

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, Dec 20, 1890 to May 30, 1891)

Our Summer Cottage

“My dear.” The speaker was my wife, the place the breakfast table, the season June, and the temperature indicated by a slim column of mercury reaching already at this early hour up into the eighties with a promise of still greater performances during the day.

Although we had been married but a few months I had already learned that the two words that introduced this paper, tender and insignificant as they seem, are capable of much variation of meaning when coming from the lips of a young woman to whom one happens to be bound in matrimony. When long drawn out with a final tremulous whisper, they indicated that the wife of your bosom is thinking of those happy days or rather moonlight nights when you were struggling so hard to convince her that life without her was not worth the living.

When pronounced quickly with a marked accent on the first syllable of “dear” and concluding with a rising inflection it is plain that her tender heart is wounded by some thoughtless word and the best thing to do is to make amends in the most complete manner possible and do it quickly. When pronounced in a firm tone of voice ending with the falling inflection, followed by a pause accompanied by a steadfast glance, you may get ready for business and take a firm grip on your pocketbook.

It was this last variation that my wife was just now indulging in. So I dropped my paper (We had gotten so far in my honeymoon that I always read the paper at breakfast) and prepared for the worst. “My dear, where are we going this summer?” I looked up in surprise. “Why need we go any where? Are we not very comfortable located here?” “And do you think I am going to stay in this hot city all summer when every body else is away enjoying themselves? I never dreamed of such a thing.”

I perceived at once that I had better pretend that in my wildest flights of imagination I had never considered the possibility suggested and timidly threw out a feeler for suggestions. As I suspected she had her plans all matured. We were to close up the house leaving our one girl in charge, (it would not be safe to leave it alone of course,) and take a little love of a cottage she had heard of in the country far away from the heat and dust of the city where we could live like two turtle doves. I suggested we would have to eat and that would require cooking and we could never get a cook to go into the country and bury herself.

Oh we would need very little cooking in the summertime and if worse came to worse she could attend to that. I meekly suggested doubts, a storm of indignation followed. Did I not know that at home on Mondays and Tuesdays (washing and ironing days) she had often set the table, poured the coffee and boiled the eggs and, as she concluded, knew how to take entire charge of things. In fact she had once made a cake which I certainly must recollect as I had eaten a piece of it. At this I groaned aloud which

resulted in such a flood of tears and reproaches that I yielded everything and the battle was over.

Well in two weeks we had packed and shipped all our movables and were installed quite comfortably. We had brought with us a lunch for the first evening and all went well. The cottage was a small affair, four rooms and a kitchen, the latter nicely fitted up with an oil stove, with a big sistern under the floor and a reasonable supply of utensils. The evening was beautiful and fairly cool and as the gentle breeze wafted to us the delicious odors of new mown hay and the pungent clover I felt that it was better than I expected.

As we were very tired we retired early. We had not been settled in oblivion very long when I was aroused by my wife clutching my arm and whispering to me to be quiet. As I had been sleeping peacefully I saw no reason for waking me up to tell me to keep still, but her next words explained "Listen, there is some one in the room." And soon enough, we could feel the presence of some one beside ourselves and hear a gentle noise as if some one were moving lightly about, carefully picking his way but from time to time betraying his presence by a gentle tap as if he were brushing against something, generally the ceiling as it seemed to me. I listened with bated breath and finally came to the conclusion that the noise seemed to come mostly from one corner. Cautiously slipping my revolver from under my pillow, I let fly at that corner. Well if the burglar had expected to pursue his vocation in peace and quiet he was most assuredly undeceived. The noise began with a sharp crack, then a slow creaking, and then all at once came a tremendous crash of falling glass which I thought would never stop. It was as if an earthquake or rather a succession of earthquakes had come upon us. But this was but the beginning. A terrific screaming by my side, alternating with peals of maniacal laughter, told me that my wife had taken refuge in hysterics.

From without I could hear the maid servant too, joining in the general din, with cries of "fire," "murder," "thieves," and other like cheerful suggestions, finally by bringing the whole matter to a climax by frantically ringing a big alarm bell, attached to the house, for the purpose of summoning aid from all the surrounding territory.

Burglars or no burglars, this must be stopped, or we would soon have a mass meeting about the house that would surpass any political gathering on record, whether the burglar had been hit or not, I did not care. In fact, I rather hoped not for I thought of appealing to him to assist me in quelling the disturbance. Regardless of consequences I sprang out of bed, turned on the light, threw a pitcher of water over my wife in the hope of reviving or rather quieting her and rushing from the room seized that maid servant and dragged her from the bell.

I then returned to my room followed by the trembling made who like the rest of us was arrayed in an exceedingly airy costume. My wife was sobbing in the corner of the bed, from time to time throwing out such ejaculations as "brute," "wretch" or similar endearing terms, which I soon learned were applied to myself, needless to say there was no burglar about the premises. Far up above our heads flitting from side to side of the

room and now and then gently tapping the ceiling in its flight was the cause of all this disturbance, a large June bug.

In the corner lay the remains of our large dressing case mirror which I had struck with my bullet, and about the floor, was scattered what pieces of glass we had not already collected in our bare feet. The site of the innocent domestic, arrayed with slightly more attention to detail than was Perseus rising from the sea, as she followed me into our nuptial chamber, aroused my wife and in peremptory tones she ordered her from the room and the house. The frightened girl paid no attention to her but persisted in clinging to my arm, imploring help from some invisible enemy. After considerable solicitude on my part to convince her that there was no danger I succeeded in getting her out of the room. My attention to the poor girl of course, but added fuel to the flame of my wife's indignation, which resolved itself into more hysterics. While endeavoring to calm her, I heard sounds of the approaching multitude about the house, who had been aroused by the alarm bell.

From every direction they came, armed some with buckets for carrying water and some with axes or hatchets that would serve either against burglars or flames. As I appeared on the front porch to address the first comers, I could see miles about, lights flitting over the hillsides and along the roads, betokened the gathering forces. What could I do. It would never do to tell the truth to these anxious neighbors who had rushed to my assistance. My ingenuity was taxed to its utmost. I told one story after another to the various detachments as they arrived, sending each off on a fruitless search for the fleeing marauders who had assailed my peaceful home. To one party I said that the burglar had succeeded in gaining entrance to the house before he was discovered but had fled to the south after I had fixed upon him and wounded him; to another I described a party of burglars, in a coach and four, daily trotting off by the public road to the north, and another party went to the east to capture the scoundrels.

In about two hours having started off all my visitors and having caught a terrible cold standing on the porch in fairy array, I succeeded in getting my disturbed household quieted down. My wife seemed rebellious and revengeful, but vented her feelings in scornful silence. The maid had given us notice and was probably packing the few belongings that she could not put about her person and all was quiet for an hour or so when just before daybreak we had to get up to prepare for the day's routine.

As the train went early and our cottage was some two miles from the station we necessarily took our breakfast before dawn. The girl had fled and my wife was too much indisposed to get up and prepare the morning repast, so I prepared a mixture of luke warm water and coffee grounds which with some dried bread from the luncheon we had brought with us, constituted my breakfast. It was drizzling rain, and the road to the station was a mud road, so that you may imagine how cheerful I felt when I reached the train, already so heavily loaded with suburban passengers that I had to stand up the whole forty five minutes of the trip into town.

Every man on that train wanted to know about the night attack and to each one I

told a slightly different story. As each man in retailing it about the city during the day insisted that he had heard from my lips, great confusion resulted and the consequence was a gradual distrust of my veracity.

In a day or so the indignant maid servant had circulated an entirely different version. According to her, I had quarreled with my wife and after abusing her into hysterics, I had tried to shoot her, when, she, the girl had tried to call the neighborhood to her assistance. I had dragged her from the bell by the hair and had brutally assaulted her so that her arms still bore the marks of my violence. She insinuated, too, a number of disagreeable things as to my moral character, not omitting to mention the fact that I had dragged her, lightly clad as she was to my room, from which she was rescued alone by the approach of the multitude she had summoned by the alarm bell. To give a further "air of artistic verisimilitude" to this tale, she offered in evidence certain violent remarks addressed to her by my wife, at the time she had so indignantly ordered her from the room.

This latter version flew so fast, that to save my honor and the honor of my family I found it necessary to tell the true story. But this merely made matters worse. In the first place nobody believed that a June bug could bring about such a disturbance. Those that had been aroused from their slumbers were so indignant over being disturbed over so slight an affair that they claimed that it would have been for better if I had agreed with the girl's version and as a general result I was set down as a fool. Each morning, as, after that horrible walk, which alternated from mire to dust, according to the weather, I reached my train, I was asked by my fellow passengers, if any burglars had called upon me the night before. We could not induce any other girl to brave the dangers so graphically described by our first assistant and life became a burden. It did not take long for me to bring my wife to my own ideas on the subject and now we are in town and we have to let a most desirable summer cottage in the midst of the beautiful rolling country within easy reach of the city.

C. T. Greve

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