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The Disadvantage of Misunderstanding Among Three.

By A. B. SEARLE.
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If anything goes wrong among associates the more persons in it the worse the trouble and the less chance of an explanation and reconciliation. In the most important episode of my life I became involved with two other persons to my permanent discomfiture. If my dealings had been with one the trouble would not have occurred.

It was the very common case of two fellows after one girl, and the two fellows were friends. I was one of the fellows, and Bob Hoyt was the other. Eileen Gilbert was the girl. It was Bob who introduced me to her, but he didn't tell me that he wanted her, so I wasn't obliged to keep off on his account. Bob was a quiet, backward sort of fellow, while I flatter myself I have that gall about me which wins with a woman.

There are several principles that I considered. The first is, "Don't show your hand to others;" the second, "If you want anything don't make it appear valuable." I determined to keep Bob in the dark as to my intentions and to lead him to believe that Eileen was no great catch. Of course this was difficult for me to do and at the same time see enough of her to win her. But I handled the matter so well that I got in a number of visits without Bob knowing anything about them. How far I succeeded in leading him to believe that she was not worth trying for I couldn't find out. He wasn't much of a talker. I knew very well he admired her and that I'd better do what I could to head him off.

Eileen for quite awhile was on the fence between Bob and me. I had some property, while Bob had nothing but pluck and energy, and I'll do him the justice to admit that he had plenty of both. There's nothing mean about me even in speaking of a rival. Bob showed no disposition to win the girl, but I didn't know whether this was because he didn't fancy her or because I had intimated that she was not especially to be desired. This gave me every chance, and I availed myself of the position.

Eileen lived at her father's country place, about fifty miles from the city, and during the summer I made hay while the sun shone, spending a number of week ends in the village near her home ostensibly for the fishing, which was good in the neighborhood. Finally I sounded Eileen sufficiently to discover that a proposal was liable to be accepted. This was by letter, and I resolved to go to her and close the matter. As luck would have it, who should be at the station to see his mother off on a train but Bob. I had to confess where I was going and whom I was going to see, but I intimated that I had promised to go to make one of a house party and expected to be much bored. Bob told me he thought I'd have a good time if I only made up my mind to do so, but I refused to be convinced.

I made my proposition to Eileen, and it was graciously received. But girls never like to give an answer on the moment. They like to keep a fellow worried. It's an awful suspense to a man, and the more feverish a man is under it the better the girl likes it. I told her that I wouldn't go back to the city without an answer. I remained two days, but the answer didn't come. I wished I hadn't said what I did about waiting for it and began to think of an excuse for breaking the embarrassing position. Besides, I couldn't remain away from my duties. I hit on what seemed an excellent plan. I would telegraph Bob to call me back "on business." This would convince him that I was being bored and enable me to await my answer in the city. I sent a message to Bob as follows: "Insufferably bored. Get me out of this by wiring me to return on important business."

I directed the telegraph operator to send the reply to me at the Gilbert residence. I told Eileen that I would go on a tramp during the day and hoped that by my return at evening I would receive the long deferred answer. She would not promise definitely, but gave me to understand not only that I should have it, but that it would be favorable. I hoped to find my recall at the house when I came in from my tramp and get away on a night train.

I tramped all day, returning about 5 o'clock. I expected to see Eileen on the piazza dressed for the afternoon and hoped to be made happy. But as I approached I saw that the piazza was vacant. I went up to the front door and rang for admittance. A maid came, opened the door and poked a telegram at me, with the ominous words:

"Miss Gilbert says to tell you that she opened it thinking it might be best for her to send for you. Please accept her apologies."

I took the bit of yellow paper from the envelope and read it. Horror of horrors! It was my telegram to Bob. It had been sent to me indorsed, "Party not in town." While I was staring at it the maid shut the door in my face.

As I said at the beginning, it was having a third party in the matter that brought trouble. If it hadn't been for Bob I'd never have sent that telegram. And if it hadn't been for Bob I might have made it up with Eileen. She was just mad enough to write him an invitation to visit at her father's house with other friends, and when, after repeated efforts to see Eileen, I went to the city I saw Bob passing me on a train going to have the whole field to himself. When he returned he announced his engagement.

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