

OUR STORY TELLER



A : TERRIBLE : TEMPER.

"If there is anything especially obnoxious to me," avowed Miss Murphy, in solemn conclusion, "it is interference with the affairs of others; but in this case I said to myself, 'Duty, Mary Anne Murphy, duty!'"

"O!" gasped Jessica. She had sunk back in the rose-beribboned rattan rocker in quite a tremor of dismay.

A very charming room, this suburban parlor, into which gold bars of sunshine slanted through the half-closed Venetians. Worthy even of pretty Jessica—it, with its tiled hardwood floor, its silver-fox and bearskin rugs, its Madras-draped windows, its quaintly modern mantel of polished oak, its eccentric chairs, its grotesque tables, its dainty aquarelles, its Chinese cabinets, its slender but admirably chosen collection of bisque and Limoges.

And surely eye, however critical, could crave no sweeter picture than little Miss Ray made in her pale blue surah tea gown, encased with Valenciennes, and all her bronze-bright ripply hair braided in childish fashion down her back. But just now the lovely face was curiously colorless, the purple-blue eyes wide and startled under their long lashes.

There was silence after that sharp exclamation of Jessica's. Miss Murphy could afford to be silent. She had dropped her small shell and it had exploded with a most satisfactory report. She sat rigidly erect in the consciousness of duty done, every fold of her black silk visiting costume stiff with propriety, every pompon on the brown beige bonnet bristling with respectability.

"I don't believe a word of it!" declared Jessica, slowly.

If impolite, the remark was in no degree insolent. It was simply the utterance of a conviction. Miss Murphy was not offended. She removed her gaze from a gem of Van Elton's on the opposite wall to fasten it on the agitated little lady in the rocker. It took some endurance on Jessica's part to sit meekly under the scrutiny of those faded blue eyes—eyes tolerant, placid, benignant, as those of a benignant old cow.

"It is true, my dear. He said it. I heard him with my own ears!"

This really was unanswerable. "They were in the front parlor," pursued Miss Murphy, folding her plump, tan-gloved hands with aggravating leisure and serenity. "I sat sewing just behind the portiere. I never would have staid could I only have foretold what was coming. They had been talking about other things, and were silent for awhile. Suddenly my Ned burst out laughing. 'So you've seen her,' he said, 'and you don't fancy her, eh?' 'Fancy her,' echoed Jack. 'Well, I should say not!'"

"Well?" urged Jessica, scandally.

She would hear it out, she told herself—she would—every word of it!

"Well, then," slowly, to heighten by suspense the effect of her narrative, "Ned said, 'The boys around here all like her immensely. Roy Pates says she's a daisy!'"

"O!" moaned Jessica. "You must excuse that nephew of mine, my dear; you really must. Ned but repeats what he hears. Besides, you know, he is only a boy yet—just 18. What Ned said is of no importance. Please go on."

She sat erect again, very pale and imperative, indeed.

"If you insist on hearing," hesitatingly, "Jack replied, 'Well, I don't. I did just at first. I confess for awhile she deceived me. But a few days gave me enough of her.' Ned said: 'Why, we all thought you were in great luck to get her.' 'Luck!' cried Jack in answer, so loud my dear, I fairly jumped. 'Luck! Yes, the most confounded piece of bad luck I ever struck!' I am ashamed to say, my dear, but to be veracious I must say that here Ned, quite carried away by his youthful sympathies, inquired: 'Can't you get out of it?' And Jack said: 'Confound it, no! That's the worst of it. I can't break such a contract with any honor to myself. But I only wish some other fellow stood in my shoes just now. I've promised to take her, and I've got to do it, but it's a deuced bad bargain!—oh,

my dear Jessica, you're not going to faint!"

Jessica put out her hand with a slight, repressing gesture.

"No, Miss Murphy, I am not going to faint. Is that all?"

Miss Murphy was rather disconcerted. Her shell had not exploded noisily, it is true. But now that the smoke was clearing away she, at whose feet it had been flung, was not dead—not even wounded.

"Yes, I believe that was all, for just then some one summoned Jack. But as he went out he called back to Ned: 'I'll see you at Bryant's to-morrow night and talk this unfortunate blunder over again. Be in my study at 10. I'll meet you there!'"

"And that really is all?" queried Jessica, quite her own possessed self again.

Miss Murphy started. To once more drop into smiles, her balloon, which had sailed up so straightly and securely at first, had suddenly collapsed and was falling with startling rapidity.

"I should think," severely, "it would be quite enough."

"Enough?" airily. "That's it! It's too much! You know an overdose of poison occasionally counteracts the effect of a lesser quantity, and I think," with a smile charmingly confidential, "it is something the same way with gossip—don't you?"

It was Miss Murphy's turn to gasp. Such a girl! But then one never could understand Jessica Ray. Miss Murphy thought it was time to go. With the cessation of conversation concerning personal affairs her interest died a natural death. She was averse to wading in foreign waters. The inodorous pool scummed over with village scandal sufficed her. She feared aught else.

"Good-by, my dear," with a bewildered shake of the tinsel bonnet. "I am so sorry I had to tell you. Life is full of unpleasant duties. I never like to interfere in other people's affairs. 'Charity,' I always say; 'charity and silence.' If there is anything I particularly detest it is talebearing. Well, as I said, I must be going. Good-by, my dear. I'm so glad you don't mind."

"Good-by," cordially.

"We all thought," pausing at the door for a parting thrust, "that it was to be not only a marriage de convenance, but a genuine love affair on both sides."

"Indeed!" said Jessica, brightly arching her pretty brows.

And then at last the door closed on her visitor's broad, black-silk back. The blitheness born of bravado died out of little Miss Ray's face. She went slowly back to the rose-beribboned rocker and sat down therein for a good, heart-sick, discontented, mortified, miserable cry. When she had been very, very young and charming, and Jack Sutherland an awkward lad of 10, their fathers had planned a marriage in the future. The planning stood, by the way, upon an agreeably substantial basis, looking at the affair from a financial point of view.

Soon after Jack's father had died and Jack had gone to live with his mother's relatives in England. He carried with him the memory of a pair of sweet eyes, for all the world like big, blue, dew-wet forget-me-nots, for wee Jessica had parted from her playmate with a particularly tender and protesting farewell. Twelve years passed. Neither chafed—as in novelistic traditions bound—against the paternal decision of their childhood. No fair English maiden displaced his first love in Jack's loyal heart. As for Jessica, she had grown to think of Jack as a hero who was coming across the sea to claim her. When she anticipated that coming before her mind's eye forth pranced a snowy charger bearing a plumed knight.

One day, just two weeks ago it was, she went down to the drawing-room in response to the servant's announcement. A gentleman standing in the window turned at her entrance. He came swiftly forward, both hands extended, his face brightening with gay admiration.

"It is—it is—little Jessica!"

his neck swung no mandolin. From his shoulder fell no cloak of ruby velvet. Not stalwart statured was he, nor raven haired, nor flashing eyed. Not the grand creation of her girlhood's sweet foolish dreams, in truth, his rivals would have said, a very ordinary young man. But he had come! Jessica's heart gave a great throb. A true woman, though, ego, an arch-hypocrite, she put her hand in his with an air of cool surprise, a touch of wellbred reproof in her greeting.

"And you are—Mr. Sutherland!" Neither had in any way suggested the odd relation in which they tacitly stood to each other. Both felt the chain that bound them, for all its massive golden links a very frail and brittle one in the passionate strength of youthful impulse. Neither would be slow to fling it off if the bandage proved oppressive. However, it did not. The childish, ignorant, romantic affection which had been smoldering in their hearts since the sorrowful parting of the playmates, at a word, a touch, a look, blazed up into a pure and strong and steady flame. Of his courtship Jack Sutherland made short work. Putting aside the understanding between their fathers like the man he was he wooed her for her own sweet sake.

Just two nights ago he had told her in his own direct fashion how dearly he loved her. And Jessica—well, last evening had come the sapphire ring that—only last evening and to-day this.

If Miss Murphy's neat little shell had not brought death it had caused pain akin to it.

"It's the money!" moaned Jessica. "It's the horrid detestable money he wants. It isn't me!" And then a face with clear brown eyes and a kind, grave smile arose before her and she broke down crying afresh.

But after awhile she sprang up, rubbing two very small resolute fists in two very pink eyes. "I won't see him to-night. And I'll be in the library at 10. And I'll hear what else he has to—no, I won't! I won't eavesdrop. But I'll look my very loveliest—I will—I will!"

And she did.

As she came up the parlors at Mrs. Bryant's "small and early" Miss Murphy—always first on the field—looked at her in amazement. Quite a bewitching vision little Miss Ray to-night, roselipped, star-eyed, smiling, her slim, dusk draperies of lace trailing softly behind her, a huge cluster of violets at her bosom. It was after 10 before she could escape from her companion and make her way to the library. Her hand on the portiere dividing that apartment from the morning room, she paused.

Voices. She didn't intend to eavesdrop. Of course, it was unintentional—all was said and over so quickly. Equally of course it was dishonorable, but I think as a rule we are not apt to consider questions of honor with extreme nicety when our hearts are very sore.

"I've decided to take her," Jack's quiet voice was saying, wearily. "It's the only thing I can do now."

Ned spoke.

"She's skittish, I know, but (by way of consolation) she may outgrow that."

Jessica groaned involuntarily. Jack glanced toward the curtain.

"Well, drop the subject." In a lower voice; "Keep it dark, like a good boy. I don't want people to know I am such a young fool as to be taken in by a bag of bones, all paint and drugs."

Jessica was plump as a partridge, and her complexion was a "bloom" patented by nature's self. The morning room was built save from the hall. Thank goodness for that! She felt herself growing faint and dizzy. Was that Jack who talked so—could it be—her Jack?

"O, come now!" laughed Ned, "you know you are exaggerating. She's not quite as bad as that!"

"Pretty nearly!" ruefully. "I don't so much mind her skittishness—I could break her of that, I flatter myself—but she has a terrible temper!"

She must not faint, Jessica told herself frantically. O, she must not! Was that dark thing beside her in the shadow of the portiere a fauteuil. She sank down on it heavily, weakly, exhaustedly. Horror of horrors! It at first succumbed a second to her weight, then moved, protested with vigorous energy, shrieked.

All faintness banished, Jessica leaped to her feet, her soft, quick cry of alarm mingling with that muffled roar of rheumatic agony.

"That's aunt!" gasped Ned.

"Jessica!" cried Jack. He strode forward and flung aside the portiere. The light from the library poured into the shadowy morning room. It fell on Jessica standing just within, very white and trembling, and it showed on the floor a large and ungraceful heap of crushed drab silk and bugles, disordered "front," and greswome groans.

For a moment they stood and stared—speechless. But Miss Murphy kept on growning.

"What is it all about?" queried Ned bewilderedly, helping his aunt to rise.

"I—I," faltered Jessica, "sat down on Miss Murphy!"

"What?" cried Ned.

"We were eavesdropping," confessed Miss Murphy, with venomous candor, "and Jessica took me for a footstool and—"

"My darling?" whispered Jack (no, not to Miss Murphy) "I thought when

I heard your voice you were hurt or—"

Jessica flamed up.

"How dare you? Stand back, sir! Here's your ring." She tugged bravely, but it fitted well. "I have heard in what manner you speak of me. No," disgustedly, "don't appear astonished! Recall your conversation of yesterday morning with Ned Sales."

Ned stared at being thus abruptly referred to. Jack looked dazed. "I did not intend to hear such another conversation as that which had been repeated to me, but I did. If I'm—I'm," the rose crimsoning in her cheeks, "skittish," bringing out the hateful word with a jerk, "and—and a deuced—bad—bargain," slowly, "and if I've got a ter—ter—here's your ring!" She had wrenched it off at last.

But Jack did not take it. His dumb dismay had turned to uproarious mirth. It was well a noisy polonaise was in progress in the drawing-room. He laughed. He kept on laughing. Suddenly the whole ludicrous misunderstanding bursting on Ned he struck in with a very howl of delight, and they fell into each other's arms like a couple of crazy boys and supported each other and laughed.

But, recollecting Jessica standing there, Sutherland explained, between shameful relapses into laughter: "It was—a horse. I thought I knew all about horseflesh. I knew nothing. I have to take her—the idioy is mine. I fondly fancied I had found a Maud S. Jim Smiley's famous nag could beat her. I gave a thousand for her. She's worth—and, now you understand!"

For Jessica had sprung forward, mouth and eyes three sweet, remorseful "O's!"

"Jack—Jack! And how I talked just now!" all riotous blushes. "I must have, after all, a—a—the kind of a temper you said the horse had."

"I'll risk it," laughed Jack.

Headless of Mrs. Bryant's small nephew who had entered and stood stock still, an exclamation point of inquisitive delight; heedless of Ned, who clung in silent, spasmodic convulsions to the portiere; heedless even, this rash young man, of Miss Murphy, that ancient virgin, who, rigid and frigid, glowered at him in an access of scandalized modesty, he took his sweetheart in his arms with a good, long, loving kiss, and thus adoringly addressed her:

"Doubted me, did you? You—contemptible little—wretch!"—New York Dispatch.

Longevity and Sleeping by Compass

A Magdeburg physician, according to the Lyon Medical, who died recently at the age of 109, attributed his remarkable longevity to his constant practice of sleeping with his head to the north and his feet to the south. He considered this position most favorable to the magnetic currents which run constantly toward the north pole, and increase the energy of the vital principle. A correspondent of Dr. Felix Bremond "found that a kind of nervous irritation to which he was subject ceased when he placed the head of his bed a little east of north. This position of the head of the bed brought him more sound and peaceful slumber, and with such regularity that when he wished to rise earlier than usual in the morning, all he had to do was to change the direction of the head of his bed, when his sleep became lighter and of shorter duration. Dr. Bremond himself, however, found that the direction of his body made no difference to the soundness of his slumbers, provided he went to sleep in a comfortable bed, at the usual hour and at the end of a day of active work."—Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.

Where the Presidents Are Buried.

The burial places of our Presidents are widely scattered. Washington lies at Mount Vernon; the two Adamesses are buried under the old church at Quincy, Mass.; Jefferson rests at Monticello; Madison's grave is at Montpelier, not far from Monticello; Monroe's remains lie in the Richmond Cemetery; Jackson's grave is in front of his old residence, "The Hermitage;" Van Buren was buried at Kinderhook; Harrison, at North Bend, near Cincinnati; Polk, at Nashville; Taylor's remains are near Louisville; Fillmore lies in Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo; Pierce was buried in Concord, New Hampshire, and Buchanan at Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Lincoln's grave is near Springfield, Illinois; Johnson's is at Greenville; Garfield's at Cleveland, Ohio; Grant's at Riverside, and Arthur's at Albany.—Washington letter.

Unanswerable.

Pat—I tell you the old frinds are always the best, after all, and I can prove it.

Dennis—How?

Pat—Where'll you find a new frind that has shtood by you as long as the old ones have?—Cleveland Leader.

Worse than Crime.

Fuddy—Football was a crime in England in the reign of Henry VIII.

Duddy—The way they play it now is a blunder, which is worse than a crime.—Boston Transcript.

Couldn't Help It.

Trivret—How did Joysmith get the reputation of being such a liar?

Dicer—He used to be the United States weather forecaster here.—New York Weather.

SHEEP NONSENSE

She—"What do you think of the way I speak German?" He—"Oh, it beats the Dutch."—Yonkers Statesman.

Cynic—I can't see why a man who is happy when single should ever marry. Friend—He never does.—Puck.

He—You girls seem to be awfully fond of sweets. She—And you men seem to be awfully fond of sour.—Cornell Widow.

Stern father—I hear you were out gambling last night. Is it true? Gay youth—No, sir; I was ahead.—New York Journal.

Beggar—Please, sir, I'm so exhausted I can't get my breath and— Gentleman—Here's five cents; go and buy one.—Harlem Life.

Mr. New Hub—What does it mean when a bride promises to obey? Mrs. New Hub—Simply that she prefers not to make a scene.—Puck.

"Tredde is jealous of his prerogatives, isn't he?" "What makes you say so?" "He got angry the other night and told me not to be a fool."—New York Sun.

"Do you think Skinner can make a living out there?" "Make a living! Why, he'd make a living on a rock in the middle of the ocean—if there was another man on the rock."—Tit-Bits.

Mrs. Spot—Your husband is an inventor, I believe? Mrs. Spotter—Yes. Some of his excuses for coming home late at night are in use all over the country.—Philadelphia North American.

"Won't you take this seat?" said the gentleman in the car, rising and lifting his hat. "No, thank you," said the girl with the skates on her arm; "I've been skating, and I'm tired sitting down."—Yonkers Statesman.

"If I didn't love my husband, I'd stab him to death!" exclaimed the warm-blooded lady from New Orleans. "I wouldn't," said the Chicago woman; "I'd get a divorce and stiek him for alimony."—Town Topics.

"And how did he die?" asked the lady who had come West to inquire after the husband she had lost. "Er—by request, ma'am," said the gentle cowboy, as mildly and regretfully as possible.—Indianapolis Journal.

"Who is that young woman near the other end of the table talking about correct taste in art?" "Which young woman? There are several." "The one with the wooden toothpick in her mouth."—Chicago Tribune.

"Do you see anything coming our way?" asked the morning star of a companion. "Not yet," was the reply; "but I see a servant below there who is about to light her kitchen fire with kerosene."—Yonkers Statesman.

"It's perfectly absurd, this clamor about our hats. People who can't see over them would better not go to the theater." "I know; that's what I told my husband, and he said, 'All right, we won't go; and we don't.'"—Bazar.

Simonsby—I have a chance to marry two girls; one is pretty, but a mere butterfly, as it were, and the other, though plain, is an excellent housekeeper. Mr. Russell of Chicago—Take the pretty one first.—Indianapolis Journal.

"How long have you been on this route?" asked the drummer of the conductor on a primitive Southern railroad. "Ten years, suh." "Indeed? You must have gotten on several miles south of where I did."—Detroit Free Press.

He—"Now that our engagement is ended, I suppose we should return each other's letters?" She—"I suppose so. And, George, while we are about it, why not return each other's kisses?" Engagement renewed on the spot.—Boston Transcript.

A young student lately presented himself for examination and ignominiously failed. To his family, anxious to hear of his success, he telegraphed thus: "Examination splendid; professors enthusiastic. They wish for a second in October."—Tit-Bits.

He—"Do you remember when first we met? The dew was on the grass, the air was full of summer scents, and—"

She—"Yes; and now there's no summer, no dew, no grass and no sense. By the way, have you heard of my engagement?"—Detroit Free Press.

Ethel—"Oh, dear me! I don't know what to think! Algy asked me last night if I wouldn't like to have something around the house that I could love, and that would love me." Edith—"Well?" Ethel—"Well, I don't know whether he means himself or whether he is thinking of buying me a dog!"—Puck.

Mrs. Yeast—"I wish I could think of something to keep my husband at home at nights." Mrs. Puncheon—"Get him a bicycle." Mrs. Yeast—"That would take him out more than ever." Mrs. Puncheon—"Oh, no, it wouldn't! My husband got one the day before yesterday and the doctor says he won't be out for a month."—Household Words