

WHAT CAME OF IT.

From *Hearth And Home*.

CHAPTER I.

A rush of feet up the stairs, and four young fellows, fashionably attired, and of the lily tpe—that is, "they worked not, neither did they spin" burst into the luxuriously furnished bachelor apartments of Tom Morton, who was sitting gloomily in dressing-gown and slippers over a late breakfast.

"Tom, dear old chappie," exclaimed the foremost, "we've come to congratulate you."

"Condole, you mean, Jack," said a hinder one.

"Rubbish! We heard last night that that dear, rich old aunt was dead, and you were returned from paying the last sad offices, like a fond and dutiful nephew."

"Look here, you fellows," replied he addressed, a young man of about four-and-twenty, with a good looking, honest countenance, lined, however, by the effects of late hours not passed in study, "this is no subject for jest. While aunt Jo lived she was precious kind to me—barring the lectures on dissipation and extravagance. She allowed me a handsome allowance."

"Which, chappie," interpolated one, helping himself to a cigar from the cabinet, "you spent royally. You never disgraced yourself by having a shilling in your purse at quarter day."

"No, only a heap of bills, which, after a lecture as long as my arm, were paid. There's not one of you can say either, that while I had a guinea in my pocket, I was not always willing to help any of you chaps."

"Not only willing, dear boy," cried Jack, clapping him on the shoulder, "but did. Do you imagine we shall ever forget that? Not we, chappie; if ever the time comes to prove it, we will prove it; trust us. Yes, like one o'clock. But look here, Tom, you may be sorry for the old lady, but you are not going to pull a long face at coming into a pretty tidy little estate and fifteen hundred a year; that's about the figure, isn't it?"

"Yes; but you see," remarked Tom Morton, a trifle lugubriously, "I haven't come into it."

"Not come into the property!" chorused the four voices.

"No; my aunt Jo has left the strangest of wills. Confound it! It wasn't what I'd a right to expect."

"What is it, Tom?" "How is it strange?" came the chorus. "How much has she left you?"

"A hundred and fifty a year."

"A hundred and fifty! Only that? Why, it doesn't come up to your half year income."

"And that even only under conditions," continued Tom Morton, beginning to drop into the relief of making public his hard treatment.

"For that income—my bills will be all paid, that I may start fair with it—I must live for a full year at Hardmeads."

"Hard lines if should be," put in Jack; "still rent free for a year—"

"Ah, but there's more to come; for that year every day I must dig a portion of a something acre field—a small Salisbury Plain, you know—beginning at the right hand corner south, and leaving off at the left corner north. Just imagine, you chaps, I—I who never dug even a flower bed."

"And if you don't do it?"

"Then my debts are paid, and I start life on an empty purse."

"Are you going to do it?"

"I? I dig that precious field? I live a year out of London for that miserable income? No fear, my boys."

"That aunt Joe must have been mad." "Poor old Tom." "What a wretched old fraud," echoed the four; one, after a pause, adding:

"I say, Jack, did you say you were going to Lord's? So am I. We'll go together, eh? Poor Tom, I fancy, would prefer our room to our company. We're confoundedly sorry, dear boy," grasping his hand effusively. "Mind, if we can be of any assistance, count on us."

"Thank you, old fellows; I knew you'd say that!" answered Tom Morton, his eyes moistening with proud gratitude. "Well, dare say my own company is the best for me at present. It is such a peculiar will, isn't it?"

"Deucedly peculiar! The old fraud!"

"You'll come again soon?" queried Tom.

"Rather. Don't fear, chappie, we'll not desert you. Poor old Tom!"

So they talked themselves out of the room. Tom Morton too relieved by their departure to observe the absence of the genial ring in their voices when they left, which was present at their arrival.

"Tom's wiped out, poor chappie," remarked Jack, philosophically lighting one of Tom's cigars. "That old aunt saw where he was heading, and wouldn't have her money go to the dogs."

Arm in arm they strolled down the street, willfully blind possibly that they represented those dogs to whom Tom, with generous lavishness had always held his purse open.

Tom sat some while longer over his scarcely tasted breakfast, then dressing, took a hansom to Kensington.

"She had better learn the truth at once," he mused, gloomily. "But it's all up there now."

Stopping at a house in the Addison Road, knocking, he was shown into the morning room, or rather went there for he was a familiar visitor. By the table sat a girl of about twenty, tall, slender, exceedingly good looking, with calm, slender, exceedingly good looking, with calm, clearly cut features, indicative of intelligence and power.

She rose at once, greeting him with one of those smiles that make even the plainest face beautiful.

"Here you are, Tom," she said, "I have been expecting you."

"Yes, Juliet, here I am," answered Tom holding both of the firm white hands, and looking into the large, clear gray eyes mournfully; "I've come to set you free."

"Set me free, Tom?"

"Yes; for if you never would name the day when you would marry me before, you never will now. It would be dishonorable, in fact, for me to expect you to under the present circumstances. I love you to well to ask it Ju."

"What are the present circumstances, Tom?" she inquired interrogatively. "I don't quite understand. You have just returned from Hardmeads."

"Yes; I came away directly I had heard aunt Jo's will read. A peculiar will it is."

"Peculiar, Tom?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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