

"Nothing could be better, except a little opera," said Delaunay lightly.

"I will think of it," rejoined the lady smiling, as the two bowed politely and departed.

III.—POVERTY, RICHES, AND A RIVAL.

Back in the dingy Inn, and no money between them, the two men sat a couple of nights after this, and discussed their prospects with gravity tempered by sanguine outbursts.

"I've given notice here," said Jimmie Bell, "and taken chambers in the Temple. I merely mention this as I gave you, Ted, for one reference, and the editor of the 'London Lady's' for another. I proposed a new article to him this morning, and he's accepted it. 'The Natural Means of Retaining Youthfulness,' eh! good idea. It's simply sleep all you can, and never go to bed hungry."

"Why are you going to the Temple? Can you afford it?"

"Yes, there's the thousand pounds, you know; and then it looks better for old Gribble and Gorge to send briefs there. Miss Carmichael is a brick! She's really interesting herself. She's actually written."

"Stay; how do you know all this?"

"Well, if you want to know, I casually heard so from Miss Tudor;" and Jimmie threw up the window and said the evening was fine.

"Jim," said Delaunay earnestly, "just say what you think of Miss Carmichael—and me."

"Think! why, my dear Ted, that you're a devilish lucky fellow, about to be settled in life. Here you are a man of thirty; she's not more than forty-two; and what in heaven's name is twelve years to a handsome woman like she is. You must settle sometime; you can't go hanging on in this poverty-stricken fashion; you, with all your big ideas narrowed by a meagre salary. Why, what do you think of your life yourself?"

"Most ridiculous," said Ted heartily.

"It's reckless and criminal," corrected Jimmie severely. He saw that his friend was hanging fire.

"I say, we ought to raise some money," said Ted, after a pause.

"That's all right, the City's full of it; leave that to me. I'll look after it to-morrow."

A week later Miss Carmichael and Miss Tudor were located at one of the big West-end hotels. The two men called, and were invited to dine the next evening. When they presented themselves they found an unexpected fifth had been added to the party, a Mr. Peebles, an elderly Scotch gentleman and a lawyer to boot.

By means of Amy in the first instance, through Jimmie Bell in the second, and thence to Delaunay, the latter young man learnt that Peebles was an elderly wooer, one of those cautious, procrastinating mortals who had ever hesitated to pop the momentous question, always intending but never fulfilling. He had not made his will either.

The fact of Peebles may be said to have spurred Delaunay on to rapid achievement. Anyway, when Ted called one afternoon and found Peebles sitting alone with Miss Carmichael, and, moreover, gathered from a certain something in his manner that he considered himself a privileged visitor, able to stay when he liked, go when he liked, do as he chose, in fact, Mr. Delaunay determined to sit him out, to the ultimate consternation of Miss Carmichael, who, when both her visitors had far exceeded the limits of an ordinary afternoon call, excused herself and went in search of Miss Tudor.

It appears, then, that it dimly entered the Scotchman's head that here was an individual who was, so to speak, poaching upon the Peebles manorial rights.

"I believe, sir," he observed, with cold sarcasm, "you have known Miss Carmichael quite recently?"

"I've known her long enough to appreciate her worth," said the young man boldly. "How dare you discuss the young lady behind her back?"

"Sir," said Mr. Peebles, "I'll have ye to know ye're no' speaking to your office-clerks."

Delaunay rose, walked over to the gentleman, and said, very gently, "Look here, Mr. Peebles, I'll pitch you downstairs if you address me again like that."

As the young man looked, and indeed felt perfectly capable of it at that moment, Mr. Peebles cautiously sought his hat and stood up; at that moment Miss Carmichael and Amy entered.

"Excuse my leaving you so long—must you be going, Mr. Peebles."

"Yes, Miss Carmichael, I must be going, and I'm sorry," he said angrily "to leave you in such company."

For a minute a blank silence reigned.

"Mr. Peebles," said his astonished hostess, "I think you are pre-

suming upon an old acquaintance."

Before he could reply, Delaunay strode up. "Mr. Peebles, I think you are a gentleman. Here is my card. Any disagreement with me we can discuss later, without the ladies. Allow me to help you on with your coat;" but the old man with an angry glance left the room.

"Amy," said Delaunay, "it is better I should explain this unfortunate occurrence to Miss Carmichael alone," and went and opened the door for her, and when Amy, with a look of puzzled astonishment, had glided away, Delaunay simply pleaded his case so well and so earnestly and with such real ardour, thanks to the Scotch contingent, that when he left an hour later, he was the accepted husband of Miss Carmichael, and the future landlord of five thousand a year. Little more remains to be added; the marriage took place in the summer, and now when Mr. and Mrs. Jimmie Bell, nee Amy Tudor, visit them, they are always impressed with the quiet happiness of the chief inmates of Park Lodge.

Dandie the dog has a permanent residence at Eastbourne, and wears a silver collar with a certain date upon it.

Jim, though a successful barrister, still writes for the Press and his friends. Not long after Ted's marriage, he sent a "private couplet" to Park Lodge, as a suitable suggestion for engraving on Dandie's collar. Mrs. Delaunay thought it clever, but Ted did not. It ran:—

"If little dogs could only learn to write,
What reams of revelations they'd indite."

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