

Fatal Loss OF A NEGATIVE.

BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

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"All I can say is, it's a duce of a bore!" exclaimed Philip Blount, a smart, good-looking lawyer, who was on very good terms with himself, whose age might be six or seven and twenty, to his particular chum, Tom Marling, a stout, ruddy, horsey stock broker, perhaps a few years older.

"Well, it is rather hard lines," returned Marling, sympathetically. "If they had given me timely notice I might have managed to get down to the Grange, but such an abrupt invite looks as if Gwen Dashedwood did not want me down there."

This dialogue was going on in the private office of Mr. Marling, where the two men were discussing a light luncheon of oysters and stout, having a little time to spare at the general refreshment hour.

Blount was yet only a clerk in the old established firm of Ardell & Son, but that firm was now reduced to the surviving son, who was Blount's maternal uncle, and a childless widower.

Marling was a very well off bachelor, much given to the good things of this life and Blount's special friend.



"My Dear Nephew, I am Delighted to See You."

charming widow, whose charms were enhanced by the possession of an income which enabled her to rent such a residence. Here she gave delightful "Friday to Monday" parties, invitations to which people fished for eagerly.

Gwendolaine Dashedwood was the daughter of Mr. Ardell's deceased wife's sister, his ward, and the mistress of his house. Blount rather imagined his uncle wished to make a match between his nephew and niece, and was quite sure of his own wishes on the subject; for Gwen Dashedwood was a bright, attractive brunette, with big, brown eyes that could say a great deal—and he paid assiduous court to the young lady.

"Were you asked?" continued Blount. "Lord, no! I'm not at all up to the mark of Mrs. Chomondley Morton's parties, not elegant enough by your chalks."

"Better ask you than that beast Everard. I hate the fellow!" "Blount, you're a fool!" "No more than my neighbors."

"Rather less, in a general way; but you are a fool about that cousin of yours."

"She isn't my cousin; she is no relation at all!" "Well, whether she is or not, you'll lose your game if you lose your balance about her. From what I have seen, I am inclined to think you stand very well with her, and Everard is bound to grin and sour and blubber to be a dangerous rival. Besides, that Indian forestry appoint ment of his is no great thing, and the Miss Dashedwood is not the girl to think of a man who is obliged to live in his wilds."

"I'm not so sure, Marling. Everard has an infernal cool air of command and superiority that imposes on women, and Gwen has a dash of romance in her. I fancy she thinks or suspects that I am what she would call 'low-minded' because I have the sense to have an eye to the main chance; but I flatter myself, I've been making way with her lately. There's nothing good down with that sort of girl like an air of being hopelessly gone upon her, and, in fact, I am rather—! It's such an uncommon luck to have a fancy for the right young women."

"Is she the right one?" "She is. You see my uncle is deuced fond of her, and pretty sure to leave her the bigger half of his worldly goods, though he likes me, but if we marry, we'll have the whole." "Admirable reasoning! But if you are making way, you may snap your fingers at Everard."

Gardens, remarkably good—a matter of no small importance in Blount's eyes—and Mr. Ardell was exceedingly conversational in a careful and didactic manner throughout it.

When desert was put on the table and James departed a short pause ensued; then Mr. Ardell said: "I think you will find a fresh Bradshaw on the writing table in the window. Let us make sure of the train before you start."

Philip rose and went to the table whence he returned with Bradshaw and another book, handsomely bound in deep red with gold letters and decorations.

"You are right," he said, "the Bradshaw is due at 10.30." He handed Bradshaw to his uncle and continued: "I see you have Everard's book here. 'Life in the Wild Woods.' I don't fancy him in the least, doesn't give me the idea of a writing man."

"I have not read the book," returned his uncle, with a tinge of disdain in his tone. "That copy was presented to Gwendolaine. I was rather annoyed at her accepting it, though I do not very well see how she could have refused it. But Mr. Everard is not a man I like. He is pretentious and dictatorial. In fact, inclined to take liberties, or I should say, he presumes on some connection with old friends of Gwendolaine's to come here much oftener than I like, and assume a familiar tone with my niece of which I totally disapprove."

"Yes, my dear uncle, I have noticed it also, and it makes me indignant. However, he has gone to the continent and—"

"Why, yes, I know. He wrote to Gwendolaine explaining why he could not go to this party and mentioned that he was going abroad, a very unnecessary proceeding, as I told my niece."

"And what did she say?" "Well, she laughed and said that for all I knew, it might be very necessary."

"A curious answer," said Blount, "What do you make of it?" "What? Oh, nothing. It is really unimportant, all I fancy that Mr. Everard aspires to a matrimonial alliance with us, rather an audacious project on his part."

"I should think it was!" cried Blount.

"I am not without hope, if only no long pause, each being occupied with long hopes and fears for the future. Suddenly Blount exclaimed: 'Could one drive from Paddington to Charing Cross in half an hour, with a minute or two to spare?'"

"Yes, if the streets were not crowded, and the horse a good one. Why do you ask?" "Oh, ah, I only wanted your opinion. That is, my dear uncle, I have an awful dread of that fellow Everard, and it's curious, but this morning I saw a note from him saying he was going to start for the continent this evening, or some time today. Could it be?"

"Be what?" asked Mr. Ardell, putting on his glasses to gaze at the speaker.

(To be Continued.)

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