

Suite Homes And Their Romance

O Henry

FEW young couples in the Big-City-of-Bluff began their married existence with greater promise of happiness than did Mr. and Mrs. Claude Turpin. They felt no especial animosity toward each other; they were comfortably established in a handsome apartment house that had a name and accommodations like those of a sleepingcar; they were living as expensively as the couple on the next floor above who had twice their income; and their marriage had occurred on a wager, a ferryboat and first acquaintance, thus securing a sensational newspaper notice with their names attached to pictures of the Queen of Roumania and M. Santos-Dumont.

Turpin's income was \$200 per month. On pay day, after calculating the amounts due for rent, instalments on furniture and piano, gas, and bills owed to the florist, confectioner, milliner, tailor, wine merchant and cab company, the Turpins would find that they still had \$200 left to spend. How to do this is one of the secrets of metropolitan life.

The domestic life of the Turpins was a beautiful picture to see. But you couldn't gaze upon it as you could at an oleograph of "Don't Wake Grandma," or "Brooklyn by Moonlight."

You had to blink when looked at it; and you heard a fizzing sound just like the machine with a "scope" at the end of it. Yes; there wasn't much repose about the picture of the Turpins' domestic life. It was something like "Spearing Salmon in the Columbia River," or "Japanese Artillery in Action."

Every day was just like another; as the days are in New York. In the morning Turpin would take bromoseltzer, his pocket change from under the clock, his hat, no breakfast and his departure for the office. At noon Mrs. Turpin would get out of bed and humour, put on a kimono, airs, and the water to boil for coffee.

Turpin lunched downtown. He came home at 6 to dress for dinner. They always dined out. They strayed from the chop-house to chop-sueydom, from terrace to table d'hôte, from rathskeller to roadhouse, from café to casino, from Maria's to the Martha Washington. Such is domestic life in the great city. Your vine is the mistletoe; your fig tree bears dates. Your household gods are Mercury and John Howard Payne. For the wedding march you now hear only "Come with the Gypsy Bride." You rarely dine at the same place twice in succession. You tire of the food; and, besides, you want to give them time for the question of that souvenir silver sugar bowl to blow over.

The Turpins were therefore happy. They made many warm and delightful friends, some of whom they remembered the next day. Their home life was an ideal one, according to the rules and regulations of the Book of Bluff.

There came a time when it dawned upon Turpin that his wife was getting away with too much money. If you belong to the near-swell class in the Big City, and your income is \$200 per month, and you find at the end of the month, after looking over the bills for current expenses, that you, yourself, have spent \$150, you very naturally wonder what has become

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of the other \$50. So you suspect your wife. And perhaps you give her a hint that something needs explanation.

"I say, Vivien," said Turpin, one afternoon when they were enjoying in rapt silence the peace and quiet of their cozy apartment, "you've been creating a hiatus big enough for a dog to crawl through in this month's honorarium. You haven't been paying your dressmaker anything on account, have you?"

There was a moment's silence. No sounds could be heard except the breathing of the fox terrier, and the subdued, monotonous sizzling of Vivien's fulvous locks against the insensate curling irons. Claude Turpin, sitting upon a pillow that he had thoughtfully placed upon the convolutions of the apartment sofa, narrowly watched the riante, lovely face of his wife.

"Claudie, dear," said she, touching her finger to her ruby tongue and testing the unresponsive curling irons, "you do me an injustice. Mme. Toinette has not seen a cent of mine since the day you paid your tailor ten dollars on account."

Turpin's suspicions were allayed for the time. But one day soon there came an anonymous letter to him that read:

"Watch your wife. She is blowing in your money secretly. I was a sufferer just as you are. The place is No. 345 Blank Street. A word to the wise, etc.

"A MAN WHO KNOWS"

Turpin took this letter to the captain of police of the precinct that he lived in.

"My precinct is as clean as a hound's tooth," said the captain. "The lid's shut down as close there as it is over the eye of a Williamsburg girl when she's kissed at a party. But if you think there's anything queer at the address, I'll go there with ye."

On the next afternoon at 3, Turpin and the captain crept softly up the stairs of No. 345 Blank Street. A dozen plain-clothes men, dressed in full police uniforms, so as to allay suspicion, waited in the hall below.

At the top of the stairs was a door, which was found to be locked. The captain took a key from his pocket and unlocked it. The two men entered.

They found themselves in a large room, occupied by twenty or twenty-five elegantly clothed ladies. Racing charts hung against the walls, a ticker clicked in one corner; with a telephone receiver to his ear a man was calling out the various positions of the horses in a very exciting race. The occupants of the room looked up at the intruders; but, as if reassured by the sight of the captain's uniform, they reverted their attention to the man at the telephone.

"You see," said the captain to Turpin, "the value of an anonymous letter! No high-minded and self-respecting gentleman should consider one worthy of notice. Is your wife among this assembly, Mr. Turpin?"

"She is not," said Turpin.

"And if she was," continued the captain, "would she be within the reach of the tongue of slander? These ladies constitute a Browning Society. They meet to discuss the meaning of the great poet. The telephone is connected with Boston, whence the parent society transmits frequently its interpretations of the poems. Be ashamed of yer suspicions, Mr. Turpin."

"Go soak your shield," said Turpin. "Vivien knows how to take care of herself in a pool-room. She's not dropping anything on the ponies. There must be something queer going on here."

"Nothing but Browning," said the captain. "Hear that?"

"Thanatopsis by a nose," drawled the man at the telephone.

"That's not Browning; that's Longfellow," said Turpin, who sometimes read books.

"Back to the pasture!" exclaimed the captain. "Longfellow made the pacing-to-wagon record of 7.53 'way back in 1868."

"I believe there's something queer about this joint," repeated Turpin.

"I don't see it," said the captain.

"I know it looks like a pool-room, all right," persisted Turpin, "but that's all a blind. Vivien has been dropping a lot of coin somewhere. I believe there's some underhanded work going on here."

A number of racing sheets were tacked close together, covering a large space on one of the walls. Turpin, suspicious, tore several of them down. A door, previously hidden, was revealed. Turpin placed an ear to the crack and listened intently. He heard the soft hum of many voices, low and guarded laughter, and a sharp, metallic clicking and scraping as if from a multitude of tiny but busy objects.

"My God! It is as I feared!" whispered Turpin to himself. "Summon your men at once!" he called to the captain. "She is in there, I know."

At the blowing of the captain's whistle the uniformed plain-clothes men rushed up the stairs into the poolroom. When they saw the betting paraphernalia distributed around they halted, surprised and puzzled to know why they had been summoned.

But the captain pointed to the lock-ed door and bade them break it down. In a few moments they demolished it with the axes they carried. Into the other room sprang Claude Turpin, with the captain at his heels.

The scene was one that lingered long in Turpin's mind. Nearly a score of women -- women expensively and fashionably clothed, many beautiful and of refined appearance -- had been seated at little marble-topped tables. When the police burst open the door they shrieked and ran here and there like gayly plumed birds that had been disturbed in a tropical grove. Some

became hysterical; one or two fainted; several knelt at the feet of the officers and besought them for mercy on account of their families and social position.

A man who had been seated behind a desk had seized a roll of currency as large as the ankle of a Paradise Roof Gardens chorus girl and jumped out of the window. Half a dozen attendants huddled at one end of the room, breathless from fear.

Upon the tables remained the damning and incontrovertible evidences of the guilt of the habituées of that sinister room -- dish after dish heaped high with ice cream, and surrounded by stacks of empty ones, scraped to the last spoonful.

"Ladies," said the captain to his weeping circle of prisoner "I'll not hold any of yez. Some of yez I recognize as having fine houses and good standing in the community, with hard-working husbands and childer at home. But I'll read ye a bit of a lecture before ye go. In the next room there's a 20-to-1 shot just dropped in under the wire three lengths ahead of the field. Is this the way ye waste your husbands' money instead of helping earn it? Home wid yez! The lid's on the ice-cream freezer in this precinct."

Claude Turpin's wife was among the patrons of the raided room. He led her to their apartment in stem silence. There she wept so remorsefully and besought his forgiveness so pleadingly that he forgot his just anger, and soon he gathered his penitent golden-haired Vivien in his arms and forgave her.

"Darling," she murmured, half sobbingly, as the moonlight drifted through the open window, glorifying her sweet, upturned face, "I know I done wrong. I will never touch ice cream again. I forgot you were not a millionaire. I used to go there every day. But to-day I felt some strange, sad presentiment of evil, and I was not myself. I ate only eleven saucers."

"Say no more," said Claude, gently as he fondly caressed her waving curls.

"And you are sure that you fully forgive me?" asked Vivien, gazing at him entreatingly with dewy eyes of heavenly blue.

"Almost sure, little one," answered Claude, stooping and lightly touching her snowy forehead with his lips. "I'll let you know later on. I've got a month's salary down on Vanilla to win the three-year-old steeplechase to-morrow; and if the ice-cream hunch is to the good you are It again -- see?"

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