

They laughed, and Vibbard blurted out, with a queer, boyish grimace:

"It's *me*. She don't like me. Hey, Thorny?"

"It's nearer the truth," returned his friend, "to say that you're so bashful you don't give her half a chance to make known what she does think of you."

"Oh, time enough—time enough," said Vibbard, good-humoredly.

Remembering that I must hurry back to catch my train, I suddenly found that I had been in an abstracted mood, for I was still standing with my hat off.

"Well, let me know how you get on," I said, jocosely, as I parted from the comrades.

Yet for the life of me I could not tell which one of them it was that I should expect to hear from as a suitor for the girl's hand.

It was within a fortnight after this that they came to my office—for I had been admitted to the bar—and announced that the time for drawing up their long-pending agreement had arrived. They were still as eager as ever about it, and I very soon had the instrument made out, stating the mutual consideration, and duly signed and sealed.

Finding that they had been at Stansby again, I was prompted to ask them more about Ida.

"Do you know," I said, boldly, "that I am very much puzzled as to which of you was the more interested in her?"

They took it in good part, and Silverthorn answered:

"That's not surprising. I don't know, myself."

"I'm trying," said Vibbard, bluntly, "to make Thorny fall in love with her. But I can't seem to succeed."

"No," said his friend, "because I insist upon it that she's just the woman for *you*."

Vibbard turned to me with an expression of ridicule.

"Yes," he said, "Thorny is as much wrapped up in that idea as if his own happiness depended on my marrying her."

"You're rivals, then, after a new fashion," was my comment. "Don't you see, though, how you are to settle it?"

"No."

"Why, each of you should propose in form for the other. Then Miss Winwood would have to take the difficulty into her own hands."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Vibbard. "That's a good idea. But suppose she don't care for either of us?"

"Very well. I don't see that in that case she would be worse off than yourselves, for neither of you seem to care for her."

"Oh yes, we do!" exclaimed Silverthorn, instantly.

"Yes, we care a great deal," insisted Vibbard.

They both grew so very earnest over this that I didn't dare to continue the subject, and it was left in greater mystery than before.

At last the time of graduation came, and the two friends parted to pursue their separate ways. Silverthorn had a widowed mother living at a distance in the country, whose income had barely enabled her to send him through college on a meagre allowance. He went home to visit her for a few days, and then promptly took his place on a daily newspaper in Boston, where he spent six months of wretched failure. He had great hopes of achieving in a short time some prodigious triumph in writing; but at the end of this period he gave it all up, and decided to develop the mechanical genius which he thought he had perhaps inherited from his father. I began to have a suspicion when I learned that this new turn had led him to Stansby, where he procured a position as a sort of clerk to the superintendent, Winwood.

After some months, I went out to see