

Jack's feeble voice broke the long silence.

'I thought you would never come again,' he said.

Father Austin's expression showed that he did not understand.

'After my speech, Phil, when I—I lied about you.'

The flushed forehead showed how the priest had once felt; but now he pressed the hand that lay in his, and said: 'I forgot that long ago.'

The dying man spoke again, but rather to himself than to his companion. 'And now you are the only one who cares. Why did you not forget me altogether?'

Without answering, Father Austin took a little photograph from his pocket-book and held it before him. It was Jack himself—Jack as he looked in that bright early period of his dark life. He thought how, if he had been Phil, he would have torn it and cast it away.

But Father Austin was speaking again.

'We alone remain of our old class. Father Winston died last year. Do you remember them, Jack?'

'Every one,' was the reply, for the photograph had brought back the old days and the old faces.

'How we used to pray at Our Lady's altar before a holiday!' Phil said.

A sad smile passed over Grey's face at the recollection.

'Yes, for good weather for our cricket!' he replied, and his thin voice trembled as the boy's devotion to the Mother of God rose before his mind.

But the thought which Father Austin wished to inspire had come, for Grey turned to him with the words: 'If I had always prayed like that, Phil—'

'Jack, I have prayed for you every day.'

The wistful eyes gleamed with love for the faithful friend. 'You would have brought me to heaven if man could, but it is too late.'

'Not too late for God's mercy,' said the priest.

The stream of hope that these blessed words ever bring was in the way, but it had first to conquer the bed-rock of his pride.

'But to turn again, after all that has passed; does it not seem the act of a coward?'

'No, Jack; it would be the act of a trustful child.'

There was silence for some minutes. Jack Grey lay with eyes closed. Hope had gathered its strength, and was beating upon the only weak spot, perhaps, in his fatal pride. Then he opened his eyes again, but this time they showed that hope had broken down the barrier and was flowing over his soul in glad ripples. He bent his head and tried to pray, then turning to the priest, he said humbly: 'Then help me to become a child again.'

The victory was won.—*The Patrician*.

## MR. RIBBLE'S LUCK

Mrs. Ribble was brushing her husband's hat in the room which, except for an additional cupboard where the two slept, was their whole house.

Ever since he had lost his scholarship at the age of thirty-five, owing to the arrival of a head master with row views and a belief in the younger men, he had been unsuccessful.

He had taken to commercial travelling.

'I wish it were any other kind of work,' he said, bitterly. 'Not because it makes me lose my self-esteem. I'm past that. But people don't seem to want fire extinguishers. And there are the girls.'

'They're very well,' said Mrs. Ribble, cheerfully.

'And you're getting so thin,' he said, pausing on the threshold.

'Not a bit of it,' said Mrs. Ribble, and she spoke stoutly enough.

But when Augustus had vanished down the steep stairs, with his black bag in his hand, she wept a little from sheer weakness.

'It does seem hopeless,' she whispered to herself, and sat down to paint away delicately at the fans by which she made a few pence now and then to supplement Mr. Ribble's diminutive income.

It may have been the fortitude of despair that took hold of Mr. Ribble as he tramped westward, but it certainly seemed to him that morning that he had never felt more resolute and composed.

A square of handsome houses, in an old-fashioned, but elegant, style of architecture that Mr. Ribble knew from experience to indicate wealthy occupants, distracted his attention from his reckoning, and he eyed them with the eye of a business man.

Some kind of luck was certainly with him, for, in spite of the bitter cold of the weather, which varied between wind and sleet, the door was opened in less than a minute in answer to his ring of the bell.

'Er—er'—Mr. Ribble pulled himself together smartly—'may I see the lady of the house for a moment?'

'Is it important?' asked the maid.

'Very,' said Mr. Ribble.

'If you will step this way, please, I'll ask the mistress if she will see you.'

He employed his time in unpacking the contents of his black bag.

'Good morning. I am afraid that my father is too busy to see any one. Can I—? Oh!'

A radiant lady, young, with a scarlet dress that was the very color to keep cold away, had flashed into the room, suddenly encountering the row of Jubkin's infallible fire extinguisher (in flasks) that Mr. Ribble had heaped upon the floor.

'Oh,' she said, 'have you—dropped them?'

Confusion took hold of Mr. Ribble by the throat.

'Ma-madam—I—they—apologise. Being anxious to—er—dispose—'

'What are they?' the girl asked, curiously.

'Fire extinguishers,' said Mr. Ribble. 'Would it be possible to sell you any? They are useful.'

'I expect they are,' said the girl, kindly; 'but, as you see, we have another kind already.'

'I see. I'm very sorry for intruding. I—' Mr. Ribble back to the door.

Something in Mr. Ribble's broken pleadings must have given the girl a glimpse of his desperate anxiety, for she smiled again, and said this time:

'Well, I know that my father is always a little anxious about his library, and if your flasks really do extinguish—'

'Permit me to show you,' Mr. Ribble held out a sample flask in trembling hand.

'If you would be kind enough to break it over a fire?'

'Like this?'

She had taken the flask and had bent over the grate. Next moment, and before the flask had been shattered, a tongue of flame from the log fire had leaped up unaccountably and set her dress in a flame.

She started back with a little cry of dismay, and Ribble, to his own astonishment, heard himself saying in a calm and rather stern voice:

'Stand still, please. It will be out in a minute.'

And he poured the contents of a flask on the dress.

To his horror the flame shot up through the inflammable material of the dress more as if oil than anything else had been poured upon it.

Jubkin's infallible fire extinguisher had failed, and Mr. Ribble's heart beat on his ribs. Never had he supposed that he was travelling for a deceiver and trying to sell a fraud.

And as the girl almost wrested herself from Mr. Ribble's grasp, shrieking with fear, he collected himself. Another moment, and he had wrapped one of the rugs about her and was stifling the flame.

'Thank you.'

A rather suffocating voice came out of the rug in heartfelt gratitude.

'I hope you are not greatly hurt,' he stammered. 'I should never forgive myself. I never knew—'

'You saved me,' she said, and just then the door opened, and a tall, grey-headed old man entered in a vast flurry. 'Betty!' he said, and stopped in dismay.

'It's all right, father,' said the girl. 'This gentleman has just saved my life, I think. I caught fire.'

And Mr. Ribble found himself a hero.

At the end of a half hour, when his burned hands had been bandaged, he discovered that Mr. Essington, owner of the magnificent library, was gratefully wondering what in the world he could do for him (Mr. Ribble) to show his gratitude for saving his daughter so gallantly and with such presence of mind.

'But it was my fault,' Mr. Ribble protested.

'Nonsense, sir; not a bit of it. Now, tell me something—anything I can do for you?'

Mr. Ribble modestly thought that, perhaps, the old gentleman would allow him to look around the library.

'My dear sir, you may look around it for ever,' said Mr. Essington. 'By jove!'—he paused and looked at Mr. Ribble doubtfully; it may be that his daughter had given him a hint.

'I wonder . . . I suppose you could not recommend me a librarian by any chance? I'm getting over-floved and am having a new library built at the back of the house. And I'm looking for a librarian. I thought of offering £250 as a start. Of course, it would not mean the whole day.'

'If—if—'

'You don't mean to tell me you'd take it yourself?' said Mr. Essington, apparently delighted. 'My dear sir, I'd make it £300 if you would. I knew you were a scholar from the first glance at you, 'pon my word.'

And so Mr. Ribble entered upon the kingdom of his heart's content. As he told Mary, when he got back in the afternoon, it was like Dickens and a fairy tale mixed in one.