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A STORY OF TWO CIPHERS

When the Old Man Wrote His Check He Got Mixed With His Figures.

By W. R. ROSE.

Obed Jarrett was a hard man. He rather gloried in his hardness. A hard man was a man who couldn't be fooled. Obed Jarrett never was fooled. In his private opinion the world was made up of a few honest men and a great many fools and knaves. An honest man was one who paid his way and neither asked nor gave favors. Fools might call him hard, and knaves might snarl because he wasn't gullible. But what cared Obed Jarrett?

The honest man sat at his desk that June afternoon with his pen loosely dangling in his fingers and his check book open before him. He was in no hurry. To give away money was so new a sensation that he felt justified in prolonging it—not but that he could amply afford to give the sum he had fixed upon; it was the principle of the thing that held him irresolute.

He was worth close to $80,000. There was a memorandum slip in the upper right hand drawer that showed this total in round figures. He could have told the amount within a dollar or two. It was a gilt edged property—stocks, mortgages, cash and a little real estate.

"If I was sold out tomorrow," said Obed, smiling grimly, "it would bring every penny that I've totaled it at."

He had won this comfortable property by shrewdness rather than hard work. For more than 20 years he had bought mortgages and loaned money and snapped up unconsidered financial trifles in that same old office. He slept in the rooms above it, and sometimes for days together he didn't leave the building. There had been few episodes to enliven the dullness of this money grubbing life, but tomorrow one of them was to take place. Tomorrow his son, his only child, was to be married.

Instinctively his eyes turned to the portrait above his desk—the portrait of a brown haired young woman, with smiling eyes and slightly parted lips. As he looked upon the gentle face he felt a little tightening about the heart. Dead four and twenty years. Their son was four and twenty, and he married tomorrow. Their son. Had he done his duty by their son? He thought so. He had certainly given him a good schooling. The boy had gone through college with credit to himself and his father and had helped to pay his way too. Obed had wanted him to study law, but he had a love for chemistry and, in company with a fellow student, had set up an office of his own. They stated in as consulting chemists and assayers and were—from all Obed could learn—building up a fairly remunerative business. He was certainly a good boy, though perhaps a little lacking in that respect which his father most begets confidence. It seemed but a day or two ago that he had come to him and said:

"Father, I am going to marry."

It was like a blow to Obed.

"Well, well," he presently said in his testy way, "since it's all settled, why do you come to me?"

"Because I think you should know about it," said Arthur stoutly.

"You didn't think to consult me before you took this step," said the old man grimly.

"You couldn't expect that, father," said the son. "I—I am no longer a boy. Besides, you can't help but approve of her. She's the dearest girl. Her name is Alma Truman, and her father is chief accountant with Fancher & Co. She's the eldest of six, and they're awfully broken up at the idea of her going. That's the kind of girl to marry, father—the kind that is missed at home. But you must see her."

"How do you expect to support her?" inquired Obed drily.

"With these two hands and the excellent education you have given me," replied Arthur.

The boy had taken him around to the Trumans' house one evening, but there were so many Trumans, and it was only a short call, and he had scarcely caught a glimpse of the girl. And now the boy was going to marry and leave him, he felt, forever.

Their boy! Had he always remembered that Arthur was their boy? Would things have been different if she had lived? Would he himself have become the dry, old, money making machine he was? God only knew.

How happy they had been that brief year. How ambitious he was for her sake. How he toiled and planned. And he remembered how she would come to him and lay her soft, cool hands on his and draw the pen away and turn him round in his chair and command him to rest. Was she smiling down on him now as she had smiled down upon him then and as she almost seemed to smile upon him from the lifeless canvas?

Four and twenty years, and here he sat, an old man, preparing a wedding gift for their son who was to be married tomorrow. A gift for their son! Yes, yes. It was a custom—foolish perhaps. He would give him a check for $100. It was a tidy sum and pretty nearly as much cash as the boy's father had when he married. A hundred dollars! Surely a liberal gift for—for their boy. Their boy!

He bent forward suddenly and dipped his pen in the ink. It was strange how dim the lines on the check seemed. He wrote the date. Four and twenty years ago. Why, the room seemed full of her! Was she leaning over his shoulder again? He slowly made the figure "1" and the two ciphers. Their boy! Was that the touch of her soft, cool hands on his? Was—was she guiding his pen? The lines were dim indeed as he slowly wrote. Then he paused and stared down at his work and carefully added his signature.

He dropped back in his chair and brushed his hand across his eyes and for a moment was very still. When he looked up again at the portrait, he smiled. Then he briskly tore out the check, pushed back the book, shut down the desk and, seizing his hat, was off.

Ten minutes later he confronted the serious faced teller of the Sixth National and thrust the check at him across his plate glass shelf.

"Certify that, please," he said in his crisp way.

The teller picked up the slip of paper in his preoccupied manner and glanced at it. Then his face suddenly beamed.

"Why, that's fine!" he cried and certified it in a hurry.

Obed said nothing.

* * * * * * *

It was a quiet little home wedding. Only the relatives were present, but there was such a lot of them on the Truman side. It was a nice wedding if it was quiet. The house was beautified with flowers and vines and ribbons under the supervision of the sister who was in the school of art, and everybody looked quite happy, including the younger Trumans, who were bearing up bravely.

Arthur took his father with him to the house and then left him in the hall in charge of an usher.

"There is usually, I think," said Obed to the usher, "a place set aside for the gifts to the—the happy pair. Am I right?"

"You are," said the smiling usher. "This way." And he led him up stairs to the little room where the modest gifts were displayed. Fortunately for Obed there was nobody in the apartment at the moment, and when the usher's back was turned he slipped the check from his pocket and laid it under the edge of a plaque on the table. Then he softly stole down stairs.

After the ceremony he came slowly forward, following the others who had offered their congratulations, and took his son's hand and pressed it warmly. Then he turned to his new daughter, surprised at a look that passed between the happy pair and wondering what it meant.

"Father Jarrett," said Alma as she raised her face and the old man quite without forethought stooped and kissed her; "Father Jarrett, you know that nobody can refuse a bride's request. And Arthur and I want you to promise to come and live with us just as soon as we are settled in our flat."

"No, no!" said the astonished Obed. "I—I should be in your way."

"That's no answer," said Alma. "Say at least that you will come and try it."

The old man hesitated. She certainly was a dear girl.

"I will promise to try it," he smilingly said, and somehow his heart felt lighter than it had for many years.

"And to think," he muttered to himself as he stepped back, "that she invited me without knowing a blessed thing about that check!"

A few moments later his son called to him.

"Father," he said, "come up with us and look at the presents. It's a good time. Everybody is busy talking, and Alma wants you to see how nice and kind her friends have been."

So they went up to the little room, and there Alma began her rapid history of the gifts and their donors.

Suddenly they were interrupted by a cry from Arthur. He had discovered the check.

"What's this!" he stammered. "'Pay to the order of Arthur Jarrett $10,000? Why, father!"

Somehow the boy's note of profound surprise jarred a little on the father's heart.

"Oh, oh! Now we can have a home of our own!" cried the delighted girl, who was looking over Arthur's shoulder. "But you know, Father Jarrett, that you would have been just as welcome at the flat."

"Yes, yes, I know," he answered. Then he added a little brokenly: "I want to be perfectly honest about this money. One hundred dollars is from me and the rest from Arthur's mother."

They looked at him wonderingly, and he turned suddenly away.

When he looked around, he said with his grim old smile: "Slip it in your pocket, my boy. The money will be there when you get back."

But after Alma and Arthur had started on their two weeks' wedding journey and the old man was walking back to his lonely rooms he suddenly straightened up and said to himself half aloud:

"It will only be two weeks."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

SOWING.

Sow thou thy seed of corn and wait awhile.
See the snow falling and the ice spray gleam
Above its hiding place. Hear the wind scream
And the wild tempest sweep o'er mile and mile
Of sullen landscape. Watch the raincloud's vial
Empty above it, and the rifful beam
Of sunlight thwart the field until a seam
Of tender green shoot up to greet thy smile.
And, lo! God's miracle is wrought once more
Of life from death—from loss, most wondrous gain;
The cornfield glitters with its golden store
On the same land where late the storm and rain
Beat on the bare, brown earth. Thy sowing o'er,
Thine but to wait and pray lest faith should wane!

Sow thou thy seed of love, O heart, and wait!
Though it lie hidden, though thy doubts and fears
Whisper to thee 'tis lost and thy sad tears
Fall on the icebound soil of bitter fate,
Surely the seed will live; spring sets the gate
Of life wide open. See, though hid for years,
Love seeks the light of love! Its tender spears
Shall gladden thy sad eyes at last, though late,
E'en but the blade perchance and not the bloom.
Oftimes God seeth that love's flower rare
Hath no perfection this side of the tomb,
But needeth for its growth the purer air
Of his sweet paradise; after earth's gloom
Love hath its blossoming, not here, but there!
—Kate Mellersh in Chambers' Journal.

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