

MISCELLANEOUS:

HIS HAPPY NEW YEAR.

When Macy knew that the stenographer, who was to take Evans' place, was a girl, he entered into the first revolt he had ever initiated against his partner's plans.

"It's no place for a girl, Dartley—the work's too important, and technical. She'd probably have to learn a new system to master our mining-phrases, and we'd have to stand a hundred inconveniences, while she was coaching herself. Besides—"

Dartley interrupted him with the reminder that young Evans had taken care of the mining technicalities without special stenographic training—but the argument from Macy's point of view, was puerile. "Boys can pick up those things by instinct. It's their nature. But a girl—" The broken sentence was a sufficient climax to Macy—and his partner knew it would be useless to base his case upon the mere argument of competency. He knew, in fact, that Macy's objection lay in his aversion to feminine society—a foible forced upon his friend's notice by Macy's untactful evasions of the attentions proffered him in a social way during his stay in Chicago—and which had roused the ire—not only of Dartley's wife—who had gone out of her way to lionize the big, handsome but unsocial blonde, who was her husband's friend and business associate—but also the marriageable belles to whom his indifference had given affront.

When the vein was struck that proclaimed the Bluebird a bonanza—and it became necessary for one of the stockholders to be on the spot, Dartley knew that the eagerness with which Macy accepted the chance of burying himself in the little mining town near their claim was due to the opportunity it afforded him to escape from the social obligations which his stay in the city entailed.

Some story of a disastrous love-affair in Macy's remote past was afloat as an explanation of his obstinate repellant of feminine society, but the tale seemed too trite for credence, and Dartley had decided that it was due rather to a sort of natural shyness resulting from his long stay at Cape Colony and in other barbarous regions where he had been vainly seeking the fortune that had come to him at length through the rich strike in an insignificant claim in Montana.

For a year Dartley had tried with philanthropic energy to reform Macy's "retiring disposition," but had finally abandoned his friend as a hopeless case.

Seeing him stubbornly serious in regard to the present question—Dartley was obliged to take him into his confidence as to the story whose claim had induced him to pledge himself to the girl's interests.

It was a story of sensational poverty. The father—thrown out of work by a long illness—and seeing his wife die from the effects of absolute want, after a long, fruitless search for employment—had attempted to relieve the necessities of himself and his child by robbery—an effort which ended in disaster and for which he was now serving a penal sentence in an eastern state penitentiary. The child, left to the tender mercies of voluntary charity, had at her father's insistence, been kept in ignorance of his fate—a story of accidental drowning accounting for his disappearance and silence—the assumed name under which he was tried and convicted aiding the deception by keeping the affair out of people's mouths. The girl, taking

eager hold of an opportunity afforded, had fitted herself to earn an independent livelihood—and it was through the efforts of her friend and patron that Dartley had become interested in her behalf, to the extent of pledging her the position in the Bluebird office that was soon to be vacated by Evans. The influence of a railway friend of Dartley's had secured her a pass from Chicago and she was already on her way to enter upon her duties at the beginning of the month.

This fact, together with the other exigencies of the girl's case, cut the ground from beneath the two feet which Macy had obstinately planted upon his friend's proposition. Dartley knew from the first that he had a court of final appeal against Macy's stubbornness in his friend's acute sensitiveness to human suffering, and the result of his story justified the faith he had placed in its influence.

Macy yielded, however, with a bad grace; which manifested itself in alternating spells of gloomy silence and sullen sarcasm up to the time of the girl's arrival; and his cold reception of that harmless person when she at last arrived, filled Dartley's mind with misgivings, as he considered the girl's future in the view of Macy's belligerent attitude.

Macy had left the dictation of correspondence unreservedly to Dartley, during the latter's stay at the Bluebird, and it was when he went away and the work fell under Macy's reluctant supervision, that the girl's trials began.

A week's experience of Macy's rapid dictation and raspingly authoritative manner reduced her to a condition bordering upon nervous prostration, and the note-taking and transcribing which went smoothly enough before Dartley's departure, began to take on a problematic aspect when Macy's impatient presence was behind her chair. In vain did she sit up far into the night reading books of mining reference to accustom herself to technical terms—and spend portions of her earnings in hiring the landlady's small daughter to read passages in staccato time, in the faith that practice would enable her to solve the problem of her unusual slackness in her work. The pencil that flew to Myella's swift but mild enunciation lagged hopelessly before Macy's impatient tone and eye and the phrases she had mastered, seemed, in the few short hours between night and office time, to have resolved themselves into a dead language when she essayed to read her notes under Macy's critical vision.

"It's funny you should get so thin up here," the landlady said one day, some three weeks after the girl's arrival. "The mountain air fleshes most people up, but it seems to me you look paler than when you come. It must be you work too hard."

"Oh, it isn't the work," said the girl. "I—I guess it's the altitude." She turned away—but not before Mrs. Lane saw the tears that filled the blue eyes, and the pathetic quiver about the small brave mouth.

It all came to a climax one day when Macy was in a particularly aggressive mood. Rumors of an impending strike were about, and it was taking all the diplomacy he possessed to avert, what at this juncture, would mean a disastrous loss to the company should the mine close down.

The absence of any one who might help bear the brunt of the anxiety deepened Macy's sense of grievance as he entered the rear office, and saw the girl's slight figure shrink nervously, as

was evident, at his approach. It would have been a little different, Macy thought, if Evans were there, for he had taken an intelligent interest in the affairs of the company—and could comprehend the amount of anxiety involved in the threatened complications.

The girl's pen rolled across the table, as she sat down near her desk to dictate, and he waited with a frown on his face, while she reached for it, and laid her note-book ready for his dictation.

Anxiety, impatience, a little spleen at Dartley's easy reception of the news he had telegraphed, all made his mood and manner irritable—and presently when he asked her to "read back" for his benefit a sentence upon upon whose careful wording much would depend in regard to the influence it might have upon the miners, her notes refused absolutely to interpret themselves to her nervous scrutiny.

"Didn't you take the sentence?" Macy asked sharply at last.

"Yes, sir. I—I am trying to find it," Macy waited frowningly while she went down the lines of hieroglyphics—as unanswering to her now, as if she had not spent months of daily practice at the short-hand college—and graduated therefrom with a red-taped certificate of her efficiency.

"Have you found it?" asked Macy presently, in ugly tones.

"No, sir."

"Go back to the beginning and read down to it—aloud." The girl obeyed. She read the first few lines—haltingly, by an effort of pure memory—then came to a full stop.

"Well—go on," said Macy, ominously.

The girl's face was pale, and her eyes, fixed unseeing on the lines, and curves and dots, were swimming with tears.

"Can't you read your notes?" thundered Macy.

"I think—if you would let me be by myself a moment," faltered the girl, desparately—"I could—"

"I can't afford to take a holiday while you teach yourself stenography," Macy interrupted. "This letter's important; it has to be gotten off this morning."

He had known beforehand that it was brutal—and had believed it warranted by his grievance; but he had been far from counting upon the outcome of his impatience.

He had just commenced to suggest that she should take the dictation again in long-hand—when it happened.

He had never heard any woman cry before—and the mildest phase of feminine grief would have sufficed to overwhelm him—but the sobs which shook the slight figure leaning on the desk in its absolute abandon of grief did more than embarrass—they frightened him.

It was to the girl a culmination of days of nervous tension and anxious fear—of sleepless nights filled with thoughts of an ominously brooding future in which she should find herself turned adrift, probably with the verdict of "incompetent" to bear as a record for future reference.

Macy in his man's blindness and long-nursed prejudices had sensed nothing of it, till her broken sentences, gasped between heart-drawn sobs—made him realize all.

"I—I'm sorry—I'm so dull—I've tried hard—but it don't seem any good. I see—I can't go on. I guess—I'm too stupid to learn it. I—I'll have to go away."

She broke again into a paroxysm of sobs, whilst Macy looked on helplessly. Go away—why, where would she go? The story Dartley had told him came back to him vividly for the first time since he had heard it. He rose and stood with his hand awkwardly upon her chair-back. "I—you mustn't give way like this, Miss Conroy. It won't do to get discouraged. You'll get along