

**A VERY
YOUNG COUPLE**

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A Very Young Couple by Elizabeth Anna Hart

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ELIZABETH ANNA HART

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A VERY YOUNG COUPLE.

CHAPTER I.

A PERFECTLY HAPPY WOMAN.

WHEN Mrs. Edward Petherick retired to bed on the night of the 12th of May, 1885, it may confidently be said that there was not a happier woman in London. She had been married eighteen months, and, despite certain ominous prognostications on the part of her aunt, Mrs. Gibbon, her wedded life had been without a cloud. Her husband was far from rich, his professional earnings as a literary man averaging not more than £200 a year, but he had ambition and unbounded hope, and he was never tired of declaring to his darling Kate that they would one day keep their carriage. Meanwhile, whenever they were

thrown upon their own resources, they did very well with 'busses and cabs, hansoms for choice.

Edward's faith in the carriage of the future did not spring from the knowledge that Kate's father was a wealthy man, and Kate an only child. Of course in such a marriage there were expectations, but what Edward meant was that he would one day be rich and famous by his own talents and exertions. The carriage was to come out of his brains.

"Look at Dickens," he said, "with his books and his readings. Look at George Eliot. Twelve thousand pounds for a novel—that's what she got for *Romola*. And I could write two a year. Three, if I were pushed to it."

"I am sure you could," said Kate, gazing fondly at her hero, "and every bit as good."

Then she began to think of the fine things they could do with £36,000 per annum. She covered pages upon pages with calculations, but not being good at figures she could not quite succeed in making both ends meet.

It was a love match. What else could have

brought such a very young couple together? None of your prosy, unromantic, slow-going affairs. A flash, and it was over. They both remembered the moment, and often recalled it. A match-making friend of the young folk had a box at the Lyceum, and invited them, and bade them sit next to each other. They cheerfully obeyed. Edward was a fine, handsome fellow, and in his dress suit looked the equal of a prince, Kate was lovely and ravishingly dressed, During a love scene on the stage Edward's hand happened by accident to touch Kate's. She looked up, and their eyes met. That was the eventful moment. A magnetic thrill, an electric flash, call it what you will, passed from eye to eye, and thence from soul to soul. They were strangely silent and happy during the concluding scenes of the play, and when it was over and they had parted, Edward went home to his lonely chambers in the Temple, taking Kate with him—in his mind's eye. How he mentally raved about her as he paced his room smoking his cigar, I leave to your imagination. Kate drove home to the paternal mansion (Queen Anne style), and thought

of nothing but Edward. She dreamt of him all night, and when she woke in the morning felt that existence would be a dreary blank without him. By that time Edward had also made up his mind that life without Kate would be a hollow mockery. What followed is soon told. They met and met again, and Edward, obtaining an introduction to Kate's parents, enjoyed numerous opportunities of making love to his idol. It is not at all to his discredit that he made good use of them.

But after a while Kate's mother began to have misgivings. Kate and Edward had secretly engaged themselves to each other, and it was by Kate's advice that Edward did not immediately court the dreadful but inevitable quarter of an hour in papa's private room. Edward had honestly made her acquainted with his circumstances, and she knew it would be a difficult matter to obtain her mother's consent. Of her father she was not afraid. She was his pet and tyrant, and she could wind him round her little finger. A few smiles, a few tears, a few kisses, a few hugs, and she could persuade him to anything. Her influence

being so powerful, it is not surprising that Edward was led by her and obeyed her instructions. But why did not Kate's mother, the moment her suspicions were aroused, herself open fire upon Edward? It is explained in a very few words. Edward could obtain orders for the theatres. Though volumes were written, no more legitimate reason could be afforded.

He was on terms with most of the managers and principal actors in London, and was a favorite among them. He belonged to two clubs, one literary and journalistic, the other theatrical; he was agreeable, clever, and witty, and it was generally conceded that he had a career before him, and that one day he would do a big thing. London managers extended the courtesies of their theatres to him, and often invited him unsolicited. And Kate's mother would say:

"By the way, Mr. Petherick, you know So-and-so, I believe."

"Yes," Edward would reply, "we have been friends for years."

"How nice! Everybody is talking about the new play. They say it is admirable,

and that So-and-so's acting in it is wonderful."

"It is very fine indeed. Would you like to go, Mrs. Holland?"

"Oh, Mr. Petherick, I wouldn't trouble you for the world."

"It is no trouble, Mrs. Holland; you will be really giving me pleasure. Only yesterday So-and-so pressed me to come and bring my friends. What night will suit you!"

The night being fixed, a private box would be sent to Mrs. Holland, who could not do less than ask Edward to join them. Or, if stalls were sent instead of a box, be sure that Edward was there, either in the next seat or immediately at the back. I am not sure which is the better position for a lover. If he sits next to his idol he is in a dream; if behind her, in a delirium of happiness. It might be that Edward occasionally paid for the seats, but that is neither here nor there. The Hollands were not aware of it, and Kate's mother was only too eager to lay herself under an obligation to the young gentleman. In a certain sense the power he possessed was demoralizing.

At length matters became so warm be-