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The Shah's Adventure.

By L. RUTHERFOORD SKEY.

(Author of "Passing Down the Avenue," etc.)

THIRTEEN days had fallen upon old Balleen Castle. The young ladies, last representatives of the ancient house of McLoughlin, had been sinking deeper and deeper into the pit prepared for them. The first shovelful of rich virgin soil, out of which the pit was hollowed, had been heaved aside, lightheartedly, by Major McLoughlin the day he approached his new tenant, and neighbour, Mr. Joseph Frost, for a temporary loan of one hundred pounds. The loan was to be repaid in three months. The Major's promise was made in all good faith but it suited Mr. Frost's book better to encourage the gallant officer to stave off the evil day of repayment. The great Leveller, meantime, stepped in unawares and laid the Major low on the cold bosom of Mother Earth; by which time Mr. Joseph Frost, gombeen man in disguise, had managed to mount up a insignificant debt to one hundred pounds multiplied by ten. Nor was this all; the gombeen man, afflicted by a plethora of wealth and flesh, was

For six months Mr. Frost paid the mourning daughters every conceivable attention, offering assistance and advice on every possible occasion, till one day Elice McLoughlin saw a look in the man's eyes that filled her young mind and soul with repugnance and loathing. 'Could that over-fed, ignorant money-god imagine that she could ever, ever love him? Yet that was exactly what his eyes plainly said, and what obviously his lips only awaited occasion to repeat.

Elice cut the interview short, and withdrew to her room—"to cry her purty eyes out," as Biddy Murphy afterwards described it—and then sought her sister.

"We must leave the old place, Kathleen," she said quietly. "We must sell Balleen." She would rather beg her daily bread than marry that creature Frost, whose fat, flabby hands made her delicate flesh creep with repulsion.

Kathleen's tears were mingled with her sister's when Biddy, one-time nurse and now maid of all work, entered the room.

"Why then, Miss Elice and Miss Kath-

he lamented, "why a dacist man like mesel should be punished this way! The devil wants latin' and so does the devil's fry."

"Gusty," said a sweet, commanding voice at the stable door, "bring out the Shah. I want to look at him."

Gusty pulled his forelock, hastened to the Shah's loose-box, and led the blue-blooded hunter forth. The beautiful horse stepped gracefully over the paved floor, out into the square grass-grown courtyard. His coat shone like spun silk in the warm sunshine; his long, magnificent tail swayed to the movements of his slender, wonderful legs.

Elice had owned the Shah since he was a leggy young colt and she would never consent to the curtailment of his splendid tail; and her love for him grew daily, as he grew in strength and beauty, in depth and intensity.

She laid her hand on the arching, glossy neck and let her cheek rest a moment against the silky curves of his shoulder.

Had it come to this?

"Take him back, Gusty," she said, turning away. "You must take him to the fair to-morrow—to be sold."

And she walked across the courtyard with her head held resolutely up. But her eyes were filled with unshed tears. The sins of the fathers were to be visited upon the children!

"Poor Father," she said, stemming back the tide behind her eyelashes, "you little dreamt it would come to this!"

Back to his loose-box Gusty led the Shah. As he turned to fasten the door he spat again on the paved floor, and

About eleven o'clock Gusty arrived on the fair green with the Shah. An air of extreme pride and importance sat on Gusty's stolid face as he led his charge through the gate. The Shah tossed his head and pulled with gentle persistence on the bit.

In a few minutes a small crowd of horse-dealers and horsey farmers gathered round Gusty. But their eyes were glued on the horse he led.

"Trot him out," said a dealer encouragingly.

Gusty smoked his short "Jay" with calm indifference, and marched on as though the fair green had been established solely for the benefit of the Shah. Unconsciously he did not become a seller, though no one liked it better in a buyer than did Gusty Kane.

"Get up, man, and try him at the jumps!" said another.

"What's your price, Gusty?" asked a farmer to whom horse and man were of daily familiarity.

"Five hundred pounds!"

The crowd roared.

"Will ye take five pounds—in gold?" asked one.

"Ah, man, sure he's wall-eyed and rising fifteen if he's a day!" volunteered another.

Gusty eyed the speaker stonily.

"An' he the same token, you're blind of half an eye, broken winded, and risin' fifty, me boy-oh," replied Gusty leisurely. "Stand back there, ye spalpeens." This latter was addressed to a knot of urchins who were sprawling in his path across the green. The lads scattered at the sound of Gusty's switch singing over their ears.

In the centre of the market-place Gusty took his stand and handled his horse dexterously, but with a fine air of modesty.

A group of dealers followed in the wake, and in the rear of the dealers some gentlemen drew up. Gusty watched them out the corners of his eyes. Presently he made a sign to a man on his right.

"Jer," he muttered as he examined the Shah's hoofs, "d'ye know anny of them chaps?"

"I do," Jer answered under his breath.

"Thirsty weather, Jer."

"A glass or two would do no harm," said Jer, spying the neck of a bottle in Gusty's coat-tail.

"A well greased tongue is better than a stiff wan anny day o' the week, glory be to God," remarked Gusty standing with his back to Jer while Jer extracted the bottle neatly. "I'm tryin' to sell the baste to ould Frost gombeen man, rاجر, robler of the widow and the fatherless. If you know anyone with a spare bag o' gold in the bank, tip him the wink, Jer, like a dacist boy."

"Faith, Gusty, I left none of me seven senses in the bed this morning." Jer strolled off and entered into casual talk with the men he knew. The neck of the bottle made intimate friendships ere the liquid it contained had time to mellow with old age.

Drawing the back of his hand across his mouth, a dealer stepped forward to feel the Shah's legs.

"Light!" he said, shaking his head.

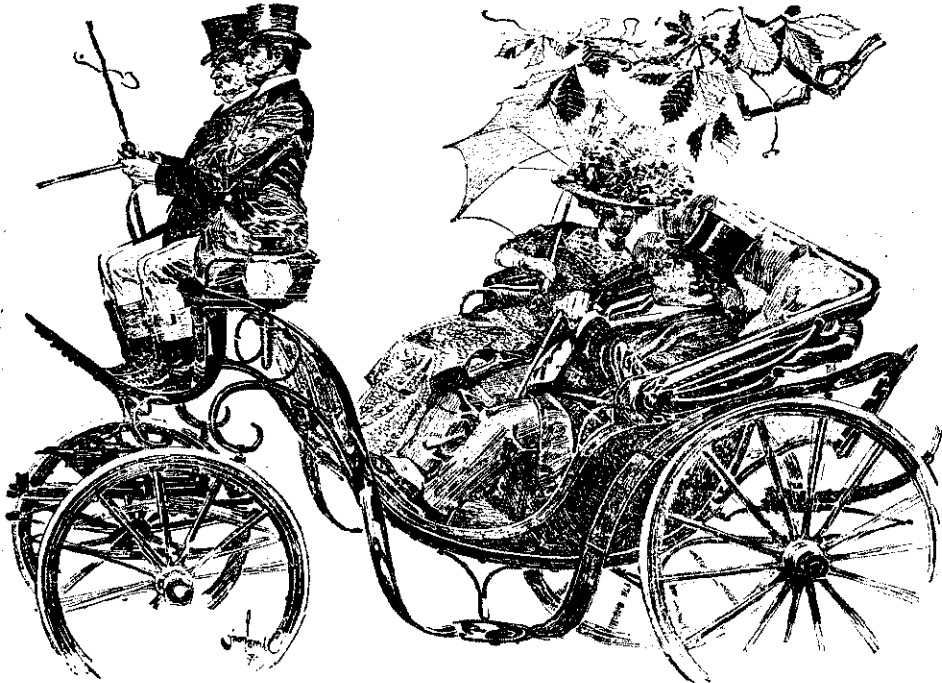
"Is it light?" queried Gusty, confidentially. "Be me soul, he's that light on the legs you'd think he was a swallow on the wing. Divil a word of a lie in it," he added clearing his mouth to "lay the dust."

The dealer examined the horse's mouth.

"Rising six," said Gusty, without turning a hair.

"Sixteen," amended the dealer.

"Fix the course of nature and no harm at all," said Gusty smartly. "He's as steady as a judge—and grand blood in him, rاجرerous stock, sir. At the Mullmahinessey Point to Point races he bet sixteen competitors—an' he'd done the same aisy on three legs if only he'd been axed. Peter's Wink's Mother's grand-son. If he was a christian he wouldn't call the Queen his aunt. Quiet as a lamb, no thricks, never said 'boo' to a goose nor 'no' to a fence in all his born days; fresh as a daisy winkin' the top of the morning to the sun—ay, after three days had hawking! Look at the eye of him, feel them legs. The 'cute-ness of the baste bates all over I saw—faith, it lings Banagher and Banagher bangs the divil! Well if you'll believe me, sir—and it's a fact now I'm telling ye—I saw him one day with my own two eyes, but luck to them! Look round at the horses at the meet at the cross roads beyond, just above Mat Morriarty's on the other side of the Knock, where



My dear, you are not looking well. No—I think I am suffering from fatty degeneration of the husband.

afflicted likewise by the pangs of hopeless, or at least unrequited love. If he sighed, he sighed in private and in vain till the happy day dawned when, confident of success, he was determined that the debt should be redeemed.

For Major McLoughlin lay silent beneath the turf he loved.

From a singular, frankly engaging child, Elice McLoughlin had developed into a lovely dark-eyed girl of twenty-one, with cheeks that rivalled the peaches on the south wall of the old-world garden of Balleen Castle, famous though these were for their richness and bloom.

It was just a week previous to the Major's sudden decease that Joseph Frost belought himself of his outstanding loan and requested an early settlement—or, in lieu thereof, the hand of the beautiful Elice.

Unfortunately, the Major's banking account was over-drawn, and he knew not where to turn to lay his hands upon a thousand pounds. Death relieved him of his anxieties, and he passed away under a stroke, leaving his two girls his embarrassments and liabilities for legacy.

leen, what sorrow's on you at all?" she cried.

"Oh, Biddy, dear," her young mistress replied with a choked sob, "we must sell dear, dear old Balleen!" In a few words she explained the pitiful situation and Biddy went away muttering fiercely about the nasty ways of gombeen men when their name was Frost.

Biddy trudged out to the stables to consult the tower of Balleen's strength, Gusty Kane, coachman, gardener, handyman and general factotum, and Biddy Murphy's forlorn matrimonial hope.

"Gusty, 'tisn't much use or ornament you'll be if you don't contrive some 'cute way to bate that ould villain," she concluded, turning her broad back on the admiring Gusty.

"Faix, I'll do me best to drive a rusty nail into his coffin afore he's ready to be helped into it," said Gusty, punctuating his reply by deliberate and positive expectation.

But when Biddy was out of sight Gusty scratched his head in great tribulation.

"The dear knows, the dear knows,"

scratched his head anew for inspiration. Presently a smile added to the width of his broad face.

Into the stable Biddy stole like a thief in the night.

"What's that Miss Elice was sayin', Gusty avick?" she whispered.

"Arrah, what would she be sayin', woman dear, but that I'm to sell me heart's blood on the fair to-morrow? What else? An' haven't I reared him as if he was a Christian all out an' the child of me bosom? Be off with yours—f wale your shoes are good, Biddy Murphy."

The rest of that day Gusty spent grooming the Shah's "own brother" in the stall by the stable window—curry-combing, branding, blacking boots—hissing melodiously as he applied the "olow grease." By the time he had finished and stood surveying the scene of his labours, the horse, Gusty averred, was "the dead mott" of the famous Shah. "An' faix, his own brother might he desaved he him if they stood side by side with no more nor the width of the yard betune them!"