

An Error Brings an Error

By MARTLAND MALTBEE

Alan Forbes had been engaged to Jennie Hatch for more than a year, and, since his salary was not sufficient to warrant marriage and his prospects of a raise were poor, the two reluctantly determined to give up each other, calling their engagement off.

Jennie had an aunt, an old woman, who lived alone. She was very poor—at least she was supposed to be—and Jennie devoted a great deal of time to her, the old lady being very feeble. About the time that Alan and Jennie decided there was no hope for them the aunt grew worse and died suddenly. On her deathbed she told Jennie that she would find in a crevice in the chimney enough money to bury her and what was left over would be hers.

The day after the funeral Alan received a note from Jennie asking him to meet her at the aunt's house. She had a surprise for him. Alan went to the house at the time mentioned and found no one there. On a table was a little pass book showing deposits of some \$12,000. The book bore a number, but not a name.

In turning over the leaves of the book a bit of paper fell out of it. Alan saw the words "Dearest Jennie" written in a man's hand. Yielding to a desire to know who was thus addressing the girl he loved in such endearing terms, he overcame his scruples against reading what had been written. The writer, who signed himself Dick, broke with "Dearest Jennie" on account of a story he had heard reflecting on her good name.

Here was a terrible revelation. Alan, not wishing to see Jennie again until he had made up his mind what action to take with regard to her, went away, leaving the book and the note just as he had found them.

Now, Jennie just before her lover's entrance had gone upstairs and was busying herself putting the house to rights, for it was hers as well as the deposits recorded in the pass book which she had found in the chimney. She had laid the book on the table to show Alan when he came, but a will she had also found she had put in a desk.

When Alan came in Jennie did not hear him, nor was she aware of his going. Noticing that the time she had asked him to come had passed, she concluded to go downstairs and wait for him there. She waited an hour, and, since he had not come, she surmised that he had not received her note. She was greatly disappointed, for she had counted on showing him her inheritance.

Since Alan did not put in an appearance, Jennie sent to his home to learn the reason. She was told that he had gone out about the hour she had expected him and had not returned, nor did he return that day or the next or at all.

His disappearance at a time when their marriage was not only possible, but the wherewithal for their future comfort had been provided, was a terrible blow to her. Moreover, it was a mystery. Had Alan been spirited away, or had he been killed? There was no answer.

Jennie concluded to live alone in the house she had inherited. She had faith that some day Alan would come back to her, and she would receive him in the home that had been provided for them. But year after year passed, and he did not come.

One day an old man came to the house and asked for Jane Hatch. Jennie told him that Jane Hatch had been dead several years. He appeared to be very much cast down. Jennie informed him that she was Jane Hatch's niece and had been named for her aunt. At this the man opened his heart to her, telling her that he had been betrothed to her aunt in their youth and had wronged her, having listened to a story to her injury.

Meanwhile Jennie on taking the pass book to the bank had discovered the note that had driven Alan away, though it had not occurred to her that it was the cause of his going. She now produced the note and returned it to the visitor. This led to her telling him the story of her own bereavement. What had not occurred to her occurred to her visitor. He suggested to her that Alan had come into the house while she was upstairs, found the note in the pass book and, supposing that it was for the living instead of the dead Jennie, had taken himself away.

"My mistake," he said, "has embittered the lives of two generations. This paper shall do no more harm." And he threw it into the fire. Then he added: "I have brought this trouble upon you. I will make it my business to find your lover. If he is alive I will return him to you."

The stranger began a systematic course of advertising for Alan Forbes, and at last one of the notices reached Alan's eyes. He communicated with the advertiser, who at once went to see him.

One morning while Jennie Hatch was attending to her household duties she went from the upper story down to her living room. There stood Alan Forbes. Jennie uttered a cry.

"I have come," said Alan, "to ask your forgiveness for having made what some would call a blunder, but which I now see was a crime. Instead of condemning you unheard I should have listened to your explanation."

"It was all a horrid mistake!" cried Jennie, staggering toward him. He received her in his arms.

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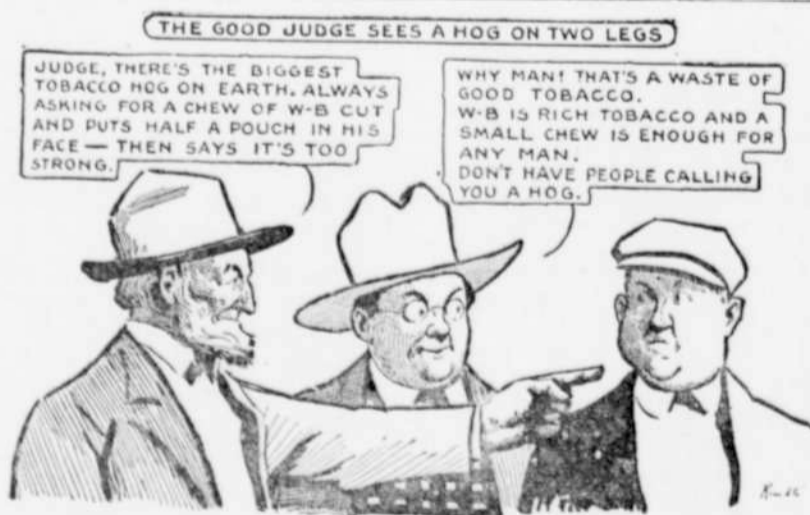
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