

Now, Bert had seen this man before, and his thoughts flew back to the occasion of the meeting. It was in the bank's private office, whither the cashier had been summoned previous to undertaking an important mission in connection with the business of the house. Mr. Curzon was giving the necessary instructions when this stranger, now leaning on the railing, entered unannounced. The effect of his appearance on Mr. Curzon had been remarkable. The fine face had grown ghastly white. In a husky voice the banker had postponed the important mission, and given the stranger an unusually long private audience.

"Curzon been gone some time?" queried the man, his face still wearing that smile of nonchalant familiarity.

"He went to his country seat yesterday afternoon," Bert replied. "We expected him in this morning."

"Probably delayed," the man drawled. "I'll wait for him in his private office."

Half an hour later Chris. came to the cashier's window, bearing a dispatch.

"The boy told me 'twas to be read immediate," he said. "Mr. Freeman's out, so you'd better open it."

Bert tore away the envelope.

"Accident near Reading. Am on the train. No one injured. Tell any inquirer will be in as soon as possible. Curzon."

"All right, uncle," said Bert, smiling and nodding.

"Say," said Chris., coming nearer the railing, "he's in there," jerking his thumb in the direction indicated.

"He?" Bert repeated. "Oh, yes; I'll tell him."

The cashier entered the office.

"There's been an accident—" he commenced.

"Good God!" exclaimed the stranger, starting to his feet, and grasping the cashier's arm. There was no easy nonchalance in his manner now; his face was as white as Curzon's had been on the previous occasion. In a few seconds the man recovered himself, and asked, with forced calmness:

"Curzon hurt?"

"No one injured," Bert replied, again pausing before he spoke. From his continual "sizing up" of applicants for bank favors, Bert had come to be something of a judge of men, and his mental conclusion now was:

"Curzon's welfare is indispensable to this person."

"I'll call again," said the visitor, as he betook himself from the room and from the bank.

Old Chris. was aware that the Curzon family had a skeleton in their closet, and, indeed, why shouldn't he know all the affairs of their household, he having been so long connected with them that he could remember when Miss Grace, as a little child, had been in the habit of dropping in to receive the cookies for which his wife, Mary, was famous.

In fact, the old couple considered themselves a part of Curzon's, and so jealously guarded the aforementioned skeleton that Miss Grace had grown to womanhood in total ignorance of what a scapegrace her dead brother, Frank, had been. It was three years since he had met his death by drowning, and in the opinion of Chris. and his wife Mr. Curzon should be regaining his cheerfulness, but, instead, he seemed to grow more despondent.

The second day after the receipt of the aforementioned telegram, Miss Grace came to see Mary, her face much flushed, as she announced "I'm going to be married." Then she began to cry as if her heart would break.

Mary was all amazement. A great amount of questioning drew from the lugubrious *fiance* that Falkner was the name of the proposed husband. Mary didn't know Falkner, but Chris. coming in just then, the faithful wife took him into a side room and related the whole affair. Chris. was knocked too flat to grasp it all. "Falkner!" was all he could say. "Falkner waited an hour or so in the private office for Mr. Curzon last Wednesday."

Chris. peeped out and saw the girl whose head was still bent in sobs; then he shambled from the room, and from sheer force of habit presented himself before the cashier's desk.

"Mr. Dore," he whispered, then, as Bert, who saw by the redness of the porter's face that something unusual had transpired, leaned out to catch it, "Falkner's goin' ter marry our Miss Grace."

Such a clatter of falling gold drew the attention of the other clerks. Bert's hands had opened in spite of his efforts to prevent them. His face was redder than the porter's.

"She's down with Mary cryin' over it," Chris. said.

There was balm in this information to soothe the ragged edges of the wound. If she was crying, she was not happy, surely. The cashier made a sudden, though rather tardy, resolve to try his own fortune.

"Ask Mary to keep her, and invite me in after closing, will you, Chris.?" he pleaded.

Chris. looked stupid, but finally got it through his head, and hurried away to apprise Mary of the part she was to play.

Mary's task was rendered less difficult by reason of a rattling thunder shower that came up. Punctually at half past two Bert knocked at the porter's door.

Of course Chris. and Mary were glad to see him, and chided him on the infrequency of his visits. They showed plainly that they considered his coming an honor. Somehow the younger couple became interested in an exchange of opinions regarding books and pictures and music. Bert had an interesting way of describing things, and in his talk he managed to