

## *Two Fair Detectives*

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“WHAT do you think young men talk about when they sit at open windows smoking on summer evenings? Do you suppose it is of love? Indeed I suspect it is of money; or, if not of money, then at least of something that either makes money or spends it.

Cleve Sullivan has been spending his for four years in Europe, and he has just been telling his friend, John Selden how he spent it. John has spent his in New York—he is inclined to think just as probably. Both stories conclude in the same way.

“I have not a thousand dollars left, John.”

“Nor I, Cleave.”

“I thought your cousin died two years ago. Surely you have not spent all the old gentleman’s money already?”

“I only got twenty thousand dollars; I owed half of it.”

“Only twenty thousand! What did he do with it?”

“Gave it to his wife. He married a beauty about a year after you went away, died in a few months afterward, and left her his whole fortune. I had no claim on him. He educated me, gave me a profession and twenty thousand dollars. That was very well; he was only my mother’s cousin.”

“And the widow—where is she?”

“Living at his country seat. I have never seen her. She was one of the St. Maurs of Maryland.”

“Good family, and all beauties. Why don’t you marry the widow?”

“Why, I never thought of such a thing.”

“You can’t think of anything better. Write her a little note at once; say that you and I will soon be in her neighborhood, and that gratitude to your cousin, and all that kind of thing—then beg leave to call and pay your respects, etc., etc.”

John demurred a good deal to the plan, but Cleave was masterful, and the note was written, Cleave himself putting it in the post-office.

That was on Monday night. On Wednesday morning the Widow Clare found it with a dozen others upon her breakfast table. She was a dainty, high-bred little lady, with

“Eyes that drowse with dreamy splendor,  
Cheeks with rose-leaf tinting leader,

Lips like fragrant posy.”

and, withal, a kind, hospitable temper, well inclined to be happy in the happiness of others.

But this letter could not be answered with the usual polite formula. She was quite aware that John Selden had regarded himself for many years as his cousin’s heir, and that her marriage with the late Thomas Clare had very seriously altered his prospects. Women easily see through the best laid plans of men, and this plan was transparent enough to the shrewd little widow. John would scarcely have liked the half-contemptuous shrug and smile with which her private thoughts on the matter terminated.

“Clementine, if you could spare a moment from your fashion paper. I want to consult you, dear, about a visitor.”

Clementine raised her blue eyes, dropped her paper, and said: “Who is it, Fan?”

“It is John Selden. If Mr. Clare had not married me, he would have inherited the Clare estate. I think he is coming now in order to see if it is worth while asking for it encumbered by his cousin’s widow.”

“What selfishness! Write and tell him that you are just leaving for the Suez Canal, or the Sandwich Islands, or any other inconvenient place.”

“No; I have a better plan than that—Clementine, do stop reading for a few minutes. I will take that pretty cottage at Ryebank for the summer, and Mr. Selden and his friend shall visit us there. No one knows me in the place, and I will take some of the servants with me.”

“Well?”

“Then, Clementine, you are to be the widow Clare, and I your poor friend and companion.”

“Good! very good! ‘The Fair Deceivers’—an excellent comedy. How I shall snub you, Fan! And for once I shall have the pleasure of out-dressing you. But has not Mr. Selden seen you?”

“No; I was married in Maryland and went immediately to Europe. I came back a widow two years ago, and Mr. Selden has never remembered me until now. I wonder who this friend is that he proposes to bring with him?”

“Oh, men always think in pairs, Fan. They never decide on any thing until their particular friend approves. I dare say they wrote the letter together. What is the gentleman’s name?”

The widow examined the note, “‘My friend Mr. Cleave Sullivan.’ Do you know him, Clementine?”

“No; I am quite sure that I never saw Mr. Cleve Sullivan. I don’t fall in love with the name—do you? But pray accept the offer for both gentlemen, Fan, and write this morning, dear.”

Then Clementine returned to the consideration of the lace in coquilles for her new dress.

The plan so hastily sketched was subsequently thoroughly discussed and carried out. The cottage at Ryebank was taken, and one evening at the end of June the two ladies took possession of it. The new widow Clare had engaged a maid in New York, and fell into her part with charming ease and a very pretty assumption of authority; and the real widow, in her plain dress and pensive, quiet manners, realized effectively the idea of a cultivated but dependent companion. They had two days in which to reframe their parts and get all the household machinery in order, and then the gentlemen arrived at Ryebank.

Fan and Clementine were quite ready for their first call; the latter in a rich and exquisite morning costume, the former in a simple dress of spoiled lawn. Clementine went through the introductions with consummate ease of manner, and in half an hour they were a very pleasant party. John's cousinship afforded an excellent basis for informal companionship. Indeed, in a few days John began to find the relationship tiresome; It had been, "Cousin John, do this," and "Cousin John, come here," continually, and one night when Cleave and he sat down to smoke their final cigar, he was irritable enough to give his objections the form of speech.

"Cleave, to tell the honest truth, I do not like Mrs. Clare."

"I think she is a very lovely woman, John."

"I say nothing against her beauty, Cleave; I don't like her, and I have no mind to occupy the place that beautiful, ill-used Miss Marat fills. The way Cousin Clare ignores or snubs a woman to whom she is in every way inferior makes me angry enough, I assure you.

"Don't fall in love with the wrong woman, John."

"Your advice is too late, Cleve; I am in love. There is no use deceiving ourselves or each other. You seem to like the widow—why not marry her? I am quite willing you should."

"Thank you, John; I have already made some advances that way. They have been favorably received, I think."

"You are so handsome, a fellow has no chance against you. But we shall hardly quarrel, if you do not interfere between lovely little Clement and myself."

"I could not afford to smile on her, John; she is too poor. And what on earth are you going to do with a poor wife? Nothing added to nothing will not make a decent living."

"I am going to ask her to be my wife and if she does me the honor to say 'Yes,' I will make a decent living out of my profession."

From this time forth John devoted himself with some contentation to his supposed cousin's companion. He was determined to let the widow perceive that he had made his choice, and that

he could not be bought with money. Mr. Selden and Miss Marat were always together, and the widow did not interfere between her companion and her cousin. Perhaps she was rather glad of their close friendship, for the handsome Cleave made a much more delightful attendant. Thus the party fell quite naturally into couples, and the two weeks that the gentlemen had first fixed as the limit of their stay lengthened into two months.

It was noticeable that as the ladies became more confidential with their lovers, they had less to say to each other; and it began at last to be quite evident to the real widow that the ploy must end for the present, or the denouement would come prematurely. Circumstances favored her determination. One night Clementine, with a radiant face, came into her friend's room and said: "Fan, I have something to tell you. Cleave has asked me to marry him."

"Now, Clement you have told him all; I know you have."

"Not a word, Fan. He still believes me the widow Clare."

"Did you accept him?"

"Conditionally. I am to give him a final answer when we go to the city in October. You are going to New York this winter are you not?"

"Yes. Our little game progresses finely. John Selden asked me to be his wife tonight."

"I told him men think and act in pairs."

"John is a noble fellow. I pretended to think his cousin had ill-used him, and he defended him until I was ashamed of myself; absolutely said, Clement, that you were a sufficient excuse for Mr. Clare's will. Then he blamed his own past idleness so much, and promised if I would only try and endure 'the siege and arrows' of your outrageous temper, Clement, for two years longer, he would have made a home for me in which I could be happy. Yes, Clement, I should marry John Selden if we had not a \$5 bill between us."

"I wish Cleve had been a little more explicit about his money affairs. However, there is time enough yet. When they leave to-morrow, what shall we do?"

"We will remain here another month; Levine will have the house ready for me by that time. I have written to him about refurnishing the parlors."

So next day the lovers parted, with many promises of constant letters and future happy days together. The interval was long and dull enough; but it passed, and one morning both gentlemen received notes of invitation to a small dinner party at the widow Clare's mansion in —street. There was a good deal of dressing for this party. Cleve wished to make his entrance into his future home as became the prospective master of a million and a half of money, and John was desirous of not suffering in Clements eyes by any comparison with the other gentleman who will probably be there.

Scarcely had they entered the drawing room when the ladies appeared, the true widow Clare no longer in the unassuming toilet she had hitherto wore, but magnificent in white crepe linen and satin, her arms and throat and pretty head flushing with sapphire and diamonds. Her companion had assumed now the role of simplicity, and Cleave was disappointed with the first glance at her plain, white Chamberry gauze dress.

John had seen nothing but the bright face of the girl he loved and the love-light in her eyes. Before she could speak he had taken both her hands and whispered, "Dearest and best and loveliest Clement."

Her smile answered him first. Then she said: "Pardon me, Mr. Selden, but we have been in masquerade all summer, and now we must unmask before real life begins. My name is not Clementine Marat, but Fanny Clare. Cousin John, I hope you are not disappointed." Then she put her hand into John's and they wandered off into the conservatory to finish their explanation.

Mr. Cleve Sullivan found himself at that moment in the most trying circumstances of his life. The real Clementine Marat stood looking down at a flower on the carpet, and evidently expecting him to resume the tender attitude he had been accustomed to bear toward her. He was a man of quick decision where his own interests were concerned, and it did not take him half a minute to review his position and determine what to do. This plain, blonde girl without fortune was not the girl he could marry; she had deceived him, too—he had a sudden and severe spasm of morality, his confidence was broken; he thought it was very poor sport to play with a man's most sacred feelings; he had been deeply disappointed and grieved, etc., etc.

Clementine stood perfectly still, with her eyes fixed on the spot on the carpet and her cheeks gradually flushing, as Cleave made his awkward accusations. She gave him no help and she made no defense, and it soon becomes embarrassing for a man to stand in the midst of a large drawing room and talk to himself about any girl. Cleve felt it so.

"Have you done, sir!" at length she asked, lifting to his face a pair of blue eyes scintillating with scorn and anger. "I promised you a final answer to your suit when we met in New York. You have spared me that trouble. Good evening, sir."

Clementine showed to no one her disappointment, and she probably soon recovered from it. Her life was full of many other pleasant plans and hopes, and she could well afford to let a selfish lover pass out of it. She remained with her friend until after the marriage between her and John Selden had been consummated; and then Cleve saw her name among the list of passengers sailing on one particular day for Europe. As John and his bride left on the same steamer, Cleave supposed of course, she had gone in their company.

"Nice thing it would have been for Cleve Sullivan to marry John Selden's wife maid, or something or other! John always was a lucky fellow. Some are always unlucky in love affairs—I always am."

Half a year afterward he reiterated this statement with a great deal of unnecessary emphasis. He was just buttoning his gloves preparatory to starting on his afternoon's drive, when an old acquaintance hailed him.

"Oh, it's that old fool Belmar," he muttered; "I shall have to offer him a ride. I thought he was in Paris. Hello Belmar, when did you get back? Have a ride?"

"No, thank you. I have promised my wife to ride with her this afternoon."

"Your wife! When were you married?"

"Last month, in Paris."

"And the happy lady was—"

"Why I thought you knew: every one is talking about my good fortune. Mrs. Belmar is old Paul Marat's only child."

"What!"

"Miss Clementine Marat. She brings me nearly \$3,000,000 in money and real estate, and a heart beyond all price."

"How on earth did you meet her!"

"She was traveling with Mr. and Mrs. Selden—you know John Selden. She has lived with Mrs. Selden ever since she left school; they were friends when they were girls together."

Cleve gathered up his reins, and riding to Mr. Frank Delmar, drove at a double rate up the avenue and the park. He could not trust himself to speak to any one, and when he did, the remark which he made to himself in most confidence was not flattering. For once Mr. Cleve Sullivan told Mr. Cleve Sullivan that he had been badly punished and that he well deserved it.

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