



WOMAN'S WIT

BY MRS. ALEXANDER

CHAPTER I.

A glowing September morning was pouring its golden light through the open window of a morning room or study, in the eastern wing of a picturesque old house standing half way up a hillside in one of the Midland shires. A background of beech trees framed in its mellow red brick walls, and before it lay a wide, undulating plain, many colored, and bounded by distant dim blue hills.

A pleasant room could scarce be found, though the furniture was old-fashioned, the curtains and carpet faded. The bay window opened on a terrace, below which were pleasure grounds, and in its recess stood a table, spread with dainty china and delicate silver—the remains of the breakfast—and a vase of hot-house flowers, from a conservatory into which a glass door admitted.

The sole occupant was a gentleman, a slight, elegant looking man of thirty or upward, with silky, wavy dark hair and small mustache, and an unmistakable air of distinction.

A pile of letters lay beside him, while he had pushed away his plate to make room for a book, which he was studying apparently with deep interest.

Presently he raised his eyes—eyes of most canny blue—and looked upon the glossy landscape which lay before him. But his vision was evidently directed to some far distant object, and after a moment's thought, he took up a pencil and began to scribble calculations on the back of a letter.

"Yes," he murmured, "if it can be carried out, I shall be a free man." Then opening the letter on which he had been scribbling, he turned over a page or two covered with small, firm writing, and read slowly.

"I shall do nothing about a second trustee until after your festivities," ran the paragraph he had selected. "Besides, every one is away at this season. Need I say I have perfect confidence in you?"

He folded it up and put it under an elastic band, which held some other letters together, and bearing the envelope into minute fragments, threw them into the waste-paper basket beside him.

As he did so, a soft indistinct sound from an adjoining room—the door into which stood open—caught his ear. He paused and listened. The faint rustling drew nearer, and a pleasant voice began to sing in a low tone, as if the singer thought in song. The listener seemed to recognize the music or the voice. His face brightened; he half rose from his seat, but resumed it, as if he wished to hear more. The next moment a lady walked through the doorway and stopped opposite to him.

A young lady, tall and slight, though round and graceful; she was simply dressed in a maize-colored print and a pretty muslin and lace apron tied with brown ribbons, a sash of the same marked her shapely waist, and tan gaiters hid her hands, one of which held a large garden adorned with a couple of pale-pink chrysanthemums. The face it had shaded was fair and fresh, and lighted by a couple of large dark-gray eyes—eyes, lashes, eyebrows, all dark, compared to the light-brown hair that curled in a small fringe over her brow, and was gathered nearly back into a large knot.

She gazed for an instant in frank amazement at the gentleman, who rose to greet her—then a quick, bright smile curved her red-lipped, kindly mouth, and made a little comely inter-ventive dimple in one cheek, as she cried:

"Why, how—when did you come, squire? We all fancied you were in Scotland."

"Well, you see I am not," he returned, advancing toward her with an outstretched hand, in which she placed hers. "And what are you doing, I should like to know, invading my premises in this barbarous fashion?"

"You know very well I always come to the library for any books I may want, and by your leave, too. You're such an absentee you ought not to be surprised if thieves did break through and steal."

"No, I am not in the least surprised," with emphasis.

"Well, I was, a little, when I found the library window open," resumed the young lady, "but I thought Mrs. Storer was having a thorough cleaning, so walked in, and, imagining she was in the room, I—"

"Uncerthed the master! I shall accept your coming as a good omen." His handsome, though somewhat worn, face was aglow with pleasure as he spoke, but her eyes were attracted to the pile of letters and the open book, and she did not notice him.

"I arrived quite unexpectedly last night, to the great disgust of my few faithful retainers," he went on. "Do you know, I have been planning great things—things that will rejoice you, ma belle Leonore."

"Pray, don't give me my long name," she exclaimed, with a pretty impatient nod. "It always reminds me of that horrid raven tapping at the chamber door. What are your great things?"

"Dorington and Isabel are coming to stay with me, and the Harveys, Amy Balfour, Mrs. Ruthven and a lot more, and I am going to give a big ball to the nobility, gentry, and even the cad, of the surrounding country."

"No, really?" with evident delight, "you are quite charming for thinking of such a thing."

"I am glad your estimate of me coincides with that of society in general."

"How awfully conceited you are, squire, but I am glad Lady Dorington is coming, and I shall be delighted to dance at your ball. Now I must go. How late you are! The breakfast things still on the table!" and glancing at the book as she walked to the window, "What are your studies? Chemistry? Who are you going to poison? I did not think you were scientific."

"Nor am I; I am only a student of human nature. But don't you want a book? Let us find one, and I will carry it home for you."

"You are too obliging. I want a vol-

ume of Pope. I had a dispute last night with Mr. Winton about a passage in the 'Rape of the Lock,' and I want to prove myself right."

"Ah! a long-drawn 'ah.' Is he here? Well, find your book, and I will escort you back."

He gathered up his papers, thrust them into a bureau, which he locked, and rang for his valet.

His visitor returned to the library, a large somber apartment pervaded with a faint delightful odor of Russia leather, and from one of the well-filled shelves selected a book. Then putting on her hat, she passed through the glass door by which she had entered, and stood gazing at the wide landscape visible from the terrace.

"All this seems tame enough after continental scenery," said the squire, joining her.

"It has a great charm for me. There is a sense of life, and freedom, and cheerfulness in English landscape that you scarcely ever find elsewhere." She descended the steps to the gravelled path beneath as she spoke, her companion following, and coming up beside her.

"You have preserved a large amount of patriotism in spite of your long sojourn abroad."

"I have; yet I love Germany, too. I was very happy there."

"Were you ever unhappy?" he asked, with a slightly contemptuous upturning of his brows.

"Well, no, I do not think I ever was. I have been very, very sorry for the trouble of my friends, but not on my own account."

So talking, they walked across the pleasure grounds, and through a gate which admitted them to a wide, park-like stretch of pasture, bordered at one side by a strip of woodland into which the path led. Soon the ground began to slope steeply down to a shallow valley, at the bottom of which ran a small rapid river, chafing and murmuring among big, black, wet stones, and leaping joyfully over an abrupt rocky barrier, some few hundred yards above, where they struck upon the stream. A narrow, ivy-grown bridge spanned the fall, turning toward which they came in sight of a low, irregular house, or rather cottage, on the opposite side.

"How thoroughly English this looks," said the squire. "It is Arcadian; but you will be awfully bored after awhile, and the sight of your abode reminds me I have not asked for Mrs. L'Estrange."

"She is quite well, and will be very pleased to see you."

"And I shall be only too glad to trouble you with my presence, but not this morning. I have a pile of letters to answer, and an appalling amount of arrangements to make. In short, I ought not to have come so far ahead with you."

"You are a voluntary traitor," she returned, passing on the bridge.

"That I acknowledge. Now I have seen you to the edge of your own territory, I will say good-by. If I come and beg a cup of coffee about eight or nine this evening, I suppose I shall not be barred out?"

"If the door is locked we will let you in through the window."

He bowed, and raising his soft felt hat with easy grace, stood looking after her as she walked away with a smooth, light step down the path which led toward the cottage.

Clifford Marsden, the squire of Evesleigh, was one of the fortunate individuals sometimes described as having been "born with a silver spoon in his mouth." He had succeeded his father while still a schoolboy; the savings of his minority enabled him to start clear of all incumbrances when he came of age, and the sixteen or seventeen years which had since elapsed had been diligently occupied by him in creating fresh ones.

He had lived with boundless extravagance and self-indulgence. He had done everything, seen everything, exhausted everything possible for a gentleman whose character was still fair, whose popularity was undiminished. Bankers and city men knew that his lands were heavily mortgaged; but society, as yet, only admired his magnificence, without doubting his solvency.

Evesleigh had seen little of his master of late years, but in his boyish days, and for some time after attaining his majority, Marsden hunted and shot in due season at Evesleigh.

His near neighbor and relative was Colonel L'Estrange of Brookdale, the cottage just described.

The beauty of the site had probably induced the builder of Evesleigh House to place that edifice on the verge of the estate, for the stream above mentioned was its boundary on this side. The farm and residence of Brookdale had been purchased by the squire's great-grandfather, who settled it on his only daughter. This lady had married a penniless soldier of good family. Colonel L'Estrange was her grandson.

He had married in India, and soon after his return home, his delicate wife died somewhat suddenly, leaving him a baby girl of about five years old. The colonel, a grave, taciturn man, old for his years, and unaccustomed in habits, lived on in his humble home, finding consolation in sport, and looked up to the young Squire of Evesleigh as a mighty hunter, an unerring shot.

When Leonora, or Nora L'Estrange, who was a pet and plaything with her cousin, had reached her tenth year, her father suddenly discovered she was too old to be left entirely with her nurse. Of a boarding school he would not hear, and in short, the only solution to the difficulty which found favor in his eyes, was immediate marriage with a pretty, pale, timid girl, the orphan daughter of a former friend, whom he found in a dependent position, as companion to a rich old maiden lady, in the neighboring cathedral town of Oldbridge.

The new Mrs. L'Estrange was barely twelve years older than her step-daughter, and the Oldbridge gossip prophesied that the young lady would be too much for her father's wife.

But, by some mysterious influence of sympathy or mutual comprehension, they drew to each other. Indeed, the old nurse did not hesitate to say that her young lady was regularly bewitched, and, for her part, was free to confess that it seemed

OUR STORY TELLER



TWO GUARDIAN ANGELS.

DON'T look at me so earnestly, Madge. I can't bear it. I know I am wrong, and that every word you utter comes with the double forcefulness of truth."

"Ah, then, you are not yet the abject slave of this terrible gambling fiend, Oh, Reg, give me an earnest of your belief in the rightfulness of my words! Promise me to give up betting for ever, and once more—"

His little hand was placed lovingly in his, and she looked into his face beseechingly.

Reg Wellingford, her lover, had said right. He could not bear to look into her anguish-stricken, pleading face. Her every word cut him. But she did not upbraid, even by insinuation. Her tones were full of tenderness. She pleaded with an intensity of love. Her very soul was racked when she thought of her lover's danger, and Reginald loved Madge.

"Madge," said he, suddenly taking her in his arms, and kissing her upturned lips fervently, "Madge, you have conquered. You are my little guardian angel, now, as always. I will, for your sake, as well as for my own, give up betting forever. After next week's meeting, the turf shall know me no more."

"But why wait until then, Reg?"

"My engagements are all made, and—"

"Well, afterwards, then. Oh, my darling! thank you so much for your promise. Now I know that nothing can ever come between us, and Madge caressed his hand lovingly. "But, Reg," she continued, "I have something else to say. Are you quite sure that Richard Stone is your friend?"

"How? I don't understand."

"Well, Reg, I—I don't know, only I don't like him. He has always given me the impression that he was deceitful, and that he was simply using you for his own purposes."

"What purpose can Stone have?"

"Shall I be frank, Reg? Well—well, he loves me, and proposed to me last night—"

"Impossible! Why, he knew that you and I were already engaged."

"Yes, but—but he pointed out that—that you were being rapidly ruined on the turf, and—and—"

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Reg, his brow clouding.

"And when I told him that my life's mission was that of your guardian angel, as you so often call me, he became very angry. He said that soon you would be penniless, and that then your sense of honor would compel you to set me free, and—"

"And so it would."

"And his face, Reg! Oh, if you could have seen the look of hatred which passed over it when I told him that I was yours now and forever! But he cannot injure you, Reg, can he?"

"Injure me! No, pet. Don't fill your mind with any more harassing thoughts. Next week, my gambler's life shall cease, and I will endeavor to make myself worthy of my guardian angel," and he stooped and kissed her once more.

On leaving her house, Reginald Wellingford became lost in thought. He had left Madge behind, but her image followed him. He saw now more clearly than ever how reckless he had been. A cloud of revelation seemed to have burst over him. But he had at last given his promise, and made Madge happy! Why, then, was he so inwardly perturbed? There was one thought which was even now burning itself into his very soul. His pulse quickened and his brain throbbled in consequence of it. What had he done? Why, in a moment of insane folly, he had staked his all upon the favorite for the coming event. Rendered reckless by heavy losses, he had made this plunge in the hope of redeeming himself. And now he realized what the following week really meant to him. Should Sultan win—well! But if—he grew hot, and his brain reeled under the contemplation—if the favorite lost? Great heavens! He would be ruined, beggared, penniless! Further, he would have to renounce Madge—his darling, his idol. What fiend had blinded him to these issues before? Would to God he had allowed his guardian angel to prevail sooner! But—but Sultan must win. So powerful seemed the possibility of his failure, however, that Reg would fain have run away from his own thoughts. Presently he was accosted by a voice he knew well.

little Jack found themselves on the down platform of the railway station. Jack released his hand from his father's, and was soon engaged playing with a terrier, which exhibited a desire to scrape acquaintance with him. The frolic of the child and dog amused many of those who were waiting for the train, and among them Reginald Wellingford, who had come down to learn any news he could of the horse upon which he had so much depending.

Soon the train was in sight. The ponderous, snorting steam-horse rapidly drew nearer and nearer. Little Jack at that moment gave chase to the dog. The train was entering the station. Scarcely anyone could have said how it happened, but suddenly a horrified shriek from the spectators rent the air. Jack, in making a snatch at the dog, stumbled, and before anyone could prevent him, he fell from the platform on to the line in front of the rapidly approaching train. It seemed as if nothing short of a miracle could save him. There was one brave heart willing to risk it, however. With a bound, Reginald Wellingford cleared the intervening space between him and the child. A clutch, a sudden fling, then a quick jump aside, and little Jack was literally snatched from the jaws of death. Both were saved.

Poor Tim swooned and fell to the ground, and for a time the utmost confusion prevailed. Shortly, however, Reginald was induced to accompany Tim and the child home. The jockey was profuse in his gratitude.

"How can I ever thank you, sir?" he asked. "That boy is my idol; he is my guardian angel, and has done more to keep me in a straight course than all else besides."

"Has this man, too, a guardian angel?" thought Reginald.

"Yes," said Tim, "I owe you more than my life. How can I thank you?"

Quite unconscious of the compact between Tim and Richard Stone, Reg replied:

"Win on Thursday, Tim, and I shall be repaid. Lose—and—and—I am ruined."

Great heavens! how those words haunted Tim. For some time he stared blankly before him and trembled visibly. But there was not much struggling now. What was the money to him in comparison with the man who had risked his life in order to save that of his guardian angel?

"Sultan shall win, sir," said he, "if I perish in making him."

From that hour, even up to the moment when the flag fell, those ominous words, "Lose, and I am ruined," surged through Tim's brain. And when the race began, that brave act at the station lent Tim a further stimulus. Never had he striven as he strove that day. With spur and whip, but riding with his head, he urged the noble and responsive animal onward. The race was entirely between Sultan and Astoria. The two ran neck and neck up the straight, and the excitement was intense. Richard Stone watched with much exultation until the post was reached. Here, with a gigantic effort, Tim fairly flung Sultan's head in front of his rival and won by a neck.

Reginald Wellingford was saved, Stone was ruined.—Yankee Blade.

A Log Cabin Religion.

We hear much nowadays about the college settlements—a practical Christianity devoted to the poor in our great cities. Somewhat of this nature is a noble enterprise that has just been started in North Carolina. The founder, Miss Susan Chester, a Vassar graduate, intends to labor among and for the mountaineers, to better their condition, to teach them the beauty of home life, to lift them up spiritually, and to supplement in every way the work of a chapel nearby, which is open but four months in the year. Miss Chester intends to interest some Northern people in this movement who are accustomed to summer at Asheville, three miles distant. With some friends, she will live in a little log cabin, and, having studied thoroughly all social questions, will endeavor to extend her influence throughout the entire community.

Do Fishes Recollect?

Mr. Seth Green, an authority upon the rearing of fishes, kept in a pond a large number of trout that had been caught by means of a fly and barbless hook. The men were ordered to take them quietly and gently, so that they had plenty of time to study the tackle by which they had been captured. Mr. Green believed the trout never forgot this experience of theirs. He used sometimes to walk by the side of the pond feeding the fishes, but carrying behind his back a cane and a fishing-rod. The trout would follow him for bread, and when he suddenly waved his cane over them, though startled at the time, they soon returned for the food. Presently he would raise his fishing-rod, but the moment the trout saw it they darted to the far end of the pond, and remained in hiding for the rest of the day.

Royalty in a Rage.

The London Echo tells how various people act when they are angry. The Prince of Wales winks his left eye rapidly; the Emperor of Austria puffs out his cheeks; the Czar lays his hand flat on the top of his head; Mr. Gladstone turns swiftly on his heels, as if executing a volte face; Dr. Tanner lays back his head and swears; the Sultan of Turkey draws his hand rapidly across his throat; and Mr. Charles Mitchell shoots out his flat suddenly and forcibly in a horizontal direction.

Rare almost as great poets, rarer perhaps than veritable saints and martyrs, are consummate men of business.—Helps.

A woman isn't a dyed-in-the-wool thrifty housekeeper unless she patches her dish cloths.

(To be continued)

Soldiers' Poor Cooks.

In those Crimean days our soldiers had no knowledge of cooking, being in this respect far behind the French and Turks. But even had our men been perfect cooks, they would have had but little opportunity of exercising their skill. Camp kettles were issued at Kalamita Bay when the troops landed, in the proportion of one to five men. Now, the kettle would cook fresh meat, but salt meat for five men, as more water is required to extract the brine from salt meat than the kettle could hold, and, moreover, this number, five, represented nothing then, nor does it now, in our regimental systems.

Most of the kettles had been dropped at the Alma, or in the subsequent march, and the soldiers were reduced for all cooking purposes to the mess tin which each man carried on his back. These were inadequate. The lid, perhaps, was most prized, for when the body is wet and cold there is a craving for a hot drink, and it took less time and fuel to roast the green coffee berries in the lid than to boil the salt meat in the body of the tin. It had not occurred to any one in the department then responsible for our commissariat that to make a mug of coffee out of green berries, roasting and grinding apparatus was essential, and till January, when some roasted coffee was landed, our men might be daily seen pounding, with stones or round shot, the berries in a fragment of exploded shell.—Sir Evelyn Wood, in the Fort-nightly Review.

Brains Versus Capital.

There still lives in Philadelphia, at the age of 70 years, Frank O. Deschamps, the inventor of artificial legs. It was over fifty years ago when Mr. Deschamps, then an apprentice, was asked by his master to see what he could do for a foppish Frenchman who had lost a leg. At that time only wooden pegs were known, and the Frenchman was dissatisfied with this by no means elegant substitute. In two days young Deschamps had finished a complete model of an artificial leg, with every movement of the natural limb duplicated. His master had it patented, and it yields him a fortune. Deschamps was paid 50 cents for his invention.

Better one bite at forty of Truth's bitter rind than the hot wine that gushed from the vintage at twenty.—Lowell.