**Fickle Fortune, or How Gladys Hustled**

O. Henry

“Press me no more Mr. Snooper,” said Gladys Vavasour-Smith. “I can never be yours.”

“You have led me to believe different, Gladys,” said Bertram D. Snooper.

The setting sun was flooding with golden light the oriel windows of a magnificent mansion situated in one of the most aristocratic streets west of the brick yard.

Bertram D. Snooper, a poor but ambitious and talented young lawyer, had just lost his first suit. He had dared to aspire to the hand of Gladys Vavasour-Smith, the beautiful and talented daughter of one of the oldest and proudest families in the county. The bluest blood flowed in her veins. Her grandfather had sawed wood for the Hornsbys and an aunt on her mother’s side had married a man who had been kicked by General Lee’s mule.

The lines about Bertram D. Snooper’s hands and mouth were drawn tighter as he paced to and fro, waiting for a reply to the question he intended to ask Gladys as soon as he thought of one.

At last an idea occurred to him.

“Why will you not marry me?” he asked in an inaudible tone.

“Because,” said Gladys firmly, speaking easily with great difficulty, “the progression and enlightenment that the woman of to-day possesses demand that the man shall bring to the marriage altar a heart and body as free from the debasing and hereditary iniquities that now no longer exist except in the chimerical imagination of enslaved custom.”

“It is as I expected,” said Bertram, wiping his heated brow on the window curtain. “You have been reading books.”

“Besides that,” continued Gladys, ignoring the deadly charge, “you have no money.”

The blood of the Snoopers rose hastily and mantled the cheek of Bertram D. He put on his coat and moved proudly to the door.

“Stay here till I return,” he said, “I will be back in fifteen years.”

When he had finished speaking he ceased and left the room.

When he had gone, Gladys felt an uncontrollable yearning take possession of her. She said slowly, rather to herself than for publication, “I wonder if there was any of that cold cabbage left from dinner.”

She then left the room.

When she did so, a dark-complexioned man with black hair and gloomy, desperate looking clothes, came out of the fireplace where he had been concealed and stated:

“Aha! I have you in my power at last, Bertram D. Snooper. Gladys Vavasour-Smith shall be mine. I am in the possession of secrets that not a soul in the world suspects. I have papers to prove that Bertram Snooper is the heir to the [Footnote: An estate famous in Texas legal history. It took many, many years for adjustment and a large part of the property was, of course, consumed as expenses of litigation.] Tom Bean estate, and I have discovered that Gladys’ grandfather who sawed wood for the Hornsby’s was also a cook in Major Rhoads Fisher’s command during the war. Therefore, the family repudiate her, and she will marry me in order to drag their proud name down in the dust. Ha, ha, ha!”

As the reader has doubtless long ago discovered, this man was no other than Henry R. Grasty. Mr. Grasty then proceeded to gloat some more, and then with a sardonic laugh left for New York.

Fifteen years have elapsed.

Of course, our readers will understand that this is only supposed to the the case.

It really took less than a minute to make the little stars that represent an interval of time.

We could not afford to stop a piece in the middle and wait fifteen years before continuing it.

We hope this explanation will suffice. We are careful not to create any wrong impressions.

Gladys Vavasour-Smith and Henry R. Grasty stood at the marriage altar.

Mr. Grasty had evidently worked his rabbit’s foot successfully, although he was quite a while in doing so.

Just as the preacher was about to pronounce the fatal words on which he would have realized ten dollars and had the laugh on Mr. Grasty, the steeple of the church fell off and Bertram D. Snooper entered.

The preacher fell to the ground with a dull thud. He could ill afford to lose ten dollars. He was hastily removed and a cheaper one secured.

Bertram D. Snooper held a Statesman in his hand.

“Aha!” he said, “I thought I would surprise you. I just got in this morning. Here is a paper noticing my arrival.”

He handed it to Henry R. Grasty.

Mr. Grasty looked at the paper and turned deadly pale. It was dated three weeks after Mr. Snooper’s arrival.

“Foiled again!” he hissed.

“Speak, Bertram D. Snooper,” said Gladys, “why have you come between me and Henry?”

“I have just discovered that I am the sole heir to Tom Bean’s estate and am worth two million dollars.”

With a glad cry Gladys threw herself in Bertram’s arms.

Henry R. Grasty drew from his breast pocket a large tin box and opened it, took therefrom 467 pages of closely written foolscap.

“What you say is true, Mr. Snooper, but I ask you to read that,” he said, handing it to Bertram Snooper.

Mr. Snooper had no sooner read the document than he uttered a piercing shriek and bit off a large chew of tobacco.

“All is lost,” he said.

“What is that document?” asked Gladys. “Governor Hogg’s message?”

“It is not as bad as that,” said Bertram, “but it deprives me of my entire fortune. But I care not for that, Gladys, since I have won you.”

“What is it? Speak, I implore you,” said Gladys.

“Those papers,” said Henry R. Grasty, “are the proofs of my appointment as administrator of the Tom Bean estate.”

With a loving cry Gladys threw herself in Henry R. Grasty’s arms.

Twenty minutes later Bertram D. Snooper was seen deliberately to enter a beer saloon on Seventeenth Street.