

Grand Alliance;

Love That Knew No Bounds.

CHAPTER XI.
The inner door was slightly ajar, Mrs. Alwyn reading aloud to Leonora something the post had brought, heard nothing of the light approaching step. Sydney could not avoid catching the last sentence.

"We mean no offense; but seem' one of us is wholly laid by now, and you know full well, ma'am, how we've bore up again our troubles from beginnin' to end, we humbly ask a trifle now and parlanche, as black as a thunder-cloud "why did you not knock? Never—never should you enter a room in that manner when people are reading letters!"

"I beg your pardon, mamma. I did not mean to interrupt you. Is yours a troublesome one?"

"Ye—es—no—oh, no! That is, nothing particular. Merely a beging letter. Is yours more important?"

The girl's bearing was so wonderfully bright, for a moment Mrs. Alwyn thought Mr. Villiers had proposed in writing and was certainly to be accepted.

"It seems so to me, mamma. But if you, for once, will read what Mr. Cheene says, you can best tell me if it really is." And she laid the open epistle down for perusal.

A suspicion of its contents came over Mrs. Alwyn, but she read it slowly through without a word, her face lowering at every line. Then she folded and almost flung it back to the owner.

"Your true and dutiful friend is a most meddlesome old man!" she said briefly.

"Then it is true!" cried Sydney, her delight in the news, not to be quenched even by this reception of it. "Where, oh, where does the money come from, mamma?"

"From me. That is, if you will kindly have patience and listen"—for Sydney uttered a bewildered ejaculation—from the sum secured to me by marriage-settlement. You would have heard all in due time if this ridiculous interference had not forestalled the proper explanation. Mercifully, your father put away a few thousands for any family he might have, but until any child or children came of age, the interest was mine exclusively. I explained part of this to you once before. Now when your birthday arrives next month you are at liberty to assume control of the money, six thousand pounds. I presume you will expect to lay the interest out yourself, instead of leaving me to do so."

Sydney looked almost aghast at the prospect, after her very meager allowance. She felt such a person of property!

"Why, however much will it be mamma?" she all but gasped.

"Between two and three hundred but"—as Sydney barely restrained a delightful note—"you must, of course, pay properly for your share of this home while you stay in it."

"But that will leave me rich!" cried Sydney, "if you take half, or even more. Oh, mamma, venturing to let a hand drop on Mrs. Alwyn's shoulder, "I can't help being very glad, I hope it doesn't vex you."

"Vex me! Oh, dear, no," so drawing up her handsome figure as to ride

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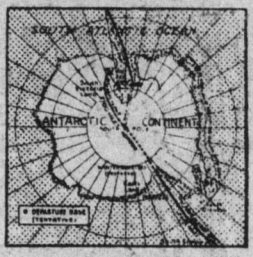
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herself of contact with that warm, sager young touch; "but, naturally, I don't exit as you do. In a certain way, remember, your gain is my loss. Now," with just the glimmer of a sneer, "of course you want to carry your news to those Dacies. Be sure and say it was merely antedated by that garrulous old man. And—Sydney," as the girl turned away, chilled, subdued—somehow she and her mother could never either rejoice or mourn together—"as you pass the post office, bring me half a crown's worth of stamps." Thus did Mrs. Alwyn merge these wondrous tidings a the current of the commonplace, affectually damping her daughter's pleasure for the hour. But it renewed itself before long, and during the day days that followed many and many a superb castle did Miss Sydney rear on the solid foundation of those six thousand.

It was while the full glamour of his brilliant promise was upon her that Mr. Villiers came down again, and felt himself fairly checked by the frank innocence with which his surprise and congratulations were falmed. "I have such a piece of news to tell you," said Sydney, the first minute she was with him alone. "Something I really think you will like to hear. In quite a very small way I am actually a bit of an heiress, Mr. Villiers. Value six thousand pounds!"

Love would have made no stumbling block of that speech, but it put interest into a quandary. Guiltily conscious of having been very much needed aware of the grand fact all he way through, Mr. Rupert expressed his satisfaction awkwardly and in guarded phrase (at which Sydney was sorry, having counted on his sharing her gratification more warmly; she did not want some one to be very glad at it), and the great question he had been determining to ask her somehow stuck in his throat.

Holding conference with his aunt he said, "Upon my honor," he said, with a sheepishness that was about the most creditable trait yet recorded of him, "when a girl has just told you she is worth so much a fellow can't decently make a dash at it all in a moment. It would have been better now if I'd spoken at Christmas. As I didn't, I'll stake my 'uck on my next coming. I can get my holiday just about the birthday week, Aunt Helen, and bring everything to the right end then."

As a man can not be forced into proposing against his will, Mrs. Alwyn could only acquiesce.

She bestowed, though, anything but benedictions on Mr. Cheene for his share in this further procrastination!

CHAPTER XII.
Verily, during the next two or three weeks any one would have found a difficulty in impressing upon Sydney Alwyn that money is the root of all evil.

On the contrary, it seemed the root whence flowers of delight and comfortable fruits innumerable must surely spring forth. At any rate her share of this earthly pelf was destined to a joyful career, and as if determined to lose no time in starting her new one on a happy mission, Sydney actually went boldly to her mother

the day after Rupert left, and begged the loan of twenty pounds, to be repaid out of the very first of those mighty quarterly receipts she was anticipating.

This singular request arose out of an hour at the Gate House that noon. There Mrs. Dacie, instead of being as usual actually at work or waiting on her good doctor-husband, was reported invisible; actually and confessedly not well enough to be downstairs, and the sunny sitting room looked sadly empty, the master grievously hipped and lonely without her cheery presence.

"She was not really ill. Oh, dear, no!" Mary said, with anxious effort to believe her own words, "only tired; with the heat, perhaps." And Dr. Dacie tapped his thermometer, grumbling over the glorious weather, very ready and desirous to persuade himself that ten degrees less warmth would quite restore his good wife, de-luding himself by any fiction, rather than confess that the labor of making both ends meet through many years was revenging itself now on mind and body.

But Sydney could well read between these poorly deceptive lines, and began casting about how her new power could amend the situation. "If the mother had been taken for a holiday in the spring," fidgeted the doctor, dense as men so often are to the possibilities of the family purse, "she might have been set up for the summer," and lo, here was the rich young woman's opportunity.

"Why shouldn't she go now, Mr. Dacie?"

"I want her to, my dear. Her sisters in Warwickshire would have her any day, but—"

"But mamma couldn't go so far," broke in Mary, hastily, the color mounting over the lines on her fair, kind face; "I don't mean—as her father began, "Pshaw!"—"I don't mean that she is too ill—but—"

And Sydney comprehended those "buts" as well as possible. The doctor had not got all last Christmas's payments in yet, few though they were. An active young man from Edinburgh settled at Oakleigh and was diminishing the scanty list of patients every quarter. There was no board laid by for holidays, no fund to furnish change for the house-mistress. "Why," thought Sydney, hiding the sparkle of her swift design behind the outspread newspaper, "it seems as if I were made rich on purpose for this!" And not an hour had she lost in securing from Mrs. Alwyn that advance which was to speed Mrs. Dacie on her health-seeking journey.

That Mrs. Alwyn demurred at the loan goes without saying. But Sydney in the strength of her new posi-

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tion was irrepresible. Between entreaty and persuasion, backed by usurious offer, she carried her point. "If you lend me the money, mamma," she promised, when refusal seemed imminent, "I'll give you that mirror from the Hedingham china shop, with yellow roses round it, for interest. Now!" And then, pretending to joke at the bribe she had every intention of accepting, Mrs. Alwyn yielded. Off went Sydney, triumphant, to Mary Dacie, and the upshot of a very April interview was preparation for Mrs. Dacie to have a whole fortnight's rest with her sisters at Chaddeley, and the arch-conspirator's only regret was that nothing could induce her friends to use more than half the sum she brought them.

"If you want more we will ask for it," Mary promised; so the solitary note went into hiding against possible requirements, and Sydney, in most infectiously high spirits, haunted the Gate House till its mistress, with Mary to drive her to the nearest station, was fairly started for what St. Clair's folk called "the sheers."

"Good-luck for all of us go with you, Moll," cried the doctor, as Punch trotted off.

"And better still come back!" cried Sydney (how often she remembered that valeidation later on!) And then she hovered as blithe as a bee about the doctor, beguiling him into tales of when he and his Moll were young, and what a pretty woman she was, till by and by Mary came smiling back, reporting her mother gone off looking better already; and an eloquent clasp of Sydney's fingers sent the girl away so brimful of contentment, she could almost have cried "for gratitude over her golden thousands."

An evil! Nay, that was downright slander. Money was delicious. Delicious! If this poor fraction had sent such circles of relief rippling over one whole household, what might the rest do? It colored with a rosy hue even the dull neutral tints of her home. If her mother could smile over a china-framed mirror, she should often have cause to smile!

A great joyful perspective that "Open Sesame" of wondrous coin disclosed, and the vanishing point was—Love! Surely she could now do so much for so many, and that should be her payment. Sact a Jubilate stirred within her as she passed the church as made the glitter of its windows seem an invitation opportunity and not to be refused. A sacrilegious little male Pegg, playing surptitious leap-frog among the tombstones, was captured and set to work at the back of the organ for the sum of twopence, and seated before the keys. Sydney herself, tears in her eyes and her heart in her voice, sung forth her gladness in a quaint psalm of Bach's setting, found (incongruous enough there) among her father's few possessions.

Again and again the happy harmony rang out "Rejoice and be thankful! Rejoice and be thankful!" And perhaps in all the centuries that the wide-winged, oak-carved angels had looked gravely down from the timber roof, no truer votive notes had risen from below than those of Sydney Alwyn's unselfish exultation. (To be Continued.)

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