

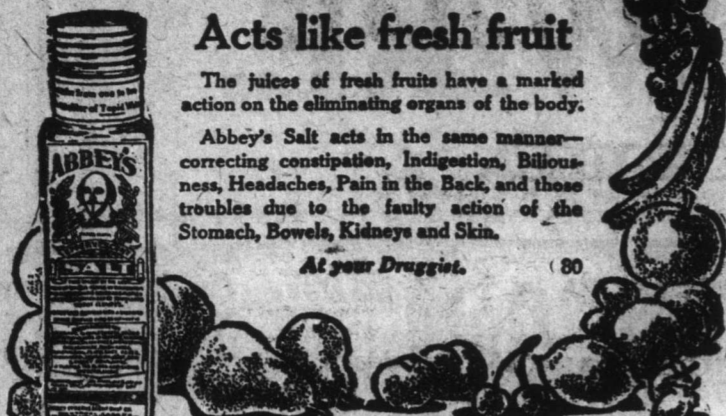
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The Romance

OF A

Marriage.

CHAPTER XXI.

These latter epistles, which, no doubt, cost their authors considerable trouble, Weston tore in two before she committed them to the vasty deep of the waste-paper basket.

This being done, the useful and accomplished Weston went to the piano and played the accompaniments to one or two songs, which Flossie tried, selecting those she liked, and singing them over and over again, sometimes jumping up and going through an appropriate action. This was her daily practice. When a new piece was in preparation, of course she had to learn her part—learn it word by word, and invent and introduce the saucy speeches and repartees of her own. No; an actress's life is not, all things considered, a particularly easy one, though at first sight it may appear so; and often Flossie's head ached, and her eyes smarted, and her throat burnt before her morning's work was finished.

But she hadn't to learn a part this morning, because "Old King Cole" was in the middle of a long run, and having practised her songs, she leaned back languidly, and looking at the morning over her shoulder, said that she thought she should go out.

As Flossie rarely, if ever, walked—she had exercised enough on the stage, you see—violent exercise, too—Weston rang the bell and ordered the victoria, and Flossie went up and changed the morning-robe for an outdoor costume, as perfect in its way as the loose dressing-gown, and selected with the finest art, and with all due reference to the state of the weather, and the light, and the place she was to drive in.

The victoria came round, and mistress and maid entered it and were driven to the park, where, falling in line with the equipages of duchesses, the plain, green carriage received instant recognition and acknowledgment.

Hats flew off the heads, smiles fell on the faces of the gentlemen lounging on the rails or strolling arm in

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arm along the path, while the man about town pointed out to his cousin from the country "the famous actress, Miss Flossie Hamilton, who had half the peerage at her feet, and drew ten thousand a year from the Frivolity." Your man about town always exaggerates a little for the country cousin.

But though Flossie smiles and nods in her pleasantest manner, there is a far-away look in her blue eyes, an absent, drooping expression on her short, curled lips.

Even when she exchanges a bantering "good-morning" gossip with Lord Fozzle, her thoughts are far away from his lordship, and presently she puts up her sunshade to cover her face, and leaning back, says:

"It all seems very stupid this evening, Weston. Let us go home; it must be nearly five o'clock."

The victoria leaves the line and rolls back to Raglan Street, and Flossie, looking a little tired, coils herself into the cosiest chair in the cosy drawing-room, and Weston—the footman never appears unless there is company—brings in an elegant set of tea-set and places it on a table by her mistress's elbow.

Five o'clock chimes in the clock on the mantel-shelf, and Flossie looks up with a laugh.

"The major will be here directly; he always comes five minutes after his time, never before or later. I wonder what he wants. Weston, I feel—did you ever feel as if anyone were walking over your grave?"

Weston laughs.

"I know what you mean, miss, what they call a presentiment."

"Yes, that's it," said Flossie, nodding her curly head. "I don't have that sort of thing often. The last time I had it was just before the failure of that piece at the Frivolity. I've got it now."

"Have a drop of brandy in the tea, miss; your are a little low."

"No," says Flossie, who hated brandy; "I shall be all right to-night. There's the major, as a gentle and yet aristocratic knock and ring resounded through the tiny house.

The footman announced the major, who, passing Weston as he entered, smiled and murmured:

"Ah! how do you do, Weston?" in his nicest manner. The major was always "nice" to everybody, especially so to the other sex.

"Well, major," said Flossie, from her couch; and she extended a small thin hand without rising, but with a pleasant little smile; "here you are, punctual as usual, and here am I, and here is the tea. Will you have a cup?" And she fills one of the costly cups, gazing at him out of the corners of her blue eyes with a curious little smile. "How well you look, major. What would some of our people not give to know your secret of perpetual youth! Why, how many years have I known you—ever since I used to play fairies in the pantomimes, and come wrapped in a shawl. Do you remember—"

"My dear Flossie, I never remember anything," said the major, gallantly, nibbling at the piece of bread-and-butter. "I've the worst memory in the world."

Flossie laughed. She knew that the major, on the contrary, never forgot anything.

"And have you been enjoying yourself down at Hurdley's?"

Flossie knew most of the peerage intimately, and was in the habit of cutting off their titles.

The major emits a little sigh, and shakes his head in his best manner,

while he wipes a crumb of bread from his lip, and watches Flossie over the pocket-handkerchief.

"Not? Really not? I thought you always enjoyed yourself everywhere" and she laughs.

"So I do, my dear Flossie, and I enjoy myself at the Grange, very much; but—" and he sighed again.

Flossie watched him with almost unceasing admiration and amusement. She was an actress herself, you see, and could appreciate an actor.

"And what did you want to see me about?" she went on, leaning back and fanning herself with graceful ease; just like a little kitten—only that kittens' claws do not sparkle with diamonds. "I'm half inclined to think that you came all the way from Woldshire to see me. Did you? What is it? Have you bought a theatre, and do you want me to manage it?"

"My dear Flossie," leaning back and laughing softly, with admiration in his eyes. "You are quite right; you are so exquisitely quick. Ah, when beauty and intellect are combined, how perfect and matchless—"

"Thank you, thank you very much, major," broke in Flossie, with a smile and a wave of the fan. "I know that speech by heart. You didn't come all this way from the end of the earth to pay me a compliment, and an old one. What is it? Is there—?" She paused a moment, and the fan, that seemed to move with her thoughts, paused too. "Is there anything the matter?"

The major nodded.

"My dear, I give you my word I had resolved to be so cheerful, and, shall I say, deceitful, so that you might not guess, and here I am talking and behaving so much like an old crow that you detect me in a moment. Ah, Flossie, my incapability of concealing my thoughts has caused me more trouble than anything else throughout my life."

Flossie leaned back to laugh at her ease.

"You always were so awfully frank and open, major, we know!" she retorted, pleasantly. "Well, what is it? Have you—I don't know what to guess about you, because you never have any misfortunes or do anything foolish. Do tell me! I never could guess, and I am"—putting her hands together and turning her face imploringly—"so curious! Is it about yourself? Have you lost all your money at that dreadful carte you men are so foolishly fond of, and do you want me to lend you a million or two?"

The major laughs, and shakes his head.

"No, my dear Flossie, though I am sure you would do it. No; it's about Rick!"

He brings it out suddenly—too suddenly, perhaps—his keen eyes watching her covertly to see the effect.

The effect is strange. The fan stops, the petite face goes deadly white, and the blue eyes grow large and set. As a matter of fact, her heart—if Flossie has one—seems to stand still. Another woman would spring up; but Flossie is an actress, and used to control her emotions, and so sits statue-like for a moment waiting to command her voice; but it is a very strange voice, very unlike the musical, clear one that the Frivolity knows, when she says, slowly:

"Is he dead?"

The major's eyes open with well-affected surprise.

"Dead! My dear Flossie!"

"Not—dead," she echoes; and her bosom heaves, while the fan moves slightly again. "Then he is ill, I know!" with a little gasp in her breath, but with the same stern suppression of emotion. "He has been thrown from his horse in that beastly hunting."

"No, no, my dear child," says the major; "we don't hunt in June, you know."

"I don't know," she says; and then, with a touch of dangerous sharpness in her voice: "What is it, then? What do you mean?" The voice rises. "Why do you sit there like"—the fan shakes

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now, and the eyes sparkle ominously—"like—a—a mute, and play with me!" The voice is very high now, and the fan spasmodic.

"My dear Flossie, my dear, impetuous child!"

"Stut! What is it? If he isn't dead, and he isn't ill, and I can see he isn't—you'd tell me fast enough if he were—what is it? Quick!"

The major, for once frightened out of his composure and self-possession, looks at her and shakes his head.

"No, my dear, it's neither one nor the other. I was going to say that it was worse; the foolish boy is going to be married."

With a spring she is off the sofa and up, standing before him, her face white, her eyes flashing, her even, little teeth clenched, the costly fan fallen at her feet.

"It's a lie!" she exclaimed, without opening her mouth. "It's a cruel—"

The voice broke suddenly, the light died out of her eyes, and she fell back, a rigid little figure, on to the couch from which she had sprung like a tigress.

The major, who had the greatest dislike to scenes, and especially to those made by the fair sex, rose and looked round for the bell; but a small, low voice stopped him.

"Stop where you are; don't touch that bell; don't speak to me for a minute."

The major stopped short and approached the sofa, gazing down at the pretty, white face with anxious alarm; but he obeyed and remained silent.

Before the minute had expired Flossie sat up, and with a strange sort of sigh, looked at him with still half-vacant eyes which grew more intelligent presently.

"And it's true?" she said.

"My dear Flossie, I am a brute. I ought to have broken—"

She smiled sarcastically.

"Don't trouble to apologise. You did it on purpose, major. I suppose you wanted to see how I should take it. Well, are you satisfied?"

"My dear Flossie—"

"Is it true, or—not? I can see by your face it is true."

She rose, steadying herself by the table, and stood as if to test her strength.

"Give me my fan," she said, pointing to it.

(To be continued.)

Tooth and Grey Eye.

A London physician, discussing the statement by a Bristol dentist, that the removal of an abscessed tooth changed the colour of a woman's eye from grey to brown, expressed the opinion that the woman at birth had two blue eyes, which in the course of years would turn from blue to grey, and grey to brown. The pigmentation of one eye, however, was prevented by the abscess which absorbed from the blood the colour intended for the iris. It will be recalled that an American specialist recently diagnosed Earl Grey's eye trouble as having its origin in an abscessed tooth.

Fashion Plates.

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Comprising Pattern 3095 which illustrates a Cape and Muff Set, and Pattern 3164 a smart skirt.


Broad cloth, duvetyn, serge, velvet or tricotine could be used for the skirt, with fur banding to match the fur of Cape and Muff, which could also be of the skirt material and fur trimmed.

The Cape and Muff Set is cut in 3 Sizes for the Cape: Small, 32-34, Medium, 36-38, and Large, 40-42 inches bust measure, and in One size, Medium, for the Muff. It will require 2 1/2 yards of 44 inch material for the Cape, and 1/2 yard of 80 inch material with 1 1/4 yard of lining for the Muff.

The Skirt is cut in 7 Sizes: 23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, and 34 inches waist measure. A Medium size will require 3 1/2 yards of 40 inch material. With plaits extended, the width of the skirt at its lower edge is 2 1/2 yards.

This illustration calls for TWO separate patterns which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10c. FOR EACH pattern in silver or stamps.

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Pattern 3094 cut in 7 Sizes: 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44 and 46 inches bust measure is here shown. For comfort, convenience and attraction, this model has much to recommend it. The lines are simple, and the garment may be made for service, or as a "porch" or "afternoon" dress. Foulard, taffeta, serge, gabardine, crepe de china, voile or poplin would be nice for a "dresser" dress. Developed as a work dress it would look well in gingham, chambray, lineh, lawn or percale.

Size 38 requires 6 1/2 yards of 36 inch material. Width of Skirt at lower edge is about 2 1/2 yards.

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