

# "HIS PLACE in the WORLD"

By Mrs. Bilsborough

CHAPTER XXI.—(Continued.)

"BY Jove! I'd no idea it was so late! You ass, why the blazes didn't you call me a couple of hours ago?" He sprang out of bed. "Is my bath ready?" he shouted.

"Yes, m' lord."

"Get out my last new suit—one that has not been worn. A fellow must put on new togs to celebrate an occasion of this sort!"

"Yes, m' lord," grinned the valet.

An hour later, Wallsend emerged from his room—by the combined and elaborate efforts of his valet and himself—an immaculately turned-out man.

He ate a leisurely breakfast. The only letter he opened was the one addressed in the blotted and illiterate hand. He looked with disgust at the dirty envelope, and a heavy scowl spread over his face as he took out a grimy half sheet of paper and read the few lines scrawled across it. He read it over twice, then went over to the fireplace and dropped it in the flames.

"Everlastingly wants more money. Well, it's got to come to an end somehow—and soon!"

Lord Wallsend seemed suddenly to have lost his appetite and sat for a long time frowning darkly at his plate; finally he pushed it away, rose, and left the room.

His valet handed him his hat, gloves, and cane, and he sauntered forth, humming the latest music-hall ditty with the air of a man who has not a care in the world.

James Kenway, who had secured the post of hall porter, gave his lordship a military salute as he passed out.

"Looks as if 'e'd bin abroad wheer there was a bit o' sun, by the colour of 'is skin," confided James Kenway to himself, as he looked after the well-groomed man. "Fair like a nigger 'e looks—but 'e ain't 'arf a toff, for all that, 'e ain't."

Owing to the fact of Kenway having secured the said position of hall porter in the building a few days after his last unsuccessful attempt to see Doctor Bassingbroke, he had never again had an opportunity to visit Portman Square.

Sometimes his conscience troubled him when he thought of the poor girl he had met in such a curious way; but gradually the remembrance of her was fading from his mind in the press of other duties, and he comforted himself always with the reflection that he had himself no recollection whatever of the things which had taken place during his own three years' derangement.

Of course, if the poor girl was off her head, there was really nothing he could do in the matter, especially now that the great doctor had gone to die in Central Africa.

In which thought James Kenway was grievously mistaken, for there was much that he could do. Moreover, he was shortly to be called upon to do it, and to set the Wheel of Justice in motion, with far-reaching consequences to many persons besides himself.

CHAPTER XXII.

What Came Of It.

IT was afternoon when Lord Wallsend presented himself at the house in Curzon Street.

Lady Assitas received him in the state drawing-room, coming to him with outstretched hands and a face wreathed in smiles.

"Well?" he queried.

"You have seen the announcement?"

she replied with an air of satisfaction.

He nodded, then added: "How can I thank you? I was sure you would plead my cause successfully."

"I did my best," she answered evasively.

"And Margaret? She accepts me?" He looked at Lady Assitas keenly. She flushed a little under the hard scrutiny of his pale blue eyes.

"Well, of course, girls always are shy at first, you know. Margaret will get used to the idea in a day or two."

"I may see her?" he asked eagerly. "You will let me have my answer from her own lips?"

The Roman General looked vaguely uncomfortable.

"I am not sure—to-day," she faltered. "In fact, Margaret has a headache and is lying down. I think perhaps it would be better to give her a little time—before—you see her."

Seeing his look of annoyance, she rose with a gay smile.

"Impatient man—I will see what I can do for you! But I won't promise, mind you!"

WITH this she sailed out of the room, leaving him to his own reflections.

He lifted his eyes to the ceiling with an enigmatical smile upon his lips.

"Of course there has been a row—and mamma wants time to bring the girl to her senses." He read the situation aright, and enjoyed the fact that he was forcing the Roman General to show her hand.

"Matter of fact, she's afraid of Peggy spoiling the whole show." He laughed softly, and continued to gaze aloft. "She'll take care I don't see the girl to-day."

A huge old glass chandelier hung from the centre of the ceiling. It belonged to a previous generation, but Lord Assitas, conservative in other things as well as politics, resisted every effort of his wife to get rid of it. When fully illuminated, it sparkled like a million diamonds—a pendant shower of light—but in the daytime it looked heavy and obsolete, and presented a difficult and delicate task to keep it free from dust.

It caught the glance now of Wallsend's upturned eyes, and he noticed a fine cobweb meshed upon the higher branches. A fly was slowly travelling up one of the lustres, and he watched it with lazy amusement, making straight for the web. He saw the spider in ambush waiting; and his sympathies were with the spider, which he backed as the winner.

He had become so intent upon the issue, that the door had opened noiselessly, and Margaret Assitas entered. The opening of the door caused a slight vibration of the atmosphere—the lustre trembled, the fly spread its wings, and Lord Wallsend was made aware of its escape and Margaret's presence in one and the same fraction of time.

Her face was very white, the lids of her eyes rather red, and the expression of her mouth far from reassuring.

He rose and met her with an easy, assured smile.

"My dear girl, you are not looking at all well. Lady Assitas ought not to have disturbed you on my account," he hastened to say. "I could have called another time if you didn't feel up to seeing me."

"I wished to see you," said Margaret quietly. "Mamma did try to prevent me doing so—but I insisted on coming down."

"You angel!" said the man, purposely misunderstanding her, and seizing her hand, he kissed it passionately. Margaret snatched it away, caught at a chair, and sat down.

"Have you seen the papers?" she asked coldly.

"Of course—I—I—"

"Was it not rather premature—before you had my consent?" she asked bitterly.

"I—Peggy—listen—you know how I love you—you can't mean to say—that—that—" Lord Wallsend suddenly stammered and, looking for a chair, sat down.

Her face warned him that a "scene" was imminent. He was beginning to feel uncomfortable. Margaret had made him feel that way on more than one occasion.

"Did you put that announcement in—or did mamma?" she asked in a clear, determined voice.

"Really—I say Peggy—you are not going to cut up rough over it, are you? I—I—wouldn't like to vex you for the world."

"Will you kindly answer my question?" said the girl frigidly.

"Does it make any difference—really?" he asked. "The announcement has been put in—you don't mean to go back on it?" he exclaimed in sudden alarm, as he saw the cold glint in her eyes.

He foresaw himself being held up to public ridicule if she persisted in taking up this attitude. He flushed a dull red, his patience was nearly giving out. The girl must be a fool to try him as she was doing.

"It makes this difference—that I intend to find out who did send the announcement. I think I might, at least, have been consulted first," she flashed out.

"DON'T blame me, then, Peggy," he hastily implored. "I think I did the right thing in coming to your father and mother and asking for their consent—and—"

"When was this?" asked Margaret in a level voice.

"I spoke to Lady Assitas yesterday—she promised to plead my cause with you—and—and—I was to call for your answer."

"I suppose you thought you had received it this morning when you read the papers," said Margaret with icy scorn.

"I—I—well—I hoped so," admitted Lord Wallsend, tugging at the end of his moustache to conceal his chagrin.

"I am glad to hear what you have told me, and I am sorry to have to un-deceive you—I cannot, will not, be your wife."

She rose and stood tall and rigid. Lord Wallsend rose also; he had gone livid, and his eyes flashed dangerously.

"I shall not take that as your final answer," he said. "You are angry at present at the trick your mother has played you; believe me, I had no hand in it. In a day or two calmer reflections will prevail. I will call again at the end of the week, when I hope to receive a more favourable answer."

He lifted her cold hand to his lips, and walked quietly out of the room.

She stood as he had left her, white and rigid, staring at the hand which he had just kissed; then she suddenly stamped her foot and burst into tears.

"It is too bad—it is shameful—I won't—I won't—stand it," she muttered, after which she went upstairs, locked herself in her room and



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