

STORIETTES

CAROLINE—A MEMORY.

THE orchestra was playing the "Auf Wiedersehen." It was his favorite waltz, but he stood at the far end of the ball room, leaning languidly against one of the massive pillars that supported the brilliantly lighted dome. With an aimless indolence, he watched one couple after another whirl past and around him. Fragments of their conversation came to him at intervals, softly blended with the musical laughter of women. He knew many of the women. For the past five years he had danced and laughed and flirted with them—to some made love—but all that was over now; at least, it would be on the morrow, for then he was to marry Mildred Van Rassalas.

This was his last bachelor ball. He scarcely knew why he had come. He felt out of place. Already the people had begun to stare wonderingly at him, and that saucy little débutante, Rosa Carey, had just glided up to him whispering something about "the great pity that *she* wasn't there to make life worth living!"

The ball was a bore. He would go around to the club. He found some of his friends on the lookout for him; so he summoned the little throng into the buffet, bade them drink to his health, and while the wine was circling, and one old fellow—a bachelor, by the way—was telling his juniors of his first love, "his divine love," as he termed it, the groom elect stepped away unperceived and entered his room. Stirring the fire that glowed in the grate, he sank into a chair. The sound of the "Auf Wiedersehen" rang in his ears. With it came a flood of memories, and the faces and forms of his old loves took semblance in his mind.

There was Alice—what a bright little creature she was! They had met over at the Blanchards', at some informal affair. She smiled at him so sweetly when they were introduced that he liked her from that moment. It was only a flirtation at first, but such things will turn out differently sometimes. Two months, then came some slight misunderstanding—a few hot words, and—well, she was a jolly little thing—too bad she married that beast of a man, Wiggins, the pork millionaire!

Augusta was tall and stately. The wealth of dark, gleaming hair was her crowning glory. How well it matched her black, fearless eyes, and how it contrasted with her even,

white teeth! She wrote poetry, and read deep books, and tried to make him read them. Just to please her he had begun "The Ring and the Book." When he found, however, that the same rather uninteresting story was being told over and over again, he really had to lay it aside. The root of the trouble was that their tastes were not alike. Their minds moved in different avenues. She could not look up to him as a woman should to the man she is going to marry. They realized it, after a while, and it was by mutual consent that the affair was broken off. He really was fond of her, though, and it might have gone rather hard with him, but just at that critical moment Maud came into his life.

Maud was a born flirt. He might have known that she was just amusing herself, but then her eyes—how blue they were, how truthful, how full of womanly sympathy! What a fool he was in those days, those old days! He trusted in her, believed in her, loved her—until that night. How well he remembered it! They were out on the pier at Narragansett. The moon was up, the water smooth and bright as a sheet of silver. He was holding her hand; how small and soft it was!

"Set the day, Maud," he was saying.

"Yes, to be sure. Let it be tomorrow," she laughed.

"No, no. Come now," he had persisted, "set the day. Why should we wait any longer?"

"Oh, Harry, don't be so foolish," she answered, yawning slightly.

"Foolish!" he had answered in surprise.

"I am deeply in earnest!"

"In earnest!" Then she threw back her dainty head, and the sound of her laughter went out over the still water. "What, we marry! How absolutely ridiculous!" and she laughed again.

Did he let her see how deeply he felt the sting? Not he! His pride served him with strength to act out the wretched little one sided comedy. He, too, laughed at the idea of their marrying.

He was the gayest man at the ball that night, but with the coming of the morning a great bitterness crept into his heart. Money was the only thing worth having, after all.

Several seasons after that, Mildred Van Rassalas, wealthy and wise in the lore of the world, took society by storm. With a businesslike deliberation he had set about his

task of winning her; and tomorrow was their wedding day!

Alice, Augusta, Maud, Mildred, and—yes, there was another; one who came before them all, and whose memory he still cherished as a sacred heritage. It was so long ago, yet he could see her now, with that calm smile on her child-like face, with the soft light in her clear gray eyes, and the halo of daffodil hair! Caroline!

How he had loved her—his first love, his “divine love”! He was sure, in those old days, that she loved him, too. Her face would light up at his coming, and her voice take to itself a melody the like of which he had heard not since, nor hoped to hear in this world. What a struggle it was to part without telling her of his love! But then he felt that he must achieve something before he could ask her to be his wife, and he sealed his lips and came to the great city, with a thousand noble ambitions in his heart. His love was too strong, however, to brook years of uncertain waiting. He vividly recalled the night he wrote that letter, telling her all, and asking if he might come to hear the glad answer from her own lips.

Then had followed a feverish state of excitement, while he awaited the answer. Three days, each of which seemed a year, and there came a neat package addressed in her hand. It was only a little tobacco pouch, tied with blue strings, and upon it was worked in embroidery the inscription, “For an Old Bachelor.”

He had laid it softly upon the table and sat down. It was broad day. He knew that underneath his window, in the street below, people were passing to and fro and vehicles streaming up and down, and yet no sound came to him. How still the world had seemed in that one great moment! “For an Old Bachelor.” He understood. She wished to save him the pain of a long and tiresome refusal. This was her answer! Then, mechanically, he had taken the tobacco pouch and placed it in a corner of his trunk, and had gone out for a walk, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, knowing only that his loss was irredeemable!

Caroline, Alice, Augusta, Maud, Mildred—Caroline!

Aye, she was the first and—even though he was about to lead another to the altar—*she* was the last!

Strange that she had never married. Still watching over her aged father, he had heard. Just like her. What a different man he might have been could he have won her love! Well, he would marry tomorrow. He would cease to be an “old bachelor,” and the tobacco pouch?—yes, he would destroy it.

The fire was dull, and a shiver went through the man as he unlocked the trunk. With a reverence greater than that with which he had ever touched the hand of his bride to be, he took up the little memento. For a moment he stood looking at it with dim eyes. Then he laid it gently upon the dull coals, and, as if dreading to see it in flames, went hastily into his bed room, softly closing the door.

Jenkins, the fire maker, came in early the next morning. As he knelt in front of the grate, his eyes fell upon something yellow lying on the dead coals.

“A tobacco pouch the governor has thrown away,” he muttered, holding it up by a faded string. “Just the thing for Jenkins’ loose crumbs;” and he began to fill it with “plug cut.” His finger touched something crisp within the pouch, and he drew forth a tiny slip of paper, upon which was written in faded ink the one word “Come.”

“Humph, that must be an out of date invitation to a shindig!” soliloquized Jenkins, as he tore up the tiny slip, and deposited the fragments in the dust pan.

Joseph Sebastian Rogers.

THE RIVALS FOR THE HAND OF WILBUR'S WIDOW.

WILBUR was a young fellow of good family, good education, and just enough means to start himself in business. When he came to a little Wyoming town, not so very far from Fremont's Peak, it did not take the people long to discover that he was a “rustler from 'way back.” He bought a thousand head of cattle, and it was a surprisingly short time before this non gambling, non drinking tenderfoot could count his herd by the ten thousands. Next he went East, married, and brought out to his ranch the prettiest bride ever seen in Sweetwater County. Then he died; and no woman in a strange land ever had more consoling male friends. They would have died for her, one and all. In fact, several did, over pistols and whisky for two.

The race for the desirable situation left vacant by Wilbur's demise eventually narrowed down, however, until there were but two competitors left. One of these was big Bill Brown, a good friend in a difficulty, a bad enemy in a quarrel, a man with a past of evident interest, but the kind of man one would not dare to cross examine to any great extent either on or off the witness stand. He was the owner of a wonderful gold mine, whose location he kept a profound mystery. There were many who would have been willing to spend years hunting for that mine, if only to locate another one near it—but then there were Brown's size, nerve, and readiness