

THE YOUNG ENGLISHWOMAN.

A PRIZE MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER III.

IN one thing, at least, Uncle Martin was mistaken. Carry Lintott had no intention of marrying without her mother's consent, and to gain that was now her great task. Nor was Mr. Rubelstein so utterly a friendless alien as at the first shock of disappointment the Lintott family had been disposed to believe. He had no relatives in England, but he had many friends. When Carry's first burst of tears were shed upon her mother's bosom, she had many things to tell which helped to soften the hard, harsh truth. And very soon Mr. Rubelstein came to visit them. To be sure, there was something saddening—almost disheartening—in the manner of his coming. The Lintotts were all on the *qui vive*, not openly, but secretly; Laura, and Martha—who was at home on a visit—peering through the window-curtains to catch a first glimpse of the stranger. And to see him, as he approached the house, partly leaning on the arm of an elder friend, with his head erect, and his spiritless eyes turned up towards the light they could never hope to see, was almost an affliction in itself. The two sisters could not but pity him, but sisterly and affectionate as they were, how much more they pitied “poor Carry!” It could scarcely be called selfishness in them, if they secretly congratulated themselves upon their own better choice.

But Mr. Rubelstein was a different man when seated in the room, and the embarrassments of introduction were over. He was then perfectly at his ease, and was so quick in his discrimination of sounds, that he turned to every speaker in succession, and evidently knew by the tone of the voice every individual present, before he had been half an hour their guest. Then, although a German by birth, he had lived in England from his boyhood, and spoke English, with a foreign accent it is true, but with perfect fluency. Moreover, his very deprivation of sight seemed to remove numberless causes of difficulty out of his way, and allow him to speak with a freedom and an absence of restraint which none but a blind man could have attained to in so short a time. His eyes were open, and for an instant one might suppose that they flashed with the intelligence of his speech, but the next moment it would be evident that they were without fire or expression, and did not, even in their motions, respond to the words upon

his tongue. Still, Mr. Rubelstein made a decidedly favourable impression upon the Lintott family. He had a handsome, expressive face, with a profusion of light, curling hair; and, although he had little animation in his movements, he was not awkward, and so far as his sightless condition would admit of their exhibition, had decidedly the manners of a gentleman. In short, he was quick, fluent, and intellectual; was prepossessing in manners and appearance; and if these were the only qualifications requisite or desirable in a son or a brother-in-law, no visitor could have been more welcome; but—ah, that “but!” In that little word were crowded a host of condemnations, any one of which threatened destruction to the hopes of the suitor—Mr. Rubelstein was a foreigner; he was a man without realized resources; his profession was a precarious, and sometimes an ill-rewarded one; and he was blind! The last disability was more crushing than all the preceding ones put together, and it was the one of them all for which there was no remedy. Altogether it was a hapless case.

But Carry’s resolution was not to be shaken. She had set her faith, her hope, her whole heart upon this union, and was not to be coaxed, or entreated, or threatened out of her design. She coaxed and pleaded in her turn, and supported her wish with such arguments as were deeply ingenious, if not profoundly wise. She was never anything but patient and humble under the flood of advice, and almost reproach, which poured upon her from her mother’s and her sisters’ lips, but it did not turn her from her purpose by one hair’s breadth. Nor was Rubelstein, on his part, at all wanting in the energy and dignity demanded by the occasion. He was no ignoble suitor. He did not attempt to underrate the difficulty of his position; he did not deny his comparative poverty; but he urged, on the other hand, his probity, his recognized talents, and his known steadiness of character.

“What am I to do, George?” cried Mrs. Lintott, in her extremity, appealing to her brother:

“You must let them have their own way,” answered Uncle Martin, balancing himself before the fire, with his hands behind his back. “There’s no help for it, Mary; and we must hope for the best.”

“Perhaps their children will be born blind!” ejaculated Mrs. Lintott.

“Like puppies,” *thought* Uncle Martin, but he did not say so. What he did say was, “They are more likely to be born with good eyes in their heads, like Carry’s; and my advice is, let them be happy in their own way; they won’t be happy in any other.”

And so it was. Mrs. Lintott gave a reluctant consent, and Karl Rubelstein and Caroline Lintott were united in holy wedlock. It was a very quiet marriage. Nobody but the parties chiefly concerned were very proud, or very happy, in it; but the solemn, beautiful ceremony acquired additional force and character from the position of the bride, and the calamity which seemed to rest upon the bridegroom. A simple, unassuming, fervent pair were they, nevertheless, armed and comforted with the full reliance on the power and beneficence of that God whose help they sought in their prayers. And so they set out together on their fresh journey in life.

Very different were the nuptials of Laura, and Mr. Lunge, the banker’s son. Here, now, was an union full of rich promise, and upon which all parties might congratulate themselves. Here was no foreign element, no natural defect, no poverty, to mar the future of the happy pair. The bridegroom might be said to have condescended a little in marrying a girl with a dowry next to nothing; but then that was a chance which happened every day, and might be supposed to be compensated for by the many shining virtues and the beauty of the bride; but, for the bride herself, she was lifted into a sphere of prosperity to which she could scarcely have hoped to reach. Their marriage was a show. Carriage-wheels rumbled, and horses, proud in their white favours, rang their iron hoofs on the stones before the house on that eventful

morning. Servants in livery, with outrageous bouquets, lounged on the steps, and hung about the iron railings by the door. Bridesmaids, half a dozen at least, in white, and silver, and gold, with impossible flowers glittering in their hair, fluttered about the bride; and there was gorgeous company, a sumptuous breakfast, with no end of health-drinking in rich wines, and an open carriage, with blue and white-coated postillions, to carry the happy pair on their wedding tour. That was a prize marriage, if you like. The happiest day in two lives, and only far, far too short.

The marriage of Mr. Sampson and Martha Lintott was a very slow business. It was a long time before it came about, for Mr. Sampson could not make up his mind, and even at last required to be dragged, or pushed, or somehow stimulated into the expression of the unutterable bliss with which he would lead Miss Lintott to the altar. And that bliss awaited him,—indeed it had waited for him a very long time,—and when it came was a very dull and rather shabby affair. Altogether it took nearly two years, from the time that Uncle Martin offered his prize of a hundred pounds for the most successful marriage, to the day when Mr. Sampson handed his affianced into a hackney cab, which was to take him to the railway station, and thence, some hundred and fifty miles into the country, to his father's house in Hertfordshire.

The Lintott family was scattered. That was an inevitable result of the marriage of the three sisters; but it was no reason why they should be estranged. Yet this was the case, more or less, with all three, but most with one, and that one was Carry. In fact, Carry had never been forgiven for marrying the poor, blind, German teacher. It was, in a manner, a disgrace to the family. Carry herself was as dutiful and affectionate as ever, and Rubelstein warmly seconded her every thought and word. But they were not cordially received by their relatives, excepting, perhaps, poor Mrs. Lintott herself, who again was held back by the dread of her son-in-law, Mr. Lunge, who from the first had expressed his contempt for the "foreign jabber in languages."

The fact was, that the Rubelsteins were feared because it was supposed they were in want of help. It was known they were poor, and it was suspected that too much encouragement might incite them to become beggars. Carry had drawn out her little money on her marriage, and for aught her friends knew, it might be all spent long ago; and what could they earn by teaching? So the Rubelsteins were people to be avoided.

CHAPTER IV.

"I SHOULDN'T wonder," soliloquized Uncle Martin in his bachelor's chambers, "if I don't have to keep the hundred pounds in my pocket. I don't see the winner."

This was nearly twelve months after the last marriage,—that of Martha.

"As for Carry," continued the good man, "I never hear anything of her, and I suppose she's a gone goose. Then there's Martha; she and her husband—that walking-stick, Mr. Sampson—opened a school at Hertford, and made a regular smash of it; and now Sampson and his wife have gone back to the father—them sort of people always go back to the father—to play humble usher in the old man's school. And now comes Mr. Lunge—look, what he wants?"

Uncle Martin held an open letter in one hand, and as this query suggested itself to his mind, he smote it vindictively with the back of the other.

"Wants to borrow fifty pounds of me, does he? Like his impudence! Let him go to the bank for it, and see what they'll say to him. I can tell him what they'd say to him. They'd let him know he was an extravagant fellow, and that they'd cut his credit short altogether. That's what they'd say to him."

This was Uncle Martin's honest opinion, and it was as near the truth as it could well be. Young Lunge was an extravagant fellow, and like most men of the same class,

got very little for his money after all. Then, if Mr. Lunge was a banker's son, he was not the bank; and he might as well have been one of the humblest clerks at the desk so far as his control of the bank property was concerned. If he had been as industrious as the said humble clerks, it would have been some kind of set-off for his other great failing. But he was idle as well as extravagant, and nothing but his position as son of the banker saved him from dismissal.

It is the peculiarity of reckless expenditure, that the abundance of money upon which it feeds never exists but once, and that for a very short time. Afterwards, it is all scramble and subterfuge to make both ends meet. An extravagant rich man is not near so well off as a provident poor man, nor in possession or enjoyment of so many luxuries. The gulf once created, everything tumbles into it, and not all the wealth of the world would make it full.

Mr. Lunge stood upon the edge of just such a gulf; and although in receipt of more than enough to gratify all reasonable desires, he was continually under pressure for ordinary necessities; and pinched and driven into a corner for a few pounds. And thus it was that he wrote to Uncle Martin for a loan.

"I'll have a look at him, first," muttered Uncle Martin to himself, as he buttoned up his coat. "If he really wants it, perhaps I'll lend him fifty pounds, but—"

Uncle Martin left an ominous blank here in lieu of finishing the sentence, and strode off to his sister's, Mrs. Lintott.

The first face which met his eye as he entered the parlour was that of his niece, Martha, now Mrs. Sampson. She was well in health, but looked harassed, though resigned.

"Well, Martha," cried Uncle Martin, gaily, "all comfortable at home?"

Yes, all was comfortable at home, Martha said, with a little sigh; only old Mr. Sampson was so cross sometimes.

"I should think he was," thought Uncle Martin.

It was so hard, Martha explained, to establish a new business, and Mr. Sampson hadn't the nerve. He might have done very well in Hertford if he had kept on; but it was so much trouble, and he hadn't the nerve, and so he gave it up.

"The more chicken he," thought Uncle Martin.

It was a great expense, Martha went on to say, but Mr. Sampson had paid everybody. And now he was conducting, or rather helping to conduct, his father's school; and perhaps, some day, when——"

"I see," thought Uncle Martin, "waiting for a dead man's shoes. May the old gentleman live long!"

Uncle Martin took an unusual interest that day in the official and commercial announcements in the *Times*. He had a copy of the day's paper in his pocket. He began at the bottom and read upwards, through the Dissolutions of Partnerships, the Scotch Sequestrations, the Declarations of Dividends, and so came slyly, and by gentle degrees, to the List of Bankrupts. But it wasn't there. No; he read the list twice down, but the name he sought was not to be found, and he laid down the paper with a grim smile.

"I might have expected," thought Uncle Martin, "that they wouldn't let it go quite so far with Mr. Lunge."

Then, by way of distraction, Uncle Martin got among the general advertisements, and presently cried "Hulloa!" in quite a startling manner, as he came upon the name of "Rubelstein." It was repeated, not twice, nor thrice, but, at least, a dozen times—a string of advertisements a quarter of a column long, each commencing with the name of "Rubelstein;" and all of them had reference to music, some in French, some in German, some in English. Here was "*Rubelstein's Chante Heroïque*;" there "*Der*

Heimath: Neue Melodie, von Karl Rubelstein;" again, "*Rubelstein's Twilight: A Fantasia for the Piano-forte;*" and so on.

"Astonishing!" cried Uncle Martin. "I never heard of this before. I must go and see about this."

Then he showed the advertisements to his sister, Mrs. Lintott, who understood it as little as he did; and both felt a little ashamed, for both were conscious that they had neglected and even slighted "those poor Rubelsteins," as they were called.

"I'm going to Laura's," said Uncle Martin, "and I'll take Rubelstein on my way back."

He found Mr. Lunge at home—he lived in a stylish villa at Bayswater—confined to his room by a sick-headache. Laura met him in *déshabille*, looking very haggard and unhappy. The house was well furnished, showily furnished, but was heavy, sombre, and untidy. Mr. Lunge was not at home to anybody else, but of course he was at home to Uncle Martin.

"That's how a fellow gets served," cried Mr. Lunge, tossing a letter to his visitor, after the usual salutations. Uncle Martin read it. It was a short, severe note from Mr. Lunge, the older, declaring that, as Mr. Lunge, the younger, could not conform to the rules of the office, he had filled up his place, and should henceforth allow him (Mr. Lunge, the younger) only so much—a poor sum—in lieu of his usual salary.

"What do you think of that, now, for a poser?" cried the exasperated but dolorous Mr. Lunge; "after one has used all one's energies in the service, that's the reward one gets!"

Uncle Martin did not respond to this pathetic appeal in the manner that was expected of him; and he told a very great story immediately afterwards, when he informed Mr. Lunge that he was extremely sorry he could not help him with fifty pounds just then. It was particularly unfortunate, he said, that he happened to be very short of cash, or nothing would have given him so much pleasure. And so he took his leave.

The Rubelsteins lived in some obscure street in Chelsea, so Uncle Martin had been given to understand. He had never been there, nor had any of the family, for it was understood that the Rubelsteins lived in lodgings, and might not be prepared to receive company. Moreover, as had been said, the family had no particular desire to visit the Rubelsteins. Uncle Martin had his misgivings, and when he came to the small, dingy house to which he had been directed, he felt more than half inclined to turn back; but he could not for very shame. What was his relief when a homely, respectable woman, informed him, in answer to his summons, that Mr. Rubelstein had left, and now lived in a neighbouring "Terrace," to which she directed him. This was in the main road, and the house indicated was a small, bright, cottage-built residence, with trees and a pretty garden in front. As Uncle Martin tripped up the stone footway, he heard the tones of a piano, pealing in no uncertain melody, from the slightly open window. Nor did he wait long at the door; for almost before he could give his usual authoritative rap, Carry stood ready to receive him. She had seen him from the window, and could not wait for ceremony. Never was there such a welcome from both Karl and Carry; and not five minutes had elapsed before Uncle Martin sat in the plainly-furnished but neatly-ordered parlour, with the chubbiest of little babies on his knees, whose bright, large, dark eyes were a perfect wonder.

"Not born blind, then," thought Uncle Martin, "like the puppies."

Carry was quite in a flutter of excitement, and laughed and almost cried by turns, and Rubelstein himself was no less demonstrative in his delight. Then they had such good news to tell Uncle Martin. Karl had been *so* successful; he had more teaching than he could well attend to, and he had made quite a hit in musical composition. Had

Uncle heard? Yes, Uncle had heard, and was as much pleased as he had been surprised. It was a sight to see Rubelstein, sitting quite upright in his chair, with his hands spread along his knees, his head thrown back, his eyes, lustreless as they were, turned towards the light, and his handsome face lighted up with unalloyed pleasure.

"I'm delighted," cried Uncle Martin, dancing the chubby baby on his knee, "to see you so comfortable."

Rubelstein laughed aloud.

"Comfortable!" he exclaimed, "I should think so—why not?"

"Oh, uncle," was Carry's tearful response, "we *are* happy!"

It came out, upon explanation, that the successful musical compositions were joint productions. Rubelstein, although gifted with rare perceptions of melody, was only an ordinary player; but, stimulated by his love for his wife, and his sense of duty, he had endeavoured to cultivate his natural ability for music in his leisure hours, with the view of making it yield profitable employment in the future. In this effort Carry had assisted him by her own musical acquirements, and encouraged him by her sympathy and praise. His task-work soon yielded fruit; he overflowed with melody; and Carry, who could write down music by ear with perfect ease, became without difficulty his musical amanuensis; and together they had succeeded.

"And now, Karl's pieces," cried Carry, having concluded this little explanation, "make a little income in themselves."

"Why, Carry," said Uncle Martin, laughing heartily at the idea, "you'll be getting quite rich."

"That we shall," answered Carry, seriously, although she laughed too; "and as it is, we want for nothing."

Uncle Martin's eyes twinkled with unusual light, and then he suddenly relapsed into gravity.

"Ah!" he said, possibly with a reflective glance at two other homes he had visited that day, "it all depends upon whether one has the resolution to succeed. Once get that into one's head and one's fingers, and one soon finds out the way."

Uncle Martin stayed to tea, and went home happy. The idea of the prize marriage was constantly in his mind, but he had never once referred to it: he had his reasons.

"I'll invite them all to dinner," said Uncle Martin, as he strode towards home, "and make the award publicly. The Rubelsteins have won it, there's not a doubt about it. The other two will be vexed, of course; but I can't help that. They'll get a good dinner, at any rate."

He carried out his plan to the letter, and presented his prize with the dessert. He made a neat little speech, too, but it did not tell all he thought: only just a sort of first season.

"For," Uncle Martin explained, "I would not, as a rule, recommend young women to marry blind husbands; even that is better, of course, than if husband and wife were both blind, for then, 'shall they not fall into the ditch?' whereas, supposing the first case, it is only like being blind of one eye. But this I do say: our dear friends, Carry and Karl, notwithstanding a certain obscurity of vision, have managed to see their way before them exceedingly well."

It certainly was a strange pass to come to, that the rich banker's son should borrow money of the poor, despised foreign teacher; and that the reserved Mr. Sampson should so far find "nerve" as to become a debtor in the same quarter. But so it was; and in the end, Uncle Martin's marriage-prize of a hundred pounds became about equally divided between the three families. And Karl and Carry cared not, "but went on their way rejoicing."