

Maude—we began to talk of you and your marriage; and then—I don't know how—we found ourselves discussing poverty, money, *et-cetera*; and I told her of the horror I had of heiresses. Thanks to poor Warburton's affair with Miss Alverton—

"The deuce you did!" put in Jack much amused.

"Yes, and then—and then— Oh hang it, man, I can't tell how it all came about exactly! But I found myself kissing her, and it was particularly jolly. You know," continued Gerald meditatively, "she's an awfully nice girl to kiss!"

"Well, you are the coolest hand!" laughed Jack. "I wonder if Miss Maude reciprocates the sentiment? But, to come to more serious matters, may one inquire what you two young people propose living on?"

"Oh, I shall have to buckle to, and try for some appointment! I think I can manage that somehow. I expect there'll be a deuce of a row about it, though. The matter will be wild, for I know she has some fearful heiress in tow for me; and truly I think that prospect added a zest to the present affair."

"Well, my dear fellow, I'm prepared to admit that you've reckoned up your own share of the row; but how about Maude's people?"

"Maude's people!" repeated Gerald slowly. "I never thought of them. Somehow I had a notion she had none. I suppose I fancied I should have to come and ask your consent, if I thought of the matter at all—which, now that I come to consider, I don't believe I ever did. The worst is, I never told her about myself—not that it matters much, after all, for I can tell her at any time."

"No, thank you!" put in Jack sharply. "You'll do nothing of the sort. Maude most certainly has 'people,' and I will only undertake to smooth your way with them on the condition that you promise faithfully to sink 'Lord Foulis' till I give you leave to resume your name."

"Oh, come, I say!" protested Gerald. "This is my only condition; but I stick to it. You will not breathe a syllable about your title till I give you leave, or I shall leave you in the lurch; and, if I do, I wouldn't give much for your chances."

This shot told; the promise was given, and Gerald departed to dress for dinner and dream of his happiness. But Jack's troubles were not over. Hardly was Gerald gone when Margaret entered.

"Oh, Jack, Jack, what on earth shall we do? What will aunt Eleanor say?

Really, Jack dear, it was too foolish of you having Gerald Foulis here now, and he an artist too!"

"Why, my child, don't you like him?"

"Like him! That's not the question. I like him immensely, and think he would be a capital husband for Maude; but her mother—her uncle?"

"Her mother and her uncle, my dear, will do what dozens of mothers and uncles before have them have done—bluster a little, growl, grumble, and give in. Now don't you go fretting yourself ill, little woman; it will all come right. Just tell me—has she said anything to you?"

"Nothing exactly. Only just now she turned and kissed me, which, by-the-way, she has never done before of her own accord—and began to say something; but then she checked herself, asking me at what time the post went out, and begging me to excuse her appearing at dinner, as her walk and the heat had given her a headache."

"If that is the case my dear, let us dine. I am not a lover, and I am hungry."

Meanwhile Maude, having got rid of anxious little Madge, sat down to her desk and wrote—

"Dear Mother—What your real intention may have been in sending me here I cannot certainly say, though at times I fancy I can guess it. If I am right in my conjecture, your plan has simply failed. Mr. Melford and Margaret have been kindness itself, and my life during the past two months has been a very happy one. About three weeks since Mr. Foulis, a friend of Mr. Melford's, came on a visit; he is an artist, very clever, very pleasant, and very poor. You see I put the facts clearly, if badly, before you. This afternoon, knowing nothing more of me than he has seen here, thinking me simply Margaret's cousin, as poor as himself, he proposed, and I have accepted him. That this will cause you some annoyance is, I fear, inevitable; and for this I am truly sorry, as I know that you have always intended to do the very best and kindest for me. At the same time, I must tell you frankly, my mind is thoroughly made up, and, as long as Gerald Foulis cares to have me, I am his. I may also add that he has not the slightest idea of my former prospects; and I certainly shall not tell him, for, from one or two unfortunate circumstances, he has a perfect horror of heiresses. If you do not care to tell uncle Ralph my news, I will do so."

"Please let me have an answer as soon as may be, and believe me

"Your affectionate daughter,

"MAUDE ALVERTON."

Having dispatched this letter, Maude felt easier. She had now put matters out of her own hands, and, be the issue what it might, intended fully to keep troth with Gerald.

The next morning passed uneasily.