

"Let me tell you a little fairy story: There were once a prince and a princess. They loved each other. But the prince was poor and dared not tell of his love for fear of being thought a fortune hunter. His silence made the princess angry. So she went and promised her hand to another man, and they all lived miserably unhappy ever after. And the moral of that stupid little story is that I'm sick of respectability, and I'm awake from my crazy dream of love, and I'm going back to Maxim's, and you can all go to—Marsovia!"

"He loves me! He loves me!" panted Sonia under her breath.



CHAPTER VI.  
At Maxim's

MAXIM'S after midnight—the show restaurant whither sight-seeing Americans and other tourists flock and whose dizzy, machine made merriment they solemnly believe to be a part and parcel of true Parisian life.

On the night of Sonia's garden party one group of men and women who entered the jolly restaurant were so different from the usual habitués of the place as to come in for not a few amused glances from their neighbors. They were Mme. Natalie Popoff, Mme. Nova Kovitch and Casenda and St. Brioché. The visit was Natalie's idea.



At Maxim's.

She had heard Danilo's wild speech of goodby to Sonia and his announcement that he was off to Maxim's. Hence the ambassador's wife, with a feeble yearning to atone in some way for the false position into which the widow had been thrust for her sake, had resolved to follow in the hope of securing a word in private with Danilo and setting matters right again.

Natalie had not confided her plan to her husband, and now as the party were ushered to a secluded table in an alcove she glanced at the riotous scene about her with a delighted nervousness. The delight vanished suddenly, however, and the nervousness waxed to a panic fear as a familiar voice smote upon her ear.

Popoff had just come in and was standing not ten feet away from the secluded table where his wife sat trembling.

"I want to see Prince Danilo at once," he said to the head waiter. "Has he arrived?"

"Not yet, sir," was the reply, "but he will be here very soon. There is a supper party waiting for him over there," waving to a tableful of gayly appareled girls with tired eyes.

"Really!" exclaimed the ambassador. "I'll just join them till he comes."

He toddled off to the distant table, where, to Natalie's jealous eye, he seemed to make himself at home with a phenomenal ease and quickness. He was scarce seated when Danilo strode in. The whole table rose to give the prince noisy greeting.

"Why, hello, your excellency!" cried Danilo. "This is queer company for a monument of respectability like yourself to wander into!"

"I came only to see you," protested the ambassador, drawing him aside. "I was bound I'd come here and wait till you appeared!"

"Oh, I see," cut in the prince, thoroughly enjoying his confusion. "Fools rush in where—"

"I didn't rush in," fumed the ambassador; "I crept here in a meanly cab, and I sneaked into the place like a pickpocket for fear some one would recognize me. I sacrificed myself to my country. Suppose my wife should hear of it! I came to implore you, to cast myself on your mercy, to beg you once more to prevent the widow from—"

"I must see his excellency," insisted a portly man behind them, his voice booming through the whole room. "He is here, and I— Oh!" he broke off on sight of Popoff. "Here you are! I—" "My dear Nova Kovitch," pettishly

interrupted the ambassador, "is it necessary to hunt for me with a brass band? Couldn't you?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt you," answered Nova Kovitch, "but here's a dispatch from the Marsovian ministry. It seemed to me important, and I brought it on."

Popoff took the slip of paper and read aloud:

"If Mme. Sadowa's twenty millions are allowed to leave Marsovia we are a bankrupt country."

"There, Prince Danilo," continued the ambassador, turning on the young man in melodramatic appeal; "you see it's right up to you! Your country appeals to you to save it! You are Marsovia's last hope. Marry the widow and—"

"I'll marry no one!" flared up Danilo. "To the deuce with matrimony and Marsovia and myself! I'm done with sill! dreams of love and all that nonsense. I'm free, and I'm going to make a night of it. I!"

He paused and stood silent, dumfounded. Down the little flight of stairs leading into the room a woman was advancing alone.

"Sonia!" exclaimed Danilo.

With a word of excuse to the others, he hurried across and met the widow as she reached the foot of the steps.

"You're here," he muttered in horrified wonder—"here alone?"

"Yes," replied Sonia coldly. "Is it any affair of yours?"

"First the summer house," he went on as in a daze, "then Maxim's."

"Quite so. Is that all you have to say?"

"No," he retorted; "I have one thing more. You should not marry De Joldon."

"No? Why not, pray?"

"Because I!"

He checked himself. She finished the sentence for him.

"Because you love me?" she suggested.

He broke into a discordant, miserable laugh.

"Don't laugh that silly way!" she reprimanded sharply.

"I am sorry you don't like it," he observed. "It's the only way I know."

"Then don't laugh at all. The laugh is on my side, anyway."

"On your side?"

"Yes. You are angry at what happened this evening. But it wasn't I who was in the summer house with M. de Joldon."

"But I saw you there," he declared.

"I took another woman's place to get her out of—" awkward scrape with her husband with M. Popoff. She was—

"And I never even guessed it!" cried Danilo, his sullen face breaking into a smile of utter relief. "What a fool I was! I was green and yellow with jealousy. I!"

He caught himself up, but it was too late. Sonia's eyes danced.

"But since you don't love me," she asked, "why were you green and yellow with?"

"Because green and yellow are our national colors. I am nothing if not patriotic. You see?"

"Mme. Sadowa—prince?" gurgled Popoff, trotting up to them, unable longer to restrain his anxiety. "I hope it is all settled. All nicely arranged, eh?"

"Same old fan!" commented Popoff, idly opening it. Then, with a jump as his eye vaguely caught the sentence Natalie had scribbled beneath De Joldon's avowal, he screamed:

"My wife's handwriting! Then it was my wife after all!"

"Sir," quoted Nova Kovitch, "Caesar's wife should be above suspicion."

"But Caesar never brought his wife to Paris!" wailed Popoff. "This is bad for me."

"No, no!" pleaded Natalie, who at sight of the fatal trinket had left her table and run forward. "It's all a horrid mistake. I can explain. I!"

"Silence!" commanded Popoff in his most magisterial manner. "Madame, under section 4 of the Marsovian code I hereby divorce you. This fan is sufficient evidence."

As Natalie started back, dumb with horror, Popoff turned impressively to Sonia and, to the widow's amused dismay, sank on one knee before her.

"Mme. Sadowa," he declared, "I am free, and in the name of our fatherland I beseech you to become my wife!"

Sonia was seemingly blind to the white misery in Natalie's face and the look of angry surprise in Danilo's. She answered, with perfect composure:

"My dear M. Popoff, I am deeply honored by your proposal, but before I ac-

cept it is only fair to tell you that if I marry again I lose all my fortune."

The ambassador scrambled hastily to his feet.

"I—I was perhaps just a wee bit hasty," he stammered, looking sheepishly about for a way of escape.

Natalie came forward and handed him the fan.

"Did you read the words I wrote on it?" she asked timidly.

"I am—a dutiful—wife!" spelled out the ambassador. "Forgive me! I didn't understand. Shall we let bygones be bygones?"

Danilo, who had stood silent during the odd proposal, now stepped past Popoff and faced Sonia, a new light in his eyes.

"Is it true you will lose all your money if you marry again?" he asked in a voice he tried in vain to keep steady.

"Yes," she admitted; "it is true."



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"I LOVE YOU, SONIA," HE WHISPERED.

"If you mean is madame to marry De Joldon," answered Danilo, "she is not."

"But this evening," ejaculated Popoff, "in the summer house?"

"She took another woman's place," replied the prince, disregarding Sonia's warning gesture.

"Dear me!" squealed Popoff, his curiosity reviving. "Who was she?"

"Excuse me, your excellency," remarked Nish, who had entered with Nova Kovitch and had hovered aimlessly about waiting to get in a word, "but here is a fan that was picked up in the summer house after the party. You told me to search the place, and I did. If I may say so, I!"

"Then why shouldn't I say now what I want to?"

"Why not?" she agreed demurely. He drew a step nearer.

"I love you, Sonia," he whispered. Steadily, happily, she met his burning eyes as she answered:

"I love you, Danilo. I have always loved you."

"Tut, tut!" fretted Popoff, pushing peevishly between them. "This'll never do. You can't marry her, prince. You'll both be paupers."

"Not quite," gently corrected Sonia. "I shall lose my money, it is true, but—only because I am going to give it all to my husband."

[THE END.]

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