



CHAPTER XIX.

"Yes, dear, I obeyed you. You were hard and cruel to me that night in the fir plantation; but I knew that you were wise and honest and true; and I made up my mind that I would keep the engagement entered upon beside my mother's deathbed. So I held on, Vixen—yes, I will call you by the old pet name now; henceforward you are mine, and I shall call you what I like—I held on, and was altogether an exemplary lover, went wherever I was ordered to go, and always came when they whistled for me, and, in a word, did my duty in that state of life to which it had pleased heaven to call me, and my reward has been to be jilted with every circumstance of gloominess on my wedding morning."

"Jilted!" cried Vixen, her big brown eyes shining in pleasant mockery. "Why, I thought Lady Mabel adored you!"

"So did I!" answered Roderick naïvely, "an' I pitied the poor dear thing for her infatuation. I still believe that Mabel was fond of me once, but Lord Mallow bowled me out. The second-best brought a marriage certificate in his pocket when he came to stay at Ashbourne, and had the art to engage rogues at Southampton, and sleep there a night en passant. He left a portmanteau and a hat box there, and that constituted legal occupancy; so, when he won Lady Mabel's consent to an elopement he had only to ride over to Southampton and give notice to the parson and clerks. The whole thing was done splendidly. Lady Mabel went out at 8 o'clock, under the pretense of going to early church. Mallow was waiting for her with a fly, half a mile from Ashbourne. They drove to Southampton together, and were married at 10 o'clock in the old church of St. Michael. Whil's the disengaged duchess and her women were hunting everywhere for the bride, and all the visitors at Ashbourne were arraying themselves in their wedding finery, and the village children were filling their baskets with flowers to strew upon the pathway of the happy pair, emblematic of the flowers which did not blossom in the highway of life, the lady was over the border with Jock of Hazeldean! Wasn't it true, Vixen?"

"At half past ten there came a telegram from my runaway bride: 'Ask Roderick to forgive me, dear mamma. I found out the last that my heart was not mine to give, and I am married to Lord Mallow. I do not think my cousin will grieve very much.'

"That last clause was sensible enough, was it not, Vixen?"

"I think the whole business was very sensible," said Vixen, with a sweet, grave smile.

"She will be very happy as Lady Mallow," said Roderick. "Mallow will legislate for Ireland, and she will rule him."

"But how did you come here?" asked Vixen, looking up at her lover with a sweet wonder. "All this only happened yesterday morning."

"Is there not a steamer that leaves Southampton nightly? If she had not been one, I would have chartered a boat for myself. I would have come in a cockleshell; I would have come with a swimming belt; I would have done anything wild and adventurous to hasten to my love. I started for Southampton the minute I saw that too blessed telegram; went to St. Michael's, saw the registry with its entry of Lord Mallow's marriage, hardly dry, and then went down to the docks and booked my berths. Oh, what a long day yesterday was—the longest day of my life!"

"And of mine," sighed Vixen, between tears and laughter, "in spite of the shepherd kings."

"Are those Jersey people you have picked up?" Rorie asked faintly.

"This turned the scale, and Vixen into a joyous peal of laughter."

"How did you find me here?" she asked.

"Very easily. Your custodian—what a grim-looking personage she is, by the way—told me where you were gone and directed me how to follow you. I told her I had a most important message to deliver to you from your mother. You don't think that artless device, I hope?"

"Not much. How is dear mamma? She complains in her letters of not feeling very well."

"I have not seen her lately. When I did, I thought her looking ill and worn. She will get well when you go back to her, Vixen."

"I shall never go back to the Abbey House."

"Yes, you will; for one fortnight, at least. After that your home will be at Briarwood. You must be married from your father's house."

"Who said I was going to be married, sir?" asked Vixen, with delicious coquetry.

"I said it—I say it. Do you think I am too bold, darling? Ought I to go on my knees, love, and make a formal offer? Why, I have loved you all my life; and I think you have loved me as long."

"So have I, Rorie," she answered softly, shyly, sweetly. "I always loved you; there was no state of my life when you were not dearer to me than any one on earth, except my father."

"Dear love, I am ashamed of my happiness," said Roderick steadily. "I have been so much and unvaryingly. I gave away my hopes of life in one foolishly soft moment, to gratify my mother's dying wish—a wish that had been dinned into my ear for the last year of her life—and I have done nothing but repeat of my folly since. Can you forgive me, Vixen? I shall never forgive myself."

"Let the past be like a dream that we have dreamed. It will make the future seem so much the brighter."

"Yes."

And then under the blue August sky, fearless and unabashed, these happy lovers gave each other the kiss of betrothal.

"What am I to do with you?" Vixen asked laughingly. "I ought to go home to Les Tourelles."

"Don't you think you might be me with you? I am your young man now, now, now."

They left the battlements, descended the narrow stairs, and went side by side, through sunlit fields and lanes, to the old Carolian manor-house. What would Miss Skipwith say? Vixen laughed merrily at the image of that cheetah lady.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived at Les Tourelles. They had loitered a little in those

sunny lanes, stopping to look seaward through a gap in the hedge, or to examine a fern which was to be terms of Hampshire."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Skipwith, looking much alarmed; "this is very embarrassing. I am so unversed in such matters. My life has been given up to study, far from the haunts of men. My nephew informed me that there was a kind of—in point of fact, a flirtation between Miss Rorie and a gentleman in Hampshire, of which he highly disapproved, the gentleman being engaged to marry his cousin."

"It was I," said Rorie, "but there was no flirtation. I was Miss Tempest's oldest friend—her old playfellow, and we liked to see each other, and were always friendly together; it was an understanding that I was to marry my cousin. It was Miss Tempest's particular desire that I should keep an engagement made beside my mother's deathbed. If Miss Tempest had thought otherwise I should have been at her feet. I would have flung an examination; the dressmaker who never forgets her apprehension lost her customer; shall not be pleased—all these and a score of other kinds of women need to learn the lesson of the value of the mind at least."

A conscientious, worrying wife of a Maine farmer hurried to the hen house on an icy day with a pan of food. She slipped and fell—and a broken hip stopped the quick footstep and dulled the keen vision for "things which must be done." For three months the patient lay in bed, alone many hours of each day, thinking over her life and habits and responsibilities—her successes and her failure. When she could hobble to a wheeled chair, she was a different creature from the anxious, nervous woman who had been forced to submit to imprisonment.

A perspective of the months and years of life, a new conviction that peace of mind is more important than peace and cakes, a sense of proportion which included herself and the claims of her own nature as well as the appetites of her hungry family and the profits of the farm, had revealed themselves to her in the long days of enforced inactivity.

"My broken hip saved my life and my soul, too, I guess," the grateful woman used to say, with the smile of one who had found that the worst enemy of good work is worry.—Youth's Companion.

A Modern Meditation.

Idle not; for idleness is the mother of all sins.

Neither dawdle nor dilly-dally; for the dawdler growth weary and accomplisheth naught.

Delay not, nor postpone; for more crimes are due to postponement than to deliberate intention.

Hesitate not; for the only way to get a thing done is to do it now.

Glower not, nor grouch; for it is a fearful crime to make other people unhappy.

Never indulge yourself in despair; for there is no surer way to miss all the good things that are coming to you.

Neither indulge in vain retrospection; for what is done is done forever, and the only wise thing is to forget it.

Blame not thyself nor any other person too much; for there are laws stronger than any of us that govern the universe.

Make hope and industry thy habits; for by these two practices shall a man reach the highest place—even contentment.

The Perfect Hostess.

You know her as soon as you step over the sill.

She has diffused an atmosphere of welcome over the entire house.

You feel at home in every room, even though left alone, says the Cooking Club Magazine.

And you are left alone sometimes.

For the perfect hostess doesn't dog your footsteps every minute.

She knows that you will want to write letters, and nap and read.

She gives you the house to entertain yourself in and you can have her, too, whenever you want her.

She does not wear you out with too many entertainments or too many persons.

She doesn't make you feel that you've got to "pay for your keep" by doing chores.

Neither does she refuse to let you have her, if she sees it would make you happiest.

She gives you the impression it's a joy just to have you in the house.

And you always want to see her again.

Dressed in Their Best.

The little coat on the standing figure is made of bright red cloth, trimmed with black braid and straps of the cloth, finished with gilt buttons. It is cut with a very full flare in the skirt. The dress is navy blue cashmere, trimmed with parallel crimson silk folds, with stitches between them done in blue sash's silk. The guimpe is white chintz, trimmed with navy blue soutache.

The Prize Cow.

Take for yourself a well bred cow, get her on feed, cram and feed and stuff and cram her for, say, a year.

Go to the trouble of washing and currying and scrubbing and combing her twice a day, get down on your bums, my friend, sandpaper her hoofs, groan her legs, polish her horns and brush her tail, and by the time show season comes around you should have a very creditable looking show cow.—Sheridan (Mo.) Advance.

During the Reception.

Eva—Percy Sapp is going to receive another poem. Some of the romantic girls call him the "Mountaineer Spring" because he is always gushing.

Katherine—H'm! He reminds me more of an artesian well.

Eva—Because he never ceases?

Katherine—No; because he is such a great bore.

"How late you are, Violet?" she said, looking up dreamily from her manuscript. "I have been rewriting and polishing portions of my essay on Buddha. The time has flown, and I had no idea of the hour till Dodderidge came in, just now, to ask if he should shut up the house; and then I remembered that he had gone to the gate to watch for Mr. Vawdry."

"I'm afraid you must think our goings-on rather eccentric," Rorie began, shyly; "but perhaps Vix—Miss Tem-

pest has told you what old friends we are; that, in fact, I am quite the oldest friend she has. I came to Jersey on purpose to ask her to marry me, and she has been good enough—smiling blissfully at Vixen, who tried to look daggers at him—to say yes."

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"Pretty well. It reminds me of mama's dressmaker, Madame Theodore."

"Because Mabel insisted upon having sage-green curtains, and chair-covers, and a sage-green wall with a chocolate dado—did you ever hear of a dado?—in the new morning-room I built for her. I'm rather afraid you won't like it; I should have preferred pink or blue myself, and not a dado. It looks so much as if one had run short of wallpaper. But it can all be altered by and by, if you don't like it."

CHAPTER XX.

They found Miss Skipwith pacing the weedy gravel walk in front of her parlor window, with a disturbed air, and a yellow envelope in her hand.

"My dear, this has been an eventful day," she exclaimed. "I have been very anxious for your return. Here is a telegram for you; and as it is the first you have had since you have been staying here, I conclude it is of some importance."

Vixen took the envelope eagerly from her hand. It was from Captain Carmichael to Miss Tempest:

"Come home by the next boat. Your mother is ill, and anxious to see you. The carriage will meet you at Southampton."

Poor Vixen looked at her lover with a conscience-stricken countenance.

"Oh, Rorie, and I have been sickly, wildly, wildly happy!" she cried, as if it were a crime.

"And I made so light of mama's last letter, in which she complained of being ill. I hardly gave it a thought."

"I don't suppose there is anything wrong," said Rorie, in a comfortingly after he had studied meaning those bold words in the telegram, trying to squeeze the utmost meaning out of the brief sentence. "You see, Captain Carmichael does not say that your mother is dangerously ill, or even ill; he only says ill."

"But he tells me to go home—he who hates me, and was so glad to get me out of the house."

"He will be very happy as Lady Mallow," said Roderick. "Mallow will legislate for Ireland, and she will rule him."

"But how did you come here?" asked Vixen, with a sweet, grave smile.

"Ask Roderick to forgive me, dear mamma. I found out the last that my heart was not mine to give, and I am married to Lord Mallow. I do not think my cousin will grieve very much."

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