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The Romance of a Marriage.

CHAPTER XXX.

"I will forget, and all shall go on as it was before; we will take life easy, Bob, and mind our fields, and crops, and dogs, and horses, and be happy, as in our old fashion before this—this wild young man came to break our peace; we will be happy in our own way!"

A groan that breaks from his lips startles her into silence, and she turns to look at him.

His face, his clear, handsome, honest face is pale and working with distress, which is all the more marked for his efforts to conceal it.

"Bob," she says, laying her hand upon his arm, her dark eyes fixed on his face with apprehension and concern. "What is it? There is something else. You are in trouble! Oh, Bob! how selfish and inconsiderate I have been! I have been thinking only of myself, while you—you said you were going up to London on business before—before this affair of mine. Was it bad business, Bob? Tell me," and she draws nearer to him.

He sits with his pipe in his hand, his head bowed, his brows knit.

"No, Paula; he couldn't. He said—that was perfectly true, and I knew it—that the land was mortgaged in the best times, and that now it wouldn't fetch the money lent on it, and that—that—"

"Go on, go on. Do you think I can't bear it?" she says, almost wildly.

"That if we couldn't raise the money we should have to turn out."

Silence for a moment. Ah, it is bad indeed when sorrow will not allow of words.

"Those were the words. He said them with a smile, because he thought that I could raise the money; but—but—and I didn't tell him that I couldn't," says poor Bob. "You see, I was too proud. But"—with a gesture of despair that would be comical but for its awfulness—"what the devil we are to do, I don't know," and he laughs a curt little laugh. "One cannot farm without money; one cannot pay one's debts, either, without money. We've each of us a small income—it's not much; not enough to keep even this crooked place up, with the land. We—he draws a long breath—"we shall have to let it, Paula—the old place that—"

He stops and looks round the room, and then like a man refills his pipe.

Paula nestles closer to him; she is too wise to utter the commonplace condolences, but she puts her hand in his and presses it, and he understands her.

"The worst of it is," he says, presently, and with a grimace, "that Alice

must be told. She'll kick up a shine, as sure as eggs are eggs. She'll say that I have muddled the money away, and—that sort of thing."

Paula flushes angrily.

"Will she?" she says. "Then you ought to remind her that some portion of it has been 'muddled' in keeping two idle girls."

"Nonsense!" he says, roughly.

"It is not nonsense; it is simple, honest truth!" says Paula, her eyes filling. "Oh, Bob! do you think I don't understand? Do you think I don't know how much you have sacrificed for us—what a father as well as a brother you have been to us, and how generous, and—a little sob—"how unselfish? You have gone about in your old clothes, and worked like a farm-labourer while we have played the fine ladies with our new dresses, and—"

"At any rate, Paula," he says, with a grim smile, "you haven't had many fine dresses; don't talk nonsense, my child."

"But there shall be an end of it," she goes on, thrusting back the hair from her forehead, "at least so far as I am concerned."

He laughs.

"What do you mean to do, young man?" he says, half-sadly. "Don't talk rubbish about earning your own living, and going for a governess or a companion, because that wouldn't be in your line."

Paula sighs. It is so true!

"You'd box your pupils' ears before the first half-hour was over, and utterly decline to carry foot-stools about, which seems to be the chief occupation of companions. No, Paula, my child, if you could get a good situation to bring in young horses, or teach fellows how to throw a fly—"

She winces, and he stops short. "I beg your pardon, but don't get any absurd notion of that sort into your head. As I said, there's enough for us to live upon; but the cottages and the land must be let, and—Have you seen anything of the Palmers lately?" he breaks off, with affected carelessness.

Paula looks up at him, quickly, her woman's wit reading his heart.

"Oh, Bob, Bob!" she says, "what will May say?"

He is silent for a moment, and his handsome face grows pale.

"I don't know," he replies, simply.

"I—I shall know to-morrow."

Paula creeps closer to him, and lays her hand over his.

"Oh, Bob, how selfish one can be! I have never thought of your trouble, and it must be as great as mine! Poor May!"

"Don't say any more," he says, hoarsely, his hand covering his face from the light. "After all, it—it is what I expected. It isn't likely her father would give her to me, and yet—yet—well, Paula, you know what I mean, you have gone through the mill yourself. And—and if you can bear it, I ought to be able to, but it is awfully hard and rough. I think you'd better go to bed; I shall sit up and finish this pipe, and try and rehearse what I'm to say to Alice to-morrow. There's one thing—with a smile—"it will be something to do to fight it out with her. Put a bottle of smelling-salts on the mantel-shelf in case she faints."

And Paula bends over and kisses him, and leaves him to fight his fight as she has fought hers.

Avoid Operations for Kidney Troubles GinPills FOR THE KIDNEYS

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Did you know that I was coming here?" says Bob, with a flush on his face and light in his eyes, as jumping the stile that separated the Court lands from his own, he almost fell over May, standing, blushing demurely, by the hedge.

"No," she says; then she hangs her head and flushes. "Yes, I watched you from the window, and—and I thought perhaps you might come."

Bob wrings both her hands and



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looks down at her, and for the first time there is no shyness in his face. Brave men are only shy and timid when it is all plain sailing; show them danger, and they are as bold as lions.

"When did you come back? What a long time you have been away!" she says, offering to withdraw her hands, but so faintly that he manages to keep them, still looking down into her blue eyes with grave tenderness and something that is like pity.

"I came back last night, May, dear," he says. "Yes, I have been away a long time—though it is only a day or two."

"And have you enjoyed yourself? What is the matter?" she breaks off, with all a woman's quickness at reading the signs of trouble or joy in her lover's face.

"I'm in trouble, May," he says, frankly.

Bob couldn't beat about the bush to save his life.

"I am so sorry!" she murmurs, and the blue eyes lift themselves to his, already moist with sympathy. "Will you—may you tell me about it?"

"Yes," he says, widening his chest, just as he does when he takes a dive in the pool on the early spring mornings when the ice is still on the surface. "Yes, I've come to tell you, May—it is only your due."

"Then it's about me?" she says, quickly, and with a little pant. "Is—is it very bad news?"

"It is very bad news for me, dear," he says, simply, and with compressed lips. "So bad that I shrink from telling you. But—but perhaps you are prepared. You remember what I said in the stables, May, that I was not good enough for an heiress like you—"

"You said some stupid things," she says, with a smile, "but I forget them; I only remembered that—"

"Well!"

"That you said you loved me," she says, looking up at him bravely.

He draws her to him and bends his head to kiss her, but stops suddenly and suppresses a groan. She turns pale, and shrinks back from him—a half-careless is worse than none to a woman—and slowly takes her hands away. He does not try to recover them, but thrusts his own in his pockets, and looks aside.

"Well?" she says, after a moment, during which poor Bob stuns, fighting hard against the desire to take her in his arms and hide her face while he tells his story. "Aren't you going to tell me? It is that—that I have offended you, or that—that you are sorry for what you said in the stable?" and her eyes fill, though she keeps them fixed upon him bravely.

Bob turns to her and puts his hand upon her arm, and she can feel the strong hand tremble.

"May, dear," he says in a low voice, "I'm trying to tell you; but don't make it harder for me. I'm trying to do my duty—and it comes very rough. Look here, May, you know I love you—I feel that you know it. I needn't keep saying it. Tell me that you know it."

She creeps a little nearer the stile upon which his hand rests with a firm grasp, and looks up at him.

"I—I—thought so," she says.

"I do love you, with all my heart and soul," he says, fervently. "But—but, May I ought not to have told you so. I know that I ought not, if I was like stealing a rare jewel when the owner wasn't looking; for, May, do

you remember that I said I wouldn't speak to your father till after the harvest?"

"Yes," she says, almost inaudibly.

"Well," he says, and he draws a long breath; "there will be no harvest for me."

"No!"

"No," he says, with a groan. "May, I was always a poor man, not the man to come wooing the heiress of Powis Court; but I'm a ruined one," and his hand closes spasmodically.

She looks up at him with timid, frightened eyes for a moment, then she comes closer to him and puts her hand timidly on his arm.

"Oh, I am so sorry!"

He inclines his head with much gratitude.

"I—I knew you would be," he says. "I felt that. And I knew that you'd believe me when I told you that I didn't know the fix I was in when I asked you to let me love you. I didn't, indeed, May."

"I believe you," she says in a low voice. "I'd believe every word you said, though all the world were against it!"

"Thank you, thank you, dear!" he says. "But I wish I hadn't spoken! I'd borne it so long, that I could have borne to keep it silent longer; but that night you looked so beautiful, and—and my resolutions slipped away like water, and so I spoke. Forgive me, May! It wasn't fair!"

"Forgive you!" she says, with a strange smile. "For making me the happiest girl in the world! Yes, I'll forgive you, Bob!"

"Don't," he says, almost painfully; "say something hard and unkind. Tell me I, a pauper, had no right to love you, who are rich and above my reach. Don't say a kind word, May, it will make it harder to say good-bye."

Her sweet face pales and her eyes close for a moment, then she raises them to his face.

"Are you going to say 'Good-bye'?" she says, almost inaudibly.

"Yes," he says, hoarsely; "I have come to tell you all, May. The fact is that I—I am a ruined man; the land is mortgaged—you won't understand; I'm afraid; but, anyhow, I can't afford to keep up the farm, and—and we are going—Heaven knows where we are going; it doesn't matter where, as we are going to leave here. May, it is a bitter parting, my dear, but—but you have made it as sweet as you can. You have forgiven me, I shall always remember that; and, May, wherever I go I shall remember you, and I hope that you will be happy."

"Thank you," she says, and a strange change comes over her face, a strange light in her eyes, that are no longer timid and shy, but burn with a fierce fire. "Thank you. Is there anything else?"

He shakes his head and clears his throat, for there is a suspicious lump in it.

"Nothing else, May, except this: I hope some better and—and worthier fellow will make you happy."

"Did you come to insult me?" she says, with a little smile direct into his eyes.

"No," he cannot repeat the word. (To be Continued.)

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