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**The Romance of a Marriage.**

CHAPTER XLII.

Then her glance wanders and falls on Paul's face, down which the tears are streaming; and with a gesture as of returning consciousness the thin hand goes up to her blue eyes.

"Ah, yes, yes! I remember. You are here still. You are good, good, very, very good. And he—"

Rick comes forward and bends over her and she looks up at him with a smile.

"It's all right now, Rick," she says, struggling with the falling breath. "I can see—I am not so bad as—as you thought me, after all. Don't turn from me," for he has turned to choke back the tears that assuredly do not shame his manhood. "Don't do that! She hasn't; and I wronged her worse than you."

"My poor girl!" he mutters, hoarsely.

"Poor girl!" she echoes, with gentle mockery. "I never knew what it was to be happy till now. And don't pity me, Rick. I've not been used to it," naively. "Never been pitied! Besides, I am better now—I've been ill, awfully ill, awfully ill, they say; but I'm going to—London to turn over a new leaf. I'm going to try and be good like she is. And when I'm strong and well, perhaps—perhaps she will let me see her. I feel very tired, dear, very, very tired. Don't let me sleep too long—for I shall be so happy when—when I wake!"

And with a child-like smile the blue eyes close, the golden head nestles peacefully against Paula's sorrowing bosom, and all is still.

There is silence profound for a minute. Paula has bent her face and hidden it against the short, golden curls. Sir Herrick touches her gently on the shoulder.

"Is she asleep?" he whispers.

Paula lifts her head; the tears are streaming down her face.

"Yes," she says, "she is asleep!" For she knows that poor Flossie is dead.

CHAPTER XLIII.

That is a fine line of the poet's:  
"Summer glids the beautiful scene and fills the soul with joy."

**GROVE'S O-PEN-TRATE SALVE**

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To thoroughly appreciate happiness one must taste it, as the bees do the flowers in summer-time.

And it is midsummer now. The sun is streaming over the time-eaten turrets of the Court, and falling in golden rays on the verandah of Myrtle Cottage.

As if this story had not been written, as if the historic events herein set down had been but the phantasy of a dream, a girl in a muslin dress steps out on to the terrace, and flings a handful of bread crumbs to the pigeons and doves that come nestling about her feet.

The girl in the muslin dress is Paula—Paula the same as of old, but for the deeper light in the dark eyes and the increased loveliness which a year will bring to maiden beauty.

It is, doubtless, the same muslin dress which Sir Herrick loved so well; but, alas! there is a black silk scarf round the waist, worn in memory of poor, weak Flossie, fallen asleep long months ago.

Not pale and weary now is the beautiful face, for there is a flush of health and happiness upon the cheek, and a light in the dark eyes that bring back all the old girlish brightness which won Sir Herrick's heart that moonlight night when he danced the Manola waltz outside the Court window.

Her lips, half-parted with laughter at the antics of an ungainly Coochin China cock, who has stepped forward for a share of the feast, Paula looks little different, excepting that serious depth in her dark eyes, to the Paula who stood there two years back. Happiness is a grand medicine! It will bring back youth, transform tears to smiles, groans to laughter, weakness to strength. And Paula is very happy.

If you would know why, look over her shoulder and mark that stalwart form, clad in a cool linen suit that sits upon him with graceful ease—listen to that musical voice, as it says in tones fairly divided between the admiring and affectionate:

"Hallo, Paula, feeding those greedy fowls of yours? For my word, I believe you care more for that comic Coochin China, to say nothing of the cock, than for your subject slave!" And he puts his hands on her shoulders and kisses the shell-like ears, lovingly.

"Is that you, Rick?" she asks, laughing and blushing.

"Is it?" he retorts. "Is there any other man who would dare to treat you so?"

"You're very early," she says, with mock rebuke.

He shrugs his shoulders.

"I have been up for hours, wandering about and fishing; one can't stop long in that stuffy inn. Any news this morning?" And he puts his arms round her and draws her to him, much to the indignation of the feathered crowd at their feet, who resent his intrusion with a series of crows and cooings.

"Don't, sir, you'll rumple my hair, and I have only just done it." And she evades his embrace with a gentle reluctance that is an invitation in itself. "No, there is no news." And she sighs, but not unhappily.

"No news is good news," he says, cheerfully. "I've an idea that Bob is all right; he is so well able to take care of himself."

Paula throws a crum, meditatively.

"Ye—s," she assents. "It wasn't a despairing kind of letter, was it? But it was so vague. Poor May! Do you

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notice how anxious she is beginning to look, Rick?"

He nods.

"Yes, and Papa Palmer—confound him!—begins to chuckle and crow. He thinks Bob is beater; but I'll back him even now."

"Thank you, dear," murmurs Paula, drawing a little closer. "That is like you, you always give us hope. May says—by the way, I shall really be quite jealous of May—that she always feels as if her heart were twice as large after hearing you talk."

He laughs.

"Then she'll hear me to-night," he says. "Old Palmer—I beg his pardon—is not a bad sort after all; he has overlooked the little squabble between Stancy—"

"Rick!"—rebukingly—"you promised me you would never speak of that—that time!" and her face crimson.

"Pardon again," he says, stroking her hair; "I'm so happy that the past doesn't count, my darling. Well, Mr. Palmer has asked us to go and dine there to-night, and I accepted. Was I wrong?"

"No, only presumptuous," says Paula, smiling naively. "You should have answered for yourself, sir; time enough to answer for me when—"

She stops short, colouring at the slip of the tongue.

He laughs, and kisses her proudly.

"Next Wednesday week," he murmurs. "I wish it were to-day!"

"Then I do not!" with a pout. "I haven't got half my dress finished, sir."

"I'll marry you in this cotton one," he says, tacking up a piece of muslin with his finger and thumb.

Paula laughs.

"What would Alice say?"

"By the way, is there any news of that pink of perfection?" he asks, not over-anxiously.

"I had a letter yesterday; she seems to be enjoying herself with her new friends, and says that I am not to expect her home for a day or two. There's not much in the letter except a full and minute description of the dress she wore at a ball the other night. Fancy—with a long breath of dismay—"fancy dancing at a ball such weather as this!"

"Unless it were outside, on a gravel path," he says in a whisper.

"Now, Rick," indignantly; but she laughs. "Ah, what a dance that was! And what an awful thing it was to do. I can see the wickedness of it now."

"You have grown so much older, haven't you?" he says, with mock gravity. "Is that a gray hair?" and under the pretence of examining he kisses the golden head.

"You will have someone see you directly," says Paula, alarmingly. "Oh, Alice said that she had met Stancy de Palmer in London. And I think that was all."

"Miss Alice hasn't forgiven you for flinging away that five thousand pounds, my lady," he says, "and, 'pon my word, I think it was rather quixotic."

"No, you do not," she retorts, gently. "Money won in gambling never brings anyone any good."

"Then the Consumption Hospital you sent it to will come to grief, I suppose?"

"I don't intend to argue with you," says Paula. "Why, you know you didn't want me to keep it."

He laughs loudly.

"Fancy sending the money—one wins over a race to a hospital!"

"That's different."

"I don't want to argue with you," he retorts, mimicking her tone and laughing openly at her.

"If we are going to quarrel," says Paula, with much solemnity, "I had better go indoors;" but she only goes as far as the chair and sinks into it with a sigh of indolent happiness.

Sir Herrick seats himself on the edge of the terrace at her feet, and takes out a cigarette and smokes in silence for a few moments. They are both so happy that they will often sit there communing without words; content so that they are near each other.

Then, after a pause, he looks over his shoulder.

"I've taken that cottage," he says, referring to a picturesque little cottage in the village which they have looked at together and meditated over.

"Are you sure we can afford it?" she answers in a low voice of supernatural wisdom.

"Yes, quite. I have been going into ways and means, and I find that our united incomes amount to exactly five hundred and twenty pounds a year. Enormous, isn't it?"

And he laughs. It is about the sum he used to spend in flowers for his button-hole and hansom cabs.

"It seems a great deal to me," says Paula. "Are you sure it is so much?"

"Quite," he says. "Show you the calculation if you like."

"Don't," says Paula, emphatically. "I never could understand figures; like poor Bob, I always get them muddled."

"A nice prospect!" he retorts, with mock despair. "You'll make a nice housekeeper. We shall be ruined in six months."

"Not by me, sir. If I cannot master figures—"

"Say 'mistress.' You are feminine."

"Don't interrupt. If I can't master figures, I can run a house, as you call it. Oh, Rick, we shall be quite rich!"

"Quite," he says, with lazy content. "Yes, we are going to try 'love in a cottage.' I am longing for the experiment."

Paula flushes.

"Are you going to sit there all day?" she demands, severely.

"I was thinking of doing so," he answers, serenely.

"Then you must not," she returns. "At any rate, I must not keep you company. I have to make a pie, and see to my dress, if I am to dine at the Court. Ah, the Court, Rick! You are sure you will not think enviously of the Court when you are living in your cottage?"


And she looks at him wistfully.

"Certing," he responds, promptly. "Why, when did I think of it? If I remember rightly, a certain young lady used to peek at me for my refusal to mourn over my lost riches."

(To be continued.)

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