

Complete Story.

The Tale of the Young Couple.

From the "Pictorial Magazine."

They had arrived from the Continent and were evidently upon their honeymoon. The husband gave his name as Captain Maurice Eckstein, and was an extremely handsome young man, whilst "Madame," his wife, was a charmingly pretty girl apparently not a day more than twenty-one. They were both so genuinely attached to one another and so completely happy that I own I felt a good deal of pleasure in watching them.

"We are thinking of making a long stay in your city, Mr. Matheson," said young Eckstein, a week after their arrival, "so are going to take a small house. We have come to the conclusion that, at present, England is a more desirable place than our own native land," he said, shooting a glance at his pretty young wife.

At their request I gave them the names of several house agents, and they set forth on their search. In a day or so they came back with the news they had discovered a "lovely little house" in Atchester Avenue, Kensington.

Henceforth they were very busy. The house was empty and was to be done up; they had a key and visited it all hours of the day, making wonderful arrangements.

It was a few days afterwards that I made my discovery. Early in the morning I had paid a visit to a wine merchant's to give some orders. The office was situated in a little street turning off from the big avenue in which the Mammoth stood, and the entrance was the first doorway round the corner. Having concluded my business, I emerged, and was standing in the passage lighting a cigarette. As I did so, I noticed a tall dark man with a beard on the pavement in front of me; by his side was a handsome-looking woman, exquisitely dressed. The man had taken hold of her arm, and apparently drawn her into the little street. They were staring across to the other side of the avenue.

"Stay here a moment—till they get safely past!" the man said, in a low, warning voice. "I told you Hensch had found them—see, how they walk together—she, smiling and laughing!"

I followed the direction of the man's gaze, and gave an involuntary start. Captain Maurice Eckstein and his wife were walking quickly on the other side of the avenue in the direction of the Mammoth.

I looked at the man and woman in front of me—they were quite unaware of my close proximity. The man was staring at the young couple, a curious look of malignity in his eyes. The woman's face, too, was drawn and white, and her lips were pressed tightly together.

"And he scorned what I offered him!" she said, her eyes blazing with hatred. "Gave it up for a slip of a girl like that!"

"And she has set my honour at defiance!" said the man between his set teeth. "I swear that before a year is out, she—" he dropped his voice and I could not catch what he said.

They moved away and I was left in the doorway bewildered at what I had heard. I returned to the Mammoth and found young Eckstein making enquiries about the key of his new house. He thought he had left it in the pocket of his light dustcoat, which he had brought down before breakfast and hung up in the cloak-room. As he was speaking a clerk came out of the office and gave it to him. It had been picked up in the cloak-room by another visitor at the hotel, who had brought it to the office.

"Who was it?" enquired young Eckstein.

The clerk caught sight of a man coming towards them.

"A Mr. Hensch—this gentleman!" he said, indicating the new arrival.

I almost uttered an exclamation as I heard the name. Eckstein turned to the man, and going up to him thanked him politely for the trouble he had taken.

I looked curiously at the man. He was thick set, rather short, with swarthy features and alert, little beady eyes. I remembered he had arrived at the hotel about three days before, but had paid no particular attention to his name.

I wanted to speak to Eckstein at once, but, at that moment, I was called away on a matter of importance, and, when I returned, both the captain and his wife had departed, and I caught sight of Hensch disappearing in the direction of a smoking-room.

The incident of the key in connection with what I had overheard in the street was certainly very curious, and I began to feel the mystery deepening. I decided to go up to my room in order to think what I had better do. On my way I caught sight of a tall man standing in the vestibule. His name was Nathaniel Robson, and although very few were aware of the fact, he was connected in an official way with the Mammoth—in short, he was a remarkably astute private detective, and had frequently been of great assistance to me.

I took him up to my room, and, shutting the door, told him the whole of the circumstances.

"What do you think of it?" I asked at the conclusion.

He stroked his chin. "It looks ugly. The fact of this man being posted here shows that business is meant. Do you want me to look into it?" he added, rising.

"Yes—the Mammoth can't afford to have sensations," I answered.

He departed and I did not see him again until the evening. The first thing he did was to pull out a newspaper from his pocket. I glanced at it and found it was one published in Austria. He showed me a marked paragraph.

"The result of five hours' hard searching in the office!" he explained. I looked at it and read the paragraph out.

"We learn on good authority of a scandal that has recently occurred in one of the highest and most noble of our families. It appears that the youngest daughter, unwillingly betrothed by her father to a gentleman of rank and great wealth, has eloped with a young officer with whom she had a clandestine love affair. The story has been kept a great secret, and names of course cannot be mentioned, but it is believed that up to the present all efforts to trace the runaways have been unsuccessful."

"It might be only a coincidence!" I said, laying the paper down.

"I think not!" he said. "I have had Hensch shadowed to-day, and made some interesting discoveries. The man you saw in the street is Baron Julius Hapmarek, and he is staying at the Grandal. He comes from Austria, is a person of rank and immense wealth, and was recently betrothed to Stephanie, the youngest daughter of Count Alexander Von Halberg, of Halberg Castle—the head of one of the highest and most noble of Austrian families!"

I uttered an exclamation. "You're right, Robson. Her name is Stephanie. I've heard Eckstein address her!" I cried. "And the woman—?"

"She is also at the Grandal, and goes by the name of the Countess Theresa Larmanx—I've not been able to find out anything about her yet,

but am making enquiries in Vienna and Paris."

"But what does it all mean? Assuming that the young people have eloped and married, what can the Baron do—what's his game?"

"He is a man of a brute nature, and had set his heart on marrying this beautiful young girl!" replied Robson. "Her father, though noble, is poor, and probably in the Baron's power—he had promised her to him. Now she has escaped his clutches and he has followed her. It may be revenge—it may be some desperate plan to secure her after all. For the present we can only watch and wait."

"And the key of the new house?" He shook his head.

"I cannot see that part of it yet!"

I decided to tell young Eckstein the next morning, but, being called away suddenly to attend a meeting of the directors, I missed the opportunity. I was not free until after lunch, then I caught sight of the young captain and his wife and Hensch coming from the restaurant together. Eckstein looked heavy eyed, and his wife glanced at him anxiously.

"I do not like going without you, Maurice, dear. It seems so selfish!" she said with a sympathetic smile.

I learnt that he had a bad headache and that they had arranged to go to hear a celebrated violinist at Queen's Hall. His wife was passionately devoted to music and he wished her to go though he could not do so himself. Accordingly, after a lot of persuasion, she set off by herself, and Eckstein turned into a smoking-room. I thought this would be my opportunity, so went into the bureau until Hensch should be out of the way. Presently he sauntered out of the hotel, and I noticed Robson follow him.

Fate, however, seemed against my telling Eckstein of my discovery, for again an important matter detained me, and nearly three-quarters of an hour elapsed before I could go in search of him. I found him in the vestibule with his hat on—reading a note which a messenger boy had brought him. A look of perplexity was on his face as he scanned the contents. He turned to me.

"I have to go out, Mr. Matheson!" he said hurriedly. "If my wife should happen to return before I do, would you kindly tell her that I have been called away. Thank you so much!" And before I could stop him he had hurried away.

Shortly after five "Madame" returned. She asked me where her husband was and I gave her the message.

"Called away?" she repeated wonderingly. "I did not know he had any friends in London! Never mind, he will be in again soon!" she added,

with a bright smile. "I will have some tea and wait."

She went upstairs to her room, and I returned to the vestibule. At that moment I saw a cab draw up and Robson jumped out. I could see something had happened, so took him at once to a little office on the ground floor which was empty.

"Has Madame Eckstein returned?" he asked, hurriedly.

"Yes—she wandered at her husband's absence. A messenger brought a note this afternoon, and he went off in a great hurry. He told me he was called away."

He uttered an exclamation. "By heavens, then, he has been trapped!" he cried. "There's not a moment to lose. Do you know the address of the new house?" he inquired feverishly.

"Yes—17, Atchester Avenue, Kensington!" I cried wonderingly.

Already he had opened the door.

"It may be a matter of life and death to him. Will you come? I must have someone with me!"

I picked up my hat.

"Yes—I'll come!" I cried. The mystery had caught hold of me, and my blood was stirred at the thought of an adventure.

We made our way out, and jumped into the cab that was still waiting. Whilst we were being driven to Atchester Avenue, Robson told me the gist of what had happened in the afternoon.

"I followed Hensch from here; first he went to a messenger office and sent a message—probably the one to Eckstein—also another to someone else. Then he went to Queen's Hall, where 'Madame' was. He stopped there an hour, then came out and walked in the direction of the Grandal. He waited for some time outside—about a hundred yards away from the entrance, until, to my astonishment, young Eckstein came down the steps. Hensch crossed hurriedly and ran after him—I followed. I managed to get in such a position that I could hear and not be seen. Hensch said it was luck his meeting him, he had been to Queen's Hall and was returning to the Mammoth with a message from his wife. After the concert she was going to the new house, would he, Eckstein, follow her, if he felt well enough? She thought, perhaps, the fresh air might do him good!"

"And she sent no such message—it was a ruse?" I cried.

"Yes," continued Robson. "Young Eckstein thanked Hensch, jumped into a cab, and was driven away. I would have followed, but there was no second cab. Then I realised that I did not know the address of the new house, so came along at once

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