRICE MARLOW,

TO TIFFANY & CO., DR.

Dec. 23, 1890. To one pair garters, jeweled clasps.....\$150.00

Cable messages.....5 50

Total.....\$155.50

Fitz did not say a word. The placid smile played about his mouth as he realized his own stupidity in not remembering that the bill would not be sent until after the first of January, and that the change of purchase would be noted.

"I'm but a wretched amateur at this sort of thing. I'll have to improve if she keeps me here much longer," were the thoughts that passed through his mind while he paused to await further developments.

His aunt was glaring fiercely at him, so he read the bill over again, this time aloud.

"Well, sir?" she hissed.

"Well," he replied, "I think it's all right," and he summoned that smile which had so often melted worthy hearts.

"Do you mean to tell me that you expect me to furnish your female friends with garters? and garters at \$155.50 a pair?"

"Well, no—not exactly; but you gave me a pin and told me I could change it; I did so," Fitz stammered.

"And you have the audacity to tell me to my face that you are in the habit of presenting jeweled garters to low women?"

"No, emphatically no!" he replied: "I did not give these garters to any such person."

"And who, pray, but a low, vulgar female would receive garters from a man? I repeat she is a low, unprincipled busy."

"Stop," he cried, "I forbid you to speak those words. The lady who is now wearing those garters is as pure as my dear mother."

"You scoundrel," she shrieked, "how dare you mention this creature in the same breath with my sister?"

"I dare do anything to defend the fair name of my wife," he replied, very calmly.

It was out. His aunt now knew he was married, and a scene ensued which generous minded people would not care to read about.

The upshot of it all was that the family lawyer was sent for. Fitz received a letter with a check enclosed for \$300 and was told that he need expect nothing more.

A few days later his dear aunt died, and when her will was read, Fitz was not among the beneficiaries.

The poor fellow wrote a long letter to Elise, telling her everything. His plan was to get a position in a business house, and by working hard he would soon be able to bring her to New York, and they would be happy, so happy, together.

He felt sure that she would help him, for he knew how brave and true she was.

He got a position in an insurance office, and then followed the long disheartening period that a young man brought up in luxury and idleness experiences when, for the first time in his life, he comes into contact with the cold and hard business world.

But he struggled manfully on and rose step by step to the position of manager.

In the meantime Elise—what had become of her? She wrote occasionally, but her letters were not of the loving, encouraging kind that Fitz was in so much need of. Life was now so dull to her after the sweet fruits of pleasure she had tasted in the old days.

"He really ought not to have married me, with all this uncertainty about his money matters," she kept repeating to herself; so it is not surprising that while in this mood she found the attentions of a rich old reuf agreeable, and was finally persuaded to apply for a divorce on the ground of abandonment. She succeeded in this, as Fitz did not contest, and immediately married her rich lover. She is

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