

# Man and Wife

By

Wilkie Collins

[Web-Books.Com](http://Web-Books.Com)

## Man and Wife

Prologue -- The Irish Marriage .....	5
The Owls.....	31
The Guests .....	33
The Discoveries .....	41
The Two.....	49
The Plan .....	56
The Suitor.....	60
The Debt.....	70
The Scandal.....	77
Anne.....	84
Mr. Bishopriggs .....	96
Sir Patrick.....	103
Arnold.....	107
Blanche .....	116
Geoffrey As A Letter-Writer .....	125
Geoffrey In The Marriage Market .....	129
Geoffrey As A Public Character .....	132
Near It .....	138
Nearer Still .....	142
Close On It .....	151
Touching It.....	161
Done!.....	174
Gone.....	187

Traced .....	198
Backward .....	209
Forward.....	215
Dropped.....	221
Outwitted.....	225
Stifled.....	233
Anne Among The Lawyers.....	237
Anne In The Newspapers.....	242
Seeds Of The Future (First Sowing).....	245
Seeds Of The Future (Second Sowing).....	257
Seeds Of The Future (Third Sowing).....	266
The Night Before .....	271
The Day.....	277
The Truth At Last.....	279
The Way Out.....	289
The News From Glasgow .....	297
Anne Wins A Victory .....	305
Julius Makes Mischief .....	311
Lady Lundie Does Her Duty.....	324
The Smoking-Room Window.....	337
The Explosion.....	341
The Letter And The Law.....	348
The Foot-Race.....	359
A Scotch Marriage .....	371
The Last Chance .....	393

The Night .....	401
The Morning .....	410
The Proposal .....	416
The Apparition .....	422
What Had Happened In The Hours Of Darkness?.....	428
The Manuscript.....	435
The Signs Of The End.....	452
The Means.....	463
The End.....	466
Epilogue .....	475

## Prologue -- The Irish Marriage

Part First.

The Villa At Hampstead

I

ON a summer's morning, between thirty and forty years ago, two girls were crying bitterly in the cabin of an East Indian passenger ship, bound outward, from Gravesend to Bombay.

They were both of the same age--eighteen. They had both, from childhood upward, been close and dear friends at the same school. They were now parting for the first time--and parting, it might be, for life.

The name of one was Blanche. The name of the other was Anne.

Both were the children of poor parents, both had been pupil-teachers at the school; and both were destined to earn their own bread. Personally speaking, and socially speaking, these were the only points of resemblance between them.

Blanche was passably attractive and passably intelligent, and no more. Anne was rarely beautiful and rarely endowed. Blanche's parents were worthy people, whose first consideration was to secure, at any sacrifice, the future well-being of their child. Anne's parents were heartless and depraved. Their one idea, in connection with their daughter, was to speculate on her beauty, and to turn her abilities to profitable account.

The girls were starting in life under widely different conditions. Blanche was going to India, to be governess in the household of a Judge, under care of the Judge's wife. Anne was to wait at home until the first opportunity offered of sending her cheaply to Milan. There, among strangers, she was to be perfected in the actress's and the singer's art; then to return to England, and make the fortune of her family on the lyric stage.

Such were the prospects of the two as they sat together in the cabin of the Indiaman locked fast in each other's arms, and crying bitterly. The whispered farewell talk exchanged between them--exaggerated and impulsive as girls' talk is apt to be--came honestly, in each case, straight from the heart.

"Blanche! you may be married in India. Make your husband bring you back to England."

"Anne! you may take a dislike to the stage. Come out to India if you do."

"In England or out of England, married or not married, we will meet, darling--if it's years hence--with all the old love between us; friends who help each other, sisters who trust each other, for life! Vow it, Blanche!"

"I vow it, Anne!"

"With all your heart and soul?"

"With all my heart and soul!"

The sails were spread to the wind, and the ship began to move in the water. It was necessary to appeal to the captain's authority before the girls could be parted. The captain interfered gently and firmly. "Come, my dear," he said, putting his arm round Anne; "you won't mind me! I have got a daughter of my own." Anne's head fell on the sailor's shoulder. He put her, with his own hands, into the shore-boat alongside. In five minutes more the ship had gathered way; the boat was at the landing-stage--and the girls had seen the last of each other for many a long year to come.

This was in the summer of eighteen hundred and thirty-one.

II.

Twenty-four years later--in the summer of eighteen hundred and fifty-five--there was a villa at Hampstead to be let, furnished.

The house was still occupied by the persons who desired to let it. On the evening on which this scene opens a lady and two gentlemen were seated at the dinner-table. The lady had reached the mature age of forty-two. She was still a rarely beautiful woman. Her husband, some years younger than herself, faced her at the table, sitting silent and constrained, and never, even by accident, looking at his wife. The third person was a guest. The husband's name was Vanborough. The guest's name was Kendrew.

It was the end of the dinner. The fruit and the wine were on the table. Mr. Vanborough pushed the bottles in silence to Mr. Kendrew. The lady of the house looked round at the servant who was waiting, and said, "Tell the children to come in."

The door opened, and a girl twelve years old entered, lending by the hand a younger girl of five. They were both prettily dressed in white, with sashes of the same shade of light blue. But there was no family resemblance between them. The elder girl was frail and delicate, with a pale, sensitive face. The younger was light and florid, with round red cheeks and bright, saucy eyes--a charming little picture of happiness and health.

Mr. Kendrew looked inquiringly at the youngest of the two girls.

"Here is a young lady," he said, "who is a total stranger to me."

"If you had not been a total stranger yourself for a whole year past," answered Mrs. Vanborough, "you would never have made that confession. This is little Blanche--the only child of the dearest friend I have. When Blanche's mother and I last saw each other we were two poor school-girls beginning the world. My friend went to India, and married there late in life. You may have heard of her husband--the famous Indian officer, Sir Thomas Lundie? Yes: 'the rich Sir Thomas,' as you call him. Lady Lundie is now on her way back to England, for the first time since she left it--I am afraid to say how many years since. I expected her yesterday; I expect her to-day--she may come at any moment. We exchanged promises to meet, in the ship that took her to India--'vows' we called them in the dear old times. Imagine how changed we shall find each other when we do meet again at last!"

"In the mean time," said Mr. Kendrew, "your friend appears to have sent you her little daughter to represent her? It's a long journey for so young a traveler."

"A journey ordered by the doctors in India a year since," rejoined Mrs. Vanborough. "They said Blanche's health required English air. Sir Thomas was ill at the time, and his wife couldn't leave him. She had to send the child to England, and who should she send her to but me? Look at her now, and say if the English air hasn't agreed with her! We two mothers, Mr. Kendrew, seem literally to live again in our children. I have an only child. My friend has an only child. My daughter is little Anne--as I was. My friend's daughter is little Blanche--as she was. And, to crown it all, those two girls have taken the same fancy to each other which we took to each other in the by-gone days at school. One has often heard of hereditary hatred. Is there such a thing as hereditary love as well?"

Before the guest could answer, his attention was claimed by the master of the house.

"Kendrew," said Mr. Vanborough, "when you have had enough of domestic sentiment, suppose you take a glass of wine?"

The words were spoken with undisguised contempt of tone and manner. Mrs. Vanborough's color rose. She waited, and controlled the momentary irritation. When she spoke to her husband it was evidently with a wish to soothe and conciliate him.

"I am afraid, my dear, you are not well this evening?"

"I shall be better when those children have done clattering with their knives and forks."

The girls were peeling fruit. The younger one went on. The elder stopped, and looked at her mother. Mrs. Vanborough beckoned to Blanche to come to her, and pointed toward the French window opening to the floor.

"Would you like to eat your fruit in the garden, Blanche?"

"Yes," said Blanche, "if Anne will go with me."

Anne rose at once, and the two girls went away together into the garden, hand in hand. On their departure Mr. Kendrew wisely started a new subject. He referred to the letting of the house.

"The loss of the garden will be a sad loss to those two young ladies," he said. "It really seems to be a pity that you should be giving up this pretty place."

"Leaving the house is not the worst of the sacrifice," answered Mrs. Vanborough. "If John finds Hampstead too far for him from London, of course we must move. The only hardship that I complain of is the hardship of having the house to let."

Mr. Vanborough looked across the table, as ungraciously as possible, at his wife.

"What have you to do with it?" he asked.

Mrs. Vanborough tried to clear the conjugal horizon by a smile.

"My dear John," she said, gently, "you forget that, while you are at business, I am here all day. I can't help seeing the people who come to look at the house. Such people!" she continued, turning to Mr. Kendrew. "They distrust every thing, from the scraper at the door to the chimneys on the roof. They force their way in at all hours. They ask all sorts

of impudent questions--and they show you plainly that they don't mean to believe your answers, before you have time to make them. Some wretch of a woman says, 'Do you think the drains are right?'--and sniffs suspiciously, before I can say Yes. Some brute of a man asks, 'Are you quite sure this house is solidly built, ma'am?'--and jumps on the floor at the full stretch of his legs, without waiting for me to reply. Nobody believes in our gravel soil and our south aspect. Nobody wants any of our improvements. The moment they hear of John's Artesian well, they look as if they never drank water. And, if they happen to pass my poultry-yard, they instantly lose all appreciation of the merits of a fresh egg!"

Mr. Kendrew laughed. "I have been through it all in my time," he said. "The people who want to take a house are the born enemies of the people who want to let a house. Odd--isn't it, Vanborough?"

Mr. Vanborough's sullen humor resisted his friend as obstinately as it had resisted his wife.

"I dare say," he answered. "I wasn't listening."

This time the tone was almost brutal. Mrs. Vanborough looked at her husband with unconcealed surprise and distress.

"John!" she said. "What can be the matter with you? Are you in pain?"

"A man may be anxious and worried, I suppose, without being actually in pain."

"I am sorry to hear you are worried. Is it business?"

"Yes--business."

"Consult Mr. Kendrew."

"I am waiting to consult him."

Mrs. Vanborough rose immediately. "Ring, dear," she said, "when you want coffee." As she passed her husband she stopped and laid her hand tenderly on his forehead. "I wish I could smooth out that frown!" she whispered. Mr. Vanborough impatiently shook his head. Mrs. Vanborough sighed as she turned to the door. Her husband called to her before she could leave the room.

"Mind we are not interrupted!"

"I will do my best, John." She looked at Mr. Kendrew, holding the door open for her; and resumed, with an effort, her former lightness of tone. "But don't forget our 'born enemies!' Somebody may come, even at this hour of the evening, who wants to see the house."

The two gentlemen were left alone over their wine. There was a strong personal contrast between them. Mr. Vanborough was tall and dark--a dashing, handsome man; with an energy in his face which all the world saw; with an inbred falseness under it which only a special observer could detect. Mr. Kendrew was short and light--slow and awkward in manner, except when something happened to rouse him. Looking in his face, the world

saw an ugly and undemonstrative little man. The special observer, penetrating under the surface, found a fine nature beneath, resting on a steady foundation of honor and truth.

Mr. Vanborough opened the conversation.

"If you ever marry," he said, "don't be such a fool, Kendrew, as I have been. Don't take a wife from the stage."

"If I could get such a wife as yours," replied the other, "I would take her from the stage to-morrow. A beautiful woman, a clever woman, a woman of unblemished character, and a woman who truly loves you. Man alive! what do you want more?"

"I want a great deal more. I want a woman highly connected and highly bred--a woman who can receive the best society in England, and open her husband's way to a position in the world."

"A position in the world!" cried Mr. Kendrew. "Here is a man whose father has left him half a million of money--with the one condition annexed to it of taking his father's place at the head of one of the greatest mercantile houses in England. And he talks about a position, as if he was a junior clerk in his own office! What on earth does your ambition see, beyond what your ambition has already got?"

Mr. Vanborough finished his glass of wine, and looked his friend steadily in the face.

"My ambition," he said, "sees a Parliamentary career, with a Peerage at the end of it--and with no obstacle in the way but my estimable wife."

Mr. Kendrew lifted his hand warningly. "Don't talk in that way," he said. "If you're joking--it's a joke I don't see. If you're in earnest--you force a suspicion on me which I would rather not feel. Let us change the subject."

"No! Let us have it out at once. What do you suspect?"

"I suspect you are getting tired of your wife."

"She is forty-two, and I am thirty-five; and I have been married to her for thirteen years. You know all that--and you only suspect I am tired of her. Bless your innocence! Have you any thing more to say?"

"If you force me to it, I take the freedom of an old friend, and I say you are not treating her fairly. It's nearly two years since you broke up your establishment abroad, and came to England on your father's death. With the exception of myself, and one or two other friends of former days, you have presented your wife to nobody. Your new position has smoothed the way for you into the best society. You never take your wife with you. You go out as if you were a single man. I have reason to know that you are actually believed to be a single man, among these new acquaintances of yours, in more than one quarter. Forgive me for speaking my mind bluntly--I say what I think. It's unworthy of you to keep your wife buried here, as if you were ashamed of her."

"I am ashamed of her."

"Vanborough!"

"Wait a little! you are not to have it all your own way, my good fellow. What are the facts? Thirteen years ago I fell in love with a handsome public singer, and married her. My father was angry with me; and I had to go and live with her abroad. It didn't matter, abroad. My father forgave me on his death-bed, and I had to bring her home again. It does matter, at home. I find myself, with a great career opening before me, tied to a woman whose relations are (as you well know) the lowest of the low. A woman without the slightest distinction of manner, or the slightest aspiration beyond her nursery and her kitchen, her piano and her books. Is that a wife who can help me to make my place in society?--who can smooth my way through social obstacles and political obstacles, to the House of Lords? By Jupiter! if ever there was a woman to be 'buried' (as you call it), that woman is my wife. And, what's more, if you want the truth, it's because I can't bury her here that I'm going to leave this house. She has got a cursed knack of making acquaintances wherever she goes. She'll have a circle of friends about her if I leave her in this neighborhood much longer. Friends who remember her as the famous opera-singer. Friends who will see her swindling scoundrel of a father (when my back is turned) coming drunk to the door to borrow money of her! I tell you, my marriage has wrecked my prospects. It's no use talking to me of my wife's virtues. She is a millstone round my neck, with all her virtues. If I had not been a born idiot I should have waited, and married a woman who would have been of some use to me; a woman with high connections--"

Mr. Kendrew touched his host's arm, and suddenly interrupted him.

"To come to the point," he said--"a woman like Lady Jane Parnell."

Mr. Vanborough started. His eyes fell, for the first time, before the eyes of his friend.

"What do you know about Lady Jane?" he asked.

"Nothing. I don't move in Lady Jane's world--but I do go sometimes to the opera. I saw you with her last night in her box; and I heard what was said in the stalls near me. You were openly spoken of as the favored man who was singled out from the rest by Lady Jane. Imagine what would happen if your wife heard that! You are wrong, Vanborough--you are in every way wrong. You alarm, you distress, you disappoint me. I never sought this explanation--but now it has come, I won't shrink from it. Reconsider your conduct; reconsider what you have said to me--or you count me no longer among your friends. No! I want no farther talk about it now. We are both getting hot--we may end in saying what had better have been left unsaid. Once more, let us change the subject. You wrote me word that you wanted me here to-day, because you needed my advice on a matter of some importance. What is it?"

Silence followed that question. Mr. Vanborough's face betrayed signs of embarrassment. He poured himself out another glass of wine, and drank it at a draught before he replied.

"It's not so easy to tell you what I want," he said, "after the tone you have taken with me about my wife."

Mr. Kendrew looked surprised.

"Is Mrs. Vanborough concerned in the matter?" he asked.

"Yes."

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

