

A DEMORALIZING MARRIAGE

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A Demoralizing Marriage by Edgar Fawcett

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EDGAR FAWCETT

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BY

EDGAR FAWCETT,

AUTHOR OF "DOUGLAS DUANE," "AN AMBITIOUS WOMAN,"
"A GENTLEMAN OF LEISURE," ETC.

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1889.

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TO MY FRIEND,

EDGAR SALTUS,

IN RECOGNITION OF HIS DISTINCT GENIUS, IN AFFECTIONATE APPRECIATION
OF HIS RAPID SUCCESS AS A FAVELIST, AND IN THE HOPE THAT
MANY YEARS MAY PASS BEFORE ALL HIS BRILLIANT
GIFTS OF STORY-TELLING SHALL CEASE TO
CHARM THEIR LOYAL LISTENERS.

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A DEMORALIZING MARRIAGE.

I.

"It ought to be a very brilliant ball," said Mrs. Casilear.

"I haven't a doubt that it will be," returned the reporter for the *Morning Luminary*.

Mrs. Casilear rose from her chair and moved several paces toward the centre of the really imperial drawing-room. She was a large-moulded woman, with luminous black eyes and a set of teeth that should have been quite flawless because she frequently showed them in a full, bland smile. But Mrs. Casilear's teeth were marvels of adroit dentistry, and, like everything else about her, gave evidence of careful, artistic cultivation. Still, it is possible that no woman could have been at once more smart of attire, more dignified of carriage, and more entirely unaristocratic of demeanor. It was not that she revealed any taint of vulgarity; she had the "broad" pronunciation and nasal-toned voice of the West; but we have learned to associate these with so much refinement and education in our American women that they no longer carry a deplorable sound to New York or Boston ears. The English that Mrs. Casilear used was without

fault. She adjusted her white, gem-decked and well-tended hands with grace; her attire was always the pith and kernel of fashion, unmarred by one least hint of loudness. Nothing about her would have furnished material for the censure of a *raffineur* in codes, modes and niceties, and yet you could not have found any such dainty arbiter, from New York to St. Petersburg, who would have been willing to admit that high-breeding was one of her evident endowments. A critic thus deftly equipped, however, might have conceded that she showed a conscious desire to be accredited with this distinction.

"I thought it best to see you in person, and to tell you all the facts," Mrs. Casilear now continued. She lifted one arm, indicating by a sweep of it the ornaments and grandeurs of the apartment. "You may mention the house," she continued, "if you care to do so."

"Oh, yes," said the reporter, who chanced, in this case, to be a woman. "I understand *that* perfectly." She dashed off several lines on the tablets on her lap, glancing for a moment to right and left. "While I waited for you to appear I took a great deal of notice."

She was a girl of perhaps not more than twenty, with a pale, clean-cut face that looked none the healthier because of her somewhat shabby raiment, and a quick-darting brown eye that habit had already trained in the keener aptitudes of scrutiny.

"Oh, very well," replied Mrs. Casilear. She proceeded to speak as if addressing some imaginary third party, her

gaze roaming from tapestry to statue, from Turkish rug to Japanese screen, from a painting by Cabanel to a bronze by Barye, finally resting upon her own portrait, preposterously flattered, for which a vast number of francs had not long ago been paid in Paris to Carolus Duran. "There are about a thousand invitations issued. The rooms will be decorated with the choicest flowers procurable; Klunder has that in charge,—*gloire de Paris* and Cornelia Cook roses, you know, and a profusion of lilies-of-the-valley."

"Thank you," said the reporter, with her slim and rather dingy fingers working away at her tablets. An instant later she looked up inquiringly. "There'll be a German, I suppose."

"Oh, of course."

"Who will lead it, please? Mr. Pinckney Clarke? Mr. Schuykill Lexington?"

Mrs. Casilear lifted her neat black eyebrows haughtily, —a trifle too haughtily under the circumstances, which were those of her own voluntary submission to an "interview."

"Must I tell that?" she asked, with a little cold trill of laughter.

"Oh, not if you haven't decided yet," said the girl-scribe apologetically.

Mrs. Casilear coughed. "Well, I haven't." She promptly became more affable. "You take for granted that one of those two gentlemen ought to lead my *cotillon*?"

"Oh, no; not that. But they're mostly leading, this

winter, at the Patriarchs' and the Assemblies, and all such places. Mr. Pinckney Clarke is considered the best leader, I believe, though he don't come of the same Knickerbocker stock, you know, as Mr. Schuylkill Lexington does."

"Ah, indeed," was the measuredly sedate reply. "Well, I am *not* decided yet on that point. But you might put down Mr. Lexington. I suppose my sister will select him."

"Very well. Thank you." The fingers began to work again at the tablets. "Your sister is Miss Rosalind Maturin, I believe?"

"Miss Rosalind Maturin. Yes; I see you know her."

The reporter looked up again, with a smile. "Of course. Who doesn't? Your family is about as well known to *us* newspaper people as though 'twas the President's."

"Ah, I see," murmured Mrs. Casilear. She liked this; it was just the sort of incense that pleasantly tickled her nostrils.

"Some of the guests, now?" continued the girl. "Would you mind giving me a few of their names, please? I mean of those that have accepted."

"Accepted?" Mrs. Casilear briskly echoed, and with a tartness that told she did not like the word. "No one has accepted, my good young lady, and for an excellent reason. I sent my cards out simply in the form of an 'At Home.' That did away with the bothersome shower of notes afterward."

"An 'At Home'. Certainly. I understand."

The girl understood but too well. She had said to one