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The Guardian's Short Story

THANKS TO THE METER.

By James Clegg.

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"Please, have you a quarter?" The girl from across the hall held out a tiny hand, in the palm of which were displayed three nickels and a dime.

"Did you know what I was coming after?" she said, with a laugh. Digby had never heard her laugh before. It was a low, rippling laugh, almost as attractive as her smile.

"Yes, when," she cried. "The other day we only had a check, and no one could cash it."

"Not at all," he assured. As though to prove him false the gas in his hall grew dim. "I have more change," he explained, "and it's all right."

He watched her regretfully as she slipped back into her own apartment. He had planned many brilliant encounters in which he would hold her enthralled by his wit, and they would live



"IT WAS AWFULLY BRAVE OF YOU, BEN," SHE WHISPERED.

happily ever after. Instead he had never been so dull, and perhaps he had lost his chance.

The gas had gone out as he closed the door and limped into the kitchen. He knew very well that it was useless to search for a quarter. He had found the one he had just given up only after a search. He would have to fall back on candles. There were half a dozen in the dining room, and by lighting four he managed to read after a fashion.

But he had scarcely settled himself to his reading when the doorbell rang again. He wondered who it might be now as he made his way down the dark hall. The girl across the hall stood there again.

"You fibbed," she said reproachfully. "You said you had another quarter for yourself. You let me drop yours in our meter, and we can see across the shaft that you're using candles."

"I rather like them," he assured, but she would have none of it.

"You were just going to drop the coin in your meter," she cried. "That is why you had it in your hand."

In the face of deduction he was dumb. The girl went on:

"I know you can't go downstairs to get change because you hurt your ankle. It wouldn't be any use anyway. It's Sunday, and only the drug store is open, and they are all out of quarters. I was down there just before I asked you for one. Mother says you must come in to our flat and read. You may smoke all you like. We don't mind it in the least."

"I am very comfortable," he protested.

The opportunity he had longed for had come, and he was too bashful to avail himself of it. In the end the girl in her masterful little way carried her point. Presently he was installed in the pleasant parlor and was telling motherly Mrs. Fallows all about his trials without his mother.

"It must be so lonesome for you," she cried. "Why didn't you come to us long ago?"

never got acquainted with any one. All of our friends live on the other side of town."

"We come from the country, where we are used to being neighborly," she explained. "I want you to feel that you are welcome here any time."

There was a sincerity in her tones that brought a genial glow to Digby's heart, and the girl (he knew now her name was Ethel) seconded her mother with a glance.

That night was but the beginning of a new life for Digby. The following evening he brought home a box of candy as a return courtesy and was invited to spend the evening, so gradually he fell into the habit of dropping in after dinner. There were trips to the theater, little excursions on Sunday, and even when he had word from his mother that she had decided to remain west for the summer he did not offer objection.

The more he was with Ethel the more deeply in love he became. He had never known many women, and this charming girl was the first he had ever loved. Often he would declare to himself that he would propose, but each time his courage failed him.

Then one night came the climax. The gas began to flicker and burn low, and Ethel left the room to drop in the coin that would turn on the flow again. He heard a match strike in the kitchen, where the gas had not been lit, then came an explosion, and he rushed down the narrow hall.

In some fashion the meter had sprung a leak, and the lighted match had caused the ignition of the gas. Ethel, her light gown ablaze, came staggering blindly toward him. He had his coat off before they met and threw it about her shoulders, forcing her to the carpet that the blaze might not be able to gain headway toward her face. The gas in the apartment had been extinguished, and he was forced to work in the dark, but he beat out the flames with his hand and then rushed into the kitchen to check the flow of gas.

It was easy to extinguish the flames there and shut off the gas at the inlet. Then he opened the doors from their apartment to his and bore her in his arms to his mother's room. Mrs. Fallows followed and took charge of the girl while he went for the doctor.

It was some hours later that he was permitted to see Ethel. She had asked for him, her mother said, and he stole gently into the room. She put out her uninjured hand and smiled up at him. In some miraculous fashion her face had not been touched by the flames, though her masses of golden hair were crisp and lank.

"It was awfully brave of you, Ben," she whispered as he bent over her. "When that explosion came the first thing I thought was that I was so glad that you were there. I knew you would help me. The doctor says you saved my life by putting the fire out so quickly."

"Any one could have done it," he protested, "but I'm glad it was I."

"So am I," she answered. "I'd like to be around all the time, if you'll let me," he went on in sudden bravery.

"I was afraid you were getting to look on me more as a sister," she said as the blood came slowly into her cheeks. "Are you sure, Ben, that it's not just because of the accident?"

"The accident has nothing to do with it," he protested, "except that the thought of how I might have lost you gave me the courage to speak."

"I think," she smiled faintly, "that we ought to be very grateful to that gas meter. That's how I first met you, you remember."

VACCINATION NOTICE

In accordance with the provisions of the "Vaccination Act, 1886," the Superintendent of Vaccination for Charlottetown will be at the office of the undersigned, 178 Kent Street, on

Wednesday and Saturday from 1.30 to 3.30 p. m. and 6.30 to 9 p. m.

The Law requires that all unvaccinated persons of the age of three months or upwards, must be present to be vaccinated; children under twelve years of age to be brought by one of their parents or their guardian.

The charge for vaccination will be twenty-five cents for each person to be paid at the time of such vaccination.

Any person failing or neglecting to attend, or bring his or her young children at the above time and place will be subject to the fines and penalties of the Vaccination Act.

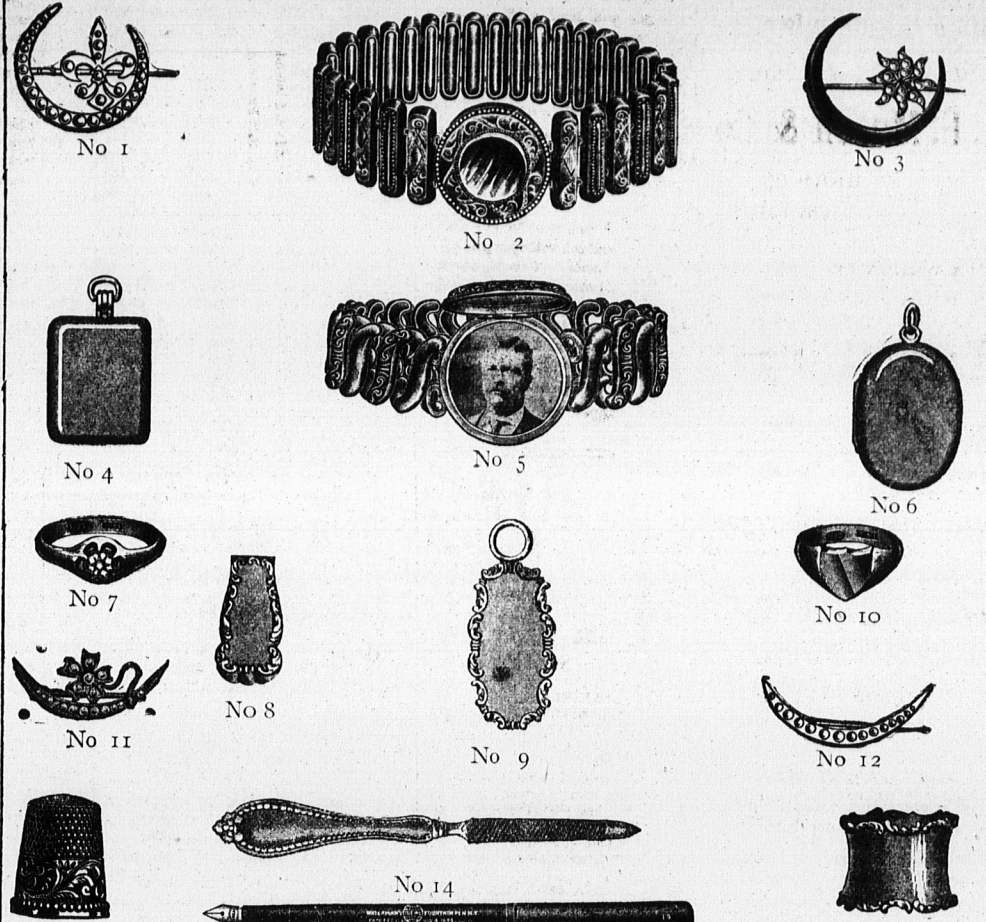
H. D. JOHNSON, M. D. Health Officer Superintendent of Vaccination. 1-21dttstf Dated this 14th day Nov 1907

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RATES OF FERRAGE. Passengers 70, Horses 200, Hogs 50, Sheep 50, Vehicles 100, Horned Cattle 200, Produce per bus 1-20, Heavy Weights 40.

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