

(CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.)

Anslie Clayton that I feel interested in you, but simply as Adrian Conroy's cousin, who has access, when he pleases, to the private sitting room of Adrian Conroy's wife—a thoughtless girl, who knows not what she is doing, and little thinks the misery she may be laying up for herself in trusting so implicitly a man who may some day play her false.

'Since when did the Goddess of Night take to preaching and to prudery?'

A dull flush crimsoned his face as he drew nearer to her, continuing in a low, tense voice—

'Elspeth, this is folly, and you know it. My heart is yours—has been yours since that memorable St. Valentine's Eve. Marie is simply a passing interest—the amusement of a moment. That she feels differently towards myself is not my fault entirely. Own, just once, that you are not indifferent to me—that you have never succeeded in forgetting me—and I will go over to Tasmania and bring Adrian back to his wife.'

'I think you forget yourself, Mr. Clayton. Must I remind you a second time that I am Lord Cam—'

'You madden me!' He was close to her now, his arms about her. 'Listen; and remember you have driven me to tell it you. Marie is willing to leave her husband and go away with me. I have not wished it—do not wish it—but I swear that I will take her away this very night unless you clasp your hands round my neck and own, with your lips on mine, that your love for me equals mine for you. That is all I ask—just one moment's mad bliss. I would leave you then, and not see you again during my uncle's lifetime.'

'Am I to perjure myself, and disgrace the name I bear, to save another woman from the consequences of her folly? This I will do, I promise you—I will tell Marie what manner of man you are!'

She released herself, her scornful look and tone making him wonder if he had been mistaken in thinking she cared for him.

He stood sullenly facing her.

'Marie would not take your word against mine, Lady Camperdown.'

'Pardon me if I differ from you. I think even Marie would believe her own sister.'

'Her own sister!'

'You had not guessed? But perhaps you did not know that she was Marie de Windt before she was Marie Wakeman? Yes; it is for a sister's honour that I am prepared to fight, Mr. Clayton.'

'Your sister! No, I had not guessed. How should I?'

There was a knock at the door, and a servant entered.

Would misdi please return at once to milord, who had been suddenly taken ill?'

In an instant Anslie Clayton was again at her side as he saw her face blanch.

'Elspeth—forgive me yet once more! I so longed for one crumb of comfort. Your sister is safe—do not fear! And forget what I said; she regards me only as a cousin, I swear to you.'

He went downstairs with her to the carriage which was waiting, and took a seat by her side.

'Last time it was your aunt's illness. Now it is my uncle's. I wonder whose turn it will be next? If I should be ill, would you come to me?'

'Yes, if I could do any good.'

After that she refused to talk; and, indeed, there was little time, for they were very soon at the Hotel Bristol, where Lord Camperdown always liked to stay.

Elspeth's experienced eye told her at once that the end was near.

Lord Camperdown had awoke from his nap in a kind of fit.

His man had chanced to enter the room at the moment, and had immediately sent a messenger for his mistress and another for a doctor.

All was done that could be done, but there was no hope from the first.

Elspeth did not leave the dying man for a moment.

Clayton, too, insisted on staying, and the poor old gentleman seemed pleased to have him there.

He never spoke again, but his last action was more expressive than words.

Taking a hand of each—Elspeth's right and Clayton's right—he joined them together, thus signifying what he would have them do when he was no more.

In less than half-an-hour after that he was gone, and Elspeth was a widow, and free to love and be loved.

'We ask your pardon most humbly, my dear Elspeth.'

'It was my own fault, Uncle Joe; I behaved disgracefully, and I don't wonder that you were ashamed of me, and ready to believe anything you heard concerning me.'

The dowager Lady Camperdown had returned to the vicarage, taking with her the new Lady Camperdown, over whom she claimed a sort of guardianship until Adrian Conroy should return.

The two girls made very merry over their double relationship.

'Of course, I am privileged to call you Elspeth, but I shall tell Adrian that he must address you as grandmamma. It is quite too funny that you should have married his grandfather!'

Elspeth smiled, then sighed as she remembered the kind and courteous old man, of whom she had been genuinely fond.

Anslie Clayton had fulfilled his promise concerning Marie by taking himself off, the day after Lord Camperdown had been laid in the family vault at Collaton. Of course, they had brought him to England to be buried with his forefathers.

It transpired later that Clayton had sailed for Tasmania, whence he returned, some six months after, with his cousin, who had at length settled things to his satisfaction at the Antipodes, and came thus leisurely to take up his new honors and transplant his wife to the family estate.

Lady Wakeman—willing to admit that the dark twin had done as well as the fair one—persuaded Marie that it was her duty

to acknowledge the cordial welcome she had received from the county by giving a ball large enough to include everybody on her visiting list.

'Let it be fancy-dress!' urged Anslie Clayton. 'And let the day be St. Valentine's Eve. Will you do this for me, Marie, and ask no questions?'

Marie was always ready to do as he asked, though she was more satisfied than formerly with her choice of a husband.

Perhaps the fact of being Lady Camperdown, of Collaton Park, had something to do with this.

Mrs Clayton, of nowhere in particular, would not be nearly so important a personage.

Anslie Clayton was doubtful if Elspeth would be content to drop her title and take the lesser position of his wife.

He was determined to know his fate on St. Valentine's Eve.

Old Lord Camperdown had been dead a year. There was no earthly reason why his young widow should mourn him longer.

When young Lady Camperdown sent out invitations for her ball, Elspeth, who was still at the vicarage, received an unmistakable proposal of marriage from Clayton.

It was written in brief, but emphatic language.

'I want you too much to think of living without you. Some women would refuse to trust me after the glimpses I had given from time to time of my truly Satanic nature. But, if you love me, you will not fear. Let your answer wait till St. Valentine's Eve. I have a fancy to have my fate made known to me on the anniversary of the night we first met. It you mean to say "Yes," appear at the ball as "Night."'

Elspeth smiled happily over the characteristic note.

Afraid? Not she; she loved too well.

Being still mourning for Lord Camperdown, the fact of her wearing black at her sister's ball would excite no comment save that of approval. But her dress on this occasion was suggestive of a very dark and starless night.

It was entirely black, relieved only by a crescent moon in her piled up hair, formed of diamonds which had reached her anonymously by post on the morning of St. Valentine's Eve.

She knew well enough whence it came, and her lips touched it passionately before it found a temporary resting place in her black hair.

Slowly she descended the stairs when her maid had put the finishing touches to her sombre-hued gown.

She was early—partly from intent, and partly by accident.

But she was not the only person who was dressed early on that occasion.

As she went rustling softly down the wide shallow stairs, a figure—all in black, like herself—appeared suddenly from some hidden corner, and, taking her hand, drew her into the shadow whence he had emerged.

'My darling My queen! My heart's best love!'

A dozen other names as sweet to listen to were showered upon her as she yielded unresistingly to his passionate embraces, giving as much as she received in Love's coin of the realm.

'I saw the diamonds glistening in your hair when you turned to come downstairs, Elspeth; it was all I could do to prevent myself rushing up to claim you then and there. But I remembered that there were doors in full view, and servants might be passing up or down. You came so slowly, heart of mine, you could not have guessed that I was waiting for you here!'

'I certainly didn't know you were here; but I knew you were waiting for me somewhere!'

Then why did you not hasten to my arms and lips?'

'Anticipation was so sweet,' she answered smilingly.

'More so than reality? Answer me, Elspeth?'

'As if you wanted an answer!'

'But I do.'

'Scoop, then; I must whisper.'

He readily bent his head until he felt her mouth on his ear.

'Are you satisfied, Anslie?'

'Ask me that again!'

'Are you satisfied, Anslie?'

'It's the first time you've called me that. I had no idea I had such a nice sounding name. Am I satisfied? Very nearly, I think. I need little more to make me the happiest man in all the universe. Only a short service in church. It is not much to ask. When shall it be, Elspeth?'

'How can I say? I have not yet got used to the thought that it must come some day.'

'You shrink from it?'

'Not I. If you want a living bride, Anslie I must beg that you don't make life an impossibility by crushing the breath out of me. Come, people are arriving. We must go down.'

'Remember, the waltzes are all mine.'

'All! What will be thought and said?'

'Only what I hope will be thought and said very generally before the evening is many hours old. Our love need no longer be a secret, Elspeth.'

At the drawing room door the footman looked at them interrogatively.

'Two as dingy figures as I'd want to see,' he subsequently announced below stairs.

'Though I'll admit that black becomes the dowager wonderful well; and as for Mr. Clayton, his face shone like the full moon.'

'Proserpine and Pluto!' announced Anslie deliberately, drawing his darling's hand through his arm and holding it there.

And the names had been shouted into the room before Elspeth could do more than murmur an objecting—

'Anslie!'

Marie smiled delightfully, and kissed her sister warmly.

The few guests who had as yet arrived were familiar friends, whose presence made no difference even in this supreme moment.

'I am so glad, Elspeth! It is quite time you came down from your pedestal as the "dowager." I am tired of you as a grand-

mother. Anslie you'll be a most charming brother. I only hope Elspeth will find you equally charming as a husband.'

'Elspeth has no fears on that score,' he replied coolly, moving on with his betrothed to receive the congratulations of the assembled few.

People came thick and fast after this, and the orchestra struck up 'Morgenblatter.'

Elspeth, turning a smiling face on her lover, asked—

'Did you draw up the musical programme, Anslie?'

'You have not forgotten?'

He smiled too, adding, as his finger and thumb went to his waistcoat pocket—

'There is something I have not forgotten.'

Drawing off her left glove, without waiting to ask permission, he slipped a ring on her finger murmuring tenderly though with laughing eyes—

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'Pluto to his wife Proserpine.'

Before she had time to replace the glove, he was guiding her down the room amongst the other dancers, and murmuring in her ear—

'I have a plain gold one in my pocket. When will you have it, Elspeth?'

'One thing at a time!' she replied, with a glance that stirred his pulses; 'let us waltz now; surely it is joy enough.'

'True, sweetheart! Let us waltz to night, and wed to-morrow. Shall we, Elspeth? I should hate a prosaic, everyday marriage. We will steal a march on every one, and fulfil bygone expectations. What do you say to eloping with me?'

The idea found favor with her, as he saw by the glimpses of wickedness in her eyes.

'It will serve them right for having doubted you,' he urged.

'So it will! I'll do it, Anslie! But not to-morrow.'

'And why not to-morrow? Delays are dangerous, and a special license has a sort of fascination about it. Besides, what is more appropriate than that the love born on St. Valentine's Day should be sealed on St. Valentine's Day? You will have to give in to me, Elspeth, unless you would have me doubt the fullness of your love.'

'Foolish one!' she whispered chidingly.

'Does that mean you consent?'

'I suppose it does. Now don't talk any more. I want to enjoy myself.'

He laughed, and obeyed, content to be silent for a while.

There are friends who will stand by you to the last cent. Your cent, not theirs.—

Professor Huxley once wrote in regard to a scientific congress over which he was to preside; 'All this week I shall be occupied in hearing one jackass contradict another jackass about questions which are of no importance.'

One of the advantages of living in a republic is that the people can rejoice over the birth of a child in the executive mansion whether the infant is a girl or boy.

Diseases Conveyed by Insects.

Surg. Gen. Wyman has issued a general circular to medical officers of the marine hospital service, calling special attention to the importance of insects as factors in conveying diseases.

The circular says there is no longer doubt as to the relation of the mosquito to malarial and to filariasis.

'According to Simond,' it says, 'plague transmitted from the rat to the man by the flea. The insect of typhoid fever and to a certain extent cholera, may be conveyed by flies. Medical officers are requested to place mosquito netting over the beds communicable diseased patients.'

Hospitals are to be thoroughly protected by fly screens at all openings, particular attention having been paid to the kitchen, dining room and protection of the food. Sulphur fumigation is given as the best methods of killing insect in a large room.



A GRECIAN BRIDE.