

A FORBIDDEN MARRIAGE.

BY LAURA JEAN LIBBEY.

[CONTINUED.]

At that moment both glanced up and caught sight of Bernard Chesleigh's white, set face.

"Mr. Chesleigh, your escort, does not appear to like me," he said. "He appears angry because you have been so kind as to dance with me. Has he any right to direct your actions?" he asked, with eager intentness.

"Any right!" echoed Reine. "No. Why should he?"

The answer so unhesitatingly given relieved Waldemar Waldron's mind wonderfully. He saw that Bernard Chesleigh loved Reine; but she was utterly unconscious of it. She gave him only formal friendship in return.

He had no chance of saying good night to Reine—Bernard Chesleigh was too watchful for that—but he promised himself that he should see Reine soon again. Although he haunted the shaded road where she would be likely to ride, and the green, flower-strewn glades where she might walk, a week passed and he had not caught so much as a glimpse of General Hastings's daughter.

Had he made less of an impression upon her than he had imagined? He had been so certain of meeting her; or was she kept in close surveillance under the watchful eyes of a stern papa?

Waldemar Waldron was determined to find out.

He dared not call openly at Fairlawn and ask for Miss Reine, but he laid his plans to lay siege to the girl's heart in a most adroit manner. He wrote the most charming of notes, and by bribing one of the maids, succeeded in having it conveyed to Reine in an odoriferous bouquet.

How deliciously romantic! How Reine's heart thrilled as she read the ardent missive that told how he had watched and waited for her in vain. Would she permit him to call upon her at Fairlawn? He would be so pleased to meet her again. If she would write him just a single line to let him know that she was well, he would be so grateful. She could place it in the hollow of the old oak tree that stood at the right angle of the park that skirted Fairlawn.

The very romance connected with the novel idea captivated Reine's girlish fancy.

The next day Waldemar Waldron received his answer, but she did not tell him that the general had forbidden her to drive or walk beyond the grounds of Fairlawn without the escort of the stolid old footman, and that in her anger she had declared she would not go at all if she was to be followed by a lackey. The general had given as a reason that the country about was infested by tramps. She never dreamed that the true reason was Bernard Chesleigh had told the general that, as they had feared, the heir of Waldron Towers had been at the fete, and how infatuated he had appeared to be with Reine.

General Hastings listened in silence.

"She may have espoused the young man's cause when you warned her against him, Chesleigh," he said. "Young girls have a penchant for being on the contrary side. Ten to one she'll never think of him again. Still, it would be as well to nip such an affair in the bud. She shall not go out without an attendant; so she'll not be likely to meet this gay Lothario again."

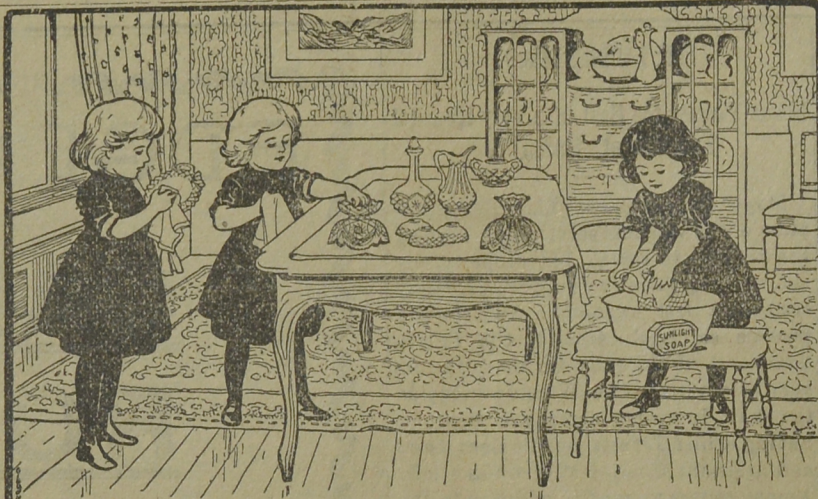
But love laughs at the stern decree of wise parents as well as locksmiths, as we have seen; and the pink-tinted note that found its way to Reine, hidden among the flowers, was followed by many more such missives, which found their way back and forth through the agency of the hollow oak tree.

Wooing by letter has a charm about it peculiarly its own, so much more can be said by the pen than by the lips can utter; and then young girls have the habit of reading and rereading them till they know every tenderly expressed thought by heart.

They were Reine's first love-letters, for they grew to be that; and the enforced separation which she was ob-

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liged to submit to only increased flame in her rebellious little heart. And when Waldemar pleaded that he must see her soon and gain her consent to asking her father a very important question, her own heart acceded eagerly.

"Let me see you, Reine, if but for a few brief moments, at the old oak tree, to-night," he wrote. "I will be there at seven sharp."

It could not be so very wrong to grant him a few short moments, Reine told herself. A meeting at the old trysting-place, seen through the warm haze of a young girl's fancy, was delightfully romantic. Reine went. She could stay but a few moments, however, for her father had sent her a message after tea that he wanted to see her in the library that evening, at eight.

How handsome Waldemar Waldron looked as he advanced eagerly in the moonlight to meet her. He had quite made up his mind to win her. Reine's fresh, young beauty charmed him. He loved her quite as much as he was capable of loving. He had vowed to wrest her from Bernard Chesleigh, his mortal foe. And last, but by no means the least, she was heiress to a million. What man would wish a fairer prize?

He knew there would be a battle to fight before he gained Reine Hastings for his bride. He had sown more wild oats than were usually allotted to young men, and he had reaped the whirlwind for a harvest. He knew that he would never have been received as a guest at Fairlawn by the old general. Bernard Chesleigh knew enough about him to interfere with that. So no other way of winning fair Reine was left him save through the adorable letters he knew so well how to write. "All was fair in love and war."

"You can give me only a few brief moments, Reine?" he said, reproachfully. "How shall I tell you all I have to say, in so short a time? The words I would utter would fill volumes."

He clasped the little white hand, bending his handsome head over it, and the beautiful story, so old and sweet, that young girls love to listen to so well—the story that had been so charmingly told in a score or more of letters, in an hundred different ways—was breathed again in eloquent, passionate words.

She looked up at him with startled eyes, crimson flushes coming and going on her dimpled face. But she loved him. The artless, girlish replies to his letters had told him that long ago.

Her golden head drooped. She tried to speak, but her lovely lips trembled with all a young girl's coy bashfulness.

"You do care for me, Reine," he whispered. "Look up and tell me so. Tell me that, and nothing shall ever part us. You will be mine in life, mine in death, mine through eternity. Say that you love me, Reine, and will be my bride, and to-morrow I will come and ask your father for this dear little hand. He may censure our wooing, yet it could not have been tenderer, sweeter. He may hold out against us at first, but when he finds out how well we love each other, he will yield in the end."

She did not shrink from his caresses, for Reine Hastings, the general's lovely daughter, had learned to love Waldemar Waldron with all her heart. She sat with him under the trees, listening to his words of love, so unutterably happy, and the answer she made him must have pleased him, for his eyes blazed with triumph.

Yes, she had promised to be his bride.

"They may try to part us, Reine," he said, "they may calumniate me, and try to vilify me in your eyes; but you will be true to me through good or evil report—true to me if we lose the whole world beside," he went on, anxiously and eagerly.

"Why should any one wish to part us?" asked Reine.

"I will tell you, my darling," he answered, with an assumption of intense sorrow. "You are General

Hastings' heiress, rich in this world's goods, while I am comparatively poor. They will say I am no match for you—that you are expected to marry brilliantly."

Reine laughed, thinking how little weight money would have with her father in considering her happiness. Why, he had never denied his motherless daughter anything that she had really set her mind on in all her bright young life. He would not do so now.

"We shall have trouble, Reine," he said. "I am sure we will have trouble in gaining your father's consent. But with you on my side—if you stand by me firmly—he will not hold out against us long. I will come to Fairlawn to-morrow morning, Reine, and see him."

The great bell in an adjacent belfry rang out the hour of eight in measured strokes, and the lovers parted hastily.

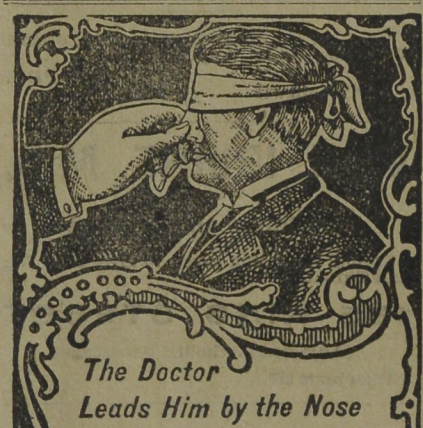
He to go slowly back to Waldron Towers, triumphant over his prospects of the future; she to hurry back to the house to keep her appointment with her father in the library, her throbbing heart in a whirl, the glamor of love's beautiful dream enfolding her.

General Hastings was pacing up and down the room when she entered. She went up to him swiftly, clasping her arms about him, hiding the tell-tale, blushing face in his breast.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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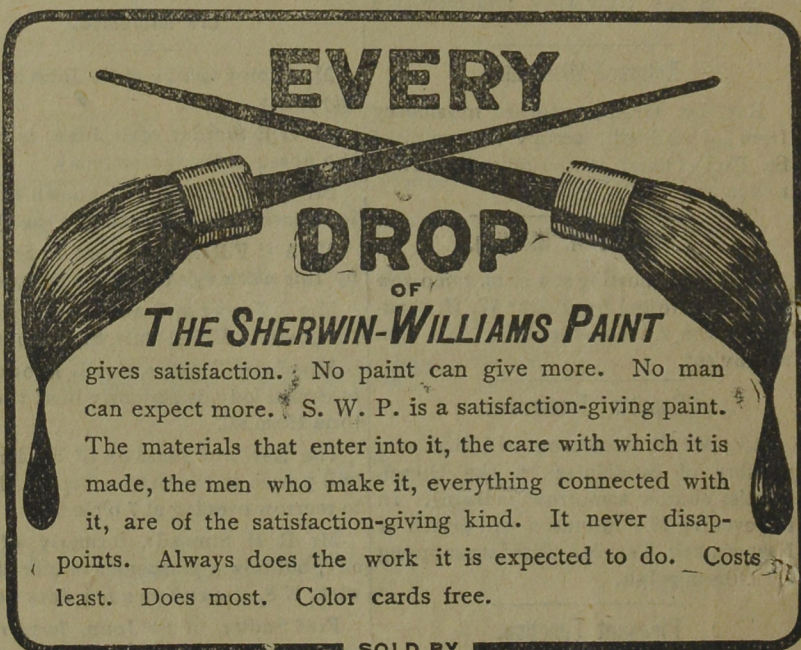
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