

## The Honeymoon

By George Randolph Chester.

And so they were married. The rain of the rice had scarcely ceased upon the roof of their carriage, and the echoes of the gay laughter behind them had scarcely died away, when Ralph Huntington turned to his bride with a boyish laugh and clasped her hand.

"At last, at last!" he breathed, and bent forward to place a kiss upon her lips.

"Wait!" she commanded, turning her face away and putting up her hand.

The man drew back, shocked.

"I must tell you something first," she went on, her voice lowered almost to a whisper and her face pale. "I feel it my duty to let you know just what you have bought."

"Bought!" he cried. "Grace!"

"Yes, bought," she answered; "purchased like any other expensive work of art. You knew this when I agreed

ried you; I paid my debt and my family's debt to you, but I have made the whole transaction plain. There is no question of false pretense between us. My conscience is clean upon that score; but since the bargain is concluded, I will be 'game,' as Lon calls it. Now, I will take your kiss," and she held up her pallid lips.

The man laughed, but the laugh was not a particularly jovial one. He had to moisten his lips before he replied to her, and there was a trace of huskiness in his voice.

"Mrs. Huntington," he replied, "the only kiss I ever bought before was at a charity fair, and I did not even then accept the goods that I had paid for. The cheek that was held out to me was a beautiful one, but, in the circumstances, it repelled me. I have never been able to see the joke in these things. They



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to marry you, although you were not told quite so plainly; but I have seen, as the days have gone by between our engagement and to-day's mockery, that you have been more and more inclined to forget it."

"I did, almost," replied the man evenly. "I hoped against hope until I almost began to believe."

"It is your own fault," she retorted. "You knew that I favored Gilbert. You knew that he had not a friend to plead his suit. You knew that he was poor, and could not afford me. You knew that every one interested in seeing that I had a luxurious future brought me lying tales of him—tried to prove him unworthy."

"Absolve me, please," the man broke in. "I never raised a voice against him."

"No, you were too clever," she charged cruelly, not caring to notice that he winced under the stroke. "Instead of that, you bought me. You helped my father out of his crisis and set him upon his feet again. You—"

"Purely in the way of business," interrupted the man. "It was no more than I might have done for any other friend of mine."

"Indeed!" she replied. "And was it purely business that made you secure my brother Will his appointment? that made you get Lon out of his college scrape? that made you—oh, your favors have been too many and too lavish to enumerate! They were part of the price you paid for me, calls upon my gratitude which I could not ignore. Well, I mar-

—they are too sacred to me; so you must continue to remain in my debt."

"And so they were married, and lived happily ever after." The old, old commonplace ending to the fairy-stories recurred to him with crushing mockery. This, then, was the end of his day-dreams; this the end of the impetuous wooing into which Grace Harding's beauty had drawn him. He knew of other marriages like this where the bargains were more coolly sealed, where the conventions were better observed and the hideous truth better glossed over, but he shuddered to think of them. This, after all, was better.

His wife presently complained of being chilly. He reflected grimly that the chill which had suddenly filled that carriage was one that no fire could drive out, but nevertheless he adjusted her wrap tenderly about her, touching her as gently as if she were some beautiful, fragile thing that must not be clumsily handled or rudely breathed upon, lest it crumble before his very eyes. He tried to be strictly impersonal, and he was almost angry with himself to find that, in spite of the cold dash she had given him, the mere touch of her garment thrilled him.

In the train his first impulse was to surround her with magazines and retire to the smoker, but even in his deep disappointment he could not forget what was due to her. With those white ribbons, tied by prankish friends to their luggage, flaunting their new estate to the world, he could not leave her to seem



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