

THE WEDDING BELLS.

OR, TELLING HER FORTUNE

By the Author of "PROVED, OR NOT PROVED?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

GRANT WITNESSES A PROPOSAL.

Grant draws back a little, fearing that Clara will be coming to the window; and though he would give much to touch the little hand—to hear her voice utter his name—he will not let her know that he is so near. His love is almost an insult to her purity now, he thinks, bitterly, as he shrinks back on the snow covered balcony, feeling neither the bitterness of the wind nor seeing the street behind with its gas lamps, its rolling carriages, its crowds of hurrying passers-by, turning night into day, as they hastened on to the *Bal de l'Opera*.

But Clara does not approach the window. She looks at her watch with a weary little movement of her head, as if she were very tired; then she goes over to the piano, and, sitting down, puts her hands softly on the keys; and with a sudden, sharp pang Grant Ellison hears the notes of the song he sang to her on that last night in London—"In the Gloaming."

She plays the air softly, but she does not sing the words. She dares not trust her voice; but the simple, pathetic air reaches Grant as he stands without, and his lips quiver as he recalls the words:

"In the gloaming, O, my darling,
Think not bitterly of me,
Though I passed away in silence,
Left you lonely, set free,
For my heart was crushed with longing—
What had been could never be,
It was best to leave you thus, dear—
Best for you and best for me;
It was best to leave you thus—
Best for you and best for me."

The soft, pathetic music ceases, and Clara, still sitting at the piano, covers her face with her hands. Hard as Sir Grant's silence has been hitherto, now it is doubly difficult to preserve—he can guess so well what she is thinking of, for what she is grieving; and his heart sends out a wild, bitter cry of love, and yearning, and remorse, and bitterness, which he can hardly repress, and he longs with an almost unconquerable longing to take her in his arms and kiss away the tears which fall through her fingers on to the still, white ivory keys on which her fingers had strayed. But Clara's weakness is of short duration; she dashes away her tears, and rises with a look on her face which shows that she has learned to suffer and be strong. Hardly has she risen than the door opens, and a servant usher in a gentleman, who approaches Clara hurriedly, apparently making apologies for his late intrusion. He is a handsome, slender, dark man, who, from his manner and quick gesticulation, is a foreigner, while his dress and appearance are distinguished, and the latter extremely prepossessing; while Sir Grant notices that in his manner toward Clara there is an amount of *empressment* and devotion, which he does not attempt to conceal, and which brings a burning jealousy into the heart of the unseen spectator.

The new comer is apparently on his way to the opera, for he wears a domino of imperial blue, a handsome costume of rich satin, which speaks of wealth, and it becomes him well.

Clara receives him with a smile, but does not ask him to sit down, for both remain standing, and the light of the chandelier falls full on both faces—the pale, steadfast, sorrowful girl's face, on the impassioned, dark face and brilliant, speaking eyes of her companion.

The words they utter do not reach Sir Grant, as he stands without in the cold and bitter night; but from his manner it is evident that he is pleading with her for something, and pleading with an earnestness which leaves no doubt of his sincerity. The girl's face is pale, moved, and startled, and Grant sees that the little hand is trembling. Once or twice she makes a gesture which seems to entreat him to stop, but he goes on earnestly, passionately, and Sir Grant has no difficulty in guessing the meaning of the burning words which fall from his lips; and standing there, a sickening, deadly pain oppresses him. This man also loves her, and he is young, handsome, and noble-looking. May it not be that he will win her?

For a moment the pain of that thought turns Grant sick; the next, the selfishness is conquered, and says softly to himself, "If she is happy, that is all I ask."

Then he turns from the window with a feeling that he ought not to watch that interview, and is about to leave the balcony when his love for Clara conquers all scruples, and he resumes his first position.

They are still standing together in the light of the chandelier, but Clara is speaking now, and her fair young face is very pitiful and grave. Whatever she says to him he hears without interruption; then, as she ceases to speak, he turns from her with a despairing gesture, and there is a silence, which he is the first to break.

He turns to her calmly, and says "something in a grave, earnest manner, and Clara puts out her hand to him with a sad smile. He stoops his head over her hand touches it with his lips, and the next moment he is gone.

Clara stands in deep, sad thought for a few minutes; then she, too, leaves the room, and it seems as if a sudden blackness and darkness have fallen upon Sir Grant, as, after waiting a few moments to see if she would return, he goes back to his own sitting room.

It is midnight when he enters the room, but there are no symptoms of cessation in the noise and bustle of the streets; and, as he paces up and down in deep thought, the loud voices and laughter, and rolling wheels, and trampling horses, reach him through the open windows. Presently a thought strikes him; he will go to the *Bal de l'Opera* and to see the woman who stands between him and happiness—the woman whose life makes the misery of his own. He will have no difficulty in obtaining a domino, for he knows Paris well, and he does not care what the disguise is, so that it is a good one; so he goes down stairs, calls the first *facere*, and is driven to the *Passage des Panoramas*, which he leaves a few minutes later disguised in a black satin domino and mask.

The ball is a brilliant one and a crowded one, full of mad, reckless gaiety which is the chief characteristic of these *festes*. Dominoes of all colors, sizes, and qualities. Finest, *chateaux*, *imp* and *forte*

through the corridors and the staircases; bright eyes gleam through the black masks, jewels flash, light laughter and gay voices are around him on every side, as he wanders to and fro, a tall stately, solitary figure in that gay, glittering crowd. It is difficult to guess at any one under their disguises, and Sir Grant gives up the idea of discovering his wife, and his about to leave the Opera, when his ear catches a few words spoken in English by a domino passing by him, also leaving the ball. He recognizes the slow, metallic voice at once, and turns. It comes from a woman who is leaning on the arm of a man wearing a magnificent costume of a Knight Templar, while his companion is draped in rose hued satin, with a quantity of black lace about it. She is laughing gayly, and they are followed by half a dozen men, masked and attired in rich, fancy dress.

Standing on the steps of the Opera, Sir Grant sees them enter a couple of hand-ome private carriages and drive away, while he leaves the ball and walks slowly and wearily through the streets to the hotel again.

That night, in another hotel, not a stone's throw from the roof that covered Clara Frith sleeping quietly with the tears she had shed still glittering on her long lashes, Adelaide Chester sat at the head of a supper-table, round which were gathered some half-dozen men, "lairs of high degree," all more or less captivated by her matchless beauty and grace.

The supper room was a handsome, rose-hung chamber, with glittering crystal and silver, and every delicacy in and out of season which could be desired; and as Adelaide Chester—I cannot bear to give her her right name and title—sat there, glancing from one to another with sparkling eyes and frequent smiles, she felt the intoxication of all their adulation and homage, and thought that life without pleasure—such pleasure!—would not be worth having.

The conversation was witty and brilliant, for those around her were men of culture and position, all ready to bow down at the shrine of the fairest woman in all Paris—of the woman whom men gazed at with a sudden, giddy admiration, as they passed her in the street—of the woman whose brilliance and fascination were unequalled—the woman who in her youth had won Grant Ellison's passionate love—who had darkened and blighted the best years of his life; who had tried—vainly, thank Heaven—to tempt him from his honor and truth; who stood now between him and happiness.

The night wore on; laughter and mirth reigned supreme; bright eyes grew brighter, gay laughter rang yet more gayly, when suddenly, with a sound which was audible over all the mirth, and gayety, and song, arose a terrible cry—a cry which struck terror to the hearts of those who heard—a cry of "Fire!"

CHAPTER XXX. IN THE HOSPITAL.

It was the evening of the following day; the snow was falling heavily, the wind was blowing, fierce gusts, which made a blinding shower of the thick white flakes, in the *cafes* the gas was burning gayly; from the restaurants the diners were filling out laughing and gesticulating, and going into the *cafes* to have their coffee; the theatres were just opening their doors; the stream of life flowed on gayly, as it does in Paris, no matter who may be suffering, or dying, or torn with grief; while in a room in the Hotel Dieu a woman who had been a queen of beauty twelve short hours before lay dying.

The room was very still. Outside the stream of life might flow ever so gayly; ever so noisily, but its sound and its gayety never penetrated there. The only light in the quiet chamber was that given by the night-lamp burning on the table, and that was carefully shaded from the face lying upon the white pillows—a scarred, disfigured face now, which had been so beautiful, which had turned men's heads and broken their hearts, and blighted their lives by its loveliness.

The nurse, quietly attentive and grave, sat by the bedside, and she was the only person with the dying woman, who had been deceasing fitfully and restlessly, and who opened her eyes now with a sudden impatience.

"Will they not come? Is it late?" she said, feebly.

"It is not too late," answered the *garde* gently. "They have not had time to come yet; you must be patient!"

"Patient! I was never patient!" was the fretful answer. "Move the curtain and let me see the light."

The nurse obeyed, and the soft lamp-light fell on the lustrous, eager eyes, the scarred and bandaged face—on the wealth of raven hair which fell over the white pillows, on the helpless, pitiful, prostrate form.

She was dying. No human power could save her, the doctors said, as they had gathered round her bed a few hours before—not dying from the effects of the burns she had received, but from the shock to her system caused by the fright and terror. She had been brought to the hospital in the chill winter morning, through the snow and rain, with diamonds still on her wrists and round her throat, and the pink satin and lace of her domino still hanging about her in lustrous folds; and although the principal physicians in Paris had come to her assistance she was sinking rapidly.

"What time is it?" she said, faintly.

"Nearly eight o'clock," was the gentle answer.

"And we sent at seven?" she muttered, impatiently. "Will they come? I want to see her. Will they come in time?"

"I am going to die!" she said in a moment, the great dark eyes, bright with a feverish lustre, going swiftly to the grave, pitying face beside her. "I am not sorry, because I could not face life again without my beauty! Without it life would not have been worth having!"

"Hush! do not say that!" said the nurse, gently. "There is something better worth living for than mere admiration and homage."

"Is there! I never found anything, but I suppose other people do—some—a few, perhaps—a few like—"

She broke off suddenly, and moved restlessly on the pillows.

"Are you in pain?" said the nurse, gently.

"No, hardly at all. Do you know who saved me from the fire last night?" she asked, looking up eagerly for a moment.

"He was a brave man, but I do not know who he was," the nurse answered, softly, for her heart ached for this beautiful miserable woman, who, while unwilling to retain life now that her beauty was lost, was dreading death with an intensity terrible to see. "You do not know—ah! but I do," she said, in her broken, unsteady voice. "I will tell you. It was the man, of all others, who has reason to wish me dead. It was my husband!"

"Your husband!" repeated the nurse, looking at her in surprise, and thinking her delirious, for those who had brought her to the Hotel Dieu had said that she was Miss Chester, the beautiful English actress.

"Yes, my husband!" she repeated, with something almost like passion. "Ah! will they never come—will they never come?"

Hardly had the broken, passionate words been spoken, when the door opened gently, and one of the surgeons entered. He came in slowly to the side of the bed, looked critically at the patient, and felt her pulse.

The great, dark eyes sought his.

"Have they come—are they here?" she said, eagerly; and as he made an affirmative gesture, she went on "Let me see them—let me see her now! Let me atone if I can."

"They are here, but you must be very careful. You must not excite yourself," he said, impressively.

"How can I! I have not strength to do it," she muttered, impatiently. "Send them to me, doctor, while I have power to see them."

"I will bring them," he answered, gently; and turning he left the room.

"Shade the light—shade the light!" said the dying woman, impatiently. "They know me so beautiful! They shall not see me now."

There was something unutterably sad and pitiful in her eagerness to hide the damage the fire had made; and just as the nurse had obeyed her, the doctor re-entered the room, followed by a lady and gentleman.

The lady was young and very pale the nurse saw, as she came near; and the gentleman with her, a blue-eyed, handsome young fellow, with a pleasant face, held her hand closely in his, and as they drew near he whispered, gently:

"Don't be afraid, Clara; I will not go."

"Here are your friends," said the surgeon, gently, and a gleam of eagerness lighted up the great, dark eyes, which were growing dim now.

The surgeon made them a sign to approach the bed, and as they did so, the eagerness died out of the dark eyes, and a wistful expression of disappointment came into them.

"Where is he?" she said, quickly, looking from Clara's face to Ted's, and her eyes resting finally on the young girl's countenance, which was pale, and moved, and grave, and impressed with something akin to fear.

"Where is he? Would he not come?"

"Whom do you wish to see?" said Clara, gently, bending over her, and speaking with a tremor in her voice.

Ted's answer was in one word only, but that word made the color rise hotly in Clara's face.

"Grant," said the low voice, huskily. Clara glanced at Ted pitifully, then she stooped over the bed.

"He is not here! He is at Charnook," she said, "my will telegraph for him."

"He is here in Paris!" said Grant's wife, quickly. "You are cruel to try and keep him from me now. Don't you know that I am dying? I shall not be in your way long!"

"I would not keep him from you," Clara said, shrinking back a little. "But he is in England, I assure you."

"He is here!" was the swift reply. "No; I am not delirious. He is here—send for him."

At the sound of her hasty, angry words—at the sight of the anger which flashed in the dark, glittering eyes, Clara drew back, shrinking closer to Ted.

"Will you send for Grant?" she said, softly. "She wishes to see him, and she has every right, you know."

"Grant is in Paris," Ted said, hastily, in the same low voice. "At least, he was here last night, but to-day I have not seen him."

"In Paris!" Clara repeated, tremulously. "Yes," whispered Ted; then bending toward the wistful, eager face on the pillow, he said, gently, "Sir Grant is in Paris, but Miss Frith did not know that he is here. I have not seen him to-day, and he only came last night; but since you wish to see him, I will cause every inquiry to be made."

"I must see him! He is my husband—do you know that I am Lady Ellison?" she said, faintly. Then the white lids closed over the eager, glittering eyes, and she sank back upon her pillows.

Clara uttered a cry of alarm, which brought the nurse to the bedside; and while she applied restoratives, Ted told Clara that Sir Grant had arrived the previous night, but that he seemed not to have returned to the hotel after they left for the *Bal de l'Opera*.

"It is evident that the poor creature has seen him," said Ted, compassionately. "Will he have returned now, do you think?" Clara said, faintly—she was sitting in a chair the doctor had brought to her, and looked pale and startled. "She wants to see him, and oh! Ted—she is his wife."

Ted Fetherstone turned to the doctor, and they exchanged a few words. Then the latter went to the bed, and came back, looking very grave.

"It is only a question of a few hours now," he said, shaking his head; "and it is doubtful whether she will keep her consciousness. We have given opiates to lessen the pain."

"Grant; oh! send for him—he saved me—he saved me!" said the faint, broken tones from the bed. "I cannot die without his forgiveness!"

They looked from one to the other in silent distress, when the nurse uttered a sudden exclamation: "She told me it was her husband saved her from the fire!" she said, excitedly. "Can it be that she was right. I thought her mind wandering!"

Ted started violently, and the surgeon went toward the bed. "Can you not tell us more?" he said slowly and distinctly. "This gentleman—your husband—are you sure that he saved you?"

"Saved me! yes; he came through the flames and took me in his arms," she said, a sudden gleam of admiration lighting up the dying eyes. "He did not say much, only 'Keep still, and you will be safe.'"

"You are sure it was he?" said Ted, huskily. "Where is he now?"

"I do not know—how should I? I fainted, I suppose, for I knew no more until I awoke here. Will you send for him! It was noble, I suppose, to save me when I stand between him and happiness."

"If she is right in her conjecture," said the surgeon, in a low voice to Ted, "he is here; he was hurt a good deal, and insensible, and they brought her with her."

"Hush!" said Ted, quickly, with a swift, apprehensive glance at Clara, whose eyes were bright with the great light of admiration which had shone in them as she heard Adelaide Chester's words. "Hush! Is he much hurt?"

"Not seriously. If it will be any comfort to her he can come to her," the surgeon answered, in the same low voice.

Ted hesitated a moment. He knew that it would startle Clara beyond measure to see Sir Grant; and yet, what could be done?

He went over to her, the dying woman's eyes eagerly fixed on his face as he spoke. "Clara," he said, in a low voice, "Grant is here; the surgeon says he was hurt—"

"Hurt?" The flush which had risen in her face as she had listened to the words which she so simply told of the heroism of the man she loved, faded, leaving her face colorless as before, "Hurt?" she repeated, in a very low voice. "Seriously?"

"No; Clara, on my honor, not seriously," said Ted, hurriedly, meeting the earnest, questioning eyes frankly and steadfastly. "But they brought him here, and the doctor says he can come in to see her," with a glance at the bed; "now, almost immediately."

The red blood rose in the pale cheeks again.

"Here?" Clara said tremulously. "May I go, Ted?"

She rose as she spoke, but Miss Chester's watchful eyes saw the movement. "Do not go—why should you fear him? You care for him, do you not? You looked as if you did that night at the Variety," she said, in her harsh, broken, jarring voice. "I want to see you together—stay."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE DOWNWARD PATH.

Terrible Tragedy which Followed an Elopement from a Village.

Stephen A. Brady and Miss Stella Kent eloped from Norwalk two years ago. Before the elopement Brady was one of the most prosperous and widely-known business men of the town. He did business as a jeweller, and lived happily with his family in a pretty little cottage, until Miss Stella Kent, a sister of Mrs. Brady, went to reside with the family. Miss Kent's personal charms and lively disposition soon won the affections of Brady. The natural outcome was a family quarrel, which compelled Miss Kent to seek another boarding place. Not long after came the announcement that Miss Kent and Brady had eloped. It is not known that any attempt was made to trace the movements of the runaway couple, but it was reported shortly afterward that a gentleman from Norwalk had seen them in Kansas City. The affair, which had almost been forgotten, was revived by the receipt of Missouri papers giving the details of a double tragedy which occurred in the little village of Iron Knob on the night of Jan. 30, and of which Brady and the woman Kent are supposed to have been the victims. The *Index* of that place tells the following story of the tragedy:

Late last summer there arrived in this village a man and woman of middle age with an infant. They stopped for a short time at the Emo Hotel, where they were known as Mr. and Mrs. Jackson of Kansas City. They afterwards moved into a house on Banks street, the man setting himself up as a repairer of watches, clocks, and jewelry. Business, however, was very poor with him, and together with his passion for drink, the couple had a hard time to get along. It had been observed that the man was drinking more heavily than ever, and had shown on such occasions a very ugly disposition.

On Wednesday night last the neighbors, hearing loud noises and terrible screams coming from the house, summoned a deputy sheriff, who, with a number of others, entered the house, but too late to prevent a terrible tragedy. They found that the man, while evidently in a state of crazy intoxication, had beaten the woman with an axe until her features were scarcely recognizable, and had then cut his own throat with a knife. The child lay upon the bed unharmed, too young to realize what had happened. The man was dead when found, but the woman lingered some two hours before dying, during which time she was occasionally conscious and able to talk in an incoherent manner.

It was gathered from her conversation that the couple originally came from Connecticut, where they were well connected, the man having deserted wife and family to elope with the woman, who seems not to have been married. The right names of the parties could not be clearly understood, but was thought to be either Kemp or Braly.

When the couple first arrived here they were quite fleshy people, but dissipation by the man and care and worry on the part of the woman had reduced them very much at the last.

As there was nothing of value or to indicate the names or address of friends found among their effects, they were buried at the expense of the town in the West Branch burying ground. The child, a bright, healthy-looking girl baby, has been taken in charge by the town authorities, and will be properly cared for. The true history of the parties and their wanderings since leaving their native State will probably never be known in this section, although many are curious to know it.

The description of the man and woman corresponds in every particular with that of Brady and Miss Kent, and the statements made by the dying woman are identical with the circumstances attending their elopement. Both the Brady and Kent families are well connected in Norwalk. Brady's daughter, a pretty and accomplished young lady, being betrothed to the son of a retired hat manufacturer, and a brother of Miss Kent having wedded a daughter of Representative Bell.

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