

A WILD PROXY.

BY MRS. W. K. OLIFFORD.

(Continued.)

'Of course,' said Merreday when he was consulted the next morning. 'Train from Victoria to Dover, stay there. can't sweep your bride along as if she were a locust cloud. Next morning cross to Calais, lunch at the buffet on cold chicken and overcharge, go on to Paris: a little quiet hotel in the Rue St. Roch, affected by the retiring and intellectual. Three days there, drive her to the Bois, and tire her out at the Louvre; but she won't show it, being newly married and anxious to live up to you. Then on to Lucerne—scenery and solitude, if you can get the latter in Switzerland, or St. G. thard, if you want to go to the Italian lakes. Marseilles, of course, if you like; but you will find it grilling; in that case take train at Paris down France, lunch at Fontainebleau, sentiment in the forest: on to Dijon, and stay. This will give an historical interest to your honeymoon, for at Dijon they have a monument to the one trophy taken by the French in the German war; it was taken by Garibaldi's son in a fog, but that is no matter. On to Avignon, palaces of the Popes and the River, then to Marseilles, old port, Cannegiore, and high salutin'. Crawl along the edge of the Mediterranean to Genoa. Let's look up the trains at once.'

'We can do that later at Paris.'

'I mean the train on the day. Now, then, here's Bradshaw. Victoria, that's the best way to Dover—4.30, that's about the time for you—fast train. Dover 6.42, loads of time for dinner.'

'Yes, that'll do very well, let me look,' said Halstead, and he made a note of the time.

'Good Lord,' thought Merreday, 'he can't even remember the time of that train going without putting it down', and then he went on aloud, 'I'll arrange you comfortably, old man, get your tickets, register your luggage half an hour before, drop a line to the Lord Warden and to the Paris hotel for rooms—it makes things more leisurely as you go along, and I pride myself on turning my man off neatly. I have ordered a bouquet for Nell.'

'I'm so glad you thought of calling her Nell; it suits her better than Helen.'

'Of course it does,' Merreday answered. 'Besides, you don't want to feel as if you were an ancient Greek going about with a future statue. I put her up to calling you Lal too, and lots of other things; told her to treat you with a little less reverence: I believe she thinks matrimony a new religion, she takes you so respectfully. Now, if she were engaged to me—'

'But you see she's not,' said Halstead, a little distantly.

'Rather a pity for her,' thought Merreday; she would find it more lively if she were. 'What are you going to give her for a wedding present. Made up your mind?'

'No, I've not thought of it yet.'

'By George! talk of being engaged, you behave as if you hadn't even been christened; how you are going to get married I don't know. Rather wish you hadn't been in such a hurry. I thought of proposing to her myself.'

'Perhaps she wouldn't have had you,' said Halstead, who didn't much like this sort of a joke. 'I thought you were rather inclined that way when you sent those flowers.'

So they hurried on. 'Well, you ought to be proud of her.'

'I am.'

'May the Lord reward you for it, said Merreday, solemnly. Then he continued: 'I'm going down to my banker now. By the way, you'll want some circular notes for Thursday for this precious honeymoon of yours.' He walked down Grosvenor Place thinking. 'It's lucky for him that he's marrying a girl of twenty; she would have found him pretty slow if she'd been five years older, I can tell him.' He hailed a hansom and drove on. 'I believe he was jealous at my liking Nell. I wish I could wake him up, what a lark it would be.' A little bitterness came into his heart. He was arranging everything, he was in uproarious spirits, and enjoying himself immensely, but all the time he knew that had the chance been given him he could have loved his cousin's *fiancée* better than he would ever love any other woman on earth, and to have married her—the very thought of it made his heart leap. Well, it didn't matter, he would laugh it out to the end. 'But, my God! if she'd been mine!' and he ground his teeth. 'She will find life a little more cut and dried with him than she would have found it with me.'

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Lambert was not very well on the wedding day. He managed to give the bride away and to sit by her at the *déjeuner*; but afterwards he crept away to lie down, telling Helen to come and see him before she started on her wedding journey. For the rest it was a glorious day: the sun blazed, the air was still, and all Queen's Gate was pleasantly excited. The bridegroom looked tall and picturesque as he stood by the altar rails. Now and then looking down the aisle he gave a little dreamy nod to someone he knew that made half a church full of hearts beat quicker. Merreday was wilder than ever, though he managed to look discreetly grave as he

stood by Halstead's side whispering ridiculous directions. 'When the bride comes,' he said, 'you advance a step to meet her. Some bridegrooms kiss their bride's hand, but this is often very embarrassing, for she may be holding her veil as well as carrying her bouquet. But he always whispers something appropriate when she arrives. It must only be one word—'darling,' for instance, or 'sweetest,' by which time the bridesmaids will have advanced. If you can't speak because you feel like an idiot, just keep your eyes turned down on her, that rounds off the moment before the parson begins. The seventeenth man I saw through at this business said 'golly' when his bride appeared, but it wasn't a success.'

'I shall say something to you soon that will amaze you——' began Halstead.

'She is coming and she looks splendid,' Merreday whispered excitedly; 'walks like an empress. If you'd only drop down dead, Lal, I'd cover up your corpse and marry her in a moment before she found out the difference.'

'On, if your gabble would cease,' Halstead exclaimed in a whisper. Luckily circumstances obliged it to do so.

Lal looked at his bride half in wonder as they drove back to the house, and kissed the edge of her veil.

'I can't believe it yet,' he said; 'it seems too good to be true.'

Weddings are much alike; and this one showed no difference.

'You must leave here at four,' Merreday said—he had sobered down a little by this time—and you'll be in heaps of time. I shall get there half-an-hour before to register the luggage and secure you a compartment to yourselves, and then my offices as best man come to an end.'

'Thank God,' thought Halstead.

He was at Victoria by a quarter to four. He registered the luggage, took the tickets, and secured the carriage.

'The train is altered to day, sir,' said the porter. 'July 1st, it goes now at 4.20.'

'By Jove!' thought Merreday, 'it will be a pretty business if they don't come in time. They would have to dangle round for an hour, and that idiot Lal would look bored, as he did just now. I wonder if he'll fall asleep in the train. I'll bet he buys a couple of evening papers.'

He went outside the station, but there was not a sign of them. Back to the platform, and up and down by the bookstall.

'Oh! Nell, Nell,' he muttered, 'to think you are going off with that lukewarm dreamer, who will never love you as he should.'

It was a quarter past four.

'My stars! they are late,' his wild spirits flashed back with a sudden desire to do something startling, 'I wish I could bolt with her and leave him gasping. Lord! how they would stand stock-still with astonishment.'

He laughed aloud at even the thought of it, and his eyes danced with mischief.

Eighteen minutes past four: he was getting excited.

Suddenly he saw them appear through one of the entrances. They were talking excitedly together, and looked flustered and hurried, as if something had happened. He rushed forward.

'Here, Frank,' said Halstead, 'take charge of Nell for a moment; there's been a collision outside. We were nearly smashed up. I fear the coachman is badly hurt; I must see to him for a moment.'

In a moment he had gone.

Nell crossed to Merreday. There was a soft grey wrap over her arm, a little bunch of roses in her hand. She looked enchanting; a mad idea flashed through him; but he fought it.

'Stay,' he said, putting his hand on her arm. 'Stay where you are for a moment, I must go after him. You'll lose your train. There's hardly a moment.'

He left her standing on the platform, and rushed after Lal. There was a crowd outside. Halstead was there, calmly giving directions. With almost frantic despair Merreday seized his arm.

'Never mind these people; come away,' he said.

'Wait a bit,' Lal answered calmly, 'I wish you'd stay with Nell.'

'Never mind anything that has happened here,' Merreday entreated, trying to ward off the fiend that was whispering to him, 'You'll be late, come away.' Halstead pulled out his watch and looked at it. It was a last straw.

'I must see to this poor chap,' he said slowly, there are eleven minutes before the train goes, I'll be there in five. Go and take care of Nell.'

'Come now,' Merreday said, desperately once more.

'No,—in five minutes; go to Nell.'

'I will,' the other answered, between his teeth, 'the gods have decreed it. Without another word he turned and ran back to the platform. She was waiting. He seized her hand, and as he did so the scent of the roses she carried swept across his face: that remembrance stayed with him forever afterwards.

'Come,' he said, excitedly; 'it's all right. I'll explain,' and still holding her hand, he ran with her through the barrier, which was closed with a bang behind them—along the platform, and almost pushed her into the carriage he had secured.

'Oh, but Lal——,' she cried, in astonishment, all but jumping out again, but Merreday prevented her.

'It's all right. He's coming,' he said. 'I'll explain,' and jumped in. As he entered, the train started. He leant out of the window, and beckoned a porter.

LOOKED LIKE A SKELETON.

GENTLEMEN, Last summer my baby was so bad with summer complaint that he looked like a skeleton. Although I had not much faith in it, I took a friend's advice and tried Dr. Fowlers Extract of Wild Strawberry. He soon got better. I truly believe it saved his life.

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