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Cinderella and other stories

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Cinderella

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CINDERELLA

THE servants of the Hotel Salisbury, which is so called because it is situated on Broadway and conducted on the American plan by a man named Riggs, had agreed upon a date for their annual ball and volunteer concert, and had announced that it would eclipse every other annual ball in the history of the hotel. As the Hotel Salisbury had been only two years in existence, this was not an idle boast, and it had the effect of inducing many people to buy the tickets, which sold at a dollar apiece, and were good for "one gent and a lady," and entitled the bearer to a hat-check without extra charge.

In the flutter of preparation all ranks were temporarily levelled, and social barriers taken down with the mutual consent of those separated by them; the night-clerk so far unbent as to personally request the colored hall-boy Number Eight to play a banjo solo

at the concert, which was to fill in the pauses between the dances, and the chambermaids timidly consulted with the lady telegraph operator and the lady in charge of the telephone, as to whether or not they intended to wear hats.

And so every employee on every floor of the hotel was working individually for the success of the ball, from the engineers in charge of the electric light plant in the cellar, to the night-watchman on the ninth story, and the elevator-boys who belonged to no floor in particular.

Miss Celestine Terrell, who was Mrs. Grahame West in private life, and young Grahame West, who played the part opposite to hers in the Gilbert and Sullivan Opera that was then in the third month of its New York run, were among the honored patrons of the Hotel Salisbury. Miss Terrell, in her utter inability to adjust the American coinage to English standards, and also in the kindness of her heart, had given too generous tips to all of the hotel waiters, and some of this money had passed into the gallery window of the Broadway Theatre, where the hotel waiters had heard her sing

and seen her dance, and had failed to recognize her young husband in the Lord Chancellor's wig and black silk court dress. So they knew that she was a celebrated personage, and they urged the *maître d'hôtel* to invite her to the ball, and then persuade her to take a part in their volunteer concert.

Paul, the head-waiter, or "Pierrot," as Grahame West called him, because it was shorter, as he explained, hovered over the two young English people one night at supper, and served them lavishly with his own hands.

"Miss Terrell," said Paul, nervously, — "I beg pardon, Madam, Mrs. Grahame West, I should say, — I would like to make an invitation to you."

Celestine looked at her husband inquiringly, and bowed her head for Paul to continue.

"The employees of the Salisbury give the annual ball and concert on the sixteenth of December, and the committee have inquired and requested of me, on account of your kindness, to ask you would you be so polite as to sing a little song for us at the night of our ball?"

The head-waiter drew a long breath and straightened himself with a sense of relief at having done his part, whether the Grahame Wests did theirs or not.

As a rule, Miss Terrell did not sing in private, and had only broken this rule twice, when the inducements which led her to do so were forty pounds for each performance, and the fact that her beloved Princess of Wales was to be present. So she hesitated for an instant.

"Why, you are very good," she said, doubtfully. "Will there be any other people there, — any one not an employee, I mean?"

Paul misunderstood her and became a servant again.

"No, I am afraid there will be only the employees, Madam," he said.

"Oh, then, I should be very glad to come," murmured Celestine, sweetly. "But I never sing out of the theatre, so you must n't mind if it is not good."

The head-waiter played a violent tattoo on the back of the chair in his delight, and balanced and bowed.

"Ah, we are very proud and pleased that we can induce Madam to make so great

exceptions," he declared. "The committee will be most happy. We will send a carriage for Madam, and a bouquet for Madam also," he added grandly, as one who was not to be denied the etiquette to which he plainly showed he was used.

"Will we come?" cried Van Bibber, incredulously, as he and Travers sat watching Grahame make up in his dressing-room. "I should say we would come. And you must all take supper with us first, and we will get Letty Chamberlain from the Gaiety Company and Lester to come too, and make them each do a turn."

"And we can dance on the floor ourselves, can't we?" asked Grahame West, "as they do at home Christmas-eve in the servants' hall, when her ladyship dances in the same set with the butler and the men waltz with the cook."

"Well, over here," said Van Bibber, "you'll have to be careful that you're properly presented to the cook first, or she'll appeal to the floor committee and have you thrown out."

"The interesting thing about that ball,"

said Travers, as he and Van Bibber walked home that night, "is the fact that those hotel people are getting a galaxy of stars to amuse them for nothing who wouldn't exhibit themselves at a Fifth Avenue dance for all the money in Wall Street. And the joke of it is going to be that the servants will vastly prefer the banjo solo by hall-boy Number Eight."

Lyric Hall lies just this side of the Forty-second Street station along the line of the Sixth Avenue Elevated road, and you can look into its windows from the passing train. It was after one o'clock when the invited guests and their friends pushed open the storm-doors and were recognized by the anxious committee-men who were taking tickets at the top of the stairs. The committee-men fled in different directions, shouting for Mr. Paul, and Mr. Paul arrived beaming with delight and moisture, and presented a huge bouquet to Mrs. West, and welcomed her friends with hospitable warmth.

Mrs. West and Miss Chamberlain took off their hats and the men gave up their coats, not without misgivings, to a sleepy young

man who said pleasantly, as he dragged them into the coat-room window, "that they would be playing in great luck if they ever saw them again."

"I don't need to give you no checks," he explained; "just ask for the coats with real fur on 'em. Nobody else has any."

There was a balcony overhanging the floor, and the invited guests were escorted to it, and given seats where they could look down upon the dancers below, and the committeemen, in dangling badges with edges of silver fringe, stood behind their chairs and poured out champagne for them lavishly, and tore up the wine-check which the barkeeper brought with it, with princely hospitality.

The entrance of the invited guests created but small interest, and neither the beauty of the two English girls nor Lester's well-known features, which smiled from shop-windows and on every ash-barrel in the New York streets, aroused any particular comment. The employees were much more occupied with the Lancers then in progress, and with the joyful actions of one of their number who was playing blind-man's-buff with himself, and swaying from set to set in

search of his partner, who had given him up as hopeless and retired to the supper-room for crackers and beer.

Some of the ladies wore bonnets, and others wore flowers in their hair, and a half-dozen were in gowns which were obviously intended for dancing and nothing else. But none of them were in *décolleté* gowns. A few wore gloves. They had copied the fashions of their richer sisters with the intuitive taste of the American girl of their class, and they waltzed quite as well as the ladies whose dresses they copied, and many of them were exceedingly pretty. The costumes of the gentlemen varied from the clothes they wore nightly when waiting on the table, to cutaway coats with white satin ties, and the regular blue and brass-buttoned uniform of the hotel.

"I am going to dance," said Van Bibber, "if Mr. Pierrot will present me to one of the ladies."

Paul introduced him to a lady in a white cheese-cloth dress and black walking-shoes, with whom no one else would dance, and the musicians struck up "The Band Played On," and they launched out upon a slippery floor.

Van Bibber was conscious that his friends were applauding him in dumb show from the balcony, and when his partner asked who they were, he repudiated them altogether, and said he could not imagine, but that he guessed from their bad manners they were professional entertainers hired for the evening.

The music stopped abruptly, and as he saw Mrs. West leaving the balcony, he knew that his turn had come, and as she passed him he applauded her vociferously, and as no one else applauded even slightly, she grew very red.

Her friends knew that they formed the audience which she dreaded, and she knew that they were rejoicing in her embarrassment, which the head of the downstairs department, as Mr. Paul described him, increased to an hysterical point by introducing her as "Miss Ellen Terry, the great English actress, who would now oblige with a song."

The man had seen the name of the wonderful English actress on the bill-boards in front of Abbey's Theatre, and he had been told that Miss Terrell was English, and con-

fused the two names. As he passed Van Bibber he drew his waistcoat into shape with a proud shrug of his shoulders, and said, anxiously, "I gave your friend a good introduction, anyway, did n't I?"

"You did, indeed," Van Bibber answered. "You could n't have surprised her more; and it made a great hit with me, too."

No one in the room listened to the singing. The gentlemen had crossed their legs comfortably and were expressing their regret to their partners that so much time was wasted in sandwiching songs between the waltzes, and the ladies were engaged in criticizing Celestine's hair, which she wore in a bun. They thought that it might be English, but it certainly was not their idea of good style.

Celestine was conscious of the fact that her husband and Lester were hanging far over the balcony, holding their hands to their eyes as though they were opera-glasses, and exclaiming with admiration and delight; and when she had finished the first verse, they pretended to think that the song was over, and shouted, "Bravo, encore," and applauded frantically, and then apparently

overcome with confusion at their mistake, sank back entirely from sight.

"I think Miss Terrell's an elegant singer," Van Bibber's partner said to him. "I seen her at the hotel frequently. She has such a pleasant way with her, quite lady-like. She's the only actress I ever saw that has retained her timidity. She acts as though she were shy, don't she?"

Van Bibber, who had spent a month on the Thames the summer before, with the Grahame Wests, surveyed Celestine with sudden interest, as though he had never seen her before until that moment, and agreed that she did look shy, one might almost say frightened to death. Mrs. West rushed through the second verse of the song, bowed breathlessly, and ran down the steps of the stage and back to the refuge of the balcony, while the audience applauded with perfunctory politeness and called clamorously to the musicians to "Let her go!"

"And that is the song," commented Van Bibber, "that gets six encores and three calls every night on Broadway!"

Grahame West affected to be greatly chagrined at his wife's failure to charm the

chambermaids and porters with her little love-song, and when his turn came, he left them with alacrity, assuring them that they would now see the difference, as he would sing a song better suited to their level.

But the song that had charmed London and captured the unprotected coast town of New York, fell on heedless ears; and except the evil ones in the gallery, no one laughed and no one listened, and Lester declared with tears in his eyes that he would not go through such an ordeal for the receipts of an Actors' Fund Benefit.

Van Bibber's partner caught him laughing at Grahame West's vain efforts to amuse, and said, tolerantly, that Mr. West was certainly comical, but that she had a lady friend with her who could recite pieces which were that comic that you 'd die of laughing. She presented her friend to Van Bibber, and he said he hoped that they were going to hear her recite, as laughing must be a pleasant death. But the young lady explained that she had had the misfortune to lose her only brother that summer, and that she had given up everything but dancing in consequence. She said she did not think it looked

right to see a girl in mourning recite comic monologues.

Van Bibber struggled to be sympathetic, and asked what her brother had died of? She told him that "he died of a Thursday," and the conversation came to an embarrassing pause.

Van Bibber's partner had another friend in a gray corduroy waistcoat and tan shoes, who was of Hebraic appearance. He also wore several very fine rings, and officiated with what was certainly religious tolerance at the M. E. Bethel Church. She said he was an elegant or — gan — ist, putting the emphasis on the second syllable, which made Van Bibber think that she was speaking of some religious body to which he belonged. But the organist made his profession clear by explaining that the committee had just invited him to oblige the company with a solo on the piano, but that he had been hitting the champagne so hard that he doubted if he could tell the keys from the pedals, and he added that if they'd excuse him he would go to sleep, which he immediately did with his head on the shoulder of the lady recitationist, who tactfully tried not to notice that he was there.

They were all waltzing again, and as Van Bibber guided his partner for a second time around the room, he noticed a particularly handsome girl in a walking-dress, who was doing some sort of a fancy step with a solemn, grave-faced young man in the hotel livery. They seemed by their manner to know each other very well, and they had apparently practised the step that they were doing often before.

The girl was much taller than the man, and was superior to him in every way. Her movements were freer and less conscious, and she carried her head and shoulders as though she had never bent them above a broom. Her complexion was soft and her hair of the finest, deepest auburn. Among all the girls upon the floor she was the most remarkable, even if her dancing had not immediately distinguished her.

The step which she and her partner were exhibiting was one that probably had been taught her by a professor of dancing at some East Side academy, at the rate of fifty cents per hour, and which she no doubt believed was the latest step danced in the gilded halls of the Few Hundred. In this waltz the two

dancers held each other's hands, and the man swung his partner behind him, and then would turn and take up the step with her where they had dropped it; or they swung around and around each other several times, as people do in fancy skating, and sometimes he spun her so quickly one way that the skirt of her walking-dress was wound as tightly around her legs and ankles as a cord around a top, and then as he swung her in the opposite direction, it unwound again, and wrapped about her from the other side. They varied this when it pleased them with balancings and steps and posturings that were not sufficiently extravagant to bring any comment from the other dancers, but which were so full of grace and feeling for time and rhythm, that Van Bibber continually reversed his partner so that he might not for an instant lose sight of the girl with auburn hair.

"She is a very remarkable dancer," he said at last, apologetically. "Do you know who she is?"

His partner had observed his interest with increasing disapproval, and she smiled triumphantly now at the chance that his question gave her.

"She is the seventh floor chambermaid," she said. "I," she added in a tone which marked the social superiority, "am a checker and marker."

"Really?" said Van Bibber, with a polite accent of proper awe.

He decided that he must see more of this Cinderella of the Hotel Salisbury; and dropping his partner by the side of the lady recitationist, he bowed his thanks and hurried to the gallery for a better view.

When he reached it he found his professional friends hanging over the railing, watching every movement which the girl made with an intense and unaffected interest.

"Have you noticed that girl with red hair?" he asked, as he pulled up a chair beside them.

But they only nodded and kept their eyes fastened on the opening in the crowd through which she had disappeared.

"There she is," Grahame West cried excitedly, as the girl swept out from the mass of dancers into the clear space. "Now you can see what I mean, Celestine," he said. "Where he turns her like that. We could do it in the shadow-dance in the second

act. It's very pretty. She lets go his right hand and then he swings her and balances backward until she takes up the step again, when she faces him. It is very simple and very effective. Is n't it, George?"

Lester nodded and said, "Yes, very. She's a born dancer. You can teach people steps, but you can't teach them to be graceful."

"She reminds me of Sylvia Grey," said Miss Chamberlain. "There's nothing violent about it, or faked, is there? It's just the poetry of motion, without any tricks."

Lester, who was a trick dancer himself, and Grahame West, who was one of the best eccentric dancers in England, assented to this cheerfully.

Van Bibber listened to the comments of the authorities and smiled grimly. The contrast which their lives presented to that of the young girl whom they praised so highly, struck him as being most interesting. Here were two men who had made comic dances a profound and serious study, and the two women who had lifted dancing to the plane of a fine art, all envying and complimenting a girl who was doing for her own pleasure

that which was to them hard work and a livelihood. But while they were going back the next day to be applauded and petted and praised by a friendly public, she was to fly like Cinderella, to take up her sweeping and dusting and the making of beds, and the answering of peremptory summonses from electric buttons.

"A good teacher could make her worth one hundred dollars a week in six lessons," said Lester, dispassionately. "I'd be willing to make her an offer myself, if I had n't too many dancers in the piece already."

"A hundred dollars — that's twenty pounds," said Mrs. Grahame West. "You do pay such prices over here! But I quite agree that she is very graceful; and she is so unconscious, too, is n't she?"

The interest in Cinderella ceased when the waltzing stopped, and the attention of those in the gallery was riveted with equal intensity upon Miss Chamberlain and Travers who had faced each other in a quadrille, Miss Chamberlain having accepted the assistant barkeeper for a partner, while Travers contented himself with a tall, elderly female, who in business hours had entire charge of

the linen department. The barkeeper was a melancholy man with a dyed mustache, and when he asked the English dancer from what hotel she came, and she, thinking he meant at what hotel was she stopping, told him, he said that that was a slow place, and that if she would let him know when she had her night off, he would be pleased to meet her at the Twenty-third station of the Sixth Avenue road on the uptown side, and would take her to the theatre, for which, he explained, he was able to obtain tickets for nothing, as so many men gave him their return checks for drinks.

Miss Chamberlain told him in return, that she just doted on the theatre, and promised to meet him the very next evening. She sent him anonymously instead two seats in the front row for her performance. She had much delight the next night in watching his countenance when, after arriving somewhat late and cross, he recognized the radiant beauty on the stage as the young person with whom he had condescended to dance.

When the quadrille was over she introduced him to Travers, and Travers told him he mixed drinks at the Knickerbocker Club,

and that his greatest work was a Van Bibber cocktail. And when the barkeeper asked for the recipe and promised to "push it along," Travers told him he never made it twice the same, as it depended entirely on his mood.

Mrs. Grahame West and Lester were scandalized at the conduct of these two young people and ordered the party home, and as the dance was growing somewhat noisy and the gentlemen were smoking as they danced, the invited guests made their bows to Mr. Paul and went out into cold, silent streets, followed by the thanks and compliments of seven bare-headed and swaying committee-men.

The next week Lester went on the road with his comic opera company; the Grahame Wests sailed to England, Letty Chamberlain and the other "Gee Gees," as Travers called the Gayety Girls, departed for Chicago, and Travers and Van Bibber were left alone.

The annual ball was a month in the past, when Van Bibber found Travers at breakfast at their club, and dropped into a chair beside him with a sigh of weariness and indecision.

"What's the trouble? Have some breakfast?" said Travers, cheerfully.

"Thank you, no," said Van Bibber, gazing at his friend doubtfully; "I want to ask you what you think of this. Do you remember that girl at that servants' ball?"

"Which girl? — Tall girl with red hair — did fancy dance? Yes — why?"

"Well, I've been thinking about her lately," said Van Bibber, "and what they said of her dancing. It seems to me that if it's as good as they thought it was, the girl ought to be told of it and encouraged. They evidently meant what they said. It was n't as though they were talking about her to her relatives and had to say something pleasant. Lester thought she could make a hundred dollars a week if she had had six lessons. Well, six lessons would n't cost much, not more than ten dollars at the most, and a hundred a week for an original outlay of ten is a good investment."

Travers nodded his head in assent, and whacked an egg viciously with his spoon. "What's your scheme?" he said. "Is your idea to help the lady for her own sake — sort of a philanthropic snap — or as a specu-

lation? We might make it pay as a speculation. You see nobody knows about her except you and me. We might form her into a sort of stock company and teach her to dance, and secure her engagements and then take our commission out of her salary. Is that what you were thinking of doing?"

"No, that was not my idea," said Van Bibber, smiling. "I had n't any plan. I just thought I'd go down to that hotel and tell her that in the opinion of the four people best qualified to know what good dancing is, she is a good dancer, and then leave the rest to her. She must have some friends or relations who would help her to take a start. If it's true that she can make a hit as a dancer, it seems a pity that she should n't know it, does n't it? If she succeeded, she'd make a pot of money, and if she failed she'd be just where she is now."

Travers considered this subject deeply, with knit brows.

"That's so," he said. "I'll tell you what let's do. Let's go see some of the managers of those continuous performance places, and tell them we have a dark horse that the Grahame Wests and Letty Chamberlain

herself and George Lester think is the coming dancer of the age, and ask them to give her a chance. And we'll make some sort of a contract with them. We ought to fix it so that she is to get bigger money the longer they keep her in the bill, have her salary on a rising scale. Come on," he exclaimed, warming to the idea. "Let's go now. What have you got to do?"

"I've got nothing better to do than just that," Van Bibber declared, briskly.

The managers whom they interviewed were interested but non-committal. They agreed that the girl must be a remarkable dancer indeed to warrant such praise from such authorities, but they wanted to see her and judge for themselves, and they asked to be given her address, which the impresarios refused to disclose. But they secured from the managers the names of several men who taught fancy dancing, and who prepared aspirants for the vaudeville stage, and having obtained from them their prices and their opinion as to how long a time would be required to give the finishing touches to a dancer already accomplished in the art, they directed their steps to the Hotel Salisbury.

“‘From the Seventh Story to the Stage,’” said Travers. “She will make very good newspaper paragraphs, won’t she? ‘The New American Dancer, endorsed by Celestine Terrell, Letty Chamberlain, and Cortlandt Van Bibber.’ And we could get her outside engagements to dance at studios and evening parties after her regular performance, couldn’t we?” he continued. “She ought to ask from fifty to a hundred dollars a night. With her regular salary that would average about three hundred and fifty a week. She is probably making three dollars a week now, and eats in the servants’ hall.”

“And then we will send her abroad,” interrupted Van Bibber, taking up the tale, “and she will do the music halls in London. If she plays three halls a night, say one on the Surrey Side, and Islington, and a smart West End hall like the Empire or the Alhambra, at fifteen guineas a turn, that would bring her in five hundred and twenty-five dollars a week. And then she would go to the Folies Bergère in Paris, and finally to Petersburg and Milan, and then come back to dance in the Grand Opera season, under Gus Harris, with a great international

reputation, and hung with flowers and medals and diamond sun-bursts and things."

"Rather," said Travers, shaking his head enthusiastically. "And after that we must invent a new dance for her, with colored lights and mechanical snaps and things, and have it patented; and finally she will get her picture on soda-cracker boxes and cigarette advertisements, and have a race-horse named after her, and give testimonials for nerve tonics and soap. Does fame reach farther than that?"

"I think not," said Van Bibber, "unless they give her name to a new make of bicycle. We must give her a new name, anyway, and rechristen her, whatever her name may be. We'll call her Cinderella — La Cinderella. That sounds fine, does n't it, even if it is rather long for the very largest type."

"It is n't much longer than Carmencita," suggested the other. "And people who have the proud knowledge of knowing her like you and me will call her 'Cinders' for short. And when we read of her dancing before the Czar of All the Russias, and leading the ballet at the Grand Opera House in

Paris, we'll say, 'that is our handiwork,' and we will feel that we have not lived in vain."

"Seventh floor, please," said Van Bibber to the elevator boy.

The elevator boy was a young man of serious demeanor, with a smooth-shaven face and a square, determined jaw. There was something about him which seemed familiar, but Van Bibber could not determine just what it was. The elevator stopped to allow some people to leave it at the second floor, and as the young man shoved the door to again, Van Bibber asked him if he happened to know of a chambermaid with red hair, a tall girl on the seventh floor, a girl who danced very well.

The wire rope of the elevator slipped less rapidly through the hands of the young man who controlled it, and he turned and fixed his eyes with sudden interest on Van Bibber's face, and scrutinized him and his companion with serious consideration.

"Yes, I know her — I know who you mean, anyway," he said. "Why?"

"Why?" echoed Van Bibber, raising his

eyes. "We wish to see her on a matter of business. Can you tell me her name?"

The elevator was running so slowly now that its movement upward was barely perceptible.

"Her name's Annie — Annie Crehan. Excuse me," said the young man, doubtfully, "ain't you the young fellows who came to our ball with that English lady, the one that sung?"

"Yes," Van Bibber assented, pleasantly. "We were there. That's where I've seen you before. You were there too, weren't you?"

"Me and Annie was dancing together most all the evening. I seen all youse watching her."

"Of course," exclaimed Van Bibber. "I remember you now. Oh, then you must know her quite well. Maybe you can help us. We want to put her on the stage."

The elevator came to a stop with an abrupt jerk, and the young man shoved his hands behind him, and leaned back against one of the mirrors in its side.

"On the stage," he repeated. "Why?"

Van Bibber smiled and shrugged his shoul-

ders in some embarrassment at this peremptory challenge. But there was nothing in the young man's tone or manner that could give offence. He seemed much in earnest, and spoke as though they must understand that he had some right to question.

"Why? Because of her dancing. She is a very remarkable dancer. All of those actors with us that night said so. You must know that yourself better than any one else, since you can dance with her. She could make quite a fortune as a dancer, and we have persuaded several managers to promise to give her a trial. And if she needs money to pay for lessons, or to buy the proper dresses and slippers and things, we are willing to give it to her, or to lend it to her, if she would like that better."

"Why?" repeated the young man, immovably. His manner was not encouraging.

"Why — what?" interrupted Travers, with growing impatience.

"Why are you willing to give her money? You don't know her."

Van Bibber looked at Travers, and Travers smiled in some annoyance. The electric bell rang violently from different floors, but

the young man did not heed it. He had halted the elevator between two landings, and he now seated himself on the velvet cushions and crossed one leg over the other, as though for a protracted debate. Travers gazed about him in humorous apprehension, as though alarmed at the position in which he found himself, hung as it were between the earth and sky.

"I swear I am an unarmed man," he said, in a whisper.

"Our intentions are well meant, I assure you," said Van Bibber, with an amused smile. "The girl is working ten hours a day for very little money, isn't she? You know she is, when she could make a great deal of money by working half as hard. We have some influence with theatrical people, and we meant merely to put her in the way of bettering her position, and to give her the chance to do something which she can do better than many others, while almost any one, I take it, can sweep and make beds. If she were properly managed, she could become a great dancer, and delight thousands of people — add to the gayety of nations, as it were. She's hardly doing that now, is she?"

Have you any objections to that? What right have you to make objections, anyway?"

The young man regarded the two young gentlemen before him with a dogged countenance, but there was now in his eyes a look of helplessness and of great disquietude.

"We're engaged to be married, Annie and me," he said. "That's it."

"Oh," exclaimed Van Bibber, "I beg your pardon. That's different. Well, in that case, you can help us very much, if you wish. We leave it entirely with you!"

"I don't want that you should leave it with me," said the young man, harshly. "I don't want to have nothing to do with it. Annie can speak for herself. I knew it was coming to this," he said, leaning forward and clasping his hands together, "or something like this. I've never felt dead sure of Annie, never once. I always knew something would happen."

"Why, nothing has happened," said Van Bibber, soothingly. "You would both benefit by it. We would be as willing to help two as one. You would both be better off."

The young man raised his head and stared at Van Bibber reprovingly.

“You know better than that,” he said. “You know what I’d look like. Of course she could make money as a dancer, I’ve known that for some time, but she has n’t thought of it yet, and she’d never have thought of it herself. But the question is n’t me or what I want. It’s Annie. Is she going to be happier or not, that’s the question. And I’m telling you that she could n’t be any happier than she is now. I know that, too. We’re just as contented as two folks ever was. We’ve been saving for three months, and buying furniture from the instalment people, and next month we were going to move into a flat on Seventh Avenue, quite handy to the hotel. If she goes onto the stage could she be any happier? And if you’re honest in saying you’re thinking of the two of us—I ask you where would I come in? I’ll be pulling this wire rope and she’ll be all over the country, and her friends won’t be my friends and her ways won’t be my ways. She’ll get out of reach of me in a week, and I won’t be in it. I’m not the sort to go loafing round while my wife supports me, carrying her satchel for her. And there’s nothing I can do but just

this. She 'd come back here some day and live in the front floor suite, and I 'd pull her up and down in this elevator. That 's what will happen. Here 's what you two gentlemen are doing." The young man leaned forward eagerly. "You 're offering a change to two people that are as well off now as they ever hope to be, and they 're contented. We don't know nothin' better. Now, are you dead sure that you 're giving us something better than what we 've got? You can't make me any happier than I am, and as far as Annie knows, up to now, she could n't be better fixed, and no one could care for her more.

"My God! gentlemen," he cried, desperately, "think! She 's all I 've got. There 's lots of dancers, but she 's not a dancer to me, she 's just Annie. I don't want her to delight the gayety of nations. I want her for myself. Maybe I 'm selfish, but I can't help that. She 's mine, and you 're trying to take her away from me. Suppose she was your girl, and some one was sneaking her away from you. You 'd try to stop it, would n't you, if she was all you had?" He stopped breathlessly and stared alternately from one

to the other of the young men before him. Their countenances showed an expression of well-bred concern.

"It's for you to judge," he went on, helplessly; "if you want to take the responsibility, well and good, that's for you to say. I'm not stopping you, but she's all I've got."

The young man stopped, and there was a pause while he eyed them eagerly. The elevator bell rang out again with vicious indignation.

Travers struck at the toe of his boot with his stick and straightened his shoulders.

"I think you're extremely selfish, if you ask me," he said.

The young man stood up quickly and took his elevator rope in both hands. "All right," he said, quietly, "that settles it. I'll take you up to Annie now, and you can arrange it with her. I'm not standing in her way."

"Hold on," protested Van Bibber and Travers in a breath. "Don't be in such a hurry," growled Travers.

The young man stood immovable, with his hands on the wire and looking down on them, his face full of doubt and distress.

"I don't want to stand in Annie's way," he repeated, as though to himself. "I'll do whatever you say. I'll take you to the seventh floor or I'll drop you to the street. It's up to you, gentlemen," he added, helplessly, and turning his back to them threw his arm against the wall of the elevator and buried his face upon it.

There was an embarrassing pause, during which Van Bibber scowled at himself in the mirror opposite as though to ask it what a man who looked like that should do under such trying circumstances.

He turned at last and stared at Travers. "'Where ignorance is bliss, it's folly to be wise,'" he whispered, keeping his face toward his friend. "What do you say? Personally I don't see myself in the part of Providence. It's the case of the poor man and his one ewe lamb, isn't it?"

"We don't want his ewe lamb, do we?" growled Travers. "It's a case of the dog in a manger, I say. I thought we were going to be fairy godfathers to 'La Cinderella.'"

"The lady seems to be supplied with a most determined godfather as it is," returned Van Bibber.

The elevator boy raised his face and stared at them with haggard eyes.

“Well?” he begged.

Van Bibber smiled upon him reassuringly, with a look partly of respect and partly of pity.

“You can drop us to the street,” he said.