

# THE AMERICAN.

## TWO WEDDING RINGS.

I had just heard the whistle of the teamster at the door, and looked over the business papers of my husband if there were any letters for me.

There was no immediate response in my query, and I inferred from the suspicious silence that either Mrs. McEntee or her daughter was inspecting my letters, probably reading the post cards, if there were any.

That is very often a peculiarity of ladies' daughters as people who are compelled to board well know.

Again I asked:

"Mrs. McEntee, are there any letters for me? I expect a letter of some importance."

"Coming, sir, coming," replied Maud, her daughter, as the latter slowly ascended the stairs gazing very intently at a postcard.

In a few moments more she arrived at my landing on the second floor, and gave to me a letter, two postcards and a newspaper.

"I thought that you were inspecting my correspondence," I said, sarcastically.

"What? Oh Mr. Belton! I would never think of such a thing." And she went downstairs, tossing her head like an enraged Shetland pony.

One card from my tailor, one from Louis Durand to tell me that he could not keep a certain engagement with me, and a letter from Percy Crosmier, who had warmed his slippers at the same college fire with me scarcely three years ago.

His epistle ran thus:

"Dear Belton—I claim your congratulations. I am to be married next week to the sweetest girl the sun ever shone upon. There's surprise number one for you. And I wish you'd go to Silverman, the jeweler, and get the wedding ring, size inclosed on a bit of paper. There's surprise number two. Seriously, old fellow, it will do me a great favor, for business matters here are complicated in such a way that I cannot hope to get to the city a day before the event, and of course I know that I can trust your taste and judgment equally with my own. Have the words, 'Helen, 1896,' engraved on the inside, and please send by post without delay. Ever yours faithfully,

"Percy Crosmier."

"Well," said I to myself, laying down my old chum's rapturous letter, "here's a pretty commission for a bachelor. An angel is she? I don't believe she's any more angelic than Pauline Brooks. But every man thinks his own goose a swan. I pity the poor fellow, I'm sure; he's clearly in a state of glamour that makes him see everything couleur de rose. But I'm not one to desert a friend at a pinch—I'll buy his miserable wedding ring with the greatest pleasure in life."

So I locked my desk, put on my overcoat, and went straightway to Silverman.

Jones was behind the counter. I knew Jones; I had bought a gold bracelet of him for Pauline Brooks six months ago. Jones was a dapper little fellow, with stiffly waxed mustache, a cameo scarf pin and hair bedewed with some ambrosial perfume or other.

"Wedding rings, if you please," said I, plunging at once into the object of my visit. "Here's the size," producing my slip of paper.

"Any inscription, sir?" questioned Jones, assuming so preternaturally knowing an aspect that I could cheerfully have pitched him in among the plated ware in the big glass showcase behind him.

"Helen," said I brusquely. "1896."

"Emma, sir?" Jones put his hand behind his ear to assist his hearing.

"Helen!" I bawled out, painfully

but she was gone before he had time to dash the answer. And when he pondered upon what he had been about to say in his eagerness and surprise, he was rather glad that she had left before he compelled her to refuse him again as she had once suggested.

The orchestra, in a gale of melody, had ended its dance with a delicious crash, and Miss Reville stood with her head held high, waiting for the decision of the audience. A breathless moment passed, and then two or three short clapping claps from different parts of the house, the gallery principally, and that was all she had waited!

The manager frowned and cursed himself for having engaged a card that would not draw even one night, but Miss Gordon did not see him as she hastened to her dressing room, blinded by tears and crushed in spirit as she had never been before. She did not hear the manager sharply reprimand Jim for applauding behind the scenes. In fact, she heard nothing but the sobs that shook her own small body, and once inside her dressing room flung herself in all her finery of tights and fluffy skirts upon her trunk there to let the tears she had held back so long come as they would.

A moment later there came a soft knock outside, and she turned quickly that her head might be in the shadow, ere she said, "Come in." The door swung open and Jim stepped quickly inside, letting it close again behind him. Even before she could see him through the mist of tears in her blue eyes, the dancer knew it was he. "One trembling word, full of love and longing and comfort, escaped his lips—

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