

Hubbell Versus Terry

[Original.]

When old John Fallows, childless widower, became partially blind, people wondered how he was going to get on. It was not long before their anxiety was allayed by the announcement that Rebecca Hubbell, a young lady socially prominent and much sought after, had of her own free will resigned the world to devote herself to the poor old man.

Fallows' only descendant was a niece, Jane Terry, the daughter of his sister. When Miss Hubbell entered upon the care of John Fallows, Miss Terry was a schoolgirl. A year later she was graduated, and it was supposed that she would relieve the woman who was giving up her life to devote it to the invalid by taking her place. But she did not. Then people began to talk. A story was circulated that she was bent rather on frivolity than shutting herself up to be a prey to the whims of a peevish old man. Miss Terry gave color to the report by accepting the offer of a woman who took a fancy to her to introduce her into society. Being attractive, her social success was looked for by her friends. Nevertheless she was a failure. She was blamed for permitting Miss Hubbell to do a work that she should have done herself. This feeling was more pronounced since Miss Hubbell had been prominent in the circle to which Miss Terry had been introduced. Besides this, there were a number of little sayings going about the origin of which could not be traced.

When Mrs. A. asked Mrs. B. why Miss Terry did not assume her proper place with respect to her uncle, Mrs. B. would say that she had heard it stated that the old gentleman was so nervous and irritable that only one of a serene disposition could manage him. When Mrs. C. asked Mrs. D. the same question, Mrs. D. would look grave and say that Miss Terry was jealous of the influence of that angel over her uncle and would like to get near him if she could. It was the old man who kept her away. Whatever truth there was in these reports, certain it is that they blocked Miss Terry's social aspirations, and after being present at a few functions she was dropped.

Then came a surprise. John Fallows died, and instead of leaving a competency, as had been supposed, he left millions. But, as a still greater surprise, he bequeathed everything to his niece, Jane Terry, not remembering Miss Hubbell with a penny. Society was shocked. Miss Hubbell's sacrifice was unrequited, while Miss Terry, who had shirked a duty in order to attempt to assume a place in society, which declined to receive her, was made rich. A few cynical people predicted that society might protest with its heart against such injustice, but that Miss Terry would open with a golden key a lock that would not turn with one of baser metal. But these did not reckon on the hold Miss Hubbell still held on the social leaders. Society with unexpected generosity took up the cause of the poor girl who had been wronged and turned its back on the girl it assumed had wronged her.

Then it was rumored that the deceased had drawn a codicil to his will leaving a considerable part of his estate to Miss Hubbell. This codicil had been appropriated by Miss Terry. Miss Hubbell commenced suit to break the will. All would depend upon securing possession of a slip of paper on which the codicil had been written. It was known or at least supposed to be in the keeping of Miss Terry or her attorneys. Could they be forced to produce it in court?

Miss Terry surprised every one by taking the management of her affairs into her own hands. She engaged her lawyers and instructed them in the method of their defense. They were to admit the existence of the paper in question, but were to decline to produce it till compelled to do so in open court. This course only inflamed Miss Hubbell's supporters against the heiress, and the social doors remained barred against her.

All periods of waiting have an end, and so did the suspense attending the case of Hubbell versus Terry. The lawyers for the claimant and the lawyers for the defendant came into court with their satchels full of papers and their clerks loaded with law books. Rebecca Hubbell showed great confidence, for her lawyers assured her that they would compel her enemies to produce the codicil. The most careful study of Miss Terry's face failed to reveal what she felt. Society was present in large numbers, and for once society was deeply interested in seeing a wrong righted.

Miss Hubbell's principal attorney after a few preliminary questions to a witness who had admitted he had seen the much talked of paper bearing the codicil asked of the court that it be produced by the defense. The attorney for the defense objected. The court ruled that the document must be brought out. Slowly the attorney drew from his pocket a wallet and from the wallet a half sheet of letter paper and handed it to the claimant's advocates. The latter read it and turned pale.

Ten minutes later the claim was withdrawn, and claimant and defendant left the courtroom, the former a broken down woman, the latter serenely victorious. This was the codicil:

"To be used only in case Rebecca Hubbell attempts to break this will. For years she has dominated me. She tried to force me to marry her. She has kept my niece, Jane Terry, from me."

Jane Terry did not need to open social doors with golden keys. Her enemy was silenced. There was no further opposition to her entrance.

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