

Prince Charlie.

By BURFORD DELANNOY.

(Continued.)

The swelling tones would rise and fall and echo, long after the discordance had subsided. Real love is very rare, rarer than gold and diamonds, but it is found sometimes. In out-of-the-way places, too; wholly unsought, conjoining the hearts of man and woman by the closeness and perfection of their union and coincidence.

She had come to think and he had thought so, too that God had framed them so, the one to the other. Fight the idea as she would, in her woman's weakness she thought so still. He, in his manly strength, endeavoured to crush the thought as it rose in his bosom.

But it was there to crush.

CHAPTER XIX.

Playing the Spy.

When the child had passed all the ailments on the road of convalescence, had reached perfect health, Masters ceased his visits to the bungalow. His interest in Gracie induced him not to avoid meeting her on the front.

The child was all warmth and affection and love for the man she was going to marry. The mother hid her aching heart behind a smile; a woman's usual veil. It was not what a novelist describes as a sad sweet smile; it had degenerated into an hysterical, jerky, clattering, little laugh.

The weather continued fine; the author prolonged his stay. For that reason—anyway, for his own satisfaction he set down that as the cause—he stayed on at Wivernsea.

Not a day passed but he met his little sweetheart. Not a day passed but the breach between the man and woman widened. Soon the conventional greeting at meeting and parting came to be dreaded by each.

They dared not look into each other's eyes. As hands met for those two brief moments, each involuntarily looked away from the other. Fingers were clasped flimsily; fell away awkwardly. Heartiness even of the faintest description was lacking in the shake.

One morning he had a letter from his lawyers. It called for his attention in London; a question of making an affidavit over some copyright infringement. He resolved to catch the fast train up, and so he able to get back by the fast evening

train down. He was at the station early, having enquiries to make. A parcel of books sent down to him had, by reason of the railway company's vagaries, not reached him. Those inquiries made and satisfied, he purchased newspapers.

Messrs. Smith and Son occupied a space in the booking office. As he dealt with the juvenile representative of the great Strand firm, he was standing with his back to the ticket pigeon-hole. He was presently startled by hearing a voice he recognized, saying—

"First-class, return, London, please."

He turned round sharply, expecting to see the mistress of Ivy Cottage; he could have sworn to her voice anywhere. A woman plainly dressed, almost shabbily, with a long thick veil, stood purchasing the ticket. She repeated the demand; the ticket seller had not caught the words.

Hearing it a second time, Masters had no shadow of doubt about the voice's owner. There were no two voices like it in the world. But the costume amazed him; could only be explained one way.

Not a pleasant way, either. It was a disguise! Masters felt certain of it. She had always been well, expensively dressed. Now, by reason of that, the change was the more striking.

There were three minutes before the train was due; five minutes passed before it arrived. The shabbily-dressed woman paced the platform. Masters watched her from the waiting room window; five minutes of utter misery.

The station bell rang a second time, the train came in. The veiled woman hurried to a first-class carriage in front of the train. The guard opened a door and she entered one of its compartments. A moment after Masters had entered another.

His purchases at the bookstall lay on the seat beside him all the way to London; he did not read a line of them. For two whole hours he sat stonily looking out of the window, thinking. Thinking as well as the numb feeling of wretchedness and horror holding him would allow.

It was the first really cold day of the approaching winter. With a view to travelling in comfort, Masters had unpacked, and was wearing a long heavy ulster. It changed his appearance altogether. He knew that, and bred of the knowledge, there came a desire to track the woman in the other compartment.

With his coat-collar up, she would not be likely to recognize him. It would be possible to follow her and see what this mysterious disguise and flight to London meant, whether she was really as black as his suspicion painted her, as appearances represented her.

Was it a gentlemanly thing to do?

He did not pause to answer his own question. Curiosity and the desire, the necessity, to either set at rest or confirm his fears, outweighed everything. Any certainty is better than suspense; we always say so and feel it so—until that certainty is known.

His mind was quickly made up; to follow her. Besides, how could he tell but what she might have need of him; the disguise led to the thought of such a possibility. Masters' was a fertile brain; a dozen such possibilities entered his mind at once. Disguise very frequently meant danger. If that were the case it was his duty as a man, to shield her.

He would not fail her—so he urged with himself. A desire to do any particular thing causes us to find reasons for its justification; excellent reason. He had made up his mind to follow her.

At Charing Cross the woman in the front part of the train alighted. Got into a hansom cab. Masters got into another. A disturbing recollection came to him of a private detective in one of his own books who had acted in similar fashion. But he was not deterred by it.

Through the trap in the cab roof the enquiry came. Looking up he answered the driver—

"Keep that hansom in sight. I want to see, and not be seen—do you understand?"

"I'm fly."

As the Jesu answered he closed one eye. Then, as he closed the trap, said to himself—

"Man from the Yard—what's she been a-doin' of, I wonder?"

The first cab went over Westminster Bridge, turned into Lambeth, pulled up outside a corner public house. The second cab slowed down and passed the first at walking pace. The woman was paying her fare. Then she entered a door on the glass panels of which were inscribed the words—

BOTTLE AND JUG DEPARTMENT.

Masters' cabman knew his business; promptly reined in his horse round the corner.

"That do you, sir?"

He put the question as Masters alighted, and was feeling in his trousers pockets; continued—

"She's gone into the Green Dragon round the corner, she has. We passed the pub a minute ago."

Masters winced. Then reflected that the cabman was only fulfilling his duty zealously. Rewarded him with a half-sovereign.

"Going back, sir?"

Golden fares are rare enough to be worth looking after for a return journey.

"Perhaps—I don't know."

"I'll be stopping here, sir—here, for half-an-hour, if you should want me, sir."

Masters nodded. Passed through a door brass-plated with the words—

HOTEL ENTRANCE.

A flight of stairs faced him. To the left was another door, glass-lettered with the word—

SALOON.

Into the saloon Masters went. Square panels of bevelled ground glass pivotted on their centres along the top of the bar, shielding the occupants of the saloon from the gaze of those in the opposite bar.

As he entered, Masters heard the woman he had followed, enquiring over the bar—

"Mr. Rigby? He is staying here—he expects me."

The hesitation in the enquiring voice made the barman look up. Nervousness in women is rather an uncommon thing to find in the bar of a Surrey-side public-house.

"Oh, yes. But you've come in the wrong way. Round the corner and in at the hotel entrance. You'll find him on the second floor, room 15."

She went out. The bar-tender crossing to him, Masters called for a whisky and soda. Tasted, then tilted the glass, and let the contents be soaked up by the sawdust on the floor. It was not a drink which he thought likely to benefit him. The Lambeth blend of whisky did not seem to tickle his palate.

Watching through the saloon door, he presently saw the veiled woman come in through the hotel entrance, and ascend the stairs. Allowing half-a-minute to elapse, he passed out and himself mounted the stairs. As he commenced the ascent of the second flight he heard a door close; guessed it to be the door of room No. 15.

Reaching the passage on the second floor he noted that the door of room No. 14 was shut. No. 15 was shut too. No. 16 was open. He paused on its threshold; cast an eye round; not a soul was in the passage; entered. Then the door of No. 16 was shut too—shut, and the key turned on the inside.

A hurried glance satisfied him that it was an unoccupied room. He was glad of that; an explanation that he had entered to wash his hands would suffice, should need of explanation arise. All the rooms, he guessed, were bedrooms on that floor.

A door was in the dividing wall of No. 15 and 16. To that Masters applied his ear. A sense of the contemptibility of the action was strong upon him; yet he could not refrain.

Something crossed his mind about the end justifying the means. It was a principle he had always violently combated; practice and theory are sometimes at variance. Shame was merged into a feeling of gladness; that there was no key in the lock; it made hearing easier. And he meant to go the whole length; to listen.

As he did so, reflected that such a despicable act as eavesdropping would have been impossible to him a



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month ago. Suggested to himself that she had brought him to it. That is man's way—even the best of them.

(To be continued.)

OUR HOMEMAKER.

Where the mountains slope to the westward, And their purple chalcids hold The new-made wine of the sunset—Crimson, and amber, and gold—

In this old wide-opened doorway, With the elm-boughs overhead, The houses all cherry behind her, And the plentiful table spread,

She has stood to welcome our coming, Watched our upward climb, When the evening hour had brought us, Oh, many and many a time!

Again is the doorway opened, And the house is garnished and sweet, But she silently waits our coming, And we enter with silent feet.

A little while she is waiting, Not where she has met us before; For over the pleasant threshold She has only to cross once more.

The smile on her face is quiet, And a lily is on her breast; Her hands are folded together, And the word on her lips is "rest."

And yet it looks like a welcome, For her work is compassed and done, All things are seemly and ready, And her resting time is come.

It is we who may not cross over; Only, with song and prayer, A little way into the glory We may reach as we leave her there.

But we cannot think of her idle; She must be a home-maker still; God giveth that work to the angels Who fittest the task fulfil.

And somewhere yet in the hilltops Of the country that hath no pain, She will watch in her beautiful doorway, To bid us welcome again.

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"The contest, provided the Liverpool challenger accepts the conditions, will begin at noon on March 6," he explained to an Express representative yesterday.

"The time throughout will be sixty bars a minute, and the waltz will be the dance selected. The competitors will dance in an inner track in the ballroom, and dancing couples in the outer ring to a band. Whenever the band stops an automatic piano will immediately begin to play.

"From noon on the 6th to the hour on the 7th when the dancers finish, the competitors will be on the move. Relays of lady partners will be provided, and food and drink will be taken while dancing.

"Mr. Helps will train for the dance by taking long walks and by dancing. At first he will dance for half an hour without a break, and then the time will be increased by slow stages until he can dance hours together."

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