

**THE Grand Alliance;**  
—OR—  
**Love That Knew No Bounds.**

CHAPTER VII.

"Not under present circumstances," replied Mrs. Alwyn, with a glance at Leonora among the flower-beds; "things have been too depressed about here for William to sell profitably. But I've made him an offer for The Dale myself, and hope he's likely to close with it. Of course, it will lessen the few thousands I shall have left to live on when Sydney takes her own. But I think it a desirable investment for me and Leonora." Then after about two seconds' pause—"The Conynghams, I believe, are anxious for it."

"And you mean they may have it with the young lady; if not, go without it! Well devised," laughed the major; but Mrs. Alwyn, vexed with herself for showing her cards so plainly in a boastful moment, hurriedly changed the subject.

"Say nothing to Sydney of her little fortune at present, please. There is no need to explain till she is nearer of age—if on the eve of marrying, so much the better. I have thought it over and I am sure this is best for all of us, Rupert included."

The major could only bow acquiescence. For his own part he would have preferred the girl to know her pecuniary value before he sent his son a-courting. But women ought to understand each other best; they had a circumlocutory way of going to work over trifles that he could not pretend to understand, and therefore had best not interfere with. So, contented on the whole, with his confabulator, he joined the young people, while Mrs. Alwyn with a satisfied smile went in to dress for dinner.

"Much of gardeners, either of you?" he questioned, noticing, as he neared them, the delight on Sydney's mobile face as she bent over a lovely half-opened rose, bent till it met her cheek in what seemed a mutual caress—"It's fine exercise for those who like it."

"Oh, will you persuade mamma so?" cried Sydney. "I think it's work that people in the country ought to be allowed, don't you, Major Villiers? Somehow one feels the better for the very touch of a flower; and again she stroked the exquisite petals which she had watched day by day from their first unfurling.

"And are you of the same way of thinking?" the major asked his niece, who answered, gracefully sheltering her face from the sun's slanting rays with a big straw fan.

"Oh yes, I constantly feel a great deal the better for them, uncle, especially when they match one's dress so deliciously as this darling does!" and stopping, her taper fingers dexterously broke off the last lovely "La France," and transferred it to the folds of lace meandering down her delicate pink robe.

Sydney almost visibly winced, crimsoned, and without a word turned off to the house. Leonora looked after her with an amused smile and a little shrug.

"Now, I suppose this is one of her pets, so I've offended her," she exclaimed. "She is so odd. I do wish Sydney could be more like us!"

"The same song her mother sings," thought the major, and, whether by accident or by design of Mrs. Alwyn to demonstrate the difficulties she had complained of, he heard during the next few days a great deal more in the same strain.

"May I appeal to you, dear Major Villiers," begged his hostess, when he appeared at the breakfast-table next morning; "as quite one of ourselves, will you say whether her sister's wishes, or I may add the wants of the household, or an engagement of her own making, a fulfillment of her own whim, should take precedence with Sydney? Perhaps she will pay your verdict the compliment of attending to it."

"Well, all depends on what the wish, and the want, and the whim may be," returned the major, rubbing his hands and endeavoring to give

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he matter a jocular turn with a general "good-morning" all round. "De-tails, if you please, ladies!"

"Leonora particularly wants something from Hemyngford. I ask Sydney to drive in for it. She prefers staying at home to practice a social singing class at the school-house at noon."

"Well, with a little accommodation couldn't all be managed?" said the major (the man of war was a most thorough-going man of peace). "Could not the singing class be put off, or the drive take place in the afternoon? One or the other, surely."

"I require my mission executed before luncheon," said Mrs. Alwyn, very positively. "I should think the class can be put off if Sydney chooses."

"Mamma," said the girl, speaking as if distressed at the altercation she was driven to, "you know Mr. Vaughan fixed noon-time; it is too late for me to alter it if I wished."

"Then send and ask Mary Dacie to take it."

"Her father is not so well. She has her hands full. I should be so glad if I might ease her."

"At my expense?" said Mrs. Alwyn, in deeply grieved tones. "Very well,

if you will not alter your mind to oblige me, I can not compel you. Tell Hillys—to the servant just entering with the post-bag—"the pony will not be wanted this morning. Leonora, darling, give your uncle a culet. Sydney, if it is not too much trouble, will you pass Major Villiers the toast? You will excuse my opening this, will you not?"

And the ruffled hostess proceeded in disinter the correspondence of The Dale from its leathern rice, tangle, turning out, as luck would have it among other papers, circulars, and post cards, one communication that proved a fresh bone of contention.

"From that old man again," Mrs Alwyn exclaimed, tossing a letter over to her younger daughter. "My dear, dear Sydney, will you never oblige me by letting that correspondence drop?" (Sydney stooped over her coffee, answering nothing, her letter held tight beneath the table); "can you not, knowing my distinct desire leave this unanswered, and so put an end to what I disapprove?"

Sydney's head drooped lower, and the painful color deepened on her cheeks. "No, mamma, I can not," she said, her voice low, but quiet, clear, and then, after a faint of swal-

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lowing her food, she got up, with a little apologetic gesture, and left the room before the tears, gathering in her eyes, had time to fall.

"The sort of thing I constantly contend with!" said Mrs. Alwyn, plaintively. "But don't let it spoil your breakfast, major. Take an egg."

Uneasy at all this electricity in the domestic atmosphere, Major Villiers essayed to carry off some of the overcharge by a quiet talk with the rebel, and to that intent, catching sight of her an hour after at the furthest end of the laurel hedge, wiring a roving honeysuckle to a rustic arch, he followed her there, and with a fatherly pat on the shoulder, and just a touch of reproach in his manner, asked,

"Well, now, young maiden mine, and why couldn't you manage to put off other friends and please that mamma of yours this morning? You will forgive an old man for lecturing, won't you? but people of one house should try to be of one mind, my child!"

At the kindly expostulation, the gentle tone, Sydney dropped her coil of wire and turned impetuously round.

"I do wish to Major Villiers, and I do try. But somehow nothing seems to answer! I seem born to worry mamma. Ever since I was quite little it has been the same. Leonora has been her delight, her comfort, I, her annoyance, her trouble. Just as Leonora is so beautiful and I am not" (her listener turned his glance full on the supple young form, the flashing hazel gray eyes, the red sensitive lips, the well-poised head with coil after coil of dark locks wisted round, and quoth he to himself, "You're not so far off that, to my mind, my dear!") "so Leonora as naturally known how to please in everything. I"—she let fall her arms, extended in sorrowful eloquence—"in nothing!"

The soft-hearted major felt very uncomfortable.

"Oh, come," said he, soothingly, you are only feeling sore and unhappy now, Miss Sydney—

"I wish you would call me Sydney," she interrupted.

"Well, Sydney, then; so you see things a little crookedly, perhaps. If you could have yielded this morning, matters might not have looked so gloomy. Now, would it not have been better to neglect outsiders, even, and to those commissions for your mother? Particular ones, perhaps, as she appeared to want them so much."

"Particular!" Sydney stopped as they paced out of sight of the house down the shrubbery, and her look of distress vanished in a gust of sudden laughter. "Particular! oh, very, indeed! I should have saved"—calculating on her finger-tips—"on sugar, seven farthings; on buttons—let me see, pearl—one dozen, I should think three half-pence! Yes, three-pence-farthing would have been the valuable result of my drive. Now, to spare mamma's and Leonora's pockets to that huge extent, do you say I ought to have run off from what I had promised to do, and left my best 'friends in the lurch?'"

The major evaded the question, preferring to ask who those best friends were; and Sydney, glowing, gave him an account of all the Dacies, all the rector's goodness to her, ending with, "If it were not for them I should be fifty times more ill-tempered and incorrigible! Knowing what I am, think what that means, and just consider whether I ought not to work for them even at the appalling loss of threepence farthing!"

The major was old-fashioned enough to be clear-headed on some points.

"I do think, 'my dear,' he said, simply, "there's one thing you plainly ought to do, that is, show up your mother's or Leonora's small economics, which I suppose they feel bound to make, for the sake of ridiculing them."

All Sydney's nerves slackened under the altered tone. Reddening with shame, tears gathered thickly on her long black lashes. She moved on very slowly. Then—

"I beg your pardon," she said, quite humbly. "I know I ought not to have done it. But—but"—shaking off the twinkling drops, and clasping her hands very tightly behind her—

(To be Continued.)

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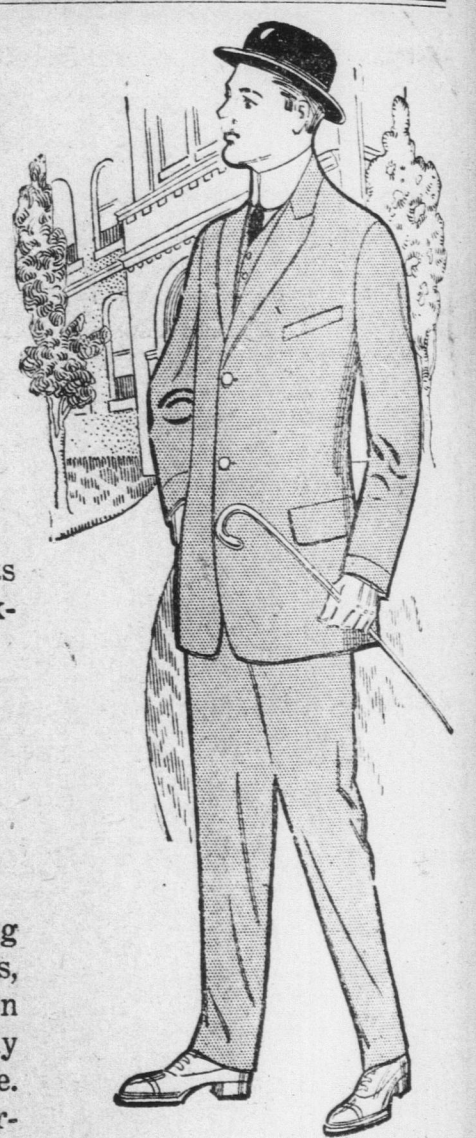
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