

amazement. Then he recovered his loyalty, and added: "But I needn't ask that, I know it for a fact already. I'm sorry that they and you are at odds. But as they never mentioned you to me I couldn't know, you see."

"Never mentioned her to him!"

Lady Petres nearly wept, from mingled feeling of disgust with her sister for having been so generously uncommunicative, and with herself for having been so prematurely outspoken.

And the one for whose sake she had snubbed her sister, her own daughter Bella, for whose welfare and social advancement she pursued her selfish policy unremittingly, Bella sat and scowled at her disapprovingly.

But by-and-by when the guests were gone the mother and daughter had a confidential chat, and once more Bella smiled upon her mother, for they had agreed upon a course of policy, and the next morning they set out to pursue it.

It was nothing else then to call at last on the long-neglected Warrens, and by means of hints and innuendoes lead the latter to suppose that they would be infringing on Bella's rights if they continued to cultivate Mr. Rodney Deane.

"If I don't have him, I don't mean that the girl who's only a teacher shall, and crow over me," Bella said, tossing her plain head, and Lady Petres agreed.

"Certainly not, my dear; such an idea, indeed!"

They left their carriage at some distance and made their way to the little house.

Cherry let them in with a grin and defiant look that was born of her suspicion of their purpose in coming. Presently they found themselves in a very small but very tasteful room, where lovely flowers—some of them hot-house ones—brightened up every nook.

Into this room came Mrs. Warren in a neat serge dress and a big holland apron.

When Bella saw how "nice" her aunt looked, she dreaded her unknown cousin in addition to disliking her.

"I could hardly believe my ears when Cherry told me. You have really come to me at last, Arabella," she said, and she went up to them and kissed them both, and they knew that there was no venom in her kisses.

"Ah! you little know how *onerous* my duties are, Margaret, or you wouldn't reproach me for not having come before," Lady Petres said pleasantly. "But now that we have met tell me all about yourselves."

"Madge will be in presently to speak for herself. My husband has gone out for his daily stroll to the club to see the papers."

Lady Petres nodded condescendingly, and Bella put in:

"Is it true that your daughter gives lessons to gentlemen, aunt Margaret? We heard it last night from a great friend of ours, and we were so shocked, weren't we, mamma?"

"Why?"

"Oh! how can you ask Why? aunt Margaret. Fancy a girl teaching a lot of men. Men call it 'jolly,' but we know what they mean by that."

Mrs. Warren's color changed slightly, but she spoke quite calmly.

"My daughter has but one gentleman pupil. I can hardly conceive that he would speak of her or her teaching disparagingly."

"Only one! Then is Mr. Deane the only one she teaches? Well, Margaret, if you *will* have it, it was from Mr. Deane that we heard that your daughter taught, and he spoke of you as the 'jolliest people.' Spoke of you at my table, in ignorance, of course, of the connection—the relationship between us. Poor Rodney! How distressed he will be when he finds it out."

"He need not ever find it out," said Mrs. Warren.

"Do you mean you won't tell him?"

"Certainly, I mean that—"

"Thanks—thanks!" Lady Petres said, quite warmly; "you are a mother, and will understand what I feel when I tell you that he is—well, not engaged to Bella, but very near being so. His mother comes next week, and after that I shall be able to tell you more."

"Rodney Deane almost engaged to Bella!" Mrs. Warren cried out so loudly in her amazement and horror that her words fell clearly upon the ears of the two young people who were opening the door and entering the room at the moment. One of these was Madge, who sprang to her mother's side, crying out:

"Don't look beaten, mother, darling, I'll bear it!"

The other was Rodney Deane himself, who, drawing himself up with his coldest air of officer-like dignity, followed Madge at once, saying:

"You're not called upon to bear anything beyond hearing me say that Lady Petres has made a mistake—an exceedingly gross mistake. Mrs. Warren listen! Should I have got my mother down here to make the acquaintance of my wife that is to be if I had been guilty of any idle fooling in any other quarter?"

As he spoke he took Madge's hand and drew it within his arm.

Lady Petres and Bella departed in undignified haste, without waiting for any further explanation of the situation.

It would scarcely, perhaps, have pleased them to hear that Rodney Deane had gone to the cosy dinner at Admiralty House the night before in a specially elated frame of mind. This elation was caused by the fact of his having conquered the Warren's scruples by showing them a letter from his mother, in which that lady said she would, with all her heart, come and lodge near him, and make the acquaintance of his darling Madge.

"But you must tell her that I am coming to see my *future* daughter, so she must promise to be that before I come!"

Madge gave the promise heartily enough then, and Rodney Deane would have told Lady Petres of his engagement that same night if she had not made her crowning effort to keep what she considered the loaves and fishes from her "POOR RELATIONS!"

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