

THE DRIP OF THE HONEY

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A Little Interruption in the Honeymoon Which Made it all the Sweeter

THEY were leaning on the stone balustrade of San Tritone de Monti. The sun was going down on the dome of St. Peter's and on the thirteenth day of their honeymoon.

He sighed heavily, not because it was all so beautiful and new, where before them lay the city and the Seven Hills and Mount Gianicola bathed in golden dusk and Soracte pencilled far to the right, but because something momentous had happened. As to what this momentous thing was he was still in the dark. Yet the moment he had stepped out of the Borghese Gallery that afternoon he had felt its presence, dim and gigantic and foreboding, felt it just as sailors feel the approaching iceberg long before it is in sight.

And it was not two weeks since they had left New York (they had been light and careless then, he told himself) in a shower of telegrams and roses and good-bys. And until to-day, he remembered bitterly, there had not been one hour, one moment, when life had seemed anything but sun and happiness for both of them. But it had come at last—he all along had felt secretly that it was bound to come—and now he wondered, whatever turn things might take, if the old feeling could ever be brought to life again.

"Just to think," he said at last, throwing a stab of wistfulness into it, "it's not two weeks since we left New York!"

"Does it seem so long?" she asked, succumbing to the stab. Her voice was neither the Charybdis of ice nor the Scylla of open tears, but it carried with it no expected touch of finalities. So in his bewilderment he only sighed again—this thing, he held, would have to work itself out, now. He began reading from his guide-book calmly and with great deliberation. "Then climb these historic steps," he waved the open guide-book down toward the Piazza di Spagna, "at sunset, when they are bathed in the last rays of the sun. From a hundred ancient bellies the mellow bells ring for *Ave Maria*, and up out of a blaze of twilight glory gleams and towers the great dome of St. Peter's."

"Rubbish!" he thought he heard her say under her breath.

He stopped and looked at her. Her nose seemed tilted in open defiance of all Rome and its traditions; her little pointed chin was nestling in the clasped hollow of her hand; her arm, in turn, was resting on a ledge of cold and unappreciative stone; and her eyes were gazing down the long straight line of Via Condotti. He had a sudden temptation to surrender everything and incontinently seize her. But he thought better of this, and opened his guide-book with careful fingers and slightly uplifted eyebrows.

"Deary," she said at last cooingly; yet he marvelled at the fact that a once endearing diminutive could be made so sepulchrally cool and lifeless, and all by one little trick of intonation and voice.

He punished her accordingly by not answering in at least ten long seconds.

"Deary," she said again, with an acidulated sweetness that smote him to the heart, "how long have you known Constantia Fleming?"

"Why?" he asked vacuously.

That was like him, she told herself, seeking escape in side issues. "Oh, I was only wondering," she said carelessly.

"Yes, but wondering what?"

"I was only wondering if there was any reason why she should come over and speak to you first in the Borghese this afternoon."

"Did she?" he asked, trying in vain to recall that phase of the meeting and blinking a bit over the effort.

His wife did not even deign to answer, but pursued her own narrow and rigorous course. "And what did she mean by pointing to that Titian and asking which we had found, our sacred or our profane love?"

"Isn't that the name of the picture?" he suggested inspiredly.

"But will you please tell me why she should ask anybody such a personal question as that? And you of all people?"



He could not answer, of course. There followed another silence.

"Elmer Pitts," she said at last, "was it accidental that you and Constantia Fleming met here in Rome?"

"Accidental? Of course it was!" he declared stoutly. "I didn't even know she was in Europe. Good Lord, we ourselves didn't even expect to be in Rome this week!"

"I'm not used to being sworn at," she retorted.

"But, Frances, you're so—so confoundedly unreasonable to-day!"

Her brooding and indignant eyes were still turned down the straight and narrow line of Via Condotti. "I've been thinking about this a great deal to-day, Elmer," she said more in latent sorrow than patent anger. "And I never thought you would try to deceive me, after—after everything we have been to one another!"

He looked at her helplessly.

She swallowed hard, before she could go on. "And I told you everything, from first to last. I didn't keep back a thing from you."

"But how could I help being decent to Constantia Fleming? She'd always been—been considerate, and all that, with me."

"Considerate!" with withering scorn. "That is not what I should care to call it!" And again she swallowed hard before she could go on. "It's no use pretending I don't know things, Elmer. I've been thinking about them all along. You used to play golf with her, and you were on the Appleby's yacht with her as well."

"But what of that?" he demanded. "Other girls—"

"It's different from other girls," she declared.

He looked at his shoes helplessly.

"And you were always trailing about after her"—then, in a half-assuaging afterthought—"before you knew me."

"Wasn't it she who did the trailing after me?" he had the effrontery to suggest, chuckling cruelly.

"Oh, I don't doubt it! That sort of girl usually does!"

"I've been thinking about this a great deal to-day, Elmer," she said, more in sorrow than in anger.

She looked at him studiously from under lowered eyebrows. Then she shuddered a little at the sting of some new thought that had come to her. "Yes, it would serve you right," she said absently.

"What would serve me right?" he asked.

"If—if I had never known you, and you had kept on and on in the old way, and had married Constantia Fleming, and had had to spend your life with that sort of girl!"

His first impulse was to groan out an unhappy "Don't" but he steeled himself against any such bending to her will.

"Why, Constantia isn't such a bad sort, is she?" he asked innocently.

Her gaze, which had been fixed on dimly pencilled Soracte, swept around to him determinedly. "Elmer Pitts, did you ever kiss Constantia Fleming?" she demanded.

"I don't know. I forget."

"You forget?" she said bitterly. Then a little relieving sigh escaped her. "But I suppose a man always forgets—with that sort of girl."

"Of course!" cried Elmer, as he tried to take her hand. But she drew it away.

"You haven't answered my question. You are trying to hoodwink me and deceive me."

He was about to open his mouth to reply, when she stopped him with a passionate little gesture.

"No, don't! Don't commit yourself! I couldn't bear the thought of you ever being soft and mushy and moonshiny with a woman. It's so unlike you."

He drew the corners of his mouth down and his shoulders up, wondering if after all he didn't a little resemble the portrait busts of Cæsar Augustus.

"Elmer," she said dolorously, moving away from him, "do you think you would have married anybody but me, if you had never met me and known me?"

"Never!" he declared with heat.

"I can't believe that," she said dreamily. "No, I can't believe it." And the unhappiness in her voice made him miserable. He essayed an effort to speak, but a lump in the throat of Cæsar Augustus was making it hard for him to begin.

"We have been too happy," she went on quaveringly. "We thought it could last and be just always the same. But, you see, it can't!"

"No, it can't!" he agreed as dolorously.

She clasped her hands in a little wringing motion of despair.

"Perhaps these last two weeks have been too happy," he ventured more hopefully.

"Yes, too happy," she echoed drearily.

"And perhaps this little—er—this little set-to will make things all right again," he ventured, still hopefully.

She searched his face through the twilight for some slight sign of mockery, but none was there. "Oh, you don't understand!" she mourned vaguely.

"I know it!" he said bitterly.

She made a dash at her eyes with the back of her hand. He could see her shaken bosom rise and fall on the stone balustrade.

"Frankie!" he said miserably, putting his arm about her sobbing figure.

"Do you understand?" she pleaded, in open tears now, on his shoulder.

He gulped a little, before he could answer. "I only understand one thing, my own: that I love you more than anything in all the world, more than life itself!"

"Do you, Elmer?" she said solemnly.

Then a silence fell over them, and far out over the Campagna an early star or two, shining brightly, came out.

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