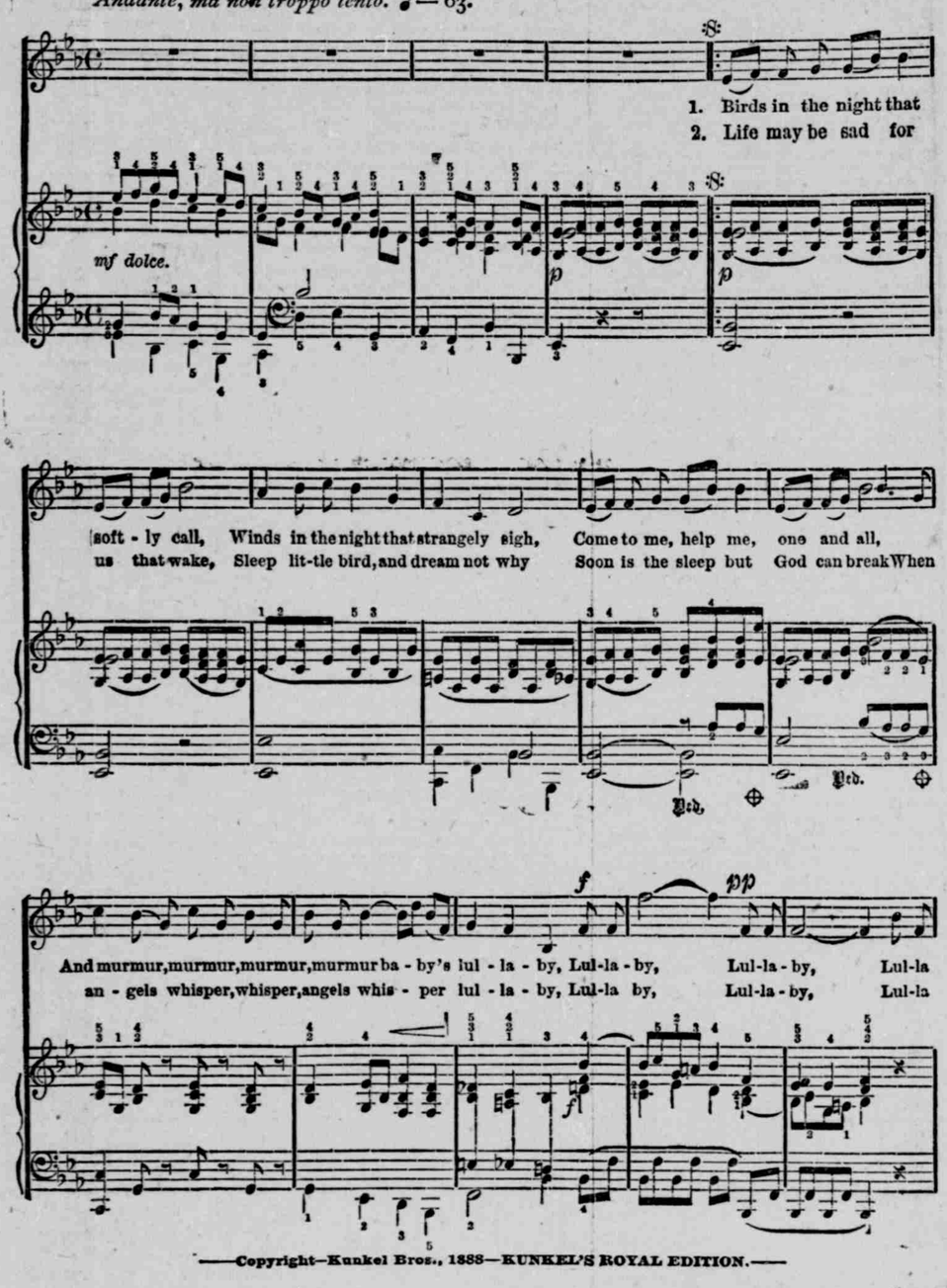
BIRDS IN THE NIGHT.

Words by LIONEL H. LEWIN. *ARTHUR S. SULLIVAN.*

Andante, ma non troppo lento. ♩ — 63.



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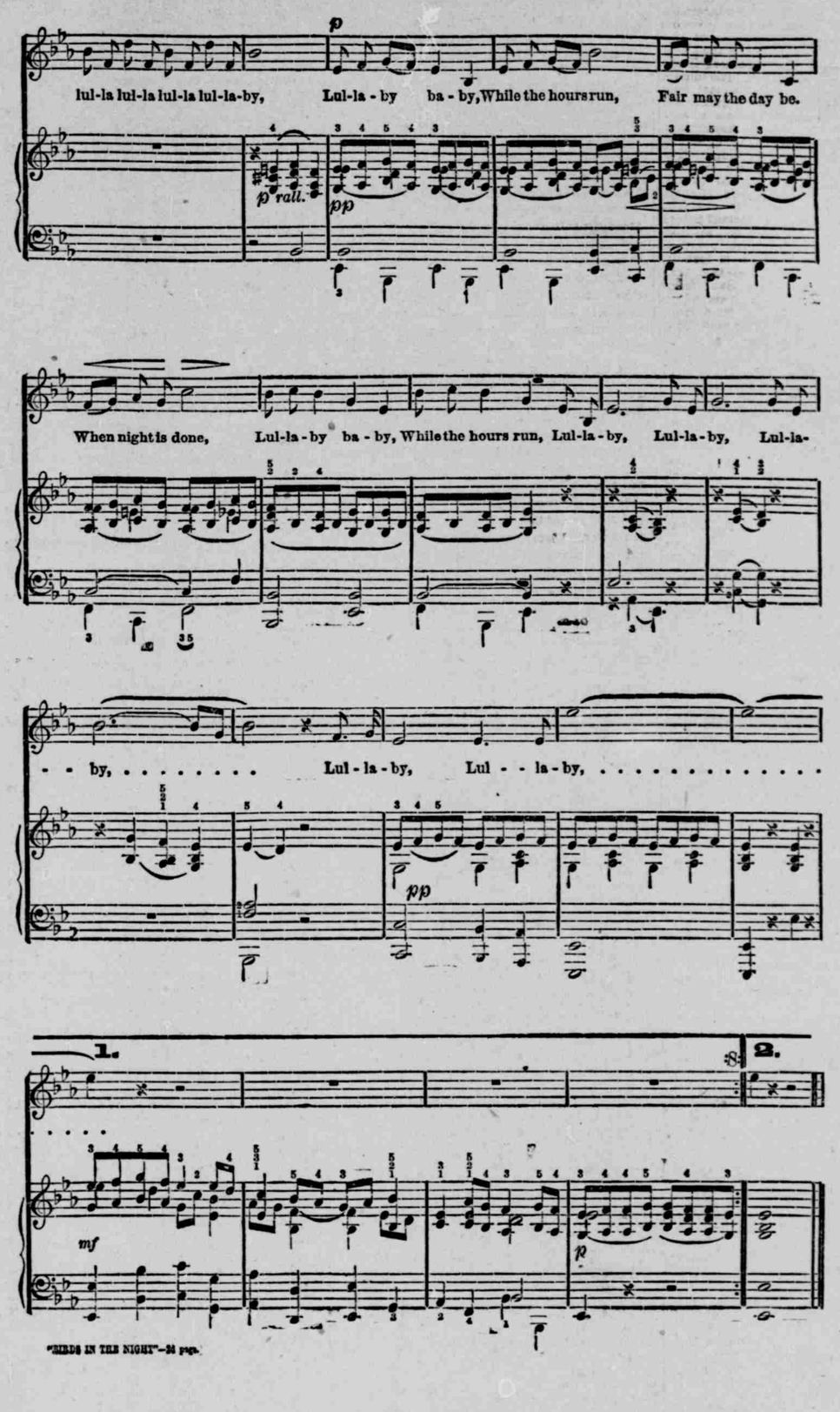

"BIRDS IN THE NIGHT"—24 pgs.

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LOVE BY TELEPONE

By Lillias Campbell Davidson.

There was a general commercial upset, one day, in a certain great Canadian town, when a hurricane had broken half the telephone wires in the neighborhood, and brought the usual means of communication to a stand-still.

"It's bad for trade, a thing of this sort," said Dick Valory, lounging in the depths of the most luxurious of arm-chairs, in an office which looked considerably more like a lady's boudoir, with its high-art wall-paper, its pictures and its stands of flowers. "Paralyzes one's industries, and everything like that, you know."

"Quite unnecessary, old man, as regards yours," remarked his particular chum, Fred Greenhithe, who had dropped in in the course of his morning labors to have a chat. "Nature has saved you that affliction, anyway."

"Heaven preserve us! he's trying to be funny!" murmured Dick, sadly. "Well, what would be the use of energy if I had it? What have I got to be energetic about?"

"Oh, I know you were born with that valuable spoon in your mouth, my good fellow—you haven't to grub for your daily bread as we poor mortals have. You toil not, neither do you spin."

"I certainly can't perform the latter operation, but as to toiling—I beg your pardon! Have I not studied law till my hair's turning gray, and am I not prepared to practice it for the benefit of my grateful countrymen—if they only choose to avail themselves of the chance?"

"The fact is, you ought to marry—you want an interest in life."

Valory made a grimace. "I'd secure it then, and no mistake!" he said. "No, Fred, my boy—that's not possible; she hasn't crossed my path as yet, and I don't much fancy she ever will. None of the girls I ever met made a lasting impression on my young affections. Their voices weren't sweet enough."

"Their voices!"

"Yes, their voices. You know how particular I am about a person's voice, and the idea of a wife whose every tone jarred on one's ear isn't to be endured for a moment. American girls' voices are pitched in too high a key. I rather fancy an Italian would suit me—or a Spaniard—but then there are drawbacks about the nationality. I can't find a voice I care for enough to marry, so I suppose I shall go down to my grave a lonely unmarried bachelor. Hello! What's that?"

"That" was the telephone bell ringing sharply.

"Anyone there?" asked a soft clear voice.

Dick sprang to his feet with more agility than one would have given him credit for, and seized the tube.

"All right!" he cried excitedly.

"Please connect with No. 293," came the voice again.

Dick cast a look of awe at his friend.

"Thinks I'm the central office!" he said. "The wires must have tangled up some, I should say. "All right!" he called once more.

A moment's pause, then the bell sounded again. "Thinks she's hitched on to 293, poor thing!" Dick murmured compassionately.

"Are you there, Nan?" came in pretty girlish accents.

"Oh, Lor'!" said Dick, "what a tangled web we weave, and no mistake! I'm not Nan, and I can't make believe to be, with the best intentions in the world. She'd find me out, even if I struggled into falsetto!"

"Darling!—I want to speak to you—Nan, dear!"

"Oh, good heavens!" said Dick, falling back. "This is coming it rather too strong. 'Darling,' too—Nobody ever called me that before, that I can remember. It's a particularly pleasant sensation, even if it isn't for me."

"Why dont you tell her she is making a mistake?" Greenhithe said, somewhat impatiently. "I've lots to say to you, and I can't stop."

"Then go, my dear fellow—go, as soon as you like. Alas! I've got to tell her I'm not Nan—I only wish I were. It's the sweetest voice I ever heard on mortal woman. Ahem—I regret to tell you, Madam, that I'm not the lady you honor me by taking me for. The wires have got twisted, some way, and I'm somebody else."

A girlish shriek, instantly muffled, and a sound of smothered, silvery laughter.

"Don't go! pray don't go!" cried Dick in desperation. "I'm awfully sorry I'm not Nan. I would be, if I could. Won't you stop and talk a little while? I'm very ill and lonely!"

"Well, upon my life!" ejaculated Greenhithe.

"Hold your tongue!" said Valory in a hasty aside. There was a moment's pause.

"Poor man!" said the voice, in accents of the most angelic compassion. "Are you very ill?"

"Very."

"What is the matter?"

"I've been wounded."

"Wounded! Dear me, how dreadful! Railway accident? gun-shot? how did it happen and when?"

"Just about five minutes ago, and it was an arrow."

"An arrow! How very odd! Who could have shot it? How did it hit you?"

"It was a very little boy with wings—and it came down a telephone tube," said Valory recklessly.

"Well, of all the audacity!" Greenhithe was unable to murmur more.

Again there was a smothered sound of mirth. "Won't you prescribe for me?" Valory was throwing a tenderness into his tones which fired his friend with admiration. "I'm sure you're the only person living who could do me good."

"With pleasure. A little hemp seed would suit your case, exactly."

"Taken in what form?"

"Outward application, about the neck."

"That sounds comforting," confided Valory to his friend, but the only answer was a shout of laughter.

"Jove!" said Greenhithe, doubling up with mirth. "That's a sharp-witted little person, anyway. She's advising you to go and hang yourself.

"Cruel!" murmured Valory, in accents of soft reproach. "Do you think that would mend matters?"

"On second thought, no!" and there floated on the air the notes of Henella's song, "A lover forsaken a new love may get, but the neck that is broken can never be set!"

"Tell me!" began Valory hastily, but a sharp jirk of the wire interrupted him. "I must know," he went on, in agitation, but a new voice broke into his protestations—"All right—wires mended, connections established with central office again!"

"Central office be hanged!" said Valory, with fervor, as he sank into the nearest chair, and turned a face of absolute woe upon his chum. "I've lost her forever!"

"Never mind, it was growing about time to stop," remarked Greenhithe dryly. "You were getting rather beyond yourself, my good fellow."

"I tell you, Fred," Valory spoke with solemn emphasis. "The woman who owns that voice shall be my wife, as sure as I sit here!"

"Don't make rash vows, there's a good man. She's probably got a husband already."

"I don't believe it. I feel convinced I've found my destiny at last. Oh, the angelic sweetness of those tones! it's the very voice I've sought for all my life!"

"I say, draw it mild!" ejaculated Greenhithe.

"And now, how on earth am I to find her? Oh, cruel irony of fate!"

"Advertise."

"Greenhithe, if you go on joking I shall kill you! I tell you, it's life and death to me. She's not American, anyway."

"No, American girls don't say 'railway.'"

"By Jove, there's a clew!" Valory made a dash across the room and caught up the book of telephone addresses. "No. 293—why—its Mrs. Ballard. You know the Ballards, don't you, Fred?"

"Yes, slightly."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, go round there this minute, and find out whom that voice belongs to."

"Well, that's an eccentric errand!" Greenhithe did not seem enchanted. "I really don't know how I can undertake it."

"Then I will."

"Well, as you don't know them, I'd better save you from being regarded as a lunatic, I suppose. In the words of Mme. Somebody—slightly altered—'Oh, friendship! what crimes are committed in thy name!'" and Greenhithe took up his hat. In half an hour or so he was back again.

"Well?" demanded Valory, pouncing upon him.

"Well, I did my level best, but the result's poor. First of all, I had to arm myself with a box of Maronsglacis, and pretend to having lost a philopena with Margie Ballard, by way of an excuse for a call. And I didn't get much by it, either. Nobody in the Ballard household rejoices in the name of Nan, that's certain, anyhow, and they don't seem to know any girl who does. I've exercised a power of invention over ascertaining that that ought to place me in the first rank of celebrated novelists."

"But didn't you do any good?" asked Valory ungratefully.

"I only found out that there are some English people staying in the town—friends of Mrs. Havermire's, that pretty little widow—a whole family, it seems. Margie Ballard leads. I met them; they're only traveling here. That doesn't seem much of a clew, certainly."

"All the same, I'll remember it. I tell you, Fred, I'm not joking. If I can find the owner of that exquisite voice, I'll marry her out of hand. I'm as serious as ever I was in my life—more serious, worse luck! I feel like a funeral sermon at the thought of losing her!" And Greenhithe could only shake his head compassionately.

"Birdie, what do you think!" pretty little Mrs. Havermire burst into her bright little morning-room, where the early summer sunlight came in softly through the heavy silk blinds with their dainty frills of lace, and the blaze of scarlet geraniums in the balcony made a glow of color in contrast to the subdued harmony of tints about the floor and walls. "Your sin has found you out, young lady! I've just been calling at the Ballards, as I didn't manage to get there yesterday, and they told me Mr. Greenhithe has been there making all sorts of queer inquiries about people named Nan, and English young ladies. Now, then! you've got yourself into a nice little scrape!"

"Oh!" and a very lovely little person rose hastily from the piano-stool. Her blue eyes opened wide, and a vivid rush of color in her soft, pink cheeks, "What shall I do!" Both little hands went up to hide the vehement blushes, and she sank down again as if the piano-stool were a stool of repentance. "Oh, Nan! I should die of shame if I ever met that man!"

"I don't wonder, you naughty girl!" said her hostess in judicial tones, though her eyes were dancing with amusement. "I never heard anything so disgraceful. To flirt with a total stranger down a telephone! That sort of thing may be considered correct in England, but we don't do it in Canada."

"Oh, Nan! Don't be horrid! You know it was only fun. I thought, of course, you were at the Ballards, as you said you would be; and how should I know the wires were broken? And then, when he began to talk—it did seem so funny that I couldn't help going on. I felt so safe, you know; it was like being invisible, and when he began to be so dreadfully audacious it was all the funnier. He must be a nice man—but, oh—if he ever were to find me out! I should die of mortification. I hate his very memory."

"Somehow, I don't believe it was Fred Greenhithe," said Mrs. Havermire, meditatively. "He's much too proper. It sounds a great deal more like his friend, Dick Valory. Well, you won't be here long, Birdie, my dear, worse luck for me; and there's not much fear of your meeting him. What would your respected parents say if they knew?"

Birdie hung her pretty head. "They'd disown me!" she said, meekly. "And then I'd have to address papa with, 'Tyrant, soon I'll burst thy chains!'" And turning to the piano again, she broke into "Una voce poca fa!" with a wonderful sweetness and affability.

Nan had wandered to the open window.

"Speak of certain personages!" she murmured to herself. There's Dick Valory just going by on the other side of the way. What a pity Birdie was such a little goose. She'll never bear to think of him now, and I did so want them to meet. The'd have suited each other exactly. Good Heaven!" she broke off, as Valory stopped suddenly, started violently—turned to look up at her windows, and dashed hastily across the street. "Stop, Birdie, for goodness sake, stop. Dick Valory's coming in—he's heard your voice, you're lost!"

With one spring Miss Constable was at the door, but her hostess caught her. "You can't fly!" she said excitedly. "There's no place to fly to. He's coming up stairs this minute. I hear his step. What shall we—shall we do? There, I know!—leave it to me. Sit down in that darkest corner, and don't utter a word at the peril of your life! Heaven forgive any lies I may have to tell for your sake!"

Valory entered, a bright look of expectancy upon his face.

"Ah, Mr. Valory, delighted to see you!" Mrs. Havermire almost swept him off his feet with the warmth of her greeting. "My friend, Miss Constable," then dropping her voice. "Poor girl, a terrible affliction—deaf and dumb—quite cut off from all intercourse with the outside world, but so very charming." Valory's face, which had lit up with a perfect glow on beholding the vision of golden hair and a pale blue frock, fell suddenly.

"Does she not speak at all?" he asked. "How does one make her understand?"

"Oh, she speaks with her fingers." Then, unconscious whether Birdie really possessed any knowledge of that art, and alarmed lest her caller was a past master of it:—"But she is very clever at understanding people's meaning by the motion of their lips."

Very clever, indeed, thought Valory, as she noticed a sudden spasm cross the lovely face, and felt certain she had noticed the allusion to her infirmity.

"I ventured to call, Mrs. Havermire," he said, "because I was so struck just now by some singing which came from your house. You know my mania for lovely voices, and this one was so exquisite that I could not pass without finding out who owned it. Do satisfy my curiosity."

Mrs. Havermire smiled benignly.

"Spriggins will be gratified," she said. "I must tell you that I have friends with me, and their English lady's maid, Spriggins, has suddenly developed a wild desire to take to the concert stage. She really has a very nice voice, and Mrs. Constable has kindly been giving her lessons. I really must tell her what you say."

Valory's jaw dropped, and he was gazing at the little widow like one confounded.

"And there she goes this minute, I declare!" said Mrs. Havermire, jumping up and running to the window, as they heard the front door close. "Quick, quick, Mr. Valory—you can just see her as she crosses the street. She's rather a superior woman—well spoken, and all that—but I think her appearance is rather against her as a queen of song."

Appearance! Crossing the street with a prim, yet solid tread, was the gaunt figure of a woman of thirty—decent, lady's maidish, respectable to the last degree, with a face of wooden plainess and hair which rivaled the poppy in its hue.

"Like one who walketh in a dream," poor Valory groped for his hat and got himself away.

"It's a bitter, bitter world!" he groaned, leaning his disheveled head on both his hands, and pouring out his griefs to Greenhithe's somewhat callous ear. "I've found the loveliest girl I ever saw in all my life, and she is deaf and dumb. And when I tracked the one voice I ever loved to its lawful owner—a lady's maid. Not but what I'd even have played the Lord of Burleigh, if she'd looked like the village maiden, but those carrots! That cast-iron visage! Oh, Greenhithe, it's a hard world. I'm going abroad to try and forget it; the Antartic sails next week and I mean to take berth in her!"

Sure enough, another week saw Valory on the high seas,—still pensive and somewhat inclined to nurse a broken heart, but becoming consoled by his new surroundings and the discovery of some pleasant people on board. They had it pretty rough the first day and there were a good many gaps at table;—one lady in the state-room next to his own, Valory heard, was especially bad and kept her daughter in close attendance. It was the morning of their second day out, and Dick was lying in his berth in that delicious state of laziness induced by the knowledge that he'd be late for breakfast if he did not rise and robe himself like a shot,—when suddenly there fell upon his sleepy ear a sound which started him bolt upright and set his heart beating like a hammer. With strained ears he listened for its repetition, for as sure as he was a living Canadian he could have sworn that the snatch of song he had just heard was uttered by the heroine of the telephone—Constable's English maid!

"Heavens! Can she have dogged my footsteps!" he gasped. "Has she tracked me o'er the pathless deep?" but even as he thought it he heard the door of the next state-room open and the owner of the voice emerge, still speaking.

"Then good-bye for the present, poor little mamma!" it said. "I'll send your breakfast down. You don't mind my going, now you're better?"

"She has a mother!" groaned Valory. "My destined mother-in-law, perhaps! Can Fate really mean me to fall into her grip? Does she look less gaunt on sea than on shore, I wonder?" And, with a skillful movement, he slid along the berth and peered cautiously through the swinging window-pane at its head. There, walking lightly down the narrow passage humming a gay opera air to herself, he beheld a slight, girlish figure in a blue serge sailor gown, together with the golden hair and shapely head of the deaf and dumb Miss Constable!

Valory fell back upon his pillows absolutely as devoid of speech as he had supposed her to be. For quite ten seconds there was utter silence, broken by a convulsion of laughter which threatened to rend the blankets.

"I see it all now!" he gasped, when at length sheer exhaution had brought him to a pause. "It's as plain as the English maid! The poor little thing was shocked at what she'd done, perhaps got a scolding from her people, and didn't dare confess to me. Now I remember how sly and nervous she was that day! Couldn't bear the sight of me, I dare say, and hated me for turning up. Hum! This rather complicated matters—what a nuisance! Not that I mean to let wild horses keep her from me—but she may take a different view. I have it!—I must shave. She may remember my name, but won't think I'm the same man if my mustache is gone." He scrambled down to the floor, contemplated his luxuriant mustache in the three squade inches of mirror allowed by a generous shipping company. "I shall look awful!" he murmured. "But I'd do more than that for her sweet sake. Anyhow, if she likes me after this, it will be for myself alone—that's one comfort." And, with an unfaltering hand, he made the sacrifice. Breakfast was nearly over when he reached the saloon, and Miss Constable was not to be seen; but Valory soon identified a certain dignified old gentleman as her paternal relative, and determined to lay siege upon him. One or two particularly excellent cigars out of Dick's case soon awakened a kindly interest in the elderly mind, for a youth of such sound taste, and the pair wandered upon deck together. There sat the object of Valory's devotion, in a sheltered corner—her blue eyes tied closely upon the novel in her hand; and the little rings of golden hair blowing about in the fresh breeze from under her dark-blue Tam O' Shanter cap in such a way that was nothing less than maddening. She did not look up as the gentlemen appeared, and they continued to walk up and down, deep in the conversation into which they had fallen. Still at last Mr. Constable stopped, and looked at his watch.

"Sorry to break off this pleasant chat," he said, "but must go below and look after my wife. She's been wretchedly ill, and its particularly unfortunate, as she just lost her maid—a very valuable servant, but extremely foolish. Took it into her head she would make her fortune as a singer, and stayed behind in Canada to do it! My daughter has had to take her place since we've been on board, and wait on her mother, which has made it rather dull for her so far; however, I dare say she'll get to know someone to speak to before long.

"If you will do me the honor of introducing me," said Dick, with the guile of the serpent, "I'll be very pleased to use my humble efforts for her entertainment."

So they turned toward the deck chair with its dainty burden, and the next minute Valory was bowing before those blue eyes which were looking up at him with a startled surprise at the sound of his name. He bore the scrutiny with courage; but there was enough of slight chilliness in her manner, as her father withdrew and left them together, to make him say presently.

"I hear you have been some time in Canada; I wonder if you ever happened to come across any of my cousins—I've a whole heap of them, but I don't see much of them myself—haven't met any of them for an age."

Miss Constable, who had looked sharply at him at the first sound of his voice, seemed to experience a sudden relief.

"I think one of them called on my friend Mrs. Havermire, while I was with her in Montreal." She said with an effort, "I remember the name, and he was very much like you, in appearance—wonderfully like, in fact. I did not know him though. I never even spoke to him that day." And in spite of herself Miss Constable's fair cheek flamed.

"Oh, Lor'!" said Dick to himself. "Can she possibly mind as much as that? I never must let her know till we're married—if I can help it."

But the "best laid plans, etc.—it was long before that important day—in fact, it was the night before they reached Liverpool, that the murder actually came out. It was a star-lit evening, though without the moon—just the kind of night generally preferred by a young couple who have half an hour previously discovered that it was mutually impossible to go on living apart—and have confided that conviction either to each. There was a round game raging in the saloon, which had drawn within the fell circle of its fascinations most of the cabin passengers. So the deck was, practically speaking, their own. Arm and arm—to speak within due bounds, they hung over the side of the ship and conversed in tones whose lowness one would have supposed unnecessary from the total absence of other ears than their own.

"And to think!" said Valory, rendered delirious by bliss, "that I once thought my ultimate destiny was to be the hangman's rope!"

"What can you mean, dear?" in somewhat startled accents.

"Oh, I was recommended by the first woman I ever loved to go and hang myself."

"The odious, atrocious creature! But Dick I thought—I hoped—you had never—never cared for anybody before you met me!"

"So did I, my darling, and I think it still. But my first love thought differently, you know, for she sang to me:

"A lover forsaken, a new love may get;—
But a neck that is broken, can never be set!"

"Dick!—" There were volumes in the tone and tragedies in the gesture with which a small white hand was torn from his grasp and as slight shoulder turned from him indignantly. "Then it was you, after all—and not your cousin! Oh, I could never have believed you would deceive me!"

"Birdie—my own—listen. I beg of you, Birdie!" Dick became alarmed as the hand still refused to surrender itself to his capture. "I wouldn't have deceived you for any earthly consideration—if I hadn't been obliged. Really, you know, if I had been my own cousin I'd have had to thrash him for daring to make love to you, and that would have caused more disagreeable family complications. As it is, it doesn't matter, don't you see?"

"Doesn't matter?" reproachfully—"when you have shaken all my trust in you? How can I ever believe in you again, when you have once deceived me?"

"It isn't difficult, really, when you once set your mind to it," pleaded Dick earnestly. "I've found it can be done myself. Don't you see, darling, that there wasn't another line left open to me, if I wanted to make you ever look at me? If I hadn't pretended to be my own cousin I should have had to pretend to be deaf and dumb—and, of course, I couldn't stoop to that, you know, could I?"

Silence. Then a small soft hand came out gently through the semi-darkness, and laid itself within Dick's still extended palm.

"I don't think I ought to forgive you," murmured a voice which Valory still thinks the most delicious upon earth. "I'm almost afraid it's wicked. But if you'll promise never—never to tell me a thing that isn't true again"—and the rest was suddenly stifled.

"One thing"—it was a good while after, and there were indications of Miss Constable's papa coming to look for his missing daughter, "one thing you must promise me. I'll never live in a house that has one of those horrible telephones in it—never. We don't have them in England, and I'm sure it shows our common sense. Will you promise, Dick?"

"We'll live in the domestic style of the cave-dwelling-man period, if you wish it, my darling!" he said.

And Miss Constable professed herself entirely satisfied.

HUMOR OF THE DAY.

The Best He Could Do.

New York Sun.

Old Lady (to street gamin)—You don't chew tobacco, do you, little boy?

Little Boy—No-m; but I kin give yer a cigarette.

Everything Goes.

Time.

Young Mother (to butcher)—I have brought my little baby, Mr. Bullwinkle. Will you kindly weigh him?

Butcher—Yes, ma'am; bones an' all, I s'spose?

New to Her.

New York Sun.

Mr. Gotham (at the ball game)—Do not Welch's curves, Miss Breezy, remind you of Hogarth's line of beauty?

Miss Breezy (from Chicago)—Well, really, Mr. Gotham, I never saw Hogarth pitch.

The Cause.

Nebraska Journal.

Naomi—"George, I believe that love brings us anguish as well as bliss."

"So do I."

"Did you ever experience that restlessness, that anxiety, that positive pain, that——"

"Certainly, love."

"And what, think you, caused it all?"

"Chiggers."

Essential to Success.

The Epoch.

Young Man (to plain old party)—I take it, sir, that you are not a college bred man?

Plain Old Party—Young man, I was put to work when I was a boy.

Young Man—Too bad; everybody should have a college education to succeed in life. Then you don't know anything about colleges?

Plain Old Party—Not much. You see I've only endowed four of 'em.

She Knew Him Well.

Time.

Miss Clara (blushing)—Do you know, Ethel, that young Mr. Sampson proposed to me last night, and I accepted him?

Miss Ethel (heartily)—I congratulate you sincerely, Clara. Mr. Sampson is a noble young man.

Miss Clara—Do you know him very well?

Miss Ethel—Oh, yes. It was only a few months ago that I promised to be a sister to him.

A Ruinous Percentage.

New York Sun.

Customer—How is your brother doing, Isaacstein, who went to the oil country a year or so ago?

Mr. Isaacstein—Ah! poor Abraham, he vas blown oop by dynamite; dot vas pad.

Customer—You don't tell me. Were his remains found?

Mr. Isaacstein (overcome)—My frent, not more as t-venty-five per cent. Choost think of dot, only t-venty-five per cent. Dot vas awful.

How He Kept the Geese at Work.

Atlanta Journal.

"When I was in Alabama, between Porter's Gap and Millerville," said a gentleman in Atlanta, "I came to a country place where a man was driving ten or twelve geese from a branch toward a cotton patch. 'For Heaven's sake, said I, 'what is it you have on the necks of those geese?' 'Those are gourds, full of water. I drive these geese into that cotton patch and keep them there all day weeding out the cotton. There is no water in the cotton patch, and I have to give them water in this way to keep them there.' 'But how do they get the water out of those gourds under their necks?' 'They drink out of each other's gourds. Each gourd has an opening in the side so that another goose can put his bill into the gourd and drink. If you will stay here long enough you will see it yourself.' I waited there half a day to see that performance, and I finally saw it. The geese did just as the man said they would. When a goose got thirsty he walked up to his neighbor and coolly drank out of the gourd on his neck."

A Mean Reporter.

Philadelphia North American

When the doctors cannot agree, who shall then be able to decide? has been a mooted question. A piece of newspaper enterprise by a Boston paper disclosed a very remarkable difference of opinion among the physicians in that city. A reporter in perfect health visited ten of the prominent doctors of the "hub" and stated symptoms that did not exist, requesting a diagnosis. Every doctor diagnosed the case in a different way and gave different prescriptions. The diagnosis and prescriptions were all published, together with the statement of the splendid health of the supposed patient. Those doctors will probably never hear the last of it.