

The Home Reading Circle



CLINTON ROSS

THE AUTHOR OF "THE SCARLET COAT," "THE MESSING RUSSY" etc.
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SYNOPSIS.

Robert Merrivale has succeeded his father as the head of the great Merrivale Mills. He is young, but still unmarried, and his mother determines that if he won't find a wife for himself she will pick out Sallie Pentland. Robert and Sallie are great friends, but they frankly confess to each other that their friendship is not love. Sallie, however, asks Robert to keep up the pretense of courtship, saying that she has a particular reason for so doing. While this comedy is in progress, Clarissa Henlow is engaged at the office as a stenographer. She is of fine southern family, reduced in fortune by the war. Robert finds himself more interested in Clarissa than he is willing to admit, and even experiences pangs of jealousy when he meets her one Sunday with a young man named Samuel Sladding. One day a crank enters the office and attempts to molest Merrivale. Clarissa knocks the pistol from his hand just in time. This incident is all the more distressing to Mrs. Merrivale on account of the relations it brings about between her son and Clarissa. She sees that Robert is in love with the stenographer, and before long the young man does indeed want to listen to him.

PART III.

That next afternoon I saw my mother's landau drawing around the corner of Clarissa street. I stopped with a sudden fear. Why had my mother been there? Was she playing the part of the mother-in-law who appeared to the style of wooing, and I hadn't done it in that way. I hesitated. Her voice said "come in." She was standing, her hands crossed behind her, looking out of the window.

"Clarissa," said I, "I am here for your answer."

"Are you then in earnest?" she asked, turning. "Isn't it just generosity—imagination—because I knocked down that man's hand?"

She faced me, and it was as if she had been weeping.

"Can you doubt me? Look at me," I cried.

"It's too late," she said, wearily. "I can't let it be."

"I have given my word," she said.

"To whom?" I asked. I was thinking.

"To Mr. Sladding," she said.

"Ah, yes, I understand," I said. The room seemed to be swimming. "I have been a fool, then."

"Please don't," she said. "You make it hard."

"I beg your pardon, I have no right to talk to you in this way."

Outside, I remember I called a cab. I remember rage and pique suddenly held me; for after all, love and vanity are not far apart, whatever our theories about them. I went up to the Pentlands, where I found Sallie in.

"The matter is," said I, "that our engagement—now that it has been announced—must be kept."

"Nonsense," said Sallie.

"Really," said I.

"I know you do," she said. "You have been fitted."

"Eh, how did you know?"

"You look it," she said.

"How does a man look under such a condition?"

"Very bad tempered—and foolish. But cheer up, Bobbie, the ordeal is at most over. I, too, am going to jilt you."

"The deuce," said I.

"Tonight I am going to run away with Sam Dwyer," Sallie said slowly. "What's to become of me?" I asked.

"Go back to her?"

"She won't have me."

"Yes, she will," said Sallie with a laugh.

"Why?"

"Because she loves you."

"She can't."

"Oh, it might be possible for some girl to love you, Bobbie," said Sallie. "Well, she's engaged to another man."

"You don't mean it?" said Sallie.

"Not to that Sladding."

"Yes, to that fellow," I cried.

"It can't be he," said Sallie, her eyes dilating. "It can't be."

"Why not?" I said. "He's rather a poor creature, I think to be sure."

"He isn't; he wasn't; yes—no, he isn't. Don't you see why he can't be the man? Well, Bob, I told you a fib. He's the man I am going to elope with tonight. He's the man my family won't let me marry because he is poor. He is the man—and not Sam Dwyer at all."

"An—like—she?"

"I must talk to you. Then—you will you must forgive me."

She held the letter up again.

"Don't you recognize the hand?"

"It's his," said I, suddenly—"my father's."

"Yes, listen. It is his voice, written me from Virginia—during the war. It has reached me as from the dead. I found it—you know that little oak desk in my room. I was fumbling over some papers. You remember the story—that time he was wounded and his life saved; they found a letter on his person. That letter, Bobbie, you know the story, was directed to me. The rebel officer sent it north to me, with written on it the officer's name who had written your father out from the range of the gun."

I ALMOST RAN INTO MY MOTHER.

"How was I asked, eagerly—" a Colonel Henlow?"

"A Colonel Henlow," cried my mother, bending her head; "and I just had been to ask this Colonel Henlow's daughter to give up my son. I had been reasoning abominably—because I thought that girl could not possibly make you happy, Bobbie, the girl who, in turn—saved you to me."

She was sobbing softly, gently; but I pressed her hand in mine.

"I am sure I won't have her," I groaned.

"It's desirable to have you engaged at once to somebody, as I have stated, and there's nobody you've gone so far with as his girl—"

"You intend to let Sallie elope," said I, almost maliciously.

"Elope!" cried my mother. "Good gracious, of course not! I have a duty from my knowledge of the case!"

After a moment she looked at me with a reassured smile.

"I shall tell Jane Pentland how I became reconciled to your engagement with Miss Henlow. I shall assure her that young people must arrange these affairs for themselves. I shall warn her that when anything has gone so far as you say Sallie's affair with young Sladding has—it's better to accept it as inevitable. But marriages, dear Bobbie, are not made in Heaven—"

"Let's hope these will end there."

"Well, amen," said my mother, almost gaily. "But were she grown print and sober. We were approaching the house of my fate. Would Clarissa persist in sending me away?"

"You dear, good woman, you did it all for the best. But—"

"If after all doesn't seem to be all for the best," my mother said.

"We can never tell," said I; "you did what you thought was for the best."

I was still pressing her hand and I think it comforted her.

"I believe my impression of her is to be depended on. You don't know—whether she cares for me. How can she?"

"I wish you wouldn't be so humble about any woman," my mother said.

"The only thing which persuades me that she may—"

"Of course she does," said my mother.

"That she didn't just say 'no,'" I continued; "she told me a fib. She said she had promised herself to that fellow, Sam Sladding."

"Well," said my mother, quickly, "she has, hasn't she?"

"No; she was fibbing."

"How do you know?"

"Sallie knows."

"How can Sallie know?"

"Because," said I, "Sallie intends to marry this same fellow, Sladding."

"Sallie!" said my mother, "Sallie!"

"No, she never cared for me."

"Then you mean to say that both Sallie Pentland and you have been deliberately deceiving me?"

"I didn't think that of Sallie," I said. "I am sorry."

"I was particularly sorry because now I had certainly let Sallie's cat out of the bag; and I certainly ought not to have done it; I owed that much to Sallie."

"What are we to do?" my mother asked, almost helplessly.

"We are going straight to Eighth street," I now answered, with a deal of deliberation.

"I don't think that of Sallie," I said. "I am sorry."

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I was still outside the door; I was waiting the moment to rush in; to make her acknowledge her lie; to ask her the reason for it.

"Miss Henlow—may I say Clarissa? I am not opposed to your marrying my son. In fact, I find now—that I was well—mistaken."

For a moment there was silence; then I heard sob; I pushed into the room. The two were weeping, like two silly women, in each other's arms. Clarissa looked pale and beautiful.

"You lied to me, Clarissa Henlow?" said I, at the door.

"How did you know?" she said, turning. "And if you do know, how dare you say it? Sam and I knew that you had an understanding, so we made one ourselves. Sam was very jealous—"

"Gladly," said I, "I'll say."

"Oh, he's just my cousin."

"And he's going to elope with Miss Penland?"

"He told me that after you had left," Clarissa said. "You see, when you were here I didn't know but that possibly you might marry—"

"Sallie? But what's that to do with the case?"

"Sam and I intended to pretend not to be hurt."

"Who deceivers you women are?" said I. "Still, we men love you."

"Really, now," said Clarissa, with some mockery.

"You ought to know, dear," said I.

"I do," she said, slowly, after some moments. "I always knew that you were here. I may state here that my mother—still, as I surmised, keeping, even in her defeat, her position of manager of hearts—succeeded in getting the Pentlands reconciled to Sallie's engagement with Sladding, whom I have found—"

"I no longer have reason to be jealous of him—a very good fellow, despite his appearance. In calling my dear mother a manager of hearts, I must not forget that in the end she found her own heart the most unmanageable; in the end she had not the heart to leave us miserable, although that indeed might have seemed to her then by all odds the better worldly policy. Yet, what's better in the world than to have your will in the matter of marrying, always never regret it. I was right from the first," says Johnson, the head clerk, with a chuckle, when it chances that Clarissa comes down to go home with me.

"Your judgment," Mr. Johnson, I answer, "is always right even in the matter of matrimony, and never to regret it. I was right from the first," says Johnson, the head clerk, with a chuckle, when it chances that Clarissa comes down to go home with me.

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The greatest care was taken by the machinists under the direction of Master Mechanic Buchanan to see that the weighing was accurate. When every part of the engine had been weighed a force of the best-qualified mechanics was put at work to re-assemble the engine. When it was complete again it was put into active service.

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Our method of doing the suit and wrap business is different from other houses. We manufacture the finest goods in our own work rooms. We buy from importers and manufacturers the latest styles of goods for spot cash below the market prices and give our customers better goods for less money than any other house in Scranton. The great opening sale is the beginning of this spring's wonderful low-price movement, in Ladies' Suits, Skirts, Waists and Wraps.

Broadcloth Suits, especially effective Eton jackets, with Dolers, four different styles, worth \$8.50—

Stylish French Broadcloth Suits, fly front jackets, silk lined throughout, hand backed skirts, worth \$12.00—

Etamine, Crash, Cloth Canvas Weave Suits, in all the new shades, latest cut, latest patterns, fan back, well lined, \$4.98