

CHAPTER XIX

*In which Porges Big, and Porges Small discuss
the subject of Matrimony*

“WHAT is it, my Porges?”

“Well,—I’m a bit worried, you know.”

“Worried?”

“Yes,—’fraid I shall be an old man before my time, Uncle Porges. Adam says it’s worry that ages a man,—an’ it killed a cat too!”

“And why do you worry?”

“Oh, it’s my Auntie Anthea, a course!—she was crying again last night—”

“Crying!” Bellew had been lying flat upon his back in the fragrant shadow of the hay-rick, but now he sat up—very suddenly, so suddenly that Small Porges started. “Crying?” he repeated, “last night! Are you sure?”

“Oh yes! You see, she forgot to come an’ ‘tuck me up’ last night, so I crept downstairs,—very quietly, you know, to see why. An’ I found her bending over the table, all sobbing, an’ crying. At first she tried to pretend that she wasn’t, but I saw the tears quite plain,—her cheeks were all wet, you know; an’ when

I put my arms round her—to comfort her a bit, an’ asked her what was the matter, she only kissed me a lot, an’ said ‘nothing! nothing,—only a headache!’”

“And why was she crying, do you suppose, my Porges?”

“Oh!—money, a course!” he sighed.

“What makes you think it was money?”

“’Cause she’d been talking to Adam,—I heard him say ‘Good-night,’ as I crept down the stairs,—”

“Ah?” said Bellew, staring straight before him. His beloved pipe had slipped from his fingers, and, for a wonder, lay all neglected. “It was after she had talked with Adam, was it, my Porges?”

“Yes,—that’s why I knew it was ’bout money; Adam’s always talking ’bout morgyges, an’ bills, an’ money. Oh Uncle Porges, how I do—hate money!”

“It is sometimes a confounded nuisance!” nodded Bellew.

“But I do wish we had some,—so we could pay all her bills, an’ morgyges for her. She’d be so happy, you know, an’ go about singing like she used to,—an’ I shouldn’t worry myself into an old man before my time,—all wrinkled, an’ gray, you know; an’ all would be

revelry, an' joy, if only she had enough gold, an' bank-notes!"

"And she was—crying, you say!" demanded Bellew again, his gaze still far away.

"Yes."

"You are quite sure you saw the—tears, my Porges?"

"Oh yes! an' there was one on her nose, too,—a big one, that shone awful' bright,—twinkled, you know."

"And she said it was only a headache, did she?"

"Yes, but that meant money,—money always makes her head ache, lately. Oh Uncle Porges!—I s'pose people do find fortunes, sometimes, don't they?"

"Why yes, to be sure they do."

"Then I wish I knew where they looked for them," said he with a very big sigh indeed, "I've hunted an' hunted in all the attics, an' the cupboards, an' under hedges, an' in ditches, an' prayed, an' prayed, you know,—every night."

"Then, of course, you'll be answered, my Porges."

"Do you really s'pose I shall be answered? You see it's such an awful' long way for one small prayer to have to go,—from here to

heaven. An' there's clouds that get in the way, an' I'm 'fraid my prayers aren't quite big, or heavy enough, an' get lost, an' blown away in the wind."

"No, my Porges," said Bellew, drawing his arm about the small disconsolate figure, "you may depend upon it that your prayers fly straight up into heaven, and that neither the clouds, nor the wind can come between, or blow them away. So just keep on praying, old chap, and when the time is ripe, they'll be answered, never fear."

"Answered?—Do you mean,—oh Uncle Porges!—do you mean—the Money Moon?" The small hand upon Bellew's arm, quivered, and his voice trembled with eagerness.

"Why yes, to be sure,—the Money Moon, my Porges,—it's bound to come, one of these fine nights."

"Ah!—but when,—oh! when will the Money Moon ever come?"

"Well, I can't be quite sure, but I rather fancy, from the look of things, my Porges, that it will be pretty soon."

"Oh, I do hope so!—for her sake, an' my sake. You see, she may go getting herself married to Mr. Cassilis, if something doesn't happen soon, an' I shouldn't like that, you know."

"Neither should I, my Porges. But what makes you think so?"

"Why he's always bothering her, an' asking her to, you see. She always says 'No' a course, but — one of these fine days, I'm 'fraid she'll say 'Yes' — accidentally, you know."

"Heaven forbid, nephew!"

"Does that mean you hope not?"

"Indeed yes."

"Then I say heaven forbid, too, — 'cause I don't think she'd ever be happy in Mr. Cassilis's great, big house. An' I shouldn't either."

"Why, of course not!"

"*You* never go about asking people to marry you, do you Uncle Porges?"

"Well, it could hardly be called a confirmed habit of mine."

"That's one of the things I like about you so, — all the time you've been here you haven't asked my Auntie Anthea once, have you?"

"No, my Porges, — not yet."

"Oh! — but you don't mean that you — ever will?"

"Would you be very grieved, and angry, if I did, — some day soon, my Porges?"

"Well, I — I didn't think you were that kind

of a man!" answered Small Porges, sighing and shaking his head regretfully.

"I'm afraid I am, nephew."

"Do you really mean that you want to — marry my Auntie Anthea?"

"I do."

"As much as Mr. Cassilis does?"

"A great deal more, I think."

Small Porges sighed again, and shook his head very gravely indeed:

"Uncle Porges," said he, "I'm — s'prised at you!"

"I rather feared you would be, nephew."

"It's all so awful' silly, you know! — why do you want to marry her?"

"Because, like a Prince in a fairy tale, I'm — er — rather anxious to — live happy ever after."

"Oh!" said Small Porges, turning this over in his mind, "I never thought of that."

"Marriage is a very important institution, you see, my Porges, — especially in this case, because I can't possibly live happy ever after, unless I marry — first; — now can I?"

"No, I s'pose not!" Small Porges admitted, albeit reluctantly, after he had pondered the matter a while with wrinkled brow, "but why pick out — my Auntie Anthea?"

“ Just because she happens to be your Auntie Anthea, of course.”

Small Porges sighed again:

“ Why then, if she’s got to be married some day, so she can live happy ever after, — well, — I s’pose you’d better take her, Uncle Porges.”

“ Thank you, old chap, — I mean to.”

“ I’d rather you took her than Mr. Cassilis, an’ — why there he is! ”

“ Who? ”

“ Mr. Cassilis. An’ he’s stopped, an’ he’s twisting his moustache.”

“ Mr. Cassilis, who had been crossing the paddock, had indeed stopped, and was twisting his black moustache, as if he were hesitating between two courses. Finally, he pushed open the gate, and, approaching Bellew, saluted him with that supercilious air which Miss Priscilla always declared she found so “ trying.”

“ Ah, Mr. Bellew! what might it be this morning, — the pitchfork — the scythe, or the plough? ” he enquired.

“ Neither, sir, — this morning it is — matrimony.”

“ Eh! — I beg your pardon, — matrimony? ”

“ With a large M, sir,” nodded Bellew, “ marriage, sir, — wedlock; my nephew and I

are discussing it in its aspects philosophical, sociological, and — ”

“ That is surely rather a — peculiar subject to discuss with a child, Mr. Bellew — ”

“ Meaning my nephew, sir? ”

“ I mean — young George, there.”

“ Precisely, — my nephew, Small Porges.”

“ I refer,” said Mr. Cassilis, with slow, and crushing emphasis, “ to Miss Devine’s nephew — ”

“ And mine, Mr. Cassilis, — mine by — er — mutual adoption, and inclination.”

“ And I repeat that your choice of subjects is — peculiar, to say the least of it.”

“ But then, mine is rather a peculiar nephew, sir. But, surely it was not to discuss nephews, — mine or anyone else’s, that you are hither come, and our ears do wait upon you, — pray be seated, sir.”

“ Thank you, I prefer to stand.”

“ Strange!” murmured Bellew, shaking his head, “ I never stand if I can sit, or sit if I can lie down.”

“ I should like you to define, exactly, your position — here at Dapplemere, Mr. Bellew.”

Bellew’s sleepy glance missed nothing of the other’s challenging attitude, and his ear, nothing of Mr. Cassilis’s authoritative tone, there-

fore his smile was most engaging as he answered:

“ My position here, sir, is truly the most — er — enviable in the world. Prudence is an admirable cook, — particularly as regard Yorkshire Pudding; gentle, little Miss Priscilla is the most — er Aunt-like, and perfect of house-keepers; and Miss Anthea is our sovereign lady, before whose radiant beauty, Small Porges and I like true knights, and gallant gentles, do constant homage, and in whose behalf Small Porges and I do stand prepared to wage stern battle, by day, or by night.”

“ Indeed!” said Mr. Cassilis, and his smile was even more supercilious than usual.

“ Yes, sir,” nodded Bellew, “ I do confess me a most fortunate, and happy, wight who, having wandered hither and yon upon this planet of ours, which is so vast, and so very small, — has, by the most happy chance, found his way hither into Arcady.”

“ And — may I enquire how long you intend to lead this Arcadian existence?”

“ I fear I cannot answer that question until the full o’ the moon, sir, — at present, I grieve to say, — I do not know.”

Mr. Cassilis struck his riding-boot a sudden smart rap with his whip; his eyes snapped,

and his nostrils dilated, as he glanced down into Bellew’s imperturbable face.

“ At least you know, and will perhaps explain, what prompted you to buy all that furniture? You were the only buyer at the sale I understand.”

“ Who — bought anything, yes,” nodded Bellew.

“ And pray — what was your object, — you — a stranger?”

“ Well,” replied Bellew slowly, as he began to fill his pipe, “ I bought it because it was there to buy, you know; I bought it because furniture is apt to be rather useful, now and then, — I acquired the chairs to — er — sit in, the tables to — er — put things on, and — ”

“ Don’t quibble with me, Mr. Bellew!”

“ I beg your pardon, Mr. Cassilis!”

“ When I ask a question, sir, I am in the habit of receiving a direct reply, — ”

“ And when I am asked a question, Mr. Cassilis, I am in the habit of answering it precisely as I please, — or not at all.”

“ Mr. Bellew, let me impress upon you, once and for all, that Miss Devine has friends, — old and tried friends, to whom she can always turn for aid in any financial difficulty she may have to encounter, — friends who can more

than tide over all her difficulties without the — interference of strangers; and, as one of her oldest friends, I demand to know by what right you force your wholly unnecessary assistance upon her?"

"My very good sir," returned Bellew, shaking his head in gentle reproof, "really, you seem to forget that you are not addressing one of your grooms, or footmen, — consequently you force me to remind you of the fact; furthermore, —"

"That is no answer!" said Mr. Cassilis, his gloved hands tight-clenched upon his hunting-crop, — his whole attitude one of menace.

"Furthermore," pursued Bellew placidly, settling the tobacco in his pipe with his thumb, "you can continue to — er demand, until all's blue, and I shall continue to lie here, and smoke, and gaze up at the smiling serenity of heaven."

The black brows of Mr. Cassilis met in a sudden frown, he tossed his whip aside, and took a sudden quick stride towards the recumbent Bellew with so evident an intention, that Small Porges shrank instinctively further within the encircling arm.

But, at that psychic moment, very fortunately for all concerned, there came the sound of a

quick, light step, and Anthea stood between them.

"Mr. Cassilis! — Mr. Bellew!" she exclaimed, her cheeks flushed, and her bosom heaving with the haste she had made, "pray whatever does this mean?"

Bellew rose to his feet, and seeing Cassilis was silent, shook his head and smiled:

"Upon my word, I hardly know, Miss Anthea. Our friend Mr. Cassilis seems to have got himself all worked up over the — er — sale, I fancy —"

"The furniture!" exclaimed Anthea, and stamped her foot with vexation. "That wretched furniture! Of course you explained your object in buying it, Mr. Bellew?"

"Well, no, — we hadn't got as far as that."

Now when he said this, Anthea's eyes flashed sudden scorn at him, and she curled her lip at him, and turned her back upon him:

"Mr. Bellew bought my furniture because he intends to set up house-keeping — he is to be married — soon, I believe."

"When the moon is at the full!" nodded Bellew.

"Married!" exclaimed Mr. Cassilis, his frown vanishing as if by magic. "Oh, indeed —"

"I am on my way to the hop-gardens, if you care to walk with me, Mr. Cassilis?" and, with the words, Anthea turned, and, as he watched them walk away, together,—Bellew noticed upon the face of Mr. Cassilis an expression very like triumph, and, in his general air, a suggestion of proprietorship that jarred upon him most unpleasantly.

"Why do you frown so, Uncle Porges?"

"I—er—was thinking, nephew."

"Well, I'm thinking, too!" nodded Small Porges, his brows knitted portentously. And thus they sat, Big, and Little Porges, frowning in unison at space for quite a while.

"Are you quite sure you never told my Auntie Anthea that you were going to marry her?" enquired Small Porges, at last.

"Quite sure, comrade,—why?"

"Then how did she know you were going to marry her, an' settle down?"

"Marry—her, and settle down?"

"Yes,—at the full o' the moon, you know."

"Why really—I don't know, my Porges,—unless she guessed it."

"I specks she did,—she's awful' clever at guessing things! But, do you know—"

"Well?"

"I'm thinking I don't just like the way she

smiled at Mr. Cassilis, I never saw her look at him like that before,—as if she were awful' glad to see him, you know; so I don't think I'd wait till the full o' the moon, if I were you. I think you'd better marry her—this afternoon."

"That," said Bellew, clapping him on the shoulder, "is a very admirable idea,—I'll mention it to her on the first available opportunity, my Porges."

But the opportunity did not come that day, nor the next, nor the next after that, for it seemed that with the approach of the "Hop-picking" Anthea had no thought, or time, for anything else.

Wherefore Bellew smoked many pipes, and, as the days wore on, possessed his soul in patience, which is a most excellent precept to follow—in all things but love.