

# The Storyteller

## 'A SUCCESSFUL MAN'

'Garth hath not anything to show more fair' than Rostrevor on a summer eve, when the sun, 'trailing clouds of glory' as he goes, transforms the shining waters of the loch to floods of living gold or glowing ruby, each tiny sail thereon catching the hues of splendor; Cloughmore rising from its wooded base a grey, lonely peak against the radiant sky. In this romantic spot Herbert Grey and his fair young bride had elected to spend their honeymoon.

At present Grey was bulking rather largely in the public eye as one of the leading men of a new colony, where, by a clever stroke of commercial enterprise, he had achieved an enormous fortune. He had come back to Britain to be lionised, feted, and flattered in a style that made him look back with a curious thrill to days when he had not always had enough to eat, and had wandered a friendless lad through Glasgow's streets in search of employment. Under the searchlight of critical investigation, he revealed not a scrap of side or arrogance; he was found to be straightforward and unassuming, with the frank geniality of the colonial embroidered, so to speak, on the sturdy self-reliance of the Scot; and the one made an admirable background for the other.

Fashionable and 'society' journals had been provided with abundance of 'copy' by his marriage with Madge Moncrieff, whose family, though poor, was very old and proud. Those persons who always sneer at the successful man opined that Grey would be posing as an aristocrat himself, and going in for a peerage; and they related tales of his early struggles with an air of implying that it would have been more to his credit had he remained in poverty-stricken obscurity. They were also in a position to state that his marriage had been made by Miss Moncrieff's scheming mother, who had simply sold her daughter to the highest bidder, a proceeding from which only misery could result.

They might, perhaps, have thought that that prediction was being fulfilled if they had been able, at this moment, to see into the room where Madge was sitting in pensive solitude. She was realising that it is a solemn, strange, and perilous thing for a woman to become a wife. More intimate knowledge of Mr. Grey's qualities and characteristics might produce liking and esteem, but the splendid dreams of young romance were over. She was married to a man of whom she knew very little, for whom she felt rather fear than love. Her consolation was in the belief that marriage is a scarement, and that God would give her grace to do her duty.

There was an interruption—swift and rather heavy steps, and a smothering embrace, from which she extricated herself to gaze upon a lady with close-cropped hair, a sunburned face crowned by a hard felt hat and surmounting a 'mannish' collar and tie; and she recognised Flora Winthorpe, a former schoolmate, who lived apart from her husband, and had made herself somewhat notorious of recent years by the liberty, not to say license, she permitted her tongue and pen. From press and platform she advocated 'Woman's Rights,' the chief of them being, in her view, the right to dissolve the marriage tie for any reason whatsoever. She was an old friend, however; and Madge's heart was casting itself upon the past for comfort.

'My dear girl, what a tiny place the world is!' cried Flora. 'Fancy us both selecting Rostrevor for our summer sport! Congratulations! And please show me your very own husband.'

'Mr. Grey is out,' said Madge.

And Flora shrieked:

'Don't you know him well enough to call him by his Christian name, you little silly?' As Madge colored and looked down with brimming eyes, she added assuagingly: 'Dearest, what is the matter? Aren't you happy? Is he a brute? For love of Auld Lang Syne trust me, and I'll soon straighten the tangled threads.'

At times silence is a prison from which we long to escape; Madge, moreover, was touched by Flora's solicitude.

'I have nothing to complain of but my own ridiculous fancies,' she said. 'No doubt I ask too much from life, more than it has to give, and I should be well content with being the object of a sensible man's care and courtesy.'

'Is courtesy a non-de-plume for indifference? One doesn't associate the former with a self-made man, you know. But isn't yours the ideal love-match you ever vowed to make?'

'Circumstances are stronger than schoolgirl vows, Flora. Mine was a "marriage arranged." On the one hand, mamma with so many daughters and debts and so little money; on the other, Mr. Grey with his vast fortune and his ambition for social success. I dared not interpose my personal feelings between their plans. Now—well, now I wonder how I could marry a man who was content to take a wife for such reasons and on such terms.'

'At least you can spend his money, and that's always a pleasant pastime. I want you both to dine with me on Friday. Your aborigine can eat with his knife, put his feet on the table, or have a bone on the mat, just as he prefers. My house is Liberty Hall. I promise you a feast fit for emperors.'

'Not on Friday surely!' smiled Madge. 'Hadn't you better choose another day?'

'What's the matter with Friday? Good gracious, child, you don't mean to say that you cling to those silly old superstitions yet? You are far behind the times. It is many a day since I ceased to believe in God and the fables they told us at school.'

Madge winced and shuddered.

'What would you say of a person who bared an arm hideous with sores and ulcers, and thrust it under your eyes?' she asked.

'I should say the person did a disgusting and offensive thing,' declared Flora trenchantly. 'Why?'

'You have just done it to me,' said Madge; and the other woman colored, paused, shrugged her shoulders and rejoined:

'I grasp your meaning. Well, I won't exhibit my spiritual ulcers to you again, and you shall fast on Friday to your heart's content. But on Thursday I'll hope to see you and your new acquisition.'

Shortly after her departure Herbert Grey came in, —a tall and sinewy man, with a shapely dark head, deep blue eyes, and well-cut bronzed features. The contraction of his fine black brows was a new development, and to Madge's timid perceptions indicated temper. What had roused his wrath, she wondered.

'Mrs. Winthorpe called,' she said. 'I don't know whether you have heard of her or not—'

'Most people have, it strikes me,' he interjected dryly; and Madge reddened at his tone, adding rather nervously:

'She has invited us to dine with her on Thursday.'

'Which gives you the trouble of declining, of course.'

'No, indeed: I accepted. She is an old friend,' said Madge; at which her husband looked at her, with darkening eyes and set, stern lips.

'Nevertheless, I distinctly forbid you to go to her house. Whatever she may have been, she is not now a person with whom I can permit my wife to associate. Your aborigine is not wholly devoid of self-respect.'

Madge stared at him until understanding came to her with a touch of scorn.

'So, like Dickens' Marchioness, you take limited views of society through the keyholes of doors?' she said.

'I paid listener's toll, I grant,' he answered. 'Neither of you heard me come in, and at first I did not realise that your conversation was private. I got away as quickly as I could, but not before I had heard enough to be pleased that my ears, and not a servant's, were regaled with your confidences.'

Herbert's tone and manner suddenly changed, the coldness and hardness of both melting away.

'Look here, Madge! I did not, and do not, care a brass button for social success. What I sought was love, sympathy; someone to protect and cherish, to share all I had and make it worth the having; my whole heart went out to you at our first meeting. You did not lead me on I grant: you were proud and cold, and held yourself aloof from me. But your mother knew that I loved you; knew, too, that I would not consciously marry a girl that despised me. She led me to believe that you liked me, but were too shy to show your feelings; and she warned me against being too demonstrative. Ah—well, the thing is done! But I think your side has the best of the bargain. They have got all they asked. I wanted love, and have not even received liking.'