

The Goose That Laid the Golden Egg

By F. A. MITCHEL

"I have heard that you won your wife from the fact that you were a successful author," said Dawson to his friend Sturdevant. "If a man wants to win a woman he must raise himself above his fellow men by doing something that glitters. To wear a gaudy uniform is the easiest way with the ordinary type of woman. But I am not surprised that it required a different sort of prominence to secure Mrs. Sturdevant. She is a very bright woman and would naturally look up to a man of your caliber."

Sturdevant glanced at the ceiling, then at the floor, then out through the window.

"Yes," he replied, "my wife is a smart woman, but she has no reason to admire me."

"That's modesty for you."

"You don't know anything about women, John. You say a woman to love a man must look up to him. So far, so good. But she is just as likely to love him because she looks down on him. The truth is, the sex is not to be analyzed. This story that I won my wife on account of my literary standing is balderdash. I'll tell you the basis of it if you like."

"Please do so."

"I have always been rather impractical, and Dora is the very reverse. When I met her I was ambitious to write a successful novel. She listened to my talk, sympathized with me, but I could see that she considered me in the clouds.

"You don't seem to think I'm up to the work of successful scribbling? I said to her one day, miffed at her want of enthusiasm.

"I think you're not down to it," she replied.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, that would take too long to explain."

"She might have truthfully added, 'I wouldn't attempt to try to fire it into as stupid a brain as yours.'"

"I was engaged at that time on my story, 'The Goose That Laid the Golden Egg.'"

"I believe 200,000 copies were sold?" Dawson broke in.

"Three hundred thousand."

"And all the while," interrupted Dawson, "it was you who—"

"Don't be in such a hurry. I'm telling this story. I put \$1,000 into the venture. I intended to spend it all on the printing and binding, but Dora persuaded me to have it illustrated. So I paid \$300 of the amount for pictures. The book was published through Lampblack & Co., who put their imprint on the title page.

"Three months passed, and I got a check from them for \$27.50. The public didn't clamor for the goose that laid the golden egg worth a cent. One reviewer said that it was easy to pick out the goose that didn't lay the golden egg, which complimentary remark evidently referred to the author. Another three months passed, and I got another check for \$6.75.

"What was my surprise when the next quarterly payment was made to receive \$150. After that one day when I was introduced to a man he looked at me curiously and asked, 'Author of "The Goose That Laid the Golden Egg?"' Surprised, I admitted that I was and with a heart flutter. The next day I was told by a friend that my book was being talked about, and, stopping at a book and news stand, the dealer told me that he was selling it

like hot cakes. I asked him to what he attributed the sudden increase of sales, and he replied:

"The public wants it."

"This satisfied me that I had at least struck a popular vein, and I hoped to climb the ladder of literary fame.

"To make a long story short, my novel was talked about by everybody, rich and poor, high and low. In six months I had cleared a small fortune; then the sales fell to nothing. I had made some money, but no literary reputation.

"Dora and I were married and went to Europe on a bridal trip. One day while on the voyage over I was twitting her on her want of appreciation of my ability to succeed as an author, when she said:

"The reviewer who said that it was easy to pick out the goose that didn't lay the golden egg was half right. Now listen to me.

"One day after your novel had fallen flat," she went on, "I concluded to try to stir up an interest in it. I went to all my friends and told them there was a hidden meaning in the title and asked them to guess what it was. They all went about propounding the query to their friends. It got noised about that there was a mystery in the book that did not appear on the surface. I re-enforced the position by propounding the query whether the goose was a goose or a gander. This set people to quarrelling as to whether the hero, Tom Phunnyfeller, or the heroine, Miriam Twaddleby, was the mystery. To half my friends I suggested that the book was written to advocate the cause of votes for women; to the other half that it was an attack on the abilities of our sex. That's all. I didn't have to do any more. The public got hungry for the goose, and we got the golden egg."

Sturdevant paused.

"Why haven't you followed up your success?" asked Dawson.

"Because my wife would not permit me to kill the goose that laid the golden egg."

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