

# The Merry Widow

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

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## CHAPTER III. The Garden Fete.

THE gardens of Mme. Sonia Sadova's villa, just outside Paris, were gayly decorated for a lawn fete. The grounds were dotted with laughing groups of brightly dressed men and women, for Sonia had particularly requested that all her Marsovian guests wear their picturesque native costume, and the result was a veritable kaleidoscope of color, a perfect riot of gorgeous hues and striking figures.

Ambassador Popoff, his long, lean figure draped in vivid green, was pacing the alleys of the garden near the entrance gate, pausing nervously now and again to scan late arrivals in search of some one. At length he descried the man he sought, Nish, was just busting into the grounds, and the ambassador at once beckoned to him.

"Now, then, Mr. Nish," cried Popoff as soon as the little clerk had shambled within earshot, "I told you to

"Impossible!"

"Why impossible, pray? I think I have as good eyes as any man. I think, sir, I can detect love when I see it. And from the way De Joldon looks at the widow—why, I don't know a single thing that doesn't point toward his being in love with her. If—"

"If I may say so, your excellency," put in Nish, shuffling excessively, "I think I could tell you of a 'single' thing, or, rather," he added, chuckling, "when I say 'single' I mean 'married.'"

"Mr. Nish," interrupted Popoff, "if you can stop wriggling around like an inebriated centipede long enough to talk plainly, will you do me the honor to put your blithering into plain words?"

"Well, your excellency," stammered Nish, "I happen to know M. de Joldon is already head over heels in love with a lady who has a husband. He—"

"Mr. Nish," thundered Popoff, "you are demystifying yourself to the contemptible net of talking scandal! Are you aware of that, Mr. Nish? If so, go on talking it and tell me who she is."

"You fool!" whispered Danilo in Nish's ear. "Everybody but the ambassador himself knows it is Mme. Popoff whom De Joldon loves. Be careful!"

"Why," he said on impulse, "this is De Joldon's handwriting! How does it happen that he—"

"Then," squealed Popoff in triumph, "it is Mme. Nova Kovitch he loves. The whole thing is absurdly simple when a brain like mine is brought to bear on it."

Delighted with his own astuteness, the ambassador pattered off to join the other guests, leaving Danilo, fan in hand, blankly facing the astounded little clerk.

"Nish," observed the prince, "do you suppose it's possible De Joldon can be in love with Mme. Nova Kovitch as well as with Mme. Popoff?"

"I'd—I'd like to think so," murmured Nish as he started faithfully off in the wake of his chief. "I'd like to think so. It—it would make it less exclusive, less of a monopoly. And to think his excellency never recognized his own wife's fan! Where ignorance is bliss why read up on divorce laws?"

Laying the fan on a nearby table, Danilo was turning away when a voice behind him called mockingly:

"Still in retreat? So you are afraid of me?"

Waiting about, the prince faced Sonia. She was bewitchingly pretty in the black and gold Marsovian dress that snowed to gold advantage every wily line of her figure.

"I'm not retreating," he contradicted, "only skirting in light cavalry fashion."

"And you are going away like that? Oh, you stupid man!"

"I can't tell what you mean," he answered, puzzled.

"And I shan't tell what I mean," she rejoined. "By the way," she added, "how do you happen to be here? You defied my invitation."

"I'm here," he replied bluntly, "because I'm making it my business to get rid of every Frenchman who shows signs of proposing to you."

"But why?" she asked in wonder. "For my own amusement; that's all." "You—you don't happen to be in love

with her, do you?"

Noting that Danilo's back was toward her, she furtively lifted the fan to her lips and kissed the written words. Then as she restored it to the table she whispered:

"Just the same, I'll make him say it. He shall!"

She crossed to where he stood.

"Have you nothing to say to me, prince?" she asked.

"Only one thing—goodbye!"

"Goodbye!" she echoed. "You're not going?"

"I leave Paris tomorrow morning—by the first train—forever!"

"Then you won't be here, after all, to dance at my wedding?"

"No!"

"But you promised. And now, I suppose, I shall never see you again, for when I'm married I shall live in Paris."

"I thought you were more patriotic," he sighed. "It seems hard that you should turn your back on your native land, marry a Frenchman and settle here."

"Yet it is what I have decided," she answered. "This is probably the last time I shall wear our native costume or dance our wild national dances. Today's fete is a sort of farewell to old times."

"No; our dances and costumes would not appeal to a Frenchman. Who is it you are going to marry?"

"The engagement isn't announced yet," she evaded.

"Then," he returned, with a shrug, "I suppose I shall never know, for I leave early tomorrow."

"And you won't dance at my wedding?"

"I've told you I would not."

"If you won't," she cried, a sudden inspiration flashing through her mind and lighting her pale face to dazzling beauty, "dances with me now!"

She stretched out her slender white arms with an allurements that no mortal man could resist.

"An Easy One.

Ex-Senator Spooner tells of a case tried in a Wisconsin court in which, during the course of the cross examination of an exceptionally youthful looking physician, the opposing counsel was led to utter some rather sarcastic remarks as to the probability that so young a doctor should thoroughly understand his business.

"Are you," asked counsel, "acquainted with the symptoms of concussion of the brain?"

"I am."

"Then let us take a concrete case. If my learned friend, counsel for the defense, and myself were to bang our heads together, should we get concussion of the brain?"

"The probabilities are that counsel for the defense would."

They Were Quits.

A city fellow while hunting went out into the country one day and lost his way, and as he was standing by a crossroad he saw a farmer a little way off. He walked over to the farmer and said, "Say, Pat, which road leads to the station?" "How do you know my name is Pat?" asked the farmer. "I guessed it," said the fellow. "Well," replied the farmer, "then guess the way to the station."—Judge's Library.

Inferences.

When a man fails to keep an appointment, infer that you are seeking the favor, not he.

When you hear an American lauding the institutions and customs of Europe and speaking slightly of the United States, infer that he will never be president.

When you hear a man "dearing" and "darlinging" his wife in public, infer that he "damns" her at home.

When a woman prattles much about female rights, infer that she doesn't understand the meaning of household duties.

When you hear a spinster gushing over the many offers of marriage she has rejected, infer that she will snap at the first fellow who comes along.

When a critic is unjustly severe in condemning a literary production, infer that it has wounded his pride, vanity or self interest.

When a magazine returns a voluntary contribution, infer that the editor knows what he wants and you don't.

When an acquaintance invites you to take a drink, infer that he expects you to treat back.

When it is told about the clubs that you are the most popular poker player, infer that you are losing all the money.

When a man flatters you, infer that he takes you for a fool who is easily worked.

When an acquaintance whispers softly in your ear some dark secret, infer that he has spread it all over town.

When you lose your job, infer that it requires a search warrant to find a friend.—New York Press.

His "Character."

There is a story of a Scotch gentleman who had to dismiss his gardener for dishonesty. For the sake of the man's wife and family, however, he gave him a "character" and framed it in this way: "I hereby certify that A. B. has been my gardener for over two years and that during that time he was never out of the garden than to get his mail."—Ladies' Home Journal.

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bring Prince Danilo here and not to leave him for an instant until—"

"He wouldn't let me stay," explained Nish. "He says he won't come. He's giving a party—if I may say so, a very gay one."

"And for the sake of a lot of pleasure seeking idlers the prince refuses to obey my orders and come to Mme. Sonia's?"

"Yes, your excellency. He positively refuses to come. And when I say 'positively' refuses I— Here he is now!"

Danilo, resplendent in the uniform of a Marsovian captain of hussars, strolled nonchalantly forward, with a careless nod that quite ignored the ambassador's glare of reproof at his intemperate

"I understand, prince," began Popoff coldly, "that you positively refused to obey my—"

"So I did, so I did," asserted Danilo cheerfully. "But at the last moment I changed my mind and my clothes, and here I am. I've postponed my party for an hour or so. You see, I remembered my promise to help you scare away from the widow any Frenchman who seemed inclined to make love to her. That's why I came."

"Good!" approved Popoff, rubbing his hands gleefully. "Very good! And where do you expect to begin?"

"With the most dangerous suitor, who is he?"

"Well," replied Popoff confidently, "I've had my eye on her, and it seems to me that De Joldon—"

"De Joldon?" asked Danilo.

"Well, Mr. Nish," repeated Popoff majestically as he eyed the squirming clerk with lofty majesty, "I'm waiting to hear the name of the lady that De Joldon is in love with."

"He—he neglected to tell me, your excellency," sputtered Nish.

"Then," decided the ambassador, "I shall discover her by diplomatic means, and when I find who she is she shall use her influence to lure De Joldon away from the widow. Prince, will you help me in this?"

"Leave it all to me," suggested Danilo, with startling willingness. "Don't try to learn her identity yourself. Let me attend to the whole matter."

"All right," consented Popoff. "It will be a good lesson in diplomacy for you. Perhaps I can put you on the right track."

The ambassador drew an ivory fan from his pocket.

"Last night at the embassy ball," said he, "Nova Kovitch, who used to be one of my attaches, brought me this. He was crazy with jealousy. He'd just picked up the fan; said it was his wife's and that some man had written 'I love you' on one of the sticks. He was going home to beat his wife and make her confess who the villain was when I persuaded my wife to save poor Mme. Nova Kovitch by pretending the fan was her own. Ah, but my wife is a born diplomatist! Nova Kovitch was convinced, and I pocketed the fan for future reference."

Danilo took the franker of Popoff's hints and read the pencilled inscription.

with me yourself?" she asked, a tinge of witfulness in the light mockery of her tone.

"Certainly not," he retorted, with suspicious promptitude.

"You're very, very rude!" she reproved. "But since you don't love me you ought to be able to give me good advice about accepting a man I really want to marry."

"Oh!" growled Danilo, chagrined. "Then there is some one you want to marry?"

She nodded.

"Whoever the man is, he's after your money," he snarled.

"No," she contradicted. "He is not—not this one."

"You said all men were alike."

"This man is different. He loves me."

"Then marry him! What is it to me? Marry any one you want to. I don't care. And I'll dance at your wedding. I'll dance till I wear holes through both my shoes."

"You silly boy!" she scoffed. "You're jealous!"

"Jealous?" he raged. "Jealous? I'm jealous! That's a good one!"

Words failed him, and he stalked away to a nearby summer house, where he paused, lost in seething contemplation of the little building's architecture.

The neglected fan lying on the table caught Sonia's eye. She picked it up idly and opened it. The words "I love you" and her name. Quick as lightning she turned to Danilo.

"I understood," she murmured to herself. "He wanted to scare me off to get to her."