

The Maiden And The Maniac

Good looking, tall, well built, one of the best all-round men of his college both in studies and sports, and the possessor of a splendid income, Vincent Sternroyd could have had almost any girl of his acquaintance for the asking. This being the case, of course he set his heart upon Alton Jones, the only girl of his acquaintance who would not have him. True, he had not asked her, but, as she never lost an opportunity of giving him to understand he had found disfavor in her sight, he very naturally came to the conclusion that she would refuse him if he did. He was not "dashing" enough for her.

There was another objection to him in her eyes. Pa and Ma Gibbs—the young lady's parents—and Pa and Ma Sternroyd being friends and neighbors of half a century, were in favor of seeing their children united in holy matrimony. Under these circumstances, Gertrude could not show her "emancipation" if she married Vincent, and the fact that she had a sneaking kindness for him hidden away deep in the bottom of her heart made her more grumpy to him than she would otherwise have been. There was another thing against him, and that was that she could not find anything against him. That was her great grievance, and caused her to continually attempt to discover something about him with which to find fault.

During the summer following his graduation Vincent was invited to spend a week or so with the Gibbs' at their country residence. He had received an offer of the position of War Correspondent for a large newspaper, and was undecided whether to accept it or not. He did not need it, for his income was a large one; but he was ambitious and wanted to gain laurels in the literary field. Here was just what he wanted—experience. Of course, he might never return—well—he would try his luck with Gertrude at once, and if he failed he would accept the position; if not he would stay at home.

Having settled the question as far as he was concerned, he had to look out for an opportunity to speak to Gertrude upon the subject. This was no easy matter, for she was seldom alone; and if, by chance, she and he were *en tête-à-tête* she invariably snubbed him when he became at all sentimental.

One day, however, they were out with a party boating up the river, and she had been unusually gracious to him. If he could only get her alone, now was his chance. With this object in view, he proposed landing and resting on the bank. They were passing a cool and shady spot where the branches of the trees dipped their leaves into the stream and mingled them with the water lilies that floated drowsily beneath their shelter from the sun's fierce rays. A little further on the river turned and became shallower, which meant some hard pulling. A cow loved a little distance. It was very hot. Vincent won his point, and the party ran the boat ashore.

Just as Sternroyd had made up his mind that it was about time to suggest Miss Gibbs should take a stroll with him in the meadows, Alton Jones, a hated rival, coolly walked her off and left him to mourn his lack of nerve. Alton Jones had a record as a sprinter, and this helped him a long way in the estimation of his fair companion. They had not been gone many minutes before their example was followed by another couple, who was accompanied by a third, and the disconsolate lover was left alone. Urged by a desire to kick himself, Mr. Alton Jones, and various gentlemen of his acquaintance, not to mention a longing to say hard things to Miss Gertrude herself, Vincent put his hands in his pockets and sauntered after the others. Half way across the field they came in sight of a herd of cattle quietly grazing under some trees.

"How picturesque that is, Miss Gibbs!" exclaimed Jones, pointing towards the group of cows chewing the cud contentedly in the shade. "It makes me think of a picture by—ah—er—Rubens."

"Yes," observed Vincent joining them. "I've seen a good many cows in Rubens' pictures—and if I may be permitted to suggest a return to the boat—you will see my reason for so doing."

His "reasons" were plainly visible. They were pawing the ground and making undoubted preparations for charging the intruders.

"A bull!" yelled Alton Jones excitedly. Then the party retraced their steps with more speed than dignity, and Mr. Jones proved his right to be second he held. Vincent, however, lagged behind and kept between Gertrude and the approaching snorting and bellowing lord of the pasture.

As Jones was the first to reach the landing, he was there to help Gertrude when she arrived; the others scrambled in next and Vincent was left to push off the boat just as the enemy appeared on the bank above them.

Gertrude had been too busy to look backwards while running, and did not know what Vincent had done; she merely knew he was the last to get into the boat, and compared his agility as a runner with that of the others to his disadvantage. He must be a "duffer" she thought if he could not run as fast as the girls.

could. Then she noticed how pale he was and attracted general attention to the fact by remarking: "Why Vincent, how white you are. Were you afraid?"

"You bet I was," he replied, honestly, "weren't you?"

"Oh, I am a girl!" she replied, evasively, remembering that a new woman should not have feminine weaknesses; "but if I were a man, I would not be, or if I were would not acknowledge it."

"Why not?" asked Vincent.

She shrugged her shoulders and pointedly turned to Alton Jones.

"Oh, Mr. Jones!" she exclaimed, "it was so kind of you to help me, regardless of the peril you yourself were in. It was noble of you. I do so admire courage."

The men looked at her and then at each other, uncertain whether she was quietly ridiculing them or not. She continued: "If ever I marry, it must be a chevalier Bayard 'sans peur et sans reproche.' I have my ideal, you see, Mr. Jones."

Here she paused and Mr. Jones swelled with pride to almost twice his normal size. Vincent was listening in quiet amusement, when she suddenly turned to him and scornfully observed:

"But I despise a coward."

Vincent was too proud to answer, but his face reddened to the roots of his curly blonde hair. The men laughed, because they knew Vincent's reputation was above suspicion, and that no man could have said the same thing with impunity. The girls laughed because they misunderstood the men's motives, and Gertrude laughed after a while because she had convicted Vincent of poltroonery and now had something against him at last. But it did not make her any happier. She wished it had been something else she had discovered against him.

Vincent was terribly hurt, not so much at the imputation, but at the evident regard for his feelings that Gertrude displayed.

It was absolutely cruel, the way she held him up to scorn—or thought she did, which, as far as she was concerned came to the same thing. He did not blame her so much for mistaking the admission of fear for cowardice—it is a very common mistake—but he felt that if she could "show him up" like that she could not care for him—must even dislike him.

When they reached the house Vincent quietly told his host and hostess that he had accepted the offer of the Editor of the *Univers* to go out to Japan as war correspondent, and that he would have to go up to town the next day.

Gertrude was not up in time to bid him "good-bye" so he left without seeing her, for which he was duly grateful. He felt not only hurt but angry the more he thought of her treatment of him, and it had taken all the diplomacy at the command of Alton Jones and the others to keep him from finding a gentlemanly excuse to give them each a thrashing by way of salve to his sore feelings.

In this state of mind he remained, and received an invitation to be present at a ball given on Gertrude's eighteenth birthday. The Gibbs' had come back to the city on purpose to celebrate the event, and it was to take place upon the eve of his departure to the seat of war.

At first he was tempted to refuse; but upon second thought, decided to accept and show Miss Gertrude how little he cared for her opinion—or herself.

She looked particularly pretty that night. Her plump throat and arms gleaming whitely in the glare of the electric lights; her long, silken, chestnut locks were coiled up on the crown of her shapely little head in a way to expose the beauty of her neck and shoulders. Her deep blue eyes shone like sapphires beneath their long, curling, black lashes, and her lovely mouth, slightly open, revealed two rows of pearly teeth between the parted, full red lips. She was also possessed of a figure as graceful and perfect as a Psyche, and her actions were the poetry of motion.

Sternroyd had never seen her look so beautiful. He did not know whether he adored her or hated her. However, he was determined not to be trampled on even by such pretty little feet as hers, and quietly put his name down on her card for the first dance after supper—the one for which no one was ever known to keep an engagement.

"Why, the one before supper is not engaged?" she exclaimed, surprised out of her usual behavior towards him.

"This one will do very nicely, thank you," he replied, calmly; then, with a little bow, moved away to secure other partners. She colored, and tapped her little toe on the carpet, in vexation at laying herself open to a snub from him. She could not imagine how he dared to do it. Why, he might as well have told her at once he did not want to dance with her at all. Well, she did not care—not she. But she had not expected it from him.

Since her last conversation with him in the country she had heard various accounts of him, all infinitely to his credit, and proving him to be anything but a coward. All his college friends, including Jones himself, were perfectly willing to testify to his courage. They gave glowing accounts of his prowess in flood, field and even personal encounters, with and without gloves, and she was beginning to think she had not only wantonly insulted him, but grossly misjudged him into the bargain. She had intended apologizing

to him, but now she just wouldn't. It served him right; he should not have admitted he was afraid. Then when she thought he was going away and might never come back, the tears came to her eyes and she had all she could do to restrain them. She had also suddenly discovered he was handsome. True she had heard other girls say so before, but she had always shrugged her shoulders and replied: "D'you think so?" And he danced so well, too. And how entertained and interested his partner always seemed to be; and as he passed with a pretty girl in his arms she experienced a novel sensation. She was actually jealous! She had gone too far, and he did not care for her any more; that was evident. What a fool she had been! Well, she didn't care; there were plenty of other men only too anxious to serve her Alton Jones and Molyneux Brown and Alexander Van Squalter, and—but somehow they did not seem very attractive to night. She could not listen to their small talk with interest or even patience to-night. She could not understand what had come over her—or Vincent either.

She had danced the much-coveted "before supper" valse with Jones and was waiting for supper to be announced—when her mother came up looking very pale and nervous and told the orchestra to play another valse. She was just about to ask Mrs. Gibbs what was the matter when the music of one of Waldteufel's masterpieces floated upon the fragrant air and Jones asked her if he could have the honor. As he was to take her into supper she naturally said he might and they were about to start when the orchestra dropped their instruments with a crash and the lady of the house quietly fainted away.

The cause of all this was the appearance of a terrible looking figure in the doorway. At first glance it was nothing more than a man cook; but the look in his eyes, the froth at the corners of his mouth, his bristling hair, mustache, and goatee, together with the brandishing of a huge carving knife he carried in his muscular right hand, proclaimed the fact that he was out of his senses.

He was a tall man, angular and with high cheek bones. His hooked nose, rather large and pointed ears and long mustache gave him the appearance of a *Mehistopheles* masquerading as a chef. He wore his cap jauntily on one side, his apron artistically draped and he showed his long white teeth in a sardonic smile that sent a cold thrill down the spines of the assembled company.

For a moment the apparition coolly surveyed the crowd of half paralyzed society men and women, and tried the edge of his blade on a hair he deliberately plucked from his head for the purpose. The awkward pause that followed was broken by the chef himself who observed politely:

"Gentleman an' lady—zat ze soupper ces late ces my fault an' also not my fault. I haf been waiting for my soupmeat an' she haf no come. I must haf soupmeat. Will one of zese gentlemen or of zese lady be kind enough to let me make soup of him."

This was said sweetly enough to have charmed most people into volunteering at once; but no one seemed eager to distinguish themselves.

This dilatoriness exasperated the chef, whose politeness vanished, and with blazing eyes, he thundered:

"Sac-r-r-r-e tonnerre! Nom d'ame pipe! If no person will come zen I will take ze first zat arrive myself. Sac a papier! I haf madame's dinner to prepare an' she haf hunger."

Poor Mrs. Gibbs! She was in blissful ignorance of the awful fact that her cannibalism had come to light at last. And still no one stirred or spoke.

"No!" shrieked the chef, losing all patience, "zei ve are going to see; vai!"

He gave a stamp like an infuriated bull and brandished his carver aloft. Everybody expected to be killed in their tracks when a voice said:

"Stop Crouton! I'll go with you."

The maniac immediately resumed his suavity and replied, with a little bow:

"A la bonne heure! An' it ces Monsieur Sternroyd, too, Good! He was ever obliging—Monsieur Sternroyd. You will make a ver' nice soup, Monsieur, ver' excellent soup."

"See that I do, Crouton, or I shall lose faith in your culinary ability," replied Vincent good-naturedly. Then he added: "Excuse me just one moment, chef, I want to give this card to Miss Gertrude."

The chef bowed like a gallant courtier, while the young man scribbled a few words on his card and handed it to Miss Gibbs.

"Now I am at your disposal, chef," he continued, joining the cook at the door, and descending the stairs with him, apparently on the west of terms.

Gertrude then looked at the card and read: "Will keep him as long as I can. Send for patrol. Quick, or it may be too late."

Turning to Jones she said excitedly: "You run for the police, and I'll turn in the alarm myself."

Meanwhile, Vincent and the chef had reached the kitchen, into which the latter ushered the former with a bow. They were all alone there, for the servants had vacated the premises in a great hurry.

(Continued on Page 5.)

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