

"How could I?" reproachfully.  
 "But I said it."  
 "Yes—but in a tone."  
 "I meant it, however," says he earnestly. "Though I can't prove it. You have still a penny!"

"No. No. Only a half-penny now," says she with a delightful little glance. "And you have the other half. It is like the old broken sixpence! Why," laughing, though a little shyly, "we must be lovers."

"For life!" says he, in a low tone. He draws her to him.

Meantime Diana and her husband, in the morning room, are discussing the late turn of affairs with great spirit.

"It is the most fortunate thing that could have happened for Hilary, anyway," says Jim.

"Yes. I always felt—I always knew her engagement with him would come to nothing."

"So did I," with disgust. "And after all it was a most confounded will!"

"You see, Hilary is not the sort of girl to marry without love."

"I think any girl who could do it—"

"Oh, Jim, but I rather think you advised her to do it at first."

"Not I. It was you who advised her. In my opinion the girl who could bring herself to marry a man simply for money's sake ought to get the sack—"

"My dear Jim! how dreadfully vulgar! That is what the servants say when—well—when one gives them warning—the sack, you know."

"And the bawstring, I was about to add, when"—with dignity—"I was interrupted. Really, Diana, the head of the house ought sometimes to be shown the consideration that—"

"Oh, bother!" says Diana, most irreverently. "Let us talk about Hilary. Do you know, Jim, I am even now rather sorry that she won't marry Mr. Ker."

"Of course. She would be twice as well off then as she is at present. Women are never satisfied."

"And this from you!" says Diana, tragically. "But look here, Jim. I really think only for Mrs. Dyson-Moore she might have married him."

"You think she liked him then?"

"Well, I don't know. But that woman spoiled it all, however it was. She kept him away from Hilary to-day. There is no doubt about that. And at the McIntyres' dance you must have noticed how she flirted with him."

"She'd flirt with a broomstick."

"Nobody would mind a broomstick. The thing is that Hilary objected to her flirting with Mr. Ker."

"I think the question is whether Ker objected!"

"Nonsense. I'm sure—I'm positive the Fred is all he ought to be!"

"Then the sooner we buy him a postcard at the public expense, and place him on it, the sooner we shall be doing a public duty. All he ought to be! Diana! how many times have you told me I was wrong I ought to be! And that familiar application. Fred! I object to it."

"Oh, Jim, dearest, I wish you would be serious, if only for five minutes. Somehow, I had set my heart on this marriage; and now, because of this odious Mrs. Dyson-Moore, it is all over. She has made some mischief—"

"She's sure to be in it where mischief is brewing," says Clifford, with conviction. "Anyway, it is all over now, and I, for one, in perfectly certain Hilary wouldn't have looked at him. Girls are such fools!"

"Well," sighing, "perhaps so. She certainly treated him very cavalierly."

"Don't make yourself miserable over it, Di. From all I saw I think they hated each other."

"Yes, yes, I suppose so."

"They'd have led a most awful life!"

"It would have killed darling Hilary!"

"Or Ker! Man—brute as he is—has been known to die of ill-treatment. To my thinking, they are both well out of it!"

"Yes; it would never have done."

At this moment the door is pushed slowly open, and Hilary's charming head appears. Another head is looking in over hers. It is Ker's.

Mr. and Mrs. Clifford grow paralyzed.

"Di—may we come in?" Hilary's voice is shy—her face is one soft, sweet blush. "I—um," with a charming glance behind, "want to tell you—that—"

"That we are going to be married," says Ker, in the frankest, clearest way.

"Oh," says Diana, a little faintly—then she conquers her weakness, and suddenly finds herself embracing Hilary with extreme warmth.

"I am glad," says she, giving her hands to Ker, who, however, appears dissatisfied with them, as he stoops and kisses her cheek. "And so is Jim. We always desired this delightful solution of the—difficulty—and now, when there is no difficulty, it is all the more delightful. In fact, Jim and I were just now saying—"

She catches Jim's eye, and breaks down ignominiously. What had they just been saying?

"Yes, it is a great surprise. No wonder Diana is overwhelmed," says Jim.

"She was about to say we were just dwelling on—on the—" he pauses ominously, and Diana's knees grow weak, "on the happiness that would be yours if you made up your minds to spend your lives together." His tone is sweetness and light itself.

"Dear old Jim!" says Hilary, affectionately. She had not seen that Diana is growing apoplectic. Presently she carries away her new possession with her for a stroll through the garden, and Diana and Jim remain once more face to face and alone.

"Who'd have thought it?" says Diana, solemnly. "But, after all, I'm sure they will be happy! Hilary is such a darling, and he seems so delightful, so kind; frank, I call him!"

"Frank! Nonsense, Diana. It isn't five minutes ago since you called him Fred!"

At this they both give way to subdued but uncontrollable laughter.

It was such a relief.

THE END.

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