

Chapter Eight

The marriage of Lady Agatha came first, and was a sort of pageant. The female writers for fashion papers lived upon it for weeks before it occurred and for some time after. There were numberless things to be written about it. Each flower of the garden of girls was to be described, with her bridesmaid's dress, and the exquisite skin and eyes and hair which would stamp her as the beauty of her season when she came out. There yet remained five beauties in Lady Claraway's possession, and the fifth was a baby thing of six, who ravished all beholders as she toddled into church carrying her sister's train, aided by a little boy page in white velvet and point lace.

The wedding was the most radiant of the year. It was indeed a fairy pageant, of youth and beauty, and happiness and hope.

One of the most interesting features of the occasion was the presence of the future Marchioness of Walderhurst, "the beautiful Miss Fox-Seton." The fashion papers were very strenuous on the subject of Emily's beauty. One of them mentioned that the height and pose of her majestic figure and the cut of her profile suggested the Venus of Milo. Jane Cupp cut out every paragraph she could find and, after reading them aloud to her young man, sent them in a large envelope to Chichester. Emily, faithfully endeavouring to adjust herself to the demands of her approaching magnificence, was several times alarmed by descriptions of

her charms and accomplishments which she came upon accidentally in the course of her reading of various periodicals.

The Walderhurst wedding was dignified and distinguished, but not radiant. The emotions Emily passed through during the day--from her awakening almost at dawn to the silence of her bedroom at South Audley Street, until evening closed in upon her sitting in the private parlour of an hotel in the company of the Marquis of Walderhurst--it would require too many pages to describe.

Her first realisation of the day brought with it the physical consciousness that her heart was thumping--steadily thumping, which is quite a different matter from the ordinary beating--at the realisation of what had come at last. An event which a year ago the wildest dream could not have depicted for her was to-day an actual fact; a fortune such as she would have thought of with awe if it had befallen another woman, had befallen her unpretending self. She passed her hand over her forehead and gasped as she thought of it.

"I hope I shall be able to get accustomed to it and not be a--a disappointment," she said. "Oh!" with a great rising wave of a blush, "how good of him! How can I ever--"

She lived through the events of the day in a sort of dream within a dream. When Jane Cupp brought her tea, she found herself involuntarily making a mental effort to try to look as if she was really awake. Jane,

who was an emotional creature, was inwardly so shaken by her feelings that she herself had stood outside the door a few moments biting her lips to keep them from trembling, before she dared entirely trust herself to come in. Her hand was far from steady as she set down the tray.

"Good morning, Jane," Emily said, by way of trying the sound of her voice.

"Good morning, miss," Jane answered. "It's a beautiful morning, miss. I hope--you are very well?"

And then the day had begun.

Afterwards it marched on with solemn thrill and stately movement through hours of wondrous preparation for an imposing function, through the splendid gravity of the function itself, accompanied by brilliant crowds collected and looking on in a fashionable church, and motley crowds collected to look on outside the edifice, the latter pushing and jostling each other and commenting in more or less respectful if excited undertones, but throughout devouring with awe-struck or envious eyes. Great people whom Emily had only known through the frequent mention of their names in newspapers or through their relationship or intimacy with her patrons, came to congratulate her in her rôle of bride. She seemed to be for hours the centre of a surging, changing crowd, and her one thought was to bear herself with an outward semblance of composure. No

one but herself could know that she was saying internally over and over again, to steady herself, making it all seem real, "I am being married. This is my wedding. I am Emily Fox-Seton being married to the Marquis of Walderhurst. For his sake I must not look stupid or excited. I am not in a dream."

How often she said this after the ceremony was over and they returned to South Audley Street, for the wedding breakfast could scarcely be computed. When Lord Walderhurst helped her from the carriage and she stepped on to the strip of red carpet and saw the crowd on each side of it and the coachman and footmen with their big white wedding favours and the line of other equipages coming up, her head whirled.

"That's the Marchioness," a young woman with a bandbox exclaimed, nudging her companion. "That's 'er! Looks a bit pale, doesn't she?"

"But, oh Gawd! look at them di-monds an' pearls--jess look at 'em!" cried the other. "Wish it was me."

The breakfast seemed splendid and glittering and long; people seemed splendid and glittering and far off; and by the time Emily went to change her bridal magnificence for her travelling costume she had borne as much strain as she was equal to. She was devoutly grateful for the relief of finding herself alone in her bedroom with Jane Cupp.

"Jane," she said, "you know exactly how many minutes I can dress in and

just when I must get into the carriage. Can you give me five minutes to lie down quite flat and dab my forehead with eau de cologne? Five minutes, Jane. But be quite sure."

"Yes, miss--I do beg pardon--my lady. You can have five--safe."

She took no more,--Jane went into the dressing-room and stood near its door, holding the watch in her hand,--but even five minutes did her good.

She felt less delirious when she descended the stairs and passed through the crowds again on Lord Walderhurst's arm. She seemed to walk through a garden in resplendent bloom. Then there were the red carpet once more, and the street people, and the crowd of carriages and liveries, and big, white favours.

Inside the carriage, and moving away to the echo of the street people's cheer, she tried to turn and look at Lord Walderhurst with an unalarmed, if faint, smile.

"Well," he said, with the originality which marked him, "it is really over!"

"Yes," Emily agreed with him. "And I never can forget Lady Maria's goodness."

Walderhurst gazed at her with a dawning inquiry in his mind. He himself did not know what the inquiry was. But it was something a trifle stimulating. It had something to do with the way in which she had carried herself throughout the whole thing. Really few women could have done it as well. The pale violet of her travelling costume which was touched with sable was becoming to her fine, straight figure. And at the moment her eyes rested on his with the suggestion of trustful appeal. Despite the inelasticity of his mind, he vaguely realised his bridegroom honours.

"I can begin now," he said with stiff lightness, if such a paradox can be, "to address you as the man in Esmond addressed his wife. I can call you 'my lady.'"

"Oh!" she said, still trying to smile, but quivering.

"You look very nice," he said. "Upon my word you do."

And kissed her trembling honest mouth almost as if he had been a man--not quite--but almost.