



# The Westcott Elopement

(Continued from Page Twenty.)

glanced at him over her shoulder he had apparently gone to sleep.

Franklin Westcott, it transpired, was not at home, but was expected every moment as the Charlotetown train was in. Aunt Maggie conveyed Anne into what she called "the library" and left her there. The dog had got up and followed them in. He came and arranged himself at Anne's feet.

Anne found herself liking "the library." It was a cheerful, shabby room with a fire glowing cozily in the grate and bearskin rugs on the worn red carpet. Old Franklin Westcott evidently did himself well in regard to books and pipes.

Presently she heard him come in. He hung up his hat and coat in the hall. He stood in the library door with a very decided scowl on his brow.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. Well, and what do you want?"

He had not even offered to shake hands with her. Of the two, Anne thought the dog had decidedly the better manners.

"Mr. Westcott, please hear me through patiently before . . ."

"I am patient. Very patient. Proceed." Anne decided that there was no use beating about the bush with a man like Franklin Westcott.

"I have come to tell you," she said steadily. "That Dovie has married Jarvis Morrow."

Then she waited for the earthquake. None came. Not a muscle of Franklin Westcott's lean brown face changed. He came in and sat down on the hand-legged leather chair opposite Anne.

"When?" he said.

"Last night . . . at his sister's."

Franklin Westcott looked at her for a moment. Then he threw back his head and went into one of his soundless spasms of laughter.

"You mustn't blame Dovie, Mr. Westcott," said Anne earnestly, recovering her poise now that the awful revelation was over.

"It wasn't her fault . . ."

"It isn't her fault," said Franklin Westcott. "Was he trying to be sarcastic?"

"No, it was all mine," said Anne, simply and bravely. "I . . . I advised her to el . . . to be married . . . I made her do it. So please forgive her, Mr. Westcott."

Franklin Westcott coolly picked up a pipe and began to fill it.

"If you made Sybil elope with Jarvis Morrow, Miss Shirley, you've accomplished more than I ever thought anybody could. I was beginning to be afraid she'd never have backbone enough to do it. And then I'd have had to back down . . . and how we Westcotts hate backing down! You've saved my face, Miss Shirley, and I'm profoundly grateful to you."

There was a very loud silence while Franklin Westcott tamped his tobacco down and looked with an amused twinkle at Anne's face. Anne was so much at sea she didn't know what to say.

"I suppose," said Franklin Westcott, "that you came here in fear and trembling to break the terrible news to me?"

"Yes," said Anne a trifle shortly.

Franklin Westcott chuckled soundlessly.

"You needn't have. You couldn't have

brought me more welcome tidings. Why, I picked Jarvis Morrow out for Sybil when they were kids. Soon as other boys began taking notice of her I shooed them all off. That gave Jarvis his first notion of her. He'd show the old man! But he was so popular with the girls that I could never believe the incredible luck when he did really take a genuine fancy to her. Then I laid out my plans of campaign. I knew the Morrrows, root and branch. You don't want things they can get easily. And they're determined to get a thing if they're told they can't. They always go by contraries. Jarvis' father broke three girls' hearts because their families threw them at his head. In Jarvis' case I knew exactly what would happen. Sybil would fall head over heels in love with him . . . and he'd be tired of her in no time. I knew he wouldn't keep on wanting her if she was too easy to get, so I forbade him to come near the place and I forbade Sybil to have a word to say to him and generally played the heavy parent to perfection. Talk about the charm of the uncaught! It's nothing to the charm of the uncatchable. It all worked out according to schedule but I struck a snag in Sybil's spinelessness. She's a nice child but she is spineless. What a time I had prodding her through High School! I've been thinking she'd never have the pluck to marry him in my teeth. Now, if you've got your breath back, by dear, unboomer yourself of the whole story."

Anne's sense of humor had again come to her rescue. She could never refuse an opportunity for a good laugh even when it was on herself. And she suddenly felt very well acquainted with Franklin Westcott.

He listened to the tale, taking quiet, enjoyable whiffs of his pipe. When Anne had finished he nodded comfortably.

"More obliged to you than ever. She'd never have got up the grit to do it if it hadn't been for you. And Jarvis Morrow wouldn't have risked being made a fool of twice . . . not if I know the breed. Gosh, but I've had a narrow escape. I'm yours to command for life, Miss Shirley. You're a real brick to come here as you did, believing all the yarns gossip told you. You've been told a plenty, haven't you now?"

Anne nodded. The bull-dog had got his head on her lap and was snoring blissfully. "Everyone agreed that you were cranky, crabbed and crusty," she said candidly.

"And I suppose they told you I was a tyrant and made my poor wife's life miserable and ruled my family with a rod of iron?"

"Something like that . . . but I really did take it with a grain of salt, Mr. Westcott. I felt Dovie couldn't be as fond of you as she was if you were quite as black as you were painted."

"Sensible gal! My wife was a happy woman, Miss Shirley. I ruled my household as a man should, but not tyrannically. Of, of course, I had a spell of temper now and then, but Mollie didn't mind them after she got used to them. Besides, I always gave her a ring or a necklace or some such bauble after I calmed down. There jewelry a woman in town had more nice jewelry. I must get it out and give it to Sybil."

Anne went wicked.

"What about Milton's poems?" she asked slyly.

"Milton's poems? Oh, that. It wasn't Milton . . . it was Tennyson. I reverence Milton, but I can't abide Alfred. He's too lady-like. Those last two lines of Enoch Arden made me so mad one night I did fire the book through the window. But I picked it up next day for the sake of the Bugle Song. I'd forgive anybody anything for that. It didn't go into the lily pond . . ."

that was Mother Frouy's embroidery. You're not going to stay and have a bite of supper with a lonely old fellow robbed of his only child."

"I'm really sorry, Mr. Westcott, but I have to attend a meeting of the staff tonight."

"Well, I'll be seeing you when Sybil comes back. I'll have to fling a party for this no doubt. And gosh, what a relief this has been to my mind! You've no idea how I'd have hated to have to back down and say, 'Take her.' Now all I have to do is to pretend to be heart-broken and resigned and forgive her sadly for the sake of her poor mother. I'll do it beautifully. Jarvis must never suspect. Don't you give the show away?"

"I won't," promised Anne.

Franklin Westcott saw her courteously to the door. The bulldog sat up on his haunches and cried after her.

Franklin Westcott took his pipe out of his mouth at the door and tapped her on the shoulder with it.

"Always remember," he said solemnly, "that there's more than one way to skin a

cat. It can be done so that the animal will never know he's lost his hide. Thank you . . . thank you."

"People told me I didn't know Franklin Westcott," reflected Anne as she took her way home. "They were right . . . I didn't. And neither did they."

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