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A Marriage of Reason

By Maurice Francis Egan, Author of "The Land of St. Laurence," "Tales of Sexton Maginnis," "The Fate of John Longworthy," "Songs and Sonnets," "The Ghost in Hamlet," etc

CHAPTER XXIV.—Continued.

She wiped her eyes and felt comforted. After all, to say at her uncle's would mean to struggle continually against her aunt's will and perhaps to make a breach between her uncle and aunt, and she felt sure that to take up her residence at Mrs. Percival's, after leaving her uncle's house, would seem a great offence in his eyes.

She strapped her trunk and rang for the porter. Just as the trunk disappeared, the Lady Alicia entered the room; she was attired in her rough serge suit and thick walking shoes, and a large blue veil did not add to the elegance of her appearance. She threw back her veil, and Katharine observed that she was pale and anxious-looking.

"So you are actually going to play the fool, Kitty—you are really in earnest in doing this Don Quixote act!" Biddy said, sharply.

Katharine's color rose, but she restrained the words that rose to her lips.

"Cervantes made Don Quixote a very noble gentleman, if I remember," she said with a smile.

"And so you will give up the best things in life for a whim?"

"If the best things in life are riches and luxury, I am willing to

give them up. If they are the best things in life, our Lord lived in vain," Katharine said with spirit.

"Is this the talk of a convent girl?" said the Lady Alicia, with sarcasm.

"I don't know what your convent girls are taught, but here in America we are taught that the best things under Heaven are not money and luxuries. We are not taught that to marry for these things is the sole duty of women."

Katharine's temper was rising. Biddy changed color; she had a temper, too.

"Do you mean that for me, Kitty O'Connor?"

"Perhaps I did mean it for you," said Katharine, hastily. "Biddy, I don't want to quarrel. You will never understand me, so what's the use of talking?"

The Lady Alicia went to the window and drummed on the pane with her fingers. Katharine held the door-knob in her hand; she was anxious to be gone.

"Do you think Wirt Percival could deceive me in any way? Do you think that there is any truth in that note?"

Katharine turned in amazement.

"You don't mean to say that you have such a doubt of the man you promised to marry. On, Biddy!"

Lady Alicia raised her eyeglass, with an attempt at insolence. Kitty O'Connor was a nice girl, no doubt, but she might go too far. The eyeglass dropped; Katharine was not at all subdued.

"I do distrust Mr. Percival," she said, after an uneasy pause. "You Americans have such lax ideas about marriage and divorce—the man has no religion. He may be a Mormon for all I know—Americans are so queer."

Katharine put her hand on the knob again; she was disgusted.

"I might have known you wouldn't let such a prize escape you, if there wasn't something wrong about him."

"Good-bye," said Katharine, opening the door.

"Stop!" cried Lady Alicia. "I am wretched. Kitty—can't you see it? I can't ask this man whether he is divorced or not—and they say in Dublin that half America is divorced—and I haven't any mother to do it. Don't you see how wretched I am? If he were a Catholic, I should be safe—but, as it is, I am not at all sure. At home everybody knows everybody, and one is pretty safe. But here—Oh, don't you see how wretched I am?"

"Very wretched," said Katharine. "to think of marrying a man whom you distrust. I can't imagine anybody more wretched."

The Lady Alicia rose angrily.

"What am I to do? I can't marry at home unless I go down in the social scale. I haven't any money, and nobody at home in our set would marry me without a dot. You ought to know that. What am I to do?"

Biddy intended this question to be pathetic. But Katharine did not understand it that way.

"Work," she said.

"Work?" repeated Lady Alicia, sarcastically. "Work! Starve, be a pauper, live a pauper, die a pauper! What can I work at? One of your newspaper men offered me a lot of money for a series of articles on 'How They Act in English Society.' I shall do that, and help pay—for my trousseau. It won't last long, though, and I fancy that, when the man sees how I write, he'll be tired of his bargain. I can't even teach you American girls deportment—Parisians! But don't let us quarrel, as you said. I must marry Percival."

"It is worse than death. He does not believe in Christianity even; and for that reason I do not trust him. Biddy, I cannot understand you. For what our religion teaches us is like a mere passing breath, you are willing to sacrifice what is really best in life—Faith and Peace."

Biddy went up to Katharine and

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put her arms about her. Katharine felt a tear fall on her hand.

"I wish I had never met you!" she said, passionately. "Nobody ever talked that way to me before. Nobody that I knew could afford to marry for love, and of course the sentimental novels are all nonsense; but we never thought of religion, and yet now I begin to see that religion ought to have something to do with marriage. One can't trust a man in this country, where even the best people seem to believe in divorce. It's Paganism! You Americans are utterly unscrupulous!"

Katharine could not help smiling; she could not tell why. There was an artless worldliness in Lady Alicia's point of view which was amusing; instantly, however, Katharine saw again the miserable side of the affair.

"Wirt Percival is no doubt a gentleman," she said. "I imagine that he would never break a promise he had made. But, Biddy, think of a life spent with a husband whose God is not your God—who will grow year by year more and more apart from you."

"I'm not thinking of the sentimental side; but Kitty, I have only a short time to stay in the country. It must be Wirt Percival or nobody."

"Let it be nobody, then."

"That is impossible."

Katharine drew away from her friend.

"Good-bye," she said. "I am afraid I shall never see you again; but I will pray for you, Biddy."

"Help me, to find out what that note means."

Katharine looked thoughtful.

"I will—and I think I can. Mrs. Carey is Jenny Mavrick's sister, she knows. Biddy," cried Katharine, as a new light flashed into her mind. "I have it now! Mrs. Carey is not the wife of Wirt Percival, but of Ferdinand Carey—Carey is Carey—don't you see?"

Lady Alicia stared. Slowly she was made to understand what Katharine meant.

"Thank you, Kitty," she said; "I believe you are right. The paragraph—particularly the one that writes in that nasty New York paper—had you engaged to this Carey. Yes, you are right! I am awfully relieved!"

"Good-bye," Katharine said. "I must go. If you have distrusted Wirt Percival once, what guarantee have you that you will not distrust him again?"

Katharine hastily left the room. The Lady Alicia looked after her wistfully, and then went down stairs

slowly, with a thoughtful look on her face.

CHAPTER XXV.—A Wrecked Life.

Katharine felt that she had solved the mystery of the notes by a sudden flash of that intuition which is every sane woman's birthright. Jenny Mavrick's sister was Mrs. Carey, and Mrs. Carey and the woman whose child she had baptized were one. When she had time to think it all over in the car going down town, she was amazed that both the Lady Alicia and herself had taken it so coolly. It seemed impossible—impossible that Ferdinand Carey could have married a woman like Jenny Mavrick's sister, she had for social standing. And yet there was a mystery about him; he had hinted of a sad past. Katharine recalled the face of Mrs. Carey and her look of suffering. How could it have happened? Jenny Mavrick was a worker among the workers; and her sister was of the same class, while Ferdinand Carey was of another class entirely. How wretched it was. Katharine thought. And then as she thought of Biddy and Wirt Percival, her heart went out to her friend, and she shuddered. Marriage without trust, marriage without the trust harmony in the most essential of all things—religion—meant to her unmitigated misery and regret.

It was growing dark when she reached the little house down town. A cheerful light shone in the parlor, and Mrs. Carey, looking less sad and spiritless than in the morning, received her warmly. She looked up in Katharine's face shyly and then kissed her. Katharine was surprised and pleased by this demonstration.

"It is good to have you here—good to see you here. Ah, suppose baby had died without baptism!"

The woman gently removed Katharine's wrap and hat, and kissed her again. She found that her room had been made warm and comfortable for her.

She locked the door and enjoyed for a few moments the comfortable sensation of being alone. She was free at last. Mrs. Sherwood could not interrupt or insist on her going through any fashionable formalities now.

She made her plan. She would rest a day or two, and then try to find pupils. And perhaps Herr Teufelsch might be induced to help her to a place as a concert singer. She had hope, and there was work before her. Providence seemed to have led her into this house—into the house of Ferdinand Carey's wife, and perhaps it might be her mission to reconcile those two whom God had joined, and who were parted, she felt sure, by the influence of man. The cars rattled past her windows, their jingling bells at first disturbing her meditations. But she became used to it after a time. The room was small, the green blinds on the window a little faded, but there was an air of neatness and severity about everything such as one finds only in Philadelphia, where even poverty has a distinction of its own, and is seldom the squalid thing found in other cities.

Katharine wrote two long letters to the convent, and one of them was to her little friend, Maria Rodrigues, full of sage maxims. In answer to them, there came a few days later, a letter from Mother Ursula full of gentle reproach. Could not Katharine have come back to the convent, if her aunt's house were intolerable. And might she not have endured that house until her uncle could have come home. After all, Mother Ursula said, "obedience was better than sacrifice." What unknown dangers might a young girl meet, venturing alone into a strange city? Mother Ursula counselled her in the end to see the parish priest at once, and to inquire particularly into the character of the people among whom she had fallen.

The other message consisted of an orange skin which enclosed some guava jelly, from the little Maria, and a ship of paper on which was written in a large round hand, "I love you." This message somehow or other gave Katharine a good deal of consolation.

For a few days she saw little of the people of the house, except at meals. They were quiet and soft-spoken, and eager to please. Katharine noticed that Mrs. Carey still possessed great beauty, although a sad and troubled look never left her. When she was not busy arranging her belongings in the room, she wrote letters, and even composed a little song. The only response to a note sent to Mrs. Sherwood was a large trunk containing all her dresses and gloves, with a slip of paper pinned inside the lid, on which her aunt had written:

"Your uncle will never see you again. You are as dead to him."

It gave Katharine a passing pang. But, in a few moments, she regained her composure. She was sure that her uncle had not authorized those words. She called Mrs. Carey up to her room to show her the fiery. The woman's eyes sparkled and she sighed, as Katharine displayed the soft silks and gauzes.

Katharine was surprised.

"I didn't think you had such an interest in these things."

"Ah! it would have made such a difference!" she answered, half to herself. "He was fond of such things, and I had never acquired the graces which he liked. Perhaps if he had seen me once in a dress like that—for I was not always so worn and faded as I am now."

"He!" asked Katharine. "He! I fancy he could not have been much of a man, if he admired you for your looks and dress alone. I thought there was more to him than that."

Katharine remembered herself, saw Mrs. Carey start. She took her hands.

"I have guessed who he is. Ferdinand Carey is your husband!"

The woman dropped her eyes and then looked at Katharine in a startled way.

"And you knew this, and yet—"

"No," said Katharine. "I did not—I guessed it lately. Besides, you are mistaken—I know what you mean—Mr. Carey was never engaged to me—he is an honorable man. There was a silly rumor in the newspapers about it, but—"

"Thank God!" said Mrs. Carey, looking young and bright again.

"You give me new life again. I feared, with his idea about divorce, that he might have sent me adrift. Oh, it can be done, you know—it can be done without a poor woman knowing anything about it—for he is rich, and the laws are all against marriage in this country."

"And yet you married him, knowing that he held marriage as a trifle—saw a thing of mere human law!"

"No human being can help me," said Mrs. Carey sadly. "The past is past. And—I love him still."

"It must be helped!" said Katharine, with all the decisiveness of hopeful youth. "God works through human means, and He never intended that married people should be separated. Besides, there must be hope, since Ferdinand Carey himself is so unhappy."

"I wish I could think that he was unhappy," said the woman, "and yet I would not cause him pain for all the world. If he were unhappy there would be hope for me. I hear that he is the gayest of the gay. I read of him among people who would despise me as the dirt beneath their feet. He has wealth, society, pleasure—while I have nothing but bitterness, and the memory of that death."

"Neither wealth nor pleasure makes us happy. Father Mohen told me that you ought to be happy, because you are good."

"Father Mohen is kind; if I try to be good, it is because he keeps me from despair."

Father Mohen was the parish priest whom Katharine, following Mother Ursula's advice, had seen.

"No," said Mrs. Carey, burying her face in her hands. "It would be better for me to die. It would release him. I know I deserve all this—I brought it on myself. I know that I should never have married. But I can't help suffering. I can't forget him. He is my husband—and you say these stories were false!"

"All false," said Katharine.

"I love him," answered Mrs. Carey, simply.

Katharine did not answer at once; she stood, holding the soft gauze in her hands.

"I cannot understand how you could have loved a man whom you did not respect—a man who could hold lightly that supreme principle upon which your whole happiness was to rest. I cannot understand it—I want to help you now. I know now why you were so anxious to warn me. I thought those warnings were pointed at Mr. Wirt Percival."

"I am glad; he has forsaken me, but he is not as base as I thought. Jenny told me how kind you had been to her, and when rumor coupled your name and his together, I was almost tempted to kill myself. I can make them both happy," I said.

Katharine shuddered.

"How horrible!" she exclaimed.

"Some people would have called it heroic," said Mrs. Carey. "Ferdinand Carey would, and I thought, 'he will weep over my grave and think kind thoughts of me.' But I hurried off to the church, and there, before the altar, all these sinful thoughts went away."

What unknown dangers the woman's neck.

"You are morbid," she said, then she had to stop and think—a case of this kind was beyond her experience. She was not sentimental, and Mrs. Carey's proposed sacrifice appeared to her not only foolish, but criminal. The truth is, Katharine had not read the current novels.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," she said cheerfully. "you stay here and I'll bring up some tea—Oh, yes, I will; you must let me wait on you this time; you must! Then we'll sit in this quiet room and have a lovely talk. And you'll let me call you Mrs. Carey."

"No," said the woman, with a frown. "I shall not be called by that name so long as he is ashamed of me. Call me Helen, if you will."

"Well, Helen, wait!"

Katharine enjoyed the excitement of running downstairs and making tea in the little kitchen; besides, it gave her time to think. Oh, if Mother Ursula were here! It was such a responsibility to have a human heart in her hands.

When she returned with the tea, she found Helen Carey crying. This pleased her; for she believed that tea and tears were sovereign cures for the sorrows of her sex.

To be continued.

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