

CUPID'S LAST ARROW

BY HOUGHTON HUGHES

ST. JOHN'S HOME FOR THE AGED sits in placid contentment in the center of a whole city square. Dinner was just over, and the stooped, white-haired old gentlemen and the sweet little old ladies were hurrying out in friendly rivalry to secure their favorite chairs on the veranda. Miss Jane Dobson, who had seen seventy summers, came out leaning on the arm of Gregory Wallace, who had seen three more than she.

Andrew Blair, from a corner of the porch, watched the pair talking confidentially together.

"Jane!" he cried at last, in a petulant voice. "I'm keeping your chair for ye!"

She turned at the sound of his voice, and hastened to him.

"Why, I didn't see you, Andrew," she fluttered. "I didn't think you had come out yet."

"No, you didn't see me; but—but I seen you, didn't I?" he said querulously, stealing a glance at Gregory. "Now, didn't I, eh?"

"Well," she answered mildly, "you're not provoked, are you, Andrew?"

"Oh, no, no, no! Not provoked, Jane. Takes more than that to make me mad—now that I'm gettin' pretty well on in years."

He thumped down the steps with his cane and, bending over slowly, culled a little bouquet of pansies from the flower-bed on the lawn. She rocked her chair back and forth nervously, as he made his way up the stoop and presented it to her. The whole veranda watched the affair with amusement.

When the last century was in mid course Andrew Blair was in his prime. He never missed a dance at Nicholl's or the Astor House, and none was lustier than he at passes with glasses and lasses. He cast his first vote for Polk, and the

Civil War found him a spry young fellow of forty. When he grew reminiscent at times, sitting in the sun, all these things would come back to him; but he always brushed them away and roused himself. "Andrew Blair is still alive," he would murmur. Then he would turn for somebody to talk to about flying-machines.

For several years Andrew had found more satisfaction in conversing with Jane Dobson than with anybody else; and she, he believed, found just as much pleasure in talking to him, for whenever old Gregory Wallace engaged her in conversation, as he often did, he was never able to keep her away from Andrew for very long.

They give little thought to the things that happen daily at the home—the happenings of long ago are the cherished ones—so that if you should ask how Andrew Blair first became drawn to Jane Dobson, probably nobody could tell you how or when. The truth of the matter was that the pair had fallen in love as deeply as any young couple on a May morning.

She stood up to let him move her chair into the sunshine.

"Is that the coat I mended for you, Andrew?" she said, fingering his alpaca house-coat as she fastened a pansy in his buttonhole with fingers that trembled a little.

"Yes, Jane. You sewed up this seam the time I ripped it. D'ye remember? It wasn't so long ago—only 'bout six or seven years."

"It seems like yesterday," she whispered ingenuously.

"I did all my mendin' myself till you volunteered to sew that coat for me."

"Poor boy!"

They watched the porter watering the flower-bed.

"I've never kept anything back from

you, Jennie," said he, swinging his chair around suddenly to face hers. "So I feel bound to tell you 'bout that coat. I—I ripped it myself *on purpose*! What do you think of that?"

"Andrew!" she exclaimed artfully, starting back an inch.

"Yes, I did! An' I tore them trousers *on purpose*; an' I pulled eight buttons off *on purpose*! Gregory made up the idea out of his head. He pulled his'n off for Daisy Watkins to sew." Andrew laughed immoderately in a high, wavering key, shaking his long, white locks. "He-ee-ee! Gregory had to sew 'em all on again himself. He got soured then, and threatened to tell all 'bout it. I dared him to do it! I'd 'a' thrashed him—that I would! But, anyway, I thought I'd tell ye 'bout it myself, an' steal his thunder."

His hand sought hers under her knitting-work, and she forgave him with a tender little squeeze, while he told her again, for the hundredth time, that he could not understand why she had never married. Gregory Wallace, watching them from a distance, unable to stand it any longer, nodded curtly to old Captain Williams, and stalked majestically into the reading-room.

As evening came on, the old couples sauntered down the paths to several benches, placed round the flower-beds and screened from the street by hedges, where they sat till the retiring-bell sounded at nine o'clock. Andrew and Jane had done this so often that Gregory, exiled to loneliness all evening on the porch, used to wonder what they found to talk about.

When they returned to-night, however, it was evident that something unusual was in the air. Coming up the walk, Andrew gesticulated wildly, and pounded in his words with his cane, while Jane clung to his arm more closely than ever, and regarded every one on the veranda with feverish, excited eyes. Andrew Blair and Jane Dobson had determined to get married! With a remnant of his old enthusiasm he was defying anybody to say them nay.

In the hall at the foot of the stairs he kissed her good night in front of Gregory, who gave a little snort of indignation. Miss Isabelle Null, looking down

upon them from the floor above, checked a scream with difficulty, and straightway resolved to stop the scandal.

II

DR. TISDALL, the superintendent of St. John's, was no youngster himself. He was a little too prim to be popular with the inmates; they thought him old-fashioned in his ideas, and said so in his hearing, with the privileged bluntness of old age.

He sat in his sunny office the next afternoon, writing at his desk with quick, impatient movements. The clump of Andrew Blair's stick sounded on the parquet flooring outside, and a moment later Andrew and Jane stood before the desk.

"Good morning, Dr. Tisdall," began Andrew ponderously.

"Good morning," he replied icily.

"Dr. Tisdall, Miss Dobson"—indicating Jane with a stately bow—"and myself have come to secure your consent to our gettin' married, in order—"

"Getting married! Why, bless me, Andrew Blair, are you out of your head?" cried the superintendent, starting to his feet.

"Not as I know of, Dr. Tisdall. I'm sound o' mind an' body," replied Andrew, fingering his cane. Jane took a firmer clasp of his arm.

"Why, it's perfectly absurd! You two old people! Why, I never heard of such a thing! Marriage at your age!"

Dr. Tisdall played nervously with the cover of his ink-well, and shot angry glances from one to the other. He had never been confronted with such a situation before. Andrew Blair's choler was slowly rising.

"As to age, doctor, be that as it may. We've talked this over, Jane and I, and if there's any good reason to prevent us from being united in the marriage-tie, I want to know it." He glared balefully at the little superintendent, and thumped his cane.

"Why, for a man of your years—But see here, see here! It's in the by-laws!" He tapped a call-bell. "Michael, bring me that green book on the directors' table. I'm positive the by-laws forbid it! Now, see here! Here it is. Section sixty-six, article two: 'Any

inmate, male or female, entering into the marriage state after admission to this home, forfeits immediately all rights and privileges as a member thereof, and must leave.' There you are!" The superintendent closed the book with a conclusive bang, and took off his spectacles carefully. "But apart from that, a man of your years ought—"

"Now, that's enough!" cried Andrew, starting forward and bringing his cane down smartly across the desk. "You've said enough 'bout years an' age. A body would think you was talking to an old granny."

"Andrew Blair, think of your position here! I want you to leave this office. I am not accustomed—"

Andrew dismissed Jane from the scene with a gesture.

"All right," he said shortly, in low, quavering tones. "There's nothin' more to talk about. I got up when the bell rang, an' I lay down when the bell rang, an' for years I did this an' that when the bell rang; but in this matter I'm a goin' to follow my own lights." His voice faltered, and broke pathetically. "If I can't obey the c'mands of my conscience here, I'll go."

An expostulation was on the superintendent's lips, but Andrew turned abruptly and went out. He took down his hat from the stand, and they heard the door slam behind him. Jane, with awe-struck eyes, watched him from a corner of the porch as he stalked down the path.

Over the face of Gregory Wallace, eavesdropping at the door, a slow smile of exultation spread as the full significance of what he had just heard dawned upon him. The bang of the gate behind Andrew Blair lifted a load from his heart. His one rival was gone! He quietly stepped out on the veranda to observe Jane. Even as he looked she turned with quivering lips and went upstairs to her room, passing by Isabelle Null without a word.

Gregory was quite the last one to have you imagine that any sentiment lurked within him, but as he stood there an unbidden moisture came all of a sudden into his eyes. Thoughts ran through his head with unaccustomed swiftness. The form of Michael, the porter, filling the

water-cooler at that instant, was the one needed incentive to action.

"Here! Go after him, Michael!" he shouted, hurrying over as quickly as his rheumatics would permit. "Go after him at once, sir! D'ye hear? Bring him back here!"

He fumbled in his inside coat-pocket. There was a folded two-dollar bill in it that he had been saving for months. He drew it out slowly, and then suddenly thrust it, without looking, into the porter's hand.

"I'll fetch him back, sir," said Michael, starting off.

"Bring him back safe! D'ye hear? And let nothing happen to him, or I'll—I'll— Go on, man! Go on!"

III

STRAIGHT down Park Place old Andrew stalked, shaking his cane so violently and mumbling in so outrageous a manner that passers-by turned to regard him curiously. He looked neither to right nor left, but hurried on. Soon he came into a more thickly populated section of the city, where people stared at his white locks and his blue suit. Rude children cried out after him, but he had no ear for them. He was all in a flutter; he never recalled being so excited in his life.

"The idea of it! By-laws!" he said a hundred times. "The old blackguard—he slandered me! One would think I was feeble, senile, incapacitated!"

Three times he stumbled into strangers, and once he was nearly thrown by a child's go-cart. A man behind helped him up, restored his cane, and then took his arm; but he shook the good Samaritan off with an angry snarl and hurried on. The old legs that had followed Sherman soon began to tire, however, and he was forced to sit on a door-step and rest. He nodded there for a while till the recurring memory of the quarrel drove him onward. He raised his cane threateningly whenever anybody ventured to approach him; but little by little his bravado and choler oozed out, and left behind a chilling sensation of helplessness.

He must have been walking for nearly three hours when he came to a wide, crowded thoroughfare, whose noise and

action quite bewildered him. On the curb he stood nonplused for a moment, and then stepped out into the swift-moving current of traffic.

An automobile, turning the corner suddenly, skidded on the wet asphalt and struck him a glancing blow, throwing him stunned to the street. Then Michael, more frightened than he, ran up, lifted him to his feet, and brushed the mud from his clothes excitedly. All afternoon the porter had followed him like a faithful hound, fearing to approach, for his first entreaties had been spurned with contempt.

Michael did not know just how to get him to go back; but, with a fine touch of the sympathy that makes us all kin, he said:

"Your lady is waitin' for youse on the stoop."

"You refer to Miss Dobson, I presume?" said Andrew stiffly.

"Yissor."

"Then, in that case, I will—will accompany you." A little later: "I am going to lean upon your arm, Michael. I am not used to so much walking."

Andrew said hardly anything else on the way back to St. John's, but walked like a man in a maze. It was dark when they got there, and nobody was on the veranda but Jane, though a shadow lurking behind the giant lilac-bush might have been Gregory. Jane knew it was Andrew as soon as she heard the gate click, and she peered down the path.

"I've been waiting for you this long time, Andrew," said she, taking her wraps from the chair she had saved for him. "Where on earth have you been?"

After dinner he sat down by her side, and gave a long-drawn sigh, like a traveler home from a world-end journey. The haziness of fourscore years was in his dull eye, and his mind was a void into which the day's events were slowly drifting back one by one.

"We'll wait, Jane; we'll wait," he said resignedly. "Tisdall's term will be up in three years more, an' I'll use my influence with the board of managers against his being reelected. We'll have another man in, and then we'll see what we can do about that by-law." The bell chimed for the hour of retiring, and he helped her up from her chair with the gallantry of long ago. "Meanwhile, Jane, we'll consider ourselves engaged. It didn't say anything in the by-law about engagements, did it?"

When he got up-stairs to his room he turned up the gas and stood for a while smiling childishly at the peaked, white-fringed face looking out at him from the mirror. He straightened his tie, smoothed down a refractory white lock, and hummed in a cracked voice:

All the belles,
Round in dells,
Cannot help but admire;
And I know
I'm the beau
Whom the maidens desire!

GATHERED ROSES

As one through some beloved garden strays
For the last time, and, lingering, stays to break
A blossom here and there for old joy's sake,
So I go back through our lost yesterdays
And cull my fragrant memories—your praise
And pride of me, the songs we used to make,
The happy name you gave me. Oh, I take
So little ere I face the untried ways!
How will it be, dear, when I look on these
My gathered roses in the years to be?
Shall I behold love's garden all ablow
As once we knew it, or, as one who sees
That place he loved deserted, utterly
Given to emptiness and wind and snow?

Theodosia Garrison

DESMOND O'CONNOR*

A ROMANCE OF THE IRISH BRIGADE

BY GEORGE H. JESSOP

AUTHOR OF "SAM'L OF POSEN," "GERALD FRENCH'S FRIENDS,"
"JUDGE LYNCH," ETC.

XXVIII (*continued*)

WITHOUT further preliminaries, without seconds, without witnesses, the French captain and the Irish colonel crossed swords for the first time.

O'Connor possessed no mean skill with his weapon, but he quickly realized that he had met his master. Gaston de Brissac's reputation was that of the finest swordsman in King Louis's army, and he had fought duels innumerable. At first he was half blinded with rage, and attacked fiercely—so fiercely that the Irishman, though he had the advantage of position, standing with his back to the light, while it shone full on his antagonist, could scarcely parry the captain's lightning thrusts.

Every trick of the fencing-school was at Gaston's command. Though he seemed to lay himself open a dozen times a minute, his opponent never succeeded in passing his guard, and the brief rally ended by Desmond receiving a slight wound in the hand from a thrust that forced his sword from his grasp. But the Irishman was ambidextrous. Quick as a cat he sprang backward, recovering his weapon with his left hand ere it touched the ground, and faced his antagonist again, left shoulder forward.

De Brissac lunged as his adversary's sword fell, but O'Connor's quick leap saved him. Gaston, however, seized the opportunity to get between him and the window, thereby securing the advantage of the light, and the duel was resumed on more unequal terms than ever.

O'Connor was by this time well aware that he had no chance in a regular fencing-bout. His only hope lay in attacking strongly and persistently, risking such wounds as he might receive. De Brissac was somewhat disconcerted by the left-handed play, and contented himself with parrying the thrusts aimed at him until he should become accustomed to the new conditions. He gave back step by step before the Irishman's rushes, which, he foresaw, must soon waste the colonel's strength.

To a spectator, had one been present, it might have seemed that Desmond held the advantage in the second phase of the duel, but Gaston knew better. He had mastered his first rage, and now fought coolly and warily, biding his time.

O'Connor felt that his strength was going. The thought of Margaret—of Margaret without him to guard her, of Margaret at the mercy of this assassin—maddened him. Concentrating all his energy on a last desperate effort, he closed on his enemy, trying to get to half-sword's length.

True to his policy, Gaston yielded a step; but he had not allowed sufficiently for his constant backward movement. His heel caught on the window-ledge behind him, and he staggered back, falling with his full weight on the rotten railings of the balcony. There was a crash of splintering woodwork, a wild, despairing shriek, and the Frenchman's lifeless form, shockingly mangled, lay on the stones of the courtyard sixty feet below.

Desmond could scarce realize his vic-

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