

# One in a Thousand, BUT TRUE TO THE LAST

CHAPTER IV. THE WEDDING.

To all but Loys there is no need for tears or sadness. A young, handsome girl is going to secure one of the best prizes in the matrimonial market, and they are all heartily glad to be able to make merry over the event. They would gladly, any of them, take her place; but, as that cannot very well be, they are highly delighted to play "second fiddle," and make a bevy of charming bridesmaids.

As I turn into my room, Loys tells me to be quick and get my hair done, while she is speaking to Theo. I slip off my wrapper and don a dressing gown, and, in combing out and brushing my enormous mass of hair, I forget the subject that has been troubling me since our return home. I plait the long, shining tresses into a smooth braid and twist it up into a heavy knot behind my head. Then, having combed my fringe down, I look at my dress and wonder if I shall be able to get into it by myself. It is the first trained skirt I have had and I want, if possible, to have it on before Loys returns. I am so afraid she will laugh at me if I am stupid in putting it on. I turn it over and over, and feel convinced I shall never be able to kneel down in it, for, being of silk, and a thick one, too, it will not give or split like a thinner material. However, the fear of ridicule makes me desperate, and I force it over my head somehow, much to the detriment of the knot of hair and to the intense discomfort of my whole person. Just as I am fastening the last hook, something which secures the train in its proper position gives way, with a loud crack, and I feel easier. I strut backward and forward before the glass in the wardrobe, and think how well the delicate, sheeny blue contrasts with my fair skin and bright hair. After all, I am better-looking than I thought; and how like Theo! I flush all over at the thought, for my eldest sister is my beau ideal of feminine beauty. I fasten the collar with a brooch of turquoise, and clasp the locket round my throat.

Just as I have finished, Loys comes in; she enters with a rush and a bang, and then stops short. "Why, Audrey," she said, vehemently, "how jolly you look, and how like Theo you are!"

Then it is true, after all; my glass did not deceive me!

"Am I?" I say, carelessly. "No one ever said so before."

"It's perfectly absurd! Anyone might mistake you for her," she answers, emphatically.

"You're awfully late, Loys," I say. "Shall I stop and help you, or will you get on quicker if I am out of the way?"

"Oh, go to Theo!" she says. "I've stayed till the last minute. And, if you put the wreath on before I come, be sure to put it well in front. She will look horrid if it is hanging off the back."

I suggest that a medium might be

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desirable, but Loys lifts her sponge threateningly, and, fearful for my dress, I betake myself out of the room precipitately.

I go down the corridor mindingly, glancing every moment over my shoulder, to see the effect of my train, which goes "swish-swish," and certainly takes more dust off the floor than two brooms would do. The distance from our room to Theo's is not very long; but this morning I take just twice as long to traverse it as I should do if I were clothed in a linen wrapper. I find Theo just putting on her dress. She looks very lovely, but is exceedingly pale; I can hardly say whether her dress or her face is the whiter. But she is quite calm, perfectly composed. I fasten on the wreath in strict accordance with Loys' orders. Theo does not make any suggestions and I think if I left it off altogether she would not find it out. Having satisfied myself that it is safe, and will not create a diversion by coming off during the ceremony, I, with the aid of Bates, Theo's new maid, proceed to envelop her with the cloud of misty tulle, which has the effect of making her look like a spirit.

"What a pity you haven't a little more color!" I remark, stepping backward to criticize her narrowly.

"Oh, never mind that!" she says with a smile. "No one expects brides to look anything but pale."

"I'm not so sure of that," I answer thoughtfully. "I've heard a good many times about 'blushing brides.'"

"It is all nonsense; they blushed only in novels. And, even if a red face is the proper thing, I am very sorry I can't oblige you. Here is Loys. Shall I do?"

"You look exquisite!" affirms Loys rapturously. "I would come and kiss you, only I should crush something or another, and that would be a pity."

"And, if your dress feels like mine," I say, grimly, "you would find a difficulty in lifting up her veil. I don't know how we are to kneel down in church, for I have had two explosions already."

"So have I," returns Loys, eagerly. "I thought it would spoil the set of the skirt; and I have been trying to find the place where the tape has been sewn. I found the two strings tied together on one side, but I couldn't find the place to sew it on the other side. I was going to ask you to do it for me; but, if—"

"Oh, go as you are! You look all right; and it will never do to have a general crackling when we kneel down. It would be awkward if we set Lasselles off laughing."

"Lasselles will be too frightened to hear anything," says Loys, with a laugh. "I looked into the dining room just before I came upstairs, and he was sitting with his head upon his hands, the very picture of abject misery."

At this Theo raises her head—I think, eagerly. Until now she has taken no notice whatever of our silly chatter.

"If he wishes—" she begins.

"Too late, dear," says Loys; "he went too church ten minutes ago."

Theo turns away, and I think she sighs.

We are in Theo's room, when a servant announces that our carriage is waiting; so we have a run for it to the last. Our hats are of white felt, with a profusion of blue feathers, and refuse, with a persistency almost incredible, to keep on at all.

"What are we to do?" asks Loys, blankly.

"I wonder how the others have

managed?" I say, without answering her question.

"Perhaps a big pin would be of use," says she, in desperation.

I seize her suggestion, which is a good one, and, snatching up our gloves, we run down, amidst a general scold from everyone not already departed for being late. The first thing Loys does is to split her glove right across the palm. Then she discovers that she must have got mine by mistake; but I stoutly refuse to change. In my present excited state, I prefer a glove a size too large to one likely to be a tight fit, and woefully torn, into the bargain. I tell Loys to keep her hand shut, and no one will notice it; and then we alight, for the church is not very far from the manor. Four of the bridesmaids are already waiting within the porch, and the very first thing I notice is that Rose Lasselles is in tribulation about her hat.

"I don't know what to do," she whispers, tragically. "My wreath that has slipped back three times already, and if it falls off in church, everyone will laugh."

"Turn round," I say. "I got some big pine to fasten mine, and I have brought a couple in case they were wanted."

By the time I have made Rose's hat secure the bride's carriage stops at the gate, and she comes, like a snowflake, up the churchyard path, leaning upon my father's arm. They pass in between us. We form a line behind her, and the procession moves slowly up the aisle. There is a buzz of admiration through the church, which is quite full, as Theo advances to the altar, where the bridegroom, an archdeacon and the clergyman are awaiting her. There is a moment's solemn pause, and the service commences. The exhortation is read, the all-important questions are asked and answered, and Lord Lasselles and Theo are pronounced man and wife.

When the service is over, everyone crowds round Theo, and Lady Lasselles lifts her veil back. She is kissed and hugged until her husband must be almost driven to exasperation. I am not able to get near her before she is taken to the vestry to sign the books. Loys is told to follow her, and the other bridesmaids, with their respective groomsmen, arrange themselves in a double row in the aisle. It seems a long time before Loys and the "best man" come out and take their places at the head of the bridal attendants, but immediately after the newly married pair make their appearance. As they pass me, I think I have never seen Derrick look so well, and certainly Theo never showed to such advantage. Her pallor has changed to a sickly, tired look, and she has exactly the air of a person walking in her sleep. I think it is a good thing her husband does not see with my eyes. As soon as they pass through the porch, the assembled crowd of villagers and school children set up a shout of welcome, and flowers are plentifully strewn in their path. Halfway down to the carriage Theo stops suddenly, with a little cry of pain, and, drawing aside her dress, shows that a thorn attached to a wild rose, has run through her thin, satin shoe into her foot. Her husband stoops down and removes it.

"It is a fortunate omen," I hear him say, tenderly; "for, so I will take all thorns out of your path."

His face is so alight with love and pride that he looks almost handsome. I wonder does he notice that Theo never answers.

All the morning the sun has streamed down in a flood of liquid light; so, if omens are to be believed, the bride must be destined to be happy; and it is somewhat remarkable that no one has shed a tear. Possibly, if Loys and I had been ready and waiting, with our gloves on for half an hour, we should have wept copiously; but, as it is, we have been obliged to think of our dresses, and the little difficulty with our hats quite put off anything like "giving way" before we got to church.

The breakfast passes off as such festivities usually do. There is a good deal of fun among the young people, but Theo sits like a statue, immovable as marble. Once the archdeacon addresses her by her new title, but she does not appear to hear him until her husband tells her of it. Then she turns, with ready grace: "Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Vane! I thought you were speaking to Lady Lasselles."

"So I was," he says, with a laugh; then she blushes vividly, and looks at Derrick, piteously.

"It's all right," he says, tenderly; "you'll soon get used to it."

There are the usual speeches and compliments; and, when the entertainment has been spun out to the utmost possible length, Theo rises, and, with her train of azure-clad attendants, flutters away. Just before she is ready to leave the room, she holds out her right hand, that I may fasten her cuff, and I notice that she still wears a broad, byzantine ring set with diamonds.

"Are you wearing that to-day?" I exclaim, in a horrified tone.

"I cannot take it off," she says, a little confusedly.

"Have you tried?" I ask, harshly, looking straight at her.

Her eyes droop before mine, and I pity Derrick more than ever.

A few minutes later the "happy pair," as everyone calls them, have driven away, and the guests quietly disperse. The men staying in the house go off to the stables with my father, and the ladies retire to their own rooms. Lady Lasselles says she is going to lay down; so, one by one, the others having got out of their tight robes, find their way to our room in all the luxury of dressing gowns.

(To be Continued.)

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