

saxe-blue pom-pom dangling frivously from each spoke.

"Madge, Madge, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"Merely dressing to suit the part, Roddie."

"But, by jove, I didn't know you. And I say, I thought the idea was for you to look—well, as plain as you could?"

"Well, these clothes are quite plain, quite simple," returned Madge, smiling inwardly over the thought that Roddie should never, never know what that simplicity had cost—namely, the rest of the savings intended for her Brittany holiday. "And I thought I'd wave my hair for a change."

"A change? It's a transformation."

"No; it's my own hair," laughed the girl, who, with her new clothes, seemed to have assumed a totally new manner.

A manner coquettish, assured; a manner of positive proprietorship in Roddie Hastings.

And it was not lost upon Miss Mirabelle, though she made herself sweetly hospitable towards the intruder. She was even sweeter, however, towards the intruder's introducer.

"Do you see? It's begun to work, old boy," declared Madge, reassuming her normal "platonic pal" manner as Roddie, though actually pressed to remain by a glance from his lovely brunette, saw the transformed blonde back to her lodging. "She's astonished and piqued. A bird's wings never look so white as when it flies. And Mirabelle's beginning to fancy that there is a possibility of your flying."

"How can she?" murmured Roddie, quite dazed by the success of the ruse.

"You're surprised? Ah, well, I know girls better than you do, so mind you go on taking my advice. 'Keep the bone and the dog will follow you.' The bone of contention being in this case your attentions."

"I should never have believed that Mirabelle was—was like that."

"All girls are like that," declared the other conspirator. "A little wholesome neglect, and you'll see the result next time you propose to her. When's that to be, Roddie?"

"She told me just before we came down that I wasn't to bother her about it again for another fortnight."

"Right," returned Madge, holding out her unusually manicured hand as they reached the honeysucked post-office porch. "It's going to be horribly difficult for you, though."

"Shan't mind that if it really does come off all right. Besides, it seems to be more—more amusing than I thought it would. Isn't it funny?"

"Awfully funny. Quite a lark, in fact," agreed Madge, taking away the hand again. "Good-bye till to-morrow, partner-in-crime."

He beamed at her gratefully.

"Good night, locum."

#### Chapter III.

Quickly the lovely summer days went by, but they seemed slow enough this year to Mirabelle.

That spoilt beauty was having the dullest holiday of her life at Cowry Bay. There was nobody there—absolutely nobody, except a couple of Sandhurst cadets, callow youths in scarlet-and-white blazers, who fell victims at once.

But Mirabelle was, after all, not yet old enough, as she put it pettishly, to

take an interest in kidnapping. And as for her legitimate admirer—he who was to propose to her for the tenth time at the end of the month—what was he doing? Neglecting his charming hostess, and dancing attendance on that silly, straw-haired girl who had come down to sketch.

Very little sketching she'd done, indeed, except that one unfinished study of a field of blazing scarlet poppies in the emerald-green corn, which she had taken a whole morning to paint, while Roddie Hastings, if you please, had sprawled on the grass beside her easel, reading aloud to her, "Love in the Valley."

And almost every other morning he had likewise spent with this chit of a Madge.

There'd been walks on the beach—always under the indignant black eyes of Mirabelle—rows in the bay, climbs up the cliff. It was all very well for Roddie to give out that he and this girl were old friends from childhood, and that he was bound to make things as amusing as he could for her while she was away alone on her holiday.

Personally, Mirabelle disapproved of bachelor-girls who go about without any chaperons, and who pretend to believe in platonic friendships.

white thingummies—what are those flowers?"

"Syringa. The country name for it is 'mock-orange.' Mock-orange blossoms for a mock-love affair. Appropriate, isn't it?"

"I can't think why you've never had a real love affair of your own, Madge, instead of just going in for a make-believe one to oblige a friend."

"As you said yourself, I'm not that sort of girl."

"You've seemed quite a different sort of girl since we've been down here. I—why, even I haven't seemed to know you before," declared Roddie, examining his old chum with a new curiosity. "It may be your having had to pretend to be different, and to play up to me and all that, but this 'locum' business seems to have brought you out, Madge."

"Has it?" she said carelessly. "I'm glad I'm—I seem to be some sort of credit to your taste, Roddie. I'd never thought of wasting time and money on clothes before. What was the use? I mean—this is my first job as a 'locum,' you see. However, we won't waste time talking about me. What about Mirabelle? I think it would be almost safe to begin paying her a little attention

eye out? Were the sandhills to be made as dangerous as the beastly links?" and so on, thus dispersing his anger—against himself—and giving Madge time to collect her self-possession.

Neither quite knew what had occurred. But it seemed to Madge that for one whirling second something hot and soft had scorched her cheek; and to Roddie it seemed that his lips could never forget that one stolen kiss.

But he had forgotten himself. And he seemed to read his reproach in Madge's averted glance, when he left her at the post office.

"I have behaved like a fool and a cad," he said bitterly. Dashed if I know how it occurred. I must make an excuse not to see her for a couple of days. It's the end of the fortnight on Saturday, anyhow. I was a beast to do it."

#### Chapter IV.

Another person at Cowry Bay was calling herself names at that moment.

"Idiot! To give myself away like that. Why did I come? Why did I think I could bear it? Why was I ever born?" fumed Madge, the bachelor-girl, in the little latticed-windowed bedroom of her lodging. "Oh, I thought it would be worth it, just one fortnight of looking nice and enjoying myself in the sunshine with him, even if it were only make-believe, even if I were only the 'locum' he looks upon me as. And now it's worse than ever; I can never see him again, never."

Indeed, she did not see Roddie Hastings for two whole days. Madge spent those miserable days in painting the lanes in the opposite direction from Mirabelle's house. Then came that Saturday which she felt she could hardly live through. The day which ended that fatal fortnight; the day when Roddie was to propose—for the goodness—knew—how—many—eth time—to Mirabelle, and to be accepted.

Oh, yes. She'd accept him this time. Madge had seen it in those "black diamonds" of eyes of hers.

The ruse of a locum tenens in Roddie's affections had been but too successful; and Madge, who'd only herself to thank, felt like the little boy that nobody loved, and who proposed to go out into the garden and eat worms.

Only Madge's form of it was to feel she ought to put on all her old studio clothes and to scrape her pretty hair back. She did not, however. Not yet would she go back to being the prosaic, hard-working girl. She was still wearing the blue-and-white cotton frock of her butterfly fortnight that afternoon, when she set up her easel near a splendid hedge tangle of purple and golden vetch, which she sat staring at when a well-known voice behind her made her start.

"Too difficult to paint, eh?" it said gaily. "Ah, the most beautiful things are the hardest to express properly."

And Madge, pulling herself together by an entirely feminine effort, met Roddie's smiling grey eyes with a smile in her own.

"Hullo!" Her voice was perfectly steady. "Where have you been?"

"I have just come," he told her blithely, "from having a most interesting talk with Mirabelle."

"Have you proposed to her?"

"Yes."



A View of Riga, the large Russian Sea Port, recently fallen to the Germans.

Mirabelle, who began making pointed remarks about two being company, and who had loftily refused to leave the lawn, glanced across from the garden of her house and again saw two figures—the tall, athletic one in white flannels, and the small, dainty one in saxe-blue—sitting close together in the shadow of the sandhills. Very "platonic" that looked.

Roddie was a humbug and a flirt. Never before had an admirer of Mirabelle's flirted with anyone else. The girl—well, the girl was a shameless poacher. Mirabelle was not used to having her preserves poached. Yet, what could she do? And what was going to happen at the end of the fortnight?

The couple on the sandhills were talking thus:

"Madge."

"Well? You needn't say it in that impressive tone, Roddie. Mirabelle can't hear us from the garden. You can talk as we usually do—as man to man."

"Speaking as man to man, then—why did you never do it before?"

"Do what?"

"Oh, get yourself up to look so awfully—well, different. Do your hair that jolly way, leave off those beastly collars and clumpy boots, wear a pretty frock, and take to picture hats with clumps of

again now, Roddie. It's nearly the end of the fortnight, and—ah!"

She stopped with a little cry. Something whistled by like a bullet, missing within a hair's breadth the smooth forehead under the mock-orange trimmed hat, before dropping with a little thud into the warm sand.

It was a trifling incident, one of these details that sometimes make or mar a destiny. Only a golf ball. But for a moment it seemed like a thunderbolt that had fallen between them.

Utterly startled, the girl shrank back against the man, whose arm went involuntarily round her; and for one second Madge clung to it, leant her soft cheek against it, and gasped "Roddie!"

"It's all right, darling," said Roddie Hastings, without pausing to think. And then sandhills and sky seemed to wheel about Madge's head in swirls of gold and blue. An angry, scarlet-coated figure blundered into the picture.

"So sorry," growled the golfer, in a serve-you-right tone of voice. "Not hurt, I hope? Didn't you hear me call 'fore'?"

Roddie, standing up very suddenly, told that golfer exactly what he thought of his criminal carelessness.

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