

















(COPYRIGHT, 1904.)

"All I can say is, it's a dence of a bore!" exclaimed Philip Blount, a smart, good-looking lawyer, who, as you might be six or seven and twenty to his particular chum, Tom Marling, a stout, rubicund, horsey stock broker, perhaps a few years older.

"Well, it's rather hard lines," returned Marling, sympathetically. "If they had given me timely notice, I might have managed to get down to the Grange, but such an abrupt invite looks as if Owen Dashedwood had not wanted me down there."

This dialogue was going on in the private office of Mr. Marling, where the two men were discussing a light luncheon of oysters and stout, having a little time to spare at the general refreshment hour.

Blount was yet only a clerk in the old established firm of Ardell & Son; but that firm was now reduced to the surviving son, who was Blount's maternal uncle, and a childless widower.

Marling was a very well off bachelor, leading a life to the good end of this life and Blount's special friend.

"Down there" indicated a picturesque old place called Vardine, near

to Lady Dalrymple's ball, when I went to claim my aunt, he said, as she took my arm: 'You must be sure to warling with returner!' in a dictatorial tone, as if she were his wife, by Jove!"

Marling laughed. "Well, I know he lost one of the Grange party."

"How?" ejaculated Blount.

"Instead of replying, Marling rummaged among some papers which lay in a square white receptacle on his knee-hole table, and tossed over a note to his guest."

"That was the 'East India Club,' and ran thus:

"Ah, then he could not have gone to Mrs. Morton's," said Blount, with a sigh of relief. "I can't think how Owen puts up with his overbearing swagger."

"Come now, Blount, he doesn't swagger."

"I suppose Owen will be home to dinner at seven. I think I'll

things in such a vague condition! James might have been dancing at attendance at Paddington from 6:30 on, leaving his functions at the window left by the household and reducing Mr. Ardell to the inconvenience of a female waiter.

Dinner was usual in Londale Gardens, remarkably good—a matter of no small importance in Blount's eyes—and Mr. Ardell was exceedingly conversational in a careful and didactic manner throughout it.

When seated at the table and James departed a short pause ensued; then Mr. Ardell said: "I think you will see a fresh Bradshaw on the table."

"I have not read the book," returned his uncle, with a frown of disdains in his face. "That copy was presented to Gwendolene. I was rather annoyed at her accepting it, though I do not very much like the book either."

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Mr. Ardell, yes, I know. He wrote to Gwendolene explaining why he could not go to this party and mentioned that she was going alone and very much surprised, as I told my niece."

"And what did she say?"

"Well, she laughed and said that for all I knew, it might be very necessary."

"A curious answer," said Blount, uneasily. "What do you make of it?"

"What? Oh, nothing. It is really unimportant, only I fancy that Mr. Ardell applies to a matrimonial alliance with her, and she looks kindly on his part."

"I should think it was!" cried Blount, "I tried to seem on confidential terms with Owen, but—"

"She has too much sense to heed him. In fact, she would not offend me by entertaining any proposition of the kind."

"Interrupted Ardell. 'I fancy you are aware, my dear Philip, that my great wish is to see my nephew and niece united before I die—not only because I am attached to you, but both of you each and every one of you equally by what I may be enabled to bequest.'"

"And I desire nothing so ardently," cried Philip, "as to see my nephew and niece united before I die—not only because I am attached to you, but both of you each and every one of you equally by what I may be enabled to bequest."

"In fact, I have loved her ever since she came from school to reside here."

"I have suspected it," said Philip, "I have suspected it," returned his uncle, playing with the double eyeglass which hung from his neck. "But my dear boy, I am not sure of it."

"I am not without hope, if only no one comes between us." There was a long pause, each being occupied with his own hopes and fears for the future.

Subtly Blount exclaimed: "Could one of them from Paddington to Charing Cross in half an hour, with a minute or two to spare?"

"Yes, if the streets were not crowded, and the horses a good deal slower."

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"Then we showed, said Blount at last, looking at the heavy classical brocade cover over the fireplace, and haven't left my seat so much as to get to the door."

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By this time he had reached a condition of mind which induced him to seek comfort in contemplating his uncle's arguments against himself.

Suppose his horrible suspicions proved true? Mr. Ardell would certainly cut off Owen with a shilling—or, perhaps a farthing—possibly all his uncle's fortune might come to him.

"I have always been fond of her. There's such good and staid about her, and last night she looked so beautiful and friendly. What bright, mischievous brown eyes she has. There's no gloom in her set of her face."

No, at least not now. If Owen slipped through my fingers, I should be about. I want to meet the 10:20 from R—, and it's 10:15 now."

Blount paced slowly up and down revolving the possibilities of his position.

Gwen was certainly what is called a girl of spirit, not to say slightly headstrong, and there was no saying what a young man of that description might, could or would do. What motive had she in sending that mysterious telegram last night? Either he or I omitted the negative."

"My dear Gwen," began Blount, imploringly. "Don't 'mess' me!" she interrupted. "As to Mr. Everard, he's your quarry with his fiancée, an old schoolfellow of mine. I have helped to reconcile the relations and recently sat upon her and her mother in Paris."

"But, Gwen, if you knew my feelings—"

"If you had kept them to yourself, and not tried to make mischief with my uncle, and lower me in his opinion, I might have been able to do more for you."

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"Impossible!" said the indignant stranger. "You show your ignorance of my uncle's character."

"But, uncle, women are so queer and flighty, and—"

"I don't know what you mean. I have never seen the man in question, who ruled the lower regions."

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"MY DEAR REVEREND, I AM DELIGHTED TO SEE YOU."

Maldehead, at present tenanted by a charming widow, whose charms were enhanced by the possession of an income which enabled her to rent such a residence. Here she gave delightful "Friday to Monday" parties, invitations to which people fished for eagerly.

Gwendolene Dashedwood was the daughter of Mr. Ardell's deceased wife's sister, his ward, and the mistress of his house. Blount, rather fancied his uncle wished to make a match between his nephew and niece, and was quite sure of his own wishes on the subject; for Gwen Dashedwood was a bright, attractive brunette, with big, brown eyes that gave a great deal—and he paid assiduous court to the young lady.

"Were you asked?" continued Blount, "I am not at all up to the mark of Mrs. Cholmondeley Morton's parties, not elegant enough by long ways."

"Better ask you than that beast Everard. I hate the fellow."

"Blount, you're a fellow with her. No more than my neighbors."

"Rather less, in a general way; but you are a fool about that cousin of yours."

"She isn't a cousin; she is no relation at all."

"Well, whether she is or not, you'll lose your game if you lose your balance about her. From what I have heard, I am inclined to think you stand well with her, and Everard much too good and sour and black-browed to be a dangerous rival. Besides, that Indian foreigner appointed to his is no great thing. And then Miss Dashedwood is not the girl to think of a man who is obliged to live in the wilds."

"I'm not so sure, Marling. Everard has an unimpaired cool air of command and superiority that impresses women, and Gwen has a dash of romance to her. I don't think or suspects that an what she would call 'low-minded' because I have the sense to have an eye for the main chance, but I flatter myself I've been making way with her lately. There's nothing goes down better than a sort of girl like an air of being lordly from upon her, and, in fact, I am—rather! It's such uncommon luck to have a fancy for the right woman."

"Is she the right one?"

"She is. You see my uncle is doneed of her and she's quite sure to leave goods, though he likes me, but if we marry, we'll have a new will."

"Admirable reasoning; but if you are making way, you may snip your fingers at Everard."

"I don't know. I got away early last week and found him at tea with Gwendolene—and after sitting out with him for an hour in the conserva-

dine with my uncle in case he feels lonely. He was not at the office to-day, and I'm not supposed to know that his intention and presented himself to his uncle a few minutes before seven in accurate evening dress, a pale yellow gown to match the smile upon his lips. Altogether a handsome, gentleman-like looking young fellow, and stood looking steadily, thought Mr. Ardell, who was spelling over an evening paper somewhat disconcerted in his big and luxuriously ornamented drawing-room.

Mr. Ardell was a well-remembered man of about sixty-five, of a precise and a little exacting, with severe notions as regarded conduct, principle, industry, and such like old-fashioned laws of life.





