

# The Wedding Eve;

Or, Married to a Fairy.

## CHAPTER III.

Long before Nicholas Wray awoke on the following morning, I was up and away on my journey.

As long as I live I shall remember every detail of that journey. The rain came down in torrents, making amends for the exceptionally dry early summer.

On Tuesday I had to be back again to Equine Lodge to a literary breakfast, and later on to a concert.

In Lythinge there resided a local "vet," a blacksmith who cut human hair or shod horses indiscriminately, but was reported to have too heavy a hand for the more delicate operation of shaving.

An old Saxon church, with short, square tower and gray, lichen-covered walls, crowned the summit of a grassy hill, at the foot of which, in the days of the Roman invasion, the sea washed the walls of a massive castle.

From the quiet churchyard above, where pine-trees, rattling in the tempestuous wind which followed the rain, fringed the outer edge of the steep descent, I stood for over an hour gazing over the wide-spreading marshes to the angry line of sea beyond.

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## CHAPTER IV.

In one respect my friend Collars had misinformed me. The Rose and Crown Inn, Lythinge, made no pretence of calling itself a hotel.

It was a one-story building in two wings. The one which contained the chief entrance—the bar, two small parlors, and eight bedrooms.

Here I sat for some time, opening the windows, and letting the strong wind blow up from the harbor and hit her in the neighborhood to get up an appetite for the inevitable ham and eggs supper.

The air was laden with the scent of hay after the recent heavy rain; down the grassy cliff-side fat, Kentish sheep and lambs were contentedly munching the short herbage.

At this moment, and indeed must, sound the heart of discontent in such a spoiled child of fortune as I was then esteemed. But, although I would not own it, it was the thought of my forthcoming loveless marriage that stuck in my throat.

This boisterous wind gave me just the sense of physical fighting I wanted in my troubled state of mind. I wanted to feel the sand prickling my cheeks and eyes, and as I drew nearer the long line of dull yellowish-gray fringed with seething white, my lips grew wet and salt with the spray on the sea.

Afternoon deepened into evening as I wandered between the lines of sand-dunes and the waves, until a very keen country hunger made me turn inland again, and struggle in the teeth of the wind up the rugged cliff-side toward the church tower.

To the last day of my life I shall remember the picture which presented itself before my charmed eyes as I gazed at the vivid orange light from the western sky suffused the room, striking through to the opaque masses of blackish-gray cloud on the land side.

This I thought before I had seen her face. But when she suddenly turned and confronted me in her light-footed dance, and the sunset shone in her tangled fair hair, glanced along her little white teeth, nestled in the dimples about her mouth, and swam in the liquid clearness of her eyes, she was no longer a girl, indeed, I realized that this exquisite embodiment of grace and gladness was a woman in the first flush of her youth; a woman so lovely, so pure, and sweet to look at, that I held my breath as I gazed upon her, and thanked Heaven that I had lived to behold her.

Later on I realized that she was poorly, even shabbily, dressed in a gown of gray cotton, very short and rather unbecomingly by her own hands.

I have always intensely loved dancing, and have seen all the great step-dancers and ballet-dancers of my time, but I have never seen, and I never shall see anything so spontaneous, so joyous and dainty, as this girl's movements.

I hardly know how long I knelt on the stairs watching her, when a creaking of the ancient woodwork drew her attention

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BLACK, GREEN OR MIXED

to me. She bounded to the door, pushed it open, and caught me before I had time to escape. I had expected that she would be either shy or angry, but she was neither.

"I didn't know any one was there," she said. "Can you play the piano?"

"I could play a little by ear, and I crossed to the piano. The young girl flew there by my side, opened it for me, and leaped over me, humming still, while I picked flowing over my coat-sleeve as she watched my fingers.

She was not in the least self-conscious or shy. She treated me rather as if she were a child, and when I struck the notes she indicated, she turned a lovely, glowing face up close to mine in evident delight, and clasped her hands.

Seen thus close, there was no flaw in her bewildering prettiness. Her features were small and neat, her nose being short and straight, and her laughing lips curled and red as a rosebud carved in coral.

Presently, as I mastered the tune, she sprang to her feet and began to dance again, inventing her own steps with marvelous grace and dexterity.

She grew tired at last, and stopped, rosy-red as the sunset itself. She slid into a kneeling position by one of the open windows, and supporting herself upon her elbows, she flushed cheeks in her hands, looked out toward the sea.

"All red like fire. I do like a red sunset all over the sky like that. It makes me feel warm and happy."

"You are hot with dancing," I said, assuming a fatherly and reproving tone. "You ought not to run the risk of taking a chill in the evening air."

"Don't be a lark, isn't it?" she asked. "That's why I love going to church. I sing the hymns as loud as ever I can, and it makes me feel good and lively."

"There was something pathetic in the thin, sweet voice, which had not yet lost its childlike quality, and in the frank confidence with which she gazed up into my face.

"Don't be a lark, isn't it?" she asked. "That's why I love going to church. I sing the hymns as loud as ever I can, and it makes me feel good and lively."

"I'm so tired," she murmured, "and so hungry. I do wish father would come."

"When do you expect to see him?" she asked. "He's over at the Red Lion in West Sandhythe. I left him there because the landlord wouldn't have me, and I know Mrs. Nokes here. We've tramped fifteen miles to-day, and she hasn't had any time to eat since nine o'clock this morning. But, if they like father's recitations and begin toasting him, I don't know when he'll get here."

"Why don't you order some dinner for yourself?" I asked. "I haven't any money, and father mayn't have any by the time he comes here. Mrs. Nokes knows us, and don't give credit. That's why I got in a bit of practice at my dancing, so as to be ready to work for our supper if anybody comes in."

"Do you work at dancing for your living?" I asked, feeling suddenly a great pity creep into my heart for the fragile, half-formed little thing kneeling there so close to me, with the fading light making an aureole of her yellow hair.

She nodded. "But it isn't much of a living," she admitted. "Mother was a clergyman's daughter, and she made father promise I shouldn't be made to dance on the stage. That was when she was dying, ten years ago. I'd love to be on the stage," she continued, her bright eyes growing brighter still.

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Her under lip quivered as she spoke. In spite of her evident lack of education, and her defective grammar, there was no trace of vulgarity about her. She was as unaffected and free from self-consciousness with a stranger as though she had been all her life accustomed to the best society. Her countenance changed as often and as openly as a child's, and she turned to me now

with a look of appeal in her blue eyes that was irresistible.

"I'm so hungry," she whispered plaintively. "You told me you dance for your living," I said. "Now I love dancing, and I have never seen anyone dance more prettily than you. I was watching you a long time from the stairs before you saw me, and you must let me pay for the pleasure."

(To be continued.)

## BUTLER'S STORY.

Ellis Parker Butler some years ago wrote a story which he thought would fit into the scheme of one of the smaller magazines. He sent the story to the editor. It was printed. Failing to receive payment, he made an inquiry. There came a cheque



Ellis Parker Butler.

for \$2. The humorist returned this with the message, "You probably need this more than I do." To which the editor replied: "Thank you. We do."

## THE ASTONISHED LAIRD.

Acted Immediately.

Dr. Abernethy once visited a crusty old laird who was laid up with gout. He wanted to get out with his gun, and was in a temper, and, while the doctor was looking at his foot, asked complacently, "Why don't you strike at the root and get me better?"

Soberly the doctor got up, took his walking-stick, and smashed to pieces a decanter of wine which was standing on the table. The astonished laird sprang up and demanded an explanation. "Oh," said the doctor, "I am only striking at the root!"

## Came to Her Mistress.

The day before she was to be married an old rustic servant came to her mistress and entrusted her savings to her keeping. "Why should I keep your money for you? I thought you were going to be married," said the mistress. "So I am, ma'am; but you don't suppose I'm going to keep all this money in the house with that strange man about the place?"



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