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A Select Story.

Master Tom's Engagement.

Old Mr. Molyneux was immensely proud of his position as a county magistrate. He lived in a feudal castle, he had bought cheaply, having taken over at the same time the good will, so to speak, of its former owners social influence and dignity. In consideration of his great wealth his neighbors charitably ignored the fact that his father had been a small tradesman and that he himself had carried on a lucrative business in the hardware line for many years. It was not a bad old fellow, this vulgarly being of a subdued and offensive kind, and consequently he was received in the best county society. But he aspired to even greater distinction, for his pet project was to marry his own son, Tom, to one of the Earl of Laburnum's daughters. There seemed no reason why this auspicious venture should not come about, for the only Florence looked kindly upon Master Tom, and his relationship had more than once hinted that he would raise no objection. Lord Laburnum was the lord lieutenant of the county, and an alliance with his family meant admission into the most aristocratic circles.

Unfortunately Master Tom was a scapegraw, and his father preferred to let him see a little of the world before revealing the high honors that were in store for him. The fact was Tom showed no predilection whatever for the Lady Florence, and he was just of that democratic age when a youth is not to underrate social advantages. The old man hoped that when Master Tom had had his fling he would begin to awake to the reality of his position, and be amenable to reason. He knew that Tom was raising a very respectable crop of debts, and that before his parental assistance would be sought. When the crisis arrived he intended to make known his wishes, and to take advantage of the lad's embarrassment to impose conditions. Meanwhile, as Tom seemed to have taken to his heart a roving commission, there was no apparent danger of his seriously compromising his affections.

One day, however, the young man came down from town, where he was habitually staying for the bar, and with a very grave and determined air, announced that he was engaged to be married. Old Mr. Molyneux nearly fell off his chair at the spot. The young lady came not unwelcome, carrying on the business of a dressmaker at the West End, his horror and indignation knew no bounds. In vain Tom pleaded that Miss Fabian was a lady by birth and education, and that the poverty of her family was her only crime. His father became more and more furious, until Tom showed symptoms of open rebellion.

"Think of your position in the county!" cried old Mr. Molyneux, perceiving this and wisely making an effort to control himself. "I will take it for granted, if you like, that the girl is really like and well educated and all the rest of it, but her station is altogether inferior to yours."

"I don't see that," said Tom, stubbornly.

"Why, of course. It is ridiculous," said the old gentleman swelling with self-importance. Her father, you say, is a poor cut-throat dealer of a clerk in a shop."

"I've never noticed his coat had holes in it," retorted Tom. "As for his being a clerk in the city, so you were—once. The only difference is that you have been more fortunate than he and have made enough money to retire upon."

"None of your infernal radical notions here," cried old Mr. Molyneux, indignantly at this reference to his own origin. "It would be just as sensible to say that you and I are the equals of Lord Laburnum because old Adam was our common ancestor. What does it matter if I was once a clerk in the city? I have since attained a superior grade in the social scale, and that is the fact that must be faced. I'm marrying the daughter of a city clerk, who earns her living by dress-making, you would make a misalliance."

"Just as Lady Florence would be marrying me," said Tom, looking wonderfully innocent.

"Who is talking about Lady Florence?" said old Mr. Molyneux, taken aback by his unexpected thrust.

"Nobody—only I have an idea that you wish me to marry out of my station," retorted Tom.

"I don't wish you to marry at all, Sir, not for many a long year," cried the old man, fairly nonplussed.

"What I mean is, father," said Tom, doggedly, "that I see no more harm in marrying below one's station—to use your own terms—than in marrying above it. If one is not wrong the other must be."

"Stuff and nonsense, Sir, you don't know what you are talking about," exclaimed Mr. Molyneux. "I don't want to have an argument with you. The long and short of the matter is that I won't hear of this foolish engagement. There! It is no use talking. Let there be an end of it, or I shall have something very unpleasant to say."

The old man bounced out of the room as he spoke, not a little startled and amazed at his son's tone and attitude. Hitherto Tom had had never ventured to argue with him, partly from filial duty and partly from inherent weakness of character. He began to fear that the lad possessed unexpected firmness, until he soothed his mind by the reflection that he had probably been coached for the interview. This sus-

picion explained Master Tom's unaccountable readiness of repartee, which had made him appear a dangerous adversary. Relieved in his mind by the discovery, old Mr. Molyneux gradually cooled down and completely recovered his self-confidence. He easily convinced himself that Tom would never dare to disobey him, and instead of the feeling the least apprehensive of the marriage taking place, he was only uneasy lest rumors of the engagement should reach the Laburnums. He promptly resolved to treat the matter as definitely disposed of, and to make no further allusion to it at all events until Tom had had time for reflection. Judging from appearances the lad seemed completely subdued. He spent the next few days slaughtering pheasants in a dejected and sulky frame of mind. His father smiled within himself and held his tongue, though he showed by his manner that he did not intend to be trifled with. When he considered that he might safely speak he said one morning with assumed carelessness:

"Well, my boy, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to shoot over Mr. Bailey's farm," replied Tom.

"Nonsense! You know what I am referring to," said the old man, turning red. "I am speaking of this idiotic love affair."

"Oh, well, of course, I must keep my word," said Tom, with flushed cheeks.

"What you have not written to break it off," said Mr. Molyneux, feigning surprise.

"No, Gur'nor, I haven't," said Tom. "I hoped you would have softened by this time."

"And I believed you would have remembered that your first duty was to obey your father," cried the old man, beginning to boil. "Do you mean to tell me that you still contemplate marrying—a dressmaker?"

"She has sold her business, father," said Tom, eagerly. "She might have done better had she waited a bit, but out of deference to your wishes—"

"My wishes?" interrupted Mr. Molyneux, angrily. "I don't care if she comes on twenty business, when I say is that you shall never marry her with my consent. That's all."

"I should be very sorry to disobey you, father," began Tom, but—

"Look here, my boy," interrupted the old gentleman, quickly, speaking with unannounced calmness, "let us understand each other. I forbid this foolish engagement, and I order you to break it off at once. This is the last time I shall say within an hour, and unless you break it off in the course of a week the affair is at an end I stop supplies. If you persist in marrying the girl, then, by heaven! I will alter my will and leave every farthing I possess to your cousin Ted—in fact I will make him heir and discard you altogether."

It is doubtful whether the old man could have really carried out this serious threat, for he was fond of his son, and proud of him in a way, but he looked very determined when he uttered it, and Tom was evidently impressed. The lad dropped his eyes before his father's stern glance, and the ruddy color left his cheeks for an instant.

Tom was evidently seriously disconcerted by this remark. He turned on his heel, muttering something about catching the next train to leave town, leaving his father master of the situation. The old man considered that he had gained a signal victory, and was, therefore, not the least perturbed when his son started off to the station with his luggage, in literal accordance with his injunction. He did not doubt that Master Tom would see the folly of his ways; and, sure enough, two days afterward the young man reappeared, looking decidedly sheepish, and tottering in submission. He even brought a copy of the letter he had written to the young lady, which Mr. Molyneux thought a little too curt and matter of fact, if any fault was to be found with it. However, he was not inclined to be hypercritical in this respect and he heartily applauded Tom's action.

"You know, Tom," he added, noting the wholesome effect of his words, "you are entirely dependent upon me, and unless you took to pouching I don't see how you could possibly earn a crust. Besides, you are up to your ears in debt."

"I don't owe much," said Tom, quickly with a tell-tale blush.

"You will find out that you owe a good deal when your creditors learn that I have made you consign 'em my heir," said the old man enigmatically.

"I'm going away for a bit, Gur'nor," said the lad, who winced a little at his father's boisterous good humor, and seemed half ashamed of his conduct.

"Webster and some other fellows have hired a yacht and sail for Madeira tomorrow."

"By all means, my boy," cried Mr. Molyneux, secretly delighted that his son should leave England for awhile at this juncture; and look here, Tom, while you are away I will settle matters with those friends of yours."

He produced rather a formidable list of names and figures as he spoke, and Tom started with surprise, as he well might, at perceiving how full and accurate was his father's knowledge of his pecuniary embarrassments. The old man cut short his son's confused protestations of gratitude and apology by saying good-humoredly:

"Well, well, you must turn over a new leaf, my boy. Reasonable economy must be the order of the day, and I hope on your return that you will settle down and reside permanently in the country."

He had it on the tip of his tongue to hint that he must be prepared to marry Lady Florence, but he wisely re-

frained. Nevertheless, he was as full of the project as ever, and after Tom's departure he spoke to Lord Laburnum more plainly than he had hitherto done. His lordship, without pledging himself, gave an encouraging reply, and he resolved to bring matters to a crisis immediately upon his son's return. The consequence was that the task of settling with Tom's creditors proved quite an agreeable relaxation, and did not cause him a moment's ill-humor. But he was very much startled and disgusted on hearing that his solicitor had been asked to accept service of a writ on Tom's behalf in an action for damages for breach of promise of marriage brought by Miss Fabian against her faithless lover. The news upset him considerably, for such a scandal would set all the newspapers gossiping about his antecedents, while Tom could hardly fail to cut a ridiculous figure in the witness box. Old Mr. Molyneux soon arrived at the conclusion that the action must be compromised at any cost, for the sake of his own dignity, not to mention the alliance with the Laburnums. He rushed up to town in quite a frantic state, and disregarding the advice and protestations of his solicitor, insisted that Miss Fabian's claim should be settled forthwith at any sacrifice, in order to avert the danger of the affair finding its way into the papers.

He was successful in his main project, but rich man as he was, he almost groaned when he sat down to write the check that Miss Fabian's advisers demanded. The amount was represented by no less than five figures, and the worst of it was that he got no sympathy whatever from his solicitor, who declared that by going to trial, or even by holding out for a longer time, he saved the greater part of the money.

In spite of his great relief that the threatened scandal had been averted, old Mr. Molyneux soon began to regret the sacrifice he had made, and to fret about his enormous loss. He was not by any means a penurious man, but, like all parvenus, he keenly appreciated the value of money. He did not mind what he spent so long as he had something to show for his money. In this main project, the result attained was entirely negative. Every one is inclined to underrate a danger when it has passed, and Mr. Molyneux could not help suspecting that he had been too easily frightened. This uncomfortable reflection worried him a good deal, particularly when he learned that Lord Laburnum had made arrangements to take his family to the south of France for the winter, and that he was to be absent for a long time, and old Mr. Molyneux was seized with an ominous foreboding when he heard the news.

Tom returned after an absence of three or four months, and was evidently not a little apprehensive of the reception he would meet with. He had received some angry letters from his father, referring to the damages he had had to pay, and he therefore appeared nervous and embarrassed at their first meeting. But the old man, delighted at seeing him again, sought to put him at his ease by saying:

"I'm not going to allude to what has happened, my boy. I'm willing to let bygones be bygones."

"You are very good, father, but—"

"What is the matter?" inquired old Mr. Molyneux as Tom paused in confusion.

"I still cling to the hope that you will consent to my marriage with Miss Fabian," said Tom, desperately.

"What?" roared his father with a great start.

"You see, Gur'nor," proceeded Tom, "I'm in a much better position than I was when I went away. Then, as you justly pointed out, I was in debt, I had no capital, and I was altogether dependent upon you. But my debts are now paid, and as for capital—"

"Well, Sir, what about capital?" interrupted the old man, too much amazed to be angry.

"There is the money you paid to Miss Fabian,"