

A Marriage Has Been Arranged

BY ALFRED SUTRO

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MR. HARRISON CROCKSTEAD

LADY ALINE DE VAUX

Produced at the Garrick Theatre on March 27, 1904

A MARRIAGE HAS BEEN ARRANGED....

SCENE The conservatory of No. 300 Grosvenor Square. Hour, close on midnight. A ball is in progress, and dreamy waltz music is heard in the distance.

LADY ALINE DE VAUX enters, leaning on the arm of MR. HARRISON CROCKSTEAD.

LADY ALINE is a tall, exquisitely-gowned girl, of the conventional and much-admired type of beauty. Put her in any drawing-room in the world, and she would at once be recognised as a highborn Englishwoman. She has in her, in embryo, all those excellent qualities that go to make a great lady: the icy stare, the haughty movement of the shoulder, the disdainful arch of the lip; she has also, but only an experienced observer would notice it, something of wistfulness, something that speaks of a sore and wounded heart--though it is sufficiently evident that this organ is kept under admirable control. A girl who has been placed in a position of life where artificiality rules, who has been taught to be artificial and has thoroughly learned her lesson; yet one who would unhesitatingly know the proper thing to do did a camel bolt with her in the desert, or an eastern potentate invite her to become his two hundred and fifty-seventh wife. In a word, a lady of complete self-possession and magnificent control. MR. CROCKSTEAD is a big, burly man of forty or so, and of the kind to

whom the ordinary West End butler would consider himself perfectly justified in declaring that her ladyship was not at home. And yet his evening clothes sit well on him; and there is a certain air of command about the man that would have made the butler uncomfortable. That functionary would have excused himself by declaring that MR. CROCKSTEAD didn't look a gentleman. And perhaps he doesn't. His walk is rather a slouch; he has a way of keeping his hands in his pockets, and of jerking out his sentences; a way, above all, of seeming perfectly indifferent to the comfort of the people he happens to be addressing. The impression he gives is one of power, not of refinement; and the massive face, with its heavy lines, and eyes that are usually veiled, seems to give no clue whatever to the character of the man within.

The couple break apart when they enter the room; LADY ALINE is the least bit nervous, though she shows no trace of it; MR. CROCKSTEAD absolutely imperturbable and undisturbed.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Looking around.*] Ah--this is the place--very quiet, retired, romantic--et cetera. Music in the distance--all very appropriate and sentimental.

[*She leaves him, and sits, quietly fanning herself; he stands, looking at her.*] You seem perfectly calm, Lady Aline?

ALINE. [*Sitting.*] Conservatories are not unusual appendages to a ball-room, Mr. Crockstead; nor is this conservatory unlike other conservatories.

CROCKSTEAD [*Turning to her.*] I wonder why women are always so evasive?

ALINE. With your permission we will not discuss the sex. You and I are too old to be cynical, and too young to be appreciative. And besides, it is a rule of mine, whenever I sit out a dance, that my partner shall avoid the subjects of women--and golf.

CROCKSTEAD. You limit the area of conversation. But then, in this particular instance, I take it, we have not come here to talk?

ALINE. [*Coldly.*] I beg your pardon!

CROCKSTEAD. [*Sitting beside her.*] Lady Aline, they are dancing a cotillon in there, so we have half an hour before us. We shall not be disturbed, for the Duchess, your aunt, has considerably stationed her aged companion in the corridor, with instructions to ward off intruders.

ALINE. [*Very surprised.*] Mr. Crockstead!

CROCKSTEAD. [*Looking hard at her.*] Didn't you know? [ALINE *turns aside, embarrassed.*] That's right--of course you did. Don't you know why I have brought you here? That's right; of course you do. The Duchess, your aunt, and the Marchioness, your mother--observe how fondly my tongue trips out the titles--smiled sweetly on us as we left the ball-room. There will be a notice in the *Morning Post* tomorrow: "A Marriage Has Been Arranged Between--"

ALINE. [*Bewildered and offended.*] Mr. Crockstead! This--this is--

CROCKSTEAD. [*Always in the same quiet tone.*] Because I have not yet proposed, you mean? Of course I intend to, Lady Aline. Only as I know that you will accept me--

ALINE. [*In icy tones, as she rises.*] Let us go back to the ball-room.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Quite undisturbed.*] Oh, please! That won't help us, you know. Do sit down. I assure you I have never proposed before, so that naturally I am a trifle nervous. Of course I know that we are only supers really, without much of a speaking part; but the spirit moves me to gag, in the absence of the stage-manager, who is, let us say, the Duchess--

ALINE. I have heard of the New Humour, Mr. Crockstead, though I confess I have never understood it. This may be an exquisite example-

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CROCKSTEAD. By no means. I am merely trying to do the right thing, though perhaps not the conventional one. Before making you

the formal offer of my hand and fortune, which amounts to a little over three millions--

ALINE. [*Fanning herself.*] How people exaggerate! Between six and seven, *I* heard.

CROCKSTEAD. Only three at present, but we must be patient. Before throwing myself at your feet, metaphorically, I am anxious that you should know something of the man whom you are about to marry.

ALINE. That is really most considerate!

CROCKSTEAD. I have the advantage of you, you see, inasmuch as you have many dear friends, who have told me all about you.

ALINE. [*With growing exasperation, but keeping very cool.*] Indeed?

CROCKSTEAD. I am aware, for instance, that this is your ninth season--

ALINE. [*Snapping her fan.*] You are remarkably well-informed.

CROCKSTEAD. I have been told that again to-night, three times, by charming young women who vowed that they loved you. Now, as I have no dearest friends, it is unlikely that you will have heard anything equally definite concerning myself. I propose to enlighten you.

ALINE. [*Satirically.*] The story of your life--how thrilling!

CROCKSTEAD. I trust you may find it so. [*He sits, and pauses for a moment, then begins, very quietly.*] Lady Aline, I am a self-made man, as the foolish phrase has it--a man whose early years were spent in savage and desolate places, where the devil had much to say; a man in whom whatever there once had been of natural kindness was very soon kicked out. I was poor, and lonely, for thirty-two years: I have been rich, and lonely, for ten. My millions have been made honestly enough; but poverty and wretchedness had left their mark on me, and you will find very few men with a good word to say for Harrison

Crockstead. I have no polish, or culture, or tastes. Art wearies me, literature sends me to sleep--

ALINE. When you come to the chapter of your personal deficiencies, Mr. Crockstead, please remember that they are sufficiently evident for me to have already observed them.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Without a trace of annoyance.*] That is true. I will pass, then, to more intimate matters. In a little township in Australia--a horrible place where there was gold--I met a woman whom I loved. She was what is technically known as a bad woman. She ran away with another man. I tracked them to Texas, and in a mining camp there I shot the man. I wanted to take the woman back, but she refused. That has been my solitary love affair; and I shall never love any woman again as I loved her. I think that is all that I have to tell you. And now--will you marry me, Lady Aline?

ALINE. [*Very steadily, facing him.*] Not if you were the last man in this world, Mr. Crockstead.

CROCKSTEAD. [*With a pleasant smile.*] At least that is emphatic.

ALINE. See, I will give you confidence for confidence. This is, as you suggest, my ninth season. Living in an absurd milieu where marriage with a wealthy man is regarded as the one aim in life, I have, during the past few weeks, done all that lay in my power to wring a proposal from you.

CROCKSTEAD. I appreciate your sincerity.

ALINE. Perhaps the knowledge that other women were doing the same lent a little zest to the pursuit, which otherwise would have been very dreary; for I confess that your personality did not--especially appeal to me.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Cheerfully.*] Thank you very much.

ALINE. Not at all. Indeed, this room being the Palace of Truth, I will admit that it was only by thinking hard of your three millions that I

have been able to conceal the weariness I have felt in your society.
And now will you marry me, Mr. Crockstead?

CROCKSTEAD. [*Serenely.*] I fancy that's what we're here for, isn't it?

ALINE. [*Stamping her foot.*] I have, of course, been debarred from the disreputable amours on which you linger so fondly; but I loved a soldier cousin of mine, and would have run away with him had my mother not packed me off in time. He went to India, and I stayed here; but he is the only man I have loved or ever shall love. Further, let me tell you I am twenty-eight; I have always been poor--I hate poverty, and it has soured me no less than you. Dress is the thing in life I care for most, vulgarity my chief abomination. And to be frank, I consider you the most vulgar person I have ever met. Will you still marry me, Mr. Crockstead?

CROCKSTEAD. [*With undiminished cheerfulness.*] Why not?

ALINE. This is an outrage. Am I a horse, do you think, or a ballet-dancer? Do you imagine I will sell myself to you for your three millions?

CROCKSTEAD. Logic, my dear Lady Aline, is evidently not one of your more special possessions. For, had it not been for my--somewhat eccentric preliminaries--you *would* have accepted me, would you not?

ALINE. [*Embarrassed.*] I--I--

CROCKSTEAD. If I had said to you, timidly: "Lady Aline, I love you: I am a simple, unsophisticated person; will you marry me?" You would have answered, "Yes, Harrison, I will."

ALINE. It is a mercy to have escaped marrying a man with such a Christian name as Harrison.

CROCKSTEAD. It has been in the family for generations, you know; but it is a strange thing that I am always called Harrison, and that no one ever adopts the diminutive.

ALINE. That does not surprise me: we have no pet name for the East wind.

CROCKSTEAD. The possession of millions, you see, Lady Aline, puts you into eternal quarantine. It is a kind of yellow fever, with the difference that people are perpetually anxious to catch your complaint. But we digress. To return to the question of our marriage--

ALINE. I beg your pardon.

CROCKSTEAD. I presume that it is--arranged?

ALINE. [*Haughtily.*] Mr. Crockstead, let me remind you that frankness has its limits: exceeding these, it is apt to degenerate into impertinence. Be good enough to conduct me to the ball-room.

[*She moves to the door.*]

CROCKSTEAD. You have five sisters, I believe, Lady Aline?
[ALINE *stops short.*] All younger than yourself, all marriageable, and all unmarried?

[ALINE *hangs her head and is silent.*]

CROCKSTEAD. Your father--

ALINE. [*Fiercely.*] Not a word of my father!

CROCKSTEAD. Your father is a gentleman. The breed is rare, and very fine when you get it. But he is exceedingly poor. People marry for money nowadays; and your mother will be very unhappy if this marriage of ours falls through.

ALINE. [*Moving a step towards him.*] Is it to oblige my mother, then, that you desire to marry me?

CROCKSTEAD. Well, no. But you see I must marry some one, in mere self-defence; and honestly, I think you will do at least as well as any one else. [ALINE *bursts out laughing.*] That strikes you as funny?

ALINE. If you had the least grain of chivalrous feeling, you would realise that the man who could speak to a woman as you have spoken to me--

[*She pauses.*]

CROCKSTEAD. Yes?

ALINE. I leave you to finish the sentence.

CROCKSTEAD. Thank you. I will finish it my own way. I will say that when a woman deliberately tries to wring an offer of marriage from a man whom she does not love, she deserves to be spoken to as I have spoken to you, Lady Aline.

ALINE. [*Scornfully.*] Love! What has love to do with marriage?

CROCKSTEAD. That remark rings hollow. You have been good enough to tell me of your cousin, whom you did love--

ALINE. Well?

CROCKSTEAD. And with whom you would have eloped, had your mother not prevented you.

ALINE. I most certainly should.

CROCKSTEAD. So you see that at one period of your life you thought differently.--You were very fond of him?

ALINE. I have told you.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Meditatively.*] If I had been he, mother or no mother, money or no money, I would have carried you off. I fancy it must be pleasant to be loved by you, Lady Aline.

ALINE. [*Dropping a mock curtsey, as she sits on the sofa.*] You do me too much honour.

CROCKSTEAD. [*Still thoughtful, moving about the room.*] Next to being king, it is good to be maker of kings. Where is this cousin now?

ALINE. In America. But might I suggest that we have exhausted the subject?

CROCKSTEAD. Do you remember your "Arabian Nights," Lady Aline?

ALINE. Vaguely.

CROCKSTEAD. You have at least not forgotten that sublime Caliph, Haroun Al-Raschid?

ALINE. Oh, no--but why?

CROCKSTEAD. We millionaires are the Caliphs to-day; and we command more faithful than ever bowed to them. And, like that old scoundrel Haroun, we may at times permit ourselves a respectable impulse. What is your cousin's address?

ALINE. Again I ask--why?

CROCKSTEAD. I will put him in a position to marry you.

ALINE. [*In extreme surprise.*] What! [*She rises.*

CROCKSTEAD. Oh, don't be alarmed, I'll manage it pleasantly. I'll give him tips, shares, speculate for him, make him a director of one or two of my companies. He shall have an income of four thousand a year. You can live on that.

ALINE. You are not serious?

CROCKSTEAD. Oh yes; and though men may not like me, they always trust my word. You may.

ALINE. And why will you do this thing?

CROCKSTEAD. Call it caprice--call it a mere vulgar desire to let my magnificence dazzle you--call it the less vulgar desire to know that my money has made you happy with the man you love.

ALINE. That is generous.

CROCKSTEAD. I remember an old poem I learnt at school--which told how Frederick the Great coveted a mill that adjoined a favourite estate of his; but the miller refused to sell. Frederick could have turned him out, of course--there was not very much public opinion in those days--but he respected the miller's firmness, and left him in solid possession. And mark that, at that very same time, he annexed--in other words stole--the province of Silesia.

ALINE. Ah--

CROCKSTEAD. [*Moving to the fireplace.*]

"Ce sont là jeux de Princes: Ils respectent un meunier, Ils volent une province."

[*The music stops.*]

ALINE. You speak French?

CROCKSTEAD. I am fond of it. It is the true and native language of insincerity.

ALINE. And yet you seem sincere.

CROCKSTEAD. I am permitting myself that luxury to-night. I am uncorking, let us say, the one bottle of '47 port left in my cellar.

ALINE. You are not quite fair to yourself, perhaps.

CROCKSTEAD. Do not let this action of mine cause you too suddenly to alter your opinion. The verdict you pronounced before was, on the whole, just.

ALINE. What verdict?

CROCKSTEAD. I was the most unpleasant person you ever had met.

ALINE. That was an exaggeration.

CROCKSTEAD. The most repulsive--

ALINE. [*Quickly.*] I did not say that.

CROCKSTEAD. And who prided himself on his repulsiveness. Very true, in the main, and yet consider! My wealth dates back ten years; till then I had known hunger, and every kind of sorrow and despair. I had stretched out longing arms to the world, but not a heart opened to me. And suddenly, when the taste of men's cruelty was bitter in my mouth, capricious fortune snatched me from abject poverty and gave me delirious wealth. I was ploughing a barren field, and flung up a nugget. From that moment gold dogged my footsteps. I enriched the few friends I had--they turned howlingly from me because I did not give them more. I showered money on whoever sought it of me--they cursed me because it was mine to give. In my poverty there had been the bond of common sorrow between me and my fellows: in my wealth I stand alone, a modern Ishmael, with every man's hand against me.

ALINE. [*Gently.*] Why do you tell me this?

CROCKSTEAD. Because I am no longer asking you to marry me. Because you are the first person in all these years who has been truthful and frank with me. And because, perhaps, in the happiness that will, I trust, be yours, I want you to think kindly of me. [*She puts out her hand, he takes it.*] And now, shall we return to the ball-room? The music has stopped; they must be going to supper.

ALINE. What shall I say to the Marchioness, my mother, and the Duchess, my aunt?

CROCKSTEAD. You will acquaint those noble ladies with the fact of your having refused me.

[*They have both risen, and move up the room together.*]

ALINE. I shall be a nine days' wonder. And how do you propose to carry out your little scheme?

CROCKSTEAD. I will take Saturday's boat--you will give me a line to your cousin. I had better state the case plainly to him, perhaps?

ALINE. That demands consideration.

CROCKSTEAD. And I will tell you what you shall do for me in return. Find me a wife!

ALINE. I?

CROCKSTEAD. You. I beg it on my knees. I give you carte blanche. I undertake to propose, with my eyes shut, to the woman you shall select.

ALINE. And will you treat her to the--little preliminaries--with which you have favoured me?

CROCKSTEAD. No. I said those things to you because I liked you.

ALINE. And you don't intend to like the other one?

CROCKSTEAD. I will marry her, I can trust you to find me a loyal and intelligent woman.

ALINE. In Society?

CROCKSTEAD. For preference. She will be better versed in spending money than a governess, or country parson's daughter.

ALINE. But why this voracity for marriage?

CROCKSTEAD. Lady Aline, I am hunted, pestered, worried, persecuted. I have settled two breach of promise actions already, though Heaven knows I did no more than remark it was a fine day, or enquire after the lady's health. If you do not help me, some energetic

woman will capture me--I feel it--and bully me for the rest of my days. I raise a despairing cry to you--Find me a wife!

ALINE. Do you desire the lady to have any--special qualifications?

CROCKSTEAD. No--the home-grown article will do. One thing, though--I should like her to be--merciful.

ALINE. I don't understand.

CROCKSTEAD. I have a vague desire to do something with my money: my wife might help me. I should like her to have pity.

ALINE. Pity?

CROCKSTEAD. In the midst of her wealth I should wish her to be sorry for those who are poor.

ALINE. Yes. And, as regards the rest--

CROCKSTEAD. The rest I leave to you, with absolute confidence. You will help me?

ALINE. I will try. My choice is to be final?

CROCKSTEAD. Absolutely.

ALINE. I have an intimate friend--I wonder whether she would do?

CROCKSTEAD. Tell me about her.

ALINE. She and I made our debut the same season. Like myself she has hitherto been her mother's despair.

CROCKSTEAD. Because she has not yet--

ALINE. Married--yes. Oh, if men knew how hard the lot is of the portionless girl, who has to sit, and smile, and wait, with a very desolate heart--they would think less unkindly of her, perhaps--[*She smiles.*] But I am digressing, too.

CROCKSTEAD. Tell me more of your friend.

ALINE. She is outwardly hard, and a trifle bitter, but I fancy sunshine would thaw her. There has not been much happiness in her life.

CROCKSTEAD. Would she marry a man she did not love?

ALINE. If she did you would not respect her?

CROCKSTEAD. I don't say that. She will be your choice; and therefore deserving of confidence. Is she handsome?

ALINE. Well--no.

CROCKSTEAD. [*With a quick glance at her.*] That's a pity. But we can't have everything.

ALINE. No. There is one episode in her life that I feel she would like you to know--

CROCKSTEAD. If you are not betraying a confidence--

ALINE. [*Looking down.*] No. She loved a man, years ago, very dearly. They were too poor to marry, but they vowed to wait. Within six months she learned that he was engaged.

CROCKSTEAD. Ah!

ALINE. To a fat and wealthy widow--

CROCKSTEAD. The old story.

ALINE. Who was touring through India, and had been made love to by every unmarried officer in the regiment. She chose him.

CROCKSTEAD. India? [*He moves towards her.*]

ALINE. Yes.

CROCKSTEAD. I have an idea that I shall like your friend. [*He takes her hand in his.*]

ALINE. I shall be careful to tell her all that you said to me--at the beginning--

CROCKSTEAD. It is quite possible that my remarks may not apply after all.

ALINE. But I believe myself from what I know of you both that--if she marries you--it will not be--altogether--for your money.

CROCKSTEAD. Listen--they're playing "God Save the King." Will you be my wife, Aline?

ALINE. Yes--Harry.

[*He takes her in his arms and kisses her.*]

CURTAIN