

MADAME SOLOMON.

BY MRS. BARRY PAIN.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. RUSSELL FLINT.

MADAME was putting the last touch to her last creation, subsequently described with pastoral simplicity as "a flowing skirt and kimono mantle of *chiffon velours couleur teint de Créole* with dull gold encrustations *style Joséphine*," when Miss Gallop announced that a customer was waiting to be fitted.

"Who ces eet—so airy?" snapped Madame, who was never under her own control till midday.

"Mrs. Cranthorpe, to fit her lace tea-gown," said Miss Gallop, looking down her nose and holding herself, from force of habit (and corsets), like the letter S.

"I come, I come," said Madame, "and I want Miss Stoner to put on this costume *immédiatement*. We will show it to Mrs. Cranthorpe; it is *tout-à-fait dans son genre*."

So apparently thought Mrs. Cranthorpe when she saw the creation, paraded by the proud and peerless Miss Stoner.

"Oh! Madame Jules, I *never* saw anything so wholly fascinating! Why didn't I see this before I got the tobacco velvet? Oh! it was *cruel* of you!"

"But I come from finishing this costume now, this minute. How could I show it to madame before? Madame must have the two *velours, voilà!*"

"Oh! if you knew what a scolding I got last night from Mr. Cranthorpe. He said I was ruining him with my dress bills; he did, really." This with the sweetest smile.

"Oh! Monsieur will not be sorry when he sees Madame looking more charming, more *élégante* than all the others. He will say: '*Eh bien! ça valait bien la peine.*' You tell him, when Madame Jules created this costume she had in her head and in her heart—Mrs. Cranthorpe. *C'est créé pour Madame*. You shall see it on yourself before you try the tea-gown, *tout-de-suite*."

She saw. She walked twice up and twice down before the colossal mirror, and was practically lost.

"And what is the price?" she asked, with a slight acceleration of the pulses.

"Forty-five guineas," said Madame without moving a muscle.

"Oh! good gracious!"

"But Madame knows that the costume is worth twice forty-five guineas; only for Madame, because she is an *artiste* in her *toilettes*, because she has a figure that would *avantager* the picturesque—"

"Well, let me try on the tea-gown, and I'll think," she said.

And what she thought, whilst Madame and her assistant pivoted round her, draping lace, trying effects, and discarding one inspiration for another, was that, if she could persuade dear Betty to take that tobacco velvet off her hands (at a reduced price, of course) she could sell the horrible turquoise and diamond brooch from Aunt Laura, and pay for this new gown without letting Teddy know anything about it. Not letting Teddy know anything about it was a favourite mode of procedure with her; it led to dreadful scenes, of course, now and again, when cats slipped out of bags, but on the whole, she argued, it averted scenes more dreadful and more frequent.

"Well, I shall go home," was all she said to Madame Jules at the end of that exhausting but satisfactory fitting, "and tell my husband all about it. I shall ask him to give it to me now as a Christmas present. You must keep the gown for me till this afternoon, and, if he says I may have it, I'll come back at about—er—two o'clock, and probably walk off in it to Lady Portlake's wedding. There! Of course, you know this wedding is to be the event of the week. The best gowns will be in all the papers. I shall *make* him say 'Yes,' so mind you keep it for me."

Madame Jules was most agreeable. Anything to please such an old customer; but longer than this afternoon she could not promise to reserve a "creation" that would at once be desired by every one who saw it.

And so the matter was left.



"'And what is the price?' she asked, with a slight acceleration of the pulses."

Mrs. Cranthorpe jumped into her electric brougham, and drove straight to her sister Betty's. Betty was the dearest fool in the world, and could be made to do anything.

Meanwhile, Madame Jules was already busy with Lady Shrewsford, who harboured the theory that Jules was the only woman out of Paris who could make her look three inches smaller than she really was, in all the right places. It broke Madame's heart to have to wrestle with a figure of such proportions, but *que voulez-vous?* She was a lady who brought the right people. To-day, for instance, "I am sendin' a charming little woman to you," she explained, as soon as the removal of the new bodice allowed her to breathe, "a little American. She wants to take a Jules gown back to New York with her. You'll have to give her somethin' very lovely, and quick, too. She sails on Friday."

Madame threw up her plump, cream-coloured hands. Oh! why did not her ladyship come a little earlier? This was *djâ* Tuesday, and she was so busy now—such a *quantité* of orders—all wanted quick, quick! It was impossible—*impossible* to make anything fresh.

"Well, you must do your best, or give her somethin' you've got," said her ladyship placidly. "Let me have mine on Thursday, anyhow. Come along, Toots," and the Pekingese was squeezed into billows of sable, and whirled away to a luncheon party, which he loathed.

Any one can foresee what occurred. The charming American came twenty minutes later, ran a frost-bright eye over the *chiffon velours couleur teint de Créole* with encrustations, etc., etc., guessed on the high F that there was nothing much more elegant than that, this side of heaven, insisted on trying it on (and never mind the other silly woman, who was *not* sailing on Friday, and could easily get another), fell madly in love with herself, reckoned forty-five guineas was dirt cheap, and she would give fifty if that would settle the matter, and so effectually crumpled up Madame's limp sense of honour that she was allowed to write the cheque for it then and there, with one of Madame's infernally bad pens, and was about to walk away in it, when Mrs. Cranthorpe's electric brougham drew up again at the kerb.

She was shown into the fitting-room at the moment when Madame was shaking

her blue-black head and saying, "Oh! she will not return," and the fair American was getting a purchase of the chiffon velours skirt tail with triumphant vivacity.

"One moment, please," said Mrs. Cranthorpe, a trifle pale. And an unpleasant scene ensued. Mrs. Cranthorpe insisted on her rights in tones of icy politeness, and kept her teeth in them. The American denied them with much good-humour and some ill-timed witticisms. Madame stood with the cheque in her hand, and most of the blood to her head, defending herself with a volley of inaccuracies in her native tongue.

The final suggestion came from the American.

"Well, look here, I'll tell you what I'm willing to do, although I've *paid* for the gown, mind, and made it mine by law. I'll let you have the skirt' (she pronounced it 'skoit') and get my dressmaker in New York to make me another like it, and I'll keep the mantle——"

Madame shrieked. "What! You will divide the *mantau* from the *jupe* and kill the whole *costume!*"

Mrs. Cranthorpe bit her lip. "Don't be afraid, Madame Jules," she said; "I will give her the whole thing and never see it again, sooner than have such a work of art destroyed."

"Aha! There speak the *artiste*—the true *artiste!* This *mantau* was created for this *jupe*. No one shall dare to separate them. It is a crime. Madame would never have suggested *un tel Vandalisme*. Madame shall have this costume, *coûte que coûte!*" She tore the cheque across and across with dramatic action. "*Et pour vous, madame,*" bowing towards the American with a magnificent shrug, "I can only say: *Je regrette beaucoup.*"

That ended it. Nothing would move her.

The American sailed for New York without a Jules in her colossal trunks, and Mrs. Cranthorpe was mentioned in the notices of the Portlake wedding as being "quite one of the most artistically garbed, in a gown of *chiffon velours, couleur,*" etc.

Betty was there in an ill-fitting tobacco velvet, looking like a cheap cigar.

And somewhere off Tottenham Court Road a jeweller was removing some turquoises and diamonds from their setting.

Of course Teddy knew nothing about it, or he would have quoted the story of Solomon and the baby, inevitably.