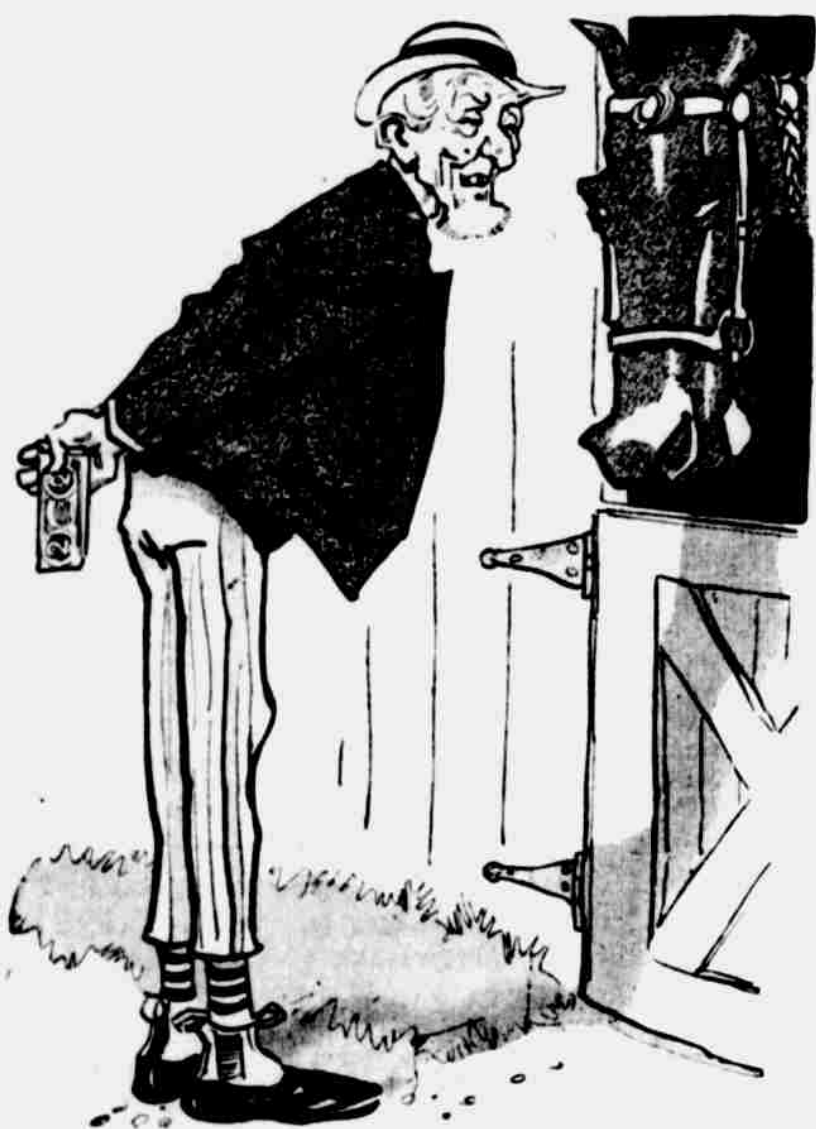


PALLADIUM SHORT STORY PAGE

OUR NEW POPULAR SONG

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I.
Ebenezer Brown came to New York town,
With two dollars that he thought he'd like to bet;
Rode down to the track, afterward walked back,
For the horse he bet upon is kind of running yet.
Just before the race, Brown, he poked his face
In the pesky paddock just as if he owned the place;
Saw a little tout lead a horse called "Mabel" out,
Now he's out his two, and you should hear him shout:

Chorus:
"When you go down to New York town,
And ride down to Sheepshead Bay,
Give my regards to Mabel,
The horse in the second stable—around the corner—
I'd like to bet she's eating there yet,
She ran like a hen with a chill, still—
Give my regards to Mabel, and tell her
I was stung for my two dollar bill."



A PARODY ON
"Give My Regards
to Mabel."

By William F. Kirk.

II.
Back to New York town, Ebenezer Brown
Came to visit when five years or more had fled;
Took a horse car ride, suddenly he spied
Mabel helping haul the car, the poor old quadruped!
Mabel was so slow, as in the long ago,
Brown he thought about the day she didn't even show.
Ebenezer laughed real hard, to the driver gave his card,
Said, "Just do a favor to an old time pard."

Chorus:
"Here is a tip, buy a nice whip,
One that is good and strong;
Give my regards to Mabel,
The horse in the second stable—you're driving her—
I'd like to bet that she's loafing yet,
If you don't sting her I will, still—
Give Mabel what Cain gave Abel, and tell her
How she cost me my two dollar bill."

Try It Over on
the Piano!



THE ADVENTRESS

By J. J. Bell.

"HALIBUT, my dear fellow, you are worried."
"I am, Bliss."
"There is something on your mind."

"There is," Mr. Halibut dropped back in his easy chair and eyed his cigar dismally.

Mr. James Bliss leant forward and gazed anxiously at his old friend and guest. They had just dined, and the host had been puzzled at the other's dullness. Both were men of over fifty, and their friendship dated from boyhood. They were bachelors.

"If I can be of any assistance at all, Halibut, please say so," said Bliss gently. "Forgive my mentioning it, but for some time I have suspected that all was not well with you. Is—is it the case that you got badly hit by the Cosmopolitan Copper collapse?"

"A thousand thanks, Bliss; but it isn't money. I will tell you the truth—there is no one else I could trust, and I am sorry I did not tell you before." He paused and sighed.

"I am at your service always," said his friend.

"I believe you, Bliss, I believe you. Well—to come to the point—I am—er—entangled."

"Entangled?"

"In other words, I am engaged to be married."

"Heaven bless us! And you never told me! That was hardly friendly, Halibut. Come, who was it now? But why—"

"I am engaged to Mrs. Ida Cornish, the—er—the adventress."

Mr. Halibut—having made this announcement, sucked savagely at his dead cigar.

"My dear fellow!" his friend exclaimed. "What is this you are telling me? I do not understand. I do not know Mrs. Ida Cornish, not even by name; but you tell me you are engaged to marry her, and then, before I can get out a word of congratulation, you describe her as an adventress—"

"Congratulations, Bliss, would be out of place," said Halibut. "It is your commiseration I require, and—and your assistance, if possible."

"My dear friend, you shall have anything I can give you. But I am still very much in the dark."

"The whole affair is simply explained. Three months ago, coming over on the Caronia, I met Mrs. Ida Cornish. To put it briefly, she attracted me, for she is very beautiful, while I don't think she can be over five-and-thirty. She had been widowed ten years before I met her. Her manner, I am ready to admit, is excessively charming. We met frequently—very frequently—on board."

"On the journey from Liverpool to town I was able to be of some service to her, and obtained her address. She put up at the Talbot, a quiet hotel in Suffolk street. She seemed to have no friends in town. I called upon her at the hotel. Finally I asked her to marry me. She agreed at once. It did not occur to me till afterwards that she had never mentioned her people. When I hinted at the subject she evaded it. I felt it my duty to myself to make—er—some private inquiries."

"That," said Mr. Bliss, looking very unhappy, "must have been most repugnant to you."

"It was," said Mr. Halibut grimly; "yet not so repugnant as the result of the inquiries."

"Dear, dear!" murmured the host sympathetically. "Is it so very bad, my poor friend?"

"Bliss," said the other suddenly, "have you ever had any experience with women?"

"Never," replied Mr. Bliss. But he reddened, and a flush spread over his shaven countenance, extending to his bald head.

"Not since I was very young, anyhow," he added. "I made rather a fool of myself when I was about eighteen—"

"Oh, that's nothing," his friend interrupted. "You have had no experience with the mature article. In fact, I believe you have avoided ladies' society for many years."

"That is perhaps the truth."

"Then you don't know what it is to be deceived. The first result of my inquiries showed that I was not, after all, her only visitor. She was in the habit of receiving visits from a man who was not a gentleman. Secondly, she had a child, a boy, hidden—somewhere. Thirdly, she had no money, and was gradually pawning her jewelry."

"Poor thing!" muttered Mr. Bliss.

"She had been in the habit of coming over from Canada every year for nine years and putting up at the Talbot. But that is enough. What do you think of it all, Bliss?"

"It is truly dreadful. And what explanation did she give you?"

"None; I asked for none—they would have been futile. Besides, as you can see, it would have been awkward to have admitted that I had had her wanted."

"Yes, still, you know, Halibut, she might be able to give satisfactory explanations for peculiar actions. You might give her a chance without actually letting her know that she had been—ahem!—watched. If I were you—"

"My good fellow," Halibut broke in impatiently, "I don't want explanations. I have done with her. I have been an infatuated idiot, but thank God, that is over."

"You—don't mean that you aren't going to marry the lady?" stammered Bliss.

"That's exactly what I do mean."

"Oh!" murmured Bliss helplessly.

A silence fell between them.

Halibut spoke first. "I am not asking your pity," he said, with

a hard laugh. "I am not suffering in the least from a broken heart. So you need not think of me in—"

"I was thinking of Mrs. Cornish," put in Bliss mildly. "It will be very hard for her."

"Oh, I suppose I'll have to pay her something. Now, Bliss, will you help me to get out of this stupid entanglement?" He looked across at his old friend.

Mr. Bliss shrunk a little in his chair, and his eyes sought the floor. "What do you wish me to do, Halibut?" he asked at last.

"Interview the lady for me," replied Halibut. He ignored his friend's exclamation and went on: "Of course, I don't want any publicity. That's what I am afraid of with a woman of this sort. She'll threaten all kinds of things, and, of course, she has the power to make a case of it. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," said Mr. Bliss feebly. "But are you quite sure she is so bad?"

"Don't get sentimental, Bliss! If you had had as much sentiment as I've had you would know better. However, let's keep to the point. I desire neither publicity nor ruinous expense. And I have been thinking that since she has no hesitation in deceiving me, I would have some justification in practising a little deception upon her."

"Excuse me, Halibut, but have you ever really cared for this lady?" The host's voice was a trifle cold.

Halibut laughed awkwardly. "Possibly not," he said. "There's no fool like a middle-aged fool. To tell you the truth, marriage would not suit me."

"In short, you are rather glad of this excuse for retaining your freedom."

"Come, Bliss, you are getting severe. Apart from everything else, I have been shockingly badly treated. How would you feel in my position?"

"Dreadful! I beg your pardon, Halibut, for seeming to lack sympathy. I do not wonder that you have become somewhat embittered. But would it not be a wiser course to instruct your lawyer to see the lady? I fear that—"

"A lawyer would simply put the fat in the fire. Besides I am anxious to spare the woman's feelings as far as possible. I want to give her an excuse for throwing me over. Do you see?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, suppose you call on the lady, as an old friend of mine; suppose you told her how I was unable to come myself, because I had been completely prostrated by an appalling discovery, to-wit, that while making preparations for the marriage I had learned of the existence of insanity in my family. What then?"

"What a hideous subterfuge, Halibut!" cried Bliss in a shocked voice.

"Can you suggest anything better?"

"And what a mission for me to undertake! Are you really serious?" Mr. Bliss passed his hand over his bald head.

"Of course I am serious. The matter is not one for jesting upon. My dear fellow, I've thought the thing out; I've looked at it every way, and I really cannot see a better solution of the difficulty—for her as well as for myself. Not that she deserves much consideration," he added quickly.

"It is too much—I cannot undertake it," said Bliss dejectedly.

"For the sake of our friendship, Bliss."

"It might put an end to our friendship," was the reply.

"Nonsense, man! Perhaps you think me hard and mean, but as I said before, put yourself in my place."

"Could you tell her simply that you had lost all your money? Then you would prove at once whether or not she was a mere adventress."

"My dear fellow, you are simple," said Halibut, "with the unpleasant laugh that was new to his host, 'the long and short of the matter is this: If you can't, or won't help me, there will be an amusing breach of promise case ending in heavy damages.'"

Bliss had an immediate vision of his friend's name in the newspapers, and it sickened him.

"One question, Halibut," he said, suddenly. "What would you do in the event of the lady's action being satisfactorily explained?"

"Allow her something extra, I suppose," Mr. Bliss winced.

Then he took a fresh cigar from the box, nipped off the end, and lit it. For a couple of minutes he smoked thoughtfully.

When he spoke his voice was quiet and steady.

"I will do what you ask, Halibut."

"Thank you, old man," cried the other, jumping up and holding out his hand. "I might depend upon you."

Bliss shook the extended hand, but rather limply.

"Look here, Halibut," he said, with unusual sternness. "If you have misjudged this poor woman, I—I will never forgive you. Now I am ready to listen to your instructions."

It was late when the men parted, and for the first time in their long friendship Bliss was not sorry to see his friend's back. He felt ashamed of himself, arguing that Halibut's feelings ought to count for everything and the unknown woman's for nothing; yet he could not get rid of the knowledge of having seen his old friend's soul as he could never have dreamed to see it.

At 3 o'clock the following afternoon Mr. Bliss mounted the steps of the Talbot Hotel.

"How could Halibut do it?" he asked himself miserably.

His naturally ruddy countenance was pale, and he looked as if he had been up all night. He went slowly to the office, and ten-

dered his card and inquiry.

"Mrs. Cornish will see you in the small upper drawing room, sir," said the clerk five minutes later, and Mr. Bliss followed a boy up stairs, his mind in a turmoil.

He entered the drawing room, which was empty. It was November, but the beads stood on his brow.

"Mr. Bliss?" said a womanly voice behind him, and he turned with a start.

"Mrs. Cornish?" he murmured, bowing.

"You wished to see me?"

"Yes, madam. I—I bring a message from my friend, Mr. William Halibut. Will you take a seat, madame? Over here, perhaps," he said, indicating a couple of chairs in a recess.

Mrs. Cornish accepted the seat which he placed for her.

"Will you not be seated?" she said. She looked up at Bliss, and he dropped his eyes, but not before hers had thrilled him. In a flash he understood how his friend had become infatuated. The woman was very beautiful.

"Thank you, madam," he returned, seating himself. His tongue failed him.

"You have a message, I think you said, from Mr. Halibut?" she said quietly.

"Yes, madam," stammered Bliss. The business was a thousand times worse than he had imagined it in the long, sleepless night.

"I have been expecting a message from Mr. Halibut," she said gravely. "You're Mr. Halibut's lawyer?"

"No, no, good heavens, madam!" he exclaimed. "I am his oldest friend, and I am charged with a message which—"

"Which is not quite pleasant for me to receive, nor for you to deliver," she spoke calmly.

Her visitor started.

"Will you be good enough to deliver the message?"

"Madam, it pains me deeply," he began.

"I am sure it does, but pray make an effort to proceed. Perhaps, to begin with, you can tell me why Mr. Halibut is not here himself? When last he honored me with his presence he was good enough to appoint this hour for calling upon me." Her voice was cool and level.

Mr. Bliss forced himself to speak.

"Mrs. Cornish—madam—Mr. Halibut is not here because he is prostrated by a—er—a frightful discovery."

"Several discoveries, surely?"

"The discovery concerns himself—his family, madam. While in the midst of preparing for the coming change in his affairs—he discovered a dreadful in-p-p-ediment."

"Dear me! And he gave it to his oldest friend?"

"Madam, for God's sake, do not jest," cried Bliss. "Mr. Halibut discovered that there was insanity in his family, and confined to the male side. His father escaped, but—"

"Do you know, Mr. Bliss," interrupted the lady, sweetly, "that for nearly a week I have strongly suspected this?"

"Madam!" he gasped.

"And so," she continued, "your friend, Mr. Halibut is—not so fortunate as his father was?"

"Madam! William Halibut is as sane as I am. But—"

"A marriage has been arranged, but will not take place on account of the insanity of the gentleman," reflectively murmured Mrs. Cornish. "Yes; I think that announcement, with names of course, would do as well as any for the Morning Post. What do you think, Mr. Bliss? Is that what Mr. Halibut would like?"

Mr. Bliss fairly shuddered. What an adventress the woman was, after all. And yet his middle-aged heart beat with admiration for something—more than her audacity. He was wondering what to say next, when she spoke, her voice a little higher and a little keener than previously.

"Is that all your message from your friend?"

"Not all, madam. He, of course, realizes that you—"

"Want money."

Mr. Bliss went dumb.

"How much does he offer, sir?"

"He—he would rather you made—a suggestion, madam."

"But how much?"

A sickening came over the man's soul. At that moment he hated Halibut.

"How much?" she repeated. "Quick, sir!"

"Two hundred pounds," whispered Bliss. "He—"

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Cornish, with a steely little laugh. "How highly he rates himself, to be sure!"

Her visitor writhed on his chair. He could make nothing of this woman. But how brave—how very brave she was!

"Is that all the message, sir?"

"I do not know, madam, I do not know," he said helplessly, losing his head.

"I fear you are but an indifferent messenger," she remarked, not unkindly, "though you are doubtless a good friend. But I will now give you a message for Mr. Halibut."

"Would you not consider the matter till to-morrow?" he said eagerly.

"I considered it yesterday," she returned, and he fell back in his chair. "My message is short. Kindly say to Mr. Halibut that I am perfectly satisfied that his money should perish with him, as I desire neither."

Into the pallid countenance of Mr. Bliss the blood flew. He rose weakly and stood before her.

"Madam—Mrs. Cornish—forgive me!" he said hoarsely.

"She did not appear to hear him. She seemed to be wholly intent upon her fingers, which were twisting together in her lap. "It is a silly word," she murmured. "It is the stupidity that makes it so cruel. After all," she went on, raising her voice a trifle, "I think I may add to the message I have just given you, sir."

"Madam," he broke in, "I am feeling like a whipped cur. Say you forgive me."

She gave him a brief glance.

"Have I said anything to justify myself?" she asked.

"It was not necessary. As long as I live I shall regret this day."

"Suppose I were proved to be wicked?"

"I should regret it all the more. But that is impossible. Mrs. Cornish, let me speak. I understand two things now. One is that you are alone, and in some great difficulty; the other is that I would give all that I have to be able to help you."

"Ah! You are kind, Mr. Bliss," but you do not know much about women."

"I have known a few—good women. Let me help you."

"Sh, hush, I beg of you! How can you tell that I am trust-

worthy? Listen, please, while I add to my message to Mr. Halibut. I will tell you what I am."

"I will listen; but I know what you are already. One moment, please."

There was a writing table close by, and he pencilled some words on a sheet of paper, placed it in an envelope, and proffered it to her.

"This," said he unsteadily, "is what I think of you now and always. Tell me your story if you will, and afterward open this."

She took the envelope unwillingly, curiously. "What strange ways you have, Mr. Bliss."

"They are strange to myself, Mrs. Cornish."

She glanced at him, wondering. The whole man seemed to have changed since the beginning of the interview; he seemed to have grown stronger, straighter and even younger.

"My story will go into a few words," she began. "My marriage was a runaway one, and my husband's parents have never forgiven me, nor will they ever do so. My husband was of importance; I was a nobody, with one relative in the shape of a not very presentable brother."

"A year after our marriage my husband died suddenly. He had been unable to make any provision for my little boy and myself. My husband's people offered to take my little boy and bring him up—they are very rich—if I would agree to give him up entirely. I refused. They then offered to permit me to see him seven days in the year—not seven days running, lest so much of his mother should be in his mind."

"In desperation, for the boy's sake, I consented. That was ten years ago. I went out to Canada to keep house for my brother, on condition that he would allow me sufficient money to come home once a year for a month. It was on my tenth voyage home that I met Mr. Halibut. I accepted his offer of marriage—why, do you think, Mr. Bliss?"

"Halibut," said Bliss, slowly, "always seemed to me a man that any woman would have been glad to marry. But now I know you were thinking of your little boy. Why did you not tell Halibut?"

"Mrs. Cornish sighed. "I—I put off telling him. I was afraid he—"

"He would change his mind. It was dreadfully wrong of me—it wasn't honest—I was really no better than a common adventress."

Bliss started.

"But Mr. Bliss, I—I wanted my little boy. I had wanted him all these terrible years, and when the chance of regaining him came at last I could not bear to risk anything. I was always waiting for a better opportunity to tell him about my little boy."

"If you had only told Halibut," Bliss began gently.

"No; I am not sorry now," she said firmly. "Mr. Halibut never really cared for me; how could he be expected to care for my little boy?"

"But—"

"Mr. Bliss, it would have been misery to have married such a man. And now for the end of the message."

She gave a short, harsh laugh.

"Please tell Mr. Halibut to employ a better quality of private detective the next time he requires one. The individual who has been watching my movements of late was made of poor stuff. He was no man for my husband's old servant—the only friend I have in London—who gave him a sound thrashing last night on the country road leading from my little boy's present home. The miserable creature confessed everything."

"Then you knew?" gasped Bliss.

"Did I not say to you that I had suspected the existence of insanity in Mr. Halibut's family? I try to be charitable, you know."

Bliss hung his head.

"You might also tell Mr. Halibut that when I arrived in London I had money sufficient for a month. Three months have passed. He knows, of course, through his agent, that I have been disposing of my little bits of jewelry. My late husband's servant, who has always been ready to serve me on my yearly visits, helped me there."

"It was necessary, you understand, for me to live respectably until Mr. Halibut was ready to marry me." She spoke quite calmly.

"Great heavens!" whispered Bliss.

"I shall return Mr. Halibut's presents within an hour. I think that is all, Mr. Bliss."

There was a silence between them. The traffic under the windows seemed unusually loud.

"And—and—your little boy?" said Bliss very softly, leaning forward.

"Ah! my little boy, my little boy."

She fell to playing with her fingers.

Bliss rose and stood behind her chair.

"Madam," he said, gazing down at her. "Won't you open the envelope?" Then he turned away.

She lifted it from her lap and took out the sheet of note paper. On it were written the words:

"Mrs. Ida Cornish—I should be honored if you would marry me—"

"JAMES BLISS."

It seemed a long time ere he found courage to look around. The woman's head was bowed, and her tears were falling on the note.

Bliss went slowly toward her, but halted a little way off.

"Madam," he stammered, "will you forgive me?"

She dried her eyes and looked up with a tremulous smile.

"It is so long since I have cried," she said shakily. "I don't cry even when I part from my little boy."

"Then you are too sad."

"Mr. Bliss," she said quickly. "What a big heart you have! It is surely equal to the combined hearts of all the men I ever met—I thank you for your beautiful pity."

"Pity!" he exclaimed, his face ruddy. "Before ever I saw you it was pity—but now—ah, madam—Mrs. Cornish—I do but trouble you now, but will you permit this lonely old fellow to—to come again—soon? Not for your sake, not even for the little boy's sake—permit him to come again—soon?"

"Oh, no, no, Mr. Bliss, you must never see me again," she cried hiding her face in her hands.

But how tender her voice was!

Mr. Bliss went to the door, and as he opened it he said softly but distinctly:

"Madam, dear madam, I will call to-morrow at three."

And he went out and closed the door as though it were upon something very delicate and very exquisite and very precious.

Palladium Want Ads Pay