

# The Fifth Wheel

By Beatrice Heron-Maxwell and Florence & Eastwick

CHAPTER XXXV.—(Continued.)

HER eyes fell before the passionate fire of his, and her breath came quickly.

He laid his hand over hers where it rested on the arm of the chair.

"If we part to-day," he continued earnestly, "God only knows what new thing may happen to separate us. Once we are married, nothing matters. Don't you see, darling?"

"But if there is more trouble about this case?" she suggested.

"Then we will meet it together. You believe that I am innocent of any share in it, don't you? You know I am speaking the truth when I say that I never knew the girl at all."

"I believe every word you say, Laurie."

"Then believe that I love you with my whole heart and soul and trust me to set things straight when you are my wife. Will you come, Fen?"

She hesitated for a moment longer. "I am so shabby," she said, looking down at the simple serge dress in which she had travelled home.

He laughed and rose. "I'll engage a room for you and Theo to tidy up in," he said, "and give you ten minutes. Then we must start."

She followed him across the lounge to where the others were sitting.

"Do you feel like a best man?" Laurie asked Mauleverer.

"I do," answered Tubby, "the best man that ever lived—just engaged to the best girl in the world."

Theo's smile, softly tender and happy, supplemented the assertion.

"Then come along and see me turned off," Laurie said.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

There are thirty-six numbers on a roulette board, and they all have their turn. It's like life—sometimes you get a black one, and then a red, sometimes you have a run of one or the other all together, and then comes a zero and you start afresh.

THE ceremony, brief and quiet, with only Theo and Tubby as witnesses, was over. Fenella in a maze of happiness that seemed as a mirage to a wayworn traveller, too real and too perfect not to be visionary, stood in the centre of the little group, in the hotel lounge while the three of them touched glasses and drank her health.

"To Mrs. Laurence Pridham," said Tubby, raising his and clinking Theo's glass.

"Here's wishing her many happy returns of the day. Fen, I look towards you."

"To the bride," Theo proclaimed.

"May you live happy ever after."

"Here's hoping," put in Laurie, "now then you two, no heel-taps!"

and they all drained their glasses.

It was at this very moment that a page came through the lounge calling out Laurie's number and said, in reply to a question from Laurie as to what he was wanted for, "There's a gentleman and a little girl looking for one of your party."

"Why," broke in Fenella, catching sight of three people at the other end of the lounge, "it's little Eve."

And at the same instant, the child, recognizing her two friends, ran towards them, followed by her mother and Mr. Ferdinand Saxon.

The mother, Mrs. Moorhouse, seeing her little daughter's enthusiastic greeting to Fenella, introduced herself.

"I am sure it is Miss Leach," she

said. "I am Eve's mother. You can imagine how full my heart is of gratitude towards you. I thought my little darling was lost. I never hoped to see her again—and then I heard of your wonderful heroism. I cannot thank you enough. And Mr. Mauleverer—which is he?"

Fenella indicated Tubby who, in his old lazy drawl, said—to end the embarrassment of Mrs. Moorhouse's thanks—"Eve has made a mistake. That isn't Miss Leach really. As a matter of fact Miss Leach ceased to exist about half-an-hour ago."

Eve bubbled over with laughter and called him a story-teller, and Tubby continued, "This lady is Mrs. Laurence Pridham."

Mrs. Moorhouse looked at him doubtfully, suspecting a joke of some kind, whereupon Tubby gravely introduced Laurie to them both—and suggested that the bride's health should be drunk again with all the honours.

Meanwhile Mr. Saxon, waiting a few paces away, had gathered what was passing and now approached.

"My dear," he said to his niece, "I should be glad if you would present me," adding to them all, "I hope I don't intrude, in joining this little party as an uninvited guest."

"THIS is my uncle, Mr. Saxon," Mrs. Moorhouse said, "He has just come back from Aix-les-Bains to meet me."

"I am proud and honoured," Saxon declared, "to make the acquaintance of the lady who saved my little Eve by her magnificent unselfish presence of mind. No words could express my grateful appreciation of, as I understand—Mrs. Laurence Pridham. Sir"—he turned to Laurie—"you are, if I may be allowed to say so, one of the most fortunate men in the world at this moment. May I have the pleasure of knowing Mr. Theodor Mauleverer?"

"A doubtful pleasure, I am afraid," responded Tubby as he shook hands.

"Pardon me," Saxon dissented, there is no possible doubt as to my desire to meet you, Mr. Mauleverer, not only for your own sake, but for the sake of someone who is going to unite us in close relationship. I asked your sister's permission to tell you that she had consented to become my wife."

Tubby's equable politeness was proof against this surprising intelligence, and he merely said, "Is that so?" with an air of mildly civil interest.

"That is so. I hope to persuade her to let me fix an early date for the wedding, if the state of your father's health permits. Sallie is with Lori Brismain now, as you probably know."

"Yes, I shall have to be moving on there," remarked Tubby. "I should have gone to St. George's Square straight from the station but for unforeseen circumstances."

He glanced at Theo, and Saxon's eyes followed his. "Pleasant ones, I am sure," said the millionaire gallantly. "May I be permitted to ask the name of this young lady?"

Theo's cheeks dimpled at him, for she was very pleased indeed at his announcement about Sallie. It cleared the decks for Laurie at home, she considered.

It was decided eventually that Tubby should accompany his brother-in-law-elect to St. George's Square, returning later to dine with Saxon at the Cecil, where he had taken a suite

of rooms for himself and the Moorhouses.

"But you will see me at the Chase to-morrow, without fail," Tubby said to Theo as they withdrew to a corner together before parting. "I shall bring my father's blessing with me, I know—though very little else, I'm sorry to say, my poor child."

"Don't, Tubby!" The brown eyes flashed with sudden tears. "As if I wanted anything else but you."

"A bad bargain for you, kiddie. But I'm going to work in future. No more philandering—no more gambling. If you'll throw in your luck with mine, and if there isn't a billet here, I'm ready to go abroad. Would you come?"

"To the end of the world," she breathed softly.

There was a pause.

"Beastly places, these palm-courts, for saying good-bye in," observed Tubby. "I'm afraid we must save up for to-morrow, kid."

While they were talking and Laurie had gone to fetch his hat and coat, leaving Fenella with the Moorhouses, Ferdinand Saxon, seating himself, took out a diminutive pocket cheque-book and a stylo.

After writing a cheque in four figures, he signalled a waiter and asked for a sheet of paper and an envelope. This being brought, he indited a brief message, enclosed it with the cheque in the envelope and addressed it to Mrs. Laurence Pridham.

Then, with a smile of satisfaction, he rejoined the others and took his part in the farewells, finally placing the envelope in Fenella's hand.

"We are going to be great friends, I hope," he said, "and it seems to me there's a possibility of our being connections in the future." He paused to look towards Theo and Tubby. "I hope Mr. Pridham will allow me to present my little wedding gift to his bride."

FENELLA blushed a vivid rose-colour and accepted the envelope unhesitatingly.

"I have never," continued Saxon, "felt so much pleasure in a wedding gift as I do to-day. As an old man, Mr. Pridham, and under such exceptional circumstances, you won't refuse me that pleasure I know. A wedding-day is a special occasion and I claim all the usual privileges."

"It is awfully kind of you, Mr. Saxon," Fenella replied, and began to open the envelope.

"Read it at your leisure," he said. "I hope this is only au revoir and we shall meet soon again."

After his departure Fenella opened the envelope. The message was a characteristic one.

"For the sake of the little child whom we both love, and whose life you saved, accept my homage and with it this small gift, to remind you of what I shall never forget. Ferdinand and Saxon." She looked at the cheque and held it out to her husband with dismay.

"Laurie!" she gasped, "it's for TWO thousand pounds! What a wonderful old man. I wish he hadn't given me so much—except—well—I shall not come to you so empty-handed, Laurie. I can't send it back, since he put it in this way."

Laurie was contented that she should do as she thought best. Money never counted with him, except as a necessary means to an end.

"We must jog along now," he said,



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