

BETRAYED;

A DARK MARRIAGE MORN.

A Romance of Love, Intrigue and Crime.

BY MRS. ALICE P. CARRISTON

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LIGHTNING'S FLASH IN THE CLEAR SKY. Flora had closed her eyes to conceal her tears. She opened them at the instant Sylve seized her hand and called her "poor angel."

"Seeing the man on his knees, she could not comprehend it, and only exclaimed, simply: 'Are you mad, Mr. Sylve?'"

"Yes, I am mad!" Sylve threw his hair back with a romantic gesture common to him and, he believed, to the poets. "Yes, I am mad with love and with pity, for I see your sufferings, pure and noble victim!"

Flora only stared in blank astonishment. "I suppose yourself with confidence," he continued, "on a heart that will be devoted to you until death—a heart into which your tears now roll to its most sacred depths."

Flora did not wish her tears to roll to such a distance, so she dried them. "A man on his knees before the woman he adores must appear to her either sublime or ridiculous. Unfortunately the attitude of Sylve, at once theatrical and awkward, did not seem sublime to Flora. To her lively imagination it was irresistibly ludicrous."

"A bright gleam of amusement illumined her charming countenance; she bit her lips to conceal it, but it shone out of her eyes nevertheless. 'One should never kneel unless sure of rising conqueror. Otherwise, like Sylve, he exposes himself to be laughed at.'"

"This book has evidently bewildered you. Go and take some rest and we will forget this; only you must never forget yourself again in this manner." Sylve rose. He was livid.

"Mrs. Cleveland," he said, bitterly, "the love of a great heart can never be an offense. Mine at least would have been sincere; mine would have been faithful; mine would not have been an infamous snare!"

The emphasis of these words displayed so evident an intention, the countenance of Flora changed immediately. She moved uneasily on the lounge. "What do you mean, Mr. Sylve?"

"Nothing, ma'am, which you do not know, I think," he replied meaningly. She rose. "You shall explain your meaning immediately to me, sir!" she exclaimed; "or later, to my husband."

"But your husband," cried the secretary, in a tone of admirable sincerity; "these made me sure you were not ignorant of it!"

nameless refinement and the subtle perfume of purity. He took pity on her. "But, madam, you cannot stay here," he rejoined, in a softer voice.

"No?" "You must have some great sorrow?" "Very great."

"What is your name?" "Flora Cleveland," she said, simply. The man looked bewildered. "Will you tell me where you live?" he asked.

She gave the number with perfect simplicity and perfect indifference. She seemed to be thinking nothing of what she was saying. "Ah! just below here," said the officer.

"Yes," she rejoined. "Will you take my arm?" She did so quietly, and they started slowly down the street.

Eugene had just reached the house, and heard with stupefied surprise, from the lips of the lady's maid, the details of his wife's mysterious disappearance, when the bell rang violently.

He rushed out and met his wife on the stairs. She had somewhat recovered her calmness, and as he interrogated her with a searching glance, made a ghastly effort to smile.

"I was slightly ill and went out a little," she said. "I walked too far and am somewhat tired."

Notwithstanding the improbability of the explanation, he did not hesitate. He murmured a few soft words of reproach and placed her in the hands of her maid, who removed her wet garments.

During that time he called the officer, who remained in the vestibule, and closely interrogated him. On learning where he had found Flora, Eugene knew at once and fully the whole truth.

He went directly to his wife. She had retired and was trembling in every limb. One of her hands was resting outside the coverlet.

He rushed to take it, but she withdrew it gently, but with sad and resolute dignity. The simple gesture told him they were separated forever.

By a tacit arrangement proposed by her, and as tacitly accepted by him, Flora became virtually a widow. He remained for some seconds immovable, his expression lost in the shadow of a curtain; then slowly left the chamber.

part a most wretched night, did not feel his nerves equal in the morning to meeting the reception possibly in waiting for him at the Lelands'. His letter was skillfully penned, to put asleep suspicion if it had not been fully aroused, and if Flora had not betrayed him.

[It announced his acceptance of a lucrative situation, suddenly offered him in a commercial house in Boston. He was obliged to decide at once, and to start that same morning, for fear of losing an opportunity which could not recur again. It concluded with the liveliest gratitude and regret.

Eugene could not very well reach his brother-in-law's secretary to strangle him; so he resolved to do the next best thing. He not only sent him a friendly letter thanking him for all his kindness to his wife, but a handsome present in addition as a testimonial of his sympathy and good wishes!

This, however, was a simple precaution, for he apprehended nothing more from the voracious reptile, so far beneath him, after he had once shaken him off.

Seeing him deprived of the only weapon he could possibly use against him, he felt safe. Besides, so far as he knew, Sylve had lost the only interest he could desire to subserv, for he knew the man had done him the compliment of courting his wife.

And he really esteemed him a little less low, after discovering this gentlemanly taste! Ah! but the end was not yet.

CHAPTER XXVIII. THE DAUGHTER AND HER MOTHER. It required on the part of Eugene Cleveland, this same morning, an exertion of all his courage to perform his duty as a gentleman in receiving Mr. and Mrs. Leland upon their return home.

But courage had for some time past his soldier's meaning virtue; and this, at least, he sought never to lose. He received them most gracefully—his father and mother-in-law as they descended from their carriage and entered the room.

Mr. Leland was much broken in health. The trip, which it had been hoped would benefit, had only wearied him; and now, on again entering his own door, he begged to be at once assisted to his sleeping room.

Leland lingered in surprise at not seeing her daughter there to meet them, and cast an inquiring look upon Eugene. He informed her that she had been a little indisposed since the preceding evening. Notwithstanding the precautions he took in his anxiety and by his smile, he could not prevent Mrs. Leland from feeling a lively alarm.

He did not pretend, however, entirely to reassure her. Under his reserved and measured replies, she felt the presentiment of some disaster. After having pressed him with many questions, she suddenly turned and hurried up stairs.

Flora, to spare her mother the first shock, had quitted her bed and dressed herself; and the poor child had even put a little rouge on her pale cheeks. Eugene, in his haste made to her, and which her daughter's chamber, and then withdrew.

All that passed between them at first was a silent interchange of mutual caresses. Then the mother seated herself near her son, and looked into the depths of her eyes. "What is the matter?" she asked sadly. "Oh, nothing—nothing hopeless! only you must love your little Flo more than ever. And why not?"

As the time passed on he sat himself down and tried to read, but his thoughts wandered. His ear eagerly received, against his will, the slightest sounds in the house. If a foot seemed approaching him, he rose suddenly and tried to compose his countenance. When the door of the neighboring chamber was opened his agony was redoubled.

He caught the sound of a weary sigh, then, an instant after, the dull fall of Mrs. Leland upon the carpet, then her despairing sobs.

Eugene threw from him violently the book which he was forcing himself to read, placing his elbows on the bureau which was before him, held, for a long time, his pale forehead tightened in his contracted hands. When the sound of the sobs abated and ceased, little by little, he breathed freer.

A little after midday he received this note: "My husband's health is hopelessly broken. He has sent in his resignation to the directors of the bank. He longs for the country. Warren has placed his house at Roxbury at our disposal, and we depart almost immediately. If you will permit me to take my daughter with me for a few days, I shall be grateful to you."

AGNES LELAND. He returned this simple reply: "You can do nothing of which I do not approve to-day and always."

"EUGENE CLEVELAND." Mrs. Leland, in fact, having consulted the inclination and the strength of her daughter, had determined to remove her without delay, if possible, from the impressions of the spot where she had suffered so severely from the presence of her husband, and from the unfortunate embarrassment of their mutual situation.

She desired also to meditate in solitude, in order to decide what course to take under such varied circumstances. Finally, she had not the courage to see Eugene again—if she could ever see him again—until some time had elapsed. It was not without anxiety that she awaited his reply to the request she had addressed him.

In the midst of the troubled confusion of her ideas, she believed him capable of almost anything; and she feared everything from him. Eugene's note reassured her.

She hastened to read it to her daughter and her mother. The two lost creatures who cling to the smallest twig, remarked with pleasure the kind of respectful abandonment with which he had reposed their destinies in their own hand.

He spent the remainder of the day in his counting-room, and when he returned they had departed.

CHAPTER XXIX. THE REPTILE TURNS TO STING. When Flora Cleveland returned to New York and her home she there experienced the painful impressions of the past, and the somber preoccupation of the future; but she brought there with her, although in a fragile form, a most powerful consolation—her first-born child.

Assailed by grief, and even menaced by new emotions, she was obliged to renounce the nursing of her little one; but nevertheless she never left him, for she was jealous even of his nurse. She at least wished to be loved by him.

She loved him with an infinite passion. She loved him because he was her own son and the price of her misfortune—of her hope of human happiness hereafter. She loved him because he was so beautiful as the day. And it was true he was so; for he resembled his father—and she loved him also on that account.

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