

Fanny's Flirtation
by Judge Clark

Our troth—I speak of Fanny Blake and me—had been plighted years before, and was most solemnly renewed when I left my native village to come and practice law in the city.

But rumors at length reached me that Fanny was receiving attentions, not quite consistent with our relations, from a dashing young stranger—one Mortimer Fitz Flare, a social star of the first magnitude, whose sudden appearance had greatly dimmed, by comparison, the lesser lights of the village firmament.

I wrote to Fanny, expostulating with some warmth. She replied with spirit. I rejoined with temper. She retorted with more, adding an offer to cancel our engagement, which, in some angry lines, I accepted. And so matters stood at the time at which I begin my story.

I was sitting in my office one morning, reading a letter from home filled with village gossip, and recounting, with needless particularity, I thought, the details of a report that Fanny Blake's becoming Mrs. Mortimer Fitz Flare, was only a question of time.

The chagrin I felt was quite disproportioned to any right I had to take an interest in the subject. But I *did* take an interest in it none the less.

The train of my reflections was far from agreeable, and I was by no means displeased at its interruption by the entrance of a messenger with a note.

"Come to meet me at once," it read; "I am in trouble, and need your assistance."

It was signed "THOMAS BLAKE," and came from one of the station-houses.

Tom Blake, Fanny's brother and I, had been schoolmates and fast friends. Though not over-bright at his books, none excelled Tom in boyish prowess. More than once he had stood my champion, and I had loved him like a brother, as well for his own, as Fanny's sake; for there was no better or more whole-souled fellow than Tom Blake.

He had gone early to seek his fortune in the West, and I had never seen him since. Could it be my old friend, in distress, who now hailed me for assistance? The best way was to go and see.

It *was* Tom, sure enough. I found him seated on the prisoner's bench, amid a squad of sorry-looking companions, all waiting their turn for a morning dose of justice.

"You see," said Tom, our greeting over, "I knew you were in the city, and looked you up in the directory, and sent for you, not knowing what else to do."

"I am glad you did so," I answered; "but, first of all, tell me how you got here?"

"Hang me if I know whether it's more serious or funny," said Tom. "However, I'll tell you the

whole thing, and then you can judge for yourself.”

The officers suffered us to go aside together, and Tom thus recounted his story:

“A man who has lived five years in the silver-diggings is apt to get a little rusty in city ways, I suppose, especially if he was never very well up in ‘em. At any rate, when I landed here yesterday from Nevada, I have reason to believe there are several points on which I might have been better posted.

“As I trudged up Broadway, looking right and left at the sights, I was accosted by a genteel-looking person, whose countenance betokened great distress.

“‘I am a stranger here,’ he said. ‘A telegram summoned me from Boston to the bedside of a dying mother. I reached this place by the last train, but my pocket was picked at the dépôt, and I am without the means of proceeding further.

“‘I have a valuable gold watch, however, a gift from my deceased father. It grieves me deeply to part with it, but I have no other resource. I will sell it for seventy-five dollars. If you will step into that jeweler’s store,’ he added, ‘you can easily ascertain that the sum asked is not half the real value.’

“I pitied the stranger’s situation, and taking his watch, entered the place pointed out, and learned that the representation of value was strictly true.

“‘I am willing to aid you,’ I said, returning to the spot at which I had left the stranger, ‘but wish to take no advantage of your need. I’ll give you the required sum, with my address, and you can have the watch at any time by returning the money.’

“His eyes filled with tears as he pressed my hand silently. Gratitude choked his utterance.

“I had nothing less than a hundred dollar bill about me.

“‘Perhaps this gentleman can change it,’ suggested the stranger, mastering his emotion sufficiently to speak, and touching the arm of another genteel-looking person who chanced to be passing.

“The gentleman kindly obliged us, and the affair being thus satisfactorily concluded, we exchanged bows all round and separated.

“I may have been a little ostentatious of my handsome watch during the evening. Anyhow, I consulted it pretty frequently, till, at last, taking it out as I was leaving the theatre, I felt a tap on the shoulder.

“‘Allow me to look at that watch,’ said a tall man, who had been looking over my shoulder.

“‘None of your tricks on travellers,’ I answered, slipping it back into my pocket.

“‘The greenhorn dodge won’t do here,’ he replied; ‘you must go along with me.’ At the same time turning up his lapel, he displayed an officer’s badge.

“Seeing I was in the clutches of the law, I made no resistance, but walked quietly along.

“At the police station the watch found on me was identified as stolen property, and the twenty-five dollars change I had received was pronounced spurious. And so I am detained, it seems, on the double charge of being a thief and a counterfeiter.”

I knew the judge personally, and had little difficulty in convincing him that Tom had been made the victim of imposture by a thief and his accomplice. I was accepted as bail for my friend’s appearance whenever required, and he and I were suffered to depart in peace.

Tom left for his and my old home the next morning, where I promised to join him at the Christmas ball, which would take place in a few days.

It was my first visit to the old place since my departure to live in the city.

I went to the ball early, where I met all my old friends, most of whom were right glad to see me.

I was a little nervous at the thought of meeting Fanny, but determined to put on a careless air, and show her how little impression had been made by her faithless conduct.

She appeared at last, escorted by a showy-looking youth, who, I doubted not, was the renowned Fitz Flare himself.

They came directly towards me, and I stood my ground.

“Good evening, Mr. ——,” said Fanny, with her usual easy grace, extending her hand, which I took, at the same time returning her salutation.

“Allow me to introduce Mr. Fitz Flare,” she continued. “You and he may have met before, as he frequently visits the city. Indeed, he has just returned from there this evening.

“Ah! here comes my brother Tom,” she said, interrupting herself.

“Mr. Fitz Flare, my brother.”

As the looks of the two encountered both gave a start. The dandy turned pale and trembled. Tom’s face flushed with anger.

“Why, that’s the scoundrel,” he exclaimed, “who put off the stolen watch on me! [”]

“What are you doing in company with my sister?” he thundered, advancing threateningly.

Fitz Flare would have fled, but Tom's grasp was on his collar. A constable was called, and the captured pickpocket and counterfeiter was delivered over to the hands of justice.

Explanations followed between Fanny and myself. There never had been anything serious in her flirtation with the dandy, which rumor had grossly magnified. We made up, and the natural result followed.

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