

TWICE MARRIED.

At a late—very late breakfast, the morning after the Shirley ball, the Smiths were assembled with the exception of Blanche, who had entreated to be left undisturbed, since she must sleep or die, and Percival, who had breakfasted sketchily on scraps and confectionery, hours before, and was away in the woods with his gun.

The mail, always deposited in a little heap beside the general's plate, had been distributed. There was very little—two newspapers, a couple of letters for Nesbit Thorne, and one for Norma from a New York friend, claiming a promised visit, and overflowing with gossip and news of Gotham, full of personalities also, and a faint ladylike suspicion of wickedness—a racy, entertaining letter.

"Mamma," observed Norma, glancing up from her letter, "Kate says that Cecil Cumberland is engaged, or going to be engaged. I can't exactly make out which. It appears to be considerably true. Kate writes: 'Cecil looks married, and sulkily important. I ranged in a solid phalanx of indignation, which, of course, affair firmly. Eva Cumberland here this morning in heat of passion over it; an apoplexy or hydrophobia is the old lady. The fact of Norma's voice trailed off into a ligible murmur, and she read: 'Mrs. — who, my dear?'

her mother, with lively in Cecil going to marry an widow."

"Wait a moment, mamma, so indistinctly, I'll be able presently." There was a sharp perceptible in Norma's voice.

"But why do the family assist Mrs. Smith. A warning her daughter admonished her matter rest; that there were nected with Mr. Cumberland's investigation and discussion of better be postponed. Mrs. Smith burned with inquiries, but she them back, and sought to prod sion by idle conjectures about I

Thorne presently followed he lished himself opposite. He friends with Norma; once in his marriage there had appeared hood of their becoming more. All that had been forgotten the woman's memory was mo. They were wonderfully good these two; they never worried one another.

Thorne, having no special de his own letters, lighted a cigar, fire to a glorious blaze, and w satational. The theme he select cussion was the topic introduced at the breakfast table: previously—the debatable en their New York acquaintance subject he chose to exhibit an as Norma felt, unnecessary, curiosity. He cross-question vigorously, and failing to elicit replies, laughingly accused her to earn a cheap notoriety by th of a petty mystery.

"I wish you'd stop trying on the witness stand, Nesb claimed in vexation; 'why do your own letters? One is f know. See what she says.'

Thorne took his wife's miss pocket, opened, and glanced hurriedly; then turned back page, and re-read it more care pression of his face hardening i slightly dashed with disgust. was penned in a large runnin covered eight pages of daint paper. It was rambling in and lachrymose in tone, but it want, and made that want clea. It was—divorce.

Mrs. Thorne gave no specia desiring release from her ma she dwelt at length on her "k protected" condition, and w for herself, and considered her one; suggesting blame to he that he had not taken the nec for her release long before. E that he had been selfish and proper consideration for her it to her to take the initi the matter. He should ha about the divorce at the t separation, she said, and so ha annoyance. As he had not d hoped he would show some con her now, and help her to arr agreeable business as speedily as possible. He really owed her "after all that had passed"; it were heavily underscored.

"Read that!" he said, and letter into Norma's lap. W doing so, he broke the seal letter which proved to be a co from a firm of solicitors in a in Illinois, in whose hands I had placed her case. It was delicately and ambiguously worded, as became the nature of the business, and contained simply a courteous notification of their client's intentions.

Norma had been prepared for Mrs. Thorne's letter by that of her friend Mrs. Vincent; and perhaps also by a secret hope on which she had fed for years—a hope that this would happen. She read the letter therefore without emotion, and returned it without comment.

"Well?" he queried impatiently.

"Well!" she echoed.

"What do you think of it?"

"I think that Mrs. Thorne wishes to marry again."

"No!—do you?" The tone was thoughtful; the interrogation delivered slowly. The idea was a new one, and it put a different complexion upon the matter, because of the child; there were still several years during which the personal custody of the boy was the mother's of right. It behooved him to look into this matter more closely.

"Yes, I'm sure of it," responded Norma; "its town talk. See what Kate Vincent says about it."

She handed him her letter folded down at this paragraph: "People have been mildly excited, and the gossip's tongues set wagging by a rumor which floated down from the Adirondacks last summer, and has been gaining body and substance ever since. You remember how Cecil Cumberland philaandered after a certain lady of our acquaint-

ance last winter, and how unremitting were his attentions? Friendship, my dear! Harmless friendship of a pure platonic plat form; you understand—*boni soit qui mal y pense*. Well, this autumn the plot thickened; the platonic became less apparent; the friendship more pronounced. Nothing painfully noticeable—oh no; the lady is too clever—still, the gossip began to take a contract, and work on it in slack seasons, and latterly with diligence. It is openly predicted that madam will seek a divorce, and then!—we shall see what we shall see. Cecil looks radiantly worried and sulkily important. His family are ranged in a solid phalanx of indignant opposition, which of course clinches the matter firmly. Eva Cumberland was here this morning in a white heat of passion over it, and I believe apoplexy or hydrophobia is imminent for the old lady. The fact of Mrs. Thorne's being still a married woman gives the affair a queer look to squeamish mortals, and the Cumberland women are the quintessence of con-

through her lashes; "I fear I only bore you with my story, but my mind has been so exercised over the poor fellow's troubles again lately, that I must unburden it to some one. You have no personal interest in the matter, therefore you will forgive my trespassing on your courtesy—especially when I tell you that I've no one at home to talk to. Nesbit wishes particularly that his story shouldn't get abroad here, and if I should revive it in Blanche's mind, she might mention it to others. Mamma would not; but unfortunately mamma and I rarely look at a thing from the same standpoint. It's been a relief to speak to you—far greater than speaking to Blanche. "Blanche is so excitable."

Yes; Blanche was excitable, Pocahontas assented absently; she was bracing her will, and steeling her nerves to endure without finching. Not for worlds would she—even by the quivering of an eyelash—let Norma see the torture she was inflicting. She felt that Norma had an object in this disclosure, and was dimly sure that the object was

man would inquire. Would the gentleman walk in. What name should he say? Mr. Thorne—and his business was pressing; he must see her at once.

The man opened the door of the back parlor and stood aside to let Mr. Thorne pass; then he closed it noiselessly and proceeded up-stairs to inform his mistress.

Thorne glanced around the room curiously; it was two years since he had seen it. On the marble hearth burned a bright wood-fire, and the dancing flames reflected themselves in the burnished brasses. The tiles around the fireplace were souvenirs of his wedding, hand-painted by the bevy of bridesmaids to please a fancy of Ethel's. Norma's was in the centre—the place of honor. It was a strange thing that Norma had selected to paint; heavy sprays of mingled nightshade and monkshood on a ground the color of a fading leaf; but, strange as it was, it was the most beautiful of them all. There were flowers in the room and the perfume of heliotrope and roses filled the air. The piano was open and on it one of

"Why will it be restricted?" she demanded, her color and her temper rising. "It shall not be restricted or hampered in any way, I tell you, Nesbit Thorne! Am I to be fettered and bound and trammelled by you forever? I will not be. The divorce shall give me unlimited power to do what I please with my life. It shall make me as free as air—as free as I was before I married you."

"You would not wish to marry again?" he repeated.

"Why not?" rising to her feet and confronting him in angry excitement.

"Because, in that case, you would lose your child. I neither could nor would permit my son to be brought up in the house of a man who stood to him in the relationship you propose."

"You cannot take him from me," Mrs. Thorne retorted in defiant contradiction; her ideas of the power of men and lawyers hopelessly vague and bewildered. "No court on earth would take so small a child from his mother."

he having the case come misunderstood you. I d the affair managed ublicity and comment. ase comes into court, it, and try to the boy, even for the rs the mother, on the rable to support and

the case to come into and you know that I ou delight in torment-

nel. I've no wish to ly wished to show you / my rights, and that -all the power which -on my side. Our i a miserable mis- we rushed into it with- each other's characters , like most couples who e a five-barred gate, to grief. I shall not f you wish to go, I shall is is what I propose : atter, will take all the arrangements, bear all be necessary for one of nd see these lawyers, if often there. It may rgo a short residence r to simulate citizen- the divorce legal. it this, and if it's t. After the divorce of this house, and a support it; and also n as long as you re- In return, you must boy for the years you , and must bind your- to me, or any person month before any such r, by word or act, to e life, or any disposi- it to make of him. I object to any future e from my house, and otice in ample time, to bout the boy." w me to see the child

to brute, and you are mly stipulate that the in some other house at liberty to visit him , so long as you are ement and leave his ill never mention you shall expect the same you. When he is old een us, he will decide

arry again, yourself. then? You are very ising in your dictation can have feelings and

i. He considered that vell to his wife. He ell to her; to let the so that no shadow or ht fall upon the future. set the affair in a new pleasant light, and he t. thinking that by so f it. There was the poles between Pocah- scil Cumberland. He judge of what would e of his son.

ng the probability e mine," he responded e in circulation have at."

with defiant inquiry. seeking freedom from ne man, in order to another. That your rksome because they ag other vows to I pass over the moral ; that must rest with (it is astonishing how lt in administering the with your conscience," with that I've nothing oe of such reports— nduct as a married

woman open to censure—gives me the right to dictate the terms of our legal separa- tion. I'm obliged to speak plainly, Ethel. You brought about the issue, and must abide by the consequences. I've stated my terms, and it's for you to accept or decline them."

She signified her acceptance of his proposal in a few brusque, ungracious words, for she considered it due to her dignity to be disagreeable, in that she was acceding to terms, not dictating them.

CHAPTER XV.

Thorne had even less difficulty with his legal arrangements than he had anticipated. He had hitherto relegated the subject of divorce to the limbo of things as little thought and spoken of as possible by well-bred people. He knew nothing of the *modus operandi*, and was surprised at the ease and celerity with which the legal machine moved.

Thorne walked in the direction of his hotel in a state of preoccupation. He was sore and irritated; he disliked it all intensely; it jarred upon him and offended his taste. Over and over he cursed it all for a damnable business from beginning to end. He was perfectly aware, reasoning from cause to effect, that the situation was in some sort, his own fault; but that was a poor consolation. That side of the question did not readily present itself; he horizon was occupied by the nearer and more personal view. He loathed it all, and was genuinely sorry for himself and con-

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and slippers, sat over the fire in Pocahontas room, brushing out their long hair, Norma found the opportunity for which she had lain in wait the entire evening.

After some idle conversation, she deftly turned the talk upon New York, and the life there, and rallied all her powers to be picturesque and entertaining. She held her listener entranced with rapid, clever sketches of society and the men and women who composed it, drawing vivid pictures of its usages, beliefs, and modes of thought and expression. Gradually she glided into personalities, giving some of her individual experiences, and sketching in an acquaintance or two, with brilliant, caustic touches. Soon Thorne's name appeared, and she noticed that the listener's interest deepened. She spoke of him in warm terms of admiration—dwelt on his intellect, his talents and the bright promise of his manhood; and then, observing that the brush had ceased its regular passes over the bright brown hair, and that the gray eyes were on the fire, without pause or warning she spoke of his hurried courtship and sudden marriage. She winced involuntarily as she saw the cold, gray pallor creep slowly over the girl's face, and noted the sudden tremor that passed through her limbs; but she steeled herself against compassion, and proceeded with her brushing and her narrative like one devoid of sight and understanding.

"I can not expect you, who know Nesbit so slightly, to be much interested in all this," she said, watching Pocahontas

the part of a gentleman, but of a generous, long-suffering man. Thorne felt a glow of satisfaction in the knowledge that in years to come his son would think well of him.

But this supposition of Norma's in regard to a second marriage put the whole matter in a new light in regard to the child. If such a change should be in contemplation, other arrangements must be made about the boy; he could no longer remain in the custody of his mother. His son could not remain under the roof of his wife's second husband during his own lifetime. The line must be drawn somewhere. It did not occur to Thorne that his wife with equal justice might raise similar objections.

He determined to see Ethel at once and discover whether or not there was truth in the reports that had reached him anent Cecil Cumberland. If there should be, he would bring such pressure as lay in his power to bear on her, in order to obtain immediate possession of the boy. The child was still so young that the law gave the mother rights which could only be set aside at the expense of a disagreeable suit; but Thorne thought he could manage Ethel in such a way as to make her voluntarily surrender her rights. He knew that her affection for the child was neither deep nor strong.

He ascended the steps of his own house and rang the bell sharply. It was answered by a strange servant who regarded him with interest; evidently a gentleman caller at that hour of the morning was unusual. Was Mrs. Thorne at home? The

Thorne might have retorted that the misunderstanding had been mutual, and also that all the wretchedness had not fallen to her share; but he would not stoop to reproaches and vituperation. It was a natural peculiarity of her shallow nature to demand exhaustive comprehension for quite commonplace emotions.

"It's useless debating the past, Ethel. We've both been too much to blame to afford the luxury of stone-throwing. What we must consider now is the future. Is your mind quite made up? Are you determined on the divorce?"

"Quite determined. I've given the matter careful consideration, and am convinced that entire separation, legal as well as nominal, is absolutely necessary to my happiness."

"And your reasons?"

"Haven't I told you, Nesbit?" using his name, for the first time, in her anger, "Why do you insist on my repeating the same thing over and over, eternally? I'm sick of my life, and want to change it."

"But how?" he persisted. "Your life will be the same as now, and your position not so assured. The alimony allowed by law won't anything like cover your present expenditures, and you can hardly expect me to be more generous than the law compels. The divorce can make little difference, save to diminish your income and deprive you of the protection of my name. You will not care to marry again, and the divorce will be a restricted one." Thorne was forcing his adversary's hand.