

Southern Invasion

By ARTHUR W. PEACH.

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Mr. Van Vert smoothed his gray goatee and looked at his sister soberly. "I am called away, Lucia; I've got to go South for a week, and I am going to put Avery into your very capable hands. I want you to see that nothing comes to a head. There are four or five young fellows about this city that would run off with her bodily, I do believe. She would be willing to fall in love with them for the fun of it. So keep a good eye out for her. I want her to meet none of them. Hold on, there's young Gregory at Branum's. I will think about it, and if I decide to give him open sesame I'll let you know."

Miss Lucia set her lips. "I shall take good care of the witch. She will be further away from an engagement than she is now when you get back, Van."

"Good! I don't want to be a crank about it, you know, but I don't want some of these chaps that I do not respect to bob up. I told young Gregory to stay away, and he's obeyed; that's why I think I may lift the embargo on him until I am back. Anyway, don't let a chap in unless he has my permission in writing."

Avery, dark-haired, dark-eyed and with the light of witchery gleaming in her eyes, came into the room to bid her father good-bye.

"Father, I'm going to have a glorious time when you're gone!" she said. "Oh, I'll lead Auntie a dance!"

"My dear, I danced you on my knee once—so look out," Miss Lucia said.

"Yes, child, be good," her father urged.

Avery laughed. "I shall do as I'm told," she answered.

Her father looked at her and shook his head.

The news evidently worked out and around Avery's devoted circle of suitors about evening time, for there was a succession of telephone calls, all of which reached Miss Lucia first, and all of which were soon ended with the information that Avery was to rest during her father's absence and not take up her social engagements until his return.

A maid came into Miss Lucia's room bearing a card and smiling a little. "Miss Lucia, there is a gentleman at the door who would like to see Miss Avery, but wishes to see you first."

Miss Lucia took the card and read, "Sidney Langdon." She knew no one of that name, but the engraving of the card was artistic work and costly, and she decided she would go down and meet him.

Miss Lucia went into the reception room, her head up, and encased in her most freezing manner. A tall, clean-limbed, rather handsome man with smiling eyes rose to meet her.

After the first few formal words he explained his errand. "Miss Lucia, my father was a great friend of Mr. Van Vert when he was in the South. I had just come to the city by steamer and met him as he was going out. I told him who I was, and, in fact, he recognized me. He was in a great hurry, and gave me this slip of paper, on which he scribbled all he had time to."

The young fellow removed from a seal wallet, with great care, a slip of paper, and handed it to Miss Lucia.

She took it with cold hand, but with a weakening inside. She had been examining the caller and decided he was one of the handsomest young men she had ever seen; but she had her duty to perform and she was going to do it.

The paper she recognized as the kind used by her brother in his personal notebook. On the slip was scribbled: "This is Sidney Langdon. Please take him in. Van Vert."

She studied it a moment, deciding what to do. It was written plainly enough, however. She was removed from any responsibility by the note.

"How long are you going to be in the city?" Miss Lucia asked.

"I hardly know," he answered frankly. "I may stay some time, and I may not. I am at the Parmount Club just now."

"We shall be glad to make you welcome here any time," Miss Lucia began, and paused, for upstairs just over them was the sound of something falling to the floor. She knew it was Avery, making it known that she would like to meet the unknown visitor.

Lucia covered the noise with a remark, hesitated a little as to what she had better do and called up the wide stairs: "Avery, your father has sent us a son of one of his old friends. Come down."

"Just a minute!" a clear, sweet voice half sang, half chanted.

And she came down the broad stairs, a lithe picture of beauty against the golden oak of the great stairs.

The young fellow's clear, friendly eyes were bright with welcome and admiration.

In the days that followed Langdon became a regular and persistent visitor. Miss Lucia knew at the moment of their meeting it was to be a case of love at first sight; and she was not surprised when the confession came from Avery that he had asked her and she had consented to be his own.

Lucia was pleased, for she had learned to like the young fellow; but she feared her brother.

Fate brought him in an hour after the confession, and Avery told him. Van Vert cast down his cane, and stormed: "Lucia, what does this mean? I had confidence in you—"

"But you sent a note!" his sister cried, half fainting. She explained the details.

"The rascal! I did meet him, and I scribbled that note; but I intended it for Moss, at the office. I told, or thought I did, the fellow to take it to Moss, and he would see that things were done right; but here he marches up here!"

Langdon came into the room. "Mr. Van Vert, I understood what that slip was for; I made myself known at the office, and was treated well. I didn't think of the note, to be frank, until I learned from Gregory there, how you had left things and—about Avery. I had heard father speak of her, and I made up my mind to see her; when I saw her, I made up my mind to win her—and I have! All we want is your word!"

Van Vert held out his hands. "You have it! If I said no, you'd get her anyway; I know the Langdons. So happiness to both of you!"

The other day a distinguished and venerable painter, in answer to the question whether he waited for the happy mood, said: "Never. I always keep at work, and when the impulse comes it finds me ready and obedient." A man's hand is never on the door of opportunity unless it is a hand already made strong to push back that door, and enter in and take possession. Opportunity is never used save by the man who is ready and obedient.—Outlook.

Give not thy tongue too great liberty, lest it take thee prisoner. A word unspoken is, like the sword in the scabbard, thine; if vented, thy sword is in another's hands. If thou desire to be held wise, be so wise as to hold thy tongue.—Quarles.

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