

"Cherub Devine"

By SEWELL FORD

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CHAPTER IX.
ON Friday the countess received this communication from Mr. Devine: "Wait. Coming up tonight. Important."

As a result Hewington Acres hummed with anticipation. What could it mean? What had happened? What was going to happen?

Eppings was certain that Mr. Devine was bringing home some titled guest, possibly a duke or a lord, and he prepared dinner accordingly. The countess was puzzled. Even Mr. Hewington emerged from his study and wanted to know why every one seemed so disturbed.

"It's because of Mr. Devine, sir," said Eppings. "He's coming up on a special train, sir, and I must see about the table at once, sir."

Surely the particular frame of mind which Mr. Devine had conjured up for himself was quite worthy of a better audience than he gave it, although he was neither serene nor filled with confident joy. But he was very much alive. He bubbled, sparkled, scintillated. His mental faculties, never dull, were at their keenest. His spirits seemed to be lashed by a veritable storm of animation, one moment soaring to dizzy heights, the next sinking to dark depths.

Young Mr. Walloway, who was his sole companion, was somewhat disgusted with this illogical behavior. Much against his will he had been dragged from his office to accompany the Cherub just when there was much work to be done.

"Oh, the railroad be blown, Nick! Lots of time to attend to that. Forget it."

Yet now that they were well started toward Hewington Acres the Cherub evinced a desire to talk, although the precise topic at which he was aiming was not clear. It was unrelated to railroads, for the opening was of an intimate and personal nature.

"Nick, you rascal," he suddenly exclaimed, "why aren't you married?"

"Why aren't you, Cherub?" he retorted.

"Me!" Mr. Devine affected to be profoundly surprised at such a question. "Now, come, Nick, what sort of a fine woman would have Cherub Devine?"

"You're too modest, Cherub. You underrate yourself. I suppose you never tried?"

"Never had a chance, my boy. Why, see here, Nick, there's never been a time in all my life that I've had even a speaking acquaintance with a real good woman, such as you know by the dozen—that is, leaving out the last few days, of course. Now, with you it's been different. You've had a chance to pick and choose."

"Ah, have I?"

Cherub Devine caught the subdued note of pain in the quick rejoinder.

"You don't mean, Nick, that you got a turndown?"

Brusque as were the words, they carried a message of sympathetic feeling which rang true, and that was the quality which made so many friends for Cherub Devine. Young Mr. Walloway was certainly not the one to make offhand confidences, but he nodded his head in assent.

Unexpectedly finding himself an intruder on private grounds, Mr. Devine curbed his buoyancy and gazed with embarrassed emotion at the proprietor thereof.

"Oh, well," he observed, "maybe you're just as well off. Guess it was some time ago, when you were young and vealy, eh?"

"I was a young ass, if that's what you mean," cynically responded Nicholas. "I was too sure of her and played the fool. You see, we were youngsters together, playmates. It was one of those affairs that everybody understood was settled from the time we were a dozen years old. I took it as a matter of course that I was the only person she could ever care for. In time she resented it, and before I knew it I had lost her."

"Went off with some one else, did she?"

Again young Mr. Walloway inclined his head. He got up, took a seat on the other side of the car and unfolded a newspaper.

It was less than an hour's ride at best, but before it was half over Cherub Devine was consulting watch and time table and had again shifted his seat to the forward chair, where he could watch for the name boards on the stations.

Perceiving this unusual agitation of a mind normally free from such disturbances, you might suspect that Mr. Devine was about to make some great venture. It was a fact. His plans, however, were somewhat vague. About the only definite part of his program was his decision to turn himself out of house and home immediately upon reaching Hewington Acres. This detail was already prepared. The Countess Vecchi should buy back the place at her own terms. She now had the means, and he was well assured of her desire to do so.

Small wonder, then, that Cherub Devine in a brief period of time forgot all about the revived wretchedness



THE PICTURE WAS A LIKENESS OF THE COUNTESS VECCHI.

of young Mr. Walloway. A question suddenly occurring to the Cherub, he abruptly walked back to where young Mr. Walloway still sat, intently gazing at something he held shielded in his two hands. It was nothing more than the gold oval which he wore as a watch fob. Dozens of times the Cherub had seen it dangling from the breast pocket of Nick's coat without specially remarking it. Now he noted that it was really a locket, for it was open. Glancing carelessly over Nick's shoulder, he saw it contained a picture, a miniature on ivory. And the picture on which young Mr. Walloway was gazing with such rapt paths was a likeness of the Countess Vecchi. And in an instant it was made clear to him that the woman whom Nicholas Walloway had loved and lost and still continued to love was the Countess Vecchi.

Fortunately Mr. Devine had not spoken, and the roar of the car wheels had drowned his approach. Swiftly he withdrew. Then he sat down to ponder on the situation. Quite abruptly the Cherub now came upon the realization of his own purposes. He was a little staggered by the discovery of his audacity, but this was no new sensation. His audacious flights were always more or less of an impromptu nature. In a moment he was smiling confidently, as was his custom when once he had decided upon a line of action, however unpromising might be the future. The heavier the clouds ahead the lighter the smile. Nick was a good fellow and all that, but if he chose to mope inactive in the background let him stay there. He (Cherub Devine) would show him how to play the game boldly—perhaps how to win.

And then came the thought, Would that be absolutely just to the Countess Vecchi? She and Nicholas had been spoony on each other for years, and she must have liked Nick. He was a likable fellow, clean, sturdy, substantial, one of her own class, and—oh, the Cherub winced at that—one whom she would call a gentleman. Yes, Nick would measure up to all her demands as to what a gentleman should be.

And had it been really she who had broken off the match, or was it due to the ambitious plans of her father? Then after she had come back, humbled in spirit, the Hewington fortune dissipated, had she perhaps held Nick at arm's length because of her pride? Was this the reason of his seeming inaction? Had he been all the time waiting in the hope that some day she would relent, and might she not do so, now that in some measure her fortune had been restored? Ought not she to have the chance? Was not the opportunity for a free choice due to her? Shouldn't Nick have another show too?

Floundering through some such maze of reasoning, the Cherub at last came to this brilliant conclusion, with only a faint suspicion that he was about to make an astonishing clump of himself. He even experienced a glow of satisfaction as he hastily mapped out his new program. You would almost have thought by the cheerful manner in which he laid it before young Mr. Walloway that he thought he was attaining a long desired end.

"Well, Nick," he began, this time giving young Mr. Walloway due warning of his approach, "we're almost there. Now, the first thing on the docket is for you to fix up this business about the house with the countess."

"I?" exclaimed Nicholas. "Why, sure! You know her better than I do. You go up and have a talk with her; tell her how you sold the stocks and what she can buy back the property for."

"But—but—why don't you?"

"Me! Oh, I've got to skip back to town on this train. Just wanted to get you started straight. You can do it so much better than I can, being one of her own kind, and all that. Aren't afraid of the countess, are you?"

(To Be Continued)

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This is not true of balk line and other forms of billiards, as a general rule. Few, indeed, are the men of the majority that play the game who are able to average more than five or six at the most intricate kind of billiards. They never seem able to grasp the finer points of the game and after running up five or six points become lost when a more complete knowledge is required.

Many reasons may be advanced for this condition. One is faulty instruction or lack of tutoring. The general player is the business or professional man who cares to play the game just so he can hold his own or be a little better than his companion. He does not get or seek proper instruction; hence makes no great advancement in the game.

It has been stated recently that the stroke is one of the principal qualifications for a person becoming expert at billiards. Such is not the case. As a matter of fact, no two of the great players have the same stroke; hence the fallacy of that argument is obvious.

Let the beginner ask questions of those more experienced at the game and pay less attention to his stroke and pose and there will be more players who are able to average more than six or seven at billiards.

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