

# DIAMONDS FOR THE BRIDE

Or, a Proposal by Proxy

## CHAPTER VI.—(Cont'd)

"I shall be here to see you with my own eyes, Dulcie, and that is everything. I am grateful to father for consenting, though it was quite at the last."

"No, it isn't everything. To have you for my bridesmaid was what I wanted—most of all. And a week would have made all the difference. You could have wired to Aldegonde with the measures, and she would have had it ready."

"Dulcie, I could not have been your bridesmaid, even if father had been willing."

"Madge, dear! Why not?"

"Because—Dulcie, will you be very much surprised? Because I am married."

Dulcie cried out in her astonishment. "Married, Madge! You?"

"Hush! hush! I will tell you about it. It is a sad story, as sad as that other story you would not have to-night. But we must not cry over it; I have wept all my tears away. And perhaps some day I shall know what—and why."

"Married!" Dulcie repeated, this time in a whisper. "Does—does papa know?"

"No—he had cast me off; there was no reason why he should be told. But I mean to tell him now, after to-morrow, and before I go. There was something about it that would have pleased him; it was not a brilliant marriage, like you are making, little one. And I was old enough to choose for myself."

"A sad story! Oh! Madge, you speak as if—as if—What happened? Is he—?"

She looked at Margaret's dress. It was dark and plain, but not the dress of a widow.

"Is he dead—is that what you would ask? Dulcie, I don't know. I have lost him."

"Lost—and you do not know whether he is dead or not?"

"I will tell you all that needs to be told. He was an Englishman, a gentleman, but poor, with his way to make. I did not mind that. I could help him a little, so I thought; I had my own income, and should not be a burden. He had been working hard in Paris, perfecting a scientific discovery; and he came to Barbizon for change and rest, for the free wild life and the rambles in the forest. There is a sort of inn there, frequented by artists. That was where he lived, and my cottage was not far away. I was painting out the doors most of the day."

"And you made friends just by chance?"

"Yes; and then what followed was very quick. Too quick, I suppose; but why should we have waited to drift apart again? We were both lonely; he as lonely as I. We were married, and I was happy; as happy as you are, Dulcie—perhaps happier. We had our wedding journey—it was not a long one—and then we came back to Barbizon, to my cottage. I was to wait there while he went to Paris and made certain arrangements. We were to hire a studio and work together—at portraits in a new scheme of color, which was his discovery. It was to be our joint venture, you understand; mine as well as his. Money had to be paid down in advance, for advertisement, for appliances, for the hire of a shop window for display. My little fortune was absolutely at my own disposal, and I sold out one of the investments, two hundred and fifty pounds, and he took it with him to deposit. I never saw him again; I never heard. And that is six months ago."

"How dreadful! My poor Madge—"

"Don't pity me, or perhaps I shall find my tears again; and you know we must not cry to-night. It is possible the money was a danger; his life may have been taken for the sake of it, paltry sum as it was. If he had lived, he would have come back to me, for he loved me, Dulcie, he loved me. I am sure of this—as sure as that I loved him; loved and trusted him with all my heart."

"And could you find out nothing?"

"Perhaps I was wrong, but I was too proud to ask. How could I tell the world that my husband had deserted me and robbed me? Think of that, Dulcie; my husband! But, oh! it cannot have been that; he did not, he could not. He is dead."

That surely was the solution of the riddle. Dulcie, kneeling and looking up into the beautiful face, could think of no other. This Margaret was the sort of woman men might die for; she could never have been cast aside.

She took the passive left hand and turned it over. There was the

marriage ring on its proper finger, but it was concealed—hidden by an old-fashioned gem-ring, over-large, which Margaret wore above it, and which had belonged to her mother. "We ought not to call you Miss Swayne," she began.

"Never mind; I will be Miss Swayne for these two days, though the name is strange to me. I was Miss Fielding at Barbizon. What does it matter? I intend to tell my father before I go, but I will take my own time for it."

Dulcie was still musing over the ring. Presently she asked: "What did you call him?"

Margaret sighed in saying the name; it could never be like a common word upon her lips.

"George—"

"How odd that your lover should be George as well as mine," the bride began impulsively. But at this point a servant came to the door, and the further name was unsaid.

"Miss Dulcie, Mr. Gower is in the library, asking to see you. He says can you spare him a few minutes?"

Dulcie sprang up on the instant, and then looked back at the figure in the deep chair.

"Madge, won't you change your mind and come down with me? I would like you to see him to-night."

But Margaret shook her head. "No. Go alone, as he wishes. That is what he does wish, I am sure. To-morrow will be time enough for me."

Dulcie did not urge her further, but she turned back from the door for another kiss.

"Oh, you poor dear!" she said, out of the wealth of her happiness pitying this other who had lost her all. "I wish it was your George who was waiting downstairs instead of mine."

## CHAPTER VII.

Some women are gifted above others with the power of self-concealment, of wearing a serene mask over the natural face of the soul, which, under this disguise, may be wrung and drawn with torture. Again and again through that long day the stab of recollection, of apprehension, had gone home, but the mistress of the Court could not yield to her anguish, and shut the door of privacy against the world. In all the preparations which were on foot hers was the guiding mind; and not long after noon Colonel Swayne came back from Leavenworth, needing a dozen small services which his wife's hand and no other was used to render. As he grew older he depended more and more upon Annabel, that sort of leaning which may be quite dissociated from affection, yet is sweet to a woman's heart. He was used to her, she suited him better than any other; he would suffer less if the tie between them were divided; and, as she yielded to the exactions, it was a further pang to her to know how near might be the danger of dividing. Did the man Vincy know her as she surely had known him? Time had greatly changed her from that schoolgirl of sixteen on whom he had brought calamity; but if he had tracked down Harold to Fortune's Court, he might as surely have tracked her too.

The first gong sounded, and when she went to her room her maid was fastening some lace into the dinner-gown which lay upon the bed. The woman had a note to give her. A boy brought it, she said, but he did not wait, as there would be no answer.

The envelope was soiled with the impact of rustic fingers, but the handwriting of the address, unscathed for half a lifetime, revived unwelcome memories. Mrs. Swayne tore it open—standing at her dressing-table—read, and crushed the enclosure in her hand. Her worst fears had come true, and though she spoke of guarding the secret, what was going to be the price?

She was conscious of eyes upon her, and that the letter must be concealed. She was not often a wearer of ornaments, but, for the sake of safe depositary, she unlocked her jewel-case, and took from it the first object her fingers touched, so that she might slip that paper within and turn the key. It was a pendant jewel of emeralds, which had been a love-gift from her husband. She shivered when she saw what she had drawn forth, but, when her toilet was complete, she let the woman clasp it at her neck.

Between nine and ten at the garden shelter. She could slip out there after dinner, no one being the wiser; her husband occupied with his guests, his brother Swin-

ton and the old Archdeacon, staying with them against the morrow. A false errand; it seemed doubly false, sitting opposite the man who trusted her; but what had she been but false from the beginning of her marriage, however loyal in deed? A whitened sepulchre, a pretence, because she had presumed to sit in high places of honor, knowing herself unworthy. The position of this man's wife—she had coveted it when offered, long ago, at High Mount, and the achievement of it had given her her heart's desire—rehabilitation, the final blotting out (so it had seemed) of that error of her girlhood, buried so far back under the piled years that it might have happened to another woman in another world.

Through these years Vincy had completely died out of her life, so completely that she hoped, grew even to believe, that he was dead indeed. He kept the secret without tinge, when to all concerned it was nothing but a shame. In this unwelcome resurrection he had stumbled on discovery that the keeping might be turned to his advantage. He had made demand of Harold; he would make it also of her. Colonel Swayne's position would suggest wealth, the command of money for his wife—untrue, for the manage at Fortune's Court was ruled by strict economy. It had been her pride to have it so, and every shilling that passed through her hands was money for account. And then it flashed into her mind—an evil inspiration—that actually at this time there was money in the house, enough to stop Vincy's mouth—convertible securities, not yet sent to the bank, but locked away in the safe in her husband's dressing-room, of which she knew the key. There had been discussion between May and Colonel Swayne only the day before, May urging immediate lodgment, for the bonds were as good as circular notes, and could not be traced. If she put it in Vincy's power to take these, she might be able to buy silence, salvation.

It would be theft, and theft is an ugly matter—even between man and wife, and after the declaration in the marriage service. But it was in his interest as well as hers—to spare him grief and a far greater loss, to avert the shadow that might fall upon their boy. She would be justified, she told herself. And yet—

We hear much in these days of lights hitherto unknown to man, which make plain the framework of the body, the bone within the flesh. But what if there were rays spiritual as well as rays material, which, behind the outward mask, could show the thought of the heart? It would have been a revelation startling indeed in this fair, dignified woman at the head of her husband's table, wearing his trust as a crown of honor, gracious to his guests of to-night, who were both of them nearly allied by blood.

The Archdeacon was a first cousin and a Swayne, a bachelor churchman, who would take a chief part in tying the knot matrimonial on the morrow. The other guest, Lord Swinton, was the Colonel's brother, who, like himself, had served in the Army—a childless man with a paralysed

wife. Lady Swinton had lain for years on her couch, and might linger there for as many more, so the succession seemed safe to Otho Swayne, and after him to his boy. And of the boy Ernest, this Swinton uncle was well-nigh as fond and proud as if he had been indeed his father.

(To be continued.)

## WHERE PROTECTION HELPS THE FARMER.

Keeps Out Meats and Butter From the Antipodes.

An instance of how a Protective Tariff protects the farmer of Canada is seen now and then, when the Customs Officers hold up for duty some shipment from far-off Australia or China.

On March 18th last, 750 carcasses of frozen lamb from Australia were landed at St. John, N. B. 250 carcasses were sent to the William Davies Co., Limited, Toronto. The greater part of the remainder were shipped to Montreal. This lamb was purchased at nine cents per pound delivered in bond at Toronto.

Under existing conditions the duty was three cents per pound. This made the lamb cost twelve cents per pound laid down in Toronto.

Fresh dressed lambs were selling in Toronto at that time at 12½¢ to 13¢ per pound.

Hence, after paying this duty there was not much difference between the prices of the Australian and Canadian lamb.

The duty protected the Canadian farmer against the Australian product.

Under Reciprocity the duty on this frozen lamb will be only 1½¢ per pound, so that similar shipments could be laid down in Toronto at 10½¢ per pound, two or three cents per pound cheaper than the price for the home raised products.

Referring to the lambs which were sent to Montreal. When they reached Montreal, Canadian lamb was selling at 10½¢. The Australian lambs were sold at 9½¢, delivered ex cars Montreal duty paid, the owners apparently being contented to undersell the Canadian market by one cent per pound.

Now, if you wish to see the effect upon the live stock market of the receipt of this Australian lamb in Montreal, turn up the Montreal papers of March 20th, in one of which, for example, the headline was, "Sheep Sold Lower in Local Markets."

If, with the three cent duty on every pound, frozen lamb can be profitably imported from Australia, it seems almost conclusive that reducing the duty will also reduce the price of Canadian lamb accordingly.

And not only does Australia export frozen meat, but it exports butter as well. It exports annually between fifty and seventy-five million pounds of butter.

Australian butter can be laid down now in bond at Montreal at 23¢ per pound. A duty of four cents per pound keeps it out of competition with the Canadian butter now selling at 26¢ per pound.

Under Reciprocity, which would do away with the duty of four cents per pound, the Eastern Townships butter would have to compete during the winter months with Australian butter which cost only 23¢ per pound in Montreal.

A SQUARE MEAL IN FRANCE.

2-1-2 Pounds of Meat and 12 Quarts of Strong Drink Per Capita.

Frenchmen are pretty able trenchermen, but the following account of a meal made by eight Norman peasants, surpasses expectations. According to the Medical Journal, a grazer with seven of his friends undertook an expedition to gather fagots.

Among them they should have managed some 60 fagots, but thirty-seven represented the sum of their work, the small total being accounted for, possibly by the luncheon which the octet devoured. They managed to consume twenty pounds of meat, eighty quarts of pure perry, sixteen bottles of assorted wines, nine bottles of champagne and eight quarts of cider brandy of an alcoholic strength of 65 per cent. A roast goose, placed thoughtfully among the rations, was not required.

This luncheon represents an average of two and a half pounds of meat and twelve quarts of milk, none of it weak, per capita during the twelve hours occupied by the expedition.

CAUSE FOR MIRTH.

"Jane," said a lady rather sharply to her cook, "I must insist that you keep better hours and that you have less company in the kitchen at night. Last night you kept me from sleeping because of the uproarious laughter of one of your woman friends."

"Yes, ma'am, I know," was the apologetic reply; "but she couldn't help it. I—as a telling of her how you tried to make cake one day."

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"Here's an article in this magazine entitled 'How to Meet Trouble,'" said Mrs. Wedderly. "Shall I read to you?" "No thank you," replied the husband. "How to dodge trouble is the brand of information I'm looking for."

"Have you any men serving sentences for bigamy?" asked the prison visitor. "Lots of them," replied the warden; "but we confine them all in the insane ward."

Anyway the workman who turns out a poor job is a decided improvement on the one who does nothing but stand around and make remarks.

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8-48 Has 8 line wires, 48 in. high, 12 stays to the rod, all No. 9 hard steel wire. Spacing 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 7, 8. Price per rod, freight prepaid 30¢

9-48 Same as 9-48-0, with 12 stays to the rod. Price per rod, freight prepaid 32½¢

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