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The Romance of a Marriage.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Of course, it is only natural. Keep things as quiet as you may, in a place like this the truth will leak out, and everybody who is anybody in Nouvelle knows that you have secured the great catch, the heir to Powis and the Palmer millions. My dear, you seem half-insensible to your own notoriety! Why, the eyes of the world, represented by Nouvelle-sur-mer, will be upon you, and are expectantly waiting for you. Don't laugh!" for a mirthless smile has fitted over the pale face. "Take the honours the gods have given you and be happy. Here is your dress. I should make an admirable lady's-maid, judging by the care and forethought I expend on your behalf. You left it to me—and here it is," and she lifts a beautiful costume de bal from the large imperial.

Paula looks at the dress, a cloud of black lace with flakes of silver shimmering here and there, and the domino of dove-grey, looks at it with the faint interest of one who is regarding a dress that is to be worn by anyone but herself, and says, calmly: "It is very pretty."

"Pretty!" echoes Alice. "Pretty! My dear, it is the loveliest thing I ever saw. It is a work of genius. I wrote and told him that I wanted to represent Moonlight, and—here it is, the very thing. Talk about painters, now I call Worth an artist, really an artist. Come and try it on."

Paula goes slowly to the box, and Alice slips the dress over her head.

"My dear," she says, emphatically, "it does me credit. It does indeed. I used to laugh at your hair in the old days—of course you have forgiven me—that was before this craze for red hair, you know; but your hair looks simply lovely against that silver and the dove-grey of the domino. Draw it round you. Here, take the mask!"

Paula slips the mask on with a half-hearted smile. What does it matter whether she looks plain or pretty? She is sold; part of the price, the

earnest-money, has been paid, and is on its way to Bob—poor Bob! And now, ah, well! Life has lost its savour, and not even the genuine admiration of her sex—that most delicious of all tributes to a woman—can lighten the heart that lies so dead and benumbed in her bosom.

With a smile she puts the finery away from her.

"It is very pretty. I am much obliged to you, Alice," she says. "But, what are you going to wear? That seems to me of more importance; you, you know—with one of her old laughs—are still in the market."

Alice shrugs her shoulders, and lifts a pearly blue dress from the box.

"Oh, I am of no consequence. I am not the bride-elect, I am only the elder sister of the lovely Miss Estcourt; but I have got a very pretty dress," and she holds it up.

"And what does that mean?" asks Paula, taking the dress and examining it with a forced display of interest.

"I am Dawn," says Alice. "Rather hackneyed, isn't it? I expect there will be half a dozen Dawns and Mornings at least; but what does it matter?"

"It matters very much," says Paula, "but you will be sure to look nicer and prettier than anyone else in the room."

"Bar one," says Alice, cheerfully. "My dear, I know you will eclipse me, and I am quite resigned. Indeed I have known it for months past. We have changed places; it is you who are the 'beautiful Miss Estcourt,' now, and I am quite content to shine by your reflection."

Paula laughs incredulously.

"This will be a big affair," says Alice, folding up the dress and bustling about cheerfully. "They say it will be the biggest things they ever had at Nouvelle."

"Where is it to be?" asks Paula, absently.

Alice stares at her.

"Why, do you mean to say that you don't know—that you didn't hear them talking about it, Stancy and May, and all of us, the other night, any night of the week past?"

Paula colours slightly.

"I remember something about it," she says, quietly; "but I'm afraid I didn't listen very attentively. I must have been thinking of something else."

Alice laughs quietly.

"Well, Paula, my dear, I have vowed a vow that I won't lose patience with you, and I'll keep it, though you do try me pretty hard sometimes. Where is it to be? In the salon of the casino—the large salon next the play-room, you know. I forgot; you have never seen it—for Paula has always declined Stancy's offer to take her in to the gambling-room. "They thought of having it in the Golden Eagle, but the room was found to be too small; and Mr. Palmer arranged—he really doesn't seem to care what he spends—with the committee, that they should have the casino salon."

"I hate that place," says Paula.

Alice laughs.

"You'll like it to-night, my dear. Besides, you are not obliged to go into the gambling-room, although it adjoins the ball-room. Come along; let us go and dress. I have told them to send some tea up."

and it wasn't his crime



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A New Method of Treating an Old Complaint

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Perhaps Paula is the only person in Nouvelle who is indifferent to the grand annual ball which is one of the chief attractions of that charming watering-place. Nothing but the ball has been talked about for the last fortnight, and the great question of the day, not only for the gentler but the rougher sex, has been, "What shall I wear?"

Stancy has decided to go as a cavalier, and has already practised before his glass the proper swagger—which comes rather naturally—pertaining to the costume of a swell of the Charles II. period. Even Mr. Palmer has been bitten by the prevailing mania, and has consented to wear the costume of a doge of Venice, though what sort of a person a doge may have been that respectable gentleman is totally ignorant. Alice has chosen May's dress, as she has chosen Paula's and her own, and all are looking forward to the eventful evening excepting Paula, to whom all evenings are uneventful now—now that she has lost her first and false love and has sold herself.

Of the party, Stancy de Palmer is perhaps the most radiant and self-satisfied. As usual in his pampered, selfish life, he has "got his way;" he has set his small heart upon getting Paula—perhaps because she was difficult to get—and he has won her. He goes about all day in a state of enthusiastic satisfaction and conceit. Conceit, because it has suddenly dawned upon Nouvelle that the younger Miss Estcourt is the beauty of the place, and she belongs to him! It goes for nothing with him—the cold, icy way in which she has accepted him—the fact that he has "bought her" as certainly and palpably as ever he bought a horse or a dog. Another man might feel hurt by her cold indifference, but Stancy does not. He is quite satisfied, and takes all the congratulations that are showered upon him with a self-complacent smile of superiority and assurance, and—*is happy.* Mr. Palmer and May are satisfied also, for is not Stancy ever so much steadier already? Does he not limit the champagne and the whiskey, and avoid that dreadful gambling-table?

"Stancy's all right," says Mr. Palmer, with a chuckle. "Once married, he'll settle down and go steady."

And if May remarks Paula's set face and cold, absent smile, she consoles herself with the reflection that Paula was always a strange girl, and that when she and Stancy are married they will be like the good people in the fairy tales, happy ever afterwards!

And so the comedy—ah! and the tragedy—of life go on. Hearts break, and one's friends are blind, and to their cry of "All's well!" the human soul sinks in the deep waters, perchance never to rise again!

And May is happier than she has been for some time, for Paula has whispered a word of hope, and a word of hope means so much to timid, unexpecting May. Instead of telling her what Bob had written, that he must give her up, Paula has whispered that all may yet be well, and that Bob may make his fortune and keep his word after all. But not a word has she said of the sacrifice she has made for them both—not a word of the thousand

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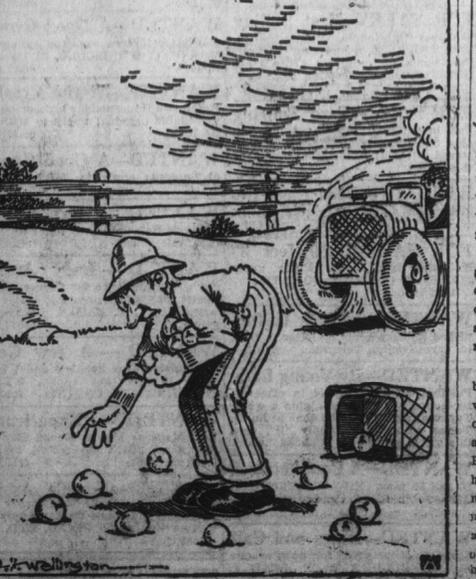
2748

2748—For the blouse, one could use galatea, gingham, drill, or linen; for the trousers, these materials are suitable too, and likewise flannel, serge, velvet and corduroy.

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