

# A Foolish Young Man;

Or, the Belle of the Season.

## CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued).

Then she opened it, slowly, as lingeringly she had looked at it, spinning out the pleasure, the delight which lay before her in the perusal of her first love-letter. With her foot upon the old-fashioned fender, her drooping as if there was someone present to see her blushes, she read the letter; and it is not too much to say that at first she failed utterly to grasp its meaning. With knit brows and quaking heart, she read it again and again, until its significance was, so to speak, forced upon her; then her arms fell limply to her sides, and she looked straight before her in a dazed, benumbed fashion, every word burning itself upon her brain and searing her heart.

The blow had fallen so suddenly, so unexpectedly, like a bolt from the blue, smiting the happiness of her young life as a sapling is smitten by summer lightning, that for the moment she felt no pain, nothing but the benumbing of all her faculties; so that she did not see the portrait of the dead and gone Heron upon which her eyes rested, did not hear her father's voice calling to her from the library, was conscious of nothing but those terrible words which were dining through her brain like the booming of a great bell. Presently she uttered a low cry and clasped her head with her hands, as if to shut out the sound of the words that tortured her.

It could not be true—it could not be true! Stafford had not written it. It was some cruel jest, a very cruel jest, perpetrated by someone who hated them both, and who wantonly inflicted pain. Yes; that was it! That could be the only explanation. Someone had written in his name; it was a forgery; she would meet Stafford presently, and they would laugh at it together. He would be very angry, would want to punish the person who had done it; but he and she would laugh together, and he would take her in his arms and kiss her in one of the many ways in which he had made a kiss an ecstasy of delight, and they would laugh together as he whispered that nothing should ever separate them.

She laughed now as she pictured the scene that would be enacted. But suddenly the laugh died on her lips, as there flashed across her mind the words Jessie had said. Stafford was engaged to Maude Falconer, the girl up at the Villa, whose beauty and grace and wealth all the dale was talking of.

Oh, Heavens! Was there any truth in it, was there any truth in it? Had Stafford indeed, written that cruel letter? Had he left her for ever, for ever, for ever? Should she never see him again, never again hear him tell her that he loved her, would always love her?

The room spun round with her, she suddenly felt sick and faint, and, reeling, caught at the carved mantelpiece to prevent herself from falling. Then gradually the death-like faintness passed, and she became conscious that her father's voice was calling to her, and she clasped her head again and swept the hair from her forehead, and clenched her hands in the effort to gain her presence of mind and self-command.

She picked up the letter, and, with a shudder, thrust it in her bosom, as Cleopatra might have thrust the asp which was to destroy her; then with leaden feet, she crossed the hall and opened the library door, and saw her father standing by the table cluttered with papers in one hand, and gesticulating wildly with the other. Dizzily, for there seemed to be a mist before her eyes, she went to him and laid a hand upon his arm.

"What is it, father?" she said. "Are you ill? What is the matter?" He gazed at her vacantly and struck his hand on the table, after the manner of a child in a senseless passion.

"Lost! Lost! All lost!" he mumbled, jumbling the words together almost incoherently.

"What is lost, father?" she asked. "Everything, everything!" he cried in the same manner. "I can't remember, can't remember! It's ruin, utter ruin! My head—I can't think, can't remember! Lost, lost!"

In her terror, she put her young arm round him as a mother encircles her child in the delirium of fever.

"Try and tell me, father!" she implored him. "Try and be calm, dearest! Tell me, and I will help you. What is lost?" He tried to struggle from her arms, tried to push her from him.

"You know!" he mumbled. "You've watched me—you know the truth! Everything is lost! I am ruined! The mortgage! Herondale will pass away! I am a poor man, a very poor man! Have pity on me, have pity on me!"

He slipped, by sheer weight, from her arms and fell into the chair. She sank on to her knees, her arms still round him, and stroked and caressed his withered hand that twitched and shook; and to her horror his stony eyes grew more vacant, his jaw dropped, and he sank still lower in the chair.

"Jessie! Jessie!" she called, and they rushed in. For a space they stood aghast and unhelpful from fright, then Jason tried to lift his master from the chair into which he had collapsed. The old man's eyes closed, he struggled for breath, and when he had gained it, he looked from one to the other with a smile, which added to Ida's grief and terror.

"It's all right!" he whispered, huskily, pantingly. "It's all right; they don't

know. They don't guess!" Then his manner changed to one of intense alarm and dismay. "Lost! Lost!" he gasped. "Ruined, ruined! Herondale has gone—gone—all is gone! My poor child—Ida!" "Father!" broke from Ida's white lips. "Father, I am here. Look at me, speak to me. I am here—everything is not lost. I am here, and all is well."

His lips twisted into a smile, a smile of cunning, almost of glee; then he groaned, and the cry rose again.

"I can't remember—all is lost! Ruined! My poor child! Have pity on my child!" As she clung to him, supporting him as she clung, she felt a shudder run through him, and he fell a lifeless heap on her shoulder.

The minutes—were they minutes or years?—passed, and were broken into fragments by a cry from Jessie.

"Miss Ida! Miss Ida! He's—the master's dead!"

Ida raised her father's head from her shoulder and looked into his face, and knew that the girl had spoken the truth. He was dead. She had lost both father and lover in one day.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Ida sat in the library on the morning of the funeral. A pelting rain beat upon the windows, over which the blinds had been drawn; the great silence which reigned in the chamber above, in which the dead master of Heron lay, brooded over the whole house, and seemed in no part of it more intense than in this great book-lined room, in which Godfrey Heron had spent so much of his life. Ida lay back in the great armchair in which he had died, her small brown hands lying limply in her lap, her eyes fixed absently upon the open book which lay on the table as he had left it. The pallor of her face, increased by her sorrow, was accentuated by the black dress, almost as plainly as the black dress, the red-eyed Jessie made as that which the red-eyed Jessie wore in her kitchen. Though nearly a week had elapsed since her father had died in her young arms, and notwithstanding her capacity for self-reliance, Ida had not yet recovered from the stupor of the shock.

She was scarcely thinking as she lay back in his chair and looked at the table over which he had bent for so many years; she scarcely realized that he had passed out of her life, and that she was alone in the world; and she was only vaguely conscious that her sorrow had, so to speak, a double edge; that she had lost not only her father, but the man to whom she had given her heart, the man who should have been standing beside her now, shielding her with his strong arms, comforting her with words of pity and love. The double blow had fallen so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that the pain of it had been dulled and blunted. The capacity of human nature for suffering is, after all, not unlimited. God says to physical pain and mental anguish, "Thus far and no farther;" and this limitation saved Ida from utter collapse.

Then, again, she was not free to indulge in idle grief, in the luxury of woe; the great house had still to be run, she had to bury her beloved dead, she had to bury her grief, and she did it, and went through it all, with outward calm, sustained by that Heron spirit which may be described as the religion of her class—noblesse oblige. Jessie had wept loudly through the house ever since the death, and could weep as loudly now; but if Ida shed any tears she wept in the silence and darkness of her own room, and no one knew her utter a moan. "To suffer in silence and be strong" was the badge of all her tribe, and she wore it with quiet stoicism.

Godfrey Heron's death had happened so suddenly that the news of it scarcely got beyond the radius of the estate before the following morning, and Stafford had gone to London in ignorance of this second blow with which Fate had followed up the one he had dealt Ida; and when the neighbors—the Vaynes, the Bannerdales, and the Avorys—came quickly and readily enough to offer their sympathy and help, they could do nothing. The girl, solitary and lonely in her grief as she had been solitary and lonely through her life, would see no one but the doctor and Mr. Wordley, and the people who had once been warm and intimate friends of the family left reluctantly and sadly, to talk over the melancholy circumstance, and to wonder what would become of the daughter of the eccentric man who had lived the life of a recluse.

Mr. Wordley would have liked to have persuaded her to see some of the women who had hastened to her to comfort her; but he knew that any attempt at persuasion would have been in vain, that he would not have been able to break down the barrier of reserve which the girl had instinctively erected between her suffering soul and the world. His heart ached for her, and he did all that a man could do to lighten the burden of her trouble; but there was very little that he could do beyond superintending the necessary arrangements for the funeral.

His first thought was of the relatives; but, somewhat to his own dismay, he found that the only one whom he could trace was a cousin, a more than middle-aged man who, though he bore the name of Heron, was quite unknown to Ida, and so far as Mr. Wordley was aware, had not

crossed the threshold of the Hall for many years. He was a certain John Heron, a retired barrister, who had gone in for religion, not in the form of either of the Established Churches, but of that of one of the least known sects, the members of which called themselves some kind of brothers, were supposed to be very strict observers of the Scriptural law, and were considered by those who did not belong to them both narrow-minded and uncharitable.

Mr. John Heron was a prominent member of this little sect, and was famous in its small circles for his extreme sanctity and his eloquence as a lay preacher. Mr. Wordley, with much misgiving, had invited this, the only relative he could find, to the funeral, and Ida was now awaiting this gentleman's arrival.

The stealthy footsteps which belonged to those who minister to the dead passed up and down the great house, Jason was setting out the simple "funeral baked meats" which are considered appropriate to the occasion, and Mr. Wordley paced up and down the hall with his hands behind his back, listening, and glancing through the window in expectation of the carriage which had been sent for Mr. John Heron. Presently he saw it rounding a bend of the drive, and went into the library to prepare Ida. She raised her head but not her eyes as he entered, and looked at him with that dull apathy which denotes the benumbed heart, the mind crushed under its heavy weight of sorrow.

"I came in to tell you, my dear, that Mr. John Heron is coming," he said. "The carriage is just turning the bend of the drive."

"I will come," she said, raising and supporting herself by the heavy carved arm of the great chair.

"No, no!" he said. "Sit down and wait here." He did not want her to hear the stealthy tread of the undertaker's men, and meet the coffin which they were going to bring downstairs and place in the hall. "I will bring him in here. Is there anything you would like me to say to him, my dear?" he asked, and spoke with a certain hesitancy; for as yet he had not spoken of her future, feeling that her grief was too recent, too sacred, to permit of the intrusion of material and worldly matters.

"To say to him?" she repeated, in a low, dull voice, as if she did not understand.

"Yes," he said. "I did not know whether you had formed any plan, whether," he hesitated again, "you had thought of going to pay a visit—to these relations of yours. He lives in the north of London, and has a wife and son and daughter, as you know."

Ida passed her hand across her brow, trying to remember.

"Ah, yes," she said at last. "I remember you told me about them. I never heard of them before—until now. Why should I go to them? Do they want me? Have they asked me?"

Mr. Wordley coughed discreetly. They certainly had not asked her, but he felt quite assured that an individual whose reputation for sanctity stood so high could not be so deficient in charity as to refuse a home to his orphan cousin. "They have not asked you any definite invitation yet, but they will be sure to want you to go and stay with them, for a time at any rate; and I think you ought to go."

"I do not think I should like it," said Ida, but indifferently, as if the question were of no moment. "I would rather stay here."

Mr. Wordley polished his glasses very intently.

"I am afraid you'd find it very lonely at the Hall, my dear," he said. "In fact, I don't think you could remain here by yourself," he added, evading the direct gaze of the great, sad eyes.

"I should feel lonely anywhere," she said. "More lonely with people I don't know, probably, than I should feel here, with Jessie and Jason—and the dogs. Well, well, we can't discuss the question now, and will endeavor to act for the best, my dear," said the old man, still intent upon his glasses. "I hear the carriage. I will bring Mr. John in."

He returned in a minute or two, accompanied by a tall and gaunt individual, who, in his black clothes and white necktie, looked a cross between a superior undertaker and a City man. His features were strongly marked, and the expression of his countenance was both severe and melancholy, and, judging by his expression and his voice, which was harsh and lachrymose, his particular form of religion did not appear to afford him much amusement or consolation.

"This is your cousin, Mr. John Heron," said poor Mr. Wordley, who was evidently suffering from the effects of his few minutes' conversation with that gentleman. Mr. John Heron surveyed the slight figure and white face with its sad, star-like eyes—surveyed it with a grim kind of severity, which was probably intended for sympathy, and extending a cold, damp hand, which resembled an extremely bony shoulder of mutton, said, in a rasping, melancholy voice:

"How do you do, Ida? I trust you are bearing your burden as becomes a Christian. We are born to sorrow. The train was three-quarters of an hour late."

"I am sorry," said Ida, in her low voice leaving him to judge whether she expressed regret for our birthright of misery or the lateness of the train. "Will you have some lunch—some wine?" she asked, a dull, vague wonder rising in her mind that this grim, middle-class man should be of kith and kin with her dead father.

"Thank you; no. I had an abominable biscuit at the station." He drew back from, and waved away, the tray of wine which Jason at this moment brought in. "I never touch wine, I, and all mine, are total abstainers. Those who fly to the wine-cup in moments of tribulation and grief rely on a broken reed which shall pierce their hand. I trust you do not drink, Cousin Ida?"

"No—yes; sometimes; not much," she replied, vaguely, and regarding him with

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a dull wonder; for she had never seen this kind of man before.

Mr. Wordley poured out a glass of wine, and, in silent indignation, handed it to her; and, unconscious of the heavy scowl with which Mr. John Heron regarded her, she put her lips to it.

"A glass of wine is not a bad thing at any time," said the old lawyer; "especially when one is weakened and prostrated by trouble. Try and drink a little more, my dear."

"It is a matter of opinion, of conviction, of principle," said Mr. John Heron, grimly as if he were in the pulpit. "We must be guided by the light of our conscience; we must not yield to the seductive influences of creature comfort. We are told that strong drink is raging."

"This was rather more than Mr. Wordley could stand, and, very red in the face, he invited Mr. John Heron to go up to the room which he had prepared for him. When that gentleman had stalked out, the old lawyer looked at Ida with a mixture of dismay and commiseration.

"Not a—er—particularly cheerful and genial person, my dear; but no doubt Mr. John Heron is extremely conscientious and—er—good-hearted."

"I daresay," assented Ida, apathetically. "It does not matter. It was very kind of him to come so far to—to the funeral," she added. "He might have stayed away; for I don't think my father knew him, and I never heard of him. Is it not time yet?" she asked, in a low voice.

As she spoke, Jessie came in and took her upstairs to her room to put on the thick black cloak, the bonnet with its long crape veil, in which Ida was to follow her father to the grave; for in spite of Mr. Wordley's remonstrances, she had remained firm in her resolve to go to the church-yard.

Presently the procession started.

The old clergyman who had christened her and every Sunday had cast glances of interest and affection at her, as she sat in the great "loose box" of a pew, found it very difficult to read the solemn service without breaking down, and his old, thin voice quavered as he spoke the words of hope and consolation which the storm of wind and rain caught up and swept across the narrow church-yard and down the dale of which the Herons had been so long masters.

Mr. John Heron stood grim and gaunt opposite Ida, as if he were a figure carved out of wood, and showed no sign of animation until the end of the service, when he looked round with a sudden eagerness, and opened his large square lips as if he were going to "improve the occasion" by an address; but Mr. Wordley, who suspected him of such intention, nipped it in the bud by saying:

"Will you give your arm to Miss Ida, Mr. Heron? I want to get her back to the Hall as soon as possible."

Ida was led to the carriage, passing through a lane of sympathizers amongst whom were representatives of all the great dale families; and all bent their heads with a respectful pity and sympathy as the young girl made her way down the narrow path. About half a dozen persons had been asked to go to the Hall for the funeral lunch, at which Mr. John Heron, as representative of the family, presided. It was a melancholy meal; for most of those present were thinking of the orphan girl in her room above. They spoke in lowered voices of the dead man and of the great family from which he had sprung, and recalled stories of the wealth and lavishness of past Herons; and when the meal was over, there suddenly fell a silence, and all eyes were turned upon Mr. Wordley; for the moment had arrived for the reading of the will.

Mr. Wordley rose, coughed, and wiped his eye-glasses, and looked round gravely. "As the legal adviser of my late client, Mr. Godfrey Heron, I have to inform you, gentlemen, that there is no will. My client died intestate."

The listeners exchanged glances, and looked grave and concerned.

"No will?" said Lord Bannerdale, anxiously; then his kindly face cleared. "But of course everything goes to his daughter; the estate is not entailed?"

Mr. Wordley inclined his head. "The estate is not entailed, as you say, Lord Bannerdale; and my client, Miss Ida Heron, inherits everything."

They drew a breath of relief, and nodded assentingly; and presently they made a general movement of departure. Lord Bannerdale lingered behind the others.

"I won't ask the poor child to see me, Mr. Wordley," he said. "Will you therefore be good enough to give her Lady Bannerdale's love, and to tell her that, as Lady Bannerdale has written to her, we shall be more than pleased if she will come to us at the Court. She is to consider it her home for just as long as she should please; and we shall feel it a

pleasure and an honor to have her amongst us as one of our own. Of course she cannot remain alone here, in this great place."

The old lawyer bowed. "I will give her your kind message, for which I thank you on her behalf, Lord Bannerdale. I do not know what she will do, or where she will go; at present she is not in a condition to discuss any plans for her future, though to-day she expressed a desire to remain at the Hall." He paused for a moment before he added: "I do not know whether she can do so."

"My cousin is young, and a mere child, and she must follow the advice of her elders and her guardian. The future of even the sparrow is in higher hands than ours, and we know not what a day may bring forth," said Mr. John Heron, grimly, and with an unlifting of his heavy brows.

"Quite so," said Lord Bannerdale, who had taken a great dislike for the sanctimonious speaker, and who could scarcely repress a shudder as he shook Mr. John Heron's cold and clammy hand.

When they had all gone, Mr. Wordley said:

"We had better go to the library and talk matters over. I will send for Miss Ida. It seems cruel to disturb her at such a moment, but there is no help for it."

"You speak as if you had had tidings, Mr. Wordley, to give us," said Mr. John Heron.

"I am afraid I have," responded the old lawyer, shaking his grey head sadly. (To be continued.)

## BISMARCK'S WAY.

Preferred Killing Prisoners to Taking Them Captive.

Reports that the Germans have been giving "No quarter" to any of the Belgian peasantry who opposed them are, it is to be hoped, exaggerated, but such methods commend themselves to Bismarck. "Prisoners! More prisoners!" he exclaimed at Versailles after one of Prince Frederick Charles' victories. "What the devil do we want with prisoners! Why don't they make a battue of them?" To Frances-tireurs he strongly objected to mercy being shown, and stormed because Garibaldi's "free company" of 13,000 volunteers were granted terms of surrender. "Thirteen thousand prisoners who are not even Frenchmen!" he cried. "Why on earth were they not shot?"

Bismarck may have objected to the taking of prisoners, but his prejudices obviously had no effect in the Franco-German War. According to Moltke, who wrote the official history of the campaign, the French prisoners reached the extraordinary total of 21,508 officers and 702,048 men. But of these nearly 250,000 were the Paris garrison, who were only nominally prisoners, and over 90,000 represented the French troops disarmed and interned in neutral Switzerland. Still, with these deductions, more than 380,000 officers and men were actually imprisoned in Germany, and were released only when peace was declared.

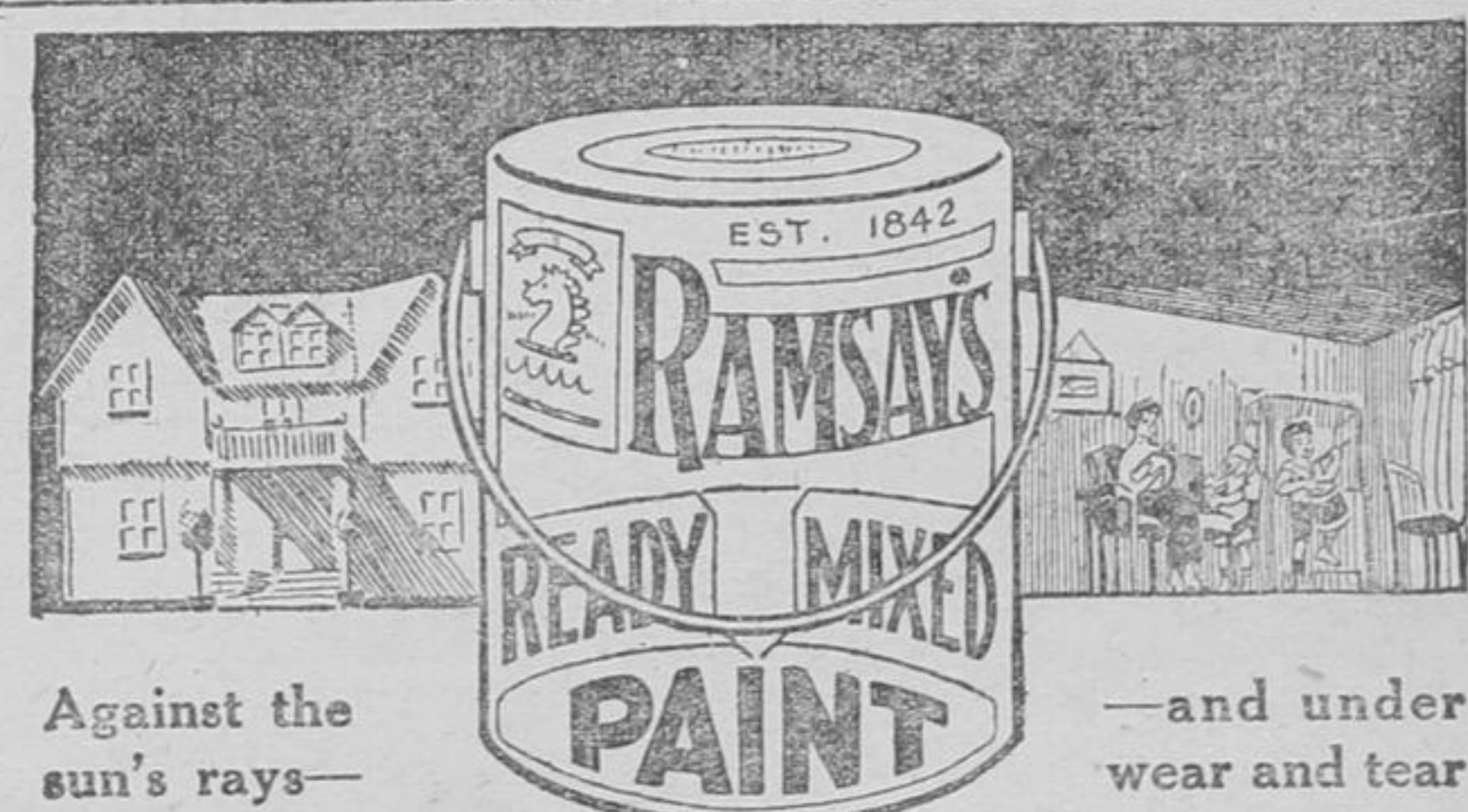
## Method In It.

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She—Because I wished to guard against marrying a man with no grit or perseverance.



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