

A HONEYMOON IN HIDING

The Fascinating Adventures of a Romantic Honeymoon

By MRS. GEORGE DE HORNE VAIZEY



GWEN sniffed, and wiped her eyes with an infinitesimal handkerchief. To a certain extent she allowed herself to be propitiated by her husband's blandishments, but it was evident that a grievance still lingered. Dr. Hilbert was perfectly conscious of the nature of that grievance, and, smiling, awaited the moment when it would be put into words.

"Did you ever—were you really—is it true that you were ever—"

"Marked? By all the gods of heathen mythology, Gwendoline, my wife, I was not. Whatever may be the attitude the most diametrically opposed to 'marked,' that attitude was mine. And she showed me 'gently but firmly,' oh, lor! That Scotch fellow was all out of it when he wanted to see himself as others see him. If I had the chance to-morrow of hearing how my best pals talked of me behind my back, I'd run like a hare!"

"All people are not like some people. I'd scorn to say a word against a human creature, however—however hatefully they treated me."

Pat swallowed several times in silence, his screwed-up face eloquently expressive above his wife's reclining head. Then he said tactfully:

"But you, of course, my darling, are unlike everyone else. I say! This has been a bit of a nerve-shaking experience. I need calming down. Let's have some tea."

CHAPTER V.

SUNDAY! A Sunday in town is apt to be a somewhat dreary occasion to those who have no regular interests or pursuits, or who for any reason are temporarily debarred from the same.

Dr. Patrick Hilbert, standing with his hands in his pockets, staring through the shrouded windows of the Den, on the first Sunday morning after his marriage, was conscious of an acute pang of regret at the remembrance of the lost fifty pounds. Ah! that this bright spring day had found himself and his bride in some peaceful country retreat, instead of being mewed up in a dull town house, unable to draw back the very curtains for fear of detection. He stifled a sigh, and turned towards his wife.

"Gwen! Have you any plans for to-day?"

"We are going to church."

"Are we? H'm!"

"Pat! How can you? Of course we are. It's the first Sunday we have had together. We *should* be ungrateful if we didn't go, and—"

"Right you are, little dear. So we will. Question is, where?"

"We shall have to think. There are lots of places I have wished to go to 'some day,' and they would all be interesting."

"Such as?"

"Oh-h, the Oratory, the City Temple, and the Guards' Chapel—and the Christian Science place in Baker Street—and Southwark Cathedral, and the headquarters of the Salvation Army, and—"

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" Pat fairly gasped with amazement. "Talk of 'fancy religions!' No one can accuse you of being a narrow-minded young woman. Do you propose to take them all at a dose, or to extend the programme over a couple of Sundays? I'm the meekest and most amenable of men, but I tell you plainly, I'm off. I've an idea of my own for once, and I'll back it to be the better of the two. The question is, given congenial society, as many rests as you like, and meals at due intervals—how many miles could you walk in a day?"

"H'm," Gwen meditated. "How many miles does one walk in an hour?"

"Say three. Three would be about your figure, I should think."

"Then I could manage twelve. Two hours in the morning, and two in the afternoon, with rests at lunch and tea. Could we have lunch and tea?"

"Certainly. I'll promise you that, and we'll keep well within the dozen miles. That's fine. I've a ripping little book upstairs, which gave me some fine country walks last year, a guide-book of rambles round London by field path and hedgerow—so that one can practically walk the whole day without striking a high road. We'll get off early, train to

the starting point, laze along through the fields, get lunch at one nice little 'pub,' tea at another, and bring up about six o'clock at a country church, enjoy the service, and train home to supper. How does that strike you for a programme?"

Gwen acclaimed the suggestion with her wonted enthusiasm, whereupon the guide-book was taken from Pat's bureau, and its contents searched for the most attractive expedition. On almost every page the most alluring descriptions attracted the eye, as for instance: "The present ramble introduces the visitor to a variety of scenes. At one time, he saunters along a riverside, at another, he wanders over a breezy common, or through quaint half-forgotten villages," or again, "The church dates from the fourteenth century; note a stile on the left, cross it and enter the Park. Through four fields the right-hand hedge is followed, then cross a second stile, and continue by the side of the ornamental water. Now turn up the hill to the left, from the summit of which an extensive view," etc., etc.

With such careful directions as these to guide one's footsteps—with, moreover, instructions as to

smell like?" queried the bride, wrinkling her little nose in eloquent disapproval.

"Musty!"

"Silly! Of course it's musty. There are lots of musties. What's it like—this particular must?"

"Sure I can't say!"

Gwen sniffed again, inflating her nostrils in critical fashion.

"It's like old bound volumes of the *Sunday at Home*. We had rows of them at home in the schoolroom, and I know the smell by heart. It wafts me back to my youth, but we *did* have the windows open. Ring the bell, Pat, do. I'm ravenous."

A smiling landlady appeared at the summons of that bell, and the same discussion took place concerning the forthcoming meal which has taken place in English village inns since the Flood, and will in all probability continue until the last trump.

Visitors: "What can we have?"

Landlady: "Anything, sir; anything you fancy."

"Any soup?"

"No soup to-day, sir; no call for soup on Sundays."

"Any fish?"

"No fish to-day, sir. Awkward place to buy fish. Only three times a week, but anything you wish in joints. What would the lady—"

Lady (promptly): "Roast chicken."

Landlady (pauses, hesitates, then with brilliant amiability): "We *have* chickens, of course, five chickens; plenty of chickens. I could kill one and cook it at once, if you wouldn't mind waiting, say an hour and anarf!"

The ramblers, explaining that they would seriously mind waiting any period over five minutes, resigned themselves stolidly to the meal of ages. Hot joint and vegetables (boiled potatoes and watery cabbage). Cold joint and salad (plain, undressed lettuce). Apple pie, with a pale and solid crust, and a jug of admirable, yellow cream. Strong-smelling, strong-tasting cheese, and delicious bread and butter. Good home-brewed ale; coffee, well-mixed with grounds.

Not a tempting *menu*, perhaps, but, given youth and good appetite, worse meals than this can be eaten with relish. Pat and Gwen made a hearty meal, and continued on their way powerfully refreshed.

The afternoon ramble through peaceful and pretty country presented no unusual features; another hotel supplied tea (embellished with radishes and spring onions), and shortly after five o'clock the lovers arrived at the village where they proposed to attend evening service, before repairing to a station two miles off to catch the nine o'clock train to town.

The spurt given by the refreshing cup of tea had sped them so rapidly on their way that they found themselves arrived at their destination a good hour sooner than they had intended, and the question arose how to occupy the superfluous time. According to regrettable English fashion the church was closed; it was a fine old pile of rough, grey stone, and promised an interesting interior, so that the fact was the more to be regretted, and the rectory was a stately mansion, approached by tall, iron gates and surrounded by beautiful and extensive grounds. The grounds were in apple-pie order, the house itself presented an air of sleek prosperity. Evidently this was one of the "fat" livings, where in return for spiritual services rendered to a handful of villagers, an incumbent received a stipend running well into four figures.

Dr. Patrick Hilbert had several scathing remarks to make on the good fortune of clerics as he peered through the gate at the velvety lawn, the massed borders of bulbs, the glimpse of glasshouses in the distance. Then, at Gwen's suggestion, they turned down a narrow lane which bent a circular course round the village.

"There might be a little place to let, which would just suit us for a week-end cottage!" she suggested hopefully.

Somewhat to Pat's relief, no cottage, large or small, appeared to be vacant. It was a prosperous looking little village, and the gardening display was unusually attractive. Right at the end of the lane stood a small, white house, a degree superior to a cottage, and surrounded by a thick, well kept, laurel hedge. On the principle that that which is hidden is always more alluring than that which lies unconcealed, our honeymoon couple made strenuous efforts to peer through this encircling screen. Pat stood a-tip-toe, Gwen stooped low to find an open



"Gwen acclaimed the suggestion."

the various hostels *en route*, and thoughtful information as to Sunday trains, no one need go astray, and it was a very bright and happy couple of ramblers who alighted at the quiet station of K— on that sunny spring morning.

During the course of the next few hours the flowery language of the guide-book was abundantly verified; the trees appeared in their "leafy green," the grass was "studded with gem-like flowers," "feathered choristers warbled overhead," and the swans "floated proudly over the surface of the still lake," as duly therein advertised. There also appeared the "snug hostel" at the identical moment when the question of lunch had assumed paramount importance, and the honeymoon couple were shown into a dim, low room of the type well known to wanderers through rural England. Oil-clothed floor, horsehair furniture, portraits of Queen Victoria over the sideboard, and Edward VII. above the mantelpiece, windows shrouded with Nottingham lace curtains, and banked high with fuchsias and geraniums. Atmosphere chill, and—"What does it