

MR. ESHOLT'S YOUNG WIFE.

BY T. W. SPEIGHT.

CHAPTER X.

Wilmot was just leaving Mr. Esholt's room with a number of letters and other documents in his hand, when a servant came to tell him that there was a gentleman at the door who desired particularly to speak with him. Wilmot went at once, thinking it was probably a messenger from Mr. Kimber; but the person he found waiting in the entrance hall was a total stranger to him. He was an under-sized, dark-complexioned, dapper-looking man, apparently about thirty years old. He had been bright-glancing eyes, an insinuating manner, and a soft sleeky voice. He wore a suit of mourning, new and very shiny, with two large jet studs showing prominently on the ample bosom of his shirt. Wilmot bit his lips as he went forward, as if to keep down some inward agitation.

"You are Mr. Wilmot Burrell, I presume," said the stranger, seeming to take him in at a glance from head to foot. "That is my name," answered Wilmot stiffly.

"As I have called on a private matter of some importance, I had better, perhaps, begin by introducing myself," went on the other, as he extracted a card from his case and presented it with a smile and a little bow. Wilmot took it, and read thereon a name he had never heard before: "Mr. Reginald Vampy."

"You say you have called to see me on a private matter," he said, his eyes wandering from the card to the stranger's face and then back again. He was evidently ill at ease about something.

"Precisely.—I see you are busy"—with a glance at the letters—"but five minutes will suffice for me to say all I have to say."

After a moment's hesitation, Wilmot said: "Come this way, Mr. Vampy;" and with that he led the way towards the study. Mr. Vampy followed with a remark or two as to the unsettled state of the weather, to which the other hardly responded. As soon as they were inside the room and the door shut, the little precautionary measure already described took place, after which the two men sat down at the table, facing each other.

To Agnes, hiding there in the dark against her will, the situation was one that filled her with dismay. There was no way out but through the study. Should she, or should she not, make her presence known? But how account for being there?—how explain why she did not come forward at the moment Wilmot drew back the portiers and announce herself? But even while she was asking herself these questions, the two men began to speak, and she recognised that the moment for retreat had gone by. With her consent or without it, she must perforce stay where she was till the interview should come to an end.

"As your time is valuable, and mine, perhaps, scarcely less so," began Mr. Vampy, "I will not waste it by beating about the bush. Brevity, as I take it, is not merely the soul of wit, but that of business as well. I have here in my possession"—and he produced a bulky pocket-book as he spoke—"a certain slip of paper bearing your signature on one side of it and that of Mr. Robert Esholt on the other. It is, in fact, a bill, drawn at two months' date, for the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds, and will fall due a fortnight from to-day. In all probability, you recognise the document in question?" Mr. Vampy held up a slip of paper between his thumb and finger as he spoke.

If Wilmot Burrell's face had been pale before, it was ashen now. His mouth worked with a strange nervous twitching. For a few moments all power of speech seemed taken from him. Mr. Vampy put back the slip into his pocket-book and quietly waited. At length Wilmot spoke. "The bill you hold was given on the distinct understanding that it should be accepted as deposit, and not be discounted or allowed to change hands in any way."

"That is a point respecting what I have no information," replied Mr. Vampy in his quiet precise way; "but in business circumstances sometimes after cases, and as a matter of fact the bill has come into my people's hands in the ordinary course of such transactions."

Again there was a brief silence. Wilmot seemed to be weighing every word in his mind before giving utterance to it. "Even granting such to be the case, Mr. Vampy—although, mind you, a gross breach of confidence must have been committed somewhere in order to make such a thing possible—the bill does not fall due for a fortnight, consequently—you will pardon my saying so—I fail in some degree to gather the purport of your call upon me this evening."

A peculiar smile wrinkled the curves of Mr. Vampy's mouth and peered out of the corners of his eyes. It was not a pleasant smile, and Wilmot's marrow seemed to turn to ice as he saw it.

"The reason of my visit, Mr. Burrell, is not far to seek. My people have had a previous acquaintance with the signature of Mr. Esholt, who, as you are doubtless aware, writes a very bold bluff sort of hand. Now, singular to say, our cashier—he is one of the most suspicious of mortals—is not altogether satisfied with the endorsement of the bill I showed you just now. He says that it differs in two or three small but very recognisable particulars from Mr. Esholt's usual signature, and that when that gentleman wrote it, if he wrote it at all, he must either have been ill or—shall we say—slightly 'mellow,' or in fact anything you please except in his ordinary business mood. Such being the state of the case, my firm have deputed me to wait upon you, or upon Mr. Esholt, or both of you with the view of satisfying that most suspicious of cashiers that the endorsement in question is really that of the person it purports to be. I hope I have made myself clearly understood?"

Of a surety he had done that, as Wilmot acknowledged to himself with an inward shiver. "Pray, Mr. Vampy," he contrived to say presently, "may I inquire the name of the firm you so ably represent?"

"That is a detail, Mr. Burrell, which at this stage of the affair I grieve to say I am not at liberty to enlighten you on. When I called at your Water Street office this afternoon," he continued, "and was informed that I should find you here, I was also told that Mr. Esholt was ill. Possibly, however, he is not too ill to see me for half a minute, so as to enable me to satisfy my people with regard to the little matter

which has brought me here. Perhaps, Mr. Burrell, you will kindly ascertain whether Mr. Esholt will favour me with an interview." As he spoke he took out his watch and glanced at it.

Wilmot felt as nearly all hunted animals are said to feel when brought to bay. He could not turn and rend his foe, much as he would have liked to do so, but he could at least set him at defiance and dare him to do his worst. Like many other men, he was only a coward up to a certain point; and now that the worst had to be faced, now that no door of retreat seemed left open to him, his nerves braced themselves like bands of steel. Leaning forward, with his elbows on the table, and looking his visitor straight in the eyes, he said in a cold hard voice that was not without a touch of defiance in it: "What should you say, Mr. Vampy, or whatever your name may be, if I were to tell you that the endorsement on that bill was not written by Mr. Robert Esholt?"

"I should say that you would be telling me nothing more than I had a very strong suspicion of already."

Wilmot sank back in his chair and stared at the other, as not knowing what to say next.

Mr. Vampy's irritating smile once more crept over his face. "I was pretty well assured before I entered this house," he went on, "that Mr. Esholt's pen had never written in his name on the back of the bill in my possession."

"In that case, sir, may I ask once more to what I am indebted for the honour of this interview? I presume your only object in coming here was to inform Mr. Esholt of your clever discovery; why, then, you should have sought this preliminary interview with me, I am at a loss to understand. Mr. Esholt is up-stairs, and although far from well, I have no doubt he will see you on a matter which so closely concerns the interests of both of you. Shall I ring for a servant, Mr. Vampy, to take up your card?" He half rose from his chair as he asked the last question.

"I admire your impetuosity, Mr. Burrell," answered the other in his sleek evenly modulated tones, "although, under the circumstances, it is perhaps scarcely judicious on your part to give way to it. Apparently it has not suggested itself to you that in coming here I might possibly be actuated by a motive very different from the one you have imputed to me."

A great throb of hope seemed to vibrate through every nerve in Wilmot's body; he half caught his breath for a moment; then he said in a faint voice: "Go on, sir, if you please."

"I presume, Mr. Burrell, that when the little document to which our conversation refers was first launched on an unappreciative world, there was some likelihood of its being duly honoured when it should fall due?"

"Every likelihood, Mr. Vampy—a likelihood which is as strong to-day as it was six weeks ago."

"I am glad to hear it—very glad, for your sake, Mr. Burrell. Supposing, in that case—I merely say supposing—our firm should see their way to allow the bill to come to maturity in their own hands and without negotiating it further, it may be accepted as a fact that it would be met in due course on its presentation on the twenty-fourth?"

"That may be accepted as an undoubted fact, Mr. Vampy," he replied, but with just a shade of hesitation, which did not escape the other's notice.

"That is to say, Mr. Burrell, so far as one may accept anything as a fact in a world in which promissory notes play such an important part." Mr. Vampy chuckled softly to himself, and then resumed more soberly: "So far, so good. Our firm, Mr. Burrell, while actuated by every desire to conduct their business on purely philanthropic principles, find themselves under the unfortunate necessity of doing as their neighbours do. You will scarcely, therefore, be surprised at my asking you what return you would be prepared to make in consideration of the service just hinted at by me?"

Wilmot moistened his parched lips with his tongue. Then he said: "Will you tell me what return it is in my power to make?"

"I will. The bill I hold is for the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds. You shall give me a supplementary document—merely your own note of hand—for a further sum of one hundred pounds, making in all three hundred and fifty, which amount you will be in a position to meet this day fortnight—eh?"

Wilmot Burrell set his teeth hard and clenched his hands. He was so utterly taken aback that he needed a few moments to recover himself. But the brain works nimbly in the great crisis of our lives. "If I am in a position to meet two hundred and fifty pounds on the twenty-fourth, I shall be in a position to meet another hundred," he said to himself. "Should I not be in a position to meet either, then one piece of paper will be just of as much or as little value as the other."

Mr. Vampy had picked up a book and was glancing over the title-page. Presently he said: "Well, Mr. Burrell, what say you? Do you accept our proposition?"

"I accept it."

"Good. On the supposition that you might do so, I brought with me a little form duly drawn up, to which I will presently get you to affix your signature. Before doing so, however, I must ask you to be good enough to enlighten me as to the means you propose to adopt, or the source from which you propose deriving the funds to enable you to meet your engagements on the day in question."

If Wilmot had been staggered before, he was doubly so now. He stared at the little man in black as if he only half comprehended his meaning. Mr. Vampy looked at his watch for the second time.

"Pardon me," said Wilmot at length, a little stiffly, "but you are seeking to inquire into private matters which concern myself alone."

"Pardon me, Mr. Burrell, but is not our interview of a private and confidential nature throughout? When you come to think the matter over you will recognise that I am asking of you nothing unreasonable. You have promised to meet a certain engagement by a certain

date; all I want to know is the method by which you propose arriving at the result in question. Without doubting your bona fides in the least, you will allow me to hint that there is nothing to hinder you between now and the twenty-fourth from starting for Paris, or New York, or Timbuctoo, in which case what, may I ask, would be the value of the little bill which my firm, wisely or unwisely, have taken upon themselves to discount?"

Wilmot abruptly pushed back his chair and began to pace the room like a man in a strait from which he sees no way of escape.

"Come, come, Mr. Burrell," said Mr. Vampy in a tone of mild banter; "there's not the slightest necessity for you to put yourself about. A little confidential information is all I ask for, which there can be no difficulty in your affording me. May I be allowed to hint that possibly there's a bit of horse-flesh at the bottom of your little difficulties—that perhaps you are looking forward—eh? to the Croton Autumn Meeting, this day week, to recoup your fortunes and set you on your legs again? Come, now, Mr. Burrell, confide in me—make a clean breast of it."

"You've hit the right nail on the head, Vampy!" exclaimed Wilmot in one of those sudden bursts of confidence to which desperate men sometimes give way. "I've laid sixteen to one on *Persephone* for the Croton Cup; and if she pulls it off, I shall be able to wipe the slate clean and have a clear thou. into the bargain."

"Bravo, Mr. Burrell, bravo! When a man takes to riding across country, he should ride boldly or not at all. I hope with all my heart *Persephone* will show the others a clean pair of heels—all the more because I happen to have a couple of fivers on her myself, so that you and I may be said to row in the same boat. Still, there are uncertainties in all things mundane, and exceeding horse-racing, and I am sure you are far too astute an individual not to have at least two strings to your bow in the little game you are now playing. Supposing for a moment *Persephone* does not come in first—what then?"

The momentary elation which had shown itself in Wilmot's eyes a minute or two before had now died out again; his face put on the same dull ashen hue it had worn earlier in the interview. He had resumed his seat, and was nervously tearing a sheet of paper into minute shreds. After a moment or two he said, but without raising his eyes from the table: "Even if that should happen which you say might happen—not that it will, mind you—I have other means left of meeting my engagements when they fall due."

"And those means are?"—queried Vampy's silky voice.

There was no reply. The sheet of paper was still being torn and retorn. "I am awaiting your answer, Mr. Burrell. Time is on the wing, as some poet has very justly remarked."

Wilmot drew in his breath and set his teeth hard for a moment; then he said, in slow sullen tones, still without looking up: "We have a big settling-day at the office on the twenty-fourth."

"I understand. The bill will be met by you out of the day's proceeds."

Wilmot nodded.

"And after that—But that is a matter which concerns yourself alone. So long as my people can rely on having their money, they have nothing to do with anything further. As it happens, I have some acquaintance with the interior working of Mr. Esholt's office; but I had no idea, Mr. Burrell, that you held a position in it sufficiently onerous and confidential to allow of your being able to—well, to meet a liability like the one we have been discussing, without running the risk of any immediate unpleasant consequences to yourself."

"The explanation is simple enough," answered Wilmot, still sullenly, for at no time was he one to stand being catechised without resenting it. "So long as Mr. Esholt is away ill, Mr. Kimber, the head-clerk and cashier, undertakes the general management of the business, while his own ordinary duties are divided between myself and another clerk."

"Nothing could be clearer so far," answered Mr. Vampy blandly. "But supposing—and we always have to suppose a great deal in these matters—supposing Mr. Esholt should be well enough to return to business earlier than the twenty-fourth, and Mr. Kimber were to resume his ordinary functions—what then?"

"No answer." "It seems to me, Mr. Burrell, that there is still a little screw loose somewhere—just a possibility, in fact, that your house of cards may come tumbling about your ears at the last moment." The best-laid schemes of mice and men—you know the rest. And in such a case, what would become of my poor little bill? Have you nothing further to suggest, Mr. Burrell?"

"Nothing." It was indeed a house of cards that he had built for himself; he recognised that fact now, in the pitiless light thrown on it by his visitor, as he had never had the courage to recognise it before.

"It seems to me," said Mr. Vampy, after a pause, during which he had been softly tapping on the table with the nails of his right hand, "that there is one way, and one only, by means of which my people will be able to make themselves absolutely sure of their money, and you at the same time have one more chance afforded you of pulling yourself together and of running straight for the future."

Wilmot looked up, and the eyes of the two men met. Wilmot's eyes asked the question his lips were powerless to ask.

As if in answer to it, Mr. Vampy leaned forward a little way and said in a low impressive tone: "Mr. Esholt must not be well enough to go back to business by the twenty-fourth."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Ingenious Australians.

A novel plan for extinguishing a church debt has been hit upon in Melbourne, Australia. The church committee—or vestry, as the case may be—divide the total debt among themselves, and each man insures his life for the amount that falls to his share. The policies are transferred to the church, and the annual payments on them are made out of the collections. Then, of course, as the members of committee "drop off," the sums insured on their lives drop in, and later, when the only survivor dies the last installment of the church debt is paid.

The forest area of the United States is estimated at 481,764,598 acres.

MONACO.

Monte Carlo to be Closed Forever the Great Gambling Place no More.

On the 16th of April, 1892, the great gambling establishment at Monaco will close its doors forever. On that day the agreement between the government of the principality and the world-famed hell of Monte Carlo expires, and there is not the remotest chance of its being renewed. It was the knowledge of the present ruler's determined attitude in the matter which has alone prevented the French government from availing itself of its position as suzerain power to take immediate steps toward the suppression of this plague-spot of Europe—steps which both President Grevy and President Carnot have repeatedly been urged to adopt, not only by popular sentiment, but also by nearly every one of the great monarchs of the Old World. Russia, Germany, Italy, and Great Britain have been particularly pressing in their applications to the Paris government to put a stop to the scandal; and it may safely be averred that Queen Victoria would never have condescended to pay such marked and gracious attention during her recent stay at Grasse to the Prince and Princess of Monaco had she not received satisfactory assurance concerning the approaching close of the gambling palace at Monte Carlo. On the occasion of her former stays in the south of France the strict and stern old lady had indignantly refused the bouquets and baskets of flowers sent to her by the late Prince Charles III., whereas this spring she not only received the reigning Prince and Princess at Grasse with all the honors due to sovereigns, but even went so far as to send, first, her ambassador, the Earl Lytton, and a day later her daughter, Princess Beatrice, with Prince Battenberg, to return the visit at Monte Carlo.

Prince Albert, whose marriage a couple of years ago with the enormously wealthy widow the Duchesse de Richelieu, a daughter of the New Orleans and Parisian banker Heine, has enabled him to dispense with the \$600,000 annually contributed toward the civil list of the sovereign of Monaco by the management of the Monte Carlo Casino, has already notified the latter that he has no intention of renewing the lease, and accordingly M. Blanc, and his two brothers-in-law, "Prince" Roland Bonaparte and Prince Constantine Radziwoil, who are the principal shareholders of the Casino company, have already perfected their arrangements for the transfer of their operations to Andorra, the little Pyrenean republic on the Franco-Spanish frontier line. Under their auspices a company entitled the Cercle des Etrangers d'Andorra (the Stangers' Club of Andorra) has been successfully floated at Paris, and no less than forty thousand \$100 shares have already been disposed of at a heavy premium. All the plans for the new buildings at Andorra have been perfected, and to those who are acquainted with the French Riviera it may be of interest to learn that the new theatre designed for Andorra is an exact reproduction of the theatre on the Jetty promenade at Nice.

It was not until after much hesitation that the syndicate owning the Monte Carlo Casino concession decided upon Andorra as the scene of their future operations. They had previously endeavored to secure an abiding-place for their roulette, their trente-et-quarante, and their rouge-et-noir tables in several other parts of Europe—including Valdez, the capital of the little principality of Liechtenstein; San Marino, the tiny republic in northern Italy; at Saxons-Bains; at Aix-les-Bains; and even at Belgrade and Sofia. Everywhere, however, their overtures were rejected, and after discussing the rival merits of Tangier and Andorra, they finally decided in favor of the latter.

Andorra has been an independent republic since the days of Charlemagne, who, in the year 778, confirmed the rights, privileges, and freedom of "the valleys and sovereignties of Andorra." The territory comprises about 169 square miles, and the population numbers about 6000. It is governed by a council of twenty-four members, elected for four years by four heads of families in each parish. The council elect a first and second syndic, or mayor, to preside and to wield the executive power. The costume of these two dignitaries is of a character to strike awe into the hearts of those who may eventually visit the little republic for the purpose of trying their luck at the gambling-tables. It is composed of silver-buckled shoes, blue stockings, red garters, gray knee-breeches, broad scarlet sash, black cloak, catalan cap, and a gigantic black cocked hat perched on top of the cap. They take their oath of office by laying their left hand on the sacred "Books of the Valley"—the *Digestum* and the *Pollax*—in which the history, the traditions, the laws, and the customs of the ancient republic are hopelessly jumbled together. The primitive character of the people may be estimated by the fact that the salary and allowances of the first syndic—the chief magistrate of the republic—amount to the magnificent sum of sixty pesetas, or about twelve dollars, per annum.

For a Girl's Summer Trunk.

If you wear a fluffy bang, you want your alcohol lamp.

If you wear laced shoes, you want a dozen pairs of shoe-strings.

If you varnish or polish your shoes, you want a new bottle of blacking.

If you are inclined to sunburn, you want a pot of strawberry cream or some cold cream.

If you are fond of reading, you want your favorite books.

If you ever use pins, you want a block of black ones and a paper of white ones.

If you are a good girl and mend your clothes, you want some spools of thread, your needles, your thimble and some buttons.

If you make yourself sweet with infant-powder and a puff, you want a sealed package of powder.

If you use bonnet pins to fasten on your hat, you want a dozen of them.

If you are inclined to be ill-tempered and petulant, you want unlimited patience.

If you are inclined to be careless and inconsiderate, you want a very large package of energy and friendliness.

And if you are lacking in politeness, then you want to remember that surely she who claims to be a Christian, must, before every thing else, be gentle in her manners.—*The Ladies Home Journal*.

London consumed in April, 1891, an average of 3,442,163 gallons of water a day more than it did in April, 1890.

TIT-BITS.

After the Circus.

"Is everything reversed in the looking-glass, papa?" asked Jimmieboy. "Yes—everything," said papa. "Then I'm glad I'm not a looking-glass boy," observed Jimmieboy. "I don't think I'd like to have an elephant ride around a circus ring on my shoulders."

He is More Comfortable Now.

"I am indeed grieved to hear that your poor husband has gone to a better world!" "Thank ye, sir; but, poor dear! it's just as well. This 'ere cold climate never suited his complaint."

A Feathered Alarmist.

"Mr. Carter, I'm 'most afraid we won't wake up at four in the mornin', so I've had Kitridge bring up our old rooster 't tie t' the leg o' yer bed. He ginerally begins t' crow 'bout that time in the mornin', an' a purty sure t' wake up folks wot hain't used t' hearin' 'im."

Where to Begin.

He (despondently). "My dear, we really must economize. Now what can we get along without?" She. "I really don't know, Frank, unless it's your appetite."

Made Some Difference.

"Yes," she murmured, "I loved him. He was not worthy of me, but I felt I could not give him up. So my parents took me across the ocean."

"Did that make any difference in your feelings?"

"Yes. The second day out I felt as if I could give up everything."

And she changed the subject.

A Delay in The Proceedings.

Mrs. Slimson (to little Willie Slimson, who has been taking in the ball game). "So that's where you have been, is it? You just wait till your father gets home, young man, and he will give you a good trouncing!" Willie (confidently). "He won't be home yet awhile. He staid for the last inning."

Royal Oculists.

"I see the Prince of Bavaria, being a skillful oculist, treats the poor among his subjects without charge. What a contrast to the conduct of the Prince of Wales!" "Yes; but you must admit that the English Prince is doing a good deal to open the eyes of his future subjects."

Her Weakness.

O woman, in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
Then none so cheaply pleased as thou!
We've only to submit to take
Hot rhubarb tea and anti-ache,
And gizzard oil and ipecac,
And porous plasters on the back,
A flaxseed poultice, catnip tea,
And Quackem's pet discovery,
Hot-water bags, and sweats beside,
And camphor nasally applied,
And castor oil and vaseline,
And coals with feathers burnt between,
And soothing syrup, paregoric,
Cold-water cloths, and drinks caloric,
And all the housewife's category—
'Tis then we see her in her glory,
Needing, to make her bliss complete,
But mustard plasters on our feet.

A Misfit Marriage License.

"I got a license here day before yesterday," said a man to a clerk in the Vital Statistics Office. "That document gave permission of the people of this sovereign State for the uniting in wedlock of Jeremiah Sassafras and Annabel McJunkin."

"Yes."

"I paid fifty cents for that license in good hard cash."

"Well, what of it?"

"Annabel McJunkin won't have me."

"That's bad. Went back on her promise, did she?"

"Not exactly, sir. You see she hadn't promised to marry me."

"Then why did you get a license?"

"It was this way. I loved her, and wanted to marry her; and I thought if I got a license, and took it to her, she'd see I meant business, and would come to time."

"And it didn't work?"

"No, sir. I showed her the big seal of the State, and told her that the eyes of the whole commonwealth, through the duly qualified officers, were upon her, and that her duty was to obey the mandate of the law."

"What did she say to that?"

"She only laughed."

"That's very sad."

"Sad's no name for it, sir; and I want to know what's to be done."

"I don't see any remedy."

"Is a weak girl with red hair to defy the authority of the State?"

"That's about the way of it."

"Can't you send an officer to impress upon her the dignity of the commonwealth, and to make her understand that the documents issued by this office are not to be rifled with?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose I can get my money back, can't I?"

"No."

"Here's the license just as it was when I took it away from here, not a bit the worse for wear."

"We can't take it back, sir, or refund the fee."

"And you can't compel the girl to marry me after issuing that license and charging me good money for it?"

"No."

"Then that settles it. The government of the present day is a hollow mockery. Henceforth I am an anarchist of the reddest redness. You hear me, insolent minion of a supine and powerless State! I go, but I return! The day of vengeance draws nigh, sir. Beware! You shall hear from me again, and when you hear me tremble!" And Jeremiah Sassafras was gone.—*Harper's Bazar*.

The president of the Bank of Manitoba, reports that institution in a flourishing condition.