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**Grand Alliance;**

**Love That Knew No Bounds.**

CHAPTER XVI.

On the contrary, it would leave her an appreciable trifle to the good. Rupert was thoughtful beyond his sex. What an excellent husband he would make poor Sydney! Mrs. Alwyn felt quite a glow of regard for him, pleasant fellow that he was! She took his arm affectionately, with "That would do! That would do!" "amply," she was on the point of saying, but substituted, "as I should contrive it." There was no need to arm Rupert with the notion that he was acting very liberally. She preferred the obligation to rest with her. So she concluded, "And I will arrange that other point, Rupert, and take pains to settle it speedily, as you wish."

"Thanks, very much." It took a load off his mind, and he could add with quite a cool air, "Of course you see why it is so desirable."

"Perfectly" ("Hang it, I hope not! thought the gentleman.") "And now if we are to dine at eight, I think it time we went indoors, Rupert."

He took off his straw hat with "Then au revoir, mamma!"—and profoundly contented with the compact just concluded, went gayly into the house, up to his own room three steps at a time, singing "Love in the eyes sits playing" so lustily over his quarter of an hour's dressing that the perched sparrows outside had a chance of beauty-sleep till he had descended to the drawing-room in the evening garb which, is he might believe the testimony of many mirrors invested him with his most gentlemanly and attractive exterior.

"Sydney not come!" he said, impatiently, on entering, and Leonora the one occupant of the apartment, replied, rather sarcastically—for though all this exaltation of Sydney was needful means to a desirable end, she was getting thoroughly tired of it—"No, actually not here yet, poor poor Rupert. So you must wait a little longer before you can verify the charming ditty you have been waking up the echoes with so melodiously."

"Laughing at me!" said Mr. Villiers, seating himself by his faithful cousin. The characteristics of kinship were strong between these two. He could play upon her moods as readily as she upon her cottage piano. "And when she knows how keenly sensitive I am to feminine ridicule. Cruel, very! But, Norah, my dear—pardon!"—as the young lady stiffened her rounded figure warningly—"I should say 'my dear Norah,' that's correct enough for cousins, isn't it?—remember two can indulge in these playful pleasantries. Permit me to inquire who may be the 'te' associated with the 'mo' in the strains I had the happiness of listening to just now. Such impassioned vocalization signifies something individual, not general. Benignly enlighten me, dear coz."

"Nonsense!" said Leonora, a smile belying a frown.  
 "Now had that 'te' anything to do with a clerical act of nobility? A gentleman in a soft wide-awake, who walked up from the village with you this morning?"  
 "Silence, Rupert!"  
 "And who had something so serious to discuss before separating, it in-

olved five minutes' conversation, deliberation, and blushes!"

"Really, Rupert, this is intolerable! If I had known you were playing the spy—"

"Hard names, hard names, young people! Now what's amiss?" This was Mrs. Alwyn's question as she came rustling in.

"Nothing very bad, Aunt Helen. Only Leonora perversely declines to tell me what absorbed her and Mr. Duvesne this morning. And I consider that, as a near relative, I ought to know it."

"Then, most inquisitive of men," cried Leonora, her mother listening carefully, while pretending to laugh, "hear and believe! Mr. Duvesne was asking my opinion about the hangings of a room."

"Innocent enough," said Mrs. Alwyn.

"That depends, Aunt Helen. What room, Cousin Norah?"

"Curiosity—your name is Rupert Villiers!" cried the young lady, nothing loathing to be pushed to the extremity of confession. "It was a—morning-room; the pretty west one you noticed, mamma, when the rectory was building. Mr. Duvesne's study is just the opposite side of the vestibule."

"Eh! Et lui! H'm! 'Pour moi—our toi!' hummed Mr. Villiers, mischievously. "And what color wished 'he,' and what color counseled you, Cousin Norah?"

"Rupert, you are too absurd. Mr. Duvesne fancied pale pink, but I aid at once that would go very badly with—"

"Squirrel-colored hair!" audaciously flicking at her much-be-curled tresses.

"Pshaw! With the yellow-red of sunset, Mr. Villiers. They mix most horribly. So I suggested pale blue, and Mr. Duvesne—"

"Coincided, of course! And right

you are, Norah. Blue for you blondes you know, all the world over!"

"Mamma, silence him! Tell him such badinage is very vulgar. It must be put a stop to. Positively I can't listen to it any longer!" cried Leonora, getting up with a maidenly display of affront.

"Well, here comes something to re-lease you," said Mrs. Alwyn. "I heard wheels turning in at the gate, think."

Instantly Mr. Villiers was out and into the hall. His aunt followed more leisurely. Leonora was deserted with a suspicious pout on her full lips and keen desire burning within her that er time to command such devoted lacry might be nigh.

The spirit of fun animating Mr. Villiers the minute before was put to the right-about as he hastened to the porch, first to assist Sydney in descending from the cab which had brought her home. His attitude was ertection for the occasion; a mixture of tender deference and lover-like impatience calculated to set the stamp of surrender to himself on the "impressionable" nature of his nearly betrothed. But whether absence had had its proverbial effect, and whether the wonder-working little god were enthroned in his lady's eyes, the anxious gentleman was unable at once to judge. Sydney kept her glance nervously averted. Nor would she suffer him, as he desired, to clasp her fingers for a moment in the porch.

Instead, she loosed his arm, and went quickly to her mother, meeting her cool, self-contained welcome with a tremulous embrace that held un-speakable depth of deprecation and emotion. So monstrous to the girl's generous instincts had seemed the harsh judgment of her mother's do-ings to which her first passionate outburst of humiliated pain had driven her, that now, as cheek lay to cheek, she felt a very Judas, yet,

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somehow, sorrier for her mother than herself—her mother, after all!

Mrs. Alwyn was quick to mark disturbing signs, which she set down to weariness.

"I was very wrong," she said, "to let you take that journey in three days. You are tired, Sydney?"

"Dreadfully."

"You did not rest as you ought the day between."

"Rest! Oh, no, mamma." The notion was so grotesque. Coming atop the long strain of cheerfulness kept up perforce before Mrs. Dacie, it fetched for answer a little cry, half laughter, near tears. A single soft syllable would have plunged Sydney into the yet unknown regions of hysteria. But from such weakness her mother's promptitude shielded her.

"Ah! you are like all young people—not to be trusted out alone. Here, Phillips, take Miss Alwyn's bag up stairs, and help her to dress. Posting about in this way, you have had no regular meals, of course. Be quick down to dinner, my dear. We waited for you."

"Must I come—" Sydney began.

"Most certainly you must," Mrs. Alwyn broke in. And, conscious that she must spend no strength on skirmishes, but save all for the battle royal close upon her, Sydney gave in; wearily changed traveling-clothes for a dress that matched her pale face, and re-appeared to endure the ceremonial of four courses, with the best semblance of appetite she could command.

But it was not a successful dinner. Leonora at one end of the table, looked, as she felt, petulant. Mrs. Alwyn, having made careless inquiry for Mrs. Dacie, dropped the journey and its object altogether, bestowing her spare minutes in lady-like vituperation of the Hedyngham fishmonger, who had sent an inferior cut of salmon to that ordered.

(To be Continued.)

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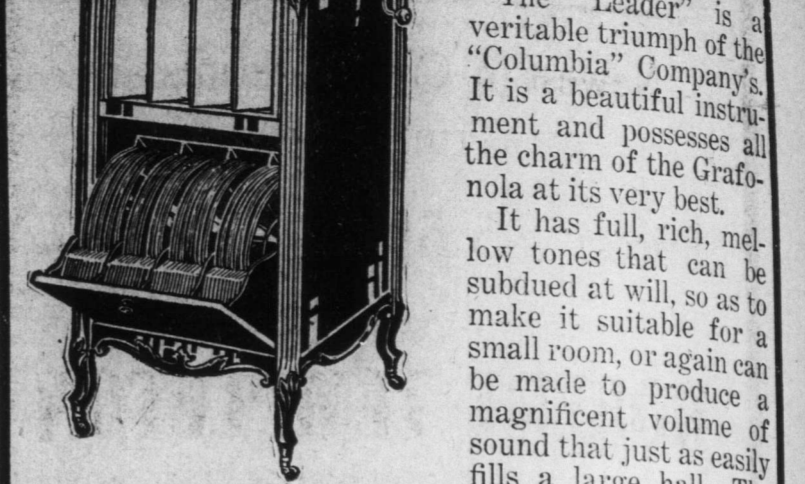
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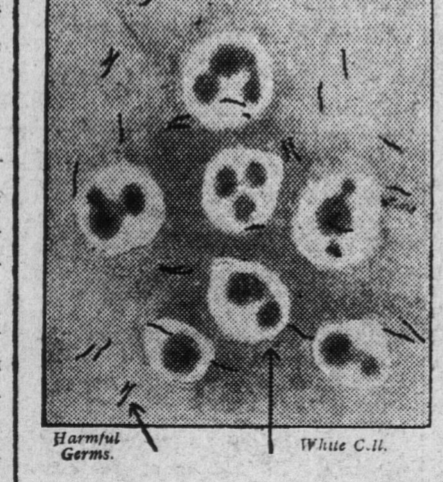
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6 "	15
9 "	53
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