

THE TATTLE-TALE.

She Got a Chance to Turn the Title on Her Accuser.

By TEMPLE BAILEY.
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Patricia and the professor were the last to leave the breakfast table.

"So Mary Morris and Williston are engaged," the professor remarked. "Everybody is talking about it."

Patricia looked up at him, startled. "Why, it's a secret!"

The professor shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing is a secret when it is once told, and the news came from our landlady."

"Mrs. Murdoch? Why, I told Mrs. Murdoch," Patricia confessed. "She asked me such direct questions that I couldn't easily evade, but I never dreamed she would tell."

"And Mary Morris never dreamed that you would tell," the professor remarked. "That's the way all gossip begins."

"I think," said Patricia, flaming, "that you are very unpleasant to call it gossip."

"Do you know the name we have for little girls who talk too much?" he asked her gravely.

She shook her head. "Tattle-tale," he told her.

"Oh," she flung out, "how rude you are!" Then her lip quivered. "You are horrid to make me so uncomfortable!"

When Patricia's lip quivered it was time for a mere man to lay down his weapons, and the professor was beginning hurriedly, "I didn't mean," when Mary Morris appeared at the door.

"Oh, Patricia," she reproached, "did you tell Mrs. Murdoch?"

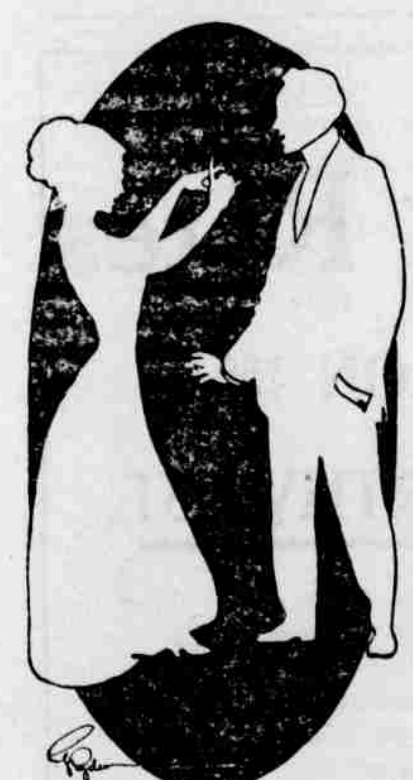
"Yes," Patricia admitted, "I did, but I didn't think she would repeat it, Mary."

"And I didn't think you would," Mary condemned. "I thought you could keep a secret, Patricia."

"Oh, Mary!" Patricia's tone was distressed.

"I thought I could trust you, Patricia," And away she went, and Patricia delivered a passionate opinion to the professor.

"Nobody seems to think that I should have had to lie to evade Mrs. Mur-



"TATTLE-TALE!" SHE TEASED AND RAN FROM HIM, LAUGHING.

doch's questions. She just wormed it out of me, and I can't evade like some people."

The professor rose and came around to her. "You know I wouldn't hurt you for the world."

"But you have hurt me," Patricia sobbed, "and I wish you'd go away. I don't want to speak to you any more—to you or to Mary Morris or—anybody!"

Then she fled from the dining room, and the professor had to take his punishment, for Patricia refused to make up. She did not stay for the after breakfast chat that had become so much to the professor. And after dinner she shut herself in her room and could not be coaxed down to sing the Irish melodies that had been the delight of the boarders.

"It's too bad," the professor said in a worried way to Mary Morris.

"Yes," Mary agreed, "but I can't do anything with her. I went to her with tears in my eyes and begged pardon, but she said that you and I were just alike; that we had judged her—and she would abide by our judgment."

"Poor little Pat!" said the professor, tenderly.

He didn't like to say how much he missed her, the little friend whom he had come to know in the big boarding house.

On Saturday he sent her some flowers—pansies tied with pale purple ribbon, with a little card, "For thoughts." And Patricia had sent him a perfunctory little note of thanks and had not worn the pansies. How

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could he know that she had slept with them against her cheek and had pressed two purple ones in her Testament?

It was all very unpleasant and unhappy, and it might have lasted longer if it had not been for Mrs. Murdoch.

The big landlady told one day a bit of scandal. It related to the husband of a meek little woman who always appeared at the breakfast table in a red tea gown.

Mrs. Murdoch, having breathed her precious bit of news into the ears of a half dozen spinsters, rejoiced in the flurry of exciting comment. And excitement lent to her cheeks when she came in to the Sunday dinner a redness that was increased by the warmth of the day.

This Sunday meal was a dinner to conjure with. The boarders ate and praised, and Mrs. Murdoch was just leaning back in her chair when the husband of the lady who wore the red tea gown burst upon the scene.

He went straight up to Mrs. Murdoch and thundered, "What have you been saying about me to my wife?"

Mrs. Murdoch turned pale. Never before had her sins of gossip been brought home to her. "Nothing," she stammered.

"You have told enough to make her unhappy, to make her accuse me—me. What right had you?"

Mrs. Murdoch took refuge in the excuse of the weak. "Well, I was told!"

"Who told you?" His black eyes swept the board.

The eyes of the six spinsters met his serenely. Not from them had come the first telling of the tale.

But Patricia flushed, as the innocent will at times with the memory of former sins upon them. The flush caught Mrs. Murdoch's desperate eye.

"It seems to me that I heard it from Miss Patricia," she murmured.

"Oh!" Patricia gasped, but before she could say more the professor was on his feet.

"I think you must take that back, Mrs. Murdoch." His voice was stern. "Miss Patricia is incapable of such a thing. I think every one here will agree to that."

"Well," Mrs. Murdoch evaded, "you know she told me about Mary Morris' engagement."

"Because you wormed it out of her, and she was too truthful to be able to evade"—the professor's tones cut like steel—"and I am sure that if this gentleman will investigate the stories he has heard he will find that your source of information was outside of the house, but that within the tale has been spread by you, and you alone."

"And now," he proceeded, "I would suggest that you apologize to Miss Patricia at once or I shall feel compelled to give you notice, and I am sure that others will follow. One cannot afford to live where one is likely to be held up in this way."

Mrs. Murdoch's eyes glanced warily about the table, saw that popular opinion was with the professor and surrendered.

"Oh, of course," she said, "I was mistaken. It wasn't Miss Patricia."

"Thank you," the professor said gravely, "and now, as we have only our coffee to forego, I would suggest that your boarders withdraw while you satisfy this gentleman as to the source of your information."

He stalked out at the head of a long line, consisting of Mary Morris and Williston and the six spinsters and,

at the very end, Patricia.

When they reached the hall there was a little hubbub of comment and of laughter, under cover of which the professor said to Patricia, "I'd have knocked her down if she had been a man."

Patricia's eyes were shining. "Oh," she said, "how good you were to defend me before all those people!"

"It wasn't entirely unselfish," the professor admitted. "I hoped I might win forgiveness."

And Patricia accorded it, and they went for a walk together in the beauty of the autumn twilight, and when they came back they were engaged.

"I am going to tell everybody," the professor declared.

Patricia's eyes flashed their delight, but her lips were mutinous.

"Tattle-tale!" she teased and ran from him, laughing, to the shelter of her room.

An Impostor.

"Mebbe you'd like to put a piece about me in yer paper," quavered the old man, hobbling up to the city editor's desk.

"What have you done?" demanded the arbiter of publicity's destiny.

"Nothin' much, but I was a hundred years old yesterday."

"A hundred, eh? But can you walk without a stick and read fine print without glasses?"

"N-no."

"You are an impostor!" The old man broke down and confessed he was only ninety-seven.—Cleveland Leader.

His Luck.

Tom—I wish that I had Alfred's good luck. Dick—So he's generally lucky? Tom—Lucky! If he walked out of the window in his sleep at dead of night there would be another man going by below carrying a feather bed.

The Harder Task.

"My ambition is to write a history of the world. There is no task more difficult, I imagine."

"Oh, I don't know. My ambition is to concoct a new anecdote."—Washington Herald.

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