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THE WATCH-DOG

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Illustrations by Phillips Ward

AFTER three minutes of silent and intense thought, John Barton gave out the statement that the moonlight on the terrace was pretty. Aline Ellison said, "Yes, very pretty."

"But, I say, by Jove," said a voice behind them, "you should see some of the moonlight effects on the Mediterranean, Barton. You really should. They would appeal to you. There is nothing like them, is there, Miss Ellison?"

Homicidal feelings surged up within John's bosom. This was the fourth time that day that Lord Bertie Fendall had butted in just as he had got Aline alone. It was maddening. Man, in his dealings with the more attractive of the opposite sex, is either a buzzer or a thinker. John was a thinker. In ordinary circumstances a tolerable conversationalist, he became when in the presence of Aline Ellison, a thinker of the most pronounced type, practically incapable of speech. What he wanted was time. He was freight, not express. But he had perseverance, and, provided the line was kept clear, was bound to get somewhere in the end.

The advent of Lord Bertie had blocked the line. From the moment when Mr. Keith, their host, had returned from New York bringing with him the son and heir of the Earl of Stockleigh, John's manoeuvres had received a check. In Lord Bertie he had a rival, and a rival who was a buzzer. The Englishman had the gift of conversation, and a course of travel had provided him with material for small-talk. Aline, her father being rich and her mother a sort of female Ulysses, had gone over much of the ground which Lord Bertie had covered; and the animation with which she exchanged views of European travel with him made John moist with agony. John was no fool—members of the New York Stock Exchange would have testified to that—but he had never been east of the Statue of Liberty; and, in conversations dealing with the views from the summit of the Jungfrau or the paintings of obscure Dagoes in Florentine picture-galleries, this handicapped him.

On the present occasion he accepted defeat with moody resignation. His opportunity had gone. The conversation was now dealing with Monte Carlo, and Lord Bertie had plainly come to stay. His high-pitched voice rattled on and on. Aline seemed absorbed.

With a muttered excuse John turned into the house. It was hard. To-morrow he was leaving for New York, owing to the sudden illness of his partner. True, he would be coming back in a week or so; but in that time the worst, probably, would have happened. He went to bed so spirited that, stubbing his toe against a chair in the dark, he merely sighed.

AS he paced the terrace after breakfast, waiting for the automobile, Keggs, the Keiths' butler, approached.

At the beginning of his visit, Keggs had inspired John with an awe amounting at times to a positive discomfort. He had suffered terribly under the butler's dignified gaze, until one morning the latter, with the air of a high-priest conferring with an underling on some point of ritual, had asked him whether in his opinion he would be doing rightly in putting his shirt on Mumbin' Mose, in a forthcoming

handicap, as he had been advised to do by a metropolitan friend who claimed to be in the confidence of the trainer. John, recovering from the shock, answered in the affirmative; and a long and stately exchange of ideas on the subject of Current Form ensued. At dinner, a few days later, the butler, leaning over John to help him to sherry, murmured softly: "Romped 'ome, sir, thanking you, sir," and from that moment had intimated by his manner that John might consider himself promoted to the rank of an equal and a friend.

"Hexcuse me, sir," said the butler, "but Frederick, who 'as charge of your packing, desired me to ask you what arrangements you wished made with regard to the dog, sir."

The animal in question was a beautiful bulldog, Reuben by name. John had brought him to the country at the special request of Aline, who had met him in New York and fallen an instant victim to his rugged charms.

"The dog?" he said. "Oh, yes. Tell Frederick to put his leash on. Where is he?"

"Frederick, sir?"

"No, Reuben."

"Gruffling at 'is lordship, sir," said Keggs, tranquilly, as if he were naming some customary and recognized occupation for bulldogs.

"Gruffling at—? What!"

"'Is lordship, sir, 'ave climbed a tree, and Reuben is at the foot, gruffling at 'im very fierce."

John stared.

"'Is lordship, sir," continued Keggs, "'as always been uncommon afraid of dogs, from boyhood hup. I 'ad the honour to be employed as butler some years ago by 'is father, Lord Stockleigh, and was enabled at that time to hobserve Lord 'Erbert's hextreme aversion for animals of that description. 'Is humeasiness in the presence of even 'er ladyship's toy Pomeranian was 'ighly marked and much commented on in the servants' 'all."

"So you had met Lord Herbert before?"

"I was butler at the castle a matter of six years, sir."

"Well," said John, with some reluctance, "I guess we must get him out of that tree. Fancy being afraid of old Reuben! Why, he wouldn't hurt a fly."

"'E 'ave took a huncommon dislike to 'is lordship, sir," said Keggs.

"Where's the tree?"

"Hat the lower end of the terrace, sir. Beyond the nood statoo, sir."

John ran in the direction indicated, his steps guided by an intermittent sound as of one gargling. Presently he came in view of the tree. At the foot, with his legs well spread and his massive head raised, stood Reuben. From a branch some little distance from the ground peered down the agitated face of Lord Bertie Fendall. His lordship's aristocratic pallor was intensified. He looked almost green.

"I say," he called, as John appeared, "do for Heaven's sake take that bally dog away. I've been up here the dickens of a time. It isn't safe with that animal about. He's a bally menace."

Reuben, glancing over his shoulder, recognized his master, and, having no



"I say," he called. "Do take that bally dog away!"

tail to speak of, wagged his body in a welcoming way. He looked up at Lord Bertie, and back again at John. As clearly as if he had spoken the words his eye said—

"Come along, John. You and I are friends. Be a sport and pull him down out of that."

"Take the brute away," cried his lordship.

"He's quite good-natured, really. He won't hurt you."

"He won't get the bally chance," replied Lord Bertie, with acerbity. "Take him away."

John stooped and grasped the dog's collar.

"Come on, Reuben, you old fool," he said. "We shall be missing that train."

THE automobile was already at the door when he got back. Mr. Keith was there, and Aline.

"Too bad, Barton," said Mr. Keith, "your having to break your visit like this. You'll come back, though? How soon, do you think?"

"Inside of two weeks, I hope," said John. "Hammond has had these influenza attacks before. They never last long. Have you seen Reuben's leash anywhere?"

Aline Ellison uttered a cry of anguish.

"Oh, you aren't taking Reuben, Mr. Barton! You can't! You mustn't!"

John cleared his throat.

What he wanted to say was, "Miss Ellison, your lightest wish is law. I love you—and not with the weak two-by-four imitation of affection such as may be offered to you by certain knock-kneed members of the British peerage. Take Reuben. And when you look upon him, think, if but for a moment, of one who though far away, is thinking always of you."

What he said was: "Er, I——"

And that, mind you, was going some for John.

"Oh, thank you!" cried Aline. "Thank you so much, Mr. Barton. It's perfectly sweet of you, and I'll take such care of him. I won't let him out of my sight for a minute."

" . . .," said John, brightly. Mathematicians do not need to be informed that " . . ." is the algebraical sign representing a blend of wheeze, croak, and hiccough.

And the automobile rolled off.

It was about an hour later that Lord Bertie Fendall, finding Aline seated under the shade of the trees, came to a halt beside her.

"Barton went off in the car just now, didn't he?" he inquired casually.

"Yes," said Aline. Lord Bertie drew a deep breath of relief and

