



Grand Alliance;

Love That Knew No Bounds.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Mary was distinctly shaking her head behind the speaker.

"I couldn't undertake that—I don't think it practicable," her husband answered. "It would surely get to them who you were. Best be above board at once, Miss Alwyn."

"She looked at him with distress not to be explained.

"But you will make them take the money? Bind them to do it somehow?"

Mary's mouth formed a visible "no."

"I fear my urging would be of no use," responded Richard Drayton, a model of marital obedience. "Hurst will treat the matter as I should, unless he is singularly changed. He will prefer any species of work to muling a generous woman in this way."

"But oh, if he knew how refusal would hurt me!" she cried, leaning forward with her hands clasped.

Mary made expressive signs at the supple entreating figure.

"If you told him that yourself, he might be induced to take your view of it," conceded Mary's spouse, "but I couldn't tie myself to persuade him."

"Go with Richard and me to Wynstone," suggested Mary, stooping over the girl, "then, you know, dear, you can put it in a business way, and settle it all perhaps in a few minutes."

"The best way possible, unless you prefer writing to that Miss Hurst—Mrs. Babbington, whatever she is!" coincided Mr. Drayton.

Sydney changed color. She archer-blundered Miss Jean might so convey her offer that Mr. Hurst would infallibly reject it. The best, perhaps only, chance of extorting his acceptance of it might lie in her urging it herself on some such pretext as had lured him into book-making. Drooping, for this pang she was courting—to meet, to leave him again, pierced her beforehand.

"Then I think I will go," she said, and having chosen this course a feverish haste possessed her to start forth upon it. "Are you, are we, going to-day?" she asked.

"To-day! Why, Sydney, child, you need a week's nursing before you set out on that expedition!"

"I want no nursing. I am exceedingly well, Mary," this in hot haste; then sinking back wearily, "and I can come here afterward, you know. Miss Ambler will take care of me then."

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"Mary is wise. We should put Wynstone off for a few days, I think," said Mr. Drayton.

"And let Mr. Babbington oust Miss Hurst's brother, and fling him into the pleasant tolls of Mr. Montague Carle! And you call that being his friend!" cried Sydney, brimming over with indignation.

"Then suppose we say to-morrow," yielded the gentleman; his commander-in-chief having telegraphed to that effect. And "to-morrow," soon after midday, they went.

From efforts at most charming cheerfulness—reward for their concession—Sydney subsided, as they neared Capel Moor, into speechlessness, and as they traversed the lane to Wynstone, now paced in front of her companions, now lagged behind, in a mood decipherable only by one of her own sex. Mrs. Drayton's own pulse went a trifle faster from certain conjurings up of her usually placid imagination; but her fancies she loyally kept to herself—bride though she was.

"I am afraid Miss Alwyn won't accomplish what she is come for," said Mr. Drayton, as they passed the church; Sydney lingering by the gate.

"We shall see," returned his oracle, and just then a trim West-country lass met them, looked at the unknown pair inquisitively, at Sydney with broad saluting smile and courtesy.

"Miss Grey back, I do declare now! But they're not expecting of you, are they, miss, 'cause mistress gave me half a day to go to mother's. But if you please I'll run back again, and be ready to open the door before you get there; yes, indeed!"

"And so lose your holiday, Fanny!" said Sydney. "No, you shall not do that. We are only—making a call."

"But, miss," expostulated the maid, "Rebecca's in the garden-piece picking strawberries. She'll never hear the bell, and for sure, she's that slow she'll take five minutes answering it. And strangers, too," with a side courtesy at Miss Grey's friends. "Let me run back, miss."

"They mind waiting no more than I do," (Truly, Sydney was grateful for the respite. Like a coward, she was wishing herself a thousand miles away.) "Shall we find all—both at home?" That much she must know.

"Yes, miss, as yet. But come Monday, and they're going off. Mr. Hurst into West Wales, and—"smothering a chuckle—"and mistress somewhere's to Mr. Babbington's sister's to get married you! The road's dusty a bit up, Miss Grey; won't you go in, by the orchard?" volunteered Fanny, departing with another courtesy.

"Yes, that we will," said Mary Drayton, covering Sydney's silence adroitly with complaints of the heat; and taking the shadier way, they just contrived to escape seeing or being seen by Miss Hurst, who, with many assurances to her brother that she should not be half an hour absent, started at that precise minute from her own porch door off to the Manor House.

"Oh, the river, the river, and the hill!" cried Mary, enthusiastically, as the new un-Suffolk-like scenes opened out. "Sydney, you never made half enough of what you had to leave. It is a picture I could look at alone for hours."

"Suppose you look at it for ten minutes with me instead," laughed her husband, drawing her nearer (that couple have not discarded honey-moon habits to this day). "I believe Miss Alwyn would find it easier to say what she intends to Hurst and his sister without us two sitting by

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listening. Then we would put in an appearance presently, and do our share of persuasion if necessary."

The Earl's Son;

OR—

TWO HEARTS UNITED.

CHAPTER I.

"Talbot gets the title and inherits the estate," said Lord Lynborough. "That should be enough for him; it is unencumbered; it is sufficient even for him."

"Or should be," remarked Bolton. "Or should be," repeated the earl, with a tightening of his thin lips. "It was enough for me."

"Mr. Talbot and your lordship are two very different persons."

"Thanks, Bolton! I do not intend leaving Talbot any of the prey which I have saved or made. I have no quarrel with my nephew, but I do not think there is much love lost between us. I make no complaint. His ways are not my ways—that is all."

"Mr. Talbot is a most estimable young man, my lord. He is making a name for himself; he is beginning to loom somewhat largely in the public eye."

"So I am told. He is welcome to loom as largely as she pleases, and I trust the public enjoys the looming. But I have no desire to discuss Talbot's indisputable virtues and manifold talents. We are talking of Veronica. I will ask you to draw up a will which will give her at my death the possession of my fortune. There is one condition—"

The lawyer looked up sharply, but said nothing.

"A very simple one—and one which Veronica will not refuse compliance. It is this—that she marry a man of rank."

Mr. Bolton put his pencil-case in his pocket-book and, leaning back again, looked fixedly at the earl.

"I venture to think the word simple scarcely fits it, my lord," he said. "I need scarcely remind you that Miss Veronica is a young lady possessed of considerable pride—"

"I know," responded his lordship. "I noticed it the day she arrived here. I have remarked it ever since, daily. Pride is supposed to be, rightly or wrongly, a striking characteristic of our family—though God alone knows what we have to be proud of!—and Veronica has apparently inherited more than her share. I am counting upon this fact: of course I am! If I could rely on it altogether, Bolton, there would be no need for my condition; but I cannot. As you know, there is a bad strain in her blood. My brother married beneath him. Her mother was—"

"A most respectable young woman," put in Mr. Bolton, firmly.

"Exactly," retorted the earl, with a

faint smile. "You have described her position with your usual laconic lucidity. I never saw her."

"If you had seen her, my lord," said Mr. Bolton, "you would have formed a most favorable opinion of her; for, though she was below your brother in rank, she was a worthy lady and a good wife. And, after all, it is not the first time a man has married beneath him; and very often such marriages turn out more disastrously."

It was a truism of the most obvious kind; but its effect upon the earl was peculiar. His hand dropped from his head, a faint color rose to his white face, and a gleam, an angry, suspicious gleam, shot from the dark eyes, and the black brows above them drew together in a frown; but these signs of emotion passed as quickly as they had come and gave place to the usual cynical smile, as he said:

"Quite so, quite so. But the fact remains that the strain is there, and therefore I must guard against it. With my money goes Wayneford Park. It was my mother's. If I care for any place on earth, I care for Wayneford. She will reign there; I do not propose that some upstart commoner shall reign beside her. I would rather the money and the Park went to Talbot. After all, as I said, it is a simple condition. We can put it to her; if she should accept it, well and good; if not—" He made a little gesture with his hand and leant back as if the argument were finished. "We may as well ask her now, Bolton."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "As well now as at any other time, my lord," he said.

The earl touched the bell beside his chair; a footman entered noiselessly—all noises were strictly barred at Lynne Court—and his lordship bade him ask Miss Gresham if she would be kind enough to come to the library.

The earl sank back into a reclining attitude, his eyes half closed; his face, the hue of old ivory, his attenuated form, were statuesque; and Mr. Bolton, as he looked at him meditatively, was reminded of one of the effigies on the family tombs in the chapel at the end of the west wing. Scarcely one of the originals of those effigies but had had a moving history; what, wondered even the old lawyer, who knew so much, was the secret history of this, the present Earl of Lynborough?

He was still wondering when the door was opened by the footman to admit the young girl of whom the two men had been speaking.

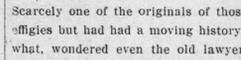
Descriptions of women's looks are always inadequate and often misleading; and it is difficult to explain wherein lay the charm of Veronica's face, the charm which made itself felt by all who looked on her. Her eyes were grey, the Lynborough grey which not seldom became violet; the brows above them were dark and straight like those of the family portraits; the mouth was by no means small, but bewitching with curves which would have indicated more than the usual feminine tenderness, especially when she smiled, if it had not been for the pride which lurked at the corners of the mobile lips as it shone in the depths of the wonderful eyes and revealed itself in the poise of the shapely head. Can one sum up all this with one word—beautiful?

(To be Continued.)

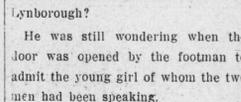
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