

THE MARKED CARDS

By CLINTON ROSS.

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"A man's past will catch him sooner or later." They had been five days over the sea, the young man and the girl. He had forgotten whether this were the Atlantic or the sea that sweeps the shore of Elysium. Now, on the fifth day, they were on deck and talking somewhat in this way:

"You must walk with me," she called from her chair.

"It's a delightful punishment."

"Thanks! I believe that's a compliment."

"Truth's a compliment, eh?" he said, smiling.

"The best compliments, I suppose, are those that pretend to be truths, but are lies."

"I am afraid this is getting rather too fast for me," he said. "Wait until I think about it."

"To carry out what you have begun you should say to me: 'I can't think about it, for I have to think about you.'"

"Is it needful to say that?" he said, looking down at the girl. "How beautiful you are!"

By the rules of conventional conversation it was an utterly inane remark, and the girl's laughter rolled out, full and delightful, but her voice was low.

"I am glad you think so."

A deeper red tinged his bronzed cheeks as he realized his temerity.

"You know I do," he said.

"Oh, do you? This is the fifth day of our acquaintance. Today we shall be at Sandy Hook."

He drew a long breath, and his voice was earnest. New York and work and to see her no more!

Two elderly persons wrapped to their ears were watching the two.

"What a remarkable girl Nell Wolverton is!" one, gray and rosy and fat and imposing, was saying.

"She's certainly carrying on a remarkable flirtation with that young man. Who is he?" said the other, with the severity of position gained by effort.

"Some sort of engineer in the employ of the Winfield company. Mary Winfield introduced him to Nell."

"That girl would flirt with anybody. She seems to find all men infinitely amusing. Isn't she handsome? Now you would suppose she was somebody or other. But the Wolvertons—oh, you know!" quoth the other lady.

"Her mother was one of the most pushing women I ever knew," assented her companion.

"Of the dead, nihil nisi bonum," said the imposing one. "She was an extraordinarily ambitious woman. With pluck and ten millions and a daughter like that, an ambitious, clever woman can do anything in New York. The Wolverton money is said to be indefinite millions instead. And now they belong in Far Westchester. Oh, dear, how many men have been after that girl! There were the Marquis di Rodri and the little Duke of Sussex and Freddy Van Brule and—she flirts and laughs at 'em all, just as she does with that young man."

Mary Winfield was watching the two with much the same thoughts. This poor young man didn't understand sophisticated young women. It was abominable of Nell Wolverton; she was sorry she had introduced them; she might have known that Nell would play with any man as she would with a cat or a dog. Oh, dear, this Melville was so out of it; so busy and capable and such an efficient servant of the Winfield company. But Nell was Nell, and Mary ought to have known better.

If Nell were Nell, she was proving it with a vengeance. She was making Melville tell her of himself, and she was giving him nothing of herself in return. They were seated now, looking out at the frothing white and green in the ship's wake. She was glancing at him again and again with mild, interested eyes. He was forgetting himself and was telling how his father left him only money enough for school and college, which he had increased by some tutoring; of how he had worked and won a position in a machine shop of the Winfield company; of how he had progressed further and now

would imply politely that there were many others which he doubtless frequented. "The men are very stupid in it. It's all very stupid. It's just sport and gossip. For my part, give me men that do things."

"I think," said the young man making his way, "that I prefer other men to do things and leave 'em to me already done. Now, my father—"

He paused, wondering whether he had better tell her, and then it seemed to him, now that he remembered it, that this put him on a sort of equality with Miss Wolverton, as though the inequality that stood between them was suddenly swept away by the thought of this story. But had he a right to

she might have said she liked a fox terrier.

"And the man's dishonesty was really your blessing. It made you do things. Oh, I know. I know a lot of men, and the men of the Far Westchester set are so tiresome."

"Oh, thanks," said he lamely.

"But you mustn't be tiresome. Do you see that line there? That's Sandy Hook. I know it. I have seen it that way a dozen times. And—I must be going below. Oh, I have been so much interested."

And she went away brightly smiling, and he felt suddenly the least like a fool. The feeling was increased when he found in the bustle of landing that she had only a cool hand and a distant "So glad to have met you" and no acknowledgment of the fact that he had asked to call, which she plainly had evaded. He felt revengeful and a bit of an anarchist. And the next morning when he was reporting to Mr. Winfield his success in London and being complimented by the company's head his success seemed cheap. He had a picture before him of a bright, high bred looking, exquisitely gowned young woman surrounded by flippantly gay persons whose world was not his and never could be, for when one is making his way ploddingly, with no particular capital, he can't reasonably expect that way to be made before he may be gray and all the desire for pleasure, life's good things, quite gone.

It may be supposed that Miss Wolverton put the young man of the Atlantic out of her mind. Perhaps she had some thoughts of him or else she never would have repeated the story he had told her at a dinner where her father was most unusually her escort. At a dinner one owes it as a duty to do his part. Nell did not care to be lacking and wanted her bonnet to be as natty as another's and her story as spirited. For she waged a little strife to make the world she knew hold her clever. Now she couldn't, try as she would, think of another story than the one Melville had told her.

"Mary Winfield introduced me to a very entertaining man on the Lucania, a man who does things, you know."

"What does he do, horses or yachts?" said Bertie Townley. "Oh, I say, Nell, you don't mean that serious faced chap you were mooning about with so much?"

"The very man," Miss Wolverton said without turning color.

And she told Melville's story.

"How extraordinary!" gasped Mrs. Pemberton. "You do meet such strange people at sea."

"Business methods are oftentimes dishonest," said Judge Torbid pompously. "Yet—"

"Your story isn't funny enough," criticised Bertie Townley.

Samuel Wolverton—I should say "Sam," the great Sam—held his nose in his port. He's a thin, sharp featured, silent man, and looking at him one always wonders how he succeeded in possessing such a daughter.

Driving home he said to Nell: "If I were you, I don't think I'd try to tell stories at dinner."

"Why, papa?"

"It's undignified."

"Do you think so?" she said petulantly. She usually had him well in hand.

"What did you say that man's name is?" he asked after a moment.

"Burke Melville."

Suddenly she turned.

"Papa, you were in California?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Did you ever hear a story like that?"

"I have heard a lot of stories. California is full of 'em. Read Bret Harte. As for your acquaintance, he was probably yarning."

"No, no; he wasn't."

"What makes you think that?"

"He isn't that kind of a man."

"Nell, I think that you can take care of yourself, but I don't believe you can judge men."

"Oh, trust me for that," she said airily, and at the moment she was indeed trying to judge no less a person than her father. She had thought that she understood him. Had she? He was fond of her. He denied her nothing, and she loved him. But—there were depths she could not fathom, and she knew no more of his real life, even less, than an outsider.

But now a sudden fear possessed her. She rushed up stairs to a little room which she used for her writing table and her books, and eagerly she looked for a paper in a certain English magazine, "American Millionaires, No. X, Samuel Wolverton." Had she been mistaken? And then she read: "The beginning of this extraordinary fortune was in '66 in Red gulch, California. Melville and Wolverton were storekeepers who exchanged a supposed bad debt for the now famed Bullfinch mine. Wolverton bought out his partner."

For a minute the room seemed to swim.

"Oh, if mamma were only here!" the girl said moaningly.

"It's true—true. This is all his and not mine, every penny of it. And he knew when he told me. He knew."

And she stole down to her father.

She went toward him, the magazine in hand and held it before him. Wolverton started. He had never seen her like this, and her pallor frightened him. And then he saw to what she pointed.

"Was the story he told me true?"

"What if it were?"

"What if it were?" she said mockingly. "You can't understand 'what if it were.'"

But the father said quietly, with a mastery of himself:

"If it were true, that Melville couldn't have succeeded. He hadn't it in him. He would have failed at anything. I cut loose from him."

"But you haven't told me whether the story is true."

"I won't acknowledge or deny it," he said at last. "What of it? You ought

not to find fault. My money has made you a position as fine as any o' 'em."

"Good night," said the girl.

At the door he called to her: "Nell, you haven't kissed me good night."

"I can't—tonight."

And she was gone.

"A woman can't understand business. She'll get over it." But he failed to sleep well that night. She was not at breakfast. He went to her room. She was sleeping with a look that frightened him. On his way down town he stopped at his doctor's. "I am troubled with that insomnia."

"Mr. Wolverton," said the practitioner, "I have told you again and again that you must let up on work and worry."

"I know, I know," said the great man. "By the way, I wish you would see Nell. I am worried about her."

He kept himself busy down town until about 3 and then drove through the park in the parade, a tired faced man people pointed out.

As he entered the house he heard Nell's voice. He paused in the hall and listened.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Melville," she was saying.

"I had your note and came here promptly, I think."

"Yes; promptly."

"I have passed you several times, but I don't believe you saw me," Melville said rather bitterly.

He was thinking how charming she appeared here in her own house. He was blaming himself for all that he had thought of her, when her world, of which he had that brief glimpse, had been shut out.

"I sent for you," Nell went on, "to ask you why you told me that story when—you knew that your father's partner then—was—my father?"

The listener started and moved toward the door and drew back.

At last he heard:

"Miss Wolverton—yes, it was so, it is so, and I was a coward to tell you."

"I am glad you told me," Nell said humbly, for this was no longer the proud Miss Wolverton. She wondered at herself, tears were in her eyes, and self control was far away.

"I don't know what made me tell you, and yet I do know. I have lied. I do know now. You seemed so far out of my reach, and I wanted you to be in my reach. Do you understand?"

"I don't know that I understand," the girl said. "I can't seem to understand."

"And— Oh, you are crying. I have hurt you. I wouldn't hurt you for the world."

"Don't," she said. "Please don't."

But he was saying:

"I know the reason now. It was—don't you see—didn't you see?"

After a moment the listener heard Nell's voice:

"It's best so. If you do, it rights itself. And—I see it clearly. I know now why I didn't want you to be of Bertie Townley's class. You are a man who does things—and will—a man for a woman to be proud of, and—yes



"What did you say that man's name is?" he asked.

tell her? No; she wouldn't, couldn't know; that was so long ago and forgotten.

"And your father? Go on; I am interested."

"He might have had the things, the money, to have put me in your friend Bertie's position if luck had been his way and if he hadn't been cheated."

"I never can think of you as a man like Bertie," Miss Wolverton said decisively, with that calm confidence in her eyes. The eyes may have been rather more expressive because this was the last day of all and he would slip out of her life so soon. She was fair to look upon, clever, accomplished, charming. This fence of the sexes was her delight. She could no more avoid it than she could breathing. Our unsophisticated young man failed to understand her. Later common sense was to reach out from the grim, matter of fact depths of his nature and grasp his sentimentality until it hurt him.

"Oh, it's a little story of what might have been years ago in Red Nugget gulch, California. My father was out there after gold, like the rest, and he fell in with a man with whom he made a partnership in a general store. Sometimes in exchange for goods they took claims. At first they made a lot of money, and then they lost nearly every penny in trying to develop a claim that failed. Well, each blamed the other, and they decided to separate. They could decide on no other way than to cut the cards. So they sat down one day and cut, and some things fell to my father and some to his partner. And the papers were drawn up and the division made. A week after that a claim which had gone to my father's partner began to develop. It proved a find. My father's partner made the beginning of a great fortune that way."

"Well?" said the girl.

"Now, the shanty that served for the store had fallen to my father, not the stock, which went to pay the firm's debts. Three weeks after this my father sat talking with a mining expert, who spoke of the big find on my father's former partner's lucky claim, and he stated boastfully, to show his value as an expert probably, that he had told my father's partner—we will call him Smith—that the claim was extremely valuable. This set my father to thinking. Smith believed the claim to be valuable. But my father could not acknowledge that the man had given him a chance, even if he had dishonestly hidden his notion of the claim. That day my father happened in the abandoned store. On the table were the two packs of dirty cards just as they had been left the day of the division. They had cut in the bare inner room, which hadn't been disturbed since. My father picked up these instruments of his bad luck, and he saw that the pack Smith had used had been marked."

"How awful!" the listener said. "And you might have had money if it hadn't been—"

"If it hadn't been for Smith's dishonesty, yes, Miss Wolverton. But to return to the story. My father went to Smith, whom he accused, but Smith looked him in the face and laughed: 'You are crazy, man. And you haven't any proof. Who'd believe you?'"

"Was that the end of it?" the girl asked gently.

"No; not the end of it. My father could prove nothing indeed. His affairs went from bad to worse. He left California penniless. Later in the east he accumulated the little money he was able to leave me. But it was always a hard struggle for him and my mother, who died shortly after I was born."

"And Smith? That's not the name."

Melville hesitated.

"No; that's not the name. It's a well known name, but we will let it remain Smith. Everything Smith touched became money. He was accused of dishonesty many times in the course of his career, but nothing ever was proven. He succeeded and is today one of the powerful men of the country."

They were silent, the girl grave.

"And that's the reason you think you are not in the class of Bertie Townley. Well, I don't want you to be in that class."

"If you would care that much," said he half lightly, half earnestly.

"Oh, I like you," she said cheerily, as

she might have said she liked a fox terrier.

"And the man's dishonesty was really your blessing. It made you do things. Oh, I know. I know a lot of men, and the men of the Far Westchester set are so tiresome."

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Many are the uses and the schemes that are devised for the purpose of beating the paying tellers in banks, and the cranks are as much to be feared as the crooks.

"That old man who has just left the bank," said the teller as he ran his fingers quickly over the new bills, "has been coming to this place every day for the past two years calling for money. He comes in every morning exactly at 11 o'clock and asks quietly if his check has arrived. I always have to tell him no, and he thanks me graciously and goes away. I was new at the bank when he came in the first time, but I saw at a glance that he had something the matter with his headgear. When he asked about his money, I told him that we had nothing, and he looked greatly surprised and worried. He asked many other questions and then left. He returned the next morning and the next, and he has been coming ever since. One day he failed to show himself, and I thought he had given up the hunt as a bad thing. For a month he kept away, but by and by he bobbed up serenely again.

"I've been sick," he said, "and I hope I have not caused you any inconvenience in holding my money. No money here? What? That is strange. With this he thanked me and went away. He will be here again in the morning, and he'll keep coming day after day until death sends him to a bigger bank. The man is just a sample of what we get every day, although he is the most regular chap of the kind I have ever seen. The boys around the bank feel rather superstitious now if he fails to come in, and I'll gamble that that black porter yonder will quit his job the very first time that old man fails to make his daily visit."

The teller leaned on the counter. "Yes," he went on, "it would surprise you to know how many people come here day after day to get money when they have absolutely no reason for coming. They have no papers on which money can be secured, but they just come right along, hoping, I guess, that some day they will hit the bank. Now, last week a big fellow who had evidently been drinking rushed in and yelled to me that he wanted \$1,000. I had never seen him before, and he made no pretense of handing up any papers. He said he was in a big rush. I realized at once that he was crazy and I acted quickly. Reaching back to my drawer, I put my hand on my revolver and waited. He did not see the weapon. 'The vault is closed,' I said, 'and you cannot get any money today.' With that he reached his hand to his hip pocket, but I did not move. I looked him squarely in the eye and waited. He stood there for 20 seconds, with his hand on his hip and his eyes on me, and then he cowed. Without a word he turned his back to me and walked out. I tried to find out who the man was, but failed, and he never came back to repeat the demand.

"Another time I had a really dangerous crazy man to handle, but I acted like a flash and possibly saved my skin. It was about 1 o'clock one summer day when the weather was stifling. The front and side doors were propped open to let in the breeze, and I was looking over the books when a big fellow ran in the front door screaming. I looked up and saw him flourish a butcher knife, which fairly glistened in the light. 'Where did he go with that money?' he called at the top of his voice as he halted and looked at me. 'Right out that door,' I said quickly, and in a moment the man had dashed through the door and went sailing down the alley. A policeman was called, but the man was not seen afterward. I am sure I would have felt the edge of his dangerous knife if I had not sent him out that door.

"Another strange thing happened once while I was working as a clerk in another bank. I was standing by the teller's counter when a nicely dressed young man came in, walking rather awkwardly. He managed to reach the teller and presented a paper. 'Will you please cash this for me?' he said. The teller took the paper mechanically and looked at the stranger. 'Why, this is no good,' he said. 'This is only a piece of white paper. What kind of a game are you trying to work?' The man gasped. 'Why, it is a check,' he called quickly. 'Not much,' said the teller, handing it back. The man looked at it. 'Good God!' he cried. 'Then I am blind!' They took him away, and he died at the hospital before he had a chance to explain. The doctors said it was a mystery, and the man's body was kept for six months. Finally it was sent to Kansas on the order of a woman who wired a description and said it was her son's."—New York Sun.

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