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A Lawyer Cheated, OR Mr. Fiel's Delicate Case.

WHEN MRS. FIEL was a bride, all the spectators agreed that she was a pretty and interesting girl, who would make a fine woman when she came to fill out. But she never did fill out; on the contrary, Time, that stole her years away, robbed her of plumpness too; and after thirty anniversaries of that wedding-day, she was considerably more slender than at starting; but a better wife you will scarcely find in all England, and that is infinitely more important than comeliness and tasteful attire, as you will own before you have been married for a quarter of a century.

Excellent at all times, Mrs. Fiel culminated at meals. Call no man happy till you have seen him at breakfast; a natural irritability in Mr. Fiel's disposition had been almost entirely cured by little soothing comforts and tit-bits. He was a solicitor, with an office in London, and a semi-detached villa in the suburbs, who had to leave the latter at nine to reach the former by ten every morning. This necessitated breakfast at eight, but even at that early hour Mrs. Fiel saw to every detail herself.

It would have shaken a very confirmed bachelor to have seen her table one spring morning a few years ago—the linen was so white, and the tea so black, the water-cresses and radishes so fresh, the marmalade and apricot jam so daintily set out, the eggs so new-looking, the loaf so brown and crusty, the dry toast so crisp and thin. And when she heard the tread of her husband's foot on the staircase, and the flourish on his nose which invariably heralded his approach, she rang the bell for the appetizing little covered dish, which matched and fitted the slop-basin, to be brought up. This contained frizzled slices of ham or bacon, delicate and curled, a sausage, a kidney, or the savory thigh of a chicken. May such be your only domestic broils!

A hale, neat man, with sharp, gray eyes, and a very good opinion of himself, entered and looked at his letters, selecting and opening one at once.

"Well, Martha," said he, "the Chipchew has arrived at last."

"You don't say so! Then Mr. Lobyear will be here presently. Will he come to stay with us, do you think?"

"I don't know. You had better have a bed ready; though I expect he has not come to England with the idea of shutting himself up with an old man and woman four miles from the Marble Arch. Still, as everything will be strange to him at first, he may accept my invitation for a night or two."

"This Mr. Thomas Lobyear is rich—is he not?"

"Will be, I suppose. At present, he probably depends upon his father, who has given me very liberal orders, absurdly liberal orders, about him. From living so long among savages, the old man must have lost all idea of the value of money. However, there is plenty of it accumulating, and it does not matter to me."

"Don't you think," said Mrs. Fiel, "it might be well to have Sarah home?"

Sarah, the only child of the Fiels, was at a finishing-school at Clifton, but she was seventeen and a woman.

"Ah, ah, ah!" laughed the lawyer.

"At your match-making, old lady? From what I am advised, he is proof against your attempts. Besides which, it would be something like a breach of trust; old Lobyear has evidently got other views for his son than marrying him at present—at any rate to an English woman."

"Why, he would never go and match

him with a heathen, with a ring through her nose like a pig!"

"I don't know that," replied Mr. Fiel, laughing; "if he would discover a new weed or a fresh variety of black beetle by it, he certainly would."

It was of good augury for Mrs. Fiel when her husband laughed, and a better when he replied to her observations, instead of looking deaf and grunting, which he generally did if she alluded to his clients or their business; for it showed that he was willing to be pumped, and Mrs. Fiel's thirst for information was great, though it was rarely slaked. In the present instance, however, the lawyer thought he might require feminine aid in the task which he had undertaken, and was therefore not unwilling to admit his wife into his confidence.

"Ah," said she, "that was a curious idea for a rich man, to banish himself completely, and give up civilized life, for the sake of studying botany and butterflies in Japan. For a poor man, indeed, it would be explicable if he expected to make something by it in the end; but from what you say, Mr. Lobyear has more money than he knows what to do with as it is."

"Yes; he was well off originally, and got a good property through his wife besides."

"Ah, poor man; I dare say grief for her death gave him a craze."

"Fudge!" exclaimed Mr. Fiel somewhat rudely. "He was glad enough to be free to go hunting on his favorite hobby. If she had lived another year, it is my opinion that he would have bolted and left her."

"Ah, well," said Mr. Fiel, "it is a fortunate thing for him, or at any rate for this son, that he fixed on so good a man of business as yourself to look after his interests."

"Well," replied her husband, complacently, "considering that the bulk of his property is in houses situated in a rapidly improving neighborhood, and that the tenants are up to all sorts of dodges to avoid having their rents raised, perhaps an agent who was not sharp might miss an advantage here and there. For instance, there was an application for the renewal of a lease the other day, and I discovered that the tenant, who had been paying forty pound a year, had underlet for the last three years at a hundred and ten."

"Lor, how sharp you are!"

"Well, I was not born in Yorkshire for nothing. I do not know of more than one person who ever regularly took me in—that young rascal, Tom Scott, who robbed me five years ago."

"Ah, that was very shocking," said the good wife, soothingly, "but then, you know, he was brought up in your own office."

"Why, Martha! Do you suppose, then, that he learned dishonesty there? I never expected an epigram of that sort from your mouth. I would have you to know that I could put at least a couple of thousand in my pocket from this Lobyear property alone, without a chance of detection, if I chose to be dishonest."

"I am sure I never meant to call you an epigram, or any other name," cried Mrs. Fiel, astonished at this outbreak. "I only said that a breach of trust was easy for that Scott, because he had been under you for some time, and probably had had opportunities."

"Oh, that is different," said her husband, cracking an egg. It was not a tender conscience which made Mr. Fiel so touchy—for though priding himself upon keen shrewdness, he was perfectly upright and trustworthy—but he thought of Tom Scott. There is the disadvantage in reckoning yourself to be cleverer than the rest of the world, that if ever you are taken in, it rankles. So the remembrance of Tom Scott always irritated him. He had taken a fancy to the sharp lad, and put him in the office, where he favored, encouraged, and trusted him more and more every year; and the result had been a cunning bit of roguery, and flight. There was one consolation; he had caught the scoundrel, who was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Had Tom Scott got off with impunity, his heart would have been near breaking.

"I suppose this young gentleman was quite a lad when his father went to foreign parts?" said Mrs. Fiel presently, returning to the pump-handle.

"As he is not of age yet, I suppose he must have been," replied her husband, continuing to flow.

"Was he educated in England before he went out to his father?"

"I don't know. Mr. Lobyear never mentioned him before. I have written regularly to advise him how his affairs stood,

and he has from time to time briefly acknowledged my letters, declaring himself satisfied, telling me to do what I thought best, saying where he wished his remittances sent, and now and then requesting me to undertake certain commissions for him connected with his pursuits, but not at all with my business. However, as he has always behaved very handsomely, I have done my best to oblige him, and mean to do so still, though the present job is rather a delicate affair, and quite out of my line: what I call a regular bit of diplomacy."

"Ah?"

"Yes. It seems that the young man has inherited his father's fancy for a roving life, though not his scientific tastes. He has been living in Borneo for some years, sailing about with expeditions against the pirates, and I don't know what all. Mr. Lobyear, senior, went to China from Japan a year and a half ago, and his son joined him at Hongkong, where he intimated a desire to go to England for a while, and have a spell of comfortable living. The father was willing enough to let him do so, and gave him a letter of credit to me, and started him in one of the sailing-ships. But after he had sailed, Mr. Lobyear, senior, received information from a friend that his son's principal reason for desiring to visit England was the hope of meeting with an adventuress, whose acquaintance he had made in Calcutta, and whom, in the ardor of a first passion, he desired to marry. The lady had other views at the time; and she is a most undesirable wife for him. This news having come to me by steamer, has of course long preceded the youngster's actual arrival; and my mission is to prevent the marriage. This can be done with comparative ease while he is a minor; but he will come of age in eight months, and it would be poor success merely to delay matters for that time. I hope to break it off altogether."

"Exactly. And don't you think that if he were thrown into the society of an innocent, accomplished, and attractive girl, his infatuation for this creature would the sooner be got over?"

"Well, well; send for Sarah if you like; she would be leaving, anyhow, at the end of the quarter. Only, don't put her up to thinking this youngster a very great catch, for his father may have other children and older ones, for aught I know. Or he may spend all his money in building pagodas, or aquariums, or black-beetle museums; or in fitting out expeditions to discover the South Pole, which really ought to have a turn, after all the fuss made about the North. I am not by any means sure that it is a good thing, Martha."

As Mr. Fiel uttered these last words, he looked at his watch, and then took a cigar out of his case; whereupon Mrs. Fiel brushed his hat, and brought it to him, together with a light. Something like a wife! And ere a man could cry—"Conductor; hold!" the City Atlas had devoured him up.

It is one thing for a sailing-ship to be telegraphed, and another for it to arrive in port. A heavy gale tantalized the crew and passengers of the Chipchew, and it was a week before Mr. Fiel and his client's son met by which time the accomplished Sarah was safely established under the paternal roof; for her mother thought the lawyer exaggerated the chances against the young man's inheriting a good fortune, and stuck to her intrigue. It is certain that she herself over-estimated her daughter's attractions. Sarah was a good girl enough, but common-place, and not beautiful; a pellet hardly calculated to drive out another very firmly fixed in the pop-gun heart of a lover.

However, the designing mother and unwitting daughter had a fair chance, for Lobyear accepted the offer of hospitality made him by Mr. Fiel, and established himself in their house until he could look about him. Travel in hot climates had matured the young man, whom you would have taken for five-and-twenty. It had likewise tamed him; and his face and hands were so dark, that Mrs. Fiel was induced to make inquiries about the nationality of his mother; but as her husband had never known anything of Mr. Lobyear before he put his affairs in his hands, on going out to the east, and was even ignorant, until quite lately, of the very existence of this son, she could not get much satisfactory information out of him. So she concluded that Mr. Lobyear senior's oriental tastes were not confined to the fauna and flora; and the deep blackness of the young man's hair, eyebrows, and long, drooping, silky moustache certainly tended to confirm her theory. His manners were not very good. There was an evident restraint about him;

and if, in an unguarded moment, he gave nature her head, he became boisterous and vulgar. He was very careful, however, and only broke out once or twice, recovering himself almost immediately. He seemed to find that the safest plan was to spoon Sarah, and devoted himself to her so assiduously the first evening, that Mr. Fiel listened to his wife's statement of *pros and cons* with seriousness that night.

"I have no doubt his father means well by him at present," said he, "or he would hardly show so much anxiety about his contracting an unfavorable marriage, as to give me almost *carte blanche* in the cost of preventing it.—Neither would he name so handsome a sum as sixty pounds a month for expenses, if he intended to leave him penniless at death. But this is all conjecture."

"But rather strong, surely, dear; and he is certainly smitten with Sarah," said Mrs. Fiel.

"Don't be too sure of that. Very likely he carries on with everything in a petticoat, or out of one, in those Borneo parts, that he meets; or it may be that he is throwing dust in my eyes, to cover his intrigue with his old Calcutta friend."

Mr. Fiel felt it to be so important to prevent the young man giving him the slip, that he left his other business to the clerks, and took upon him the office of cicerone whereby he made acquaintance with many London sights that he had never seen before—the interior of St. Paul's, to wit: the top of the monument; Madame Tussaud's wax-works; and certain bewildering circular pictures, apparently seen from the inside, as if one were a figure represented, called panoramas—all of which very much interested the young man, who nevertheless owned that, on the whole, he preferred Calcutta. Mention of that city gave the lawyer an opening; he inquired if there was much society there—pleasant society? And, eventually, Mr. Lobyear, the son, who of course could not be expected to know his father's discovery and communication to his lawyer, took his cicerone into confidence. He adored the most charming, innocent, persecuted saint that ever excited the jealousy of a spiteful coterie. Her name was Montacute, and she was a widow without encumbrances. She had been residing in a quiet part of the Isle of Wight, but was now on her way to London; and he had received a letter that very morning directing him where to find her; so he would not trespass on Mr. Fiel's hospitality after that day. Whereabouts was Duke street, Jermyn street? The complacent Mr. Fiel conducted him to that neighborhood, and also, in reply to farther questions, gave him an outline of the steps it was necessary to take before a gentleman and lady, inclined that way, could be joined together in holy matrimony. There could be no harm done in affording him such scraps of information: the first cabman passing would have driven him to the address, and the charming widow probably had license and banns formalities at her finger's ends.

"Of course, you are of age?" he threw it in at the end.

"I believe my father would say I was some time short of it," replied the young man carelessly, "but really his evidence is so little to be trusted in any matter not connected with plants or insects, that I mean to give myself the benefit of the doubt. That's good law, eh?"

Mr. Fiel proposed a bachelor's dinner at his club that day, and entertained his guest all the evening with caustic observations upon widows, and the dangers to which young men are exposed from beautiful sirens, whose antecedents would not bear strict examination, illustrated with numerous apposite anecdotes, which the young man seemed to enjoy heartily. But he would not apply them to his own case; so that, at last, the lawyer was forced to be more explicit, and with much apology asked whether the young man knew who the late Mr. Montacute was, and under what circumstances the fair widow came to be alone and unprotected in Calcutta? But the ardent lover would not listen to a hint reflecting upon the object of his affections and got so excited and angry that Mr. Fiel dropped the subject at once. Where was the use of talking sense to a man who declared that if all the world swore to anything which his mistress denied, he should take her word in preference to the united oath? To expose his game by showing the paternal letter empowering him to forbid the marriage, would have been stupid indeed at present; that must be kept as the very last resource, when, combined with consideration of probable disinheritance it might have effect. What

effect? Mr. Fiel asked himself unflinchingly when quiet that night. Probably that of making young Lobyear dissemble for the time, and marry his widow elsewhere, unknown to the lawyer. And if the agent were deceived, the bridegroom might well hope to conceal the matter from his butterfly-hunting father; at all events, for a time. Young people, especially when in love, never look far forward, but have a confidence in things turning up. Mr. Fiel owned with inward chagrin that he was at fault.

Suddenly an idea flashed upon him like an inspiration. Why not attack the woman? He had her address.

"Of course," he said, turning his head on his pillow.

"What, my dear?" responded Mrs. Fiel.

"Nothing," and he went to sleep.

Next morning young Lobyear left Mr. Fiel's house, and went to a hotel in Jermyn street.

Mr. Fiel possessed a very sharp office-boy, for in spite of the trick which had been played him by Tom Scott, he liked sharp boys; only, he meant never to give another the chance of abusing his confidence. Billy Daw was employed in minor matters alone; his master had no intention of punishing him.

The lad had already seen young Lobyear; the house in Duke street was now pointed out to him, and he was directed to watch it, and let his master know when Mr. Lobyear left it.

So Mr. Fiel waited in his club, which was close by, and Billy Daw loafed within sight of Duke street. Billy was good at loafing; he gleaned amusement and instruction from the window of a newspaper and caricature shop; studied natural history at a fishmonger's; set two boys to fight; exasperated a drunken man; procured "cuts behind" for several youngsters who were riding without paying their fare—all without losing sight of the door he was directed to watch. His report at the end of the day was, that Mr. Lobyear had left his hotel, and gone to the house in Duke street at eleven a. m. At half-past one a servant-girl had come out with an empty dish, and returned in ten minutes with oysters. At six o'clock Mr. Lobyear did at last come out, accompanied by a lady, and they walked together arm in arm to St. James' Hall.

"Never mind," said Mr. Fiel; "he can't stick so close as that to her long, however desperate his condition may be. Try again to-morrow."

True enough at twelve o'clock the next day Billy Daw summoned his master from the club, and informed him that Mr. Lobyear had gone out for some time, and the lady was at home. Asked how he knew that his absence was not for a few minutes only, he replied that the gentleman had lit up his baccy directly he got outside the door.

Mr. Fiel wasted no time in farther questioning, and hastened to the house in Duke street, knocked and rang, and inquired for Mrs. Montacute. Yes, the servant-girl said; she lodged there, and was at home. What name? And the lawyer was ushered into the front drawing-room.

A lady with a creamy complexion and golden hair, elegantly dressed in half-mourning, closed the novel she had been reading, and rose from her lounging-chair to receive him. Pretty, thought the visitor, decidedly pretty; but at least ten years older than *he* is.

"You do not know me, madam, or the object of my visit," he said; "so I had better tell you at once that my name is Fiel, and that I am the legal adviser of Mr. Lobyear, the father of the gentleman who aspires, I believe, to the honor of your hand."

Mrs. Montacute bowed, and requested him to be seated.

"I hope you will pardon me continued Mr. Fiel, dropped into a chair which faced the lady, and looking as conciliatory as he could, "if what I have to say should in any way prove disagreeable; I am but the mouthpiece of my client, you know. Mr. Lobyear, senior, has heard, not from his son, but through other sources, of his projected marriage, I regret to say he has conveyed to me his disapproval."

"O, sir!"

"His very decided disapproval. He has never had the honor or pleasure of seeing you, madam, or he would probably view the matter in very different light, and hesitate before depriving his only child of the felicity so nearly secured to him. But, unfortunately, his letter was forwarded to me from Hong-Kong; he was then about

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