

The Romance

Marriage.

CHAPTER XIX.

"With an effort Alice raises her eyes to his face and laughs. "It is an excellent jest," she says. "I do not believe in palmistry, Major Vericourt, not a little bit, but all the same I quite agree with you that any man who agrees with Sir Herrick and Paula would be most ill-advised."

"Beautifully put," he murmurs. "And my little jest hasn't offended you?" "Not at all," she says, avoiding his eyes. "And—and I am to take things as if the engagement met with your approval?"

"There is the sound of footsteps on the terrace, and the major's quick eyes catch them.

"Follow my lead, my dear Miss Alice," he whispers.

The next instant Herrick and Paula comes round the corner. He has drawn her hand in his own, and is toying with the fingers that meet his with a mute caress. Instantly, of course, she snatches her hand away, and shrinks like a timid fawn at sight of the major and Alice; but Sir Herrick keeps quite calm and cool, but for the slight touch of colour in his cheeks, and the dash of pride in his eyes.

The major rises with a little gasp of delight, and, coming towards them, drags his stick, and holds out his white, ungloved hands to Paula.

"My dear child!" he exclaims in a voice apparently struggling with emotion.

Paula cannot do otherwise than put her two hands into his, and the major presses them affectionately, and looks down at her.

"And so this is to be my little boy's wife, is it?" he says, with tender playfulness. "I wish you every happiness, my dear—every happiness! Indeed, you have made me very happy—very happy, indeed! As I told dear Rick, there is no young lady I have ever seen who made such an instant impression on me as did you and your dear sister here. I assure you, my dear Miss Paula, that last night I said to myself, in the foolish way that solitary old men have of expressing their thoughts and wishes alone—I said to myself, 'Ah, if my dear Rick would but fall in love with one of these charming creatures, how delighted I should be!'"

And the soft-hearted, impressionable major raises her hands one after the other to his lips and kisses them, while Alice smiles lovingly at the picture, and murmurs, with sisterly enthusiasm and sympathy:

"Dear Paula!"

And Sir Herrick? Sir Herrick stands with folded arms and knit brows, wondering whether there ever was in the world, since it first began to roll, a more daring and accomplished actor and hypocrite than his much-admired uncle, the Honourable Francis Vericourt.

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Neglect exposure to damp and cold frequently result in a derangement of the kidneys and bladder.

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CHAPTER XX.

The major not only stopped to lunch, but after a little pressing from Alice, remained to dinner, made a little more elaborate than usual with much exertion on the part of Jane, and he made himself charming. Sir Herrick and Paula might reasonably have been expecting to be happy, and they were; Sir Herrick in his quiet, calm fashion, and Paula in a shy, tremulous little way; but no one of the party seemed half so happy as the major. He was full of anecdotes—more full even than on the previous evening—and kept them in a perpetual glow of amusement. Even Bob, the taciturn and passive, relaxed into a series of broad grins, and, when the major at last departed, expressed his opinion to Paula that, after all, if the said major was a humbug, he was a jolly, amusing one.

Sir Herrick dutifully went to put his revered relative in the carriage, and the major said a few words as he wrapped his fur cloak round him.

"Well, Rick," he said, "I hope I've done my duty, eh?"

"You have been extremely pleasant, sir," said Rick, with his hands in his pockets, and his dark eyes fixed on the major's small, keen ones.

"Nothing of the disappointed, grumpy old curmudgeon in my manner, I trust?" said the major, almost humbly.

Sir Herrick laughed.

"Yes have been only too kind; don't think I'm ungrateful, sir. I am not. I am much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it," responded the major, and there was a hint of irony in his tone. "Well, I'm glad you're satisfied, Rick. I never do anything by halves. Having surrendered, I pulled down my colours and hoisted up yours. I could not do more. And, after all, she is an extremely pretty child, winning and gracious."

"Paula is an angel," said Rick, gravely.

"Exactly, of course; an angel," assented the major.

Then there was a pause, and Sir Herrick, anxious to get back to his

angel, was about to tell the coachman to drive on, when the major put his hand out and laid it on Sir Herrick's arm, and, looking him full in the face, said in a low, significant voice:

"I suppose you will be going to town soon, Rick?"

Sir Herrick nodded.

"There are—ahem!—some things to clear up, I suppose?"

Sir Herrick nodded again, and his brow darkened.

"Yes," he replied, "I must go to town."

"In a day or two would do," said the major. "You won't go for a day or two?"

"No," responded Sir Herrick, shortly, as if the subject were distasteful.

"Well, good-night, my dear boy, and Heaven bless you!" and with this devout aspiration the major leant back and was rolled away.

"Great heavens, Vericourt, what does this mean?" demanded Lord Hurstley, when the major entered his lordship's dressing-room, looking very tired and worried. "Taken a contract for running the mails? This is the second day you have been posting about the country. You will knock yourself up, and then what will the public at large, and society in particular, do?"

"Don't laugh at me, my dear Hurstley," implored the major, with a plaintive little smile. "It is dreadful, isn't it? And your poor horses, too! I'm very sorry. Of course I've been over to see Rick. I didn't like to say too much last night, but the foolish boy has got into a most dreadful mess."

"So!" said his lordship—he had sent the valet out of the room. "What is it—better, overrun the constable, or what?"

"I wish it were anyone of them," groaned the major, with a sigh.

"Then it's a woman," said Lord Hurstley, laughing. "Well, that's nothing new for Rick, you know, major."

"Ah!" moaned the major, shaking his head; "but he wants to marry this one!"

The earl drew a comically long face, and emitted a low whistle.

"Jove! that's bad. What an idiot Rick must be!"

"Oh, a perfect idiot—simply insane! ought to confine him in a private lunatic asylum!" assented the major. "I shouldn't have mentioned it, but that it will oblige me to go to town to-morrow."

"No?"

The major shook his head dolefully. "Yes, I must go. Very hard, indeed, just as I was so comfortable, my dear Hurstley; but I can just see a chance of stopping poor Rick in his downward run to ruin, and I must seize at it. Good-bye. I shall start early in the morning. Good-bye, my dear Hurstley."

And feeling every inch a martyr, the ease-loving major toddled stiffly to bed.

But before he went he asked Morgan for a telegram form, and wrote the following message in his fine Italian and quite unshaky hand:

"From Major Vericourt, "The Grange, "Crawfield.

"To Miss Flossie Hamilton, "229 Raglan Street, Chelsea.

"Will you be in to-day at five o'clock? I will take a cup of tea."

"Take it to the post-office directly after eight to-morrow, Morgan," he said. "And tell the cook to make me some chicken broth for breakfast. I feel quite overdone. It is very hard!"

And just about this time two figures were standing very close together at the gate of the cottage, in the shadow thrown by the laurels that stood out dark and clear against the bright moonlight. Two figures very near to each other, the one—the girl's—eloquent with the poetry of a first passion leaning like a strip of ivy against the stalwart form of the man.

"Must you go," murmurs Paula, "so soon? Is it so late? It does not seem late. How quickly the day has passed, and yet some moments it seems so long. I wish it were only evening still! No! for the night is so beautiful. Hush! how hushed and quiet it is; that was an owl fitting from the church. Must you go? I am so—so sorry. Do you know why? No, not because I love to have you near me, not that only—"

"Why, then, little one?" he whispers, his dark eyes bent on her with a passionate regard that has a certain wistful sadness in it; something that hints at remorse or regret lurking in it. "Why, then? What a strange child it is. Tell me!"

"Shall I?" she murmurs, half-

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shamefacedly. "It is because when you are gone I begin to think that it is not all real. Something whispers to my heart, 'You foolish girl! It is all a dream. There is such a person as Sir Herrick Powis, but he is not your Rick; not your love. You are dreaming. Wake up and see what a deluded thing you are.' And then I have to try hard and persuade myself that it is real, and that—that—"

"Well?"

"That you love me."

"It is real enough, by Heaven!" he says in a low voice that thrills through her. "Some day—soon, perhaps—I shall not go away."

"Not go away!" with wide-open eyes, in which surprise and joy are mingled.

"No," he says; "when we are married."

"Ah!" she draws a little breath, and her head droops, "that will be a long, long way ahead, years, and years."

"Nonsense!" he says, laughing, and drawing her closer; "months—I would it were weeks! Days seem too long for me. Meanwhile, you shall be happy, my darling!"

"Yes," she says, thoughtfully, playing absently with the plain curb chain that hangs in the present fashion, from pocket to pocket across the waistcoat. "I have been very happy to-day. How cruelly you maligned your uncle, the major. Why didn't you tell me he was an honourable?"

"Didn't I?" he says, carelessly. "I forgot it."

"Why is he an honourable?" she asks.

He laughs.

"I am dreadfully ignorant," she says, laughing, too; "not fit to be the wife of a baronet, no, not at all fit."

"You are fit to be the wife of an emperor," he says. "The major is an honourable because he is the son—the third son of a peer."

"Dear me!" says Paula. "Well, I'm not surprised; I think he ought to be a duke; he looks exactly like one, so thin and aristocratic, and so—ah, there, I won't hear one word against him. I feel I ought to say, like poor Jo, 'He was very good to me, he was!'"

And she laughs, her low, rippling laugh, that is such exquisite melody in the ears of her lover.

"No one could help being good to you," he says. "Even the major—"

He stops short, and looks down suddenly.

In her absent trifling with his watch Albert she has pulled out from his pocket a locket attached to the end of the curb, and her eyes are fixed on it now, not cursorily, not with any great interest, but with dreamy approval and admiration. It is a locket of plain, dull gold, having on one side the two hawks with extended wings of the Powis crest.

(To be continued.)

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Sunday Services.

C. E. Cathedral—Holy Communion, 8; Morning Service, 11; Canonical Service on "The Reunion of Christendom"; 6.30, Evening Service.

St. Thomas's—Holy Communion, 8; Children's Service, 9.30; Morning Prayer and Sermon, 11; Freshers, The Rector, Sunday Schools, 2.45; Dunsford Boys' Bible Class, 3.45; Girls' Bible Class, 3.45; Women's Bible Class, 8; Children's Church Service, 8.30; Evensong and Sermon, 8.30; Preacher, The Rector; Subject: "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican—or shall the eyes look up or down."

St. Mary the Virgin—Holy Communion, 8; Matins and Litany, 11; Confirmation Class (Boys), 3.45; Confirmation Class (Girls), 4; Holy Baptism, 5; Evensong, 6.30.

METHODIST.

Gower St.—11, Rev. G. J. Bond, B.A., LL.D.; 3.30, Rev. E. W. Forbes, M.A., B.D.

George St.—11, Rev. E. W. Forbes, M.A., B.D.; 6.30, Rev. D. B. Hemmecon, B.A.

Cochrane St.—11, Rev. W. B. Bugden, B.A.; 6.30, Rev. G. J. Bond, B.A., LL.D.

Wesley—11, Rev. D. B. Hemmecon, B.A.; 6.30, Rev. W. B. Bugden, B.A.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church—Rev. Gordon Dickie, M.A., Minister. The Minister will preach at 11 and 6.30. Morning Subject: "Christian Victory." Sunday School and Bible Classes will meet at 2 o'clock. Evening Subject: "Saving and Spending." Strangers welcome at all services.

Congregational—11 and 6.30, Rev. Dr. Fenwick.

Adventist—Subject: "Evidences in the Christian Life." All welcome. Evangelist D. C. Barrett.

International Bible Students' Association meet in the Chapter Room, Victoria Hall, opposite Gower St. Church; 8 p.m. Sunday School Lesson; 8. Discourse: "The Result of the Covenants." All interested in Bible Study are invited to attend.

ST. THOMAS'S—The services for to-morrow are outlined elsewhere. The Rector will preach at both morning and evening services. At 8 p.m. Dr. Jones will continue the course of sermons on the Commandments, the subject being "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican—or shall the eyes look up or down." Everybody cordially invited.

GOWER ST.—9.45, Men's Class meetings; 2.30, Sunday School and Bible Classes for men and women; 4, Young Women's Class meeting; 11 and 6.30, Public Worship. The preacher in the morning will be Rev. Dr. Bond. There will be a church parade of the Wolf Cub. The Pastor will preach in the evening on "The Church's Responsibility."

WEEK-DAY MEETINGS—Monday, 11 a.m., United Methodist Thanksgiving Service; Friday, 7.45 p.m., Prayer meeting. A cordial welcome is extended to all comers.

GOWER ST. MEN'S BIBLE CLASS—A special meeting of the class will be held on Sunday afternoon at 2.30. Mr. Wm. White, manager of the White Clothing Co., will speak on "Christ and Commerce." Capt. Lloyd Woods will sing. All men interested are cordially invited.

WESLEY—Wesley Church Sunday Morning Victory Class in the Young Men's Room. Everybody welcome to our 9 o'clock prayer service, and at 9.45 there will be a great Victory Service. Every member is expected to be present and help ring out the good old victory bell; everybody welcome.

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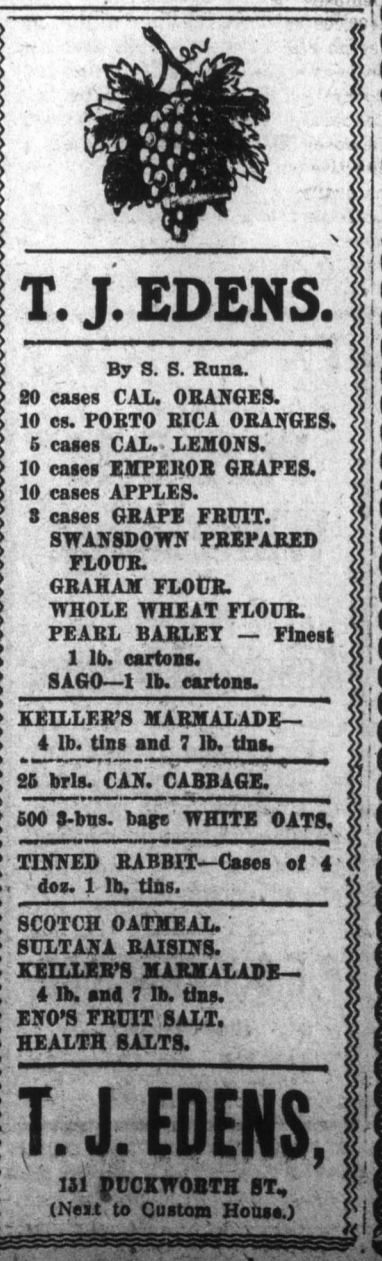
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