

"Oh, no," said Monica's resigned little voice. "I don't mind—anything."

"No, I don't suppose you do, you poor old darling," was Frances' final farewell as she and the other girls, who were so full of pity for the friend who was about to marry "so well," as it is called, went down stairs.

Monica did not go with them. She made the excuse that she had to take that pink trousseau tea-frock, which she had been trying on for their inspection. And in the hall Monica's mother called to the departing visitors to come into the drawing-room for a minute.

"Shut the door behind you dears, I just want to ask you something," said Monica's mother, who was a pretty, faded, foolish creature, with a rather disastrous habit of confiding all things to all men—also women.

"Just tell me, how you think darling Monica seems? Fairly cheerful?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. East; very happy," began Monica's best girl friend, as in duty bound. But the clear tones of the irrepressible Frances interrupted her.

"Well, you don't exactly expect her to be cheerful, can you? Going right away from everyone, with a strange young man she doesn't like in the least! But I do think she bears up very pluckily!"

Monica's mother gave a little sniff and abbed her pretty faded eyes with a handkerchief.

"Young people are so cruel. I dare say you are all thinking that I am a horrible mother, sacrificing my only daughter for my own comforts."

"Oh, we don't think that! We know here are those boys of yours to be educated, as Mother says, and Monica's nature to be thought of. She couldn't have been allowed to pine away as an old-maid just because Dick got married to someone else! And I daresay she'll be awfully glad she took Mr. Messenger when she gets older and forgets about things like romance," was Frances' consolation.

"And Mr. Messenger is really better looking than Dick, and nicer," she went on. "At least you'd think so, if you weren't in love with Dick. I'd hate to marry anyone I really didn't love, myself, and so would any of us; and we're sorry that Monica, who's so sweet, couldn't have managed to have her own love story. But you can't have everything, can you Mrs. East?"

Poor Mrs. East looked helpless. "It's time we went," murmured Monica's second best chum. "Come along Frances."

But as the girls were getting up the door opened to admit Monica's elder brother, the one in the City.

"Oh, you're back Mr. East! I didn't know you left so early, or have you left for good?" asked Frances, beaming upon him. "I know you said you hated to be glued to that abominable office stool. But you won't have to be glued much longer now, will you? I mean now that you are getting such a wealthy brother-in-law to find jobs for you! Oh, Molly, why will you kick me? Have I said the wrong thing again?"

"Oh, not in the least," said young East rather grimly. "You have only said what everyone knows, Miss Frances."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Frances. "I keep saying that I look at things from a common sense point of view. I mean things like Monica's marriage, which they all seem to think is so mercenary. I think it is very sensible; and I am sure it'll turn out all right. In about twelve or fifteen years' time it doesn't really matter much who one has married, does it? Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said young East, with a grin set to his jaw, as the hall door clanged behind Monica's three colleagues. He was frowning heavily as he came back to his mother, who was now frankly in tears.

"Pleasant, wasn't it?" he said curtly. "Oh, Ronald, it's awful! Oh, what wouldn't I give if my poor proud sensitive Monica were free to follow the dictates of her own heart, instead of being obliged to marry this young fellow, who isn't really of our world at all!"

"He's a good deal more self-respect than some of the people who really are of our world, and it's a pity he isn't

marrying into a family that appreciates it. Still, Monica isn't married to him yet," said her brother.

"There are still two days for her to back out if she wants."

"Oh, but she doesn't want—she can't want—she mustn't want!" exclaimed poor flurried Mrs. East, taking fright again. "She knows what it means, Ronald. She knows how much depends on this marriage. Mr. Messenger has settled up all those debts of your father's. Why do you know it would have been bankruptcy, if he hadn't! We could not have kept Eric and little John at school and now they will be able to go to college. I do think it was good of Mr. Messenger—I really can't call him 'Billy,'" said the poor lady dolefully. "He certainly is very kind and thoughtful, even if he isn't exactly

out to business this morning, you looked fifteen years older than your age, and now you look twenty years younger—Why do you laugh like that, Jack—Oh! Can there be some good news at last?"

"Yes, dear, things are all right now. Do you understand? Those investments which I gave up as bad have turned up trumps, after all. We are poor no longer."

"Jack!"

"Father! You're not joking?"

"Joking, my boy? When I tell you we are as rich as we ever were, should I joke on so serious a subject? Don't you see what this means for all of us—It means that I can pay all my debts myself; it means that your sister can be saved from—"

"Mr. Messenger!" announced the maid at the door.

"But Mr. East," said young Messenger slowly. "It was with no idea of repayment, I—"

"Oh I know, my boy. Awfully decent of you, I'm sure. But you see, now that the case is altered—altered I may say, entirely altered in more ways than one."

Monica's father laid particular stress on the last sentence as he feared the young man would not grasp what he was driving at.

He misjudged the young man's perception; for the color died out of his face, his voice was steady as he responded:

"Do you mean the case about Monica?"

There was a horrible silence, but at last Monica's father cleared his throat again and began:

"Well Mr. Messenger I think that business was made clear from the beginning. Monica never attempted to make out that she was not marrying you—"

"For my money," put in the young man bluntly.

"Marrying you to please all of us," corrected her father frowning. "I don't think she attempted to deceive you, did she?"

"Oh, never!" said Monica's fiancé a little huskily. Then he added, "I quite understand. Of course I release Monica at once."

"I must say you are uncommonly decent about it," said Mr. East awkwardly, while Monica's mother sobbed a little, and Monica's brother felt—as he expressed it—"the worst cad unhung."

"It would probably save a good deal of pain and embarrassment for both of you," suggested Monica's father, "if you would write to my daughter—"

"I had rather see her," put in young Messenger quietly, "if it's the same to you."

"Oh, certainly—er—if you would like to go into the dining-room, I will send her into you presently."

"Might I ask to see her at once?" suggested young Messenger, a little hoarsely, but still composed—"And here!"

"Poor chap," thought Monica's brother. "This is beastly rough on him! Still I feel it like a ton weight off my chest that little Monica's free after all."

"I'd better just explain to Monica first," murmured Mrs. East, "and then I'll bring her down to you. I won't keep you many minutes."

But to those waiting it seemed like hours of miserable silence before she returned. And with her still wearing the pretty pink trousseau frock, came Monica herself.

"Here she is, I've told her," said Mrs. East half tearfully. "I don't know what Monica can say to you, Mr. Messenger. But I can only assure you that we are all most terribly sorry—"

"And I am most awfully glad!" broke in Monica's clear girlish tones.

It was to him she spoke.

"Yes, I am glad father isn't a pauper after all. Because now I shall be believed when I say exactly what I mean."

"Don't. It's all right," put in young Messenger, with a mournful but hurt look. "I quite understand, Monica."

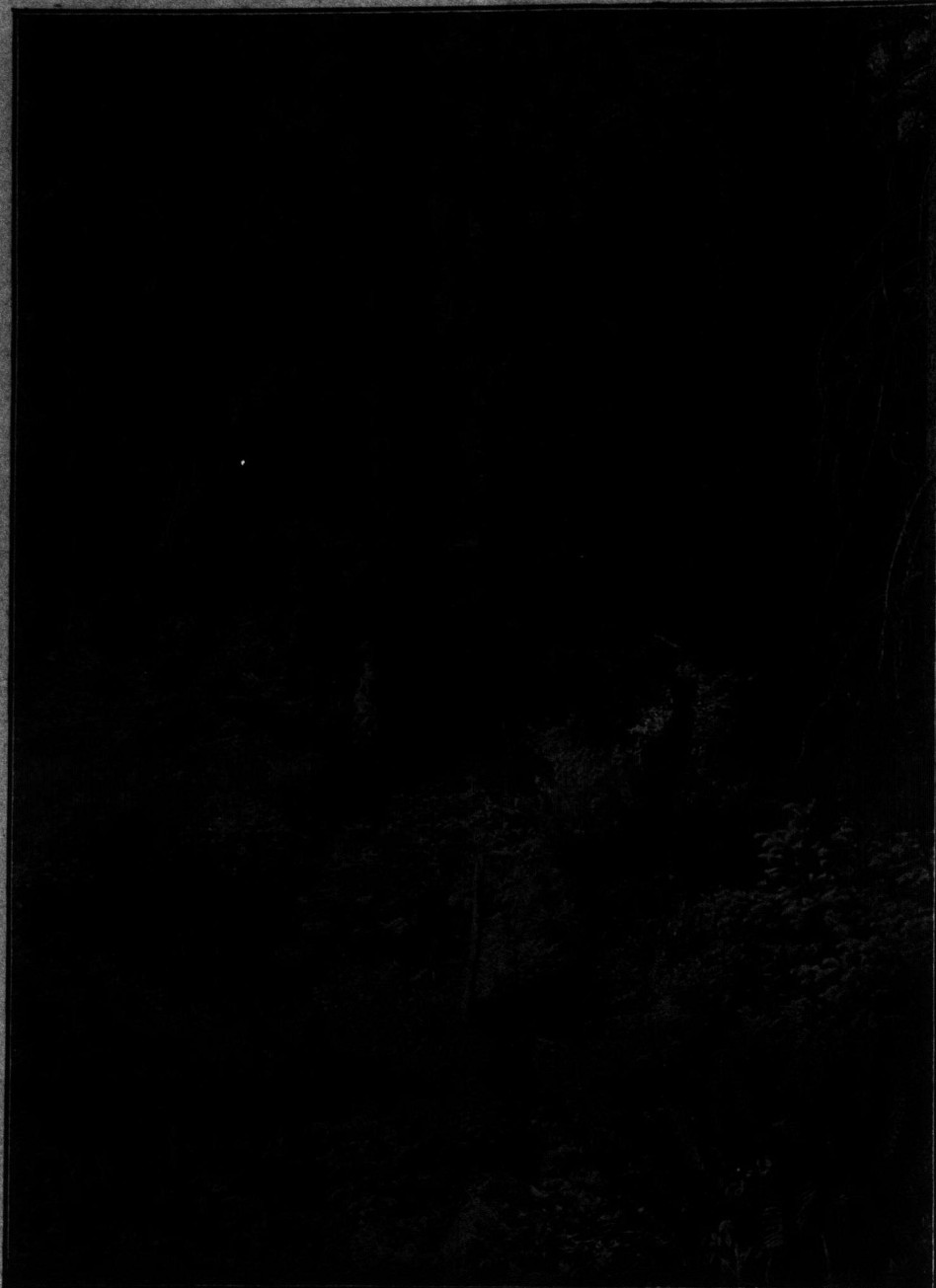
"Understand! You never did. None of you understand," announced the girl suddenly.

"Everybody from father down to Frances, took it for granted I was being forced into my engagement. They talked, and hinted, and tried to console me about marrying for money until—until I was too furious to contradict them. They went on clinging to that stupid old delusion about my being fond of Dick. And for weeks I've been so mad that I'd have died, sooner than tell you the truth! Even—even Billy seemed too blind to see it!"

"To see what, Monica?" her lover broke in with an excited little catch in his voice. "What do you mean by—the truth?"

No longer could Monica have been compared to a shut white rosebud. Glowing as one of those full blown damask roses in her mother's hand, was the face she raised to that of her lover, as she held out her hands.

"The truth is," she confessed shyly but distinctly, "that I'm going to marry Billy Messenger on Thursday because I love him, and for no other reason."



The Forest Primeval—A Truly Beautiful Scene in B.C.

—exactly—well even if his father was a self-made man. I'm sure he has been most generous about settlements, and about your new position—"

"Would you mind not rubbing that in, Mother?"

"I'm sorry, dear, but I am only trying to remind you how much is dependent upon this marriage of Monica's," pursued his mother dismally. "Of course we all dislike as much as she must, poor child, even though the young man is so tactful, and all that. I've never seen your father look more broken hearted."

"Hallo! Hallo there! Who's talking about broken hearts?" interrupted a loud cheerful voice. The windows, when thrown open, and Monica's father entered with an air which made his wife and son gasp at him.

"What's happened to you, Jack?" said Mrs. East suddenly, and her son exclaimed simultaneously, "What's happened, father?"

"Happened?" echoed Mr. East, with an excited laugh. "Why should anything happen?"

"Why are you so different?" returned his wife, still staring at him, while her usually resigned voice took a note of excited expectancy. "When you went

The young fellow, broad shouldered and resolute looking as he was, entered rather nervously. "All that money" had never conferred on the son of the self-made man, that assurance it is supposed to give.

Young Messenger in the presence of his fiancée's family, never seemed able to forget that he was "Marrying above him." He was never quite at ease with these people. Even as he came in he realized that there was something more than usually superior about his future mother-in-law's "Good evening."

"I only looked in to tell Monica why those bridesmaids' presents hadn't turned up before," he explained in his shy, but not unpleasant voice. "Am I interrupting you?"

"Oh, no," hesitated Mrs. East, with a look at her husband, which being interpreted meant, "Tell him now."

And, by degrees, with many interruptions, repetitions and half apologies, the man thus suddenly restored to fortune, broke the tidings to the man to whom he owed more than he cared to think about.

"You know I shall never forget your kindness, Messenger, I am only too thankful to be able to pay it back sooner than I hoped."