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The Romance of a Marriage.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Fathers of families squatted on the beach and read the papers or threw stones into the sea; loving couples paced under the low cliff or sat—very close to each other—in the shrubberies, white-capped nurse-maids shrieked shrilly, in French, to their charges; the invalids came out in their bath-chairs and sunned themselves; dapper little soldiers sauntered by, twisting their moustaches and ogling the nurse-maids; portly ladies dawdled along the parade with fat pugs panting behind them; in short, the day, with all its humours, had begun, and seated in a shady nook just off the parade, sat Paula and Alice looking silently on.

Alice, dressed with exquisite taste, and carefully sheltered by a pink-lit sunshade, leans back, a yellow-covered French novel in her hand, her eyes, half-contemptuous air of amusement which used to irritate poor Bob.

It might be eleven weeks instead of eleven months for all the change in her fair face. Placid, serene, superior, she looks just as she looked that day at the picnic to Sir Wolfert's tomb, just as she will look, happen what may, ten years hence.

Beside her sits Paula—our Paula. There is no French novel in her hand, no sunshade to screen her face from the soft glare. She, too, sits looking on, but it is a question whether she sees anything save the great blue sea that stretches to the horizon.

With her hands clasped loosely in her lap, she is lost in thought, unconscious of the ever-moving throng, of the humours of the crowd, unconscious of the promenaders, especially of those of the male sex, who glance, and sometimes stare at the beautiful face, so fixed and rapt, and wonder who and what she is.

Beautiful we have written, and ad-

visedly, for Paula's beauty has grown and developed in these eleven months into a distinct loveliness, which all who look upon it, save herself, acknowledge and confess.

Even Alice, who once professed to think slightly of the red hair and freckled, sunburnt complexion, has grown to admit—to herself and reluctantly—that Paula "has improved." Is obliged to admit that the glances of the passers-by, while they pass over her face, linger on Paula's, and leave it with slow reluctance.

The red hair has grown into a more decided golden bronze, the dark eyes have gained an intenser, deeper hue, the red lips, that used to curve with ready laughter, have acquired, all unconsciously, a new and strange charm in their expression of meditation.

"An air of repose suits Paula," Alice says to intimate friends: "She looks at her best when she is silent and thinking of—nothing. Oh, yes, my sister is very good-looking, and if she would but exert herself—"

And she shrugs her white shoulders and smiles.

But Paula is all unconscious; she does not exert herself, because she does not find anything worth exerting herself about.

Neither the present nor the future have any hold upon her; she is living in the past—living in it so entirely that it is scarcely the past to her. It is only when a letter comes from Bob—it is always sent to her, not to Alice—that she awakes and takes a part in life. And yet she does not wear the willow. The smile comes to her lips many a time and oft, and at times, when moved by some of the humours of the crowd, she can laugh. Then those who hear her, declare that laughter suits her best, and wonder why she wears that rapt, far-away look which, try as they will, they cannot sometimes dispel.

Nouvelle is interested in them; Nouvelle is easily interested, by the way. By the gay young sparks, that dawdle on the parade and frequent the billiard-rooms and casino, they are called the sisters, and many an attempt has been made to gain an introduction and admittance to the little villa on the cliff where they lodge, in company of the stiff old lady who plays the part of dragon and propriety.

But it is difficult to gain an introduction, more difficult still to obtain an invitation. It is understood that the young ladies wish to remain in retirement, that they are abroad for their health, though Paula is sunburnt and the picture of robustness, and Alice looks as fresh and blooming as a pink rose.

"How the people stare," says Alice, shifting her sunshade, but not so as to conceal her pretty face.

"Do they?" says Paula, indifferently, her eyes still fixed on the sea. "It is their way—they can't help it any more than they can help having their photographs taken or sucking tooth-picks. If it were not for the photographs and the toothpicks, I am convinced that the gilded youth who favour Nouvelle with their splendid presence would expire."

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Alice yawns behind her faintly laced handkerchief.

"How hot it is!" she says, languidly. "I should like to bathe. Will you come?"

Paula glances at the bathers disappearing in the water with a faint smile.

"No, thanks; it is a little—slightly—too public for me. I had my bath before breakfast."

"What nonsense!" says Alice, peevishly; "everybody bathes here in the middle of the day. Why should you object?"

"I don't—to everybody doing it," says Paula, "so long as I am not included. Of course they bathe in the middle of the day. What would be the use of the pretty costumes—which always remind me of a trapeze performer—if there were no one to see them? Look at that fat French woman in the blue-striped costume! Isn't she exactly like a tight-rope dancer?"

Alice smiles languidly.

"I hope I don't look like that," she says, with a little simper.

"Exactly; only not quite so much so," says Paula calmly. "But you needn't mind, as you say everybody does it; all the English girls, even that quiet family on the cliff over there. I wonder what they would say if you asked them to cut the same appearance at Brighton? Be shocked to death. It's a strange world; what is improper on one side of the Channel becomes quite proper on the other. Go and put on your trapeze suit and bathe, Alice, and I will remain to watch, wonder, and admire."

Alice looks up at her not too amiably, shrugs her shoulders.

"You are a singular girl, my dear," she says; "I wish you weren't quite so prudish."

Paula laughs—a quiet, indifferent laugh.

"Am I prudish?" she says. "I didn't know it. What does it matter? What does anything matter?" And she laughs.

Alice looks at her from under her half-closed eyes.

"Paula, my dear," she says, "you have got into a bad habit of regarding the world as—as—"

"As played out," says Paula. "Don't be shocked! That is an Americanism I heard one of your friends use the other evening. Have I? I am very sorry; and yet it's a stupid kind of world, and does seem rather exhausted."

"Because you can't have everything you want," says Alice, with a dash of colour; "because a certain individual who shall be nameless has chosen to be true to his character and played the traitor; because you choose to cherish the memory of that worthless individual, and waste your life thinking of him, when you might have made yourself and—and everybody happy by taking someone else. I wish Sir Herrick Powis had been at the bottom of the sea before you set your eyes on him!"

Paula's face grows pale, and her eyes gleam in the strange way that has become habitual to them of late; but she smiles.

"Do you want me to be a mermaid?" she says, with fine irony. "I should have to have been, you know, if I had been compelled to go to the bottom of the sea to see him."

"Pshaw!" says Alice, impatiently. "Paula, my dear, you are wasting your life! And all for a man not worth a thought. I shall go and bathe."

Fashion Plates.

Paula laughs, moved neither to anger nor impatience.

"Do," she says, "or I shall think you are wasting your morning. Leave me your novel; is it very interesting?"

"Yes," says Alice, sweetly. "It is about a stupid girl who refuses a good part, marries a man without a penny, and lives—wretched ever afterwards." And she drops the yellow-coloured novel on the seat, and walks off.

Paula picks up the book and turns the pages, but does not attempt to follow the fortunes of the "stupid" heroine, and presently she has the pleasure of seeing Alice, dressed in a light-fitting bathing-suit, bobbing up and down in the water in company with the others.

She sits and stares out to see absent, the book in her hand; the gilded youth pass her by and stare, after their kind, and the fat, middle-aged ladies, with the panting pugs, pass and stare after their kind; and but unnoticed by the girl, who sits gazing into the past, and regardless of the future.

Presently a bath-chair comes slowly along the parade, and stops close by the bench.

Paula is quite unconscious of its proximity for a minute or so; but her attention is attracted to it by hearing a voice say, "How hot and tired I am!"

The voice is singularly musical—so youthful and yet so weary—that it penetrates to Paula's heart, and she turns her head to see whence it comes. She sees, just at the side of her, a bath-chair, propelled by the usual bent and wooden-faced man, who stands and wipes his face, glad of a rest, and accompanied by a woman who is evidently the maid of the occupant of the chair.

Paula looks from one to the other absent; then her glance falls upon the principal figure—a fair-haired, delicate-looking girl, whose blue eyes, fixed wearily upon the sea, seem, though they do not look at her, to go to Paula's heart.

She sits and gazes with reluctant interest, struggling against a strange, unnatural fascination.

It is not the beauty of the face, though it is beautiful enough in all conscience; it is not the palpable delicacy of the dazzling complexion, with its hectic flush, which tells its pathetic story all too plainly; it is—she scarcely can explain all in a moment what it is that attracts her; but with all her old impetuosity she picks up the sunshade, which has lain by her side disregarding, and moving, half-rising, along the bench, says:

"Will you have my sunshade? You are quite unsheltered."

The girl does not start, but turns the weary, blue eyes upon her with a questioning gaze, half-surprised, half-pleading, and the two, the one so frail and feeble, the other so full of youth, strength, and vitality, look at each other.

"Take my sunshade," says Paula again, and in her direct fashion. "The sun is hot this morning."

The girl puts out a white, thin hand, upon which the blue veins are as distinct as if they had been pencilled.

(To be Continued.)

"Now, Gerald, I hope you are not going to marry a mere parlor ornament. In other words, I hope the girl you have selected is a girl who can do something." "She's that all right. Why, that girl can roll a cigarette better than I can."

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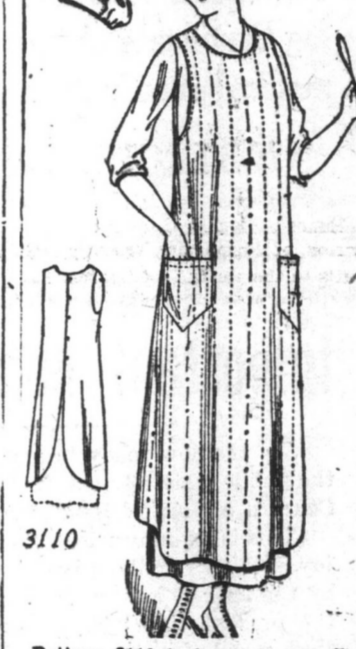


Pattern 3109 here illustrated is cut in 3 Sizes: 16, 18, and 20 years. For the 18 years size, 5½ yards of 44 inch material will be required.

Duvelyn, serge, taffeta, satin, poplin, crepe and crepe de chine would be attractive for this model. Blue duvelyn with pipings of beige, and collar and cuffs embroidered in colored worsted is smart for this. The width of the skirt at lower edge with plaits extended is 1½ yard.

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