

Mr. Templeton's Choice.

BY MARY REED CROWELL.

Mr. Theophilus Templeton leaned very comfortably back in his crimson leather, brass-nail-studded library chair, and rested his elbows on the arms, and brought his finger-tips together, and looked very benign and important.

"A rich man, eh? Well, yes, I am a rich man—what some people would call a very rich man; and the beauty of it is, I made my fortune myself. When I started out for myself, a lad of ten—that's fifty years ago, or more—I had all my worldly goods in a red bandana, slung on a stick over my shoulders. To-day—I say it without boasting—there's not a finer line of steamships afloat than the 'Clyties,' and I own 'em'—all every blessed baker's dozen of 'em."

Fred Warrington listened respectfully—a handsome young fellow it did one good to look at, with a wide-awake, frank look in his blue eyes, and a general manly bearing about him that recommended him wherever he went, very especially to ladies.

"And yet, with all your wealth, your beautiful home, your kindly, affectionate nature, you have used all your life in accumulating riches. You have never married—never had a real, true home."

"That's the rankest kind of nonsense, my boy! I never married because I never yet saw the woman I wanted. But it's a good thing for a young fellow to settle down—I believe that, if I didn't practice it, I hope you'll marry early, Fred."

A little twinkling look was in Warrington's handsome eyes.

"I agree with you there, sir, to a T. I think I shall marry early."

Mr. Templeton bestowed a satisfied look on him.

"All right, my dear boy! Marry early, and marry to please me, and I'll remember you handsomely. I'll give you the house to live in, in summer-time, and the avenue residence for winter. I'll give you ten thousand a year income, and your wife shall have the handsomest diamonds Tiffany can collect."

Any one in the world would have thought Fred Warrington would have been transported to the seventh heaven of rapture at the bewildering prospect held out to him; but he merely looked a little graver, as he bowed courteously.

"I know you are just as good and generous as it is possible for man to be. Uncle Philo, but—"

And Mr. Fred Warrington hesitated in his speech, and a thoughtful frown gathered on his forehead.

Mr. Templeton looked the surprise he felt.

"But 'where can the 'but' be to such an offer as that? You've only to marry to please me. By Jupiter, Frederick! it isn't possible you're already in love!"

"Already; and engaged to the sweetest and dearest little girl—"

Mr. Templeton remorselessly cut short the lover-like enthusiasm.

"Oh, of course—of course! But who is she? What's her name?"

"She is Miss Rosie Fleming, and she is a music-teacher, and her eyes are—"

Mr. Templeton looked sternly across the library-table.

"I don't care whether they are black or green, you can't marry her. I've picked out a wife for you, and the quicker you get clear of your music-teacher the better."

Fred colored—then the look of wide-eyed defiance Uncle Philo was acquainted with came into his eyes, making them deep and darkly blue.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, quietly, "but a fellow prefers to pick out his own wife. I have chosen Miss Fleming."

"The deuce you have! Well, then, let's hear what you have to say when I tell you the lady I have in my eye for my future niece is the most beautiful, cultured, refined girl ever flashed into New York society. She's rich, too, and just the very daisy for you. A music-teacher, indeed, when Beatrice Lovett is to be had for the asking!"

"Which doesn't raise her in my estimation," Fred avowed, serenely.

"What! Mr. Templeton said, sternly. 'Fred, you're an ass!'"

And then Fred laughed, which had a most exasperating effect upon the old gentleman.

"I say you shall marry her, and I want you to put on your hat and go with me at once and be introduced to her! She's staying at Mrs. Saxony's. Come along, sir!"

Fred rose promptly.

"Certainly! I'll go and be presented to her, and I dare say there will be no reason why I shall not admire her immensely. But as for falling in love with Miss Lovett—"

He laughed and shrugged his broad shoulders, and then put on his wide-rimmed Panama and went out with Mr. Templeton to meet the charming young lady intended for his destiny.

It was a beautiful little villa, nearer the bluff than Mr. Templeton's stately mansion, a little back from the bay, and it made a very pretty picture, with its white lace draperies floating in the stiff sea breeze, and the spray from the fountains blowing in a rainbow shower, and the gay striped awnings fluttering their scalloped borders in the July sunshine.

The liveried footman bowed his best, and regretted to be obliged to inform the gentlemen that Mrs. Saxony was not in. A swift look of dismay on Mr. Templeton's face, perhaps touched that functionary's tender heart, and he hastened to assure them that "Miss Lovett was in the drawing room—would they walk in?"

But that Mr. Templeton declined doing, as he was not personally acquainted with Miss Lovett; at least not sufficiently acquainted with her, to present himself. He had known her when she was a girl of ten, and had always been her father's most cherished friend, and had been in correspondence with Mr. Lovett when he died so suddenly out in India; but all the same, with an old bachelor's characteristic shrinking from pretty young girls, he declined the invitation until Mrs. Saxony should be present.

"It's too bad—too—everlastingly bad!" he said, as they went through

the beautiful little park, into which carriages were not admitted; and, impelled by an impulse he recognized afterward as Fate, Mr. Templeton passed midway down the path, and turned to look back at the house.

"By Jove! There she is at the window—Miss Lovett! Isn't she a beauty? Isn't she sweet enough to turn any fellow topsy-turvy? Look, Fred—there's the wife I've picked out for you! Can your music-teacher beat that?"

And Mr. Templeton seized his unoffending nephew by the sleeve, and gesticulated emphatically toward the open window where a young girl sat, beautiful indeed—marvelously beautiful! fair and dainty—with dark, lustrous hair, braided on a proud little head, and straight heavy dark brows, that made the purity of her complexion still more dazzling. A rosebud of a mouth, a round, handsomely-chiseled chin, a white dress, with creamy lace and a pink rose at the throat, made a picture fair enough to indeed have turned any man's senses "topsy-turvy."

She did not raise her eyes from her book, and she was perfectly unconscious of their espionages, or of Fred Warrington's transfixed gaze.

"So you're struck, eh? So you'll give the old man credit for having good taste, will you? You wouldn't mind having her for your wife, after all, I suppose?"

Fred drew a long breath, and then quickly linked his arm in Mr. Templeton's, and drew him away.

"She is the sweetest, most beautiful girl I ever saw. I'll marry her to-morrow, if she'll have me," he said.

And how the old gentleman laughed, and poked him facetiously between the ribs, when they were in the carriage!

"Music-teacher, is it? What's that?"

And then Fred laughed, and Mr. Templeton generously decided not to be too sarcastic on the poor boy.

While at the same moment a tall, lovely girl, several years older than the fairy in white, by the window in Mrs. Saxony's drawing-room, entered and went up to her.

"Absorbed in 'A Fair Barbarian' still, Rosie? It is time for my lesson, isn't it?"

And Rosie Fleming laid down her book, and for an hour she and Miss Beatrice Lovett devoted themselves to the music-lesson, to be interrupted by a gentleman who had bribed the footman to permit him to enter the music-room unannounced, and to whom Rosie flew, with a little shriek of delight.

"Fred—oh, Fred! How did you know I was in Newport? I only came yesterday, to assist Miss Lovett with her music. This is Miss Lovett, Fred. Mr. Warrington, Miss Lovett."

And before he had finished his very delightful call, Mr. Warrington related to the ladies the mistake his uncle had made.

"And I am sure Miss Lovett will not blame me if I insist that I shall marry you, little Rosie; and the sooner the better, before Uncle Philo discovers his mistake."

And that very afternoon there was a quiet wedding in the Rev. Dr. Roth's parson, while Mr. Templeton was taking his noons in his chair, with his handkerchief over his face, dreaming of the days when the beautiful Miss Lovett would reign right royally in his nephew's home.

At eight o'clock that night he was electrified by the receipt of a note from Fred:

"I have been and gone and done it, Uncle Philo," it said. "I promised you I would marry the lady you selected for me, and I shall present her to you in an hour. There's nothing like striking when the iron's hot, is there?"

And punctually on time, Fred appeared, his bride on his arm—lovely as the morning, blushing like a rose, her blue eyes shining like stars, her sweet red mouth quivering as she looked wistfully up in Mr. Templeton's face, when Fred presented her.

"We've quite stolen a march upon you; but this is my wife, Uncle Theophilus—Mrs. Fred Warrington, fast and sure."

"I'm astonished, and dumfounded, and delighted, my dear! How ever did you do it, Fred?"

And before Fred made the explanation he deemed incumbent just then and there, a servant announced a lady, who came sweeping in, in royal garments of deep purple velvet—a girl with starry eyes and hair as golden as sunshine.

"Miss Beatrice Lovett!"

And then—well, the scene is indescribable, but with two lovely women, beseeching him to forgive, and the pansy-purple eyes making him feel the queerest around his heart he ever had felt, somehow—he never knew how—he simmered quietly down, and he accepted the situation with the best grace at his command, until—six months afterward, when he triumphantly announced to his nephew that the luckiest day of his life had been when he met Rosie for Miss Fleming.

"For, since you wouldn't have her for your wife, you shall have her for your aunt, and help yourself if you can!"

But, as no one was at all anxious to help it, Mr. Templeton married his beautiful young wife, and it is a question who of the quartette is the happiest.

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