

TWO VENTURES.

BY HURKARU.

CHAPTER XI—THE RETURN MATCH

You will easily understand that Madeline, whom we left at Scarborough Beach in a somewhat unhappy state of mind, was quickly aware that the report of Dugdale's death from the Tunnel explosion was all a mistake, but she has never forgotten the miserable blank which had seemed to stretch out before her for the few days succeeding the first news of the catastrophe.

On returning to New York in September her life resumed "the even tenor of its way," driving or riding in the park, calling or receiving, dining or giving dinners, balls and so forth. We all know the fashionable routine and only continue it long enough, the monotony becomes as great as in the most hum drum country existence. You meet the same people day after day, dance with the same partners night after night, hear the same stories and make the same remarks in reply. Now and then Madeline might seek relief in a quiet evening with the Ralstons,—who were not wealthy enough to move in the exalted atmosphere of the "four hundred,"—but naturally these occasions were "few and far between," and Madeline in consequence would laughingly call Annette her angel.

There was a slight ripple upon the calm waters of New York society when it was announced that Lord Falconbridge, after a lengthened tour through the States and a voyage to Australia and Japan, had returned by way of Vancouver and was again in New York. The Van Higgins expected his lordship to call, after the hospitality they supposed they had extended to him during his first visit, but he did not put in an appearance, and it was quite by chance that Madeline met the real owner of Bicksley Park, which happened thus: One afternoon she, accompanied by Annette, visited the Museum of Arts, and, as the two were standing before one of the paintings in the North Gallery, a lady, touching Madeline on the shoulder, said "Allow me to introduce Lord Falconbridge."

Miss Van Higgin returned, bowing coldly, "Lord Falconbridge and I have met—," but as her eyes rested on his lordship she suddenly stopped, adding "Excuse me, I took you for somebody else." Lord Falconbridge smiled, and murmured that he hoped there would be no mistakes in future. Madeline was puzzled; this was certainly not the man whom they had entertained as Lord Falconbridge some months previously, although there was a resemblance, while, as for his lordship, he had clean forgotten the name of Van Higgin and the trick he had played when last in New York, but hearing from a friend, he had met in his travels, that there were some really nice people in that city,



This is all very well, but—

he had determined to see for himself the class from which some of the English aristocracy had of late years chosen their brides. Of course the above meeting was but momentary, a bow, a few words, and it was over, but Lord Falconbridge had been very much struck with Madeline's appearance, and resolved within himself to improve the acquaintance.

A gentleman whom Madeline knew very well—a Mr. Winston—happening to join her as Lord Falconbridge was moving away, she said "Excuse me, you will think it a strange question, but can you tell me if that is really Lord Falconbridge walking with Mrs. Merwin?"

"Certainly that is the Simon Pure, Miss Van Higgin," replied Mr. Winston. "May I enquire why you ask, for I see you have a reason?"

"He does not seem to be the Lord Falconbridge I met last year," said Madeline. "He appears smaller, not so good-looking, yet more of a gentleman—in the society sense of the term, I mean."

"I was not in town on the occasion of his last visit," returned Mr. Winston smiling, "but I have heard a report—how far true I cannot say—that he played an atrocious practical joke, when here before, by making his man servant, who is so like him (though taller and stouter) that you might take them for brothers, represent him, but I can scarcely believe he carried the deception to the extent they say he did."

"His man servant—his valet I presume—it cannot be, and yet it is very strange," said Madeline laughing uncasily, while an indignant flush stole over her cheeks. "Is not Rosa Bonheur's 'Horse Fair' a glorious picture Mr. Winston? You can fancy you hear those horses snorting and squealing just as they do in Normandy."

Thus it was that Madeline, after the manner of her sex, entirely changed the conversation from a subject which had become disagreeable to her. It reminds one of a hare doubling when she feels the unpleasant breath of the hounds close behind her. Men are not so quick, but stutter and stammer and show plainly the talk is not to their liking, whereas Madeline Van Higgin dismissed Lord Falconbridge and began to discuss squealing horses, as though the one naturally followed the other at that particular point.

Lord Falconbridge himself was a trifle 'piqued' by Madeline's cool treatment of him, for he had become so accustomed to be "run after," that he could not, all at once, comprehend anything which partook of a repulse. "Who the deuce is this beauty, that she should give herself airs?" he wondered to himself, and then added aloud to his companion, Mrs. Merwin, "Miss Van Higgin is very lovely, but proud, is she not?"

"Oh no I never heard that of her," replied Mrs. Merwin. "We consider her one of the leaders of New York society."