

The Romance of Marriage.

CHAPTER XXI

Flossie sighed. Fancy sighing at the thought of a prince of the blood coming to sup with you!

"It's a great nuisance," she said, leaning back. "There were no letters when we left!"

"No, miss, only some invitations and bills—no real letters."

"None from—from Sir Herrick Powis?" said Flossie, with just the faintest hesitation in her voice.

"No, miss, none from Sir Herrick. I can't think what has become of him."

Flossie leaned back into the extreme corner of the admirably appointed brougham built by Peters—and paid for, which not all Peter's broughams are—and turned her face to the satin-covered padding.

"Oh, he is only out of town—down somewhere for that idiotic fishing!" she said. Then she sat up, and a faint flush burnt on her cheek. "I wonder how a sensible man like Sir Herrick can take any interest in such a ridiculous amusement! I—" A sharp, sudden cough stopped her for a moment, and brought a bright flush—a too bright flush, brighter than the rough made—on her cheeks. "I wonder he doesn't get tired of it. Weston, did I look as well as usual to-night; did it go off as well, do you think?"

The maid smiled and laughed with easy confidence.

"Better, if anything, miss. I never saw you look better. And so to the song, why, they'd have encored it fifty times instead of five."

"I only gave it to them four times to-night," said Flossie, thoughtfully. "I couldn't sing any more. I had such a pain on my chest—such a funny pain. I've had it once or twice lately."

"It's the draughts, miss," said Weston, seriously. "I'll speak about 'em to-morrow. If I were you I'd have Sir Alfred, and see what he says."

Flossie laughs.

"Call in a doctor! What a foolish woman you are, Weston! Why, it would be in all the papers, and they'd say I had—consumption," and she laughs. "No; as you say, it's a draught, and they must stop it; and I won't—I say I won't—sing that song more than four times—it's more than a woman can do in one night."

She coughs again, and the hectic flush rises to her cheeks. "I wish those people weren't coming to-night. If it weren't for his royal highness, I'd go to bed!"—and she laughs. "I wonder what he'd say? I don't much care. But I suppose it would get into the society papers; one can't do the slightest thing without the papers getting hold of it."

"You'll be all right, miss, when you get home and have had your supper," says Weston, cheerily. "And I'll speak about the draughts to-morrow."

"Yes, I shall be all right," says Flossie, and she nestles in her furs with a little, girlish shiver.

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The brougham arrives at Raglan Street, and the footman—both footman and coachman are attired in the quietest liveries of invisible green: you would think it was the equipage of a bishop—opens the door and guides his mistress up the steps.

The supper is all laid. An elegant table; the best of linen, the best of silver—all plain; Flossie's taste is, as I have said, admirable—equitely cut glass, choice flowers, and a button-hole bouquet for each guest.

As she looks round the room and the table, Flossie's spirits rise. She forgets "the draughts" at the Frivolity and her slight, hacking cough; but presently her eye falls upon the chair on the right of her own, and she sighs.

"I hate fishing and all that nonsense," she murmurs. "Why can't men be satisfied with their clubs in the day-time and the theatre in the evening? I wish—she pauses, and a faint little smile crosses her lips—"I wish he was going to be here."

Then she goes upstairs where Weston awaits her, and changes the plain black merino dress, in which she invariably goes and comes from the Frivolity, for an evening-dress of Worth's, and disdaining powder and paint—for Flossie is still young and beautiful, and only uses powder and paint at the theatre—come down into the tiny drawing-room and awaits her guests.

It is a very merry supper. The prince sits at her right hand, and Lord Fozzle at her left. They have all been at the Frivolity and heard her great song, encored four times, and they are full of admiration, and what is better, appreciation; and as the champagne goes round, Flossie's spirits rise.

Her blue eyes shine like china, her little mouth arches like a child's rapture with laughter, and her voice, full and yet sweet, is heard above the rest.

"You want to know how I became famous?" she says in answer to a complimentary question of the prince's. "I'll tell you. Did you ever play—no, I mean do you know what hop-scotch is?"

The prince, whose amiability and affability are a by-word, thinks for a minute and knits his brows. He knows, or is supposed to know, everything, but he is obliged to admit that he doesn't know this.

"I'm afraid—"

"You don't know," says Flossie, cutting him short. "I'll tell you. You chalk out a number of squares on the pavement, and you get a piece of broken china—a piece of an old plate will do—and you hop on one leg, and kick the piece of plate from square to square, and if you kick it into the square you want, you score. Do you understand?"

His royal highness inclines his head and smiles.

"I understand. I think I've seen children playing it."

"I daresay," says Flossie. "Well, I've played it scores of times when I lived in an alley—there is no pride about Flossie; she is always willing to recall her early life and all its squalor and meanness—scores of times. Well, when I was a super at the Frivolity, just dancing and singing with the chorus, I noticed how fond the people in front were of something new, and I thought, if I can hit upon something new, and my chance comes, my fortune is made."

She pauses and raises her champagne glass, and the prince just touches it with his.

"Please go on," he says, "I am awfully interested."

"It seems to me you are easily interested," says Flossie. "Well, my chance did come. The leading lady—there, don't smile—got the mumps. Ever had mumps? I suppose not; at any rate, she got the mumps, and the stage-manager he said, 'Flossie, here's a chance for you. If you can learn her part in twelve hours you can take it.' I knew the part by heart, but I pretended I didn't, and I said to him, 'Mr. Bloxam, in case I should break down I should like to introduce a bit of business,' and he said 'Very well,' and so I arranged this hop-scotch business with the leader of the band, and he made some pretty music, and I danced to it, playing hop-scotch with a piece of china. And the pit and gallery understood it and laughed and applauded, and the stalls—the stalls always follow the pit and gallery, you know—followed suit, and from thirty shillings a week Flossie Hamilton rose to forty guineas, and here I am! Give his royal highness some of that extra dry champagne, Parsons, and Parsons—for Flossie had a footman like grand folk—filled his highness's glass, and the supper went on merrily.

It went still more merrily when, at someone's suggestion, Flossie sang the great, four-time-encored song out of the burlesque, and the party did not break up until quite the small hours.

The prince, let us hope, enjoyed himself very much. Surely a prince should know life in all its phases, and it was as surely merely a love of knowledge that drew his royal highness to Flossie's supper parties.

At any rate he enjoyed himself, and many a time afterward, when he was assisting at some high and mighty entertainment, he would contrast its slowness and dullness with Flossie's suppers.

With song and laughter, with the famous champagne and the still more famous Madera, they kept it up until the small hours, and then they went, Flossie respectfully kissing the hand of his royal highness, and she, the giver of the feast, went to bed.

"Good-night, Weston," she said, and a laugh accompanied the words, "good-night. Let me have any letters there may be in the morning."

And Flossie Hamilton, the most famous, let us say, notorious actress in London, fell asleep.

There was not a letter, but a telegram in the morning, and the faithful Weston carried it to her mistress about twelve o'clock, which was the ordinary time of Flossie's awaking.

"A telegram," she said, anxiously; "give it to me," and she snatched it from Weston's hands.

Then she read it, and crumpling it up in her small fists, she flung it from her.

"I thought it was from him," she said, with evident disappointment; "it only from the old major. Don't call me until two o'clock unless—she pauses—unless Sir Herrick comes."

"Very well, miss," says the faithful

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Weston; and Flossie turns on her pillow with an impatient, dissatisfied sigh.

At two o'clock the devoted Weston calls her young mistress, and Flossie gets up and makes her toilette. Let it be put to her credit that she does not use either paint or powder when off the stage, but relies on her youthful charms, still unimpaired by gas-light and rouge.

Then she comes down to breakfast, which is served in a dainty little morning-room—a mere box of a room, with easy-chairs, and a canary in the window, with a stand of ferns and flowers under his cage; with the morning papers and the magazines lying on a side-table, with all sorts of luxuries and evidences of our advanced civilization.

Flossie, clad in her morning-robe of palest blue satin and cashmere, with soft ecru lace nestling round her throat and at her wrists, the thin, white wrists which were so supple and graceful, looking a perfect picture of dainty grace: Flossie lay back in her chair and partook of her breakfast; a very simple meal—nothing more nor less than an egg beaten up in milk, with just a dash of the oldest and choicest of cognac—it came from Lord Fozzle's cellars—in it; and while she disposed of this simple fare, she looked through the paper to see if there was any mention of the popular actress Miss Flossie Hamilton; and having satisfied herself on that point, turned to the fashionable intelligence column, which she read carefully, and which she found recorded the visit of Major the Honourable Francis Vericourt to Lord Hurstley; but there was nothing about Sir Herrick, and with a sigh and a pout of impatience she flung the paper from her. Politics, the general news of the world, were nothing to Flossie—absolutely nothing. The theatres first, the fashionable column next, and the rest nowhere.

Then she opened her letters—or, rather, Weston did—reading out aloud those which she thought interesting enough for her mistress, and dropping into a pretty, gilt, cane wicker paper basket the numerous begging letters and applications for orders, and the still more numerous avowals of undying love made by sundry young gentlemen of the crutch-and-tooth-pick school.

(To be continued.)

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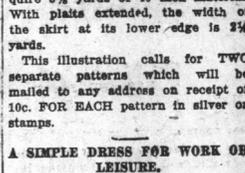
Broad cloth, duvetyne, serge, velvet or tricotine could be used for the skirt, with fur banding to match the fur of Cape and Muff, which could also be of the skirt material and fur trimmed.

The Cape and Muff Set is cut in 3 Sizes for the Cape: Small, 32-34, Medium, 36-38, and Large, 40-42 inches bust measure, and in One size, Medium, for the Muff. It will require 2 1/2 yards of 44 inch material for the Cape, and 1/2 yard of 30 inch material with 1 1/2 yard of lining for the Muff.

The Skirt is cut in 7 Sizes: 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, and 34 inches waist measure. A Medium size will require 3 1/2 yards of 40 inch material. With platts extended, the width of the skirt at its lower edge is 2 1/2 yards.

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Pattern 3094 cut in 7 Sizes: 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, and 36 inches bust measure is here shown. For comfort, convenience and attraction, this model has much to recommend it. The lines are simple, and the garment may be made for service, or as a "porch" or "afternoon" dress. Foulard, taffeta, serge, gabardine, crepe de chine, voile or poplin would be nice for a "dressey" dress. Developed as a work dress it would look well in gingham, chambray, linen, lawn or percale.

Size 38 requires 6 1/2 yards of 36 inch material. Width of Skirt at lower edge is about 2 1/2 yards.

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