

# The Bridal Eve

MRS. E. D. E. N. A NOVEL SOUTH WORTH

Author of "Self-Raised," "The Deserted Wife," "The Bride's Fate," "Retribution," "Ishmael," "The Wife's Victory," Etc., Etc.

(Continued from last week.)

"You have brought this trouble upon the justice of God, which it were impious to doubt."

"You speak like one of the patriarchs of old. I grow strong and hopeful while I listen to you," said Laura Elmer, earnestly.

"It is the power of the truth spoken, and not of the speaker," said the doctor, humbly. "And now, my child, you must take care of yourself. You must not neglect needful food and rest, and refreshing exercise in the open air."

"Doctor, it was not to talk of myself, but of Cassinove, that I requested you to come to me to-night. Have you seen him lately?"

"No, my child; I have not had an hour's leisure, except early in the morning or late in the evening, just before the prison doors are opened, or after they are closed. But to-morrow I will make the leisure, and surely see him."

"He is fearfully changed, doctor; you will be pained to see him; he has grown so thin and pale from his long and close confinement in that dreary prison. And he is so desolate, doctor; can any man be more desolate than he is? Think of it!—a helpless, poor, sister, or brother, without a friend in the wide world, save only me—"

"But you are all to him—his guardian angel."

"I do all that I may for him, yet not enough; I cannot be all that I might be to him were I his sister—or his wife," added Laura Elmer, in a lower tone.

"Well, my dear," said the doctor, "I do not think I have only his sister, or his wife, that I might have the privilege of being with him always, so that he might never more feel desolate and alone in his sorrow. Doctor, I cannot be his sister, but I can be his wife, and again her pale cheek flushed."

"You might be his wife," said the doctor, finishing her sentence.

"Oh, doctor, that I were only his sister, or his wife, that I might have the privilege of being with him always, so that he might never more feel desolate and alone in his sorrow. Doctor, I cannot be his sister, but I can be his wife, and again her pale cheek flushed."

"I promised to be so long ago. Doctor, if instead of coming into Newgate, Ferdinand Cassinove had come into an inheritance, the first use he would have made of his property would have been to ask me to share it with him. Doctor, have I not the same right to share his adversity?" cried Laura, with a burst of tears.

"My child, I know not what to say to you," said the good physician, in painful perplexity.

"Doctor, listen to me farther. This privilege that I crave would be the greatest possible consolation to me, and take notice, doctor—the only possible chance of safety to Cassinove!"

"The only chance of safety to Cassinove!" echoed Dr. Clark, in extreme surprise.

"Yes, doctor, his only chance of life rests in this relationship."

"My dear Miss Elmer, explain yourself."

"Listen, then. In the confusion and distress that immediately followed the discovery of the murder of Sir Vincent Lester, I was overlooked or forgotten. At least, I was not summoned as a witness before the coroner's inquest. There were, perhaps, witnesses in plenty without me, who testified directly to those fatal circumstances that were deemed quite sufficient to convict Cassinove. And I was glad to be left out. But now the continual gossip of the people and the press, concerning my name more and more into the affair, and under the notice of the authorities. They hint at a cause of that murder that makes my cheeks burn and my heart shudder. I live in the daily dread of being subpoenaed to testify as to this cause on the approaching trial. But if I bore this relationship to him, doctor, I would not be compelled to give evidence against him."

"But would your evidence so seriously affect Cassinove?"

"It would put the seal upon his fate."

"Miss Elmer, my child, tell me what this testimony is, that I may judge of its importance. You may confide in my word with perfect safety, for I shall never repeat your words; and even if I were capable of such a breach of confidence, it could do no harm since 'hearsay' is no legal evidence."

"It was a fierce and deadly quarrel between Ferdinand Cassinove and Sir Vincent Lester on the evening preceding the murder of the baronet," said Laura, in a low and shuddering voice. "I see, my child; I see it all! Tell me, my child, I can serve you. What would you have me to do?"

"Doctor, you are a Christian gentleman—you believe in a faithful prayer and in providential guidance. Go home, and reflect on all that I have told you. Put away all worldly thoughts and all conventional ideas. Think only of justice, and of the mercy. Pray to the Lord for direction; and to-morrow, when you visit Cassinove, you will know what to say and do," replied Laura Elmer, with sweet gravity, and she arose as to close the interview. He also rose. He looked at her—beautiful, pale statue that she seemed—and taking her hand, he replied: "I will, my child, I will; and may the Lord guide my thoughts and my words. You are good-night. And he raised her hand to his lips, and departed."

### CHAPTER XXXI.

The next day Dr. Clark had an interview with Cassinove in the prison and pointed out to him that the only course to prevent Laura giving evidence was to make her his wife.

Cassinove at first demurred, but the good doctor easily persuaded him that it would be for the best.

And then he took his leave for a short time to make the arrangements for the strange marriage.

First he called at the lodgings of Miss Elmer, whom he found dressed as if for a walk.

"My carriage is at the door, my child, and if you are going to visit your prisoner this morning, I will gladly take you there," said the doctor, artfully.

"I thank you; I was just going; I am quite ready, and need not detain you an instant," said Miss Elmer, joining him.

He took her to the prison, through all the halls and passages, and then withdrew to procure the special license. Then he called upon Cassinove's old pastor, the Rev. Henry Watson, of St. Matthews. He found the good old man in his study, and in a private interview, explained to him the service for which he was wanted.

Now, among the very few who had an unshaken faith in the innocence of Cassinove, was the Rev. Mr. Watson, the pastor, who had known him intimately from childhood to maturity.

So after a little hesitation at the strangeness of the service required of him, and after being assured by the doctor that there were good reasons why the marriage should be solemnized, the good man consented to do so.

Dr. Clark and in Cassinove, and though greatly mystified, consented to go and perform the ceremony.

In the meantime Laura Elmer had passed into the cell of her betrothed.

Cassinove was sitting just outside the door, and he had soon good reason to know that her marriage had not taken place one hour too soon.

The next morning, while she was preparing to start on a certain day, a sheriff's officer was shown into her room, who served her with a document that proved to be a subpoena, addressed to Laura Elmer, spinster, and ordering her, under penalty of certain pains and penalties, to appear upon a certain day at the Central Criminal Court, Old Bailey, as a witness on the part of the prosecution in the case of "The Crown versus Ferdinand Cassinove, charged with the willful murder of Sir Vincent Lester, baronet."

Laura read it, and returned it, saying: "This does not concern me. My name is not Elmer, neither am I a single woman."

"Then will you be good enough to tell me where I can find Miss Laura Elmer?"

"Nowhere, I presume; I, who once bore that name, have now another."

"Then, madam, will you be so good as to tell me your new name, that I may have the mistake corrected?" said the officer, taking out his tablets.

"You need not give yourself that trouble. I am the wife of Ferdinand Cassinove, and therefore incapacitated from giving evidence on his trial," said Laura, gently.

The officer looked at her in surprise, and then muttering that he would see about it, departed.

And Laura Elmer went on her way to the prison, where she found Ferdinand Cassinove in the latter's consultation with his wife, who had just arrived to greet the lady, saying: "My client has just told me of the ceremony that took place here yesterday morning. I had already learned that a subpoena was out for you this morning, one day too late. You have achieved a great stroke of diplomacy, madam, and saved my client."

"If anything can save him in such extremity," murmured Cassinove, under his breath.

"When does the trial come on, sir?" inquired Laura of the lawyer.

"To-morrow, madam."

### CHAPTER XXXII.

It was the morning of the day of the trial, the trial par excellence, the session—the trial of the tutor, Ferdinand Cassinove, for the murder of his employer, Sir Vincent Lester, one of the oldest baronets of England.

All London was talking of it. It formed the subject of conversation at every shop in the city, as well as at the chambers of Messrs. Clagget and Fulmer, counsel for the prisoner, and at the cell at Newgate, where Ferdinand Cassinove awaited his summons to the court-room.

An unusually early hour, a crowd, composed in part of the most respectable citizens of London, collected in front of the Old Bailey to await the opening of the doors.

As soon as the doors were thrown open, the crowd pressed into the court-room as into a playhouse, to witness the agonizing spectacle of a fellow creature on trial for his life, as if it had been a play got up for their entertainment.

At ten o'clock the judges entered the court-room, and took their places on the bench.

And soon after the order was given to bring in the prisoner.

All eyes were now turned in the direction of the door through which the prisoner was expected to enter.

And in a few minutes Ferdinand Cassinove made his appearance, walking between two police officers.

His step was firm, his carriage erect, his glance keen, and his bearing proud. His face was pale only in contrast to the darkness of the ebon locks that waved around his lofty brow, and the sable suit of clerical cloth that formed his usual costume.

Behind him walked Laura, clothed in deep mourning, and leaning on the arm of the venerable Dr. Clark.

Laura was accommodated with a seat beneath the counsel's counsel.

Dr. Clark unwillingly took his place among the witnesses on the part of the Crown.

"And Ferdinand Cassinove was ushered into the prisoner's dock. He looked around himself, over the sea of faces upturned to him; no friendly look met him; no kindly glance from eyes fixed upon him; no kindly expression of countenance. Curiously, and vindictively, he noted the expression of the multitude.

Wearily, despairingly, Cassinove turned from this black array to look upon the group of witnesses for the defense, who were seated on his right. They were very few in number—consisting of his venerable pastor, his old schoolmaster, and his old nurse, all come to testify to his childhood. With these Cassinove was acquainted to see old Colonel Hastings, dressed in deep mourning, and looking worn and wasted as though from illness. Cassinove beckoned Mr. Fulmer, his junior counsel, and inquired: "How came Colonel Hastings hither?"

"He presented himself this morning as a voluntary witness for the defense. He has just arrived from Baden-Baden, where his constitution received a terrible shock, the death of his only and nearest son."

"The death of his son? Mr. Albert Hastings? When did he die?" inquired Cassinove, in surprise.

"About a month ago."

"In his body, not an hour. In mind, always. I fear! He blew his brains out after losing fifty thousand pounds at a card table in Baden-Baden. It has broken his father's heart, as you may see after the catastrophe, and has only just arrived in England, to serve you, if he can, he says."

The attorney-general proceeded to open the case for the Crown by stating at large the facts of the murder for which the prisoner at the bar had been indicted, commented severely on his progress upon the atrocious nature of homicide in general, and of this murder in particular, wherein he said were all the vice of ingratitude, hypocrisy, and treachery. Wherein the said were all the vice of ingratitude, hypocrisy, and treachery. Wherein the said were all the vice of ingratitude, hypocrisy, and treachery.

After having the oath dusted to look at the prisoner, and turned to meet the full, dark eyes of Cassinove fixed with a look of anxious integrity upon her. This was the first time she had seen him since the night of the murder, and his expression of countenance evidently surprised her.

Cassinove and Laura both wondered what Lady Lester would have to testify in regard to the murder, when they knew that her ladyship had slept soundly through the whole of the first discovery of the murder.

"I know when she began to speak. I am the widow of the deceased. I know the prisoner at the bar; he filled the situation of tutor of our younger son, and resided in our house for nearly twelve months."

"Can your ladyship inform the jury what seemed to be the state of feeling between the deceased and prisoner?" inquired the counsel for the Crown.

"At first the deceased and the prisoner seemed to entertain for each other a cordial friendship as could possibly exist between persons of unequal rank and age. Gradually, but evidently, that friendship cooled, until, at length, it changed to a bitter enmity."

"Will your ladyship tell the court how the enmity exhibited itself?"

"In many daily acts of mutual annoyance; in many looks, words and deeds of hatred."

"Your ladyship will please be specific and instance some of these stated acts of mutual enmity?"

"The first instance, Sir Vincent Lester, very much disliked the attentions paid by Mr. Cassinove to a young person residing in the capacity of governess in our family. And, though Mr. Cassinove was a man of great respectability in those attentions, but augmented them."

Here a titter ran through the crowd mingled with murmurs of "Very natural." "Quite right," etc. "The counsel for the prisoner," said the counsel for the Crown, "is now in the way of Mr. Cassinove's conversation with the governess."

"What motive do you suppose the deceased had for this course of conduct toward the prisoner?"

"This question was challenged, objected to, and ruled out. The counsel put it in another form, and inquired: 'What was the cause of this hatred between the prisoner and the deceased?'"



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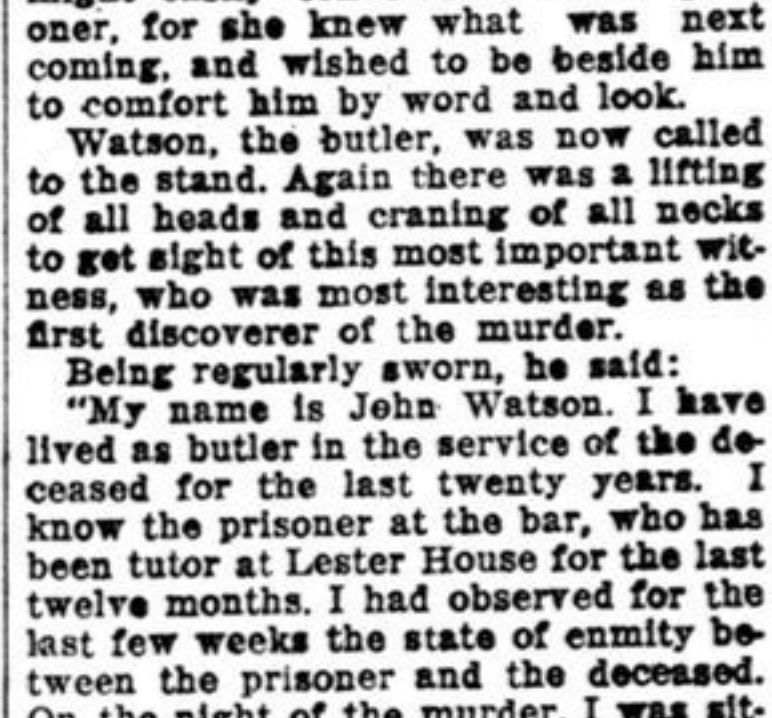
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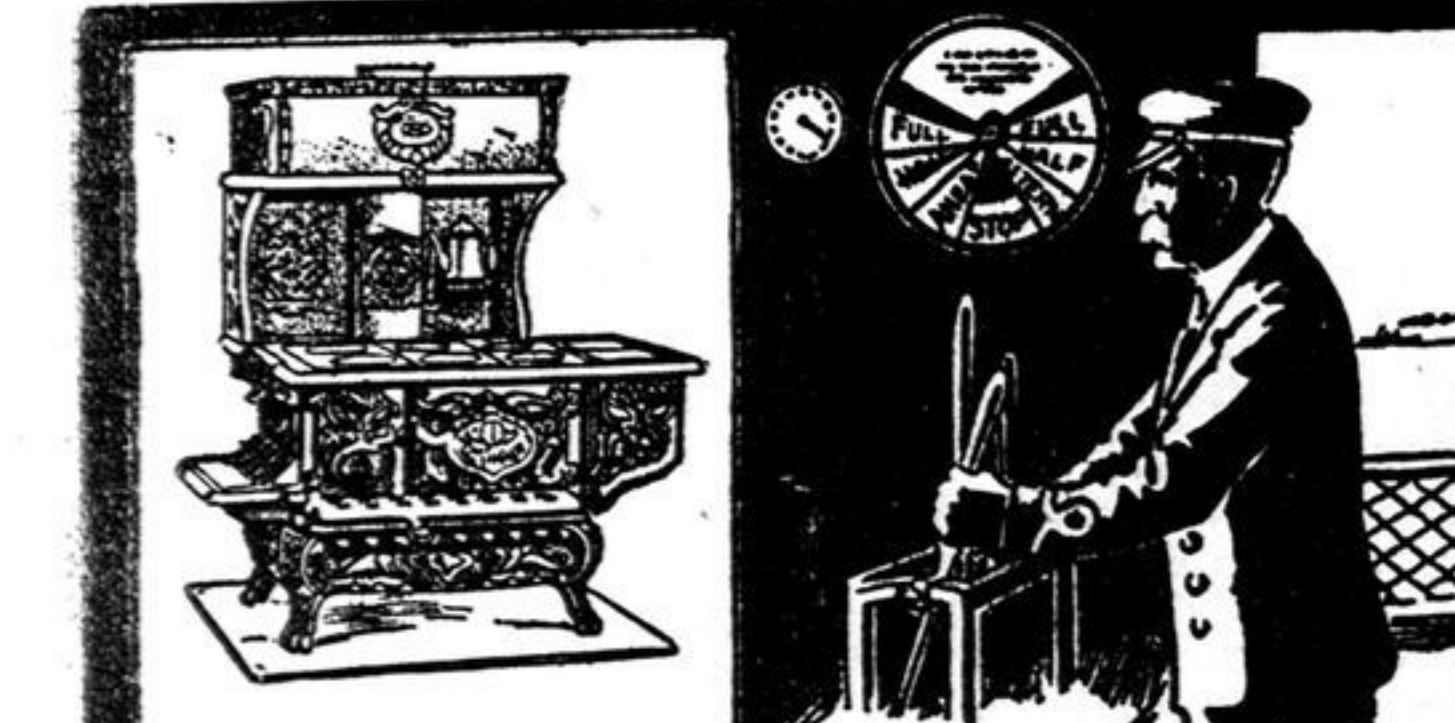
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