Before Breakfast.

It was one of those clear cold nights late in November. The streets were deserted and the absence of lights in the houses of the neighborhood indicated that the hour was late. The wind played havoc with the dismantled vines about the windows and its melancholy whistling did little to comfort the occupant of one room in an unattractive boarding house in the South End. He sat dozing before the slowly dying embers of an open fire. The half-smoked pipe had dropped from his sleepy fingers and lay upon the floor in imminent danger of being crushed by the clumsy rocking-chair.

He was from the West and friends of his family had made it most pleasant in former years by extending their hospitality at the holiday season. From the first he had enjoyed the company of one of the younger daughters and it was not long before people surmised, as people will, that there was something between the young folks.

Now it was Thanksgiving again, but, instead of looking forward to a repetition of the jovial times, he sat cursing his luck that a misunderstanding had blasted his hopes of an invitation this year and worse yet he was given to understand that his friendship was no longer desired.

Mystified he sat long before the fire until, overcome with fatigue, he dropped into a troubled sleep.

It was still dark when he was awakened by a hearty slap on the shoulder and a familiar voice sounded in his ear: "Perhaps I ought to apologize old man for disturbing your slumbers, I came through on the sleeper and not being in a sleeping mood I got up as soon as we reached Boston. I had my key from last year so I walked in. How are they going?"

A grunt from the chair was the only reply.

"Well there's no danger of my nose's peeling from the sun burst of this welcome. What's the matter with you anyway?"

A faint voice came from the direction of the rocker; "Davy, I'm miserable."

"As bad as that?" replied Davy. "A woman in the case, I suppose, as the fellow said when he found a female mummy. Eh?"

"This is no time to joke," retorted the other now more awake.

"Forgive me old man; really I didn't know it was anything serious. These affairs never used to bother you," replied his friend.

The two men seated themselves and David, expecting to hear a long story, carefully filled his pipe, applied a match and puffing meditatively, waited in silence. Dick sat with downcast eyes, his hands nervously stroking the threadbare arms of his rocking-chair.

"Come Dickey, it's your play," urged the rocking-chair.

"I haven't much to tell," replied the one addressed. "It's all over between us—and that's all."

"Oh, come now," exclaimed his companion between puffs, "Cheer up, the worst is yet to come—I mean you might be married or dead or something. It'll come out all right, I know it will.

By the way, what's this I hear about you at Russell's wedding? Queer that fellow and you should be of the same name and no relation."

"That was a coincidence," replied Dick, now thoroughly awake and keen to change the subject.

"Some of the people at the reception took me for the groom. And wait till I tell you. What a joke on him! He forgot to get the marriage license and he came to me and asked if I wouldn't, as his friend, help him out of the present difficulty by hurrying to the city clerk's office and obtaining the document. It was all made out, he said, and I would only have to ask for it.

"I hurried to the office but luck was against me. The clerk had just left for lunch. Out I rushed and seeing him in the distance called out in my eagerness, 'I want a marriage license.' Hearing himself thus addressed he stopped, and, as I approached asked when the wedding was to take place. 'Now,' I fairly shouted in my excitement.

"Of course on our way to the office I explained that the license was for my friend Russell who in the hurry of his wedding day had neglected to call that morning. So far so good. I obtained the paper and congratulated myself on the successful execution of my commission.

"But on passing from the office I heard a remark addressed to me which caused the blood to rush to my face in a most uncomfortable manner.