

## CHAPTER XI

### ROMANCE

THERE came a day when Billy Burton received a cable from England.

"I must leave—I must go back home," he said. There was a strange look in his young eyes.

"Oh!" was all little Mary could say.

"But you and I—we were meant for each other," Billy rushed on. "I can't leave you this way, unless—unless you will marry me. Then I'll go and get this silly business fixed up and return to you, my little Mary. For you know now how I love you."

He had said it at last! The words she had been secretly wishing he would utter came from his lips. 'It was too wonderful.' But she knew she would have to forego her happiness. How could she, being what she was, marry this upstanding English lad, even though he were but a rider in a rodeo. He was too good for his job—that she knew. She would



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have to tell him all about herself, and as she wrote to Old Silver, "It will be so hard to do! I wish sometimes that he hadn't asked me. I can't deceive him, and yet my conscience tells me I can never become his wife unless I tell him everything, from beginning to end."

She told him.

He laughed, and laughed.

Little Mary did not know what to make of his mirth. Was he finished with her? Ah! she couldn't bear the thought of that!

"What difference does all this make?" Billy Burton cried, when his laughter had died away. "It only makes you all the sweeter to me, you little goosey of a girl."

She wrote to old Oliver Silver the next week.

"And so we were married! And the Prince sailed away. Oh, I must tell you everything! When he came to sign the registry, I noticed that he did not put down 'William Burton,' but just a single name—'Clieveden.' It startled me. I saw him having a whispered conversation with Nellie Bond just before he took his train to go back East to catch his steamer; and when he was gone she came to me and said, 'And how is Lady Clieveden feeling now?' Oh, Mr. Silver, I was in tears by this time. I



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thought I'd been tricked and duped once more. But no! Don't jump. Don't think I'm crazy; but Billy had come into a title, with a good income—he'd always detested smart life in England, and came to America after the War simply to seek adventure and get away from silly stiffness. And here was I, a rodeo rider, a' Lady now! But it hasn't left any funny marks on me, as I feared it would. Billy is back now. I gave up rodeo-ing, if there's such a word, and waited for him 'way out West. Lady Clieveden! Think of that! Your little Mary is Lady Clieveden! And people say there are no fairy-tales nowadays! Well, let them say so. I don't care. I know there are. For I'm *in* one!"

Old Silver couldn't believe all this. Yet it was absolutely true, as soon he was to learn.

Clieveden said, on his return, in the first flush of their happiness:

"We are people of importance now, my dear little girl. We must clear up the wretched past. I've been thinking things over. We've got to go back to New York and face that old bail charge against Lady Clieveden. Don't be alarmed. I did something about it on my way back here. Just trust to your lord and master!" And he gave one of his roaring



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laughs that little Mary had come to love so well.

But then, she loved everything about Clieveden—she always would; and she would do anything he asked her.

So one morning they found themselves again in New York—a part once more of that beating pulse, that throbbing heart, people who have once known it never quite escape from.

And the Hotel Splendide was graced with their presence on a certain gorgeous winter afternoon. Little Mary, with her sense of the dramatic, did not wish the clerks and bell-boys to see her first: it must be Old Silver. So she put on a heavy veil, hiding the prettiness of her face, and waited behind a pillar while Clievedon sent up a card for both of them to Room 931.

That meeting! The old actor wept real tears—of joy, and little Mary sobbed, as even great ladies often do, I am told; and even Clievedon, who had heard so much of the old man, found himself wiping the side of his eye with one of his hands and turning away, manfully ashamed of this anything but British expression of his feelings!

Well, they talked and talked. They laughed, they cried, they called in Barrow and drank



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a toast in his excellent champagne—oh, just a sip for little Mary, but plenty for the young man and the two elderly ones!

Then little Mary, who never forgot anybody, sent for Annie, and they had a good cry on each other's shoulders, in each other's arms; and they saw Erdleigh, and the desk clerk, and Pete, and even little fair-haired Lillie, who looked very pale this year; and the head waiter in the grill, and many of the underlings all the way down the line—none was forgotten in the rapture that little Mary knew. And they all smiled and beamed on Clieveden—what an upstanding, handsome peer he was, to be sure! And they were told of Nellie Bond and *her* marriage—for it had, of course, transpired that Nellie and the lad of the farm married, too.

The sergeant at the desk in the old ramshackle police station was the first to be seen, and he directed them to the Chief of Police. They explained everything. How Mary had been spirited away, and what had come of it—good fortune, instead of evil. How Clieveden had come into his title and wed the little girl, making her a Lady. How wealth was theirs now, and the bail would be forfeited, if need be. All those necessary details: They were told about



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the pale young man, and through him (he had turned state's evidence) the "valet," who was, in reality, the old gentleman who had bailed little Mary out—yes, they "got" him, too. And little Mary (Lady Clieveden now) was set right with every one.

But the best thing of all was the dinner that Billy and his little wife gave in their rooms at the Ambassador for Old 931. They picked that very suite in the Ambassador, and there the table was spread; and Barrow sent the champagne for it.

(It was when he opened his "wine cellar," which, curiously enough, was in the hall outside his own suite, that he missed several bottles. But that's another story.)

Well, the banquet was a riot. They drank to Cornwall, where Clieveden's estate was; and then they drank to Devonshire, where the little farm was to be. There was to be another glad reunion some day. Some day! Ah! how far away it seemed.

And when Old Silver rose to propose the health and long happiness of the young folk, his voice broke for the first time in public—if this could be called in public!—and his hand shook as he lifted his glass. But he managed to get through somehow, sterling old actor



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that he was, and they laughed again, the while they wept. And when Old Silver was about to go, Clieveden presented him with a huge box of cigars—little Mary's idea. And when he opened it, as he was bade to do then and there, he found, tucked in the centre, a wonderful pearl pin!

· You see, little Mary had to have her tiny joke. For wasn't it an innocent-looking box of cigars and some pearls that had brought her to this astonishing moment in her life?

That was what she said when, falteringly, she tried to tell them all how happy she was.