

THE NE'ER-DO-WELL

By Anita Clay Munoz

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THE Van Houstons were an aristocratic family—people of the world—and as happy as most but for the fact that a family skeleton lodged in their hearts in the memory of an older brother—Peter Van Houston—who had been expelled from college and after running wild for a time had suddenly ended it all by forging his father's name to a check for \$5,000, collecting the money and departing for the west.

At that time his father, Hubert Van Houston, was one of the rich men of Wall street. Years before he had buried his first wife, who left him this troublesome son, and had married again, a fashionable widow, who duly presented him with a daughter. This lady comforted him when his boy went away, cared for him through his last illness, wept gently when he died and after a time settled down to enjoy the money her husband had left exclusively to her and their daughter Elizabeth.

Since then time had brought its customary gifts—white hair to Mrs. Van Houston and a husband and children to her daughter, now Mrs. Marmaduke Odell.

One afternoon at about this time their legal adviser, Mr. Clarendon, sat in his office at his desk when the door opened to admit a man of about fifty years of age, who said, "Are you James Clarendon?" "Yes, sir." "Legal adviser for Mrs. Van Houston?" "I am, sir. But what is your business with me?" "I should like to make my will," the man replied. "It's a long story. Have you time to listen?" "Go on." The newcomer leaned forward. "Don't you know me, Mr. Clarendon?" "I do not." He laughed a low, bitter laugh. "Forgotten by every one, I suppose. The ne'er-do-well, the black sheep!" Mr. Clarendon looked at him keenly. "You are not"—"I am—Peter Van



"I SHOULD LIKE TO MAKE MY WILL."

Houston!" The lawyer fell back in surprise and dismay. "Well," he said, "and what do you want?" "I desire to make my will. I'll not keep you long," his visitor said dryly. "They say that the way of the transgressor is hard, but I have reason to doubt the truth of that statement, for the stolen money brought me luck from the moment I went to the far west. The great business out there was lassoing wild horses. I became an expert at this and bought and sold until I had accumulated a good sum of money."

"Are you married?" "No. Women have no attraction for me. A little black trunk that I keep under my bed and that holds all my securities is my only love. People call me a miser, and I rather enjoy the name. It means so much," he cried, "and such a sure means of revenge!" "Revenge. Ah!" The lawyer grew attentive.

"Mr. Clarendon, I acknowledge I did wrong, and I have suffered. An outcast for thirty years, hidden, unknown! And my sister Elizabeth—she is rich and sensitive to disgrace! She would not receive me, for instance?"

"Of course," the lawyer said, "I cannot answer for my clients. As you say, they are proud, but money is often a strong influence."

"Get your papers out, Mr. Clarendon." The man's voice was husky. "Draw up a will for me. Wait." He grew white, put his hand over his heart and gasped. "An attack of the heart! The doctors say I cannot live a year. Draw up the papers, lawyer. I want revenge!"

"You will leave the bulk of your fortune away from your family?" the lawyer queried. Mr. Van Houston appeared to be waiting for strength to continue. "Tomorrow I shall go to my sister's house. I want them to think I am poor! I want to find out if they are cruel enough to live in luxury knowing that the rightful heir is starving in their neighborhood. You alone are to know the truth! My fortune amounts to \$1,000,000. In a black iron box in my room are my papers of value. I have decided to dispose of my fortune in this manner—\$100,000 to you, Mr. Clarendon, and the bulk to my sister, Elizabeth—but with this stip-

ulation: If she or any of them blights me then I leave my fortune to charity."

When Van Houston had gone Mr. Clarendon paced up and down thoughtfully. "If I do not act at once it will be too late," he observed.

That evening when Mrs. Van Houston and her daughter, Mrs. Odell, returned from the opera they found Mr. Clarendon in the reception room. "I hope this visit is not to tell us that our funds are low," laughed Mrs. Odell.

"I have not come to scold, dear madam, but to tell you a bit of news. I have business of a private nature to communicate to you, Mrs. Odell. Peter Van Houston was in my office today."

Both women uttered sharp exclamations; the younger shivered. "I hoped he was dead," she said.

"Will he sue for his share in his father's estate?" cried Mrs. Van Houston. "Oh, what a blow! Elizabeth, he will not receive him!"

"I always expected it!" Mrs. Odell said. "And now this awful news is brought to us! I shall refuse to see him!"

The lawyer, instructing the ladies to secrecy, told them of Mr. Van Houston's will and the conditions imposed and later took his departure.

"Peter evidently inherited his father's talent for money getting," Mrs. Van Houston observed. "Thank fortune, he can live but a year longer. Peter as a young man was extremely tiresome."

"Never mind, mother," Mrs. Odell cried. "I am going to get that money. Ah, the front door! Marmaduke," she called out, "news!" Her husband, a fastidious looking man, entered the room.

The next day Peter Van Houston presented himself at his sister's house. Mrs. Van Houston and her daughter received him.

"We are so surprised!" said the older woman, extending her hand cordially. "Only the bad penny turning up again," her stepson answered. "I've had a hard life, mother. For years, rather than return to my family penniless, I have lived by doing odd jobs here and there, but at last ill health and poverty drove me home."

They asked him to remain to dinner, and he accepted the invitation.

Later in the evening, as Mr. Odell was showing him to the door, Mr. Van Houston surprised him by asking for the loan of \$50.

"I am a poor man, Marmaduke," he said as he took it. "I do not know when I can return it."

"Do not let that worry you, my good fellow," Mr. Odell replied. "Any time will suit me." He shut the door. "How the man tries to catch us!" he exclaimed.

A night a week later Mr. and Mrs. Odell were receiving their friends. The house was ablaze with the glare of many lights. Women in handsome toilets and men immaculate in evening clothes moved about exchanging greetings.

All the pleasure of anticipation of this evening's enjoyment had been spoiled for the hostess by the uncertainty in her mind whether to invite her brother or not. After much talking she decided to run the risk of his accidental coming and resolved that if she got over this night safely to venture on no more public entertainments until Mr. Van Houston's heart trouble had relieved them of his presence. But now she could not keep her eyes from glancing apprehensively toward the doorway. Half past 10 and he had not arrived! She was certain now that he would not come and began to talk brightly until suddenly she felt the unwelcome touch of a cold, clammy hand on her bare arm. Peter was at her side, saying slowly: "Good evening, Elizabeth. Having a party? I am just in time!"

"Why, Peter! I am glad to see you." Mrs. Odell smiled, but her voice trembled.

Mrs. Van Houston instinctively crossed over to her daughter's side and extended her hand to her stepson with well feigned cordiality. "Would you

like to join Marmaduke in the smoking room or would you prefer to meet some of our friends?" she inquired. With cruel and deliberate slowness he said, "Elizabeth's and your friends are my friends, mother, so I would be glad to know them." His stepmother slipped her hand through his arm, saying, with a nervous laugh, "Ah, here is Mr. Clarendon," as the lawyer crossed over the threshold. "You must meet the family adviser, Peter. Mr. Clarendon, this



"WHY, PETER! I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU."

is an agony of suffering. Equally distressed, Mrs. Van Houston rose from her chair and, throwing out her arm tragically, exclaimed in angry tones, "Peter Van Houston was always a ne'er-do-well, a black sheep, a disgrace! And he died one!"

And while his family alternately stormed, raged and wept, the dead man lay rigid on his pallet in his little room, a smile of peaceful satisfaction adorning his white, set features.

It was just before Lent when Mr. Van Houston came home. All through this season the family lived quietly. As he saw more of his newly found family Mr. Van Houston appeared to get on with them better. He would sit for hours at a time with his brother-in-law, smoking one after another of his best cigars, and no matter how stringent the money market was or what bills were pressing Peter did not scruple to ask Mr. Odell for loans of money. Through the summer he visited them at their country place, turning up at odd times, usually when most inconvenient, frightened them with frequent attacks of weakness of the heart and in the autumn when the leaves were falling he died.

This is how it happened: One morning he sent for Mr. Clarendon, stating he was ill.

The lawyer made haste to reach Mr. Van Houston's bedside. Away at the

top of the house in a small hall bedroom Mr. Clarendon found Van Houston stretched on a pallet in the corner, weak, gasping, dying.

The lawyer's quick eye caught a glimpse of the black iron box under the bed.

The sick man smiled sarcastically. "Well, I guess I'm done for," he whispered. "The folks can take—a little—comfort—now."

Clarendon took his hand. "My dear friend," he said sadly. "Any parting messages to your family?" Peter had to struggle for strength to say, "No fortune."

The startled lawyer lowered his head to catch the whispered words. "A scheme—for—revenge." The man then ceased to breathe.

With something cold clutching at his heart, Mr. Clarendon hastily lifted out the black box and raised the lid. He discovered some soiled collars, a few worn-out neckties and a new pair of shoes. In the small, bare room there was nothing else that could hold or conceal anything. The lawyer, stunned and dazed, walked down the staircase and out of the house without a backward glance.

Outside the fall day had grown gray-er. The wind had risen, raw and bleak. Mr. Clarendon felt cold and proceeded on his way shiveringly.

The news of the death of Mr. Van Houston had preceded him, so later when he presented himself at the residence of the deceased man's family he found them all assembled in the drawing room. Lurking under looks of decorous mournfulness, the lawyer could detect expressions on their countenances of relief and exultant joy. Mr. Clarendon had put off the telling of these unpleasant tidings as long as he could, and now that the disagreeable duty was fully upon him he hardly knew how to proceed.

"I am the bearer of very, very bad news," he began solemnly.

Mr. Odell approached him. "Of course, Clarendon, you immediately secured possession of the black iron box? And you have the will?"

"I am not good at breaking bad news gently," the lawyer pined up and down the rooms nervously—"or prolonging suspense. The truth is that I did not secure the black iron box because it contained nothing but trash, and the will is not worth the paper upon which it is written. Your brother, Mrs. Odell, died absolutely penniless."

They turned blanched, startled faces toward him, and no one spoke. Then their son Hubert broke the silence with a sharp laugh.

"A cool hand, by thunder! Fooled the lot of us, including the lawyer!" "The devil!" exclaimed Marmaduke Odell, fairly shaking from shock and chagrin. "It can't be true! Why, man," approaching Mr. Clarendon desperately, "think of my cigars and the money I loaned him! Am I to have nothing in return?"

"It is all terrible, of course," Mr. Clarendon assented gravely. "And what adds to the misfortune is that you, being the next of kin, will have to defray the expenses of burial."

Mr. Odell shook his head and groaned aloud.

"We have been deceived, tricked and cheated!" his wife shrieked. "I shall go mad thinking of it! Such fools as we have been!" She wrung her hands

in an agony of suffering.

Equally distressed, Mrs. Van Houston rose from her chair and, throwing out her arm tragically, exclaimed in angry tones, "Peter Van Houston was always a ne'er-do-well, a black sheep, a disgrace! And he died one!"

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DRINK WHEN YOU EAT

TAKE AS MUCH WATER AS YOU WANT WITH YOUR MEALS.

It is Excellent For the Digestion, It is Claimed, as Neither Gastric Juice Nor Pepsin Work Properly Unless Largely Diluted With Water.

How much water should we drink and when should we drink it are questions so simple that at first sight their discussion seems superfluous. One would naturally answer, "Drink all the water you wish when you are thirsty," but authorities say, "Drink more than you wish when you are not thirsty," for they recommend that a gallon or so be drunk between meals, which is more water than we need and the very time the system least demands it. Usually we experience thirst during or directly after eating.

Inasmuch as 87 per cent of the whole body is water, which is, of course, being used up every moment, there is no question that we should drink of this element copiously, but it is a serious question whether we should refrain from water at meals—the time we particularly desire it.

There is a class of persons, ever growing more numerous, that believes that whatever is wrong. For the natural and simple they would substitute the artificial and complicated. To drink water while or directly after eating is a natural instinct. Give a dog his dinner, putting a bowl of water near it, and observe that he will first eat all he can and then immediately drink. Wild animals look for a stream after feeding. Cage birds will stop pecking at seed to peck at water. Children have a perpetual thirst, and I have seen babies that, unlike young Oliver, have refused to eat more when denied water after every few mouthfuls.

It is especially important that babies be given what water they wish and at the time they wish it, which is usually at table.

The thinner food is the more easily and thoroughly it is digested; in fact, it cannot be digested until it has been made liquid by the gastric and intestinal juices. Indigestion is caused often by food that has not been sufficiently moistened by the digestive secretions.

There are sound physiological reasons for our craving water with meals. Water is the solvent that constitutes 95 per cent of the gastric juice. Now, when one eats a hearty meal and does not drink, the amount of water in the stomach is not sufficient thoroughly to moisten the great quantity of food, and this makes digestion difficult.

On the other hand, when enough water is ingested with the food the latter is well moistened and broken up, the digestible particles being then readily acted on by the gastric juice and afterward absorbed. Again, when the partially digested food (chyme) passes into the intestines it is most important that it be very moist, particularly as water is constantly absorbed from the chyle

in the large intestine. Bad cases of constipation are caused by dry chyle remaining in the intestines, where it sets up an inflammation that sometimes proves fatal. Dry faeces, of course, resisting peristaltic action. The excrement of persons suffering from constipation is always dry and hard and is a potent cause of appendicitis.

The idea that water drinking at meals unduly dilutes the gastric juice is nonsensical, water being not so palatable that one is apt to drink more than his digestive functions require. As a matter of fact water generally facilitates the digestion of albuminous substances. In this connection Dr. A. Jacobi in his work on "Infant Diet," page 67, says:

"In experiments upon digestion of albumen with gastric juice obtained from the stomach of animals it was noticed that after a certain time the process began to slacken, but was renewed merely by the addition of water. The gastric juice became saturated with the substance it had dissolved and ceased to act upon what remained until it had been diluted. In the living stomach this dilution is of even greater importance, for it permits of the immediate absorption of the substances soluble in water and which do not require the specific action of the gastric juice." Neither the gastric juice nor pepsin has any true digestive action unless they be largely diluted with water.

It goes without saying that it is not the food that is ingested, but that which is digested, that does good, and this principle holds good with water, which is practically a food. Now, when one resists the perfectly natural desire to drink while eating he may be not thirty several hours afterward.

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