

Love, Marriage and Divorce Among Plants

Remarkable Characteristics of Trees, Vines and Flowers, as Revealed by the Latest Studies of an Expert

BY ROYAL DIXON.

Author of "The Human Side of Plants." PERHAPS it would be difficult to find in the whole range of plant creation anything more curious and human-like than the love, marriage and divorce among plants. Here, as in the human world, "love," or to be more accurate, "amoroseness," underlies every act of the plant kingdom. It is the most powerful factor for the perpetuation of all plant life. In the great tropical forests of Africa and South America this mate-hunger is far more ravenous than even food-hunger. Divorce among the uncanny tree monsters is practically unknown, but courtship sometimes lasts for 50 years, and so the female has plenty of time to make up her mind. However, the whole affair is often a matter of convenience. Should the marriage prove unsatisfactory, she often poisons her mate and then herself, and they die in each other's arms.

If the human race is ever to get over its habit of making a muddle of loving, it must begin to study more carefully the ways of plant lovers. They also are still groping in the dark on these vital points, but they do not deny the power of the passions as some of the human race have done, nor do they try to analyze it back through its 10th power. Women are anxious to know all about the psychology of love, and men haven't the retrospection even to try to trace its path.

Our most difficult problems—love, marriage and divorce—are also the problems of the plant world. In the great tropical forests a continuous battle is waged both above and below the earth, as well as in the sky and sea. These battles are not only for the possession of territory, but for the possession of proper mates.

Methods of Love-Making. The methods of love-making of the plant world may seem more brutal than that of our cave-dwelling forefathers, but there, as in the human world, love knows no law. A vampire vine, the Devil's Snare, so gigantic in size that it is supposed to be able to capture

wild dogs, and suck the blood from their bodies, just as an insect-eating plant snaps up a fly and sucks the blood from the dead fly's body, will, during the mating season, continually send out his huge, white, electrically-charged limbs, and clasp his lover to his arms. If she refuses and is too weak to defend herself, he deliberately kills her in his terrible arms. If she is able to free herself, it must be at the sacrifice of many of her limbs, and she must turn entirely away and grow in a different direction.

If she is a flirt, her destruction is certain. Her monster lover is very clever and in the early Spring great tear drops of honey continually flow from his amorous eyes. If the object of his adoration ever trusts him to come near, or allows him to take just one kiss, it is all off, and she is his wife and slave forever afterward. Sometimes it happens that she marries him in preference to death and watches for an opportune time to kill him.

Death by strangulation is her only chance to rid herself of this undesirable mate. If she is very wise she will wrap her arms so tightly around his body that he must eventually die and then she stands a widow forever, cursed by having to hold up to the world the dead corpse of her murdered husband. If she chooses to marry again, she must still embrace her dead husband, unless he has crumbled away. But that is not likely, for these trees do not remain long in widowhood. It is not uncommon to see certain female trees holding in their manifold arms the corpses of several dead husbands. But judge them not harshly, for they may have been forced to marry some of these undesirable.

Strange rumors have been circulated of the existence of huge, monster-like fig vines and sometimes trees which have the most elaborate courtships, kidnappings, marriages and oftentimes divorces. These are usually found in the remote and unvisited parts of the great tropics. Science has recently discovered, however, that there is a good foundation for these extraordinary fic-

tions. In the valley of the Amazon the married life of these monsters is most unusual and divorce is unknown. There is little danger of infidelity in either case. And the bridal kiss lasts forever! Who knows but what Adam and Eve really learned to spoon from the trees! Surely there could be no better precedent than a family tree.

Human-Like Traits. This strange, human-like plant may be taken as an example of the model lover. No plant-woman could resist his manly charms. If he foolishly desires to remain a bachelor, like some silly men, he grows up as a long, spider-like vine, with feminine-looking tendrils in the place of arms. Like a beanstalk, he climbs and climbs up and over tall trees. Sometimes late in life he sees the error of his ways and takes unto himself a bride, but then it is too late, for she soon tires of him and kills him. In the plant world this is all right, for the more times she has been married, the more charms she is supposed to possess. Each time she squeezes a husband to death, there is more space for her and her new husband to spoon, and lean on the corpses of her former lovers.

His courting is what wins her heart. The gallant lover adorns himself in his gayest colors for winning a bride. If his love responds to his ardent wooing, they embrace for life and grow up as a single tree. But should she refuse him—alas! He becomes a climbing vine of the most voracious kind, twisting, climbing, strangling and murdering everything that comes within his reach. Thus in the plant world as well as among human beings, love has its effect. The soured, disappointed lover of the plant world is just as much a menace to his tribe as is the disappointed and sour man.

Cunning Courtships. Perhaps the most cunning and weird of all plant courtships is that of certain orchids. For many generations they have had to wage warfare by ingenious methods. They have no prickles, thorns, swords or daggers against birds and animals that would



CURIOS DRAWING BY L. G. LEARNED, MADE UNDER THE DIRECTION OF MR. DIXON, SUGGESTING HOW THE VAMPIRE VINE, CALLED THE DEVIL'S SNARE, SEIZES UPON A TREE AND HOW THE TWO BECOME LOCKED IN EACH OTHER'S ARMS.

eat them. Nor have they any weapons to use in the protection of their loves, which they resort to imitate bees, butterflies, snakes, and even bats, are most unusual. Orchids are the most skilled of all plants in the art of simulation. They choose for imitation some insect, bird or animal free from danger. Some orchids imitate poisonous spiders. The fly orchid and the bee orchid are examples which imitate so skillfully that trained scientists are often at fault in detecting the deception. These orchids resemble clusters of bees or flies resting on a dry twig. Many of the larger species of orchids imitate huge bats. This imitation aids the orchid in its courtship. The poor,

deluded bat alights on a sprig of these flowers, thinking he is approaching other bats, but, instead, he is only deceived by this weird flower that it may use him as a messenger of love to other orchids. The bat's head is covered with pollen, and when he goes to another similar flower, he carries the precious yellow dust with him, so the bat orchids are fertilized in this strange way. Bat love knows no law, and in the plant world these cunning ways of theirs is only a tribute to the necessities of married life in a world where the story of all life is a story of continual contention and strife. The struggle in the plant underworld is most terrible and almost unthinkable. And the results mean much to the hu-

man world, for, after all, we are dependent upon the plants for everything we have, even to the air we breathe. In case a certain tree, like our own catalpa, grows tired of mating with its own species, and is fertilized by means of the pollen from some other tree, the result is a hybrid, which, in most cases, will not reproduce its kind. As a result, we soon find certain valuable trees becoming extinct, just as the birth rate in certain countries is decreasing. Always "Practical." The plant world and the human world have practically the same forms of love, courtship, marriage and divorce, except in many cases the plant world is more practical about these things. It more readily seems to look

forward to the future generations of its kind, and it gives its offspring a better start in life. For this reason it might be well for all lovers carefully to study plants. In the plant world there is not only a school of mothercraft, but there is also a school of fathercraft. The female plant demands that her wooer be strong, beautiful, chaste and true. These are the great evidences of the sagacity of plants. To enter into the realm of their daily affairs of family life is to become a modern Columbus, landing on the shores of a new and wonderful world. To explore them is to come to a fuller and surer realization of the unity of all forms of life, a firmer conviction that all life is related through a universal Nature.



STRANGE TROPICAL ORCHIDS WHICH SO INGENUOUSLY IMITATE BATS OF THE FOREST THAT EVEN SKILLED SCIENTISTS FREQUENTLY ARE DECEIVED.

THE SCARLET RUNNER

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that, for a second, turned him giddy. Had nothing gone wrong? What if this were not a joke, but deadly earnest? What if these laughing women should never see their jewels again? By this time the contents of those leather pouches might be worth two hundred thousand pounds. If, under his charming air of bonhomie Fitzgerald were a rogue—well, the game would be well worth the candle for a man in financial troubles of any sort. And that poor, happy child, the hostess—what a humiliation for her if at her house, led on by her example, all these people lost their dearest treasures! She would never be forgiven—could never live down such a calamity. She might even lose her lover through it.

"In case anything should go wrong?" If Miss Dauvray had meant this—meant him to guess, meant to give him something by which, if his wits were quick and his courage high, he could stop the game!

Suddenly his head was clear as a bell. If he did the thing which had sprung into his brain he would not spoil Fitzgerald's chance of the prize, in case the play were a genuine frolic after all. But if it were earnest he might save the situation for Miss Van Bouten—save the jewels—and, unless Fitzgerald were a fool, no one need ever know the truth.

He decided to act, and the moment had come. Fitzgerald had finished. He and his assistant were beginning their dash towards the glass doors. But instead of unlocking it, as Christopher had been told to do, he tried it quickly, found it fastened, and slipped the key into his pocket. Then, with his back to the gold curtains he fired one barrel of Eloise Dauvray's revolver at the ceiling.

This was to let Fitzgerald know that he was formidable; that he carried no harmless toy at his belt, and the effect was overpowering. All the women screamed (he hated frightening them, but it was for their own good), and even Fitzgerald and his followers were taken aback for an instant.

It was but for an instant though. They sprang forward; but Christopher stopped them with his leveled revolver before they could touch the triggers of theirs.

"Hands up, or I fire!" he shouted. Their weapons had death in them, too—he was sure of that—but his could speak first, and if it spoke there would be an end of one man. The danger was that he could not be sure of covering two at a time, and the third was not far off now; but that was the risk he had been ready to run, and on the instant he was called upon to face it.

From behind Fitzgerald the other man would have taken the chance and fired, but someone knocked up his arm (no one but Christopher saw that it was a veiled abbess), and Lord Arrowdale, as Louis XIV, alert and grave enough now, took advantage of the fellow's brief confusion to seize the revolver from behind.

With that Fitzgerald burst into a loud laugh and tucked his weapon in his belt. (Was it because he knew the game was up, and the only hope lay in saving appearances, or was he merely ready to end his harmless play for the prize?) "Don't be frightened, anybody, and spoil sport," he cried, his voice breaking with laughter. Then, snatching off his mask and looking handsome and gallant in his slouch hat, he ran and knelt at Undine's feet, calling his comrades to follow.

"Our leather pouches, and all that is in them is," he exclaimed, "in exchange for the prize, fair lady."

And Miss Van Bouten took off her mask also, smiling and beautiful, though a little pale.

"Shall he have the prize my friends?" she cried aloud.

And the company, unmasking, answered with many voices that the prize must belong to the highwayman.

"It's to be put to the vote, you know, at supper," she said.

Fitzgerald and his friends, having given up their bags of spoil to their hostess, rose from their knees.

Then Fitzgerald came to where Rags stood by the door. Everyone was listening, but all he had to say was to

thank Christopher for his "dramatic conception of his part."

"Your own slight mistake," he finished, "has proved a blessing in disguise, for it enables me also to change my mind at the last minute. I and my friends will stay to supper and hear our fate—in the matter of the blue diamonds. You are free to do as you choose."

"I must be getting back to town."

"With your car? Very well; we will meet later."

Fitzgerald was the hero of the occasion; and one of the young men of Miss Dauvray's party presently slipped away unnoticed. Perhaps two others did the same—Christopher did not know. But when he reached Scarlet Runner, to his intense surprise there sat Miss Dauvray in the seat next to the driver's.

"Will you take me home?" she asked. "With pleasure," he said. "And quickly?"

"If you wish."

They started, and for a few moments neither spoke. Then Christopher asked, "Did I do the thing you wanted?"

"Yes," she said. "I thought you would do it."

"You hypnotized me, perhaps. But—was it a game, or—"

"Oh, a game, if you like. But a terrible game. I would have given my life to stop it, or—yours. You've saved both. I can give more, I think. If he wins the prize he'll let me alone for awhile. But if he'd succeeded tonight I—couldn't have borne it. What would there have been for me? Only to disappear, as he meant to do, or—disappear in another way, a quieter way. I should have chosen that. I'm so very tired, you see."

"Tired of what?" Christopher questioned her almost fiercely.

"Of playing cat's-paw for him. I'm a coward. I'm horribly afraid of him. He could ruin me. I've helped him several times—in country houses, where I've been staying. It's nearly killed me, but I had to do it. This would have been worst of all, though. I love little Millie van Bouten. I bear her no grudge for taking Arrowdale from me, because I didn't love him. It was only his money and title I wanted—needed, if you like. Fitz thought I'd be glad of revenge, but I'm not vindictive. I

helped only because I was forced to."

"Why?"

"Oh, it all began with the most awful losses at bridge, and a hundred outside debts to drive me half mad. Once—I was mad then. I think—I cheated. Fitz saw, and saved me, for—this kind of thing. He's in awful straits, too. But the blue diamonds will save him, if he gets it. For your sake I hope he will, as well as for mine. He doesn't forget easily."

"How did he mean to rid himself of me tonight?" asked Christopher quietly.

"You can guess, I think. Of course, the story of the pastrycook and the pie, and giving back the jewels, was a fiction for your benefit. But you would have been asked to stop your car at a certain place, I believe, as if to meet the 'pastrycook' and then—they wouldn't have killed you, for Fitz was going to disappear and you couldn't have identified the other man. But you would have had a knock on the head, and Fitz would have driven your car where he liked. He can drive one or two makes of cars, and he's been taking lessons with your kind for the last three days. But now don't ask me any more questions, will you? I'm so tired. If you are kind, let me rest."

Christopher obeyed and sat silent, driving fast. Neither spoke again until he had brought her to her own door in Regent's Park.

Then, as he stopped Scarlet Runner, he broke out:

"All this time I've been thinking of what you've said. I—"

She burst into merry, if nervous laughter. "What I've said? Surely you don't take all that wild nonsense seriously. Of course I was joking. It was a fairy-story from beginning to end, believe me."

"I can't," said Christopher. "Then you are the April fool after all, aren't you? But thank you, nevertheless, a thousand times, for bringing me home. And take care—Fitz won't be too pleased with you for changing the end of his game."

Stunned, Christopher let her slip away from him. Had it been a joke, then, the whole thing? He would never quite know, it might be. But he had a very strong theory; and that theory did not prevent him from wishing to see Eloise Dauvray again.

(A New Adventure Next Week.)