

THE WOOING OF ERNA

It is needless to say that the majority of the men there were delighted at the prospect of one who had been treated as a lion since his re-entry into society.

Lord Aubrey was taken aback more completely than ever before in his life. He had looked upon Erna as in some sort a piece of property in which he had a nearly exclusive right. He was deeply interested in her in a benevolent sort of way, and within the past few minutes had been planning for her future on a scale of grandeur.

And now the hidden of Aubrey, whom he had relentlessly consigned to a finishing school after releasing her misdeeds to her aunt, had met him as a woman of the world who has a score to pay, and has the coin wherewith to pay it.

He bit his lip and hardly knew how to act. He could easily have retorted in a way to mortify Erna; but, aside from the fact that he was too much of a gentleman to do so, there was a feeling that he would be unable to say anything that she could not answer wit as well as wit as his own.

He turned with a grave smile to poor Violet, and said, as he bowed to her: "We have paid our respects to the queen of beauty; shall we go look at the lawn tennis now?"

"If you please," murmured Lady Violet, casting a reproachful glance at Erna.

"Our young lady can be very chilling when she chooses," he said, when they were out of hearing of the party about Erna.

"Wasn't it dreadful?" exclaimed Violet. "Oh, how you must have offended her! I never saw her like that before."

"Yes," he replied, "I must have given her great offense. Yours must be a splendid school for finishing girls. Erna was a girl when I last saw her, and a particularly lively one. She seems to be a woman now."

The earl was altogether too wise to attempt to force himself on Erna in the presence of others; but he was determined to see her alone, and insist upon an explanation; and he trusted to fortune to give him the opportunity.

A few hours earlier he would have smiled at the notion of watching for an opportunity to talk with Erna; but now he was too earnest to smile, or even wonder at himself.

He had cared for her past, and he had her future in his charge, and he felt that he could not be treated in such a way at the whim of a silly girl. He would not have believed that it would hurt him so much; but it had hurt him, because, as he believed, there was something of ingratitude in what she had done. He was quite sure that he felt her action very little as a man, but very much as a guardian.

It was as a joint guardian that he followed her that evening, just as dusk was falling. She had evidently gone to the drawing-room, which was deserted, to seek a little respite from her social triumphs.

It was still light enough to distinguish faces easily, and she recognized him at once, when she looked up, warned of his approach by his footsteps. He saw her face change, and grow defiant, as if in anticipation of what was to follow.

"I came after you," he said, something of the sternness of a guardian in his tone, "in order that there might be no unpleasant repetition of the scene of this afternoon."

"But," she said, coldly, "there will be a repetition of it. I have no desire to converse with you, and do not recognize your right to assume such a tone toward me. I will not pretend," she said, with more warmth, "not to understand why you assume such a tone. It is because you have, or believe that you have, a money claim on me. I distinctly repudiate it."

"When I was a child I was the recipient of your bounty, and was grateful. Some day I shall discharge the obligation incurred then. At this moment I am being kept at school at your expense, but I owe you no gratitude for it. I would not have accepted another favor from you had it been possible to avoid it. I declared to my aunt that I would not. She said I must obey her, being a minor. I obeyed her, and have gone to the school. I shall remain there, perforce, until I am of age. Then, cost what it may, involve what it may, I shall refuse everything that comes from you, directly or indirectly."

She had grown warmer and warmer with each word, until her speech became a sort of fiery torrent which there was no staying. The earl was compelled to abandon the high ground he had contemplated standing on in face of such vehement refusal to admit him to the house.

"At least," he said, without any suspicion of superiority in his tone, and altogether in the manner of a man to a woman his equal, "you will not refuse to tell me why you take this violent position."

"An explanation should not be necessary," she replied, haughtily. "Have you forgotten that at Aubrey you betrayed my easily won confidence by telling my aunt of the things I had done in the childish mischief? Can you not comprehend that I was a woman almost, and that you insulted me in acting as you did? What right had you to play the part of censor of my actions? What episode in your own life entitled you to the privilege? Was it that which drove you from London? or that which took place on the continent?"

"What will you do? I renounce any pretensions I may have had to governing your actions, since you are so certain of your unworthiness, but I am in a manner responsible for your future. Because you are a Cecil, and for no reason at all personal to yourself, I responded to the request of your aunt to defray the expenses of your education. I ask no gratitude for that. It was a thing I would do for any other Cecil. But I did it for you, and by doing it made myself responsible for your future. Will you not permit me, as a Cecil, to provide suitably for you?"

"I will not. I would rather die than voluntarily accept a penny for you."

"Sturdily your hatred of me is out of proportion to my offense," he said, quietly.

"I do not pretend to explain my sentiments or actions," she vehemently replied. "I refuse finally to accept the least thing from you."

"But what will you do?" he demanded. "What are you fitted to do that is by you refused? I do not ask you to consider anybody but yourself; but beg of you not to punish me by placing yourself in a situation of misery. And what else can be possible?"

"I absolve you from all concern to my future," she said, proudly. "I shall know how to act as worthily as other Cecils have acted. Your solicitude is uncalled for. I have reason to believe that you are not a good judge of motives and actions in others."

"You are very bitter," he said. "Do you really know the story of my life? I do not, and do not wish to know it," she quickly replied. "Perhaps when I am older, or when I have a husband to tell me, if he think best, I may know it."

CHAPTER XVII.

"You are cruel," Aubrey said, stung almost to anger at her persistent reluctance to the matter of the cloud that hung about his reputation.

"You are not forced to hear my words," Erna retorted. "I ask nothing of you but to be left in peace."

"Is it your intention," he asked, changing the subject suddenly, "to put yourself in the matrimonial market? Is that your notion of the way to rid yourself of my assistance?"

"How readily your thought run on the basest designs!" she replied. "In fact, I had not thought of such a plan, but it may be a suggestion worthy of a Cecil's attention. I am told that I am beautiful. Thank you!"

"You distort whatever I say. Let it be so. I will leave you. Are we to be enemies because we cannot be friends?"

"It is a matter of indifference to me what we are, so that it is understood that nothing will cause me to alter my determination as to accepting assistance from you. I would startle with joy rather than be under obligation to you for a mouthful of food."

"I accept the conditions," he said, in a low tone. "I will make no attempt, directly or indirectly, to make you the recipient of my bounty, and, in return, or in consequence, if that suit you better, we shall be friends."

"We need not be enemies," she answered, uncompromisingly, "but I do not see either the necessity or the advantage of being friends. There was a time when we might have been friends, but you tossed away the goodwill I voluntarily offered you, as if it had been a child's toy, for which you, in your superior manhood, had no use."

It would be hard to convey the effect of the words uttered by Erna. Spoken by an ordinary voice, they would still have carried a sting, but uttered in a voice whose every exquisite modulation had a meaning, it seemed to her listener as if she were piercing his acutest sensibilities with a myriad poniards.

He had sought her much in the manner of one seeking a wayward child, and he had listened to her with a re-awakening of his soul. He could not have put the idea in words, but in his inner consciousness there was a feeling that all the bitterness under which he writhed was but the manifestation is some way of a soul in agony.

He writhed under her stinging, bitter words, but he caught a glimpse of his own soul, chained down by his own bitterness and cynicism, and he did not hate her as he might have done. He did not hate her, but he did not know why he did not.

"I will not disturb you longer," he said. "I have made a grievous mistake. I came to chide a girl; I go away asking pardon of a woman."

He bowed and left her alone. Twice and three times she essayed to say something to him, but the words caught in her throat, and were never said. He passed out of sight in the gathering twilight, and she sank into a chair sobbing bitterly.

"Oh, why did I? why did I? I know he is good and true, and I stung him like a serpent. If he only knew what was in my heart! But he never shall know."

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you treated him I don't suppose you care, but Lord Aubrey expects to hear you."

"A reason why I should not recite," said Erna, coldly.

"I didn't know you disliked him," said Violet. "From the way you stood up for him the other day I was sure you must admire him. I don't believe a word of the dreadful stories about him, whatever they are. Besides, Gertrude will hang for him, I mean her. He told me he admired her voice, and as he is the lion of the evening, she will have a tremendous triumph."

"Let her have it," said Erna, quite unmoved.

"I wouldn't care," pleaded Violet, "only he said he was so fond of music, particularly vocal music; and I can't bear to think how Gertrude will go back to school and tell how she triumphed."

"Do you care so very much?" demanded Erna, suddenly.

"Indeed I do," cried Violet, eagerly.

"Then I'll tell you what I will do," replied Erna. "I will recite on one condition—that you persuade your mother to ask me to sing after Gertrude."

"But, Erna—"

"Well, I won't recite then?"

"You can sing, then?" asked Violet, timidly. It was like doubting the infallible to ask the question, but she was so afraid Erna might make a failure.

"I want to try," answered Erna, shortly. "Will you ask your mother or not?"

"Of course I will, but if she asks me if you can sing, what shall I say? I never have said a word about your singing."

"Tell her I can sing, of course. If I fail, let me bear the brunt of it."

Erna could be very imperious, and her subjects were well aware of the fact. It was useless to argue the matter, and Violet fell back trustfully on the firm assurance that, inasmuch as Erna had never failed in an undertaking, she never would; and off she went to confer with the duchess, while Erna, with bright eyes and glowing cheeks, went to her room to dress. The conversation between the duchess and Violet was in this wise:

"Mamma, Erna will recite, and, what is more, I have coaxed her to sing."

"To sing! she does sing, too? You know Lady Gertrude is going to sing."

"You can let Erna sing after Gertrude."

"She has a wonderfully sweet voice. Everybody is speaking of it. I didn't know she could sing. Of course, if she sings, I shall be pleased to have her. Unless—I wonder if Lord Aubrey is as much struck with her as the other gentlemen are!"

Artful little Violet understood the meaning of that question. If Lord Aubrey admired Erna too much, then Erna was to have no chance of fascinating him still further by her singing.

"I don't believe he is, mamma, and I know that she detests him. I heard him say how much he admired Gertrude. I am glad, for his sake, that you invited her."

"You are a silly girl!" said the duchess, with sudden asperity. "Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Why, mamma, I didn't know it until this afternoon, and you did not consult me about which of my schoolmates to invite, excepting Erna. Anyhow, I don't see what difference it makes."

"Well, I do, then. By all means, have Erna sing. I hope she sings well enough to follow Gertrude," said the duchess, anxiously.

"Erna does everything better than anybody else. For my part, I don't believe she would consent to sing after Gertrude if she were not sure of what she could do. Though, of course, Gertrude has an exceptional voice. Lord Aubrey noticed that. He was speaking about it this afternoon."

"I wonder," said the duchess, suddenly, "if Erna has a suitable dress for the evening."

"She has nothing very fine," answered Violet; "but nobody ever notices what she wears."

"She must have one of your gowns, Violet. Let her have her choice on that point. I will, mamma, but I won't promise she will wear it. She is awfully independent, and she may not like the suggestion, even."

"Well, do the best you can. She is your friend, and I wish her to appear to the best advantage. Your father tells me that the Marquis de Melrose has been asking very particularly about her. It would be a great thing for a poor girl to win him for a husband."

"A mamma with forty thousand a year, and able to settle ten thousand on his bride! Don't be romantic, my dear. It isn't every girl who has such a chance."

"Ugh!" murmured Violet, as she hastened to Erna's room, "she would not take him if he had twice as much. I'll tell her, and have a good laugh over the old monkey."

Violet's maid was arranging Erna's hair when the former entered the room.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she cried, enthusiastically, "that is the most becoming way to arrange your hair. Did you bring your pink silk? I am sure you did not, and it is the only gown to wear with your hair like that."

Violet was certain the pink silk had not been brought, for it was growing shabby. But she was very artful in her own harmless little way.

"No, I didn't bring the pink silk," replied Erna. "That would have done very well at the court of King Tatters, but not here."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" cried Violet, and then said, in her most wheedling tone: "If do wish you would wear a pink silk I have. It is loose for me, and will just fit you; I am sure. Don't you believe it would, Jeanie?"

"It would be exactly the gown for mademoiselle," said the maid, critically.

"Will you let me get it, Erna, dear?" Erna stared rather fixedly at her for a moment, and Violet expected some terrible response.

"Yes, if it fits I'll wear it."

"As well to wear a gown of Violet's as one bought with his money," thought Erna.

The pink gown chanced to be one that was a little too large for Violet, and fitted Erna to perfection, showing her rounded, perfect figure in all its symmetrical outline. Her neck and arms were more exposed than she had ever had them before, but a glance told her that she need not be ashamed of them. Indeed, Violet and Jeanne went into ecstasies over them.

Having succeeded with the gown, Violet would have had Erna borrow some of her jewels, but Erna refused in a tone that was not to be gainsaid, and afterward Violet was rejoiced, for when Erna was ready to go down she looked as if another touch would have spoiled a perfect picture.

"Gertrude won't have a chance to-night," thought Violet. And when she was ready she whispered to Jeanne: "Go learn if Lady Gertrude has gone down yet."

"Are you ready? Shall we go down?" inquired Erna, composedly.

"Wait until Jeanne comes back. Aren't you a bit afraid?" she demanded, unable to comprehend Erna's composure.

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In this condition she was advised to try Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. Grasping at even the possibility of help she decided to do so. After taking three boxes she actually found some improvement, and from that time on this improvement was steady and increasing daily until after a few months she felt the cure was complete. She says: "Dr. Williams' Pink Pills have done what doctors failed to do and what I myself thought was impossible. They have freed me from the terrible trouble I suffered, and my old joy in life has been renewed." When Mrs. Hall began taking Dr. Williams' Pink Pills she weighed only one hundred pounds, while under her renewed health her weight has increased to one hundred and thirty pounds.

Dr. Williams' Pink Pills can be had from any dealer in medicine or will be sent by mail at 50 cents a box or six boxes for \$2.50 by The Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., Brockville, Ont.

BIRDS' NESTS.
(London Free Press.)

Let it be known far and wide that the boy who robs a bird's nest is a foe to his kind. About this time of year the instinct grows acute with opportunity. The birds are nesting, busy to recruit the species. They are doing a great work of humanity. Why interfere with it? The small boy's precocious habit in stealing the eggs should be made a criminal offense, as it is the utmost folly of wantonness.

A stitch in time saves nine, and every house fly killed early saves a thousand at least later on. Wilson's Fly Pads will kill many times more flies than any other article.

Never Rocked a Boat.

"Before I consent to let you have my daughter," said the grim old gentleman, "there are some questions I would like to ask you. Are you quick-tempered?"

"Well, yes; to tell the truth, I'm afraid I am."

"I'm Ever swear?"

"Sometimes, when I become very angry I do."

"Smoke?"

"Yes, but I have never noticed that it injured me."

"Ever drink intoxicating liquors?"

"I occasionally take a drink, but I'm not a slave to the habit, I assure you."

"Have you ever been in jail?"

"Once. I took some funds to which I had no right, but I did not do it deliberately, I assure you. It was the result of a misunderstanding."

"Yes. It generally is. How about your family? What kind of ancestors did you have?"

tree. An old fox steps out into the road and trots boldly along ahead of you for some distance; but, when he discovers that you are gaining on him, he turns for an instant, shows his teeth with a snarl, and then slinks away into the bushes. Further along a partridge with her brood of chicks has also ventured out into the road and, when she, too, discovers that you are drawing uncomfortably near, there is a great to-do. With outspread wings, and uttering the plaintive cry made by a mother partridge when she believes her young to be in danger, she hastily collects the members of her family and leads and drives them back into the security of the woods.—From "Brook Trout and Their Surroundings," in the Outing Magazine for June.

NOISY AFRICAN NATIVES. Laughter Seldom Heard in the Up-road—Sounds of Tomtoms.

Among the African natives there can be nothing done without noise, according to William B. Clarke, of Pittsburgh, Pa., who has travelled extensively in Africa.

"It is simply appalling, the rush, the roar, the chatter and the bustle, like Bedlam let loose," Mr. Clarke said. "The principal object of conversation is said to be money, and the hubbub, bawling and uproar in all sorts of tones from shrill and screaming to gruff and growling, accompanied by all sorts of gesticulations with tongue, head and feet, are beyond description."

"It is rather odd, but laughter is almost never heard in this uproar; and as for whistling, it is a lost art. If there are any quarrels they are not to be heard in public, although when a company of natives gets to carry on an animated conversation it appears to the observer as if the next act would be a melee."

"In addition to these natural sounds there are others of an artificial character that are equally familiar to the traveller. Such is the noise of the drums called tomtoms, which are beaten on every occasion, and a kind of pipe about eighteen inches long, with holes like those of a flute, and breathed through in a way that produces a variety of notes of a wild, discordant character. A frightful noise is made by the kaffa men blowing on a big shell."—From the Washington Post.

She's Sure to be an Actress.

It was the opening day of the kindergarten. The teacher began by asking each child what it had learned to do.

"James, what can you do?"

"Please, ma'am, I can sharpen pencils."

"That's very nice, William, what can you do?"

"I can throw a ball."

"That's splendid, Mary, what can you do?"

"I can undress myself," was the proud response.

"I'm sure that must be a great help to your mother, Mary, Rachel, what can you do?"

"I can undress myself," interrupted Mary.

"Yes, Mary, that's very nice, but you mustn't interrupt, Rachel."

"I can undress myself," piped Mary.

"So you have said twice before, Mary. If you interrupt again, you will have to be punished. Now, Rachel, what can you do?"

"I take care of my baby brother, sometimes, and—"

"That's lovely, Rachel. Charles, what can you do?"

"I can undress myself," persisted Mary, cooly, before Charles had time to answer. So the teacher gently led Mary to the cloak room to meditate on her disobedience. Shortly afterward the doctor called to see if all the children were well.

"Yes," the teacher assured him, "we are all well and happy this morning. Oh, all but one little girl. I think there must be something the matter with her tongue. Will you look at it please? Mary, come here a moment."

Mary fluttered into the room, minus her clothes. Waving her arms she said with childish glee:

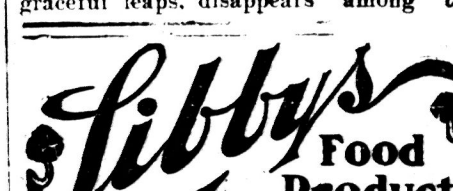
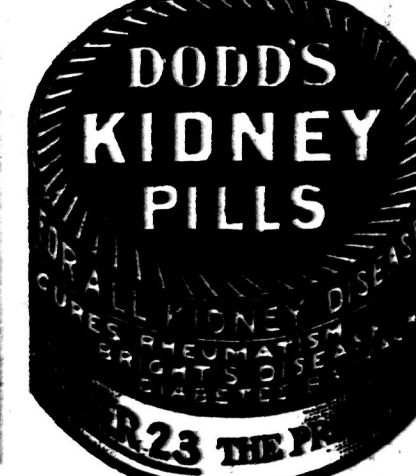
"See, I can undress myself!"—Everybody's Magazine.

Banks Guarded by Soldiers.

Like the Bank of England, the Bank of France is now guarded every night by soldiers, who do sentry duty outside the building, a watch being likewise kept inside its precincts. But within quite recent times the officials at the French bank resorted to a very novel method of protecting their bullion. This consisted in engaging masons to wall up the doors of the vaults in the cellar with hydraulic mortar as soon as the money was deposited each day in these receptacles. The water was then turned on and kept running until the whole cellar was flooded. A burglar would be obliged to work in a diving suit and break down a cement wall before he could even begin to plunder the vaults. When the bank officials arrived next morning, the water was drawn off, the masonry torn down, and the vaults opened. Curiously enough, within a few months after this obsolete manner of protecting the banks' cash was done away with, burglars did actually get into the vaults and decamp with gold worth forty-five thousand dollars in gold coin.—From "The Romance of Strong-Rooms," in the June Strand Magazine.

THE WASTE OF MILITARISM.
(Canadian Trade Review.)

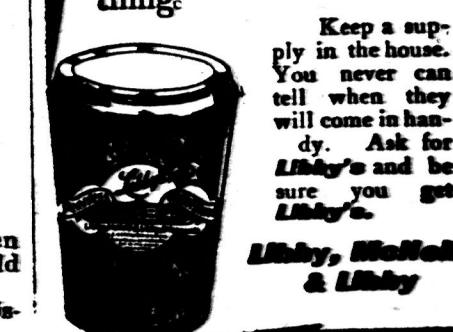
The end will come when the property-holding classes and the working classes see that it is to their interest to unite and oppose further financial burdens in this direction. Close the purse, and war preparations will cease. No longer will defiant banners, buttressed by "patriotism" be seen on the outward walls of challenging to battle, but the arts of peace will replace the arts of war. Soldiers and sailors will stop being mere wealth consumers, and will become wealth producers, and then both labor and capital will be benefited by what is now being wasted. Then "the brotherhood of man" will not be the idle dream it is to-day. "And they shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit thereof; they shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat."



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