

The Wedding Eve;

Or, Married to a Fairy.

CHAPTER V.—(Continued).

Nicholas Wray, who admired her more than any man I had ever met, once made a sketch of her while she talked to another artist in his studio. Nicholas had the faculty of bringing out, in those outline "impressions" of his, just the qualities in his sitters which they would wish to conceal from the outer world, and in this sketch of Madge the restless sadness underlying the surface brilliancy of her nature was strongly emphasized. She hated that sketch. I knew, although she pretended to be charmed with it. It was put away somewhere as soon as it came into her possession, and no one had had a chance of seeing it since. But now as I sat in Lythinge churchyard by moonlight, and looked upon her face by the light of memory, its inherent sadness became for the first time clear to me, contrasted with the happiest face I had ever seen.

Lady Margaret's image faded in rings of tobacco-smoke, and in its place I recalled that of Lilith Saxon, iridescent as she danced in the golden sunset rays. I could feel the light touch of her lips upon my cheek yet, and the ripple of her laughter seemed to fill the air about me. Poor little half-starved marsh-fairy! Every nerve in my body tingled with hot indignation as I thought of her father's cowardly cruelty toward her.

"Mother was a lady, and I'm sorry I'm not one, too."

In her simplicity and frankness, and her entire absence of shyness and self-consciousness, she was already, although she knew it not, far better bred in manner than many a slangy little school-girl of my acquaintance, upon whose education hundreds of pounds had been spent by her parents, coarsened, spoiled, and spoiled of patience and content, of gaiety and gratitude, and a sweet sunniness of temper were hers, together with a little grace of movement, which distinguished her from the staid, steepled, stooping-shouldered, tightly shod girls of her age in my own rank of life, whom I occasionally met, but whom I invariably shunned. As a rule, young girls from twelve to seventeen are all self-consciousness, awkwardness, empty-headedness, vanity, and giggles; too old to be treated as children, too young to be talked to as women, and at their worst as regards looks, pinching their waists and stealing their elder sisters' face-powder, prone to pimples, red elbows, and red hands, and given to over-ornament in the matter of crude-colored bows and ribbons.

To fall in love with one of these half-fledged things could scarcely occur to a sane man; but were Lilith Saxon a year or two older, I could well imagine a man in any rank of life making an utter fool of himself for such a she.

My vision had become a reality, for there before me, as though evolved out of tobacco-clouds, she stood, a tall, slender, childlike form in shadowy gray garments, with the moonlight falling upon her bare head and silvering her yellow hair.

She laughed as I remained motionless for a moment, staring at her in silence. "Did you think I was a ghost?" she asked, in that weak, sweet voice of hers. "I woke up a few minutes ago, and found it was ten o'clock and father hadn't come home. There were some laboring men making a noise in the bar, and Mrs. Nokes was cross, and told me to go off to bed. But I felt worried about father, and I thought I would like to speak to you about it, as there wasn't anybody else as would listen to me. I do hope no harm has come to him. I al-

ways get frightened when he's late like this, because when he takes a glass too much, his temper is so bad, and the least thing that's said will make him quarrel. I do hope he's all right, and won't be very cross when he comes home—comes here, I mean. Haven't you any settled home?" I asked.

Lilith shook her head. "Not what you would call a settled home," she said. "There's a shop in Rye kept by a cousin of father's, where we go and stay sometimes when father has put by a pound or two, but that doesn't happen often. My! doesn't the moon look lovely shimmering over the sea? And the marshes look so peaceful here and there. I wish we were on the sands. Walking there at night is just beautiful when they are firm and crisp and the sea has let them. I've run along them in my bare feet by the hour at night sometimes, when we've been very badly off and haven't known where to go, and father's been cross because he enjoyed it so. I've screamed with delight sometimes to feel the cool waves crawling round my feet in the moonlight, while he's been swearing because the public houses were closed, and the night wind put his pipe out! I've said then I shouldn't like to be a man, although I'm thirsty and wanting pipes or beer. It seems so much cheaper and simpler to be a girl."

She had seated herself on a mound of turf not far from where I sat. The unconventional proceeding did not seem to trouble her for a moment, and, indeed, what could social laws mean to this light-hearted little wayside wildflower? I had not the heart to explain them to her, in any case, and together we listened for some seconds in silence to the wind rustling through the fringe of pine-trees that bordered the churchyard, and stared in silence across the marshes to the moon-flooded sea.

At last Lilith drew a long, sighing breath.

"When I die," she said, "I want to lie here. I've seen graveyards in towns—dreadful places, all railings, and boards saying you mustn't pick the flowers, and all that. But think how quietly one could sleep here, with only the sheep-bells or the church-bells to bother one, and long, long grass to keep one warm in winter, and cool in summer. I had a little sister older than me. She died three years ago, and her grave is in a London cemetery. From a flower-girl I begged some roses that were a bit faded, and put them, in an old jam-pot I got out of our landlady, on the earth over my sister's head. I wonder if she knew she was very fond of flowers. A cold carried her off, just as it did mother. Father was getting a living teaching elocution during the day, then—most to servants who wanted to go on the stage, and Bessie and I used to go out together at night and sing in the streets when it was quite dark. She used to sing beautiful, high and sweet like a bird. But one winter she got a cough, and in the spring she couldn't shake it off. She said, 'I wish I were let the rain in; we owed the landlady something, and she wanted to get rid of us, and wouldn't have it mended. Bessie was fond of father, and wouldn't worry him, she said, though she knew how thin she got and big her eyes came to look. People gave her more money at first when they heard her cough, but coughing took away her voice at last, and then father had to go out alone, and Bessie made nearly as much money. She called me to her one night—I remember it so well—and told me to be a good girl, and to try my best to take care of father, and never to forget her and mother if I was ever tempted to do anything wrong. And while I was listening and crying, and not understanding her, she stopped talking, and her hands grew cold, and I knew she was dead.

"It did seem so strange to have her there, and to see her as never get an answer. She'd always been so kind to me, and so ready to kiss and pet me, it seemed awful to have her lying so still and cold, and never taking notice of me. Father went on drearily at first when I told him Bessie was dead. He raved and stamped and acted and quoted a lot of Shakespeare. Then he went out, and didn't come back for hours. He had been drinking all the time and had spent all our money. At ten o'clock he came in, and then father found out I could dance, and was always making me practise. I had to make up to him for his lost ones, he said. You see, mother used to give lessons in French and music, and do needlework for the shops. She is buried in Rye—father's cousin lent the money for that—but I want to be buried here, high up and quiet, where I can hear the sea."

More than once as she spoke tears had started to my eyes. The sordid, pitiful details of that sad childhood, the picture her simple words conjured up of the lovely, blue-eyed child, watching through the long hours in those dreary lodgings, by the dead body of her sister, and of the drooping roses she had begged from a flower-girl to place upon Bessie's grave—all these things affected me as no tale of sorrow had ever done before. A passionate longing for me to protect her from the dangers of her wandering life, and the callous cruelty and greed of her unworthy father. But how could a man of my age interfere in the affairs of a lovely child, and stray many years his junior? I could do nothing. I could not even hint to her of the strength of chivalrous love and pity with which she inspired me; and even while I was seeking for words in which to express the depth of my sympathy, her mood changed, and she was laughing gaily.

"Mrs. Nokes was so shocked and angry when she heard I'd had tea with you. She said you'd complained to her, but I knew that wasn't true, and I told her so."

"Of course it wasn't true, Lilith."

"Of course not. Then she said I ought to be ashamed of myself, and I was too old to be bothering gentlemen to take notice of me."

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen next month. How old are you, Mr. Hervey?"

"Twenty-seven next month—nearly old enough to be your father, you see."

"Oh, no; father's nearly fifty. I've never met anybody so easy to talk to as you. Does everybody you meet want to tell you everything, I wonder?"

"Not that I know of, Lilith, the grass you are sitting on is damp, and it is quite time you went to bed. Your father will certainly be angry if he comes to the inn and finds you are out."

"That's true. I suppose I had better go in," she said, rising to her feet. "Oh, I've been sitting on a grave all this time! I wish I had known I wouldn't have done it. Is it unlucky?"

"You superstitious child! It will be very unlucky if you take a chill from the damp grass."

"I hate leaving here. It grows calmer and prettier every moment now the wind is going down again. You will see me to the inn, won't you? To-morrow we may be on the tramp again, and you are

so kind, and I like you so much I can't bear to think of saying good-by to you."

I shall see you in the morning when you leave. Come, Lilith! The dew is falling heavily and the mists are rising over the marsh. Come!"

She was lingering in the churchyard, but when I stretched out my hand she at once slipped hers into it, a very small, very thin hand, the skin rather rough from constant exposure, but a dear little hand for all that. I clasped my fingers over it, and led her into the highroad, between fields of barley, that led to the inn.

As we turned a corner, walking thus hand in hand, and talking like old friends, a long, dark shadow fell across our path. Lilith trembled and hung back, half hiding herself behind me. "At last I've found you!" a thick voice exclaimed, as the shuffling figure of a tall, broadly built man in shabby, weather-stained clothes, blue-eyed, gray-bearded, and clearly the worse for drink, lurched out full view in a very small, very thin hand, the skin rather rough from constant exposure, but a dear little hand for all that. I clasped my fingers over it, and led her into the highroad, between fields of barley, that led to the inn.

CHAPTER VI.

In Horatio Saxon's manner, accentuated by his half-inebriated condition, was a very evident trace of the footlights, a melodramatic over-emphasis, which, as afterward learned, had grown to characterize the man's tones and gestures in every situation in life.

At the same time it was clear that he was extremely angry, and the sudden snatch he made at his daughter's arm would have hurt her had I not interposed to ward off his angry grasp.

Then he turned upon me in genuine fury, but still tinged with theatrical exaggeration.

"And who are you, pray, that you should interfere between father and child? Some London cad, fresh from his shop, coming here in his best clothes and palming himself off as a gentleman! How dare you speak to that young lady? Do you know that I am her father? And you, you sly, ungodly mix, what do you mean by such forward, immodest conduct? Leave that fellow at once and come to me as I bid you."

He lurched and swayed in his walk, so that every moment I feared that he might overbalance and fall over the heap of loose stones bordering the roadway, which was in course of being mended. The spot was absolutely deserted but for our three selves, and in the vivid moonlight the intense stillness seemed ghastly and unnatural.

Lilith was close behind me, and I felt her tremble as Saxon made another lunge in her direction with his heavy oaken stick. Perhaps it would have been better had she gone to him quietly at once, for her hesitation seemed to work him into a fury.

Roughly thrusting me on one side, he gripped her shoulder, and dragging the child toward him, shook her violently from side to side. A low cry of pain and fear broke from her lips, followed by the thud of a heavy blow from his clenched fist upon her shoulder. At the sound I lost all self-control, and, hurling myself upon the brute, I compelled him to loose his hold on her.

Sobbing with terror, Lilith ran on a few steps ahead, and old Saxon turned to vent his fury upon me.

With a volley of oaths he sprang toward me, brandishing his stick above his head. I was young and active and easily dodged the heavy blow he directed at my skull. Missing me, he lost his balance, lurched forward, staggered, and tripping against the stones by the wayside, fell heavily, face downward on the ground.

For few seconds I waited for him to rise and renew the attack; but, finding that he did not move, I went to his assistance, and with some difficulty raised

him from the ground. Blood was flowing freely from a gaping wound in the temple, made by contact with a sharp flint just where his head had struck it. His eyes were open, and his distorted, purple face still wore the look of rage I had last seen there. But he offered no resistance to my touch, and lay like a log in my arms as I knelt by his side.

(To be continued.)

MANY STARVING IN JAPAN.

Famine District Covers Over a Million Acres.

The famine district of Hokkaido, in the north of Japan, covers more than 1,000,000 acres which are devoted to rice culture and general farming. The loss has amounted to about \$10,000,000, and 66,000 persons are in need of help, according to an official report. It continues: "For the last three years the farmers have had poor crops, and the failure on account of the frost this year leaves them in a pitiable condition."

"Men are subsisting on straw, the bark of trees, acorns, and buckwheat chaff powdered and made into gruel. Mothers living on such food have been unable to feed their babies, and have made a milk substitute out of the hulls of rice, which they beat into a powder and mix with boiling water. The young men have left home in search of work, while the aged and the children are left behind to freeze or starve unless outside relief is brought to them."

A sad story of the famine district is told by the Rev. Chigan Takahashi, a missionary. A tenant in Yubari district, whose wife was dying from starvation and illness, stole a bale of potatoes from his landlord.

The wife was grateful for the kindness of her husband, but said: "I do not wish to live any longer

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if it must be on stolen food," and urged him to return the goods.


The husband, conscience stricken, was carrying back the potatoes when he met the land owner. He confessed his theft and asked forgiveness.

The landowner was impressed by the sad story and not only forgave the offense, but made a gift of the potatoes to the farmer. The happy man returned home—and found his wife hanging dead. The husband then hanged himself.

The Japanese have organized a national relief association.

An Extraordinary Turtle.

A correspondent writes that a tremendous turtle, believed to be the largest on record, weighing more than 1,000 pounds, has been caught on the shores of the Isla de Flores, off Monte Video (Uruguay). Eight men were necessary to carry it on to the beach. It was exhibited for two days on the Prado beach, and afterwards on the Ramirez and other beaches at Monte Video. It is proposed to present the shell to the museum at Monte Video.




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