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Treasures of Brookmere

By MARTHA McCULLOCH-WILLIAMS

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"Jessamine, come in 'at once!' Mrs. Brookmere called acidly from the west porch. As her granddaughter rose obediently, but with a little impatient sigh, her companion, Austin Wills, whistled softly, then said:

"Jessamine, go upstairs and fetch my embroidery. Be sure you don't forget my glasses," madam said, as though the young man had not spoken. Jessamine made to obey, but Wills held her back. He lifted his hat to the elder lady, turned and walked off, saying over his shoulder: "Send the maid up, madam. It's bad luck to turn back. I can't allow Miss Jessamine to risk spoiling our cruise."

"Oh, what will she do to me?" Jessamine cried as they hurried away. Madam had been too paralyzed by Wills' audacity to say a word. Austin drew Jessamine's hand farther over his arm and smiled down at her, saying: "I hope it will be 'Out of my house, ingrate!' Then, you see, you will have to come to my house whether or no."

"Mercy, you do take a lot on yourself!" Jessamine said, pulling away her hand, her eyes dancing wickedly. "I begin to fear, Mr. Wills, that you have taken our little affair seriously?"

"Isn't it to be taken seriously? Really you lift a weight off my conscience," Wills interrupted in her own tone; then, after a chuckle: "Jess, I must lecture you—point out the sinful folly of your course. Here you might be, by taking pains and showing yourself properly devout and submissive, Mrs. Beveridge—possibly Mrs. Bishop Beveridge—I really believe the gentleman has it in him to go high ecclesiastically, he's so snave and alken, just the sort to worm himself into the minds of rich churchmen, not to mention their check books. Yet you are passing him up—passing up the chance of a lifetime—for the sake of—"

"A very commonplace sinner," Jessamine broke in. Wills gave her a look of pained surprise. "I was going to say 'for the sake of having your own willful way,'" he protested.

"It was early afternoon, and the long, smooth river reach, flecked with sun and shade, mirrored perfectly the summer world either side. Jessamine hung over the boat side, staring at her own image. Austin watched her with happy eyes, but after a little he drew her upright, saying softly: "Vanity, thy name is Jessamine. I can't have another case of Narcissus and his image upon my conscience."

help!" Jessamine asked in bewilderment. "He is mighty near committed to madam. Wait until he is quite committed, then do your best to take him away from her. You can do it, never fear. He's human, if he is a preacher, and no mere man yet born of woman is able to stand against you."

"Thank you again," Jessamine said, tossing her head. "Oh, I want that clump of cardinal flower," leaning as she spoke toward the shelving shore. Wills shook his head. "Snakes!" he said laconically, speaking very loud; then, in a low aside: "Here's where we quarrel, Jess. Insist upon getting out. The bishop to be is coming down the path."

"Oh, Mr. Beveridge," Jessamine called eagerly, "do come and pick some flowers for me. I want to pick them myself, but I find I am a prisoner," with a withering glance at Wills. Beveridge ran down to the water's edge. "Won't you let me rescue you?" he cried, holding out his hand. "Jump! I promise you shall get nothing worse than a pair of wet feet by it."

"She needn't have even them," Wills said boorishly. "If you'll agree to see her to the house I'll be glad enough to put her ashore. Not in the humor for walking myself and still less for botanizing." Half an hour later Mrs. Brookmere was surprised and, if truth must be spoken, not wholly pleased to see Jessamine sauntering leisurely, her hands full of scarlet bloom, with the Rev. Bewly Beveridge at her elbow. Now the minister had been madam's own companion all through the earlier afternoon, and, though he had not said much—quite too little to make madam aware of her own state of mind—he had looked unutterably things. She had found the looking pleasant—she was of the women made to be married, childless, although she had buried three husbands, and still possessed of an alert and lively vanity. She liked to see her name at the head of lists of patronesses, especially missionary and rescue bands. Further, flattery was meat her soul loved to feed on. The Rev. Bewly had found that out at about the second minute and acted upon the knowledge. Indeed, his mind was pretty well made up to marry her before the interview ended. But then he had not seen Jessamine in this mood. Jessamine upset his calculations; she fairly swept him off his feet.

Madam was sadly puzzled throughout the next week. Wills haunted the house as much as ever, though Jessamine openly flouted him, at the same time smiling shyly propitiation at the bishop to be. He also was in a maze. Jessamine's encouragement was too elusive to warrant giving over his pursuit of madam, yet sufficiently unsettling to make him at times distrust Wills. Wills glared at him and ostentatiously ignored him. It was that which gave him the strongest hope. Wills must be jealous—madly jealous. If only Beveridge had never begun to court that old woman! She was in the beginning eager to play fairy godmother. It was sickening to feel that he had disturbed this pious purpose, making the lady feel that she was not too old to inspire grand passion number four.

Presently he began to see light. He would have it out with Jessamine—ask her plumply to be Mrs. Beveridge, and, if she said "yes," go to madam for her blessing, along with an apocryphal tale of a distant wooer ready to sue for her hand. He could make it appear he had been finding out her mind toward a fourth marriage. It would go hard with him, but that somewhere he would find a man to make good. Indeed, providentially he already knew the man—a college president, poor and plous, entitled to write half the alphabet after his name in honorary distinctions, with children all safely married, and much in want of a good home. So he went straight to Jessamine, begging her to sing to him. The music room was at the very end of the house, thus well apart. There was small chance of interruption. All the rest were busy with games or flirting or walking in the flower garden under a white moon.

Jessamine went with him, walking high headed and joyous. At the door of the parlors she waved him forward, running back herself upon some errand he did not understand. Whatever it was, she did it very quickly. He had hardly found the songs he wanted when she was beside him, smiling at him in the most bewildering fashion. As she reached for the music her hand, apparently by chance, fell lightly upon his. He tried to hold it, but she snatched it away, turned from him and began to sing very softly. He watched her with burning eyes, his breath coming hard and fast. As she made to rise he put his arms about her and gathered her to his breast, saying hoarsely: "Jessamine, darling, won't you make music for me always? Unless you do my life will be wasted."

"You—you are not in earnest!" Jessamine said, slipping from his arms and averting her face. "You, who are so great, so wise, so good, need another sort of wife—somebody who can help you. I—I should be only a burden."

money," grandmother said, stepping through the French window upon Austin Wills' arm. After one look at her the Rev. Bewly Beveridge stepped out through the same window. He knew the treasures of Brookmere were wholly lost to him, no matter how they were reckoned.

His Opportunity Came. Rear Admiral Charles D. Sigbee, U. S. N., was once advanced after a long and patient wait from commander to captain. On the day that he was promoted he went ashore and kept the launch which was to take him to his ship waiting beyond the appointed time. When he finally strode down, Paymaster Charles W. Slamm, who was in charge of the launch, said: "Captain, you—you have just been promoted, and you—you have made a bad beginning. You have kept the boat waiting ten minutes, sir." "Be calm, Mr. Slamm," said the new captain, with a tantalizing grin; "I've been waiting years for the privilege."

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