

# A WEDDING HAS BEEN RE-ARRANGED

BY ELLEN E. MACKIE

IT'S downright immoral, Roxane! The fellow is old enough to be your grandfather. "My father!" corrected the girl, wickedly. "Gilbert Mansfield is just two years older than mother."

"The antique oyster," growled Jerry brutally, with a furious wrench at the wheel of the car he was driving. The machine gave a sudden, rather alarming swerve.

"Look out, Jerry," warned Roxane, "is this a proposal or a suicide pact, darling?"

Jerry concentrated his gaze on the road, and righted the car, which slowed down to almost a crawl as they turned into an unfrequented lane. The young man registered a sullen silence.

"Why the doldrums?" teased Roxane, admiring her bright brown eyes in the tiny mirror of her vanity, "don't be dull, Jerry."

"Dull!" echoed the youth, "you should get used to dullness; marrying a man nearly three times your age. I say it's downright immoral."

"Then you won't assist me to my life-of-shame by being an usher at my June wedding?"

"June?" The car came to an abrupt stop, Jerry turned deliberately and faced her. "June?" he barked.

"Don't shout, darling! My hearing is painfully acute."

She was a piquant, provocative little person, curled up—almost hidden from view—in the deep seat of the low-slung roadster; her fetching brown-and-beige tailleur and rakish felt sports hat, humming chic to her lithe young figure. Few men could look at Roxane Holmer and remain unmoved.

"Not really in June?" asked Jerry, desperately. "But what's wrong with June," meeting his incredulous eyes with half-mocking humor, "weddings do sometimes occur in June without the world screaming scandal."

Jerry Newton gave a disgusted grunt. "Then you really and actually mean to marry this man?" dramatically, "I thought it was just one of your caprices—and would end ace-deuce. Lord! Mansfield! That old fossil. Why doesn't he marry your mother?" He laughed derisively.

"Because he happens to be rather mad about me," returned the girl complacently, examining the baguette diamond on her left hand. The ring was most reassuring.

AND indeed all the rest of the world wondered even as the irrepressible Jerry Newton why Mansfield wasn't marrying Roxane's mother. Yet nobody wondered more than Mrs. Holmer herself. She and Gilbert Mansfield had been such tremendous friends practically engaged. The man had repeatedly mentioned a honeymoon in Italy. He had danced attendance upon Grace Holmer for two years. They were invited out everywhere together. Grace's friends, like herself, took the engagement for granted.

Then Roxane had returned from her school abroad, and before Grace had even sensed the change in Mansfield's sentiments, the child bounded in one day with the news that she was going to marry Gilbert.

Naturally, Mrs. Holmer had mixed emotions on the impending marriage. Certainly Roxane had been a strain on her moderate income. Grace

had sacrificed herself to send her daughter to school abroad, to make it possible for her to go among people of wealth and social position. Then there had been Roxy's debut last autumn—the gowns, the wraps, the hats, the accessories, the flowers, the taxis, the photographs, the endless little gifts from Roxy to the other debs. Mrs. Holmer had confessed to a friend that she sometimes wondered if they would get through the season without mortgaging the furniture.

Now . . . it would be goodbye to all that. Gilbert Mansfield's money could give her expensive blossom the perfect setting.

Mrs. Holmer had the sporting instinct. She decided Roxane's wedding should be a fitting climax to a luxuriously-fostered girlhood. To achieve it, she was prepared to risk all on this, the last throw.

NOT opaline rose, mother!"

"Why not, Roxane, dear? It's so smart now for a bride to have a colored wedding gown, and opaline is such a delicate pink. Your eight bridesmaids could be frocked in deeper rose."

They were discussing the details of the wedding one cool, wet night in May—mother and daughter—lounging over a grate fire in Roxane's room. The girl's one-piece pyjamas of cream silk crepe were banded in chartreuse. She wore a little matching cardigan. Her half-grown locks tumbled in a shining mass over her shoulders. Despite the dabs of cold cream plastered on nose and cheeks, Roxane was indeed lovely to look upon. Hers was the beauty of the early blossom, just peeping over the edge of life . . . wondering asking the eternal question.

"Oh, mother, I do want a medieval wedding," she declared romantically.

"Medieval? My dear child that sort of thing has to be awfully well done. A masterpiece! It would run into a fabulous amount."

"Couldn't we manage it?" she coaxed, jabbing a poker into the grate.

"Gilbert wouldn't fit into a medieval wedding," her mother hedged. It was so hard to refuse Roxane, especially on this particular occasion. "Wait," Grace paused, puckering her brows, "I saw an adorable idea for the gowns," and she branched off into a description of a dazzling model from Patou.

"We could have it copied," Roxane rhapsodized; and soon the two were absorbed in planning all the picturesque details of a fashionable modern wedding.

DURING the intervening month, Roxane was riotously entertained. A popular member of the younger set, it was a case of every day, all day, and practically all night.

Gilbert, during his two years' friendship with the girl's mother, had been content to plod along at a comfortable, middle-aged, jog trot. Now, to keep pace with Roxane, he had to become a very high stepper indeed. But Mansfield was game. Tremendously flattered at having won this much-sought-after deb, he was ready to meet her every whim. Actually, the engagement had been as much of a surprise to Gilbert as it was to his friends. His proposal was almost unpremeditated. On one or two occasions when calling at the

**"Volte face," cries Cupid, and the result is a double victory; a story to remind us that nothing, after all, is sacred—even a formal invitation to a wedding**

Holmer house, he had found himself alone with Roxane. Certain fascinating little tricks of the girl caught him. Suddenly he became blinded in a sunburst of romance—the inevitable surrender of middle-age to the budding glories of youth. Then came the unexpected proposal.

It was just three days before the wedding. A dinner-dance in honor of the bridal party was being given that night at the country club. During the evening Gilbert Mansfield noticed, for the first time, the strange attitude of young Newton. To the older man it was slightly disconcerting. Not that a successful man-of-affairs like Gilbert could be seriously disturbed by the cynicisms of a mere youth, just fresh from college. And yet there are certain occasions when twenty-three has a decided advantage over forty-three. Jerry was a good-looking young animal, a leader of the smart juniors. He enjoyed an easy popularity in a set where Mansfield felt *passé*.

And so it was on this evening, that for the first time, the prospective bridegroom had his misgivings. He became conscious of the disparity between his and Roxane's ages. With it, came a slight ennui; a boredom at all this superfluous entertaining. He had been going a pace . . . unconsciously straining to keep up with the revellings of youth. After marriage . . . what? Would Roxane be willing to slacken the reins?

While he was sitting a few minutes alone in the smoking room, these disturbing thoughts obsessed him. Through the open door to the ballroom, he glimpsed Roxane and Jerry as they swung past in the dance. The freedom, the ecstasy of youth, the way their young bodies yielded to the music, disquieted him. Never had he seen the girl respond to a dance with such buoyancy of spirit. Her lips were parted in a smile, her eyes like stars. Jerry's continued gaze on her face irritated Roxy's fiancé. Twenty years ago it would have fired him with jealousy.

SO THIS is where the recluse is hiding . . .

The familiar voice of a woman broke in upon his reveries. He forced his eyes from the dancers to meet the amused glance of Grace Holmer.

"I'm famished for a cigarette," she told him. It's a jolly lucky hand the little goddess Fate has dealt out to us, Gilbert," whimsically, "you and I, such old pals. Now we have a real tie" . . . she hesitated.

The man responded with a half puzzled smile. Was she so happy then, over the marriage? He had felt a bit guilty about Grace. Once he even thought she cared . . . But, of course, her daughter would come first. One would expect that of Grace.

"Don't mind the child, Gilbert," she said impulsively, as though sensing a subconscious fear he had scarcely dared [See also page 89]

s. John St. Clair  
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H. U. K.

