The Wedding Eve;

Or, Married to a Fairy.

CHAPTER I.

When I was ill—very ill, both in mind and body—not many months ago, my kind nurse procured for me a large assortment of the latest and most popular novels.

The authors were chiefly ladies, and one and all were occupied in showing how delicate, and how little understood a thing is the heart of a woman, and how little unworthy a being is man to be intrusted with the care of it; how coarse and gross are his tastes, how unstable and wavering in the passion he dignifies by the name of love.

The books containing these principles have had a great sale, and have run through many editions, and after reading them I was moved, perhaps in a spirit of protest, to chronicle faithfully my own experiences as a lover, admitting, first, candidly that I may not be accepted as an ordinary type of man, on account of my unusual capability—a very unfashionable one in this end of the century—for making an utter fool of myself where my affections are concerned.

I have never written before, and have nothing but the memory of my experience to guide me—an experience burned so deeply into my mind that I shall have great difficulty in speaking of it without bitterness. What I want to show is this: That men, as well as women, occasionally have hearts, and are none the happier or the better treated for it. It is the old story, I suppose—in dealing with the other sex, one must be the executioner, or the victim. All I maintain is, that the world-old strife is not always one-sided in result; the race is not always to the swift, or the battle to the strong.

The romance of my life, such as it was, began just six years ago. Its starting-point was the accidental meeting in the park with a foolish youth, a fellow club-man, who frittered his life away at afternoon tea-tables, and thought himself popular because he was laughed at by half the well-dressed men and women in London.

For the life of me, I never could remember the fellow's name, but we all called him "Collars," on account of the tremendously high ones he wore, and as "Collars" I shall speak of him now.

"I congratulate you, Hervey," Collars began. "You are in luck. Heard about your picture being bought by the something or other bequest for the nation. Let me see, what will the nation do with it? Put it in a museum, don't they? Or is it in the academy cellars? Never mind; it's a great honor, of course. I wish I had gone in for painting. But you look fagged. Want a change, eh? I've discovered the jolliest little place you ever saw. No railway, five miles from anywhere, and a mile from the sea. Stuck on a cliff—you can live like a fighting-cock at a shilling a day, and never see a soul. No visitors—no room for any—any you can't see the French coast. I do so love to get away from the French coast on a clear day. Run down in an hour and a half, and you can paint ripping big landscapes all day without any natives to bother you. There aren't any natives—besides, they're too stupid. So you're an A.R.A. now! Fellow told me the other day it meant 'Another Ruined Artist,' as you painting chaps never do any good when you begin to stick letters after your name. Never mind; they can't take it away, and you're sure to be an R.A., if you live long enough. Then you can sell any stuff. Not that you want the money. Lucky dog! Rolling in wealth, and engaged to an heiress. When's it coming off?"

Collars had run himself out, and he stopped to take breath, not to wait for an answer. I handed him my pocketbook and pencil.

"Write down the address of that place you spoke of," I said. And Collars, taken by surprise before he was wound up again, wrote it down:

"The Rose and Crown Hotel, Lythinge, Kent."

"It's an inn, not a hotel, really, you know," he explained; "but they think 'hotel' is finer because it has five letters in it and inn has only three. Jolly old sanded floor, you know. I sit there and drink beer and ask the farmers about the crops. That sort of thing rests a man at the end of the season."

I burst out laughing, and he laughed also, without knowing why. The picture conjured up before my mind's eye of Collars, immaculately dressed, imperturbably hobnobbing with the sons of agriculture, and asking them, in his loud, slipshod English, irrelevant questions about the crops, struck me as being irresistibly humorous. Still, "out of the mouths of babes" words of wisdom have been known to come, and I mentally resolved to run down to Lythinge within the next twenty-four hours.

The fact was, I was tired, and wanted to think. The London season was in full swing, and, being well off and successful, I had so many friends and acquaintances that I sometimes sighed for my own society. Above all, I longed for the sea.

I was born at sea, on a voyage to India, whither my mother and father were travelling to join my father's regiment. My mother's people had been in the navy for generations—an ancestor fell by Nelson's side—and a living great-uncle of mine was a distinguished admiral. I had the sea in my blood, and, as they would not make a sailor of me, I became a painter of the sea and ships. I believe I succeeded because I loved it. I had a bit of a yacht, and kept a deaf old salt and his grandson always within call about the coast, and I got more pleasure out of that boat than the smartest reception or ball could give me.

After getting rid of Collars, I made my way along the Row, nodding to acquaintances, while I looked out for old Lady Carchester's carriage. Everybody called Madge's mother "Old Lady Carchester," although she could not really have been more than five-and-fifty; but she was so small, and wizened, and painted, and had something so witchlike and uncanny about her that she might have been a hundred. She was the daughter and sole heiress of "Jackson's candles," or, to put it another way, Madge's maternal grandfather had been a tallow millionaire from the north of England, and his money had helped to build the parliamentary fame and secure a peerage for the son of that eminent lawyer, John Lorimer, created Baron Lorimer, whose son, Madge's father, had been buried in a brand-new family vault nine years ago, under the style and title of first Earl of Sandling.

A year later his disconsolate countess descended in rank a step or two to become the wife of my uncle, Baron Carchester, and Madge and I first became acquainted.

My uncle Carchester was the head of our house. I was his favorite nephew, and after my parents' death his home was mine. I know it has grieved him always that I, the son of his best-loved brother, am not heir to the title and what is left of the family estates. My Uncle Greville's two boys, who come before me, are not strong physically or mentally, but there they are. They are welcome to the title, although Madge, for one, who thinks a lot of titles, grudges it to them.

But Madge must speak for herself, and in order to tell my tale properly, I must try and make you understand her, and see her as I did on this particular afternoon, bending forward in her carriage and showing her fine white teeth in a delightful laugh as she listened to what Charlie Brookton—who is considered one of the most amusing men about town, but whom I personally dislike intensely—was relating to her across the railings of the Row.

Madge saw me before she chose to notice me; at least, I divined that from the extra interest she began to take in Brookton's conversation. She knew I did not like the man, and she always took a malicious pleasure in being specially gracious to men I did not like. Even now, when I look back, I cannot pretend to understand Madge's motives. That she had a motive for almost everything she did I have very little doubt, except on occasions when her feelings carried her away. But she did not allow that to happen very often.

She was four-and-twenty, and considered one of the most fascinating women in London—an odd series of contradictions, daring in speech, but irreproachable in conduct, a coquette to her finger-tips, and yet at times bluntly sincere; far too cynical in her views, and yet believing with the most whole-souled loyalty in those to whom her trust was given. I cannot lay claim to understanding Madge, and it would take reams of paper to record my varied impressions of her changing, complex nature.

As to her appearance, she was considered a great beauty, but I suppose that had she been plain Miss Lorimer, without any money, she would have been esteemed merely a pretty, interesting-looking girl. Her skin was very clear and fair, but she powdered so thickly that everybody said she rouged, also, which was a calumny. She had an abundance of pretty brown hair, but she patronized some detestable French hair-dresser, who frizzed and fluffed, and gilded and bronzed it until I was never sure of the color it would be from one season to another; a straight, finely modeled nose, with something almost disdainful and insolent about the curve at the tip of it; dark eyebrows, with that crook in the middle which physiognomists tell us means wit; rather a large mouth, well shaped, but a little hard when closed; a prettily curved chin and throat, and dainty little ears. Such were Madge's claims to beauty, added to a shapely figure not tall enough for grace, and a nice, soft hand, unusually strong for a girl. Her voice was altogether charming; it put you at your ease, or it chilled your blood by its freezing qualities, at its owner's will, and there was a touch of the chill on when she greeted me after I had shaken hands with Aunt Louise, the mummified-looking little old lady who sat by Madge's side, and in whose sharp, hawklike features there lurked little, if any, trace of her daughter's comeliness.

Charlie Brookton left the carriage almost as soon as I arrived. Men had a way of making room for me near Madge's side. Not only were we cousins, or rather step-cousins, for there was no real relationship between us, but it was one of those clearly understood and settled family arrangements that we were to make a match of it some day. My uncle and Lady Carchester certainly wished it, as did the rest of the family, but when Madge came of age, three years before, she had resolutely refused to let the marriage take place until she had what she called "a few years' liberty" to sow some decorous and highly cultivated oats on her own account.

To this suggestion, of course, I agreed. I loved my art, and wanted to make some name for myself, and it was not as though Madge cared for me. In my work she took a very real interest, and often helped me greatly by her suggestions. Neither she nor I saw that anything was to be gained by tying ourselves up at twenty-one and twenty-three. It was not as though we could not see each other every day. My studio was close to my uncle's place, and Madge and I could be together whenever we pleased. Sometimes it seemed to me that she had about her capabilities for a really ardent attachment, should the right man come in her way, and I confess I now and then secretly hoped he would do so. I was very fond of Madge, but her biting, sarcastic remarks often hurt me, and her views of life, and especially of woman's proper share in it, were disquieting in the extreme. Then, too, she flirted so much that, watching her, I often rejoiced that I was not in love with her, as so many other men were. It was not that she was unkind or cruel. She was, on the contrary, too kind, and she encouraged all her admirers to make fools of themselves, so that she was always surrounded by a little court of half-accepted, half-rejected worshippers, who waited about, as she herself expressed it, in case I should "drop out of the running."

That was her way of putting it, and, of course, it was absurd. Yet I often felt I stood in the way of a brilliant match for her, and sometimes I used to tease her about it.

"You won't marry me," I used to say, "yet you let me keep other fellows off. Is that reasonable?"

But she had turned on me with sudden temper.

"I act like this to please myself," she said. "Suppose I like to be a girl-bachelor, or, in other words, an old maid? I presume I may please myself? It is not as if you were in love and wanted to marry some one else."

"I! Good heavens, no!"

"You are not in love, are you, Adrian?" she had suddenly asked me very earnestly, laying her finger-tips on my shoulders and gazing up into my face.

"Not a little bit," I had answered, with perfect truth, and she had pushed me from her a little impatiently, and changed the subject by bursting into extravagant praises of the beauties and graces of her last favorite actor.

This had happened on the occasion of our last meeting, two days before. To-day she greeted me, as I said with a little offended air.

"Why didn't you come to lunch yesterday?" she asked sharply. "The president came, and we expected you. It would do you good to meet him like that, and Denvil, the new art critic on the Daily Post, was there, too. It was very stupid of you not to come. What were you doing?"

"I was sketching, and I couldn't leave my work."

"Poor, dear thing! Toiling for your daily bread or perhaps for a little scrap of butter to put on it, eh? And, by the way, talking of poverty stricken artists such as you—have you heard of Nicholas Wray lately?"

"No. Have you?"

"Yes."

Her expression changed suddenly, and her dark eyes grew pitiful and moist.

"Adrian," she said, in a very low voice, "you must find him out at once and help him. He has been ill, and he is nearly starving!"

"Who told you so?"

"Denvil said something which made me suspect it. So I wrote Nicholas Wray a note asking him to lunch with us, as I wanted to talk to him about making an outline sketch of my father from his portraits. I sent it by hand, and got a verbal answer, thanking me, but saying he could not undertake any work at present. I'm sure there's something very wrong with him."

But here the thin, high voice of Madge's mother chimed in:

"If Nicholas Wray is ill, he has drunk himself into it. I have no patience with dirty, drunken, money-borrowing Bohemians. It's the fashion to call his daubs clever, but I've seen better work done with a bit of chalk on the pavement."

Lady Carchester seldom spoke, but when she did air her views they were usually old-fashioned and emphatic. Nicholas Wray had been a fellow student of mine in Paris studios. His work was chiefly black and white, dashing, brilliant caricatures and "impressions," and as such could not commend itself to Madge's mother, who in art rated "finish" above all other qualities. Madge, on her part, believed that Wray had a future, and Madge was generally right. She made a funny little mone at me, unseen to Lady Carchester, but she was wise enough to drop the subject of Nicholas Wray, who by the way, cherished so profound an admiration for her that now and then I wondered whether he had succeeded in making some slight impression upon her apparently unassailable heart.

"You'll dine with us, of course?" she said. "Otherwise, we may be late; and I don't want to miss that duet in the first act. Oh! And I want you to go with me to Hurlingham to-morrow, and——"

"To-morrow," I said, "I am going out of town."

She raised her eyebrows.

"Out of town! Why?"

"Because I am sick of it."

Madge flushed angrily.

"Complimentary to us, isn't it, mama? I am sure we have done our best——"

"Don't be silly, Madge. You know how I hate a London season. And haven't I been good, doing everything and going everywhere? Now I want to be out of it for a few hours——"

"Where are you going? Mama, there's Lady Wrexford bowing to you. What a frightful hat! And her complexion isn't made up to tone with it one bit. You great artiste, Adrian, R.A.'s, and A.R.A.'s, and all that, ought to take advantage of your social position to go about giving hints to people how to paint properly—their faces, I mean. There's Miss St. Albyn just gone by, with a cream-colored complexion, clearly meant for black, under a corn-flower-blue hat. And Lady Marchmont is made up cerise with a vieux rose costume. A few elementary lessons in the art of making-up would come as a boon and a blessing to so many women, and prevent us, who know apple-green from purple, from having our eyes set on edge. Well, Adrian, what was it you were saying about going away? And whither are you bound?"

"Out of the pale of civilization for a day or two. I want to forget the Row, and the opera, and Hurlingham, and Lady Marchmont's make-up, and——"

"And me?"

"Not you, of course, but myself, my stiffly collared frock-coated self."

"And play at being an artist?"

I bowed and laughed, but I did not like it. Madge knew how to make her speeches sting.

"Exactly," I said; "and play at being an artist. But my destination is a state secret."

"Never mind," she returned, smiling radiantly into my face, as though conscious that her last thrust had been too sharply barbed. "I dare say we shall see the result of your visit on the line at Burlington House next spring."

"Among other respectable and popular mediocrities."

"Now you are being bitter at your own expense. Your work is far above mediocrity."

"But I don't starve in a garret, which, in your opinion, is the one and only incentive to talent. Good-by until this evening."

"Good-by, and don't be late for dinner."

Then she leaned for an instant toward me, and whispered very lightly, for Lady Carchester was rather deaf:

"Don't forget Nicholas Wray."

I did not forget him. I bent my steps at once in the direction of his studio; and as I walked I thought about my Cousin Madge.

Clearly I was bound to her, and I liked no other woman so well. For eight years we had seen each other almost daily, and, although I did not for a moment flatter myself that she loved me, she was fond of me in her way, and had not the least objection to marry me—at some time.

(To be continued.)

COLONEL. GOETHALS.

How He Rose to the Top in the Engineering Profession.

The soldier and administrative military man have been bred for three generations in George Washington Goethals, the successful engineer who has just about completed his big job of digging the Panama Canal. He is claimed now by many cities and States, but he is a Brooklyn boy, and although his ancestry is Swiss, and of the military Swiss at that, his grandfather was a surgeon in the French army and was with Napoleon at Austerlitz. His own father, John Goethals, was born in Switzerland and moved to Amsterdam in his early boyhood. In 1848 he came to this country, making his home in Brooklyn, where, in 1858, the present Colonel Goethals was born.

Colonel Goethals.

The origin of the family name is interesting. In good Dutch it is the equivalent of the English "stiff necked," and was conferred on the first of the present line, who was one of the Crusaders, by an early King of Flanders. This man was fighting side by side with his king when a foe struck him a mighty blow. The sword was turned aside by the armor and the man kept on fighting. A second blow was struck, but still the man kept on fighting before the eyes of his king, until the battle was won. After the conflict the king called the warrior to his side and commended him for his prowess.

"Sire," said the soldier, "I break before I bend."

"Henceforth," said the king, "thy name is Goethals, the stiff necked." The name has "stuck," and for centuries the family motto was "We break before we bend."

George Goethals started school at the age of six at old Public School No. 15, State and Powers Street (now Third Avenue), Brooklyn. That was in 1864. He played with the older boys around in the lots which are now in the centre of a great city. Nor was he a "star" pupil. The tales told by his teachers and associates hint that he often was among those detained after the regular hours. It was there, however, that the soldier blood of his ancestors first showed itself, for in the closing years of the civil war great bodies of soldiers were often encamped in the vacant lots surrounding the old schoolhouse, and he recognized the call of destiny in his earliest years.

It was in 1875 that the boy first became fired with an ambition to go to the military academy. At the academy he soon won a reputation as a "digger," because he was at his studies early and late. The effectiveness of this was shown when, in 1880, he was graduated so high up in his class that he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Engineer Corps, which is open only to those students graduated with the highest markings.

In 1891 he was promoted to the grade of captain and placed in charge of the improvement of the Tennessee River, for the next four years. He was the chief engineer of the First Army Corps in the Spanish war of 1898 and became a major in the Corps of Engineers in 1900. In 1907 he became a lieutenant-colonel, and in the same year was appointed chairman and chief engineer of the Isthmian Canal Commission. He received his commission as a colonel in 1909.

Colonel Goethals married Miss Rodman, of New Bedford, Mass., in 1884. They have two sons, one of whom recently was graduated near the head of his class at West Point and now is serving in the canal zone, under his father, as a second lieutenant of engineers.

Now that his big job is nearly over he is being sought after by many cities and corporations. He has been offered the position of New York's Chief of Police, but is not likely to take it. He will either remain as Governor of the Canal Zone or go north to build the Alaska railway in all probability.

TRIALS OF A CLERGYMAN.

Some Laughable Incidents are Here Recorded.

Do not be a parson unless you are blessed with a strong sense of humor and a thick hide, advises an English clergyman in Pearson's Weekly. A parson's duty is to visit his flock. If he does not, great is the grumbling. If he does, he is snubbed. The snubs mix nicely with the welcomes, to prevent you from being puffed up. The following is one of the neatest of them:

I was asked by a friend who had been offered a living near me to go and see the vicarage and church and report. I did so, and the clerk showed me round. As we neared the end, he turned to me, and said:

"Be you our new parson, sir, if I may make so bold?" I assured him that I was not. "I be main glad to hear that, sir," he said, with relief. "We've always had good uns so far!"

In a scattered parish, I called upon an old couple about tea time. "Would you like a cup of tea?" the housewife asked. I confessed that I should like it very much. The dear old soul prepared one, and kept apologizing because she had no jam or cake. I assured her that it did not matter in the least. "Well, sir," she said, brightening, "after all, 'tisn't as if you was one of them that feed high. Anyone can see that!"

One more. A friend of mine had got a job for a man who had been for a long time out of work. I guessed he was getting pretty shabby, so I looked up a suit,—we were much of a size,—and took it round. The man's wife took it, and I waited in the room, ready to be overwhelmed with thanks. She came back, and said:

"My 'usband thanks you kindly, sir, but he don't hold with parson's clothes; but if you've got anything as 'd suit a man, he'll have a look at it!"

You know very well that the excuses you offer others wouldn't satisfy you.

The cynic is one who never sees a good quality in a man, and never fails to see a bad one.—Ward Beecher.

Sir Robert Ball, the late British Astronomer Royal, used to tell with relish an amusing story against himself. Visiting Stratford-on-Avon to give a lecture, he said to his landlady at dinner: "I will give you a lesson in astronomy, madam. Have you ever heard of the great Platonic year, when everything must return to its first condition? In 26,000 years we shall be here again, eating a dinner precisely like this. Will you give me credit till then?" "Yes," was the prompt reply. "You were here 26,000 years ago and left without paying. Settle the old bill and I'll trust you with the new!"

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