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...That... Preposterous ..Will..

BY L. G. MOBERLY.

(Continued.)

Her eyes, that had hitherto been partially veiled by her sweeping lashes, were opened fully, and fixed themselves upon the young man's face, over which crept a shade of embarrassment.

"Nothing that could have upset him so seriously," he said with hesitation; "he — well—you knew him, Mrs. Bedsworth?"

"Oh! yes—I knew him," the words spoken with a curious bitterness, and the speaker's flexible lips closed upon them with a little snap. It was almost as though she could have said more had she chosen, and a strange hard light came into her eyes. But it vanished as quickly as it had come, and a tiny laugh broke from her. "Oh, yes," she repeated lightly, "I knew him. Who did not know the rich Mr. Haines? I had known him for some time, even before my dear little girl's engagement to you. I sometimes thought"—she paused, again her eyes searched his face keenly—"I sometimes thought he was not—very pleased—about the engagement."

Dayrell stirred uneasily, and flushed.

"Mr. Haines was a man of very strong prejudices," he said slowly, "and—I think—perhaps he was not very pleased that I wished to marry."

The look that flashed out of those watchful eyes might have been interpreted as, "I thought so," but Mrs. Bedsworth only said smoothly—

"You think it was only a general disapproval, not a particular dislike to Stella—or—to me?"

No cat could have watched a mouse more closely, than this woman watched the increasingly embarrassed face of the man before her, and there was even a suspicion of a smile about her mouth, when he answered impetuously—

"No man in his senses could dislike Stella—nor you. My godfather had strong prejudices, and was apt to take unreasoning dislikes. Why—he hardly knew you excepting as an acquaintance." Alan did not look at his listener but turned gloomy eyes towards the fire, thus failing to observe the expression which for a second swept over Mrs. Bedsworth's face as she said—

"The merest acquaintance, that was all. Therefore, if he disliked us, one can only call it prejudice. Don't mind telling me the truth, Alan"—for an instant her hand rested lightly on his shoulder—"he did not like us, did he?"

"It is useless denying that he was very much annoyed about my engagement, and he said one or two sharp things about smart women of the world," Alan answered with considerable reluctance; "but I thought it was all part of his hatred of society in general. Why should he take a dislike to you and Stella? and such a dislike as to make him alter his will in favor of——"

"Ah, yes!" Mrs. Bedsworth interrupted quickly, "your note did not enlighten us as to what Mr. Haines had done with his great fortune. You only said something vague about conditions."

"Conditions!" Alan rose impulsively, and he began pacing the room with short irritated steps. "I don't wish to speak evil of the poor old man now he is dead, but—bless my soul, if insanity did not prompt him, then pure malice must have led him to think of the conditions in this wretched will."

"Do you mean that you might still have the money, if you agreed to his conditions?" Her eyes showed no sign of excitement, but there was a quick nervous movement of her hands that would have spoken volumes to a close observer.

"If I agreed—yes," Alan replied; "but you will understand that the agreement is impossible, when I tell you that the fortune is left to a wretched little servant girl, another godchild of Mr. Haines, and that his idea apparently was that I should marry her!"

"Marry a servant girl? Do you really mean to say he actually left that great fortune to a servant girl?" Mrs. Bedsworth's voice rang with genuine amazement and horror.

"He has worded his will in the simplest possible way, there is no getting out of what he means. The bulk of the money is left to a girl called Miranda Hume."

"Good heavens!" Mrs. Bedsworth ejaculated feebly.

"She is a slavey in a lodging-house. The will requests that she will marry me during the next three years, or——"

"Or—What?" Mrs. Bedsworth's tones were eager. "Will she forfeit the money if she does not marry you?"

Alan laughed harshly.

"Not she. My godfather had no intention of allowing me to get the money in any roundabout way of that sort. She may remain single and keep the money: after three years she may marry the chimneysweep if she likes, and still keep the money. There is only one chance for me. If she marries before the three years are up, and marries any one excepting me, the money reverts to me."

Mrs. Bedsworth's eyes positively glowed; she put out her hand, and pulled the excited young man down to the sofa beside her.

"And she is young?"

"Seventeen, I believe."

"Then, my dear Alan, you really need not despair," came the exultant response; "do you really suppose that a girl of that class will remain unmarried, when so many people will be more than willing to marry her and her fortune?"

"But I shouldn't like to feel the poor little thing was to be sacrificed to a fortune hunter for my sake," Dayrell said quickly; "besides which, you see, her fortune would go if she married within the three specified years, and I don't want to behave like a brute to her. This will is not her fault, and Mr. Bray tells me she was most anxious to make every compensation in her power to me."

"You misunderstand me, my dear Alan" —Mrs. Bedsworth's voice was more than ever soft and soothing—"I quite think that this girl might be pursued by fortune hunters, and one would not wish her to succumb to one of them—no indeed. But if she was taken in hand by people who could train her and help her, and teach her how to behave and so on, perhaps she might even attract some one for herself alone, and in that case, Alan, I know you would be generous."

"Good heavens, do you mean would I hand over some of the fortune to her if she married within the next three years and it came to me? By Jove! I should rather think I would. But things don't, as a rule, work out so satisfactorily in real life: they only do that in fiction."

"Is this girl absolutely, and in every way impossible?" Mrs. Bedsworth asked, leaving his remark unanswered, and looking thoughtfully across the room.

"Goodness knows. I haven't seen her. Mr. Bray suggested our meeting, but I saw no earthly use in doing that. He said she was a red-haired servant girl, a cockney slavey in a third rate lodging-house. And yet my godfather actually says in his will that a marriage with her would be true wisdom, and that I have hitherto been blind, or some such absurdity."

"Blind?" his listener looked at him scrutinizingly; "yes—that was a strange expression to use," but something in the look of her down-drooped eyes belied the words she said. Any one less absorbed than was Alan at that moment must have seen that she could make a very shrewd guess indeed as to the meaning of the strange sentence in Mr. Haines' will.

Within the well-coiffured head many thoughts were revolving even during the course of her conversation with Dayrell, and a well defined scheme was well on its way to completion by the time Alan spoke again.

"I consider myself in no way responsible for Miss Miranda Hume's future, seeing that, in spite of my godfather's remarks about my blindness—whatever he meant by that—I shall not marry a young woman of her class, even if she was made of gold!"

"No, no—of course not;" Mrs. Bedsworth smiled, and the scheme within her fertile brain took a more and more definite shape. "I cannot imagine you married to a London slavey, Alan" — her eyes wandered over his strong refined face—"but setting aside altogether the question of marrying the girl, I really think we might devise some means by which she should be educated and made presentable: and if she does marry some one else in these next three years, well, as we said just now, you will give her a good dowry."

"It is useless to pretend I should not be glad if she married," Alan said ruefully, "and I don't want to deal unfairly by her in any way. If you think I am in any way bound to take steps about her education, why — I will be guided by you."

"Let me think it all over quietly," was the reply, and that scheme in her brain became full grown in a leap and a bound; "if I can help you to any solution of your difficulties, you know I will." She rose as she spoke, and her soft hand lingered caressingly on his arm.

"And now you have talked quite long enough to a tiresome old woman. I shall send Stella to you."

He caught her hand in his and held it closely in a grip that exercised all Mrs. Bedsworth's fortitude to bear with equanimity.

"I ought not to let you be so good to me," he exclaimed brokenly; "I ought to insist upon doing what I suggested in my letter to you. I ought to break off our engagement. It is not fair to let Stella, my beautiful little Stella, be tied to a man whose fortune depends now entirely on his own exertions."

"What do you think Stella and Stella's mother are made of?" she answered, tapping his arm playfully; "have we seemed to you so mercenary? Did you suppose we cared only about your money?" and she smiled her prettiest, most deprecating smile.

"Mercenary?" Dayrell said impetuously; "it is all the other way. You and Stella consider your own interests so little, that I ought to consider them for you. You ought to make me give Stella up: you would if you were a worldly wise mother," he added, looking at her with infatuated eyes, "but—I don't know whether I am strong enough to give her up for her own good."

"There is to be no talk of giving up," she answered gaily: "you and Stella are young. Surely, you can wait a little bit—and—who knows, something may turn up. Some good luck may come your way; we won't talk or think of such things as broken engagements."

(To be continued.)

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Daily Fashion Hint for Times Readers.



EMBROIDERIES AND THE TUNIC STYLE.

In models recently received from Paris, where the so-called dull season oftentimes produces the most charming and effective novelties, there is evident a strong tendency to return to the two-piece skirt and the tunic styles. Good news this for the tall and slender woman, but for her petite sister who wishes to make the most of her inches the tunic mode will not prove welcome.

In the gown that is pictured the grape design is done in the natural green shades that identify the Malaga grape, the fruit being fashioned from chiffon well padded of a semblance of the natural grape, while the vine and leaves are done in embroidery stitches. The sleeve is merely a drapery of the embroidered chiffon the bodice plain and close fitting, while the tunic, or top, part of the skirt is fitted with dart-shaped tucks over the hips. The underskirt is merely a frothy mass of plisse chiffon ruffles, each edged with an effective ruching, the tunic top falling in wide points all around.



TOQUE OF FUR, WITH VELVET CROWN.

One of the fashionable fur toques is shown in the sketch, the model bearing the name of a famous French milliner. The brim of the toque was of sable, the draped crown being of shaded tan velvet. At the left side was an aigrette in light yellow, at the base of which was a handsome gilt and enamel buckle holding in place two or three sable tails, which fell over the hair.

PENSIONS FOR RAILWAY MEN

The System Adopted by Many Companies in the United States.

(The Railway Age.)

The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe has been added to the list of railway companies which have adopted a liberal plan for the retirement and pensioning of employes on reaching the age of sixty-five years. The Santa Fe method differs somewhat from that of most of the other companies in that, instead of providing an allowance based upon 1 per cent. of the average regular monthly pay received for the ten years next preceding retirement, it fixes the pension on the following plan: "For each year of service an allowance of 1 1-4 per cent, of the first $50 of the hightest average monthly pay of the officer or employe during any consecutive ten years of service and in addition three-fourths of 1 per cent. of any excess of such highest average monthly pay over $50." The allowance in no case is to be less than $20 or more than $75 a month, but in exceptional cases of long and unbroken service, of first-class record, the pension may be increased by not exceeding 25 per cent. The companies which now have adopted pension systems and the year in which they became effective are as follows: Baltimore & Ohio in 1884; Pennsylvania Railroad in 1900; Chicago & Northwestern and Illinois Central in 1901; Southern Pacific lines, Union Pacific Oregon Railroad & Navigation, Oregon Short Line, Philadelphia & Reading, Delaware, Lackawana & Western, Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburg and Canadian Pacific in 1903; Atlantic Coast Line in 1904; Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe January 1, 1907. The New York Central Company has for some time been preparing to establish a pension plan on all the lines of the system, including the New York Central & Hudson River, Boston & Albany, West Shore, Big Four, Lake Shore & Michigan Southern, Michigan Central and other roads, and the announcement of this important extension of provision for superannuated employes is expected early in the present year.

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FRANK J. CHENEY

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(Seal) A. W. GLEASON,
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