

IN THE GRASP OF THE GRIP.

From Demorest's Magazine:

"Ah—ah—ah—chew!" sneezed Harwood Harrison as he wended his way towards the library where he knew Miss Constance Clayton was probably seated with her little, blue satin-slipped feet in front of the glowing grate.

Harwood lived with his rich, fashionable, maiden aunt, and this winter, as usual, Miss Constance was making her a long visit.

The only cloud on the horizon at present was the affluent aunt's anxiety lest she should miss having the fashionable prevalent influenza. "Why, just think of it!" she said at the breakfast-table in a tone of despair, "here are Mrs. Ashton and two of the Vandergrits and several of the McKinstry families all sick with 'la grippe,' and here I am, just as well as ever. I declare I am singly mortified!" But with a strong imagination and an unwavering determination a great deal can be accomplished.

That evening, after Harwood had comfortably seated himself by the charming Miss Constance and her blue satin slippers by the glowing grate, while trying to fight off fits of sneezing and coughing which continually threatened him, he managed to lead the conversation round to a point at which he had been aiming for many weeks. In fact, he had just taken possession of four plump little fingers, and commenced telling her of his undying love, when the sneezes took full possession of him, and the declaration ended in decided symptoms of the grip. She seized the opportunity to remark that "some physicians claimed the grip was contagious," and moved to the other side of the grate.

After the temporary interruption Harwood manfully braced up and was again turning the conversation to the point on his mind—or heart—but it being difficult to make love at a distance, he was on the point of crossing the rug, to kneel at the blue-satin-slipped shrine, when in rushed a servant in a rush of pleasurable excitement, announcing, with evident satisfaction, that she now had the grippe, and wished Harwood to hurry for Dr. Grimshaw, the most fashionable physician on Fifth Avenue.

The faithful maid was a devoted attendant, and shared in her mistress's exhilaration at the prospect of being as fashionable as her sick society-sufferers.

Harwood for some days had been struggling with the prevailing influenza; but to-night, when the grip had been the cause of two such interruptions, he felt a sudden horror and dread of the disease which seemed to have a grip on his fate. He especially realized this, when, on leaving the house, he met a man on the steps whom he had always felt as a powerful rival in his path to Miss Constance's affections.

After leaving his message at the doctor's office, his first impulse was to rush back and break up the tete-a-tete between Miss Clayton and his dreaded rival; but, instead of this, he wandered slowly home, tortured by indescribable pangs; he was unable to decide whether it was from jealousy or the grip.

The next night was the date for the german at the Talkmans', and Harwood's cold had so increased that he realized the impossibility

of keeping his engagement; and this meant that his dread rival would escort Miss Constance. However, he took solid consolation in the knowledge that his rival was the worst waltzer in New York.

The night of the dance, while Harwood paced the floor at home with the grip, he could think of nothing except the rival careering through the waltz with Constance in his arms, who on this occasion was arrayed in one of her most beautiful toilets. To Harwood's eyes she seemed a vision of loveliness; and the more beautiful she looked, the more ferocious were his feelings toward her escort. These thoughts, combined with his cold, did not tend to soothe his mind for a moment.

After numerous attempts at reading and various imitations of writing, he finally settled himself by the grate fire with an unacknowledged determination to be up when Constance should return. He was unconscious of the flight of time, till, suddenly, the sound of a suppressed sneeze, a real grip sneeze, aroused him. His first thought was that one of the servants was passing through the hall; but on glancing at the clock he realized that the luteness of the hour made that unlikely, so he cautiously moved through the rooms into the hall, and again a smothered sneeze caught his ear. It seemed to be in Constance's room, but it was no sneeze; so cautiously approaching the door, which was partly open, he peered in, and was a trifle to observe a quiet, business-like sneak-thief having the grip on a large bundle of plunder.

At this moment the gentleman was busily engaged in trying to get into his pocket a small silver jewel box which Harwood recognized as an heirloom most precious to Constance. This roused him to sudden action; and without stopping to realize that the only revolver the house afforded was carefully locked in his writing case, he calmly walked into the room, and before he was fully aware of the situation he was rolling on the floor in a very lively struggle with the burglar, who, finally freeing himself, fled from the room, leaving his plunder and Harwood on the floor.

But the latter, a second later, was in hot pursuit. Down the stairs they flew, Harwood yelling "Thieves! robbers! burglars!" at every jump. Rushing through the hall and the library, to the extension, the intruder made a graceful exit through the window, to the grapevine trellis, followed by the now thoroughly aroused Harwood.

The wooden trellis was evidently not equal to the emergency, and, with a noise of a young cyclone, it fell. Harwood landed in such a way that he was able to get his grip on the retiring free-trader, though for a moment only, yet long enough to gain possession of Constance's jewel-Lox.

(To be Continued.)

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