

of passing a nice, quiet evening with Jack, smoking his cigars, and enjoying his books, I had been compelled to do the agreeable to an old lady and a couple of young girls, and to submit to the insulting treatment of a 'particular friend' of the family. Yes, Harry had played me a very shabby trick; and as for Mr. Jack Morley himself, his conduct was simply inexcusable, to say the least of it.

As I ascended the stairs, my temper was not improved by hearing loud shouts of laughter issue from one of parlours. I was certain they had got hold of that fish story by this time, and were making merry over it at my expense. I hurried up to my room, slammed the door after me, and went to bed in the worst possible of humours.

CHAPTER VI.

AN EXPLANATION THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN MADE, FOLLOWED BY ONE THAT WAS.

'Pshaw! I have overslept myself!' I exclaimed, as I opened my eyes to the fact that the early morning sun was already flooding my chamber with his cheery beams.

This exclamation was evoked for the reason that I had, the day before, resolved that I would this morning put my long cherished purpose into execution; namely, to rise with the lark, and meet the glowing sun upon the upland lawn; and then, if the time before breakfast permitted, stroll into the farm-yard and the dairy, and over to that rustic little bridge.

What peculiar charms the two former of these places were supposed to have possessed for me, I must admit I had no very distinct idea; but I had always associated them with my ideas of rural life, as being necessary appendages to every country house. I might also perhaps have entertained the idea that a rustic little bridge was

a necessary appendage, too; but that this was the case I was not quite so sure. I had seen nothing of the kind about the grounds as yet; but still a closer inspection might not fail to reveal it.

Two quick raps upon my door, accompanied by the sound of Harry's voice, brought me to my feet. When admitted, his first words were, in a tone of some little displeasure. I thought,

'Well, I must say, you are about the most unreliable fellow I ever knew. What excuse have you to offer for yourself?'

I regarded him with a slightly puzzled look, and said shortly.

'What do you mean?'

'Why didn't you come?' said Harry.

'Come where?' I replied.

'Absolutely forgotten all about it already,' he observed, regarding me with a despairing air.

'Oh! I understand,' I said, 'Why didn't *you* come?'

'It was really too bad of you,' remarked Harry; 'especially after Jack had prepared the most sumptuous of dinners; bought a box of especially fine regalias, and laid in a supply of choice old Madeira; and all in honour of your visit. After your promise to me, old fellow, I must say it was very shabby of you not to come.'

Now, if Harry thought that by this puerile attempt at a joke, I was to be diverted from any feeling of displeasure that his own conduct in the matter might very reasonably have caused me, he was mistaken. But I would let him see that I could indulge in a little pleasantry of the kind myself; so I said, in a somewhat ironical tone:

'Oh, yes; I enjoyed the dinner immensely; relished the cigars and the Madeira beyond measure, and thought Mr. Jack Morley himself really one of the most hospitable and agreeable fellows in the world; and the plainness and old-fashioned ways of his mother and sisters particularly charming.'