

BETRAYED;

A DARK MARRIAGE MORN.

A Romance of Love, Intrigue and Crime.

BY MRS. ALICE P. CARRISTON.

CHAPTER XXIX (Continued.)

Some time now passed without making any sensible change in the relations of the different persons of this story. This was the most brilliant phase, and probably the happiest, in the life of Eugene Cleveland.

The sudden death of Sidney Leland had more than doubled his fortune, and his careful business management and clever speculations augmented it every day.

Mrs. Leland continued to reside at her old home in Roxbury, where her son passed much of his time.

Clara Denton and Mildred Lester were glad for the most part in New York, and there were now bright hopes that Mildred would soon be her old self again—the great specialist emphatically promised.

Warren Leland passed all his evenings when he was in the city, in his society. Eugene Cleveland's liaison with Clara Elliston, without being proclaimed, was suspected, and completed his prestige.

His prosperity, too, was great. It was nevertheless true that he did not enjoy it without trouble. Two black spots darkened the sky above his head, and might contain a destroying thunder.

His life was eternally suspended on a thread. Any day Senator Elliston might be informed of the intrigue which dishonored him, either through some selfish reason or through public rumor, which began to spread.

Should this ever happen, he knew his uncle would never submit to it, and he had determined never to defend his life against his outraged friend and relative.

This resolve, firmly decided upon in his secret soul, gave him the last word to his conscience.

All his future destiny was thus at the mercy of an accident most likely to happen.

The second cause of his disquietude was the jealous hatred manifested by Clara against the young girl she had herself selected.

After having jested freely on this subject at first, she had, little by little, ceased even to allude to it.

Eugene could not misunderstand certain signs and symptoms, and was sometimes alarmed at this silent jealousy.

Feeling to eradicate this most violent feminine sentiment in so strong a soul, he was compelled, day by day, to resort to tricks which wounded his pride, and probably his heart also, for his wife, to whom his new conduct was inexplicable, suffered intensely, and he saw it.

One evening there was a grand reception at the Elliston mansion.

Clara, before making a little trip with her husband, had called on her friends, and now over for the evening, was making her adieux to a choice group of her friends.

Although this fête professed to be but a social gathering, she had organized it with her usual elegance and taste.

A kind of gallery composed of vases and flowers, connected the drawing-rooms with the conservatory at the other end of the garden.

This evening proved a very painful one to Clara.

Her husband's neglect of her was so marked, his assiduity to Clara so persistent, their mutual understanding so apparent, that the young wife felt the pain of her devotion to an almost insupportable degree.

She went and took refuge in the conservatory, and finding herself alone there, commenced weeping.

A few moments later, Eugene, not seeing her in the drawing-room, became uneasy.

She saw him as he entered the conservatory, by one of those instantaneous glances by which women contrive to see without looking.

She pretended to be examining the flowers, and by a strong effort of will dried her tears.

Her husband advanced slowly toward her.

"What a magnificent camellia!" he said to her. "Do you know this variety?"

sufferings and humiliations of which I have a presentiment, I am so much afraid of myself, that I offer you and give you your liberty. I prefer this horrible grief, but which is at least open and noble! It is no snare that I set for you, believe me! Look at me, I seldom weep."

The dark blue of her eyes was bathed in tears.

"Yes, I am sincere," she went on; "and I beg of you, if it is so, profit by this moment, for, if you let it escape, you will never find it again."

Eugene was little prepared for this decided proposal. The idea of breaking off his liaison with Clara never had entered his mind. This liaison seemed to him very reconcilable with the sentiments his wife would inspire him with.

It was at the same time with the greatest wickedness and the perpetual danger of his life, but it was also the excitement, the pride, and the magnificent voluptuousness of it.

He hesitated.

The idea of losing the love which had cost him so dear exasperated him.

He cast a burning glance on this beautiful face, refined and exalted as that of a warring archangel.

"My life is yours," he said. "How could you have alarmed yourself, or even thought of my feelings toward another? I do not want honor and humanity command me—nothing more. As for you—I love you—understand that."

"Is it true?" she asked. "It is true I believe you!"

She took his hand and gazed at him a moment without speaking, her eyes dimmed, her bosom palpitating; then suddenly rising, she said:

"My beloved, you know I have guests!" and seating him with a smile left the little room.

This scene, however, left a disagreeable impression on the mind of Eugene Cleveland.

He thought of it impatiently the next morning while trying a horse in Central Park—when he suddenly found himself face to face with the ex-private secretary, Oscar Slyme.

He had never seen this personage since the day he had ventured to make love to his wife.

The park was almost deserted at this hour. Slyme could not avoid, as he had probably done more than once, encountering Cleveland.

Seeing himself recognized he saluted him and stopped, with an uneasy smile on his lips.

His worn black coat and doubtful linen showed poverty unacknowledged but profound. Eugene did not notice these details, or his natural generosity probably would have been awakened and he would have been the sudden indignation which took possession of him.

He reigned in his horse sharply.

"Ah, it is you, Slyme?" he said. "You have left Boston, then? What are you doing now?"

"I am looking for a situation, Mr. Cleveland," said Slyme, humbly, who knew his old rival too well not to read clearly in the curl of his mustache the prognostic of a storm.

"And why?" said Eugene, "do you not return to your trade of locksmith? You are so skillful at it! The most complicated locks had no secret for you."

"I do not understand your meaning," murmured Slyme.

"Ah, a liar as well as a picklock, eh?" and throwing out these words with an accent of withering scorn, Eugene, striking him one sharp blow across the face with his riding whip, tranquilly passed on at a walk.

Instantly the face of the ex-secretary became ghastly white, save only for the fiery red mark across it. A look of mortal hatred came into his eyes. He gazed after the slowly retreating form of the personage who lived in the road had him from view; then hissing out the words, "You shall pay dearly for that, Eugene Cleveland!" he turned and hurried away.

CHAPTER XXX.

PREPARING FOR THE TRAGEDY.

Mildred Lester and her devoted friend and constant companion, Clara Denton, did not spend all their time in New York. Scarcely a week passed during which they did not visit Clara's home in Roxbury for a day, at least, and oftentimes when they returned to the city, Edith Denton, who was rapidly developing into a lovely young woman, would accompany them.

The great specialist was assiduous in his attentions to Mildred, and almost at every visit emphatically declared that the time was now close at hand when all that she had ever lost would be restored to her.

Thus far the past had come back to her gradually, but in the doctor's opinion the complete restoration of her faculties would be instantaneous, and probably brought about by some great and sudden shock.

Warren Leland, who had now attained the object of his ambition and was a member of Congress, was indefatigable in his attentions to the two ladies. Whenever they were in New York or Roxbury, he too was there, and at last the devoted Clara had the desire of her soul gratified, his affections were wholly transferred to Mildred, and abruptly, one evening, he asked her to be his wife, and was accepted.

Strange as it may seem, while he yet retained the warmest regard for Clara Denton, he almost idolized Mildred—felt for her a love, a passion, which even the beautiful and royal Clara had never inspired, and he could not bear to be absent from her side even for a day.

Under these circumstances he urged that the marriage should take place with the least possible delay, and after some deliberation an early day was set, and preparations for the interesting event were begun in earnest.

And now Edith became a very important personage. Her services were required by her mother and Mildred from early dawn till latest eve. Everybody called upon her for assistance. She became a female Mercury, and her feet were soon as well known in the great dry goods establishments as those of the proprietors themselves.

More than once in her excursions she had met a lovely young lady, several years her senior, but with the sweetest yet saddest face, she thought she had ever seen.

One day, in Marcey's she saw this lady in conversation with the physician who attended Mildred, and at once intimated to him that she should like an introduction.

He responded promptly.

"Miss Fielding," he said, "permit me to make you acquainted with my charming young friend, Miss Edith Denton. Miss Denton, this is Miss Fielding. She will tell you presently that her name is Meta Fielding. I am really pleased, young ladies, that through me you two should become known to each other."

"No more pleased than I am," exclaimed Edith, heartily. "I have wanted to make her acquaintance ever since I first saw her, and I am glad you were the medium through which my desire has been gratified."

"So you really wanted to know me, dear?" asked Meta, in a plesSED tone.

"Yes, indeed, I did," answered Edith, emphatically.

"And I was most anxious to make your acquaintance. Your face pleased me so much."

"They talked for some time together, and before they parted Edith had promised to pay Meta a visit the very next day.

Of course, when she reached home, Edith was full of her new friend, and could talk of nothing else.

"Meta Fielding!" repeated Mildred, with a troubled look. "Meta Fielding! Surely I have heard that name before."

"When and where, dear?" asked Clara, eagerly. "Was it in the old times, before your sickness?"

"Yes, yes, it was before that, when I— and then she stopped, with a bewildered expression on her face.

At little later Warren Leland called, and Clara at once asked him if he knew a lady named Fielding.

"Meta Fielding," supplemented Edith; "and she lives on West Forty-seventh street."

"Single lady, I suppose?" he said.

"No, no," said Warren, slowly. "I don't think I have the pleasure of the young lady's acquaintance."

"She has a brother named Ray, and he's in a bank down town," Edith explained.

"All that puts a different face on the matter altogether," said Leland. "I know Ray Fielding very well. He is now assistant cashier in the Atlantic National Bank, of which my father was President. Are you sure he's her brother?"

"Oh, yes," said Edith; "Meta told me all about him."

"Then it's all right; the family is very well connected, and they are perfectly proper people to know."

"Good to hear it!" exclaimed Edith; "I intend to call on my new friend to-morrow."

"Do so, by all means."

"You may be sure I shall."

"But, Warren," broke in Clara, "Mildred feels sure she knew this Meta Fielding in her old days; at least, she is certain she has heard the name before."

"She may have heard the name, but I hardly think she has ever met Miss Fielding. The brother and sister, I believe, have passed most of their lives in New York."

"Then where can she have heard the name?"

"Why, perhaps in this very room. I have had short business notes, drafts, and other papers, signed by Fielding, almost every day, and, no doubt, have spoken his name in her presence."

"I am pretty sure that's the explanation."

"I shall know to-morrow," laughed Edith.

"How will you find out?" asked Leland.

"Easy enough," was the reply. "I shall ask Meta if she ever knew Mildred Lester."

"Of course!" exclaimed her mother; "why didn't you think of that before?"

"Because you're not young and quick-witted as I am," laughed the girl, as she fled to her room.

When she was gone, Leland suddenly turned to her mother and asked:

"When did you or your father hear from Mildred's brother last?"

"We have not heard from him in some time; indeed, for several months," was the answer. "He is still in the South or West, I believe."

"But remittances come regularly?"

"Yes, certainly."

"From where?"

"From Mr. Lester's agent here in New York."

"Have you his address?"

"No, I have not; and I question if my father has."

"That is unfortunate; for Mr. Lester should be notified of the impending event in his own time."

"I have thought of that."

"Can you suggest anything?"

"Perhaps if you saw and talked with my father, he might think of some way whereby you could communicate with Mr. Lester."

"Do so; and meantime, I will look over what papers I have with me. I may find some note from him that will give me a clue."

The next day Leland went to Roxbury. He was at the time when he chanced upon, he was surprised to see old Weldon, the quondam rag-picker, boarding a Western bound train.

Somewhat, but why he could not think, the sight of him brought poor Amy Brown and her wretched husband to his mind.

But hastily dismissing these he thought of the old man.

"Now, what can he be going to New York for?" he mused. "Can it be that he is tired of a rural life? I hope not, for his detestable, and I am sure, would catch his own train if he thought no more of the matter at the time."

Meanwhile, Oscar Slyme, the "brother" with whom he was so anxious to communicate, was already thoroughly informed of all that had transpired relating to Mildred Lester since his last visit to her in Roxbury; and he knew perfectly well that she was likely very soon to marry Warren Leland.

But instead of warning her or her friends of the terrible mistake they were about to make, he hugged himself with fiendish delight to think of the misery it would cause his hated enemy when he should hear of it; and he resolved that he should hear of it very soon after the wedding, and take pleasure in some other thing that should be revealed.

But did Oscar Slyme no longer care for Clara Elliston?

No, his eyes had been thoroughly opened; he knew he had merely been her tool, and he had thoroughly hated it.

He knew Clara never could be his. He knew that he was about to do what make her hate him, and might kill her; but he was thoroughly resolved to wreak vengeance on Cleveland and Clara at any cost, and such a vengeance as never before was heard of.

Then came cunning and calculation, and he persuaded himself that by managing properly, he could gain a large sum from Sherwood Elliston, for the unholy secret he possessed.

He resolved, therefore, since he had the opportunity, to put himself, once for all, beyond misery and want, by cleverly speculating, through his secret, on the great fortune of the Senator.

This secret he had already given to Clara under the inspirations of another sentiment, but he had then in his hands the proofs, which he now was without.

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