

Stella Dallas

By OLIVE HIGGINS PROUTY (Continued From Saturday.) Alfred Munn invited her to every

dance there was at the River club that spring. People began to envy. Women, she told Effie, began to talk. She knew of at least a dozen who would give their eye-teeth if Alfred Munn would ask them to dance with him. He really was as good as a

professional. He had asked her to be his partner in one of the new fancy dances last Saturday night. They had been the only two on the floor. Everybody else had sat around and stared, and applauded afterwards. Oh, she was really managing to make

quite a splash in Milhampton with Alfred Munn. At the Luncheon club she belonged to. The girls had discussed little else last Friday. Rosamond was simply green with jealousy. Stella could tell she was, because she acted so cool and offish. Lots of people were "jolly" her about him. She got it from all sides. Even that nice old tabby-cat, Mrs. Palmer had heard the talk. She had stopped her on the street one day and given her a little motherly advice. Too bad nobody ever invited

Ed to dinner, or to anything small or private. He would be so much more useful. She couldn't see why they didn't. But never mind, he was convenient just as he was, and oh, awfully kind! She was getting a little tired of him, she must confess.

But then, she always did, when "the new" wore off, and "they got a little bluish" with it. Effie wondered if there wasn't danger of Stephen's hearing about the splash Stella was making in Milhampton with Alfred Munn. "Why, of course," Stella exclaimed to that. "I want him to hear about it. I don't intend to give Stephen the satisfaction of thinking I had to go into seclusion the minute he cleared out. He had an idea I couldn't get along in this town without his telling me how to do it. He meant to use his importance to my position here as a kind of gun to point at me and make me do just as he wants, when we get together again. Good gracious, having a good time, being successful all her own way, is the only gun I've got to point at him, my dear."

It's possible to receive a bullet wound, even a fatal bullet wound, and be unaware of it, until you put your hand to the wound. There are a few tinges a little. You're surprised when your fingers come into contact with something warm and wet. You're shocked to see a red spot on your face, and find them red! Laurel was the messenger who brought the first sign of red to Stella's horrified attention. Stella sent out a dozen invitations to a party for Laurel in June. All Laurel's schoolmates were having parties this year. Stella intended that Laurel's party should surpass them all. There would be a tall, tall donkey, and a peanut butter, and a cobweb contest, and a Jack Horner pie, and creamed chicken, and ice cream and paper cups, and Laurel mailed the invitations on a Friday night. All day Saturday and Sunday she was full of the exhilarating consciousness that others were sharing the wonderful secret. When she started to school on Monday there was a sparkle beneath the calm gray surface of her eyes that made them look almost black—like the pools of meadow brooks in mid-morning sunshine. When Laurel came home at noon her eyes seemed to have faded like the pools when the sun is hidden behind clouds. Instead of the blackness and there was a grave, wondering, bewildered look in them. "Nobody can come to my party, mother," she announced briefly. All day Sunday the mothers of the recipients of the pink envelopes had been busy at the telephone. Twice Laurel had to tell her mother that nobody could come to the party before Stella grasped the significance of the announcement. Then she only she had to tell her mother, and held her to her right. "We don't care. We don't care," she burst out. "Let them stay away! We'll have our party by ourselves! Don't you mind, Lollie. We'll have the party just the same—you and I and Uncle Ed Munn. Cats! Just because father runs off and leaves us all alone! I think I'll get each other, Lollie, anyhow. I won't ever run off and leave you, and, or Lollie, you won't ever run off and leave me, will you—ever, ever?" Stella was crying now.

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CHAPTER X. It was several weeks before Stella knew how serious her bullet wound was. She was calm by that time. She could talk over its details with Effie McDevitt with perfect composure and with a touch of brusque humor, too. "Why," she said, "Ed bores me. He never gave me a thrill in his life. Oh, Milhampton makes me sick! Narrow-minded, evil-minded, nasty, faded, I think I'll tell you just how it was. I was down there in Boston, for two days, shopping, getting favors and things for Lillie's party. Naturally, when Ed suggested that he run down and take me to the theater in the evening, I was pleased to pieces. 'Wouldn't you be? I love the theater in Boston. We didn't stay at the same hotel, though for the life of me I don't see why we shouldn't. There were a hundred or so other men staying there. Glory, how I hate all this winking and shoulder-shrugging stuff about hotels and bedrooms! When Ed suggested, after the theater, that he drop around and have breakfast with me, why, I said, 'Sure, Mike,' quick as a wink. It never entered my head but what that was all right. I didn't care if somebody from Milhampton did see me. Married woman like me! Breakfast! Right in a public dining room! What's there so horrible about that, I'd like to know! I didn't want anything of Ed but a little fun, and a little advertising. When Stephen wrote to me in that iceberg way of his and asked if I would like my freedom, so as to be able to marry Alfred Munn, I could have screamed! Marry Ed? Why, I'd commit suicide first. I don't want to marry Ed! I haven't anything but an understanding of the human animal! A woman can have other reasons for liking a little attention than just the one the shady

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