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Picked Out For Each Other

An Attempt at Matchmaking That Met With a Setback

By EDGAR MINTURN

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In the autumn of 19— I received a note from Eileen Duncan, who had married my chum, Charlie Duncan, inviting me to their country place in the New Hampshire hills. "We are to entertain a house party," said Mrs. Duncan, "which will be incomplete without you. Charlie and I are so happy that we wish to confer a like happiness on you. A girl will be a member of your party whom we have picked out for you. We are not going to tell you which one of our guests she is, nor are we going to tell her who is the man we have picked out for her, though we have told her that such a man is to be present. We are going to leave you to find each other."

"Well, now," I said to myself, "I like that. Heaven protect me from those girls whom I am told I am expected to marry! But in this case there is an element of uncertainty. I am left free to choose, and the lady is as free as I. There's something of the game of 'hide and seek' in it. I'll attend the house party."

Charlie inherited a large fortune and owns one of those big tracts of land on which our rich Americans are settling up their country places. The house would easily accommodate fifty guests. On my arrival I found nearly that number assembled, three-quarters of them being young unmarried persons. I have no faith in woman's idea of justice or fairness and thought it more than likely that Eileen Duncan would give the girl for whom she had picked me out an advantage over me—at least a hint as to when she was "warm" or when she was "cold," as the children do in their hiding games—but Charlie said on his word of honor we should neither of us receive the slightest assistance in the matter.

I looked the women over, feeling sure that if my hosts had struck the right one for me I would know her at once. Whether or no I struck the girl they had decided upon, I certainly noticed one whose general makeup pleased me very much. She was a Miss Hester Adams. One of the guests, John Crowell, was attentive to her, so that I did not at once get much opportunity to devote myself to her.

And here was a point in this little game wherein I, a man, had an advantage.

age. I came back out the girl who had been chosen for me, while she must remain passive. On the other hand, she might remain hidden within herself, a corps of observation, watching the enemy's movements.

Within a week I found myself rivaling John Crowell and several other men for the favor of Hester Adams. She was by no means the most prominent young lady in the party, but any one with discernment could detect in her a certain worth which, after all, other things being equal, determines the real standing of both men and women. Crowell seemed to have the inside track, the rest of us standing about even, although I can remember, looking back to that far period, that I was not left without an occasional morsel of comfort.

But one afternoon a terrible gulf came up between Hester Adams and myself. We men were all roomed on the third floor, while the women were on the second. Going up to dress for dinner, I was obliged to pass Crowell's room. His door stood ajar, and, looking in, I saw a lady standing before the dresser. She took up a jeweled scarfpin and examined it. Her back was toward me, but I saw her face reflected in the mirror over the dresser. She was Hester Adams. Sticking the pin in her corsage where it would be hidden, she was turning when I, not wishing her to see me, went on to my room.

Of all the positions in which I have ever found myself this was surely the most singular, the most unpleasant. I had seen a guest, one in whom I was beginning to be interested, in the men's quarters steal jewelry. Whether she knew it or not I could not tell, but the man from whom she was pilfering was Crowell, who was devoted to her.

An hour later we assembled at dinner. Naturally I looked at Miss Adams. I failed to catch her eye, but I saw in it a troubled expression. During the dinner she seemed to be thinking of something else than what was said to her. Fearing to show a difference in my treatment of her, I did not address her while we were dining nor during the evening.

My secret weighed upon me. What surprised me was a certain disappointment I felt in Hester Adams. It convinced me that the little god had wounded me, though I had not known it. I brooded over the theft I had seen. Was it an effect of kleptomania? Surely the girl had no occasion to steal. I had noticed a frightened look on her face which indicated that she was cognizant of what she was doing. I wondered if she knew that she was in Crowell's room. I saw her going into her own room the next morning and noticed that it was directly under the one in which she had committed the theft. I had seen Crowell wear the scarfpin and watched to see if it had been returned to him, I fancying the thief might have done

so under qualms of conscience. But Crowell did not appear with it in his neckwear. I thought to ask him if he had missed it, but nothing could have induced me to give the slightest intimation of what I had seen.

Naturally this disagreeable feature of my visit marred my enjoyment, and, as for the game I had looked forward to playing with some interest, I forgot it entirely. One evening the hostess said to me:

"You have disappointed me in not having shown a preference for any of the girls of the party. To make the matter more interesting I am going to tell you that I noticed in her a decided preference for you as soon as you arrived."

"A preference for me?" I exclaimed, surprised.

"Yes, for you?"

"What intimation did she give of the fact?"

"Don't you wish you knew?" and, tapping me playfully with her fan, she ran away to other guests.

During the rest of our stay at the Duncans' country place Hester Adams seemed always to have something on her mind. For a time she was sought by her admirers as before, but like seeks like, and the young men, finding her preoccupied and unentertaining, gradually drew away to more animated companions. I, too, with the secret on my mind, was moody and ill disposed to join in the gay sports our host provided for us. And shortly before the expiration of the term for which I had been invited I made an excuse to leave. Charlie drove me to the station and while we were waiting for the train said to me:

"Eileen is greatly disappointed at the failure of her effort to make a match for you."

"I'm sorry not to oblige her, but you know those things can't be forced. Possibly had I known the girl your wife picked out for me I might have done better."

"She's a splendid woman."

"I say, Charlie, since we've not mated and it's all over, suppose you tell me who she is."

"Eileen would divorce me if I did."

"On my honor, she shall never know from me."

There was a whistle, and the train rolled up. Just as I was about to get aboard Charlie whispered in my ear:

"Hester Adams."

I hurried into the car and sank in my seat in a semi-stunned condition. The little god likes startling things. Better a disagreeable episode than

none at all. Some of the most violent loves have started with a quarrel. The secret I carried with me had kept Hester Adams in my mind to the exclusion of all others. Eileen Duncan had told me that the girl she had picked out for me had shown me a preference. And now comes Charlie and reveals her as the girl I had caught pilfering. Surely Cupid must have buckled over such a complicated situation.

Charlie's information capped the climax. It revealed to me that the plan to mate me, so far as I was concerned, had been eminently successful, but a plan to marry me had resulted in a catastrophe. The happy issue in my case would be paradoxical—marriage with a thief.

Soon after the Duncans returned to the city I received a note from Eileen as follows:

A confession has been made to me concerning something that occurred during your recent visit to us. One of our guests—one I esteem very highly—has made me her confidant. I believe every word she says, and your and my friendship hereafter depends upon your believing her too.

I paused to remark that this was a very womanly statement. It confirmed my ideas of the inconsiderateness of the sex.

Please come over on Tuesday evening and hear what is due the lady that you should know.

To describe my feelings at this promised explanation of what I regarded inexplicable would be impossible. I counted the hours till Tuesday evening, then went to the Duncans'. I was ushered into a drawing room, where stood a single person. That person was Hester Adams. She seemed to have lost twenty pounds since I had last seen her. I bowed deferentially, and without seating herself or asking me to be seated she said:

"During my visit at the Duncans' one day I went upstairs, so wrapped in something of which I was thinking that I passed over two flights of stairs instead of one and entered the room directly over mine. Advancing to the dresser, still thinking of what was on my mind, I picked up a scarfpin. At that moment my reverie was broken by a footstep in the hall, and in the glass before me I saw you."

"Saw me?" I interrupted.

"It flashed upon me that I was in a man's apartment. I have since seen how unwise I was not to come out and take the consequences. I feared not to be believed. It seemed to me that I must bear the imputation of having gone to a man's room for a purpose. I preferred that purpose to be considered theft. I put the scarfpin I had inadvertently taken up in my corsage and turned slowly enough to enable you to pass on without our meeting."

"I have been a fool," I exclaimed, "not to have known that you could see my reflection as well as I could see yours. It is I who have been to blame, not you. I should have been chevrillous enough to attribute your presence in that room to a mistake. Had I known that you saw me I should have certainly assured you of

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my perfect confidence in your innocence."

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