MR. DAWBARN.

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CHAPTER I.

"Would you have the kindness to step this way, sir, into Mr. Dawbarn's room?"

These words were addressed by a banker's clerk to a young man whose dress and manners were a vulgar compound of groom, betting man, and pugilist. The sporting gentleman swaggered by the desks and the clerks, looking minute disparagement at the whole concern, and was ushered through the double doors into presence of Mr. Dawbarn.

Mr. Dawbarn was the principal banker in Bramlingdon, and Bramlingdon was the county town of the little county of Mafford. It consisted of one long, straggling street, beautified by five old churches, each a splendid specimen of architecture, which contrasted strongly with the Town Hall, the Corn Exchange, and the Market Place, which were modern buildings, and unpleasant to look at.

"Mr. Studden," said Mr. Dawbarn to the young gentleman of sporting appearance, "I have to talk to you, sir, very seriously; sit down, if you please."

Mr. Studden sat in a chair as if it were a saddle, shut one eye knowingly, and examined the thong of his whip with the other.

"Mr. Studden," continued the banker solemnly, "I have been informed that you have overdrawn your account to the amount of"——

"Yes; I know all about that, governor," broke in Mr. Studden. "I've been told so twice."

"I therefore gave directions that the next time you presented a check, you should be shown in here to me," said the banker.

"That is—a check of my own drawing."

"Quite so."

"Well, now I am here," said Mr. Studden, goading the side of his imaginary horse with his left heel, "respectful comps, and should like to know your little game. What's to be done?"

"Mr. Studden, I have known you from a boy."

"Well, I know that."

"And I now see you a ruined man"——

"Hold hard, Matilda," interrupted Studden; "not ruined—pushed for the moment—on my knees, but not staked. I've been unlucky on the races this last year—unlucky at play. Why, last night I lost a pot at loo, and then that girl behaved to me in"——

"Mr. Studden," said the banker, closing his eyes, "I cannot listen to a catalogue of your cri—cri—imprudences. I am the father of a family, and"——

"Cut that, governor!" broke in the amiable Mr. Studden. "What I want is money, and not preaching—no preachee and floggee too. This is the state of the odds. I've overdrawn my account, good; will you let me have some more? tin, I mean. If you will, I am sure to retrieve myself. I've some splendid things on, but must have the ready—ti—iddity—rhino."

"Mr. Studden," said Mr. Dawbarn, "I do not understand your jargon, nor is such language the sort of thing I am accustomed to hear. You have lost the fortune left you by your father in gambling, horse racing, and —and the like. For the last seven years I have seen going to irretrievable ruin. As you had a long minority, and no friends to advise you, I have tried to help you, but I regret to say, your complete ruin is inevitable—inevitable."

"Bet you fifteen to one it isn't!" said Mr. Studden.

"What you owe me," continued the banker, not noticing the interruption—"what you owe me I shall never trouble you for."

"Bless you!" said the irreverent Studden.

Mr. Dawbarn's face reddened. "Mr. Studden," he choked out, "I am not accustomed to be treated with rudeness, and I don't mean to begin now. I would have given you some advice, sir."

"Don't want it, thank you."

"Good advice, parental advice; but it will be of no use, I can see."

"Not a bit."

"I shall leave you therefore to the pursuit of your career of profligacy, and may it—may it"—Mr. Dawbarn stammered, for he felt that he was proposing a toast at a public meeting—"may it prove to you that—that—that"——

"Out with it, governor," said the insolent young sporting man.

"No, sir, I will not out with it," said the banker, majestically. "I will not say what I was going to say."

"Are you quite clear what you were going to say?" inquired the young man, who respected neither age nor wealth.

Mr. Dawbarn covered his defeat grandly. "I will not detain you any longer, Mr. Studden." He rang the bell. "I wish you good day, sir; my servant will show you out."

"Very good, governor," said Mr. Studden, dismounting from his chair, or saddle. "You throw me over—very good; and just at the moment when I could make a colossal fortune. If I had your capital, or you had my talent and speculated—ka foozilum!—what might not be made with the tips I have! I know the way out, Chawles"—this Mr. Studden addressed to the servant—"you needn't show me. Mr. Dawbarn, I have the honor to be, sir, yours truly, ever to command, et cetera—cetera—cetera."

Mr. Studden departed with a flourish, leaving the banker in a state of the most wrathful indignation. Mr. Dawbarn was a great man in Bramlingdon and accustomed to be treated with respect and deference and servility, and though so excellent a person, Mr. Dawbarn was something of a humbug, and the young man's manners had convinced him that he knew it, and it is very annoying to men of 50 years of age to be found out by their juniors. Mr. Robert Studden, or, as he was called, Mr. Bob Studden, or Mr. Rip Studden, swaggered past the cashier and clerks with the ease of a jockey and the grace of a groom. A dozen steps from the door of the bank he met a clerk whom he stopped.

"Halloa!" he cried, with graceful badinage, "Munro, how goes it?"

"How do you do, Mr. Studden?" inquired the clerk.

"Don't be in such a hurry. Well, how is she, eh?"

"Mr. Stud—I"——

"Don't be afraid, my boy. I'm not the man to spoil sport. Why not bolt with her? Bolt! I'd lend you my last fiver to help you. I saw you the other morning. Ri-tol-de-rol, lol-li-day."

Mr. Studden closed one eye, thrust his tongue into his cheek and strolled down the one long, straggling street of Bramlingdon, the pink of sporting self conscious vulgarity.

CHAPTER II.

In a small country town it is impossible that anything can be kept secret, except murder, and then rumor points to so many probable criminals that justice and detective policemen become lost in surmise, and embarrass the innocent that the guilty may go free. Slow to detect murder, the provincial intellect is swift at the discovery of love. Had Romeo met Juliet at a fancy ball in Peddlingham, instead of at a masquerade in Verona, and afterwards prowled about the garden of his mistress' father's house, the Sussex Capulet and Montague would have been informed of the occurrences early on the following morning by several competent and credible eye witnesses—all of the gentler sex, and the majority on the other side of five-and-thirty years of age.

It was Christmas day, cold, clear and frosty. Mr. Dawbarn was dressed in his brightest black, and his cravat was as a monument to the most irreproachable of laundresses. But Mr. Dawbarn was pale and agitated, his head shook and his hands trembled, till the papers he held in them rattled and crumpled.

When a servant opened the dining room door and announced "Mr. Munro," Mr. Dawbarn turned paler, and when the young clerk whom Mr. Robert Studden had so playfully rallied a fortnight before in the street entered, the banker trembled more violently.

"Mr. Munro," said the banker, when the door was closed, "you—you—you doubtless know why I have sent for you—on this festive occ—occa—sion, today?"

The young clerk, who was as pale as Mr. Dawbarn, faltered out, "No, sir," with so transparent an effort that the banker saw that the young man perfectly understood the reason of the interview.

"Your conduct, sir, has been such that I—I—I do not know how to address you," stammered Mr. Dawbarn. "That you, sir, my servant, my paid and salaried servant, should have so abused my confidence; should have so dared to try to so injure me is—is—what I did not expect from you. I know all, sir, all. You are discharged from the bank this moment."

A pang shot over the young man's face.

"You will not be allowed to enter there again. This quarter's salary is there, sir." The banker put upon the table a small paper packet. "And I shall not suffer you to take your place at your desk again, there is a half year's salary." The banker placed another small packet on the table, and the clerk made a deprecatory motion with one hand. "I insist on it, sir, and shall take no denial. I also insist on your leaving Bramlingdon tonight, or to-morrow morning, at the latest. Should you have any debts here, leave a list of them, and today being Christmas day, I will see that one of the clerks pays them the day after to-morrow. There can be no excuse for your remaining, and your absence, sir, is a matter of much more importance to me than a few paltry pounds; so I will hear of no objection."

Mr. Dawbarn paused and drew breath, and the young clerk looked at him and then at the window, as if out into a far distance beyond.

"My accounts, sir"—— he began, when the banker interrupted him.

"Will be found quite right, I dare say. Had you only robbed me of money, sir, I should have been better pleased. I have treated you only too well, and in return see what you have done." Mr. Dawbarn struck his clenched hand upon the table. "But no matter. Do I understand that you will leave Bramlingdon to-night?"

Munro took his eyes from the window, and, looking full in the banker's face, said:

"Lucy."

Mr. Dawbarn's face turned scarlet, and he again struck the table. "Don't mention my daughter's name to me, sir, if you please. I won't hear it! How dare you? There, sir, are the rubbishing letters you have sent to her, and if you have any sense of decency or honesty left, you will return those you have of hers—of—of my daughter's."

Munro took up the letters his former master had tossed to him.

"Did you hear me, sir?" asked the banker.

"I beg your pardon."

"I say, will you give me back her letters, and will you leave Bramlingdon to-night?"

There was a pause, and the bells of the church rang out for morning service.

"I can make no promise, sir," replied the young clerk, very clearly. "I have a duty to your daughter as well as a duty to you. If she desires that I should"——

"You set me at defiance, do you, sir?" burst in the banker. "Very good, very good; but don't suppose that if you stay here forever that you will see my daughter, or be enabled to write to her. If you stop in Bramlingdon, she goes. Next week she travels with her mother to London, abroad, anywhere, away from her father's presumptuous clerk, who, because his master asked him a few times to his house, to sit at his table, and treated him as an equal, so far forgot himself as to lift his eyes up to his daughter, his only child."

It had been a terrible Christmas morning in the banker's house. Mr. and Mrs. Dawbarn had been informed that their only daughter, Lucy, rose every morning early and had an interview with the young clerk, Munro, in the kitchen garden, the door of which opened into a lane, and of which door either Lucy or the young clerk, or both, possessed a key. Lucy had been forced into confession, and had gone on her knees to her papa, and wept and implored him not to hurt her George. She had given up all his letters, which she was in the habit of placing under her pillow every night, and which letters Munro had written stealthily in banking hours and placed in a certain portion of the wall, near the tool house in the kitchen garden. Mr. Dawbarn went on wildly and frightened Mrs. Dawbarn, a good, motherly woman, into a fit. When Mrs. Dawbarn recovered, Miss Lucy went off into a swoon, and her father and mother had to recover her, and Mr. Dawbarn was in agony lest the servants of his household should be cognizant of the disturbance, which was an entirely unnecessary excitement on his part, as they, the servants, had known all about it for the last eight months. Poor Lucy was told that Munro was to be immediately sent away, but that she and her mamma were to go to church that day, as their absence might be remarked by a devout but curious congregation, and that she was to bathe her eyes and look unconcerned, easy, comfortable and composed.

As Lucy and her mamma passed the door of the dining room, Lucy heard the young clerk's voice. She knew that she should never see him again, and she could not resist her impulse. She ran to the door, seized the handle, and would have opened it, but her mamma pulled her away, and on the other side Mr Dawbarn rushed to the door and put his back against it. Munro strode to the window, that he might take a last look of his mistress as she left the house.

"Good-by, George dear, good-by!" cried poor Lucy in the passage. "We shall never see each other again; but good-by and good-by and good-by again."

CHAPTER III.

A year had elapsed since Lucy Dawbarn had bidden farewell to her father's clerk through the dining room door. He had left Bramlingdon and gone no one knew whither. Neither letter nor message came to Lucy; she was too strictly watched. She often walked in the garden and looked at that portion of the wall where they had concealed their letters. The good old trick that they used to take out and put back again was a thing of the past. In its place there was a bran new red brick cemented by bran new white mortar that you could see a mile off. Lucy had been to London, and had been visiting not only her father's and mother's relatives but the magnates of the county, and had seen all sorts of pleasures and fashion and distraction, and at the end of six months had returned very thin and pale.

She had been home but a few weeks when the news came that young Munro had sailed from Liverpool for New York. It reached Lucy's ears through a sympathetic servant maid. The next morning she sent word that she would like to have a cup of tea sent to her up stairs in her own room, as she had a headache and begged to be excused from the breakfast table. Mrs. Dawbarn knew that she had heard of Munro's departure for America, but she did not dare to mention even the name of the objectionable clerk to her husband, who was entirely ignorant of the young man's movements. Two or three days after the doctor was sent for. The medical man hummed and hawed and said that his patient was low. Lucy grew worse and worse. A consultation was held. The young lady's disorder was pronounced to be nervous fever, and one white headed old gentleman from London suggested to Mr. and Mrs. Dawbarn that if the young lady were engaged he should not advise the postponement of the ceremony.

"You see, my dear Mr. Dawbarn," said the old gentleman, "your dear daughter's malady is partly mental. She has here no employment, that is, no fresh employment for her mind. If you could substitute new duties, fresh impressions, she would recover quickly. Her energy is wearing her to pieces; she wants, so to speak, to begin her life over again. If—if her partner has not yet been chosen"—here the eyes of the father and mother met—"let her travel, let her choose an occupation, give her something to do. I know a young lady—much the same kind of case—who took to painting, and found considerable benefit from the study and the practice. Italy, now, might create a desire to cultivate some art—say music, eh? Your dear daughter is not strong; her mind is too much for her body."

Lucy was taken to Harrogate, to Cheltenham, to Leamington and Scarborough, then to the south of France and Italy. When she returned to Bramlingdon she had to be lifted from the carriage. Her father, who had not seen her for two months, was struck with the visible alteration in her face and figure. He himself carried her to her room and was hardly conscious of his burden. She said she was tired with her journey and would go to bed. Mr. Dawbarn descended to dine with his wife, and meeting on the stairs with the sympathetic housemaid who had informed Lucy of Munro's departure for America, and asking the girl why she was crying, and receiving for answer that it was for Miss Lucy, he discharged her on the spot.

It was a dismal dinner. Husband and wife spoke but little, and when one caught the the other's eye there was a great show of appetite. Mr. Dawbarn drank a considerable quantity of sherry. When the cloth was removed the conversation flagged. Neither dared begin the consultation they felt was inevitable. Before they went into Lucy's room to look at her as she lay sleeping, Mr. Dawbarn put his arm around his wife's waist and kissed her on the forehead, a proceeding which made the good old lady tremble very much and her mouth and nostrils quiver.

Side by side in the dark the couple lay awake in their luxurious chamber, starting at the reflection of the window frame upon the blinds. The father began.

"Jemima."

"Philip," said the mother.

"What do you think of Lucy?"

The mother heaved a deep sigh.

"Good God!" said the banker, "when I took her up in my arms I could hardly feel her weight. She was like a feather—like a feather. Jemima, you're crying, my love. Tell me, honestly, now, honestly, candidly, as you think. Tell me, tell me."

The wife threw her arm around her husband's neck and sobbed: "I fear that we shall lose her."

It was spoken, and death was recognized as a presence in the house.

"D'ye think there's no hope?"

"Only one, and that a very poor one."

Mr. Dawbarn felt a mental qualm, for he knew what was coming.

"What's that?" he asked.

"You'll be angry with me, Philip, if I tell you."

"Angry, my dear? no, no, not a bit," said the father.

"You know what I mean."

The banker sighed.

"Do you mean"—— he began.

"Yes, I do," replied the mother. "If Lucy could see or hear of that young man, I believe she would recover. I'm sure it would do her good."

There was a long pause. Mr. Dawbarn groaned in spirit, but he felt that his wife was right.

"I had such better views for her," groaned the banker.

"Yes, my dear, I know you had," said the wife, pressing his hand.

"Lord Landringa was most particular in his attentions, and Sir Theophilus Hawdon absolutely spoke to me about her."

"I know he did," said the acquiescent wife.

"Think of Lucy being Lady Landringa or Lady Hawdon! county people—and then of her being Mrs. —— oh!"

"It's a sad thing, dear, but what can we do now that she's so ill—poor thing! And if we could save her life"——

Mr. Dawbarn turned in the bed. "I'll ask Topham about it to-morrow." (Topham was the doctor.) "I'll hear his opinion."

"I have asked him," said the mother, "and he agrees with me."

"But how can it be done?" asked the banker, turning again restlessly. "I can't ask the fellow to marry my daughter."

"No, but you can offer him a situation in the bank."

"Suppose he refuses."

"He won't refuse."

"But how can I find him? Where is he?"

"In America," answered Mrs. Dawbarn.

"America!" repeated the banker, sitting up in bed. "Then how the deuce is he to be got at?"

"Advertise for him. If he will apply to So-and-So, he will hear of something to his advantage. I asked Dr. Topham's advice about all that."

"Advertising is not respectable," said the banker; to which his wife made no reply but the word 'Lucy.'"

"Besides," continued Mrs. Dawbarn, after a short pause, "if you don't like advertising, send somebody after him to find out where he is."

"Send somebody! Send who?

"Oh, that Mr. Studden; he's doing nothing and I dare say will be glad of the job."

"I suppose that Topham advised that too?"

"Yes, he did."

"I thought I recognized Topham's interest in that young vagabond. I suppose you and he have talked this matter over now some time."

"I and Mr. Studden?"

"No, you and Topham."

"Yes."

"And you've arranged it all between you."

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me this before, Jemima?"

"I was afraid."

"Afraid! Afraid of what?"

"Of you."

"Of me, Jemima? Don't you think I love my child as much as you?"

"I'm sure you do; but you men don't understand some things."

"But Topham's a man," remarked the puzzled banker.

"But then he's a doctor," was the reply.

Mr. Dawbarn groaned inwardly, as a possible coronet presented itself to his mind's eye—and then faded away. "I suppose you must have it your own way," he said.

"May I, Philip?" asked his wife, putting her arm around his neck a second time.

"Yes, I believe you're in the right. But won't the shock—the surprise hurt her?"

"I'll answer for that. May I tell her to-morrow?"

"Yes," sighed the vanquished father.

"Bless you, Philip!" said the good mother; and she kissed her partner, and both wife and husband slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER IV.

"Lucy, my dear," said Mrs. Dawbarn the next morning as she entered the invalid's chamber, "I and papa have been talking about you."

"Yes, mamma," said Lucy, with an evident want of interest in the subject.

"And what do you think he says?"

"Don't know, mamma."

"He's going to make some alterations in the bank."

"Oh, indeed!"

Miss Lucy had not the smallest solicitude about the bank.

"And what else do you think?"

"Oh, mamma, I am so tired," said Lucy peevishly.

"What else do you think he means to do?" continued Mrs. Dawbarn, bending her matronly head over her daughter's face, and pouring into her ear words that made the girl flush scarlet and her eyes flash.

"Oh, mamma, it can't be true!"

"My love, could I deceive you?"

"No, dear mamma, no; but oh, is it true? Kiss me, mamma dear. I am so happy and so thankful, and—and in a little time, when I've thought over how happy I am, papa may come in, and I'll kiss him and thank him, and tell him how grateful I am too, and"——

But poor Lucy could get no further, and sobbed and wept with delight.

"My darling, kiss me now," said her father, advancing from the door, behind which he had watched the effect of the news. "I'll do anything to make you happy—anything."

"O papa! my own papa!"

"My darling, you'll love me now again as you used to do, won't you? and—and—there's Mr. Bob Studden's knock. I'll send that fellow off to New York—I mean to Liverpool, this very night."

Mr. Bob Studden was waiting in the dining room. He was so changed in face, dress, appearance and manner that when Mr. Dawbarn saw him he started and said:

"Are you Mr. Robert Studden?"

"Yes, Mr. Dawbarn, it's me," said the familiar voice. "I dare say you find me changed. I do myself."

He was indeed altered. In place of the spick, span, new, natty, dressy, shiny, oily, varnished Bob, the delight of barmaids and the envy of grooms, stood a shabby, corduroy trousered, waistcoatless vagabond, smelling of straw and porter. Mr. Dawbarn hesitated before he asked him to sit down.

"I got your letter, sir," said Bob, whose manner was as deferential as his clothes were shabby, "and came on immediately. Sorry I couldn't present myself more decently; but such is fate."

"What are you doing now, Mr. Studden?" asked the banker.

"At present, sir, replied Bob, "I am stableman at the Cock and Bottle."

"Good gracious!"

"It's not what I could wish, sir, but it's better than nothing. I'm sorry to say I'm only employed there two days a week—Mondays and market days; but still, what with odd jobs, I manage to grub on."

Mr. Dawbarn looked at the ex-betting man's wan face and wistful eyes, and asked him if he would take a glass of wine.

Bob shot a quick glance, and said that he would; and in the keen look Mr. Dawbarn read hunger.

"The sherry," said the banker to a servant, "and bring lunch—some cold roast beef—and—you know; and when we've lunched, Mr. Studden, we'll talk business."

Mr. Studden's performance upon the beef was so extraordinary that the banker feared that he would commit involuntary suicide. It was with a feeling of intense relief that he saw him attack the cheese; but the attack was so prolonged that Mr. Dawbarn feared lest the suffocation the beef had left unaccomplished should be effected by the Stilton.

"Not any more, sir, thank you," answered Bob to his host's complimentary question. "I never tasted such a cheese—and as for the beef, it's beautiful. I haven't tasted animal food for these ten days. For red herring is not animal food any more than a lump of salt is, and I'm sick of red herrings. Soak 'em in as much hot water as you like, they always taste of lucifers; perhaps because they lie next to 'em in the shop. I may thank you, Mr. Dawbarn, for a real meal such as I haven't had for—for"——

The wine Mr. Studden had drunk seemed to have got into his head, and from his head into his eyes. Men are strange creatures—and even betting men are men—and whether it was the memory of bygone days, or the wine, or the bread, or the butter, or the beef, or the cheese that affected him, cannot be ascertained, but one of these causes, or some of them, or all, caused Bob Studden to lay his head upon his arms, and to cry copiously.

He then began accusing himself, and saying that he was a bad lot; that he was miserable and repented; that his life was an hourly curse to him; that he knew he had brought it all upon himself; that all his friends had deserted him, particularly those who had shared his hospitality, and even his money, when he was prosperous; that the man who owed his rise in life to him, and whom he had assisted at a crisis, had behaved to him with an ingratitude that stung him to the soul; that he was half starved and had no bed but in the stable; that he was ruined—ruined—and had no hope.

When the poor, broken down gamester had exhausted himself, the banker began. He told him that he (the banker) had been advised to offer him (Studden) employment because he knew him to be intelligent, and hoped that his past sufferings had been a warning to him for the future; that the business he wished to employ him on was difficult and delicate, being no less than to go to New York and from there to wherever else it might be necessary to travel, in search of Mr. Munro; that money would be provided and letters furnished him, and that he was required to start for Liverpool that very night; that it was hoped he would not lightly give up a chance that offered him redemption for the past and a fine prospect for the future.

"I'll do it! I'll do it!" said Bob, rising and grasping the banker's hand; "and God bless you, Mr. Dawbarn, for giving a poor outcast devil like me the chance. I'll not deceive you, sir, if I do"——

"Hush, hush, Mr. Studden."

"You'll make a man of me, sir—a MAN! I'll be true as steel. I'll not bet—not on the best horse that was ever foaled. To-night, sir—I'll start this minute, barefoot, if you wished it. I've got a decent suit of clothes in pawn, sir, quite good enough for the likes of me; I'll be faithful and true, sir, and God bless you, sir, and—and"——

Here Bob broke down again, and even stiff Mr. Dawbarn was compelled to use his cambric handkerchief as Mr. Studden used his coat sleeve. Bob was furnished with letters; among them was one from Mr. Dawbarn addressed to Munro, which inclosed a note from Lucy, which contained only these words, written in a large, trembling hand:

"Come back to me—oh! come back to me, my dear; and soon, if you would see again upon this earth your own LUCY."

A few hours after Bob was seated on the roof of the night coach, and as it rattled past the banker's house he saw a light in Lucy's chamber. Although the night was cold the window was thrown up, and a thin hand waved a handkerchief.

CHAPTER V.

Two years elapsed and there was no news of the missing Mr. Munro. Letters arrived frequently from different parts of America from Mr. Bob Studden, who evidently found his task to be more difficult than he had supposed. America was a large continent, and it was not so easy to find one particular man upon it. Poor Lucy amused herself by reading books and perusing maps. She liked to wonder if George were there—or there, and what sort of place it was. She arranged all Mr Bob Studden's letters of intelligence in chronological order and compared them with the books and the maps, and so traced his progress. She always knew when an American letter arrived by an instinct for which she was at a loss to account herself; but for all these sources of consolation, for all her mother's and father's solicitude, she grew weaker and weaker. She took no air but in an invalid chair. Her father walked by her side grave and dejected. Stealthy shadows took possession of the banker's house. They flitted on the windows, lingered on the staircases and hung about the passages; and the good folks of Bramlingdon looked sad as they passed the banker's, over which, as over those it contained, there hung the sanctity of a great sorrow.

Two long, long years and two long, long months Lucy waited and hoped, each day her pale cheek growing paler, and her light form lighter, and toward Christmas she was unable to be lifted from her bed. Dr. Topham said that he had exhausted the resources of his science; and when the poor girl turned feverishly, and, with a slight access of delirium, asked for the fiftieth time if there were no news, the doctor beckoned the banker and his wife from the sick room and said:

"I've an idea! This cannot last long—she must be quieted somehow. She keeps asking for news; now news from America would quiet her and she might sleep."

"We have no news," said the single minded banker.

"No," replied the doctor, "but we can make some."

"Make some!"

"Fabricate it—invent it. Don't you see?"

"O doctor!" remarked the tearful mother, "to deceive a poor creature on the threshold of death!"

"To snatch her from death," said Dr. Topham. "It must be done. It is the last chance. We must write a letter from Studden this very night."

"But—but—but—it is forgery!" stammered the banker.

"Besides," said Mrs. Dawbarn, "Lucy knows Mr. Studden's hand and always examines the envelopes."

"Then," said the doctor, "we must do it by telegraph."

"Telegraph!"

"Yes. In a few minutes you will receive a telegram from Mr. Bob Studden, saying that he has just arrived at Liverpool with—with a companion."

"Who'll send it?"

"I will," said the doctor.

"But when—when she finds that Studden is not in England—what then?"

"We must think of something else," said the undaunted Topham. "The case is desperate, and something desperate must be tried. Go and talk to her, Mrs. Dawbarn, and I'll send the telegram."

With a strong feeling of conscious guilt Mr. and Mrs. Dawbarn put into their daughter's hand a telegram containing these words: "From Robert Studden, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, to Charles Dawbarn, Bramlingdon.

"I have just arrived in Liverpool. I have news of Mr. M. I hope to be in Bramlingdon by Thursday."

Lucy read the telegram and sat up in her bed.

"He's come, mamma!" she said, and her eyes flashed and her cheeks flushed. "He landed in England this morning—I felt he did—about 9 o'clock. He will be here soon, George will—very soon—very soon. Mamma, please tell Eliza to put out my lilac frock. He liked lilac—and to come and do my hair—and—and—and—tell Eliza to come to me—and I can tell her what I want myself."

The father and mother exchanged glances that said: "Here is the consequence of our deception. What can be done next?" The thought had hardly been interchanged before a smart rap was heard at the street door, and a servant came in with another telegraphic dispatch, which ran thus:

"From R. Studden, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, to C. Dawbarn, Bramlingdon.

"Just arrived here with Mr. Munro. Shall start by night train, leaving here at 1:30. M. and self will be at Bramlingdon to-morrow. Telegraph back."

"How absurd of Topham to send two telegrams!" said Mr. Dawbarn, when he and his wife were alone, "as if one would not bring mischief enough. He must be mad."

Dr. Topham entered the house, and inquired how his plan had succeeded.

"Oh, Lucy is very much delighted and agitated," answered Lucy's father. "What we shall do with her when she finds the news not true, I do not know. But, Topham, why the deuce did you send two telegrams?"

"Two!" echoed Topham. "I only sent one."

"Yes, you did."

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did. Here it is."

The doctor looked at the second telegram, and said, "I didn't send this."

"No! Who then?"

"By Jove! He did! Studden, I mean. Dawbarn, he's come! he's come! I only anticipated the truth. It was a medical inspiration—and my patient will recover."

Mr. Dawbarn lost no time in telegraphing back to Liverpool. At Lucy's express desire Mr. Studden was instructed to telegraph at every station, that she might know how much nearer and nearer her George was to her. The telegraph boys were up the whole night, and Lucy kept the telegrams and read them until she fell fast asleep.

When she awoke she found herself unable to rise, so resolved to receive her future husband in state; and when she had looked in the mirror she begged her mamma in a whisper to let her have some rouge—"not to make me look better, but for fear my pale, white, white cheeks should frighten George."

The heavy hours flew by. George arrived, and was shown upstairs to his faithful, constant mistress; and the servants in the kitchen held great jubilee, and there was sweethearting below stairs as well as above.

Mr. Dawbarn found Mr. Bob Studden quite an American—according to the notion of Americans imbibed by Englishmen a few months resident in the New World. He wore a "goatee" beard, square toed boots, and loud trousers and cravat. He addressed Mr. Dawbarn as "colonel," and assumed a manner that savored equally of the quarter-deck and the counter—half pirate, half bagman.

"As I advertised you, colonel," he explained, "in the various letters from the various diggings where I fixed my temporary location when I set foot in New York, I could find small trace of G. Munro, but I followed up that trace, and dogged eternally wherever he had made tracks. At last I lost him, and was near thinkin' I was done holler—yes, sir—and do you know why I thought I was done holler? He changed his name, and what his last occupation was I could not discover. However, I traveled and traveled on; and how d'ye think, and whar d'ye think, colonel, I found him out at last?"

"I don't know."

"It was quite by accident—it was. I thought I'd heard of him in Detroit, but I couldn't find him in Detroit; and I was goin' away by the cars on the following sun up. Not knowing what to do with myself till roosting time, I strolled into the museum—that is—that was a theatre then. The first man I see upon the stage was G. Munro, dressed like a citizen, in coat, vest and pants, or perhaps I should not have known him. I hailed him, and we started off that very night. We traveled quicker than post, or I should have written. I should have diagnosed him before, but the track was cold, because he had changed his name, and gone upon the stage—a fact which I have not mentioned to any one but you, nor do I intend to du—the stage not being considered by the general as business like."

Lucy was soon seen out again in the invalid chair, but her father no longer walked by her side. He was replaced by Mr. Munro, who usually propelled it himself. Within eighteen months the young couple were married, and some time after George was made a partner in the bank. Mr. Robert Studden, by the assistance of his patron, emigrated to Australia, where he drives a thriving business in horses. Before he sailed he spent the Christmas day with the bride and bridegroom. And though our tale ends happily with marriage and dowry, as novels and plays should end, it is not for that reason a fiction, but a true story of true love.

AN IDEAL CHRISTMAS.

Events of a Day Which Made Mr. Scriggles Tired.

It was Christmas day; anybody could tell it; sleigh bells rang out more crisp and clear than usual; the sun was brighter, the air was sharper, men stepped more briskly along the streets, the chimes sounded sweeter; the sleigh bells tinkled more merrily, and if that wasn't enough to convince the most skeptical, he could look at the heading of the morning newspaper.

"Ha!" cried Mr. Scriggles as he limped out of bed; "beautiful day! beautiful; and, indeed, Christmas; Mrs. Scriggles isn't awake yet either; I'll get ahead of her this time. Merry Christ——"

"Scriggles, has the servant got that fire started yet?"

"I don't know, dear; I was just going down to see about it. Merry Christ——"

"Scriggles, I would like to have $5 to give to the church. Have you got any money left from last night?"

"Certainly, I kept $25 exclusively for Christmas. I'll leave the five on the dressing case for you."

He skipped gayly down stairs just in time to meet the new up stairs girl.

"Good mornin', Misther Scriggles, Merry Christmas and Christmas gift."

"Certainly, Bridget, here's a couple of dollars for you."

The cook was just emerging from the kitchen when he arrived at the door.

"Christmus gif', Massa Scriggles."

"Certainly, Arabella; here's $2 for you."

Breakfast was eaten and Scriggles presented his wife with a bonnet which she said was horrid, and she gave him a cane to add to his collection, which numbered something over a dozen.

He then took the street car down town.

"Mornin', Massa Scriggles," said his bootblack. "Chrismus gif."

"Yes, Sam; here's a dollar for you."

"Christmas gift, Mr. Scriggles," said the elevator boy.

"Yes, of course; here's a dollar for you."

"Christmas gift, Mr. Scriggles," said his office boy in a cheery, holiday tone, which was good for $2.

"Ah, good day, madame," said he to the lady whom he found seated in his chair. "Merry Christmas to you, I'm sure."

"I am glad to see that you have the true Christian spirit," she said. "I augurs favorably for my errand."

"What can I do for you, ma'am?"

"I am working in the cause of charity," she replied. "I am soliciting subscriptions for the new mission for the natives of Patagonia. I hope I may put you down for $10."

Mr. Scriggles said certainly, and handed her the money.

The janitor and two scrub ladies also made successful calls. He had to compromise with the latter on 50 cents apiece.

At about 3 o'clock Mr. Scriggles concluded to start for home. As he reached the sidewalk he felt in his vest pockets, then in his trousers pocket. A slight look of annoyance crossed his face.

"Merry Christmas," said a cheery voice.

"Oh, how are you, Brown; yes, to be sure. Do you happen to have a car ticket in your pocket?"

"No, I haven't."

"Any change?"

"No, not a red."

When Scriggles reached home it was about half past 6. He dragged himself wearily through the door and hung himself on the lounge.

"Did you have a pleasant Christmas?" asked his wife.

"Christmas be—blessed!" was the only reply as he flopped over on his side, with his face to the wall.

A Christmas Group.

The shining holly hangs upon the wall,
Its scarlet clusters gleaming in the light
Of ruddy fire glow, and the welcome sound
Of silver laughter; ripples through the room,
From youthful voices, whilst the mistletoe
Its white, tranparent beadlets temptingly
Hangs o'er their sunny heads.

Now kith and kin
Are grouped in circle round the cheery hearth,
Each telling his experience of the year,
For some there be that only meet at Yule.

The gray haired grandshire sagely nods his head
What time the prattle of the four-year old—
The golden tressed youngling of the flock—
Is poured into his ear; and on his knees,
Eager to prate, doth she, wee fairy, sit,
The household darling of a score of hearts.
In yonder snug armchair sits grandmamma,
Whilst ten-year Tommy steals beside her knee,
Knowing full well, the bright eyed, saucy rogue,
The hidden soft spot in the old dame's heart;
And with a loving, half regretful gaze,
Look on the children's parents, carried back
To the "lang syne" when they themselves were
blest
In childhood's happy, glad unconsciousness
Of ills to come; and so, forgetting Time,
They in their treasured blossoms bloom again.

—A. H. B.