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**The Romance OF A Marriage.**

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"How do you do, my dear Miss Alice?" he says, with his patronising air full on. "Quite a pleasant surprise, and 'ow's Miss Paula?" but his bland enquiry is addressed to deaf ears, for Paula stands with May's hand in hers, their eyes fixed on each other with a mute, tender, sympathetic interest.

May, pale and red by turns, pants a little commonplace greeting; but Paula will utter no commonplaces, and takes her to the window, where May can speak to her heart's content.

"Oh, Paula, dear," she whispers hurriedly, "you can't tell how delighted I was when Stancy came in and said that he had met you. I could scarcely believe it; it—it is the first bit of good news I've heard since—since—"

Here she stops, and her lips quiver. Paula presses the timid little hand sympathetically.

"And have you been very ill, dear?" she murmurs, examining the pretty face, and noting its thin, worried, and all-too-wistful look.

May shakes her head a little wearily. "No, not ill, Paula, dear, though they all said I was, and the great London doctor insisted upon papa bringing me here. Poor papa! he hates the Continent so much, you know. Poor papa!" And she sighs.

Paula looks at her questioningly; the sigh seems to indicate some kind of trouble beyond her—May's—illness.

"What is the matter?" she asks. "Has there been any trouble?"

May glances around her, to see that the others are not with in hearing.

"It's—it's not only about me, Paula, dear," she says. "Of course there has been trouble, and papa is hard with me sometimes because I will not give in—as if I ever should!" And a faint flash of steadfast resolution dyes the

pale, pretty face, and the blue eyes grow suddenly resolute. "I promised him that I would wait, and I will wait till—till I die! But—with piteous cadences—"It is hard to have to wait month after month and hear nothing. Tonight, when Stancy came in and said that he had seen you, my heart leapt, and—and I nearly fainted. My first thought—I am always selfish, dear—was, not that I should see you, but that I should hear of him. Is he—"

Paula draws her arm nearer, and caresses her hand.

"Bob was all right when last we heard, dear," she says in a whisper that is rather tremulous, though she smiles gravely. "But—but he has not made his fortune yet; and he sent the tenderest message to you."

"Oh, Paula! and you did not send it to me!"

"No, dear," says Paula. "He said that I was to wait until I saw you; that I was not to unsettle you with bad news. You see, the poor boy hoped to have been able to write to you and tell you that he had succeeded. Don't you understand?"

"May nods with swimming eyes.

"Dear, dear Bob!" she murmurs; "he was always so considerate and thoughtful. If you had seen him the day we parted; how patient he was with papa; how noble and forgiving! Oh! there is no one like him, no one, not ever Sir Herrick—oh, forgive me, Paula, I am forgetting your trouble."

Paula smiles.

"My trouble is long past and done with, dear," she says, with that dreamy, absent look in her dark eyes. "It has gone and faded with the past. There was no hope there, dear, while you, ah, you can hope! Bob is too brave and clever not to keep his word. Be brave and patient, May, dear, we shall be sisters yet," and she bends her glorious head and kisses the pretty, tearful face.

"Now tell me about your other trouble, dear," she says, "and let us get it all over," and she laughs, softly.

May hesitates and looks at her with a curious shyness.

"It—it's about Stancy, Paula," she says, hesitatingly, and looking away.

"About your brother?" says Paula, rather coolly, and with a sudden lack of interest.

"Yes," she says in a whisper. "Stancy has been—rather wild. Oh, Paula, don't laugh!" for a smile at the vision of Stancy de Palmer in a state of wildness has fallen over Paula's face.

"I beg your pardon, dear," she says; "so on."

"He has been very, very wild and foolish," says May, with a sigh, "and it has made papa very unhappy and angry. He—he wants Stancy to—to settle."

"Settle?" says Paula, absently.

May looks up at her with shy distress.

"Yes; marry, you know. But Stancy won't; he doesn't seem to see anyone he likes, and—and he doesn't get any better."

Paula's face flushes for a moment, then she laughs faintly as she remembers Stancy's proposal. She

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glances, too, at that young gentleman as he leans against the mantel-shelf, resplendent in his evening-dress, with a huge diamond solitaire in his shirt-front, and his hands thrust in his pockets. Certainly he has not improved: the plain, vulgar, conceited face has grown—what is it?—redder and more puffy, and there is a swagger about the gawky figure which smacks of third-class billiard-rooms and brandy-and-water.

As she looks at him another figure rises before her mental vision; it is that of the slim, straight figure of Sir Herrick, with its handsome, clear-cut face, and, crowning all, the air of high birth and breeding.

"I don't know what's come to him," says May, glancing at him; "he—used not to be at any time too wise; but lately, the last twelve months, he has become quite foolish and dissipated; but papa says it would be all right if he would only marry and settle down, and I think it would. Stancy is easily led, you know, dear," pleadingly.

"I daresay," says Paula. "I hope he will get someone to lead him for your sake, dear."

"Y—es," says May, looking wistfully up at the lovely face. "I'm sure, if Stancy could get the person he wants he would improve and turn right round. He is not at all bad, Paula, dear."

"No one is," says Paula, with a faint smile at the pretty little eagerness of her companion; "there is good in all of us—at least, I suppose so"—wistfully, as she thinks of him who deceived and betrayed her.

"What are you two young ladies confabing about?" said Stancy, coming upon them with his awkward attempt at ease. "Exchanging secrets, eh? Haven't you got a word for me, Miss Paula, after all this time?" he adds, with a flushed face and an aggrieved air.

Paula turns to him as May glides away.

"You would scarcely throw me a word this morning," he goes on, shuffling with his patent-leather-clad feet and staring at the carpet. "I suppose I've offended you? I don't know how, though."

"Oh, no," says Paula, with a cheerfulness that is worse than coldness; "perhaps I was a little surprised at seeing you so suddenly, you know."

He looks up with a reassured smile that makes Paula sorry that she has answered him so graciously.

"I thought you were offended at something. There's never any knowing what a woman means, you know."

"Sometimes it is scarcely worth while trying to find out," says Paula, faintly smiling.

He looks at her with half-sullen suspicion.

"That's like one of your old speeches," he says. "I never used to know exactly what you meant. I always used to think that you were making fun of me. I suppose you're doing it now?" and he reddens.

"No, no," says Paula. "Indeed I am not," and she makes a movement away from the window.

"Don't go away for a minute," he says. "Give me a minute or two after all this time. If you get amongst them," and he jerks his head politely towards the rest, "I shan't get another word out of you. What have you been doing since you left Woldshire?"

Certainly he has not improved! Paula struggles with the desire to turn and leave him, and forces a polite smile.

"Not very much, I am afraid," she says. "Just looking at the tea, and sleeping, and eating."

He looks round the room with a contemptuous stare, which takes in the seedy apartment with its shabby furniture and lodging-house appearance.

"You must have found it confoundingly slow, I should think," he says, with lofty pity. "All alone, you two, too?"

"Yes, all alone," says Paula, absently.

He looks at her curiously, with a half-suppressed eagerness which covertly dwells upon the beautiful face, far more lovely than of old, and fidgets with his clumsy hands.

"We must alter all that now we've come, you know," he says. "We must get up some outings. Are you fond of sailing?"

Paula nods.

"That's the style! I'll hire a yacht."

"Pray do not on my account," says Paula, quietly.

"Oh, but I shall," he says, with a nod. "We'll get up a regular trip. The governor's got some horses here—"

"Don't propose a four-in-hand," says Paula. "My nerves are not so strong as they were, Mr. Stancy."

He colours angrily.

"There you are!" he says. "Laughing at me again. When you know it wasn't my fault, but that fellow Sir Herrick's."

Paula's face pales, but she looks at him steadily.

"I—I beg your pardon," he mumbles, reddening sullenly. "Don't let's quarrel the first night we meet."

Paula laughs with fine irony.

"It takes two to make a quarrel, Mr. Stancy," she says, "and one will be missing in our case."

"I shan't quarrel with you, you may depend on that," he says, with a leer.

Paula inclines her head.

"No," he says, earnestly, "I've made up my mind to—to bear anything you like to say, as I give you warning. You can laugh at me as much as you like and I shan't mind."

"I don't think I shall avail myself of the permission, but I'm much obliged," says Paula, and she turns and leaves him.

The exquisite Stancy leans against the window and watches her quietly; indeed, for the rest of the evening his eyes scarcely leave her, excepting when Alice, with a charming apology for the absence of champagne, orders in the brandy-and-soda and some coffee.

Mr. Stancy chooses the former; and Paula, happening to glance at May, sees an anxious look on the pale, pretty face, as her brother mixes for himself a third tumbler of the seductive refreshment.

She notices, too, that after his liberal libations his coarse face grows redder, and his manner louder, more markedly vulgar.

"Don't forget our bargain, Miss Paula," he says, as they are taking their departure.

"I've just been telling Miss Paula," he explains to Mr. Palmer, who stands with his opera-hat stuck against his side, and his fat hands bursting through the lavender kid gloves, "that I'm going to hire a yacht for her, and that we're going to have a fine time of it."

(To be Continued.)

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