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The Romance OF A Marriage.

CHAPTER III.

"What's he like?" he asks, getting his cigarettes out.
"Who?" she says. "Oh, a sugar-baker's son trying to be something better. Don't you remember the story of the man who asked a friend what costume he would advise him to wear at a fancy ball? 'Go disguised as a gentleman,' said the friend."
He leans back and laughs.
"Poor beggar! After all he can't help being a sugar-baker's son, you know. They are awfully rich, I suppose?"
"Awfully, immensely, wickedly. They bought this beautiful place, you know."
He nods, and knocks the ash off his cigarette.
She sighs. If there is a sentimental spot in Paula's heart, Powis Court is enshrined there.
"Yes; fancy this lovely old place, full of historical associations—they say a King of England stayed here for a week in the old times; I wonder he didn't stay altogether—a dear old place, which no one who hadn't come over with William the Conqueror ought to own. Fancy its falling into the hands of a sugar-baker!"
"Rum—rather," he says.
"Rum!" she repeats, indignant at his lack of sympathy. "It is monstrous! If I had been the Powis who parted with it, I would rather have burnt it to the ground."
He looks at her, and a faint light comes into his eyes, called there, perhaps, by the brilliant light in hers.
"He'd have been sent to quod—prison, I mean," he says coolly.
"I'd have perished in the flames with it!" retorts Paula; then she laughs at her own romantic fit. "No, of course, he was very sensible. He sold it and got away—disappeared into the nothingness, as Alice's German master

used to say. I suppose he couldn't bear to see it again; at any rate, none of the Powises have ever come back."
"Poor dev—poor wretches," says the young man, flinging his cigarette away, and looking up at the beautiful face, now ruminative and thoughtful.
"After all," she says, as if she had been considering, "it might have fallen into worse hands. Mr. Palmer is not so bad as he might be; he is very kind; for instance, I am not trespassing to-night. He lets us walk here in the grounds whenever we like."
"Mighty condescending!"
"Yes," she says, with a little laugh, "so it is. We are all such poor little people beside the Palmers of the Court, though once we shared Hampden with the Powises."
He looked at her fixedly.
"Yes?" he says, with an interested air of enquiry.
Paula nods, so wrapt in the subject as to have forgotten her intended departure.
"Yes, the Estcourts and the Powises were lords of all we survey; but my great-grandfather discovered a mine—a very deep mine—so deep that it swallowed all the land excepting that little bit you see there," and she points to some corn-covered fields rising up the swell of the hill, "and the Powises—I don't know what they discovered, but their lands went also. Quite a little romance, isn't it?"
He nods, still looking at her.
"And your father lives at that cottage?"
She looks down at him, and the smile dies out of the eyes, leaving them very soft and sad and tender, so tenderly sorrowful that they seem to go straight to his heart, and his own eyes fall before them.
"No," she says, "he is there," and she points to the church-yard, with its white stones, just visible beyond the Powis garden.
He does not speak, does not offer any apology or expression of regret, but he inclines his head and gives a gesture more eloquent than a volume.
"No," she goes on quickly, "there are only Alice and Bob and me left, and we live there, as you say, and," putting the shawl round her, "if you come to-morrow and ask for my brother, he will tell you everything you want to know about the fishing. I must go now. I ought not to have stayed so long. Good-night."
He rises and stands bareheaded.
"Good-night, Miss Estcourt," he says.
She starts, and then laughs.
"I forgot, I thought you knew me. I had forgotten for the moment that I had told you my name."
"Only the surname," he says, gravely, with no suspicion of impertinence, but with a frank question.
"Oh, my other name is Pauline," she says, carelessly; "they call me Paula. Good night. Oh, don't come

until one o'clock to-morrow, because my brother is about the farm until then, unless you come at eight o'clock, and I suppose—with a laugh—"you won't do that!"
"I shall come at eight o'clock," he says.
"Very well," she says, rising. "I'll tell him you are coming."
He looks at her.
"Thank you very much," he says.
"Will you please tell him my name—Herrick Powis?"
She doesn't start, but she turns and looks at him, with, at first, a smile of incredulity. Of course it is a joke. But as he stands in the moonlight, with his handsome, debonaire face just pleasantly expressive with a smile, she sees that it is the truth, and that she has been spending a moonlight quarter of an hour with a Powis of Powis Court. Spending a quarter of an hour with him! Worse than that: dancing with him and telling him his own family history!

"Powis!" she says, and she looks from the tall figure to the old house in the background. "Really, Powis? I beg your pardon, of course you know your own name, but—"
"One of the Powises who used to live here?" he says. "Yes, I can just remember the old place; we left when I was a youngster of five—"
Paula looks at him, as he speaks with his careless ease, almost indifference.
"Is it possible?" she says, with a smile of amazement.
"Is what possible: that I could ever have been five years old?" he says, with a smile.
"No; but that—that you could come back here, and—and dance, actually dance, outside the house that was once your forefathers'?"
"Why not?" he says, thrusting his hands in his pockets, and looking at her with a frank air of amusement.
"Well—and she draws a long breath—"of course, if you don't mind—"
"Pon my word," he says, argumentatively, "I don't see why not. I enjoyed it. I never enjoyed a dance so much in my life," and he just inclines his head.
Paula looks at him with that deep, thoughtful look which comes into her eyes sometimes and makes them look so large and solemn.
"It is simply dreadful!" she says.
"Nero fiddling while Rome was burning. I don't know how you could do it. If Powis Court once belonged to me, and I had lost it, I could never bear to see it again; and as to dancing outside it, when my place was inside, if it was anywhere, why—"
Then, as she sees the frank, half-amused smile on his face, called up by her enthusiasm, she stops short, and, impelled by some invisible imp, she laughs long and merrily.
"It is too ridiculous!" she says.
"Have you no sentiment in your soul—no spark of romance?"
"Not a spark, I'm afraid," he says. "Of course I'm very sorry. I'd rather have had the old place than Palmer; but Palmer bought it, and I suppose we had the money, though—with a smile—"I can't say I have ever seen any of it, and the thing is as long as it is broad. But I see you won't forgive me easily."

"No," says Paula, frankly; "I don't think that I shall."
"You have asked me to come and march about the place like a provincial Hamlet?" he says.
Paula nods brightly.
"Yes, I should have much preferred that," she says, almost defiantly.
"Couldn't do it," he says. "Never was good at that sort of thing. Make the best of things, I say. After all,



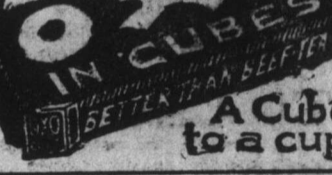
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life is short, and if you don't make it a merry one—"

"And the way of making it a merry one is to dance outside the old ancestral halls that are yours no longer!" says Paula, with a quiet smile.
He thinks for a moment.
"Yes," he says, "if you won't dance inside, and you get the chance of such a partner as I had."
She drops him an elaborate courtesy.
"Now I've offended you?" he says.
"Not at all!" she retorts. "I am not so easily offended. Good-night, Mr. Powis—Herrick Powis, I think you said."
"Herrick! Yes; but I'm generally called Rick," he nods, almost in the same words she had used.
Paula inclines her head, but vouchsafes no reply, and the next moment she has gone.

CHAPTER IV.

Paula sped homewards, opened the door beneath the verandah, which rarely knew lock and bolt; for the inhabitants of Hampden Powis were not given "to break in and steal;" and, flinging her shawl on the sofa, sank down into a chair—to think.
It was, so to speak, the most eventful incident in her life.
To think that she should have met a Powis—a real live Powis—and outside the old Court, and that she should actually have seen and talked and danced with him! It was very amusing; it was also rather disappointing and annoying.
She had been wont to associate the name of Powis with all that was romantic and mournful and sad; had pictured the Powises wandering about the face of the globe, a scattered race; and here was a Powis who walked about the grounds that should have been his, and smoked cigarettes as if nothing had happened. It annoyed her. And his name, too—Herrick—"but I am generally called Rick." As if any of the Powises could be called Rick!

"How he could endure, to sit there outside, while a sugar-baker lorded it in his old house, I cannot conceive," she thought.
Then she began to recall the figure and face of the young man; and here there was some satisfaction.
"He looked noble and well-born," she mused. "Most men would have been mistaken for a gamekeeper in those cords; but he looked a gentleman—and he was handsome, too; yes, awfully handsome. I suppose Stacey de Palmer would give half his inheritance to look like that. And the way he talks, too—so easy and natural and nice. It must be a good thing to be a gentleman, even though one had lost everything. I wonder whether he is very poor? And I treated him to a bit of my family history! He bore it well; that is like a gentleman all over. Many a man—a common man—would have stopped me, and said, with proud hauteur, 'I am a Powis!' but he didn't; he just let me talk on. Poor young fellow!"
Take care, Paula, my free-hearted young maiden! We all know what pity is akin to.

(To be continued.)

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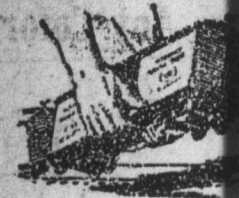
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