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The Romance of a Marriage.

CHAPTER XI.

"No, no!" says Paula in a strained voice. "It is quite true; I never—she shudders—I never loved him. How could I?" wildly. "It was for the money; but I will pay it back. There must be some way of paying it back, I cannot—I cannot keep my word!"

"Very fine!" sneers Stancy. "Who cares for the money? Perhaps Sir Herrick will find it; though perhaps—"

"Mademoiselle at last!" says a voice, eager and excited, and the young Frenchman darts into the room with that peculiar gesture characteristic of his race.

"Mademoiselle," he says, gesticulating, then she stops and looks round. "But I intrude!"

"No, no!" says Alice, quickly. "We are just taking a rest. Is anything the matter?"

"Matter!" he echoes, shrugging his shoulders up to his ears and spreading out his hands, palms upwards. "You shall hear. Mademoiselle—with a bow to Paula, who stands regarding him with an absent stare—"was gracious enough to permit me to woe fortune in her favour—"

"Woo who?" says practical Alice, gazing at him as if he were some lunatic.

"To woo fortune," he repeats, "at the rouge-et-noir table at the saloon."

"What do you mean?" demands Alice, as politely as she can. "Has the man taken leave of his senses?"

The young fellow makes a gesture of despair. These English are so difficult of comprehension, he thinks. A Frenchwoman would have understood it all at a word.

"Mademoiselle," he said, with forced patience and elaborate distinctness, "your charming sister honoured me with her hand for a waltz. Wishing to find rest for her, I let her, all unwittingly, to the salon. There, attracted by the play, we remained spectators of the fascinating game. In a moment of—what will you call it?—idleness, I begged mademoiselle to permit me to place a stake in her name and on her behalf."

"Well?" says Alice, with ill-concealed impatience and an anxious glance at Stancy, who stands, his hands thrust into his pockets—imagine a cavalier with his hands in his pockets!—a scowl on his face. "Well, and you lost it? Everybody always does. It doesn't matter in the slightest, I assure you."

"Pardon me," he says, with a deprecatory bow, "it matters considerably. I did not lose it. I have never lost it. Here is the identical coin!"

and he takes a napoleon from his pocket and holds it out—"the identical coin. I did not lose it. I have, on the contrary, won. I have, mademoiselle, achieved the rare feat of—prostituting the bank!"

Silence profound and intense.

"What?" exclaims Alice, at last, and incredulously.

The Frenchman smiles and bows; he is calm and self-possessed by this time.

"It is true, mademoiselle. I have broken the bank. Such a run of luck has, they assure me, not been known for years. Surely, mademoiselle's gold piece was bewitched. The bank is just closed, and I have hurried away to find mademoiselle and place in her charming hands the result of her good fortune." And with a pleasant smile he takes a crushed heap of notes and gold from his breast-pocket and approaches Paula, who stands staring at him motionless and silent.

"Stop!" says Alice, with a little pant. "This—this is most extraordinary! You—you have broken the bank. Why, then you must have won—"

"Five thousand pounds," he says, calmly.

Alice sinks back into her chair, pale and agitated.

Stancy pricks up his ears, and takes his hands from his pockets.

Paula alone stands unmoved.

"Five thousand!" murmurs Alice.

"But—of course it is yours; it is not my sister's."

The young fellow flushes a deep crimson, then turns pale, and his eyes glitter.

"Mademoiselle does not mean to insult me!" he says, laying his hand on his breast and bowing low.

"Insult!" stammers Alice. "No; no; certainly not. But—but you know you won the money."

"With this coin, which mademoiselle gave me, and playing for mademoiselle alone, alone and solely," he says, distinctly. When he laughs quietly, "You need have no scruples. Were I a beggar, I should not touch one farthing of this money; it is not mine—but, in short, I have the misfortune to be rich, mademoiselle. I have"—with a shrug of his shoulders and in an apologetic tone—"I have more than I know how to do with already; therefore—calmly and with infinite dignity—"permit me to hand to you that which is yours in every sense, and to congratulate you!" and he extends the notes and gold to Paula.

She does not move, does not speak for a moment. The truth is gradually dawning upon her. The truth of this fact that she has the wherewithal to pay back the sum for which she sold herself, and he free of Stancy de Palmer's scorn.

"Mademoiselle," he says, reproachfully, "you will not refuse. See! And respectfully he takes her hand, and opening it, gently lays the heap into the white palm. Then, with a bow, he touches her fingers with his lips, and goes out.

With a gesture of relief, and a sob that seems to shake her whole frame, Paula staggers forward and extends the gold-laden hand to Stancy.

"The money! It is there!" she says, and as it falls at his feet from her unsteady grasp she tears off the jewels he has given her, and drops them also.

Then, with a low, stifling cry, she staggers and falls heavily against the pedestal.

CHAPTER XII.

"Let us get away—only let us get away!" implores Alice as she supports the motionless, lifeless figure, all glorious in its moonlight dress. "If we can only get away before a scene! Go for your father, May, and tell him to order the carriage."

For Stancy stands staring stupidly at the heap of notes and gold and the trinkets lying at his feet, as if incapable of movement.

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May hurries out, white and trembling, and Mr. Palmer comes.

"Bless my soul!" he pants, puffing; but Alice stamps her foot impatiently.

"Get the carriage," she says, curtly; "my sister has fainted. Don't lose a moment, or the crowd will come gaping round us. Where is her mask?"

And with a gentle movement she slips it on to the white face; for already several couples are stopping and peering into the dimly lit antechamber with curious eyes. There is also the beginning of the excitement which will spread through Nouvelle before the day is out—it has already dawned—the excitement which always attends the breaking of the bank. Already it has leaked out that a young French viscount has won the highest amount permitted, and that with a napoleon borrowed—so the rumour goes—from the beautiful and mysterious Moonlight.

Alice, panting a little, stands before Paula, striving to hide her from the aforesaid curious eyes, and in a fierce whisper says to Stancy:

"Keep them out! Tell them a lady has fainted in the heat, and send them away! Do you hear? Have you lost your senses?"

And she actually pushes him, stepping over the precious heap in front of him as she speaks, and covering it with her long skirts.

Stancy, roused at last, succeeds in dispersing the gathered crowd, and returns; but Alice will not let him stay.

"Don't remain here," she says, "unless you want a scene, which you will certainly get if she sees you here when she comes to. I know Paula better than you do, and she is serious—I never saw her more serious in her life."

"What have I done?" he demands, gully, eyeing the limp figure.

"Done!" retorts Alice, with a smile of impatient contempt. "Made a fool of yourself, my dear Stancy. You have just undone all the good I have striven so hard to effect. What on earth made you mention the miserable money? That was the one thing needed to drive her over the edge. She could have borne anything but that: Paula is as proud as Lucifer. It may not be too late to remedy matters, but—and she shrugs her shoulders—"you will most certainly destroy the only chance by remaining." And thus emphatically commanded, Stancy de Palmer stinks off.

It is not until he has got outside that he remembers the money, and in turning his head, he has the satisfaction of seeing Alice sweep it up and thrust it, jewels and all, into her pocket.

By the time Mr. Palmer returns to announce that the carriage is waiting, Paula has recovered. Slowly opening her eyes, she reveals the direction of her sleeping thoughts.

"Poor Rick!" she murmurs; then looking round, she starts anxiously. "Has he gone?" she murmurs, with a shudder.

"Yes—yes," says Alice.

"And are we at home? Ah, no, not yet! Why do we not go?"

"Because we can't fly through the roof," says Alice. "Oh, here is a carriage. We can't go through that crowd, Mr. Palmer."

"This way," says the young Frenchman, entering and opening a door. "This leads to a back staircase. Is mademoiselle better? I shall never forgive myself for being the cause of her discomfort." And he looks indeed heart-broken; but Paula smiles—a pale, ghostly smile—and holds out her hand to him.

"Sudden relief, sudden joy, are as overwhelming as sudden grief," she

says. "You do not know how deeply I am indebted to you."

"To imagine such a thing is happiness for me, mademoiselle," he says in his courtly way, and he conducts them down the staircase with the air of a field-stick-in-walking; Mr. Palmer follows, and Stancy dogs their heels at a discreet distance; but Alice dismisses them.

"We had better go home alone, thanks," she says. "Paula is overcome by the heat; she will get better when she is at home; and tell Stancy"—this in a whisper—"not to come to-morrow. Leave her to me."

By "to-morrow" Alice means to-day, for the morning sun is breaking through the curtains of the salon, and fighting hard with the candles and gas.

As the carriage rolls away from the entrance to the hotel, a tall figure, with its coat-collar turned up and its soft deer-stalker drawn over its brows, steps forward from the line of footmen and looks in through the window with an intense stare; then, with a bitter laugh, and something like an oath on the set lips, it turns aside towards the stairs.

As he does so a woman, who has also been watching, disentangles herself from the crowd and follows him and having tracked him to a clear space, free from observers, overtakes him, and lays her hand with respectful reluctance on his arm.

He turns and glares at her fiercely, and the sternness of his eyes does not abate, when she says in faltering accents:

"It's me—Weston—Sir Herrick!"

"Well?" he asks, curtly, impatiently. "What is it?"

"Oh, Sir Herrick," she says, timidly, yet eagerly, "I have waited for you such a long time!"

"You have waited for me?" he says, wearily, and by no means curiously.

"Yes, Sir Herrick. I saw you—we saw you go by the window this afternoon, and I thought you would be at the ball."

He frowns darkly.

"Well," he says, significantly.

"Yes, Sir Herrick. She is here, of course, or I shouldn't be. She sent me."

"For me?"

She nods hurriedly, glancing up and down the quiet street fearfully.

"Yes, Sir Herrick; she told me to wait until I saw you come out, and I have waited—nearly all the night through. I have only been back to her twice, and each time she sent me back to watch for you."

"What does she want?" he says. His one great desire, if the weariness in which his soul is steeped can leave room for desire, is to get away from Nouvelle, to get away from the place in which dwells his lost love; the girl who has sold herself to Stancy de Palmer. "What does she want?" he asks, dully.

Weston shakes her head.

"I don't know, Sir Herrick. She is much changed—quieter, I mean, and all that, and she sits for hours looking out at the sea. She didn't tell me; all she said was, 'Tell him I am ill, and if there is anything of the old Sir Herrick left in him he will come to me.'"

Sir Herrick looks down at the pavement, rosy with the rays of the rising sun.

(To be continued.)

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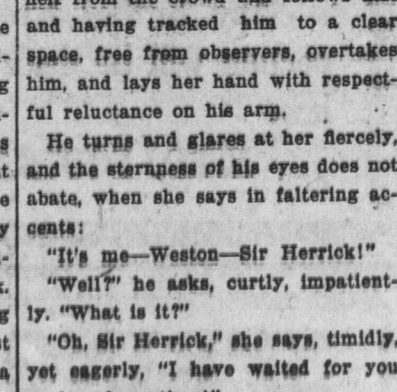


3064. White crepe de chine was chosen for this style with embroidery in blue, and "Val" lace for trimming. The style is good also for lawn, batiste, muslin, voile, crepe, satin, and silk.

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 1/2 yards of 36 inch material.

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