

PARTNERS FOR LIFE.

At Mrs. Haynes' house, Madison square, the time about nine in the evening, and the occasion a wedding ball.

How the wedding ball ever became fashionable is beyond discovery. When a house is to be illustrated by a wedding, it is not improbable that the bride (whose looks and appearance have to be rigorously considered) apart, nobody with any self-respect dreams of going to bed on the night preceding the delightful event.

But supposing that the household does fall asleep, assuredly its members will be awake and up before cock-crow; and, therefore, it may be assumed that previous to sunset, and the tuning up of the nightingales, all the assistants at marriages would be glad of a little rest and quiet.

Mrs. Haynes' ball looked very promising, fresh and bright; for it is the peculiar advantage of wedding balls that everybody is invited and comes without question as to who is who. So there they are generally numbers of nice people who, for the occasion, make themselves quite agreeable and familiar, albeit they would cut you dead in the neighborhood of the avenue next morning.

Mrs. Haynes was radiant, for she had married off the eldest daughter very well indeed; the bridegroom, with the most admirable, proper spirit, had taken Alice on an extended European tour, and her mother was quite easy and happy in her mind, because every parent in society is aware that when an eldest daughter is married well at an early age, her sisters go off soon and brilliantly.

Mrs. Haynes numbered many daughters, some pretty, and some—well, not so very plain as several odious persons said they were.

"Philip Hessitone," Mrs. Haynes was heard to say by one of her dearest, and upon that occasion most envious friends, for the poor woman's daughter had remained deplorably on hand an unconscionably long time.

Mrs. Haynes was seen by her friend to hurry forward, and welcome, with very considerable earnestness, a gentleman who had certainly left his youthful days behind.

"How glad I am to see you, Philip; for I never expected you would come!"

"I sometimes creep out of my shell," replied the gentleman addressed, and in a very pleasant, cheerful voice.

"You should come out of it oftener, Philip—perhaps, even, altogether."

"Ah, and marry! Now, is not that what you were going to say?"

"Certainly; all young men ought to marry!"

"So I saw," replied Philip Hessitone, cheerfully; "but, of course, the argument does not in the slightest manner apply to old men, and therefore is not applicable to me."

"You old? Why, Philip, you are not much above thirty!"

He laughed. "I admit I am not forty, but nearer it by twelvemonth than I was last years."

"Thirty—or at least you don't look more," said Mrs. Haynes. "There, let us talk about it by-and-by. You must leave me now, for here come some other guests."

He bowed, calmly walked on, and sat himself in a quiet corner, whence he watched the proceedings in no cynical spirit, but as a man who looks in through an open door at a merry-making, or by chance turns into a church and sees a wedding, that he may get through thirty minutes before the hour of an appointment has come, or a rain starts.

Healthy, hearty and fully occupied, Philip Hessitone had no time for cynicism.

"And who is that young fellow?" asked the host's familiar friend, when they were once again seated side by side.

"My dear Margaret," replied Mrs. Haynes, laughing lowly, "his case is the drollest of which I have any knowledge."

"Indeed! but he does not look dull, Anne."

"No, dear Margaret; I said his case was droll; for he himself is one the most solid and advantageous of men, and I should be very glad to see him united to my Grace."

"Ah! I thought so," said the friend, in an amiably malicious voice. "But who is he? and in what consists the drollery of his case?"

"He is a distant cousin of mine, and his name is Philip Hessitone. He is very well off, perfectly healthy, and a most useful fellow—an agricultural chemist I believe he is called; as you see, is good-looking, strong, and not so old."

"Thirty?"

"More—about thirty-five. But looking not more than the age you name, because he is one of the most temperate men in New York, and an incorrigible bachelor."

"You startle me utterly! What a frightful determination! Ah, you are smiling! Then, his bachelorhood and the drollery of his case correlate? Pray—pray be quick and tell me, or some more troublesome guests will arrive, and you will be torn from my side."

"At eighteen, that noble young man fell in love with a woman of thirty."

"Well, but why do you call him noble?"

"Because he was constant. Though it must be admitted that she was a sensible woman—"

"Do I know her?" asked the other, interrupting.

"Yes; but I certainly will not mention the lady's name. Of course, she was wise enough to marry some one else; and he vowed, thereupon, that he would never marry."

"How charming!"

"And he has kept his word!"

"How ridiculous! Of course, one can under-

stand a youth being constant to a lost love for a time—just after twenty-five!"

"But so; and he would make such a capital husband! My Grace, who is very sensible and homespun, and likes men who are no longer boys, would gladly accept him, and, as I am very frank, I have told him so; but you cannot shake his vanity, because the man has no vanity to shatter; and he smiles, and tells me that he is old enough to be her father, which, of course, is not the truth."

"Certainly not. And so you will not tell me the name of the flirt who left him out in the cold?"

"No."

"Has she a family?"

"Two families."

"What?"

"Oh, yes; the man she married left her a widow very soon after, and with little beyond one daughter; and in a short time after, she went to the altar for the second time, and altogether retired from society."

"Ah, then, I shall never have the pleasure of seeing her."

"Never; her husband is quite a Puritan, and never goes into society."

"And what is the age of the daughter?"

"About seventeen, and—dear me, what a coincidence!"

Mrs. Haynes' companion followed her friend's eyes to the door, and saw them resting on a charming, bony-faced girl who was entering the room, side by side with probably the hardest-looking and boniest woman within the boundaries of Murray Hill.

The young girl hurried toward her host.

"Dear Mrs. Haynes," she said, "I never hoped to have the pleasure of being at Alice's wedding ball, and I assure you I thought it was almost cruel to ask me, but—"

"But," said her attenuated companion in a masculine yet very amiable voice, "being on a visit to me, she comes with me."

"Miss Craves and papa are associated in some kind of charitable work."

"The suppression of all offenses," insisted Miss Craves.

"And she was visiting at our home," said the young lady, "and saw your invitation, and so contrived that I should go on a visit to her, and then—that is how I happen to be here."

"How well you look, Bertie!" remarked Mrs. Haynes. "One would fancy you lived in the brightest house in New York."

"Oh, papa is very kind and good."

"Of course," said Miss Craves; "one of the best men in the world. We all know that!"

Here Bertie Ollyfant, as she looked about her with all the eagerness of a girl at a ball, who very rarely sees a dance, uttered a light cry.

"What has happened?" asked Mrs. Haynes, earnestly.

"That gentleman," said Miss Ollyfant, "seated near the conservatory, and looking about him—who is he?"

"A distant cousin of mine," replied Mrs. Haynes. "Shall I introduce you?"

"And something more than cousin to me!" said bare-boned Miss Craves; "for he is one of the noblest of men, and my very dear friend."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Haynes.

"Yes," said Miss Craves, actually blushing as she made the admission; "and, Bertie, I shall be delighted to introduce you."

"Thank you, Miss Craves," said Bertha Ollyfant, with a bright look—"I can introduce myself, for I know the gentleman, and I do sincerely hope that he has not forgotten me. I never, never could forget him! He is handsomer than ever. I am going to him at once."

Miss Craves and Mrs. Haynes looked at each other in great confusion and amazement.

"This," observed the latter to the spinster, as they both watched the young lady hurrying away—"this comes of her being reared in a house where there is no society!"

"'Tis one of the best houses in the world, Mr. Harre's is, and he one of the noblest of men; but it is quite true she has not been taught any of the amenities and proper observances of society. But, pray, pardon me, Mrs. Haynes; I am afraid I have been obliging you with one of the speeches they say I make far too long, when I am at one of our committee meetings."

Meanwhile, Philip Hessitone, perfectly at peace with himself and all the world, was dreamily watching the dancing, when he was startled by a fresh young voice, which said,

"Dear Mr. Hessitone, how glad I am to see you again, after all these years!"

He started up, and took the pretty, white-gloved hand that was offered him, and fancied that he must be mad, insane, suddenly delirious, as he looked upon the face before him.

Nearly twenty years of his life had suddenly fallen away, and he was looking upon one who had long been dead to him, but with this difference—that the face he now saw seemed younger and still more beautiful than the countenance he remembered as lighting up his extreme early manhood.

She had on a light, bright lace dress; and as she spoke to him, he saw the fairy material lying over her heart pulsating in answer to her beautiful excitement.

"You are very good to know me," he returned, eagerly taking the proffered hand; "I do not remember your name, though your face appears delightfully familiar to me!"

"Your memory is excellent to recall my features," she said, "after seven years; unless, indeed, you confound them with my mother's—"

they say I am very like her."

Suddenly this strong and perfectly healthy

man found himself faint, and the lights going dull and whirling.

He took possession of himself the next moment, and said, "Let us sit down—unless, you are being waited for."

"I? Oh, no; I do not know any one in the room, except yourself, our hostess, Mrs. Haynes, with whose daughter I went to school, and Miss Craves, who was so very good as to bring me here; and now I shall love her all my life, because I see you!"

Philip almost blushed, but he respected the bright features and beautiful figure not any the less for these statements. He saw that she spoke from sheer honesty of purpose, and from no other motive. As for imagining that she was flirting, such a supposition could not have occurred to him, because he had no previous grain of an idea that he was worth, or fit for, flirting with.

But his heart was beating in a manner very different from its mode of agitation now and again when he succeeded in any of his scientific experiments.

"But where was I so fortunate as to see you seven years since?"

She laughed, with the most delicious silvery laugh in the world, as she said, "For years afterward I believed you saved my life, and I do really think mamma encouraged me to believe that I owed my existence to your—your noble conduct. But of course I found out at last that there was no saving of life at all (I wish there had been), because already two boats were put off when you came to my help."

He looked puzzled.

"Ah!" she said; "you do not remember. Certainly it would be most absurd for me to suppose that you could recollect helping a little girl from a rock, in the middle of the rising tide."

He started, and took her hand.

"Is it possible that the delightfully grateful little girl of seven years since has grown into so lovely a woman!"

"Oh, I look older than I am—I am only 17, while you look younger than I know you to be; although mamma has told me that when you were very young, you appeared quite a man!"

He started, and then said suddenly: "What is your mamma's name?"

"She is Mrs. Harre."

Immediately his aspect changed to one of disappointment.

"So you remember me now? Do you also recall how I asked you to tell me your name, and how you gave me your card? That is how mamma came to identify you, Mr. Hessitone. You see, I have your name familiarly at the end of my tongue. But there was another circumstance which made mamma certain, and that was when she asked me if I noticed any scar on your face, and I told her that, as I was clinging to you, I saw a little, deep cut over your left eye; and then mamma was quite certain, and—will you believe it?—mamma had tears in her eyes, and said she would rather have had you save me from danger than any other man in the wide world."

"But I was of slight use, Miss Harre. I saw a little girl at Newport, who had been caught by a fast tide, on a rock, where she was busy watching some small crabs in a pool. I waded to her—it was not up to my shoulders—and brought her to the beach. That was all—except that she gave me a kiss, and I gave her a card."

"You never answered mamma's letter, in which she thanked you."

"I did not receive one," he replied, softly.

"Indeed! How glad she will be to hear that; for she always thought you had never forgiven her. In whatever way could mamma have injured you, dear Mr. Hessitone—for she is one of the gentlest creatures, and she has often said that your character was a rare one?"

"But pardon my curiosity, if I ask you where I met your mamma, Miss Harre?"

"My name is not Harre, Mr. Hessitone, though mamma's is. I am Bertha Ollyfant."

"Ah, your mother's name is Bertha, is it not?"

"Yes; I was named after her. But you have turned pale, and you are trembling! Shall I call to one of the gentlemen?"

"No, no, no! Is your mother quite well?"

"Quite. She will be so glad to know I have met you! I have often spoken of you to her, having noticed how glad she was to hear your name. I suppose she liked you when you were a boy?"

"Yes," he said; "she liked me a little when I was a boy, though at the time I looked manly enough, and, I dare say, took all the advantages boys will take when nature allows them to fancy themselves men. But how is it that you are named Ollyfant? I knew that your mamma married a Mr. Ollyfant, and that she is now named Harre!"

"Poor mamma! Papa died when I was two years old, and leaving her poor. But you have started again! Is it because you hear that mamma was poor? Ah, I suppose as a boy she was very kind to you, and that you are grateful enough to be sorry that she suffered so much!"

"Yes," he answered, observing her with a touching look of pity; "that is just it."

"I think she must have married for my sake, because she has always seemed a little afraid of Mr. Harre."

"Is he an unpleasant man?"

"No; but he is a descendant from one of the French Huguenot families, and our house is very grave and solemn. We keep fast on the Eve of St. Bartholomew, go to the Huguenot chapel on the Day of Blood, as his friends call it, and prayers are always said in quaint old French."

"Indeed! he murmured. "But that is rather a sad life for you, Miss Ollyfant; is it not?"

"No; Mr. Harre is very kind—but he remembers how his ancestors suffered. You will come and see him, will you not? I am sure you will get on capitally together, for Miss Craves and you are friends—why, you are positively blushing again, Mr. Hessitone!—and she and papa are fast and firm in their friendship, though they scarcely think alike upon one question. Ah!—and here she and Mrs. Haynes come!"

Miss Craves looked a little grim, as she said, "You and Bertie appear to be getting on capitally."

"Cousin Hessitone," said Mrs. Haynes, "you must not be angry with our little girl, if only for her mother's sake, because she has been prattling. She is not in society, and scarcely knows its rules."

Hessitone found himself oddly resenting in his heart this attack upon his young questioner, as he replied, "We are old friends; at least, I am an old friend of her; and she has invited me to call upon her mother and her father-in-law, and I am going to do so."

These simple words completely routed all surmise on the two ladies' part, and simplified matters exceedingly.

Miss Craves went more glum, while Mrs. Haynes looked very sympathetically at her daughter Grace, and kissed her with much emotion when that young lady (who had watched the couple through the long agony of a false) burst into quite a little shower of tears.

Within an hour, Hessitone attempted to remember a quadrille, after watching the figures through a couple of dances—of course, with dashing Bertie Ollyfant for a partner; and he acquitted himself not at all badly.

That night, as he walked home, after shawling Bertie in the hall, and accompanying her to the jobbed brougham, which Miss Craves displayed for this occasion—poor spinsters! she was left cruelly and unfairly in the background—that night, be it said, as Philip Hessitone walked home, he found the air fresher than usual, and his step lighter.

"After all," he thought, "I am not even a middle-aged man yet."

Home reached, he did not go to bed, but sat thinking—thinking, and turning over matters in his own mind.

"Harry Esmond, best of gentlemen," he mused, "married the mother when the daughter jilted him; perhaps, in my case, the mother having been wise enough to laugh at a boy, the daughter will—Bah! what a vain old fool I am. No doubt she has got a sweetheart—ay, even a round dozen."

But nevertheless, he thought on the subject till his heart throbbed, while he whispered to himself; "If she could only love me! if she could but know how earnest men of my age are when they have spent their lives carefully. If see could love me."

He called upon Mrs. Harre the following day.

He somewhat dreaded the interview, but she placed him at his ease directly.

"I should have known you in a moment, Phillip," she said familiarly; "although it is eighteen years since we met. Let me see—you had not then gone to the university. You are about 36, and I am quiet an old woman—in fact past 50."

By which amiable and well-managed little speech, the kind-hearted lady meant to say,

"See how wise and merciful I was when I laughed at your love! To-day I am an old woman while you may still pass for a young man! See from what you have been saved!"

And it was at this moment that the memory of the old love changed to a new shape, and his new love dominated him.

Yet, even at that moment, he was dazzled and confused by the strangeness of his position. He had been rejected because he was too young, and now he might be repulsed because he was too old.

Just then Bertha entered the room, saluted him, and sitting down near her mother, he saw them side by side, and his memory and his new experience played strange havoc in his brain and heart.

"Stay with us the day, Phillip, if you will," said the lady. "We are quiet out of society here. We do not even dress for dinner, and Mr. Harre has expressed a desire to make your acquaintance. He has heard of you, and, I believe admires something scientific you have done."

He accepted the friendly offer: and in ten minutes he found himself at home, after the rare manner of those homes where few are admitted, who, being permitted to break the charm of seclusion, are so treated that they never wish to go away again, except for the convenience and freedom of their hosts.

The lady of that primitive home being called away to family duties, the task of entertaining Phillip fell upon Bertie.

Utterly unsophisticated, and having lived amongst wise persons all her life, she found her position by no means an awkward one. On the contrary, she was delighted; and quiet ignoring all sense of the short acquaintance, she threw herself, heart and soul, into the pleasant task of showing him her father-in-law's house, and ground, the laboratory, his puritanical library and his various scientific contrivances.

"And you love him very much, Bertie?"

"Ye-es," she said honestly enough; "I love him, but I am a little afraid of him, because he thinks Puritan blood the best in the world; and, therefore, he cannot think me as good as his own children—not that he lets me see he thinks this, but I know it must be so."

"You must feel dull in this place," he said.