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The Romance of a Marriage.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Yes, insult!" she repeats, and her lips tremble. "Because it sounds like it. It seems as if you thought I was something less than a woman; a—sort of doll without a heart—a thing to chop and change like a weather-cock."

"May!"

"Do you think that—that my love was such a poor kind of thing that would die out and fade away because you hadn't quite so much money—oh, how I hate the word!—as you thought you had? Well, good-bye!"

And she turns, her eyes flashing, her lips quivering, her whole little figure quivering, too.

"May—stop!" he exclaims, aghast and bewildered by this sudden change in her character.

"Well!" she says, turning her head, but keeping her face from him.

But Bob is speechless for a moment; then he says, unsteadily:

"No, May, I didn't think that—that you'd change, or that you wouldn't mind. Why! Don't I know you better than that? But I wanted to do my duty, May; and is it my duty, and the fair thing, to come to you and say, 'I'm a pauper, or next door to one, but all the same I shall keep you to your word, and you must wait until I get rich? and,' he says, bitterly, 'Why, that would have been a cowardly thing to do. Don't you see?'"

With a little cry of infinite tenderness and affection, she turns to him, and before he knows it almost, her sleek little head lies upon his broad chest.

"Oh, Bob! Bob! forgive me! you were quite right. I mean it was just like your unselfish nobleness, and I was a spiteful little cat!" vehemently; "but I can't say good-bye for all that. I won't!—With a sudden tightening of the hands grasping his coat-lappets, and a flash of the blue eyes that sends the hot blood to Bob's cheeks, and the fire to his eyes in sympathy—"I won't! Do you think it

matters to me whether you are rich or poor? I like you better for being poor. I hate money, and all the fuss, and bother, and meanness, and pride it brings with it. Good-bye! Why, Bob!"—and here comes a little sob—"It would break my heart!"

His broad chest heaves.

"Don't tempt me, May!" he whispers, hoarsely.

"Tempt you!" she says. "I wish I knew how. I like you to talk about—about your love for me, Bob. There! see what a bold bird you are making of me! And, Bob, you do love me!"

"Very, very dearly, May, dear!" he says, with that grand simplicity which becomes him so admirably.

"I—I think you do a little," she says naively; "but I shan't think so if you talk about leaving me. Never—never say again what you have said just now, Bob; and as to waiting—why, I'll wait until—until I am as grey and old as old Mother Grimes in the lane, and—longer," with a sob.

He presses her to him, and looks down at the tear-dimmed eyes, speechless for a moment; then he says:

"May, you have won; but it would have been better for you, dear, if you had lost. No, I know now that for all my—bravado, I couldn't have said 'Good-bye' forever, either. May, if—if you'll wait as you say, I'll go abroad—somehow—anywhere, and I'll come back rich enough to ask your father to give you to me; and—and—if he won't—"

"But he must," she says, with a firm thrill in her tremulous voice.

"For nothing—nothing shall ever make me forget you, Bob—"

"What the dev—Why, confound—"

It is not Bob who speaks, but Mr. Houndell Palmer, who stands beside them with his hands hanging helplessly at his side, his pompous face purple, his great, round eyes almost starting from his head with indignant amazement.

May utters a little cry of alarm and glides from Bob's arms, but does not attempt to run away; indeed, she keeps quite close to him, and confronts her father with something like defiance on her pale, sweet face.

Mr. Houndell, gasping like a fish out of water, stares speechless for a moment at the pair.

"What—what the deuce does this mean, eh?" he demands at last. "This is pretty conduct for—a young lady! What do you mean, by—by daring to put your arm round my—my daughter's waist?"

Bob, pale but calm enough, looks him steadily in the face, was scarcely fair and honest to keep it secret from you. The fact is, Mr. Palmer, I have asked May to be my wife—"

"You—you've—confound your impudence!" stutters the indignant sugar-baker, gasping—"you've dared to ask her to be your wife, and have the insolence to tell me so to my face. 'May, too! I'll trouble you to give that young lady a handle to her name.'"

"Father!" cries May.

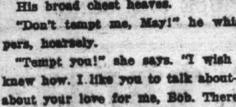
"Don't talk to me, Miss Impertinence!" he roars. "I won't stand it! I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself, a—meeting a young man on the sly, like this, and allowing him to talk such stoopid nonsense; him so much beneath you, too. Why—why, it might as well be a' beep one of the grooms out

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of the stable," and he glares at Bob furiously.

"Father! father!" cries May, her eyes flashing, her cheeks scarlet. "You—your forget yourself and me, Bob!"—turning to Bob with outstretched, appealing hand—"don't mind him; he doesn't mean it; he is angry and—and excited!"

"Don't I mean it? But I do!" exclaims Mr. Palmer, with a snort; "and he knows it, too. And it's true. If it ain't, why don't he come and ask me like a man, not entice you, you little fool, to meet him on the sly? What's he got to say to that?"

Bob, pale and quivering, keeps his temper.

"There's something in that, sir," he says. "I ought to have come to you: I see it now. But, you see, when a man fears the answer he shirks putting the question—"

"Answer, yes. I'd have given an answer sharp enough," retorts the sugar-baker, with a sneer. "I'd have sent you about your business pretty soon. A pretty thing! Do you know who the young lady is, young master?"

An answer scarcely being necessary, Bob wisely remains silent.

"I'll tell you, sir. She's my daughter—Houndell Palmer's—of the Court—daughter—and who are you to have the impudence to fall in love with her—for that's what you'll talk about, I suppose? Who are you, I say? Are you a young lord? No! Perhaps you've got a big fortune at your back?"

Bob shakes his head gravely.

"No!" with a snarl. "I know that well enough. You're as poor as a church mouse. Oh, I see your game as clear as print: you think you'll feather your nest with my money, do you?"

Still Bob is silent. "He is her father," he keeps repeating to himself. "I have not been straight with him. I've got to bear it."

But May cannot keep silent.

"Father, for shame!" she pants, with heaving bosom and flashing eyes. "It's true, you stupid little idiot!" he says. "It's your money he wants, not you."

"That's a lie!" says poor Bob, stung into speech at last; and May, as she hears the grim, honest response, feels her heart bound with admiration, even in the midst of her terror and sorrow.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I didn't mean to give you the lie, but it is not true. I love her for herself alone, and I don't care—I wish to Heaven she hadn't a penny."

"I daresay," retorts Mr. Palmer, thrusting one hand in his pocket and shaking the other at the pair. "Well, I'll tell you what: if she was to be fool enough to listen to you and disobey me, you'd have your wish, for I'm—I'm hanged if she'd ever touch a penny of mine!" and he shakes his head fiercely until his face grows even more purple than before.

"I am content to take you at your word, sir," says Bob, gravely. "I am a poor man."

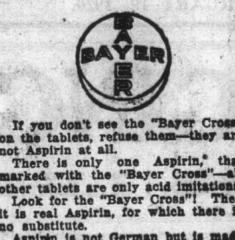
"Poor! I should think you were!" puts in the sugar-baker, with angry contempt.

"But a poor man can be an honest one, and can love as well as a rich one," Bob says, with bitterness. "I love your daughter, Mr. Palmer, and I am sorry I did not come to you before and tell you so straight out."

"I don't care whether you're sorry or not," he snarls. "It don't make any

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difference to me. I don't take any concern in you or your feelings. All I've got to do with is my gal; and I tell you flat that I ain't toiled and slaved for all these years to see my money wasted on the likes of you. I don't want to quarrel with you"—he adds, sullenly, and with a shake of the head—"and I don't want any row or fuss. All I say is, that this piece of cursed, stoopid nonsense must come to an end. The ideal! But there, as I say, I ain't going to say anything unpleasant. Give me your word that there's an end of it, and we won't say no more about it," and he holds out his hand as if he had made an extremely magnanimous offer, which the most unreasoning of young men would not refuse.

But Bob looks at him steadily, and May, glancing from one to the other—from the vulgar, purse-proud, overbearing face of her father to the pale, handsome one of her lover, creeps closer to Bob, and waits, breathless, for the answer. Bob looks him steadily in the face.

"You ask too much, sir," he says in a low tone. "I—I can't give her up I have tried, but I cannot do it."

Something like an oath slips from the sugar-baker's lips; but Bob goes on steadily:

"I will not do it. If you had asked me to wait—wait until I could come better fitted to ask for her, I would have said 'Yes' gladly. Don't be too hard upon me!" he pleads, his voice breaking for the first time.

"Hard be hanged!" retorts Mr. Palmer, coarsely. "You won't give her up, you say. Well, I'm obliged to you for speaking out. I shall know what to do. May, go home!" and he points to the house.

But May does not move; she creeps, indeed, a little nearer to Bob, and her hand stretches out to him pleadingly.

"Go home!" roars Mr. Palmer. "You've seen the last of the impudent young scoundrel."

"Father! father!" she implores, the tears springing to her eyes, her hand raised as if to silence him. "If you only knew him half as well as I do you wouldn't say that!"

"I know him well enough!" he retorts. "And I say he's a scoundrel to steal a man's daughter behind his back!"

"And I say he did not steal!" says May, with a sudden drying up of her tears and a steadfast look in her eyes. "He did not steal, for I gave myself to him, and no one—on, father, not even you—shall take me from him. You force me to speak out; he—he has stood and borne all your hard, cruel words; but I cannot any longer. I love him—I love him, and I will never—never give him up while—while—her voice breaks—"while he does not wish it!"

Mr. Palmer stands like a man turned to stone for a moment, then, with an oath, he takes a step forward, almost as if he were about to strike one or both of them. May stands her ground; but Bob steps in between them and holds up his hand with a warning gesture.

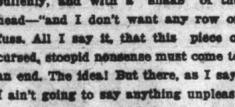
"No, no!" he says, hoarsely, and there is something in the tone that arrests Mr. Palmer's steps. "No, no," he repeats. "Keep calm, sir. There—there must be nothing like that between you!"

Then he takes May's hand and looks down at her.

(To be continued.)

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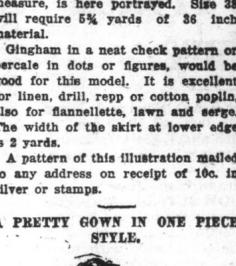


Pattern 3115, cut in 7 Sizes: 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44 and 46 inches bust measure, is here portrayed. Size 38 will require 5 1/2 yards of 36 inch material.

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