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**The Old Marquis**  
OR,  
**The Girl of the Cloisters**

CHAPTER XXVIII.  
AN EXTRAORDINARY WEDDING.

He began to talk in his brightest and best manner, making Lord Edgar laugh in his hearty, frank fashion, and even causing Lela to ripple now and again. He exerted that mysterious charm which he possessed to the utmost, and rattling on with ready wit and pleasantry, and yet mingling it with a show of deep respect for Lela that would have won her heart but for the impression she had received when she first saw him, and which neither his wit nor his perfect manner could quite dispel.

She was angry with herself for entertaining the vague feeling of distrust, but there it remained, even when Lord Edgar was laughing at her, she herself was smiling at some piece of elaborate nonsense uttered in Clifford Revel's softest of voices.

"Lady Fane," he said, "you drink no wine! Let me recommend this Pomme— I hope you've got at least a dozen cases of this, Edgar—it is just a lady's wine—not too sweet, and not too dry! May I?" and he leaned forward and filled her glass, disregarding her protestation.

He filled his own at the same time and emptied it at a draught; he was enjoying himself to the utmost. He felt that he should like to laugh aloud, with wild, mad triumph. Meanwhile, Lovel waited in noiseless gravity, and dish after dish made its appearance and vanished. Then came the sweets, and with them a small wedding-cake, upon the top of which was formed in crimson the letters "E. L."

"Edgar and Lela!" said Edgar. "Why, who thought of that, Clifford?" Clifford Revel waved his hand airily.

"My small contribution to the feast," he said. "Now, my lady, you must cut it, and I think I deserve the first piece!"

By this time Lovel and the maid had withdrawn, and were doubtless drinking a glass of the old Pomme in the anteroom.

"Yes! So he does! Give it to him, Lela!" said Lord Edgar. "I don't know what I'll say 'we—should have done without you, Cliff! Give him the first piece, and may it bring him as beautiful and sweet a wife as I have got!"

Lela crimsoned, but Clifford Revel

laughed—almost boisterously. "Edgar is privileged to-day, Lady Fane; he can say what he pleases. But I must say, for my part, that I echo the wish with all my heart. Will you not say so, too?" and he looked at her.

Lela started lightly, and held the knife motionless, then, as she put the slice of compressed indigestives on his plate, she said:

"I wish you all the happiness you deserve!"

Lord Edgar laughed aloud, but Clifford Revel shrugged his shoulders. "I am satisfied! Thank you, Lady Fane! After all, I shall not fare so badly, if your wish be realized. I am not half a bad fellow, I beg you to believe that, Lady Fane! It may sound conceited, but I protest that, as the world goes, I am not worse than the rest of my kind!"

He rattled on in this fashion for half an hour, then he filled his glass again and passed the bottle to Lord Edgar. "I have only one duty left to perform," he said, with a smile that should have been a sardonic sneer, "and that is to propose the health of the bride."

Lord Edgar nodded and smiled at Lela. "The bride!" repeated Clifford Revel, and he rose and stood smiling down on them, with his wine-glass in his hand. "Edgar, my dear fellow, if this were an ordinary wedding breakfast, with two rows of guests, I might be excused for making an ordinary speech. But it is not! Ordinary wedding breakfasts, alas! are too often but the feast which follows on a ceremony which has united two persons who have become one for a hundred reasons, rather than that which alone should prove the cause—love! But in your case love is the sole and all principal reason. Yours, my dear

Edgar, and if you will permit me to so call you, my dear Lela, is a marriage in which love reigns paramount. Love, pure and unadorned by any thought of the world's dross, hovers over the marriage feast. To you, my dear Edgar, I can only offer the congratulations which are due to a man who has the happiness to be the husband of so beautiful and charming a bride as Lady Fane! Before you stretches a long vista of happy years. To you, Lady Fane, I would desire to express my heartfelt wishes for your perfect joy and happiness!"

"Hear, hear!" said Lord Edgar, softly, as he put his hand on Lela's arm.

"You have married this morning the man of your choice, and I will

make bold to say that your choice has been a wise and happy one. I—I speak as his closest friend—know the depth and sincerity of his love for you. I know how severely he has been tried and how well he has proved his devotion to you. My dear Edgar—my dear Lela, I wish you both a long and prosperous and happy life; and for myself I desire no greater happiness than to be considered your most faithful and devoted friend. Lady Fane, I drink your health!"

And he raised the glass to his lips and bowed to her.

Lela would have liked to have felt grateful; she would not have been ashamed if her eyes had been dim with tears; but somehow the speech did not move her. She found herself watching critically the soft admirably managed voice, and a vague and, as she thought, unreasonable feeling of uneasiness and distrust possessed her. But Lord Edgar had no doubts or distrust.

He sipped his wine, and, with a touch of color in his face, rose, looking in silence for a moment from one to the other. Then he said:

"Clifford, in the name of my dear wife and my own, I thank you for all your kindness to me and to her. She knows all that you have done for us, before and on this day. But she does not know you as well as I do, though I trust the day may come when you will realize how good a fellow you are. I can't make a speech as you can; I have not the gift of the gab; and he laughed, and Clifford Revel laughed in echo. "But I can just manage to thank you for your good wishes, and to say that both my wife and myself wish that our happiness, which you troubled so much to bring about, may one day fall to your lot! Clifford, I drink your health and your future happiness."

He raised his glass as he spoke; then noticing that Lela did not respond, touched her arm.

She started, blushed, and put her glass to her lips.

There were a few moments of chatting between Clifford and Edgar, then Clifford Revel looked at his watch.

"I must be going," he said; "I am sorry to go. I don't know when I have felt happier than I have done this morning! But our happiest moments are but brief. Good-bye, Lady Fane."

And he held out his hand. Lela put hers into it, and tried to feel that she liked him—she was sorry that he was going, but the feeling would not come.

"Good-bye," she said, softly. Lord Edgar grasped his cousin's hand warmly, and, putting his other hand on his shoulder, accompanied him out of the room.

"Good-bye, old fellow," he said, "and a thousand thanks. If helping to make others happy makes happiness for one's self, you ought to be in a jolly mood this morning." Then he added, in a lower voice: "We shall start in half an hour. I have determined to go to that pretty place up the river—Pangley; we shall be able to run up to town if we want to. You must come down and see us. Clifford, was I not right? Is she not beautiful and sweet, and all that is good and gracious?"

"She is, she is!" assented Clifford Revel, earnestly; "and you were right in every way."

"Is she not fit to be the future Countess of Farintosh, Clifford?" demanded Lord Edgar, with honest pride and love shining in his eyes.

"She is quite fit," again assented Clifford Revel; "and when the time comes she will make an admirable mistress of Faneworth—when the time comes!"

"Neither she nor I wish for that time," said Lord Edgar, gravely.

"Of course not," said Clifford Revel. "Good-bye, my dear boy. Go and be happy, and don't quite forget me."

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whispered. "But talking of pretty things, come here, Lela."

And he led her to a cabinet and took out the boxes containing his purchases of the preceding day.

"There!" he said, spreading out the costly results of his morning's work. "If there is anything you don't like, say so, dearest, and we'll get them to exchange them."

Lela stood amazed and delighted, the ready crimson flaming in her cheeks.

"For me! Are all these really for me?" she said, with a little pant, her fingers playing, woman-like, over the satin-lined cases in which the gems lay glittering.

He laughed, as he watched her face, with a lover's delight.

"Yes—why, they are only a few trifles, dearest! You shall choose some things for yourself; you will do it better than I have done!"

"No, never!" she exclaimed. "Nothing could be more beautiful than these."

"Let us see how they look; if anything will make them look beautiful, your sweet face and form will, my darling!" and he clasped the gems around her neck and wrist, and as she stood blushing shyly, he caught her in his arms and kissed her proudly. She had just time to break from him when Lovel knocked at the door and announced the brougham.

"Go and get your things on, my darling. We have a little shopping to do before we start on our travels."

She went at once. She had placed herself in his hands and was all obedience; and with Lovel to open the door for them and send them off with ceremonious gravity, they started shopping.

"Why, this is a linen draper's," said Lela, as they stopped at Swan & Edgar's.

Lord Edgar laughed delightedly. "Why, you didn't imagine that I wanted to go shopping on my own account?" he said. "Do you think I have forgotten the smallness of your luggage, and that you must want something? This is part of my day's pleasure, dearest!"

She said not a word, but her eyes grew moist at the first evidence of his care and forethought.

(To be continued.)

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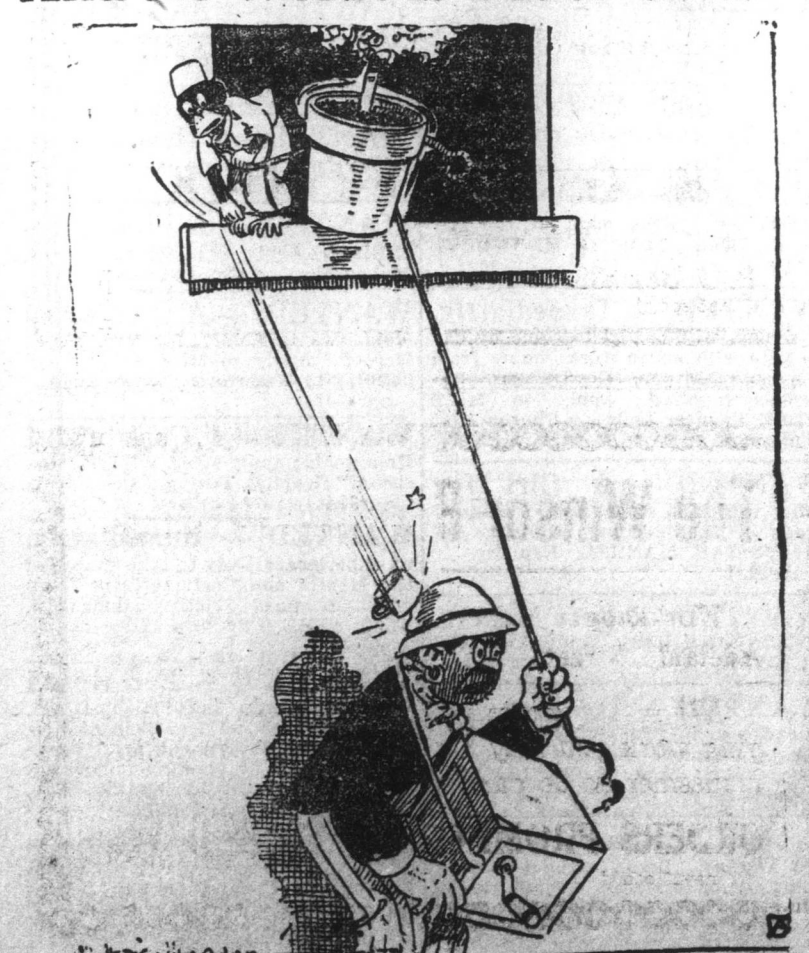
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the impulse of a sudden  
ready for You—It's  
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