

DIAMONDS FOR THE BRIDE

Or, a Proposal by Proxy

CHAPTER III.—(Cont'd)

The suggestion was perceptibly unwelcome. It was plain Gower did not wish to be identified with the man mistaken for him at Lucca.

"I could hardly follow it, except by presenting myself at the hotel, and asking if I was remembered there. Any Italian innkeeper would say yes to such a question, purely out of politeness and a wish to please, and without the slightest real memory. I should gain nothing; worse than nothing, as it would confirm a mistake. I can try going to Chalmers as a patient, or I can follow Morden's advice to leave the thing alone. I see no middle course, as my effort to trace the money ended in failure."

"Then leave it alone, my dear fellow," returned Colonel Swayne, with at least a surface heartiness, though his first opinion was unshaken. "You have forgotten, because you were knocked on the head in Paris; but it does not follow there was anything particular to forget. Probably you led a commonplace existence during those last months, though in some unknown way you managed to fill your purse. You left England intending to travel, and no doubt you did travel—to Lucca or elsewhere. You were not tied to resume your occupation at a given time."

"No, it had come to an end." "And you were not enslaved to that pernicious habit, a regular correspondence, so there was nothing exceptional about your silence towards your friends. I range myself on Sir Luke Morden's side. I don't believe the last summer will trouble you in the future, or trouble Dulcie, which is more immediately my concern."

Here was the judgment of another counselor, a third voice urging him to treat the unknown past as if it had never been. He would endeavor to obey them, these advisers who beckoned him on in the path of his desire, and stop his ears against the inward monitor which refused to prophesy smooth things, and had no tongue except for woe.

Colonel Swayne pushed back his chair and rose. He had delivered his opinion, and there was an end of the matter. "If really you will have no more wine," he was beginning, "we will join Mrs. Swayne in the drawing-room."

The sentence was barely spoken when the butler came to the door. "If you please, sir," he said diffidently. "Headcliff is here, wanting to see you."

Now Headcliff was the bailiff, and it was altogether against rule for Colonel Swayne to be disturbed of an evening. "Didn't you tell him I am engaged?" said the master of the house with irritation. "Let him go to Mr. May."

"If you please, sir, it is about Mr. May's order and the cutting in the spinney. He wants to know, sir, if it is your wish to have it done at once."

"Tell him yes, and set the men on it to-morrow." And then to Gower, as the servant withdrew: "It's astonishing how the people here hate this young fellow May. They won't take an order, if they can help it, that comes to them through him. I don't know in what way he has contrived to put their backs up; he seems inoffensive enough, knows his business, and sticks to it. I'd have Headcliff in and give him a talking to, but it hardly seems worth while. May will be gone in another three weeks to take up an appointment abroad; and if my arm is sound again by then, I shall not need a secretary."

The last words were uttered half across the hall, and once the drawing-room door was opened the subject was abandoned. Mrs. Swayne sat at her embroidery frame under the light; Dulcie was at the piano, candle-lit in the recess; May did not appear.

Fortune's Court kept early hours and Gower went up to his room about eleven—a room which looked out at the side of the house above the shrubberies. He was minded to have a last before turning in, and with lights shut off he flung the window open, sitting atween his teeth and deep in thought. He was not thinking of any inmate of the Court, except indirectly of Dulcie; his mind had gone back to Mrs. Pinkerton and Lucca, to the void and the spectres. Thick evergreens clothed the steep bank sloping to the river, a reach of which was visible below, a broad flood now touched into silver by the moon. There was a white space of path also lighted on the lower terrace, where for some thirty yards it was free from the shadow of overhanging trees. Idly looking down on this, he saw two figures emerge from the dimness on one side, and, slowly sauntering, pass into the dimness on the other.

The appearance was so unexpected that his attention was instantly arrested. The man was hatless, and his blonde head was plainly visible in the moonlight. It was the secretary May, and the woman who moved beside him held up a grey silken skirt from contact with the night damps of the path, and wore a lace shawl muffled about her head and shoulders.

The red glow of Gower's pipe darkened, for he forgot to draw at it. He took his elbows off the sill with a long breath of amazement. "By Jove!" he ejaculated, as he looked after the couple disappearing into shadow, "unless somebody is masquerading, that was the second Mrs. Swayne!"

CHAPTER IV.

When Colonel Swayne was freed from his first marriage by judicial decree, he was speedily minded to contract a second. Certain cogent reasons urged him again towards matrimony—the chief of these being that he desired an heir. The two daughters on their arrival had each acutely disappointed him, for he was passionately anxious a son should succeed, not only to his own small patrimony of the Court, but to the barony of Swinton, which would pass to him on the death of a childless brother. Such were the hopes that the first Mrs. Swayne had failed to fulfil; and in looking round the circle of his acquaintance for a successor, they directed his choice. He must wed with a woman young enough to bear him children, and of birth and breeding befitting the mother of his heir.

The circle of choice proved to be more limited than appeared at a first view. The Miss Welters were rich and well-born, but they were strict Anglicans, and would not hear of wedding a man who had regained his freedom through the doubtful doorway of divorce. His old friend Leverton had a daughter, but she was barely twenty, and too young for him; an unmarried sister of Leverton's might not have proved unwilling, but she had crossed the border into middle age. Mrs. Kirk-Connell was handsome, a lively widow, and he was accustomed to meet and flirt with her in the hunting field. She would have responded to his suit, and felt no scruple in becoming the second Mrs. Swayne and prospective Lady Swinton; but, after his first experience, a brilliant and high-spirited woman inspired him with distrust. The matrimonial handkerchief was still untended, when there came into the neighborhood a certain Lady Kennedy as tenant for the country residence of High Mount, taking it furnished for a term of two years.

Lady Kennedy was also a widow, but she was past all pretensions to youth, and well on at this time in the sixties. She had married off her own daughters, but a niece, Annabel Thorold, came with her to High Mount. Miss Thorold owned two and thirty years; she looked mature, but had not lost her early beauty. She had none of the vacuity of manner which scared Colonel Swayne in the case of the fair huntress; she was still and demure as a nun who has been let out of her convent on parole. She parted her hair in the middle and wore it plainly; she kept her eyes at home and modestly cast down. Her voice was soft, which is an excellent thing in a woman; and her taste in dress was a quiet one—she affected greys, with sometimes a touch of violet; greys which accorded well with a delicate tint of complexion. If it had been her object to attract Colonel Swayne, nothing better could have been devised than this outward appearance of meekness and purity. He rose like a greedy trout at the color of the bait, and before Lady Kennedy had been six months at High Mount, her niece was requested to change her name to Swayne, with the prospect of becoming Lady Swinton in the future.

It was a sultry afternoon in August when Annabel Thorold came with the intelligence to her protectress. The wide horizon was black with threatened storm, and as she stood between Lady Kennedy and the open window her fair head was relieved against the gathering darkness. The aunt was a martyr to arthritis; just now her foot was affected, and she sat with it raised on a cushion; the malady affected her temper, and Annabel's life was not always an easy one.

"You don't mean to tell me Otho Swayne has made a fool of himself after that fashion? That he has proposed in plain terms to marry you? What reply did you make to him?"

"I have given him no answer yet, Aunt Kennedy. I said I must have time to think it over; he had taken me by surprise. And I wished to consult with you."

"It's an astonishing chance for you, Annabel, and I make no doubt you would do your duty as a wife. But, if he knew the truth, you know and I know that this proposal would not be."

"Is that to stand against me for ever? A child's fault, for I was no more. A child more sinned against than sinning. And now so many years have gone by."

"I allow it is hard. I've felt that always, and that is why I have been a friend to you. You will do worse, in my opinion, if you marry this man deceiving him, than anything you did before."

"And if I tell him, there will be an end."

Lady Kennedy looked at the fixed face before her, and then away at the gathering clouds, purple and dun. She knew what Annabel intended by this consultation, knew what it was which was asked of her as well as if it had been put into words, such words as these: Will you keep my secret, you alone who know it? Will you remain dumb and let me have my chance, now that it has come?

"What became of Vincy?" "I cannot tell you. I never hear of him. He went abroad."

"I know the child is provided for, and passes as the son of a cousin. You would not want to be so insane as to have anything to do with him?"

For the first time Annabel Thorold's composure was endangered. But the brief spasm was immediately mastered. "Isuppose not," she said. "No."

There was another pause, and then Lady Kennedy spoke again— impatiently, as if racked by a twinge of pain.

"After all, you are old enough to know your own mind, to settle the question of conscience and judge for yourself. I have told you what I think, and now I wash my hands of the affair. If it goes on, I shall ask you no questions—whether you have told, or how much you have told; if it is off I shall not blame you. There is a first flash; I have been expecting it all the afternoon. Shut the window, for I hate to have it open in a storm."

That was all, but there was a tacit understanding between the women. Annabel could take her own course, and Lady Kennedy, however disapproving, would not speak. The wedding took place from High Mount, but soon afterwards her ladyship or the doctors discovered that the river neighborhood was bad for arthritis. Lady Kennedy did not stay out the term for which High Mount was taken, but she left her niece the mistress of Fortune's Court. The hoped-for heir was born in the second year of her marriage, and had proved, up to the date of this story, an only child.

Colonel Swayne was a happy man in the late gratification of his paternal ambition, and the second Mrs. Swayne made him an excellent wife. Many women, alluring in the bud, unfold after marriage into another color of flour; but Annabel Swayne kept her attractive meekness and her trick of the dropped eyelashes. Her gowns might be of richer material, but the quiet style of dress which had attracted her middle-aged husband was still maintained, though modified by changing fashions. But the nursery was the centre of interest at Fortune's Court, the little heir growing up stout and strong, and

A SPOON SHAKER.

Straight From Coffeedon.

Coffee can marshal a good squadron of enemies and some very hard ones to overcome. A lady in Florida writes:

"I have always been very fond of good coffee, and for years drank it at least three times a day. At last, however, I found that it was injuring me."

"I became bilious, subject to frequent and violent headaches, and so very nervous, that I could not lift a spoon to my mouth without spilling a part of its contents."

"My heart got 'rickety' and beat so fast and so hard that I could scarcely breathe, while my skin got thick and dingy, with yellow blotches on my face, caused by the condition of my liver and blood."

"I made up my mind that all these afflictions came from the coffee, and I determined to experiment and see."

"So I quit coffee and got a package of Postum which furnished my hot morning beverage. After a little time I was rewarded by a complete restoration of my health in every respect."

"I do not suffer from biliousness any more, my headaches have disappeared, my nerves are as steady as could be desired, my heart beats regularly and my complexion has cleared up beautifully—the blotches have been wiped out and it is such a pleasure to be well again."

Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich.

Read the little book, "The Road to Wellville," in pgs. "There's a reason."

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.

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having attained, in these days which preceded Dulcie's marriage, to the age of six and a half years.

At the Court there was an apartment on the north side which went by the name of the business room. Here was installed the temporary secretary, Mr. Harold May, whose duties were to write Colonel Swayne's letters and attend to estate affairs—this only since that accident in the hunting-field which had disabled the Colonel's right arm. He was a connection of the Thorold family, and had been recommended to Mrs. Swayne by some of her own friends.

(To be continued.)

"THE SCHOLARS' WALK."

Concerning the Whit-Week Procession in the Cotton Country.

If one wanted to convince a Southerner of the important place Lancashire Sunday-schools take in the hearts of mill-folk, it would only be necessary to take him to one or other of the factory towns to witness the annual procession of scholars during Whit-week.

For quite a number of factory towns give up this, one of the best of their holidays, in furthering the cause of their Sunday-schools, and with bands playing and banners flying, the scholars pass through the main thoroughfares for hours at a stretch.

Preston can claim to be the foremost town in this respect. Fully thirty thousand people take part in the various processions on Whit Monday, while it is indeed no exaggeration to say that almost every other inhabitant of the town is a looker-on.

Indeed, people come from miles around to see the "scholars' walk," and the processions are well worth seeing, for there are thousands of boys and girls, attired in rich, attractive, and picturesque costumes, walking beside the almost priceless banners.

It is interesting to stand among the crowd and listen to the remarks of the women-folk as one or other of their offspring come into view.

The little tot of four years, dressed in snowy white, and holding lightly to the banner rope, is Mrs. Maggs's youngest child. The exclamations of admiration anent the pretty child and its charming dress lead Mrs. Maggs to give a detailed account of the making of the dress to all who are willing to listen.

Perhaps the onlookers fail to notice the motto on the banner and its singular appropriateness to the occasion—"A little child shall lead them." For the little ones are placed in front to lead the way, and make the pace.

In some cases there are guilds connected with the Sunday-schools, and these help to supply scholars belonging to poor families with suitable attire. And in this way many who would otherwise be unable to attend are enabled to take part in the demonstration.

But there are many interesting phases of the procession. The two men carrying the poles of the banner have, perhaps, got more than they bargained for. Especially is this so if the day is windy, and there is a troubled look on their perspiring faces as they await each fresh gust of wind. It is then in-

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variably that the voice in the crowd is heard with:

"By gum, Bob, but it's mekkin' the sweat!"

And so it is; but Bob doesn't mind. He is taking the part allotted to him by the organizers. Besides, there are relays of pole-carriers, and soon he is mopping his forehead with his handkerchief, as another man takes his place.

Then the photographers are busy. A snapshot which includes Mrs. Maggs's little lass holding the "color string" (banner rope) will have a ready sale among the child's relatives and friends.

And this reminds one of the story which was originally told when these photographs first began to appear in connection with the processions.

Two little lads had been poring over one of the pictures for a couple of minutes, when one said to the other:

"So, tha, con ta see them pair o' clogs?" pointing to a pair which were the only pair visible of someone who was standing in the second row of onlookers.

"Ay," said the other little lad. "What about 'em?"

"Well," rejoined the first lad, "them's eaur Lucy!"

RECORD OF CORONATION.

By those who actually took part in the Coronation ceremony, a book which is now being prepared by the Somerset (Eng.) Herald, Mr. H. Farnham Burke, C.V.O., will be carefully treasured. This is the historical record of the Coronation, and is produced under the authority of the Earl Marshal, with the approval of the King. Only subscribers will be able to obtain a copy, and the price has been fixed at four guineas. The volume of royal quarto size, will be bound in purple morocco, and will bear the monograms of the King and Queen in rich gilt. It will contain an official account of the Coronation, illustrated by twenty colored plates of portions of the ceremony and costumes worn. Altogether, the book will be worthy of taking its place in the libraries of peers.

Visitor—"Is your clock right?" Tired Hostess (at the end of her patience and politeness)—"Oh, no! That's the one we call 'The Visitor.'" Visitor—"What a quaint name! Why?" Hostess—"Because it doesn't go!"

ROOM NUMBER THIRTEEN.

Hotels Cannot Rent Rooms Numbered Thirteen.

"I see that a landlord at Hornsey applied for permission to change the number of a house from 13 to 11a," remarked a hotel superintendent. "Strange how superstitious many people are about numbers! Now, if you went to many of the big hotels in London, you could not engage a room numbered 13. Why? Because it does not exist. In some cases the room which is actually No. 13 is chock full of lumber; in others a jump is made from 12 to 14, and in others the numbers begin not at 1, but at 50, or even 100. There is one house, I believe, in which all the numbers are even."

"The fact is, many hotel managers have discovered that a room numbered 13 won't let, and sometimes there is difficulty in allotting No. 113 or No. 213. Several times I have known people leave a hotel rather than have a number containing the dreaded figures 13."

"But 13 is not the only number considered unlucky. A gentleman well known at a certain hotel—he often stopped at it—was shown into No. 4. As soon as he caught sight of the number on the door he stepped back and asked for another room, explaining that 4 and multiples of it were his unlucky numbers. There was not another room to offer him, so he went to a neighboring hotel. In the morning he returned for a picture he had left."

"Just as well you didn't have that room, sir," said the clerk, in handing it over. "No. 4 was burnt out in the night; a wire fused."

"After that the gentleman was more than ever convinced that 4 was a number to be avoided at all costs.

"There are 'unlucky' rooms in some hotels, though. I know a case where there were two suicides in the same room during a period of about six weeks and shortly afterwards a sudden death—from natural causes this time—took place in the same room. In fact, it is not uncommon for a series of mishaps or tragedies to occur or be connected with a particular room."

"Do you give your wife an allowance?" "Yes." "How much do you allow her?" "Don't you think it is rather impertinent for you to ask what my salary is?"



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