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The Romance of a Marriage.

CHAPTER IV.

"I don't see that it's so ridiculous," murmured Paula. "Any more ridiculous than—than Bob, for instance."

"I was christened Robert. Miss Impertinence. There can't be two of 'em, and both young. You're you, you said?"

"Yes, young," she murmured. "And what has he done?"

"What hasn't he? would be a better question," he retorts. "Anything you like, up to breaking into a church."

"Now, Bob!"

"Fact. Why, he's the worst of the lot. They say but for him that the Powises would have pulled through a bit. He's a gambler, and a—let's go to bed!"

"But what's he doing down here, then, in the hole-and-corner of a place?" demands Paula, triumphant-ly.

"Perhaps he's come to break into the church," says Bob, stretching himself. "And so he's coming here to-morrow, is he?"

"Yes, Bob; and, Bob—"

"Well?" with a tremendous yawn.

"You'll be civil, won't you?"

"My dear child, a refined and polished characteristic of your humble servant," he says, with another yawn.

"Nonsense, Bob. You, know what I mean. You see, I asked him to come. He's—he's coming to breakfast."

"The der—the deuce he is! All right. I suppose he'll go after breakfast. Don't alarm yourself. The young man's goings-on are nothing to us. Of course we'll make him welcome. Give him a plan of the church, and lend him a dark-lantern and crowbar, if he likes. Herrick Powis! Well, it's a rum go. And now, I'm going to bed. You are sure you saw to the coat?"

CHAPTER V.

Notwithstanding her late vigil, Paula is up betimes. Even if she were very tired it would be difficult to lie in bed such a morning as this which breaks after the night of the Court ball. A morning in which the birds commence their concert at dawn; when the meadows take to themselves a sheeny gloss; when the young corn waves joyously in the generous sunlight; when the atmosphere is loaded with the scent of the flowers, earthly jewels that match man's handiwork and add perfume to the glory of colors and brilliance. A morning when the heart feels as light as a feather; when song bursts from the lips instinctively and naturally; when the world seems all bright and rose-col-

oured, and life a gift to thank Heaven for and to rejoice in.

Barring Bob, who is generally up at dawn, marching over the fields or whistling about the stables, and Mary, the handmaid, who rises with the lark, no one is earlier to meet the greeting kiss of day than Paula.

She comes down this morning fresh as the dew that begets the grass, clad in her white morning-dress, well worn as all her dresses are, and fitting her lithe, supple figure like an otter-skin.

And yet she has not slept overmuch, for the incident of last night was not easy to dispel; and even in her sleep she heard the music of the "Manola" waltz and saw the tall, slight figure of the young man whom Bob has described as the wildest of the Powises.

Alice the beauty is still asleep, recovering her wonted delicacy of complexion and sleeping off the effects of last night's dissipation; and Bob's whistle can be heard even where Pauline stands under the verandah, a flock of cooling pigeons at her feet, fluttering at the crumbs with which she every morning regales them.

As a rule these said pigeons take their breakfast with an accompaniment of music; but this morning the song is silent on Paula's lips, and a little dreamy abstraction sits in her dark eyes.

Bob's words are still ringing in her ears, the vision of the young stranger is still before her eyes.

"There is some mistake," she says. "Bob will be the first to say so when he sees him and hears him talk. And he will be here directly!" and with a start she throws the last of the crumbs to the excited pigeons and springs into the house.

The breakfast is all laid. It is not an elaborate one, but what there is of it is simply perfect. Fresh butter, cream in abundance, a huge pyramid of strawberries, a pink-and-white ham, and coffee made to perfection simmering on the hob.

She stands and looks at it, unconsciously completing a picture that would make the mouth of a devotee to art water with envy and longing; a picture that would make the fortune of an artist, if he could just put it on canvas.

"Perhaps he won't come," she says to herself. "If—if he is what Bob says he is, he won't care to come; and yet, last night—"

A step on the terrace, and a man's voice singing:

"Here's to the maiden of bashful fifteen."

"Herrick Powis!"

and Bob enters, his handsome face tanned and rosy, his eyes bright and sparkling.

"Hallo," he says, pitching his hat into a corner. "Breakfast ready? I'm as hungry as a hunter!" and he drops into a chair opposite the ham and seizes a knife and fork. "Hungry as a hunter! Come on! What are you waiting for? Where's Alice?"

"Alice has had a cup of tea, and some toast," says Paula.

"All right; give me some coffee—"

"Not yet."

"Well? cutting away at the ham vigorously."

"Aren't you going to wait? He might come."

"He? Who? Oh! that Herrick Powis. What! Not if I know it. Wouldn't wait for the Czar of all the Russias. Sit down. He won't come. That kind of gentry don't put much value on promises. Hallo!" for a shadow falls

Paula seizes the coffee-pot and bends over the cup as if her life depended upon the exact amount of milk that should be allotted to each.

"Do you—do you take sugar?" she asks, without raising her eyes.

"Thanks," he says, "not much, please;" for Paula, in her little nervousness, threatens to empty the contents of the bowl into his cup.

"Oh," she says, "Bob—my brother—takes a great deal."

"Anything this side of half a pound," says Bob, cutting away at the ham. "Have some ham? Fine morning isn't it? Looks well for the crops. Staying here—I mean in Hampton?"

"Yes," said Herrick Powis; "at the King's Arms. I came down for some fishing, and fishing is my excuse for intruding this morning."

"No intrusion," says Bob in his direct fashion. "It isn't too fat? Glad to see you."

Thanks. I heard at the inn that you were an adept with the fly, and so I ventured to call."

"All right," says Bob. "I'll show you the proper fly, and take you to the



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across the table, and a tall figure stands in the door-way.

Bob suspends his operations on the ham and stares: for, bareheaded, stands the young gentleman who so easily persuaded Paula into the "Manola" waltz.

"I beg pardon," he says, and his voice, low and clear, rings like music through the room, "but I missed the front door, and—"

He looks from one to the other with that easy smile, that self-possessed manner, which only the bred-and-born gentleman possesses, and which all other may strive after in vain.

Paula stands silent, with downcast eyes. Now, in the full glare of daylight, her escapade of the night before looks—well, simply outrageous.

Bob is the first to speak.

"Don't apologise," he says in his straightforward fashion. "You are Mr. Powis?"

"Herrick Powis."

"Yes," says Bob, rising; "my sister—and he nods at Paula, silent and motionless—"told me that you were coming."

"Yes," says Herrick Powis; "I'm afraid I've turned up at an inconvenient hour—"

"No, you haven't," says Bob, on whom the musical voice, the self-possessed, natural manner, have made their mark. "Have you had your breakfast?"

Herrick Powis shakes his head and smiles.

"Not yet."

"Then you've come just at the right time," says Bob. "Paula, give Mr. Powis a chair. Sit down and join us. My sister—Paula—but you've met before."

Paula's face "grows like a poppy," but Herrick Powis, shows no embarrassment.

"Yes," he says, "we have met before," and he bows, as he takes his seat.

Paula seizes the coffee-pot and bends over the cup as if her life depended upon the exact amount of milk that should be allotted to each.

"Do you—do you take sugar?" she asks, without raising her eyes.

"Thanks," he says, "not much, please;" for Paula, in her little nervousness, threatens to empty the contents of the bowl into his cup.

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best spots. The trout are not large here; but you know that, of course?"

"No," he says, quietly. "I don't know Hampton at all."

Bob stares.

"I mean that I haven't seen it since I was six years old."

"No, of course—just so," says Bob, rather hastily. It must have been about that period that the Powises were sold up. "No, just so. You live in London, of course?"

"Yes," is the reply, with a faint smile, "if I may be said to live anywhere. I've been travelling most of my time. But I've rooms in London."

"With your uncle, the baronet?" says Bob.

"No," says Herrick Powis, "not exactly. My uncle is dead."

Bob suspends his ham-laden fork between his plate and his mouth.

"Oh! Dead, eh? Then—then who's the baronet?"

"I am," is the reply, with a smile.

"Oh!" says Bob.

Paula nearly drops her cup. Baronet! Then she has been indulging in an escapade, a moonlight dance with the head of the house of Powis! Baronet!

"I didn't know, Sir Herrick," says Bob.

And the "Sir" strikes on Paula's ears with extraordinary force.

"He died about a month ago. What splendid coffee!"

And he glances at Paula, who lowers her eyes.

"Then," says Bob, "you came in for the prop—I mean the title?"

"Yes—the title," assents Sir Herrick, with a smile. "Is this ham one of your own curing? I'll have another slice, if I may."

"Yes," says Bob, "Paula—my sister there—saw to it. Is isn't bad," he adds, with a brother's sang-froid.

"It is delicious," Sir Herrick says; and his eyes wander to Paula's face with the direct, frank look which she had noticed the preceding night as so characteristic of him. "We don't get ham like this in town."

"No, I suppose not," says Bob. "It isn't bad. And so you've come down for the fishing?"

"Yes, for a change," says the last of the Powises.

"Not a bad place, the King's Arms," goes on Bob. "Comfortable and snug."

"That describes it to a nicety," assents Sir Herrick.

"Have some strawberries," remarks Bob, after a pause. "At any rate, they'll compete with London. Paula—wake up, Paula!" For Paula, usually so brisk and talkative, seems smitten dumb and absent-minded.

Sir Herrick holds a clean plate, and Paula puts some strawberries on to it, and passes him the cream.

(To be continued.)

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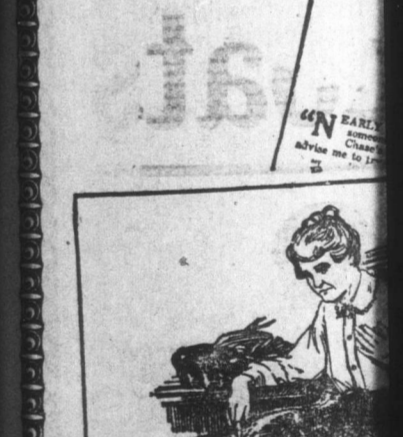
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