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**The Romance
OF A
Marriage.**

CHAPTER XIX.

"Thanks, thanks, well, Miss Alice, I need scarcely say that I am going to speak to you about my nephew, my dear Rick, and your charming sister."

Alice's head droops shyly.

"Of course," says the major, "I am in the dear boy's confidence. Rick and I have no secrets from each other."

"Haven't you?" thinks Alice; but she murmurs, innocently: "Of course not."

"Rick's happiness has been the sole aim and object of my life," continues the major, with a pathetic ring in his admirably arranged voice.

"Next to your own," is Alice's mental comment.

"My sole aim and object; of course this little confession of his has taken me by surprise, though," waxing eloquent, and pressing Alice's arm, "when I saw the dear child, with her bewitching face, and that glory of hair which—when the painter and—ahem!—the poet, alike would combine to laud, I say that when I saw her my surprise was considerably lessened. Ah, my dear Miss Alice, how all-powerful is love; what an exquisite picture two fondly beating hearts present to this—or—view of humanity."

"Yes, indeed, yes," murmurs Alice, wondering what the astute and fox-like old gentleman is leading up to.

"I say," says the major, letting his eyes wander over the scene in an absent, contemplative manner, but nevertheless managing to keep Alice's face in sight—"I say that nothing is more touching and more beautiful. One's heart instinctively melts at such a spectacle, and one is deaf to the promptings of worldly prudence."

There is silence for a moment, while the major heaves a sentimental sigh, and dries an imaginary tear from the extreme corner of his eye; then he says, still softly, but with a dangerous suddenness:

"Of course you are aware that my dear Rick is to speak bluntly, next door to a pauper!"

Alice starts, and looks up at the impassive face with a side glance out of her innocent, blue eyes.

"I don't think my brother—"

The major smiles.

"My dear, your rebuke, so delicately conveyed, is greatly deserved. I am aware that I ought to talk the matter over with your excellent brother; but—may I do not flatter—I feel that it is under your watchful care that our dear Miss Paula has—er—budded and blossomed, so to speak, and it is to you I address myself in this most confidential little chat."

"Dear Paula!" murmurs Alice. "Of course, I have her happiness at heart, and though I am, unfortunately, so young myself—"

The major pats her hand.

"My dear," he says, drily, "you are a young and a beautiful girl"—pause—"and a clever one."

Alice starts, and a swift gleam comes into her eyes.

"What is it you wish to say to me, Major Vericourt?" she says in quite a different tone.

"Just simply the plain, straightforward truth, my dear," retorts the major.

"Then—then you have withheld your consent to my sister's engagement with Sir Herrick Powis?" says Alice.

"Not at all—not at all!" murmurs the major, always, be it remembered, speaking in the softest, most musical of voices. "Not at all."

"I don't understand," says Alice, her brows knitting delicately.

"The major smiles down at her.

"Withhold my consent, my dear! Where would be the use of that? No; I gave it after a time."

"Then—then you consent to their marriage?" says Alice.

"By no means," murmurs the major. "Be patient with me, Miss Alice. Here is the plain truth: My nephew is something a little better than a pauper, and will remain so unless he becomes my heir—which he will do if he behaves like a sensible young fellow and not like an inspired idiot."

From any other lips this language would be blunt to offensiveness; but from the major's gentle, curved ones, and accompanied by his most insinuating smile, they tell upon Alice's ears and cause nothing but a feeling of intense curiosity as to what is coming next.

"And he would be an idiot if he married my sister, I suppose?" she says, smiling up at him.

"Did I not say you were a clever girl?" he says, "My dear," patting her arm, and looking down at her admiringly, "I adore genius. You are genius, I was not mistaken in my estimate of your intellectual superiority to the run of young girls. I said, 'Here is a really clever girl. I will place myself in her hands, unreservedly and completely. And I intend doing so. Now see, my dear; here is poor Rick, the last of an old and impoverished race, with a duty before him—I need not say that of restoring the fortunes of his fallen family. Here he is, and here am I, ready and anxious to help him, when, lo and behold! he falls in love with—just the most charming little piece of rusticity that I ever saw; she is indeed charming, the dear Miss Paula. Would to Heaven that, in addition to her youth and beauty, Fortune had dowered her with that baser gift which, alas! the sordid world holds above even youth and beauty!"

"You mean that if Paula had been an heiress—"

"My dear child," murmurs the major, admiringly, "you put it in a nutshell."

"Then—then, why did you consent?" says Alice.

The major looks at her.

"Because if I had not, it could have made no difference; yes, indeed it would; my poor, infatuated Rick would have gone off and got married, and no one would have been any the wiser, until it was too late!"

It is Alice's time to smile now, and she does so. With the sweetest smile, she raises her eyes.

"Oh, no," she murmurs. "Someone would—I should. Dear Major Vericourt, you forget that I am dear Paula's watchful guardian, and—I shouldn't let her marry a pauper, even though he were a baronet and as handsome as Sir Herrick."

The major raises her hand to his lips in an ecstasy of admiration.

"My dear young lady!" he exclaims, "Most admirably put, beautifully put, I feel indeed that we know each other. But all the same, you don't know Rick as well as I do. Ever since he was a boy in knickerbockers, opposition at ways had the effect of driving him to desperation. Opposition in this case would lead to the most disastrous result, and certainly wouldn't stop the marriage."

"Which must be prevented?" says Alice, simply.

"Yes, yes!" he murmurs.

"Poor Paula!" says Alice, with a little, smiling sigh.

"Tut, tut!" mutters the major, patting her hand.

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"Pray speak it," says Alice, rather ironically.

"Well, I will," says the major, turning to her. "Look at me, my dear. You see only an ugly old man. Yes, yes," for Alice smiles and shakes her head. "But I tell you I am quite a prophet, and, unlike most prophets, a very lucky one. My prophecies generally come true, for the simple reason that I make them. Now, shall I prophesy?"

"Do," says Alice, leaning back, but still watching him.

"Well, then," he says, patting the gold top to his stick, and keeping time to his soft voice, "I prophesy that before very long, even in the very midst of their foolish little billing, and cooing, something will come to pass that will put an end to it. You mustn't ask me what the something is, because I couldn't tell you. But mind, I rely upon you to help me when it does come."

Alice nods.

"Please go on."

"Well, then, our dear little child will be very sorry—one knows how a child will cry over a lost toy, does not one? It is very sad, very touching, I declare I could cry myself at the sight of their little woe; but they soon forget it, so very soon! And our dear child will forget it."

"And the toy?" asks Alice, coolly.

"The toy—meaning Rick!" says the major in his most charmingly frank manner. "Oh! he will cut up very rough for a time—very rough, indeed; and then—then he will come to his senses, and come back and do what his good uncle—meaning myself, my dear—wishes him."

"I suppose," says Alice, gently, "that one must not enquire what that may be?"

"My dear, I'll tell you at once!" exclaims the major, opening out his arms as if he would reveal the innermost secrets of his heart to her. "I will be candid myself! In a word, he will come back and marry the daughter of our genial and worthy friend the sugar-baker."

Alice stares, and then she leans back and laughs softly.

"Why do you tell me all this?" she says, eyeing him curiously.

The keen smile curves the thin lips of the man of the world.

"Because I have more to tell, my dear," he says, "and I want your help. Do you see? I say to myself, 'This young lady is too clever and brilliant to be made a tool of—you see how frankly I speak!'—she must be a confederate in our little scheme, and a partner."

Alice inclines her head.

"I ought to be either very angry or very flattered," she says.

"My dear, be neither. I give you my word I don't flatter you. I am—if you'll allow me to say so—also clever, at any rate, too clever to flatter you! No; there must be no 'secrets' between us."

Alice thinks a moment.

"Poor Paula! Isn't it rather hard, major?"

"Hard! To save her from marrying a pauper baronet when she might be Mrs. Stancy de Palmer."

**Fashion
Plates.**

A HOUSE DRESS FOR MATURE FIGURES.



2842—This is a good style for a work dress, but equally suitable for porch wear. Percale, gingham, linen, lawn, repp, poplin, and seersucker, are desirable materials for this design. The sleeve may be in wrist or shorter length.

The Pattern is cut in 7 sizes: 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46 and 48 inches bust measure. Size 38 requires 4 1/2 yards of 44 inch material. Width of skirt at lower edge, is about 2 1/4 yards.

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The Pattern is cut in 4 sizes: Small, 32-34; Medium, 36-38; Large, 40-42; Extra Large, 44-46 inches bust measure. Size Medium requires 4 1/4 yards of 36 inch material, with 1 1/4 yards of banding, 2 1/4 inch wide, for neck and front.

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He says this looking full into her blue eyes, and his lips curve as he sees the flash of light that comes into them, and the pallor that smites her face at his words.

For a moment Alice sits, white and struggling with her embarrassment, when she looks at him.

"No, I cannot complain of your want of frankness," she says, with a catch in her breath. "And you think your prophecy will come true?"

"I am sure of it—if you will help me," he says, nodding. "At any cost, Rick must be safe from the marriage; the safest way is to marry our dear Paula. Believe me, she will make our friend Mr. Stancy de Palmer a most admirable wife. He would not suit everyone; he is not, if I may say so, either clever or brilliant—just the husband for a dear child like your sister."

Alice smiles.

"Really," she says, "it is so nice to hear you dispose of people's future that one almost regrets one is not included in the catalogue. Will you not prophesy for me?"

"Give me your hand," he says; and taking off her glove, she holds her palm upwards.

"Yes," he says, "I can. I see a young and beautiful creature, gifted with a brilliant intellect, and passing away in a quiet country place, drifting into a match with a man who is not worthy of her in any way. Then there comes across the scene an ugly old man who says to this beautiful, brilliant creature, 'Stop, while there's time. You were born to grace the great world, to shine in a better sphere than the society of country squires: you the queen of many a salon. You marry the son of a sugar-baker! With your gifts, natural and acquired, you should— you shall— marry a coronet! And I, an ugly old prophet, will help you to it!'"

White, breathless, but still forcing a smile, Alice listens. A cold, ambitious light gleams in her hard, blue eyes. Already, in fancy, she feels that same coronet pressing on her brow.

The major finishes, his last words dying away almost in a whisper, his keep eyes fixed on her face, while a cynical smile curves his thin lips.

With an effort Alice raises her eyes to his face and laughs.

(To be continued.)

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The cherry, the peach, and the plum all originally come from Persia.

The lemon tree is very fruitful and much more hardy than the orange tree.

In some parts of Africa dates form the main food of the natives, their huts are composed chiefly of the leaves, the fibre of the leaf-stalk is employed in rope-making, and from the sap is obtained an intoxicating drink.

Raisins are rich in sugar, and it is this property that makes them serviceable to the manufacturer of wine. The bunches intended for table use are sometimes dipped in water upon which swims a layer of olive oil. This makes the skins soft and gives them a glossy lustre.

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