

STRANGELY WEDDED.

A Thrilling Story of Romance and Adventure.

CHAPTER XXX.

A PLAIN QUESTION.

A sudden bold and unexpected question will many times surprise a man and lay him open.

It must be owned that although the old Jack had in a great measure come back again, there was still a great gulf fixed between Lord Rosstrevor and Ethel.

All the sweet friendliness of the old relations between them were gone, for a time at least. The weeks crept by and wore into months; Ethel's time as a tenant of Mrs. Ackroyd's came to an end and she moved her belongings to another flat on the same floor as Madame Wolenski's was on. These rooms were larger and brighter in every way and Ethel would have been perfectly happy in them if only that barrier of restraint which existed between Jack and her had been removed.

But they seemed to see far less of each other than they used to do in poor Cosmo's time—he never came to dinner now, never suggested going anywhere with her, and although he came in to see her nearly every day it was always about the same time in the afternoon and he never stayed a very long time. In fact, he was, as he believed, leading such a very circumspect life that not even Mrs. Grundy could venture to couple his name with that of the young widow whose husband had been so mysteriously murdered.

So the pleasant spring days wore on; London became gay and bright, the trees in the parks and squares put on their tenderest shades of green, the smart boxes in front of the smart houses began to be filled with all colours of the rainbow—with great moon-daisies, red geraniums, rich-hued begonias and gay calceolarias—and people came and went to all manner of entertainments, clad in the gayest of garments; indeed it was a brilliant season and Ethel began to feel like some humble mole stranded in the midst of a great garden-party.

She might have gone out a good deal herself at this time, for Madame Wolenski was in a very smart set, thanks to her good introductions, and would willingly have taken her everywhere. Apart from this, a lovely young widow of twenty-three, with an income absolutely her own of seven thousand a year, does not generally want for friendship and attention in the gay city where feelings are really not very deep—where you may see the frisky widow of fifty years, and of six weeks' widowhood, going modestly to the opera under the thin disguise of her duty to society and an unwillingness to intrude her private griefs upon the world at large.

But Ethel, who now that she was complete mistress of herself in every way had begun to deave on a very fair will of her own, had made up her mind to one thing, which was that she would not go out into Society during that season. She had promised to go abroad to Homburg or Swabach—in August with Madame Wolenski, and Rosstrevor had half promised to follow them. Indeed if the truth be told, he was already busily engaged in getting up such symptoms as would sternly necessitate a sojourn at a German *Bad* during the late part of the summer.

But meantime Ethel was still the other man's wife—and the other man, poor misguided man that he had been, stood between them far more than he had ever had any wish to do.

"He is so different," Ethel complained bitterly to Madame one day when that lady had been taxing her with her altered looks and low spirits. "He has never been the same since he became Lord Rosstrevor. I don't believe the difference is anything to do with poor Cosmo's death at all. He used to be fond of me, Helene—yes, indeed, he did—he told me so."

"A great many men tell married women that," remarked Madame drily—"it is a very safe way of amusing themselves."

"But Jack never wanted to amuse himself in that way," Ethel cried indignantly—"but listen—if you will keep it as a great secret, Helene, I will tell you all, and then you can advise me, for I have nobody—nobody to help me in any way but you."

"It shall be a perfect secret," said Madame solemnly.

"Well, I will tell you all. You know when Major Dennis exchanged to the 15th I was then a very unhappy woman. He did not ill-use me, at least not actually, although I have had my arms and wrists all bruised and black from his roughness."

"My little one—never!" Madame cried indignantly.

"Yes, it is true," Ethel replied. "And one day when Jack and I were out together, he noticed it—and he asked me to leave Cosmo and—you know the rest."

"And you would not?"

"No—I was fond of Jack, you know, and he wouldn't have suggested it if he had not thought that Cosmo had ill-used me. But really Cosmo scarcely knew what he was about—he—he—"

"Had been drinking, I suppose?" ended Madame. "Well; and Mr. Jack asked you to end it all by going away with him. And, of course, that was what any man who cared for you would do. And when you said No?"

"Well, I think Jack was rather glad," Ethel answered simply. "I'm sure of it—only Helene, although he told me more than once that he loved me with all his heart, he has never told me so since—since he might have done. I think about it all, and I think about it till I scarcely know what to believe. Sometimes I feel sure that he does care—and then again, I feel as if I have been mistaken and that he only pities me. Sometimes I fancy I have too much money, and if he were Jack Trevor still I would speak out boldly about it. But Jack is rich now, very rich, and my seven thousand a year are a mere nothing compared to his income. And then again I fancy that now there is a title to consider and he the last of the name, that he may not want to—to—marry a widow, who might have no heir. Oh! I think and I think till I am nearly out of my senses. And at the end of it all, I don't know what to think."

Madame Wolenski took the girl's small soft hand.

"It is very hard on you, my little one," she said, "but I would have patience yet. I don't think about the matter—I know Lord Rosstrevor loves you with all his heart."

"How do you know?"

"I have seen him watching you about the

room. I have seen him turn so eagerly to the door when we have met here and you have not yet come to us. I have seen a thousand signs good enough to tell me what he feels for you—and I say to you, little one, only have a little patience and all will be well by and by."

So Ethel, with what patience she could muster, set herself to the task of waiting. It was but weary work, and before many days had gone by, Madame Wolenski, who had kept her eyes open, made up her mind that she would take the matter into her own hands and put uncertainty to an end once for all.

Now Madame Wolenski, like all persons who have travelled much and lived in many countries, was a woman who did not hesitate long after she had once made up her mind; therefore she did not hesitate very long at this juncture. Having decided to act she very soon found a way of having a little private talk to Lord Rosstrevor—in fact, the very next time she met him at Mrs. Dennis's, she found an opportunity of saying to him, "I particularly want to have half an hour's quiet talk with you, Lord Rosstrevor."

"Certainly, Madame," he replied. "When shall I—?"

"I will go now—will you come into my room when you take leave of the little one?"

"Certainly I am at your service," he said courteously.

"Nay, it is not for my service exactly," she said smiling at him.

He smiled too, and then Ethel, who had been to fetch the majestic Crummles, came back again, and very soon Madame betook herself away.

"Yes, I must go, dear child," she said when Ethel began a feeble protest against her going so soon. "I am dining out and have something to do before then."

She kissed her and patted her cheek, gave her hand to Lord Rosstrevor and also a meaningful look as he held open the door. And presently, that is after half an hour or so, Jack also took his leave and instead of turning down the stairs—Ethel never went to the lift or the top of the stairs with him, as she used to do—he went on and rang at Madame Wolenski's bell.

He was shown into her boudoir, a pleasant little room with plenty of flowers and plants about it and with a tiny conservatory at one end.

"Come in here," she said holding out her hand to him. "We shall be less likely to be disturbed than in the other rooms. I find my friends have a way of coming unexpectedly and wishing to write a note to me."

Lord Rosstrevor followed her into the room and she closed the door behind them. "We shall be quite undisturbed here," she said. "And now, I daresay you are wondering why I asked you to come up here?"

"A little," he answered smiling.

"Ah! yes. Well—I am going to ask you a very plain question—perhaps what you will think a very impertinent question—but I am almost an old woman, Lord Rosstrevor, and I hope you will forgive me if I seem either impertinent or intrusive. But as you must know, I take a very great and deep interest in our dear little friend, Mrs. Dennis—and I want you to tell me in the strictest confidence, whether you have any strong feeling for her?"

"Certainly I have," he replied.

"Then let me tell you," said Madame looking straight at him. "that you are making her very unhappy, very unhappy indeed."

"I hope not—" he began, when the lady interrupted him.

"Lord Rosstrevor," she said laying her hand on his arm—"I beg you to answer me plainly—What is it that has come between you?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

A STRAIGHTFORWARD ANSWER.

Truth needs not many words. When Madame Wolenski put that very plain question to Lord Rosstrevor, he gave a start and looked at her as if to ask the meaning of her words. And Madame, who was a woman of quick perceptions, caught the meaning of the look and answered it at once.

"You would ask me what I mean?" she said. "Of course, that is very natural. Believe me in the first place I beg, when I say that I have no curiosity on the subject whatever. I am putting myself forward wholly and solely for my dear little friend's welfare. I have thought all ways that you were exceedingly fond of her, and I know that she likes you not a little. But something has come between you, something which keeps you from speaking out and asking her to become your wife; is it not so?"

"Yes," he said, "that is so."

"Then," she returned persuasively, "I want to know what it is, because it is possible that I might be able to help you over it."

"Well, I will tell you how I am situated. First, shall we not sit down? It is a pity to keep a lady standing so long. That is better. Well, Madame, to begin at the beginning and to tell you, as you wish, precisely all about it—Ethel and I have been married when she was married to Major Dennis."

"I have already gathered that," she said.

"But her mother kept us apart—mothers have sometimes a disagreeable way of interfering in their daughters' love-affairs and the marriages they make do not always turn out the best that could have been brought about. In this case—well, Major Dennis is dead, and I don't want to speak against a dead man, but for once I am bound to say that a more unmitigated brute never lived. In the first place he was more than twenty years older than Ethel, in the second he was a hard, blatant, drunken bully. He was never faithful to her—he thought nothing of raking his best friend out of his grave to serve as a blind to his poor little innocent child-wife. Why for weeks down at Chertsey, he was literally hunted down by some foreign woman who had a grudge against him—aye, and was hunted out of the Service too, for she got entrance into the house at last—their hut you know—and that frightened him so that he sent in his papers and came to London to lose himself."

"And that woman's name was—?"

"Valerie—Mademoiselle Valerie," he answered.

"Ethel has mentioned her to me," said Madame calmly.

"She told you about her?" he exclaimed.

"She told me nothing. She only asked me one day, before Major Dennis was killed, if I had ever met or heard of such a person."

"And you had not?"

"I told her I had never heard of Valerie as a surname," Madame replied. "Well, go on with your story please. I am deeply interested."

"Well," he continued, "I don't say that Dennis ever actually struck her or beat her—not when he was sober, that is—but he thought nothing of catching hold of her little delicate wrists with his brutal fingers and gripping them till they were black with bruises—I've seen them so myself, and though she tried hard to pass it off, declared he only had caught at her to steady himself and all the rest, I've been half-maddened more than once, Madame, and would have given half my fortune to take him outside and give him a jolly good thrashing. But you can't do that sort of thing in the Service; your oath prevents it, and besides, for her sake, I had to bottle up all I felt and force myself to be decently civil to the brute. She wouldn't leave him—not for his sake, of course, but because she had been brought up in that sphere of life in which that kind of slur becomes insupportable; and although I had asked her to go and would have gone at any moment that she chose, yet I did not press it. I didn't want the woman I loved to go wrong, do you see? Well, one fine morning, to everybody's horror, this man is found dead with a knife in his back, and his widow, still more than a child, comes into a large fortune absolutely at her own disposal. At the same time his death is apparently shrouded in mystery and as likely as not the mystery will never be solved. Now do you not see how I am placed?"

"No, I don't," replied Madame—"unless you think that the child killed him herself, and with the usual selfishness of a man, you have a lurking fear that she might have a knife for you also."

"No, I did not think of that," he said unguardedly.

"Then you did suspect her," echoed Madame quickly.

Lord Rosstrevor looked up—"It's no use trying to deceive you, Madame," he said, "that thought did occur to me. She was so strange and—and I am ashamed even to remember it of myself. Please don't talk about it any more. I shall never think of it again if I can help it."

"But what then," cried Madame, "is it that still stands between you?"

"For a moment he sat looking irresolutely into the fire. "Madame," he said, "while this murder remains undiscovered, everybody who had any connection with the dead man is liable to suspicion, and who, do you think, is so liable to the suspicion of being interested in his death as I? If I were to marry Ethel to-morrow and she ever got an idea into her head—and remember, it might suggest itself or be suggested to her at any moment—that I had killed him, I should be perfectly powerless to defend myself to her or to put the idea out of her mind."

"But you know where you were at that time?" she cried.

"Yes, I know where I was, but as a matter of fact I was not at Trevor Hall. I got so sick of the gloom and rancour and loneliness that I went into Norwich, dined, did a theatre and slept at a hotel—they might know me—they might not. I got back to Trevor Hall just in time to have got back from London—now do you understand? All that I wonder at is that they didn't haul me up at once and charge me with the murder."

"They did not do that because they had followed your movements down to Norfolk and back again with tolerable accuracy, and because you were well-known here and would certainly have been identified had you passed in or out."

"Pooh! Somebody must have got in or out without being seen—that is unless it was done by someone within the building," he answered.

"Yes, that is so. Then your great object is to find out who killed Major Dennis?"

"It is."

"And you don't mean to marry her until you do know?"

"That is just so. Madame, I can't marry her until this hideous possibility is done away with," he cried.

"Lord Rosstrevor," she said—"have you any idea in your own mind as to who did it?"

"Yes."

"Who was that person?"

He hesitated a moment—"Oh? I don't think I ought to mention a name when the matter is so serious as murder; it isn't fair—I may be utterly wrong."

"It will be perfectly safe with me," she said calmly. "I give you my word of honour that I will never divulge that name."

She held out her hand as an earnest of good faith and he took it for a moment in his own. "I think," he said rather unwillingly, "that the woman Valerie did it. You see, she had every reason to do him a harm, at least—by her general conduct, it would seem so. He had the most mortal and abject fear of her, and I feel pretty sure that she meant doing for him sooner or later, and that he knew it."

"Then why did you not set the police on her track?" Madame enquired.

"I would have done so. I wanted to do it, but Ethel would not hear of it! She was so convinced that the evidence against her was so overwhelming that she wouldn't have a chance of getting off. And as it couldn't have been possible for her to get in or out without being seen, it would not be fair to set the police after her. But she did it, Madame, all the same."

never fall to her own lot! Not without reverence did Mabel regard this little symbol of innocence and helplessness, though it had once belonged to one whom she had such cause to dislike and dread. For twenty years it had doubtless been a sacred treasure, the existence of which was known to his mother only; and less dear, perhaps, had it become, as further and further her son had wandered from guilelessness and love. Perhaps that was the explanation of those plaintive words, "My poor darling's hair."

With reverent fingers, Mabel replaced this shining treasure, and was about to unfold it as before, when she perceived for the first time that there was writing on the inside of the outer sheet also. There were only a few lines in dim and faded ink, tear-spotted too, as the inner paper was, but they could not have rapt her attention more had they appeared in letters of fire upon her chamber-wall.

A New Year Transformation.

An unmistakably gloomy day. The sky overcast with leaden clouds, gave little promise of future sunshine. The rain came down with a steady patter as it struck against the window pane. Glancing without, the woods wore all the dreary depression of a rainy day in winter. You realized then, if never before, the literal meaning of the words "Nature is weeping,"—not with the tender half regretful passion of an April shower, but rather weeping with a sullen mournfulness of wintry despair.

"What a discouraging prospect for the day before New Year! No hope of pleasant weather to-morrow!" and Briece turned from the window with a sigh which was mentally echoed by all present.

Surely this dripping sky and dark, dreary earth contained little assurance of a cloudless to-morrow. The gray shadow of early twilight settled over the landscape, but the storm increased rather than diminished. As evening drew apace, the wind moaned in a sad minor key as if wailing a funeral dirge over the departing year. Nature's requiem mingled with her copious tears, filled kindred hearts with sympathizing sorrow.

Oh mournful memory, you haunt other than Nature's universal heart as she sobs in anguish wail. Past joys, half forgotten dreams, awake in many hearts. The dying year has countless mourners to-night. Each listener to the moaning wind is filled with sorrow, as the year passes rapidly away to join the throng of passed years—hardly less dear in their flush of youth and beauty.

Still Nature wept in unavailing regret. The last sound heard before entering dreamland was the splash and patter of the rain. The sighing of the winter wind was the weird strain which sounded in our ears as we sank to sleep to await the drawing of a New Year.

The sound of the rain had ceased as the morning light flickered through the window drapery. Drawing aside the curtains a vision of entrancing loveliness met the eye. Nature was metamorphosed from the dreariness of dark despair to the brilliancy of joyous gladness. Each tear of the evening, was this glad morning transformed into a radiant, sparkling gem. The tiniest shrub was not forgotten in the distribution of this wealth of dazzling beauty. The slender branches of the willow trees swayed beneath their burden of jewels. The towering forms of the oak and the poplar trees, bore their treasures proudly; while the red berries of the mountain ash gleamed faintly through the ice crystals which covered, but did not hide, their cheery brightness.

O marvelous and beautiful magic which has clothed the naked limbs of the forest trees in a mantle of such radiant beauty! Each branch revealed a new and hitherto undiscovered delight, as the bright rays of the sun flashed into rainbow hues the delicate crystals. Heart and mind were filled with admiration closely allied to awe, as realizing and acknowledging the Power, which, clothing Nature with loveliness in the springtime of the year, clad with still more beauteous adorning, the landscape in the gloomy and desolate winter. Nothing was forgotten, from the tall forest trees grand in their majestic stateliness to the humble and despised weeds of the garden. No, that Master Hand had endowed each with its own share of Heaven-sent jewels.

Was not that New Year day prophetic? The sad music of the evening changed to faint notes of delightful harmony as the ice crystals under the smile of the sun relaxing their tenacious clasp, fell with a silvery tone unheard by all save Nature's lovers. To her true, friends many rare secrets are revealed, many delightful melodies sounded which to the indifferent observer are withheld. Her most hopeful and glorious promises, contain no encouragement for the unappreciative beholder who passes through life blind and deaf to the charms of Nature's varying moods.

Nature's charms are many to some hearts. Springtime the timid violet starts; summer with her wealth of splendor fair; autumn tinted when bright and rare are Nature's charms all fled,—when winter cold, flushes to rest the blooming, smiling world. No, Nature's charms are never lost, but grow alike in summer bloom and winter snow.

Failure of a Salvage Expedition.

From cable advices which have been received in Liverpool, it seems that the attempts which have been made to float the African mail steamer *Opobo* have been unsuccessful, and all efforts in that direction have been abandoned. The *Opobo* got stranded during a dense fog on the West African coast near Grand Bassam. The surf which breaks on that part of the coast is so terrific that salvage operations can only be conducted with the greatest difficulty. The powerful steam tug *Wrestler* was sent specially out from Liverpool to try and tow the steamer off, and was provided with steam pumps of great force. The cablegram shows that steam had been got up on board the *Opobo* herself, and that she had been moved with her stem out to sea—indeed, that her head had been got on the second roller or surf-wave when her bow was so strained by the force of the towing that it broke. The steamer's stern was still held fast in the sand, but as the bow was nearly pulled out of her, all further attempts had to be abandoned. Much sympathy is felt for the salvors, who, although they failed to get the steamer off, nevertheless had the satisfaction of recovering a quantity of the vessel's cargo.

British Enterprise in Brazil.

According to recent news from Brazil there are now sixty steamers plying on the Amazon, nearly all of them belonging to British capitalists, and we learn that this commercial fleet will be greatly enlarged before the end of another year through British enterprise. Many of these steamers are of heavy tonnage, and are more stanchly built than those that ply on the Mississippi. They carry on business with the towns along the banks of the Amazon, and some of them traverse its main affluents, the Rio Negro and Rio Madeira, while others go so far up toward its navigable headwaters that there is now a probability of its soon becoming a highway for Peruvians bound for Europe. A steamer trip across the continent from the vicinity of the Andes Mountains to any place at the embouchure of the Amazon, and a voyage from thence up the Atlantic through the West India Islands to the port of New York, might take up two months of time, but would certainly give the traveller a spectacular panorama that could not be found elsewhere on the globe.

It is announced that the man Government intends establishing factories for the manufacture of the Koch consumption lymph.

The Inquisition in India.

The interior of the edifice of the notorious Inquisition of Goa has been often described by the old travelers, to whose works in "Collection of Voyages" we must refer the reader. Sufficient it will be to mention that the building now razed to the ground covered a space of two acres, contained three large halls, and 200 prisoners' cells above and under the basement, and was girded by walls of immense thickness.

At once the palace and the prison of the Inquisition, it was the pride and terror of the people of Goa. Suddenly and silently would the black-robed myrmidons of the establishment appear in any house in the city, touch the accused upon the shoulder, and bid him follow them. No matter how popular the victim had been, not one hand would be raised in his defense as he was hurried through the busy streets within the remorseless doors of the "holy office."

At Goa a large majority of the Hindu population had embraced Christianity, but they would often revert to the practice in secret of occult rites. Such acts were regarded as sorcery and magic in those days, and if the native had been baptised he could rarely escape the stake as punishment for lapse into these practices.

To this day the few Hindus who dwell at Old Goa speak with bated breath as they point to the stony heap where stood the Inquisition. There, they tell you, stood *Oriem ghor*, the "Great House." Many *auto-da-fe* were held there in this last century. The last *auto-da-fe* which took place in Goa was in February, 1773; but the number of persons condemned, and those, if any, who were burned, does not seem to have been recorded. In the year 1800 the number of prisoners was forty-seven. By a royal decree from Portugal, dated May 21, 1814, the Holy Inquisition was forever abolished. The building was then shut up and abandoned to decay and ruin, which, indeed, for a long time previously had been actively going on. In 1820 a large portion was pulled down, and of the remainder the Abbe Cottineau, who visited Goa in 1827, says: "The whole is now fast decaying, no doors or window shutters existing. Shrubs, thorns, and rubbish block up the front entrance, and the interior must be filled with snakes and other reptiles."

Finally, in 1829, a complete wreck of the dread edifice was perpetrated by the authorities, who required materials for building operations at Panjim. The whole place was pulled down and left a hideous mound of debris—a sort of accursed heap in memory of the deeds of barbarity so long enacted within the hellish place. Fonseca, however, relates one stage further. In 1859, when the grand exposition of St. Francis Xavier's remains was being prepared for, the greater part of the stones, stucco, and rubbish was carted away. And lo! the men who were engaged on the heap discovered steps going below to a subterranean vault or dungeon, and beneath this cellar, under a heavy, boat-shaped piece of lead, was found a human skeleton.—*Murray's Magazine*.

The British Navy in Detail.

Great Britain's commanding lead will probably not only be maintained, but increased. Eighty thousand tons of wooden armored vessels must be crossed off the list of effective vessels of the French navy within two or three years. Their average value of about twenty-five per cent. giving about 20,000 standard tons, will reduce the amount given in the table to a standard (our standard battle ship) tonnage of 285,000 in 1893 or 1894. By that date England will have completed all of the ships at present laid down, and probably none that are considered in the table will have disappeared from her list of effectives.

Up to two years ago, when the present British building programme was decided upon, France seemed to be in a fair way to catch up with her rival. Sir Edward Reed, late chief constructor of the British navy, in an article in *Harper's Magazine* for January, 1886, said that under certain circumstances the issue of a naval war between England and France might be very doubtful. However true this may have been then, it is no longer so. The English naval strength is increasing at a hitherto unprecedented rate; that of France, very slowly.

The British Naval Defence act of 1889 authorized new construction to the amount of over \$100,000,000. In armored ships this includes one turret and seven barbette battle ships of 14,150 tons each. Their names are the Royal Sovereign, Royal Oak, Revenge, Repulse, Renown, Ramilies, Resolution and Hood (turret ship). Also two second class battle ships—the *Centurion* and the *Barfleur*—of about eleven thousand tons each. The magnitude of this addition to the British Navy may be appreciated when it is found that the power of these ten ships is over one hundred and seventy thousand standard tons, or greater than the entire Russian navy, or the combined power of the German and the United States navies, including our newly designed battle ships and thirteen new armor clads building in Germany. The general character of the eight great battle ships may be seen by an examination of their dimensions, &c. They are:—Length, 380 feet; beam, 75 feet; draught, 27½ feet; armor belt, 18 inches thick at the water line and 250 feet long; barbette and turrets, 18 inches thick; battery, four 13½-inch 67-ton guns, ten 6-inch rapid fire guns; maximum speed with forced draught, estimated at 17½ knots; steaming distance with 900 tons of coal, 7,000 knots at 10 knots per hour. All these vessels are now in process of construction and are to be completed by 1893.

About the Dairy.

A comfortable cow stable need not be costly, but a stable will be costly if not comfortable. A stack of straw will make more warmth for more cows if used as bedding in a warm barn instead of out of doors.

When you go to buy a cow note how the owner goes up to her and how she accepts the approach. If she receives a pat or stroke as though she were accustomed to it well and good, but if she looks afraid or surprised, look out for her to be some time in getting acquainted.

A good creamery man remarked the other day that he would give \$500 to have his patrons together for two hours, so he could talk to them. He knew it would be money in his pockets to do so, as it would be money in their pockets, and what puts money in their pockets is money in his. No creamery man, no farmer can afford to miss attending every dairymen's meeting that comes anywhere near him. In fact, he cannot afford to miss them, even if he has to go out of his way to attend them.