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Our Home

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25 Cents a Year.

TWO PAIRS OF LOVERS.

Mamie Esdaile and her father's guest, Captain Hemsley, were dawdling away the half-hour before dressing for dinner beside the glowing fire that burned on the wide hearth in the entrance-hall.

They had been riding together that afternoon, braving muddy roads and gloomy skies, and now declared themselves too dirty and dishevelled to join their friends at afternoon-tea in the drawing-room.

Besides, letters for Mamie had come by the second post, and she never could enjoy her correspondence with a buzz of talk around her.

Not that the presence of Wyatt Hemsley seemed to inconvenience her at all, but then words had been spoken during that afternoon's ride which had made their interests, like their hearts, *one*.

"An invitation for Lady Carby's ball—shall we accept it—Wyatt?"

Captain Hemsley, after a hasty glance round to assure himself that they were alone, snatched a kiss from the lips of his friend's name as he passed.

"If you will promise to keep all your waltzes for me."

Mamie called him a greedy boy, but gave the required pledge, and opened another envelope.

To this she gave a pettish tap as soon as she had mastered its contents.

"Was there ever anything so provoking! Sibyl Hardress was to have come to us to-morrow, and now she writes to excuse herself. As she was well aware I should not be satisfied without knowing why, she adds her reason. She is so sick of being pointed out as a great heiress and besieged with the attentions of men she despises, that she intends to go to Girton and devote herself to study. There's a Miss Misanthrop for you! Young, pretty, and rich, and tired of admiration at four-and-twenty!"

"Humph! this is odd!" exclaimed her lover. "Your friend writes in precisely the same strain as Gerald Lowther did this morning. I wanted you to know him, and despatched your father's kind invitation urging him to accept it. But he says—let me see, what does he say? Ah! here is his letter. 'Pray excuse me, dear Wyatt; I am not up to the gay life of a country house, and feel safer and happier among my books.'"

"Please interpret," said Mamie. "Of what is the unfortunate man afraid?"

"Of women's eyes, my precious!" was the laughing reply. "When he and I were at Edinburgh last year I happen to know that poor Gerald encountered your fair and learned friend. They were becoming quite intimate when someone whispered in his ear that she was an heiress, and perhaps the same kind friend warned her that poor scholars do sometimes marry for money. At any rate, the lady looked coldly on her admirer, and he took the alarm and went back to Cambridge directly."

"But Mr. Lowther is not—"

"A money-hunter? My dearest Mamie, he is one of the proudest, the most honorable of men!"

"And Sibyl is a dear girl in spite of her learning. How I wish we could have brought them together and made them as happy as we are!"

"Is it impossible?" queried Wyatt.

"N-o-o!" replied Mamie, after a little consideration. "With your assistance I think it could be done."

"You shall have my help as far as the carrying out of your schemes, but don't ask me to invent or suggest. Beyond military tactics I am a duffer at nothing."

"Perhaps that is why I love—I mean, why I feel

a sort of a friendly liking for you," responded the young lady, demurely. "No, sir, you are not to kiss me again. If grandmamma were to come this way she would be horrified. Bring me that writing-case and we will commence operations at once. I shall write to Sibyl and you must pen a few lines to Mr. Lowther."

"What am I to say?" asked the captain, when both were seated with the inkstand between them.

"Simply that you have just proposed and been accepted—that the young lady is staying here, and you cannot be content till your dear old friend has seen her and approved your choice. Take no excuses—say you shall meet every train, and so on. Be quick, that our letters may go out this evening. Of course I shall write to Sibyl in a similar strain."

"Yes? But I don't see the drift of your arrangement. I had already intended to tell Lowther what a happy fellow your sweet confession has made me."

"But you must not mention names," and Mamie held up a warning finger. "You are to leave him in doubt whether it is Sibyl Hardress who is or is not your *fiancee*."

"Hum—well—I have no objections to mystifying him a little. But how about Miss Hardress? What are you going to say to her?"

"I shall hint and insinuate that Mr. Lowther's talents have been too much for my susceptibility."

Still Captain Hemsley looked perplexed.

"And so, by rousing their jealousy as well as their curiosity, you think you shall secure their coming to Esdaile Abbey? But then, they will no sooner see you and I together than they will understand the true state of affairs."

"They shall not be allowed to see us together," interrupted Mamie; "Sibyl must be the object of your devotion, whilst I—"

"Whilst you walk, ride and chat with Gerald Lowther! I could not stand that, Mamie—I couldn't, really."

Miss Esdaile gave him a reproachful look.

"Have you so little faith in me? Cannot you make a small sacrifice to secure your friend's happiness?"

"Small do you call it? If you loved as fondly as I do, you would know that it would exasperate me to madness to see you smiling on another as you have smiled on me, letting him hang over your chair, or absorb you in confidential chat. Lowther can be very fascinating when he likes."

"But he is not Wyatt Hemsley. Oh! it is cruel of you to doubt me!"

As Mamie showed signs of becoming tearful, her lover apologized, and pledged himself to do just as she pleased.

"I will imitate you precisely," he added, a little maliciously. "When Lowther squeezes your hand, I will press Miss Hardress's taper fingers, and gaze in her eyes."

"Indeed, sir, you'll do no such thing! Do you want to make me hate her? This is going beyond your instructions with a vengeance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" croaked grandmamma Esdaile's pet-parrot. "How very absurd we are!"

For once Poll's observation was so well-timed, that the lovers laughed, and were reconciled. The letters were written and despatched, eliciting on the following day telegrams from both recipients.

"Will be with you to-night," Mr. Lowther wired. "You shall see me to-morrow," was Miss Hardress's message, and the delighted conspirators kept the secret of their engagement from every one but Mamie's father, lest it should interfere with the success of their plot.

The Esdailes had gone to dine with some old friends when Gerald Lowther arrived at the abbey, but Captain Hemsley was there to welcome him; and they spent a very pleasant evening in the library, some-

times talking, sometimes examining the rare old books and manuscripts with which its oaken cases had been filled by a former squire.

"But you have not told me anything respecting your betrothed," said Gerald, presently.

"You shall see her to-morrow. I think you have met her before," replied the young officer.

"Is she the daughter or niece of Mr. Esdaile?"

"What made you think that?" queried Captain Hemsley, evasively. "Mamie Esdaile is a dear little girl, but she has not the brilliant mind of Sibyl Hardress."

Mr. Lowther started, stammered something unintelligible, then thrust his hands into his pockets, and fell into a brown study.

What strange contrarities in human nature he was continually encountering! Who could imagine his gay, scatter-brained, military friend worshipping at the shrine of a modern *Minerva*!

Mamie drove her ponies to the station to meet Miss Hardress.

"I hope," said the latter, "you haven't a house full of people."

"Dear me, no. Just our own family, grandmamma, one of my uncles, who is helping papa make his plans for draining those marsh lands by the river; Mr. Gerald Lowther—you have heard of him?—and his *fidus Achates*, Captain Hemsley. Don't fall in love with young Hemsley, Sib, because a little bird has whispered to me that he is engaged."

Miss Hardress curled her finely-chiselled lip. "Those military men are generally sad flirts, but the warning was not needed. I shall never marry; but devote my time and my money to good purposes."

"How angelic of you! For my own part I am more unselfish. Instead of making myself a name as a great female philanthropist, I shall be content to be the mistress of some happy household, with a dear good husband loving and praising me as the best of wives."

"Yours is a very sweet and womanly ambition," said Sibyl, with a sigh; "but you might have ascribed to me better motives for my plans."

"Dear Sib, it is not wise to plan at all. Let both of us be content for a wiser Hand to rule our destinies."

"But how grave we are," Mamie added the next moment. "Here comes papa to meet us, and the gentlemen are with him. I do so hope you will like Mr. Lowther! For my sake, you know."

Both Sibyl Hardress and Gerald Lowther assured themselves that they were very pleased to renew the acquaintance under circumstances that enabled them to be on the best of terms without any danger of misunderstanding, and once again they glided into intimacy; they read the same books, discussed favorite topics, and held long arguments with an increasing respect for each other's mental powers.

It was only when Gerald was smoking his last cigar, or Sibyl was brushing her tresses at night, that he would marvel how she could bestow such a heart as hers on a thoughtless boy who took no interest in her pursuit, and she would feel vexed with Mamie for her frivolity. Why did she not fit herself to be the companion of the clever man who had chosen her for his wife?

"I am afraid we are in a maze and don't know the way out," Wyatt Hemsley confided to his betrothed one morning when they had stolen away to the conservatory, while Gerald and Sibyl bent their heads together over a pamphlet on the Semitic stone. "They are the best of friends, but no sooner give either of them a hint of our scheming than they will fly apart and no earthly power will bring them together again."

"Cannot we trust to circumstances?"

"You see," objected Mamie's lover, "I am a selfish