

A HONEYMOON IN HIDING

The Fascinating Adventures of a Romantic Honeymoon

By MRS. GEORGE DE HORNE VAIZEY

CHAPTER I.

"ONLY another day! I can't believe it. This time to-morrow you will be my wife. You will have a wedding-ring on your finger, and a Mrs. to your name; you will be Mrs. Pat Hilbert, and little Gwen Nugent will be no more. Bless her little heart, she was a sweet thing. But Gwen Hilbert—Gwen Hilbert will be just a thousand times sweeter. I'm going to love her a thousand times more. Don't I wish it were three o'clock to-morrow afternoon when all the frustration was over, and we were safely started on our honeymoon!"

"I don't. Not I. It's my very own wedding, and I'm going to enjoy every moment of the day. I've the prettiest dress, and the prettiest bridesmaids, and the prettiest presents that ever were seen, and if you were a polite bridegroom you'd have interrupted me before now to say that I was the prettiest bride. And I'll simply love walking up the aisle and seeing all the people craning and staring just for the privilege of seeing *Me*, and seeing you standing there waiting, and feeling that it's really and truly true at last, and we are going to be married! The service part itself is solemn, but you and I are so perfectly, utterly one, that it's a beautiful solemnity, for we are only longing to be bound. How will you feel when he says: 'I do now pronounce them man and wife,' and the organ peals out, *Tum—tum—te rum tum tum tum?*" Gwen's right hand strummed an impassioned bar from the "Wedding March" on her lover's knee. "I've sat listening to it so many times—from a back pew—feeling so flat and dull, knowing that I had to go home to darn stockings and eat cold mutton for dinner, but this time it will be for me, that glorious crash of sound—for You and Me, and I'll be the bride coming floating down the aisle, with my veil thrown back, smiling at the back pews out of my beautiful new world. Oh, I'll love it; I'll love it. And you, poor dear, you might as well love it too, and be'aisy. Nobody'll look at you. You'll be hidden by my veil and my train and my flowers, and no one will give you a second thought. It's Gwen Nugent's day. Exit Gwen Nugent in a blaze of glory. She's going to marry a doctor; a poor, struggling, unknown G. P., and be good and industrious ever after. Amen. Kiss me at once!"

The prospective bridegroom obeyed expansively, and with admirable despatch. Then he rumbled his hair and sighed, and said:

"Yes. Poor! that's the deuce of it. I can't help worrying about the house and wondering if we have done right in undertaking such a big rent. I can't bear to think that you may be tight, and have to do without things you have been accustomed to. If the practice does as well as we expect, we ought to be pretty comfortable in a few years, but this furnishing business is horribly expensive—and just for the moment—"

"I know. We've got to look at every sixpence before we spend it, and turn it over several times and reflect seriously if threepence wouldn't do instead. Who cares? I don't. We shall have each other, and piles of new clothes, and a houseful of new old furniture, and all the pots and pans and brooms and brushes and uninteresting etceteras spick and span, so that the cook won't have to say every second day, 'I shall require a blacking-brush and two new saucepans.' (That's the way the money goes). And if you grumble about your food, I can always retort that you *told* me to be economical. Did you call in at the house to-day as you passed? How is its dear little self?"

"I did. It is looking wonderfully straight and settled. The boxes you sent in are locked up in the storeroom, and I've got the key on my bunch. I've written to the police to keep a sharp lookout, and asked them to warn the neighbors on both sides that the house is empty. It's insured, too, against fire and burglary, so I think we have taken all precautions. The maids are to go in two days before we arrive, aren't they? Sure that's enough?"

"Quite! There's nothing to do but to dust and stoke and get in provisions. I'll pick out the knick-knacks myself. Cousin Emily has been badgering me to let her do it. As if I would! People are so officious about a new house; especially unmarried cousins; they are capable of arranging the whole thing while you are away, and expecting you to be pleased and grateful. That's why I insisted upon getting everything ready before we leave. They think we are mad not to leave a caretaker in charge, but I know what *that* would mean, cousins popping in from morning to night, fussing and 'improving,' and I won't allow anyone to improve my own home but its own mistress. We had quite a scene on the subject; they thought I was very ungrateful, and to appease them I had to agree that they should look in once or twice as they were driving past, just to 'see that all was right.' They have a key, but I don't think they will attempt any alter-

ations now. I'm longing to get into our own house, Pat. You are going to have a house of your own, Pat. And a honeymoon. Do you realize it? Do you tremble? It's commonly agreed that a honeymoon is a most critical and disillusionising experience. I've read reams about it in the magazine pages of newspapers. 'For the first time these two young people find themselves left alone to their own resources, the rain falls, the wind howls against the panes of the country hotel. A feeling of deadly *ennui* possesses the groom.' Pat! I shall kill you if you are possessed by a feeling of deadly *ennui*."

Pat laughed, a ringing, self-confident laugh.

"So you may. You have my full permission. My honeymoon is going to last all my life, and feel too short when I get to the end. As to this preliminary canter, darling, we'll have all the fun we can out of our fifty pounds, and I leave it entirely to you to settle how it's to be spent. We'll be reckless and extravagant, and blow it in a week, or we'll be careful and provident, and eke it out for a month; but when it's finished, back we come. We can't afford to spend any more just now. I fancy you and I can contrive to get a fair amount of happiness out of fifty pounds and our own resource. Eh, little bride?"

"Oh, Pat!" cried Gwen, sighing. "Isn't it a heavenly world?"

CHAPTER II.

PAT and Gwen Hilbert had been married for exactly two hours and three-quarters. Their heads were thrust out of the door of a first-class railway compartment, the window of which bore a label reserving it for their exclusive use. They were occupied in waving adieu to the best man, and in regarding with benign patronage the scurrying masses of miserable, ordinary people on the platform who were *not* starting off on a honeymoon.

"Excursion or something!" volunteered the best man vaguely. "But you're all right, anyway. Boxes in the second van at the back. Ta-ta! Bless you, my children. Bear up."

Pat showed his straight, white teeth in the most beaming of smiles; Gwen screwed up her little nose in a saucy grimace; the sun shone full on their faces, and showed them so young, so handsome, so radiantly happy and content, that they seemed the habitants of another world from the careworn figures on the platform. And so in good truth they were. Then, with a jolt and a roar, the train glided out of the station, and the honeymoon was begun. The newly-married pair seated themselves, and smiled rapturously into each other's faces.

"At last! We're off! We've left them all behind. I've got you all to myself. Hurrah! Mrs. Hilbert, I love you. You're the nicest married woman I've ever met. You looked adorable in church. I'm not sure that you don't look more adorable now. Is that a 'going-away gown'? Will it be described in the papers? Will it say, 'the bride wore a dress the color of her eyes, with trimmings the color of her hair, and jolly little lace fixings at the throat, and a long, curly feather that tickled her husband's cheek?'"

Mrs. Hilbert laughed and tossed the aforesaid feather in the air.

"It has been exciting. Such a lovely day, and such crowds in the church, and everyone so kind. I have enjoyed myself. I wish it were all coming over again. Did I really look nice? It was so aggravating being inside the veil and not able to see. Did you hear any remarks as we came out of church?"

"What sort of remarks?"

"Oh—h—about me! Nice remarks—people saying I looked pretty, or anything like that? I heard nothing but one great long 'Oh—h!' There was a man at the gate taking snapshots. I do hope we shall see them."

The bridegroom shivered.

"I hope we don't. Like his impudence! About fifty people have told me that I was a lucky fellow, and every man in the church was blue with envy, but I was too much taken up with you to listen to stray remarks. It's just as I said, Gwen Hilbert is a thousand times lovelier and dearer than Gwen Nugent. Take off your glove and show me your ring. I want to see how it looks."

Gwen complied with a smile, and then, with sudden remembrance, held out her hand towards him.

"Look. The bracelet. Mrs. Maddison gave it to me at the reception. Brought it in her pocket, and slipped it on when she shook hands. Wasn't it sweet of her? Isn't it a pet?"

"Turquoise and diamonds. Very pretty indeed. What a pile of jewelry you have. That reminds me—I had a present too—a cheque from Bremner. It arrived last night, and I put it in my pocket-book

with the rest. Something more to add on to our honeymoon fund, darling. I'll hand it over to you to spend in some of your beloved old furniture shops. There are always lots of them about in holiday places. You shall go and buy something the first wet day, when you want something to do."

"Pat, you darling. May I really? How lovely of you! I'm simply longing for a bureau—a really old one—to put in the den. What's the matter?"

"Er, nothing. I am just—I thought I put—"

Pat frowned slightly as he thrust his hand into one pocket after another, and brought it out empty. He rose from his seat and stood stretched to his full height, a tall, supple figure diving that impatient hand now here, now there, a second, a third time into the same pockets, while the frown deepened on his brow. "Where *can* it be?"

Gwen smiled with easy reassurance. "Poor boy, what piles of pockets! It must be dreadfully confusing to be a man. Let me feel. No, it certainly isn't there. You must have put it in your bag."

"I never—," began Pat emphatically, then checked himself, and turned to lift his crocodile handbag from the rail. His face grew perceptibly paler, it grew paler still when a few moments' hurried turning over of contents revealed no signs of the missing book. "No; it's not here! *Gwen!* It can't be—I can't possibly have lost—"

"No, no, dear. Don't get flustered. Think. When did you have it last? Have you paid anything this morning?"

"I gave Masters five pounds for our fares and small expenses. Here's the change." He thrust his hand into a trousers pocket and drew out a promiscuous jumble of coins. "I had it this morning. I put Bremner's note besides the others—two twenty-fives. I remembered distinctly putting it in my pocket. *By Jove!* He sat down on the seat with a sudden thud, as if a devastating remembrance had robbed his muscles of their power. "I remember now. A man knocked against me in the crowd. I thought it was an accident, a seedy-looking fellow with a hatchet face, a pickpocket, no doubt. He apologized and cut out of sight. He's got it, Gwen! For a ducat he's got it. He spotted us, no doubt, and guessed I should be worth plundering. It's gone. Our fifty pounds—the money for our honeymoon."

"Wait a minute, darling; wait a minute. Don't take the worst for granted. Is there nowhere else you can look? No other pocket; no other bag? You are *sure* you didn't give it to anyone to keep? People are not always *quite* responsible on their wedding mornings—I did the silliest things. No? But then, even at the worst, dear, didn't you take the numbers of the cheques?"

Pat started; a light flashed in his eyes, then hopelessly flickered out, while the red stained his cheek.

"Er—yes, of course. I always do. But, you see, the dickens of it is, as a matter of fact, I wrote them in the pocketbook itself."

"I see," said Gwen demurely. She pressed her lips together, but the corners twitched, and the next moment she burst into a peal of laughter.

"So much for your methodical business habits. Oh, Pat, you unfortunate creature, what a handle you have given me! Never again will you dare to accuse me of carelessness. And you have not the least idea what the numbers were, or any way of such lots of money lately, poor dear, haven't you? What a mercy you did, and that there wasn't more left in the book. Don't look so miserable, dear. If it's gone it's gone, and it's no use grizzling."

"How can I help it? Think what it means. I could kill myself. It's enough to make anyone miserable. How you *can* laugh!"

"Of course I can laugh. It's my wedding day, and I couldn't be miserable for fifty times fifty pounds. If you can, I'm very much annoyed. What's fifty pounds when you've got a wife?"

"Darling!" There was a rueful not in Pat's voice. "It's just because of the wife that I want it so badly. I couldn't have a honeymoon without a wife, but now it looks precious like having the wife without a honeymoon. If the money has gone, Of course, I could wire to the bank for more, but—"

Gwen shook her head.

"No, certainly not. We made up our minds that we must not draw any more. Whatever we do, we must not begin our married life by being reckless and improvident. You've spent far more money than you expected on furnishing. That's my fault, but I don't repent it. When you mean to live with things all your life, they ought to be good and congenial, and those dear old tables and cabinets are going to be real friends to me, but I won't let you make any more holes into your poor little capital. You shan't draw another penny piece."

