

DONA FERENTIS

It had just struck 7, and the restless impatience which indicates that dinner is being kept waiting had settled on the three members of the Wilkins family assembled before the drawing room fire. Mrs. Wilkins looked continually from the work on her lap to the clock on the mantelpiece with an expression which would have been more amiable if it had been less controlled. Miss Wilkins affected to be reading a book, but the constant tapping of her foot on the carpet showed that her thoughts were not following her eyes. Miss Gertie Wilkins had less constraint. She moved restlessly from the clock to the window, and back again from the window to the clock, with discontent in her face and grumbling in her voice. At last she broke out:

"If I were engaged, I'd teach him to be punctual. Dick's always late."

Her sister did not answer. She was meditating the best manner of executing judgment on the offender, and had just decided on a course of extreme severity when a ring at the bell relieved the general tension. "There he is," said Gertie. "I'll give him a piece of my mind," and she darted out of the room. Mrs. Wilkins and her elder daughter carefully settled their features into an expression of cold displeasure, and waited the arrival of their visitor. They could hear the sound of voices below at the street door; but there was no noise as of the door closing, or of anyone entering the house. They had almost forgotten their displeasure in their curiosity, when Gertie's step was heard bounding up the stairs again.

"A telegram, I expect," said Miss Wilkins, with ill-concealed disappointment.

"Really, that would be most annoying now," her mother remarked.

The next moment Gertie rushed into the room bearing, not a telegram, but a large and expensive bouquet of yellow chrysanthemums. "A boy brought these for the lady of the house," she announced; "and he can't say whom they're from."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed both ladies in a breath, their interest divided between Gertie and the remarkably handsome bouquet which she carried.

"Just what I say. The boy said he was ordered to leave the flowers at No. 19, for 'the lady of the house,' and he doesn't know who sent them. Aren't they nice?"

"What a curious thing!" said Miss Wilkins.

"What beautiful flowers!" said her mother. "They must have cost at least 10 shillings. Who can have sent them?"

"Why, can't you guess?" Gertie inquired. "It's as plain as A B C. Who could have sent them but Dick? It's a peace offering for being late, of course."

The idea instantly found favor. "Of course, it's Dick," said Miss Wilkins.

"Of course it is," said Mrs. Wilkins. "What a very kind thought! But he should not have spent so much money. No doubt he had to go out of his way to get them, and that made him late. He could not get such flowers everywhere. But why send them anonymously? Why not bring them with him?"

"Oh, I suppose he thought it would be fun to make us guess," said Miss Wilkins. "You see, he sent the flowers on first, so that our curiosity about the giver would be at its height when he arrived."

As if to confirm the theory, there was at that moment a ring at the bell, and Gertie, from the window, announced that the long-expected guest was at the door.

"It would show our appreciation of the gift," said Mrs. Wilkins, "if we put the flowers on the dining table. You arrange them, Gwennie, dear, will you? I will receive Richard. And, Gertie, please tell the cook that she may serve up dinner."

Immediately afterwards Richard Johnston entered Mrs. Wilkins' drawing-room with much misgiving in his heart and a profusion of apologies on his lips. He knew that he was nearly twenty minutes late, and that unpunctuality was one of the most serious of offenses in the eyes of his betrothed. What was his surprise to find the mother of his betrothed all smiles and graciousness. His excuses were "quite unnecessary"; there had been no inconvenience; "in fact, they had hardly noticed that he was late, at all." He was at once conducted into the drawing-room, where his reception by Miss Wilkins and Gertie was of the same bewildering and unmerited cordiality.

He had no time for private conference with Miss Wilkins, but she sat next to him at dinner. Whenever he tried to apologize for being late she smiled at him with a particularly kindly eye, and assured him that "they quite understood."

Poor Johnston could not readily adjust himself to a reception so different from that for which he had braced himself. Why did they all smile at him so knowingly? True, he had had his mustache curled before leaving the city; but that could hardly have made so favorable an impression.

As the soup was being removed Miss Wilkins pressed his hand under the table, and whispered tenderly:

"Thank you, dear, so much. It was nice of you. Mother was very pleased."

Johnston, increasingly uneasy, whispered back, in innocent inquiry:

"What about?"

"Oh, you silly boy! Did you suppose that I should not guess?" There was a flattering emphasis upon the "I," but for the life of him Johnston could not think what he had done to deserve it. He had not time to turn the question over in his mind, for Mrs. Wilkins demanded his attention.

"You see to what good purpose they have been put," she said, with an appreciative smile for Johnston, and a meaning glance towards the flowers in the center of the table.

Johnston looked at Mrs. Wilkins, and then followed the direction of her gaze to the flowers, with a perfectly blank and bewildered expression.

Miss Gertie then took up the case for the prosecution.

"Oh, it's no use trying to look stupid" (Johnston bowed); "we knew directly it was you."

It here occurred to Johnston that the speediest method of clearing up the mystery would be to affect a guilty knowledge of the facts. So he put on his airiest manner, and answered:

"So you found me out directly, eh? There is no deceiving your sagacity, Gertie."

"It didn't want much sagacity," said Gertie; "who else could it be?"

"Who else, indeed?" said Johnston.

"It is useless for you to try to 'fo good by stealth,'" smiled Mrs. Wilkins.

"But you must allow me to blush to find it fame," retorted Johnston.

"What was it that betrayed me?"



SHE REGARDED JOHNSTON WITH STERN ACCUSATION.

"Oh, don't imagine that the boy split," said the younger Miss Wilkins. "Gertie!" interrupted her mother, admonishingly.

"What did the boy say?" asked Johnston, cunningly, for he was deeply interested by this time.

Mrs. Wilkins replied: "He asked the maid whether our house was No. 19; and then gave her the flowers for 'the lady of the house.' Gertie—ah—happened to be in the hall, and asked him from whom they came. But he said he could not tell."

The situation was now clear. Johnston realized with alarm that he was supposed to have been the donor of the handsome bouquet which he saw before him. That he actually was not responsible for the courteous attention with which he was credited he felt in some way to be a reproach; and he blushed with shame. He had it on his lips to say, "My dear Mrs. Wilkins, I did not send the flowers;" but his courage failed him. It would be such a nasty fall from grace for him, and such a slight upon the ladies' discernment. No; he must break the truth gradually, and hedge a little longer.

"I suppose you got them at Mason's?" inquired Gertie.

"No, I did not," said Johnston.

"Then it was Gregory's. That's the only other shop near. I thought it was. Things are ever so much cheaper" at

Gregory's. Mother thought you'd paid at least 10 shillings for them."

"Wherever you got the flowers," hurriedly broke in Mrs. Wilkins, "they are very beautiful, and I thank you again most cordially."

"But you really must not thank me," protested Johnston. "I haven't admitted that I did send the flowers. And, in any case, to attempt to thank the donor is to disregard his wish to be anonymous."

"If you really wished not to be found out," said Mrs. Wilkins, "you would not have chosen my favorite flowers—yellow chrysanthemums."

"Besides, you looked so conscious as you came in," said Mrs. Wilkins.

"That's the worst of being late," thought Johnston.

"And I saw you recognized the flowers directly you entered the room."

"Yes," added Gertie, "and the way you tried to look as if you didn't understand was awfully weak. Anyone could see you were pretending. Why, you're still blushing, I declare. Look at him, Gwen."

Johnston could not help laughing, the evidence against him was so strong; and this behavior of his was regarded as certain confirmation of his guilt. As well as he could for laughter, he tried to get out, "But this is all a mistake."

His protestations were received with polite smiles of incredulity and the citation of further incontestable proofs of his guilt. After some minutes of his vain contest, Gertie broke in:

"Of course, it was good fun to make us guess, but now that we have guessed, what's the use of pretending any longer?"

"Yes, Dick, is was very sweet of you, but you must have known that we could not be long in the dark," and Miss Wilkins pressed his hand under the table again.

"And there is no reason why you should not take the thanks which you deserve," said Mrs. Wilkins, as though closing the subject.

Johnston roared aloud. There he was, surrounded by people who insisted, in spite of all protestations, in thrusting gratitude upon him for something he had not done. The situation was too comic. The ladies, however, were rather annoyed. They, naturally, thought that the thanks which they had expressed so graciously were worthy of being received with more respect.

"I must say, I should appreciate the joke better if you did not carry it quite so far," said Miss Wilkins.

Johnston was sore and savage; but he did not see why other people's unreasonableness should spoil his evening. If they were so determined that he had sent the flowers, he would contradict them no more.

Presently Miss Gwendoline reappeared. She had evidently determined to overlook Johnston's perversity; and he soon forgot his troubles. When that peculiar degree of tenderness had been reached which prompts lovers to address each other in the third person, Miss Wilkins began playfully to improve the occasion.

"And he won't be a silly boy any more?" (Interlude.) "And he won't tell any more naughty stories?" (Another interlude.) "Say, I send the flowers." (Attempted interlude.) "No, not till you've said it."

At this happy moment, and before Johnston could reply, Gertie burst into the room with the simple ejaculation: "Well!"

She stood in the doorway regarding poor Johnston with stern accusation in her eye; and he quailed before that glance, realizing instinctively that he was "in for it" again.

"You really must not bounce about the house like that, Gertie," said Miss Wilkins, with some irritation; "you make one think that something dreadful has happened. Whatever is the matter?"

"Ask him," said Gertie, pointing to the miserable Johnston, who awaited his fate with the fortitude of despair.

"It was a good joke, wasn't it?" continued the mistress of the situation. "No wonder you laughed so much. What a pretty pair of fools we must have seemed, Gwen?"

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Wilkins, with rising impatience.

"Why, I mean the flowers, of course."

"Then allow me to tell you that we have agreed to let that subject drop once and for all."

"Oh, have we?" replied Gertie. "Unfortunately, there is someone at the door who won't let it drop. The boy is here again."

"What boy?"

"The boy who brought the flowers."

"Well?"

"He wants them back. There's been a mistake. He ought to have left them at No. 9 instead of No. 19."

Conscious of the indignation kindling in his sweetheart's eyes, Johnston, with the inspiration of despair, saw that there was only one course possible to save the situation.

He burst into as plausible an affection of hearty laughter as his nervousness would permit. The ladies looked mystified, but unrelenting.

"Be good enough to explain yourself," said Miss Wilkins.

"It's awfully funny, isn't it?" said her sister sarcastically.

"It is, it is," laughed Johnston. "Don't you see? It's part of the joke, telling the boy to come back for the flowers. Ha, ha, ha! It was to make you believe that I didn't really send them." And leaving no time for questioning, Johnston rushed downstairs, thrust a sovereign into the boy's hand, and slammed the door upon him.

During the rest of the evening Miss Wilkins' mood was preoccupied, as one who ponders deeply. But Gertie had evidently been sternly forbidden to refer to the subject of flowers, and they were not mentioned again. How far Miss Wilkins realized the true state of the case, Johnston never knew, but when he was ordering the bridal bouquet he was given particular instructions to leave his card with the florist.

"Really, Dick, I don't want to argue this question any longer. Presumably you wished your flowers to give pleasure; you are assured that they have

done so, and I wonder you can't see what a pity it is to go on talking about them till they become anything but a source of pleasure. It is so silly, and so very gratuitous."

"But I assure you, my dear girl, that I did not send the flowers!" said Johnston, with desperate earnestness.

Gertie whistled, and Mrs. Wilkins looked grave.

"Really, Dick, this is too much. If you will insist in continuing to amuse yourself in this way, it shall not be at my expense. When you think the joke is exhausted, you can let me know."

With this Miss Wilkins swept out of the room; and Johnston feared by the look on her face that her anger would not be easily appeased.

There was silence for some moments. "Why don't you own up?" said Gertie, as she followed her sister out of the room.

When she was left alone with him, Mrs. Wilkins appealed to Johnston again.

"Really, Richard," she said, with the sort of kind severity one would extend to a fractious lunatic, "I think it is a pity that the evening should be spoiled in this way; especially when it promised to be so pleasant. Whatever your reasons for this obstinacy may be, is it worth while making us all unhappy?"

Poor Johnston looked dismal and desperate enough. The joke had evidently lost its point for him.

"May I tell Gwendoline when I go upstairs that—the mood has passed?" continued Mrs. Wilkins.

"That the mood has passed," it was too much for poor Johnston's temper.

"Yes," he said. "Say I'm awfully sorry that I didn't admit at once that I sent the flowers." This was strictly true.

"That's right," said Mrs. Wilkins cheerfully, as she left the room.

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JOLLY JOKER

She snored.—"How does your wife sleep?" asked the doctor of the man whose better half was under his care. "Orally," said the man.—Truth.

"Good canvasback ducks," said Dickers, "are quoted, I see, at \$3 apiece. How true it is that riches have wings."—Chicago Tribune.

"Margaret always reads the end of a novel first." "Why?" "So she can be awake at night wondering how it began."—Chicago Record.

"Pa, what is a pessimist?" "A pessimist, my son, is a person who never goes out on his wheel without expecting to puncture his tire."—Puck.

Mrs. Painter—"My husband is delighted with my pictures." Mrs. Painter—"You don't say? Don't they look like you?"—Yonkers Statesman.

"Not every man is made a fool of," remarked the observer of men and things, "but every man has the material in him."—Detroit Journal.

"The decree," announced the messenger of Jupiter, "is that you shall be bound forever to the wheel!" "Why make?" asked Ixion, anxiously.—Puck.

Police Magistrate—"Have you ever seen the prisoner at the bar?" Witness—"Never, your honor; but I've seen him when I strongly suspected he'd been at it."—Tit-Bits.

Yabsley—"Did you ever make a mistake in the dark and kiss the wrong girl?" Mudge—"No, I have got mixed in the dark and kissed some other girl."—Indianapolis Journal.

"Some men," said Uncle Eben, "in train er dog ter do anyting dey tell 'em, an' at de same time raise de most disobeintest chillun in de neighborhood."—Washington Star.

"Dah ain' much use o' sufferin' in a fence," said Uncle Eben; "seems like 'dis worl' picks out anybody foh'er time, it ain' gwinter to be sufferin' till he hollers."—Washington Star.

"And the divorce laws are so very liberal in your section?" "Liberal! Say! They are so liberal that nobody ever heard of a woman crying at a wedding out there."—Detroit Journal.

"My dear, if you took that fan abroad you might have trouble in getting it home again." "What do you mean?" "I mean the tariff on art, my love."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Apprehension: The Professor—"As a matter of fact, there are different dialects in different parts of Scotland." Friend—"Great Scott! Are there more countries to hear from?"—Truth.

Mrs. Spatt—"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.

First Burglar—Lord, Bill! dis advertisement wouldnt fool nobody. Second Burglar—Wot is it? First Burglar—Fifty dollars reward an' no questions asked.—signed by a woman.—Leslie's Weekly.

"Frisbie is the laziest man I ever knew." "What makes you think so?" "He actually seems to be glad that he's getting baldheaded, so that he won't have to comb his hair any more."—Cleveland Leader.

"Might I ask what school of poetry you prefer?" inquired the young man who writes. And the old gentleman replied: "The homeopathic school. The smaller the dose, the better it suits me."—Washington Star.

Pease—I suppose you've learned a great deal about gardening since you've lived in the country? Hubbard—Yes, I'm picking up something all the time. This year I've given up trying to raise my own vegetables.—Puck.

"How did they stop the elopement?" asked Maud. "By a detestable piece of trickery," replied Mamie; "her father put his head out of the window and shouted that her hat was on crooked, and when she grabbed for it she upset the tandem."—Washington Star.

"Why do you do up your hair in those papers, dear?" remarked General Weller of his wife, as she came down to breakfast in the Cuban boarding-house. "Why, that's the way you do the enemy up, is it not, dear?" replied the general's spouse.—Yonkers Statesman.

Once upon a time two Cows reclined peacefully beneath a tree. "Oh, by the way," one of the Cows remarked casually, "why was it, if I may ask, that you didn't chase those golfers yesterday?" "Oh, I don't care to be the cause of little calves being made to suffer."—Detroit Free Press.

"How long is it going to take to get through with this case?" asked the client, who was under suspicion of house-breaking. "Well," replied the young lawyer, thoughtfully, "it'll take me about two weeks to get through with it, but I'm afraid it's going to take you about four years."—Washington Star.

Browner—So you haven't a bicycle, Miss Neere? Miss Neere—No, I looked at one the other day, but there was something about it I didn't like and the man wouldn't alter it, so I didn't get it. Browner—They generally make any alterations required. What was it you wanted altered? Miss Neere—The price.—Judy.