

STORIETTES

By the Way

I CROUCHED into the closer embrace of the shadow and listened. The second-hand revolver clicked healthily. The horseman was approaching rapidly.

The spot I had selected was a bit of the equestrian roadway where it flanks the reservoir. A bridge, spanning it at this point, offered a kindly concealment from the moonlight, while the favoring base of an arch gave me a vantage-point from which to seize a bridle. Simple; but, I trusted, effective.

The lope was checked to a walk as the horseman breathed his mount.

"Get down!"

With easy grace the man slid from the saddle. There was no suspicion of even suppressed excitement as he asked:

"What's the trouble?"

"Strained financial situation," I answered.

"Oh, I see," he replied lightly. "Shall we talk the situation over?"

I studied him to see if he was fencing for time or planning some defense, but his features, as I caught them indistinctly in the moonlight, spoke nothing but a pleased and quickened interest in an encounter a little out of the ordinary.

"Money talks, here as elsewhere," I snapped surlily. "My argument is a good one; of the best make."

"Better and better," he murmured, as though summing something up to himself. Then, in a clearer and somewhat changed tone in which rang a commanding note, he said:

"I'm glad we met. It will prove to our common advantage. Pocket your trinket. We'll have supper together somewhere and talk things over afterward. I suppose you are hungry."

He named a well-known but unpretentious café on the West Side, agreed to meet me there within the hour, mounted leisurely, and rode off.

And I calmly pocketed my gun and watched him go.

Then I shook myself out of the daze which the incident had thrown over me and laughed at myself for a distinctly "easy" beginner in arts nefarious.

But laugh as I might, I couldn't shake myself from a feeling that the fellow was actually sincere in his invitation. So, though calling myself a fool, I headed toward the West Side.

My clothes, somewhat worn, showed still the "cut" of tailored days, and, but for being unshaven, I was not too slouchy to dine at the place my man had mentioned.

At the door of the café I took up station, still trusting the tone I thought had rung true in his appointment.

A hansom whirled up to the curb; my man stepped out, paid his fare, and, noting me though I stood in shadow, led the way through the swinging doors and toward a small table in a far corner.

A solid half hour he watched my furious meal. I booked him now as a blasé man of wealth with a new and distinctly out-of-the-ordinary while-time.

Finally I laid down knife and fork with an irrepressible sigh of satisfaction; he leaned across the table toward me and, extending his hand, said:

"I don't blame you a bit!"

As I reached forward to take the proffered hand my fingers came into contact with the moist earth of the bridle-path just under the bridge.

I raised myself to a sitting posture and drew a trembling hand across a damp and benumbed forehead.

A good-sized lump proved that the riding-crop had been wielded to advantage.

Burke Jenkins

The Pants-Button

THE girl had spoken of the matter with such an appearance of indifference that it was a surprise to see sudden tears glistening in her eyes. She brushed them away with an impatient

shame, but there was defiance in her manner as she faced her aunt's astonishment.

"Oh, I know you'll be thinking I'm silly and childish! But I don't care. It is not surprising that I mind so much about it! It's more than just an invitation to a garden-party. It's—it's everything!"

The little old lady answered in a gentle treble with sweet high notes. "Why, my dear Barbara, I don't blame you in the least for wanting to go; but I do think you are perhaps overestimating the importance of the incident."

"No, I'm not," cried the girl eagerly. "There! I knew you didn't understand. You are so unworldly! But you see, the Folsoms are *the* people in town—the old family. And to be seen there means you have the entrée to the best society in Newton. Now, don't smile when I say 'best society.' There *is* such a thing, and if we only get started right there is no reason why we shouldn't be in it as well as any one. Father's position at the college entitles us to a thoroughly good social rank."

At her aunt's involuntary smile she flushed and went on defiantly again: "Well, why shouldn't I want to know the best people, when we have just moved to a new place and are beginning fresh? I *belong* with them—they are my kind. I want what other people want, and it's not——"

The elder woman turned the conversation away from its tone of argument. "Yes, dear, I see. But I'm just as new here as you and your father. There is nothing I can do."

"No, I suppose not," said the girl disappointedly. "Only I get so in the way of thinking that you can give me everything I want. You nearly always have." Her eyes filled again with tears.

The old lady melted instantly. "Poor dear Barbara! I'm so sorry, darling! If Aunt Deborah could do anything—you know, dear, there's just nothing I wouldn't do for my little girl. I *wish* I could help you!"

A little heartened by this sympathy, the girl rose to go, settling her ruff about her lovely, pearly face with a gesture of resolution.

"Well, there's no use talking about

it. I've just got to go without. It's one of those things when you can't lift a finger to *do* anything yourself."

In spite of these brave words, she received the other's tenderly sympathetic regard with quivering lips.

"Wait for me an instant, Barbara, and I'll walk along with you. I'm going to my washerwoman's."

"Oh, Aunt Deborah, why *will* you do such things! Why don't you send one of the maids?"

"Ah, you can't bring me up right, at my age, dear Barbara. I'm incorrigible."

Barbara said no more, and they walked down the elm-shaded street in silence. At the corner the tall girl stooped and kissed the little old woman.

"Good-by, aunty," she said absently, and drooped to the walk to a comfortable, vine-grown house. Her aunt looked after her listless passage and shook her head sadly.

As she went on, her old face fell into lines of dejection and fatigue. She transacted her business with the harassed laundress abstractedly, with none of her usual eager, kindly interest in the lives of the poor, and turned away from the shabby house so absorbed in her own thoughts that she did not notice a little girl crying steadily and disconsolately on the edge of the ditch which served the unpaved street for gutter.

Miss Mather brushed against the child and stumbled over a bare little outstretched foot.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, my dear!" she cried, transferring her attention to the forlorn figure.

The little girl drew the foot back into safety under the edge of her very short skirt, but otherwise interrupted in no way the vehemence of her grief. The old woman sat down beside her.

"What's the matter, you little dear?" she crooned in her sweet quaver. She now recognized the child as her washerwoman's, whom she had seen playing about the house. "Can't I do anything to help you, Molly?"

The mourner looked up and stopped her sobs for a moment. A gleam of hope shot across her tempest of tears.

"Will you give me a pants-button?" she queried in an agony of suspense.

"Good gracious, my dear! What did you say?"

"Have you got a pants-button you can let me have? A black iron pants-button?"

"Why, no!" cried the old maid. "How in the world should I have such a thing?"

The child at once relapsed into her wild lamentation. "Nobody's got one—nobody but men and boys, and we haven't got any of *them*," she sobbed.

Miss Morton wiped her forehead with a gesture of bewilderment. "What under the sun do you want of such an ugly common button as that, you little baby girl?"

She put her arm around Molly and held her close. The little girl screwed her fists into her eyes and managed between gusts of sorrow to gasp out her explanation.

The boy next door had had a cat, and now the cat was dead, and he had laid her out in state in a shoe-box, and put green stuff around her, and made an awning over her with vines down from it—"oh, just grand, they say," wailed the child.

All day she had lain thus on her catafalque, and the price of admission to the show was a pants-button. "He said he never thought about my not having one—he didn't *do* it to be mean—but now he's said it, of course he has to stick to it." Unquestioning loyalty throbbed in her words. "I'm the only little girl on this street, and, of course, all the boys have them—but they won't give me one—"

All day they had been coming and going in the little gate by which she now sat, viewing the great spectacle, and now they were assembled inside, and the cat was to be buried. They were going to have a grand funeral, with drums and whistling for fifes, and the price of admission was a pants-button.

They were going to bury her in one end of the flower-garden—"his" father kept a greenhouse, hence the high fence and narrow gate—and they were going to plant real flowers with roots over her, and the price of admission was a pants-button.

They were going to have pretend prayers, and put up a tombstone with

her name on it, and the price of admission was a pants-button.

At this point the child grew unintelligible, choked with sobs.

Miss Mather rose briskly and took out her purse. "Why, you poor baby! Here, I'll pay for your admission. I'm sure they'd rather have a nice shiny dime an—"

"No! No! Momma tried to pay me in, I cried so. She left her washing and came over with a quarter—but don't you see, they can't! The price of admission *isn't* money! It's a pants-button."

So impassioned and unwavering a certainty rang in her shrill outcry that the old woman was silenced, but not outwitted.

"Very well, we'll go down to the little store I noticed here and buy one."

"You can't! You can't! Momma went there, and they are just out of them. They'll have them in to-morrow, but she'll be buried in a few minutes."

Indeed, at that instant a confused thumping of drums began back of the fence.

There was need for immediate action if at all. "Why don't you get one from your father's trousers and get your mother to sew on another to-morrow?"

"My father's dead! And we just moved here a little while ago, so we don't know anybody to ask. And, anyway, momma said she was too busy and it was just a dead cat."

"What *is* there about the cat, anyhow? Didn't you ever see her when she was alive?"

"Oh, lots of times! But now she's dead!"

"Didn't you ever see a dead cat?"

"Oh, yes, four'r five—but—*everybody's* been in but me—every single person but me! Couldn't you lift me up so I could look over the fence just a minute?"

The gallant little lady rose to the occasion. "I'll see," she said, and with a great effort she lifted the heavy child high in her feeble old arms.

There was a scuffling on sand inside, and many piping and tuneless variations on "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," whistled very slowly and solemnly. Trembling from head to foot, she held

up as high as she could the fifty pounds of anguished femininity, and was rewarded by a howl of disappointment.

"No, it's no use! You're too little! I can't even reach the top board with my hands."

Miss Mather set her down quickly and leaned, panting, against the fence, her old face very pale.

"I'm afraid you will have to do without, this time, dear," she said, surveying with a hopeless intensity of pity the damp heap of misery on the sidewalk. There is no too deep for consolatory words, and in a compassionate silence the old lady moved away.

Still breathing heavily, she faltered along until she came to a bench in a dusty, unkempt "people's park." She sank down on this and unloosed her bonnet-strings wearily. She looked very tired and old and sad.

Suddenly she began to laugh. Although the passers-by stared curiously at the solitary old woman laughing to herself, she did not stop. High and sweet her cracked old mirth tinkled in the sunny air.

But her eyes were full of tears.

Dorothy Canfield

The Unhappy Pair

RICHARD is the most bashful person I have ever met, excepting myself. It is so easy for any girl to embarrass him, and, of course, especially easy for me. There is a good deal of Richard, and when he is embarrassed he frowns and pinks up and looks perfectly lovely. So I was very much disappointed to see that he didn't pink up a bit when I first told him that they had decided on a day to announce our engagement.

By "they" I mean my family—Aunt Justina and Aunt Gertrude and Bess, who have been running Richard's and my engagement ever since he told Aunt Justina that he had to marry me or die.

"Well, let 'em announce it," he said. "What do we care?"

"But you don't see," I explained. "They are going to give an afternoon reception to pet and patronize."

"Pet who?" asked Dick.

I noticed by his grammar that he was beginning to be scared.

"Pet us, you goose!" I said.

"Must I be on hand?" said he.

I tried to freeze, the way Aunt Justina does in church.

"I didn't know, Polly," he said, crest-fallen and nice. "I have never been announced before. Why can't we be engaged and announced and married all by ourselves and let everybody else go to the——"

"Richard!" I shouted, just in time; but he finished the sentence in his mind, and I guess I did.

You will hardly blame us when you understand about Northover, where I live. It is a sleepy, beautiful village, and it hasn't much to do except to look at the views and discuss pronunciation. There are lots of girls in Northover, and also girls who have grown up and never been married. This makes it rather awful to be engaged in Northover.

Northover people are dear and generous and neighborly. If you have a great trouble, they all pitch in to help you with it. And if you have a great happiness, they all pitch in to help you with it, too, until you want to scream.

After the engagement was decided, and Dick had gone back to New York, Aunt Justina and Aunt Gertrude and Bess were very angelic about it. We all four were absolutely happy. When we had finished crying, we had dinner, and there was a tomato soup.

"Richard likes clear green turtle, Polly," said Aunt Gertrude, with a mechanical smile. "I will give you a recipe."

She meant to be pleasant, I knew, but I had a little shiver on my backbone, just the same. I could feel those pleasantries coming along at every meal.

Almost immediately, too, they began to talk about presents. "Uncle Jerry will probably give you this, if we mention it to him, and Cousin Miranda that, and I must suggest to Margaret Tweedie——" Oh! They joked me about Dick's letters—the same solemn, dutiful jokes every morning for breakfast. It got on my nerves like anything. I always did hate to be patronized by older people who seem to imagine they know more about me than I do.

If I could only have seen Richard often, everything would have been all