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CHAPTER XX.

"Goodness knows what they're up to," returned Phillips. "Missus is as close as a nut, and Miss Leonora don't say a word to such as we. But my advice is, Hills, bud your roses as fast as you please."

"Then ain't she a-comin' at all?" cried honest Dan Hills, discomfited.

"You leave me to find out, and when I know I'll tell you."

So Phillips took her turn at investigating matters, and inquired respectfully next day of her mistress when Miss Sydney's room was to be set in order. She didn't wish to be behind with it, and it would take a whole forenoon.

"Do it when I tell you," said Mrs. Alwyn, shortly, an angry gleam at the back of her eye. And Phillips answered,

"Oh, very well, 'm," with such meekness that her mistress scented suspicion in the obedient syllable.

"On the whole, though," she said with a good assumption of second consideration, "I think the room had better be thoroughly turned out. Help Waters with it to-morrow. Then it will be ready for Miss Sydney, if she returns next week."

"And for anyone else, if she doesn't," commented Phillips, acutely, on this order. And she added, borrowing the phraseology of a gamekeeping parent, that nobody was quicker at a double than her mistress, but she, Phillips, was not to be took in by no doubles, and it was her belief that Miss Sydney was gone for good.

This disquieting opinion soon spread in St. Clair's. Reaching Patty Peggs, of whom, as of all her pupils and pensioners, Sydney had dared take no leave, it furnished her with courage to go bobbing, like a cork afloat, to Mrs. Alwyn the next Sunday, with "Please, mum, ain't Miss Sydney a-comin' to learn us our singin' no more? Mother an' me du want to know bad." And old Mrs. Hills lay in wait at her door, like an anxious spider, to catch the lady from The Dale with the same question; and even Mrs. Dacie, disturbed by some echo of this report, donned her black silk, and went over to Sydney's old home, determined to come at the truth, one way or other.

But the doctor's good wife was easily disposed of.

"To an old friend like yourself, Mrs. Dacie," said Mrs. Alwyn, meeting inquiry with an overawing melancholy, "I confess that Sydney has disappointed me—oh! sadly—me and others—me grievously. She is best away till—till it has blown over. Excuse my saying more. It is too painful. And are you really stronger? And how is the kind doctor?" Et cetera, et cetera.

Mary's simple-minded mother went away, after a most affable half hour, convinced that her favorite's banishment was only the outcome of a difference on matrimonial plans, and volunteered the opinion cheerfully that "her own notion always had been that Sydney was far too good for die-away Mr. Villiers. Mr. Drayton, now, was far more worthy of her. How nice it would be if he came over again, and they two made a match of it, wouldn't it?"

This call, however, left Mrs. Alwyn deeply disturbed. One mysterious sentence, "Neither of your young ladies to be getting married, after all we'd expected," strengthened a grewsome dread which had stolen lately into her mind. Leonora coming in found her mother perturbed past explanation.

"This state of things distracts me!" the elder lady cried. "I can't keep up the farce of that unfortunate child Sydney being out on a visit forever. And I will not be compelled to publish the truth. I keep staving matters off till something—happens—something gets—settled—for you——my poor Leonora."

"Ah!" said Leonora, "but nothing does happen."

"But it may, my dear. Oh, it must!"

"It's exactly three weeks and three days since Mr. Duvesne last called, mamma."

Mrs. Alwyn stood a couple of minutes as if focused for a model of middle-aged perplexity. Her nerves were so unstrung, her patience so exhausted, that a decisive step she must take, whether right or wrong.

As it happened, she took the wrong.

"Ring the bell, Leonora," she exclaimed, flushed, with rising determination, "and order the pony-carriage. Tell Phillips she must help me to dress. For"—kissing her daughter—"I am going to Oakleigh Place."

Some thirty minutes the lady devoted upstairs to a more than ordinarily careful toilet. Then she descended, her still handsome countenance going into visiting array of suave composure; her costume of rich steel satin; ostrich-tips of the same hue about her head-gear; her slightly superabundant figure toned down by a costly Spanish mantilla. With perfect gloves, a card-case of oxidised silver, her eyeglass peeping forth from her bodice, no ornament save a necklace of superb onyx beads, Mrs. Alwyn might have passed for the peeress going to patronize the plebian. Her mirror said as much, and furnished her with self-possession for the expedition. One glance she cast at Hills—the corduroyed gardner lost in the liveried groom—at the well-hung little carriage—at the glossy pony, and the neatly monogrammed harness. These passing muster irreproachably, she took her seat, shook out her silken rug, unfurled her sunshade, with hope beating high, gave the oredr, "To Oakleigh Place," and off to Oakleigh Place they started.

Now, at that very hour, Lady Comyngham was studying a letter received the same morning from Lady Avena Massey. It was not the countess's afternoon "at home," so in the abandon of well-worn morning costume her ladyship was reposing on her own small drawing-room sofa, her daughters Margaret and Gertrude posed attentively as she read scraps of their sister's missive.

"'Christening day so fine! Baby behaved like a little angel. The girls—' Ah! that I read at breakfast. But I skipped a piece because of your papa. He's disposed to limit our visiting circle in a way that I tell him can't be done in the country. But he nearly rebelled at our **omnium gatherum** last summer, and would joke me forever if he found I had taken people up whom now I wanted to drop. So I stopped at this bit about Mrs. Alwyn. Here it is. Listen, my dears. 'One singular thing happened on the christening-day. When I went up from dinner, I had to go for a peep at my boy. As a great treat I gave my maid, Lewis, leave to go to the nursery and assist in putting him into his bassinet. Imagine my vexation when I saw his beautiful robe, which Mrs. Alwyn sent him, scorching in front of the fire in the night nursery! The lace was ruined. It was Lewis's fault, it appears, and when I reproved her for her carelessness, she broke forth crying violently, and sobbed out that the lace was horrid stuff all through, and she wished it might not bring the dear baby ill-luck. Of course I insisted on this being explained, and then she told me that her father had lost all his savings through this Mrs. Alwyn's husband, and that when she had been at St. Clair's with me and seen the style of living at The Dale, she wrote in her mother's name, begging a trifle for the old couple, and got an angry letter back and the noble sum of two-and-sixpence!'"

"The cold-blooded creature!" cried Lady Margaret. "Mamma, I never liked that woman! But is Avena sure it's true?"

"Well hark. 'I quieted Lewis, and I made an opportunity of asking old Lady Wynne about these Alwyns. It seems that years ago they lived near each other, and Mrs. Alwyn, according to Lady Wynne, was a handsome, pushing person, who forced her way into society where she was not so welcome as her husband would have been if he had cared to enter it. He was a lawyer, and immensely respected. He was rich, too, but after he married his wife gave him no opportunity of saving. And when he failed through some mining catastrophe, Mrs. Alwyn gathered all the valuables together that she could, and decamped with them, and refused to spare one penny of her handsome settlements to save her husband's unlucky creditors from any misery whatever!'"

"Horrible woman!" chorused the countess's daughters.

"'The Wynnes and every one at Stillcote considered her conduct most grasping, and I assure you, dearest mamma, the notion of being under an obligation to such a person is most painful to me. I felt relieved that the robe was destroyed. I shall let Lewis sell that Mechlin she gave me and pass the price on to her poor father. I need not say, pray don't let the girls get intimate at The Dale! And in future, Edward—' Oh! that's all."

"And quite enough, too, mamma!"

"Yes, annoying, is it not? But it's quite impossible to enter a new neighborhood without making a blunder. We must get over this as civilly as possible, but let Mrs. Alwyn distinctly see we intend no visiting in future. Which owes a call, my dears—Mrs. Alwyn or myself?"

"You do, mamma. She came a day or two after lunching here."

"Obtrusive, very. However, we go to Scotland in August. Till then we'll take care to see nothing of her—"

The door opened and a footman appeared. "Mrs. Alwyn, my lady."

"Not at—" began the countess. But too late. The soft sweep of the visitor's skirt was on the steps. Mesdames Gertrude and Margaret vanished into an adjacent conservatory. Mrs. Alwyn sailed gracefully into the room, and Lady Comyngham lurched in-elegantly from her sofa to receive this undesired guest.

With silent satisfaction Mrs. Alwyn perceived her hostess at a disadvantage. Gauging other person's feelings by her own, she attributed to her **heshabille** the annoyance that swept over the countess's features and proceeded to offer apologies, which she half considered her own due. To be found not **bien arrangee** after luncheon struck Mrs. Alwyn almost as a sin.

"How exceedingly kind of you, dear Lady Comyngham, to admit me on one of your off-days! I felt sure you would." ("Why?" the countess's suddenly stiffened finger seemed to ask). "Or, rather, I hoped you would. I so much wanted to see you."

Then Lady Comyngham smoothing her crumpled frills, replied, unsmilingly, that "Mrs. Alwyn was very—kind."

"I had been thinking of leaving St. Clair's for a few weeks. The Dale is so relaxing. My daughter requires a more bracing air, but—"

"Ah!" interrupted the countess, with real interest, "one daughter is gone out, I hear." (Mrs. Alwyn flinched. What was coming?) "But not, I think, as you expected when you last spoke of her. Not as a bride?"

"No—oh, dear, no! She is merely away"—bodily—"on a long visit."

"Not a ruptured engagement, then, I hope," returned the countess, civilly. ("For," as she said to her daughter afterward, "that younger girl was a gentlewoman. I am not ashamed to admit that I liked her.") "I should be sorry to hear of any disappointment to Miss Alwyn. She seemed so radiant when we last met."

(To be Continued.)

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Pile of Bodies

Found Huddled Together in Ruins of St. Louis Building — Seven Dead Taken Out Yesterday and Twenty-Seven Given up by Their Friends.

St. Louis, Mo., March 30—The real extent of the calamity caused by the fire which destroyed the Missouri Athletic Club building yesterday, it is believed, will begin to unfold itself to-day, when firemen enter the ruins in search of the score or more of bodies thought to be buried there.

Four powerful searchlights which were played on the tangled mass of iron, brick and charred wood early to-day, revealed what appeared to be a pile of bodies huddled together near the front wall of the building. Because of the perilous condition of the last remaining wall firemen were unable to recover the bodies.

It is expected however, the ruins will have cooled sufficiently during the day to permit the rescue to be undertaken. What appeared to be a human body also was seen wedged between the fire escape and the last remaining wall just below a seven story window.

Seven dead were taken from the building yesterday and twenty-seven others who are known to have been in the building at the time of the fire have been given up as dead by their friends, who escaped. It is possible that beyond this number there were several persons in the club-house not registered.

The total number of persons who were in the club-house when the fire alarm was given and who escaped with more or less serious injuries, reached fifty-five. The men had been driven into the street in their night clothes and in many instances were compelled to jump from fifth, sixth and seventh story windows to save their lives.

Many of those who escaped, becoming dazed or hysterical through the experience, wandered about the city all day before reporting to the Board of Identification which had been established at the Press Club of St. Louis. This partly was responsible for the excess number of dead given to the early estimates of the loss of life. Five of the seven bodies recovered have been indentified.

Tit For Tat.

The Chicago Bachelor Girl's Club, which has sixty members has laid down rules for candidates for matrimony. Any man expecting to take one of the number must answer the following questions, among others:

1. Have you bad habits, such as smoking and drinking to excess?
2. Will you treat your mother-in-law as you would your own mother?
3. Will you start the fire in the morning and carry out the ashes?
4. Do you intend to attain more prominence each year?
5. Do you attend church regularly and how much do you put in the collection box?
6. Will you promise to kiss your wife goodby every morning, not as an act of duty, but as one of the rarest pleasures of life?
7. Wil you promise to be cheerful at home and not kick on your wife's cooking?
8. Do you promise to spend your evenings at home?
9. Will you promise to obey the Ten Commandments?

This is a very commendable list of questions, and it is hoped that the girls are attractive enough to make the fellows want to give satisfactory answers. But why not put over against these questions for the girls to answer? That would be fair. And how would questions like these do?

1. Have you bad habits such as scolding and gossiping to excess?
2. Will you be kind to the fellows who are occasionally brought home?
3. Will you keep the house neat and clean?
4. Do you intend to make yourself more attractive each year?
5. Do you attend church, and how much do you go to study styles?
6. Will you make yourself so agreeable that your husband will feel that he has missed it when he cannot kiss you each day?
7. Will you promise to spend some of your time at home, and to learn to cook as well as you can play bridge?
8. Will you go out once in a while when a man wants to and be glad that your husband has other friends?
9. Will you keep the Two Great Commandments.

The men in this world were made to match the women. Indeed the men have largely been shaped by the women. If now and then some good women gets a poor stick of a man, the majority of men are so good as the women will allow them to be. This being good is a two-sided matter. There is something if either husband or wife really has contagious about the real thing. And it the other does not altogether escape.

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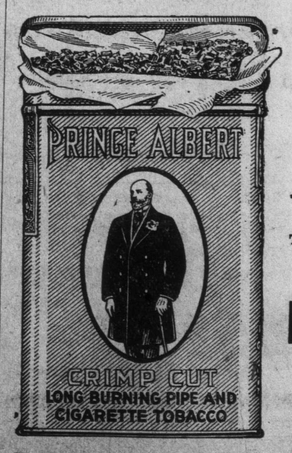

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