A POKE O' MOONSHINE.

How Willis Farsell Secured a Wife and a Fortune.

BY FRANKLIN FILE.

CHAPTER I.

THE OFFICE OF THE CLARION OF LIBERTY.

If the Canada line had been a streak of bright color on the ground, as it is on the maps, the new March snow would have covered it wide and deep. A man and a woman in a sleigh, drawn by a horse whose bells jingled furiously with his rapid gait, were looking for some sign that they had crossed the border. They came to a post upholding a board which was black on the side of their approach, as though there was nothing in that direction worth an inscription; but, when they had passed it and looked back, they saw on its other surface the big word, "Vermont," underneath which was the smaller line, "Liberty for the South." At sight of that the travelers lifted their faces a little above their ample furs, showing that the eager eyes belonged to young persons.

"Now we're in Yankeeland," the man exclaimed, in a congratulatory voice.

"But not yet to the land of Liberty," the woman responded, with a look forward and then back, as though safety lay in front and danger behind.

"G'long!" and a touch of the whip made the horse shake the bells more violently with a plunge into a still faster pace.

The young woman imbedded her nose again in the fur, and only her bright eyes were visible between the mink of collar and cap as she kept a lookout for the village of Liberty. As their sleigh slid into the first street of it, they met a man who was putting his feet down and taking them up so very deliberately that his purpose did not seem to be to go anywhere, but rather to make tracks in the snow with a huge pair of new boots.

"Can you tell me, sir," said the driver, as he pulled up the horse, "where we can find a clergyman?"

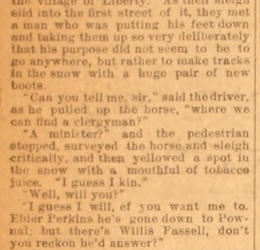
"A minister?" and the pedestrian stopped, surveyed the horse and sleigh critically, and then yellowed a spot in the snow with a mouthful of tobacco juice. "I guess I kin."

"Well, will you?"

"I guess I will, if you want me to. Elder Perkins he's gone down to Pownal; but there's Willis Fassell, don't you reckon he'd answer?"

Whom did you mention?" asked the young woman, exposing one red little ear above the fur, which had prevented her hearing the name.

"Elder Perkins' assistant, ma'am; I



"IS IT YOU?"

guess he's down tew the Clarion office jest now—'er Judge Purry's, and that's the same thing. Drive right straight along, same way you're goin', till ye come tew a winder with 'Law Offis' onto it, and another winder with 'Clarion of Liberty' onto it, and a door between 'em. I guess you'll find Elder Perkins' assistant right in there."

Those directions were successfully obeyed. While the man stayed in the sleigh to hold the reigns of the fractious horse, the young woman got out to make the inquiry. She pushed open the door, and, on confronting the only inmate, impulsively shut it between them and her sleighing companion, as though the two men ought not to see each other.

"Why, Will Fassell! Is it you?" she exclaimed.

"And Grace Willowby! Is it you?" he responsively ejaculated.

She expressed apology and regret along with her astonishment at encountering a former acquaintance, while he was manifestly glad and yet grim on seeing her. He bowed politely, and she quickly regained perfect composure. Then they shook hands and momentarily scrutinized each other. She saw a tall, good-looking fellow of twenty-five, with a neatly trimmed beard, a frock coat buttoned up, and little of the aspect of a rural Vermonter. The woman whom his eyes encompassed had not long ceased to be a girl, for her maturity was still fresh and smooth, and the chill of a wintry March day had seemingly frosted the delicate blonde of her hair and skin, making her look like an exquisite image in bisque.

"We were looking for the clergyman's asso'iate," Miss Willowby said, with a markedly English accent.

"You have found him," was Fassell's steady reply. "I am a licensed preacher, and, on occasion, I act as substitute or assistant for Elder Perkins. What can I do for you?"

"Marry me, please, to the gentleman out there in the sleigh."

Fassell involuntarily grabbed at his heart, as though that organ had omitted a beat, then he drew a hard breath, his windpipe having developed a sudden obstruction. But Miss Willowby was determined not to see any symptoms of his agitation, and, opening the door, she called out:

"Shamus! Shamus! The gentleman is here."

Turning to Fassell, she continued; "Mr. Shamus O'Flarretty is an ex-captain of the British army. I met him in Quebec. We have eloped from over the border, and——"

The entrance of Mr. O'Flarretty introduced a man of military straightness, alert gray eyes and bristling red hair, very thick in a mustache as well as on his head. She explained to him: "Mr. Fassell and I are old friends, Shamus. We knew each other very well, indeed, when he was a student at Yale and I lived at home in New Haven—before I went abroad, you know."

"The lady and I are in a bit av haste to be married," said ex-Captain O'Flarretty, with a touch of Irish brogue in some of his words; "that is to say, me dear sor, circumstances and meself combine to overcome her natural desire for convintional decorum. We must be married at wonce, sor. Can you do it legally?"

"I have no doubt of it," Mr. Fassell dazedly answered. "I am a little of a lawyer—a sort of assistant to ex-Judge Purry—this is his place," and he indicated the half of the room whose window was lettered "Law Office."

That moiety of the premises was railed by itself, and it held a desk, a safe, chairs, bookshelves and other denotements of a lawyer's work.

"As a clerico-legal composite, sor, if you'll permit me to say so," exclaimed Mr. O'Flarretty, explosively, "you're mighty handy in this case. You're doubtless competent as a lawyer to decide whether, as a clergyman, you can legally marry us two."

"Oh, the ceremony would be valid, no doubt," but the emphasis and inflection of the word "valid" indicated, to Miss Willowby's alert apprehension, that the speaker condemned the proceedings upon other than professional grounds.

But O'Flarretty was not keenly perceptive as to any side matter. "We want, sor," he went on, "what I'm minded to call an instantaneous marriage. And, when it's done, we'd like to have it published. The newspaper office——"

"Is this other half the room," Fassell interposed, as prompt and perfunctory as a tourists' guide.

That area was railed off, like its opposite, and its furniture, too, indicated that mind was there turned into matter. A heap of various newspapers here, a bunch of proof slips on a hook there, a batch of manuscript on another hook yonder, and characteristic literature everywhere—these things could belong to nothing else than a country editor's sanctum. Miss Willowby's glance went swiftly from one object to another, and was not puzzled until it rested on a big cake of maple sugar, a squirrelskin cap, and a bunch of home-knitted stockings, which lay in a row on the bit of counter which topped a section of the railing. Then her gaze became fixed on a huge yellow pumpkin, which was held tightly in the arms of a capacious armcha r, and an explanation seemed to be demanded.

"No," said Fassell, "Colonel Burble, editor of the Clarion of Liberty, doesn't deal in country produce—further than to take it for subscriptions when he can't get cash. These things have come in to-day. I received them in the Colonel's absence. I am his associate in the Clarion, you know."

"Really, I didn't know," Miss Willowby responded. "So you are the aid of Elder Perkins in the ministry, of Judge Purry in the law, and of Colonel Burble in journalism? You used to tell me that one professorship at Yale would satisfy your ambition."

"Have you forgotten one other aspiration that——"

"And your versatility is such a convainyance, sor," O'Flarretty vivaciously broke in. "You can marry us on the spot—legally and ecclesiastically—and then—when does the Clarion go to press?"

"This evening."

"And then you can publish the marriage notice for us to mail back to Canada to-morrow. You are, sor, the man for every duty connicted with this affair."

"Except that of bridegroom," sighed the triple friend in need.

"You promise to do this and print it?"

"I do."

O'Flarretty took the hand of Miss Willowby, and they stood beside Fassell, ready to be united in wedlock. The apportionment of confidence and temerity in this bridal party was unusual. The bride was placidly acquiescent, it is true, but the bridegroom had a dominant and leading aspect fit for the officiating clergyman, while the man who stood in that capacity was confused and hesitant.

"Do you, Grace, take this man?" he began, like an expostulation.

"Howid on, sor," O'Flarretty interrupted. "I don't intend to be capracious and I don't wish to encourage delay that might be dangerous; but wouldn't it be in accordance with custom to first ask me, 'Do you, Shamus, take this woman?' Not that it makes, sor, any difference in the wurruld."

By this time it was clear to Miss Willowby that no formula of marriage at all was necessary, and O'Flarretty's look liked by Fassell, who looked as though he would collapse before reaching the end of the briefest possible ceremony having for its climax, "I pronounce you man and wife." It happened also that the delay caused by O'Flarretty's criticism, although momentary, endangered his project, for the door opened before the confused celebrator could start anew, and Silas Furry, ex-County Judge and present counselor-at-law, entered briskly. The group amazed him.

"I was about to marry this l dy," Fassell began.

"You marry the lady!" Mr. Furry exclaimed.

"I was about to marry this lady," and a gurgle of regret broke the sentence again, "to this gentleman. But maybe, Judge, the legal points ought to be first submitted to you. Really, Mr. O'Flarretty, I would advise that course."

"And I agree," said Miss Willowby, thereby making the complexion of the impatient Irishman imitate the hot hue of his hair.

"I don't see, Gr-r-race——" he began.

But Judge Purry, who was a heavily suave and overpoweringly placid man of middle age, conducted the bride presumptive to a chair within his own railing, and seated himself opposite her in his accustomed pose of a judicial listener.

"Pray state your case," he said.

"I will put it into few words," she replied. "I am heiress to property which an eccentric uncle willed to me with the odd proviso that I should marry or my twenty-first birthday—neither sooner nor later. I shall be twenty-one years old at eleven o'clock to-night. The fortune was in twenty big and fine but uncut diamonds, well worth a thousand dollars apiece on the average. Uncle mined them himself in South Africa, and on returning rich to Quebec placed them in a bag for stowage in a safe-deposit vault. Well, the chief executor of the will was my guardian, and he had a son whom he planned to become my husband to-day. My protest was all in vain, but my ingenuity aided and abetted by Captain O'Flarretty's interest——"

"Say Captain O'Flarretty's love, me darling," suggested that gentleman, who was leaning over the rail.

"Aided and abetted by Captain O'Flarretty's love," she obediently began again, "my ingenuity was not in vain. The diamonds were brought to the house early this morning, to be given to me after the wedding, for which all essential preparations had been made except to gain the consent of the br.de. Well, as I said, aided by Captain O'Flarretty's——"

"Interest," prompted Willis Fassell, who had listened to the narrative absorbedly.

"Love," suggested the Captain, like the flare and boom of a bomb.

Without accepting either of the suggested words she went on: "I seized the

"PRAY, STATE YOUR CASE."

bag of diamonds, slipped from the house, joined Captain O'Flarretty, and eloped with him across the border. Now, what I can't make out is the legality of the act."

The fact has already been given that Miss Willowby spoke with a markedly English accent, contracted during a residence of several years in England, and her narrative to Judge Purry had been delivered like a Briton born, clear through to the last 'cahn't."

"I cahn't advise in the breath," said the lawyer. "I beg your pardon, I mean I 'can't,'" and, resolutely escaping from the beauty's spell and pronunciation, he repeated "I can't" with the short, hard "a" of a true and loyal Yankee. Unquestionably the diamonds were not yours when you took them. Just how culpable in law you are for the seizure is a nice point. Besides, there is a minor question as to customs duty, and whether they are not liable to confiscation for being smuggled into the United States. Again, would your marriage here, under all the circumstances, place you in a safe attitude? Too excessively busy to-day as a nominee for the judicial bench, with the election only three days off, but I comprehend the urgency of your case, and will prepare myself to guide you with sound advice in time for you to wed before midnight."

"Meanwhile," said she, "here is the bag of diamonds," and she produced from a pocket deep in the mysterious labyrinth of her skirts a small buckskin bag. "I see you have a safe. Will you lock up the stones while the Captain and I are getting supper?"

Judge Purry took the bag and held it out with one hand, while with the other he put the cord loosely over his wrist, as the sleight-of-hand performer does when seeking to convince his spectators that no trick is to be played at that moment. He unlocked the outer door of the safe, and then an inner box, using one hand only, while the other was outstretched with the treasure. In that circumspect manner he at length deposited the bag in the box, and locked the two doors.

"I don't mean that your bag of diamonds shall become a poke o' moonshine," he said.

"And what is that?" she asked.

"Oh, 'poke' means bag, and there's a fairy legend in this neighborhood of a night chase for a bag of treasure. But when it was found, and looked into, the captor saw only moonshine. That's the tale of the poke 'o moonshine."

CHAPTER II.

THE CLARION OF LIBERTY GOES TO PRESS.

An hour passed, and the office of the Clarion of Liberty was silent and empty, while the allied rear of its mind and body that was alive. One hand was touching its fingers in rotation to the railing, as though the smallest lapse from the exact digital sequence would not only disturb the easy see-saw of the chair, but also be a cruel slight to the omitted finger. But suddenly the quietude of the place was broken. The outer door opened and shut with a bang, inclosing more air in the little entry than it could hold, and so puffing the inner door open, with a clatter of latch and a squeak of hinge. A cyclonic movement of the air was developed, whirling a wreath of snow through the doorway and fluttering every loose bit of paper in the room.

The center of the storm was Colonel Hiram Burble, editor and publisher of the Clarion and an embodiment of commotion. The brim of his soft felt hat was taking to itself a new shape, as though agitated by the motion of the brain which it held. The unbuttoned overcoat was flapping its skirts in a seeming endeavor to empty the pockets of their protruding papers. The plump figure of Mr. Burble became very pantomimic while he was discovering his late associate, and his smoothly shaven face was busy, in all its features, with various expressions of surprise.

"Willis! Willis! Willis!" he exclaimed, speaking the name thrice in the time that almost anybody else could have uttered it only once. "Can it be, Willis—and do I comprehend that you have forgotten this is Thursday? And don't you know, Willis—of course you do—that the two hands of the clock are shaking each other as they pass in their accolade 6 p. m.?"

The Colonel had by this time entered his sanctum and paced rapidly twice around a circle therein, and at each passing had deposited on his desk a handful of memoranda and papers grabbed out of one or another of his pockets.

"Is the last form closed, Willis? No—you're going to say 'No,' when you have leisure to answer. Of course, you know I always come in with the last gust and on the final wave, like an argosy freighted down with a wealth of news. Why, sir, man and beast and the very elements themselves load me with news to burgeon the columns of the Clarion, while those of the impoverished Banner perish in their paucity. The so-called editor of the Banner had passed Squire Dickson's house, which is being painted red, and had made a memorandum which, you may be sure, Willis, will falsely itemize it yellow, when I came along; upon which the painter fell from the ladder and broke his leg."

Here the Colonel plucked a scrap of paper from his vest pocket and consulted the scrawl pencilled thereon.

"His name is Francklyn—with a 'c' and a 'y'—Caulkins—with a 'u,' he continued with unabated velocity; 'Mouth of Moss he caught in the netting of the useless 'y.' Would you believe it, Willis—why shouldn't you, as I tell it, and not the presumed editor of the oblique and sideling Banner—Long Ben Dilworthy's horse ran away an instant in front of me, and five minutes behind that vituperative, profane, and interloper in journalism. His name is —is—is——" and he fumbled in one pocket after another.

"Samuel Ransom," said Fassell, who had been aroused from his lethargy.

"Willis — Willis — Willis," and the editor advanced rapidly, associating with an impetuosity which, had it been unusual, would have made that young man prepare to run or fight, "you are well aware that the name of that creature is unprintable in my paper and unspeakable in my office. I was alluding to the horse, sir, the horse, and, if somewhat libelous, title is 'Chilled Syrup. The Clarion's account shall be headed 'Chilled Syrup Runs in March,' while the nonentity across the way won't have a line."

The Colonel strode across the room to a doorway at the foot of a staircase and called, with a lift in key and volume for each word: "Eb! Eben! Ebenezer! Ebenezer!"

At the first shout a pair of heavy feet had struck the top step, and at the last one a boy reached the bottom with a thud. He was the printer's devil of this establishment, and the ink on his face might have been mistaken for smut from work at purgatorial fires. He wore neither coat nor vest, and whether he would much longer wear trousers depended on the frail resolution of a single suspender.

"Eb," the editor commanded, "tell Johnson we can close up in half an hour. I'll give him just about three stickfuls of copy. Ask him if the Frolic Burlesque Company's ad is in——"

"Yessir; it's in. A hull column with pictes," the boy interposed.

"Pictures anything like those on the fence by the Dorcas Hall?" and by a spreading of his arms and a lifting of one leg Burble clearly indicated a ballet dancer.

"Some on 'em like that, and some on 'em like this," and the boy kicked higher than his pursy employer could hope to.

"Good gracious! H'm—ha! Well, tell Johnson to make up the church notices in the adjoining column. We must preserve a moral balance in this com-

"IT JUSTLY COMMANDS SPACE."

munity, even if we can't stand on the toes of one foot and comb our hair with the other set. Willis, did you make a safe, conservative notice?"

"Oh, yes; one calculated to warn the righteous and advise the wicked."

"And did you write the topical verses, with what the manager called 'local gags,' to be sung in this blithesome and prismatic show?"

Fassell implored silence with a gesture so violent that Colonel Burble obeyed it.

"The doggerel has been written," the editorial associate said, "by a reluctant person, who would not like to be known as its author, I assure you."

"Well, you can ease your conscience—his conscience—by writing, or letting him write, a hymn for Elder Perkins. Genius must be versatile."

"And compose stanzas to the refrain 'That is what a naughty echo said to me.'"

"Say, Kernel Burble," said Eb the devil, "lemme say suthin'. Put them verses inter the Clarion. There ain't no zim in this week's paper."

"Zim? Do you mean vim or zip?"

"I mean anything with er zi-z-z-zip-zi-zz to it. There ain't a crime head, there ain't no mysterious affair, and there ain't nothin' in my arms a length about next season's baseball. But there's too much guff, and a whole handful of it is about old Aunt Hetable Green's big punk."

"Aunt Hetable's pumpkin," and the editor placed one hand on the abnormal growth, which filled a chair, "is a great agricultural achievement, and it justly commands space."

The editor sat down to write his news items, which he did with celerity, while the sub-editor labored much harder at a shorter piece of manuscript. The boy fetched proofs and carried copy until the chief's two paragraphs were in the hands of the typesetters.

"You're writing an obituary, Willis," said Burble, crossing the room and glancing over his aid's shoulder. "I see it in your solemn face. The Clarion has lost a subscriber? Ah! 'A young lady!' One of the good mothers—and of complicated diseases, judging by your obliterations and interlineations."

Fassell covered the page with his hands, as though it was a secret love letter instead of matter for publication.

"Oh, it is a legal document!" Burble continued. "Now, Willis, I don't wish to be exacting, but I do demand my third of you, Thursday is my day clear through, and you shouldn't take a minute of it from journalism to give to the law."

For answer the young man handed the sheet of copy to the editor, who read from it a brief account of the case of Capt. O'Flarretty and Grace Willowby.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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