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The Bridal Eve

(Continued from Page 2.)

"I see that the paragraph means to say that the Duke of Beresleigh is about to marry Lady Etheridge."
 "Exactly; and that is just what the old duchess intended when she intended to become but a guest at Lady Lester's, with so much asperity that Sir Vincent, raising his eyebrows, inquired, with some surprise:
 "Well, my dear, and why should the manoeuvres of the duchess in favor of her son discompose you?"
 "Sir Vincent, we also have a son who must make an eligible marriage."
 "Oh—h—h! I understand you, Lady Etheridge, with her vast estates, would have been a very desirable part for Ruthven. But this atrocious old ogress of a manoeuvring dowager has been beforehand with us," said the baronet, laughing, and then adding: "But never mind, my dear; let us hope it is not true; we have nothing to ground a belief in, but a newspaper paragraph, which is in itself a tremendous thing in existence. It is generally safe to believe just the opposite of that which it states."

"That is my only hope; and it is just possible that I may meet the duchess and this young baroness at Carleton House to-night; I have ordered Ruthven to attend me thither—and here he comes," said her ladyship, as the door opened, and gave admittance to Mr. Ruthven Lester.
 "We succeed to your diplomacy, I would give the duchess a long start, and back your cool, clear head at 'any odds against all her grace's hot haste,'" said the baronet, smiling.
 "And, by the way, Sir Vincent, if you should go out before I rise in the morning, I wish you would leave me a check for a thousand pounds! I must give a party for this young baroness."

"Ah, these tickets in the matrimonial lottery cost something, I see," thought Sir Vincent, as he gallantly handed his lady to her carriage.
 At Carleton House that evening the beauty, fashion and celebrity of the court and city were assembled to assist at one of the most brilliant entertainments of the season, the supper of the Princess of Wales, with the amiable and unfortunate Princess Caroline of Brunswick. It was a scene of almost Oriental magnificence, splendor and luxury. Not a seraglio on an Eastern bazaar, or the sensual paradise of a follower of Mahomet, could have presented a larger or more varied collection of hours than were gathered together in the royal drawing-rooms of Carleton House. Above this crowd of brilliant beauties and delicate blondes, no less than our rival queens of beauty contended for the crown. These were the Duchesses of Devonshire and Gordon and the two Misses Gunning. But these ladies had been for many seasons the admired of all admirers; and though the lustre of their bloom had scarcely commenced to fall, the charm of their novelty was certainly dimmed.

Lady Lester made a point of arriving late. The rooms were quite full. Arriving paid her respects to the Prince and Princess of Wales, leaving on the arm of her son, she made a tour of the rooms, in search of the Duchess of Beresleigh and her party. In vain, for neither the duchess nor the Ladies Wardour were anywhere to be seen. Though constantly nodding and smiling, and exchanging compliments with her fashionable friends, and longing to make inquiries, she forbore, from that deep policy that taught her what great results sometimes spring from trifles; for to ask for the Duchess of Beresleigh would turn the conversation upon her grace and her grace's beautiful guest, the wealthy young baroness, and start—no one could foresee—how many rival schemes to entrap the heiress.

"How is it?" said Lady Lester to her son, "the duchess will not bring her here for two reasons that are not very apparent to me; the first is, that this profligate Prince of Wales, who is in no degree reformed by his marriage with a woman whom he cannot appreciate, who has besides grown weary of his old flame, must not be permitted to see Lady Etheridge until she is secured to the duke; and the second reason is that the young baroness is evidently intended to make her debut in society upon the occasion of her first presentation to the Majesties. Consequently, I cannot issue tickets for my party until I know when the next drawing-room is to be held."

And, wearied with her fruitless promenade, Lady Lester turned into an alcove shaded and perfumed with many bouquets and wreaths of flowers, seated herself within its cool shadows, and said:
 "You may go and leave me here to rest for half an hour, Ruthven, and then order the carriage and return for me."
 The young man departed, nothing loth, and the lady, idly fanning herself, fell into meditation.
 She was soon interrupted by the approach of two persons. With the secretiveness and curiosity of her nature, she withdrew into the deepest shadows of the alcove, where she was quite concealed by the branches of an orange tree.

The two persons entered the alcove. The first she recognized as the Prince of Wales, the second as one of his gentlemen in waiting, known even then as the confidant of his pleasures and vices.
 "You perceive that the duchess has not appeared here this evening with the beauty," said the prince.
 "No, your Royal Highness."
 "But then the Duchess of Beresleigh never was a habitue of Carleton House. You have seen this new beauty?"
 "Yes, your Royal Highness."
 "And are her charms as great as they have been represented?"
 "Your Royal Highness may be assured she is a prize worth all the trouble

that we shall have to earn her. She is about twenty-four years of age, her form is of medium height and beautifully proportioned, though not yet so rounded as it will be in a few years. Her complexion is as fair as a lily and as blooming as her features of a delicate Grecian cast. Her eyes are of a dark, brilliant hue. Her cheeks are roses, her lips rosebuds. And her hair, of a bright, warm, golden hue, surrounds this beautiful face with a halo. She is not only a beauty of the first order, but more than that, a beauty of your Royal Highness's own exquisite taste," said the minion, with a truculent bow.

"Mechanisms, you have succeeded in exciting my interest in this fair creature, and now I shall rely on your skill and address in procuring an interview with her."
 "Your Royal Highness knows that I am ever keenly alive to your wishes, and active in their execution. This Hesperian fruit is guarded by a terrible dragon in the shape of a duchess. I do not at all despair of plucking it for your Royal Highness."
 "And remember that a prince's gratitude waits on your success."

The parties then left the alcove, and mingled with the company.
 "Oh, the wretches! the atrocious wretches!" exclaimed Lady Lester, emerging from her concealment, and quite aroused by her usual sympathy by the discovery of a plot that threatened not only the ruin of her own plans, but the total destruction of an innocent girl. "The most heinous wretches! And what a fate is this of the friendless young baroness, exposed alike to the matrimonial manoeuvres of an old dowager, and the pursuit of a profligate prince! I must find some way of rescuing her from these perils," concluded her ladyship, highly indignant at the enormity of others, yet in her sweetest and most unobtrusive regard to the young baroness were quite as mercenary as those ascribed to the duchess, if not as dishonorable as those ascribed to the prince.

The return of Ruthven Lester put an end to her soliloquy. She took the arm of her son and left the palace.
 In the hall of Lester House she encountered Sir Vincent, who had just returned from a protracted debate in the House of Commons.
 "Well, has your ladyship inveigled—I beg your pardon—fascinated this little rustic beauty?" inquired the baronet.
 "I have not even seen her. Trust the duchess for that. I might have known it. Their party was not at Carleton House," said her ladyship, pettishly.
 "Very proper! Carleton House is precisely the last place in the kingdom to which I should introduce a young beauty," replied the baronet.
 "Oh, it was not an objection, but an objection to the society to be found at Carleton House that caused the duchess to absent herself with her charge; it was, I presume, with the intention that the young heiress should make her debut in the drawing-room of their Majesties."

"Quite right," said the baronet, smiling.
 "And now, Sir Vincent, I must wish you good-night and retire," said her ladyship, with a cool bow of her fair head, as she floated past and ascended the stairs to her dressing-room, where she found Mademoiselle Jeanette, the ministering priestess of that temple of vanity, in attendance.
 Lady Lester sank indolently into her dressing-chair, lifted her languid eyes to the mirror before her, and started to see the careworn look upon her usually calm face.
 "I protest a few more hours of such unpleasant excitement as I have had this evening will do me more harm than a de-aged aspect. I really cannot afford, at my age, to make myself anxious on Ruthven's account. He must take his chance with others. And yet it would be a great pity to let this rich old barony of Swinburne slip from my grasp. For the want of little exertion on my part. Well, it is no use to lose my sleep with thinking. The day is long enough for that, Jeanette!"
 "Oui, milady."
 "Bring me some of those sedative drops; make my chamber dark; and remember in the morning to be in attendance here, to prevent any one making the least noise near my door. I must sleep for twelve hours, Jeanette."

"Oui, certainement, madame," replied the obsequious femme de chambre, as she assisted her mistress to divest herself of the ball dress and prepare for repose.

CHAPTER XV.
 The Duchess of Beresleigh was a very different woman from that which the jealousy and suspicions of Lady Lester had represented her to be. Her title of "Grace" was no misnomer. She was one of nature as well as of society's nobleswomen—one whose personal excellence might have redeemed her whole order from the charge of irrational pride and hard selfishness. She educated her sons and daughters in the same high and holy principles that governed her own conduct.
 They had lived mostly in Beresleigh Court, which adjoined Swinburne Chase, but the families had never been intimate because the duchess had deeply disapproved the character and conduct of the late baron as well as that of the guardian he had left over his heiress; and, in fact, soon after the death of the baron, the Duke of Beresleigh had been appointed resident minister at one of the continental courts, where, at the end of five years, he died.

The duchess and her family spent their first year of mourning retirement on the Continent, and then returned to Beresleigh Court.
 It was but a few weeks after their settlement at home that Dr. Seymour called upon the duchess, and commended to her kind offices the new Baroness Etheridge of Swinburne, and, in answer to the inquiries of her grace, related the strange discovery that had thrown down one young girl from rank and wealth to poverty and dependence, and elevated another from insignificance and obscurity to fortune and power. The worthy doctor spoke of both these young persons with the highest praise of their conduct under their opposite ordeals of sudden prosperity and sudden adversity.

The duchess was at once interested in the new claimant for her neighborly attentions; and no less so in the high-souled woman who had so promptly resigned her fortune and position, and so nobly sustained her cruel reverses.
 Her grace promised to call on the new Lady Etheridge, and secretly resolved also, as soon as she should go up to town, to seek out Laura Elmer.
 She kept her word, and took an early opportunity of visiting Swinburne Castle. The beauty, goodness and intelligence of the young baroness soon won the love and esteem of the duchess, and when a woman ever lived better able to judge of the characters of those with whom she was brought into contact, she was not far from the mark.

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visit between the Duchess and Lady Etheridge, her grace invited the young baroness to spend some weeks at Beresleigh Court.
 Rose accepted the invitation, and passed a month very pleasantly with her new friends.
 It was in the intimacy of daily intercourse that Rosamond learned to revere the lofty character of the duchess, and to love the amiable dispositions of the young Ladies Wardour.
 But there was another member of the family that interested the Rosamond far more than did the duchess and her daughters; this was, indeed, the present head of the house.

George, Duke of Beresleigh, was now in the thirty-third year of his age. To a very handsome person he united a most self-cultivated mind and an amiable heart.
 To his surprise and pleasure he found nothing underbred in the manner and nothing vulgar in the mind of this young beauty, and his early-made acquaintance; indeed, every day discovered new graces in her person and in her spirit; and the duke soon found admiration growing into a warmer and more permanent sentiment.
 "At thirty-three men are not so apt to act rashly from an impulse of admiration or affection as they are at ten years younger or ten years older than that age; consequently, the duke held his inclinations in check, and restricted his attentions to Rosamond within such limits of intellect and decorum as should be safe to both.
 Rosamond, on her part, began by admiring the son for his resemblance, in person and in character, to the mother whom she so deeply revered; next, she found herself under great pleasure in his society and conversation of the duke when he was present, and in thoughts and memories of him when he was absent; then her mind became more occupied with the future than with the past. The memory of her mother and her own fading form, and her heart like the black shadows of night. The hope of a higher and holier affection was dawning.

Rosamond seldom or never returned to the subject of Albert Hastings, alias William Lovel, and when she did, it was only to wonder how she could have honored him, first, with such a degree of love, and secondly, with such a degree of hate, when in fact the best and the worst that he deserved was simply just contempt.
 Still she was surprised and humiliated to find her affections going out to ward another object.
 "It is possible," she said to herself, "that my nature is so light as to change easily;" and she would seriously try to task, and try to come to my senses. In truth, it is quite time, since my thoughts are running upon one who has never requested me so to employ them.

A law, which Swinburne Castle went the young baroness, but not to remain there long.
 The Duchess of Beresleigh, with her family, was going to town for the season. She came over to Swinburne with the Duchess of Devonshire, and would take no denial.
 Rosamond, who could refuse the duchess nothing, after a feeble resistance, yielded. And accordingly it was arranged that Lady Etheridge of Swinburne should accompany them to town, and enter society under the auspices of the Duchess of Beresleigh.

The duke preceded the family by two or three weeks, in order to take his seat in the House of Lords, and give his vote and influence in favor of the bill which would give a title to the Baron of Swinburne was then before the peers. There was, however, scarcely a shadow of doubt upon the minds of any as to the final issue of the case. A few days previous to the commencement of the Duchess of Beresleigh's journey to London, the duke ran down to Somerset, and suddenly appeared at Beresleigh Court, with the news that the great case had been decided in favor of Rosamond Etheridge.

As within a few days of this day the duchess and her family, accompanied by Lady Etheridge, set out for London, and in due course of time arrive at their residence, Beresleigh House, Belgrave Square.

CHAPTER XVI.
 As soon as it was known that the Duchess of Beresleigh, with the young Ladies Wardour and the youthful heiress of Swinburne, was in town, a show of interest in the daily Beresleigh House. These her graces duly acknowledged by sending or leaving her own card at various residences of the callers.

Many morning callers were also made to her house by the Duchess of Devonshire, who she received alone, or with her daughters.
 Lady Etheridge was always invited. Numerous invitations to dinners, evening parties, balls, etc., arrived for the ladies of the family; but all these were politely declined, except such as referred to entertainments to be given after the first drawing-room of the season. In a word, the duchess had determined that her beautiful young guest should make her first entrance into society at the Royal Palace of St. James. With a woman's zest and a mother's zeal she superintended the preparation of a magnificent court dress for Lady Etheridge.

The important day arrived. Wishing upon this occasion to give her whole attention to her young protegee, the duchess resolved not to go, and to trust with all her daughters. Therefore, she decided that for once the Ladies Wardour should remain at home.
 As by her rank the Duchess of Beresleigh took precedence of all ladies, except the Duchesses of royal descent, it was proper that her grace should be early at the palace. The drawing-room was to be held from twelve to three.

At half-past eleven the duchess, in her court dress—a white satin skirt, a purple velvet jacket, a matching mantle, and a magnificent crown of diamonds and a plume of ostrich feathers—entered the dressing-room of her protegee, to inspect the toilet of the latter.
 "Beautiful, my dear," is not, "adorned the most."
 Rose, in her simple cottage dress, had been very pretty.
 Rose, in her court dress, was dazzlingly beautiful. Though a young maiden, yet a baroness in her own right, she wore a profusion of priceless and wearing brilliant jewels. The family diamonds had been reset for this occasion.

She wore a robe of white point lace over a white satin skirt, and a train of rich white brocade. Her hair was arranged in ringlets, and covered with a wreath of white rosebuds, glittering with the dew of small diamonds. Bouquets of the same flowers rested upon her bosom, looked up at her, and, as she turned, they gleamed on her dress. Her hair was adorned with a crown of diamonds and a plume of ostrich feathers. Her feet were clad in white satin slippers with diamond buckles; and she wore a crown of diamonds and a plume of ostrich feathers.

Excitement had given a more brilliant splendor to her blue eyes, and a brighter bloom to her rosy cheeks. The duchess gazed upon her with delight, commended the skill of Mademoiselle Gabrielle, the French dress-maker, and then turning to her protegee, said:
 "The carriage is announced, love, and it is quite time we were off."
 They descended to the hall, went out and entered the coach, and in a few minutes were rolling on toward St. James's Palace, where they arrived at twelve o'clock.

The place was thronged with coroneted carriages, filled with splendidly dressed visitors, waiting their turn to draw up before the gates. The coach of the duchess rolled into its place behind that of the Duchess of Devonshire, and in due time drew up before the palace doors.
 The duchess and her protegee alighted and entered the palace.
 Queen Charlotte had brought from her father's court such of the German love of solemn pomp. The outer halls and ante-rooms of St. James' were filled with officers of the household, in their gorgeous costumes, and with their badges of office.
 Leads upon the arm of the duchess, Lady Etheridge trembled, as many a novice has done before and since, under the overwhelming effect of royal state and magnificence. A few judicious words from the duchess reassured her, and they passed on to the drawing-room, that was already filled with a brilliant company.
 At the upper end of the room stood the royal party, consisting of the King and Queen, the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Duchess of York and Clarence, the Duchess of Devonshire, and the Princesses Augusta and Amelia. The Duchess of Norfolk was just in the act of paying her respects to royalty. The Duchess of Beresleigh took her place in the circle, and, while writing her name, quietly indicated to Lady Etheridge the most noted persons present.

First she named the members of the royal party, upon whom Rose gazed with a hushed veneration.
 "That very ordinary-looking old gentleman, my dear, is really the King. That very plain, elderly lady on his left is truly the Queen. That handsome, somewhat dissipated-looking man, on the left of her majesty, is the Prince of Wales. The unhappy-looking woman by his side is the new-married Caroline of Brunswick, the Princess of Wales. The young ladies on the right of his majesty are the Princesses Augusta and Amelia. The young gentlemen by their sides are the Dukes of York and Clarence, and the Duke of Devonshire, in voice so low as to be quite inaudible to any one except the interlocutor.
 "And those standing behind the royal party?" inquired Rose, in a subdued key.
 "They are the lords and ladies in waiting upon their majesties—Lord Aylesbury, the Duchess of Ancaster, Lady Holderness, Lady Lester, and Colonel Hastings."

At the naming of the last two Rose started, and changed color so visibly that the duchess turned and looked at her in silent inquiry.
 "Oh," said Rose, in a voice scarcely above her breath, "Colonel Hastings was the guardian of Laura Elmer when she was supposed to be the heiress of Swinburne; and Lady Lester is her present employer and patroness. The sudden sight of persons in such interesting relations with my dearest friend startled me."
 "Ah, I see," replied her grace, drawing the arm of her protegee within her own, and moving on toward the royal party.

And while the room seemed whirling around with Rose, the duchess paid her respects to their majesties, and presented the Baroness Etheridge of Swinburne.
 "Rose courted lowly, and blushed deeply, as she bowed over and kissed the hand that was offered to her salute.
 Her graceful embarrassment was, without the least mauvais honte, and did not detract from the interest of a loud murmur of admiration ran through the royal circle as the duchess and her beautiful protegee passed on. As they receded from the royal party, the subdued whisper of admiration which respect for majesty had restrained, grew more audible, and exclamations of:
 "How beautiful!"
 "How graceful!"
 "How elegant!"
 "This rising star will eclipse all the court beauties!" were heard all around.

And one baleful whisper reached the ears of the duchess.
 "Look, how the eyes of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales follow her. We shall have a new salutation, vice the Countess of Jersey, deposed."
 On hearing this wicked whisper, the import of which did not reach the intelligence of Rose's innocent nature, the duchess looked around haughtily, and silenced by a glance the unprincipled speaker, whom she recognized as an officer of the guard in attendance upon the prince's person.
 She passed on with her protegee through the crowded ante-rooms to the outer hall, and thence to her carriage.
 "You have made what is called a 'great sensation,' my love. Expect to be invited to the court balls, and everywhere else, as a matter of course. Situations will open up upon you. And now that you have, as in duty bound, paid your respects first to royalty, you are at liberty to enter freely into the gayeties of society. Go wherever you wish."

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ARRIVALS

60 From Toronto	5.00 a.m.
19 From Peterborough	8.00 a.m.
32 From Haliburton	8.55 a.m.
21 From Port Hope	9.10 a.m.
30 From Cobocook	10.10 a.m.
22 From Toronto	10.50 a.m.
35 From Port Hope	2.05 p.m.
42 From I. B. & O. Jct.	5.45 p.m.
23 From Port Hope	6.25 p.m.
54 From Whitby	7.30 p.m.
24 From Toronto	8.05 p.m.
56 From Whitby	8.45 p.m.
18 From Toronto	9.20 p.m.
1 From Belleville	9.45 p.m.

DEPARTURES

34 From Port Hope	6.00 a.m.
51 From Toronto	6.30 a.m.
10 From Belleville	7.20 a.m.
21 From Toronto	9.15 a.m.
22 From Port Hope	10.55 a.m.
43 From I. B. & O. Jct.	11.00 a.m.
55 From Whitby	11.05 a.m.
37 From Toronto	12.05 p.m.
28 From Port Hope	2.40 p.m.
25 From Toronto	6.35 p.m.
21 From Cobocook	6.50 p.m.
15 From Peterboro	9.23 a.m.
7 From Toronto	8.05 a.m.
61 From Belleville	8.15 p.m.

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And while the room seemed whirling around with Rose, the duchess paid her respects to their majesties, and presented the Baroness Etheridge of Swinburne.
 "Rose courted lowly, and blushed deeply, as she bowed over and kissed the hand that was offered to her salute.
 Her graceful embarrassment was, without the least mauvais honte, and did not detract from the interest of a loud murmur of admiration ran through the royal circle as the duchess and her beautiful protegee passed on. As they receded from the royal party, the subdued whisper of admiration which respect for majesty had restrained, grew more audible, and exclamations of:
 "How beautiful!"
 "How graceful!"
 "How elegant!"
 "This rising star will eclipse all the court beauties!" were heard all around.

And one baleful whisper reached the ears of the duchess.
 "Look, how the eyes of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales follow her. We shall have a new salutation, vice the Countess of Jersey, deposed."
 On hearing this wicked whisper, the import of which did not reach the intelligence of Rose's innocent nature, the duchess looked around haughtily, and silenced by a glance the unprincipled speaker, whom she recognized as an officer of the guard in attendance upon the prince's person.
 She passed on with her protegee through the crowded ante-rooms to the outer hall, and thence to her carriage.
 "You have made what is called a 'great sensation,' my love. Expect to be invited to the court balls, and everywhere else, as a matter of course. Situations will open up upon you. And now that you have, as in duty bound, paid your respects first to royalty, you are at liberty to enter freely into the gayeties of society. Go wherever you wish."

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Grand Trunk Railway Time Table

ARRIVALS

60 From Toronto	5.00 a.m.
19 From Peterborough	8.00 a.m.
32 From Haliburton	8.55 a.m.
21 From Port Hope	9.10 a.m.
30 From Cobocook	10.10 a.m.
22 From Toronto	10.50 a.m.
35 From Port Hope	2.05 p.m.
42 From I. B. & O. Jct.	5.45 p.m.
23 From Port Hope	6.25 p.m.
54 From Whitby	7.30 p.m.
24 From Toronto	8.05 p.m.
56 From Whitby	8.45 p.m.
18 From Toronto	9.20 p.m.
1 From Belleville	9.45 p.m.

DEPARTURES

34 From Port Hope	6.00 a.m.
51 From Toronto	6.30 a.m.
10 From Belleville	7.20 a.m.
21 From Toronto	9.15 a.m.
22 From Port Hope	10.55 a.m.
43 From I. B. & O. Jct.	11.00 a.m.
55 From Whitby	11.05 a.m.
37 From Toronto	12.05 p.m.
28 From Port Hope	2.40 p.m.
25 From Toronto	6.35 p.m.
21 From Cobocook	6.50 p.m.
15 From Peterboro	9.23 a.m.
7 From Toronto	8.05 a.m.
61 From Belleville	8.15 p.m.

she, excepting always, to Carleton House," said the duchess, as they drove homeward.
 "Carleton House?" echoed the young baron