

JIMMY'S OPPORTUNITY

A Story

By HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH.

[Copyright, 1909, by Associated Literary Press.]

Jimmy Fitzgerald was downcast. Everybody was against him, he told himself, and in that sweeping generalization he included even Carroll. For if it had not been for Carroll's connivance, her tame submission to the maneuvers of interfering relatives, the words which had trembled on his lips for three dragging months would have been spoken long ago.

From the standpoint of a disinterested spectator, Jimmy was ready to admire the cleverness which so far had circumvented him. "Good team work," he denominated it. The ingenious air with which Grandmother Reynolds would appear to claim Carroll's assistance in regard to a dropped stitch in her knitting, just when Jimmy was bringing matters to a climax and Carroll was turning a most becoming plink, was only equaled by the childlike innocence with which Carroll's small brother would rush bawling into the library with a bloody handkerchief held to his nose interrupting an eloquent outbreak beginning "Since the first hour I saw you!"

In Jimmy's estimation this was all the harder to bear because he was so perfectly eligible. Character and prospects alike were beyond question. The most serious accusation that could be brought against the match was that both of them were young. Carroll's sister Marie was of the opinion that an engagement would be absurd, and Jimmy thought he knew why. If George Freeman, Marie's latest admirer, had been as eager to propose as Jimmy was, the latter young man felt positive that no obstacles would be put in his way.

With a duplicity foreign to his usually frank nature, Jimmy lost no opportunity of expressing to Freeman the admiration with which Marie inspired him. If the older sister were once engaged, or better still, married, Jimmy believed there would be hope for him.

Meanwhile the family opposition showed itself in a system of espionage which kept Jimmy's great avowal unspoken. If he suggested a walk, either Mrs. Reynolds declared that Carroll's cold would not permit her to venture out or Marie invited herself to accompany them. If the theatre, a chaperon was necessary. Whole-souled co-operation on Carroll's part would have relieved the situation, but the girl knew so well what Jimmy wanted that her modesty shrank from giving him anything but the most negative assistance. Accordingly Jimmy decided that she, too, was against him, and gave himself up to thoughts of unutterable gloom.

He called one afternoon wearing an expression of grim determination which, if he had known it, put the conspirators on their guard. He was ushered into the family living room, and Mrs. Reynolds entertained him till Carroll came down. Jimmy made a few inane comments on the weather, his eyes devouring the pretty girlish figure seated demurely in the opposite corner.

"It's too fine a day for the house," said Jimmy. "Suppose we take a little walk."

"Really, Carroll, dear," said Mrs. Reynolds, before Carroll could reply, "it won't do for you to leave the house. Mrs. Baker is likely to want you any moment. We have a dressmaker here, Mr. Fitzgerald," she continued, turning to Jimmy with her most charming smile.

"Can't we sit on the piazza?" suggested Jimmy. Carroll agreed to the suggestion. But, as it proved, her small brother Bob was in possession of the hammock, and he remained for two hours, enlivening the occasion by describing the exploits of the ball team.

An ear-splitting whistle in the rear of the house relieved them at length of Bob's company. Without delay Jimmy plunged into the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Carroll, there's something I want to say to you!"

"Carroll, Mrs. Baker is ready for you," said Marie's voice behind the parlor shutters. That she had been waiting there, biding her time, Jimmy could not doubt. Then the gate clicked and Mr. Reynolds came up the walk. He settled himself in the chair Carroll had vacated, and he and Jimmy talked politics till dinner time.

The young man refused an invitation to remain to dinner. He went away with a lowering brow and a heavy heart. But at 9.30 o'clock that evening the telephone bell rang, interrupting a game of bridge going on in the den. Carroll, who was nearest to the insistent instrument, pushed back her chair and went to answer the summons.

Hello—hello! Oh, yes, this is Carroll." She turned a pretty flushed face toward the three at the card table. "Please don't talk for a minute. I can't hear."

The next minute she heard very dis-

tinctly, for the room had become absolutely still, and the voice at the other end of the wire was clear and penetrating.

"This is Jimmy, Carroll. There's something I've been trying to say to you for three months. And I'm going to say it now."

"Why, I don't see!"

"Well, it doesn't matter whether you see or not. Just listen. Ever since I met you on Phil Reynolds' yacht a year ago, I've loved you. From the very first hour."

"O, hush!"

"I'm not going to hush, I think about you every minute while I'm awake, and dream about you when I'm asleep. I'm not any good any more, and I shan't be, till I find out whether you care for me or not. And if you don't, I'm going to the Philippines or somewhere."

"Don't talk so loud."

"I don't care who hears me. I've kept it to myself just as long as I can. Carroll, darling, can't you care for me a little?"

"Sh! Come tomorrow."

"I'll come tomorrow fast enough if you tell me what I want to hear. Haven't I been coming day after day for months, without getting a chance to tell you that I love the very ground you walk on? And now I've got it I'm going to wait till you say yes or no. If you can't love me I might as well!"

Abruptly the voice ceased. Carroll waited expectantly. Then a terrible suspicion flashed through her mind which in a moment had become a certainty. Tremulously she accused the operator, "You've cut me off."

"What number do you want?" replied that young woman.

"Oh, I don't know. I haven't any idea. Oh, why did you cut me off just then?"

The trio at the card table were staring at her strangely. "How absurdly you are acting, Carroll," exclaimed Marie sharply. "Come and finish the game."

"Yes, come and finish the game, Carroll," said her father. "The other matter can be settled another time, I hope."

"We've got 'em on the run, Miss Carroll," chuckled George Freeman, who happened to be Carroll's partner.

Slowly the girl moved toward her place. What would Jimmy think? Perhaps he would believe that she had deliberately hung up the receiver, preferring this way of giving him his answer. And he had spoken of the Philippines. She grew a little dizzy and groped for her chair.

Just at that moment the telephone rang again, and Carroll bounded toward it, her agility in surprising contrast to her late uncertainty and feebleness.

"Hello! Hello!"

"Hello, Jimmy. I will. I mean I do."

A long pause. "I suppose it's too late for me to come up this evening," suggested Jimmy, tentatively.

"Of course not. Only hurry." She hung up the receiver and turned a radiant face. Again Marie looked suspicious.

"That must have been a very important conversation," she said, scathingly. "I hope it's settled now."

Carroll answered her with a dignity in which there was no suggestion of the down-trodden younger sister.

"It is," she replied. "Jimmy and I are engaged."