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AFTER THE UNATTAINABLE

I am a bank clerk. My name is Septimus Spratley. The latter fact may tend to militate against my success in life. But I cannot help it. It is my misfortune and not my fault. I was born with that name, and should be resigned to my fate. My salary is not princely; let that be clearly understood at the outset. I have a young wife who is the dearest, cheery woman in all the world, only she is not thoroughly satisfied with our pretty little home; her ideas and tastes are inclined to soar to a higher sphere.

Urged by a mad desire to satisfy these aspirations, I modelled my conduct by that of a friend of mine, who had urged among his comrades the sobriquet of "Form-a-Glance," from which the direction of his proclivities may readily be gleaned. His luck, or knowledge of horse-flesh, was marvellous. Hardly a week passed that I did not encounter him, accompanied by a fat pocketbook overflowing with checks and banknotes, the result of his winnings. He inspired me with respect, this man—his name was Ginx—and became invested in my imagination with a glamour of fateful and prophetic romance.

I accordingly resolved, in my bland and hopeful way, to emulate him, to back winners—to increase my income in the same free and easy manner as Ginx did. But, alas! I could not follow the great master in the equine science. My geese turned out all wrong. If I backed them to win, they obstinately insisted upon coming in second; and if I backed them for a place, the irony of fate as regularly sent them nowhere.

It will readily be understood that I got into worse difficulties than ever, and that, instead of surrounding my wife with luxuries, I was soon surrounding myself by a healthy crop of debts.

As though to add the tortures of Tantalus to my other misfortunes, Ginx opened a very substantial account at our bank. Confound him! I don't think I ever met a man whom I hate, despise and yet envy as I do Ginx. When he comes up to cash a big cheque I take it to heart as a personal insult, and feel far more inclined to throw the sovereigns in his face, and blind him with them, than to shovel them across the counter in the usual way. This may be an unchristian spirit, but I cannot help it, these wretched horses are at fault.

Under these circumstances, one day, after 17 torrid interviews with 17 duns, the whole performance winding up with a paroxysm of tears on the part of my better half—she hardly ever reproached me, poor dear!—under these circumstances, I say, my last fervent prayer on retiring to rest was: "Confound Ginx! How I wish I could change places with him!"

In the morning I awoke with a start to a fresh consciousness of my difficulties and troubles; but I looked around; my wife was not in her accustomed place! I called loudly upon the name of Minnie, but my words fell upon a chilling and unresponsive silence. What did it mean! Was it possible that my thoughtless conduct had driven her to some rash act—that she had fled—that—Oh, heavens! the next thought which crossed my mind I dare not shape in words. I started up and looked around me. I was in a strange bed in a strange room! A far more luxurious room than my own!

What had happened? Was I dreaming? Had I been spirited away during the night! Or had some magic metamorphosis taken place in my surroundings? But, granting the latter supposition, where was Minnie! No improvement in my condition could compensate for the loss of my darling.

I performed a hasty toilet as best I could (the apartment was unprovided with looking-glasses), and ran down stairs. The house was much larger than mine and far better appointed. With considerable depreciation I opened the door of the front parlor—a light and elegant room—where a luxurious breakfast was prepared, with a manservant in attendance. He bowed gravely, and said:

"Mrs. Ginx has called and wishes to see you, sir."

"Ginx!" I echoed faintly; the familiar name sounded strangely in my ear. The servant looked astonished. Well, perhaps a solution of my strange experience was at hand, so I said: "Show her up, please."

However, the words had barely passed my lips when she showed up: a pretty little dark woman, on the right side of

thirty, but possessing decided signs of temper and determination.

"Show me up!" she burst out. "I've been waiting long enough, in all conscience. Show me up, indeed! Mind I don't show you up in your true colors!"

"Just what I should like. I assure you I'm in a false position at present."

Strange to say this quiet and truthful observation only served to provoke the young lady to further wrath. There was an avalanche this time, culminating in an urgent inquiry as to how I dared speak like that to my wife.

"Pardon me," I protested, nervously; "either you or I are laboring under some strange delusion. You are not my wife."

"I know I am not, now, since I have been wise enough to insist upon a separation. But my allowance is overdue. Where is it?"

"Goodness only knows. I have no money. I am up to my eyes in debt."

"Fiddlesticks! Why, your dividends came due on the fifth. Besides, do you think I haven't heard of the £1,000 you have won on Sir Viato and Victor Wild?"

I vainly protested that I had never backed a single winner in my life.

"Oh, what a liar you are!" she exclaimed, with emphatic candor. "You'll deny next that you ever promised to make me an allowance at all."

"I do deny it, politely, but firmly. I should never have made so rash a promise. What would Minnie say?"

"Minnie?" she fairly shrieked. "Pray who is Minnie?"

"She is my—"

The sentence was never finished. For the first time I caught sight of my face in the over-mantel, and realized the appalling fact that I had become Ginx! This frequently happens in narratives of this description—we are growing used to it; therefore, I put forward this somewhat startling statement with scant apology and no explanation. I wished I was Ginx, and I was Ginx—that is all.

My feelings at that moment cannot be described, and can hardly be imagined. But there was another reason why my last assertion remained unfinished. It was this—the teapot came hurtling through the air, just missed my head, but annihilated the ornaments on the mantelpiece. After that, I thought that to assert Minnie as my wife would be impolitic, and would seem untruthful.

Mrs. Ginx continued doing a great deal of damage to the furniture and china. It struck me that a hasty but dignified departure was my best plan of action. At the door I turned and impressively uttered the following words:

"Wait till Ginx comes back. I feel sure he won't be satisfied with the condition of his breakfast room!"

I stood upon the pavement outside the house, ruminating. Here alone I considered myself safe. Poor Ginx! What a rosy time he had of it! Well, we all have skeletons in our cupboards. I no longer envied him. No, I pitied him from the bottom of my very heart. But I pitied myself still more.

Now that I bore the outward semblance of Ginx, I must suffer, vicariously for him. Suffer! Aye, ten thousand times worse, for I had lost my Minnie. Where was she? Should I ever see her, ever hold her in my arms again? If we should meet, she would not know me. My terrible situation began to dawn upon me in all its horror. But stay! Since I was Ginx I was rich, and could alleviate the wants of Septimus and Minnie Spratley.

I put my hand in my pocket, and drew forth a pocketbook. No money, but some blank checks. Good! No sooner thought of than done. I repaired to the bank where up to the day before, I myself had been employed. I ought to have been prepared, but still it gave me a shock to see myself there behind the counter, busy weighing gold and counting out silver.

But Ginx had not accepted that situation with that calmness and resignation which I should have expected of him. He was getting his cash all wrong, making a muddle of checks, going round asking absurd questions on the simplest matters, and generally making things warm for himself and everyone else in a manner that had never been known before in that highly correct and respectable establishment.

I boldly wrote out a check for \$250, and carelessly handed it in. Ginx started, and looked up with an evil scowl upon his handsome face (I mean my face)—not that smile of recognition and welcome that seems most natural to a kindly-hearted man on meeting himself.

"Well, I do know something about that anyway," he exclaimed, angrily. "I was hardly prepared for this. Upon my word it's the biggest piece of cheek I ever heard of. You've coolly come to steal \$250 from me, and you actually think I am going to hand it over to you. Cash your check? No, I'll see you hanged first!"

Mr. Jordan, the manager, now entered from his inner sanctum.

Really, Mr. Spratley, your conduct this morning is outrageous, and if you are not more careful for the future—

"Oh, don't mind him. He can't help it. He's affected by the heat, I'm afraid," I interrupted, faintly, the perspiration rolling down my own countenance (or Ginx's) for I could see that the wretched man would get the sack, and if ever our idenities were restored, I should suffer for Ginx's absurd behavior.

"Your cash, sir," said another clerk. I took up the notes and gold hastily, with feverish hands, and fled rapidly from the bank, leaving my alter ego shouting, protesting and conducting himself altogether in a positively preposterous manner. Well, I had borrowed his money, that was all; why should I not, since I had borrowed his identity? I took a bus and hurried off to my own abode—that is—I mean Septimus Spratley's.

As I neared the familiar row of desirable villa residences how ardently I wished I was myself again! Wishing alone had effected the change; why should it not the restoration as well?

Yet, stay—I must be careful. If we changed places back again, the money would go too, and that would never do. At length I reached my peaceful domicile. The door was open; I walked in and to my horror and dismay found myself face to face with a scene of chaos and confusion.

Minnie was in the front parlor bathed in a deluge of tears, and surrounded by a seething crowd of creditors. In stentorian tones (for Ginx had a loud voice), and with that assumption, dignity and arrogance which nothing in this world so readily lends as the possession of money, I shouted:

"Now then, you impudent scoundrels, be civil, if you can, and be off with you. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, worrying a defenceless woman like this. How much is your debt? And yours? And yours? There are pens and ink. Here's your money; make out your receipts, and rid the house of your pestilential presence!"

They all became very cringing and obsequious, but acceded to my polite requests, and fled with the utmost rapidity. My wife looked on in blank amazement, too much astonished, indeed, to speak a word or utter a single protest. At length she stammered forth:

"Mr. Ginx, how can I thank you!—yet I hardly know what to say,—if my husband were here, perhaps he would not accept it."

"Oh, he wouldn't mind—he'd rather like it!"

"But I can't understand"

"Neither can I. It's beyond human comprehension."

"And you have done this out of pure, disinterested kindness! My poor husband! He rushed out of the house this morning without speaking a word or eating a morsel of breakfast, like somebody mad!"

"He was never here this morning at all! Ah, Minnie! Minnie! Don't you know me? I am your husband!"

"Sir!"

"Ah, don't turn away from me. It's too terrible. Never mind what I look like, it's what I am; and I am your husband!"

"You are mad!"

"No, no. I tell you I am Timmy!"

"Timmy!" she echoed, with a strange, vague wonder in her voice. It was a fond abbreviation of hers for my somewhat arithmetical cognomen, which was known only by ourselves, used in the very dearest intimacy of our home life, almost a Masonic sign between us.

At this moment a postman thrust a letter in at the window. It was a way he had got, because we did not boast a letter box. It was for me. I tore it open, and had just gleaned the news that an uncle of mine was dead, leaving me a legacy of £5,000, when Mrs. Spratley indignantly snatched the letter from my hand.

"Upon my word, this is too bad!" she exclaimed. "It's no reason because you've been kind to us, that you should pry into my husband's private correspondence."

"But, Minnie—"

"Again, Mr. Ginx! How dare you?"

"Oh, I wish to heaven," I cried fervently, "I could become myself again, and could prove to you who that self is...."



Pearl McFarland, Wallaceburg, Ont.

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Name.	County Tax.	Road Tax.
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Black, Geo.	5.64	50
Gesner, John.	2.21	

ROBERT COCHRANE, Collector Richibucto, Kent Co., 3rd Oct. 1895.

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