

THE COST OF AN ESCAPADE

"Oh, I should love to go, but I'm afraid. It would be so dreadful if any one found it out!"

"But why should they? Besides, everybody goes to music halls nowadays; and then in Paris, you know"——

"Yes; but it depends whom they go with, doesn't it?" and Mrs. Linton glanced mischievously at her companion.

He laughed in a self embarrassed, half-flattered way. "You're not complimentary, at any rate; but do make up your mind and say when you will come."

She hesitated a moment. "I can't know. It's all wrong of course; but I do so want to go! Hush! here is Phillip. I'll write to you."

At this moment Mr. Linton joined them, and after a few general remarks, Dick Redmayne bowed good-night and strolled off into the court-yard of the hotel to drink his coffee in the open.

"Will she come, I wonder?" he asked himself, as he sipped his chateau-cake, and let his eyes wander idly on the busy chattering crowd of Parisians who sauntered to and fro on pleasure bent.

Dick had declared to himself a hundred times within the last three weeks that he was not in love. A man who respected himself and regarded his peace of mind did not fall in love with other men's wives, he told himself emphatically; yet all the while he was conscious that he was too keenly alive to Mrs. Linton's attractions to be quite safe. They had met in the Riviera; happened to be staying in the same hotel, neighbors at table d'hôte, and that sort of thing. No man with eyes in his head could help seeing that the piquant little dark woman with the bear of a husband was more than commonly pretty. The acquaintance had ripened. Mrs. Linton had pretty childish ways, and their conversation had gradually passed from the commonplace into the confidential; he knew that she was a French Canadian, brought up in the strictest seclusion and married off hand as soon as she had merged into long frocks to a man old enough to be her father, and who she scarcely knew. Dick was very sorry for her; the vivacious and fascinating little brunette was a creature made for "love and laughter," and ill-mated with the stern, morose man who apparently took the world, and all that therein is, including his butterfly of a wife, au grand sérieux. The Lintons were bound for London eventually, where the husband intended to winter, having business, he said, which required his presence there for some months; but on their way they were taking in Paris, where, to please Mrs. Linton, they were to make a short stay.

"I'm awfully sorry you are going," Dick had said when Mrs. Linton informed him of their approaching departure. "It will be so dull when you are gone."

"Will it?" She raised her big eyes to his face with a look half-mischievous half-serious. "There are heaps of other people left, don't you know?"

"But they won't be you," he had replied significantly.

"No? Then why don't you come with us?"

The remark had been thrown out with a laugh; but, after all why not? And so it was that Dick Redmayne found himself travelling in the wake of the Lintons, installed with them in the Grand Hotel in Paris, and unpleasantly

conscious that if they decided tomorrow to start for Kamchatka he would probably pack his portmanteau and his him thither also. Nevertheless, he stoutly declared to himself that he was not in love with Trinette Linton, only charitably anxious to amuse her and lighten a little of the monotony of her life with her bore of a husband. Tonight Trinette had inadvertently remarked that the desire of her heart was to visit Le Cafe Ambassadeurs to hear the great Yvette on her native asphalt. To broach such a subject to Phillip Linton was impossible. Still, why should not the little woman's curiosity be gratified? It would be the simplest thing in the world to take her there—where was the harm?—and the poor child would enjoy it as much as an escaped schoolgirl delights in a surreptitious novel.

For a couple of days, however, Phillip Linton was constantly at his wife's side. When she and Dick met in the evening in the big salon she looked tired and dispirited, and gave melancholy accounts of mornings spent in museums and afternoons in galleries, which she frankly confessed to Dick were places she loathed.

It was on the third day that, on going to dress for dinner, he found a small note on his dressing-table:

"Dear Mr. Redmayne: Phillip has gone to Rouen on business; he will not be back till the morning. The museums have made me so wicked; don't say you have an engagement this evening.—T. L.

Never in his life had Redmayne dressed at such a rate; in less than half an hour he was knocking at the Lintons' salon on the floor below.

Mrs. Linton herself opened it. She blushed as she saw him standing there, and drew back a little embarrassed.

"I've just got your note, and"——

"Oh!" she interrupted hurriedly, "I'm afraid it was very silly; please forget all about it."

"Not at all; it was charming of you to write it. Now just get a cloak or something, and we'll go straight off somewhere and have dinner, and then on to the Ambassadeurs."

The little woman was crimson to the roots of her hair.

"I dare not."

"Why not? Aren't we friends? Don't you trust me?"

"Oh, yes—yes—only"——

"There is no only about it. Run, like a good girl, and put something on your shoulders, and let us go."

She hesitated a moment longer. Dick argued in the most elder-brotherly and prosaic fashion, and it ended of course, in Trinette looking down at her black gown deprecatingly, and saying:

"But I can't go like this, and my maid is out for the evening."

"You look charming in that. Come just as you are."

It was the busiest time of the evening and no one was likely to notice the black-gowned little figure, her head swathed in a filmy lace veil, walking so demurely by Dick's side.

When they were seated in the sacre all Trinette's spirits, checked a little by the first shock of the escapade, returned in full force. She laughed, and chatted and talked delightful nonsense in the way which made her special charm, which Dick always likened to that of a precocious and pretty child.

"Do you know that it's my birthday today?" she remarked suddenly; "and

poor old Phillip gave me the loveliest present. Just look!" and loosening the lace about her head, she showed him a long chain of perfectly shaped pearls, interspersed here and there with diamonds. It hung far down upon her breast, and was wonderfully beautiful.

Dick's admiration was loud and genuine. It's exquisite!" he exclaimed, "and it must have cost a lot of money."

He said to himself: "I shouldn't have thought that solemn chap had it in him to make such presents."

"Wasn't it sweet of him to give me such a lovely thing!" And then without waiting for an answer, she glided off again to some other subject.

It was a strange evening altogether for Dick Redmayne—the tete-a-tete dinner, the concert at the Ambassadeurs with Trinette's little gurgles of suppressed laughter, and small efforts at being shocked; the snug supper afterward, and then the discreet parting on her stage, when he held her hand—"but as a friend might or only a second longer"—and felt the glance of her dark eyes, trusting (and surely something more!), as they rested on him during that whispered "good night."

It was a unique experience, he told himself, and only to be accounted for by Trinette's naive innocence and child-like confidence. But it was no longer any use reiterating to himself that he was not in love with her; his assertion no longer carried conviction.

As he tossed to and fro he determined that his only safety—and, perhaps poor child! her's, too—lay in prompt retreat. He would leave Paris tomorrow to go anywhere out of reach of her dark eyes, her cooing voice, her pretty, impulsive ways. At last he fell asleep, only to dream sweet dreams which turned to hideous nightmare always by the sudden appearance of Phillip Linton upon the scene.

His servant woke him on entering with his letters. Dick turned them over listlessly, when his eye was caught by an unstamped one. It was surely in Trinette's handwriting; he tore it open hastily:

"For pity's sake, come to me; come to me; I am in dreadful trouble—T."

In trouble? Since last night? What could have happened? Had Linton returned during their absence? As he dressed hastily he cursed himself for his selfish folly in having allowed Trinette's innocence to lead her into such a situation; for who was there in the world who would believe the truth of last night's doings?

She was sitting in her salon, in the most picturesque of morning wrappers, when he entered. She had been weeping, evidently; but somehow it was not unbecoming, and her dark eyes looked all the sweeter. He was by her side in a moment.

"What has happened?" he asked hurriedly. "My dear Mrs. Linton, what is the trouble?"

"My pearls!" she gasped tragically, "Mr. Redmayne, I have lost the pearls that Phillip gave me yesterday! Oh, what shall I—what can I do?"

"But it's impossible! You had them at the Ambassadeurs, I saw them"—

"I know; I missed them directly I began to undress. I would have come to you then, only it was so late, and I did not dare."

"But you could only have dropped them at the supper-place or in the sacre. I will go to the Prefecture de Police. They will turn up: don't cry, my poor

child."

"No they won't! I'm sure they won't; and Phillip will never forgive me. He will be angry. Oh, why did I go? It was wicked"——

Dick tried to soothe her, to reassure her; the chain was too valuable for a cabman or a waiter to dare to retain it; it must be returned.

"What time does Mr. Linton return?"

"By the 12.50. Oh, what shall I do?"

"Be a good child and eat some breakfast. I'll run off to make inquiries, and before you have finished your coffee the pearls shall be here."

His inquiries proved futile, as he feared in his own mind they would. Nothing had been seen; nothing had been found. There was only one thing possible—to return to the hotel and ascertain if Trinette knew whence the jewels had come, and try to procure another chain at any cost.

Fresh tears greeted the news of Dick's failure, and there was really nothing possible but to attempt to comfort her as one would a child—only, the child was a woman.

"But we must not forget the pearls," he said at last. "You have no idea where they came from—the name was not on the case?"

Trinette shook her head mournfully.

"Well I dare say I can get something like them in the Rue de la Paix. Don't worry, dearest; you shall have them in an hour."

"And if you fail?"

"Bah! I shall not fail."

A few minutes later he was standing in a jeweler's shop describing the sort of thing he wanted. Yea, they had something of the kind in stock. Dick looked at it; the pearls seemed smaller and the diamonds farther apart, than in the one Trinette had worn; but surely he would find no better substitute, and how was Linton to imagine it was any other than the one he had given his wife?

The price staggered Dick somewhat, prepared as he had been for a long one. He wrote his cheque, waited impatiently during the necessary formalities, and at last hurried back to the hotel. It was past 1, despite his haste, and Linton would have returned?

Trinette met him on the landing, her finger to her lips. He held out the case in silence; she caught it from him quickly.

At dinner the Lintons were not to be seen. Dick was restless and uneasy, and strolling into the hall chatted with the concierge, slipping in a careless question about his friends.

"The big Englishman and la petite dame? They left by the afternoon express for the south."

Dick gasped, and the conversation with the concierge came to an abrupt conclusion. For weeks he lingered on at the Grand, hoping Trinette would write and give some account of her movements. But nothing came until months afterward, when in the Paris column of a London paper he read of the arrest of a pair of clever swindlers with many aliases, one of which was Linton. The woman turned upon her accomplice and gave details of several of their most successful frauds, among which figured the story of a palais Royal neck-chain, supposed to be lost, and replaced by a valuable Rue de la Paix trinket by an amorous and gullible Englishman.—W.

Church Howe was in the city this week.