A BOOBY PRIZE STORY

[Original.]

It was proposed at the Millerton Literary club that a prize be offered for the best short story. Some one suggested that it would be better to offer a prize for the worst short story, whereupon it was determined to give two prizes, one for the best and one for the worst. At a meeting of the club the manuscripts handed in were read by the secretary. The following was in competition for the booby prize:

A TALE OF THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINS.

One dark, dismal, disagreeable night in midwinter, when the June roses were in full bloom, a woman stood at the door of a cabin in the Catskill mountains. Her tattered garments fluttered in the wind, while her jewels flashed in rainbow hues in the hot noonday sun.

"He cometh not," she said.

There was a creaking of horse's hubs down the road, and a moment later the splendid figure of a young man of some seventy-five summers, mounted on an Arabian steed, with steel springs and leathern curtains, emerged from the clove.

"Oh, Algernon, why are you so late?"

"Clarissa, dearest, I have been delayed by a puncture in the left hind leg of my trusty steed."

"Algernon, I have the worst possible news for you. Father is unalterably opposed to our marriage. He has a six pounder, loaded and pointed up the chimney, ready to fire as soon as he is aware of your presence."

"What, ho! Does the old dotard think to scare me?" And with one leap he landed on the roof and stood looking defiantly down the chimney. There was a report, followed by a shriek from Clarissa, and her lover's headless trunk rolled at her feet.

Maddened by the sight, Clarissa was about to rush into the cabin to reproach her father with the bloody deed when Algernon stopped her.

"Consider," he said. "The gun is by this time reloaded. Let us take refuge under the fall of the Kaaterskill."

Alas, they were too late! Just as they were about to sink behind a mountain peak the father appeared at his cabin door with a fieldglass and, pointing it deliberately at the fugitives, pulled the trigger.

"Are you hurt, dearest?" asked Algernon tenderly.

"'Tis nothing—a mere break in the left ventricle of the heart. I am better now. And you?"

"A trifle. The old man has been sadly fooled. Both my legs and both my arms are cork. My right arm is gone, but I have three limbs left of good flesh and blood."

"Then let us speed on."

Pulling the throttle wide open, they skimmed the ice merrily. Reaching a lake from which the water had been drained to supply the neighboring residences with warmth, they looked about for a boat with which to cross.

"Oh, for a mud scow!" exclaimed Clarissa.

"Here is something better," replied Algernon, and, seizing a toboggan tied to a post, they mounted and rode up the mountain side with lightning speed.

The sight from the summit was resplendent with beauty. The rising sun was sinking in the north. The full moon, a slender crescent fit to deck a lady's brow, was at the moment passing behind Arcturus. All nature was hushed, the stillness unbroken save for the blows of a thousand artisans in a boiler shop in the valley.

The lovers were standing on the peak, pensively viewing the scene and unconscious of danger, when the pursuing father, wringing the sweat from his raven locks, reached the summit of a neighboring mountain and looked wildly about for the fugitives. Not seeing them, he drew a searchlight from his vest pocket and, pointing it directly at Algernon's heart, fired. The brave man who could not be worsted by round shot succumbed to the more subtle power of electricity. An arm and two legs caught fire and blazed with the brilliancy of pitch pine.

"My love! My love!" shrieked Clarissa. "Must I stand here helpless and see you burn to a cinder?"

"Fear not, dear heart," replied the iron hearted man. "I am only vulnerable in the thorax." With that he waded into the lake and was extinguished.

Moved by Algernon's bravery and Clarissa's tears, the old man relented. Seeing the limbless body of his would be son-in-law floating in the lake, he waded in and, seizing Algernon by the right arm and left leg, dragged him to the shore.

"Give me your hand, noble man," said Clarissa's father.

"You've burned it," moaned Algernon.

Fortunately at that moment a distinguished dominie passed by, walking on an alpenstock, and consented to unite the pair in the holy bonds of matrimony. Then they all went home to a joyous wedding breakfast.

Years have passed since the sound of these festivities ceased to leap in echoes from crag to crag. The buttercups and daisies lovingly nod to each other, kissed by the clouds that stoop from heaven to wrap them in a winding sheet of disagreeable fog. The shrill whistle of the locomotive softly floats over the mountain plains where once the only means of conveyance was heaven's own simple meteorite. The numerous progeny of Algernon and Clarissa now scamper over the mountains, triplets having come to them with every spring frost and every winter heat wave.

* * * * * * *

The committee unanimously agreed to bestow upon the author of this thrilling tale the booby prize.

F. A. MITCHEL.

Men and Food.

Cassius wanted to know "upon what meat doth this our Cæsar feed that he is grown so great." Some antiquarian has been making an investigation into the diet of the New England Cæsars, including Governor Winslow, Daniel Webster and others. He finds that they or their ancestors breakfasted on hasty pudding, pea soup flavored with pork, squash, turnips and onions; dined on the same, with rye pudding, brown bread and an occasional fowl, and supped on fresh fish, with vegetables.

But Cassius did not really think that greatness had its root in meat and drink, for he said, "The fault, dear Brutus, is * * * in ourselves, that we are underlings," after declaring that "men at some time are masters of their fates."

He was right. It was not pea soup and rye bread in the east that made Webster, nor was it salt pork in the west that raised Lincoln until he overtopped all others in his generation.—Youth's Companion.

A Common Snake.

The common snake, which bears the scientific name of Tropidonotus natrix, is one species of a genus (tropidonotus) which extends over Europe and North America and from northern Asia to north Australia, there being seventeen or eighteen Indian species alone. Our common snake may serve as an example of the largest family into which serpents are divided—the family colubridæ—of which there are upward of 165 species in India alone. The family contains most of the harmless snakes, and it is also illustrated by a small snake, Coronella austraca, which some years ago was discovered to be an inhabitant of Dorsetshire and Hampshire. The coronella feeds exclusively on lizards, slow worms and small snakes. Though harmless, it will bite.—Quarterly Review.

Taking Off a Horse Collar.

It is not always ignorant persons who fail to observe closely. Coleridge and Wordsworth took a drive with a friend. After great difficulty the horse was unharnessed, except they could not get the collar off. One of them said it was a "downright impossibility" and that the horse's head must have grown since the collar was put on. "La, master," said a girl, "turn the collar upside down."

Swimming Brides.

Girls inhabiting the island of Himla, near Rhodes, are not allowed to marry until they have brought up a specified number of sponges, each taken from a certain depth. The people of the island earn their living by the sponge fishery.

The Gizzard.

The gizzard is an everlasting grinding mill. Called into action, it always reduces the grain as it is swallowed, so that the crop is rarely distended.

WHEN THE DOOR OPENED

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Before Reynolds had had time to ring the door opened and a girl stood within, like a picture in a frame, a young girl in white, with yellow hair. At her waist and throat were silks of blue, the color of her eyes.

"Oh!" she smiled. "I beg your pardon. I was just going out. You came to see Elizabeth, didn't you? Will you enter? I will call her."

He entered, walking straight forward, but with eyes turned toward the girl, following the glimmer of her sash and skirts as she ran, swift footed, up the stairs to Elizabeth's room.

A far door opened and shut, opened and shut once more, and other footsteps descended the stairs. They ran across the hall and into the room. Elizabeth stood before him—Elizabeth, tall and dark haired and beautiful, putting a slender hand on his shoulder, looking up into his face and saying:

"I've been waiting for you. I thought you were never coming. Let me take your hat and your gloves. Sit down here by me. It seems an age since I saw you—an age, an eon!"

He sat down by her. He took her hand. He separated her fingers in his old way, toying with them. He looked at them absently, one at a time, at their tapering, at the tender pink of the nails.

By and by, "Who was it opened the door?" he asked and waited, eager eyed, for her answer.

"The little girl? It was Bertha, my cousin. She is just home from school. She is a pretty little girl, isn't she?"

His eyes took on a look of remembering.

"Yes," he answered after a long time; "she is—a very pretty little girl."

A week later Elizabeth sat in her room waiting. His usual hour of coming was half after 8. It was now 8.

Presently, rising, she moved about, arranging the flowers in a vase, touching a picture into place and straightening out the gilt edged books lying here and there and everywhere. She sat down again, thinking those long thoughts of youth that go to fill up the hours of waiting. The minute hand pointed to half after 8. The clock struck with a tiny tinkle. She arose a second time and walked up and down.

Once more she stood before the little clock. Nine, almost!

Perhaps something had detained him. Perhaps, after all, he would not come. She crossed the room; she opened the door; she trailed down the stairway silently, not with intention, but from force of habit. Absorbed in her own disappointment, she was within ten steps of the door before she saw him standing there with her little cousin, laughing lightly, both of them their faces aglearn with the flare of the light in the hall silhouetted against the night.

He looked up—the girl also.

"I was just coming to tell you," she said, showing two rows of small white teeth in a radiant smile, "that Mr. Reynolds was here."

Elizabeth began to look upon her cousin with new eyes. She perceived the beauty of her through the magnifying lorgnette of his regard. She had thought her a child, removed one stage from the playing with dolls. She found her a woman, well into the stage of commencing to play with hearts.

and skillfully. She observed the slim height of her, the charming roundness withal, the delicate curve of cheek, the length of eyelash, the calm young blueness of eye.

Then she took to long hours of practice. The keys of the piano sometimes vibrated with a sound like a sob.

Her nights were divided into two varieties—white nights when she expected him and dark nights when she did not.

That was a black night. She was not expecting him. For the passing of the interim she had gone to a neighbor's house, visiting a friend. It was late when she came back along dewy walks on either side of which flowers nodded sleepily. Above the house the new moon peeped, a golden crescent dangling from the twinkle of a star.

The house was hushed, half dark. One light only burned in the hall, and near the piano in the long parlor, through whose open windows wafted redolent breaths of the nodding flowers, another. Glowing electric tulips, those lights were, burning on slender stems.

The hall door was open. Entering, she hung her wrap on the rack and started toward the parlor. Often it happened that upon those dark nights of hers she was able to leave part of her loneliness upon the piano keys.

She halted on the threshold, her footsteps arrested by voices—cooing, whispering voices that she knew—his and hers.

Turning falteringly, very softly, for fear they would hear, she commenced her ascent of the stairs. She lagged suddenly. It was as if she had run a long way and was tired. Nevertheless she set her face steadfastly forward, not daring to look back.

Never had the stairs seemed so many, so endless, so high. It was as if she tried to climb to heaven leaving heartsick behind.

At length she reached her door. She opened it. The emptiness of the room was like the emptiness of a cave.

She crossed it in the dark and stood at the window, looking out. From the dusk of the green, sweet garden the clumps of daisies smiled up at her; dangling from the twinkle of the star the moon hung yellowly above, and below the lone sad cat, the color of the night, paced the gray of the garden wall softly, slowly, undulatingly and untiringly.

ZOE ANDERSON NORRIS.

The Murphy Murder Case

[Original.]

"Well," said the superintendent, "did you catch him?"

"No. We went to his house, and he wasn't there. Then we followed him down the valley, for if he had gone up it would have led him back to the mines. Meanwhile we had posted men on the hilltops on either side and know that he didn't get out that way.

"H'm! Keep up your efforts to find him. Search every bit of territory where he may possibly be."

Tom Murphy had been murdered down in the mine in a pocket where he had been alone with Jim Dugan. Dugan had succeeded in getting out, passing men who had not yet heard of the murder. It was this knowledge of the time of his exit that enabled his pursuers to know of the possibility of his movements.

Dugan was not found, and after several days' search it was believed that he had got out of the valley. His wife declared that she knew no more of his whereabouts than those who were hunting him. The matter was left with the police and all effort abandoned.

A month after the Murphy murder, as a gang of men were quitting work, Hans Schmitt remained behind, and, going to a heap of coal near by, he began to turn over loose pieces with his pick. As soon as his companions had gone up in the cage he suddenly stopped, listened and, hearing the sound of a single pick, went toward the worker. Presently, putting out his light, Schmitt moved more stealthily, pausing now and again to listen, starting at some sound in a distant part of the mine and, when assured that there was no one near, moving on again. At last, coming near the place, a sort of pocket, where a man was working alone, Schmitt stole up behind him, raised his pick and was about to bring it down on the skull of the victim when suddenly a hand grasped the pick from behind. At the same moment a voice cried:

"Jacob!"

The workman turned, the light in his hat revealing Hans Schmitt standing with his upraised pick. A moment later the man behind, moving from the shadow cast by the would be murderer, was also recognized.

"Carl Foegel!" exclaimed the workman. "What does this mean?"

"That had I not been on the watch and saved you you would have been murdered."

Schmitt, loosening his hold on his pick, made a move to get away, but Foegel caught him around the waist, and Jacob Schuster pinioned his arms. In this condition they dragged him to the foot of the cage and gave the signal for it to ascend. In ten minutes more they had their captive between them in the office of the superintendent.

"Had it not been for Foegel," said Schuster, "this man, Hans Schmitt, would have murdered me. I was doing some extra work alone. Schmitt crept up behind me and raised his pick to strike when Foegel held it."

"How did you happen to be there?" asked the superintendent of Foegel.

"Before I tell my story," said Foegel, "I would like to have Schmitt's room searched."

The superintendent ordered the search made, and in a few minutes the searchers returned with some money and a watch that had belonged to the murdered Murphy.

"How is this?" said the superintendent, surprised. "This man was not suspected of killing Murphy. Jim Dugan did that job and proved that he had done it by running away."

"Shall I tell my story?" said Foegel.

"Yes; proceed."

"On the evening of Murphy's murder I was working with my gang when I felt thirsty, and, going for some water, I saw a man ahead of me, skulking along as though bent on some villainy. I kept back, following him to where Murphy was working, and saw him raise his pick and strike Murphy. For a moment I was paralyzed and gave him time to rob the body. I then rushed forward, but not before the murderer had gone. I lifted Murphy up and saw that he was dead. It then occurred to me that if found there with the body I would be suspected of the murder, especially as I could not identify the real murderer, so I got out. As I was leaving I was seen by a man who was passing the place."

The superintendent looked dazed. "My good man," he said, "how long since you began to work here?"

"Since the day after the murder."

"Take him away," said the superintendent. "He's gone daft."

"One moment," continued Foegel. "I have been watching many men, including Hans Schmitt, and today when the men quit work and he did not go with them I believed he was bent on mischief. I strayed behind, followed him and this time prevented a murder."

"But the Murphy case"—

"After Murphy was murdered I went to my home, shaved off my red beard, changed my hair to black with some hair dye belonging to my wife and put on old clothes that I hadn't worn for a year. I then came to you and engaged to work under the assumed name of Carl Foegel."

"You are"—

"Jim Dugan."

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed the astonished superintendent. "Why did you run away?"

"To prevent being hanged for a murder I did not commit. I returned to the mine to discover the murderer, and there he is."

There was rejoicing that night at the cabin of Jim Dugan when he returned to his wife and children vindicated by his own wit and daring.

SARAH EARL TWEED.

FOR BETTER ROADS.

Men of Wealth Interested In Highway Improvement.

Men of wealth are evincing a practical interest in road improvement for the benefit of their fellow men. George Gould has offered to bear one-third of the entire cost of the improvement of the public highways in the vicinity of Lakewood, N. J., and Colonel J. J. Astor has spent large sums on the roads near Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

Recently Harley T. Proctor, a summer resident of Williamstown, Mass., offered to give the town $10,000 for the improvement of the roads, providing the latter raises $50,000 for the same purpose. Mr. Proctor makes the gift because he believes that better roads would increase the popularity of Williamstown as a summer resort. He recently had the stone hill road put in excellent condition at a cost of $500. The town furnished the drainage pipes and permitted Mr. Proctor to use the road scraper.

Harvest Times.

Crops are being harvested somewhere in the world during every month in the year. South Africa and Peru harvest in November, and Bengal, Burma and New South Wales in December.

Forethought.

Gilhooley—Oi jist bought me a bottle of hair restorer.

Mulcahey—But your hair ain't falling out.

Gilhooley—Thot's jist it. If Oi shtart usin' it now, Oi won't git bald when me hair does fall out.—New York Times.

Queen Alexandra's Friend.

Miss Charlotte Knollys occupies a position which is envied by every other

Englishwoman. She is Queen Alexandra's secretary and most intimate friend. Her father, Sir Francis Knollys, is private secretary to the king.

Governor of Vermont.

General John G. McCullough, the newly chosen governor of Vermont, was born in Delaware and went to Cal-

ifornia in his youth. In 1873 he removed to Vermont. He owns a 200 acre farm in southern Vermont, near Bennington.

Cutting Cold Butter.

Cutting butter in very cold weather is often a difficulty. When cutting a slice of butter from a large roll, first dip the knife into hot water, when all likelihood of breaking the butter will be avoided.