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A Happy
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How Mrs. Causely "Called" the Bluebells.

BY W. H. NEALL.



HEY were a delightful young married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Bert Bluebell, and had resided in the quiet little village just about two weeks.

As yet, they had not cultivated the neighbors although the neighbors had religiously tried to cultivate them. Mrs. Causely especially; her lawn adjoined that of the Bluebells, and she felt it her duty to be sociable like.

Her laudable desire had a threefold object in it too; she wanted to know who they were; what they were, and—everything else worth knowing about them.

For Mrs. Causely was something of a gossip, to state it plainly, and the villagers looked to her for information on all important topics. The good woman did not wish to be considered inquisitive, far from it, merely "motherly," that was all. On the morning of the young couple's arrival, Mrs. Causely had leaned over the fence and seeing Mrs. Bluebell flitting in and out of the house like a happy bird, called to her. Obediently Mrs. Bluebell came to the fence and Mrs. Causely proceeded to be neighborly at once.

"Hadn't I better come over and show you how to regulate that range?" said she. "Mrs. Van Roden"—the previous occupant of the house—"had a terrible time with it 'til I showed her how.

"Then the valve of the pump gets out of kilter sometimes. I'll just run in and show you how to fix it.

"I reckon that you'd better let me help you set your things to rights. You're young at it, you know."

But to all these proffers of aid pretty Mrs. Bluebell shook her head and answered:

"No, thanks! Bert and I can manage very nicely."

"Stuck up thing!" Mrs. Causely muttered as she went back to her kitchen.

"Likely as not they're afraid that I'll find out some of their family secrets. I'll just keep my eyes and ears open."

And she did.

But spy all she could, Mrs. Causely knew no more of the Bluebell family than she did the first day they took the cozy village house.

Every morning Mr. Bluebell kissed his wife at the door and stepped lively away towards the station, gayly waving his hand until out of sight, and every evening, upon his return from his business in the city, the little pink and white blossom of womanhood met him at the gate, and—more kisses.

"Soft as butter!" growled Mrs. Causely through the blinds. "They're not as good as they make believe to be."

But she was mistaken, for, on the two Sundays they had resided in the place, they had attended church, and had even intimated that in the near future they would probably connect themselves with it. This was good news to the Rev. Mr. Bingie, for his flock was not any too large, and as Mrs. Bluebell was a capital singer, she would greatly augment the choir.

On the second Sunday of the advent of the young couple, the Rev. Mr. Bingie had delivered a stirring sermon on "The Sins of the World," laying particular stress upon gambling.

He had evidently studied Hoyle's book of games, as well as several others thoroughly, for he seemed to have the names of the various kinds of hazard down to a dot.

Faro was dwelt upon and torn into pieces.

Dice was described as the load-stones of the devil.

Billiards and pool as the royal road to Hades.

Even poor, old maidish croquet was treated to a scorching.

Euchre was placed in the category of fashionable evils, leading by easy stages, to degeneration and disgrace.

And poker! Poker! and the good man shuddered at the mere mention of the name.

Poker was a sea of fire and brimstone, out of which the devotee never emerges.

A man who played poker was lost forever. His children were neglected; his wife abused; his money wasted, and ruin, poverty and death stared him in the face.

At this peculiar and extraordinary mode of using the sanctuary, Mr. Bluebell turned towards his wife, elevated his eyebrows and smiled his surprise.

Mrs. Bluebell slightly pursed her pretty lips, a sign that plainly said:

"Very much out of place."

All this little by-play Mrs. Causely saw and stored it up for future reference.

How she could use it she did not know, but she had always made it a point not to let anything escape her.

On the following Wednesday the opportunity of her life came; an opportunity for which she had long waited; the smiling, innocent appearing young couple was to be unmasked.

As usual Mrs. Causely was looking and listening through the blinds.

Mr. Bluebell had kissed his wife as of yore, and was swinging down the lane, when Mrs. Bluebell bethought of something and flew down to the gate, calling:

"Bert! Bert! Oh, Bert!"

He stopped and turned around, inclining his head to catch her words.

"Don't forget the poker to-night," she cried, "and be sure to bring the chips and the money for Kittie."

He nodded his head and went on.

Poker! That one word struck Mrs. Causely with stunning force.

Poker, the fire and brimstone pit; poker, that which the Rev. Mr. Bingie had particularly warned his people against.

Poker, and to-night.

"Oh! you deceitful persons," groaned Mrs. Causely, from the depth of her heart. "I saw your sly winking and smiling in church last Sunday; Mr. Bingie shall be warned of this; he shall know what kind of people he has to deal with; poker players, indeed."

She bustled into the dining-room.

A smell of tobacco smoke, that floated in through the open window, assailed her nostrils.

"Ah, there is Jack," she thought.

"He is a city boy and likely knows something of this dreadful game of poker. And I ought to know something of its evils also. Mr. Bingie didn't go into particulars; how could he?"

Jack Brown *was* a city boy, true enough; spending his college vacation at his aunt's, the aforesaid Mrs. Causely.

Jack had been introduced to several poker games at college, and he was so fascinated with the acquaintanceship, that the wee small hours came only too soon.

"Jack!" called Mrs. Causely. "Put out that nasty pipe and come here; I want to ask you some important questions."

The nephew carefully knocked out the ashes from his meerschau bowl, and presented himself before his aunt.

"Jack," said she, severely, "do you play poker?"

"I do *not*," he answered, firmly, as well as truthfully.

No, poor boy, he was too reckless.

"I thought that you were not guilty of such an unpardonable sin," said she, "but—but—do you *know* how the game is played?"

"Yes, auntie, I must confess that I have seen quite a number *try* to play it."

"And it's a shocking game, isn't it? Just runs away with the money, doesn't it?"

"Well, sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, and sometimes, at the end of the evening, you come out even. You never know until you cash in your chips."

"Chips!"

"Yes; they are a part of the paraphernalia. First you buy a stack of chips, you know; white ones, red ones, and blue ones."

"Chips!"

"That's what I said; I——"

"That's what *she* said too; oh! Jack! the sweet faced daughter of Satan."

Jack gazed at his aunt in wonder.

"She said what?" he finally asked. "And who is 'she,' and what makes you call her a 'daughter of Satan?'"

"Oh! never mind, Jack, never mind. Go on, go on; I'm so agitated."

"You certainly *are* rather flustered, auntie. Well, after the chips are all arranged before you, then the cards are dealt out. Next you begin to bet; ante; raise; call and show up, understand?"

"No, I don't understand at all," she replied. "But I know that a powerful lot of money is lost by it all; it's dreadful, dreadful. One man wins it all I suppose, and the others are left penniless."

"Well, I don't know about one fellow raking in all the boodle, though the cold blooded, nervy player generally does, unless there's a 'kittie.'"

"A 'kittie!'"

"Yes, in that event, the 'kittie' comes in for a share of the profits; at the end of a season's play, the 'kittie' is the best man by far."

"The 'kittie,' oh! Jack, *she* said that also. He was to bring money for the 'kittie,' this is terrible, terrible."

"Who said it, and who is to bring money?" demanded Jack, really getting vexed at his aunt's queer manner of speaking.

"Oh! I'm too disturbed to tell you now," she replied. "I *must* go over and see Mrs. Trumpter."

With that, she snatched up a sun-bonnet, and flew across the street to one of her old cronies.

In a few minutes the whole matter was laid before that lady, and Mr. and Mrs. Bluebell, Jack Brown, poker, chips and "kitties," were mixed up promiscuously.

The animated conversation ended by both ladies emerging from the house, Mrs. Trumpter going in one direction and Mrs. Causely in another, so that, by noon, Mrs. General Priest knew that "Mr. Bluebell carried on a gambling house, and had joined the church to entice the youth of the village."

Mrs. Gardiner was informed that "Jack Brown had lost all his money in Mr. Bluebell's house, and that Jack's father had sworn out a warrant for the arrest of the gambler."

Mrs. Perkins was led to understand that, "the police had raided Mr. and Mrs. Bluebell's house, and that Jack Brown had been poisoned by a 'kittie;' a deadly drug that gamblers use."

Wherever the story went, it was added to, distorted and re-distorted until the small village was in a ferment.

The Rev. Mr. Bingie was appealed to.

He immediately summoned the official members of his church around him, and a plan of action agreed upon.

It was arranged that the minister, the official members, and Mrs. Causely, the accuser, should call in a body, that very evening, upon Mr. and Mrs. Bluebell, and endeavor to turn them from the error of their ways.

In blest ignorance of what was in store for them, the young couple contentedly sat in their snug, little library; she sewing, and he reading aloud the evening paper.

Outside of the house a great crowd had congregated, and when the Rev. Mr. Bingie, supported by appointed committee, rang the bell, a solemn hush fell upon the multitude.

The door was opened by a rosy-faced Irish girl, and Mr. Bingie, clearing his throat, asked:

"Are Mr. and Mrs. Bluebell at home?"

"They be, sur," was the answer. "An' in the li-bo-ra-ry. sur."

With pious mien, the self-appointed censors filed in.

The young couple arose, and Mr. Bluebell advanced, offering his hand, whilst Mrs. Bluebell, with womanly instinct, mistrusted that they were about to be made the recipients of a surprise party, and mentally bemoaned their fate.

The husband shook hands all round, and invited his visitors to be seated.

They all found chairs with the exception of the Rev. Mr. Bingie, who as spokesman, remained standing. It was an embarrassing situation, but the minister had nerved himself for the ordeal.

With a preliminary throat clearing, he began :

"Brother Bluebell, I call you 'brother' for I understand that, in the near future you intend making application for admittance into our flock ; Brother Bluebell, can a wolf enter the fold of the lambs without the lambs suffering ?"

Mr. Bluebell thought not and Mrs. Bluebell looked frightened.

"Brother Bluebell, he who makes religion a cloak to cover a nefarious business, is a detriment to a community."

Mr. Bluebell again agreed but began to look annoyed, whilst his wife nervously toyed with a paper-cutter. "Brother," went on the Rev. Mr. Bingie relentlessly, "you and your wife were at church last Sunday, and heard my sermon. A powerful sermon, sir ; a sermon that ought to turn people from paths of vice and corruption."

"It was a powerful sermon, Mr. Bingie," said Mr. Bluebell. "And I indorse most everything in it."

"You do ; ah ! the deceit of man. Beware, sir, beware, the pit is before you. You and your wife are standing on its brink."

Mr. Bluebell was now plainly angry and Mrs. Bluebell showed signs of great alarm, whilst Mrs. Causely was seen to apply her handkerchief several times to her eyes.

"Please explain, sir," said the young husband with dignity. "I fail to catch the drift of your conversation. It is an enigma to me."

"I will be brief, brother. It has come to my ears that you and your wife are slaves, yes, slaves to a hellish game."

The young couple's eyes were wide open with amazement.

"A game ; what game ?" queried Mr. Bluebell.

"What game ? Ah, the brazenness of it."

And the Rev. Mr. Bingie rolled his eyes.

"What game ? Poker, brother, poker. Poker that smells of

fire and brimstone; that steals the pocketbook and sears the soul."

Mrs. Causely wept audibly.

Mr. Bluebell glanced at his wife with a peculiar smile and she seemed reassured.

"So, I and my wife are accused of being slaves to poker, eh?" said the young man, reflectively scratching his chin. "Who brings the charge?"

"Brother Bluebell, it is my painful duty to inform you that Sister Causely, your neighbor, has undisputable evidence."

Mrs. Causely nodded her head in a sorrowful (?) fashion.

"This morning," continued Mr. Bingie, "she overheard your conversation relating to this evening. I will repeat it word for word, although I defile my tongue by so doing. Your wife uttered them, sir."

Straightway Mrs. Bluebell became agitated again.

"Ah, sister, you may well tremble, for those words have brought censure and disgrace upon you both."

"What were they, sir? This farce is entirely too long—" began the husband, much nettled.

"Patience, brother, patience," and the minister sighed, and then in a doleful voice continued:

"When you were half way down the street this morning your wife called after you. Do you remember that?"

Mr. Bluebell inclined his head.

"Her words, as I got them from Sister Causely, were: 'Don't forget the poker, to-night.' Do you remember them, brother?"

A great light suddenly broke over the intellect of Mr. Bluebell and Mrs. Bluebell was positively radiant.

"Why yes, I do remember Nan saying that," replied the husband, "you did, didn't you, dear?"

"I certainly did," she replied, concealing her face in her handkerchief to prevent laughing outright.

"You do not deny it then?" went on Mr. Bingie, impressively. "Ah! sister, shed tears, thy sins have found thee out. Now, brother, your wife followed up that request by another, it was—'and be sure to bring the chips!' Am I right?"

"Perfectly."

"And you admit that too; admit being asked to bring the chips. Chips, the devil's play-things; the base implements of the game, and did you obey your wife's instructions?"

"I did."

The Rev. Mr. Bingie could not find words to express his horror.

After recovering somewhat from Mr. Bluebell's admission, he proceeded to the third and last charge in the accusation.

"Now, brother, there is one more, and I am finished. Did—did you bring the money for the 'kittie?'—the most debasing thing of the whole transaction."

"I did not forget it," answered Mr. Bluebell.

His eyes twinkled, and the corners of his mouth twitched with an irrepressible desire to laugh.

The Rev. Mr. Bingie and the rest of the committee groaned.

The young husband now took the floor.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "whilst I thank you exceedingly for your interest in my wife and myself, and appreciate the trouble that you have taken to bring us back to the paths of rectitude, nevertheless people can make grand mistakes—inquisitive people especially."

This was a direct shot at Mrs. Causely, and she bristled accordingly.

"Now whilst I admit that my wife did remind me of the poker, the chips and the 'kittie,' as you say, yet I will state that Mrs. Bluebell and myself never played a game of poker in our lives, and in fact, never intend to. I will go further, I have never seen a poker game played."

"Or I, either," broke in Mrs. Bluebell.

A look of incredulity went around the room, and Mrs. Causely gave a decided sniff.

"Now, to show you how easily one may be mistaken," Mr. Bluebell continued, "I will give you ocular proof; excuse me, for just a moment."

He left the room but returned almost immediately, accompanied by the plump-looking servant girl who bore a platter.

"Now," said he, turning to the girl, "what I am about to ask you may appear a trifle singular, yet I want you to answer me without question. Will you please tell me how you rake the kitchen fire?"

"Phy wid a pohker, sur; to be sure."

"Good; and how did you rake it this morning?"

"Wid a sthick, sur; there beyant any pohker in the house, sur, till yez brought wan home the night, sur."

"Of course; and here it is," said Mr. Bluebell, opening his coat and exposing to view a bran new iron poker.

Mr. Bingie and the committee exchanged glances.

"Now, please," Mr. Bluebell went on, again turning to the girl, "kindly tell me what you have on that plate."

"Phy, they be chips, sur; preatey chips; the missis told yez to bring them the night, sur; phwat a funny question."

Mr. Bingie's committee arose, and Mr. Bingie himself was busy clearing his throat.

Mrs. Causely, as red as a lobster, eyed the door.

"Now, tell me your name, please," said Mr. Bluebell, still addressing the girl.

"Me name, is it? Phy, yez know it is Kittie Mullen, sur."

"Thank you, Kittie; that will do. Please take the poker and platter back to the kitchen."

Mr. Bluebell now turned to the discomfited people before him.

"To-morrow will be Thursday; Kittie's day out, you know. My wife was fearful that I would forget Kittie's wages; she was merely reminding me this morning, that is all."

Dumfounded, covered with confusion, and heartily ashamed of the whole affair, Mr. Bingie and the committee stood staring at the young couple.

All but Mrs. Causely; she was having a private case of hysterics in the corner.

Not a word did the Rev. Mr. Bingie say. What could he say?

Slowly, and in deep humility, the minister and the committee strode out of the house, supporting one poor, crushed female between them.

What their feelings must have been can only be imagined and what disconcerted them all the more, were the peals after peals of laughter that came from behind the closed door.

How the committee explained it all to the waiting throng is another story.

Jack Brown was so overcome with the absurdity of the thing, that he fell off of the limb of a tree, on which he was roosting, and broke his beloved pipe.

Poker, chips and "Kittie," were too much for Mr. and Mrs. Bluebell and they never attended the Rev. Mr. Bingie's church again; it would have been impossible for them to have kept their faces at all straight during the services.