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HIS FRIEND'S FIANCEE

A Man Was Saved From a Woman's Toils and a Friendship Broken

By EDWARD COMPTON

"What can I do for you, Mr. Dillon?"

The question was asked by a young man of an old one who had called upon him at his bachelor rooms. The two seated themselves, and Mr. Dillon explained his visit.

"You are my son's most intimate friend, John, and have more influence over him than any other man. Jim has come to a crisis in his life and is likely to be wrecked. I wish you to try to save him."

"You mean his infatuation for Clara Markland?"

"I do. I am convinced that she wishes to marry him for what he will inherit from me; that she cares nothing for him; that as his wife she will be constantly encouraging the attentions of other men, and in the end there will be a divorce, he being obliged to pay her a very large alimony."

"Why do you not make it known to the lady that you will disinherit him if he marries her?"

"Such a course would make a breach between him and me. He is my only child, and we have always been friends as well as father and son. In anything else than an infatuation for a woman he would do as I might ask. The only way to handle this case is to convince him beyond a doubt that the woman is fooling him, and I appeal to you to accomplish that if possible."

John Turner sat in deep thought for awhile, then said:

"You are asking me to make a breach between Jim and me, but since it is far better that it should occur between him and me than between his father and himself I will do what I can in the matter, but my experience is that one who interferes between a man and the woman he loves or a girl and the man she loves gets himself disliked without securing the desired end. I will, however, try to form a plan by which I may show Jim the woman's character without his being aware that I know she is the woman he loves. He has asked me to go with him to call upon her, but I have always put him off with some excuse. She has never seen me, which will give me an advantage. This is all I can say to you at present. If I save Jim from an unfortunate marriage, even at the expense of our friendship, I shall rejoice. Besides, I would gladly serve his father."

Mr. Dillon rose, pressed Turner's hand and left him with thanks for the spirit in which he had received his request. Dillon, whose inventive faculties seemed to need the stimulant of tobacco, lighted a pipe and sat down to think upon what he considered a problem, the solution of which was almost hopeless.

One afternoon not long after the interview between Mr. Dillon and John Turner the latter telephoned his friend Jim to meet him at their club for dinner. He hoped Jim would not fail him, since he had a communication to make of a confidential nature. Dillon, who had no engagement with his fiancée for that evening, promised to be present, and at the appointed hour the two met in the club lounge room.

"What is it, old man?" asked Dillon.

"I'm in love," replied Turner.

"Good; there's an additional bond of union between us. You now know how I feel, and we can sympathize with each other. Who is she?"

"The loveliest woman on the face of the earth."

"There I must differ with you," smiled Jim. "I happen to be engaged to the loveliest woman on earth myself."

"When you see the one I refer to you will acknowledge yourself mistaken."

"Well, well; we won't quarrel about that. Tell me of her."

"She is cunning and gentle, but without strong in honesty."

"She must be Clara Markland's twin sister."

"She is no woman's twin sister. There may be double stars in the firmament of the heavens, but the woman who has honored me with her regard is a central sun."

"You're enthusiastic, John. What a change from the man who received the announcement of my engagement so coldly! You've caught the fever yourself, my boy, and know now what a fiery disease it is. But you haven't told me the lady's name."

"Nor can I at present."

"Why?"

"Because we are not engaged."

"But you will be. Besides, there's

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no harm in telling a chum that you love a certain woman. On the contrary, you are paying her a compliment."

"There is harm in telling any friend that a certain woman is considering whether or no she will accept an offer of marriage from me."

"You should certainly marry an honorable woman. Your own sense of honor is too keen to be practical."

"It is that high sense of honor in-born in the woman I love which makes me honorable. It is understood between us that neither shall say anything to involve the other till I have her final answer. If I supposed it possible for you to discover whom I refer to I should never hold up my head again."

The two friends while at dinner and during the evening spent the time each eulogizing the woman he loved, and when they parted Jim exacted a promise that John would introduce him to his love just as soon as an engagement had taken place between them.

"By the bye," he added, "when are you going with me to call on Clara?"

"After my return from a business trip I must take within a day or two. I have only one evening before my departure that could be applied in this way, and you know with whom I would be likely to spend it."

"I certainly do."

John Turner did not report himself to his friend Dillon as back from his journey for several weeks when one morning he appeared in the latter's office, his exuberant manner somewhat changed. He made no reference to his love affair till Jim asked him about it, then said that there was a hitch.

The young lady was in great tribulation over it. By keeping it secret she had hoped to gain time in which to win the approval of her father to the match. But thus far she had failed. He was in favor of her marrying another man, one who was the prospective heir to a fortune. "She loves me," John added mournfully, "but she and her father are very close. She can't bear to disappoint him. Besides, she is one of those persons who are prone to act for the good of others at their own expense."

"Who's your rival?" asked Jim.

"That I don't know. The lady would not be justified in telling me."

"How do you know she really loves

you?"

"While I trust her implicitly, I must admit that I have no other proof than her word that she does."

Jim mentioned the call they were to make together, but John felt so despondent about his own affair that he begged off till something definite in it should have been reached.

One day John told Jim that he had persuaded his love to accept a ring from him. It was to be an engagement ring if they became engaged, and if they were not engaged the lady insisted upon its return. John asked his friend to go with him to a jeweler and assist in the selection of the gift. Jim did not quite understand how a woman so sensitively honorable as his friend's lady love had been described could accept a ring under the circumstances. Nevertheless the case seemed to be a peculiar one, and he understood from John that he regarded the gift as a possible stepping stone to an engagement.

The two friends visited a jeweler in company, and the ring selected was one that Turner especially fancied. There were two diamonds held in the fangs of a snake. Dillon condemned the ring as entirely inappropriate to the occasion. But Turner's heart seemed set on it, and he bought it. He left it with the jeweler to have the lady's initials engraved in it, explaining to his friend that, his own mind being made up, this was allowable. When the lady made up her mind to take him his own initials could be put in.

Soon after the purchase of the ring Turner told Dillon that he had received permission to take him to call on the lady of his love. Dillon gladly accepted the invitation.

When they went up the steps of the dwelling, to which Turner led the way, Dillon stopped and exclaimed:

"For heaven's sake, John, what does this mean?"

"It means," was the reply, "that this is the house where lives the woman who has admitted that she loves me."

Dillon had run up the steps and pushed the bell. Before Jim could speak again the door was opened by a servant. John waited for Jim to enter, then went in himself. Clara Markland was seated in the drawing room. At seeing the two men she paled. Then she tried to slip from her finger a ring. But before she could do so her fiancé had seen it and recognized the gift he had seen when his friend had bought it.

It was an impressive tableau—the woman who feared that she had lost an advantageous match, the undecayed lover and the man who had played the game.

"I now see, John," said Dillon in an icy tone, "why you fancied the two diamonds in the fangs of a serpent."

"Well, gentlemen," said Miss Markland, "how does it happen that you two call together?"

"I leave it to my friend to make the explanation," said Dillon. "I had no idea that he was taking me to call on my fiancée."

"Since whatever motive," said Turner, "that I may have had has been accomplished—namely, to prove to a deceived man his deception—I am not needed here. I leave you two together to make up this little difference."

The difference the lady succeeded in making up, which meant an enmity on the part of her lover for his chum. When Dillon next met Turner he passed him without speaking to him. Dillon married Miss Markland, and so long as a small fortune left him by his mother lasted she used it to float herself in the fashionable world. Meanwhile Mr. Dillon, Sr., died and left his estate in Turner's hands in trust for his son, to be paid him on certain conditions. When Dillon's means were exhausted his wife left him. Then one day he called on Turner to ask his forgiveness.

Turner told him that he was permitted by his father's will to pay him any money of which his wife could reap no benefit.

The friendship that was interrupted during this period of young Dillon's marriage became closer than ever. "As to the woman, she drifted away from both of them."

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