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HOW HE WAS REVENGED.

BY HELEN FORREST GRAVES.
From The Illustrated Home Guest
CHAPTER II.

"Pay four hundred dollars! How are we to do it?" querulously demanded her father.

"We must earn—save—scrape? Father, it must be done!"

Mr. Fairford said no more—it might be that he recognized in his daughter the ruling spirit in that hour of peril and trial. At all events, he lacked courage to contradict or oppose her.

"Yes, the president was in at that hour. Had they any particular business with him?"

The bank porter looked rather doubtfully at the old man and the tall, slender, pale woman, who were standing humbly just within the glittering plate glass doors of the Ashlicote Bank. People came and went, the hum of business echoed on every side, and the strange pair presented a marked contrast to the rest of the bank customers.

"Yes," said Virginia, firmly, "our business is of importance—of the greatest importance."

For she saw that her father looked instinctively to her to be the "poke woman."

"I'll see if he can receive you," said the man, still dubiously.

Presently he returned.

"Mr. Melton is at leisure for a few moments. You're to walk in."

And he ushered the old man and the young woman into a small, elegantly furnished private room, where a bright fire burned upon the marble hearth, and two or three cushioned chairs stood around.

The bank president was a tall, finely made man of about thirty, with dark eyes, hair as black as a raven's wing, and a colorless complexion. Virginia had expected to see a portly, gray haired old gentleman, well advanced in the vale of years—he was rather surprised to realize that bank presidents need not necessarily be grandfathers.

"What is your business with me?" he asked boldly, while his keen eyes seemed to read them through and through.

"To ask for mercy, sir!" she gasped.

"Mercy! It is hardly a bankable commodity! But go on."

He listened, coldly and calmly, while Virginia told her simple tale and pleaded for mercy in her erring brother's behalf.

"I know he has done wrong, sir. Yet he is young—hardly twenty-five. If you visit him with the extreme penalty of the law, he is lost forever. The disgrace would cling to him always; the stigma would darken his whole future. Oh, sir, listen to our prayers—be merciful!"

The bank president smiled a little satirically.

"I doubt if you know whom you are talking to."

"You are the president of the bank, sir!"

"Yes; but I am also another personage, whom you once knew well. Virginia Fairford, I did not think you would so soon have forgotten the barefooted boy who was turned from your father's door as a thief—who was struck as a dog might have been. Need I tell you that my name is Charles Melton? That I was once the drudge of your father's farm?"

Mr. Fairford looked vaguely at the speaker, as if he hardly under-

stood, but Virginia's cheek grew pale, and her heart seemed to turn to ice within her bosom. Once more she seemed to hear the words spoken in the twilight, "Virginia, I shall lie to be revenged some day!" She had never forgotten those words, nor the tones in which they were spoken. Her pleadings died away on her parched tongue; a sort of stony despair took possession of her whole being.

"Virginia," the bank president said, softly, "do not look so pale. For the sake of old times all shall be forgiven and forgotten. Alfred shall have another chance. You will shake hands with me, Mr. Fairford?"

For Virginia could not speak.

"Heaven bless you, sir!" stammered the old man, "and God forgive me! We'll pay you sir, some time—we will indeed."

And they did; but the payment was not in dollars and cents. Mr. Melton required a higher currency; he wanted Virginia herself.

"I have loved you ever since we were children together, dearest," he said.

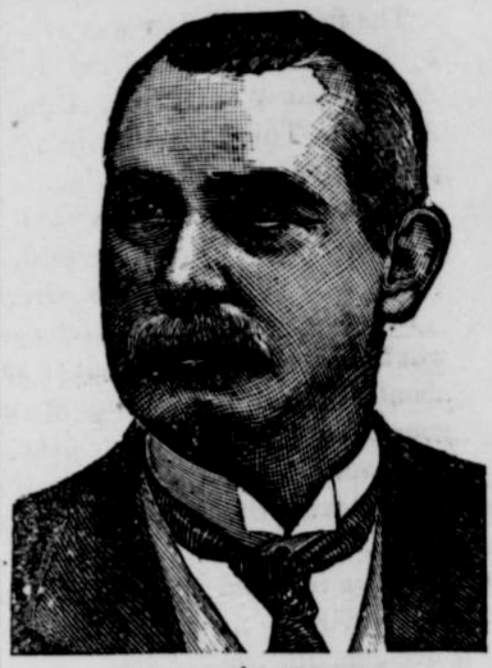
Virginia's blushes indicated too plainly that she had not forgotten her first and only love, the boy whom her father had so basely accused and cruelly banished.

A brief explanation made everything plain. The banished boy, by industry and honesty, had made his way in the world, until he was rewarded with the first position in the bank, where Farmer Fairford found him.

Three weeks later a quiet wedding took place in the old farmhouse, and Charley Melton and Virginia Fairford were the bride and groom.

A year afterward Alfred, having unmistakably shown his repentance, was promoted to a position of trust in the bank; and this was the bank president's revenge.

THE END.



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