

and couldn't marry without an act of Congress!" Philpot's eyes closed to conceal his contentment, and his face became almost gentle as he briefly congratulated himself that his calling did not emulate the wind in dealing with shorn lambs. Out of a crucible of troubles came gold; only, Philander must be consumed slowly. "This is going to cost more'n ordinary services," he murmured, frowning as if regretting that fact. "You see, I've got to be on my guard every minute for a month or so. Kind of a minuteman, you know. It's really a sort of insurance you're taking out. But leave it to me. I'll fix it!"

LIGHTER in heart and pocketbook, Philander drew his portly form on the box and whistled shrilly as he toiled his lumbering coach down the quiet street. His visit to the lawyer's office had removed a mighty load from his heart. Now his simple soul expanded as it hearkened to the day's warmth and fresh odors. Unconsciously he assumed his old slashing style, forgetful of yesterday's resolve to abate a bit in elegance and to practise a more subdued deportment. But, now that his dread secret was shared with a friend, his apprehensions became dulled, and after so many hours of gnawing fear his spirits must needs feast on optimism.

"Would you do an errand for me?" cried a voice on his right.

Wondering who could be living in the old Pike house, he reined in and looked over the fence. She was small and trim and looked almost childish as she stood behind some creeping vines.

"I'm Miss Farnum, the new milliner," she smiled, now approaching through the gate.

He eyed her in silent surprise. She was not a child, but a woman, his lazy wits decided; and, oblivious to the flicker of demure amusement on her face, he gravely continued to admire her. She was different from other women he had met. Her long lashes curtailed a tolerance of his prolonged homage, although she repeated a bit shortly, "I asked if you would do an errand for me!"

Then he became galvanized into his old gracious self, and out-Philandered all former efforts as he doffed his hat while clambering down, and replied in a hearty affirmative. "So you're the new milliner," he added. "Moved here from Porterville, didn't you? Lawyer Philpot was saying he knew you, and that you was coming. But he didn't say—ah—huh."

"Didn't say what?" she urged. Philander coughed and reddened, and lamely replied, "Well, he didn't let on you was—ah—huh," then, desperately, "so small."

She tilted her head and surveyed him coldly. "I know of no reason why Mr. Philpot should have discussed me," she said. "Being my friend, he naturally would not. Sorry to have stopped you. No; never mind about the errand. I've changed my mind. Besides, I'm not small!" And she turned and walked rapidly through the gate.

"I'd dearly love to oblige you," he begged, following her for a few paces. "Now, you jest let me!"

"No!"

"I'm sorry—" he began, humbly placing a hand on the gate.

"I'm busy," she frigidly replied.

"Good morning!"

For the rest of the trip he had eyes only for a small figure behind green vines; requests that he sample pickles and pastry were not heard.

ON his return he stopped at her home and resolutely dared the privacy of the porch. "I've come to say that if you need anything at the junction, I'll go back for it," he explained.

"You'd drive way back there for—nine miles?" she cried, her surprise smothering all formality.

"Jest let me!" he pleaded, his eyes round with deliberate admiration.

"You're very obliging," she murmured, flushing under his fixed gaze.

"I'm not surprised, though. Miss Turner was saying this noon, while trying on a hat, that 'Our stage driver—' There! I shouldn't repeat it."

He felt uncomfortable in turn and avoided her quizzical gaze, and gruffly demurred, "I don't care what no one said. I'm not obliging by natur'. I was meant for a hermit. But I'd like mortally well to please you. I've—I've been thinking so ever since morning."

"Has Miss Simms decided what color she will paint her barn?" she asked in innocent irrelevancy. "She was saying she would go entirely by your advice."

"I hate barns and paint!" he mumbled. "I don't care if she never paints it. But please, Miss Farnum, ain't there any errand I can do for you?"

"Why, no," she replied icily.

"Well, I shall call to-morrow and make sure," he sighed, turning to go.

"You needn't bother," she laughed, with a sneering note in her voice.

The sneer did not escape him. It was the hinge on which his new life swung,—she was the first

woman to belittle his advances! He felt his pedestal rocking; yet, so perverse is poor human nature, he loved the wounds she gave him and found sweet solace in enduring the rebuffs. Cruelty is the evil angel's contribution to humanity. But there is a cruelty that soothes, that is divine,—to Philander the little milliner and her flouting ways was an angel. Only, being limited in opportunities, his visual conception of an angel would have been satisfied by the usual ornaments on a valentine. Miss Farnum was much superior to any of these. In his eyes she was a valentine creation sublimated.

As his horizon ended with her, he forgot his lawyer, his recent fears, his weekly payments of protection money. The past was washed from his mind entirely. The future was walled off by the present. At last his accumulated humbleness made him bold in honesty, and one day he meekly said:

"I'm sorry you don't like to have me stop here; but I must come for awhile longer. I—I can't seem to help it, you know."

As he drove away on that occasion, the angry tenor of her gaze faltered a bit and the pink in her cheeks spread warmly, as she murmured, "The conceited nuisance! And yet, he's almost handsome at times."

MINUTIE, almost exclusively, troop across the camera obscura of a small village. Nothing is so immaterial as to escape notice,—it is the



Then He Out-Philandered All His Former Efforts.

realm of the microscope. Therefore, at the end of a few weeks Tibbetts' store was observant of two facts: Philander had ceased being promiscuous, and the women folks did not like the new milliner. A woman's name is ever good soil for the gossip weed, and with a multiplicity of incentives the loungers babbled. Some, urged on by the women, were venomous, some were merely clownish; but all expressed surprise that Philander did not seem to know she was "bespoke."

Philander endured it all in silence; possibly he heard but little of it. Philpot was one of the last to note the stage driver's infatuation; this, perhaps, because he had been absent from the village. At first, in the street, he was incredulous; then, alone in his office, he was furious. There was nothing in his bearing to evidence the latter emotion when he jolted Philander out of a day dream on the post-office steps by joyously whispering, "Step into my office, old fellow!"

Once secluded, Philpot seized his client by both hands and shook them with the fervor of a brother,

crying, "Cheer up, Philander! You did not trust me in vain! All is well!"

"Er—ah?" muttered Philander, releasing his hands and caressing his fingers.

"Yes, siree!" continued Philpot, pacing proudly before the desk. "Leave it to Abner M. Philpot to find a remedy in any case! Philander, I never did a neater stroke of work in my life! But it was tough, a regular puzzler!"

"Huh!" ejaculated Philander, sitting on the end of the desk and watching the other with a new expression. "You've fixed it, you mean, so none of them old maids can bother me? I'd almost forgotten it."

"I have fixed it so no one can ever bother you," cried Philpot dramatically. Then, placing an emphatic hand on Philander's broad shoulder, he slowly repeated, "So no one can ever bother you! I've fixed it this way: I have obtained an injunction order from the court, restraining you from making love to any female."

"What! To any woman?" gasped Philander, collapsing into a chair, while his face froze as his sluggish mind sought to grapple with the potentials of this announcement.

"You are free, free!" exulted Philpot, slapping his client's shoulder at each word. "I have fixed it so that you can never marry!"

Philander stared stupidly at the ceiling for some seconds and tried to count the flies. Then his countenance warmed into an expression of definite horror, while his glazed eyes beheld only a small figure behind the vines; and he finally whispered, "On what grounds did you get such an order?"

"On the ground that you are afflicted with recurrent attacks of insanity," gleefully informed Philpot.

"Insane! I can never marry!" choked Philander, tottering to his feet.

"Be calm," soothed Philpot. "Great joy seldom kills; but be calm. There, there! don't try to thank me. I like you, Philly, else I couldn't have saved you. But saved you are. Hurrah!"

"Saved me! Yes, saved me! Ha-ha! Yah!" wildly muttered the stage driver, crushing his hat low over his eyes.

"Now I want you to share a little secret with me," archly whispered Philpot. "Now that you are happy, I want you to know I am happy too. I'm going to get married. It's Miss Farnum, the little milliner. I got acquainted with her when attending court in Porterville."

THE little milliner was among the first to notice the great change in Philander. She smiled scornfully at his first ignominy of her; then her brown eyes became anxiously steady as the indifference was repeated. The king did not hanker for the tea tax so much as he desired the prerogative of imposing it.

The queer bits of gossip, prattled by her customers, cast little light on his metamorphosis. Gossips are ignorant vivisectionists; sometimes they use dull knives. In Philander's case many needless cuts and slashes were made, the milliner thought.

Mrs. Turner more than intimated that he was insane. This seemed almost plausible to the milliner, until it was added that Miss Turner was the cause of his aberration. The mother hinted that the daughter had been cruel to him. The little milliner wrinkled her nose. Miss Simms was darkly poetic. With a wild gleam briefly lighting up her dying eye, she sang, "I Know He Will Return!" at the Methodist social. The audience immediately connected the solo with Philander's bowed head and moody mien. Mrs. Porter sighed and "hoped" everything would end happily; but insisted that Minerva was to be considered "free" in the meanwhile.

This mélange of innuendo and rumor incited Miss Farnum to lead Philpot skilfully to the subject. The lawyer, pausing at her gate to urge his suit,—which, despite his confident assertion to Philander, was not yet favorably terminated,—smiled mysteriously and murmured a truism that incompetents should be gently cared for and humored. He was direct and positive, however, in his statement that Philander had said farewell to all things sentimental.

IN this manner did Philander pass from her life, except as he was seen, shadow like, in the distance. Sometimes she paused in her work and looked out as his coach rolled by. The very horses were infected by his lassitude and shambled listlessly. It was like watching a funeral train.

Discontent is a malady that advances rapidly.