MARRIED FOR MONEY.

BY THE DUCHESS,

AUTHOR OF "PHYLLIS," "MOLLY BAWN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER II.—CONTINUED.

"So you know Mr. Mervyn?" she says coolly.

"A little. It would take a clever man to really know him. He—it is rather awkward, all things considered—but he is the one enemy I have on earth. One would wish to be at least on good terms with one's wife's *—friends.*"

"Your enemy!"

It occurs to her as strange, even at this moment, that Randal Mervyn had not mentioned his acquaintance with her husband.

"Well, that sounds rather theatrical. Let us say that he objects to my society. Once I found him out in— but that can't matter now. What remains is the certainty that he would do me a bad turn if he could."

"And you hate him?"

"I really don't know," says George Barrington. "I don't care about soiling my fingers at any time; and at least I could hardly surpass the injury he has done me."

"At least you know all now," she says.

"It is a pity, for both of us, I did not know it sooner."

"If I had told you, you would not have married me?" she says.

At this he stares a little, and then says contemptuously,

"Your affection for him must be great indeed if you gave him up for the mere sake of filthy lucre."

"It wasn't that," she says; "and there is no good to be gained by an explanation now. When my declared indifference to you did not induce you to forego your determination to marry me, nothing else would."

"There you wrong me," he says coldly. "I am at least an honest man. I never hanker after my neighbor's goods."

She pales a little at this insult, but says nothing.

"May I ask," says Barrington presently, "why you did me the honor to marry me?"

"To tell you what you already know would be waste of time."

"I can hardly believe you sacrificed your love and your whole life for the sake of 5000*l.* a year. It isn't good enough."

"You put it wrongly," she says, with some passion, rising in such a violent fashion as she pushes the chair on which she has been sitting far from her. "How dare you think that! Were you Crœsus himself I would not have married you, but for my father's sake."

"I had no idea your father was so dear to you," retorts he, with a sneer.

"He owed *your* father money; he could not repay it. There was only one way, and I—I was sacrificed! Now that you made me say what you already know, are you satisfied? Is your revenge complete? It was well arranged between you all."

Then, in a second, her passion dies.

"Why discuss it?" she says, with the old calm listlessness.

"*Your* father owed *mine* money!" repeats he, in a somewhat stunned manner, his face very pale.

"Yes." Then, with a contemptuous smile, "you would have me believe you knew nothing of it?"

"On my soul, I didn't, says Barrington. "All this is a revelation. I can now read between the lines. My poor father! so this is how he sought to secure my happiness. Alas, how difficult a thing it is to meddle with the threads of life! But *your* father, cries he fiercely, "what shall be said of him?"

"Anything you like, says Florence coldly. "The worst you could say would neither pain nor offend me. I have done with *him* for ever. So much gratitude I owe you."

"Don't overburden yourself," says Barrington drily. He pauses for a moment, and considers a little; and then again turns his face to hers. "May I ask you again," he says, "what you now intend doing? Is it to be home, or Italy, or where?"

"Decide for yourself," returns she curtly.

"I must consider you too." He says this very gently. "However divided our interests may be, we are, unfortunately bound to each other until kindly death steps in to do a good turn to one or the other of us. Therefore to precipitate ourselves again so soon upon the friends we have left behind will only create comment, and make matters even more awkard for us than they are already."

She bows her head, but says nothing. She is looking pale and exhausted, and almost incapable of speech.

"Then let us go on to Paris," says Barrington. "It will be dull for you, but we need stay there only a week. When we return to our home you can easily explain—that *we;* yes, *we* will be decidedly the best—pined for a home Christmas, and so we came back sooner than we first intended. Nobody will believe you, I dare say; but at least nobody can prove the lie."

"Yes, it is a good plan," she says heavily, conquering, by a supreme effort, the sense of weakness that is overpowering her.

She rises as she speaks, and stands resting her hand on the back of her chair.

"As for this week you are to put in with me alone," says Barrington hurriedly, "don't let it distress you. You will dine with me, for the sake of appearances and the prejudices of your maid; but beyond that I promise you shall see me only when you desire my presence."

"I thank you for that, at least," she says gratefully.

There is a note of passionate relief in her tone. She makes a step forward, with a face the color of death. Then something happens to the walls of the room, she hardly knows what, but she flings out her arms affrightedly, as though to keep them away from her.

"Florence!" cries Barrington, hurrying towards her.

She sways slowly forward, and, but for his arms, would have fallen heavily to the ground.

CHAPTER III.

"I am just going to leap into the dark."

"We take no note of time but from its loss," says Young. To Florence Barrington these seven days in Paris are each one a century in itself, whose death is longed for even as its birth is known. Now, back again in her native country, she feel the hours no whit less wearisome, and chafes and writhes beneath the yoke that has been laid upon her.

She let her thoughts run with wilful directness upon the man she loves, or at least believes she could have loved had things gone smoothly with her, and one day is startled by finding herself face to face with him.

According to some people, Mr. Mervyn is a very nice young man. He certainly *is* nice in the matter of clothes, and feet, and figure; and whatever hair his barber leaves him curls really beautifully.

When Florence finds him standing in her path with his hat off, he is looking specially handsome, and full of melancholy. He was not, perhaps, quite so melancholy the moment before, but he must love her indeed to grow so despondent the very instant he sees her—or sees that she sees him—it is *almost* the same.

He really does feel some dejection as he gazes at her charming face and notes how it pales beneath his gaze. She might have been his, he tells himself, had the Fates been more propitious. By which he means, if the Fates had endowed her with a liberal income. And now it is all over, and the man he hates most on earth has stolen her from him.

But *is* it all over? he asks himself, as he watches her changing face, and notes the deep discontent bosomed in her lovely eyes. To work the undoing of his enemy seems to Mr. Mervyn a very pleasing pastime wherewith to while away these dreary winter days.

Hour by hour this thought grows with him, and strengthens into a positive determination, to lower the man who had once lowered him in the esteem of his fellows. It is his sweetest dream by night and day, and after a while he tells himself, with a fierce glow of delight, that he has succeeded even beyond his utmost expectations.

To Florence his love is but a secondary consideration when compared with her wild longing to escape from a thraldom into which she has been forced. A martyrdom the more terribly degrading in that she believes Barrington to be as indifferent to her as she to him.

And so the perishable days come and go, and the dreary silent Christmas creeps past them, and the New Year is at hand.

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Opening the door of the library, she enters the room quietly, and goes up to where Barrington is sitting. It is quite ten o'clock, yet there is something about her of wind and fresh chill that suggests the possibility of her having been abroad, even on such a night as this.

It is rainless, truly, but the frost is biting, and the snow is falling softly between earth and heaven.

Barrington, however, expresses neither surprise nor displeasure. Rising courteously, he moves to one side, thus dumbly inviting her to come to the fire.

"I am not cold," she says with a little deprecating gesture.

"Exercise provides the best warmth, certainly," returns he quietly.

"Yes, I have been out," says Florence.

"A little imprudent, don't you think?" inquires he, knocking the ash off his cigar, and finally throwing the cigar itself (with what appears to her almost a regretful glance) into the fire.

"*What?*" she says sharply.

"Your meeting him in this sort of way, and unattended."

She starts as if shot, but rallies directly, and walks straight up to the fire.

"I didn't know you were your own detective," she says coolly; "but as it is so, I am glad of it. It simplifies matters; and makes it easier for me to tell you why I came here to-night."

"After all, my words but expressed a *mental* certainty," he says slowly; "I had nothing to build upon. Do not teach yourself to think more harshly of me then you need. When I saw you had been out, of course I knew—Well, and you have something to tell me, you say?"

"Yes, it is on my mind, and I must get rid of it. This life we are leading—I can stand it no longer!"

"It is dull, certainly," says Mr. Barrington. "One cannot blame you for such a speech as that. Even *I* find it insupportable."

"Well, I am going," says Florence recklessly.

"Yes! and with whom?"

"You know; Randal Mervyn," replied she, with a defiant glance. It is a glance, too, so full of weariness, and almost childish anger, that from his soul he pities her.

"I think, perhaps, you might have made a better choice," he says. "But that is your own affair. Existence here, I know, is barren to the last degree, but—how do you propose improving it?"

"*Any* change must be an improvement."

She creeps closer to the fire, as if chilled, and holds out her small hand to the genial warmth. A ray from the fire catching the diamonds in her rings draws her attention to them. Slowly, mechanically, she slips them from her fingers one by one, and lays them on the chimney-piece.

"O, pray don't do that," says Barrington. You will miss them, and they are of no earthly use to me. It seems to me such a silly thing to make oneself uncomfortable in this sort of way."

"I am happier without them. Of course, I might have gone away without giving you warning," she says, turning her face up to his; "but I knew you would lay no embargo on my going; on the contrary," bitterly, "I knew you would rather rejoice at it."

"Shall I? Well, never mind that now," says Barrington; "leave me out of it altogether. I don't suppose I was ever really *in* it. You are going to try life anew with Mervyn, you say?"

"Yes." Her voice is so low and tired that either excitement or passion would be almost impossible to it.

"But—"

"There must be no hindrances," interrupts she doggedly; "my mind is quite made up. If you detain me now, it shall be to-morrow. And if not then, some other time."

"You quite mistake me," says Barrington calmly. "I seek to place no hindrance in your way. Why should I? A prisoner would be to me a most embarrassing possession. Go where you will, *I* shall not seek to detain you. Indeed, I must thank your for you behavior on this occasion; you have spared the idle conjecturing and angry searching that usually accompany this sort of thing. It is really the most comfortably arranged affair of the kind that I have ever known. Well; and when are you going?"

"As soon as possible," she says, puzzled by his careless treatment of what she regards as a tragedy. Is her vengeance, then, to be incomplete?

"It is a serious step. I should take time to consider it if I were you," says Barrington thoughtfully. "To change from one evil to another can hardly be termed wise."

"It cannot at all events be a change for the worse," she says bitterly. "To him at least I am something; to you, nothing."

"Are you so sure of that?"

"Have you ever spoken even one word of love to me? Do you treat me as he does?"

"I dare say not; but the reason for my stupidity is obvious: I never loved—I never thought of love in connection with any one but you. He, I understand, has had considerable experience."

"It is your part to malign him," she says, with cold disdain.

"There you mistake me again. I owe both him and you a debt of gratitude, but no grudge. You are doing me a very good turn, which I acknowledge. By your goodness I shall be enabled to obtain a divorce; and, as the gods cannot *always* prove unkind, I dare say some time or other in the future I shall induce some heart to love me."

She makes no answer to this. Something in her face—a vague restlessness—and her determination not to sit down, reduce speculation to certainty with him in a few minutes.

"You are going to meet him again now?" he says, with calm question.

"Yes," defiantly.

"It would be necessary, of course, to make arrangements. You have not told me, I think, when you intend going?"

"To-night, if possible. There is an up-train at midnight."

As she says this, still with a touch of defiance about her, a sigh escapes her. It does *not* escape him.

"But consider the cold. Why not wait until the morning, and go up to town comfortably? Take your own ponies to the station, and your luggage, and that. To be without one's luggage means misery. I would avoid the orthodox secrecy, if I were you, and the usual conventionalities. An affair of this kind must necessarily be vulgar; but, by stripping it of its worn out trappings, I don't see why you could not make something almost attractive out of it."

"It is kind of you to interest yourself so much," she says sneeringly.

IN A SECOND HE HAS TWINED HIS HAND IN MERVYN'S COLLAR, AND BROUGHT HIM ON HIS KNEES BEFORE "Y[illegible]

"I have always felt an interest in you." Then suddenly, "You are looking pale and tired. Think of the journey that lies before you; and let me entreat you to take at least a glass of wine before you start."

"No, no!"

"Why not?" He pours out a glass as he speaks, and brings it to her "There is no reason why you should refuse to take a simple cordial from the hands of the man you swore 'to love and honor;' we will say nothing of the "obey,' as it would have been my pleasure to turn the tables, and obey *your* slightest whim, had things been different. You are going to betray me to-night; but at least let us part friends."

There is a cynical smile on his lips but, her head being bent, she is ignorant of it.

"Where do you meet him?" he asks presently.

"At the smaller gate, at the end of the garden."

"He has a conveyance for you?"

"He has a carriage."

"If he is there now you should not delay him. Remember what a severe night it is. New Year's-eve, by the bye. Well, I hope your next year," with a courteous glance, "will be happier than your last."

"You are very kind," she says. "And now, good-bye."

"Not yet. Not here. Let me accompany you as far as the garden gate."

"*You!*"

"Yes. Why not? I am one of the advanced school of thought; one of those liberal beings who look with leniency upon anything. Why should any human thing be unhappy, if it can accomplish an escape from its misery? It is misery to you to be *with* me or *without* Mervyn—I really don't know which. You cry to yourself, 'O, that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest!' Nature not having endowed you with these useful appendages, you wisely make another way for yourself to escape."

"Why should I take you out at this hour?"

"For no reason, except that I want to go. You see," pointing to the dog-whip beside him, "I was really going out, whether or no, to the kennels. Let me see you to your destination first."

"There is really no necessity," she says, drawing back.

"Perhaps not. But I have a fancy to see the last of you. What! will you refuse this small request of mine, when probably we shall never meet again? Come, let me take you to Mervyn. When with him I shall understand you are in *safe keeping.*" Again the shadow of a smile, replete with sarcastic bitterness, crosses his face.

CHAPTER IV.

"There's neither honesty, manhood, nor Good fellowship in thee."

The snow has ceased to fall, and a dull moon shines sullenly from between two clouds. It gives sufficient light, however, to let Mervyn, at the wicket-gate, see that two figures are approaching him instead of one. He starts involuntarily, and makes a movement as if to go.

"You needn't run away," says Barrington, the grave ghost of a humorous expression lighting his eyes.

Thus openly addressed, Mervyn perforce comes to a standstill, though the desire for flight is undeniably written upon his brow.

Florence, glancing nervously from one man to the other, tells herself at this moment there is a mental beauty that far outdoes the merely physical.

"I know all about it," says the ugly man imperturbably. "Mrs. Barrington, having found life with me insupportable, is desirous of trying it with you. I think myself she shows bad taste; but that is so natural a conceit that I dare say you will excuse it. She tells me you intend to travel. Continuous change is always to be desired on such occasions; but I hope you will be able to make her happy. She is extravagant in some ways. I like an extravagant woman myself," says Barrington pleasantly. "But it doesn't suit all purses."

"I don't understand you," says Mervyn, with a miserable attempt at haughtiness.

"Then I must try to make my meaning clearer. Look here," says Barrington, changing his tone suddenly, and turning sharply upon the other, "let us drop hints and come to business. You are in debt, as I *know*; you are on the point of absolute ruin as I *suspect*. In six months you will not have enough money to keep yourself going, to say nothing of another. I give you a chance of beginning a new life elsewhere. If you will leave this place *alone* to-morrow I will give you 5000*l.*"

The crisp, clear voice ceases, and silence follows it. Mrs. Barrington, throwing back her hood from her face, stares with passionate impatience at the man in whose love she had believed a minute ago. Will he *never* speak? Is there to be a hesitation, a choice, between *her* and a paltry sum of money?

"If I thought," he stammers at last lamely, "that it would be for *her* happiness to leave her in peace, I—"

"If you are about to make any allusion to Mrs. Barrington, I must beg you to leave it unsaid," interrupts Mrs. Barrington's husband unpleasantly. "Come to the point. You will take the money, and be gone?"

There is another silence, even more distressing than the last. Florence, immovable as a statue, stands erect; Barrington is beating his foot angrily on the ground. As for Mervyn;—he *is* ruined—there was no exaggeration in that suspicion—and the money is a temptation, and—

"Considering all I am giving up—" he begins, too confused, perhaps, to comprehend the enormity of his words.

"There, don't be a greater blackguard than is strictly necessary," says George Barrington, cutting him short with a frown. "You accept my terms? That is well. To-morrow morning you shall have my cheque, and now—you shall have *this!*"

In a second he has twined his hand in Mervyn's collar, and brought him on his knees before him. Raising the dog-whip, he brings it down with uncontrollable fury upon his shoulders again and again, until the miserable craven cries aloud for mercy, grovelling at the very feet of the woman to whom he had been half a hero at least, an hour ago. With a final cut, Barrington flings him far from him, and, taking Florence's hand with impulsive haste, hurries her toward the house until they are out of sight and hearing of the frightened wretch they have left behind.

Then, the fierce fit of passion and revenge over, Barrington stops and breathes heavily. The livid pallor departs from his lips, the baleful fire from his eyes; he even smiles.

Florence, terrified, breaks into bitter weeping.

"Come home, you little silly fool," says ugly Barrington, not altogether unkindly; and then he actually laughs aloud, as he may who wins. But presently, seeing how she sobs and trembles, he goes nearer to her, and finally places his arm round her.

But she shrinks from him.

"I wonder you can bear to touch me," she says, shivering. "I suppose after this, my [illegible] is with my father."

"Your best place is with your husband," says George Barrington, "if you will only trust him."

"O George, that word *trust* makes me quite! How can you trust *me?*"

"I would trust you with my life—nay, with far more, my honor—this very moment," says Barrington simply, "in spite of all that has come and gone. A woman who found a difficulty in running away from her husband, without first apprising him of her intention, can't have much the matter with her. Let us forget to-night. It is known but to that cur and you and me; and he, I fancy, will be slow to speak of it."

"But you will *think* of it."

"Not I; or even if I do, it will be only to laud myself afresh for my clever treatment of a grievous evil. I unmasked a villain just at the right moment, and before the necessary witness."

"If you had treated me differently just at first—had shown me that you loved me—"

"Nay, then I should have been a clumsy fool, and have lost my game. Now I breathe the air of heaven with renewed lungs, and hope again there is still a chance to win your love."

"'Hope, that some *fool* has called the anchor of the soul,'" murmurs she, copying the tone and words he had used on the evening of their marriage to a nicety. He smiles, and she smiles too, because youth is warm within her, and it is so hard to be *always* sighing. Still, the smile is followed by a sigh.

But the ice being slightly broken, he bends down to her, and kisses her warmly.

"That is the first real kiss I have ever dared to give you," he says, his plain face lighting up until it is nearly handsome. "Now I begin to woo you in earnest. And there is one thing, sweetheart: let no sense of mistaken gratitude, of revulsion of feeling, induce you to *fancy* you love me until you really do. Let me be your suitor for the present."

She makes him no answer to this. They have regained the house now; entering the hall, a glow of warmth smites on their hands and faces.

"At least tell me," he says, looking into her nervous eyes, "that you find it pleasanter returning to a warm fire than to be hurrying, on such a night as this, through sleet and snow."

She shudders.

"What have you not saved me from!" she says. She half puts out her hand, as though to touch him, and then timidly draws it back again.

"Now, I will have none of that," he says, in his masterful but tender fashion, taking her hand and laying it upon his heart.

"There is one thing," she says, with downcast lids. "Since our marriage though I have not kissed *you*, I have at least kissed no one else." She blushes excessively as she says this, but she lifts her head and looks him very fairly in the eyes. He draws his breath quickly.

"I thank you for that," he says; and then more lightly, "after all, I believe your liking for him was more fancy than anything else."

"And obstinacy," confesses she, in a low, sweet tone. "My father was so averse to him; and besides, he used to say sweet words to me when all the world seemed unkind."

"And when *I*, who should have protected you, was silent and reserved. The blame must rest with me, for I was the better man of the two," says Barrington boldly, "and should have found victory easy. After all," quaintly, "there are other things as worthy of commendation as a Grecian nose."

"Ah! what is that?" exclaims she, starting violently. Even as she speaks the sound of the calm, sweet, solemn bells ringing in the New Year is borne to them upon the wings of the rushing wind

"It is another year begun," says Barrington gravely. "Let us pray that in it may be found happiness for us!"

THE END.

Canada Bill's Funeral.

Canada Bill was the greatest monte man and cross-roader that we ever had in this country. He died at Scranton, Pa., and I remember his funeral very well. We went out to the graveyard with the body, and just as the coffin was being lowered into the grave one of the party broke out: "I'll bet a hundred to fifty he's not in the box!" and there wasn't a man to take it. "For," said another, "I've known him to get out of as tight places as that." Bill was known from one end of the country to the other. It was a story generally circulated just before his death that he had offered a railroad corporation $25,000 a year for the privilege of playing monte and doing "con," work generally, and guaranteeing to tackle no passengers but ministers.—*From an Interview with a Confidence Man.*

It Might Have Been.

A fair and buxom widow who had buried three husbands recently went with a gentleman, who in his younger years had paid her marked attention, to inspect the graves of her dear departed. After contemplating them in mournful silence she murmured to her companion: "Ah, James, you might have been in that row now if you had only had a little more courage!"—*St. Albans Messenger.*