

would come one of those elusive flashes lighting up the darkness of his brain, seeming to show him that in that veiled past of his he had walked on equal terms with the class in which Margaret Assitas was such a splendid figure.

Would that veil of his past life ever be lifted? If it was lifted, would the revelation put him in a position to dare—

"Folly!" he cried aloud in answer to these thoughts. "Folly!"

And yet, despite himself, he knew that he was hoping.

## CHAPTER XX.

## Scandal in High Life.

LEUT. ALAN WINTERFIELD, whose treatment by Lady Assitas, in connection with her daughter, Madge, had evoked such bitter words from Miss Pragg during the memorable car drive that so enlightened John Grey as to the matrimonial ventures of the Assitas family, had won his promotion before returning from his far station in China.

Letters had been forbidden by the petticoated Roman General, her mother, but he was young, and had faith in the woman he loved.

His years of banishment had been filled with hard work, lonely waiting, and a hungry, passionate longing for the girl he worshipped. Then he was stricken down with fever, then again with plague.

No one thought he would see his native land again! But the young officer fought tenaciously for his life. There was a woman waiting for him—wanting him as he wanted her—he must live, for her sake. When at length he was invalided home, it was only the power of his indomitable will which sustained him through the long journey.

Arrived in England, he lost no time in presenting himself at the Assitas' mansion in Curzon Street, determined that nothing should stand in the way of his union with Madge, now that his position had improved.

She was old enough to assert her right to choose for herself; he intended to marry her in the face of opposition. Never for a moment did the possibility occur to him that she might not be free to marry him. She was his, he told himself—irrevocably his—nothing could alter that.

His illness was forgotten in the eager joy of home-coming. The blow of the news that her mother had forced her to marry a dotard with a title, came with such overwhelming force, that it brought on a serious relapse, and he lay for weeks in a critical condition between life and death, with fever running through his veins again and burning out his vital forces.

Society, in a flutter, was waiting to welcome the young officer with open arms; but Captain Alan Winterfield, in the solitude of his sick-room, thought only of Madge, and registered a vow that, married though she was, he would see her once again at all costs, the moment he was able to set foot abroad. And with grim resolution he kept his vow.

Madge, gentle and passive, had been unable to resist the overpowering will of the Roman General, comforting herself with the thought that the old Earl, in the course of nature would probably be dead before her soldier lover returned from his China station. Then, free from the thralldom of home, she would be able to accept her happiness with both hands.

Thus she had temporised with fate, but Alan had returned before his time, and the old Earl was not dead, but very much alive.

It was a trembling, white-faced woman who received this impetuous lover of former days. On Alan's face, no trace remained of the glad joy of home-coming—all she saw was a stern man with set jaw, from whose despairing eyes angry fires answered her agonized and appealing glance. Excuses froze upon her lips before this inexorable, accusing man.

"I did not think it of you, Madge—I would have staked my life upon your constancy."

"Alan! Oh, Alan!" she faltered.

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