

The Sound of Wedding Bells —OR— Won After Great Perseverance!

CHAPTER XXIV.

There is a general laugh at this, which makes the little eyes dance with wrath, and certainly would have brought forth a storm of passion if the kidneys had not appeared at the moment. At sight of them the good old man grew gentle and calm in a moment.

Dulcie is very quiet during the meal, but she smiles as cheerily as of old, and Archie does most of the talking.

When the footman has taken the things away, she picks up the paper, but Sir Archie gently puts his hand upon it.

"I'm going to read this morning," he says, and he draws an easy-chair forward for her.

Dulcie laughs, and looks up appealingly at Lady Brookley; but her ladyship smiles and shrugs her shoulders.

"Better give in, my dear," she says. "He is a most wickedly obstinate boy, always was. Never mind, we'll punish him. We'll make him read it right through, advertisements and all."

Dulcie leans back in her chair, and Archie having just wheeled a footstool for her, commences to read. He has evidently done it before, for he picks out the right passages.

"Humph!" growls the earl. "you don't read like Miss Dorrimore; she doesn't stop at the long words."

"Beg pardon," says Archie, gravely, "education neglected, you know; obliged to spell words of more than three syllables over to myself first."

And he goes on. Presently the earl goes off to his club, and Lady Brookley rings the bell.

"We are going for a drive, my dear," she says. "No auction rooms to-day."

"Great Heavens!" exclaims Archie, forgetting himself; "you don't mean to say that you take her to auction-rooms, aunt?"

"Why not?" says Dulcie, gravely, and Archie colors.

"Eh! oh, of course. Yes, certainly, well, we are not going this morning."

"As you have Sir Archie, I don't think I'll go, if you don't mind, Lady Brookley," she says.

"Nonsense, my dear," says the old lady, sharply; "the air will do you good."

"Look here," says Archie, with an inward pang at the sacrifice, "I don't think I can manage it. I've got an engagement at the club. I'll be back to lunch, if you'll have me! Good-bye."

And he hurries out. Dulcie's face flushes, and the old lady's eyes twinkle.

"Stupid boy!" she says. Dulcie looks up inquiringly.

"Didn't you see, my dear?" says the old lady. "He thought you didn't want him, and like a sensible fellow he effaced himself."

Dulcie laughs; but something, a sudden moisture in her eyes, causes her to hide them with her long lashes.

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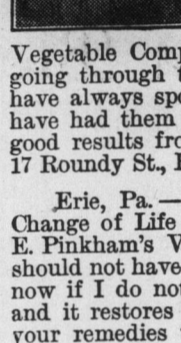
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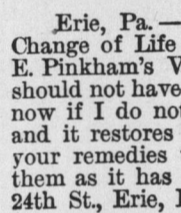
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"That is a nice thing," she says, a little spot of crimson on her cheek; "the companion to drive away her mistress' nephew."

"The old lady coughs, and hides a smile.

"Archie is very sensitive, my dear," she says. "By the way, don't you think he is rather a good-looking boy?"

Dulcie nods. "Yes," she says. "I think he is more than good-looking!"

"So do a great many more," retorts her ladyship. "It has always been a wonder to me that he hasn't been a wonder to me that he hasn't been a very rich, you know, and so many have set their caps at him."

Dulcie doesn't look up. "It's my opinion—I tell you in confidence, my dear—that he has lost his heart to some young girl in that awful Wales. If he hasn't, what on earth should he go there for?"

Dulcie shakes her head, and a sudden feeling of resentment—unnatural enough—nerves her against the unknown young lady.

"I hope she will be worthy of him," goes on her ladyship; "for he is a dear, good fellow. I don't know a better-hearted boy in the kingdom."

"I'm sure of that," says Dulcie, warmly, and with a sudden light in her eyes.

And her ladyship smiles again, with a little satisfied twinkle in her eyes. At luncheon Archie puts in an appearance, a flower in his button-hole, a soft light in his blue eyes.

"Well," he says, "have you enjoyed your drive?"

"Yes," says her ladyship; "you were a stupid boy not to come with us."

"Oh, I haven't been idle," he says, and goes into the hall and brings in a parcel. "Look here; I went round to the bookseller's and got some books; I thought Miss Dor—I thought you'd like to have a new novel or two." And he cuts the string and takes out the books.

"Thank you," says her ladyship. "What a thoughtful boy you have grown!"

"Haven't I?" he says, as he takes his seat; "quite a useful member of society."

"I wish you'd make yourself useful by serving on the committee of the club, and getting 'em to stuff up some of the windows," growls the earl.

"If you two can tear yourselves away from your beloved clubs, why, you can dine with us. Dulcie, I wish you'd tell them to get out the yellow seal claret for Sir Archie."

Dulcie looks up, but Sir Archie cuts in:

"I'll tell them; but I don't care what claret it is, aunt."

"That's nonsense!" says her ladyship; "all men care about their claret. It is the only thing they care for, Dulcie; take my word for it."

When the luncheon is over, Archie finds himself near Dulcie, and he says, in an undertone:

"Miss Dorrimore, if—if you think I shall be in the way, there is no occasion for me to go to the Gardens."

Dulcie looks up with a little smile that is rather pitiful.

"Why should you not go?" she says. "Very well," he says, "you did not want me this morning, and I thought perhaps—"

"Oh, but you mistake," she says, hurriedly, "and—besides, please do not forget that my likes and dislikes count as nothing here. Will you try and remember that?"

He inclines his head. "I will remember everything you wish me to remember," he says, gently. "Then I may go?"

She puckers her dark brows.

"Why do you ask me?" she says, almost fretfully. "I am nobody. Ask her ladyship."

He inclines his head again, and repeats into silence until the carriage is announced; then he puts them in and follows, his heart beating fast and furious, for he sees a smile of encouragement in Lady Brookley's eyes. As he hits upon the right way to go her?

It is a crowded show. The tents are full of a surging mass of fashionably dressed people, who wander through the promenades between the banks of blossoms looking more at each other's costumes than at the flowers, and before they have "done" the first tent Lady Brookley has fallen in with some friends and have been carried off by them, and Dulcie and Sir Archie are left alone.

"Won't you take my arm?" he says, as they enter a marquee where the crush is the thickest; "better, I think, or we shall lose one another."

Dulcie puts her hand upon his arm resolutely, and suppressing the desire to press it to his side, he steers her through the fashionable mob.

For once, perhaps the first time, Dulcie put her veil back, and Archie enjoys the perhaps questionable pleasure of seeing eyeglasses leveled right and left at the lady or his arm, and hears more than once the muttered "Who is she?"

But he puts up with it. Since that evening—that fatal evening for Dulcie—when he held her in his arms and whispered, "I love you," he had not been so happy.

"If I can but keep from frightening or offending her!" he mutters, and he registers a mental vow to watch every word he says and keep a strict guard over his tell-tale eyes which, whenever they go to Dulcie's face—and how often they wander thither!—declares eloquently the passion he bears for her.

She does not talk much, he treats her almost as if she were like one of the sensitive plants, gently, considerately, quietly content with the murmured monosyllable she vouchsafes him now and again, and pointing out to her the choicest specimens it is right that she should see.

And Dulcie? She would be more or less than human if she did not appreciate his delicacy and goodness. In the old days she might not have detected it, certainly would not have valued it, but now—ah, well, sorrow and trouble make us all quick to notice the kindness in others, and Dulcie is grateful.

(To be Continued.)

Everyday Etiquette.

"When o invitations have been issued for a wedding and you receive an announcement card for the event, is it customary to send a present?" asked Marie.

"When no invitations have been issued announcements are, strictly speaking, sent in their stead and one may not send a present or may, as one feels like doing," advised her aunt.

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