

THE PROPHECY¹

BY EDEN PHILLPOTTS

[THE following story is reprinted by arrangement with the publishers.]

CHARLES FORDE saw his neighbor, Thomas Finch, walking up the garden path of Oatlands, and braced himself for an exceedingly painful interview; because Mr. Finch was betrothed to the elder man's only daughter, and within the past four-and-twenty hours Jenny Forde had changed her mind and decided, after an engagement of six months, that Tom Finch, of Five Elms, was not the man for her.

She could offer no decent excuse for this defection, and her father knew it. Mr. Finch farmed his own land and enjoyed a reputation for good sense and good fortune. His record was untarnished, his prospects excellent, his health good. A dark, clean-shaven man of character, he had courted Jenny and won her without difficulty. He loved her heartily and had proved a generous and kindly sweetheart; yet now, within three months of marriage, the young woman decided that nothing on earth would make her marry Tom. She lacked the pluck to tell him herself, and her widowed father, after protesting indignantly and striving for three days to convince the wayward maid that she was doing a wicked thing, found her obstinacy proof against every argument.

She offered no sane reasons — a fact that made Mr. Forde's task the more difficult; and in the approaching inter-

view his sympathies were entirely with Thomas. Nor did he disguise the fact when Finch appeared.

'Come in the pleasure garden out o' the way, Tom,' began Charles. 'I'm in a lot of trouble. That's why for I asked you to step over.'

'I take it kindly that you should,' answered the younger. 'If I, as be going to be your son-in-law at Michaelmas, can't help you in a hitch, 't is pity.'

'Two difficulties I be in,' said Farmer Forde, 'and one is nought, but t'other looks like the worst come-along-of-it as I've been called to face since my wife died. Will you have a spot of whiskey?'

'No, thank you, not of a morning. What's the trouble, then?'

'First, my cowman's leaving — after ten years. My right hand, you may say; and now he's a fancy as Dartmoor ban't suiting his breathing parts, and be going down to the in-country. A proper disaster in its way, for such a cowman I don't count to see again.'

'Fancy Amos off! You do surprise me. But if that be nothing to t'other disaster, then it must be fearsome bad, Charles.'

'So 'tis, Tom; and what's more, you're in it. I'm properly out of sorts about the thing, and it's knocked ten years off my life, as I powerfully believe. In a word, Jenny ain't going to marry you, my dear. I've talked my throat sore, and used pretty harsh language too, as well I might; but she be dead to honor and justice and every damn thing; and 'tis my cruel task to

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tell you, because she have n't got the face.'

Mr. Finch breathed heavily through his nose, and his dark eyes grew very hard.

'This is what her airs and graces of late have meant, then,' he said. 'I've known there was something in the wind this longful time, Charles Forde; and I was patient, as becomes a man with a female. And why have she done this outrageous act, if I may ax?'

'You may ax, same as I did, a hundred times, Tom; but whether you'll get an answer be to see. In a word, all she'll say is that it have been borne in upon her, so fierce as sunrise, that she must marry a fair man. A fair man or none it have got to be, and her "inner soul" — that's what she calls it, her "inner soul" — tells her that the man she takes will be the flaxen sort. Another kind would spell failure.'

'And that's all the reason for throwing me over after six months' tokening and about two years' courting?'

'Tis too shameful for words, and if she were n't my one and only I'd turn her out of the house for it,' declared the master of Oatlands. 'But there it stands, and I'll swear you ain't much more put about than me.'

Mr. Finch was silent for some moments, and the father of the faithless girl ran his hand through his scanty hair, pulled his whiskers, and sighed heavily.

Then Thomas asked a question.

'And what about my presents, master?'

'They be all here in this parcel,' answered Mr. Forde. 'You'll find 'em to the leastest, Tom. Everything be done decently and in order, for that matter.'

'Decently! Your daughter don't know the meaning of the word,' answered Finch. 'I ban't going to blow nor bluster, nor make any sort of fuss;

because to do so would be to waste steam and leave me so much the worse off. And I ban't going to say I'm not cruel shocked and disappointed neither. I am. This is such a disaster as I could n't have thought would have overtaken a straight and simple man like me.'

'You've a right to see her if you want, Tom. I told her that.'

'I do not want. If she could do this in cold blood, for no honest reason on earth, then I don't want to see her again. And I don't want to think of her neither. It beggars belief and be contrary to nature, though doubtless not contrary to woman's nature. She's a wicked girl, Charles, and her heart be in the wrong place, and God help the flaxen man when he comes along — that's all I've got to say about it.'

Mr. Finch rose and prepared to go his way.

'You've took it like the fine chap you are, Tom; and I hope to God you won't let this catastrophe come between me and you. I've been your friend since you grewed up, and your father's friend afore you, and I'd rather have cut off this hand than let such a fearful blow come upon you from anyone of my name.'

'I believe you. I don't feel no different to you. I'm sorry you should have such a woman as a daughter. Now I'll be gone.'

He took his presents, which made rather a bulky parcel, put on his hat, and went his way, while a pair of eyes as dark as his own, but not as straight, watched him depart from a dormer window in the thatch above.

A moment or two later Jenny Forde joined her father, who gloomily filled his pipe.

She was a slim, good-looking girl of twenty-five with a face rather lacking in expression. She had indeed no particular characteristics, save vanity and

ignorance, and the folly she had now committed arose from another foolish act in the recent past. Unknown to her parent or sweetheart, Jenny allowed a gypsy to tell her fortune at a revel, and learning from the 'wise woman' that she must wed a fair man, who would come to her and court her in disguise, the prospect of a romance so attractive induced her change of mind. For the gypsy had once predicted smooth things to a bosom friend of Jenny's, and something so like the prophecy actually happened to this maiden a year afterward that Miss Forde herself sought the prophetess at the next opportunity. She was now quite determined to accept the old woman's promises, even at the expense of her own good name and character for sense.

'How did it go?' she asked.

'You hard devil!' answered Jenny's father. 'What do you care how it's gone? He's took it like the man he is.'

'And took his presents also, I see.'

'Certainly. Why for not? You would n't have had the face to sport his fal-lals no more, I should think, after you'd put it across him this way. He was sorry for himself, that life had brought him such a facer, and he was sorry for me, because I'd got such a bad-hearted creature for a daughter.'

'And he might have been sorry for me too, I should think. A fine woman and a clever woman like me don't do such a thing for nought. I was sorry enough to turn him down, was n't I? But you can't help your feelings and convictions; and once I got properly fixed in my mind that I must wed a fair man, or none, I could n't go on with Tom Finch — in justice to him. If you find you've stopped loving a man, you've got to say so, have n't you? And no sensible man wants to love a woman that don't love him.'

They wrangled to no purpose, and Jenny declared herself hardly treated

and misunderstood. But in reality she experienced nothing but a sense of secret relief that the matter had come to an end. She was not built to feel deeply, but she was built to pretend cleverly, and Mr. Finch had certainly believed that she cared for him and could not fail to make a valuable and whole-hearted wife.

A week passed, and the news ran through Ponsworthy hamlet that Jenny Forde had changed her mind about Tom Finch. The sensation lasted a second week, and those who did not admire Mr. Finch — being induced to disparage him by reason of his prosperity — were not sorry; while his friends declared him well out of a stupid mating, for they argued that Miss Forde must be a fool to jilt the best man she was ever likely to win; and no man desires to marry a fool.

Then, while Jenny's father was forgetting this unfortunate incident, before the growing problem of his new cowman, a cowman appeared. It wanted but a fortnight to the withdrawal of the invaluable Amos, and his master began to despair of the right man, when a light shone through the gloom, and a most admirable and accomplished person offered his services. He came armed with excellent credentials; he proved of amiable disposition and invincible good nature; and he was, as Charles Forde could not fail to note, about the most strikingly handsome man he had seen in his life.

Samuel Pascoe was eight-and-twenty. He stood six feet high, and chance had willed that his features should be cast in classic mould. There was something Greek in his open, clear-cut face, beautiful mouth, and round chin. His eyes were gray and lustrous, his forehead broad, his corn-colored hair close and curly.

Having read an excellent account of Samuel, and learned further that he

had fought in the war, which was an essential in Mr. Forde's opinion, he examined him on the subject of his business, and found him well versed in it.

'You seem to know so much about cows as a man of your age can be expected to know,' admitted the farmer; 'and your papers are all they should be. No encumbrances, neither?'

'None whatever,' declared the youth.

'You want ten shilling a week more than what I'd hoped to pay, however.'

'I reckon you'll find I'm worth it, master,' said Samuel. 'Your ten cows won't take me all my time. I like horses too, though I don't pretend to know much about 'em inside. But I can plough, and I be fond of ploughing.'

'Come, then, and us'll see how we get on,' decided the master of Oatlands. 'You ban't too nice for the rough and tumble, I hope?' he added. 'You look a bit of a gentleman, and us ain't got no use for nothing like that.'

Samuel Pascoe laughed.

'It's only army ways,' he said. 'You get in the fashion of washing and shaving and being smart — all good things on a farm, or anywhere.'

'Very true indeed,' admitted the elder. 'I've a great belief in washing, and have preached it to deaf ears all my life. If you can stand to work, I don't care how clean you be, nor yet what you wear.'

So Mr. Pascoe took up his new duties, and two months later Charles confessed to Tom Finch that he was worth his money.

'It shows, if that wanted showing, that there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,' he declared. 'I never thought to better Amos, yet here's a man so ready and willing as ever he was, and cleverer, along of education. A proper treasure in fact.'

'Without a doubt he is,' replied the younger farmer. 'A very understand-

ing chap, and nice in his speech; and the best-looking beggar — bar none — that ever I saw. He comes in to me for a tell now and then, and he's cured my piebald cow of her bad heel — a thing I never hoped for.'

They expatiated on the virtues of Samuel, and then Mr. Forde ventured a word concerning Jenny.

'Forgive a painful subject,' he said. 'Nought but friendship and my deep respect for you makes me speak of it, Tom. I hope you be recovering very well from your cruel shock? With all my heart I hope it.'

'I am,' answered Finch calmly. 'I am recovering, because what you said just now — as to fish in the sea — is so true of a sweetheart as a cowman. In fact, truer, because no doubt there's lots of young, rising maidens near wife-old as will make very good mates for the men; but there ain't lots of chaps to match Sam Pascoe, or, if there are, I ain't never seen 'em.'

'Very true indeed,' replied the other. Then he hesitated, opened his mouth to speak, but put his pipe in again and kept silent. Indeed, the subject that had flashed to Mr. Forde's mind was hardly one for the other's ear. It concerned a situation of the most delicate nature, a situation that had not yet developed, and which, in any case, could hardly be mentioned in the hearing of Thomas Finch.

They parted, and the elder communed with his own heart. For within six weeks of the cowman's advent he had not failed to perceive a startling circumstance. Samuel lived at the farm and took his meals with the head man and the family. From apparent indifference toward him, there had awakened interest in the mistress of Oatlands, and now Jenny's father believed that she began to entertain something like regard for Mr. Pascoe. Samuel quite unconsciously stimulated

this emotion. He was very charming and attentive; but his good manners and cheerful smiles might be considered public property. He proved a sociable person and accepted the friendship of all who cared to offer it. There was no mystery about him. He let it be known that he was not engaged to be married, and declared himself well contented with his present lot. He liked the women and they liked him, but he seemed very complete in himself.

Then Mr. Forde made his discovery, and, once suspicious, bided his time until no shadow of doubt remained. He had in truth surprised Jenny's secret. For, if ever she had loved anybody, she now found herself in love with Samuel. In the first place, he was a very fascinating and elusive person, entirely attractive as a man; and, in the second, she could not but perceive he conformed very closely to the gypsy's words. He was fair, amazingly good to look at, and, what was still more important, a certain aloof air lent promise that Mr. Pascoe might be more than he appeared. One thing only remained to complete the great prophecy: Samuel must now fall in love with Jenny. But that, so far, he showed no signs of doing.

Yet the girl soon lived in a day-dream, for nothing so beautiful and attractive as Samuel had she seen, and she doubted not that his modesty prompted him to hesitate before declaring an answering love. Her part she did, however, and presently by a thousand touches must have made it apparent to any man, not an idiot, that she cared for him. But he made no answering sign, and once again Farmer Forde began to suffer increasing uneasiness on behalf of his child. For his part, after two months of the incomparable Pascoe, Jenny's father felt that such a son-in-law, even though he came empty-handed, would receive nothing

but a welcome from him. Indeed, Samuel was to be preferred even to Thomas. For Mr. Finch, of course, had intended that Jenny should leave her home for Five Elms when she married him, whereas, since Oatlands would be her property upon her father's death, the advent of a man ready and willing to make the farm his care for the rest of his life, with Jenny for helpmate, was a picture that had sentimental attraction for Mr. Forde.

Still, however, Samuel held off; and not merely did he hold off, but he gave no hint or sign that he was ever coming on. Sometimes indeed Jenny saw gleams of hope. She treasured his least word and counted every day's smiles; but she remembered Mr. Finch and perceived that none of the signs of a man in love marked Pascoe's friendship. He thanked her for her good offices — the button she sewed on and the socks she darned, the flower she would pick for his buttonhole on Sunday, and her assiduity to furnish the dishes that Samuel declared his favorites; but nothing came of it, and, when her father ventured to approach the subject and hint to Jenny that her regard for the cowman began to grow rather painfully obvious, she was frank, wept many tears, and confessed in Charles Forde's ear that she loved.

'Why the mischief he don't speak I can't think,' she sobbed. 'He's the man was meant for me — the man the "wise woman" saw in her crystal. I know it by a thousand things. And he loves me — he must, if he's got a heart — but — but the silly modesty of the man! He knows I be well-to-do and all that. And yet — oh, 'tis a cruel trial of patience. I could slap his beautiful face sometimes. But I ban't a queen to tell him I'll marry him.'

'No,' admitted the farmer, 'you can't tell him you'll marry him; but since I'm set on the chap very near so

much as you, belike I might whisper a word in season. Only there's one cruel doubt. If he ban't got no use for you, then he'll be scared and give notice. In fact, there won't be nothing else for him to do, as a right-thinking young man.'

'You need n't fear no such thing,' she answered. 'He only wants a hint, I reckon, and if you do it clever, with a proper care for my feelings, he'll offer for me. He's a very good man and I love him; and once he knows it — though how he don't I can't guess — then he'll do the rest. I'll go to Ashburton Sunday and be out of the way, and you can say the word in season.'

Mr. Forde promised and obeyed. He dreaded the interview and its sequel very gravely, for he did not share Jenny's confidence; but he spoke, and Mr. Pascoe listened. Samuel was all smiles as usual, though he did not commit himself, and, after his master had hinted that Jenny was seeking a husband, the cowman declared that her chosen would be fortunate when he came along.

'The point is that he have come along,' murmured Mr. Forde. 'He have come along, Samuel; and since a nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse, I need n't say no more than that his two initial letters be S. P. The rest I'll leave very willing to you.'

Mr. Pascoe exhibited no very great astonishment, nor was his gratification marked. Indeed, he kept exceedingly cool, smiled his ineffable smile, and said that Jenny's father had thrown light on an obscure situation.

'T is a great compliment, I'm sure,' he said. 'I be going to eat my dinner along with Mr. Finch next Sunday, for he's shown me amazing friendship since I came to Ponsworthy; and if Miss will be so kind as to meet me to New Bridge on River Dart at three of the clock that afternoon, I'll do what

I can to clear the thing up very clever.'

'And terrible pleased I shall be, let me tell you,' added Mr. Forde. 'I think the world of you, Samuel; and though you ain't got no money, my son, you've got what's a lot better — a dollop of sense and good understanding. And I'd so soon see you reigning at Oatlands, after I go home, as any man I know.'

Samuel acknowledged such handsome praise fittingly.

'Ditto here,' he said. 'I'm very proud to work for you, master, and the man who is your son-in-law won't have lived in vain for sartin. For you'm kindness made alive, I'm sure.'

'And Jenny's my daughter, Samuel.'

'Favors her mother, no doubt,' said Mr. Pascoe, blandly.

He preserved his impassive charm throughout the week, and made no allusion to the tryst; but he asked for Wednesday off, and did not return until a late hour.

Then came the appointed afternoon, and Jenny, with a high heart, made ready after Sunday dinner. Gloves, feather, and a new frock completed the picture, and she reached New Bridge five minutes before the hour.

Samuel, who had taken his dinner at Five Elms, was not there; but at three a little procession crept from the byway that led to Mr. Finch's farm, and Jenny Forde observed a young woman, a perambulator, and a man. The man trundled the perambulator, and the young woman walked with her arm in his. It was Samuel Pascoe.

He introduced his wife and babe.

'This is my Milly, Miss,' he said, 'and this is my Sammy — one year old and the living daps of his mother, as you see.'

Jenny kept her head with an effort. Then the procession went forward, and she struggled home. When Pascoe returned in the evening and explained

that his wife had arrived two days before at the invitation of Mr. Finch, Jenny was gone to bed with a headache, and Samuel's master had it out.

'You said you had no encumbrances, Samuel Pascoe,' he began sternly.

'No more I have, Mr. Forde. My wife and child be the joy of my life and no more of an encumbrance than my nose. You see, 'twas this way. When I come first to wait on you, last June, I axed the road to Oatlands at Farmer Finch's, and he saw me himself and got talking. And he said that I'd do very wisely to keep shut about my family and not let on I was married for six months. Why for he advised so I can't say; but so he did. And when I heard as Miss favored me I went instanter to Mr. Finch and told him how 'twas, and he said the truth must out, and he'd take in my family for a few days; which he did do. And so it happened, and I done as he advised, and went o' Wednesday to fetch Milly and Sam. And Mr. Finch be wanting a new cowman and dairymaid also. So no doubt 'twill be the cleverest thing for me to go to him come my month's out.'

'This be a dark and devilish plot, then?' asked Mr. Forde, with gathering indignation. 'A plot against me and my darter?'

'Not on my part,' answered Samuel. 'I understood as you liked for your people to be single, but I hoped when

I'd made good you'd overlook my wife and child. As to your darter, Mr. Finch never named her name to me.'

So the cowman prepared to join a new master; Jenny went to the seaside to recover; and Mr. Forde demanded an explanation from his old friend, which Mr. Finch did not deny him.

'I wanted a slap at her,' confessed Thomas, 'and when that terrible handsome, flaxen chap come along I saw my way. It all went very clever, and she did n't get an ounce more than she deserved, as you well know, Charles. Now she'll understand a bit of what she made me suffer — if she can understand anything. And of course Samuel could n't stay along with you no more, so he comes to me. Sorry I had to hit you so hard, but I could n't be evens with your beastly Jenny no other way.'

'Then this I'll say,' answered the elder. 'You've done a hateful thing, Thomas Finch, and, though the law can't reach you, I hope your conscience will; and never speak to me no more, for you be dead to me hereafter.'

'As you please, farmer. But you can have my old cowman if you mind to. He's going begging, and he's got a skew eye and one leg shorter than t'other, and no hair on his poll, — flaxen or otherwise, — so your girl ban't likely to make no trouble for you in that quarter.'

JAZZ AND GUITAR¹

BY ÉDOUARD COMBE

My title is one that MM. Duvernois and Dieudonné have used for a comedy in which they have presented the contrast between two types of women, two kinds of love. The jazz-band symbolizes modernism and dancing — that whole superficial existence in which women have forgotten even the idea of real love. The guitar, on the other hand, is intended to suggest the sentimentality of moonlight serenades, simple, old-fashioned love, naïve enough, but so sincere that no one could think it ridiculous. I have often thought of that contrast since Andrés Segovia came into prominence and we saw what a great artist could do with the guitar. Even earlier I had often reflected on the jazz-band and wondered what its contribution to modern music would prove to be. The purely musical contrast between these two is quite as sharp as the symbolic contrast, and in its way as interesting.

Let us take the first of them, the guitar. It comes to us to-day as a resurrected instrument. Everyone thought that the guitar was dead, used only by a few blind beggars, and almost solely in Spain; even in Spain it had come to be used exclusively in accompaniment, either for the voice or for a singing-instrument such as the violin, or for the mandolin. Its interest for us was purely retrospective, historical, almost archæological. It took an interpreter of genius to re-discover the guitar, to reconstruct its

technique, and, above all, to give it back its soul. Then, all of a sudden, the scales fell from our eyes. The guitar was not what we used to think it — a poor, limited, monotonous instrument. On the contrary, it proved to be marvelously rich in resources of all kinds, an instrument from which can be drawn a quite unexpected variety of sound, and which in its vast range — four octaves, like the alto and the clarinet — may well be compared with the monarchs of the instrumental solo. Add to this that its mounting of six strings makes possible full chords and polyphony. The volume of sound is not great, but this fact is redeemed by its quality — mellow, distinguished, and aristocratic.

The guitar is mounted and tuned like the lute. All the music that has been written for the lute can be used on it. Its destiny was the same as that of the lute when the growing popularity of the harpsichord ousted it from favor. After hearing Segovia it is easy to see that this was an illogical confusion, and that the reasons for giving up the lute should have served for keeping the guitar. The harpsichord was certainly an advance over the lute, because its keyboard made possible the simultaneous use of both hands and thereby doubled its resources. It went even further as soon as the two keyboards were adopted, along with duplication of strings and varied uses of the plectrum. Far be it from me to underrate the harpsichord. Wanda

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