

# Grand Alliance; —OR— Love That Knew No Bounds.

CHAPTER V.  
"No, I did not, mamma. Mr. Bruce—a neighboring vicar—asked me who the charming girl in white was—meaning Sydney. And the Countess said she had the prettiest, most natural figure she had seen for a long time."  
"Very polite of the Countess," coldly.

"And Mr. Duvesne watched Sydney all the time she played with the school-children at that idiotic 'gathering nuts in May.' After you brought him to me he hardly spoke. I don't think he listened when I talked. I said I was tired and would he get me some tea? And," finished Leonora, shaking her elegantly shaped head very gravely, "he went quite briskly. But he never came back! Instead, he followed Sydney for an hour with a heavy dish of cake!"

This was serious. Mrs. Alwyn seated herself for meditation, surveying the situation uneasily. Mr. Duvesne, an honorable and Reverend scion of the great Conyngnam family, was the man whom she was ready to move heaven and earth to gain for a son-in-law—a husband for Leonora. But it was on the cards that John Alwyn's daughter might come most undesirably to the front, and, once there, hold her own in any company. The thought that the child, unwelcome from her first breath, should oust the darling offspring of her first marriage was intolerable. The mother, weighted with uneven burden, puckered her brows, and bit her lips, and sighed, but saw no light through her difficulties—quick though she mostly was at finding the straightest road to her own advantage.

For once Leonora's unimaginative self opened the way out of perplexity.  
"It would be awkward, mamma," she said, plaintively, "if this sort of thing always went on. I should dislike Sydney—and I've no desire to do so. I can only think of one plan to set things comfortable."

"Ah!" Her mother looked up, anxious, not hopeful.  
"And perhaps that isn't possible. But would it not be very nice if we could get Sydney pleasantly away? Get her—married, or going to be, so she wouldn't interfere at all? Could it be done?"

Mrs. Alwyn got up and kissed her daughter rapturously.  
"Done! It's the very thing! An admirably unselfish thought! I fancy I see my way. I believe I know the very man. I won't lose a day, my love, in attending to it!"

And surely enough that same afternoon's post bore forth the first move in this newly suggested family game.

## CHAPTER VI.

The missive calculated to inter-meddle with our heroine's fortunes was compiled with much thought and care, addressed in her mother's faultlessly correct handwriting to one "Major Villiers, Petersham," and ran thus:

"The Dale, St. Clair's, June 20.  
"My Dear Alfred—It was only an hour ago, when talking with Leonora, that it occurred to me your visit to us, postponed these last two summers, ought surely to take place this

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present one. Pardon me for not writing and pressing this before, but, as you know, with all the weight of domestic minutiae, and the cares inseparable from the charge of two unmarried girls, my mind is always on the stretch, and I fear I am sometimes remiss where I ought to be the very reverse. Your niece and I both hope, however, that you will show you are not offended by coming to us as quickly as possible. We shall be so glad to receive you at any time you may fix. I may add, if you need further persuasion, that I have much to consult you about, much to speak of, whereon I feel your advice will be invaluable—"

"Now that must mean," quoth the major to himself, taking his cigar from his lips, and meditatively expelling rings of smoke as he lounged in his chair, upon his balcony overlooking the calm beauty of the Thames valley—"that certainly must mean my clever sister-in-law wants to get something or other out of me. Let me see: the last time she requested my counsel it turned out she wanted to stay at my Cousin Sarah's in Piccadilly, and to get an invitation for Miss Leonora to the Artillery Fete. The time before it was Henley Regatta; and before that—Well, with a great puff, "I can't recollect; but the good lady's affection isn't disinterested, as a rule. However, I needn't cry out before I'm hurt. Will see what's on the carpet now. Advice—h'm, h'm—'invaluable'—ah! here's the place."

"Perhaps it may be as well to name the point that disturbs me now before we meet. Candidly, then, it's about Sydney; and though she is no real relation to you, yet, as you are associated with my own brother in the trusteeship of her little property (which charge will end next year, for she is twenty now), I am sure you will not mind my troubling you with what concerns her—"

"Twenty! Is she really?" pondered Major Villiers, with another pause. "How time flies, to be sure! And what's the young lady up to, I wonder! Got into some love-scraper, I'll be bound, as all girls do—except my niece, Leonora, by the way. She doesn't seem to hurry herself. Now, Miss Sydney. At your service."

"It is really quite a misfortune that all my younger daughter's strongest characteristics are at variance with her sister's; but such being the case, more pronouncedly so every year, you can conceive the difficulty it is to me to do justice to them both, more especially as Sydney has not that delightful pliability of disposition which Leonora inherits from her dear father—"

"Delightful pliability!" muttered the major, his gray eyebrows comically raised. "Well, well! the dead know no wrong, but poor Hal used to be dubbed as weak as ditch-water when he was alive. I suppose this is the same fact but politely."

"I find no fault with her. Pray don't think I complain of her. She has qualities which make her much liked by some. I merely confide in you that I foresee many embarrassments arising from my two families, though each so small, especially when another year makes Sydney mistress of her six thousand pounds, and leaves me so much the poorer—"

"Oh, ho! The ladies don't hit it off, that's it in plain English," said the major, with a superior masculine chuckle; "but if my sister-in-law thinks I'm going to put my finger in to that description of family pie, she's very much mistaken. Never was able to argue with a woman in my life.

They trip you up with a smile or half a dozen tears, and then what's a fellow to do?"

"I am so anxious for my children's welfare that perhaps I harass myself unnecessarily; but looking to the future, I can see my little home peacefully with your brother's child alone, and (alas!) peacefully with her and Sydney. Under these circumstances, I am sure you will quickly see in what I am trusting as a remedy—"

"No, that I'll be hanged if I can!" muttered the major, but he was quickly enlightened.  
"In marriage—"  
"Oh!" groaned the gallant officer; "what schemers these women are!"  
"And here I think you may possibly arrange something to our mutual satisfaction—"

"Why," stammered the lady's confidant, coloring up to the roots of his gray hair, "she doesn't mean to offer her daughter to me, does she?"

"For if your son Rupert" (O—h!) "is still free and feeling any inclination to settle in life, I frankly tell you he would be a most acceptable son-in-law—"

The major heaved a sigh of relief, looked grave, and read on very seriously after this.

"You, and he through you, knowing every circumstance connected with our family affairs, would require no explanation of past events, which in itself would be a great relief to me Sydney, if the marriage were arranged, would, I trust, settle happily into a suburban life. There would be little likelihood of her returning to her unfortunate father's neighborhood which I have always felt most undesirable. Such a terrible collapse as his may even yet be remembered there. And, lastly, Mr. Rupert would secure a wife and immediate dowry neither of which, I think, is inferior to what he may have the choice of in general society. Think this all over my dear major, and if your judgment agrees with mine, that the match is one to be wished, come down and talk over with me. With me only, of course. With Sydney's temperament it would be quite unwise to let her have any suspicion of our plan. She has a great tendency to independence of action, but perhaps you gentleman might like her none the worse for that. Looking impatiently for your reply, with Leonora's kind love and my own."

"Ever, dear Alfred,  
"Yours very truly,  
"HELEN ALWYN."

"The truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth!" Now I wonder if his is any or all of that," mused the major, treating himself to the unusual luxury of a second cigar, to assist his cogitations. "The worst of women is, they're so confoundedly crafty."

Then he began his letter again, hummed and had over the commencement, underlined with his massive gold pencil the fact that Sydney's mother had no fault to find with her.

put a double mark under the sum mentioned as coming into the girl's control so speedily, emphatically scored the admission of what would be a great relief to Mrs. Alwyn, with rather a grim smile, and "No question she means that! But I don't know as we ought to blame her. At any rate, it's all done with long ago!" and finally, with head well back, and steadfastly sky-gazing, he ruminated long over "if Rupert is still free, and feeling an inclination to settle in life."

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