

THE EVENING TELEGRAM'S PRIZE STORY CONTEST



Conditions of Short Story Prize Competition.

FIFTY DOLLARS IN GOLD will be awarded each week to the writer whose story is judged the best of those submitted during the week. For all stories which may not be awarded a prize, but which may be judged good enough to publish, the EVENING TELEGRAM will pay space rates. The general conditions of the competition are these:— The story may be fiction, light or grave, humorous or sad, or it may be a narrative of an actual experience. The story must not exceed 5,000 words. Write on one side of the paper only. Address all stories to the Short Story Prize Editor, the EVENING TELEGRAM, Herald Square, New York City. Manuscripts unaccompanied by stamps cannot be returned. The contest opens on Monday and closes on Thursday of each week. On Saturday the names of the prize winners are announced. The contest, which is free to all, is open now.

A BACHELOR'S VALENTINE.

By Minnie Douglas, Sea Cliff, N. Y.

On the evening of February 11, when Robert Landis entered his bachelor apartment, he went straight to the sitting room before removing either hat or coat. He scanned desk and mantelpiece, a look of expectancy in his eyes; but, at the end of his search, a sigh escaped him and an expression of disappointment clouded his face. The object of his quest was not forthcoming.



He went to the window and looked comprehensively down on the street below. A crowd of hope still lingered in his mind, for his eyes were fixed on the corner where the pedestrians must come from the main thoroughfare. They were all hurrying on their way, their heads bent resolutely against the chill February wind.

Landis pulled himself together, removed his hat and coat and went to the fire. "Am I getting old?" he mentally ejaculated. "Can it be that Jeannette considers me too matured to be interested in her?"

He drew in his breath, tightened the grip on himself and stared into the flames as he remarked:—"Of course it's absurd for a bright, fresh girl like Jeannette to think of me. Still, it's hard for a man to realize that he's being pushed to the wall in favor of younger folk. Dame Fate has been a bit unkind, but I'll just have to smother the fire-bank it, as it were, with the ashes of a too fervent flame."

Previously he had been bidden to attend Jeannette's parties. When she was in gaiters and pianoforte he was asked to help entertain the youngsters. As she grew older, he was invited because of his skill in manipulating the piano in the event of an impromptu dance. He sighed again as he reflected:—"And now they are all grown up; they can amuse themselves, play their own dance music and be independent of me. My day is over—with them."

Landis was the partner of Jeannette's father and the two men, despite the difference in their age, were great friends. This also was food for conjecture. Why did Mr. Atchison ask him to come round for a friendly smoke while the house was given over to merry-making? He knew that a Valentine party was in progress; he had heard her father telephoning to the confederate, and he had glanced from the conversation that the affair had been arranged on the spur of the moment. This fact kept him hoping that Jeannette would remember her old friend at the last moment.

Jeannette was exactly twenty years his junior, and the fact that he had seen her grow up made the disparity in their ages seem even more. Doubtless, he reflected, she had acquired a fatherly attitude toward the girl; or so she felt it. And yet—was it mere fancy—or had she really seemed shy with him on last Valentine's night when she had selected him as her valentine in one of the foolish games? A flush overspread the man's face; his mind became

asked, catching her hand and drawing her in to the sitting room fire. He felt like a schoolboy entering into some prank. "Sit down! Sit down! Here." He drew up his best beloved chair and placed her in it, but the satin covered feet on a hassock and stood before her, the freckled dancing in her eyes. He looked down at her, unable yet to realize that the picture before him was not a part of his fire-side dreams.

"Are you comfortable?" was asked by way of making conversation to dispel the embarrassing silence. "Perfectly," she cried brightly. "Do you know I've just discovered what makes a—well, men of maturity so attractive?"

Landis straightened his necktie and pulled down his waistcoat. "Yes?" he replied, interrogatively. "It's their thoughtfulness—their faculty for making girls comfortable with sweet little attentions."

"That is our mission in life." A flush came over the girl's face—a touch of embarrassment on her manner. She began to realize her loneliness with Robert in the room.

"Is this the latest in Valentine frolics?" he asked, looking down on her, a suspicion twinkling at the corner of his mouth. "Oh, oh, Mr. Landis, it—seems so much more than that I've done it. I—I'm sorry, I—I—Her eyes dropped.

"Borry? Why, it's the jolliest idea I've encountered in years. How did you think of anything so original?" "Oh, it wasn't my idea," she burst forth, anxious to shift some of the blame.

A wave of disappointment came over Landis. "But, of course," she went on, "I'm sorry for lending myself to such an infraction."

"Innocent be damned," exclaimed Landis, with good natured abandon. "There's saving grace in the humor and naivete of the situation, so let us not spoil a rush of business and the suddenness of my party. He had quite forgotten to ask you. Then we tried to get you on the phone and couldn't. Central said the windstorm had broken down the wires. Then some of the boys proposed that one of the girls dress as a Valentine and come round for you. Another suggested the fun of delivering the girl in a basket. Every one became madly enthusiastic. The idea appealed to them, so I, being no bigger than a minute, as father puts it, was deputed to represent your valentine. The girls dressed me; the boys went to the attic, got the hamper, packed me, delivered me and—here I am."

"She threw out her arms as if to throw off a touch of hysteria that had crept into her voice. "Bob Landis caught the two outstretched hands in his. She looked up at him, a startled expression in her eyes. He gazed steadily down at her. The warmth of his touch and manner caused her to look up.

"You are not afraid of me?" he whispered, bending over her. "Oh, no," she laughed, a funny, little confused laugh. "Then why do you shrink from me?" "Because you are holding my hands."

The pliant, girlish face had regained some of its mischievousness. "Haven't I done that many times before?"

"A whimsical smile met her upturned glance. "Oh, yes; but somehow it seems different this time." "It is different. Can't you tell what the difference is?" "I—I'm afraid not." Her voice had a slight tremor.

"There is the same difference in my attitude toward you to-night that there is in yours toward me."

"There was silence; he felt her hands tremble. "Can't you guess the cause of it? Can't you tell why you don't look at me with the same friendly indifference you have used at all the other times when I have caught your hands?"

She remained silent, the brown head drooping lower to hide the happiness that came into her eyes.

He drew her up to him. "Jeannette," he said, the old pet name slipping from him with a new warmth. "look at me!" She raised her eyes timidly. "Am I too old for you to care for?"

She shook her head emphatically. He continued, "Am I gray and sprightly enough to entertain you?"

"I hate gay and sprightly men who always grin like Chinese mandarins. Besides, you else would think of the little attentions so dear to a girl's heart."

He trembled with pure delight at his own maturity.

"Am I the sort of man you would trust your whole life and future happiness to?" She nodded again, more emphatically.

"Then come—I'll take you back and introduce you to your dear daddy as my real Valentine—to be my very own through a long succession of the good old saint's anniversaries."

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