

BARR AMELIA E.

THE MAN BETWEEN: AN
INTERNATIONAL
ROMANCE

Amelia Barr

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International Romance**

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PART FIRST – O LOVE WILL VENTURE IN!

CHAPTER I

THE thing that I know least about is my beginning. For it is possible to introduce Ethel Rawdon in so many picturesque ways that the choice is embarrassing, and forces me to the conclusion that the actual circumstances, though commonplace, may be the most suitable. Certainly the events that shape our lives are seldom ushered in with pomp or ceremony; they steal upon us unannounced, and begin their work without giving any premonition of their importance.

Consequently Ethel had no idea when she returned home one night from a rather stupid entertainment that she was about to open a new and important chapter of her life. Hitherto that life had been one of the sweetest and simplest character—the lessons and sports of childhood and girlhood had claimed her nineteen years; and Ethel was just at that wonderful age when, the brook and the river having met, she was feeling the first swell of those irresistible tides which would carry her day by day to the haven of all days.

It was Saturday night in the January of 1900, verging toward twelve o'clock. When she entered her room, she saw that one of the windows was open, and she stood a moment or two at it, looking across the straight miles of white lights, in whose illumined shadows thousands of sleepers were holding their lives in pause.

"It is not New York at all," she whispered, "it is some magical city that I have seen, but have never trod. It will vanish about six o'clock in the morning, and there will be only common streets, full of common people. Of course," and here she closed the window and leisurely removed her opera cloak, "of course, this is only dreaming, but to dream waking, or to dream sleeping, is very pleasant. In dreams we can have men as we like them, and women as we want them, and make all the world happy and beautiful."

She was in no hurry of feeling or movement. She had been in a crowd for some hours, and was glad to be quite alone and talk to herself a little. It was also so restful to gradually relinquish all the restraining gauds of fashionable attire, and as she leisurely performed these duties, she entered into conversation with her own heart—talked over with it the events of the past week, and decided that its fretless days, full of good things, had been, from the beginning to the end, sweet as a cup of new milk. For a woman's heart is very talkative, and requires little to make it eloquent in its own way.

In the midst of this intimate companionship she turned her head, and saw two letters lying upon a table. She rose and lifted them. One was an invitation to a studio reception, and she let it flutter indeterminately from her hand; the other was both familiar and appealing; none of her correspondents but Dora Denning used that peculiar shade of blue paper, and she instantly began to wonder why Dora had written to her.

"I saw her yesterday afternoon," she reflected, "and she told me everything she had to tell—and what does she-mean by such a tantalizing message as this? 'Dearest Ethel: I have the most extraordinary news. Come to me immediately. Dora.' How exactly like Dora!" she commented. "Come to me im-mediately—whether you are in bed or asleep—whether you are sick or well—whether it is midnight or high noon—come to me immediately. Well, Dora, I am going to sleep now, and to-morrow is Sunday, and I never know what view father is going to take of Sunday. He may ask me to go to church with him, and he may not. He may want me to drive in the afternoon, and again he

may not; but Sunday is father's home day, and Ruth and I make a point of obliging him in regard to it. That is one of our family principles; and a girl ought to have a few principles of conduct involving self-denial. Aunt Ruth says, 'Life cannot stand erect without self-denial,' and aunt is usually right—but I do wonder what Dora wants! I cannot imagine what extraordinary news has come. I must try and see her to-morrow—it may be difficult—but I must make the effort”—and with this satisfying resolution she easily fell asleep.

When she awoke the church bells were ringing and she knew that her father and aunt would have breakfasted. The feet did not trouble her. It was an accidental sleep-over; she had not planned it, and circumstances would take care of themselves. In any case, she had no fear of rebuke. No one was ever cross with Ethel. It was a matter of pretty general belief that whatever Ethel did was just right. So she dressed herself becomingly in a cloth suit, and, with her plumed hat on her head, went down to see what the day had to offer her.

"The first thing is coffee, and then, all being agreeable, Dora. I shall not look further ahead," she thought.

As she entered the room she called "Good morning!" and her voice was like the voice of the birds when they call "Spring!"; and her face was radiant with smiles, and the touch of her lips and the clasp of her hand warm with love and life; and her father and aunt forgot that she was late, and that her breakfast was yet to order.

She took up the reproach herself. "I am so sorry, Aunt Ruth. I only want a cup of coffee and a roll."

"My dear, you cannot go without a proper breakfast. Never mind the hour. What would you like best?"

"You are so good, Ruth. I should like a nice breakfast—a breast of chicken and mushrooms, and some hot muffins and marmalade would do. How comfortable you look here! Father, you are buried in newspapers. Is anyone going to church?"

Ruth ordered the desired breakfast and Mr. Rawdon took out his watch—"I am afraid you have delayed us too long this morning, Ethel."

"Am I to be the scapegoat? Now, I do not believe anyone wanted to go to church. Ruth had her book, you, the newspapers. It is warm and pleasant here, it is cold and windy outside. I know what confession would be made, if honesty were the fashion."

"Well, my little girl, honesty is the fashion in this house. I believe in going to church. Religion is the Mother of Duty, and we should all make a sad mess of life without duty. Is not that so, Ruth?"

"Truth itself, Edward; but religion is not going to church and listening to sermons. Those who built the old cathedrals of Europe had no idea that sitting in comfortable pews and listening to some man talking was worshipping God. Those great naves were intended for men and women to stand or kneel in before God. And there were no high or low standing or kneeling places; all were on a level before Him. It is our modern Protestantism which has brought in lazy lolling in cushioned pews; and the gallery, which makes a church as like a playhouse as possible!"

"What are you aiming at, Ruth?"

"I only meant to say, I would like going to church much better if we went solely to praise God, and entreat His mercy. I do not care to hear sermons."

"My dear Ruth, sermons are a large fact in our social economy. When a million or two are preached every year, they have a strong claim on our attention. To use a trade phrase, sermons are firm, and I believe a moderate tax on them would yield an astonishing income."

"See how you talk of them, Edward; as if they were a commercial commodity. If you respected them—"

"I do. I grant them a steady pneumatic pressure in the region of morals, and even faith. Picture to yourself, Ruth, New York without sermons. The dear old city would be like a ship without ballast,

heeling over with every wind, and letting in the waters of immorality and scepticism. Remove this pulpit balance just for one week from New York City, and where should we be?”

“Well then,” said Ethel, “the clergy ought to give New York a first-rate article in sermons, either of home or foreign manufacture. New York expects the very best of everything; and when she gets it, she opens her heart and her pocketbook enjoys it, and pays for it.”

“That is the truth, Ethel. I was thinking of your grandmother Rawdon. You have your hat on—are you going to see her?”

“I am going to see Dora Denning. I had an urgent note from her last night. She says she has ‘extraordinary news’ and begs me to ‘come to her immediately.’ I cannot imagine what her news is. I saw her Friday afternoon.”

“She has a new poodle, or a new lover, or a new way of crimping her hair,” suggested Ruth Bayard scornfully. “She imposes on you, Ethel; why do you submit to her selfishness?”

“I suppose because I have become used to it. Four years ago I began to take her part, when the girls teased and tormented her in the schoolroom, and I have big-sistered her ever since. I suppose we get to love those who make us kind and give us trouble. Dora is not perfect, but I like her better than any friend I have. And she must like me, for she asks my advice about everything in her life.”

“Does she take it?”

“Yes—generally. Sometimes I have to make her take it.”

“She has a mother. Why does she not go to her?”

“Mrs. Denning knows nothing about certain subjects. I am Dora’s social godmother, and she must dress and behave as I tell her to do. Poor Mrs. Denning! I am so sorry for her—another cup of coffee, Ruth—it is not very strong.”

“Why should you be sorry for Mrs. Denning, Her husband is enormously rich—she lives in a palace, and has a crowd of men and women servants to wait upon her—carriages, horses, motor cars, what not, at her command.”

“Yet really, Ruth, she is a most unhappy woman. In that little Western town from which they came, she was everybody. She ran the churches, and was chairwoman in all the clubs, and President of the Temperance Union, and manager of every religious, social, and political festival; and her days were full to the brim of just the things she liked to do. Her dress there was considered magnificent; people begged her for patterns, and regarded her as the very glass of fashion. Servants thought it a great privilege to be employed on the Denning place, and she ordered her house and managed her half-score of men and maids with pleasant autocracy. NOW! Well, I will tell you how it is, NOW. She sits all day in her splendid rooms, or rides out in her car or carriage, and no one knows her, and of course no one speaks to her. Mr. Denning has his Wall Street friends—”

“And enemies,” interrupted Judge Rawdon.

“And enemies! You are right, father. But he enjoys one as much as the other—that is, he would as willingly fight his enemies as feast his friends. He says a big day in Wall Street makes him alive from head to foot. He really looks happy. Bryce Denning has got into two clubs, and his money passes him, for he plays, and is willing to love prudently. But no one cares about Mrs. Denning. She is quite old—forty-five, I dare say; and she is stout, and does not wear the colors and style she ought to wear—none of her things have the right ‘look,’ and of course I cannot advise a matron. Then, her fine English servants take her house out of her hands. She is afraid of them. The butler suavely tries to inform her; the housekeeper removed the white crotched scarfs and things from the gilded chairs, and I am sure Mrs. Denning had a heartache about their loss; but she saw that they had also vanished from Dora’s parlor, so she took the hint, and accepted the lesson. Really, her humility and isolation are pitiful. I am going to ask grandmother to go and see her. Grandmother might take her to church, and get Dr. Simpson and Mrs. Simpson to introduce her. Her money and adaptability would do the rest. There, I have had a good breakfast, though I was late. It is not always the early bird that gets

chicken and mushrooms. Now I will go and see what Dora wants”—and lifting her furs with a smile, and a “Good morning!” equally charming, she disappeared.

“Did you notice her voice, Ruth?” asked Judge Rawdon. “What a tone there is in her ‘good morning!’”

“There is a tone in every one’s good morning, Edward. I think people’s salutations set to music would reveal their inmost character. Ethel’s good morning says in D major ‘How good is the day!’ and her good night drops into the minor third, and says pensively ‘How sweet is the night!’”

“Nay, Ruth, I don’t understand all that; but I do understand the voice. It goes straight to my heart.”

“And to my heart also, Edward. I think too there is a measured music, a central time and tune, in every life. Quick, melodious natures like Ethel’s never wander far from their keynote, and are therefore joyously set; while slow, irresolute people deviate far, and only come back after painful dissonances and frequent changes.”

“You are generally right, Ruth, even where I cannot follow you. I hope Ethel will be home for dinner. I like my Sunday dinner with both of you, and I may bring my mother back with me.”

Then he said “Good morning” with an intentional cheerfulness, and Ruth was left alone with her book. She gave a moment’s thought to the value of good example, and then with a sigh of content let her eyes rest on the words Ethel’s presence had for awhile silenced:

“I am filled with a sense of sweetness and wonder that such, little things can make a mortal so exceedingly rich. But I confess that the chiefest of all my delights is still the religious.” (Theodore Parker.) She read the words again, then closed her eyes and let the honey of some sacred memory satisfy her soul. And in those few minutes of reverie, Ruth Bayard revealed the keynote of her being. Wanderings from it, caused by the exigencies and duties of life, frequently occurred; but she quickly returned to its central and controlling harmony; and her serenity and poise were therefore as natural as was her niece’s joyousness and hope. Nor was her religious character the result of temperament, or of a secluded life. Ruth Bayard was a woman of thought and culture, and wise in the ways of the world, but not worldly. Her personality was very attractive, she had a good form, an agreeable face, speaking gray eyes, and brown hair, soft and naturally wavy. She was a distant cousin of Ethel’s mother, but had been brought up with her in the same household, and always regarded her as a sister, and Ethel never remembered that she was only her aunt by adoption. Ten years older than her niece, she had mothered her with a wise and loving patience, and her thoughts never wandered long or far from the girl. Consequently, she soon found herself wondering what reason there could be for Dora Denning’s urgency.

In the meantime Ethel had reached her friend’s residence a new building of unusual size and very ornate architecture. Liveried footmen and waiting women bowed her with mute attention to Miss Denning’s suite, an absolutely private arrangement of five rooms, marvelously furnished for the young lady’s comfort and delight. The windows of her parlor overlooked the park, and she was standing at one of them as Ethel entered the room. In a passion of welcoming gladness she turned to her, exclaiming: “I have been watching for you hours and hours, Ethel. I have the most wonderful thing to tell you. I am so happy! So happy! No one was ever as happy as I am.”

Then Ethel took both her hands, and, as they stood together, she looked intently at her friend. Some new charm transfigured her face; for her dark, gazelle eyes were not more lambent than her cheeks, though in a different way; while her black hair in its picturesquely arranged disorder seemed instinct with life, and hardly to be restrained. She was constantly pushing it back, caressing or arranging it; and her white, slender fingers, sparkling with jewels, moved among the crimped and wavy locks, as if there was an intelligent sympathy between them.

“How beautiful you are to-day, Dora! Who has worked wonders on you?”

“Basil Stanhope. He loves me! He loves me! He told me so last night—in the sweetest words that were ever uttered. I shall never forget one of them—never, as long as I live! Let us sit down. I want to tell you everything.”

“I am astonished, Dora!”

“So was mother, and father, and Bryce. No one suspected our affection. Mother used to grumble about my going ‘at all hours’ to St. Jude’s church; but that was because St. Jude’s is so very High Church, and mother is a Methodist Episcopal. It was the morning and evening prayers she objected to. No one had any suspicion of the clergyman. Oh, Ethel, he is so handsome! So good! So clever! I think every woman in the church is in love with him.”

“Then if he is a good man, he must be very unhappy.”

“Of course he is quite ignorant of their admiration, and therefore quite innocent. I am the only woman he loves, and he never even remembers me when he is in the sacred office. If you could see him come out of the vestry in his white surplice, with his rapt face and prophetic eyes. So mystical! So beautiful! You would not wonder that I worship him.”

“But I do not understand—how did you meet him socially?”

“I met him at Mrs. Taylor’s first. Then he spoke to me one morning as I came out of church, and the next morning he walked through the park with me. And after that—all was easy enough.”

“I see. What does your father and mother think—or rather, what do they say?”

“Father always says what he thinks, and mother thinks and says what I do. This condition simplified matters very much. Basil wrote to father, and yesterday after dinner he had an interview with him. I expected it, and was quite prepared for any climax that might come. I wore my loveliest white frock, and had lilies of the valley in my hair and on my breast; and father called me ‘his little angel’ and piously wondered ‘how I could be his daughter.’ All dinner time I tried to be angelic, and after dinner I sang ‘Little Boy Blue’ and some of the songs he loves; and I felt, when Basil’s card came in, that I had prepared the proper atmosphere for the interview.”

“You are really very clever, Dora.”

“I tried to continue singing and playing, but I could not; the notes all ran together, the words were lost. I went to mother’s side and put my hand in hers, and she said softly: ‘I can hear your father storming a little, but he will settle down the quicker for it. I dare say he will bring Mr. Stanhope in here before long.’”

“Did he?”

“No. That was Bryce’s fault. How Bryce happened to be in the house at that hour, I cannot imagine; but it seems to be natural for him to drop into any interview where he can make trouble. However, it turned out all for the best, for when mother heard Bryce’s voice above all the other sounds, she said, ‘Come Dora, we shall have to interfere now.’ Then I was delighted. I was angelically dressed, and I felt equal to the interview.”

“Do you really mean that you joined the three quarreling men?”

“Of course. Mother was quite calm—calm enough to freeze a tempest—but she gave father a look he comprehended. Then she shook hands with Basil, and would have made some remark to Bryce, but with his usual impertinence he took the initiative, and told her: very authoritatively to ‘retire and take me with her’—calling me that ‘demure little flirt’ in a tone that was very offensive. You should have seen father blaze into anger at his words. He told Bryce to remember that ‘Mr. Ben Denning owned the house, and that Bryce had four or five rooms in it by his courtesy.’ He said also that the ‘ladies present were Mr. Ben Denning’s wife and daughter, and that it was impertinent in him to order them out of his parlor, where they were always welcome.’ Bryce was white with passion, but he answered in his affected way—‘Sir, that sly girl with her pretended piety and her sneak of a lover is my sister, and I shall not permit her to disgrace my family without making a protest.’”

“And then?”

"I began to cry, and I put my arms around father's neck and said he must defend me; that I was not 'sly,' and Basil was not 'a sneak,' and father kissed me, and said he would settle with any man, and every man, who presumed to call me either sly or a flirt."

"I think Mr. Denning acted beautifully. What did Bryce say?"

"He turned to Basil, and said: 'Mr. Stanhope, if you are not a cad, you will leave the house. You have no right to intrude yourself into family affairs and family quarrels.' Basil had seated mother, and was standing with one hand on the back of her chair, and he did not answer Bryce—there was no need, father answered quick enough. He said Mr. Stanhope had asked to become one of the family, and for his part he would welcome him freely; and then he asked mother if she was of his mind, and mother smiled and reached her hand backward to Basil. Then father kissed me again, and somehow Basil's arm was round me, and I know I looked lovely—almost like a bride! Oh, Ethel, it was just heavenly!"

"I am sure it was. Did Bryce leave the room then?"

"Yes; he went out in a passion, declaring he would never notice me again. This morning at breakfast I said I was sorry Bryce felt so hurt, but father was sure Bryce would find plenty of consolation in the fact that his disapproval of my choice would excuse him from giving me a wedding present. You know Bryce is a mean little miser!"

"On the contrary, I thought he was very; luxurious and extravagant."

"Where Bryce is concerned, yes; toward everyone else his conduct is too mean to consider. Why, father makes him an allowance of \$20,000 a year and he empties father's cigar boxes whenever he can do so without—"

"Let us talk about Mr. Stanhope he is far more interesting. When are you going to marry him?"

"In the Spring. Father is going to give me some money and I have the fortune Grandmother Cahill left me. It has been well invested, and father told me this morning I was a fairly rich little woman. Basil has some private fortune, also his stipend—we shall do very well. Basil's family is one of the finest among the old Boston aristocrats, and he is closely connected with the English Stanhopes, who rank with the greatest of the nobility."

"I wish Americans would learn to rely on their own nobility. I am tired of their everlasting attempts to graft on some English noble family. No matter how great or clever a man may be, you are sure to read of his descent from some Scottish chief or English earl."

"They can't help their descent, Ethel."

"They need not pin all they have done on to it. Often father frets me in the same way. If he wins a difficult case, he does it naturally, because he is a Rawdon. He is handsome, gentlemanly, honorable, even a perfect horseman, all because, being a Rawdon, he was by nature and inheritance compelled to such perfection. It is very provoking, Dora, and if I were you I would not allow Basil to begin a song about 'the English Stanhopes.' Aunt Ruth and I get very tired often of the English Rawdons, and are really thankful for the separating Atlantic."

"I don't think I shall feel in that way, Ethel. I like the nobility; so does father, he says the Dennings are a fine old family."

"Why talk of genealogies when there is such a man as Basil Stanhope to consider? Let us grant him perfection and agree that he is to marry you in the Spring; well then, there is the ceremony, and the wedding garments! Of course it is to be a church wedding?"

"We shall be married in Basil's own church. I can hardly eat or sleep for thinking of the joy and the triumph of it! There will be women there ready to eat their hearts with envy—I believe indeed, Ethel, that every woman in the church is in love with Basil."

"You have said that before, and I am sure you are wrong. A great many of them are married and are in love with their own husbands; and the kind of girls who go to St. Jude's are not the kind who marry clergymen. Mr. Stanhope's whole income would hardly buy their gloves and parasols."

"I don't think you are pleased that I am going to marry. You must not be jealous of Basil. I shall love you just the same."

“Under no conditions, Dora, would I allow jealousy to trouble my life. All the same, you will not love me after your marriage as you have loved me in the past. I shall not expect it.”

Passionate denials of this assertion, reminiscences of the past, assurances for the future followed, and Ethel accepted them without dispute and without faith. But she understood that the mere circumstance of her engagement was all that Dora could manage at present; and that the details of the marriage merged themselves constantly in the wonderful fact that Basil Stanhope loved her, and that some time, not far off, she was going to be his wife. This joyful certainty filled her heart and her comprehension, and she had a natural reluctance to subject it to the details of the social and religious ceremonies necessary. Such things permitted others to participate in her joy, and she resented the idea. For a time she wished to keep her lover in a world where no other thought might trouble the thought of Dora.

Ethel understood her friend's mood, and was rather relieved when her carriage arrived. She felt that her presence was preventing Dora's absolute surrender of herself to thoughts of her lover, and all the way home she marveled at the girl's infatuation, and wondered if it would be possible for her to fall into such a dotage of love for any man. She answered this query positively—“No, if I should lose my heart, I shall not therefore lose my head”—and then, before she could finish assuring herself of her determinate wisdom, some mocking lines she had often quoted to love-sick girls went laughing through her memory—

“O Woman! Woman! O our frail, frail sex!
No wonder tragedies are made from us!
Always the same—nothing but loves and cradles.”

She found Ruth Bayard dressed for dinner, but her father was not present. That was satisfactory, for he was always a little impatient when the talk was of lovers and weddings; and just then this topic was uppermost in Ethel's mind.

“Ruth,” she said, “Dora is engaged,” and then in a few sentences she told the little romance Dora had lived for the past year, and its happy culmination. “Setting money aside, I think he will make a very suitable husband. What do you think, Ruth?”

“From what I know of Mr. Stanhope, I should doubt it. I am sure he will put his duties before every earthly thing, and I am sure Dora will object to that. Then I wonder if Dora is made on a pattern large enough to be the moneyed partner in matrimony. I should think Mr. Stanhope was a proud man.”

“Dora says he is connected with the English noble family of Stanhopes.”

“We shall certainly have all the connections of the English nobility in America very soon now—but why does he marry Dora? Is it her money?”

“I think not. I have heard from various sources some fine things of Basil Stanhope. There are many richer girls than Dora in St. Jude's. I dare say some one of them would have married him.”

“You are mistaken. Do you think Margery Starey, Jane Lewes, or any of the girls of their order would marry a man with a few thousands a year? And to marry for love is beyond the frontiers of such women's intelligence. In their creed a husband is a banker, not a man to be loved and cared for. You know how much of a banker Mr. Stanhope could be.”

“Bryce Denning is very angry at what he evidently considers his sister's mesalliance.”

“If Mr. Stanhope is connected with the English Stanhopes, the mesalliance must be laid to his charge.”

“Indeed the Dennings have some pretenses to good lineage, and Bryce spoke of his sister 'disgracing his family by her contemplated marriage.'”

“His family! My dear Ethel, his grandfather was a manufacturer of tin tacks. And now that we have got as far away as the Denning's grandfather, suppose we drop the subject.”

“Content; I am a little tired of the clan Denning—that is their original name Dora says. I will go now and dress for dinner.”

Then Ruth rose and looked inquisitively around the room. It was as she wished it to be—the very expression of elegant comfort—warm and light, and holding the scent of roses: a place of deep, large chairs with no odds and ends to worry about, a room to lounge and chat in, and where the last touch of perfect home freedom was given by a big mastiff who, having heard the door-bell ring, strolled in to see who had called.

CHAPTER II

DURING dinner both Ruth and Ethel were aware of some sub-interest in the Judge's manner; his absent-mindedness was unusual, and once Ruth saw a faint smile that nothing evident could have induced. Unconsciously also he set a tone of constraint and hurry; the meal was not loitered over, the conversation flagged, and all rose from the table with a sense of relief; perhaps, indeed, with a feeling of expectation.

They entered the parlor together, and the mastiff rose to meet them, asking permission to remain with the little coaxing push of his nose which brought the ready answer:

"Certainly, Sultan. Make yourself comfortable."

Then they grouped themselves round the fire, and the Judge lit his cigar and looked at Ethel in a way that instantly brought curiosity to the question:

"You have a secret, father," she said. "Is it about grandmother?"

"It is news rather than a secret, Ethel. And grandmother has a good deal to do with it, for it is about her family—the Mostyns."

"Oh!"

The tone of Ethel's "Oh!" was not encouraging, and Ruth's look of interest held in abeyance was just as chilling. But something like this attitude had been expected, and Judge Rawdon was not discouraged by it; he knew that youth is capable of great and sudden changes, and that its ability to find reasonable motives for them is unlimited, so he calmly continued:

"You are aware that your grandmother's name before marriage was Rachel Mostyn?"

"I have seen it a thousand times at the bottom of her sampler, father, the one that is framed and hanging in her morning room—Rachel Mostyn, November, Anno Domini, 1827."

"Very well. She married George Rawdon, and they came to New York in 1834. They had a pretty house on the Bowling Green and lived very happily there. I was born in 1850, the youngest of their children. You know that I sign my name Edward M. Rawdon; it is really Edward Mostyn Rawdon."

He paused, and Ruth said, "I suppose Mrs. Rawdon has had some news from her old home?"

"She had a letter last night, and I shall probably receive one to-morrow. Frederick Mostyn, her grand-nephew, is coming to New York, and Squire Rawdon, of Rawdon Manor, writes to recommend the young man to our hospitality."

"But you surely do not intend to invite him here, Edward. I think that would not do."

"He is going to the Holland House. But he is our kinsman, and therefore we must be hospitable."

"I have been trying to count the kinship. It is out of my reckoning," said Ethel. "I hope at least he is nice and presentable."

"The Mostyns are a handsome family. Look at your grandmother. And Squire Rawdon speaks very well of Mr. Mostyn. He has taken the right side in politics, and is likely to make his mark. They were always great sportsmen, and I dare say this representative of the family is a good-looking fellow, well-mannered, and perfectly dressed."

Ethel laughed. "If his clothes fit him he will be an English wonder. I have seen lots of Englishmen; they are all frights as to trousers and vests. There was Lord Wycomb, his broadcloths and satins and linen were marvels in quality, but the make! The girls hated to be seen walking with him, and he would walk—'good for the constitution,' was his explanation for all his peculiarities. The Caylers were weary to death of them."

"And yet," said Ruth, "they sang songs of triumph when Lou Cayler married him."

"That was a different thing. Lou would make him get 'fits' and stop wearing sloppy, baggy arrangements. And I do not suppose the English lord has now a single peculiarity left, unless it be

his constitutional walk—that, of course. I have heard English babies get out of their cradles to take a constitutional.”

During this tirade Ruth had been thinking. “Edward,” she asked, “why does Squire Rawdon introduce Mr. Mostyn? Their relationship cannot be worth counting.”

“There you are wrong, Ruth.” He spoke with a little excitement. “Englishmen never deny matrimonial relationships, if they are worthy ones. Mostyn and Rawdon are bound together by many a gold wedding ring; we reckon such ties relationships. Squire Rawdon lost his son and his two grandsons a year ago. Perhaps this young man may eventually stand in their place. The Squire is nearly eighty years old; he is the last of the English Rawdons—at least of our branch of it.”

“You suppose this Mr. Mostyn may become Squire of Rawdon Manor?”

“He may, Ruth, but it is not certain. There is a large mortgage on the Manor.”

“Oh!”

Both girls made the ejaculation at the same moment, and in both voices there was the same curious tone of speculation. It was a cry after truth apprehended, but not realized. Mr. Rawdon remained silent; he was debating with himself the advisability of further confidence, but he came quickly to the conclusion that enough had been told for the present. Turning to Ethel, he said: “I suppose girls have a code of honor about their secrets. Is Dora Denning’s ‘extraordinary news’ shut up in it?”

“Oh, no, father. She is going to be married. That is all.”

“That is enough. Who is the man?”

“Reverend Mr. Stanhope.”

“Nonsense!”

“Positively.”

“I never heard anything more ridiculous. That saintly young priest! Why, Dora will be tired to death of him in a month. And he? Poor fellow!”

“Why poor fellow? He is very much in love with her.”

“It is hard to understand. St. Jerome’s love ‘pale with midnight prayer’ would be more believable than the butterfly Dora. Goodness, gracious! The idea of that man being in love! It pulls him down a bit. I thought he never looked at a woman.”

“Do you know him, father?”

“As many people know him—by good report. I know that he is a clergyman who believes what he preaches. I know a Wall Street broker who left St. Jude’s church because Mr. Stanhope’s sermons on Sunday put such a fine edge on his conscience that Mondays were dangerous days for him to do business on. And whatever Wall Street financiers think of the Bible personally, they do like a man who sticks to his colors, and who holds intact the truth committed to him. Stanhope does this emphatically; and he is so well trusted that if he wanted to build a new church he could get all the money necessary, from Wall Street men in an hour. And he is going to marry! Going to marry Dora Denning! It is ‘extraordinary news,’ indeed!”

Ethel was a little offended at such unusual surprise. “I think you don’t quite understand Dora,” she said. “It will be Mr. Stanhope’s fault if she is not led in the right way; for if he only loves and pets her enough he may do all he wishes with her. I know, I have both coaxed and ordered her for four years—sometimes one way is best, and sometimes the other.”

“How is a man to tell which way to take? What do her parents think of the marriage?”

“They are pleased with it.”

“Pleased with it! Then I have nothing more to say, except that I hope they will not appeal to me on any question of divorce that may arise from such an unlikely marriage.”

“They are only lovers yet, Edward,” said Ruth. “It is not fair, or kind, to even think of divorce.”

“My dear Ruth, the fashionable girl of today accepts marriage with the provision of divorce.”

“Dora is hardly one of that set.”

"I hope she may keep out of it, but marriage will give her many opportunities. Well, I am sorry for the young priest. He isn't fit to manage a woman like Dora Denning. I am afraid he will get the worst of it."

"I think you are very unkind, father. Dora is my friend, and I know her. She is a girl of intense feelings and very affectionate. And she has dissolved all her life and mind in Mr. Stanhope's life and mind, just as a lump of sugar is dissolved in water."

Ruth laughed. "Can you not find a more poetic simile, Ethel?"

"It will do. This is an age of matter; a material symbol is the proper thing."

"I am glad to hear she has dissolved her mind in Stanhope's," said Judge Rawdon. "Dora's intellect in itself is childish. What did the man see in her that he should desire her?"

"Father, you never can tell how much brains men like with their beauty. Very little will do generally. And Dora has beauty—great beauty; no one can deny that. I think Dora is giving up a great deal. To her, at least, marriage is a state of passing from perfect freedom into the comparative condition of a slave, giving up her own way constantly for some one else's way."

"Well, Ethel, the remedy is in the lady's hands. She is not forced to marry, and the slavery that is voluntary is no hardship. Now, my dear, I have a case to look over, and you must excuse me to-night. To-morrow we shall know more concerning Mr. Mostyn, and it is easier to talk about certainties than probabilities."

But if conversation ceased about Mr. Mostyn, thought did not; for, a couple of hours afterwards, Ethel tapped at her aunt's door and said, "Just a moment, Ruth."

"Yes, dear, what is it?"

"Did you notice what father said about the mortgage on Rawdon Manor?"

"Yes."

"He seemed to know all about it."

"I think he does know all about it."

"Do you think he holds it?"

"He may do so—it is not unlikely."

"Oh! Then Mr. Fred Mostyn, if he is to inherit Rawdon, would like the mortgage removed?"

"Of course he would."

"And the way to remove it would be to marry the daughter of the holder of the mortgage?"

"It would be one way."

"So he is coming to look me over. I am a matrimonial possibility. How do you like that idea, Aunt Ruth?"

"I do not entertain it for a moment. Mr. Mostyn may not even know of the mortgage. When men mortgage their estates they do not make confidences about the matter, or talk it over with their friends. They always conceal and hide the transaction. If your father holds the mortgage, I feel sure that no one but himself and Squire Rawdon know anything about it. Don't look at the wrong side of events, Ethel; be content with the right side of life's tapestry. Why are you not asleep? What are you worrying about?"

"Nothing, only I have not heard all I wanted to hear."

"And perhaps that is good for you."

"I shall go and see grandmother first thing in the morning."

"I would not if I were you. You cannot make any excuse she will not see through. Your father will call on Mr. Mostyn to-morrow, and we shall get unprejudiced information."

"Oh, I don't know that, Ruth. Father is intensely American three hundred and sixty-four days and twenty-three hours in a year, and then in the odd hour he will flare up Yorkshire like a conflagration."

"English, you mean?"

"No. Yorkshire IS England to grandmother and father. They don't think anything much of the other counties, and people from them are just respectable foreigners. You may depend upon it, whatever grandmother says of Mr. Fred Mostyn, father will believe it, too."

"Your father always believes whatever your grandmother says. Good night, dear."

"Good night. I think I shall go to grandmother in the morning. I know how to manage her. I shall meet her squarely with the truth, and acknowledge that I am dying with curiosity about Mr. Mostyn."

"And she will tease and lecture you, say you are 'not sweetheart high yet, only a little maid,' and so on. Far better go and talk with Dora. To-morrow she will need you, I am sure. Ethel, I am very sleepy. Good night again, dear."

"Good night!" Then with a sudden animation, "I know what to do, I shall tell grandmother about Dora's marriage. It is all plain enough now. Good night, Ruth." And this good night, though dropping sweetly into the minor third, had yet on its final inflection something of the pleasant hopefulness of its major key—it expressed anticipation and satisfaction.

What happened in the night session she could not tell, but she awoke with a positive disinclination to ask a question about Mr. Mostyn. "I have received orders from some one," she said to Ruth; "I simply do not care whether I ever see or hear of the man again. I am going to Dora, and I may not come home until late. You know they will depend upon me for every suggestion."

In fact, Ethel did not return home until the following day, for a snowstorm came up in the afternoon, and the girl was weary with planning and writing, and well inclined to eat with Dora the delicate little dinner served to them in Dora's private parlor. Then about nine o'clock Mr. Stanhope called, and Ethel found it pleasant enough to watch the lovers and listen to Mrs. Denning's opinions of what had been already planned. And the next day she seemed to be so absolutely necessary to the movement of the marriage preparations, that it was nearly dark before she was permitted to return home.

It was but a short walk between the two houses, and Ethel was resolved to have the refreshment of the exercise. And how good it was to feel the pinch of the frost and the gust of the north wind, and after it to come to the happy portal of home, and the familiar atmosphere of the cheerful hall, and then to peep into the firelit room in which Ruth lay dreaming in the dusky shadows.

"Ruth, darling!"

"Ethel! I have just sent for you to come home." Then she rose and took Ethel in her arms. "How delightfully cold you are! And what rosy cheeks! Do you know that we have a little dinner party?"

"Mr. Mostyn?"

"Yes, and your grandmother, and perhaps Dr. Fisher—the Doctor is not certain."

"And I see that you are already dressed. How handsome you look! That black lace dress, with the dull gold ornaments, is all right."

"I felt as if jewels would be overdress for a family dinner."

"Yes, but jewels always snub men so completely. It is not altogether that they represent money; they give an air of royalty, and a woman without jewels is like an uncrowned queen—she does not get the homage. I can't account for it, but there it is. I shall wear my sapphire necklace. What did father say about our new kinsman?"

"Very little. It was impossible to judge from his words what he thought. I fancied that he might have been a little disappointed."

"I should not wonder. We shall see."

"You will be dressed in an hour?"

"In less time. Shall I wear white or blue?"

"Pale blue and white flowers. There are some white violets in the library. I have a red rose. We shall contrast each other very well."

"What is it all about? Do we really care how we look in the eyes of this Mr. Mostyn?"

"Of course we care. We should not be women if we did not care. We must make some sort of an impression, and naturally we prefer that it should be a pleasant one."

"If we consider the mortgage—"

"Nonsense! The mortgage is not in it."

"Good-by. Tell Mattie to bring me a cup of tea upstairs. I will be dressed in an hour."

The tea was brought and drank, and Ethel fell asleep while her maid prepared every item for her toilet. Then she spoke to her mistress, and Ethel awakened, as she always did, with a smile; nature's surest sign of a radically sweet temper. And everything went in accord with the smile; her hair fell naturally into its most becoming waves, her dress into its most graceful folds; the sapphire necklace matched the blue of her happy eyes, the roses of youth were on her cheeks, and white violets on her breast. She felt her own beauty and was glad of it, and with a laughing word of pleasure went down to the parlor.

Madam Rawdon was standing before the fire, but when she heard the door open she turned her face toward it.

"Come here, Ethel Rawdon," she said, "and let me have a look at you." And Ethel went to her side, laid her hand lightly on the old lady's shoulder and kissed her cheek. "You do look middling well," she continued, "and your dress is about as it should be. I like a girl to dress like a girl—still, the sapphires. Are they necessary?"

"You would not say corals, would you, grandmother? I have those you gave me when I was three years old."

"Keep your wit, my dear, for this evening. I should not wonder but you might need it. Fred Mostyn is rather better than I expected. It was a great pleasure to see him. It was like a bit of my own youth back again. When you are a very old woman there are few things sweeter, Ethel."

"But you are not an old woman, grandmother."

Nor was she. In spite of her seventy-five years she stood erect at the side of her grand-daughter. Her abundant hair was partly gray, but the gray mingled with the little oval of costly lace that lay upon it, and the effect was soft and fair as powdering. She had been very handsome, and her beauty lingered as the beauty of some flowers linger, in fainter tints and in less firm outlines; for she had never fallen from that "grace of God vouchsafed to children," and therefore she had kept not only the enthusiasms of her youth, but that sweet promise of the "times of restitution" when the child shall die one hundred years old, because the child-heart shall be kept in all its freshness and trust. Yes, in Rachel Rawdon's heart the well-springs of love and life lay too deep for the frosts of age to touch. She would be eternally young before she grew old.

She sat down as Ethel spoke, and drew the girl to her side. "I hear your friend is going to marry," she said.

"Dora? Yes."

"Are you sorry?"

"Perhaps not. Dora has been a care to me for four years. I hope her husband may manage her as well as I have done."

"Are you afraid he will not?"

"I cannot tell, grandmother. I see all Dora's faults. Mr. Stanhope is certain that she has no faults. Hitherto she has had her own way in everything. Excepting myself, no one has ventured to contradict her. But, then, Dora is over head and ears in love, and love, it is said, makes all things easy to bear and to do."

"One thing, girls, amazes me—it is how readily women go to church and promise to love, honor, and obey their husbands, when they never intend to do anything of the kind."

"There is a still more amazing thing, Madam," answered Ruth; "that is that men should be so foolish as to think, or hope, they perhaps might do so."

“Old-fashioned women used to manage it some way or other, Ruth. But the old-fashioned woman was a very soft-hearted creature, and, maybe, it was just as well that she was.”

“But Woman’s Dark Ages are nearly over, Madam; and is not the New Woman a great improvement on the Old Woman?”

“I haven’t made up my mind yet, Ruth, about the New Woman. I notice one thing that a few of the new kind have got into their pretty heads, and that is, that they ought to have been men; and they have followed up that idea so far that there is now very little difference in their looks, and still less in their walk; they go stamping along with the step of an athlete and the stride of a peasant on fresh plowed fields. It is the most hideous of walks imaginable. The Grecian bend, which you cannot remember, but may have heard of, was a lackadaisical, vulgar walking fad, but it was grace itself compared with the hideous stride which the New Woman has acquired on the golf links or somewhere else.”

“But men stamp and stride in the same way, grandmother.”

“A long stride suits a man’s anatomy well enough; it does not suit a woman’s—she feels every stride she takes, I’ll warrant her.”

“If she plays golf—”

“My dear Ethel, there is no need for her to play golf. It is a man’s game and was played for centuries by men only. In Scotland, the home of golf, it was not thought nice for women to even go to the links, because of the awful language they were likely to hear.”

“Then, grandmother, is it not well for ladies to play golf if it keeps men from using ‘awful language’ to each other?”

“God love you, child! Men will think what they dare not speak.”

“If we could only have some new men!” sighed Ethel. “The lover of to-day is just what a girl can pick up; he has no wit and no wisdom and no illusions. He talks of his muscles and smells of cigarettes—perhaps of whisky”—and at these words, Judge Rawdon, accompanied by Mr. Fred Mostyn, entered the room.

The introductions slipped over easily, they hardly seemed to be necessary, and the young man took the chair offered as naturally as if he had sat by the hearth all his life. There was no pause and no embarrassment and no useless polite platitudes; and Ethel’s first feeling about her kinsman was one of admiration for the perfect ease and almost instinctive at-homeness with which he took his place. He had come to his own and his own had received him; that was the situation, a very pleasant one, which he accepted with the smiling trust that was at once the most perfect and polite of acknowledgments.

“So you do not enjoy traveling?” said Judge Rawdon as if continuing a conversation.

“I think it the most painful way of taking pleasure, sir—that is the actual transit. And sleeping cars and electric-lighted steamers and hotels do not mitigate the suffering. If Dante was writing now he might depict a constant round of personally conducted tours in Purgatory. I should think the punishment adequate for any offense. But I like arriving at places. New York has given me a lot of new sensations to-day, and I have forgotten the transit troubles already.”

He talked well and temperately, and yet Ethel could not avoid the conclusion that he was a man of positive character and uncompromising prejudices. And she also felt a little disappointed in his personality, which contradicted her ideal of a Yorkshire squire. For he was small and slender in stature, and his face was keen and thin, from the high cheek bones to the sharp point of the clean-shaven chin. Yet it was an interesting face, for the brows were broad and the eyes bright and glancing. That his nature held the opposite of his qualities was evident from the mouth, which was composed and discreet and generally clothed with a frank smile, negated by the deep, sonorous voice which belongs to the indiscreet and quarrelsome. His dress was perfect. Ethel could find no fault in it, except the monocle which he did not use once during the evening, and which she therefore decided was a quite idle and unhandsome adjunct.

One feature of his character was definite—he was a home-loving man. He liked the society of women with whom he could be familiar, and he preferred the company of books and music to fashionable social functions. This pleasant habit of domesticity was illustrated during the evening by an accidental incident—a noisy, mechanical street organ stopped before the windows, and in a blatant manner began its performance. Conversation was paralyzed by the intrusion and when it was removed Judge Rawdon said: “What a democratic, leveling, aggressive thing music is! It insists on being heard. It is always in the way, it thrusts itself upon you, whether you want it or not. Now art is different. You go to see pictures when you wish to.”

Mostyn did not notice the criticism on music itself, but added in a soft, disapproving way: “That man has no music in him. Do you know that was one of Mendelssohn’s delicious dreams. This is how it should have been rendered,” and he went impulsively to the piano and then the sweet monotonous cadences and melodious reveries slipped from his long white fingers till the whole room was permeated with a delicious sense of moonlit solitude and conversation was stilled in its languor. The young man had played his own dismissal, but it was an effective one, and he complimented himself on his readiness to seize opportunities for display, and on his genius in satisfying them.

“I think I astonished them a little,” he mused, “and I wonder what that pretty, cousin of mine thought of the music and the musician. I fancy we shall be good friends; she is proud—that is no fault; and she has very decided opinions—which might be a great fault; but I think I rather astonished them.”

To such reflections he stepped rather pompously down the avenue, not at all influenced by any premonition that his satisfactory feelings might be imperfectly shared. Yet silence was the first result of his departure. Judge Rawdon took out his pocketbook and began to study its entries. Ruth Bayard rose and closed the piano. Ethel lifted a magazine, while it was Madam who finally asked in an impatient tone:

“What do you think of Frederick? I suppose, Edward, you have an opinion. Isn’t he a very clever man?”

“I should not wonder if he were, mother, clever to a fault.”

“I never heard a young man talk better.”

“He talked a great deal, but then, you know, he was not on his oath.”

“I’ll warrant every word he said.”

“Your warrant is fine surety, mother, but I am not bound to believe all I hear. You women can please yourselves.”

And with these words he left the women to find out, if they could, what manner of man their newly-found kinsman might be.

CHAPTER III

ONE of the most comfortable things about Frederick Mostyn was his almost boyish delight in the new life which New York opened to him. Every phase of it was so fresh, so unusual, that his Yorkshire existence at Mostyn Hall gave him no precedents and no experiences by which to measure events. The simplest things were surprising or interesting. He was never weary of taking those exciting "lifts" to the top of twenty-three story buildings and admiring the wonderful views such altitudes gave him. He did not perhaps comprehend how much he was influenced by the friction of two million wills and interests; did not realize how they evoked an electric condition that got behind the foreground of existence and stirred something more at the roots of his being than any previous experience had ever done. And this feeling was especially entrancing when he saw the great city and majestic river lying at his feet in the white, uncanny light of electricity, all its color gone, its breath cold, its life strangely remote and quiet, men moving like shadows, and sounds hollow and faint and far off, as if they came from a distant world. It gave him a sense of dreamland quite as much as that of reality. The Yorkshire moors and words grew dull and dreary in his memory; even the thought of the hunting field could not lure his desire. New York was full of marvelous novelties; its daily routine, even in the hotel and on the streets, gripped his heart and his imagination; and he confessed to himself that New York was life at first hand; fresh drawn, its very foam sparkling and intoxicating. He walked from the Park to the Battery and examined all that caught his eye. He had a history of the city and sought out every historical site; he even went over to Weehawken, and did his best to locate the spot where Burr and Hamilton fought. He admired Hamilton, but after reading all about the two men, gave his sympathy to Burr, "a clever, unlucky little chap," he said. "Why do clever men hate each other?" and then he smiled queerly as he remembered political enemies of great men in his own day and his own country; and concluded that "it was their nature to do so."

But in these outside enthusiasms he did not forget his personal relations. It took him but a few days to domesticate himself in both the Rawdon houses. When the weather drove him off the streets, he found a pleasant refuge either with Madam or with Ethel and Miss Bayard. Ethel he saw less frequently than he liked; she was nearly always with Dora Denning, but with Ruth Bayard he contracted a very pleasant friendship. He told her all his adventures and found her more sympathetic than Madam ever pretended to be. Madam thought him provincial in his tastes, and was better pleased to hear that he had a visiting entry at two good clubs, and had hired a motor car, and was learning how to manage it. Then she told herself that if he was good to her, she would buy him one to be proud of before he returned to Yorkshire.

It was at the Elite Club Bryce Denning first saw him. He came in with Shaw McLaren, a young man whose acquaintance was considered as most definitely satisfactory. Vainly Bryce Denning had striven to obtain any notice whatever from McLaren, whose exclusiveness was proverbial. Who then was this stranger he appeared so anxious to entertain? His look of supreme satisfaction, his high-bred air, and peculiar intonation quickly satisfied Bryce as to his nationality.

"English, of course," he reflected, "and probably one of the aristocrats that Shaw meets at his recently ennobled sister's place. He is forever bragging about them. I must find out who Shaw's last British lion is," and just as he arrived at this decision the person appeared who could satisfy him.

"That man!" was the reply to the inevitable question—"why, he is some relative of the old lady Rawdon. He is staying at the Holland House, but spends his time with the Rawdons, old and young; the young one is a beauty, you know."

"Do you think so? She is a good deal at our house. I suppose the fellow has some pretensions. Judge Rawdon will be a man hard to satisfy with a son-in-law."

"I fancy his daughter will take that subject in her own hand. She looks like a girl of spirit; and this man is not as handsome as most Englishmen."

“Not if you judge him by bulk, but women want more than mere bulk; he has an air of breeding you can’t mistake, and he looks clever.”

“His name is Mostyn. I have heard him spoken of. Would you like to know him?”

“I could live without that honor”—then Bryce turned the conversation upon a recent horse sale, and a few moments later was sauntering up the avenue. He was now resolved to make up his quarrel with Dora. Through Dora he could manage to meet Mostyn socially, and he smiled in anticipation of that proud moment when he should parade in his own friendly leash McLaren’s new British lion. Besides, the introduction to Mr. Mostyn might, if judiciously managed, promote his own acquaintance with Shaw McLaren, a sequence to be much desired; an end he had persistently looked for.

He went straight to his sister’s apartments and touched the bell quite gently. Her maid opened the door and looked annoyed and uncertain. She knew all about the cruelly wicked opposition of Miss Denning’s brother to that nice young man, Basil Stanhope; and also the general attitude of the Denning household, which was a comprehensive disapproval of all that Mr. Bryce said and did.

Dora had, however, talked all her anger away; she wished now to be friends with her brother. She knew that his absence from her wedding would cause unpleasant notice, and she had other reasons, purely selfish, all emphasizing the advantages of a reconciliation. So she went to meet Bryce with a pretty, pathetic air of injury patiently endured, and when Bryce put out his hands and said, “Forgive me, Dodo! I cannot bear your anger any longer!” she was quite ready for the next act, which was to lay her pretty head on his shoulder and murmur, “I am not angry, Bryce—I am grieved, dear.”

“I know, Dodo—forgive me! It was all my fault. I think I was jealous of you; it was hard to find that you loved a stranger better than you loved me. Kiss me, and be my own sweet, beautiful sister again. I shall try to like all the people you like—for your sake, you know.”

Then Dora was charming. She sat and talked and planned and told him all that had been done and all that was yet to do. And Bryce never once named either Ethel or Mr. Mostyn. He knew Dora was a shrewd little woman, and that he would have to be very careful in introducing the subject of Mr. Mostyn, or else she would be sure to reach the central truth of his submission to her. But, somehow, things happen for those who are content to leave their desires to contingencies and accidentals. The next morning he breakfasted with the family and felt himself repaid for his concession to Dora by the evident pleasure their renewed affection gave his father and mother; and though the elder Denning made no remark in the renewed family solidarity, Bryce anticipated many little favors and accommodations from his father’s satisfaction.

After breakfast he sat down, lit his cigar and waited. Both his mother and Dora had much to tell him, and he listened, and gave them such excellent advice that they were compelled to regret the arrangements already made had lacked the benefit of his counsels.

“But you had Ethel Rawdon,” he said. “I thought she was everybody rolled into one.”

“Oh, Ethel doesn’t know as much as she thinks she does,” said Mrs. Denning. “I don’t agree with lots of things she advises.”

“Then take my advice, mother.”

“Oh, Bryce, it is the best of all.”

“Bryce does not know about dress and such things, mother. Ethel finds out what she does not know. Bryce cannot go to modistes and milliners with me.”

“Well, Ethel does not pay as much attention as she might—she is always going somewhere or other with that Englishman, that she says is a relative—for my part, I doubt it.”

“Oh, mother!”

“Girls will say anything, Dora, to hide a love affair. Why does she never bring him here to call?”

“Because I asked her not. I do not want to make new friends, especially English ones, now. I am so busy all day, and of course my evenings belong to Basil.”

“Yes, and there is no one to talk to me. Ethel and the Englishman would pass an hour or two very nicely, and your father is very fond of foreigners. I think you ought to ask Ethel to introduce

him to us; then we could have a little dinner for him and invite him to our opera box—don't you agree with me, Bryce?"

"If Dora does. Of course, at this time, Dora's wishes and engagements are the most important. I have seen the young man at the club with Shaw McLaren and about town with Judge Rawdon and others. He seems a nice little fellow. Jack Lacy wanted to introduce me to him yesterday, but I told him I could live without the honor. Of course, if Dora feels like having him here that is a very different matter. He is certainly distinguished looking, and would give an air to the wedding."

"Is he handsome, Bryce?"

"Yes—and no. Women would rave about him; men would think him finical and dandified. He looks as if he were the happiest fellow in the world—in fact, he looked to me so provokingly happy that I disliked him; but now that Dodo is my little sister again, I can be happy enough to envy no one."

Then Dora slipped her hand into her brother's hand, and Bryce knew that he might take his way to his little office in William Street, the advent of Mr. Mostyn into his life being now as certain as anything in this questionable, fluctuating world could be. As he was sauntering down the avenue he met Ethel and he turned and walked back with her to the Denning house. He was so good-natured and so good-humored that Ethel could not avoid an inquisitive look at the usually glum young man, and he caught it with a laugh and said, "I suppose you wonder what is the matter with me, Miss Rawdon?"

"You look more than usually happy. If I suppose you have found a wife or a fortune, shall I be wrong?"

"You come near the truth; I have found a sister. Do you know I am very fond of Dora and we have made up our quarrel?"

Then Ethel looked at him again. She did not believe him. She was sure that Dora was not the only evoker of the unbounded satisfaction in Bryce Denning's face and manner. But she let the reason pass; she had no likely arguments to use against it. And that day Mrs. Denning, with a slight air of injury, opened the subject of Mr. Mostyn's introduction to them. She thought Ethel had hardly treated the Dennings fairly. Everyone was wondering they had not met him. Of course, she knew they were not aristocrats and she supposed Ethel was ashamed of them, but, for her part, she thought they were as good as most people, and if it came to money, they could put down dollar for dollar with any multi-millionaire in America, or England either, for that matter.

When the reproach took this tone there seemed to be only one thing for Ethel to say or to do; but that one thing was exactly what she did not say or do. She took up Mrs. Denning's reproach and complained that "her relative and friend had been purposely and definitely ignored. Dora had told her plainly she did not wish to make Mr. Mostyn's acquaintance; and, in accord with this feeling, no one in the Denning family had called on Mr. Mostyn, or shown him the least courtesy. She thought the whole Rawdon family had the best of reasons for feeling hurt at the neglect."

This view of the case had not entered Mrs. Denning's mind. She was quickly sorry and apologetic for Dora's selfishness and her own thoughtlessness, and Ethel was not difficult to pacify. There was then no duty so imperative as the arrangement of a little dinner for Mr. Mostyn. "We will make it quite a family affair," said Mrs. Denning, "then we can go to the opera afterwards. Shall I call on Mr. Mostyn at the Holland House?" she asked anxiously.

"I will ask Bryce to call," said Dora. "Bryce will do anything to please me now, mother."

In this way, Bryce Denning's desires were all arranged for him, and that evening Dora made her request. Bryce heard it with a pronounced pout of his lips, but finally told Dora she was "irresistible," and as his time for pleasing her was nearly out, he would even call on the Englishman at her request.

"Mind!" he added, "I think he is as proud as Lucifer, and I may get nothing for my civility but the excuse of a previous engagement."

But Bryce Denning expected much more than this, and he got all that he expected. The young men had a common ground to meet on, and they quickly became as intimate as ever Frederick Mostyn permitted himself to be with a stranger. Bryce could hardly help catching enthusiasm from Mostyn on

the subject of New York, and he was able to show his new acquaintance phases of life in the marvelous city which were of the greatest interest to the inquisitive Yorkshire squire—Chinese theaters and opium dives; German, Italian, Spanish, Jewish, French cities sheltering themselves within the great arms of the great American city; queer restaurants, where he could eat of the national dishes of every civilized country under the sun; places of amusement, legal and illegal, and the vast under side of the evident life—all the uncared for toiling of the thousands who work through the midnight hours. In these excursions the young men became in a way familiar, though neither of them ever told the other the real feelings of their hearts or the real aim of their lives.

The proposed dinner took place ten days after its suggestion. There was nothing remarkable in the function itself; all millionaires have the same delicacies and the same wines, and serve these things with precisely the same ceremonies. And, as a general thing, the company follow rigidly ordained laws of conversation. Stories about public people, remarks about the weather and the opera, are in order; but original ideas or decided opinions are unpardonable social errors. Yet even these commonplace events may contain some element that shall unexpectedly cut a life in two, and so change its aims and desires as to virtually create a new character. It was Frederick Mostyn who in this instance underwent this great personal change; a change totally unexpected and for which he was absolutely unprepared. For the people gathered in Mrs. Denning's drawing-room were mostly known to him, and the exceptions did not appear to possess any remarkable traits, except Basil Stanhope, who stood thoughtfully at a window, his pale, lofty beauty wearing an air of expectation. Mostyn decided that he was naturally impatient for the presence of his fiancée, whose delayed entrance he perceived was also annoying Ethel. Then there was a slight movement, a sudden silence, and Mostyn saw Stanhope's face flush and turn magically radiant. Mechanically he followed his movement and the next moment his eyes met Fate, and Love slipped in between. Dora was there, a fairy-like vision in pale amber draperies, softened with silk lace. Diamonds were in her wonderfully waved hair and round her fair white neck. They clasped her belt and adorned the instep of her little amber silk slippers. She held a yellow rose in her hand, and yellow rosebuds lay among the lace at her bosom, and Mostyn, stupefied by her undreamed-of loveliness, saw golden emanations from the clear pallor of her face. He felt for a moment or two as if he should certainly faint; only by a miracle of stubborn will did he drag his consciousness from that golden-tinted, sparkling haze of beauty which had smitten him like an enchantment. Then the girl was looking at him with her soft, dark, gazelle eyes; she was even speaking to him, but what she said, or what reply he made, he could never by any means remember. Miss Bayard was to be his companion, and with some effort and a few indistinct words he gave her his arm. She asked if he was ill, and when a shake of the head answered the query, she covered the few minutes of his disconcertion with her conversation. He looked at her gratefully and gathered his personality together. For Love had come to him like a two-edged sword, dividing the flesh and the spirit, and he longed to cry aloud and relieve the sweet torture of the possession.

Reaction, however, came quickly, and with it a wonderful access of all his powers. The sweet, strong wine of Love went to his brain like celestial nectar. All the witty, amusing things he had ever heard came trooping into his memory, and the dinner was long delayed by his fine humor, his pleasant anecdotes, and the laughing thoughts which others caught up and illustrated in their own way.

It was a feast full of good things, but its spirit was not able to bear transition. The company scattered quickly when it was over to the opera or theater or to the rest of a quiet evening at home, for at the end enthusiasm of any kind has a chilling effect on the feelings. None of the party understood this result, and yet all were, in their way, affected by the sudden fall of mental temperature. Mr. Denning went to his library and took out his private ledger, a penitential sort of reading which he relished after moods of any kind of enjoyment. Mrs. Denning selected Ethel Rawdon for her text of disillusion. She "thought Ethel had been a little jealous of Dora's dress," and Dora said, "It was one of her surprises, and Ethel thought she ought to know everything." "You are too obedient to Ethel," continued Mrs. Denning and Dora looked with a charming demureness at her lover, and said, "She

had to be obedient to some one wiser than herself,” and so slipped her hand into Basil’s hand. And he understood the promise, and with a look of passionate affection raised the little jeweled pledge and kissed it.

Perhaps no one was more affected by this chill, critical after-hour than Miss Bayard and Ethel. Mostyn accompanied them home, but he was depressed, and his courtesy had the air of an obligation. He said he had a sudden headache, and was not sorry when the ladies bid him “good night” on the threshold. Indeed, he felt that he must have refused any invitation to lengthen out the hours with them or anybody. He wanted one thing, and he wanted that with all his soul—solitude, that he might fill it with images of Dora, and with passionate promises that either by fair means or by foul, by right or by wrong, he would win the bewitching woman for his wife.

CHAPTER IV

“WHAT do you think of the evening, Aunt Ruth?” Ethel was in her aunt’s room, comfortably wrapped in a pink kimono, when she asked this question.

“What do you think of it, Ethel?”

“I am not sure.”

“The dinner was well served.”

“Yes. Who was the little dark man you talked with, aunt?”

“He was a Mr. Marriot, a banker, and a friend of Bryce Denning’s. He is a fresh addition to society, I think. He had the word ‘gold’ always on his lips; and he believes in it as good men believe in God. The general conversation annoyed him; he could not understand men being entertained by it.”

“They were, though, for once Jamie Sayer forgot to talk about his pictures.”

“Is that the name of your escort?”

“Yes.”

“And is he an artist?”

“A second-rate one. He is painting Dora’s picture, and is a great favorite of Mrs. Denning’s.”

“A strange, wild-looking man. When I saw him first he was lying, dislocated, over his ottoman rather than sitting on it.”

“Oh, that is a part of his affectations. He is really a childish, self-conscious creature, with a very decided dash of vulgarity. He only tries to look strange and wild, and he would be delighted if he knew you had thought him so.”

“I was glad to see Claudine Jeffrys. How slim and graceful she is! And, pray, who is that Miss Ullman?”

“A very rich woman. She has Bryce under consideration. Many other men have been in the same position, for she is sure they all want her money and not her. Perhaps she is right. I saw you talking to her, aunt.”

“For a short time. I did not enjoy her company. She is so mercilessly realistic, she takes all the color out of life. Everything about her, even her speech, is sharp-lined as the edge of a knife. She could make Bryce’s life very miserable.”

“Perhaps it might turn out the other way. Bryce Denning has capacities in the same line. How far apart, how far above every man there, stood Basil Stanhope!”

“He is strikingly handsome and graceful, and I am sure that his luminous serenity does not arise from apathy. I should say he was a man of very strong and tender feelings.”

“And he gives all the strength and tenderness of his feelings to Dora. Men are strange creatures.”

“Who directed Dora’s dress this evening?”

“Herself or her maid. I had nothing to do with it. The effect was stunning.”

“Fred thought so. In fact, Fred Hostyn—”

“Fell in love with her.”

“Exactly. ‘Fell,’ that is the word—fell prostrate. Usually the lover of to-day walks very timidly and carefully into the condition, step by step, and calculating every step before he takes it. Fred plunged headlong into the whirling vortex. I am very sorry. It is a catastrophe.”

“I never witnessed the accident before. I have heard of men getting wounds and falls, and developing new faculties in consequence, but we saw the phenomenon take place this evening.”

“Love, if it be love, is known in a moment. Man who never saw the sun before would know it was the sun. In Fred’s case it was an instantaneous, impetuous passion, flaming up at the sight of such unexpected beauty—a passion that will probably fade as rapidly as it rose.”

“Fred is not that kind of a man, aunt. He does not like every one and everything, but whoever or whatever he does like becomes a lasting part of his life. Even the old chairs and tables at Mostyn

are held as sacred objects by him, though I have no doubt an American girl would trundle them off to the garret. It is the same with the people. He actually regards the Rawdons as belonging in some way to the Mostyns; and I do not believe he has ever been in love before.”

“Nonsense!”

“He was so surprised by the attack. If it had been the tenth or twentieth time he would have taken it more philosophically; besides, if he had ever loved any woman, he would have gone on loving her, and we should have known all about her perfections by this time.”

“Dora is nearly a married woman, and Mostyn knows it.”

“Nearly may make all the difference. When Dora is married he will be compelled to accept the inevitable and make the best of it.”

“When Dora is married he will idealize her, and assure himself that her marriage is the tragedy of both their lives.”

“Dora will give him no reason to suppose such a thing. I am sure she will not. She is too much in love with Mr. Stanhope to notice any other lover.”

“You are mistaken, Ethel. Swiftly as Fred was vanquished she noticed it, and many times—once even while leaning on Mr. Stanhope’s arm—she turned the arrow in the heart wound with sweet little glances and smiles, and pretty appeals to the blind adoration of her new lover. It was, to me, a humiliating spectacle. How could she do it?”

“I am sure Dora meant no wrong. It is so natural for a lovely girl to show off a little. She will marry and forget Fred Mostyn lives.”

“And Fred will forget?”

“Fred will not forget.”

“Then I shall be very sorry for your father and grandmother.”

“What have they to do with Fred marrying?”

“A great deal. Fred has been so familiar and homely the last two or three weeks, that they have come to look upon him as a future member of the family. It has been ‘Cousin Ethel’ and ‘Aunt Ruth’ and even ‘grandmother’ and ‘Cousin Fred,’ and no objections have been made to the use of such personal terms. I think your father hopes for a closer tie between you and Fred Mostyn than cousinship.”

“Whatever might have been is over. Do you imagine I could consent to be the secondary deity, to come after Dora—Dora of all the girls I have ever known? The idea is an insult to my heart and my intelligence. Nothing on earth could make me submit to such an indignity.”

“I do not suppose, Ethel, that any wife is the first object of her husband’s love.”

“At least they tell her she is so, swear it an inch deep; and no woman is fool enough to look beyond that oath, but when she is sure that she is a second best! AH! That is not a position I will ever take in any man’s heart knowingly.”

“Of course, Fred Mostyn will have to marry.”

“Of course, he will make a duty of the event. The line of Mostyns must be continued. England might go to ruin if the Mostyns perished off the English earth; but, Aunt Ruth, I count myself worthy of a better fate than to become a mere branch in the genealogical tree of the Mostyns. And that is all Fred Mostyn’s wife will ever be to him, unless he marries Dora.”

“But that very supposition implies tragedy, and it is most unlikely.”

“Yes, for Dora is a good little thing. She has never been familiar with vice. She has even a horror of poor women divorced from impossible husbands. She believes her marriage will be watched by the angels, and recorded in heaven. Basil has instructed her to regard marriage as a holy sacrament, and I am sure he does the same.”

“Then why should we forecast evil to their names? As for Cousin Fred, I dare say he is comfortably asleep.”

“I am sure he is not. I believe he is smoking and calling himself names for not having come to New York last May, when father first invited him. Had he done so things might have been different.”

“Yes, they might. When Good Fortune calls, and the called ‘will not when they may,’ then, ‘when they will’ Good Fortune has become Misfortune. Welcome a pleasure or a gain at once, or don’t answer it at all. It was on this rock, Ethel, the bark that carried my love went to pieces. I know; yes, I know!”

“My dear aunt!”

“It is all right now, dear; but things might have been that are not. As to Dora, I think she may be trusted with Basil Stanhope. He is one of the best and handsomest men I ever saw, and he has now rights in Dora’s love no one can tamper with. Mostyn is an honorable man.”

“All right, but—

“Love will venture in,
Where he daurna well be seen;
O Love will venture in,
Where Wisdom once has been—

and then, aunt, what then?”

PART SECOND – PLAYING WITH FIRE

CHAPTER V

THE next day after lunch Ethel said she was going to walk down to Gramercy Park and spend an hour or two with her grandmother, and “Will you send the carriage for me at five o’clock?” she asked.

“Your father has ordered the carriage to be at the Holland House at five o’clock. It can call for you first, and then go to the Holland House. But do not keep your father waiting. If he is not at the entrance give your card to the outside porter; he will have it sent up to Fred’s apartments.”

“Then father is calling on Fred? What for? Is he sick?”

“Oh, no, business of some kind. I hope you will have a pleasant walk.”

“There is no doubt of it.”

Indeed, she was radiant with its exhilaration when she reached Gramercy Park. As she ran up the steps of the big, old-fashioned house she saw Madam at the window picking up some dropped stitches in her knitting. Madam saw her at the same moment, and the old face and the young face both alike kindled with love, as well as with happy anticipation of coveted intercourse.

“I am so glad to see you, darling Granny. I could not wait until to-morrow.”

“And why should you, child? I have been watching for you all morning. I want to hear about the Denning dinner. I suppose you went?”

“Yes, we went; we had to. Dinners in strange houses are a common calamity; I can’t expect to be spared what everyone has to endure.”

“Don’t be affected, Ethel. You like going out to dinner. Of course, you do! It is only natural, considering.”

“I don’t, Granny. I like dances and theaters and operas, but I don’t like dinners. However, the Denning dinner was a grand exception. It gave me and the others a sensation.”

“I expected that.”

“It was beautifully ordered. Majordomo Parkinson saw to that. If he had arranged it for his late employer, the Duke of Richmond, it could not have been finer. There was not a break anywhere.”

“How many were present?”

“Just a dozen.”

“Mr. Denning and Bryce, of course. Who were the others?”

“Mr. Stanhope, of course. Granny, he wore his clerical dress. It made him look so remarkable.”

“He did right. A clergyman ought to look different from other men. I do not believe Basil Stanhope, having assumed the dress of a servant of God, would put it off one hour for any social exigency. Why should he? It is a grander attire than any military or naval uniform, and no court dress is comparable, for it is the court dress of the King of kings.”

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