

# BETRAYED;

OR—

## A DARK MARRIAGE MORN.

A Romance of Love, Intrigue and Crime.

BY MRS. ALICE P. CARRISTON.

### CHAPTER XX.—(Continued.)

An old servant slept on a settee before the open door, smiling in her dreams at the beautiful scene about her.

Leland awoke her, inquired for the master of the house, and was ushered into the hall.

"Thence he entered a charming apartment, where a young lady in a garden hat was arranging bouquets in porcelain vases.

She turned at the noise of the opening door, and Leland saw—Clara Denton!

As he saluted her with an air of astonishment and doubt, she looked fixedly at him with her great eyes.

He spoke first, with, however, more of hesitation than usual.

"Pardon me, madam, but I inquired for Mr. Metcalf."

"He is in a distant field, but will soon return. Be kind enough to wait."

She led him into another apartment and pointed him to a chair, seating herself near the fireplace.

"But, madam, in the absence of Mr. Metcalf, can I have the honor of speaking with his daughter?"

"The shadow of a smile flitted over Clara Denton's dark but charming face.

"His daughter?" she said; "I am his daughter."

"You! Pardon me, I beg, but I thought—"

"—a person—that is a rather severe—he hesitated, then added simply: "and I find I am in error."

Clara Denton seemed completely unmoved by this compliment.

"Will you be kind enough, sir," she said, "to let me know who I have the honor of receiving?"

"I am Warren Lester."

"Ah! Indeed! Pray be seated, Mr. Lester. Then I have excuses also to make. It was probably you whom we saw this morning. We have been very busy—my friend, my daughter, and myself—but we were ignorant of your arrival, and the Sedley farm has been so long deserted, you know."

"I sincerely hope, Mrs. Denton, that you and the other ladies will make no change in your residence."

Mrs. Denton, by a movement of the hand, implied that she appreciated the offer, but should not accept it.

Then there was a pause long enough to embarrass Leland, during which his eyes fell upon the piano, and his lips almost formed the original remark:

"You are a musician, Mrs. Denton?"

Suddenly recollecting his true, however, he feared to betray himself by the allusion, and was silent.

"You come from New York, Mr. Lester?" the young widow at length asked.

"I left the city only yesterday."

"You are acquainted with our friend, Mr. Sweetland, I believe."

"Yes, it was he who suggested that I should call on you."

"We are charmed that you have done so, and what an excellent man our Congressman is!"

"Excellent, indeed, Mr. Denton."

"There was another pause."

"If you do not object to a short walk in the sun," said the widow, at length, "let us walk to meet my father."

Leland bowed. Mrs. Denton rose and rang the bell.

"Ask Miss Lester and Edith," she said to the old servant who answered it, "to be kind enough to put on their hats and join us."

A moment later Mildred Lester and Edith Denton entered the room.

On being introduced, Mildred flushed a little, seemed somewhat embarrassed, then smiled sweetly and frankly, and ended by giving the young man her hand.

Edith cast on him the steady, frank look of an inquisitive child, bowed slightly to him, and they all left the room by a door opening on the lawn.

Clara Denton, while responding courteously to the graceful speeches of Leland, walked on with a light and rapid step, her fairy-like little boots leaving their impression on the smooth surface of the gravel path.

Without knowing it, she walked with indescribable grace; with that supple, elastic undulation which would have been coquetish, had it not been undeniably natural.

Reaching the well-laid stone wall that inclosed the right side of the "home lot," she opened a little gate that led into a narrow path through an immense field of young corn. She passed into this path, followed in single file by Edith, Mildred, and by Leland.

The child soon became restless and excited; Mildred was calm and silent.

Leland, who was close to the latter, began to grow interested, as he watched her beautiful and tranquil features.

But he was also deeply interested in Clara Denton. He cast a glance toward her.

They were approaching the fence which raked the end of the field. He was about to call to attract her attention, when, suddenly, half turning, and raising her hand, she said:

"My father, sir," and Leland, looking in the direction indicated, saw a very tall man gazing at them from the fence and shading his eyes with his hand.

He was dressed in a suit of heavy tweed, and wore a soft felt hat.

Leland immediately recognized the white hair and dark eyebrows as the same he had seen bending over the violin the night before.

"Father," said Mrs. Denton, introducing the young man by a wave of the hand, "this is Mr. Warren Lester."

"Mr. Lester," repeated the old man, in a deep and conciliatory voice, "you are most welcome; and coming through the bars, he gave his guest a soft, brown hand, as he continued: "Your grandfather and I were neighbors. I knew your mother well in her younger days, and am delighted to have her son under my roof. Your mother is a most amiable person, young sir, and certainly you are."

The old man hesitated, and finished his sentence by a sonorous "hem!" that resounded and rumbled in his chest as if in the vault of heaven.

"I received your note inclosing Sweetland's letter," he continued, after a moment; "was sorry you could not give us the pleasure of your acquaintance at that time. I have been looking for you ever since."

me, sir, I beg. Edith, child, respect my growing corn."

"Is it really true, Mr. Lester, that you have the happy idea of quitting the great American Babylon, to install yourself upon your rural possessions?"

"It will be a good example, sir—an excellent example! You will never regret taking such a step."

"Now you see my little domain—mea paupera regna—the retreat of the sage. Here I live, and live happily, like an old shepherd in the golden age—loved by my neighbors, which is not easy; and venerating the gods, which is perhaps easier."

"Ah, young sir, you read Virgil, I am sure, and you will excuse me if I quote him. It was for me he wrote:

"Fortunate senex, hic inter fumina totus, Et fontes sacros frigus captabit opacus."

"And this as well:

"Fortunatus et ille deos qui vocat agrestes, Panem, siccumque siccum."

"Nymphasque sorores!" finished Leland, smiling and moving his head slightly in the direction of the ladies, who preceded them.

"Quite to the point, that is pure truth!" cried Metcalf, gayly. "Did you hear that, Clara?"

"Yes, father."

"And did you understand it?"

"No, father."

"I do not believe you, my dear; I do not believe you!" the old man laughed heartily. "Do not believe me, Mr. Lester; women have the faculty of understanding compliments in every language."

This conversation brought them to the house, where they sat down on the veranda to enjoy the view.

Leland praised judiciously the farm and well-kept lawn, accepted an invitation to dinner the next week, and then discreetly retired, flattering himself that his introduction had made a favorable impression upon Nathan Metcalf, but regretting his apparent want of progress with the fairy-footed daughter and her friend Mildred Lester.

He was in error.

"This young man," said Mr. Metcalf, when he was left alone with his daughter, "has some touch of the ancients, which is something; but he still resembles his father, whom I never liked. His eyes and his smile recall some traits of his admirable mother, but positively, my dear Clara, I am afraid of him. His principles, they say, are vicious."

"Who says so, father?"

"Current rumor, my child."

"Current rumor, my dear father, is often mistaken, and always exaggerates. For my part, I like the gentleman, who seems thoroughly refined and at his ease."

"Bah! I suppose because he compared you to a nymph in the fable."

"If he compared me to a nymph in the fable, he was wrong; but he never addressed me a word in English that was not in good taste. Before we condemn him let us see for ourselves. It is a habit you have always recommended to me, you know."

"You cannot deny, Clara," said the old man with irritation, "that he exhales the most decided and disagreeable odor of New York—of Fifth Avenue itself! He is too polite—too studied! Not the shadow of enthusiasm—no fire of youth! He never laughs as I should wish to see a man of his age laugh; a young man should roar to spit his waistband!"

"There, father, you don't mean all you say, I'm sure. And for my part, I repeat, I like him; his manners please me."

Mildred, Lester, and Edith had come away together, Mildred holding Edith's hand. As they entered the door Mildred whispered in her companion's ear:

"Isn't he a handsome gentleman? I'm sorry he's gone."

CHAPTER XXI.

LELAND SECURES AN ALLY—THE RAGPICKER.

During the succeeding week Leland met Nathan Metcalf and the several members of his family more than once. And after the dinner to which he had been invited he determined, upon mature reflection, on a bold move—a move that had the effect of plunging Clara Denton in the most profound astonishment.

He asked her in a low voice, and with peculiar emphasis, if she would be kind enough, at her leisure, to grant him the honor of a moment's private conversation.

Clara Denton opened still wider those large eyes of hers, blushed slightly, and replied that she would be at home the next afternoon at three o'clock.

At the appointed hour he presented himself before her.

He found her in the garden, seated under a group of young trees, forming a rustic bow.

She was fond of this place; the most tender memories were associated with it. She was seated at a small rustic table, covered with pieces of wool and silk, on a low chair, her feet elevated on a stool, and working on a piece of embroidery with great apparent tranquillity.

Warren Lester, an expert in all the niceties and exquisite devices of the female mind, smiled to himself at this audience in the open air. He thought he fathomed its meaning. Mrs. Denton desired to deprive this interview of the confidential character which closed doors would have given it.

This was the simple truth. This lady, who was one of the noblest of her sex, was not at all simple. She had not passed ten years of her youth, her beauty, and her widowhood without receiving, under forms more or less direct, some dozens of declarations, which had inspired her with impressions, which, although just, were not always too flattering to the delicacy and discretion of the opposite sex.

Like all women of her age, she knew her danger, and, unlike most of them, she did not love it. She had invariably turned into the broad road of friendship all those she had surprised rambling within the prohibited limits of love.

The request of Warren Lester for a private interview had seriously preoccupied her since the previous evening. What could be the object of this mysterious interview? She puzzled her brain to imagine, but could not divine.

It was not probable that Mr. Lester, at the commencement of their acquaintance, would feel himself entitled to declare his passion. However much the renowned gallantry of the young man rose to her memory, she thought so famous a lady-killer as he might adopt unusual methods, and might think himself entitled to dispense with much ceremony in dealing with a humble country woman.

Animated by these ideas, she resolved to receive him in the garden, having received during her short experience, the open air and a wide open space were not favorable to bold wooers.

Leland bowed to Mrs. Denton, then setting himself, drew his chair nearer to hers, mischievously, perhaps, and lowering his voice into a confidential tone, said:

"Mrs. Denton, will you permit me to consider a secret to you, and ask your counsel?"

She raised her graceful head, fixed upon the young man her soft bright gaze, smiled vaguely, and by a slight movement of the hand intimated to him: "You surprise me; but I will listen to you."

"This is my first secret, madam. I desire to represent the district in Congress."

At this unexpected declaration, Mrs. Denton looked at him, breathed a slight sigh of relief, and gravely listened to what he had to say.

"Mr. Sweetland," continued the young man, "has manifested a kindly feeling for me. He intends to retire at the end of his present term, and is anxious that I should become his successor. He has not concealed from me, however, the fact that the support your father's indispensability to my success as a candidate."

"I have therefore come here, by his advice, in the hope of obtaining this support; but the ideas and opinions expressed by your father at dinner yesterday, appear to me so directly opposite to my pretensions, that I feel truly discouraged. To be brief, Mrs. Denton, in my perplexity I conceived the idea—indiscreet, doubtless—to appeal to your kindness, and ask your advice—which I am determined to follow, whatever it may be."

"But, sir! you embarrass me greatly," said the lady, whose pretty face, at first clouded, brightened up immediately with a frank smile.

"I have a special claim on your kindness—the contrary, perhaps—but I am a human being, and you are charitable. Well, in truth, Mrs. Denton, this matter seriously concerns my fortune, my future, and my whole destiny. This opportunity which now presents itself for me to enter public life, so young, is exceptional. I would therefore be so kind as to aid me?"

"But how can I?" replied Mrs. Denton. "I never interfere in politics, and that is precisely what you ask me to do."

"Nevertheless, I pray you not to oppose me."

"Why should I oppose you?"

"Great heavens, madam! you have a right to be severe. My youth was a little dissipated. My reputation, in some respects, is not overgood; I doubt not you have heard so, and I cannot but fear it has inspired you with some dislike for me."

"Mr. Lester, we live very retired here. We know nothing of what passes in New York. If we did, this would not prevent my assisting you, if I knew how, for I think that serious and elevated labors could not fail happily to change your ordinary habits."

"It is truly a delicious thing," thought the young man, "to mystify so spiritual a person."

"Mrs. Denton," he continued, with his quiet grace, "I join in your hopes, but as you desire to encourage my ambition, I believe I shall succeed in obtaining your father's support. You know him well. For my part, I like the gentleman, who seems thoroughly refined and at his ease."

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ever since her marriage. Her husband was a shoe-maker—not much of one, I suppose; but they owned a little patch of land and a hovel, a poor place enough, in all conscience, but still their own, and so, when her husband died, Jennie sent for me, and now, instead of picking up rags in New York, I am scratching the ground in Roxbury."

"Ah, something of a rise in life! I trust the change agrees with you."

"I am well enough satisfied."

"At least, you are with your own flesh and blood."

"Yes, I am that much better off, certainly."

"Your daughter has children, you said?"

"Yes—two."

"And they are sick?"

"Very sick."

"What is the matter?"

"I do not know—I cannot understand."

"Has a doctor seen them?"

"A doctor! Good gracious! How could we pay a doctor?"

"But you must have one. Here, go for one at once," and he offered him a five-dollar bill.

The old man stretched forth his hand to take it. Then a strange expression came into his eyes, and quickly withdrawing his hand, he said hurriedly, "No, no!" and turning abruptly, hastened away.

Leland gazed after him for a moment with a thoughtful air, and then, with bowed head, and his hands tightly clasped behind him, slowly made his way homeward.

With an effort, he at last succeeded in throwing off the disagreeable impression the quondam rag-picker had made, and by the time he had reached his own door had almost forgotten him.

In truth, he had something much more agreeable to think of, and could not congratulate himself on his campaign, which seemed to him, not without reason, to have been a masterpiece of strategy.

By a clever mixture of frankness and cunning he had quickly enlisted Clara Denton in his interest. From that moment the realization of his ambitious dreams seemed assured, for he was not ignorant of the incomparable value of woman's assistance, and knew all the power of those small but energetic efforts, and of those subterranean movements which assimilate feminine influence to the secret and irresistible influences of nature.

Another point gained—he had established a secret between that pretty woman and himself, and had placed himself on a confidential footing with her.

He had gained the right to keep secret her clandestine words and private conversation, and such a position cleverly managed could aid him to pass very agreeably the time necessary to gain residence in Connecticut, and the period occupied in his political canvass.

Leland, on entering the house, sat down to write to Mr. Sweetland to inform him of the opening of his operations, and advised him to keep him. From that day he turned his attention to following up the two persons who could control his election.

His policy as regarded Mr. Metcalf was as simple as it was clever. Profiting by his growing familiarity as a neighbor, he went to school, as it were, to the old gentleman farmer, and gave him up the direction of the Sedley farm. By this quiet compliment, enhanced by his captivating courtesy, he advanced insensibly in the good graces of the old man.

Let me some weeks of almost daily intercourse, Mr. Metcalf graciously praised his young neighbor as a good fellow, an excellent musician, an amiable associate; but to make him a Congressman, saw some things which might disquiet him, some things which, however, did not worry himself so much about the matter as might be supposed, for his second ambition had superseded his first; in other words, his fancy for Clara Denton had been more pressing than his love for political preferment.

We are compelled to admit, not to his credit, that he first proposed to himself to gain the affections of his fair neighbor as a simple pastime, as an interesting adventure, and, above all, as a work of art, which was extremely difficult and would redound to his great honor.

To accomplish his object, he trusted to his own principles, to the fascinations of his manner and his previous successes. Instinctively he knew that as an ordinary young man, however, did not press upon his love for political preferment.

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