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A YOUNG GIRL'S WOOING.

BY E. P. ROE,

Author of "His Sombre Rivals," "From Jest to Earnest," &c., &c.

"Mr. Arnault has gone."

"Gone where?" she gasped.

"I don't know. As the clock struck twelve he came rapidly out and walked away. He passed by me, but would not answer when I spoke to him. Come, let me take you to your room."

With a chill at heart almost like that of death she went with him, and sat down pale and speechless.

In a few moments a note was brought to Mr. Wildmere's door, and he took it to his daughter. She could scarcely open it with her nerveless fingers, and when she read the brief words:

"Miss Wildmere: You must permit me to renounce all claims upon you now and forever. Memory and your own thoughts will reveal to you the obvious reasons for my action.

"GRAYDON MUIR."

she found a brief respite from the results of her diplomacy in unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BROKEN LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

Mr. Wildmere looked almost ten years older when he came down to what he supposed would be a solitary breakfast; but something like hope and gladness reappeared on his haggard face when he saw Arnault at his table as usual. He scarcely knew how he would be received, but Arnault was as affable and courteous as he would have been months previous, and no one in the breakfast-room would have imagined that anything had occurred to disturb the relations between the two gentlemen. He enquired politely after the ladies, expressed regret that they were indisposed, and changed the subject in a tone and manner natural to a mere acquaintance.

Although his courtesy would appear faultless to observers, it made Wildmere shiver.

"Mr. Arnault," Mr. Wildmere said, a little nervously, as they left the breakfast-room, "may I speak with you?"

"Certainly," replied Arnault, with cool politeness, and he followed Mr. Wildmere to a deserted part of the piazza.

"You made a very kind and liberal offer to my daughter," the latter began.

"And received my final answer last night," was the cold, decisive reply. "It would be impossible to imagine more definite assurance that Miss Wildmere has no regard for me than was given within the time I stipulated. I have accepted such assurance as final. Good-morning, sir," and with a polite bow he turned on his heel and went je his room.

Mr. Wildmere afterward learned that he took the first train to New York.

"I am going to church with you today," said Graydon, "and I shall try to behave."

"Try to! You cannot sit with me unless you promise to behave."

"That is the way to talk to men," said Mrs. Muir, who was completely under her husband's thumb. "They like you all the better for showing some spirit."

"I am not trying to make Graydon like me better, but only to insure that he spends Sunday as should a good American."

"There is no longer any 'better' about my liking for Madge. It's all best. I admit, however, that she has so much spirit that she inspires unaffected awe."

"A roundabout way of calling me awful."

"Since you won't ride or drive with me to-day, are you too 'awfully good,' as Harry says, to take a walk after dinner."

"It depends on how you behave in church."

They spent the afternoon in a very different manner, however, for soon after breakfast Dr. Sommers told them that Tilly Wendall was at rest, and that the funeral would be that afternoon.

With Dr. Sommers' tidings Graydon saw that a shadow had fallen on Madge's face, and his manner at once became gravely and gently considerate. There were allusions to the dead girl in the service at the chapel, where she had been an attendant, and Graydon saw half-shed tears in Madge's eyes more than once.

She drove out with him in the lovely summer afternoon to the gray old farmhouse. The thoughts of each were busy—they had not much to say to each other—and Madge was grateful for his quiet consideration for her mood. It was another proof that the man she loved and not a shallow, coarse-fibred nature. With all his strength he could be a gentle, sympathetic presence—thinking of her first, thoughtfully reading her unspoken wishes, and not jealous egotist.

"Oh," he thought, "how blessed is this content with sweet sister Madge—sister in spite of all she says—compared with the brief, feverish pleasure in an engagement with such a sham of a woman as Stella Wildmere, or the mad chaos of financial disaster which my suit might have brought about!" and he unconsciously gave a profound sigh of satisfaction.

"O Graydon, what a sigh!" Madge exclaimed. "Is your regret so great? You were indeed thinking very deeply."

"So were you Madge,—so you have been during the last half hour. My sigh was one of boundless relief and gratitude. If you will permit me, I will tell you the thoughts that occasioned it as a proof of my friendly confidence. May I tell you?"

"Yes, if you think it right," she said, with slightly heightened color.

"It seems to me both right and natural that I should tell you," and he put the thoughts which preceded his sigh into words.

"Yes," she replied, gravely; "I think you have escaped much that you would regret. Please don't talk about it any more."

"What were you thinking about, Madge?" he asked, looking into her flushed and lovely face.

"I have thought a great deal about Tilly and what passed between us. That is the house there, and it will always remain in my mind as a distinct memory."

Farm wagons and vehicles of all descriptions were gathering at the dwelling. They were driven by men with faces as rugged and weather-beaten as the mountains around them. By their sides were plain featured matrons, whose rustic beauty had early faded under the stress of life's toil, and apple-cheeked boys and girls, with faces composed into the most unnatural and portentous gravity. There was a sprinkling of young men, with visages so burnt by the sun that they might pass for civilized Indians. They were accompanied by young women who, in their remote rural homes, had obtained hints from the world of fashion, and after the manner of American girls had arrayed themselves with a neatness and taste that was surprising; and the fresh pink and white of their complexions made a pleasing contrast with their swains. Although the occasion was one of solemnity, it was not without its pleasurable excitement. They all knew about poor Tilly, and to-day was the culmination of the little drama of her illness, the details of which had been discussed for weeks among the neighbors—not in callous curiosity, but with that strange blending of gossip and sympathy which is found in rural districts. The conclusion of all such talk had been a sigh and the words, "She is prepared to go."

When Dr. Sommers saw Madge and Graydon he came to them and said: "Mrs. Wendall requested that when you came you and whoever accompanied you should be brought to her. Tilly before she died, expressed the wish that you should sit with her mother during the funeral. No, no, Mr. Muir, Mrs. Wendall would have no objection to any of Miss Alden's friends. I can give you a seat here by this window. The other rooms will be very crowded with those who are strangers to you."

Graydon found himself by the same window at which Madge had sat in her long vigil. The bed had been removed and in its place was a plain yet tasteful casket. Mr. Wendall, with his head bowed down, sat at its foot; wiping away tears from time to time with a bandana handkerchief. Two or three stanch friends and helpers sat also in the room, for it would appear that the Wendalls had no relatives in the vicinity.

As Madge sat down by Mrs. Wendall, so intent was the mother's gaze upon her dead child that she did not at first notice the young girl's presence. Madge took a thin, toil-worn hand caressingly in both her own, and then the tearless eyes were turned upon her, and the light of recognition came slowly into them, as if she were recalling her thoughts from an immense distance.

"I'm glad you've come," she said, in a loud, strange whisper. "She wanted you to be with me. She said you had trouble, and would know how to sustain me. She left a message for you. She said, 'Tell dear Madge that the dying sometimes have clear vision,—tell her I've prayed for her ever since, and she'll be happy yet, even in this world. Tell her that I only saw her a little while, but she belongs to those I shall wait to welcome.' You'll stay by me till it's all over, won't you?"

Madge was deeply agitated, but she managed to say distinctly, "Tilly also said something to me, and I want you to think of her words through all that is to come. She said, 'Think where I have gone, and don't grieve a moment.'"

"Yes, I'll come to that by and by; but now I can think of only one thing—they are going to take away my baby;" and she laid her head on the still bosom with a yearning in her face which only God, who created the mother's heart, could understand.

What followed need not be dwelt upon. The mother and father took their last farewell, the casket was carried to the outer room, the simple service was soon over, the tearful tributes paid, and then the slow procession took its way to a little graveyard on a hill-side among the mountains.

"I can't go and see Tilly buried," said Mrs. Wendall, in the same unnatural whisper. "I will go to her grave some day, but not yet. I am trying to keep up, but I don't feel that I could stand on my feet a minute now."

"I'll stay with you till they come back," Madge answered tenderly; and at last she was left alone in the house, holding the tearless mother's hand. "You loved Tilly, Mrs. Wendall," she sobbed. "Think of where she's gone. No more tears; no more pain; no more death."

Her touch of sympathy broke the stony paralysis; her hot tears melted those which seemed to have congealed in the breaking heart, and the mother took Madge in her arms and cried till her strength was gone.

When Mr. Wendall returned with some of the neighbors, Madge met him at the door and held up a warning finger. The overwrought woman had been soothed into the blessed oblivion of restoring sleep, the first she had had for many hours. A motherly-looking woman whispered her intention of remaining with Mrs. Wendall all night. Then Graydon drove her away, his only greeting being a warm pressure of her hand.

At last Madge breathed softly, "Think where I have gone. Where is heaven? What is it?"

His eyes were moist as he turned towards her. "I don't know, Madge," he said. "I know one thing, however, I shall never, as you asked, say a word against your faith. I've seen its fruits to-day."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A NEW EXPERIMENT.

Stella Wildmere would not leave the seclusion of her room. As the hours passed the more overwhelming grew her disappointment and humiliation, and her chief impulse now was to get away from a place that had grown hateful to her. She had passed almost a sleepless night, and since had shut herself up in her room, looking at the past with a fixed stare and rigid face, over which at times would pass a crimson hue of shame.

Mrs. Wildmere went down to dinner with her husband, and then learned that Mr. Arnault had breakfasted with him. This fact she told Stella on her return, and the girl sent for her father immediately.

"Why did you not tell me that Mr. Arnault was here this morning?" she asked, harshly.

He looked at her steadily, but made no reply.

"Why don't you answer me?" she resumed, springing up in her impatience and taking a step toward him.

He still maintained the same steadfast, earnest look, which began to grow embarrassing, for it emphasized the consciousness which she could not stifle, that she alone was to blame.

She turned irritably away, and sat down on the opposite side of the room.

"It's just part and parcel of your past folly," she began. "If I had known he was here, and could have seen him or written to him—"

She still encountered the same searching eyes that appeared to be looking into her very soul.

"Oh, well, if you have nothing to say—"

"I have a great deal to say," answered her father, quietly, "but you are not ready to hear it yet."

"More lecturing and fault-finding," said Stella, sullenly.

"I have not lectured or found fault. I have warned you and tried to make you see the truth and to help you."

"And with your usual success. When can we leave this house?"

"We must leave it to-morrow. I will speak in kindness and truth when you are ready to listen. I know the past; I have little left now but memory."

He waited some moments, but there was no relenting on her part, and he passed out.

All the afternoon conscience waged war with anger, shame, pride and fear—fear for the future, fear of her father, for she had never before seen him look as he had since he had met her on the piazza the evening before. He had manifested none of his usual traits of irritability alternating with a coldness corresponding to her own. He seemed to have passed beyond these surface indications of trouble to the condition of one who sees evils that he cannot avert and who rallies sufficient manhood to meet them with a dignity that bordered on despair.

As Stella grew calmer she had a growing perception of this truth. He no longer indulged in vague, half-sincere predictions of disaster. His aspect was that of a man who was looking at fate.

This feeling was intensified by her mother, who at last came in and said, in a weak, half-desperate way, "Stella there is no use of your going on in this style any longer. Your father says we must leave as early as possible to-morrow. I can't do everything to get ready. I'm so unnerved I can scarcely stand now. Do come down to supper with us, or else let a good supper be brought to you, and then let us act as if we had not lost our senses utterly. Your father looks and is so strange that I scarcely know him."

"I'll not go down again. Nothing would tempt me to meet Graydon Muir and the curious stare of the people. If you will have a supper sent to me I will take it and do all the packing myself. Please tell papa that I wish to see him after supper."

She then made a toilet suitable for her task, and waited impatiently. Her father soon appeared with a dainty and inviting supper. As soon as they were alone Stella began:

"Now, papa, tell me the worst—not what you fear, but just what is before us."

"Eat your supper first."

"No; I wish to learn the absolute truth. You said you had a great deal to say to me. I'm calm now, and I suppose I've acted like a fool long enough."

"I have much to say, but not many words. I must begin again. Heaven only knows how or where. I am about at the end of my resources. I do not propose to reproach you for the past. It's gone now, and can't be helped. My proposal to you is that you begin also. You have tried pleasing yourself and thinking of self first pretty thoroughly. You know what it is to be a belle. Now, why not try the experiment of being a true, earnest, unselfish woman, whose first effort is to do right. Believe me, Stella, there is a God in heaven who thwarts selfishness and punishes it in ways often least expected. You have had a terrible and practical illustration of what I say. Are you not a girl of too much mind to make the same blunder again? With your youth you need not spoil your life, or that of others, unless you do it wilfully."

She leaned back in her chair, and bitter tears came into her eyes.

"Yes," she faltered, "my lesson has been a terrible one; but perhaps I never should have become sane without it. I have been exacting and receiving all my life, and yet to-night I feel that I have nothing to show for all those gay, brilliant years,—not even a father's love, and little claim upon it."

He came to her side and kissed her again and again.

"You don't know, nything about a father's love," he s d. "It survives everything and anything, and your love would save me."

Never, even under the eyes of Graydon Muir, had she been so conscious of her heart before. Had he seen her when she departed on the earliest train in the morning he would have witnessed a new expression on her face.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MADGE ALDEN'S RIDE.

When Henry Muir and his family gathered at breakfast the next morning, the removal to Hotel Kaaterskill was the uppermost theme, and it was agreed that Madge and Graydon should ride thither on horseback, and return by train, if wearied. Mr. Muir then went to the city, well prepared to establish himself on a safer footing. Graydon and Madge soon after were on their way through the mountain valleys, the latter with difficulty holding her horse down to the pace they desired to maintain.

After riding rapidly for some distance, they reached long, lonely stretches, favorable for conversation, and Graydon was too fond of hearing Madge talk to lose the opportunity. He looked wonderingly at her flushed face, with the freshness of the morning in it; her brilliant eyes, from which flashed a spirit that nothing seemed to daunt; the sudden compression of her lips, as with power and inimitable grace she reined in her chafing steed. Never before had she appeared so vital and beautiful, and he rode at her side with something like exultation that they were so much to each other. He was turning his back on a past fraught with peril, over which hung the shadow of what must have been a lifelong disappointment.

"The girl who would have taken me, as Henry chooses among commercial securities, cannot now make me an adjunct to her self-pleasing career," he thought. "I am free—free to become to Madge what I was in old times." What an idiot I was to endure Stella's criticism while she was playing it so sharp between Arnault and myself! No wonder crystal Madge said she and Stella were not congenial! I call Madge crystal, yet I don't understand her fully, and have not since my return. She has had some deep and experience, which she is hiding from all. From what Mrs. Wendall said at the funeral yesterday, Madge must have revealed more of it to that dying girl than to any one else. Could she have formed what promises to be a hopeless love in her Western home, and is she now hiding a wound that will not heal, while bravely and cheerfully facing life as it is? Perhaps her purpose to return to Santa Barbara proves that she does not regard her love as utterly hopeless. Well, whatever the truth may be, she hides her secret with consummate skill, and I shall not pry into even her affairs. I only know that as I feel now I should prize her friendship above any other woman's love."

"What are you thinking of so deeply?" she asked, meeting his eyes.

"My thoughts just then was that I should prize your friendship above any other woman's love, and I had been felicitating myself that Stella Wildmere would never have the right to criticize the fact."

"O Graydon, what a man of moods and tenses you are!" Then she added, laughing, "There has been indeed a kaleidoscopic turn in affairs. Mr. Arnault disappeared yesterday, and Mary learned that the Wildmeres left by the early train this morning."

"Yes, Miss Wildmere followed Arnault promptly. They are near of kin, but not too near to marry. Their nuptials should be solemnized in Wall street, under flowers arranged into a dollar symbol."

"I feel sorry for Mr. and Mrs. Wildmere, though; especially the former. I think he might have been quite different had the fates been kinder."

"I would rather dismiss them all from my mind as far as possible. Don't think me callous about Stella; the revelation of her cold, mercenary soul makes me shudder when I think how narrowly I escaped allying myself to it."

"You have indeed had an escape," Madge replied, gravely. "If she were a young, thoughtless, undeveloped girl her womanhood might have come to her afterward. I hope I am mistaken, but she has made a singular impression on me."

"Please tell me it. You have insight into character that in one so young is surprising."

"I have no special insight. I simply feel people. They create an atmosphere and make some dominant impression with which I always associate them."

"I am eager to know what impression Miss Wildmere made."

"I fear this would be true of her even after she becomes a mature woman. A man might be almost perishing at her side from mental trouble of some kind, and, so far from feeling for him, and sympathizing, she wouldn't even know it, and he couldn't make her know it. She would turn from him to a new dress, a new admirer, or a new phase of amusement, and forget him, and the fact that he was her husband would not make much difference. Some deep experience of her own may change her, but I don't know. I fear another's experience would be like a tragedy without the walls while she was safe within."

"O Madge, think of a man with a strong, sensitive nature beating his very heart to death against such pumice-stone callousness!"

"I don't like to think of it," she replied. "Come, I ask with you now that we forget her as far as possible. She may not disappoint a man like Arnault. Let them both become shadows in the background of memory. Here's a level place. Now for a gallop."

When at last they pulled up, Graydon said, "Your horse is awfully strong and restless to-day."

"Yes; he has not been used enough of late. He'll be quiet before night, for I am enjoying this so much that I should like to return in the same way."

"I am delighted to hear you say so. My spirits begin to rise the moment I am with you, and you are the only woman I ever knew from whose side I could not go with the feeling, 'Well, some other time would suit me now.'"

Her laugh rang out so suddenly and merrily that her horse sprang into a gallop, but she checked him speedily, and thought, with an exultant thrill, "Graydon now has surely revealed an unmistakable symptom." To him she said:

"You amuse me immensely. You are almost as outspoken as little Harry, and, like him, you mistake the impression of the moment for the immutable."

"Now, that's not fair to me. I've been constant to you. Own up, Madge, haven't I?"

With a glance and a smile which she never gave to others, and rarely to him, she said:

"I own up. I don't believe a real brother would have been half so nice."

"Let the past guarantee the future, then. Shake hands against all future misunderstandings."

She was scarcely ready to shake hands on such a basis, but of course would have complied. In the slight confusion her hand had relaxed its grasp on the curb-rein, and at the same moment a locomotive, coming along the side of the opposite mountain, blew a shrill whistle. Instantly her horse had the bit in his teeth, and was off at a furious pace.

When the engineer of the train saw Madge's desperate riding he surmised that her horse was not under control, and put on extra steam in order to take the exciting cause of the animal's terror out of the way. He thought he could easily reach the summit of the clove where the carriage-drive crossed the track before Madge, and then pass swiftly over the down grade beyond; but he had not calculated on the terrific speed of the horse; and when at last the track and roadway were almost side by side the frantic beast, with its pale rider, was abreast of the train. For a moment the engineer was irresolute, and then, too late he feared, "slowed up."

The narrow road, with a precipitous mountain on the left, was so near to the flying train that the passengers in an open car could almost touch Madge, and she was to them like a strange and beautiful apparition, with her white face and large dark eyes filled with an unspeakable dread.

"Oh, stop the train!" she cried, and her voice, with the whole power of her lungs, rung out far above the clatter of the wheels, wakening despairing echoes from the mountains impending on either side.

The speed of the cars was perceptibly checked; the passengers saw the foam-flecked brute, with head stubbornly bent downward and eye of fire, pass beyond them. An instant later, to their horrified gaze and that of Graydon's, who was following as fast as a less swift horse could carry him, Madge and the locomotive appeared to come together. The young man gave a hoarse, inarticulate cry between a curse and a shout, and whipped his horse forward furiously.

The speed of the train was renewed, and he saw through the open car that Madge must have past unharmed before the engine, just grazing it. It also appeared that she was gaining the mastery, for her horse was rearing; then bars of ordinary make intervened and hid her from view a moment, and the train clattered noisily on.

When he crossed the track Madge was not where he had last seen her. The road beyond ran at a greater distance from the railway, and was lined with trees and bushes. Through an opening among these he saw that the horse had resumed his old mad pace, that Madge was still mounted, but that she was no longer erect, and sat with her head bowed and her whip-hand clutching the mane. He also saw, with a sinking heart, that the road curved a little further on, and evidently crossed the track again.

A moment later—Oh horror! An opening in the foliage revealed Madge dashing headlong, apparently, into the train. He grew so faint that he almost fell from his horse, and was scarcely conscious, until, with a strong revulsion of hope, he found himself under the track which, about an eighth of a mile from the previous crossing, passes just above the roadway. Not aware of this fact, and with vision broken by intervening trees, he could not have imagined anything else than a collision, which must have been fatal in its consequences.

With hope his pulse quickened, his strength returned, and he again urged his jaded horse forward, at the same time sending out his voice:

"Madge, Madge, keep up a little longer."

The road had left the car-track, the noise of the train was dying away in the distance. At last, turning a curve, he saw that Madge's horse had come down to a canter, and that she was pulling feebly at the rein.

As he approached he shouted "Whoa!" with such a voice of command that the horse stopped suddenly, and she almost fell forward.

"Quick, Graydon, quick!" she gasped.

He sprang to the ground, and a second later she was an unconscious burden in his arms.

He laid her gently on a mossy bank under an oak; then, with a face fairly livid with passion, he threw a small revolver from his hip-pocket, stopped back to the horse that now stood trembling and exhausted in the road, and shot him dead.

He now saw that they had been observed at a neighboring farmhouse, and that people were running toward them. Gathering Madge again in his arms, he bore her toward the dwelling, in which effort he was soon aided by a stout countryman.

The farmer's wife was all solicitude, and to her and her daughter's ministrations Madge was left, while Graydon waited, with intense anxiety, in the porch, explaining what had occurred, with a manner much distraught, in answer to many questions.

"The cursed brute is done for now," he concluded.

When he entered the "spare room" of the farmhouse, Madge, with a smile that was like a ray of sunshine, extended her hand from the lounge on which she was reclining, and said:

"You didn't fail me, Graydon. I couldn't have kept up a moment longer. I should have fainted before had I not heard your voice. How good God has been!"

He held her hand in both of his own, his mouth twitched nervously, but his emotion was too strong for speech.

"Don't feel so badly, Graydon," she resumed. "There, see, you are making me cry. I can't bear to see you—I can't bear to see a man—so moved. Please now, you look so pale that I am frightened. I'm not strong, but shall get better at once if I see you yourself."

"Forgive me, Madge, but it seems as if I had suffered the pangs of death ten times over—there, I won't speak about it till we both have recovered from the shock. Dear, brave, little girl; how can I thank you enough for keeping up till I could reach you!"

She began to laugh a little too nervously to be natural. Her heart was glad over her escape, and in a glad tumult at his words and manner. "He was no shadow of a man, nor did ice-water flow in his veins. His feeling had been so strong that it had almost broken her self-control.

"Some day," she exulted, "some day God will turn his fraternal affection into the wine of love."

"I'm so nervous," she said, "that I must either laugh or cry. What a plight we are in! How shall we go forward or backward?"

"We shall not do either very soon. Mrs. Hobson is making you a cup of tea; and then you must rest thoroughly, and sleep, if possible."

"What will you do?"

"Oh, I'll soothe my nerves with a cigar, and berate myself on the porch. When you are thoroughly rested I'll have Mr. Hobson drive us on to the nearest station. We are in no plight whatever, if you received no harm."

"I haven't. Promise me one thing."

"Anything—everything."

"Do no fighting. I'm sorry you killed the horse; but he did act vilely, and I suppose you had to let off your anger in some way. I was angry myself all first—he was so stupid. But when I found I couldn't hold him at all I thought I must die— Oh, how it all comes back to me! What thoughts I had, and how sweet life became! Oh, oh—" and she began sobbing like a child.

"Madge, please—I can't endure this, indeed I can't."

But her overwrought nerves were not easily controlled, and he knelt beside her, speaking soothingly and pleadingly. "Dear Madge, dear sister Madge. Oh, I wish Mary was here!" and he kissed her again and again.

"Graydon," she gasped, "stop! There I'm better;" and she did seem to recover almost instantly.

"Try to sleep, Madge," said Graydon, "and I won't worry or take on a bit;" and he disappeared.

There was no sleep for her, and yet she felt herself wonderfully restored. Was it the potency of Mrs. Hobson's tea? or that which he had placed upon her lips?

TO BE CONTINUED.

A Newburg, (N. Y.) despatch says Prof. Charles Rehm, the leader of the West Point military band, is suffering from poisoning believed to have been caused by wearing colored stockings. About three months ago he remembers having scratched his leg to alleviate an itching sensation, and has been prostrated ever since. Both legs are affected, the left one being swollen to three times its natural size. It has broken out in sores from the ankle to the knee, and will, it is said, have to be amputated.

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