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The Romance OF A Marriage.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"But that wasn't what I was going to say— don't cry, May!"—for May has hidden her face on Paula's bosom and is sobbing softly. "I wanted your advice and assistance, sir. You see, this find has made the land valuable; they are building quite a town; there was a bank, a church, and a newspaper office when I started, and, as the land's mine of, course I want to dispose of it to the best advantage. I thought a company"—

Mr. Palmer jumps to his feet.

"Of course, sell it to a company. Ask a hundred thousand pounds for it. I will get it. I'll show you the way. Bless my soul!" he breaks off feverishly. "There's a fortune in it. I've seen it done before. Er—have you had any dinner? What will you have? You must have something. My dear sir, I insist upon it," and he rings the bell furiously. "Confound it, are they all deaf? Here, bring—bring—bring me the best you've got in the house; bring some champagne. Sir Herrick, ain't this wonderful? Didn't I say there was stuff in him, didn't I say that he'd make his way? Give me your hand, my dear Bob. I'm glad to see you. I'm delighted."

But Bob has gone over to May, and they have disappeared mysteriously.

Mr. Palmer runs up and down the room.

"Most wonderful thing I ever heard!" he exclaims. "Oh! but I always said he'd do."

Then the servants bring in the tray. He makes a grab at the canvas bag.

As he does so a letter, which had lain hidden at the bottom, catches his eyes, and he takes it out.

"Hallo, this is for me!" he exclaims. "From—from Stancy!"

"He gave it me yesterday," says Bob, from the other end of the room.

"Oh! What's it mean? Hallo!" And he sinks into chair with a groan.

"Papa!" exclaims May, and she runs to him. "What is it?"

"What is it?" echoes Mr. Palmer. "Why—why—the young fool! I beg your pardon, my dear," looking at Paula. "But he's gone and married your sister Alice."

"What!" ejaculates Sir Herrick.

"It's all right," says Bob, coolly, "they were married the day before yesterday."

"Why—why," stammers Mr. Palmer. Then his eyes fall on Bob, and he gasps as he remembers that it is the goldmine-owner's sister.

"It's all right, sir," says Bob, coolly. "The young couple are very happy, and begged me to say that they were very sorry—no, not sorry—yes, sorry that they hadn't asked your consent."

"I'll cut him off with a shilling," says Mr. Palmer, hoarsely.

"They will have to live on Alice's dowry," says Bob, cheerfully. "Come, come, sir, don't let us be hard upon them. Alice will keep him—ahem!—straight—"

Mr. Palmer thinks a moment, then he holds out his hand.

"If you agree, my dear Mr. Robert," he says. Then, to the footman, "Why the devil don't you bring Mr. Estcourt something to eat!"

Let us drop the curtain. Oh, gold! gold! How potent art thou! Even Love needs thy help, and owns thy magic sway!

* * * * * * *

When the curtain reasends for the last time in this eventful drama, three months are supposed to have elapsed.

In the easiest of easy-chairs that the smoking-room of the Court can boast, sits Sir Herrick. It is late; the servants have gone to bed, the moon can be seen through the windows sinking in the west.

Sir Herrick poises the end of his cigar in his fingers, and flings it into the grate, with a sigh of contentment and a look at the watch.

As he does so there comes a knock at the door, followed by the apparition of a dainty figure in an evening-dress of Worth's, with diamonds on her arms, and on her wrists, and in her hair; an apparition of youthful loveliness that might well make the heart of a man who owned it beat with pride and satisfaction.

"Well," she says, "have they all gone to bed, and are you going to sit up all night?"

Sir Herrick squeezes into a corner o' the capacious chair, and beckons her.

"Come and sit down, you restless one," he says.

Paula makes a pout of indifference, but comes and nestles into the chair, nevertheless.

"You'll spoil my nice dress," she says.

"Never mind," he retorts, putting his arm round her in the old, lover-like fashion. "What an awful swell you are!" And his eyes wander over her with quiet pride. "Why all these diamonds to-night, my wife? Why this war-paint?"

She laughs half-shamefacedly.

"I put it on to please the poor old major," she says. "Has he gone to bed?"

Sir Herrick nods.

"Yes, an hour ago. Poor old fellow! He insisted upon making a speech, congratulating me upon being a Powis of Powis Court; as if I had earned it or brought it about myself, instead of allowing him to buy it of old Palmer."

"Dear old major!" says Paula. "It is the one thing he had set his heart upon, to see you back in the old place. And he is so happy! What do you think he called me to-night?"

"I don't know. He seems to call you by a good many flattering epithets, you little witch!"

"He called me 'My Lady Chatelaine!' And when I asked what it meant, he said, 'You are the mistress of the castle, my dear. This roof has sheltered generations of Powises, and I hope—' "

"Go on," says Sir Herrick, with a smile.

Paula crimsons.

"I sha'n't. Has Bob gone to bed?"

"An hour ago. Bob is bored with great company, and likes to rise early; he is also filled with his approaching nuptials. Bob is a happy man, and deserves to be so."

"And May!" says Paula, smiling. "I never saw such a change in a girl; she is all smiles and laughter. We have just been looking over the trousseau."

Sir Herrick nods with the sublime complacency of a married man.

"Bob's a lucky man; but I'm the luckiest of the lot. Oh why didn't Alice come when you asked her?"

Paula is silent for a moment, then she sighs.

"Poor Alice! Rick, dear—"

"Well?" lazily, as he unfastens a coil of the golden hair and holds it up to the light.

"I'm afraid Alice isn't quite happy. There is something in her letter that makes me suspicious. Why didn't she come when we asked her? Rick, I'm afraid Stancy is not—not—steady."

"My dear," he says with a smile, "you magnify mole-hills into mountains. If Alice can't keep Stancy steady, no one on the earth can. You can't expect every man to be the model of domestic virtues like Lady Powis's husband. No, my lady, it is not reasonable. Do you use gold powder for your hair?"

"Nonsense!" says Paula. "You are colour blind. My hair is red; I always told you so. And are you going to sit up all night?"

THE END.

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"A GOLD LADEN DERELICT"

OR

The Impecunious Adventuress.

CHAPTER I.

It did not remain with the judge very long. He briefly summed up markedly in favor of the accused, and made some quiet but biting criticisms of the evidence of some of the witnesses for the prosecution.

When he had finished, there was a brief putting together of heads in the jury box, and then the foreman stood up and intimated that they did not wish to retire for deliberation. Whereupon, in answer to the usual questions, he said, with a touch of emotion in his voice:

"We find the accused not guilty, my lord; and we wish to add that, in our estimation, this action ought never to have been brought against the accused."

There was a burst of applause, which instantly sank into silence as the judge raised the feather of his quill pen, as a gesture of reproof, and looked around with a frown on his brow, and just the flicker of a smile crossing his lips.

"The accused is discharged," said the judge, "and I may say that I entirely agree not only with the verdict, but also with the comment which the jury have thought fit to add to it. I mean no reflection on the officers of the crown when I say that, in my opinion, this prosecution ought never to have gone further than the police-court proceedings."

The applause broke out again, and the voice of the usher calling out the next case, and then somewhat superfluously announcing that it would be taken first on the list for the next day, was drowned by a general rustling of draperies, and that indescribable sound which attends the moving of any considerable mass of human beings.

The drama was over. The curtain had fallen at the right moment, and just as it ought to have done on the triumphant vindication of innocence.

Then came congratulations and hand-shaking. The man whose good name had been saved, untarnished, by Kenneth Markham's masterly management of his case, took the young lawyer by both hands and whispered his thanks for saving not only his honor, but his life.

Nevil Jarvis had a few moments before shaken hands with him, and said, with perhaps more warmth than sincerity:

"Congratulate you, Markham. A good case, splendidly won. We had no chance against you. Hope I shall be prosecuting some of our respectable witnesses soon. Then we shan't have you against us, I suppose—eh?"

To which Kenneth replied, with a laugh:

"I don't think so."

Afterward, when the friends of the vindicated man had claimed him, there came the sweetest congratulations of all.

As he went into the passageway, past the jury box, which is on the right-hand side of the seat of judgement as you face it, Mercia Reynold, the girl of the nut-brown hair and hazel eyes, came to meet him with both hands out, and whispered:

"Oh, how splendid, Kenneth! I knew that his lordship was innocent all the time, but I never knew what villains those other people must be until you had pilloried them in the limelight of full exposure."

He laughed as he took her hand.

"My dear Mercia, it is just as well that the words spoken in a court of law are privileged, or what you have said would certainly give grounds for an action for slander."

At this moment Nevil Jarvis came by in his swinging silk grown, looking, as he always did, strong, handsome, and keen of eye, but just now not overpleased. Still, as he stopped by Kenneth's side, his brows lifted and his rather thin, well-cut lips opened into a smile.

"Ah, Miss Reynold, good afternoon," he greeted her, extending a big, strong, white hand adorned with a massive signet ring. "I noticed you among the audience all day, but somehow I couldn't get near you at lunch time. Interesting show, wasn't it? And now, of course, you are congratulating the hero of the day."

"Yes," replied Mercia, holding out her hand to him, "I've just been telling Kenneth that he did splendidly, and so did you, Nevil—at least, as well as you could have done," she went on, after an instant's hesitation. "But I'm afraid you had what I believe you lawyers call a bad case."

"I think we might have made it a pretty good one if we hadn't had this Bayard of the long robe against us. You were quite right, he was splendid, as you say. Kenneth, when are you going to take the bench? You've only to ask after this, you know."

Kenneth laughed, without replying, and turned to another girl, who was a little behind Mercia, by the side of a big, broad-shouldered, somewhat swarthy young fellow of about twenty-eight, with a dark, strong face, whose chief, if not only, attraction lay in its strength and in the softness of the brown eyes that looked out from under the somewhat heavy brows.

It was easy to see that the girl was Kenneth's sister. The likeness between them put that quite beyond question. As to the relationship between Miss Kate Markham and John Ackersley, the big, dreamy-eyed young man beside her—well, it only needed a glance at those same eyes whenever they looked at her to make that fairly plain.

(To be continued.)

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