



Frat Cupid

by
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THE study door banged shut with angry violence and Mr. Wickles sighed. To fully understand and sympathize with that sigh, it should be explained that Mr. Wickles was constitutionally intolerant of noise, hurry, excitement, and all other cataclysmal disturbances of a high-pressure world.

He liked to foresee events a long time before they arrived, consider them with care when they were present, and reflect upon them a long time after they had departed. To avoid a more derogatory designation, he was accustomed to term himself a philosopher, which was only another way of saying that he found it far too troublesome to keep abreast of the procession, and preferred to consume his ample income in leisurely fashion, and with dignified aloofness, contemplate the ant-like activities of his fellow men.

For the rest, he was fair and thirty, weighed a trifle over two hundred, and gave the impression of being fatter than he really was.

His outraged sensibilities becoming calmer with the lapse of time, Mr. Wickles lit a cigarette as corpulent after its kind as he was after his, and proceeded to analyze the tumult through which he had just passed with all the methodicalness induced by a well-ordered and easily flowing life.

"In the first place," began Mr. Wickles, giving utterance to another sigh as an involuntary tribute to the immediate past, "John says Rosamond says he—Oh, the devil!" said Mr. Wickles, stopping short. "That isn't going to do at all. I think, perhaps," continued Mr. Wickles,

meditatively irritating his left ear, "it would be clearer if I put it down on paper."

Taken instantly by the idea, Mr. Wickles reached for the little pile of stationery which he knew reposed on its own particular portion of his exasperatingly neat desk, and after thoughtfully animating his cigarette for an interval, at length threw it away and commenced to write.

A.—John is engaged to Rosamond—"That isn't strictly true, though," commented Mr. Wickles, interrupting his labors, and then added: "However, we'll let it go."

B.—John owns—"that is to say, did own," corrected Mr. Wickles, by way of footnote—*a gold watchcharm of a somewhat unusual pattern.*

C.—Rosamond has several times admired said charm and hinted—"at least I take it that she did, although John didn't actually say so." observed Mr. Wickles, adding another mental footnote—*that said charm could be made into a very ornamental job wherewith to grace her own watch when not restrained by a chain.*

"Myself," decided Mr. Wickles, looking up from the paper. "I consider it very indelicate and unladylike of her. But then I've noticed that young women are distressingly forward in these days."

D.—John, it appears, entered an objection to the proposed change of ownership, on the ground that the said charm was the gift of a fidus Achates, who presented it to him the last thing before setting out to join the Red Cross in Europe. Hence the said charm becomes a sacred token of friendship, not to be lightly parted with.

"I know that's all true, by the way," interjected Mr. Wickles: "because I was with him when he gave it to him."

And perfectly satisfied with this enigmatic statement, he proceeded:

E.—A few days ago Rosamond perceives that aforesaid charm is absent from its usual place. John, upon being questioned, admits with great reluctance that he has lost it, but is unable to say how, when, or where.

F.—This morning Rosamond, calling upon a certain bosom friend ("that is, she was a bosom friend until to-day") named Eloise Hammond—

"When I came down from Lake George last week," mused Mr. Wickles reminiscently, "the parlor car was named Eloise. I remember the name very distinctly, because at Albany the conductor sold my chair to an extremely ill-mannered woman with a baby while I was in the smoking-room. Quite a curious coincidence," thought Mr. Wickles, pursuing his self-appointed task, greatly cheered by the discovery.

—beholds dangling from the watch of the said Eloise a fob ornamented with the identical charm which John refused to give her and then assured her he had lost. NOTE: Said Eloise calculated to awaken jealousy, having reputation for beauty and known to be an accomplished coquette.

Mr. Wickles hesitatingly regarded the last sentence for a minute, and then hastily underscored the word "reputation" and resumed: *Said Eloise refusing pointblank any explanation of how she obtained said charm.*

G (and last).—Rosamond instantly flares up, passionately repudiates said Eloise as a false and traitorous friend, seeks out John and, charging him with deceit, perfidy, faithlessness, treachery, and so on to the extent of her vocabulary, declares she never, never, never wants to see his face again.

"Rash impetuosity!" mourned Mr. Wickles, shaking his head sadly. "The crying evil of an evil age, and especially prevalent among the young. And yet there are people foolish enough to hope for an era of universal peace!

"I do wish," remarked Mr. Wickles petulantly, "that John could have settled his affairs himself, and not felt constrained to burst in upon me and disgorge his woes, right in the middle of

my afternoon nap. Now I won't have a moment's quiet until this misunderstanding is patched up or smoothed over or disposed of somehow. I suppose," murmured Mr. Wickles uncertainly, "that I really ought to interfere. John won't be fit to live with as long as this quarrel lasts, and that will upset me, and I *do* object to being upset—object very seriously. Oh, Sarah! Sarah! You little thought what you were placing on my shoulders when you asked me to be a father to your orphaned son!"

Thus apostrophizing his deceased sister, Mr. Wickles picked up his pen once more and added to his digest of the situation:

Testimony of John Murray concerning the foregoing—"I really did lose the darn thing, Uncle Wicky. Honest I did" Opinion on testimony of John Murray—It sounds like the truth. Note on opinion—But he may be lying.

"There," said Mr. Wickles, surveying his copperplate chirography with considerable pride, "now the first and most logical thing to do is to interview this Eloise Hammond."

Grunting protestingly, he hoisted himself from his comfortable armchair and, possessing himself of hat, stick, and gloves, sallied forth resolutely on his mission.

The season was September and the weather warm, with just a weak foreboding of the coming winter in the westerly breeze. Mr. Wickles sauntered ponderously down Sylvan Street to Main, and after pausing at the corner to imbibe refreshment, continued his slow course to Prospect Place and the lawn-girdled Hammond home.

A pink-cheeked maid admitted him, and, ignoring his admiring smirk, coldly vouchsafed the information that Miss Hammond was within and would be apprised of his arrival. Mr. Wickles, polishing his nose with the handle of his cane and the handle of his cane with his nose, watched her haughty retirement with sentimental interest, and then entering the drawing-room, deposited himself with care on what appeared to be the most enduring chair.

Presently the unseen stairs gently echoed light footfalls, and immediately thereafter Miss Hammond was ushered into his presence by that vague and nameless odor compounded of talcum powder and femininity which seems indissolubly

associated with womankind between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five.

“Mr. Wickles,” said Miss Hammond, losing a fascinating smile upon him through sheer force of habit, for as a captive he was utterly undesirable, “this is an unexpected pleasure.”

“Miss Hammond,” returned Mr. Wickles, finding his feet grudgingly, although he appreciated the smile, “to me, I regret to say, this occasion is an unexpected pain.”

“You should have taken a jitney,” said Miss Hammond sympathetically. “You know, they’ll stop at your house for you now—if you pay five cents more.”

Mr. Wickles regarded her reproachfully.

“My regret, Miss Hammond,” he advised her, “is occasioned by the motive for my call—not by my expenditure of energy in coming here. I may have faults,” conceded Mr. Wickles, recklessly taking her into his confidence: “but laziness, I am glad to say, is not one of them. Indeed, I sincerely believe that exercise—in moderation, of course—always in moderation——”

“You should try rolling on the floor,” suggested Miss Hammond, with an air of helpfulness, “in the morning before breakfast. I took off five pounds that way, and had to have all my evening gowns made over.”

Mr. Wickles, embarrassed, lost the thread of his exordium and hurriedly plunged at once into the chief topic.

“I was about to say, Miss Hammond,” he began, his nervousness, contrary to the usual habit of nervousness, endowing him with unexpected brevity and clearness, “that I wanted to see you in regard to a silly misunderstanding which has arisen between my nephew, John Murray——”

“With all due regard for your personal feelings, Mr. Wickles,” interrupted Miss Hammond icily, “John Murray is a fool!”

“——and,” Mr. Wickles hastened on, accelerating slightly. “Rosamond Thayer——”

“With all due regard for your personal feelings a second time, Mr. Wickles,” reiterated Miss Hammond, lowering her own temperature and consequently that of her immediate surroundings about fifteen degrees, “Rosamond Thayer is a bigger fool!”

“——about a certain watchcharm.” persisted Mr. Wickles, with the grim determination of a

General Grant preparing to fight it out on that line if it took all afternoon, “which, I have reason for believing——”

“Mr. Wickles!” warned Miss Hammond, scarlet-cheeked, and now registering something like forty degrees of frost. “With all due regard for your personal feelings a *third* time, it’s my opinion that if you keep on, you’ll be the biggest fool of all!”

Mr. Wickles shivered slightly and immediately contradicting himself, mopped the uncultivated fore part of his head with a purple-bordered silk handkerchief.

“You have, if I remember correctly,” continued Miss Hammond, sending her angry gaze so close above his bald spot that he fancied he could feel the wind of it, “more than once expressed the opinion that the world would be a better place if every one minded his own business. The present occasion, Mr. Wickles, strikes me as being an excellent opportunity for you to put that theory of yours into practise. Permit me, Mr. Wickles, to wish you a very good afternoon!”

“My dear Miss Hammond,” pleaded Mr. Wickles, beseechingly extending two plump arms toward her, “listen to me. I beg of you! It is with no thought for my *own* interests that I ask you to give me a hearing. Two young, breaking hearts. Miss Hammond——”

“If that little cat Rosamond Thayer,” declared Miss Hammond vindictively, “chooses to break her heart because she’s an idiot, it serves her right, and I hope she breaks it into fifty-seven separate pieces! As for John Murray,” continued Miss Hammond, gathering momentum as she went along. “the best I can wish for him is that this will be a lesson to him to be careful in the future how he bestows his affections on flirty, overdressed, powdered-faced, brainless little dolls! Mr. Wickles.” wound up Miss Hammond, pulverizing him with the same crushing disdain she used to discourage a too admiring streetcar *vis-à-vis*, “I heartily agree with you that this is a painful occasion, and I think it had best be terminated. Permit me again, Mr. Wickles, to wish you a *very good* afternoon!”

And she took her departure with scornfully elevated nose and disgust displayed in every line of her expressive figure.

Mr. Wickles, shaking his head sadly,

navigated unpiloted to the hallway, identified his hat, stick, and gloves, and let himself cautiously out of the front door, his manner plainly indicating that he suspected it of mouse-trap qualities, and feared it might suddenly snap shut upon him before he was halfway through. Emerging triumphantly, however, he gratefully expanded his chest and wandered toward the street, foundered in the depths of deep thought.

So concerned was he with contemplation that he took no heed to his steps, and unwittingly trod upon a flame-haired youth of some nine or ten years earnestly engaged in marbles with an equal-aged and even dirtier companion, directly in the middle of the path.

“Hey, you big, fat boob!” growled the victim, cherishing a flattened leg. “W’y th’ell don’t ya look where yer goin’?”

“Say, bricktop,” inquired his friend delightedly, “d’ja hear ‘bout one o’ th’ elephants gettin’ lost from the circus? You’ll get fifty dollars f’r takin’ ‘im back.”

“What’s ‘e think ‘e’s doin’,” appealed the assaulted one to the surroundings generally—“playin’ steam roller—or p’litical p’rade?”

Mr. Wickles, dreading further shrill-voiced personalities, became extremely apologetic.

“Aw, now, boys,” he protested contritely. “Aw, now, boys—I’m awfully sorry. Call it square and I’ll give you each a dime. But you know,” he reproved, “you really oughtn’t to play marbles right in the center of the walk.”

“Guess I gotta right t’ play where I want in m’ own yard,” grumbled he of the illuminating thatch, partly mollified, however, by the bestowed indemnity. “Y’ oughta walk in the street where they’d be room fer somepin’ besides yerself.”

“Say, son,” asked Mr. Wickles earnestly, almost astonished at the wealth of his discovery, “are you Eloise Hammond’s brother?”

“S’posin’ I am?” hedged the questioned one distrustfully, though with an eye to possible further gain.

“Because if you are,” pursued Mr. Wickles in a manner enticingly mysterious, “I got a little proposition to make to you.”

“Straight goods?” insisted the youth, still suspicious. “No kiddin’?”

“You walk along with me a ways and I’ll tell you all about it,” promised Mr. Wickles

encouragingly.

The man of to-morrow appeared dubious, but finally arose and abstractedly dusting one knee—the cleaner one—fell into step beside the seductive source of hoped-for good things, while the abandoned friend, vigorously discouraged in an attempt to follow, shouted comments, conceived in the worst possible taste, upon the weird appearance of the receding couple. To these Master Hammond paid merely the courtesy of a thumbed nose, and with engaging gravity turned his freckled face upward to his companion.

“Now then, sonny,” said Mr. Wickles, when they had passed beyond ear range, “have you noticed the watch fob your sister’s been wearing lately?”

“Y’ mean th’ one with the gold thing-‘umjig an’ the red stone in th’ middle?” asked Master Hammond.

“Yes, sonny,” responded Mr. Wickles, recognizing the description with an effort. “Yes—that’s the one.”

“I got cha,” assured Master Hammond, nodding energetically. “Slide, Kelly!”

“Well, then,” resumed Mr. Wickles, choosing his words with care, “I want to find out who gave it to her, but I *don’t* want her to know it’s me that’s trying to find out.”

Master Hammond positively endangered the security of his head by his violent wagging thereof, and replied briefly: “I’m on like a duck, old feller! What’ll ya gi’ me?”

“Anything you want,” conceded Mr. Wickles recklessly. “That is to say,” corrected Mr. Wickles, suddenly prudent, “anything within reason.”

“Motorcycle?” suggested Master Hammond, quite carried away by this dazzling opportunity.

“My dear boy,” objected Mr. Wickles, aghast at such amazing rapacity in one so young, “I said anything *within reason!* I’m not a beef trust!”

“Ain’t ya?” queried Master Hammond grinning. “I t’ought p’r’aps ya was. Well.” he hesitated, striving to gage accurately the extent to which his benefactor might safely be despoiled, “call it a pair o’ football pants an’ shin guards an’ a nose guard an’ orange an’ black jersey, an’ I’ll go ya!”

Mr. Wickles gazed upon this exponent of a grasping age with great sadness, but reflecting that

as the price of peace the cost was negligible, at length assented.

"It's a shame ta do it!" grieved Master Hammond joyously. "It's like swipin' apples off'n the push-cart when the wop's in the corner s'loon. Tell me where ya live, an' I'll slip round after supper an' put ya wise."

Mr. Wickles imparted the information, with an added caution to keep his own share in the transaction concealed under impenetrable obscurity, and saw his amateur sleuth depart with some misgivings, but a considerably stronger belief that at last all was right with the world.

The satisfaction brought by this conviction surmounted the silent, sullen dejection of his nephew all through the long course of a dreary dinner, and toward the close of the meal Mr. Wickles, bolstered up by sublime confidence, even ventured to bestow words of comfort upon the distraught young man.

"I think, John," he hazarded, placing the tips of his fingers together in the manner most approved by clergymen and Sunday school superintendents, "that I have this afternoon been able to assist you a little toward effecting a reconciliation with your—ah—formerly prospective bride."

The nephew pushed back his chair in the violence of his emotion and stared astounded at the benevolent countenance of his uncle.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "Have you been buttin' in? Then it's all over, and I'm a lost man!"

And throwing up his hands with an incoherent cry of anguish, he rushed wildly from the room.

For at least five minutes Mr. Wickles gazed in horrified amazement at the door through which the ingrate had vanished, absently prodding his chin the while with a spoon destined to aid in the consumption of preserved peaches. How long, left to himself, he would have gone on gazing at the door, it is impossible to say; but, the cat-footed butler entered, bearing a small violet-scented note on a massive and polished silver tray.

Mr. Wickles accepted the offering as in a dream, looked at the back, stared blankly at the waveringly traced address, held it in front of the light and unsuccessfully tried to see through it, shook it, felt all over the exterior with five pudgy fingers, and finally recovering himself, stuck one

prong of a salad-smear'd fork into a gap in the flap, ripped the envelope raggedly open, and read the monogrammed missive:

DEAR MR. WICKLES:

I received your ambassador late this afternoon, and he is now in his bedroom, consoling himself for the loss of his supper with bread and milk. Please do not accuse him of betraying you. I saw you abduct him after you left the house, and putting two and two together, as I was taught to do in school, found that, as usual, they made four. However, as long as your plot failed through no fault in his diplomacy, I have told him that he can justly claim from you the promised pay, and if I know anything about my brother, I'd advise you, for your own sake, to give it to him. The methods of annoyance possible to a small boy I have found by sad experience to be limitless. Sincerely yours,

ELOISE EVELYN HAMMOND.

P.S.—I'm not revengeful; simply human.

"Dear me!" bleated Mr. Wickles feebly. And again, after a brief interval: "*Dear me!*"

There are moments in life when the power of spoken language fails. To one of these moments Mr. Wickles had come, and although he fairly trembled all over with internal turbulations, no words issued forth from the mouth which, in his chaotic condition, he had left standing open after his last exclamation, thereby giving to himself a remarkable resemblance to an expiring bullfrog.

"It's my own fault," gasped Mr. Wickles. "I brought it on myself, and I don't harbor any grudge. But, oh! *wouldn't* I like to have that young lady turned over across my knee for five minutes!"

There being no immediate prospect of an opportunity arising for gratifying his desire, however, Mr. Wickles suddenly decided to seek the alleviating atmosphere of his club. Indeed, warned by the surgings of rage within him, Mr. Wickles felt that distraction of some kind was absolutely essential to keep from bursting with a loud bang, an event not only involving great inconvenience to himself, but threatening disaster to the well-appointed interior of the dining-room.

Accordingly he hastily scrambled to his feet and fairly bolting out of the house, betook him clubward at a pace that would have filled his

friends with very genuine alarm.

Panting up the steps, he hurled hat, stick, and gloves at the astonished attendant, and without an instant's hesitation laid a straight course for the bar.

"Hello, Wicky, old ghost!" hailed a cheerful voice. "Pursued by the police, or trying to catch up with last week?"

Mr. Wickles incautiously checked his impetuous drive at the imminent risk of falling flat, and, revolving in his orbit, saw Harrison Howard, an engaging young citizen of about his own age, but, to do justice to both parties, resembling him in no other possible particular.

"Harry!" greeted Mr. Wickles with great fervor. "I'm glad to see you, Harry! Harry, I'm very glad to see you! Come and have a drink, Harry!"

"Wicky, old skeleton," returned Harrison Howard, "there is something in your manner—to plagiarize an ancient ballad—which I find it impossible to resist. You can make mine," Harrison Howard directed the bartender, as they drew up at the polished mahogany rail, "a large, blond beer."

"Harry," Mr. Wickles confided—"a little Scotch, Bill—Harry, you behold in me a most miserable being!"

"Wicky, old greyhound," replied Harrison Howard, replacing his empty glass. "you will pardon me if I contradict you, but at the present moment I am able to behold in you nothing but a good Samaritan. Nevertheless," admitted Harrison Howard, "I can recognize in your unexpected hospitality something distantly related to a bribe, and so, with sincere gratitude for past favors—another large, blond one, Bill, *if* you please—I resignedly await the recital of your woes."

Whereupon Mr. Wickles, expanding under the influence of the Scotch, poured forth his tale, with such additions and marginal notes as his excited imagination and the whisky suggested.

Long before he had finished, Harrison Howard shamelessly abandoned himself to mirth, and when the somber story finally ended, he seized the railing at the edge of the bar and rocked back and forth, sputtering and crowing with happiness.

"Wicky—oh, Wicky!" he gurgled joyfully. "You'll bring my bright, young life to an untimely

termination—I *know* you will! Tell me, Wicky, old walking stick," said Harrison Howard resolutely restraining himself. "Tell me truly—what would you give for an eight-cylinder, year after next model, fully-equipped-including-self-starter-and electric-headlights solution of this dark and deadly mystery?"

"Harry," answered Mr. Wickles, moved almost to tears by the memory of his misery and Scotch number two, "I—I'd give *anything*, Harry—*anything*! Even if I had to go out and steal it!"

"Now I'll tell you how it stands, Wicky, old centipede," said Harrison Howard confidently; "I've got the reply to this riddle safely stowed away in my little, old, cranny cranium, and it's yours, Wicky, yours forever and always. But at a price, Wicky—at a price!"

He wagged his head portentously and, sensing an arid argument, commanded Bill to fill them up again.

"You remember," resumed Harrison Howard, indenting the foam on his glass with his breath, "that little block of stock I tried to sell you day before yesterday?"

"The Consolidated Traction shares, Harry?" queried Mr. Wickles. "Yes, Harry—yes, I remember those very well."

"I'm glad you do, Wicky," returned Harrison Howard, much gratified. "I'm very glad you do, Wicky. It shows my efforts weren't entirely wasted on the desert air. Well, Wicky, old rain-spout, you just agree to give me your check for those shares—any time. Wicky, any time at all within, say, ten days—and I'll give you nickel-plated, double-back-action -and-guaranteed proof that Rosamond Thayer and Jack Murray have been creating a mighty hullabaloo over nothing at all. Is it a deal?"

"Harry," groaned Mr. Wickles, writhing in extreme discomfort, "it's—it's a hold-up—a brutal, cave-man robbery, Harry! But—but I'd sell my immortal soul for peace, Harry. I'd even agree to learn golf! Harry, it's a deal!"

"Wicky, old pump-rod," said Harrison Howard sympathetically, "it's a shame to do it—a blazing shame—and I feel for you, Wicky; I do, indeed. My better nature," declaimed Harrison Howard, describing mystic circles with his glass, "hides its eyes, and turns aside in tears and disgust

at this strong-arm game I'm perpetrating. But alas, Wicky, at the present moment my primeval instincts have the upper hand. Besides," concluded Harrison Howard, dropping unexpectedly to the practical, "I need the money."

He deposited his glass carefully on the bar and hooked a finger confidentially through Mr. Wickles's buttonhole.

"I gave that watch-charm to Eloise Hammond myself!"

"You!" stuttered Mr. Wickles. "You—you! But why—why—?"

He suddenly gagged and grew frightfully red in the face.

"Bill!" ordered Harrison Howard hastily. "A brandy and soda for the gentleman—quick! There—there, Wicky, old corn-stalk," he continued, with difficulty supporting his wavering companion. "Take it easy, Wicky—take it easy, Wicky! It'll pass off in a minute."

"But why—why," screamed Mr. Wickles, catching his breath after a frantic effort—"why the devil didn't she *say so*?"

"That, my precious little Wicky," responded Harrison Howard happily, "is the maraschino cherry in the cocktail—the whipped cream on the hot chocolate—the furtive kiss at the end of a long evening of hand-holding! You ask me why she didn't say so, Wicky? Because, Wicky, we've been engaged for precisely four weeks at eleven twenty-seven o'clock to-night—if my watch was right.

"You know, Wicky," went on Harrison Howard, slapping him cheerily on the back, just as he was in the act of absorbing the reanimating mixture set before him, "in this pleasant little village, the faintest film of fact in suspected quarters is sufficient to set one hundred and seven—if you conceded the Nelsons a place in our set—tongues to talking for ten days Straight, and engaged people who want to keep their engagement quiet for a while have got to be *dam*' circumspect.

"Now I'll tell you, Wicky, old telephone-pole, the true inwardness of this business with a conciseness and clarity that even *your* methodical mind will have no difficulty in comprehending. Eloise saw that watch-charm on Ben Davis before he went to Europe, and was so smitten with it that for a while she couldn't talk

about anything else. So after we got engaged I wrote Ben, asking him where he bought the thing, and when I received his reply, hied me straightway to Maiden Lane and obtained the closest copy that could be produced. As a matter of fact, there *is* a difference in the design, but the family resemblance is strong enough to deceive an excitable female without the slightest trouble.

"Of course, it was just luck that Jack lost *his* twin about the same time Eloise started wearing *hers*. Naturally, Eloise wasn't any too pleased when Rosamond cussed her out this morning, so she had two motives for keeping the origin of her ornament secret—number one being that she was afraid if it got round that I was giving her expensive jewelry—it cost twelve ninety-eight, including the plush case—the populace would do some disastrous deductive work; and number two, that by maintaining a discreet silence she'd be getting back at Rosamond.

"I don't mind telling you all this," explained Harrison Howard, lighting a cigar, "because I'm going to persuade Eloise to announce it at the Thornton tea on Friday. And here," terminated Harrison Howard, drawing forth a mass of papers from an inside pocket and searching diligently thereamong, "is the receipted bill for the charm, which I'll throw into the bargain, free gratis for nothing."

"Harry," said Mr. Wickles, "*one* of the considerations which prevents me from laying violent hands upon you is the reflection that some glad day I shall see you in a striped suit, breaking stone. You can give me the bill, Harry," said Mr. Wickles. "And," he added ungenerously, "I only hope that you and Eloise will find that married life comes up to your worst expectations."

"At least," pondered Mr. Wickles, walking sadly homeward, "I can prove to John that he has done me an injustice, and that will be some light satisfaction. But it's not equal to the cost," sighed Mr. Wickles—"not by any means."

But John's room turned out to be tenantless, after Mr. Wickles had informed himself by careful inspection that his nephew was nowhere within the confines of the first floor. So Mr. Wickles sat down and considered his next move.

"For a bet," thought Mr. Wickles, surveying the disorderly apartment with deep disfavor, "he's gone to try and make it up with Rosamond. But I

guess.” concluded Mr. Wickles, abstractedly raising a sprawling pair of trousers from the floor with the laudable object of hanging them up somewhere and thereby creating an atmosphere of neatness, “I guess I’d better see Rosamond anyhow, and tell her all about it. Yes,” determined Mr. Wickles, absently dandling the trousers, “that’s what I’ll do—Hello!”

A sparkling something spun into the air and fell to the floor with a subdued clink, and uttering a hoarse cry Mr. Wickles plunged downward upon it.

“In the cuff of his trousers!” shouted Mr. Wickles, lifting his perspiring face in a kind of exaltation. “Well—upon—my—*word!*”

A testy examination disclosed the broken golden link which had caused all this catastrophe, and Mr. Wickles feasted his eyes upon it for a space, rejoicing aloud. Then he hurriedly thrust the gem-encrusted bit of gold into his pocket, and descending the stairs headlong, careless of their ominous cracking, seized hat, cane, and gloves and shot out of the door into the night

At the corner of Main Street a passing jitney rescued him from the curb and bore him rapidly to Fairview Avenue, where the driver collected ten cents, stoutly maintaining that the depreciation of his springs during the trip would reach fully twice that amount. Little Mr. Wickles cared! He thought of the tribute to be exacted by Master Hammond, of the undesired shares of Consolidated Traction, of the ignominy heaped upon his head by the fair Eloise. And he thought of himself in the guise of a clothed and corpulent cupid, slapped his pocket, and actually laughed!

Turning in at the gateway to the Thayer mansion, Mr. Wickles trod upon the grass, which yielded to his weight but uttered no audible remonstrance. He advanced very silently.

A climbing Dorothy Perkins vine screened a section of the veranda from public gaze, and as he

approached, Mr. Wickles was aware of the sound of voices issuing through the intricacies of the overlapping leaves.

“I don’t care!” wailed a sweet soprano tremulously. “I don’t care if you give away *twenty thousand* watch-charms! Oh, Jackie, I’ve been so awfully, *awfully* miser’ble!”

The last of the exclamation broke off short in a spasmodic interruption of some seventy seconds’ duration, and then a masculine bass replied, “But you *do* believe me, don’t you, Rose? You *do* believe that I lost it as I said? And didn’t give it to Eloise Hammond? My dearest, darlingest, wonderfulest little white rose, don’t you *know* that I care more for the tiniest tip of your littlest finger than all the Eloise Hammondses in—”

“Oh, Jackie, I’ll believe anything you tell me—*anything!* Only love me, Jackie, and—and *want* me, and—and——”

Came a second spasmodic interruption, and the listening Wickles covered his ears and groaned.

He thought, as he tiptoed heavily away, of the tribute to be exacted by Master Hammond. He thought, as he turned into the avenue, of the undesired shares of Consolidated Traction. He thought, as he hesitated on the corner of Main Street, of the ignominy he had suffered at the hands of the fair Eloise. and his anguished soul cried out against the remorseless circumstance that had crushed him on its wheel.

Spinning about despairingly, an illuminated sign, suspended above the sidewalk, caught his eye. He regarded it with interest, and as his whirling brain began to comprehend the blazing legend, his spirit insensibly grew quieter, and at last an actual smile, albeit a weak one, tentatively expanded his mouth.

“Café!” read Mr. Wickles, advancing one foot and smacking his lips. “Ah!”