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**Grand Alliance;  
OR,  
Love That Knew No Bounds.**

CHAPTER VI.

His meal, only half finished, was pushed aside. His first pint of All-sop already consumed, a second was being uncorked by a waiter as the major drew near. So preoccupied was he in twirling the end of his long brown mustache, and staring at rather than studying the 'Times' supplement, that his father approached unnoticed and had sat down in front of him before he recognized with a stare who was nigh.

"Why you want a whiff of fresh air my lad," said the major, kindly, reaching over the table to shake hands. "London in this hot weather is a teaser. Why don't you run down a dine with me oftener—eh?"

Perhaps a perfectly candid answer to this would have been awkward, or, so suddenly questioned, Mr. Rupert had no satisfactory excuse ready. Anyhow, he returned only an uneasy laugh, and a disjointed assurance that he was all right—"didn't feel the heat; only happened to have a plague of a headache this morning."

"Then that won't cure it," said the major, pushing aside the ale.

"No, thanks; I won't take it myself. I stick to my rule. Nothing before dinner, very little after. I learned dietetics in India, you know, and advise you to profit by my experience. But you look out of sorts"—anxiously, for the old officer was very fond of his one son. "Are you getting late hours? Is there extra work on at the office?"

"Oh, no! nothing particular doing there," returned Mr. Rupert, pulling himself together under his father's scrutiny, and judiciously answering the last cause of his question. "And I'm all right. I assure you. What brings you up here to-day?"

Now the major, like many a brave man, was no social tactician. He had a trick of going straight at his mark, which sometimes decomposed his son amazingly—the present occasion was no exception. Taking Mrs. Alwyn's letter from his pocket, he tapped it, addressed downward, with some solemnity, and

pushing aside the cruet and covers, leaned forward with—

"Here's what brought me. Something rather serious that I want a few words with you over. The sooner the better."

At these portentous sentences Mr. Rupert Villiers changed color. More than one spectral bill not included in the last over-heavy schedule that he had submitted to his father reproached his memory. A horrible dread stirred within him that a certain florist's account might have got round to the major, for he had been ass enough that season to bequeath with bouquets a fair cantatrice, who never so much as wasted a thought on where her Marechale Niels and lilies and ferns came from so regularly, nor had ever repaid his costly offerings with a single special smile. A fear shot through him that a transaction involving an IOU to one young Tuffer—a friend the major cared for little—might have reached paternal ears; and a guilty recollection overcame him that he had as good as given his word never again to meddle with a fascinating game called "Nap."

All these and many another qualm gave the young man a bad sixty seconds, and when the letter was passed over to him, with a low but emphatic "Just read that, and let me hear what you have to say about it," the fingers with which he opened Mrs. Alwyn's epistle positively shook with apprehension. But the writing and a rapid glance at the signature relieved him unspcakably. The whole quickly scanned, he breathed freely again though a new species of dilemma was now upon him. The careless laxity of his life en garcon so unexpectedly stormed, all the charms of that unfettered condition shone forth bewitchingly. All the entanglement he had just now quaked at modestly took themselves to the background. He felt, if not opposed to the project in no way enthusiastic over it, and showed as much by the shrug with which he re-folded and returned the letter to his father.

"I've only a quarter of an hour," he said, taking out his watch. "Suppose you walk my way with me, sir;" and arm-in-arm the two descended the club steps and betook themselves toward Pall Mall.

"Well?" said the elder man, impatiently, before they had gone many paces—his son's coolness nettled him. The matter had appeared to him so supremely important; he shouldn't

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advanced wisdom of a young generation, would have called "an amiable old muddle-head," he failed at first to discover where lay the pressing need to alter the household by marrying on any other change.

But that was only in the earliest hours of his reception, at the very onset, when Mrs. Alwyn was all graciousness, tempered with a slightly nervous anxiety as to how her overtures would be received and would prosper; when Leonora was posing as just a slightly ill-used damsel much tried, but far too truly sweet to turn ill-tempered on any provocation whatever; and when Sydney lingered more than ever in the background with a proud and wistful sad reserve begotten of her mother's injunction just as their guest was coming—"Remember Major Villiers is no relation of yours, my dear. He is a kind hearted man, and would very likely be inclined to make no difference between you and Leonora; but recollect he is her father's brother, not yours."

A very few days, however, under the same roof somewhat lowered this stilted style of intercourse. In that time Major Villiers took observation very diplomatically; made mental note of a bright, eager-eyed intelligence that never missed a single point in the old campaign stories delighted in telling, though his own young relative, plaiting her prettiness, or twisting her many rings about, would put in her "how horrid!" or "how charming!" at exasperatingly wrong intervals; brought to bear upon the case the theory of his own concerning the impossibility of perfect amity existing between Celt and Saxon, setting Sydney down as the type of one, Leonora of the other, and secretly bestowing his preference on the first; and decided to his own complete satisfaction that this household would become a tuneful enough key-note in that other new home he had set his mind on rearing.

(To be Continued.)

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have taken the offer of a pretty girl and six thousand pounds so calmly in his young days—"Well, Rupert, what do you think of it all?"

"I think, sir, it is very kind and complimentary of my aunt to wish to bestow on me the daughter she evidently wishes to be rid of."

"Now, my boy, no joking! The letter is frank enough, and we'll treat it courteously, if you please. I've no doubt the situation is awkward. Second marriages always lead to something of the sort. But do you feel any inclination to assist in altering it? That's the question."

"Well, you see, sir," demurred Mr. Rupert. "I know literally nothing of this little Sydney. I dare say she mayn't be little now, but she was when I was at St. Clair's for a couple of days five years ago. Just a slip of a girl, no particular beauty, especially beside Leonora. Rather awkward, and very shy."

"Oh, she'll be altered, she'll be altered!" interposed the major, who had pondered himself into vehemently desiring the match; "I shall see her before you make the least sign, you know, and I promise you I won't send you a wooing unless I like the look of the fair lady. Her father was a handsome man, perhaps she has grown like him. And then there's the money to consider. Of course, we must tie it to herself, but a wife with an income of her own is an excellent thing for a young man, let me tell you. You'd best not turn your back on a chance you may never get again, Master Rupert. It appears to me you treat this proposal too off-handedly."

"And it appears to me," returned his son, laughing outright at the elder man's evident eagerness, "that you are determined, my dear sir, on this young person and myself becoming husband and wife! May I ask you if you've definitely determined on our wedding day?"

"Now, nonsense, nonsense, lad!" said the father. "I'm neither such a tonkey nor despot! I'm only putting the matter before you as it's my duty to do. Why, Sydney is only twenty. If you see her and take a fancy to her, you'd have a year to go love-making, off and on at your leisure; and I should think," with a proud, paternal look at the young man, who was certainly good-looking, though the general effect of his appearance might owe a good deal to his tailor—"I should think you could get her to say 'yes' in that time. Then we could have the marrying, take a little house up Richmond way, and I've got a few pounds I could square your last bachelor bills with, and you'd have a good prospect in life as I ought to expect, or you ought to desire. So, what shall it be? Shall I write back and chime in with your aunt's idea, or shall I give the whole concern the cold shoulder?"

The major had put the advantage of the whole concern very neatly. A glimpse in a corner flower-shop of a ravishing arrangement of ferns and gardens ordered by himself the day before, and a significant salutation waited to him by his friend Tuffer, who just then whisked by in a hansom, recalled sundry very present and irksome obligations to Mr. Rupert. The governor was a good old liberal soul, he thought, with some compunction. And a year, if he drew in directly, would give him time to get quit of some of his least mentionable debts out of his own income. He'd better make a virtue of necessity, then.

"You and my aunt are a pair of conspirators," he said, with an air of "Well, to please you, I'll give in!" "So go on your visit of inspection, sir, by all means. But whatever you do, commit me to nothing yet by so much as a shadow of a hint. If you drop a line when you're coming back, I'll meet you and hear your report. There's the workshop. This is my door. Good-bye, sir." And the major, well pleased with this first step of the negotiations, went back to Petersham, and wrote off to his sister-in-law, fixing Monday in the following week for his visit to St. Clair's.

CHAPTER VII.

Following his letter in due course, the major arrived at The Dale on what he termed his reconnoitering expedition, and being in most matters apprehending to the opposite sex no more than what his son, with the

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