

"JACK SHALL HAVE JILL"

By Alice Van Leer Carrick

"WOMEN", said Sir Willoughby Patterne, "are matchmakers by nature", and I agree with him; it is a feminine failing that I acknowledge — and justify. Now usually, according to convention, a matchmaking woman is a nuisance to her acquaintance; constant in endeavor, inevitable; hurrying along her devastating path scattering engagements right and left, and sulking when her plans miscarry. All this I avoid; in real life I am as little disposed to encourage matrimony as Mr. Woodhouse himself. Not that I am any friend to celibacy; I merely do not bestir myself actively against it, and I satisfy what I am told is a true womanly instinct not by marrying off my friends, but by arranging matches between my favorite heroes and heroines of fiction. In other words, I am like that lovable old gentleman who could not bear to talk scandal, but who freed his soul from its natural human malice by abusing Judas Iscariot. Do not mistake me; for nothing would I interfere with manifest destiny or meddle with the fate of those fair, unhappy, happy lovers of all time: Tristram and Iseult, Romeo and Juliet, Paolo and Francesca; they who forever hold high festival in our dreams. But, for example, take Patient Griselda who, though a poor, weak, shillyshallying, good sort of creature, truly never had a chance. I should have married her to King Arthur who would have appreciated her qualities, and given the keeping of that detestable Count Walter's destiny into the hands of Vivian, or Madame Pernelle, or Lady Catherine de Bourgh, any of whom, being women of determination, would have taught him a lesson.

That's just for instance. To go on,

there are book matches, — of course, that I do ungrudgingly approve: "Jane Eyre" and "Wuthering Heights" leave me completely content; they couldn't have ended otherwise. But I believe that I am one of the very few readers of the whole world who is delighted to have Ivanhoe safely wedded to Rowena; Thackeray's sequel to the contrary, I am convinced that Rebecca was not the woman for him; her oriental gloom would have driven him back, despondent, to the Crusades within a year. And I thrill when Evelina, escaping the wiles of Sir Clement, the amorous pursuit of Mr. Smith and Mr. Brangton, "united herself forever with the object of her dearest, her eternal affection". I rejoice at the somewhat acrobatic devotion of Lord Mortimer as he "alternately embraced Amanda, and alternately fell at her feet"; and I am only *too* thankful when the nuptials of Sir Charles Grandison and Miss Harriet Byron are finally consummated. They weren't fit to marry anybody else! (By the way, did you ever notice the spiritual affinity between Sir Charles and Sir Willoughby, the one difference being that Meredith knew he was dealing with an egoist, and Richardson didn't? Oh, well, another. They both "had a leg", but Sir Charles certainly was luckier with the ladies!)

Still, if these few marriages please me, there are many, many more that leave me quite unreconciled. How Thackeray — otherwise greatly beloved — can chill my blood with the matches he makes! I am determined to undo some of them! To my thinking it was given him to create just one perfect love story, "The Virginians", with George and Theo living its happy protestants to be. But this one, only. Now for me Beatrix Esmond — ah, divine! — never grows old, never sinks into Mad-

am Tusher-Bernstein, querulous, infinitely pathetic. She is always radiant youth clicking down that stately stairway in high heeled shoes and scarlet stockings; beautiful, imperious, dangling young Lord Ashburnham, or the Duke of Hamilton, or poor Harry, luckless lover that he was. Oh, I know it all was different; I just "pretend" because I care too much. And I don't see why Clive Newcome had to marry Rosie; and I never, never, never would have allowed Charlotte to accept that swaggering Philip, nor Laura Pendennis. If Laura had taken Warrington — and destiny was defied when she didn't — she might have amounted to something; struggle would have benefited her, strengthened her, and prevented her from degenerating into "a dowdy woman out of the nursery". That's what Talbot Twysden called her, and he was right; mentally dowdy, she grows more steadily tiresome with each succeeding volume. Besides, Pendennis never was meant to marry. He had burned up his heart in that first hot flame kindled by the Fotheringay; in those early days when love woke him at dawn and drove him, breathless. "Men like that always live in comfortable bachelor lodgings with broken hearts, and are adored by their landladies." Can you really see Pendennis a settled married man? Come now, confess!

And Jane Austen even more distresses me; about just two matches, it is true. But she is usually so complete, so understanding, she marries off her heroes and heroines with such sensibility and such sense (a very necessary combination, let me tell you) — she so justly joins Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney; Frederick Wentworth and gentle Anne Elliot; Mrs. Elton and her "*cara sposo*" — that I am disposed to consider Fanny Price's refusal

of Henry Crawford, and Edmund's repudiation of Mary, as little short of a calamity. Do you remember when first you read "Mansfield Park" and, midway, felt the delicious little thrill of prescience that Fanny's destiny was about to blossom? I have never entirely lost it; after many years it still comes to me afresh. "'She will be late', said Sir Thomas, drawing out his watch." Oh, joy, it is beginning! And then, when Fanny drives off to the dinner party at the Parsonage, in the carriage that Aunt Norris didn't want her to have, and you see Henry Crawford's barouche drawn up in the doorway, you are very little surprised. You are even less surprised when, some weeks later, Henry confesses his love for one of the charmingest Cinderellas that all literature has given to us. Mrs. Norris is going to rage ineffectually at Fanny's promotion over Julia, and we are to have the felicity of hearing her — another happiness! But to have that beautiful bubble burst, the dream disappear! To marry Fanny to Edmund; to be obliged to think of her as eternally listening to his sermons in the pulpit and his sermons at the dinner table ("My dearest Fanny", taking her hand and *reasoning* with her); to have her condemned to a life all bread and butter when it might have savored a trifle of caviar! Mated with Mary Crawford, Edmund Bertram had the chance of becoming an interesting man as well as a respectable one; and, if I know women at all, Henry would have made Fanny Price very happy. Further I do not complain; I do not go so far as a Friend-in-Jane-Austen who insists that his favorite writer lost the chance of making the most eugenic match of all time — that of Mary Bennet and Mr. Collins. Still, had this happened, Elizabeth might never have visited Rosings, nor met again the adorable Fitzwilliam

Darcy, the only other "book man" besides Harry Warrington that I ever wanted to marry.

With Dickens I have very little quarrel; in almost every case Jack has his Jill and all does go well. Excepting always, of course, Dora, who ought not to die, who *doesn't* die, now that I think "David Copperfield" over. Rather I am tempted to accept another friend's solution, and marry Agnes to Steerforth. "It", so this man says, "would have served him right." And with Trollope I have no quarrel at all, principally, I suppose, because I don't care; because I so much prefer his countryside to his characters, his frames to his portraits. A little mild wonder, perhaps, at Lady Glencora's giving up Burgo Fitzgerald whom she really loved for that stupid, arrogant Plantaganet Palliser; a gentle pleasure in the happiness of the Vicarage couple at Bullhampton. But nothing to make me *ache* the way Maggie Tulliver's death does. For I would have her live; come back triumphant in "that maize coloured satinette", with Stephen adoring, and all St. Oggs smiling upon her. Poor Maggie, who so prophetically wanted "to avenge Rebecca and Flora MacIvor and Minna and all the rest of the dark, unhappy ones".

Ah, well, we all have "matchmade" more or less, all of us women, at any rate; twisted and twined the threads of destiny into a golden web of our own patterning, from the time that we were old enough to grieve when Jo refused Laurie, and weep when Prince Charlie

died and never could marry Rose in Bloom. I suppose of all people in the world the ones least disposed to actual matchmaking are the women who write novels; they have enough of it in the dailiness of their lives. You remember Mrs. Humphry Ward's telling Agnes Repplier that nobody knew better than she how *totally* unsuited Jacob and Julie were to each other, but that she simply could not endure the agony of contriving other marriages for them? So you and I, dear bookish matchmaker, who marry off our fiction friends, may suffer torments, but our acquaintance will not, and thus we acquire merit even in this world. How much better than cajoling and urging and wondering about our friends matrimonially it is to say, for instance, "Have you heard of Newland Archer's engagement to Ellen Olinska? I persuaded him to go to see her when he was in Paris, and now it's all so happily settled." Or, "I've just heard that Carol Milford is going to marry Dr. Kennicott, and live in that absurd Gopher Prairie, wherever that is. Somewhere out in Minnesota, I believe. And Carol's such a complete Cockney. Do you think it *can* last?"

Let me commend my method to you. I divert myself, I satisfy my "purely female instinct", and I still am beloved by my friends, relatives, and neighbors. As a social safety valve it is incomparable; as a pleasure, permanent, for sometime or other you must come to the end of your visiting list, but books go on forever.