

But I was really so much interested in getting at their minds through this channel, that I couldn't comply at once.

"Now, you two fellows, you know," said I, laughing, "are younger than I, and I think it becomes me to know exactly what this thing means before proceeding any further in it. How can I tell but one of you is trying to get an advantage over the other?"

The pair looked startled at this, but it was only, I found, because they were so astonished at having such a construction put upon their project.

"Don't be alarmed," I hastened to say. "I wasn't serious."

But Vibbard persisted in a dogged expression of gloom.

"It's always this way," he presently declared, in a heavy, provoked tone. "My father, you know, is a shrewd man, and everybody is forever accusing me of being mean and overreaching. But I never dreamed that it could be imputed in such a move as—well, never mind!" he suddenly exclaimed in a loud voice, and with assumed indifference, getting up from his chair. "Of course it's all over now. I sha'n't do anything more about it, after what Ferguson has said." He was so sulky that he had to resort to thus putting me in the third person, although he was not addressing these words to Silverthorn. Then he gave his thick frame a slight shake, as if to get rid of the disagreeable feelings I had excited, and turned toward his friend. On the instant there came into his unmoved eyes and his matter-of-fact countenance a look of sentiment so incongruous as to be almost laughable. "I wish I could have done it, Thorny," said he, wistfully.

"Hold on, Vibbard," I interposed. "Don't be discouraged."

He paid no attention.

Upon this Silverthorn fired up.

"Hullo, Bill, this won't do! Do you suppose I'm going to let our pet arrange-

ment drop that way and leave you to be so misconstrued? Come back here and sit down." (Vibbard was already at the door.) "As for *your* getting any advantage out of this, is it likely? Why, you are well off now, to begin with—that is, your father is—and I am poor, downright poor; Ferguson must have seen that."

Here was a surprise! The dreamy youth was proving himself much more sensible than the beefy and practical one. Vibbard, however, seemed to enjoy being admonished by Silverthorn, and resumed his seat quite meekly. To me, in my balancing frame of mind, it occurred that one might go farther than Silverthorn had done, in saying that any advantage to Vibbard was very improbable; one might assume that it was Silverthorn who would reap the profit. But I decided not to disturb the already troubled waters any more.

Silverthorn, however, expressed this idea: "You'll be thinking," he said to me, with a smile, "that I am going to get the upper hand in this bargain; and I know there seems a greater chance of it. But then I have hopes—I—" The dreamy look, which I have described by the simile of a haze, gathered and increased on his fair, ingenuous young face, and his eyes quite ignored me for a moment, being fixed on some imaginary outlook very entrancing to him, until he recalled his flagging voice to add: "Well, I don't know that I can put it before you, but there are possibilities which may make a great difference in my fortunes within a few years."

I fancied that Vibbard gave me a quick, confidential glance, as much as to say, "Don't disturb that idea. Let him think so." But the next moment his features were as inert as ever.

It turned out, on inquiry, that only Vibbard was of age; his friend, being quick in study, had entered college early, and nearly two years stood between him