

ceremony of the African savage; the approach of the ardent lover, driving his quota of fat kine, in just compensation to the parents of his intended. Equally barbaric! And what gift would be adequate to her value?

Then I had descended to more cultured times. I described the methods of Greece in her glory, of Rome in her power. In order, I unfolded the eruditions of the scholars upon the manners of the Goths and Huns, the Vandals and the Albigenses—those savage, yet chivalrous hordes, whom the Church moulded into the knights of the middle ages—true, noble, generous, loving, 'Sans peur et sans reproche!' And lastly, I had descended—a sad descent, indeed!—from the fair and courtly gallantry of the chevaliers of old to the sad degeneracy and utter lack of romance of our dull and sordid times. 'It remains,' I had concluded, 'for some keen, noble, and enterprising spirit of our day to break asunder the absurd and ridiculous traditions of the times, which must needs have every ardent swain breathe his passion in cold and awkward speech into the lady's redenning ear. What a false boast must our national ingenuity appear, if it cannot suggest some newer, more fitting, less ludicrous manner of making so poetic and lofty a thing as a proposal of marriage!'

Alas! these words, written in jest, returned to reproach me. I recalled how I had received for them, from the absent-minded editor, an insignificant note, which I threw away, and a cheque, which I kept. But the confounded thing had had some success, and was not yet entirely forgotten. It was only a week ago—I winced at the thought—that some coy maiden had told me that she would like to hear how I would really make a proposal, since I could write one so prettily. In short, taking all things into account, I decided that I must do the thing artistically and in a novel way. But how? Genius of Invention, how? My mind was destitute of ideas; my spirit faltered at the task before it; when, raising my eyes from the ground, I saw—for I had gotten well into the business district—a window gorgeously decked out in which was represented good old Santa Claus distributing all manner of resplendent Christmas gifts. Happy inspiration! Could I not propose by means of a Christmas gift?

Thereafter I haunted the windows of stores devoted to alluring wares by the hour. I went through the whole catalogue of Christmas possibilities, one by one. I tried the patience of the most suave and obliging clerks of both sexes by remarking to each of their suggestions, 'too personal,' or 'too familiar,' as the case might be, leaving them to puzzle their brains angrily as to what was familiar about a diamond brooch or what was personal in a golden scent bottle. And I was annoyed by the smiling amusement which my acquaintances—bound most probably on a similar errand—displayed when they saw me poking over cases of women's trifling jewels. They little dreamed of the brilliant coup that I meditated.

At last, desperate after a week of such torture, I decided upon—a ring.

True, a ring is the most common and conventional of lovers' tokens. But mine was redeemed from the commonplace by the inscription which, with much hesitation, I ordered carved within it:

'Will—you—be—mine?'—explaining to the astonished clerk that 'it was—er—a jest!'—as if one jests with rings of price!

Let me pass over in silence the various emotions which wrung my soul during the short week which elapsed before the time arrived at which to present my gift. Suffice it to say that on Christmas Eve I wrote, in a too trembling hand, on a card a couplet worthy of the occasion. Then I called a messenger boy—faithful and ready servant!—and dismissed him with the precious packet. And then I waited.

The night wore on. From my study window I could see the houses of my neighbors, lit and swept and garnished for the feast. On the street the crowd of festive wayfarers, laden with bundles and joy, ebbed and vanished into their various snug harbors. I saw a Christmas tree being decked for the morrow, and realized how lonely is the bachelor's lot! I fell into a reverie on the joys and genial mirth of the merry and holy season, and grew actually cheerful, then sighed to think how inappropriate it all might be. Finally I went to bed, and after ages of ages fell asleep.

I awoke with a start. Was it time for the postman yet? Not for three hours. I arose and strolled out into the air.

The postman came and passed and entered not. I blamed his forgetfulness and hallooed after him, but he had nothing. I went to the post-office—nothing there. Nothing, that is, save the proof-sheets of 'The Causes of Decadence in Nations, etc,' which ordinarily would have given me the keenest pleasure, but now filled me with deep disgust. What did I care about the decadence of nations? But I took it home and after going to

church, where I prayed with fervor for a certain Christmas gift, I returned home and worked steadily all of Christmas Day at the proof-sheets, slashing them so that the printer must have stared. In fact, I believe that it is to my savage humor on that day and the following that the book owes its commended incisiveness of style.

The next day I continued pegging away viciously at the proof, and as before, the postman passed unregarded.

Then I grew desperate. I searched out that messenger boy and denounced him. But they showed me a receipt written in Billy's sprawling hand. My last hope gone, I went down slowly to the office, a saddened and a broken man. Old Dr. Burdy met me and asked me if I didn't think I needed a tonic! Biffins, the insurance man, crossed my path, and for the first time in five years didn't beg me to take out a policy in the 'Crumbly Insecurity Co.,' 'safest on earth.' I reached the office at last and stared at one spot on the ceiling for a solid hour. Then a brisk step sounded in the corridor, the door snapped open, and Billy rushed in. Billy never comes and goes, he always bursts in and rushes out. 'Hello, old foggy!' said he, 'look as sick as if you'd swallowed a frog. Brace up, man; your bank hasn't failed, has it?' I turned a dull eye on him, and he resumed: 'I'm awfully sorry that I didn't get around sooner to tell you, but the old man has been sick, and I, and Billy's form grew more erect, 'am running the business; three hundred men under me (lower floor, you know), and I couldn't, but Miss Jocelyn's uncle died suddenly, and she is gone.'

'Gone!' said I hoarsely, jumping up and seizing his arm in a frantic grasp. 'Did she get my—present?'

'Oh!' said Billy. 'No—that is, yes, I suppose she has by this time. It came after she left, and I mailed it to her. Why, what is the matter with you?' For I had fallen back in my chair, and was mopping my face with my handkerchief. 'Don't you trust the mail, you idiot?' yelled Billy. 'Why what was that—the Koh-i-noor? Anyhow, I registered it; it can't be lost!'

'No, no, Billy,' said I faintly, 'it's not that. I was afraid—just then the office door clicked open again, and a messenger boy briskly entered. 'Telegram for you, sir,' said he, 'sign here, please!' I took the yellow envelope, while Billy sprawled a signature, on the boy's book.

One look at the telegram was enough; I was transported. It said:

'Yes.

'Agatha Jocelyn.'

Oh, crumpled, yellow telegraph blank, spattered with ink, marked by oily fingers, you were far more delightful in mine eyes than the golden pages of poetry or the yellow wealth of kings! Dear Agatha!

'Billy,' said I, beaming brightly upon that surprised young man, 'congratulate me, my boy; I'm going to be your cousin!'

Now there are two who love the little lamp in the study, which burns steadily above them, night after night. From where I write, within the circle of its rays, I can see that very ring, glittering merrily on her finger.

Magic ring! you did your errand well.—'Catholic World.'

In his concluding volume of his 'History of Our Own Times,' Mr. McCarthy assigns first place among Parliamentary orators to John Bright, and wavers between Gladstone and Richard Lalor Shiel for the second position, reminding us that the only thing upon which Gladstone and Disraeli agreed was as to the wonderful oratorical gifts of Shiel.

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