

Fated to Marry a Soldier.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS.

A long cheer—the band had struck up "The Girl I Left Behind Me"; it was at the other end of the street now, and the bandmen's uniforms were but dots of colour.

He was gone. The red coats still filed past, but Lucy did not see them.

Olivia, thinking she was going to faint caught her in her arms; but she rallied, and staggered once more to the window to see the last.

They all had passed by this time. There was no chance of seeing him—her husband—and the Lancers' band, far away now, still played "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

CHAPTER IV. LUCY'S TRIALS.

The ex-Mayor of Castletown was not the man to yield without a struggle.

He had often run considerable risks in the days gone by, but then he thoroughly knew his own business, and his forecast of future prices almost always turned out correct.

Now, however, chiefly because it was hard to do nothing, and receive small but safe returns for his invested money, he had been tempted to speculate, and like many another, had fallen amongst thieves.

Yet, it was hard to believe this, and, with a mental oath that Grimes should never have his daughter for wife, he hastened to town to see if he could do nothing to retrieve his fortune.

It was a case of throwing good money after bad and in a fortnight he returned a desperate and ruined man.

His one and only hope rested in his daughter, and he did not hesitate now.

It was the morning after his return from town that he patted her on the shoulder and said—

"Lucy, my love come with me into the study; I want to say something to you."

The girl's heart went cold.

He knew everything, then. Such was the conviction which flashed upon her.

Olivia's glance told her that they thought alike, so it was only by a great effort that she roused herself for the deal.

For a moment her hopes revived, when her father, instead of speaking sternly, asked her gently to sit down in a chair he placed for her.

"My dear," he said, taking his stand before the empty fire-place, "I should not have troubled you if the matter had not been important. Ahem! Cannot you guess the subject on which I—I wish to speak to you? A subject which interests every young girl; her marriage, in fact."

Lucy lifted her face, radiant with blushes.

He did know all, then, and was not very angry.

"Dear father," she whispered, throwing her arms round his neck, "how could you have guessed? Who told you?"

He was immensely relieved, till the image of old Grimes rose before his eyes.

There was a mistake, evidently.

"Who told me?" he repeated, anxious to come to the point, and get it over. "Why, who but Matthew Grimes himself? He—he is a kinder-hearted man than he seems; people misjudge him, Lucy."

The girl had started back, and, with dilated eyes, was searching her father's face.

"Mr. Grimes!" she said, slowly. "What can he have to do with it?"

"He has asked me for you. He wants you for his wife. That's the long and short of it," Sir John said, hurriedly.

She almost laughed.

The idea of old Grimes being in love!

"How very absurd!" she exclaimed. "Of course, you told him so?" she repeated.

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"My dear, you must listen to me," Sir John replied, his fingers nervously playing with his watch-chain. "Naturally, I cannot expect you to care, let alone love, such a man as Matthew Grimes; but your affections are not otherwise engaged, and when I tell you that my ruin or safety depends on your making the sacrifice of marrying this man, why, I am sure you will not hesitate. I have always been a good, indulgent father to you, Lucy; come oblige me in this matter. Nothing short of absolute necessity makes me ask it, and I will see he makes proper settlements."

A look of horror came into the girl's eyes.

"You—ask—me—to—marry—that—old man?"

The words dropped one by one from her lips, and she retreated, step by step, as she spoke them.

"My dear," cried the knight, driven to desperation, "this is no matter of sentiment. The question, plainly put, is whether you wish to see your father sold up and ruined, together with the shame of such a thing happening—all of us reduce to penury, in fact—or the reverse. Choose! Thank Heaven, I am equal to even such a cruel blow as this. My own daughter, too!"

And Sir John, with an injured look on his red face, walked to the window and looked out.

"Oh, Dick!" thought the girl, "how wise you were. It might have cost me a struggle—it might have broken my heart, almost, to refuse my father; but now there can be no hesitation."

Sir John, looking out of window, and hearing his daughter sigh, felt victory in his grasp.

"Poor thing!" he thought; "but once those cursed deeds are burnt, I'll see that Grimes treats her well. She shall always find a home with me."

He was startled from his dream by feeling Lucy's hand on his shoulder.

"Father, dear father, do not think me an undutiful daughter," she said. And looking at her he saw the tears trembling on her long lashes. "But I cannot marry Mr. Grimes, not even to save you from ruin or disgrace. I—I have pledged myself to another, and no power on earth shall make me break my oath."

From red the knight's cheeks turned to purple.

"What!" he cried, passionately. "You would let your father go to gaol? Yes; to gaol!" he repeated, fiercely. "Do you suppose that, before applying to you, I had not played my last card to regain what I had lost? If you do not care to make a sacrifice for me, your father, perhaps you may for your cousin, for every penny of her money has gone in the crash!"

Lucy looked imploringly, doubtfully, into her father's face.

"It is not, cannot be true!" she gasped. "Oh father!"

"It's as true as that there is a Heaven," he answered, sullenly. "It was for her sake as much as mine."

There was a pause.

She knew all now, and her miserable father, though his hands trembled, felt sure his daughter must yield, and the burden would be lifted from his shoulders.

Lucy hesitated.

It wanted but a word to explain the utter impossibility of her sacrificing herself. Twice that morning the words, "I am married," had trembled on her lips; but how could she tell him?

It was Dick's secret as well as hers, and he had forbidden her to speak till his return.

She took the only course open.

"Forgive me, father," she answered, quietly, but with a tremor in her voice she was unable to conceal. "Even to save you from death, or Olivia from ruin, I cannot break my oath; I cannot be false to the man I love."

He saw her face turn white, he saw her away, and then fall senseless on the floor; but he never attempted to save, or even to raise her.

"Henceforth I have no daughter," he said to himself, and, meeting a servant as he passed out of the room, he told him roughly to send a maid, as Miss Lucy had fainted.

Whilst the scene between father and daughter was taking place in the study, Monsieur le Vicomte de Friel was not without his own anxieties.

He knew that the one great chance of enriching himself by marriage lay almost within his grasp; but he was too experienced a player to risk anything by precipitating matters; however, a chance word dropped by Lady Minstead had determined him to throw caution to the winds, and play a desperate game before it was too late.

Fortune favoured him.

Olivia came out into the garden alone, Lucy being detained by her father.

"She loves me; but does she love me enough?" the handsome Frenchman muttered to himself, as he gazed admiringly at her graceful figure and pretty face.

"It's dreadfully tiresome," Sir John wanted to speak to Lucy," remarked the young lady, swinging a little basket to and fro. "She may be an hour before she is free, so I suppose, monsieur la vicomte, I shall have to put up with you as a companion as far as the mushroom beds."

"When the wind falls ore, it blows for another," the Frenchman replied, gravely. "Shall I carry the basket? No? May I carry the umbrella? No? Eh bien! I at all events I have the happiness of being with

Miss Talbot, even if she does not smile on me."

"Vicomte, you will excuse me, I know but I do not feel in the mood to listen to compliments. What do you think Sir John wanted with Lucy?"

"Ma foi!" thought the vicomte, "I must find out."

He only shrugged his shoulders, and suggested money matters.

Olivia laughed.

"How silly of you, vicomte!" she cried. "Do you think Sir John would consult Lucy about his speculations? No, I fear it is worse than that."

"Use affaire de cœur, then," he said. "In that case I will ask no questions. I myself suffer, and therefore feel for others. Do you not think, Miss Olivia, that the pleasures of this world ought to outnumber the pains?"

"Ah, but the sufferings of men who fancy themselves in love, ought not to count as pains! All the time they are simply gratifying their vanity by saying to themselves 'She must yield, she cannot resist me.'"

The Frenchman bowed.

"A fair thrust, mademoiselle," he said, "and well driven home. May I ask if you think a man—mind I do not say all men—incapable of feeling the agony of unrequited love as much as a woman?"

"I do not pretend to make a study of men's minds," Olivia answered; then, correcting herself, she added: "That was a self-conceited remark of mine, monsieur le Vicomte; please pardon it. A woman has no right to inflict pain needlessly on a man who truly loves her."

They had passed into a lonely part of the kitchen garden, which the mushrooms seemed to have all to themselves.

The vicomte took the basket from her hand, and placed it on a wall.

"Then, hear me, in justice," taking the now disengaged hand. "You must have noticed how my love for you, Olivia, has grown day by day, ever since I came here. I have not pleaded to you before, because I am not rich, and madame has told me you are a great rich heiress. But I have not the strength to refrain any longer."

"I love you, mademoiselle, respectfully and profoundly. I love you passionately; yet, I look upon you as I do the pure evening star, which, perhaps, marks my destiny. Such love as mine you find not in this cold England. I came from the south, where the sun shines and warms our blood till it burns fiercely in our veins."

"With us the love of a woman is all in all. We are ready to throw away riches—to risk life itself to obtain it. Can I hope for yours, Olivia? I love only you. Let your riches go, I care not for them. Let us be married tomorrow. Let us think of our love—only our love—and let Sir John do what he likes with our wealth."

The colour had risen to her cheeks, and her eyes grew softer as he pleaded his cause.

He looked so handsome.

Every word came from his lips with such eloquent force.

He saw his chance, and pressed his suit more passionately than ever.

She looked up, and their eyes met.

She read in his, exultation, triumph, but not love, and, somehow, another face rose between her and his—a handsome, tanned face, with long, drooping, fair moustache, and eyes that looked kindly and honest.

The illusion, which for a moment had wrapped her in its folds, vanished, and she almost laughed at her own folly.

"Poor Lucien!" she said. "But really you do it very well. What practice you must have had! Still, let me advise you to keep to your usual quiet style. It is very killing. Now, do not look cross or disappointed; we are excellent friends, and I like you very much; but, as a husband—no. There now, we have wasted time. Lucy may be out directly, and there is not a mushroom out."

He actually trembled with rage, and turned his head aside lest she should read his face.

He walked away a few steps to recover himself.

He cursed her in his heart, as only a disappointed Frenchman can curse a woman, and then he swore she should be his at any risk, at any cost; but his self-control returned within a minute, and his face, it colorless, was calm when he went towards her again.

"Let us forget this mad moment and continue to be friends," he said, holding out his hand. "It was too great a happiness to dream of."

"Try and forget it," she said, kindly. "I like you, and you must rest satisfied with that. And now, to show that we are re-

conciled, take the knife, monsieur le vicomte, and cut the mushrooms."

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CHAPTER V. THE PLOT.

There could have been no stronger sign of the ex-mayor of Castletown's despair than his taking the Vicomte de Friel into his confidence.

He was so unnerved by his losses, and the danger in which he stood on account of appropriating his ward's money, that he felt utterly incapable of facing Matthew Grimes with the news of his daughter's refusal—that last hope to which he had clung as a drowning man clings to a straw.

The vicomte listened patiently, but with a glow of triumph in his heart, whilst the knight told him of his embarrassments—taking care not to mention anything concerning Olivia's money—and how he stood at the mercy of Grimes, the usurer and miser, who knew not what mercy meant.

"If you would see him for me, vicomte," he said, "and show him how worse than useless it is to press me just now, you would earn my undying gratitude."

"I never thought my daughter would have the heart to ruin me by refusing to become Grimes' wife; a cruelty on her part which I can never forget."

"Who knows if the shares may not rise again, it will only give me time? And tell him that, if he forces me into bankruptcy, between death and shame I shall not hesitate which to choose."

"Leave it to me, Sir John, and I will do my best. Surely, with a little diplomacy, I shall be able to gain you time—a respite, if nothing else."

The knight seized the Frenchman's hand.

"Do that," he cried, "and I shall be your debtor for life. Time is all I ask."

On the axiom that there is no time like the present, the vicomte set off for the Holt there and then.

The sight of the broken fences, and weed grown avenue, did not discourage him.

"He must aid me when I disclose to him my plot," he said to himself. "He cannot act without me, and, when men of his age fall in love, they are capable of any sacrifice—prepared to run any risks to obtain their ends. For once, the game is being played into my hands."

He sent in his card by the manservant, having written "From Sir John Minstead" above his own name.

In a few minutes he was shown into the miser's room.

The old man was not seated at his desk, but at a small table near the fireplace, in which burnt a few sticks, although the sun was shining warmly.

He rose and bowed in a stiff, old-fashioned way to his visitor.

The vicomte introduced himself in a few words.

"And now, Mr. Grimes," he said, he had states his errand, "surely you and I can hit on some plan which will suit us both, leaving Sir John out of the question."

"Accustomed as he was to meet the greatest rascals with their own weapons, this little speech nearly made the old man start out of his chair."

"Leave Sir John's affairs out of the question!" he exclaimed. "Why, what else do you come for? He wants time, does he? Well, you may tell him that he shall have an hour more than I am obliged to give him according to the bond. And so, young man if you have nothing more to say, you may go."

The Frenchman showed his white teeth, and leaned a little further over the table.

"I have something more to say," he said. "I am here to offer to realize your dearest dream, to offer you the girl you long for to your wife."

The miser's face flushed up, and then went deadly pale.

"You—you lie!" he cried, in a voice which trembled. "With your own lips you have told me that her father besought her in vain to marry me. Ah! once my wife, I should know how to bend her spirit; but it is hopeless, and the money I will have, it only to see her forced to work for her living."

His face glow d with malice as he spoke and, as the last words dropped from his lips, he raised his claw like hand, and shook it in the air.

The vicomte smiled, as it well pleased.

"It had not been known before how strong your passion burns," he remarked, "I should know it now."

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