

A Foolish Young Man;

Or, the Belle of the Season.

CHAPTER XXIV.—(Continued).

"What splendid condition that horse is in, Pottinger," she said. "His coat is like satin. I suppose you were in the army?"

Of course Pottinger was flattered and answered in the negative very reluctantly. "Not but what Mr. Stafford, miss, isn't as particular as any army gent could be. I should be sorry to turn out a badly groomed 'oss for Mr. Stafford's eyes to goggle on, miss. He's a kind-hearted a master as a man could desire to have, but that's about the one thing Mr. Stafford wouldn't stand, miss."

"I suppose not," she said. "Are you going to ride into Bryndermere this morning, Pottinger? If so, I should be glad if you would take these notes to the linen draper's and the chemist's, and bring me back the things I have written for."

"Certainly, miss," said Pottinger; then he remembered Stafford's order, and looked anything but certain. "Would it do late in the morning, miss? I have to go somewhere first."

"Oh, yes," she replied. "Where shall I put the letters—in this wallet?" Pottinger answered in the affirmative and thanked her, and she unfastened the wallet, talking to him as she did so. "Is that a swelling on that near fore leg, Pottinger?" she said, suddenly, pointing to Adonis.

Pottinger started and regarded her with a look of horror, and, of course, instantly knelt down to examine the suspected member. Long before he had come up again with a breath of relief and a smiling "No, miss, there is nothing the matter with it," she had looked into the wallet and seen Stafford's letter.

"Oh, I thought there was," she said. "Have you finished your horse?"

"No, miss," he replied. "I have the master's hunter and the mare you ride to do yet."

She nodded and went out of the stable, humming one of her songs, but she did not go very far. In five minutes she was back again.

"Oh, Pottinger, don't trouble about those letters. I will ride into Bryndermere myself."

Pottinger was in the mare's stall, and Maude stopped him as he was coming forward, by saying:

"Don't trouble; I'll take the letters from the wallet."

With Stafford's letter amongst her own in her pocket, she went quickly, and yet without apparent hurry, to her own room, sent away her maid on an errand, and slipped the bolt in the door. Rapidly she lit her silver spirit-lamp and heated the water almost to boiling-point, and held the envelope of Stafford's letter over the flame until the gum was melted and the flap came open. Then she took out the letter, and, throwing herself back in an easy chair, read it slowly.

At first, as she read, her face burned, then it grew pale, and still paler; every word of the bitter farewell, of the renunciation, written as if with a man's heart's blood, stabbed her and tortured her with the pangs of jealousy. Once she started to her feet, her hands clenched, a super-thrown back, her eyes flashing; a super-figure—she was minded to take the letter and fling it in Stafford's face, and with it fling back the pledge which he had given her the night before; then she collapsed, as it were, and sank into a chair, dropping the letter and covering her face with her hands. "She could not. The strength of her love made her weak as water where that love was concerned. Though her pride called upon her to surrender Stafford, she could not respond to it."

Swearing to and fro, with her eyes covered as if to hide her shame, she tried to tell herself that Stafford's was only a transient fancy for this girl, that it was a mere flirtation, a vulgar liaison that she would teach him to forget.

"He shall, he shall!" she cried behind her hands, as if the words were wrung from her in her anguish of wounded pride and rejected love. "I will teach him. There is no art that woman ever used that I will not use—they say I am beautiful; if I am, my beauty shall minister to him as no woman's beauty has ever ministered before. Cold to all the rest of the world, I will be to him a fire which shall warm his life and make it a heaven."

It is only because he saw her first; if he had seen me—Oh, curse her, curse her! Last night, while he was talking to me, even while he was kissing me, he was thinking of her. But she shall not have him! She has lost and I have won—and I will keep him!

She dashed her hand across her eyes, though there were no tears in them, and stood upright, holding herself tensely as if she were battling for calm; then she replaced the poignant letter in its envelope, and went back to the stable. Again she met no one, for those who were down were in at breakfast.

"I have changed my mind again, Pottinger," she said, "and will be glad if you will take the notes, please. See, I have put them back in the wallet."

"Certainly, miss!" said Pottinger, and he touched his forehead two or three times, and colored and smiled awkwardly and looked at her with new and vivid interest. One of the maids had run into the stable, during Maude's absence, and had told her the news that his master was engaged to Miss Maude Falconer; for as servants, who are so quick to discover all our little secrets, had already learnt this open one, and the servants' hall was buzzing with it.

CHAPTER XXV.

That morning Ida came downstairs singing, not loudly, but in the soft undertone which a girl uses when she is supremely happy and she has hopes of seeing the cause of her happiness very soon. All through breakfast, while Mr. Heron read his letters, opening them and reading them stealthily as usual, her heart was singing its love-song to her, and she was wondering whether she would meet Stafford by the stream or among the hills. That she should meet him she felt quite sure, for he had never failed to leave the gay party at the Villa to come over to her every evening.

Perhaps he had spoken to his father, and, in the wonderful way men have, had swept aside all the obstacles which stood against their union. He was so strong, so self-reliant, so masterful—though so gentle with her—that surely no obstacles could stand against him. She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she almost started when Mr. Heron, announced that Mr. Wordley, the family lawyer, was in the library. Mr. Heron flushed and scrambled his letters and papers together as he rose.

"Won't Mr. Wordley come in and have some breakfast?" suggested Ida, her father, shaking his head impatiently, said that Mr. Wordley was sure to have had his breakfast, and shuffled out of the room.

A few minutes after he had gone, Jessie came in for the day's orders, and Ida dragged her thoughts away from the all-absorbing subject and plunged into house-keeping. It was not a lengthy or a very elaborate business, as but when it was over Jessie lingered and began collecting the breakfast things, glancing shyly at Ida, as she always did when she wanted to gossip.

"There was fine doings up at the Villa last night, Miss Ida!" she began, rather timidly, for Ida seldom encouraged her chatter. "There was a ball there. Such a tremendous grand affair! There hasn't been anything like it ever known in this country. Williams was up there this morning, and Susie told him that it was like fairyland, and what with the beautiful rooms and the music and the ladies' rich dresses and jewels. She got a peep through one of the open doors, and she says it quite took her breath away."

Ida smiled. She was not envious; for would not Susie come over presently and tell her all about it; who was there, with whom he had danced, and how all the time he had been longing to be by her side?

"Susie says that the ladies was beautiful, Miss Ida, and that the most beautiful of them all was Miss Falconer. Susie says she had the most lovely dress, like a cloud of smoke, with diamonds sparkling all over it like stars."

"That sounds very pretty and poetical, Jessie," said Ida.

"What would he care for a dress like a cloud, or the diamonds that shone like stars on it? Did she not know that he loved the little rain-washed habit which a certain rustic country girl wore, better than the choicest production of Worth?"

"Yes, miss," Jessie went on, "and Susie says that Mr. Stafford, the lord's son—the simple dale-folk as often called Sir Stephen 'my lord' as 'sir'—danced over so many times with her, and the servants were saying that he was making love to her, and that they shouldn't be surprised to hear that Mr. Stafford was going to marry Miss Falconer."

Ida could not prevent the color rising to her face, but she laughed unforcedly, and with no misgiving; for she had looked into Stafford's eyes and read his soul through them. He was here, let all the women in the world be beautiful and decked in silks and satins. She ran upstairs to put on her habit, leaving Jessie rather disappointed at the effect of her news, and she sang while she tied the little scarlet sailor's knot, and presently came down the stairs with a step as light as her heart. As she was mounting and talking to Jason about the fact of the steers, Mr. Wordley came out of the house to get his horse, and hurried to her, bare-headed in the good old way.

"No, I can't stay," he said in answer to her invitation. "I have to be back at the office; but I'll ride a little way with you, if I may. It isn't often I get the chance of riding with the prettiest girl in the county. There now, I've made you blush, as I used to when you sat upon my knee, and I told you that little girl had no right to stars for eyes."

Ida laughed.

"But I'm a big girl now," she said.

"and too old for compliments; besides, lawyers should always speak the truth."

"For goodness' sake! don't spread that theory, my dear, or we shall all have to put out shutters up," he retorted, with mock alarm.

He got on his old red-roan rather stiffly, and they rode out of the courtyard and on to the road, where, he sure, Ida's star-like eyes swept the hills, and the valleys just perchance a young man should be riding there. They rode in silence for a few minutes, during which the old lawyer seemed very thoughtful, and glanced at her sideways, as if he were trying to make up his mind about something. At last he said, with an affectation of casualness:

"Father been pretty well of late, my dear?"

Ida hesitated for a moment. She could not bring herself to tell even Mr. Wordley of her father's habit of walking in his sleep.

"Yes," she said, "fairly well. Sometimes he is rather restless and irritable, as if he were worried. Has he anything to worry him, Mr. Wordley—I mean anything more than usual?"

He did not answer, and she looked at him as if waiting for his reply.

"I was thinking of what you just said; that you were a big girl. So you are, though you always seem to me like the little child I used to nurse. But the world rolls on and you have grown into a big woman, and I ought to tell you the truth," he said, at last.

"The truth!" she echoed, with a quick glance.

"Yes," he said, nodding gravely. "Does your father ever talk to you of business, my dear? I know that you manage the house and the farm, and manage them well, but I don't know whether he ever tells you anything about the business of the estate. I ask because I am in rather an awkward position. When your father dismissed his steward I thought he would consult me on the matters which the steward used to manage; but he has not done so, and I am really more ignorant about his affairs than anyone would credit, seeing that I have been the Heron's family lawyer—I and mine—since, well, say, since the Flood."

"No; my father tells me nothing," said Ida. "Is there anything the matter, is there anything I should know?"

He looked at her gravely, compassionately.

"My dear, I think there is," he said. "If you had a brother or any relative near you I would not worry you, would not tell you. But you have none, you are quite alone, you see."

"Quite alone," she echoed. And then she blushed as she remembered Stafford, and that she was no longer alone in the world.

"And so I think you ought to be told that your father's affairs are—are not as satisfactory as they should be."

"I know that we are very poor," said Ida in a low voice.

"Ah, yes," he said. "And so are a great many of the landed gentry nowadays; but they will struggle on, and I had hoped that by some stroke of good luck I might have had your father to struggle on, and perhaps save something, make some provision, for you. But, my dear, see now! I am going to treat you as if you were indeed a woman; and you will be brave, I know, for you are a Heron, and a Heron—it sounds like a name that has never shown the white feather—your father's affairs are—"

your father's affairs are—
"I am afraid," you know that estate is encumbered, that the entail was cut off so that you might inherit; but advantage has been taken of the cutting off the entail to raise fresh loans since the steward was dismissed, and I have been ignorant of your father's business matters. I came today to tell him that the interest of the heaviest mortgage was long overdue, and that the mortgagee, who says that he has applied several times, is threatening foreclosure. I felt quite sure that I should get the money from your father this morning, but he has put me off, and makes some difficulty. He made a rambling, almost incoherent statement, which I did not understand; and from a word or two he incautiously let drop, I am afraid that—"

He stopped and frowned and puckered his lips as if reluctant to continue. Ida looked at him steadily with her deep grey eyes.

"Go on," she said. "Do not be afraid to tell me the truth. I can bear it. I would rather know the worst, know what I have to face. For some time past I have feared my father was in trouble. Do you think I am afraid? Please tell me all."

"In a word, then, my dear," said the old lawyer, with a sigh, "I am afraid your father has been speculating and, like ninety-nine out of a hundred that I have seen losing, it is like playing against the bank at Monte Carlo; one may break it, but the advantage is on the bank's side, and for the one who wins thousands lose. Can you tell me if there are any grounds for my apprehension?"

Ida was silent for a moment as she recalled her father's manner of late, his habit of shutting himself up in the library of keeping his letters from her, of secreting papers, and, above all, the furtive glances which she had now and again seen him cast at her.

"I am afraid that it is only too true," she said. "My poor father! What is to be done, Mr. Wordley? Can I do anything?"

The old man shook his head. He knew too well that once a man has really taken to gambling, whether it be on the Stock Exchange, or at a green table, or on the turf, there is very little hope of saving him.

"I fear you can do nothing," he replied, sadly. "A Heron never yet brooked interference even by his nearest and dearest. You must say nothing about it. Even now, you must be careful how I approach him; for this morning he was testy and irritable and resented the few questions I ventured to put to him. Don't make yourself unhappy about it. I will try and arrange about the mortgage, and I will come over again as soon as possible and try to persuade your father to confide in me, if he used to do. Now, come, remember! You are not to worry yourself, my dear, but to leave it entirely to me. Things are rarely as bad as they seem, and there is always a gleam of light in the darkest sky. Perhaps, some day, we shall see Heron in all his old glory; and when that day comes, my little girl with the star eyes will queen it in the dale like one of the Heron ladies of the past."

He patted her hand as he held it, patted and stroked it and looked at her with a tender and encouraging smile, which made Ida's eyes grow moist. She rode down the dale gravely and sadly for some minutes; then the thought flashed through her mind, warming her heart, that she was not alone, that there was one who loved her and to whom she could fly for consolation and encouragement. Yes, it was only right that she should tell Stafford all; there should be no concealment from him.

She rode along the highway looking for him, but he was nowhere to be seen. When she came to the opening by the gate, she saw the large, white Villa gleaming in the sunlight; a launch was putting off from the landing-place with men and women on board, and she could almost fancy that she heard the sound of laughter. The contrast of the prosperity typified by the great white place and the poverty of Heron Hall smote her sharply. She was poorer even than she had thought; what would the great, the rich Sir Stephen say to such a daughter-in-law? She watched the launch dreamily as it shot across the lake, and wondered whether Stafford was on board, laughing and talking perhaps with the beautiful Miss Falconer. In that moment of her double thought was not pleasant, but there was no jealousy in it.



Canada's Future Governor-General at the Front
PRINCE ALEXANDER OF TECK, brother of Queen Mary, and the future Governor-General of Canada, is with the British troops on the Continent.

for in her assurance of his love he was free to talk and jest with whom he pleased. She turned, and after making her usual circuit, rode homewards. As she reached the crossroad she heard the sound of a horse coming from the Hall, and she pulled up, her heart beating for the foreman came round the bend and she saw that it was a groom. He touched his hat as he passed, and rode on at a sharp trot in the direction of Bryndermere. Ida wondered why he had been to the Hall, but concluded that he had gone there with some message about the farm produce.

"When she rode into the stable-yard, she saw Jessie and Jason standing by the small hall door and talking eagerly, and Jessie came forward, and taking a letter from under her apron, held it out with a smile."

"It's just come from the Villa, Miss Ida," she said. "And oh, miss, what I told you this morning—it's quite true. It was Mr. Stafford's own groom as brought the note, and he says that his master is engaged to Miss Falconer, and over it. He was as proud as Punch, Miss Ida; for he says that his new mistress is terrible rich as well as beautiful, and that there'll be the grandest of grand doings up there."

The blood rushed to Ida's face for a moment, then faded, and she slipped the note into the pocket of her habit and laughed. For it sounded too ridiculous, too incredible to cause her even a shadow of annoyance. She gave one or two orders to Jason, then went into the hall, took the note from her pocket and looked at the address, lovingly, lingeringly; for instinctively she knew whose hand had written it. It was the first letter she had received from him; what would it say to her? No doubt it was to tell her why he had not been able to meet her that morning, to ask her to meet him later in the day. With a blush of maidenly shame she lifted the envelope to her lips and kissed each written word.

(To be continued.)

FROM PALACE TO DENTISTRY.
The Real-Life Romance of Royal Family's Relation.

It isn't often that a favorite of kings and emperors comes down to the level of middle-class mediocrity, but it does happen sometimes.

Claire von Wallenstein, Baroness von Schonberg, and now Countess Sternau zu Hohenau, has had a most remarkable career.

To-day the Countess draws teeth almost under the shadow of the Kaiser's palace in Berlin, and the German royalties must be intensely chagrined to find one of their own relations actually earning her living under their very eyes. Nor can

they be ignorant of the fact, for on the door of the flat in the Numburger Platz there is the bold inscription in brass: "Hohenau, Dentist."

As "Hohe" signifies royal descent, just as Fitz does, in a less degree, in Great Britain, the brass plate excites no end of interest in the lady bearing this illustrious "handle."

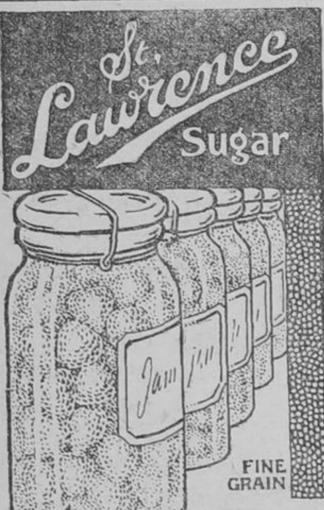
The now famous lady dentist of Berlin became a relation of both the German and British royalties a year or two ago, when she was married in London by special license to Count Wenzel Sternau zu Hohenau.

Claire von Wallenstein is the daughter of a rich Hungarian family of high position. Blessed with unusual good looks, at 18 years old she was married to the Baron von Schonberg. Youth, beauty and wealth soon made the young Baroness von Schonberg one of the most honored hostesses in Vienna.

She became involved, however, in politics, and lost the Emperor's favor. Her fortune was confiscated, so the story goes, and she was banished. Her husband, the Baron von Schonberg, quickly divorced her, and she went to Switzerland. She won the beauty prize at Monte Carlo and at the Concours Hippique at Brussels; then went to London, where Count Hohenau fell in love with her, married her, and was sent by his relations to a "sanatorium"! Now the lovely ex-politician of Austria is a Berlin dentist.

Not An Even Break.
Rex and Tommy had been inattentive the whole morning, and the teacher said that each must write his name 200 times as a punishment. Presently, when the rest of the class had gone home, Tommy was found crying bitterly.

"It's not fair," he sobbed. "Rex has only got to write Rex Dun 200 times, but my name is Thomas O'Shaughnessy."



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