

Two Men and Two Women

“THERE’S a pretty creature for you.”

“You think so?”

Myself and my wife, “*ego et rex meus*”—I put myself first because speech number one is of my making. Speech number two, Fanny’s, properly a statement of fact, became a question from a certain rising inflection of the voice, likewise of the eyebrows.

It was at No. 8 Endicott Place—a private boarding-house distinguished from others of its class by being situated within a stone’s throw of the State House, within two rods of Beacon Street, and by being the temporary abode of Israel P. Gorch and his wife Frances. (P. for Putnam, and although it is a matter entirely personal to myself, perhaps it may be permitted me to state that it is a custom in our family to christen every eldest child Israel Putnam. My twin sister Isa and myself constitute a dual example of this filial practice, the reason whereof is apparent from the fact that the Gorches, in common with a thousand other people, are descended by ordinary generations from the hero who dragged the wolf from his cave, and who cantered down the stone stairs at—— Really I forget where. The Heights of Abraham we’ll say by way of rounding the sentence. And as, according to the catechism, all of us sons of Adam, six thousand years ago, “sinned in him, and fell with him in the first transgression,” so much the more, only a hundred odd years back, we, the descendants of “Old Put,” must have dragged with him, and cantered with him in his first glorifications. This much for my name.)

To return to No. 8 Endicott Place. It was in the month of September, and Fanny, on my arm, was being assisted up three flights from dinner. The remarks at the head of this column were *apropos* of a newcomer at our table. My wife, who is a judge of those matters, supplemented her question with:

“I can’t say how she might look *dressed*.”

Don’t, dear reader, jump to the conclusion that ladies at Endicott Place came to dinner *undressed*. But you will not wonder at my adjuring my spouse by the shadow of Plymouth Rock to explain herself.

“Israel, dear, you do not mean to tell me that you didn’t notice anything peculiar?”

“Now you mention it, Loveliness, I do remember she had her hair brushed instead of its being left in the usual fashionable state of antepandial dishevelment. Moreover, I think that, like Bunyan’s Pilgrim at the wicket-gate, she had lost the burden from her back.”

“Oh, bah! A dowdy.”

“Where ignorance is bliss ‘tis folly to be wise,” I ejaculated. “It only shows, my dear, how inferior is the lord of creation to the lady of ditto. Now, I had thought really that so graceful and elegant a woman had not, for some time gladdened my eyes. You may be sure that will be the

verdict of men and brethren generally.”

“Dear, yes, I dare say. You’re all alike; ready to make geese of yourselves at the first glimpse of a doll-face, and the sound of a lisping voice. My dear, let us have that chapter of Ruskin.”

So Miss Howard came into the family. A “permanency,” not a “temporary,” as we were soon given to understand by our landlady, Mrs. Dwight,

“Poor thing!” said the landlady. “She’s been very unfortunate. She is an orphan. She was [brought] up by her grandparents with ‘great expectations.’ The old people died. The will was contested. Poor Alice was left with a thousand dollars, and here she is. She writes six hours a day in one of the insurance offices, sings in a church in South Boston Sundays, and is to bare two weeks’ vacation in the fifty-two.”

This story was told the next Sunday, Alice Howard being absent. She had started off at nine o’clock, in the midst of a pouring rain—the “line storm”—to meet her engagement at South Boston.

As Mrs. Dwight told the story, I noticed young Verulam set his teeth together, and look down to conceal a flash of the eyes, and of honest indignation. Verulam was a poor and promising lawyer, and was admitted to the bar last year.

I looked at Verulam, and fancied that he might not be loth to undertake the defense of so charming a client.

“Just to think of writing every day! How very, very unpleasant!” drawled Miss Jacob.

This lady was a large brunette, had fine eyes, and did the heavy magnificence for the whole family. She wore much “barbaric gold.” She scented with musk the whole flat where she dwelt, and she had a curved nose. Withal, she lost no opportunity of protesting that not a drop of the blood of her own and of my Scriptural namesake coursed through her veins.

Have I mentioned that my own sphere—or, more properly, rectangle—of duty was the Custom House?

Coming home to our four-o’clock dinner, it often happened that I came across Miss Howard, and we walked up to Endicott Place in company. She was a bright little woman. She talked little and listened much, and, besides, had a way of looking up at you that makes a man know where his heart is.

You’ll understand that, after a little, I got to watch for that slender figure in the gray suit, got to watch for the little hat with its blue ribbon, and to miss them when they failed to appear.

The insurance office where Miss Howard wrote was on Tremont Street. One day as I came along I saw the chip hat and blue ribbon a few rods in advance of me, and as I stepped faster to overtake it, I noticed young Stanforth start out from Kennard’s, join Alice, catch the step, and

walk on with her.

Stanforth was a fellow-boarder—a son of Stanforth the importer of China goods. The family were abroad just then, therefore we had, this youngster at our table.

“Now, that won’t be bad,” I said, to myself. “He’s got money—some sense. She has everything but money.”

You see, like the scheming old fellow I am getting to be, I began to build a castle upon this slender foundation.

Well, of course I crossed over to Park Street, and took the shortest route to dinner.

As I was fumbling for my latch-key, to let myself in, I was surprised to see Miss Howard come out the door. She met me face to face at the entrance.

“What! home before me?” I exclaimed.

For answer she held up a letter. She was just running down to the corner, half a block off, to drop it into the box.

“I’d like to know how they managed to get home first,” I thought, as I watched the gray dress and chip hat flit down the street. Then I went in to my dinner, and thought no more of the incident at that time. We dined at 8:30. I was always half an hour late.

Of these little circumstances you will see the drift presently.

I had been in the house perhaps five minutes when Miss Howard took her seat at the table, and Stanforth soon followed her.

Fanny and I were just setting ourselves to a game of chess that evening when she suddenly cried out:

“Why, Israel, where is my jewel-case?”

She was standing with the upper drawer of her bureau open, and where the jewel-case should have been, was nothing.

“You’ve been robbed apparently,” I said.

“Oh, my dear! And my diamond-pin which was grandmother’s! and the corals you brought me from Rome! and the bracelet of Florentine mosaic! It seems to me I can’t have it so!” wailed my wife, and sat down in the Slough of Despond.

I went out and spoke to a detective directly, and then we discussed the thing in all its bearing between ourselves.

At breakfast next morning, naturally enough, the topic of the robbery was on the table.

“I took out a pair of bracelets,” said Fanny, “when I dressed for dinner. That was my last sight of the case.”

“Some person must have come down through the scuttle,” said Mrs. Dwight. “I have questioned Norah, and she reports that no one came in or went out during dinner but the family. She says you, Miss Howard, went out with a letter, and then came in with Mr. Stanforth.”

“Norah is mistaken. I had not come in or gone out until I came with Mr. Stanforth.”

Miss Howard spoke distinctly.

What! and I had met her, seen her with my own eyes, as I came in!

No one replied.

Mrs. Dwight had the air of a person silenced but not convinced.

Norah always sat in the hall at dinner, and she was a trusty girl.

I held my peace. I would not set all the women in the house buzzing, until I was certain. But I could have taken my oath that I had met Alice Howard that day at the door.

Once afterward I fancied I saw her enter one of the low shops on a street of bad repute, but I did not get near enough to be sure.

I mentioned this also to the detective, and I said to Alice:

“Did I see you down on —— Street this morning?”

“I think not,” was the quiet reply; and she looked at me as frankly as she had looked that morning at breakfast, when I had first suspected her.

“Will sense win, or cents, do you think?”

Fanny put this question to me one night soon after this.

We had gone up-stairs, having spent an evening in the parlor.

Alice had been singing, and Stanforth had been turning the leaves for her.

It was a pretty picture—the young girl with her blush like the pink of the inner conchshell, and that handsome fellow hanging over the piano, and devouring her with his eyes.

A pretty picture, but Verulam did not think so. He sat aloof, and said nothing.

It wasn't long after that I noticed Alice whispering to grandmother one morning. I saw her kneel by the old woman's chair, and I couldn't avoid hearing grandmother say:

"Never you fret, dearie. Something will tell you before long which is the right one."

I knew the young girl must be halting between Stanforth and Verulam. To one poor as she was the temptation of Stanforth's thousands must have been a temptation indeed. But things were decided in a way that we least expected.

"I believe that I've got track of that jewelry, Gorch," said the detective to me one day, "The coral has been offered for sale at Picket's, on —— Street."

The very place where I had fancied that I saw Alice! Was it possible that girl could be a thief?

That evening, the family being out, I had gone down to the parlor on the second floor to get a magazine. The fire was bright, and I seated myself for a few moments. There was no light save firelight in the room; the gas in the adjoining hall was turned down.

As I sat, I heard a key click at the hall-door, and some one stopped lightly in.

I bent forward, and I distinctly saw Alice pass by the open door, and ascend the stairs. But, instead of going on to her own room, I heard her enter that of Miss Jacob.

I listened to her humming a low tune to herself as was her custom when moving about the house. It was five minutes, I should think, before she came down. Then she paused at the parlor-door, and looked in.

I had drawn into the shadow, and she did not see me. I saw her, however, distinctly. The gray dress she had worn when she went out an hour before, the chip hat, and the blue veil. She held a letter in her hand, and I thought, "She is going to post it."

But she did not return, and though I waited an hour, I did not see or hear her again that night.

Next morning I chanced to meet Miss Howard on the landing as we were going to breakfast.

"You did not see me when you looked into the parlor last evening?" I said. To my surprise she glanced up at me as though she did not understand. I went on: "When you came in, and went up to Miss Jacob's room."

"I? In Miss Jacob's room? I went out at seven o'clock, and came in at ten. I spent the evening at the house of a friend," she replied, with dignity.

That moment the door of Miss Jacob's room flew back, and that lady came rushing out, crying:

“I have been robbed! I have been robbed! My purse with five hundred dollars and my diamonds besides! Oh, my diamonds! my diamonds!”

The repose of “the castle of Vere de Vere” was broken. The majestic mien of the lady was lost, and she raved of her diamonds as that famous hero, of whose race Miss Jacob was *not*, raved of his ducats.

I looked at Alice. Not a feature of her face showed guilt. There was only the look of compassion which her friend’s loss would naturally occasion.

I knew not what to think. That there had been a burglar in the house there was no doubt. We again breakfasted in haste and with many words. Then I started for the Custom House. Down Park Street, in front of me, sauntered Stanforth and Alice.

I was watching them, when, as they reached the corner of Tremont Street, from the church-steps, came a man in the uniform of the police, and touched the girl on the arm.

“I want you to come with me,” he said.

“Me?” she answered, smiling. “Do you need my testimony in something?”

Not a tinge of self-consciousness even then.

“Rather think we do. Mebbly you can help us find them lost jewels that was stole from No. 8 Endicott Place.”

“You don’t mean to arrest me?” she asked.

For the first time she turned pale.

“That’s about the plain English on’t, miss.”

She stood still an instant. Then, turning to Stanforth, she said:

“Perhaps you will be kind enough to go to the office, and tell them why I can’t be there today. And—another thing—if I’m not back by Sunday, ask Mrs. Dwight to send word to the people out at the church in South Boston. Now, I’m ready,” and, bowing to us, she walked away on the arm of the policeman.

“That is rather an ugly piece of business, I declare,” said Stanforth. “Pon honor, I don’t know,” he stammered—“if she’s guilty, it isn’t just the thing for a fellow to go down to the office and give her message as one of her friends.”

“I’ll go,” said I, angry enough to knock the boy down for his silly weakness. “A fine lover you!” I thought, “deserting at the first alarm!”

Verulam was not at dinner that day. I suspected where he was. Of course Miss Howard was the only person talked of. The women were down on her, except grandmother. She was full of faith.

“It’ll all come out straight—just wait,” she said.

But I confess I couldn’t see where the light was to come from. Then I told Fanny, for the first time, of my suspicion.

“Ah! she’s deep; I knew that from the outset. Trust one of your meek women for deception.”

But the *denouement* came sooner than we had anticipated.

It was ten o’clock that evening. Norah was half sick, and Fanny had asked me to go down and get a pitcher of ice-water, to save the servant the trouble.

As I came back through the dim hall, who should open the door of Miss Howard’s room but Miss Howard herself.

There she stood, gray dress, blue veil, and all— “the gownd, the bonnet, and the wail.”

“Indeed !—you are home so soon!” I said.

The girl bowed, and, as before, held up a letter to be mailed. That instant a suspicion darted through my mind. I put myself across her path, and spoke:

“Come, stop and tell about it! We’re all interested.”

Instead of answering, the woman tried to brush past me. I caught her, and drew her to the gaslight on the landing.

“Let me go!” she shrieked, with an oath.

“Aha! my fine girl. This isn’t the voice of Alice Howard!”

It was a coarse, vulgar tone. It was not the woman I had believed it to be. I gave a cry. Stanforth and Jesse Dwight ran down. We took the female into the parlor.

Her hat came off in the affray, and with it, some braids of hair.

Then stood before us a girl with short, red locks and a high forehead. In ten minutes she was under the care of our detective.

Alice Howard slept in her own room that night. Fanny and I took a carriage and went for her. We found Verulam there.

The story of the other is soon told.

The girl was Nell Brink, and she was well known to the police. She was found to be in the employ of a notorious clan of burglars, who, noting her resemblance to Alice Howard, had laid their plan accordingly. She had furnished herself with a dress precisely like Alice's, and, with the hat and veil, the resemblance was such as to have deceived their own brothers.

Then a night-key was procured, and, taking advantage of the times when Miss Howard would naturally be going out and coining in, the burglaries had been effected.

But they had overstepped their mark. Miss Nell Brink had made one journey too many. Seeing no light in Alice's room that evening, she had ventured up, and was actually, when I grappled with her, making off with fifty dollars of her double's earnings.

What became of her?

Of Nell? Oh, she was sentenced to twenty years in State Prison.

Mr. and Mrs. Verulam board at No. 8 Endicott Place.

Funny's wedding-gift was a certain bracelet of Florentine mosaic, which was found—along with the diamonds of Miss Jacob, and not a few other treasures, including all that we had lost, save the corals—in a box, secreted under a pile of old lumber, down near Cambridge Bridge.

Stanforth is still unmarried. He tried to get back into the esteem of the young lady, but the ordeal of arrest had shown the stuff of which the two men were made.

Mrs. Verulam is prettier than ever. Oh!—and one thing more! Her husband has overhauled the old lawsuit of the contested will, and, I'm told, is likely to secure for his wife her rightful inheritance.

So much for Miss Howard and her double.

Frank Leslie's Pleasant Hours, August 1874